

Introduction

This volume brings together studies from diverse academic disciplines around a central, unifying question: how was the future of Rome, both near and distant in time, imagined by different populations living under the Roman Empire? The volume originates in a conference in Tel Aviv (2013), titled “The Future of Rome: Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Perspectives.” Scholars of Greek and Roman history and literature, Jewish history and thought, and early Christian history and thought, were asked the question about the future of Rome in relation to the people and texts they study; thus it was refracted through contemporary but disparate (and not perforce mutually informative or interactive) literary and religious traditions. One of the remarkable results of the conference was the realization that practically no one living under Rome’s rule, including the Romans themselves, did *not* think about the question in one form or another.

Such was the effect of the vast extent and power of Rome’s empire, the antiquity and success of the city, with its explicit and implicit claim of universality and eternity, and its penetration into the lives of its subjects, that it imposed on basic aspects of human cognition and sentience, affecting people’s individual and group identity, their self-understanding on a historical continuum and their concepts of historical time, their beliefs about the role of divine and supernatural factors in present personal circumstance and all history. Thinking about the future in any period will evoke such existential questions as one’s sense of place and purpose; in the period extending from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity, these questions frequently took the form of reaction to Rome, in a variety of forms.

It is important to state that the main question occupying the lecturers at the conference and the contributors to this volume (not an identical roster) is not what Jonas Grethlein has called in a recent book, “futures past.”¹ This term concerns the historian’s perspective, both the modern historian

¹ Grethlein 2013.

looking back with a long view at past events, and more interestingly, ancient historians' use of teleology, i.e. knowledge of outcomes, in constructing their narratives of past events. Grethlein is interested in separating the experience of the historical subjects, who did not know their future, from the construction of their experience by the historian armed with that knowledge. The *telos* in this sense lies within already-experienced historical time. By contrast, we are interested here in how historical subjects and writers conceived of the not-yet-experienced future of the Roman Empire, which was for them more or less equivalent to the future of humanity but also could have direct personal consequences. Thinking about the future of Rome could employ any number of means: logical speculation, reasoning from historical patterns, extrapolation from nature, exegetical reasoning, and application of religious belief. The question concerns all those who lived across the wide swath of the Empire (not just Romans and educated Greeks) and who tried to make sense of their lives on a historical continuum.

There existed in antiquity various concepts of time, but they divide into two main (but not mutually exclusive) types with variations, linear and cyclical. Aside from scholarship on time in Greek philosophy, the fundamental article by Arnaldo Momigliano, "Time in Ancient Historiography," and subsequent studies have focused on historical writing.² The present collection finds intersecting ideas about the future in a wide array of literary genres and cultures. François Hartog has written, in *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2012), that the pre-modern notion of lived-in time was undynamic, history serving as an undifferentiated resource for great ideas and actions informing the present. Thinking about the future is a habit of culture, and, for Hartog, defining one's present in terms of the future is a modern phenomenon (and after 1989, he says, we returned to a disorienting presentism). This characterization of the past, in which history is primarily *magister vitae*, is not the focus of analysis of most of the texts and thoughts in this volume. Rather, the analyses here focus on how the Romans and their subjects found patterns in historical time and used them to assess their present condition by peering into the future.

I Romans

The Roman imperialistic notion of an unending future, which became a propagandistic theme of the Principate, first emerges in the late Republic.

² Momigliano 1977b. See also e.g. the two collections of essays edited by Alexandra Lanieri (2011 and 2016).

Cicero is our earliest surviving source for both the concept of Rome's eternity and an attempt to work out in Latin a concrete understanding of historical time. Historical immortality can be expressed in both linear and cyclical models of time. Carlos Lévy, in Chapter 1 (Some Remarks on Cicero's Perception of the Future of Rome), observes that while Cicero invokes the concept of eternal Rome, he shows "no deep reflexion on Rome's future." Cicero rather uses the concept of timelessness as a rhetorical and philosophical tool to work out the implications of Rome's exceptionalism. This was particularly pressing during Cicero's lifetime, "when the crisis of the Republic was so deep that even the incantatory evocation of the powerful empire and of prominent *exempla* was insufficient to mitigate it." *De Legibus* is an almost desperate last-ditch attempt to imagine the potential of Rome's greatness, but is based on what Lévy calls a "somewhat naïve teleology." Cicero's persistent, hopeful focus is on the grand elements of Rome and Romans that can be called immortal.

