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

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Chapter 3
From *Orbis terrarum* to *Orbis Romanus*: the *Imperium Romanum* transformed

1. Introduction

Most handbooks in the field of ancient history give the year 27 BC as the commencement of the history of the Roman Empire, but the heyday of Roman territorial expansion was in the period of the Late Republic, roughly from the age of Sulla to that of Julius Caesar, rather than during the Early Empire.[1]

During much of the Augustan period, the momentum of Roman expansion remained robust. After the annexation of Egypt in 30 BC, North-West Spain was subjugated by 19 BC. After these conquests, Augustus acquired new territories in Africa and Arabia. The hill tribes of the Alpine region succumbed to Roman rule after bitter fighting between 16 to 14 BC. Pannonia, Dalmatia, northern Macedonia and Achaea were also incorporated in this period. The brothers Drusus and Tiberius launched large-scale campaigns into the German lands beyond the Rhine between 12 and 9 BC, leading Roman arms as far as the Elbe River. At the time of the Teutoburg Forest disaster in AD 9, Germany was on the point of becoming a province. This audacious worldwide military expansion fits the literary picture which is found in the *Res Gestae*, as I have argued in the first chapter of this thesis.[2]

Despite such a promising beginning, during the last decade of Augustus' reign the Romans suffered a severe blow from revolts in Dalmatia and Pannonia between AD 6 and AD 9. Immediately following the revolt of Illyricum, Varus' defeat resulted in the loss of three Roman legions. The elderly Augustus responded by moving all Roman forces back to the left bank of the Rhine. In a posthumous *consilium*, he advised his successor not to expand the boundaries of the empire beyond the current frontiers.[3] This *consilium* suggests a

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[1] For the rise of Roman imperialism, see Chapter One.

[2] Many articles focus on the subject of the world conquest under Augustus, for example, Brunt (1990) 169-176; Nicolet (1991) 40-47; Eck (1998), 93-104.

[3] Tac., *Ann.* 1,11,7: *addideratque consilium coercendi intra terminus imperii* (He had added the advice that the empire should be kept within its boundary stones); Dio, 56,33; Whittaker (1994) 25.

degree of frontier consciousness had awakened in the minds of the Roman ruling elite of the Early Principate.[4]

John Richardson has studied the change in the meanings of the two terms *imperium* and *provincia* in Latin literature. One of his findings was that it was only during the final years of Augustus' reign that these terms began to be used to refer to territorial entities which were bounded by *fines*.[5] In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus claims that he extended the *fines* of "all the provinces of the Roman people" (*omnium provinciarum populi Romani*). Here the provinces are seen as geographically circumscribed units whose size could be expanded by military conquest. In his *consilium*, Augustus advised his successors to refrain from further expansion and "not to wish to increase the empire to any greater dimensions".[6]

In retrospect, Augustus' recommendation did not determine Roman imperial policy making during the first and second centuries. Only three decades after the catastrophe in the Teutoburg Forest, the Romans began to contemplate the conquest of Britain. Gaius' abortive plan to invade the island was followed up by Claudius who sent an invasion army in AD 43. Although his successor Nero might be seen as one of the least warlike emperors in Roman history, imperial conquest continued during his reign. In the East, Nero's general, Corbulo, achieved notable successes against Parthia, and in the West the Romans continued to expand their territory in Britain. In AD 61, Nero dispatched a praetorian regiment up the Nile on an exploratory and cartographical mission. Around the time of his death, he was planning to send his armies to the region of the Caspian Gates.[7] In the 80s AD, Domitian's Chattian Wars extended Roman control over parts of Free Germany. Two decades later, Trajan turned Dacia into a Roman province and as late as the

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[4] Isaac (1990) 28; Whittaker (1994) 29; (2004) 40-42.

[5] Richardson (2011) 10. While Richardson's theory is broadly acceptable, he goes rather far in playing down the degree of frontier consciousness during the Republic. The *lex publici portorii Asiae* (*AE* 1989, 681; *SEG* XXXIX 1180), which was set up under Nero but contains much Republican material, refers to "the boundaries of the province", demonstrating that a distinction was made between the land within the province of Asia and that outside the provincial boundaries. For studies of the inscription, see Engelmann and Knibbe (1989); Cottier and Crawford (2009). For discussions of the boundaries of the province of Asia, see Mitchell (2009) 169 ff.; Kantor (2011) 155-58.

[6] Cass. Dio 56,33,5.

[7] Plin. *HN* 6,181; Sen. *Q Nat.* 6,8,3–4; and Cass. Dio 63,8,1; Nicolet (1991) 86; Pogorzelski (2011) 151.

early third century Septimius Severus invaded Mesopotamia. Cassius Dio claims that he did so "out of a desire for glory".[8]

In short, although the pace of the Roman conquest slowed down during and after the final years of Augustus' reign, territorial expansion continued for more than two centuries, demonstrating that, until the early third century, most Roman emperors did not direct their efforts to demarcating the frontiers of the empire.

In this chapter I shall argue that a more bounded worldview began to emerge during the second century AD, without obliterating the Augustan ideology of the *imperium sine fine*. One of the questions which will be considered is how these competing worldviews could coexist. Another is whether the emergence of an alternative worldview which assigned great importance to fixed and well-defended boundaries had any discernible impact on actual military policies.

2. *Fines imperii*: limits of power or limits of territory?

As seen in the first chapter, the Emperor Augustus proclaimed that he had made the entire world subject to the rule (*imperium*) of the Roman people.[9] This claim fits perfectly with the concept of an *imperium sine fine* which is found in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[10] Indeed, the relationship between space and power is more explicitly expressed in the works of other Augustan writers such as Horace, Ovid and Vitruvius, and material objects also broadcast the idea that all the peoples of the world were now subject to Rome. On the *Gemma Augustea*, the emperor can be seen enthroned as Jupiter, sitting in the midst of various deities, including Roma, Tellus and Oceanus. He is crowned by another figure who has been identified as *Oikoumene*. The bottom half of the cameo shows Roman soldiers with barbarian captives.[11] The image explicitly advertises Rome's supremacy over the entire world, while emphasizing Augustus' divinely sanctioned power and authority. The Great Cameo of France, which dates to

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[8] Cass. Dio 67,4,1.
[9] *RG* heading: *quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Romani subiecit*. Some scholars assume the preface was added by Tiberius. See Cooley (2009) 102.
[10] Verg. *Aen* 1,278-79.
[11] For the Gemma Augusta, see Bernoulli (1886) 262–274 and Plate XXIX; Picard (1957) 304–310; Richter (1971) Vol. 2, no. 501; Megow (1987) no. A10, 155–163; Hannestad 1988, 78–80; Ando (2000) 287. For a picture see Zanker (1988) 230–232, with Fig. 182 on p. 231; Pollini (1993) 50; Whittaker (1994) 33-34, with Fig. 6 on p. 34.

the early reign of Tiberius, also expresses the idea that the *imperium Romani* has no boundaries.[12] The image shows a seated Tiberius holding a spear and surrounded by a cluster of figures. Some of these have been identified as members of the imperial *domus divina* and others as deities. In the sky, can be seen a man carrying a globe. One of the messages conveyed by this scene is that domination over the *orbis terrarum* had been transmitted from Augustus to Tiberius.

The claim that Rome's rule had no limits continued to be repeated by other writers of the first century. Pliny the Elder, for instance, states that a vast portion of the Earth bears the Romans' glory and honour.[13] Flavius Josephus credits King Agrippa of Judaea with a speech in which he points out to the rebellious Jewish people that Romans arms "have triumphed over the whole world", warning them not to challenge the authority of Rome.[14] These texts show that, throughout the first century AD, the ideology of Roman power without limits remained deeply ingrained in the minds of the upper classes of Roman society.

