William V. Harris: Roman Power. A Thousand Years of Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016. XXI, 357 p., 37 ill., 7 maps. £ 33.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-15271-7.

This is an ambitious book. In what is in effect an extended essay, the author presents readers with an interpretation of Roman success and failure that is worthy of the pageantry and variegated nature of ancient Roman history. Wide-ranging like its subject, this book moves gracefully from the sands of the Sahara to the deserted ruins of Dura-Europos on the banks of the Euphrates, from the moorland of northern Britain to the valley of the Nile, encompassing the majesty and realities of Roman power. Likewise ambitious and appropriately broad is the chronological range, with this essay covering the full arc of Roman history over the course of a millennium. Epic breadth in terms of space and time is, wondrous to say, accompanied by the telling use of detail so as to make memorable, pungent points in the argument advanced. Harris offers no complete, exhaustive narrative, and for that reason this book is all the more successful. Any plodding attempt to provide readers with a blow-by-blow account of the rise and fall of the Empire would have lost the way in the wood for the sheer number of trees to be distinguished. Instead, Harris provides readers with an extended essay that sets forth a cogent analysis identifying the fundamental causes for the Romans' creation of Empire as well as the decline and fall of that polity. Heir to the historiographical tradition of Montesquieu and Gibbon, Harris has written an essay that is a pleasure to read and of benefit and interest to the general public and scholars alike. Accessible to a wide range of readers and yet presenting its scholarship in immediate format by footnotes, this book is an essay that can be used as a textbook for courses and seminars on Roman history precisely because of its combination of erudition and popular appeal.

The opening gambit of Chapter 1 (1–14: "The long-term evolution of Roman power") affords readers an overview of the whole work. Within a few, dense pages, Harris elegantly sets forth the structure, concept, and approaches that inform this book. Concrete analysis of the success of Roman imperialism and the subsequent decline and fall of the Empire involves enunciating the idea of Rome and the concomitant idea of Roman power over the course of a millennium extending more or less from 400 BC to AD 600. *La longue durée* is a concept discernible here, even if Harris never uses the French term nor refers to the work of Fernand Braudel, Marc Bloch, or

the *Annales* school.[1] As the idolatry of power is self-consciously eschewed, so too are scholarly conventions regarding the chronological limits and subdivisions of investigation. Neither AD 337 nor 395 nor 410 nor 476 nor 602 will do for Harris, who opts for a concluding date of AD 641 with the end of the reign of Heraclius and the fall of Alexandria to Arab conquerors. The conquest of Veii (*ca.* 393 BC) arguably marks the beginning of some four centuries of uninterrupted territorial expansion. The visible deceleration of Roman conquest decided by the emperor Tiberius (AD 16) marks a pivotal moment in the definition of Empire and Roman power, even if open avowal of the limits of Empire by Hadrian and senatorial criticism of the creation of the province of Mesopotamia by Septimius Severus might suggest later ones. The failure to conquer the whole of Germany was gravid with consequences for the future. Another pivotal moment, for Harris, is the death of Constantine (AD 337), as he identifies that as the moment as of which "internal political cohesion" began to fall apart (5). A final pivotal moment is furnished by the Arab conquest of Alexandria, which meant the definitive end of the Mediterranean as a Roman lake. Having established and defended his chronological subdivision of the subject, with a useful note on the methodological need to engage in cross-period comparisons, Harris illustrates how excessive abstraction in discussing power can be avoided through the use of concrete examples. The euergetism of a local magistrate, for instance, is illustrated by a mosaic from Smirat (Tunisia) depicting the animal hunt (*venatio*) staged by Magerius, where the inscription emphasises the link between wealth and power. Similarly, a coin minted by the moneyer Cn. Lentulus in 76/75 BC is used to illustrate the myth of Roman universal power exercised on land and at sea. Both the legalistic formulations of power and the myth-making that grounded power, moreover, are identified as essential areas of investigation. Harris wraps up this introductory chapter with reflections on the definition of power and a brief survey of theories of power. Identifying the characteristic of "insistence" or "durability" as an especial virtue of the Max Weber's definition of power, Harris himself espouses an