Translating the potentially immortal elements of Roman character and deeds into the immortality of Rome is presented most clearly in the *Pro Sestio*, where Cicero asks rhetorically, *quod si immortale retinetur, quis non intelligit immortalem hanc ciuitatem futuram?* ("If this example be preserved for ever, who can doubt that this State will be immortal?"). Immortality can be found in cyclical history as well: in his letters, Cicero evokes the theory of the mixed constitution in its Polybian form to wonder about Rome's future, elaborating on the exceptional qualities of Rome's geographical situation, legal and political system, and personal qualities of its people. But it is all phrased in the form of a condition: "If, for Cicero as much later for Descartes, the power of will is infinite, the concept of eternity of the *res publica* gets a new meaning. It produces the perfect adaptation of the Romans, and especially of the *maiores*, to the nature of things, and especially of political evolutions, but at the same time it depends on the ability of the citizens to want to maintain this privileged situation."

Vergil's Fourth *Eclogue*, marking the birth of a divine child and foretelling the imminence of peace in a new golden age, is another artifact of the struggle with hopes and doubts about the future in the catastrophic last years of the Republic. Brian Breed's Chapter 2 in this volume (*Eclogue 4 and the Futures of Rome*), a thoroughgoing analysis of that crucial poem, points to the ambiguity and uncertainty that arise from what are in fact multiple time-schemes underlying the poem. He learns from this that "Time does not fall easily into mutually exclusive periods with clear borders. Different ways of organizing time overlap and come into conflict,

and Rome's future, its many possible futures, will develop through patterns and relationships that involve both division and continuity, and that expose tendencies toward both unification and fragmentation." The reason for uncertainty about the shape of the future derives from uncertainty about the present, and how to orient oneself from it: possibilities include but are not limited to the mythological metallic ages, the *fasti*, the human lifespan, the *saecula*, the *magnus annus*. Moreover, the golden age prophesied in the poem presents a difficult problem of interpretation. Since Rome did not exist in the Hesiodic golden age, a new golden age represents not the return of a glorious Roman past but a new, unfamiliar era; the Romans had to decide what to carry from the old Rome into the hope-laden future. Thus the new golden age, by the terms of *Eclogue* 4, will coexist with elements of the iron, and universal peace will still be contingent on the matters of Rome and the suppression of its self-destructive tendencies.³

The universal harmony of a golden age, when established, will not be the same thing for all Romans. In fact, people will perforce experience it in radically different ways. To quote Breed's cogent conclusion:

The association of the golden age with the rule of one man suggests that in or around 40 BC it was possible to imagine a future in which a fundamental change in the political culture at Rome could represent the basis for a claim that one period of time has ended and a new one has begun. But it equally offers the possibility of recognizing that lives will be differently impacted by any such change. For all that some will embrace change and adapt accordingly and others struggle to cope with the consequences, there will also be a choice to go on living in total or occasional disregard of the claims of a political authority to have altered the rhythms of life equally for all. So Vergil in the end is right about another thing. A change of eras will be as much a matter of interpretation, of recognizing patterns and balancing alternatives, in the political and social life of the Romans as it is in a literary text like *Eclogue* 4.

A different kind of multivalence attended the concept of Rome's eternity once the idea became a part of Augustan propaganda. The stability of the new regime and the early Principate, in retrospect, can make us forget that the confident assertions of the everlasting future of the city and Empire were expressions more of hope than solid facts (here the *telos* in the sense of

³ That contingency may be seen as well in Horace *Odes* 3.30–6–9, in which the poet seeks to claim the eternity of his own poetic reputation by asserting that it will last so long as the *pontifex maximus* and the silent Vestal "climb the Capitol" in their annual rite. As Greg Woolf says in Chapter 4 (discussed pp. 6–7), "Horace's Ode evokes not just posterity but also eternity, the extension of the present conceived of endless iterations of the ritual cycle."

