Introduction

The papers collected in this book roughly deal with three topics concerning empire and ideology in the ancient world. The first six share in common the attempt to trace anachronisms in modern views of ancient empires, anachronisms which, as I suggest, lead to misinterpretations and distorted perspectives. The next nine deal with aspects of ethnic and cultural relationships, and Graeco-Roman views of others, foreigners, and minorities, and include two concerned with the Jews. These nine papers also contain examples of anachronistic views of the ancient world, but their aim is, first and foremost, to trace the limits of tolerance and integration in ancient empires; they also provide specific evidence for mixed or separate communities in Late Roman Palestine. The final two papers propose solutions to controversies over Roman control of desert routes, notably the priorities given to frontier defence or rather to security of communications.

Roma Aeterna

The concept of Eternal Rome is a familiar one. Nowadays we associate it with the city that once ruled an empire, became the world-capital of Roman Catholicism, continued to exist as one of the major cultural centres of the Western world, and is still there, a vibrant city for us to admire.

But what did *Roma aeterna* mean to the Romans as a concept? That is the topic of the first study in this book.

Scipio, as cited by the historian Polybius, expounded that nothing is eternal and therefore Rome would end like other cities before it. This explicitly denies the idea of an eternal Rome, whatever it represents. An insistence on eternity is first found in the work of Cicero: the army gave the Roman people its name and brought it eternal glory. Here eternity does not refer to the city as such, but to Rome as a people who are collectively eternal. We encounter something similar in the expression 'the eternal memory of your name'. The concept of 'the Roman name' has a

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specific force and more will be said about this. In Cicero's *civitas*, in the
sense of 'the state', empire and glory should be eternal. The idea of 'eter-
nity' in most cases applies to these concepts, and only rarely to the city
(once in a letter, *urbs*). We find the same pattern in the work of authors
of the Augustan period. In Livy's work the city is described as eternal only
twice. A similar tendency is found in the works of Tibullus and Ovid.

Many passages of various authors from the Augustan period which use
the term 'eternal' mention Romulus, the founder of the city, the city's
foundation, or crucial moments in Roman history. One of them, by Ovid
in his *Fasti,* specifically mentions the eternity of the *numina Caesaris*. This
is the only reference to the eternity of an emperor, rather than the city or
the Empire, in the Julio-Claudian period, an indication that the idea was
conceivable, but not regarded as appropriate at the time. Suetonius' criti-
cism of Nero, who applied the concept to himself, is telling.

Velleius Paterculus and Valerius Maximus each refer to the eternity of
the Roman Empire. Both the Elder and the Younger Pliny combine the
ideas of the glory and eternity of the Empire.

The city as such is said on two further occasions to be eternal: in the
work of Frontinus (on the city's aqueducts) and, much later, in that of
Ammianus. In other words: to call the city eternal remained exceptional in
Roman antiquity. We should note the existence of a cult to 'Roma Aeterna'
(the state) in provinces, as testified by inscriptions.

The idea of an eternal Rome is thus sometimes associated with Rome as
a city, but far more often with Rome as a state, a people, and, above all, an
empire. This ambiguity has deeper roots. It is immediately connected with the
fluidity of the concept of Rome itself. Rome began as a village that developed
into a city-state and gradually expanded into an empire. The name 'Roma'
could refer to the city, but also to the people, or rather, the collective citizenry.
The Empire, of course, was called *Imperium Romanum*, but to translate that
as 'the Roman Empire' is somewhat misleading, or a simplification, for the
original meaning of the term was 'power', 'the power of the Roman Empire'.
Even in the days of the Principate it was never a purely geographic concept.
There was no simple term for 'the Roman state', for *civitas* was also a fluid term
that could simply indicate a city, but also refer to its citizens. The expression
that is most often used for the 'the Roman state' is *nomen Romanum*. Cicero is
the first to use it frequently: 'For so great is the dignity of this empire, so great
is the honour in which the Roman name is held among all nations.'[1] Here it

