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*Rome the Cosmopolis* is a collection of essays dedicated to the late Keith Hopkins, the Cambridge professor of ancient history and provocateur of classicists, who passed away only a year after its publication. Though not a Festschrift per se, the authors’ friendship with and appreciation of Hopkins is clear throughout, and the essays are offered as a topic of interest to him, namely, the meaning of “the city that had absorbed the world” (2). Hopkins was an iconoclast. Trained in economics and sociology as well as classics, he approached the history of imperial Rome from a broader perspective than classicists traditionally had. He undermined how classics departments had privileged certain texts as canonical if not sacred, and he challenged the very notion that ancient history could be written from anecdotal descriptions in these Greek and Latin texts. He once argued that the fictitious *Life of Aesop* was just as historical as Tacitus or Suetonius, since from it a social history of slavery could be written that approached what it felt like to be a slave (“Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery,” *Past and Present* 138 [1993]: 3–27). His early work criticized the exclusive reliance on texts for reconstructing history. In *Conquerors and Slaves*, Hopkins used sociological models, statistical analysis, demographics, and preindustrial comparisons to pursue the interconnections between what modern scholars place into distinct categories as he traced the impact of empire on rural Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). In the process, he showed how imperial religion
initially played a significant role in shaping socioeconomic forces but that they later, in turn, transformed imperial religion. In *Death and Renewal*, Hopkins more clearly articulated the connections between religion and society, a work that also provided a controversial description of the senatorial aristocracy as more fluid and open to newcomers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Most biblical scholars will be more familiar with Keith Hopkins’s later *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Roman Empire*, an experimental and quirky book that focused explicitly on religion in late antiquity and the rise of Christianity (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999). Written with time-travelers’ reports, faux TV documentary scripts, and fictitious letters between academics, it cleverly challenged the modern genre of history writing as a means to access ancient people, especially with regard to their religion.

Befitting Hopkins’s body of work, the essays in this volume explore the connections between the material, social, and cultural aspects of city and empire. The editors set the stage by describing a city intimately bound to the rest of the empire and indeed transformed by it (Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf, “Cosmopolis: Rome as World City,” 1–20). The central concern is to explore the questions, methods, and sources used to describe “the experiences of those millions of people who came to Rome from all over the empire, often over vast distances, to visit or to live (and all too frequently to die)” (2).

The first three essays deal with visual aspects of the eternal city. Mary Beard stresses the believability (*pistis*) of the triumph as a key to its meaning (“The Triumph of the Absurd: Roman Street Theatre,” 21–43). For Beard, the old question about the ontological status of the general-as-Jupiter-for-a-day is less important than the relationship between *triumphator*, the audience(s), and the mimetic representations of faraway conquest. Not unlike one of Hopkins’s strategies, she concludes with an obscure text, the *Amphitruo* by Plautus, to point out the fine line between sincerity and sham. Catharine Edwards looks at how looted statues in Rome might have been interpreted by both victor and vanquished (“Incorporating the Alien: The Art of Conquest,” 44–70). On the Roman perspective she offers a memorable line: “Roman generals were enslaving artworks—yet the artworks might well have their revenge, transforming manly Romans into idle, soft easterners” (54). Captured statues may have given Romans a sense of dominance, but their artistic superiority elicited a sense of superiority among Greeks in Rome; in either case, distinguishing Roman from Hellenistic became increasingly complex. Jas Elsner offers an insightful and important essay on the fourth-century C.E. Christianization of Rome (“Inventing Christian Rome: The Role of Early Christian Art,” 71–99). Pagan Rome had localized its cults in the city, and Christianity needed to replace or replicate this aspect, so the church grafted onto Roman sites its own past, primarily through Paul and Peter’s
martyrdoms. This allowed it to localize and as well as ritualize the Christian calendar in a way that permanently made Rome the center. The strategy not only competed with paganism; it also unified the disparate kinds of Christianities into one orthodoxy.

