

## **Roman Power and the Mediterranean World (An Overview)**

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### **1. Introduction: Rome and Her Neighbours**

To understand the trajectory of the Roman Republic it is important to understand Rome's place in the Mediterranean World. Rome was at first only a small city-state situated in central Italy, with a traditional founding date of 754 B.C.E., a date arrived at by correlating the founding of the city with an eclipse which was noted in third year of the sixth Olympiad (Olympic Games cycle) in Greece (Plutarch *Romulus* XII.2; for the mythic origins of Rome as collected in one literary epic, see Virgil's *Aeneid*). Like many neighbouring states, Rome was essentially a civic centre controlling an adjacent region of country-side. In this she at first seemed little different to many neighbouring cities, e.g. Cumae to the south, or nearby Corioli, and not substantially different in these geographical factors from the city-states of classical Greece. Prior to the large-scale conquest of neighbouring territories, Rome probably controlled around 800-960 square kilometers (smaller than Attica), and probably could support a population of 60,000 in total (Delbrück 1975, p260; Brunt 1971, p1).

There were certain strategic benefits to the position of Rome. Originally an Iron Age settlement of the 9th and 8th centuries built on two hills, she was able to spread out to the nearby hills and then drain the marshy ground between them (see Scullard 1979; Ogilvie 1980). According to late sources key phases of expansion were completed by the kings Tullus Hostilius and Servius Tullius, with the wall of the city extended to include these new areas (Livy I.44; Eutropius *Compendium of Roman History* I.1-8, in Lewis & Reinhold 1990, pp60-62). This gave Rome a large city area, which, when enclosed by fortified walls, was easily defended. Likewise, her position on the Tiber River was ideal. The site controlled a fjord which routed north-south trade, while the river was navigable by small ships not much further upstream (Delbrück 1975, p258). In this way Rome had easy communication to the sea, but was less vulnerable to sea-borne attack, or piracy, (a common way of life in the first millennium B.C.E.) than coastal cities. She was also well-located for access to mountain passes to the centre, east, and north-east of Italy, with somewhat easier access to the south (Brunt 1971, p28).

But these advantages are similar to those enjoyed by many Etruscan, Phoenician or Greek cities. More significant was Rome's placement between two regional cultures. To the north she faced the Etruscan culture, from which she borrowed heavily. The Etruscans were a deeply religious and artistic people who settled a number cities in Tuscany, the Po valley and in southern Italy. They were also skilled in warfare, and for a time, in the late 6th century, Etruscan kings controlled Rome. However, the Romans were excellent students and hardy fighters; they threw off the Etruscan control and then defeated the Etruscan cities over a 250 year period, circa 500-265 B.C.E. (see Scullard 1979).

To the south were a group of peoples with a related life style and language, the Latins. The Romans fought some of these tribes, early on defeating the people of Alba Longa, then the Sabines, and in the end headed a league of Latin cities which she turned northwards against the Etruscans (Scullard 1979; Scullard 1980). The successful dominance of these two groups gave Rome her original strength. Rome expanded in two ways, by direct annexation of conquered land for distribution among her own citizens, as occurred after the conquest of Veii in 396 C.E. (Brunt 1971, pp3-5), and by an absorption of conquered people into her own citizen body. Likewise, Rome built a network of voluntary 'equal' allies plus conquered allies subject to manpower levies and taxes that soon gave her access to the considerable resources (see Lewis & Reinhold 1990, pp88-93). With the manpower and resources she levied from the Latins and Etruscans she went on to defeat the other peoples of central Italy, including the Samnites, Umbrians, Oscans and the Aequi (see Scullard 1980). After this she moved against the Greek colonies in southern Italy, dominating Capua, Neapolis and then Tarentum.

At this point Rome was to meet three major challenges that were to occupy her for over 150 years: the Greeks and Macedonians, the Celts and Gauls (tribal peoples of northern Italy, France and parts of Spain) and the Carthaginians. We can look at them thematically in this outline, though not in great detail.

In fact Greek settlement in southern Italy and Sicily had created dozens of cities whose total wealth and population challenged that of mainland Greece. Greek cities such as Corinth, Athens and Sparta sent out colonies all over the Mediterranean world during the 8-6<sup>th</sup> B.C.E. centuries, and found in southern Italy and Sicily a land so vast and rich that they called it Magna Graecia, 'Greater Greece'. The Romans readily overcame colonies such as Cumae and Neapolis, but in the late third century was involved in a vigorous war with Tarentum and her allies, which drew in the Molossian King Pyrrhus from Elis, a powerful city in north-western mainland Greece. Pyrrhus drew on the military methods of the Macedonians and also included elephants in his forces, making him a formidable foe (Delbrück 1975, p297). Pyrrhus was able to win many victories against the Romans in Italy (280-279 B.C.E.), but his manpower losses were such that he could not afford to sustain such victories. King Pyrrhus is reported to have said after one particularly bloody victory: "If we win one battle against the Romans we shall be completely ruined." (Plutarch *Life of Pyrrhus* 21, in Lewis & Reinhold 1990, p88). In the end, Roman manpower and military organization overcame these southern cities, and all of central and southern Italy was now her 'allies'.

