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978-1-107-15271-7 - Roman Power: A Thousand Years of Empire

W. V. Harris

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YEARS OF EMPIRE

The Roman Empire was one of the largest and most enduring in world history. In his new book, distinguished historian William Harris sets out to explain, within an eclectic theoretical framework, the waxing and eventual waning of Roman imperial power, together with the Roman community's internal power structures (political power, social power, gender power, economic power). Effectively integrating analysis with a compelling narrative, he traces this linkage between the external and the internal through three very long periods, and part of the originality of the book is that it almost uniquely considers both the gradual rise of the Roman Empire and its demise as an empire in the fifth and seventh centuries AD. Professor Harris contends that comparing the Romans of these diverse periods sharply illuminates both the growth and the shrinkage of Roman power as well as the empire's extraordinary durability.

The pupil of extraordinary Oxford teachers, W. V. Harris counts himself fortunate to have escaped at the age of twenty-six to the hyper-stimulating environments of New York City and the Columbia University History Department. The author of *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*, *Ancient Literacy*, *Restraining Rage: the Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (which won the Breasted Prize of the American Historical Association), *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*, and *Rome's Imperial Economy*, he has also edited books about ancient money, the ancient Mediterranean, and the spread of Christianity, among other subjects. Among other honours, he is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy.

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ROMAN POWER

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for W.E.S.H., with love

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Preface

I especially want this book to be accessible and useful to people who, while they want to learn about the Romans and their empire, know little about Roman history as it is now understood. With such readers in mind, I have explained technical terms and identified historical actors more than I would have done in a narrowly academic book, and I have also provided a table of dates. At the same time, the book has some moments of originality (sketched out in Chapter 1) which may attract the attention of other scholars of ancient history.

‘As it is now understood’: with that phrase I intend to say that I have attempted to take very recent as well as older scholarship into account. But alas no one can possibly claim to have read and seen everything that pertains to a thousand years of Roman history. Roughly 130 ancient writers are mentioned in this book (not counting the authors of documentary texts), and there exist texts that I have not read. Meanwhile the modern bibliography of Roman history, literature, law, and archaeology is a tropical jungle. I have attempted to take account of as much of it as possible, down to the early months of 2015.

In the interests of transparency I have referred as often as possible to the primary sources and to the vastly variegated material evidence that a Roman historian has at his or her disposal. I have also provided in the notes a basic guide to modern scholarly writing about Roman power, tending to emphasize what is recent but not shying away from older works. I have emphatically *not* provided full bibliographies on every controversy. And I have – regretfully – privileged works in English: Roman history is an international subject, and a scholar must attend carefully to literature in at least five modern languages, but one has to recognize that many anglophone students are monolingual.

The book is short in relation to its gigantic subject-matter. I have elided two aspects of this subject-matter, and the reader deserves explanations. In the first place, I have not said a great deal about the biases, motives,

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interests, methods, presuppositions, or general background of the men (they are virtually all men) who provide us with our textual evidence. A full discussion would have required a separate volume of a quite different character. Readers on the alert will undoubtedly notice a number of implicit evaluations.

I have also elided almost all discussion of the natural environment of the Romans and their neighbours. That is my next big project. The reader of this book will notice some references to mineral and timber resources, access to which was quite crucial to Roman power on a number of occasions. The reason why there is not more here about the natural environment is fairly simple: too much is uncertain at this date. Two examples: deforestation is hard to define, let alone assess; there was a lot of it, but the inhabitants of the Roman Empire may have managed their woodlands well enough that no major ecological or economic harm was done. I have discussed this matter elsewhere (Harris 2011a). Then there is the related matter of climate change: it is generally agreed that there was a 'Roman Warm Period', but when exactly, and what difference did it make to the viability of the Roman Empire? (See Hin 2013 and Manning 2013 for overviews). In short, we are still some distance away from being able to relate the growth, survival, or decline of Roman power in a definite and convincing way to environmental factors.

