

STATE POWER
in
ANCIENT
CHINA & ROME

Edited by
WALTER SCHEIDEL



STATE POWER IN ANCIENT CHINA AND ROME

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Chronology

CHINA

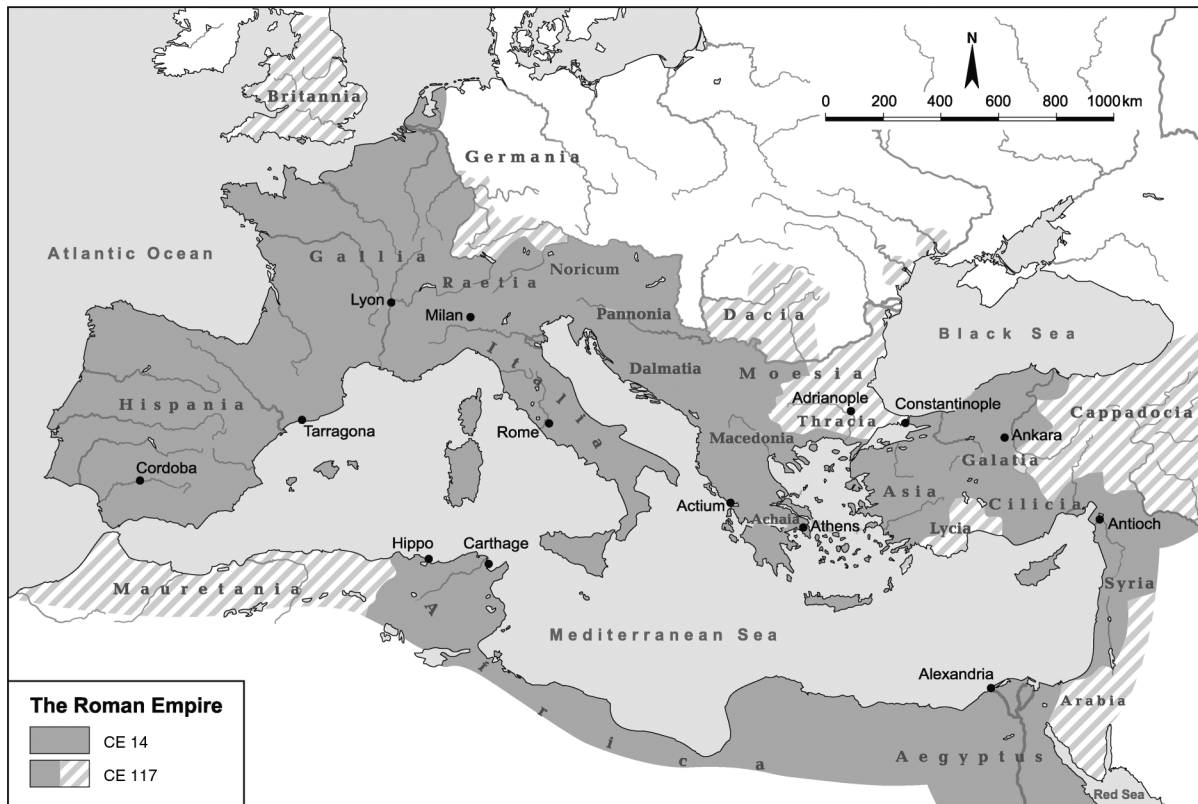
c.1600–c.1045 BCE	Shang Dynasty
c.1045–771 BCE	Western Zhou Dynasty
897 BCE	Enfeoffment of Qin Ying (conventional date)
770–256 BCE	Eastern Zhou Dynasty
770–481 BCE	Spring and Autumn Period
770 BCE	Ennoblement of Qin Xiang
551–479 BCE	Life of Kong Fuzi (Confucius) (conventional dates)
480–221 BCE	Warring States Period
361–338 BCE	Reforms of Shang Yang in Qin
316 BCE	Qin conquest of Sichuan
247–210 BCE	Reign of King Zheng of Qin (221–210 BCE as Qin Shi Huangdi)
230–221 BCE	Qin conquest of the other Warring States
221–206 BCE	Qin Dynasty
206 BCE–9 CE	Western Han Dynasty
141–87 BCE	Reign of Han Wudi
9–25 CE	Xin Dynasty (reign of Wang Mang until 23 CE)
25–220 CE	Eastern Han Dynasty
220–589 CE	Period of Disunion (Six Dynasties Period)
220–265 CE	Three Kingdoms Period
265–316 CE	Western Jin Dynasty
304–439 CE	Sixteen Kingdoms Period
386–534 CE	Northern Wei Dynasty
535–581 CE	Western Wei and Northern Zhou Dynasties
581–618 CE	Sui Dynasty
589 CE	Sui conquest of southern China
618–907 CE	Tang Dynasty

907–960 CE	Five Kingdoms Period
960–1276 CE	Song Dynasty
960–1126 CE	Northern Song Period
1127–1276 CE	Southern Song Period
1271–1368 CE	Yuan Dynasty (Mongols)
1368–1644 CE	Ming Dynasty
1644–1911 CE	Qing Dynasty (Manchu)

