

CHAPTER ONE

From *Imperium* to Imperialism

WRITING THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The rise and fall of a great empire cannot fail to fascinate us, for we can all see in such a story something of our own times. But of all the empires that have come and gone, none has a more immediate appeal than the Empire of Rome. It pervades our lives today: its legacy is everywhere to be seen.

—Barry W. Cunliffe, *Rome and Her Empire*

The endurance of the Roman Empire is one of the success stories of history. That it survived so long is a sign of its principal achievement, whereby a heterogeneous mixture of races and creeds were induced to settle down together in a more or less peaceful way under the *Pax Romana*.

—J.S. Wachter, *The Roman World*

DEFINITIONS OF EMPIRE AND IMPERIALISM

It is generally agreed that the Roman Empire was one of the most successful and enduring empires in world history.¹ Its reputation was successively foretold, celebrated and mourned in classical antiquity.² There has been a long afterlife, creating a linear link between Western society today and the Roman state, reflected in religion, law, political structures, philosophy, art, and architecture.³ Perhaps partly in consequence, many

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¹ Empires seem to be fashionable these days. Visitors to the British Museum in recent years have been presented with a series of blockbuster exhibitions showcasing an array of ancient empires, from Babylon (Finkel and Seymour 2008), to China (Portal 2007), to Persia (Curtis and Tallis 2005) and Hadrian and Rome (Oppen 2008). Note also the Royal Academy Byzantium show (Cormack and Vassilaki 2008). Rome certainly stands up to this sort of scrutiny as an extraordinary example of a preindustrial superstate.

² Dalby 2000, 8–20, provides a good introduction to some of the key sources.

³ See Goodman 1997, 3, for an example of this sentiment.

people in the United States and Europe are curiously nostalgic about the Roman Empire in a way that has become deeply unfashionable in studies of modern empires.⁴

There have even been attempts to imagine a world in which the Roman Empire never ended. Some readers may be familiar with the wonderful conceit of Robert Silverberg's novel *Roma Eterna*, and his imagined episodes of later Roman history, including the conquest of the Americas and extending to an attempted "space shot" in the year 2723 AUC (*ab urbe condita*). The global scope and extreme longevity of Silverberg's Rome—still a resolutely pagan state at the end, having averted the rise of both Christianity and Islam—emphasizes the unedifying aspects of military dictatorship.⁵ Like bald narrative accounts of Roman history, these modern reimaginings blur into a catalog of wars, coups, attempted revolts, persecutions, assassinations, and murders.⁶ Here, of course, is the great paradox of the Roman Empire. Lauded in many modern accounts as an exemplary and beneficent power,⁷ it was also a bloody and dangerous autocracy.⁸ Of course, Rome was not the only human society prone to war and violence—much debate has been prompted by Lawrence Keeley's *War before Civilization* concerning humanity's predilection for intercommunal conflict from prehistory onward.⁹ However, the scale, frequency and length of wars in Roman society were undeniably unusual in a preindustrial age. Despite interesting differences from modern colonial regimes in the manner in which local elites were integrated into the imperial project, the facade of civil government was underpinned by violence, both real and latent.¹⁰

⁴ Notwithstanding Ferguson's recent efforts to rehabilitate the British Empire (2004), the strongly expressed proempire sentiments of Wells 1996 are less self-evidently correct to a postcolonial generation.

⁵ Silverberg 2003. McDougall 2005 represents another attempt to imagine the Roman Empire in the modern world, complete with high-tech crucifixion on steel crosses. For all its imagination (and pretension) neither book depicts the Roman world and power structures as well as Harris (2006).

⁶ Potter 2009 is a fine modern example of the grand narrative history, with the wars and power struggles predominating. Wells 1992 and Woolf 2004a are more rounded accounts of wars, politics, social institutions, and much more, but presented in an almost entirely positive manner.

⁷ A recent example is the work of British politician Boris Johnson (whose 2006 *Dream of Rome* is actually more of a fantasy than a dream).

⁸ See, most recently, Faulkner 2008 for a blow-by-blow description of Rome's history as "a system of robbery with violence" (p. xii).

⁹ Keeley 1996. See Parker Pearson and Thorpe 2005, and Thorpe 2003, for some of the ensuing debate.

¹⁰ Potter 1999 strikes a good balance between lauding the positives of Roman rule and acknowledging the effects of the state's "monopolization of extreme force."

Cinematic visions of Rome have changed over the years, but in general there is a mismatch between these depictions and the rosier scholarly consensus on the Roman Empire—typically what has been highlighted in “sword and sandal epics” has been sex and violence, with the empire more often than not representing the “dark side.”¹¹ Occasional ruminations on Rome’s decline and fall, of course, have had as much to tell us about contemporary unease about the future of the American empire.¹² It remains a paradox to me that cinema has done more to challenge our preconceptions of Rome than academic study. For instance, I can think of no darker depiction of life at the sharp end of Roman power than the scourging scene in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*.¹³

Definitions of imperialism and of empire are varied and controversial, so I need to make my position clear at the outset. Some commentators have argued that the *imperium Romanum* was quite distinct from the modern term *imperialism* and, in comparison with modern empires, the Roman Empire was a product of very different political and economic forces.¹⁴ A recent study has suggested that Roman expansionism fits more readily into an analytical frame of state building rather than an anachronistic back-projection of imperialism.¹⁵ Yet that seems to ignore much about Rome that was exceptional in relation to other states of classical antiquity—the nature of Rome as a cosmopolis or metropolis fits more readily into analysis of imperial systems than of other ancient cities.¹⁶

¹¹ On Rome as the “dark side,” see, e.g., the films *Ben Hur* (1959, dir. William Wyler), *Spartacus* (1960, dir. Stanley Kubrick), the TV miniseries *Masada* (1981, dir. Boris Sagal), or many a biblical epic. Even in the fabulous comedy of *Monty Python’s Life of Brian* (1979, dir. Terry Jones) there is much spot-on critical comment on Roman oppression and cruel punishments. The salacious sexuality of Rome is notably shown off in Federico Fellini’s *Satyricon* (1968) and Bob Guccione’s dreadful (what was Helen Mirren thinking?) *Caligula* (1979). The highly compulsive HBO TV series *Rome* (2005–2007) pulled off the neat trick of combining graphic sex and violence with soap opera characters to present Rome as a truly cruel and decadent society from top to bottom.

¹² See Anthony Mann’s *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) and Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000).

¹³ Almost unwatchable for its graphic detail and cruelty, the scourging in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) is nonetheless a compelling depiction of the mundane violence of the Roman Empire.

¹⁴ Hobson 1902.

¹⁵ Eich and Eich 2005; the definitional problem is, however, acknowledged on page 5: “The word imperialism seems to defy any easy definition.” Their linkage between violence/warfare and state-building seems reasonable for the early stages of Roman expansionism, but their analysis seems to elide the transformative effect on Roman society of the “extraordinary success in war” (which they admit distinguishes Rome from contemporary societies). I would argue that Rome’s success did transform its social, economic, and political structures in ways that have more in common with other empires than with other nascent states.

¹⁶ See various chapters in Edwards and Woolf 2003; also Morley 1996.

Similarly, the detail of extant Roman treaties with subject and allied peoples emphasize the extraordinary and unequal nature of these relations and the mechanisms that Rome adopted to control or to exert influence on far-flung territories.¹⁷ Furthermore, I believe that there are issues relating to the exercise of power and the responses that power evokes, where it is legitimate to draw comparisons as well as contrasts between ancient and modern. Current attempts to situate the modern United States among past empires recognize the relevance of the Roman world.¹⁸

So, let us move on to some key definitions. An *empire* is the geopolitical manifestation of relationships of control imposed by a state on the sovereignty of others.¹⁹ Empires generally combine a core, often metropolitan-controlled territory, with peripheral territories and have multiethnic or multinational dimensions. *Empire* can thus be defined as rule over very wide territories and many peoples largely without their consent. While ancient societies did not have as developed a sense of self-determination as modern states, the fact that incorporation was often fiercely contested militarily is symptomatic of the fundamentally nonconsensual nature of imperialism.

Imperialism refers to both the process and attitudes by which an empire is established and maintained. Some have argued that imperialism is essentially a modern phenomenon, though I would counter that the process existed in antiquity even if less explicitly developed in conceptual terms.²⁰ However, just as empires evolve over time, imperialism need not be static or uniform. When we look at the dynamics of the Roman Empire, we perhaps need to look beyond the rather monolithic definitions of most accounts and to consider several distinctive phases of imperialism. We also need to beware of the tendency of both modern and ancient commentators to explain earlier phases in the light of institutions and ideologies that developed only in later phases. Imperialism should be seen as a dynamic and shape-shifting process.

¹⁷ See Mitchell 2005 for a detailed study of a recently recognized treaty of 46 BC between Rome and Lycia, with accompanying discussion of other treaties. Mitchell notes (2005, 185) that there were “fundamental instruments of Roman policy. Countless bilateral agreements with nominally independent partners created a complex network of reciprocal legal relationships which underpinned Rome’s imperial authority.”

¹⁸ Hardt and Negri 2000; James 2006; Maier 2006. Vidal 1989 is perceptive on the influence of Rome on the formative years of American imperialism, with the first chapter alone containing numerous allusions by the protagonists to classical mythology and specific references to Julius Caesar (twice), Augustus, and Cicero.

¹⁹ For a range of definitions see Doyle 1986; Hardt and Negri 2000; Kieran 1995; Lieven 2000; Said 1993; and Webster 1996b.

²⁰ For a variety of views on imperialism, see Doyle 1986, 19; Howe 2002, 30; Lichtheim 1971, 4; Reynolds 1981, vii; and Said 1993, 8.

Colonialism is a more restricted term that defines the system of rule of one people over another, in which sovereignty is operated over the colonized at a distance, often through the installation of settlements of colonists in the related process of *colonization*.²¹ Both words, of course, derive from the Roman term *colonia*, initially definable as a settlement of citizens in conquered territory.²² In recent years there has been increasing interest in the diverse nature of colonialism and colonization through the ages and the archaeological manifestations of these processes.²³ We shall look in more detail at colonialism later on.

Explaining empire is much more tricky than defining it, but I think the key approach must be to explore the networks of power that sustain it. What unites all types and ages of empires is the combination of the “will to power” and the large scale at which it is expressed. The domination of others is a characteristic of human societies, but empires very often achieve the step change of effecting rule over vast areas and huge populations by comparatively small numbers of imperial servants.²⁴ For this reason alone, I do not accept that the ancient land empires can have nothing in common with the capitalist sea empires of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or the American airstrip and aircraft carrier empire of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²⁵ Even a modern account attempting to rehabilitate the reputation of the British Empire reveals telling structural similarities with the themes of this book—the changing realities of any specific empire as it went through phases of (d)evolution, globalization, the shrinking of the world though improved communications and infrastructure, the construction of power around the acquisition of knowledge, resource exploitation as driver or consequence of expansion, and the smoke-and-mirrors realities of minute provincial administrations ruling huge territories and millions of subjects.²⁶

²¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998, 45–51; Howe 2002, 30; Maier 2006, 44.

²² Gosden 2004, 1.

²³ Given 2004; Gosden 2004; Hodos 2006; Hurst and Owen 2005; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Stein 2005; Van Dommelen 1997; 1998; Van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007a.

²⁴ See Mitchell 2004 for a brilliant literary exploration of the Nietzschean view of power. For summary accounts of the relative economy of imperial rule in British India, see James 1997; Morris 1979.

²⁵ For similar arguments, see Webster 1997a. The work of international relations specialists such as Fitzpatrick (1992, 2005) reflects a similar preference for broad-based comparative study of empires.

²⁶ Ferguson 2004, xi–xxviii. While I disagree with many of his conclusions about the positive balance sheet of the British Empire (characterized on xxvii as the triumph of capitalism, the Anglicization of North America and Australasia, the predominance of Protestantism and the survival of parliamentary institutions), the analysis does not duck the issue of the negative impacts as well.

