

WHY ROME FELL

DECLINE AND FALL,
OR DRIFT AND CHANGE?



Dr. MICHAEL ARNHEIM

WILEY Blackwell

Why Rome Fell

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*Decline and Fall, or Drift
and Change?*

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WILEY Blackwell

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POSUI DEUM ADIUTOREM MEUM

To the Sacred Memory of My Beloved Parents

Dr Wilhelm Arnheim (1901–75)

*A wise medical doctor and true polymath, with the driest sense of
humor
and*

Mrs. Vicky Arnheim (1905–90)

*A brilliant musician, gifted teacher,
dedicated social organizer,
Great cook, and loving mother
and*

To the sacred memory of my beloved grandmother, “Oma”

Mrs. Martha Arnheim (1875–1965)

*An eternally cheerful and optimistic, courageous spirit,
who taught me German, and whose wonderful
humorous tales*

Of the old Germany will remain with me always.

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About the Author



Dr Michael Arnheim (commonly known as “Doctor Mike”) is a practicing London Barrister, Sometime Fellow of St. John’s College, Cambridge, and author of 23 published books to date, this being the twenty-third.

Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, to a German father and South African mother, he attended the prestigious King Edward VII School. As a 14-year-old schoolboy he was picked to join the “Quiz Kids” team of five capped and gowned teenagers appearing every Friday evening on South Africa’s Springbok Radio, of which he became a stalwart member, “retiring” at the age of eighteen.

He entered Johannesburg’s University of the Witwatersrand at the age of 16, taking a first-class B.A. in History and Classics at the age of 19, first-class Honours in Classics at 20 and an M.A. with distinction at the age of 21.

Michael Arnheim then went up to St. John’s College, Cambridge, on a National Scholarship (later converted to a St. John’s College scholarship, supplemented by a Strathcona Travel Exhibition). He was awarded a Cambridge Ph.D. in 1969 in record time, and in 1972, his doctoral dissertation was published by the Oxford University Press under the title of *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire*. In the meantime, he was elected into a Fellowship of St. John’s College, Cambridge, where he combined research with a great deal of teaching

for a number of colleges in Classics and Ancient History.

At the age of 31, Michael Arnheim was invited to take up the position of full Professor and Head of the Department of Classics back at his old university in South Africa. During his time in that position, he devised a new system of learning Latin, for which he wrote a series of Latin stories titled *The Adventures of Marcus*. He also taught his students Spanish under the title of “Modern Latin,” using etymological links with English, along the lines later described in *Gateway English: How to Boost your English Word Power and Unlock New Languages* (2020.).

Despondent about the future of South Africa, Dr Arnheim returned to Britain, where he was called to the Bar by Lincoln’s Inn in 1988, combining his practice of law with the writing of books (23 to date)—a combination that is still continuing.

Arnheim’s books essentially belong to three main categories: history, religion, and law. His legal studies and practice soon made him aware of the injustice inherent in English law, resulting at least partly from what Lord Neuberger, the former President of the UK Supreme Court, had the courage in 2017 to describe as “a notable degree of disarray and a marked lack of reliable principle” in the whole vast field of the law of Tort. Arnheim’s legal writings have tackled this serious but veiled problem with suggested practical solutions.

Arnheim also has an original take on religion—a classification of all religions, ancient and modern alike, as either “communal” or “creed” religions. Christianity and Islam, the two largest religions in the world today, are “creed” religions, based on a creed or set of beliefs. However, in the ancient world most religions, including the Roman “pagan” state religion, were “communal.” Membership of a particular community, society or nation carried with it automatic membership of that community’s religion. Everyone in a communal religion understood that every community, society or nation has its own religion. So, communal religions are by definition tolerant—while creed religions are naturally intolerant. Every creed religion—and every denomination, grouping or sect of every creed religion—is based on a set of beliefs, which is taken to be “the truth.” Anyone who does not accept this creed is a “heretic,” a “pagan,” or an “unbeliever,” and is punished accordingly. The dominance of Christianity in the later Roman Empire marked a sea-change in Roman and world history—the substitution of religious intolerance and persecution for toleration and freedom of worship.

