

J. Alison Rosenblitt. *Rome After Sulla*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. xiv + 219 + 6 bw illus. HB £91.80. ISBN: 9781472580597.

The life, dictatorship, and legacy of Lucius Cornelius Sulla have become topics of renewed scholarly interest in the past decade. Harriet Flower's *Roman Republics* posed new questions about the nature of Sulla's dictatorship and its effect on the political culture of the Late Republic, arguing for the radical nature of Sulla's reforms. In the last decade, new studies by Catherine Steel, Elke-Stein Hölkeskamp, Alexandra Eckert, and others have reconsidered the effects of Sulla's decisions, his memory, and the trauma of the civil wars on Roman society. J. Alison Rosenblitt's *Rome after Sulla* is therefore a timely new monograph that contributes to the extensive and current debates over Sulla and his legacy. Rosenblitt's argument is that the fundamental injustice of the dictator's reforms, proscriptions, and exclusions was a cause of constant instability in the late Republic. The book's focus on issues of justice and accountability is welcome and fits into recent trends to examine the substance of late Republican politics and legislation. At the same time, Rosenblitt engages with questions of periodization, and especially challenges the tendency to view the years after Sulla as the story of Pompey's rise. As a result, the book focuses on events in the 70s, a promising decision, given that it is a decade often ignored due to source difficulties. Sulla's Republic, Rosenblitt argues, was doomed to failure from its inception.

Rosenblitt's concise and ambitious book is a response to much of this new scholarship on Sulla and the late Roman Republic, but it is as much a book about historiography as it is about history. Rosenblitt's second purpose is to consider the ways in which the aftermath of Sulla's regime influenced and is reflected by Sallust's fragmentary *Historiae*, written in the 40s-30s B.C. Analyzing this lost work is a difficult task, given how little of it survives, with the exception of four long speeches, two letters, and many smaller fragments. Rosenblitt argues that Sallust's pessimistic perspective on the last generation of the Roman Republic better reflects the realities of political life than the Ciceronian corpus, with its focus on consensus and community.

The book is divided into three parts, along with an introduction, an epilogue, two appendices, and extensive endnotes. The first part (Chapters 2 and 3) aims to show that Sulla's regime was unstable even during his dictatorship and the end of his life. Rosenblitt argues that Cicero's *Pro Roscio Amerino* was meant to be a challenge to Sulla's regime through its exposure of the uncertainties surrounding Sulla's power and life during the proscriptions. She turns next to the consular elections in 79 and politics between Sulla's retirement into private life after his consulship in 80 B.C. and the former dictator's death in 78. Rosenblitt contests Ronald Syme's view that Sulla was in complete control of Roman politics during these years. She suggests that Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, the consul of 78 and soon after a leader of a revolt against the Sullan senate, advocated for the rights of children of the proscribed while Sulla

was still alive. This section's overall argument that the end of Sulla's life saw much dissension, especially in the city of Rome, is compelling. However, many of the specifics, including those surrounding Lepidus, could use more elaboration. Much of the case for Rosenblitt's interpretation of Lepidus' consular candidacy, for example, stems from a notice in the 5th century A.D. historian Orosius, who refers to a *Scipio Lepidi filius* who later died during Lepidus' revolt. The suggestion is, as per Münzer, that this Scipio was a son of Lepidus adopted by the proscribed consular, Lucius Cornelius Scipio Asiagenus. Rosenblitt assumes that, as a child of a proscribed Roman, Lepidus' son was exempted from a political career, motivating Lepidus' advocacy (pp. 33, 65). This prosopographical connection is plausible, but Orosius' vague reference is a difficult foundation for such a strong conclusion.

The following section narrows in on the trauma that Sulla's civil wars and regime inflicted on the Romans, arguing that the last three decades of the Republic must be viewed as distinctly "post-Sullan." (p. 81). The first two chapters of this section focus on the *tumultus Lepidi*, the civil violence that Lepidus either instigated or took advantage of as consul in 78-77, ending in his death in battle in Etruria. Chapter Six more broadly focuses on the tensions and unrest in Rome after Sulla's death in the 70s, whether due to attempts to hold the profiteers of Sulla's proscriptions accountable, anger over the fates of the proscribed and their children, or popular frustration over lost benefits and rights. There are many interesting ideas in this chapter that could further be developed, which makes the decision to focus on the 70s through the prism of Lepidus, his motivations, and his revolt for so much of the section and the book (Chapters Three, Four, Five, Seven, and Appendix A) a frustrating one. Chapter Four (pp. 45–61) is dedicated to separating and analyzing three different traditions about the revolt, represented by Appian, Livy, and Sallust, along with later authors who drew on them, but these traditions overlap too much to draw helpful distinctions. Much of the analysis of Sallust's interpretation of the revolt, for example, relies on a vague reference in Tacitus' *Annales* 3.27 to *turbidae rogationes* of Lepidus that Rosenblitt takes as a reference to Sallust's lost account of Lepidus' legislation, which she argues was a prominent feature of the historian's treatment of Lepidus. Even if Tacitus took this phrase from the *Historiae*, which is certainly a possibility, it is only one possibility, as Rosenblitt admits in the endnotes (p. 167, nn. 23–24). It is a difficult basis for reconstructing Sallust's narrative of Lepidus in comparison to other source traditions.