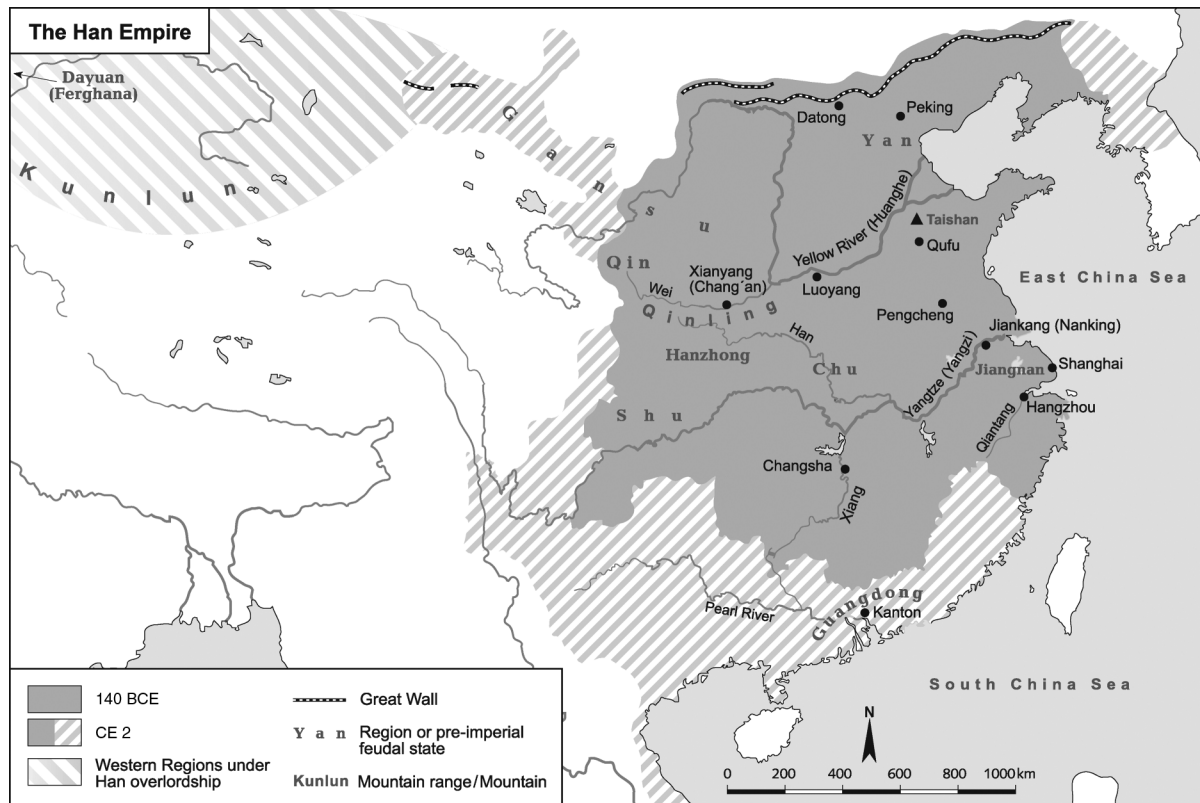
ROME

753 BCE	Foundation of Rome (conventional date)
753–510 BCE	Roman regal period (conventional dates)
c.650–600 BCE	Emergence of Latin city-state culture
509–27 BCE	Roman Republic (conventional dates)
396 BCE	Conquest of Veii (conventional date)
338 BCE	Full control over Latium
326–272 BCE	Wars of conquest in peninsular Italy
264–146 BCE	Wars against Carthage
215–168 BCE	Wars against Macedon
192–188 BCE	War against the Seleucid Empire
206–133 BCE	Conquest of Iberian Peninsula
133–30 BCE	Period of civil wars
91–89 BCE	Social War against Italian allies
88–64 CE	Wars against Pontus and Armenia
58–51 BCE	Conquest of Gaul
48–44 BCE	Dictatorship of Julius Caesar
43–32 BCE	Second Triumvirate
27 BCE	Formal restoration of the Republic
27 BCE–235 CE	Principate (early imperial monarchy)
27 BCE–14 CE	Reign of Augustus
235–284 CE	Period of the Soldier Emperors
284–305 CE	Reign of Diocletian
284–602/641 CE	Later Roman Empire
306–337 CE	Reign of Constantine
313 CE	Formal toleration and beginning of state support for Christianity
325 CE	Council of Nicaea
330 CE	Establishment of Constantinople
391 CE	Ban of pagan temples and sacrifices
395 CE	Final separation of the eastern and western halves of the empire

410 CE	Sack of Rome by the Goths
476/480 CE	Termination of the Western Roman Empire
527–565 CE	Reign of Justinian
534–554 CE	East Roman wars of reconquest in the western Mediterranean
602–628 CE	War against the Sasanid Empire (Persia)
634–718 CE	Arab invasions
800 CE	Charlemagne crowned Roman Emperor
962 CE	Otto I crowned Roman Emperor
1204 CE	Crusader conquest of Constantinople
1453 CE	Turkish conquest of Constantinople
1806 CE	Dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation
1870 CE	End of the Papal States



MAP 1. *The Roman Empire (c. 200 CE)*



MAP 2: *The Han Empire (c. 2 CE)*

STATE POWER IN ANCIENT CHINA AND ROME

Introduction

Walter Scheidel

THE dramatic expansion of the scale of human cooperation has been the most important development in social evolution. What did it take to incorporate diverse local communities into larger structures that allowed the mobilization and coordination of resources across thousands of miles and millions of people?¹ The growth of state power has been a key element of this process, yet its causes are still much debated across academic disciplines.² Given the success of state-level societies in most of the world, this problem is best addressed from a comparative perspective. The same holds true for the study of empire, a form of centralized cooperation that dominated the more developed parts of the globe for thousands of years.

