

## BOOK REVIEW

*Divination, Prediction and the End of the Roman Republic*. By FEDERICO SANTANGELO. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 357. Hardcover, \$104.99. ISBN 978-1-107-02684-1.

Just as important as the word ‘divination’ in Federico Santangelo’s title is the word ‘prediction’. Although his book has a great deal to say about the types of divination practiced in Rome and Italy during the first century BC, both public and private, its principal theme is the use of divination in the prediction and management of political change at a time of crisis. Described mainly from the viewpoint of political elites, particularly Cicero, divinatory rituals and interpretations are seen as critical tools in the aristocratic struggles for power that defined the period from Sulla to the second triumvirate. So dangerous to monarchical rule did their predictions appear that they were eventually brought—one by one—under the control of Augustus by the end of the century.

The author is aware that divination, as a worldwide phenomenon, comprises much more than the prediction and control of the future, but his interest here is mainly in exploring what Cicero defined in the first sentence of the *De divinatione* as “the presentiment (*praesensio*) and knowledge (*scientia*) of future things” (47). This definition fits well with an intellectualist understanding of divination as a (proto-scientific) system of techniques “intended for the explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events,” as Robin Horton put it in 1971 (“African Conversion,” *Africa* 41.2, 94), and makes it possible for Santangelo to employ Cicero’s dialogue on the subject to survey the considerable diversity of divination in late republican Rome and Italy at the same time as he explores its contribution to the political and philosophical debates of the day. The result is a carefully crafted and consistently interesting analysis of the politics of divination at a time when—not for the last time in antiquity—its outcomes carried weighty political consequences and its workings were debated with the utmost attention.

After a brief introduction and an opening chapter on the context of the *De divinatione*, chapter 2 discusses what Santangelo identifies as Cicero’s strong preference for *religio* over *superstitio* and *prudentia* (*providentia*) over *divinatio*. The next four chapters are devoted to the main types of divination practiced in

late republican Rome and Italy. Chapter 3 surveys divination by dreams and lots. These were popular forms, but with the exception of sortition for public office, were not integrated into the state system, and therefore feature less prominently in the book's overall argument.

Chapter 4, on haruspicy, points to the increasing importance of Etruscan divination over the second and first centuries, and especially to the willingness of its practitioners to adapt their responses to changing political needs. Chapter 5 continues this subject by exploring the influence of Etruscan theories of the *saecula* on Roman concepts of political change.

Chapter 6 studies the Sibylline books, reconstructed after the fire of 83 BC and destined to play an increasingly partisan role until their eventual removal to Octavian's complete control. Chapter 7 completes the survey with an overview of the "wild prophecies" of *harioli* and *vates*, inspired diviners attested from the very beginnings of Latin literature and often seen to threaten the political control of elites. The practice of augury, whose status as a form of divination is contested in the *De divinatione*, does not receive a separate chapter here, but is instead discussed as needed in other chapters, as well as in an Appendix on questions of augural law that pertained to the election of P. Cornelius Dolabella as suffect consul in 44.

The next group of four chapters offers a survey organized by author and genre of concepts of foresight/prediction and decline/change in late republican politics and literature. Chapter 8 probes Cicero's correspondence for connections between his interest—and evident skill—in (non-divinatory) prediction of the future and the political crises that consumed his attention. Its theme of political decline is resumed in chapter 9 with a focus on Sallust; his relatively low level of interest in divination and religion is then contrasted in the following chapter with Livy's high level of interest in these subjects.

Chapter 10 ranges widely and interestingly over Livy's ideas about divination, religion, fate, and moral decline, and sets the stage for a discussion in chapter 11 of signs and prophecies in Virgil. His reference to the *De divinatione* in the first book of the *Georgics* allows Santangelo to resume the main narrative line, slightly obscured in the chapters on Sallust and Livy, and to reconnect with the types of divination discussed in the earlier chapters. This sets the stage for the final chapter on divination and monarchy, which outlines all the steps Octavian took to restrict, control, and monopolize divination.

A brief conclusion sums up the book's arguments, and closes with the very different divinatory environment of the early empire, as seen in Tacitus's

description of the re-dedication of the Capitol in AD 70. A useful glossary of terms, comprehensive and up to date bibliography, and *index locorum* and general index complete the work.

Santangelo's book constitutes an important contribution to the growing body of literature on ancient divination, and particularly to its manifestations in the politics of late republican Rome. It will be of interest to a wide range of readers, and useful in charting many of the ways in which the practice of divination shaped and was shaped by the political and intellectual concerns of the last century of the Roman Republic.

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