

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN IMPERIALISM *

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I

William Harris' *War and Imperialism* (Oxford, 1979) has already received a long review in last year's *Journal* (70 (1980) 177 f.) by A. N. Sherwin White ; but the importance of the book and of its theme clearly justifies further discussion of the essential problems raised. In any case, the review concentrated almost entirely on points of disagreement and hardly stated a position on the general questions raised by Harris' work. What is more the author and his reviewer, sharp though their disagreements may be, seem to share a range of assumptions about the scope of the problem and the appropriate methods of dealing with it ; in my view, these assumptions need to be stated and examined.

The first point to be emphasized is that Harris' book is intended to deal with a specific, limited problem and that Sherwin White's review accepts its chosen scope as appropriate. They are both locked in a particular academic controversy, whose terms were set by Mommsen, Holleaux and most recently by Badian's *Roman Imperialism*. The view has been widely held that the Romans did not have a consciously aggressive policy towards the rest of their world ; that their wars tended to happen either because of their fear of threats to their security, or the security of their boundaries, or in defence of their allies' interests. They were not therefore conscious imperialists. Moreover—and this is the part of the thesis especially stressed by Badian in consciously anti-Marxist polemic—they had no economic purposes at all ; if economic consequences followed, they were unintended consequences, at least until the late republican period. The net result was that they had no open aspiration to conquest, domination, and expansion. Important evidence for the view is derived from Roman policy towards the East, at least down to 148 B.C. and possibly longer still. It is said that they repeatedly conquered kings and peoples, but then took no steps towards the consolidation of imperial rule. Their idea was quick victory, a bag of loot, a string of slaves and back home. A determinant factor in the evolution of these attitudes was the *ius fetiale*, the priestly law which controlled the initiation of war-making and which laid it down that wars would not be *iusta* and therefore not receive the necessary divine support, unless the enemy had (a) performed wrongful and aggressive acts, (b) been given the time and opportunity for proper reparations to be made, (c) received a formal declaration of war, duly made, with the appropriate ritual gestures and prayers.

The major achievement of *War and Imperialism* is surely that it makes this view virtually untenable in the form in which I have stated it : at the very least, defensive imperialism will need to be re-stated in a new form to deal with Harris' critique. For this reason alone, the book deserves to be given far more credit than Sherwin White seems prepared to allow it. The thesis as argued may be carried rather too far and some aspects of the defensive view can certainly still be maintained, as I shall try to suggest below ; but the central contentions of the book seem to me to be fully established. I should summarize them as :

- (1) Both the expectations and the social ethos of Romans of high and low status were geared to regular war-making ; they had the attitudes and habits which go with this way of life.
- (2) Many Romans, including all those who had a major influence on policy decisions, made, and knew they made, large profits out of warfare and out of the expansion of the Empire.
- (3) Expansion was a publicly stated aim, uninhibited by the supposed ideology of the *ius fetiale*. Harris' remarks on this should be read together with Peter Brunt's discussion in Garnsey and Whittaker's *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (1978), 175 f.
- (4) Roman wars were often aggressive in intention, even if not formally so.

* Earlier versions of this paper were read to Professor Millar's seminar in the Institute of Classical Studies and to the assembled Ancient Historians at

their annual meeting in Wellingborough. I am very grateful for critical comment on both occasions.

The first three of these propositions are Harris' own contentions in Chapters I/III; and I would, in general, accept his position. My fourth proposition is much weaker than the position Harris argues in Chapter V. This final chapter seems to me much the least admirable part of the book; it surveys methodically the origins of all the major wars of the period, seeking to show that in virtually every case the Romans were the aggressors. Sherwin White is here quite right to object that the arguments are sometimes strained, the analysis at a superficial level and the author too close to his subject, losing the overall development of policy while grinding through war after war. At the beginning of any war, identifying the aggressor is a matter of dispute, between the two sides or even between factions on either side; in the case of republican wars, the sources we have are always one-sided, vitiated by prejudice or just inadequately detailed. The project of proving Rome the aggressor in every case is therefore hopeless; but it is also unnecessary for Harris' case, because it is perfectly possible to believe that Roman aims were in general expansionist without having to believe that the Romans were the aggressors in every single war they ever fought. Wars begin from complex situations, in which aggression, mutual fear, confusion, accident, bad communications, personal and political ambitions and many other factors play a part. Harris seems to be seeking a simple formula which he can apply to every case. What his argument requires is a broader treatment, not only of why the wars started but of why they continued; it is far more important to know why the Romans went on fighting in Sicily for over twenty years, than to know why they took one particular decision in 264 B.C. In Harris' perspective the latter question gets pages of (perfectly sensible) discussion, the former only a line or two.

