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The Crisis of the Roman Republic:
Archaeology of a Concept*

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1. It is by now commonplace to remark that the concept of crisis is applied all too frequently to the study of political, social, and economic developments; and it is by now customary to express perplexity or open impatience in the face of its indiscriminate use. On the other hand, the category of 'crisis' remains attractive to anyone who harbours any kind of historical interest: it is an invitation

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to focus attention on fronts of tension and conflict, on the ways in which these emerge and define themselves, and on the outcomes they entail. Where there is historical change, there is (at least) a layer of crisis to explore. In the modern historiography on the late Roman Republic – which we shall define, for the purposes of this discussion, as the period from the Gracchi to Actium – the concept of crisis emerges with distinctive prominence, albeit not always in a clear-cut manner, against the backdrop of a long and complex phase of political transition towards a monarchic regime, and is thus akin, or at least closely comparable, to other concepts that all require further definition, and present fronts of opportunity and scope for misunderstanding or confusion: end, fall, decline, decadence, revolution, compromise, settlement, resettlement.¹

Talking about crisis also means posing problems of periodisation, on the one hand, and of analytical perspective, on the other: both themes have real practical relevance and thick theoretical density. In a classic study that appeared four decades ago, Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006) attempted to bring some order into this field of problems by proposing a quadripartite reading of the concept of crisis.² Its first potential definition denotes a series of events that lead to a culminating point at which action becomes necessary: a notion derived from the language of medicine, where ‘crisis’ (already in the Greek *krisis*, and later in its modern derivations) indicates the stage in the course of an illness at which there is the prospect, at the same time, of a fatal outcome and a full recovery. A second definition designates a moment in which a decisive and final outcome is imminent, and after which the course of history is irreversibly changed: a form of the concept drawn from theology. Two further meanings are more clearly oriented towards an historical or, to use Koselleck’s language, temporal discourse: crisis may be understood as a permanent or long-term theme, which may constantly recur; or as a short-term occurrence that is historically immanent and may have major long-term consequences.

One could compile a long list of instances in which these two definitions of crisis were deployed in the modern historiography on the Roman Republic. A recent study by Gregory Golden is entirely based on a definition of ‘crisis’ that focuses on the short term, and requires an immediate response: according to his

¹ See also the role of the concept of ‘transformation’ in recent studies on Late Antiquity: Wood 2013, 315-317.

² Koselleck 1982 (Engl. transl., Koselleck 2006). Koselleck’s reflection on the topic goes back to his fundamental study on the ‘pathogenesis of the bourgeois world’ (Koselleck 1959, 132-157); see also Koselleck 2002. – On the theoretical and historiographical significance of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the eight-volume collective work in which Koselleck 1982 appeared, to the study of the Roman Republic see Hölkeskamp 2010, 46-47; on its modest impact on English-speaking scholarship see Crawford 2011, 109.

working definition, one can speak of a crisis only when there is a definite time to address it.³ Golden does not deny, of course, that the Roman Republic experienced a phase of grave and ultimately fatal turmoil, but maintains that it was an ‘open-ended’ issue; there was all the time to resolve it (209). What prevented an effective solution, however, was the absence of an agent recognized by all sides as a fair arbitrator that may offer widely acceptable solutions.⁴ This is a debatable, if clear, contention, which seems to rely on an essentially nominalistic approach – we shall come back to this problem.

There are other examples, and very distinguished ones, of the use of the concept of ‘crisis’ to refer to short-term situations. Gaston Boissier (1823-1908), in *Cicéron et ses amis* (1882), evokes it to refer to a range of very different instances: the civil war between Caesarians and Pompeians (56, 192, 195, 347); Cato’s personal turmoil during that conflict (302); and the serious social crisis that affected Rome in the first century BCE (172), of which the scandals in which some Roman ‘grandes dames’ were involved were a striking symptom. In *The Roman Revolution* (1939), Ronald Syme (1903-1989) consistently resorted to the term to refer to chronologically specific situations, such as the crisis of Spring 56 BCE, when L. Domitius Ahenobarbus stood for the consulship on an openly anti-Caesarian program, and Pompey briefly seemed inclined to support him, only to choose to renew the entente with Caesar and Crassus shortly afterwards (37); the events that preceded the outbreak of the civil war in 49 BCE (49); and, above all, the complex juncture between 27 and 23, to which a whole chapter, significantly entitled ‘Crisis in Party and State’, is devoted (331-348).⁵ In the latter case, it is especially remarkable that the notion of crisis is not applied in a general or generic sense, but is referred to specific political remits. We will return to this point in the final pages of this essay (§36).

The main issue to be pursued at this stage of the discussion, though, is the one identified by the third definition identified by Koselleck, that is the crisis of the Roman Republic in a longer-term perspective. It is true that every crisis can legitimately be read as a cluster of shorter-term crises, variously connected with one another;⁶ yet it is already clear from various ancient sources that the transition from the Republic to the Principate, through a series of civil conflicts,

³ Golden 2013.

⁴ Golden 2013, 212. Golden’s discussion disregards the modern debate on Caesarism and Gramsci’s seminal definition: ‘la soluzione ‘arbitrale’, affidata ad una grande personalità, di una situazione storico-politica caratterizzata da un equilibrio di forze a prospettiva catastrofica’ (Q 13 §27; see *infra*, §26).

⁵ On the scholarly ‘crisis theories’ that took shape about the settlements of 27 and 23 BCE cf. Badian 1982, 18-38, who argues that both solutions were in fact the outcomes of careful planning.

⁶ Cf. Morstein-Marx 2004, 280: ‘litany of crises’; Watts 2021, 16: ‘cycles of dysfunction’.

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should be understood as an historical trajectory that unfolded over several decades. Subsequent interpreters of the Roman Republic, since the Middle Ages, have put forward a very wide range of readings of the late Republican crisis, and the key aim of this discussion is to offer an analytical summary of that rich and complex field, identifying and exploring the main interpretive options. While the history of the modern historiography on the late Republic has on the whole received its fair share of attention, a study of this specific front of enquiry and debate has never been produced.⁷ The discussion proposed here aims to offer a wide-ranging assessment of the topic, which will then have to be put to the test of more circumscribed and detailed studies, and may in turn be further expanded by the engagement with historiographical and theoretical developments that the author of this study is not equipped to explore – not least because of the lack of the required language knowledge.

A further preliminary clarification is in order. According to Koselleck, the term ‘crisis’ did not enter the political vocabulary until 1627 (perhaps significantly, a year in which England was struck by a plague epidemic), when Sir Benjamin Rudyerd spoke of a ‘Chrysis of Parliaments’ in a debate on the conflict between the English Crown and the House of Commons.⁸ As always, the search for a *pròtos heuretés* involves some risks. In Italian there is in fact at least one attestation of the term *crisi* as early as in September 1614, when Guido Bentivoglio (1577-1644), Apostolic Nuncio at the court of the Archdukes of Flanders, discussed the Flemish affairs in a letter from Brussels to a Veronese correspondent, the Cavalier Tedeschi, and claimed that the King of Spain and the Archdukes of the Lower Countries had decided to open a new military conflict only because they were in a state of necessity: ‘E crediatelo a me, il quale, e per ragion del carico che maneggio, e per rispetto della confidenza che mi si mostra, ho grand’occasione di toccare il polso alle cose, e di saper le crisi di questi moti’.⁹ It is quite possible that a more systematic study, encompassing other European modern languages, might yield more results before the watershed identified by Koselleck. At any rate, the use of the term ‘crisis’ in a politi-

⁷ Millar 2002a, 50-156 and Pocock 2003, 98-416 are the reference discussions on the key strands of the historiographical debate on the Roman Republic. Deininger 1980 and Bruhns 2003 offer useful theoretical frameworks; see also, most recently, the dense account in Terrenato 2019, 10-30. – The breadth of the topic makes any claim to bibliographical exhaustiveness obviously untenable. The references in the footnotes do not even have the ambition to offer some basic orientation, but are limited to contributions that shed light on problems that are directly relevant to the discussion, or towards which the argument has a direct debt.

⁸ Cobbett 1809, 62: ‘This is the crisis of parliaments; we shall know by this if parliaments live or die’.

⁹ Bentivoglio 1826, 154.

cal context is an early seventeenth-century development, which gained momentum several decades later. To cite a distinguished example, also cited by Koselleck, in 1712 G. W. Leibniz remarked, in a discussion of the foreign policy of Tsarist Russia, that 'l'Europe est maintenant dans un état de changement et dans une crise, où elle n'a jamais été depuis l'Empire de Charlemagne'.¹⁰ This cursory comment effectively brings into focus the link that often exists between crisis, historical change, and periodisation. Yet one does not have to wait for the emergence of the word 'crisis', in its various modern forms, to encounter a clear awareness of the fall of the Roman Republic and its significance as an historical process, a reflection on the causes of that development, and a debate on its periodisation.

2. The end of the Republic does not emerge as a discernible theme in most of the great medieval historical compilations produced in Western Europe, from the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (1110/1120-1180) to the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1190-1264), where the knowledge of the period appears codified through exemplary medallions, poorly connected to each other. At least two exceptions are worth noting, though. The *Chronicon universale* of the Benedictine monk Ekkhard of Aura (d. 1126) provides a fairly rich overview of late Republican history, effectively framing it in the wider context of the history of what seven centuries later was to be called the Hellenistic world (Alexander the Great is a strong focus of interest in an earlier section).¹¹ The connection between the Numantine war and the Gracchan crisis is rather deftly brought out, although the initiative of the tribunes is cursorily dismissed as the outcome of personal ambition.¹² The focus is consistently kept on the wars that Rome fought throughout that period, which the annalistic form of the chronicle allows Ekkhard to summarise rather effectively. Caesar receives considerable attention, and is singled out as the one who 'primus apud Romanos singulare arripuit imperium, regnavitque annis quinque';¹³ the rise of Octavian is also discussed in some detail, not least because it intersects with the demise of the last

¹⁰ Leibniz 1873, 227-228: cf. Koselleck 1982, 632 (= 2006, 363); 2002, 239.

¹¹ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores VI, 33-231, esp. 86-93. Alexander: 62-75. Ekkehard's work was a rewriting and continuation of the universal chronicle by Frutolf of Michelsberg (d. 1103): see McCarthy 2013, 1-83 for an account of the history of both texts (esp. 29-30 on the discussion of Roman matters).

¹² *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores VI, 86: 'oritur apud Romanos utilis de provisione collatio, sed infamis de ambitione contentio'.

¹³ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores VI, 91.

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of the Ptolemies, and the significance of the name Augustus is also recognized in fundamentally sound terms.¹⁴

The subject is also integrated in the wide-ranging historical account outlined by Otto of Freising (ca. 1114-1158) in the *Chronicon* or *Liber de duabus civitatibus*, a vast compilation in eight books, written between 1143 and 1147, which covers the history of the world from its origins to 1146.¹⁵ The second book deals with the period from the victory of the Medes over the Assyrians to the birth of Christ, which in Otto's perspective is of course a fundamental watershed; the third book ends with the reign of Constantine. Otto is deeply immersed in the political events of his time, and the last two books are an important source on the twelfth century in their own right. His historical reflection, however, is part of a tradition that has a complex history in the ancient world, and that Otto accessed through Augustine and Orosius: the theme of the succession of empires. For him, an imperial subject and notable who chose to dedicate the second edition of the *Chronicon* (1157) to Frederick Barbarossa, that problem enabled a convergence between the distant past and the present. The historical trajectory of Rome is especially significant, but does not have the exemplary value of a unique or exceptional experience. Otto deals with Rome as an imperial power, welding its destiny to the end of the historical period in which the Persians and Greeks had dominated (2.27): the external wars waged by Rome are most interesting to him, rather than the circumstances of its foundation and political development. The theme of domestic conflict is introduced to mark a clear contrast with the external successes of the city (2.44). The key point is set at the war with Jugurtha, when the figure of Marius, who will later have a direct role in a civil conflict, emerges; the Gracchan period is not mentioned. The narrative of the wars that punctuate the late Republican period is presented very selectively (no mention is made of the battle of Actium), but with consistent reference to their Mediterranean – or indeed universal – context (2.48: 'ex omni parte mundi vires contractae'). The themes and the dynamics of the political struggle are not explored; on the other hand, Otto was well aware that the 'Romanae rei publicae status' had significantly changed in the second half of the first century BCE, and had not only brought harm to the enemies of Rome, but to Roman citizens too (2.51). The birth of Christ is the periodizing moment with which the second book closes, as we have seen: the development through which the 'alternantia mala' that punctuate the history of Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans are undone and resolved. Otto operates according to a providential logic; the tension

¹⁴ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Scriptores VI, 92: 'summa rerum ac potestatum penes unum esse coepit et mansit; quod Graeci monarchiam dicunt'.

¹⁵ The importance of this work in the history of the historiography on the Roman Empire has been asserted by Pocock 2003, 98-126; see 107-108 on its treatment of the end of the Republic.

between imperial expansion and internal discord is clear to him, however, and he is also aware of the political turning point marked by Octavian's victory: after his rise, the Romans had kings instead of consuls (3.3). The process is not explained, except with a generic reference to an endogenous collapse of the *res publica* (2.48, with an allusion to Lucan 1.81); however, its importance is firmly recognized.

In the *Faits des Romains*, an anonymous work composed in northern France around 1213-1214, the Republican period is instead wholly neglected, and the attention is focused instead on the imperial age, which is made to begin with Julius Caesar; the conquest of Gaul, inextricably linked to his name, acquires an important thematic value. This fundamental indifference to the historical development of the Republic finds significant parallels in both Byzantine and Arab historiography, even in earlier periods. John Malalas (ca. 491-ca. 578) and the tradition that goes back to him does not deal with the late Republican age. The narrative and interpretive framework is the *translatio imperii*, and the fall of the Republic is given a quick mention after Octavian's return to Rome, leading to his seizure of power from the Senate (9.19) and his rise to royal power (9.22). The point of discontinuity in Byzantine historiography is John of Antioch, who included an extensive section on Republican history in his *Historia chronike*, probably written in the first quarter of the seventh century. It survives in a severely fragmentary form, which allows us to get a measure of its richness, but not to reconstruct in any detail its interpretive framework. A distinction was established between *monarchia* (a despotic regime) and *basileia* (which instead guarantees the freedom of citizens in a monarchic context).¹⁶ John's work had considerable impact on the subsequent tradition, and sizeable sections of it were recast in the *Excerpta Constantiniana* (10th cent.) and in those of Maximus Planudes (ca. 1250-ca. 1305).¹⁷ In Eastern Arab historiography the fall of the Republic is never identified as an historical problem either, and the Republican age is discussed only occasionally.¹⁸ Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 965) recognized the im-

¹⁶ See Roberto 2005, XIII-XIV; see also XXIX-XXX for an important discussion of John as an historian rooted in an age of profound transformation.

¹⁷ See Roberto 2005, CI-CXI and, most recently, Manafis 2020, 191-213. The practice of the *Excerpta*, moreover, played an important role in broadening historical interests and knowledge to areas less beaten by the historical tradition, such as the Republican period: Németh 2018, 174-176. – See also the cursory and clear-cut statement of Michael Psellus (1018-1078 or 1096), for whom Julius Caesar was the architect of the transition from an aristocracy to a monarchy, and from consulship to kingship (*Historia suntomos* 16); for a summary of the assessments of other Byzantine authors see Kaldellis 2015, 29-31, who puts forward the distinction between regime and *politeia*, and argues that a change of the governance structure does not rule out the continuity of the political community.

¹⁸ See Di Branco 2009, 107-112; König 2015, 129-148.

portance of the Roman conquest of the Greek world, but stated that it was impossible to provide an informed discussion of it.¹⁹ Western Arab culture had easier access to parts of the classical tradition: notably, the *Kitab Hurusiyus* translated and reworked the text of Orosius.²⁰ Interest in Republican history, however, remained limited; the engagement with the conquest of the Iberian peninsula is relatively more intensive, especially in the so-called *Crónica del moro Rasis*, from the tenth century.²¹ The great Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) also relies on a framework of Orosian descent; in the *Kitab al-Ibar* he devotes a brief discussion to Caesar's wars (2.236, ed. Shahada-Zakkar) and identifies in 'Julius Caesar, son of Gaius' the character who put the Roman Republic to an end, after '700 years' (2.233).²² The process leading to that regime change, however, is neither described nor discussed.

3. From the mid-thirteenth century the idea that the Roman Republic underwent a phase of grave political turmoil, ending with the transition to an essentially monarchic regime, began to clearly emerge and receive close and innovative discussion. The extensive *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum* of the Dominican friar Martinus of Opava (Polonus, d. 1278) includes a substantial section on the history of the late Republic, largely based on Orosius.²³ There is no discussion of the period as a coherent historical process, but Augustus' victory («avunculo successit in dominio») is singled out as the stage at which the account widens to encompass the «regimen Urbis spirituale» along with the «temporale».²⁴ Jesus and Augustus are the initiators of two new complementary orders for Rome and for the world; Martinus does not comment on the qualitative difference between the regime of Caesar and that of Augustus, but takes it as a key working assumption.

Original and significant insights were also put forward in works that did not set out to produce a narrative account. In an encyclopaedic project such as the *Trésor* by Brunetto Latini (ca. 1220-ca. 1294), a Florentine scholar and politician, Rome became an indispensable feature in the effort to bring order into the world and human knowledge: both as an historical precedent and model of a monarchic and potentially universal regime, and as an imperial power. The project of the *Trésor* is developed during its author's exile in France (1260-1267),

¹⁹ *Muruj al-dhahab*, §717.1, ed. Barbier de Meynard-Pavet de Courteille-Pellat.

²⁰ Extensive discussion in Di Branco 2009, 143-166.

²¹ See Di Branco 2009, 186. See also the interest that the Andalusian historian and geographer al-Bakrī (1040-1094) took in the Punic Wars: König 2015, 139-140.

²² See Di Branco 2009, 208-211; König 2015, 146.

²³ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptores XXII*, 377-475, esp. 404-406.

²⁴ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptores XXII*, 406.

in which an ambitious arrangement of the main coordinates of human knowledge is put forward, and an original blend of epistemology and cosmology is attempted. At the heart of Latini's interests, however, there is rhetoric, understood as the art of thinking and arguing in an orderly fashion, and thus in itself an intellectual activity of profound significance. Cicero is a key figure, and his *De inuentione* a constant presence throughout the work.²⁵

The first book opens with a series of remarks on the world, its origin, and the nature of the soul, and then outlines a vast historical overview, which first closely follows the Bible, and later moves on, through King Ninus, to the Eastern and Hellenistic kingdoms (1.26). The focus then switches to the myth of Aeneas (1.34) and, immediately afterwards, to the early history of Rome, starting with Romulus, king and founder of the new city (1.36). Latini is clear about the importance of the transition from a monarchic regime to a republican one, which in turn ended, on his reckoning, after a period of 465 years. The periodizing moment is the conspiracy of Catiline 'encontre cels qui governoient Rome, pour le muement des dignitez': an initiative repressed by Cicero, with whose work, as already mentioned, Latini is highly conversant, as well as with the debate between Cato and Caesar in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*. With that traumatic event, the Republican period came to an end; a new one began, in which the conflict shifted from Rome to Etruria, where Catiline and his men were defeated. After the victory at Pistoriae, the Romans founded Florence, not far away, under the patronage of the god Mars: 'por ce n'est il mie merueille se li Florentin sont touz jors en guerre et en descort, car cele planete regne sor els'. Latini is a thinker with universalizing ambitions, but is deeply rooted in a civic context. The decisive moment of the fall of the Republic merges into the history of his hometown and into the very events that caused his exile.²⁶

In his vision, as well as in that of the author of the *Faits des Romains*, there is also a clear change of scenario with the rise of Caesar and the end of the war against Pompey (1.38). Latini does not speak of the end of the Republic, but of the emergence of a monarchic regime ('il sol ot la signorie de Rome'). The subsequent rise of Octavian confirms a trend that had already started, and is then

²⁵ Latini also translated part of the *De inuentione* into volgare, as well as Cicero's three Caesarian speeches (edited respectively in Maggini 1915 and Lorenzi 1998, with the important discussion of Montefusco 2021: see esp. 87-88 on Latini's assessment of Cicero's political position).

²⁶ The story of Catiline is already associated with the beginnings of the municipal history of Florence and the rivalry with Fiesole and Pistoia in the *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century (edited in Chellini 2009; see Marcone 2016, esp. 33-35, 39). On the subsequent development of the theme of the Roman origins of the city in 14th and 15th century Florentine culture see Baron 1966, 61-64, who makes no mention of Latini, and Pocock 1975, 52-53.

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followed by a periodizing moment of altogether different nature and importance: the birth of Christ. Latini is a political thinker, and for him reflecting on politics is part of a broader investigation into the balance that governs the world and presides over its change. The dynamics of power, however, are not a central issue in his project. The problem was to receive an influential discussion a few years later, when the great theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) devoted a section of *De regimine principum*, written around 1272, to political power and to the laws that preside over it. The problem of the variety of political regimes and the intrinsic possibility of their degeneration is central to the first chapters of the work. The Roman Republic quickly emerges as a valid case study on the limits of monarchy and the evils of tyranny, its degeneration, and its harmful nature as a regime (1.4). Thomas has in mind (1.5) the judgment of Sallust on the advantages that freedom brought to Rome (*BC* 7.3), and the existence of the consulship – in fact a yearly monarchy, in his opinion – appears to him as an original solution, which forges a new communal spirit and persuades citizens to accept serious burdens and restrictions, from military service to sumptuary legislation. However, Thomas does not go into the causes that led to the end of that setup, and confines himself to noting that the disagreements among citizens led to a series of civil wars, from which a monarchic government emerged;²⁷ most emperors did not prove equal to their tasks. Republican Rome, like the example of the Jews under the Judges, quoted immediately afterwards, is a warning of the dangers in both directions: when one shuns monarchy, which Thomas regards as the intrinsically best political regime, and when monarchy degenerates into tyranny.

Aquinas shows apparent familiarity with the key historical events of the late Republic at other stages of his work. He was a reader of Sallust, Cicero, and Valerius Maximus, and he obviously engaged thoroughly with Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.²⁸ The writing of *De regimine principum* was continued by another Dominican cleric, Ptolemy of Lucca (ca. 1240-1327), who was the author of a large part of the second book and of the whole of the third one, and shows a comparable interest in Roman matters.²⁹ A quick mention of Cato's speech in

²⁷ See Pocock 2003, 141: 'the product of liberty rather than usurpation'.

²⁸ A range of readings shared by Remigio de' Girolami (1235-1319), a Florentine Dominican and a pupil of Thomas, who in *De bono comuni* (edited in Panella 1985, 123-168) makes explicit reference to 'auctoritas infidelium' on problems of political theory and produces (ch. 5) a list of examples of republican virtue, from Publicola to Cato Uticensis, on whom he also reports the hostile judgment in Aug. *Civ. D.* 1.23.24, which goes back to Caesar himself ('noluit sibi parci').

²⁹ See the detailed discussion in Davis 1974 (cf. 1984, 254-289), who places Ptolemy within a line of 'Tuscan sympathy for republican Rome' (1974, 50 = 1984, 289), opened by Latini and

Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* confirms the impression that in that period the *res publica* had been reduced to nothing ('ad nihilum est redacta').³⁰ The point is clarified in the following book (3.12), when Ptolemy discusses in detail the problem of imperial power and its legitimacy. In a restatement of the *translatio imperii* model, Rome becomes the dominant power after Alexander the Great (here the crucial source is the first book of *Maccabees*) and exercises its hegemony with commendable moderation (3.15).³¹ Ptolemy also notes a fundamental difference between Caesar and Octavian. The former is openly described as the usurper of his own power, putting an end to the regime based on the consulship, while his adoptive son draws the necessary consequences by establishing a monarchic regime and exercising it with 'modestia', securing an exceptionally enduring power (3.12).

4. Two founding figures of Italian literature, and indeed of Italian as a literary language, made important contributions to the emerging debate on the end of the Roman Republic. The political reflection that Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) put forward a generation after Aquinas and Ptolemy is also based, as is well known, on the assumption that monarchy is the ideal regime, both from the political standpoint and from the theological one: the earthly transposition of the heavenly order. In the third book of *De regimine principum* (3.4.1), Ptolemy had openly claimed that the existence of the Roman empire was a consequence of divine favour, prompted in turn by the zeal that the Roman kings and rulers showed towards their people. In Dante this interpretive approach becomes both more consistent and more focused. The central text to this aspect of his reflection is *Monarchia*, datable to 1317 or shortly afterwards, where the foundations of the temporal monarchy and the issue of its alignment with divine will are analytically discussed. From the first book the Roman empire emerges as an inescapable precedent: the Romans ruled like kings over other peoples, and the nature of their hegemony demands particular attention. Here, too, a necessary link between political order and cosmic order is identified. In the second book Rome

continued until Dante, which should not be understood as a 'school'; see esp. Davis 1974, 41 on the concept of 'humanistic history' in the early fourteenth century.

³⁰ 2.7: 'ne populus fame deficeret Salustius etiam narrat sententiam Catonis in Catilinam qualiter respublica profecit Romanis: quia aerarium publicum viguit Romae, quo deficiente ad nihilum est redacta, ut temporibus eiusdem Catonis dicit accidisse'. The translation in Blythe 1997, 118 ('And in *The War with Catiline* Sallust relates Cato's opinion that the Republic was profitable to the Romans when the public stores thrived in Rome, but that after they had been abandoned the Republic reached a low point') is misleading.

³¹ On the importance of this source in Ptolemy's work see Millar 2002, 59-60. On the ancient developments of the reflection on *translatio imperii*, until the age of Justinian, see the essays collected in Cresci-Gazzano 2018.

emerges as a central problem. Dante is keen to establish whether her power was the result of usurpation or of legitimate right. He clearly chooses in favour of the second hypothesis, and attributes to Rome, through Aeneas, a legitimate claim to domination that derives precisely from the city's ties with Asia, through Ilium, and with Africa, through Carthage (2.3). Subsequently, the thesis that explains the genesis of the empire with the devotion of the Roman people to the collective interest is restated (2.5). The Livian tradition offers a repertoire of distinguished examples, from Cincinnatus to the Elder Cato, which Dante duly lists, before developing in the following chapters the theme of the compliance of Roman rule with divine law and will. Roman history is thus defined as a providential development; it has rightly been defined a sort of sacred history, fully integrated in the trajectory that accompanies the unfolding of a providential project and the affirmation of the Christian faith.³² In a chapter that has attracted much discussion, even in recent years (2.9), Dante defines Roman hegemony as the outcome of a contest between various hegemonic powers, which started with the Assyrian king Ninus and then took a crucial turn with Alexander; he is conversant with the tradition, reported by Livy, about a diplomatic contact between the Macedonian sovereign and Rome. Alexander's untimely death becomes a key factor, and the symptom of a providential plan.³³ Conversely, Dante appears to be completely uninterested in political developments at Rome.

In other moments in his work, though, concerns of a different kind emerge. In *Il Convivio*, a philosophico-political treatise he wrote in Volgare between 1304 and 1307 (but including material in verse composed before the exile), the history of Rome had received further attention, in generally similar terms to those of *Monarchia* (4.5). The point that prompts Dante's interest here is the Roman empire's ability to ensure political unity and universal peace: the birth of Jesus himself is evidence of the excellent, and on closer inspection unequalled, condition in which the world found itself. The whole of Rome's history is read as the manifestation of a providential plan, and the exemplary figures of Republican history that Dante draws from Livy's narrative are both examples of outstanding virtue and instruments of the Divine Providence. Dante is well aware that, from Caesar ('primo prencipe sommo') onwards, Rome was governed under a different regime, but the nature of that transition does not concern him. Even the story of Catiline, to which he does devote a brief mention, is but a fur-

³² Canfora 2015, 81-85 and Sasso 2017, 190-199 (esp. 191: 'nella storia di Roma Dante non scorgeva se non un processo unitario nel quale ogni possibile conflitto si risolveva nella necessità del risultato imperiale') are in agreement on this point. Cf. Baron 1966, 46 on the absence of 'any coherent historical critique of the institution of the Empire' throughout the fourteenth century.

³³ See Sasso 2017, 88-98, who also addresses in detail the problems posed by Dante's reference to Livy in this context, and offers an excellent bibliographical overview.

ther sign of divine favour: Cicero, ‘nuovo cittadino di picciola condizione’, was able to muster the strength to defend the freedom of Rome.

The age of the civil wars is also clearly recalled in Justinian’s speech in the sixth canto of *Paradiso*: the reference to the betrayal and defeat of Brutus and Cassius, in Modena and Perugia, and to the defeat of Cleopatra, however, is placed in the context of the victory of Octavian, the ‘baiulo seguente’ (‘the next keeper’) who continued Caesar’s work, pushed the boundaries of the empire as far as the Red Sea, and restored an era of peace, heralded by the closing of the gates of the Temple of Janus (73-81). Caesar’s rise to monarchic power is also read from the point of view of imperial expansion, following a series of victories from Gaul to North Africa and Spain, ‘ove sentia la pompeiana tuba’ (72). The defeat of the Catilinarians is again marked by the connection with Fiesole and Florence (53-54): the fall of the Republic, like the end of the Empire in the West, is not identified as an historical problem, but as part of a development in which the divine will manifests itself and a superior form of imperial power gradually takes shape.

Even in *De gestis Caesaris* of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch – 1304-1374) Caesar’s impact on the political history of his time receives minimal attention.³⁴ Interest is directed instead toward the biographical aspects, the dynamics of the conquest of Gaul, and the moral dimension of his character. In discussing the problem of Caesar’s ambition, however, the problem of responsibility in the outbreak of the civil war of 49-48 is also raised: on that count Petrarch has stern words for his hero and his choice to take up arms against Rome (20.1; cf. 20.8). He is also clear that the conflict led to a fundamental political shift, which also affected the military remit: ‘Disciplinam militarem, publice solitam doceri, ad se reduxit, ut privatim suo doceretur arbitrio’ (20.3). The figure of Labienus, who fought under Caesar’s orders in Gaul, but refused to join him in the civil war, receives special attention (20.4). On the other hand, the judgment on the outcome of Caesar’s victory is necessarily complex. He routed a large number of enemies, demonstrating great military qualities, but also defeated his country (26.1). On the other hand, Petrarch clearly takes a stand against those who see Caesar as a usurper, and acknowledges his role in the making of the empire.³⁵

De gestis Caesaris is a late work of Petrarch, which followed a larger project, conceived in 1337-38 and conducted between 1341 and 1343, for a collec-

³⁴ The reference edition is Crevatin 2003.

³⁵ See 26.26 (Caesar’s mildness, in spite of his opponents’ accusations); 26.28 (hatred of Caesar and illegitimacy of his assassination); 26.42 (judgment on the conspiracy). Cf. Conetti 2017 on the role of the imperial tradition in Petrarch, especially in the *Familiare*s, and its deep connection with the city of Rome.

tion of lives *De viris illustribus*.³⁶ The original plan of that work called for a series of biographies of great Romans, from Romulus to Titus. However, the project stopped halfway through, resulting in a cycle of 23 biographies, almost all Roman, with the exception of those of Alexander, Pyrrhus and Hannibal; the endpoint is an extended discussion of Scipio Africanus and an unfinished biography of the Elder Cato. Even the contrast between the two men constituted a difficult problem to overcome: a moment of rupture within the remit of the mid-Republican nobility, which foreboded even more traumatic developments. Petrarch returned to this project on several occasions, first conceiving a cycle of biographies of distinguished men (from Adam to Hercules) and then, in his final years, a new cycle of thirty-six Roman lives (from Romulus to Trajan), which was never written;³⁷ it was to be taken up again and brought to completion by the Paduan Lombardo della Seta (d. 1390), the author of a *Quorundam virorum et clarissimorum heroum epithoma*.

Petrarch never found the time or the energy to deal with the final phase of the Republic. Shortly after completing his biography of Scipio in 1339, he turned to the composition of *Africa*, the great poem on the Hannibalic War. The biography of the Africanus went through two more drafts, demonstrating his continuing interest in the 'classical' phase of the Republic and in an individual that Petrarch admired, *inter alia*, for his determination not to become a tyrant and not to allow the Republic to fall into a spiral of civil wars (12.28). In an important digression (10.38-46), he also demonstrates a far from superficial knowledge of the Republic's institutional arrangements and of the obstacles they posed to individual ambition: first and foremost, the temporary nature of military commands. It is thus all the more remarkable, in his view, that great military leaders emerged in a context that made long-term strategic initiatives very difficult: a symptom of their individual qualities and of the willingness of many commanders to pursue glory, without fear of having to hand over their command and the glory of their victory to others, after the end of a campaign.³⁸ In identifying the historical importance of the temporary duration of commands, Petrarch posed a theme on which Machiavelli, nearly two centuries later, offered a decisive development.

5. Caesar presented at least two fundamental reasons of interest to fourteenth-century students: the story of an extraordinary character, and the relation-

³⁶ The reference edition of *De viris illustribus* is Martellotti 1964. The work is now accessible along with *De gestis Caesaris* in the elegant Italian translation by U. Dotti, accompanied by an extensive introduction (2007).

³⁷ On the composition of this work see Dotti 2007, 5-8.

³⁸ On the importance of ch. 10 see Dotti 2007, 35-36.

ship between the legitimacy of the monarchic regime in Rome and that of Roman imperial rule. In the *De translatione imperii*, composed around 1342, Marsilius of Padua (ca. 1275-1342/1343) openly wonders whether the Roman empire was founded by Caesar or by Augustus. The problem is resolved, in his view, by the fact that Caesar violated and usurped the republic (§2: ‘non fuit imperator, sed rei publicae violator et illius potius usurpator’). He does not deserve a place in the sequence of emperors (*ibid.*), nor was he able to uphold the high standards of conduct of the Romans who lived in the seven centuries between Romulus and Caesar Augustus (cf. §1); in the *Defensor pacis* (1324) Marsilius had spoken admiringly of the Roman rule in the provinces and of the sense of justice that inspired it.³⁹ If the fall of the Republic does not seem to be of any interest to Marsilius, the secession of the East from the hegemony of the Romans and the Greeks (i.e. the Byzantine empire) is instead recognized as a theme of firm significance, all the more so in a work that focuses on the historical sequence of the empires (§3).

In the reflection of the jurist Bartolus of Sassoferrato (1313/1313-1357), the major historical figures are consistently in the background; instead, the focus is on the evolution and degeneration of the political regimes and on the philosophical dimension of the problem. In *De regimine civitatis* (composed shortly after 1355), Rome is a useful case study that offers examples of the three main forms of government: not at the same time, as the theorists of the mixed constitution claimed, but in three different historical phases.⁴⁰ After the expulsion of the kings there was a popular government – an Aristotelian *politia* – eventually replaced by the oligarchic rule of the Senate. Finally, the monarchic regime of a *princeps* took hold. Bartolus does not put forward precise periodisations, but establishes a direct link between the development of the polity and the shift to a regime that was first oligarchic, and then monarchic. His reflection is further sharpened in the discussion of the relationship between the size of a city and the political regime. Only the small state can be governed by a democratic regime; cities like Venice and Florence are necessarily ruled by oligarchies; ancient Rome shows that the transition to a monarchic regime is the best scenario, once the ‘tertius gradus magnitudinis’ of greatness has been reached.⁴¹ This is a re-

³⁹ On the distance between this analysis and that of Brunetto Latini and Ptolemy see Pocock 2003, 147. For a recent discussion of the concept of *populus* in Marsilio see Nederman 2020, 507, who views the *Corpus iuris civilis* as the fundamental point of orientation in his reflection – a much more significant one than Aristotle’s *Politics*.

⁴⁰ The reference edition is Quaglioni 1983, 149-170; see esp. 150-152.

⁴¹ Ed. Quaglioni 1983, 165-166: ‘hoc autem fere posset contingere in civitate una per se; sed si esset civitas, quae multum aliis civitatibus et provinciis dominaretur, huic genti bonum est regi per unum’. On the lasting influence of this aspect of Bartolus’ thought see Deininger 1980, 99.

statement of the theory that views monarchy as the best political regime, albeit always vulnerable to tyrannical degeneration. Bartolus devoted a separate work to this theme, *De tyranno*, composed between 1355 and 1357, where Roman history receives no detailed discussion, despite the frequent references to the *Digest*.⁴² However, the problem of political and constitutional degeneration was to find very wide resonance in the debate of the following decades.

In fifteenth-century Italy, and notably in Florence, the reflection on the fall of the Roman Republic became more precise and more intense, as did the awareness of the distance between Republican and Imperial history.⁴³ In the very first year of the century Coluccio Salutati (1331/1332-1406) wrote *De Tyranno*, where the comparison with Roman history is explicit and close: the strategy could not be further apart from Bartolus'.⁴⁴ Through the reflection on Caesar, his regime and his assassination, Salutati refines the theoretical coordinates upon which the whole discussion is based. The first two parts of the work explore the general definition of tyrant and tyranny, and the problem of the lawfulness of tyrannicide; the following two sections put the conclusions to the test through a close comparison with the story of Caesar, which Salutati reconstructs on the basis of Cicero's testimony. Dante, 'divinissimus civis et compatriota meus' (1.5), is a direct interlocutor: the choice of placing Brutus and Cassius in Hell prompts a reflection, in the fifth and final section of the treatise, on the very foundations of monarchic power and the lawfulness of resistance. Salutati theorizes, from a juridical point of view, a perspective that is in full continuity with the reflection on monarchy articulated from Thomas onwards. The insistence on the central importance of the 'titulus dominandi' that distinguishes a tyrant from a 'legitimus princeps', executor and guarantor of the laws (1.9), reflects his legal perspective. The two original points are the choices to focus on a degenerate form of the monarchic regime, and to delve into a specific case study. Salutati brings to the discussion of this problem a knowledge of the ancient texts that is not inferior to Petrarch's: his review of Cicero's judgments on Caesar and of the development of the relationship between the two men is an original development in the history of scholarship (3.2-8). One-sided approaches – such as the thesis that Cicero would never have described Caesar as a tyrant, or the tendency to a literal reading of the *Pro Marcello* – coexist with the important insight that the Arpinate feared the monarchic ambitions of Pompey. Here Salutati

⁴² Edited in Quaglioni 1983, 175-213. On the significance of this work in the humanistic debate on tyranny see Hankins 2019, 113-115; on the originality of Salutati's historiographical perspective see Galasso 2017, 19-20.

⁴³ See Canfora 2001, 31-73; Pedullà 2011, 21-41 and 2018, 13-26.

⁴⁴ Ercole 1914, with its extensive introduction, remains the reference edition; see 173-179 for a comparison with Bartolus. See also Canfora 2001, 31-36 and Hankins 2019, 128-133.

makes use of his direct knowledge of the *Ad Familiares*, which he had discovered in Vercelli just less than a decade earlier, in 1392 (3.8, esp. on *Fam.* 4.9). There is not yet a comprehensive historical reflection on the late Roman Republic, but there is a clear understanding of the periodizing value of the war of 49-48: a time when both factions clashed with the exclusive intention of securing supremacy (3.9: 'utrimque par impietas, par furor et equalis ambitio'). Caesar's victory is the result of a divine decision ('dei dispositione factum est ut Caesar victor fuerit'); however, subsequent developments, notably the choice to embrace clemency, are credited to the farsighted actions of the victor. The attitude towards the defeated and the choice to preserve the legal structures of the Republic are the factor that clearly distinguish Caesar's regime from a tyranny, and make him superior to Marius and Sulla, who could not contain their bloodlust (4.9-10).⁴⁵ The problem of legitimacy does not even arise for the emperors who gained power after him (4.1: 'continuatis honoribus ceteri principes, quos nemo tyrannos iudicat, in successionem imperii ducti sunt').

A few years later, in 1403/1404, Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), a member of Salutati's immediate circle, pursued the study of ancient Rome from a local history perspective. The *Laudatio urbis Florentine* returns to the theme of the historical link between Rome and Florence, which was already asserted in Brunetto Latini, as we have seen. The excellence of the Tuscan city, which is the central theme of Bruni's work, is confirmed precisely by the link with Rome, the universal model of virtue and good government. Florence is the custodian of Rome's heritage and its imperial prerogatives. Not all the history of Rome, however, is a story of undisputed virtue (ch. 34): public freedom was violated and undone by some ruthless men who can rightly be regarded as thieves.⁴⁶ Florence was founded before that harmful monarchic turning point, and managed to keep its republican spirit alive. Bruni does not go into the reasons that led to the collapse of Roman freedom, nor does he precisely date the foundation of Florence; what interests him is instead the continuity between that lost freedom and that of which Florence still is in full possession. Bruni's judgement on

⁴⁵ Salutati's historical judgement on this period remains implicit: see also the mention of 'Sullana temporum vastitas proximaque dissensio' (4.17), which serves as a clear example of the need for a monarchic outcome after a season of civil strife.

⁴⁶ *Laudatio*, §31: 'Hec igitur splendidissima Romanorum colonia eo maxime tempore deducta est quo populi Romani imperium maxime florebat, quo potentissimi reges et bellicosissime gentes armis et virtute domite erant: Carthago, Numantia, Corinthus a stirpe interierant; omnes terrarumque omnia in potestatem eius populi venerant; nichil calamitatis populo Romano ab ullis hostibus inflictum erat. Nondum Cesares, Antonii, Tiberii, Nerones, pestes atque exitia rei publice, libertatem sustulerant. Sed vigeat sancta et inconcussa libertas, que tamen non multo post hanc coloniam deductam a sceleratissimis latronibus sublata est.'

the historical development of Republican Rome is thus far removed from that of his friend and mentor Salutati. There is, however, a clear link with Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, which identified the Middle Republic as the peak of Roman history;⁴⁷ Bruni's strong biographical interest is also confirmed by both his Latin life of Cicero and the vast project of a Latin translation of the *Parallel Lives*.⁴⁸ His dissent from the historical judgment of Salutati finds even more explicit expression in the *Dialoghi a Pietro Paolo Istriano*, where the character of Niccolò Nicoli confronts Coluccio directly, and issues a sharp critique of Dante's choice to place Brutus and Cassius alongside Lucifer. Caesar is explicitly defined as a tyrant. Salutati is given the opportunity to defend his own theses, and Nicoli himself declares, on the second day of the dialogue, that he has been arguing a radical view precisely in order to stimulate discussion. The debate on Caesar and the Liberators is part of a wider reflection on the ties between literature and history, and on the link between antiquity and the present, in which the comparison with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio – three recent authors, but already part of a canon that was being codified – plays a central role.

Bruni later returned to the relationship between Rome and Florence in the *Historiae Florentini populi*, in twelve books: a project that shares the same outlook as the *Laudatio*, but develops it to a far greater degree of ambition. Bruni started it in 1415 and kept working on it until his death, almost thirty years later. The problem of the foundation of the city and its political and moral relationship with the age of the late Republican civil wars forcefully arises in the opening section of the work. The foundation of Florence is directly associated with the settlement of a Sullan colony at Fiesole and with the arrival in that part of Etruria of a large contingent of veterans.⁴⁹ The thesis ran counter to the dominant tradition, which viewed Caesar as the founder of the city. Florence was founded at the confluence of the Arno and the Mugnone in the period immediately following the victory of Sulla; the references of Cicero and Sallust to the building projects promoted by the veterans can be explained precisely with the foundation of a new city, first called *Fluentia*, and later *Florentia*.⁵⁰ The connection between the beginnings of Florence's history and the crisis of the late Republic be-

⁴⁷ Cf. the noteworthy enumeration of the 'summi ac praestantissimi duces et senati principes' in the *Laudatio Florentine Urbis* (§31, p. 15.9-13 ed. Baldassarri), of 1404, which opens with Publicola, closes with Cicero, and also includes the Gracchi.

⁴⁸ On these projects see the recent discussion in Ianziti 2012, 27-43, 320-326 (Plutarch), 44-60, 326-333 (Cicero).

⁴⁹ Bruni 2001, 10-12, §3-6. See Pocock 2003, 160-169; Ianziti 2012, 104-106. On the importance of the 'Sulla thesis' in fifteenth-century Italy see Baron 1966, 49-52, 56-59.

⁵⁰ Cic. *Cat.* 2.20; Sall. *Cat.* 12.3. On Bruni's strong debt to Sallust see La Penna 1968, 409-431.

comes even closer than in the *Laudatio*: the debts incurred by the Sullan veterans were one of the causes of Catiline's conspiracy. That event had very serious consequences in Rome, but a beneficial effect in Florence, because it served as a warning to the inhabitants of the new city about the dangers of civic discord, financial instability, and individual initiative.⁵¹ On the other hand, the Roman hegemony in Italy (to which Bruni devotes a long, pioneering excursus) precluded Florence an expansion even remotely comparable to Rome's, and also protected the city from the risk of what Bruni explicitly calls 'declinatio Romani imperii'.⁵² The final stage of that development were the so-called barbarian invasions, from the arrival of the Goths to the victory of the Lombards, but, according to Bruni, the starting point – what could fairly be called, albeit with an anachronistic term, the *critical* stage – was the moment when Rome lost her freedom and began to obey the emperors.⁵³ There is a fundamental link between the demise of political freedom and the loss of virtue, in a context in which many of the best men were killed. The general political climate rewarded flattery. Competition for public office had come to an end, and so had any incentive to demonstrate one's moral qualities; Augustus and Trajan are worthy exceptions in an otherwise uninspiring climate. The process that led to the loss of Republican liberty receives no discussion; beyond a mention of the background of Catiline's conspiracy, its context is never explored. Julius Caesar's victory is a periodizing moment, but it is not an object of in-depth reflection or serious critical scrutiny.

6. Caesar, on the other hand, remained a matter of fundamental interest to those who approached Republican history from theoretical angles – notably to thinkers who were engaged in the reflection on monarchy and tyranny, and on the similarities and differences between the two regimes. For the writers who considered Caesar's story from the standpoint of the history of the preceding centuries, instead of that of the Roman empire, the comparison with the Scipios, which Petrarch had already identified as a decisive issue, was especially strong and worthy of further investigation. In 1435 it was the subject of an exchange of letters between Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) and Guarino Veronese (1374-1460), in which two opposing points of view were articulated at some length. Poggio wrote a celebration of the Africanus' Republican virtues, programmatically contrasting them with Caesar's grave flaws; Guarino replied with a long

⁵¹ Bruni 2001, 14-15, §9.

⁵² Bruni 2001, 48, §38: 'declinationem autem Romani imperii ab eo fere tempore ponendam reor quo, amissa libertate, imperatoribus servire Roma incepit'.

⁵³ On the importance of this periodisation see Hankins 2019, 82.

defence of Caesar, to which Poggio responded.⁵⁴ What is of interest here is how the biographies of the two great men are framed in the wider context of the crisis of the Republic. Indeed, they seem to summarize and override it: the historical framework within which Scipio and Caesar operated receives less than cursory discussion; their historical importance is explained with their personal qualities, not with their role within a larger process.⁵⁵ For Poggio, Caesar is a great military leader who does not demonstrate the same skills in the political sphere: indeed, he is a most damaging citizen to his country (111.19-20). This tension is not apparent in Scipio, who combines the ability to achieve glory in the military sphere with a great concern for the welfare of the political community and full personal integrity: an overt allusion to Cosimo de' Medici, who had come to power in 1434, a few months before the letter was written.⁵⁶ The critique of Caesar is based on a moral condemnation, which revolves around his lust for power. There is no attempt to offer further explanation, nor to clarify the general terms of the context in which Caesar acted: there is a mention of the civil wars in which he was involved (113.84-85) and of his choice to take up the dictatorship (113.103), but without proposing any explanation for those developments of major importance. On the other hand, Poggio is clear about the terms of the turning point that coincided with Caesar's 'civilis victoria': the advent of a new regime that was to have dreadful consequences, with the rise to power of evil emperors and the oppression of literary and philosophical studies (118.327-337). Caesar is not just the destroyer of Roman liberty: he is the 'Latinae linguae et bonarum artium parricida.'

Guarino sets the problem in quite the opposite terms, and in direct response to Poggio's polemic. His starting point is a long defence of the vitality of Roman culture after Julius Caesar; if a repressive strand existed in Rome, it was rather embodied by the Elder Cato, who prompted the decision of the Senate on the expulsion of Greek philosophers in 155 BCE (122.161-164). Guarino defines Caesar as a model of political and, in a broader sense, moral conduct; his discussion is not so much interested in Scipio's faults as in the aspects that determine Caesar's excellence. Still, some references to other moments in Rome's history are in order. According to Guarino, Caesar was fully aligned with the political practice dominant in Rome for at least a generation. If a clear watershed is to be sought in the history of Republican freedom, it will be found in the age of Mari-

⁵⁴ The texts are edited, with an extensive introduction, in Canfora 2001, 111-167, from which we quote. On the debt of this controversy to Petrarch's work see *ibid.*, 24-30.

⁵⁵ Poggio had already shown a strong interest in Roman history in his first work, a dialogue *De avaritia* (1428), where the character of Antonio Loschi produces a eulogy of public wealth, citing Rome and its monetary system as an exemplary case (1538, 6-7; see also 14-15).

