THE TRIUMVIRAL PERIOD: CIVIL WAR, POLITICAL CRISIS AND SOCIOECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Fergus Millar

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INTRODUCTION

Julius Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March in the year 44 BC because a large group of aristocrats thought that the Roman *res publica* was on its way to being destroyed and replaced by a system of one-man rule led by Caesar, who at the time had been appointed *dictator perpetuus* and whose authority at Rome had been uncontested since his victory over the Pompeians in the Civil War. The conspirators apparently assumed that the dictator's death would be enough to make things return to how they had been before the beginning of the Civil War in 49, that is, to what they considered to be the traditional Republic.[1] However, a substantial part of the new political elite, who had been loyal to and benefited from Caesar for some time, did not support the plotters, and the Roman plebs openly demonstrated against them.

The Caesarians, with the consul Marcus Antonius leading them, managed to thwart the coup and then they themselves took the control of the city. The reading of Caesar's will brought the man who would later become the ruler of Rome to the forefront of the political scene. This, of course, was his adoptive son Octavius, who cleverly adopted his father's name and became Gaius Julius Caesar. Over the following months, military clashes took place among various competing forces, which turned out to be the beginning of the civil wars that would drag on for more than a decade. During this period, alliances between leading men shifted time and again in accordance with personal interests.

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1 See now P. López Barja de Quiroga (2020) "The *Bellum Civile Pompeianum*: the War of Words", *CQ*.

While in general terms one can speak of a struggle between Caesarians and 'Republicans', at times these conflicts were undoubtedly more personal than ideological.

In November 43 with the passing of the *lex Titia*, the Triumvirate, which was comprised of Lepidus, Antonius and Young Caesar, emerged as the highest of Rome's magistracies. According to Appian, the Triumvirs had consular power that was supposedly identical to that of the consuls. In practice, however, the prerogatives of the Triumvirs were above anything that had traditionally corresponded to Republican Rome's highest office. The creation of the Triumvirate as the official magistracy for the Roman government radically changed the political scene: for just over a decade, Marcus Antonius and the future Augustus (with Lepidus having lost practically all of his influence) ruled Rome, first as allies against the anti-Caesarians or 'Republicans' (most notably Sextus Pompeius, Pompey the Great's youngest son) and then later against each other until Octavian defeated Antonius at Actium in 31, thus becoming the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

The so-called Triumviral period (43-31) is the historical and chronological topic on which this book focuses its attention. It is a period of enormous complexity, to explain which we must rely on mainly later sources, ranging from the historians Cassius Dio and Appian to authors who narrated the life of Augustus and Antonius, such as Suetonius and Plutarch. That said, Cicero is also useful for the months that followed Caesar's assassination. It was a period characterized by intense political propaganda between the various rivals who vied for the public's favour. While we can partially reconstruct these wars of words, young Caesar's eventual success and long rule as Princeps allowed him to rewrite history according to his own interests, a fact that makes it all the more difficult to reconstruct the Triumviral decade.

Nothing from the subsequent Augustan age can be fully understood without keeping in mind (and understanding) the previous Triumviral period. Nonetheless, on many occasions scholars have acted as if the Triumvirate was merely a transitional phase between Caesar and Augustus, though it is clear that the period must be studied in and of itself. Historians, of course, know what happened after this brief period: the creation of the Principate under Augustus' rule, and therefore the de facto establishment of a monarchy plastered over with a Republican facade. But the protagonists of the Triumviral period obviously did not know what would become of Rome's future. They

were living through a phase of the Republic that was characterized by a series of social and political conflicts that were in part new and different and yet partly identical to the tensions of the previous decades. This book seeks examine the Triumviral period on its own terms, not merely as a phase of transition to the Principate and not explaining what was happening with an eye towards the future, but rather as a consequence of the recent past and taking into account the specific circumstances that came into play in 43-31.

