



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

World views and military policies in the early Roman and Western Han empires

Wang, Z.

Citation

Wang, Z. (2015, December 17). *World views and military policies in the early Roman and Western Han empires*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/37048> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Zhongxiao Wang

Title: World views and military policies in the Early Roman and Western Han empires

Issue Date: 2015-12-17

Chapter 1

Roman worldviews during the Republic

1. Introduction

In 220 BC Rome had just recovered from the horror of the invasion by the Gauls and was being dragged into a war against various Illyrian tribes living on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea. Only one year later, the siege and fall of the city of Saguntum triggered a new war between Rome and Carthage.¹ At the outbreak of the Hannibalic War, neither the Romans nor the Carthaginians could foresee that it would last for nearly twenty years or that it would profoundly change the course of world history. The defeat of Carthage itself marked the beginning of a new era of Roman expansion. In the late 160s BC, Polybius revealed an acute sense of the far-reaching changes which had taken place and was shocked by the rise of Roman power throughout the Mediterranean world. In the first book of his *Histories*, he sees the four years between 220 and 216 BC (the 140th Olympiad) as the beginning of “world history”.² Polybius says that prior to the Second Punic War history had been fragmented; the histories of various regions were unrelated to one another. In other words, before the outbreak of the Second Punic War the histories of Libya, Italy and Asia had unfolded separately. After 218 BC, events in the West and the East had become interlinked and “the affairs of Italy and Libya have been interwoven with those of Asia and Greece, leading to one end.”³ In a short period of a mere fifty-six years, Rome had extended its power from Italy across almost the entire inhabited known world. How could this have happened? The question is raised in the opening of Polybius’ *Histories* and prompted him to look for explanations in the rest of his books.⁴

In reality, at the time of Polybius’ death (c. 118 BC) Rome had not yet

¹ For the origins of the Second Punic War, see Astin (1967) 577–596.

² Polyb. 1,3,1.

³ Polyb. 1,3,3-4.

⁴ Polyb. 1,5. On the interactions between the Romans and the Hellenistic world in the work of Polybius, see Walbank (1963) 1-13; Derow (1979) 1-15. For the notion of universal history and the concept of space in the eyes of Polybius, see Clarke (1999) 77-127; For reflections on Polybius’ Roman mastery of the world in book 6, see Erskine (2013) 231-247.

completed the conquest of the entire world.⁵ The final stage of Roman expansion in Asia Minor and the Near East did not take place until the time of Pompey in the 60s BC. Only in the 50s BC were central and northern Gaul conquered by Caesar's legions. Egypt became a province in 30 BC, and south-west Germany, Britain, Judaea and Dacia passed into Roman hands after the establishment of the Principate. Although the Romans continued to covet the empire of Parthia for centuries, the annexation of the Iranian plateau never happened, let alone the acquisition of the exotic Indian lands conquered by Alexander the Great.⁶

As this chapter will show, the fact that a large part of the known world had not been conquered did not stop Augustus from claiming Roman supremacy throughout the *orbis terrarum*. During Augustus' reign Polla, a sister of Marcus Agrippa, began the construction of the *Porticus Vipsania*. This building was unfinished at the time of Agrippa's death in 12 BC but was completed by Augustus. According to Pliny, in this building Agrippa planned "to set the world before the city for inspection".⁷ This statement has been interpreted as referring to a map of the world but, as Brodersen has pointed out, Pliny might be referring to an inscription listing or describing the various parts of the inhabited world.⁸ However Pliny's words are interpreted, there can be no doubt that the *Porticus Vipsania* with its map or inscription was intended to be an emblem of Augustan world rule.

The final decades of the third century BC not only marked the beginning of a new phase in "universal history" in the Mediterranean world. In 220 BC, at the other end of the Eurasian continent, the state of Qin 秦 had just ended its wars against the other six states and ultimately unified China, an area completely unknown to all but a handful of Greeks and Romans. Chronologically, the

⁵ It is extremely doubtful whether anyone in Rome was toying with the idea of conquering of the world in the time of Polybius. As both Derow and Gruen have pointed out, we must distinguish between the accomplishment of "worldwide supremacy" and world domination as a military and political goal. See Derow (1979); Gruen (1984) 286; Clarke (1999) 116.

⁶ About the growth of Roman imperialism from the early second century BC in the aftermath of the Hannibalic War to the age of Julius Caesar, see the brief overviews of Badian (1968) 1-16 and Lintott (1993) 6-15. For the Roman view of India, see Whittaker (2004) 144-62.

⁷ Pliny *HN* 3,17.

⁸ Nicolet (1991) 95-121 follows the traditional view that Pliny is referring to a world map. But see the criticisms of Brodersen (1995) 268-285.

establishment of the Chinese empire, which has been designated the “Great Unity” (Da yitong 大一統), took place slightly earlier than the rise of Rome to super-power status in the Mediterranean.⁹ In the same year in which the Romans began to build the Via Flaminia between Rome and the Latin colony of Ariminum (220 BC), the new government of Qin was equally ambitiously implementing the imperial highway system.¹⁰ Sima Qian 司馬遷 says that during the reign of Qin Shi Huang (r. 221 – 216 BC), the first emperor of Qin, two large-scale palace-construction projects were carried out in Xianyang 咸陽, the capital of the new empire. In 220 BC the First Emperor built the Xin Palace 信宮 near the south bank of the River Wei 渭河. Shortly afterwards, it was renamed the Ji Temple 極廟 to symbolize the ultimate power of heaven. In 212 BC, Qin Shi Huang began to construct a garden called Shanglin 上林苑 and the famous palace of Epang 阿房宮 on the same site. Besides these building activities, between the palace of Epang and the South Mountain 南山, a huge bridge was erected spanning the River Wei, to connect the new buildings with the capital, Xianyang. On a symbolic level, this bridge referred to the fact that the constellation of the Big Dipper and Polaris had crossed the Galaxy and met the star Encampment (part of the constellation of Pegasus). As such, it reflected the way in which the First Emperor imagined the universe.

