

EMPIRE AND IMPERIALISM THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES. REFLECTIONS ON A HISTORICAL *EXEMPLUM*. INTRODUCTION

Wouter BRACKE (Academia Belgica)
Jan NELIS (Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès)
Jan DE MAEYER (BHIR-IHBR)

The present book is the result of the conference “*Renovatio, inventio, absentia imperii*. From the Roman Empire to Contemporary Imperialism”, held in Brussels at the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Academia Belgica in Rome (September 11-13, 2014). The colloquium was a stimulating moment of collaboration between the Academia Belgica and the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome (BHIR-IHBR). At the heart of the conference was the “reception”, “Nachleben” or “permanence” of the Roman Empire, of an idea and a historical paradigm which since classical Antiquity has supported the most widespread claims used to obtain and consolidate power.

1. SITUATING THE THEME

Already in May 1939 one of the conferences delivered in the context of the opening of the Academia Belgica was dedicated to the Roman Empire. On May 8, the Academy was officially inaugurated in its newly built palace at the edge of the Villa Borghese in the Valle Giulia. Four days earlier, Jacques Pirenne, at the request of the then Belgian ambassador to Italy, André de Kerchove de Denterghem, entertained at the ambassador’s residence the directors of the foreign historical institutes in Rome, the president of the Accademia Reale as well as the rector of Rome’s university, ambassadors and representatives of the Italian state on Belgium and the Roman Empire. Our colleague Francis Balace has, with humor and detachment, discussed the episode in his contribution to the history of the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome.¹ The episode is an interesting illustration of

¹ Cfr. Balace, Francis. “Academia Belgica, an I. Entre ‘culture’ et propagande à la fin de l’ère fasciste”. *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, 73 (2003), 67-92, esp. 84-87.

how the idea of *Imperium* can be perceived, interpreted and used. To the liberal historian Jacques Pirenne, specialized in Ancient law and a fine Egyptologist, the conquest of the Belgian territory by the Romans in the first century B.C. serves as an introduction to a discussion of the Roman Empire's Greco-oriental origins, especially with relation to the idea of democracy based on individualism and rationalism, humanism, and contract and commercial law. According to the Belgian nationalist Pirenne, Rome's success is imbedded in its capacity to transcend the limits of national politics in order to create a single citizenship, that of the *civis Romanus*: Italy is no more than a province; emperors came from Spain, Gaul, Africa or the East; important cultural centers could be found in Rome, of course, but also in Athens, Alexandria, Beirut, and Palestine. In his memoirs, published posthumously, Pirenne explains the sense of his speech as a fine critique of the fascist regime and that it was perceived as such by the public. The conference was published the very same year in the liberal oriented *Le Flambeau: revue belge de questions politiques, et littéraires*, a review with a strong interest in international politics and very much loyal to the former allies of WWI; its directors at the time were the classical philologists Henri Grégoire and Oscar Grosjean.

The focus of the conference of September 2014 was on culture in a broad sense, i.e. including besides the arts, philosophy, religion, and most importantly, discourse. As such, a wide array of themes were subjected to academic scrutiny, both in the papers that were presented and during the lively discussions that ensued. Whereas the main focus was on Europe and North America, the conference also reached out towards non-Western contexts, whether or not directly related to the Roman example.

A theoretical and sociological dimension was added thanks to the discussion on methodological issues relevant to the conference theme. More specifically, the following question(s) received particular attention: what is our position as researchers, embedded in a contemporary, often Western, democratic and capitalist context; what about the notion of empire itself, its constituent elements and the kind of ideological prerogatives to which it is generally subjected; in other words, apart from the many historical variants and instances of reception of empire, through which filters can, and inevitably do, we approach this topic? This question has become ever more pregnant since the beginning of the twenty-first century, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, following the events of September 11, which have revived what could be called American "imperialism", and at a time when an essentially economic variant, driven by "emerging" powers such as China, has increasingly contested existing power structures.

In light of such meta-historical awareness, the conference touched as much on the nature of the Roman Empire as it did on its historical legacy

and, more importantly so, on who claims the latter inheritance throughout the most diverse epochs. By discussing some highly contrasting views on this topic, participants explored issues that are of fundamental importance to the writing, not only of cultural history, but also of history itself.