⁵⁶ Canfora 2001, 47-48.

us and Sulla, when Rome experienced a condition of 'servitus' (136.75-137.816);⁵⁷ Clodius also established a despotic regime, a 'dominatus' (137.817), of which Cicero was the most distinguished victim, and Pompey gave evidence of a 'tyrannica vis' (137.826), to which Caesar opposed a legitimate reaction. According to Guarino, who evokes a well-known passage from Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* (28.4-6), by the middle of the first century BCE Rome had lost the discipline, integrity, and devotion to the fatherland that had long animated it: Caesar established a regime that restored civil and social order, 'perinde ac medicum' (138.855). The sorrow of the Roman people in the weeks following his death is a testament to the strength of his design. Guarino consciously joins a strong intellectual and historiographical tradition, and cites in support of his argument a long passage from Cassius Dio (138.860-886: Cass. Dio 44.1-3); this general judgment corroborates and clarifies the verdict in favour of Caesar, but is not the main point. In his detailed reply, Poggio defends his theses, while acknowledging the importance of the attempt to recognize historical precedents for Caesar's action (165.1019-1029): the age of Marius and Sulla, however, is a misleading example that can credibly be used to support a critique of Caesar. While it is true that customs were already corrupt at that time, the Republican institutions were still in place: Caesar would soon dismantle them. Cassius Dio's judgment is just the opinion of a 'Graeculus adulator, natus in servitute' (165.1029-1030).⁵⁸ Brutus and Cassius, on the contrary, deserve full appreciation (165.1045-1047). Poggio directly engages with Guarino, who had explicitly condemned them (138.871-876), but here the memory of Dante's *Inferno* and Salutati's reflection on the subject is certainly significant.

The discussion between Poggio and Guarino is a debate between equals, who restored their relations shortly after that public exchange. Guarino had read more widely than his Florentine counterpart, who, unlike him, had no Greek; even the reference to Cassius Dio is indicative of a broader historical and analytical outlook than that of many of his contemporaries. He belonged to a network of scholars that were active mainly in northern Italy and did not regard their hometowns as their exclusive or primary horizon: it was one of the forms assumed by what Gramsci called the cosmopolitan character of Italian intellectuals. The trace of the controversy between Poggio and Guarino can be felt in other moments of the humanistic reflection, from Cyriacus of Ancona to Giovanni Pontano, and is probably also recognizable in Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, even

⁵⁷ Fryde 1983, 70-72.

⁵⁸ On this anti-Hellenic attitude in Poggio and other Latin humanist writers see Canfora 2001, 18-19.

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though it is not always possible to distinguish the direct influence of the Petrarchan model from that of its later developments.⁵⁹

7. The Scipio-Caesar opposition is not the only avenue of reflection on the Roman Republic to have emerged in this period. Around 1452, Michele Savonarola (ca. 1385-1466), a physician at the Este court and paternal grandfather of the great Dominican preacher, wrote a treatise *De vera republica*, in which he denied the Roman Republic before Caesar the very status of *res publica*: without a prince there can be no state worthy of the name.⁶⁰ A few years later, a major work definitively set Republican Rome as an historical and theoretical problem. The *Roma triumphans* by Biondo Flavio (1392-1463), a great scholar born in Forlì, and active in Ferrara, Florence and Rome (1459, in ten books), represents the story of the city as a path of continuity between the ancient and Christian ages, driven by the intent to identify in Rome an example of civilization for the present time; the recent fall of Constantinople, the Second Rome, is a decisive element of the context in which the work, dedicated to Pope Pius II, takes shape. The account is backed up by an unprecedented amount of documentation, first and foremost literary.⁶¹ The discussion culminates, in the final book of the work, with the codification of a Christian triumph, which is singled out as the main area of continuity between ancient and modern times, and comes at the end of a survey of the factors that made Rome great: the religious, political, and military institutions, as well as the forms and practices of social life.

The seventh book includes an historical overview, focusing on the wars, both external and civil, in which the city was involved: however, no interpretation of the late Republic is put forward.⁶² The end of freedom is not viewed as a moment of strong interest.⁶³ The two watersheds that Biondo identifies in the history of Rome are rather the war against Pyrrhus (145: the first conflict with a non-Italian enemy) and the Gothic sack, which he dates to April 412 (152F: 'Romanorum imperii declinatio coepit').⁶⁴ In the ninth book, on the other hand,

⁵⁹ Canfora 2001, 63-78.

⁶⁰ The work is still unpublished; its manuscript is at the Biblioteca Estense in Modena. I draw this summary from Hankins 2019, 89, who frames Savonarola's argument within the wider fifteenth-century debate about the best form of *res publica*.

⁶¹ Muecke 2016, xi-xii; cf. xiv on the relationship with Poggio. On the momentous importance of this work, see most recently Hankins 2019, 70, 291.

⁶² Biondo 1559, 146-149.

⁶³ See Hankins 2019, 299.

⁶⁴ The same periodisation is already put forward at the beginning of the *Historiae ab inclinatione Romanorum* (1453): 'quod multis placuisse legimus, hanc de qua agimus imperii inclinationem in C. Caesaris dictatura coepissa, ea ratione non approbamus, quia aucta potius quam imminuta fuit sub Caesarum multis Romana potentia' (Biondo 1531, 4). Delle Donne 2016, 76 reads

the impact of luxury on the history of the city is discussed, and is explicitly associated with imperial expansion, notably with the arrival of Roman troops in Asia Minor at the beginning of the second century BCE (184-185). On the other hand, many of the sources on which Biondo works directly record various aspects of Republican history, and the repertoire of examples that he constructs is deeply integrated in the development of the discussion, even within an interpretive framework that emphasizes aspects of continuity. The examination of moral aspects cannot be disjointed from wider political and historical assessments. Biondo stresses the importance of this aspect in the fifth book, where the honesty and frugality of the ancient Romans are discussed at length, and a caesura between Republic and Empire is identified (117B-C). With the advent of the Principate there are only a few traces left of the 'continentia', 'humanitas', and 'liberalitas' that distinguished the ancient times and which, even at the time of Marius and Sulla, led many not to profit from the proscriptions.⁶⁵

Biondo constructed a systematic framework that stood out as an unparalleled point of orientation for over a century, until the great works of Carlo Sigonio, and in which he put forward a differentiated and original periodisation of Roman history. Alongside this project of quite exceptional scope, in the second half of the fifteenth century the vast repertoire of great characters and exemplary situations with which late Republican history is interwoven continued to nourish historical and political reflection from different, if not contradictory, points of view, even well beyond the sphere of those who dealt with the ancient world. Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as Platina (c. 1421-1481), who was born near Cremona and lived between Mantua, Florence and Rome, working first for the Gonzaga, then for the Medici, and finally for Sixtus IV. His best-known work was the *Vitae pontificum*, published for the first time in 1479 and intended for wide circulation; it also received various translations, and posthumous updates by Onofrio Panvinio. Platina had broad interests, though. In the dialogue *De optimo cive* (1474), in two books, Cosimo de' Medici, Lorenzo il Magnifico, and Platina himself discuss the virtues to which a citizen should aspire; Cosimo, a model of the civil prince, plays a central role in the conversation. References to ancient Rome are frequent, from the early lines of the work, but they never translate into a coherent historical interpretation. Cosimo reproaches Saturninus, Sp. Maelius and the two Gracchi for having aspired to a tyranny that would have brought about the ruin of the city; in the same passage, 'avaritia' and 'voluptas' are recognized as the factors that led to the degeneration of Rome in which Cu-

there a 'very clear' critical reference to the different periodisation of the 'declinatio' in Bruni's *Historiae Florentini populi* (see above).

⁶⁵ On the importance of this passage see Pedullà 2011, 222-224 and 2018, 87.

rio, Fabricius, and Cato the Elder had stood out for their moral qualities.⁶⁶ The last century of the Republic, however, is not the only historical junction in which civic order is threatened. The juxtaposition of Sp. Maelius and the Gracchi is revealing of a significant line of continuity in Roman political culture; Coriolanus, a few lines later, is placed alongside Marius, Cinna, and Carbo as an example of a citizen who took up arms against his country.⁶⁷ At another point in the discussion, Cosimo associates the cruelty of Marius with that of Hannibal and Mithridates, shortly after an explicit condemnation of Sulla's ferocity towards his enemies.⁶⁸

Platina shows no sympathy for the plight of the Roman people, but his references do not reveal a full acceptance of a generically 'optimat' point of view either.⁶⁹ In *De vera nobilitate*, he observes how some patricians posed a very serious threat to freedom: Sulla, Clodius, Catiline (40-41). In addition to the moralistic criticism, focused on the consequences of luxury and ambition, there is an original idea, which is argued in the second book of *De optimo cive*. The great men of Rome, from L. Brutus to Scipio, pursued virtue for its intrinsic value, and served their country and fellow-citizens because they thought it was right. Others, however, acted because they aimed at the recognition of others: the lives of Saturninus, Sp. Maelius, the Gracchi, and even Livius Drusus (it is not clear whether father or son) were rooted 'in ostentatione' (62). Platina seems to recognize, albeit in general and imprecise terms, the emergence of new modes of political competition and their deleterious effects. In another dialogue in which political and philosophical reflection are deeply intertwined, *De falso et vero bono* (ca. 1471-72), Roman history becomes a repertoire of examples of misconduct, in a long list in which the Gracchi, Saturninus and Sp. Maelius are placed next to Clodius as examples of magistrates who abused their power, Marius is blamed for his 'licentia', Sulla for his 'saevitia', Caesar for the sole power ('dominatus') he exercised, and Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero are included for their distinctive 'crudelitas et rabies'.⁷⁰ Platina's look at Roman history is focused on the last century of the Republic, but presupposes a fundamental continuity, from the archaic period to the Principate.

The political dimension of Roman history receives closer consideration in the work of the Sienese humanist Francesco Patrizi (1413-1494). In the last part of his life, as bishop of Gaeta, after a long and complex trajectory of political

⁶⁶ Platina 1562, 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Platina 1562, 69.

⁶⁹ See Nelson 2004, 69.

⁷⁰ Platina 1562, 25. For a positive nod to the exemplary value of ancient history see the close of the *Panegyricus* in praise of Cardinal Bessarione, composed in 1470 (1562, 83-84).

and ecclesiastical engagement, Patrizi devoted himself to a broad theoretical reflection, which culminated in *De regno et regis institutione*, in nine books, composed between 1481 and 1484, but published posthumously in Paris between 1518 and 1519.⁷¹ He saw in the monarchic regime the implementation of the natural principle according to which ‘omnis multitudo ab uno incipit’:⁷² hence its superiority, which is apparent from its ability to resolve military emergencies by restoring unity through the will of an individual. The Roman dictatorship is an exemplary model, which Patrizi discusses analytically, recalling various specific cases, from Camillus to Fabius Maximus.⁷³ The subsequent development of Roman history confirms its value. Even in phases of internal conflict the solution entailed the conferral of power on an individual, first on Sulla, then on Caesar. The transition is not read as a violation of Republican principles, but, on the contrary, as their fulfilment, supported by the most virtuous citizens; even Cicero is included among those who favoured a monarchic outcome, on the basis of a rather one-sided reading of a letter to Atticus in May 59 BCE.⁷⁴ Caesar is then credited with the ability to restore peace, through his victory in the civil war and an enlightened use of clemency (41–45); the identification between the monarchic regime and the revival of orderly coexistence is asserted in full continuity with the Augustan regime.⁷⁵ Patrizi can draw on a far superior scholarly skillset to that of the authors of the previous generations (to make the condemnation of Brutus more forceful, reference is made to Aeschylus: 43–44), but his reflection on Rome still operates within a paradigm of ‘sacred history’.⁷⁶ The fall of the Republic is not even formulated as an historical problem worthy of attention: at best, the Republican regime is an interlude between the monarchic period of the origins and the empire.⁷⁷

A full integration between Republican and Imperial history also emerges from the account of the Florentine Aurelio Lippo Brandolini (ca. 1454–1497) in *De comparatione reipublicae et regni*, a dialogue written between 1489 and

⁷¹ I quote from the edition printed in Paris in 1582, *apud Aegidium Gorbinum*, with a remarkable preface by Denis Lambin, dated 1567. On this work see Tinelli’s recent introduction 2019, which precludes a critical edition, and the important discussion in Hankins 2019, 386–422.

⁷² 1.13 (Patrizi 1582, 39).

⁷³ Patrizi 1582, 40–41.

⁷⁴ Cic. Att. 2.14.1: *ego autem usque eo sum enervatus ut hoc otio quo nunc tabescimus malim ἐντροπνεῖσθαι quam cum optima spe dimicare.*

⁷⁵ On the clemency of Caesar and Octavian, especially after their victories in battle, see also 5.1 (197–200).

⁷⁶ On the role of erudition in Patrizi and his interest in Athens and Sparta see Hankins 2019, 369–374.

⁷⁷ See 9.2, p. 386–387, with some remarks on the continuing relevance of the *rex sacrorum* in Roman religious institutions, even during the Republic.

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1490 at the court of the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus, who is also the main character.⁷⁸ Greed is identified as the factor that led to the fall of the Roman Empire, after a long historical phase in which the striving for personal glory had been combined with a strong public spirit and deep moral rigour: Brandolini sees undisturbed continuity, from this point of view, between Camillus, the Scipios, Marius, Caesar, and Augustus, whose military and political qualities he curiously equates (1.8-14, esp. 8). In the second book, devoted to the link between justice and monarchy, an even more sharply critical point of view is taken. The fall of the Republic is explicitly attributed to the renunciation of the virtuous customs and poverty that had enabled Rome to excel. Having allowed within itself the wealth and luxury from Greece and Asia, the city became home to the worst possible state. Its eventual demise was finally the most ruinous of all, and proved how damaging relations with foreigners are: the Romans came to be hated by all other peoples (2.23). The fall of the Republican regime is never identified as an historical fact worthy of attention, or at any rate as a problematic aspect. In the third book, specifically devoted to the theme of good government, the Republican age is dismissed as a deviation from the natural course of events. After two centuries of orderly monarchic government, which brought peace and harmony, a long phase of civil unrest began; it was brought to an end by the return to the government of an individual after a series of civil wars. The predominance of a single ruler is merely the reassertion of a natural principle.⁷⁹ Under the Principate the same principle applied. Rome was effectively governed as long as power remained in the hands of one man, while it relapsed into civil war when alternatives to imperial power emerged. Matthias Corvinus mentions the names of Vitellius and Septimius Severus, and then establishes an explicit analogy with the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico.⁸⁰

8. At the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, reflection on ancient Rome took on even more creative and diverse forms. One of the most notable examples is the work of Bernardo Rucellai (1448-1514), a member of one of the most prestigious Florentine families and one of the prominent figures in the cultural life of the city in his time. A decisive role was played by the circle of the Orti Oricellari that he convened and Niccolò Machiavelli frequented: as Carlo Dionisotti demonstrated in a classic study, Polybius' reflection on the forms of

⁷⁸ Now accessible in the excellent edition, with English translation, in Hankins 2009; see also Hankins 2019, 90. Valuable introduction in Puskás 2013.

⁷⁹ 3.38: 'natura ipsa optimum illum unius principatum appetente'. On the Roman civil wars see also 3.68.

⁸⁰ Cf. 3.92, where Matthias establishes a direct continuity between empire and papacy.

government and the Roman polity mobilised great interest there.⁸¹ Rucellai played an especially significant role in the construction of a more advanced form of antiquarian knowledge about Rome, starting with the monumental landscape of the city. In *De urbe Roma*, datable between 1502 and 1504, a vast amount of information on the city and its monuments is organized in the form of a walk through the city, taken during a visit made a few years earlier by Rucellai himself, in the company of Leon Battista Alberti and Lorenzo il Magnifico. The political and religious history of Rome comes into focus through the close examination of its monuments; the space for the analysis of specific historical periods and for the interpretation of specific problems, however, is subordinated to the account of the *Realien*. The very form of the discussion, which is structured as a commentary on the late antique Regionary Catalogues, leads to a preference for aspects of continuity within the chronological range of Roman history. The discussion of the Curia Calabra and the other Curiae of ancient Rome leads to a praise of Roman institutions, based on an explicit reference to Livy and Polybius. Rucellai agrees with Livy that no other city was able to delay the arrival of *luxuria* more effectively than Rome, and explicitly echoes the appreciation voiced by the historian of Megalopolis; for the first time in the early modern period, the sixth book of the *Histories* is placed at the centre of a discussion, however cursory, of the political and constitutional history of Rome.⁸² The events in which the Gracchi, Cinna, and Sulla played a central role may be considered a refutation of Polybius' analysis, but the same principle applies to politics as cogently as it does to human character. Separating vices from virtues is often a difficult task. Rucellai does not envisage clear discontinuity, but the gradual establishment of a state of imbalance, in which luxury is the decisive element.

The most explicit reflection on the history of the late Republic emerges, however, at a surprising stage: the entry on the so-called 'Elephas Herbarius', which was reportedly found on the slopes of the Capitoline Hill, towards the Forum Holitorium. That distinctive monument, known only through the Regionary Catalogues, prompts a wider discussion on luxury in Rome, in which a Sallustian theme is implicitly taken up.⁸³ The decisive stage was Sulla's victory, which

⁸¹ Dionisotti 1971, 254 (= 1980, 140-141); the importance of that discovery was immediately emphasized by Momigliano 1974, 360-361 (= 1980, 114-115). Dymond 2021, 29-35 offers a good summary of the debate on Machiavelli's debt to Polybius; the article as a whole restates the thesis of a strong influence of the sixth book of the *Histories* on the *Discourses* and on the interpretation of human psychology proposed there.

⁸² Rucellai 1770, col. 949. For a recent reading of this passage see Dymond 2021, 35-37, 40-41.

⁸³ Rucellai 1770, col. 961. On the Elephant see Coarelli 1995. The name of the statue has been explained by its proximity to the *Forum Holitorium* or by the fact that it represented an ele-

consolidated and intensified a trend that was already underway, with the precise intention of creating spaces of entertainment for his soldiers; Caesar and the emperors who came to power after him only continued that line of conduct.⁸⁴ That striking statue is thus the symptom of a far-reaching process. Rucellai does not insist further on this aspect; curiously, the following entry, devoted to the Comitium, does not discuss the role of the Roman people or the theme of their freedom. The connection between urban space and general political conditions is there, however, and the problem of luxury emerges most forcefully in a discussion where the magnificence of the city is framed a central theme: an entry devoted to a general category of buildings, the *Domus Priscorum Ducum*, which raises the theme of the tension between public and private luxury.⁸⁵ Here the engagement with Sallust becomes explicit right at the outset, and the age of Sulla and Pompey is identified as the time after which freedom was undermined and power was concentrated in the hands of few.⁸⁶ The judgement on Augustus ('*prudētissimū Principem*') and his regime, though, seems firmly positive, as his reign was an age of concord and intellectual development.⁸⁷ In the following entry, on the Curia Cornelia, Rucellai qualifies that assessment in a brief reflection on the dictatorship of Sulla and the political impact of the example it set. After the consulship of Pompey and Crassus (probably that of 70 BCE), the aim of all those who gained a prominent political position was to reach the '*principatus*'. This led some to behave '*regio more*', and to engage in major, even extravagant building projects in the city.⁸⁸ Rucellai's vast compilation is thus informed by a coherent idea of Rome and an informed reading of the course of its history. The decision to concentrate on the development of the city and its monuments proves an opportunity to delve into a crucial *arcanum imperii*.

9. The distinction between *princeps* and *tyrannus* is a highly significant one in the political and cultural debate of the early sixteenth century. Mario Salamonio (c. 1450-1532), a Roman jurist of aristocratic ancestry, based his whole work *De principatu* (composed in 1513 and dedicated to Pope Leo X de' Medici, but not published until 1544) on this very problem. In the fictional dialogue between an historian, a lawyer, and a philosopher, the example of ancient Rome constantly recurs, and the (not altogether new) theme of the connection between

phant in the act of feeding on vegetables; according to Rucellai, though, it was covered with plants ('*sive hedera, sive quavis alia viridi semper, atque flexibili materia convestitus foret*').

⁸⁴ Pedullà 2011, 224-226 and 2018, 87-88.

⁸⁵ Rucellai 1770, col. 965-967.

⁸⁶ Rucellai 1770, 966: '*post ea tempora libertatis opes imminutae, paucorum potentia crevit*'.

⁸⁷ Rucellai 1770, 965-966.

⁸⁸ Rucellai 1770, 967.

imperial expansion and the fall of the Republic is raised, at the start of the fifth book, with a clarity never achieved in previous discussions.⁸⁹ At the same time, consensus is identified as a necessary factor to the existence of a principate. The power of the prince is thus subjected to various restrictions, and the possibility to remove a prince who no longer enjoys the consent of the people is openly envisaged.⁹⁰

With Salamonio the careful reflection on the historical events of ancient Rome is closely integrated with the theoretical reflection on politics. He was a contemporary of Niccolò Machiavelli: *De principatu* was written in the same year as *Il Principe (De principatibus)*, and there has been much discussion about the relationship between the two works.⁹¹ Machiavelli, as is well known, brought about a swift change of pace in the historical reflection on Republican Rome. His work is framed in the context of a decisive historical juncture in Italian history, whose periodizing moment is the descent of Charles VIII's troops in 1494, and which in Florence takes on especially intense and complex resonances through the preaching and the political initiative of Girolamo Savonarola. The very existence of Italy and Florence appears to be at risk, and Machiavelli's reflection is chiefly aimed at devising ways out of that crisis.⁹² The reflection on Roman history is a central part of this effort. The late Republican period plays a relatively less important role than the period of the Conflict of the Orders and the Middle Republic, but Machiavelli's thinking is mobilised by his fundamental interest in the decline and transformation of political regimes. Knowledge, whether direct or mediated, of Polybius' Book VI is only a feature of its intellectual background. The end of the Republic is the terminal point of his reflection on the Roman polity: for him, as was later the case for Mommsen, Roman history makes sense as the history of freedom and discord.

In *The Prince* the history of the late Republic receives cursory, almost casual discussion. There is a quick mention of the Gracchi, who are compared to the Florentine Giorgio Scali as examples of political leaders who relied too heavily on popular favour (ch. 9);⁹³ a mention of the excessive liberality of Caesar (ch. 16: 'uno di quelli che voleva pervenire al principato di Roma'); there is no mention of his rivals), which would have led the empire to financial ruin had

⁸⁹ Ed. 1578, 110-111.

⁹⁰ On this aspect of Salamonio's reflection see Millar 2002a, 66-67.

⁹¹ See Biasiori 2014.

⁹² See most recently Pedullà 2011, 400 and 2018, 171; Ciliberto 2019, 39-84; Asor Rosa 2019, esp. 238-259; Salvo Rossi 2020, 47-60. See also Hankins 2019, 1-30 for the view that the whole development of Italian humanism should be understood as a response to a crisis.

⁹³ On Machiavelli's assessment of the Gracchi see Santangelo 2006; McCormick 2009; Cadoni 2014a; Fontana 2017.

he survived and failed to harness it; and a quick mention of the fact that Scipio Africanus lived ‘sotto el governo del Senato’, which prevented his indulgence towards the soldiers from manifesting itself in its most nefarious aspects, and on the contrary allowed to turn it into a reason of glory, despite the criticism of Fabius Maximus, who accused him of being a ‘corruttore della romana milizia’.⁹⁴

However, in the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, composed in 1517-1518 and published posthumously in 1531, the theme is central.⁹⁵ There emerges a clear distinction between periodisation and investigation of the causes of historical change. The age of the Gracchi is repeatedly identified as the moment that marks the end of ‘vivere libero’, the closure of the history of a Republic that had taken shape after the expulsion of the Tarquins.⁹⁶ At the same time, other historical moments, directly presupposed by the initiative of the two tribunes, are identified as even more significant: notably the rise to power of Marius (1.5: ‘la potenza di Mario, e la rovina di Roma’) and the prevalence of his faction, which is the direct cause of the end of political freedom.⁹⁷ There is no contradiction in this sort of *décalage*. If the agrarian and political crisis of 133 BCE is a shift in the historical development of the Republic, the regime under which Rome had been ruled for centuries is irreparably compromised only when Marius achieves a dominant position.⁹⁸ It is the corruption ‘messa nel popolo’ by the ‘parti mariane’ that marks the decisive change: when Caesar took over the leadership of that faction, ‘potette accecare quella moltitudine’, and subjected it to his ‘giogo’ without being noticed (1.17 §8).⁹⁹ When Pompey and his followers

⁹⁴ Cf. also the use of medical metaphor in ch. 3, where the Romans’ foresight in conducting provincial affairs is discussed, and the mention of ‘morbo che partorì la contenzione della legge agraria, che infine fu causa della distruzione della Republica’ in *Discorsi* 1.37.

⁹⁵ For a recent authoritative overview, with an extensive bibliography, see Cadoni 2014b. The issue of the chronology of the *Discorsi* and their relation to the *Principe* is a classic theme in the historiography on Machiavelli, but one that has relative importance in the context of this discussion: see the recent summary in Carta 2018, 277-278.

⁹⁶ See 1.6 (where explicit reference is made to the ‘rovina del vivere libero’); 1.37 §16 and §26-27; see also 1.4 for the periodisation from the expulsion of the Tarquins to the Gracchi. Cf. Hankins 2019, 78-79, who claims that the ‘Tacitean’ distinction between Republic and Principate emerged only at the end of the eighteenth century.

⁹⁷ See Cadoni 2014b, 679-680.

⁹⁸ On Machiavelli’s acceptance of the thesis of a ‘Gracchan explanation’ see Pocock 2003, 208-214. On the periodizing value of 133 BCE in the ancient historical tradition and in the development of Roman political culture see most recently Vial-Logeay 2012 and Schropp 2017; see also Hammer 2020, 100-102 and, from the standpoint of a specific problem of institutional history, Görne 2020, 153-189.

⁹⁹ See Cadoni 2014b, 680, who points out the partial contradiction with 3.8 §14, where it is argued that ‘ne’ tempi di Mario e di Silla... già la materia era corrotta’ (see below, n. 87).

tried to oppose him in 49, they only accelerated the fall of Republican freedom (1.33). Caesar is the ‘primo tiranno in Roma’, but his rise comes at the end of a much longer and more complex story (1.37 §20).¹⁰⁰

The image of Marius as a pivotal figure in the age of the civil wars is already in Plutarch; in the *Discorsi* Machiavelli offers an original development, as he recognizes in him the champion of the interests of the plebs, who had been oppressed by the nobility after the defeat of the Gracchi. The violent polarization of the conflict, which until then had been brought into the fold of the Republican order, will prove fatal. The explanation for this change, however, does not lie in the clash between two factions or a few individuals. On the one hand, moral factors carry some weight: Sulla and Marius acted in the way they did because ‘già la materia era corrotta’, and they could afford to behave in a fashion that in a different time would have cost them their lives (3.8).¹⁰¹ On the other hand, important constitutional and political factors converge: the introduction of the possibility of extending a magistracy was a consequence of the making of the transmarine empire (3.24: ‘quanto più i Romani si discostarono con le armi’), which, albeit linked to pragmatic considerations, had deleterious and unforeseen outcomes.¹⁰²

The increasing spread of this practice had, according to Machiavelli, two direct consequences: the shrinking of military competence within the Roman political elite, matched by the emergence of few highly skilled commanders, on the one hand, and the waning of the soldiers’ loyalty, on the other – ‘che, stando uno cittadino assai tempo comandante d’uno esercito, se lo guadagnava e facevaselo partigiano; perché quello esercito col tempo dimenticava il Senato e riconosceva quello capo’ (3.24). Marius and Sulla are founding figures in this regard too. With them the link between citizenship and military service (the ‘milizia’) that plays such a significant role in Machiavelli’s political reflection, and in Italian history in his time, is severed. Their actions are underpinned by remarkable leadership, which combines ruthless dissimulation, a quick understanding of the military situations, and great skill in mobilizing and retaining the

¹⁰⁰ On this chapter and the emphasis it places on ambition, rather than corruption, which is instead identified as the dominant factor in 1.17, see Cadoni 2014b, 679; cf. also Cadoni 2021, 254-257. The close reading in Pedullà 2011, 164-171 and 2018, 73-78 is very significant, notably for the emphasis it places on the ‘aporetic’ aspects of the chapter. On the role of the agrarian laws in 1.37 see Nelson 2004, 74-76 and Winter 2018, 149-151.

¹⁰¹ Moral factors are identified as the cause of the end of the Republic also in the well-known comparison between Rome and Florence right at the start of the third book of the *Florentine Histories* (3.1): ‘Roma, sendosi quella loro virtù convertita in superbia, si ridusse in termine che senza avere un principe non si poteva mantenere’. On the importance of this passage and the difficult interpretation of ‘loro’ (the whole Roman people’s or the nobility’s?) see Cadoni 2014b, 684.

¹⁰² On the value and limitations of this remark see Millar 2002a, 76-77.

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loyalty of the soldiery: Machiavelli insists on this point in various passages of *Dell'arte della guerra*, written between 1519 and 1520 and published in 1521.¹⁰³

Fabrizio Colonna, the central character of that dialogue, states that the reputation of Pompey and Caesar, and of the other Roman commanders who lived after the Hannibalic War, was that of valiant men, not good ones (1.306, ed. Martelli). A few lines below, Fabrizio attributes a decisive role in the fall of the Republic to the evolution of warfare into an art, or rather to the formation of a professional army: 'Roma pertanto, mentre ch'ella fu bene ordinata (che fu infino a' Gracchi) non ebbe alcuno soldato che pigliasse questo esercizio per arte; e però ne ebbe pochi cattivi, e quelli tanti furono severamente puniti' (1.307). Machiavelli thus identifies the land and the army as the two decisive factors in the end of the Republic. He does not attempt, though, to integrate the analysis of these two themes – *the Army and the Land*, to cite the title of P. A. Brunt's classic study – into a single interpretive framework.¹⁰⁴ In the background, there are two other lines of investigation and interpretation that were destined to have wide success:¹⁰⁵ constitutional change, and the consequences of imperial expansion.

10. Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540), the other great Florentine political thinker of the first half of the sixteenth century, offered a systematic critique of the theses developed in the *Discorsi* in a set of *Considerazioni*, composed in 1529. The starting point of his discussion is a strong disagreement on the possibility of viewing antiquity as an exemplary model. The most famous codification of that principle is of course in one of the *Ricordi*, written between 1528

¹⁰³ Marius: 4,348, 350; 6,373. Sulla: 4.350, 354; 6.373. The thesis of a periodizing value of the struggle between Marius and Sulla was argued, some decades later, by Pero de Mexía (1497-1551), who established a direct link between that civil conflict and the one between Caesar and Pompey, the founding moment of the imperial age: see esp. the introductory section of the *Historia Imperial y Cesarea* (1552, 2, with the remarks of Pocock 2003, 241-242) and the cursory comments in his vast compilation *Silva de varia lección*, published for the first time in 1540 (1602, 133-134, 488). The civil wars of the late Republic were also a topic of interest in the historiography that in the mid-sixteenth century dealt with the clashes between the *conquistadores*, notably between the Pizarros and the Almagros: the analogy between harsh clashes preceded by a season of close friendship fascinated authors such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Agustín de Zárate, and Pedro Cieza de León (see the extensive discussion in MacCormack 2007, 67-85).

¹⁰⁴ Brunt 1962 = 1988, 240-280.

¹⁰⁵ The weight of constitutional aspects in Machiavelli's reflection on ancient Rome seems to be underestimated by Straumann 2016, 300-302, who instead attributes to Jean Bodin the first attempt to reflect on the fall of the Roman Republic in terms of a 'constitutional crisis', within the framework of a broader reflection on sovereignty.

and 1530;¹⁰⁶ however, the *Considerazioni* articulate at some length important reservations about Machiavelli's reading of Roman history. In Guicciardini's view, Rome owed its expansion to military success and political concord, rather than to the discordant balance traced by Machiavelli; the tribunate is no balancing force, because it has the effect of restraining the Senate, but not the plebs. His whole vision is resolutely hostile to the political primacy of the people, in Rome as elsewhere: the *contiones* are a factor of instability that must be contained and directed; the Gracchi are authors of seditious laws. Their initiative, which had deleterious consequences in the long term, was however part of an ongoing moral degeneration, which Guicciardini does not account for, but which he identifies as the factor that allowed the attempt of the 'gente bassa' to prevail on the rich and powerful (ch. 6). The thesis that viewed the extension of the military commands as a decisive element is also radically dismissed.¹⁰⁷

A few years earlier, in 1521, Guicciardini had posed the problem in more precise and detailed terms in the *Dialogo sul Reggimento di Firenze*, where the character of Bernardo del Nero systematically uses the analogy between contemporary political issues and the history of Rome, Sparta, and Venice.¹⁰⁸ The basic conceptual coordinates are not unlike those of the *Considerazioni*. Once again the fall of the Republic is explained with a moral decline, and the anti-popular prejudice is here expressed through a medical metaphor, as will also be the case in many subsequent reflections on the late Republican crisis; a number of ancient sources provided a clear blueprint.¹⁰⁹ According to Guicciardini, relying on 'conzioni' is like putting the health of a sick person in the hands of an 'inperito medico'.¹¹⁰ However, there is scope for an original insight. In the classical phase of Republican history, a share of power was attributed to the people, albeit largely inferior to that of the Senate and the highest magistracies, in order to ensure their obedience and discipline in military campaigns. Bernardo maintains that Rome's success was not due to an intrinsically superior institutional structure, but to 'virtù militare', which in turn was crucially linked with the political settlement between patricians and plebeians.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ *Ricordi* C 110: 'Quanto si ingannano coloro che a ogni parola allegano e' romani! Bisognerebbe avere una città condizionata come era loro, e poi governarsi secondo quello esempio; el quale a chi ha le qualità disproporzionate è tanto disproporzionato, quanto sarebbe volere che uno asino facessi el corso di uno cavallo.'

¹⁰⁷ On the enduring tension between a 'Machiavellian' strand of the Republican tradition and a 'Guicciardinian' one cf. Connolly 2015, 12 n. 26, 63, 203.

¹⁰⁸ Millar 2002a, 78-79 stresses its importance.

¹⁰⁹ See most recently Walters 2020, esp. 33-38.

¹¹⁰ Ed. Lugnani Scarano 1970, 402.

¹¹¹ Ed. Lugnani Scarano 1970, 451-460, esp. 451.

11. Both Machiavelli and Guicciardini framed their reflections on the Roman Republic within a framework that included, on the one hand, an ambitious study of the foundational rules of politics and, on the other, a consistent concern with the destiny of the city of Florence and of Italy. The latter aspect was central to much of the reflection on Roman history in the fifteenth century and in the first half of the sixteenth:¹¹² reflecting on the city-state that Republican Rome had become a training ground to understand the city's position in a political context where altogether new challenges were posed. It is no coincidence that so much of the early modern debate on the crisis of the Roman Republic took place in Italy. At the same time, it is significant that the subsequent major development in the reflection on the late Republic was made possible by the work of an author who, though strongly rooted in the context of sixteenth-century Northern Italy, did not frame his activity within a civic context: the historian Carlo Sigonio (ca. 1520-1584), born in Modena, who taught at the Universities of Venice, Padua and Bologna, and whose work does not reflect a strong municipal loyalty. The degree of detail and analytical insight that Sigonio achieved in the study of Roman institutions was unparalleled at the time (with the partial exception of Nicolas de Grouchy's *De comitiis Romanorum*, 1559), and was not equalled until the emergence of nineteenth-century philological *Methodes*.¹¹³ The basic insight from which most of his work stemmed was that Roman history should be understood through the definition of legal categories, in which citizenship takes centre stage; even the history of the conquest of Italy and the Empire could credibly be read through the systematic study of the legal structures established by Rome. For Sigonio, *ius* is the prism through which Roman history can most effectively be read, notably in the age of the 'free republic'; the diachronic dimension is pursued through the in-depth study of specific legal categories.¹¹⁴ Machiavelli too, as we have seen, had understood the weight of legal factors in accelerating political developments. With Sigonio, however, the analysis reaches a much higher degree of depth, oriented by a lucidly classificatory approach.

¹¹² See Rubinstein 2004, esp. 212-213.

¹¹³ The assessment of Gabba 1971, 5 (= 1995, 299), who defined him as the greatest Italian historian of antiquity before Gaetano De Sanctis, remains valid.

¹¹⁴ Sigonio's repeated references to 'res publica libera' or 'liberata' show a clear awareness of the distinction between monarchic, republican and imperial age; on the end of republican freedom see esp. Sigonio 1576, 29 (1.6: 'Sed tamen haec libertas dominante Sylla concussa, Caesare vero regente labefactata, Augusto demum imperante funditus euersa est'). The concept of the end of republican freedom is mentioned without further discussion at the outset of de Grouchy's work on the *comitia* (1559, 3: 'Respublica Romanorum quamdiu fuit libera'); the aim of that discussion, however, is to further the study of the democratic element identified by Polybius.

His distinctive contribution to the reflection on the crisis of the late Republic derives from the taxonomic intent that animates the investigation.¹¹⁵

In the second book of *De antiquo iure civium Romanorum*, at the end of a discussion on the orders into which the Roman citizen body is divided, the theme of the correct definition of *nobilitas* is posed, and, as a corollary, right at the end of the work, of categories that are no longer legal or social, but political.¹¹⁶ Until then, the division of Rome's civic body had been based on the distinction between rich and poor, or between patricians and plebeians. Sigonio identified a third type of bipartition in the civic body, exclusively linked to the competition for power and necessarily harmful: the *partium studia*, the political opposition between *optimates* and *populares*. Sigonio draws these categories from the well-known passage in Cicero's *Pro Sestio* (96-98), but puts them at the service of a wider interpretive proposal, which was bound to have great success. Cicero's definition focuses, as is well known, on the *optimates*; Sigonio assumes that it is possible to derive a definition of who the *populares* were by negative inference. At the beginning of his analysis there is an original proposal: the first traces of the division between the two groups date back to the censorship of Appius Claudius Caecus, when for the first time a political line was established that challenged the primacy of the Senate, with the attempt to enrol in the senatorial order the sons of some freedmen. Sigonio draws it from Livy's text, where the language of civic division is transposed to the end of the fourth century BCE, in an operation that later scholarship has often recognized as anachronistic: 'ex eo tempore in duas partes discessit ciuitas aliud integer populus, fautor, et cultor bonorum, alius forensis factio tenebat'.

What interests him most, however, is Cicero's definition, to which he attributes a typically Aristotelian trait: the *optimates*, on that view, are both the best men and the advocates of the best outcomes for the community. In practice, however, Sigonio recognizes a fundamental fault line, to which Cicero alludes only briefly. The most significant clashes in Roman politics are, in his view, the contrasts between consuls and tribunes. Until the end of the Conflict of the Orders, the disputes between the two magistracies were also disputes between patricians and plebeians. After the latter were given access to the higher magistracies, the terms of the conflict shifted to a scenario in which the head of the *optimates* and the head of the *populares* constantly faced each other. The clash was all about the different political agendas, and was no longer mainly a function of family and clan allegiances ('controuersiam fecit non generis

¹¹⁵ Flower 2010, 10 stresses the importance of Sigonio's periodisations put forward by Sigonio.

¹¹⁶ See the good introduction to this aspect of Sigonio's historical reflection in McCuaig 1989, 153-173. See also, most recently, Rich 2020, 71-73.

dissimilitudo, sed voluntatum distractio'). Sigonio also attributed decisive weight to the dynamics within the patricio-plebeian *nobilitas*, which included the families who held the highest magistracies, and for whom he had avowed sympathy. The *optimates* were mostly men of the nobility, who – in his opinion – could only have the welfare and glory of the commonwealth at heart. The few noblemen who sided with the *populares* – Lepidus, Caesar, Clodius – were bearers of gravely destabilizing projects.

Sigonio then challenges one aspect of the passage of the *Pro Sestio* from which he had taken his cue. The idealisation of the political and moral qualities of the *optimates* does not take into account their ability to harm the state, for a whole series of reasons and circumstances; declining mental faculties, criminal behaviour, economic hardship. The analysis becomes tendentiously moralistic: only a degenerate optimate can become a *popularis*, and Tiberius Gracchus is a signal example of this principle. Sigonio's whole reading of Roman politics is thus rigidly one-dimensional: the difference between *optimates* and *populares* is clearly recognizable, and coincides with the difference between the pursuit of the collective good and the pursuit of seditious ends. In the background, there is a strong social prejudice and a firmly anti-democratic approach: the *populares* necessarily resort to the support of the lower elements of society ('humillimos ac tenuissimos'), trying to build their strength on the consensus of the majority. For a long phase of Roman history, from the war against Pyrrhus until the middle of the second century BCE, the clash between the factions came to a halt. There is here a partly original periodisation, although the war against Pyrrhus had also played an important role in Biondo. Moreover, Sigonio revives the idea that places the Gracchi at the origin of a process in which the city was traversed by a cycle of *seditiones*, to which the just initiative of the consuls responded. A line is traced from the events of 133 BCE down to the clash between Caesar and Bibulus, in which the consul who pursues a demagogic agenda prevails. The discussion is squarely focused on the political and institutional aspects (*optimates* vs *populares*, consuls vs tribunes); there is no attempt to explore the economic and social issues that were discussed in some of the sources to which Sigonio did have access.

The analysis of the terminal phase of the Republic leads to a surprising conclusion, in its strict application of an interpretive scheme. The binary model is reproduced even during the civil wars, which are described – but not explained – in dualistic terms. Caesar is the champion of the plebs, who defeats Pompey, the leader of the *optimates*, and is then eliminated by those he had defeated ('per optimates interfecto'). The Caesaricides are attributed the title of 'patriae liberatores', while Antony and Octavian benefit from the constant support of the people. Their conflict is not even mentioned; the nature of Caesar's

regime is briefly described as a tyranny, in which the winner had taken over the whole state ('universa ad se unum translata republica').

A few lines below, Sigonio makes use of another image, partly in contradiction with what precedes, and even more revealing: the civil wars, during which the weapons that had made Rome great were turned against the city, destroyed the *res publica*. It is not just a question, then, of the end of 'vivere libero', in Machiavelli's terms, but of the destruction of a political body. Significantly, the work ends here: Sigonio does not deal with the history of the Principate, nor with the completion of the transition from republic to monarchy. With the defeat of the Liberators, the prospect of a Republican regime, governed by the wise counsel of the *optimates*, was completely exhausted. The choice is all the more remarkable in an author whose discussion of the Republican period shows great interest in periodizing moments: the end of the Conflict of the Orders, the censorship of Appius Claudius, the end of the war against Pyrrhus, the Gracchan moment. However, the historical space is completely obliterated by the destruction of the Republic ('republicam unam... deleuerunt'): an image of striking clarity, which has no direct connection with the theme of the medical metaphor, and instead places the emphasis squarely on human factors.

12. Sigonio's work showed serious limitations in its historical and political analysis, but was underpinned by an unprecedented wealth of information and critical scrutiny of the sources. It also had the ability to combine a detailed analysis of the institutional framework of Republican Rome with a discussion of its decline and the genesis of a new political order. The operation was by no means obvious: in the vast antiquarian account constructed a generation later by the great Flemish scholar Justus Lipsius (1547-1605) in *De militia Romana* (1595) and in *Admiranda sive de magnitudine Romana* (1599) the end of the Republic is never discussed, not even cursorily.¹¹⁷

The problem of the form of government of Rome and its evolution is instead identified as a central issue in a highly original work that appeared posthumously in 1599: the *Discorsi politici* of the Venetian nobleman Paolo Paruta, diplomat and official historiographer of the Republic (1540-1598). The impact of this work on the modern historiography on Rome was minimal, despite the English translation edited by Henry Carey, Earl of Monmouth, which appeared in 1657; however, the clarity and strength of its general conception warrant some discussion in this context.¹¹⁸ Paruta never quotes Sigonio and takes no in-

¹¹⁷ Cf. Lipsius 1596, 3, with the comment of Pocock 2003, 286: 'Lipsius is concerned with the *exemplum*, not the narrative; the *peinture* of what Rome once was, not the *récit* of how it ceased to be'.

¹¹⁸ See the useful recent discussion in Dymond 2021, 49.

terest in institutional or antiquarian aspects: his interlocutors are Polybius, Salust, Livy. The *Discorsi* are divided into two books: the first one is almost entirely devoted to Rome (with two final chapters on the Roman conquest of Greece and on ostracism), while the second discusses the affairs of the Republic of Venice; the theme of its first chapter ('Perchè la Repubblica di Venezia non abbia acquistato tanto stato, come fece quella di Roma') reveals, though, how the reflection on the ancient world illuminates and clarifies that on contemporary realities. The development of the argument of the first book breaks new ground, and marks a clear discontinuity from Polybius and Machiavelli. His central interest is the form of government; the moral character of the city is also a major theme. Polybius' reading is radically challenged: Rome was not a mixed constitution and, above all, never achieved a sound balance (1.1). It was a Republic 'in ogni parte popolare', because the power was attributed according to the decisions of the people; the 'orders', however, were badly balanced ('proporzionati'), both because the extension of the military commands ended up concentrating power in the hands of the few, and because the distribution of wealth was increasingly uneven.¹¹⁹ From the latter factor derived the initiative of the Gracchi, which aroused 'gravi discordie' and finally 'l'ultima ruina della Repubblica'.¹²⁰ For those who seek a more balanced institutional model, Sparta is a much more satisfactory reference point.¹²¹

Paruta's reading might until now appear rather conventional, even in the periodisation that it puts forward. It is, however, already notable in itself how clearly, albeit implicitly, he distances himself from Machiavelli's reading, except of his acceptance of the point on the extension of the commands: the presence of conflicting forces is not seen as a point of strength or as a factor of development.¹²² The most original aspect of Paruta's reflection, however, is the clear devaluation of the Republic, fully in keeping with the intention stated at the outset not to 'lasciarsi offuscare dallo splendore delle grandezze Romane' (1599, 2): Rome was *never* well ordered, except in the military sphere. The most effective metaphor is thus not so much the usual medical image, to which Paruta also resorts in places, but that of a 'ferro irruginito' (17) that in peacetime loses

¹¹⁹ Paruta 1599, 3-12, esp. 7 (popular republic) and 8 (bad proportion of orders).

¹²⁰ Paruta 1599, 6.

¹²¹ Paruta 1599, 10. A similar comparison between Rome and Sparta was already outlined in the final part of the third book of *Della perfettione della vita politica* (1579, 313; see also 143 for a mention of Polybius).

¹²² See esp. Paruta 1599, 8: 'tale diversità de gli ordini veniva a farla, quasi un corpo di due capi, e di due forme; onde fu sempre da domestiche discordie travagliata'; cf. also 44, just at the end of the first speech, where he speaks of the Republic as 'quasi un corpo di mala temperatura, in cui de'l continuo s'andavano diversi cattivi humori generando' – the debt to the *Discorsi* is evident.

all its splendour. Even the thesis that sees in the fall of Carthage the decisive moment is denounced as misleading (2.7): Rome was constantly involved in military operations even after 146 BCE, and the disagreements between Marius and Sulla arose during wartime, in the final phase of the war of Jugurtha.¹²³ Rome did not know how to lay down its arms and did not know how to create a climate of peace that could lead to the 'felicità civile'.¹²⁴ Moreover, it was from the armies that corruption and partisan spirit took hold, and then spread to the nobility.¹²⁵ Paruta appropriately poses the problem of the inevitability of the monarchic turn, asking why Republican freedom was not restored after the assassination of Caesar (1.8). The moral and political decline in which the Republic finds itself is however irreversible, because an unbridled ambition, and a tendency to indulge the worst impulses of the plebs have taken hold among the nobility.¹²⁶ Here Paruta again shows himself to be an attentive reader of Polybius, and consciously articulates a revised version of the anacyclosis model. The popular state of the Republic becomes 'pessimo e corrottissimo', and then morphs into a tyranny. The terms of the periodisation proposed at this stage of the argument are not always unambiguous. With Caesar's victory came the third age of Roman history, which had begun with the beginning of the First Punic War; Caesar's tyranny, however, was a form 'più espressa' of the tyranny established by Sulla, in which Paruta identifies the third attempt to establish a regime of 'servitù': the Roman people had been able to defeat the first two – the monarchy and the decemviral regime – but had by then lost the moral resources to respond to the new challenge.¹²⁷ In the concluding part of the book of the *Discorsi* devoted to ancient history, Paruta also poses the problem of the longevity of the Roman empire and the factors that made it possible. Tyranny, again, offers a key insight: the conditions for despotic rule were so deeply established that the regime survived even under cruel or incompetent emperors; and the strength of the empire lay primarily in the solidity of its military structure.¹²⁸ Paruta, on the other hand, was an admirer of monarchy, which he considered ideally suited to the management of complex state structures: Rome is the exception to a well-established principle.¹²⁹ His long exploration of the history of Rome ends with a point that would have warranted closer attention in later historiography: it is not the form of government that determines the success of a state, but the strength of

¹²³ Paruta 1599, 139.

¹²⁴ Paruta 1599, 148.

¹²⁵ Paruta 1559, 152-153.

¹²⁶ Paruta 1599, 161-163.

¹²⁷ 1.10: see Paruta 1599, 192.

¹²⁸ Paruta 1599, 209-211.

