ROBIN WATERFIELD

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This is for two sets of friends, two wonderful families,
the Snowdons and the Stanfords

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to Fortune.
William Shakespeare,
Julius Caesar, Act 4, scene 3

CONTENTS

PREFACE

"Is there anyone on earth who is so narrow-minded or uninquisitive that he could fail to want to know how and thanks to what kind of political system almost the entire known world was conquered and brought under a single empire, the empire of the Romans, in less than fifty-three years—an unprecedented event?" So wrote the Greek historian Polybius of Megalopolis at the beginning of his monumental work.[1] The 53-year period he had in mind (counting inclusively) stretched from the start of the Second Punic War in 219 BCE until 167, the year of the overthrow of the Macedonian monarchy by Rome and the division of Macedon into four independent republics.

The period I cover in this book includes Polybius's fifty-three years, though I start a little earlier and end a little later. I start with the First Illyrian War of 229 and a final chapter looks ahead past 167 to the destruction of Corinth in 146. The importance of the period lies fundamentally in the clash of the superpowers—Rome, Macedon, and Syria. But I start with the so-called Illyrian wars (they hardly deserve the name), not least because I believe that their contribution to the eventual clash of the superpowers has not been fully appreciated, or has at least been underestimated by recent historians.

This was a period of extraordinary activity and expansion by Rome, but, as the subtitle of the book implies, my focus is limited to the Greek east, and chiefly the Greek mainland. Roman imperial expansion into Hellenized lands further east than the Balkan peninsula took place later, though the foundations were laid in my period. Roman expansion

in the west was happening more or less simultaneously, by means of a series of wars with the wealthy North African trading city of Carthage (the Punic wars), and then with Spanish tribes. These events, critical for Mediterranean history, will play a part in the book chiefly and merely in the sense that Roman experiences in the west conditioned their responses to opportunities and events in the east—reaction to Hannibal and depletion of resources being the most telling factors. In any case, the titanic struggle with Carthage has tended over the years to distract attention from the equally critical events that were happening further east.

I have broken up the (largely military) narrative of events with commentary, and with "asides" on social and cultural matters, that illuminate and add depth to our understanding of the period. For instance, when the conquest of Greece began, Rome was still relatively poor and simple, and so when it came into more constant contact with its older neighbors, with their long cultural history and urbane reputations, insistent questions arose: How much of this culture can we adopt without losing our identity? Would it matter? What *is* our identity? The Romans were forced to define themselves by contrast with Greeks, and the beginning of that process of self-definition is a fascinating aspect of the history of the period—fascinating, but hard to grasp. At the same time, of course, the Romans were also refining their impressions of the Greeks. There is just enough evidence to give us tantalizing glimpses of what the Romans thought of the Greeks, and vice versa.

This book is part of a series designed for consumption not only by scholars, but also by undergraduates and anyone interested in ancient history. Apart from the addition of aids such as a glossary and a timeline, this consideration has shaped the book mainly in that I have avoided going in any depth into the controversies that abound. I should take this opportunity, therefore, to say something about a few broad conclusions to which my reading and thinking have led me.

First, and most importantly, where Roman imperialism is concerned, I fall closer to the camp of William Harris than I do to that of Maurice Holleaux or his later allies. That is, I believe that the Romans were more aggressive imperialists in this period than used to be commonly held before the first edition of Harris's *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*

in 1979—that they did not go to war only when they were truly threatened (though they might pretend they were), nor were they dragged into entanglement with the east by accident or a series of accidents (Gruen, simplified), nor were their eastern wars purely the result of factors systemic to the Mediterranean world of the time (Eckstein, simplified).

The difficulty in appreciating this, and the reason that redoubtable scholars can look at the same body of evidence and arrive at contradictory conclusions, is that Roman imperialism, at this stage, took on a peculiar form. For a long time, there was no actual annexation—no taxation, no army of occupation, no imperialist administrative structures. Every time the Romans came, they also withdrew, in a tidal pattern that lasted several decades. But, in my view, each time they withdrew, they left more of the Greek world under a form of indirect, extralegal rule. It was an economical and effective system, requiring only deference from their subjects, and little in the way of commitment of resources by Rome. However, it did require the Romans to display enough resolution, and even ruthlessness, while they were there, to command deference while they were absent even from those who had not already been weakened by the previous round of brutality.

