

VALENTINA ARENA and JONATHAN PRAG with assistant editor ANDREW STILES (EDS), *A COMPANION TO THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC* (Blackwell companions to the ancient world). Hoboken, NJ and Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2022. Pp. xix + 595. ISBN 9781444339659. £135.00.

This is not the first *Companion* to be dedicated to this (long) period of ancient history. It follows two others recently edited by Nathan Rosenstein and Robert Morstein-Marx (2006) and Harriet Flower (2014). It is, however, distinct in more than one respect, usefully focusing on politics and reflecting both on the Roman Republic itself — its events, institutions and actors (including women and freedmen) — and on how thinking about Roman republican politics has evolved from antiquity to the present. This ambitious programme justifies the book's division into six main parts, each of which addresses broad and specific themes: 'Modern Reading' of the Republic, from Machiavelli to Syme (Part I, chs 2–7); 'Ancient Interpreters', from Polybius to Cassius Dio (Part II, chs 8–13); 'Institutionalised *Loca*' (Part III, chs 14–21); 'Political Actors' (Part IV, chs 22–27); 'Values, Rituals and Political Discourse' (Part V, chs 28–35) and 'Politics in Action', a series of case studies (Part VI, chs 36–40).

The main aim of this *Companion*, which is like any book a product of its time, is to foreground the notion of political culture not only within the different national historiographies, but now at the international level through the *lingua franca* that English has become. The collective reflection that emerges owes much to the German scholar Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, whose numerous studies have shown the diverse forms of expression at play in Roman politics: no longer just institutions or alliances between the great families of the Roman Republic, but also a set of shared values and a visual culture, in short a 'conceptual system ... of mutual and shared expectations of behaviour in public roles, and of the semantics of politics in general' (6). The editors have therefore entrusted him with the first chapter, conceived as a general introduction, in which he traces what he calls 'the career of a concept'.

While the notion of political (and religious) anthropology is now commonly employed in discussions of certain periods (e.g. for the ancient Greek world in French historiography), that of political culture has spread more gradually among scholars of Rome, as a reaction to another reaction. It emerged following the publication of numerous studies by Fergus Millar that aimed at counterbalancing the then dominance of a fundamentally oligarchic interpretation of the Roman Republic by re-defining it as a form of direct democracy 'in a strictly neutral sense'. His analysis had the great merit of highlighting the popular elements of the Roman political system, which were in fact pre-requisites for the existence of the nobility itself, rooted as it was in the holding of elective magistracies. However, this view was vigorously opposed precisely because democracy was never a neutral concept and never will be. It was, therefore, necessary to go beyond debate about whether the Roman Republic was (more) oligarchic or (more) democratic, which was always reductive because it used Greek notions to define a non-Greek city. The notion of political culture has made it possible to overcome this dichotomy by articulating oligarchic/aristocratic and democratic elements and by showing how such an articulation led to the emergence of a political regime *sui generis*. The result is a vision of politics in Rome which is essentially aristocratic, and may be contested for this reason, but which has the great merit of integrating the popular dimension of Roman politics by making the people an indispensable actor in the system both as arbiter and as manifestation of the civic ideology of the Roman *res publica*. Amy Russell's chapter on the tribune of the plebs is one of those that best highlights the two sides of this political culture by showing how this central function was neither a simple compromise with the aristocracy nor an open opposition to it.

This outcome could only be achieved through international intellectual exchange. The notion of 'political culture' was first introduced in the English-speaking world by political scientists in the late 1950s and early 1960s, then used by a historian of ancient Greek politics, Josiah Ober, in the late 1980s, and finally applied to the history of the Roman Republic in different national historiographical traditions: first in Germany, from where it later passed to France, Italy and Spain before returning like a boomerang, though transformed, to the English-speaking world from which it originated. Such a complex and tortuous trajectory indicates the extent to which research has become internationalised. One can only rejoice in a dialogue that transcends the barriers of national academic traditions and languages in stark contrast with the practices of the generation of Roman historians born in the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas Fergus Millar paid little attention to the work of Christian Meier, who was also ignored by the great French scholar Claude Nicolet, this *Companion* includes many articles by non-native English speakers — with half of the chapters (twenty of forty) written by authors from various European traditions. The result reflects the

ongoing debates of the entire scientific community and, in this sense, represents a collective advance that succeeds in respecting national nuances in an increasingly globalised world.

