

BOOK REVIEW

A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics. By YELENA BARAZ. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012. Pp. x + 252. Hardcover. \$45.00/£30.00. ISBN 978-0-691-15332-2.

In this well-written and thought-provoking book, Yelena Baraz engages with the prefaces of Cicero's philosophical works written in the 40's to demonstrate how he used these introductions to "sell" philosophy as a viable method of stabilizing the Republic. Using Genette's study of textual presentation as her starting point, Baraz focuses on the "historical and circumstantial nature" of the prefaces.¹ She adroitly counters the arguments of scholars who believe that philosophy was, for Cicero, merely a pastime or a consolation for personal and political misfortunes. Baraz is not interested in the minutiae of the philosophical arguments. Rather, she concentrates her argument on the two primary difficulties faced by Cicero in composing the *philosophica*: convincing his readers that philosophy is both useful and consistent with Roman *mores*, and convincing his readers that he is the right man to engage in such arguments.

Chapter 1, "Otiose Otium," describes the social criticisms Cicero faced in writing his philosophical program. Cicero found himself fighting the perception that philosophy is acceptable as long as it remains on the periphery. This is Cicero's greatest challenge—to convince his readers that philosophy is not an abandonment of civic duty. Sallust and the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are used as comparanda: Sallust for his exposition of the cultural biases Cicero was combating in his prefaces, while the author of *ad Herennium* represents a mouthpiece for the criticisms Cicero expects to encounter.

In Chapter 2, "On a More Personal Note," Baraz examines Cicero's correspondence as a tool for understanding Cicero's goals for the *philosophica*. Cicero expressed a myriad of goals in his letters. Baraz believes that this is intentional; Cicero is contradictory only when it serves a rhetorical purpose. She argues that Cicero persistently believed that philosophy was "a tool that men can use in mak-

¹ G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

ing decisions with implications for the state" (47); furthermore, in his letters, he "blurs the traditional boundaries between the political and philosophical spheres" (95). She disagrees with scholars who view Cicero's *philosophica* as a form of consolation; he turns to philosophy only when he finds himself on the political margins.

The third chapter, "A Gift of Philosophy," concerns itself with the act of translation. Baraz presents Cicero as a translator of ideas: from Greek to Latin, to be sure, but, more importantly, from useless to useful, un-Roman to Roman. A basic premise of Cicero's arguments for philosophy is that the "subject matter cannot be allowed to stand on its own merits" (111). Cicero hoped through his philosophy to encourage, indeed, restore, communication between the *boni*—dare we say, restore the *concordia ordinum*—by casting philosophy as a useful activity for those engaged in public life.

Chapter 4, "With the Same Voice," continues the themes from the previous chapter by examining Cicero's use of oratory as a way to establish a link between philosophy and traditional public life. Cicero uses himself as the exemplar for the validity of engaging in philosophical inquiry. For example, the preface to the *Paradoxa* uses rhetorical terms to validate Cicero's adherence to Academic skepticism vis-à-vis Cato's active resistance to Caesar. In *N.D.* 1 Cicero establishes a connection between his past and present activities, thereby refuting the detractors who would comment that he had only suddenly turned to philosophy. Because Cicero, and men like him, engage in philosophy as part of their *negotium*, the two are intertwined whether one writes philosophy or not.

Chapter 5, "Reading a Ciceronian Preface," looks at the ways Cicero attempts to control the author–audience dynamic, primarily through the construction of an ideal reader, identified as an upper-class man open to the possibilities of Greek learning combined with Roman *mores*. Cicero employs the precepts of *amicitia* to invite the general reader to identify with the ideal reader/dedicatee, thereby making the general reader one of Cicero's *amici*; the *philosophica* become the *beneficia* of one friend to another.

The final chapter, "Philosophy after Caesar," looks at the effect of Caesar's assassination on Cicero's philosophical project. Adoption and paternalism become key metaphors as Cicero recasts his previous view of philosophy as a substitute for public life. Caesar's death removed the barrier to public life which contributed to the earlier works, and Cicero becomes much more didactic. Philosophy loses its position as integral to the future of the state, though it still carries importance.

Philology is at the heart of Baraz's book. Careful readings of the text abound, with her interpretation often hinging on a particular word here or an antithesis there.² However, some readers may find a few of the readings tenuous, a complaint Baraz acknowledges (192). My only quibble regards the scope of the book. I do not believe that the break between Cicero's rhetorical-philosophical works of the 50's and the later program of the 40's is as clean as Baraz makes it out to be. Some discussion of a pre-civil war Cicero is contained in Chs. 1 and 2, but little mention is made of events between 61–49, a precious few letters notwithstanding. While Baraz makes her reasons clear for not treating the earlier works in detail, she does make connections between the two groups (e.g. *Sen.* and *Amic.* are linked to *Rep.* and *de Orat.* in the choice of interlocutors and their didactic nature on p. 198). I hope that in the future she will tackle the prefaces of the three earlier works as well.

In summary, Baraz's stimulating and nuanced argument about Cicero's literary and political goals should make this book a standard reference for anyone interested in Cicero, his philosophical program, or the intellectual life of the Late Republic.

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² The careful reading extends to the copyediting. I noted only one small mistake of fact—the attribution of a letter from Cicero's proconsulship to the 40's (73)—and two minor typographical errors.