

Comparisons with imperial Rome in early twentieth-century Britain and in the US during the Bush Jr. administration

Aggressive foreign policy by unipolar powers and the lure of the Roman Empire



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Cover image: A portrait of William Pitt the Elder (1708-1778), which was painted in 1768 by Charles Wilson Peal – a descendant of British settlers and the most energetic artist of the American Revolution. The portrait illustrates the importance of Roman symbols of liberty to artists who created paintings, statues, or simple drawings of people who were seen as champions of British and/or American liberty. Meant to commemorate Pitt's opposition to the Stamp Act, it shows him dressed as a Roman, with the Magna Carta in his left hand and with his right hand pointing to a statue of the Roman goddess of liberty, who carries two Roman symbols of liberty: the *pileus* (a cap that was given to manumitted slaves) and the *vindicta* (a staff that with which a slave was tapped to grant freedom). On Pitt's right-hand side there is an altar of liberty that is decorated with busts of Algernon Sidney and John Hampden, who were both celebrated English patriots and seen as champions of English liberty. Both men fought on the side of the Parliamentarians during the English Civil War which resulted in the execution of Charles I at Whitehall, which is shown in the background of the painting.

From: <http://tv-hs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/William-Pitt-Portrait1.jpg> (accessed on 23 January 2016).

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Introduction

Among the few facts that have survived the postmodern critique on historical scholarship is the certainty that when people look at the past they always do so through the ‘lens’ of the present. This is unavoidable, for people have always felt the need to determine their place and rôle in the world to give meaning to their lives, and one of the ways in which we can do so is by looking to the past. We look to the past for a wide variety of reasons: out of curiosity; to (re)define ourselves; for lessons and inspiration; or out of a desire to (de)legitimise current developments. To these ends, we make historical comparisons to find out how we differ from those who came before us and in what ways we are alike. These comparisons invariably lead to observations that are not in any way objective or dispassionate in nature. Instead, they result in biased observations, that are shaped by present-day concerns and ideas. Selectivity is, perhaps, the most prominent form of bias, for when we draw historical comparisons we make a (often unconscious) selection based on what we consider relevant or useful to the present. Consequently, our image of the past is always, to some extent, shaped by contemporary concerns, or, put differently, the present creates the past as much as the past creates the present. Historical comparisons, therefore, often tell us as much about the past as they do about the times in which they were made and the people who produced them.

Classical traditions?

Graeco-Roman antiquity has long provided points of reference for (in particular, but not exclusively) westerners who wished to comment on developments and events in the world around them. This is in no small part due to the prominent position of the corpus of classical texts which, until quite recently, occupied a position of nearly unquestionable authority because they were perceived as the great repository of Western civilisation. Ideas and terms that find their origin in the classical world have, however, also influenced the cultures of countries outside Europe and the Americas. Since the end of the Second World War, for example, virtually every country describes itself as a democracy – a form of government that is widely believed to have originated in late sixth-century Athens¹ – since doing otherwise would seriously harm a nation’s reputation and political credibility. This is why countries with a political system that does not resemble Western liberal democracies in any significant way still style themselves as ‘democracies’. North Korea, for instance, adopted the name ‘Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’ in 1948, following the official division of the Korean Peninsula into two nation states.

The global drive toward ‘democracy’ after the Second World War had little to do with a renewed interest in its classical origins, instead it was a response to the destructive force of a number of dictatorships that had brought war, devastation, and death to the first half of the twentieth century. After the horrors inflicted upon the world during two world wars – and also

¹ Recent research, however, indicates that the origins of democracy may well lie outside ancient Greece. The Australian political theorist John Keane, for example, suggests that assembly-based democracy’s roots lie with the ancient civilisations that dominated modern-day Syria, Iraq and Iran around 2500 BC, see Keane 2009, xi, 107-108.

during smaller conflicts like the Spanish Civil War – a vast majority of the world’s inhabitants was prepared to take the desirability of liberal democracy, as the supposedly ideal form of government, for granted.² It was widely believed (and still is) that liberal democracies do not fight one another, thus people hoped that the spread of democracy would promote peace around the world.³

To some extent, it is rather odd that people still identify democracy with the system of government developed in ancient Athens, for the workings of our democracies bear little resemblance to the political order that was developed in Athens during the fifth century BC. Apart from the fact that women and slaves had no political rights in Athens, the absence of selection by lot in modern democracies is arguably the most significant difference between ancient Athenian democracy and modern democracies. Selection by lot gave each citizen of Athens an equal chance at obtaining political power, while in modern representative democracies small elites of professional politicians hold a near monopoly on political power.⁴ Despite all this, and in spite of the great differences between the political orders of the classical world and those of today, it is still possible to speak of a classical tradition within the political systems of post-classical historical periods. This is because the political organisation of ancient Athens and ancient Rome provided people, and continues to provide us, with the vocabulary with which we define our political systems.

The modern conception of dictatorship is another example of a term that – although it has survived from antiquity – today means something rather different than in republican Rome. Today, the term ‘dictator’ implies a political regime in which the leader has absolute power and stands above the law. Typically, such rulers attained this power through the use of violence. This description admittedly rather fits Julius Caesar’s position of supreme power during the final years of the Roman Republic in which he was eventually proclaimed ‘dictator in perpetuity’. During the vast majority of the history of the Roman Republic, however, the office of dictator was given to a person in times of emergency. This person was endowed with extraordinary powers for a limited period of time (six months at the most), after which he was required to relinquish his power and give account of his actions. In a way, therefore, it was Caesar’s usurpation and abuse of the office of dictator (and that of Sulla before him) that inspired the term’s modern significance.⁵ Probably the most enduring legacy of classical antiquity is the survival of Roman law in legal systems all around the world (and particularly in the West). Although modern legal systems are, of course, different from the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (the Code of Justinian) – which is considered to be the final manifestation of historical Roman law – the majority of the categories used in this collection of legal documents have made their way into modern Western civil codes either completely or partially. Thus, they remain the foundation documents of the Western legal tradition.⁶ The same goes for the classical origins of the terms despotism and republicanism, to name just two other

² Ryan 2013, 946.

³ Bowden 2014, 15.

⁴ Ryan 2013, 946-951; For an excellent account of the differences between the direct democracy of ancient Athens and modern representative democracies and an analysis of how and why these differences came into existence, see Manin 1997.

⁵ Nippel 2010, 267-268.

⁶ Vincenti 2010, 512-519.

concepts that are generally associated with classical antiquity. Despite the fact that these terms have gained a new significance over time, their original meanings set the scene for later discussion by philosophers, political theorists, and historians. In this sense one can speak of the existence of a classical tradition.

To conclude, I will provide an overview of the origins and afterlife of a term that is central to this thesis – empire. The word ‘empire’ is derived from the Latin *imperium*, meaning ‘order’ or ‘command’. During the Roman Republic it was used to describe an office holder’s lawful authority. After the transformation from republic to principate under Augustus (63 BC-AD 14), the word came to be associated with the power that was held by military commanders. The title of *imperator*, which – during the republic – had sometimes been conferred on victorious generals, became associated exclusively with the reigning emperor. During the principate people began using the word *imperium* to describe both the geographical extent of Rome’s authority and the cultural and political unity that was believed to come with it. In the period after the fall of the Western Roman Empire the term *imperium* was mainly used in the meaning that it had during the Roman Republic – to signify the sovereignty of a ruler or state. In the course of the seventh and eighth century, the word regained its significance as a term to describe the geographical extent of a ruler’s power, meaning that a ruler ruled over more than just one territory. Today, the word ‘empire’ is used to describe an extensive group of peoples or states ruled over by a single monarch, oligarchy, ethnic group, or sovereign state. One thing that all definitions of ‘empire’ have in common is ‘the association between extended territorial dominion and military rule.’⁷ Since the dissolution of the large European world empires after the Second World War, new, postcolonial perspectives, have forced former colonial powers to recognise that their empires were at times maintained through violent military oppression.⁸ Although it is possible to differentiate between colonialism and imperialism, the two terms are often used interchangeably in postcolonial literature. This is because colonialism, as Edward Said put it, ‘is almost always a consequence of imperialism’.⁹

Aggressive unipolar powers and imperial comparisons

In a 2010 review article, the American classicist Eric Adler notes that comparisons between the Roman Empire and the United States were ‘omnipresent in Western intellectual life’ following the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Adler also states that these comparisons became far less common after the start of the presidency of Barack Obama, which strongly suggests that they were the result of the bellicose foreign policy of the Bush Jr. administration.¹⁰ The British classicist Maria Wyke has noted the same increase in comparisons between the United States and the Roman Empire during the Bush presidency in her 2012 monograph on the US reception of Julius Caesar from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. She also attributes this increase to the Bush Jr. administration’s aggressive foreign policy and resolve to maintain its

⁷ Pagden 2010, 310.

⁸ *ibid.*, 310-312.

⁹ Said 1993, 9.

¹⁰ Adler 2010, 315-316.

global military dominance. Similar to Adler, Wyke also notes that comparisons between US foreign policy and Roman imperialism quickly disappeared after Bush completed his two terms of office. However, she also notes that similar comparisons resurfaced (on a much smaller scale) after some time as it became clear to the American public that Obama continued parts of the Bush Jr. administration's foreign policy – most notably the continued large scale involvement of the US military in foreign wars, such as the military intervention in Libya.¹¹ Debates about post-9/11 US foreign policy are, of course, not exclusively shaped by images of Roman imperialism. Other concepts and ideas, such as the concepts 'empire lite' and 'soft power', are also used to shape contemporary discussions about America's rôle on the world stage, but these fall outside the scope of this thesis.¹²

In a 2014 review essay on Wyke's above-mentioned monograph, the German-British classicist Constanze Güthenke has argued that the reception of classical knowledge, figures, and themes is more readily politicised in the US than in Europe. Güthenke states that this willingness to politicise classical antiquity might be due to the influence of forms of presentism (i.e. a tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts) that are 'particular to the United States'.¹³ If correct, this would imply that the use of images of (for example) Roman imperialism to make a statement about modern politics is largely confined to the US. At first sight, there seems to be some merit in this argument, since current European political commentators rarely use Rome as an analogy for contemporary European politics.¹⁴ In the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century, however, images of Rome were drawn upon by a wide variety of people within Europe to make political statements. The history and future of the British Empire, for instance, was debated through the lens of its distant Roman 'antecedent'.¹⁵ This suggests that American willingness to politicise images of classical antiquity is probably not due to the influence of forms of presentism that are particular to the United States, instead, the inclination to do so may very well be caused by America's position as the world's dominant political and military power – a position that had previously been occupied by the British Empire.

In his 2010 monograph *The Roman Empire: roots of imperialism*, the ancient historian Neville Morley states that the 'dynamic of debate' present in nineteenth and early twentieth-century discussions of British imperialism has also been present in debates about the supposed 'new imperialism' of the United States. He notes that, as had been the case in debates around British imperialism, writers who have sought to comment on the dominant position of the US on the world stage today have done so by comparing it to the Roman Empire – highlighting both supposed similarities and the differences between the two.¹⁶ Adler has also argued that there are parallels between how intellectuals in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain and in present-day

¹¹ Wyke 2012, 208-209, 236-237.

¹² For more information see, Ignatieff 2003; Nye 2004.

¹³ Güthenke 2014, 166-167.

¹⁴ Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. The British politician Boris Johnson, for example, regularly compares the European Union with the Roman Empire in his 2006 book *The Dream of Rome*, see Johnson 2007.

¹⁵ A wide range of studies on this topic has been published, see, for example, Vance 1997; Hingley 2000; Bradley 2010a; Butler 2012; Hagerman 2013; Vasunia 2013.

¹⁶ Morley 2010, 6-7.

America made use of images of the Roman Empire to either support or criticise policies that were perceived as imperialist.¹⁷

Neither Morley nor Adler has, however, made a detailed study of whether these comparisons were of a similar or different nature. In the introduction to his monograph, Morley only briefly mentions that imperial comparisons were used both in debates about the British Empire and in debates about contemporary US foreign policy without analysing any of these comparisons in detail.¹⁸ Adler provides more detailed analyses of these comparisons, but only to reduce the debates about whether the British Empire and the US resemble the Roman Empire to a matter of political preference. According to Adler, the Roman analogy has mainly appealed to anti-imperialist intellectuals, both in the context of discussions about British imperialism and in debates about modern US foreign policy.¹⁹ A little further on, however, Adler concedes that this is mainly the case in modern American debates about the merits of empire, since it has been pointed out that in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain the Roman analogy typically was of the most interest to supporters of British imperialism.²⁰

In addition, Adler's choice to interpret the debate between those who deemed the British and Roman empires similar and those who did not as, essentially, a debate between opponents of contemporary British imperialism and its supporters is problematic. This is because late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British intellectuals could very well criticise aggressive imperialist policies without calling for the dissolution of Britain's world empire. The British linguist and literary historian Norman Vance, for example, has pointed out that the British Liberal politician William Gladstone repeatedly criticised the aggressive foreign policies of his colleagues Lord Palmerston (Henry Temple) and Benjamin Disraeli by drawing upon images of the Roman Empire (a tactic that was also frequently employed by his opponents Palmerston and Disraeli). Vance also notes, however, that during his four tenures as Prime Minister, Gladstone 'had to deal with empire or overseas acquisitions as a *fait accompli* and a responsibility of government'. Instead of attempting to disband Britain's empire, Gladstone advocated a less aggressive foreign policy.²¹ Furthermore, Adler is frequently forced to admit that (both in the context of the British Empire and the United States) proponents of an aggressive foreign policy – who according to him were generally hostile to equations between the Roman Empire and the foreign policy of their respective states²² – often saw not only differences but also similarities when they looked at Rome.²³

The influence of the above-mentioned classical 'traditions' notwithstanding, the obsession with Rome as a point of reference in these comparisons might arguably be called surprising since there are so many other empires that could be used as a point of reference (e.g. imperial China

¹⁷ Adler 2008a; Adler 2008b.

¹⁸ Morley 2010, 1-13, in particular 6-11.

¹⁹ Adler 2008b, 603.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 604; This contradicts, in part, the conclusions that Adler reached in an earlier paper, namely that 'equating Britain and Rome was an argumentative strategy most fully employed by anti-imperialists', see Adler 2008a, 208.

²¹ Vance 1997, 225-232; Vance 2011, 250-253.

²² Adler 2008a, 208; Adler 2008b, 603.

²³ See, for instance, Adler 2008a, 199-201, 204; Adler 2008b 595-596.

under the Han dynasty, the Mughal Empire, or the Aztec Empire to name but a few). It has been argued that the Roman Empire is accorded such a prominent rôle in imperial analogies because Roman civilisation has long been perceived as the exclusive heritage of countries in Western Europe and countries with a substantial Western-European ancestral population, such as the United States.²⁴ From Rome, westerners allegedly inherited much of what defines present Western political structures, religious life, legal systems, philosophy, art, and architecture. This supposed linear historical connection between Western culture and society and the Roman Empire has made it difficult for westerners to critically reflect on the potential downsides of Roman imperialism, and, arguably, on the true extent of the presumed similarity between the culture and society of the Western world and that of the Roman Empire.²⁵ As Morley has pointed out, Roman imperialism seems to have become the archetypal form of 'benign imperialism' against which all other forms of imperialism can be measured and found wanting in one way or another.²⁶ This explains the appeal of the Roman Empire to early twentieth-century Britons and modern Americans who sought for a point of reference against which they could measure the achievements of their respective states.

Approach

This thesis seeks to analyse the differences and similarities between early twentieth-century comparisons between the British and Roman empires and between comparisons between America and Rome that were drawn during the Bush Jr. presidency. My analysis of these comparisons will not just focus on the political preferences of the people who made them, but also on their content and with what purpose in mind this was given shape. Because the amount of works in which such comparisons are drawn is very large, I have chosen to select six monographs – three of which were written during the early twentieth century by British authors and the other three were written during the Bush Jr. presidency by American authors.

To determine in what ways these works of imperial comparison are alike and in what ways they differ, I will first offer an analysis of their contents that – since these types of comparison originate from a colonial context – will sometimes draw on elements of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory, as the name suggests, finds its origin in the re-evaluation of more recent western imperialisms after the dissolution of the European world empires in the aftermath of the Second World War. Just as it has led scholars who specialise in the history of more recent European empires to challenge the Eurocentric bias within historical accounts and other representations of this period in western history, it has led ancient historians and archaeologists to challenge the Romano-centric bias within narratives about the Roman Empire and its provinces.²⁷ Thus, drawing on elements of postcolonial theory will allow me to elucidate how the impact of British imperialism has influenced the comparisons drawn by the three early twentieth-century British authors. In addition, it will also allow me to establish the extent to which

²⁴ Mattingly 2014, 13, 15.

²⁵ Mattingly 2014, 3, 13; Morley 2010, 1, 13.

²⁶ Morley 2010, 8.

²⁷ For a discussion of this process see, Webster 1996, 1-9.

postcolonial perspectives on Roman imperialism have influenced the comparisons that were drawn by the three early twenty-first century American authors.

Thereafter, I will attempt to answer the following questions with regard to each of the selected publications: (1) At what period in the history of the Roman Empire is the comparison aimed, why at this period, and how does this effect the comparison?; (2) On what sources is the comparison based (e.g. ancient Roman texts, secondary literature, or narratives based on archaeological material), why on these sources, and how does this effect the comparison?; (3) In what themes is the author that has made the comparison interested, why is (s)he interested in these themes (do they, for instance, reflect contemporary imperial concerns), and how do they effect the comparison?; (4) Why does the author make this comparison, how might the author's background (for example how (s)he was educated) have influenced his/her conclusions, and how does the purpose of the comparison influence its outcome?

