

EXPERIENCING ROME

CULTURE, IDENTITY AND POWER
IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE



Edited by Janet Huskinson

Experiencing Rome

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Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire

EDITED BY JANET HUSKINSON



in association with



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Preface

The essays in this book were especially written for a third-level Open University course on ‘Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire’ with the needs of undergraduate students primarily in mind. But we hope that they will be of interest and value to many other readers who want to read about these aspects of Roman society, whether or not they already have much knowledge of the Roman world.

As with all Open University publications, the authors have been supported by a team of people in producing this volume, and we would like to acknowledge with thanks the help of Kate Clements, Clare Butler and Nancy Marten (course editors), Ruth Cole and Debbie Ball (course managers), Sophie Reid (course secretary), Tony Coulson and Jane Lea (picture researchers), Rich Hoyle (designer), Ray Munns (cartographer), John Taylor (graphic artist), Robert Gibson (compositor), Isobel MacLean (indexer), and Gill Gowans and Jonathan Hunt (who made the arrangements for co-publication with Routledge).

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Key dates

Periods in Greek history

The 'Archaic' period usually refers to the years from 800 to 500 BC. It saw the formation of Greek culture.

The 'Classical' period is generally used for the fifth and early fourth centuries BC. It is particularly associated with the politics and culture of city states (*poleis*).

The 'Hellenistic' period is usually taken to run from the accession of Alexander as king of Macedon in 336 BC to the first century BC. Alexander conquered the Persian empire and much of the near east, opening up those areas to a common Greek culture (*koiné*), which continued even into the period of the Roman empire.

Periods in Roman history

753 BC Legendary foundation of Rome: period of kings.

509 BC The republic set up (in place of kings), with a ruling senate and two annually elected consuls.

'Early republic' usually relates to the fourth and third centuries BC. Rome was established as a leading Mediterranean power by defeating Carthage in the Punic Wars.

'Mid republic' usually means the second century BC. It saw continuing expansion of Rome's power in areas of the Mediterranean such as Greece and Asia Minor.

'Late republic' usually means the first century BC. This saw increasing tension in Italy, to do with citizenship rights for the Italian allies of Rome and the distribution of land; in mid first century Rome there was mounting rivalry between individuals (such as Pompey and Julius Caesar) with political and military power.

31 BC Octavian defeated Mark Antony at the battle of Actium, and in 28 BC by a constitutional settlement took the title *princeps* (leading citizen). In 27 BC he took the title Augustus.

List of emperors, their reigns and their dynasties

Julio-Claudians

27 BC–AD 14	Augustus
AD 14–37	Tiberius
AD 37–41	Gaius, also known as Caligula
AD 41–54	Claudius
AD 54–68	Nero
AD 68–69	Galba
AD 69	‘The year of the Four Emperors’: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian

Flavians

AD 69–79	Vespasian
AD 79–81	Titus
AD 81–96	Domitian
AD 96–98	Nerva
AD 98–117	Trajan
AD 117–38	Hadrian

