

## FROM REPUBLIC TO PRINCIPATE

OSGOOD (J.) *Rome and the Making of a World State 150 BCE–20 CE*. Pp. x + 274, ill., maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Paper, £21.99, US\$28.99 (Cased, £69.99, US\$89.99). ISBN: 978-1-108-41319-0 (978-1-107-02989-7 hbk).

What professional Roman historians choose to read is oftentimes not what students of Roman history choose to read. As an undergraduate or general reader, many of the names of places and people are peculiar; all but the famous historical events are new; and the range of frameworks for interpreting those events are likewise unfamiliar. An introduction is needed to draw together this array of material in a coherent way. The great achievement of this new book is to undertake that task with a clarity and confidence that not only addresses that audience, but also sets out an overall interpretation of the years 150 BCE–20 CE that more experienced historians will find fresh and informative.

The argument that underpins O.'s rich and engaging survey of the development from Republic to Principate is as follows: this transition in Roman government should in fact be conceived of as the transition from a piecemeal Republican empire to an organised world state (pp. 1–8). The process was not strictly constitutional or indeed generally political. Rather, the evolution of the management of the empire itself created the framework for autocracy. This may be seen, for example, during the Caesarean civil wars, where legions and whole provinces were required to declare their loyalty to a single individual (pp. 179–84). Of course SPQR, which O. uses as a shorthand for the traditional institutions of the old Republic, resisted these changes. Rightly included in O.'s analysis of this transition are also wider questions of cultural, societal and economic change: the introduction of new modes of political and philosophical thought; new forms of art and architecture; and the structural differentiation of interests in

society: equestrians, *publicani*, provincials, Italians, ‘new men’ and so forth. These all in their own ways challenged the traditional institutions of SPQR.

The organisation of O.’s book into chapters makes clear the interrelation of these various factors. The bulk of the chronology – the ‘narrative history’, from Carthage to Tiberius – is presented in Chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 14. Interspersed throughout these, however, are more contextual sections on the socio-economic and cultural background. We have, for example, a survey of the city of Rome itself, its multiplying inhabitants and their living conditions, plus the organisation of its political and religious life (Chapter 3, pp. 25–47). Later, an impressively concise study of the demographic and economic transformation of Italy foregrounds the Social War (Chapter 6, pp. 90–107). O.’s arrangement of the material is impressive, and that arrangement directly facilitates his overall rhetorical objective: political history cannot be divorced from cultural, aesthetic and economic questions.

For those relatively new to Roman history, the two chapters on the Augustan revolution are a magisterial introduction, cogently discussed and rich in evidence (pp. 199–241). However, they may strike readers beyond entry-level as a little too conservative. The overall impression created here is of the benevolent ruler of a stable state. Certainly when comparing this period with the preceding century we may wish to be persuaded. But the analysis O. offers is fundamentally the one that the regime would wish to offer, and a critical reader might be inclined to disagree. In narrating the disastrous expedition of Aelius Gallus as prefect of Egypt, for example (pp. 208–9), O. ends with Augustus’ sweetening of the story in the *Res Gestae*: ‘Job done’. Given the focus in this chapter on the Principate as an evolving government for the world state, it is odd to ignore Aelius’ immediate predecessor, C. Cornelius Gallus. As prefect, Cornelius Gallus’ incursions into modern-day Ethiopia had in fact no apparent

authorisation from Augustus. Gallus' monumental stela in three languages celebrating the event glorified *his own* achievement (*CIL* III 14147.5 = *ILS* 8995). Furthermore, he appears to have negotiated on his own initiative with worrying independence. Might the 'world state' endanger Augustus' position, too? Gallus was recalled, tried and killed himself (see Suet. *Aug.* 66; Cass. Dio 53.23; Vell. Pat. 2.91). Similar examples of provincial misrule to complicate O.'s picture include Marcus Primus, who allegedly attacked a Thracian client-kingdom without authorisation. Primus' defence was that he acted under Augustus' instructions – charges that Augustus denied. Evidently some were not convinced by the *princeps*' version of events, since several voted for Primus' acquittal. Further trials for conspiracy ensued, in which several jurors were again not convinced by the regime's case. Augustus' solution was to abolish the secret ballot in such cases, i.e. to deliberately rig the procedure (Cass. Dio 54.3). These scandals exemplify the internal challenges faced by the world state and Augustus' tendency to repressive action.

O.'s discussion of Egnatius Rufus (pp. 205, 213), whose successful institution of a fire brigade as aedile won him tremendous popularity until he then over-reached himself, also passes over certain details in favour of a sanitised narrative. O. emphasises that Augustus' repression of Rufus' support base 'confirmed that Augustus would defend the *res publica* when called upon' (p. 206). A more prosaic reading might argue that Rufus' popularity left the new *princeps* embarrassed and infuriated and he had to be done away with (see Cass. Dio 53.23). Our sources also suggest that Rufus had been at the centre of a wider conspiracy against Augustus' life (Sen. *Clem.* 1.9.6; Vell. Pat. 2.91). Similarly, O.'s discussion of Julia's disgrace treats the adultery itself as the treasonous act – 'a stain on the House of Augustus' (p. 245) – while passing over the darker side of the political context: the embarrassing challenge to the *princeps*' risible

moral and social legislation (Cass. Dio 54.16) and the coincidental exile of Iullus Antonius, Julia's lover, for conspiracy in the same year as her (Plin. *HN* 7.45; Cass. Dio 55.10.15). O.'s discussion of Augustus is an invaluable introduction, but readers might question his vision of the 'benevolent ruler', which de-emphasises the causes of instability and the often repressive steps taken by Augustus to address it.

The text itself is a joy to read. O.'s treatment of this period is enriched by his generous use of maps, tables and figures, for example those illustrating the *cursus honorum* and the Julio-Claudian family tree. It is not entirely free of errors: 'A marble statue of a youngman' (p. 170; *sic*) is the more obvious of half a dozen other examples, but responsibility for this rests with the publisher, not the author. The text does not use notes. This naturally raises an issue for O.'s many well-chosen quotations from the sources. Innovatively, these are all placed into a helpful digest of quotations (pp. 259–64), enabling readers to locate easily a quotation that catches their eye. The same cannot be said for O.'s primary narrative sources of *information*, on which he is usually silent. Readers may be fascinated by the tumultuous careers of the Gracchi (pp. 52–61), but where ought they to go for the information? Thankfully, O. ends each chapter with an extensive section of 'Further Reading', containing the majority of the most important work on the material discussed. These bibliographies are helpfully arranged with brief summaries indicating the relative significance of the items and pulling together important debates, such as the demography of Republican Italy (pp. 106–7). O. does not generally examine at length the detail of debates such as these, but summarises them approachably (e.g. pp. 53, 95).

To reiterate, the great strength of this book is to re-evaluate the transition from Republic to Principate with a new analysis of Rome's evolving response to the challenges of empire while also presenting most of the main topics of importance with

clarity and vigour. O. invites us to enjoy Roman history and to revel in reading it. His Cato is a particular source of mirth. Textbook examples of 'vintage Cato' include his ode to cabbage in the *De agricultura*, and his expulsion of a senatorial colleague for daring to kiss his wife in public (pp. 17, 30, 96). These asides look like levity; but they exemplify the growing sense, both on the part of Cato and of Sallust and Livy later, that SPQR was challenged by as well as enriched by its growing position. O.'s readable and compelling narrative explores this process most convincingly, although readers familiar with Augustan history may find that section too conventional. This book will be essential reading for entry-level undergraduate Roman history programmes; and for specialists it is a model of the freshness and vitality that can be breathed into teaching this period of Roman history.

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