With regard to the comparisons made in the context of the British Empire, I have selected three studies that were all written in the second decade of the twentieth century, following a period of rapid imperial expansion that has been described as the 'Age of Empire'.²⁸ Between 1910 and 1914 many books featuring imperial parallels were published, three of which have been identified to be of special importance: Lord Cromer's (Evelyn Baring) *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (1910), Charles Lucas' *Greater Rome and Greater Britain* (1912), and Lord Bryce's (James Bryce) *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India: the Diffusion of Roman and English Law Throughout the World* (1914).²⁹ With regard to the comparisons made in the context of post-9/11 US foreign policy, I have selected three studies that were all written during the final years of the Bush Jr. administration when the consequences of its bellicose foreign policy had taken their toll on the popularity rating of George W. Bush.³⁰ Two of these books focus entirely on comparisons between the United States and Rome: Cullen Murphy's *Are We Rome?: The Fall of An Empire and the Fate of America* (2007), and Thomas Madden's *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built – and America is Building – a New World* (2008). The final book has a broader focus and offers a comparative study of a wider range of empires but includes comparisons between the Roman Empire and the United States: Amy Chua's *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance – and Why They Fall* (2007).

I have divided my thesis into four chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the influence of British imperialism on the reception of Rome and its empire in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. The second chapter contains an analysis of the imperial comparisons drawn in the above-mentioned three books that were written by British authors during the second decade of the twentieth century. The third chapter gives an overview of the reception of the Roman empire in British colonial America and, later, the United States. The fourth and final chapter consist of an analysis of the imperial comparisons drawn in the above-mentioned books that were written by American authors during the final years of the presidency of George W.

²⁸ Hobsbawm 1994, 56-83, see also Koebner and Schmidt 1964, 135-165.

²⁹ Bryce 1914.

³⁰ Wyke notes that by the time George W. Bush had the lowest approval rating of any sitting president by the time he completed his second term of office, see Wyke 2012, 236.

Bush. The results of the case studies that are described in chapter two and four will be compared in the conclusion, that aims to provide some insights into how the imperial comparisons between the Roman empire and the British Empire and United States respectively differ from each other and in what ways they are alike.

I think it is important to study whether these comparisons are similar, for if they do resemble each other, then that would be cause for concern from a postcolonial perspective. Early twentieth-century comparisons between Rome and the British Empire were, understandably, heavily influenced by the impact of British imperialism. If Morley is right in suggesting that recent comparisons between Rome and the US are of a similar nature, then this would mean that they offer a similar view of the relationship between an imperial power and its colonial subjects. Since we supposedly live in a postcolonial era, such a view would be outdated and undesirable. Because Morley, and – to a lesser extent – Adler have not analysed the contents of both groups of comparisons in great detail, however, a thorough study of them is required. Only then can the question be answered whether or not the early twentieth-century British imperial comparisons and the early twenty-first century American imperial comparisons were drawn for similar reasons and served kindred purposes.

Chapter 1 – The British Empire and late-Victorian and Edwardian images of Rome

Although comparisons between the British Empire and Rome were drawn most frequently in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, they were part of a much older tradition. The Revolution of 1688-1689 had circumscribed the powers and privileges held by the monarchy and greatly enhanced the constitutional powers of the English Parliament. The social groups that benefited most from this development were the aristocracy and, to a lesser extent, the gentry. Eager to legitimise their increased power, members of the aristocracy and the gentry began to identify themselves with the senatorial oligarchy of the Roman Republic and the classical principles of liberty and civic virtue that were associated with it.³¹ Some would even argue that the Roman Republic was similar to Britain's political system.³² In addition, Roman architecture, art, and literature were widely admired among members of Britain's eighteenth-century social elite. During the early eighteenth-century classical models were so popular that England in this period is often called 'Augustan England'.³³ The use of this term has, however, been criticised because it suggests a link with post-Republican Augustan Rome. This is misleading since, while there was admiration for Roman republican history, imperial Rome was perceived in mainly negative terms.³⁴

The positive image of the Roman Republic enabled politicians like the above-mentioned Palmerstone (1784-1865) and Disraeli (1804-1881) to make use of Roman analogies during debates in the House of Commons. Both men frequently did so when they were forced to defend their aggressive imperialist foreign policy against the criticism of more moderate colleagues.³⁵ In one case in particular, the Roman analogy seems to have helped shape foreign policy. This was during the 'Don Pacifico Affair' of January 1850. David Pacifico was a Portuguese-Jewish businessman from Gibraltar, and therefore a British citizen, who had been living in Greece for some time when his property was attacked and vandalised by an anti-Semitic mob in 1847. Afterward, Pacifico appealed to the Greek government for compensation, which was refused in 1848. Lord Palmerstone, the British Foreign Secretary at the time, used this incident (and a number of similar cases) to justify his order to install a naval blockade of the Piraeus harbour to put pressure on the Greek government. To legitimise this drastic course of action, which was heavily criticised in the House of Commons, he made use of a Roman analogy. Referring to the Roman doctrine of citizenship with the famous Latin phrase *civis romanus sum*, he convinced a majority of his colleagues that British citizens should be protected from injustice regardless of their location, as, he argued, had also been the case with Roman citizens. He thus modelled British foreign policy on the example set by the doctrine of Roman citizenship.³⁶

³¹ Ayres 1997, xiv.

³² Hingley 2000, 22.

³³ Hingley 2008, 117.

³⁴ Ayres 1997, xiv.

³⁵ Vance 1997, 230.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 225-226.

It was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century that a number of intellectuals started to draw elaborate analogies between the British Empire and imperial Rome. It has been suggested that the year 1870 is of special significance in this context. It was in this year that the regime of the French emperor Napoleon III came to an end after he was captured and deposed following the defeat of the French armies in the Franco-Prussian War. Napoleon III had made extensive use of Roman-style iconography to associate himself with both his illustrious uncle, Napoleon I, and imperial Rome. Because of this, it is sometimes argued, the word imperialism was perceived in overwhelmingly negative terms.³⁷ Hostility towards imperialism and, therefore, towards the Roman Empire, would, however, continue until well after the end of Napoleon III's reign in 1870. The spectre of empire, with its connotations of absolute authority and supremacy by force, continued to haunt the British national consciousness. This fear was reinforced by concerns about the military threat posed by the new German Empire. Consequently, parallels between the British Empire and Rome were never completely unproblematic. Especially since the Roman emperors were associated with corruption, violence, and other forms of immoral behaviour.³⁸ This negative image of Rome's later imperial period was in no small part due to Edward Gibbon's magisterial *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published between 1776-1789), which depicted late antique Rome as despotic, corrupt, and decadent.³⁹

The negative image of Rome would last until the late 1870s, when – following the controversial Royal Titles Act (1876), which allowed Queen Victoria to take the title 'Empress of India' – imperial Rome began to be interpreted in a more positive fashion. Before that time however, images of Hellenic antiquity dominated any parallels that were drawn between classical antiquity and Britain's imperial present.⁴⁰ The gradually more positive reception of imperial Rome during the late 1870s was, perhaps, also the result of a period of unprecedented British imperial expansion. Between 1870 and 1900 the British Empire increased enormously, particularly in Africa where Britain participated in the so-called 'Scramble for Africa'. By 1900, Britain ruled over a quarter of the world's population, its land empire covered a fifth of the world's land surface, and, Britain being a maritime empire, it dominated world trade with over forty percent of the world's merchant ships flying the British flag.⁴¹ To people who were trying to measure Britain's imperial 'achievements' and who wanted to define its rôle in the world, that other – once large and powerful – European empire, the Roman Empire, offered a compelling parallel.

Thus, a wide range of people made comparisons between the British Empire and the Roman Empire, among them, for instance, politicians and colonial administrators, such as Lord Curzon, Lord Cromer, and Arthur Balfour; and educationalists and children's writers, such as Lord Baden-Powell and Rudyard Kipling. Academics were no exception, and among them was the most influential Roman scholar in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain – Francis Haverfield.⁴² He considered Roman imperialism similar to British imperialism, in particular with regard to

³⁷ Koebner and Schmidt 1964, 1; Vance 2011, 253.

³⁸ Koebner and Schmidt 1964, 118; Vance 1997, 228-229.

³⁹ Levine 1986, 82.

⁴⁰ Hingley 2000, 19-22.

⁴¹ Bradley 2010b, 127; Cornish 2014, 14.

⁴² Hingley 2000, 25; Rogers and Hingley 2010, 203.

British colonial India, united by what was then considered to be a mission to civilise the uncivilised.⁴³ This belief in the similarity of the two empires had made him, and plenty of his contemporaries, convinced that the study of Roman imperialism would yield valuable lessons for the present.⁴⁴ Haverfield, for example, argued that the study of Roman military installations, such as the Ambleside Roman Fort (a Roman fort in the Lake District), could yield lessons relevant for securing the contemporary British imperial frontier in the north-west of India.⁴⁵

Although the Roman Empire offered a compelling imperial parallel to late-Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals, they did not exclusively identify with Roman imperial servants when it came to the history of Roman Britain. A number of leaders of peoples native to Britain that revolted against Roman rule, such as Caractacus and Boudica, were sometimes lauded for their efforts as ‘heroes of the resistance’. Attitudes to persons who had offered armed resistance to Roman rule were, however, always ambivalent, as becomes clear with regard to the figure of Calgacus, who was at times presented as a national British hero, and at times as an insignificant barbarian.⁴⁶ In addition, it is hard to say if the analogies that were drawn between Britain and Rome actually influenced British government policy.⁴⁷ It is, however, clear that imperial officials were drawn from a social elite whose members were classically educated, in particular with regard to the Indian Civil Service. The Indian-British classicist Phiroze Vasunia has, for example, pointed out that the ICS entrance examinations strongly favoured candidates with classical educations that could only be obtained in Britain and disadvantaged Indians who lacked this educational background.⁴⁸ Because of this, an institution like Oxford University was able to provide over half of the entrants to the ICS between 1892 and 1914. In addition, it has been pointed out that, as late as 1938, six out of eight provincial governors in India were so-called ‘Greats men’ (i.e. men who had obtained Oxford Classics degrees).⁴⁹ Of course, this does not prove that their background in Classics had a direct impact on British imperial policy, but one might be allowed to suppose that classically-educated British colonial administrators sometimes modelled their behaviour on Greek or Roman ‘examples’.

The fact that comparisons between Roman imperialism and British imperialism focussed mainly on British imperial policy in India should be seen as a direct consequence of the nineteenth-century belief in the progressive nature of civilisation. As early as the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, members of Britain’s social elite had been interested in the history of Roman Britain and in archaeological remains from that period. This was because the Romans were held responsible for introduction of classical culture in Britain, a culture ‘which modern Britons were thought to be improving.’⁵⁰ Consequently, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British colonial administrators saw it as their task to spread

⁴³ Haverfield 1911, xviii; Haverfield 1915, 11.

⁴⁴ Hingley 2000, 28-37.

⁴⁵ Haverfield’s 1913 lecture to the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, an excerpt of which is cited in: Hingley 2000, 47.

⁴⁶ Bradley 2010b, 131-151; Hingley 2000, 72-85.

⁴⁷ Chakravarty 1989, 5-12, argues that this was the case with regard to elements of British colonial policy.

⁴⁸ Vasunia 2005b; Vasunia 2013, 193-235

⁴⁹ Mattingly 2014, 10.

⁵⁰ Hingley 2008, 118.

that civilisation in Britain's colonial empire. However, not every part of the British Empire needed to be civilised. An internal hierarchy existed that determined whether specific territories controlled by Britain needed to be civilised. At the top of this hierarchy was Britain (with a particular focus on England), in second place were Britain's self-governing colonies (called dominions), and in third and final place were the parts of the British Empire that were inhabited by people who were perceived as backward and uncivilised. It was on these territories that the 'civilising efforts' of the British state were focused.⁵¹ At first, Greek methods of colonisation were considered suitable for these 'less civilised' colonies. This was because British imperial administrators, politicians, and intellectuals believed that, one day, British efforts to 'civilise' the populations of these territories would be complete. When this had happened, the 'civilised' inhabitants of those colonies would be allowed to govern themselves, as, it was argued, Greek colonies were also largely independent from their respective mother cities.⁵²

The Indian Mutiny of 1857, however, changed everything. The population of British India was portrayed as ungrateful by British journalists and writers, because the Indians had supposedly repaid the attempts of their 'benevolent' colonial masters to 'civilise' them with violence. Thus, a number of imperial administrators, politicians, and scholars concluded that the people of British India should never be allowed to govern themselves. Because of this, they argued that British colonial policy in India should be informed by the Roman – and not the Greek – model of colonisation since Rome's colonies subordinate to the authority of Rome. The belief that Britain was under an obligation to civilise the inhabitants of its 'less developed' colonies survived the Indian Mutiny, but not for long. The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 in Jamaica largely destroyed this belief and in its aftermath racial stereotyping would increase. Theories that non-white subjects could not be civilised now became mainstream.⁵³ As we will see, both the Indian Mutiny and the Morant Bay Rebellion and their respective effects on British imperial policy heavily influenced early twentieth-century comparisons between Roman and British imperialism.

⁵¹ Butler 2012, 18, 20-21.

⁵² *ibid.*, 25-26.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 25-33.

Chapter 2 – Early twentieth-century British works of imperial comparison

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the comparisons made between Rome and Britain in three works of imperial comparison that were all written in the second decade of the twentieth century. Since the comparisons that are made by the authors of these monographs focus on the same themes, I have chosen not to provide a separate analysis of the contents of each book. Instead, I have summarised the similarities and differences that their authors perceived between the Roman and British empires thematically, which makes it more easy to compare their views on separate topics. In the second part of this chapter, I will try to provide an answer to the sub questions that I have listed in the introduction. These questions focus on the author's motives, their use of the available sources, and the choices they made while writing their books.

Before I start my analysis of the contents of the books, it is worthwhile to provide some information about their authors. The three books were all written by men who in some capacity were (or had been) involved in either the study of Classics or in the government of Britain's empire. *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* was written by Evelyn Baring (1841-1917), the first Earl of Cromer. Although he had no university education, Cromer was exceptionally well read – having thought himself Greek and Latin while he was stationed on Corfu (he may also have acquired some knowledge of Greek and Latin during his time as a cadet at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, since Classics was among the subjects thought there⁵⁴). Cromer had been an imperial administrator in India and was Consul-General of Egypt between 1883 and 1907. After his retirement, he devoted himself to literary pursuits and among those was his work about ancient and modern imperialism.⁵⁵ He was President of the Classical Association for the year 1909-10. He was probably asked to fulfil this position because of his interest in Classics and his experience as an imperial administrator. Cromer himself certainly believed that his experience as Consul-General of Egypt ('a country which was at different times under the sway of the Macedonian and the Roman'⁵⁶) made him the right person to make some comments about the differences and similarities between ancient (in particular Roman) and modern (in particular British) imperialism.⁵⁷ His book is an expanded version of the Presidential address that he presented to the Classical Association on 11 January 1910.⁵⁸ *Greater Rome and Greater Britain* was written by Charles Lucas (1853-1931). Lucas had obtained a first class degree in Classics at Oxford and ended in first place on the civil service examination list of 1877, which gained him a place at the Colonial Office. In this Office, he would eventually rise to become the first head of the Dominions Department. He wrote several books about the British Empire and ended his career as a Fellow of All Souls College in Oxford.⁵⁹ *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India* was written by James Bryce (1838-1922), the first Viscount Bryce. Like Lucas, Bryce was a diplomat with a background in Classics. In 1870 he was appointed Regius Professor of Civil Law

⁵⁴ Anderson 2009, 66.

⁵⁵ Freeman 1996, 23; Hingley 2000, 34-35; Vasunia 2005a, 49-50, 60.

⁵⁶ Cromer 1910, 3.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 1-3.

⁵⁸ Hingley 2000, 35.

⁵⁹ Freeman 1996, 23; Hingley 2000, 34; Vasunia 2005a, 50.

at Oxford, but from the late 1870s he became increasingly interested in politics – eventually becoming a cabinet member as Chief Secretary for Ireland. His public career ended in 1913, when he retired from the post of British Ambassador to the United States (which he had held since 1907). In 1901, he wrote two essays on the Roman and the British Empires which were first published separately. Revised versions of both essays were published as a book 1914, which was used as a textbook for candidates to the ICS examinations.⁶⁰ Considering the fact that Bryce was Professor of Civil Law at Oxford between 1870-1893, it need not surprise us that he was also interested in the similarities and differences between Roman and English law. Hence, the second part of his comparative study of the Roman and British empires is focussed on this topic.⁶¹

2.1 Analysis of the themes covered by the imperial comparisons in the selected books

Of the three authors, Bryce makes the most wide-ranging comparison between ancient and modern imperialism. He states that the modern European world empires have brought about the diffusion of European forms of thought and ways of life around the world – making it ever more uniform. Bryce argues that a similar process (albeit on a smaller scale) occurred in the regions controlled by the Roman Empire, creating a uniform civilisation that ‘was Greek on the side of thought, of literature, and of art, [and] Roman on the side of law and institutions.’⁶²

Justifications for the historical comparisons

All writers begin their comparative accounts with a justification of their comparison between the two empires. Cromer notes that although the empires are comparable, there are also ‘many notable differences’.⁶³ As the name of his book suggests, Roman imperialism is not the only form of imperialism that is discussed in his book. He also briefly mentions Athenian imperialism, but after closer examination he concludes that it cannot successfully be compared with British imperialism. A study of Roman imperialism, by contrast, can yield some ‘valuable lessons’, because the Romans – unlike the Greeks, who Cromer portrays as undisciplined, and too individualistic – were austere and practical enough to effectively execute their imperial policies. In addition, Cromer asserts that Roman values and education fostered ‘Imperial tendencies’.⁶⁴ He does not believe that every part of Britain’s empire can successfully be compared with the Roman Empire, noting that some of Britain’s colonies (the so-called dominions) were self-governing and therefore differed greatly from the Roman provinces.⁶⁵ Lucas states that he compares the British Empire to the Roman Empire because the latter ‘was the greatest political system of the ancient world’, thereby suggesting that Britain occupied a similar elevated position in the modern world.⁶⁶ Bryce asserts that of all Britain’s imperial possessions only India can be usefully compared with the Roman Empire since he believes that it is ‘governed on the same principles and by the same

⁶⁰ Freeman 1996, 23; Vasunia 2005a, 50.

⁶¹ Bryce 1914, 79-133.

⁶² *ibid.*, 3.

