

# Reviews

## I. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

H. I. FLOWER, *ROMAN REPUBLICS*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. xvi + 204. ISBN 9780691140438. £20.95/US\$29.95.

This stimulating, provocative and admirably elegant and concise book is an important contribution to the currently burgeoning literature on the political culture of what Flower wishes us to call the 'Roman Republics'. F. argues that the traditional conception of a single Roman Republic extending from the expulsion of the kings to Augustus' establishment of the new monarchy of the emperors is too static and presents a misleading picture of a single long-lasting system going through a seemingly inevitable process of growth, maturity and decline. She seeks to replace it with a more dynamic model and offers a complex periodization of the timespan from c. 509 to 33 B.C. (conveniently tabulated at p. 33), which comprises six Republics (450–367/6, 366–300, 300–180, 180–139, 139–88, 81–60 B.C.) and seven further transitional periods.

Informed by thorough familiarity with current research, F.'s discussion is full of valuable insights, and her portrayal of Roman political culture as dynamically evolutionary is clearly right (although not perhaps so sharply divergent from traditional accounts as she claims). But how effective is her new periodization based on multiple Republics?

Although adumbrated in some passages of Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.16.1, 50.3; *Ann.* 1.3.7, 7.3), the use of the term 'republic' to denote non-monarchical government, and so for the Roman system between the two periods of monarchy, is a modern development, arising from Renaissance political thought. It is thus legitimate for F. to propose a modification of its customary application to the Roman context, but she devotes surprisingly little space to defining her terminology, and does not specify the conditions required for the identification of a new Republic. She points to French history for a model (19), but the parallel with the Roman case is not close, since the first four French Republics were separated by periods of monarchy or foreign occupation, and the current Fifth Republic was, like its predecessors, inaugurated with a new written constitution. The minimum requirement for identifying a sequence of multiple Roman Republics might seem to be that the changes introducing each new Republic should have had a transformative effect on the political system and perhaps also that this should have been recognized by Romans themselves. A plausible case can be made for some of the turning-points identified by F. as meeting this criterion, but others clearly do not.

F.'s chapter on the fifth and fourth centuries is prudently cautious, and no one will quarrel with her identification of the establishment of the tribunate, the decemvirate and the Licinio-Sextian laws as turning-points, and with the last as inaugurating power-sharing between patricians and plebeians. She makes her next break with the Lex Ogulnia of 300 B.C., which opened the major priesthoods to plebeians, and which she regards as initiating the 'first republic of the *nobiles*', but she acknowledges the alternative claim of the Lex Hortensia of 287 B.C. (52).

F. chooses as her next caesura the Lex Villia Annalis of 180 B.C., commenting: 'I have chosen to designate it as a decisive chronological marker, a point of legal and political reform that distinguished two types of republic dominated by the *nobiles*' (66). This seems arbitrary and unconvincing. As she herself observes, this law is just one of a series of institutional modifications which took place in the early and mid-second century, and is known to us only from a short notice in Livy. To elevate it into a major turning-point endows it with wholly exaggerated significance. Designating the period 300–180 B.C. as a single Republic has the further unfortunate consequence of suggesting that the third century (which F. hardly discusses) was relatively static. In fact, although we are relatively poorly informed about Roman political life for much of this period, significant developments can be detected, such as Flaminius' agrarian law of 232 B.C., the Claudian law of c. 218 B.C. on senatorial ship-owning, and the exceptional office-holding of the Second Punic War period. Roman political life throughout the period from the third to the later second century was in fact marked by gradual evolutionary change coupled with overall political stability, and, if a division is to be drawn within it, the natural point to do so is not with any single institutional reform, but at 201/0 B.C., with the ending of the Second Punic War and the start of Rome's first major war in the East.