On the basis of available sources, a large part of the bibliography on the Triumviral period has heavily focused on the military events and on the period's dominant characters (e.g. Antonius, Octavian, Sextus Pompeius or even Cleopatra), thus giving paramount prominence to the shifting alliances established between such figures. There is no doubt that the study of these leaders is important, but this volume instead aims to address a series of underlying structural problems that emerged between 43 and 31, such as the legal nature of power attributed to the Triumvirs; changes and continuity in Republican institutions, both in Rome and the provinces of the Empire; the development of the very concept of civil war; the strategies of political comunication and propaganda carried out by various means (especially through oratory) in order to win over public opinion; economic consequences for Rome and Italy, whether caused by the damage from the constant wars or, alternatively, resulting from the proscriptions and confiscations carried out by the Triumvirs, which meant the ruin of many elite families and the enrichment of others; and the transformation of Roman-Italian society.

The book is divided into five sections, the first of which is devoted to institutional issues under the title *Continuity and Change: Interactions between Triumviral and Republican Institutions*. To begin, Frederik Vervaet focuses on the legal dimensions of the Triumvirate, analyzing the genesis of the office and its distinctive features. To do so, Vervaet examines the precise circumstances behind the *lex Titia*, as well as the motives and calculations of the protagonists involved. The question of how extraordinary this magistracy really was is also raised: the Triumvirate was certainly unprecedented, but did it come out of nowhere? Any answer to this question must be steeped in the discussion on the so-called non-annual Republican magistracies. Next, Francisco Pina Polo addresses the question of how the traditional Republican institutions (magistracies, assemblies and senate) and the Triumvirs lived together or confronted each other. In short, can we speak of institutional normality or should we speak of institutional exceptionality during the Triumviral period?

The first section closes with Marie-Claire Ferriès' chapter in which she studies the composition of the senate during the period and the political implications of such an organization.

War was omnipresent between 43 and 31 in different scenarios throughout the Mediterranean, but also in Italy. There were attempts at mediation to achieve peace as well as concrete pacts that resulted in short-lived agreements amid quickly changing alliances. The second section, *War and Peace*, is dedicated to these topics, although it does not deal with the study of any specific conflict. Valentina Arena analyses the idea and concept of *bellum civile* throughout the first century, by asking what its meaning and consequences were in the Triumviral period and when the term's popularity came to overshadow other phrases that refer to political dissension and strife. Arena focuses on what this change in language use reveals about the ways in which the Romans conceived of their own civic and political community. Carsten Hjort Lange also concentrates on the impact of civil war on Roman society and Roman culture in general during the late Republic and especially during the early days of the Triumvirate, while also devoting the second part of his chapter to the so-called Pact of Brundisium. From a very different perspective, Hannah Cornwell studies the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation, emphasising the repeated use of the term *concordia* during the period, though remarkably this is the *concordia* of individuals rather than of the community as a whole. Finally, Francesca Rohr Vio tackles a very specific subject: why and how were children used in politics and in diplomacy? Was this an ancient custom or was it something innovative at the time? What arguments and tools were used to legitimise such practices?

The third section is dedicated to *Strategies of Political Communication*. One of the most significant aspects of the political conflict that took place during the Triumviral period in Rome was the struggle for legitimacy between the various contenders. For that reason it was fundamental to win the battle for public opinion, particularly in the city of Rome. Consequently, oratory in the senate, before the people and in the courts was an essential element for the diffusion of political arguments and the discrediting of one's adversary. Catherine Steel explores the institutional framework for public speech in the period, paying particular attention to how the functions and use of public oratory changed, who the speakers were and finally the exceptional role of women as public speakers. One of the key elements of oratory during the Triumviral period was the belittling of the political adversary in speeches and pamphlets through invective, a word that embraces the full spectrum of

insults and verbal abuse in order to vilify an opponent. Martin Jehne analyses in his chapter the rapid escalation of invective and the impact that the presence of troops in or around the city of Rome had on invective culture.

Both in ancient times and today, one of the objectives of oratory is to provoke fear, both individual and collective, as a means of achieving the speaker's political goals. This is the topic that Frédéric Hurlet has studied, taking as his point of departure the fact that fear was obviously present in Roman society during the Triumviral period. Hurlet analyses, on the one hand, the concrete expressions of that emotion that appear in the sources and the use that the political leaders made of it. On the other hand, he discusses the way in which Octavian instrumentalized and even amplified it once he took power, in order to draw a clear contrast between the insecurity of the previous years and the tranquility assured by the new regime thanks to the return of peace. It was obviously military success that delivered final victory and unchallenged power to Young Caesar. However, public speech was also very significant to his eventual success. In this respect, Henriette van der Blom analyses Octavian's oratorical record in the late Republican and Triumviral periods in order to assess how he employed public speech as a part of his career and how his speeches were recorded.

