
Rosetta

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**Amy Russell, 2016. *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xix & 226. £67.99 hardback. ISBN
978-1-1070-4049-6 (Hbk).**

Reviewed by Mamede Queiroz Dias.

Amy Russell's book offers an analysis of politics in the Roman Republic and its relationship with Roman public spaces. Focusing on both public and private spaces, Russell carefully analyses not only literary documents but also archaeological evidence. The backbone of her approach hinges on avoiding the separation of the city from the human experience. This allows her to draw attention to misunderstandings related to the concepts of public and private spaces in the Roman Republic. Overall, the eight chapters of Russell's work provide a coherent and stimulating analysis in which she coordinates the interpretation of places and buildings (e.g. Forum, porticos, and temples) with the accounts of those Romans who lived there.

In chapter one (*Introduction*), the author draws attention to the difficulties of defining the Latin concepts of *publicus* and *privatus*. According to her, there is no clear polarization between the two in Roman culture. On the contrary, they overlapped often, depending on the interests of individuals. In addition, she emphasizes that studies on the Roman "Domus" are traditionally used to the complexities featured in both concepts inside the house, in which a private space was not completely private. It was also a place to carry out business and political transactions. Russell's work deals with similar issues, however, it observes a reverse phenomenon and analyses the private space inside the public one.

Especially because we have correlated concepts of public and private in our modern language, defining *publicus* and *privatus* in ancient Rome is not a simple task. Thus, chapter two (*Roman concepts: publicus and privatus*) deals with the definitions of both ancient concepts. Chiefly using Republican texts, Russell demonstrates the paradoxical aspects of these two conceptions. One example is the Roman Forum.

On one hand, this was a *publicus* space because it was a free area, accessible to everyone and with uncontrolled entrances. On the other hand, it was also *publicus* because politics took place there, meaning only Roman male citizens could participate in it. This coexistence and tension between freedom of behaviour (inclusive) and surveillance/control (exclusive) were a typical feature of the Roman concept of *publicus*.

Continuing Russell's analysis, chapter three (*The definition of political space in the Forum Romanum*) explores political spaces in the Roman Forum. The forum was the most important place for Republican politics. It was also a location where members of the elite attempted to earn a legacy as great Romans. Thus, Russell observes that the transition between the second century and the early first century BCE was crucial for the reconfiguration of the Roman Forum. In this period, transformations occurred in two diametrically opposite directions: one was the establishment of a political space where citizens could make decisions; the other occurred through the attempts of individuals and groups to influence and dominate the decision-making processes of these spaces. This political dynamic affected the configuration of public space in the Forum.

In chapter four (*Forum between political space and private space*), the Forum is analysed as a place of dispute by the Roman elite. Russell explores how private interests overlapped the Forum's political spaces. Domestic and commercial buildings inside the Forum were bought and turned into public places, such as basilicas. Nonetheless, the basilica preserved the relation with the magistrate (and his family) responsible for its construction. Such practices highlighted the tensions among these elite men, whose private aims sought to monumentalize their own presence (and that of their family) and to influence both the political space and the Roman community.

Chapter five (*Gods, patrons, and community in sacred space*) expands the previous analysis of the Forum to other spatial contexts. Russell demonstrates how the

aristocracy sought to interfere in sacred spaces by means of statues, arches, porticos, temples, etc. Once again, the boundaries between the public and the private are blurred. An example of this is the votive victory temples dedicated by generals to divinities. Not infrequently, such temples contained a complex combining the temple itself with other buildings that could be more clearly linked to the general and his family name. For example, the general Quintus Caecilius Metellus, after a military conquest under the Macedonians, built a new temple dedicated to Jupiter Stator next to the pre-existing temple of Juno Regina, and, enclosing both, he also built the *Porticus Metellus*. This practice paradoxically combines the need for the patron to reach the highest possible audience (public space feature), with the need to maintain a strong link between the patron and his family (private space feature).

The following chapter (*Greek art in Roman space: public conquest and private leisure*) provides more details on how this practice of intervention and manipulation of the public and sacred space operated. The victorious generals inserted artworks from their *manubiae* into the decoration of such places. According to Russell, these Hellenistic elements (statues and architectural styles) broke the typicality of Roman architectural landscape, setting it apart from the surroundings and thus attracting more visitors. At the same time, these patrons inserted themselves in an ambiguous context between the Hellenistic monarchical world, associated with idleness and pleasure, and a republican world linked to civic and public life.

Chapter seven (*Pompey and the privatization of the public space on the Campus Martius*) analyses the theatre of Pompey. According to Russell, Pompeian complex as a whole (i.e., theatre, portico, garden, temple, *curia* and statue) is one of the best examples of space in which the public and the private were interwoven. All these features simultaneously memorialize the general's name and project him as a great Roman patron. Emulating the Hellenistic kings' palaces, the complex represents "the culmination of all trends" (p.156) analysed in the previous chapters, that is, the affirmation of personal power over the Roman political space. The complex of Pompey would only have one equivalent in size and personality, that being Augustus' palace on the Palatine hill.

The last chapter (*Conclusion: the death of the public space?*) summarizes the main points presented throughout the book and presents an argument about the end of public space with the establishment of Augustus. If Roman public space had thus far been disputed by the elites, it had never been totally controlled by any of these generals in a hegemonic way. Augustus put an end to the competitive dynamics of aristocracy by monopolizing interventions in the city of Rome and controlling the political magistracies. The *princeps* never became a *privatus*. In this sense, the empire reformulated definitively the concepts of public and private spaces.

Throughout the book, Russell reaffirms her hypothesis: it is impossible to draw a clear line between the concepts of public and private spaces. Instead, they constantly overlap, varying according to the interests of the individuals involved and meeting in various combinations (political and sacred, private and political, private and leisure and so on). As the author herself points out, due to the nature of the documentation, it is difficult to expand her analysis beyond male elite citizens and understand the position of other individuals (p. 188). Another limit concerns the applicability of a behavioural approach, which is equally difficult to apply due to the type and quality of the sources. In this sense, Russell's argument sometimes appears to be more of a theoretical arrangement (which is quite important) and a method of analysis. In addition, the criteria for choosing the cases analysed is not explained. Is the lack of documents the reason for choosing the analysed cases? Or does the author select these cases to confirm the thesis? In either case, the book is indispensable for those who seek to better understand the nuances of Roman political life and its relationship with Roman public and private spaces.