Roman history

There is a staple criticism that is levelled at scholarship in English by Continental European reviewers, especially when they are pushed for time or short of ideas: engagement with scholarship in languages other than English is too sparse; the bibliography is largely monolingual; there is insufficient openness to debates in other historiographical traditions. To be sure, that is often a pertinent objection. But it is also a trope, and as such it is almost unfailingly lazy and unsatisfactory. Scholarship produced in non-English-speaking academic settings does not necessarily fare better. There is a widespread tendency – understandable and undesirable at the same time – to engage more intensively with work that has appeared in the same language in which one writes and teaches. Moreover, the presence of a suitably multilingual bibliography is not in itself a sign of genuine openness to what different intellectual traditions have to offer to the study of a problem: it might be a sign of scholarly diligence; in many cases, it is barely more than window-dressing.

Engaging with any piece of scholarship involves having some awareness of the intellectual context in which it took shape: the models it builds upon or pushes back against; the vocabulary that populates it; and the academic setting in which it was produced. Linguistic competence is necessary, but is not sufficient to enable a reader to become immersed in the tradition in which a given contribution originated. Translations of major scholarly works can play an invaluable role in that connection. They do not just have the merit of making important material available to audiences that do not have the toolkit to work on it; they also give to those who can read it in the original the chance to reflect more carefully on what (more or less) familiar work has to offer. They create connections between different historical vocabularies; they make intellectual discourses in separate linguistic remits more capacious and more productive.

That is what Amy Russell and Hans Beck have achieved in the latest instalment of the CUP series *Classical Scholarship in Translation*.[1] Their anthology of key German contributions on Roman Republican history is not just an invaluable regest of studies that made a significant impact on the field, and can now conveniently and fruitfully be offered to the English-reading classroom. It is also a stimulating account of how a generation of German scholars has made a highly original contribution to the study of the Republic, and how its intellectual vocabulary took shape and was deployed. The core of the book consists of ten important essays published between 2000 and 2009: two each by Martin Jehne and Tonio Hölscher, and one each by Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, Uwe Walter, Wolfgang Blösel, Hans Beck, Egon Flaig, and Claudia Tiersch. For the first time, some key concepts in the debate on Roman Republican politics are given an airing in a language other than German: Jehne's *Jovialität* (here rendered as 'benevolence') and the code it entailed, or indeed his reflection on 'rituals of integration'; and Flaig's famously demanding work on the ritual grammar of institutionalized politics. Some essays may profitably be read in lockstep with one another: Walter's study of 'history culture' explicitly builds upon Hölscher's contribution on public monuments and public memory. There is much to learn from every single piece that has been included in this volume.

[1] *The Roman Republic and Political Culture. German Scholarship in Translation,* edited by Amy Russell and Hans Beck. Translations by Kathrin Lüddecke, Classical Scholarship in Translation. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xii + 409. 12 illustrations, 2 tables. Hardback £100. ISBN: 978-1-009-51510-8.

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The very choice of making this material available in English and putting its terminological load to the test of an English translation is valuable work, which will bring new energy and new potential into this body of scholarship. Kathrin Lüddecke has done a stellar job, insofar as I can judge, in turning what is sometimes very demanding German prose into English; some key terms have helpfully been given in the original, whilst being translated between brackets, giving readers the chance to control the translation and reflect upon it for themselves.

This decision has been shared with the volume editors, and in her introduction Amy Russell gives an invaluable list of German 'untranslatables' (15–19), which quickly turns into a primer of key concepts and the ways in which they might be put to use. She keenly explores and confronts the risks and potential shortcomings of this editorial project: the danger of creating a canon of sorts by focusing on a narrow field of very established male scholars; the glaring gender imbalance of the list of contributors; the possibility that an English translation might further reduce the widely cherished and intrinsically valuable linguistic diversity of the field. The latter argument, as she demonstrates, does not really wash: translation is an intellectual operation, which carries real historiographical value; and making this work available in English will make it more widely accessible, and will meaningfully serve the cohorts of graduate programmes as they are here and now (see esp. 7–8: what she says about the Anglosphere also applies to Southern Europe in most respects). She is also right in pointing out that the degree of intellectual sophistication that can be seen in this edition is not within the reach of existing AI translation tools (in their own right a major resource that should be robustly built into any research training programme, and cannot be left to the domain of self-help).

Russell rightly insists that this volume does not amount to a canon. Most of Hölkeskamp's work, for instance, has been left out because it has appeared in English elsewhere: he has overseen its translation himself at various stages of his career.[2] What we are presented with here is a possible summary of an intellectual tradition that is situated in a very specific time. As one reads through this collection from cover to cover (contravening the editorial expectations stated on p. 23), it is hard to escape that they are, in a number of ways, the product of a different political age: it is striking how little they speak about conflict, inequality, coercion, oppression, or deception. Economic developments and the link between Roman politics and the empire receive hardly any attention. Moreover, different strategies for making sense of the Roman Republic have emerged in the last fifteen years or so. Hölkeskamp charts some of this debate in his valuable contribution, which serves as a second introduction of sorts to this volume, and offers a staggeringly useful bibliography. He rightly points out that some of the most promising developments are unfolding in the debates on early Rome (47–8), where the dynamics of state formation are yielding insight into the ways in which politics operated on a longer-term basis. Harriet Flower draws attention to a few more directions of travel (87–8) at the end of a beautiful piece in which her uniquely insightful engagement with German historiography shines through, and where she voices the measured hope that