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[1] Cicero, *Ver.* 2.5.150: *tanta enim huius imperi amplitudo, tanta nominis Romani dignitas est apud omnis
nationes ut ista in nostros homines crudelitas nemini concessa esse videatur.*

can still be interpreted as merely a term for 'reputation'. That is no longer the case when Cicero says: 'Who has such a hatred, one might almost say for the Roman name, as to despise and reject the *Medea* of Ennius or the *Antiope* of Pacuvius, and give as his reason that though he enjoys the corresponding plays of Euripides he cannot endure books written in Latin?'[2] The expression *nomen Romanum* occurs frequently in Augustan literature, notably the work of Livy, again in phrases that may indicate 'the Roman reputation' or 'fame',[3] but also in the sense of 'people' or even 'power': 'Go, and with the help of the gods, restore the unconquerable Roman name!'[4] It is also used frequently as a term for 'the Roman people'.[5] In the fourth century the Isaurians are described as inhabiting a region 'in the middle of "the Roman name"'.[6] Here, of course, it refers to the Roman Empire. A proper understanding of the eternity which the Romans ascribed to Rome requires a lucid understanding of their various means of self-identification.

Roman Victory Displayed: Symbols, Allegories, and Personifications

The second essay in this book deals with a topic related to that of the first: the meaning and significance of what are usually regarded as symbols, allegories, and personifications that represent Roman superiority, conquest, and rule over other peoples. This is an attempt to clarify the ancient perspective as opposed to our modern approach, which is that personifications and allegories are 'abstract thinking made easy'. In our age ideas and concepts are given the shape of living persons, as in the case when justice is depicted as a blindfolded woman with scales and sword, or the USA appears as Uncle Sam. In the ancient world, on the other hand, similar images are used to express mythological entities, not abstract ones. Gaia, Uranus, Helios, Selene, Eros, etc. are at one and the same time physical phenomena as well as anthropomorphic gods, who fall in love, marry, have children, and, in the case of Uranus, get castrated.

Ancient ideas of collective or national identity are different from those of our times. Here we return to the subject of Chapter 1. For example, on its

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[2] Cicero, *Fin.* 1.4.6: *quis enim tam inimicus paene nomini Romano est, qui Ennii Medeam aut Antiopam Pacuvii spernat aut reiciat?*
[3] Livy 4.33.5: *nominis Romani ac uirtutis patrum uestraeque memores.*
[4] Livy 7.10.4: *perge et nomen Romanum inuictum iuuantibus dis praesta.*
[5] For instance: Frontinus, *Str.* 1.2.2; Nepos, *Vit. Han.* 7.3; HA Severus Alexander 53: *nomen Romanum et imperium.*
[6] HA Tir. Tryg. 26: *in medio Romani nominis solo regio eorum.*

coins the city of Athens refers to itself as 'the Athenians', not as 'Athens'. As just noted, the Roman Empire was the *Imperium Romanum*, i.e. 'Roman power', and the city the *senatus populusque Romanus* or *Romanorum*, 'the senate and the people of Rome'. Rome, the state, is usually designated as *nomen Romanum*. In other words, the Roman Empire was not a single abstract entity, but the expression denoted Rome's military might, or a collective of the senate and the people of Rome. The alternative was a monarchy where the monarch *was* the state, Persia and Egypt being the classic examples. This is still the case in the work of Shakespeare: France, England, Lancaster, and York are persons – rulers and lords. The same was not true for the Roman emperor, who is never called *Roma* in the literature.

Symbols and Personifications

When considering Graeco-Roman images as symbols and personifications, we are attempting to understand pre-monotheistic concepts with conceptual models drawn from secular, post-Renaissance culture. It ought to be obvious, but is not generally regarded so, that we must be extremely cautious when interpreting material from the former period along lines familiar to us who live in a later period. Or, to put it differently, our modern approach is that personifications and allegories are abstract concepts, or impersonal or collective entities, depicted in the form of living individuals. Ideas are given the shape of human beings, as in the case just mentioned, when justice is depicted as a woman with scales. In the ancient world, on the other hand, similar images are used to show mythological figures, not abstract ones, as already noted in the case of Gaia, Uranus, Helios, Selene, and Eros. There is an essential difference: in Graeco-Roman antiquity it was thought that Gaia and Helios actually existed somewhere in reality. Nobody in modern times would imagine that Justice is alive in the shape of a woman. We should avoid confusing modern forms of abstraction with expressions of ancient religion and mythology.

