

However, I note two minor shortcomings that should be considered as conversations about this important topic continue. The argument, first of all, feels somewhat undertheorised and, therefore, somewhat lacking in a strong conceptual lexicon. In many ways, the fact that the book traffics lightly in theory is a virtue, given how impressively lucid and effortless R.-J.'s style is throughout. But the hermeneutical scaffolding in the introduction could have been strengthened with some selective readings in contemporary process philosophy and its complement of new ontological theories. This is especially the case with R.-J.'s somewhat confusing notion of 'madeness', which denotes for her not the artificiality but the processuality of an object that inheres in its finished state. Similarly unclear at times are her notions of 'construction' and 'building'. Given the capaciousness of these concepts, referable to both monuments and buildings and bridges alike, it may have been helpful to make clear what did *not* count as construction for a Roman.

Secondly, I found the book's insistence on concluding that construction sheds light on the metapoetics of Latin literature a bit disappointing. Given the insistence on turning back to the metaliterary, and more specifically to the aesthetics of the metaliterary, the book does not have time to address many of the questions it raises. How do phenomena such as the environment or intercultural contact during the process of building play into the rhetoric of 'madeness'? How do we incorporate more materially minded approaches to the processes of literary composition, such as that of genetic criticism? And, finally, how do we contrast the (largely elite) agency of authors with the much more diverse and subaltern agencies involved in the processes of construction? In her treatment of the draining of the Fucine Lake, for example, R.-J. spends a lot of time thinking about the elite agents involved – poets, historians and the imperial family –, but spends little to no time considering the slaves who did the dirty and extremely dangerous job of digging the canal. If we are going to offer up a comparison between the work of engineering and that of writing poetry in the 2020s, I think we should address the extreme power differential of the people involved in the respective constructions. Of course, this can remain a metapoetic gesture; we may consider, for example, T. Geue's *JRS* 108 [2018], 115–40) reading of the power imbalances in Virgil's depiction of *labor* in the *Georgics*. But it is one that does not overemphasise the soft hands of Amphion over the hard labour of Zeuthus – a key binary at play in R.-J.'s chapter on the *Thebaid* but not fleshed out as thoroughly as it perhaps could be. These are, of course, but small suggestions, and *Building in Words* remains a most worthwhile and delightful read for scholars of Latin books and monuments.

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## INTELLECTUALS IN THE LATE REPUBLIC

VOLK (K.) *The Roman Republic of Letters. Scholarship, Philosophy, and Politics in the Age of Cicero and Caesar*. Pp. xiv + 379. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021. Cased, £28, US\$35. ISBN: 978-0-691-19387-8.

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The book under review is a magisterial investigation of the intersections between the intellectual sociability and the political activities of the leading 'scholar senators' – Cicero,

Julius Caesar, Brutus, Varro, Cato, Cassius Longinus and Nigidius Figulus – from 63 to 43 BCE (with special attention to the period of the mid-50s to the mid-40s), the tumultuous time of the final decades of the Republic, which also saw the production of the most significant late Republican works of scholarship in a diverse array of genres. Although ‘playful’ (p. 22 n. 3), V.’s retrojection of the Neo-Latin term *res publica litteraria*, originally developed in Humanist circles, to refer to the intellectual sodality of leading politicians in the final years of the Republic, is a highly appropriate means of delineating her topic: the deeply interpenetrating cooperative and competitive intellectual *sodalitas* of late Republican amateur scholars and the networking dynamics of the Republican political process.