With these qualifications, Harris' arguments must force a thorough reconsideration of the thesis of a defensive Roman imperialism. I find it very difficult to see what Sherwin White's position is on this basic issue. His general tenor is to defend and re-assert the 'traditional' view, but he does not define or elaborate this; his energies turn rather to defending the Romans against the charge of incessant aggressiveness and to demanding that more account should be taken of real-life complexities, of the limitations of manpower and of the physical environment of the Mediterranean world. However, he holds without question that the picture offered in the earlier chapters of *War and Imperialism* is to be accepted, indeed regarded as obvious; and he even seeks to strengthen the case for seeing strong economic pressures on the formation of imperial policy, when he emphasizes the importance of the business interest (180), which he complains Harris unduly neglects. It would seem that an emphasis on the importance of the economic factor is one element common to the book and its reviewer, but it is not easy to see how Sherwin White reconciles this with the belief that Roman war-decisions were regularly defensive in character, if that is in fact his view.

On one very important issue, Sherwin White has damaging criticisms to make of *War and Imperialism*; it is on this point that part of the defensive case can and should still be defended. This is the treatment by Rome of those areas which were conquered in the first half of the second century, but not provincialized or methodically exploited. Harris tries to show that in each case where conquest was not followed by annexation, there were practical reasons, specific to the particular place and time, which would have, or could have, inhibited the Romans from accepting the obligations of permanent control. We should, he argues, be wrong to conclude that there was any settled reluctance to see the empire expand, only a series of pragmatic judgements, which all happened to go the same way. Sherwin White is surely right to complain that this is the result of the author's standing 'too close to the subject'. Taking the areas one by one does not close the argument; there is also the overall fact that, despite extensive conquests, they did not choose to settle down and extract revenues in any of the newly subdued territories between 200 and 148 B.C. Even in Macedonia where they did impose a tax, they did so at a relatively low rate (half that extracted by Perseus previously). The case of Spain is also suggestive; John Richardson (*JRS* 66 (1976) 139 f.) has made it seem extremely probable that, in the early days of Roman control, they taxed only in very erratic ways, levying supplies when armies needed feeding; and similarly they allowed the mines simply to carry on as before, taking a rake-off, but not taking control of management until much later. What all this suggests is that there is far more room than Harris allows for muddle, confusion and unclear thinking. It seems certain that the Romans'

capacity to conquer did for a time outrun their will or capacity to devise means of regularly extracting a surplus from the conquered peoples. This in turn defines the extent to which we can attribute economic imperialism to the decision-takers. It does not mean that their war-decisions were not aggressive, nor does it mean that they had no economic motives; but it does mean that their economic objectives were either short-term or unconsidered—either they wanted slaves and quick profit, or they had simply not considered the problems in advance. We cannot of course regard them as innocent of the possibilities of taxation, since they had already taken control of a successful system in Sicily. The last century of the republic therefore becomes the period in which they progressively discovered the potential benefits of their achievements, by means of taxation systems, overseas colonization, money-lending and trade. If this is the right approach, Harris' conclusions on this particular subject can be revised without threatening his central conclusions at all.