Comparative history has many uses.³ Drawing historians out of their comfort zones of specialist expertise, comparison defamiliarizes the deceptively familiar. Consideration of alternatives makes the characteristics of one's "own" case seem less self-evident and helps us appreciate the range of possible outcomes. In Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin's words, comparison's "chief prize is a way out of parochialism."⁴ Comparison allows us to identify problems and questions that are not readily apparent from the historical record of a given time or place or from specialized scholarship beholden to its own "local" priorities and discourses. But raising new questions is only a first, if vital, step. Comparison is of particular importance in the process of explaining historical developments: "Comparative historical inquiry is fundamentally concerned with explanation and the identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest."⁵ A comparative approach encourages us to think in terms of specific factors that operate in different environments and how

1. See Turchin et al. 2012 for a recent overview.

2. Scheidel 2013 offers an up-to-date survey of the debate.

3. Valuable discussions of the methods and practices of comparative history include Bonnell 1980; Skocpol and Somers 1980; Tilly 1984; Ragin 1987; Haupt and Kocka 1996; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a.

4. Lloyd and Sivin 2002: 8.

5. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003b: 11.

they are configured in individual cases. The goal is to move from description and “local” narratives of explanation to more rigorous causal investigation: “Analyses that are confined to single cases... cannot deal effectively with factors that are largely or completely held constant within the boundaries of the case (or are simply less visible in that structural or cultural context). This is the reason why going beyond the boundaries of a single case can put into question seemingly well-established causal accounts and generate new problems and insights.”⁶ In the final analysis, we must ask ourselves whether it is even possible (let alone desirable) to make sense of observed outcomes by looking at a single case.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the methodological issues involved in comparative history and their relevance for students of the ancient world.⁷ Suffice it to note that comparison is best understood as a highly flexible approach or perspective rather than a formal method, and that it must be employed as a means to an end and not as an end in itself: hence the emphasis on generating new questions and improved causal explanation. It also merits attention that comparative perspectives tend to destabilize entrenched disciplinary practice: they can be hard to reconcile with normative ideals of technical competence (especially in the philological domain) and in their emphasis on discrete variables may conflict with the notion that all historical processes are deeply embedded in and therefore inextricable from their respective environments. These tensions are real but also fruitful inasmuch as they prompt us to question established academic tastes and beliefs. Serious engagement with comparative history has the potential to change the ways in which scholarly knowledge is produced, most notably by encouraging close collaboration across different areas of expertise. More generally, a comparative perspective offers a much-needed antidote to hyperspecialization, a bane of contemporary professional historiography.

And indeed, much of the best scholarship on the history of empire treats it as a theme, as a phenomenon to be explored cross-culturally.⁸ This book is designed as a contribution to this endeavor. It focuses on two case studies, the Qin and Han Empires in East Asia and the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean basin and its hinterlands. One-on-one comparison may be ill suited to the testing of more general models, given that very small samples cannot be expected to support generalizing findings,⁹ but it compensates for this shortcoming by offering

6. Rueschemeyer 2003: 332.

7. I develop this in Scheidel forthcoming b.

8. E.g., Eisenstadt 1963; Kautsky 1982; Doyle 1986; Mann 1986; Finer 1997; Lieven 2000: 3–40; Alcock et al. 2001; Motyl 2001; Howe 2002; Bang and Bayly 2003; Wood 2003; Elliott 2006; Chua 2007; Munkler 2007; Blanton and Fargher 2008; Darwin 2008; Hurler 2008; Morris and Scheidel 2009; Scheidel 2009a; Turchin 2009; Burbank and Cooper 2010; Parsons 2010; Bang and Bayly 2011; Leitner 2011; Bang and Kolodziejczyk 2012; Cooper 2004; Reynolds 2006; Vasunia 2011 review some recent efforts. Bang, Bayly, and Scheidel forthcoming will further broaden the scope.

9. For this problem see Rueschemeyer 2003.

greater depth and deeper contextualization than more wide-ranging surveys that require higher levels of abstraction.