1 As regards the history of the *Annales* school, see P. Burke: The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School, 1929–89. Cambridge 1999; A. Burguière: L'École des Annales. Une histoire intellectuelle. Paris 2006. For the figure of Bloch, see C. Fink: Marc Bloch. A Life in History. Cambridge 1991; U. Raulff: Marc Bloch, un historien au XXe siècle. Traduit de l'allemand par O. Mannoni. Paris 2005, esp. 341–344 (for a list of publications). For the figure of Braudel, see G. Gemelli: Fernand Braudel. Paris 1995; P. Daix: Braudel. Paris 1995.

eclectic approach that considers circumstances as they changed over time. The conclusion is a *tour de force* in terms of the citation of thinkers who have reflected on the nature of power and the Roman experience: Andreski and Mann; Machiavelli and Arendt; Thucydides, Polybius, and Sallust; Montesquieu and Gibbon; Marx and Foucault; Finley, Hopkins, Harris himself, and Cornell.[2] As a coda to this world of ideas is appended a reflection on the power of images and the fact that much work is still to be done on material remains, especially as regards sociological and psychological aspects in terms of elite audience.

The next two chapters review the period extending from 400 BC to AD 16. Chapter 2 (15–67: "The Romans against outsiders, 400 BC to AD 16") covers the establishment of Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean, and Chapter 3 (68–111: "The Romans against each other, from republic to monarchy") deals with the transformation of the Roman constitution. The topics are complementary and can be subsumed under two broad questions. How did the Empire come into being? What effects did the Empire have on the Romans? Harris, of course, poses dozens of questions, normally adumbrating responses rather than offering exhaustive answers. What emerges from this twin focus is a succinct, lucid outline of political and military history that is accompanied by a crisp, persuasive analysis of underlying causes. Thanks to the use of large-scale chronological divisions and chapter sections, the organization of this vast mass of material is clear and comprehensible. For instance, three sections of Chapter 2 nicely epitomise the growth of the Roman state between the middle Republic and the early Principate: "Techniques of domination [...] to 241 BC"; "World power, 241–146 BC"; and "Almost irresistible" for the period 146 BC–AD 16. In addition, Harris provides of list of annexations of territory (50–53) for the last-cited section so as to clarify the concept and substantiate Roman expansion between the razing of Corinth and Carthage and the recall of Germanicus. But this is no mere chronicle of Roman expansion.[3] There is constant attention to concepts and analytical regard for the power of abstract ideas. For example, Diodorus of

2 It is worth remarking that the image (4) of Charles-Louis de Secondat (1689–1755), baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, is particularly apt and beautifully reproduced. In an age where colour and three-dimensionality predominate, there is much to be said for the elegance of the black-and-white etchings of an earlier age.

3 In fact, Harris regularly refers readers to the *CAH* for further narrative details; the reviewer counts thirty-three items from the revised *CAH* in the bibliography.

Sicily is cited for Hiero II of Syracuse's commenting on Roman insistence on their *fides* (48), which concept they clearly deployed as an ideological justification for the pursuit of empire. In like fashion, Harris shows a consummate mastery of the telling statistic, such as when he notes that the participation of "*at the very most*" some 3,000–4,000 voters in the tribal assembly must give pause regarding the modern attempt to interpret that institution in "democratic" terms (74; original italics). Then there is the exemplary use of epigraphic evidence, whether citing and depicting the sarcophagus of L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus (39) or even recovering them from literature (21, 64) and thereby allowing us to hear contemporary voices. The use that Harris makes of the material evidence is likewise discerning. Coins represented for fine points made in the text (27, 38, 46, 70, 89, 90) are shown with both obverse and reverse! The reconstructed remains of a ship (28) are presented with a caption that is duly cautious of interpretation. Wall paintings (24, 91) are clear and to the point, despite being reproduced in black-and-white photographs. Statuary (56) is depicted, but only with a focus upon the telling detail of relevance to the narrative and analysis offered in the text. Harris is no *tiro* in the interweaving of text and image, and he has managed to perform the enviable feat of producing a dense, aesthetically pleasing, and stimulating synthesis. The treatment of the rise to Empire is accessible to neophytes, but also has much to offer for thought for veterans of the subject. These two chapters are far better than any textbook in print.