[2] See K.-J. Hölkeskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic. An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research,* (Princeton and Oxford, 2010); id., *Roman Republican Reflections. Studies in Politics, Power, and Pageantry* (Stuttgart, 2020). Some of Hölkeskamp's late Republican studies have most recently appeared in Italian translation, preceded by a valuable interview by Maurizio Giangiulio and Giorgia Proietti: *Memoria e storia. Quattro studi e un'intervista* (Naples, 2025). See pp. 35–6 for an overview of the translations of Hölkeskamp's work into several European languages.

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this book will further understanding across different traditions by demonstrating the terms of their mutual engagement.

Some aspects of this volume leave the reader craving (even) more. The choice not to provide an index was a conscious one, but I would still maintain that it was a missed opportunity to give better orientation on what is covered in this volume, and what sort of evidence is actually handled in the body of scholarship represented. Hans Beck has offered effective summaries of each contribution, making clear what was distinctive and original about it at the time it appeared. It would have been very helpful to have brief addenda on the impact of each of those pieces, or on how the debate has moved on some specific points. And perhaps readers could have been drawn more explicitly to the instances of 'diversity of thought' (23) that are apparent in these papers, notwithstanding their shared approach. But these are the gripes of a keen and grateful reader. Russell and Beck have brought to completion a first-rate intellectual operation. Any student of the Roman Republic should get hold of this book.

It is worth going back to the theme of the intersections between scholarly agendas and the political climate in which they take shape. Some of the most stimulating work to have appeared over the last year or so is intently shaped by contemporary concerns – or indeed worries. If the scholarship presented in English by Russell and Beck is the product of an age of relative political stability, the brilliant set of papers collected in *How Republics Die* (a telling title, if ever there was one) explicitly frame their agendas around the developments of January 2021 and November 2024.[3] The volume is in fact based on a conference held at Melbourne in July 2023, but it is apparent that the contributors have kept interacting with each other's work since, and have been taking stock of more recent political developments. The coverage of the volume is very wide indeed: there are papers on Greek democracy, on aspects of modern political thought, and on specific phases of twentieth-century developments. The core of the book, though, is a series of studies on Roman Republican history, helpfully arranged under three headings: concepts, causation, and effect. There is a shared theme and a common set of concerns; it is less apparent that there is also a shared grid of research questions. That is of relative importance, though: the series of papers collected in this volume is one of the clearest and most stimulating illustrations of the potential that the study of the late-Roman Republic still has in store. They should be taken collectively as a powerful interim report on the state of the field and its direction; in the words chosen by the editors in the introduction, they strike a felicitous balance between the exploration of old problems with new perspectives and new problems with old perspectives. There is sustained confrontation with some recent contributions in contemporary political thought: H. Levisky and D. Ziblatt's *How Democracies Die* (2018) is explicitly framed as an interlocutor by the title of this new book; their 2022 intervention *Tyranny of the Minority* is an important presence, too. It is worth acknowledging the editors' choice to include in the conversation a number of early-career scholars; the Open Access availability of the book is bound to serve well the reach and impact of their work. Every single piece in this volume warrants close attention and detailed discussion; for our purposes I will

[3] *How Republics Die. Creeping Authoritarianism in Ancient Rome and Beyond,* edited by Frederik Juliaan Vervaet, David Rafferty, and Christopher J. Dart, Studies in Ancient Civil War 4, Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2025. Pp. xv + 540. Hardback, £91, ISBN: 978-3-11-165027-2; e-book, Open Access, ISBN: 978-3-11-170544-6.

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invidiously single out four. Amy Russell takes on the well-established view that the Republic ended when consensus was irrevocably eroded, and posits a much more dynamic image of the Republican tradition, which was predicated on adaptability and openness to change, and broke down when the pathways to meaningful change narrowed and the system became overly rigid: it is a case of gatekeeping gone badly wrong, rather than one of unrestrained and unwise inclusion of dangerous forces. This reading, as Russell points out, might also get us to think harder about the politics of our own time, and the rewards of the 'open' or 'antagonistic democracy' models envisaged by theorists such as Hélène Landemore and Chantal Mouffe. James Tan makes a powerful case for bringing economic factors back to the core of any attempt to make sense of the late Republic. As he points out, the 'proletarisation' model was long central in twentieth-century debates; while it was proved wrong by sustained work on the archaeological and literary evidence alike, it has never been replaced by a comparable set of working parameters. Tan argues that it is time to resume this project through an openly modernistic outlook, which takes seriously the complexity and the scale of the Roman economy. He sketches some areas for future work (taxation, the link between growth and inequality, the role of the provinces), and is optimistic on the ability of this new focus on economic developments to get us out of the debate between what he terms the 'conventional model' and the 'sleepwalker' thesis by opening up new opportunities for historical explanation. Tom Hillard and Lea Beness turn to immaterial factors, which also have an important role to play in this conversation: they reflect on the role that lack of trust, incivility, disillusion, and alienation have in late Republican politics, drawing on examples between the 160s and the 50s. The evidence that they muster may be seen as a return to the 'consensus breakdown' model, but in fact leaves room for a range of different readings: it has the merit, at any rate, of drawing our attention to the intellectual and moral climate of that period. Jeff Tatum brings authoritarianism into the mix through the prism of the work of Marlies Glasius and her focus on authoritarian practices. He uses that concept as a springboard towards an original reassessment of Roman politics in the 70s BCE: the calls for the restoration of the tribunate are attractively explained as a form of authoritarian practice, and indeed of 'accountability sabotage' on the part of the 'governing class'. The outcome is a teachable example of how measured and informed engagement with modern theory can bring new energy to the study of a well-trodden dossier. I am conscious of how ruthlessly selective this overview has been, not least because it leaves out two very substantial chapters by the editors. There is much else to discuss and weigh up in this book: in spite of its ostensibly specific outlook, it is easily one of the most stimulating big-picture contributions to Republican history to have appeared in the last decade.