Grethlein's "futures past" is useful). In the first century, recent and even more distant history presented a situation of constant and rapid change: Rome's remarkable rise to world dominance, its rapid deterioration into internal chaos. The Augustan poets contended with the claim of a new unending historical era, but had to coordinate that with the evidence of their experience and learning. The actual term *Roma Aeterna* appears infrequently in Augustan literature.⁴ As Philip Hardie has shown in some detail,⁵ most of the Augustan poets' references to Rome's new stability and eternity are colored by an acknowledgment, either patent or implied, of the mutability of all things, a natural law to which even Rome is subject. The poetic accounts of early Rome bring out the dramatic contrast with present-day Rome. *Aeneid* Book 7 is rife with metamorphosis. Ovid's mention of *Roma Aeterna* in the *Fasti* is put into perspective by the role of Janus in the same poem, representing endless change.⁶ The poets were reluctant or unable to harness themselves unambiguously to the theme of Rome's eternity stemming from its present restoration.

This ambiguity is explored by Ayelet Haimson Lushkov in Chapter 3 (*Imperium sine fine*: Rome's Future in Augustan Epic), which is a close comparative reading of a crucial concept from *Aeneid* 1 and the end of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The famous promise by Jupiter of *imperium sine fine* is explained straightforwardly: it "embodies . . . the formal rejection of a narrative doubling back on itself, and celebrates instead the linear teleology of Augustan triumphalism: the Romans will never have run half the race, since theirs is a never-ending march to glory. To Venus' question – *quem finem?* – Jupiter's answer is a resounding 'none'." No actual limit, then, either temporal or geographical. The *imperium sine fine* is realized long after the epic poem itself ends in a grisly and unsatisfactory way with Turnus' death. Continuity implies necessary closures, so that the promise of Rome's future may also cause some anxiety in Vergil's readers: for Rome to be on the cusp of embodying Jupiter's promise, it had to pass through many violent endings, *inter alia* of Troy, Iulus' *imperium*, the kings, the Republic as it had been: what was the *imperium* that would extend endlessly into the future? Given the Romans' Trojan roots and historical memories such as the proposed transplantation to Veii opposed by Camillus, the Romans did not know even whether they would perpetually

⁴ Cf. Tibullus 2.5.23; Ovid, *Fasti* 3.72. Actually, it is an expression that is used more in modern times than in antiquity. The phrase *Roma aeterna* does not appear on coins until the time of Hadrian (RIC II, 265a–d).

⁵ Hardie 1994: 59–82. ⁶ See also Newlands 1995: 7.

inhabit their imperial city (and cf. Horace's Epode 16, imagining Rome bereft after the civil war):

The future imagined for Rome is one where not only the place itself but also its values have been abandoned, and that negative image functions protreptically to defend the city and ensure its proper and more glorious future. But choice of ends is also a choice of futures, and the contest between parallel futures is especially characteristic of the epic genre

The future of Rome is even more ambiguous in end of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. We return here to Ovidian paradoxical juxtaposition of expressions of eternity beside finitude. The poem closes with the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, which Lushkov reads as a delicate intertextual play with the *Aeneid*, and then the poet's final assurances of his own poetic immortality being coterminous with Rome's. Caesar's deification is fulfillment of Helenus' prophecy, given voice by Ovid, of future Roman – and Julian – greatness. Essentially, this transition into a new era requires transitioning from historical time to mythical time: a cyclical return, but with no projected end. Yet the final scenes are preceded by the long discourse of Pythagoras expounding the constant flux of the universe, a law of constant change that must apply to Rome. “In the *Metamorphoses*, a poem which ends literally and figuratively with a decisive break in Rome's constitutional and religious growth, Rome's empire is *sine fine* in the sense that it is without a *telos*, which is not to say that it is without end.” Thus Ovid's implied doubts about Rome's eternity affect even his own immortality as a poet.

It may be supposed that a notion of time extending indefinitely into the future was embodied in the Roman calendar, which erased distinctions between mythical and historical time and, after Caesar's reform, regularized and stabilized the year and brought order to ritual junctures.⁷ This regularization allowed the Romans to relate to the future as static. Greg Woolf's explication of the Arval rituals and records, in Chapter 4 (Posterity in the Arval *Acta*), is based on a key insight, namely that ritual is a way of *suppressing* time, an attempt to flatten distinctions between past and future, so that the conception of time may not even contain proper linear motion: “the *Acta* construct a kind of continuous present in place of a sense of time flowing unidirectionally from past to future via the present. The implications for the future are clear. If change is always inconsequential and non-directional – Brownian motion more than entropy – then the future is

⁷ Feeney 2007.

envisaged as essentially a prolongation of the present.” The Arvals’ purpose in publishing their proceedings was in fact to demonstrate the rituals’ very timelessness, their (hoped-for) immunity to change, to ward off, almost talismanically, drastic and usually violent collapses, failures, and overturnings. The older cults of Rome, even those thought to predate the foundation of the city, served the same purpose, i.e. to establish the eternity of Rome by making the distant past and the infinite future an undifferentiated temporal space. Thus the function of commemorative time can be understood as “the recording of key events but in isolation, not as points on a sequence or moments in a narrative. Perhaps we might even see these dating conventions working actively to suppress any sense of history unrolling.”

