Introduction

In 64 BCE, during a time of great political unrest at Rome, Marcus Tullius Cicero ran for consul, the highest political office in the land. Born into a wealthy family from the small town of Arpinum about 60 miles south of Rome, Cicero had received a first-rate education. As a young man at Rome, he learned rhetoric from Lucius Crassus, a most accomplished orator and former consul, and philosophy from the head of Plato's Academy, Philo of Larissa, who taught Cicero to argue on all sides of a given issue. He supplemented this foundation by studying abroad in Greece from 79 to 77 BCE, where he continued his study in philosophy and rhetoric. After he returned to Rome, Cicero found great success as an advocate and established himself as the most acclaimed orator in Rome. He also launched his political career, progressing swiftly through the traditional order of political offices known as the *cursus honorum* until only the consulship remained.

Despite his considerable past success and formidable intellectual and political talent, Cicero's campaign for the consulship faced long odds. Since the end of monarchical rule at Rome in 509 BCE, the highest offices had been dominated by a limited number of aristocratic families (*nobiles*). This period of Rome's history, known as the Republic (509–27 BCE), saw a prolonged struggle between the elite and plebeians, which resulted (among other reforms) in lower magistracies opening up to "new men," political outsiders who lacked senatorial ancestors. But it was still rare for new men, whose ambitions were scorned and derided by the *nobiles*, to attain the consulship. Cicero was a "new man" (*homo novus*).

Cicero clearly needed all the help he could get, so his brother, Quintus, wrote a handbook advising him on how to win the upcoming election. Quintus' *Commentariolum petitionis* provides a snapshot of the practical workings of Roman politics during the Republic. It offers practical advice about what a candidate should do to run a successful campaign that results in the Roman people voting to entrust him with Rome's highest office.

Cicero must utilize political alliances (*amicitiae*) among the elite and display the virtues used to cement these alliances, such as generosity and gratitude. Rhetoric and skillful public speaking are paramount. He should understand the power of emotions like fear and hope in politics. Ideally he could broaden his base by threading the needle of presenting himself as a politician concerned with the non-aristocratic people's welfare (a *popularis*) and as someone devoted to strengthening the influence of the senate (an *optimas*). But above all, he must stay focused. "Every day as you go down to the Forum, tell yourself: 'I am a new man. I seek the consulship. This is Rome.' "[1]

Several of the political practices, institutions, emotions, and virtues described by Quintus in such pragmatic and realistic terms appear in the writings of Cicero, Polybius, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, where they contribute to an ideology that has come to be known as republicanism.[2] This ideology has several important defining characteristics. Rome is conceived as a commonwealth or *res publica* (literally, "the public matter"). It has a constitution that recognizes "popular sovereignty" and the rule of law. Republicanism stresses the importance of civic virtue and citizenship, and the danger of civic corruption. Essential too are oratory as an instrument of political decision-making, devotion to Rome and its gods, and a commitment to Rome's standing and glory in both domestic and international contexts. Although ancient Latin contained no word for "republicanism," Romans and non-Roman observers wrote at length on the basic elements of republicanism and on Rome's political culture, which held them together.[3]

Like many concepts, Roman republicanism can be better understood by clarifying what it is not. It does not necessarily correspond to the historical time period known as the Republic: some of the most important treatments of republican themes are found in historians, such as Livy and Tacitus, writing after the Republic had been transformed into a monarchy. Moreover, to speak of Roman republicanism as an ideology is not to suggest that all of the thinkers who engaged with its primary themes agreed with one another or even saw themselves as working within an

[1] For Republican elections and electioneering (including discussion of Q. Cic. *Pet.*), see Yakobson 1999 and Feig Vishnia 2012 (introductory level overview). Feig Vishnia 2012 also provides an overview of the scholarly debate over the authorship of the *Commentariolum petitionis* (108–10). For our purposes it makes little difference whether Quintus Cicero is its author.

