

Dexter Hoyos, *Rome Victorious: The Irresistible Rise of the Roman Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2018. 272 pages. Hardback \$35 USD. ISBN: 9781780762746.

This book has the hallmarks of a “lecture book,” where a senior scholar takes his or her notes, accumulated and refined by decades behind the lectern, and synthesizes them into a book. I do not know if this is the origin of this particular work, but one gets the sense of reading what undergraduates at the University of Sydney have been hearing over Dexter Hoyos’ distinguished teaching career. There is much to recommend about such books, as they allow readers access to an intellectual product usually reserved for a small, tuition-paying audience.

Hoyos covers the phenomenon of Roman imperialism from the late fourth century BC to the mid-third century AD, from the conquest of Italy to the cusp of the Third Century Crisis. He does not concern himself with the monarchy, early Republic or Late Antiquity. While the book touches on a wide range of subjects, the key theme for Hoyos is the integration of subject populations, especially through the spread of Roman citizenship, culminating in the Antonine Constitution of AD 212.

Despite its rather overbearing title, amplified by the image of the Ludovisi battle sarcophagus on the dust cover, *Rome Victorious* is not a military history. There is very little about the Roman army, or even the course of most of the major wars. Indeed, military affairs elicit special brevity from Hoyos (who has previously made substantial contributions on the military history of the ancient world, especially the Punic Wars). The Second Punic War elapses over the course of a page, while the Second Macedonian War is fought and won within a single-sentence. It is somewhat jarring when Hoyos in later chapters decides to linger on Imperial-era operations in Germany and Britain, indulging four pages on Augustan-era misadventures in Germany and an extravagant five pages on the conquest of Britain.

Overall, Hoyos is ruthlessly efficient. Just as he does not linger on wars, neither does he fawn or fulminate over emperors, who flit in and out of the scene. Hoyos is far more interested in the imperial system, and not the man perched, often precariously, at its pinnacle. This has the advantage of preventing the Imperial chapters from degenerating into a litany of mad emperors and their antics, although at the risk of understating the institutional importance of the emperor as both the central node in a political and military network and as a potent and universal cultural lodestone.

Hoyos succumbs to the temptation to indulge in a moral accounting of the costs and benefits of Rome’s empire, with the usual “Monty Python” (his words) benefits: peace, prosperity, infrastructure (although Hoyos notes the latter was never a priority) and the indubitable cons: extraction, corruption, violence, etc. Despite a great deal of hedging, Hoyos seems to see the Roman Empire as a moderately positive phenomenon on the balance. While this is a defensible position, I wish that he had delved a little more into what the ledger of perceived costs and benefits tells

us about the amoral dynamics of empire. To what extent did the positives result from negotiation between subjects and ruler, from emperors becoming trapped in manufactured ideologies of beneficence, or simply as positive externalities of tributary extraction and military deployments? And to what extent were corruption, malfeasance and atrocity features, and not bugs, of Roman governance?

While the interests of brevity may inhibit taking the story all the way to the bitter end in AD 476 (or, heaven forbid, AD 1453), I do wish that Hoyos had included some discussion of the Third Century Crisis. Just as Rome's republican-era conquests defined many imperial dynamics well into the Principate, in the third century AD the fissures in the imperial edifice, obscured by previous centuries of relative peace and stability, suddenly and precipitously ruptured. Even the happy story of the spread of citizenship might take a darker turn, as when in AD 250 the emperor Decius ordered universal sacrifice, an order that is only intelligible in the context of universal citizenship, and then launched a violent persecution of the one group that refused, the Christians. Indeed, it is worth considering, given the centrality that Hoyos gives integration to his master narrative, why the third century AD empire was a fragmented and dysfunctional place despite (or, it is worth pondering, because?) of the legal inclusion of nearly all of its inhabitants.

Still, it is not unreasonable to look at the roughly 500 years from the Middle Republic to the High Empire as a cohesive and coherent periodization, characterized by the military dominance of the Roman state apparatus, even if Rome's internal political configuration shifted dramatically. Overall, Hoyos is to be commended for his masterful distillation of material that might otherwise comprise a two-semester sequence into a clearly written, deeply researched and highly informative work that will appeal to a spectrum of audiences.

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