¹²⁹ 1.13: see Paruta 1599, 268-272.

its military structures, which, in the case of Rome, remained largely unchanged in the transition from the Republic to the Principate.¹³⁰

13. Paruta's silence is an exception: Sigonio's great scholarly construction did not fail to arouse interest and admiration, even outside Italy. Jean Bodin (1530-1596) acknowledged its importance in the *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, which appeared in 1566, where the reflection on ancient Rome also owes an explicit debt to Machiavelli, who is credited with reopening a discussion on political regimes after 1,200 years of silence. Bodin is keen to look harder into the difference between popular government and ochlocracy: in his reading, Republican Rome is a popular government in its happiest historical phase, and is led into ruin when an ochlocratic power takes over, as a direct result of the Gracchan initiative.¹³¹ In the background there is a thesis that Bodin derives directly from Sallust, one of his authors: Rome fell prey to civil strife when it ceased to fight external wars. The final outcome of that process, however, was not a complete failure. Monarchy was preferable to the power of the masses, as well as to that of the *optimates* who opposed it. The imperial regime is a *legitimus dominatus*.¹³²

The theme of the best form of government is central to Bodin's other great work, the *Six Livres sur la République* (1576), where the celebration of hereditary monarchy as a political regime superior to any other comes at the end of a vast survey of the different methods of government and the sources of sovereignty. The problem of the rise and decline of political regimes is discussed in the fourth book ('De la naissance, accroissement, estat fleurissant, décadence, et ruines des Républiques'), where the precedent of the late Roman Republic regains strong relevance from the very first chapter. Sulla stands out as an instructive object of analysis, because he is the enabler of two opposite transitions, first from a popular to a monarchic order, and then vice versa (4.1, p. 403, ed. 1577). The different modes of the two shifts are an example of how a change in a positive direction is possible, and how the choice to voluntarily relinquish power can lead, and in fact usually leads, to a peaceful transition. Of particular concern to Bodin is the timing of political change: the importance of ensuring that it is not too rapid, and the problem of how to determine the optimal length of public office. The Roman practice, whereby all major magistracies expire at the same

¹³⁰ Paruta 1599, 288-290.

¹³¹ Bodin 1650, 188 (= 2013, 410); see also 248 (= 2013, 509) for the mention of the *ochlocratia, vel potius anarchia turbulentae plebis* established after the *sedition Gracchana*, until Marius and Sulla, who mark the beginning of a civil war. Andrew 2011, 102-106, esp. 104 is generally helpful on Bodin's reading of Republican history.

¹³² Bodin 1650, 248 (= 2013, 509).

time, and are renewed after intense competition, seems of special interest to him. Here comes into play a negative evaluation of Gaius Gracchus, who suppressed the power of the Senate and the magistrates, ‘pour donner au peuple la cognoissance de toutes choses’, unleashing a sequence of seditions, assassinations, and civil wars: that juncture marked the end of the most prosperous phase of the Republic’s history, opened with the First Punic War and ended with the conquest of the kingdom of Macedonia (4.6, p. 494).¹³³ Moreover, sedition usually causes greater disruption in a popular or aristocratic polity than in a monarchic one, eventually leading to the iniquitous rule of one faction (4.7, p. 496).

From Bodin onwards, the heterogenesis of ends – the idea that a political strategy might yield altogether unintended consequences – is a theme that repeatedly emerges in the reflection on the late Roman Republic. The Italian Protestant jurist Alberico Gentili (1552-1608), who kept Bodin’s work well in mind in his reflection on regal sovereignty, noted that the Roman people had been the creator of their own servitude; the emperors successfully attempted to deprive them of all power and, at the same time, to receive their mandate to rule.¹³⁴ In his legal-historical perspective, the imperial regime is the outcome of a decision by the people to cede their power to an individual; the emperor’s power, which originates from that of the people, shares its fundamental characteristics.¹³⁵ The admiration for Machiavelli and the *Discorsi* did not prevent Gentili from giving a fundamentally critical judgment on the political conduct of the Roman people.¹³⁶ The reflection on the late Republic also had strong philosophical implications, which prompted the interest of some of the greatest thinkers of the early modern age. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in the *Leviathan* (1651), offers few, highly specific remarks on that count. The aspect of Roman history that interested him was the imperial period, notably its aspects of continuity with the Church of Rome. To play an important role is also a hostility towards the tumultuary ideology transmitted by various Roman authors – Cicero, in particular – to the moderns, through an anti-monarchic rhetoric that Hobbes

¹³³ See Straumann 2016, 299-300. No mention is made of Tiberius Gracchus in this passage: cf. the reference to his ‘sedition’ (4.2, p. 448); instead, the agrarian law of 133 BCE receives a more favourable assessment (5.2, p. 551-552).

¹³⁴ Gentili 1605, 23: ‘Voluerunt principes velut a populo capere regnandi potestatem, quem omni exercuerant potestate, ut eundem haberent ad servitium omne proniorem, qui et auctor suae seruitutis exstitisset’. On Gentili’s debt towards Bodin see Schröder 2010, 170-172.

¹³⁵ Gentili 1605, 31-33. See Straumann 2010, 108-110.

¹³⁶ Cf. Gentili 1585, 109: ‘plane aureas in Liuium Obseruationes... Machiauellus Democrati-ae laudator et assertor acerrimus’. See also the cursory rejection of the theory of *metus hostilis* by the champion of the Roman cause in *De Armis Romanis*, published in 1599 (2.9, Gentili 2011, 260: ‘non metu eius civitatis bonam exstitisse civitatem meam, sed sponte sua, ac virtute vera’).

The Crisis of the Roman Republic

considers deeply harmful.¹³⁷ The fall of the Republic, however, is a good example of the harmful consequences of the ‘Want of Absolute Power’, which Hobbes identifies as a cause of the weakening or dissolution of a state, and which can take hold in any political regime (ch. 29: 1909, 248). The ‘antient Roman common-wealth’ was governed by the Senate and the People, with neither factor ‘pretending to be the whole Power.’ However, when the seditions of the Gracchi, Saturninus, ‘and others’ cast doubt on that principle, a process opened up that first led to the wars between People and Senate, with Marius and Sulla, and finally to the ‘Extinction of their Democracy, and the setting up of Monarchy’ (249).

For Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), on the other hand, the Roman Republic must be regarded as an aristocracy. In a passage (18.35) of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) the historical significance of the expulsion of the kings is openly belittled. The Romans were able to get rid of a despotic monarch, only to entrust power to a number of tyrants, who led them into a series of internal and external wars; eventually they reverted to a monarchy, in practice if not in name, not unlike the regime established by Cromwell in England. The historical events of Rome play a largely marginal role in Spinoza’s reflection, with the crucial exception of the tenth chapter of his last, unfinished work, the *Tractatus Politicus*, where the problem of the *aristocraticum imperium* and its end is raised. The starting point is a passage from the third book of Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*, where the medical metaphor is used to define an aspect of historical change: in the state, as in human bodies, ‘quod quotidie aggregatur aliquid, quod quandoque indiget curatione’. Something is added every day, and requires an appropriate therapeutic intervention that may bring the organism back to its original vigour.¹³⁸ Spinoza recognizes the validity of this principle, and turns it in favour of an anti-monarchic argument. The challenge he identifies is to create a centre of power that has the same force as the Roman dictatorship, but is not confined to the management of emergencies and is shared among several individuals – the syndics of the ideal Republic whose laws he outlines. The Roman precedent is of great significance, even if Spinoza’s knowledge is at best loose. The tribunate of the plebs had, according to his reading, permanent power, and

¹³⁷ Ch. 21: 1909, 166. See Lintott 1999, 248.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Discorsi* 3.1: ‘Perché tutti e’ principii delle sètte, e delle republiche e de’ regni, conviene che abbiano in sé qualche bontà, mediante la quale ripiglio la prima riputazione ed il primo augumento loro. E perché nel processo del tempo quella bontà si corrompe, se non interviene cosa che la riduca al segno, ammazza di necessità quel corpo. E questi dottori di medicina dicono, parlando de’ corpi degli uomini, «quod quotidie aggregatur aliquid, quod quandoque indiget curatione». Questa riduzione verso il principio, parlando delle republiche, si fa o per accidente estrinseco o per prudenza intrinseca.’

was in principle a valid model for the institution he has in mind; it was, however, partly an ineffective magistracy (10.3: ‘verum impares, ut Scipionis alicuius potentiam premerent’) and partly a factor of instability, and even sedition. Spinoza is also convinced that it is possible to define a Republican equilibrium that is immune from the risk of collapse or radical change caused by internal factors, or from the fear caused by a situation of crisis. In a prudently ordered commonwealth, a state of terror cannot arise.

On this point Spinoza’s dissent from Machiavelli is as implicit as it is profound. However, his analysis of the fall of the Republic converges with that of the *Discorsi* on an important point: the decisive factor was the concentration of power in the hands of an individual. A crucial role is not attributed to transmarine wars, but to how emergencies were addressed (10.10): ‘Quantumvis igitur civitas recte ordinata et iura optime instituta sint, in maximis tamen imperii angustiis, quando omnes, ut fit, terrore quodam panico capiuntur, tum omnes id solum, quod praesens metus suadet, nulla futuri neque legum habita ratione, probant, omnium ora in virum victoriis clarum vertuntur, eundemque legibus solvunt, atque ipsi imperium (pessimo exemplo) continuant totamque rempublicam ipsius fidei conmittunt, quae res sane Romani imperii exitii fuit causa’. The choice of entrusting oneself to a man with great military credentials is a direct consequence of the terror that seizes the community and clouds its judgment, replacing the prudence and farsightedness that must underlie every political decision, and making short-term considerations prevail. The immediate cause of the end of the Republic lay in the decision to cede absolute power to an individual. The ‘maximae imperii angustiae’ are the moments that precipitate the catastrophe;¹³⁹ the underlying problem, however, is more deep-rooted, and amounts to the inability of the Republic to understand the quality of the challenges that lie ahead and address them with the required calm and focus. In Spinoza there is no notion of a ‘crisis of the Roman Republic’, whether understood as a more or less coherent process or as a discrete historical period. There is instead the consciousness of a fundamental inadequacy of the Roman state, which some specific historical moments revealed in all its depth.

Roman history plays a much more significant role in the reflection of James Harrington (1611-1677), arguably the greatest thinker of the English Republican tradition. In outlining the order of an ideal community, *Oceana* (*The Commonwealth of Oceana*, 1656), he addressed with particular interest the issues of the agrarian laws and the link between wealth and power. Harrington, consistently with his political attitude, had no sympathy for Caesar, whom, tak-

¹³⁹ See e.g. E. Curley’s (2016, 600) translation: ‘in the greatest crises of the state’.

ing a cue from Machiavelli, he defined as ‘more execrable’ than Catiline.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, he unhesitatingly recognized his historical importance, and saw in his victory the end of Roman freedom, and ‘the transition of ancient into modern prudence’:¹⁴¹ a remark that is the starting point of the work. Harrington’s debt to Machiavelli is also clear in other respects. He too sees a decisive factor in the renewal of military commands and magistracies, and observes that, in an age of civil wars, Sulla and Caesar obtained supreme power thanks to the extension of their dictatorships.¹⁴² There is, however, an explicit disagreement on another crucial point: the controversy around the agrarian laws was not the cause of the Republic’s ruin, but a necessary development, which stemmed from an issue directly pertaining to the stability and cohesion of the state. It is precisely the equitable distribution of wealth in the civic body that is the safest antidote to the instability caused by competition for resources (on this point Harrington is indebted to Livy’s *Praefatio*).¹⁴³ Since a good agrarian law is intrinsically necessary, even the choice of introducing it belatedly has harmful consequences. The Gracchi acted generously, but in an untimely fashion, and with a vehemence that entailed ruinous consequences for the Republic.¹⁴⁴ In this case too, a noble design, which broke up obsolete *clientelae* structures, had an unforeseen impact, far from its original intentions.

In 1681 a similar reading was put forward, quite independently and on quite different ideological grounds, in the *Discours d’histoire universelle* of Jacques Bénigne Bossuet’s (1627-1704), who first produced a lengthy tribute to the virtues of Republican Rome, largely based on Polybius, and then discussed the fall of the Republic, firmly attributing it to the popular element: ‘Malgré cette grandeur du nom romain, malgré la politique profonde, et toutes les belles institutions de cette fameuse république, elle portoit en son sein la cause de sa ruine dans la jalousie perpetuelle du peuple contre le senat, ou plustost des

¹⁴⁰ Ed. Pocock 1992, 250.

¹⁴¹ Ed. Pocock 1992, 8. See Millar 2002a, 89.

¹⁴² Ed. Pocock 1992, 131.

¹⁴³ Ed. Pocock 1992, 106-107, with a direct quote from Livy’s *Preface*. Procacci 1995, 243-245 and Hammersley 2019, 184 stress from different points of view the importance and originality of this passage. On the importance of the agrarian laws in Harrington see Nelson 2004, 93-97, 112-113; Andrew 2011, 44-45; Foxley 2022, 44-45.

¹⁴⁴ Ed. Pocock 1992, 43-44. Harrington’s interpretive line on the agrarian law and on the problem of the distribution of wealth was further developed in the reflections of Henry Neville (1620-1694), a remarkable intellectual and political activist, an opponent of Cromwell and a friend of the author of *Oceana*. In the second dialogue of his *Plato Redivivus*, between an English gentleman and a Venetian, the thesis of the untimeliness of the Gracchan initiative is restated, albeit with a laudatory slant: Neville 1681, 62-63, 133-134. See Nelson 2004, 132-134.

plebeïens contre les patriciens'.¹⁴⁵ This assessment was not driven just by a prejudice against popular sovereignty and its political agency. According to Bossuet, the tension between patricians and plebeians was already inscribed in the Romulean order. The power of the Roman people was crucial in the running of the commonwealth.¹⁴⁶ The Republic came to an end when a compromise between popular initiative and senatorial authority proved impossible; the ambitions of some individuals played a decisive role in precipitating that process. The Gracchi are strongly criticised, in an interpretive framework that is in many other respects strongly influenced by Sallust, and in which a direct correlation is established between internal concord and military activity.¹⁴⁷ Bossuet was writing in the middle of the age of absolutism, but his judgement on the advent of the Principate could not be more hostile: it was the beginning of an age of tyranny, in which the authority of the Senate was curtailed by the might of the armies.¹⁴⁸

14. While in the seventeenth century the late Roman Republic attracted the interest of some great thinkers, major historical and interpretive overviews on the period remained relatively rare. The age of the Principate, especially in its later phase, when the history of the Empire is increasingly intertwined with the history of the Church, was an object of much deeper and more fruitful investigation, in which legal developments played a key role.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, it would be simplistic to regard the study of the Republic in this period as an historiographical season without history, in which only uncritical compilations or flat moralistic re-readings were produced. Instead, a strategy of close reading of the sources began to assert itself, laying the groundwork for further critical investigation. An important example in this respect were the rich compilations of Wil-

¹⁴⁵ 3.6: 1681, 535. On Bossuet's reading of Polybius see most recently Thornton 2020, 251-252.

¹⁴⁶ On the importance of *libertas* in Bossuet see Pocock 2003, 328.

¹⁴⁷ 3.7: 1681, 544 ('Les Gracques mirent tout en confusion, et leurs seditieuses propositions furent le commencement de toutes les guerres civiles').

¹⁴⁸ Bossuet 1681, 547-548.

¹⁴⁹ Mazzarino 2009, 383-399, remains fundamental on this point, and views Vico and Niebuhr as the turning points in the modern understanding of Republican history; see the epigrammatic statement at 384: 'sull'impero romano si ragionava, nei secoli XVII e XVIII, infinitamente meglio che sulla repubblica'. In a 1936 essay, Momigliano stressed instead the weight of the link between the crisis of the Republic and the birth of the Empire in the development of modern historiography on the Principate (1955, 127-136; cf. 127-128 on Vico). On the significant areas of disagreement between those two major studies see Mazza 2009, 373-380. – Wood 2013 is now an essential orientation point on the history of modern historiography on the transition from the Late Empire to the Middle Ages.

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liam Bellenden (ca. 1550-c. 1633), a Scottish scholar, *magister libellorum supplicum* of King James I Stuart, who worked for a long time in Paris and published three important treatises during his stay there. In *Ciceronis Princeps, siue de Statu Principis et Imperii* (1608) and *Ciceronis Consul, Senator, Senatusque Romanus, siue de Statu Reipublicae et Urbis Imperandi Orbis* (1612) the work of Cicero is used as a path to reconstructing the tasks of the magistrates and the Roman Senate, and the principles that governed their action.¹⁵⁰ The antiquarian mode merges with the moralistic purpose. *Ciceronis Princeps* is mainly taken up by the reflection on the qualities that should be sought in a good monarch, articulated in a Ciceronian language, and with references that go back as far as Plato and Xenophon (30-31), while *Ciceronis Consul* offers a systematic analysis of the various forms of political participation in Rome – from candidacies to the management of meetings, from triumph to the deliberations of the Senate – with a dense series of timely references to ancient sources (*Cicero in primis*), which often take the form of verbatim quotation; there is some discussion of the qualities required of a good *imperator* (chap. 16) or what factors constitute the *constantia* of a senator (ch. 39). The discussion presupposes a sound knowledge of the main historical developments (see e.g. 224-231: ch. 30 on the role of the Senate in civic disputes), but it is never thoroughly corroborated by rigorous historical interpretation. Chapter 42, devoted to the *contentiones* ‘*quae prima civilium bellorum incendia excitarant*’, is no exception; the choice to single out the dispute over the Mithridatic command as their starting point (315-316), however, is remarkable.

The extensive work *De tribus luminibus Romanorum libri sexdecim*, which appeared posthumously in 1633, is unfinished: the discussion of the biography of Cicero, the first great ‘Roman light’, was intended to be followed by those of Seneca and Pliny the Elder. The most interesting aspect for the purposes of this discussion, however, is the sharp shift from the synchronic to the diachronic dimension. Bellenden gives a systematic annalistic summary of the history of Rome from its foundation to the death of Cicero, with an extensive set of learned notes: the approach to the quotations from ancient sources is consistent with that of the two previous works and largely accounts for the size of the work: scores of pages are taken up by long extracts from Cicero’s correspondence. The most significant interpretive cues emerge from the organisation of the subject matter: the seventh book begins with the war of Numantia, the eighth starts from the day of the birth of Cicero, the ninth with the censorship of L. Licinius Crassus and the expulsion of the *rhetores Latini*, the tenth with the praef-

¹⁵⁰ See Bellenden 1615: in this edition the two treatises are preceded by an ambitious discussion *De Statu Prisci Orbis in Religione, Re politica, et Literis*, which takes its start from biblical examples; cf. chapters 12-13 on moral and intellectual decline in Greece and Rome (75-83).

torship of Verres. Beyond some original ideas, which derive from an extensive knowledge of the ancient sources, Bellenden falls short of a discussion of Republican history in which narrative and interpretation are coherently integrated.¹⁵¹

In France there was the attempt, in many ways pioneering, of Scipion Dupleix (or Du Pleix: 1569-1661), who, in the context of a vast historiographic, philosophical, and antiquarian production, produced a sizeable overview of Roman history, the *Histoire romaine depuis la fondation de Rome*: a work in three volumes, published in 1638, which was the first of its kind in French.¹⁵² The second half of the second volume is devoted to the late Republic, and ends with the crossing of the Rubicon. It is a mainly descriptive discussion, which mostly reproduces the points of view of the sources that Dupleix had at his disposal: about the Gracchi, for instance, the fundamentally favourable point of view of Plutarch and of the part of the ancient tradition that emphasizes their moral and intellectual qualities is restated. The operation, however, is already innovative in itself, because it puts a systematic review of literary texts to the service of a solid narrative framework. The interpretive moment is marginal, and tends to concentrate on moralistic aspects: on themes such as the insolence of the tribunes, the arrogance of the Senate, the corrupting effect of luxury, and the ambition of some great political figures; all these factors make the return to a monarchic regime inevitable (2.626, at the outset of book 27, ch. 10). For Dupleix, in fact, the Republic is a glorious interlude in a long historical development that had opened with a monarchic arrangement and would then revert to it, albeit in a somewhat different form. In this cyclical mode there is also a providential element, which Dupleix, a French historiographer and Councillor of State under Louis XIII, sees at work in the development of political bodies (2.625) as well as in the vicissitudes of individuals (see e.g. 2.463-464, on Lucullus, a Plutarchian character who arouses in him admiration and moral disapproval in equal measure). For a nobleman who lived in the midst of Bourbon absolutism, the monarchic outcome is a providential development in itself.

References to the design of Providence also lead another vast seventeenth-century historical compilation, the *Histoire de la République romaine* by Pierre Moret de la Fayolle, published in two volumes in 1675.¹⁵³ Moret was an *Avocat au Parlement*; his reading was undoubtedly extensive, although, unlike Dupleix, he did not include references to the ancient sources. His extensive treatment

¹⁵¹ See Sampson 2008, 205 n. 76 and Stuart-Buttle 2019, 152 on the late seventeenth-century controversy around the possible plagiarism of Bellenden's work by C. Middleton.

¹⁵² See Raskolnikoff 1992, 494-496 on the impact of this work on French historiography.

¹⁵³ See esp. 2.308, on the so-called First Triumvirate; 371-372 on Caesar's aims. On this work see Martin 1969, 884 n. 85; Sampson 2008, 194.

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maintains an annalistic slant: the discussion is organised under the rubric of the various consular pairs. The levels of analysis and interpretation are thus subordinated to that of the factual narrative. However, the work offers a reliable picture of information on the whole, also through a detailed analytical index. The term ‘crise’ makes its appearance in a crucial passage to designate a single specific moment in which the end of the Republican regime loomed: ‘Le temps du retour de Cesar [*sic*] approchoit, et ce retour tenoit tous les Romains dans une terrible agitation. On jugeoit aisement que ce retour estoit la crise de la Republique, et que la nuée estoit sur le point de crever’ (2.335). For Moret too the monarchy is an altogether positive development, and his judgment of Caesar’s human and political qualities is nothing short of enthusiastic. The narrative ends when Caesar is still invested with a power that is to all intents and purposes regal and the Republic can thus be said to have ended; the Ides of March and the subsequent season of civil wars are left out of account.

Some references to the intervention of Providence are not lacking either in the two volumes that Samuel de Broë, Seigneur de Citry et de la Guette (the chronology of his life is unknown), devoted to the two Triumvirates in 1681.¹⁵⁴ The first one begins with the aftermath of Catiline’s conspiracy and closes with the Ides of March, while the second, in two volumes, continues the narrative until the conquest of Alexandria.¹⁵⁵ Those two alliances – albeit with their clear differences, which de Broë does not discuss analytically – are thus the pivot of a wide-ranging narrative of the last three decades of the Republic, which is based on a relatively innovative periodisation and a coherent approach: at the centre of the historical process there is political history, in turn dominated by a few great figures. The most remarkable aspect of de Broë’s work, however, lies in its title: it is the first one to feature the term *Triumvirat*.¹⁵⁶

Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) made good use of Moret’s work in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1st ed., 1695-1696), where the end of the Republic is not identified as the subject of a separate entry or as a specific topic of investigation, but is an important aspect of the entries devoted to Brutus, Cassius, and

¹⁵⁴ De Broë 1683 a, b, c. On the mentions of Providence see de Broë 1683b, 284, 293-294 and 1683c, 191; cf. 1694b, 2.72, 76, 165.

¹⁵⁵ The third edition of 1694, on the other hand, has a rather puzzling structure: the second volume opens with an essay on the *Particularitez de la vie de Jules Cesar* (1694b, 7-56) and continues with a long, laudatory discussion of Augustus’ reign (57-218), before returning, after eighteen chapters, to the Ides of March and setting out the developments until Cleopatra’s death.

¹⁵⁶ See Ridley 1999, 135, with an interesting reconstruction of the possible origin of the term in modern historiography. On de Broë’s relative lack of interest in defining the concept see 1694a, 20 and 1694b, 2.28.

Julius Caesar.¹⁵⁷ The Ides of March prompt the most pointed remarks of the nature of the process that led to the end of the Republic, when, in the entry on Brutus, Bayle raises the question of how the Liberators would have judged their actions in light of the events that followed. In his view, had they known the consequences of their deed, they would have chosen not to kill Caesar, and spared Rome the harshest suffering. Bayle is certainly no admirer of Caesar: the entry devoted to the tribune L. Metellus, who confronted him shortly after his arrival in Rome in 49 BCE, voices genuine sympathy for the lonely opponent of Rome's new master (10.416-418). Caesar's victory, however, is explained as the outcome of deeply rooted historical forces. Quite apart from the intentions of Brutus and Cassius, the terms of the political context were by then irreversible: Rome had long since been a Republic in name only, and a regime change was made inevitable by the imperial expansion and the exposure of the city 'au luxe et à l'ambition.' Rome could have only maintained a democratic regime if it had remained a small state, refusing to engage in 'guerres offensives'.¹⁵⁸ Bayle anticipated an interpretive insight that, a generation later, was to be central to Montesquieu's *Considérations*.

15. In seventeenth-century Britain the late Republic received few substantial historical discussions; imperial history was relatively better served.¹⁵⁹ At least three exceptions are worth discussing, though, along with the already mentioned, and to some extent anomalous, case of William Bellenden. In 1601 the distinguished lawyer William Fulbecke (1560-1603?) published an account ('or rather, a bridge') of the period between the end of what survives of Livy and the beginning of Tacitus's work: the history that unfolds over 120 years, in which 'the fame and fortune of the Romans ebbs and flowes'.¹⁶⁰ The Gracchi and the Social War receive close attention, and a strong moralizing agenda is matched by a close and consistent focus on political history.¹⁶¹ The victory of Julius Caesar marks the beginning of a demise: the three books into which the work is divided are named after the Parcae, and the final one, significantly titled 'Atropos',

¹⁵⁷ Respectively in 4.186-194 (Brutus), 4.501-511 (Cassius) and 5.20-43 (Caesar). See the useful summary under the heading 'Rome' in the 'Table des matières' in Bayle 1820, 16.540-541 and cf. 'République', 536. On Bayle's role in the history of French historiography on ancient Rome see Raskolnikoff 1992, 16-18, 253-254 and Grell 1995, 403-407.

¹⁵⁸ Bayle 1820, 4.191.

¹⁵⁹ On the late sixteenth century see Cox Jensen 2012, 121-122. Readers, though, had access to an increasingly rich range of ancient sources, which created the conditions for a substantial shift in the second quarter of the seventeenth century: Cox Jensen 2012, 25-118.

¹⁶⁰ Fulbecke 1601: the periodisation ranges from 151 BCE to 31 BCE (13), although the work ends with an account of the settlement of 27 and the main aspects of Augustus' reign.

¹⁶¹ See Cox Jensen 2012, 128.

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begins with the aftermath of Caesar's victory in Spain.¹⁶² There is no doubt in Fulbecke's mind that Caesar acquired monarchic power through violent means; yet his assassination was a treacherous and illegitimate act, and Brutus and Cassius receive unreserved condemnation. Fulbecke's periodization is shaped by a fundamental concern for civic order and tranquillity. Although he is not an unreserved admirer of Augustus, his work ends with a strong statement of the rewards that peace brought to Rome.¹⁶³

A generation later, Peter Heylin's (or Heylyn: 1599-1662) remarkable essay, *Augustus, or An Essay of those Meanes and Counsels whereby the Commonwealth of Rome was altered, and reduced to a monarchy* (published anonymously in 1632, but written a few years earlier) stands out both for its stylistic brilliance and for its overall conception and structure, in which biography and history are integrated: Augustus' rise to power and his regime are discussed against the backdrop of the fall of the Roman Republic. This is one of the first attempts ever made in English historiography to problematise the historical developments of the period as a theme that required sustained discussion. The most original point of Heylin's discussion is the refusal to see in the events of the late Republic a process of decline: on the contrary, it is a new ascent, from 'Populacy, or Democracy' to the more orderly and accomplished monarchic regime, which Rome had already enjoyed once.¹⁶⁴ The late Republic is thus to be understood as a series of unsuccessful attempts to establish a highly desirable monarchic regime; Caesar's death is a moment in which 'Liberty' could have been restored, if Mark Antony had not intervened (27), creating the conditions for the rise of Octavian (whom Heylin indifferently calls *Augustus* for the period before 27 BCE: see p. 30). Even a traumatic season like the Triumviral proscriptions should be viewed positively, because it led to the elimination of 'the stoutest of the Nobles and the Commons' (44), and thus contributed decisively to creating the conditions for the return of peace within a monarchic order. Heylin was a chaplain at the court of Charles I Stuart, and his approach to the Augustan age reflects a lucidly royalist outlook.¹⁶⁵ It is perhaps unsurprising that late Re-

¹⁶² Fulbecke 1601, 166-209. The first book, 'Clotho', ends with the defeat of Catiline. On Fulbecke's critique of Caesar see Cox Jensen 2012, 130, 142; his debt to Lucan is apparent (143).

¹⁶³ Fulbecke 1601, 209. See Cox Jensen 2012, 194-195, 210-212.

¹⁶⁴ Heylin 1632, 22-23.

¹⁶⁵ See Sommerville 1999, 242. Heylin's discussion, moreover, does not put forward any implicit political analogies with modern events: see, however, the mention of the Brindisi agreements between the Triumvirs and Sextus Pompey along with the Savona conference of 1507 between Louis XII of France and Ferdinand II of Aragon (50-51). Cf. Cox Jensen 2012, 193, 202, 209-210, who sees Heylyn's discussion as rather ambiguous, and fundamentally indebted to the Machiavellian and Tacitean traditions.

publican history should raise some interest in those quarters. When in 1648 Sir Richard Fanshawe (1608-1666) dedicated to the Prince of Wales (the future king Charles II) a collection of poems and translations from Latin, Italian, and Spanish, he included his versions of two poems of Horace in which civil war features prominently (*Carm.* 3.24 and *Epod.* 16), and addressed to the Prince a *Summary Discourse of the Civill Warres of Rome, extracted out of the best Latine writers in Prose and Verse*.¹⁶⁶ Whether he actually resorted to the *best* authors remains a matter for debate: his key source is Velleius Paterculus. He did succeed, though, in providing a brief, effective, and tendentious account, which identified Tiberius Gracchus as the ‘firebrand’ that unleashed a long season of civil strife, and Augustus as a prince whose ambition was ‘to civilize and make happy’, and who wisely decided ‘to tye the hands of a potent Mad people, from doing farther mischief to themselves’.¹⁶⁷

The Roman Republic also has a prominent place in the political writings of Marchamont Nedham (ca. 1620-1678), a complex and controversial figure of the age of the English Revolution, whose ideological and political aims could have hardly been further apart from those of Heylin and Fanshawe. In the series of speeches collected in 1656 in *The Excellencie of a Free State*, the problem of popular sovereignty is central, and Rome proves an exceptionally fertile case study, and indeed a constant point of reference. According to Nedham, the Roman people always were the sovereign body in the city: for the best part of Republican history, though, their supremacy was usurped by the Senate, until ‘Gracchus’ (probably Tiberius) openly raised the issue and persuaded the people to overcome the authority of the Senate.¹⁶⁸ There is no trajectory of decline or crisis: on the contrary, the authentic spirit of the Republic is honoured only in the final season of that regime, only to be subverted again by the rise of some great character, who were able to leverage the ‘continuation of power’ (6-7) – the point was already stressed, as we have seen, by Machiavelli. Nedham establishes a direct link between imperial expansion and ‘democratic’ regime. When the competition for power is open, the political community benefits greatly from it; in his view, both Rome and Carthage illustrate this principle (26-27). The periodisation on which this judgment is based is never stated explicitly, but the decisive factor of decline is identified in the growth of the power of those who

¹⁶⁶ Ed. Davidson 1997, 53-146, esp. 131-134 (Horace’s poems), 135-142 (*Summary Discourse*).

¹⁶⁷ See resp. ed. Davidson 1997, 135 and 141.

¹⁶⁸ Nedham 1767, xi. See xvi for the analogy between early and mid-republican Rome, Sparta and Venice. The historiographical importance of this work has been stressed by Millar 2002a, 84-86. On the quality of his engagement with Republican history see Foxley 2022, 45-46, 49-50. On his ‘non-Ciceronian’ approach to agrarian legislation see Nelson 2004, 91-93.

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were supposed to serve the people. Sulla and Caesar are the two key examples, recalled with striking frequency;¹⁶⁹ at one point, Nedham argues that the period between the dictatorships was an ephemeral return of senatorial supremacy.¹⁷⁰ Even for John Milton (1608-1674), who in *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) approached from a rather different angle the problem of how to establish a polity, the Roman Republic was a regime in which the people gained a hegemonic role. His attitude, however, was ‘immoderate and ambitious,’ and ended up having harmful effects: Marius pandered to the wishes of the people in every way, provoking Sulla’s reaction and the advent of his tyranny.¹⁷¹ The Roman case is a negative example of the importance of ensuring a political balance within a Republican framework.

In the last decade of the century, however, new and more ambitious attempts to produce an overview of Republican history were also made in England, from rather different political and methodological standpoints. A translation of de Broë’s work by the playwright Thomas Otway appeared in 1686. In 1699 Walter Moyle (1672-1721), a Whig politician and writer, and a keen admirer of Harrington, wrote an *Essay on the Constitution and Government of the Roman State*, which remained unpublished until 1726. The main features of the monarchic regime and the structure of the Republic receive a brief and perceptive discussion:¹⁷² Polybius is a central reference point, at least as significant as Machiavelli and Harrington, and the underlying theme of the essay is the process of change in the political regime under which the Roman State was run: from a monarchy to an aristocratic state, to a popular one, which then becomes corrupt, and dissolves. Moyle takes up the Machiavellian principle that sees in civil strife (which he calls ‘seditions’) a force that strengthened (‘reform’d and

¹⁶⁹ Nedham 1767, 40-41, 54, 67, 77, 110, 117-118, 135-136.

¹⁷⁰ Nedham 1767, 41; cf. however 122, where it is said that in 44 BCE the Roman people had been ‘educated in a free-state’ (122). See also 126-127, where Sulla is spoken of as the military leader chosen by the Senate to defend itself against the popular mobilization prompted by the Gracchi: a remark that casts some doubt on the extent of Nedham’s factual knowledge.

¹⁷¹ Milton 1791, 22-23: it is possible that Machiavelli’s negative judgement on Marius may be playing a part here. See Millar 2002a, 96-99.

¹⁷² First edition: Moyle 1726, 1-148; see also the edition by the radical polemicist John Thelwall, under the title *Democracy Vindicated* (Moyle 1796, on which see Scrivener 2002, 127-132). The most easily accessible modern edition is in Robbins 1969, 201-259, whose introduction also offers a good biographical account (21-38; see 31 on the dating of the essay). On Moyle see also Nelson 2004, 136-138 and Straumann 2016, 312-313. Venturi 1970, 72 remains essential fundamental on the political dimension of his reflection on ancient Rome and its importance in the wider European context.

perfected') the Republican government.¹⁷³ The success of the Republican system is based on the ability to take swift and effective action. Moyle subscribes to the view that moral factors have a great weight in the developments of the late Republic, but regards them as part of a wider problem. The popular regime tends to fail to respect its own fundamental laws, and the general moderation of the Republican legal framework tends to leave scope for abuse. The underlying theme, then, is a growing neglect of the institutional order of the Republic and of the need to protect it.¹⁷⁴

There is a comparable degree of attention to the legal systems of Rome in *Romae Antiquae Notitia: or, the Antiquities of Rome*, an important work by the Oxford scholar Basil Kennett (1674-1715), whose first edition appeared in 1696: a remarkable work both for the originality of its approach and for the precocity of its author.¹⁷⁵ At the heart of the undertaking is a systematic overview of Roman institutions, which takes up the whole second part (29-375) and is divided into five thematic sections: the form of the city, religion, government and the administration of justice, military institutions, customs and traditions. The quality of Kennett's information and exposition was unprecedented in English-language historiography, and had few parallels in Europe: it determined the work's success for several generations. The first part is a concise narrative of the history of Rome from the foundation to the fall of the Western Empire (1-28); the end of the Republic is not even identified as an historical issue worthy of discussion, apart from a quick eulogistic nod to Augustus.¹⁷⁶ In the stimulating essay with which the work opens, *Of the Roman Learning*, however, the theme is addressed within a broader attempt to trace the whole intellectual history of the Graeco-Roman world. In Kennett's view, the link between the decline of the 'Common-Wealth' and the victories against Carthage and in Greece is widely recognized: Athens transmitted to Rome the 'Arts of Debauchy'; the imperial capital, however, also drew new intellectual energies. If there is a political decline, 'the Conquest of the great Empire of *Science*' acquires instead a whole new vigour, which changes the profile and quality of Roman cultural life: all the great political leaders of the late Republic, except Marius, are men of great intellectual stature.¹⁷⁷ The peak of that trajectory coincides with the Augustan age.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Moyle 1726, 102 (= Robbins 1969, 242-243). On Moyle's debt towards Machiavelli see Millar 2002a, 102-103.

¹⁷⁴ Moyle 1726, 132-138 (= Robbins 1969, 253-255).

¹⁷⁵ The quotation is from the fifth edition, which appeared in 1713. The importance of the work is rightly stressed by Akça Ataç 2013, 479-480, 492-493.

¹⁷⁶ Kennett 1713, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Kennett 1713, vi-x, esp. vi. See, however, the veiled scepticism about the link between corruption and 'intercourse with foreigners' (239, in a discussion of Rome's maritime presence).

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The second introductory essay, *Of the Roman Education*, offers an original approach through a biographical profile of Cicero's youth.¹⁷⁹

The most significant insight is to be found in the discussion of the orders into which the Roman citizen body is divided. Kennett explicitly takes up a theme already identified by Sigonio, posing the question of the correct definition of *optimates* and *populares*, and suggesting a completely opposite reading.¹⁸⁰ The division posited by the Modenese historian was in fact limited to distinguishing the virtuous from the vicious, and is not measured 'with the Sense of Things'. It is unrealistic to assume that a political faction should consist entirely of honest men; moreover, Cicero, on whom Sigonio bases his categorization, is a tendentious author, directly involved in the political controversy. Kennett offers a methodological principle of exceptional importance: 'It would therefore be a much more moderate Judgment, to find the Difference rather on Policy than on Morality; rather on the Principles of Government, than on Religion and private Duty'.¹⁸¹

In the same years, Laurence Echard (c. 1670-1730), formerly a student at Christ's College, Cambridge, and later a priest in the Anglican Church, produced a long and detailed treatment of the whole history of the Republic: *The Roman History, from the Building of the City, to the Perfect Settlement of the Empire* (1695, 1724⁹). For all its limitations, this work is, for the purposes of our discussion, an even sharper turning point than Kennett's great compilation.¹⁸² Echard is best known for a history of England that appeared between 1707 and 1720; his work on Roman history is an early project, in which he presents a very broad base of information within a coherent interpretive framework. The discussion of the late Republic is not based on the concept of crisis, or on that of transition. Instead, the Republic ('commonwealth') comes to a dissolution, and in its place a 'monarchy' emerges, which soon establishes itself as a wonderfully prosperous and happy regime, founded on the lucid vision of Augustus: not even his most corrupt successors were able to undermine it. Augustus became 'Supreme Governor of the Roman People, neither by Inheritance, nor Usurpation,

¹⁷⁸ Kennett 1713, x-xii.

¹⁷⁹ Kennett 1713, xxvii-xxx.

¹⁸⁰ Kennett 1713, 98-99.

¹⁸¹ Kennett 1713, 99. Ward 1964, 425-426 sees a prophetic note in this statement; cf. n. 5 on the wording of this passage in the first edition.

¹⁸² See Sampson, 2008, 191-196, who takes a cue from Momigliano 1950, 294 (= 1955, 78). See Ridley 1996, 303-310, esp. 311-315 on its modest impact. Between 1728 and 1742, however, the Abbé Desfontaines published a French translation in six volumes, which had a rather wide circulation: Raskolnikoff 1992, 496-497. In the *Traité d'Études* Rollin placed it first in a short list of modern treatises on Roman history (Rollin 1740, 1.57); cf. Voltaire's critical judgment (1770, 350), which indirectly confirms its importance: 'aussi fautive que tronquée'.

nor Conquest, nor Election, yet by means of 'em all'.¹⁸³ If the impact of the new regime is read in strongly idealizing terms, reflecting the intellectual and political coordinates of the English Augustanism of the late seventeenth century, Echard summarises its originality in felicitous and original terms:¹⁸⁴ through the four pathways to power that he attributes to Augustus one can follow the trace of the dynamics of power and political competition in the late Republic. This is not the only insight yielded by this work: far from being a moralistic compilation, Echard's *Roman History* offers an informed and distinctive outlook on a number of political and constitutional aspects.

A central contention of the work is a radical periodisation, which is reflected in the division of the subject matter: a first book on the 'Regal State', a second on the 'Consular State', from the creation of Republican government to the 'ruin of it by the First Triumvirate', and a third on the 'Mix'd State', which here certainly does not have the meaning of 'mixed constitution', but designates instead the combination of republican and monarchic elements, and is brought to a close by the settlement of 27 BCE. This subdivision, which focuses on the realities of power and their institutional implications, is also accompanied by a more familiar watershed, in which more distinctly moralizing factors can be invoked. The fall of Carthage and the end of the great external campaigns lead to a gradual loss of the 'ancient Modesty, Plainness, and Severity of Life'.¹⁸⁵ Out of that corruption came the abuses of the great landowners, which Tiberius Gracchus attempted to remedy; the 'Civil Dissensions' that started at that time did not end with his defeat.¹⁸⁶ The dictatorship of Sulla (which Echard considers perpetual, and assimilates to a sort of monarchy) was the second great step towards the destruction of the 'Consular State'. After the end of that phase, a phase of political division reasserted itself, which could not find a point of stability: a fact that is in itself revealing of how a change in the form of the State was now necessary, and how it was about to fall into the hands of 'Men of Greatest Power and Ambition'.¹⁸⁷ The First Triumvirate was a moment in which a long phase of politi-

¹⁸³ Echard 1724, 450.

¹⁸⁴ For a reading of Echard in the context of English Augustanism (a more critical one than that proposed here), see Weinbrot 1978, 54-58 (cf. esp. 54-55 on the influence of de Broë's work) and Akça Ataç 2013, 497-500. For an effective definition of the concept of 'Augustanism', see Weinbrot 1978, 5: 'the omnibus belief that during the reign of Augustus Caesar the throne was a center of value. The exalted character of the monarch induced stable government, the arts of peace, protection by heaven, refinement of literary style, and patronage of great authors'; cf. instead the reservations about this term in Ayres 1997, XIV.

¹⁸⁵ Echard 1724, 237.

¹⁸⁶ Echard 1724, 241.

¹⁸⁷ Echard 1724, 289.

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cal decadence came to an end, and an altogether different season began, in which the monarchic element was flanked by the consular one.

The value of Echard's approach lies in shifting the focus from the intentions of an individual or a faction to longer-term developments, which were largely misread by those who lived through them and eventually led to entirely unexpected outcomes. It was an insight of great historiographical significance and originality, which was to have important developments over the following decades. Echard's study attained a much higher level of originality and interpretive power than the vast account of universal history offered in the *Ductor historicus* of Thomas Hearne (or Hearn: 1678-1735), where the story of Rome is given great prominence, but without addressing the problem of historical explanation and the various biographical studies that appeared in this period.¹⁸⁸ The latter were significant contributions in their own right: the *Histoire des IV Cicérons* by François Macé (1640-1721), which claims to reconstruct the history of the late Republic through the lives of Marcus and Quintus Tullius Cicero and their respective sons, asserting their greatness with sometimes surprising arguments;¹⁸⁹ the *Observations on the Life of Cicero* by George Lyttleton (1709-1773), which marked an important step in the critical evaluation of that major figure;¹⁹⁰ or the *Roman Conversations; or Historical Exercises* by John Wilcock (1673-1756), an admirable example of how the history of the Roman Republic could be covered in the advanced tuition of the sons of the English ruling class through an original integration of biographical approach, moral teaching, and references to the topography of the city of Rome.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Hearne 1705. The organisation of the material, however, is of some interest: the first volume closes with the birth of Christ; the victory over Hannibal marks the beginning of the ninth epoch in world history, which ends with the birth of the Redeemer (72-75); the affairs of Rome are discussed in the third book, devoted to the 'Ancient Monarchies, which preceded the Birth of JESUS CHRIST', and the beginning of a monarchic regime coincides with the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and the granting to Octavian of the 'Venerable Name of Augustus' (458).

¹⁸⁹ See e.g. Macé 1725, 224, where it is argued that the mere fact that M. Tullius Cicero *junior* held the consulship in 29 BCE, the year in which the gates of the Temple of Janus were closed, places him among 'les hommes les plus illustres'; his alcohol addiction was a thoughtless, but understandable, reaction to the loss of political freedom (234-238).

¹⁹⁰ See Lyttleton 1741, 7-8 for the well-known argument on the link between 'excessive Prosperity' and 'Vices and Corruption', and the use of the term 'Revolution'. On Lyttleton's study on Cicero see Ward 1964, 430-431 (esp. 430: 'for its time a remarkable piece of historical judgment'); Fox 2013, 329-331; Cambiano 2018, 149.

¹⁹¹ Wilcock 1763. For a different and equally original application of the biographical approach see *Roman Portraits*, a series of poems in heroic verse published by Robert Jephson (1736/7-1803) in 1794, which focuses on the Republican age (see esp. vi: 'As to the policy of the Romans, the penetration of Montesquieu has left little for future investigation').

The historical process that led to the fall of the Republic, however, also continued to mobilize the interest of authors of high literary and intellectual calibre. In the *Discourses Concerning Government* by the English Republican politician and theorist Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), written in 1681 and published posthumously in 1698, the Roman Republic is celebrated as an example of what a republican regime could achieve, especially in the military remit.¹⁹² The civil wars that led to its fall are instead the consequence of a struggle for monarchic power, and indirectly prove the superiority of the republican order. Like others before him, Sidney posits a connection between the defeat of any external enemy, the extension of commands, and the fall of military discipline.¹⁹³ The Empire, on the other hand, is an era of unstoppable decline. In his first political work, published anonymously in 1701, Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) approached the problem of civil unrest in Rome from the opposite standpoint to Sidney's, in the context of an ambitious comparison with Athens. His analysis ranges through the whole Republican period, from the beginning of the Conflict of the Orders, and puts forward a reading that has a clear anti-democratic slant.¹⁹⁴ The decisive theme of the last century of the Republic were the 'popular encroachments', which, taking advantage of a state of peace, led to a gradual defeat of the power of the nobility and a predominance of the tribune of the plebs over the other magistrates: a '*dominatio Plebis*'.¹⁹⁵ It is precisely the predominance of the people that paves the way to a monarchic regime: being incapable of and uninterested in building a stable structure, the people tend to hand over power to the lowest bidder. The victories of a vicious man like Antony or of a young man like Octavius can be explained precisely by a comprehensively debased political context. At the core of Swift's reflection, as the two concluding chapters make clear, there is the problem of the balance of power in ancient and modern political communities, notably in contemporary England, which risks, in his view, a fate not unlike that suffered by Athens in the fourth century BCE and by Rome in the first (60).

16. For Swift, the main theme in late Republican history is the collapse of political order. Thirty years later, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755)

¹⁹² Sidney 1698, 120-123. The work was written in response to Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), a defence of the principle of divine right. See Houston 1991, 158-159; Nelson 2004, 134 n. 28.

¹⁹³ Sidney 1698, 120.

¹⁹⁴ Swift 1701, 24-40. See Ward 1964, 420-422; Ayres 1997, 20.

¹⁹⁵ Swift 1701, 36. Cf. the remarkable use of Machiavellian terminology at 34: 'The Warlike Genius of the People, and continual Employment they had for it, served to divert this Humor from running into a Head, till the age of the Gracchi.'

identified instead in the ‘perte de la liberté’ a central aspect of the discussion in *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734): the key stage in an historical process that was to end only centuries later. Rome always had factors of internal discord, which for a long time remained hidden from the outside world, throughout the phase of external wars (‘il y avait dans ses murailles une guerre cachée’), and for a long time were effectively contained. In general, the political system retained within itself the tools to correct its own distortions, even when the influx of new wealth after the transmarine campaigns began to cause new imbalances: the censorship played a significant role. The key factors in the decline of the Republic, however, were direct and unforeseen consequences of Rome’s success in the Mediterranean: territorial expansion, which required the creation of multi-year commands (a theme that featured prominently in Machiavelli’s reflection), and the growth of the city, its population, and the wider citizen body.¹⁹⁶ Montesquieu’s analysis does not identify clear-cut periodizing moments or figures to whom major tasks should be attributed; what interests him is the general trend.¹⁹⁷ The Gracchi attempted a series of measures favourable to the cause of the people. The reaction they unleashed was one of unprecedented harshness, because a nobility with strong material resources and unprecedented unscrupulousness had now emerged. Sulla enacted a program of reforms designed to restore public freedom. However, his own actions undermined the political framework to its foundations – ‘la République devant nécessairement périr, il n’était plus question que de savoir comment et par qui elle devait être abattue’ (§11). The historical importance that Montesquieu attributed to Sulla is further displayed by the brief *Dialogue de Sylla et d’Eucrate*, which appeared in *the Mercure de France* in February 1745 and was then published as an appendix to the *Considérations* from 1748 onwards. At the end of a dialogue between Sulla, who had stepped down from power only a few days before, and a fictional Greek philosopher, the latter harshly evokes the devastating effects of the action of the victor in the civil war: ‘Vous avez divulgué ce fatal secret, et ôté ce qui fait seul les bons citoyens d’une république trop riche et trop grande, le désespoir de pouvoir l’opprimer’.