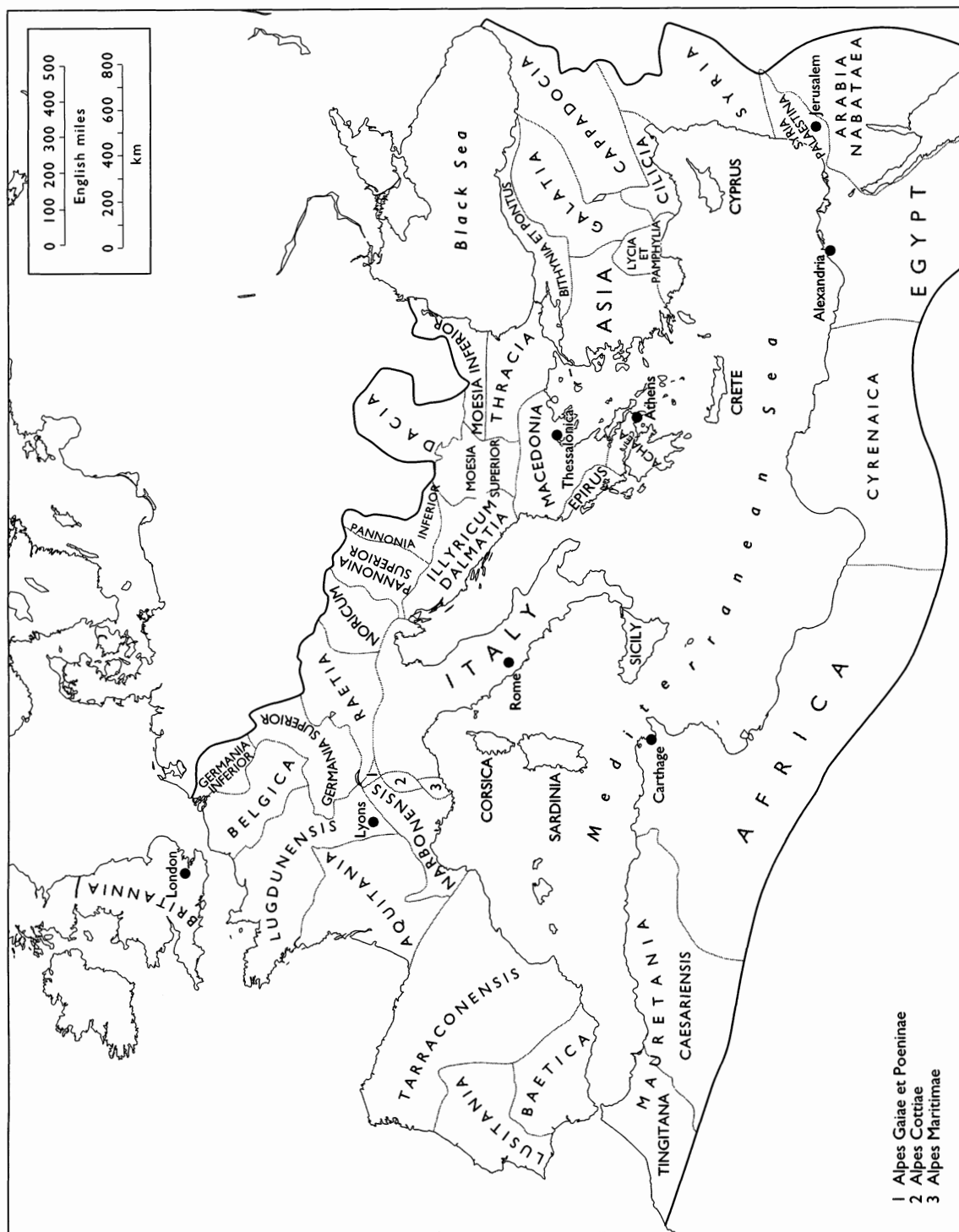
Antonines

AD 138–61	Antoninus Pius
AD 161–80	Marcus Aurelius (co-emperor with Lucius Verus AD 161–69)
AD 180–92	Commodus (co-emperor with his father, Marcus Aurelius 177–80)
AD 193	Pertinax
AD 193	Didius Julianus

