

## **Roman History and the American Philological Association 1900–2000**

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Roman history may broadly be defined as the study of the institutions, culture, and society of the Roman world ranging in time from the eighth century B.C. to the seventh century A.D. It is the tale of the infinitely complex interactions of the diverse peoples of the Mediterranean basin and neighboring lands as mediated through the structures of the Roman State. It is a subject that depends upon philology, material culture, and comparative analysis with other premodern societies.

The range of Roman history renders it a difficult companion to subjects that depend on any one of the sub-disciplines that make up the spectrum of Classical Studies. Nonetheless, that companionship is central to the discipline as practiced in North America. The overwhelming proportion of domestically trained hires of Roman historians into history departments during the last twenty years has been of people who were trained in classics departments or programs devoted to ancient history in which strong linguistic training was a feature. The same has been true of domestically trained hires into Classics departments. Significant as this partnership may be, there are also significant differences in approach. Historiography is one feature of the subject, but much that is most significant in the last century comes from other areas of study, the use of other texts, and of material culture. Roman history is as much an area of premodern history as it is a branch of classical studies, a tension to which I will return.

The question of compatibility arises very quickly for anyone investigating the issue of *TAPA* that ended the nineteenth century. In the articles at the front there is one piece that might charitably fit under the rubric of Roman historiography—Gudeman's study of the sources of Tacitus' *Germania*—and a very interesting examination of Greek agonistic inscriptions by Edward Capps of the University of Chicago. Otherwise the subject may be sought in an abstract of a paper given at the annual meeting (at Madison in July) of a piece on the βασιλικὸς λόγος by Theodore Burgess of the Bradley Polytechnic Institute,

which seems to have slipped into the program as a portion of a longer work on the meaning of ἐπιδεῖκνυμι. The Association was, of course, in those days, devoted very much to philology, and encompassed modern as well as ancient literatures. Sun myths in Lithuanian folk songs share space with several articles on Roman religion that I would claim under my definition of Roman history. It would however, be wrong to take the *TAPA* of 1900 as representative of work being done in the subject.

In the *TAPA* volume for 1905 Henry Sanders of the University of Michigan offered an excellent discussion of the Oxyrhyncus summary of Livy, returning to a theme that he had first treated two years earlier. The same issue also offers the first appearance in the pages of *TAPA* by another man whose legacy in the study of the Roman world would be very great: Francis W. Kelsey. His theme this year would be the title of Caesar's *Commentarii rerum gestarum*, as he argued the title of the Caesarian corpus should be known. In later years he would offer a constant stream of publications more closely linked to his abiding interest in material culture. Studies of Roman material culture, and especially of Roman epigraphy, pick up during the ensuing years and in 1914 we have the first appearance in *TAPA* of Miss Taylor, then of Vassar College, with a preliminary study connected with her first book on the divinity of the Roman emperor.

It is fair to say that the foundations of Roman history were then in place as they are today. The material with which the historian needed to engage was seen to go well beyond the texts preserved through the manuscript tradition, and the range of subjects extended well beyond any that could be addressed solely through literary works. This should hardly be surprising, as the turn of the last century was, in many ways, the golden age of epigraphy. The great Wilhelm Dittenberger lived until 1906, constantly updating his splendid *Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum*. His *Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae* had appeared in 1904, and Hermann Dessau was already at work on *Inscriptiones latinae selectae*. The great corpora of *CIL* and *IG* were still progressing, but the commentaries of Dittenberger and Dessau were crucial in making epigraphy the critical tool of the ancient historian that it has become. The roots of all this go back, of course to Boeckh, at the beginning of the century, but I think that it is reasonable to say that the creation of massive corpora of inscriptions at the end of the century had the effect of placing ancient history on the same documentary foundation that modern history had acquired under the influence of Ranke. At the same time the post-Napoleonic urge to create great national museums containing the treasures of ancient civilizations had moved beyond the stage of simple piracy to systematic study.

But there is something else here that is missing, and as I move beyond 1900 into the 20s and 30s, I should say that there are two things, or rather two people who are most astonishingly missing from the pages of *TAPA*. The two greatest Roman historians of the first half of the century never published a word in the journal, even though one of them would be president of the association in 1928. They are, of course, Tenney Frank and Michael Rostovtzeff.

