

TRADE ROUTES AND COMMERCE

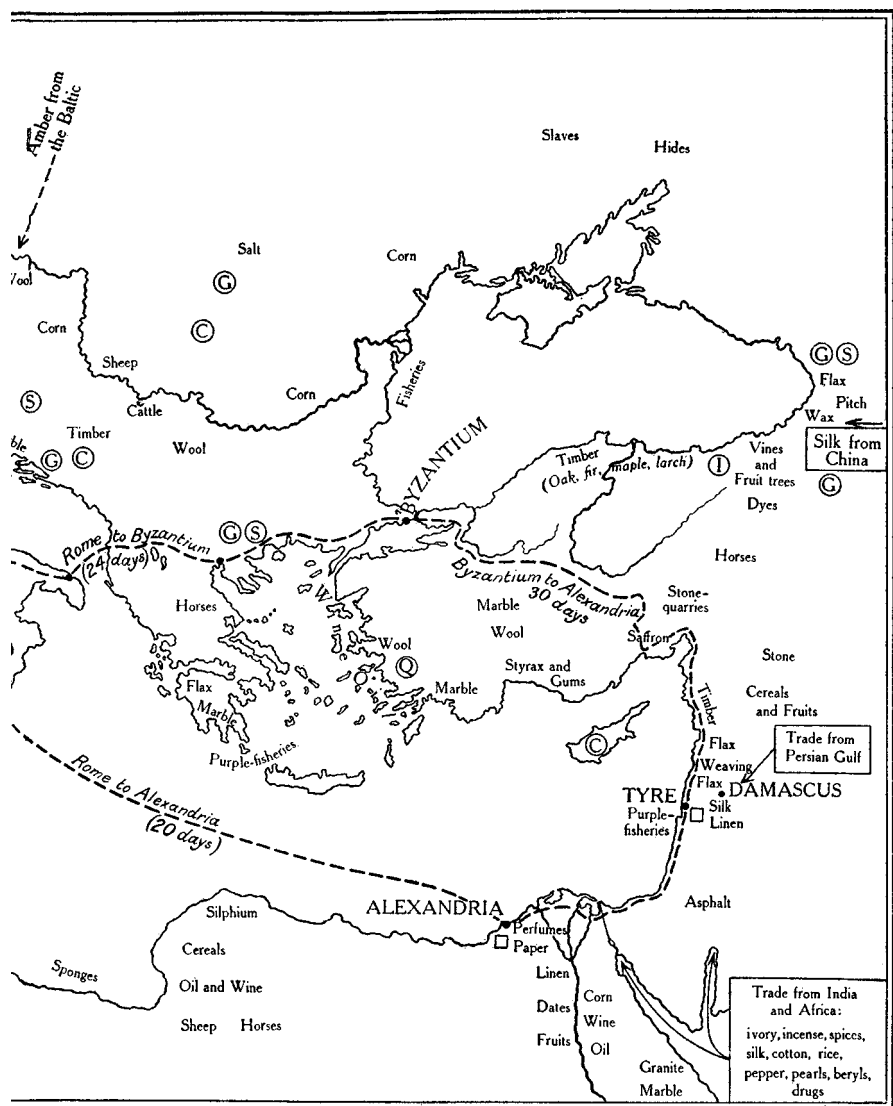
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978-1-316-62005-2 — Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire

M. P. Charlesworth

Frontmatter

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OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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TRADE-ROUTES
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To

WILLIAM COOPER PROCTER

TRUSTEE OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΗ

P R E F A C E

IN this book I have tried briefly to outline a part of the economic life of the Roman Empire during its first two centuries. I cannot claim to have done full justice to the period: the subject is too interesting, the problems too many, to be treated adequately in two hundred and forty pages; but I trust that the book gives a reasonably true picture, and that it will prove useful, even if merely as a collection of facts. I have given, without any idea of fullness, such references as seemed to me necessary; these I have gathered in the course of my own reading save a few which I owe to the works of M. Jullian and M. Pârvan.

I have enjoyed writing this book for two reasons: firstly because I believe in the Roman Empire, and secondly because the work has been done in three pleasant places of this world—in the Graduate College of Princeton University in America, in Jesus College, and finally in St John's College, Cambridge. To the governing bodies of all these great societies I must express my thanks for their kindness, and to many friends for their ready help. More especially would I thank Professor F. F. Abbott, and Professor David Magie, of Princeton, for generous aid and advice, and Mr Wilfrid Schoff, of Philadelphia, for kind permission to draw on his published papers; the examiners for the Hare Prize, Mr T. R. Glover and Mr F. E. Adcock, for criticism and suggestions: Mr R. S. Marsden and Mr P. S. Noble, scholars of Jesus and St John's Colleges respectively, for assistance with references, and last but not least Mr B. L. Manning, of Jesus College, who has helped me far more than I can describe or acknowledge.