To argue that Rome was compelled to war for moral reasons, such as obligations toward friends, or because in a condition of Mediterranean "anarchy" (lack of international law or a strong central authority) war was inevitable, fails to give the whole picture. Even supposing that there was some external compulsion, the level or kind of response the Romans delivered was not fully determined by it. The evidence shows, I believe, that they often chose war of their own accord, that the discourse of "compulsion by external factors" is an echo of their very potent justificatory propaganda, and that, thanks to the militaristic nature of their culture, they relished the opportunity to expand their power.

Second, I find it difficult to see that there was a "party" of "Greek experts" in Rome who influenced senatorial policy. There were, of course, men who had more experience of the Greek language and Greek affairs than others, and the senators, not being stupid, made use of them; in the narrative that follows, we will often find men chosen by lot to command an army in Greece or Asia Minor, and then repeatedly used after that

for diplomatic missions in the east or as advisers to subsequent generals. Then again, one of the novel practices forced upon Rome by the Second Punic War was the introduction of annual extensions of the field commands of men who were doing a good job, and this simple and effective measure was applied to the eastern wars as well; it was a way of counteracting the negative effects of the inevitable short-termism of Roman political life, with its annual elections and other hedges against individual power. But, although pressure groups undoubtedly existed within the Senate, and although personal relationships counted for a great deal in the political life of Rome, it goes beyond our evidence to see these Greek experts as a pressure group.

Third, I am not convinced that there was much in the way of a class struggle in Greece in the first half of the second century. What little evidence there is fits the idea that it was propaganda rather than actual fact: knowing the Roman preference for administration by the rich, factions portrayed their enemies as fostering popularist constitutional reforms. There were undoubtedly financial and social crises in a number of Greek states, but they seem to have affected all strata of society.

Fourth, some will find similarities between the imperialism of Republican Rome and that of the United States today. Cultural historian Thomas Bender pinpoints the peculiar nature of U.S. imperialism since the Second World War in the following terms: "Indirect rule and influence replaced colonialism; military bases, client states and financial aid replaced pith helmets, jodhpurs, and rajas."[2] With the appropriate terms changed, this could almost be a description of Roman policy, as portrayed in this book. I do not deny the similarities, then, but it would take a different kind of book to bring them out in detail—and a different author, one more steeped in modern history and political analysis. Still, I would not deny that familiarity with the modern version of empire-creation by bullying, bribery, and judicious intervention may have helped to open my eyes to the nature of its ancient cousin.

In short, for the purposes of this book, I have avoided the finer details of all scholarly controversies. My first aim has been no more than to explicate a complex, important, and relatively unknown period of European history, and I have hardly strayed from that goal. But I have used the notes

not just for referencing, but to alert the reader to the major scholarly controversies as they arise. By the same token, I have included a generous bibliography to aid further research.

And there are indeed many topics that invite further reading. This was a unique period of European history, filled with world-changing events. The two cultures whose intermingling would come to create what we think of as "the Classics," the foundational culture of Europe, made their first enduring contact. Of the great Macedonian kingdoms that had emerged from the wars of Alexander the Great's Successors, one was destroyed by the Romans (Macedon) and another was severely weakened (Syria); Egypt was already weak, and Pergamum was aligned with Rome anyway. At the start of my period, there were five superpowers in the Mediterranean; less than sixty years later, there was only one. Above all, we witness large parts of Greece thrown into turmoil and then devastated so thoroughly that they did not recover for centuries. It is tempting to end this preface as it began: with the same challenge to the reader that Polybius issued over two thousand years ago.