2 Greeks

The strongest interest in proofs of Rome’s eternity – that is, Rome’s breaking the historical law of the rise and fall of states with which Herodotus staked out his history – or at least the most serious attempts to grapple with the claim, are to be found in Greek writers, who, while within the intellectual and literary orbit of Rome, still endowed their writings with the enthusiasm of admiring non-natives explaining Rome to outsiders and skeptics. By the same token, the strongest assertions of Rome’s certain demise – and the reasons for it – are conveyed in sectarian texts in languages other than Latin: Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic.

After Rome’s victory in Pydna in 168 BCE, Greek historiography shifted its primary focus to Rome and universal history. The task of the historian is to narrate and explain, and Rome required explanation, not only its rise to domination but its continuing success and prognosis. Jonathan Price shows in Chapter 5 (The Future of Rome in Three Greek Historians of Rome), how Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Appian of Alexandria, while living in different eras, each used, as a means of analysis and explanation, the typological succession of four empires defining world history. These four empires were followed by a fifth, which in the Greek historians is Rome; the question was whether that fifth empire would be the last in the succession, or the succession would continue indefinitely. This 4+1 model, as later chapters in this volume bring out, was the basis for an apocalyptic vision in Judaism and Christianity, going back ultimately to the Book of Daniel. But the oriental origins of the model are irrelevant to the Greek historians’ understanding of it: by Polybius’ time it had migrated into Greek culture and was available for him to interpret. Polybius, as Price

shows, is the hardest case, because of his notorious change of opinion about the shape and purpose of his history, reflecting (apparently) a change of opinion about Rome's fate: he seemed at first to think that Rome had overcome the inherent fatal flaws of other states and in fact had defeated the cycle of history, implying that the Roman Empire would last forever; but by the end of his *History*, near the end of the extra ten books he added after changing his mind, he marshals the 4+1 model to state as clearly as he could that Rome was subject to the same forces of decline as other states, and this fifth world empire would eventually come to end, giving way to a sixth, and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

Not so, however, Dionysius and Appian, who lived in different, less volatile ages (or at least in times when the volatility in certain provinces was felt less directly in Rome). Dionysius opens his work with the 4+1 model to justify his claim, in the manner of Thucydides, that his subject, Rome's origins and history, is the most worthwhile subject for the writer and reader of history. In his Preface he elaborates the implications of the model, and offers the climactic assessment that Rome "was ordained by fate to excel in the course of time all other cities, whether Greek or barbarian, not only in its size, but also in the majesty of its empire and in every other form of prosperity, and to be celebrated above them all as long as mortality shall endure." This seems to be Dionysius' genuine belief; at least the search for nuance and subterfuge in his writing have not been completely successful. It is certainly a plainer and less encumbered statement of Rome's immortality than anything found in Latin writers, even Aemilius Sura and Pompeius Trogus, whose use of the 4+1 model can be recovered from their fragmentary works.

The historian Appian lived at a time when the stability of the Roman Empire, despite a relatively brief violent transition between dynasties a hundred years previously, seemed secure and almost indisputable. Like Dionysius, Appian prefaces his *History* with the 4+1 succession of empires to demonstrate Rome's unprecedented greatness. Appian openly expresses confidence in Rome's continuing strength and domination; it had survived *stasis* by becoming stronger than before. Rome's endurance was a more prominent theme in Appian's time. In a similar manner, Aelius Aristides expressed the hope that Rome would be the last empire in history: "History records five empires, and may their numbers not increase."⁸ Plutarch suggested that Rome, unlike all previous political entities, may have

⁸ Aelius Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration* 234 (183–4).

defeated Fortune herself.⁹ Yet doubt lingers: were *five books*, more than a fifth of the entire composition, really necessary to make the point of Rome's endurance – especially when those books are filled with ever more hideous examples of “the measureless ambition of men, their dreadful lust of power . . .”? The Romans had overcome internal division – but through military means; the second-century reader may have wondered whether the Romans had overcome innate human tendencies as well.

