

## BOOK REVIEW

*Rome After Sulla*. By ALISON J. ROSENBLITT. London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2019. Pp. xiv + 220. Hardback, \$114.00. ISBN 978-1-4725-8057-3.

In this very interesting book, J. Alison Rosenblitt addresses an often-overlooked period of Roman history, namely, the first years after Sulla's dictatorship (79-77 BC). In Chapter 1, which serves as an Introduction, Rosenblitt sets out her aims and methodology. "This book is about the instability of the Sulian settlement" (1). For her, the main reason for such instability is that Sulla's settlement was based on exclusion (obviously applying to the victims of proscription and their heirs).

M. Aemilius Lepidus and his insurrection have therefore an important role in this book. Lepidus' endeavor is crucial to understanding the complexity of those few years, which witnessed a fierce battle to restore the importance of the tribunate of the plebs.

In terms of sources used, Rosenblitt declares her interest in Sallust's *Historiae* to counterbalance the "Cicero-centric readings of the late republic" (1). This does not mean, of course, that she ignores Cicero's importance in those years, but it is a welcome change to try and widen up our understanding of the late republic.

The book is then divided into three parts, according to the main subject treated. Each part contains a different number of chapters, for a total of ten. Part 1 is about "Negotiating the End of Sulla" and contains two chapters. Chapter 2, "80 BC: The *pro Roscio* Vanishes," claims that the end of the proscription lists in 81 BC did not mark the end of fear in Rome. Sulla asserted that the situation was back to normal, but in reality, people were still extremely uncertain of what were the limits of their freedom. Rosenblitt uses Cicero's *pro Roscio* to make this fear emerge and shed light on the actual situation in Rome.

Chapter 3, "79 BC: The Turning Tide," argues that the uncertainty continued even after Sulla's retirement, while immediately after it a debate started about the civil rights of those hit by the proscriptions. Here, the main protagonist emerges, M. Aemilius Lepidus, who won the consulship for 78 BC. He was personally

interested in the matter, for his son, earlier adopted by L. Cornelius Scipio Asiagenus, was now among the heirs of the *conscripti*.

Part 2 is about “Counter-revolution” and contains three chapters, all focusing on the acts of Aemilius Lepidus in the years 78-77 BC. Chapter 4, “Urban Conflict and Etrurian Tumult: Formulating 78-77 BC,” engages with the three main sources on the events: Appian, Livy and Sallust. Each of them interprets the event in a different way. Appian reiterates the scheme of the civil wars, Livy points to the moral aspects of Lepidus’ actions while Sallust is more interested in explaining Lepidus’ actual political program.

Chapter 5, “More than Catiline, Less than Caesar: The Politics of M. Aemilius Lepidus, cos. 78 BC,” focuses on the reconstruction of the actual facts of Lepidus’ political action. “We can know more about Lepidus than we might think” is the sentence that opens the chapter and serves very well as its summary. The chapter is very solid. Rosenblitt reconstructs the complexity of Lepidus’ last years using all the available evidence. Chapter 6, “After Sulla; After Lepidus,” analyzes the meaning of the definition “post-Sullan,” concluding that the post-Sullan period lasted very long, for Romans felt the consequences of Sulla’s policy for decades.

Part 3 is about “Sallust and the Political Culture of Rome after Sulla” and contains four chapters. The first two parts try to reconstruct the actual consequences of Sulla’s reforms and they demonstrate that they failed to restore stability in Rome, while the last part “concentrate(s) more fully on the Sallustian perspective” (90), since Sallust is seen as a proxy to better understand the “deep and irrevocable changes that occurred in Roman political culture after Sulla” (90).

Chapter 7, “Autocracy and Stability: Moving Beyond the ‘Problems’ of the Speech of Lepidus,” clearly engages with the speech attributed to Lepidus by Sallust. Here the autocracy and violence of Sulla are exposed in a way that, in the context of Sallust’s work, mirrors Caesar’s clemency. Chapter 8, “Dominatio and Deceit: Sallust on Pompey,” explores the actions of Pompey and his deceit of Lepidus through the analysis of the letter that Sallust attributes to Pompey. Chapter 9, “Hostile Politics (I): Political Discourse after Sulla,” reveals the effects of the violence of the Sullan and Marian period on the politics after Sulla’s retirement. Chapter 10, “Hostile Politics (II): Sallust’s *Historiae*,” ends the analysis with one more focus on Sallust’s work and how it handles the complexities of the Sullan period, mixing internal and external wars and setting a dark example for the later generation of politicians.

A conclusive appendix offers a good summary of the whole book, followed by two appendices, on “Evidence for the Activities of M. Aemilius Lepidus, cos. 78 BC” and “Problems in Sallust’s speech of Lepidus.”

In conclusion, the book is extremely interesting and its methodology is sound. It covers a period with relatively little scholarship and has a right focus on Sallust, an author generally somehow not fully explored in studies regarding this period. It is recommended reading for all scholars dealing with the history of late Roman Republic.

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