There are good reasons to think that the First Emperor’s mausoleum, located at the foot of Li Mountain 驪山, about ten miles northwest of the city of Xianyang, also reflected ideas about the celestial and temporal worlds.¹¹ Since excavations of the mausoleum complex have not been carried out so far, scholars have very limited knowledge about the structure of the inner chambers and the objects they contain.¹² However, thanks to the vivid and detailed description of Sima Qian, it is possible to shed some light on this giant

⁹ For discussion on the paradigm of “Great Unity” of Chinese history, see Pines (2000) 280-324.

¹⁰ The large-scale constructions of the Qin included the making of the “Straight Road” (Zhidao 直道) and the imperial highways (Chidao 馳道), see Shelach (2011) 122; 131-32. On the construction of the Straight Road, see *Shiji* 6, 256; *ibid.* 110, 2885-86; Shi Nianhai 史念海 (1991) 435-453.

¹¹ On the construction of the palaces in imperial Qin, see *Shiji* 6: Bodde (1986) 54; Lewis (2006) 156-158; 171-175.

¹² For discussions about the latest findings to do with the Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang, see Thote and Von Falkenhausen (2008). For the latest review concerning the untouched mausoleum see Shelach (2013).

monument. Sima Qian's account records that the ceiling of the burial chamber was decorated with jewels depicting the sun, the moon and the stars. The chamber also contained other spectacular features such as miniature palaces, pavilions with flowing rivers and surging oceans made of mercury. If the narrative of Sima Qian is authentic, there is no reason to doubt that the First Emperor attempted to connect the earthly and celestial worlds, thereby constructing a complex universal network to fit the cognitive map of the universe in his mind.¹³

After ending periods of intense military conflict and restoring peace and order, the founders of the Roman and Qin empires each made an attempt to proclaim their successes to the world. In doing so, they disseminated visible images of the world through the media of coinage, architecture, sculpture and other works of art. Both emperors also left behind important documents eulogizing their virtues and their accomplishments in establishing their "universal" empires. The documents in question are the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and the Stele Inscriptions of the First Emperor of Qin. Each of these texts contains important information about the world views which the first Roman and first Chinese emperor sought to disseminate, thereby allowing us to study similarities and differences between Roman and Chinese conceptions of "world domination".¹⁴ In these texts Qin Shi Huang and Augustus used the terms *tianxia* and *orbis terrarum* to refer to the geographical dimensions of imperial power. At first sight, the meanings of these terms are very similar, but closer scrutiny reveals they had very different connotations in their respective cultural and political contexts.

The first two chapters of this book are devoted to the emergence of the

¹³ Lewis (2006) 172-3.

¹⁴ There is no need to reiterate the importance of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* in studies of the political history of Roman Principate. Named "the queen of inscriptions" by Mommsen, it provides an invaluable insight for our understanding of Roman political ideology of Augustan and later periods. The text of *Res Gestae* has been translated into many languages (e.g. for the Chinese version, see Zhang Nan and Zhang Qiang, 2007). For the latest English translation and commentary, see Cooley (2009). The stele inscriptions commemorating the achievements of Qin Shi Huang, originally eight in number, were all inscribed in stone and set up on mountains. Six of them were preserved in Sima Qian's *Shiji*. The text of one of the two inscriptions missing from Sima Qian's work is known from a copy made during the Tang dynasty, but the other one has been lost. Systematic modern research on the inscriptions started with Rong Geng (1935) 125-71. The seven Qin stele inscriptions are discussed and analyzed in Kern (2000).

Roman and Chinese ideologies of “world domination” and more specifically to a study of the semantics of various terms used in texts broadcasting these ideologies. In each case, I shall begin by examining how the ancient Chinese and the Romans imagined the world prior to the establishment of the Qin and Augustan empires. Focusing on the seemingly parallel terms *orbis terrarum* and *tianxia*, I shall first analyse the text of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and then that of the Stele Inscriptions of Qin Shi Huang in an attempt to capture the worldviews of the emperors responsible for their creation. Building on the findings which will emerge from these textual enquiries, I shall offer an explanation of the strikingly different imperial world views which emerge from the Roman and Chinese material.

2. Roman worldviews during the Middle and Late Republic

In Roman Italy historical writing began with Fabius Pictor, who was active during the final years of the third century BC.¹⁵ However, Fabius wrote his history in Greek. The first historical book written in Latin was Cato’s *Origines*, which appeared a couple of decades after Fabius Pictor’s account. For the study of early Roman history, ancient historians have to rely on archaeological evidence and, to a lesser extent, on various works written by Greek authors during the second and first centuries BC. Unquestionably, the Romans had developed their own concepts of space and geography as early as the Regal period, but the evidence relating to Roman worldviews during the Monarchy and during the first three centuries of the Republic is too meagre to offer a basis for systematic research.¹⁶

In 509 BC Rome concluded a treaty with Carthage which contained provisions concerning Roman traders doing business in Sardinia, Sicily and North Africa. Nevertheless, politically the geographical horizon of the Romans remained confined to the area between Veii and Tarracina.¹⁷ During the fourth and early third centuries BC, Roman power was extended northwards to the Pisa-Rimini line and southwards to the Ionian Sea. In 268 BC a map of *Italia*

¹⁵ On the primary literary sources of the early Roman Republic, see Cornell (1995) 1-26; Bispam (2007) 29-51.

¹⁶ On the views of cosmology and space in the Roman tradition, Whittaker gives a brief introduction in his first chapter. See Whittaker (2004) 10-30. Others, see Brodersen (2010).