In the same year that Miss Taylor published her first paper in *TAPA*, her teacher, Tenney Frank, then still at Bryn Mawr College, brought forth a book entitled *Roman Imperialism*. The work of 1914, and his years of teaching at Bryn Mawr before its publication, had moved him far from the subject of his dissertation (and first book) on *Attraction of Mood in Early Latin*, published in 1905, and his first article, published in *The Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago* in 1903 on "A Stichometric Scholium to the *Medea* of Euripides, with Remarks on the Text of Didymus." The transformation of Tenney Frank from linguist to historian may be traced through a series of articles after the publication of his thesis that ranged from "The Use of the Optative in the *Edda*," (1906) through some early experiments in the writing of ancient history (between 1907 and 1910). After this point he ceased to write primarily on linguistics, and turned his attention completely to what were to become the preoccupations of the next thirty years of his life: Latin literature and Roman history.

While Frank's reputation these days stems largely from his initiation of the *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, his interests were far broader. He was a devoted reader of Latin, and one who insisted on reading Latin in light of its historical context (a proto-New-Historicist, perhaps). And he was an assiduous student of the historical record. He spent several years as Professor in charge of the School of Classical Studies at the American Academy and published widely on Roman archaeology. His terms in Rome were periods of genuine labor and served to enhance the massive international reputation that he had first achieved through the publication of *Roman Imperialism*. The date and subject were timely. The preface was completed on 20 January 1914, but his thesis reads almost as a prophecy of the popular hysteria that accompanied the outbreak of war in August. In his view the driving force behind Roman imperialism was not the self interest of the aristocracy, but rather "the free Roman people" who "stumbled falteringly and unwittingly into ever-increasing dominion, until finally the overgrown empire imposed a burden of rule upon the conquerors that leveled the whole state to a condition of servitude" (358). He wrote in conscious reaction to what he saw as the dominant tendency of European (especially German) scholarship to attribute excessive influence in a democratic society to the aristocracy. He objected to "old-world" political traditions that taught historians

to accept territorial expansion as a matter of course. Instead, he asked his readers to “imagine a people far removed from the economic pressure as well as the political traditions of modern Europe, an agricultural people, not too thickly settled and not egged on by commercial ambitions” (vii) His theme was the disintegration of negative cross currents in such a society that would be opposed to war and it was not one that could be comprehended in a single formula of modern invention. He did not reject such formulae; modern theories helped shape his own every bit as much as did his upbringing in Kansas. He was born in Clay Center Kansas in 1876, educated in Kansas City, where he worked during school vacations for the Swift Meat Packing Company. His Romans were very much formed by his own picture of the mid-Western United States.<sup>1</sup>

In his discussion of the Roman peasantry in *Roman Imperialism*, Frank noted with admiration the work of a Russian scholar whose earliest work, in German, had taken on the subject of the Roman colonate. In 1921, the author of this book, recently rejected by the electors to the Camden Chair of Ancient History in the University of Oxford, arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, succeeding another influential figure of this period, W. L. Westermann. I will not here reprise the extensive bibliography that has recently arisen on the career of Michael Rostovtzeff, a tribute to his value as a symbol to enable the reentry of Russian classicists into the world community, as well as to his genius as an historian. But I hope that I might introduce two somewhat obscure moments in his career that serve to epitomize the nature of his contribution. It was in the summer of 1921

<sup>1</sup>His identification of the values of the Roman farmer with democracy led him to adopt contemporary theories of racial determinism to explain what he saw as the decline of Roman institutions and literature in the imperial period. Frank 1916 did indeed, as Broughton (1990: 70) noted, attract attention, and he repeated these views, almost verbatim, in e.g. Frank 1920: 158–64 and 1927: 211–18, despite trenchant criticism of the onomastic conclusions in Gordon 1924: 101–11. The thrust of Frank’s study is that “the lack of energy and enterprise, the failure of foresight and common sense, the weakening of moral and political stamina, all were concomitant with the gradual diminution of the stock which, in earlier days, had displayed these qualities” (1916: 705). Nor was Gordon herself immune from deterministic thought as she wrote “hence precisely that portion of the Roman world from which its government, its culture and its ideas proceeded, was derived to a great extent from a servile class, of no nationality and of a civilization not their own. The conventionality, the waning literary and artistic inspiration, and the general creeping paralysis of ancient culture may find part of its explanation here” (110). It was Baynes (1943: 33) who properly contextualized these notions within the spectrum of implicitly and explicitly racist thought connected with theories of “imperial decline,” though Frank himself had placed his work in the context of studies of ancient mystery cults.

