

DE LA TORRE, José I. (coord.). *Grandes enemigos de Roma*. Madrid: Nowtilus, 2024, 417 pp. [ISBN 978-84-130-5479-7]

Roman historiography has traditionally been written from the viewpoint of Rome itself —its generals, emperors, institutions, and victories. The volume *Grandes enemigos de Roma*, edited by José Ignacio de la Torre, offers a compelling and innovative shift in perspective: to narrate the history of Rome through the eyes of those who opposed it. This approach not only rescues key figures from the peoples who resisted Roman expansion but also invites reflection on how this "otherness" has been represented and reinterpreted, both in ancient sources and in their contemporary reception, including cinematic portrayals.

De la Torre led a project in which he succeeded in assembling a team of specialists —such as Julio Rodríguez, Luis Amela, and Emilio Campomanes— while ensuring coherence and a consistently rigorous academic standard. The editorial line is clear: to produce collective works that blend research and public engagement, aiming to reach a broad audience without compromising scholarly quality.

The decision to reconstruct Roman history from the perspective of the "others" is significant, as it opens new methodological and narrative pathways aligned with modern approaches, such as reception studies and the history of alterity. From this angle, the book also interrogates the silences and implicit references in Roman authors' accounts, revealing how the image of Rome's adversaries is inevitably mediated. Nevertheless, the volume succeeds in

bringing this alterity into focus without losing sight of the broader imperial narrative. Readers come to see that Rome's enemies were not mere ephemeral resisters but historical actors who decisively shaped the political and military evolution of the Empire.

The tone of the book strikes a careful balance between erudition and clarity. The narrative is accessible and engaging, making it suitable for both academic and general readers. The text avoids excessive footnotes and detailed bibliographies, instead offering a consolidated reference section and a final biographical glossary. Also noteworthy is the volume's material quality: the selection of classical texts and inclusion of carefully curated colour images enhance its utility and appeal.

Chronologically, the volume covers the period from the 3rd century BCE to the 5th century CE —far from arbitrary, this span reflects the consolidation of Rome as a dominant power and the later period of crisis and transformation leading to the fall of the Western Empire. The book thus embraces a broad yet clearly defined temporal span, enabling the reader to trace connections among various resistances in very different political and geographical contexts.

The volume is structured into eleven chapters and an Introduction, where De la Torre highlights the ruthless nature of the conflicts in which Rome was engaged. For most of its adversaries, coexistence was rarely a viable option: defeat often meant Romanisation or cultural dissolution. Yet the editor also emphasizes that Rome learned from its rivals, adopting tactics and organizational strategies that had proven effective. This ambivalence —Rome as

both an assimilating force and a permeable one— is central to much of the book's analysis.

One of the book's main strengths lies in the gallery of characters and peoples explored in each chapter. The contributors delve into specific cases while maintaining a cohesive overall structure.

The first chapter is dedicated to Pyrrhus of Epirus, one of Rome's earliest enemies. With his partial victories in southern Italy, Pyrrhus challenged the Republic to such an extent that the term "Pyrrhic victory" was coined. However, his failure to consolidate Macedonian power and establish lasting hegemony ultimately turned him into a lesson for Roman learning and adaptation.

The second chapter focuses on Viriathus, the Lusitanian leader who spearheaded a determined resistance in Hispania. Roman chroniclers portrayed him as the "terror of Rome," attributing to him almost supernatural qualities. His story illustrates the extent to which the Iberian wars tested Roman legions and forced the development of far-reaching strategies.

Chapter three examines Mithridates VI of Pontus, a relentless adversary who epitomized Hellenistic opposition to Roman hegemony. The three Mithridatic Wars not only demonstrated the king's power but also paved the way for Rome's expansion into the East. This case underscores the complexity of an opponent capable of combining military resistance with a coherent political vision.

The fourth chapter centers on Vercingetorix, the Arvernian leader immortalized in the surrender at Alesia painted by Lionel Royer. His defeat

by Caesar paradoxically gave rise to a powerful myth: that of Gallic resistance, which became a cultural and political symbol in later periods, particularly in 19th-century France. This chapter, along with the first and third, is particularly noteworthy given the general public's unfamiliarity with its protagonists.

Subsequent chapters expand the geographical scope beyond the central Mediterranean. The Germanic wars are represented by Arminius, the architect of the Teutoburg Forest ambush (9 CE), which definitively halted Roman expansion across the Rhine. The account reveals how a single disaster could shape imperial strategy for centuries.

The partial conquest of Britain under Claudius is examined with special attention to Boudica, the Iceni queen who led a revolt with immense symbolic force. The chapter also revisits military and economic hypotheses that explain the failure of a full occupation of the island, as well as the persistent challenges posed by the Caledonian tribes along the northern frontier.

Chapter seven turns to Dacia. Under King Burebista, this region emerged as a regional power. Rome, attracted by its resources, launched campaigns under Domitian and Trajan. The narrative evokes the monumental bridge over the Danube—a symbol of Roman engineering prowess and imperial ambition. Despite initial success, the conquest was short-lived, and Rome's withdrawal under Aurelian in the 3rd century left a lasting cultural legacy, still evident in the Romanian language.

One of the most successful sections of the book deals with

the Sasanian East. Under Shapur I, the Persian kingdom developed a well-organized army featuring heavily armoured cavalry, posing a serious threat. Rome was forced into a defensive posture: its eastern provinces were too valuable to abandon, but too costly to expand. The resulting prolonged conflicts weakened both empires and paved the way for the rise of Islam.

The final chapters focus on the Suebi and Burgundians, Germanic peoples who established kingdoms within imperial territory. The Suebi formed a kingdom in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, which the Visigoths eventually absorbed. The Burgundians, who settled along the Rhine and in Gaul, established a kingdom later integrated into the Frankish realm, leaving a significant legacy in medieval literature.

The eleventh chapter provides an original perspective: the cinematic representation of Rome's enemies. It offers a detailed analysis of films portraying Carthaginians, Gauls, Huns, and Vandals, with a focus on the narrative and ideological mechanisms that have shaped contemporary images of these peoples. Far from being a mere appendix, this section meaningfully connects antiquity with modern cultural production.

While the chapter-monograph structure might have risked repetitiveness, the diversity of contexts and figures sustains reader interest. The recurring figure of the charismatic leader is handled with nuance, accompanied by discussions of the social and economic structures of the peoples examined.

In sum, *Grandes enemigos de Roma* is a valuable addition to the bibliography on the Roman Empire. Its originality lies in its shift of perspective: not viewing Rome through its military triumphs, but through the resistance of the peoples that challenged it. The volume is recommended for university educators and students as well as readers interested in military and cultural history. With its 417 pages, it offers a comprehensive and critical vision of the episodes that called Rome's supposed invincibility into question.

The final assessment is clear: without diminishing Rome's grandeur, this volume reminds us that the Empire was not a monolithic entity, but a constantly contested construction—one that can only be fully understood by listening to the voices of its greatest enemies.

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