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Cicéron

Yves Roman, *Cicéron*. Paris: Fayard, 2020. Pp. 432. ISBN 9782213705224 €24,00.

Review by

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A brief *Avant propos* and *Introduction* precede the ten chapters into which the book is divided, which follow the chronological development of Cicero's life: each of them is further divided into sections and subsections, so that each reading unit is the average size of a newspaper article. The text is followed by a concise conclusion, notes, and a series of apparatuses: an essential chronology; a sort of prosopographical index (*Approches biographiques*), but without precise references to the text; the bibliography (*Orientations bibliographiques*); and finally, an index of ancient and modern names. More useful to the reader and less consuming in terms of space would have been to supply the *Approches biographiques* with references to the pages of the occurrences and to reserve the index to modern names only.

The ten chapters are divided into four parts, which follow the course of time: *La rhétorique, tremplin vers le consulat* (106–63 av. J.-C.) and *La vaine quête du premier rang* (63–47/46 av. J.-C.), both divided into three chapters (15–193); *Le refuge de l'écriture* (45–44 av. J.-C.) and *Fin et postérité* (43 av. J.-C.–XXI^e siècle), of two sections each (pp. 195–333). In this arrangement the only questionable thing is joining the end of Cicero's life with the *Fortleben*. Apart from this, the unity of the main character is safeguarded by the skillful alternation of properly biographical parts with excursuses for the historical framework and brief descriptions of characters and presentations of works. In this way, for example, the two chapters of the third section are entirely dedicated to Ciceronian works: the first to rhetorical and philosophical treatises and the second to political treatises. Ubiquitous is the expedient of explaining Cicero through Cicero, with brief but frequent quotations from his works, reproduced only in translation, taken from the Collection des Universités de France (CUF), as usual in France. When it is not Cicero who is quoted, it is often Plutarch who is paraphrased (far too often about exile, for example, p. 108 ff.). Latin and Greek are banished, except for rare words here and there.

I do not believe that the ideal target of this biography coincides with the usual reader of BMCR and other scientific journals in our field: the book is not written to meet the needs of classicists and even less of Ciceronianists, but rather for a more general French audience, lacking in knowledge about the Roman Republic. The ample presence of cultural, economic, social, and prosopographical excursuses, so as the exclusion of any

erudite discussion (confined to the notes at the end of the book) move in this direction. Examined from this point of view, the biography certainly has its merits: the style is easy and captivating, accessible even for a non-native speaker like the present reviewer. From a material point of view, moreover, the book is very elegant, with a quality of raw materials (weight of paper, strength of binding, printing of characters, choice of cover) well above the modest and popular selling price.^[1]

The topical desire of this genre is to expose an account *sine ira et studio*, and is undoubtedly crowned with success: the approach is more often defensive than accusatory, due to the need to justify to an unsuspecting reader the many complex, contradictory, apparently inconsistent and/or opportunistic aspects of Cicero's career and writings. Roman is not, however, an apologist and acknowledges faithfully Cicero's errors of political perspective, following the most recent lines of research in France with sure judgment and certainly doing good service to the French-speaking *grand public*. One appreciates the historical-economic excursuses, in which Cicero is no longer at the center of the book (*e.g.*, pp. 252–260), and some fine psychological touches in the relations with Caesar, for example (pp. 176–178).

My review may stop there. Indeed, it may seem unfair to review a book from a perspective for which it was not written; however, since BMCR is not *Le Figaro*,^[2] I think a *caveat* is still necessary for the experienced reader and even the undergraduate, who will derive limited benefit from reading this book.

The first point concerns the approximately 350 entries in the bibliography, by French authors, or translated into French, with a scant group of twenty titles in English, ten in Italian, three in German, and one in Spanish, if I have counted correctly. One appreciates the attention to economic contributions, competently used in socio-historical excursuses, but personally I would have found it arduous and not very correct to write a biography of Cicero including his thought and his *Fortleben* without ever mentioning M. Fuhrmann, M. Gelzer, M. Griffin, E. Gruen, R. Kaster, E. Lepore, E. Narducci and W. Stroh, to name a few.

