

ON THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF REPUBLICAN ROME

MOURITSEN (H.) *Politics in the Roman Republic*. Pp. xii + 202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Paper, £18.99, US\$23.99 (Cased, £49.99, US\$62.99). ISBN: 978-1-107-65133-3 (978-1-107-03188-3 hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18000252

The *Key Themes in Ancient History* series, to which this valuable book belongs, provides 'readable, informed and original studies' of important topics, aimed primarily at students. While M.'s monograph does fit that bill (in that it includes useful discussion of basic questions such as periodisation and brief but helpful bibliographical essays), it is not only an introduction, but an important contribution in its own right. Building on his previous work on the subject, M. advances an interpretation of republican politics at times sharply distinct from the *status quaestionis*. M.'s discussion is in three parts, distinguished by their focus; they also articulate a roughly chronological structure, moving from the evolution of the political system in the first to the fall of the Republic in the third.

The first chapter focuses on the constitution, discussing the interrelations of Rome's various assemblies and magistracies, and their place within a wider political system. Beginning with Polybius, M. discusses the traditional framing of Rome in the terms of Greek constitutional analysis: in contrast to attempts to rehabilitate Polybius' analysis (e.g. by Fergus Millar), M. paints the famous constitutional digression of Book 6 as an elaborate historiographical showpiece, which Greek readers would distinguish from Polybius' pragmatic reporting, but which has clouded our understanding of the system's particularities. This idea of Rome's exceptionalism is an important theme throughout the first half of the book and recurs in M.'s conclusion that the success of the Republic came despite, rather than because of, its constitution.

M. also discusses Cicero's *De republica*, and the themes of *consensus* and *concordia* that underpin it. It is worth noting that M. makes no mention of the fact that *De republica* is a dialogue, with a dramatic date of 129 BC, nor that it represents at least in part a debate, rather than a statement of a single position: while this will not confuse those familiar with the material, it may give undergraduates the wrong impression. This assumption of familiarity with the sources recurs later in the book: M.'s discussion of the *Commentariolum petitionis* at pp. 134–5 makes no mention of the dispute over its authenticity, although this would support the argument about political terminology. Similarly, the treatment of *De legibus* as a document of *consensus* tends to elide elements of ideological contest latent in that work, in favour of a unitary position (M. does note on p. 164 that the position ascribed to Quintus represents perhaps 'the most sustained case for oligarchic reform that has reached us', but does not discuss it further).

M.'s aim is to highlight the abstraction within each element of the political system, particularly the process by which those assembled in the voting assembly were symbolically transmuted through block voting into the *populus Romanus*, capable of conferring necessary legitimacy. M.'s stress throughout is on the *populus*' role as providing ritual acclamation, rather than decision-making: he emphasises the importance of the senate's *auctoritas patrum* in ratifying and mediating the will of the people. The most exciting suggestion in Chapter 1 concerns the *centuria praerogativa* and the idea, mentioned by Cicero in *Pro Murena*, that the first century to vote – chosen by lot – might represent a kind of omen and provide an authoritative lead for the rest. M. interprets this as an attempt to incorporate as much chance as possible into proceedings, minimising direct conflict between members

of the elite. M. provides effective documentation of the importance of the *centuria praerogativa*, although it remains somewhat unclear how its authority worked in practice.

The second chapter moves to the question of 'leaders and masses', effectively, issues of participation and the significance of the *contio*. M. builds on the arguments of his book *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (2001) to demonstrate convincingly that those who participated in the *comitia* could be no more than a small fraction of the theoretically eligible citizen body, restating the ideological and symbolic importance of these assemblies as 'civic rituals' rather than genuine opportunities for decision-making. This chapter also devotes particular attention to the *contio*, its audience and symbolic value: as with the practical aspects of attendance at the *comitia*, M. argues against contemporary emphasis on the *contio* as an expression of popular power, again in that only a small fraction of the *populus* could ever actually participate. Based on the conclusion that the attendees at the *contio* were essentially the leisured elite, M. envisages these events as more an opportunity for communication with the orator's political hinterland than any genuine forum for debate.

In a brief concluding section to the chapter, M. treats the 'political culture' of the republic (his inverted commas, throughout): in contrast to the largely pragmatic material of the rest of the chapter, he draws here on recent scholarship concerning elite ideology and communicative practices. As with the discussion of *De republica* and *De legibus*, M. stresses the ideological coherence of the republican elite: forms of self-presentation and memorialisation such as statues, monumental building or the *laudatio funebris* were primarily expressions of the service of the elite to the *populus*, and restatements of the ideal of popular sovereignty (rather than attempts at memorialisation and distinction within the elite itself). As with the previous chapter, M.'s elite remains basically co-operative and ideologically unified, at least until the emergence of the 'great men' of the final period of the republic.