The following two chapters deal with the period AD 16–337, effectively covering the history of the Roman state between the death of Augustus and that of Constantine. Chapter 4 (112–150: "The Romans against outsiders, AD 16 to 337") considers the consolidation of hegemony by the Roman state as a global power, and Chapter 5 (151–218: "The Romans against each other: from empire to nation?") reckons with the failure of the Roman state to transform from an empire into a nation. Again a couple of fundamental questions may be discerned as lying behind the numerous questions posed by Harris. How did the Romans maintain and consolidate the Empire? How did the existence of the Empire translate into the socio-economic reality of Roman life? In responding to these questions, Harris presents readers with a stunningly wide array of voices and experiences. From emperors to lackeys (viz. panegyrists) and female gladiators, Harris displays a rare sensitivity in assembling so great a variety of perspectives on power at the height of the

Empire. Ceaselessly wandering, much like the emperor Hadrian, Harris effortlessly moves the narrative and analysis from centre to periphery and back, weaving a grandiose, sophisticated tapestry. In so doing, he introduces readers to the full panoply of materials available to the historian. There are detailed maps to be praised for their clarity and occasional ground-breaking innovation (116–117, 138–139). Through carefully chosen images of architecture (119, 122, 163), painting (172), statuary (123, 178), and bas-reliefs (118, 127, 160, 175), readers are provided with a vivid sense of the spaces of the Roman world and the people who inhabited them. The violence of reducing people to slavery (e.g. the panel from the Column of Marcus Aurelius depicted at 127) is merely one of the various scenes of "daily life" to which Harris draws readers' attention in a subtle reinforcement of the elementary observation that "slavery [wa]s the water in which everything else floats" (151).[4] Coins (141, 212) and inscriptions (e.g. 126, 148) are also used with the discernment required for pepper and other spices, so as to highlight specific points, as if to offer startling motes of light that penetrate the darkness as one proceeds ever further into the depths of the *Domus Aurea*. Through the sure guidance of Harris, readers hear a wide range of voices, which include emperors (135, 205), panegyrists (112), senators (180), and knights (155), historians (179) and geographers (130), and jurists (200, 205) and philosophers (201). From petitions written on papyri (201) to epitaphs etched in stone (148), readers are repeatedly reminded of what Roman power meant in concrete terms of lived experience. The fiscal aspects of imperialism, the extension of the franchise, and the differentiation between *honestiores* and *humiliores* are merely a few of the topics covered as Harris reveals and analyses the workings of Roman power in these two chapters dedicated to the period between Tiberius and Constantine. Briefly encountered though they are, on a canvas of such epic dimensions, figures such as Domitian, Septimius Severus, and Diocletian emerge with brilliant clarity.

The final pair of chapters covers the period AD 337–641, narrating and analysing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Chapter 6 (219–263: "The

4 Cf. p. 3, citing J. Webster: Routes to Slavery in the Roman World: a Comparative Perspective on the Archaeology of Forced Migration. In: H. Eckardt (ed.): Roman Diasporas. Archaeological Approaches to Mobility and Diversity in the Roman Empire. Portsmouth 2010 (Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplementary Series 78), 45–65, in particular 62, for 100 million people enslaved over the course of the Roman millennium.