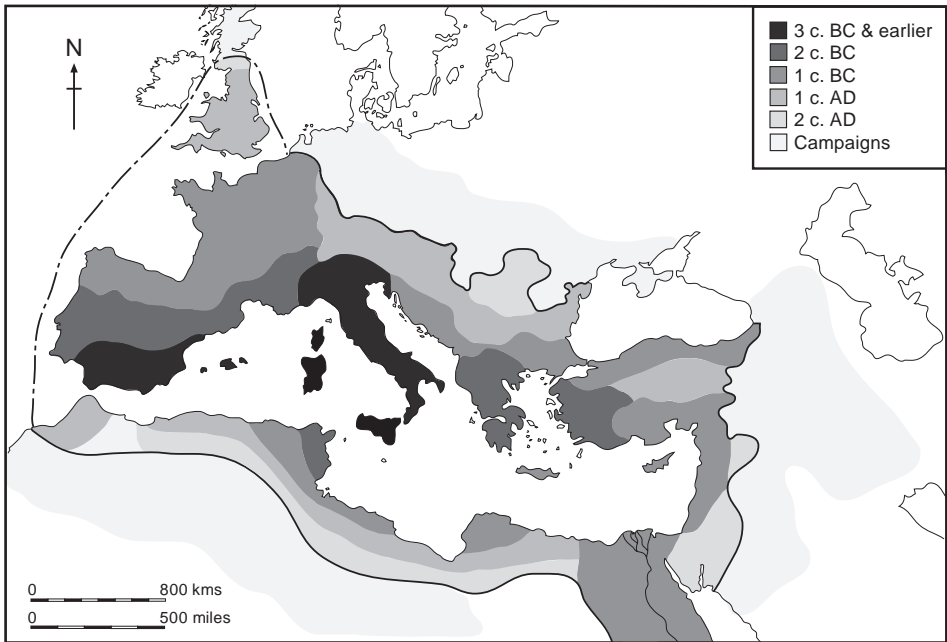


FIGURE 1.1 Map showing phases of expansion of the Roman Empire.

If we consider the extent and chronology of the Roman Empire, along with the manner in which it was acquired and governed, it is apparent that it shares many common characteristics with political and military entities that have been described as empires in world history.²⁷ But it is equally obvious in surveying historical “snapshot” maps of the growth and decline of the Roman territorial empire that this was a dynamic process, with structural breaks and discontinuities, more than a manifest destiny (see figs 1.1–1.2). The scale and formal processes of empires differ over time, but certain states—by their size, complexity, expanding borders, and populations—can be recognized as belonging to a family of empires. The Roman Empire at its height in the mid-second century encompassed an area of about 4 million square kilometers, with an ethnically diverse and polyglot population probably in excess of 60 million. The same area today is occupied by more than 40 modern nation states. Although Rome does not share all the characteristics of modern empires, the scale of the Roman Empire (especially in relation to preindustrial communications and infrastructure) is particularly striking and would suggest that Rome has as at least as much in common with megastates

²⁷ See Alcock et al. 2001 for a comparative perspective.

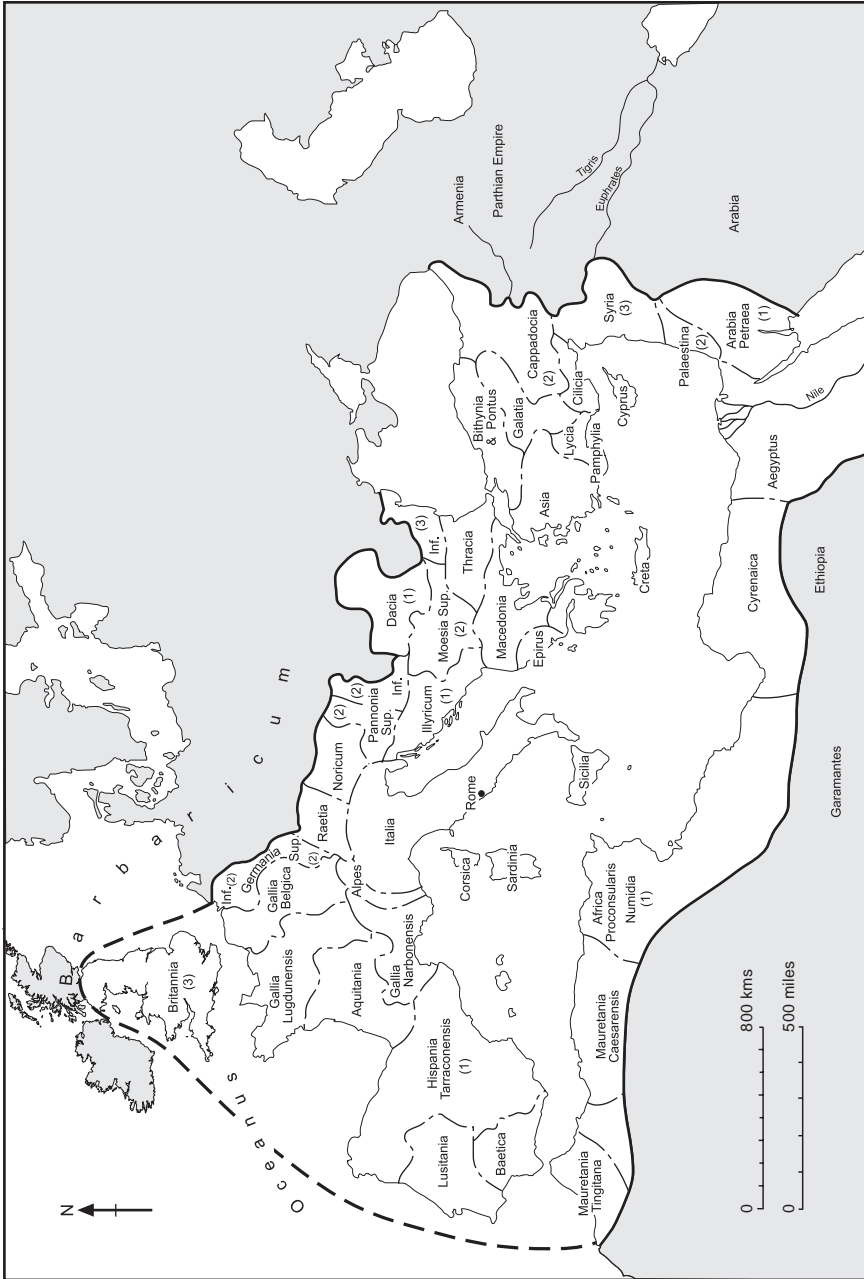


FIGURE 1.2 Map of the Roman Empire in the mid-second century AD, with an indication of the distribution of the legions (numbers in parentheses).

from the same or later eras as it does with the process of state formation and lesser rivals in classical antiquity.²⁸

In any case, historiographically the Roman Empire has been “the paradigmatic example from which many traditional understandings of empire derive.”²⁹ The word *empire* itself comes from the Latin term *imperium*, though the development of the modern understanding represents the fusion of three semantic lines in European thought.³⁰ The first of these emphasized the idea of sovereignty over people and territory; the second assimilated empire with any nonsubordinate state; the third focused attention on expansionist states that incorporated other states and territories, with a resulting level of internal diversity. This, in part, explains the difficulties of coming up with a universally accepted definition today.

We must also note the interconnectedness of the ideology of modern empire and the development of the study of ancient Rome in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.³¹ For example, the impact of Oxford classicists in the Indian Civil Service has been highlighted by Oswyn Murray and others: Oxford provided half the ICS entrants between 1892 and 1914, and in 1938 no less than six out of eight provincial governors in India were Greats men (that is, had Oxford classics degrees).³² Knowledge and admiration of the Roman Empire shaped British policy in its own colonies,³³ while at the same time the modern British imperial experience reinforced a particular view of the Roman world; as Edward Fiddes noted in 1906, “The Roman Empire was the first great imperial experiment which rose above the methods of brute force or mere well-devised bureaucracy. Rome made a genuine effort to unite liberty and Empire . . . she offered, if not political lessons . . . at least a highly interesting analogy to similar modern experiments. In particular the English historian is irresistibly reminded of the British Empire, and especially of the great Indian Dependency.”³⁴

²⁸ Contra Eich and Eich 2005.

²⁹ Alcock et al. 2001, xviii.

³⁰ Lintott 1981; cf. Kallett-Marx 1995, 18–29; Richardson 1991; Woolf 2001. See Morrison 2001 for the discussion on the development of the concept of empire in European thought. MacCormack 2007 is a fascinating study of the ways in which the example of the Roman Empire informed Spain’s understanding of the Inca empire that it conquered in the sixteenth century, provided models for Spain’s own emerging imperial structures, and ultimately was influential in helping the conquered Andean population to understand the new world order.

³¹ Brunt 1965; Freeman 2007; Hingley 2000, 2008.

³² Murray 2000; Vasunia 2003, 94.

³³ Chakravarty 1989, 5–12.

³⁴ Fiddes, in the introduction to Arnold 1906, 5–6; cf. Brunt 1990, 110–11, who notes that modern imperialism “influenced the interpretation of Roman history with false analo-

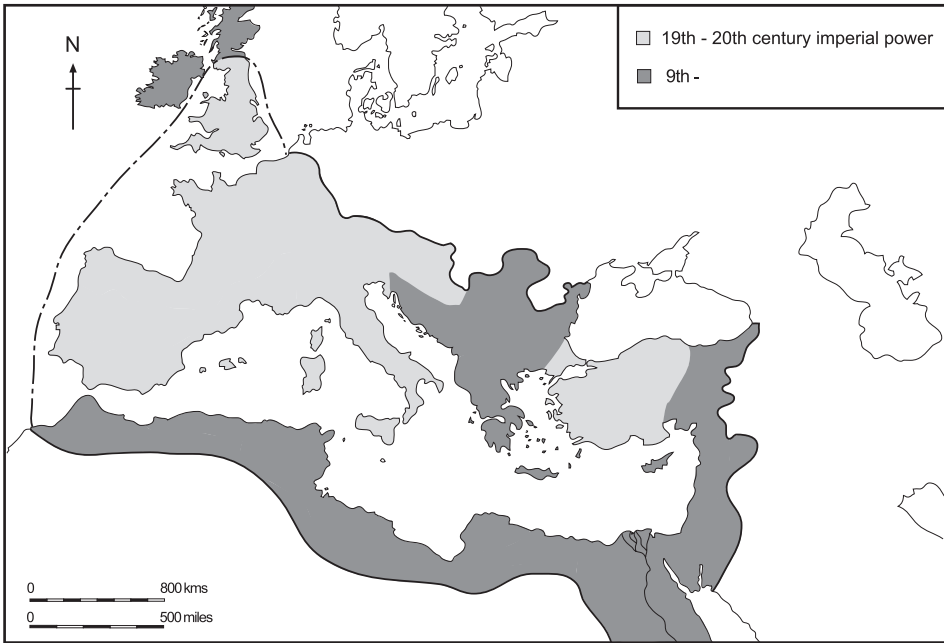


FIGURE 1.3 Map of the Roman Empire showing division of area between nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial powers and colonized territories.

Modern empires have made extensive use of images of Rome to shape popular perceptions.³⁵ They have also exploited architecture that evokes past empires and have amassed knowledge and collections in support of their claims to be successor states. As Charles Meier notes, “The Louvre, the Pergamon Museum, the British Museum collected the tribute of ancient civilizations, sometimes merely taken, occasionally bestowed by the current rulers of despoliated sites. Empire meant to conquer and to collect, to appropriate the testimony of civilizations as tribute, and to build the capacious structures that would befit the acquisition.”³⁶

The European and American enthusiastic adoption of classical antiquity as the birthright of Western civilization is an intellectual proposition that is based as much on modern colonial history as on direct cultural inheritance. Consider the spatial relationship between the Roman Empire and modern colonial powers and colonized peoples (fig. 1.3). The

gies.” See Hingley 2008, 228–325, for an extended analysis of the impact of Romans in Britain on the British in India (and vice versa).

