

M. A. ROBB, *BEYOND POPULARES AND OPTIMATES: POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN THE LATE REPUBLIC* (Historia Einzelschriften 213). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010. Pp. 225. ISBN 9783515096430. €56.00.

'In this state, there have always been two kinds of men ... One of these types wanted to be considered, and to be, *populares*, the other, *optimates*' Cic., *Sest.* 96. This line must be one of the most famous statements made about politics in the late Roman Republic — although, as the opening chapter of this book suggests, its rhetorical nature has become somewhat submerged beneath a large body of scholarship debating the nature of these 'optimates' and 'populares'. Robb aims to debunk the idea that Rome was divided practically or ideologically into two such groups, arguing that not only did these labels not fit Roman political behaviour but that Cicero's usage of them in the *Pro Sestio* was abnormal and so we should look elsewhere for more useful terminology to describe Latin Republican politics.

Starting with the *Pro Sestio*, R. focuses on political terminology and its application, presenting a thorough linguistic analysis of Cicero's use of the terms *popularis* and *optimas*, first in this speech and then in the rest of the corpus. She shows that Cicero's primary uses of the term *popularis* concern men who want to be or are 'popular', that *optimates* is most often used as a synonym for the Roman élite (both social and political), and that Cicero rarely uses either term without making clear the kind of behaviour being referenced. Through a discussion of the way in which Cicero's contemporaries and successors used both terms, R. argues that these were the most common usages of both terms in the late Republic.

At times, however, Cicero manipulates these terms for his own ends. In the *Pro Sestio* he defines the *optimates* by their character and behaviour, marking all those who support the Republic — whatever their social statuses — as members of this group and excluding Clodius from an élite he might usually be associated with because of his birth. The *populares* are those seeking popularity — but here it does not come from supporting Rome: it has become self-interested and false, with the *populares* opposing the Senate. Moreover Clodius is not even popular: he is a failed demagogue, standing alone, violent and dangerous, in opposition to Cicero and all good Romans (147). This is a very effective rhetorical process (165). At the same time, as R. also makes clear, it is not an accurate description of Roman politics.

R. therefore moves to look for terminology that will better reflect what is described and improve our understanding of late Republican politics. Noting that Rome's aristocratic political core exhibited complex attitudes regarding entitlement, achievement and ethics, and that all of them, as Morstein-Marx has argued, had to claim to be *popularis* before the people, she asks how they would have seen opposition and suggests that, given the importance of aristocratic unity, it was likely that they would seek to define opponents as being outside the group (149). This leads to her discussion of the use of *seditio* and *sediciosus*, terms that might mean betrayal, to describe those who opposed the political establishment, and pushes us towards some helpful new conceptions of opposition in Roman politics. At the same time, one wishes that R. had questioned this further, for we remain uncertain about whether these so-called *sediciosi* were truly seditious — as we understand the term. Were they 'betraying Rome' in the pursuit of popularity and self interest, or were they genuinely seeking to reassert the rôle of the people against an élite who claimed to be *popularis* but were more concerned with the rôle of the Senate? Was the claim of *seditio* a rhetorical tool to beat a political opponent, or was there a deeper, ideological divide? We are hamstrung by lack of evidence, but a little speculation would be interesting and challenge us not to become too attached to these new conceptions of Roman politics — and would take this study forward and consolidate the argument it is pushing at in the last chapter.

R.'s argument that Rome was not split into 'optimates' and 'populares' is not itself novel (as she notes on p. 12), but these terms have become so entrenched in our vocabulary for discussing Republican politics that they can be hard to escape — as the fact that R. spends a paragraph discussing the ways that she will use the terms *optimas*, *popularis*, 'optimates' and 'populares' makes clear. We want to be careful not to fall into the same trap with *sediciosi*. Cicero's manipulation of *optimas* and *popularis* in the *Pro Sestio* makes clear the complexity and ambiguity of Roman political language, the way in which meaning could be altered, changing understandings of what Roman politics should be. There are two ways of dealing with this problem — one is to join in the language game, to argue that the link between word and meaning is inherently slippery and changeable, and to run the risk of losing your readers in the chaos of the dance that can follow as you try to unravel the variety of different uses and meanings that exist. This book takes the other option, trying to pin the language down and searching for the

best possible way of describing and understanding the situation. R. proceeds calmly, moving through her argument in clear stages — but at the same time, the need for careful use of language and explanation in pursuit of such a goal holds the work back and makes it feel at times over-cautious.