Romans against outsiders, AD 337 to 641") deals with the fall of the Empire in the West (fifth century) and in the East (seventh century), and Chapter 7 (264-302: "The Romans against each other in two long crises") reviews the late antique structures of internal power and developments that proved conducive to the failure of Empire. Again two questions may perhaps summarize what is at stake, even though Harris properly poses a whole host of questions regarding these momentous changes and events. Why did the Empire collapse (separately, at a remove of two centuries from one episode to the next) in the West and the East when it did? What role did internal power relations play in this process? Attentive to the many, different elements of society and the existence of multiple causes, Harris selects from a mass of material (see below), so as to offer memorable vignettes and penetrating analysis. Through broad brushstrokes and precise details, the end of the Roman experience comes alive. Harris communicates in sober terms events that were clearly dramatic for contemporaries, and he does so with a sharp eye for paradox. So, for example, there is no need to cite the story of the pet chicken named "Roma" to communicate to readers the utter inadequacy of Honorius as a Roman leader. Introducing Honorius and his older brother with the remark that Theodosius' sons were "still children" at the time of their father's death in AD 395 (228; cf. 271, for Synesius on Arcadius "living the life of a jelly-fish"), Harris obliquely demonstrates Honorius' incompetence through a juxtaposition of written narrative with the image of Honorius as a latter-day Constantine on the diptych of Anicius Petronius Probus (*cos.* 406) (p. 230) and by citation of a law issued on the day after the fall of Rome with a view to obtaining religious unity (239). The analysis of people, structures, and events is consistently penetrating, and judgements unforgiving. Harris displays hardy scepticism and a commendable refusal to accept common narratives and errors, as can be seen from his criticism of estimates of the size of the Roman army in this period (229).[5] Harris, moreover, deals squarely with problems, as is shown by his discussion of the nature of the post-Justinianic army (250). Indeed, a signal merit of this work is his ability (and willingness) to identify problems as such, as in the case of the disaffection and alienation that a large portion of the Christians of Egypt and Syria felt for the central government (296). As in the previous pairings of chapters, maps (221, 241) and images of material remains (224, 227, 230,

5 The criticism deals with merely the most eminent example: H. Elton: Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350–425. Oxford 1996 (Oxford Classical Monographs), 128.

246, 258, 262, 268, 270, 285, 298) illustrate, buttress, and expand the arguments made in the text. Ivory diptychs, silver plates, coins, a bust, a papyrus, and a fresco offer readers a visual and intellectual feast, inviting them to reflect on the various manifestations of power in the late Roman world.[6] Not surprisingly, the text is abundantly dotted with citations and references to written sources. Perhaps a list on the order of late antique authors will suffice to convey an impression of this wealth of documentation: *Notitia Dignitatum*, *Codex Theodosianus*, *Codex Iustinianus*, the *Novels*, the *Sirmondian Constitutions*, Claudian, Prudentius, Rutilius Namatianus, Sidonius Apollinaris (289, missing from index), Themistius, Libanius, Synesius, Firmicus Maternus, Symmachus, Ammianus Marcellinus, the *Augustan History*, Priscus of Panium, Zosimus, John the Lydian, Procopius, Agathias, Eusebius of Caesarea, Socrates, Sozomen, Evagrius, John of Ephesus, Theophylact Simocatta, John of Nikiu, Nicephorus, Paulinus of Nola, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Paul the Deacon, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus (271–272, missing from index), John Chrysostom, Abbot Shenoute, George of Pisidia, John of Thessalonica, Pseudo-Sebeos, Michael the Syrian, and yet others. This wealth of documentation is combined with an ability to identify precious, telling details so as to offer an analysis that is firmly rooted in history and yet refreshingly new.

