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'Plebs' and Politics in the Late Roman Republic analyses the political role of the masses in a profoundly aristocratic society. Constitutionally the *populus Romanus* wielded almost unlimited powers, controlling legislation and the election of officials, a fact which has inspired 'democratic' readings of the Roman republic. In this book a distinction is drawn between the formal powers of the Roman people and the practical realisation of these powers, or in other words between the Roman people as a constitutional concept and the actual crowds which represented them in public meetings and assemblies. The question is approached from a quantitative as well as qualitative perspective, asking how large these crowds were, and how their size affected their social composition. Building on those investigations, the different types of meetings and assemblies are analysed with a view to reconstructing their practical functioning and locating them in their proper social context. The result is a new picture of the place of the masses in the running of the Roman state, which challenges the 'democratic' interpretation, and presents a society riven by social conflicts and a widening gap between rich and poor.

HENRIK MOURITSEN is Lecturer in Ancient History at King's College London. He is the author of *Elections, Magistrates and Municipal Elite: Studies in Pompeian Epigraphy* (1988) and *Italian Unification: A Study in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (1998).

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