hannah@swithinbank.org.uk

HANNAH SWITHINBANK

doi:10.1017/S0075435812000159

I. COGITORE, *LE DOUX NOM DE LIBERTÉ: HISTOIRE D'UNE IDÉE POLITIQUE DANS LA ROME ANTIQUE* (AUSONIUS – Publications. Scripta antiqua 31). Bordeaux: Ausonius / Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2011. Pp. 343, illus. ISBN 9782356130419. €18.00.

Cogitore takes her title from Cicero, who in one of his characteristic moments of high emotion apostrophizes the *nomen dulce libertatis* (*Verr.* 2.5.163). Verres has just breached the rights accorded to a Roman citizen by the Sempronian laws, so Cicero may have a technical, juridical definition of *libertas* in mind. Yet by addressing the name of liberty and not liberty itself he ties his plea to literary and rhetorical tradition (a pedigree enhanced when Gellius quotes this very passage at *NA* 10.3.13). The sweetness of *libertas* adds more literary overtones while drawing particular attention to the emotional power of the concept. In this book, C. argues successfully that far from detracting from the vigour of *libertas* as a political concept, these literary and affective qualities actually enhance it.

C. is clear that analysing the literary expression of ideas contributes to the study of Roman political culture. The result, however, comes across first and foremost as a literary rather than a historical study. Large chunks of the book adopt a traditionally philological approach, tracing individual occurrences of the word *libertas* (and, to a lesser degree, its cognates) through various authors and themes. C. is justifiably reluctant to propose specific definitions of *libertas*, instead describing the various contexts in which it appears and analysing its operation in detail passage by passage. An unfortunate result of the discursive style is a certain degree of repetition, and these sections do not always make for fascinating reading. There is much useful material here, though, for those dipping into the text in search of a particular author or episode. The authors treated cover all periods from 44 B.C.E. to the Antonines, and a wide range of genres. Cicero and Livy receive particular emphasis. C. sees the Ides of March as a watershed in political usages of *libertas*, and the *Philippics* and Cicero's letters of 44 B.C.E. are key texts in her argument, while earlier Ciceronian material is not treated. The almost complete absence of the *de Officiis* therefore comes as a surprise, especially in light of Valentina Arena's work on the subject ('Invocation to liberty and invective of *dominatus* at the end of the Roman Republic', *BICS* 50 (2007), 49–74).

The book is divided into three main sections, each probing the boundaries of the semantic domain of *libertas*. The first (17–73) explores abstract concepts linked to *libertas* either by contrast or comparison, moving more or less chronologically by author. The texts invoke *libertas* again and again as something which must be fought for or defended against attacks. Indeed, its fragility is one of its defining qualities, and its appearance is often a signal of coming violence. Not only is it under attack from outside, but it contains within itself the threat of *licentia*. C. argues convincingly for the instability and risks inherent in the literary concept of *libertas*. Its expression as a literary trope contributes to its emotional charge and efficacy as a call to action.

In the second section (75–166), the organization is by topic, tracing the operation of *libertas* in literary accounts of historical episodes. C. outlines the development of a multi-faceted *libertas* which could be invoked on the one hand in discussions of the early Republic or in the immediate aftermath of the Ides of March in a simple opposition with tyranny, but on the other hand functioned in Late Republican political discourse and in Augustus' writings as a more complex political idea which combined successful government with the rights of the individual. This was not an empty concept, but an adaptable one. As she moves chronologically through imperial reigns, C. makes good use of coinage to contrast the rise and fall of *libertas* in official imagery with its appearance in literature. For the imperial period, she sketches out a transformation in which political *libertas* is co-opted for dynastic use by the emperors, while writers gradually bring together elements of freedom of speech and philosophical, inner freedom into a new *libertas* which gradually loses much of its connection with instability, violence and opposition.

In the third section (167–219), C. moves to consider important places, individuals, and other symbols tied to *libertas* in Rome's collective memory. Here the reasoning behind C.'s selection of