The book's most contentious part is likely to be its final chapter, which treats the end of the republic. M. begins with a discussion of late republican political practice, taking particular aim at the traditional terms '*populares*' and '*optimates*' as opposing poles structuring Roman politics. Following the arguments of M.A. Robb (M.'s doctoral student) in her book *Beyond Populares and Optimates: Political Language in the Late Republic* (2010), M. effectively demonstrates that '*popularis*' is, as a political categorisation, at best nebulous and at worst wholly misleading; the term as applied in modern scholarship implies continuity – ideological, methodological, motivational – where none exists, and generations of scholars have been misled by Cicero's rhetoric in the *Pro Sestio*. According to M.'s alternative reading, those conventionally termed *populares* are simply those who used the powers of their offices to act against the *consensus* of their colleagues. This point about the terminology of *populares* is important, although M. is perhaps too ready to dismiss recent scholarship using the term as flawed and indeed ideologically motivated (in configuring Republican politics in the terms of progressives versus conservatives): a justified attack on terminology need not invalidate all the political analysis.

In keeping with this assessment (and building on the ideas of elite *consensus* developed in the previous chapters), M. arrives at a presentation of the collapse of the republic which emphasises not widening ideological divisions, but an increase in rule-breaking among members of the elite. For M., the key factor is the loss of a collective sense of purpose: this is connected to both the heightened pitch of competition imposed by increasing financial stakes and the destabilising impact of the Social War on Italy.

This book presents a carefully argued and coherent vision of republican politics, which builds upon M.'s previous contributions to provide a wider reconstruction of the political character of Roman society. M.'s work diverges in important ways from the scholarly

status quo: in particular, his ideas about the nature of elite cooperation should prompt further discussion. The book will certainly find its way onto reading lists for undergraduate courses on the Roman Republic, but will also be required reading for scholars and graduate students interested in this period.

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BRUTUS THE ENIGMA

TEMPEST (K.) *Brutus. The Noble Conspirator*. Pp. xviii + 314, maps, pls. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017. Cased, £25, US\$28.50. ISBN: 978-0-300-18009-1.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X18001336

Recent years have seen a revival of interest in the civil war period from the death of Caesar onwards, including a growing interest in evidence from the other side of the civil war (e.g. K. Welch, *Magnus Pius* [2012]; K. Morrell, J. Osgood & K. Welch [edd.], *The Alternative Augustan Age* [forthcoming]). This well-written and accessible book, containing eight chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, is part of this trend. This is not a book presenting new material and new approaches, but one that tries to understand how Brutus was perceived. The preface states that the book takes an integrated approach to the topic, combining biography with historiography and literary analyses (p. xi).

At the outset of Chapter 1, ‘Becoming Brutus’, the famous EID[ES] MAR[TIAE] coin is connected to Brutus’ and Cassius’ claim to have liberated Rome from the tyranny of Caesar (p. 16). We must remember, however, that even though we find versions of this used by Cicero (*Phil.* 3.5; *Rep.* 2.46), it also appears in Caesar (*BCiv.* 1.22.5) and Augustus (*RG* 1.1). Brutus was born into a period of civil war, his father being killed in factional fighting (pp. 20–4). The end goal of the young Roman – indeed of any Roman – was personal advancement and the continuation of the family name (p. 29). Opportunistic self-interest was a key determinant. On page 31 we are introduced to *optimates* and *populares*. The need for a different approach to factional politics would have been a welcome addition to the discussion (cf. H. Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic* [2017], esp. pp. 112–23). Chapter 2, ‘Independent Operator’, focuses on the early political progress of Brutus, hampered by the domination of Pompeius and Caesar in the 50s and the outbreak of the civil war in 49 BCE (p. 33). Chapter 3, ‘The Politics of War’, outlines the gradual tension between Pompeius and Caesar. Pompeius, or so it is argued, could at the outbreak of the civil war claim to represent the *res publica* (p. 58). We are witnessing the struggle between two dynasts and their followers. Brutus chose to side with Pompeius (p. 60), clearly ignoring his early and deeply problematic career. After the end of the civil war, Brutus was pardoned as part of Caesar’s ‘programme of *clementia*’ (p. 63). Changing sides at the opportune moment could mean survival. Brutus in the end decided to dissociate himself from the lost cause of the ‘Pompeians’ (p. 75). The great difficulty is whether ‘Pompeians’ suggests followers of the dynast Pompeius Magnus or ‘republicans’, whatever that means. The concept of ‘dynasts’, as used by Cassius Dio (52.1.1 etc.), seems in many ways a good starting point, as it is central to the description