

Roman Republics

Harriet I. Flower

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Flower starts this book with an astute essay on perception and perspective when writing about the past, focussing on the Republic of Rome in particular. She criticises the general approach to Roman timelines, by stating that it is not a suitable approach to include the 450 years of the republic into one time period as it was not static. Instead the period requires a different and innovative approach. She makes it clear that historians writing about the past write from a modern perspective using timelines and approaches totally alien to the civilisation about which they write.

She does however emphasise that the Romans themselves did not have a clearway of recording years, and in regard to the Republic period, they did not even have a word themselves for Republic, in the sense that we understand it. They used *res publica* which had a variety of meanings including the community itself, the political system of government, as well as a shared civic community, transcending social divisions. The Romans themselves at times pluralised this to *res publicae* to mean states or republics. Therefore Flower asserts that the Romans did not view their history as a block known as the Republic, but instead a series of republics based on individual rulers and their achievements, and therefore should be the approach historians take when writing about them.

Flower therefore proposes that this period could be divided into 13 time periods and six separate republics. The pre-republican period after the monarchy (509-494); a proto-republic ending with the 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); a transitional period during which republican operations ceased (88-81); Republic 6 (81-60); a triumvirate (59-53); a transitional period (53-49); Caesar's dictatorship (49-44); and a second triumvirate (43-33).

She proves the logic of this timeline through various case studies, looking at the politics of each period, from which she ascertains whether it should be classified as republican politics or not. She asserts the strength of approaching the Republic of Rome in this way, as it means the system and politics of each republic can be assessed identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the period. By looking at each of the six republics in detail, it is possible to see exactly what led to their collapse as well as the social impact on religion, the army and the populace. The reactions to all of the political changes taking place were diverse, including the introduction of the cult of personality, which showed a marked difference between at least two of the republics and what they stood for. The implications for the wider history of this period are outlined by Flower, which includes the interpretation that contrary to popular belief, Sulla did not restore the Republic; he started a new one, with different ideals and politics. She also demonstrates that the period commonly referred to as the 'Fall of the Republic' actually falls in the period following the final Republic. Some of these ideas may be contested in Classics academia as this is the only book to suggest such periodization of the Republic period.

The book is well written and is easy to read, but it I feel it is not aimed at beginners in Roman history. At times, as a mere dabbler, I felt a little lost at the depth in which she discussed events and politics which she assumes the reader is aware. There is however an extensive bibliography which provides lots of useful references, guiding the reader to books and articles of interest.

The book does provide an original approach, and a useful historical account of the six republics that Flower identifies, discussing the changes that took place, marking the beginning and end of each republic, as well the aftermath of the end of the republic period in Rome altogether. Flower also uses convincing arguments for her theory, supporting it with case studies and reasoning. This would

therefore be a recommended read for a student of Roman history who is looking for an alternative view on the chronology and periodization of the republic period, which could greatly enhance their knowledge of this very interesting period in Roman history.