

BOOK REVIEW

The Laws of the Roman People: Public Law in the Expansion and Decline of the Roman Republic. By CALLIE WILLIAMSON. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016. Pp. xxviii + 508. Paper, \$44.95. ISBN 978-0-472-03661-5.

When writing an academic book, the hope is that the finished work will be, above all, useful. In that, Callie Williamson's *The Laws of the Roman People*, now available in a reasonably priced paperback edition, more than succeeds. Its ambitious goal—to explore the rise and fall of public lawmaking during the Roman Republic in its historical and cultural context—is met and exceeded, delivering a lucid and thorough discussion of the topic that is detailed enough to satisfy specialists in Roman legal history, yet accessible to those first exploring the field. It approaches its subject organically, moving from the mechanics of composing and passing law to the historical circumstances that shaped the process, and does an admirable job of bringing life to the dry minutiae of the legislative process.

The book divides into three major sections: Patterns and Process, The Expansion of Rome, and The Decline of the Republic. The first (Patterns and Process) begins with a discussion of the various lawmaking assemblies and the sorts of legislation passed in them, moving chronologically from the early Republic to the assassination of Caesar in 44 BCE. It then turns to a specific land reform bill (the *Rogatio Agraria Servilia* of 63 BCE) discussed extensively in Cicero's speeches and letters as a case study in the mechanisms, customary and formal, by which public legislation moved from draft, to promulgation, and then to law. The entire three-chapter section is accompanied by a number of charts arranging the known statistics of public legislation by factors such as date, topic, sponsorship, and category.

The remainder of the book proceeds chronologically, arguing that periods of crisis and expansion coincided with the increasing use of lawmaking assemblies, then contextualizing the history of public legislation within the expansion of Roman dominance in the Italian peninsula. Williamson convincingly ties the use of popular assemblies to Roman efforts to promote loyalty and unity in the face of

Hannibal's invasion, grounding her discussion in the evolving economic and geographic conditions of an increasingly urbanized Italy. The fourth and fifth chapters are particularly gratifying in their bottom-up approach, focusing on the ways in which the customs and concerns of rural non-elite Italians impacted the way in which Rome approached the legislative problems of the time. This gives an organic feel to the argument; conflicts over land use in this section inform, in retrospect, the features of agrarian legislation so central to the first section. Likewise, the narrative of territorial expansion lies neatly parallel to the first section's arguments about expansion in the legislative process.

Finally, in the third section (Decline of the Republic), the focus returns to the city of Rome and the way in which the crises of leadership during the first century BCE impacted the world of Roman law and lawmaking, transitioning smoothly from the social history of the second section with a discussion of how Rome evolved into a central regulatory hub for Italy. Then, Williamson moves on to the events and personalities that directed policy from that urban center, returning, briefly, to the years of the Second Punic war before proceeding through the civil conflicts of the late Republic. The eighth chapter pivots around Sulla's dictatorship and the stream of legislation generated during 81 BCE. She concludes in the ninth chapter with Julius Caesar, arguing that the posthumous enactment of Caesar's laws in 44 BCE effectively finalized the shift away from public, collaborative lawmaking toward a process lead and controlled by the *princeps*. Within that discussion, Williamson provides valuable context for the genesis of laws regulating the political process, corruption, and murder—laws that were the basis of many a high-profile case of the Imperial period and are therefore of special interest to scholars whose interests range later than the late Republic.

The text and argument alone are enough to make this book a substantial contribution to the field of Roman law and legislation; it covers a large span of time without falling prey to sweeping generalization, maintaining a high density of detail to satisfy the curiosity of a variety of readers. But the tables and appendices add yet another aid to the reader, organizing as they do a vast array of information in a format that is sensible and easy to consult. This reviewer's copy is battered and coffee-stained from being grabbed for hasty consultation, and now bristles with tabs marked for future reference. Anyone with an interest in ancient Rome, regardless of their level of interest in law and government, will find Williamson's work relevant and thorough.

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