In combination with the surviving speeches of Sallust surrounding Lepidus, Rosenblitt wants to use this reconstruction of Sallust's Lepidus to emphasize that he was not a moderate or simply a political opportunist. He was instead attempting to dismantle the Sullan settlement and became a champion for the excluded, including the proscribed, Etrurians dispossessed by Sullan veteran colonies, and the urban plebs. Chapter Five (pp. 63–79) argues in particular that Lepidus tried to enact a series of substantive urban reforms that were central to his agenda, including re-introducing the corn dole and advocating for the return of tribunician power once he

had left for Etruria. Given the difficulties of the patchy sources for Lepidus, many of these arguments are too speculative and their focus too narrow to support Rosenblitt's provocative broader argument for the disruption caused by Sulla's transformation of Roman society.

The third section of the book, with its focus on historiography, is ultimately the strongest and makes the greatest contribution to the field. It explores the ways that Sallust's *Historiae* exposes changes in Roman culture after the death of Sulla, which is where the work's narrative begins, while also arguing that Sallust's perspective reflects changing discourses at Rome in the 70s–50s B.C. Chapter Seven (pp. 93–99; see also Appendix B) analyzes the speech of Lepidus in the *Historiae* as a case study. Rosenblitt convincingly demonstrates that whether the speech is anachronistic or the audience is meant to be sympathetic to Lepidus, it subverts Sulla's self-fashioning and his claims that through his acts and dictatorship, he had brought stability and renewal to the Roman Republic. Chapter Eight (pp. 101–113) expands on this reading of Lepidus' speech by considering the roles deceit and autocracy play in the *Historiae*, especially through the role of Pompey, as exemplified by Sallust's version of "the letter of Pompey" from Spain. The tyranny of Sulla and the rise of ambitious, dissembling, would-be-autocrats, like Pompey and Caesar, raise questions in Sallust about whether any late Republican senator could pursue politics sincerely.

The final two chapters deal with the concept of "hostile politics," a political discourse that Rosenblitt argues stemmed from the *hostis* decrees of the civil wars of the 80s, through which Roman citizens were branded as foreign enemies. In the aftermath of Sulla's victory and the trauma that ensued, popular advocates, represented in the speeches of Sallust, could suggest that powerful senators were enemies of the Roman people who had enslaved and despoiled them. Rosenblitt claims that this was a distinctive brand of contional rhetoric used exclusively by those challenging Sulla's system and its elite beneficiaries. She therefore challenges Morstein-Marx's conclusion in *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Roman Republic* that *contiones* were subject to ideological monotony, in which every speaker would claim to be a *popularis*, a representative of the Roman people. Crucial for this argument is the claim that Sallust is not inventing this type of rhetoric or taking it from the civil war period of the 40s and 30s. Instead, the speeches in his *Historiae* are modeled on discourses that emerged in Roman politics specifically from Sulla's acts and oratory, reflecting the late Republic's ruptured political culture. To prove this, much is made of comment by Cicero in *de lege agraria* 2.14 criticizing unnecessary warfare between consuls and tribunes of the plebs. The analysis of hostile politics in Sallust's speeches is compelling, but much more evidence is needed from the 70s, 60s, and 50s to show that it became a key component of late Republican political life and was a distinctive brand of rhetoric – a fuller section on contional speakers, such as Cicero, Milo, and Clodius would have been effective. The book ends with a short epilogue (pp. 141–144). It suggests that Sallust's model of hostile politics is representative of a crisis of legitimacy in the late Republic, and that the breakdown in

social cohesion caused by the civil wars of the 80s did not stabilize until the Augustan era.

Overall, I stress again that I found the sections dealing with Sallustian historiography generally more convincing than those centred around late Republican history, even though many of the arguments concerning the latter are interesting and worthy of further consideration, such as the case for hostile politics. Rosenblitt acknowledges that the narrow geographical and chronological focus of the book may be construed as a weakness, but one that the authors hopes is offset by the detailed treatment given to the years 80–77 B.C. (p. 81). For this reader, the narrowness of much of the book's focus in terms of geography (the city of Rome), time (the Lepidus revolt), and source material (Sallust's *Histories*) cannot help but weaken Rosenblitt's broader historical conclusions about the late Republic. Given that the book is attempting to disprove a Ciceronian conception of late Republican politics, more time could be spent on non-Sallustian rhetoric, along with other events in the 70s and beyond that could reinforce the book's arguments, such as the Sertorius conflict. Similarly, although some attention is paid to material and topographical evidence, more could be considered, and more done with the examples used. For example, difficult and speculative readings of the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus (p. 89) and a (possible) statue of Sulla as an orator (p. 124–125) are used to draw strong conclusions about the emotional trauma of the proscriptions and Sulla's contional oratory, respectively. I therefore especially recommend *Rome after Sulla* for scholars interested in Latin historiography and Sallust. Historians of the late Republic will find many of Rosenblitt's ideas provocative and worth examination, though they may disagree with the book's conclusions. I imagine, however, that these ideas and conclusions will stimulate further discussion of Lucius Cornelius Sulla and his legacy.

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