¹⁷ Pol. 3,23.

was set up in the temple of *Tellus* (Earth) by the Roman consul P. Sempronius Sophus. This map probably showed peninsular Italy.¹⁸ About a century later, Cato famously referred to the Alps as a wall protecting Italy, but in another passage he refers to Gallia Cisalpina as lying outside Italy, suggesting that, as late as the first half of the second century BC, at least two different concepts of “Italy” coexisted and also that, depending on the context, the ideological boundaries of *Italia* might be constructed differently.¹⁹

In his account of the year 197 BC, Livy reports that various Greek states sent ambassadors to Rome in order to persuade the Senate to continue the war against Philip V of Macedon. Livy writes, “What especially impressed the Senate was their elucidation of the geography of the area in question, of the sea and the land. This made it clear to everyone that, if the king held Demetrias in Thessaly, Chalcis in Euboea and Corinth in Achaëa, Greece could not be free ...”²⁰ This episode shows that as late as the early second century BC members of the Roman elite were still inadequately acquainted with the geography of mainland Greece.

The concept of *orbis terrarum* does not appear to have developed until the late Republic. The obvious explanation for this is that Roman worldviews developed as a result of military conquest and territorial expansion beyond the Italian Peninsula after the First Punic War.²¹ Nevertheless, it is clear that during the Middle and Late Republic Roman geographical and cosmological conceptions were in some ways influenced by ancient Greek and Hellenistic thought.²² During the past century, Greek theories about the universe and the inhabited *oikoumene* from Homer to the death of Alexander the Great have received considerable scholarly attention.²³ The inevitable starting point is

¹⁸ Varro RR 1,2,1; Florus, 1,19,2. For modern discussions see Williams (2001) 37; Bispham (2007) 56.

¹⁹ Cato F85P (= iv. 10C) and F39P (= ii. 9c). Cf. Bispham (2007) 59. For the evolving notion of *Italia* during the Republic, see Dench (2005) 152-221; Bispham (2007) 53-73.

²⁰ Livy 32,37.

²¹ Only in the early first century BC was *imperium* related to the *orbis terrarum* in literature. For some examples: Cic. *De imp. Cn. Pomp.* 53; Cat. 4,11; *Rosc. Am.* 131; *Off.* 2,27; *Inv. rhet.* 4,13. For the meaning of the phrase *orbis terrarum*, see Nicolet (1991) 31; Gruen (1984) 274.

²² For the relations between Greeks and Romans and the influences of ancient Greek culture on the Roman aristocratic society in the Republic, see Rawson (1985) 3-38. Especially for the impacts of Greek geographical thought on the later Romans, see Rawson (1985) 250-67; Momigliano (1971).

²³ Nicolet (1991) 57-85. On the idea of the *oikoumene*, see Gisinger (1937) = Gisinger, Oikoumenē, *RE* 2123-74.

Homer's depiction of the inhabited *oikoumene* as a huge island encircled by the boundless Ocean, an idea which remained popular in the Archaic and Classical periods.²⁴

Pytheas of Massalia, a Greek adventurer and geographer who lived in the fourth century, for example, wrote two books, a *Description of the Earth*, and a treatise *On the Ocean*. Of these works, only a few fragments survive.²⁵ It appears that Pytheas expanded existing geographical knowledge on the basis of his voyages and expeditions to the northern and western parts of the Mediterranean world.²⁶ As a result of further research carried out by Dicaearchus of Messana (c. 350 – 285 BC), Aristarchus of Samos (310 – 230 BC) and, especially, by Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 276 – 195 BC), who is widely regarded as the most erudite scholar of the third century, cartographical theories were raised to a higher level as the standard of geographical and astronomical knowledge grew. Nevertheless, with regard to the general understanding of the *oikoumene*, Eratosthenes still maintained the Homeric model, seeing the world as an indivisible entity surrounded by vast oceans.²⁷

There is no agreement in the sources on what else remained beyond the ocean, although a number of Hellenistic scholars seem to have believed that there was more than one *oikoumene* in existence.²⁸ Crates of Mallos, a Greek Stoic philosopher and grammarian living in the second century BC, proposed that the globe was divided by the ocean into four zones which were symmetrically positioned in four directions.

When Latin authors use the expression *orbis terrarum* to refer to the inhabited world in its entirety, their conception of what this world looked like is indistinguishable from that of their Classical and Hellenistic predecessors.²⁹ Cicero, for instance, believed that the inhabited world was encircled by an

²⁴ On the world visions of the ancient Greeks from the time of Hesiod to Alexander the Great, see Romm (1994). Herodotus, for instance, did not believe in the existence of a river of Ocean flowing around the whole earth. See Her. 4,36.

²⁵ See Mette (1952).

²⁶ He wrote two books, at least as far as we know: *On the Ocean* and *Description of the Earth*, of both of which only fragments remain. See Nicolet (1991) 60. For the itinerary of Pytheas, see Dion (1977) 189-99.

²⁷ About the development of geographical knowledge in the Hellenistic period, see Nicolet (1991) 60-2.

²⁸ Homer seems to have believed that the world had boundaries. In Book Nine of the *Odyssey*, he depicts the coastline of Polyphemus' island as the boundary of the Earth. See Hom. *Od.* 9,284; Romm (1994) 12.

²⁹ See Nicolet (1991) 15-31; Gruen (1984) 273-5.

immense ocean.³⁰ He also relates the dream of Scipio Africanus in which the Earth is said to consist of two zones, the north and the south, with the Greeks and Romans both living in the north, and conjectures that, had Alexander the Great lived longer, he might have crossed the vast ocean.³¹ His contemporary, Sallust, records that Sertorius was forced to flee to the edge of the known inhabited world, the ocean, to escape from his enemies.³² A couple of decades later, Virgil and Horace appealed to Augustus to pursue his world conquest, carrying Roman arms beyond the encircling Ocean, and conquering every piece of land on Earth.³³ Strabo says that, although the eastern and southern limits of the *oikoumene* were still unknown, they presumably bordered on the ocean.³⁴ The same idea is to be found in the works of Pomponius Mela and Pliny the Elder in the Early Imperial period.³⁵

These examples clearly show that Roman ideas about the *oikoumene* were heavily influenced by Classical and Hellenistic geographical thought, a consequence of the increasing interaction with the Hellenistic world after the third century BC.³⁶ As the extant literary sources are too scarce to permit a thorough examination of the matter, to what degree such a worldview was in accord with that of the early Romans has to remain unknown. However, it has to be remembered that, before the mid-third century BC, Rome was a traditional agrarian society in which most people were peasants who knew little about seafaring.³⁷ The first Roman navy was created at the time of the First Punic War, and it was only then that the Senate began to conceive the possibility of establishing Roman military power in the western Mediterranean.

