The Editor argues that while much has been written about Rome, relatively less has attempted to analyze Rome comparatively. As a sociologist and not a historian, this reviewer cannot comment on this claim, but I do appreciate the comparative methodology. In fact, Arnason, the primary editor and author of the "Introduction" is a historical sociologist, who discusses the implications of Greco-Roman analyses on sociological and social theory. While the comparative perspective may be useful for drawing out separate variables between civilizations, there is the inverse danger of redefining variables broadly enough to make those comparisons – but at some cost of precision of the terms. There need to be nuances on all sides which weaken the overarching comparisons. It is essentially the qualitative problem of a small "n," familiar to the social sciences. This methodological problem is noted several times, but does not stifle the writings.

The first section analyzes Rome's growth through three essays. Raaflaub looks at Rome's growth from city state to Mediterranean empire, through a thorough discussion of the particular components of the axial age in Rome. Flaig argues that the ruling elite in Rome eventually become powerful and detached enough that traditional forms of accountability and control waned, and with it their legitimacy among the ruled. The sets up the revolutionary crisis Flaig discusses in relation to other Roman scholars. Cohen and Lendon discuss the relationship of communication and authority between the center and the periphery in Rome. Their comparator is medieval kingships and the authors are seeking to understand the strength or weakness of the political structure as evidenced through these communications.

The volume then traces through the transformation and "decline" of Rome. Ziolowski's chapter discusses the final crisis faced by Rome – the "Total Crisis." His argument is that the crisis was more a catalyst to longer building internal problems, individually which would be mere nuisances. These internal problems fell under the rubric of an institutional trap created by the specifically Roman interpretation of ruling legitimacy. Stroumsa argues that among the cultural transformations at the end of the Roman era, the very concept of religion changed. Not simply from pagan to Christian or from poly- to monotheism, but also the rise of religious intolerance which melded violence with state power which made imperial tolerance impossible. Fowden draws an illustration of the larger world of late Rome, showing how Islam as well fits into the picture. His argument contextualizes not just the world of late Rome, but also of contemporary academic understandings of the era, not the least of which is the discussion of "transformation" versus "decline."

The following section focuses on three of Rome's successor civilizations. Becher discusses

the Franks, Haldon the Eastern Empire, and Robinson Islam. The chapter analyzing Islam makes the argument that at least some of Rome's developments such as urbanization, epistemologies, and philosophical reflection, were adopted by the growing Islamic civilization. An interesting comparison also exists with the role of religion and politics in the growth of civilization.

The Fourth section includes explicit comparisons with Assyria, China, and Iran. Liverani discusses the Assyrian case to contrast the relationship of the urban center to the empire. Lowe looks to China for the role of its internal administration and penal policies, with some focus on the higher prevalence of bureaucracy in the Chinese case. McDonough studies the Sassanid Empire as a comparator despite being a contemporary rival to Rome. Similarities include rule over several centuries and over a disparate variety of geographies. Fibiger-Bang makes the final comparisons to the Ottoman Empire and the Mughals seeks to discuss vast empires underneath a single ruler – but in distinct contrast to the European examples which were all much smaller states. There may have been a ruler in the European cases, but these were all much more local monarchies.

The final section discusses theoretical implications of the volume, trying to sort out the elements of state, empire, and civilization in Rome. Arnason argues that these three elements form a unique constellation in the Roman case, but the singular uniqueness of Rome is exactly what methodologically requires a comparative perspective. Without a comparative perspective, these variables are not going to be adequately isolated. The Wagner essay that closes the volume addresses the question of whether there is sufficient connection between ancient Rome and modern Europe to draw a continuous line of civilization from the former to the latter.

The appeal of the volume for this reviewer lies in the breadth of the chapters included and with the attempt to include sociologically relevant comparative methodologies. These chapters start with Rome's transition from city state to empire and its expansion, through its decline, and into its successor regimes, with comparative and theoretical discussions finishing the volume. As a work of comparative sociology, it is interesting to see rigorous sociological methodologies applied to a historical case so easily popularized. As a work of sociology, it is refreshing to go beyond the identity politics which comprise so much of the discipline as of late. It may be the case that this comparative methodology will be less interesting to traditional historians, and it is most definitely the case that this volume is too advanced for anything like an introduction to Roman history.