Wim Blockmans opens the book and presents a historical overview of the concept, reality and illusion, of empire and imperialism, from their first appearances until the present day. Discussing both the relevant terminology (empire, confederation, State, nation, etc.) and scholarship, the reader is presented with an appreciation of the European Union as what could be termed an anti-imperial, or in any case inverted imperial polity, i.e. that of its bottom-up construction since the 1950s. With a keen eye for recent evolutions and mentalities in contemporary European societies, Blockmans offers an ideal methodological framework for the study of empire(s), taking into account multiple social, economic, political and ethnic parameters. After Blockmans' study, in respect of the conference's course of presentations, this book is structured along a series of general lines of inquiry, each of which offers viewpoints originating from varied temporal and geographical contexts. More particularly, this book addresses issues related to three thematic axes.

2. ROME AND ITS HERITAGE.

THE LEGACY OF THE *IMPERIUM ROMANUM* IN EUROPEAN CULTURE

Firstly, the theme *Rome and its heritage. The legacy of the Imperium Romanum in European culture, from Antiquity to the present* has been addressed. Here the origins of the idea of empire, as well as its transformations and permutations, are at the center of attention, starting with ancient Rome, where the idea of empire was carefully crafted in the late republican and early imperial periods, whereupon it proved resilient throughout European (and later also American) history. Roman imperial performance became the cultural and political hallmark for the aspirations of medieval kings and emperors of the feudal era, for rising State power across the early modern period and for European colonial expansion from the sixteenth century onwards. Imagery and rhetoric mirrored the great classical authors and politicians. Roman architecture set the scene for demonstrations of power and ideology. If the *renovatio imperii* inspired early Western monarchs like Charlemagne, it was Roman law that catered to State centralization of the rising European States from the late Middle Ages onwards and laid the foundations for State power and the authority of the prince, as well as for the attitudes of kings and dukes during the

Renaissance. But at the same time ideas of republicanism and resistance to power yielded by one level of authority also claimed descent from Rome. As further exemplified by, most notably, the growing interest in the Roman Empire during the Enlightenment as well as under Napoleon I, the historical *exemplum* offered by the Roman Empire is of an extremely versatile and multifaceted nature, and its applicability cannot by any means be confined to one single interpretation.

Six papers belong to this category. **Milinda Banerjee's** essay explores a hitherto less-studied geographical context, i.e. nineteenth- and twentieth-century India, with a focus on Bengal. In the writings of *littérateurs* and other intellectuals, he traces the presence of the Roman Empire, which inspired various kinds of metaphors, images, analogies, and symbols, based on Rome's physical remnants (ruins), but not only as an image of grandeur. Mainly at the basis of anti-colonial and nationalist political thought, the image of Rome was one of imperial decay, incarnated by the ruins foreign (Indian) travelers could witness in the Eternal City. By contrast, the example of Christianity, fittingly embodied by the Roman catacombs, became an illustration of resistance to imperial ruination, as is shown by the example of the Mausoleum of Hadrian/Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. However, together with Julius Caesar and, e.g., Marcus Aurelius, the latter emperor could also offer a more pacific image, that of the virtues and nobility of agricultural labor, for example. Hence Indian political thought did not produce one well-defined image of ancient Rome, but rather a multi-faceted, negotiable, historical paradigm, which was put at the service of emerging nationalist thought.

Even though it is also set in a colonial and post-colonial context, that of British and Spanish America's revolutionary age, **Elise Bartosik-Vélez's** paper shows republican, and to a lesser extent imperial Rome largely as a positive example, inspiring republican rhetoric, political thought, and models, following a variety of factors such as, first and foremost, ancient Rome's sheer vastness, but also its ideological dimension, as a symbol of strength and glory, of civilization, and, admittedly somewhat more controversially, of ethnic homogeneity. Bartosik-Vélez shows how, particularly in political writings and poetry from British America, a strong belief prevailed in the (republican) virtues of territorial expansion as a safeguard for what could be termed "national unity through diversity", a belief that was partly religious in nature – cfr. the original settlers' belief in divine providence's projection of the construction of a "city on the hill" – and partly also inspired by ancient Rome's continuous legacy. On the other hand, in Spanish American thought the idea of territorial expansion was largely

absent. Rather, politicians as well as activists like Simón Bolívar turned towards ancient Roman political structures, the emulation of which was effectively integrated into some of the newly created nation-states, e.g., Bolivia, Venezuela, and Colombia. In addition to this, Rome also served as an example for the creation of a confederate, Southern American continental confederative structure which, however, would respect member states' national independence, and not focus on territorial expansion.