³⁰ Cic. *Rep.* 4,31.

³¹ Cic. *Rep.* 6,20; 4,31. The tale that Alexander the Great had ambitiously planned to cross over the Ocean and conquer the whole world is described only by Cicero, but hints of it are also seen in the writings of other Roman authors. See Quint. *Inst.* 3,8,16; Sen. *Ep.* 119,7; Luc. 10,36,41.

³² Sall. *Hist.* 1,102.

³³ Verg. *G.* 1,25-31; *Aen.* 6,785-88; 8,226-27; Hor. *Carm.* 1,12,57; Ov. *Fast.* 4,857-62.

³⁴ Strab. 1,1,8.

³⁵ Pomponius Mela, a geographer living in Rome during the reign of Claudius, wrote 3 books entitled *De chorographia* (*Description of Regions*). He thought that the Earth consisted of two hemispheres and was divided into five climatic zones, wholly surrounded by the Ocean. See Pompon. 1,5; 3,45. His work became the main source for Pliny the Elder's description of the world. Plin. *HN* 2,2405f.

³⁶ For general upper-class Roman attitudes to the Hellenistic culture, see Gruen (1984) 204-72.

³⁷ Rosenstein (2004) 3.

3. The emergence of the idea of world domination during the late Republic

As the result of the First Punic War, Sicily became Rome's first overseas province in 241 BC. Only three years later, Sardinia and Corsica were annexed. After the battle of Zama (202 BC), Rome became the mistress of the western Mediterranean, enabling it to shift some of its focus of attention to the East. Although threats from northern Italy during the first decades of the second century retarded the pace of conquest in the East, Rome managed to intervene in the affairs of the Hellenistic world and triumphed over Philip V of Macedon and the Seleucid king Antiochus III.³⁸ It is noteworthy that these successes did not immediately result in the creation of new provinces in the eastern Mediterranean. Although Macedon and Asia became Roman provinces in 146 BC and 129 BC, large-scale annexations of eastern territory did not happen until the time of Sulla and Pompey in the next century.³⁹ Syria was not transformed into a province until after the Battle of Dastria in 66 BC. The eastward expansion came to a temporary halt in 53 BC when M. Licinius Crassus lost his legions at Carrhae.⁴⁰ Julius Caesar planned to campaign against the Parthian Empire but was assassinated before he could carry out this project.⁴¹ In an attempt to surpass Octavian in terms of military achievements, Mark Antony mounted his Persian campaign in 37 BC but achieved few lasting results.⁴² Not until the time of Augustus, in 20 BC, did Rome manage to reclaim the Roman standards which had been in Parthian possession and then did so by diplomatic means.⁴³

³⁸ For the contacts between Rome and the Hellenistic world in the early stages, see Arthur Eckstein's recent book: Eckstein (2008). For the policies of the Roman state in the East in the second century BC, see Sherwin-White (1984) 18-121.

³⁹ By 103 BC, the number of overseas provinces of Rome had risen to eleven. Most were located in the western half of the Mediterranean world. They were: Sicily (241), Sardinia (238), Corsica (238), Hispania Ulterior (197), Hispania Citerior (197), Cisalpine Gaul (191), Macedon (146), Africa (146), Asia (129), Transalpine Gaul (121) and Cilicia (103). Illyricum was a Roman protectorate from 167 BC but does not seem to have become a separate province having its own provincial administration until the late 30s BC.

⁴⁰ Cass. Dio 40,21-4; Plut. *Crass.* 23-7.

⁴¹ On Caesar's plan, see Suet. *Jul.* 44,3.

⁴² On M. Antony's disastrous Parthian campaign, see Cass. Dio 49,23-28; Plut. *Ant.* 37-50.

⁴³ For the retrieval of the standards from the hands of Parthian king Phraates, see Cass. Dio 54,8. The Roman wars in the East and Roman foreign policies from the mid-

Ever since the late nineteenth century, there has been a lengthy and fierce debate about the driving forces behind Roman imperialism during the Republic.⁴⁴ Commencing with Mommsen, some have argued that Rome's territorial expansion was driven mainly by the wish to obtain security by eliminating external threats (T. Mommsen, Maurice Holleaux, de Sanctis, T. Frank, and H. H. Scullard). Against this hypothesis, many other scholars have maintained that Roman expansion was stimulated by the prospect of tangible profits and martial *gloria* (W. Harris, P. Brunt and K. Hopkins, E. Gruen and N. Rosenstein). Yet another group of researchers emphasizes the importance of such psychological drives as greed, fear and shame, or a mixture of such sentiments (J. Rich, S. Mattern, J. Peristiany). Whatever the view adopted, Roman society was characterized by a high-level of militarism. Constant wars and campaigns were part and parcel of the state of Rome for centuries, fostering a competitive and highly militaristic culture. As Eckstein has recently pointed out, such a warlike and aggressive culture was not a uniquely Roman feature but a common characteristic of states in the Mediterranean world, and hence should not be seen as the key to Rome's success. In his view, the success of Rome was largely built on its remarkable capacity to absorb the resources of newly conquered territories and people for the next round of military expansion.⁴⁵

Whatever view is taken on the driving forces behind Roman expansion during the Republic, it cannot be denied that Rome was a thoroughly militaristic society. During the Republic, Roman aristocrats had to serve in the army for ten years, and military service was a requirement for access to political office. The military participation rate of the citizen population was very high. During the second century BC, approximately ten per cent of the adult male citizen population served in the army in each year. During the wars of the first century BC, this ratio rose to one-third.⁴⁶ Another statistic shows that more than half of all Roman citizens regularly served in the army for seven years in the early second century BC.⁴⁷ It is also generally accepted that military success brought

second century BC to the Augustan period are surveyed by Sherwin-White (1984).

