

*Loreto* (L.) *Guerra e libertà nella repubblica romana*. J.R. Seeley e le radici intellettuali della *Roman Revolution* di Ronald Syme. Pp. xvii + 169. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1999. pbk ISBN: 88 7062 981 3

*Syme* (R.) *The Provincial at Rome and Rome and the Balkans 80BC - AD 14* (ed. A. Birley). Pp. xxvi + 238. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999. £32.50 hbk. ISBN 0 85989 632 3

I feel a little self-conscious reviewing the work of Ronald Syme and considering his historical legacy. I never met him and was still a student at the time of his death. I suspect many who read this know far more about S.'s politics and would be able to deploy personal recollections to discuss his intellectual origins and interests. Yet anyone who teaches early Roman imperial history lives with S.'s legacy and it seems to me that knowledge of S.'s intellectual roots is important for a deeper understanding both of his work and his place in historiography. Six decades on, the Roman revolution continues to obsess historians and *The Roman Revolution* plays a large part in our understanding. Thus, both these works are to be welcomed.

Publishing the discarded works of dead authors is a somewhat dangerous task. *The Provincial at Rome and Rome and the Balkans* predate *The Roman Revolution*. S, could, one supposes, have returned to the works should he have regarded them as important or worthy and one must always suspect that such works are best left on the shelf to which the author so obviously consigned them. Of the two, it is *The Provincial at Rome* which appears the more interesting and more finished piece. In this, we see some of those features that made S. a great historian. There are the Tacitean rhetorical flourishes, the tremendous eye for detail and the impressive knowledge of the interconnection and careers of the Roman imperial aristocracy, but it is his knowledge of the major themes of history as reflected in these seemingly minor details, that marks S. out from others who have adopted the techniques of the prosopographer. The themes

of law and politics and the histories of individuals and political structures are already present and, to an extent, *The Provincial at Rome* is an obvious precursor to *The Roman Revolution*.

L.'s book is a study of S.'s intellectual roots within English historiography and especially his debt to the Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, John R. Seeley. Classicists probably know Seeley best for his edition of Livy *Book I*, but Seeley was a notable political writer whose most controversial work was *The Expansion of England* published in 1883, a significant contribution to the late nineteenth-century debate on the purpose of Empire. Seeley argued for an England that would blend the colonies into a single political nation which would harness the talents of the new and vibrant cultures of, say, New Zealand, an example which one can only imagine appealed to S.'s ironic sensibilities. This debate may lurk behind *The Provincial at Rome*. S.'s attention had been drawn to the Claudian debate on the incorporation of Gauls into the Senate. He dismissed the legalistic approach of previous scholars and argued forcibly that the proposal caused controversy because of prejudice against the Gauls who were not regarded as being part of the Roman system. The parallels resonate further if one considers that S.'s general approach to politics was to disregard issues of constitutional form to argue that oligarchy was the fundamental power structure behind all political systems. Thus, the parallels between twentieth-century oligarchs, unwilling to let a New Zealander into the hallowed inner social and political sanctum, and the behaviour of the Claudian aristocracy were particularly pertinent.

L. sets S. within a peculiarly English political context. 'Revolution', for instance, in S. and Seeley looks not to the continental uprisings of 1848 or the French Revolution, nor is it part of a Marxist class struggle, but instead is a violent uprising within the government-making power. It is, therefore, not so much a change in political system as a shaking of the oligarchy. For S., the paradigm seems to have been the Glorious Revolution, the greatest conservative revolution in English history. Similarly, although

L. notes that ‘imperialism’ was not part of English political discourse in the mid-nineteenth century, words such as ‘Caesarianism’, ‘Bonapartism’ or ‘Cromwellianism’ at least served some of the same functions. The interest of Seeley in the militarisation of power was again carried through to S. together with an interest in political structures (Seeley also wrote an introduction to political science) rather than constitutional law. L. demonstrates S.’s intellectual roots in the nineteenth-century and that he looked beyond the dictators of the 1930s to rather older political models. This might be seen as devaluing S. the European, whose awareness of European politics illuminates virtually every page of *The Roman Revolution*, but certainly adds another level of complexity to our understanding of S. and his thought. Both the new additions to the Syme corpus and L.’s analysis are valuable contributions to our understanding of intellectual debate in ancient history in the early twentieth century.

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