This transformation is a major theme of the present book—together with a shift in the power structure, particularly in the West, an issue that has engaged Arnheim’s interest since his undergraduate days, when he developed an original comparative analytical approach to history

covering multiple societies spanning over three millennia, from early Greece to the present day. Focusing particularly on the power structure of these disparate societies, Arnheim developed the hypothesis that, regardless of outward appearances, all societies, past and present alike, belong to only one of two models of government: rule by an elite minority (oligarchy, morphing to aristocracy) on the one hand, or, on the other, rule by a single individual, or monarchy (whether the ruler is designated as king, president, dictator, or anything else.) This issue is pursued in the present book. The significance of power structure, a much neglected aspect of history, lies in its value as an analytical tool, and in its relationship to social mobility, liberty and equality.

For further information on Michael Arnheim, you may consult the Wikipedia article on him at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Arnheim. You are also welcome to contact him by email at Counsel@arnheim-law.com.

Preface

This book has had a very long gestation period. Having developed an interest as an undergraduate in elite theory, I decided to test its applicability to the Later Roman Empire for my Cambridge Ph.D., on which I embarked in 1966. My doctoral supervisor, A.H.M. (“Hugo”) Jones, the Cambridge Professor of Ancient History, had brought out his magisterial three-volume *Later Roman Empire* two years earlier. In my Ph.D. dissertation I emphasized Constantine’s radical departure from his immediate predecessors’ policy by reopening imperial appointments to members of the senatorial aristocracy in the West, from which they had been all but excluded. I concluded that this policy, perpetuated by Constantine’s successors, effectively weakened the imperial government in the West—but not in the East—thus contributing to the fall of the western empire, and paving the way toward the medieval world.

My doctoral oral examination in 1969 turned out to be a surprisingly enjoyable occasion. My examiners, both Oxford men, were Peter Brown, then a Fellow of All Souls, and Professor W.H.C. (“Bill”) Frend of Glasgow University. After a wide-ranging discussion, even including the Chinese mandarin, both examiners suggested that my dissertation be published as a book, with specific mention of the Oxford University Press. Sure enough, in 1972, a revised version of my thesis duly appeared, under the Clarendon Press imprint, titled *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire*.

In 1971, while my book was in the press, Peter Brown, whose only previous book was a biography of Augustine of Hippo, brought out a slender, lavishly illustrated volume, with very few references, titled *The World of Late Antiquity*, spanning the period 150–750 CE, from the heyday of the “High Empire” until the end of the early Muslim conquests. Like myself, Brown emphasized continuity well beyond the “fall” of the western empire. But there the similarity ended.

To my surprise, Brown and his followers tend to view the period through rose-colored spectacles, labeling it all, and not least, Christianity—which became dominant in the fourth century—a “Good Thing.” This overtly subjective and judgmental approach, from which most serious historians had been trying to free themselves for the past hundred years or more, inevitably led to special pleading and a distorted view of the period and of history generally.

After testing out my hypothesis about power structure and ethos in a number of different historical periods and societies in my *Aristocracy in Greek Society* (1977) and *Two Models of Government* (2016), interspersed with books on religion and law, I eventually decided to return to my original stamping ground.

The present work is a very different book from my 1972 publication, but the conclusions are not essentially different, though they are applied to a much wider canvas. The book’s broad scope has also resulted in a certain amount of overlap between the chapters, giving the book something of a modular character. This feature is also designed to prevent misunderstanding, which is all too common in a subject as controversial as this.

The people whose help and assistance I have received over the years are too numerous to name. But I cannot omit to mention my former student and long-time friend Tom Malnati of Florida, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for proofreading the whole book. All errors remaining are my own responsibility alone. The encouragement of my friend Jack Ward has probably brought the work to fruition sooner than would otherwise have been the case. And there have been many profitable discussions with colleagues and former students over the years.