The impression of a work designed for a general French audience is confirmed by the statement that Cicero's true dimensions became clear only at the end of the twentieth century, 'quand fut achevé en France un travail gigantesque, échelonné sur plus de cinquante ans et qui visait à classer la correspondance cicéronienne par ordre chronologique' (p. 8). It is as if the same work had not already been completed by R.Y. Tyrrell and L.C. Purser in the late nineteenth century, not to mention D.R. Shackleton Bailey (all these names are missing from Roman's bibliography); likewise, it is the CUF edition of É. Cuq which is introduced as the first full explanation of the legal subtexts of the *Pro Quinctio* (p. 35). Those who have been working for thirty or forty years to defend Cicero from the bias of, say, Mommsen or Carcopino, even in France (C. Lévy's *Cicero Academicus* comes to mind), will be surprised to read the breath of presentism of the *incipit* of the *Introduction* (p. 11): 'La Nécessité est impérieuse. Il faut rouvrir le dossier Cicéron'.

The chapters devoted to the treatises are by necessity more compilative, indebted to their respective CUF editions (always honestly quoted). I will therefore limit myself to pointing out a few examples:

- Roman continues to resort to the problematic definition of ‘parfaitement éclectique’ for Cicero’s philosophy (p. 236; p. 249).
- Rather than recognizing Cicero’s allegiance to the vast family of Platonism, repeatedly claimed by himself, around the age of twenty Cicero would still have been uncertain between Academy, Stoicism and Epicureanism, according to Roman (p. 22), but at the time of the trip to Greece ‘sans être totalement stoïcien, il penchait de ce côté’ (p. 40).
- Posidonius is hastily and inaccurately presented as a ‘penseur religieux’ (p. 42).
- The note on *otium cum servitio* in Sall. *or Lep.* does not seem to take into account the fact that Sallust wrote many years after Cicero’s death (p. 141).
- The way Roman speaks of the *Pro Milone* (‘Mais était-ce bien la plaidoirie prononcée par l’Arpinate? Tout Rome devait, à juste raison, en douter’, p. 157) seems to ignore the existence of the *excepta oratio* mentioned by Quint. 4.2.25 *et alibi*, of which we have even fragments (Puccioni D 3).
- I do not understand on what basis Roman defines ‘passablement asianique’ the *Pro Marcello* and ‘profondement attique’ the *Pro Ligario* (p. 180).
- It is surprising that twice as many pages are devoted to the *Pro Quinctio* as to the *Pro Roscio Amerino*, despite the far greater political weight of the latter speech.
- When he speaks of the trial of Verres (pp. 63–73), Roman never mentions the *divinatio* or even the name of Quintus Caecilius.
- Noteworthy is the absence of information on the date of his marriage with Terentia (pp. 43–45); on the question of the attribution of the *Commentariolum* (pp. 84–86); on 1.2.1 in relation to the supposed defense of Catiline in 65; on the maneuvers to prevent the adoption of Clodius (pp. 115 ff.); on the *lex de exilio Ciceronis*; on *Att.* 10.4.3 (*nos sibi quondam ad pedes stratos ne sublevabat quidem*, which would have helped Roman not to rely solely on the Plutarchean account for dealings with Pompey in 58); and on the conditions under which Cicero defended Milo for the murder of Clodius (p. 157).

Turning to questions of judgment, I do not share the oft-expressed evaluation of Atticus as a ‘véritable ami’ (p. 27; p. 81; p. 119) and I see in him many opportunistic aspects, before and after Cicero’s assassination; I do not know to what extent the latter’s political position was intended to be a centrist ‘troisième voie’ (pp. 32–33; p. 73) between *optimates* and *populares* rather than conservatism (pp. 92–94) based on the census and not on the nobility of blood and enhanced by true respect (as paternalistic as one might imagine) of the people and the provincials. As for the contrasts between *optimates* and

populares, mentioned several times in the book, in my opinion Roman could have taken a more prosopographical position, tying political choices and affiliations more often to issues of clientele and/or *amicitia*.

In conclusion, Roman fulfills his mission of offering francophone readers a biography of Cicero that is pleasant to read, competent in its historical frame of reference, and generally judicious in its statements, despite some flaws. Scholars and students of classics will prefer to devote their time to other readings.

Notes

[1] Printing errors are also very rare: e. g. ‘*in abstentia*’ p. 164; ‘personnality’ (*pro* ‘personality’) p. 417.

[2] Where a review of this book has been published (Jacques de Saint Victor, “Cicéron d’Yves Roman: une postérité contrastée”, [Le Figaro November 18, 2020](#)). Note also that the book won a literary prize in France (*Prix Méditerranée Essai* 2021), however not the first conquered by Roman.