Such claims did not remain not undisputed. Some Latin writers of the early first century explicitly acknowledge that not all *gentes* and *nationes* of the *orbis terrarum* are subject to Rome's domination. Ovid, for example, urges Augustus not to stop territorial expansion but to pursue universal domination. As he writes,

> *Ecce, parat Caesar, domito quod defuit orbi*
> *Addere. Nunc, Oriens ultime, noster eris.*
> Oh, Caesar was preparing to complete the conquest of the world!
> Now, the farthest East should be ours.[15]

The contemporary poet Horace likewise expresses the wish that Caesar will push forward into the lands inhabited by various groups of barbarians, among them the Parthians, the Scythians, the Arabs and the Britons.[16] He takes for granted that all the territories from the far West (Spain) to the far East (India), and from the Nile in the deep south to Britain in the north hold Augustus in

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[12] Gagé (1930), 18–21; Megow (1987) no. A85 on 202–206; Ando (2000) 289, n. 57.
[13] Plin. *HN* 2,68,6-8.
[14] Jos. *BJ* 2,358.
[15] Ov. *Ar. Am.* 1,177-8; *Met.* 15,832-831; see also Nicolet (1991) 44; Ov. *Met.* 15, 832-831.
[16] Hor. *Serm.* 2.1.10-15.

awe.[17] Virgil predicts that the territory of Augustan Rome will reach the Garamantes and India, surpassing Hercules and Dionysus.[18] Strabo, on the one hand, emphasizes that the Britons sent envoys to Augustus to ask for his friendship, but also admits that Britain was not under direct Roman control. His explanation is that Britain was simply not worth conquering.[19] During the reign of Nero, the poet Lucan laments that the conquest of the world should have been completed by Pompey and Caesar, but that the attainment of this goal had been delayed by the civil war. Hence, he prompts Nero to complete this project.[20] A number of unconquered peoples are explicitly identified in his work. For example, in the first book of his *Bellum Civile*, he expresses the view that, if the Romans genuinely love war, they must set out to campaign against the peoples dwelling on the edge of the world, such as the Scythians, the barbarous Arabs and even the people of Central or East Asia:

> *sub iuga iam Seres, iam barbarus isset Araxes*
> *et gens si qua iacet nascenti conscia Nilo.*
> *tum, si tantus amor belli tibi, Roma, nefandi,*
> *totum sub Latias leges cum miseris orbem,*
> *in te verte manus: nondum tibi defuit hostis.*
> Already the Seres might have passed beneath our yoke, already the barbarous Araxes,
> and any race, if there is one, that knows the source of the Nile.
> If Rome has such love of unspeakable warfare,
> let her first subdue the whole world under Latin laws,
> turn your hand against yourself—you have never yet lacked a foe.[21]

At the same time, many Romans seem to have thought that Roman power had been brought to nearly every corner of the earth. For instance, in AD 15, after the mutiny of the Roman troops on the German frontier, Germanicus launched a punitive campaign against the Chatti and Cherusci. After defeating the German barbarians, a number of Roman legions reached the shores of the North Sea via the river routes. Tacitus describes this part of the ocean as the roughest in the world, with hostile coasts bordering a vast and deep sea beyond

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[17] Hor. *Carm. 4.14.41-52*
[18] Mattern (1999) 169.
[19] Strab. 2,5,8.
[20] Luc. *BC* 1,53-62.
[21] Luc. *BC* 1,13-23.

which no other lands exist.[22] On the eve of the Claudian invasion of Britain, the troops commanded by the Roman general Aulus Paulinus were reluctant to board ship, because they thought Britain was outside the limits of the known world.[23] In the fictitious the speech given by Boudicca, she points out that the ocean separates the island of Britain from the continent, claiming that the Britons were living under a different sky.[24] After Claudius' conquest of Britain in 43, the emperor had a naval crown fixed to the pediment of the imperial palace, symbolizing that he had overcome the Ocean. An inscription dating to c. AD 51-52 states that Claudius was the first to have subjected the barbarian tribes living beyond the Ocean to the rule of the Roman people.[25]

This discussion produces two conclusions. Firstly, during the first century AD the idea that Rome, as the *caput orbis terrarum*, had universal and limitless power continued to be reiterated. Secondly, the claim to universal dominance could be combined with the admission that in actual fact Rome had not yet conquered the entire world in a geographical sense.

The concept of world dominance might be regarded as part of the ideological legacy of the Late Republic, when Roman writers and politicians had embraced an open, encompassing and outwardly oriented worldview, as discussed in Chapter One. In the sections which follow, I shall examine to what extent this unbounded worldview manifested itself in greater territorial expansion and in Roman frontier policies. At the end of this chapter, I shall return to Roman worldviews, focusing specifically on the changes in the ideological representations of the empire which can be observed during the first two centuries of the Principate.

3. Frontiers, foreign relations and imperial expansion during the first and second centuries AD

3.1. Client kingdoms

Undeniably a certain type of frontier consciousness existed during both the Republic and the Early Empire. When the Roman province of Africa was created after 146 BC, an earthwork, the *fossa regia*, was constructed to demarcate

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[22] Tac. *Ann.* 2,24.
[23] Cass. Dio 60,19,3.
[24] Cass. Dio 62,4,2.
[25] Wiedemann (1996) 236.

the boundary between the new province and the Numidian kingdom.[26] This example shows that, even if the Romans might not have thought of each frontier province as having a clear linear boundary, they were fully aware that those lands which were either occupied by allied kingdoms or inhabited by various barbarian tribes were not directly controlled by Rome. Consequently, it is not entirely true that the idea that states are separated by clear boundary lines did not emerge until the Early Modern Period.[27]

If a certain degree of frontier consciousness had not existed, Augustus' advice to "keep the empire within its boundaries" (*coercendi intra terminos imperii*) would have been nonsensical.[28] In this passage, the phrase *terminos imperii* must refer to the boundaries of the geographical area within which Rome could exert her power absolutely and directly. During the period of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, many parts of the Roman empire were surrounded by various client kingdoms or client tribes.[29] Although it is by no means obvious that the decision not to incorporate these client kingdoms and tribes stemmed from any conscious strategic considerations, as presumed by some modern scholars, it remains the case that, in the Early Imperial period, most client kings and tribal leaders who were thought of as *amici populi Romani* were allowed to keep their positions, as long as they behaved as loyal allies.[30]

In his account of the foreign policies adopted by Augustus around 20 BC, Cassius Dio distinguishes between two types of territories controlled by the Romans. While those territories which had been incorporated as *provinciae* were governed according to Roman customs, Augustus allowed allied peoples to

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[26] For discussions of the *fossa regia*, see Di Vita-Evrard (1986); Mattingly (2005) 137, 181-182, 206, 330; Quinn (2004); Abid (2014) 401-418.

[27] Whittaker claims that, by their nature, empires are incompatible with territoriality. See Whittaker (2004) 2. He argues that there was no direct link between sovereignty and territoriality until 1648, when the Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War. This moment is widely regarded as signalling the creation of the concept of the nation-state. For the significance of the Westphalian system, see Osiander (2001) 257-284. For criticism see Badie (1995) 12-17. Whittaker's point remains valid to the extent that the client kingdoms of the first century could be seen as being subject to (indirect) Roman rule.

[28] Tac. *Ann.* 1,11; Cass. Dio 56,33,5.

[29] General studies about the relationship between the Roman Empire and the client kingdoms in the Principate, see Braund's monograph: Braund (1984); also Braund (1988) 69-96.

[30] Braund (1984) 55-70. This is also the viewpoint of Luttwak, who argues that the imperial rulers strategically employed the client system to defend the empire and sustain expansion. See Luttwak (1978) 50.

govern themselves in accordance with their indigenous traditions.[31] Dio also says that Augustus was satisfied with the *status quo* and that he had no intention of bringing any new territories or allied nations under his rule.[32] Likewise, Suetonius discusses the fate of those kingdoms which had turned against Rome during the civil war. In the aftermath of this conflict, Augustus restored some of these kingdoms but incorporated others into various Roman provinces.[33]

In some cases Rome took the step of appointing new client kings. King Juba II of Mauritania provides a good example. Juba II was raised and educated in Rome. His father was Juba I, an ally of Pompey and an enemy of Caesar, who died after the battle of Thapsus in 46 BC. Juba II became a close friend of Octavian. In 27 BC Juba was made king of Mauritania and married Cleopatra Selene II.[34] Juba's kingdom was not annexed until AD 40, because, Cassius Dio asserts, Caligula coveted the wealth of Mauritania. Juba's son and successor, Ptolemy, was recalled to Rome and forced to commit suicide. Thereafter the kingdom of Mauritania was annexed and divided into two provinces, Mauritania Tingitana and Caesariensis.[35]

The fate of the kingdom Cappadocia in the East was similar to that of Mauritania. After the death of King Archelaus in AD 17, it became part of the province of Syria. If Tacitus' account is reliable, the main reason for taking this step was that Archelaus had been discourteous to Tiberius when he was living as an exile in Rhodes in AD 1.[36] Another client kingdom, Commagene was also annexed in AD 17, after the death of King Antiochus III.[37] Among the client kingdoms bordering the eastern provinces, the disappearance of the client kingdom of Thrace can be attributed to similar causes. After the death of King Rhoemetalces I in AD 12 Augustus separated Thrace into two kingdoms, appointing Cotys VIII and Rhescuporis II kings, but in AD 19 the latter reunited the kingdom by murdering Cotys.[38] When the reigning king Rhoemetalces III was murdered in 46, Claudius converted Thrace into a

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[31] Cass. Dio 54,9,1.

[32] Suetonius has a similar account; see Suet *Aug.* 21,2,-3.

[33] Suet. *Aug.* 48.

[34] Dio Cass. 53,26,2. Braund (1984) 16-17.

[35] Dio Cass. 59,23,1. For general discussions of these two frontier provinces, see Millar (1967) 169-172; Raven (1969) 55; Breeze (2012) 142-143.

[36] Dio Cass. 57,17,3-6; Tac. *Ann.* 2,42.