¹⁹⁶ On Montesquieu’s negative view of the extension of the Roman citizenship to the Italians see Desideri 1991, 602-603, who frames this attitude into the broader modern debate on the making of the Roman empire; Manent 2010, 205-206. On the importance of not isolating Montesquieu in the development of the historical reflection on ancient Rome see Pocock 2003, 341-42. On Montesquieu’s debt towards Harrington and Moyle see Nelson 2004, 159-163.

¹⁹⁷ See Weinbrot 1978, 222-223 and Grell 1995, 514-515 on the originality of Montesquieu’s approach to Augustus and the imperial age; see also Grell 1995, 1085 on the ‘disgrâce d’Auguste’ in France in the 1770s and its political dimension. On the close link between Republican and Imperial history in the *Considérations* see Wood 2013, 61-62.

The structural factors and the impact of the individual are closely built into a coherent framework, which leaves no room for escape.¹⁹⁸ Even after the Ides of March, the prospect of a return to freedom is completely unrealistic: Rome finds itself in the exceptional situation of being without a tyrant and without freedom (ch. 12). In that complete absence of any sort of political order, the transition to a monarchic regime becomes inevitable.

Montesquieu had an immediate and very significant impact on the historical reflection about Rome, not just among scholars who were engaged in cutting-edge research.¹⁹⁹ The large-scale accounts of ancient history produced from the 1770s by the Abbé Claude-François-Xavier Millot (1726-1785) were primarily intended to be used in educational settings, and were very influential in that respect. Yet they put forward a firm and controversial theoretical position, and they included frequent statements of their debt towards Montesquieu's work. They are driven by the ambition to blend a serviceable factual overview with a discussion of the rise and decline of polities. Ancient history, notably that of Rome, is regarded as the necessary prologue to modern history;²⁰⁰ the discussion of Roman history is framed around a periodisation into twelve epochs. The seventh one starts with the end of the Second Punic War and ends just before Tiberius Gracchus' tribunate, which is understood as a reaction to an unequal distribution of wealth; the eighth one ends with the rise of Marius, and leaves room for an age of civil wars that continues until Philippi. The suicides of Brutus and Cassius mark the end of the Republic, but are hardly a critical moment: had the two Liberators prevailed they would have established a military monarchy, not unlike their opponents.²⁰¹ The condition for a monarchic turn were structurally embedded by then; the inevitability of the regime change, though, did not make it a desirable one. In fact, Millot singles out the Republican period as the age of prosperity in Roman history; the Empire is an age of decline, and the barbarian invasions consolidate a well-established trend. After 1789, the French revolu-

¹⁹⁸ Sulla's reply ('Je ne crains qu'un homme dans lequel je crois voir plusieurs Marius...') has real dramatic value, and recalls the well-known dualism between Sulla and Caesar; at the same time, it suggests a fatal underestimation of the actual significance of his actions – a variant of the theme of the heterogenesis of ends. On Montesquieu's 'tragic' reading of Roman history see Manent 2010, 209-2015

¹⁹⁹ See Grell 1995, 449-450.

²⁰⁰ Millot 1800, 2.177-178: 'Comme l'Histoire romaine absorbe, pour ainsi dire, celles des autres nations, et qu'elle commence une longue chaîne de faits, qui aboutit à l'histoire moderne; nous la diviserons en époques'.

²⁰¹ Millot 1800, 3.162-163.

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tionary authorities urged school teachers to draw knowledge and inspiration from Millot's work.²⁰²

The entry on the Roman Republic in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, written by the indefatigable Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt (1751), takes up verbatim the main conclusions of the *Considérations*. The great project of 'critical history' of the Roman Republic of Louis de Beaufort, to which we will return later, has an explicit theoretical and historiographical debt to Montesquieu. The work of the Abbé Séran de la Tour on the tribunate of the plebs (1774) also contains a heartfelt appreciation of the *Considérations*, with which it shares a heavily critical judgment towards the role of the people and its political agency in the process that led to the end of the Republic.²⁰³ Séran also puts forward a unilateral, albeit not unoriginal, point of view, and chooses to conduct the study of a whole historical period from the point of view of a single magistracy.²⁰⁴ His work belongs in a season of French historiography in which the landscape begins to diversify, and alongside large-scale treatments there is a growing number of specific contributions, both on prosopographical problems and on questions of institutional and administrative history. The concerns

²⁰² On Millot's historiographical and philosophical position and its contemporary impact see Meirlaen 2010, 268-273.

²⁰³ Nothing is known about the biography of this scholar, who was very prolific and relatively influential in his own day: see Raskolnikoff 1992, 455 n. 240 and Nicolet 2003, 35-36. Grell 1995, 1029 sees in his reading of the tribunate a pro-aristocratic response to de Beaufort. The harsh response that some decades later the *Idéologue* Pierre-Claude-François Daunou (1761-1840) issued in three lectures of his *Cours d'études historiques* (1842-1849, 20 vols.: esp. vol. 16, 1847, no. 62-64; the lectures, however, were given between 1825 and 1829: see vol. 20, 438) indirectly demonstrates its relevance: see the detailed discussion in Raskolnikoff 1992, 693-698. On the contribution of the *Idéologues* and notably of Count Volney to the study of Roman history and the eclipse of the cult of the Republic see Raskolnikoff 1982a (= 1990, 111-127) and 1983a, 203-213 (= 1990, 99-109), and Fezzi 2012, 35-36. The idea of a linear progress of mankind does not easily lend itself to a study of crisis; the main tenet of their attitude towards antiquity is a warning about the risks of an uncritical imitation of the Ancients. Pierre-Charles Lévesque's (1736-1812) *Histoire critique de la République romaine*, in three volumes (1807), is a significant example of this approach and its limitations: see I.xxxviii ('Est-ce donc à des Français de fléchir le genou devant la grandeur romaine? Toute grandeur s'affaïsse devant celle de notre nation, devant celle de notre héros'). The idea of a link between the fall of the Republic and imperial expansion is restated; the judgment on the Principate is as hostile as that on the declining and corrupt Republic, with the exception of the Augustan age (3.460). See also Raskolnikoff 1992, 675-681 and Nicolet 2003, 105-106.

²⁰⁴ Besides the intrinsic shortcomings of the approach, this interpretive choice is considerably more ambitious and sophisticated than the survey of Roman institutions put forward by de Beaufort, the three volumes *Du gouvernement de la République romaine* by Alex Adrien de Texier, exiled in Germany after the Revolution (1796), or the *Civil and Constitutional History of Rome* published a generation later by Henry Bankes (1818, in two volumes).

prompted by the political climate were never far removed from historical enquiry. In the fateful year 1789 Paul-Philippe Gudin de la Bletterie (1738-1812), a man of letters and playwright, author of a *Supplément to Du Contrat social* (1792), published a remarkable comparative study of the Roman voting assemblies, the French States-General, and the English Parliament.²⁰⁵ Its starting point is the role of the *comitia* as an instrument of the general will: from that vantage point, Gudin traces a history of Roman institutions from the regal period onwards, and of the political culture in which they operated. The system of magistracies is read as an instrument that limits the risk of abuse of power against the plebs: the tribunate is credited with a central and largely salutary role (38-45). Rome's great successes and the construction itself of the empire, on which Gudin expands at length (55-83), were made possible by an admirably balanced political system, an 'étonnant ensemble' in which 'les commotions intérieures n'affaiblirent point ses forces'.²⁰⁶ Its strength is indirectly revealed by its ability to maintain imperial dominions even during the 'great revolution' that led to the end of the Republic (83). Gudin summarizes the causes of that process under the heading 'Fautes, abus, imprévoyances' (83-97): the key factor he identifies is the unprecedented growth of the armies, called upon to defend an empire populated by multitudes of non-citizens and slaves. The enlistment of the *capite censi* thus becomes a necessity upon which unscrupulous political and military leaders rely (95-96). Imperial history, in some respects, begins with Sulla, who conquers Rome and aims to reform the Republic without understanding the need for a wholly new regime (97). Consistently with the aims of his work, Gudin identifies the turning point of Roman history in the shift from the primacy of the *comitia* to that of the armies.²⁰⁷

The definitive desacralization of Roman history was crucially supported by – though by no means confined to – a series of learned works, which were never devoid of an original historiographic and ideological approach: the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres was a major hub of that new historiographical season.²⁰⁸ It was not exclusively a French development. In England a series of

²⁰⁵ Gudin de la Bletterie 1789. See Nicolet 2003, 38-39.

²⁰⁶ Gudin de la Bletterie 1789, 60.

²⁰⁷ See Gudin de Bletterie 1789, 94-95 for a reflection on the political choices that may have halted that process.

²⁰⁸ See the remarkable picture sketched in Raskolnikoff 1992, 346-351, to which we can also add the brief memoir by the Abbé Nicolas-Hubert de Mongault (1674-1746; see Mongault 1717), who saw in the imperial cult the importation to Rome of a practice that was originally devoted to provincial governors, and an unmistakable sign of the end of republican freedom (363: after Pharsalus, the Romans became 'tout d'un coup de vils esclaves'). Mongault is best known as an editor and translator of the *Letters to Atticus* and Herodian.

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studies were produced on the Roman Senate, its membership, and its functions. The short tract that the Abbé Vertot was prompted to write by Earl Stanhope appeared in an English edition in the same year as the French one;²⁰⁹ a series of tracts followed, by Edward Spelman (1743: an appendix to a translation of Plb. 6.3-18), Conyers Middleton (1747; see §23), and Thomas Chapman (1750), within the space of less than a decade; Nathaniel Hooke, who is best known for a full-scale general discussion of Republican history (cf. §20), published a substantial volume of *Observations* on those four works (1758).²¹⁰

The mid-eighteenth century also witnessed altogether new modes of engagement with the ancient evidence. Two large-scale projects put forward an interpretation of the whole late Republican period through the study of the life and work of two ancient authors. Jacques Morabin (1687-1762) published an *Histoire de l'exile de Cicéron* (1725), which ends with a sizeable collection of *testimonia*, and, two decades later, an *Histoire de Cicéron* (1745), in three volumes, the last of which revolves around an astonishingly rich series of learned annotations. The impact of that work was hindered by the publication of the French translation of Conyers Middleton's biography (on which see below, §23), altogether different in outlook and literary quality, but not superior in terms of historical information.²¹¹ Both of Morabin's works were based on a long commitment to translation and scholarly investigation that led to a pioneering prosopographical work, the *Nomenclator Ciceronianus* (1757). In 1777 the major project of the Président de Brosses (Charles de Brosses, 1709-1777) came to completion, a few weeks before its author's death, having been in the making for three decades. It put forward a history of the last century of the Republic around a complete edition of the works of Sallust in three volumes:²¹² the two monographs frame a rewriting of the *Historiae* through the collection of fragments and the construction of extensive connecting sections.²¹³

The importance and originality of Montesquieu's reflections were also promptly recognized by alert readers beyond the Alps. The essay on the 'commercio dei Romani' that Francesco Mengotti (1749-1830), a nobleman from the Veneto, successfully submitted to a prize competition of the Académie des In-

²⁰⁹ Vertot 1721.

²¹⁰ That prompted further debate: cf. Spelman's riposte (1758) and the intervention of William Bowyer in Hooke's favour (1783, xi-xvi; followed by an index to Hooke's *Observations*).

²¹¹ Morabin 1725, esp. 409-468; Morabin 1745, esp. 3.i-ccclvii. Middleton, however, made use of Morabin's work on Cicero's exile. Cf. Grell 1995, 432-433, who sees in the contemporary publication of these works the symptom of a new interest in ancient Rome among the educated public, balanced out by a strong learned interest in Greek history.

²¹² De Brosses 1777.

²¹³ See Raskolnikoff 1992, 327-343; Grell 1995, 1018-1022; Marcone 2013, esp. 483-488.

scriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1786, and subsequently published in various Italian editions, owes a great debt to the French thinker: the thesis of a Roman hostility to trade develops arguments that were already made in *De l'esprit des loix*.²¹⁴ The periodisation envisaged by Mengotti – from the First Punic War to Constantine – was dictated by the theme of the essay competition advertised by the Académie, even if Mengotti included an introductory section on the first five centuries of Rome's history; the late Republican period, however, is the main focus of the essay.²¹⁵ The basic thesis is clearly stated: Rome was never able to develop a strong commercial infrastructure, neither within its dominions nor towards the outside. On the contrary, it was a predatory power: its economic structure is based on the acquisition of large amounts of war spoils, managed with unapologetic ruthlessness, and with the twofold aim of making exploitation as intensive as possible and preventing the economic and political recovery of the defeated communities.²¹⁶ The economic history of Rome, then, is the history of its imperialism, and involves the systematic denunciation of its abuses. The parasitic aspect of the Roman imperial strategy has its most radical manifestation in the conduct of publicans and provincial governors.²¹⁷ It is precisely to the publicani that is linked a moment of periodizing significance, on which Mengotti makes an explicit reference to *De l'esprit des loix*: the decision of Gaius Gracchus to hand control of the criminal courts to the knights marks the moment in which 'non si videro più nè [sic] virtù, nè onore, nè polizia, nè leggi, nè magistrature, nè magistrati'.²¹⁸ The link between the acquisitive aspects of Roman imperialism and the political decline on the domestic front is forcefully asserted, and is combined with an extensive critique of the consequences of luxury in Roman society, which neither Caesar nor others were able to direct 'al pubblico bene, facendolo diventare un'eccitamento [sic] dell'industria, un fomite del Commercio, e un veicolo della circolazione'.²¹⁹ Mengotti's harsh judgment on late Republican Rome does not become any more lenient for the imperial age, which he sees as a season of servitude, in which Italy suffered more than any

²¹⁴ The quotation is from the fourth Italian edition (Mengotti 1803). Roberto 2003, 354-361 is fundamental on Mengotti's debt to Montesquieu. See, from various standpoints, the important discussions in Raskolnikoff 1992, 248-249, 387-388; Gabba 1995, 63-72; Firpo 2008, 296-298 (= 2012, 36-37, 62-63).

²¹⁵ Mengotti 1803, 53-108.

²¹⁶ Cf. Mengotti 1803, 78 on Rome's habit of resorting to the 'barbara politica del Macchia-vello...: *Convien ridurre un paese di conquista ad uno stato, che non possa più rivoltarsi*".

²¹⁷ Mengotti 1803, 81-92.

²¹⁸ Mengotti 1803, 82-83; the reference is to *Esprit des Loix* 11.18.

²¹⁹ Mengotti 1803, 104. In the following paragraph, the image of luxury as 'una secrezione necessaria alla massa degli umori soprabbondanti della capitale' is also striking.

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other part of the empire:²²⁰ the allocation of land to veterans, the depopulation of the countryside, the concentration of property, and the disorderly growth of the city of Rome were its underlying themes. The only concern of the emperors, however, was the protection of the city and its people; although the very existence of the empire offered in principle the most favourable conditions for the development of trade, the emperors never had a clear strategy on how to build them.²²¹ The relationship between Rome and the empire was always one of ‘Commercio passivo’, which led to the gradual exhaustion of the resources gathered through military victories, to the impoverishment of the empire and, finally, to the revenge of the East on the West that had so ruthlessly plundered it.²²² In establishing a link between despotism and the ruin of trade Mengotti develops a theme that is already in Montesquieu.²²³

The Piedmontese Carlo Denina (1731-1813) stressed the importance of Montesquieu’s reflection right at the beginning of the second book of *Delle rivoluzioni d’Italia*, a vast account of the history of Italy from 390 BCE to 1792, the first two volumes of which appeared in 1796: the *Considérations* are singled out along with Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* as a key reflection on the history of the Roman Republic.²²⁴ Denina, however, puts both to task for failing to account for the importance of Italy in the development of Rome’s history and the emergence of its greatness, and identifies this theme as the central node of the second book, which sketches a picture of Republican history from the viewpoint of the relationship with Italy; the impact of Roman hegemony on the Peninsula is identified as a theme of equal significance.²²⁵ Denina’s history is not systematic, but articulates a strong and in many respects original interpretive framework: the extension of Roman citizenship is identified as the central theme. The Social War was a turning point, but caused Italy dreadful woes; the age of Marius and Sulla is the stage at which the Republic reaches a point of consumption, squeezed between two warring parties.²²⁶ The political unification of Italy had in

²²⁰ Mengotti 1803, 111: ‘Misera Italia! Ella fu tanto più infelice, quanto più vicina ai suoi tiranni’.

²²¹ Mengotti 1803, 139-140.

²²² Mengotti 1803, 151.

²²³ See Roberto 2003, 359-361.

²²⁴ Denina 1769, 63-64. See Marcone 2000, 1086 (= 2009, 41) and Firpo 2008, 288 (= 2012, 35). On the use of the term ‘rivoluzione’ in this context see Marcone 2000, 1078 n. 25 (= 2009, 34 n. 25).

²²⁵ Cf. I. II, ch. 4: ‘Stato politico d’Italia dopo che fu soggiogata da’ Romani’ (Denina 1769, 86-89).

²²⁶ Denina 1769, 93-94 (esp. 94, where Denina resorts to a language closely reminiscent of Machiavelli: ‘fino a quel tempo i cattivi umori erano stati dai pensieri di nemici esterni ritenuti in qualche calma ancor dopo le sedizioni dei Gracchi’).

turn very serious long-term consequences: the ‘rovina d’Italia’ began at the very moment when its prosperity appeared to be greatest.²²⁷ The political integration of the Italian elites led to an impoverishment of their communities, and accelerated a process of concentration of land ownership that was already well under way; the creation of ‘colonie militari’ in the last century of the Republic was another factor of impoverishment.²²⁸ On the other hand, the advent of a monarchic regime was a logical consequence of the extension of citizenship to the Italians: ‘le Repubbliche democratiche non possono sussistere se non che fra brevi limiti di dominio’.²²⁹ The ‘riforma dello Stato’ was an unavoidable necessity, postponed by the rebellion of Spartacus and subsequent civil wars, and finally addressed by the Augustan regime, which Denina defines as ‘di forma mista’, or a monarchy tempered by the Senate and supported by popular freedom.²³⁰

17. As we shall see in some detail below (§30), the legacy of Montesquieu’s thesis on the fall of the Roman Republic has not been exhausted or resolved, even in the most recent debates. Reflection on the unintended consequences of Rome’s imperial success has undergone many and varied developments, and has often been intertwined with the theoretical reflection on modern political setups. Some traces of that can be identified even before Montesquieu’s intervention in the debate. Between 1720 and 1723 John Trenchard (1662-1723) and Thomas Gordon (c. 1691-1750), two notable Whig polemicists, published in the *London Journal* and the *British Journal* a series of 144 letters on *Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, under the pseudonym of *Cato*, later collected in four volumes in 1724, and reissued on several occasions over the following decades.²³¹ In that series of essays the reflection on the needs and challenges of the political events of the time is structurally intertwined with the political and intellectual history of the late Republic. In the eleventh letter (7 January 1720), on the need to punish very serious crimes that are not explicitly sanctioned by existing laws, Gordon’s chosen starting point is the Ciceronian principle *salus populi suprema lex esto* (*Leg.* 3.8), and the development of the discussion includes a reflection on the intents and purposes of Roman dictatorship.²³² There is no solution of continuity between ancient and modern politics: the letter closes by asserting the central role of Parliament in

²²⁷ Denina 1769, 97.

²²⁸ Denina 1769, 103-105.

²²⁹ Denina 1769, 107. See Firpo 2008, 288-289 (= 2012, 28-30, 56).

²³⁰ See Marcone 2000, 1087 (= 2009, 42), who also emphasizes Denina’s sympathy towards the eighteenth-century ideal of the small state, and Firpo 2008, 289-290 (= 2012, 30-31, 56).

²³¹ The reference edition is Trenchard-Gordon 1995.

²³² Trenchard-Gordon 1995, 1.87.

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the English system.²³³ In letter 33 (17 June 1721) Gordon discusses the very serious risks of ‘natural encroachments of power’, and Pompey emerges as an especially relevant case study, even more so than Nero.²³⁴ His example demonstrates the absolute necessity of restraining the power of the magistrates: Rome’s freedom lasted as long as there was an adequate degree of control over office-holders. Once the arbitrary rule of a few men had been imposed, the city was first defenceless against the attacks of its tyrants (Caesar is the most prominent example), and then also against external enemies. Thus, almost surprisingly, and without further discussion, a necessary link emerges between the fall of the Republic and that of the Empire.

In later years Gordon pursued that link from an original perspective in two collections of essays published to supplement the editions of Tacitus and Sallust that he edited between 1728 and 1744. His *Discourses* are a remarkable example of how one could aspire to a productive balance between the interpretation of an author or a text, and the discussion of the big-picture problems presented by that work. The structure of the essays on Tacitus is revealing: an assessment of the value of the available English translations and a general introduction to the author’s life and work are immediately followed by an essay on Julius Caesar and his role in the establishment of the regime to which Tacitus devotes his discussion.²³⁵ Subsequently, the discussion shifts to Augustus, and then takes on a thematic structure: the nature of the imperial regime, the prosecutions for high treason, the role of the judicial system, and the army. The loss of political freedom is thus the underlying issue, which also explains the choice to give attention to a character that is discussed only tangentially in Tacitus’ work. Caesar, however, is credited with a decisive role: to him – a Catiline who had the good fortune not to be defeated – is attributed the arrival of corruption in Rome. Even his celebrated clemency is explained by the intention to buttress his regime; his murder was lawful, because the tyrannical nature of his regime had made it necessary. ‘Octavius Caesar’ also deserves the same label of usurper: his rise is based on deceit and fraud, and his whole political trajectory may be explained as ‘all one train of perfidiousness’.²³⁶ In the *Discourses* on Tacitus the references to the fall of the Republic are tightly concentrated on the last thirty years, especially the rise of Caesar, despite some cursory mentions of the ‘usurpations’ of Marius and Sulla; in those on Sallust the perspective widens and the focus becomes

²³³ Trenchard-Gordon 1995, 1.93.

²³⁴ Trenchard-Gordon 1995, 1.236 (with an explicit reference to Tac. *Ann.* 3.28.1: *suarum-que legum auctor idem ac subuersor*). See Straumann 2016, 313-316. See Ayres 1997, 21 and Andrew 2011, 58-62 for a reading of the letters as a case for an optimate republicanism.

²³⁵ Gordon 1753, 185-201. See Pocock 2003, 316-318.

²³⁶ Gordon 1753, 206.

more precise. The basic problem is no longer the Principate, but the forms and modes of political divisions, on which the work of Sallust offered especially productive ideas: the first speech is entitled 'Of Faction and Parties', the second 'Of Patriots and Parricides'.²³⁷ The contempt for Caesar remains profound, as is shown by the reflection on the comparison with Cato Uticensis, but the historical events of the late Republic receive much closer attention.²³⁸

A whole *Discourse* is devoted to Sulla's decision to leave power:²³⁹ a theme that, like Caesar's dictatorship, is marginal in its author's project, but contributes to its framework. Several moments of Sallust's narrative prompt an important reflection on the tribunate of the plebs: a careful analysis, not focused on short-term aspects, shows how in that magistracy there were the seeds of personal rule and the premises for the rise of 'popular Tyrants'.²⁴⁰ The Gracchi, with their radical methods, are fully included in this tradition, beyond their nobility of character and intent, and the seriousness of the agrarian question that they tried to solve. In their case, the theme of the heterogenesis of ends and that of the medical metaphor merge: the medicine they had prepared against the dominance of the nobles would have had a lethal outcome for Republican freedom.²⁴¹ The history of the Republic – even in its most prosperous phase – is not one of orderly coexistence between the Senate and the people, nor of elegant compensation between two forces that end up balancing each other. On the contrary, it is based on the attempt of one camp to prevail over the other; the monarchic outcome is finally made possible by the alliance between the people and a leader. Another original aspect in Gordon's argument is the notion itself of corruption, which requires careful consideration: one can rightly invoke it for projects that pose a threat to the civil order, but strategies that aim at defending the existing political order can also make use of the same methods, even though their aims are quite different. The methods of Cicero and Catiline are not too unlike each other.²⁴² To emphasize the possible affinity between virtue and corruption does not amount to denying their fundamental differences: on the contrary, for late Republican Rome one can identify without any doubt a path of corruption, which spread among the people, and on which Caesar based his political fortunes. In Gordon the anti-monarchic sentiment is intertwined with the prejudice against the people.

²³⁷ Gordon 1744, 1-35.

²³⁸ See Ward 1964, 423-424.

²³⁹ Gordon 1744, 60-64.

²⁴⁰ Gordon 1744, 81.

²⁴¹ Gordon 1744, 78. See Ward 1964, 424.

²⁴² Gordon 1744, 98.

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The work of Trenchard and Gordon had considerable resonance in North America, and the choice of using a pseudonym drawn from Roman history found at least another notable parallel in that context.²⁴³ In *The Federalist Papers* (1787-1788) James Madison (1751-1836) reflects on the risks posed by the presence of a permanent military force in the context of a federal political order (ch. 41), and evokes the disturbing precedent of the Roman legions: a model of discipline and a decisive instrument in the construction of Roman hegemony, which proved fatal to the survival of Republican freedom. Other aspects of the Roman institutional construction were instead based, according to the authors of the Papers, on more careful and far-sighted reflection: in discussing the merits of the institution of a House of Representatives, Madison notes that the tribunate of the plebs was ‘that branch of a free government, which has the people on its side’: it was deliberately intended to counterbalance the Senate, and often succeeded in prevailing upon it.²⁴⁴ Here the pressures of political controversy lead Madison (who writes, like his co-authors Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, under the pseudonym *Publius*) astray: the urgency of recognizing in the democratically elected assembly the bulwark of the US Constitution and its principles induces him to unduly simplify the complexity of the relations between tribunes and Senate in Republican Rome.

18. In other instances the discussion of the history of Rome was part of a broader reflection on the link between politics and morality, and between politics and religion. In 1663 an original work by Charles de Saint-Évremond (1614-1703) had offered a full-scale treatment of the Roman Republic through a discussion of the ‘divers génies du peuple romain dans les divers temps de la république’.²⁴⁵ In modernizing, but not entirely misplaced, terms, one might say that a link is established between political developments and the history of mentality. The periodisation is in itself of the greatest interest: the work opens with the monarchic period, and closes with the end of the age of Tiberius. To be fully understood, the Republic must be studied in the light of what precedes and immediately follows it. Within this broad analytical framework, some phases of historical development are then identified: the beginning of the Republican age, when the Romans are ‘furieux de liberté et bien public’ (46), fierce and incorruptible. The war with Pyrrhus is a first turning point, because it puts them in

²⁴³ On the impact of this work in North America see Barry 2007. On the classicism of the Founders see Richard 1994; cf. Cole 2019 on the influence of Cicero’s thought. On Madison’s education see esp. Richard 1994, 25-26.

²⁴⁴ Madison-Hamilton-Jay 1987, 374-375.

²⁴⁵ I quote from Saint-Évremond 1865, 38-254. On this work see the careful readings of Hope 1999, 291-320; Andrivet 1998, and, more concisely, Andrivet 2000.

contact with Greek culture and a new way of conducting public affairs: the confrontation with a fearsome enemy leads them to make even greater efforts, and to replace the ‘vaillance féroce’ of their early history with a new combination of courage and resolve. The culminating moment of Republican history, however, was the Hannibalic War, to which Saint-Évremond devoted a long chapter: ‘la République... a eu auparavant plus d’auster té ; elle a eu depuis plus de grandeur, jamais un mérite si véritable’.²⁴⁶ Already towards the end of the conflict a new factionalism begins to assert itself (ch. 8), and the fate of Scipio Africanus in the years following the war is adduced as decisive proof of the growing moral corruption of the senatorial order, in which ambition and the desire for glory prevail, rather than any concern for the collective good – ‘le genie d’intérêt qui prit la place de celui de l’honneur’.²⁴⁷

It is in this context that the initiative of the Gracchi takes shape: Saint-Évremond discusses it at the very end of the chapter, integrating it firmly into a political and moral process that has already been underway for decades. At this point, which for our purposes would be decisive, the work breaks off. The text of the following seven chapters, covering the rest of the Republican period, was lost along with most of the papers that Saint-Évremond, leaving for exile in the Netherlands in 1665, deposited with his friend Edmund Waller, who then died in the Great Plague of London. Only their summaries survive, hinting at a firmly Sallustian reading of the late Republic, with overviews of chapters on the Jugurthine War, Metellus, and Catiline’s conspiracy. On his return from exile, Saint-Évremond did not rewrite the chapters that had gone lost, but resumed his account from the Augustan age, on which he voiced a clearly positive judgment, which is in part surprising against the backdrop of the admiration that he had previously voiced for Republican freedom. The victor of Actium, in his view, succeeded in creating an ‘heureuse sujétion, plus éloignée de la servitude que l’ancienne liberté’, founded on the widespread recognition of the historical necessity of the new regime.²⁴⁸ The people recognized it as a check on their seditiousness; the Senate as a limit to its iniquity. Tiberius – whose faults were clear to Augustus, by the end of his life incapable of dealing with Livia’s schemes – marked instead the beginning of a regime in which the principles of government of Augustus were betrayed, and a tyrannical design asserted itself; the ‘docilité’ that had prevailed in the Augustan age made it tolerable until the age of Nero.

The decision to integrate the story of the Gracchi with the developments of mid-Republican history also informs another major discussion of the Roman Republic, the *Histoire des révolutions arrivées dans le gouvernement de la ré-*

²⁴⁶ Saint-Évremond 1865, 73.

²⁴⁷ Saint-Évremond 1865, 105.

²⁴⁸ Saint-Évremond 1865, 111.

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publique romaine by the Abbé René Aubert de Vertot (1655-1735), published in 1719.²⁴⁹ The work, in fourteen books, is a wide-ranging narrative overview of the whole of Roman history from the regal period to the end of the Republic. The reference to the ‘revolutions’ in the title does not imply an exclusive, or even strong, concentration on what a century later several German-speaking historians defined as *Revolutionszeit*, but should rather be explained with the intention of reconstructing the history of the Republic through its main political upheavals.²⁵⁰ The tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus is introduced towards the end of the eighth book, after a bitter reflection on the pernicious consequences of the conquest of Carthage and the advent of luxury in Rome. The opposition to the initiatives of the tribune is described as the resistance of a faction of plutocrats who viewed themselves as above the law. Vertot is very well acquainted with the literary tradition, but his interest is essentially moralistic, focusing primarily on the tension between freedom and corruption, and between poverty and wealth.²⁵¹ At the same time, he is clear about the quality of the historical process he is dealing with. Its outcome, marked by the battle of Philippi, is the end of Republican freedom. Augustus was an able prince, who ‘accoutuma insensiblement des hommes libres à la servitude’, and made an undoubtedly monarchic regime tolerable.

This argument was already in Saint-Évremond, but Vertot’s enterprise broke fresh ground: it set new standards of historical investigation and writing, which had a great impact both in France and abroad.²⁵² The prolific polemicist Simon-Nicholas Henri Linguet (1736-1794), a vocal supporter of absolutism, produced a continuation of that great work, an *Histoire des Révolutions de l’Empire Romain*, in two volumes and eight books (1766-1768), which ended with the assassination of Alexander Severus and Julia Mamaea.²⁵³ In eighteenth-

²⁴⁹ Raskolnikoff 1992, 29-38. Nicolet 2003, 27-31 and Andrew 2011, 117-118 offer useful contextualizations of Vertot’s work within the framework of European historiography.

²⁵⁰ As far as I have been able to establish, the term ‘révolution’ first appeared in the title of a study on the late Republic in 1679, when Ancheman de Martignac published in Paris *Révolution de l’état populaire en monarchique par le différend de César et de Pompée (non uidi)*: despite the title, it is a summary of the civil war of 49/46 BCE, without a critical analysis of the ensuing political change (Raskolnikoff 1983b, 122-123 = 1990, 152-153). On the term ‘révolution’ in the context of the eighteenth-century French historiographical debate see Grell 1995, 1039-1048. On the distinction between the concepts of crisis and revolution see Vierhaus 1978, 324 and 1979, 78-79.

²⁵¹ See Raskolnikoff 1992, 36-37 on Vertot’s tendency not to question the validity of the literary tradition.

²⁵² The invitation of Earl Stanhope to write a tract on the membership of the Senate (Vertot 1721) is early and significant evidence of the interest his work raised beyond France. See Wiesen 2020, 162 on the impact of Vertot in the United States.

²⁵³ Linguet 1766-1768.

century France other attempts were made to draw a general picture of Republican history, with even greater ambition, and on an extraordinary scale.²⁵⁴ Two members of the Society of Jesus, François Catrou (1659-1737) and Pierre-Julien Rouillé (1684-1740), published a history of Rome in twenty-two volumes, between 1722 and 1737, which set out to base a narrative reconstruction on a systematic review of antiquarian sources. Arnaldo Momigliano saw in its preface one of the early examples of the conscious intention to overcome an antiquarian approach by adopting an historical outlook.²⁵⁵ The critical integration of the sources into the structure of the discussion is a necessary part of that project. It is precisely the hypertrophic size of the work that raise doubts about its actual success, though, and the effectiveness of its selection criteria, pervaded by a totalizing ambition.²⁵⁶ However, there is no lack of valuable interpretive insights, which are also reflected in the general structure of the work. The link between imperial expansion and political collapse is clearly established on several occasions. The defeat of external enemies is accompanied by the emergence of ‘vipères plus cruelles’ within the political community.²⁵⁷ The determining factor is the interaction between luxury and sedition, between ‘violences du peuple’ and ‘libertinage’, and the process identified is that of a simultaneous growth of the empire and the ambition of some to dominate it,²⁵⁸ hence a keen interest of the story of Catiline. Catrou and Rouillé’s history is certainly moralistic, but reflects religious concerns only occasionally (the fifteenth volume closes with the conquest of the Temple in Jerusalem); rather, political preoccupations are at its core. The close of the work, after sixteen volumes and sixty-four books, is the death of Pompey: Republican freedom is buried with his ashes.²⁵⁹ Caesar’s victory and the Triumviral age do not belong in the Republican period, and the age of Octavian becomes the subject of a supplementary volume, adjoined to the work as a separate appendix (1735); in the subtitle he is significantly referred to as the ‘second empereur’.²⁶⁰

Charles Rollin (1661-1741), Professor of Eloquence at the Collège Royal, *recteur* of the University of Paris, editor of Quintilian, devoted the final stretch of a very distinguished career to a vast *Histoire romaine depuis la fonda-*

²⁵⁴ For an overview of the scholarship on Greek and Roman history in eighteenth-century France, which was especially intense from 1730 onwards, see Grell 1995, 290-292.

²⁵⁵ Momigliano 1950, 294 (= 1955, 79).

²⁵⁶ On the reception of this work, whose coverage ends with the early imperial period, see Grell 1995, 843-844.

²⁵⁷ Catrou-Rouillé 1730a, 186.

²⁵⁸ Catrou-Rouillé 1730a, 286.

²⁵⁹ Catrou-Rouillé 1730b, 678.

²⁶⁰ Catrou-Rouillé 1735.

tion de Rome jusqu'à la bataille d'Actium (1738-1748), which shares many of the shortcomings of the work of Cadou and Rouillé, and a similar approach to the ancient sources.²⁶¹ He died before he could properly devote himself to the history of the late Republic, but his published work does convey a clear sense of his views on the period. In the *Traité d'Études* (1726-1728), in which he had outlined a vast programme for the teaching of *Belles-Lettres* at the *Faculté des Arts* of the University of Paris, Rollin dwelt on the importance of Roman history, the culminating point of secular history, 'la plus riche de toutes les Histoires en grands événements et en grands exemples', and identified in Echard, Vertot, and Bossuet the three main modern authorities.²⁶² The brief overview of late Republican history that Rollin produced in the same work hinged on moralistic considerations: the two key drivers were the spread of luxury and the desire for domination, often cloaked in disingenuous references to virtue and glory.²⁶³ The tendency to set the story around some great figures, from the Gracchi to the 'jeune Octavius', is closely aligned with that moralistic approach: Rollin reproduces the laudatory judgement that Saint-Évremond expressed about him, and the providential reading of his victory put forward by S. Le Nain de Tillemont in *Histoire des Empereurs romains* (1690-1697, 1738).²⁶⁴

The whole of the eighth volume of the *Histoire romaine* is devoted to the age of the Gracchi – 'une triste époque', which opened a series of seditions and led to the fall of a freedom 'qui ne servoit plus qu'à donner des tyrans à la République sous le nom de défenseurs'.²⁶⁵ In the closing pages of the previous volume, Rollin had already dwelled on the moral decline – gradual but unmistakable – that the city went through. Its first signs may be seen in hindsight as early as at the beginning of the second century, when the deaths of the Scipios were mourned more sadly by the Iberians than by the Romans. Rollin also uses the well-worn medical metaphor, with the image of a disease that takes possession of 'toute une nation'.²⁶⁶ The work was continued and brought to completion by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crévier (1693-1765), who was able to make use of Rollin's preparatory materials only for the ninth volume, and remained faithful to the general approach of his predecessor and mentor for the remaining seven. The

²⁶¹ Rollin-Crévier 1738-1748. For a recent discussion see Verhaart 2020, 172-189. The *Histoire romaine* follows a fourteen-volume *Histoire ancienne* (1730-1738) ranging from ancient Egypt to the Greek world: a work of considerable impact, in which the providential approach already has a decisive weight (see Grell 1995, 877-881).

²⁶² Rollin 1740, 1.57. On the *Traité* see Grell 1995, 7-16.

²⁶³ Rollin 1740, 2.415.

²⁶⁴ Rollin 1740, 2.434-436.

²⁶⁵ Rollin-Crévier 1743, 5.

²⁶⁶ Rollin 1742, 601.

periodisation goes as far as the battle of Actium, according to the terms set in the title of the work. The evaluation of Augustus on which the sixteenth and final volume ends is, on the one hand, a balanced judgment of the historical role of the character and, on the other, a summative reflection on the whole trajectory of the late Republic ('cette grande révolution') that ends up exceeding the boundaries of historical enquiry: the advent of the monarchy was not only a necessary development ('la seule ressource de la République'), but a providential outcome, which created the conditions for the rise of Christianity.²⁶⁷ The end of senatorial hegemony was a decisive factor.²⁶⁸ If an assembly made up of a solid majority of pagans had remained in control of the empire, it would have been impossible for the new religion to gain a dominant position.

19. Those broad overviews had considerable impact, in France and well beyond, and paved the way for new interpretive discussions, in which serious and ambitious scholarship was hardly ever divorced from pressing political and philosophical concerns. In 1751 Gabriel de Mably (1709-1785) published the first edition of a volume of *Observations sur les Romains*, in six books, which followed a similar text of *Observations sur les Grecs*, which had appeared two years earlier; in 1740, he had already printed, with Didot, a *Parallèle des Romains et des François*. Mably's thinking is firmly framed within a broader field of political concerns, which the later developments in his work further confirmed, making him a central figure in the intellectual debates that preceded the Revolution.²⁶⁹ The *Observations*, of which a second edition appeared in 1767, takes as its vantage point a specific aspect of the history of Rome: the Republican government and the causes that led to the demise of freedom. The analysis is primarily thematic: a narrative account of the developments from the Gracchi to Augustus is put forward in the second book. The explanation identified by Mably sums up two well-established historiographical themes: moral corruption and the preponderant weight of provincial governors.²⁷⁰ In this regard, Mably has a highly original proposal, which brings him into the realm of counterfactual history: if in each province a Senate had been established on the direct mandate of the Roman one, the proconsuls would not have achieved the overwhelming power that they ended up gaining.²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Crévier 1749, 179.

²⁶⁸ Crévier 1780, 180.

²⁶⁹ See Wood 2013, 45-51 on Mably's role in modern historiography on the early Middle Ages.

²⁷⁰ Mably 1767, 58.

²⁷¹ Mably 1767, 65-66.

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Other important historiographical insights qualify and clarify the picture. In Rome, the awareness of political decline asserted itself very slowly, without there being a clear perception of that process for a long time; moreover, in Rome an impoverished population was dangerously receptive to the possibility of a tyrannical turn (62-63). The political system was intrinsically unstable: personal ambition was a central factor, and could often take on the semblance of selfless sympathy towards the cause of the people. Tiberius Gracchus was driven by personal aims, and used the fight against the rich as a means to advance his own position (73). Mably, however, established a clear distinction between ambition and despotism: Marius still kept to the right side of the divide, while Sulla was the first to establish tyrannical supremacy. With the so-called First Triumvirate, the shifting balance of the Republic, alternatively aristocratic and popular, stabilized in an oligarchic settlement. On the other hand, the Senate had by then lost the ability to play a central historical role: that is amply apparent from its conduct in the months following the Ides of March. Cicero, to whom Mably pays special attention, summarizes in his own trajectory many of the shortcomings of the whole governing class. Octavian, on the contrary, is a striking example of the impact that ambition could have on a political context such as that of Republican Rome when it was not led astray or moderated by other passions (136). Being a man without virtues or vices, entirely devoted to the acquisition of power, he could read the opportunities presented to him by a period of anarchy with admirable clarity. The destruction of freedom in Rome is brought about by three battles (Pharsalus, Philippi, and Actium: 144), but the roots of the process are deep. Nor can Augustus be credited with a strategy of regeneration: the Roman people were in no fit state to revive a history of liberty, notwithstanding the willingness of the *princeps* to exercise moderation.²⁷² The destiny of Rome is thus that of a renewed, irrevocable despotism.

The historical picture of ancient Rome offered by Mably's younger brother, Étienne de Condillac (1714-1780), is less well known, but certainly interesting – not least because it follows rather different lines. Condillac, an original thinker linked to the *Encyclopédie* and to the origins of the *Idéologues* movement, and a pioneering theorist of knowledge, in 1758 was appointed as tutor to the Duke of Parma Ferdinand of Bourbon, nephew of Louis XV, and composed for him an extensive *Cours d'Études*, later published in 1775. The history of Rome is framed within a broader reconstruction of the history of mankind.²⁷³ The most

²⁷² Mably 1767, 146. On Mably's position in the anti-Augustan tradition see Weinbrot 1978, 223.

²⁷³ The period from the First Punic War to Octavian's victory is discussed in Books 8-10: Condillac 1798. See Guerci 1978, esp. 213-239 on the section of the *Cours* devoted to Roman history.

original and significant aspect of the discussion is the tendency to belittle the exceptional nature of Roman history and to deny its exemplary value.²⁷⁴ There are significant lines of convergence with the interpretation put forward in Mably's *Observations*: the decisive weight of moral factors in the decline of the Republic, the role of personal ambition, the sceptical judgment on Octavian. 146 BCE is identified as a periodizing moment, marking the transition from the eighth to the ninth book of Condillac's extensive discussion. The choice of emphasizing moral decline, though, is not tantamount to repeating the well-known cliché of so much of the historiographic tradition. It is instead a decisive aspect of a reading that consistently downplays Rome's virtues. If it is true that the rise of the Republic was due to moral rigour and military supremacy, the two factors were not the outcome of political choices or coherent strategies: on the contrary, the whole structure of the Roman polity took shape almost by accident. The Roman constitution is not the result of a precise design, nor is the conflict that repeatedly runs through it in any way intentional; there is indeed a basic link between wars and good government in Roman history, but the Senate had no awareness of it.²⁷⁵ The strongest attribute of the Roman Republic was instead the ability to unintentionally affirm and uncritically reproduce, for centuries, some 'maximes', and indeed some 'prejudices'. This is in no way exceptional feature; on the contrary, it is a tendency that Rome shares with Sparta, and with all 'nations'.²⁷⁶

The decline of the Republic also occurred through largely undetected processes. The impact of luxury and public prosperity was underestimated, and moral decline was followed by widespread contempt for the law. The victory over the Gracchi persuaded the Senate of the effectiveness of political violence; the indiscriminate exploitation of the provinces was affirmed; the power of donations to the soldiery soon became apparent. The picture is even more clear-cut than in Mably: we end up having neither a democracy nor an aristocracy, but an incessant clash between armed leaders.²⁷⁷ The process has its own clear internal logic, but is not driven by the strategic design of a great man. Even the conclusive moment of that long season, Octavian's victory, is the result of largely fortuitous circumstances, among which there were the grave errors of his opponents. His personal qualities are actually far inferior to Caesar's, and flattery is a defining trait of his time.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Guerci 1987, 441: 'la più antiromana delle storie romane del Settecento francese'.

²⁷⁵ Condillac 1798, 275-276.

²⁷⁶ Condillac 1798, 289-290.

²⁷⁷ Condillac 1798, 355-357.

²⁷⁸ Condillac 1798, 620.

20. Condillac never mentions the name of the greatest French-speaking Roman historian of the eighteenth century, Louis de Beaufort (1703-1795): a scholar whose impact was nothing short of transformative, and who is mainly associated with his critical study of Rome's origins, conducted in the celebrated *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des cinq premiers siècles de l'Histoire romaine* (1738). Three decades later Beaufort had also published a broader historical-antiquarian picture of the Republic, *La République Romaine, ou Plan général de l'ancien gouvernement de Rome* (1766), where a detailed critical enquiry was accompanied by a coherent ordering vision, which placed the project in the intellectual lineage of Sigonio and de Grouchy.²⁷⁹ It is neither a narrative history nor the treatment of a particular theme, but rather an analytical discussion of Roman institutions: the cartographic analogy that is implicit in the title is illustrative of the general ambition. In the handling of some specific problems, wider interpretive insights emerge. The long chapter on the *comitia* (ed. 1767, 3.6: a theme on which de Grouchy had written a major work) becomes an opportunity to discuss the problem of popular power and its relationship with that of the Senate, and to address the agrarian question and the Gracchan initiative. Having set these premises, an historical picture of the 'ruin' of the Republic then takes shape. The intentions of the two tribunes were noble, but proved to be a mortal blow to the Republic: their initiative opened the eyes of the people to the abuses of the nobility and opened a long season of hatred and conflict.²⁸⁰ Sulla's attempt to bring stability was soon thwarted by the unscrupulousness of Pompey, who in turn would himself end up in the rubble of the Republic.²⁸¹ The disorder that reigns in the *comitia* is revealing of more serious and widespread disruption: by the end of the 60s, the Republic was reduced to a ghost. In spite of his appreciation of the aims of the Gracchi, de Beaufort saw in the Senate the ultimate hurdle to the end of Republican freedom, in the face of the indifference of the people and the overwhelming ambitions of certain individuals;²⁸² Cicero's exile is an example of how the cause of Republican liberty was lost.²⁸³ Recognition of the abuses of the nobility is thus accompanied, with even greater strength, by the anarchy created by a 'vile populace' (313), which has by then lost all interest in

²⁷⁹ On this work see Guerci 1987; Raskolnikoff 1992, 446-454 (the book as a whole may be read as a vast reflection on the whole production of de Beaufort and his role in European historiography); Pocock 2003, 361-371; Balbo 2020, 117-125. On Condillac's possible, though unstated, debt to de Beaufort see Guerci 1987, 440-441.

²⁸⁰ Ed. 1767, 2.298-299. See Guerci 1987, 446-449; Pocock 2003, 365-367; Balbo 2020, 123-124.

²⁸¹ Ed. 1767, 2.307.

²⁸² Ed. 1767, 2.308-309, 313, 315-316.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* 318.

the greater good of the Republic. There is an unresolved tension in the argument: economic and moral factors are intertwined, without a clear reading being offered. The problem is resolved in favour of the second hypothesis in the last chapter of the work (8.8), where the theme of the frugality of the Roman people is discussed. The speech of Spurius Ligustinus in Livy is singled out as an exemplary model of civic and military discipline, which allows de Beaufort to establish a clear opposition between the morally unscathed rural plebs and the corrupt and ethnically mixed urban plebs.²⁸⁴ Here, too, there is a restatement of a familiar view: the Gracchi started a process that ended with Caesar's rise to power.²⁸⁵ An even stronger position was argued in the following year by Gautier de Sibert (ca. 1720-1798), in a paper presented at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, the 'Dissertation sur la loi Sempronia', where the judicial law of Gaius Gracchus is identified as the moment that broke a long tradition of Republican stability and balance between the three powers, and had fatal consequences for the common freedom. In this schematic, if original, analysis the influence of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des loix* is patently at work.²⁸⁶

In England, Nathaniel Hooke (ca. 1687-1763) produced an historical account of great commitment and ambition, in direct conversation with those produced across the Channel. Over a period of more than thirty years (1738-1771) he published a *Roman History, from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*, divided into eleven books and destined to have lasting success: the last edition appeared in 1830. The dedicatory epistle, addressed to Alexander Pope, contains a revealing statement of intent: Hooke's ambition was to write a 'History of Roman virtue and patriotism'.²⁸⁷ The work, however, is above all a narrative history, into which some elements of learned discussion are slotted (among which stands out a proposal of palingenesis of the Twelve Tables: book 2, ch. 27), along with moralistic evaluations that serve as points of general orien-

²⁸⁴ Ed. 1767, 6.368-390.