In the third century that Rome had to deal with two other power groups. The first were the loose confederations of Celtic tribes who still held parts of north-west Italy and the western Po River valley. Celtic peoples had successfully invaded Roman territory early in her history, in 390 B.C.E., but this was more a large scale-raid than a permanent conquest. The Celtic peoples in Italy were slowly pushed back by Roman advances through Etruria and across the Apennine Mountains in the south and south-eastern Po valley. Serious conflicts with various Celtic tribes, including the Boii, the Lingones and the Insubres (who brought in their allies the Gaesatae) developed after 226 B.C.E., when these tribes mustered a force of over 70,000 troops and headed south through Etruria (Scullard 1980, p189; Plutarch *Marcellus* 3-7). They were defeated by consular armies after a hard battle in 225 B.C.E. The third major Gallic invasion occurred alongside Hannibal's invasion of Italy, with Hannibal using the brave but less-disciplined Gauls to blunt the Rome legions. It was after this war that Rome defeated the Celts in Cisalpine Gaul (this side, the Italian side, of the Alps, i.e. Nearer Gaul), and began to reinforce the northern cities with colonists. New Roman roads penetrating across the Apennines and up the Po valley allowed greater Roman expansion until the entire region was under direct control. After this war Rome also proceeded to make alliances in

southern France, and to directly take over Carthaginian settlements in Spain. Here, she had a long period of strained relations with the Celtiberians and Iberians of the peninsula, but maintained control of most of south-eastern Spain.

Southern Gaul, the region of Provence, was directly conquered by 121 B.C.E, and became the province of Gallia Narbonensis (after its capital of Narbo). From 109 B.C.E. Roman leaders such as Marius would engage in desperate wars against powerful Germanic tribal groupings such as the Cimbri and the Teutones who moved into Gaul and threatened Italy itself. Thereafter the Gauls of central and northern France would engage the Romans, particularly Julius Caesar, in major wars during the 1st century B.C.E. (see Cunliffe 1988). Combined, these Celtic peoples probably outnumbered the entire manpower of Italy, but their disunity, indeed the divisive nature of their local politics, meant they could rarely act as a unified enemy. They were only occasionally brought together under charismatic leaders, such as Vercingetorix (Caesar's strongest Gallic opponent), and usually only for a short period of time. The 'Celts' would remain a major foil for Roman expansion and borders in Britain and along the Danube where Celtic influences helped shape the Dacian kingdom.

## **2. Power Blocks of the Mediterranean**

To the south Rome met perhaps her most dangerous rival. Carthage was a Phoenician city in north Africa, with an official foundation date of 814 B.C.E. The Carthaginians had a vigorous trading culture, establishing trading ports and settlements throughout the central and Western Mediterranean, in Spain, and on the Atlantic coasts of Spain and North Africa. From the seventh century on Carthage also extended her influence in North Africa, building up alliances with, and some hegemony over, the Lybians to the east, the Numidians to the west. But Carthage was much more than an economic power. She also built a fine navy, and commanded a strong mercenary army led by Carthaginian officers. In the middle 6th century, after defeating Greek fleets, Carthage managed to extend her influence in Western Sicily and Corsica. These tools allowed her by the third century to build up a virtual empire in Spain, which became one of her main economic resources.

By this stage Sicily was one of the most important strategic regions in the Mediterranean (see Norwich 2006). A fertile island, it was also a cross-roads between Italy and Africa, and between the Levant (eastern Mediterranean) and Western Europe. Its coastal regions in particular had been settled by the Greeks, and major cities such as Gela, Megara and Syracuse had been founded in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E.. Syracuse (originally a Spartan colony) in particular, became one of the most powerful and wealthy cities in the ancient world during the 5th and 4th centuries. However, Syracuse never managed to dominate the entire island of Sicily, and during the growing tension between Carthage and Rome, she was generally allied with one side or the other.

