

LBRIS

We know  
books

# Polybius and Roman Imperialism

Donald Walter Baronowski



Bristol Classical Press

## Contents

Preface	ix
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	1

**Part I. The Attitude of Intellectuals to Imperial  
Domination in the Hellenistic Period**

1. Greek Philosophers and Roman Imperialism	17
2. Poets, Prophecies and Roman Imperialism	29
3. Historians and Roman Imperialism	43

**Part II. Polybius' Attitude to Roman Domination**

4. Polybius on Legitimate Expansion	65
5. Polybius on the Acquisition, Expansion and Preservation of Imperial Rule	87
6. Polybius on the Enemies of Rome	114
7. Polybius in the Service of Rome	132
8. Polybius, Rome, Barbarism and Fate	149
9. Polybius on the Future of the Roman Empire	153
Conclusions	164
Notes	177
Bibliography	213
Index of Passages Cited	233
General Index	239

## Part I

The Attitude of Intellectuals to Imperial  
Domination in the Hellenistic Period

The first three chapters of this book examine the attitude of Greek intellectuals (and a few non-Greeks) to the phenomenon of imperial domination. What did philosophers, poets, prophetic writers and historians think of imperial rule in principle, and how did they judge particular ruling nations? It will be argued that, with rare exceptions, these intellectuals, active between the late third and the early first century BC, accepted imperial domination as a normal feature of the international structure. This period, which includes the lifespan of Polybius, represents a meaningful portion of political and intellectual history. Beginning with Philinus' study of Rome's initial overseas expansion during the First Punic War, it ends with Posidonius' survey of the Mediterranean world, which culminated with the reaffirmation of Roman supremacy as a result of victory in the First Mithridatic War.

Philosophers debated whether imperial rule could be defended on the basis of morality or expediency, and the historian Posidonius (himself a Stoic philosopher) maintained that it could be justified on the basis of morality. Poets, prophetic writers and historians admired or defended one or another of the important ruling powers of the Hellenistic age, especially Rome, Carthage and the Ptolemies.

It is therefore evident that Polybius wrote in an intellectual environment disposed, for the most part, to accept imperial dominion as a normal feature of the international scene, an intellectual environment in which authors usually admired or defended Rome or some other imperialist nation. These intellectuals often evinced respect for the order achieved, or the benefits conferred, by the ruling power. Thus their response to imperial rule also suggests that they maintained a certain intellectual distance from the dominant nation. In Part Two of this work, it will be argued that Polybius admired imperial rule in general, that he admired and defended Roman domination, but preserved a certain intellectual independence of the ruling power. It will therefore emerge that in fundamental ways he resembled the intellectuals of his age in his attitude towards imperial dominion.

## Greek Philosophers and Roman Imperialism

In the middle of the second century BC, Greek philosophers became concerned with the problem of Roman imperialism. The point of departure for discussion of their work is Book 3 of Cicero's *De Re Publica*, in which the characters Lucius Furius Philus and Gaius Laelius express opposing views about the role of justice in the conduct of government and international relations. Furius Philus divides the concept of justice into two categories. Natural (or true) justice, established by God, respects the rights of all (*suum cuique reddere*). Because it is absolute and concerned with the rights of others, it is unsuitable as the basis of government and international relations. On the other hand, civil justice (equivalent to prudent self-interest), determined by utility, aims at the advantage of particular individuals, groups or communities through the establishment of convention or the pursuit of self-aggrandizement. Relative and expedient, it is the only practicable basis for the conduct of government and international affairs. All empires, including that of Rome, are founded on self-interest rather than natural justice (Cic. *Rep.* 3.8-29; cf. Lact. *Div. Inst.* 5.16.13).