³⁵ Hingley 2001.

³⁶ Maier 2006, 47; cf. Dyson 2006. See also the important collection of essays in Hingley 2001.

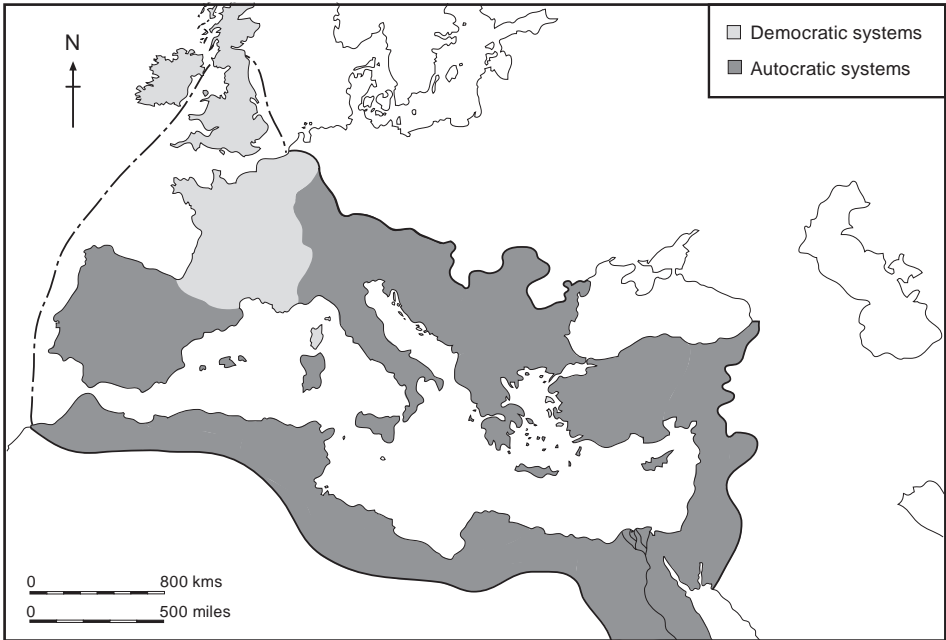


FIGURE 1.4 Map of the Roman Empire showing twentieth-century territories that were predominantly under democratic government and those that endured significant periods of nondemocratic rule.

strongest proponents of Western civilization have been the modern imperial powers of Western Europe (plus the United States), while the roots of opposition to this ideology are in part to be found in territories that were placed under the colonial authority of Western "great powers" who claimed to be successors of Rome.³⁷ It is also striking that of the countries that have done most to promote the idea of Rome as an exemplary empire, many have enjoyed the luxury of long-term democratic systems of government (Britain, France, the United States), while a large part of the territory of Rome's empire has been and in some instances continues to be governed by nondemocratic systems of various hues (see fig. 1.4).

Three European states enshrined an extreme reverence of Rome in their own fascist ideology and iconography, further discrediting the reputation of Rome for many of the people within its former territories. The Western European/North American positive attitude to all things Roman is thus far from universally shared by people now living in, for instance, the countries corresponding to Rome's African and Eastern territories.

³⁷ This theme is developed further in chapter 2.

The discipline of classics in general (and Roman archaeology in particular) needs to address the fact that its foundations are built on a modern imperial discourse and that this has major implications for its current practice.³⁸

APPROACHES TO ROMAN IMPERIALISM

A dominant theme in studies of the Roman Empire—drawing on the late classical tradition—has concerned explanations of decline and fall. This remains as true today as in the time of Edward Gibbon, notwithstanding a tendency in late antique studies to stress the positives and continuities of what followed after.³⁹ I do not wish to add to the literature on this subject and my focus will be much more concerned with the operation of the empire than with its failure and collapse. However, a recurrent feature in studies of Rome's decline is a sense of wonder that something so emblematic of civilization and order should have been brought down by "barbarians." In the Western tradition, the fall of Rome is felt keenly because we have internalized Roman civilization as our own heritage without pausing to reflect on the real links between ourselves and ancient Rome.

This observation links with another aspect of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century views of the Roman Empire that stressed the positive appraisal of its effects. "Seldom has the government of the world been conducted for so long in an orderly sequence," notes Theodor Mommsen. "In its sphere, which those who belonged to it were not far wrong in regarding as the world, it fostered the peace and prosperity of the many nations united under its sway longer and more completely than any other leading power has ever done."⁴⁰ Gibbon posits, "If a man were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus."⁴¹

³⁸ Goff 2003 represents a first step in exploring the relationship between classics and colonialism, though as Fletcher 2008 observes (with some exceptions—notably, Vasunia and Goff), "colonialism, rather than responsible postcolonial dialogue, is a ghostly presence . . . [the book] offers a . . . start to the difficult process of decolonization within the discipline of classics itself" (296–97).

³⁹ See the extraordinary cluster of recent overviews by Heather 2005; McCormick 2001; Ward-Perkins 2005; Wickham 2005. On Gibbon and the evolution of Roman studies, see Hingley 2008.

⁴⁰ Mommsen 1968, 4.

⁴¹ Gibbon 1896, 78.

These views have had a long afterlife and expressions of uncritical adulation of all things Roman can still be found in many popular books and TV series like *What the Romans Did for Us* or *The Dream of Rome*.⁴² Much analysis still rests on the belief that Rome's rule was based principally on loyalty and consensus among its subjects, or at least those who were rich and powerful enough to matter.⁴³ The recent Hadrian exhibition at the British Museum ostensibly provided an up-to-date picture of the man and his empire, though the title *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* rather overstated the extent to which this show got beyond art and image.⁴⁴ Another tendency in some modern scholarship is to sidestep the awkward associations of the word *empire* in favor of the more laudable term *civilization*: "Roman civilization has survived through the centuries as a tangible living tradition, manifesting itself in every aspect of the modern world, from language and legal systems, to roads and buildings . . . this magnificent survey of the astonishing achievements of one of the greatest and most influential of all civilizations."⁴⁵

Important though they are, the specific political and constitutional aspects of the Roman Empire are of lesser relevance to my thesis than the nature and effects of imperial power.⁴⁶ I am interested, above all, in how subject peoples experienced empire and how this affected their behavior and material culture. The realities of power at the center were complex and changed over time. It requires a different sort of study to deconstruct, for example, the accounts of Polybius (*Histories*) on the Republic or of Dio on the changes under Augustus.⁴⁷ Polybius extolled the Roman state as the ideal form of government, comprising the best aspects of the three main political systems (monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy). There is much work still to be done in this area, of course, as demonstrated by Fergus Millar's recent reevaluation of the democratic

⁴² Wilkinson 2000; Johnson 2006.

⁴³ Ando 2000, 66–67, attacks attempts (including my own) to compare past and present experiences of imperialism as leading to "profound errors in understanding the past." But the question could also be asked whether we are equally compromised by avoiding the existence of a distinct discourse of imperialism in our ancient sources and in accepting at face value the view of the empire offered us by the elite testimonies that survive.

⁴⁴ "Conflict" as a theme in the book of the exhibition is largely restricted to the presentation of a few exquisite photographs of well-preserved finds from the Bar Kokhba revolt (see Oppen 2008, 89–97). This strikes me as an opportunity missed, as some reviewers have noted (see Beard 2008). This is the problem with much traditional scholarship on the Roman Empire: it may on the surface appear to promise an equal emphasis on assimilation and on resistance, but in reality tends to concentrate on the former (Pippidi 1976).

⁴⁵ Book jacket blurb, Liberati and Bourbon 2001.

⁴⁶ See Lintott 1993 for these traditional emphases.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Dio, *Roman History*, 52; cf. Swan 2004 for an up to date commentary.

credentials of the Late Republic and the Republic's afterlife in later political thought.⁴⁸

A significant development in modern studies of imperialism, much influenced by contemporary world developments, is the linkage to be made between imperialism and globalization.⁴⁹ One definition of globalization presents it as a “a social process in which constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.”⁵⁰ It is readily apparent that empires create and maintain conditions that will tend to favor such processes. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the perceived aspiration of U.S. foreign policy toward universal world order have focused interest on earlier imperial powers with similar claims to “world” dominance. The Roman case is seen by some as an important example of the phenomenon. An interesting aspect of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's view is that empire is a theoretical concept “characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire's rule has no limits.”⁵¹ The idea of an empire without limits had a strong Roman pedigree, of course, encapsulated in Virgil's “*imperium sine fine*” that Jupiter ordained was to be without physical or temporal constraints (*Aeneid* 1.278–79).⁵²

Michael Doyle has identified three main models of imperial expansion (see table 1.1).⁵³ The metrocentric model emphasizes the attitudes and aspirations of those at the center. The pericentric model gives greater emphasis to events on the periphery determining the actions of an imperial state. Finally, the systemic or realist view seeks to explain empire in relation to theories about the nature of power and power disparities: war is a natural outcome of inherent instability in situations where the security of states is not guaranteed by international law. Security in such situations is often only achievable through a state acquiring power and influence at the expense of others. Modern studies of the nature of power in society are thus of potential interest to ancient historians.⁵⁴

In terms of the Roman Empire, there has been considerable interest in Joseph Schumpeter's ideas about metrocentric militaristic societies creating “war machines” dedicated to imperial expansion.⁵⁵ William

⁴⁸ See, among others, Millar 2002.

⁴⁹ Hardt and Negri 2000; Hingley 2005; Hitchner 2008; Osterhammel and Petersson 2003; Pitts 2008; Sweetman 2007; Witcher 2000.

⁵⁰ Waters 2000, 5; cf. Sweetman 2007, 65–67.

⁵¹ Hardt and Negri 2000, xiv; Howe 2002, 117.

⁵² On the late Republican genesis of the Roman “vocation” for Mediterranean empire, see Gruen 1984a, 273–84.

⁵³ Doyle 1986, 11–47.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Foucault 1979, 1980; Said 1986.

⁵⁵ Schumpeter 1955, 88–89; see also the good summary in Champion 2004, 1–8.

TABLE 1.1
Different models of imperialism

	<i>Metrocentric</i>	<i>Pericentric</i>	<i>Systemic</i>
SCENARIO	Metropolitan state expands at expense of neighbors	Reaction or resistance of periphery to a state leads to expansion of state	Expansion of states conditioned by the balance of power relations among them
CAUSAL FACTORS	Disposition for conquest and domination at center	Action of officers of state at periphery or external factors override policies of center	Power asymmetries among states/territories create opportunities for expansion
PRIME MOTIVATION	Greed (profit), ideology, militarism, political capital (prestige, glory)	Personal greed/ambition, external pressure	Fear, competition

Source: Doyle 1986.

Harris has been the most influential exponent of this view of an atavistic and aggressive Roman state, though scholarly opinions vary on what motivated expansionism. Put bluntly, the main modern explanations of Rome's aggressive expansionism are fear, greed, glory, or a combination of all three.⁵⁶ There are crucial differences, for instance, between those that highlight economic motivation, as opposed to a simple lust for glory and prestige, underlying Roman behavior.⁵⁷ Moreover, some scholars have mixed a metrocentric approach that focuses on imperialism as a central element of Roman politics and society, with a more pericentric view.⁵⁸ The view that Roman expansion was sometimes undertaken with great reluctance in the face of external threats and severe provocation rests in part on the post facto justifications offered by the Roman sources for the frequent wars of conquest.⁵⁹ There have been rather fewer theoretical explorations of the systemic operation of power in Roman imperialism, though Edward N. Luttwak's analysis of the rationale behind Roman frontiers in these terms remains a valuable and underrated attempt.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Harris 1971, 1978, 1984. See also Dyson 1985; North 1981; Rich 1995 (an excellent summary of the three main theories regarding motivations). The recent monographs by Eckstein (2006, 2008) on the rise of Rome and its relations with the Hellenistic world will be both controversial and influential for their engagement with modern political science.