[2] Republicanism as conceived by the later tradition: Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978; Rahe 1992. Roman republicanism: Connolly 2015. For Polybius, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus as republican thinkers, see Balot 2010 (Polybius); Kapust 2011b (Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus); Vasaly 2015 (Livy).

[3] For *res publica*, see now Hodgson 2017.

identifiable tradition of thought; indeed, "republican" thinkers diverged on their conceptions of some of republicanism's central concepts. Nor does the republican ideology necessarily correspond to practical everyday political realities. In fact, Roman republicanism may be described as projecting a "realistic utopia" in which historical and current political practices, institutions, and values become ideals designed to hold the commonwealth together.[4]

The current book offers an introduction to Roman political thought that places at its center this ideological notion of Roman republicanism. In the pages to follow, we will investigate how the basic elements of republican thought were articulated and defended in the Republic, and then transformed or rejected later in Roman history. Roman republicanism, then, is presented here as an entrée into the much broader subject of Roman political thought. This broader category requires definition. Let's take the three terms in reverse order.

First, "thought." As opposed to political philosophy, which consists of the systematic and theoretical treatment of politics usually written by an author working within a philosophical tradition, political thought designates a much broader field, encompassing any and all thinking about politics (C. J. Rowe 2000: 1–2; Cartledge 2009). Political thought may be conveyed through a broad range of media and literary forms, from poetry to historiography to inscriptions to philosophical treatises and dialogues. I have sought to employ as great a range of this literary evidence as the subject and space allow.

Second, "political." The term "political" comes to us from Greece, not Rome. So in a sense by speaking of Roman *political* thought, we are already using conceptual language that is foreign to Rome. However, in doing so we are following much earlier observers of Roman history. Writers such as Polybius, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Josephus, and Cassius Dio used the key Greek political concept of *politeia* to describe Roman political society and culture. Often translated in English as "constitution" or "regime," the term *politeia* in Greek political thought is a multivalent concept, encompassing the arrangement of offices and institutions in a political society as well as its political culture or way of life, that is, fundamental social values and principles comprising and determining citizenship, laws, religion, ethical norms, military organization, education, art, music, the economy, international relations, and more (J. W. Atkins forthcoming e). Latin lacks any simple equivalent to *politeia*. When Latin

[4] Roman republicanism as an ideology: Wilkinson 2012: 7–17.

writers needed to translate the Greek word, they often turned to the equally multivalent *res publica*. However, as Cicero indicates in his *De republica*, whose very title offers a Latin version of Plato's *Politeia* (*Republic*), no less central than the formal institutions of the *res publica* were the laws, practices, and customs that shaped its citizens. Indeed, the Roman "constitution" is composed of the laws, rights, and customs that shaped the Roman way of life over time (see chapter 1). Accordingly, the analysis of virtually every chapter of this book turns on the rich interplay between the formal political institutions and political culture that characterized Roman political thought.

Roman social and political culture was highly competitive. All Roman citizens, regardless of class, were concerned with standing and esteem in the eyes of others. For plebeians, this standing separated them from slaves; for elites, standing was maintained and enhanced by successfully receiving public honors, by enjoying military success, and by holding political office. Citizens' lives were highly regulated by perceptions of honor and shame, which directed all aspects of their public and private lives. In addition to citizens' social behavior, Roman political culture regulated public institutions, such as criminal and public law, state religion, the military, and domestic and foreign policy (Hölkeskamp 2010: 17–18). Both ancient proponents and critics of Roman republicanism engaged Roman political culture in their analyses. Important terms for Rome's political culture include *honor*, *gloria*, *decus*, *virtus*, *nobilitas*, *dignitas*, *auctoritas*, *imperium*, *pietas*, *religio*, *ius*, *lex*, *mos*, *aequalitas*, *libertas*, and *mos maiorum*. The meanings and significance of these terms for Roman political thought will be discussed throughout this book.[5]