[37] Tac. *ibid.*

[38] Tac. *Ann.* 2,64-67.

province.[39] By the end of the reign of Vespasian in 79, many former client kingdoms had become Roman territories.

Those client kings who were allowed to keep their kingdoms or had had them conferred by friendly emperors, were expected to ensure the stability of the frontiers and to provide manpower for the auxiliary units.[40] Similar relationships had already been formed during the Middle and Late Republic, when some foreign rulers had sought the patronage of powerful Roman families.[41] During the Early Empire, allied kings had to play the game exercising more care, as personal relationships with the incumbent emperor became a crucial factor in the fate of their kingdoms.[42] Augustus awarded kingdoms to his friends Juba II of Mauritania and Herod the Great. Antiochus IV of Commagene and Herod Agrippa were close friends of Caligula. Immediately after the latter's accession to the throne, Antiochus received the territory of his deceased father augmented by the coastlands of Cilicia. Simultaneously, Julius Agrippa (Herod Agrippa) was released from prison and offered a vast amount of land and royal titles. When he died in AD 44, his kingdom ceased to exist, but his son Julius Agrippa II received the kingdom formerly held by his uncle, Herod of Chalcis. In the 60s, Nero enlarged his territory by adding a number of cities in the Galilee and Peraea. The kingdom continued to exist until Julius Agrippa's death in AD 93.[43]

Were the allied kingdoms bordering the provinces of the empire regarded as being inside or outside the empire? As argued by Braund, the best answer to this question is that they "were neither and both".[44] Administratively, the Romans were aware of the distinction between provinces and non-provincial areas. In the *Res Gestae*, for instance, Augustus claims that he

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[39] Dio Cass. 60,28.

[40] Luttwak (1976) 49-50. Most scholars criticize Luttwak for overestimating the role of these allied kingdoms in securing the provinces of the empire during the Julio-Claudian era, but there can be little doubt that they did have this effect to a greater or lesser degree, whatever the aims originally were. See Gruen (1978) 564.

[41] Astin (1967) 27-31; Badian (1958); Braund (1988) 82-86; Wallace-Hadrill (1989).

[42] Some examples, see Braund (1984) 55 ff.

[43] Joseph, *Ant. Iud.* 20,9-15; Tac. *Hist.* 2,81. In addition to these examples, it is known that the Parthian king, Vologaeses, did once, in AD 69, promise to offer Vespasian 40,000 archers, although the latter refused to avail himself of it. For some other examples: the Cheruscan leader Italicus, Iulius Agrippa of Judaea, Antiochus IV of Commagene and Tigranes V of Armenia and Pharasmanes of Iberia; see Suet. *Vesp.* 6,3; Tac. *Hist.* 4,51.

[44] Braund (1984) 182.

advanced the "the boundary of Illyricum to the bank of the River Danube".[45] The passage shows that the Emperor regarded the Danube as the border of Illyricum, at least at a particular moment in time. In AD 66, when the Armenian king, Tiridates, returned home after paying a visit to Nero, he was accompanied by many artists whom he brought with him from the city of Rome. Cassius Dio says that Corbulo forbade some of these artists to cross into the land of Armenia,[46] proving that the existence of a clear territorial division did not mean that Armenia was free to pursue its own policies independently of Rome. Similarly, the fact that a stone column was set up to mark the boundary between the province of Osrhoene and the kingdom of Abgar of Edessa in AD 195 does not imply that Abgar was free to disregard Roman interests.[47]

In those regions in which Roman provinces did not border on client kingdoms, indisputable traces of a dynamic conception of provincial *fines* exist. The passage from the *Res Gestae* in which Augustus claims to have extended the *fines Illyrici* all the way the Danube goes on to state that his army crossed the Danube and subdued the Dacians beyond it.[48] Tacitus refers to Elephantine and Syene as being the frontier-posts of the Roman Empire at the time of Germanicus' visit in AD 19, but then goes on to say that, in his time, the boundary had been extended to the Red Sea. In the *Germania*, Tacitus explains that, only after a military road had been built (*limite acto*) and the garrisons had been moved forward (*promotisque praesidiis*), was the area of the *Agri Decumates* regarded as an outlying region of the empire and as part of a province.[49]

3.2. Parthia and the East

During the first and second centuries, Rome probably considered Parthia the only neighbouring state capable of posing a serious threat to it.[50] The Persians had been defeated by Alexander the Great, but Rome never came close to

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[45] *RG* 30,1.

[46] Cass. Dio, 62,6,3.

[47] The stone was set up when the new province of Osrhoene was established. See Lo Cascio (2000) 85; Whittaker (2004) 7.

[48] *RG* 30,2.

[49] Tac. *Ger.* 29,4. In the Penguin translation of 1948, the phrase *limite acto* is mistranslated as "the frontier line of defence was drawn". For the meanings of the terms *limes* and *limites*, see Isaac (1988) 125-147.

[50] However, the dearth of evidence from the Parthian side makes it difficult for modern researchers to evaluate relationship between Rome and Parthia. For the problems posed by the biased sources, see the comments of Wheeler (2000) 288.

repeating this achievement against the Parthians. After Crassus' defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC and the unsuccessful campaigns of Mark Antony, the Roman government developed a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Parthia.

Augustus recovered the lost Roman standards and prisoners from Parthia by diplomacy. Roman writers of the first century urged Augustus to march against Parthia, but no such expedition was undertaken during his reign.[51] Under Nero, military conflicts took place between Parthia and Rome but these never escalated into massive warfare. During the second and early third centuries, Rome fought several large-scale wars against the Parthians. The armies of Trajan and Septimius Severus did manage to capture large parts of Mesopotamia, but the Rome troops never managed to penetrate into the Iranian hinterland and turn the whole area to a Roman province.[52]

Between the death of Augustus and that of Septimius Severus, the Romans were able to maintain their *dignitas* in their relations with Parthia.[53] Whenever the confrontations between Rome and Parthia escalated into warfare, it was usually Rome which was capable of enough mobilizing military manpower and resources to launch long-distant campaigns into the Parthian territories, rather than the other way round.[54] Although scholars claim that most Roman emperors of the first two centuries adopted the prudent strategy of avoiding direct confrontation with Parthia, preferring to deal with the Parthian question by manipulating the politics of Armenia, it is widely agreed

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[51] Hor. *Odes*, 4,15,23; Pogorzelski (2011) 163-168 e.g. For the general discussion about the relationship between Rome and Parthia from Augustus to Caracalla in the third century, see Karl-Heinz Ziegler (1964); Campbell (1993) 213-240; Wheeler (2000) 287-292.

[52] Cass. Dio 68,17; 71,2; 76,9-13. For overall discussion about Roman-Persian wars from the Late Republic to the third century, see Isaac (1990) 28-33.

[53] Cass. Dio 68,29. The failure to extend Roman control into the Parthian hinterland can be attributed to complex reasons. Focusing on the Euphrates River, Dąbrowa, points out that, unlike other major rivers in the Roman frontier zones, such as the Rhine and the Danube, only a limited section of the Euphrates was navigable. In addition, no navigation upstream was possible. These features made it difficult for Rome to gain control over the whole waterway. See Dąbrowa (2002) 275-279.

[54] In a letter sent by the Caesennius Paetus, legate of Cappadocia, to the Parthian king Vologaeses V in AD 62, the former compares the strength of the two states, claiming that the king of Parthia had mobilized all the resources of his kingdom against Rome's two legions, but that Rome had the rest of the world (*orbem terrarum reliquum*) behind it. It should, however, be noted that Paetus made this claim while his troops were being besieged by Parthian troops in a series of hastily erected camps. He was ultimately forced to accept a treaty under which all Roman troops were to be withdrawn from Armenia. See Tac. *Ann.* 15,13.

that, before the rise of the Sassanid Empire in the mid-third century, Rome had the upper hand in Roman-Parthian relationships.[55] In other words, while the Roman emperors of the Principate might have surrendered the ambition of rivalling the achievements of Alexander the Great by annexing all of Parthia, the Romans continued to have a large degree of political and military freedom in dealing with their eastern neighbour.

3.3. North-West and Central Europe (the Rhine and Danube frontiers)

On the western fringes of the empire, where no political entity capable of playing a role similar to that of Parthia existed, the levels of political organization were more primitive than they were in the East.[56] After Augustus' death, the majority of German tribes maintained alliances with the Romans. From the first century AD, numerous German barbarians served in the Roman auxiliary troops, but tribal loyalties to the Roman government were fragile. The events leading to the Teutoburg Forest disaster and the Batavian Revolt during the civil war between AD 68 and 69 are well-known cases in point.[57] Unquestionably, because of the low level of cohesiveness within these tribal organizations and their limited military striking power, they did not pose any really serious threat to Roman domination and, under normal circumstances, the Romans experienced few difficulties in keeping the German tribes in check by a combination of military force, diplomacy and other techniques. Italicus, for example, the son of Flavus the brother of Arminius, was educated in Rome. He was then sent back to the Cherusci by the Roman emperor Claudius when the tribe asked the Romans for king. Maroboduus, the leader of the Marcomanni, incurred the anger of Tiberius because he did not provide the Romans with

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[55] Isaac (1990) 19-53.