⁶³ Cromer 1910, 9.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁶ Lucas 1912, 9.

methods'.⁶⁷ This presupposition is present in all three books, for they all turn to British imperial policy in India to illustrate the differences and similarities with Roman imperialism. As, mentioned above, this should be seen as a consequence of (1) a 'hierarchy of civilisation' that existed within the British Empire, and (2) changing attitudes to the population of British India following the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Parts of the British Empire that did not contain substantial settlements populated by British colonists were at the bottom of the 'hierarchy of civilisation'. Its population was considered backward and many believed that Britain was under an obligation to 'civilise' them as, supposedly, the Romans had done with the provincial populations of their empire. The fact that all three writers believe that British imperial rule in India can successfully be compared with Roman rule in its provinces reveals the impact of the Indian Mutiny, which resulted in an increase of popularity of the Roman model of colonisation.

Interestingly, none of the authors has drawn parallels between the government of Britain itself and that of the Roman Empire. This is, to some extent, surprising, since – as has been pointed out above – members of the English aristocracy and gentry had hinted at the existence of similarities between the post-1689 British political system and that of the Roman Republic. It is possible that it was considered likely that such comparisons would be overshadowed by less positive images of imperial Rome and, consequently, give rise to controversy. Such a fear might have been justified since the Royal Titles Act of 1876 was both preceded and followed by heated debates about whether or not the term 'imperialism' had a place in British politics.⁶⁸ The English historian James Froude made the mistake of underestimating anti-imperial sentiments when he published a study about Julius Caesar in 1879. In this study, he argued that democratic institutions and representative governments were incapable of ruling an overseas empire. Thus, he saw the transformation of the Roman Republic into a state ruled by one man as a necessary and good thing – arguing that the British Empire also necessitated the move from a constitutional government to an imperial government. Unfortunately for Froude, his reviewers were unanimous in their rejection of this idea.⁶⁹ Clearly, parallels with Rome that involved a direct link with the political system in Britain itself could, sometimes, get a bit too close to home.

Explanations and justifications for territorial expansion

All three writers turn to a supposedly similar 'national character' to explain why both the Romans and the British were able to create such a large empire. Cromer writes that the Roman and British 'character' was similar because he believes that both nations were at their best in times of trouble and adversity.⁷⁰ According to Lucas, both the Romans and the British were special in that they 'had an innate capacity for ruling'.⁷¹ In similar fashion, Bryce states that 'the Romans and the English may be compared as conquering powers' since they both 'triumphed by force of

⁶⁷ Bryce 1914, 5.

⁶⁸ Koebner and Schmidt 1964, 118-126.

⁶⁹ Vance 1997, 228, with references.

⁷⁰ Cromer 1910, 34-35.

⁷¹ Lucas 1912, 154.

character.⁷² In addition, he argues that both were propelled by self-confidence derived from victories they had in the past, a self-confidence that, according to Bryce, enabled them to ‘face any odds’.⁷³ Only Cromer and Bryce feel the need to legitimate Roman and British territorial expansion. Cromer contends that there is a close analogy between Roman and British imperial expansion. He argues that both Roman and British conquests were fuelled by the same motive – the ‘irresistible necessity of acquiring defensible frontiers.’⁷⁴ With which he means natural frontiers.⁷⁵ Bryce is of a similar opinion, stating that both Roman conquest and British territorial expansion in India were inspired by a desire for security and the search for natural frontiers.⁷⁶ The belief that Roman imperialism was defensive in nature had a long history in studies of the Roman Empire and existed due to an uncritical evaluation of the justifications that were offered for Rome’s wars in ancient Roman texts. It has been pointed out that these justifications were ‘very often framed in terms of a defensive ideology’, an ideology ‘which the Western European colonial powers were to exploit in a similar fashion hundreds of years later.’⁷⁷ Thus, it is likely that the already positive evaluation for Roman territorial expansion that was offered in ancient texts was reinforced by the authors’ equally positive evaluation of British territorial expansion.

Benign imperialism?

When dealing with the question of whether both empires had the best interest of their subjects at heart, the authors see both similarities and differences between the two empires. Cromer states that, at first, there was little difference between the policy of both imperial powers toward the peoples living in conquered regions. He states that both empires were eager to extract as much revenue from them as possible.⁷⁸ With regard to British India, however, Cromer notes that this situation ended by the end of the eighteenth century when the East India Company was placed under parliamentary control.⁷⁹ He does not mention any such shift in policy on the part of the Romans and condemns them for placing financial gain before good government.⁸⁰ Although Cromer believes that there were some instances in which the Roman authorities pursued a ‘humanitarian policy’ (i.e. in suppressing the ‘cruelties of Druidical worship’), he concludes that Roman imperial policy ‘if judged by such modern standards as we are wont to apply, stands condemned.’⁸¹ At the same time, he does state that there are mitigating circumstances that should be taken into account in order to avoid doing injustice to Roman imperialists, namely the rise of Christianity. He asserts that Christianity ‘has established a moral code on principles almost wholly unknown to the ancient world’.⁸² Although he does not explicitly mention this, he seems to suggest that it is somewhat unfair to judge Roman imperialism by modern standards. Further on,

⁷² Bryce 1914, 54.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 55-56.

⁷⁴ Cromer 1910, 20, 31-33.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 31-33.

⁷⁶ Bryce 1914, 10, 15, 18.

⁷⁷ Souza 1996, 131.

⁷⁸ Cromer 1910, 41-43.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 65-68.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 57.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 49-50.

⁸² *ibid.*, 45.

however, Cromer contends that British imperialism is more beneficial than its ancient Roman ‘counterpart’ because it is better able to improve the lives of its subjects through scientific discoveries and medical advancements. Despite the fact that the Romans had to do without these advancements, Cromer still feels the need to point out that the Romans never had the intention to improve either the quality or length of the lives of provincial populations.⁸³ He probably did this to convince his reader that, in the end, Roman imperialism was less beneficial to subject peoples than contemporary British imperial rule.

According to Lucas, the populations of the Roman provinces were bereft of their freedom, while at least some of Britain’s overseas possessions were given more and more freedom, and, eventually, the right to govern themselves.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he admits that some of Britain’s overseas possessions (those without English colonists or their descendants) are held by force. Lucas adds, however, that he believes that the military presence in those territories will grow ever less ‘as good government has produced good will.’⁸⁵ Of the Roman provinces he writes, by contrast, that throughout their history they were largely pieces on a ‘military chess-board’. Lucas believes that Roman policy in the provinces was mainly aimed at maintaining them (i.e. through a strong military presence in the frontier provinces). He admits that the same can be said for British India, but is keen to assert that British imperial policy is not exclusively motivated by military concerns. Instead, he asserts that it is also aimed at improving the lives of imperial subjects.⁸⁶ Like Cromer, Lucas states that in the British Empire medical advances were used to improve the lives of all of the empire’s inhabitants. He claims that the Romans only used their medical knowledge to improve the health of their soldiers and that of the populations of their urban settlements.⁸⁷

Bryce notes that both empires created an impressive transport infrastructure, that made their imperial possessions more defensible while, at the same time, promoting trade and commerce. The author clearly considers this to be a good thing. In addition he is of the opinion that both the imperialism of the Romans and that of the English was beneficial to conquered peoples because it brought about unprecedentedly long periods of internal peace.⁸⁸ With regard to the systems of government they introduced, Bryce claims that – although he believes that both brought better government to conquered peoples – British government in its imperial possessions is better than that of the Romans in their provinces. According to Bryce this difference is due to the beneficial influence of British public opinion, which, he contends, forces its imperial officials to hold to higher moral standards than the Roman authorities ever did. Bryce believes that this limits the amount of corruption among the officials of the British Empire.⁸⁹ Furthermore, he thinks that the British authorities did more for its subjects because, in spite of its respect for local customs, it

⁸³ Cromer 1910, 108-114.

⁸⁴ Lucas 1912, 153.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 161.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 59-60.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁸ Bryce 1914, 20-22.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 25-27.

tries to abolish customs that they deem ‘socially or morally deleterious.’⁹⁰ Contrary to Lucas, Bryce feels that, since both the Roman Empire and the British Empire was acquired through military violence, both Roman rule in its provinces and British rule in India was/is of a permanent military character.⁹¹

(Religious) tolerance

Cromer thinks that British imperial administrators have emulated their distant Roman ‘counterparts’ with regard to respecting the local customs of conquered peoples. Although he believes this to be a good thing, he does think that, in some cases, British administrators have displayed too much tolerance, for instance in the case of infant marriages in India.⁹² Lucas also notes with approval that the English, like the Romans, have tolerated the survival of local customs.⁹³ In line with Cromer and Lucas, Bryce also feels that the British, like the Romans, do not wish to disturb the customs and beliefs of their imperial subjects.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, however, Bryce claims that one cannot speak of religious tolerance in the ancient world, since the presence of many polytheistic religions meant that ‘there was nothing to tolerate. All religions were equally true, or equally useful, each for its own country or nation.’⁹⁵

Assimilation

Cromer observes that in the Roman Empire ‘the conquered race [was] ultimately placed on an equal – or even, possibly, on a superior – footing to its conquerors’ and notes that that this did not happen in the British Empire.⁹⁶ Consequently, he arrives at the conclusion that the Romans succeeded far better in assimilating conquered peoples.⁹⁷ Lucas agrees, arguing that ‘the Romans stand out beyond almost all peoples in the extent to which they disregarded race, and in the liberality with which they widened their citizenship.’⁹⁸ He does, however, add that the Romans ‘were more successful in assimilation than any modern nation, partly because in the Western provinces a larger proportion of their subjects were in a primitive stage and, therefore, ready for the melting pot than has been the case in modern Empires.’⁹⁹ Bryce also states that while the Romans had no great difficulty assimilating subject peoples into their empire, Britain may never succeed at reaching a similar level of assimilation in India.¹⁰⁰

Although Cromer believes that the Romans were better at assimilating conquered peoples, he does not think that this reflects badly on the British colonial administrators. This becomes clear when he turns to the topic of the use of auxiliaries. He notes that many of the peoples that were once forced by Rome to provide soldiers for their armies over time acquired more privileges and

⁹⁰ Bryce 1914, 52.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 12.

⁹² Cromer 1910, 85-86.

⁹³ Lucas 1912, 163.

⁹⁴ Bryce 1914, 48.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁶ Cromer 1910, 37-38.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 72-73, 77.

⁹⁸ Lucas 1912, 94.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰⁰ Bryce 1914, 21.

power and became more civilised – allowing some individuals from the provinces to become emperors (Cromer mentions Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Septimius Severus as examples). He notes with approval that the same process is not occurring in Britain’s overseas territories. Cromer acknowledges that Britain – like Rome – relies heavily on the use of auxiliaries to control its far-flung territories (especially in India), but he believes that these warriors, like the rest of their respective peoples, have accepted their subservient position without complaint.¹⁰¹

Bryce has less faith in the loyalty and subservience of auxiliaries to their respective Roman or British ‘superiors’. He asserts that Rome’s heavy reliance on auxiliaries during late antiquity had an adverse effect on the strength of its armies. That he also does not trust auxiliary soldiers in Britain’s Indian Army becomes clear when he states that: ‘England guards against its risks by having a considerable force of British troops alongside her native army.’¹⁰² Bryce’s distrust reflected broader anxieties about the use of auxiliaries by the British government – anxieties that had existed in England for some time. When detachments of the Indian Army were stationed in Europe (on Malta) for the first time in 1878, for example, this was severely criticised because many people experienced the proximity of colonial troops as threatening. *The Spectator* (a weekly British conservative magazine) even claimed that the deployment of military units that were composed of soldiers who belonged to ‘subject races’ was reminiscent of Roman imperial decadence.¹⁰³ Clearly, there were limits to the extent to which colonial troops could be assimilated into the British Army – nineteenth-century Britons were happy to let the Indian Army fight for Britain in India, but not in Europe.

Impediments to assimilation

1) Race Cromer feels that in the case of British imperialism in Asia and Africa racial prejudice has stood in the way of the successful assimilation of conquered peoples.¹⁰⁴ He remarks that this type of ‘colour antipathy was absent in Roman society, which made it easier for them to assimilate conquered peoples.’¹⁰⁵ Lucas also defines what he calls the ‘colour question’ as the ‘greatest difficulty’ facing the British Empire. He notes that in the Roman Empire racial differences did not create a barrier between the Roman rulers and their provincial subjects. To illustrate the divisive rôle of race in the British empire as opposed to the Roman Empire, Lucas uses the example of slavery. He observes that slavery in the Roman Empire was not based on the colour of someone’s skin, while in the British Empire, by contrast, black people were exclusively marked out for slavery.¹⁰⁶ Lucas does not condemn the existence of racial discrimination in the British Empire, for he believes that there is ‘rational ground for discrimination’ because ‘the qualities, character, and upbringing of most coloured men are not those which are in demand for a ruling race, and are not, except in rare individual cases, eliminated by education on the white

¹⁰¹ Cromer 1910, 35-41.

¹⁰² Bryce 1914, 12.

¹⁰³ Koebner and Schmidt 1964, 139-140.

¹⁰⁴ Cromer 1910, 88-89.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰⁶ Lucas 1912, 97-98.

man's lines.¹⁰⁷ Bryce points out that while provincials were able to obtain high office in the Roman Empire, the British administrators in India 'have continued to reserve the higher posts for men of European stock.'¹⁰⁸ According to Bryce, this is out of necessity since, allowing a few exceptions, Indians as a rule do not 'possess the qualities which the English deem to be needed for leadership in war or for the higher posts of administration in peace.'¹⁰⁹ Bryce also states that race was less of a problem for the Romans because they (with the exception of the Egyptians, Numidians, and Nubians) hardly encountered peoples of a different colour. He claims this made assimilation easier, since 'the absence of any physical and conspicuous distinctions between those races' encouraged a fusion between the different races.¹¹⁰ Conversely, he contends that the population of British India is 'sharply divided into whites and natives.'¹¹¹ It is in Bryce's writings then, that we most clearly see the a reflection of the rise in racial stereotyping that occurred as a consequence of the British response to the Indian Mutiny and the Morant Bay Rebellion. As mentioned above, non-whites were deemed racially incapable of becoming 'civilised' – a theory Bryce seems to agree with wholeheartedly.

2) Religion Cromer asserts that the 'easy going polytheism and pantheism of the ancient world' made it easy for the Romans to integrate the religions of conquered peoples into their own religious pantheon. This, in turn, made it easier for them to assimilate conquered peoples.¹¹² Cromer blames the rise of 'unassimilative' religions such as Christianity and Islam for creating new barriers between European imperial powers and subject peoples. He points out that the one time that the Romans encountered such a religion (that of the Jews) they – like modern imperial powers – failed miserably in their efforts toward assimilation.¹¹³ Bryce detects the same problem, arguing that the rise of faiths which claim to be exclusively and universally true has caused religious prejudice, intolerance, and prosecution on a scale unknown to the Romans.¹¹⁴

3) Language Cromer states that conquered peoples in the western part of the Roman Empire were eager to learn Latin because knowledge of the language offered them new opportunities. He laments the fact that the same cannot be said for British subjects in India and concedes that this is because they are offered to few opportunities for social advancement.¹¹⁵ However, Cromer believes it to be unwise to teach the native population of India English. In fact, he warns his contemporaries against teaching 'subject races' any of the European languages because it would furnish 'the subject races with a very powerful arm against their alien rulers.'¹¹⁶ Bryce, conversely, regrets the absence of one or two dominant languages, like Greek and Latin, in India. According to Bryce the rapid dissemination of these languages throughout the Roman provinces allowed the Romans to quickly assimilate their subjects. Because of 'the lower level of intellectual progress' in

¹⁰⁷ Lucas 1912, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Bryce 1914, 40.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 60-61.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 61.

¹¹² Cromer 1910, 91-92.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, 93-95.

¹¹⁴ Bryce 1914, 48-52, 64-65.

¹¹⁵ Cromer 1910, 104.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 97-107.

India, he fears that it will take years before a substantial part of the population has learned English and starts to identify with the culture of their colonial rulers.¹¹⁷

Cromer's unwillingness to provide a European-style education to the native population of India may very well be due to the impact of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Cromer, born in 1841, was sixteen years old at the time, so he was definitely old enough to understand what had been happening in India. In addition, the uprising happened when Cromer was a cadet at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, an environment that probably encouraged a higher than average level of reflection on events that threatened the continued existence of Britain's empire. It is, therefore, possible that Cromer had the Indian Mutiny in mind when he warned against providing the Indians with an education in European languages – knowledge they might well use to give voice to their desire for independence.

Slavery

Cromer describes slavery as 'that great blot on ancient civilization'.¹¹⁸ Instead of acknowledging that, until quite recently, slavery also existed within the British Empire, he seems to criticise the Romans for making slaves out of conquered peoples.¹¹⁹ Lucas acknowledges that the institution of slavery existed in both the Roman and British Empires. According to him, however, the two empires were not comparable in this respect since slavery existed throughout the Roman Empire and not just in some of the regions it controlled – as was the case in the British Empire.¹²⁰ Bryce makes a different distinction, he argues that in the Roman Empire the 'horrors of slavery' were mitigated because Roman slaves were often of the same race as their masters. Therefore, he seems to imply, they were treated better than slaves in the British Empire.¹²¹ Interestingly, none of the authors mentions the way in which ancient texts, particularly those by the philosopher Aristotle, had been used by European colonial administrators to legitimate the existence of slavery. The Spanish had been the first to employ such a strategy to justify their enslavement of the native populations of their American colonies, and later empires would follow their example.¹²² The fact that the authors make no mention of this is probably because they are embarrassed by the fact that slavery had existed in the British Empire. This embarrassment is probably why both Cromer and Lucas condemn the ancient Romans for allowing the existence of slavery in their empire. Consequently, admitting that, in the past, British imperialists had drawn upon Greek and Roman justifications to legitimate slavery would have been unthinkable.

Empire, democracy, and self-government

Cromer expresses some unease about the compatibility of democracy with empire. He is, however, quick to reassure his British public that it has nothing to worry about by comparing Britain's representative democracy with that of Athens. He argues that the Athenian Empire did

¹¹⁷ Bryce 1914, 67-68.

