

# **SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA**

YEARBOOK OF THE ISRAEL SOCIETY  
FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

**VOLUME XLIV**

**2025**

ISSN 0334-4509 (PRINT)

2731-2933 (ONLINE)

The appearance of this volume has been made possible by the support of

Bar-Ilan University  
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
The Open University  
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PUBLISHED BY  
THE ISRAEL SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

<http://www.israel-classics.org>

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Price \$50

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Camera-ready copy produced by the editorial staff of *Scripta Classica Israelica*  
Printed in Israel by Magnes Press, Jerusalem

# SCRIPTA CLASSICA ISRAELICA

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Melanie Racette-Campbell, *The Crisis of Masculinity in the Age of Augustus*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2023. 262 pp. ISBN: 9780299343507.

In this book, Melanie Racette-Campbell describes a change in masculinity from the late Republic to Augustan era. The book builds upon previous work on Roman gender, especially that of Myles McDonnell,<sup>1</sup> from which R.-C. draws her primary definition of masculinity and with whose work she seems to be in silent dialogue. Perhaps because of this debt, R.-C.'s discussion rarely engages with gender theory; instead, she discusses authorial responses to the Principate. This focus results in a book with some excellent close readings, but a somewhat underdeveloped argument.

The long introductory chapter begins with R.-C.'s definition of masculinity, which is surprisingly brief given the book's title (p. 5). R.-C. considers only 'elite masculinity', which in the Republic comprised wealth, education, military and political service, and a well-behaved family. Because the traditional arenas of senatorial competition – in particular, political office and military campaigns – were subsequently dominated by Augustus, a change in conceptions of masculinity developed over the triumviral era and initial years of the Principate (the book largely ends with Ovid's *Amores*). This chapter also analyzes the Res Gestae and a handful of monuments to establish Augustus' conception of *virtus*, both for himself and others. R.-C. argues that Augustus established the family as a new locus of male competition, pointing to the *ius trium liberorum* (pp. 22, 127). Since this law also applied to women, its relation to masculinity remains unclear.

Because this chapter provides the scaffold on which the remainder of the book is constructed, several underdeveloped ideas reverberate through the subsequent chapters. One is the relationship between the public and face-to-face nature of Roman society and the literary texts that form the core of R.-C.'s argument. Judith Butler and the performance of gender are introduced (p. 4), but their application to R.-C.'s evidence is not explained. This question lingers through the remainder of the book, especially since R.-C. often slips between discussing the poetic persona and the poet himself (e.g., pp. 127–8). Elucidation of how – or even whether – this difference matters for our understanding of masculinity would be useful. One misses engagement with scholarship on the Republican performance of politics, little of which is in English;<sup>2</sup> in fact, the bibliography is almost entirely Anglophone. While it is churlish to count reference items by language, R.-C. has identified the political arena as a key locus of masculinity; that political arena has been analyzed extensively in German, and the insights of that scholarship are absent from her book.

Another lingering question is the nature of the 'Roman elite'. R.C. defines them as 'those with sufficient property to support themselves and to acquire a full literary education' (p. 5), but this collapses the distinctions between Rome's wealthiest citizens. On the one hand, the definition of 'masculinity' as competition for office emasculates some members of the equestrian class. On the other, the second half of the first century BCE saw the virtual extinction of Rome's oldest families and their replacement by Italians; it is fair to ask, then, whether and how this 'crisis' was not one of Republic vs. Principate, but the coalescence of multiple Italian cultures, each with their own ideas of masculinity.

Chapter one is devoted to the precursors of the 'crisis', and it is from this chapter that the consequences of the problems raised above become apparent. The two best-preserved authors of the period, Cicero and Catullus, both emerge as proto-Augustan men who question the dominant

<sup>1</sup> McDonnell 2006; cf. R.-C. p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Flaig 2003; Hölkeskamp 2010, 2017, and 2019 (a review of 21<sup>st</sup> century research).

masculine paradigms of their time. Because the other surviving late Republican authors are never discussed, the reader is left to wonder how well their self-presentation maps on to R.-C.'s conception of 'Augustan' masculinity. Varro's *Rust.* and *Ling.*, in centering Varro's scholarship, seem rather to foreshadow one of R.C.'s 'strategies' (pp. 125, 160, and *passim*) from later chapters: asserting intellectual authority (see chapter three). One could say the same of Lucretius' rewriting of Greek philosophy. A clearer explanation of how literary texts 'perform' masculinity, and of why the late Republic is not the time of 'crisis', would be useful, but this question is precluded by R.-C.'s choice to start from the assumption of an Augustan-era change (p. 3). Similarly missing from this chapter are Republican men who rejected 'masculinity' in R.-C.'s definition: the obvious example is Atticus, who appears briefly on p. 139 but is otherwise absent from this book. Other potential counterexamples, such as the Sullan-era Lucius Licinius Lucullus, go unmentioned.

