

## ROMAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

What can the Romans teach us about politics? This thematic introduction to Roman political thought shows how the Roman world developed political ideas of lasting significance, from the consequential constitutional notions of the separation of powers, political legitimacy, and individual rights to key concepts in international relations, such as imperialism, just war theory, and cosmopolitanism. Jed Atkins relates these and many other important ideas to Roman republicanism, traces their evolution across all major periods of Roman history, and describes Christianity's important contributions to their development. Using the politics and political thought of the United States as a case study, he argues that the relevance of Roman political thought for modern liberal democracies lies in the profound mixture of ideas both familiar and foreign to us that shaped and enlivened Roman republicanism. Accessible to students and non-specialists, this book provides an invaluable guide to Roman political thought and its enduring legacies.

JED W. ATKINS is an Assistant Professor of Classical Studies at Duke University. His research focuses on Greek, Roman, and early Christian moral and political thought. In addition, he works on the modern reception of ancient political thought. He is the author of *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws* (Cambridge, 2013) and is co-editing (with Thomas Bénatouïl) the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Cicero's Philosophy*.

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THOUGHT

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## *Preface*

This book is intended to be a first word on Roman political thought. Not first chronologically, for a number of important works have appeared in recent years on the topic by scholars working in the fields of ancient history, ancient philosophy, the history of political thought, and political theory. Rather, I hope that this book will be a first port of call for those interested in Roman political thought, including (and especially) undergraduate and graduate students as well as teachers and scholars in disciplines such as history, classics, political science, religion, and philosophy.

The book is a product of teaching. Its basic methodology of combining the analysis of texts and concepts finds a distant antecedent in a Cambridge undergraduate history course, “History of Political Thought to c. 1700,” for which I offered supervisions during my graduate studies. But above all, the structure and content of this book arose from teaching Greek and Roman political thought at Duke University in a variety of contexts ranging from first-year seminars to large undergraduate lecture courses to graduate research seminars.

My students come to Roman political thought with a variety of expectations and interests: some are interested primarily in contemporary politics or political theory; others, in Roman history or early Christianity or the history of political thought. Hardly any arrive with a preexisting interest in Roman political thought. This is to be expected. In undergraduate and graduate courses on ancient political thought, the Romans typically receive far less attention than the Greeks, if they are taught at all. Yet Roman political thought is perhaps even less accessible than Greek political thought to students and non-specialists. The most fruitful work on Roman political thought takes an integrative approach, combining careful attention to a wide range of texts within their social and intellectual contexts, the consideration of topics of perennial interest in the history of political thought, and the awareness of current trends in political theory. To appreciate what

Roman political thinkers have to offer, then, requires familiarity with a number of different subjects – all undergirded by a great deal of scholarly literature, some of which is highly specialist in nature.

My foremost goal in writing this book is to equip students and teachers to appreciate the character and enduring relevance of Roman political thought by inviting them to consider the fruits of one such attempt at the integrative approach described above. As in teaching, I have aimed above all to make the ideas accessible and relevant – even if, as I shall argue, Roman political thought is most relevant when we take proper account of its “foreign” elements. As a first word, I hope to engage, move, and provoke readers to consider the topic at greater length. Thus, while my first concern is to engage with the ancient texts and ideas themselves, I have also sought to direct readers interested in further enquiry to helpful works within the massive literature.

During the course of writing this book, I have incurred many debts. The first is to my students. I first tried organizing a political theory course thematically with “Democracy: Ancient and Modern,” an introductory lecture course analyzing Athenian and American democracy. Undergraduate and graduate seminars on Roman political thought followed the content and structure of this book. Finally, I tried out drafts of chapters 1 and 2 as well as material from chapters 6 and 7 in my first-year seminar on liberty and equality in Greek, Roman, and American political thought. The discussions of the National Archives in the introduction to chapter 1 and the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in the conclusion to chapter 4 were inspired by the annual field trip that this class takes to Washington, D.C. as part of the Visions of Freedom Focus cluster led by Michael Gillespie.

A number of colleagues and friends helped at various stages of the project. Malcolm Schofield, Benjamin Keim, and Keegan Callanan offered advice and feedback on my initial proposal for this project, which also benefited from comments by an anonymous referee for Cambridge University Press. Others read early drafts of portions of the manuscript and graciously offered comments. These include William Altman, Tolly Boatwright, Bob Connor, Luca Grillo, Daniel Kapust, Sean McConnell, Kavin Rowe, and Catherine Steel. Ted Graham helped compile the timeline. I am grateful to the editors of the Key Themes in Ancient History series, Paul Cartledge and Peter Garnsey, and to Michael Sharp at Cambridge University Press for the invitation to contribute and for sound advice at every step of the process. I am also indebted to Peter and Paul for extremely helpful comments on two earlier drafts of the manuscript. Kate Mertes compiled the index.