⁴⁴ Erskine offers a lucid overview of approaches to the nature of Roman imperialism over the one hundred years since Mommsen, see Erskine (2010) 33-49.

⁴⁵ See Eckstein (2006) and (2008) 16-19 and 187-88.

⁴⁶ Brunt (1971) iv.

⁴⁷ Hopkins (1978) 32-5; Finley (1985) 68. For Roman manpower and recruitment during the Middle Republic, see De Ligt (2007); For publications and scholarly debates on the problems of Roman demography in the last decades, see Scheidel (2008); De

enormous material, social and political rewards. All of these factors helped to drive Roman expansion forwards, but for a long time no clear concept of the ultimate territorial objectives of this process emerged.

So, exactly when did Roman politicians, generals or intellectuals conceive of the idea that Rome might be on the way to achieving mastery of the entire world?

In Arrian's *Anabasis*, Alexander the Great is credited with having had the plan to conquer the entire inhabited world. When his army refused to advance farther into India, for instance, Alexander is said to have given a speech in which he tried to persuade his men to follow him to the Eastern Ocean. In Book Seven, Arrian reports that some writers believed that Alexander intended to sail round Arabia, Ethiopia and Libya, so as to press forward beyond Mount Atlas and conquer Libya and Carthage. Other writers have credited Alexander with the intention of attacking the Scythians living near the Sea of Azov or with the plan of invading Italy.⁴⁸

It has been plausibly suggested that the theme of world domination which surfaces in the sources recounting Alexander's conquests was borrowed from the cultures of the Ancient Near East, where Assyrian and Persian kings had claimed control of the four corners of the earth.⁴⁹ During the three centuries following Alexander's death, various Hellenistic monarchs tried to emulate Alexander's example and repeated his ideological claims. The ideal of establishing universal rule after the conquest of vast territories and multitudes of peoples can be found in texts relating to the achievements of various monarchs of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. The most famous example is the *Res Gestae* of Ptolemy III Euergetes (r. 246 – 222 BC), which contains the following account of his achievements during the Third Syrian War:

Ptolemy, the Great King..., paternal descendant of Heracles, son of Zeus, and mother's side of Dionysus, son of Zeus, after he had inherited his father's dominion over Egypt, Libya, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lycia, Caria and the islands of the Cyclades, he marched out into Asia with infantry and horsemen and elephants from the land of the Troglodytes and from Ethiopia, which his father and he was the first to hunt from these lands and, after bringing them to Egypt, equipped them for military use. Having gained possession (kyrieusas) of all the land on this side of the Euphrates, of Kilikia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and of all the

Ligt (2012), in particular Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, 79-192.

⁴⁸ Arr. *Anab.* 5,26; 7,2.

⁴⁹ Strootman (2014) 120-37.

*forces in these countries and of the Indian elephants, and having made all the rulers of these areas his subjects, he crossed the river Euphrates, and having subdued Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Sousiana, Persis, Media and the rest of the land as far as Bactria, and having sought out all the sacred objects that had been carried out of Egypt by the Persians, and having brought them back to Egypt together with the rest of the treasures from these areas, he sent his forces across the rivers (canals) that were dug out . . .*⁵⁰

Similar ideological statements are to be found in Appian's account of the far-flung conquest of Seleucus Nicator (r. 306-281 BC):

*He acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, 'Seleucid' Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander. The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus.*⁵¹

In his attempt to emulate Alexander, one of the most dynamic and successful Seleucid kings, Antiochus III (r. 222-187 BC), claimed the title of *Megas Basileus*, a term borrowed from the Persian tradition.⁵² Likewise, Hannibal's spectacular march into Italy was said to have been encouraged by the example of Alexander the Great's military expedition to the Persian Empire.⁵³

Various pieces of evidence suggest that the example set by Alexander and the claims to universal rule which were formulated by some of his successors had a major impact not only on Roman ideas about generalship but also on formulations of the ultimate goals of imperial conquest. Scipio Africanus was probably the first Roman general to model himself on Alexander.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it took at least another century for the Hellenistic concept of world domination to find its way into Roman ideology.

A key figure in this process was Pompey the Great, another general whose aspirations for glory were inspired by the accomplishments of Alexander the Great.⁵⁵ Diodorus describes the results of Pompey's campaigns in the East

⁵⁰ OGIS 54; cf. Austin (2006) 466, no. 268; Sage (1996): no. 275; Chaniotis (2005) 58.

⁵¹ App. *Syr.* 55.

⁵² On the name, see Ma (1999) 273-76. About Antiochus III's emulation of Alexander the Great, see *ibid.* 273.

⁵³ Hoyos (2003) 105.

⁵⁴ Weippert is critical of the Alexander *imitatio* by Scipio Africanus. See Weippert (1970) 55.

