

**Yelena Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics*, (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press) 2012. Pp. xi, 252. ISBN 9780691153322.**

This wide-ranging and important monograph offers a sustained analysis of the place of philosophy during the late Roman Republic and the tension between its claim to universality and the historical and personal constraints of its practitioners (8).

This investigation is carried out through the prism of Cicero's prefaces to the philosophical works he composed under Caesar's dictatorship (the often called *encyclopaedia philosophica*), starting with the composition of the lost *Hortensius* (early 45BC) and ending with the *de officiis* (late 44BC). Following Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), as well as Cicero's lead, Baraz identifies the prefaces as the primary locus for the most explicit engagement between the reader and the author, the privileged platform for an investigation concerned with 'writing philosophy as cultural act specific to its place, its time, and, above all, its author' (5). The approach is innovative and the result worthy of commendation.

After contextualising Cicero's work through a careful reading of the prefaces to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum* and *coniuratio Catilinae* and discussing the elite's resistance to intellectual activity in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2 the author tries to disentangle the heterogeneous reasons behind Cicero's project through a splendid analysis of his correspondence. Chapter 3 comprises a meticulous reading of the prefaces to the *de natura deorum*, the *Tusculanae Disputatines*, and the *de finibus*, tackling the issue of translation and the role of philosophy as useful activity for those engaged in public life. In Chapter 4, the work focuses on the preface to *Paradoxa Stoicorum* and returns to the prefaces of the *de natura deorum* 1 and *Tusculanae Disputationes* to explore the use of rhetoric in these texts as a means to create a place for philosophy within Roman public culture and give

it 'a more familiar face' (149). Chapter 5 deals with the prefaces to the *Topica* and the *de senectute* to engage with the topic of readership whose positive response Cicero wishes to secure through a number of different techniques (such as the appeals to *amicitia*, for example, or by a selection of quotations and allusions). The final chapter concerns the prefaces of works composed after Caesar's death, in which the author detects a shift in Cicero's attitude to philosophy. With the death of the tyrant, Cicero may once again relegate philosophy to the sphere of *otium*, subsidiary to those political duties that can now resume their centrality. This line of inquiry, pursued through an analysis of the prefaces to the *de fato*, the *de amicitia*, and the *de officiis*, is illustrated by the choice of dedicatees and topics throughout 45-44BC.

The author convincingly reverses the assumption that prefaces are unimportant, a supposition very strongly fostered by Cicero's famous letter (*Att.* 16.6 = SB 414) on the interchangeability of prefaces, and convincingly shows how much they can tell the reader about Cicero's philosophical project, that, during the time of Caesar's domination, was conceived by its author as unified.

If, on the one hand, the work is methodologically aware and conversant with modern theoretical works (the footnotes are a mine of information of all kinds), on the other, it is always very well grounded in ancient texts that are carefully and painstakingly analysed both in terms of textual criticism and literary sensitivity. The judgment is always balanced and convincing and the author's exegetical abilities are the strongest aspect of the work.

However, when considering the broader issues, the book becomes less convincing. Investigating the image of Cicero as the author of philosophical works depicted by Cicero himself in the prefaces of these treatises, the overall picture of the orator that emerges from this monograph - exemplified by the treatment of the choice of dedicatees - is not, in itself, the most innovative: Cicero, forced into inactivity by unfavourable political and (to a lesser extent) personal circumstances, namely Caesar's dictatorship and the death of his daughter

Tullia, turns to philosophy as a way to engage with politics and ameliorate the condition of a moribund Republic, while trying to find consolation for his personal grief. When these external circumstances no longer act as a hindrance, Cicero throws himself back into the political arena.

Centring the investigation on the authorial voice of Cicero, that is on Cicero's motivations and statements, these conclusions are, to a certain extent, inevitable.

However, by privileging this approach, however legitimate this choice might be, the book reproduces the (to a certain extent) false dichotomy presented in our sources between philosophy as an ancillary pursuit that belongs to the sphere of *otium*, and active political engagement that belongs to the sphere of *negotium*, proper to the Roman elite. This dichotomy certainly existed in the consciousness of the Romans and was intertwined with Roman attitude towards Greek culture in a rather complicated way. However, when so investigated, it obscures the role played by Greek philosophy in informing Roman political language. By doing so it contributes to the false assumption that the only way to assess the relation between Greek philosophy and Roman politics is to analyse the degree of awareness and receptiveness of individual practitioners. To be sure, this is just a side-effect of the approach adopted, rather than a heralded stance of the author, who, in fact, mentions and gives some consideration to the work by Griffin and Long, who most prominently corrected this view.

Nonetheless, the overall picture that emerges from the treatment is that the relationship between philosophy and politics has something meaningful to contribute to the unfolding of historical events only if politicians did not look at philosophy with suspicion, and openly and consciously accepted its role in their life and, it seems, practiced its tenets both as part of their public and private life.

Following this approach it is inevitable that amongst Cicero's failures, alongside the inability to revive and stabilise traditional Roman values, one must count his incapacity to 'reverse Roman resistance to philosophy.' Unsurprisingly, therefore, according to this reading, 'philosophy in Rome remained the province of professional intellectuals, important in the education of future elites, but often regarded with suspicion when it transgressed beyond that finite domain' (222-3).

This analysis does not seem to take in full account that philosophy in Rome first provided the Roman elite with a way of thinking about a problem and secondly informed many of those concepts (*utilitas* and *honestas* are just two of them, but the list is long) that politicians then used to advocate their stance on specific issues. Viewed in these terms, philosophy was not relegated to a marginal place in the lives of Roman politicians and certainly did not fulfil a 'somewhat decorative function' (2). It was certainly not the case that 'a house philosopher could be a status symbol, but philosophy was, for the most part, kept strictly separate from the arena of public business' (2).

However, for those interested in the cultural life of the late Republic, this book presents an exemplary, thorough reading of how these problems were analysed by Cicero and other main protagonists of the political life of the time. More in general, this valuable book, beautifully written, will be of great significance to all those interested in Cicero as well as in the intellectual history of the late Roman Republic.