I am privileged to have had the late Professor A.H.M. (“Hugo”) Jones as my doctoral supervisor in Cambridge, behind whose slight frame and shy and retiring manner there lurked a powerhouse of erudition and intellectual brilliance. In the best tradition of academic history and scholarly research, his magisterial three-volume *Later Roman Empire* betrays no clue as to his political or religious beliefs. I also owe a great debt to my mentor, friend and colleague at St. John’s, the late Professor John Crook, a gifted teacher and true polymath, combining an easy familiarity with Classical literature with a depth of knowledge of Ancient History and Roman Law, together with a linguistic facility in

ancient and modern languages alike, not to mention skill as a classical clarinetist.

I am delighted to say that I have had a long and happy association with Wiley, starting with my *US Constitution for Dummies*, the first edition of which came out in 2009, and the second in 2018. I owe a debt of gratitude to the Wiley team with whom I have been working on this book: my managing editor, Andrew Minton, together with Todd Green, Skyler Van Valkenburgh, and latterly Will Croft as executive editor, and Ananth Ganesan. And thanks to the Oxford University Press for allowing me to quote from my *Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire*, published in 1972.

Any reader of this book is welcome to contact me with queries or comments at: Counsel@arnheim-law.com.

Dr. Michael Arnheim
Summer solstice, 2021

Introduction

Only a handful of Roman emperors are household names, and, of those, two, Augustus and Constantine, are pre-eminent but for very different reasons. Augustus established a form of government that would last for nigh on three centuries, and become a byword for stability, justice, and peace.

Constantine cast a long shadow by embracing Christianity and by establishing a new capital in Constantinople. Less well known, but long-lasting nevertheless, were his administrative and military reforms, including in particular his appointment to high civil (but not military) office in the West members of the senatorial aristocracy, who had been virtually excluded from any appointments under Diocletian.

A comparative thematic view will clarify the issues to be tackled in this study:

- **Monarchy:** From Augustus's victory over Antony in 31 BCE, Rome was a monarchy: First, the so-called Principate, which lasted until 284 then the "Dominate" under Diocletian and early Constantine until 312 in the empire as a whole and perpetuated in the East, or Byzantine Empire, until 1453, and, in the West, the new Constantinian model of monarchy, from around 312 until the fall of

the western empire, conventionally dated to 476, and beyond, in the “barbarian” successor states in the West.

- **Power structure:** There is a natural antipathy between monarchy and aristocracy or oligarchy. Strong monarchy ideally needs support from the lower classes against the aristocracy, which, however, should not be unduly antagonized.
 - This was well understood by Augustus, who cultivated the support of the Roman *plebs urbana*, which he had inherited from his adoptive father Julius Caesar, together with that of the army, and the *equites* (the second class in the state), while conciliating the senatorial aristocracy by allowing them to retain the bulk of provincial governorships.
 - The power of the emperor in the Dominate, as established by Diocletian, depended largely on the army and, also to some extent, on eunuch chamberlains. As perpetuated in Byzantium, the emperor came to be dependent on eunuch chamberlains and on the Church, with which he had a symbiotic relationship (sometimes inaccurately characterized as caesaropapism).
 - The model of government introduced by Constantine in the West had strict separation between civil and military officials. As far as the army was concerned, the emperor came to depend increasingly on “barbarian” military officials. On the civil side, members of the senatorial aristocracy exercised renewed influence through imperial appointments right up to the level of praetorian prefect—albeit mostly only for intermittent short periods—which, however, enabled them to combine office, landholding, and wealth in the same areas, and, to some extent, develop into a centrifugal force. The enhanced position of the aristocracy did not, however, rise to the level of power-sharing with the emperor (and later “barbarian” kings), let alone a hybrid power structure or oligarchy of any kind.
- **Social Mobility:** From the early Principate onward, the emperor elevated “new men,” first from around Italy, and then from the provinces, to senatorial status. In the late third century this stopped, and emperors started appointing equestrians directly to governorships without bothering to make them senators first. This culminated under Diocletian, when the senatorial career became a cul-de-sac. This was reversed by Constantine, who not only appointed men of senatorial *birth* to office again, but also made a number of previously equestrian posts carry automatic senatorial status. But contrary to a common impression, this did *not* actually create “fusion,” the creation of a “service aristocracy,” or an “aristocracy of office” in the West, though it did have this effect in the

East. The difference was that the West already had a traditional hereditary senatorial aristocracy, which the East lacked. A high proportion of men appointed to senatorial posts in the West were of noble origin already, and in any case, they formed a proud caste, which in the fifth century added influential bishoprics (especially in Gaul) to their existing clutch of office, land, and wealth.

