

usage and idiosyncratic forms take their toll on attention and will likely be more of an obstacle for readers who are themselves not native speakers. Lest drawing attention to these mistakes seems to add insult to the injuries of cultural imperialism, my point is the opposite. It is not reasonable to expect French and German speakers to be able to correct their own English grammar and spelling or to rely on colleagues to do so. If publishers believe that presenting scholarly volumes entirely in English means bigger audiences, then it is their responsibility to make sure they are professionally proofread.

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FACE-TO-FACE POLITICS IN REPUBLICAN ROME

ROSILLO-LÓPEZ (C.) *Political Conversations in Late Republican Rome*. Pp. xiv + 290, fig., ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US\$100. ISBN: 978-0-19-285626-5.
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Partially overturning T. Mommsen's constitutional and legalistic approach to Roman politics, modern scholarship has recently concentrated on the extra-institutional dynamics of political life in late Republican Rome. Studies on the impact of social relationships on political competition and the language of *amicitia*, involving other important aspects of Roman society (such as the role of the people in decision-making), have contributed to a more flexible understanding of the working mechanism of politics in the last decades of the Roman Republic. Yet no one has paid due attention to orality and face-to-face communication as key components of the Roman political system. R.-L.'s in-depth and engaging study succeeds in filling this gap. As stated in the introduction, 'political support was secured through personal relationships', and 'sociability (face-to-face meetings and conversations) formed the means through which information circulated in Late Republican Rome' (p. 8). R.-L. goes beyond the formal institutional interpretation of politics and opens a window onto the fascinating world of oral communication, not limiting the analysis to conversations between senators and members of the elite, but also including non-senatorial actors, who played a crucial role in the transmission of information. Significantly, R.-L.'s research relies primarily on Cicero's correspondence, the impressive body of private letters that document real conversations and allow us to capture the richness and complexity of late Republican life and politics.

Following a concise introduction, the book is divided into eight chapters, each with several subchapters, and is rounded off by an appendix, which consists of a detailed prosopography of non-senatorial actors involved in face-to-face conversations (mentioned in Cicero's epistles). There follows an exhaustive bibliography, an index of people and a subject index. Chapters 1 and 2 illustrate the methodological framework of the study. By overcoming the traditional and schematic distinction between institutional and extra-institutional politics (*la politique* and *le politique*, to use French modern terminology), R.-L. inquires into political practices in Republican Rome from an enlarged perspective and sees conversations as intrinsic to the formation of a political culture, based on the harmonic interdependency of senatorial power and collective consensus: the result is a wider, and more reliable, definition of politics and political participation that takes into

account the active role of citizens not properly belonging to the dominating elite (Chapter 1). The choice of R.-L. to build the analysis on an almost exclusive use of Cicero's letters is reasonable and well justified. Despite their degree of literacy, the letters are 'not tainted by hindsight' (p. 27) and reflect the immediacy and instability of political life, as may be argued from Nepos, *Att.* 16.3–4: they present a unique and remarkable view on Roman society and politics, written as they are by a politically engaged public figure (Chapter 2).

The following chapter re-establishes the importance of face-to-face meetings to the *métier* of Roman senators. R.-L. correctly defines senators as 'political actors', conducting their activity in person through informal meetings, dinners and visits, and points to the political significance of the practice of encounters in person, especially during the turbulent years preceding the end of the civil war, as demonstrated by the exemplary case of Servius Sulpicius Rufus or, again, by Cicero's letters of negotiation after the Ides of March (see also the appendix at the end of the chapter, listing a series of informal meetings from January to May 49 BCE, pp. 81ff.). The treatment of the conference of Luca is the most innovative part of this section. Refusing the standard version of the conference as an exceptional event (not mentioned in contemporary sources, apart from Cicero's letter to Lentulus Spinther two years later), R.-L. revisits the logistics of senatorial conferences and understands the meeting within the context of face-to-face politics and political conversations between leading politicians. Like many other meetings, the conference of Luca 'constituted the kind of encounter that Roman politicians repeatedly had and that formed the basis for everyday politics' (p. 80).