⁵⁵ According to Sallust, "Pompey from his early manhood, influenced by what his

in language which is strongly reminiscent of the ideological claims of various Hellenistic kings:

Pompeius Magnus, son of Gnaeus, imperator, freed the coasts of the world and all the islands within the Ocean from the attacks of pirates. He rescued from siege the kingdom of Ariobarzanes, Galatia and the territories and provinces beyond there, Asia and Bithynia. He protected Paphlagonia, Pontus, Armenia and Achaia, also Iberia, Colchis, Mesopotamia, Sophene and Gordyene. He subjugated Dareius king of the Medes, Artocles king of the Iberians, Aristobulus king of the Jews, and Aretas king of the Nabataean Arabs, also Syria next to Cilicia, Judaea, Arabia, the province of Cyrenaica, the Achaean, Iazygi, Suani and Heniochi, and the other tribes that inhabit the coast between Colchis and Lake Maeotis, together with the kings of these tribes, nine in number, and all the nations that dwell between the Pontic Sea and the Red Sea. He extended the borders of the empire up to the borders of the world. He maintained the revenues of the Romans, and in some cases he increased them.⁵⁶

Plutarch's biography of Pompey describes the latter's achievements in very similar terms:

Inscriptions borne in advance of the procession indicated the nations over which Pompey triumphed. these were: Pontus, Armenia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Media, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Palestine, Judaea, Arabia ... and cities not much under nine hundred in number, besides eight hundred pirate ships, while thirty-nine cities had been founded ... But that which most enhanced his glory and had never been the achievement of any Roman before, was that he celebrated his third triumph over the third continent. For others before him had celebrated three triumphs; but he celebrated his first over Libya (Africa), his second over Europe, and his last over Asia, so that he seemed in a way to have included the whole world in his three triumphs.⁵⁷

According to Velleius Paterculus, Pompey set up three monuments, each representing a continent that he had conquered.⁵⁸

Pompey's claim that he had established Roman power throughout the inhabited world was clearly influenced by Hellenistic imperial ideology, with

supporters said, thinking that he would be the equal of King Alexander, sought to rival his deeds and plans". See Sall. *Hist.* 3,88. For Pompey's emulation of Alexander the Great, see Weippert (1970) 56-104.

⁵⁶ Diod. Sic. 40,4.

⁵⁷ Plut. *Pomp.* 45; Cass. Dio 49,40,2 -41,3.

⁵⁸ Vell. Pat. 2,40,4.

which the Romans had become familiar during the second and first centuries BC. Considering the example set by Pompey, it is not surprising to find Crassus attempting to invade and conquer Parthia, and Caesar's conquest of Gaul as well as his expedition to Britain could be presented in the same light. In 34 BC Mark Antony declared Cleopatra VII Queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya and Coele Syria. To Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion, he granted the title King of Kings, giving him sovereignty over the vassal kings and cities of the Middle East. Of course, Octavian presented this act as proof that Antony had been manipulated to the point at which he was prepared to betray the interests of the Roman people. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Antony's seemingly "insane" behaviour made perfect sense from the point of view of Hellenistic practice and ideology.⁵⁹

After defeating his opponents in 31 BC, Octavian boasted that he had brought peace to the Roman empire. Nevertheless, new wars against external enemies were launched, marking a new phase of bold expansionism which lasted until the later years of Augustus' reign. Augustus' presentation of these military successes and the ideology of conquest which emerges from his account will be examined in the final part of this chapter.

4. *Imperium sine fine* and the idea of Roman world domination

Once Augustus had secured his position, the Roman legions were moved to the periphery of the empire. During the next two centuries most wars were fought far away from Italy.⁶⁰ Ever since Edward Gibbon, Roman historians have used the expression *Pax Romana* to refer to the relatively peaceful period which now commenced for most inhabitants of Italy and the Mediterranean provinces of the empire.⁶¹ Of course, the quasi-disappearance of warfare from these core regions by no means implies that Roman emperors began to adopt anti-militaristic policies, or that the incentives which had driven Roman imperialism during the Republic no longer existed. In fact, a positive attitude to warfare and imperial expansion remained important elements in mainstream ideology. Soon after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Virgil vigorously celebrated Roman

⁵⁹ This view is elucidated in Strootman (2014).

⁶⁰ For the transformation, see Cornell (1993) 139-70.

⁶¹ Weinstock points out that *pax*, in the Augustan context, connotes security and order, rather than tranquility. See Weinstock (1960) 33-58; Galinsky (2005) 115. Discussion on the concept of *pax Romana*, see Woolf (1993) 179.

dominion over the Mediterranean world and fictitiously represents various peoples living beyond the boundaries of the Roman empire, among them Britons, Parthians and Indians, as having been subjected to Rome's supremacy.⁶² Horace also expresses the wish that Augustus will conquer the Parthians and Scythians living in the peripheral parts of the *oikoumene*.⁶³ As agent and representative of Jupiter, Augustus has spread the power of the Romans all over the inhabited world. Ovid expresses similarly optimistic ideas about Rome's expansion throughout the entire world. He claims that, under Augustus, the expanse controlled by the city of Rome had become conterminous with the entire world (*Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*).⁶⁴ He urges Augustus to undertake the long-awaited march to the East and finally subdue the Parthians by force. In a similar vein, Livy, at the beginning of his *Ab urbe condita*, predicts that it was Rome's destiny to be "the head of the world".⁶⁵

The theme of Rome's world conquest was propagated not only in literature but also in a wide range of visual media. For example, a coin minted between 32 and 29 BC depicts an image of the Roman goddess Victoria standing on a globe, with a wreath and a palm frond in her hands, signifying Rome's domination of the world.⁶⁶ Other visual materials used to present Rome's world ascendancy include Agrippa's map. From Pliny the Elder's account, we know that it was displayed on the wall of *Porticus Vipsania*.⁶⁷ Despite this information, whether or not it was a real, graphic map remains a matter of dispute. According to Servius, Augustus constructed a *porticus ad nationes*, in which he displayed statues from almost all known peoples of the world. A giant statue of Hercules stood at the entrance, symbolizing that Rome's domination had spread over the entire *oikoumene*.⁶⁸ As we will see, such

⁶² Verg. *G.* 3,16-33; 2,169-70.

⁶³ Hor. *Serm.* 2,1,10-15.

⁶⁴ Ov. *Fast.* 2,684. On the one hand, Ovid sings of peace, on the other hand he expresses the hope that people of all the corners of the world will fear the offspring of Aeneas. See Ov. *Fast.* 4,857-863.

⁶⁵ Livy 1,16,7: *caput orbis terrarum*.

