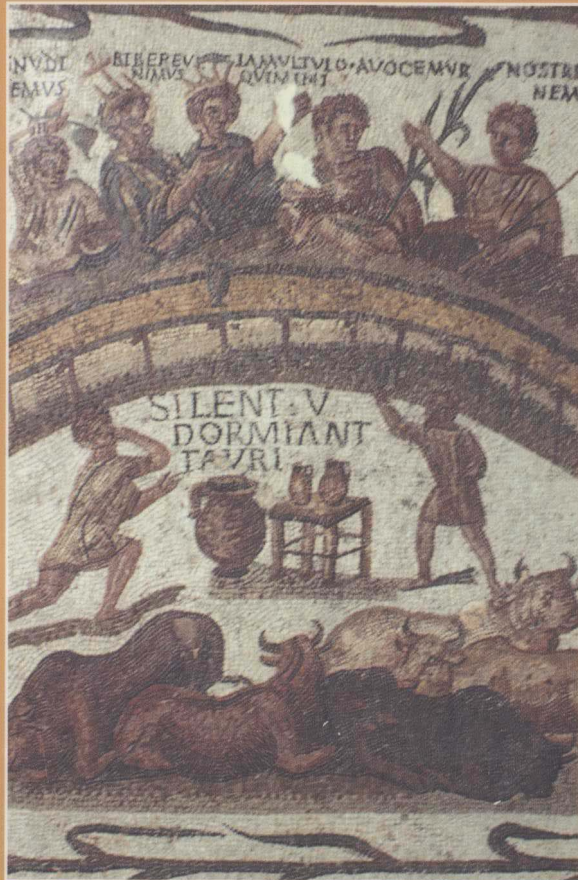


THE ROMAN EMPIRE



SECOND EDITION

COLIN WELLS

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Preface to the Second Edition

'THE INVITATION to write this book on the Roman Empire from 44 BC to AD 235 came just as I finished a term as Visiting Professor at the University of California at Berkeley, where I had been lecturing to undergraduates on this period. My lecture notes were in order, I was stimulated by the questions and discussions that the course had evoked, and still drunk on the Berkeley climate in spring. I thought that writing the book would be easy.'

So began the Preface to the First Edition, written in January 1984 in a memorable Ottawa blizzard, and continuing: 'The book has not been easy. The more I thought I knew about a subject, the harder it was to write about it. I could have filled half the book with Augustus alone. It was not easy to do without footnotes. The Fontana History of the Ancient World is aimed at the general reader, but the professional scholar, writing in a field which has seen so much scholarly activity, feels his colleagues looking over his shoulder, and is obsessed with the need to justify himself, to reassure them that he realizes when he is oversimplifying, or when he has passed over in silence a topic generally deemed to be fascinatingly controversial, which generally means hopelessly obscure.'

It was eight years later, on a windy, sunny January day in South Texas, like early April in England, that I sent off the material for this new edition, which permitted me to correct a number of the more egregious errors that disfigured the first edition. Some were due to faulty typing and proofreading, for instance the appearance of that strange hybrid family, the Corneli Pisones. So too the legions lost with Varus were listed, once as the 17th, 18th, and 19th, and once with the 20th implausibly replacing the 17th: I am surprised that I did not get a letter from the ghost of some former

centurion of the 20th Valeria Victrix, pointing out its distinguished record many years later in Britain and elsewhere. There were points where I omitted to mention a new theory, as on Cogidubnus's title, because I was simply not convinced, and I have now tried to be explicit. Other errors, alas, came from the same defect that caused Dr Johnson to define 'pastern' as 'the knee of a horse': 'Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance.'

One or two discussions have been shortened, for instance that on the date of 'Murena's conspiracy', and I have altered or added material where reviewers' comments or my own reading suggested it, for instance on Augustus's social legislation, where I was influenced by Susan Treggiari's chapter for the new *Cambridge Ancient History*, which she was kind enough to let me see before publication; on Armenia and the Euphrates frontier, which I saw for the first time in 1988 under the auspices of David French and Chris Lightfoot of the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara; and on the role of religion and especially of the imperial cult, following Simon Price, *Rituals and Power* (Cambridge, 1984). The reviewers from whom I learned most were Tony Birley, John Carter, Laura Hardwick, and Barbara Levick, and I also benefited greatly from the questions and comments of Kai Brodersen, who translated and adapted the work for the German edition.

