

REVIEW

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE
MILITARY UNDER THE SECOND TRIUMVIRATE

Rita Mangiameli, *Tra duces e milites. Forme di comunicazione politica al tramonto della repubblica (Polymnia. Collana di Scienze dell'antichità. Studi di Storia romana 2)*. Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2012. Pp. xx + 412. Paper, €30.00. ISBN 978-88-8303-376-6.

To classical scholars, the few but fateful years from Caesar's assassination to the battle of Actium have a lot to offer. They are packed with political and military action and are relatively well documented through literary texts. In not even a decade and a half, the Roman world's political system undergoes profound changes: aristocratic competition is replaced by the *Pax Augusta*, the rule of the nobility first by the Second Triumvirate and then by what eventually was to become the Principate, the specifically Roman model of monarchy.

Two specific aspects of this story are at the centre of Rita Mangiameli's book, which is a revised version of the author's Venice PhD thesis: communication and the military. The book's main objective is to determine as to what degree the soldiers became, in the turmoil following the murder of Caesar, a political factor (p. XIX). The relationship between the armies and their leaders during the final decades of the Roman Republic has been the subject of much scholarly attention since at least Anton von Premerstein's *Vom Werden und Wesen des Prinzipats* (1937). Premerstein then coined the ideal type of *Heeresgefolgschaft* which was later usually referred to as *Heeresklientel*, suggesting that it was rooted, somehow, in the Roman institution of *patrocinium*. Thirty years after Premerstein, Helga Botermann first investigated the soldiers' role as political subjects (*Die Soldaten und die römische Politik in der Zeit von Caesars Tod bis zur Begründung des zweiten Triumvirats*, 1968), though with a focus on their economic interests and for a very narrow time frame. Again, forty years on, Arthur Keaveney devoted another monograph to the Roman military in the age of the 'revolution' (*The Army in the Roman Revolution*, 2007).

While Mangiameli uses Botermann's work throughout her book, Premerstein and Keaveney are conspicuously absent from her bibliography. This, however, is not due to any sloppiness in Mangiameli's research, but rather to the specific direction her investigation takes. She sees her book as a

contribution to the ‘democracy in Rome’ debate spurred by Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp and Fergus Millar, and indeed her focus on ‘political communication’ fills a gap in the ever-growing bibliography on this topic. As far as the debate is concerned, she tends to side with Hölkeskamp—and her argument throughout the book indeed makes several points in his favour.

Mangiameli has divided her book into three sections. Section I (‘Grammatica di un antagonismo politico’) covers the months from the Ides of March to the conclusion of the Second Triumvirate at Bononia (43 BC). Section II (‘Parole e segni negli anni del Secondo Triumvirato’) traces the relationship between the army and its commanders during the much longer period from Philippi to Actium. Here, much attention is paid to the various agreements between the triumvirs (Brundisium, Misenum, Tarentum) and the relationship between east and west.

The final section attempts at a ‘lettura semiotica’ of the acts of communication discussed so far. This is the real centrepiece of Mangiameli’s work. Here, she discusses the various ‘channels’ of communication between the relevant actors—oral, written, and visual—as well as its main arenas: the city of Rome and the military camp. Heavily drawing on Roman Jakobson’s structural analysis, Mangiameli contrasts the leaders’ voices with those of the soldiers. While one might object that the *contiones* and *adlocutiones* she tends to take at face value are located in the realm of literary fiction rather than actual political communication, her investigation of other media, coins in particular, is conclusive: the political leaders of the period all tried to convey iconic messages as a means of ‘autolegittimazione’ (p. 330).

The soldiers, on the other hand, appear as a compact social pressure-group, united by *esprit de corps* and common economic interests, with the ability to articulate their political agenda and willing to defend ‘identità, dignitas e opportunità socio-economiche’ (p. 375). Mangiameli investigates their ‘voices’ in the dynamic field defined by vertical loyalties (*patrocinium*), hierarchic command structures, and conventional arenas of communication (*salutatio, deductio, adsectatio*). In the tradition of Premerstein, and partly rejecting more recent research, she emphasises the importance of vertical *patronus-clientes* bonds such as *pietas* and *fides*—quite rightly, as this reviewer believes. Such bonds, she further points out, also entail—as far as the soldiers’ objectives are concerned—‘un contenuto democratico’. While Mangiameli rejects the notion that, in its twilight, the Roman Republic had developed a ‘democratic’ political system, she certainly sees pronounced participatory elements in the political communication between the soldiers and their superiors.

This conclusion of hers is rather cautious, and with good reason: it is through the literary tradition and its rhetoric that we can trace the soldiers and their voices. This takes nothing away from the merits of her work: investigating one particular arena of political communication in the final days of

the Republic, she has brilliantly exposed the all but brutal changes this society was going through. Any reader of this fine book will easily comprehend why, after Caesar's murder, the Roman nobility could never again rise to its former power.

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