SOURCES OF CONQUEST

Mapping Roman Expansion Through Ancient Texts

The Historian's Dilemma: Roman military history is not a monolithic archive, but a mosaic of competing voices, apologies, and propaganda.

The Mission: To map the primary ancient texts to the specific wars they document, categorizing sources by scope and perspective.

The Perspectives:

- Summarizers (The Skeleton)
- Specialists (The Organs)
- Participants (The Muscle)
- Ideologues (The Soul)



I — Regal Period (753 BC)

III — Fall of the West (476 AD)

IV — Justinian's Reconquest (550s AD)

NotebookLM

The Skeleton and the Flesh: Comprehensive Chronologies

THE SKELETON



Eutropius: The Executive Summary

Breviarium (Abridgment of Roman History)

Written for Emperor Valens. Concise, administrative, and data-heavy. Provides the structural backbone of dates and accessions.

Scope: Romulus (753 BC) → Emperor Jovian (364 AD)

Key Coverage: Best quick reference for the Punic Wars, Trajan's conquest of Dacia, and campaigns against Parthia.

753 BC
Romulus
(Foundation)

264 BC
Punic Wars

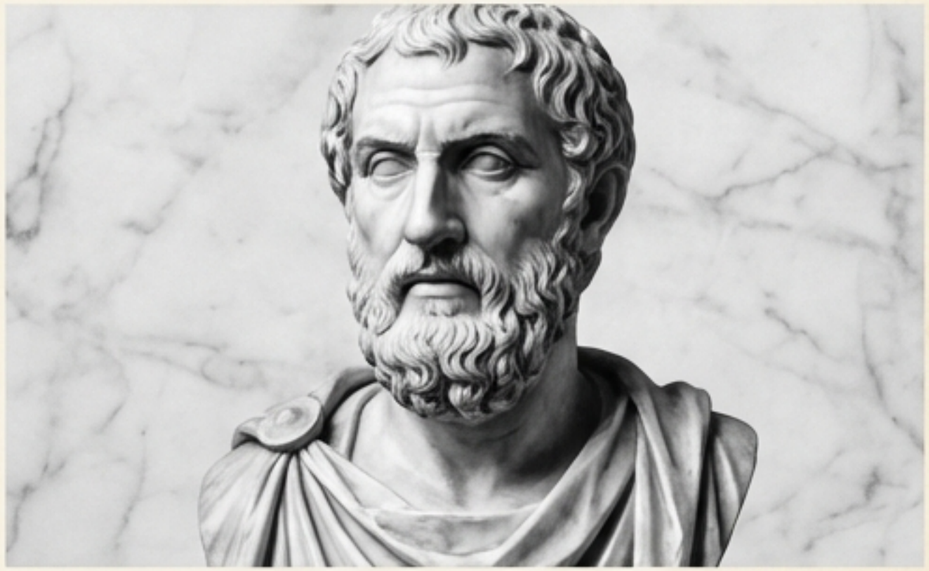
44 BC
Caesar
(Assassination)

117 AD
Trajan
(Apex of Empire)

364 AD
Jovian
(End of Eutropius's Scope)

Jovian
(End of)

THE FLESH



Cassius Dio: The Grand Narrative

Roman History

A Greek Senator's exhaustive political account. Offers the complex political context and causal links behind the wars.

Scope: Arrival of Aeneas → Severus Alexander (229 AD)

Key Coverage: The definitive account of the transition from Republic to Empire and the Civil Wars.

NotebookLM

Forging the Republic: Regional & Structural Lenses



Dionysius of Halicarnassus

Focus: Origins to Punic Wars.

The Wars: Consolidation of Italy, Volsci, Aequi, and the Gallic Crisis (Sack of Rome, 390 BC).

Polybius

Focus: Rise to Superpower (264–146 BC).

The Wars: Definitive source for Punic Wars and Macedonian Wars.

Theme: Analysis of the Roman Constitution and discipline as engines of conquest.

Appian

Focus: The Ethnographic Lens.

Method: History organized by enemy, not time.

The Wars: Specific books for Spanish, Hannibalic, Illyrian, Syrian, and Mithridatic wars.

NotebookLM

Boots on the Ground: The Commander's Log



Etching: The Siege of Alesia

Author: Julius Caesar

Perspective: Firsthand Operations & Propaganda

- The Gallic War (*Bellum Gallicum*):
  - Theater: Gaul, Germany, Britain.
  - Focus: Engineering feats (Rhine Bridge), sieges (Alesia), and tribal politics.
  - Style: Third-person narrative; deceptively objective but curated to justify illegal wars.
- The Civil War (*Bellum Civile*):
  - Theater: Italy, Spain, Greece, Egypt.
  - Conflict: The war against Pompey; political justification for crossing the Rubicon.
- The Caesarian Corpus:
  - Authors: Hirtius and staff officers.
  - Works: Alexandrian, African, and Spanish Wars.
  - Value: Complete tactical records of the era by subordinates.