II

The achievement of the book should not be under-estimated, nor its implications missed. Our whole understanding of imperialism and its origins is in question. The effect of the 'defensive imperialism' hypothesis has been to remove the need for explanation. The idea has been that the wars happened piecemeal without intention or purpose; in particular, there was no search for wealth or slaves, except as an incidental consequence of the fact of the wars. The whole problem has been reduced to one of the analysis of the causes of individual conflicts; since the circumstances were always different and the initiatives either external or provoked by external developments, there was nothing left to be explained. The wars became a sort of absolute, defying coherent analysis. What Harris has done is to restore the problem. He also recreates the possibility of effective comparison between Roman and later imperialism and the application to the Roman case of theories derived from situations on which our historical record is far better. I say 'possibility' out of respect for the notorious problems in the way of such a comparison, insuperable by definition for those to whom imperialism is a phase of the history of capitalism in its modern form, but formidable on any view at all. It is worth noticing that a basis for the comparison has recently been explored, with particular reference to the early Near Eastern Empires, by K. Ekholm and J. Friedman, in *Power & Propaganda* (1979) ed. M. T. Larsen (= *Mesopotamia*, 7). They try to show that, despite all the differences, ancient imperialist systems can be analysed in the terms of modern theory, especially in the key area of the development of the economic relationship between centre and periphery.

If Harris takes us to the threshold of such a discussion of general problems, he takes us no further. He seems to have very little to say about the implications of his own results. We may even ask what exactly he is claiming to have proved for the Romans, what historical reality he is pointing out to us.

What is in dispute is not whether there was planning of strategy over long periods—for which no ancient state was equipped—but whether there was a strong continuing drive to expand. Little long-term planning lay behind even the most vigorous imperialisms of the nineteenth century. These non-existent Roman plans are an artificial target, an Aunt Sally. We should turn our attention instead to the direct evidence concerning Rome's drive to expand. (107)

This passage occurs in his discussion of the open statements of the policy of expansion, but the remarks evidently do have general reference. The case he is making is not that there was a long-term plan worked out in advance and designed to promote the power and wealth of the Roman people. Each decision, as he conceives it, was taken in the light of the immediate perceived interest of Rome in the particular situation they found themselves in. But there was an overall 'drive': the problem is to know what exactly *was* that drive—does he mean simply that an observable process continued, or is he saying that some forces were at work over and above the individual decision? I am not really sure which he means and the question does not explicitly arise again.

For the most part, Harris is not concerned to offer any kind of theory or explanation or causal analysis of imperialism as such. He is almost entirely locked into the framework of the controversy which we have been discussing. He takes a specific theory and methodically

assesses it, assesses it into the ground. Only occasionally do general issues arise at all. On reflection, even the title is programmatic: *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327-70 B.C.* At first sight, the precision of the dates seems odd; but, of course, he is concerned only with one phase of the story of Roman imperialism. He does not claim to be explaining its genesis and he cheerfully leaves it at the point when its character changes into the imperialism of the great buccaneers of the last seventy years of the era. He even justifies the final date as avoiding 'adding certain lengthy discussions . . . notably concerning Caesar's commentaries'; 'the most remarkable document of Roman imperialism' as Professor Brunt has called them in the article mentioned above. It would, of course, be wrong to criticize a book, which deals with a stated part of a phenomenon, for not dealing with the whole of it. On the other hand, an author might be expected to give his views about the general theory of his subject, at least as background to his more detailed study; or to say that no such general theory is attainable and to explain why. It is significant that Harris feels himself under no such obligation and that Sherwin White sees this as no cause for comment or criticism, except to say that the starting-point is too late and that the picture is distorted as a result (178).

There is just one passage, where more general issues arise about the whole historical process, not as one might expect in a general introduction or conclusion, but in the context of a specific discussion of the economic motives for imperialism; the eventual conclusion (93) is that ' . . . desire for economic gain was a factor of the greatest importance in predisposing senators to take aggressive and interventionist decisions in foreign policy . . .'. The argument is important enough to be quoted in full (83/4):