- **Aristocratic Ethos:** Stratified or hierarchical societies, which have always been the norm in most periods, have given rise to a general sense that people are unequal, and that birth and pedigrees matter. Four hundred and fifty years of aristocratic rule under the Roman Republic inculcated this aristocratic ethos into the very marrow of society, and it was not dispelled by the monarchical regime that followed it, down to the Middle Ages, and even into the West of today with its supposedly egalitarian ethos.

Why Did the West Fall?

At various points during the fifth century the western empire was gradually dismembered, and reconfigured as a shifting mosaic of “barbarian” kingdoms. How and why did this happen? In helping us to tackle this question we have two comparators: the Principate and the Byzantine Empire. Though under severe pressure, both internal and external, the Principate never succumbed. Secondly, though the western empire dissolved, the East survived for a thousand years, until 1453.

“Indissoluble Union and Easy Obedience”

How do these two comparisons help? In his inimitable rolling prose, and without undue exaggeration, Edward Gibbon (1737–94) pointed to “the indissoluble union and easy obedience that pervaded the government of Augustus and the Antonines.” (Gibbon, Ch. 51.) Contrary to the special pleading of some modern writers, these two crucial cementing factors were absent in the later Roman Empire.

Tacitus (c.56–c.120) puts into the mouth of a Caledonian (Scottish) chieftain what has become a well-known indictment of Roman rule: “Robbery, slaughter, and plunder, they describe in lying words as empire, and where they make a desert, they call it peace” (Tac. *Agric.*, 29 f., tr. M. Arnheim). It is, of course, more than likely, that leaders of conquered peoples would not have thanked the Romans for depriving them of their liberty, and we know of several hard-fought conquests over the years. Yet, before long, the benefits of Roman rule came to be appreciated, especially

when the Romans opened up their own senate and, indeed, the imperial purple itself, to provincials. Gibbon's point is brought home all the more forcefully when it is recognized that, whatever happened to the Roman Empire, it did not suffer the fate of the modern British, French, Portuguese, and Dutch colonial empires, which all came to an end as a result of local nationalist resistance. Roman citizenship was highly prized. *Civis Romanus sum* (I am a Roman citizen), famously proclaimed Paul of Tarsus in asserting his right to be tried before the emperor; and *peregrini* (free provincial subjects) would serve for twenty-five years in the Roman army in order to earn the coveted title of Roman citizen.

Lower down in the social scale, the Principate also epitomized social mobility. Unlike in the Greek city-states, for example, in Rome manumitted slaves or freedmen—*liberti* or *libertini* (for the distinction between them, see Mouritsen 2011, p. 65)—automatically became Roman citizens, with no bar on their owning property or amassing great wealth, or even holding responsible posts in government, as occurred particularly under Claudius. Successful freedmen were rewarded for their patriotism by being given a minor priesthood in the imperial cult as *seviri Augustales*, which even entitled them, like high magistrates, to be attended by a lictor. Trimalchio, the fictitious anti-hero freedman of Petronius's *Satyricon*, is inordinately proud of this honor, quite likely a true reflection of real life.

Caracalla's extension of citizenship to all free male inhabitants of the empire in 212 (though apparently done for tax reasons) is yet another illustration of Rome's policy of inclusiveness, which had already resulted in most emperors from Trajan (r. 98–117) onward being provincials.

Universal citizenship, however, had an adverse effect on military recruitment. Without an incentive for provincials to enlist, more “barbarians” were recruited than ever before, and conscription, introduced under Diocletian, continued as long as the western empire survived.