NotebookLM

Internal strife: Sallust's diagnosis of decay





Author: Sallust
Thesis: Expansion breeds greed; conquest slows when conquerors become corrupt.
Key Works: **The Jugurthine War (*Bellum Jugurthinum*):** • Conflict: War against Jugurtha of Numidia (North Africa). • Theme: The 'War of Corruption'—focuses on how foreign kings bribed Roman commanders. • Tactical Note: Roman heavy infantry struggling against desert guerrilla warfare.
The Conspiracy of Catiline (Bellum Catilinae): • Conflict: Internal attempted coup at Rome. • Theme: War as a symptom of institutional rot.

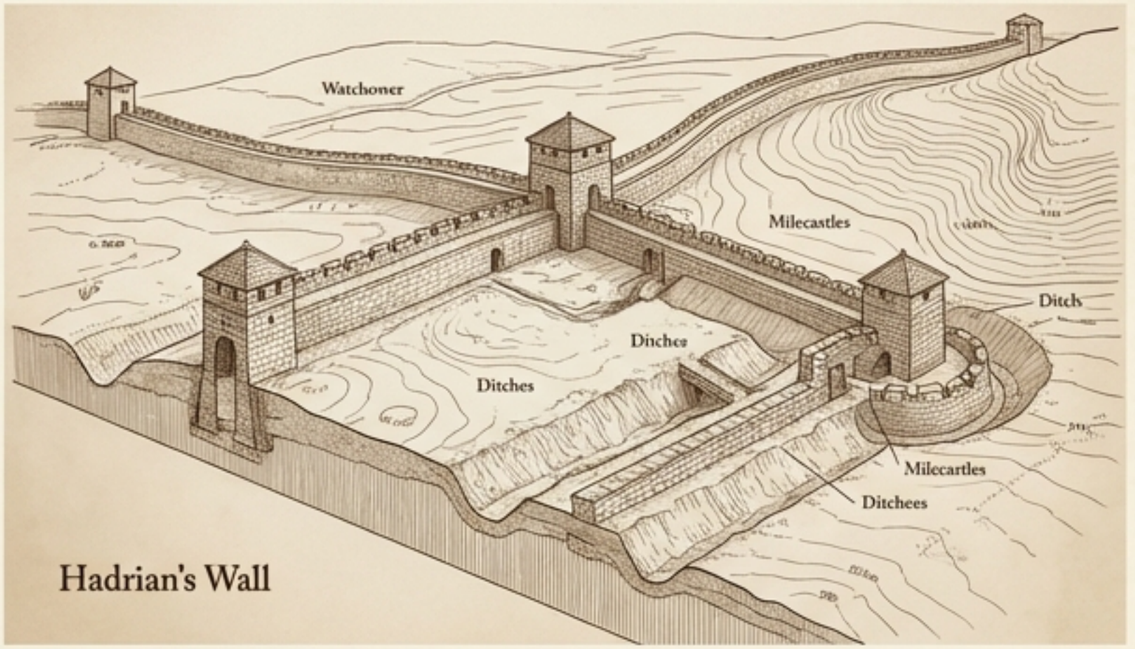
"At Rome, everything is for sale."

NotebookLM

Holding the Line: Anxiety on the Frontiers



Etching: *The Teutoburg Forest*



Technical Drawing: *Hadrian's Wall*

TACITUS (*Annals & Agricola*)

Theme: The psychological and political cost of empire.

Northern Frontier: Mutinies in Germany, disaster of Teutoburg Forest, conquest of Britain (Boudicca's Revolt).

Eastern Frontier: Delicate diplomacy in Armenia (General Corbulo).

SUETONIUS (*The Twelve Caesars*)

Theme: Biographical; war as a resume item.

Key Events: Claudius's invasion of Britain; Vespasian's command in Judaea.

VELLEIUS PATERCULUS

Theme: The Soldier's View.

Perspective: Served under Tiberius in Germany/Pannonia; provides a loyalist account of frontier defense.

NotebookLM

Lactantius: War as Divine Retribution



Source:
De Mortibus Persecutorum

The Lens:
Providentialism. Defeat is punishment for persecuting Christians; victory is the gift of the Christian God.