Christoph Mauntel's essay takes us many centuries back, to medieval England, Spain, Europe and Mongolia. In his paper, he stresses the fact that the terms *imperator* and *imperium* are polyvalent ideological and political concepts, with multiple and divergent uses. Still, they nearly always refer to a heightened, elevated form of royal or pseudo-royal power. A common element, in medieval Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Christian Spain as well as in the accounts of Mongolian imperial expansion in thirteenth-century travelogues, is the near absence of references to ancient Rome, a somewhat surprising element, especially in view of the (at least temporal) vicinity of the Roman Empire. Indeed, even if it has to be taken into account that sources are limited and some have been identified as outright forgeries, it seems very much so that in this period, the use of an imperial Latin vocabulary points to a relatively "liberal" interpretation, much broader than the singular focus on the Roman Empire. The English case, where the term *imperator* was often accompanied by that of *rex* or also by the Greek *basileus*, in particular aptly illustrates the singular, flexible usage of such terms, which at times even seemed interchangeable. With some exceptions, their common denominator seems to have been a kind of exalted royal power and authority, often also referring to specific rulers' spheres of influence. What clearly stands out in all three cases (England, Spain, accounts of Mongolia) is that in this period at least, there does not seem to have been one single, well-defined imperial idea, nor one sole, ideal type of *imperator*.

Based on in-depth analysis of visual sources in both early-modern Italy (Siena, Florence, Venice) and Holland (Amsterdam and Enkhuizen), **Arthur Weststeijn** further explores the tandem imperialism-republicanism, which is often simplistically analyzed in terms of incompatibility, if not outright contradiction. His paper shows how early-modern republican city-state structures, both on the Italian peninsula and in the Dutch Republic, constantly referred to not only Republican Rome and its foremost citizens, but also, both implicitly and at times explicitly, to Roman imperialism. From his study emerges the image of a steady negotiation of values such as liberty and empire, independence, and (territorial and/or commercial)

expansion. Whereas the example of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena is essentially a *caveat* against a “Roman” kind of *hubris* by which personal ambition leads to the dissolution of empire and liberty, the imagery in the *Sala dei Gigli* of Florence’s Palazzo della Signoria evokes the virtuousness of territorial expansion based not on the example of the Roman Empire, but of the Republican period, incarnated here in the figure of Marcus Furius Camillus. As Weststeijn aptly states, in this specific context imperialist conquest is a token of justice, whereby empire becomes the outcome and triumph of peace. At first glance, the example of Venice’s Palazzo Ducale contrasts with what has been observed concerning Siena and Florence, but on closer investigation the absence of Rome, which is only indirectly present, reinforces Venice’s claim to be its modern heir. Indeed, whereas references to Roman imperialism are absent, the Palazzo Ducale contains more than one *clin d’œil* to Roman antiquity, and imperial power. Finally, the Town Hall and Admiralty in Amsterdam and Enkhuizen’s Town Hall illustrate how during the apex of the Dutch Republic, such contradictory interpretations and usages of ancient Roman imperialism as both an example and a counter-example were systematically being reproduced, whereby the focus lay on Dutch peaceful commercial imperialism as opposed to the Roman military imperial drive. A common denominator remains highly sensitive in Dutch society up until today, i.e. the large-scale recourse that was made to slavery.

Andre Sashalmi’s study takes us to Russia, presenting some of the most visible and discursively dominant features of the Russian elite’s attitude towards and references to the Roman Empire from 1520 to 1725 (the death of Peter the Great). The most striking element in this author’s analysis is the identification of an evolution from the religious sphere (Russian rulers as guardians of the faith) to the secular one (serving and protecting the “common good”), i.e. a shifting focus from the fulfillment of spiritual towards political needs. Sashalmi’s study notably offers an interesting assessment of the idea of Russia, and Moscow, as a “Third Rome”. From his analysis it emerges that this latter idea was first and foremost religiously connoted. As a consequence, Sashalmi argues, it did not influence Russian foreign policy, nor become an official ideological guideline for the tsars, at least in the period under scrutiny here. At the same time, it seems quite clear that further research on this topic needs to be undertaken, notably based on a wider selection of source material. Another central thesis in this paper is the relatively late emergence of references to secular Rome at the end of the seventeenth century, mostly (but not exclusively) through evocations and emulations of Roman ceremonial and iconography. The most striking examples described by Sashalmi are

triumphal entries and triumphal gates, references to Roman (pagan) mythology, and iconographic representations of the tsar/emperor on coins and in engravings. It is at this point in the study that it becomes clear that the Russian example constitutes a category in itself, i.e. a context in which pagan Rome, and Roman imperialism, are initially absent, but become present as the country opens up towards the West and its continuous *cultus* of the classical tradition.