¹¹⁸ Cromer 1910, 63.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 63-64.

¹²⁰ Lucas 1912, 91.

¹²¹ Bryce 1914, 61.

¹²² Houdt 2015, 67-84.

not fall because democracy and empire are necessarily incompatible, rather it was destroyed by ‘democracy run mad’. Cromer considers representative democracies to be far more responsible and reliable.¹²³ All the same, he denies this type of democracy to the Indians, stating they are not ready for self-government because they are too divided. Cromer even praises the Romans for never having had the intension to prepare their provincial subjects for self-government. Although he acknowledges the fact that ‘[n]ations wax and wane’, Cromer is of the opinion that Britain should emulate Rome in this respect, at least ‘until human nature entirely changes, and until racial and religious passions disappear from the face of the earth’.¹²⁴

Lucas also expresses some unease about the compatibility of democracy with empire, for he asserts that the ‘Romans were far superior to the English in continuity of policy, and that want of continuity has been the chief failing of the English in the matter of their Empire.’¹²⁵ Lucas blames this lack of continuity in imperial policy on the type of government in England, which he describes as a ‘party Government’ that thanks its existence to ‘English love of freedom’.¹²⁶ Like Cromer, Lucas is not in favour of granting India the right to govern itself anytime soon.¹²⁷

Bryce points out that there is a discrepancy between the fact that the English have a democratic system of government at home, while in India they rule on ‘absolutist principles’. He quickly justifies this arrangement in India by stating that ‘no other sort of government would suit a vast population of different races and tongues, divided by the religious animosities of Hindus and Musulmans, and with no sort of experience of self-government on a scale larger than that of the Village Council.’¹²⁸ In addition, he claims that ‘though a few intelligent men, educated in European ideas, complain of the despotic power of the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy, the people of India generally do not wish to govern themselves.’¹²⁹ Bryce does not deny that British rule in India, like Roman rule in its provinces, is despotic but, nonetheless, he considers it to be necessary.¹³⁰

The reluctance of all three authors to even consider the possibility of home rule for India’s inhabitants seems to be the result of a loss of belief in England’s ability so civilise native population (as mentioned above, this was, in turn, a consequence of the rebellions in India and Jamaica). In addition, the increasing popularity of theories of race – that argued that non-white peoples were genetically inferior and incapable of becoming ‘civilised’ – during the early twentieth century will also have influenced the views of the authors discussed here.

¹²³ Cromer 1910, 5-8.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 117-127.

¹²⁵ Lucas 1912, 160, 88.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, 160.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 151.

¹²⁸ Bryce 1914, 31.

¹²⁹ *idem.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 28.

2.2 The authors' motives, methodology, and their use of the available sources

Above, I have analysed the themes covered by the authors of the three works of imperial comparison. Below, I will provide answers to the sub questions posed in the introduction with regard to each book and its author.

At what period in the history of the Roman Empire is the comparison aimed, why at this period, and how does this affect the comparison?

Cromer's narrative is not aimed at a specific point in time in the history of the Roman Empire, instead he switches freely between different periods. When he wants to illustrate that some Roman statesmen resisted the call for territorial expansion – as, Cromer mentions, Gladstone had done in Britain – he mainly turns to Roman republican history.¹³¹ When he seeks to prove that the Romans did not surpass the British in their ability to assimilate subject peoples, however, he turns to the problematic relationship between the Roman authorities and the Jews under the principate.¹³² Generally, Lucas does not differentiate between different periods in Roman history, instead, he mainly speaks of 'the Romans', 'the Roman State', and 'the Roman Empire'. In those cases in which he does make a distinction between different periods in Roman history, he mainly does so to illustrate that the Roman empire did not significantly change (with regard to the way it was governed) during its long history. Only when he describes the gradual expansion and evolution of citizenship in the Roman Empire does he differentiate between different periods.¹³³ Similarly, Bryce sometimes makes distinctions between different periods in Roman history, for example when he seeks to prove that both in the case of the 'earlier days' of the Roman Empire and in the British Empire in India there were variations in the administration of the provinces.¹³⁴ For the most part, however, Bryce speaks of 'the Romans' and 'the Roman Empire' without differentiating between different periods in their history.

All three writers refuse to focus on any particular period in Roman history, which sometimes leads to rather unnuanced generalisations. Readers of their books could be forgiven for thinking that, throughout its long history, Roman imperialism remained of the same form. This was, of course, not the case. There is no uniform and coherent policy that guided Roman expansion and policy with regard to its provinces from the First Punic War onward. Instead, Roman imperialism changed over time, as did Roman culture and society.¹³⁵ There are two possible reasons for this lack of historical focus in the analysed works. The first is that none of the authors were Roman historians. Despite their classical education (Lucas and Bryce) and interest in classical texts (Cromer), neither of the three writers can be counted as an expert on the topic of Roman history. In order to assemble the amount of material they needed, it is, therefore, likely that they rather arbitrarily gathered pieces of information that they considered useful. Herein lies the second reason for the lack of historical focus, for the three books were written with a specific agenda in

¹³¹ Cromer 1910, 19-33.

¹³² *ibid.*, 93-95.

¹³³ Lucas 1912, 92-95.

¹³⁴ Bryce 1914, 32-35.

¹³⁵ Mattingly 2014, 17; Morley 2010, 9-10.

mind (I will return to this topic later). This means that the authors' lack of historical focus may very well result from a desire to find material that fitted their wider narrative about the supposed similarities and differences between the two empires.

On what sources is the comparison based, why on these sources, and how does this affect the comparison?

Before he delivered his Presidential address to the Classical Association and wrote his book on the similarities and differences between ancient and modern imperialism, Cromer is known to have consulted a wide range of experts on, predominantly, ancient imperialism to compensate his own limited knowledge on this topic. Among them were Gilbert Murray, then Professor of Ancient Greek at Oxford; John Bury, then Professor of Modern History at Cambridge; Francis Haverfield, then Camden Professor of Ancient History at Oxford; Edwyn Bevan, a Hellenistic scholar; and Gertrude Bell, who was, among many other things, an archaeologist and considered as an expert on the Near East. He seems to have selected these people because they were considered to be among 'the most distinguished scholars of the times'.¹³⁶ In addition, Cromer frequently refers to the works of such well-known scholars as Edward Gibbon, Theodor Mommsen, and Guglielmo Ferrero. In addition, Cromer cites a wide variety of ancient historians, such as Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, Tacitus, and Suetonius. In short, Cromer has founded his portrayal of Roman imperialism on both the work of his academic contemporaries (and some of their predecessors) and on his own interpretation of ancient texts. Most of the time, he seems to take the information in these texts at face value, although he does display some scepticism when he quotes passages from speeches in the first book of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Tacitus' *Agricola*.¹³⁷ When Cromer claims that, by virtue of their values and education, the Romans were far better suited to govern an empire than the Greeks ever were, he singles out Virgil and writes: 'Virgil, who was an enthusiastic Imperialist, was probably a true representative of the Roman public opinion in his day.'¹³⁸ Thus, he echoes the sentiments of some of his contemporaries, for while Virgil had been negatively regarded for much of the nineteenth century, members of England's political and administrative elite began to appreciate him more and more during the final decades of the century. Vance notes that 'men of affairs came to respect the Romans for their sheer administrative competence. Advocates of the British Empire began to thrill to Virgil's celebration of Imperial Rome bounding her Empire with the earth (*Aeneid* 6.781f). They particularly liked Virgil's confident claim that, while other nations might excel in the fine arts, it was the Roman privilege to perfect the arts of government (*Aeneid* 6.848-53).'¹³⁹

Bryce does not refer to any sources at all, so it is completely unclear where he obtained the information he needed to put his interpretation of Roman imperialism to writing. Lucas seldomly refers to his source material. In the few instances that he does provide his readers with an insight

¹³⁶ Chamberlain 1972, 61.

¹³⁷ Cromer 1910, 33, 46-47.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁹ Vance 1997, 141.

into his source material he refers to secondary literature written by many, though not all, of the scholars who were also consulted by Cromer – Edward Gibbon, Charles Merivale, Theodor Mommsen, John Bury, Henry Pelham, and Harold Mattingly. Because of this it is very difficult to say anything about the way in which these scholars (both of them trained classicists, as opposed to Cromer) selected their data. Similar to Cromer, Bryce singles out Virgil as the ‘national poet of the Empire, in whom imperial patriotism found its highest expression.’¹⁴⁰ Like Cromer, Bryce therefore echoes the newfound appreciation of Virgil among high-ranking British intellectuals that occurred in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

As mentioned above, the interpretation of Virgil as the poet of ‘empire’ gained prominence during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This interpretation remained influential during much of the twentieth century. The well-known British poet and essayist T.S. Elliot, for instance, argued in 1951 that Virgil’s *Aeneid* was not just about justifying Roman imperial expansion, but that it had also provided modern Europeans with an imperial ideal that was worthy of pursuit.¹⁴¹ This interpretation reflected the pro-imperial mindset of many Europeans, the Second World War would, however, lead to less flattering evaluations of present and past imperial projects. It has been pointed out for example that, from the 1950s onward, an increasing number of classicists interpreted Virgil’s view on Roman imperial expansion as deeply ambivalent. For all Rome’s achievements, Virgil supposedly despaired at the enormous human cost of Rome’s countless wars – a cost so high that, to Virgil, Rome’s triumphs had become meaningless.¹⁴²

In what themes is the author that has made the comparison interested, why is he interested in these themes (do they, for instance reflect contemporary imperial concerns), and how do they affect the comparison?

As has been made clear above, there are a number of themes that have found their way into all three works of imperial comparison. Vasunia has pointed out that the comparisons between Rome and Britain in these books invariably ‘point to contemporary concerns about empire, race decay, and decline.’¹⁴³ In addition, he argues that these concerns are invariably ‘obfuscated or contained in ways that reveal the ideological motivation of this precise historical comparison.’¹⁴⁴ This assessment seems to be particularly true with regard to four of the themes that are listed above: ‘Assimilation’ and ‘Impediments to assimilation’; ‘Slavery’; and ‘Empire, democracy, and self-government’.

Cromer, Lucas, and Bryce are all in agreement that the Romans were far more successful in assimilating conquered peoples than the British, particularly with regard to British India. When they explain this difference, they all claim this was – for the most part – not due to lack of intention or ability on the part of Britain’s imperial authorities. Instead, they all argue that the British are faced with much more difficulties during their efforts to assimilate ‘the locals’ than the

¹⁴⁰ Bryce 1914, 66.

¹⁴¹ Kennedy 1997, 45.

¹⁴² Tarrant 1997, 179-180.

¹⁴³ Vasunia 2005a, 38.

¹⁴⁴ *idem.*

Romans ever were. One of the obstacles that all three writers mention is the existence of racial prejudice in the British Empire. Cromer asserts that this kind of prejudice did not exist in the Roman Empire, which made it easier for the Roman authorities to assimilate their provincial subjects. To some extent, he seems to disapprove of the racial prejudices within the British Empire. Lucas notes the same difference between Roman/ancient and British/modern attitudes to race, but states that British racial prejudice is entirely rational and, therefore, justified. Bryce is more creative, claiming that, unlike the British, the Romans hardly encountered people of a different colour. Their interest in the topic of race can therefore be explained as follows: they all observed that the Romans had been more successful at assimilating conquered peoples than the British and were unsure of whether or not this was due to some failure on the part of their countrymen. Comparing the circumstances in which both imperial powers tried to incorporate subject peoples into their empires convinced (and reassured) them that this was not the case. Instead they were able to conclude that the Romans had it easier.

In similar fashion, both Cromer and Bryce contend that the polytheistic religions of the Roman world made assimilation easier, since those religions made no claim to being exclusively and universally true. They argue that the rise of unassimilative religions – and subsequent increase of religious prejudice, intolerance, and prosecution – such as Christianity and Islam have caused religious unrest on a scale unknown to the Romans. Cromer sagaciously points out that the one time the Romans did encounter a religion that refused to acknowledge the possible existence of any other god than their own, they failed in their efforts toward assimilation. Probably much to the relief of their readers, Cromer and Bryce therefore again concluded that the success of the Roman authorities and the comparative failure of the British authorities in assimilating subject peoples was due to differing historical circumstances.

Both Lucas and Bryce seem to struggle with the fact that slavery was once a part of British imperialism. They acknowledge that, until the abolition of slavery throughout the empire in 1843, the British Empire was in this respect similar to the Roman Empire. Lucas, however, downplays this difference, arguing that slavery in the British Empire was never as widespread as in the Roman Empire. Bryce, conversely, argues that slaves were better treated in the Roman Empire, supposedly because they were often of the same race as their owners. On this point, neither author is able to silence the lingering moral unease about the fact that slavery was once an integral part of the British Empire. Cromer criticises the Romans for allowing slavery, but (deliberately?) does not mention that it also existed in Britain's overseas territories.

To conclude, all three authors express their unease about the relationship between democracy and empire, albeit in slightly different manners. Cromer believes that direct democracies are unable to govern an empire because, it is implied, the wishes of the people are liable to change rather often, making it impossible to execute a coherent imperial policy for a longer period of time. He assures his readers that they have nothing to worry about because representative democracies, like Britain, are far more stable. Lucas detects the same problem and is less optimistic about the future, declaring that 'party Government' stands in the way of continuity in imperial policy. Bryce is troubled by a different matter – the contradiction that while the English

enjoy the benefits of democratic government at home, they deny a similar form of government to the peoples of India. Although he quickly justifies this situation – arguing that the Indians are incapable to rule themselves and that the majority is happy to accept British control – the fact that he brings it up shows that he is troubled by it. Although both Cromer and Lucas do not voice the same concerns, they are clearly struggling with the same problem since they both offer justifications for a prolonged British presence in India. All authors compare the despotic nature of Roman rule (and its benefits) with the equally despotic nature of British rule in India to help justify, or at least excuse, the continued existence of the latter.

Why does the author make this comparison, how might the author’s background have influenced his conclusions, and how does the purpose of the comparison influence its outcome?

With regard to the themes above, I think it is clear that the comparison with the Roman Empire was in part an effort to dispel or, in each case, mitigate some of the fears regarding less successful elements and morally questionable elements of British imperial policy. I would argue that the comparisons that deal with the other themes are mainly aimed at justifying British imperialism. Sometimes this is done by equating it with Roman imperialism, at other times British imperialism is presented as superior to Roman imperialism. The former is applicable to the justification that both Cromer and Bryce offer for British and Roman territorial expansion (the desire to find and secure natural frontiers). The latter is applicable to what the authors have to say about which empire was more concerned with the best interests of its subjects. All three of them contend that, although there are some basic similarities between Roman and British imperialism with regard to how they treated conquered peoples, British imperial authorities generally do more to improve the lives of their subjects than the Romans ever did.

Adler claims that ‘one detects an aura of national self-congratulation among numerous Victorian and Edwardian imperialist likening the British Empire to Rome.’¹⁴⁵ With regard to some of the themes that are discussed above, this is definitely the case. In their efforts to justify British imperialism Cromer, Lucas, and Bryce clearly feel the need to present it as a more ‘mature’ form of imperialism than Roman imperialism. However, with regard to some of the anxieties about contemporary imperialism this is not the case. Although the authors blame British failure to assimilate the population of India on factors that were not present in Roman times, they do not, for example, claim that this means that the British are actually better at assimilation than the Romans. Instead, they seem to suggest that they would have equalled the achievements of the Romans in this field, were it not for the fact that they were faced by problems unknown to their Roman ‘predecessors’.

In addition, Adler asserts that many pro-imperialists in late Victorian and Edwardian England were ‘discomfited by equation of the two empires.’¹⁴⁶ Instead, Adler argues, they mainly sought to

¹⁴⁵ Adler 2008a, 208.

¹⁴⁶ *idem*.

distance the British Empire from Rome.¹⁴⁷ Vasunia, by contrast, suggests that ‘Rome appealed most, and most extensively to those who justified the British Empire rather than those who fought against its excesses or wished to end it altogether.’¹⁴⁸ Since I have not studied the writings of anti-imperialists on this topic, I cannot confirm Vasunia’s claim. Based on the contents of the works written by Cromer, Lucas, and Bryce, however, I would argue that – opposite to what Adler suggests – early twentieth-century pro-imperialists had absolutely no qualms about equating elements of Roman imperialism with British imperialism. As noted above, they all start their historical comparisons by pointing out some basic similarities between the empires (especially with regard to India) in order to justify them. Although they identify many differences between the two empires in the comparisons that follow, all three of them also see parallels – in particular with regard to a supposedly shared ‘national character’ and with regard to the tolerance of local customs. More importantly, the fact all three authors believe that British rule in India is broadly similar to that of the Romans in the provinces of their empire reveals that they believe that both forms of imperialism had a beneficial effect on imperial subjects that had yet to be ‘civilised’.

To conclude, it is relevant to point out that all three of the writers discussed above had a stake in British imperialism, since they were all establishment figures. Cromer had been a high-ranking imperial administrator, Lucas had held a high-ranking position at the Colonial Office, and Bryce had been a cabinet member and Ambassador to the US. Therefore, it is only to be expected that they would feel the need to make the comparison between Rome and Britain work out in favour of the latter. As mentioned above, the desire to present British imperialism as superior to that of the ancient Romans should be seen as a consequence of the nineteenth-century belief in the progressive nature of civilisation. The Romans, it was thought, had introduced classical culture in Britain during their occupation of the island – enabling modern Britons to improve on this classical ‘inheritance’.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the author’s desire to portray the British Empire more favourably than Rome’s reflects a general feeling among Europeans that their respective cultures represented the epitome of the progress of civilisation and human ingenuity – a belief that would soon be shattered by the carnage of the First World War.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Adler 2008a, 195-205.

¹⁴⁸ Vasunia 2005a, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Hingley 2008, 118.

¹⁵⁰ Bowler 1989, 19, 200-201.