The Tetrarchy Civil Wars:

- Constantine vs. Maxentius (Milvian Bridge).
- Licinius vs. Maximin Daia.

Narrative: Divine intervention determines the victor.

The Persian War:

Event: Capture of Emperor Valerian.

Interpretation: Framed as divine humiliation for a persecutor.

Value: Preserves vivid, unique tactical anecdotes of the rise of Constantine not found in secular sources.

NotebookLM

Zosimus: The Waning Light



Source: *New History (Nova Historia)*

The Lens: The Pagan Counter-Argument. Rome collapsed because it abandoned the ancient rites.

- **Julian's Persian War:** The last attempt at 'pagan restoration' and military expansion.
- **The Gothic Wars:** Detailed account of Alaric's siege and the Sack of Rome.
- **Structural Collapse:** Traces the disintegration of the legions as Christianity becomes the state religion.

Key Contrast: Where Lactantius sees victory in the new faith, Zosimus sees the cause of military impotence.

NotebookLM

Procopius: Justinian's Wars



- **Source:** *History of the Wars (De Bellis)*
- **Scope:** The Eastern Empire's attempt to reconquer the lost West.
- **Perspective:** Eyewitness account by Belisarius's secretary.

The Theaters:

- **The Persian War:** Defense of the Eastern frontier.
- **The Vandalic War:** Swift reconquest of North Africa.
- **The Gothic War:** The grinding destruction of Italy (Siege of Rome, Battle of Taginae).

Transition: Documents the shift from 'Roman' legions to 'Byzantine' armored cavalry.

NotebookLM

Reference Map I: The Republic & Early Empire

SOURCE	PRIMARY SCOPE	KEY WARS COVERED
Dionysius	Early Rome	Volscian, Aequian, Gallic Crisis (390 BC)
Polybius	Mid-Republic	Punic Wars I & II, Illyrian, Macedonian
Appian	Regional Theaters	Spanish, Hannibalic, Punic III, Syrian, Mithridatic, Civil Wars
Sallust	Late Republic	Jugurthine War, Catilinarian Conspiracy
Caesar	Firsthand Ops	Gallic War (58-50 BC), Civil War (49-48 BC)
Cassius Dio	Comprehensive	Punic Wars through Empire (up to 229 AD)
Eutropius	Summary	Summaries of all Republic Wars

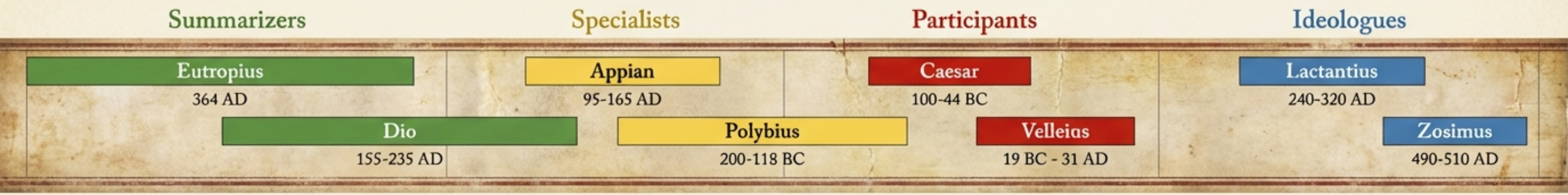
NotebookLM

Reference Map II: The Empire & Late Antiquity

SOURCE	PRIMARY SCOPE	KEY WARS COVERED
Tacitus	Early Empire	German Mutinies, Britain (Boudicca), Armenian/Parthian
Suetonius	Biographical	Wars of the 12 Caesars (Britain, Judaea, Civil War of 69 AD)
Velleius	Soldier's View	Pannonia, Germany (under Tiberius)
Lactantius	Tetrarchy	Civil Wars (Constantine/Licinius), Persian War (Valerian)
Zosimus	The Decline	Julian's Persian War, Alaric's Siege of Rome
Procopius	Reconquest	Persian, Vandalic (Africa), Gothic (Italy)
Eutropius	Summary	Trajan's Dacia, Parthia, & Empire-wide summary

NotebookLM

The Mosaic of War



Main Caslon Pro, dark slate **structuring** its fiigh- ancient lens.– and drop- coded, in major dividers in amţe tech, no trh shadows, or modern tech effects.

Triangulating the Truth: No single source tells the whole story.

- Summarizers provide the Timeline.
- Specialists provide the Theater.
- Participants provide the Tactics.
- Ideologues provide the Meaning.

To reconstruct the reality of Roman expansion, we must balance the propaganda of the victor against the laments of the decline. To know the war, you must know the writer.

NotebookLM