⁵⁷ See Gruen 1984b; Harris 1971; Rich 1995 (all reprinted in Champion 2004). See also Cornell 1995 on early Roman expansionism.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Champion 2004, 5.

⁵⁹ Badian 1968; Frank 1914 famously named this "defensive imperialism" and the theme is common in so-called gradualist appraisals of the acquisition of Rome's empire.

⁶⁰ Luttwak 1976; cf., among others, Drummond and Nelson 1994; Frontières 1993; Hanson 1989; Isaac 1990; Mattern 1999; Whittaker 1994, 2004a.

TABLE 1.2
Bartel's model of Roman colonialism and imperialism

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Imperialism</i>	<i>Colonialism</i>
ERADICATION OR RESETTLEMENT	Regional "empty cell"	Abrupt culture change
ACCULTURATION	Slow indigenous culture change	Slow indigenous culture change
EQUILIBRIUM	Indigenous cultural maintenance	Settlement enclaves

Source: Bartel 1989.

An alternative approach to the Roman Empire (and indeed perhaps to many other empires) is to see its territorial and political development as the ad hoc amalgam of metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic impulses, which varied in relative intensity over time. The logical conclusion from this is that there was no such thing as one Roman imperialism; we must talk of Roman imperialisms and recognize that the empire's shape-shifting nature was outside the control of any one person or body of people.

This proposition that Roman imperialism was a dynamic phenomenon, affected by change at center and periphery as well as through systemic factors, has important implications and helps to resolve some of the problems with prior attempts to model the impacts of Roman imperialism and colonialism. For example, one 1980s model presented variation primarily in terms of binary social groupings (Romans and natives) and envisaged three alternative strategies for political and economic control in colonial situations, with a matrix of six possible outcomes (see table 1.2).⁶¹ The categories appear now perhaps to be rather crude and static either/or choices.

The Romans themselves tried to rationalize their understanding of their imperial power and, though a somewhat retrospective process, this ideological element gave the Roman Empire a distinctive character.⁶² The Roman upper classes devoted considerable energy to legitimizing and justifying their empire. Some of the greatest works of classical literature, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, were thinly veiled apologias for Roman dominance, evoking its predestination for the role and the universality of its Empire: "You, Roman, remember by your empire to rule the world's peoples, for these will be your arts, to impose the practice of peace, to be sparing to the subjected, and to beat down the defiant."⁶³

⁶¹ See Bartel 1989, esp. 174–76; cf. Jordan 2003, 26–30, for a discussion of the problems with the model.

⁶² Champion 2004, 162–213; Woolf 1995.

⁶³ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.851–53.

Throughout Livy's *History* a principal theme was that of the glory and justice of Rome's territorial and political expansion. A particular point of scruple was the notion of the just war, which governed and ostensibly limited the circumstances under which Rome could declare war on prospective opponents.⁶⁴ However, the claims made by our ancient sources about the insistence on *iusta causa* in the fetial procedure clearly misrepresented the reality. Rome had very broad definitions of its "hemispherical interests" and a low threshold of how these might be threatened by others.⁶⁵ Moreover, there was no independent body to sit in judgment on Rome's claims that it had done everything to avoid war and that ultimate responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities always lay with its neighbors and opponents. This goes beyond mere self-justification, particularly when coupled with consideration of Roman writings on the clemency and justice shown to defeated enemies and new subjects. Taken together these reveal the creation of a complex ideology of empire that distorted reality and allowed the Roman elite to believe in the justice and divine approval of its colonial role.⁶⁶

The expansion of the Roman citizen elite and the integration of provincials into the fabric of government are generally recognized as characteristic aspects of Roman imperialism.⁶⁷ They certainly provide significant contrasts with the behaviors of modern empires and help to explain the extent and the durability of the Roman Empire.⁶⁸ The imperial rhetoric of the Late Republic and the early empire built up concepts of honor and moral reputation, but we must be careful not to take this self-image of the Roman elite entirely at face value.⁶⁹ In any case, the empire was not a level playing field; some provincial elites were noticeably more advantaged than others in the competition for posts and stipends. Behind the rhetoric of universal benefits there was fierce infighting within and between provincial elites to secure advantage for themselves and their communities. The elite class was always small—for every winner in the provinces there were a hundred other people whose exploitation supported the social position of the elite.

It is no surprise that juridical justifications of later empires have often sought and found support in the workings and values of the Roman

⁶⁴ Cicero, *De officiis*, 1.34–36; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2.72.

⁶⁵ Webster 1995b, 1996b.

⁶⁶ See Brunt 1978 for an excellent discussion.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Dench 1995 for the transformation of the central Apennine peoples.

⁶⁸ Ando 2000 provides a recent (but traditionally framed) analysis of how colonial government involved local elites. Note, however, the critical view of Ando's political naïveté expressed by Rose 2006. See also De Blois 2001; Hanson 1988; Levick 1985.

⁶⁹ Cf. Lenden 1997.

Empire.⁷⁰ The concept of imperial right and the emphasis on the maintenance of peace through the waging of aggressive “just wars” are especially strong in comparative situations.⁷¹ It is, in fact, a common feature of imperial systems to create elaborate facades that at one and the same time disguise the true nature and motivation of imperial government and provide imperial servants with an apparently moral backdrop for their actions; colonization “could be (re)presented as a virtuous and necessary ‘civilizing’ task involving education and paternalistic nurture. An example of this is Kipling’s famous admonition to America in 1899 to ‘Take up the White Man’s Burden’ . . . colonialism developed an ideology rooted in obfuscatory justification, and its violent and essentially unjust processes became increasingly difficult to perceive behind a liberal smokescreen of civilizing ‘task’ and paternalistic ‘development’ and ‘aid.’”⁷²

Whatever people made of such ideological posturing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the demise of the modern colonial empires has led to a significant shift in opinion. In popular British culture, the idea of empire was transformed during the later twentieth century from a normative power for good to an archetype of evil—think *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* as the successors to Rudyard Kipling or Rider Haggard.⁷³ The effect of this on scholarly work on the Roman Empire has not been as profound as might have been expected.

There are several reasons for this. While Oxford classicists influenced the running of the British Empire, the British Empire also profoundly affected the nature of the study and teaching of ancient history in the early twentieth century.⁷⁴ The situation was paralleled in other European countries with nineteenth-century imperial ambitions and classical pretensions. Some classicists have been quick to cry “anachronism” when contemporary reflections have impacted negatively on the orthodox presentation of the ancient world. Ronald Syme’s writing of *The Roman Revolution* was, of course, influenced by his concerns about the rise of fascism and Stalinism, a point some used in criticism of his depiction of

⁷⁰ The links between past and present in the formative years of the British Empire are quite explicit, for instance, in “The Heirs of Rome,” the first chapter in Jan Morris’s marvelous *Pax Britannica* (1979). See also the debate between Freeman 1991, 1996 and Hingley 1991, 1993, 1995.

⁷¹ Hardt and Negri 2000, 10.

⁷² Howe 2002, 47; cf. Champion 2004, 162–63.

⁷³ Fox 1929, v, provides an excellent example of the self-delusional aspects of the early-twentieth-century view of the British Empire as a “theory of world policy which is essentially the creation of the British mind: that of co-operation, without compulsion, of communities with common interests and common affections.” Rather prematurely, Fox dismissed French and German claims that the British Empire was on the wane (vi–viii).

⁷⁴ Freeman 2007; Hingley 2000, 2008; Vasunia 2003, 2005.

Augustus as a cynical and cold-blooded manipulator.⁷⁵ In a somewhat different manner, Marcel Benabou's book on African resistance to Romanization caused a storm of protest in French academic circles by explicitly drawing parallels between resistance to French and Roman colonization of the Maghreb; this despite the fact that the entire direction of French research on Roman Africa had been thoroughly compromised by its links with the modern imperial project.⁷⁶ The implications of this have to be faced: it is not just the postcolonial scholars who need to beware of anachronism; all modern literature on Roman imperialism is in effect part of an imperialist discourse of considerable longevity.

I shall return to the place of postcolonial perspectives later on. For the moment let me just say that recent approaches to the study of imperialism in the modern period lay greater stress on evaluating both the positive and negative impacts of imperialism on subject peoples than has habitually been the case in Roman studies. There is still too much of a tendency in writing on the Roman Empire to ignore the sinister side of its power and to assume that the best motivations lay behind its operation. Overall, both Roman history and Roman archaeology remain relatively undertheorized disciplines.⁷⁷ For instance, the twenty-first-century reception of the messages of power and majesty from Roman times is still handled somewhat uncritically.⁷⁸ There have also been disappointingly few attempts in the modern period to write wide-ranging accounts of the nature of the Roman Empire from an archaeological perspective.⁷⁹

The traditional approaches to the study of the Roman army and the frontiers of the empire, for instance, illustrate a chronic lack of intellectual engagement with bigger issues in favor of a piling up of descriptive detail of forts, equipment, inscriptions, military careers, and so on (see fig. 1.5).⁸⁰ There are some important initiatives to create a more dynamic agenda for the study of the impacts of the military community or of the complex interactions of the frontier zones.⁸¹ Ultimately, our understanding of the demise of the Roman Empire must focus on the long-term

⁷⁵ Syme 1939; Millar 1981.

⁷⁶ Benabou 1976; Fentress 2006, 3–4; see also chapter 2 of the present volume.

⁷⁷ See, among others, Dyson 1993; James 2003; Woolf 1990, 2004b.

⁷⁸ Zanker 1988 is the most notable exception, but two recent volumes reveal continuing mixed success at engaging with critical issues: De Blois et al. 2003; and Hingley 2001.

⁷⁹ Among the plethora of recent companion volumes on all aspects of classical antiquity, there is a continuing lack of a volume devoted to the archaeology of the Roman Empire. Earlier attempts at synthesis include Johnson 1989; Wachter 1987a, 1987b.

⁸⁰ See James 2002 for a detailed critique of the current state of Roman army studies. For a different view of the status quo, see Le Bohec 1994.

⁸¹ Goldsworthy and Haynes 1999; James 1999b; Whittaker 1994, 2004a.