Another major contribution to the study of late Republican history has now appeared in English, and it is worth noting its publication here. In 2018 Dominik Maschek produced a brilliant book that did much more than its title suggests: it is not just an account of the archaeology of the civil wars, but an attempt to construct a treatment of the crisis of the Roman Republic by placing its material culture right at the centre of the discussion.[4] Liverpool University Press has now published an English translation in its

[4] D. Maschek, *Die römischen Bürgerkriege. Archäologie und Geschichte einer Krisenzeit* (Darmstadt, 2018).

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recently-established series *Liverpool Studies in Ancient History*.[5] The appearance of this book could realistically change the way the Roman Republic is taught in English-reading settings. It is unparalleled in its ability to provide an account of the key economic and social processes that underpinned the demise of the Republican set-up, and to show how a non-event-centred history of the period can carry as much explanatory power as the best-crafted narrative accounts (many of the vital concerns voiced in the essay of James Tan discussed above are addressed here). To be sure, this is not a textbook, but if I had to point a graduate student to a detailed inventory of the key themes in current research on late Republican history, I would direct them here.

The shortcoming of the original title is repeated in this otherwise excellent English edition: the book has a much wider compass than the last four decades or so of Republican history, and it is about so much more than civil war. Its first part is about the second century BCE and the impact of Roman imperialism in a number of Mediterranean settings. The relationship between city and countryside is identified as a key theme throughout the book, along with the need to place consumption patterns at the centre of our understanding of the period. As Maschek compellingly argues, that is the way out of a history of the late Republic narrowly focused on the elites and their priorities, and a chance to write a more capacious history towards 'a balanced representation of elite and non-elite agency' (300). The discussion has a strong theoretical slant, as the conclusions make especially apparent, but it is chiefly rooted in a striking command of the material and a thoughtful appreciation of the weight of the geographical dimension; it revolves around the discussion of dozens of specific examples, drawn from a host of different kinds of evidence. This is a book that should be read from cover to cover, but will also repay frequent consultation. The shape of the discussion is the same as that of the 2018 edition; however, Maschek has included plenty of later bibliography, and in places he has explicitly engaged with it. He has, for instance, taken stock of the work of Kimberley Bowes' team on the *Roman Peasant Project* (201–2), and he discusses the argument of Barbara Walter and Peter Turchin on the connection between economic discrimination and civil conflict (299). He has also been thinking hard about the connections between his subject matter and the politics of our time, with which he sees powerful and troubling connections: his preface opens with a reference to the storming of the Capitol in 2021 and President Trump's later refusal to rule out the use of violence towards his political opponents.

The events of 6 January 2021 are also cited right at the beginning of the editors' introduction to a substantial collection of essays on unrest in the Roman Empire. Lisa Eberle and Myles Lavan have brought together a most impressive set of contributors to explore different aspects of the history of unrest through a discursive perspective; they are less keen to explore the political and social contexts in which unrest may have taken shape.[6] The focus of the book is thus mostly on textual evidence, with some incursions into the visual. The notion of unrest is sufficiently capacious (or euphemistic) to cover a staggering range of contexts and problems: it can easily encompass the whole of Roman

[5] Dominik Maschek, *The Roman Civil Wars. The Archaeology and History of a Crisis.* Translated by Joseph O'Donnell. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2025. Pp. ix + 416. Hardback, £96. ISBN: 978-1-83624-338-0.

[6] *Unrest in the Roman Empire. A Discursive History,* edited by Lisa Pilar Eberle and Myles Lavan, Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2025. Pp. 312. Paperback, €39, ISBN: 978-3-593-51932-6; Open Access, 978-3-593-45850-2.

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history. The subtitle is a red herring. The book does not quite amount to *a* discursive history, but gives some illuminating examples of how discursive history can be conducted in the study of the Roman Empire.