Walter Scheidel, as I am happy to acknowledge, started me thinking systematically about this subject by inviting me to write an essay about power for the *Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*. Many thanks to him for that stimulus.

This book would have taken even longer to write if it had not been for a generous award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, for which I am profoundly grateful; I am especially grateful to the officer of the Foundation who was most responsible, the distinguished sociologist Harriet Zuckerman.

I am also deeply grateful to Emma Dench, Kyle Harper, Evan Jewell, Irene Sanpietro, and Caroline Wazer for critical reading of various chapters of this book. I owe another very large debt to Emily Cook, a rising young art-historian who spent many hours helping me put together the book's visual apparatus. A number of other generous friends and acquaintances have stimulated thought and provided pertinent information, in particular Jairus Banaji, Mary Beard, Anne Hunnell Chen, Holger Klein, Myles Lavan, David Leith, Jonathan Prag, and Walter Scheidel himself. I thank one of my most talented former students, Sara Phang, for providing the sketch map that became Map 5. The Cambridge University Press's

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anonymous readers were extremely constructive, and I thank its energetic and learned Michael Sharp for enlisting them.

Many thanks, finally, to the American Numismatic Society and its officers for their generous help with coin images. I am grateful to the Stanwood Cockey Lodge Fund for its help with the illustrations, and to Jose Solorio for his help with the index.

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351	First plebeian censor
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334	Foundation of the first 'Latin' colony, at Caes
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313?	Abolition of debt-bondage
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27	Octavian becomes 'Augustus'
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16	Tiberius brings German war to a halt
27–37	Tiberius rules from Capri
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43	Invasion of Britain
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639–41	Muslims conquer Egypt
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654	Muslims attack Constantinople
656–61	Muslim civil war
698	Muslims capture Carthage

Abbreviations

<i>AÉ</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
Barrington	R. Talbert (ed.), <i>Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World</i> (Princeton, 2000)
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> (2nd edn)
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTh</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> , ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1901), English translation by C. Pharr (Princeton, 1952)
<i>Digest</i>	<i>Digesta</i> , ed. T. Mommsen and P. Krueger (11th edn, Berlin, 1908), English translation ed. A. Watson (Philadelphia, 1985)
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>EFH</i>	<i>Entretiens [de la Fondation Hardt] sur l'antiquité classique</i>
<i>ILLRP</i>	A. Degraffi (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae</i>
<i>ILS</i>	H. Dessau (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>IOSPE</i>	V. Latyshev (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>OGIS</i>	W. Dittenberger (ed.), <i>Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae</i>
<i>P.Abinnaeus</i>	H.I. Bell <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>The Abinnaeus Archive: Papers of a Roman Officer in the Reign of Constantius II</i> (Oxford, 1962)
<i>P.Cair.Isid.</i>	A.E.R. Boak and H.C. Youtie (eds.), <i>The Archive of Aurelius Isidorus</i> (Ann Arbor, 1960)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
<i>P.Horak</i>	H. Harrauer and R. Pintaudi (eds.), <i>Gedenkschrift Ulrike Horak (P.Horak)</i> (Florence, 2004)
<i>PIR</i>	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne
<i>P.Lond.</i>	F.G. Kenyon <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>Greek Papyri in the British Museum</i>

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<i>PLRE</i>	A.H.M. Jones <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
<i>P.Oxy.</i>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
<i>PSI</i>	<i>Papiri della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto</i>
Riccobon 1941–1943	S. Riccobono, <i>Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani</i> (Florence, 1941–1943), 3 vols.
<i>RRC</i>	M.H. Crawford, <i>Roman Republican Coinage</i> (Cambridge, 1974)
<i>SB</i>	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>Select Papyri</i>	A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar (eds.), <i>Select Papyri</i>
<i>SIG³</i>	W. Dittenberger (ed.), <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> (3rd edn)