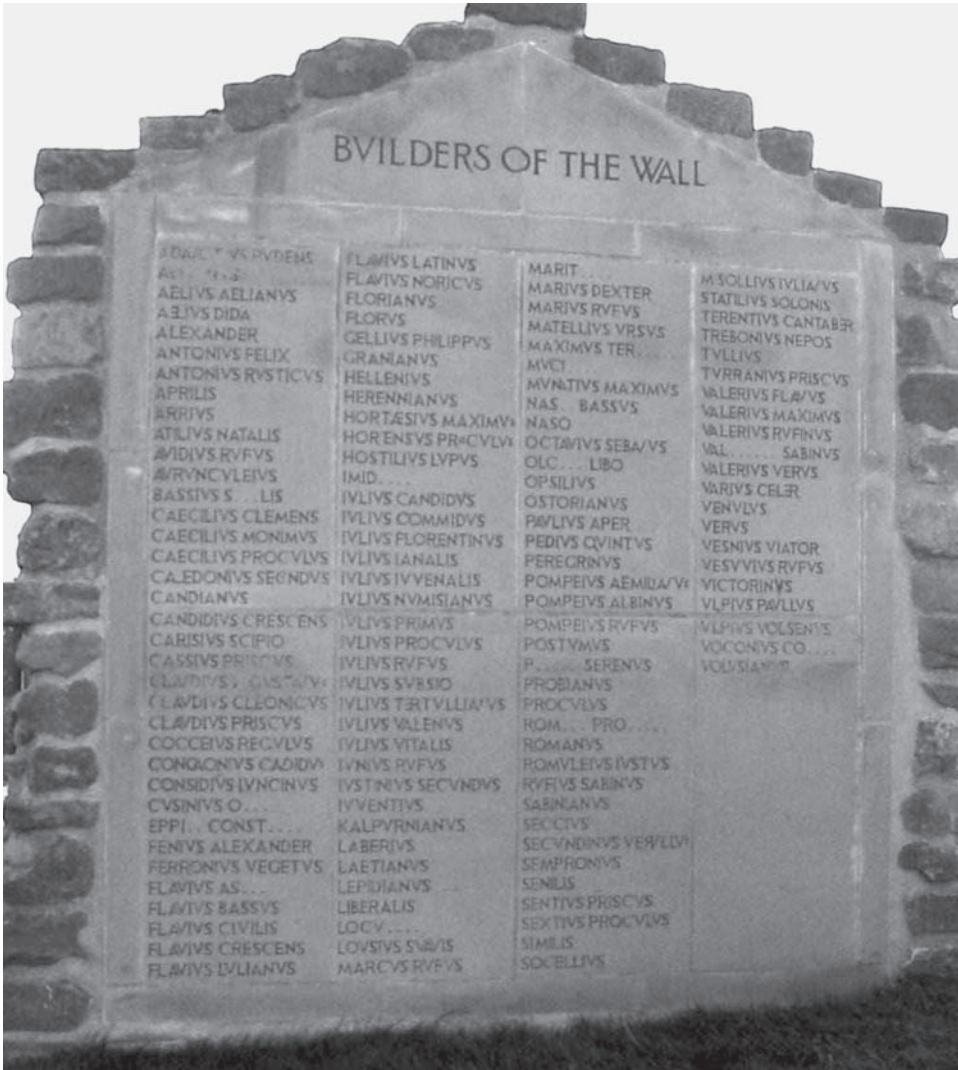


FIGURE 1.5 A remarkable modern monument erected at Wallsend near Newcastle upon Tyne, commemorating by name Roman soldiers known to have been involved in the construction of Hadrian's Wall. This celebration of imperial overlordship is a striking example of a tendency in Britain to regard the Roman Empire with uncritical adulation.

impacts of the frontier armies and changes in power relations across the frontier zones.⁸²

VULGAR AND UGLY: THE OTHER FACE OF ROMAN IMPERIALISM?

In modern text books the term “Romanization” is put to frequent employment. It is vulgar and ugly, worse than that, anachronistic and misleading. “Romanization” implies the execution of a deliberate policy. That is to misconceive the behaviour of Rome.⁸³

The quotation above is a characteristic Syme insight—he had both a good eye for spotting the questionable concept and a certain bluntness in exposing it. The use of “vulgar and ugly” catch the eye here, though Syme was, of course, fundamentally expressing his dislike of the use of the term *Romanization* in academic debate, not commenting on the nature of the Roman regime. One is reminded of a famous aphorism, “Imperialism is not a word for scholars.”⁸⁴ However, Syme’s words also recall to my mind some similarly trenchant comments by another Oxford scholar, R. G. Collingwood, on the Romanization of art in Roman Britain: “The conquest forced artists ‘into the mould of Roman life, with its vulgar efficiency and lack of taste, destroyed that gift and reduced their arts to the level of mere manufactures’ and Romano-British art was ‘dull, mechanical imitation . . . third rate artistic achievement . . . an ugliness which pervades the place like a London fog: not merely the common vulgar ugliness of the Roman Empire, but a blundering, stupid ugliness that cannot even rise to the level of that vulgarity.’”⁸⁵

This is not the place to engage in a broader debate about the aesthetics of Roman art and architecture. But I think it is noncontroversial to aver that its products were not always subtle and, just as in Victorian England, for instance, this is in part a reflection of grandiosity overcoming good taste. The vulgarity of absolute rulers has often been remarked on, with plenty of examples in the modern world of lavish but monstrous palaces.⁸⁶

Sadly, Syme’s demolition job on the use of the term Romanization was not widely picked up on first publication, with the consequence that the false paradigm of Romanization still haunts us today.⁸⁷ I shall return to

⁸² Pohl, Wood, and Reimitiz, 2001. Cf. Heather 2005; Ward-Perkins 2005.

⁸³ Syme 1988b, 64.

⁸⁴ Lord Hailey, quoted in Doyle 1986, 11.

⁸⁵ Collingwood 1936, 247, 250.

⁸⁶ York 2005 is an engaging study of modern dictators’ palaces.

⁸⁷ For a range of views, see Keay and Terrenato 2001; Mattingly 2002; Millett 1990a, 1990b; and Woolf 1992b.

the issue of Romanization near the end of this chapter; for the moment, though, I want to develop the theme of vulgarity and ugliness in another way, by moving beyond the meanings intended by Syme and Collingwood and considering whether the terms could be applied also to aspects of Roman imperialism itself.⁸⁸

The ugly side of Roman imperialism is represented most obviously by the record of warfare and destruction left in its wake.⁸⁹ Surely, we must question the benign view of Roman warfare as illustrated by Cicero, who wrote, “rather than inflicting harm, our wars were waged on behalf of allies or to uphold our *imperium* and their conclusion was either moderate or no harsher than necessary.”⁹⁰

We need to consider losses to Rome and its enemies not only in terms of battlefield deaths but also the “collateral damage” inflicted in war on civilian communities, settlements, farmland, and other economic resources.⁹¹ The enslaving of enemies was another routine element of ancient warfare, as was the levying of troops from defeated enemies and allies under treaty terms. The pillaging of wealth from conquered peoples to offset the costs of campaigns and to fund extravagant offerings of thanks to the gods who had supported Rome’s victories had severe regional impacts. In the same way, initial confiscation and potential large-scale redistribution of land served equally as a tool of retribution, coercion, and persuasion.

Of course, Rome was not a unique instance of an ancient state that resolved problems of security with extreme violence against its neighbors. As Craig Champion notes, “The world of the ancient Mediterranean states, the world in which Rome existed, seems to fulfil the grimmest paradigms of state behaviour proposed by international systems theoreticians.”⁹² However, while we can debate the exactitude of figures given in the ancient sources, it is arguable that the scale of Rome’s martial effort and colonial violence was unprecedented in antiquity.⁹³ For instance, more than three hundred triumphs are recorded from the sequence of wars between 509 and 519 BC and a “triumph” was only awarded for a victory in a battle that ended a declared war and killed at least 5,000 of the enemy.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ MacMullen (1966,1988) is a rare example of a modern scholar who has turned the spotlight on the deficiencies of Roman imperialism and its servants; there is much interesting material also in Bauman 2000; and Isaac 2004.

⁸⁹ Faulkner 2008, 46–176 presents the bloody narrative of the key period of the mid-fourth century BC down to Actium in 30 BC.

⁹⁰ Cicero, *De officiis* 2.26–27.

⁹¹ “Collateral damage” is a modern expression for a phenomenon that is as old as war.

⁹² Champion 2004, 6.

⁹³ See Campbell 2002, 1–21 for a general review of the process by which Rome went to war.

⁹⁴ *Inscriptiones Italiae* 13.1. For a fascinating new sociohistorical study of the Roman triumph, see Beard 2007.

The total casualties in these wars must have far exceeded the implied minimum of 1,500,000. As an example, Caesar's decade of campaigning in Gaul alone is alleged to have cost a million Gaulish lives.⁹⁵

Damage was not all one-sided, and Roman casualties in certain wars were high, with at least 90 severe defeats in battle suffered during the Republican era alone, with total casualties measured in hundreds of thousands.⁹⁶ In their darkest hour, confronting Hannibal, more than 50,000 Roman and allied troops perished in the years 218–215 BC alone. The ambush and destruction of three legions in the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9 was the single greatest catastrophe of the Early Principate.⁹⁷ But there were plenty of other setbacks, reflecting the ability of Rome's enemies to learn its weaknesses and to develop the tactics to inflict major defeats. This was an occupational hazard for the frontier armies of the principate.⁹⁸ They were the dominant force, but their dominance was neither unchallengeable nor unchallenged.

For a power that espoused civilization, justice, and law, the Roman way of war was not always gentle—particularly against those perceived as intransigent or guilty of humiliating Roman armies in the past. The fire and sword devastation meted out by Germanicus on the villages of the Marsi, Chatti, and Cherusci to avenge the Varian disaster is typical of the sort of conduct that could border on attempted genocide.⁹⁹ Some of the most graphic depictions of the sort of treatment that might be inflicted on civilian communities after military victories over conventional forces concerned occasions when civil war resulted in the sacking of Roman cities, as at Cremona in AD 69.¹⁰⁰ Although Roman writings are often tempered with talk of “sparing the vanquished,” it is equally clear that Rome had no compunction about employing the tactics of

⁹⁵ Plutarch, *Caesar* 15.5. There are difficulties with all such figures, of course, and Caesar was notable for his exaggerations and inventions. Nonetheless, the cumulative picture from a wide array of figures recorded in the Roman sources is that casualties in Roman wars were extraordinarily high overall in comparison to many other preindustrial societies and pre-gunpowder, unmechanized warfare. The demographic issues surrounding Rome's wars have been recently reviewed in Rosenstein 2004.

⁹⁶ Champion 2004, 7. It was of course an axiom of Roman history that “Romans have been beaten, they have lost battles, but never a war, and only wars matter” (Lucilius 613, quoted in Dalby 2000, 8).

⁹⁷ For a good evocation of the events and background to the Varian disaster, see Wells 2003.

⁹⁸ See Burns 2003 and Williams 1999 for the historical consequences of this.

⁹⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.51.1, 1.56.3–4, 2.16.1, 2.21.2.

¹⁰⁰ Tacitus, *Histories*, 3.33–34; I disagree with Whittaker 2004b, 131–32 that this breakdown of discipline may reflect the particularly high temperature of civil war. The Roman army was not an easily controlled machine; it was made up of lots of individual soldiers (James 2001b). On mass murder as a recurrent option in Roman warfare, see Isaac 2004, 215–24.

extermination where it was felt inadvisable to offer a safe pardon to defeated enemies.¹⁰¹

The human impact went much deeper, due to the practice of enslaving certain categories of prisoners taken in war. For example, in a single five-year period of the Third Samnite War (297–293 BC), figures from Livy indicate that over 66,000 captives were enslaved from a variety of defeated enemies.¹⁰² The capacity of the slave market increased over time; in 167 BC over 150,000 slaves from Epirus were disposed of, and Caesar allegedly took over 1 million in the conquest of Gaul.¹⁰³ The analysis by Keith Hopkins of the potential numbers of slaves transported into the heartlands of the empire by the first century BC may still be debated, but the argument is about the relative balance between the freeborn and slaves in Italy; the massive scale of the enslaved population, numbering in the millions, is not seriously disputed.¹⁰⁴ The demographic impact of such relentless and ruthless warfare was thus profound, though in time the subjugated peoples were allowed to participate in the next round of expansion and in the foundation of colonies on captured lands. Latin colonies established between 334 and 263 BC are estimated to have required the seizure and reallocation of over 7,000 square kilometers of prime farming lands to over 70,000 settlers.¹⁰⁵ In chapter 4, I shall explore the darker aspects of the operation of Roman colonial power, using sexuality as a main focus.

Paradoxically, the long-term maintenance of Rome's empire required far larger standing armies than had been levied to conquer most of its constituent territory. In the early second century BC the average number of legions in service was less than nine, with eleven the highest number attested; from 167 to 91 BC the annual average is estimated to have been slightly lower.¹⁰⁶ Under the Principate the average number of legions was generally twenty-eight to thirty, though expansionist wars became rare (see fig. 1.2). This seems to me to represent a fundamental change in the nature of the Roman Empire—perhaps of similar magnitude to the moment when the British Empire took over from the East India Company the commitment to garrison a huge land territory in India. The corollary of higher recurrent military spending was a need to exploit the various overseas territories more effectively in order to pay for it all. The

¹⁰¹ Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 3, is explicit on this point.