The eleven chapters in this book are highly perceptive studies of specific instances of dissent towards the imperial project: a host of dissenting voices, hidden transcripts, and patterns of non-compliance are given a fair hearing. They would all warrant close discussion in their own right. The collection has a wide chronological and geographical focus; it is productively bookended by two papers on Jewish responses to imperial hegemony (Dan-el Padilla Peralta on the *Book of Daniel* as a theoretical piece that plots a 'strategy for survivance' and Natalie Drohmann on rabbinic strategies for the suppression of unrest in the Roman imperial context). What proves especially attractive about this volume, quite apart from the calibre of the participants, is the ability to find distinctive angles on well-rehearsed themes. Lisa Eberle, for instance, revisits Appian and his well-documented interest in economic and social developments by showing how important the term *aporia* ('loss' or 'lack', depending on the context) is to his overall project. Hans Kopp lays the foundations for a new study of military unrest through a sensitive study of its terminology, especially in Latin historiography. Katell Berthelot gives a new take on Josephus and the ways in which he organizes his assessment of Roman rule in the narrative of the Judaean revolt: his position as an aristocrat who was systematically suspicious of unrest, no matter what its source was, is brought out as the main thrust. James Corke-Webster offers a strong discussion of how imperial agency becomes an increasingly prominent theme in Christian polemic, and how it is framed through a military language: persecution is cast as the clash between two warring parties. The list could (and really ought to) continue. This volume reads like the start of much-needed conversations, in the classroom and well beyond, on aspects of Roman history that have for too long been taken for granted, and require much more careful and energetic exploration.

The weight of contemporary developments is also apparent in two important books on labour in the Roman world. Del Maticic and Jordan Rogers have brought together a set of papers on working lives in ancient Rome against the backdrop of two processes: one that is still very much with us – precarity in academia – and one that belongs to a specific conjuncture of far-reaching and oft-neglected implications – the redefinition of the work–life balance that Covid forced.[7] The outcome is a diverse collection that is not held together by a strong overarching argument, but is informed by a keen shared interest in how work impacts on lives, and what strategies of control and risks shape that interaction. As the editors put it, the structure of the volume is 'more arachnoid than apiary' (13): readers are encouraged to use this book as freely as they wish.

Some papers have an obvious historical interest. Claire Holleran has a formidably rich discussion of the evidence for wandering workers in the Roman Empire, with an especially strong focus on physicians, architects, and artisans: her focus, then, is on the lived experience of internal migrants within the empire. The same professional groups receive close attention in Rebecca Sausville's contribution on working relations in Roman Asia Minor. Caroline Cheung does fascinating work on fragments by looking at

[7] *Working Lives in Ancient Rome*, edited by Del A. Maticic and Jordan Rogers, The New Antiquity, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. Pp. 427. Paperback, £129.99, ISBN: 978-3-031-61233-6.

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what repair work on large wine containers (*dolia*) may have to teach about wider patterns of production and use. John Bodel has an important discussion of *praeficae,* the women who were hired to perform laments at funerals.

Other papers have different kinds of lessons to yield, and turn to specific clusters of evidence. To name some examples: Tom Geue gives a perceptive reading of the pseudo-Virgilian poem *Moretum*; Ann Kuttner offers sophisticated insights into the depiction of workers in Roman art; Jane Sancinito explores non-elite perceptions of merchants, through a combination of literary and epigraphical texts. Cicero's correspondence comes into special focus in the chapter of Nicole Giannella on Tiro and Chrysippus, two freedmen of the orator.

As a whole, the focus of this book is largely how individuals negotiate their connection with work, whether in practice or in the discourses that are developed around it. Sarah Bond's book on labour associations in the Roman Empire fruitfully brings the collective dimension into the debate. It is a major study on socio-economic conflict and its political implications in the Roman world; inevitably, it is also shaped by contemporary concerns.[8] Class struggle has been gaining prominence in Greek history; much less so in Roman history, even though Marx and Engels defined the dualism between patricians and plebeians as an early instance of the theme. Bond does not shy away from taking her cue from *The Communist Manifesto* (a refreshing and bold move in 2025 America) in stressing how secession and withholding of the military services by plebeians were highly consequential strategies in ancient Rome. While she does not explicitly speak in terms of class struggle, she argues that organized labour is a major force in ancient Rome, which has not been given its due so far, and she reinforces the point by operating a 'strategic anachronism' in using the term 'union' to refer to ancient associations of workers. She identifies, in fact, an overarching pattern in history: when workers come together, attempts are made to control and curb their action. There is a not-so-thin thread that links up Caesar's disbanding of a number of *collegia* in mid-first-century BCE Rome with the Starbucks executive who fired baristas that had joined a union. Of course there are profound and important differences, too – but Bond is keen for us to see the analogies and their heuristic value.

The key ambition of this book – which is largely and impressively fulfilled – is to assemble and organize a dossier fleshing out that general claim. There is no shortage of relevant material, from the Struggle of the Orders to the rich body of evidence for the middle and late Republic: the Rome that Bond takes us through is a rather different place from the one sketched in the performance culture and consensus rituals that are central to the collection with which we opened this review article. The second chapter is an especially important account, in which manumission is rightly brought out as a tool of coercion and exploitation, and in which Bond discusses the basic premise of what Dominic Machado has elsewhere called 'a broader context of dissent' (it would have been fascinating to see some engagement with Peter Morton's recent reading of the second-century BCE slave wars in Sicily). Control over associations and the spaces they occupied is convincingly revealed as a major theme in late Republican history; in the early imperial age the techniques of control and repression may have become stronger,

[8] Sarah E. Bond, *Strike. Labor, Unions, and Resistance in the Roman Empire,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2025. Pp. xi + 254. 4 illustrations. Hardback, £25. ISBN: 978-0-300-27314-4.