If I were rewriting the book completely, or if I could make it half as long again, I should discuss at greater length the work of Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, with due acknowledgements to Tony Barrett, Barbara Levick, and Miriam Griffin respectively, whose biographies of those emperors appeared after this book was completed, and should also try to give more space to the Flavians, even if this meant swingeing cuts in Chapters 1 and 3. I should say more about the Roman family, a subject on which at least seven major books appeared in English during 1991 alone. I should also try to give Asia Minor, Syria, and the Euphrates frontier more prominence. As it is, some may feel that Britain gets more than its due; if so, they are right, but the book was in the first instance aimed at a British audience. I do not however apologize for the emphasis on Africa, a province of crucial importance, on which very little detailed work is available in English.

There have been so many new books in the last eight years that the Suggestions for Further Reading have been totally revised and

updated. They are intended to present a survey of the most important scholarship of the last ten years, and as such represent an important part of this revision. The new General Index is intended not only to locate information in the text, but in some cases to supplement it, for instance by adding dates of consulship.

Conceived in 1978, that the book did not appear until 1984, that ill-omened year, was primarily due to my preoccupation with the Canadian excavations on the Theodosian Wall site in the northern part of Roman Carthage, which I directed from 1976 to 1986. They were originally planned to finish in 1980, but the fascination of the site encouraged us to continue, and we ended up with everything from a Punic cemetery, through Roman, Vandal, Byzantine and Arab phases, to a British army dump, *circa* AD 1944, overlying the remains of the Wall.

I should therefore like to reiterate my thanks to Oswyn Murray, general editor of this series, and to Helen Fraser, the Fontana editor, for their patience, encouragement and comments, and above all to Susan Treggiari, once an Ottawa colleague, now of Stanford, and to Marianne Goodfellow, a former Ottawa student and colleague at Carthage, both of whom read the entire book as it was written. As I wrote at the time, not only did I adopt almost all their suggestions, but they kept up my faith in the book and in myself when I was in danger of losing it.

To Susan Treggiari, as a result of many years' friendship and teaching together, and to Peter Brunt, formerly Camden Professor, once my tutor and subsequently a fellow Fellow of Brasenose, I owe a lifelong debt for shaping the way I think about Roman history. Professor Brunt's comments on an earlier article of mine saved me from many errors, and I must also thank him for drawing my attention to one 'egregious error' and points which I had overlooked.

Others to whom I am grateful for discussion and ideas are Shimon Applebaum, on the Jewish sources; Simon Ellis, on the transition to Late Antiquity; and David Cherry, also a former Ottawa student, on soldiers and citizenship. My wife Kate and my son Dominic read certain chapters from a non-specialist viewpoint and helped me to clarify points that were obscure. I have tried out drafts on successive Roman history classes at the University of Ottawa and at Trinity University and have benefited from their comments.

The book comes out of my teaching and is therefore dedicated to

the students who have helped to shape it. My thanks are due to them, as well as to all the persons named. The original book was actually finished in Oxford, between two visits to Carthage. I remain grateful to the staff of the Ashmolean Library for their kindness, and to the Principal and Fellows of Brasenose College, whose exemplary hospitality to a former Fellow makes my visits to Oxford so pleasant and rewarding.

The work on this new edition has been carried out almost entirely in San Antonio, Texas. I surprised myself and most of my friends by moving here in 1987 after nearly thirty years in Canada, and wish to take this opportunity to record my thanks to Trinity University, and especially to President Ronald K. Calgaard, for appointing me to the new T. Frank Murchison Chair of Classical Studies, and to Dr Calgaard and Dean William O. Walker, Jr., for unstinted support thereafter. It is also thanks to Trinity and President Calgaard, and to Mr Gilbert M. Denman, Jr, and the Ewing Halsell Foundation, that we have begun work again at Carthage on a joint Texan-Canadian project, excavating a late Roman bath-building in the same sector of the city as the 1976-86 Canadian excavations.