We see, then, that the concept of immortal Rome was used in a perhaps less critical or fraught manner in Greek literary sources, especially as the Principate proved its stability and resilience; the one who offers complications is Polybius, writing in the Republic. It may be added that, from the early Principate, ἀέναντος Ῥώμῃ is occasionally invoked in Greek inscriptions from the provinces, such as in an oath to Tiberius from Cyprus and a foundation text from Akmonia,¹⁰ without apparent hesitation about the literal meaning of the term. The untroubled invocation of immortal Rome shows the kind of devotion or loyalty to the central power that a local powerful figure would wish to demonstrate, both locally and to any Roman official who might see it.

3 Jews

Further from Rome, towards the periphery of the Empire, the idea of Rome's future demise was widespread and the reasons for it were more openly and explicitly stated. Most provincial authors did not write for the Roman rulers in Rome; Josephus is the obvious exception. For Philo, laboring in first-century Alexandria to understand the Hebrew Bible (in Greek) and Greek philosophy as a unified system of thought, the only thing of permanence is God's providence; earthly empires rise and fall according to the divine will, and according to a divine plan. This theological view of history, both past and future, is explicated in Chapter 6 (Philo on the Impermanence of Empires) by Katell Berthelot. She writes that:

... from Philo's perspective, the only human community that shall endure against all the vicissitudes of life is that of Israel. The Roman Empire shall fade away, as all worldly powers do. Roman rule may last longer if emperors truly attempt to rule in a just way, and respect the right of Israel to live

⁹ *On the Fortune of the Romans* 1, 2; see Chapter 6 by Berthelot in this volume.

¹⁰ SEG 18.578, compare SEG 17.750 and *I. Salamine* 138; IGRR 4.661; see also possibly SEG 59.278 from Athens and SEG 49.1488 from Ephesus (undated).

according to its ancestral laws. It may come to an end sooner than most people think if the Romans behave unjustly and challenge God's providential care for Israel.

Thus it is not Philo's business to make predictions about when and how Rome will fall. That Rome will eventually fade away is stated unambiguously in *Quaestiones in Genesim*, but without the triumphalism that marks other Jewish writings of the first century, rather a sound philosophical certainty that God will eventually bring the perfect balance of justice to the world, and enact his "providential care for Israel." Unlike the Greek historians of Rome, Philo found little significance *per se* in the succession of previous empires; all fallen empires are examples of the same truth, namely that terrestrial powers are all impermanent; the better ones may last longer, as a reward for just rule, but inevitably come to end. In the *Legatio ad Gaium*, Philo subtly undermines the conventional claim that Rome ruled over the entire world. Yet he avoids not only Greek historiographical models, but also direct interaction with the prophetic texts like Daniel that inspired confidence in God's providence among other Jews in the period. Moreover, Philo's conviction about the existence of a divine historical plan, providing for the eternal existence only of Israel, gives a different, less important meaning to *Tyche* as a factor in history than do other writers of the early Principate, since in his theology, *Tyche* as a deliberate supernatural force guiding events must still be subordinate to God, and as a random force is contradicted by God's careful and deliberate orchestration. Even Rome's unquestioned dominance cannot be attributed to any other cause than the divine *logos*. Berthelot concludes: "It seems that for Philo, Roman rule was not the result of mere chance, insofar as God controls everything on earth, but simultaneously could not be described as a divine gift implying that divine providence worked on behalf of the Romans. In Philo's work, providence seems to be covenantal: God's providence either sustains the cosmos or benefits Israel . . ."

Philo, in his avoidance of the Book of Daniel and apocalyptic visions in general, as well as the historical succession of empires, stands apart from most other streams of thought in first-century Judaism about Rome's future, especially after 70 CE. The idea of the succession of four world empires, with a final fifth entity bringing down the fourth, originated in the second chapter of the Book of Daniel, the 4+1 model in its original form. Four empires symbolized by regressively cheaper metals will succeed one another until an enigmatic stone will smash the fourth and endure forever. Jews interpreted the stone as the Messiah, and in the first century it