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PREFACE

It is hardly possible that a first book such as this should not contain many faults—inaccuracies, over-statements, reiteration; I have done my best to correct this, but where errors still remain I must ask the reader, as does Odoric of Pordenone, “if he find anything too hard for belief, or wherein he judgeth me to stray from truth, let him remark thereon with a student’s charity and not with insolent bitterness and spiteful snarling.”

M. P. CHARLESWORTH

June 1924

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

A NEW edition has been called for far sooner than I thought likely. I have gladly seized the opportunity to correct some of the grosser blunders, to make some additions, to render some misunderstood passages more intelligible, to improve the Index, and to add a small map. No one knows the faults of this work better than I, but the conditions of reprinting did not allow that thorough revision which I should have liked to give it. But I hope the book may still prove useful, in a modest way.

M. P. C.

March 1926

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INTRODUCTION

*τίς ἀμείνων καὶ λυσιτελέστερα γένοιτ'
 ἂν ταύτης κατάστασις; νῦν πάντα μὲν
 ἄδεια πᾶσιν ὅπῃ βούλεται τις, πάντες
 δὲ οἱ πανταχοῦ λιμένες ἐνεργοί, νῦν
 τὰ μὲν ὄρη τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει τοῖς ὁδεύου-
 σιν ἢ περ αἱ πόλεις τοῖς οἰκοῦσιν
 αὐτὰς ἀσφάλειαν.* ARISTIDES

Speech before Marcus Aurelius.

What could be better or more profitable than the present state of affairs? Now any man can go whither he pleases with absolute confidence, the harbours all over the empire are full of business, even the mountains are as safe for those who journey over them as the cities are to those who dwell in them.

INTRODUCTION

THE history of how ancient commerce arose and of how man after many centuries of painful endeavour and of adventurous enterprise in lands and upon seas unknown succeeded finally in establishing those trade-routes, many of which are followed still by the modern world, is a fascinating one to study, and would prove delightful reading were it ever written down in its entirety. But unfortunately there are many obstacles to the completion of such a work, the chief one being that it would require an almost encyclopaedic mind to control and master the mass of multifarious detail that goes to form the whole. Yet it may still be possible to throw some light on the story by a consideration of Trade and of Routes at different periods of history, and it is the purpose of the present essay to discuss, however inadequately, the economic resources of the Roman Empire during the first two centuries of its existence, to indicate the various routes—old and new—by which the products of the different provinces were conveyed and interchanged, and to consider the amount of intercourse between peoples within the Empire itself. Only in this way can we obtain a glimpse of the true greatness of the Roman Empire, as a power, which, by giving freedom from enemies without and from brigandage or piracy within, and by improving all means of communication, fostered trade and commerce, and so promoted the well-being and happiness of its citizens and subjects.

It is only in recent years, however, that this interpretation has won any acceptance. In almost any older history of the period we find ourselves taught to regard it as a “necessary evil,” and we are regaled with accounts of tyrannical rule in Rome and with petty court scandals, interspersed with occasional frontier wars. Some historians, indeed, have realised the absurdity of such a picture, but they in their turn are so possessed with the idea of Municipal Self-Government that they appear to

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regard it as the sole hope for which the ancient world was longing. Indeed, people are usually surprised to hear that any considerable commerce even existed, for their thoughts have never turned in that direction.

Such a notion of the Empire is quite fallacious, and due almost entirely to the brilliant but biased writing of one ancient Roman historian. Tacitus was a pessimist of genius: his conception of the history of the period has prevailed over all others by virtue of his supreme art, and because of the indolence of modern historians. We do not rely for our knowledge of Queen Mary upon Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*; if we did, we should possess a very one-sided view of her character and of her whole reign. Yet in accepting meekly the Tacitean picture of the Early Empire—and many modern historians of that period are Tacitus and water—we are making quite as great a mistake. If we are to gain for ourselves a just estimate, we must turn to other authors and use epigraphic evidence. This is not easy, but it is worth the effort. If we make it, a new picture of the Empire begins to emerge. Between the strife and desolation of the Civil Wars and the later exhausting struggle against the inroads of the Northern barbarians we can descry two centuries of unexampled peace and prosperity under one far-reaching and efficient government. Indeed we may reasonably doubt whether at any other time in the history of the world so large a portion of the earth has enjoyed so long a visit of peace; it does not seem likely that a Roman, were he permitted to observe—and compare—the condition of present-day Macedonia and Thrace, or of Anatolia and the interior of Asia Minor, would be favourably impressed. To those who lament that it was an age of decadence and despair, we can reply that this may be true of the literary classes or of the vanishing nobility, but it is utterly false of the mercantile population; to them it was an age of hope, the dawn of a new era of stable government, of an amazing development of