I find Trinity a stimulating intellectual environment. I have learned much from my excellent Trinity students, and even more from my new colleagues, amongst whom Joan Burton, John Martin, Alida Metcalf, and Carolyn Valone have most notably enlarged my horizons. Nor can I adequately express my thanks to Diana Murin, herself an archaeologist, marvellously competent as a secretary, but more a colleague than a secretary, without whose technical help I could not have finished these revisions in the time available, and who is always saving me from errors that I should otherwise make. I am particularly grateful for her help in correcting the proofs, and above all in compiling the index.

Colin Wells,
San Antonio,
May 1992

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations have been avoided as far as possible, but it seemed unnecessarily cumbersome to print in full the titles of the various collections of inscriptions and other documents that are often cited. The following abbreviations have therefore been used:

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'année épigraphique</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>EJ</i>	Ehrenberg and Jones, <i>Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius</i>
<i>FIRA</i>	<i>Fontes Iuris Romani Anteiustiniani</i> , eds., S. Riccobono and others
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGRR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes</i>
<i>ILS</i>	Dessau, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>LR</i>	Lewis and Reinhold, <i>Roman Civilization, Selected Readings</i> , 3rd ed.
<i>P.Oxy.</i>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> , eds., B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt and others
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>Select</i>	<i>Select Papyri</i> , eds., A. S. Hunt and C. G. Edgar
<i>Papyri</i>	(Loeb Classical Library)

Note also:

<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , ed., H. Temporini
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>RIB</i>	<i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> , Vol. I, eds., R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright.

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Introduction

THE HISTORIAN of the Roman Empire must always keep in mind what was happening in the central administration of the Empire and in the entourage of the emperor; but he must also try to reflect how life went on in Italy and the provinces, in the towns, in the countryside, in the army camps, and to ask how far these different worlds impinged on each other. Theodor Mommsen, greatest of all nineteenth-century historians of Rome, wrote of our period:

Seldom has the government of the world been conducted for so long a term in an orderly sequence . . . In its sphere, which those who belonged to it were not far wrong in regarding as the world, it fostered the peace and prosperity of the many nations united under its sway longer and more completely than any other leading power has ever done. It is in the agricultural towns of Africa, in the homes of vine-dressers on the Moselle, in the flourishing townships of the Lycian mountains, and on the margin of the Syrian desert that the work of the imperial period is to be sought and to be found . . . If an angel of the Lord were to strike the balance whether the domain ruled by Severus Alexander were governed with the greater intelligence and the greater humanity at that time or at the present day, whether civilisation and national prosperity generally have since that time advanced or retrograded, it is very doubtful whether the decision would prove in favour of the present.

Government, however, could only do so much. It could create the conditions of peace and order, but, as Peter Brown has pointed out:

The Roman Empire was a very big place. Its economy and its communications were of the most primitive. The great Roman roads passed through the little towns which derived most of what they ate, lived in and wore from a radius of some thirty miles. We shall never understand the life of the towns of the Greco-Roman world unless we relive, through the texts, the creeping fear of famine. However we may draw our maps of the grandiose road-system of the Roman world, each small town knew that they would have to face out alone a winter of starvation, if ever their harvest failed . . . For many months every year, the 'realities' that have been so confidently invoked in standard accounts of the development of the Roman world – armed force, commerce, fiscal control – were simply washed away. The passes filled with snow, the great flagstones of the Roman road sunk into the mud, the stores of fodder dwindled at the posting-stations . . . the Mediterranean ceased to exist; and the distance between the Emperor and his subjects trebled. (*Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine*, p. 16)

I have tried to keep the balance between the centre and the periphery and, what was harder still, between narrative and discussion. The odd-numbered chapters are meant to provide a more or less sequential account of the development of the central administration of the Empire, the achievements of successive emperors, the court, and the struggle for power at the top. They could be read as a connected narrative, omitting the intervening even-numbered chapters. These discuss the state of Italy and of the provinces at various phases of development from the Age of Augustus to that of the Severans, with Chapter 2 being devoted to the nature of the sources for this whole period and to some of the problems which they pose.