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While preparing for our trip to northern Greece, Albania, Montenegro, and Croatia in April 2012, my wife Kathryn and I received enthusiastic advice from John Papadopoulos, Sarah Morris, and Alda Agolli of the University of California at Los Angeles, from Saimir Shpuza of the Albanian Institute of Archaeology, from Jack Davis of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and from Oliver Gilkes—Albanian experts all. In Albania itself we were given a personal tour of the museum of the Albanian Institute of Archaeology by Shpresa Gjongecaj, Director of Antiquities, and Ilir Zaloshnja, the curator of the museum. We were shown all the visitable antiquities of Hvar Island, Croatia, by Aldo Čavić and Vilma Stojković of the Stari Grad museum, good people. In Ioannina, Georgia Pliakou of the Ioannina Archaeological Museum shared some of her views, and the former (but scarcely "retired") director of the 12th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Kostas Zachos, showed us Passaron (if it is Passaron) and a delightful lakeside restaurant. Almost everywhere we went, we were conscious of following the footsteps of N. G. L. Hammond. For live directions, we are in the debt of passersby everywhere (particularly in Albania, where signs are few), but especially 90-year-old Izet Selman Baba of Klos, Albania, and Kostas Korkizogoulou of Zoodokhos Pigi, Thessaly, both of whom instantly dropped what they were doing to steer us around the antiquities of Nicaea and Cynoscephalae respectively.

This book completes at least one cycle of my life, since I was first seized by love of ancient history through studying the Roman Republic at school

and university. Since then, my specialization has been in Greek matters. But one of the many pleasures of writing this book was the chance to get back in touch with John Briscoe, who had taught me as an undergraduate, and ask him to read the typescript. He agreed, and his comments proved, of course, immensely useful. By my elbow throughout the writing of this book have been his commentaries on Livy, alongside Walbank's on Polybius. I also owe profound thanks to my other readers, lay and specialist: Richard Alston, Andrew Erskine, Tim Hucker, Andrew Lane, and Kathryn Waterfield. Stefan Vranka, exemplary commissioning editor, was as always a pleasure to work with for his skill and knowledge. Naturally, none of them is responsible for any blemishes that remain.

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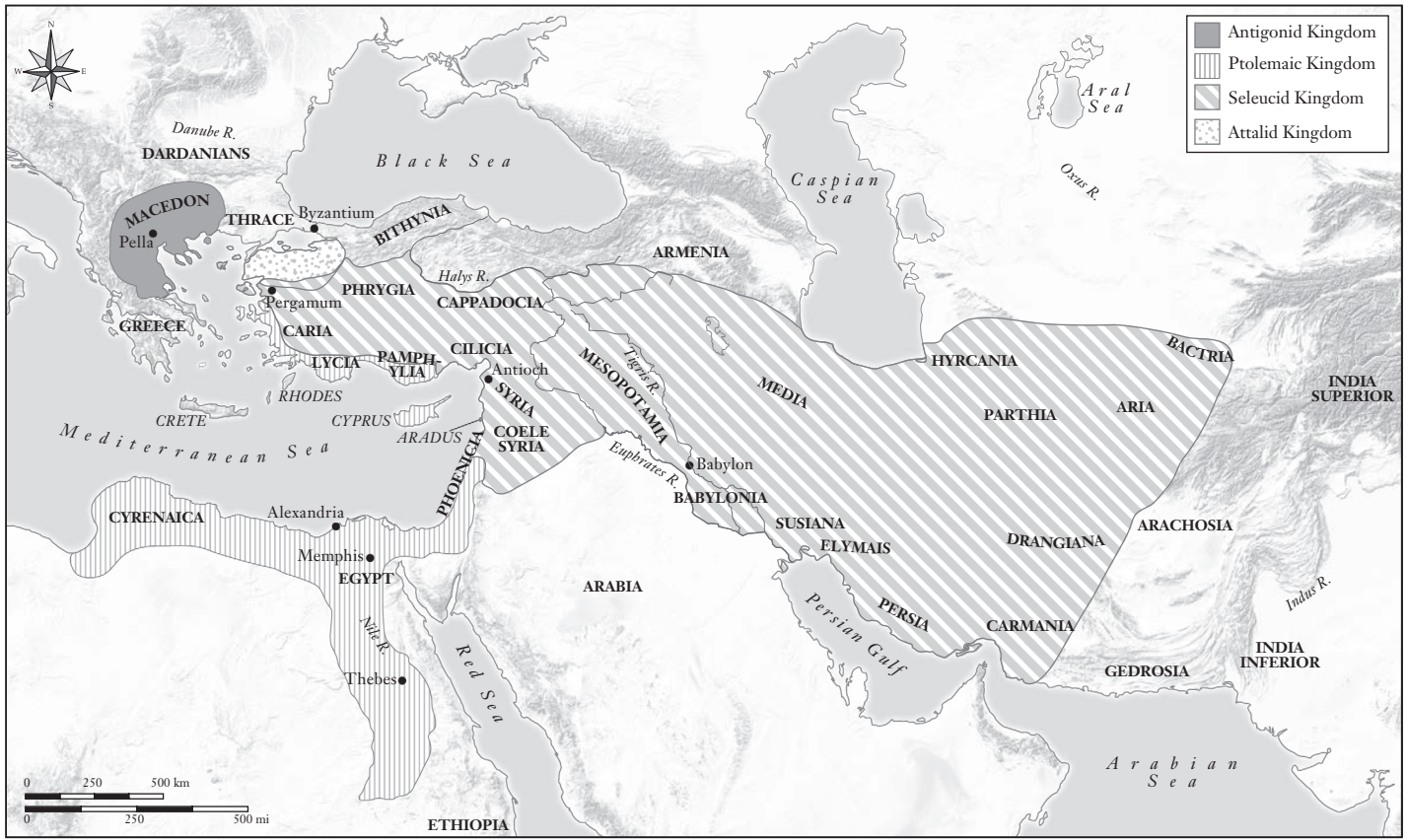
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS



MAP A

The Hellenistic Kingdoms, c. 230 BCE

MAP B
Asia Minor and the Aegean

MAP C
The Central Mediterranean

MAP D

Northern Greece, Macedon, and Thrace

MAP E
The Peloponnese and Central Greece

PRELUDE: CLOUDS IN THE WEST

It came to him, I suspect, like a flash of lightning—the bold insight that prompted Polybius of Megalopolis to put pen to paper in the 150s BCE and compose one of the greatest works of history ever written in the West, the story, in forty books, of Rome's rapid rise to imperial power in the Mediterranean. He had lived through much of the turmoil of this transformative period himself, and what he saw was that, after a certain point, all Mediterranean history became an organic whole (his metaphor), in the sense that the various histories of the various parts of the Mediterranean world all became subsumed under the history of Rome. Rome became the center, and *everything* else was on its peripheries. He also believed that he could pinpoint the moment when the process began: the summer of 217 BCE, at a convention attended by representatives of all the most important Greek leagues and states at Naupactus, near the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth.[1]

The only speech Polybius recorded from this convention, though unlikely to be accurate in all its details,[2] was delivered by a dignitary of the Aetolian League, Agelaus of Naupactus. Agelaus urged the assembled Greeks to stop making war on one another, not just as a matter of principle, but also as an urgent expediency. "If you ever allow the clouds now gathering in the west to loom over Greece," he said, "I deeply fear that all the games we now play with one another, our truces and our wars, will be so thoroughly denied us that we shall find ourselves imploring the gods to grant us this right, to make war and peace with one another as we wish, and in general to manage our own internal disputes." Agelaus was

right: the peace negotiations at Naupactus were the last the Greeks would ever conduct on their own, without Roman interference. Whether he was also right in his further implication that, if the Greeks united, they could keep the Romans at bay, we will never know, because that did not happen.

Strictly, a speaker at that moment in time could not know that it would be the Romans who would come. Polybius has Agelaus imply, correctly, that it would be either the Romans or the Carthaginians. Whichever of them won the war then raging in Italy would control the whole of the civilized western Mediterranean, and the rich resources of Spain, Sicily, Italy, and Tunisia would only serve to increase its power and its greed. Whichever side won the war was bound, before long, to turn its attention east. That was the way of the ancient Mediterranean. But, of course, Polybius knew, and his readers knew, that it would be the Romans.[3] The speech is a piece of prophetic irony.