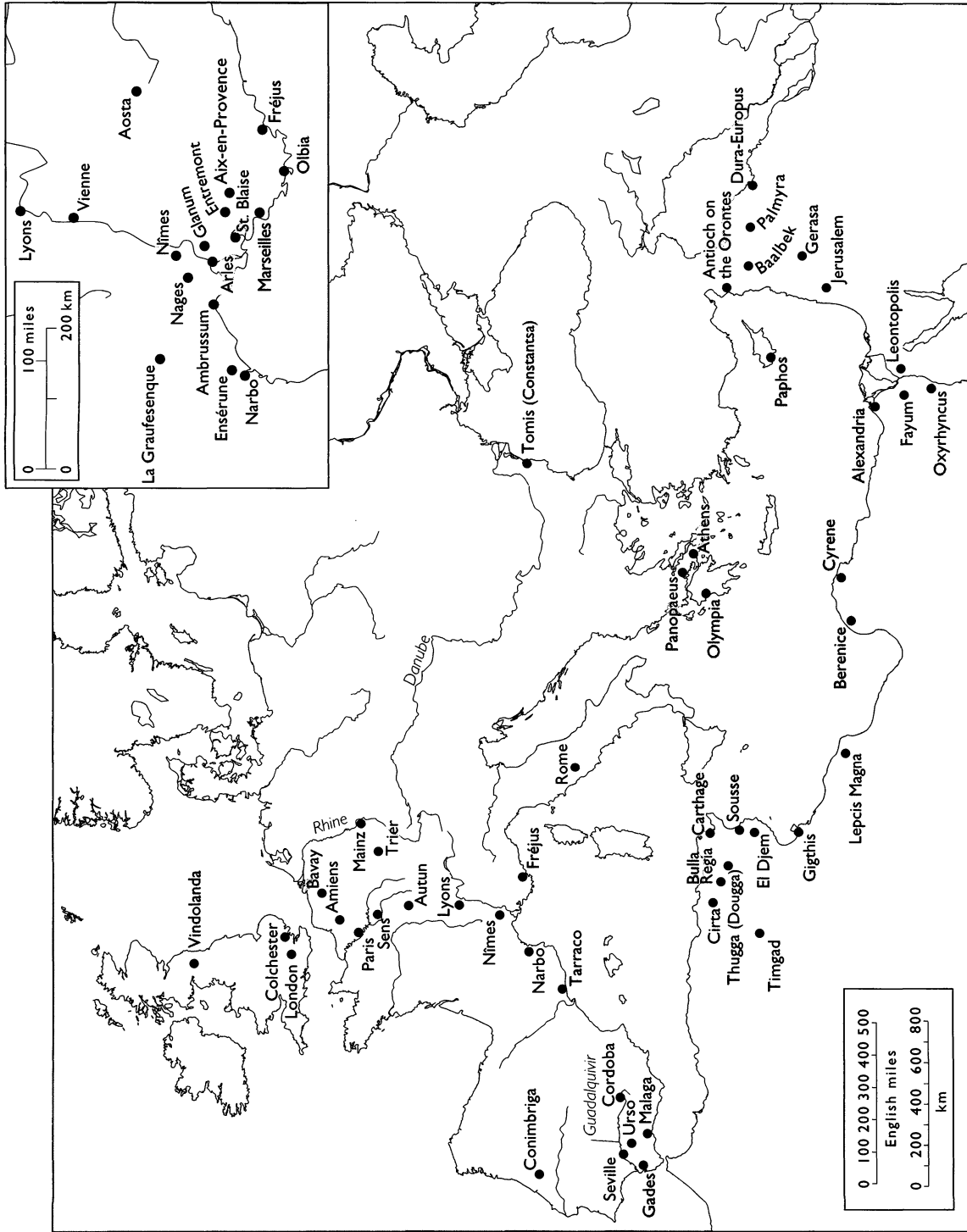
Severans

AD 193–211	Septimius Severus
AD 211–17	Caracalla (co-ruler with Geta AD 211–12)
AD 217–18	Macrinus
AD 218–22	Elagabalus
AD 222–35	Alexander Severus