But Caracalla's policy of inclusiveness stopped short of inviting whole “barbarian” tribes to settle. In 213, for example, the highly Romanized Alemanni broke through the northern frontier of the Roman Empire with a view to settlement. Far from welcoming these would-be migrants, Caracalla pushed them back and strengthened the frontier against them. Why was the imperial government unable to hold back the “barbarians” who were similarly attracted to Roman civilization in the fourth and fifth centuries? And why did the West fall while the East survived?

The answer lies partly in the sheer strength of numbers involved in these later “barbarian” incursions, possibly driven by pressure on themselves by a westward push from the Huns. Deterred by Constantinople's strong strategic position and fortifications, the “barbarians” diverted their efforts to the West.

Divided Loyalties in a Fractured Society

However, the answer to our question must be sought largely in internal factors, and, in particular, in the divided loyalties of a fractured society, exactly the opposite of Gibbon's "indissoluble union and easy obedience" of the first two centuries of the Principate. The sentiment expressed in the famous line by Horace (65–8 BCE), *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (It is sweet and fitting to die for your country), was probably widely shared during the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace) of the same period. (Horace *Od.* 3.2.)

When we come to the fourth century, we even hear of young men cutting off a thumb to beat the "draft." Judging by the number of laws against this practice, it may not have been as rare as modern writers tend to believe, and it so infuriated Valentinian I that, in 368, he ordered offenders to be burned alive. (CTh. 7.13.5.) There is no shortage of evidence of the unpopularity of conscription among the men themselves, and also among the large landowners whose duty it was to provide recruits.

The sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 and the Vandals in 455 elicited a great outpouring of grief among Christians and pagans alike, yet loyalty to the regime was generally so low among its subjects that the "barbarian" incursions generally met with very little resistance. This was the case even though the senatorial aristocracy undoubtedly benefited from having an overarching imperial structure in the West, enabling them to continue to combine office, land, and wealth in several provinces at the same time, which, however, effectively made them a centrifugal force. But, with their fortified estates, especially in Gaul, their disinclination to pay taxes, and their gradual control over the Church, many of them preferred to curry favor with their new masters rather than to attract their ire.

"The madness of the heretics must be curbed" (CTh 16.5.65.)

Contrary to the frantic efforts of some modern writers, until Christianity became dominant with imperial favor under Constantine and his successors, the Roman Empire enjoyed not only religious toleration but indeed freedom of worship and religion. (See Chapter 10.)

The religious intolerance and persecutions instituted by the Christian Roman Empire, in East and West alike, fractured this unity. Even before 380, when Christianity became the exclusive official religion of the Empire, all those who were not adherents of that religion—and of its dominant denomination—found themselves the targets of incessant attacks,

which sometimes spurred them into active disobedience. The usurper Firmus was able to hold out against the imperial government in Africa between 372 and 375, with the support of the Donatists, a “heresy” that was particularly popular in that area. The ousting of the Eastern Emperor Zeno by Basiliscus in 475 was achieved with the support of another group of “heretics,” the Monophysites, who were very strong in Egypt and Syria, and who sided with the Muslims in their conquest of Egypt (639–646.) It is clear, from among other things, the long saga of the Altar of Victory, that there were a good many pagans in the aristocracy up to and beyond the end of the fourth century. It is significant that Eugenius, the puppet emperor chosen by Arbogast with the support of the Senate in 392, made a point of restoring the Altar of Victory to its place in the Senate house and appointed the influential pagan aristocrat Virius Nicomachus Flavianus as praetorian prefect of Italy. Significantly, Priscus Attalus, selected by the Visigoths as emperor in 409 and again in 414, was a pagan. Some modern writers, in their concern to kill off paganism as early as possible, have gone out of their way to disprove the existence of an active pagan resistance in the late fourth century. Yet pagans did not need to be activists in order to feel less than loyal toward an intolerant, persecuting government. And, though supposedly extinguished by 423, paganism clearly continued to have considerable numbers of adherents for a long time thereafter. As late as the reign of Justinian (527–565), John of Ephesus boasted of converting 70,000 pagans in Asia Minor, one of the most Christianized parts of the Empire, and, in addition, a large number of pagans, including some highly placed men, in Constantinople itself, which had been established as a Christian capital by Constantine in 330.

