

Rosillo-López, Christina (ed). *Communicating Public Opinion in the Roman Republic*. Historia Einzelschriften 256. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019. Pp. 304. ISBN 9783515121729. €59.00.

Titles and Contents below.

This new volume stemming from a 2016 seminar in Seville offers many thoughtful case studies of public opinion from several decades in the Roman Republic. Where many volumes on this topic focus only on the lifetime of Cicero and on domestic issues, this volume includes pieces on military issues and political debates from the Second Punic War through the Second Triumvirate. While these are welcome additions to the burgeoning study of public communication and action in Rome, there is no consensus on what public opinion is and what discussion there is on the topic is dominated by Habermas. A more innovative approach focusing on more recent theories of public interaction is much needed. Where studies of public space in Rome and other parts of the ancient world have been open to using techniques and definitions from modern use of spatial analysis,¹ discussions of public opinion are still using concepts over 50 years old. Despite this failure of the volume as a whole, the papers within are revealing and often profound, and some also give new insight into Habermas and his application to Rome.

Rosillo-López opens the volume with an introduction discussing Habermas and his effect on ancient historians. In addition she gives a short literature review of the topic of public opinion and reputation in Roman politics. The discussion of Habermas continues in the first section of the book, ‘Public Opinion: Nature and Character’, which is comprised of three studies of Roman approaches to public opinion. Hurllet’s entry tackles the debate over Habermas the most directly in the form of a historiography and concludes that Roman concepts like *auctoritas* show the existence of public opinion but not of the “reasoned” sort Habermas chiefly valued. Russell adds to the discussion of Habermas by arguing that the Roman word “*populus*” can be conceived as synonymous with *Öffentlichkeit* as a singular conception of the public at large. Her argument builds on Hölkeskamp’s study on inclusive language in rhetoric by claiming that the use of *populus* is not a mere rhetorical trope, the Romans did view the *populus Romanus* as a singular entity.² The final study of this section is Rosillo-López’s own, which researches whether and how Romans actually measured public opinion by focusing on letters in which Cicero discussed the likely winners of upcoming elections. She concludes that Cicero was a good diviner of public opinion, even when compared to modern pollsters and argues that this talent was invaluable for a politician who needed to invest his time on winners.

¹ Ray Laurence and David Newsome, *Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii: Movement and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² Karl-J. Hölkeskamp, “Friends, Romans, Countrymen: Addressing the Roman People and the Rhetoric of Inclusion,” in *Community and Communication: Oratory and Politics in Republican Rome*, ed. Catherine Steel and Henriette van der Blom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11–28.

The next section of the book, ‘Public Opinion: Military and Institutional Questions’, is concerned with questions on military actions. These papers are intricate case studies of Roman politicians using tools to manipulate public opinion for specific ends. García Riaza argues that triumphs and other celebrations were as dependent on the state of Roman public opinion as they were on the success of the general and his influence on the Senate. In particular, García Riaza asserts that the heralds who announced victory played a central role in gaining public favor and were a critical first part of winning a triumph. Díaz Fernández’s study of the Numantine War argues that Scipio Aemilianus and his supporters politicized Rome’s losses and prosecuted Mancinius (his predecessor in Spain) as a way of ensuring a second consulship. Moreover, this process became a blueprint for other ambitious politicians like Marius. Blösel’s study surveys the specific occasions when Pompey sought extraordinary commands, adding still further case studies of using *contiones* to manipulate public opinion. Blösel adds to the previous studies by also noting the personal costs of these campaigns. He argues that the *Commentariolum petitionis* shows that Cicero had alienated many potential supporters. Morrell adds a case where both Romans and Egyptians tried to sway the public. Not only did a foreign power attempt to sway the Senate and public in the Auletes scandal, this years-long dispute included divisive trials as in the Numantine War and a new wrinkle—the use of religious institutions to influence public opinion. Ando’s study focuses on the way in which Caesar made sense of time, space, and political ritual in his account of the civil war. Ando argues that Caesar used an illusion of simultaneity to link his supporters with the *populus* at Rome to grant his actions legitimacy.

