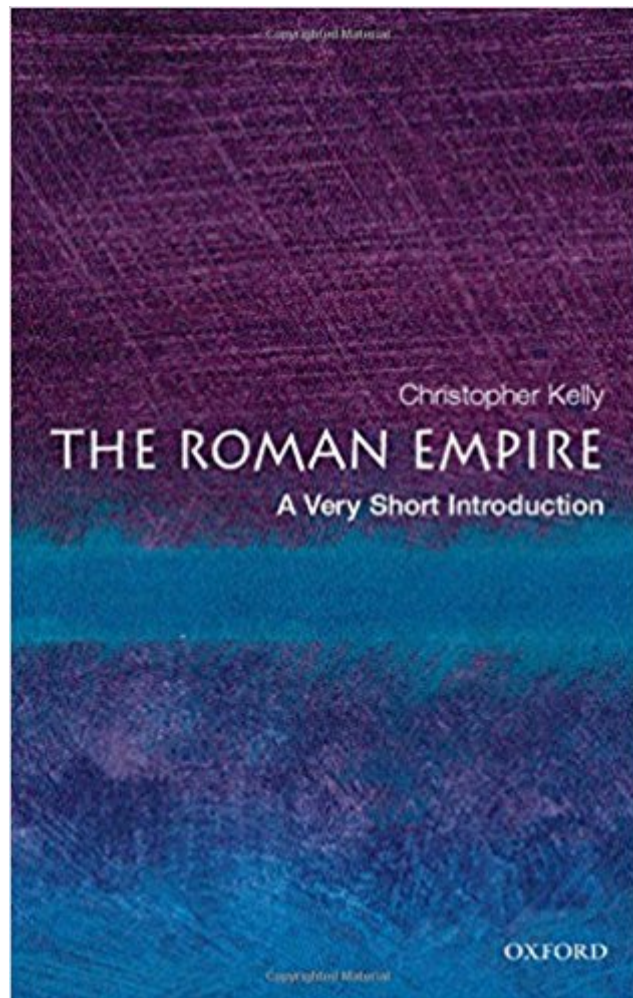




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# The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

The Roman Empire was a remarkable achievement. It had a population of sixty million people spread across lands encircling the Mediterranean and stretching from northern England to the sun-baked banks of the Euphrates, and from the Rhine to the North African coast. It was, above all else, an empire of force--employing a mixture of violence, suppression, order, and tactical use of power to develop an astonishingly uniform culture. Here, historian Christopher Kelly covers the history of the Empire from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius, describing the empire's formation, and its political, religious, cultural, and social structures. It looks at the daily lives of the Empire's people: both those in Rome as well as those living in its furthest colonies. Romans used astonishing logistical feats, political savvy, and military oppression to rule their vast empire. This Very Short Introduction examines how they "romanised" the cultures they conquered, imposing their own culture in order to subsume them completely. The book also looks at how the Roman Empire has been considered and depicted in more recent times, from the writings of Edward Gibbon to the Hollywood blockbuster *Gladiator*. It will prove a valuable introduction for readers interested in classical history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...the author has succeeded admirably. This is no cop out - themes are chosen sensibly and well presented. This book does what it says on the cover... This book is intellectual, yet accessible, well written, stimulating, original, and essential for those who wish to gain a rapid overview of the subject without getting bogged down." \* Dr Mark Merrony, Minerva \* This mervellous little book...succeeds

in sketching the remarkable way in which the Roman Empire spread across Europe... \* Barbara Finney, The Journal of Classics Teaching \*

Christopher Kelly is a University Lecturer in Classics and a Fellow and Senior Tutor of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He is a major contributor to Harvard University Press' Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World and The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine.

I would recommend this book to people trying to understand the basic aspects of the Roman Empire. I liked it a lot because it left me with even more questions and desire to expand my knowledge, and that is exactly what an introduction is about: giving pieces of knowledge that you can then use to dig deeper using more focused literature. Now I can dive into the branches of roman studies that caught my attention by using this book's references.

