

Josiah Osgood, *Rome and the Making of a World State, 150 BCE-20 CE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 274. ISBN Hb 978-1107029897; Pb 978-1108413190.

Historians employ chronological parameters in order to give shape and coherence to their narratives. Harriett Flower has recently argued for the provisional, dynamic, creative, and flexible aspects of historical periodization, provided we are honest about what that is: historical periods are for the historian narrative choices, not historical *realia*. She refers to these as “time maps,” and suggests there is a multiplicity of them. She further urges that we resist thinking of any particular “time map” as self-evidently correct. Instead, we should be willing to adopt, simultaneously, different chronological orderings in analyzing historical evidence. In this manner, we can hope to see unnoticed or under-appreciated nuances, tensions, continuities, and complexities that enrich historical understanding. The historian may keep several “time maps” in play, rather than insisting that any particular periodization exclusively corresponds to historical reality, whatever that might be. As Flower notes, “Periodization in historical terms is intrinsically and inevitably anachronistic, and this fact should be openly acknowledged” (*Roman Republics*, pg. 6).

In *Rome and the Making of a World State, 150 BCE-20 CE*, Josiah Osgood offers a somewhat unconventional “time map,” which in effect stretches what we have come to call the Late Republic in either direction. He opens his work at the mid-point of the second century BCE (roughly Polybius’ terminal point) and closes with the year 20 CE, after many of the uncertainties about Augustus’ successor and the political dispensation that would follow his death faded from view. There are good reasons for adopting this time frame. As for the opening, O. chooses a time corresponding more or less to Polybius’ eventual terminal date (initially, Polybius planned to bring his history to a conclusion with the decisive Roman victory over Macedonia at Pydna in 168; but subsequent events convinced him to extend his work to the year 146, in which the Romans destroyed both Carthage and Corinth). By 146, as Polybius asserted, the Romans were masters of the *oikoumene* and had established domination over the Mediterranean and Near East (Polybius would certainly have considered Rome a “world state” by this point in time, even if the phrase could seem like an anachronistic exaggeration for the present-day reader—acknowledged by O. on page two, bottom). O.’s own closing date, 20 CE, allows him to distance himself from the paradigm of a decadent and corrupted Republic reeling to its collapse. Instead, this study emphasizes the impressive political achievement of the Romans, and the innovative and creative ways in which they met the challenges and burdens of empire. “We need to recognize that it was during the long ‘fall of the Roman Republic’ that a more ambitious provincial administration was being developed, along with a more coherent vision of empire that promised lasting peace in exchange for loyalty to Rome and the payment of taxes. It was during ‘the fall of the Roman Republic’ that the city of Rome itself

became a cultural and intellectual center that eclipsed other Mediterranean cities and could rightly proclaim Roman power” (pg. 3).

O., as is the case with nearly all historians, has had to make a narrative choice, emphasizing either change or continuity. In his overarching narrative, he had opted for the latter. In the chronological progression through these decades in Roman history, however, he does a good job in capturing the political and social turbulence, ruptures with traditional practices, adjustments in imperial administration, and cultural developments at key historical junctures. Fourteen chapters comprise the book, and while the theme of Rome as “world state” is sustained throughout (of the fourteen chapters, six have the word “world” in their titles), we get a vivid sense, for example, of the tragic unfolding of the Gracchan revolution or the rise of Marius and the culmination of the warlord syndrome in the person of Julius Caesar. The narrative, then, adroitly balances change and continuity in thematic tension. As O. notes at the outset, “...there are advantages to thinking of the period from 150 BCE to 20 CE as a whole rather than accepting the traditional split of ‘The Last Age of the Roman Republic’ and ‘The Augustan Empire.’ Understanding the successes of government by emperors can reveal the weaknesses of SPQR, such as its inability to deal with army veterans and its difficulty in stopping the uncontrolled use of armed force. Yet we can also see more clearly how late republican leaders, however much they might have upset their contemporaries, were innovators of lasting importance....[remarks on Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus]... It is traditional to emphasize how the violence of these years undermined republican government. But from a longer view, we can also see that the brothers’ ideas about finance and empire started a century-long process of reimagining the Roman state to suit an increasingly complex social and political reality” (pg. 8).

