

OH Open Library of Humanities

Book Review

Bernard, Seth, Lisa Marie Mignone and Dan-el Padilla Peralta (eds). 2023. *Making the Middle Republic. New Approaches to Rome and Italy, c. 400–200 BCE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-1-009-32798-5 hardback \$130.

This volume presents selected papers that were originally presented at the conference ‘The Roman Republic in the Long Fourth Century’, held at Princeton University in 2019. It is very much part of a recent flurry of scholarship, both in Italy and abroad, that positions the Middle Republic as a consequential phase in the political, social and economic history of Italy (see Cifarelli, Gatti and Palombi 2019; Heitz et al. forthcoming).

The book is divided into three main sections, focusing on historical sources, material sources, and architecture and art respectively. These sections are preceded by a substantial introduction by the editors, which discusses previous scholarship on Mid-Republican Rome and Italy, as well as the various chronological limits that have been adopted in the study of this period. The Middle Republic is most commonly framed by historical and political events, with the defeat of Veii, the Gaulish sack of Rome and the introduction of the Licinio-Sextian laws

MAKING THE MIDDLE REPUBLIC

NEW APPROACHES TO ROME
AND ITALY, C.400-200 BCE

EDITED BY SETH BERNARD,
LISA MARIE MIGNONE AND
DAN-EL PADILLA PERALTA



often used to mark its start, and the commencement of the First or Second Punic War often seen as its end point; the editors, however, argue to envisage the period as one of important developments, which ‘ranged across various timescales and time spans, and throughout all precincts of Roman and Italian life’ (p. 4). Moreover, the introduction provides the rationale for the book (and the conference it stems from): its main aim is to reinvigorate traditional subjects of inquiry through novel perspectives and approaches. One of these promising perspectives is the widespread use of quantitative data in historical and archaeological inquiry.

The section ‘Historical Sources’ includes four contributions. Chapter 2, by Parrish Wright and Nicola Terrenato, uses the *Fasti Consulares* to argue for significant horizontal mobility of Italian elites (rather than vertical mobility of Roman families of plebeian rank), continuing a practice that was already clear for earlier periods of Roman history. Chapter 3, by James Tan, deals with Roman fiscal history, more particularly the institutions of *tributum* and *stipendium*. It convincingly argues for significant social and political impact of the *tributum-stipendium* system, particularly in giving important leverage and bargaining power to the *tribuni aerarii*, which were tasked with collecting the property levy and dispensing soldiers’ pay. Chapter 4, by Nathan Rosenstein, focuses on the Mid-Republican army, which needed long-term logistical support while embarking on longer campaigns that were conducted ever more distant from Rome. Like Tan in Chapter 3, he highlights the importance of the *stipendium* not just to the development of a more professional army, but also in Roman colonization and approaches to citizenship. Chapter 5, by Walter Scheidel, uses a comparison between the Sudan up to the Sokoto caliphate to approach Mid-Republican slavery. He argues that the dearth of evidence for enslaved persons in the historical and archaeological record of particularly the fourth century BC might indicate the widespread practice of the exporting of slaves, and the non-market redistribution of slaves across households, a scenario which fits well with the low level of monetization in Italy at this point in time.

The second section, Material Sources, contains three contributions that highlight the important role that material and archaeological evidence can play in re-evaluating traditional historical interpretations of the period under study. Chapter 6, by Liv Yarrow, focuses on heavy bronze coinage emphasizing their relatively low degree of standardization in terms of weight, which speaks against their use as bullion, but rather as symbolic monetary objects, linking these coins strongly to the longstanding production of *aes rude* in early Latin and Roman society. In Chapter 7, Tymon de Haas uses data from several field surveys to investigate changes to the territorial and agricultural organization of the countryside of Tyrrhenian Central Italy. Despite distinct local trajectories, a clear picture of Mid-Republican economic and demographic expansion

emerges, which led to large-scale investments (by the Roman state) in infrastructure and the reclamation of previously marginal lands, such as the inner Pontine plain. The last chapter of this section, by Angela Trentacoste and Lisa Lodwick, assembles evidence for agricultural and animal husbandry across Italy, using a long-term perspective. Their results suggest that in Mid-Republican Italy, patterns of agricultural production and animal husbandry remained relatively stable and were largely driven by regional factors (landscape, economy) with no real apparent changes following Roman annexation.

The third section of the volume, on Architecture and Art, covers three contributions. In Chapter 9, Domenico Palombi looks in detail at urban planning in Latium. He identifies the Mid-Republican period as a phase of significant monumentalization and transformation, and argues that it is this wider Latin context, rather than the city of Rome itself, which provided models for later urban development in other parts of the peninsula subjected to Roman expansion. Chapter 10, by Penelope Davies, focuses on the urban development of the city of Rome itself. By attributing agency to buildings individually and collectively, she argues that in the Mid-Republican city juxtapositions between old and new were created, with architecture functioning as an important agent in social and political transformations. The final chapter of this section, by Seth Bernard, argues that several painted scenes in tombs in Oscan Campania should be considered historical in nature. If so, they fit into a wider trend, which saw the deployment of non-written forms of historical narration as a way in which elite communities (Romans, Greeks, Etruscans, Oscans etc.) across the peninsula attempted to negotiate ongoing processes of state formation.

Two of the issues that often plague edited volumes are the lack of coherency between individual contributions and the presence of gaps in coverage, and in these regards *Making the Middle Republic* is no exception. Regarding the former, there are clear links between several chapters (for example between Chapters 3 to 6) and an excellent conclusion, written by Christopher Smith (Chapter 12), which goes a long way in drawing things together. Regarding the latter, it is important to remember that the editors explicitly state that it is not their aim to offer an authoritative and comprehensive account of Middle Republican Rome. There are, however, some notable omissions, such as the relatively scant discussion of Mid-Republican religious change (an absence acknowledged by the editors), whilst a chapter on developments in important Roman consumer industries (like fine ware production; wine production as visible in the proliferation of Graeco-Italic amphorae) would not have been out of place. At the same time, the book has several clear strengths. The contributions are, without exception, of excellent quality, generally presenting new data and approaches. The editors should

also be applauded for bringing together different strands of evidence in a single volume — historical, archaeological and art historical — that are all too often viewed in separation. Also, fitting with recent developments, many of the contributions attribute due credit to Italic (Oscan, Etruscan etc.) agents in state formation across the peninsula and in the formation of Mid-Republican Rome, profiting from a Roman aristocracy that is characterized by Wright and Terrenato as ‘fluid and open to the inclusion of new members’ (p. 28). In conclusion, this is an important volume that undoubtedly will further invigorate the study of a crucial period in Roman history.

Gijs Willem Tol

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

University of Melbourne

gijs.tol@unimelb.edu.au

References

Cifarelli, Francesco Maria, Sandra Gatti and Domenico Palombi (eds). 2019. *Oltre “Roma medio repubblicana”. Il Lazio fra i Galli e la battaglia di Zama*. Roma: Edizioni Quasar.

Heitz, Christian, Matthias Hoernes, Agnes Henning, and Ted Robinson (eds). Forthcoming. *The Long Fourth Century BCE – Tracing the Transformation of Southern Italy*. London: Routledge.

