

## BOOK REVIEW

*Political Communication in the Roman World*. By CRISTINA ROSILLO-LÓPEZ. Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishing, 2017. Pp. 284. Hardcover, \$133.00. ISBN 978-90-04-35083-0.

In this excellent volume, Cristina Rosillo-López and her colleagues examine the mechanisms, dynamics, and representations of political communication in the Roman world. Though the book focuses largely on the Ciceronian Late Republic, it offers insights and opens new avenues for investigation well beyond that period.

The first part of the book considers what constitutes political communication in the Roman world. Catherine Steel problematizes the term, “public speech,” arguing that oratorical texts omit the exchanges of speakers with interlocutors and obfuscate the interactive nature of speech-making. Further, “public speech” was not limited to speeches delivered at the Senate or *in contione*: private speeches delivered to a magistrate’s *consilium* and public remarks were valuable means of disseminating information. In a similar vein, Rosillo-López shows how informal conversations functioned as a political tool in the Late Republic, contending that acquiring information through direct communication with other political players and indirect communication through third parties was central to political success. However, the availability of information was unpredictable: Cicero often failed to obtain information from his friend, Pompey, but remained well-informed, through Atticus, of Clodius’ machinations.

The book’s next section investigates political communication at a distance. W. Jeffrey Tatum’s chapter studies *adlegatio*—the sending of one’s *familiares* to seek political favors from another member of the Roman elite. Tatum argues that *adlegatio* provided a normative, public way to conduct political interactions that minimized indignity and demonstrated respect between the two parties.

The next two chapters use letters as a rubric for political communication. Francisco Pina Polo examines Cicero’s correspondence in exile to assess political communication over long distances during the Late Republic. He shows that a wide variety of specific information, ranging from the publicly available (e.g. election results, legislative proposals) to the more private (e.g. personal letters), trav-

eled throughout the empire frequently and quickly. Juan Manuel Cortés-Copete also demonstrates the ease with which information traveled through the Roman world by showing letters allowed for active imperial governance.<sup>1</sup> He illustrates that the establishment of new secretariats *a libellis* and *ab epistulis* by Hadrian created a new imperial system in which the emperor fulfilled administrative responsibilities (i.e. issuing addenda to new legislation, establishing standard practices for provincial governors, etc.) through letters.

The third and most methodologically unified part of the volume focuses on political communication among the non-elite. Cyril Courier and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira use “interactionist sociology” to move beyond the negative representation of rumor in historiography and argue that it provided a key channel of communication for the non-elite. Such informal communication also functioned as a “laboratory” for the development of communal opinions and subsequent collective action. Courier, in his study of the response of Roman plebs to political rumors in the Early Empire, and Magalhães de Oliveira, in his discussion of reactions to news of the emperor’s death in Late Antiquity, show that rumor offered non-elite groups a means to engage and challenge entrenched power structures.

The Late Republic again takes center stage in the volume’s discussion of the failure of political communication. Antonio Duplá Ansuategui looks at how Cicero promoted political violence against his opponents. Cicero’s rhetoric of exclusion and language of apocalyptic crisis construed reconciliation with his opponents as impossible and figured violence as the only solution, a belief in which Cicero grew more entrenched over time. Martin Jehne considers the failure of the anti-Caesarians to prepare adequately for Caesar’s march on Rome. He argues that their failure to assess the situation was a consequence of political “involution”, a result of the increasing centrality of the narrow spatial and geographical bounds of Roman politics after Sulla.

In the book’s final section, Henriette Van der Blom and Rosario Morena Soldevila consider literary representations of political communication under the Empire. The former examines the reception of Republican oratory during the Principate, demonstrating that the Republican orators cited most frequently by Imperial authors are named in Cicero’s *Brutus* and publicly circulated their speeches. Additionally, she notes that the focus on the style rather than the sub-

<sup>1</sup> Contra Millar’s passive petition-response model of imperial governance articulated in *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977).

stance of Republican oratory reflects contemporary concerns about using non-political oratory to gain social prestige. Morena Soldevila analyzes Martial's second edition of Book 10 as a form of political communication, showing that the collection, re-published in the troublesome years after Nerva's accession, relies on subtle literary maneuvers rather than overt apology to rehabilitate the poet politically.

Overall, this volume significantly advances our understanding of political communication in the Roman world. The contributions are well-researched and provide compelling studies of the problems they investigate. Several essays open new avenues for study by drawing attention to forms of political communication that have been ignored by previous scholarship (e.g. *adlegatio*, informal conversation, non-public speech). Additionally, the chapters by Courier and Magalhães de Oliveira offer a new and theoretically-informed approach to non-elite communication in antiquity.

Despite the excellence of the individual contributions, the volume could have benefited from more chronological and evidentiary diversity. Late Republican politics, as seen through the lens of Ciceronian correspondence and oratory, is the central topic of six of the eleven chapters in the volume. One would also have liked to have seen more analyses of papyrological and epigraphic evidence from various parts of the Empire as a point of comparison for the picture presented by the Republican literary evidence. Nonetheless, this criticism does not detract from an excellent volume that will benefit scholars interested in political communication in antiquity.

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