What is the ultimate strength of the claim made by traditional Marxists (and by J. A. Hobson) that the need for slaves was the true origin of the whole history of Roman war and expansion? It can be no more than a doctrine. Unfortunately no well-informed Marxist writer has ever attempted to show in adequate detail how the entire phenomenon grew out of the production relations within Roman society. The attempt would be difficult, not least because Roman policy was created by an aristocracy which throughout its history devoted much of its energy to purposes other than self-enrichment, and which often, when it was concerned with gain, thought in terms of pillage and seizure rather than production; also because, when Rome's external policy underwent a profound change in the last years of Augustus' power, the reasons seem to have been mainly political. But historians opposed to Marxism are in danger of rejecting too much: for the slave supply was of very great importance to the well-being of the Romans of the middle Republic, to such an extent that it must have exercised a fundamental influence. Because the slave supply is not known to have been much discussed, we tend to assume that it was of trivial significance. The subject was clearly a distasteful one in an aristocratic society, and even in Cato's work on agriculture, which gives plentiful advice about the purchase of farm-equipment, nothing is said about the purchase of the farm-slaves whose presence is assumed. Slave-dealing, as generally in the Graeco-Roman world, was a poorly regarded occupation. Yet slaves were bought in large numbers by, or at least on behalf of, the aristocratic leaders of the state. An adequate supply of slaves at reasonable prices was not likely to be forthcoming in peaceful conditions: demand presumably tended to rise in the second century, and perhaps throughout our period, and it cannot be supposed on any reasonable assumption about the fertility of slaves that slave-breeding, together with other internal sources such as foundlings, came anywhere near meeting this demand. Thus there had to be an external supply: some of it could be obtained by purchase, as from Bithynia in the time of Nicomedes III, but most of it could more easily be obtained by war. Thus for a satisfactory slave supply war, or rather periodic successful war, was indeed highly desirable. This however, was only one of the economic benefits which were assumed to grow from successful warfare, and there is no rational justification for reckoning it the only important one, still less for treating the demand for slaves as the root of Roman imperialism.

At first sight, the main implication of the passage is to reject Marxist interpretations of imperialism. On closer examination, this is not so clear. For one thing, the arguments against a possible Marxist history are curiously weak: can he really mean that Marxist analysis only applies to ruling élites if they are *wholly* obsessed with self-enrichment? And can he really mean that the whole process of the cessation of expansion can be regarded as 'political'? Again, he does not make what might seem to be the obvious points: for instance, that the establishment of the slave economy seems, as far as our information takes

us, to be the result of imperial expansion, not to precede it; or that the theory places an excessive emphasis on economic factors at the expense of others. Indeed, this latter argument is very remote from his thinking, because his final objection to the view he is attacking is that it over-emphasizes one economic factor at the expense of other economic factors; that is, the slave-supply was of fundamental importance and made regular warfare highly desirable, but this was only one of the economic benefits of warfare and should not be allowed to obscure the others. The whole passage leaves me completely puzzled; the ideas badly need further explanation and development, but they get no further attention, although if they mean what they seem to mean, the topic ought to be of basic importance for his thought. The reader is left uncertain where he stands even in relation to the 'traditional' Marxism being discussed, let alone to (I take it the contrast is implicit) more recent sophisticated Marxism, less open to the objections he makes. As a matter of fact, to say that the concern of Roman aristocrats was with pillage and seizure not production seems simply to be raising a false and unnecessary opposition. Pillage and seizure provided exactly the resources they needed in order to finance the slave-based economy of the *latifundia*. Surely, in at least this sense, war-making and Italian production do interlock and form a mutually supporting structure. Without constant warfare, there would have been no cheap slaves and no investment capital passing into the hands of the individual estate-owning oligarch; nor would there be the escape-valve of military service and the hope of loot for the dispossessed peasants. (For analysis and for the elaboration of a model incorporating these factors, see Keith Hopkins, 'Economic Growth and Towns in Classical Antiquity', in *Towns in Societies* (ed. Abrams and Wrigley, 1978), 59 f.; *Conquerors and Slaves* (1978), Ch. 1). No doubt, all this can be seen as being the result of successful imperialism, rather than its cause; but the most important thing is to see the interdependence; once the pattern is reproducing itself, the question of cause and consequence no longer matters.