Following a useful introduction positioning her study within scholarly trends and an excellent summary of the book’s chapters, V. turns in Chapter 2 to examine the sociability of knowledge production among her protagonists. Questioning the modern view that learned senators faced significant anti-intellectualism among their practically minded peers, V. demonstrates the highly social and interactive nature of the *studia, litterae* and philosophising among senatorial and equestrian amateur intellectuals eager to distinguish themselves from Greek professionals, yet whose interchanges were highly dependent upon a bevy of collaborators and social dependents. Iterations of this *societas studiorum* as an aristocratic social practice encompassed letter exchange and gatekeeping, conversation, exchange of treatises and invitations to edit and revise, dedications of texts to fellow Republicans and the publication of texts. Further targeted discussion of ‘amicitia-in-action’ as a social code regulating this sodality as well as its physical venues (e.g. dining practices?) would be helpful in this context.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate how the study and practice of philosophy shaped and informed the personal and political decisions of senator-scholars and equestrian intellectuals. For the period leading up to Pharsalus (9 August 48 BCE) V. argues that Cato, the best-known Stoic of the first century BCE, wielded his Stoic ideals in the form of public self-fashioning in the service of his political agenda, thereby already moulding critical elements of the idealised persona most prominently promoted and contested after his death in the respective pamphleteering of Cicero and Caesar. Eschewing the title *philosophus*, Cicero the Academic Sceptic in *De re publica* and his letters in this period conceptualised his political activity as a type of ‘philosophy in practice’, employing philosophical values to interpret the political present and to regulate his public conduct. Turning to assess the most popular philosophical ideas among late Republicans, V. argues that, despite the advising of Epicurus against involvement in public affairs, late Roman intellectuals attracted to Epicureanism such as Cassius, Piso and Atticus (among others) applied Epicurean ideas as a calculus to evaluate the hedonistic payoffs of their political activities. As V. admits, these interpretations are to some extent speculative, and one wonders whether Atticus’ *amicitia* is explicitly evidence of Epicureanism in practice (cf. p. 107).

In treating the fallout after Pharsalus V. examines Cicero’s *Ad familiares* as evidence of the shared mentalities and attitudes of anti-Caesarean Republican interlocutors (many of whom had not received Caesarean *clementia*) who pursued philosophical consolations in ‘Pompeian group therapy’. V.’s survey of the topic of *libertas dicendi* during Caesar’s dictatorship includes Cicero’s *Brutus*, *Pro Marcello* and the publicity pamphlets over Cato’s legacy, which showcase a fair amount of free speech safely modulated by the strictures of gentlemanly conduct. During late 46 to late 44 BCE, when Cicero was increasingly despondent in the face of Caesar’s dictatorship and the death of his beloved Tullia (early 45), he wrote philosophy as a form of political activity, bequeathing to posterity a wide-ranging and prolific philosophical corpus, which constructed a ‘Caesar-free’ literary landscape asserting the rule of virtue impenetrable to the dictator.

V. next explores how philosophical considerations about tyranny may have contributed to the plans of Caesar's assassins Brutus and Cassius. Cicero in turn, in the post-Ides of March *De amicitia* and *De officiis*, provided a philosophical defence of *liberatores*, contending the necessity of transgressing Republican *amicitia* when loyalty conflicts with what is morally good (*honestum*).

Moving from the domestication of philosophy as 'import', Chapter 5 pivots to the issue of the proliferation of scholarly works focused on Roman identity and antiquarianism in the mid-first century BCE. Qualifying modern depictions of this scholarship as expressions of aristocratic nostalgia amidst a disintegrating political order (although this played some element) structured by the role of reason (*ratio*), V. shows that Roman antiquarianism often focused on the ongoing evolution of shared habits (*consuetudo*) across the *longue durée* of Roman history. Cicero in Book 2 of *De re publica* and Varro in the *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, respectively, depict the history of the Republican constitution and Roman religion as ongoing, complex and messy. Likewise, Cicero and Varro balance an idealised linguistic *Latinitas* with a defence of *consuetudo* when it deviated from correct forms for aesthetic reasons or because it accorded with the norms of popular practice. Alternately, however, Caesar in his *De analogia* dedicated to Cicero (and responding in part to Cicero's *De oratore*) declares his preference for more 'rational' analogic forms.

The final chapter, 'Coopting the Cosmos', traces how late Republican intellectuals staged frequent interventions in the contemporary political (dis)order by means of discursive representations of the cosmos, time and the divine. V. provides a fascinating discussion of sources presenting the anti-Caesarean Nigidius Figulus as 'Pythagorean sorcerer' (Jerome) and scholar of divination, astrology and astronomy who deployed astrology as well as a calendar of Etruscan thunder omens to issue dire prophecies of the rise of a single ruler of Rome. Caesar's cosmic intervention in the form of a new calendar signalled the dictator's power to organise not just the time of Rome but also of the universe, a move foregrounding Caesar's apotheosis. Cicero's practice of co-opting the divine for political purposes include the numerous portents of divine approval of Cicero's consular leadership in his third *Catilinarian* and his citation in 57 BCE of an obscure legal precedent to demonstrate to the *pontifices* a shortcoming in nemesis Clodius' religious orthopraxy in converting part of Cicero's demolished Palatine home into a shrine for Libertas. Ultimately, V. contends that Cicero the Sceptic was unable to settle on certain ideas about the divine, but opted to serve instead the '*auspices* of virtue' – in his view, objects of the gods' admiration – as moral guide (cf. *De divinatione*, *De consulatu suo*).