Chapter 3 – The Roman Empire in the United States of America

Like Rome itself, America has taken an inherited classical tradition and reworked it with imagination to meet the needs of each new generation. One wonders what archaeologists of the early fourth millennium A.D. will say about the fractured columns, cement arches stripped of their decorative surface stones, or the arms, legs and torsos of naked Venuses. If no written documents survive, it would be possible to see New York, Washington, and Boston as provinces of the Roman Empire. Even if the written records contradict that historical reconstruction, the claim of cultural continuity will be harder to refute. The archaeological record will support the picture of complex classical continuities that link Athens with Alexandria, Alexandria with Rome, and Rome with a whole range of small towns and great urban centers on the western shores of the Atlantic.¹⁵¹

Thus wrote the American historian of archaeology Stephen Dyson while reflecting on the large amount of American art and architecture that is inspired by Roman examples. He notes that the importance of Roman examples to America is somewhat illogical since a ‘major characteristic of America throughout much of its history has been a suspicion of the Old World and its traditions.’¹⁵² Among those traditions was, of course, European neo-classical art and architecture. Settlers in the so-called New World were, nevertheless, forced to look to the traditions of the so-called ‘Old World’ for inspiration because the ‘native Americans of the east coast of the United States had no complex architectural or pictorial tradition on which the new settlers could have drawn, even had they wished.’¹⁵³ For all their suspicion of ‘Old-World knowledge’, the social elite of colonial settlements on America’s east coast valued their knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity since it supposedly set them apart from what they perceived as the ‘savagery of the American wilderness’.¹⁵⁴ Since many of New England’s first settlers came from Cambridgeshire, education in Greek and Latin – which was seen as an indispensable part of a university education in England – was given a central place in newly founded colleges such as Boston Latin School (1635) and Harvard College (1636).¹⁵⁵ A further indication of the importance of an education in Greek and Latin is that, as was the case in England and many other European countries, knowledge of the classical languages opened doors to children of New England’s elite that remained closed to the majority of the population. A classical education, in a very Old-World fashioned way, almost invariably guaranteed its recipients of appointment to government or ecclesiastical office.¹⁵⁶

Thus, when a wealthy mercantile elite emerged in cities in (particularly, but not exclusively) New England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was only natural that

¹⁵¹ Dyson 2001, 68.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵⁴ Wyke 2012, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Dyson 2001, 58.

¹⁵⁶ Wyke 2012, 2.

they turned to England in their search for fitting ways to display their wealth. During the early eighteenth century neo-classical architecture was very popular among English aristocrats. Richard Boyle, the third Earl of Burlington, in particular, did much to promote the construction of replicas of Roman buildings.¹⁵⁷ Because of this, an appreciation of neo-classical art and architecture became embedded in the culture of New England's social elite.¹⁵⁸ As resentment against British rule grew in its American colonies, New England's political elite drew heavily on the Roman Republic as a model for government. When this resentment resulted in rebellion against the British authorities in 1775, the British king George III and British government officials in general were compared to Julius Caesar because they were all perceived as tyrants. While Caesar was blamed for the fall of the Roman Republic, George III, it was argued, was determined to destroy the new American republic (governed by the Continental Congress during the American Revolution). American revolutionaries identified with Roman statesmen, such as Cato the Younger, Brutus, Cassius, and Cicero, who had opposed Caesar and/or his adoptive son Octavian. Brutus and Cassius were particularly popular since they had killed Caesar and eventually sacrificed their lives in, what the leaders of the American Revolution perceived as, an attempt to protect the Roman Republic.¹⁵⁹ In line with this republican ideology that drew heavily on Roman examples, George Washington was often compared with Cincinnatus because they both relinquished supreme power after saving their respective republics.¹⁶⁰

After the American revolutionaries had gained their independence, they again looked to the Roman Republic as an example to model their own government on. Naturally, imperial Rome was less well-regarded. During debates that took place during the Constitutional Convention and in its aftermath, for example, some expressed their concern about the powers that would be held by the president – fearing that a person who was both head of state and commander in chief might easily become an American Caesar.¹⁶¹ Concerns that the president might become a Caesar and, consequently, the American republic an empire, resurfaced more than once in the history of the United States. During his time as president, for example, former general Andrew Jackson was repeatedly accused of both actively seeking territorial expansion and trying to increase the powers of the office of president.¹⁶² Because of this, Jackson exposed himself to the charge of Caesarism. Interestingly though, it was not just Jackson's opponents who compared him to Caesar, at least one of his supporters was of the opinion that Jackson could be favourably compared to Julius Caesar, stating that: *'Quod Caesar fecit, Jackson superavit* ["What Caesar did, Jackson has done better"].¹⁶³ It is unlikely that Jackson was pleased with this comparison, for due to the negative image of imperial Rome he presented himself as a virtuous republican.¹⁶⁴ The negative image of empire in general in this period is best illustrated by a cycle of paintings by the Anglo-American

¹⁵⁷ Ayres 1997, 105-114.

¹⁵⁸ Dyson 2001, 58.

¹⁵⁹ Malamud 2009, 11; Wyke 2012, 2-3.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶¹ Wyke 2012, 3-4, 206

¹⁶² *ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶³ Malamud 2009, 20, with references.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 24-25.

artist Thomas Cole. The five paintings together are titled *The Course of Empire* (FIG. 1) and the individual paintings are titled (1) *The Savage State*, (2) *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, (3) *The Consummation of Empire*, (4) *Destruction*, and (5) *Desolation*.



FIG. 1. *The Course of Empire* by the Anglo-American painter Thomas Cole (1801-1848).

(From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Course_of_Empire_by_Thomas_Cole. Accessed on 31 January 2016).

The paintings provide a ‘biographic’ overview of the material and cultural progress of an unspecified civilisation – from its primitive beginnings, to the height of its imperial power, and, finally, to its decline and fall. This view on the life cycle of empires reflect the fact that Cole adhered to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment belief in the cyclical nature of history. According to this belief, the history of any civilisation would be shaped by universal historical forces that included ‘the inevitable historical cycle of the rise and fall of empires.’¹⁶⁵ It has been argued that Cole created the paintings as a warning to his contemporaries for he told them that: ‘We see that nations have sprung from obscurity, risen to glory and decayed. Their rise has in general been marked by virtue; their decadence by vice, vanity, and licentiousness. Let us beware’.¹⁶⁶ Thus, some of Cole’s contemporaries saw the paintings as allegories on Jacksonian America, while the themes and artistic iconography are reminiscent of ancient Rome.¹⁶⁷ Particularly the central painting evokes images of ancient Rome: on the bridge in the foreground a military leader enters the white marble city at the head of a triumphal procession that is reminiscent of a Roman triumph; monumental Roman architecture dominates the entire painting; and the goddess Minerva overlooks the entire scene from the top of a columned pedestal. Malamud has drawn attention to the fact that Cole drew on a number of depictions of Roman triumphs for his painting, ‘especially Andrea Mantegna’s *Triumphs of Caesar* at Hampton Court Palace, which Cole had visited in July 1829.’¹⁶⁸ While the victorious military leader in the painting is suggestive of Caesar, Malamud contends that to opponents of the Jackson administration it may well have suggested the former general Andrew Jackson, who was known for his autocratic behaviour and was frequently accused of Caesarism.¹⁶⁹

Another famous example of an American president who faced charges of Caesarism is Abraham Lincoln. Among other things, his opponents accused him of seeking absolute power, violating civil liberties and the Constitution, deliberately plunging the country into civil war, and, as a result, destroying the republic. In addition, it was no coincidence that the man who murdered Lincoln came from a family that had ‘been touched by the persistent American practice of celebrating resistance to tyranny through the invocation of the name of Roman Brutus (both Lucius Junius, who [supposedly] led the revolt against the Roman kings, and Marcus Junius, who assassinated the aspirant king, Caesar). Grandfather Booth had written about himself as a Brutus when he left Britain to participate in the American Revolution, and John Wilke’s father and one of his brothers had also frequently performed on the American state in Shakespeare’s rendition of the Roman assassination.’¹⁷⁰

Although images of Rome were deeply ingrained in American (political) culture, the prominence of Rome was not reflected in academic research that focussed on classical antiquity. After the Civil War, a division emerged between academia and the world of art and architecture. In their quest to introduce higher academic standards, American universities sought to emulate

¹⁶⁵ Malamud 2009, 11, 25.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 25, with references.

¹⁶⁷ Dyson 2001, 62.

¹⁶⁸ Malamud 2009, 25, with references.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 18-25.

¹⁷⁰ Wyke 2012, 4.

those in Germany. Because of this, scholars who tried to establish classical archaeology as an academic discipline focussed their attention on the archaeology of ancient Greece. Artists and architects, however, looked to Rome for inspiration.¹⁷¹ Images of Roman architecture had exerted a strong influence on the architecture of government buildings ever since the early history of the United States. Founding Father and third US president Thomas Jefferson, for instance, deeply admired both Greek and Roman civilisation and, in particular, their architecture. During his involvement in the designing of America's capital city at Washington, D.C., he would draw heavily on Roman models, which is one of the reasons why the city became 'the greatest center for neo-Roman architecture in America.'¹⁷² The influence of Roman-style architecture on US architects was long-lasting, for as America's power grew and its economic position strengthened during the nineteenth century, members of its social elite began to see it as an imperial power with a special destiny. Architects again turned to Rome when they designed buildings that were meant to express America's growing confidence in its international importance. A number of great railway stations in major American cities were designed with monumental Roman buildings in mind. The Pennsylvania Station in New York, for example, was modelled on the Baths of Caracalla.¹⁷³ In addition, it has been argued that by the 1890s – when the US actively embarked on overseas conquests (its conquest of the North American continent being complete) – many Americans 'looked to imperial Rome as a source for symbols of its new imperial power and position.'¹⁷⁴

Returning to the use of Rome in American political culture, there is a concept that should not be absent from any discussion of the use of images of Rome in US politics – namely the term 'imperial presidency'. The term was coined by the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who published a book titled *The Imperial Presidency* in 1973 (during the Watergate scandal). In his book, Schlesinger argued that successive American presidents had repeatedly used the emergency powers that were given to them during the Cold War to exceed the limits that were imposed on their authority by the Constitution. According to the author, the illegal appropriation of powers reached its climax during the Nixon administration. Although he used the term 'imperial' to define Nixon's presidency, Schlesinger made no explicit mention of Rome or its emperors in his book.¹⁷⁵

The concept of an imperial presidency resurfaced regularly during the presidency of George W. Bush, especially in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and during its aftermath. Whereas Schlesinger had not made use of the Roman analogy, Bush was frequently charged with Caesarism. In addition, comparisons between US foreign policy and Roman imperialism became much more frequent. Representatives of the US government (including Bush Jr. while he was running for president in 2000) have repeatedly denied the existence of imperial ambitions on the part of the US, which is logical since America's founding myth asserts that the origins of the US

¹⁷¹ Dyson 2001, 63-65.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, 59-60.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁷⁴ Malamud 2010, 249-283.

¹⁷⁵ Wyke 2012, 190-192.

are inextricably linked with resistance to imperial rule. Nevertheless, a number of journalists, political commentators, and historians have argued that America has become an empire that partly resembles that of ancient Rome. These comparisons should be seen as a consequence of America's aggressive foreign policy (its so-called 'War on Terror') in the wake of the 9/11 attacks – a policy that was perhaps best illustrated by the US government's intention to wage pre-emptive war (unilaterally, if need be) against any nation that posed a risk to its national security. The fact that the concept of an imperial presidency resurfaced should be seen as a consequence of an increase in the powers of the office of president, powers the office had lost after Watergate. The Roman analogy furnished a number of opponents of the Bush Jr. administration with the means to criticise its policy both at home and abroad, while, at the same time, it provided some supporters of an 'imperial' America with a compelling historical parallel.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Wyke 2012, 205-219.

Chapter 4 – Post-9/11 American works of imperial comparison

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the comparisons made between Rome and the US in three works of imperial comparison that were all written in the final years of the Bush Jr. administration. Contrary to the early twentieth-century works of imperial comparison, there is little overlap between the three books. They cover different themes, and were written for different reasons. Therefore, I have chosen to provide a separate analysis of the main conclusions of each book. As was the case in chapter two, the second part of this chapter focusses on the sub questions that were posed in the introduction.

Again, it is worthwhile to provide some information about the authors before I start my analysis of their books. Two of the three books were written by academics, though neither of them specialises in ancient history, and one book was written by a journalist with an academic background. The latter is the author of *Are we Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America*. This book was written by Cullen Murphy (1952-), who read medieval history at Amherst College, a privately funded liberal arts college in Massachusetts. He is best known for his work as managing editor (1985-2003) and, later, interim editor (2003-2006) at the American current affairs and culture magazine *The Atlantic*.¹⁷⁷ *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built – and America is Building – a New World* was written by Thomas Madden (1960-), who read history at Illinois University. He is now a history professor who specialises in medieval history.¹⁷⁸ The final book that will be analysed below is Amy Chua's (1962-) *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance – and Why They Fall*. Chua read law at Harvard University and her work focusses on the relationship between law and social and economic development, ethnic conflict, and globalisation.¹⁷⁹

Unlike their early twentieth-century British counterparts – who were all establishment figures and had all worked as government officials – the above-mentioned authors do not have a direct stake in their nation's politics. Nevertheless, their books should be seen as attempts to either influence US government policy or public debates about it. Chua and Murphy, for instance, both lament the fact that the numbers of foreign students that attend American universities has dropped sharply as a consequence of tightened security and less friendly attitudes to foreigners after 9/11.¹⁸⁰ They also argue that America is at risk of becoming an isolated and inward looking society, with a population that does not care much about what happens in the outside world and a government that frequently conducts its foreign policy unilaterally.¹⁸¹ Finally, their respective books provide Chua and Murphy with a platform to, on the one hand, criticise the aggressive foreign policy of the Bush Jr. administration,¹⁸² and, on the other, offer their advice to current and future policymakers.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ The Atlantic Monthly Company 2005, 'Cullen Murphy'.

¹⁷⁸ Saint Louis University, 'Thomas F. Madden'.

¹⁷⁹ Yale Law School, 'Amy Chua'.

¹⁸⁰ Chua 2007, 338; Murphy 2007, 142.

¹⁸¹ Chua 2007, 340-341; Murphy 2007, 142-143.

¹⁸² Chua 2007, 321, 335; Murphy 2007, 42-43, 128.

¹⁸³ Chua 2007, 335-342; Murphy 2007, 203-206.

Whereas Chua's and Murphy's books are mainly written from the perspective of left-wing political views, Madden's book is shaped by his conservative political views. He fully supports the aggressive 'War on Terror' that was initiated by the Bush Jr. administration and even asserts that 'a nuclear retaliation would not be out of the question' if America were to become the target of an even more devastating terrorist attack than those of 9/11 at some point in the future.¹⁸⁴ In addition, he encourages the development of the sort of inward-looking society that both Chua and Murphy warn against – arguing that Americans are right not to be interested in world politics or learning different languages.¹⁸⁵

4.1 Analysis of the themes covered by the imperial comparisons in the selected books

Murphy's *Are We Rome?*

In a nutshell, Murphy defines the relationship between Roman and American imperialism as follows: America, like Rome, has built its empire 'for reasons of national self-interest; unlike Rome, it has done so without asserting actual sovereignty over the countless multitudes who receive some collateral benefit.'¹⁸⁶ Consequently, he argues that America's version of *imperium sine fine* 'is the ideology of democracy and free markets.'¹⁸⁷

General similarities

Murphy considers the Roman Empire and the US similar because both 'are the most powerful actors in their worlds, by many orders of magnitude', arguing that both gained their powerful position through use of 'military might and the "soft power" of language, culture, commerce, technology, and ideas.' In addition, Murphy observes that both states created 'global structures – administrative, economic, military, cultural – that the rest of the world and their own citizens came to take for granted'. Furthermore he credits both societies with being inclusive, (religiously) tolerant, and willing to grant citizenship to newcomers. He also mentions that lawyers and lawsuits are familiar phenomena in both societies, and that they both value the existence of private property and are willing to accept 'enormous disparities of wealth, and allow the gap to widen.' Finally, he asserts that both peoples see their national character as exceptional and consider themselves destined for great things.¹⁸⁸

General differences

Murphy observes that the Romans were no great innovators, while American science and technology is developing rapidly. Consequently, the author believes that the American economy is much more resilient than Rome's, especially since many people in the latter's provinces

¹⁸⁴ Madden 2008, 282-289, especially 288-289.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 228.

¹⁸⁶ Murphy 2007, 137.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 163.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 14-15.

depended on subsistence farming, leaving them vulnerable to droughts and infertile soil. Murphy states that while America once was a slaveholding society, this is no longer the case. He points out that Rome, conversely, was a slaveholding society throughout its existence. The author also mentions that America is more democratic than Rome and that the former's middle class (absent in Rome) forms the backbone of its society. With regard to imperialism in particular, Murphy argues that, contrary to Rome, America (allowing for a few exceptions in its past) does not aggressively seek to acquire foreign colonies. Instead, America 'prefers to extend its power by other means.' At the end of his passage on differences, the author states that many of the things we now take for granted were very different in ancient Rome, pointing out that: 'On basic matters such as gender rôles and the equality of all people, Romans and Americans would behold one another with disbelief and distaste.' Murphy comes to the nuanced conclusion that: 'If the past is another country, then Rome is another planet. And yet, that planet colonized the one we inhabit now.' By this, he probably means that we cannot deny the fact that concepts and ideas that originally came from ancient Rome still exert some influence in the modern world.¹⁸⁹

Murphy only mentions the existence of slavery in both the Roman Empire and the US briefly and does so to favourably distinguish the latter from the former – more or less arguing that America occupies the moral high ground because it eventually abolished slavery. Murphy may not be aware of this, but his approach to the topic of slavery ignores that many pre-Civil War proponents of the existence of slavery in the US actually looked to Rome to strengthen their argument for its continued existence. In the decades before the Civil War, southern supporters of slavery asserted that Rome and the Greek city-states had only been able to become great powers because of the existence of slavery.¹⁹⁰

The decline of republics

Murphy observes that the tendency to concede far-reaching powers to one man, such as Pompey, during the late Republic finds it equivalent in the growing powers of the American presidency – observing that some are concerned that 'America may drift away from a republic to a principate'.¹⁹¹ Thus, Murphy echoes earlier concerns regarding an 'imperial presidency'.