The third section, ‘Public Opinion as Public Dialogue’, is more amorphous than the previous but focuses on examples where politicians confronted an unfavorable public. Pina Polo discusses the rhetoric of fear in Cicero and compares his use of fear to modern political speeches. He concludes that Cicero presented divisive issues from agrarian laws to Antony’s rebellion on a continuum from *regnum* to *libertas*, warning the people to avoid supporting *regnum* at the cost of their freedom. Hillard’s study focuses on the *Verrine Orations*, particularly on Cicero’s assertion that the Senate’s supremacy in Rome was in danger due to public opinion. Hillard argues that Cicero is describing a valid threat and that the public was divided in supporting the Senate or giving *equites* more power. Instead of warning the people as in Pina Polo, Cicero is here warning the Senate. Welch attempts to reconstruct the “pitch” Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian made for proscriptions. Welch concludes by offering a reconstructed pitch based on critical readings of Appian, Velleius, and Dio: that the murderers of Caesar and those who aided them should face punishment under the law.

The final section, ‘The Transmission of Public Opinion’, focuses on published works rather than active debates. Tatum asks why the *Commentariolum petitionis* was written as a letter. He argues that the *commentariolum* was meant to make Cicero’s campaign strategy appear to be normal and reasonable despite the fact that it was novel. Presenting the strategy as a letter highlighted the artificial mundanity of it.

Yakobson studied the accounts where Velleius Paterculus praised leaders of the Republic in seeming contradiction to the values of Tiberius but did not come to a strong conclusion. On one hand, these sections show a member of the elite protesting the values of the *princeps*. On the other, there is the possibility that the values highlighted in Velleius, like *libertas*, were not as antithetical to Tiberius as they may appear.

This volume will be of great use to people looking for examples of public dialogue from the last centuries of the Republic on both domestic and foreign matters. The papers discuss all matter of political action: *contiones*, trials, elections, triumphs and publications. The failings are small. One might like to see discussion of events like riots and games in more detail (they are mentioned but are not central in any paper). That there is no consensus definition of public opinion gives each study freedom to explore but also seems like a missed opportunity to define the use of Habermas in the discussion or to move the debate beyond Habermas and into more modern conceptions of the public and public opinion.

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Contents

Rosillo-López, Cristina: Introduction

PUBLIC OPINION: NATURE AND CHARACTER

Hurlet, Frédéric: L'öffentliche Meinung de Habermas et l'opinion publique dans la Rome antique. De la raison à l'auctoritas

Russell, Amy: The *populus Romanus* as the source of public opinion

Rosillo-López, Cristina: How did Romans perceive and measure public opinion?

PUBLIC OPINION: MILITARY AND INSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

García Riaza, Enrique: *Laureatae litterae*. Announcing Victories and Public Opinion in the Middle Republic

Díaz Fernández, Alejandro: Military disasters, public opinion, and Roman politics during the wars in Hispania (153–133 B. C.)

Blösel, Wolfgang: The *imperia extraordinaria* of the 70s to 50s B. C. and Public Opinion

Morrell, Kit: “Who wants to go to Alexandria?” Pompey, Ptolemy, and public opinion, 57–56 BC

Ando, Clifford: The space and time of politics in civil war

PUBLIC OPINION AS PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Pina Polo, Francisco: Rhetoric of Fear in Republican Rome: the Ciceronian Case

Hillard, T. W.: Ventus Popularis? 'Popular Opinion' in the 70s and its senatorial Reception

Welch, Kathryn: Selling Proscription to the Roman Public

THE TRANSMISSION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Tatum, W. Jeffrey: Canvassing the elite: communicating sound values in the *Commentariolum Petitionis*

Yakobson, Alexander : Velleius Paterculus, imperial ideology and the old republic

APPENDIX

List of Contributors

Index of Names

Subject Index