Images of States and Peoples

Having established this line of reasoning we now return to ancient ideas of collective or national identity which are radically different from those of our times.

To start with the modern symbols of state: a modern flag has no meaning in itself, but is regarded as an object of value only because of what it symbolically represents, even if there may often be confusion and controversy,

especially when nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism crossed the boundary between secular, collective self-identification and chauvinist mysticism.[7] Even so, a modern national flag is essentially a secular object that is respected, but not believed to have magical powers. Expressions of disrespect are just that – they are not believed to be actual sacrilege or harmful magic, although they may be prohibited by law. In antiquity it was the representation of the ruler himself that was regarded as sacred. The likeness of the emperor on coins or in the form of a statue was no mere symbol; it had magic significance in and of itself and any hostile or demeaning act aimed at the image was regarded as an act of sacrilege.[8] The distinction is not always kept in mind, which is the reason for Chapter 2.

Just as there is no ancient equivalent of a national flag, an impersonal object which represents the abstract concept of a modern nation-state, there is no ancient equivalent of an animal representing the state in modern times, such as a lion, dragon, or eagle. Such symbols have their roots in heraldry, the animals appearing on many medieval and later coats of arms, a custom developed in the High Middle Ages in order to identify individual combatants.[9] Ancient Athens is associated with the owl, the reason being that that animal was closely associated with the Athenian guardian divinity, Pallas Athena. Here again the distinction is one of abstract symbolism and genuine religion. Pallas Athena was a supernatural power and so was her owl. The American eagle is a secular abstraction, unlike the eagle now often associated with Rome. To the Romans the eagle was primarily associated with the legionary standard (*aquila*), an object of cultic significance, but, again, not a symbol of the state. The Roman eagle was an identifier of a military unit.

The patron-goddess of cities in Hellenistic and Roman times, Tyche, is not a personification but a guardian deity. The wolf was important in Roman myth, for it was a she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus. We

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[7] The text of the Pledge of Allegiance of the United States, for instance, is confused and opaque and has been a subject of controversy, including a long list of court cases, especially since the addition of the words 'under God' in 1954. Cf. J. W. Baer, *The Pledge of Allegiance: A Revised History and Analysis, 1892–2007* (Annapolis, MD, 2007); J. J. Montgomery, 'Controversies over the Pledge of Allegiance in Public Schools: Case Studies Involving State Law, 9/11, and the Culture Wars' (Harvard PhD thesis, 2015, networked resource (DASH): http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:16461048).

[8] This is to be distinguished again from the pre-modern idea of the divine right of kingship. The king may have believed he enjoyed his status as a result of divine will, but divinity did not extend to the king as a person or to his images, which had no magical or divine qualities.

[9] Army units of the Roman Empire were, of course, identified by the distinctive markings on their shields and by standards and eagles. These were not heraldic in the medieval sense, as they were associated with units, not with individuals or families.

cannot, therefore, claim that the wolf is some sort of national symbol for Rome. It was an important animal of mythological significance because of its role in the legendary origins of the city.

The first point of this chapter is thus that we must be far more cautious than is often the case in the modern literature in using terms like personification, allegory, and symbol when interpreting figures in art who somehow represent peoples and cities. On the one hand, these figures may often be deities; on the other hand, they may be meant as a typical, but not a collective, representation of a community.

The more specific question asked here is to what extent ancient art, when celebrating Roman victories over foreigners, introduced allegories and personifications.

In general it ought to be obvious that the term 'personification' is inappropriate when applied to Greek and Roman art. When an image of a woman in specific dress appears on a relief or coin with the inscription 'Gallia' underneath, it is often, without further ado, claimed that this is a personification. This implies that the province(s) or peoples of Gallia are conceived in Roman thought as an abstract entity, represented by a woman. This is modern thinking. 'Gallia' is a region, a number of Roman provinces, inhabited by numerous tribes. The woman depicted represents a typical specimen of one of its inhabitants. The view that it is a form of abstraction is influenced by eighteenth-century concepts.