²⁸⁵ Ed. 1767, 6.389-390. Guerci 1987, 448 emphasizes the importance of the critique of the nobility, and its indifference to the case for reform made by the Gracchi. See also Pocock 2003, 371, who views in this passage the trace of 'democratic sympathies' on de Beaufort's part.

²⁸⁶ De Sibert 1774. See Raskolnikoff 1992, 325-327.

²⁸⁷ Hooke 1830, vi. On Hooke's relationship with Pope and their engagement in the Tory opposition to Walpole see Weinbrot 1978, 94-96; the anti-Augustan approach is in keeping with that political attitude (see *ibid.* on the 'bipartisan' character of the devaluation of Augustus in the English seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). On Hooke's political views see Ayres 1997, 19-21 and Akça Ataç 2013, 495; on the originality of his historiographical project see Ward 1964, 443-455; Turner 1986, 582-584; Sampson 2008, 199-207; Pocock 2003, 363; McDaniel 2013, 124-126. – The essays collected in Hooke 1758 give the measure of his alertness to recent and contemporary scholarship.

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tation.²⁸⁸ The thread of the discussion is chronological, but the moral development of the city's history is a theme that punctuates the organization of the subject matter. Given these premises, it is unsurprising that the cardinal moment of the work should be 146 BCE, which marks the beginning of the sixth book, and of an historical phase in which Roman power becomes irresistible. The absence of any competition and the voracious ambition of the Roman ruling class leads to commit inequities both towards foreign populations (including some long-standing allies) and towards the less privileged sectors of the civic body. The initiative of the Gracchi sought to remedy a socially and morally disorderly situation, and was driven by noble considerations of principle.²⁸⁹

The reaction of the nobility, however, leads to the 'utter ruin of Roman liberty'. After the death of Gaius Gracchus, the tribunes realized that collusion with the Senate was the only way to ensure their own survival; none of them would have the courage and generosity to uphold 'the true interest of the people'. Here lies a watershed: from this point onwards, civil conflicts will be between the Senate and 'a few grandees', or between one 'grandee' and another. The path is thus marked out: the outcome of the political dispute will be 'the subjection of Rome to an absolute and confirmed monarchy'.²⁹⁰ At the beginning of the following book, the seventh, Hooke offers a comment that further clarifies the picture, and his whole interpretive proposal. The central node of the historical juncture between the second and first centuries BCE is the massive imbalance of wealth within the civic body, which was the result of unscrupulous political choices of the Roman nobility. Here lies the profound cause of the end of the Republic: 'nothing can be more absurd than to imagine liberty and equality, an equilibrium of power, to endure in a state, where the majority of those, who make the laws, and determine the most important affairs of the public, have no land, no stable property; and who, for a subsistence, depend chiefly on what they can get by selling their votes to the rich and the ambitious'.²⁹¹ The fall of the Republic was on the cards: not so much because of the challenges posed by the Mediterranean empire, but because of strictly internal reasons and specifically material factors. From here stems a criticism of the moralistic and rhetorical historiography to which Hooke's project would seem at first sight to lead back: blaming Caesar or others for having subverted the Republic is a fruitless opera-

²⁸⁸ Hooke also shows a strong interest in questions of chronology: see Raskolnikoff 1992, 186-197.

²⁸⁹ On this aspect and its contemporary resonances see Andrew 2011, 62-63.

²⁹⁰ Hooke 1830, 3.642.

²⁹¹ Hooke 1830, 4.7.

tion – ‘idle talk, empty, unmeaning declamation’.²⁹² The ‘grandees’ of the late Republic simply drew the consequences of a state of affairs created by others: where the margin for establishing a new power is created, someone is destined to seize the opportunity. Hooke unequivocally attributes the main responsibility for the ‘mischief’ suffered by the Republic to the Senate and its ‘inexcusable folly of returning to its old pursuit of unconstitutional wealth and sway’;²⁹³ the reference is to the state of affairs before the settlement of the Conflict of the Orders. Having established that interpretive approach, and having identified a clear underlying theme in Roman Republican politics, the whole last century of the Republic can be read as an unrelenting competition for power. Even the balance defined in January 27 BCE can be explained within the parameters set a century earlier, with the failure of the Gracchi: ‘to sooth the senate and make himself popular’.²⁹⁴

David Hume (1711-1776), in his essay *On the Populousness of Ancient Nations*, first published in 1752, put forward a sharply different interpretation.²⁹⁵ In his view, the late Republic was an historical phase in which Roman politics took a bitter turn after centuries of concord and order, during which the Romans had shown the same moderation that, according to Hume, is often uncritically attributed to the Greeks. His key source in this regard is Appian: the *Civil Wars* are the most atrocious picture of massacres and violence known to history.²⁹⁶ The central theme of Hume’s work is to demonstrate the fallacy of the thesis that the ancient world was more populous than the modern one; the treatise as a whole consistently supports a broader view that ancient were in no way superior to modern ones. The violence of late Republican Rome is an exemplary case in point. The Gracchan age is an obvious watershed, for which no justification is even offered. Hume explicitly draws this point from Appian, and combines it with a distinctive argument on the role of law in late Republican history: in the final phase of the Republic, laws were no longer able to protect the civic order, because they were too mild. The absence of capital punishment was the factor that prevented appropriate initiatives against those who threatened the very existence of the Republic; exile was an inadequate deterrent. That void of legal agency ended up being filled by private revenge. The analysis thus stands at the crossroads between legal and moral factors. Curiously enough Hume, an avid reader of Appian, does not appear to see the connection between agrarian ques-

²⁹² Hooke 1830, 4.8. See the juxtaposition of Hooke and Sir Ronald Syme in Ward 1964, 454 (esp. in the judgment on Cato).

²⁹³ Hooke 1830, 4.6.

²⁹⁴ Hooke 1830, 6.365.

²⁹⁵ Hume 1875, 381-443.

²⁹⁶ Hume 1875, 408.

tion, demographic developments, and political conflict, which became one of the main areas of scholarly debate and controversy in the second half of the twentieth century.

21. Other eighteenth-century interpreters attempted a deeper integration of Republican and Imperial history, sometimes with remarkable results, which paved the way for new historiographical developments.²⁹⁷ The analysis of the end of what Machiavelli had called the 'vivere libero' found new relevance in the discussion of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. An integrated reflection on those two historical events, clearly distinct and yet broadly comparable, gained strength from that analogical approach.²⁹⁸ The historiographical inspiration that drew inspiration from a philosophical standpoint were especially fertile ground. Giambattista Vico (1668-1774) put forward, as is well known, a wide-ranging interpretation of Roman history, in which he identified powerful and complex connections between clan structures, land distribution, and political order.²⁹⁹ The clash between patricians and plebeians led to the compromise of the drafting of a code of written laws, the Twelve Tables, which shifted the control of law from the few to the multitude. Yet, according to Vico, the Senate firmly conducted the affairs of the Republic until the initiative of the Gracchi, who, in spite of being led by a sincere concern for the conditions of the plebeians, marked the end of 'Roman heroism': the end of an aristocratic state and the emergence of a popular republic, where misguided philosophy and misleading eloquence prevailed, and where a tyrannical regime soon asserted itself, after a cycle of civil wars and illegal external wars.³⁰⁰ Vico was sympathetic towards the material conditions of the Roman plebs, but his judgment on its political role was largely negative. The monarchy founded by Augustus is an original form of popular regime, which is based on the consent of nobles and plebeians: the former aim to defend themselves from popular power, the latter seek the protection of demagogues. This is a classic case of 'ricorso storico', in which the outcome of a complex process returns, in new ways, to the original equilibrium. Similarly,

²⁹⁷ See Momigliano 1936, 55 (= 1955, 128, on Vertot and Rollin): 'Non per nulla le storie moralistiche preferiscono fermarsi alle soglie dell'impero. Appunto perché in loro la derivazione dell'impero dalla crisi della repubblica ha la sua forma più semplicistica, con l'arrivo all'impero cessa il problema'. See also 1936, 55 (= 1955, 127) on the complex interaction between 'determinismo organico e moralismo' in the ancient and modern historiography on the late Republic.

²⁹⁸ On the heuristic value of this analogy, which was already clear to some contemporary observers, see Polverini 2003.

²⁹⁹ Smith 2006, 71-81 is the best starting point, not least for the masterful bibliographical orientation it provides.

³⁰⁰ See Santangelo 2016.

after the fall of the Western Empire, the beginning of the Middle Ages witnessed the reappearance of settlement patterns and political forms that closely resemble those that prevailed at the dawn of Greek and Roman history; in the development of this thesis, the analogy between acropolis and castles is central.

Vico's interpretive system, which was underpinned by a highly distinctive combination of philosophical, legal, and historical interests, offered a theoretical framework for other attempts – less original but scientifically sound – to reconstruct the history of Republican Rome. The Lucanian abbot Emmanuele Duni (1714-1781), for almost thirty years Professor of Law at the Sapienza University in Rome, openly applied the Vichian framework in the two volumes he devoted to *Origine e progressi del cittadino e del governo civile di Roma* (1763-1764). His central aim was to study the development of Roman 'democracy', i.e. of the system emerging from the solution of the Conflict of the Orders, overcoming the previous aristocratic order. In a purely Vichian spirit, the central point of interest is archaic and mid-Republican Rome. The last century of the Republic is relegated to the final chapter, where the transition to a monarchic order is rapidly charted, according to a well-known political and constitutional trajectory.³⁰¹ The influence of this aspect of Vico's thought was not limited to Italy. In 1765 the Abbé Louis-Clair Le Beau du Bignon (1738-?) published an *Histoire critique du gouvernement romain* based on the same structure adopted by Duni (allegations of plagiarism did arise), envisaging a cyclic succession of the three regimes: the century of democracy is an age of crimes, leading to the construction of the empire and the ruin of the Republican government.³⁰² The concluding chapter traces the development of the new monarchic turn and establishes a substantial continuity between empire and papacy. The same line is found in a work published over a decade later, the *Considérations sur l'origine et les révolutions du gouvernement des Romains*, also based on a similar organization: the late Republic is discussed in the penultimate chapter, the twenty-sixth, which opens with the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus.³⁰³ Before the discussion of that important moment of political history, however, there is a wide-ranging and original treatment of social and economic developments. An important chapter on the senatorial and equestrian orders, states the ambition to analyse the structure of the citizen

³⁰¹ Duni 1845, 2.227-233. The first volume of this edition opens with a remarkable 'Discorso preliminare' by Achille Gennarelli (xxv-lxix), which discusses Vico's interpretation of Roman history and offers an extensive review of the historiography on ancient Rome since de Beaufort, in explicit opposition to Niebuhr (lxiii-lxix, cxiii-cxxiii).

³⁰² Du Bignon 1765, xl. On Du Bignon's biography see Raskolnikoff 1992, 456-457. On the anti-aristocratic and anti-democratic strands of his reflection on ancient Rome see Guerri 1987, 439-440.

³⁰³ Du Bignon 1778, 2.364-394.

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body, and seeks to do justice to the growing complexity of Roman society in the age of imperial expansion.³⁰⁴

The *Essai sur les mœurs et esprits des nations* that Voltaire (1694-1778) published in 1756 is a brilliant example of a reading of the whole history of Rome from a long-term perspective. The point of view is very different from that proposed by Du Bignon, and draws on incommensurably greater intellectual and literary qualities. In a revealing passage of the introductory section, Voltaire asks what it was that enabled the Romans to stop the invasion of the Teutons at the end of the second century BCE, but prevented them from stopping the so-called barbarian invasions in Late Antiquity.³⁰⁵ The answer to that question also entails an opportunity to reach a fuller understanding of how the Roman empire took shape and when. The fact that the Romans managed to build and sustain an empire is a fact equally worthy of attention and scrutiny as its fall: a similar insight, as we shall see, also underpins an important aspect of the debate on the fall of the Republic in the later twentieth century (see below, §33).

For Voltaire the Romans were a small people of bandits, who for five centuries lived in harmony and supported themselves through warfare.³⁰⁶ Until Sulla they were led by a sincere love of their country; until the time of Scipio Africanus they were immune from the knowledge of the ‘beaux-arts’ in which the Greeks had a clear primacy. Religious tolerance was an important factor of strength for the whole political community. Voltaire’s argument reflects a clear awareness of the importance of the fall of the Republic and the transition to a new regime, but the problem never receives a focused discussion.³⁰⁷ Instead, the fall of the Empire is explained by a convergence of factors – the incompetence of the emperors, divisions at court, the impact of Christianity – that can all be explained with a productive insight: the prosperity and ruin of peoples and polities are determined by the inscrutable power of fate (‘une destinée’), and each event entails another one that tends to elude even the best predictive efforts.³⁰⁸

Voltaire’s reading dispenses with any idealization of ancient Rome, but it is not the most radical development of the debate in the second half of the eighteenth century. Baron Paul D. H. d’Holbach (1723-1789), a friend of Diderot and

³⁰⁴ Du Bignon 1778, 2.335-363. On the originality of this work, both in comparison with Du Bignon’s previous production and in the wider context of French historiography, see Raskolnikoff 1992, 456-475, where the autonomy of this author from Vico is also stressed.

³⁰⁵ Ch. LII: see Voltaire 1859, 114-116.

³⁰⁶ Ch. L: see 1859, 112.

³⁰⁷ The problem receives instead a concise discussion in the entry ‘Auguste Octave’ of the *Questions sur l’Encyclopédie*, which gives a memorably harsh portrait of the victor of the civil wars (1770, 243: ‘brigand enrichi et affermi’, ‘monstre adroit et heureux’).

³⁰⁸ Voltaire 1859, 116.

an assiduous contributor to the *Encyclopédie*, reflected at length on the problem of human freedom from a consistently materialistic perspective, which was accompanied by a vigorous polemic against religion. The problem of individual freedom is closely associated with the theme of public freedom, on which d'Holbach notably reflected in *Système social, ou principes naturels de la morale et de la politique* (1773). Mankind is not born free, since it is subject to an array of material constraints dictated by the state of nature; at the same time, freedom is supremely necessary to the happiness of peoples.³⁰⁹ The Greek and the Romans did aspire to freedom, but for them it was a vague term, 'une Divinité inconnue qu'ils adoroient sans se la définir'.³¹⁰ Rome never knew it: first it was a monarchy, and then it developed into an oligarchy (d'Holbach speaks of senators and patricians), which oppressed the plebeians and made them 'esclaves inquiets et turbulens'. The tribunes were nothing but ambitious agitators; the civil wars and proscriptions were nothing but stages through which 'ces fiers Romains', once freed from the yoke of the oligarchy, ended up under that of a dictator, and then of a series of 'Empereurs détestables'.³¹¹ D'Holbach takes direct aim at the modern myth of some great figures of Roman history: Pompey, Cato, Cicero or Brutus were not champions of freedom, but defenders of the position of a 'Sénat tyrannique'; Caesar was an ambitious man, who used the 'beau nom de liberté' to reduce the people to a new captivity. The crisis of the Roman Republic turns out to be a non-issue.

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), surely the greatest proponent of a philosophically oriented historiography on ancient Rome, deals with Republican history only tangentially in his great work on the decline and fall of the Empire. At the end of the seventh chapter, after discussing the *ludi saeculares* organized in 247 by Philip the Arab, he reflects on the completion of the first millennium of Roman history and offers a schematic periodization: four centuries of virtuous poverty, three of absolute empire, and three of 'apparent prosperity and internal decline'. The watershed is thus implicitly identified with Caesar's victory; the factors of radical change are identified in the morphing of Roman citizenship into a sort of universal citizenship, and in the transition from an army of citizens to a professional, and ultimately mercenary, army. The crisis of the Republic is not an aspect of real historical interest. The emphasis is squarely on the decline of the empire, where the unresolved tension between what may be seen and

³⁰⁹ (D'Holbach) 1773, 2.52. On this passage and its historiographical and political significance see Grell 1995, 1163-1165.

³¹⁰ (D'Holbach) 1773, 2.56.

³¹¹ Cf. (d'Holbach) 1773, 1.41-42 on the Romans as 'Tyrens de la terre' and their patriotic fanaticism.

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what proves elusive is stronger than ever: ‘The form was still the same, but the animating health and vigor were fled’.³¹²

Even for Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), in *Du contrat social* (1762), the end of the Roman Republic is a largely marginal issue.³¹³ In the second book, the expulsion of the Tarquins is instead cited as one of the rare examples of a revolution that restored the state to its original vigour, ‘en sortant des bras de la mort’: one of those ‘*époques violentes ou les révolutions font sur les peuples ce que certaines crises font sur les individus*’ (2.8). What interests Rousseau much more deeply, however, is the functioning of the institutional structures of the Republic in its classical phase. That becomes most apparent in the fourth book of the work, where there is a challenging reflection on the tribunate, the dictatorship, the censorship, and a whole chapter is devoted to the Roman *comitia* and the logic underpinning their order (4.4).³¹⁴ The theme of the end of the Republic becomes explicitly relevant only when the *leges tabellariae* that introduced the secret ballot are discussed.³¹⁵ Rousseau, with some hesitation, expresses a clear disagreement with Cicero, who had recognized in that reform a cause of the decline of the Republic. On the contrary, in his view it had been a wise measure, which identified a real problem and measured itself against the widespread corruption among the people.³¹⁶ The decline of the Republic was accelerated by the inability to implement reforms, such as the introduction of the secret ballot, which could deal with the changed political and moral situation.³¹⁷ Once again the medical metaphor recurs: ‘Comme le régime des gens sains n’est pas propre aux malades, il ne faut pas vouloir gouverner un peuple corrompu par les mêmes lois qui conviennent à un bon peuple’ (4.4). The disruptive factor, according to Rousseau, is ambition, which is pandered to by the absence of just laws and prevails even over religious scruples.

The institutions that have a balancing function are subject to the same risk of harmful degeneration. The tribunate, which when well ordered is the firm foundation of a good constitution, but becomes destructive ‘quand il usurpe la puissance executive I il n’est que le modérateur’ (4.5). Rousseau establishes a close analogy between the ephorate in Sparta, the ‘tribuns du peuple’ in Rome,

³¹² Ed. Womersley 1994, 1.461.

³¹³ See Thom 1995, 82.

³¹⁴ See Thom 1995, 79-85; Arena 2016, 10-17; and esp., most recently, Frizzera 2021, 32-129.

³¹⁵ Cf. the quick mention of the recruitment of *capite censi* in the same chapter, on which Rousseau does not express an explicit judgement (cf. Thom 1995, 84, who argues that Rousseau saw it as the beginning of a ‘terminal disorder’).

³¹⁶ On the handling of this issue see Frizzera 2021, 154-156.

³¹⁷ On the weight of moral factors in Rousseau’s discussion see Millar 2002a, 118-119.

and the Council of Ten in Venice.³¹⁸ In Rome, the usurpation of tribunician powers, originally intended to defend public liberty, ended up being turned to the advantage of the emperors ‘qui la détruiraient’. The underlying process, however, was one of corruption that had already begun: Rousseau did not define it more precisely, and confined himself to observing how the degeneration of the tribunician magistracy had considerably accelerated it.

In the chapter on dictatorship (4.6), a magistracy specifically entrusted with the solution of emergencies (Rousseau here explicitly resorts to the term ‘crise’), the analysis is deepened and extended to a strictly material factor: the decisive role of Sulla and Caesar’s armies, which marched on Rome and allowed their commanders to seize power. The competition for supremacy was not determined by internal conflicts, but by forces that were based outside the city.³¹⁹ The parsimony with which the Romans of the late Republic resorted to the dictatorship, fearing its destabilising effect, had no factual justification. The threat lay elsewhere.

In the same year as the publication of *Du contrat social* and in the following one, Adam Smith (1723-1790) gave a series of lectures on problems of law, history and political theory at the University of Glasgow, which were published in 1976 on the basis of the detailed notes taken by two participants. His reflection on private property plays a major role, and Roman law emerges as a point of reference. In some lectures the qualities of the Republican regimes and the factors leading to their downfall are also discussed in a more focused way. The case of Rome was addressed in the lectures of 28 February and 1 March 1763: like Athens, it is an example of ‘conquering republic’.³²⁰ The principal threat to such a state comes from its victorious armies and their commanders: Smith is very clear that the term ‘*imperator*’ is rooted in the political and military practice of the Republic (237), underlines the strong significance of class in the Roman armies (233-234), and establishes a clear analogy between the military monarchy that was established at the end of the Republic and that of Cromwell, even though he was less brazen than his Roman predecessors in leveraging the loyalty of the troops to his own advantage (236).³²¹ The theme resurfaces in the lecture *On Public Jurisprudence* of 1766, where the problem of the fall of the Republican regimes is discussed in general terms and where the Roman case is

³¹⁸ On these (partly surprising) analogies see Frizzera 2021, 99-103. In 1764, in the *Lettres écrites de la montagne*, Rousseau expresses a much less harsh assessment of the role of the tribunate in the fall of the Republic: on the background of that judgment see Frizzera 2021, 103-106.

³¹⁹ On this aspect of Rousseau’s thought and his assessment of the Roman dictatorship see Frizzera 2021, 111-113.

³²⁰ Smith 1978, 229.

³²¹ On this facet of Smith’s reflection see Pocock 2003, 394-396.

again addressed under the heading of the relation between opulence and decline.³²² Marius and his reform of military recruitment is once again recognized as a decisive factor: decent men no longer wanted to serve in the army, and the path was clear for Marius to recruit men of low status, who were prepared to be loyal to him rather than to the Republic. In his best-known work, *The Wealth of Nations*, published a decade later, Smith instead views the Social War as the periodizing moment. From that moment on, admission to the Roman civic body becomes undifferentiated, and it is impossible to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens: the popular assemblies are filled with an undifferentiated ‘rabble’.³²³

Smith has strong, if not altogether coherent or well-founded, views about the experience of the Roman Republic, but that historical period is hardly a focal point of interest for him. The problem of the fall of the Republic is instead the central issue of an original essay published in 1759 by a far less notable figure, Edward Wortley Montagu (1713-1776), a diplomat, politician, traveller, polyglot, and all-round eccentric: *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Antient Republics*. The central thesis of that remarkable work identifies luxury as a decisive factor in political decline: that general principle is especially well illustrated in Republican Rome.³²⁴ This approach, which is indeed rather conventional, is accompanied by a strongly innovative perspective: the decline of the Roman Republic is framed within a wider discussion that includes Athens, Sparta, Thebes and, above all, Carthage, with which a stimulating comparative analysis is carried out.³²⁵ In the background, there is a stated intention to directly draw lessons from those historical experiences in order to prevent the decline of the ‘British Constitution’ and the emergence of unbridled factional strife.³²⁶ Montagu is an avid reader of Montesquieu, whom he repeatedly quotes in laudatory terms, and he has also reflected deeply on Polybius and the anacyclosis theory.³²⁷ He describes the Roman Republic as a polity consisting of two opposite forces. The initial supremacy of the aristocratic element is overridden by the settlement reached at the end of the Struggle of the Orders, which marks the rise of the ‘Democratick power’. In turn, this ends up prevailing without any restraints,

³²² Smith 1978, 412.

³²³ Book 4, ch. 7 (Smith 1976, 624). The reference to social conflicts enables a contrastive analogy with the relationship between Britain and its colonies, for which a course of orderly integration should instead be envisaged.

³²⁴ Montagu 1759, 262-291.

³²⁵ For a comparison between Rome and Carthage see Montagu 1759, 312-356. Andrew 2011, 64-65 stresses the importance of this approach.

³²⁶ Montagu 1759, 370-384; cf. 290-291, 310-311. See Ayres 1997, 7.

³²⁷ Cf. Nicolet 2003, 37 on the impact of his work in France.

gaining traction from the imperial expansion that internal stability had made possible. Since the provincial commands derive from the vote of the people, the competition for power leads candidates and office-holders to seek their favour by indulging and increasing their greed.³²⁸ The trajectory thus leads to a tyrannical outcome: the imperial regime can in no way be regarded as a welcome development, quite apart from the qualities and merits of Augustus.³²⁹ A further thematic angle complicates and enriches Montagu's reflection: a concurrent factor of decline is identified in the loosening of religious scruples that the impact of Greek philosophy at Rome, notably Epicureanism, ended up causing, crucially accelerating the 'declension' of the Republic.³³⁰ The polemic against contemporary deism plays a significant role in that connection.

22. The main stage in the history of the late eighteenth-century historiography on the Roman Republic is *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, the vast three-volume work published in 1783 by Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), another major figure of the Scottish Enlightenment. He also extended the discussion to the imperial age, continuing until the end of Caligula's reign, and indeed to the beginning of the Flavian age.³³¹ Montesquieu's influence is apparent: in the initial remark that the shift from monarchy to republic was a revolutionary shock, necessary to ensure historical progress, and in the decisive weight that is given to imperial expansion as a factor of political decline. Despite the clear statements to the contrary, in Ferguson's sketch that philosophical approach has the traits of a far-reaching moral interpretation. The age immediately following the Hannibalic War is identified as a phase of unparalleled political and spiritual order ('the domestic policy of the State... appears to have been orderly and wise beyond that of any other time'), sustained by a spirit of equality that kept competition among fellow-citizens within acceptable boundaries.³³²

Corruption set in a few years later, and was a result of territorial expansion and military success.³³³ The view is not original, while the reading of the Gracchan age is to some extent. According to Ferguson, the intervention of the Senate was wholly legitimate and ensured the survival of the state, but alienated the

³²⁸ Montagu 1759, 261-262.

³²⁹ Montagu 1759, 282, 287.

³³⁰ Montagu 1759, 292-311.

³³¹ The quotation is from the fourth edition (1813). On this work see Turner 1986, 584-587; Gabba 1988 (= 1995, 73-97); Francesconi 2001; Andrew 2011, 173-174; McDaniel 2013, 126-154, 252-258.

³³² Ferguson 1813, 1.269.

³³³ See Pocock 2003, 403-405.

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sympathies of those who had not understood the serious risk posed by the policies of the Gracchi, and was mistakenly seen by many as a tyrannical intervention. It thus had the paradoxical consequence of accelerating the ruin of a political regime that was already intimately corrupt. The theme of the heterogenesis of ends returns, along with the medical metaphor ('a sickly state... a fever, which, with some intermissions, at every return of similar disorders, threatened it with the dissolution and ruin of its whole constitution').³³⁴ The work concentrates, with a wealth of detail that is perhaps unprecedented, on the final phase of the Republic. The second volume is devoted to the years from 67 to 44, and begins with a reflection on what, in modernizing terms, might be called an anthropology of the late Republic: an age in which competition and ambition reach a new intensity, and 'the range of the human character' is revealed in all its strength and complexity. The result is 'a scene interesting and instructive beyond any other in the history of mankind'.³³⁵ Given this general interpretive framework, it is not surprising that a large part of Republican politics is interpreted through the moral traits of the great figures of the time: the three 'adventurers' who form the First Triumvirate; Julius Caesar's 'little severity of manners' and his use of clemency at various political junctures; the deforming power of eloquence, which is revealed with striking clarity in the clash between Antony and Cicero; the care with which Octavian attempts to contain his cruelty after Actium.³³⁶ The process leading to the end of the Republic had been ongoing for some time, but it intensified with the events of 44-43 BCE, when 'the last pillars of the commonwealth seemed to be removed':³³⁷ the metaphor of the fall of the republican edifice is fully developed. The last chapter opens with the reign of Caligula, and proceeds to discuss more cursorily the developments under the Flavians, identifying in the phase between Nerva and Antoninus Pius a period of undisturbed, if brief happiness in the history of the Empire;³³⁸ the work ends with a quick reference to the subsequent decline of the Empire.³³⁹

The reading of Montesquieu also plays an ostensibly significant role in another extensive account of the history of Rome produced towards the end of the

³³⁴ Ferguson 1813, 1.390. On the importance of the critique of the Gracchi see McDaniel 2013, 134-139, who assumes a polemic aimed at Hooke; and Balbo 2020, 125, who discusses it in the context of the history of modern historiography on *ager publicus* and agrarian laws. See also Malamud 2009, 51-52, who discusses Ferguson's impact on the conservative and anti-egalitarian thinking of John Adams, the second President of the United States; on Adams' longstanding interest in Roman history and its analogical value see Shalev 2022, 68.

³³⁵ Ferguson 1813, 2.346. See Pocock 2003, 406-407.

³³⁶ Ferguson 1813, 4.105.

³³⁷ Ferguson 1813, 4.352.

³³⁸ Ferguson 1813, 5.372-397, ch. 42.

³³⁹ Ferguson 1813, 5.396.

eighteenth century, in the context of a vast discussion of human history and its development: the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803).³⁴⁰ What is missing from Herder's discussion, however, is any consideration of the greatness of Rome, which is instead depicted as a destructive and essentially criminal force (book 14, ch. 3).³⁴¹ The discussion of Rome's decline (ch. 4) focuses on the late Republic, which is the moment in which the city's long-term historical trajectory is determined: with the advent of the Principate, a military monarchy takes over, in which the armies are more powerful than the emperors, and the military defence infrastructure is mightier than the external threats. The imperial expansion revealed the inadequacy of the city-state and precipitated its demise, but was not the only factor at work. The constitutional balance of Rome, despite what many ancient and modern observers claimed, was fatally unbalanced and, above all, the military ethos that pervaded Roman society was bound to lead to a traumatic outcome. The moment in which 'dies schreckliche Schauspiel' began to unfold is the age of Marius and Sulla, when armies began to reserve their loyalty to those who had recruited them.³⁴² The dominant forces in the history of Rome are violence and ambition: there is nothing exemplary about it, nor can a providential logic be discerned (ch. 6).

23. The term 'crisis' entered the historiography of the late Roman Republic only towards the middle of the eighteenth century, once it had already become a frequent feature of the political debate, and had gradually established itself as an interpretive category worthy of attention and discussion.³⁴³ Even in this case (cf. *supra*, §1), trying to identify with certainty its first appearance is a risky and only relatively advantageous undertaking. In the remarkable *Saggio critico del triumvirato di Crasso, Pompeo, Cesare*, written between 1739 and 1741 and published posthumously, Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764) makes use of it in a fascinating page on Julius Caesar and his unscrupulousness, emphasizing the dominant role of ambition 'nelle guerre civili e nelle sedizioni': 'poiché in queste crisi politiche egli avviene siccome nelle fermentazioni chimiche, in cui dopo molto conflitto ciascuna materia e ciascun sale viene alla fine ad occupare quel

³⁴⁰ Herder 1784-1791.

³⁴¹ Herder 1790, 367-385.

³⁴² Herder 1790, 343.

³⁴³ The term appears to have entered the historiographical debate on the Late Empire at a later stage. Simonde de Sismondi 1835, 104 is the earliest instance known to me of its use to indicate a long-term process in the context of that debate – but the same proviso made in §1 about Koselleck's quest applies all the more emphatically in this case.

luogo, che più se gli conviene'.³⁴⁴ The biological metaphor is replaced by the chemical one: a choice consistent with the lively scientific interests of Algarotti and with the biographical approach of the work, which emphasizes the initiative of individuals and the impact of factors of change, instead of generally emphasizing the aspects of corruption or degeneration.³⁴⁵

Ferguson uses the term 'crisis' on a few occasions, but never as an interpretive category.³⁴⁶ A few decades earlier, in the extensive biography of Cicero composed by another Whig scholar, Conyers Middleton (1683-1750), which appeared in three volumes in 1741 and was destined to have wide resonance and influence, well beyond Britain, until the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of crisis was explicitly evoked in the discussion of some key moments: in the treatment of the conspiracy of Catiline (ed. 1801, 1.213), in the account of the weeks preceding the war of Mutina (3.178) and, above all, in the final chapter of the work, where a long assessment of Cicero and his character is developed, and where he is identified as a consistent advocate of Republican freedom (3.307-404, esp. 330-334, 382-384).³⁴⁷ It is precisely this political and ideal commitment that justifies Cicero's frequent public interventions and invalidates any accusation of vanity: 'The fate of Rome was now brought to a crisis; and the contending parties were making their last efforts, either to oppress or to preserve it' (3.332). The cause of freedom necessarily depended 'on the influence of his councils [*scil.* of Cicero]'.

A little further on, Middleton argues that Cicero's letters 'breathe the last word of expiring liberty; a great part of them having been written in the very crisis of its ruin, to rouse up all the virtue, that was left in the honest and brave, to the defence of their country' (3.340). The crisis is thus the moment in which a process of political dissolution reaches completion and becomes irreversible. In the Preface to the first volume, a central role in the political history of the Republic is credited to the Gracchan period – a watershed from which an era of vi-

³⁴⁴ Algarotti 1794, 375-376, where a generic reference is made to Montesquieu's *Esprit des loix* (perhaps at 3.3, 'Du principe de la démocratie'). The originality of Algarotti's work is stressed by Firpo 2008, 294-295 (= 2012, 35, 62).

³⁴⁵ Algarotti is also sensitive to this theme: see Algarotti 1794, 153-157 on the moral corruption of the age from the Gracchi to Augustus; however, cf. 510-522 on the superior valour of Caesar's army, which is ultimately turned against the superior interest of the republic.

³⁴⁶ See Ferguson 1799, 1.65, 137.

³⁴⁷ For two recent introductions to Middleton see Stuart-Buttle 2019, 149-178, esp. 168-174 on the biography of Cicero, and Verhaart 2020, 123-148. See also Cambiano 2018, 145-152. On Middleton's critics in Tory circles (William Guthrie, Colley Cibber, William Melmoth) see Ward 1964, 435-447. On the 'partisan' character of the biography and its reception in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Weinbrot 1978, 17; on its impact, especially in France, see Verhaart 2020, 148-172.

olence began. His judgment of the tribunes is openly hostile, and their policies on debt and agrarian redistribution 'are all contrary to the quiet, and discipline, and public faith of societies' (1.xxxiv). Their affair is not only significant because it was the first moment in which 'civil blood... was spilt in the streets of Rome'. Above all, it was important because it revealed an unforeseen lesson to those who nurtured the ambition to achieve political supremacy: only violence could support that attempt and prevail over the opposition of the Senate.³⁴⁸ Cicero was born a generation later, and all his personal and political events take place in a context where disputes 'were always decided by the longest sword' (1.xxxiv). In Middleton, however, the notion of crisis is strictly applied only to the final years of the Republic and to the phase in which the decline of that regime intensified.

Thomas Blackwell (1701-1757) takes a similar approach in his *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*, published in three volumes between 1753 and 1763 (the last one appeared posthumously, edited by John Mills): a highly original work, in which the detailed study of the social and intellectual context that distinguished the Augustan age is preceded by an extensive survey of the history of Rome from the foundation of the city, including some analogical digressions in which the modern developments in Venice and in England are brought into the discussion.³⁴⁹ Intellectual and moral factors play a central role: it is 'high Spirit and steady Virtue' that ensure the stability of the consular constitution, more than the solidity of the institutions themselves.³⁵⁰ The turning point is thus consistently identified as the inheritance of Attalus III: the moment when the poison of corruption began to seep into Roman temperance. Sulla's conduct in Asia Minor, a generation later, completed the process.³⁵¹ The whole history of the late Republic is thus read in the context of the 'Degeneracy of the Roman Manners':³⁵² the point is repeated with striking insistence. Caesar himself is a symptom of that moral decline; his unscrupulous political action, in defiance of established constitutional practice, causes such serious damage that it cannot be remedied even by his assassination, which was carried out by the most virtuous

³⁴⁸ Middleton's admiration for the Senate as a source of reasoned decision-making and an example of moral rigour is also apparent in the important antiquarian treatise that he devoted to its recruitment and functions, partly based on his correspondence with his friend and patron John Hervey (Middleton 1747: see 127-128 and esp. 171, on the contempt in which Senate decrees were held by the 'chiefs' of the Republic in its 'last age').

³⁴⁹ References to contemporary events set Blackwell's work apart from other treatises on ancient Rome that appeared in England in the eighteenth century: Akça Ataç 2013, 490.

³⁵⁰ Blackwell 1764, 1.75.

³⁵¹ Blackwell 1764, 1.137-139.

³⁵² Blackwell 1764, 1.159.

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men of the time.³⁵³ These are the premises of the clash between Antony and the Senate, which is explicitly defined as a ‘Crisis’ (1.268), and of the subsequent developments of the civil disputes. In Blackwell, however, the concept of crisis is always invoked to refer to emergency or short-term situations:³⁵⁴ the underlying dynamic, which unfolds over the long term, is one of unstoppable moral decline. Only with Octavian’s victory over Antony and Cleopatra will a new season begin, in the victor’s life and in the history of Rome alike.

The same approach informs a work that was printed in the same period, and was immediately intended for a wide readership, *The Roman History, from the Foundation of the City of Rome, to the Destruction of the Western Empire*, published in 1769 by the Irish writer and scholar Oliver Goldsmith (1728?-1774). In the first volume, which ends with the death of Pompey, the term ‘crisis’ appears only on one occasion, to refer to the turning point that the end of the Fifties marked for Caesar (464); in the second, which covers the whole imperial age, it is used when the rift between Nero and Agrippina becomes irreparable (221). Quite apart from his terminology, though, Goldsmith is clear about the importance of what he regards as the decisive moment in the terminal phase of the Republic, which brings about ‘the ruin of the commonwealth’: the dictatorship of Sulla (ch. 19), which is established in a context in which corruption is the dominant force and the Republic is already bound to perish (389). The fall of the Republic is a busy sequence of events, but has little in store for those who are interested in history: ‘Nothing can be more dreadful to a thinking mind than the government of Rome from this period, until it found refuge under the protection of Augustus’.³⁵⁵ The imperial age, to which the whole of the second volume is devoted, is much more congenial to Goldsmith. The Augustan age, in particular, is in his view the most prosperous moment in the history of Rome: ‘a dearth of historical occurrences is generally the happiness of the people’ (98).

A few years later, in 1774, an anonymous history of Rome appeared in London, presented as a series of fifty-five letters addressed by a nobleman to his son Frederick.³⁵⁶ The choice of working on a wide chronological range is in line with Goldsmith’s project, but the general historical assessment could not be further away. The empire, from the rise to power of Tiberius onwards, is an age of gradual transition to a ‘state of declension’ (2.68), which is traced to the end of the age of Constantine. The history of Rome is seen as the story of a people that

³⁵³ Blackwell 1764, 1.193.

³⁵⁴ See, in the second volume, which begins with the death of Cicero: Blackwell 1764, 2.154 (the war of Mutina); 167 (the preparations of Philippi); 332 (the tensions preceding the pact of Brundisium).

³⁵⁵ Goldsmith 1775, 330.

³⁵⁶ On the pedagogical power of the study of Roman history see Anonymous 1774, 1.298.

secured a politically dominant role, but was never completely happy (2.259). Its condition of 'unsettled' community, in which an egalitarian tension was never lacking, is a major theme of its history, which partly explains the emergence of an autocratic regime as an alternative to the dominion of the senatorial oligarchy. The anonymous author also restates the thesis of a strong moral dimension in the political decline of the Roman Republic. His periodisation, however, has a remarkably original implication, because it places the decisive moment in Pompey's triumph after the Eastern campaign. That is the moment when the city is flooded with riches and the people see their moral quality lose strength and their political role decline, without fully understanding the seriousness of that historical juncture.³⁵⁷

The last major overview of Roman history that appeared in England during the eighteenth century, that of Charles J. A. Hereford (1757/1758-?), has a more conventional structure, although its periodisation necessarily comes to terms with the recent appearance of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and thus does not go beyond the death of Marcus Aurelius.³⁵⁸ The first of the three volumes goes as far as the fall of Carthage and is rounded off by a mention of Aemilianus' prophecy. The second ends with the death of Cleopatra, at the end of a narrative that, in a little less than five hundred pages, welds internal conflicts and external wars, proposing an anti-popular point of view (the confrontation between Marius and Metellus is revealing: 2.127-128) and identifying a decisive theme in the ambition of some great figures: Pompey and Caesar are assigned an equally negative historical role. One does not have the impression of being presented with an historically coherent period, not to speak of a clearly defined problem; the few occurrences of the term 'crisis' refer to short-term emergencies.³⁵⁹ The outcome of the troubled process retraced in the second volume, however, is clear: the Republican constitution is described without hesitation as 'extinguished', and the judgment on Augustus, his political conduct, and his regime is on the whole negative.³⁶⁰

24. With Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831) the concept of 'crisis' began to be applied to a much wider chronological range. A cursory, but very important, reference features in the *Vorträge über römische Geschichte* he held in Bonn in 1829 and published posthumously. In that work Niebuhr offered a gen-

³⁵⁷ Anonymous 1774, 1.294-295.

³⁵⁸ Hereford 1792, 1.v. Hereford was an Anglican clergyman, and the author of compendia of Hume's *History of England* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, as well as of various compilations on the history of France and Spain, most of which were published anonymously.

³⁵⁹ Hereford 1792, 2.175 (civil war of 83-82 BCE) and 311 (trial of Milo).

³⁶⁰ Hereford 1792, 3.2.

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eral overview of the history of Rome from its origins to the Late Empire, far exceeding the chronological boundaries of his *Römische Geschichte* (vols. I-II: 1812, 1827-1828²; III: 1832), which stopped at the First Punic War. The last century of the Republic receives a careful and still valuable discussion, but interpretive, or even evaluative, insights are relatively rare. A favourable discussion is reserved to the Gracchi.³⁶¹ Their intentions are noble, and rest on a sound assessment of the agrarian context; in this regard, Niebuhr restates the thesis, already developed with profit in the *Römische Geschichte*, according to which the *lex Sempronia* applied only to *ager publicus*, and not to privately owned land.³⁶² Sulla was a moderate in 88, but was fiercely bloodthirsty in 82; his reforms were a restoration that was firmly intended to turn the clock back (see *infra*, §34), and were thus doomed to fail. Cicero is credited with great personal and intellectual qualities.³⁶³ Niebuhr's preference for Republican history is clearly emphasized in a brief reflection that follows the account of the battle of Actium: with the victory of Octavian, in one sense, Roman history also ends; the new regime is a cycle of separate histories of individual emperors.³⁶⁴

One has to wait until the beginning of the chapter devoted to Tiberius to find an interpretive insight of wider import.³⁶⁵ Niebuhr discusses the interest of Republican history, contrasting it with the unattractiveness of the political history of the Principate, where the vital aspects that still subsisted in the late Republic were exhausted. 'It was a situation whose course no human force could prevent; since the Hannibalic War there were only more efforts to provoke crises; a century later this too ceases'.³⁶⁶ Niebuhr does not speak of a single, coherent epoch of crisis, but of a series of moments that give the measure of an historical phase: the last century of the Republic is an epoch in which the historical process has lost all vitality. Here too the theme of inevitability returns:³⁶⁷ the crisis

³⁶¹ *Vorträge* no. 77-79: see esp. 1847, 274-275, 290-291. See the early judgment on Tiberius Gracchus in the unfinished essay on agricultural history written in Copenhagen in 1803/1804: Heuss 1981, 530-551. The tribune is credited with a strong and consistent reform agenda, which transcends the interests of a class: see Walther 1993, 181-188. – On the impact of Niebuhr's assessment on the American political culture of the second quarter of the nineteenth century see Malamud 2009, 52-53.

³⁶² On this issue see the fundamental discussion in Rich 2008, esp. 539-543.

³⁶³ Niebuhr 1848, 17-18.

³⁶⁴ Niebuhr 1848, 114.

³⁶⁵ Niebuhr 1848, 162-163.

³⁶⁶ Niebuhr 1848, 163: 'Es war ein Zustand dessen Ablauf keine menschliche Macht hemmen konnte; von dem hannibalischen Kriege an treten nur noch Anstrengungen ein um Krisen hervorzubringen, ein Jahrhundert nachher hört auch dieses auf'. See the Italian translation in Momigliano 1936, 32 (= 1955, 146).

³⁶⁷ Momigliano 1936, 33 (= 1955, 147).

has already occurred, and has had a fatal outcome. Niebuhr takes to the extreme the medical metaphor that underlies all reflection on the subject: 'an indefinite destructive disease was at work, which inevitably had to bring an end'.³⁶⁸ That radical diagnosis is not accompanied by a detailed explanation. It is clear, however, that for Niebuhr the decisive factor was the end of the political initiative of the people, which had long been the central factor of interest in Republican history: history amounts to the story of a single individual and the few that surround him.

The *Vorträge* offer a robust interpretive framework on the late Roman Republic, but reflect largely marginal interests in Niebuhr's scholarly agenda. A close reader of the *Römische Geschichte*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), had a not altogether different approach to the period:³⁶⁹ his well-known admiration for Caesar is the facet of a wider devaluation. Hegel's interests turned, however, to the opposite chronological remit to the one explored by Niebuhr. In the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, delivered in Berlin between 1822 and 1830, and published posthumously in 1837, he identified a 'second epoch' of Roman history, from the Hannibalic War to the rise of the emperors, in which the dominant theme is the moral decline induced by luxury and corruption.³⁷⁰ In many respects, this historical framework is wholly conventional. The most significant aspect is the link established between moral decline, imperial expansion, and a new political development. The Senate is unable to assert its authority over the empire, and sovereignty belongs to a people that is now reduced to an unruly mass. The emergence of a great dominant figure was thus the product of an historical necessity. In a context where the community did not have a strong spiritual centre, political power and military force prevailed, and Caesar admirably embodied them. Caesar's historical contribution is not just about his success in the struggle for power. The conquest of Gaul marks the beginning of a new phase in the history of the empire and the world: Caesar 'gründete das Theater, das jetzt der Mittelpunkt der Weltgeschichte werden sollte'.³⁷¹ The idea of Caesarism as an arbitral force, shaping a new political direction through a lucid reading of the historical forces at play, finds its first codification in these pages.³⁷² Hegel's interest in Roman history, however,

³⁶⁸ Niebuhr 1848, 163: 'eine indefinite zerstörende Krankheit wirfte, die das Ende unausbleiblich herbeiführen müßte'.

³⁶⁹ On Hegel and Niebuhr see Sasso 2016, 397-398 (= 2020, 122-123).

³⁷⁰ See the 1989 Suhrkamp edition, 371-380.

³⁷¹ Ed. 1989, 379.

³⁷² See esp. 379: 'Cäsar hat weltgeschichtlich das Rechte getan, indem er die Vermittlung und die Art und Weise des Zusammenhalts, der notwendig war, hervorbrachte'. It is of relative importance that the term 'Caesarism' was coined, as is well known, only some twenty years later, in

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is oriented above all on the imperial period, and on the prospects of renewal it outlines, both with the creation of a new political regime and with the advent of Christianity.³⁷³ The reflection on the late Republic is intended to clarify the terms and the historical importance of the imperial regime.

Hegel's discussion is part of a broader trend in the historiographical debate of the first half of the nineteenth century, which pursued the links between Republican and Imperial history with a determination that is not matched in the historiography of the previous century. Jules Michelet (1798-1874) opened the first volume of his *Histoire romaine*, which appeared in 1831, with an almost provocative statement. German historical science had devoted much attention to the first four centuries of the history of Rome, to which Louis de Beaufort had also devoted a great deal of effort; for the last two centuries 'tout est à faire'.³⁷⁴ Michelet states the ambition of making clear progress in that remit, and devotes the whole of the third book of his work to the end of the Republic, programmatically entitled 'La dissolution de la cité': neither a crisis, then, nor a reference limited to the Republic. As a brief opening note makes clear, the period between the fall of Carthage and Actium is read as a mirror image of the founding age of the city, discussed in the first book.³⁷⁵ The struggle between patricians and plebeians is matched by the clash between the Senate and the equestrian order, the Samnite wars by the Social War, and Appius Claudius by Sulla. There is also a sense of material undoing. The construction of the empire led, according to Michelet, to the rapid disappearance of the Roman people, and the settlement in Rome of large masses of slave origin.³⁷⁶ The medical metaphor is also liberally applied here. Sulla is a 'médecin impitoyable' (1.214), and at the same time ineffective: after his intervention, the Empire finds itself sicker than ever, in the grip of civil unrest, senatorial corruption and piracy. A few decades later, the 'vieille république' seemed to die with Cato (332). The choice to focus so much of the story on the clash between senators and knights has obvious resonances in the project of a young French historian of Republican sympathies at the time of the July Monarchy, and the tension between new forces and an old society that is struggling to close is a pervasive theme of the work. The final page poses a further problem, in a way that is both cursory and dramatic: the advent of the

Auguste Romieu's book, *L'ère des Césars*, of 1849 (see *infra*, §29). – Hegel's critical judgment on Cato is based on the view that the fall of the Republic was necessary: see Sasso 2016, 399-402 (= 2020, 123-127); on the judgment on Cicero see Giorcelli Bersani 2010, 127-128; Biasutti 2017, 57-68.

³⁷³ See the excellent discussion in Desmond 2020, 106-107.

³⁷⁴ Michelet 1833, 1.13.

³⁷⁵ Michelet 1833, 2.135.

³⁷⁶ Michelet 1833, 2.137-138.