Why China and Rome? The Han and Roman Empires were the largest polities of the ancient world and among the longest lasting of all premodern imperial formations. In their heyday they controlled only a small percentage of the global land mass but perhaps half the entire world population. Expanding and collapsing at roughly the same time, in some ways they seem like twins at opposite ends of Eurasia—an image well captured by Han observers' reference to a "Greater Qin" in the Far West. Yet for all their many similarities these polities developed independently of each other, a fact that greatly simplifies direct comparison by minimizing interaction effects.¹⁰ Only the comparative study of Old and New World empires would offer even more strongly autonomous cases but it also would have to confront more pronounced ecological differences. The experience of the ancient empires of eastern and western Eurasia serves as a natural experiment of independent state formation in broadly similar ecological circumstances but differentiated by basic contrasts in geography, between the Mediterranean realm of the Romans and the internally segmented land empire of the Han, and between the proximity of the steppe frontier to the core of Qin and Han power and its remove from the western inner sea. The most striking divergence concerns their afterlife: the effective absence of universal empire from post-Roman Europe and its serial reconstitution in East Asia. Whether and to what extent these discrepant trends are explained by the particular characteristics of the Han and Roman Empires remains an open (and much-neglected) question.¹¹

Comparative study of ancient eastern and western Eurasia is nothing new but has only recently begun to gain momentum, driven in no small part by the rise of China in the world today: ancient historians do not operate in a vacuum, nor should they wish to.¹² The traditional emphasis on Greek and Chinese intellectual culture remains strong, resulting in a substantial literature that has recently been brilliantly reviewed by Jeremy Tanner.¹³ Comparative engagement with Greco-Roman and early Chinese historiographical traditions has been growing apace.¹⁴ There is now enough scholarship on these topics to lay the foundations for a new area of teaching and research, one that might be called "comparative classics."

10. For the scale of distance between them and the striking limits of information about the other side, see briefly Scheidel 2009a: 3–5. Hoppál 2011 is the most recent study of the latter. Of course, some forces concurrently acted on both empires, such as climate change: e.g., Chase-Dunn, Hall, and Turchin 2007.

11. See Scheidel 2009b: 20–3, 2011a. I will deal with this in greater detail in Scheidel in progress b. For a systematic long-term comparative assessment of social development in eastern and western Eurasia, see Morris 2010, 2013.

12. See my discussion in Scheidel forthcoming a.

13. Tanner 2009. Relevant work includes Raphals 1992; Lloyd 1994, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006; Hall and Ames 1995, 1998; Lu 1998; Kuriyama 1999; Jullien 2000; Shankman and Durrant 2000, 2002; Cai 2002; Lloyd and Sivin 2002; Anderson 2003; Reding 2004; Sim 2007; Yu 2007; King and Schilling 2011. Forthcoming Cambridge dissertations by Qiaosheng Dong and Jenny Zhao will add to this body of scholarship.

14. Konrad 1967; Mutschler 1997, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b; Stuurman 2008; Martin 2009, 2010; Mittag and Mutschler 2010. See also Schaberg 1999; Kim 2009; and cf. Poo 2005.

The comparative study of the state and its institutions has also finally begun to attract more attention. Following sporadic attempts in the 1980s and 1990s, interest has significantly increased over the past decade or so.¹⁵ For now, pride of place belongs to two book-length collections of essays published in 2008 and 2009 that have dealt with representations of empire and a variety of imperial institutions.¹⁶

There are many different ways of writing comparative history, and this volume illustrates several approaches. One of the most promising of them is collaboration between experts on particular civilizations, a process that ensures consistently high levels of substantive competence but requires the right “matching” of coauthors to work well. Our opening chapter, by the historian of Rome Peter Bang and the China historian Karen Turner, showcases the strengths of this approach. The majority of contributors have chosen to explore a given topic from both sides: Corey Brennan, Mark Lewis, Carlos Noreña, and me, and to a lesser degree Peter Eich and Michael Puett, who primarily focus on one case.¹⁷ This format promotes coherence but critically relies on historians’ willingness to venture beyond their original areas of specialization. A third option is the pairing of complementary chapters on the same topic, exemplified by Dingxin Zhao’s and (again) Eich’s discussions of the Han and Roman imperial bureaucracies. In this case, comparison is more implicit in nature and arises mostly from the juxtaposition of more narrowly focused treatments. This approach offers the advantage of highlighting differences in interpretation in a way that could not easily be accommodated in jointly authored work: witness the two authors’ different views regarding the character of Western Zhou officialdom or the Chinese civil service examinations. This is as it should be, reflecting as it does the rich variety of positions held in contemporary scholarship. Taken together, these contributions therefore offer as much an introduction to the practice of comparative historical study as a survey of some of the most salient aspects of imperial state formation in ancient eastern and western Eurasia.

Our discussion revolves around four key issues: the relationship between rulers and elites (chapters 1 and 2), the recruitment, organization, and funding of state agents (chapters 3, 4, and 5), interdependences between state power and urbanism (chapters 6 and 7), and the political dimension of belief systems (chapter 8). Bang and Turner set the scene by taking a look at patrimonial politics, focusing on elite status and the relationship between state rulers and elites.

15. Hsing 1980; Evans 1985; Lorenz 1990; Motomura 1991; Gizewski 1994; Adshead 2000: 4–21, 2004: 20–9; Lieven 2000: 27–34; Hui 2005; Dettenhofer 2006; Custers 2008; Carlson 2009; Edwards 2009; Burbank and Cooper 2010: 23–59; Brennan and Hsing 2010; Zhou 2010. My own relevant work includes Scheidel 2008a, 2009b, 2009d, 2010a, 2011a, 2011c, forthcoming a, forthcoming b, forthcoming c.