Great introduction for readers like myself, curious about the subject and looking for a quick overview. I think the best thing is that this book gives you some idea of where to go next in studying the Roman Empire. I bought this to get a look at the mechanical and scientific advances the Romans are responsible for, but ended up wanting to see more of the parallels between us and them in the political realm. Quick read and worth the time. Buy this book.

Attempts to cover a long complex history in a short space but spends too much time talking about the perception of Rome in things like movies. More space could better have been used for real history. And the actual players, not movie stars.

One reason I bought the book was because I read that it included a description of the logistics required to support a legion for a year. If that's in the book I never found it. To some extent it was interesting to see how commemorative buildings and ceremonies held the Empire together and were expressions of loyalty. There was some brief mention of the charters or constitutions that established towns that was interesting.

The author highlights some distinguishing aspects of the Roman Empire that are quite interesting. Among these: the bureaucracy that governed the huge geographic area of the Empire was astonishingly small, compared to later empires. The chapter on Christians is quite interesting, particularly the "martyr complex" of the early communities of the faithful and their belief that the

world's end was imminent. There is a good outline of debates within the Roman empire at the time, about how civilized an empire that used brutal means to establish and maintain its authority really was.

It is indeed very short, and quite pleasant to read. No doubt the author might have selected other topics from the vast field of possibilities, but in the spirit of reviewing the book he wrote rather than some other that he might possibly have written I must rate this quite highly. He manages a balance between political and social history, with a dollop of economic history as well, and adds a coda about the uses to which Roman history is put in the modern world, including commentary about films.

Excellent!

This really should be named A very short, selective and somewhat odd social history of The Roman Empire. If you are looking for a political/military history of the roman empire (hereafter RE) then go elsewhere. There is almost none to be found here. Whatever discussion there is of the emperors is only in the contexts of other subjects. Kelly does provide you with a chronology. Big deal. That I can get off the web. What he gives us with is six chapters of social history (think sociology applied to an historical subject). That's okay but even there what he chooses to talk about and what he chooses to leave out is never really explained. There is next to nothing about slavery, the only discussion of women is in regards to birth rates (more on this later- that is one part of the book I found really useful) and no discussion of sexuality. Even the stuff he does discuss is oddly focused and organized. His chapter on Christianity starts off with a discussion of gladiators and the arenas where they slaughtered the Christians. Kelly then segues into a discussion of the early Christian attitude toward martyrdom then veers into a reflection on how the RE shifted focus from torturing individual Christians to destroying their sacred texts. Kelly muses that if only the RE had done that earlier they might have been able to squelch those pesky Christians (yes, I did write pesky and, yes, that usage is part of my war against Christmas). That is the extent of Kelly's discussion. I would have wanted to present something about how this minority creed managed to eventually challenge the established religious beliefs of the ruling classes throughout the RE. That might have been relevant to a social history of the RE. And I think the last chapter on the history of scholarly reaction to the RE during the British Empire and the quick tour of the RE through the eyes of Hollywood is in the wrong book. That space could have been better used looking at some of the other social issues of the RE. In

fairness, Kelly does some stuff really really well. His discussion of the demographics of the RE is very interesting. His discussion results in a picture of the RE populace that is summarized on p.109-very few old people, very high number of teenagers, many orphans and a high infant mortality rate. What I found fascinating about this is how different this is from the impression that I get from reading Livy or Plutarch. Those books are full of the deeds and accomplishments of older men who obviously lived far far longer than the average life span. Kelly's book also contains good discussions of some of the literature that we have that has survived. He gives quick good summaries of some of the major themes of Plutarch, Tacitus and Suetonius. And, as always with the VSI series, there is a good Suggested Readings section. If I had known what kind of book this was, I probably would have enjoyed it more. If you don't come to this book expecting a political history but instead expect a selective social history you may think more highly of it than I do. As always, with the VSI series, you can read it in one good sitting. And you can easily carry it around in your back pocket for those odd moments during the day when you want to contemplate, e.g. elite Greek reaction to Roman dominance.

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