But the advent of the Romans was not the only reason why Polybius chose this moment as critical for Mediterranean history. When Agelaus said that the Greeks should stop making war on one another, he actually had chiefly in mind a Macedonian, rather than a Greek, strictly speaking. He dared to rebuke King Philip V of Macedon and tell him to stop stirring up war among the Greeks. If he was ambitious, he said, he should look to Italy. Whoever won there was going to be exhausted and vulnerable. An imperialist idea that had been no more than a seed in Philip's mind at once blossomed (or so Polybius claims). The western and eastern halves of the Mediterranean were set on a collision course.

Agelaus's speech reflects the fact that in 217 some Greek statesmen were aware of the possibility of a threat from Rome. Now here is a second anecdote, a famous story, set fifty years later, in 168. Antiochus IV of Syria was poised to take Alexandria, overthrow the tottering dynasty of the Ptolemies, and gain all Egypt, but a Roman troubleshooter, Gaius Popillius Laenas, demanded that he call off the invasion and come to terms. When Antiochus prevaricated, Popillius (acting with the plenipotentiary freedom commonly granted Roman legates and commanders abroad) drew a circle around him in the dust and told him not to step outside it until he had given his answer. Antiochus caved in.[4]

The question is unavoidable: how did the eastern Mediterranean get from A to B? From a position where Rome was no more than a cloud looming in the west, to a position fifty years later—only fifty years—where it was able to threaten the most powerful king in the known world and deny him the right to pursue a foreign policy of his own choosing? This is the question this book sets out to answer.

1.

ROME TURNS EAST

THE CONFERENCE DID NOT go well. The Roman envoys told Teuta, the Illyrian queen, why they were there and itemized their overt complaints: piracy by her subjects in the Adriatic, the sea that lay between Illyris and Italy, had been worsening for some years, until a number of Italian traders had been killed and complaints had been received in Rome. They had come, they explained, to ask the queen to rein in her subjects, and to make sure that no such incident ever happened again. These were not the first such complaints the Romans had received, and with piracy rampant in the Adriatic (as elsewhere in the Mediterranean at the time) there must have been deaths before, but in 230 the Romans chose to act.

As often in diplomatic exchanges, as much was left unsaid as was heard aloud. For the Romans had also been approached for help by the people of the Adriatic island of Issa, and the envoys, the brothers Gnaeus and Lucius Coruncanius, in fact found the queen busy with the siege of Issa town. The purpose of the visit by the Roman envoys, then, was not just what it seemed to be. They were there to gauge the level of threat Teuta represented not just to Adriatic shipping, but to the region more generally. These undercurrents in the queen's pavilion escalated the tension.

As Teuta listened, she made no attempt to disguise her contempt. After the envoys had finished speaking, there were a few minutes of silence while the queen consulted with her advisers. Then she turned back to the Romans. Despite maintaining the facade of politeness that was proper to diplomatic occasions, her rejection of the envoys' petition was total. "Of course," she said, "I would never provoke Rome at an official level. But the incident you're talking about is no business of Rome's as a state, and rulers

of Illyris are not in the habit of preventing their subjects from privately profiting from the sea."

This was indeed an arrogant reply. Normal diplomatic practice might have recommended a denial that the alleged killers had been Illyrians, with an accompanying promise to look into the incident and do her best to curb piracy by her subjects. The delay would have defused the immediate tension. Instead, while fully accepting that piracy was an established way of life among her subjects,[1] she simply refused to do anything about it. But Queen Teuta's tactlessness was matched by the Romans. The younger Coruncanius lost his temper, as diplomats should not, and warned Teuta that, if her refusal to curb her subjects was normal Illyrian practice, maybe the Romans should come and change the way things were done there. The undercurrents in the meeting, as much as the deaths of Italian traders, caused the outburst. From what they had seen and heard at Issa, the Coruncanius brothers had already decided that Teuta was an enemy of Rome.