The poisonous religious atmosphere of the fragmented society that was the Christian Roman Empire helps to explain the divided loyalties that weakened the West in the face of the “barbarian” invasions and also the loss to the East of the bulk of its territory to the Muslims in the seventh century (some of which was, however, reconquered in the ninth and tenth centuries, only to be permanently lost in the aftermath of the Battle of Manzikert of 1071.)

So What?

How significant, then, was the “fall” of the western empire after all? In other words, what difference does it make whether the West fell, was pushed, or never came to an end at all? My own view is that the importance of this question has been grossly exaggerated. All the time and effort spent on the question of the fall of the Roman Empire could have been far better spent on the related, but quite separate, question of continuity and change. (See Chapter 5.)

East Is East, and West Is West

The significance of this question becomes all the more apparent by comparing continuity and change in the West with those same features in the East. Though what is now generally called the Byzantine Empire lasted over a thousand years (albeit for quite some time in a very shrunken state), its heritage is rather restricted. The only territory that can be considered a linear descendant of Byzantium in the modern world is that now occupied by Greece and the Greek-speaking part of Cyprus. In these two states alone is Greek the official language spoken as their first language by the population at large. This is a major negative feature. Though the Byzantines always thought of themselves as “Romans” (and Orthodox Christians are still referred to in Turkish as *Rûm*), their empire was essentially a Greek empire. From the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), Greek became the lingua franca of the Eastern Mediterranean even though Roman rule made Latin the official language of the whole Roman Empire until it was replaced in the East by Greek in 610.

In terms of religion, Byzantium has left a more robust heritage. The Eastern Orthodox Church, made up of a number of autonomous (or autocephalous) national churches, is today the second largest Christian denomination in the world, with 220 million adherents, largely concentrated in Eastern Europe. However, most of the autonomous churches have quite a tenuous connection with Byzantium. The liturgical language in most such churches is either Church Slavonic or a vernacular language, and though the Patriarch of Constantinople, known as the ecumenical patriarch, has priority over all other patriarchs, he is only *primus inter pares* (first among equals).

Another heritage of Byzantium which cannot be ignored is, ironically, the result of its demise, namely the rescue of thousands of Classical Greek texts, which were smuggled to the West after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and are thought to have had some effect in developing the Italian Renaissance.

None of these features, however, really provides much continuity with the Byzantine Empire.

Gothia or Romania?

The position in regard to the western empire is very different. As the Visigoth King Athaulf (r. 411–415) recognized, no “barbarian” kingdom of Gothia would ever come into existence (Orosius 7.43.4–6). The only “barbarians” who gave their name to a country were the Franks and the Angles though the language of France is a Romance language, like those of most of the rest of the western empire, and that of England

(an integral part of Britain, from the area's Roman name) has become suffused with Latin loanwords

The Roman Catholic Church, with its subdivision into dioceses and provinces, terms taken over directly from the Roman Empire, still has its headquarters in Rome, under a bishop who is called in Latin by the same title as the Roman emperor as head of the old pagan state religion: Pontifex Maximus (chief priest). Politically, too, the image of the western Roman Empire survives in the ideal of a united Europe. And a modern version of Roman Law still dominates the continent.

Three Revolutions

Constantine initiated the dominance of Christianity in the Roman world, though he was not actually baptized until on his deathbed in 337, and though Christianity did not become the sole official religion of the Empire until 380. The significance of this is that it replaced the tolerant communal Roman pagan state religion with an inherently intolerant creed religion, which has remained the dominant religion in Europe ever since. This represents both continuity and change, a major break with the past on the part of Constantine and his successors, and continuity from then on down to the present.

That revolution also had two major continuing spin-offs, namely the rise of Islam, a creed religion that became intolerant on the Christian model, and rabbinical Judaism, which, under the influence of Christianity, changed from a tolerant communal religion into an intolerant quasi-creed religion. (See Chapter 10.)

Constantine's second revolution was the establishment of Constantinople, which would come to be the permanent Christian capital of the Byzantine Empire until its fall to the Ottomans in 1453.