Laelius, on the contrary, acknowledges only one justice, the essential basis of all social relations. Established by God, it is consistent with nature and right reason, unchanging, eternal, universal, and concerned with the rights of all. Without it, no human society can exist. Nature confers dominion on what is best, for the advantage of what is inferior. Therefore imperialism is just when subordination benefits certain classes of people, and this is indeed the case when the wicked are prevented from doing wrong and when conquered nations will enjoy better conditions than they do before they are conquered. However, imperialism is unjust when it is imposed on nations capable of exercising independence. The beneficent aim of imperialism requires dominant states to rule their subjects as a father commands his children, not as a master controls his slaves. Roman rule satisfies these conditions. The Romans have created a universal empire by defending their allies. They have fought just wars, undertaken out of self-defence or loyalty to others, or in retaliation for injuries suffered, and declared in due form. Although the Roman empire is still for the most part founded on justice, it may come to be based on force. If that happens, subjects who until now have obeyed voluntarily will be con-

strained only through terror, and the survival of Rome itself may be threatened (Cic. *Rep.* 3.33-41).

The arguments of Furius Philus and Laelius reflect a debate carried on among intellectuals in Greece during the second century BC. Evidence from the *De Re Publica* indicates that Cicero based the speech of Furius Philus on arguments employed by the philosopher Carneades.<sup>1</sup> In 155 BC this scholar, head of the Academy, visited Rome in the company of Diogenes, leader of the Stoa, and Critolaus, head of the Peripatetic school. These men had been sent as ambassadors by the city of Athens to petition the senate to cancel a fine imposed on the community as a result of arbitration rendered by Sicyon at the behest of Rome. This penalty had been assessed against the Athenians for plundering the neighbouring city of Oropus. While in Rome, Carneades gave two public lectures. In the first he maintained that government and international affairs must be founded on justice; in the second he argued that self-interest must be the guiding principle in these domains.<sup>2</sup> The speech of Furius Philus, therefore, is based on Carneades' second lecture. Since the philosopher himself did not publish anything, Cicero probably derived information about his treatment of justice and self-interest from the writings of Clitomachus, student of Carneades and his successor as head of the Academy. However, Clitomachus probably reported, not the text of the lectures delivered by his teacher at Rome, but a summary of the arguments employed by Carneades over a period of time as he examined the question of justice and self-interest.<sup>3</sup> Cicero may nevertheless have assumed that the material found in Clitomachus corresponded essentially to the text of the lectures given by Carneades at Rome.

The problem of what source was used by Cicero for the speech of Laelius has occasioned much debate. What survives of *De Re Publica*, Book 3, does not explicitly trace this speech to the arguments of Carneades or, indeed, to any authority. The speech of Laelius in fact shows evidence of various philosophical influences, especially those of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. Most importantly, Laelius' justification of imperialism (Cic. *Rep.* 3.38-9) can be traced ultimately to Aristotle's defence of slavery and imperialism, and to his discussion of the various forms of power. According to Aristotle, slavery is justified when master and slave are designed by nature to occupy their respective stations. Although the slave benefits from subordination to his master, slavery is practised primarily in the interest of the master. Moreover the philosopher, who associates imperial rule (*hê despōtikê*) with the master-slave relationship, maintains that it is justified when ruling power and subject people are designed by nature to occupy their respective positions. Since Aristotle treats imperial rule as akin to the master-slave relationship, he presumably holds that, although it benefits the subject people, it aims primarily at the interest of the ruling power. Aristotle, however, also refers to a form of imperial leadership that he calls hegemony (*hê hêgemonia*), which he deems justified when it aims

at the advantage of the governed (*tôn arkhomenôn*), and he distinguishes hegemony from imperial rule (*hê despoteia*). Similarly, the rule exercised by a man over his family and by a magistrate over his fellow-citizens aims primarily at the interest of the ruled. Thus Laelius' defence of imperialism combines two elements of Aristotle's thought, namely, the natural subordination of subject people to ruling power (imperial rule), and the exercise of leadership in the interest of the governed (hegemony). Laelius therefore elevates imperial rule above the level of the master-slave relationship, associating it (unlike Aristotle) with patriarchal authority (which, according to the philosopher, operates primarily in the interest of the ruled). In addition to ideas drawn from Greek philosophy, Cicero also included examples drawn from Roman history and experience in the speeches of Furius Philus and Laelius. Because the speech of Laelius reflects various elements, scholars have disagreed on the question of the source on which it is based. Some writers believe that Cicero used a Stoic model (Panaetius or Posidonius), while others maintain that he consulted principally the works of Plato and Aristotle. It is sometimes thought that he derived the arguments of Laelius from Carneades' defence of natural justice.<sup>4</sup>