It was this clash of growing, regional powers in the 'buffer zone' of Sicily which resulted in the major showdown between the Roman and Carthaginian worlds. Carthage became embroiled in three major wars with Rome, called the Punic wars (the term Punic refers to the fact that the original settlers of Carthage came from Phoenicia). Stretching intermittently from 264-146 B.C.E., these wars included the famous march of Hannibal over the Alps and his ultimately unsuccessful invasion of Italy, a feat which greatly surprised the Romans as almost impossible for an army of that size. Rome eventually triumphed in these wars, thereby building up a huge war machine which allowed her to readily defeat the Macedonian kingdom to the east, and then dominate Greek affairs from 146 B.C.E. onwards. For the historian Polybius, in particular, it was the events of the period

220 B.C.E. (start of the Second Punic War) down to 167 B.C.E. that laid the foundations for Roman dominion:

There can surely be no one so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover by what means and under what system of government the Romans succeeded in less than fifty three years in bringing under their rule almost the whole inhabited world, an achievement which is without parallel in human history. (Polybius I.1)

The Punic Wars were crucial in forging Roman military and naval tactics, in largely finalizing her control of the Italian peninsula, and confirming that Rome might lose battles but not wars. This prepared her for intervention in mainland Greece, and conflicts against Macedonia and other Hellenistic kingdoms. The “Romans were thereby encouraged to stretch out their hands for the first time to grasp the rest, and to cross with an army into Greece and the lands of Asia.” (Polybius I.3) These trends towards domination was driven and sustained by several factors, including the internal political and value system at Rome which lauded military victories, Rome’s access to Italian manpower, and secondary gains including land, slaves and wealth (though this latter factor would be crucial in sustaining her imperial push, see Harris 1979).

Graeco-Roman relations were complex. Many Romans respected and borrowed Greek culture, but by the 2nd century they often regarded the Greeks as an argumentative and morally weak people. Thus Cato the Elder disdained Romans who were excessively fond of Greek or wrote history in that language, though Cato himself had learn some Greek (see Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 12). Rome became an arbiter in Greek affairs from the mid-second century, then moved towards more direct control of the entire region. Further east Rome interacted with the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Seleucids, centred in Syria, with the Ptolemies in Egypt, and with the kingdom Pergamum in Asia Minor. Although controlling enormous resources, these kingdoms were not unified nations, nor coherent nation-states. Rather, they were extended regions held together by the power of king and queens, their standing armies, and the efficiency of royal administration. Rome would encroach on these Hellenistic powers more and more, and by the end of the 1st century B.C.E. directly annex or dominate them.

In doing so she opened up to Rome the wealth (material, philosophical and religious) of the entire Middle East. A complex two-way flow of influence developed. If those who had been conquered were exploited, the conquerors were to become corrupted and engaged in ways both obvious and subtle. This was not just the issue of the huge wealth and attendant luxuries that flowed into Rome, nor an attendant decline in morals (as protested by figures such as Cato the Elder). These ‘Greek’ and ‘eastern’ influences were to be a very heady potion, from which the Romans were unable to isolate themselves at the cultural level. ‘Hellenization’ would be the strongest single cultural influence on the thinkers and leaders of the late Republic and early Roman Empire. In turn, these cultural ‘memes’ transformed the military rule of Rome into a system that would provide the empire with the tools of governance that would shape the Roman Empire for hundreds of years. Even Christianity, when it arrived, was partly transmitted via Greek concepts, gospels, letters and translations, in turn impacting on Latin thought and language.

### **3. Views of Power and the Roman State**

One of the central historical drivers of Roman political dominion was the changing nature of power within the Roman State, and how Rome projected its influence on its neighbours. Rome was successful in subduing all its neighbours in central Italy, and then built up an extended alliance system throughout the Italian peninsula (this was in reality a slow and bloody process based on

almost annual campaigns over centuries). In spite of major revolts by allies and the invasion of Carthaginian forces under Hannibal, this alliance continued to power Roman expansion into Sicily, Sardinia, Spain, Gaul, North Africa and then Greece in the 2nd century B.C.E. Rome rapidly extended her domain into a massive empire after her success in limiting Carthaginian power. Rome then extended her frontiers northwards into Spain and Gaul, and in the first century B.C.E. rapidly extended her sway over Asia Minor, Syria, Judaea and then Egypt. By the end of the 1st century C.E. she had pushed northwards into Britain, established frontiers in Germany and pushed further into central Europe towards the Danube. On this frontier she was soon held in place by the vigour and numbers of Germanic and Dacian tribes. In the East she pushed her control eastwards into Armenia, parts of Arabia and for a short time controlled access to northern Mesopotamia, but was never able to permanently defeat the powerful Parthian empire which controlled Mesopotamia and Persia (see Ferguson 2005). The very creation of this extended frontier was a significant and crucial part of Roman policy and thought (Dyson, 1985). Many Romans saw the extension of this boundary as a solution to the security of Rome, while others, e.g. the historian Livy, genuinely thought that they were bringing the fruits of order and civilization to the barbarian world. In turn, a major debate would emerge concerning the proper limits of empire, with emperors such as Augustus and Tiberius being concerned about over-reach to the north and east.