industrial activity, and of pushing far into unknown lands in the promotion of trade. People who are in despair and unhappiness, carrying out hated tasks in a grudging spirit, do not take the trouble to raise magnificent monuments or make imposing dedications; they have not the heart for it. But a large portion of the Latin Corpus—apart from epitaphs—is filled with the inscriptions of merchants who made votive offerings after successful voyages, gave splendid buildings to their native cities, and set up monuments to the emperor, sometimes as private individuals, sometimes as members of a guild or a corporation. Again, the study of the first two centuries makes it possible to watch the development of roads and industries, which is in itself fascinating; when we reach the age of Constantine everything has hardened down into a monotonous routine and a dull hopelessness, and private enterprise has been almost stifled.

In order to carry out this study properly we must first consider the material upon which we can base our conclusions. Unfortunately, at the outset our task is made difficult by the very smallness of this material; the ordinary Roman writer or historian took little heed of such things as trade or traders, and our authorities are all too few. We must gather our evidence as best we can from various authors; deductions must be drawn from hints carelessly thrown out, meaning wrung from scattered milestones and from fragmentary inscriptions. There is no body of precise statistics, such as those upon which the recorder of modern movements can rely, no collection of papers and manorial accounts, such as the mediaevalist can ransack—save in Egypt, which was an exceptional province—and hence we must suggest and indicate rather than employ dogmatic assertion. The authorities fall into two main classes; literary, and what we may term archaeological.

Among literary sources those of the greatest value to the historian of trade are the geographer Strabo and the

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omniscient elder Pliny. The former was an Asiatic Greek of good education; he travelled extensively and mixed with friends and officers of the emperor Augustus; where his personal knowledge was lacking he had numerous monographs and guide-books on which he could fall back, and doubtless had oral information from Gallus and his noble friends. Pliny—who comes about fifty years later—had an encyclopaedic mind; in the vast register of his *Natural History* where he “has deposited the discoveries, the arts, and the errors of mankind,” he has at the same time presented us with personal contributions from his own times and circumstances. Both are reliable men, who had travelled and gained experience of the world; without their volumes it would be almost impossible to form a clear conception of the condition of the provinces during the first century of our era: they are real contemporary authorities. In the second century there is much to be gleaned from the pages of the geographer Ptolemy, and—for the affairs of Greece—from the handbook of Pausanias. It is true that something can be gathered from such writers as Columella, Varro, and Dio Chrysostom, and from the poets, Vergil and Horace, Statius, Martial, and Juvenal, but these tend to confirm evidence already collected rather than to introduce new facts of importance. Apart from literary authors, there come certain geographical monographs and travellers’ handbooks, which are only too rare, but, where they are available, throw a flood of light upon trade conditions: the description of the voyage down the Red Sea to India left us by some unnamed sea-captain, the itinerary through Parthia, drawn up by Isidore of Charax, or the *Periplus of the Black Sea*, ascribed to Arrian, teem with valuable information.

When our literary sources are exhausted we can still fall back upon the archaeological; these include not only inscriptions, but also finds of pottery, vases, and other articles. Since they can be dated, and often assigned to

definite firms or makers, they afford valuable evidence for the extent of transport. Then there is the vast mass of inscriptions, collected by the patient labours of Mommsen and his helpers: if they are milestones they are usually dateable and so shew us what were the means of communication available at various periods; if they are dedications or epitaphs of merchants and traders, they throw valuable light upon the nationality, position, and business of these men, and upon the distances they travelled.

For such works as the *Tabula Peutingerana* or the *Antonine Itineraries*, though rightly used for giving an account of the roads of the Empire as they existed in the fourth and subsequent centuries, are naturally no evidence for their extent in the first or second, and besides afford no indication of how the complex system grew up and developed. To trace that out is an absorbing task; when we observe Tiberius constructing a special road to serve recently-acquired gold-mines near the Sierra Morena in Spain, Claudius opening up the rich iron-smelting districts of Brittany and Normandy and improving communication with the new province of Britain, garrisons placed in the passes of the Caucasus to protect travellers to and from the Caspian, new trade-roads established in Egypt by Hadrian, and expeditions being despatched, either down the Red Sea to protect merchant-ships from pirates, or across Parthia to get into closer touch with the Chinese silk-trade, we can almost see commerce developing before our eyes, and this is a thing that no map can shew us. Even roads that were originally built for frontier defence, for the quick transportation of troops from point to point, soon came to serve as highways for commerce, as the flourishing towns that sprang up along the Rhine or on the outskirts of Syria and Africa in the second century prove.