Cicero was directly acquainted with the dialogues of Plato and the writings of the major Stoic authors.<sup>5</sup> He also knew some of the Aristotelian works extant today, which were coming into wider circulation during the first century BC, and some of the popular writings, now lost, which included a dialogue in four books entitled *On Justice* (mentioned at *Rep.* 3.12). It is, however, uncertain to what extent his knowledge of Aristotle was based on direct consultation of the original works.<sup>6</sup> He was, moreover, personally connected with contemporary philosophers of the Academic, Peripatetic, Stoic and Epicurean schools.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it would have been possible for Cicero to compose arguments for the speech of Laelius by directly consulting relevant works written by Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and by using information derived from personal contact with scholars of his acquaintance.

Cicero, moreover, had a strong incentive to study the philosophers at first hand, for he would have wanted to deploy the most effective arguments possible in favour of natural justice, the position that he supported. The defence of natural justice in the *De Re Publica* follows the case for self-interest, exactly as in Plato's *Republic*. Thus Cicero emphasized the case for natural justice by reversing the order of the speeches given by Carneades at Rome, presumably retained in Clitomachus' recapitulation of Carneades' scholastic arguments. Both Greek scholars represent the method of Academic scepticism, which treated the case for and against some proposition, in this instance, the belief that natural justice must govern social relations. The emphatic position accorded the case for natural justice in the *De Re Publica* therefore demanded particular care on the part of Cicero. Since he knew his philosophical classics and had special reasons to exploit them in this context, it is very likely that he consulted

relevant works of Plato, Aristotle and the major Stoic authors when he composed the speech of Laelius defending justice.

Nevertheless, he probably also used the arguments of Carneades as reported by Clitomachus. In the first place, the variety of philosophical influences observed in the speech of Laelius is consistent with the practice of Carneades, who is said to have gathered all the arguments made in defence of justice. Although he gave particular attention to Plato and Aristotle, he also included the Stoics (Cic. *Rep.* 3.9-13).<sup>8</sup> Second, the collection of arguments marshalled by the Academic philosopher would have provided a convenient starting-point for Cicero. That he used ancillary material in his philosophical writing is evident from the fact that, in composing Book 3 of the *De Officiis*, Cicero read the *Peri tou kathêkontos* of Posidonius along with a summary of the chief points (Cic. *Att.* 16.11.4; 16.14.3-4; *Off.* 1.159; 3.8). Third, Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 5.14.5) states that Carneades in his first lecture assembled all the arguments made in favour of justice (Cic. *Rep.* 3.9). Since this information was derived from the *De Re Publica*, it appears that Cicero himself, perhaps in the introduction to Book 3, described the procedure followed by Carneades in his lectures on justice. Thus Cicero had Carneades' arguments in defence of justice *sous la main* when he composed Book 3 of the *De Re Publica*. It is therefore likely that Cicero, in composing the speech of Laelius, not only consulted the writings of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, but also used the collection of arguments in favour of natural justice assembled by Carneades and transmitted by Clitomachus.

Although the speech of Laelius was probably based on Carneades' defence of justice as well as direct consultation of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, Cicero avoided ascribing the statements of Laelius to the Academic philosopher. This is because Carneades had merely assembled arguments derived from the same prestigious authors. On the other hand, he attributed the arguments of Furius Philus to Carneades because they originated mainly with the sophists and their literary incarnations, figures such as Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, who appear in Plato's *Republic*, and Callicles, a character in the *Gorgias*. The nameless host and their literary spokesmen could be subsumed without offence under the name of the Academic philosopher, who trained their weapons upon the chief representatives of the elite schools.