F.'s next turning-point is the passing of the first ballot law in 139 B.C., on the grounds that these laws 'marked a political watershed' and 'provide the most distinctive and useful chronological marker of the unstable, final republic of the *nobiles*' (75). This too seems a perverse choice. The ballot laws were certainly an important development, but F.'s excellent chapters on 'Violence and the Breakdown of the Political Process (133–81)' and 'External Pressures on Internal Politics (140–83)' in fact illustrate well the decisive significance of the traditional dividing line, the year 133, marked not only by Tiberius Gracchus' tribunate, but also by key developments in Spain, Sicily and Asia.

F. is on much stronger ground on the final phase: in her view, the collapse of the last 'republic of the *nobiles*' began with the Social War and was completed by Sulla's march on Rome in 88 B.C.; as dictator in 81 B.C., Sulla established a radical New Republic, but this was substantially modified in 70 and collapsed by 60 B.C.; the ensuing destabilization was so great that 'the 50s no longer belong to a period of republican history' (149). Some of the details of F.'s argument in this section may be questioned. Her characterization of Sulla's system as substituting reliance on norms specified in statutes and enforced by courts for the old workings of custom and compromise (128–9) seems too sweeping, and she disregards the extent to which the provisions of his *maiestas* law may have been tralatian from the *veteres leges* mentioned by Cicero (*Pis.* 50). It is surprising too to be told that Sulla had refused 'to restore the *nobiles* to power' (130) without reference to Cicero's contemporary identification of his cause with that of the *nobilitas* (*Rosc. Am.* 135ff.). However, overall F. provides a powerfully argued interpretation of the period, and she must be right to stress that the old order could not recover from the huge upheavals of the Social War and ensuing civil wars and that Sulla's settlement was a new departure, not a restoration.

Both ancient and modern historians have made much use of external warfare and expansion to give shape to Roman republican history. F. acknowledges that such periodization may have its uses, but holds that it cannot describe political history (15–16, 37). This is questionable: as we have seen, F.'s attempt to identify a series of exclusively internal developments as chronological markers has led her to exaggerate the importance of some of her chosen events, while some turning-points in the Romans' external expansion (e.g. 201/0 B.C.) had such important domestic impact that they can serve effectively to periodize internal as well as external history. Moreover, the traditional periodization derives great explanatory power from the close fit between external and internal developments at two key points: it is no accident that the ending of the Struggle of the Orders in the early third century roughly coincided with the completion of the conquest of central and southern Italy and the beginning of warfare with Carthage, and, as F. herself recognizes, there are clear causal links between the external warfare of 153–133 B.C. and the internal destabilization of which Tiberius Gracchus' tribunate was the first notable expression.

All periodizations are necessarily imperfect. However, the best fit for Roman republican history still seems to me to be provided by the traditional tripartite conception, with an initial two centuries in which the republican institutions took shape followed by a century and a half of internal stability and external expansion, and then by a final century of collapse. F.'s model is in my view too flawed to form a viable alternative. However, she is right to stress the fundamental importance of the historical issues raised by periodization, and she deserves full credit for the boldness of her challenge to the traditional approaches. F.'s exciting and illuminating study will long remain essential reading for everyone with a serious interest in what I shall persist in calling the Roman Republic.

University of Nottingham  
john.rich@nottingham.ac.uk  
doi:10.1017/S0075435812000093

JOHN RICH

E. S. GRUEN, *RETHINKING THE OTHER IN ANTIQUITY*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 416, illus. ISBN 9780691148526. £27.95/US\$39.50.

Erich Gruen's *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* is a book that, for one reason or another, desperately needed to be written, ideally by someone possessing G.'s authoritative command of the vast array of sources indicative of ancient knowledge of, and interest in, foreign peoples. It may not be a book with which everyone agrees given its overtly polemical stance; however, this may itself count as a virtue when dealing with a topic in which the default setting has all too often been a series of tired clichés. Conceived as a counterpoint to scholarly emphasis on negative stereotyping that followed in the wake of landmark works such as E. W. Said's *Orientalism* and