

## BOOK REVIEW

*Brutus: The Noble Conspirator*. By KATHRYN TEMPEST. New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. xviii + 314. Hardback, \$32.81. ISBN 9780300180091.

Yale University Press has in recent years published the exemplary biographies of Adrian Goldsworthy on Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, and Augustus. The present volume is a worthy successor to these admirable treatments of perennially fascinating personages from Roman history. All those interested in the infamous events surrounding the fall of the Republic and in particular the death of Julius Caesar will want to read Tempest's book.

Some preliminaries: Tempest grounds her work with meticulous footnotes (a real pleasure to work through in this volume), maps and convenient chronologies and, perhaps most valuably, a judicious bibliography of subject matter that has been the focus of such oceans of scholarship. This is a work that will appeal both to popular and scholarly audiences, and it deftly navigates the different needs of diverse audiences. The lovely plates that illustrate the center of the volume add to the richness of the beautifully produced work. All ancient sources are accompanied by an English translation. The author's chronologies are especially impressive and useful insofar as she provides extensive ancient citation of sources for all the events she lists – a valuable service given the sometimes controversial question of where Brutus was on a given date. For the period from October of 43 BC to October of 42, Tempest is remarkably lucid and helpful in her source criticism.

A particular strength of Tempest's treatment of Brutus is her engagement with literary sources (including the poetic ones). For Tempest, literary evidence is taken as seriously as more stereotypically conventional "historical" sources, and throughout, her consideration of the "noble conspirator" is rooted in a close study of the extant evidence. Tempest never strays far from the primary sources, and her critical judgment throughout is consistently sound.

Tempest's Brutus is, in the end, an enigma – in other words, she reaches the same conclusion as her ancient predecessors. The value of Tempest's engage-

ment with her topic, however, is that she both confirms and affirms the fairly consistent portrait of the man that emerges from those diverse ancient sources. In this her work is similar to the other recent anglophone treatment of Brutus' life, Kirsty Corrigan's *Brutus: Caesar's Assassin* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2015). Despite the opposite focuses of their titles, both authors follow much the same methodology, and both endeavor to reconstruct a life for their subject. Together, both Tempest and Corrigan succeed in providing rich material for consideration in attempting to judge how late republican history evolved to the point where the Ides were possible if not inevitable.

Tempest is especially good at explicating the difficult years from the assassination to Philippi, and in disentangling the progress of Brutus' career in those complicated months. She offers a virtual commentary on the process of how republicanism made what some would call its last stand in Roman history in the crucial period from 44-42 BC, ultimately with the conclusion that no one likely could have succeeded where Brutus and his confrères failed. In short, Brutus and Cassius were on the wrong side of history, but for all the right reasons. Deft consideration of ancient analyses as diverse as those of Plutarch and Velleius cooperate in the composition of a portrait of a man who seems to have had simultaneously all the answers and none for the travails of his age, and who was equally convinced of both the rightness of his cause and the inadequacy of his vision in terms of the practical reality of a perhaps impossible task. To the degree that some will think that Tempest is "too easy" on Brutus, profitable commentary may be found on the problem of the tolerance of creeping incrementalism in both the political and the social realms.

Tempest's book can be read as a history of the complicated events it narrates; it also offers a beautifully written, engagingly adventurous style of narrative that makes for compelling reading even by those who know the events so well (perhaps too well). Throughout, the author offers a remarkably fresh treatment of both sources and moments in history that continue to haunt those with even casual interest in *res Romanae*. By the end, if the Brutus that emerges from these pages is no more fully realized than he was before this book, at least the ancient appraisal has been revisited and redrawn in sharper relief. And with a figure as complex and even polarizing as Brutus, that is no small achievement.

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