The concluding Chapter 8 (303–315: "Retrospect and some reflections") offers a summary of the foregoing work of synthesis and thoughts regarding its application to the present and future. Cross-period comparison is instructive, as the middle Republic and late Empire can be clearly seen to be quite different. Relating internal and external power relations in a given period is equally instructive, as causal relationships, behaviour, and actors can be analysed with greater precision and plausibility. Military aggressivity and a commonly shared idea of Rome can be discerned as fundamental to the creation of the Empire, whereas disaffection and disunity identifiably contributed in large measure to the disappearance of the Roman state. No less significant,

6 It may be worth noting that the Stilicho diptych (224) probably commemorates the appointment of that general's son Eucherius as *notarius et tribunus* at the court of Honorius; see H. C. Teitler: *Notarii* and *Exceptores.* An Inquiry into Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire (From the Early Principate to c. 450 A.D.). Amsterdam 1985 (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 1), 4 and 132.

however, were elements such as manpower and money. Co-existing in tension with one another, material and psychological factors informed the military, political, social, and economic manifestations of power. From beginning to end, however, this is a book about Rome, not America. Harris resists the temptation to "prostitut[e] historical facts" (315) and offer readers a meta-narrative in which the text ostensibly talks about ancient Rome while actually addressing contemporary issues. Nonetheless, he does close with a few thoughts regarding the relevance of the Roman experience to the present. He leaves readers, characteristically, with questions to ponder.

The table of contents (VII–VIII) is properly executed, offering readers a listing of chapters and their subdivisions. The lists of illustration (IX–XI) and maps (XII) are likewise helpful. The preface (XIII–XV) explains authorial decisions in the constitution of the text, all of which are comprehensible and laudable. The list of dates (XVI–XIX) is full and serves to orient readers and clarify the vision of Roman history that informs the text. The list of abbreviations (XX–XXI) nicely emphasizes basic instruments and the wealth of epigraphic and papyrological evidence deployed in the text. The bibliography (316–344) has been executed with care and provides readers with a guidance to (largely English-speaking) scholarship of recent years on the topics covered. The index (345–357) is helpful and fairly complete, even if unfortunate omissions and confusions are readily found (e.g. the entry "Constantius", which confuses three distinct individuals and lacks a significant fourth page [272]).[7] Overall, in short, the para-textual elements of the book contribute to its utility and appeal.

Covering such a broad expanse of time and so many instantiations of power and its effects, the book is an essay and will inevitably attract criticism as it generates discussion. That is in the natural course of things. Yet, this criticism will prove salutary for the profession as a whole, on a par with that generated by Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution* (1939) and Timothy D. Barnes's *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981). To offer pages of such criticism here would be out of place. Rather, the reviewer prefers to anticipate three potential areas that are problematic and deserving of further thought and work.

7 The individuals in question are: Constantius I; Constantius II; and Constantius III.

One area is that of the position and power of women in Roman society and politics over the course of the centuries. From Tanaquil to Servilia to Eusebia, women repeatedly emerge from the shadows as the actual power brokers in moments of crisis. Regardless of historical reality (even to the degree that it seems surreal to speak of Tanaquil as an actual person), it is an incontrovertible fact that this is precisely how the ancient sources represent them. Post-modern historians of ancient Rome would do well to keep this in mind even when working on such "masculine" topics as power in the Roman world. Indeed, there is an abundant and varied body of serious work dedicated to exploring the female condition and relations between the sexes in ancient Rome (e.g. Treggiari, Rawson, Welch, and Hopwood *inter alias*).[8] Although the position of women in Roman society is pessimistically described in realistic terms (69–70), it is truly surprising to find that Servilia is altogether omitted from the brief discussion of those women who played a role in high politics at the close of the Republic (96).[9]

