BOOK REVIEW

*Ceremony and Power: Performing Politics in Rome between Republic and Empire*. By GEOFFREY S. SUMI. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005. Pp. 360 + xii. Cloth, $75.00. ISBN 0–472–11517–0.

This study is concerned with "the relationship between political power and public ceremonial in the Roman Republic," with particular focus on the months following Caesar's assassination. Sumi (S.) focuses on public ceremonies "at which the elite and the governed came into contact, where political power was on display": *contiones, quaestiones, comitia, ludi, munera,* festivals, funerals and triumphs (p. 1). Most political activity occurred in the open air in full view of the Roman people—in public, in other words—where the activities of aristocrats were monitored, questioned and/or approved of (p. 2). S. stresses that "the will of the people … was part of the political consciousness of Roman aristocrats … Roman aristocrats prided themselves on how the people responded to them" (p. 5). The thesis is that these ceremonies came to serve as venues for political discourse and helped shape the political process, and that under Augustus these public performances were transformed into the court ceremony of the principate. The nine chapters trace public ceremonial from the dictatorship of Caesar to the death of Augustus.

Chapter 1 ("Consensus and conflict: a typology of Roman Republican ceremonial") begins by enumerating and describing the kinds of events that are the focus of S.'s study and their historical development. Public ceremonial was political action, but it is "overly simplistic to view such events as merely displays of aristocratic power" (p. 20) as the people could influence the course of a debate at a *contio* or the procedure at a trial (and an aristocrat's presence in the theatre also exposed him to insults from actors and audience members, p. 28). S.'s discussion of the aristocratic funeral is particularly fascinating (pp. 41–6).

Chapter 2 ("*Dictator perpetuo:* public ceremonial during Caesar's dictatorship") identifies one of the principal questions in forthcoming chapters as how changing topography affected the ceremonies that occurred [in the Forum Romanum] and "to what extent the new topography of the Forum evoked the memory of Caesar and his dictatorship or the traditional political procedures of the republic" (pp. 53–4). S. focuses on five themes (enough for a volume in itself): how Caesar chose to celebrate his victories in civil war; his rivalry with his predecessors; the global reach of his victories and games; his relationship to the urban plebs; and his relationship to the nobility.

Chapter 3 ("Standing in Caesar's shadow: the Ides of March and the performance of public oratory") argues that virtually every festival, triumph, law or speech contained "an overt or oblique reference to Caesar's memory" (p. 74; the next five chapters discuss and analyze the public ceremonies following his assassination). This chapter concerns the *contiones* of the Caesarians and the conspirators, although S. also treats topics such as the external appearance of the conspirators at their *contio* immediately following Caesar's murder. Thus Antony was in toga and *latus clavus*, but underneath he had chain mail, a "visible demonstration of personal peril" (p. 91).

In Chapter 4 ("*Caesar ex machina:* ceremony and Caesar's memory"), S. discusses how political power was linked to the posthumous honors awarded Caesar and to the ceremonies in which his memory was celebrated (p. 97), and gives a detailed description of Caesar's funeral (pp. 100–12), explicating how elements were added or modified to make it even more theatrical and spectacular. Chapter 5 covers the arrival of Octavian and the ascendancy of Antonius. Chapter 6 is an interesting treatment of politics and public entertainment in July 44 BC; the games were designed as political communication (p. 142). "The memory of Caesar remained at the heart of the politics of this period," as Octavian wished to honor Caesar's memory and the conspirators to remind the people of the ideals of the republic (p. 143).

Chapter 7 ("Rivalry and reconciliation: ceremony and politics from autumn 44 to the formation of the Second Triumvirate") looks at Octavian's return to Rome, a rich symbolic route which took him by the path of a *triumphator* (p. 162). S. discusses how Octavian continued to exploit the memory of Caesar to his own advantage (p. 179).

Chapter 8 ("The performance of politics in the triumviral period: opposition and consolidation") is extremely interesting—I would say the best in the book. Some of S.'s illuminating observations include how the *contio* of women in 43 BCE (with its speaker Hortensia) undermined what the triumvirs had hoped to achieve, "in particular rebuking the idea that they had produced civic harmony" (p. 191); how the unfinished nature of Caesar's building projects, the moving of the Rostra and the construction of a new senate house, underscored the instability of the regime just formed (p. 192); and how Agrippa's free barbers for the people may have been designed to encourage them to "adopt an appearance that was consistent with an atmosphere of celebration" (p. 209). S. also looks in fascinating detail at two obsolete ceremonies, the process of declaring war via the Fetial ceremony (pp. 210–13) and the closing of the doors of the

Temple of Janus (pp. 213–14), and postulates that Octavian actually invented them for his own purposes.

In Chapter 9 ("The *princeps* as performer: creating court ceremony"), S. argues that traditional Republican institutions, through which the people had long expressed their will and exercised their power, were reshaped to form one element of the court ceremony of the principate (pp. 220–1), and were used by Augustus to celebrate his family and retell his own history. The changing topography of the city (p. 221) and legislative assemblies under Augustus are covered (pp. 234–7), as are triumphs and their rarity under Augustus (pp. 247–50). Augustus at his death acknowledged that his actions were highly performative: "self-conscious, represented actions that took place in the gaze of the Roman people" (p. 220).

S's purpose is to examine public ceremonial against a backdrop of political developments. "This approach has enabled us to see how such ceremonies reflected, advanced, or hindered the struggles for power that arose after Caesar's assassination" (p. 186). Has he succeeded? There is much here for the historian, but while I understand that this is a period for which we have a great deal of detailed information, and it is consequently difficult to study, there is in general too much re-hashing of the basic historical outline, and much inessential detail, to the extent that often the thesis of the book is lost (e.g., pp. 86, 118–20, 121). Visuality in antiquity is a deservedly expanding field—but here any discussion of it is almost an aside to what is in effect an historical work. One way in which this might have been avoided is to have proceeded thematically, rather than chronologically, allowing much extraneous historical material to be weeded out.

A second problem is that S. early on draws a distinction between those who perform (aristocrats) and those who view (the masses; e.g., p. 7). This is too harsh a dichotomy; as S. himself notes, those viewing could turn the tables on those performing, taking over Caesar's funeral, for instance. But what of the other aristocrats, surely present at such ceremonies, who looked on without speaking? Are they part of the "viewing" masses or the "performing" aristocrats? To separate the two groups this harshly reminds one of John Berger's or Laura Mulvey's now dated claim that the "viewer" of a woman is necessarily, even eternally male. Visuality is more complex than this, for surely aristocrats and masses, however they were arranged in the Forum, were both spectacle and spectators.

KELLY OLSON

*University of Western Ontario*