



Roy, P. (2011) 'Harriet I. Flower, *Roman Republics*. Princeton University Press, 2010'.

*Rosetta* **10**: 91-93.

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**Harriet I. Flower, *Roman Republics*. Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. xi & 204. £20.95. ISBN 978-0-691-14043-8 (Hbk).**

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In *Roman Republics*, Harriet Flower has provided both students and scholars of this period of Roman history with a fascinating and convincing look at a subject which has been badly in need of treatment in recent years. The presentation of the Republic as a single period that lasted between 509 and 27 BC is so firmly entrenched that it is almost canonical; in particular, it is almost impossible to find any work concerned with the final century of the Republic which does not remark on the continuing ideological success of at the very least the image of an enduring republic.

Flower begins with the striking assertion that 'periodisation is the most basic tool of the historian' (p.3), a statement of such apparent intuitiveness that it really seems extraordinary that a similar refiguring of the traditional chronology of the Republic has not been attempted before. The introductory discussion that follows takes in the difficulty of analysing wider trends and phenomena (the crude definition of 'the study of history') if one were to follow an annalistic chronicle of events and offices, which is technically possible for reasonably long periods of time in the Republic (p.4). A broader issue which affects a significant portion of the study of antiquity emerges in relation to the dating of events in the ancient world in a manner which implies that they are merely the sum of what occurred 'before' a fixed point, which is necessarily at odds with how a Roman of the Republic would have conceived of dating and time (p.7). Although this is in its most literal sense anachronistic, it is impractical to employ a more historicist reading of conceptions of dating. Therefore we must continue to use BC/AD (or BCE and CE as preferred), whilst acknowledging that it is our own projection on the past.

Equally, any further divisions of the period traditionally thought to constitute the Republic would not have been recognised by the Romans themselves, a point which Flower concedes. In the most basic of readings, *Res Publica* refers to a form of government which may be contrasted with monarchy (or tyranny) and anarchy (p.11). To the Romans, the *Res Publica* meant that full and open participation in public and civic life was in theory available to all citizens, a unity of political thought and culture. This is perhaps why the 450 years or so of the traditional Republic lends itself so easily to the monolithic reading which dominates the discourse.

Flower challenges this unwieldy interpretation in three main sections: Part One, 'Framework', discusses the scholarly backdrop to the discussion and proposes a new reconstruction of the periods of the Republic. In Section II of Part One, 'Toward a New Paradigm', she suggests that the Republic should in fact be divided into six discernible mini-Republics, presenting her suggested scheme in table form, and again in graph form in Appendix I (set against a graph which shows the traditional chronology). Her suggestions are: a pre-republican post-monarchy transitional period between 509 and 494; a proto-republic between 494 and 451/0 when the law code of the Twelve Tables was composed; Republic 1 between 450 and 367/6 which is described as 'experimental', including the consular tribunes; Republic 2 between 366 and 300, a republic shared by patricians and plebeians; Republic 3 the republic of the *nobiles* 1, between 300 and 180; Republic 4, the republic of the *nobiles* 2, between 180 and 139; Republic 5, the republic of the *nobiles* 3 between 139 and 88; a transitional period between 88 and 81 with Sulla's coup and finally Republic 6, the Republic of Sulla between 81 and 60. After this point, there are two triumvirates, two transitional periods and the dictatorship of Caesar - all forms of republican governance were effectively suspended.

Flower goes on to argue that violent change is given too much traction in treatments of the period begun by Sulla's dictatorship, and suggests that non-violent, fluid and legislative change in fact played a larger part than is often owned by scholars of the period. The assignment of the final Republic to

Sulla's period is a confident and novel approach, and goes some way to undermining the traditional view of the 'fall of the Republic'. By placing certain transitional and extra-constitutional periods outside of the span of republican history, Flower skirts some of the issues which normally trouble republican historians, allowing her to take a more detailed and spacious view of the period of Roman history which preceded the Roman Empire.

Flower concludes by acknowledging the potentially high number of interpretations which this revised model could give rise to, and admits that the way it is handled (if accepted) will still be subject to the same matters of focus and priority as all methods. Although this kind of caution is commendable, it is my feeling that there is very little to argue with in her detailed and persuasive handling of this material.

The bibliography is extensive, and includes both newer works and those which could be considered 'canon'. She provides translations of all quotes in ancient languages.