Corruption

Murphy notes that, as was the case in Rome, public officials in the US increasingly put their own private interests before those of the people they purportedly serve. He argues that this development is stimulated by the privatisation of government functions such as the collection of taxes in the Roman Empire and public safety in America. By entrusting these government functions to private companies, Murphy argues, the state is losing control over tasks that are essential to the wellbeing of the state and society at large.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Murphy 2007, 16-17.

¹⁹⁰ Malamud 2009, 76-80.

¹⁹¹ Murphy 2007, 40-43.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 91-120.

The culture of the imperial capital

Both Rome and Washington have fallen victim to – what Murphy describes as – the ‘*Omphalos* syndrome’, meaning that the elites in these capitals imagine themselves and their immediate surroundings to be the centre of the world and that they believe that their reality is they only reality. Put simply, Murphy claims that the elites found in both capitals are so self-obsessed that they are completely out of touch with the world around them.¹⁹³ Murphy argues that the inhabitants of both capitals live in an artificial bubble that in the case of Rome was sustained by the *annona* (i.e. the free distribution of grain and, eventually, also olive oil and wine among Rome’s citizens) and in Washington by ‘tax revenue and borrowed money’.¹⁹⁴ In addition, he asserts that ‘Rome, like Washington, was an economically pointless metropolis, a vast importer of an empire’s riches rather than a producer of anything except words and administration (and the pungent cartloads of garbage that left the city every night).’¹⁹⁵ Later on, Murphy states that Washington’s ‘professional classes are largely insulated from economic conditions in the rest of the country.’¹⁹⁶ Although Murphy believes that the elites in both imperial capitals were self-obsessed, he thinks that Roman emperors were probably less isolated from the rest of the world and more aware of the reality outside the capital than American presidents, because the former often travelled and could be absent from Rome for longer periods of time.¹⁹⁷

The military

Murphy remarks that both states’ militaries display a remarkable degree of uniformity, observing that both American and Roman military installations look pretty much the same all around their respective worlds. In addition, he mentions that messages that were sent by Roman soldiers to their families back home (based on those found on several of the Vindolanda tablets) are very similar to those in emails of American soldiers.¹⁹⁸ Later on, Murphy notes that the downside of the existence of this uniformity within the military is the ever widening gap between the military and civilian society. He describes both militaries as subcultures that were isolated and very different from the rest of society, leading to a sense of superiority among members of the military and unfamiliarity with the society they are supposedly fighting for.¹⁹⁹

Murphy notes both states’ willingness to spend inordinate amounts of money on maintaining their military apparatus. He argues that Rome did so by levying heavy taxes that often made life difficult for its people and by constantly devaluing its currency, while the US do so by ‘borrowing trillions of dollars, going ever more deeply into debt while trying not to worry about the many serious national needs it’s simply ignoring.’²⁰⁰ Murphy returns to this point later on and

¹⁹³ Murphy 2007, 43.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 49.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 56-57.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 61-64, 164-165.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 81-83.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 65-66.

asserts that the huge military spending of both states harmed – and in America’s case continues to harm – their ability to provide basic services to their respective citizens.²⁰¹

With regard to the differences between both countries’ militaries, Murphy states that these are largely technological, arguing that the US military possesses a technological advantage over its rivals that is far greater than that of the Roman military over its respective rivals. He goes on to argue, however, that both militaries are similar in two significant ways: (1) they are both supported by a huge and efficient logistical networks; and (2) they both excel at providing the best possible training for their soldiers. Murphy notes that the feared reputation of both militaries adds a psychological dimension to their military strength – arguing that they are both perceived as more powerful than they actually are.²⁰²

Finally, Murphy feels that both Rome and America have arrived at ‘the same unsatisfactory solution’ to manpower shortages in their respective armies.²⁰³ He argues that both countries’ reliance on ‘outsiders’ – in order to fill the gap left by civilians who either do not want to enlist in the armed services or who cannot do so because of health problems – has led to dropping standards in the military. In the case of Rome these outsiders were invading peoples who, during the later Roman Empire in the west, ‘were invited en masse to fight under the imperial banners – and allowed to stay intact as peoples, and to occupy territory, and to be led by their own leaders.’ According to Murphy, this weakened Rome’s ability to defend itself because such military units were not loyal to the Roman state and not as well trained as regular Roman soldiers.²⁰⁴ Murphy claims that the ‘barbarization’ of the Roman army is mirrored by the ‘civilianization’ of the US military, arguing that the increasing reliance on civilian contractors is also undermining America’s military strength. Murphy asserts that, as was the case with Rome’s *foederati*, soldiers supplied by these companies are not loyal to the US government but to their employers and they are less well trained than regular US army units.²⁰⁵

The nature of Roman and American imperialism

Murphy detects both differences and similarities and is ambiguous on some points. He starts by mentioning a clear difference: ‘America, unlike Rome, hasn’t set out very often on deliberate missions of imperialistic conquest.’²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, he believes there is some similarity between American imperialism and Roman republican imperialism: ‘It [the US] still prefers (as Rome did at first) to leverage the capacities of client states and the local ruling class, as opposed to administrating distant domains from the center – an approach that the historian Charles Maier describes as a “consensual empire” or an “empire of invitation.”’ Murphy goes on, however, to argue that American presidents do not ‘embark on military adventures mainly for purposes of personal glory, as Caesar did in Gaul and Claudius did in Britain.’²⁰⁷ Later on, though, Murphy

²⁰¹ Murphy 2007, 75.

²⁰² *ibid.*, 67-72.

²⁰³ *ibid.*, 66.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 80.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 84-90.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 73.

²⁰⁷ *idem.*

seems to somewhat contradict himself when he remarks that: ‘Glory was no small motive in imperial Rome. (It’s no small motive now, though in America it tends to dress in the plainer fabric of “legacy.”)’²⁰⁸

Murphy is also ambiguous on the exploitive nature of empire. While he asserts that the Roman Empire pillaged other countries, he contends that ‘[o]nly metaphorically does America exact tribute.’ He goes on, however, to add that ‘in economic terms’ America ‘may suck them [other countries] dry.’ According to Murphy, America is more magnanimous in victory than Rome ever was. Pointing out that America helped Germany and Japan rebuild after the Second World War, he drily observes that, in contrast, there ‘was no rehabilitative Cato Plan for a conquered Carthage.’²⁰⁹

National character

Murphy believes that both Rome and America share a national arrogance, a belief that they are special, that makes them see outsiders (i.e. or non-Romans or non-Americans) as inferior. He thinks that this characteristic sometimes leads them to underestimating their enemies. In addition, Murphy argues that this mindset generally does not help to win the hearts and minds of conquered or allied peoples.²¹⁰ The author considers the widespread presence of cultural stereotypes in both Roman and American society as symptomatic of this cultural self-centredness.²¹¹ As examples of the harmful effects of self-superiority and self-obsession, Murphy mentions that the Romans regularly suffered defeats due to a lack of interest in the culture and capabilities of the peoples they encountered. He again suggests that this lack of interest led them to underestimate potential enemies.²¹² The author contends that, likewise, the average American’s lack of geographical knowledge and inability to speak anything other than American English (and an unwillingness to learn about geography or other languages) severely weakens its international position.²¹³ Murphy blames the setbacks in Iraq and the ‘fiasco’ in Somalia in 2006 on this cultural indifference and, to some extent, believes it to be a result of modern theories about globalisation – arguing that people have misguidedly equated globalism with cultural homogeneity. According to him, globalisation, both in the ancient world of the Romans and in the modern world, has only led to increasing homogeneity in material culture and elite society. Because of this, he argues, cultural elites in both the Roman Empire and the US have mistakenly projected the worldwide similarity of elite societies on the life of average citizens.²¹⁴

Assimilation

Murphy remarks that both Rome and America are inclusive societies that manage to absorb incomers into their social structure relatively quickly. With regard to the Romans, he does remark

²⁰⁸ Murphy 2007, 159.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 73.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, 121-142.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, 145.

²¹² *ibid.*, 124-127.

²¹³ *ibid.*, 141-143.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, 146-150.

that it was particularly the elite among the non-Romans that was incorporated into the higher echelons of Roman society relatively easily.²¹⁵ Murphy observes that although both Rome and America excelled at assimilating outsiders there was one great difference – in the Roman Empire there ‘was no conscious effort to encourage assimilation as such, no set of policy initiatives, no Department of Romanization.’²¹⁶ According to the author, newcomers to Roman civilisation nevertheless integrated because they saw its benefits. Although the Americans have set up an impressive infrastructure (Murphy mentions public education and mass communications) that – among other things – can be used to promote integration, Murphy believes that it is the magnetic pull of the American economy and American culture that encourages incomers to assimilate.²¹⁷

Madden’s *Empires of Trust*

In the preface to his book, Madden makes clear that he sees no similarities between imperial Rome and the US. He does, however, believe that there are similarities between the US and the Roman Republic.²¹⁸ According to Madden, Americans are technically right when they, like Romans before 146 BC, claim that their republic has no empire. Following this, however, he points out that ‘future historians’ may not see it that way.²¹⁹ Later on in his book, Madden argues that, like Romans in the first century BC, Americans are now coming to terms with the fact that they have an empire. He adds though, that both empires are not empires in the traditional sense, instead, their empires are ‘a collection of free peoples’.²²⁰

The nature of Roman and American imperialism

Madden describes both the Roman Republic and the US as ‘Empires of Trust’. According to him these sort of empires invariably reject opportunities to extent their territory because they do not want an empire.²²¹ Madden argues that both second-century BC Romans and modern-day Americans would object to the concept of empire and, instead, emphasise that their respective states just have ‘many, many friends and allies’.²²²

According to Madden, the imperialism of Rome and the US is defensive in nature and only began when they were provoked by the outside world – arguing that for Rome this trigger was the Gallic sack of Rome, and for the US the attack on Pearl Harbor. He believes that from that moment on, the foreign policy of both republics was focussed on securing their own safety and that of their allies. Madden adds that when they fought other peoples that was always with the aim to afterwards ‘transform their former enemies into fast friends’.²²³ He also believes that both republics were committed to ensuring that no single state ‘should have absolute power, that all

²¹⁵ Murphy 2007, 167.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, 181.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, 181-182.

²¹⁸ Madden 2008, xiii.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, 164-165.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, 176.

²²¹ *ibid.*, 5-6.

²²² *ibid.*, 14.

²²³ *ibid.*, 15-16.

states should work together as equals.’ Madden argues that, because of this, other powers were persuaded that the respective republics deserved to be trusted ‘with precisely that absolute power’.²²⁴ He argues that their desire to maintain this trust often led Rome and America into war when their allies called for help in dealing with foreign aggressors, since not providing aid in such a situation would result in loss of credibility and trust.²²⁵

Madden claims that both the Roman and the American republic’s leaders realised that they should achieve military hegemony in order to guarantee peace.²²⁶ He believes that both republics’ ability to guarantee peace and security is what attracted new allies that over time desired to become part of their respective empires. Madden uses the Social War to illustrate this process, arguing that it was a war in which Rome’s allies ‘waged war against Rome in order to become Romans.’²²⁷ According to Madden, a similar process will once take place in Europe. This is because he believes that, in the future, more and more Europeans will demand the right to vote in American elections. The author expects this right will, eventually, be granted to them – stating that ‘it seems likely that American citizenship will indeed be extended to America’s closest allies.’²²⁸

The author concedes that, for all the good intentions he credits them with, both powers have made mistakes and committed war crimes, but he emphasises that these are of an isolated nature and not part of a structural problem. As examples he mentions the misconduct of a Roman commander and his men towards the citizens of Locri (a small city in southern Italy that had sided with Hannibal during the Second Punic War and was subsequently reconquered by the Romans) and the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. In both cases, the senates of both respective republics sharply condemned these events. Madden argues that, from a historical perspective, these actions were unusual and show that both powers held themselves to higher standards than other great powers, which gave them the reputation of being responsible and trustworthy.²²⁹

Although Madden believes that the Roman and American republics were unwilling to go to war unless this was necessary to defend either themselves or their allies, he claims that this reluctance to engage in hostilities did not extend to their relationship with ‘non-civilised peoples’ – providing the example of Spanish and Gallic tribes in the ancient world and the American Indians in the more recent past. According to the author, these were ‘primitive societies, which both states considered to be a hindrance to be assimilated, moved, or destroyed.’²³⁰ Later on, Madden states that both republics conquered these tribal areas because they saw them ‘as an opportunity for colonization and exploitation.’²³¹

²²⁴ Madden 2008, 37.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 104-105.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, 200-203.

²²⁷ *ibid.*, 222-224.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, 227.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 1-8.

²³⁰ *ibid.*, 64.

²³¹ *ibid.*, 110.

National character and structure of government

Madden states that, because both republics ‘had their roots in colonialism’ and rebelled against their respective kings whose rule was seen as tyrannical, both the Roman people and their American counterparts distrust concentrated power.²³² In addition, Madden claims that – instead of being ruled by kings or other men – the Romans, like present-day Americans, wanted to be ruled by laws and therefore made sure that ‘no one, no matter how wealthy or privileged, was above the law.’²³³ The author also repeatedly stresses that both societies made sure that power was not concentrated in one person or one institution, instead, it was divided over a number of different magistrates and institutions (in this context, Madden notes that the American political system was inspired by that of the Roman Republic).²³⁴

According to Madden, ‘isolationism [was] woven deeply into both societies’ until the outside world provoked them into a more active foreign policy.²³⁵ He asserts that the core of both societies was formed by the people who lived on self-reliant family farms. The author states that these were people who valued tradition and lived accordingly. Nevertheless, he claims that both peoples were also tolerant, for example when it came to religion, which they both considered a private affair that was primarily practised at home. Unsurprisingly, Madden follows many others before him in likening Cincinnatus to George Washington, who are both often portrayed as patriotic farmers who saved their country in a time of crisis and, while doing so, longed to return to their lives as ‘simple’ farmers.²³⁶

Elder cultures

Madden observes that both the Roman and the American republic were heavily influenced by what he calls the ‘elder cultures’ of their respective worlds – explaining that for Rome this was Greek culture, and for America this was European culture. The author argues that Rome’s relationship with the Greeks was similar to that of America with Europe: both republics deeply admire aspects of their respective ‘elder cultures’ and tried to secure their peace and liberty on several occasions, but both were often ‘repaid with insults, accusations, and derision.’²³⁷ Consequently, Madden concludes that: ‘Under the protection of their devoted child, both Greece and Europe entered their old age, becoming decrepit, angry, barren, and confused.’²³⁸

Nevertheless, Madden rather surprisingly interprets frequently expressed anti-Roman and anti-American sentiments – in ancient Greece and modern Europe respectively – as a sign of trust in both powers. This is because the author believes that, like the Roman Republic, the US can easily crush any state that frequently criticises it. Madden asserts that critics of both powers were aware of this but still criticised both republics because they knew this would be tolerated since they had absolute faith that both states would use their power responsibly. Thus, Madden argues that the

²³² Madden 2008, 13, 24-26.

²³³ *ibid.*, 29.

²³⁴ *ibid.*, 29-35, 169.

²³⁵ *ibid.*, 9.

²³⁶ *ibid.*, 38-62.

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 114-115, 129.

²³⁸ *ibid.*, 139.

expression of anti-Roman and anti-American criticisms should be interpreted as statements of trust in both respective republics.²³⁹

Despite his criticism of the supposedly ‘ungrateful’ attitude of both ancient Greeks and modern Europeans towards their ‘cultural children’, Madden notes that the peoples closest to the ancient Romans and modern Americans were (and, in the American case, are) far less critical. With regard to British attitudes toward the US for example, he argues that the ‘special relationship’ between both states has made Britons more appreciative of America’s rôle in the world. Madden feels that the British identify with modern Americans because of the ‘common bounds of history, language, and culture’. The author argues that the relationship between the Etruscans and Rome was shaped by similar feelings of familiarity.²⁴⁰

Religious terrorism

Madden argues that like America, Rome also fought a war on terror – against radical Jews. He is of the opinion that the causes for both ancient and modern terrorism are exclusively religious and not due to economic, social, or political circumstances. According to Madden, the US can win its war against radical Islamist terrorism by forcing Muslims to modernise their faith. He claims that the Romans did the same with ancient Judaism – forcing Jews to give up the idea of ‘a Jewish state, a high priest, or a king of the Jews.’²⁴¹ Madden asserts that in both cases the faithful were forced to ‘come to terms with a world not of their making.’²⁴² In short, he believes that the Americans should work towards the creation of a secular world in which religion has become a solely private matter – as, according to the author, the Romans did in the distant past.

Differences

Although Madden mainly sees similarities between both republics, he does mention a few differences. He mentions, for example, that Americans are less superstitious than the Romans who believed in oracles and omens. He also points out that the Romans had no scientific or industrial revolutions.²⁴³ In addition, Madden detects one ‘inherent flaw’ in the political system of the Roman Republic – the fact that Roman senators could wield both political and military power. According to him this was the single most important reason for the eventual fall of the Roman Republic. Madden argues that the American republic is safe from the dangers faced by its distant Roman precursor, because the powers of its magistrates, and first and foremost its president, are limited by law.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Madden 2008, 142-143.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 155.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, 280-288, particularly 282.

²⁴² *ibid.*, 287.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, 20.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 293-295.

Imperial decline?