¹⁰² Cornell 1989, 389.

¹⁰³ See Livy 45.34.4–6; Hammond 1967, 634–35, on Epirus; Plutarch, *Caesar*, 15.5; and Faulkner 2008, 159 on Gaul.

¹⁰⁴ Hopkins 1978, 99–132. See also Dal Lago and Katsari 2008; Webster 2005, 2008; and the range of studies on slavery in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005).

¹⁰⁵ Cornell 1989, 405.

¹⁰⁶ Rich 1995, 44–47.

extremely ad hoc provincial arrangements for levying tribute of the second and early first centuries BC, often remarked on by the “gradualists,” were supplemented or replaced by more complex bureaucracies and far-reaching changes in land ownership and taxation. The initial stages of this were already evident by the time of Caesar, but took more concrete form with the establishment of the Principate. Chapter 5 will focus on the mechanisms that the state developed for exploiting the land, portable wealth, people, and natural resources of subjected territories.

POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES: GIVING VOICE TO THE SUBALTERN

What these instances remind us of is the powerful and disruptive impact of imperialism where the power inequalities were particularly large. The problem is that we have little extant writing from the Roman world that explicitly explored the feelings of provincials about the process of incorporation into the empire.¹⁰⁷ There is one prime exception to this general rule—the Jews. While there is a substantial ancient and modern literature on their relations with the empire, there is also perhaps a tendency to overstress the atypicality of the Jews.¹⁰⁸ They are seen as something special in the empire, and their voices thus are used to give life to ancient Judaism rather than to form a basis for understanding the experience of other provincials under Roman rule.

For other provincial societies, the voices that made themselves heard were primarily those of elite people who had closely aligned themselves with Rome and had taken their place in delivering local government and justice. Men like Aelius Aristides or Dio Chrysostom expended great efforts to extol the benefits of the empire for their fellow citizens, but the existence of such eulogies in some ways reinforces the sense that they did not contain universally self-evident truths.¹⁰⁹ The complicity of high status men in the government of Empire and as conspicuous consumers of its globalized culture must be recognized.

The Roman armies were another group who were vocal in registering their loyalty to the empire and who used its material culture to shape their identity in distinctive ways and to give themselves a sense of commonality.¹¹⁰ In some provinces, such as Britain, the community of soldiers had a hugely distorting impact on the provincewide pattern of evidence

¹⁰⁷ McCarthy 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Goodman 1998 and Schwartz 2001 are good points of introduction to the impact of imperial domination on Jewish society.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the analysis of Nutton 1978.

¹¹⁰ James 1999b, 2001.

of literacy and the use of certain types of material culture.¹¹¹ Discoveries like the Vindolanda tablets open an extraordinary window on life in the Roman Empire and are rightly celebrated as one of the major discoveries of recent decades.¹¹² However, they do not cast much light outside the close society of the community of soldiers. Nor is it just the exceptional discoveries like the Vindolanda tablets that distort our picture; the archaeological record of Roman Britain is dominated by the material culture of the Roman garrison. To a considerable extent, the army used its literacy and material culture to differentiate and to distance itself from civilians in the provinces.¹¹³

A good example of the pervasive influence of soldiers in the frontier zones comes from a remote region in southeast Jordan—the Hisma. A Greek graffito was carved on a rock here: “The Romans always win. I, Lauricius, wrote ‘Hail Zenon.’”¹¹⁴ However, this is neither indicative of “barbarian” defeatism nor acknowledgment of Roman superiority by civilian subjects. Lauricius and Zenon were almost certainly Roman soldiers (Zenon an Arab tribune in a Roman auxiliary unit), and in these frontier lands this was a standard (if superstitious) mantra of the garrison troops.¹¹⁵

Leaving aside the provincial elites and the army, then, what of the rest of the subject people in the provinces? What do we really know about their lives in and experiences of the Roman Empire? This is the area where postcolonialism can serve as a particularly valuable tool to aid our understanding of the Roman situation.¹¹⁶ Postcolonialism concerns the study of the cultural effects of colonialism and colonization.¹¹⁷ One of the major achievements of postcolonial studies has been to identify alternative narratives—to give voice to the subaltern.¹¹⁸ For instance, the rare accounts

¹¹¹ De la Bédoyère 2001, 11 notes, “The army monopolizes the historical and epigraphic record. . . . Even when cities do yield inscriptions, more often than not they record soldiers passing through, on detachment. . . . The army influenced the goods brought in, and new goods manufactured, while army pay fuelled the liquid economy, and the need to pay the army fuelled the need to conquer.”

¹¹² Bowman and Thomas 1994, 2003; cf. Birley 2003; Bowman 1994.

¹¹³ The argument is developed in some detail in Mattingly 2006c, 199–224; 520–28, and in chapter 8 of the present volume.

¹¹⁴ Sartre 1993, 165–82, no. 138.

¹¹⁵ Isaac 1998, 341.

¹¹⁶ Though not all have welcomed the emergence of the new agenda; see Branigan 1994.

¹¹⁷ Excellent introductions to postcolonial studies are Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995; Ashcroft et al. 1998, esp. 186–92; Schwarz and Ray 2000; and Williams and Chrisman 1993.

¹¹⁸ Spivak 1995. Chakrabarty 2000, 27, notes that there still remains a problem in constructing postcolonial or subaltern history “insofar as the academic discourse of history . . . is concerned, ‘Europe’ remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘Indian’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Kenyan’, and so on.” A key aspect of modern postco-

that present the indigenous side of what happened during the Spanish conquest of South America are particularly illuminating specifically because they can be set alongside Spanish accounts that provide a radically different version of events and behaviors.¹¹⁹ The issue of resistance was a key motif of much early research, with some interesting insights on how material evidence could be subjected to different readings.¹²⁰

As John Moreland has illustrated, it is too simplistic to equate people without history to a lack of texts. Equally it can be unhelpful to try to promote archaeological evidence as a complete proxy for the written word in writing these hidden lives.¹²¹ Nonetheless, writing is just one “technology of power” and a broad-based study of texts and objects has much to recommend it. “The reality,” notes Moreland, “is that people in the past . . . made and manipulated objects (and texts) as projections of their views about themselves and their place in the world . . . [objects] were actively used in the production and transformation of identities, they were used in the projection of, and resistance to, power, and they were used to create meaning in, and to structure, the routines of daily life.”¹²²

I shall return in chapter 8 to explore in detail the theme of identity and the way a variety of different forms of material culture can be assimilated with the literary and epigraphic evidence.

Though initially disdained by some historians, postcolonial studies have come to influence the mainstream agenda of historical research.¹²³ For example, historical studies of more recent periods of imperialism have shown an increasing interest in exploring the relations between colonizer and colonized, following the lead set by a number of ex-colonial subjects.¹²⁴ A key element of this new wave of research is the emphasis on the forging of multiple new identities, both in the peripheral territories and at the core of colonial worlds.¹²⁵

The achievements of postcolonial scholarship in relation to imperialism in the modern world are considerable and present both a challenge to and an opportunity for scholars of antiquity to address similar issues.

lonial studies thus concerns the decentering of this discourse, and I can see how similar approaches to the Roman Empire might produce interesting results.

¹¹⁹ See De las Casas 1992; and MacCormack 2007, esp. 66–100.

¹²⁰ Ferguson and Whitehead 1992; Miller, Rowlands, and Tilley 1989; Scott 1990.

¹²¹ See Moreland 2001, 9–32, esp. 19.

¹²² Moreland 2001, 80–84.

¹²³ Colley 2002 is a useful way into this debate, albeit with a modern British focus. Mignolo 2000 is a good example of the convergence of postcolonial studies with globalization, with an emphasis on subaltern identities, colonial difference, border thinking, and occidentalism.

¹²⁴ Dauntun and Halpern 1999; cf. Fanon 1986 and Memmi 1965.

¹²⁵ Bailey 1999, Morgan 1999.

The methodologies and exemplars are available. To date, it seems to me that archaeologists have shown more interest than ancient historians in applying postcolonial thinking to the study of the Roman Empire.¹²⁶ It is important that such studies look beyond evidence of direct resistance to Roman power if we are to avoid simply creating a binary opposition with traditional assimilative models.¹²⁷

My own interest in these issues was greatly stimulated by the writing of Edward Said, from whom I adopted the concept of discrepant experience.¹²⁸ The notion of discrepant experience demands that modern scholars explore different narratives of colonial pasts, not just the historical account of the victors. Said saw this primarily as a dichotomy between ruler and ruled, where “each had a set of interpretations of their common history with its own perspectives, historical sense, emotions and traditions.”¹²⁹ Indeed, the term *discrepancy* has sometimes been employed in postcolonial studies to denote only indigenous resistance to the imperial power, though I think the true potential of discrepant experience is realized when it encapsulates *all* the varied impacts of and reactions to colonialism. We need to break free from the tendency to see the colonial world as one of rulers and ruled (Romans and natives) and explore the full spectrum of discrepancy between these binary oppositions.¹³⁰

An immediate objection in relation to the ancient world is that unlike with more recent imperialisms we have little surviving written testimony of subject people. The twenty-first-century narrative of Roman history will thus always struggle to break free of the influence of the historical winners who penned it. However, the absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence. The deliberate burning of the library of Carthage or the setting aside of Etruscan accounts bearing on the early history of Rome indicate clearly that there were once alternative narratives. The critical point here is that we must be aware that imperial systems elicit a range of reactions in those who become subjects, from self-interested collaboration to resistance unto death, and all manner of intermediate positions. Postcolonial and postmodern literature provide plenty of examples of imaginative ways to explore the existence of discrepant experiences of empire and its subthemes of culture, identity, memory, and systemic injustice.¹³¹

¹²⁶ See Mattingly 1997a; Scott and Webster 2003; Webster and Cooper 1996; Wells 1999, 2001.

¹²⁷ On resistance and rebellion in the Roman world, see Bowersock 1987; Burnham and Johnson 1979; and Dyson 1975.

¹²⁸ Said 1978, 1993; Mattingly 1997a, 1997b.

¹²⁹ Said 1993, 11.

¹³⁰ Woolf 1997.

¹³¹ See, e.g., Brenton 1989; Kunzru 2003; Sivanandan 1997; and Soueif 1999.

Fundamentally, we need to move away from interpretational models that stress only the advantages and “self-evident” attractions of being subject to Roman dominion. An awareness of discrepant experience allows a different sort of analysis of colonial discourse that works top down *and* bottom up. It also points out the changeability of attitudes and experiences across a spectrum of response, not just between dichotomous extremes. We should expect significant shifts in the nature of the Roman Empire (and its reception by its subjects) over time.¹³² It would be surprising indeed if attitudes to Roman rule had not changed—for instance, becoming more generally positive with successive generations in provincial areas that enjoyed peaceful and prosperous conditions. But it is also clear that the Roman state did not offer the same opportunities and inducements to all in society (or to all provincial territories alike) and that some regions underwent little material change in their basic condition of exploitation and dependence across centuries of Roman military occupation.

COLONIALISM AND COLONIZATION

With these postcolonial approaches in mind, it is time to return to the definitions of colonialism and colonization.¹³³ Chris Gosden’s work on colonialism is of particular importance in that he has proposed a series of important theoretical models to encompass a wide array of “colonial” situations in world history.¹³⁴ It is interesting to note that he draws his net wide and not all his colonial societies might meet the criteria that historians would require of an imperial power (for example, Vikings, Tongans). What is particularly attractive about Gosden’s analysis is that he focuses his comparative study of colonialism on the nature and relationships of power, with particular emphasis on the interplay of people and material culture rather than on political structures.¹³⁵ He defines three main types of manifestation of colonial power, ranging in impact from extreme violence, to creative experimentation, to dominance achieved in a common cultural network (see table 1.3).

