

Review

MATTIA BALBO and FEDERICO SANTANGELO (EDS), *A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION: ROME BETWEEN HANNIBAL AND THE GRACCHI*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. x + 378. ISBN 9780197655245 (hbk), £71.00. 9780197655269 (eBook).

This volume takes both its title and inspiration from the chapter of the same name in Harriet Flower's 2010 work, *Roman Republics*. However, where Flower focuses mainly on changes in government and political practices, the topics the chapters in this volume address range much more widely. So, following the editors' introduction and justification for the project, Tan examines the possible effects of a warming climate in the second century on the assumption that the Roman Climate Optimum began c. 300 B.C.E. The increased agricultural production this facilitated could help account for the lack of demand for land redistribution as well as supporting the growth of Rome and an increasing Italian population. The latter, along with a longer sailing season, would have enabled Rome to mobilise and deploy its power abroad more effectively. However, as Tan acknowledges, there is no consensus on when the RCO began; c. 100 B.C.E. is just as likely, so all these earlier developments will have occurred without the support of a warming climate. Baldo suggests that conflict over land arose out of competition for access to *ager publicus* between slave and free labour, between small and large farmers, and owing to the latter's competitive advantage in a market economy. The senate's contradictory policies only exacerbated the conflict as it adopted a *laissez-faire* stance towards access to public land while at the same time sending out colonies and asserting public ownership in various ways.

Temeer surveys the development of Roman coinage from the later third century through to the later second. She notes that the quadrigatus coinage begins to feature symbols associated with Rome beginning c. 350, tying the coins to the *res publica*. The standardisation of coin types in the first half of the second century was followed by the appearance of 'private types', advertising families or other specific messages. This harkens back to the situation prior to the later third century, when a variety of types were produced. Caprariis challenges the current identification of the structure once identified as the porticus Aemilia but now generally identified as Rome's *Natalia* or ship sheds. She contends on a variety of grounds that the old identification is far more plausible. Taylor argues that the decrease in military deployments after 167 led to a decrease in combat experience among those recruited for the legions as well as those who led them. That in turn was the cause of repeated military failures and of a reluctance among citizens to serve. Thus, the second half of the century was characterised not by an increasing professionalism but rather amateurism among Rome's soldiers. Bellomo surveys the conflict between the principle that consuls should have the most important provincial assignments and the need for prorogation to meet foreign policy needs and the desire of commanders for glory.

Lanfranchi argues that the second century saw an important movement from *mos* to laws and plebiscites at Rome, offering an interesting statistical and graphic analysis in support. He further discusses an increase in private law legislation, focusing on the Lex Laetoria, which he connects to the Lex Villa annalis, as well as the Leges Furia and Volconia. Gallo surveys interactions between the tribunes and the senate. She finds that in many cases the tribunes acted at the behest of the senate, while in others they did not. Sometimes tribunes vetoed the senate's decrees; at others the senate interposed its *auctoritas* against a veto. Landrea's chapter examines the patrician *gentes maiores*' rivalry for the consulship, noting that the *gentes* were not monoliths but divided into *stripes* that did not necessarily cooperate. When in 172 patricians lost their monopoly on one of the two consulships, the number of patrician consuls declined. Steele identifies two narratives for the development of oratory in the period 201–134: one based on the embassy of the philosophers in 154 and its effect on aristocratic youth, represented by Cicero's account in the *de Oratore*; the other version he offers in the *Brutus*, stressing the importance of written versions of speeches starting with Cato's early in the second century. Neither is necessarily correct, and multiple narratives are possible. Santangelo argues that the years between 201 and 133 were not characterised by religious conservatism. Change and adaptation occurred in the areas of prophetic divination, popular involvement in religious affairs, the role of the senate and of statute law as

well as in the calendar. Finally, Flower offers some general thoughts on the period and examines a few areas, notably the position of women and slaves, not touched on by other contributors.

All in all, a mixed bag: some very interesting papers, many offering little that anyone familiar with the second century does not already know. More troubling, all too often transition is assumed rather than demonstrated. Were relations between the senate and tribunes significantly different prior to 218? How exactly did political rivalry among patrician clans change from what it had been before that date? Was conflict over access to land less then? The career of Flaminius might suggest otherwise. And were adaptation and change in religious practice really unknown prior to Hannibal? The absence of argument leaves a reader with doubts. Yet the truly big changes — in economy and demography; in relations with the allies, in art and intellectual and cultural life — for the most part go unexamined. So, in many ways a missed opportunity to reveal what was genuinely transitional between Hannibal and the Gracchi.

Ohio State University
rosenstein.1@osu.edu

NATHAN ROSENSTEIN

doi:10.1017/S0075435824000224

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