What is clear, then, is that Rome built an impressive empire by defeating dangerous and powerful enemies. What is even more surprising, however, is that she managed to retain it for such a long time. If we date her main imperial phase as starting around 202 B.C.E. (after the defeat of Hannibal at the battle of Zama in North Africa), then her empire lasted intact until at least 410 C.E., when Alaric and the Visigoths sacked Rome (though the Western Empire as a political framework would struggle on for decades after this, and as a cultural legacy for centuries).

Furthermore, the cultural amalgam that we identify as the Roman Empire, comprising Latin, Etruscan, Greek, and later on eastern religious components, forms one of the main cultural strata of Europe. Ideas and practices ranging from road building, architecture, the transmission of Greek classical art and philosophy, law, military technology and tactics, the machinery of government and church organization, were fostered in the Roman Republic and early Empire, and were passed on to the monarchies and tribal states which established the map of Medieval Europe. These were the structures from which the nations of Europe emerged. Even when the political structure of the Roman Empire had been dismembered, its cultural heritage continued. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Greek philosophy and eastern religions, including Christianity, were transmitted and discussed for thousands of years in Latin, or that the legal codes of Germanic and Frankish peoples would be at first written and developed in Latin, influenced by Roman law (see Ferguson 2007).

We are dealing, then, with a powerful, innovative, and long-lasting culture. It remains with us today as part of the tradition which is sometimes called 'The West', drawing comparisons with the 'East', but also engaging analogies between the Roman and American empires. The term 'West' is actually a rather dangerous one. Though there is an organic aspect to the mainstreams of classical, Medieval and early modern thought which allows us to regard it as a whole, it was not isolated from eastern and southern influences. It was both in tension with and influenced by other cultural traditions, e.g. Judaism, and the high Arabic civilization of the Middle Ages. For example, Christianity's reception by the Greeks and Romans was partly conditioned by the diaspora of the Jews, and the formation of their prayer houses and synagogues in many parts of the Mediterranean. Forms of Hellenized Judaism, plus numerous translations of Jewish thought into Greek that may have prepared many people to accept the otherwise alien notions of redemption offered by Christianity (see Kasher 1995; Koester 1982; Koester 1987; Hadas 1963; Hadas 1943).

Power, too, can be viewed in many ways within specific societies. One of the simplest views of power is the ability to make, act or do something. Thus potential and general capacity are relevant in a broad sense. Power comparative to others, however, is often held to include the ability to make them do what you want, even if it is against their will or interests (i.e. coercion). A modern real-politik view of power has been expressed by Morgenthau in the following terms: -

Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment. Power may comprise anything which establishes and maintains the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. (Morgenthau 1985, p11)

Applying this dictum to the control of foreign peoples and states, Rome developed enormous control over the Mediterranean World and Middle East for a longer period than any empire or culture of the modern world. She was able militarily to defeat major opponents, e.g. Etruscans, Samnites, Gauls etc., but then went on to incorporate these peoples as part of her alliance structure whereby she controlled their foreign policy and had privileged access to the wealth and resources of these regions. Plutarch, writing from the perspective of the 1st century A.D., notes that: -

Now this, more than anything else, was what gave increase to Rome: she always united and incorporated with herself those whom she conquered. (Plutarch *Romulus* XVI.5)

Rome also went on to develop inter-relationships which bound these foreign states to her in various ways; client-patron relationships between the ruling classes, followed by deeper trade connections and cultural penetration due to the establishment of Roman colonies and the emergence of Roman civic styles. This was the pattern of acculturation throughout much of the empire. Thus North Africa by the second century C.E. had a new city of Carthage which was a totally Roman civic centre, replete with the amphitheatres, schools, public baths and the public buildings that one would expect from any 'modern' Roman town. Of course, this process of incorporation was done at first on the basis of Roman interests: Rome and Romans remained predominate and retained control of important military and political affairs. This process would only begin to reverse once Roman citizenship was first extended through Italy, and later on to elite elements in the provinces.

What we see here is both the ability to dominate and to control, as well as to persuade and assimilate. This was at first based on Roman military skills and manpower, augmented by allied contingents as Rome came to dominate central Italy. Rome also developed a military system based on heavy infantry that was in many way superior to local military levies. Thus Rome was able to field at first two, then four legions (comprising approximately 4,000-4,200 infantry and 300 cavalry), on a regular basis during the early Republic, while by the time of the Battle of Cannae (against Hannibal) she provided more than eight Roman legions and equal numbers of allied troops for this single front (Delbrück 1975, p315; Polybius I.16). Indeed, as early as the mid-fourth century B.C.E. conscription in the city and country areas could raise ten legions (see Livy VII.25). P.A. Brunt suggests that between 200 and 168 B.C.E. some 47,000 Roman citizens took the field each year, with total Roman and Italian forces equaling 110-130,000 (1971, p13). These legions were not just organized as the hoplite line of heavy infantry (as in Greece), but involved the use of flexible maniples (of 60-120 men) that could move within the mass formation to fill gaps, support a weary front line, and be flexible on uneven terrain. Thus the Roman legion allowed for small gaps in the front line that could be filled either by auxiliary troops or by units to the immediate rear or side (Delbrück 1975, pp272-276). Likewise, the Roman legions developed efficient procedures for building fortified camps, coherent marching order, the provision of logistic support and uniform weapons, and siege equipment (see Delbrück 1975, pp284-285; Polybius VI.19-42). In general, discipline was extremely harsh, with 'insubordination, desertion and cowardice' usually being