⁶⁶ Globes on coinage as symbol of Roman domination of the known world were popular throughout the last decades of the Republic and in the early Principate. For some instances, see RRC, nos. 393; 397; 409,2; 449,4; 464,3; 465,8; 480,6; 594,5 etc. BMC, 1 no. 217. Discussions of the numismatic evidence include Gruen (1984) 274, n.5; Brunt (1990) 477; and Nicolet (1991) 41; 51, n. 29.

⁶⁷ Plin. *HN* 3,17. Scholarly discussion on Agrippa's map in Pliny's account, see Levi (1987) 17; Zanker (1988) 143; Whittaker (2004) 66; 78-79; Nicolet (1991) 100-12. Brodersen strongly opposes the existence of the map; see Brodersen (1995) 268.

⁶⁸ Mattern (1999) 183.

an open, all-encompassing mental world map contrasts sharply with the closed, exclusive worldview held by the First Emperor of China.

Another important representation of the known world (*orbis terrarum*) linked to Augustus' ambitious worldwide military conquests is to be found in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. A large part of the text (Chapters 25-33) is devoted to Rome's military expansion throughout the inhabited world after 27 BC.⁶⁹ One of the focal points of the *Res Gestae* is a long enumeration of remote towns, rivers and peoples (*gentes*). As Nicolet has pointed out, of these names, many are referred to in Latin for the first time in this document.⁷⁰ By highlighting so many unfamiliar names and displaying them to the public in Rome, the centre of Roman power, these chapters promulgate the martial greatness of the Roman people and of Augustus in particular.

The expression *orbis terrarum* appears twice in the text of *Res Gestae*:⁷¹

i. *rerum gestarum divi Augusti, quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Romani subiecit...*⁷²

[Account] of the achievements of the deified Augustus, by which he made the *orbis terrarum* subject to the rule of the Roman people...

ii. *bella terra et mari civilia externaque toto in orbe terrarum saepe gessi...*⁷³

I have often conducted wars on land and at sea, civil wars as well as foreign ones, across the entire world...

In the second of these passages Augustus refers to the military successes achieved by him "by land and sea" (*terra marique*). This expression is also found in two other passages:

iii. *Ianum Quirinum, quem clausum esse maiores nostri voluerunt, cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parva victoriis pax...*

Our ancestors wanted [the temple of] Janus Quirinus to be closed when peace had been achieved by victories on *terra marique* throughout the Roman Empire...⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cooley (2009) 36.

⁷⁰ For Augustus' primary concern with Roman society, see Nicolet (1991) 21.

⁷¹ My translations of passages from the *Res Gestae* are based on Cooley (2009).

⁷² Heading of the *Res Gestae*.

⁷³ RG 3,1.

⁷⁴ RG 13.

iv. *ob res a me aut per legatos meos auspiciis meis terra marique prospere gestas quinquagens et quinquens decrevit senatus supplicandum esse dis immortalibus.*⁷⁵

On account of affairs successfully accomplished *terra marique* by me or by my legates under my auspices the Senate fifty-five times decreed that thanksgiving should be offered to the immortal gods.

In the first two texts, Augustus announces that his achievement was based on successful conquests of the whole inhabited world (*orbis terrarum*). In making such an ambitious pronouncement, Augustus suggests that his military accomplishments exceeded those of Alexander the Great, Pompey and Julius Caesar.⁷⁶

In the third text, Augustus claims to have achieved peace by winning victories “by land and sea” (*terra marique*) throughout the Roman Empire rather than “throughout the entire world”. The former expression is more ambiguous than the latter. As Momigliano has pointed out many years ago, the Latin expression *terra marique* might be regarded as corresponding to the Greek formula *kata gēn kai kata thalassan*, which was widely used in Greek literary sources of the Hellenistic period. Momigliano suggests that the popularity of this phrase reflects the impact of the ideology of Persian kingship according to which “the king of kings” claimed universal rule “over land and sea”.⁷⁷ Viewed in this light, Augustus’ use of the expression *terra marique* could be read as another way of expressing the Roman claim to unlimited world dominance.

The central point of Chapters 26 to 33 of the *Res Gestae* is that, under Augustus’ auspices, the Roman legions had been taken to the remotest corners of the known inhabited world.⁷⁸ Chapter 26 records that Augustus had

⁷⁵ RG 4.2.

⁷⁶ RG 26,2; 31. Cf. Cooley (2009) 36-37.

⁷⁷ Momigliano has offered a series of examples to argue that, by the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the formula of “land and sea” was used to refer to political hegemonic rule over land and sea. See Momigliano (1943) 62, n. 36. It later impacted on Rome’s formation of the model of territorial conquest. In Cicero’s Speech *Pro Balbo*, for example, he voices his appreciation of Cnaeus Pompeius, *cuius res gestae omnis gentis cum clarissima victoria terra marique peragrassent, cuius tres triumphi testes essent totum orbem terrarum nostro imperio teneri* (“whose exploits had traversed all nations with splendid victory on land and at sea, whose three triumphs bore witness to the fact that the entire world is controlled by our authority”). See Cic. *Balb.* 6,16. Cf. *De imper Cn. Pompei* 56. Nicolet (1991) 36.

⁷⁸ Cooley (2009) 36-38. General discussion on Augustan imperial policy, see more in Luttwak (1976) 7-13; Mann (1979) 178-79; Gruen (1990) 395- 416; Austin and Rankov (1995) 111-13; Nicolet (1993) 85-95; Eck (1998) 93-104, etc. I shall deal with this

“extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people which had neighbouring peoples who were not subject to our authority.” No limits to Roman expansion are specified here.⁷⁹ Referring to the North, he states that the Roman fleet had sailed eastward from the mouth of the Rhine as far as the place where the sun rises. Turning to the West, Augustus says that the Roman conquests reached Cadiz, the end of the world signified by the Pillars of Hercules.⁸⁰ Besides these geographical allusions, the names of foreign peoples are listed. The aim of this selective enumeration is to show that the military achievements of Augustus exceeded those of his Roman predecessors, and even those of Alexander the Great who had not managed to lead his troops to the very edge of the world.⁸¹