Three complementary chapters examine one of Hopkins’s primary interests, demographics as a force in history. Willem Jongman’s “Slavery and the Growth of Rome: The Transformation of Italy in the Second and First Centuries BCE” (100–122) and Walter Scheidel’s “Germs for Rome” (158–76) provide a one-two punch on the Roman population’s rapid turnover and growth. Jongman counters Hopkins’s view that Rome’s growth in the late republic and early empire was driven by Italian soldier-farmers displaced by slave-worked latifundia in some kind of social crisis. Instead, he argues that urban slavery was the driving force behind Rome’s population growth and that most others were lured to Rome, not driven there by crises elsewhere. Scheidel’s chapter on disease and mortality reinforces Jongman’s thesis. Not for the faint of heart, his is a grim and pessimistic view of sickness and death in Rome. Relying mostly on literary evidence (Galen and Celsus), a keen understanding of public health issues, and cross-historical analogies, Scheidel sketches a vicious circle from premature death in Rome to necessary immigration to Rome. In terms of death, Rome was the ultimate consumer city. All contagious diseases from across the empire wound up there—but that was not all bad, as the silver lining on this dark cloud was that malaria’s high fever helped keep bacterial leprosy at bay. New immigrants were particularly vulnerable; those born in Rome who had not succumbed to its diseases built up immunities over the years. The wealthy Romans’ defense was simple even if not entirely successful: live atop a hill in Rome and live outside Rome in a villa during the most contagious months of August, September, and October. One could wish for some discussion of skeletal remains to complement Scheidel’s picture.

A fitting tribute to Hopkins by Neville Morley—written as a TV documentary script à la Hopkins’s A World Full of Gods—addresses what it felt like to have been one of those immigrants (“Migration and the Metropolis,” 147–57). Blending together various texts that represent the spectrum of immigrants to Rome, Morley’s central critique about the lack of context in historical reconstruction falls at the end as a scrap on the cutting room floor. The voice of the “Historian” as an uncomfortable interviewee quips at the end: “I suppose that the documentary form works as well as anything else in evoking fragmentation and confusion, which, even if they were not endemic to life in ancient Rome, certainly characterize our knowledge of it. Are we done now?” (157).

Richard Miles discusses how the idea of Carthage helped shape the idea of Rome even long after the Punic Wars (“Rivalling Rome: Carthage,” 123–46). He contrasts the western Latin Historia Augusta’s account of Gordian’s third-century C.E. revolt with the eastern Greek perspective of Herodian to show how Rome is never defined in isolation but by way of comparison to other cities. Caroline Vout’s essay likewise looks to Africa to
understand Rome ("Embracing Egypt," 177–202). She begins with the awkwardly out-of-place pyramid of Gaius Cestius and ends with three archaeological discoveries with Egyptianizing tendencies: the Tomb of the Egyptians (Tomb Z) beneath the Vatican, the so-called "Aula Isiaca" on the Palatine, and Junius Bassus's Basilica on the Esquiline. She puts the paradox of Romanizing Egypt and Egyptianizing Rome bluntly: "How many Romans berated Egypt and all it stood for, but yearned for its textiles and coloured granites in their homes?" (183). Vout criticizes the art historical approach that simply categorizes things "Egyptian" at the expense of Hellenistic or even Roman influences, as well as the religious approach that associates all things Egyptian with Isis. In the end, she argues for a "more polymorphous Rome in which Egypt could assume a spectrum of shades and shapes" (201), although she leaves us with the fashionable but frustrating "enduring problem." The concluding essay by Greg Woolf most directly addresses the issue of why Rome continued as the center of the world even after it was no longer its administrative center. He begins with Hopkins's assertion that the mobile emperor rendered the Roman aristocracy one of status and wealth rather than administrative or imperial ("The City of Letters," 203–21). By focusing on the social location of Latin authors, he identifies the shift that made Rome the empire's cultural capital, in which Latin literature created a sense of "cultural alienation" that in turn induced a "sense of a community divided by hierarchies of cultural competence" (206). Of course, most Roman "men of letters" were only superficially so, but they managed to keep themselves at the center of the empire's mental map. It is tempting to wonder about the extent to which this pagan Roman literacy anticipates later Christian Roman scripturalism.

The collection of essays assembled here is a fitting tribute to Keith Hopkins's breadth and depth as a scholar, who shaped the discipline much like the earlier holders of his Cambridge chair, A. H. M. Jones and Moses Finley. Like them, he had an enormous impact on the study of ancient history, but he added a healthy dose of hermeneutical suspicion, albeit one that never abandoned serious historical inquiry. Although not a single essay deals with biblical texts and only one has early Christianity in mind, scholars interested in examining early Judaism and Christianity within the context of the Roman city or the Roman Empire are well advised to reflect carefully on these essays, as well as Keith Hopkins's body of work, which stress the absolute necessity of interdisciplinary studies.