

*Cicero and the Roman Republic*. By JOHN MURRELL. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. 184. Paper, \$25.00. ISBN: 978-0-52169-116-1.

John Murrell's (M.) contribution to Cambridge's *Greece & Rome: Texts and Contexts* series, a series targeted at either advanced high school or undergraduate students, provides a chronological survey of Cicero's life and the history of the Late Republic through a selection of translations of primary readings and associated discussion questions, which are designed, according to the back cover, to encourage students "to consider the relevance of ancient texts to the modern world." M. intends "to show the strains and pressures on the Republic which eventually led to the rule of one man" (p. v), and for the most part he succeeds in achieving his aim.

Several aspects of the book stand out. While the chapters generally cover the standard episodes from Cicero's life, such as the prosecution of Verres (Ch. 4), the Catilinarian Conspiracy and the fight with Clodius (Ch. 6) and the conflict with Antonius (Ch. 12), M. also includes several often less-discussed topics, such as Cicero's thoughts on citizenship (Ch. 1) and his proconsulship in Cilicia (Ch. 10), and devotes a good bit of text to discussions of Rome and its provinces. M. has also done an admirable job of drawing from the entire Ciceronian corpus; he quotes from no fewer than 27 works, and makes liberal use of Cicero's letters. In addition, he provides supporting text from such diverse sources as Sallust, Suetonius, Plutarch and Asconius. Furthermore, M. provides a list of suggested further readings, helpfully divided into the categories of "introductory" and "more advanced" studies. There is also a short but useful glossary of terms, and the maps and illustrations that appear, while relatively few in number, are informative, high-quality additions. The four-page introduction is a fine summary of the political structure of the Roman state, and M. makes sure to emphasize the important point that the *optimates* and *populares* should not be seen as ancient equivalents of modern political parties. The biographical and explanatory footnotes that accompany the translations of primary sources are succinct and useful without being overwhelming, and the short narratives that connect the primary readings often provide valuable summaries of important political points (such as the discussion of Sulla's reforms on pp. 23-4).

I nonetheless have two main reservations about this book, the first more serious than the second. The lack of discussion of Cicero's philosophical program is glaring and unfortunate. While M.'s text contains a great deal of discussion of the degeneracy and decay of the

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Roman government, the *De Republica* is given only cursory mention on p. 118, where the focus is on the discovery of the Vatican palimpsest, not the content of the work itself. The *De Legibus* is the first work M. quotes (pp. 8–9), but only for its discussion of a man's two fatherlands, and he never mentions it again. In addition, the entirety of the period from Pharsalus to the aftermath of Caesar's assassination is condensed into a mere nine pages, and save for one quotation from *Fam.* 7.28.3, all mention of Cicero's philosophical program composed in those years is omitted. In a book that seeks to explore the reasons for Rome's evolution from republic to empire and "why [Cicero] felt so strongly about the *respublica*" (p. v), at least a token discussion of the *De Officiis* is expected. Granted, this is not a book for specialists, but these works are not beyond the capabilities of the intended audience, and they provide valuable information about Cicero's thoughts on the nature of the Republic.

My second reservation concerns the discussion questions that appear throughout the book. These questions are designed to engage the students not only with Cicero's writings and the political climate of ancient Rome but also with current events and modern political history. But the questions seem to blur the focus, and since they are integral to the stated purpose of the *Greece & Rome* series, they would be impossible to leave out if one were to adopt the book for class use. A number of them, especially in the last three chapters, are relevant and thought-provoking; for example, M. ends by asking perhaps the most fundamental question of all: "Was the *respublica* worth saving?" (p. 174). But within the context of what he is attempting to do with this text, I often felt that the questions diverted attention from Cicero and the fall of the Republic and made the book seem as if it were more concerned with modern civics. A few examples: "There are societies or countries which do not use the adversarial system. How is justice administered in such places?" (in a discussion of Verres' trial); "In modern states what views do governments and political parties have about poverty and the ways to eliminate it?" (in the chapter devoted to the Catilinarian Conspiracy, after Cicero's list of the five categories of Catiline's followers given at *Cat.* 2.17–23). Furthermore, at several points M. makes comments or presents questions that may not sit well with an American audience and that may require deft maneuvering on the instructor's part to keep the class discussion both cordial and on-topic. For example, on p. 42, M. calls the contemporary United States an imperialist state; whatever truth this statement may contain, it could be easily construed as polemical by some students. The second question on p. 91 asks students to think about modern examples of "politicians obstinately sticking to their principles when a more flexible stance might have helped the

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state"; I do not think that it is much of a stretch to think that the immediate response may involve President George W. Bush and his policies. M.'s questions also occasionally ask students to compare apples and oranges, as when he asks students on p. 126 to consider how modern warfare differs from the ancient variety described in a very short excerpt describing Cicero's unimpressive campaign at Pindenissum.

These qualms aside, M.'s book achieves its goal of providing a fairly comprehensive and accessible discussion of the collapse of the Roman Republic, and will be particularly useful for advanced high-school students. I remain hesitant about its usefulness in the undergraduate classroom, but as part of an interdisciplinary freshman seminar it is at least worthy of consideration.

JONATHAN P. ZARECKI

*University of North Carolina, Greensboro*