In the *Res Gestae*, the theme of Roman world domination is not restricted to passages dealing with military successes, but also occurs in references to diplomatic missions sent by various distant peoples who wanted to obtain Augustus’ friendship and that of the Roman people (*amicitiam meam et populi Romani*, RG 26,4). Most of those peoples who are said to have sent embassies are the inhabitants of remote regions which were barely known in Italy, like the Charydes and Semnones of Germany, and the Medes and the Indians living on the eastern edges of the inhabited world, but some of them were less exotic peoples who had not been subjugated by Rome, like the Armenians, the Parthians and the Sarmatians. Similarly, Suetonius mentions that various peoples who had previously been mere names to the Romans, like the Indians and the Scythians, were induced by Augustus’ virtues and moderation (*virtutis moderationisque*) to request the friendship of Augustus and the Roman people. Rome’s principal opponent in the East, the Parthians, symbolically submitted to Roman authority by returning the military standards which had been captured from Crassus.⁸² The underlying message is clearly that Augustus’ claim of world conquest did not necessarily have to be fulfilled by force, but could also be obtained in peaceful ways.

In short, the central message broadcast in Chapters 26-33 of the *Res Gestae* is that the boundaries of Rome have been extended on an unprecedented scale. Although in a later passage Augustus claims that his personal power

subject at length in Chapter 3.

⁷⁹ RG 26,1: *omnium provinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi.*

⁸⁰ RG 26,2-5.

⁸¹ Levi (1947) 206; Cooley (2009) 37.

⁸² Suet. *Aug.* 21,3.

(*potestas*) was “not greater than that of others”, these chapters raise him to a position above all Romans and non-Romans of all time.⁸³ The message conveyed by the *Res Gestae* is consistent with Virgil’s claim that the Roman empire was an *imperium sine fine*.⁸⁴ As mentioned, the Roman claim to domination of the entire *orbis terrarum* has clear antecedents in the Late Republic. In the *Res Gestae*, however, this theme appears to have been intertwined with a celebration of the virtues and exploits of the first emperor.⁸⁵ In other words, the theme of uncontested domination over the world is inextricably intertwined with Augustus’ self-presentation.

In conclusion, the development of the worldview of the Romans in the Republic was tied to the rise of Roman imperialism in the Mediterranean from the Early Republican period. Over a span of several centuries, the mode of the Roman imperialism follows a centrifugal pattern, which alike fostered the Roman worldview of the last hundred years of the Republic to even greater heights. By then, as a highly militarized society, the desire to conquer lands worldwide was stimulated to its zenith, fuelled by increasingly toxic competition between the leading political protagonists. However, on the other hand, it should be noted that, in the early fifth century BC, Rome was only one of the clustering of city-states of Latium in central Italy. For the greater part of the Republican period, world conquest was apparently not part of the plans of the Roman aristocratic rulers. Little is known about how the Roman elite viewed the world until the last half of the third century BC, when Roman power increasingly gained control over the whole of the Italian Peninsula. Still, it seems clear that it was only with the increase in the interactions between Rome and the Hellenistic world from the early second century BC onwards that the horizons of Romans to the outside world were dramatically broadened. In the last century of the Republic, overseas territorial expansion was paid greater attention as the competition in the search for glory and power among those men of power in the Roman Senate began to accelerate. Geography, military conquest and historiography were therefore bound up with each other more closely than before, and consequently Rome’s aspiration for world conquest was displayed more brutally. As Augustus gradually took over the state in the last

⁸³ RG 34,3. For a reconsideration of Augustus’ *auctoritas*, see Rowe (2013) 1-15.

⁸⁴ Verg. *Aen* 1,278.

⁸⁵ See Brunt (1984) 423-44. On the acceptance of Augustus’ image as monarch, see Syme’s classic account, Syme (1939) esp. 277 ff. On its reflections in coins and artworks, see Wallace-Hadrill (1986) 66-87; Zanker (1988) 297-33.

decades of the first century BC, the concept of a relative open, inclusive and outward-oriented worldview emerged more clearly.

The worldview broadcast in the *Res Gestae* can be described as open, universal and encompassing. During the last decade of Augustus' lifetime, however, the empire had to face some serious military challenges and setbacks. The rebellions which erupted in Pannonia and Dalmatia between AD 6 and AD 9 were regarded as the most serious military crisis since the Hannibalic War. In AD 9, three Roman legions were cut to pieces in the Teutoburger Forest. Following this disaster, Rome withdrew its troops from the valley of the Elbe to the western bank of the Rhine. Suetonius records that Augustus was severely affected by this stroke of bad luck.⁸⁶ Before he died, Augustus left behind a *consilium* for Tiberius, suggesting that the empire should not be expanded any farther.⁸⁷ Cassius Dio reports that Augustus left four posthumous documents for the Senate.⁸⁸ In one of these documents, the Emperor advised his fellow Romans to be satisfied with what they possessed and not to seek any farther territorial expansion. Some ancient historians see the late reign of the Augustus as a turning-point in the long history of Roman territorial expansion.⁸⁹ In their view, Roman expansion slowed down markedly after Augustus.

Before examining the course taken by Roman imperial expansion after AD 14, I shall shift the focus of my attention to China where, about two hundred years before the initiation of the Principate, the Emperor Qin Shi Huang also claimed that the entire inhabited world had been unified under his sovereignty. How did Chinese rulers and writers envisage the world before and after the establishment of imperial rule? How do the worldviews which are encountered in China compare to the Roman worldviews which we encounter in Late-Republican and Early-Imperial Rome? These are the main questions which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁸⁶ On the reign of Augustus in the last decade from AD 4 to 14, see Cass. Dio 55,13-56,46; Crook (1996) 94-112.

⁸⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 1,9,3-5.

⁸⁸ Cass. Dio 56,33.

⁸⁹ For an overview of scholarly disputes, see Sidebottom (2005) 315-30.