Empire just precedes the advent of Christianity, and the beginning of three centuries of harsh conflict between 'le dieu de la nature' and 'le dieu de l'âme'.³⁷⁷ The transition is cosmic, rather than merely political.³⁷⁸ Michelet sees another one in his own day, when the second age of the world, inaugurated by the Roman Empire, is coming to an end, and another has not yet begun. Here the interest in Roman history is combined with that in 'universal history', to which Michelet had devoted an *Introduction* in 1831, shortly before the publication of the *Histoire romaine*; in the background there is also the careful reading of *Vi-co*.³⁷⁹

Michelet's historiography always had a strong political dimension, with its focus on the history of France and the making of its national and civil identity; his consistent refusal to directly engage in partisan controversies in no way attenuated the fundamental civic nature of his project. Victor Duruy (1811-1894), Michelet's pupil and collaborator, was a far less original and influential historian, but had a distinguished political career, first as an Orleanist, then under Napoleon III, for whom he was also Minister of Education.³⁸⁰ His relationship with the Emperor was favoured by their shared interest in ancient history: in 1859 Bonaparte involved him in the writing of his *Histoire de Jules César* (on which see below, §29). Fifteen years earlier, Duruy had published an *Histoire des Romains depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la fin du règne des Antonins* (1843-1844), in seven volumes: a Gibbonian periodisation, which stopped the discussion at what the author of *Decline and Fall* had identified as the most prosperous moment of Roman history (7.550). In the following decades other works were to follow, such as a general account (a single-volume *Histoire de Rome*, published in several editions from 1848 onwards) and a revised and enlarged version of the original project (*Histoire des Romains depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la mort de Théodose*, 1879-1885);³⁸¹ the work on ancient Rome, moreover, went hand in hand with similar projects on ancient Greece and on medieval and modern France. Here, too, Michelet's model was very prominent;

³⁷⁷ Michelet 1833, 2.400.

³⁷⁸ The history of the Roman Empire initially planned by Michelet was never brought to completion: see Monod 1923, 241. On the other hand, the other great overviews produced in France in that period, notably by some teachers of the great Parisian Lycées, concentrate exclusively on the Republic (Poirson 1825-1826; Du Rozoir 1832) or on the Empire (Cayx 1836); the integration between the two periods is confined to textbooks (see e.g. Poirson-Cayx 1827).

³⁷⁹ See Raskonikoff 1992, 756-757.

³⁸⁰ See the rich biographical background in Geslot 2009 and, most recently, the important discussion in Ferrary 2018.

³⁸¹ On the choice to expand the chronological framework see Ferrary 2018, 1220-1221, who emphasizes the monarchic interpretation of the Principate in Duruy.

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more broadly, Duruy worked on the principle that in order to know the part it was necessary to have a clear awareness of its role in the larger organism.

Roman history was to him clearly distinguished from Greek history, in which he saw interests and qualities of a rather different kind; the influence of Hellenic culture in Rome was a factor of imbalance that opened up unresolvable contradictions. The last century of the Republic occupies the whole of the second volume of the *Histoire des Romains*, from the Gracchi to the death of Antony and Cleopatra: a coherent narrative unit and ‘un des plus curieux et un des plus grands faits de l’histoire’ (2.2), which does not correspond, though, to a rigid periodisation – the Republic died in 49 without a new imperial regime emerging for the following twenty years; the attempt of the Gracchi is the evident outcome of dynamics that had been established for the previous three quarters of a century. The customary medical metaphor of decomposition (2.3) is accompanied by another one drawn from sailing: the ‘social revolution’ that silently asserts itself in that period is one of those ‘écueils infranchissables pour les gouvernements qui n’ont pas su les reconnaître de loin et changer à temps la direction du navire’. The whole long path leading to the fall of the Republic is summarized in the factors of decline, in the private and public spheres, on which the introductory part of the second volume dwells (2.1-58): the encounter with Greece – which also involves the construction of the Mediterranean empire – is *the* driver of an ineluctable decline. The narrative has a strongly unilateral approach, which does not preclude original twists: the slave revolts are identified as a theme of great importance, which is intertwined with the wider social and political turmoil of peninsular Italy – Duruy speaks openly of ‘révolte des pauvres et des sujets’. Sulla marks a dreadful interlude in which a design of ruthless and rational political reorganization is asserted, aiming to create a new order through a work of destruction: ‘le Richelieu de l’aristocratie’ (2.247). At the core of his attempt, however, there is a fundamental lack of political intelligence: the massacres that follow his victory are merely the beginning of a military regime that profoundly debases the Republic. Even the central figure in the reaction against the Sullan system, Pompey the Great, shows serious personal and political shortcomings: he is not led by a clear or coherent vision, but by ambition, by the ‘intérêt de sa grandeur’ (2.473). Caesar, on the other hand, is driven by a firm monarchic aim, which sharpens after his success in Gaul (2.415-416) and to which he brings much greater determination and political skill than his opponents (2.501).

Duruy’s discussion is rather ambitious – even challenging in places. The most original contribution to the study of ancient Rome made in French historiography during the first half of the nineteenth century, however, is surely the *Économie politique des Romains* by Auguste Dureau de la Malle (1777-1857),

published in 1840 as the culmination of decades of largely pioneering research.³⁸² Its basic insight is in fact revolutionary, and makes use of the lesson of the great study on the political economy of Athens that August Boeckh had published two decades earlier. The investigation of Roman history is based on the analysis of the creation and distribution of resources, and of the institutions that regulate them and make them possible: on the study of census, demography, agriculture, administrative structures, the taxation system. For Dureau de la Malle, too, the history of Rome should be understood through the integration of the Republic and the Principate, and through a single historical watershed, which in fact could hardly be more conventional: 146 BCE. The first six centuries of Rome's history are, in his view, a laborious, austere, and prosperous period, while from the capture of Carthage onwards luxury, moral decline and political anarchy assert themselves without any real solution of continuity. The concentration of land ownership in the hands of few individuals was the decisive factor. In spite of the praiseworthy efforts of the Gracchi, the cause of agrarian reform was defeated, and what prevailed instead was the practice of granary distribution, which transformed the Roman people into a sort of parasitic nobility.³⁸³ Imperial history was the logical continuation of that state of affairs: from anarchy descended despotism, which in order to sustain itself had to resort to a costly military structure, which impoverished both the public treasury and the private economy, and which not even the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine were able to rectify.³⁸⁴ The conditions for the fall of the empire in the West were thus embedded in the Mediterranean empire that Rome built in the second century BCE. What is left unexplained is the exceptional longevity of that political and military structure.

23. Work in a comparable vein was also carried out in mid-nineteenth-century England. Charles Merivale (1808-1893), a Cambridge-educated Dean of Ely Cathedral, attempted to pursue and enhance the integration between the history of the Republic and that of the Empire, albeit from a standpoint that could hardly be further apart from Dureau de la Malle's. Of the eight volumes of his

³⁸² Dureau de la Malle 1840. See the introduction and commentary by B. Hemmerdinger to the reprint in Dureau de la Malle 1986; on the role of this work in the history of ancient demography see Lo Cascio 2006, 257-261.

³⁸³ Dureau de la Malle 1840, 2.491-493.

³⁸⁴ Dureau de la Malle 1840, 2.495-496. The massive extension of the Roman franchise is the fundamental condition that allows the creation of large imperial armies, and the outcome of unilateral decisions by Caesar and Augustus (1.314-339, esp. 316: 'C'est le plus grand homme de l'univers et le plus habile politique de l'État romain qui ont daredé concevoir et exécuter cette opération'). The wise emperors were necessarily the thrifty ones (1.338).

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History of the Romans under the Empire (1850-1864), three are devoted to the period between the death of Sulla and the definition of the powers of Augustus.³⁸⁵ In the first quarter of the first century BCE both the terms of the struggle between *optimates* and *populares*, and the relations between Rome and its Mediterranean empire were defined. In both respects Pompey is a central figure, to whom Merivale attaches great historical importance, beyond his personal limitations, for his role in the conquest of the East as well as for his clear understanding of the need to enlarge the perimeter of the traditional nobility. The underlying theme of this part of the work, however, is the moral decline of Roman society, in which religious aspects also play an important role. At the start of the third volume, after a reflection on the consequences of the Ides of March and the character of Caesar, there is a lengthy discussion on the evolution – or indeed the decline – of Roman public religion, whose breadth and detail find few parallels in nineteenth-century historiography.³⁸⁶

It is especially noteworthy for our purposes how the term ‘crisis’ finds wide application in Merivale’s discussion, and through various conceptual articulations: the largely prevailing meaning refers to short-term crises, but there is no lack of instances of the term to designate the historical process leading to the end of the Republic (1852, 1.96: ‘The policy and conduct of the popular party at the great crisis of the commonwealth’), and also in a meaning closer to the etymological one (1.152 n. 1: ‘the affair of Catiline had not yet reached its crisis’; 540: ‘No aristocracy was ever more short-sighted at the crisis of its fate’). The concept proves especially valuable to the understanding of Augustus’ strategy. At the end of the civil wars, Augustus was clear on the importance of laying down the powers he had acquired in that exceptional phase: only ‘the excitement of a political crisis’ had justified them.³⁸⁷ Returning them to the ‘commonwealth’ was thus, in Merivale’s view, the wisest way to recognize the need to emerge from the crisis and to devise, with a degree of boldness, a new political setup.

According to George Long (1800-1879), formerly Professor of Greek and Latin at University College London, and the author of a five-volume *The Decline of the Roman Republic* (1864-1874), the central figure of the late Republic was Julius Caesar, to whom the entire concluding volume of the work is devoted

³⁸⁵ Merivale chose instead a more usual periodisation in Merivale 1853, where the discussion starts from the Gracchan age. On his historiographical project see Turner 1986, 590-592; Loreto 1999, 67-73. In that work the judgement on Augustus is more negative than that expressed in *History of the Romans under the Empire*: see Butler 2012, 34-35, 37.

³⁸⁶ Merivale 1865, 3.11-27. Benjamin Constant’s *Du polythéisme romain* (published posthumously in 1833), with its original periodisation of Roman religious history into four phases, is another significant example: see Fezzi 2012, 135-136.

³⁸⁷ Merivale 1865, 3.412.

(the fourth one concentrates on the Gallic campaign). Long was not an uncritical proponent of the romantic myth of Caesar, nor is he driven by a Republican allegiance. Instead, in his account Caesar's historical significance derives from what he identifies as the key feature of the final part of the Republic: which is, in his view, military history rather than political history (5.iii). From a quantitative point of view, Long's work has few parallels in the history of the historiography on the Roman Republic: each volume exceeds five hundred pages. The periodisation has some interesting facets, as the discussion begins with the years just before the fall of Carthage, notably with the developments in the Iberian provinces in the middle of the second century, and then ends with Caesar's funeral. Although Long was a scholar of serious academic credentials, his work is not really a learned pursuit. Rather, it is a wide-ranging narrative account, based on a careful reading of the ancient sources (the importance of Appian is often emphasized), which largely disregards the modern historiography on the subject: one of the few exceptions is the *Histoire de César*, 'written, as the publisher informs us, by the Emperor Napoleon III' (4.v; see §29).

At the heart of Long's project lie a clear starting assumption and a general theoretical question, which presuppose and steer the whole discussion. The decline of political regimes is inevitable, and the late Republic offers a well-documented confirmation of that principle. The task of the historian is to explore the specific factors that prompt and steer change. Long speaks only occasionally of 'crisis', and mostly to refer to specific historical phases, such as the Social War (2.168) or the days before the unveiling of Catiline's conspiracy (3.282); the concept of 'decline' allows him instead to focus on a wider chronological span and on general underlying trends. In the preface to the fifth volume there is an explicit reference to Francis Bacon and his *Of Innovations*, where an opposition is established between the deteriorating action of time and the positive action of 'wisdom and counsel' (5.iv). However, Long found a perhaps even more significant point of reference in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, where he found important insights into the balance between internal conflict and political order, between the military dimension and the civil one, and between different interests within the same political body (1.viii-xii).

26. Merivale and Long wrote their histories of Republican Rome from standpoints of firm acceptance of the political order in which they lived – that of Victorian Britain. On the Continent, though, the reflection on the late Republic often fed on the revolutionary atmosphere that reached its peak in 1848. The subject matter lent itself to those interferences: much of the debate on the fall of the Republic and its causes presupposes a broader discussion of the dynamics of power in Rome, which is already well established in the ancient sources. To cite

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a classic example: Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) framed the whole fourth book of the *Römische Geschichte* around the concept of 'Revolution'.³⁸⁸ His choice of terminology was, in this case, firmly focused on power dynamics. The initiative of Tiberius Gracchus is revolutionary because it goes against the will of the majority of the Senate at a time when the Senate is the dominant force in Roman politics.³⁸⁹ In identifying the Gracchan period as a cardinal moment in the history of Rome, Mommsen was following a trend that had been established in German historiography for at least half a century, and had an overt connection with the political context of the time.³⁹⁰

The complex and disturbing figure of Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) plays a not negligible role in this background. He was a scholar of wide-ranging interests, and a Professor of Philosophy (*Weltweisheit*) in Göttingen from 1775, who framed his reflection on Greek and Roman history within a wider project on the development of mankind and racial divisions. He was one of the most systematic theorists of the so-called 'scientific racism', advocating the primacy of the Tartar-Caucasian race, to which he attributed superior intellectual qualities and aesthetic attributes.³⁹¹ This is not the place to go into this aspect of his thinking and his tragic legacy: the thesis of a link between the ancient Greeks and Germans through the common Aryan matrix is already asserted in his works. Meiners practiced with full competence the tools of antiquarian scholarship and had broad methodological interests. His work on ancient history turned towards problems of intellectual history and was accompanied by a reflection on broader historical and philosophical themes: his first major work on the subject, which appeared in 1781, is a history of Greek thought from the Seven Wise Men to Plato.³⁹² The rise and decline of ancient culture is immediately identified as a central issue, even if the discussion remains unfinished and does not go beyond the beginning of the fourth century BCE.

³⁸⁸ Mommsen 1855. On Mommsen's position in 1848 see Heuss 1996, 26-29; on the political and historiographical background of *RG* see 82-91.

³⁸⁹ Mommsen 1855, 86.

³⁹⁰ McGlew 1986, 426 overestimates the innovative aspect of the use of the category of 'revolution' in Mommsen. His overall reading of the section of the *Römische Geschichte* on the late Republican period is valuable, though: see esp. 434-436 on the connection between revolution and transgression, and 442-443 on the difference between ancient and modern state in Mommsen's thought; on this aspect see also Heuss 1956, 4 (= 1995, 1167). – Even the important discussion by Tornow 1978 does not discuss the use of the term 'Revolution' in German historiography before Mommsen.

³⁹¹ See Zantop 1997.

³⁹² Meiners 1781.

Its developments in the Roman context are discussed in a work of 1782, *Geschichte des Verfalls der Sitten und der Staatsverwaltung der Römer*.³⁹³ The title already identifies the underlying themes: it is a study of the downward trajectory of Rome, in which the focus is shifted from philosophical developments to social and cultural ones, linking them to political upheavals. The dialogue with contemporary historiography becomes especially close on these themes. A few years earlier, Meiners had expressed a critical view on the character and political attitude of Cicero, whom he credited with a central role in the development of philosophy in Rome and a first-rate work in the intermediation of the Greek philosophical tradition: he attributed to him a vanity and inconsistency of judgment about his contemporaries that was not fully tempered by loyalty to the country and the cause of the nobility.³⁹⁴ A few years later, however, he opened a broad historical picture of the decline of the customs and institutions of Republican Rome with an explicit retraction: Middleton's biography had persuaded him of Cicero's extraordinary human and political qualities.³⁹⁵ According to Meiners himself, his work can even be read, in a way, as a kind of supplement to that of Middleton, focusing in particular on the period before Cicero's rise to prominence. The discussion has a narrative, or at least chronological, outlook until the age of Sulla, and then dwells on various thematic aspects. The well-known thesis on the moral decline of Republican Rome, closely linked to the construction of the Mediterranean empire and the advent of prosperity and luxury, is again put forward: the turning point is identified with the victory against Antiochus III.³⁹⁶ However, the emphasis is also placed on the economic dimension of the process: on the concentration of wealth and property that it generated, and on the influx of masses of slaves into Italy, which weakened the economic fabric, deprived the free population of sources of income, and ultimately corrupted the authentic Roman race.³⁹⁷ Meiners' racist vision thus feeds on a theme developed by a strand of the ancient tradition, which sees in the decline of free labour a decisive theme of the second-century crisis; at the same time, the underlying interpretation repeatedly insists on the burden of growing economic and social inequality.³⁹⁸ The judgement on the Gracchi is broadly positive: their intentions are noble and far-sighted, even if the need to leverage popular support is a basic

³⁹³ Meiners 1782.

³⁹⁴ Meiners 1775, esp. 296-299.

³⁹⁵ Meiners 1782, 1-12. See Carhart 2007, 201-203, 211.

³⁹⁶ Meiners 1782, 24-25.

³⁹⁷ Meiners 1782, 70-72, esp. 72: 'der echte Römische Stamm, oder das reine Römische Blut gänzlich verfälscht'.

³⁹⁸ See McDaniel 2013, 140-141.

limitation of their strategy.³⁹⁹ The link between inequality and corruption also arises at other stages: after Sulla's victory, and in the 60s, when provincial governors have unlimited access to unprecedented wealth. Meiners' antiquarian expertise enables him to gather an extensive dossier on the spread of luxury in Roman society, which is part of a pervasive loosening of societal constraints: the final part of the work is devoted to the decline of military discipline, to complete the picture of an 'allgemeine Verderbenheit' that pervades every aspect of society.⁴⁰⁰

The discussion of the fall of the Republic was to be included in a work devoted to Caesar, which never saw the light of day.⁴⁰¹ In the immediately following years Meiners went on to write the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Menschheit*, which appeared in 1785, where his racist view of anthropology and history is articulated at length. He then returned to Roman history in a work published in 1791 and devoted to the moral development of Roman civilization in the first two centuries of the Empire, in which he argued for a direct link between immorality and despotism.⁴⁰²

In other scholars the confrontation with contemporary political developments was closer and more explicit. In March 1793 Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812) – himself a Göttingen professor, holder of the Chair of *Beredsamkeit und Dichtkunst* – gave a lecture with the eloquent title *Leges agrariae pestiferae et execrabiles*, in which the controversy against the contemporary supporters of agrarian reform is framed in an historical discussion of the agrarian question in Rome, the declared model of many French revolutionaries.⁴⁰³ In Heyne's view, Tiberius Gracchus attempted to confront a real impoverishment of Italy and its agriculture; the opposition he encountered was driven by the blind social selfishness of the rich.⁴⁰⁴ Heyne correctly understood that the Gracchan law applied only to the *ager publicus*, and identified on that basis an important line of development in Republican history. From the end of the second century, other reform attempts, promoted by Saturninus and other seditious tribunes, targeted land of various legal statuses, and marked a decisive historical shift. This was followed by a new type of agrarian reform, consisting in the con-

³⁹⁹ Meiners 1782, 81-82, 85-86.

⁴⁰⁰ Meiners 1782, 446. Cf. also the use of medical metaphor in the discussion of the victories against Spartacus, Catiline and the pirates (266): 'so viele krebsartige Geschwüre, die zwar für den Augenblick ausgeschnitten wurden, aber eine unheilbare Schwäche, und einen baldigen bevorstehenden Tod des ungeheuren Staatskörpers verkündigten'.

⁴⁰¹ Meiners 1782, 281.

⁴⁰² Meiners 1791.

⁴⁰³ Heyne 1796, 355. See Heidenreich 2006, 20-21; Rich 2008, 355-357.

⁴⁰⁴ Heyne 1796, 364, 366.

fiscation of land and the settlement of colonists: the model of the Sullan and Triumviral assignments.⁴⁰⁵ The central point of Heyne's argument is that agrarian law is an unviable model of political conduct in the modern context, because it lacks any historical basis (373); for our purposes, however, his analysis is interesting, above all, for the rigorous periodisation that it envisages. In an essay of the same year, Heyne returned to the analogy between late Republican and contemporary politics at the end of an essay on the Social War. In his opinion, if Rome had unreasonably denied the Italic peoples the rights to which they were entitled, England, on the other hand, had granted independence to the United States, displaying the farsightedness that befitted a civilized and prosperous nation. Rome's obtuse opposition to the Italian claims was instead the mirror of a city in decline, which was soon to face a season of civil wars and the loss of freedom.⁴⁰⁶

Arnold H. L. Heeren (1760-1842), Heyne's pupil and son-in-law, and himself a prolific historian of vast interests, also dealt with the Gracchi in an important study that appeared only two years later, showing important lines of convergence with the work of his mentor.⁴⁰⁷ Its original title was *Tiberius und Caius Gracchus*, but the reprint in the first volume of the *Kleine historische Schriften* of Heeren (1803) was published under the title *Geschichte der Revolution der Gracchen*.⁴⁰⁸ The basic thesis is close to Heyne's, but it is developed in much greater detail. If the initial claims of the reformers were entirely legitimate, the process which their attempt unleashed had dire consequences, which stand like a power example for posterity. Like Heyne, Heeren argues that the fall of the Republic had very deep roots, and that it was a process which could not be reversed after the Gracchan initiative: the 'Strom der Revolution' (151) could not be interrupted even in the face of a harsh and effective repression. No reference is made to the concept of 'crisis', but a clear line of continuity is established between the Gracchan initiative and the end of Republican freedom.⁴⁰⁹

The book that Dietrich Hermann Hegewisch (1746-1812) published on the Gracchan *Unruhen* in 1801 offered a more balanced, or at least more sensitive, reading. There is no talk of crisis or revolution, except for a polemical reference to Robespierre;⁴¹⁰ the subject, however, is identified as a topic of choice for an-

⁴⁰⁵ Heyne 1796, 369-372.

⁴⁰⁶ Heyne 1796, 358-359.

⁴⁰⁷ See Rich 2008, 538.

⁴⁰⁸ Another reprint, in the *Vermischte historische Schriften* (III, Göttingen 1821) was entitled *Geschichte der Staatsunruhen der Gracchen*. See Marcone 1989, esp. 527 n. 8 (= 2009, esp. 5 n. 8).

⁴⁰⁹ The same approach is restated in the rapid summary in Heeren 1828, 417-423 (the first edition of the work was published in 1796).

⁴¹⁰ Hegewisch 1801, 145 n. *.

yone who might take an interest in ‘Staatsrevolutionen’.⁴¹¹ Hegewisch – a professor at Kiel, whose lectures were attended and appreciated by the young Niebuhr – bases his discussion on a polemic with Ferguson, the only modern scholar to whom he makes explicit reference, criticizing both his hostile assessment of the Gracchi and specific aspects of his interpretation.⁴¹² The intention is to offer a balanced assessment, not distorted by partisan spirit, in which due distinction is made between the intentions of the tribunes and the consequences of their actions. In the period to which Hegewisch devotes his detailed analysis, irreparable wounds were inflicted on the Republic.⁴¹³ The basic bond between the parts of the civic body, ‘die Großen’ and the people, is broken: the former lose all interest in the cause of the people, while the plebs no longer see anything honourable in the authority of the Senate. There is no room left for reasoned argument and persuasion, and electoral consent is acquired by bribery.⁴¹⁴ After the failure of a reform project, the conditions for political upheaval were established.

27. The project of the *Römische Geschichte* was commissioned to Mommsen by the publishers Reimer and Hirzel in 1849, who had just attended a public lecture he had given on the Gracchi;⁴¹⁵ the first edition appeared in three volumes between 1854 and 1856. The subject soon gained deep and renewed appeal, if not full conceptual and historiographical centrality, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Karl Wilhelm Nitzsch (1818-1880), who, like Mommsen, had studied at Kiel, wrote a two-volume history of the Roman Republic, which appeared posthumously in 1884, in which he set the Hannibalic War as the great historical watershed and placed the Gracchan age within a cycle of ‘attempts at reform and revolutions’ (‘Die Reformversuche und die Revolutionen’) that unfolded from the beginning of Roman hegemony (‘Weltherrschaft’) to the death of Sulla.⁴¹⁶ The final phase (‘Untergang’) of the Republic is instead understood

⁴¹¹ Hegewisch 1801, 1.

⁴¹² Hegewisch 1801, 3-4, 76. On the approach of this study see Rich 2008, 537-538. On the reception of Ferguson’s work in Germany see Carhart 2007, 211-212. Meiners devoted a brief and penetrating review of the first edition of the *History*, noting an excessive concentration on political history and an insufficient attention to the ‘Geschichte der Sitten und Aufklärung der Römer’: Meiners 1784, esp. 892.

⁴¹³ Hegewisch 1801, 179.

⁴¹⁴ Hegewisch 1801, 179-180. See 144-145 for a judgment on the limitations of republican regimes and 167 n. *, 182-184 n. * on the inability of the Roman Republic to equip itself with effective representation mechanisms.

⁴¹⁵ See Heuss 1996, 59-60; Wickert 1969, 655-656; Rebenich 2022, 87.

⁴¹⁶ Nitzsch 1884, 2.57-170. Cf. the reservations of Tornow 1978, 59 n. 2 about the reliability of the text of this posthumous edition; Nitzsch, at any rate, recognized the analytical validity of the

as a coherent period, from 78 BCE to Actium (2.58-298). The compromise between Octavian and the Senate opens the concluding phase of ancient history, in which the two centres of power cooperate effectively; that balance will be laboriously recovered even after the fall of the Julio-Claudians, but it is soon destined to come to an end and to make room for a new history (298). That wide-ranging historical picture, mainly conveyed in narrative form, but certainly not unoriginal, appeared posthumously, at the end of a long career that also brought Nietzsche to work extensively on the history of modern Germany.⁴¹⁷

His interest in mid-second-century BCE developments, however, was a longstanding one. In 1847 he had published an extensive study of the Gracchi 'and their predecessors', which consisted of four parts: the essays on the two tribunes were preceded by two studies, respectively on agrarian and fiscal aspects and on reform attempts in the early part of the second century BCE.⁴¹⁸ The whole discussion was framed in a broader study of the agrarian question and its relationship with the Roman conquest of Italy: the introductory chapter took as its points of reference the Samnite wars and the initiative of C. Flaminius.⁴¹⁹ The work still stands out as the first point of orientation on the age of Gracchus in modern historiography, outdated in many respects, but never irrelevant (a parallel may be drawn with a work written in those same years, the study of Sulla by Karl-Salomo Zachariae, 1834); it offers, among other things, a still valuable analysis of the lines of literary tradition (437-456). Nietzsche, who graduated with a thesis on Polybius, already shows a strong interest in the interaction between people and Senate in the context of the *res publica*, and sees in the Gracchan age a moment in which political and social issues powerfully converge: all the factors that would emerge in the late Republican period are defined then (432-433). The discussion ends with a cursory analogy (434-436) between Republican Rome and the 'Rom unserer Zeit', Britain. For the 'Polybian' Nietzsche, too, history is a source of reflection and political education, and must entail the deployment of analogy.

These concerns were also shared by Mommsen, in a highly original way and from a very different ideological point of view. For him, as for Heeren and Nietzsche, the concept of 'revolution' is far more productive than that of 'crisis'. 'Revolution' is a category which, especially over the long term, has descriptive

concept of 'Revolution' in the long and critical review of Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* that he published in the *Neue Jahrbücher* between 1856 and 1858 (on which see Tornow 1978, 59-61).

⁴¹⁷ On the importance of Nietzsche's work and the areas of historiographical and political disagreement with Mommsen see Tornow 1978, 58-63, 67-72, 94-96.

⁴¹⁸ Nietzsche 1847, 11-177.

⁴¹⁹ On the idealization of early Roman agriculture and its political connotations see Yavetz 1976, 293-294.

and analytical value, both in the account of the early Republic and in the discussion of its terminal phase: Mommsen, as we have seen above, traced the beginning of a revolution destined to last a hundred years back to Gaius Gracchus.⁴²⁰ References to crises tend to focus on specific contingencies, whether political (the Gracchan crisis, the Marian crisis), military or economic. The term is rarely referred to long-term processes, for which Mommsen instead resorts to the idea of 'Verfall', decline, in both the political and moral spheres; in an especially dense passage, crisis is viewed as part of a process of decline, which contains and presupposes it, and affects especially the 'höchste Stände'.⁴²¹ 'Verfall' is a process that creates the conditions for revolutionary developments. The notion of revolution enables the historian to focus on political change, but can never be divorced from cultural dynamics. The analogy between Gaius Gracchus and Caesar is proof of that:⁴²² two political leaders driven by very similar intentions, but are surrounded by groups of supporters with very different orientations. In the space of three quarters of a century, the 'popular party' gradually reoriented its objectives: from reform to revolution, to anarchy and a direct attack on private property (3.455). At times Nitzsch revives a theme that had already had considerable historiographic fortune: the immanent necessity of the fall of the Republic. After Carrhae, the crisis precipitates towards the outcome of January 49 – in spite of Pompey's attempts to delay it – under the weight of things ('das Schwergewicht der Dinge': 3.340): there are superordinate forces in action.

The concept of crisis resurfaces, though, with a decisive role in the famous final part of the work, where a complex evaluation of Caesar and his character is produced, and the focus shifts from political to social aspects. Caesar is the victorious interpreter of the needs of his time, who knows how to resolve a crisis that had reached an insoluble point, in which irreconcilable antitheses were facing each other (3.551). His Mediterranean monarchy enabled Rome to overcome the second great crisis in its history, after the conflict between patricians and plebeians. If in the first instance the answer had come from expansion and integration in Italy, in this passage it is the Mediterranean integration that offers a new perspective. The medical metaphor makes its appearance once again. The internal disease is cured, for the second time, by a miraculous intervention. There is also an element of putrefaction ('Verwesung') in that process of rejuvenation ('Verjüngung'): a new plant emerges from a corrupt body, and from the ruins of the 'secondary nationalities' ('sekundäre Nationalitäten') destroyed

⁴²⁰ Mommsen 1855, 111: 'die hundertjährig Revolution, die von ihm datirt, ist, so weit sie eines Menschen Werk ist, das Werk des Gaius Gracchus'. See Tornow 1978, 9-34 on the use of the concept in Mommsen, esp. 24-29 on the role of the Gracchi in *RG*. See also Nicolet 2003, 188-189.

⁴²¹ Mommsen 1855, 124-125.

⁴²² See Tornow 1982, 29-30.

by a ‘levelling civilisation’ (‘nivellierende Civilisation’). Caesar designs and carries out this plan, with a clarity of vision that Mommsen celebrated in some famous pages;⁴²³ at the same time, he engages within dynamics that have already been ongoing for a long time. The tension between individual initiative and superior constraints is not fully resolved.

28. As is well known, Mommsen’s legacy had profound effects on German historiography, not least in the study of the late Republic, and already during the long life of the Berlin master.⁴²⁴ The first volume of the *Geschichte Roms* by Carl Peter (1808-1893) appeared in 1853; the work, in three volumes, was completed in 1869 and went on to have four editions. It put forward an account of the history of Rome from its foundation to the death of Marcus Aurelius, which, on the one hand, drew on the school teaching of its author and, on the other, developed his learned research. In 1841 Peter had published a remarkable overview of the constitutional history of the Republic, where he had articulated a periodisation into four ‘epochs’, the last of which runs from the Gracchi to Augustus.⁴²⁵ In the preface to the second edition of the first volume (1865) Peter put Mommsen to task for having misread the terms of the conflict between patricians and plebeians, reducing it to a clash between rich and poor, and for not having given an account of the moral and political decline of Rome that occurred in the late Republic.⁴²⁶ The second volume is entirely devoted to the century from the Gracchi to the end of the civil wars, and the disagreement with Mommsen is also stressed on various points of detail, including the problem of the end of Caesar’s provincial command.⁴²⁷ The latter’s victory is discussed as a moment of ephemeral stabilization in Italy and the empire, and as a stage in a series of political developments shaped by the prevalence of armies. While Caesar is credited with a degree of effectiveness, he is not attributed with a coherent vision as a statesman.⁴²⁸ After the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the very features of the ‘Römerthum’ can no longer even be recognized.⁴²⁹

A few years later, another substantial overview was produced by Wilhelm Ihne (1821-1902), an original scholar, who attained a university post only in his early fifties, after a somewhat unconventional career that included a long stint in charge of a school in Liverpool. His *Römische Geschichte*, which appeared in

⁴²³ Polverini 2011, 175-182 is an essential orientation point.

⁴²⁴ See Tornow 1978, 35-121.

⁴²⁵ Peter 1841.

⁴²⁶ Peter 1864, vii-ix. The argument was made more fully in Peter 1863, esp. 78-115.

⁴²⁷ Peter 1866, 259-260, n. *.

⁴²⁸ Peter 1866, 356-367.

⁴²⁹ Peter 1867, v.

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eight volumes between 1868 and 1890, also had an English edition overseen by Ihne himself. The fifth volume, devoted to the period between the defeat of Gaius Gracchus and the death of Sulla, opens with an important programmatic remark: the Roman Republic ends with Sulla's victory, and the subsequent history is already the story of a monarchic regime; in the introduction, Ihne seems to contemplate the possibility of stopping at that stage (v). Sulla, in his view, is a figure who embodies the crux of a difficult transition: a genuine republican, led to a monarchic position by historical necessity (453). Ihne only rarely uses the concept of crisis, and the terminology he uses has interesting variations between the German (1879) and English (1882) editions: for instance, in one he speaks directly of 'Verfall der Republik', in the other of 'Expansion of the Republic into an Empire'. Ihne does not reduce his analysis of the Republic to a pro-senatorial reading. The judgement on the Gracchan reforms is largely positive, both for the economic and social intentions behind them, and for their ideal inspiration: they aimed at implementing the democratic principles that were the foundations of Roman public law, but still awaited full implementation (10). The aristocratic reaction determined their defeat; the elements that determined disorder survived. In this judgment of the discrepancy between the intentions and the legacy of Gracchus' attempt, Ihne develops elements that already informed the analysis of Heyne and Heeren.

The sixth volume, published in German in 1886, is entitled *Der Kampf um die persönliche Herrschaft*, and opens with some remarks that anticipate what is to follow: the Republic could not sustain either a democratic reorganization or the Sullan resettlement. The consequences of the imperial expansion and the moral decline of the nobility made necessary a clear transition phase, and the demise of the Republican order within a monarchic organization, which asserts itself as the only credible alternative to a scenario of anarchy (5). The last two books of the work, devoted respectively to Caesar's dictatorship and the establishment of the monarchy (the latter written with August W. Zumpt), are consistent with a framework in which the development towards an autocratic outcome is inevitable.⁴³⁰ Even Caesar, to whom much attention is paid, is viewed as a political operator who knows how to skilfully read political contingencies and historical processes, and shrewdly responds to them: his reorganization is not inspired by lofty philosophical or ideal principles, but alters aspects of the Republican order to a strictly necessary extent (7.199). The inevitability of that transition ('Übergang') is decisively confirmed by the developments after the Ides of March, which do not stop the shift towards monarchy, but intensify and accelerate it.

⁴³⁰ See Tornow 1978, 81.

Ihne's work effectively shows how Mommsen's influence was felt even among those who attempted readings of a very different kind. Mommsen is the obvious polemical target of the remarkable reconstruction of the Gracchan age provided by Carl Neumann (1823-1880) in *Geschichte Roms während des Verfalles der Republik*, which appeared posthumously in 1884: an unfinished two-volume history of the late Republic, which ended with Catiline's conspiracy and opened with a broad historical overview of the second century BCE, which identified the premises of the process that led to the fall of the Republic and identified a structural factor in the tension between 'Form' and 'Wesen', which would require serious reforms, but ultimately led to an authoritarian outcome.⁴³¹ According to Neumann, it was not correct to attribute revolutionary aims to the two tribunes: the extremely violent oligarchic reaction had in fact introduced subversive elements into Roman politics.⁴³² This reflects the political point of view of Neumann, who in his youth had been a member of the Constitutional Party. Adopting an anti-oligarchic point of view does not entail, on the other hand, denying the revolutionary character of late Republican history. As is made clear in the introductory paragraph of the work, the whole period can be read as a sequence of crises and revolutions, which have their own intrinsic coherence and establish a climate in which the cultural and intellectual conditions for a clear political change are affirmed. A key outcome of the oligarchic hegemony is the treatment of the Allies, which Neumann identifies as a problematic aspect of Republican history since the Hannibalic War. The Social War is identified as the most traumatic crisis that Rome ever had to face in its history, and is at the same time the outcome of long-term developments, and of a narrow-minded attitude of the oligarchy.⁴³³ The unfinished nature of the discussion and the imperfect editorial care received by the last chapters make it impossible to fully follow its development; the discussion as a whole takes on a more explicitly narrative dimension. However, the periodizing value of the year 63 BCE clearly emerges: the moment in which the 'oligarchische Regiment' built by Sulla fifteen years earlier (2.189) collapses, and Catiline's conspiracy is discovered and repressed. The analytical approach always remains loyal to the point of view of the people (or indeed to Neumann's construction of it): the last page of the work dwells on the hatred of the Roman plebs towards the informer Vettius (2.289). Few other works produced in the nineteenth century pose the historical problem of the fall of the Republic with comparable clarity and an equally robust learned apparatus.

⁴³¹ Neumann 1884, 1.1-103, esp. 3; see Tornow 1978, 56-57 and Deininger 1980, 91. For an earlier attempt to understand the Gracchan turn in a medium-term perspective see Nitzsch 1847.

⁴³² Neumann 1884, 1.259.

⁴³³ Neumann 1884, 1.22.

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A generation later, the formidable account put forward by Karl Julius Beloch (1854-1929) in the third volume of *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft* identifies another watershed, also quite different from the one envisaged by Mommsen: the decisive crisis in ancient history was the Hannibalic War.⁴³⁴ The advent of Roman hegemony on a Mediterranean scale had profound material consequences: there was a massive influx of wealth into Italy, which was concentrated in the hands of a few 'capitalists'. The process is a seriously imbalanced one, but the general picture is a positive one: ancient Italy did not experience a phase of prosperity comparable to the one it knew between the Hannibalic War and the Social War (177). Other aspects of Mommsen's interpretation are restated. The political history of the Republic is based on the conflict between the Senate and the democratic opposition, which leads to a revolutionary outcome after the initiative of Tiberius Gracchus, when a push for social reform is soon translated into a disruptive political initiative. The concept of 'Revolution' may be invoked whenever the Senate's dominance is called into question: notably, after Sulla's death (182). The Dictator is also associated with another periodisation, which transcends the boundaries of ancient history: the harshness with which he tamed the 'Oscan' and the Etruscan 'nations' laid the foundations for Italy's national unity, but inflicted wounds on the country that were bound never to heal (*ibid.*). Sulla, who had well understood the importance of the example of Marius, was also the teacher of Caesar, who in turn grasped the principles of the politics of his time much better than Pompey, and consistently pursued the design of a personal hegemony (184). On the other hand, the story of an exceptionally capable man like Caesar confirms the validity of a principle that is central to Beloch's outlook: the individual has a negligible weight in history (185). In spite of his genius, Caesar was unable to create any political legacy, and after the Ides of March the fundamental issue of the previous years arose again: the unsolvable tension between the army, the urban plebs, and the Senate. A new monarchic outcome was soon to emerge, again based on the military pre-eminence of Italy, in which the colonial foundations led by Octavian played a decisive role.

Eduard Meyer (1855-1930) also put forward an altogether new periodisation of the late Republic, and an alternative interpretation to Mommsen's: his approach, though, was very different from that envisaged by his friend Beloch. The great work on Caesar's monarchy, whose first edition appeared in 1918, focuses on the two decades between 66 and 44. The two points of observation are thus the assignment of the Eastern command to Pompey and the Ides of March: in that climate a 'große weltgeschichtliche Epoche' (1922, VI) is summed up.

⁴³⁴ Beloch 1914.

Meyer's work is also the expression of a time of crisis: as he makes clear in the Introduction, the project is strongly rooted in the climate of the First World War. Contemporary concerns are never far from sight. In the opening pages an analogy is established between Republican Rome and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century (5-6): two states that found themselves facing a similar crisis, when their role on the political and military scene became increasingly central, and their social and economic structure was altered by changing circumstances. Both were faced with an unresolvable tension between traditional political principles ('demokratische Prinzipien') and the growing role of great figures, to whom the power to make major decisions is inevitably devolved. Meyer foresees that in the following century the crisis in the United States will reveal itself in all its might. However, he uses the concept of crisis very sparingly, and always to designate specific situations, rather than long-term historical processes;⁴³⁵ what interests him much more directly are the concepts of 'Revolution' and 'Anarchie'. Meyer fundamentally dissents from Mommsen's reading of the late Republic. The key character in his story is not Caesar, but Pompey. It was with him that a new model of political leadership definitively called into question the Republican order, creating a model of *princeps* that was to become the true point of reference of the Augustan construction. Caesar's conception of monarchy was completely overcome by his adoptive son, in favour of a paradigm of Republican restoration and renewed focus on 'Römertum': a happy balance between change and continuity.

Neither Beloch nor Meyer tackled the reflections on the late Republic put forward by a student of Mommsen who later pursued different interests: Max Weber (1864-1920).⁴³⁶ In *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum*, which appeared for the first time in 1897, but was comprehensively revised in the third edition of 1909, he presented a broad picture of Roman history through the prism of land access and management.⁴³⁷ The framing of the subject matter could not be more different from Mommsen's: the gaze is firmly directed towards economic and

⁴³⁵ The term is used in a similar fashion in the effective account of Republican history produced by an admirer of Mommsen like Johannes Kromayer (1859-1931: Kromayer 1921), which is interesting in at least two respects: the discussion of internal and external developments is largely developed in two parallel strands, and an original, Caesar-centred periodisation is put forward. The 'spätere Republik' falls into two phases, one from the end of the Hannibalic War to the first consulship of Caesar (85-126), and another from 59 to 30 BCE (126-157).

⁴³⁶ On the various stages of the debate between Meyer and Weber see Hatscher 2000, 50-54 (bibliography at 51 n. 97).

⁴³⁷ The reference edition is Weber 1924 (= 1998, 81-366); on Rome, see esp. 1924, 190-278 (= 1998, 260-366), with the fundamental discussion by Capogrossi Colognesi 2000, 260-307.

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social developments, upon which legal frameworks and structures hinge.⁴³⁸ The category of revolution comes into play, but in altogether different way from how it was deployed in the *Römische Geschichte*: the conflict that leads to that outcome is between free and slave labour, a dominant theme in the history of ancient Italy, which distinguishes it from the Hellenistic world.⁴³⁹ For Weber the whole history of the late Republic is one of class conflict, and the key theme is the dialectic between the senatorial and the equestrian orders. The Gracchi identified a political and social problem, to which they offered ideologically loaded solutions. They had to face tough opposition, and form an alliance with the equestrian order in anti-senatorial function: an ephemeral balance, which coincides with the emergence of what Weber calls ‘ancient capitalism’.⁴⁴⁰ The Sullan solution is a decisive turning point, leading to a clear split between the interests of the two orders. The knights were denied control over the resources of the province of Asia, undoing the decision taken by Gaius Gracchus. The consequence of that choice of the senatorial order was decisive: the knights were eventually led to support a Caesarist solution.⁴⁴¹ The outcome of that political

⁴³⁸ On the relationship between Mommsen and Weber see Capogrossi Colognesi 2000, 81-93.

⁴³⁹ Weber 1924, 234 (= 1998, 313).

⁴⁴⁰ Weber 1924, 235-241, esp. 240 (= 1998, 315-321, esp. 320). Winterling 2001, 599-612 points out the serious limitations of this aspect of the terminology with which Weber discusses Republican history; see also his critique of the application of the concept of ‘Honoratioren herrschaft’ (619-627). In general on the use of the concept of ‘ancient capitalism’ in Weber see Capogrossi Colognesi 2000, 313-321, 331-337 and Lo Cascio 2009, 301-313; its first appearance is in the third edition of the *Agrarverhältnisse* (1909). The debt to Mommsen’s terminology is rather superficial: see Lo Cascio 2009, 301, where a comparison with the concept of ‘agrarian capitalism’ used in *Römische Agrargeschichte* (1891) is also developed (on which see Capogrossi Colognesi 2000, 66-74, 286-289). – For a powerful early twentieth-century challenge to the relevance of the concept of ‘capitalism’ to the study of Roman agriculture cf. Salvioli 1906, 199-210 and 1929, 170-175.

⁴⁴¹ Weber 1924, 253 (= 1998, 335); in the 1950s P. A. Brunt invalidated this reconstruction with decisive arguments (Brunt 1956 = 1990, 1-8, 481). The transition to a Caesarist solution is not discussed in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, however, in the concluding part of the eighth chapter, devoted to the city, where the emphasis is placed on the ‘patrimonial Konstruktion der herrschenden Schicht’ and where the aspects of continuity between Republic and empire are emphasized, among which the impact of the clientele as an institution stands out (1947, 600-601); there is only a cursory mention of the advent of a ‘Militärmonarchie’ which guaranteed a degree of continuity of the senatorial nobility. Cf. also the mention of the Gracchan reforms, which Weber views as measures aimed at strengthening the existing political and military structures, like all the reform projects that were scoped in Antiquity (1947, 589).

change, however, was fatal for ancient capitalism, which did not survive the emergence of a strong bureaucratic state.⁴⁴²

29. Mommsen was openly hostile to the use in Ancient History of the concept of Caesarism, which was so successful in the political debate of his time, and was to play a major role in Weber's thought.⁴⁴³ The notion of *césarisme* had been coined by a conservative writer, Auguste Romieu, as Paris was emerging from the uprisings of 1848, and was above all rooted in that historical climate. Napoleon III (1808-1873) did not openly mention it in his unfinished *Histoire de Jules César*, whose first two volumes appeared in 1865 and 1866, but the idea of the historical necessity of a 'maître' for Italy, capable of rising above the factions, is part of the same reflection. The Gracchi, Marius and Sulla – who take centre stage in a substantial section of the first book – are different symptoms of the same problem, which is traced to the now unlimited power of Rome after the fall of Carthage and the alteration of the 'caractère national'.⁴⁴⁴ Caesar, on the contrary, is a balancing force, whose rise is made possible by the persecution that Sulla inflicted on him, which gives him notoriety and eventually political prominence.⁴⁴⁵ This finalistic conception expresses a new form of sacred history. Caesar is, not unlike Charlemagne and Napoleon I, an instrument of Providence.⁴⁴⁶ The Ides of March confirm that postulate: Brutus caused a new spell of civil war, but could not prevent Octavian from reaching power. Not everything, however, was destined to come together in an orderly fashion. Bonaparte observes, without further specifying his assertion, that Caesar's premature end was also responsible for the unbalanced aspects of the imperial order: the reigns of Caligula and Nero were caused by the sudden interruption of his political design.⁴⁴⁷

Even a remarkable scholar like Jean-Jacques Ampère (1800-1864), who devoted to the late Republic a large part of the fourth and last volume of his original account of Roman history and literature (*L'histoire romaine à Rome*, 1861-1864), did not set the problem in terms of 'Caesarism', but for rather dif-

⁴⁴² Weber 1924, 271 (= 1998, 358). On this aspect of Weber's thought see Capogrossi Colognesi 2000, 301-307 and Lo Cascio 2009, 323-324, 328-330.

⁴⁴³ On Caesarism in Mommsen see Nicolet 2003, 190-199 and Polverini 2011, 179-182; on Weber see Baehr 2008, 59-114. Hatscher 2000, esp. 55-105 attempts to apply Weber's concept of 'charismatische Herrschaft' to the context of the late Republic.

⁴⁴⁴ (Napoléon) 1865, 201-208, esp. 202.

⁴⁴⁵ (Napoléon) 1865, 248-249.

⁴⁴⁶ On the providential element in the treatment of Napoleon III see Nicolet 2003, 163-165, who also underlines its scholarly importance (his whole discussion of this work is fundamental, not least on its historiographic impact: 161-181).

⁴⁴⁷ (Napoléon) 1865, VI-VII.

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ferent reasons. Much as he was a careful reader of Mommsen, he was by no means an admirer of Caesar. On the contrary, the terminal point of his discussion is the death of Cato: with the disappearance of the champion of Republican liberty, '*l'empire était fait*', says Ampère, quoting Adolphe Thiers' well-known comment after the review of Satory of January 1851.⁴⁴⁸ The analogy with contemporary politics is profound, and confrontationally articulated. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), the great historian of the ancient city, on the other hand, explicitly dealt with the historical problem of Caesarism in an essay that appeared in 1870 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which is his main contribution to the study of the Roman Republic: a work of great originality, which does not seem to have had a significant impact.⁴⁴⁹ Fustel periodises Roman history through the historical development of the 'institutions militaires', which he views as fully aligned with the political arrangements. The last phase, the Principate, followed 'à la destruction du régime républicain et à la fondation du césarisme';⁴⁵⁰ at various points Fustel openly evokes the concept of 'révolution'.⁴⁵¹ Mid-Republican Rome is governed by an aristocracy of wealth, which presides with formidable effectiveness over the construction of an empire, but is unable to avoid the creation of an 'immense populace inoccupée, misérable, paresseuse, vénale et corrompue' (306). A democratic movement, on the other hand, Rome, never takes shape at Rome; the Gracchi are but a parenthesis from which the inertia of the Roman plebs is inferred. It is not a popular movement that causes the fall of the republic, but the restructuring of the army, in which Marius plays a central role. Here Fustel identifies an element that is paradoxical:

⁴⁴⁸ Ampère 1872, 634 (the italics are in the original). On the political approach of Ampère's historical reconstruction, cf. the cautious intervention of L.-A. Prévost-Paradol, who succeeded him at the Académie française: 'M. Ampère est, en effet, resté inaccessible aux systèmes aujourd'hui à la mode sur une partie importante de l'histoire de Rome'. After an elegant quotation from Montaigne (*Essais* 2.32), the speaker adds: 'Ce n'est pas qu'il [*scil.* Ampère] pût se dissimuler combien il est difficile et délicat de trancher avec certitude les questions qui se présentent dans cette partie si controversée de l'histoire du monde.'