¹³² An interesting sidelight on the Roman Empire is the fact that it made increasing use of exemplary violence in its judicial systems over time (Garnsey 1968). What does this tell us about the level of acceptance of the regime across society?

¹³³ Two important recent essays on the changing debate about what Roman colonization was and was not are Purcell 2005b and Terrenato 2005.

¹³⁴ See Gosden 2004, 24–40, for the presentation of the models.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

TABLE 1.3
 Gosden's models of colonialism

<i>Gosden's models</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Gosden reference</i>
COLONIALISM WITHIN A SHARED CULTURAL MILIEU	Colonial situation arises within/among societies that share cultural values. Power operates within understood norms of behavior and limited by area of shared culture	Early forms from Mesopotamia to Greek colonies, Aztecs, Incas, early Chinese, Vikings, Tongans	2004, 41–81
MIDDLE-GROUND COLONIALISM	Based on high level of accommodation between colonizer and colonized. Cultural change is multi-lateral, not unilateral	Roman Empire, peripheries of Greek colonization, early modern colonial contacts in America, Africa, India, etc.	2004, 82–113
TERRA NULLIUS	Nonrecognition of preexisting culture opening way for massive land appropriation and destruction of indigenous societies. Colonial violence aided by impacts of disease	Spanish South America, later colonization of North America, Australia, New Zealand, Africa	2004, 114–52

Source: Gosden 2004.

Before looking at his typology and considering the implications of this for our understanding of the Roman Empire, I want to highlight Gosden's own qualifications about the use of his typology:

The typology . . . should not be seen as stable and fixed. Nor should [it] be seen as anything other than an attempt to simplify a large and confusing reality for initial heuristic purposes: it is something to be put at risk and modified through an encounter with different cases, rather than an adequate description of them all. The last qualification . . . is that the typology should not be seen as a linear progression from one form to another: within one colonial formation all three types can exist simultaneously; there can be movement from one to another, or one form can be found alone.¹³⁶

The earliest form defined by Gosden is colonialism within a shared cultural milieu, and it is also the one that seems farthest from modern expectations of imperial power.¹³⁷ Some of these cases can be presented

¹³⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 32–33, 41–81.

as “colonialism without colonies.”¹³⁸ The operation of power within societies sharing many cultural values in common has sometimes been perceived as a process of imposition of colonies by a colonizing power, as in the case of early Greek colonization. What Gosden argues is that the appearance of these colonies may have been due more to cultural and mercantile forces than military or political will. The formation of common points of identity created strong links between widely separated and initially independent states or polities. To some extent, this may be seen as a necessary initial stage in some colonial situations, bringing societies into cultural proximity and facilitating subsequent attempts by one to impose its dominance on others.

The middle ground is defined by Gosden as a more probable outcome of colonial contact than either destruction or acculturation of a subservient culture by a dominant power.¹³⁹ This gives active agency to the colonized as well as the colonizer in the cultural interaction consequent on the political domination of the one by the other.¹⁴⁰ Culture change here is seen as a two-way street in which the preexisting culture and values of the dominant power do not necessarily supplant those of the colonized society. Rather, what is likely to emerge in many colonial situations is a new set of cultural forms that are unique to the colonial situation, and which can in some cases be transmitted back to enact change at the empire’s metropolitan core. On the other hand, it is important to remember that the power asymmetries in such situations can profoundly influence and constrain social behavior.¹⁴¹ While native agency was clearly a significant factor in many colonial situations, we should not lose sight of the distorting effect of imperial power.

The third model defined by Gosden is that of *terra nullius*.¹⁴² The violent dispossession of native peoples of their lands, accompanied by mass killing and eviction or deportation, has often been justified by the colonial fiction of creating something from a virgin landscape. The denial of the meaningful relationship of the existing population to their land was an important element in asserting the colonizers’ right to take it over. Gosden argues that the *terra nullius* approach was unique to modern imperialism and lists its extreme impacts on indigenous societies in Australia, New Zealand, North America, and South Africa, among other notorious cases. There is no doubt that the combination of capitalism,

¹³⁸ Ibid. 2004, 41.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 2004, 30–32, 82–113.

¹⁴⁰ This trend in recent work on colonialism is well reflected in the work of Hodos 2006; Van Dommelen 1997, 1998, 2002, 2005; and Van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007a, 2007b.

¹⁴¹ Mattingly 1997b; Webster 2001, 218.

¹⁴² Gosden 2004, 25–30, 114–52.

technological advantages, racism and notions of social superiority, religious convictions, and the unintended weapon of disease have all given modern imperialism a particularly brutal aspect in some of its manifestations.

However, there are aspects of this catalog of acts of inhumanity that raise important questions, it seems to me, about the extent to which colonial domination creates conditions in which people transgress normal rules of behavior. Sven Lindquist's meditation on European colonialism in Africa, "*Exterminate All the Brutes*", draws out the important conclusion that the Nazi concentration camps simply brought home to a European base the evils perpetrated in the name of empire elsewhere.¹⁴³ The atrocities committed by European powers in Africa encompassed not just the Germans, of course, but Belgians, French, British, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese. I am struck not so much by the magnitude of the crimes against humanity carried out in the name of empire (shocking though they are); rather, it is their generality that registers.¹⁴⁴

Yet it is clear that this slaughter was not a planned and coordinated action from the start, but something that evolved in the peripheral zones. The Roman colonial elites, like those of these more recent ages, were generally perturbed by the signs of moral degeneration in their societies as a side effect of imperial power.¹⁴⁵ The scientific and scholarly energy put into imperial justification was largely a post facto attempt by the imperial society at large to come to terms with what had happened in certain colonies. It seems entirely plausible that excesses that were similar in kind if not in scale have occurred in earlier colonial situations where there have been significant power imbalances and wide cultural difference between colonizer and colonized.

The potentially corrosive effects of colonial power are readily documented both by the celebrated villains (Verres in Sicily) and by real or claimed exemplars of the "good governor" (Agricola and Cato the Younger). The power dynamics of empires create the potential for brutality, injustice, and corruption even if the central authority strives to check this by creating channels for the legal recourse of aggrieved provincials and by exerting moral pressure on colonial servants to behave honorably. Many colonial officials/servants comply with the rules, but those that do not can have a disproportionate effect. The gap between aspiration and achievement is starkly illustrated by the conduct of U.S. troops in Iraq, responsible for both the moral action of removing the odious regime

¹⁴³ Lindquist 2002.

¹⁴⁴ See Pakenham 1991 and Newsinger 2006 for a detailed catalog of the horrors perpetrated in the name of modern imperial regimes.

¹⁴⁵ Lintott 1972.

of Saddam Hussein and for replicating some of its notorious behavior through the torture of civilians and the recently documented “war pornography” websites. I think that here we see, perhaps, an important systemic contributor to the evolution of imperialism, whether of the ancient or modern period.¹⁴⁶

Gosden places the Roman Empire in his second category of colonialism, the middle ground, reflecting the modern consensus view of the integration of local elites and their contributions to the hybrid cultural pattern that was characteristic of the principate. That seems a fair enough judgment of the long-term impact of the Roman Empire, but I think there is certainly scope for Roman historians and archaeologists to explore the possible existence of Gosden’s other types of colonial power at certain times and places. For instance, in many ways the earliest stages of Roman expansion within Italy could be presented as a good example of colonialism within a shared cultural milieu, especially since Rome’s role as leader does not seem to have been as apparent initially as the later annalistic accounts painted it. There are also indications in Rome’s dealings with “barbarians” and peoples on the extreme fringes of the empire that the colonial contact could pass through a phase akin to the *terra nullius* approach of the most extreme modern situations.

A necessary condition of the *terra nullius* was the dehumanizing of the “other,” something we can find plenty of evidence for at the outer edge of empire. For example, Roman writers regularly portrayed peoples they came in contact with as falling into a series of bands of progressively more degenerate character. Brent Shaw has noted that the main cause of the inability of Roman writers to provide a true picture of peoples outside the empire was the “ideological necessity for a negative image of the barbarian.”¹⁴⁷

The parallelism of descriptions of the peoples of Britain and of Libya, for instance, suggests that we are looking at topoi (purposive stereotypes) designed to present conceptual prejudices rather than actual reality (see table 1.4). The main people of the Libyan Sahara were the Garamantes, commonly presented in Greco-Roman sources as the archetypes of warlike nomads, living in tents or scattered huts, lacking in laws or civilized structures. The investigation of the archaeology of their heartlands has revealed a radically different perspective of a sedentary agricultural people, exhibiting a highly sophisticated level of social and cultural

¹⁴⁶ The systemic transformation of righteous power into transgressive power in colonial situations is, of course, famously illustrated by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (2002) and its Vietnam and Cambodia-framed modern update in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

¹⁴⁷ Shaw 2000, 374–75.

TABLE 1.4
 “Progressive Barbarization” in Britain and Africa

	<i>Britain</i>	<i>Libya</i>
COAST	Agricultural people, semicivilized, towns	Agricultural people, semicivilized, towns
INTERIOR	Pastoral peoples, no towns, scattered settlements	Pastoral peoples, no towns, scattered settlements, huts and tents
DEEPER INTERIOR	Warlike and lawless bands, sexually promiscuous, living in temporary shelters	Warlike and lawless bands, nomadic pastoralist, sexually promiscuous, living in huts and tents
DEEPEST INTERIOR	Naked savages, hunting and gathering part of lifestyle, can live like animals deep in bogs, eat bark	Naked savages, unintelligible batlike language, live in caves or sleep in open air, still further beyond are inhuman creatures with no heads, eyes in chests, etc.

evolution.¹⁴⁸ A similar trend emerges in Britain, where the sources paint a particularly bleak picture of the people of northern Scotland:

[The northern tribes] inhabit wild and waterless mountains and desolate and marshy plains; they have neither walls nor cities nor tilled fields, but live on their flocks and by hunting and on certain fruits . . . They live in tents, naked and without shoes, possess their women in common, and rear all offspring in common. They have a democratic system for the most part and are very fond of plundering. For this reason they choose their boldest men as rulers . . . They can endure hunger and cold and every hardship. For they plunge into the marshes and exist there for many days, only keeping their heads above the water, and in the forests they support themselves on bark and roots.¹⁴⁹

The archaeological data on the Iron Age peoples of the region reveal aspects of social and economic sophistication that are unheralded in the literary sources, such as the existence of substantial timber and stone-built roundhouses and the development of agriculture in the suitable parts of the landscape in Fife and Moray.¹⁵⁰

How much easier it must have been to deal with these enemies at the point of the sword if they were first relegated to subhuman status. It is clear that Rome sometimes acted against “barbarian” opponents with

¹⁴⁸ Mattingly 2003a, 76–90; 2004a, 47–52; 2006d.

¹⁴⁹ Dio, *Roman History*, 76[77].12.1–5.

¹⁵⁰ Hingley 1992; Mattingly 2006c, 47–54, 122–27, 428–39.

extreme and prejudicial violence, as when the Caledones and Maeatae revolted against Septimius Severus, immediately after their initial subjugation by his army.

But when those in the island revolted again, he summoned the soldiers and ordered them to invade their country again and to kill everyone they met, quoting this:

*Let no one escape sheer destruction
At our hands, not even the child that the mother
Bears in her womb, if a male, let him not escape sheer destruction.*¹⁵¹

There were other occasions when our Roman sources indicate that attempts were made to exterminate rebellious subjects or intractable opponents on the frontiers, such as the Silures of southeast Wales under Claudius or the Nasamones of Libya under Domitian.¹⁵² It is irrelevant to my argument that there is no evidence that these people were fully exterminated; attempted genocides are rarely completed. However, what these instances do suggest is that license was granted from time to time to Roman armies to act against native groups with extreme prejudice. This situation seems to be at least partly comparable to the excesses of modern imperialism. An interesting aspect of imperial armies is that they very often made use of large native levies—whether Batavians in Britain or Sikhs in British India. The complicity of these troops in acts of violence against provincials and enemies of the empire highlights their psychological separation from civil society.¹⁵³

It also illustrates once again the potential for transgressive behaviors. What occurred at the periphery was often not intended, foreseen, or indeed condoned at the center. The reasons for misbehavior and abuse are to some extent bound up with the realities of the power asymmetries between imperial servants and subjects. Sexual exploitation and judicial and administrative corruption are common symptoms of this.¹⁵⁴ In part they are due to the distances and slowness of communication between core and periphery, which require delegation of considerable authority to those on the ground while imposing problems of oversight and control.

