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This book examines the interaction of political and intellectual activities practiced by members of the Roman aristocracy during the final years of the republic and immediately after its fall, especially within the years 63 through 43 BCE. It is, however, “by no means intended as a study of the intellectual scene of late Republican Rome in general” (10). The cautiously circumscribed project Volk describes in chapter one, which doubles as the book’s introduction, is somewhat at odds with the grander aim implied by the book’s title. Volk’s focus is on individual actions and motivations, and she resists general explanation on methodological grounds, working from a “model of intellectual history” that is simply “the history of intellectual activities of individuals” (ibid.). Volk further aims to uncover the thoughts and intentions of the individuals whose activities are described, so as to enable reasonable speculation not only about what her subjects were thinking, but also, “what were they trying to do?” (ibid.).

The second chapter, “*Res publica* of letters,” uses Cicero’s correspondence as its main source to introduce the concerns and major players for the rest of the book. Beyond Cicero and Caesar, Volk’s “central cast” (3) consists of Brutus, Varro, Cato, Cassius Longinus, and Nigidius Figulus, with a few others playing supporting roles. Chapters three (“Engaged Philosophy”) and four (“Philosophy after Pharsalus”) track the ways these individuals navigated an increasingly dysfunctional political scene, including their participation in political crises from the Catilinarian conspiracy to Caesar’s assassination and its aftermath. Volk shows how adherents of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and the New Academy plausibly used the goals and the argumentative styles of their various sects to guide and justify their individual courses of action. In chapter four, Caesar’s most famous assassins, Brutus and Cassius, are duly discussed, but Cicero’s handling of this period gets the most attention, from his public reconciliation with Caesar in the *Pro Marcello* to his “creation of an a-Caesarian space, a private realm...superior to the public space dominated by the dictator” (157) in his epistolary, philosophical, and rhetorical writing. This chapter does a good job of making the crucial point that neither Cicero nor his peers ever give any indication of questioning the assumption that Rome’s common welfare will rest on the exercise of *individual* virtue.

Chapters five (“The Invention of Rome”) and six (“Coopting the Cosmos”) deal with a wider array of intellectual activities and with senatorial authors (notably Varro and Nigidius) who are less evidently prominent as political actors. The chronological frame of the republic’s fall, which lent coherence and momentum to chapters three and four, is less prominent here. Although the innovative dimension of Volk’s project lies in its attempt to consider jointly *all* the kinds of intellectual and political endeavor that her subjects undertook, the contents of these later chapters hang less closely together and also seem somewhat detached from the book’s first half. Volk links the investigations of Cicero and Varro into political and religious institutions and the debates about language and style that were undertaken by Caesar, Cicero, and others via a shared concern with Roman identity (182), but although she acknowledges the “fascination or even obsession” these men shared “with their own identity and past,” (190) she is critical of attempts to craft an explanation of this phenomenon that would be applicable beyond any one author. Rather, Volk presses the point that the *studia* these individuals pursued were motivated by their individual interests and goals. Scholarly interpretations of “what Varro and his fellow students of *res Romanae* thought they were doing,” Volk writes, “must therefore rest on what we think they were doing—an operation that is obviously fraught with peril” (191).

Volk’s determination to avoid the perils of overreading can lead her to decline engaging even in the modest speculation that analysis requires. In chapter five, however,

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she interprets Caesar's strategic participation in controversies about Latin language and style as "an insidious move...to sever the traditional connection between political and intellectual activities" (235–36). This is certainly so, and Volk may have used her own analysis in chapter four of Cicero's response to Caesar's domination of the public sphere explicitly to show how Cicero walked into Caesar's trap. Volk misses an opportunity here to explore more precisely how her period, and particularly Caesar's regime, prefigured "the political change...to a bona fide monarchy [that] went hand in hand with a top-down reorganization of knowledge (317)."

Chapter six, which turns from Roman identity to Roman destiny, concentrates first on the activities of Nigidius Figulus, who undertook the study and practice of multifarious forms of divination (including interpretations of the heavens, the weather, animal entrails, and hypnotized children), then turns to Caesar's reform of the calendar and his somewhat murky involvement in his own apotheosis, a process that certainly laid the foundations for his successors also to become gods. But Volk also points out the longstanding capacity, even facility, for creating new deities that characterized Roman religion. What the activities of Nigidius and Caesar have in common they appear to have shared widely with their peers, that is, a ready acceptance of religious innovation in service of political exigency, akin to the selective awareness of the invented nature of tradition that Volk notes also in Cicero's writings about the Roman constitution. Both Caesar and his opponent Nigidius made use of traditional aspects of Roman (and Etruscan) religion to serve their own political ends, though Volk reminds her readers repeatedly that what her subjects did is more accessible than what they thought, for example, when she writes, "we cannot tell what Caesar was thinking when...he found himself at the center of...his own apotheosis" (280).

In sum, Volk clearly demonstrates her study's main contentions, that "a man did not check his *studia* at the door when entering the senate, nor did he leave his concern for the *res publica* when arriving at his villa" (314), and further, that the intellectual activities of these figures "frequently constituted political interventions in their own right" (7). Neither of these insights will arrive as news to readers who routinely study and teach Cicero and his contemporaries. On the other hand, readers less familiar with this terrain may well be grateful to Volk for the great labor of collection and cross-referencing this book accomplishes. Her footnotes could prove particularly useful for this audience, as they often point toward more targeted discussions of texts and incidents that this book only surveys. But Volk's reluctance to construct an argument in positive terms (rather than "What This Book is Not" on 10–16 and *passim*) comes at a steep cost. Her engaging analyses of individual episodes such as the "Cato wars," waged by pamphlet over his posthumous reputation (134–39), and several careful, sustained discussions of individual texts, such as her parsing of Cicero's attitude toward the tribunate in *De Re Publica* and *De Legibus* (205–10), are not interwoven into an overarching argument that could pay dividends in the end, and the reticence that characterizes Volk's approach throughout winds up limiting the power and reach of the project overall.

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