16. Mutschler and Mittag 2008; Scheidel 2009a.

17. In this regard they follow the template adopted by each of the contributors to Scheidel 2009a, which stands in marked contrast to the repeated pairing of “Chinese” and “Roman” chapters in Mutschler and Mittag 2008, followed by final comparisons. For discussion of these approaches, see Kelly 2009 and Vasunia 2011.

Their comparative perspective reveals notable differences, such as that between the “city-state” culture of the ancient Mediterranean and Han urbanism, but also serves to qualify other differences, such as the perceived contrast between Han Confucianism and Roman militarism. They observe that both systems proclaimed hostility to despotic rule and developed a discourse of exemplary kingship. In their view, parallels such as this “reflect the logic of the situation: shared organizational constraints and broad similarities in the constitution of society, the structure of power, and processes of elite formation.” This highlights a crucial benefit of comparative study, its capacity to recognize broad patterns obscured by a preoccupation with “local” details and to identify significant differences between particular cases. Brennan compares processes of deliberation and decision making in the Han and Roman Empires. Drawing on a wide range of individual instances, he documents the important role of formal councils in both environments, backed by the force of custom. This adds to Bang and Turner’s inventory of structural similarities that were shaped by parallel concerns and constraints.

Zhao and Eich explore a key issue of state power: the identity of state agents and the ways in which they were recruited and managed. Zhao emphasizes the bureaucratic tradition of the Han Empire, which were already foreshadowed in the Western Zhou period, and analyzes its complex centralized mode of organization. He draws attention to mechanisms of performance checking that were critical in addressing principal-agent problems. Zhao considers Han-style Confucianism instrumental in recruiting officials and managing relations between rulers and elites. Weaknesses of the system included the internal differentiation of the imperial court, the aristocratic bias of recruitment practices, and the reliance on local clerks. He argues that early Chinese bureaucratization should not be taken as a sign of precocious “modernity”: it could emerge under a variety of circumstances independent of other features that characterized later Western modernization. Eich is at pains to distinguish between different degrees of bureaucratic development and consequently more skeptical of the notion of early Chinese bureaucratization. His main focus is on the emergence of patrimonial protobureaucratic structures under the Roman monarchy, a process that accelerated under the pressures of the third century CE and is well documented for the following period. His sketch of the late Roman system of administration in section 6 of his chapter invites direct comparison with Zhao’s portrayal of its Han counterpart. Like Zhao, Eich discusses principal-agent issues and spiritual guidelines for Roman officials, noting the absence of ideological underpinnings equivalent to those of Han Confucianism. Comparison with early China leads Eich to stress the central importance of the military sector and of municipal autonomy in the exercise of Roman state power and to identify the way communities were managed in the two empires as a critical variable in accounting for long-term differences between them.

In my own chapter I use evidence for state revenue and spending as an indicator of the size and power of the state, the nature of bargaining between rulers and taxpayers, and the identity of primary beneficiaries of imperial resource redistribution: the flow of taxes lays bare the “skeleton” of the state. In keeping with Eich’s conclusions, we find that the Roman and Han Empires prioritized spending on the military and on administrative state agents, respectively, a contrast that reflects their organizational and power structures. Levels of elite compensation also differed, favoring the top tiers of Roman officeholders. That the overall share of the state in national income appears to have been similar in both cases points to the presence of powerful constraints on premodern revenue collection irrespective of institutional context. Whether Han mechanisms of taxing and spending were more resilient in the long run and thus more conducive to subsequent imperial reunification remains an open question that warrants further study.

Two chapters deal with urbanism, a critical factor in the constitution and exercise of state power. Noreña argues that while state power was significant in structuring urbanization, outcomes differed in ways that reflect differences in administrative practice. The characteristics of the imperial capitals illustrate this difference well: while the city of Rome grew and developed over time, the Qin and Han capitals were born of massive state intervention. In both contexts, state power created what Noreña labels “artificial cities,” settlements next to army camps along the Roman frontiers and the tomb cities of the Chinese capital region. Both resulted from key features of each system, the paramount role of the standing army in the Roman Empire and the importance of dynastic continuity under the Han, which was lacking in Rome. Noreña tracks the origins of the greater government control over Han cities, which contrasted with the autonomy of Roman urban elites, to the establishment of direct state rule over the rural population in the Warring States period, a process that disempowered urban nobilities. Conversely, the cities of the Roman Empire continued to function as independent sources of social power. This proved costly as local elite autonomy uneasily coexisted with the fiscal demands of a powerful military complex. Noreña suggests that comparison with Han practice allows us to reinterpret what is often regarded as evidence of Roman efficacy as a sign of weakness that limited the infrastructural capacities of the state and might even have had long-term consequences in the aftermath of imperial collapse. Lewis compares Han and Roman forms of urbanism by focusing on their physical properties and social dynamics. This approach reinforces the impression of difference noted by Noreña. Whereas public display of political power was central to the Roman world and reflected in the spatial configuration of cities, the exclusionary principle dominated in China. Unlike in Roman cities with their assembly places and theaters, in Han cities the people gathered in markets, which served as conduits of state control. Like Noreña, Lewis observes urban continuity and autonomy in the Roman world, transience and centralized control in Han China: “Roman and

Han Empires thus crafted their cityscapes to display the nature of the ruler, the role of the army, the place of local elites, and the defining characteristics of civilization.” Yet he is careful to note that Han cities also provided spaces for those outside the official hierarchy.