¹⁵¹ Dio, *Roman History*, 76[77].15.1–4, quoting Homer, *Iliad*, 6.57–59. The translation is taken from Birley 2005, where good discussion is also to be found.

¹⁵² See Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.39, for the Silures; and Dio, *Roman History* [Epitome] 77.3.5, for the Nasamones.

¹⁵³ Again, this is not to deny that transgressive behavior in war was absent in pre-Roman society in Gaul or Britain, but it is arguable that the severity, extent, and periodicity of such actions was greater under Rome for the simple reasons that warfare and power differentials between soldiers and civilians were more pronounced.

¹⁵⁴ Hyam 1990; Young 1995.

Another driver of warfare against and repression of indigenous peoples at the margins of empires is that the representatives of the colonial power are often few in number and, though supported by the perception of imperial power, they are often more acutely aware of their own weakness than are their potential enemies. “Colonial weakness” can thus be an important catalyst in the segregation and reinforcement of difference between ruler and ruled in imperial settings. This fear factor also perhaps contributed in important ways to unpalatable behaviors by those in authority in colonial territories.¹⁵⁵

To conclude this section, it seems clear to me that Roman colonialism went through different stages of development. We can contrast Rome’s early struggle to establish position within Latium and central Italy with the more assured conquest and incorporation of other Italian peoples— involving significant land confiscations from the fourth century onward. A peculiarity of the Late Republican Empire was its initial reluctance to establish colonies in overseas territories, when there had been no such scruples about Italy, where land allocations and colonial settlements that started in the fourth century were largely completed by 170 BC. The first successful and large-scale overseas colonies were not established until the dictatorship of Julius Caesar, gaining even greater momentum under Augustus.¹⁵⁶ Although these colonies increasingly drew on citizen troops recruited outside Italy, the creation of such citizen communities in provincial territories was a significant development.¹⁵⁷ As has already been noted, this period appears to mark a distinctive new phase of Roman imperialism that was different to what had gone before in important ways. These changes broadly correlate with the institution of the principate, which demanded new ground rules for the exploitation of empire and the command of armies. The empire had largely ceased to expand by the second century AD, with few new colonies thereafter and an increasing focus on the maintenance of established territory and frontiers. By the third and fourth centuries the empire had metamorphosed again in order to preserve the security of the emperor in the face of internal rivals and a shift in the balance of power with neighboring peoples.

What I have just described in outline is a series of fundamental variations of Roman imperialism and colonialism. The same dynamism can be detected in studying the cultural impact of empire and it is to the question of Romanization that I want to return for the final section of this chapter.

¹⁵⁵ See Fincham 2001 for an interesting discussion of “colonial weakness.”

¹⁵⁶ Kallett-Marx 1995; Rich 1995, 48–49.

¹⁵⁷ Mann 1983.

ROMANIZATION AND IDENTITY

Although according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the first attestation of the verb *to romanize* is 1607, we cannot ignore the extent to which the meaning and use of the term Romanization was extended during the most intensive phase of modern imperial expansion, notably through the work of Francis Haverfield.¹⁵⁸ The traditional view of Romanization has been that it was a deliberate policy on the part of the empire to reconcile subjects to colonial rule and to reward their compliance with the fruits of civilization. There is precious little in ancient literature to back up this view, apart from a few pronouncements by upper-class Romans on the benefits of imperial rule that ring no more true than the claims of later imperial servants to have always prioritized the well-being of subject peoples. Yet many histories of Rome use the paradigm of Romanization as the bedrock of interpretation; for example: “Virgil’s exhortations regarding the use of Rome’s military might were set in a broader context—that of a ‘civilising mission.’ Indeed, military conquest was not, except perhaps in the minds of a few traditionalists, an end in itself; its purpose was to establish the conditions in which a culture of Romanization could flourish. . . . Only thus could prosperity be realised in the provinces and (eventually) the empire at large. Romanization was, therefore, a crucial part of the process of empire building.”¹⁵⁹

While it is still possible to find plenty of people who maintain the older belief in a systematic and standardized acculturation process that was initiated by the state, Martin Millett, Greg Woolf, and others have reinterpreted Romanization as primarily a manifestation of elite negotiation and native agency.¹⁶⁰ It is easy to overlook the fact that not everyone in society had the same negotiating capital as the native elites and the approach of the agents of the state could also be heavy booted (see fig. 1.6). The problems with the Romanization paradigm have been well aired in recent years. Principal among these is the fact that the term Romanization has lost whatever precision it may once have had due to the multiple and often contradictory understandings of what it means.

To sum up some of the principal objections, Romanization

- has multiple meanings/understandings and these make it a flawed paradigm
- is a very unhelpful term—it implies that cultural change was unilateral and unilinear (with the flow from advanced civilization to less advanced communities)

¹⁵⁸ Haverfield 1915; cf. Freeman 2007, 1–42; and Hingley 2000.

¹⁵⁹ Shotter 2003, 230–32.

¹⁶⁰ Millett 1990a; Woolf 1997; cf. Blagg and Millett 1990; and Metzler et al. 1995.



FIGURE 1.6 Negotiation with an imperial power can be a tricky and asymmetric business. An alternative view of what incorporation into the Roman Empire meant on the ground. (Cartoon by Simon James; reproduced with permission.)

- is part of a modern colonial discourse on the nature of empire
- places great emphasis on elite sites, Roman state monuments, and elite culture
- leads scholars to take a fundamentally pro-Roman and top-down view
- de-emphasizes elements suggesting continuing traditions of indigenous society.
- reinforces an interpretation of material culture change that is simplistic and narrow (acculturation, emulation, etc.)
- focuses attention on the degree of sameness across provinces, rather than the degree of difference/divergence.

I am not aware of other areas of the study of imperialism that cling so tenaciously to interpretative models designed in the jingoistic empire days of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Increasingly the term is put in inverted commas or qualified.¹⁶¹ A paradigm with so many different definitions is no paradigm at all.

¹⁶¹ Keay and Terrenato 2001, ix: “weak Romanization.” See also Millett 2004.

Some scholars have objected to the unilateral or unilinear flow of culture change implied by Romanization, when empirical studies show that what took place was not a uniform process of acculturation of provinces by the dominant civilization.¹⁶² The impact of the diverse civilizations of the eastern empire on the cultural mix that emerged there has been highlighted by both archaeological and historical studies.¹⁶³ In the provinces of central and northern Europe, the “Germanization” of society could be seen as a significant long-term trend, while in North Africa the long-term influence of Punic culture was widely recognized.¹⁶⁴ In fact, in every province of the empire, and even in Italy itself, there is increasing evidence of local influence on the cultural pattern that emerged, alongside elements of Roman metropolitan or imported provincial culture.¹⁶⁵ It is certainly not the case that we can identify a pure Roman culture emanating from Italy; Roman culture was an artifact of the provinces as much as it was of the metropolitan center.¹⁶⁶ Archaeological studies increasingly emphasize the degree of regional diversity and nonconformity. On the other hand, we can identify a few specific moments when the coherence and potency of cultural renaissance at the center was disproportionately influential on the periphery, as in the age of Augustus.¹⁶⁷

Nonetheless, there is still an assumption in many studies of individual provinces that there was a specific Roman cultural identity and that it was relatively homogenous across society. Studies of provincial art or religion, for instance, frequently present the subject as unproblematic and relating to provincewide trends and patterns of behavior. However, far from being a standard cultural package, what is called Romanization appears to have been a manifestation of regional and social heterogeneity within a “global” system.¹⁶⁸

I am convinced that the best way forward is to discard the term Romanization and to employ other interpretative frameworks to explore the cultural diversity of the empire. For example, Jane Webster has advanced a strong case for applying the concept of creolization to the Roman Empire, despite its connotations primarily with the New World and slave society.¹⁶⁹ Creole language and creole material culture are built up by the

¹⁶² See, e.g., those referred to in Gosden 2004.

¹⁶³ Ball 2000; Butcher 2004; Millar 1993.

¹⁶⁴ See Wells 1999, 2001 on “Germanization”; and Mattingly 1995, 160–70 on Punic cultural continuities.

¹⁶⁵ See Terrenato 1998 on Italy.

¹⁶⁶ Keay and Terrenato 2001, 113.

¹⁶⁷ Galinsky 1996, 2005; Habinek and Schiesaro 1997; MacMullen 2000; Wallace-Hadrill 1989b, 2008; Whittaker 1997; Zanker 1988.

¹⁶⁸ See the discussion in Slofstra 2002 and Woolf 2002b.

¹⁶⁹ Webster 2001.

integration of the language and traditions of the underclass with elements of language and culture of the dominant colonial society, resulting in a “highly ambiguous material culture, in the sense that it is imbued with different meanings in different contexts.”¹⁷⁰ In principle these approaches adopted in North American historical archaeology to understand the material culture and social behavior of the slaves and underprivileged classes can also be applied to the archaeological record of the Roman world. The most important aspect of the creolization model is that it does not ascribe the adoption of new linguistic practices, of new forms of pottery or of cooking equipment to a simple desire of the underprivileged or less civilized to emulate. Indeed it is clear that the social meaning of things is heavily contingent on social context and can be subverted in the creolized use. On the other hand, there is a danger that in seeking to apply the model to the Roman world we could create readings of resistance in the use of material culture at every level of society. A large part of the archaeological evidence of change in material culture in provincial society was in fact generated by people belonging to advantaged groups in society—specifically, foreigners, the local elites, and the army, whose motivations can by no means be assumed to have been the same as the poorest groups in society. Other approaches are thus needed in combination with the creolization model. I shall return to this issue in chapter 8 by exploring the themes of identity and discrepancy in Roman society. For the moment, though, understand that throughout this book I have explicitly rejected Romanization as an interpretative tool. I hope you will not miss or mourn its absence from the scene!

CONCLUSION

Writing this chapter has reminded me forcefully that the study of the Roman Empire is a very large academic subject, with a huge bibliographical backlog. Yet it seems to me that there are still many basic issues about the nature of Roman imperialism and its impacts that remain poorly understood or, simply, little explored. Developments in archaeology, in comparative history, and in the field of postcolonial studies offer a range of avenues that ancient historians, classicists, and specialists in Roman material culture should give further consideration to in the years ahead. In my recent reading I have been struck by how new developments in the study of the Roman world are paralleled in many instances by studies of the frontier societies of modern empires—the transformation of the

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 217–20.

study of the American frontier is particularly pertinent.¹⁷¹ In place of a traditional model of a uniform white settler society pushing the frontier ever westward, there is now a growing emphasis on the fact that cultural encounters at every stage were far more complex, involving great heterogeneity among communities of both natives and settlers. Roman studies could benefit from a similar sweeping revision of the consensus model.

I am aware that some of what I present in this book is unorthodox and gives more prominence to the lives of the lower orders than ancient historians tend to allow. As Syme once wrote, “The lower classes had no voice in government, no place in history.”¹⁷² That, I think, can be changed by seeking to trace something of the lived experience of the empire that they found themselves part of. While some readers will (as some in the audience at the original lectures did) find these ideas challenging, I hope that I will also find some supporters for my skepticism about the supposed universal benefits of Roman rule, my rejection of the Romanization paradigm, and my attempt to put something new in its place.

¹⁷¹ Axtell 2001; Calloway 1997; Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin 1992; Lamar and Thompson 1981; Nobles 1997; White 1991.

¹⁷² Syme 1979, 476.