Madden states that ‘the stronger and more secure the Empire of Trust becomes, the larger the market for prophecies of its destruction.’²⁴⁵ Thus, he explains the appearance of writings: (1) by eminent Romans about moral decline that were written well before the fall of the Western Roman Empire (and even longer before the fall of its eastern half); and (2) by modern authors about the decline of American power.²⁴⁶ The author believes these writings are the symptoms of both states’ success, since they can be seen as ‘a response to a human need for adversity and challenge in an age in which those had been all but abolished.’²⁴⁷

Although Madden does believe that America will eventually – like all other empires – fall, he is confident that America still has a long future too look forward too, stating that: ‘America is a young country and an even younger empire. Driven by the same internal and external dynamics as the youthful Rome, the United States is building an Empire of Trust along the same lines.’²⁴⁸

Chua’s *Day of Empire*

Chua, daughter of Chinese parents who both grew up in the Philippines, states that ‘[f]irst and foremost, this book is a tribute to America’s tolerance, which, for all its imperfection, drew my parents to this country and allowed my family to flourish, to change on our own terms, and to become Americans.’ She goes on to state that the book is not just about paying tribute, for it contains a warning for Americans as well – ‘today, more than ever before, we are in danger of losing our way.’²⁴⁹

Hyperpowers and empires

Chua’s book is about hyperpowers, she defines these as states that ‘achieved dominance in the world.’²⁵⁰ According to Chua, Rome was such a hyperpower. She recognises that Rome had ‘virtually no contact’ with, and little knowledge about, that other great ancient empire – Han dynasty China - and admits that this might lead people to conclude that Rome was only dominant in the world it knew and inhabited.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, Chua contends that Rome did not just dominate its world but also the world because she believes that second century Rome was militarily and economically superior to any of its contemporaries – including Han China, even though both empires never confronted each other directly.²⁵² Considering her non-Western background, it is somewhat surprising that Chua makes such a claim. Since the Roman Empire and Han dynasty China never confronted each other, there really is no evidence for the claim that Rome would have won such a confrontation. It would therefore, seem that Chua’s claim is made

²⁴⁵ Madden 2008, 234.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 243-250.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 234.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 297.

²⁴⁹ Chua 2007, xvii.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, xxii.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, xxi.

²⁵² *ibid.*, xxii.

from a very Western perspective – it echoes the belief in the superiority of the west that dominated the colonial era. Bearing in mind the fact that Chua was born and raised in the US, however, explains her Western point of view. According to Chua, the US are also a hyperpower, so in this respect she believes the US to be similar to Rome. She also mentions, however, that – unlike all previous hyperpowers – America was ‘the world’s first hyperpower that was not an empire, the first hyperpower with no militaristic imperial designs.’²⁵³ This would imply that the US differs from Rome since the latter clearly was a militaristic empire. Chua states, however, that 9/11 ‘changed everything’ and made American foreign policy much more aggressive. The author asserts that America’s aim to maintain its ‘unipolar military superiority’ and its right to ‘act preemptively’ has given rise to the idea of an American empire that aggressively uses its military ‘with or without international approval, to effect regime change and nation building’.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Chua arrives at the conclusion that the US are not like Rome because ‘the United States does not try or want to make foreign populations its subjects – and certainly not its citizens.’²⁵⁵ In addition, she asserts that the US is: (1) the first ‘mature, universal-suffrage democracy to become a hyperpower’; (2) ‘the first hyperpower to inhabit a world where human rights and the right of all nations to self-determination are almost universally recognized’; and (3) ‘the first hyperpower to confront the threat of global terrorist networks potentially wielding weapons of mass destruction.’²⁵⁶

Tolerance as a necessary condition for the rise of hyperpowers

Chua asserts that all states that have succeeded in becoming hyperpowers were ‘extraordinarily pluralistic’ by the standards of their respective times.²⁵⁷ She defines this tolerance as relative tolerance, arguing that ‘what matters most is not whether a society is tolerant according to some absolute, timeless standard, but whether it is more tolerant than its competitors.’²⁵⁸ According to Chua, this sort of tolerance enables a society to grow more powerful than its rivals because it attracts the ‘world’s best and brightest, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or background.’²⁵⁹ She adds that it does not really matter whether or not the existence of relative tolerance is motivated by a genuine desire to make different kinds of people feel welcome in society. Chua believes that even if it only exists for instrumental or strategic reasons it will still attract a wide range of talented people when they are offered a place to live, work, and prosper.²⁶⁰

Similarities between Rome and the US

As mentioned above, Chua believes that, in the end, the Roman Empire and the US have little in common. In spite of this, Chua does point out a number of similarities between Rome and

²⁵³ Chua 2007, xxvii.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, xxvii-xxviii.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, xxxi.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, xxvi.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, xxi.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, xxiv.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, xxiii.

²⁶⁰ *idem.*

America. Chua asserts, for example, that Rome offered a ‘cultural package that was enormously appealing to far-flung, vastly different peoples.’ She argues that the US, similarly, exports a cultural package to peoples all over the world.²⁶¹ Furthermore, she thinks that Rome’s economy policies were somewhat similar to those that are exercised by the US government, stating that: ‘Rome’s High Empire was a pre-modern model of economic globalization, free trade, and open markets that would make a Chicago economist proud.’²⁶² In addition, Chua uses modern terms when she argues that Roman subjects enjoyed unprecedented levels of ‘freedom of movement’ and ‘social mobility’.²⁶³ Although she does not draw an explicit parallel with the US at this point, it is implied that the Roman level of social mobility and freedom of movement is only matched by the US today.

Differences between Rome and the US

Chua contends that the ancient Romans had an advantage over modern Americans since the former actively tried to turn conquered peoples into Romans and could even give them citizenship. The author notes that America does not aspire to do so.²⁶⁴ Although she thinks that Rome was tolerant, Chua believes that its aim was never cultural diversity (as she believes to be the case in the US), but to assimilate conquered peoples. She states that ‘Rome was tolerant in the sense that any group willing to adopt Roman customs, manners, and ethos could be fully incorporated into the empire, regardless of ethnic origins.’ Thus, Chua believes that the Roman state had set itself the explicit aim of civilising its provincial populations.²⁶⁵ Chua states that people who are of the opinion that America is, or should become, an empire fail to acknowledge a fundamental difference between the US and Rome: the absence of any policy aimed at ‘Americanizing’ other peoples. While the Romans succeeded in making Romans out of subject peoples (which made them identify with the interest of Rome), Chua states that the US have no intention of turning people of other nationalities into Americans.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Chua believes that the US can also reward foreigners who make valuable contributions to America’s economic power by giving them ‘prestigious and lucrative positions in its corporations’ – thus in many cases securing their future loyalty.²⁶⁷

Chua also claims that ancient empires such as Rome were better able to assimilate different peoples because the polytheistic religions of the ancient world were much more tolerant than the monotheistic religions that dominate the religious landscape today.²⁶⁸ She notes that when the Roman authorities were confronted with monotheistic religions, they frequently struggled with how to deal with their religiously intolerant followers.²⁶⁹ Although she distances herself from Gibbon’s negative view on the consequences of the rise of Christianity in late antiquity, Chua also

²⁶¹ Chua 2007, xxx.

²⁶² *ibid.*, 39.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, 40.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, xxx-xxxi.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 47.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 330-331.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 340.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, xxxii.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 50-52.

believes that Rome's fall was to a large extent due to the influence of Christianity – stating that 'Rome's official embrace of Christianity introduced into imperial policy a virulent strain of intolerance that undermined those strategies of assimilation and incorporation that had so successfully held together the empire's diverse populations.'²⁷⁰ With regard to racism, Chua also spots a difference between ancient Rome and America. She notes that, while racial stereotypes were omnipresent in Roman society, there is 'little evidence that the Romans saw light skin as superior to dark skin, or vice versa.'²⁷¹ She notes that this is very much the case in the US, where racial discrimination based on skin colour has a long history.²⁷²

As mentioned above, Chua thinks that there are some similarities between the economic system of ancient Rome and that of the US. Later on in the book, however, she contends that Rome's economic power was inextricably linked to its ability to conquer other peoples in order to rob them of their wealth – mentioning the 'millions of pounds of silver and gold' that Rome gained by conquering Dacia as an example.²⁷³ Chua then argues that, conversely, America's economic power is built on a dominance it has achieved 'not through conquest but commerce.'²⁷⁴

4.2 The authors' motives, methodology, and their use of the available sources

Above, I have analysed the themes covered by the authors of the three works of imperial comparison. Below, I will provide answers to the sub questions posed in the introduction with regard to each book and its author.

At what period in the history of the Roman Empire is the comparison aimed, why at this period, and how does this affect the comparison?

Murphy switches freely between different periods of Rome's history and often draws parallels without explicitly mentioning to which period in Rome's history he is referring. Sometimes he does focus on a particular period however, for instance when he seeks to provide a Roman analogy for the growing powers of the American presidency. In this case he naturally turns to the history of the Roman republic that, particularly during its later years, saw repeated (and sometimes successful) attempts by magistrates to extend the legal powers that were traditionally associated with their respective offices. Murphy returns to the history of the Roman Republic when he seeks to prove that there is some similarity between Roman and American imperialism, pointing out that – during much of its history – the Roman Republic relied on local elites to administer its empire. In both instances, Murphy focusses attention on Rome's republican period to create a compelling parallel. If, for instance, he would have tried to compare the increasing power of the American presidency with those held by Roman emperors, this probably would not have persuaded many people since American presidents are nowhere near as powerful (particularly with regard to the domestic sphere).

²⁷⁰ Chua 2007, 54.

²⁷¹ *ibid.*, 41.

²⁷² *ibid.*, 241.

²⁷³ *ibid.*, 322.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 325.

Madden's book is focussed on the history of the Roman Republic before 146 BC. He states that he has chosen this year because until then the Romans did not realise that they were in fact in control of an empire.²⁷⁵ This allows him to draw a comparison between the Roman Republic prior to 146 BC and the US, for he argues that Americans are similarly in denial about their nation's standing as an empire. In addition, he argues that by 146 BC, the Romans had 'managed to secure the horizon', which, according to Madden, brought an end to the expansion of their empire (one of numerous historical inaccuracies in Madden's book).²⁷⁶ This is important to his comparison between the Roman Republic and the US, since he believes that American imperial expansion will also end when it has achieved global dominance. From a historical point of view this prediction makes little sense. In the first place this is because Rome would continue to conquer new territories until well into the imperial period. Its empire would not reach its greatest extent before the second century during Trajan's reign. Secondly, it is misleading to claim that Rome ever rose to a position of global dominance. Yes, it did gain control over the greater part of the world that was known to it, but – Chua's claims to the contrary notwithstanding – it never achieved the globally dominant position of, say, the British Empire or, indeed, the US.

There is one other reason for Madden's focus on the Roman Republic. He clearly has a very positive opinion of American foreign policy and the motives that drive it, so he naturally chooses a period in Rome's history that has (generally speaking) been looked on most favourably by previous generations of ancient historians – the early history of the Roman Republic. The fact that Madden takes issue with historians who present a significantly less rose-tinted image of Roman imperialism in this period seems to be due to the fact that his sources on Roman imperialism during its republican history are rather dated.²⁷⁷ Adler has pointed out, for example, that Madden generally follows Tenney Frank's views on Roman imperialism.²⁷⁸ Madden clearly expresses his admiration for Frank's work when he calls him a 'great Roman historian'.²⁷⁹ Frank may very well have been exactly that, but by now his views on Roman imperialism have become outdated following the publication of more critical examinations of this topic. Madden seems to be oblivious to the existence of this material, although he does mention the somewhat more recent (and definitely more balanced) evaluation of imperialism during the Roman Republic by William Harris in his bibliography.²⁸⁰ Oddly enough, he does not refer to this study at all in his endnotes.²⁸¹

Chua states that she focusses on, what she calls, the 'High Empire'. By this she refers to what she describes as Rome's 'second-century golden age', a period that, according to her, spans the reigns 'of four successive emperors: Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius'.²⁸² These are four of the five rulers who are commonly known as the 'five good emperors'. Chua

²⁷⁵ Madden 2008, 165.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 196-197.

²⁷⁷ See, for example, Madden 2008, 5.

²⁷⁸ Adler 2010, 318-319; Frank 1929.

²⁷⁹ Madden 2008, 74.

²⁸⁰ Harris 1979.

²⁸¹ Adler 2010, 319.

²⁸² Chua 2007, 31.

cites both Gibbon and Mommsen as the source for the positive assessment of their reigns.²⁸³ It was, indeed, Gibbon who first described the period from Domitian's death in AD 96 to that of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180 as a golden age, an assessment that was exclusively based on ancient texts. Modern historians of ancient history have pointed out that these texts were written by a small social elite whose views tell us little about the life of the majority of the population of the Roman Empire. In addition, the reigns of the 'five good emperors' followed that of Domitian, who was very unpopular amongst Rome's senatorial elite. Thus Domitian's reign is described very negatively in texts written by members of this elite, while those of his successors – who all maintained better relations with Rome's senatorial elite – are naturally represented in very positive terms.²⁸⁴ Whether or not Chua is aware of modern historians' doubts about whether the majority of Rome's subjects fared any better under the reign of the 'five good emperors' than during that of previous emperors is unclear. What is clear, though, is that she has singled out this period in Rome's history because she believes that it best illustrates Rome's supposed tolerance to other people's beliefs and customs.²⁸⁵

On what sources is the comparison based, why on these sources, and how does this affect the comparison?

In his acknowledgements, Murphy (a journalist by profession) states that he has profited from the advice from a number of experts on Rome and other topics.²⁸⁶ Probably in part because of this, Murphy has used healthy mix of ancient Roman texts and scholarly literature as his source material. With regard to the latter category, his selection contains a fair amount of recent publications on the Roman Empire and somewhat older, but still relevant, studies. This has had a positive effect on the overall quality of his comparisons. When he compares internal problems within the US with those in the Western Roman Empire during late antiquity, for example, Murphy does not describe this period in the traditional manner as one of decline and, eventually, a dramatic fall. Instead he argues that it was a period of transformation, which is very much in line with more recent scholarship on this period.²⁸⁷ He even dismisses some of the views expressed in Ward-Perkins' recent monograph, that attempts to rehabilitate the traditional view on this period.²⁸⁸ Murphy's book also stands out with regard to the value that he attributes to ancient Roman texts. He shows himself to be aware of how very selective the information contained in these texts is, and, consequently, how little we really know about the Roman world. He is also aware that this makes any comparison between ancient Rome and the US per definition unbalanced with regard to the sources available on both respective states:

The sources, in fact, indicate very little. Rome left behind a great deal of itself, in stone and metal and writing – more than any other ancient civilisation – but it's

²⁸³ Chua 2007, 31, 43.

²⁸⁴ Boatwright *et al.* 2012, 359-360.

²⁸⁵ Chua 2007, 37-41.

²⁸⁶ Murphy 2007, 207.

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 168-171.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 191, with references; Ward-Perkins 2005.

useful to remember how modest “a great deal” can be. (...) A curiosity seeker about Rome can drill a lot of dry holes. (...) We know that Nero, famous for playing the cithara while Rome burned, in fact cared deeply about his music and entered public competitions; he would lie on his back with weights on his chest to increase his lung capacity. But we don’t know basic details about the imperial budget and government during his reign. The surviving record of Rome is not only reticent but capricious. Imagine if America were to leave behind for historians the complete text of the Starr Report but only the 1947 volume of *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*.²⁸⁹

As mentioned above, Madden’s selection of scholarly literature on Roman imperialism and the Roman Republic is rather dated. It is completely acceptable to refer to Mommsen’s history of Rome, but not, as Madden does, without placing his views in their early nineteenth-century context. Although his area of expertise is medieval history, Madden should have made more of an effort to select literature that more closely reflects recent scholarly debates about Roman imperialism. As Adler has pointed out, Madden does not need to agree with all aspects of recent, more critical, accounts of Roman imperialism, but he should at least inform his readers (the book was meant for a general audience) about such views. In addition, Madden takes the views on Roman imperialism that are expressed in ancient Roman texts entirely at face value.²⁹⁰ He does not address the pro-Roman bias in these sources, which, in turn, makes the views on Roman imperialism that are expressed in Madden’s book very biased. To provide just one example, with regard to Roman motives to go to war Madden states:

Pick up any history of the Roman Republic and there is one phrase that you will find over and over again: “They appealed to Rome for aid.” Those six words explain the central dynamic by which the Romans expanded. A people somewhere would get into trouble. They would appeal to Rome for aid. The Romans would agree, gaining a new ally, but also a new war in the bargain.²⁹¹

Simplistic and uncritical descriptions like this give readers the impression that the Roman territorial expansion was motivated solely by altruistic motives: the wish to protect their allies from acts of aggression by other peoples. The possibility that ambitious Romans, who were eager to secure a bright political future, rejoiced at such opportunities to go to war for selfish motives is completely ignored by Madden. In addition, he seems to be unaware of the fact that these ‘requests for help’ may, at least in some cases, very well have been engineered by warmongering Romans looking for an excuse to go to war.²⁹² There are two possibilities here: either Madden is not aware of the bias in ancient Roman texts, which would reflect badly on his competence as a scholar, or he chose to omit such nuances because that suited his desire to provide an image of

²⁸⁹ Murphy 2007, 186-187.

²⁹⁰ Adler 2010, 319.

²⁹¹ Madden 2008, 78.

²⁹² Much has been written on this topic, see, for example, Harris 1979; North 1981; Rich 1993.

Roman imperialism that is every bit as positive as his description of US foreign policy, which would be an even more serious flaw. Either way, Madden's uncritical selection and use of source material has done wonders for his argument that we should see both the Roman Republic and the US as admirable 'Empires of Trust'. From a scholarly perspective though, it makes his work of dubious value.

Chua mainly relies on relatively recent scholarly literature on the Roman empire, Roman imperialism, the Roman economy, etc. Although she does quote several ancient authors she does not do so directly, instead, she has taken these quotes from secondary literature. She acknowledges this in the endnotes, but, since she has not included a single ancient text in her bibliography, the curious reader has to find out for himself where a specific quote originally came from and in what context it should be placed. Some of the secondary literature that is referred to by Chua is rather dated. As mentioned above, she frequently cites both Gibbon and Mommsen. In addition, she also refers to the publication by the French political philosopher Montesquieu (1689-1755). Sometimes she is critical of their findings (particularly about Gibbon's remarks about Christianity), but at other times she takes them at face value. When she discusses the adverse effects of Christian intolerance, for instance, she includes a quote from Montesquieu's 1734 book titled *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* (Considerations on the causes of the greatness of the Romans and their decline) to both sum up and reinforce her argument.²⁹³ Because the views that are expressed in these dated studies of Rome are often used by Chua to underpin her thesis – that the presence of relative tolerance allows states to reach a position of global dominance and that, in turn, the disappearance of this tolerance causes states to lose their dominant position – they are likely to make her argument more convincing to the general public. To an academic public, however, they will probably weaken Chua's argument since many of the views expressed by Montesquieu, Gibbon, and Mommsen have become outdated due to new readings of ancient texts and the growing importance of archaeological material.²⁹⁴

In what themes is the author that has made the comparison interested, why is he interested in these themes (do they, for instance reflect contemporary imperial concerns), and how do they affect the comparison?

