

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 22 – Roman Imperialism

CLCS4007

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- ▣ *Imperito* – to command, to give an order.
- ▣ *Imperium* – power to command, and hence a geographic area in which such command is recognised.
- ▣ Imperialism – ‘a policy of extending a country’s power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means’ – Oxford Dictionary;
 - the modern English term has its root in the Latin, but there was no specific Latin equivalent that conveys the meaning of our word imperialism.

Sources

- ▣ Republican Rome - Polybius, Livy, Appian, Plutarch and Caesar *Commentaries* (among other sources), but their texts are not always evenly preserved.
- ▣ Imperial Rome – literary sources (notably Tacitus and Dio Cassius); also pictorial evidence from monuments, e.g. columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, and Triumphal Arches – also numismatic, epigraphic, and papyrological evidence.

Theories of Roman Expansion

- Earlier theories of the Romans being defensive and reluctant to annex territory (e.g. reluctance to annex Macedonia, refusal of lands bequeathed to her);
 - *bellum iustum* (just war).
- It has also been suggested that economic motives not taken into account.
- Ambitions of Republican magistrates to win glory and acquire wealth.

Imperialism in the Republic

- ▣ Not necessarily based on formal annexation or conversion of an area into a province, but also on influence:
 - T. Flaminus, freedom of the Greeks (196 BC);
 - Antiochus IV expelled from Egypt by Popilius (168 BC).
- ▣ Increasing acquisition of territory:
 - parts of Spain as result of second Punic War;
 - Attalus III of Pergamun bequeaths his kingdom to Rome (133 BC).

Caesar in Gaul

- ▣ Original intention may have been to campaign in Balkans against Dacians.
- ▣ Attempted migration of Helvetii gave Caesar a pretext for intervening in Gaul.

“When it was reported to Caesar that they were attempting to make their route through our Province he hastens to set out from the city, and, by as great marches as he can, proceeds to Further Gaul, and arrives at Geneva.” – **Caesar *Gallic War* 1.7.**

Triumph

“His triumph had such a magnitude that, although it was distributed over two days, still the time would not suffice, but much of what had been prepared could not find a place in the spectacle, enough to dignify and adorn another triumphal procession. Inscriptions borne in advance of the procession indicated the nations over which he triumphed. These were: Pontus, Armenia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Media, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Palestine, Judaea, Arabia, and all the power of the pirates by sea and land which had been overthrown. Among these peoples no less than a thousand strongholds had been captured, according to the inscriptions, and cities not much under nine hundred in number, besides eight hundred piratical ships, while thirty-nine cities had been founded.” – **Plutarch *Pompey* 45.1-2.**

Expansion in Imperial Times

Military Glory and the Emperor

- Once Augustus achieves sole pre-eminence, all subsequent military campaigns are directed under his orders.
- The last person to receive a full triumph who was not a member of the Imperial family is Lucius Cornelius Balbus (19 BC).
- Emperors campaigning in person or through their legates, varies from emperor to emperor.

Symbols of Victory



Trajan's Column



Arch of Septimius Severus

Dominance of the Oikoumene

“No longer does the Euphrates allow Parthian cavalry to glance behind their backs, and regrets retaining possession of Crassus’ men: even India presents its neck to your triumph. Augustus, and the house of virgin Arabia trembles before you; and hereafter if any land retreats to the world’s end, let it be captured and feel your wrath.” – **Propertius *Elegies* 2.10.13-18.**

“Divine Caesar is contemplating war on the Indians, planning to cleave the waters of the gem-laden Indian ocean with his fleet.” – (3.4.1-2).

“Four books were then brought in and Drusus read them... the fourth had injunctions and commands for Tiberius and for the public. Among these injunctions... **He advised them to be satisfied with their present possessions and under no conditions to wish to increase the empire to any greater dimensions.** It would be hard to guard, he said, and this would lead to danger of their losing what was already theirs.” – **Dio Cassius 56.33.**

“Augustus had written this all out in his own hand. Furthermore, he had added a clause advising that the empire should not be extended beyond its present frontiers. Either he feared danger ahead or he was jealous.” – **Tacitus *Annals* 1.11.**

Motives for Expansion

- To establish credibility or gain personal glory; cf. Claudius' invasion of Britain.

“Claudius' sole campaign was of no great importance. The Senate had already voted him triumphal decorations, but he thought it beneath his dignity to accept these, and decided that Britain was the country where a real triumph could be most readily earned.”
– Suetonius *Divus Claudius* 17.

- Expansion now based, to some extent, on the views and characters of the emperors.

Fear of Ambitious Generals

- ▣ Tiberius was reportedly jealous of Germanicus' successes beyond the Rhine – **Tacitus *Annals* 2.26.**

“Domitian reacted as he often did: he pretended to be pleased when in fact he was deeply disturbed. He was conscious of the ridicule that his sham triumph over Germany had excited, when he had brought slaves in the market to dress them up and make them look like prisoners of war. But now came a genuine victory on a grand scale... He knew that there was nothing so dangerous for him as to have the name of a subject exalted above that of the emperor.” – **Tacitus *Agricola* 39.**

Roman Frontiers

The Roman Empire c. 25 BC



The Roman Empire c. AD 14



The Roman Empire c. AD 117



The Roman Empire c. AD 180



“Romanisation”

Process of Romanisation

- Earlier scholarship had credited Roman expansion with the dissemination of Greco-Roman culture and customs – marginalising / replacing pre-Roman customs.
- Adoption of Roman customs by elite for self-advancement.
- Roman preferences for those adopting outwards vestiges of Roman culture.
- Hybridization – cross-cultural exchange.

“Agricola had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight; and his object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave private encouragement and official assistance to the building of temples, public squares, and good houses... Furthermore, he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts... The result was that instead of loathing the Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was gradually led into the demoralizing temptations of arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as ‘civilisation’, when in fact they were only features of their enslavement.” – **Tacitus**
Agricola 21.

“And not only should the statesman show himself and his native State blameless towards our rulers, but he should also have always a friend among the men of high station... for the Romans themselves are most eager to promote the political interests of their friends... However, the statesman, while making his native State readily obedient to its sovereigns, must not further humble it; nor, when the leg has been fettered, go on and subject the neck to the yoke, as some who do, by referring everything, great or small, to the sovereigns, bring the reproach of slavery upon their country, or rather wholly destroy its constitutional government, making it dazed, timid, and powerless in everything... so those who invite the sovereign's decision on every decree, meeting of a council, granting of a privilege, or administrative measure, force their sovereign to be their master more than he desires.” –
Plutarch *Precepts of Statecraft* 814 c-d, 815a.

Useful Reading

- ▣ Rawson, E. (1988) 'The expansion of Rome', in Boardman, J., Griffin, J., and Oswyn, M. (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 50-73.
- ▣ Woolf, G. (1997) 'Beyond Romans and Natives', *World Archaeology* 28 (3): 339-350.