
Caesar at the Rubicon pondering the direction of his will – it is a scene crystallized in time. For all the time artists, writers, and scholars have spent trying to capture this moment, it is surprising how little responsibility is attributed to Caesar for his fateful actions. Frequently, Caesar is portrayed as having no other options but to cross and initiate a bloody civil war, his hand being forced by his enemies who just did not understand that opposition was futile, that Caesar’s time had come, that the republic was inevitably set to fall. What else was the great man to do? Strange that Caesar, who is so often depicted as an unstoppable force of nature in both ancient and modern writers, becomes a passive instrument of history, compelled by the quixotic machinations of his opponents. Foremost among Caesar’s enemies was Cato the Younger, who takes the lion’s share of the blame for tilting against windmills and resisting rather than accommodating Caesar. Mommsen can take the credit for the modern version of this tiresome interpretation, but its roots are manifest in antiquity, beginning with Cicero’s *Pro Murena*, the earliest contemporary source on Cato (see pp. 2-3 for the relevant bibliography).

Morrell’s book is not explicitly an attempt to assign blame for the civil war between Pompey and Caesar. Yet Morrell takes a refreshing look at Caesar’s opponents Pompey and Cato and through them strives to reevaluate several questions of the late republic, namely the ability of Roman politicians to develop and enact reform and the potential for cooperation between political rivals, points that militate against the republic’s inevitable fall to Caesar. Morrell certainly challenges some interpretations long accepted by Roman historians. For in addition, he also takes aim at the notion that just provincial government needed more centralized authority in a Caesar or Augustus. Moreover, Morrell questions the credit Caesar is usually granted for provincial reform and rightly puts this in the context of Caesar’s genocidal campaign in Gaul (pp. 4-5). In fact, Caesar (and to a lesser extent Cicero) plays a welcomed secondary role. Another important point Morrell takes up is the ability of the Romans to critique their own imperialism (pp. 5-10). One may rightly say that all Romans were imperialists, but how imperialism was achieved, maintained, and performed were all matters of great disagreement. Morrell argues that philosophic thought, particularly Stoicism, played a positive role in the Roman conception of good government and was frequently the distinguishing characteristic between those who saw empire merely as a means of personal enrichment and those, like Cato and Cicero, who saw empire as a means to practice just government.
Following a summary of provincial reform before 70 BCE and an overview of sources, Morrell begins his argument in chapter one by examining Pompey’s reforms as consul in 70. The strength of Morrell’s book in many ways is the ability to see relationships and to connect events that hitherto have been considered to have little or no association. To a great extent, Morrell is convincing in building the evidence for these relationships. A weakness of Morrell’s book, however, is that if the reader does not accept one strand of argument then the bigger picture starts to unwind. For example, much of chapter one is devoted to building the argument that Cicero’s *Verrines* are not simply an opportunity for the young orator to make a name for himself but part of a greater program of provincial reform championed by Pompey. Of course, both of these things can be true at the same time, and no doubt Morrell marshals a good bit of evidence for this point, citing passages from the speeches themselves (pp. 44-49) and drawing connections between Pompey and important actors in the events of 70 (pp. 40-44). Yet if one reads Cicero’s portrayal of Pompey as an exemplum of just provincial government not as an objective historical statement but as a rhetorical assertion to win the graces of a powerful man, then Morrell’s argument loses some luster (pp. 49-52, esp. p. 50 n. 174). I find Morrell’s line of reasoning generally convincing, but I suspect there will be those who feel that too many points need to align to make the overall case cohere.

In chapter two, Morrell takes up the question of Pompey’s conquests in the east. Frequently, Pompey’s campaigns against the pirates and Mithridates are studied in light of rivalries with such commanders as Lucius Lucullus and Metellus Creticus and the political fights that ensued upon his return. Morrell does not dismiss these matters, but he highlights the manner in which Pompey succeeded by relying on clemency and mutual assistance to subdue his enemies as much as on pitched battles with large numbers of casualties (pp. 61-67). These points are part of the historical record and have been noted by others, but when put in juxtaposition with Morrell’s previous interpretation of Pompey they appear less as happy accidents and more like a deliberate strategy for good governance.

The primary achievement of Morrell’s book is the re-interpretation of Cato, who for so long has either been surrounded with the aura of holiness or attacked for a philosophical stubbornness detached from reality, that is, believing he resided in Plato’s *Republic* rather than Romulus’ cesspool, as Cicero so eloquently put it (*Att.* 2.1.8). Morrell does an excellent job of evaluating Cato on his own merits, at least as much as possible given the sources, which are both encomiastic and hostile. Chapter three thus addresses Cato’s Stoicism and his views on provincial government. Morrell begins by examining Cicero’s *De Finibus*, wherein the character Cato speaks on Stoic notions of good