⁴⁴⁹ Fustel de Coulanges 1870. Cadiou 2018, 13-17 has recently drawn attention to its importance.

⁴⁵⁰ Fustel de Coulanges 1870, 296.

⁴⁵¹ For another early instance of the concept of 'Révolution romaine' see Tocqueville 1865, 211, a 'fragment historique' where a neat opposition is established: 'La Révolution romaine s'efforçant de se rattacher au passé, et conservant les noms quand elle abolit les choses. La Révolution française se flattant de faire en tout du nouveau, et le despotisme qui en est sorti ayant en partie cette prétention lui-même'. On the significance of this comment cf. Lepore 1989, 315 (= 2021, 214). The note was part of the preparatory work towards a study of the French Revolution and Napoleon, and is followed by a brief critical discussion of Merivale's *History of the Romans under the Empire*.

a massive political change is caused by an unpolitical man, a character who 'ne fut qu'un soldat' (307). With his reform of military recruitment, any solidarity between political and military structures is shattered: if in the Republic the wealthy classes continued to have a hegemonic role, in the army the poor prevailed. The name of the new regime, 'empire', reflects the fact that the head of the army, holder of the military command, is also the sovereign.⁴⁵² In the picture sketched by Fustel, neither the constitutional aspects nor the ideological or intellectual ones find a place. Instead, it is the brutality of power that determines orientations and outcomes, within a basic theoretical framework in which the most powerful revolutionary factor is identified in the tension between political and military arrangements.

For Fustel Caesarism is a valid analytical category, which is identified as the outcome of an historical process in which the main players are not individuals, but large social bodies. It is an outcome yielded by the system itself, a direct consequence of its overthrow. However, other definitions of Caesarism and different applications of it to the history of the late Republic and its underlying issues are possible; any serious reflection on the theme also presupposes a position on the reading that Mommsen gave of this period. Fustel's reading is implicitly but distinctly anti-Mommsenian, both in the weight it attributes to the military element in the devaluation of the historical importance of Julius Caesar.⁴⁵³

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) also put forward a reading of the late Republic along very different lines from those pursued by Mommsen. The second volume of his *Weltgeschichte*, published in 1881, is devoted to the Republican age, and posits the *Weltherrschaft* as the decisive theme of that period. The history of the early Republic is dispatched in the first chapter, which stops at the fourth century; the other nineteen chapters trace the developments of the Republic, with only one sizeable digression on Maccabean history, in the twelfth chapter, which immediately precedes the account of Pompey's Eastern campaigns; the point of arrival is the reign of Augustus. There is a clear imbalance in favour of the last century of the Republic: the age in which not only a change of political regime takes place, but in which – more importantly – the construction of an empire uniting West and East comes to completion (212). The outlook of the discussion is avowedly narrative; the integration between the clashes between the political factions and the construction of the imperial structure is the main focus of thematic interest, and informs, inter alia, the reflection on the civil wars and their impact on the Mediterranean scenario. The Augustan age is fully inte-

⁴⁵² Fustel de Coulanges 1870, 314.

⁴⁵³ On Fustel's open hostility to German historiography see Raskolnikoff 1992, 761-762.

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grated in the reconstruction of the late Republic as the moment in which the great issues of that historical age, both in internal politics and in the broader imperial context, were resolved: the brilliant heir of a political tradition that must be credited with a very significant historical role (417). There is full, conscious continuity with Caesar's precedent, in which Ranke recognizes very different traits from those identified by Mommsen: he was the creator of a military monarchy, openly based on Hellenistic models, which brought to fruition the unification of the empire and made it possible to overcome the central role of the city of Rome in that political structure; even the analogy with Sulla is imperfect, and ultimately fallacious (366-367).⁴⁵⁴ The Ides of March alhe moment in which a Republican reaction temporarily prevails over a man who had correctly read his own time and had offered the empire 'einen intelligenten Mittelpunkt' (376). His assassins would soon be overwhelmed by events they had not been able to adequately foresee.

The question of the direction of historical change – how it may be made sense of, resisted, or steered – is central to much of the intellectual debate of the early twentieth century. One of the most controversial and influential interventions in that conversation, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* by Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), features frequent references to Roman history, which reflect a vast, though not always reliable, knowledge of the ancient evidence. To Splengler the concept of Caesarism has a heuristic value that goes well beyond the Roman case.⁴⁵⁵ Mommsen is subjected to unqualified criticism, and so is Eduard Meyer. Their respective attempts to define the monarchy of Caesar or the principates of Pompey and Augustus fail to account for the central historical fact of the time: the end of any meaningful ideological confrontation. At the end of the Republic there was still a constitutional clash, which then turned into a brutal contest for power during the Principate.⁴⁵⁶ The advent of the *pax Romana* brings an end to all political controversy and the advent of an era in which biology prevails and historical awareness is lost. For Tacitus the struggle of the Gracchi is a distant memory;⁴⁵⁷ even the reign of Augustus is essentially inexplicable.⁴⁵⁸ Modern students have a far greater understanding of late Republican history than those

⁴⁵⁴ On Ranke's disagreement with Mommsen see Brennan 1994, 84-88.

⁴⁵⁵ See Hell 2019, 295-304 and, most recently, Engels 2021, 205-224.

⁴⁵⁶ Spengler 1972, 616. In the immediately subsequent part of his discussion Spengler uses repulsive language (616-617): 'Die immer negerhafteren Kämpfe um den Cäsarentitel hätten sich noch durch Jahrhunderte fortspinnen können, in immer primitiveren und deshalb 'ewigeren' Formen'.

⁴⁵⁷ Spengler 1972, 612.

⁴⁵⁸ Spengler 1972, 13.

who lived in the immediately subsequent generations.⁴⁵⁹ Spengler, moreover, rejects the idea of a process of crisis in the Roman Republic. In his vision, the culminating moment of Roman history is Cannae, because it is a heroic episode; the construction of the empire that follows the victory of Zama is made possible by the absence of alternatives. Moreover, Rome, like every other ancient civilization, lacked a long-term economic and social outlook: the Gracchan reform, for instance, intervened on ownership structures, but did not aim to create a more advanced agrarian civilization.⁴⁶⁰ This view is fully in keeping with a general principle that Spengler recognizes in historical development. What prevails, on a superficial level, is always the unexpected, the imponderable: 'Der unbedeutende Augustus hat Epoche gemacht, der große Tiberius ging wirkungslos vorüber'.⁴⁶¹ Augustus is a weak leader ('Schwächling'), like Pompey: the Mommsenian 'diarchy' between *princeps* and Senate is not an original insight, but the late application of a doctrine codified by Cicero. The decision to retain the tribunician power is instead driven by the recognition of the tribunate as a force that is both legitimately and tyrannical, which has a distinctive role in the Roman political order.⁴⁶²

If a periodizing moment can be identified in the political history of Republican Rome, it is the season of Gaius Flaminius, who inaugurates the 'Roman Caesarism': his Caesarism would be an opposite one, which marks the end of an age of public service ('Staatsdienst') and the beginning of an age in which the drive to power prevails ('Wille zur Macht').⁴⁶³ The Claudian plebiscite of 218 BCE, of which Flaminius was a key backer, played a decisive role in enabling the establishment of an equestrian order as an alternative to the senatorial one;⁴⁶⁴ money became the dominant factor in Roman politics. Here lies, in Spengler's eyes, the strong analogical power of that historical experience for an observer of the first half of the twentieth century.

⁴⁵⁹ According to Spengler, a correct historical understanding of the late Republic was not possible in the eighteenth century (616: an untenable claim, as much of the discussion developed so far demonstrates).

⁴⁶⁰ Spengler 1972, 180. On this passage see Engels 2021, 328. Spengler ignores the evidence for the contrary in App. *BC* 1.9.35 and 11.43-47 (which was also known to him: cf. 1036 n. 2). Cf. 1061 for the thesis that Tiberius Gracchus was supported by 'die Partei der großen Geldleute, der equites'.

⁴⁶¹ Spengler 1972, 182. For another positive assessment of Tiberius see 762.

⁴⁶² Spengler 1972, 1103-1104. On this passage and the disdain for late Republican culture that presupposes it see Dufallo 2007, 72.

⁴⁶³ Spengler 1972, 52.

⁴⁶⁴ Spengler 1972, 1073-1074.

30. Mommsen's analysis of the solution to the Republican crisis had instead a recognisable impact on the reflection that Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) put forward at the beginning of the 1930s. As is well known, he defined Caesarism as 'la soluzione 'arbitrale', affidata a una grande personalità, di una situazione storico-politica caratterizzata da un equilibrio di forze a prospettiva catastrofica' (Q13 §27).⁴⁶⁵ In the *Notebooks* there is no analytical assessment of the Republican crisis, even though there are hints of great significance. Julius Caesar is explicitly identified as an example of 'cesarismo progressivo' and as the continuator of a 'movimento democratico' inaugurated by the Gracchi, which brings a new focus on the prospects of the Mediterranean empire and a cosmopolitan outlook that was to inform much of the subsequent history of Italy.⁴⁶⁶ Once again, the political impact of imperial integration regains centre stage, with a largely original twist.

The theme of Italy's role within the imperial construction is also central to the great work of Mikhail I. Rostovtzeff (1870-1952) on the economic and social history of the Roman Empire: a book whose first edition came out in 1926, the year of Gramsci's arrest, and which bears the marks of a harsh political context, in which its author was heavily implicated.⁴⁶⁷ The first chapter is devoted to the outline of the civil wars and their political and social impact: that event takes place against the background of the imperial expansion and the inability of the Roman ruling elite to sensibly manage its consequences. In the second century BCE Italy found itself wealthier than ever before, and yet fell into a very acute crisis (23: 'as is well known'), which also affected the 'Roman State' (24). The vision of the decline of small property and slave labour that Rostovtzeff articulates is conventional, and so is the periodisation that underlies it. The most innovative aspect of the argument is the weight it grants to civil war as a basic feature of the final phase of the Republic, from which new historical forces emerged, irreversibly changing the picture: first and foremost, the armies, which must be regarded both as a military and a political force. The balance defined by Augustus is a great stabilising and conservative project, which does not translate into a mere return to the past (48). Its strength lay precisely in its ability to fully come to terms with a context that the civil wars had profoundly reshaped. The increasingly significant role that the provinces of the Empire gained in that new

⁴⁶⁵ On this passage see Canfora 2019, 287-288.

⁴⁶⁶ Progressive Caesarism: Q13 §1. Democratic movement: Q19 §1. Cosmopolitan outlook: Q17 §21. For a reading of the place of Roman history in Gramsci's discussion of Caesarism see Santangelo 2021.

⁴⁶⁷ Rostovtzeff 1926; cf. most recently the important Italian edition by A. Marcone (Rostovtzeff 2003). Rostovtzeff's work was indirectly known to Gramsci, who in February 1930 criticised its radical modernism in a letter to his brother Carlo (Gramsci 1996, 310-311).

setting was a direct consequence of the impoverishment (moral and material alike) that Italy suffered in that period.

The last century of the Roman Republic is thus a period marked by various levels of crisis, among which the agrarian crisis stands out. The decisive fact, however, is the series of civil conflicts that determine its quality and historical significance in the longer term. It is not surprising that Rostovtzeff, a member of the Kadet Party forced into exile after the October Revolution, should attribute such a central role to civil war, even in the historical development of Roman intellectual life. However, it would be rash to envisage the mechanical transposition of a contingent political climate into his historiographic reflection. The theme is already present in *Рождение Римской империи* (*The Birth of the Roman Empire*), the ‘general study’ on the genesis of the Principate that Rostovtzeff wrote in the spring of 1918, a few weeks before his forced departure from Russia. In that little book he identified the tension between the order of the city-state and the needs imposed by the empire as the major factor at the core of the crises that the Republic went through. The close integration between economic, social, and political developments was already marked out as the key theme through which the advent of the new autocratic regime could be made sense of. That insight dated back to work that Rostovtzeff had carried out in the late nineteenth century, and was to be developed more analytically in the great work on the economic and social history of the Empire that Rostovtzeff brought to completion in the early years of his exile, between Oxford and the United States.⁴⁶⁸ In their interest in the ‘cosmopolitan’ dimension of late Republican history there is a significant analogy between the pro-Czarist historian and the author of the *Prison Notebooks*.

Rostovtzeff found a much more ideologically sympathetic reader in José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), who cited the *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* at the beginning of his series of essays *Del imperio romano*, published in 1940 in *La Nación*, the leading conservative newspaper of Buenos Aires, where Ortega had taken refuge after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁶⁹ The ‘actualidad pavorosa’ of Rostovtzeff’s book calls for a radical reflection on the two principles that were lost with the advent of the imperial re-

⁴⁶⁸ See Michelotto 2020, esp. 292-294, with extensive bibliographical contextualization. *Рождение Римской империи* is accessible only in its original edition (Rostovtzeff 1918); an Italian translation by A. Ferrari, with a substantial introduction by P. G. Michelotto and M. Bellomo, is forthcoming (I am very grateful to Michelotto and Bellomo for sharing its typescript with me). For a useful survey of Russian historiography on the late Republic in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Almazova 2015.

⁴⁶⁹ Ortega y Gasset 1964, 51-107.

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gime.⁴⁷⁰ concord and freedom, which Ortega explores as the foundations of political coexistence through an original and engaged reading of some of Cicero's philosophical works. What is missing from Ortega's discussion, however, is the perception of a process of crisis: in his view, there is a clear break in 50 BCE, the moment when Cicero (in his letters, one presumes: no references are given) begins to lament the loss of *libertas*. Before then, since the expulsion of the kings, Rome has known five centuries of freedom, participation, and civic cohesion, 'sin fallar un solo día'.⁴⁷¹ Rostovtzeff, as we have seen, constructed a very different account of the last century of the Republic, and Ortega is actually very clear that the year 50 BCE is nothing more than a 'precisión simbólica'. His perception of the historical change that occurred at the end of the Republic, however, remains that of a radical and definitive change. The experience of Rome, the model of any future free society, poses the problem of political change and the possibility of arresting or reversing it: 'una técnica de la sociedad, una higiene, una medicina, una cirugía de lo colectivo' that will have to be placed on a higher cognitive level than politics.⁴⁷²

Ortega then resorts to the usual medical metaphor, albeit without openly speaking of 'crisis'. His point of view is that of an admirer of the Roman empire and of the Augustan solution, which implicitly takes up problems and challenges raised a generation earlier by Cicero. It was, however, a response to a state of crisis, 'un expediente'.⁴⁷³ Ortega's reflection aims to identify the factors that can avoid the end of the consensus; the moment in which one can speak of life as freedom, rather than life as 'adaptación' to a coercive regime.

29. The judgment on the quality and timing of a crisis depends on the assumptions with which one evaluates a political event and the aggregate of the forces that determined it. For Ortega the viewpoint is determined by Cicero and, to a lesser extent, by Livy, and the basic analytical framework derives from that choice; he sees in the Senate the pivot of the Republican structure. In the historiographical debate that unfolded between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the decline of the political role of the Senate was alternatively seen as a symptom of crisis, or a return to its true foundations. According to an original socialist historian of the Victorian period, Edward S. Beesley (1831-1915), the end of the Republic actually benefited the interests of the people: autocracy was, even by necessity, more responsive to the demands of the lower

⁴⁷⁰ Ortega y Gasset 1964, 53-54.

⁴⁷¹ Ortega y Gasset 1964, 92.

⁴⁷² Ortega y Gasset 1964, 93.

⁴⁷³ Ortega y Gasset 1964, 65.

classes than the senatorial oligarchy.⁴⁷⁴ This is, however, an isolated view, even among Marxist historians.⁴⁷⁵ One of the best Berlin students of Eduard Meyer, Arthur Rosenberg (1889-1943), who wrote an important popularising work on the history of the Roman Republic in the very years in which he formed his allegiance to communism, saw in the Augustan solution the outcome of a victorious compromise between the *optimates* and the army.⁴⁷⁶ In his view, the events of the late Republic can be understood as the clash between an oligarchic option and a democratic one. The most consistent representative of the latter political direction was Catiline, while Julius Caesar sought to introduce democratic elements into a project that did not aim at complete social upheaval.⁴⁷⁷ The whole political history of the Republic, however, has a strong democratic strand, which is at the basis of the plebeian claims and the outcome of the Struggle of the Orders. Rosenberg never speaks of a long-term crisis of the Republic; on the contrary, in his opinion, Tiberius Gracchus was elected to the tribunate in an age when the political order was fundamentally sound, in spite of the opposite views expressed on this count in ancient and modern times alike.⁴⁷⁸ The cause of the 'immediate crisis' of 133 was the arrival of 'griechischer Sozialismus' in Italy, through Diophanes of Mytilene and Blossius of Cumae.⁴⁷⁹ That phase was soon brought to an end by a long period in which the prevailing force in Roman politics was the new 'capitalist' class of knights, which was dominant from the age of Gaius Gracchus to Cinna.⁴⁸⁰ Sulla's victory marked the defeat of that social group, but not the end of the struggle for democracy in Rome, which continued until Catiline's defeat. After that, the struggle for power was restricted to the *optimates* and the army, until the Augustan compromise set in.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁴ Beesley 1878, 86-87 (the first edition of the essay dates to 1867). See Wiseman 1998, esp. 132.

⁴⁷⁵ See, however, the judgment of Cyrenus Osborne Ward (1831-1900), an ardent admirer of the Gracchi and Spartacus, and the author of an original *History of the Ancient Working People*, better known as *The Ancient Lowly*: 'the mild Augustus, whose reign was, in political respects, a model, and a glory to Rome' (Ward 1889, 518; on his Christian socialism see Malamud 1999, 104-106).

⁴⁷⁶ Rosenberg 1921a, 117.

⁴⁷⁷ Catiline ('soziale Revolution'): Rosenberg 1921a, 90-92; Caesar: Rosenberg 1921a, 109. On the original aspects of the evaluation of Catiline see Tornow 1978, 118-121.

⁴⁷⁸ Rosenberg 1921a, 55.

⁴⁷⁹ Rosenberg 1921a, 58-60. On the use of this terminology see the note of caution in Canfora 1984, 43.

⁴⁸⁰ Rosenberg 1921a, 78.

⁴⁸¹ Rosenberg 1921a, 92. A more concise version of this argument may also be found in Rosenberg 1921b, 82-85.

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At a very different end of the ideological spectrum, a number of influential scholars regarded the study of the Senate and the senatorial order as the cornerstone of any serious discussion of the Roman Republic. Friedrich Münzer (1868-1942), whose contribution to the study of the Roman nobility remains unrivalled, drew a picture of the historical evolution of the Republic through the vicissitudes of its noble families, the *Adelsfamilien*, and their political alignments, the *Adelsparteien*. Its basic assumption, as is well known, is that by studying the dynamics in the ruling class one can best make sense of the logic and the stakes of the wider political process.⁴⁸² The second half of the second century BCE is the first periodizing moment, because the primacy of the hereditary principle seems to go into crisis, in front of a ‘demokratische Hochflut’ (302) that begins its rise with the Gracchan age and knows its culminating point in the Social War and civil wars of the Eighties:⁴⁸³ a juncture that leads to the disappearance of some noble families. This phase, however, was followed by a reaction, led at different times by two patricians, Sulla and Caesar, who restored the centrality of what was left of the great noble families after the Social War and the civil wars, asking and obtaining in return full cooperation with their hegemonic aims and the reorganization of the State that they carried out.⁴⁸⁴

Some *gentes* of patrician rank, such as the Aemilii, the Claudii and the Corneli, were able to maintain a special status, not unlike that of a princely order, even in the final stages of the Republic.⁴⁸⁵ Münzer deals only tangentially with problems of political culture and their concrete implications. In that crucial passage, he marks a clear distance from the thesis argued a few months earlier by Eduard Meyer in his book on Pompey’s principate: the idea of the rule of one man was by no means foreign to Roman political culture, but was intrinsic to the aristocratic ethos. It was, however, an *arcantum imperii*, which is effectively illustrated by Pompey’s choice to marry Cornelia, a descendant of Scipio Africanus, about thirty years his junior. As the ‘Nachfolger der großen Scipionen’, and as someone who wished to attain even greater power than them, he conclud-

⁴⁸² Münzer 1920. For a recent comprehensive discussion of the historiographical project that underpins this work see Zanin 2021.

⁴⁸³ The image of the tide also plays an important role in Ferrero’s *Grandezza e decadenza*, a work well known to Münzer, albeit not with reference to the Gracchi, but to the popular movements of the mid-first century (Ferrero 1902, 491 = 2016, 262: the ‘violenta marea’ that rips through the ‘scetticismo civico’). On aquatic metaphors in Roman political culture and in the political discourse of our time cf. Jewell 2019, 1-12.

⁴⁸⁴ Münzer establishes a contrastive analogy between the Sulla-Caesar pair and the Cromwell-Napoleon one: unlike their modern epigones, the two Roman leaders came from the social group that they intended to protect and promote: a brief intervention in the debate on Caesarism, which was especially intense between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (§29).

⁴⁸⁵ Münzer 1920, 317: ‘eine Art von Fürstenstand’.

ed that marrying one of their descendants would give him the right to achieve that.

The debate on the link between culture and political practice, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, was extremely lively. Two opposite examples, of different quality and importance, both drawn from British historiography, are worth mentioning in this connection. In a spirited and fairly influential discussion, R. E. Smith (1910-1978) explored the 'failure' of the Roman Republic: a stronger term than *crisis* and *fall*, which largely disregards the idea of decline. It is also an historiographical category that has the merit of not necessarily focusing the discussion on political aspects, but suggests the possibility of a rather more holistic assessment. Smith's application of it, however, is heavily one-sided.⁴⁸⁶ The failure of the Republic is attributed, in fact, to a specific conjuncture and to two individuals: the Gracchi, whose combination of ambition and loose philosophical competence put the whole political structure of the Republic under unbearable pressure, and opened a century of traumatic change, denying Rome the possibility of an orderly and peaceful transition to monarchy.

In much more recent years, T. P. Wiseman (1940) has instead proposed a vision of the Republic in which the Roman people is the main political actor and the legitimate holder of power, and in which the nobility systematically tries to take away the influence and the resources to which it should be entitled. The political clash is a struggle for power, but it is above all a struggle over principles, over different visions of the Republic and of the running of the empire. The Roman Republic, in this vision, which is even more radical than the one put forward by Fergus Millar (1935-2019) in several epoch-making essays, is a democracy, in the fullest sense of the term: a regime based on the government of the people, which is opposed with dogged determination by powerful oligarchic forces, and comes to a tragic demise with the defeat of Caesar and the new prospect of a military monarchy, first with the Triumvirs, then, on a larger scale, with Octavian.⁴⁸⁷

31. Even the concept of revolution, though, lends itself to various periodizing operations and various attempts to construct a viable working definition. As we have seen, it aroused considerable interest in the third quarter of the nineteenth century; it is not surprising that in that period even some scholars who did

⁴⁸⁶ See Deininger 1980, 83-84.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf., in the context of Italian legal scholarship, the thesis of Guarino 1967, esp. 4-7 (= 1993, 440-443), for whom 'il governo di Roma' should be considered 'a tenor di diritto, una democrazia'; see Polverini 2005, 92-94 and Fezzi 2012, 73. Millar's contributions on Republican political culture are collected in Millar 2002b, 85-181, and should be read alongside the classic overview in Millar 1998.

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not deal mainly with ancient history discussed it in some depth. Cesare Cantù (1804-1895), in the section devoted to Roman history of his *Storia universale* (1st ed. 1838-1846), frequently resorted to it. As a careful reader of Vertot, he understood the whole story of the late Republic as a series of revolutions, ‘compite colle armi e colla prepotenza’, from Sulla onwards; Octavian is able to take advantage of the last of those, and to assert his role as a peacemaker.⁴⁸⁸ The first volume of the *Storia generale d’Italia* directed by Pasquale Villari was entrusted to Francesco Bertolini (1836-1909), who produced a history of Rome from the foundation to the fall of the Western Empire. The sixth part, which opens with the Gracchi and closes with the assassination of Caesar, is entitled ‘La rivoluzione sociale’, and adopts an otherwise rather conventional framework, in which the influence of Mommsen is clearly stated.⁴⁸⁹ A few years earlier, in 1869, John R. Seeley (1834-1895) gave a lecture at the Royal Institution in London entitled *The Great Roman Revolution*, published in the following year as the opening instalment of a trilogy of studies on Roman imperialism. Seeley was Professor of Latin at University College London and, from 1869, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge; his classical training was impeccable, but his scholarly interests went far beyond the ancient world. The ‘great revolution’ does not start with the Gracchan age, but takes place over a much shorter period: the age of Caesar and Augustus.⁴⁹⁰ The essay builds on modern debates about the figure of Caesar, and notably on the modern myth that establishes an analogy with the French revolution, and views him as an enlightened leader, if not ‘the greatest Liberal leader’ of all time.⁴⁹¹ Seeley rejects this reading comprehensively. Caesar was the author of a great political revolution, but he did not plan and did not fully understand its consequences. The faction he led was a ‘party without ideas’.⁴⁹² His rise was the result of some structural limits of the Roman political order and of the dominant political culture. The absence of a strong centralized power implies the need to rely on the dictatorship to solve

⁴⁸⁸ Cantù 1862, 1052-1053 (quote at 1053); on Vertot see 877.

⁴⁸⁹ Bertolini 1874, 329-456. Cf. Croce 1921, 2.175: ‘compilatore ma bene al corrente degli studî storici tedeschi, francesi e inglesi’.

⁴⁹⁰ The idea had at least one precedent. As early as 1820 André J. S. Nougarede de Fayet (1765-1845), a high-ranking official of the Napoleonic era who withdrew to private life during the Restoration, had adopted this periodisation in the two volumes of his *Histoire de la révolution qui renversa la République romaine et qui amena l’établissement de l’Empire*: a largely conventional narrative history, whose most distinctive aspect is the choice of focusing each of the eight books on a great figure (the fifth one is entitled ‘Fulvie’, the seventh ‘Cléopâtre’).

⁴⁹¹ Seeley 1870, 2. The originality of this essay has been stressed in Loreto 1999, 16-98. Cf. Butler 2012, 37-38, who discusses it in the context of a general reassessment of imperial Rome in British historiography in the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁴⁹² Seeley 1870, 8.

pressing emergencies and face external threats; the Roman people rejects despotism, but is not determined to fight for its freedom. Caesar's victory was the result of a superior military organisation; Augustus continued and completed that work by creating a standing army, which solved the problem of the defence of the empire in the long term. However, his actions were inspired by a consistently aristocratic spirit, which distanced him from Caesar's model. Seeley goes so far as to argue that the relationship between Caesar and Augustus was similar to that between Marius and Sulla.⁴⁹³ The two key themes of this new phase are the end of political freedom and the advent of material prosperity. On the other hand, outward respect for the Republican past remains a long-term facet of the history of the Principate: with a striking image, Seeley compares the role of the Senate in the Rome of the Caesars to that of the portrait of an ancestor in an aristocratic residence.⁴⁹⁴

It hardly needs recalling that the title of the epoch-making book published by Ronald Syme in September 1939 also refers to a revolution.⁴⁹⁵ The chronological framework is altogether different from Mommsen's: the starting point is 60 BCE. Arnaldo Momigliano (1908-1987) was an early critic of that choice: in a famous review, he argued that to fully understand the late Republic it was necessary to go up to the Sullan age. In the early 1940s Syme wrote several essays, left unfinished and published posthumously, on various aspects of that very period.⁴⁹⁶ It is surely significant that his interest was prompted by the moments in which the balance built by Sulla seemed to show signs of collapse: the case of Roscius Amerinus, Sulla's abdication, the consulship of Lepidus.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, in fact, there had been various attempts to further define the chronological terms and the decisive factors of the crisis of the Republic, and various correctives have been offered to the idea that sees the fall of Carthage or the Gracchan age as its starting point. The concept of crisis plays a prominent role in three major accounts of Republican history that appeared in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, very different from one other in orientation and approach. Abel H. Greenidge (1865-1906) conceived a six-volume history of the late Republic; he succeeded in completing only the first, which ran from the Gracchi to the end of the Jugurthine War. His sudden, untimely death was a grave loss to Roman studies, and halted a project that would probably have changed the terms of debate for generations; nor did

⁴⁹³ Seeley 1870, 22.

⁴⁹⁴ Seeley 1870, 27.

⁴⁹⁵ The claim that Seeley's contribution is a central reference point of Syme's book (Loreto 1999, 99-154) runs into at least two obstacles: Syme never mentions Seeley and, most importantly, the key figure in the 1869 essay is Caesar, not Augustus.

⁴⁹⁶ Momigliano 1940, 78 (= 1960, 412); Syme 2016, 56-110.

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Greenidge have the opportunity to form a school. The ambition and strength of his project are apparent from the first volume, where a remarkable combination of narrative force, exegetical rigour, and interpretive insight is achieved. The starting point is the Gracchan age, which is identified as the beginning of a 'period of revolt' that would end with radical political change. However, the quality of the problems at stake is not entirely new: what has changed is the intensity of social and political issues that are not different in substance from those that dominated at the time of Appius Claudius Caecus. The valuable insight on which the book is based lies in framing political developments in the context of social history. The first hundred or so pages are devoted to changes in domestic and family settings, and also serve as an introduction to the study of slavery in Republican Italy. The Senate selfishly overlooked the need for a reform program; a series of democratic initiatives were put in place, but were frustrated. At the same time, a political tradition of effective opposition to the Senate did consolidate, and eventually emerged during the Jugurthine War, when the decisive initiative did not come from the people, but from a 'powerful moneyed class' (1.471) that was by then determined to assert its own interests.

Here too the theme of the heterogenesis of ends arises: the Gracchi did not understand the nature of the historical process that their initiatives were unleashing. The use of the notion of 'crisis' is frequent, both to refer to medium-long term economic processes and to specific conjunctures. On the final page, however, the theme emerges with striking strength. The concluding image of the book is that of Marius obtaining his second consecutive consulship and command against the Teutons, in flagrant violation of the rules on access to the magistracy. In that decisive emergency, the deep character of Roman politics had been revealed: 'if a sovereign has a right to assert himself, it is one who is *in extremis*, who stands between death and revolution. Personality had again triumphed in spite of the meshes of Roman law and custom' (486). The second volume should have explored, in Greenidge's intentions, the consequences of that breach: the hints to the decisive role of the growth of 'military power' suggest that the theme was to have a decisive role.

The great overview that Greenidge was unable to complete was instead carried out by another original British historian, William E. Heitland (1847-1935), Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, who in 1909 published *The Roman Republic*, in three impressive volumes: a work that rivalled Long's in scale and outlook, and was the outcome of an even more sustained scientific commitment.⁴⁹⁷ The terminal point of the narrative is Philippi, the moment in which the prospect of a Republican restoration is definitively defeated and the

⁴⁹⁷ Heitland also published an abridged edition: Heitland 1911.

transition to the imperial regime is accomplished. Heitland, like many of his predecessors, also uses the notion of ‘crisis’ only to refer to specific historical occurrences, while in some cases he resorts to the concept of ‘decline’; the whole final century of the Republic, however, is summarized, in Mommsenian terms, under the rubric of ‘revolution’, which gives the title to the sixth and seventh parts of the work, from the Gracchi to the death of Caesar.⁴⁹⁸ Heitland’s reconstruction achieves a good balance between the analysis of general developments and the evaluation of individual aspects. There are, for instance, perceptive, if debatable, pages on the impact of Greek philosophy on the Gracchi (2.325) and on the ‘narrow and unsympathetic’ temperament that prevented Sulla from becoming ‘a great despot’ (2.534). Heitland, who was also the author of an important book on agriculture in the Graeco-Roman world *from the Point of View of Labour* (Heitland 1921), was above all very clear about the strong integration between political and economic developments, and in that respect his account was an important historiographical development, not just in the British context.⁴⁹⁹ Nor was his reflection limited to the Republican age: in an important essay of 1922, *The Roman Fate*, he discussed the problem of the decline of the Roman Empire in a long-term perspective, drawing on some recent contributions, including Tenney Frank’s *The Economic History of Rome to the End of the Republic*.⁵⁰⁰ The thesis of the inevitability of the advent of the Principate, faced with the impossibility of systemic reform, the decline of the authority of the Senate, and the inability of the assemblies to assert a leading political role, is crisply restated. Caesar merely put an end to a ‘ruinous farce’.⁵⁰¹

Guglielmo Ferrero (1871-1942) conceived an even more ambitious project than those of Greenidge and Heitland, which was originally intended to run from the middle of the second century BCE to the fall of the Empire. *Grandezza e decadenza di Roma* was later rescoped as a work in five volumes:⁵⁰² the starting point remained unchanged, but the conclusion came to coincide with the end of the Augustan age. Its international resonance was comparable to that of Mommsen’s *Römische Geschichte*; Ferrero’s work, on the other hand, prompted

⁴⁹⁸ Heitland 1909, 2.255: ‘the civic broils and bloodshed of a hundred years’. Heitland, however, is never mentioned in *The Roman Revolution*.

⁴⁹⁹ See also Oliver 1907, which does not seem to have been known to Heitland: a descriptive picture of the Roman economy, where an entirely conventional explanation of the fall of the Republic is put forward and a phase of unchallenged disorder is identified in its last century (195-196). Curiously, for Oliver – who later undertook theological studies – the ‘Revolution’ is the expulsion of the Tarquins, not the end of the Republic (esp. 28).

⁵⁰⁰ Frank 1920.

⁵⁰¹ Heitland 1922, 18-23, spec 22.

⁵⁰² Now conveniently accessible in the edition by L. Cigliani and L. Mecella (Ferrero 2016), whose introductory essays are presupposed here. See also the important discussion in Schiano 2018.

serious reservations among professional historians, notably on the part of Gaetano De Sanctis. Its interpretive proposal, however, is underpinned by an analytical vigour and a literary quality that warrant close discussion. The concept of crisis plays a central role on several occasions, sometimes in an explicit analogical comparison between the historical experience of ancient Rome and contemporary events.⁵⁰³ For Ferrero the late Roman Republic saw the gradual transition from a federation of agricultural aristocracies to a mercantile democracy: a process that has close parallels in other historical contexts, first of all in the transition from aristocratic to bourgeois society. The Gracchan age is the beginning of a crisis destined to last half a century, of which the two tribunes (according to a well-established theme) were unable to foresee. The theme was a civil war between rich and poor through which a new Italian society took shape. The rich metaphorical repertoire that Ferrero uses to qualify his various applications of the concept of crisis does not only include the usual medical one: the civil war of the 80s is the blade of a plough that upsets and revives the land.⁵⁰⁴

The inclusion of the Allies in the civic body is a central part of that vast process of historical change. With Sulla, the 'nazione italiana' fully took shape.⁵⁰⁵ A few years later, the massive influx of wealth from the East to Italy caused a 'crisi di sviluppo'; the financial dynamics played a central role in Ferrero's interpretation of late Republican politics and the story of Julius Caesar, the central figure of his work.⁵⁰⁶ Again: the final years of the Republic, notably the events of 52-51, when the fragility of the institutional structures is sorely exposed, are categorized as the 'crisi della democrazia imperialista' (the second volume is replete with analogical references to modern politics).⁵⁰⁷ The year 49 is a 'crisi suprema', which induces everyone to make clear and painful choices,⁵⁰⁸ the Ides of March mark the beginning of a new crisis, bound to last for a decade, which will make it possible to overcome antagonisms that would other-

⁵⁰³ In his introductory essay to Ferrero 2016 (7-26), Cigliani speaks of 'un intellettuale della crisi e nella crisi'.

⁵⁰⁴ Ferrero 1902, 173 = 2016, 125.

⁵⁰⁵ On the discussion of the period from Sulla to Augustus see Mecella's introductory essay in Ferrero 2016 (27-47).

⁵⁰⁶ Cf. the well-known analogy between Caesar and 'un moderno leader dei socialisti, o piuttosto con un boss della "Tammany Hall" di New York' (Ferrero 1902, 489 = 2016, 261), with the illuminating comment in Croce 1921, 2.250: 'un espediente sociologico che era già nel Vico, e ricomparve nel Mommsen'. On Ferrero's position in the history of 'anti-Caesarism' see Treves 1962a, 276-282. On the political background of this aspect of his thought see Schiano 2018, 37-50.

⁵⁰⁷ Ferrero 1904, 2.118-199 = 2016, 351-369.

⁵⁰⁸ Ferrero 1904, 334 = 2016, 426. The concept of the 'più risolutiva crisi dello stato romano' may also be found in a wide-ranging discussion published three decades later by Ettore Ciccotti, who had close intellectual ties with Ferrero: see Ciccotti 1935, 2.104 (see below §36).

wise be impossible to resolve in a new framework. The crisis was to be one of the 'più terribili della storia di Roma; ed una delle più salutari'.⁵⁰⁹ In a metaphor that has almost morbid traits, and with which the second volume is brought to a close, Ferrero argues that along with Caesar's body his political action was torn apart too.⁵¹⁰

In the volumes devoted to the Augustan age the concept of crisis is also mentioned repeatedly and variously declined: the economic and moral crisis of Italy in the Triumviral age; the moral reform, widely seen as 'unico farmaco risanatore in una crisi mortale';⁵¹¹ Horace as the poet of an age of crisis, in which tradition and Orientalism faced each other; and, in immediate aftermath of Octavian's victory, the crises that unfolded in close sequence in various parts of the empire, both in the East and – more acutely – in the Western provinces. For Ferrero, history is framed by the recurrence of dominant themes, which manifest themselves through crises that often entail heavy human and political costs. Analogy may be a tool of reliable diagnostic value, but history does not have simple answers in store. The economic and social situation in Italy in the second century BCE prompted comments that went well beyond the confines of ancient history: 'Le grandi crisi della storia, che nascono dalla scarsità dei mezzi non più bastevoli ai bisogni cresciuti, non si risolvono mai – l'Italia contemporanea non dovrebbe dimenticarlo – per le cure o gli studi di legislatori di genio; ma per lo sforzo lento e inconsapevole di tutta la nazione, che lavorando e ingegnandosi proporziona i mezzi ai bisogni, e proporzionandoli crea talora una civiltà più perfetta'.⁵¹² This remark is revealing of Ferrero's vision and method.

It may come as no surprise that the concept of crisis acquired such relevance in a work that was conceived for wide circulation. A few years later, however, it would play an even more central role in an original and challenging scholarly work. In December 1913 Emilio Betti (1890-1968), a remarkable young scholar with a strong legal and philosophical training, who was going to have a distinguished career in Roman Law, defended a thesis in Ancient History at the University of Bologna, entitled *La crisi della repubblica romana e la genesi del principato in Roma*. Its initial outcomes were two journal articles, respectively on the origin of the crisis and on the Sullan restoration; only with the posthumous re-edition in 1982, edited by Giuliano Crifò, did the ambition and interpretive power of that project become fully clear to the scholarly community,

⁵⁰⁹ Ferrero 1904, 527-528 = 2016, 508.

⁵¹⁰ Ferrero 1904, 528 = 2016, 508.

⁵¹¹ Ferrero 1906, 20 = 2016, 852.

⁵¹² Ferrero 1902, 83-84 = 2016, 88.

and the work began to receive the attention it deserved.⁵¹³ The structure of the volume was based on a clear framing of the problem and a firm interpretive premise: the first part explored the crisis of the Republic, starting with the ‘tribunato rivoluzionario’ of Tiberius Gracchus, while the second one turned to the genesis of the new regime, taking Caesar’s dictatorship as its starting point. The introductory section revolves around a long analysis of the concept of crisis and its applicability to the late Republican period was proposed, as well as its various ramifications: in political and legal thought, with the emergence of a concept of ‘signoria come diritto utile’; in the economic dimension and in the new needs posed by the expansion of the empire; and on the constitutional level, with the independent position of the tribunate and of the ‘luogotenenza provinciale’. In all those three remits a situation of ‘crisi latente’ first came about, followed by a ‘crisi acuta’. The themes raised by Betti were not in themselves original, and the starting point in the study of the crisis was the violation of the constitutional order, as had been the case in a number of earlier discussions. Yet the most innovative feature was their framing into an historical and constitutional treatment that was open to the developments of political culture.⁵¹⁴ There is an innovative reading of the Sullan regime, as a moment in which a new political and administrative vision of the Roman state and a serious attempt to establish new bureaucratic structures began to take shape.⁵¹⁵

32. Unlike Greenidge, Ferrero, and Betti, Matthias Gelzer (1886-1974) instead set his discussion of the Roman nobility by avowedly stressing some factors of continuity throughout Republican history – an approach that also clearly distinguishes him from the other great master of the ‘prosopographical method’, Friedrich Münzer, to whom he is often hastily assimilated.⁵¹⁶ His starting point, in explicit dissent from Mommsen, is the premise that the evidence for the social history of the Roman Republic is confined to its last two centuries.⁵¹⁷ Having set those parameters, he radically disputes Sallust’s thesis that there were no factional divides before 146 BCE: on the contrary, *clientelae* are well attested since the earliest stages of the historical tradition. The first figure to whom a patronage

⁵¹³ Betti 1982. See the contributions collected in Crifò 1986. – Between the Eighties and Nineties of the last century Salvatore Tondo (1931-2015) closely engaged with Betti’s work in his attempt to trace a history of the Republican crisis from a legal standpoint: see Tondo 1993, 3-208, where some earlier studies are collected.

⁵¹⁴ See Gabba 1986, 41-42; Badian 1986, 85-89; Lepore 1989, 299 (= 2021, 193-194).

⁵¹⁵ Betti 1982, 235. On this aspect see Gabba 1986, 43.

⁵¹⁶ See Hölkeskamp 2012, XXIV-XXV (= 2017, 56-58). On the extent of Gelzer’s intellectual debt to Münzer cf. Ridley 1986 and Simon 1988, 232-233.

⁵¹⁷ Gelzer 1912, xvii. Cf. Strauß 2017, 143-214 on the extent of Gelzer’s debt to Mommsen.

network can be attributed is Appius Claudius Caecus: an individual to whom Sigonio had already assigned a leading role in Roman political history (§11). If the theory of *metus hostilis* is rejected, a link is still maintained between imperial expansion and the end of the Republic. After the Hannibalic War, Roman magistrates ceased to behave as disciplined administrators, and harshly asserted their personal power, in a context in which a new individualistic outlook was emerging; Gelzer explains its rise with the increasing influence of Hellenistic political culture. Having become accustomed to being treated as kings in provincial contexts, they began to change their behaviour at home and to intensify the modes of political competition. Montesquieu's model is restated in terms that would prove very influential.⁵¹⁸

The problem of the persistence of the original Roman character is also central to other modern interpretations of the late Republic. In Hugh Last's contribution to the tenth volume of *Cambridge Ancient History* the critical moment in late Republican history is identified with the Social War: an event that marks both a fatal threat to the order of the Republic and the beginning of an entirely new historical phase, shaped by the enfranchisement of the Italians and bound to leave a profound legacy over the centuries. The development of Roman citizenship into an imperial citizenship led to a fundamental change, in which the relationship between Rome and Italy was redefined, as was the form itself of the civic body. The definition with which Last summarizes the meaning of the Social War – 'For the Roman Republic the Social War marked the crisis of its history and the culmination of its achievement' (425) – brings us back to the seventeenth-century reflections on the medical dimension of the crisis, as a turning point in the course of a disease. In the ninth volume of *Cambridge Ancient History*, devoted to the final phase of the Republic, the concept of crisis is instead evoked only occasionally, and always in reference to specific historical junctures: the economic crisis of the second century BCE, the crisis of the so-called

⁵¹⁸ Gelzer restated this thesis in his later book on Caesar 'politician and statesman', which first appeared in 1921 (I quote from the sixth edition of 1960, esp. 5), but attached greater weight to the agrarian developments of the second century BCE and to the construction of vast military *clientelae*, defined as a gradual crisis that eventually resulted in revolution and civil war (8-9; cf. 84 for the use of a medical metaphor: the greed of the governors as a cancerous formation in the 'oligarchische Reichsverwaltung'). – See also the original insight of de Ste Croix 1981, 359-360: from 133 onwards the Roman nobility transferred to Rome the repressive methods employed in the provinces during the previous century 'once the threat to their dominance (or even their property) became really serious': the boundary between external and internal warfare collapsed. The other significant Marxist account of the late Republic produced in Britain (Anderson 1974, 55-75) is relatively more conventional: it views the demise of the Republican regime as the 'crisis of senatorial power' (68), and draws the bulk of its account of the economic and social developments of from the scholarly consensus at the time of writing (P. A. Brunt is a central presence: cf. §34).

The Crisis of the Roman Republic

First Triumvirate in 57 (before the pact of Lucca), and the crisis that precedes the final break between Caesar and Pompey.

More than a century before Last, the Social War had been identified as a turning point in the whole of Roman history in a complex and original work like *L'Italia avanti il dominio dei Romani* by Giuseppe Micali (1768-1844), whose first edition appeared in 1810. The projects of Micali and Last are very different in inspiration and context, as one would expect, but share an important common problem: the relationship between local elements and central powers in the framework of large political and administrative constructions. For Micali the quality of the relations between Rome and the Italian Allies became a crucial issue for any assessment of the political and moral quality of Roman history. The latter began to be treated 'come sudditi forestieri' when Rome was by now on the way to moral decline caused by the fall of every enemy: 'Tanta fortuna fece presto svanire ogni idea di moderazione al par d'ogni virtù'.⁵¹⁹ The Social War is the moment in which the Italians obtain recognition of their rights and compensation for the abuses suffered in the preceding decades: a fair choice, which reunites 'popoli e paesi che la natura avea collocati per non essere mai divisi tra loro'.⁵²⁰ The citizen body was enlarged, but soon proved incapable of responding to the demands of the new time: that change in turn contributed to a 'grado di confusione e d'anarchia'. Indeed, the entry of new citizens proves to be a factor that intensifies the decline and accelerates the process of corruption. An equitable measure is thus built into a structure that is now unreformable, and has deteriorated under the weight of mistaken political choices. In a climate of licence, despotism revealed itself to be the only way out, dictated by the need for a 'forza reprimente' and implemented by an 'artificioso usurpatore' such as Augustus.⁵²¹ With freedom, however, all virtues disappear, and the Italic peoples

⁵¹⁹ Micali 1826, 261.

⁵²⁰ Micali 1826, 315. The inability of the Italian cities to break their mutual isolation, however, is a major theme of Micali's work, which according to De Francesco 2013, 60-61 (= 2020, 77-78) has a direct debt to the reflection of Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des loix*. Treves 1962a, 20-35 and De Francesco 2013, 51-83 (= 2020, 67-100) offer, from different perspectives, a masterful contextualization of Micali, his work and its impact. Croce 1921, 1.114-116 remains fundamental on the emergence of the 'storia dell'Italia antichissima, dell'Italia preromana, e dai romani distrutta' as a 'prologo' of the 'epos della storia italiana' (115) in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

⁵²¹ Micali 1826, 333, 342. See also the strongly negative assessment of Augustus expressed by another historian of pre-Roman Italy, Giuseppe Maria Galanti (1743-1806), in his unfinished *Prospetto storico sul mondo romano* (Galanti 2000): see Marcone 2005, 541-542 (= 2009, 93-94). In the earlier *Saggio sopra l'antica storia de' primi abitatori dell'Italia* the Social War ('guerra italica') marks instead the completion of Roman oppression: Galanti 1783, 216-218 (esp. 216: 'le città d'Italia furono allora interamente distrutte').

find themselves facing an oppression of a different kind, which was bound to last for centuries.

