

Gregory K. Golden, *Crisis Management during the Roman Republic: the role of political institutions in emergencies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvii + 245. ISBN 978-1-107-03285-9.

In this book, Golden seeks a better understanding of how the Roman Republic functioned in practice by looking at its responses to crisis situations, the systems and flaws in those responses, and the strains upon the Republic under such circumstances.

In the Prologue and again in the first chapter, Golden lays out well the major issues, the differences between external as opposed to internal crises, the challenges posed by the growth of empire as well as senatorial ambitions, and the ineffectiveness of crisis responses when not backed up by force. He also points out how “crisis-centered” has been the approach of historians to the period of the Republic, gives a precise definition of crisis, and identifies his focus as military and political crises (since it was not typical of the Roman government to address other sorts of crises and we possess fairly solid sources for a rather thorough investigation of this subject).

In the second chapter, the author investigates cases when the official Roman position of dictator was utilized to respond to external threats (such as the “tales” of Cincinnatus and Camillus, which, even though heavily mythologized, still relate Roman expectations for crisis management and reasoning behind failures to manage crises), as well as internal threats. Analysis of the “data” collected by Golden (which includes an interesting table with examples from the dictatorships of the fourth century B.C.) illustrates the frequent use of this extraordinary office (approximately every three years in that century) to handle crises during this truly formative period of the Republic. Golden takes two examples from the collection (those of Fabius Maximus and Junius Pera) as specific case studies to demonstrate the points of his overall argument. In the process, he shows how the Roman dictators tested mechanisms that would later supersede them but remained among those methods employed by the government in crisis management, that is, the decrees of *tumultus* and of *iustitium*.

The next two chapters separately address such official pronouncements of a “state of emergency” by the government of the Republic. In Chapter 3, Golden processes the evidence to arrive at a definition of the *tumultus* as a crisis presenting an imminent danger to the state from within the Italian peninsula or imminent danger to one of Rome’s provinces. He provides and discusses key examples to bear out this definition from across the period of the Republic, including troubles with the Gauls and Ligurians, threats posed by foreign kings, like Antiochus III, as well as by slave uprisings, such as that of Spartacus, and the Late Republican tumults such as the Social War, the revolt of Lepidus, the conspiracy of Catiline, and the “rebellion” of Marc Antony. In Chapter 4, Golden follows a similar train of thought in coming to define the *iustitium* as a declaration of crisis, usually connected with a concurrent decree of *tumultus*, but specifically focused on the cessation of all public and private business for the duration of the emergency, as well as the drafting of all eligible men for military service. What follows is a quite thorough investigation of the cases in which a *iustitium* was declared

without also the decree of *tumultus*, that is, at the start of the war against the rebellious King Jugurtha of Numidia and during the political confrontation between the consuls Sulla and Pompeius Rufus and the plebeian tribune Sulpicius Rufus.

Golden's fifth chapter is by far his longest and covers the most significant and controversial measure implemented by the Roman state to handle emergency situations in the Late Republic, the *senatus consultum ultimum* or final decree of the Senate. Again, the author works his way first toward a careful definition of the decree; he follows this up with an equally careful comparison of the *SCU* with the other two emergency measures already discussed. The most important points of comparison which he notices are that, unlike the other measures, the *senatus consultum ultimum* did not cause a full suspension of affairs nor did it fully protect the officials who implemented it from legal attack afterwards. His investigation of case studies includes the origin of the *SCU* in the troubles associated with the plebeian tribune, Caius Gracchus, and continues through its declaration against Saturninus, against Sulla, against Lepidus, against Catiline, and across the 50s B.C., especially the second most famous case, against Julius Caesar. Golden argues that the *SCU* functioned essentially to convey an extra measure of emergency authority upon magistrates who saw trouble brewing and already possessed the powers necessary to handle matters; it served really as more of a statement to the populace of the government recognizing a serious crisis. The Senate's resolution was thus strongly tied to the magistrates involved in addressing the crisis and backed them up with the clout of the senatorial majority, encouraging other magistrates and citizens in general to get on board with the required "fixes" called for by the situation. Golden notes throughout the examples the key, in some ways innovative, element of the *SCU*: broad discretionary latitude to cover magistrates should they go "too far" (which seems even to have been encouraged by the senators in so many cases) in settling the emergency. We should note that all the cases of the *SCU* involve Roman might turned against fellow Romans.