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but anxieties over the conduct of labour associations were far from gone: in fact, they are apparent through the evidence for the actions of city magistrates across Italy and the empire. On the one hand, the discussion is aided by the changes in the epigraphic habit, which yields relevant evidence that is largely unavailable for other periods; on the other, the sheer breadth of the theme demands a more fragmented discussion through brief treatment of local case studies. Fear is convincingly brought out as an important historical factor; the dealings between unions and magistrates (or employers) are part of the wider problem of the cultures of risk in antiquity.

Bond sees a 'golden age of association formation' between the first and second centuries CE. We have to get by with the material we have got, but I do wonder whether such a strong periodization is more dictated by the change in the epigraphic habit than by a major shift in practice. That is partly corroborated by the final part of the discussion, where circus factions in late antiquity are discussed as venues of participation and mobilization of slaves, and sports and spectacle are understood as forms of labour that deserve exploration in their own right. The possibility of envisaging different periodizations is testimony to the importance and capaciousness of the problem that Bond has identified. *Strike* has the rare quality of firmly placing a major question on the map, whilst showing the many directions that its study can take. It also presents us with dozens of teachable cases: this book is a brilliant illustration of the rewards of Roman social history.

An important angle of the study of labour is its connection with expertise: how it is developed, codified, and transmitted, and how different kinds and degrees of competence feed into the conflict between labour and capital. This is a problem of intellectual history as much as one of social history. The making of a formalized discourse on a set of practices can lead to the making of a discipline, which is in turn placed within a wider set of knowledge. In the early imperial period a distinctive body of literature on specific remits of knowledge took shape: the *artes* became a topic of formalized discussion. The canon is a well-known one: Vitruvius on architecture, Columella on agriculture, Celsus on medicine, and Onasander and Frontinus on military matters. James Zainaldin has produced an extensive discussion of this body of literature, which he reads as a key vantage point on the development of Roman scientific culture.[9] The point is not novel, and Zainaldin could have made clearer in what respects his work is a fresh departure from the ground-breaking studies of Moatti, Woolf, and König: however, he develops his discussion with impressive rigour, and the range of the analysis is impressive. The focus is on high-end intellectual debates, which are preoccupied with the understanding and ordering of the world, rather than with the practical activities that unfold on the ground. The book deals with a demanding and complex set of material, and presents its key points with admirable clarity, through a set of exercises in close reading. Zainaldin effectively shows how this body of work is informed by the ambition to construct and assert a form of knowledge that is demonstrably framed within the development of Roman imperial culture.

Surprisingly, law receives only tangential attention in his discussion: the choice is all the more striking, since Roman jurists have been gaining a welcome degree of attention

[9] James L. Zainaldin, *The* artes *and the Emergence of a Scientific Culture in the Early Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xx + 453. 16 illustrations and 5 tables. Hardback, £120, ISBN: 978-1-009-50163-7.

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of late. Much of the credit for that goes to the collaborative ERC (European Research Council)-funded project led between 2015 and 2022 by Aldo Schiavone, *Scriptores iuris Romani*, which has yielded a set of major studies, each devoted to a major jurist and a new edition of his work: a series of nineteen volumes to date, plus four *Subsidia*, published with «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, which have put on a new footing the study of the intellectual traditions that fed into the *Corpus iuris civilis*. A late offering of this great collaborative undertaking is a slim English book that gathers essays on four key figures in the history of Roman law: Q. Mucius Scaevola, Sextus Pomponius, Iulius Paulus (usually referred to as Paul), and Cn. Domitius Ulpianus (Ulpian). All these pieces have appeared in Italian in previous instalments of the series, and are offered here with a brief introduction by Schiavone.

We are presented with another example of scholarship in translation, then, and one that sets out to cross another kind of boundaries: those of subject communities that tend to work in safe isolation from one another. The language in which this volume has been published, though, is of relative significance: these essays may fairly be read as a regest of the key outcomes of the project, and the compact (though not widely affordable) form in which they have been presented greatly increases the chances for this book to make its way into classical libraries.[10]

Schiavone and Emanuele Stolfi offer two powerful introductions to the life and work of Q. Mucius Scaevola, truly doing justice to the importance of his role in the intellectual history of late Republican Rome. Schiavone is especially rewarding on Mucius' contribution to the development of modes of abstract thinking and the systematization of Roman law, and his closing pages on the analogy between the deaths of Mucius and Ulpian have an arresting quality to them. Stolfi takes us into the complexity of Mucius' work – eighteen books on civil law – which can be reliably reconstructed through the web of notes and commentaries produced by his later readers, notably Pomponius and Paul: its structure, the handling of key concepts, and the place that linguistic and grammatical analysis had in his discussion. Mucius was a central figure in the politics of his own time; Sextus Pomponius, the author of a very influential handbook on Roman law, the *Enchiridion*, can reliably be placed in the Antonine period, but is otherwise unknown. Fara Nasti must thus focus on reconstructing his work and its general structure, with a focus on its intention to give an overview of legal categories that engaged meaningfully with the institutional and administrative structures of the empire.