[56] For example, multiple tribes along the Rhine and beyond it were all lumped together under the same name and were called *Germani* by Roman authors, despite the fact that these tribes were not a unified nation. For the research on the origins and development of Germani in Roman period, abundant works have been published. However, it is impossible to mention all the studies in this footnote. Important works published in the last two decades include Todd (1992) and Wolfram (1997); see also Rüger (1996) 517-534.

[57] The most important revolts of the first century AD are recorded by Tacitus. They include the Gaulish revolt led by the Treviri in 22, the revolt of the Frisii in Lower Germania in 28, and the uprisings of the Iceni in 47 and 60.

support during the punitive German campaigns led by Tiberius and Germanicus after the Teutoburg Forest disaster.[58]

Between the end of Germanicus' German military expeditions in about AD 16 and the outbreak of the Batavian Revolt, there were a few sporadic uprisings among the German tribes of the Lower Rhine area, but on the whole the region remained relatively peaceful.[59] Tacitus states that Corbulo had the opportunity to launch a major campaign against the Chauci, but Claudius stopped him from further expansion.[60]

Turning to the frontier along the Upper Rhine and Upper-Middle Danube, from the early first century, at first sight, a good opportunity to annex the territory of Marcomanni presented itself when a split emerged in the tribal confederation AD 18 and Maroboduus fled to Italy. The reason Tiberius did not undertake any military action at this juncture remains obscure.[61] Gaius does not appear to have been interested in the conquest of this area, although he visited the Roman legions stationed on the Rhine frontiers in AD 39/40. Nero had little interest in military matters and there was no territorial gain in Germany under his reign.[62] Vespasian also showed hesitation about bringing the Roman troops across the Upper Rhine, but he did consolidate the frontier zone by building roads across the *Agri Decumates*.[63]

Taking all the evidence into account, it is fair to say that there was no attempt to expand Roman power into the territory of Germans until AD 83.[64] In that year the young emperor Domitian, who felt he lacked sufficient military prestige, launched a major war against the German *Chatti*. However, immediately following the conclusion of the First Chattian War, he turned his gaze to the frontier of the Middle Danube. Against the advice of his friends, who urged him to continue Vespasian's policy of maintaining client relationships with the Suebi and the Dacians, Domitian moved large numbers of troops from the Rhine to the Danube in preparation for another war.[65] During the last decade of the first century, the Germanic Suebi, Marcommani

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[58] Tac. *Ann.* 2,46,5.

[59] Tac. *Germ.* 37.2: *tam diu Germania vincitur*. For the policy of the German frontiers under Augustus, see Wells (1972) 156-161.

[60] Tac. *Ann.* 11,16–20; Cass. Dio 60,8,7.

[61] Suet. *Tib.* 41.

[62] Griffin (2008) 124-125.

[63] Tac. *Germ.* 29,3. Schönberger (1969) 158.

[64] Tac. *Germ.* 37. For Domitian's first Chattian War, see Cass. Dio 67,3-4; Jones (1992) 128-131.

[65] For the war of Chatti, see Jones (1973) 79-90; (1992) 126-131.

and Quadi, as well as the Sarmatians and Dacians, continued to attract plenty of Roman attention.

In the following century, Trajan's aggressive policies resulted in the incorporation of Dacia as a new province. Although shortly after his accession to the throne Hadrian withdrew the army from parts of Dacia, restricting Roman Dacia to the area within the Carpathian Mountains, Rome continued to control the entire area of the lower Danube. As long as the Marcomanni and Quadi on the middle Danube remained subservient to Rome, the imperial government could control them by manipulating their internal affairs.

Following the Claudian invasion of Britain and the creation of the province of Britannia, Rome pursued a highly expansionist policy in this area. Between 70 and 85 all of Wales, northern England and southern Scotland were added to the province.[66] After AD 85 Roman policies became less aggressive, in part because attention shifted to the eastern frontiers. Hadrian and Antoninus Pius built their walls in order to make it easier to monitor the movements of the British barbarians. In AD 208 Septimius Severus launched a new series of aggressive campaigns against the Britons. These campaigns seem to have begun as a punitive war but, as many other Roman wars, they quickly became more aggressive. The advance of the Roman troops ended with the emperor's death in Eboracum (York) in 211.[67]

On the whole, Rome enjoyed a position of superiority in dealing with the various barbarian peoples on the Rhine and Danubian frontiers during the two centuries after Augustus' death. Although some aggressive campaigns were fought and some new provinces were created, skillful manipulation of the internal affairs of barbarian tribes generally sufficed to secure Roman interests.[68] Compared to the situation which had existed during the Republic, war became intermittent but Rome did not hesitate to resort to force if the interests of the empire or the personal interests of the emperor required this. Millar has also pointed out that many conflicts seem to have been initiated by a particular emperor's subjects.[69] While there is an element of truth in this theory, it has to be said that, in almost all cases, the decision to continue a war or to make peace was made by Rome rather than by barbarian peoples. Examples

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[66] For British conquests in the reign of Vespasian, see Levick (1999) 158 -159.
[67] For Septimius Severus' military activities in Britain, see Birley (2002) 170-187. For the Roman conquest of Britain from Claudius to Septimius Severus, see Mattingly (2006) 94-127.
[68] Pitts (1989) 45-58.
[69] Millar (1966) 165-166; (2010), Part Three, Subject and Emperor, 275-537, *passim*.

include Germanicus' punitive war against the Germans between AD 15 and AD 17, Gaius' decision to abandon the plan to conquer Britain in 39, Corbulo's withdrawal of the army from the east bank of the Rhine on the orders of Claudius in 47, Domitian's Second Dacian War in 87, Hadrian's withdrawal of the Roman forces from the lower Danube in 127, as well as Commodus' decision to conclude a truce with the Marcommani, Quadi and Burii in 180. These examples illustrate that, by and large, Rome was able to maintain an elastic and confident stance in its dealings with its barbarian neighbors. While Roman policies were not invariably aggressive during the first two centuries AD, warfare always remained one of the options available to the emperors of this period.

4. Frontier policy making and the Grand Strategy revisited

In the field of Roman frontier studies, a fierce debate has raged about whether the central Roman government did develop a long-term, rational policy for the defence of the empire. A key moment in this debate has been the publication of Edward Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (1976), which stimulated debates not only among ancient historians, but also among archaeologists and political and military specialists. [70] Luttwak sees the development of the Roman frontier from the time of Augustus as having been shaped by rational and well-calculated planning. He divides the development of Roman frontiers into three chronological phases. In the first phase, which lasted from the reign of Augustus to that of Nero, the client kingdoms on the periphery of the empire were allowed to survive because the Romans believed their existence helped to protect the inner zones of the empire from the intrusions of hostile barbarian enemies. Between the death of Nero and that of Septimius Severus, Rome developed a new policy of "preclusive security" by annexing client kingdoms or tribes until it reached natural defensive frontiers. A well thought-out system of fortifications was built up in this period. Luttwak sees the period from 235 to the end of the Principate in AD 285 as the third stage of the Grand Strategy. This period witnessed the emergence of the idea of defence-in-depth. [71] Since the last period is beyond the scope of my

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[70] Luttwak (1976). For the feedback and criticism of Luttwak, see Gruen (1978) 563-566; Mann (1979) 175-183; Millar (1982) 2-23; Dyson (1985) 177-179; Isaac (1990) 5; 187-188; 376-377; Wheeler (1993) 7-41; 215-250; Whittaker (1994) 66-70; Austin and Rankov (1995) *passim*; Whittaker (2004) 28-49, Kimbley (2006) 333-362 etc.
[71] Gruen (1978) 563.

investigations, the following discussion will focus on the first two phases of Luttwak's Grand Strategy.

Luttwak's theory sits rather uneasily with the fact that imperial frontier policies during the Principate appear to have been highly erratic, not only between Augustus and Nero but also between the beginning of the Flavian period and the end of the Severan dynasty. Certainly, there are strong indications that the emperors of the first and second centuries AD did not see *continuous* territorial expansion as an inevitable military or political goal. Tiberius, for example, preferred to solve conflicts with barbarian tribes or kingdoms by virtue of either diplomacy or trickery rather than by military means. One reason for this seems to have been that he had acquired sufficient military prestige before his accession to the throne.[72] Claudius advertised his close relationship with the army, but showed little interest in further expansion after his armies had conquered large parts of Britain. As stated, he ordered Corbulo to withdraw his army to the left bank of the Rhine in 47,[73] and in AD 51 Helvidius Priscus was forced to return with his army after having crossed the Taurus Mountains into Armenia.[74]

Despite the caution exercised by some, many emperors did initiate wars and some newly conquered areas were incorporated as provinces, following the pattern set during the Republic. In most cases, the motives of the emperors who took these decisions remains an unknown mystery, but it is certain that Luttwak's emphasis on considerations of frontier security is far too one one-sided. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, among the reasons behind the foreign policy making, the necessity for emperors to accumulate military prestige is likely to have played a very important part. The conquest of Britain

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[72] In the letter to Germanicus, who was commanding the military campaign against the German barbarians in the lower Rhine in 16, Tiberius claims that he had been sent into Germany nine times by Augustus, and achieved more by diplomacy than by force. See Tac. *Ann.* 2,26.