This fascinating and meticulous study will no doubt be of great interest to specialists, but it is also appropriate for a non-scholarly audience interested in Julius Caesar, Cicero and the demise of the Republic. V.'s skilful fusion of intellectual and political history consistently pushes back on the formidable teleological weight attached to her subjects with attention to the multiform contingency of politico-cultural change and a focus on the sources. The inclusion of lengthy block quotations of the sources in both the original language and translation – often lacking in recent publications – offers a wonderful means of allowing these historical heavyweights (the 'Cicero problem' notwithstanding) to speak. Seeking to correct scholarly presumption of sociological processes at work in the sources, V. underscores the impossibility of separating the intellectual life of learned Republicans from their political nexus. Although she aims to present a complex picture of historical causation, V. ultimately cites the political crises of the era as a major catalyst shaping the remarkable intellectual achievements of the period. Regrettably, this unique sodality comes to an end with the collapse of the Republican constitution, yet future 'Republics

of Letters' would arguably flourish among ruling Roman provincials of the High Empire, penetrating deep into a Christianising world of late antiquity.

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## CICERO'S LETTERS IN CONTEXT

SPÄTH (T.) (ed.) *Gesellschaft im Brief. Ciceros Korrespondenz und die Sozialgeschichte*. (Collegium Beatus Rhenanus 9.) Pp. 430, ill. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2021. Paper, €72. ISBN: 978-3-515-13095-0.  
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Pity poor Cicero. Whenever he put stylus to tablet, writing one of his hundreds of letters, he could not simply inform his correspondent of what was going on in his life, let alone express his thoughts and feelings. Instead, he had to develop a careful strategy for how best to represent himself in his epistle, endeavouring to put on an optimal performance of Cicero the superior politician, eminent man of letters, and circumspect friend and *paterfamilias*.

This, at least, is the impression one gets from the volume under discussion, the result of a joint research project of the universities of Basel, Bern, Freiburg, Strasbourg and Mulhouse that ran from 2009 to 2013. The declared goal – so we are told by Späth, the volume editor, in the introduction – was to develop a new approach to Roman social history, using as the body of evidence the correspondence of Cicero. Späth acknowledges the narrowness of this focus: the letters are a treasure trove of information, but mostly concern a very small stratum of Roman society. For 'social history' read 'mores of the aristocracy'.

As it happens, the volume's methodology, laid out by Späth, moves away from viewing Roman society as a stable stratified system of social classes or fixed practices and ideologies. Nor are the contributors interested in Cicero as a person, approaching him instead as a 'chronotope'. Accordingly, the letters are not studied as sources that provide information about Roman society or about Cicero, but instead as spaces where society is constantly negotiated and constructed and where the author's persona is being represented and performed in ever-changing ways.

For an edited volume the book is remarkably coherent, with almost every contributor on board with the methodological programme. Apart from a historiographical piece (J. von Ungern-Sternberg) on three classic treatments of Roman social history (by Gaston Boissier, Matthias Gelzer and Eugen Täubler), the chapters (written in German or French) treat such pivotal times in Cicero's life as his exile (L. Diegel), his governorship in Cilicia (M. Coudry) and the months after the Ides of March (Späth); focus on spaces such as *horti* (I. Hilbold) and the *domus* (A.-C. Harders) and groups of people such as slaves and freedmen (M. Spurny, S. Berger Battegay); and examine epistolary topics and techniques such as the citation of *exempla* (M. Humm), invective (A. Thurn), the discussion of books and writing (F. Reich), and the response to death (S. Froehlich).

Despite the editor's expressed hope of having identified new topics, questions and approaches, the pay-off of the volume's methodology is decidedly underwhelming. By moving solely on the intratextual level of the letters' verbal construction and representation,