In much more recent times, Erich Gruen (1935) also attributed a decisive and strongly periodizing role to the Social War, in a contribution in which he returned, four decades on, to the approach and conclusions of his great book on the last generation of the Roman Republic. His reading, however, is fundamentally different from Last's: far from being a moment that paved the way for a long-term reconciliation and a new political settlement, that conflict revealed to a generation of Romans what political violence could enable when deployed on a military scale. That mighty collective trauma offered a blueprint for what was to follow several decades later.⁵²² In *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (1974), Gruen had also repeatedly probed the tension between crisis and continuity, right from the opening section, which explores the question of the persistence of Sulla's reforms, and puts forward a broadly positive assessment.⁵²³ The whole work betrays deep-seated scepticism towards the idea of a decline or a fall of the Republic, and is on the other hand much keener on placing the emphasis on factors of continuity and relative stability. Until well into the 50s BCE, the Republic proved fundamentally viable; the efficiency of the system was irrevocably compromised only by the civil war that broke out in 49 BCE.⁵²⁴

33. In the preface to the 1995 paperback edition of *The Last Generation*, Gruen denounced with good reason the loose talk and conceptual opaqueness that are typical of much of the twentieth-century debate on the 'crisis' of the Roman Republic, and voiced equally well-founded reservations on the useful-

⁵²² A not dissimilar judgement was put forward in Heuss 1956, 11-12 (= 1995, 1174-1175), who saw in the Social War the only coherently revolutionary moment in late Republican history, in which a project of radical change was pursued, and a new balance between warfare and political developments ('genetische Funktion') emerged. On the importance of that historical juncture see also Bleicken 1995, 18-22 (= 1998, 112-116). Wulff Alonso 2021, 15-16 has noted that the fall of the Republic can only be understood against the backdrop of the relationship between Rome and Italy. – Cf. David 2021, 14-23 for a sceptical assessment of the applicability of the concept of 'generation' to the history of the late Republic.

⁵²³ Gruen 1974, 6-46.

⁵²⁴ K. Girardet also attributes a decisive role to Caesar in the fall of the Republic (Girardet 1996 = 2007, 199-234); see Walter 2009, 29: 'eine sehr zugespitzte Mordtheorie' (Walter's article is an invaluable orientation point on developments in German-language historiography; see also Walter 2017, 112-114 and, most recently, Jehne 2020 = 2021). Schneider 2017, 218-239 instead explains Caesar's victory as the establishment of a military dictatorship, based on a pact between a political leader and the army; the underlying theme of his discussion, however, is the intertwining of social crisis and political crisis, which is already established from the first half of the second century (15-51: the whole book owes a strong debt to Brunt).

ness of terminological discussions about ‘crisis’ and ‘revolution’.⁵²⁵ The gist of his argument remains a fundamentally sceptical position on the possibility of identifying a definitive explanation for the end of the Roman Republic: probably an implicit response to the review in which Michael Crawford (1939) put him to task for staging a ‘Hamlet without the Prince’, resorting to narrative as a surrogate for historical explanation, and renouncing to explore the factors that had driven the senatorial oligarchy out of power.

Yet the explicit side of Gruen’s firm and measured polemic is aimed at another classic work of 20th-century historiography on the late Republic: *Res publica amissa* by Christian Meier (1929), first published in 1966 and re-edited in 1980 – a book in which the concept of ‘Krise ohne Alternative’ stands out as the leading theme of an ambitious interpretive project. In Meier’s view, the history of the late Republic is that of a context in which at least two conflicting forces face each other: an intense competition within the nobility, and an increasingly assertive and intrusive role of some great individuals. The simultaneous pressure of these two factors was bound to bring the Republic to a traumatic demise. Both factors were too deeply rooted to leave room for an alternative, or even for serious reform attempts. The scope for the political agency of the people was altogether minimal; at the same time, even the monarchic model was never properly theorised, and the transition towards the rule of one man was not the outcome of a mature reflection on a new political order.⁵²⁶ Meier’s periodisation leaves out the Gracchan age and the immediately subsequent decades, and concentrates instead on the period between the Social War and the end of the 50s. On this account, until 91 BCE the Senate had managed to contain the ‘schwärende Krankheit des Staates’ that had first broken out with the Gracchi, after the initiatives of Livius Drusus an acute crisis did set in, and had an escala-

⁵²⁵ See also Gruen’s remark (1995, vii) on the role that ‘the stability and endurance of institutions’ in the political and social ‘turmoil’ that swept through the United States between the late 1960s and the early 1970s had in shaping his reflection on the late Roman Republic; the emphasis on institutional continuity is one of the least persuasive aspects of his discussion (see e.g. Bleicken 1995, 22-23 = 1998, 116-117).

⁵²⁶ On the applicability of the concept of *Ordnung* to the study of the late Republic see Walter 2014 (esp. 96-97, 113 on Meier’s ‘Krise ohne Alternative’); 2017, 116; and 2020, 25-27. On Meier’s thinking around the problem of the Republican crisis, especially in the context of the wider developments in German historiography, see Rilinger 1982, 288-293; von Ungern-Sternberg 1982, 255-256, 268; Schneider 2017, 266-271; Jehne 2020, 6-7 (= 2021a, 61-63); Eckert 2020, 88 (who emphasizes his debt to Rudolf Vierhaus’s reflection); Jehne 2021b, 73-77; Wulff Alonso 2021, 118-119; and esp. Bernett 2008. Cf. Moatti 2018, 159: ‘ces interprétations qui ont été commentées de manière quasi talmudique au cours de ces dernières années’.

tion ('Zuspitzung') around 60.⁵²⁷ The tendency to see in the end of the Republic an inevitable historical development is also apparent in this reading: the use of the medical metaphor is, to use a facile turn of phrase, a telling symptom. In spite of the profound differences of approach and language, one can glean a trace of Mommsen's reflection on the late Republican crisis as an irresolvable clash between irreconcilable alternatives.

In Gruen's view, the pervasiveness of the concept of crisis is not matched by a comparable degree of conceptual clarity, whether in Meier or in other scholars, notably in German-speaking historiography.⁵²⁸ Even an altogether sympathetic reader like Aloys Winterling (1956) recognizes that Meier did not duly integrate in his analysis some structural factors, chiefly those related to the development of the Mediterranean empire.⁵²⁹ Meier's book, though, certainly intensified the discussion on the definition itself of 'crisis'. In German historiography, this debate was intertwined with a reflection on the viability of historical materialism as an historical approach, on the applicability of the concept of 'revolution', and on the political weight of economic and social factors: all these themes were of course especially significant in the debates between historians from the FRG and the GDR.⁵³⁰ Even a discussion intended for a wider educated readership, such as that published by Karl Christ (1923-2008) in 1979 opened with a cursory, if dense historiographic and theoretical overview, followed by a largely descriptive account. The title, *Krise und Niedergang der römischen Republik*, outlines a process in two stages, which are never clearly defined as such. Christ's discussion reflects a certain degree of scepticism on the possibility of a

⁵²⁷ On the role of great individuals in Meier's thinking see Bennett 2008, 172-174, who reflects on the tension between 'subjektive Krisenerfahrung' and 'objektive Krisenerkenntnis'. Meier discussed the role of short-term emergencies in an important later contribution, where he used the concept of 'Ernstfall' rather than that of 'Krise': Meier 1979.

⁵²⁸ On the disagreement between Meier and Gruen cf. Morstein-Marx 2004, 279-280. – It is both noteworthy and revealing of wider problems how the important anthology of essays edited by R. Seager in 1969, *The Crisis of the Roman Republic*, does not offer any definition of the concept that gives the volume its title; the same is true of Rossi 1968, a remarkable overview of this period.

⁵²⁹ Winterling 2008, 223 (= 2009, 145).

⁵³⁰ Petzold 1972 is a representative example of this front of debate, in his attempt to define the parameters through which one might resort to the notions of 'crisis' and 'revolution'; the starting point, however, is Heuss 1956 (= 1995, 1164-1191), esp. 2-4, 24-26 (= 1165-1167, 1187-1189); see 1956, 26-28 = 1995, 1189-1191 for an important bibliographical review, where no mention is made of *The Roman Revolution*). Tornow 1978 and Rilinger 1982 offer useful points of orientation on developments in German historiography. Zuchold 1980, which places an attack on Heuss at the center of the discussion, is an instructive case of Marxist polemic against the 'bürgerliche Geschichtsschreibung in der BRD'. On Heuss's reflection on the late Republic and the idea of a 'maximale Selbständigkeit der Innenpolitik' in that period see von Ungern-Sternberg 1982, 262-268.

precise theoretical definition of concepts that, like ‘revolution,’ lend themselves to empirical and even trivializing usage (12: ‘gewohnte und gängige Begrifflichkeit’). Christ’s key interlocutor turns out to be, on closer inspection, Jacob Burckhardt, the modern scholar to whom the first and last citations are devoted. The great Basle historian, in a famous essay, *Das Individuum und das Allgemeine* (published posthumously in 1905), had made the case for the importance of major characters in history.⁵³¹ Christ sought to reassess the theme by fully integrating it into the historical interpretation of the late Republican period, with the openly stated intention of countering those that he regarded as the prevailing tendencies in modern historiography (466).

The crisis of the late Republic has also received attention in projects where a comparative approach has been deployed, with varying degrees of rigour and effectiveness: the extensive study in which Joachim Tauber (1958) attempted a contrastive analysis of the late Republic and Tsarist Russia; and, in more recent years, the long pamphlet in which David Engels (1979) predicted the advent of an autocratic regime in twenty-first-century Europe in the light of the historical trajectory of the late Roman Republic.⁵³² Nor has there been a lack of re-readings from the left, such as the analogy between late Republican Rome and the United States of the early twenty-first century that was put forward in a remarkable NYT editorial by the economist Paul Krugman (1953), shortly after Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 presidential election.⁵³³ The general picture, though, is abundantly clear. From the mid-twentieth century there have been no attempts to seriously engage with the problem of the crisis of the Roman Republic outside the field of professional ancient historians.⁵³⁴ Let us go back to the brief of reconstructing the main themes of that debate.

⁵³¹ The reference edition is Burckhardt 1956. On Burckhardt’s fascination with Caesar see Christ 1963, 104-106.

⁵³² Tauber 1990; Engels 2013 (and subsequent revised editions).

⁵³³ Krugman 2016. See Santangelo 2018, 312-313. On the presence of Rome in the US political debate of the early 2000s see Malamud 2009, 256-259. Most recently, the general overview presented in Watts 2018 is led by apparent concerns over the demise of republican freedom, and stresses the harmful impact of economic inequality on political structures; see also Watts 2021, 7-28. Hammer 2020, 109-122 has spoken of Donald Trump as the architect of a ‘new Caesarism’ hinged on a ‘gradual reorientation of public institutions towards private or personal ends’ (120); a process that finds parallels in late Republican history. – A further point on language is worth making: the title of Watts 2018 makes explicit reference to the mortality of the Republic; another recent popularizing treatment (Robert 2019) speaks of the ‘agonie d’une république’.

⁵³⁴ Armitage 2017, 59-90 is a partial exception: the focus of his interest, however, are the civil wars in late Republican Rome and their ideological legacy, rather than the crisis of the political regime or social order in which those conflicts took place. – *Hannibal’s Legacy* was instead the result of the return to Ancient History of a highly original scholar, who had devoted most of his

34. In the second edition of the ninth volume of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, published in 1994, sixty years after the first one, the concept of crisis has a more precise and consistent application. The key change from the 1930s project is the periodisation. The ninth volume of the first edition, simply entitled ‘The Roman Republic’, covers the period from 133 to 44 BCE, while its second edition begins in 146 and ends with the death of Cicero, in December 43: a choice that has the clear aim of emphasizing the significance of intellectual history, placing it on the same footing as those of political history.⁵³⁵ The coverage of the tenth volume, however, starts several weeks earlier, in a slight and instructive overlap with the subject matter of the ninth volume: the analysis opens with the passing of the *lex Titia* and the creation of the Triumvirate, in November 43, and switches back to the harsh realities of power. As Syme noted, it was an apt choice: November 43 does mark the transition to absolute power.⁵³⁶

In the opening chapter of the ninth volume, Andrew Lintott (1936), one of the editors, sets the concept of crisis as the keystone of the whole period: not just because a crisis did take place, but because there was a wide and deep-seated awareness of it across Roman culture, and because the deep structures of that historical trajectory conspired towards a scenario of crisis: what dictated it was the Mediterranean expansion, which created the conditions for the army – ‘the one perennially successful department of the *res publica*’ – to rise to a position of political primacy. In the backdrop of this assessment there is the recognisable influence of Montesquieu, whose contribution on this problem is identified as a decisive moment in the modern historiographical debate, along with Machiavelli and Mommsen.⁵³⁷ In the following chapter, devoted to the ‘problems of the em-

work to other themes and other chronological areas (Toynbee 1965; Millar 2004 is illuminating on the link between Toynbee’s classical training and his historiographical perspective).

⁵³⁵ The idea that the Republic ended with the death of Cicero is by no means new: it is central to the framework of Conyers Middleton’s great book (see §23), and has a distinguished tradition in Italian scholarship throughout the nineteenth century, from Gino Capponi to Atto Vannucci (see respectively the extracts in Treves 1962b, 691, 769-770). – In the second half of the twentieth century many of the most original studies on Cicero have tried to understand his work and thought in its historical context: it is worth mentioning here the Italian edition of an important monograph by Kazimierz Kumaniecki (*Cyceron i jego współcześni* [*Cicero and his contemporaries*], Warszawa 1959), significantly entitled *Cicerone e la crisi della Repubblica romana* (Kumaniecki 1972).

⁵³⁶ See the account of a High Table conversation between Syme and C. Pelling in Pelling 2015, 211.

⁵³⁷ Cf. the even sharper (and unduly simplifying) judgement of Bringmann 2003, 21, who sees in Montesquieu the beginning of the ‘moderne Beschäftigung’ with Republican history; the attempt to base the whole history of the last century of the Republic on a thematic analysis of ‘Die Weltherrschaft und ihre Folgen’ that goes back to the last quarter of the third century BCE is re-

pire', Lintott establishes an even more precise link between the fall of Carthage and the political crisis of the Republic, in keeping with the periodisation that frames the whole volume.⁵³⁸ In the same piece, though, Lintott speaks of an agrarian crisis of the second half of the second century, not unlike what Last had done in the first edition of *CAH IX*. In other chapters there is talk of specific crises: that immediately following 70 BCE, or the one that, from September 51 onwards, preceded the outbreak of civil war. The familiar oscillation in the use of the term 'crisis', between specific occurrences and general developments, is still apparent. On the other hand, the handling of the concept in the introduction to the volume envisages such a broad application that it risks falling into an undifferentiated approach, nor is its usage framed by a clear working definition.

For all its limitations, the outlook that informs *CAH²* is by no means unique, and is to some extent intrinsic to any attempt to construct a history of the late Republic. With the exception of some studies produced in the USSR, the *Storia della costituzione romana* of Francesco De Martino (1907-2002) is perhaps the most coherent attempt to sketch an historical interpretation of the Republic from a Marxist standpoint.⁵³⁹ Its central premise is clearly articulated: political and legal change was rooted in economic and social processes, which the Roman ruling class failed to grasp in its extent and gravity (2.382-401, esp. 388). The agrarian crisis to which the Gracchi set out to respond was part and parcel of a wider 'crisi della repubblica,' in which a front of democratic political initiative emerged (2.465). At the same time, the cause of popular emancipation was undermined by the tendency of the plebs to seek an alliance with the equestrian order, which was in turn led by class solidarity to merge its interests with those

markable, not least because it is fully aligned with Montesquieu's approach (25-44). For a spirited and productive critique of Montesquieu's reading see von Ungern-Sternberg 1998, esp. 610-611, 624; cf. also von Ungern-Sternberg 1982, 254, 262.

⁵³⁸ In an important paper published two decades earlier, Lintott had critically discussed the ancient tradition on the connection between political decline, moral decline, and imperial expansion, and had (persuasively, if rather overdeterministically) located its origins in the political controversy of the Gracchan period: that account 'should not distract us now when we try to understand what changes, if any, in political *mores* were involved in the Republic's collapse' (Lintott 1972, 638).

⁵³⁹ De Martino 1958-1960. On the Soviet historiography on the late Republic after World War II, see the fundamental discussions in Raskolnikoff 1975, 171-183, 234-244; 1980, 25-29 (= 1990, 35-39) and 1982b (= 1990, 81-94), which also offer a rich bibliographical summary; the book by Sergeĭ L. Utčenko (1908-1976), Кризис и падение Римской республики (*Crisis and Fall of the Roman Republic*, 1965), which posits a causal link between the crisis of the ownership structures on which the Roman *polis* had long been founded and the end of the Republican regime, is especially relevant to the topic discussed here. – The reconstruction outlined in de Ste Croix 1981, 337-362 remains very stimulating; there is talk of 'times of crisis' (352), but the late Republican crisis is not examined as a coherent historical period.

of the senatorial order (3.3). The third volume of De Martino's work opens with a chapter significantly entitled 'Fine della repubblica': the discussion begins as early as the end of the second century BCE. What marks the onset of a new phase is the irruption of civil war into the political arena. From a political standpoint, the history of the Republic ends in 49, when it becomes clear that the outcome of the civil war would be the political hegemony of an individual (3.186: 'da questa nuova prova la repubblica non si sarebbe salvata'). The fundamental reasons for that demise, however, lie in a crisis that was not recognized and addressed in good time.⁵⁴⁰ De Martino sets the problem without any deterministic slant, but establishing a clear evolutionary trajectory, in which individuals have a largely marginal role.

The theme of the role of individuals in history, and indeed in historical crises, is acutely raised by the study of the Gracchan period. In a book that remains fundamental to this day, Claude Nicolet (1930-2010) placed the concept of 'crisis' in the title itself: *Les Gracques. Crise agraire et révolution* (1967).⁵⁴¹ In introducing the topic, however, he made clear that a far-reaching and complex crisis was at stake, which the initiative of the Gracchi merely revealed; it was going to unfold for over a century. The interplay between economic and political developments is identified as the key focus of the project. Nicolet does not merely set the problem in generic terms: understanding the weight of the economic dimension involves overcoming the narrowly political ('limitative ou machiavélienne', 9) reading that tends to concentrate on the political ambitions of the Gracchi, downplaying their initiatives to the status of features of a strategy of political advancement. Setting the crisis in the longer term is thus a strategy to acknowledge and explore its historical significance, escaping any reductionist approach.

A decade later, in an influential account of the structures of Roman Italy (1977), Nicolet framed the problem in different terms, which are a coherent development of the analysis he had put forward in the volume on the Gracchi. The concept of 'crisis' is mostly reserved to specific economic conjunctures, such as

⁵⁴⁰ A concept of crisis that largely overlaps with De Martino's is presupposed in the fundamental studies on Sallust that Antonio La Penna (1925) produced in the mid-twentieth century, culminating in La Penna 1968 – perhaps the most important book published on that author in the twentieth century. The crisis is identified there as the central theme of all the work of the historian of Amiternum, both on a personal level and a collective one: 'la crisi di Sallustio ha la sua unica ragione nella crisi della società e dello stato' (32) and the choice to place the crisis at the core of his literary project, notably of the *Historiae*, is his main contribution to the interpretation of Roman history and the development of Latin literary culture (311).

⁵⁴¹ Nicolet 1967. On Nicolet's central role in the French historiography on the Roman Republic see David-Hurlet 2020, 3-4.

that following the Hannibalic War, or to shortages in the corn supply; on the agrarian front, though, it is rejected altogether, because a crisis does not last several centuries, and is replaced by the notion of ‘question’, *res agrariae*.⁵⁴² The agrarian question is already a crucial theme of Republican history in the early fifth century, as the tradition on Spurius Cassius shows. In the second century there was not a crisis of agricultural production, but one of land ownership: Nicolet still subscribes to the view that a decline of small and medium land ownership did occur – a contention that much important work has since questioned with compelling arguments.

Peter A. Brunt (1917-2005) chose an even more radical approach. Like Nicolet, he placed economic and social developments at the core of his analysis of late Republican politics. He also spoke of an ‘agrarian problem’ in his discussion of the second century in *Social Conflicts in Republican Rome*,⁵⁴³ the concept of ‘crisis’ is in fact completely absent, both in that slender, brilliant book (1971) and in the essay on the fall of the Republic that opens the major 1988 collection under the same title⁵⁴⁴ – probably the most ambitious and original contribution to late Republican history written in the second half of the twentieth century, whose conceptual and methodological implications still await to be fully explored, and would merit a free-standing discussion in their own right.⁵⁴⁵ Brunt’s 1968 review of *Res publica amissa* did not just mark his methodological distance from Meier, but laid out an interpretive disagreement that Brunt developed at greater length in the following decades.⁵⁴⁶ The end of the Roman Republic is not best understood through the implosion of aristocratic consensus,

⁵⁴² Nicolet 1977, 117-142, esp. 117: ‘Nous parlerons de ‘question’ plutôt que de crise agraire: une crise ne dure pas plusieurs siècles’. Cf., more bluntly and from a strictly political perspective, Mouritsen 2017, 111: ‘The idea of a prolonged, almost permanent, state of crisis lasting a hundred years is, of course, meaningless’ (see already Vierhaus 1978, 320-321 and 1979, 81). See, from a different point of view, Giardina 1997, 238, 257-258, who argues for the importance of granting the status of crisis to the ‘trasformazioni lente’, and explicitly takes issue with some strands of the modern historiography on the ancient world – notably Finley’s strong emphasis on continuities; the choice to associate the concept of crisis only to wars and catastrophes does not fit the slow pace of non-capitalist economies, where crises do not have a cyclical character. Cf. also, in the context of a discussion of Marxism and historiography, Giardina 2007, 26-29.

⁵⁴³ Brunt 1971, 92.

⁵⁴⁴ There are exceptions: a quick mention of the credit crisis of the 80s BCE (Brunt 1971, 103), and one of the crisis of the third century CE (1988, 11).

⁵⁴⁵ Brunt 1971; Brunt 1988 (p. 84-89 are of extraordinary methodological interest; on the problem of historical causation in Brunt see Crawford 2009, 81).

⁵⁴⁶ Brunt 1968. On the interpretive disagreement between Brunt and Meier see Ferrary 1982, 729 and Russell 2015, 135-136. For an eloquent case for the need to write wealth into the history of the Roman Republic, which starts on a note of appreciation for Meier, see Tan 2017, xiii-xvii.

but through the erosion of the solidarity between Senate and people, and the gradually increasing willingness of the latter to support authoritarian or monarchic solutions. That state of affairs is rooted in problems that the Senate had long failed to face and resolve: imperial expansion played a decisive role.⁵⁴⁷ The issue was gradually compounded and complicated by the emerging dualism between the Senate and some individuals that were determined to assert their personal power on comprehensively new foundations. This is an elegant, if rather abstract reading. It has the considerable merit of avoiding dogmatic periodisations and a unilateral reading of the relationship between collective action and individual initiative. It also leaves scope for extraordinarily creative insights. In his short 1971 book on social conflicts in the Roman Republic, Brunt notes that the backdrop of the violence that pervades the Fifties is hunger, ‘perhaps more often than we know’.⁵⁴⁸ Brunt replaces the concept of crisis with the recurring image of a Republican order that becomes progressively less effective, and is eventually close to collapsing (1971, 127) – an order that is not merely defined by its institutional framework; the medical metaphor occasionally resurfaces.⁵⁴⁹ The concept of revolution is used, but limited to the political remit, in terms that are not very much unlike those used by Mommsen.⁵⁵⁰ The revolutionary outcome is brought about by a long and complex phase of anarchy, exacerbated by the onset of civil war.⁵⁵¹

Like Nicolet and Brunt, Michael Crawford also framed his interpretation of the Roman Republic around a robust discussion of economic and social developments. In his major account of the monetary and financial history of the Republic, the first century BCE is instead summarized under the general heading ‘The Years of Crisis’.⁵⁵² Crawford – a former pupil of Brunt – divides up the discussion into a chapter devoted to Italy and one on the empire: on the one hand, the discussion seems to be based on the classic parameters of political history; on the other, it is informed by an essentially economic theme, notably the growing integration of the empire into a single monetary system. The ‘crisis’ is never formally defined, but is empirically identified as the moment at which events precipitate, and which precedes and prepares the ‘end of the free state’

⁵⁴⁷ Brunt 1988, 68.

⁵⁴⁸ Brunt 1971, 138.

⁵⁴⁹ Brunt 1971, 145: Caesar, unlike Sulla, wants to heal the wounds of the Republic, rather than reopening them.

⁵⁵⁰ Brunt 1988, 9-11; cf. 1971, 104-105.

⁵⁵¹ Brunt 1971, 155.

⁵⁵² Crawford 1985, 173-238.

and the rise of Augustus.⁵⁵³ By contrast, the concept of ‘crisis’ is in fact irrelevant in the influential overview that Crawford had published a few years earlier in *The Roman Republic*, where the prevailing mode is an imagery of upheaval, inadequacy, and dissolution. A key chapter of that book, devoted to the period between the Social War and Sulla’s dictatorship, is entitled ‘The World Turned Upside Down’:⁵⁵⁴ an image to which Niebuhr had also resorted in his *Vorträge*, in a discussion of the actions of Sulla that makes explicit reference to the play by Ludwig Tieck, *Die verkehrte Welt* (1798).⁵⁵⁵

35. Some have chosen to overcome the problem of defining the crisis of the late Republic by leaving the ambiguity unresolved and resorting to a useful polysemy. The lucid and healthily empirical account of Catherine Steel (1973), entitled *The End of the Roman Republic. Crisis and Expansion* (2013), is a case in point. The link between crisis and expansion is less surprising and less noteworthy than the first part of the title, where a largely neutral concept, ‘the end’, is preferred to ‘fall’ or ‘decline’, which might have (or be seen to have) an evaluative and teleological slant. In another recent overview, Josiah Osgood (1974) has even proposed to go beyond the concept of ‘fall of the Roman Republic’, and has encompassed the period from 150 BCE to 20 CE within the same treatment: there are, in his view, crucial levels of continuity between the Gracchan project and the ‘reimagining’ of the Roman state that intervenes with the advent of the Principate, and that is best understood as a response to an unprecedented degree of economic and social complexity.⁵⁵⁶ The key development of that period is precisely the construction of a new polity, which fully comes to terms with its imperial horizon: ‘from World Power to World State’. Montesquieu is never quoted, but this periodisation seems to recognize and pursue the key argument of the *Considérations* on the ties between imperial expansion and political

⁵⁵³ I am consciously leaving out of account the recent and ongoing debates on the relevance of the notions of ‘state’, ‘statehood’, and ‘stateness’ to the study of the Roman Republic, although it is conceivable that a renewed critical appreciation of the concept of ‘crisis’ might in turn further that intellectual conversation. The essays collected in Lundgreen 2014 are the obvious reference point; cf. Lundgreen 2019 on the Augustan developments of the problem.

⁵⁵⁴ Crawford 1992 (1st ed. 1978), 138-153. See also Crawford 1992, 152: ‘dissolution of the *res publica*’ (on the discontinuing of the census after 70/69 BCE).

⁵⁵⁵ Niebuhr 1847, 382, who argues that Sulla aimed to bring the world back to the point where, in his view, it should have stopped. Cf. the use of the cognate metaphor of ‘das Rad der Geschichte’ in von Ungern-Sternberg 1998, 620, in a discussion of the last quarter of the second century BCE. – On the literary motif of the world upside down see Curtius 1948, 104-108.

⁵⁵⁶ Osgood 2018, esp. 8. In this discussion the concept of ‘crisis’ is always referred to short-term or chronologically well-defined situations (see e.g. 53, ‘agrarian crisis’ in the second century; 114, the financial crisis of the cities of the province of Asia in the 70s).

change. In the reading recently put forward by Claudia Moatti (1954) the making of the empire also has crucial consequences, chiefly because it leads to a radicalization of Roman society. From the beginning of the second century BCE the senatorial order begins to equip itself with new repressive instruments against anyone who dares oppose its primacy, and the concept of an idealized and indivisible *res publica* starts being defined by those who envisage an oligarchic revolution.⁵⁵⁷

In other cases, an attempt has instead been made to problematize the concept of crisis. If crisis is indeed the leading theme of the last century of the Republic, one might fairly ask whether it is an intrinsic element or an extrinsic one: whether it was brought about by internal factors or by external pressures. The title of a collective volume edited by Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp (1953) at the end of the 2000s frames the problem with impressive clarity, thoughtfully exploiting a margin of felicitous ambiguity that the German language allows: the title *Eine politische Kultur (in) der Krise?* prompts the question whether the crisis brought about an original political culture, or political culture retained a degree of autonomy. The volume as a whole does not offer an answer to this dilemma, but in its introduction Hölkeskamp does identify a fundamental problem: the definition of crisis on which historiography usually operates is a ‘common-sense Konzeption’ (24-25), and is fundamentally inadequate, because it seeks to assess the complexity and significance of historical events and processes on ‘ein statisches Gegen– oder (im doppelten Sinne) Vor-Bild einer in sich selbst ruhenden, mittleren oder ‘klassischen’ Republik’.⁵⁵⁸

Even common sense, however, can enable surprising and instructive developments. In the preface to *Roman Republics* (2010), Harriet Flower (1960) recalls a conversation with a reader who was not a professional classicist: her father, the economist Michael G. Dealtry, criticized the use of the expression ‘crisis of the Roman Republic’ to describe the period between 133 and 49 BCE in the title of a chapter of the *Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic* that she edited in 2004.⁵⁵⁹ In Dealtry’s view, the term could legitimately be applied only to ‘an acute event of short duration with a measurable outcome’;⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ Moatti 2018, 73-76.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. also the important summative comment in Tonio Hölscher’s contribution on ‘Denkmäler und Konsens’ to the same volume: ‘In den transgressiven Verhaltensformen der ausgehenden römischen Republik zeigt sich vielleicht tatsächlich nicht nur eine politische Kultur in der Krise, sondern auch eine Kultur der Krise. Denn das spätrepublikanische ‚System‘ von Provokation und Akzeptanz des Scheiterns hatte seine eigene – wenngleich labile – Kohärenz.’ (181).

⁵⁵⁹ Flower 2004. The chapter, by Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, is entitled ‘The Crisis of the Roman Republic’ (89-110).

⁵⁶⁰ Flower 2010, ix.

we have already encountered a similar definition in the discussion of G. K. Golden. From that private conversation Flower started a critical reflection that led her to articulate, a few years later, an altogether radical periodisation, in which the notion of a single Republican age is replaced by a series of fundamentally different periods, each marked by an original set of opportunities and challenges. In this framework, the last century of the Republic emerges as a period in which sharply contrasting political hypotheses faced each other: the exact opposite of the ‘crisis without alternatives’ codified by Christian Meier’s influential formula. Some alternatives emerged with greater force and effectiveness than others: Sulla was a strikingly radical reformer, even though his strategy was ultimately defeated. The very idea of a long Republican crisis is sharply and fundamentally contested.

Aloys Winterling, on the other hand, attempted an entirely different operation. In a perceptive critical reading of *Res publica amissa*, which has already been mentioned in passing, he proposed to extend the concept of ‘Krise ohne Alternative’ to the early Principate. The conflicts that led to the end of the Republic persisted, albeit mostly latent, even under a monarchic regime; the pressure of social relations upon politics did not decrease, and merely shifted from groups of friends and clients to large military organisations.⁵⁶¹ The inadequacies that, from the second century BCE onwards, had prevented the nobility from regulating its conflicts and effectively managing the empire kept occurring on a cyclical basis under the Principate: there were phases of grave instability and open civil conflict, especially at times of political transition. Roman society remained deeply stratified.

This reading presents at least one opportunity and one risk. On the one hand, the *longue durée* outlook always entails valuable opportunities, especially when it helps us overcome categories that have long been embedded in the research and teaching on any given period. On the other, there is the risk of producing an account in which the levels of continuity end up morphing into an undifferentiated backdrop. ‘Crisis’ risks becoming an imprecise and ultimately misleading byword for historical change (cf. §1).⁵⁶²

Winterling rounds off his analysis by resorting to a concept drawn from ethnology, that of ‘involution’, which is not to be understood as the straightforward opposite of ‘evolution’, but as an attitude that translates into ‘progressive complication, variety within uniformity, virtuosity within monotony’: in other words, a formal differentiation that is not matched by one of substance. There is a real risk that the historiographical debate on the crisis of the late Republic

⁵⁶¹ Winterling 2008 (Engl. transl. Winterling 2009).

⁵⁶² See Russell 2015, 135, 139.

might itself fall into a pattern of involution.⁵⁶³ A possible answer lies in the attempt to problematize the concept by exploring its complexity and putting its potential to the test.

36. If the notion of a wholesale crisis of the late Republic seems to have minimal analytical quality and barely greater descriptive capacity, more meaningful results may be yielded by applying the concept of crisis to several thematic aspects, each one with its own specific historiographic trajectory, and each one opening up specific pathways of enquiry. In the mid-1930s Ettore Ciccotti (1863-1939), in the broad overview he put forward in *La civiltà del mondo antico*, spoke of the need to understand the history of the late Republic as a patchwork of distinct but interconnected crises: ‘crisi costituzionale’ (1.115), ‘crisi della popolazione’ (1.179), ‘crisi religiosa e spirituale’ (1.263-264, 268). Ciccotti articulated his discussion around a few major problems and tended to programmatically devalue the role of great characters in history. Even in his reconstruction, however, the Gracchan moment plays a decisive role: the attempt to solve a demographic question brought about revolutionary developments, especially on the constitutional level. The whole process that ended with the advent of the new regime, however, was not the outcome of a clear strategic design. The political revolution accomplished by Caesar and Augustus was also the outcome of a ‘semplice adattamento’ to circumstances that have already changed, ‘senza piena antevegenza delle conseguenze’.⁵⁶⁴

If identifying and defining a crisis on the political terrain is often an intrinsically controversial operation, it is relatively easier to do so in economic and social history, where quantitative elements can also come to the rescue, and where it is possible to evaluate the interplay of short-term and long-term crises.⁵⁶⁵ On this level too, however, the solutions remain very much open to critique and revision. Between the 1970s and the 1980s, the work carried out at the Seminario di Antichistica of the Istituto Gramsci put forward new attempts to read the economic structures of the Roman world from a Marxist perspective, which placed at the forefront the long-term dimension. Notably, the work of Andrea Carandini (1937) that took shape in that context outlined a new historical framework of the economy of Roman Italy, centred around the history of the slave mode of production, which disregards the periodisation of traditional political history and denies the very idea of a late Republican crisis. The period from

⁵⁶³ Winterling 2008, 236-238 (= 2009, 161-163, esp. 162).

⁵⁶⁴ Ciccotti 1935, 1.139-140.

⁵⁶⁵ See Vierhaus 1978, 322-323 on the role of the concept of ‘interdependence’ in the study of crises. Cf. Morin 2020, 37-49 on crisis as a ‘concept molaire... constitué par une constellation de notions interrelationnées’ (37).

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the second century BCE to the second century CE is instead understood as a coherent historical phase, characterized by a distinctive model of exploitation of slavery that is previously unattested in the ancient world.⁵⁶⁶ More specifically, the period between the second half of the second century BCE and the whole of the first century CE is understood as an age of imperialistic expansion, made possible by a combination of ‘fluidità antiburocratica’ and ‘protezionismo monopolistico’.⁵⁶⁷ In some local contexts, especially at Vulci and Cosa, one can follow the changes in ownership structures through the first century BCE, on which the civil wars had a direct impact, leading to an increasing concentration in medium-large estates.⁵⁶⁸ The first massive economic restructuring took place, however, at the beginning of the imperial age, when an intense competition between the provinces emerged.⁵⁶⁹ Only with the Antonine age is it possible to speak of a crisis in Roman Italy.⁵⁷⁰

Even those who subscribe to more conventional periodisations than Carandini’s will readily agree that the historical picture of the agrarian ‘crisis’ of the second century BCE has changed radically in the last half century, thanks to the emergence of new archaeological evidence, on the one hand, and the insights of historical demography, on the other. Some have denied its existence *tout court*; others have problematized the link between the crisis of military recruitment, the demographic crisis, and the crisis of small ownership. The recent book of François Cadiou (1971) on the myth of the proletarianization of the late Republican armies is a powerful example of how real progress in this area necessarily entails a thorough reconsideration of long-held historiographical parameters and a sobering outlook on the limitations of the extant evidence.⁵⁷¹ A similar set of concerns applies to the study of the financial dimension, in which the close scrutiny of the numismatic evidence has a central role. The Eighties of the first century BCE are an exemplary case study on the complexity of the problem. The literary documentation – which is exceptionally rich for this period of Roman history – records several short-term crises, among which the emergency addressed by the edict of Marius Gratidianus stands out. Yet these are best un-

⁵⁶⁶ Carandini 1988, 12-13, 323-326, 337-338.

⁵⁶⁷ Carandini 1988, 273 (= 1989, 511).

⁵⁶⁸ Carandini 1988, 228-234.

⁵⁶⁹ See Carandini 1988, 274-279 (= 1989, 512-516) and 1994, 172-173; cf. 169-170 for a proposal on the periodisation of the development of the agrarian landscape in Etruria.

⁵⁷⁰ Carandini 1988, 219-224; 280-84 (= 1989, 517-520). On the importance of this historical juncture in the context of the *ager Cosanus* see Carandini 1979, 40-41, where a different periodisation is proposed for the Republican age (31-33: phase of ‘economic revolution’, ca. 170-110, and creation of the ‘villa system’, ca. 110-70 BCE).

⁵⁷¹ See Cadiou 2018, esp. 13-118.

derstood against the backdrop of the economic and monetary history of the Republic, and of the challenges presented by the major military effort that the Social War had required.⁵⁷² Useful lessons may also be yielded by reconsidering familiar topics of late Republican history in light of their mid-Republican antecedents. In his recent reading of the Gracchan period as the first ‘fiscal crisis of the imperial Republic’, James Tan (1979) attaches considerable weight to the impact of the discontinuing of the *tributum* on Roman political culture, and his discussion comes at the end of a study on Roman state finances from the outbreak of the First Punic War.⁵⁷³

The history of crises at a local and regional level has a less rich and complex historiographic tradition. Some attempts to rewrite the economic history of Italy at the end of the second century have sought to chart the different predicaments of specific regional contexts: to cite a well-known example, the concentration of land ownership appears much stronger in Southern Etruria than in Campania or in the Po Valley.⁵⁷⁴ There have also been some attempts to integrate an account of rural crisis with that of a crisis in the city of Rome.⁵⁷⁵ If one opens up the discussion to the provinces, the dossier turns out to be just as rich. Charting the economic difficulties of the communities of the province of Asia in the first half of the first century BCE, largely through the archaeological and epigraphical record, and their eventual recovery, is an important aspect of the process that leads to the transition to the new regime. With a rather lofty formula, one could say that the study of crises in local contexts will have to be part of any future investigation of the late Republican crisis.

Along with the diachronic analysis and the discussion of specific local contexts, there is also scope for reflecting on specific political and social remits. Syme, as we saw at the start of this essay (§1), devoted a crucial chapter of *The Roman Revolution* to ‘Crisis in Party and State’. In a book that has had considerable impact on French-speaking historiography, Jean-Michel David (1947) has proposed to read the whole terminal phase of the Republic through the prism of a crisis of the aristocracy.⁵⁷⁶ In his view, the Roman political elite no longer found the space to sustain and replicate its modalities of action. The emergence of some dominant figures marginalised the majority of the nobility, and brought about a crisis in the dynamics of patronage on which much of the Republican

⁵⁷² Harris 2011, 53 moots the possibility of a structural connection between population growth, large supply of slaves, fall in real wages, popular discontent, and civil war in late Republican Italy: an invaluable insight, and an inevitably speculative one.

⁵⁷³ Tan 2017, 144-170. ‘Fiscal crisis’: xxvi. Post-*tributum* generation: 144-145.

⁵⁷⁴ Launaro 2011, 103-148 is a model of what the study of site trends can reveal.

⁵⁷⁵ Boren 1958.

⁵⁷⁶ David 2000, esp. 12-13, 263-264.

political practice had hinged. Greenidge, in the early 20th century, had already spoken of a material and moral decline of the Roman nobility, and singled out its failure to address the challenges of the mid-second century BCE as a factor that unleashed major consequences in late Republican history.⁵⁷⁷ Over half a century later, Emilio Gabba (1927-2013) also spoke of a ‘crisis of the Roman ruling class’,⁵⁷⁸ and Ettore Lepore (1924-1990) entitled his overview of the 70s and 60s BCE in the *Storia di Roma* Einaudi ‘la crisi della «nobilitas»’.⁵⁷⁹ David took a broader chronological focus, and shifted the emphasis to the dynamics within a specific social group and to the consequences of a political competition that had become increasingly less rational and less effective.

On this reading, the breakdown of aristocratic consensus – to echo a formula that has had wide currency in German-speaking historiography, notably through Hölkeskamp – was the factor that brought about the end of the Republican balance.⁵⁸⁰ If there was a crisis, then, it was squarely within the political establishment. This is a productive approach, especially if one is prepared to accompany it with the analysis of specific intellectual developments: David frames it in a reading of the history of patronage in the late Republic and its role in the development of Roman oratory. Other aspects of the historical development, however, remain in the background, if not altogether neglected. Any reading that programmatically excludes economic factors and their social impact leaves open the problem of how to account for the role of subaltern groups and their

⁵⁷⁷ Greenidge 1904, 60-63, 99-100, 145. See also the reading of Antonio Guarino (1967 = 1991, 437-451), who saw the basic theme of Roman institutional history in the inability to adapt the forms of the *res publica* to the needs of the empire: the ‘crisis of democracy’, however, should not be placed before the end of the third century CE, when an autocratic regime was established. In recent years, the thesis of an enduring relevance of the notion of *res publica* under the Empire has been carried out, on different grounds and independently from Guarino, in Moatti 2018, 7-11, 284-297. – For the echoes of this theme in the Byzantine context see Kaldellis 2015, esp. 1-61.

⁵⁷⁸ Gabba 1973, 142. In the essays on army and society in the late Republic published by Gabba from the late 1940s (collected in Gabba 1973) the idea of various levels of crisis interacting with one another is frequently evoked, and at the same time remains implicit in the construction of the argument: Gabba speaks of ‘crisi degli ordinamenti repubblicani’ (1); ‘crisi militare di Roma dopo la seconda guerra punica’ (25); crisis «della compagine sociale dello Stato romano, in conseguenza del sorgere dello stato territoriale e del mutato indirizzo dell'economia» (51); ‘crisi economica e sociale della società italica’ (96); ‘crisi dell'agricoltura tradizionale e delle piccole proprietà contadine’ (559).

⁵⁷⁹ Lepore 1990.

⁵⁸⁰ See e.g. Bleicken 2004, 242-243, where an equivalence is established between the crisis of the Republic and the ‘Krise der aristokratischen Gesellschaft’, and an ‘Auflösung des politischen Grundkonsenses’ is mentioned; see Walter 2009, 27-28, 30. In Bleicken 1995, 16-17, 22-26 (= 1998, 108-109, 116-120) the argument is presented in less clear-cut terms, and a significant role is also granted to the political attitude of the equestrian order and the enlargement of citizenship.

agency. Arguing, or even working on the assumption, that the political history of any given period amounts to the history of its governing class is no longer a tenable option.

The concept of crisis retains real analytical power when it is applied to non-elite social groups too. As is well known, Gaetano De Sanctis (1870-1957) did not manage to continue his *Storia dei Romani* up to the late Republican period. However, he did have the chance to discuss in detail several aspects of the second century BCE in some contributions from the early 1920s, among which *Dopoguerra antico* stands out for ambition and significance.⁵⁸¹ That essay is an analytical treatment of the aftermath of the Hannibalic War, which explores its implications with a clarity of focus that in some respects forebodes *Hannibal's Legacy*, and is informed to a decisive degree by the context of the immediate aftermath of the Great War: themes such as the necessity of war, the attitude of the victors, and the price that empire-building entails play a central role in his discussion.⁵⁸² The concept of crisis is deployed in an especially significant fashion, which anticipates the approach pursued by David, whilst differing from it in a crucial respect. De Sanctis – a conservative Catholic who nonetheless took a keen interest in the social doctrine of the Church – noted that '[I]a vita di un popolo è... un intreccio di problemi interdipendenti, le cui soluzioni o mancate soluzioni agiscono e reagiscono del continuo le une sulle altre'. Through this metaphor, which appears to be drawn from chemistry (cf. §23), the concept of crisis is introduced: 'Il problema sociale nasceva dalla crisi della classe che era stata il fondamento della grandezza di Roma e d'Italia, la classe dei piccoli proprietari rurali'.⁵⁸³ De Sanctis takes a step further than the familiar idea of an economic crisis affecting the Italian countryside. What he identified is the eclipse of a given form of social and political coexistence, and a fundamental shift in the power balance from the class of small landowners to the urban plebs, in which he sees, in openly xenophobic terms, an element of debasement and decline.⁵⁸⁴ The crisis that De Sanctis sees at work is thus chiefly moral, and the Roman ruling class proves ill-equipped to face it, on the internal front as well as in the wider context

⁵⁸¹ See Polverini 1982; cf. also Lepore 1989, 300-301 (= 2021, 194-196), who singles out the 1920s as a turning point in the engagement with the late Republican period in Italian historiography, and stresses the role of De Sanctis' pupil Mario Attilio Levi.

⁵⁸² De Sanctis 1920 (= 1976, 9-38); see also the richly annotated reprint in Treves 1962b, 1247-1282.

⁵⁸³ De Sanctis 1920, 11 (= 1976, 17). For a radically different assessment, which still makes valuable reading today, and a case for the enduring significance of small land ownership in Roman Italy see Salvioli 1906, 111-114 (cf. Salvioli 1929, 55-58).

⁵⁸⁴ De Sanctis 1920, 12 (= 1976, 18-19): 'sempre più numerosa e sempre più scadente... abbondante, per effetto delle manumissioni, di elementi stranieri di dubbio valore'.

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of the Mediterranean empire. De Sanctis resorts to the tried and tested medical metaphor, and speaks of a painful disease that ‘rimedi ordinari e normali’ will no longer be able to heal. Many aspects of this analysis have been altogether overcome by later research: the picture of a crisis of small land ownership has been irreversibly problematised by the archaeological evidence, and De Sanctis’ reflection on the relationship between Rome and the Greek East rests upon historiographical and political assumptions that no one would explicitly invoke, and most would find repulsive. Yet the insight of pursuing the study of the crisis at the level of social classes is worth developing further. The study of the losers of any historical process has instructive insights in store.⁵⁸⁵

37. Once again we find ourselves facing a thick web of historiographical problems, as has often happened in the course of this study. Quite apart from the reservations that one might have about the term itself, reflecting on the crisis of the Roman Republic readily turns into a highly significant methodological pursuit, in which the balance between description and interpretation, the differing approaches to social and political conflict, and the role of hindsight are tightly interwoven. In his review of *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* discussed above (§33), Crawford argues that the crisis of the Republic must be understood as a whole in light of what occurred next.⁵⁸⁶ As we have seen, a not altogether dissimilar view was put forward by Winterling, albeit on entirely different premises.

This essay began with the caveat that speaking of crisis, especially in the context of the late Roman Republic, might easily (if unintentionally) turn into a shorthand way of generically referring to any kind of historical process: in the most favourable scenario, a series of Russian dolls, where a crisis always contains another; in the worst one, a night in which all cows are black. On the other hand, disposing of the concept of crisis in the history of the late Republic can

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Walter 2020, 25-28, who offers valuable insights in this regard by adopting the perspective of the victors: the coalition of those who benefited from the Augustan solution was very broad, and the social groups that were part of it would have hardly recognized the trajectory of ‘Krise und Untergang’ that modern students have often spoken of. See esp. 26: ‘Was jedoch die späte römische Republik angeht, so muss man genau hinschauen und fragen, was eigentlich <unterging> und für wen’. – For an earnest attempt to construct a thematic account of the ‘crisis revolucionaria de los Gracos’ by identifying various levels of crisis (or ‘campos de conflicto’), with a note of caution on the periodising significance of 133 BCE, see Roldán Hervás 1981, 373-424 and 1995, 171-184. Maschek 2020 takes a comparable approach to the final phase of the Republic, albeit from an archaeological point of view.

⁵⁸⁶ Crawford 1976, 214: ‘it is precisely the possession of hindsight which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the historian’. Cf. Cadiou 2018, 76-77.

hardly be a fruitful operation.⁵⁸⁷ The challenge is to productively problematise it: clearing up the field from the discussion of monolithic and totalising definitions, and escaping a narrowly empirical reading, which confines it to the description and the analysis of short-term crises and emergency situations. The discussion may then profitably be moved from the treatment of chronological segments to the analysis of specific thematic angles and the exploration of local contexts. In each of those remits one may identify different levels of crisis: processes that lead to the emergence of winners and losers, to the overcoming of existing frameworks, or the demise of their alternatives. In the elusive variability of the often implicit definitions of the term ‘crisis’ that historians have been giving, and in the usage that they have been making of it, we can see at work some fundamental assumptions of approach and methodology: they encapsulate much of their outlook on their object of study. This is another important reason for not removing the concept of crisis from our debates, and for continuing to reckon with its grave limitations and ever-changing potential. Without losing sight of a prudential working principle: *une crise peut en cacher une autre*.

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⁵⁸⁷ Vierhaus 1979, 83 remains a valuable read on the interpretive rewards of *Krisenforschung*. Morin 2020, 54 points out that any study of crisis necessarily has a theoretical dimension.

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Abstract

Questo saggio propone uno studio analitico del dibattito storiografico sulla crisi della Repubblica romana. Ne esplora i principali sviluppi dal Medioevo ai giorni nostri e discute le varie definizioni che di quel concetto sono state proposte nella storiografia moderna.

This essay provides a survey of the historiography on the crisis of the Roman Republic. It charts its key developments from the Middle Ages to our time, and discusses the various definitions of the concept that have been put forward in the scholarly debate.