It is important here to note that many of the terms I have identified as comprising Roman political culture more precisely reflect Rome's elite culture as portrayed by such self-styled defenders of the senatorial aristocracy (*optimates*) as Cicero, whose writings disproportionately shape our view of the Roman Republic. A number of important works in recent years have attempted to dive beneath the predominating aristocratic ideology to disclose a suppressed but potent Roman crowd with their own egalitarian, "democratic" ideology and political culture. While a political culture shaped by an aristocratic "honor code" lies near the heart of Roman republicanism as it is disclosed in our most significant surviving texts dealing with political themes, these same works sometimes challenge and critique

[5] Roman political culture: Hölkeskamp 2010; Blits 2014; Arena and Prag forthcoming. Roman honor: Lendon 1997; Barton 2001; Kaster 2005.

the predominant ideology, whether from perspectives working from inside (e.g., Sallust) or outside (e.g., Lucretius) of republicanism. This too is part of the story of republicanism and (more broadly) of Roman political thought.[6]

Third, "Roman." My conception of the political means that *Roman* political thought includes that which is prompted by reflection on the Roman *politeia*. Consequently, this book includes analysis not only by Roman citizens, including those such as Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom who wrote in Greek and employed Greek concepts, but also by foreign observers of the Roman *politeia* such as Polybius. Even though Rome was traditionally founded in 753 BCE, due to my focus on republicanism, the nature of our textual evidence (such evidence was thin before the second century BCE), and the constraints of space, I concentrate especially on the first century BCE and first two centuries CE, periods known as the late Republic (146–27 BCE) and Principate (27 BCE–CE 284). Space unfortunately prohibits a thorough treatment of early Christian political thought, even though many Christians too were Romans. Still, we will explore several significant ways in which Christianity transformed or challenged Roman republicanism.

The contents of this book are organized thematically: each chapter takes one or more key concepts pertaining to Roman republicanism and traces them across relevant periods of Roman history. Featured concepts include the following: the Roman constitution, sovereignty, and legitimacy; liberty and such related topics as slavery, equality, rights, and property; citizenship and civic virtue; political passions and civic corruption; rhetoric, political deliberation, and judgment; civil religion and religious toleration; and imperialism, just war theory, and cosmopolitanism. The movement within each chapter is diachronic, though chapters are not comprehensive in their chronological scope. The movement across chapters begins with a chapter on the institutional components of the Roman *politeia* as it develops from the dawn of the Republic to the beginning of the Byzantine era. This chapter also doubles as a sketch of Roman political and institutional history. Chapters 2 through 7 deal with fundamental analyses of aspects of Roman political culture, beginning with liberty, which according to Cicero "is natural to the Roman people" (*Philippics* 6.19), and concluding with the idea

[6] Roman crowd and popular politics: Millar 1984; 1986; 1998; Morstein-Marx 2004; Wiseman 2009. Connolly 2015 takes a literary approach to Roman republicanism focusing on subversive elements existing in texts by Cicero, Sallust, and Horace alongside the predominant principles of the Roman regime. Honor code and ideology: Hölkeskamp 1993; Long 1995.

of cosmopolitanism, which considers Rome in light of a notional world community.

The structure of this book integrates individual texts and arguments with a political concept's broader history at Rome. This approach has a number of advantages. Readers can trace the transformation of ideas over time or "listen in" on debates about concepts within and beyond the republican tradition. The thematic approach also facilitates bringing Roman political thought into conversation with alternative analyses of fundamental political concepts by other voices in the history of political thought and by contemporary political theorists.

