

BOOK REVIEW

Catiline. By BARBARA LEVICK. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Pp. xiv + 138. Paper, \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-4725-3489-7.

Barbara Levick's latest book is a summary of the Catilinarian conspiracy and its historical context that works best as a refresher or supplement for those already familiar with the episode. At its strongest, *Catiline* is a fast moving synthesis of the ancient sources mixed with a modern revisionist take against Cicero's narrative. The book seems to be uncertain about its audience, however, and an editorial choice prevents me from offering my highest recommendation.

Levick begins with a brief preface introducing Catiline and her allegiance to the conclusions of K. H. Waters and R. Seager, who argued Cicero either exaggerated or provoked the plot as part of his political maneuvering against Pompey.¹ In chapter one, Levick reveals that despite the book's title, Catiline is not the sole focus, and introduces Pompey and Cicero as co-protagonists, hypothesizing that all three met in 89 BCE at the siege of Asculum in the Social War. Some background on Cicero and Catiline himself is provided followed by a second chapter that introduces post-Sullan Rome.

The third chapter brings Catiline, Cicero, and Pompey up to the disproved "first" conspiracy, which, along with Cicero's election to the consulship, is the subject of the fourth chapter. Levick emphasizes that Cicero's election was contingent on being a pawn for the nobility, willing to bear the odium of suppressing popular reformers before Pompey could return from the East. In the fifth chapter, Levick treats the conspiracy of 63 in full. It is portrayed not as a single movement but as several independent insurrections, only united late in the game when Cicero drives Catiline from the city. Indeed, "Catiline's conspiracy" is mostly a phantom, forged by Cicero, with the Allobroges affair and exposure of Lentulus' plot coming as strokes of luck that "proved" Cicero's suspicions after the fact.

¹ Cf. esp. Waters, K. H. 1970. "Cicero, Sallust, and Catiline." *Historia* 19: 195-215; Seager, R. 1973. "Iusta Catilinae." *Historia* 22: 240-48.

The sixth chapter handles the fallout, emphasizing the risks Cicero took (and consequences he suffered) by manufacturing and provoking a rebellion, then illegally executing the conspirators. The book concludes with a chapter analyzing the ancient sources and briefly summarizes Catiline's image in later works, in literature and theater, as well as attempts by modern historians to "rehabilitate" him. It is here that Levick declares that the thesis of her book was that "we have a set of politicians who were victims of the conventions of their city," compelled to function within a world which privileged nobility and money, and if those things were lacking, one needed bend or break the conventions to succeed (121). Furthermore, she writes that the basis of her work is that Catiline, Cicero, and Pompey "were all victims of a militaristic slave state, which saw its subjects too as slaves" (123), concluding with some indictments of Roman ideology that pitted its citizens against one another. Lastly, there is a short "further reading" section on both ancient works and some modern scholarship.

I used excerpts from this book in the fall of 2015 as a companion to Cicero and Sallust for an undergraduate course on civil war. The students found Levick's prose to be easy reading and greatly appreciated the inclusion of wider context absent from the *Catilinarians* or the *Bellum Catilinae*, such as the trials of Murena and Rabirius. They were also quite taken with Levick's revisionist approach and became rather certain that Cicero manufactured the entire affair. Professorial guidance is advised.

Their criticisms matched my own. Based on the abundant background information in the early chapters, it seems like the intended audience is either students or the elusive "general reader." Perhaps hoping not to intimidate this audience, *Catiline* includes no footnotes or citations, even when directly quoting from an ancient source. Not only does this limit the book's usefulness to the more mature scholar who wants to see how Levick arrives at her conclusions, but it also hampers students who might want to turn to Sallust, for example, for further reading. Indeed, since explaining the conspiracy necessarily involves speculation, it would be best to show one's work, as it were.

The "further reading" guide is helpful, though it would be more useful to have footnotes within the main text. It might also have been worthwhile for Levick to note that the hard revisionist take on Catiline and Cicero is controversial and not as settled as she implies. The revisionist approach is certainly interesting and has great merit but it may not be the best introduction for someone new to the Catilinarian conspiracy. Finally, the concluding chapter in which Levick discusses the ancient sources and declares her thesis and underlying

foundation of interpretation seems oddly placed. The reader would have been better served if these statements were placed at the beginning, providing a clearer understanding of the approach Levick takes.

The production of the book is quite fine. There is a chronology covering major events from 146–27 BCE, though no maps or other images. There is a family tree that shows the relationship between Marius and Cicero, though it is curiously in the preface and not in chapter one where that connection is discussed. I only noted two typographical errors.²

Experienced scholars will find little new, while the complete novice might want to find a more traditional interpretation at first before tackling Levick's book. For the reader who has a general knowledge of Late Republican history and knows the basics of the Catilinarian Conspiracy, *Catiline* provides a well-written and easily read alternative take on those events.

MICHAEL S. VASTA

Illinois Wesleyan University, mvasta@iwu.edu

²“P.Sulla” (31) and “when Cicero undertook to influential optimates...” (90).