punished by death (Delbrück 1975, p289; see Polybius I.17). Entire units and legions could also suffer punishment, ranging from having their rations in barley (the food of slaves and gladiators) through to decimation, in which one in every ten were killed. Units that deserted or that attacked allied cities might be executed en masse (see Polybius I.7 for one example). This meant that ordinary Roman soldiers were less likely to be worn down or routed in battle unless their leaders were killed or military formations became disordered.

The element of persuasion must not be underestimated, since from the fourth century B.C.E. on Roman soldiers never fought alone. They were always accompanied by allied forces, later on called auxiliaries (*auxilia*), which roughly equaled in number the Roman manpower deployed (Delbrück 1975, p263). Cavalry forces, archers, peltasts (who used deadly slings loaded with stones or lead missiles), and light infantry were often comprised of these auxiliary or allied forces, with Numidians, Arabs, Celts and Germans often being viewed as elite cavalry, for example. The allied forces joined in because of treaty obligations, perceived benefits due to booty, or fought against shared enemies. It must be remembered that in the ancient world warfare was a normal and accepted part of life; universal citizen or tribal conscription into armed forces was common, as were regular campaigns most years, perhaps interspersed with a few years of peace. Rome, then, was one enemy among others for a Gallic or Iberian tribe, and many such groups sought alliances with powers such as Rome or Carthage in order to gain an advantage over their neighbours or traditional enemies (this trend allowed Julius Caesar's intervention in central and northern Gaul). Rome too, was less intrusive and comparatively lenient in many of her dealings; the earlier Assyrian, the Parthian, and Seleucid Empires, for example, often dealt more harshly with subject states. Romans by the Second Punic came to be viewed not only as 'masters of the art war and formidable adversaries on the battlefield' but as worthwhile allies and able to be relatively lenient to those they conquered, unless Rome's survival itself had been threatened (see Plutarch *Marcellus* 20).

At the same time, we should not overemphasize this assimilation. It was mainly the upper classes and town populations which were most affected by Roman values and culture, though the society as a whole would be more affected by economic and technological transfers. Throughout the Republican period, the empire was still a patch-work of peoples held together by the political and military dominance of the Romans. It was only in the late empire that we find a new civic strata of Gallo-Romans emerging Gaul for example, or a true mixing of local societies and Roman cultural factors in Britain, Spain and North Africa.

How Rome managed to achieve all was a unique mix of intrinsic factors (geopolitical, cultural, and social) combined with extrinsic enabling conditions, e.g. the fragmentation of Alexander the Great's empire, the divisive politics of Celtic tribes, the failure of Hannibal's Italian invasion strategy (a very close call), and the failure of wars and revolts against Roman control of Italy. Rome was challenged repeatedly by revolts of allies, conflicts with Celtic tribes in Cisalpine Gaul, challenges from cities such as Capua, and later slave revolts, e.g. in Sicily and the revolt led by Spartacus (see Bradley 1989). Part of this mix was the sustained ability to Rome to project power locally and then regionally to build an empire. Briefly, to project power externally the projector of that power must: -

- 1) have the means, (military, diplomatic, and economic)
- 2) have the will, (based on what is perceived as necessary, or as a preferred cultural choice or ideology)
- 3) have sufficient internal cohesion and stability to avoid excessive fragmentation due to internal competitions for power, whether among elite individuals, or between class and

status-groups. Ironically, new sources of wealth and high level of luxury may exacerbate this conflict.