III

It is a marked characteristic of Harris' style and technique to concentrate his attention on conscious decision-making, on planning and discussing, mostly in the senate, though sometimes also in the minds of individual oligarchs or citizens in the *comitia*. In other words he works on the assumption that what happened, happened for the most part because of consciously formulated decisions taken by bodies who understood their interests, perceived a choice and took a decision. Thus, he sees it as a crucial weakness in our understanding that we do not have access to what was said by senators in debating their policy—and indeed that ancient writers and contemporaries probably had no such access either, so that we cannot even get information second-hand. He is not, of course, suggesting that the choices were wholly rational or unmotivated and, indeed, devotes a great deal of space in the earlier part of the book to analysing the attitudes, habits and dispositions of Romans and especially the war-ethos which radically determined the ambitions and aspirations of career politicians. But he clearly feels that to know what senators said in debate would tell us why they acted as they did. It is one of the respects in which the passage just quoted is so unusual that he argues there precisely that slave-dealing must have been of fundamental importance, though undiscussed. For my part, I should expect many of the fundamental issues to have been undiscussed and even unrealized. To have the senate's minutes, illuminating though they would be, would not solve these problems.

A closely related point is that Harris tends not to be specially interested in arguments from structure; again, there are exceptions—most notably, the excellent analysis of the aristocratic war-ethos—but his discrimination seems to be erratic. This seems to me to emerge clearly in Chapter III: it consists of an introduction and then two balanced sections; the two sections are treated more or less as equivalent sources of enlightenment, yet the first is entirely devoted to the view of one historian, the Greek Polybius; the second contains a demonstration that there were prayer formulae and interpretations, publicly used at various dates in the period, which reflect the assumption enshrined in ritual that the gods approved the expansion of the Empire. There is no indication that Harris attaches more importance to the one than the other; yet Polybius is an individual who could simply be

mistaken in his judgment. The argument of the second half, if it is sound, is of infinitely greater importance.

Let me illustrate the sort of arguments I have in mind. It is well shown in Chapter I how Roman oligarchs of the middle republic took as their central criterion of achievement success in war. The programme of experience laid down for them in the *cursus* involved military training, leading to commands of increasing importance. The achievements of their ancestors were held up to them as a tradition to be emulated and if possible improved on. At every stage, religious rituals of great prominence invoked the reinforcement of divine sanction on militarism and military achievement, leading to supreme achievement in which human and divine approval were alike poured on the victorious commander, for whom normal restraints were temporarily suspended on the day of his triumph. The triumph itself was eventually bound by rule to a certain level of military performance, most morbidly by the rule that at least five thousand of the enemy must have been killed in battle. Harris' discussion of all this is conducted at the level of establishing the characteristics of the Romans' way of life—their *nomoi*. But by the third/second centuries B.C. warlike habits were enshrined in an institutional system which both reflected and perpetuated them. At this period there was an annual rhythm which underlay the contingencies of Roman expansion. Consider, for example, the position of each year's consul. He had a tradition of his family's glory to sustain and only one campaign in which to do it; rules and conventions prevented his attaining another consulship for ten years and then it was probable only if his first had been a notable success. The rules were of course applied with different degrees of rigidity in different periods, but in the most important period for this purpose (200/150 B.C.), they were firmly maintained. Down to about 100 B.C. the shape of the consular year was still significantly different from that in the later republic. The consul was primarily a military commander who had duties to perform in Rome, when first appointed, but who was always basically anxious to get away to his province. Normally, there were no consuls in Rome from Spring or early Summer onwards. One of them had to come back before the end of the consular year to hold the elections; sometimes he then went back to his province, often not. Prorogation did sometimes take place—Flamininus in Greece is the most obvious case; but very often the consul was simply replaced in the command by his successor, approximately a year after taking the command. The function of the system, whether it was consciously worked out and planned or not, was to make sure that office, provinces, the opportunities of *laus* and *gloria*, were none of them monopolized by particular individuals or particular families. The oligarchy worked to an understanding about the sharing of the available chances of undying glory.

This is not simply a question of the year's commanders putting pressure on the senate, pressure which the senate might well feel disposed to resist (cf. Sherwin White's remarks at 178). For the most part, the system of the rotation of office seemed to work reasonably well down to the 140's B.C.; the atmosphere must have been quite different from that which we know so much better in the last years of the republic, when individual ambition and competition between factions had intensified many-fold. Once a particular war-zone had fallen to Sulla, Lucullus or Pompey, the Senate could never be sure when and how the transfer to a successor could be made; the efforts by rivals to prevent such an appointment would be correspondingly bitter and this could lead occasionally, as it may have done in the cases of Cyrene and Egypt, to an inability to agree how to act at all. It cannot be assumed that this state of affairs applied a hundred years earlier and most of what we know suggests that it did not, despite occasional problems with particular commanders. In the middle republic, if one faction failed to gain a particular command or opportunity, there was always next year to hope for better things. It must have been far more important to all factions to keep a regular flow of opportunities and profits, than to attempt to exclude rivals from command. The result of this situation is familiar to all: the Romans fought wars, sometimes major, sometimes routine, almost every year for decade after decade. It seems doubtful whether they would ever have questioned the appropriateness of this situation; but the pressure of aristocratic career expectations must have constituted heavy pressure on them whether or not they were aware of it.