A short, introductory book must be selective. My primary consideration for deciding which texts should be discussed in each chapter was what would facilitate an accessible and stimulating treatment of the concept or concepts under discussion. While I aimed to cover a broad range of authors and texts over the course of the book, I did not hesitate to use authors or works in multiple chapters if they contributed to multiple concepts. Cicero appears in every chapter, a decision made both to reflect the significance of his own contributions to the concepts explored in this book and to provide a consistent reference point for viewing the contributions of others. Polybius, Sallust, Livy, Seneca, Tacitus, and St. Augustine also make significant appearances in multiple chapters. Other writers and texts make major contributions to a single chapter (e.g., Lucretius, Plutarch, Quintilian, Tertullian), and many others show up briefly in one or more places throughout the book. At appropriate points, I have provided some very basic introductory remarks to help orient readers to the most significant writers and texts, but in every case such treatments are subordinate to the concept(s) investigated in the chapter. I have similarly been selective in citing modern scholarship, both because of space constraints and because we are relatively well served by reference works in this area.[7]

As Aristotle saw when he completed his study of 158 *politeiai*, the concept of *politeia* provides a handy analytical lens for the comparison of different political societies. Three comparisons in particular concern us in this book. Let's take them in ascending order of the importance given them. The first is the relationship between Roman republicanism and Athenian democracy. Over the past three decades, scholars have debated to what extent Republican Rome was democratic (see chapter 1). Several chapters (1, 2, 3, 5, 6) touch on this question, often through brief comparisons with

[7] Important works include C. J. Rowe and Schofield 2000; Balot 2009; Hammer 2014. See bibliographical essay for details.

democratic Athens. The political culture of Roman republicanism generally suppressed the sort of full civic participation theoretically promoted by democratic Athens. But no less an important transmitter of republicanism than Cicero argued that popular sovereignty was essential for the legitimacy of the *res publica* and that respect for popular judgment was necessary for legitimate oratory (see chapters 1 and 5). Since it is impossible within the scope of this volume to pursue comparisons with Athens at any length, the interested reader should consult the comparative analyses of democratic Athens and Republican Rome provided by the team of scholars in Hammer (2015) and the discussion in Cartledge (2016).

Democratic Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE gave birth to political theory. Greek, and especially classical Athenian, political thought has claimed a far greater share of modern-day political theorists' attention than that of the Romans. In fact, for much of the twentieth century, Roman political thought was frequently ignored or dismissed as derivative of Greek thought by political theorists (Hammer 2008: ch. 1). In contrast, recent scholarship on Roman political thought has turned to comparisons with the Greeks in order to highlight original Roman contributions. At appropriate points, I draw brief comparisons with Greek political thinkers such as Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as with the philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism that originally flourished in Athens. In this book, I am less interested in the question "Why Roman instead of Greek political thought?" than in the more general question "Why Roman political thought?" However, the former question is not difficult to answer. Consider just some of the ideas or issues pursued in this book that one could not explore to the same extent, if at all, through a study of Athenian political thought:[8]

- Political legitimacy
- The separation of "constitutional" powers
- Individual, protected, "constitutional" rights
- The extension of citizens' rights to non-citizens
- Arguments for religious toleration
- The tension between universal (or "cosmopolitan") principles and the particular values that shape and define citizens' relationships to their particular polities
- Just war theory

[8] Original Roman contributions via comparison with Greek political thought: see, e.g., E. M. Atkins 1990; Schofield 1995; Lintott 1997; J. W. Atkins 2013; Straumann 2016; Remer 2017. Why the Romans?: Hammer 2008; 2014; Connolly 2015.

- The creative contributions to political thought resulting from the rise of Christianity
- How the transition from a republic to monarchy impacts topics such as liberty, citizenship, civic virtue, law, frank speech, political decision-making, civil religion, and religious toleration
- The relationship between "republicanism" and "empire."