Finally, Stefano Manganaro offers an incisive, very well documented, and evidence-based study that focuses on a concept that has hitherto not been evoked, i.e. *stabilitas imperii/regni*. The latter concept is very often encountered, from the seventh to the eleventh century, in Merovingian, Carolingian, Ottonian, and Salian charters or *diplomata*, contrary to notions such as *absentia* and *inventio imperii*, whereas the notion of *renovatio imperii* can only be found on a limited number of coins and seals. The interchangeable character of the notions *stabilitas imperii* and *stabilitas regni* in itself points to one of Manganaro's main findings, i.e. the near-total absence of references to the ancient Roman Empire in the available source material. The latter seems to be in part the consequence of the Frankish, Germanic conception of identity, of the Franco-Germanic Self, which acted as an obstacle to the appropriation of ancient Rome, at least in the source material presented by Manganaro. In addition, the author offers a dense analysis of the biblical and patristic roots of the idea of *stabilitas imperii*, as well as of the dialectic between this latter concept and that of *status imperii*, which, contrary to *stabilitas* (which is to be seen as an ideal model), points to the concrete condition of various kingdoms. However, this theory seems to be somewhat contradicted by the available sources, since in practice both concepts are often used in a rather confusing manner, nearly as synonyms.

3. THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

Secondly, a number of papers address the general theme of *Radically changing perspectives on a historical category: the Roman Empire in the contemporary era*. Since the French Revolution, which, in a process of “nationalization of the masses” (Mosse), posited the interests of the people at the core of political and societal debate, the heritage of ancient Rome has been the object of intense negotiation. In this period of high-stakes discussion concerning the boundaries and legitimacy of individual and collective power, nations and empires were created. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ancient Rome was a historical predecessor

from which lessons could be learned, examples drawn. Whereas on a sociological level, Roman republicanism inspired much fervour, arguably the idea of empire has subsequently been responsible for most of the key defining moments in world history: from instances of aggressive nationalist politics in the nineteenth century to the twentieth-century rise and fall of popular, fascist, and communist power structures, from the definitive sanctification of the USA as the only real Western superpower after WWII, from colonialism to post- and neo-colonialism, Roman imperialism has lost none of its relevance, whether as a historical *exemplum* or, alternatively, as an ominous *caveat*. Whether explicitly or implicitly, five contributors to this book explore the current, and indeed also future, fate of the Roman Empire, offering assessments of how contemporary civilizations have claimed, shaped, and also radically rejected, the cultural heritage of Rome in their struggle for power and legitimacy.

Eva Marlene Hausteiner's take on imperial declinism or pessimism vs. optimism during the Edwardian era in Great Britain sides with the aforementioned tension between (Roman) republicanism and imperialism. She identifies, in a variety of written sources by leading British intellectuals, recurring patterns of declinism, whereby she interrogates the inner logic and functionality of such discourse, focusing on the dual character of so-called Edwardian pessimism, which seems to be both a reflection of actual crisis and demise, and indicative of a will to revitalize the British Empire, against loss of territory and authority (cfr. the paper by Banerjee discussed above). From Hausteiner's paper it emerges that Edwardian declinism was proper to a well-defined cultural élite, radically imperial rather than republican, and rhetorically highly dissimilar from declinist discourse as it had existed thus far, in that ancient Rome now became a symbol of imperialism rather than of decadence and corruption. Hausteiner's central thesis is that of Edwardian optimistic pessimism, i.e. a combination of anti- and pro-imperial declinism, the latter proposing not the abolishment of empire, but rather its role as a safeguard of stability and prosperity, contrary to republican decadence. Hence, argues Hausteiner, the example of ancient Rome and its imperial structure, traditionally the object of a cautionary tale, becomes a source of inspiration for the modern imperialist drive, in a push for what she calls a technocratic vision of empire, in other words for imperial regeneration rather than decline, or fall.