The figures on which the second part of the volume concentrate are, in different ways, protagonists of an 'age of crisis', as Massimo Brutti puts it in his chapter on Paul: a conservative jurist, who sets out to defend a waning tradition in an age of increasing political instability, and steers a safe course in his dealings with the imperial power, which he served as *consiliarius* between 205 and 211 CE. Paul lived at a time when the nature of imperial power was changing; he took the view that the emperor was not immune from the obligation of respecting the law, and argued that in fact the power of the emperor drew strength from compliance with the law: there was no tension between imperial *maiestas* and respect for the law.

[10] Massimo Brutti, Valerio Marotta, Fara Nasti, Aldo Schiavone, and Emanuele Stolfi, *Roman Jurists at Work. Four Portraits*, translated by Jeremy Carden and Philip Ditchfield, Rome, «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 2024. Pp. viii + 206. Hardback, €100, ISBN: 978-88-913-3259-2.

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His contemporary Ulpian took a different stance, and placed the emperor above the law. Valerio Marotta and Schiavone explore the trajectory of that jurist in two complementary pieces: first with a focus on the history of geographical and social mobility of that remarkable man (a native of Berytus who pursued his studies in Rome), and his violent death at the hands of the praetorian guard, probably in 223 CE; and then with a reflection on the aspects that made the intellectual project of his *Institutiones* so extraordinary. Ulpian's classic work is in fact an outlier in the tradition to which it belongs, and tries to reckon with the fundamental changes that had intervened in the role of jurisprudence towards the imperial power. Ulpian's emphasis on natural law is a response to the expanding power of the emperor, and an effort to devise a new route for the interpretative primacy of the legal expert. While his attempt failed in the short term, it had a profound and distinctive intellectual legacy.

This collection is not a read for the uninitiated and the Latinless, and I am afraid the overall standard of the translation and copy-editing is often a hurdle to the enjoyment of the intellectual delights that these essays have to offer (an Italian edition would be valuable). The effort is very much worth making, though. The insights to be drawn from this volume are profound, and can be of value to anyone with an interest in Roman intellectual history, broadly understood. Moreover, as it happens, readers who do not quite feel at home with this material can now rely on a very solid entry-level guide. The Aris & Phillips series has made the excellent choice of adding a short work of Ulpian to its catalogue, the tract *On the Duty of the Proconsul*.[11] Ido Israelowich has provided a clear and elegant translation, and his commentary strikes a good balance between the linguistic elucidation of the text and the handling of its historical issues. His concerns are, in a number of ways, opposite to those of Schiavone and his collaborators: he is not mainly interested in Ulpian and his wider intellectual project, but mostly focuses on the detailed discussion of his work. The outcome is an invaluable resource, which could credibly become the centrepiece of an upper-level course on Roman imperialism. Ulpian's tract is not just a précis of what Roman governors did or were expected to be doing; it also shines a light on why they conducted themselves in a certain manner, and what their concerns and aspirations might have been. His discussion of a number of specific aspects is a starting point for the exploration that profitably radiates towards what else we know about the conduct of Roman governors in a host of regional contexts. Thanks to Israelowich's groundwork, Ulpian can become the fruitful starting point for a number of valuable explorations, linking up legal texts and inscriptions, and comparing and contrasting developments in different local settings and chronological remits.

Ulpian lived and wrote under an autocratic regime in which he was a far from negligible player himself: that contributes to making an important part of what makes his work so historically important. The connection between autocracy and Roman law is the key question of Zachary Herz's highly impressive monograph.[12] His study, based on a Columbia dissertation, is nothing short of a full-scale discussion of Roman jurisprudence in the imperial period, albeit from a clear thematic angle. Its basic point

[11] *Ulpianus. On the Duty of the Proconsul*, edited with a translation, introduction, and commentary by Ido Israelowich, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025. Pp. 216. Hardback £84. ISBN: 978-1-83624-428-8.

[12] Zachary Herz, *The God and the Bureaucrat. Roman Law, Imperial Sovereignty, and Other Stories*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xiv + 403. 8 illustrations. Hardback, £90, ISBN: 978-1-009-62995-9.

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is ostensibly simple, but involves far-reaching implications and complications: Roman law is not as compact and coherent a system as the *Corpus iuris civilis* would have it, and as generations of readers have been trained to regard it. Rather, it is a world-ordering effort that is precisely situated in an age of autocracy and represents one possible attempt to define and contain the power of the state: the story of this process is long and complex, but its crucial moment may credibly be identified in the Severan period. In Herz's compelling vision, Roman law is the product of a constituency of 'mandarins' (p. 7) who think about power through its prism; it is, otherwise put, an important part of the history of imperial representation. In this model, what survives of Roman jurisprudence is best understood as a rhetorical project, or indeed as the outcome of 'political imagination' (p. 20). As Herz repeatedly acknowledges (his engagement with prior scholarship is nothing short of outstanding), this argument belongs in an historiographical tradition that has placed Roman jurists at the core of a wider intellectual discourse; Schiavone himself has crucially contributed to it. At one point (25) Herz makes the troubling, but correct, point that not everyone who cares about Roman law has a knowledge of imperial history: his book is a powerful demonstration of the vital interdependence of the two remits. Roman law is predicated on titanic efforts of abstraction and systematization, and it is as much about imagining possible versions of the world as it is about taking stock of existing realities. It is fundamentally shaped, though, by the political pressures of the times in which it is produced.