This last point is often a decisive limit to a country's power. Indeed, this type of internal conflict, called *stasis* in the ancient Greek, was one of the most feared crises for ancient cities. Ancient historians such as Thucydides, Polybius, and Josephus all abhorred *stasis* as the most dangerous enemy of civilized states. Ironically, despite Rome's accumulative military successes and her enlarging territorial base, Rome from the 6th century onwards underwent continual political and social turmoil. In 509 B.C.E. the Romans threw out their kings and established a Republic. In the fifth century a conflict between the traditional nobility, the patricians, and the lower orders of society, the plebeians, began and continued for over two hundred years, terminating in serious conflicts over land reform that intensified in the late second century (for a summary, see Brunt 1971, pp42-59). Following the partial resolution of this conflict of the orders, a new upper class emerged, consisting of interrelated powerful families, both patrician and plebeian. This new elite dominated office-holding, and indirectly, the wealth of the fledgling empire. A new and dangerous contest for access to public office, and for the release of public lands to the less well off, began in the late 2nd century, waged in part by changing factions that called themselves either *optimates*, the best men, generally supporting aristocratic orientations, or *populares*, still lead by aristocrats but using the popular assemblies, the tribunes and to some degree plebeian interests as their support base (see Syme 1974; Brunt 1971). Other conflicts were under way; between allies who had some Roman citizen rights, but without the vote, who waged a 'Social war' against the Roman state through 91-89 B.C.E., or the series of slave wars in which mainly foreign slaves challenged Roman legions in Sicily and then Italy (see Bradley 1989).

These internal conflicts were corrosive of public life and the welfare of most ordinary Romans. After the 1st century B.C.E. the dominance of military leaders such as Marius, Sulla, Crassus, Pompey and later on Julius Caesar meant that power was embodied in individual leaders able to override the safeguards of the republican constitution to a dangerous degree. Individual men, through their prestige and wealth, and especially through their military commands, became the clients of thousands of Romans, and in the end, the patron of the entire state. This was the secret of men such as Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar, and Octavian (later on acquiring the honorific 'Augustus' as the first emperor). These leaders engaged in fierce political contests (giving them political offices that lead to military commands) and military campaigns (leading to the control and patronage of soldiers, cities, and sometimes access to enormous wealth). These trends transformed political infighting into civil wars which lasted for over fifty years, pitting dozens of Roman legions against each other and wasting cities and provinces, as well as ravaging much of Italy itself.

This period of social change, then, lasted for some centuries, intensified after 133 B.C.E., and culminated in the civil wars and revolutions of 83-31 B.C.E. The later parts of this period has been rightly called 'The Roman Revolution', suggesting a transformation of the political system from that of elite pluralism to a convergence on autocratic leaders (e.g. Sulla and Julius Caesar) and then a political system of imperial rule (see Syme 1974). In this revolution power which had been achieved through force and political cunning became accepted as legitimate, then consecrated in new institutions and customs. For example, the dictatorship, an emergency office which was supposed to be held for only a short period (usually no more than six months) during times of dire emergency, was voted to Julius Caesar for ten years, and then *in perpetuum* (Syme 1974, p52). Caesar was assassinated shortly afterwards in the name of liberty, though the conception of *libertas* involved was radically different from modern democratic notions, focusing on rights of access to office and limiting arbitrary power (see Wirszubski 1968; Brunt 1971, p94). Likewise, towards the end of the 1st century C.E. extraordinary *auctoritas* (authority and prestige) was accumulated by



Augustus even when he no longer held high office such as the consulship, thereby allowing him to rule the state by decree through the Senate purely as its *princeps*, or the 'leading man'. In reality, of course, Augustus had already defeated his enemies in a series of bloodthirsty wars, had the general loyalty of the legions, and by the promise of order, *otium*, made most Romans his clients (see Brunt 1971, p148). This is pithily described by the Roman historian Tacitus in the opening of his *Annals*:

Augustus won over the soldiers with gifts, the populace with cheap corn, and all men with the sweets of repose, and so grew greater by degrees, while he concentrated in himself the functions of the Senate, the magistrates, and the laws. (1.2)

Military power had always been a direct path to political power, but now it was taking on a central importance which could only be disastrous for the free workings of any republic. This was partly due, of course, to the perpetual need to have large numbers of legions under arms to control the empire and protect its frontiers. Likewise, during the 'social conflicts' with allied states during 90-89 B.C.E. some 250,000 were mobilized in Italy (Brunt 1971, p103). Almost continuous warfare within Italy, against Carthage, then in various theatres of empire affected and distorted the internal politics and administration of the Rome.

The Roman state, then, had its share of political violence and civil war. Yet since the 6th century C.E. Rome was only occupied briefly twice, once by the Etruscans, and then briefly by the Gauls in the 4th century (though the central citadel, the Capitol, was not taken). After the defeat of Carthage, it managed to contain serious Gallic and Germanic threats to the north, and although its allies and provinces regularly staged revolts, its empire did not begin to collapse until the 5th century C.E. Serious civil wars driven by divergent dynastic claims occurred regularly, while economic conditions began to decline from the third century onwards. But the empire and Rome's prestige continued to hold as a political centre at least until 410 C.E.