The remaining chapters are dedicated to close readings of triumviral and Augustan poetry: primarily Horace, Propertius, and Ovid, but occasionally Vergil and Tibullus. R.-C. seems to assume that her readership specializes in Roman poetry, since some crucial assumptions are left to the end of chapters or hidden in footnotes: for example, we learn only on p. 160, two pages before the end of chapter four, that the 'disengagement' analyzed in this chapter was first discussed in the 1970s. There is also a certain degree of teleology to some of R.-C.'s interpretations; for example, she argues that in the *Amores* "Ovid's disengagement ... is less sincere" because his later poetry "praises the princeps and his family" (pp. 161–2); yet Ovid could not know what he would write years later in exile.

R.-C.'s discussion of *virtus* in *Aen.* 12 is representative of her argumentation (pp. 75–9). One passage to which she draws attention is 224–6, in which Juturna disguises herself as the Italian Camers and convinces the Rutuli to intervene in the duel between Turnus and Aeneas. R.-C. asserts 'this use of *virtus* for unethical ends has the tacit approval of [Juno]. *Virtus* is emphatically not a simple moral good here' (p. 77). There is no further discussion. Yet, since the *virtus* involved belongs to the man whose visage Juturna steals, this claim needs further development: is *virtus* itself unethical? Or is it rather that Vergil has chosen *virtus* as a signal of ethics, and therefore Juturna's trick is all the more cruel? I think R.-C. means that Vergil shows how an apparent good (*virtus*) can be subverted when placed in the wrong hands; but this interpretation requires significant extra work from the reader, and surely, in a book on gender, it is relevant that the wrong hands in this case are female.

The conclusion centers on Tiberius and the transition to a permanent empire. R.C. argues that authors in this period and later fail to resist the imperial 'system' (p. 198), limiting themselves to conspiracies against individual emperors. A crucial footnote for the entire study appears only in this chapter (p. 233 n. 30): R.-C. notes that increasing epigraphic evidence 'makes some things seem like innovations when they are actually continuations of Republican practices.' The same is, of course, true for literary texts; in the argument of this book, survival has shaped interpretation. Analyzing what remains as representative of what once existed is a valid choice, but it calls into question the many times R.-C. argues her point from the silence of our sources (see pp. 45–6, 86–9, 127–8, 153–4).

A handful of errors appear in this book, although none directly affect the argument. Marius was an Italian, not a provincial, Roman citizen, and Pompey defeated the pirates before fighting Mithridates, contra p. 204 n. 13; the consular dating formula is  $x + y$  consulibus, not consulibus  $x$

+ y (p. 204 n. 21); freeborn citizens could be clients, contra pp. 51–5;<sup>3</sup> the Cantabri and Scythians are not the same, contra p. 138. There are also some truly bizarre sentences, such as the statement that poets engaged in ‘resistance that... supports the state and lends it legitimacy’ (p. 124); supporting and legitimizing power is the opposite of resistance.

One closing caveat for this review: I was trained as a historian, while R.-C. is a scholar of literature. After reading this book, I suspect that it is aimed at an audience of fellow literature scholars, and its assumptions might be less opaque to readers in that world. Yet R.-C. seems to assume an additional audience of non-specialists in Roman culture (by, for example, explaining key aspects of Roman culture such as the *cursus honorum* and the triumph [p. 5]); with a better understanding of the premises on which this book is based, I may have better appreciated its arguments.

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Giulio Iovine (ed.) *Latin Military Papyri of Dura-Europos (P.Dura 55–145): A New Edition of the Texts, with Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge University Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781009183130.

The British soldiers stationed at Dura (in present-day Syria) in March 1920 could not have imagined the archaeological time capsule they were standing on, nor what the excavation of a trench accidentally uncovering the wall paintings of the temple of Bel would lead to. Their discovery was followed by major French and American archaeological expeditions, which unearthed *inter alia* archives of papyri, a unique find as these largely come from Egypt. These papyri provide a window into the Roman period, the last phase of the city, before it was abandoned following the Persian siege and conquest of 256/7 CE. Many of the documents belonged to the large Roman garrison that inhabited up to a third of this frontier town lying on the border between the two empires. The papyri, especially the Latin ones, have been heavily researched. However, updates and publications of new fragments are more than welcome and are

<sup>3</sup> See evidence in Neel (2022), 48–53.