The second major comparison of regimes is facilitated by Rome's transformation from a republic to a form of monarchy under the Empire. Throughout this book we will look at just what points the crucial changes occurred that transformed republican rule to monarchy, changes initially introduced in the name of restoring the Republic. In many cases we find that the transformation of Roman institutions and political culture was comparatively small and gradual, even if the net effect from the point of view of a committed republican like Cicero would have been astonishing. While some changes like the abolition of popular assemblies in 14 CE were blatantly conspicuous, the majority came from altering the mixture of the ingredients that composed republicanism – increasingly emphasizing law and order at the expense of conflict and disagreement (chapters 1, 5, 7); bolstering the republican notion of freedom as absence of another's control at the expense of the complementary republican notion of freedom as related to status, agency, and participation (chapter 2); expanding the juridical notion of citizenship as a bundle of protections and rights from citizenship's "core and heart" (Gardner 1993: 2) under the Republic to encompass almost the whole of the concept under the Principate (chapter 3); removing the virtue of justice from its preeminent position as the chief virtue for citizens and assigning its administration solely to the emperor (chapters 2, 3); and the redrawing of the public and private spheres, transforming the *res publica* ("the people's property") in significant ways into the emperor's *res privata* ("private property"; chapters 1, 2, 6).

The third and final comparison of regimes is between Roman republicanism and modern liberal democracy. The question of Roman republicanism's relationship to, and relevance for, modern liberal democracy has fascinated scholars since Benjamin Constant's nineteenth-century essay "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns" stressed that Rome, like Athens, was by and large irrelevant and dangerous for modern regimes (see chapter 2). Subsequent scholarship has both affirmed and challenged Constant's conclusion. In particular, a number of important recent works have argued that Roman republicanism contributed to or anticipated important aspects of our modern liberal-democratic situation,

such as individual liberty, constitutionalism, and concerns with economic inequality. However, to approach Roman republicanism in order to discern its contemporary relevance invites the danger of focusing on those aspects that appear to some degree compatible with liberal democracy at the expense of those that are less savory but no less important. And predictably studies concerned with the contemporary relevance of Roman republicanism have given liberty, constitutionalism, and rhetoric far more attention than civil religion or imperialism.[9]

It is in fact impossible to neatly cleave the (from our perspective) more palatable parts of Roman republicanism from the unsavory or antiquated. Almost all of the concepts discussed in this book emanate from the common core of Rome's illiberal political culture. As we shall see, one can no more understand republican liberty than republican imperialism without noting the vital importance of Rome's honor code. Hence, this book invites readers to return to republicanism's origins in a status-driven, hierarchical, slave-owning world with a very different set of values from those prevailing in western liberal democracies. The elite Romans that bequeathed to us republicanism "knew nothing of capitalism or globally interrelated markets; they had no interest in modern subjectivities and autonomies; they assumed the necessity of empire; and they pursued military and political life within an ethical framework characterized by canons of nobility, aristocratic excellence, and traditional moral virtues" (Balot 2010: 486). Consequently, the study of Roman political thought enables us to approach republicanism afresh by providing critical distance from the modern ideas of capitalism, individual autonomy, the nation-state, and liberal-democratic constitutions that are often taken for granted in accounts of republicanism based largely on the modern republican tradition.[10]

I am strongly convinced of the relevance of Roman political thought for contemporary liberal-democratic readers. In fact, I have self-consciously written this book as a citizen of one such liberal-democratic regime and have not hesitated to draw comparisons to American political history, institutions, culture, and practices. As will become clear, I think that we must work hard to highlight the familiar concepts in Roman political thought, especially given the historical myopia of our own age. However,

[9] Individual liberty: Pettit 1997; Skinner 1998. Constitutionalism: Straumann 2016. Economic inequality: Connolly 2015. Rhetoric: Connolly 2007; Kapust 2011b; Remer 2017.

[10] For this criticism, see Balot 2010: 486 and the conclusion of this book. Republicanism based on the modern tradition: Pettit 1997; 2012; Viroli 2002; cf. Skinner 1998.

relevance may be found in what from our perspective is strange, jarring, or distasteful as well as in those aspects that strike a more familiar or comforting chord. Throughout this book, I will try to show that it is precisely this deep mixture of the familiar and the foreign that makes Roman political thought especially interesting and relevant. In the conclusion, I reflect on how this may be so.