

The Limits of Universal Rule

All major continental empires proclaimed their desire to rule “the entire world,” investing considerable human and material resources in expanding their territory. Each, however, eventually had to stop expansion and come to terms with a shift to defensive strategy. This volume explores the factors that facilitated Eurasian empires’ expansion and contraction: from ideology to ecology, economic and military considerations to changing composition of the imperial elites. Built around a common set of questions, a team of leading specialists systematically compare a broad set of Eurasian empires – from Achaemenid Iran, the Romans, Qin and Han China, via the Caliphate, the Byzantines and the Mongols to the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, Russians, and Ming and Qing China. The result is a state-of-the art analysis of the major imperial enterprises in Eurasian history from antiquity to the early modern that discerns both commonalities and differences in the empires’ spatial trajectories.

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Eurasian Empires Compared

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Abbreviations

BHAch I, II	Pierre Briant, <i>Bulletin d'Histoire Achéménide</i> , I (1997), II (2001)
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
DB, DNa, DPd, DPe, DPh, DSab, DZe	Royal inscriptions of Darius the Great (522–486 B. C.) found at Behistoun (DB), at Nash-i Rostam (DNa), at Persepolis (DPd, DPe, DPh), à Suse (DSa) and at Suez in Egypt (DZe)
HPE	Pierre Briant, <i>History of the Persian Empire</i> (1996)
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
KCP	Pierre Briant, <i>Kings, Countries and Peoples</i> (2017)
NN	Unedited Persepolis tablets.
PF	Richard T. Hallock, <i>Persepolis Fortification Tablets</i> (1969)
PFa	Richard T. Hallock, “Selected Fortification Texts,” (1978)
PT	George G. Cameron, <i>Persepolis Treasury Tablets</i> (1948)
SPQR	Senatus Populusque Romanus
TADAE	Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> . 4 vols. (1992–9)
TIB	Tabula Imperii Byzantini

Preface

Max Müller (1823–1900), the German professor of religion at Oxford, had famously stated that “He who knows one [religion], knows none.” Whether or not this dictum applies to studies of imperial histories is debatable; but what is undeniable is that a growing number of historians – including the editors and contributors to this volume, as well as many colleagues involved in parallel projects worldwide – believe that adding a comparative perspective to the study of “their” empire will enrich them immensely. It is with this understanding in mind that we inaugurate herewith the first volume of what we hope will become a series of studies that compare functioning patterns of major imperial formations in Eurasia.

Two of the co-editors (Biran and Pines) had the fortune to participate in several cross-disciplinary workshops initiated by the late Professor S. N. Eisenstadt (1923–2010). It is the intellectual breadth of our teacher that inspired us to undertake this project and it is to Professor Eisenstadt that we want to dedicate this volume.

This volume would never have been possible without enthusiastic collaboration of our contributors and the other participants at the Erfurt 2015 conference, from which this volume derives, as well as the dedicated research assistance, particularly of Dr. Ishayahu Landa. We thank them all and hope for new rounds of fruitful collaboration.

We are also extremely grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the generous support of which (via Michal Biran’s Anneliese Maier Research Award) enabled us to launch our project and convene its first two conferences. In addition, in preparing this volume we were supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grants 240/15 and 568/19) and the Michael William Lipson Chair in Chinese Studies (Yuri Pines), and the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007–13) through ERC Grant Agreements n. 312397 (Michal Biran) and n. 295555 (Jörg Rüpke).