Spaces and places of conversations are the core subject of Chapter 4, devoted to investigating the process of socialisation in early and late Republican Rome. In restating the key role played by conversations in practical education, founded on the replication of elitarian attitudes and behaviours (a good example is provided by the figure of the young Marcus Caelius Rufus, a well-connected politician who built a varied network of political connections), R.-L. demonstrates that the practice of cultivating and consolidating social and political ties demanded a shared space, which could generate reciprocal trust between peers, and, above all, for the observance of the unwritten rules of the *sermo*, the conversational speech (distinct from the *contentio*, the formal speech or debate) regulated by the principle of *decorum*. Conversation served as a sign of friendship: in holding conversations during dinners or *convivia*, *senacula*, *consilia* and meetings, the politician was expected not to violate the etiquette governing face-to-face communication.

Chapters 5 and 6 are respectively dedicated to the dynamics of conversations and the transmission/circulation of political information. The high degree of accuracy of the transcripts of conversations in Cicero's letters permits R.-L. to delve deeply into the tricky issue of communication of verbal and non-verbal information. Three conversations reported in direct speech (Cicero and Caesar in March 49, cf. *Cic. Att.* 9.18; Scribonius Curio and Cicero, cf. *Cic. Att.* 10.4; the group conversation of June 44 with Brutus and Cassius, cf. *Cic. Att.* 15.9), together with a letter from Decimus Iunius Brutus, discussed in *Fam.* 11.1, illuminate the process of sharing and transmitting insider information, as well as negotiating feelings (Chapter 5). In the absence of laws regulating the transmission and dissemination of political information, private conversations were crucial to requesting and releasing data on individuals or political actions. Starting from the preliminary assumption that short-term connections, not only family ties, were at the heart of Roman political life, R.-L. examines the mechanisms of circulation of insider information, which not rarely circulated out of control, and shows that gaining access to information, flowing fast among senators, consolidated a shared sense of Romanity and cemented alliances between well-connected individuals. In a sensitive way R.-L. demonstrates that

being connected or disconnected from the flow of information entailed acquisition of status or, by contrast, political isolation.

Sharing information was not a prerogative of aristocrats and Roman senators. In Chapter 7 R.-L. offers a fresh portrait of non-senatorial figures (freedmen, elite and non-elite women, *equites*), political actors immersed in the Roman circulatory system of conversations. Along with the final chapter (8), in which R.-L. focuses on conversations as preparatory to drafting and negotiating a law proposal in the Senate, this part brings new light on a hitherto underestimated aspect of Roman political life, that is, the relevance of extra-institutional politics to the working of institutional deal making.

Roman historiography has long suffered from a set of limitations on the interpretation of political life in the late Republic. Challenging the idea of politics as functioning exclusively on institutionalised senatorial and legal procedures, R.-L.'s excellent work represents the first attempt at re-evaluating the notion of political participation in late Republican Rome as founded on the harmonic integration of orality and extra-institutional into institutional. What happened in the backstage of Roman politics was of extraordinary significance to political culture. Thanks to R.-L., we now know much more about the world of oral communication and its impact on everyday life in Republican Rome.

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HEROD AND THE HISTORIANS

CZAJKOWSKI (K.), ECKHARDT (B.) *Herod in History. Nicolaus of Damascus and the Augustan Context*. Pp. viii + 196. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Cased, £65, US\$85. ISBN: 978-0-19-284521-4. doi:10.1017/S0009840X22001706

Herod the Great is surely one of the most fascinating persons from Jewish history in the Roman era. He is certainly the best described in the ancient sources at our disposal and likewise one of the most researched and biographed. Considering the amount of recent scholarly publications, one therefore wonders if there is room left for any real innovation and fresh insights. Czajkowski and Eckhardt prove that there is. Traditionally, the aim in research has been to establish a secure ground for portraying the Herod *of* history, but how to do this when our primary source, Josephus, differs vastly in his portrayal of Herod in his two historical works, just as he obviously was heavily dependent upon a certain writer with whom he also disagreed? Czajkowski and Eckhardt offer a fresh approach to this impasse by shifting focus from the 'Herod *of* history' to the 'Herod *in* history'. That is to say: the way in which the character of Herod was used to serve the needs and aims of his first biographer, Nicolaus of Damascus, who wrote in the Augustan age, and later his second biographer, Flavius Josephus, who wrote in the Flavian age. By focusing on the first, Nicolaus, the authors' aim is to overthrow the old consensus, viewing Nicolaus as a mere 'court historian', paving the way for a new understanding, according to which Nicolaus wrote to secure his own legacy not handcuffed by propagandist limitations.

Though an itinerant philosopher and historian, Nicolaus spent the better part of his active career at the court of Herod. Since a large portion of the later part of Nicolaus' *magnum*