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Chapter 2 draws on material from J. W. Atkins forthcoming d, and chapter 6, from J. W. Atkins 2017. These publications arose from conferences at London and Tübingen. I am grateful to Arena Valentina and Otfried Höffe for invitations to participate. Chapter 7 adapts material to be published (in Chinese) in J. W. Atkins forthcoming a.

Finally, I am grateful to my family: Claire, William, and Caroline. This book is dedicated to the three of you, with love.

## *Timeline*

(Some dates are traditional or approximate. The names and dates of the major periods of Roman history are printed in bold.)

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 753 BCE        | <b>Foundation of Rome</b>  |
| 753–509        | <b>Roman Monarchy</b>  |
| ?510           | Rape of Lucretia   |
| <b>509–27</b>  | <b>Roman Republican Era</b>  |
| 509            | First Valerian law, establishing right of appeal                                 |
| 494–287        | The Struggle of the Orders   |
| 451/450        | Codification of the Twelve Tables  |
| 445            | Canuleian plebiscite abolishing ban on marriage between plebeians and patricians |
| 300            | <i>Lex Ogulnia</i> , opening priesthoods to plebeians                            |
| <b>287–146</b> | <b>Middle Republic</b>   |
| 286            | <i>Lex Aquilia</i> , protecting against loss of property                         |
| 280–275        | War with Pyrrhus   |
| 264–241        | First Punic War  |
| 234            | Birth of Cato the Elder  |
| 221–201        | Second Punic War   |
| 216            | Battle of Cannae   |
| ?200           | Birth of Polybius  |
| 199            | First Porcian law, expanding rights of the Valerian law                          |
| 195            | Second Porcian law   |
| 186            | Reform of the Bacchanalia  |
| 184            | Third Porcian law  |
| 167            | Polybius is brought to Rome  |
| 155            | Carneades in Rome  |
| 149–146        | Third Punic War  |
| 149            | Death of Cato the Elder  |
| <b>146–27</b>  | <b>Late Republic</b>   |

*Timeline*

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|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 133–121   | Reforms of the Gracchi brothers   |
| ?118      | Death of Polybius   |
| 116       | Birth of Varro  |
| 111–105   | War with Jugurtha   |
| 108       | Birth of Pompey   |
| 107       | First consulship of Marius  |
| 106       | Birth of Cicero   |
| 104–100   | Second through sixth consulships of Marius  |
| 100       | Birth of Caesar   |
| ?99       | Birth of Lucretius  |
| 95        | Birth of Cato the Younger   |
| 91–88     | Social War  |
| ?87       | Cicero's <i>De inventione</i>   |
| 86        | Birth of Sallust; seventh consulship of Marius  |
| ?86–82    | <i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>   |
| 82–81     | Dictatorship of Sulla   |
| 73–63     | Third Mithridatic War   |
| 73–71     | Third Servile War; revolt of Spartacus  |
| 65/4      | Quintus Cicero's <i>Commentariolum</i>  |
| 63        | Consulship of Cicero; conspiracy of Catiline; birth of Augustus                         |
| 59–53     | First Triumvirate (Caesar, Pompey, Crassus)   |
| 59        | Birth of Livy   |
| 55        | Cicero's <i>De oratore</i> ; death of Lucretius?; circulation of <i>De rerum natura</i> |
| 56–51     | Cicero's <i>De republica</i> and <i>De legibus</i>                                      |
| 49–45     | Civil War   |
| 49        | Caesar crosses the Rubicon, invading Italy  |
| 46        | Death of Cato the Younger; Cicero's <i>Brutus</i>                                       |
| 46–44     | Dictatorship of Caesar  |
| 44        | Assassination of Caesar on the Ides of March; Cicero's <i>De officiis</i>               |
| 43–33     | Second Triumvirate (Octavian, Mark Antony, Lepidus)                                     |
| 43        | Death of Cicero   |
| 42/1      | Sallust's <i>War of Catiline</i>  |
| 41/40     | Sallust's <i>Jugurthine War</i>   |
| ?40–35    | Sallust's <i>Histories</i>  |
| 31        | Battle of Actium  |
| ?30–14 CE | Livy's <i>Ab urbe condita</i>   |
| 35        | Death of Sallust  |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 27            | Death of Varro  |
| 27 BCE–476 CE | <b>Roman Imperial Era</b>   |
| 27 BCE–284 CE | <b>Principate</b>   |
| 27 BCE–14 CE  | Reign of Augustus   |
| 19            | Publication of the <i>Aeneid</i>  |
| 4             | Birth of Seneca; birth of Jesus   |
| 5 CE          | Birth of St. Paul   |
| 14            | Death of Augustus; inscription of <i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i> ; abolition of <i>contio</i> |
| 17            | Death of Livy   |
| 23/4          | Birth of Pliny the Elder  |
| 30            | Death of Jesus  |
| 37            | Birth of Nero   |
| ?40–?50       | Birth of Dio Chrysostom   |
| 45–58         | Missionary journeys of St. Paul   |
| ?50           | Birth of Plutarch   |
| 54–68         | Reign of Nero   |
| 54–62         | Seneca's tutelage of Nero   |
| 55            | Birth of Epictetus  |
| 55/6          | Seneca's <i>De clementia</i>  |
| 56            | Birth of Tacitus  |
| 56–64         | Seneca's <i>De beneficiis</i>   |
| 61            | Birth of Pliny the Younger  |
| 64            | Great Fire of Rome, for which the Christians were blamed                                      |
| 65            | Death of Seneca   |
| ?67           | Death of St. Paul   |
| 68            | Death of Nero   |
| 70            | Destruction of Temple in Jerusalem by Titus   |
| 77–84         | Agricola's campaign in Britain  |
| 79            | Eruption of Vesuvius; death of Pliny the Elder  |
| 81–96         | Reign of Domitian   |
| ?95           | Quintilian's <i>Institutio oratoria</i>   |
| 96–98         | Reign of Nerva  |
| 98            | Tacitus' <i>Agricola</i> and <i>Germania</i>  |
| 98–117        | Reign of Trajan   |
| 100           | Pliny's <i>Panegyricus</i>  |
| 101/2         | Tacitus' <i>Dialogus</i>  |
| 109/10        | Tacitus' <i>Histories</i>   |
| 113           | Death of Pliny the Younger  |

