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The History of Rome

This three-volume English translation of Barthold Georg Niebuhr's influential *History of Rome* was published between 1828 and 1842. It follows the second German edition, which the author contrasts with the earlier edition (1811–12, translated into English in 1827) as being 'the work of a man who has reached his maturity'. The early part of the nineteenth century saw important developments in philological scholarship in Germany, and Niebuhr's international career as a statesman and scholar reflected Germany's new-found confidence in the wider world. His book had a lasting impact both within its own subject area and on the understanding of history as an academic discipline, and was a landmark of nineteenth-century European scholarship. Volume 1 covers the origins of Rome in Ancient Italy, up to the secession of the commonality, and the Tribune of the People.

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The History of Rome

VOLUME 1

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THE HISTORY OF ROME

BY

B. G. NIEBUHR.

TRANSLATED

BY

JULIUS CHARLES HARE, M. A.

AND

CONNOP THIRLWALL, M. A.

FELLOWS OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

—◆—
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**Ceterum, si, omisso optimo illo et perfectissimo genere eloquentiæ,
eligenda sit forma dicendi, malim, hercule, C. Gracchi impetum aut
L. Crassi maturitatem, quam calamistros Mæcenatis aut tinnitus Gallionis.**

TACITUS, *Dial. de Oratoribus.*

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TO HIS MAJESTY
FREDERIC WILLIAM THE THIRD,
KING OF PRUSSIA,

THIS WORK
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.



A HISTORY of Rome, represented with truth and vividness, in broad and clear outlines, free from the incumbrance of multifarious details, might be esteemed no less worthy to engage the attention of a prince, than profound and comprehensive descriptions of the most important epochs of modern times. Not so, critical investigations into the dark periods of remote antiquity; not so, a work which, while it approaches close to particular objects that it may examine them, is seldom able to occupy a station where those rich and wide prospects expand before the eye.

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But gratitude inspires courage; and in this feeling I ventured to solicit your Majesty's gracious permission for the dedication of this work.

Your Majesty's favour has afforded me the happiest leisure: it enabled me to become familiar with Rome: and the two Universities—that of Berlin, the opening of which led to my undertaking this work, and that of Bonn, to which it is my pride to belong as a free associate—are Your Majesty's noble creations.

Thus this history owes its existence to the Gracious King, to whom I devote it, with feelings faithful as those of a native subject, and with a lively recollection of every favour with which Your Majesty has distinguished me.



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PREFACE.



THE History of Rome was treated, during the first two centuries after the revival of letters, with the same prostration of the understanding and judgement to the written letter that had been handed down, and with the same fearfulness of going beyond it, which prevailed in all the other branches of knowledge. If any one had asserted a right of examining the credibility of the ancient writers and the value of their testimony, an outcry would have been raised against his atrocious presumption: the object aimed at was, in spite of all internal evidence, to combine what was related by them; at the utmost one authority was in some one particular instance postponed to another, as gently as possible, and without inducing any further results. Here and there indeed a free-born mind, such as Glareanus, broke through these bonds; but infallibly a sentence of condemnation was forthwith pronounced against him: besides such men were not the most learned; and their bold attempts were only partial and were wanting in consistency. In this department, as in others, men of splendid talents and the most copious learning conformed to the narrow spirit of their age: their labours extracted from a multitude of insulated details, what the remains of

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ancient literature did not afford united in any single work, a systematic account of Roman antiquities: what they did in this respect is wonderful. And this is sufficient to earn them an imperishable fame: for he that would find fault with them for not being independent of their age, is blind to the common lot of mortals, from which none but the favorites of the gods are exempt; and they mostly make amends for this blessing by persecution. On the other hand for history in a stricter sense little was produced: dry compilations for the times where the books of Livy were lost, and detached observations which led to nothing beyond.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century Philology entered upon a middle state between the period of her earlier greatness within her exclusive sphere, where, having accomplished whatever was to be accomplished in this manner, she consequently fell into decay, and that of a new, richer, and more comprehensive greatness, for which she was to be indebted to the developement of the other sciences, although now for a while they were overshadowing her; this like all middle states was one of uneasiness and depression. Bentley, and a few more, who were in part the creators of the new age, in part the preservers of the knowledge the old one had left behind, stood as giants amid a generation of dwarfs. Intellect and science during the seventeenth century were everywhere coming out of their nonage: men were taught by great examples to look things in the face, and to pursue their researches with freedom and confidence; to regard the books, which till then had made up the scholar's whole world, as merely pictures of a part of the living universe which could not be immediately approached; to exercise

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their own understanding, their own reason, their own judgement in everything. The field of Roman history was not left unvisited by the youthful spirit of freedom: it is undoubtedly to the pervading activity which prevailed during the latter part of that century, that we owe the first work which, together with an abundance of details, enters into a general examination of what this history is and may be made: I mean the masterly inquiries of Perizonius; a book which, like other products of genius, is unsurpassed and classical in the kind wherein it was the first. If however we here feel the breath of that spirit which in those days was everywhere awakened, yet Perizonius had advanced far beyond his age; and Bayle, who twelve years after pointed out the contradictions and impossibilities contained in a few portions of the earliest history of Rome, makes no use and takes no notice of him: neither does Beaufort, although his sole attention was directed to the object which Bayle merely fixed his eyes on for a few hours among a thousand of the same kind.