[73] Tac. *Ann.* 11,19.

[74] Tac. *Ann.* 12, 49-50. The trajectory followed by Roman-Parthian relationships is instructive in this regard. As soon as the Romans had gained the upper hand in Armenia, what the emperors normally did was to change their policy from a hawkish imperialism to diplomatic dialogue. In 63, before Corbulo's aggressive military stance, Vologaeses sued for peace (Tac. *Ann.* 15,27). Of course, because of the lack of the sources from the Parthian side, it will never be known if Tacitus is correct in claiming that Parthia accepted the authority of Rome because of the latter's superior military strength. In any case, it cannot be denied that Rome normally followed a cautious course in dealing with Parthia.

by Claudius provides the most striking example. Trajan's expeditions into Armenia and Mesopotamia, culminating in the capture of Ctesiphon, were very probably motivated by the wish to follow in the footsteps of Alexander the Great.[75] As far as can be ascertained, many other major military operations, among them Germanicus' German campaign, Domitian's Chattian War of AD 83, Antoninus Pius' military advance to the area beyond the Hadrian's wall and Septimius Severus' offensive in northern Britain, were not undertaken for the purpose of protecting or achieving imperial security. Unquestionably, an appetite for military prestige and glory seems to have played an important part in carrying out these campaigns.

This is not to say that Roman emperors never took of the security of the empire into account. In this respect Luttwak's critics have gone too far. After the Illyrian and Dalmatian revolts and the disaster of the Teutoburg Forest, Augustus seems to have reconsidered the wisdom of his earlier plan to conquer the world.[76] Hadrian's decision to give up part of the newly conquered Dacian territory might have been informed by the idea that the province of Dacia should be confined to those areas which could be defended against barbarian incursions.[77] The efforts which Hadrian made to build or reinforce linear systems of fortifications in Britain, between the upper Rhine and Danube and in the southern Aurès Mountains of Numidia likewise suggest that he had a long-term view about the safety of the imperial frontiers. Nevertheless it should be emphasized that, immediately after Hadrian's death, Antoninus Pius launched a new aggressive policy in Britain. Hadrian's Wall was abandoned and replaced by another wall which was located about 100 miles farther north. This example clearly shows that Hadrian's policies cannot be regarded as reflecting the existence of a "Grand Strategy" which informed the actions and policies of successive emperors.

As some of Luttwak's critics have pointed out, any attempt to develop a long-term military policy would have run up against insuperable practical

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[75] For Trajan's military image and the theme of "world conquest", see Griffin (2000) 109-113; 123-128; Bennett (1997) 88-99; 166-221.

[76] Dio reports that, in 23 BC, when Augustus suffered a severe illness which nearly led to his death, he gave Calpurnius Piso a document listing the forces and the public revenues. See Cass. Dio 53,30,2. According to Suetonius, in AD 14 after Augustus death, four books were brought to the Senate to be read out. One of these contained an account of how many soldiers were serving in each place and how much money there was in the Treasury. See Suet. *Aug.* 101,4. These references show that Augustus possessed general information about the present situation of the empire.

[77] Zahariade (1997) 603.

difficulties. Both J. C. Mann and Millar, for example, have emphasized that emperors and government officials were unable to obtain accurate information about recent events or developments on the distant frontiers.[78] Therefore, it would have been impossible for Roman policy makers to have made any quick response to revolts and other threats on the borders of the Roman world. Nor are there any indications that the Romans adopted a scientific or holistic approach to frontier policies.[79] A more acceptable alternative is that the emperor and his advisors devised policies on the basis of the latest news from the frontiers. If they took a more active role, they were normally motivated by considerations to do with their personal prestige or the interests of the Roman state, as I shall discuss in the following chapter.

An examination of the history of the client kingdoms, which loom large in Luttwak's account of the first stage of the Grand Strategy, confirms that the short-term interests of emperors trumped any attempt to pursue long-term strategic goals. As has been shown, personal ties with the Roman emperor and his family played a significant part in the fate of the client kingdoms. This personal factor resulted in policies which were quite erratic. After Nero had ordered Corbulo to withdraw the legions to the right bank of the Euphrates, he allowed Armenia to retain its status as a kingdom as long as it preserved its loyalty to Rome. In AD 64 the king of Armenia, Tiridates, a brother of the Parthian king, Vologaeses, was publicly crowned by Corbulo on the Euphrates frontier, in front of Nero's statue. Two years later he paid a visit to Rome and was generously treated by Nero.[80] In the early 70s, however, Vespasian deposed Aristobulus of Lesser Armenia by merging his kingdom, along with the territories of Pontus and Cappadocia, into the enlarged province of Galatia.[81]

Another good example is Commagene, a small kingdom located in northern Syria, which had swung between Rome and Parthia for generations. It was first annexed by Tiberius in 17. Caligula returned the kingdom of Commagene to his friend, Gaius Iulius Antiochus, but the latter soon lost it again. The kingdom was restored once more by Claudius in 41. In AD 71 Vespasian deprived King Antiochus IV of his title and permanently annexed Commagene, turning it into Roman territory.[82] In contrast, Julius Agrippa II,

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[78] Mann (1979) 69; 175-183; Millar (1992) 2; Graham (2006) 18.
[79] Millar (1982) 13; 15-18; Isaac (1990) 401.
[80] Cass. Dio 62,23; 63,1-6.
[81] Levick (1999) 73-74; 76-77; Luttwak (1976) 113.
[82] For the destiny of Commagene, see Sullivan (1977) 732-798; Barrett (1990) 284-286; Isaac (1990) 39-42; Levick (1999) 165.

King of the Galilee and the Peraea, who maintained friendly relations with a succession of Roman emperors, was allowed to retain his territory until his death in the year 92/93.[83] In many cases, no reasons are given for why an emperor decided to annex a client kingdom, or a part of its territory. But, whatever the motives in each individual case might have been, there can be no doubt that Roman emperors saw client kingdoms as convenient vehicles for controlling people and sustaining Rome's hegemony at minimum cost.

The only possible conclusion is that Roman decisions in the field of foreign policy, such as that to annex a particular client kingdom, were prompted by a combination of case-specific factors, some of which might have been quite trivial. All that can be said is that Roman emperors and their advisors were guided primarily by considerations linked to the ruler's interests and needs at a particular moment in time.

However, even if Luttwak's theory about the existence of a "Grand Strategy" is rejected, his observation that, from about the second half of the first century AD, the client kingdoms increasingly passed under direct Roman control remains valid. After Domitian and particularly from the Hadrianic period, many of these kingdoms disappeared, thereby making the geographical contours of the empire gradually more visible. During the same period, many new military installations, such as legionary forts, towers, palisades, ditches and military roads appeared in the frontier zone. In the second half of this chapter, I shall focus on the development of the Roman *limes* system and on the emergence of a less open worldview which fitted the changing realities of the second century AD.

5. Developments in the frontier zone

5.1. Rivers as natural boundaries

In the *Res Gestae* we not only find the concept of the *imperium sine fine*, it also includes the idea that all *gentes* inhabiting the *orbis terrarum*, including those dwelling in the remotest areas bordering the *Oceanus*, acknowledge Rome's hegemony.[84] A logical corollary of this ideological conception was that any further military conquests lost their urgency. This can be seen as contributing to the background to Augustus' *consilium*. In actual fact, the Roman frontier

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[83] Joseph *BJ* 2,220; Joseph *AJ* 19,354-20,213.
[84] Whittaker (2004) 40.

remained quite open throughout the first century AD. As has emerged, it was more or less impossible to draw a clear line separating Roman territory from the territories of indigenous tribes and Roman client kingdoms.

In marked contrast to the Han Empire, the north-western and eastern fringes of the Roman Empire were marked by three major rivers, the Rhine, Danube and Euphrates. It is well known that, from the reign of Augustus, large numbers of Roman legions supplemented by auxiliary forces were stationed along these rivers, for the purpose of securing the hinterland of the empire.[85] Furthermore, imperial fleets were stationed in several harbours in the frontier regions.[86]

During the reign of Tiberius, eight legions were stationed along the Rhine frontier. Four legions were stationed in the two Danubian provinces of Pannonia and Moesia. In the north-western frontier zones, legionary fortresses were usually constructed along the major rivers or along important tributaries. From Vindonissa (Windisch) in Upper Germania to Katwijk in the Rhine Delta, nearly all legionary forts, such as Moguntiacum (Mainz), Bonna (Bonn), Colonia Agrippinensis (Cologne), Novaesium (Neuss) and Vetera (Xanten), were situated along the c.1, 000 kilometer-long Rhine River.