Enrique García Riaza focuses on the crucial role played by political communication under the Triumvirate, since the dissemination of news and circulation of information coming from very different locations all over the Mediterranean served as the key factor in the decision-making process. García Riaza pays particular attention to the relationship between orality and writing in political communication, before concluding with a discussion of the spaces and scenarios used for negotiation during the period. Finally, Kathryn Welch analyses Marcus Antonius and the power of images, in particular Antonius' self-presentation in coins issued in 44-43, which provide evidence for his creativity and originality.

The ancient sources that we have to reconstruct the Triumviral age concentrate especially on wars and battles on the one hand, and on the other hand on the main protagonists, especially Marcus Antonius and Octavian. This makes it difficult to deal with socio-economic aspects, for which evidence is quite scarce. This is, nonetheless, the subject of the book's fourth section, entitled *Crisis and Restoration at Rome and in Italy*. First, Dominik Maschek uses a combination of archaeological and textual evidence, mainly focusing on construction and conspicuous consumption from the period, in order to determine how intense the impact these profound transformations were on

Roman society of the *res publica*. Cristina Rosillo-López, for her part, focuses on the socio-political experience of the broader Italian population: revolts in Italy and Rome; unrest over taxation; population movements and their consequences; and the role of banditry. Much attention has been devoted to confiscations and expropriations of Italian lands, which generated in the long term an extended and collective perception of unprotected property rights. This was humiliating for the defeated, but at the same time it helped to secure the Triumvirs' hold on power. Marta García Morcillo addresses this topic along with some relevant Triumviral monetary and fiscal policies, in order to help identify the underlying institutional developments that attempted to re-establish order and security within the economic system.

The last section of the volume is dedicated to *The Triumvirs and the Provinces*. Alejandro Díaz Fernández addresses how Hispania was administered during the Triumviral period. In his contribution, Andrea Raggi collects and discusses the official documents coming from the Greek East issued during the Triumviral period. He includes new additions to the list found in Millar's classic article from 1973 (see below) as well as some different scholarly analyses of these documents. Finally, W. Jeffrey Tatum discusses Antonius' stay in Athens during the first winter after Philippi in an effort to uncover something about Antonius' administration and profile in the East in the immediate aftermath of the battle.

The book concludes with Clifford Ando's closing remarks (*Law, Violence and Trauma in the Triumviral Period*), which provide both a synthesis of the volume's contents and a series of reflections for further research on the open questions surrounding the long debated Triumviral age.

The book contains contributions that were initially presented at the colloquium *The Triumviral Period: Civil War, Political Crisis and Socioeconomic Transformations*, held in Zaragoza on 3-5 September 2019. The conference was sponsored by the Research Group Hiberus (Government of Aragón) and the Institución Fernando el Católico (Diputación Provincial Zaragoza). Both the conference and the book have been mainly funded by the project *The Triumviral period and the collapse of the Roman Republic (43-31 BC): institutional, social and economical transformation* (HAR2017-82383. Agencia Estatal de Investigación, Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, Spanish Government).

Fergus Millar died in Oxford in July 2019. Many of the authors included in this book knew Fergus and enjoyed his friendship. For many of us, the meetings in Oxford over a coffee in which we got to meet many interesting people have proven unforgettable and invaluable. Fergus was a generous person who was always willing to help others, especially young colleagues. He was a modest and truly wise man, who never needed to show off, in part since his *auctoritas* was enough to establish him an undisputed expert and leader in the field. In short, Fergus was one of the most prominent and distinguished ancient historians of the last decades, during which he shed light on a range of diverse subjects including the following: Cassius Dio, the emperor in the Roman world, the Roman Republic, and recently also Late Antiquity. Whatever topic Fergus studied, he always left his mark and opened up new paths for future scholarship. This is also true for the Triumviral period, for which his seminal article "Triumvirate and Principate", published in 1973 in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, remains essential. For all these reasons, Fergus Millar deserves our appreciation and recognition. It is therefore a great pleasure and honour to dedicate this volume to his memory.

Francisco Pina Polo