O. writes in a crisp and lucid prose. This book will serve well as a main textbook for undergraduate courses in the history of the Roman Republic. It is generously supplied with useful figures, tables, and maps, and the suggestions for further reading hit the right notes. *Rome and the Making of a World State* often provides the standard interpretation of historical processes in ancient Rome, as it indicates new scholarly directions. A case in point is O.’s treatment of demographic factors underlying the attempted Gracchan land reforms. Here we can understand the traditional picture, built upon passages in our primary sources, as we find it, for example, in Arnold Toynbee’s *Hannibal’s Legacy*, while the suggestions for further reading point the reader to Nathan Rosenstein’s revisionist study, *Rome at War: Farms, Families, and Death in the Middle Republic*. In the same vein, O. gives a conventional view of the *imperium* of Roman magistrates, but he alerts the reader to two recent, more innovative works: F.J. Vervaeet’s *The High Command in the Roman Republic*, and F.K. Drogula’s *Commanders and Command in the Roman Republic and Early Empire*. Occasionally, O. augments the suggestions for further reading, ranging beyond works on Roman history proper for historical contrast or analogy, as in the references to S. Greenblatt’s *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, or V. Gatrell’s *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*.

The concision and clarity of exposition recommend adoption of this book in the classroom. Chapter 7 (“Rome Between Republic and Empire: The Stuck Elephant, 80–60 BCE”) could be paired with a selection from Mary Beard’s *The Roman Triumph*; chapter 9 (“The Course of Empire: Provincial Government and Society, 90–50 BCE”) could be juxtaposed to Ernst Badian’s little classic, *Roman Imperialism in the Late Republic*; chapter 13 (“The New Age: Refashioning Culture and Society, 30–5 BCE”) could stand alongside passages from Paul Zanker’s *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. In revising courses in Roman history, I would adopt this book as my touchstone without qualm or hesitation.

There will inevitably be trade-offs and even sacrifices in choosing any particular chronological frame, and perhaps we are well served by Harriet Flower’s injunction against restricting ourselves to any one particular “time map.” In the case of *Rome and the Making of a World State*, we might regret that we do not reach a little farther back to the time of Scipio Africanus. He upset the level playing field of competitive aristocratic politics at Rome with his astounding victory over Hannibal, but unlike the later warlords, his unprecedented success did not lead to the unraveling of the republican political system. What had changed in the intervening century? And while O. makes a good case for seeing important threads of continuity and evolution in the transition from Republic to Empire, it is difficult to ignore the stark shift from the expansionist, even predatory, imperial state that was the Republic to the empire of consolidation and maintenance that was the Principate. In choosing 20 CE as the terminal point, O. misses the opportunity to consider “throw-back” figures (representing continuity?), such as the warlike Trajan, and he does not discuss in any detail persistent martial ideological themes of the Principate and the obligatory self-representation of Roman emperors as invincible conquerors, long after Roman conquests had for the most part ground down to a halt (a phenomenon well explored by Benjamin Isaac and Susan Mattern).

In the end, these objections amount to little more than (perhaps gratuitous) quibbles. O. has given us a readable, articulate, and concise historical account. His adopted chronological parameters do not merely offer an alternative “time map” for the sake of novelty; rather, this chronological perspective invites us to keep our narrative themes of change and continuity in an open-ended, dynamic tension, without insisting on closure. This quality is what is most exciting about the book as a teaching tool, as it will encourage students to see history in all its complexity, as an intellectual activity that scorns easy solutions and resists ready-made answers. For those of us who have taught Roman history every year for years on end, *Rome and the Making of a World State* may help to refresh and reinvigorate some of our stale lectures with a slightly different chronological vantage point. Bravo.

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