that Professor Richard Ely, a liberal economist at the University of Wisconsin, took time in the course of his vacation in the Adirondacks to sketch out the plan for a series of lectures on "Urban Land Economics." His approach was historical, which led him to early urbanism, including, I fear, Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of early commercial cities. Fortunately for Ely, "after this had been outlined, discussions with Professor Michael Rostovtzeff led me to invite him to give a brief course of lectures on cities in the ancient world as a general introduction" (Rostovtzeff 1922: 5). Rostovtzeff's lectures appear to have been taken down by a stenographer, and they open as follows (1922: 18):

I do not know whether or not my course will be on land economics, but it will be on economic and social conditions, that is sure. Now, what is my purpose in giving this short introduction to your work? It is to interpret one of the main problems of modern economic and social life. I do not know if you, being Americans, grasp entirely the importance of this problem, but I, being a Russian, grasp entirely the importance of this problem.

Why does he have this understanding? It is simple, "there is no such sharp antagonism, so sharp a contrast between these two types [*sc.* city and country people] as there is, for example, in Russia and to a lesser extent in Western Europe." In his view the Russian revolution was fueled by centuries of hatred between town and country. But while his view of the relevance of the American experience to the ancient might diverge rather strikingly from that of Tenney Frank, the two men had much more to bring them together. Like Frank, Rostovtzeff had a strong background in field archaeology, he wrote on questions of art history as he did on his excavations of Scythian remains in Southern Russia and, in the last years of his life, on Dura. As with Frank, his detailed observations rarely stand the test of time. But his methodological insight, his passion for the subject, his sense that political history could only be understood against the broader background of social institutions remain central to our concerns today. As for the importance of material culture to the study of antiquity, there is perhaps no more eloquent statement than Rostovtzeff's own in a lecture that he gave for an undergraduate course on Ancient History and Archaeology at Yale in 1941/42 in which he said,

During a life of historical research and study I have tried in order to reach, or at least to come nearer to historical truth many and various ways. Of these ways none has been more exciting, nor perhaps more fruitful, than the endeavor, in my studies of the ancient world, to make full use, not of literary materials only, but also of what we call commonly archaeological evidence. (M. I. Rostovtzeff papers, Box 30, Folder 189)

For Rostovtzeff, “a new era” began in the study of the ancient world when it ceased to be devoted “almost exclusively” to “our rather meagre literary tradition.” In terms of his own teaching, there is perhaps no more powerful testimony to this than the story told me by one of his students who had come to New Haven from Madison, where she had sat in lecture rooms in which students greeted his lectures with the chant of “Rosty, Rosty Siscoombaa.” When she arrived he said to her, “You must know inscriptions, I will teach you.”<sup>2</sup>

What Rostovtzeff and Tenney Frank stood for remains important, the study of social relations, the extension of the classical world to include peoples who were neither Greek nor Roman, and a deep sympathy for the voices of those who are suppressed in the literary tradition, be they slaves, peasants, or women of all classes (the last being an interest that is perhaps more clear in some of Frank’s work than Rostovtzeff’s).

The interests of Frank and Rostovtzeff did not die with them, as the 30s, 40s, and 50s saw an impressive array of work that began from a documentary perspective, and the growth of work on the Hellenistic as well as the Roman worlds. Epigraphy and papyrology were the key to advances in the study of ancient institutions and social history. Emblematic of this approach may be the work of two scholars whose international reputations came in time to rank among the best in the subject. Both worked at Bryn Mawr. As we have seen, Lily Ross Taylor’s career began with detailed epigraphic study that illuminated the imperial cult. What remains even more important, of course, is her fundamental work on Roman elections, first on the tribal structure of Italy, and then on the actual way that voting took place. Taylor again was an historian who knew the land of which she wrote, spending much time doing productive work at the American Academy. Working in a period that was increasingly dominated by studies of prosopography, she never lost sight of the social and political institutions that set the stage upon which the aristocratic actors of late Republican politics would stand. She had an eagle eye the implications of a text, and one of the joys of the Bryn Mawr library remains her copy of Shackleton Bailey’s monumental edition of the *Letters to Atticus*. The study of commentary upon a commentary may seem a *recherché* activity, but the pencil of Miss Taylor is always one to be watched.