In the final chapter, Puett expands our discussion into the sphere of ideological power by discussing the origins and ramifications of divine rulership, focusing mostly on early China. He identifies different models of “political theology” in the Han period: the concept of divine rulership that represents a radical break with older traditions that derived aristocratic power from ancestral spirits; the notion of an all-encompassing patriarchal lineage linked to Heaven (a deity); and doctrines of self-divinization that were available to the general population and associated with millenarian movements. Both the first and the last of these supported claims of the creation of a new order. Puett notes that in the Roman Empire, divine rulership likewise became established at a time of political rupture and that it in turn prepared the ground for later human divinization movements such as Christianity. Belief systems in East and West may thus have undergone similar developments in response to changes in the nature of political power.

What lessons are we to draw from these comparisons? Our contributors identify numerous instances in which two empires that were faced with similar problems came up with similar solutions: in the realm of discourse, the promotion of idealized rulership in contradistinction to despotic practices; the growth of hierarchy, centralization, and bureaucratic features, which unfolded in response to interstate conflict, the intensity and therefore the institutional consequences of which varied greatly between these two test cases; the effective scale of taxation; cultures of collective deliberation among elites; the interaction effects between state power and urbanism; and religious responses to political change. Many more similarities could have been observed.¹⁸

Yet it is major differences that are of most value in helping us understand the relationship between particular factors and outcomes. In this case, they concern the management of cities and the role of the military. Our discussions of bureaucracy (Eich, Zhao); elite fashioning (Bang and Turner); the nature of capital cities, “artificial cities,” and local administration (Noreña); and the physical appearance of cityscapes (Lewis) all converge in revealing the crucial significance of local autonomy. Put very broadly, the contrast is between an early Chinese system of more direct state control over cities and state-employed agents that facilitated deeper (even if, by modern standards, quite limited) penetration of society by the civilian institutions of the central state and a Roman system of greater local autonomy and stronger state reliance on and investment in military institutions.

18. See esp. Gizewski 1994, with Scheidel 2009a: 4, 2009b: 15–20.

The proximate causes for these differences are quite clear: the continuous Greco-Italic tradition of city-state cultures in the West and the intensive extraction-coercion cycle of the Warring States period in the East. The mechanisms of higher-level causation, however, are more difficult to identify: for instance, how much did geographical and ecological conditions contribute to these developments? In terms of outcomes, our observations raise two big questions. One concerns the causal interdependence of specific features. Could an empire built on city-state institutions have grown as large and lasted as long as the Roman Empire in the absence of an inflated military apparatus that counterbalanced autonomous local bases of social power, and did the more centralized administrative organization of the Han state diminish the structural importance of the military sector? The other is about long-term trends, namely the disappearance of empire on a Roman scale from later Europe and its cyclical reconstitution in East Asia. Did the Qin-Han mode of deeper civilian penetration provide a more robust foundation for imperial continuation (though not ongoing continuity) than Rome's prioritizing of more socially marginal military power? Once again, the latter question requires consideration of a wide range of factors from the physical environment to belief systems.

These studies therefore contribute to a much broader debate. More could have been said on matters related to state power: about rulers, their functions and succession; military affairs; state law; the role of transcendent religion; frontier relations; or economic policies, to name just a few.¹⁹ Many of these, one suspects, may turn out to be of critical importance in answering the big questions raised here. And even that would merely be a first step. Historians of premodern empire have yet to develop viable strategies for analytical multicase comparisons, an undertaking that at the level of resolution attempted in this volume raises serious challenges to established scholarly practice and calls for a reorganization of historical research that puts much stronger emphasis on teamwork and formal hypothesis testing. Our collection cannot offer more than a building block for more ambitious edifices, offered in the spirit of experimentation and in the hope that others will take us further.

19. Several of these topics were addressed in the 2008 conference that inspired this volume but constraints of space and time prevented their inclusion.

Kingship and Elite Formation

Peter Fibiger Bang and Karen Turner

Qin entrusted its future solely to punishments and laws, without changing with the times, and thus eventually brought about the destruction of its ruling family. If, after it had united the world under its rule, Qin had practiced benevolence and righteousness and modeled its ways upon the sages of antiquity, how would Your Majesty ever have been able to win possession of the empire?¹