How then, did Rome manage what seems to be a precarious balancing act, undergoing continual political turmoil, while controlling enemy and friend alike beyond and within its expanding frontier? Several answers have been suggested. The strength of its 'mixed constitution' and the efficiency of its army and its growing naval dominance had been noted by the ancient historian Polybius (see Book VI). Its unique military and religious discipline supported a ruthless determination that would not yield even under extreme circumstances. Its ability to build a cohesive set of alliances and thereby extend its resources and manpower was well known to ancient (e.g. Livy) and modern writers (Toynbee 1965). Its careful use of sophisticated diplomacy, and a willingness to use both peace and war as weapons were significant in its control of Macedonia, Greece and then the East (Gruen 1984). The indecisive and internally weakened nature of the Hellenistic kingdoms of Macedonian, Syria and Egypt gave Rome easy access to the wealth of this partly hellenized zone. All these elements are true to some extent but are not the full story.

Four key features should be added to this list: -

- 1) External and internal politics were directly connected in the practice of Roman politics and the minds of Romans. Generals were high political office holders, e.g. consuls or praetors, while successful generals were more likely to be re-elected and further honoured. In a few cases young men of low or little rank were quickly accorded official status that boosted their careers, e.g. Sulla, Pompey and Octavian. In other words, most prominent politicians also had to be effective military leaders, though the courts provided an alternative route for men such as Cicero. The pursuit of glory and honour was fundamental to the Roman elites, and they did this by a most intense competition against their opponents, whether other Romans, or foreign powers. The dynamic of the Rome state demanded intense competition to allow the values of that

society to be realized, and warfare, with its attendant creation of empire, was one of the best environments to live out such a way of life. Death, humanitarian impulses and economic gain were secondary to this complex of interests whereby virtue was linked with courage and military ability, and whereby political power was enhanced by military campaigns. Speaking of the early Republic, Plutarch suggests:

On the other hand, we must remember that the Romans of those days prized above all else the kind of virtue which finds its expression in warlike and military achievements. We have an interesting piece of evidence for this in the fact that there is only one word in the Latin vocabulary which signifies virtue, and its meaning is *manly valour*: thus the Romans made courage stand for virtue in all its aspects, although it only denotes one of them. (Plutarch *Coriolanus* 1)

There were occasions where this linkage between political and military careers could be negative for Rome. Thus some commanders might seek prematurely to secure a victory before their command was over, or even seek a negotiated peace to avoid the succeeding officer (usually a consul or proconsul) being given the glory of a victory, e.g. Regulus' effort to negotiate a peace with the Carthaginians in the First Punic War (see Polybius I.31).

- 2) In general, Roman retained a level of internal cohesion against external enemies, regardless of bitter internal disputes among citizens. This may have partly rested on their complex constitution, as argued by Polybius, but also seems to have been a cultural inheritance from surviving regular wars early on in their history. Through surviving defeats in many battles, the people and city of Rome endured as a political unit focused on the city. On occasion one individual, class or group within the city did use a hostile foreign power as an ally in an internal dispute. One king that sought to do this, e.g. the expelled Tarquinus by bringing in the Latin tribes jealous of Rome's growing power (Plutarch *Coriolanus* 3), and Marcius (Coriolanus) who when expelled from Rome sought to use the Volscians against his home city (Plutarch *Coriolanus* 21), but these were recorded as dangerous and failed attempts. We do hear of deserters from the Roman army, sometimes taking refuge with enemy cities or tribes, but these are always severely punished, e.g. the 600 deserters that Cato the Elder executed in Spain (Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 11). The Romans of the early Republic, as portrayed in Livy, Polybius or the biographer Plutarch, seem rather 'patriotic', and at times even chauvinistic in their attitudes. But such attitudes, combined with concrete means, probably continued the rise of Rome as a discrete power which retained its cultural identity. Part of these identity and focus may have been maintained by the Roman attitudes towards religion and ritual. Thus Plutarch notes that the Romans 'have been known to perform a single sacrifice thirty times over, because some omission or mistake was believed to have taken place' and that they had extreme 'piety and reverence' in religious matters (Plutarch *Coriolanus* 25). Likewise, the dictator Fabius Maximus used religion as a way of bolstering Roman morale during the Second Punic War and as a means of reducing their fear of the enemy (see Plutarch *Fabius Maximus* 4-5). Particularly just before or during a war it was viewed as crucial 'to appease the anger of the gods or to avert inauspicious omens' by a scrupulous conduct of all appropriate rituals (see Plutarch *Fabius Maximus* 18; Plutarch *Marcellus* 4). It is not surprising therefore that a class of priests, Fetal priests, were engaged in declarations of war and negotiating peace treaties (see Livy VII.6-7).
- 3) Paradoxically, the Romans, no matter how much they maintained the control of their empire politically and administratively, by the third century B.C.E. were forced to become rather flexible and adaptive in many areas. Plutarch notes:

The truth was that by this date the Roman republic had grown too large to preserve its original purity of spirit, and the very authority which it had exercised over so many realms and peoples constantly

brought it into contact with, and obliged it to adapt itself to an extraordinary diversity of habits and modes of living. (Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 4)