Her colleague of many years, Bob Broughton, is chiefly known these days (as he will be for a very long time to come) for his magnificent *Magistrates of the Roman Republic*. With characteristic generosity, he attributed a significant role in its inception to a thesis by one of his students, Marcia Patterson, whose

<sup>2</sup>Personal communication in 1990 from Dr. Elizabeth Bunting Fine.

work on the magistrates of the Second Punic War is the basis for that section of volume 1. But great as this book is—and one can perhaps do no better than to quote Ronald Syme's fear that it is so good that it might become a substitute for reading the sources themselves—it would be wrong to see Broughton's work solely in the context of the Roman aristocracy. His thesis became what was, at the time, an excellent study of the romanization of *Africa proconsularis*, and his contribution to the *Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, on Roman Asia Minor, which drew high praise in a long review by Rostovtzeff when it appeared, is still a valuable resource.

Master of the Roman aristocracy that he was, Broughton knew that it did not define the subject, and that crucial aspects of the subject were those connected with the provinces. Indeed, as Broughton was finishing volume 1 of *Magistrates*, David Magie at Princeton was completing one of the most impressive books on a region of the Roman empire heretofore attempted. *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* may be faulted, perhaps, for an attachment to a narrative form that was not readily reconcilable with the evidence in volume 1. But no student of Asia Minor to this day would be without the judicious handling of the vast range of epigraphic material that constitutes the volume of notes in the much more substantial volume 2. Magie is all the more interesting in that he, like Westermann, to whom much credit for the initial development of papyrology in this country is due, and Rostovtzeff, had played a role well beyond the confines of Classics. He was, as were they, among the advisers to the Versailles peace conference, where his expertise in matters relating to the former Ottoman empire was welcomed.

At this point it is worth pausing for a minute to sum up some themes that link the works such as the *Economic Survey*, *Magistrates*, and *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*. They are all works that stand apart from what Rostovtzeff called the "meager literary tradition." They share in what might be called the Pauly mentality (referring to the old rather than the new) in their efforts to be comprehensive and to serve the research of other classicists. These are none of them books that make much sense to people outside of the discipline. Rostovtzeff and Westermann, whose main interest was slavery, were the only two ancient historians to serve as presidents of the American Historical Association. In an academic world that was still highly compartmentalized (and departmentalized) this well reflects the culture of the time. But strength may also be a weakness. Only Rostovtzeff and Frank sought to write for audiences of non-specialists as well as specialists, and to communicate the enduring importance of issues connected with Roman history to outsiders.

In a sense Ronald Syme's *Roman Revolution* filled the gap between Roman historians and historians of other periods from abroad. Syme appeared as a significant representative of a movement within the discipline of history during the middle of the past century. Although he often said that he had never read Namier's study of the British Parliaments when he wrote his great book, and had likewise never read the pioneering book of Charles Beard, the *Economic Interpretation of the American Constitution*, Syme represented a style of historiography in which grand narratives were seen as ideological constructs. The science, or, rather, the art of prosopography was a tool in the hands of historians who sought to break down traditional accounts created during the course of the nineteenth century and blessed with the authority of Rankean objectivity, but it worked in various ways. In the United States, the movement away from Rankean positivism—increasingly associated with Beard, and the European historian Carl Becker—came to be known as relativism. Syme was in no sense a relativist. His roots lay in the positivistic tradition of Dessau's *Prosopographia imperii romani*, and Münzer's accomplishments in producing the countless Pauly articles that he wrote before his death at the hands of the Nazis. The myths of Mommsonian historiography would fall before the accumulation of careers and tale of self interest that made up the oligarchy that lay behind the façade of any government. In the 50s and 60s, when historiography in other areas was deeply concerned with establishing truths that could not be overthrown by the lies propounded by totalitarian regimes, Syme's work had a significant place in all studies of history. It was the only work of ancient history that was required reading in sophomore tutorials for history students at Harvard when I was an undergraduate, and it owed its place there to the sense that it was one work by an ancient historian that students of history more generally should know. One remarkable feature of this selection is that, unlike the works of Moses Finley and Arnaldo Momigliano, which also attracted attention from historians of other periods, it is long and detailed.