Translations of passages quoted in the text are usually my own, unless otherwise indicated. I had originally thought to ask permission to use the Penguin translations, especially of Tacitus and Suetonius, since this would make it easier for readers to look up passages quoted in their wider context, but I soon found that these two translations, though excellent in their way and highly readable, often incorporated tacitly in the English version an interpretation of the text which was not mine. On the other hand, I

found by experience that I could not improve on Betty Radice's translation of Pliny's *Letters*, while for the *Res Gestae* of Augustus I have used or adapted Brunt and Moore's translation, for the books of the New Testament *The New English Bible*, and for various inscriptions the version in Lewis and Reinhold's invaluable *Roman Civilization, Selected Readings*, 3rd edition.

Suggestions for further reading at the end of the book are mostly confined to recent works in English, unless an older work, or a work in another language, seemed the best or the only thing available on an important topic. The selection is highly personal, books which I myself have found useful or stimulating. I have not referred to specific editions of ancient authors, unless hard to find, nor to commentaries, unless of special value to the reader without Greek or Latin. For translations, there is the Penguin series, readable, cheap and easy to find. They have done more to keep the interest in the ancient world alive over the last few decades than all university classics departments put together. Authors not available in Penguin are usually in the Loeb series (Harvard University Press and Heinemann), with Greek or Latin on the left-hand page and the English translation facing, sometimes dated in style or scholarship, but quite invaluable.

Essential Roman legal and political terms are explained in the latter part of this Introduction, along with Roman currency and Roman nomenclature. Thereafter, if a Roman name is familiar in an Anglicized form, I have used that form (Mark Antony, Trajan, etc.), while supplying the full name on first meeting, except in Chapter 2, on sources, where only the name which an author is usually known by is given; there is a list of authors' full names and dates in the Further Reading section. Towns and cities appear under the ancient or modern name or both, with clarity and ease of recognition being the aim, rather than consistency. Both forms appear in the index. For rivers and other geographical features, I have tended to use the modern name alone (Thames, not Tamesis; Great St Bernard Pass, not Alpis Poenina).

The book was originally written for a British audience; this explains a certain number of insular allusions. Other readers however, North Americans for instance, will not find it hard to supply apt parallels. The French and British may indeed be the archetypal 'nineteenth-century imperialists', but this does not

mean that we should forget the implications of 'manifest destiny' or the splendidly arrogant inscription on the base of Admiral Dewey's statue in Union Square, San Francisco; the complaints of the 'London commuter in the pub' might also be heard in a New York bar; and the problems of Brixton, if less acute than those of Harlem, are not dissimilar. Admiral Byng is perhaps not a household name, but it is worth making his acquaintance: he was 'a conscientious but somewhat limited admiral', who took so long 'making certain that the dispositions he proposed to adopt in his attack on the enemy were strictly in conformity with some very long-winded and complicated instructions lately laid down by the Lords of the Admiralty', that 'in the meantime the enemy fleet made good its escape, and the admiral on his return home was tried by court-martial and shot, *pour encourager les autres*' (the date was 1756, the battle off Minorca, the epigram Voltaire's, and the quotation is from the first of the future Lord Wavell's 1939 lectures on 'Generals and generalship', published as a pamphlet by Macmillan).

Insularity is in the mind: 'no man is an island . . .', and no culture either. I, *Claudius* is now probably better known in North America than in Britain, nor need I apologize for quoting Jane Austen and W. S. Gilbert, because, although so very English, they also belong to the whole English-speaking world. I might equally well have quoted Americans, like Stephen Vincent Benét on Julius Caesar: 'Fate has a way of picking unlikely material, / Greasy-haired second-lieutenants of French artillery, / And bald-headed, dubious, Roman rake-politicians'. And only after the book appeared did I realize that in writing about 'the Indian summer of the Antonines' and 'the Empire . . . ripening to its fall', I had, unconsciously, singing behind my brain, Robert Frost's 'O hushed October morning mild, / Thy leaves have ripened to the fall; / Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild, / Should waste them all.'