A second area that is problematic is that of the world of banking and finance and economic power. Even though he does refer to the infamous episode of Cyprus involving M. Iunius Brutus in the late 50s BC, Harris fails to elaborate upon the implications of this episode, as though it were the exception rather than the rule. Accordingly, Harris has no entry for "banking" in the index and there is no use made of any of the excellent publications of Andreau, Barlow, Bogaert, Crawford, Migeotte, Rollinger, Shatzman, and Verboven *inter alios*.[10] This is unfortunate, as Harris does make sensible remarks on economic motivation (22; cf. 59, with a reference to Ernst Badian's *Publicans and Sinners* [1983]), and there is abundant evidence to suggest that this

8 To expand upon these examples: S. Treggiari: Roman Marriage. *Iusti Coniuges* from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian. Oxford 1991; B. Rawson: Children and Childhood in Roman Italy. Oxford 2003; K. Welch: Velleius and Livia: Making a Portrait. In: E. Cowan (ed.): Velleius Paterculus. Making History. Swansea 2011, 309–334; B. Hopwood: Hortensia Speaks: an Authentic Voice of Resistance? In: K. Welch (ed.): Appian's Roman History. Empire and Civil War. Swansea 2015, 305–322.

9 For the role of Servilia, see now S. Treggiari: Servilia and Her Family. Oxford 2019; with the review of R. MacMullen (http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2019/2019-03-07.html).

10 To which the author of this review has made a modest contribution: R. Westall: The Loan to Ptolemy XII, 59–48 BCE. In: Ricerche di Egittologia e di Antichità Copte 12, 2010, 23–41; R. Westall: Caesar's *Civil War*. Historical Reality and Fabrication. Leiden/Boston 2017 (Mnemosyne. Supplements 410).

factor explains in large part the growth of the Roman empire between the sack of Veii and the curtailing of further adventures by the emperor Tiberius. As things stand, readers are treated to merely fleeting glimpses of how the nexus between military and economic power was constituted, preserved, and extended. Much more might have been accomplished in terms of analysis and description. After all, as is well known, the imperial deployment of "soft power" is often far more effective than recourse to arms. Indeed, as can be seen from the problem of "Russian sanctions" at present, finances are of the essence to those who would wield power and public authority.

A third problematic area is that of manpower and the fall of Empire in the West (fifth century) and in the East (seventh century). The civil wars of Constantine, Constantius II, Valens, and Theodosius I had exerted an infelicitous long-term effect upon the power of the Roman state in the West. Documented hecatombs at Cibalae (AD 316), Chrysopolis (AD 324), and Mursa (AD 351) were as grievous or more so than that at Adrianople (AD 376). It seems fair to conclude that every major battle of the civil wars of the fourth century involved the loss of at least 20,000 soldiers and every minor battle at least 5,000. Consequently, the actions of Constantine, Constantius II, Valens, and Theodosius I become far more comprehensible. There was a clear and pressing need to rely upon the Goths and similar groups to make good this shortage of manpower caused by the Romans' internal discord. The paradoxical result of the civil wars of the fourth century was that the defenders became the barbarians. The fall of the Empire was merely a matter of time, given the inability of the Roman state to assimilate vast masses of newcomers (despite the goodwill suggested by the anecdote reported by Orosius regarding the Gothic king Athaulf). As for the issue of manpower and the fall of the Empire in the East, it is worth underlining the fact that Justinianic reconquest of Africa and Italy was accomplished – in a seemingly definitive first phase – prior to the advent of the plague of Justinian in AD 541. The effective disappearance of large field armies seems tied to this natural disaster. The minuscule forces deployed by Justinian's generals and later imperial armies that were fielded seem characteristic of those of the earlier decades of the middle Republic, as regards numbers and not efficacy. Disaster, in short, struck after the reconquest had already been set in motion. It would have taken a truly great statesman to perceive the wisdom of abandoning the project.

Dense with information and ideas and beautifully produced, this is a volume that readers will enjoy using and re-reading. There will be much to debate, but that is as it should be. What is most important is the fact that Harris has written a volume that engages with both lay readers and professional colleagues, offering an essay of interpretation that stimulates thought and compels one to re-think former positions.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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