Did Cicero himself construct the defence of imperialism that he assigns to Laelius in *Rep.* 3.38-9, or did he find it in one of his sources? Laelius justifies imperialism based on the beneficent rule of superior over inferior, a dispensation decreed by nature for the advantage of the inferior. In another passage, he warns about the danger of basing imperial rule on force and terror instead of justice, explaining that subjects will in that case cease to obey voluntarily (Cic. *Rep.* 41). The same ideas constitute an important theme within the *Histories* of the Stoic philosopher Posidonius, to be considered in detail below.<sup>9</sup> Thus Cicero did not himself devise the

justification of imperialism assigned to Laelius. He found this argument in the *Histories* and may have discussed it with the author himself. There is, however, good reason to think that Posidonius adopted a theory elaborated by an earlier Stoic philosopher, Panaetius, and that Cicero's treatment of imperialism in the speech of Laelius may be traced to both of these scholars.<sup>10</sup>

Laelius' justification of imperialism, which is based ultimately on Aristotle's defence of slavery and imperialism, appears in a Stoic framework within the *De Re Publica*, for here the rule of superior over inferior is ascribed to natural law, itself derived from God, equated with right reason, and described as absolute and universal. Elements of Aristotle's thought are modified in such a way as to reflect the Stoic emphasis on the domination of reason over passion, and the psychological dualism implied by Laelius' description of the soul and its parts is consistent with the doctrine of Panaetius.<sup>11</sup>

As noted above, Laelius' justification of imperialism goes back ultimately to Aristotle's theory of slavery and imperialism. The connection of imperialism with slavery was also characteristic of Stoicism, for Diogenes Laertius (7.121-2) says that the Stoics considered subordination without possession (i.e. imperialism) as a type of slavery. Furthermore, according to Diogenes Laertius (loc. cit.), the Stoics distinguished four kinds of slavery: the moral type, subordination without possession (imperialism), subordination with possession (ordinary slavery), and despotism (this last category resembles the first). Of these, the moral type implies a distinction between persons who are superior (i.e. wise) and inferior (i.e. unwise). Only the superior may exercise authority over their community. Similarly, according to D.L. 7.124, the Stoics maintained that friendship exists only among the superior (i.e. the virtuous), never among the inferior (i.e. the non-virtuous). Thus the Stoic doctrines of moral slavery and of friendship involve a classification of persons as superior and inferior. Laelius' defence of imperialism involves the extension to subordination without possession (imperialism) of a distinction between superior and inferior that is explicitly applied to slavery of the moral type. Finally, D.L. 7.121-2 shows that the Stoics accepted imperialism (subordination without possession) and ordinary slavery (subordination with possession). Thus Laelius' defence of imperialism, which is based on a justification of slavery and divides human beings into a superior and an inferior category, may be viewed as consistent with Stoic thinking.

Laelius' defence of imperialism can with good reason be traced more specifically to Panaetius. As noted above, the psychological dualism implied by this theory is consistent with the views of the Stoic philosopher. Furthermore, Panaetius admired Plato and Aristotle, in the light of whose works he modified the doctrines of his own school (Cic. *Fin.* 4.79). A defence of imperialism based on Aristotle's justification of slavery and imperialism would be consistent with this tendency.<sup>12</sup> In addition, unlike

the old Stoics, who treated the state in a purely theoretical fashion, Panaetius wrote on this subject in a manner adapted for ordinary use by peoples and states (Cic. *Leg.* 3.14). A defence of imperialism would be consistent with this practical bent.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in *Off.* 2.21-9, broadly based on the *Peri tou kathêkontos* of Panaetius, Cicero maintains that imperialist nations should treat their subjects with justice and moderation, while caring for their interests (cf. 2.75).<sup>14</sup> He condemns resort to the force and severity employed by masters against their slaves. This emphasis on beneficent rule coincides with the exposition of Laelius in Cic. *Rep.* 3.38-9. Also, Panaetius was on close terms with Scipio Aemilianus, conqueror of Carthage and Numantia, whom he accompanied on the eastern embassy of 140-139 BC, and with whom he discussed political matters. Thus Panaetius was connected with members of the highest political circles at Rome, and could be expected to take an interest in the political issues confronting them.<sup>15</sup> Finally, to judge from the *De Officiis* of Cicero, Panaetius' work *Peri tou kathêkontos*, which considered action in terms of morality and expediency, included discussion of government and international affairs. Thus the justification of imperialism found in the speech of Laelius was probably formulated by Panaetius in that treatise, written about 140 BC.<sup>16</sup>