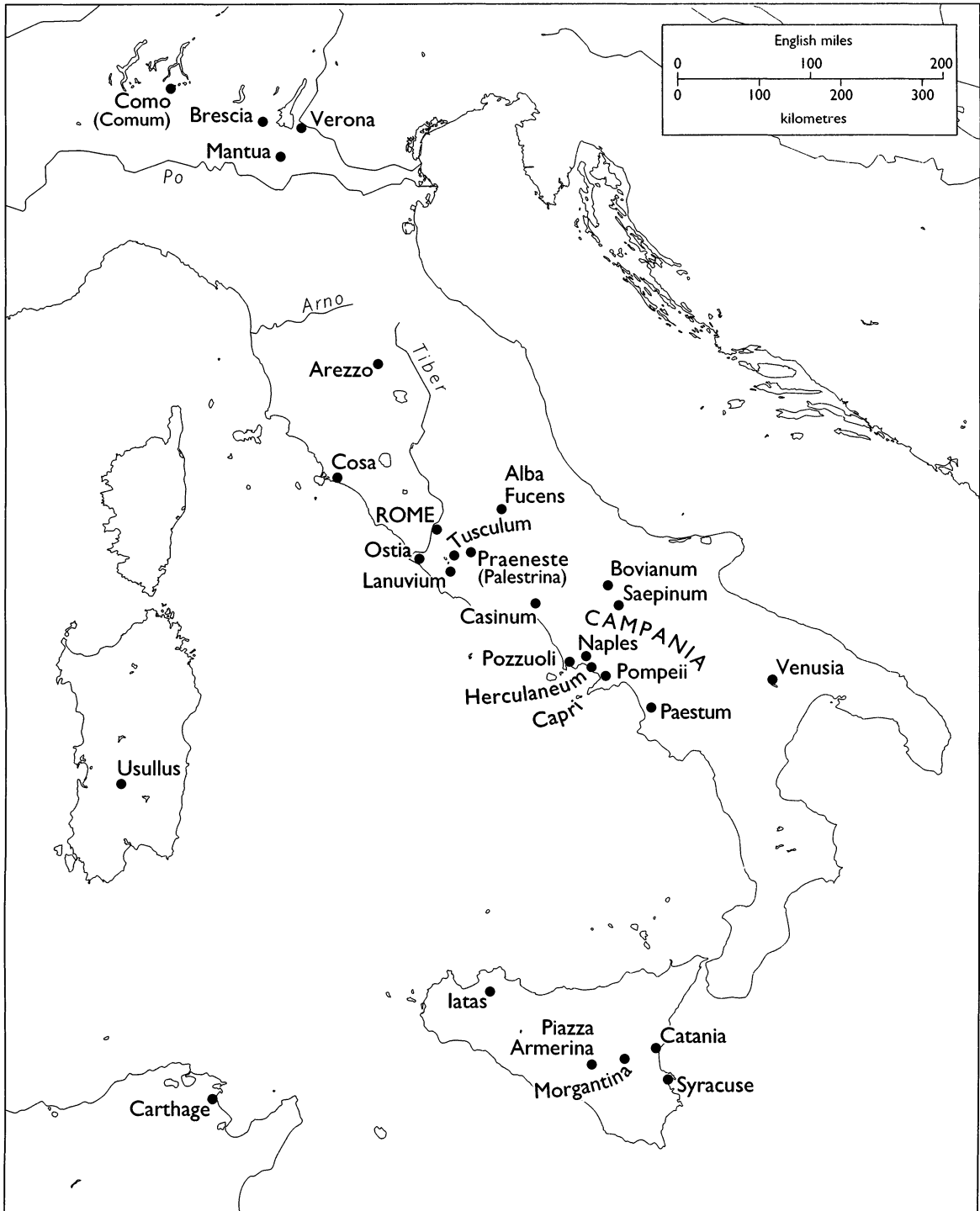
Dynasties emperors from Augustus to Nero are known as Julio-Claudians; Vespasian to Domitian as Flavians; Antoninus Pius to Commodus as the Antonines; and Septimius Severus to Alexander Severus as Severans.



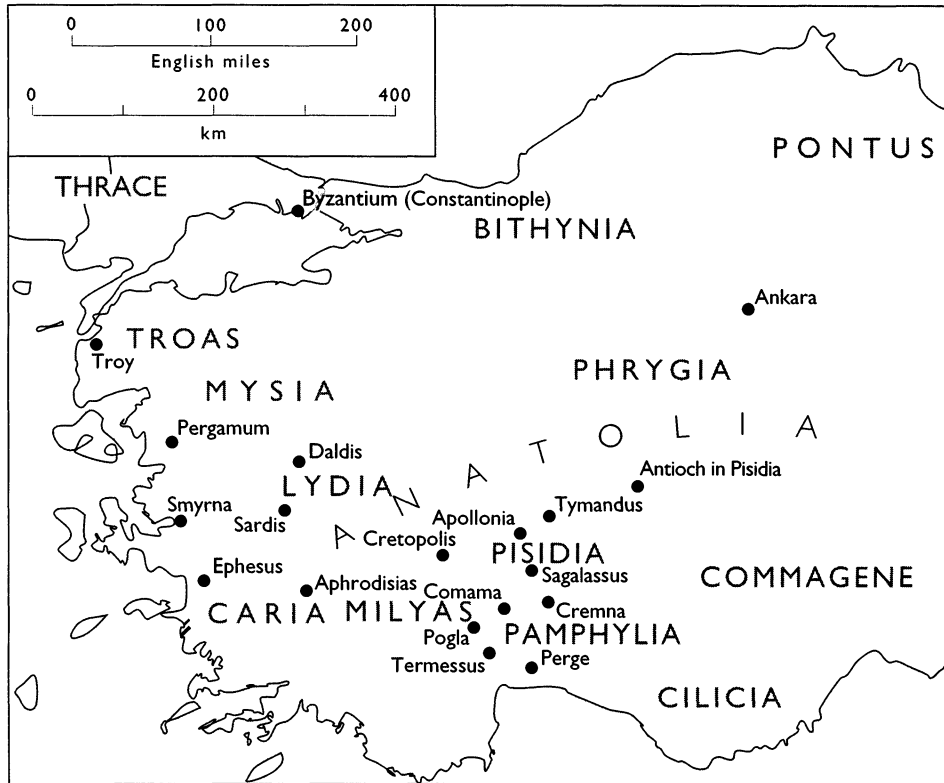
Map 1 The provinces of the Roman empire under Hadrian (AD 117-38)