The title of this book, *The God and the Bureaucrat*, brings into focus the chasm of power on which the relationship between emperors and legal experts is developed. Precisely because context is so important, the discussion takes a diachronic structure, and leads the reader from the Augustan period to the Justinianic *Corpus*: a choice that readily shows how non-linear the process is, and how key themes resurface at various points. The image of the emperor as subject to the law is one of the trends of Augustan jurisprudence; it then takes centre stage under Vespasian, and is rediscovered with Severus Alexander, at the end of the Severan period. The age of Hadrian is a phase in which jurisprudence is centralized within the imperial court, and the emperor becomes the unrivalled key source of legal judgements. That state of affairs comes into question in the third century, as the imperial regime becomes inherently less stable. That is the moment in which the jurists construct a version of Roman law that is not predicated on the person of the emperor, but relies upon higher principles. Herz brings to the fore a tension between the imperial court, which is committed to the principles of imperial authority and dynastic power, and a 'technocracy' of Severan jurists, and works against the grain of the later compilations, which tend to provide a much more irenic version of the development of Roman law. The Theodosian Code, though, is fundamentally indebted to the 'positivistic' tradition of the Severan jurists (Ulpian, Paul, Macer), and succeeds in making it usable for the purposes of an imperial project, in which the emperor is no longer a source of law, but a figure that provides unique guidance on the matters of *ius*. The great compilation of Justinian is first and foremost a product of imperial imagination and agency, in which the work of previous emperors and the body of legal tradition are turned into the constituents of the newly-codified legal order.

Herz's book was started in the mid-2010s, but has obvious contemporary urgency. It makes for inspiring and fruitfully problematic reading at a time when thinking hard about autocracy is more essential than it has been in living memory. It is surely no

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coincidence that this book has appeared in *Studies in Legal History,* a CUP series that is not mainly focused on classical topics. Herz is the kind of historian who can credibly bring into the same discussion, within a couple of pages, Fritz Schultz and E. P. Thompson (296–300), just as Ludwig Mitteis and Gérard Genette play key roles in the introduction (5–6, 11). His theoretical deftness and his willingness to talk beyond (sub-) disciplinary boundaries are key assets of this outstanding monograph.

Another important quality of Herz's book is the ability to pursue major themes and establish productive links across imperial history, well into the sixth century. Much of the best work on late antiquity over the last half-century has issued valuable lessons on the importance of being sceptical about too neatly-determined historical breaks, and giving great weight to the areas of continuity and the levels of *longue durée*. This working principle has not been applied to a substantial extent to the study of cities: Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has sought to fill the gap, within a wider collaborative project he led on the impact of the ancient city.[13] He has identified two key working principles: cities are resilient and capable of recovering from traumatic events; and one has to go beyond the study of their physical infrastructure in order to understand them. He has then set out to challenge the long-held and influential view that the ancient city came to an end in late antiquity, and that its failure was crucially determined by the demise of the propertied class that had been central to its success – the so-called *curiales.* His most immediate interlocutor is Wolf Liebeschuetz, who argued this thesis in an influential monograph: however, the argument involves a close confrontation with a tradition that links up Fustel, Weber, A. H. M. Jones, and Finley, in which 'the ancient city' is a discernible analytical category, and its end coincides with the end of antiquity. Wallace-Hadrill fruitfully shows what the key working assumptions and preconceptions of this account were, and he then goes on to challenge it by examining a specific angle of the problem: the significant role that the city, and various ideas of the city, keep playing in the literature and thought of late antiquity.

This book could hastily, but not entirely unfairly, be described as a series of connected studies on some major authors (from Orosius to Cassiodorus, from Procopius to Isidore of Seville), with forays into the study of documentary papyri and precisely-selected clusters of documentary papyri. The coherent message that Wallace-Hadrill elicits from this set of evidence is a continuing interest in the ancient city and its legacy, and its enduring significance as a model for the way in which civic life was thought about: although significant change intervened on the material level, the ancient city showed profound resilience on an immaterial one. The authors that are studied in his book would have struggled to see a decline of the city in their own time: rather, they would have failed to see any viable alternative to the city as the venue of social life. The final chapter (ch. 9, 'The Fabric of the City') partly corrects the bias by turning to some archaeological case studies of new city foundations in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages: Constantinople, Reccopolis, Anjar, Aachen show in different ways how profound and active the legacy of the ancient city was.

Wallace-Hadrill is keen to stress that his narrative is not one of straightforward continuity. On the contrary, the concept of resilience, as it has been defined in the study

[13] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *The Idea of the City in Late Antiquity. A Study in Resilience,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 440. 60 illustrations. Hardback, £44.99, ISBN: 978-1-009-52707-1.