Again, to archaeological evidence we can give almost more than its full weight. It is unfortunately not likely

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that our literary sources will ever be greatly increased, even from the discovery of papyri. But no one could claim that archaeological exploration is complete: many sites have been but half explored, many are still unopened, fresh stones and inscriptions are coming to light almost daily. The knowledge we derive from archaeology is even more certain and explicit than a literary statement; the latter may be challenged, but the vases and jars are visible and tangible and cannot be disputed. Chance so often yields unexpected treasures that we may hope for further information as the years go on, long after the last drop of meaning has been squeezed from the words of Varro or Strabo or Pliny.

For the sake of convenience I have adopted one uniform method in dealing with the subject. After a short introduction upon Italy, I review each province or region in turn, discussing successively routes, agricultural resources, mineral wealth, industries, and the intercourse of different peoples within that province. At the end of the narrative portion will be found Notes, dealing with each chapter, which are intended to support and sometimes to amplify the text itself or to deal more fully with disputed points. But neither narrative nor notes make any claim to completeness: this is a handbook, not an encyclopaedia; I have therefore stressed essentials only, deliberately omitting matters of minor importance. Thus the Danubian lands and Britain are only treated summarily: they only developed late, and though not lacking in importance, could never rival France, or Spain, or Syria. In addition, for Britain, there are so many books and articles available in English that only the briefest outline seemed necessary.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

THIS is, as its title implies, a select list only. Indeed a complete one is almost unthinkable, for it would mean reference to articles in all archaeological periodicals published during the last fifty years. But all the books mentioned will be found useful.

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The small sketch-map included here is meant merely as a suggestive outline. Easily the best economic map of the ancient world is that attached to the article by Vidal de la Blache mentioned above. Handy maps will be found in Putzger's "Historischer Schul-Atlas," in Johnston's "Atlas of Ancient History," and in Murray's "Classical Atlas."

In the text itself I have often used modern names, where they are well known, that is, Rhine and Lyons instead of Rhenus and Lugdunum: but it seemed absurd to let Halys or Orontes masquerade as Kizil Irmak or as Nahr-el-Asi. I have not troubled, however, to be scrupulously consistent.

ADDENDA

Conditions of reprinting have made it impossible to alter and amplify the text as I should have liked: I add here, therefore, references to books and articles not previously mentioned.

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There are many gaps here which I hope one day to fill, but on Dacia and the Danubian regions see

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ADDENDA

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CORRECTIONS TO TEXT

- p. 17. “No strong forces . . .” The phrase is misleading: Syria had only four legions in all, and three legions were a considerable force.
- p. 32. “Keep away from the Jews.” It is only fair to add that this is, so far as I know, a solitary example of such feeling.
- p. 89. “the white marble of Synnada.” Another slip, due to hasty writing: the marble was a beautiful red-veined variety: cf. *Stat. Silv.* 1, 5. 37.
- p. 101. “it was here that Tigranes set Tigranocerta”: the word ‘here’ is misleading, but the city lay in the region of these routes, between the Southern and Northern branches. So much is certain, though I forbear to touch on the vexed question of the site of the city itself; see the exhaustive treatment in Rice-Holmes, *The Roman Republic*, 1, pp. 409–425.
- p. 211. On one stage in the early conquest of Britain see “The Fosse” by R. G. Collingwood in *J.R.S.*, xiv, pp. 252–256.
- p. 213. On the Roman roads in Cornwall see Collingwood in *Antiq. Journ.* iv, pp. 101–112.
- p. 236. For parallels to the ‘amphorae’ of Crispinilla, cf. the finds of vases made by Publius Cippius Polybius in Croatia, Hungary, Switzerland, Schleswig, and Denmark, or of the vases of Lucius Ansius Epaphroditus in Croatia, Denmark, and Sweden (Montelius, *Kulturg. Schwedens*, p. 168). Cf. also two silver vases of Augustan age (marked *Χειρίσοφος ἐπίει*) found on the island of Lolland in Denmark (*Supp. Epig. Graec.* II, p. 152, no. 885).