By bringing members of the senatorial aristocracy back into high office, Constantine effected a third revolution, which endorsed, boosted, bolstered, and reactivated the aristocratic ethos that had been the hallmark of Roman society from the early Republic. This revolution, too, proved long-lasting, surviving until the French Revolution, and still not entirely extinct. (See Chapter 5.)

Structural or Individual?

One important question that has not received sufficient attention is how much of the continuity of the western empire was structural, and how much was personal. We know, for example, that aristocracy and the aristo-

cratic ethos survived the dissolution of the western empire. But who were the aristocrats who carried on this Roman tradition? Were they descendants of the old Roman senatorial aristocracy? Or were they “barbarian” aristocrats aping Roman manners and customs? The evidence is patchy, but the answer would appear to be a mixture of the two. (See Chapter 5.)

The Use of the Past

Tacitus claimed to have written *sine ira et studio*, (without anger or passion), or, in other words, without partiality either positive or negative. The great Greek historian Thucydides (c. 460--c. 400 BCE) wrote his *Peloponnesian War* in the belief that an accurate knowledge of the past would be useful for the future. (Thuc. 1.22.4.) The first prerequisite to this end must, therefore, be accuracy, and, as far as possible, objectivity. True objectivity is probably not an attainable goal, but that does not exempt historians from at least making the attempt.

The starting point must be choice of language. For example, the phrase, “the unnerving but mercifully brief reign of Julian” could not be anything other than overtly subjective, judgmental, hostile, and emotive (Brown 1997a, p. 638)—and even more so than “Williamamary was a Good King,” in *1066 And All That*, the witty parody of traditional British historical writing, written by W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman and published in 1930.

Because Julian “the Apostate” (r. 361–363) is known chiefly for his anti-Christian religious policy, it can safely be concluded that the negative description of his reign is motivated by disagreement with that policy, which ties in with the same author’s pro-Christian special pleading, and otherwise rose-tinted vision, inevitably plunging him headlong into a distorted view of the period. (See Chapter 12.)

Avoidance of overtly subjective, judgmental, and emotive language is important in itself, but also for another reason, namely, to use the study of the past as a tool for the future. But this can only be done on the basis of a tested empirical framework for the comparative study of different societies. There is nothing more disappointing than to see solid historical research run into a blind alley, for want of a properly analyzed framework, as happened to Sir Ronald Syme’s potentially valuable work on Augustus. Having correctly characterized Augustus’s rule as a monarchy, Syme opined that it was an oligarchy on the basis of a supposedly general “law” that “A monarchy rules through an oligarchy” (Syme, R., 1939, p. 8.)—a muddled conflation of two diametrically opposed forms of government. (See Chapter 1.) Chapter 6 illustrates how a correct formulation of power structure can be applied to different historical periods.

Part I

Transition from the Ancient to the Medieval World and Beyond

1

Rome

From Monarchy to Monarchy

This chapter is an analysis of the power structure of the Roman state from its foundation, traditionally dated 753 BCE, to the accession of the Emperor Diocletian in 284. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section A is an analytical narrative, while Section B is a discussion of some of the main discordant views propounded in modern writings.

My own view is that the early monarchy, on which there is very little reliable evidence, was replaced around 509 BCE by a “republic” dominated by an oligarchy or aristocracy. Thus far, the power structure of the Roman state conforms to a universal pattern that I identified in my Two Models of Government, first published in 2016: monarchy succeeded by an oligarchy or aristocracy. By “oligarchy”, I mean government by an elite minority, and “aristocracy” refers to a hereditary oligarchy.

The accession of Julius Caesar’s heir, known to history as Augustus, replaced the republican oligarchy with a thinly disguised monarchy that was able to satisfy, or at least placate, all sectors of society and to provide a stable form of government that lasted for some three hundred years.