Beaufort is ingenious, and his reading is extensive, though he is no philologist: one or two sections in his treatise are very ably and satisfactorily executed, while others on the contrary are exceedingly weak and shallow. Bayle is throughout and completely his master: scepticism the soul of his book: he merely attempts to deny and upset: or, if he would ever build up anything, what he erects is frail and untenable. Yet the influence and reputation of his book has spread extraordinarily: for Roman history had almost entirely escaped the attention and care of philologists; those who chiefly interested themselves about it, though not more than about

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any other, were intelligent men of the world; and for their use it was at that time handled by several authors, without any pretensions or view to learning and research. Such of these as did not wholly overlook the earlier centuries, from thinking them of no importance, were so satisfied with Beaufort's investigations as to give them up altogether. Gibbon's history, which even for the philologist is a noble masterwork, left this region untouched.

The end of the last century was the opening of a new era for Germany. Men were no longer satisfied with superficial views in any field of knowledge: vague empty words had lost their currency: but neither was the work of destruction, in which the preceding age, indignant against protracted usurpation, had taken pleasure, any longer held to be sufficient: my countrymen strove after definite and positive knowledge, like that of their forefathers; but it was after true knowledge, in the room of that imaginary knowledge which had been overthrown. We had now a literature, worthy of our nation and language: we had Lessing and Goethe: and this literature comprised, what none had yet, a great part of the Greek and Roman, not copied, but as it were reproduced. For this Germany is indebted to Voss, whom our grandchildren's children and grandchildren must extoll as their benefactor: with whom a new age for the knowledge of antiquity begins; inasmuch as he succeeded in eliciting out of the classical writers what they presuppose, their notions of the earth for instance and of the gods, their ways of life and their household habits: and understood and interpreted Homer and Virgil, as if they were our contemporaries and only separated from us by an interval

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of space. His example wrought upon many: upon me, ever since my childhood, it has been enforced by personal encouragement from this old friend of my family.

If a previous age had contented itself with looking at ancient history, in the way many look at maps or landscapes, as if they were all in all; without ever attempting to employ it as the only means that remain for producing an image of the objects it represents: it could not now be esteemed satisfactory, unless its clearness and distinctness were such that it could take its station beside the history of the present age. And the time was one when we witnessed many unheard of and incredible things: when our attention was attracted to many forgotten and decayed institutions by the sound of their downfall; and our hearts were strengthened by danger, as we became familiar with its threats, and by the passionate intensity given to our attachment to our princes and our country.

At that time philology in Germany had already reached that highth, which is now the boast of our nation. It had recognized its calling, to be the mediator between the remotest ages, to afford us the enjoyment of preserving through thousands of years an unbroken identity with the noblest and greatest nations of the ancient world; by familiarizing us, through the medium of grammar and history, with the works of their minds and the course of their destinies, as if there were no gulph which divided us from them.

In this manner, although Greek literature continued long to possess an almost exclusive preference, the critical treatment of Roman history, the discovery of the forms of the constitution which had been misunderstood, was a

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fruit which time had been maturing: and a concourse of fortunate circumstances combined to favour its growth. It was a time full of hope, when the university of Berlin was opened: and the enthusiasm and delight in which months rolled away, while the contents of the first volumes of this history were digested for lectures and worked up for publication;—to have enjoyed this, and to have lived in 1813, this of itself is enough to make a man's life, notwithstanding much sad experience, a happy one.

In this state of delight the meaning of many an ancient mystery disclosed itself: but yet more were overlooked: in much I erred: a still greater part was left in a disjointed condition feebly supported by proofs. For my knowledge was the unsatisfactory knowledge of one who had been self-taught, and who as yet had only been able to devote to study such hours as he could withdraw from business: and I had reached the end of my journey like a man walking in his sleep along the eaves. That these defects, and the overhasty composition of the first volume, which had compelled me to introduce repeated corrections in the sequel of the work itself, did not hinder its reception from being on the whole very favorable, is a proof that the revival of Roman history was in accord with the spirit of the age: nay our age, it seems to me, may discern that it is immediately called by Providence to this inquiry, inasmuch as, within the eleven years since it commenced, three new and rich sources have been opened to us by the publication of Lydus, Gaius, and Cicero's Republic: whereas centuries had previously elapsed without adding anything to our means of knowledge.