Many of the themes that are covered in Murphy's book touch upon the topic of decline. He admits as much in the epilogue of his book where he argues that it is 'the brutal reminder of impermanence' that invites us to compare our own world with that of the Romans.²⁹⁵ With regard to the above-mentioned themes 'The decline of republics', 'Corruption', 'The military', and 'The culture of the imperial capital', for instance, Murphy's aim has clearly been to use the Roman analogy as a warning for contemporary developments that he considers damaging to America. He

²⁹³ Chua 2007, 55.

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Vasunia 2015 on how events during Gibbon's lifetime influenced his image of the Roman Empire, and Hicks 2012 on how Gibbon deliberately misrepresented the contents of ancient texts. On the impact of archaeology on the study of ancient history see Sauer 2004.

²⁹⁵ Murphy 2007, 195.

warns, for example, against the use of private contractors in the US military – arguing that they, like large groups of incomers that were ‘incorporated’ into the Roman army, are less effective and more likely to be disloyal. With regard to Rome and Washington, Murphy argues that they elites in both capitals lost touch with the real world, leading to serious errors.

With regard to the existence of parallels between the motives about Roman and American imperialism Murphy is a bit unclear. He seems to struggle with this himself. As mentioned earlier, he, at one point, remarks that American presidents, unlike Roman leaders, do not start wars to obtain personal glory, yet later he mentions that the quest for glory is definitely part of American politics, although it often comes disguised in terms such as ‘legacy’.

As mentioned above, Madden’s focus on comparisons between the nature of Roman and American imperialism seems to be inspired by a desire to praise and justify contemporary American foreign policy. According to Madden, both empires are unique in world history in that they are the only ‘Empires of Trust’ (i.e. a benign form of imperialism that is driven by a desire for peace and security). In similar fashion, his discussion of ‘elder cultures’ seems to be inspired by a desire to assure his fellow Americans that the presence of anti-American sentiments in parts of the world (particularly in Europe) do not indicate a lack of trust in the US. As we have seen, the author rather inventively interprets these sentiments as symptoms of precisely the opposite. Even Madden however is not successful in hiding the negative aspects of imperialism. He admits, for example, that both the Roman Republic and the US subjugated societies they saw as ‘primitive’ because they were seen as fitting targets for colonisation and exploitation. Disconcertingly, Madden does not reflect on the implications of these observations for his argument that ‘Empires of Trust’ are so very different from ‘Empires of Conquest’. The implicit message is that the brutal subjugation and annihilation of these ‘primitive’ peoples is just a footnote compared to other more positive aspects of Roman and American imperialism.

Chua’s book is all about tolerance: about how the presence of relative tolerance enables a state to achieve world dominance, and about how the absence of tolerance will inevitably make achieving or maintaining world dominance impossible. Chua is interested in this theme because she is worried about the future of America. She disapproves of the aggressive foreign policy of the Bush Jr. administration, and highlights the harmful consequences of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As possibly its most harmful effect, she mentions the rise of the belief that America had an imperial destiny to fulfil and that it should embrace this destiny by making aggressive use of its military apparatus to eliminate possible threats and achieve regime change in non-democracies by means of the imposition of ‘American-style institutions.’²⁹⁶ According to Chua, all those who are in favour of American empire have failed to grasp the basic historical fact that, whereas previously world dominant powers – such as Rome – secured their dominance through conquest, modern hyperpowers do so through commerce. In addition, Chua warns her readers against the rise of an America that is xenophobic and, therefore, will no longer be able to attract the world’s best and brightest to contribute to its economy.²⁹⁷ Ultimately, she believes that all hyperpowers lost

²⁹⁶ Chua 2007, 320-321, 335.

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 321, 335-340.

their position of global dominance due to racism and xenophobia, arguing that for the Western Roman Empire it was a new form of religious intolerance introduced by Christianity that – combined with a rise in ethnic intolerance – finally proved too much for the empire’s institutions.²⁹⁸ She even dismisses the thousand-year history of the Byzantine Empire because it was ‘ferverently intolerant’ and, therefore, ‘never approached the grandeur of ancient Rome.’²⁹⁹

Why does the author make this comparison, how might the author’s background have influenced his/her conclusions, and how does the purpose of the comparison influence its outcome?

Murphy’s comparison between the US and Rome is in part inspired by a desire to provide his own perspective on the similarities and differences between the two empires. He points out that many others have written about this topic before him and he provides his readers with an overview of their views. Murphy explains that he wishes to draw attention to a number of themes that have not received much attention in previous publications on this topic. In addition, he argues that ‘the debate over Rome’s ultimate fate holds a key to thinking about our own.’³⁰⁰ Finally, the book provides Murphy with a platform to criticise the conduct of and decisions made by the Bush Jr. administration.³⁰¹ Murphy’s focus on – what he perceives as – the harmful effects of the Bush Jr. administration on the health of the American republic directs his comparisons with Rome toward its later ‘histories’: that of the problems faced by the late Roman Republic and that of the problems faced by the Roman Empire in late antiquity. In an interview with a reporter from *The Atlantic* (the magazine Murphy used to work for), Murphy denies that his book is written as ‘an anti-Bush tract.’ This is because the author believes that many of the developments that he considers harmful to the US ‘pre-date Bush, even if they deepened during his administration.’ Nevertheless, Murphy explains that he was not surprised by the fact that his book was not received well by reviewers on the right of America’s political spectrum, stating that his ‘sympathies certainly don’t lie with the current administration or with the way America is going.’³⁰²

Madden claims that the tragic events of 9/11 incited him to leave the ‘ivory tower’ and engage in public debates about historical topics. The debate about the degree of similarity between Rome and America, which according to Madden grew after the American invasion of Iraq was one of those. He notes that many of these debates lost their focus due to political motives on the part of participants. With his book, Madden claims to offer a non-partisan approach to the topic.³⁰³ As mentioned above, the end result is rather different. I would argue that the book is actually written to defend America’s aggressive post-9/11 foreign policy. This is not a problem, many others have done this before him. What is problematic is the fact that he promises his readers one thing and then delivers something different. The outcome of Madden’s comparison is heavily influenced by

²⁹⁸ Chua 2007, 54-58.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 57.

³⁰⁰ Murphy 2007, 6-12.

³⁰¹ For passages that explicitly mention (and criticise) the Bush Jr. administration, see Murphy 2007, 42-43, 128.

³⁰² Hahn 2007.

³⁰³ Madden 2008, ix-xiv.

his politically motivated interpretation of both US and Roman imperialism. This significantly reduces the value of such a comparison, since, in an ideal world, curiosity about the outcome of the comparison itself should be the driving force behind comparative history. Of course it is impossible for scholars to be completely objective, for, in the end, there is no such thing as ‘dispassionate scholarship’. The fact, however, that it is relatively easy to spot Madden’s deeply conservative political views in his book disqualifies it from being a valuable addition to the scholarly debate on this topic. Nevertheless, analysed from the point of view of how contemporary concerns can influence people’s interpretation of (ancient) history, it is still a very interesting book.

As Chua explains in the preface to her book, her book is meant as a tribute to America’s tolerance. She describes her Chinese father as ‘the quintessential American’ because he was allowed to build a new future for himself and his family in America through hard work. Chua is not blind to the fact that not all immigrants have received a warm welcome in the US, but asserts that legal reforms introduced during the late 1960s did much to provide immigrants with more opportunities. At the end of her preface and in the concluding chapter she warns that America is in danger of losing the ability to attract foreign talent. Chua comes to this conclusion because she identifies two troubling developments. The first of those is the Bush Jr. administration’s tendency to act unilaterally when international support for its foreign policy was lacking. Chua argues that this has hurt America’s status in the world because it gave people the impression that the US is only interested in securing its own aims without giving serious thought to the wider consequences of its actions. The second development that worries Chua is the growing popular resentment against immigrants, which, she argues, might lead to a ‘xenophobic backlash.’³⁰⁴ The purpose of her comparison with the second-century Roman Empire and with other empires (both ancient and more recent) is to prove to her readers that immigration and the tolerance that enables it are not bad things, but that, instead, they are necessary prerequisites for a state that aspires to become (or remain) world dominant.

³⁰⁴ Chua 2007, xiii-xiv, xvii, 332-333, 336-337.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to find out how the selected early-twentieth century British works of imperial comparison compare to those drawn by three American intellectuals during the final years of the Bush Jr. administration. What unites all of these works of imperial comparison is that they were all written following a period of aggressive foreign policy – that frequently involved military action – on the part of the authors' respective countries. Just as the authors of the analysed comparisons have argued that there are both differences and similarities between the Roman Empire and the 'empires' of their respective nations, so it will be argued here that there are both differences and similarities between their comparisons. This should not surprise us, for almost a hundred years had passed when the three American authors followed in the footsteps of their English 'predecessors' and put their thoughts on the merits of the Roman analogy to paper. The world has changed much during those years, for whereas a number of European countries (Britain in particular, of course) still dominated the world when the three Englishmen wrote their books, two world wars and the Cold War have since propelled the United States to a position of global dominance. In addition, it is claimed that we now live in a postcolonial era, which means that one might reasonably expect that the writings of the three American authors have been influenced by new, postcolonial, perspectives. This is particularly relevant here as the US is not an empire in the traditional sense of the word (e.g. with extensive overseas possessions that are directly administered by representatives of the US government).

Something that has not changed since the three British authors penned down their thoughts on the similarities and differences between their empire and that of Rome, however, is the obsession with the Roman Empire. The three American authors still turn to Rome as a point of reference to determine America's rôle in the world. As mentioned in the introduction, this is because of the widespread belief that there is a linear connection between Western culture and society and that of the Roman Empire – a belief that has a long history in European discourses about empire and the progress of civilisation. This belief is, arguably, not the only legacy from the colonial era that has helped shape the early twenty-first century American works of imperial comparison that have been analysed here, for America's colonial past may have prevented their authors from comparing the US with an imperial power that dominated the world much more recently. I am, of course, referring to the British Empire. Since the gap in time and technological developments that separates the British Empire from the US is much smaller than that between the Roman Empire and the US, a comparison with the former would have been the most obvious choice. America's own history as a former colony of Britain makes such a comparison unlikely, however, since America's founding myth asserts that the American Revolutionary War was fought to create a country that was free of imperial rule. Using the British Empire as a point of reference is therefore highly problematic, since it would imply a degree of similarity between the US and its former colonial ruler.

The biggest difference between the early twentieth-century British imperial comparisons and the early twenty-first century American imperial comparisons is that the former all focus on

British imperial policy in India, while the latter are not just focussed on US foreign policy (although its military intervention in Iraq is frequently foregrounded) but also on US domestic politics. There are a number of reasons for this: (1) a difference in background between the three British authors and their American counterparts, (2) the three British authors made their comparisons for reasons that differ from those of the American authors, and, consequently, (3) the British works of imperial comparison serve a different purpose than their American equivalents. I will clarify these differences below.

The authors of the three British works of imperial comparison can all be described as ‘political insiders’. With this, I mean that they had all served the British government in some official capacity. This means that they had all been responsible for the development of British imperial policy or were involved in its execution. Thus, they all had a personal interest in the maintenance of Britain’s empire. As has been mentioned above, Vasunia has pointed out that the comparisons between Rome and Britain were the result of early twentieth-century concerns about some of the less successful and morally questionable elements of British imperial policy – in particular, but not exclusively, with regard to India. Consequently, it can be said that the reason for their creation was a desire to take away some of these anxieties. The purpose of the comparisons, then, was to justify British imperial policy. Sometimes the authors sought to achieve this by equating parts of it with elements of Roman imperial rule that were deemed worthy of emulation. At other times the authors achieved their goal by favourably comparing elements of British colonial rule to elements of that of their Roman ‘predecessor’ that were deemed less successful or morally inferior. Regardless of which strategy was used, the comparisons between British imperial policy and that of its distant Roman ‘antecedent’ were meant as statements of support for the former. The fact that these extensive comparisons between Britain and Rome were all made by key establishment figures speaks volumes about who possessed the authority that was necessary to make such observations in early twentieth-century England.

Whereas the above-mentioned British authors can all be described as political insiders, their early twenty-first century American counterparts are all ‘political outsiders’. While they all have strong opinions on the policies of successive American governments, they have never been in a position that allowed them to directly influence US government policy. The fact that they do not have a direct stake in the creation and execution of US government policy is not without its advantages, as it allows them to freely criticise government policy (a freedom that the three British authors arguably did not possess). This is exactly what both Chua and Murphy do; they use the Roman analogy to criticise post-9/11 American politics (both at home and abroad) and Murphy also uses it to criticise changes in American public opinion and society. The reason why they have drawn their comparisons with Rome, then, is to express their concern about contemporary political and social developments. The purpose of their imperial comparisons is twofold: in part they should be seen as an attempt to influence US government policy, but – since both Chua and Murphy probably realise that it is unlikely that their books will have any real political influence – their writings should primarily be seen as attempts to influence American public opinion. Madden’s use of Roman analogies serves a similar purpose, with the difference

that they result from a desire to support the aggressive post-9/11 foreign policy of the Bush Jr. administration.

The fact that the American comparisons do not just involve elements of US foreign policy, but are also used to make statements about elements of the government's domestic policy is due to two reasons. The first of these is that Roman history (particularly that of the Roman Republic) has had a special relevance to Americans ever since their rebellion against the British authorities. In spite of the predominantly negative image of imperial Rome, this means that analogies with the Roman Empire are far less problematic in the context of contemporary American politics than they were in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Britain. In addition, Chua and Murphy feel free to compare aspects of contemporary American politics with imperial Rome when they seek to criticise certain policies of the US government – which is a logical choice because of the generally negative image of imperial Rome (note that Madden, who seeks to praise contemporary American policies, steers clear of any analogies with imperial Rome). The early twentieth-century English authors did not have this option since it was their aim to support and not criticise British foreign policy. Therefore they limited their comparison between the British and Roman empires to British imperial policy in India, which offered a safe context for comparisons that featured the controversial topic of 'imperialism'.

Another notable difference between the two groups of imperial comparisons is that the three early twentieth-century British comparisons are focussed on broadly the same themes. This was probably the result of the similar backgrounds of their authors, who had all been government officials. Their choice of themes arguably reflects the topics that were often discussed by the England's social and political elite. The three works of imperial comparison written by American authors during the Bush administration, by contrast, focus on a wide variety of themes – a fact that reflects the diverse backgrounds of their authors. The book of one of these authors in particular stands out because it sagaciously points the speculative nature of any comparison with imperial Rome. This is Murphy's book, for he comes to a very nuanced judgment on the feasibility of using the Roman analogy to make informed judgements about contemporary (political) developments. He explains to his readers that, for all the scholarly literature on Rome, we actually know very little about the Roman world due to the absence of (reliable) sources on many aspects of life in the Roman period, which makes it very difficult to say anything with certainty. Put differently, Murphy realises that detailed comparisons between contemporary phenomena and their Roman 'counterparts' are necessarily very speculative in nature. None of the other authors whose work is analysed in this thesis has shown him or herself to be aware of this fact.

Morley's fear that recent comparisons between Rome and the US reflect outdated positive attitudes to imperialism that are undesirable from a postcolonial point of view seems to be largely unfounded. Although Chua and Murphy see some similarities between Roman imperialism and American foreign policy, they both repeatedly state that America is not an empire in the traditional sense of the world and thus differs from Rome in fundamental ways. Only Madden's book closely resembles the imperial ideology that was present in the early twentieth-century

British works of imperial comparison. He considers the imperialism of both the Roman Republic and the US to be a good thing, since he believes that it has always been exclusively motivated by a desire to guarantee peace and security. Consequently, he argues that any wars that were fought by both powers were defensive in nature, arguing that both states have often received (and answered) requests for military aid from their allies. This echoes the beliefs of men such as Cromer and Bryce, who thought that both Roman and British imperialism was defensive in nature. The colonial mindset of Madden is further demonstrated by the way in which he deals with the negative aspects of imperialism. For, while he mentions that – at certain points in their respective histories – both the Roman Republic and the US brutally subjugated or annihilated peoples they perceived as primitive and inferior, he refuses to reflect on the implications of these actions on his naively optimistic view of Roman and American imperialism.

To conclude, I would like draw attention to an observation made in the introduction about the similar historical circumstances that preceded the publication of all six works of imperial comparison. The comparisons made in the context of British imperialism were all written following a period of rapid imperial expansion that has been described as the ‘Age of Empire’. Similarly, the comparisons made in the context of the post-9/11 foreign policy of the Bush administration were all written following a period of extensive US military operations in the Middle East. These similarities should not be ignored, for they illustrate the value that people accord to historical precedents (and the lessons that might be learned from them) in political debates that inevitably follow periods of major international conflict. The military and cultural history of Rome, it would seem, exerts a special kind of authority in such debates. Perhaps this is because, as Morley has suggested, Roman imperialism – in both its military and cultural dimension – has become the archetypal form of ‘benign imperialism’ with which all other forms of imperialism can be compared to measure their effectiveness and success. Regardless, the lure of the Roman analogy demonstrates the enduring centrality of Rome to western images of world dominance. At the same time, however, it should be noted that – as mentioned in the introduction – many other concepts have influenced contemporary debates about American ‘empire’. Thus, more research on how these ideas influence not just discussions on contemporary US foreign policy but, arguably, also the contemporary reception of Roman imperialism in the US would be welcome. Such research is likely to provide valuable insights into how processes like imperialism and colonialism have shaped and, perhaps, continue to shape the world we live in.

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