Austin and Rankov have criticized the tendency of scholarship to play down the role of the riverine frontiers of the empire as defensive barriers.[87] In some cases rivers do seem to have functioned as dividing lines separating ethnic groups. Julius Caesar stated that the River Rhine roughly separated the Germans from the Celts, although archaeological research contradicts the idea that its course coincided with any ethnic or cultural boundaries.[88] Among modern scholars, Braund has argued that rivers were perceived as deities, whose natural powers did play a part in separating different peoples.[89] After the catastrophe of the Teutoburg Forest, Augustus withdraw the army from the Elbe Valley to the west bank of the Rhine and between the late Augustan period and the outbreak of the Chattian War in 83 most Roman military forces remained stationed on the left bank of the Rhine for most of the time.[90] The fact that no permanent bridges were built over the Rhine until after the Flavian

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[85] Tac. *Ann.* 4,5; Keppie (1984) 127-33; 146-147.
[86] For the imperial fleets, see Saddington (2007); Keppie (1984) 131-132.
[87] Austin and Rankov (1995) 173.
[88] Caes. *B Gall.* 2,3,4; 4,16,1; Wells (1972) 19-24; Whittaker (1994) 77.
[89] Braund (1996) 43-49.
[90] For the positioning of the Roman imperial legions along the Rhine in Roman Germany, Raetia and Noricum in the first century, see Farnum (2005) 43-45.

advance across Odenwald could be taken to suggest that this river was regarded as a convenient barrier impeding the free movement of hostile barbarian tribes.[91]

Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence leaves no doubt that, during the Julio-Claudian period, some Roman military bases were built in areas either to the east or north of the Rhine. During the last phase of the German campaigns of this period, new camps were established along the Rhine in Germania Inferior. Examples include those in Oberaden and Haltern, both situated on the River Lippe.[92] These two camps were established as permanent military bases in the period before the battle of the Teutoburg Forest. A few bases such as Waldgirmes and Haltern even developed into civilian settlements.[93] After the Varian disaster, all forts east of the Rhine were abandoned. However, a six-mile-wide strip of land on the right bank of the river was still considered to be Roman territory and available for the use of the military (see below).[94] These examples show that, in this period, the Rhine was not regarded as marking the boundary between the Roman empire and the non-Roman-oriented tribes.[95] As many scholars have pointed out, rivers served as arteries of communication, which facilitated the transportation of military supplies from inland areas to the legionary garrisons and local communities as well as for the transmission of news and information from the frontier to the central area of the empire and vice-versa.[96] Cogently, the forts which were constructed along various rivers in the frontier zones served not only defensive purposes, but were also used as bases for further aggression.[97]

A passage from Tacitus' *Annals* shows that, during Nero's reign, the Romans remained ideologically committed to the view that the rule of Rome was universal and that the empire had no boundaries. In the early first century, an area on the right bank of the Rhine opposite Cologne had been occupied by the Frisians, but after they had been expelled, probably under Tiberius, it was

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[91] Whittaker (2004) 7. For discussions of the permanent bridges over the Rhine, see Austin and Rankov (1995) 173-180; Whittaker (2004) 53, n. 24.

[92] For Oberaden, see Schönberger (1969) 147; 149. For a reconsideration of Oberaden and Halten and other earlier Roman bases along the Lippe, based on recent archaeological research, see Wells (1998).

[93] Carroll (2011) 36-37.

[94] *Ibid.,* 38.

[95] See Schönberger (1969) 149; Wells (1998) 460-464.

[96] Whittaker (2004) 9.

[97] The Roman fortifications which were built between the Upper Rhine and the Upper Danube under Vespasian provide a good illustration.

left as an empty zone. In the late 50s AD, the Ampsivarii, who had been driven from their territories by the Chauci, arrived and occupied the lands. The Ampsivarii realized that this area was controlled by the Roman army. Therefore they chose Boiocalus, a veteran who had served in the Roman auxiliary forces for nearly fifty years, as their spokesman and sent him to Lucius Avitus, the governor of Roman Germany, to ask permission to settle in the territory. Boiocalus pointed out to Avitus that, as the territory was rarely used to pasture livestock belonging to the Roman soldiers, they should give it to a friendly tribe which had been made homeless. He continued to stress that the area in question had belonged to various tribes, implying that the Romans had no justification to hold it as an exclusive possession.[98] This episode shows that the Romans had an unchallenged dominance in this region, despite the fact that they had not occupied it. It also demonstrates that the frontier along the Rhine remained quite open and flexible.

When attention shifts from the Rhine to the Danube, a similar pattern emerges. Here too Roman armies were stationed in camps along the river from the early first century. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus claims to have brought Roman arms not only to the banks of the Danube but to the areas on the far side of the river as well.[99] At certain sites along the river, like Mursa and Sirmum, military posts were built in the time of Augustus and Tiberius. The first forts along the Danube appeared in the 30s AD at the terminal points of roads which were probably built under Tiberius. During the reign of Claudius, more forts and new routes appeared in the Pannonian frontier zone, and a legion was established at Carnuntum.[100] From about this period a Roman fleet began to patrol the river.[101] Between the accession of Gaius and the early 60s, the Danube frontier generally remained in a tranquil state.[102] However, during the final years of Nero's reign, the Roxolani, a Sarmatian tribe living to the north of the Danube, began to stir up trouble.[103] In the civil war of 68/9, the Dacian barbarians campaigned across the Danube into Moesia and destroyed some forts and legionary bases by taking advantage of the absence of the two

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[98] Tac. *Ann.* 13,55-56.
[99] *RG* 30,2.
[100] The legionary fort of Carnuntum was the largest military base of this region. See Gabler (1980) 637; also (1995) 85.
[101] Tac. *Ann.* 7,30.
[102] Wilkes (2000) 580.
[103] Tac. *Hist.* 1,79.

legions previously stationed in the province.[104] The Danubian tribes remained troublesome during the Flavian period. Vespasian's decision to transfer one more legion to the Moesian area might be an indication that he was concerned about the security of the Danube frontier. Under the Flavians, more forts and military installations appeared along the Pannonian and Moesian frontiers.[105]

In about AD 85, the Dacian king, Decebalus, launched an attack crossed the Danube, killing the Moesian governor, Oppius Sabinus, and causing widespread panic.[106] Probably in the next year, Moesia was divided into two parts, each with a consular commander to increase military effectiveness. Between 85 and 95, Domitian waged two wars against the Dacian tribes and also campaigned against the Pannonian tribes. After the suppression of Saturninus' revolt on the Rhine in 89, the emperor transferred a substantial number of troops from the Rhine frontier to the East. This signalled a shift in the centre of military activity from the Rhine region to the Danubian area. The situation on the Danube frontier saw another dramatic change after Dacia was annexed by Trajan in 106. New forts, such as Quadrata and Ad Statuas, now appeared on the lower reaches of the Danube.[107] Unquestionably, a continuous chain of military bases along the Danube had been established at the end of the Trajanic period. Nevertheless, this building programme did not signify that the Danube had become the military defensive line of these areas. The fact that, even before Trajan's Dacian War, forts were established beyond the Danube in Wallachia points in the opposite direction.[108] As did the River Rhine, the Danube served as a supply route, both in times of peace and during military campaigns.

Unlike the Rhine and Danube, the Euphrates seems to have been generally regarded as marking a kind of boundary separating the zones of influence of Rome and Parthia.[109] Plutarch records that, as early as in 55 BC, the Parthian king tried to specify the Euphrates as the boundary between Rome and Parthia but, according to the historical sources from the Roman side, Pompey rejected this proposal.[110] However, the later historian Orosius reports that the Parthians saw Crassus' expedition into Northern Mesopotamia as a

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[104] Tac. *Hist.* 3,46.
[105] Móscy (1974) 80; Gabler (1980) 637.
[106] *PIR*² O 122; Jones (1992) 138.
[107] Gabler (1979) 639.
[108] Opreanu (1995) 247-248.
[109] Dąbrowa (1995) 109.
[110] Plut. *Pomp.* 36; Whittaker (2004) 40.

violation of existing arrangements, suggesting that the Parthians did see the Euphrates as demarcating the frontier between the Roman and Parthian Empires.[111] This was confirmed by the fact that, in 2 BC or 1 BC, Gaius Caesar met Tigranes III on an island in the Euphrates and confirmed the latter as the king of Parthia.[112] A similar diplomatic meeting took place on the Euphrates in AD 18, this time between Germanicus and Parthian envoys.[113] When conflicts between Rome and Parthia escalated in AD 61, Corbulo posted his troops on the Euphrates. After defeating an army led by Caesennius Paetus, the governor of Cappadocia, the Parthian king, Vologaeses, proudly crossed the river on the back of an elephant. Having learned that Corbulo had arrived on the Euphrates frontier, he dispatched envoys to Corbulo's camp, asking for the evacuation of all Roman forts beyond the Euphrates and proposing "to make the stream the border between them, as before".[114]

It is striking that the Romans do not seem to have accepted the idea that they should give up all claims to the lands beyond the Euphrates. The obvious reason for this is that Rome never got round to acknowledging Parthia as its equal. Accepting the Euphrates as marking the limit of Roman rule was incompatible with the ideological assumption that Roman domination was, or should be, totally uncontested.

