

Finally, Celsus' Jew referred to numerous Greek myths as part of his attack against Jesus and fellow Jews who left their old identity for a new one, as cited by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 1-2. Thus, Celsus' Jew compared the story of Jesus' divine birth with that of Perseus, Amphion, Aeacus, and Minos. Celsus' Jew then hastened to add that we (Jews) do not believe these myths, but adopting a Euhemeristic stance, argued, nevertheless, that these stories were evidence of the great and truly wonderful works accomplished by these heroes, as opposed to the miserable deeds of Jesus, as he portrayed them (*Contra Celsum* 1.67). Here too, a Euhemeristic perspective was deployed. This passage is noted by B. (6), but without mention of its Euhemeristic aspect or its exploitation to allow numerous mentions of Greek myth in order to attack Jesus, while establishing this use as justifiable in Jewish terms.

I have pointed out some overstatements and omissions that might challenge the central thesis. Nevertheless, B. has written a thought provoking book that argues its case with much passion and conviction.

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Harriet I. Flower, *Roman Republics*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. xv + 204. ISBN 978-0-691-14043-8.

Dividing the past into successive units of time defined by a precise beginning and end is indispensable to the study of history. As Flower (hereafter F.) argues, it serves the '... same functions as the punctuation in a sentence and the paragraphing of a page' (4). Yet, at the same time, as she accurately perceives, it is anachronistic and based entirely on hindsight (6). It is therefore evident that although periodization is a vital tool in the writing of history, it is more often than not subject to interpretation.

In her intelligently argued book F. challenges the idea that the traditional span of the Roman Republic, covering some 450 years, should be treated as a "single time period" or regarded as a "monolithic republic". Re-evaluating the conventional division into Early, Middle and Late Republics, F. claims that this "quasi biological" division has become an orthodoxy molding our understanding of the republic, and generating the prediction of its inevitable fall. Instead she offers a new presentation of Roman chronology, identifying at least six republics in addition to several transitional periods — all distinguished, in her view, by particular political characteristics, strengths and weaknesses (23). F. takes her cue from the numbering of the French Republics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (five in all), but this comparison is somewhat infelicitous since the latter were not consecutive (save for the fourth and fifth) and each was based on a different constitution and dissimilar governmental practices.

F.'s chronology runs as follows: a pre-republican period after the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus (509-494);<sup>1</sup> a proto-republic before the first publication of the Twelve Tables (494-451/0); Republic 1 (450-367/6); Republic 2 (366-300); three republics of the *nobiles* (300-180, 180-139, and 139-88, i.e., Republics 3, 4, and 5); a transitional period during which republican procedures ceased (88-81); Republic 6 (81-60); a triumvirate (59-53); a transitional period (53-49); Caesar's dictatorship and a short transitional period after his murder (49-44); and another triumvirate (43-33).

In comparison to the traditional periodization, F.'s division, with its numerous republics and transitional stages, is rather rigid, complicated to follow and allows few options for deviation or

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<sup>1</sup> All dates are BCE.

freedom of interpretation. The traditional division, on the other hand, is much “looser” and is not as ‘tyrannical’ as F. implies (15). It has never deterred modern scholars from straying from the conventional spans of republican eras, thus creating their own chronology within the “monolithic republic” in accordance with their perceptions and analysis.

In fact, to employ F.’s chronology, one has first to agree with her interpretation of the various dates and events that serve as dividing lines between the various “republics” and transitional periods — choices that are not always sufficiently explained, especially with regard to the first two centuries of republican history. Thus, for example, F. claims that the second Republic of the *nobiles* (the term itself is nowhere defined) ends in 139 with the enactment of the *Lex Gabinia* which introduced written ballot to elections. She admits that there is little in the ancient evidence to demonstrate that the law was seen as revolutionary; nonetheless, she argues that ‘... the lack of detailed evidence proves nothing. The independence already shown by the voting assemblies in 133 is probably one result of these ballot initiatives’ (73). Yet, in this context it should be recalled that the four ballot laws were introduced gradually between 139 and 107, that the transformation to written (not necessarily secret) ballot did not entail any change of political practices or electoral patterns, that Tiberius Gracchus’ law was voted orally, since the *lex Papiria*, which applied the written ballot to legislation, was passed only in 131/130 and that Sulla did not deem these laws dangerous enough to be abolished.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, F.’s unequivocal claim that Sulla abolished the censorship (‘a striking innovation’, 123) has no corroboration in the ancient sources. This is a controversial point and other views should have been presented.<sup>3</sup> It should be recalled that the censors’ discretion in their choice of senators had already been diminished by the *lex Atinia* (131/130), which obliged them to enroll all former tribunes of the plebs. Moreover, F.’s new chronology develops in a vacuum; she practically disregards the “constitutional” repercussions of Rome’s expansion in Italy and overseas as well as that of the incorporation of the Italians into Rome’s citizen body.

The “classical Republic” did not emerge full blown once the monarchy had been abolished, and the Romans were well aware of the fact that their government was based ‘... on the genius not of one person, but of many; not in one generation, but in a period of several centuries and many ages of men’.<sup>4</sup> They had a built-in mechanism to adjust to the changes which their expansion obliged: the total absence of “constitutional laws” and the notion that a new law supersedes an older one. They achieved this by jealously shielding the principle that guided the republic from its inception: to ensure that no individual would be able to take exclusive control of the reins of power and rule at his own whim. From this perspective, the Republic could be considered as resembling the modern meaning of the term, which today signifies a regime in which the head of the state is not a monarch.

The book is very well produced and I found only one minor typo. A more detailed index would have helped readers to navigate their way through the plethora of information.

As I stated at the outset, periodization of historical eras involves interpretation and is therefore, by nature, controversial. F.’s book, which offers stimulating insights, will doubtless contribute to the ongoing discussion on the nature of republican government.

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<sup>2</sup> See R. Feig Vishnia, ‘Written Ballot, Secret Ballot and the *iudicia publica*. A note on the *leges tabellariae* (Cicero, *De legibus* 3.33-39)’, *Klio* 90 (2008): 334-346.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. E. Gabba, ‘Il ceto equestre e il senato di Silla’, *Athenaeum* 34 (1956): 135.

<sup>4</sup> *Cic. Rep.* 2.2, 2.37; see also Polyb. 6.10.13-14.