The meeting broke up in rancor, with this threat of armed retaliation hanging in the air. It is not clear what happened next, but as the envoys were getting ready to sail back home, one or possibly both of them, and the Issaean dignitary whose appeal to Rome had triggered the Roman mission, were killed. Whether or not these murders were officially sanctioned, the Romans, no doubt agreeing with the report they heard from the survivors of the diplomatic mission, took them as an act of war.[2] The Romans were committing themselves to their first overseas military venture eastward, to lands where the language and culture were Greek.

THE ILLYRIAN BID FOR LEGITIMACY

The region known as Illyris (Albania and Dalmatia, in today's terms) was regarded at the time as a barbarian place, only semi-civilized by contact with its Greek and Macedonian neighbours. It was occupied by a number of different tribes, linked by a common culture and language (a cousin of Thracian). From time to time, one of these tribes gained a degree of dominance over some or most of the rest, but never over all of them at

once. Contact with the Greek world had led to a degree of urbanization, especially in the south and along the coast, but the region still essentially consisted of many minor tribal dynasts with networks of loyalty. At the time in question, the Ardiaei were the leading tribe, and in the 230s their king, Agron, had forged a kind of union, the chief plank of which was alliances with other local magnates from central Illyris, such as Demetrius, Greek lord of the wealthy island of Pharos, and Scerdilaidas, chief of the Illyrian Labeatae.

In the late 230s, the Illyrians' Greek neighbors to the south, the confederacy of Epirote tribes and communities, descended into chaos following the republican overthrow of a by-then hated monarchy. Agron seized the opportunity. Following a significant victory over the Aetolians in 231—they had been hired by Demetrius II of Macedon to relieve the siege of Medion, a town belonging to his allies, the Acarnanians—the Illyrians, confident that they could stand up to any of their neighbors, expanded their operations. The next year, they raided as far south as the Peloponnesian coastline, but, more importantly, they seized the northern Epirote town of Phoenice (see Fig. 1.1).

The capture of Phoenice, the strongest and wealthiest city in Epirus, and then its successful defense against a determined Epirote attempt at recovery, were morale-boosting victories, but the practical consequences were uppermost in Agron's mind. Phoenice was not just an excellent lookout point; it was also close to the main north–south route from Illyris into Epirus. More immediately, the town commanded its own fertile (though rather boggy) alluvial valleys, and access to the sea at Onchesmus. There was another harbor not far south, at Buthrotum (modern Butrint, one of the best archaeological sites in Europe), but for a ship traveling north up the coast, Onchesmus was the last good harbor until Oricum, eighty kilometers (fifty miles) further on, a day's sailing or possibly two. And, even apart from the necessity of havens in bad weather, ancient ships had to be beached frequently, to forage for food and water (warships, especially, had room for little in the way of supplies), to dry out the insides of the ships (no pumps in those days), and to kill the teredo "worm" (a kind of boring mollusk). Phoenice was a valuable prize.

FIGURE 1.1
Phoenice. The capture by King Agron of this strategic northern Epirote city in 230 BCE gave the Illyrians the confidence that made them a threat to the region—and so brought them into collision with Rome.

Agron died a short while later, reputedly from pleurisy contracted after the over-enthusiastic celebration of his victories. He was succeeded by his son Pinnes—or rather, by his wife Teuta, who became regent for the boy.[3] Teuta inherited a critical situation. Following the loss of Phoenice, the Epirotes had joined the Aetolian–Achaean alliance, and their new allies dispatched an army north as soon as they could. The Illyrian army under Scerdilaidas moved south to confront them, numbering perhaps ten thousand men. The two armies met not far north of Passaron (modern Ioannina).[4]

The fate of the northwest coastline of Greece hung in the balance. But before battle was joined, the Illyrian forces were recalled by Teuta to deal with a rebellion by one of the tribes of her confederacy (we do not know which), who had called in help from the Dardanians. The Dardanian tribes occupied the region north of Macedon and northeast of Illyris (modern Kosovo, mainly), and not infrequently carried out cross-border