To these defects of my work I was far from blind: the points attacked by those who criticized it, were by no

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means the weak ones, but often the soundest and strongest. My being aware of these faults, and desirous to make use of the new discoveries, was the main reason which retarded the continuation: for it was necessary that, before I proceeded, the first volume should be written anew. Meanwhile however I was living in Italy, and living at Rome, too much taken up in gazing and receiving impressions to work with energy at books: besides I fancied I should not be able to proceed without the happiness I had once enjoyed, at the time when the point on which the question hinged would come forward into a clear light while I was conversing with Savigny, and it was so easy for me to ask many a question, so cheering to complete the embryo thought and to try its worth. On my return to Germany I drew up the plan of the third volume, preparing the way for it by remodelling the first, and correcting the second.

This new edition, in which it was my aim to make the proofs and the solutions perfect, required very extensive labours: but as all labour is lightened when new springs of activity are imparted, so this was mainly promoted by my lectures on Roman antiquities last winter. What Pyrrhus said to his Epirots—*Ye are my wings*—is the feeling of a zealous teacher toward hearers whom he loves, and whose whole souls take an interest in his discourse. Not only does the endeavour to make himself clear to them, and to utter nothing as truth which can admit of a doubt, speed his researches: the sight of them assembled before him, the immediate relation in which he stands to them, awakens a thousand thoughts during the time he is speaking: and in how very different a manner

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does one write down words which had previously been poured forth as the fresh thoughts prompted them!

The work which I here lay before the public, is, as the first glance will shew, an entirely new one, in which scarcely a few fragments of the former have been incorporated. It would have been incomparably easier to have preserved the groundwork of the first edition; I resolved on the far more difficult task, as the most expedient, which would give unity and harmony to the whole. That whole, consisting of this and the next two volumes, is the work of a man who has reached his maturity: whose powers may decline, but whose convictions are thoroughly settled, whose views cannot change: and so I wish that the former edition may be regarded as a youthful work. Our friends are often more tender-hearted toward us than we are ourselves: and perhaps one or two may regret some things that have been destroyed and cast away: more than once it was with a lingering hand that I overthrew the old edifice: but what was built on suppositions which had been found to be wrong, could not be permitted to remain; nor was it allowable to preserve it by slipping some other prop under it, so as to efface the appearance of the original foundation.

The continuation down to the term which I have now set before me, I may, if it please God and his blessing abide with me, confidently promise; although the progress may be but slow. It is the work of my life; which is to preserve my name, not unworthy of my father's: I will not lazily abandon it.

When a historian is reviving former times, his interest in them and sympathy with them will be the deeper,

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the greater the events he has witnessed with a bleeding or a rejoicing heart. His feelings are moved by justice or injustice, by wisdom or folly, by the coming or the departure of greatness, as if it were all going on before his eyes : and when he is thus moved his lips speak, although Hecuba is nothing to the player. Would it were acknowledged that the perfect distinctness and clearness of this vision destroys the power of obscure ideas and indefinite words ! that it precludes the silly desire of transferring out of ages of a totally different character what would now be altogether inapplicable ! that, to retain the poet's simile, it precludes fools from coming forward as knight errants, to avenge the sorrows of Hecuba ! If any one, after being reminded of this, persists in misapprehending my meaning, he is dishonest, or at least very simple. Of the principles on which the political opinions in my work are formed, there is not one that may not be found in Montesquieu or Burke : and the proverb, *quien hace aplicaciones, con su pan se lo coma*, is enough.

It is with a solemn feeling that I close this preface with the words which fifteen years ago closed that of the first edition : the repetition of them “brings back the images of joyous days, and much-loved shades rise up before my soul.”

There is an inspiration which proceeds from the presence and the converse of beloved friends : an immediate action upon our minds, by which the Muses are revealed to our view, awakening joy and strength in us, and purging our sight : to this through my whole life I have owed whatever was best in me. Thus I owe it to the friends in the midst of whom I returned to studies long resigned or faintly pursued, if the result has been

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propitious. Therefore do I bless the beloved memory of my departed Spalding: therefore too allow me openly to express my thanks to you, Savigny, Buttmann, and Heindorf, without whom and without our deceased friend I should certainly never have had the courage to undertake this work, without whose affectionate sympathy and enlivening presence it would hardly have been accomplished.

BONN,
December 8, 1826.

The Author has hitherto been prevented by the state of his health from bringing out the second volume of this history: the Translators hope however that its appearance will enable them ere long to lay it before the English public.—Such notes as are not numbered have been added by them, to direct the Reader to a variety of passages which the Author had made use of in the text, though he had not specifically referred to them.

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