A related topic is the interpretation of narrative art, images depicting a sequence or a series of events – as distinct from a single scene, or better, a historically significant moment. The latter may appear on coins or in sculpture. It is argued here that such single scenes allude to a significant moment in history, deemed familiar to the spectator. We should not, it is claimed here, interpret such scenes as allegories. When more space is available, as on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, we are faced with scenes from the entire war, from the beginning to the end. This is imperial art, concrete and explicit, but definitely not allegorical or symbolic by nature. The intention is to evoke the reality of war and Roman victory.

Victory Monuments in the Provinces, Trophies

A trophy is often depicted on Roman coins and monuments celebrating victories. The origin of the trophy is a sacrifice dedicated to the gods, taken from some of the spoils acquired in war. In due course these might be replaced by works of art made from or depicting them. It might seem obvious to call depictions of such trophies on coins and in sculpture symbols,

but this misses the point. The trophies were a genuine form of sacrifice following victory and that is what they remained.

There is an extensive collection of victory monuments set up in the provinces to celebrate Roman victories. These may depict individuals from the provinces and are therefore regularly interpreted as 'personified peoples (*ethnē*]) and provinces whose common feature … was that they were conquered, or deemed to have been conquered', by Rome. It is argued here that the images are not allegories, personifications, or symbols, they are a single image serving as illustration for each subjugated tribe. Clearly, the aim of such monuments was to convey the extent of the Empire, both its geographical spread and its ethnic variety.

The result of all this is that the conclusions of the two first chapters seem to reach opposite, or at least paradoxical, conclusions. The Rome that was eternal, according to Roman authors, was not the physical city as such, but the Roman people and the Empire. The terminology used to indicate the city, the state, and the Empire is not as straightforward as might be expected. In particular there is no obvious term for the state which usually is called *nomen Romanum*. Next follows the analysis of what are usually regarded as symbols, allegories, and personifications that represent Roman superiority, conquest, and rule over other peoples. Here it is argued that this represents anachronistic thinking. These depictions in art and on coins are not abstract symbols, allegories, and personifications, but images deriving from religion and myth or, alternatively, representations of concrete reality, such as conquered peoples, or enslaved cities.

These two chapters in fact deal with related topics: concepts of Roman self-identification and the manner in which Rome expressed the superiority of Roman imperial power. In both cases it is argued that anachronistic assumptions have prevented us from regarding these concepts from the ancient Roman perspective which is necessary for a proper understanding of Roman ideology.

The Roman Army and Violence

Political and military control, stability, and continuity are a precondition for imperial rule. The essential instrument to assure those aims as well as that of expansion, when desired, or defence, when necessary, was of course the army. In the case of the Roman army, unlike the armed organization of most modern states, the same military apparatus served to realize Rome's political aims directed outward – offence and defence – as well as the maintenance of internal control. In other words, there was no distinction

between the imperial army, the organization which operated against for-
eigners and against foreign powers, and the police force which maintained
internal control.

The exercise of violence is a basic feature of any army. In modern states
it is usually assumed that the sort of armed aggression aimed at foreigners
is not suitable for internal use. That is why there are different organizations
for the realization of the aims of the regime – at least in well-ordered states.
Since one and the same military organization fulfilled both aims in the
Roman Empire, it is useful to pay attention to the efficacy of the Roman
army as a police force.

This chapter therefore deals with the subject of the army and violence
within the Empire, notably in major cities. Although this may not imme-
diately be obvious, it is related to the subjects discussed in the first two
chapters in this book, namely a conceptual difficulty in defining the essence
of state, city, citizenship, and the instruments of physical control. When
considering reasonably well-functioning states – and we might assume that
the Roman Empire resembled such a state, given its longevity – we take
a number of assumptions for granted. We regard it as likely that the state
guarantees the physical and economic safety of its citizens at a minimum
level. We assume that it does not abuse the citizens in a random fashion.
A reasonable limit to the force exerted in order to maintain order and
internal security is expected. There may be differences of opinion about
what is permitted, what is necessary, and what is illegitimate, but these are
part of a modern public discourse. The numerous states where these basic
conditions do not apply are not regarded as essentially functional by our
own standards.

In the Roman Empire the situation was clearly different from what we
regard as desirable.