6. The development of the *limes* system in the second century

The Romans excelled in building roads. Since the Republican period, they had constructed roads to connect the recently conquered areas of Italy. During the Imperial period the Roman road network spread over the entire Mediterranean region. Roads symbolized Roman power, greatly facilitated troop movements and gave Rome control over of local economies and resources.

Following the conquests and annexations of the first century BC and the first century AD, the Romans also began to build roads in the peripheral zones of the empire. As Isaac has pointed out in an important article, during the Early Imperial period the literary and epigraphic sources use the term *limes* to refer to military roads constructed by the Romans during or after campaigns against external enemies.[115] In the texts of the first century, the term does not denote a

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[111] Orosius 6,13,2.
[112] Cass. Dio 55,11.
[113] Tac. *Ann.* 2,58,1.
[114] Tac. *Ann.* 15,17,3.
[115] Isaac (1988) 126-128.

clearly demarcated boundary. Nor is it used to refer to any military works built for defensive purposes.[116]

During the first century, the Roman legionaries stationed in the frontier zones not only constructed roads and bridges but also turned their hand to military camps and other military installations. Since almost all Roman military forces in Europe and the Near East were stationed along the Rhine, the Danube and the Euphrates, numerous legionary camps and smaller fortifications were therefore built along these three rivers. Many of these military installations were positioned in places which were logistically and strategically advantageous, such as the confluence of two rivers or near a crossing of frontier roads. Such locations facilitated communication and the control of traffic as well as offering good starting points for military campaigns conducted across the rivers in questions. Some military bases were not built on terrain which was convenient for defence against invading enemies, demonstrating that in this period considerations of defence were not paramount in deciding where to station military units.[117]

The first phase of Domitian's Chattian War, fought between 83 and 85, resulted in the creation of a chain of timber-built forts and watchtowers to the east of the Upper Rhine, commencing from the Taunus Heights and the Wetterau Plain and thereafter running through the Odenwald down to the Neckar Valley. The construction of this *limes* system benefited from the German policy carried out by Vespasian, who had built roads linking the Upper Rhine area and the Danube.[118] However, the *limes* system along the north-west frontier was not completed until the reign of Trajan in the early second century.[119]

During the final years of Domitian and under Trajan, the focus of military activity shifted to the East. Trajan did not undertake any offensive operations on the German and Raetian frontiers, but merely reinforced the

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[116] Isaac calls attention to a passage from Tacitus' *Agricola* (41,2): *nec iam de limite imperii et ripa* … in which *limes* refers to the (land) boundary of the empire. As he notes, this meaning is not found in earlier texts.

[117] As some scholars have pointed out, some sections of Hadrian's Wall and the *fossatum Africae*, as well as some part of the Outer Limes in Germany, did not occupy the best defensive positions. For the discussion; see Breeze (2011) 85-86.

[118] Schönberger (1969) 158; Hind (1984) 187-192; Perl (1990), 210f.

[119] Recent studies suggest that "the main establishment of this system of roads, timber towers, and forts is now seen to belong to the decade AD 105/115 rather than earlier". See Wilson (2006) 201-203.

chain of fortifications guarding the frontier zones.[120] In Britain, he built the Stanegate military road along the line between the Tyne and Solway Firth. Hadrian used this line to build his 74-mile-long wall. In the southern parts of *Mons Aurasius* (the Aurès Mountains of modern Algeria and Tunisia), a system of ditches and mud-brick bulwarks, the so-called *fossatum Africae*, was constructed.

The *Historia Augusta* claims that Hadrian created a more or less complete *limes* system protecting the empire from barbarian attack:

> *During this period and on many other occasions also, in many regions where the barbarians are held back not by rivers but by artificial barriers, Hadrian shut them off by means of high stakes planted deep in the ground and fastened together in the manner of a palisade.*[121]

Antoninus Pius basically followed Hadrian's frontier policy, although in his early reign a military campaign was mounted in the territory of Britain, which was followed by the construction of a new wall in the newly conquered land close to the Forth-Clyde isthmus. In the area of Odenwald, timber-built forts and towers now were transformed into stone structures. In the Wetterau and Neckar regions, Antoninus Pius pushed the old *limes* system forward 30 kilometres and, by the end of his reign, twenty forts and 250 watchtowers had been built between Wörth-am-Main and Lorch-Rems.[122] Here too the *limes* system was beginning to assume a distinctively linear shape, making the contours of the Roman frontier more visible.[123]

Isaac has argued that decision makers of Rome never thought about the efficient functioning of the frontier system or about ways of making provincial territories safe from attack by enemies. In my view, it cannot be denied that, as early as the Julio-Claudian period, rivers, roads and military works built in the

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[120] The efforts of the Trajanic period were limited to turning the materials from turf into stone, and to adding to the number of small-size forts, watch towers, palisades and other military infrastructure along the *limes* system, etc.; see Wilson (2006) 201-203; Breeze (2011) 58.

[121] SHA *Hadr.* 13,6.

[122] Breeze (2011) 76.

[123] From the reign of Marcus Aurelius to the early third century, the *limes* system was abandoned in some areas, for instance in Britain, where the two walls became obsolete soon after their completion. However, generally, the function of the *limes* system persisted into later centuries. The decline of the system during the Late Empire is beyond the chronological limits of my studies.

frontier zone played some part in the defence of the empire.[124] Between the end of the Chattian War in the 80s and the mid-second century, the creation of a Roman *limes* system, buttressed by a chain of linearly arranged military installations, in conjunction with the major rivers, mountain ridges and deserts marking the outer edges of the world controlled by the Romans, defined the shape of the empire more clearly. The line of watchtowers running along German and Raetian provincial borders, for example, certainly played a role in military defence. At the same time the rivers, roads and military fortifications of the frontier zone, as argued by Whittaker, served to secure control of local resources and to facilitate logistics and communications. In other words, while these natural and man-made features undoubtedly played an important part in the defence of the empire, it does not follow that the geographical boundaries of the empire became fixed during this period.

In the long term, the development of a well-garrisoned and an increasingly well-defined perimeter seems to have had an impact on the way in which Roman frontiers and Roman power were conceptualized. There are indications, for instance, that during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus territory began to play an increasingly important part in imperial thinking. Cassius Dio reports that, during the final years of Marcus Aurelius' reign, a treaty was concluded with the Marcomanni, stipulating that, "they might now settle to within a distance of five miles from the Danube".[125] What is striking about this arrangement is that it regulated the activities a barbarian people on the basis of a precise calculation. In a later passage, Cassius Dio relates that under Commodus all military outposts in the territory of the Marcomanni beyond the five-mile strip were abandoned.[126] This remark offers another piece of evidence that the outline of the frontier was becoming clearer. Not much later Commodus granted peace to another German tribe, the Burii, forbidding them to pasture their animals within a five-mile-wide strip of land bordering the province of Dacia.[127] Here too the boundary of the Roman empire was slowly being clarified. As said, in the time of Nero the territorial dispute between Rome and the Ampsivarii had been handled in a completely different manner. Therefore, it does not seem far-fetched to conclude that, during the final decades of the second century, the Roman government had

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[124] Cf. Wheeler (1993a) 27.
[125] Cass. Dio 72,15.
[126] Cass. Dio 73,2,4.
[127] Cass. Dio 73,3,2.

developed a higher degree of frontier consciousness than it had had about a century earlier.

To sum up, a combination of natural and artificial boundaries played a role in shaping the Roman frontier. During the period of roughly fifty years between the accession of Domitian and the end of Hadrian's reign, a more or less coherent systems of linearly arranged military installations took shape. Since most of these installations could be used as bases for campaigns against barbarian tribes occupying territories not yet become provinces, it would be wrong to interpret them as demarcating the external boundaries of Roman territory. It also seems clear that the original function of most of these military installations erected in the frontier zone was to control movements into the empire rather than to protect the frontier against barbarian raids, although some of the barriers in question could also have been used for defensive purposes. Nonetheless, the gradual appearance of an increasingly well-defined system of linear fortifications, many of which were situated along rivers, prompted a gradual and subtle change in Roman worldviews. In the last part of this chapter, I shall examine what the new perception of the image of the Roman world of the mid and late second century looked like.

