

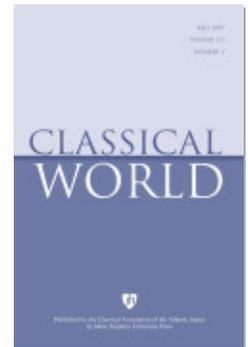


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Roman Power: A Thousand Years of Empire by W. V. Harris
(review)

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by considering how the Juvenalian satirist presents his Latin verse satire as a literary successor to New Comedy (M. Hanses, chapter 2) and conclude by examining New and Old comic allusions in the Greek epistolography of Alciphron and Aristainetos (M. Funke, chapter 12; E. A. Barbiero, chapter 13). Scholars interested in investigating Lucian's engagement with Old Comedy (R. M. Rosen, chapter 8; I. C. Storey, chapter 9) can first examine what the epigraphic evidence from Asia Minor reveals of the performance of Greek New Comedy in the second and third centuries C.E. (F. Graf, chapter 6). The volume predominantly comprises literary studies, but authors regularly engage with fragmentary papyri, archaeological evidence, and stage history. They also engage with one another, as frequent references by authors to other chapters in the book attest.

Considerable familiarity with the particulars of Athenian comedy and the wider field of classical studies (including facility with Latin and Greek) is expected of the readership, but efforts to make contributions accessible to a broad audience are also apparent. Most chapters announce their trajectories within their titles, and all but a few provide explicit outlines in the initial paragraphs and headings for relevant subsections. Several contributors also offer brief but welcome introductions to authors, texts, or concepts under consideration. For example, the opening paragraphs of Hawkins' "Dio Chrysostom and the Naked Parabasis" (chapter 4) include Dio's dates and an embedded definition of a "naked parabasis" (i.e., the isolated invocation of comic poetry to serve an admonitory function).

The editors' decision to supply a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book is particularly apt in light of the frequent overlap of references between chapters. That the volume's contributions so noticeably share in a collective endeavor may be a consequence both of shrewd editorial work and of the volume's development out of a 2014 organizer-refereed APA panel ("Greek Comedy in the Roman Empire"). I recall attending the panel and leaving the conference room inspired by the quality of the individual presentations, the cohesiveness of the ensuing discussion, and the significance of the questions raised for further study. Evidence of this volume's success lies in its provocation of a comparable feeling: the desire to continue the conversation and to consider the explorations that a second volume might include.

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W. V. Harris. *Roman Power: A Thousand Years of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xxi, 357. \$49.99. ISBN 978-1-107-15271-7.

A remarkable book from a preeminent ancient historian. Remarkable first for its scope: a history of the rise and fall of Rome's empire across a huge span of more than a thousand years composed with an alarmingly competent command of sources and relevant scholarship that hardly any other contemporary Romanist might emulate. The subject is an exposition of Roman power—a concept minimally (and mercifully) under-theorized—which analyzes the institutional,

structural, ideological, and psychological factors that explain how the Empire came into being, evolved and expanded, and eventually declined and fell—revisionist terminology, note, deliberately deployed: no final “transformation” or “transition” but an actual end: in the west in 476 and in the east in 641.

Remarkable secondly for its methodology. For his explanatory purpose, Harris resists the temptation of comparison between the Roman and other empires in favor of comparisons drawn between different periods of Rome’s own history. This allows a strong contrast to emerge between the formidable armies of the middle Republic that made the Mediterranean a Roman lake, and the much weaker forces of the late-imperial age that proved unable to withstand the pressures of constant “barbarian” invasion. Simultaneously, external and internal developments are juxtaposed, each interspersed with suitable stretches of factual narrative, to provide mutually corroborative explications of imperialistic growth and decay. The former is attributed to a multiplicity of familiar factors: Rome’s enormous reserves of military manpower, its ruthless commitment to warfare (at all social levels), an aristocratic leadership impelled by competitiveness for military glory, constitutional and strategic innovation, political privilege-sharing with the defeated, civic discipline and solidarity, support of local aristocracies, and popular commitment to Roman patriotism. The gradual erosion of these elements and their replacement by enervation and social disarray accounts for the latter. In the very long *longue durée* that the exposition involves, two crucial turning points are identified: the accession of Tiberius, which brought a halt, consolidated under Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, to the centuries-old tradition of continuous imperialistic expansion, and Constantine’s death, following which Germanic and ultimately Muslim incursions irredeemably proved the inadequacy of Rome’s resources and lack of will to sustain the imperial system. In this, two factors notably emphasized by an illustrious predecessor are given particular prominence: the barbarization of the armies and Christian intolerance. The brutality of Roman imperialism is realistically highlighted throughout.