There is another area of pressure built into the deepest layers of the Roman socio-political system and that is the organization of the Italian allies, to which *War and*

Imperialism pays only cursory attention, though it has been emphasized by others, particularly by Momigliano in *Alien Wisdom*. As the League was created by the establishment of *foedera* between Rome and the other states of non-Roman Italy, the basic condition which constituted the League's principle of operation was the provision of troops. These allied troops constituted a major, even increasing, percentage of the Roman armies which created the imperial structure of the middle republic. The system continued down to 90 B.C., when the Italians were enfranchised and became part of the regular legionary armies. These facts have a profound significance for the nature of the alliance. There was no tax or tribute, so that the resources normally found in taxation could only be realized through the employment of the military potential of the allies; for the system to have lasted as long as it did, it must have worked in ways which were not deeply destructive to the interests and pride of the component members of the League. Presumably, they received enough booty and enough credit to make the system acceptable at least at some level. The non-existence of any requirement to pay taxes was clearly part of the working complicity between the Roman oligarchs and their opposite numbers in the allied communities. For our purposes what is important is that here again the sheer availability of the military resource constituted yet another layer of pressure on the senate as it took its war-decisions. Not to have had a war, would have meant remitting the taxation on Italy for a year. To have gone on not having wars, would have meant that the League would have lost the medium through which it existed and hence that it would itself have ceased to exist. War-making was the life-blood of the Roman confederation in Italy.

It is interesting that Harris has commented (also in *JRS* 70 (1980) 193-4) on this very point, in his review of Michael Crawford's *The Roman Republic*: he complains that neither Momigliano nor Crawford has given a full defence of the theory and then says, by way of advising them about the required defence: 'It would be desirable to show that the Senate was continually anxious about, indeed preoccupied with, the problem of Italian loyalty, even though for most of the period Italy seemed quiet enough, and that the obvious—not to say overwhelming—advantages of expansion by force outside the peninsula stayed in the background.' In other words he understands the theory as operating at the level of fully conscious choices made by the Senate; it would only be if the Senate was aware of the problem of loyalty and openly debated it as a determinant consideration, that the importance of this factor could be entered into competition with rival explanations. The argument seems to be somewhat topsy-turvy, since if the theory is on the right lines, then the constant warfare of the second-century would keep the alliance in its proper function, so there would be no need for anxiety or debate on the senate's part. In fact, of course, the question is not the awareness or otherwise of the participants, but the appropriateness or otherwise of a historian's *post eventum* judgment, to be assessed by its consistency with the evidence and its power of explanation. Moreover, the two explanations do not really compete, since the argument from structure cannot explain the specific, only the long-term trend; it can never tell us why the Romans fought when they fought, or where they fought, or whom they fought. Still less can it help us understand those many occasions on which they missed their opportunities for warfare or for exploitation because the decision which might seem rational was not taken through faction-strife, or through shortage of manpower or other resources, or through negligence or ignorance. But if we are ever to understand the expansion of the empire as a process, that can only be done by isolating the factors which predisposed the Romans to certain forms of action; their political and military system seems to be one such important factor.

The points I have made suggest that Harris is working with an unrealistic model of the senate's freedom of action. It would not be difficult to add more factors to those I have discussed; perhaps the effects of Rome's own propaganda could also be seen in these terms. Rome by its own actions and statements became the city famous for its *fides*, for its strong support of friends and allies. We know how this looked when seen from Judaea in the 160's B.C.: 'And Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they are valiant men, and have pleasure in all that join themselves unto them, and make amity with all such as come unto them . . .' (I *Macc.* 8). A reputation for supporting the oppressed has to be maintained as well as earned. It has rightly been emphasized that Roman *amicitia* was a flexible conception, evoking military action if and only if it suited Roman purposes to act.