Among the more surprising parallels between the Roman and early Chinese Empires is the similarity in the type of founding myths circulated by the imperial monarchies. Both the Han Dynasty and the Roman principate of Augustus were presented as alternatives to the rule of a self-serving despot. It was—as one later historical reconstruction made a powerful adviser explain to Gaodi, the first Han emperor—only because the Qin, the dynasty to unite China, had governed with superb arrogance and based its power on harsh, brutal command that he had been able to raise the banner of rebellion and topple the former regime less than two decades after it had conquered the realm. From the time when Duke Xiao of Qin (368–338 BCE) appointed a so-called legalistically inclined reformer to implement policies to strengthen the kingdom's military and economic capacity, the kings of this far western state had become increasingly absolutist. The First Emperor of Qin (221–210 BCE) built upon these reforms to win an empire; but his name would forever be linked with tyranny, even while his mighty accomplishment awed his contemporaries. Sima Qian, who with his father authored the founding work of Chinese historiography, the *Shiji*, rarely missed an opportunity to include in its pages declarations of hatred for everything the Qin emperor represented, but nonetheless marveled at his success. The legitimacy of the Han Dynasty, however, was constructed in express opposition. Not ruthless command and dictate were to characterize the new dispensation, but respect for the time-hallowed traditions preserved in classical scripture and ancient lore—that would guarantee a clement form of rulership exercised

1. Sima Qian, *Shiji* 97.2699. The most definitive English translation to date is the series compiled by Nienhauser 1994–2010 to which we refer throughout, unless the renderings of Watson 1993 in two volumes on the Han Dynasty are the only translations available. Here see Nienhauser vol. 2: 66–7. We have used the Zhonghua edition, Peking, 1962, for the *Shiji* throughout and have altered slightly Nienhauser's translations in some cases.

with paternalistic benevolence toward the common people and respect for justice. This, then, was to become the promise of the Han rulers.²

No less a guarantee was issued with the introduction of the imperial monarchy in Rome. After he had won sole power, Julius Caesar had famously been assassinated. Certain that the “dictator for life” was about to proclaim himself king, a group of aristocrats had formed a conspiracy, anxious that the end of republican political traditions would leave no room for them, no honor and no liberty, but instead see the imposition of one man’s oppressive tyranny on society. Bent on not repeating the mistake of his adoptive father, Caesar’s heir carefully designed his position of power in the opposite fashion. He pledged to rule not as a revolutionary dictator but as the paternalistic and respectful guardian of Roman traditions. When, after a good decade of civil war, power was finally his, the republican constitution was magnanimously restored in an ostentatious gesture. The new dispensation of power would defer to the venerable ways of the forefathers, the *mos maiorum*; and the monarch feigned to leave plenty of room for the old elite, governing only as the first among equals: august, loving, and generous Father of the Country.³

There is more than curious coincidence at play here. But it is not simply a banal expression of the fact that the social order in both societies was patriarchal. Rather, it is a result of fundamental similarities in the processes of elite formation: the ruling class, solidly based in landownership, was in both cases faced with a royal court that commanded a large centralized military capacity, but claimed a territory too extensive to be ruled and monitored tightly. Given the available transport and communication technologies, considerable delegation of power was unavoidable. The negotiation of rank and privilege took place within these basic parameters. However, the configuration of social forces brought the process to articulation in slightly varying ways within our two world empires.

For the Augustan program of republican restoration was pitted against Augustus’s rival for power, Antony. The latter had teamed up with Cleopatra, ruler of the most important and affluent client kingdom of Rome: Egypt. In the final phase of the struggle for power, Augustus had played to Roman fears that Antony, if victorious, would relocate the capital from Italy to Alexandria in the eastern Mediterranean; the conquering Romans would end up as subjects in their own empire under an Oriental despotism. In this situation, Augustus stepped up as

2. The use of the short life of the Qin Empire as a foil for the virtues of the Han is in part a response to suspicions about the legitimacy of the commoner dynastic founder, Liu Bang’s, use of force to reunify China. For an interpretive study of the historiography of the text, see, for example, Durrant 1995.

3. See Osgood 2006 for an analysis of the period from Caesar’s death to Octavian’s victory to become sole ruler. The character of the principate is the object of countless studies. A good entry to this literature is provided by Galinsky 2005, in particular the contributions of Eder and Gruen. Other notable titles include Zanker 1988; Raaf-laub and Toher 1990; and Rowe 2002. Classic and immortal is Syme 1939.

the guardian of the Roman city-state and the privileges of its ruling group.⁴ No doubt the accusations hurled against Antony were both slanderous and cynically exaggerated. After all, a copious section of the Roman senatorial aristocracy fought on his side. But among many Romans at the time, there was a clear understanding that the institutions of the Roman state were being undermined by the empire.⁵

Had they known the history of the Qin-Han transition, their concerns would have given way to outright alarm. The precipitous fall of the Qin was brought about precisely by the successful rise of the provinces. In a movement spearheaded by a common laborer disgruntled with the oppressive Qin laws, the provincial elites rose up in rebellion.⁶ The deciding battles pitted two very different characters from the state of Chu: Xiang Yu, the scion of an old noble family, and Liu Bang, once a low-level Qin bureaucrat and now, through military success, the king of the state of Han—from which he took the name for his dynasty.⁷ In 202 BCE after the feudal lords submitted to Liu Bang, his own warriors urged him to change his title: “Great king, if you do not elevate your title, all of [our titles] will be suspected and not trusted.” The king of Han protested the ritually prescribed three times and accepted the highest honor, “August Emperor,” ironically following the precedent set by the First Emperor of Qin. In order to maintain order in the realm, he then parceled out a substantial portion as vassal kingdoms and gave them to the most prominent of his warriors to rule.⁸ At first, Gaodi established his capital in Luoyang, once the seat of the revered—if weakened—kings of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty and was only persuaded to move from this site, redolent with the symbolism of traditional kingship, when his advisers reminded him that the old Qin homeland was better defended.⁹ Eventually, the rulers of the empire would go through with the permanent transfer of their residential city farther to the east. This happened two centuries later with the establishment of the later Han Dynasty, eager to polish its traditionalist credentials. But for the moment, the resources