Panaetius' book may be seen in part as a reply to the arguments Carneades had cited in favour of basing government and international affairs on expediency. Carneades, moreover, had put forward the case for both justice and expediency, which he presented as separate but complementary principles. In his *Peri tou kathêkontos*, however, Panaetius maintained that conduct should be based on justice rather than expediency, but he argued that what is just is at the same time expedient, though apparent contradictions arise when, of two alternative courses of action, one merely appears to be just or expedient. Thus Panaetius would have held that government and international affairs must be based on justice, itself compatible with true self-interest.<sup>17</sup>

The *Peri tou kathêkontos* may also be viewed in part as a refutation of the Greek historian Agatharchides of Cnidus, author of a work entitled *On the Erythraean Sea*, which was written substantially during the reign of Ptolemy VI (180-145 BC). Agatharchides believed that the expansionism of the powerful and sophisticated Hellenistic kingdoms (and Rome) was consistent neither with justice nor with expediency. The imperialism of these states was immoral because it arose from wicked impulses and produced evil results; it was inexpedient because it brought grief to the perpetrators. Expansionism, moreover, subverted the rule of nature, for it corrupted native populations brought under the influence or control of the Hellenistic kingdoms. Although considered less advanced, these peoples actually surpassed the Greeks in their compliance with natural law, and therefore enjoyed a happier way of life. For them, contact with the Hellenistic world was not beneficial but harmful. Thus Agatharchides

condemned imperialism as fundamentally unjust and inexpedient.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, the arguments of Laelius, which represent Panaetius, insist that imperialism of the proper kind is indeed just, expedient, beneficial to subjects, and consistent with natural law. Finally, it would have been possible for Carneades, who died in 129/8 BC, at some point to include Panaetius' defence of imperialism in his collection of arguments supporting justice, and thus Cicero could have learned of it not only in the *Peri tou kathêkontos* of Panaetius but also in Clitomachus' summary of Carneades' teaching.<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, the opposing arguments assembled by Carneades (reflected in the speeches of Furius Philus and Laelius) indicate that, in the middle and latter half of the second century BC, Greek intellectuals were debating the proper foundation of government and international relations, including imperialism. Carneades argued the case for both natural justice and expediency. In his work *On the Erythraean Sea*, Agatharchides attacked imperialism as both unjust and inexpedient. Panaetius advocated imperialism based on justice and therefore consistent with true self-interest. His defence of imperialism was probably formulated in the *Peri tou kathêkontos* of c. 140 BC and used by Carneades in support of natural justice.

The defence of imperialism formulated by Panaetius, although inspired by Aristotelian and Stoic ideas, was probably also influenced by the concept underlying the title *koinoi euergetai*, commonly bestowed upon Rome by the Greeks in the second and first centuries BC. As Ferrary observes, this title both expresses the Greeks' recognition of universal Roman supremacy and emphasizes the principle on which that supremacy had to be founded in order to be accepted by the Greeks, that is, an exchange of benefactions and obedient gratitude.<sup>20</sup>

The next question to be considered is the place of Rome within the debate on natural justice and expediency. In Cic. *Rep.* 3.22, Furius Philus declares that the expansion of Roman power resulted from pursuit of self-interest rather than observance of justice. According to Lact. *Div. Inst.* 5.16.4 (Cic. *Rep.* 3.12), Carneades in his refutation of justice pointed specifically to the Romans as an example of an imperialist state that acts in pursuit of self-interest contrary to the requirements of justice. From these passages, it might be inferred that Carneades himself used the specific example of Rome when he lectured there in 155 BC, but this conclusion is by no means certain.

In the first place, since Lactantius had limited knowledge of Greek literature, he is unlikely to have consulted the writings of Clitomachus in order to study the arguments of Carneades. What he knew of this philosopher was derived from the *De Re Publica* of Cicero.<sup>21</sup> In *Div. Inst.* 5.14.3, for instance, Lactantius declares that readers unacquainted with the oratorical skills of Carneades may learn about the Academic philosopher through the praise bestowed on him by Cicero, evidently in the *De Re Publica* (cf. *Div. Inst.* 5.14.4-5). Moreover, he states that Carneades'