There may be a lesson here. For all that Finley and Momigliano were excellent and influential members of the ancient historical profession, they were able to reach beyond the frontiers of the discipline because they were interested in broad questions that were of interest to students of other periods. At best, their books are suggestive rather than comprehensive. This is significant in that many of our colleagues communicate across time periods not through shared bodies of evidence, but rather through shared concerns. This does not mean that the big book will not be read. Some very long books have attracted significant interest over the years from the general public, and one, not written by a member of the APA, has attained some status as a standard work for non-classicists who are interested in polytheists and Christians. But many have not done so, and their



fate is a reminder that a model that works well within the discipline will not always do so well beyond it. It is through books of various sorts that the continued vigor of the discipline can be shared with colleagues who are also interested in the past.

But I digress. There was a shift in the direction of Roman history during the 50s and 60s away from institutional history, away from the study of the provinces back in the direction of political history. To some degree this may be attributed to the perceived influence of Syme, to some extent it may be attributed to the tenor of the times. Outside of Classics there developed a suspicion of topics that smacked of Marxian influence, and of studies that suggested that some absolute truth was beyond recovery. From the early 70s onwards our colleagues who study the history of later periods have been struggling with the impact of the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era wherein the very institutions that many saw history defending were shown to be deeply flawed. To some this has been a crisis, to others a release. Roman history, I fear, lagged somewhat behind the curve, with intense interest in political institutions and politics remaining at the center of the subject longer than they might have if more Roman historians had seen their home in the AHA than the APA. But even then breaths of new air began to spread from what had been regarded as fringe areas in the post-Rostovtzeff era, the study of the Hellenistic world and, especially, of late Antiquity. The re-encounter with these periods was accompanied by a resurgence of interest in the provinces, especially those of the Greek East, which now involved a mandatory encounter with the ever-expanding corpus of Louis Robert. The sheer brilliance of Robert's work on all aspects of Greek life illuminated by documents helped open new vistas for historians seeking a reprieve from conspiracy theories and the foundation of the Augustan principate. At the same time, the study of late Antiquity, the vision of the period after Constantine as one of enormous dynamism rather than decline, opened up further categories of evidence that had long been ignored or relegated to the realm of the ecclesiastical historian. The extension of the boundaries of Roman history into the sixth century A.D. in fact reinvigorated debate in all areas, calling attention to the need for fresh approaches. Most significantly this has been accompanied by serious study of the Roman family, new debate about the nature of the economy, and recognition of the importance of non-Roman peoples within the empire. It has been a period in which many areas have benefited from methods imported from other disciplines, and from efforts to use epigraphy and papyrology to solve questions connected with the lives of the sub-elite. Studies of women, of sexuality, gender identity—and other topics that were no better defined than Ely's notion of the consumer city in the first half of the century—have shown us new ways to read the evidence that we have.

As a new century begins (finally) Roman historians find themselves with a lot of work to do, and new challenges that need to be faced squarely. I do not think that we can abandon the traditions of comprehensive scholarship so well represented by the work of Broughton or Magie. Nor can we ignore the challenge of writing so that colleagues outside of Classics, colleagues who are not about to read *Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, will recognize the questions that we are looking at as being of interest to themselves. The aforementioned work on polytheists and Christians depends heavily upon the work of Louis Robert, reminding us that there is room in the field for both general studies and a work like the late John Oliver's collection of imperial constitutions of early Roman emperors, the ongoing collection of provincial coinage, or the renewed Jacoby. I will forbear to mention Talbert's *Barrington Atlas*, which now enables us to see the ancient world as never before.

To some extent we may, at times, be reinventing the wheel. The need to take account of material culture in the writing of ancient history was as powerful a force for Rostovtzeff as it is now. The notion that documents may unlock secrets hidden by the upper class male bias of our texts was present at the turn of the last century as it is now (though the language used may be a bit different). But if the materials are often the same, what is equally impressive is that the results of their study are often so different. If I have learned anything from the study of prophecies, ancient and modern, over the last two decades, it has been that one is best advised to predict the future after it has occurred. I will not now predict a future course, but rather leave in the expectation that there is so much more that will be done.

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