4. Dio Cassius 50.3–6.1. See Syme 1939: chapter 20 for an analysis of Octavian’s “propaganda” and reminder that a large and prominent section of the Roman aristocracy followed Antony. For further elaboration, see Osgood 2006: chapter 8 and Lange 2009.

5. To which the contemporary writings of Sallust bear vivid testimony, in particular the *War against Jugurtha*.

6. See *Shiji* 48 in Watson 1993: vol. 1, 3–13 for an account of the commoners who began the revolt—a construction of history that demonstrates that the Qin despotism not only offended the aristocrats who lost their lands and positions but also enraged the common people. See further *Shiji* 97 (Watson 1993: vol.1, 219–37) on the rise of the provinces and their elites.

7. For the First Emperor of Han, we use the name Liu Bang during the civil war and Gaodi after he took the throne. His posthumous name is Gaozu. His title, king of Han, was given to him by his rival, Xiang Yu, during the wars after the fall of Qin.

8. *Shiji* 8.365; see Nienhauser vol. 2: 66–7. The title “August Emperor” (Huangdi) carried religious as well as secular implications, for it was the emperor’s title as head of the imperial clan, while “Son of Heaven” (Tianzi) signaled his role as head of state, and by the middle period of Han, these roles were distinguished in rituals of accession. For a very interesting and unique interpretation, see Nishijima 1961 and Puett’s discussion of the religious implications of the title in chapter 8 of this volume.

9. *Shiji* 8.366. Nienhauser vol. 2: 68. The cultivation of the Zhou past by the Han, in contrast to the Qin, was a way of emphasizing a more decentralized conception of the empire; see also Pines 2008: 87.

of Qin were too important for the institutions of the imperial government to be abandoned. Less drastically, therefore, a new capital, Chang'an, was founded inside the former homeland of the kings of Qin.¹⁰ Much as the new dynasty proclaimed its dislike of the previous rulers, it still needed large parts of the preexisting infrastructure of power. Not only were the legal codes and bureaucratic structure of Qin adopted, with some modifications, as the basis of government, several of the most talented and powerful officials of the former dynasty were also co-opted to help run the new empire.¹¹

In that respect, the consolidation of the Han Dynasty much resembles the arrangement reached by the Roman principate. Overtly, Augustus and his successors professed to continue the old traditional republican order while developing a new autocratic set of institutions to rule the empire. So if the rise of the provinces was surprisingly swift on the Chinese side of our comparison, Rome was soon to begin to converge.¹² Under the benevolent patronage of the Caesars, the composition of the imperial elite was gradually changed to include a steadily growing number of provincials. This, then, is the theme this essay sets out to explore: empire and the formation of cosmopolitan elites. Three sections follow: the first attempts to locate our discussion within a general context of patrimonial politics; the second offers a structural comparison of the character of imperial elites in Rome and Han China and the different components of aristocratic status; finally, the third section moves our analysis to the level of discourse to examine the dialogue between court and elites across our empires.

1. PATRIMONIAL POLITICS OF COMPLEX AGRARIAN EMPIRES

Both the Roman and Han Empires belong firmly within a category of complex agrarian empires; they combined strong central state institutions with a significant role still left to play by local, decentralized elites. They also sport some bureaucratic developments, but unfolding within a context that remained highly patrimonial.¹³ It would, for instance, be conventional to contrast the aristocratic character of Rome's ruling elites with the bureaucratic cadres of Chinese imperial society. But that is too schematic. "Aristocratic" or "bureaucratic," it bears emphasizing, are not "real" terms. Rather, these concepts represent ideal types, simplifying labels, often little more than an expression of historiographical habit, used by scholars

10. In the Han narratives, the causes for the victory of the state of Qin over its rival kingdoms did not arise from its internal reforms, but rather from external factors, such as the strategic advantages of its location. For an interesting discussion about the location of the capital in the early years of Gaodi's reign, see *Shiji* 99, the biography of Liu Jing, Watson 1993: vol. 1, 235–46. For the significance of the importance of the locations and construction of imperial cities, see Noreña and Lewis, chapters 6 and 7, in this volume.

11. See *Shiji* 53 (Watson 1993: vol. 1, 91–8), the biography of Gaodi's prime minister, Xiao He, the official most active in preserving the Qin laws and constructing a suitable palace for Gaodi. The excavation of portions of the Han code reveal just how similar it was to that of the Qin. See Li and Wen 2001.

12. See Scheidel 2009b for the notion of convergence between Chinese and Roman history.

13. See Bang and Bayly 2011 for a recent collection of studies exploring this type of empire.