We shall be much concerned with the evolution of social and political institutions in the Early Empire. Some preliminary explanation of technicalities may make things clearer. Under the Republic, ultimate power rested in the body of adult male citizens, meeting in an assembly (*comitia*) under a magistrate. To vote, a citizen had to be present. There were different types of assembly, with differently weighted systems of voting,

according to the type of business to be conducted, but they could only vote yes or no to the laws or candidates proposed by the magistrates, and became less and less important under the Empire. The last assembly known to have been convened to pass legislation is under the Emperor Nerva. Laws were called after the magistrate who introduced them. Thus a Julian Law (*lex Julia*) may be the work of either Julius Caesar or Augustus, who bore Caesar's family name by adoption (see pages 9, 12).

A resolution of the Senate (*senatus consultum*, abbreviated SC, as on coinage from the mint at Rome under the Senate's control) was not technically a law (*lex*), but came to have binding force, although the Senate's authority could be disputed in the troubled times of the Late Republic, especially when it voted virtually to suspend the laws in what it judged to be an emergency (the *senatus consultum ultimum*), used a dozen times in the Late Republic. Later, the emperor became the fount of law, and increasingly found it more convenient to legislate via the *senatus consultum* rather than the *lex*. The Senate also acquired important judicial functions. By the end of the Republic, it was composed primarily of ex-magistrates, and Augustus systematized the senatorial career (*cursus honorum*) in such a way that 20 men annually were elected quaestor, usually about the age of 25, and thereby entered the Senate. Then they might become aedile or tribune, and at about 30, could stand for the praetorship (normally twelve posts a year). Quaestors were mostly concerned with financial matters, aediles with municipal administration, praetors with judicial affairs; on tribunes see page 7. Ex-praetors might hold various posts, especially in the provinces, including governorships of smaller provinces and appointments in command of a legion.

At the age of 42, or much sooner for those specially favoured by the emperor, a man might aspire to the consulship. The two consuls who took office each year on 1 January were the nominal heads of state, and the consulship was eagerly sought, even down into the later Empire, when it had become a mere title of honour largely devoid of power. It ennobled one's family: broadly speaking, the descendant of a consul was a *nobilis*, and a man without consular ancestors in the male line, like Cicero or indeed

Augustus, was known scornfully as a 'new man' (*novus homo*). The consuls gave their name to the year in the official calendar, so that 44 BC was dated 'in the consulship of Gaius Julius Caesar and Marcus Antonius'. If a consul died in office or resigned, a suffect consul (*consul suffectus*) was appointed to complete his term. Suffect consulships were considered less distinguished, but from 5 BC onwards it became standard for the consuls of the year to resign half way through and let suffects take their place, in order to increase the supply of ex-consuls for the specifically consular posts in the public service, like the governorships of major provinces and, as the Empire went on, an increasing number of administrative jobs at Rome, which were reserved for men of consular rank. The consular lists, known as the *fasti*, survive in various inscriptions (*Fasti Capitolini*, *Fasti Ostienses*, etc.) in various degrees of completeness.

Praetors and consuls, together with ex-magistrates holding a special appointment, such as the governorship of a province, which they were considered to hold as a substitute for a praetor or consul (*pro praetore* or *pro consule*), possessed *imperium*, an untranslatable term signifying the right of command in war, to administer the laws and to inflict the death penalty (subject to a Roman citizen's right of appeal, originally to the people, later to the emperor). The *imperium* of propraetors and proconsuls was normally restricted to the province to which they were appointed (a province, *provincia*, originally meant a defined sphere of action, not necessarily geographical, as we might say in English, 'the interpretation of the law is the province of the courts'; but by the end of the Republic, it normally meant a specific territory, such as the province of Asia or of Gallia Narbonensis, i.e., Provence and Languedoc). In the Late Republic, it occurred that one proconsul might have his *imperium* defined as greater (*maius*) than another's, so that it was clear who prevailed in case of disagreement.

Under the Empire, certain provinces were assigned to the emperor, who governed them through deputies, mostly men of consular or praetorian rank, holding the title of *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, appointed by the emperor for as long as he chose and responsible only to him. Other provinces, of which the most important were Africa and Asia, continued to have proconsuls or propraetors appointed by the Senate for a one-year term. The