This only implies, however, that they could forget occasional obligations, provided the network of obligations as a whole was kept in good repair. The constant flow of embassies and appeals required constant response, sometimes, though of course not always, a response backed up by force. In a real sense, they thus became the prisoners of their own reputation. The senate, in the end, had little freedom except to organize the details of the year's campaigning. Livy is after all a perfectly good guide to what went on. No great debates about the motives and profits of war; no agonizing about the possibilities of refraining from military activity. Just debate, as Livy says, about which theatres shall be consular, which praetorian, which promagistrates be prorogued. There were of course moments when more weighty issues arose; these were the beginnings of the major wars, which clearly took extra commitment, extra recruiting, extra arms-production, extra appeals for divine collaboration. Even at those moments, the debates were about where to invest this year's resources or whether to defer action against a major enemy for a year or even two. All has to be understood within the framework of an over-arching militarist ethos and of the constant pressure for good opportunities from competitive aristocrats. The senate's freedom of action lay in matters of detail, of timing, of organisation—of course essential matters, but not of the order Harris' book presupposes.

If it is true that *War and Imperialism* operates too much on the level of conscious decision-making in relation to its own chosen field of the origins of wars, the same point has even more force in relation to the key area of economic development. It simply will not do to reduce economic issues to the level of individual motivation, still less to the level of individual 'greed'. We need to distinguish three processes, each requiring to be analysed in its own terms, though of course their effects interlocked in real life. The first is the practice of constant warfare; the second is the imposition of direct rule from the centre on what eventually became provincial areas; the third is the establishment of an imperialistic pattern of economic relationships. Each process has its own logic and its own rate of development. It seems clear enough that war-making, however its origin may be explained, must be seen as providing the initial dynamic. The imposition of direct rule, on the other hand, is in many areas of the Empire a late stage representing only the formal recognition and regularization of a pre-existing informal political and economic hegemony. Harris himself argues elegantly that annexation as such was not seen by the Romans themselves as a particularly important event; they were disinclined to set firm limits to their territorial claims, preferring to regard all areas with which they had dealings as falling within their *imperium*. The important and problematic questions, therefore, concern economic development: evidently, there was a rapid accumulation of resources in Rome and Italy at the expense of the rest of the Mediterranean world; evidently, too, there was a progressive elaboration on the part of Romans and Italians of techniques of exploitation, through trading, moneylending, the acquisition of property and so on. The information available is not adequate to give a detailed picture, though we do know a good deal about the situation as it was by the last decades of the republic. But we can at least make progress in formulating the questions which need to be answered—how far, for instance, the Mediterranean area was already forming a single economic system by the second century B.C., so that Italy can be seen as profiting at the expense of peripheral areas long before they became provincialized; and, if we should be thinking in these terms, how this process related to the progress of Roman militarism and the taking of war-decisions.

Such questions go far beyond the chosen range of *War and Imperialism*, though they are anything but irrelevant to its arguments. It is tempting to say that Harris' conceptions have their validity on their own level, that he is discussing the reality of Roman decision-making as it appeared to contemporaries, while my arguments refer to some 'deeper' process not apparent to contemporaries. There is no doubt a good deal in this, but it is not quite an adequate description of the situation. If it is true that Harris underestimates the pressure on the Senate's freedom of action caused by the attitudes, habits and expectations of the Romans, by the rituals in which these attitudes find their symbolic expression, and by the institutions and procedures in which they ultimately result, then it in fact becomes necessary to change our perspective on all the problems with which *War and Imperialism* deals. The accounts of the origins of the individual wars become relatively unimportant, not in themselves (it remains important to see why the Romans went where they did, when

they did, and how they justified what they did) but for the understanding of Roman imperialism as an historic phenomenon. The real achievement of Harris' book should be to settle once and for all the question of whether Rome's wars were aggressive or defensive, so that the focus of debate can now be shifted towards the far deeper problems of the origins, significance and eventual disappearance of the expansion-bearing structures in Roman society and organization.

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