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of ecological systems since the 1970s, gives due weight to the phases in which the features of a system are dismantled and replaced, strategies of adaptation are deployed, and significant variability occurs on the local level. On this reading, historical change does occur, but at a slow pace and in several different directions. It is also a matter of scale, and a function of the level on which the historical enquiry is conducted. While there is no doubt that the imperial edifice in the West went through a process of decline, the network of cities that was central to its long-term success did survive through a complex and diverse process of adaptation. On the level of the history of ideas, Wallace-Hadrill has proved his case very convincingly. There is not much in his discussion that is likely to sway those who view the history of the Roman world after the fourth century CE as one dominated by disruption and trauma. But his call to be mindful of the complexity of historical change and of the creative and contradictory ways in which people seek to make sense of it, and indeed deny it, carries a great deal of weight, and makes a methodological point that even sceptical readers can learn a great deal from.

Wallace-Hadrill's book has a very strong textual focus. The visual evidence, though, has been central to late-antique studies, and even to the development of the concept itself of late antiquity. The two-volume *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Late Antique Art and Archaeology* gives a stunning overview that readily turns into a full-scale treatment of the period from the viewpoint of the archaeological and iconographical material.[14] As the editors make clear, the project has been over a decade in the making: that is perhaps unavoidable, given its sheer scale (fifty-one chapters), and although some entries have not been significantly amended over the last ten years, the sheer wealth of this work, and indeed its comprehensiveness, amply make up for some inconcinnities (and occasional proofreading slips). In this context it is worth flagging up two points.

First, this is a work that warrants close consideration from anyone with an interest in the period: it should feature in any reading list on late-antique history and culture. It does not just provide clear and judicious guidance on a number of categories of visual evidence (that is the key aim of the first volume). It also tackles a number of problems of real historical significance: most evidently, perhaps, in the chapters of Cam Grey and the late Stephen Mitchell on the relationship between city and countryside in the two halves of the empire; or in Peter Heather's discussion of barbarism and migration, and in Jeroen Poblome's account on the economy of the later Roman Empire. The choice to include a chapter on early Islam (by Marcus Milwright) is especially noteworthy, and is in keeping with the capacious periodization that has been adopted: in itself a symptom of the ambition to link up the study of late antiquity with what follows as well as with what precedes it.

Secondly, this is a work that makes a strong collective point on the importance of the local dimension, through a set of brilliant studies which shed light on specific contexts, whether major cities or regional districts (Anna Leone on Africa; Renate J. Pillinger on the Balkans). The necessary step of inferring general conclusions from the study of the particulars is mostly taken care of in the first part of this work, in chapters that are ostensibly devoted to broad categories of evidence, but are in fact an attempt to discuss

[14] *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Late Antique Art and Archaeology,* edited by Leonard V. Rutgers, Neil Christie, Robin M. Jensen, and Jodi Magness, 2 vols. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Pp. xxiv + 989. Illustrated. Hardback, £110, ISBN: 978-1-107-03724-3.

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significant historical themes by pulling together sets of material from across the empire. That is the case, for instance, with the treatment of church architecture by Olof Brandt and monastic architecture by Karel Innemée, and in Gunnar Brands' sheer *tour de force* on civic architecture. Even the chapters that an ungenerous or hasty reader might find more straightforwardly descriptive and less discernibly problem-driven have important historical lessons to yield. The index brilliantly equips readers to locate the discussion of specific issues, and is an invaluable resource for the full appreciation and enjoyment of this major work.

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Reception

Unusually for a review of classical reception works, we have several commentaries. The first is a collection of Latin poetry by Martin Luther.[1] This work is made up of an Introduction, two appendices, and six chapters of verse organized around a theme, each with their own introduction, Latin text with facing translation, and commentary.

Carl Springer is keen to show that, despite Luther's translation of the Bible into the vernacular, he had a keen interest in classical texts and the Latin language, carrying his childhood learning into a lifelong practice. Furthermore, while Luther's verse has often been met with a rather lukewarm response, Springer argues that some assessments are too harsh, with his more ludic offerings equivalent in humour to better-regarded poets, and at least one of his more serious works 'filled with the sincerest of emotions [. . .] following classical, not Medieval norms' (9). Indeed, Springer discusses some of the circumstances of the transition from Medieval Latin to Humanist Latin and notes that Luther used a mixture of 'traditional classical metres' and 'the accentual and rhymed verse characteristic of the Latin and macaronic compositions [. . . .] found in the late medieval collection of verse known as the *Carmina Burana*' (1).

The first chapter of verse contains verses based on the Psalter, and those that express similar convictions. This includes the humorous *Iocus de Cubitensi*, 'A joke about Cubito', a three-line rhyming poem, possibly directed at a doctor Luther knew, playing on *cubito*'s connotations of reclining, and, Springer argues, the connection between sleep and death found in both *Kings* and the *Iliad*. There is also a contemporary re-working, 'On the exodus of Israel' of what is Psalm 113 in the *Vulgate*, in which the Egyptian pharaoh is replaced by 'Henry V, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and Prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, [who] had decided to attack the Protestant city of

[1] *The Latin Verse of Martin Luther: Texts, Translations and Commentary*. By Carl P. E. Springer. London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2025. Pp. xii + 227. Hardback £85, ISBN: 978-1-350-26149-5.

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