Section A. From Romulus to Diocletian

In the beginning, Rome was a monarchy. According to tradition, Rome, whose conventional founding date was 753 BCE, was first ruled by a succession of seven kings, starting with the eponymous Romulus, who,

if he existed at all, must have been named after the city rather than the other way round. The whole period of the monarchy is extremely shadowy. Our main authority for it is the Roman Historian Titus Livius, or Livy, whose great Roman History, titled *Ab Urbe Condita* ("From the Foundation of the City"), was written some 500 years after the fall of the monarchy, which is commonly dated to 509 BCE. Livy felt obliged to relate traditional tales and legends about the early history of Rome, but he also had access to earlier historical accounts, and he actually provides a list of no fewer than a dozen authors' names, the earliest being Quintus Fabius Pictor, whose history of Rome, written in Greek in around 200 BCE, survives only in fragmentary form.

The monarchy appears initially to have been not hereditary but elective, with the king being chosen by the Senate, an aristocratic council, and confirmed by the citizens meeting together in the Assembly known as the *Comitia Curiata*. The last three kings, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius Superbus ("Tarquin the Proud"), were reputedly Etruscans, and the monarchy seems to have become hereditary at that time, as the two Tarquins were either father and son or grandfather and grandson, and Servius Tullius was supposedly the younger Tarquin's father-in-law.

Livy's account of the last period of the monarchy paints a very confused picture, with Tarquinius Superbus initially cultivating the support of the Senate against Servius Tullius, his father-in-law, portrayed as a populist king, distributing conquered lands to the whole populace and enjoying widespread popular support. (Livy 1.46.1). Servius Tullius is even said to have been physically attacked by his son-in-law and murdered by Tarquin's entourage. (Livy 1.48). Once ensconced in power, we are told, Tarquin "...killed the leading senators who he believed had favored the cause of Servius." (Livy 1.49.2.1). This may indicate aristocratic opposition to his rule, which rather contradicts his earlier stance.

What, then, was the power-structure under the Roman monarchy? If the earlier kings really owed their position to election by the Senate, an aristocratic body, then that may point to an aristocratic regime from the start, with the king as essentially *primus inter pares* (first among equals). The last three kings, however, may possibly represent a period of Etruscan domination over Rome. So, the uprising that ended the monarchy may then be interpreted as the reclaiming by the indigenous Roman aristocracy of their previous pre-eminence against foreign domination. The only thing that appears to contradict this interpretation is the tradition that Lucius Junius Brutus and his co-conspirator Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, who were chiefly instrumental in overthrowing Tarquin the Proud and would become the first two consuls of the new Republic, were both related to the king, and that Brutus had two of his

sons put to death for siding with the ousted king. If there is any truth in this picture of a family feud, then it may be that Tarquin's overthrow was the result of internecine conflict within the Roman aristocracy.

Relics of Monarchy

Long after this time, there were some telltale signs that Rome had actually been a monarchy. These included the position of *interrex* and that of *rex sacrorum*. The *rex sacrorum* (literally, "king of the holy") was the patrician holder of the highest-ranking but largely ceremonial priesthood in the Roman state religion, who was in practice subordinate to the Pontifex Maximus (chief priest). The *rex sacrorum*, then, may be a relic of the religious functions originally carried out by the kings.

During the Republic, an *interrex* was elected by the Senate for five days only in order to hold elections when for some reason the consuls had been unable to do so. This office may possibly hark back to a time when there was a gap between two elective kings, causing an *interregnum*.

"Republic" and Democracy

The English word "republic" is a translation of the Latin *res publica*. The Latin adjective *publica* is a contraction of the non-existent **populicus*, from *populus*, "the people." So, *res publica* means, literally, "the people's thing, the people's business," hence "public or civil affairs, public or civil administration, public or civil power," and hence "the state, commonwealth, republic." (Lewis & Short.) It generally refers to the *Roman* state, as against foreign states, for which the word *civitas* was preferred, and from which (via the French) we have the English word "city."

It is important to note that, in referring to the Roman state, *res publica* did not identify any particular form of government and was still used to refer to the Roman state long after the Roman Republic had ceased to exist and when Rome was ruled by emperors. For example, in the dedication by Pliny the Elder (23–79) of his *Historia Naturalis* (Natural History) to the future Emperor Titus, he congratulates Titus on his service to *the state*, this term being expressed by *res publica*, written in 77, more than a century after the end of the Roman Republic. (Pliny, *Natural History*, 3.)