The overall accomplishment is breathtaking, and stimulation is to be found on almost every page. Yet various reservations arise. I find especially controversial Harris’s conflation of empire with Roman nationhood; his inability to distinguish what happened under given emperors from initiatives emperors may themselves have introduced; and above all the ubiquitous use of the term “the Romans” of the historical actors involved, no matter what the era or the location concerned. How imperial policy was determined, how a particular emperor controlled events known to belong to his reign, and how Romans imagined their community from epoch to epoch—or indeed who they were—remain problematic issues. The claim, for example, to know “what Hadrian had in mind” (119), and the assertions that Tiberius earlier “initiated all legislation” (166–67) and that later Justinian’s “troops are likely to have had only a limited sense of a Roman identity” (257), illustrate the difficulties. On a lesser scale, a description of the Republican soldier is almost novelistic, not historical (44), the reemergence of Vergil and Horace as imperial propagandists is a surprise (63, 104), and massive increases in the size of the late-Republican senate are unexplained (99). Harris is obviously right that no one can master all the relevant bibliography, and I stress again that his coverage is more than lesser mortals could manage. But every informed reader will make mental notes in passing of overlooked items: Gruen and Sherwin-White on Republican expansion, Garnsey on legal privilege

and food shortages, Hannestad on art and imperial policy, Treggiari on marriage, Millar on the “Greek” Roman Empire, and so on.

The book is remarkable finally for its arrogance. Part of Harris’s project is to appeal to those who want to learn about Rome’s Empire but know little about it at the outset. Such readers will be forgiven if they leave the book thinking that contemporary Roman history is a contact sport whose protagonists’ prime objective is to draw blood from as many rivals as possible. The text abounds in polemic, the footnotes are frequently scathing of those judged erroneous, and when approval is registered—and the debt to others is immense—it is mostly with carping qualification. Harris does not hesitate to speak of his own originality (that supreme Oxonian virtue) and although allowing that much of Rome’s history cannot be known, he creates the impression that what is knowable is known to him alone. An illiberal, aggressive tone contrasts strongly with the personal political claims of his final pages. Altogether, therefore, a bravura performance on the constituents of Roman power that demands vigorous applause; but not, regrettably, a standing ovation.

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Matthew C. Farmer. *Tragedy on the Comic Stage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xi, 267. \$74.00. ISBN 978-0-19-049207-6.

Farmer’s first book offers a detailed and nuanced examination of the relationship between comic and tragic drama in Athens. Though Aristophanes’ engagement with tragedy has been an object of critical interest since the scholiasts, there exists no study that attempts a systematic analysis of the comic fragments. Farmer sets out to remedy this lack. Collecting and collating a diverse body of material with admirable skill, Farmer elucidates the phenomenon of what he calls “paratragedy” in the comic poets. The term itself comes from a tantalizingly short fragment of Strattis’ *Phoenician Women*, where an anonymous character asks for “a little bit of paratragedy” (παρατραγωδησαί τι). In Farmer’s work, the term “paratragedy” denotes the set of tropes and techniques by which the comic poets portray tragic poetry, tragic playwrights, and tragic audiences in their own plays. Farmer’s book represents a valuable contribution to our understanding of ancient theater, and demonstrates the benefit of reading Aristophanes in conjunction with the comic fragments.

Farmer’s book is divided into two parts: the first focuses on the comic fragments, the second on four plays of Aristophanes. The introduction is brief—six and a half pages, two of which reproduce a long quotation from Aristophanes’ *Frogs*—and one wishes for a more thorough explanation of methodology and a more detailed preview of Farmer’s conclusions. In part 1, Farmer discusses the “culture of tragedy” in the fragments of Old and Middle Comedy. Curating fragments from Platon, Pherecrates, Callias, Teleclides, Phrynichus, Sannyrion, Axionicus, and Cratinus (among others), Farmer explores the ways in which the