7. A change in worldviews during the second century AD?

In his panegyric on the blessings of the *pax Romana*, a speech which was delivered in Rome in AD 155, Aelius Aristides describes the Roman world ruled by Emperor Antoninus Pius as follows:

> *Here you built the walls to defend you, and then erected towns bordering upon them, some in some parts, others elsewhere, filling them with colonist, giving these the comforts of arts and crafts, and in general establishing beautiful order. An encamped army, like a rampart, enclosed the civilized world in a ring… from the settled areas of Aethopia to the Phasis, and from the Euphrates in the interior to the great outermost island towards the west; all this one can call a ring and circuit of walls. … But the ring, must be greater and more impressive, in every way altogether unbreachable and indestructible, outshining them all, and in all time there has never been a wall so firm. … It is they who defend these ordinary walls. … Such are the parallel harmonies or systems of defence which curve around you, the circle of fortifications at individual points, and that ring of those who keep watch over the whole world.*[128]

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[128] Ael. Arist. *Or.* 26,80-4 (translated by J. Oliver); Breeze (2011) 20.

In his *History of Rome* Appian, a contemporary of Aelius Aristides, offers a similar picture of the Roman world being surrounded and guarded by military camps and as having acquired a clearly defined boundary:

> *In general, possessing the best part of the earth and sea they have, on the whole, aimed to preserve their empire by the exercise of prudence, rather than to extend their sway indefinitely over poverty-stricken and profitless tribes of barbarians, some of whom I have seen at Rome offering themselves, by their ambassadors, as its subjects, but the emperor would not accept them because they would be of no use to him. For other people, the emperors appoint kings, not requiring them for the empire. On some of the provinces they spend more than they receive, thinking it shameful to give them up even though they make a loss. They surround the empire with a great circle of camps and guard so great an area of land and sea like an estate.*[129]

A similar frontier consciousness is to be found in the work of Herodian in the late second and early third century:

> *From the time when Augustus assumed control of the government, however, the* princeps *freed the Italians from the necessity of working and of bearing arms; establishing forts and camps for the defense of empire, he stationed mercenaries in these to serve as a defensive bulwark on the frontier. The empire was further protected by great barriers of rivers and mountains and impassable deserts.*[130]

Up to a point Appian's assessment of imperial policies resembles Strabo's comment that Britain was so unprofitable it was not worth occupying.[131] Nevertheless, there is an important difference between the two passages. Both Strabo and Appian stress the importance of economic considerations, but Appian also describes the empire of the second century as a clearly defined geopolitical body which is defended "like an estate". His language suggests that, compared to the emperors of the early Principate, those of the mid and late second century came to think of the empire as a more cohesive geopolitical entity. Interestingly, this development is paralleled by a shift in the meaning of the term *imperium*. As Richardson has shown, the terms *imperium* and *provinciae* began to be used to designate clearly defined territorial spaces in the Augustan

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[129] App. *praef.* 7.
[130] Although Herodian writes about the Augustan Age, his account of frontier policies reflects the concerns of his own time rather than those of the Early Principate.
[131] Strab. 17,3,24; 6,4,2; Isaac (1990) 388.

period, but it was only in the early second century AD that this semantic shift reached "a mature middle age".[132]

Therefore, it seems as if imperial ideologies were slowly being adjusted in response to changes in actual military policies. Emperors and members of the ruling classes of the Roman Empire might well have realized that the limited imperial resources could not sustain continuous territorial expansion, doubts which perhaps began to creep in in the reign of Hadrian.[133] As the foregoing sections have shown, Hadrian took various steps signalling a change in frontier policy after the conquests of the Trajanic period. He withdrew some troops from the lower Danube in Dacia and gave orders to construct a wall in Britain. In North Africa a new frontier line, the so-called *fossatum Africae*, was built to regulate the movement of transhumant pastoralist and to protect the trade routes from nomadic raids.[134] At some sites along the Rhine, artificial frontier barriers consisting of a new series of wooden palisades, tree trunks and trenches were either renewed or augmented.[135] Such activities might be interpreted as pointing to a change in actual frontier policies.[136]

However, it would be wrong to interpret these developments as demonstrating that the old idea of an *imperium sine fine* was beginning to disappear in the same period. Clear traces of the ideological claim that Roman ruled the *orbis terrarum* can still be found in sources of the second century AD. In his panegyric, the same Aristides who refers to the empire being surrounded by army camps states that Rome has no fixed boundaries, claiming that "no one dictates to what point your control reaches".[137] According to the *Historia Augusta*, Septimius Severus dreamed one night that he beheld Rome and all the world from the top of a very high mountain, while the provinces sang together

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[132] Richardson (2008) 181.
[133] Webster (1985) 67.
[134] For the debate about the functions of the ditch system, see Trousset (1974) 140-142; Webster (1985) 73; Wheeler (1993) 29; Whittaker (1994) 91; Cherry (1998) 24; Breeze (2012) 121, 128. Whittaker argues that the main function of the *limes* in modern southern Algeria and Tunisia was to control the movements of transhumant pastoralists; see Whittaker (2004) 10. However, Cheery argues that there were two main functions for these barriers: to provide security for the garrisoned Roman soldiers, and to facilitate of collecting taxes from the local pastoralists. See Cherry (1998) 62-63.
[135] For a general discussion of the change of frontier policies under Hadrian, see Breeze and Dobson (1976) 28; Webster (1985) 67-85; Birley (1997) 113-141, 203-214.
[136] Whittaker (1994) 86.
[137] Whittaker (2000) 299.

to the accompaniment of the lyre and flute.[138] On the triumphal arch of the same emperor can be read the phrase *Ob rem publicam restitutam imperiumque populi Romani propagatum*, "[erected] because of the re-establishment of the state and the extension of the power of the Roman people".[139]

These examples demonstrate that the new idea of a clearly defined empire defended by army camps *coexisted* with the open concept of empire of Late Republican and Early Imperial times. Therefore, care should be exercised not to overrate the degree of frontier consciousness in the second century AD. As Chapter Five will reveal, external threats or the wish of some emperors to bolster their legitimacy by means of military successes continued to prompt quite a few rulers of the Roman Empire to take the offensive against external enemies. But that does not make the emergence of an alternative concept of empire any less significant.

8. Conclusion

Since each frontier zone of the Roman empire was unique, not only because landscape, climatic conditions and transport facilities differed from region to region but also because there were enormous variations in the nature and level of external threats, it is impossible to develop a uniform picture of Roman frontier policies which is valid for the whole empire.[140] However, if an abstraction is made from regional distinctions, it is still possible to make some general observations regarding the long-term evolution of Roman views about frontier zones and frontiers.

During the first hundred years which followed Augustus' death, the Roman world remained quite open and inclusive, both ideologically and in terms of actual military policies. Broadly speaking, no fixed boundary line serving the purpose of demarcating Roman from non-Roman territories came into existence until the mid-third century AD. During the Principate, the frontier provinces of the empire were surrounded by various client kingdoms which were not under the direct jurisdiction of the Roman government. Throughout this period, Rome's foreign policies remained flexible and

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[138] SHA. *Sep. Sev.* 3,5,1; 3,9,1.
[139] *CIL* VI, 1033= *ILS* 425.
[140] As Gruen rightly puts it, "there was little in common between Decebalus and Parthia, between barbarous Britons and the nomad tribesmen of the Sahara, and between Gothic invaders and Sassanian Persia." See Gruen (1978) 565. These distinctions undermine the validity of Luttwak's theory.

capricious. The choice to adopt a particular policy appears to have depended largely on the personal and immediate needs of the reigning emperor. In making these decisions, emperors could not rely on accurate information about conditions or developments in the peripheral zones of the empire. Compounded with the overriding importance of personal and political needs, this made it impossible for successive emperors to develop a scientifically based and clear-cut imperial strategy devised to preserve or maximize military security.

Between the last decades of the first century and the early third century AD, the contours of the Roman Empire became slowly more concrete and visible. By the late second and early third century, various Greek and Latin writers admitted the existence of imperial boundaries. In part as a result of the absorption of various client kingdoms in the East during the first century AD, the empire had increasingly become an organic political entity consisting of clearly defined territorial and administrative units. Rivers, roads and all kinds of military installations which were built in the frontier zone were increasingly beginning to resemble a ring surrounding the empire. Even though this system was originally designed for control purposes rather than for defence, its appearance had the effect of making the frontier more visible and tangible, thereby giving the *orbis terrarum Romanum* an increasingly less open appearance.

It must be stressed that the administrative and military boundaries of the empire were never hermetically sealed, and that the idea of an "empire without boundaries" was never relinquished.[141] After the reign of Augustus territorial expansion slowed down but it did not stop. At least until the time of Caracalla, the offensive spirit resurged whenever a particular emperor considered the opportune moment had come to launch fresh aggressive campaigns.

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[141] SHA *Sep. Sev.* 3,5.