Aleksandar Ignjatović offers a study of how, since the second half of the nineteenth century, Serbian history was presented as a continuous, organic process by which medieval Serbia became something of a Golden Age, bearer of the historical legacy of the Byzantine Empire. Such ideas

were linked to contemporary Serbian imperialism during the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas we have seen that in the case of Edwardian Britain imperial structures were being ideologically safeguarded by making recourse to historical *exempla*, in the Serbian case empire had to be resurrected, and it was coupled with not only Serbian nationalism, but also with a more widespread drive present in the Balkans at that time, i.e. the liberation and unification of the South Slavs. Although these ideas may at first seem incompatible with Serbian nationalism, the contrary is true, as they met in the emerging concept of Yugoslavism. Indeed, here lies the great value of Ignjatović's paper, showing the nationalist, imperialist drive common to many other countries in the region such as Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania, all historically inspired Christian nations opposed to the Ottoman Empire. Thus the "Byzantinization" of the Balkans was a central element in competing and diverging national narratives.

The subsequent paper by **Martin Kohlrausch** addresses the reception of the Roman Empire in Germany under Wilhelm II, in the context of a series of issues that occupied German society at the time, such as the discussion on monarchical state structures, religion (Protestant and/vs. Catholic), the North-South opposition, the nature of the *Reich* (an end in itself or a stepping stone towards something bigger), imperialism (and more specifically colonialism), and ethnicity. Covering the 30 years of his rule, Kohlrausch touches upon the problem of Wilhelm II's imperial ambitions and visions, of his idea of Germany as invested with an imperial mission – an idea which, as the author aptly illustrates, was both lauded and criticized by his contemporaries, both in Germany and abroad. As such, Wilhelm's reception of ancient Rome is used to reveal tensions within the newly unified Germany, visible not only in public and academic debate, but also, for example, in initiatives such as the reconstruction of the Saalburg fort, a Roman *limes* castle which Wilhelm intended to transform into a national monument, much to the dislike and contempt of (at least part of) his contemporaries and subjects. The reconstruction of the Saalburg as well as Wilhelm's inaugural speech act as telling examples of the Kaiser's fascination with imperial Rome, whose power and might he intended to emulate, and possibly surpass. Here Kohlrausch points out the Janus-like character of Wilhelm's speech and imperial scheme: a speech that was at times modest, and at times almost ridiculously bombastic in its imperial pretensions. The paper, which also addresses the issue of Byzantinism (vs. *Germanentümelei*) – as such it complements the aforementioned study by Aleksandar Ignjatović – as well as the ideological competition with Great Britain (cfr. the papers by Hausteiner and Banerjee supra), concludes by briefly evoking the post-Wilhelman era, when a different kind of

reception of antiquity, i.e. the Nazi valorization of mainly – but not solely, cfr. Hitler’s interest in Rome – the Greek, Doric example, accompanied Germanic *völkische* ideology, notably visible in Nazi architecture and sculpture.

Laura Cerasi’s paper presents a wide variety of written sources dating back to late liberal and fascist Italy, when the quintessence of empire was not so much Rome as it was the British Empire. From her detailed account it emerges that deep into the fascist period, Britain, complete with its industrial and modern outlook, was the touchstone for Italian discourse on empire and imperialism. Rome is virtually absent in the source material presented by this author, and only makes a final comeback during the late 1930s, when fascist Italy effectively conquers a colonial empire. Indeed, even if the recourse to *romanità*, to the idea of (republican and imperial) Rome has been a constant element in Italian intellectual discourse since the *Risorgimento*, it suffices to look at the writings and speeches by Mussolini to get a grasp of the continuous presence, both positively (until the early 1930s) and negatively (during the 1930s), of Britain, and British imperialism, which are only seldom linked to ancient Rome. As such Cerasi’s study aptly illustrates the volatile nature of historical discourse, which in this particular case varies from timid and explicit appreciation of British modernism to outright condemnation of the latter, and appreciation of the legacy of imperial Rome, against modernity, but at the same time at its service.

4. THE “IMAGINARY EMPIRE”: REPRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE OF POWER

Thirdly, there is the issue of the performance and representation of power, which could be summarized in the notion of “imaginary empire”. Indeed, in the visual arts, the reference to the Roman Empire has always maintained a certain relevance, whereby the exaltation of imperialist-monarchic power has continued unabated in subsequent epochs, starting with the medieval Byzantine, Carolingian, and Holy Roman Empires. At the same time, pagan figurative models were adapted in order to meet the ideological requirements of Christianity, a process which led to vociferous debate regarding the status of imagery, as well as, ultimately, to instances of iconoclasm. Consequently, the Renaissance has intensified the interest in Greco-Roman antiquity, in search of a purity which was often more the product of imagination than a tangible reality. Through a certain interpretation of Vitruvius, attempts were also made to rival Roman imperial architecture, as

a testimony and legitimization of power and authority. Culminating in the so-called *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, the appropriation of antiquity has indeed remained a core issue in art history throughout the centuries. Various explorations and transformations of the highly realistic formal language of Roman art, the sublimation of the arts by totalitarian States and Empires (from Charlemagne to Napoleon, from Stalin to Hitler and Mussolini), modern interpretations of artistic theories: all have been founded on the myth of Greek but also Roman antiquity.