Has the last word been said about the Roman Republic, or at least about its politics? The notion of political culture has the great advantage of integrating all aspects of politics into an overall scheme that does not leave out any actor or any of the traditional tools of analysis, while at the same time raising new questions (about political communication, civic rituals, gestures, theatricality and images of power). Although there are no longer any obvious blind spots, a few (small) grey areas still remain on which further research might shed new light. The most important concerns the strata of the civic body that did not belong to the Roman aristocracy in a broad sense and for which there are fewer sources. The popular elements of Roman political culture are analysed in this *Companion* in both their institutional (the people's assemblies) and social (the urban plebs) dimensions, but the most sensitive point is their articulation within a political system in which the aristocracy was prevalent. In other words, we must ask ourselves whether there was only one political culture in Rome, that of the Roman aristocracy, which was accepted, assimilated and even internalised to a certain extent by the lower strata. Or should we assume, on the contrary, the existence of another political culture, popular, which should be defined not as a counter-culture, but rather as a parallel culture — or parallel language, if we use an expression coined by Nicolet? The *Companion* as a whole tends to favour the first solution, but Robert Morstein-Marx introduces a welcome nuance in this respect by stressing that while the two cultures, aristocratic and popular, were different and could be in opposition to each other, they were also interdependent and far from being incompatible; otherwise, the Republic would have been ungovernable (395–7). As Alexander Yakobson elegantly states, the question of whether the people's acceptance of the political and social *status quo* is a manifestation of its stake in the political system or evidence for its subordination to the hegemony exercised by the aristocracy cannot be definitively decided one way or the other, because it is not exempt from ideological presuppositions (103). In sum, while it has been pointed out in the past that the people did not always obey, we should not forget to ask why they obeyed most of the time, in line with Weberian sociology.

The editors of this *Companion* are to be congratulated for having coordinated so well a volume on such a complex subject by taking care to make manifest the linkages across the forty contributions by means of multiple, very welcome internal cross-references. These linkages ensure that the whole adds up to more than a sum of its parts.

Université Paris Nanterre
fhurlet@parisnanterre.fr

FRÉDÉRIC HURLET

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STÉPHANE BENOIST (ED.), *UNE RÉPUBLIQUE IMPÉRIALE EN QUESTION?* (Dialogues d'histoire ancienne. Supplément 24). Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2021. Pp. 276, illus. ISBN 9782848678993. €28.00.

Scholars have long debated the periodisation of Roman history. Attention once focused on Late Antiquity, but has recently been extended to the republican period, after Harriet Flower's stimulating essay on *Roman Republics* (2010). This volume now turns to the 'imperial Republic'. The concept is not new. In the early 1970s, it gave the title to an essay by Raymond Aron on the United States after World War II (*République impériale. Les États-Unis dans le monde* (1973), discussed here at 20 and 71), but it has also been used to refer to other geo-historical contexts: from the United States of the eighteenth century (Michael A. Blaakman et al., eds, *The Early Imperial Republic. From the American Revolution to the U.S.-Mexican War* (forthcoming)) to the French Third Republic (Le Cour Grandmaison, *La République impériale* (2009)). It has been used for ancient Rome, too. *La repubblica imperiale* is the title of volume II.1 of Einaudi's *Storia di Roma* (1990) and, more recently, of Flower's chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (2010). In both cases the period considered is that of Rome's passage from city-state to capital of the Mediterranean, i.e. from the Samnite Wars to the end of Civil Wars. Nathan Rosenstein