(1) Massive violence in cities. It appears from the sources that the use of
    combat troops for internal police duties resulted in a far more violent
    treatment of civilians than we would now consider reasonable or effi-
    cient for the purpose of maintaining control.
(2) Physical force in a judicial context. The lack of separation of judicial
    and police authority resulted in the exercise of physical force in judi-
    cial contexts. Non-citizens could be and were physically abused before
    legal proceedings or go without them altogether.
(3) Physical abuse of individuals by soldiers or civilians of superior social
    status. The social position of military men and the weaponry at their
    disposal allowed them to intimidate and abuse civilians without proper

checks. There is evidence of acts of random violence carried out by sol-
diers without any legal or judicial restraints. This was the result of the
absence of a well-organized police force that could exert authority in
the civilian sphere.

We are therefore faced with a paradox. One of the important features of
modern states, the organization of justice, to some extent has its origins
in Roman law. At the same time, however, the Roman Empire must be
regarded a failure when we apply the norms of a modern constitutional
state in which the exercise of governmental power is constrained by the
law, and by rules defining what we regard as morally right.

Innovation and the Practice of Warfare in the Ancient World

A familiar pattern in recent centuries is the fact that warfare engenders
spurts of technical development and innovation. The question here is
not whether there existed science in the ancient world. It is a matter
of fact that there was, even if it was different from science in the mod-
ern sense of the word. Instead we consider whether there was a dem-
onstrable connection between science and war, and between war and
innovation. It is argued here that there was no close connection and,
more importantly, that it was not present even where one might have
assumed it to have existed.

It is obvious that there existed technology and technological progress in
antiquity, but this was not driven by scientific research, let alone research
carried out in specific institutions set up for this purpose, which is the
standard practice in our times. It reflected a process of learning by trial and
error. Moreover, in matters of state and warfare, this was not an institu-
tionalized process subject to rules and a reasoned method. We are facing
conceptually simple technological innovation, not science contributing to
change or war inspiring scientific progress.

First, war itself. There was no systematic work on a theory of warfare, no
institutionalized effort to draw lessons from the past for future use. There
are texts about specific aspects of warfare such as the collection of infor-
mation, tactics, and stratagems. These do reflect the past, but it is clear
that the Roman imperial army did not draw lessons systematically. Of the
various branches of learning and technology that already existed in the
past there are a few immediately relevant to warfare: geography, medicine,
and engineering, notably the improvement of weaponry. The conclusion
is drawn that all of these were applied to the needs of armies and fighting,

but none were subject to systematic research for the sake of innovation and improvement in functionality. This is all the more remarkable since the Roman imperial army was the first professional force of its kind in history. Consequently, the medical services in the army were on a large scale and well organized, relatively speaking, but the innovation lies in the sphere of practical organization, of taking care of the well-being of soldiers, without a significant role being played by scientific inquiry for the advancement of medical science.

The conclusion is paradoxical: the science that existed was not employed for gain in warfare as one might have expected, and experience gained in war did not normally give the impetus to the kind of further scientific development that is taken for granted in modern times. The reasons are to be sought in the ancient social value-system and the consequent organization of the officer corps of the army. The Roman army was commanded by wealthy, aristocratic amateurs. No less essential is the absence, in antiquity, of a clear concept of progress. Where there is no such sense, there is no drive to make progress happen.

Chapter 4 emphasizes conceptual, intellectual, and practical differences between antiquity and our times where these have been underestimated, or even ignored, in the scholarly literature. It is claimed here that the apparent modernity of much in Greek and Roman culture tends to obscure the enormous differences.

Core–Periphery Notions

The next chapter, like the considerations of symbols and personifications in Chapter 2, again considers a case of popular but anachronistic views of the ancient world. It deals with a phenomenon that is related to, but different from, that discussed in the previous chapter on innovation, namely a fashionable model applied to the Roman Empire. It is argued here, first, that this model clashes with the manner in which the Romans themselves saw their empire and, second, that it distorts ancient reality, quite apart from how the ancients themselves saw their world. The modern theory is the Core–Periphery model developed by Immanuel Wallerstein. This is essentially an expansion of dependency theory, which is a body of social scientific theories predicated on the notion that resources flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped states to a 'core' of wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expense of the former.

Before the validity of the modern theory is discussed, the ancient world-views are described. The Greeks, notably Herodotus, indeed regarded their