*Timeline*

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|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| ?114–?120       | Tacitus' <i>Annales</i>                            |
| ?115            | Death of Dio Chrysostom                            |
| 117–138         | Reign of Hadrian                                   |
| ?119            | Death of Tacitus                                   |
| ?120            | Death of Plutarch                                  |
| 135             | Death of Epictetus                                 |
| 155             | Birth of Tertullian                                |
| 161–180         | Reign of Marcus Aurelius                           |
| 170–180         | Publication of Marcus Aurelius' <i>Meditations</i> |
| 200             | Birth of Cyprian                                   |
| 212             | Antonine Constitution                              |
| 239–284         | Crisis of the Third Century                        |
| 240             | Birth of Lactantius; death of Tertullian           |
| 250             | Decree of Decius                                   |
| 258             | Cyprian martyred                                   |
| <b>284–476</b>  | <b>Dominate</b>                                    |
| 284–305         | Reign of Diocletian                                |
| 312             | Conversion of Constantine                          |
| 313             | “Edict of Milan”                                   |
| 320             | Death of Lactantius                                |
| <b>330–1453</b> | <b>Byzantine Era</b>                               |
| 330             | Foundation of Constantinople                       |
| 354             | Birth of St. Augustine                             |
| 380             | Edict of Thessalonica                              |
| 386             | St. Augustine's conversion to Christianity         |
| 410             | Visigothic sack of Rome                            |
| 426             | St. Augustine's <i>City of God</i>                 |
| 430             | Death of St. Augustine                             |
| 476             | Traditional Fall of Western Empire                 |
| 482             | Birth of Justinian                                 |
| 527–565         | Reign of Justinian                                 |
| 530–533         | Justinian's <i>Digest</i>                          |
| 565             | Death of Justinian                                 |

## *Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations*

Translations are either my own or taken from widely available English translations. When using the translations of others, I have indicated the last name of the translator in parentheses following the translation; I have followed a similar practice to indicate the edition of the Greek or Latin text where relevant. Please note the following editions:

*M. Catonis praeter librum De re rustica quae exstant*, H. Jordan (ed.), Leipzig, 1860.

*M. Tulli Ciceronis, De re publica, De legibus, Cato Maior de senectute, Laelius De amicitia*, J. G. F. Powell (ed.), Oxford, 2006.

*Oratorum Romanorum fragmenta liberae rei publicae*, E. Malcovati (ed.), Turin, 1953.

Abbreviations for classical names and titles of works follow Lidell-Scott-Jones and the Oxford Latin Dictionary. The first appearance of an author or work is unabbreviated. Please note the following abbreviations for classical periodicals and series:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>AJPh</i>    | <i>American Journal of Philology</i>   |
| <i>ANRW</i>    | H. Temporini et al. (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> . Berlin, 1972–. |
| <i>BICS</i>    | <i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>  |
| <i>CJ</i>      | <i>The Classical Journal</i>   |
| <i>ClAnt</i>   | <i>Classical Antiquity</i>   |
| <i>CPh</i>     | <i>Classical Philology</i>   |
| <i>CQ</i>      | <i>Classical Quarterly</i>   |
| <i>G&amp;R</i> | <i>Greece and Rome</i>   |
| <i>GRBS</i>    | <i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>   |
| <i>HPT</i>     | <i>History of Political Thought</i>  |



*Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations*

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|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <i>JRS</i>   | <i>The Journal of Roman Studies</i>                       |
| <i>MEFRA</i> | <i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité.</i>  |
| <i>REA</i>   | <i>Revue des études anciennes</i>                         |
| <i>TAPhS</i> | <i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i> |