Map 2 The Roman empire showing key places mentioned in the essays (see also maps 3 and 4)



Map 3 Italy, showing key places mentioned in the essays



Map 4 Asia Minor, showing key places mentioned in the essays

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Text

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Figures

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Introduction

BY JANET HUSKINSON

How people experience a culture and identify themselves in relation to it is very much to the fore in current social debate. Much of this interest has been stimulated by changes that have occurred in the power structures that traditionally shaped communities at local and international levels. These had often determined culture and identity through relationships of social class or empire, but since the second part of the twentieth century gender and ethnicity, for example, have become more powerful as ways of defining identity. In a world of fast communications and globalized culture (perhaps a new kind of imperialism?) people have become more aware of cultural distinctions as well as values and beliefs which are shared.

These factors mean that we look at ourselves and our society from a viewpoint which is inevitably rather different from, say, that of the earlier twentieth century, and this approach also extends to reviewing the past. For the history of the Roman empire this change raises many questions which were not of such interest to previous scholars, whose views were inevitably formed by *their* cultural experiences and within their own historical context. And the changes go further: there are differences now not only in the subjects researched but also in how the outcomes are represented. Rather than presenting the ancient society as a unified totality (whether reconstructed through empirical research or some large-scale theoretical model), present-day scholarship on the Roman empire tends to consider diversity and the complexity of social factors, acknowledging that insights are more achievable than definitive answers.

In fact, these approaches offer a very fruitful way of studying the Roman empire, the history of which involves many issues which have modern resonances. It is particularly interesting to look at the diversity of the Roman experience and at how the assertion of power in various forms shaped concepts of culture and identity across a wide span of time and place. Studying the Roman empire raises questions to do with the impact of a major culture on others, and also about how the responses of the 'others' may be identified and interpreted from a historical record that inevitably privileges the Roman point of view.

So there are subjects of fresh interest, and also fresh critiques and theoretical perspectives for the interpretation of them. Over the last decades post-colonial studies have challenged earlier views of the benefits of empires and of the processes by which they were established.

Post-modernism, with its interests in problematization, deconstruction and diversity of viewpoint, encourages a positive assessment of cultural variability, while post-processual archaeology has turned to look at the social element of cultural change, including the ways in which contemporary societies 'write' these periods of their past. All these approaches bring a concern to hear the hitherto 'silent voices' in Roman society (of the conquered, or of minorities within the mainstream culture such as women and children) and to understand how power and reactions to it are symbolized in society. For the Roman empire such issues can be problematic to pursue because of the gaps and biases in the ancient evidence, so revisiting ancient sources with fresh frames of reference can often open up new interpretations of the material. Culture, identity and power make just such a fresh framework as they involve a wide range of human and social interactions: they provide a vivid means for looking at ancient ways of 'experiencing Rome'.

This is what the essays in this book explore. They cover a selection of key subjects which are treated in a multidisciplinary way, each taking its own approach. Some offer surveys and synthesis of existing material, while others raise new issues or divergent theoretical perspectives; but the point of them all is to introduce students and other interested readers to ancient material and current debates to do with various ways of 'experiencing Rome' in the first three centuries or so of its empire. The first essay provides an overview of the issues involved, introducing some of the terminology (such as Romanization). Of the rest, some deal with subjects that are central aspects of any society (such as gender, religion, communication and status) and set their issues in the historical context of the Roman empire. Others examine situations that are historically specific to the Roman empire: dissent, concepts of peace, the city of Rome, developments in elite culture, economic power, urbanism and the Jewish communities in the Roman empire. They include discussions of other topics such as education, literacy, minority cultures, and concepts of civilization and barbarism. Overall, the aim is to introduce aspects of Roman society in which culture, identity and power are embedded, and to show how they work together as factors in the hugely diverse world that was Rome's empire.

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