The paper by Caffey explicitly addresses the aforementioned issues of representation of power and imaginative pureness. Through an analysis of a series of paintings by the eighteenth-century painter Benjamin West, Caffey illustrates how the British, in their subjection of parts of Great Britain, Ireland, and territories elsewhere around the globe, made recourse to ancient Rome as an *exemplum* offering the foundations upon which to ground their imperial structure and aspirations, both in the sense of territorial expansion and of what could be termed a “civilizing mission” intent at spreading British culture. From Caffey’s account, it emerges that there were as many readings of “Rome” as there were readers. Indeed, the image of Rome was as much that of a faraway past as it was an image of the present, that had to be emulated, and surpassed. For a central element that stands out in this paper is the concept of “imperial immunity”, not, of course, in the sense of immunity against empire and imperialism, but in the sense of immunity to imperial decay. Besides pictorial art, Caffey also includes contemporary literature and illustrates that at least in this specific context, republican and imperial Rome seem to go hand in hand, whereby the construct of empire was seen as a catalyst of republican virtues through their dissemination all over the Roman Empire.

Felix Saure’s essay takes us to the period immediately preceding the one covered by Kohlrausch, i.e. the German territories around 1800. Saure shows how three protagonists of German, and European, cultural life at the time, i.e. Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, fostered the widespread image of ancient Rome as second to Greece, as what could be termed a “second antiquity”, of lesser value, at the level of philosophy and *Kultur*, than Greece, and above all Athens. For Humboldt, both ancient Rome and Greece are of fundamental value for contemporary German society, whereby Rome provided “external” examples (judiciary system, religious organization, etc.), and Greece “internal” constructs at the level of philosophy, the arts, ethics, etc. For Humboldt, the Germans were invested with the power, and duty, to perpetuate and improve the Greek example, an idea that would remain at

the heart of dominant currents in German nationalist thinking until late into the twentieth century. Humboldt's philhellenism is accompanied by a specific image of the Roman past, especially of the Roman Empire, as first and foremost a political structure, highly divergent from Greece. However, at the same time he acknowledges that without Rome, the spiritual heritage of ancient Greece would have been lost to contemporary societies. For Herder, as Saure aptly illustrates, Rome is not only a political, administrative center, but a place where the spirit or *Geist* of all those it has conquered in a sense survives. His concept of Rome is much larger and ethereal than what has been observed in the case of Humboldt. In Herder's mindset, Rome somehow becomes an idea which accrues to an ensemble of mental, aesthetic, and ideological representations linked to the city of Rome, its history, culture and religions. As in Humboldt, it functions as a "bridge" by which the Greek heritage was passed on, but it is also inherently destructive, eventually destroying all that it conquers through war – war as opposed to culture. Finally, Saure turns towards Karl Friedrich Schinkel's philhellenism, which led to outright denial of ancient Rome's creative forces, a thesis that is in full conformity with German theory at the time but which, in the works and drawings of Schinkel, is somewhat softened by visual reminders of Roman republican and imperial architecture.

5. THE "GRAMMAR OF A MYTHICAL LANGUAGE" AS A CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter, by **Christophe Imbert**, reflects upon the way in which empire, *imperium*, has become, or rather has been and perhaps still is, part of what is called the "grammar of a mythical language". Imbert's is not a linguistic analysis, but rather a philosophical/literary exploration of many centuries of world literature. From his account emerges both the closeness and *Entfremdung* we feel when referring to empire, both the concrete and, above all, imaginary predicates that are repeatedly associated with it. The paper's quality lies in the sustained manner in which poets, philosophers, artists, and intellectuals belonging to the most diverse temporal and geographical contexts are resuscitated within its pages, leaving the reader with the desire to discover these manifestations, and the many others that have not been treated. This final observation concerning Imbert's essay can also be made regarding the present volume, which has shown that the study of the reception of the Roman Empire, and of notions linked to it, still has a bright future ahead of itself. The editors hope that the papers presented here will further stimulate research in this highly promising field of research.