Particular circumstances, such as timing and distance from Rome, made some crises difficult to resolve by the means noted so far. In his sixth chapter, Golden examines these unusual circumstances that generated special responses to crisis. These include the invasion of Hannibal, for instance, in which all available magistrates were granted *imperium* (the power to command and be obeyed) and the Senate met in continuous session, without a decree of *tumultus* or the holding of emergency levies under a *iustitium* (at least none noted by the sources). On the other hand, the threat perceived by Rome from the actions of King Philip V of Macedon was not addressed by emergency measures but rather through the normal operations of the Republic's diplomatic and military machinery. Closer to home, the Senate employed standard procedures to stifle the alleged Bacchanalian conspiracy in the early second century B.C.; followers of the religion suffered intimidation and even execution at the hands of magistrates and volunteers summoned by them. Plebeian tribunes utilized their accepted powers to reverse the political impasses caused by the brothers Laenas in 173 and 172 B.C. Even the invasion of Italy by Germanic warriors at the end of the second century was met by

fairly simple extension of magisterial powers (those of Marius) rather than emergency measures. By way of contrast, the Senate botched its handling of three major crises in the Late Republic: first, the rising of the independent-minded King Mithradates VI of Pontus against Rome; second, the political feuding of Sulla against Sulpicius and Marius, which ended in Sulla's "conquest" of Rome by its own armed forces; and third, and most significant, the confrontation between the Senate majority and the plebeian tribune Tiberius Gracchus, which led to his death at hands of senatorial vigilantes. In these cases, neither standard procedures nor emergency ones were employed to avert or settle the crises, for which Golden can find no satisfactory explanation in the sources.

His seventh chapter focuses on the troubles of 44–43 B.C., acknowledging that the Republic was not yet dead but surely hanging in the balance. In the aftermath of the Ides of March, the Roman government handled matters well and averted a crisis, with the Senate (often pushed by the famous orator Cicero) again functioning as defender of the Republic and of the common good, in opposition to Antony's attempts at self-aggrandizement during the remainder of the year 44. Golden provides a very nice summary and analysis of events, especially illustrative of the Senate engaging in effective crisis management, notably in its frequent meetings of late 44 and early 43. Yet he also demonstrates how the ultimate power in arbitrating the course of those events was not the Senate but rather the armies under their various Roman commanders. No *SCU* or any other such measure could really alter this; in the end, military might settled the Republic's woes.

Chapter Eight addresses the question of whether any change in responses to crisis or any repeated practices can be identified over the lifetime of the Republic. Golden agrees with other scholars that, because of limitations inherent in that extraordinary office, a shift took place away from dictatorship as the primary response and toward greater senatorial intercession in emergencies (especially externally-caused). He also argues that the Roman court system could not function as a viable honest broker in internal crises because it was so often used to settle personal vendettas among the Roman aristocracy. Resorting to the voters of Rome would have been anathema to the elite, an unacceptable recognition of the erosion of their superior status in contrast to the People's greater power. Yet, with the People's help, dictatorship rose again in the persons of Sulla and Caesar during the Late Republic; they arrogated to themselves the ultimate authority of this ancient emergency executive not only to settle affairs but also establish unilateral power. The Emperors later followed in this train, and Golden provides a very nice summary of how what was entailed in being Rome's "First Citizen" derived directly from the crisis management measures of the Republic.

Overall, the major conclusions of this excellent study are the following. The Senate attempted to redress challenges to the state from the inside, but often made matters worse because it could not compete with the power wielded by its individual members at times and never developed an impartial institutional structure to do so across time. Even the *SCU* met the challenge of political violence with more violence rather than some peaceful response in which laws and traditions would gain further respect from all

parties involved. Indeed, crisis management appears to have been left up to either one or a few magistrates with emergency powers, in a sense, divesting the Senate as a whole of responsibility for settling matters. The behavior of Popillius Laenas in the late second century B.C., who employed force to put an end to crises whether abroad or at home, epitomizes the point.

From another angle, Golden shows that there were not that many checks in place upon officials within the Republic system to avert internal crises. Again the Senate in numerous situations did not exhibit enough of a consensus against renegade magistrates, instead acting as a biased partisan itself, preventing it from standing (as Cicero so fervently wished it would) as the defender of concord and common good, as the honest broker between competing, ambitious magistrates.

If the Senate and courts (as noted above) could not fulfill that role, what element of the political or legal system could serve as final, trusted arbiter in a formal sense? Even the Popular Assemblies could not, since they were summoned by magistrates and otherwise inactive. And it was the magistrates, though so often regarded by modern scholars as appendages of the Senate, who really held the pivotal position in all the crises of the Republic. They were the only accepted means of putting the will of the Senate or the People into practice and held all the powers, but they were exactly the ones who most often challenged the system and precipitated internal crises.

As Golden shows, perhaps the early dictators had been acceptable to all parties in internal disputes and generated respect from their decisions, but by the time of the *senatus consultum ultimum* in the late second century B.C., respect and high regard had been cast aside in favor of quick and dirty force to destroy force. The history of crisis management during the Republic reveals that the Roman elite did not want the sort of control on their ambitions that a legitimate, final arbiter would impose; to have no written constitution or supreme court, or any other formal mechanism to prevent them from generating crises for their own aggrandizement, actually made their lives much more thrilling and their career options more flexible, and they sought this over systemic stability.

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