They were therefore ready to adopt new forms of music and entertainment from the Etruscans (Livy VII.2), new naval construction techniques for warships such as the quinquereme design taken from the Carthaginians during the First Punic War (see Polybius I.20), philosophy and literature from the Greeks, religious influences from Egypt, Asia Minor and Judaea (e.g. the cults of Isis, Mithra and eventually Christianity), trade goods and luxuries from the limits of Europe, Africa and Asia (e.g. amber from Russia, tunny fish from the Black Sea, perfumes from Arabia, silk from China). The Romans managed to absorb this wide range of technologies and cultural artifacts without entirely losing their identity. Indeed, there was considerable resistance within the late Republic against too much foreign influence. Railing against foreign ideas and luxuries became a standard call among Roman conservatives such as Cato the Elder, and laws against conspicuous display and consumption were regularly passed but with little effect (see Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 18). There seems to have been a need to regulate these tendencies. Thus office of the censorship was viewed during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. as a high position that would crown a political career (see Lewis & Reinhold 1990, pp120-122), and was extended in its roles to regulate political ranks as well as *mores*:

This office [the censorship] was regarded as the crowning honour of Roman civic life, and in a sense the culminating achievement of a political career. Its powers were very extensive and they included the right to inquire into the lives and manners of the citizens. The Romans did not think it proper that anyone should be left free to follow his personal preferences and appetites, whether in marriage, the regulation of his daily life, or the entertainment of his friends, without a large measure of surveillance and control. They believed that a man's true character was more clearly revealed in his private life than in his public or political career, and they therefore chose two officials, one from the so-called patricians and the other a plebeian, whose duty it was to watch, regulate and punish any tendency to indulge in licentious or voluptuous habits and to depart from the traditional and established way of living. These officers were known as censors, and they had the authority to degrade a Roman knight or expel a senator who led a vicious or disorderly life. They also carried out and maintained a general census of property, kept a register of all the citizens according to their social and political classification, and exercised various other important powers. (Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 16)

At various stages Greek philosophers, Jewish teachers, the cult of Bacchus (Bauman, 1990) and other eastern cults were expelled from the city of Rome (see Plutarch *Cato the Elder* 22-23). Even Augustus would seek a return to more traditional Roman values and family life, but by the first century C.E. Rome had already been transformed by its empire. It was only in the later empire (2nd to 4th centuries C.E.) that Roman culture was entirely 'hijacked', by the hellenized religion we call Christianity.

4) Roman foreign policy had quickly moved towards a doctrine of 'pre-emption', whereby a powerful enemy on the fringe of Roman territories or allied cities became the object of suspicion and then containment. This trend engaged Rome in numerous wars, either by entanglement via duties to allies, or as pretexts to remove growing threats. Thus the growing power of Carthage in relation to Spain and Sicily led to Roman efforts to forestall the Carthaginians securing a 'bridgehead for the invasion of Italy', setting the scene for the first Punic War (see Polybius I.10-11). Threats from Macedonia, Pontus and the Seleucids were also dealt with in this light, while Parthia was only gradually accepted as the eastern empire that could be militarily contained but not occupied and conquered (see Ferguson 2005).

It is possible to view Rome and Roman leadership as a political system built on power augmentation. The very intensity of internal conflicts created a highly militarized and mobilized society that could readily face external challenges during the republican period. At the same time,

such a state could not remain stable with a pluralist competitive framework, creating an internal dynamic that led to repeated civil wars and finally political domination by a *princeps* whose position evolved into a hereditary, centralised dynasty. Roman emperors used republic institutions but relied on military force and fear to run the empire. At worst this was a dominate, as found under the rule of the Emperor Domitian, at best an enlightened system of nominated emperors as found under Hadrian.

#### 4. Conclusion: Political and Cultural Dynamism

Roman cultural dynamism and resilience, combined with their adaptive and absorptive abilities, constituted a kind of power that neither Carthage or Macedonia retained. This potential to change, without losing their geographical, cultural and political centre, gave the Romans a decisive advantage over the loosely centred Hellenistic kingdoms to the east, and the more mobile Celtic and Germanic tribes on their northern frontiers. The Roman empire was a 'hard-forged' political structure, but also a cultural crucible containing many diverse elements. This political life interacted with and created different forms of cultural expression. Although the Romans borrowed much of their art, social practices and literature (e.g. from the Greeks and Etruscans), they also transformed it and then diffused it throughout their empire. It was in the early Republic that the military and political resilience of the Romans was forged, and severely tested in the context of an expanding empire racked by civil war. The Romans were truly the masters of war and became masters in the art of governing others. However, by the period of the late Republic they were only able to rule themselves through the emergence of an authoritarian government that ultimately undermined the very meaning and value of Roman citizenship.

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