

Andrea Balbo, Pierangelo Buongiorno and Ermanno Malaspina (editors), *Rappresentazione e uso dei senatus consulta nelle fonti letterarie della repubblica e del primo principato*. Acta Senatus, Series B, volume 2. Publisher Franz Steiner, Stuttgart 2018. 530 pages.

The ›Acta Senatus‹ series at Steiner Verlag is intended to showcase the outcomes of the project ›Palingenesie der Römischen Senatsbeschlüsse‹ (PaRoS) that Pierangelo Buongiorno has been leading at Münster since 2014, under a major Humboldt Foundation grant. While Series A will include the various instalments of the palingenesis of the senatus consulta on which Buongiorno and his team have been working, Series B will consist primarily of the proceedings of an astonishingly rich set of conferences and seminars that PaRoS has been organising since its inception: it is expected that over a dozen volumes will appear in due course. Few recent or ongoing projects in Ancient History can claim to even approach its scale and reach. This is the second offering, gathering the papers that were presented at a conference on the use and representation of senatus consulta in the literary sources between Republic (mostly late) and early Principate.

In their brief Introduction (pp. 7–12) the editors bemoan the tendency to obliterate languages with strong scholarly traditions to the advantage of English, and assert their choice of a multilingual operation (on a factual note, the ›monocultura anglosassone‹ evoked on p. 8 just does not exist). More interestingly, they make a positive case for bringing into the project the skills of literary scholars, philologists (two categories subsumed by the Italian word ›filologo‹), historians, and legal scholars for the interpretation of the evidence for senatus consulta: with an elaborate geometric metaphor they speak of a ›visione pluriprospectica,

sfaccettata e stereoscopica‹ (p. 8) of the problems at hand and of ›poliedricità degli approcci‹.

What is less clear is the degree of integration among the different approaches and sets of expertise: whether talking to each other is actually going to lead to a change of vision. The impression is that the instinct of some contributors has been not to stray away from the boundaries of their sub-disciplinary expertise, and indeed not to be seen to have done that: Lisa Piazzini starts her valuable discussion of Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 29 by making clear that she will be pursuing her study from the standpoint ›del filologo‹ and that she will not invade the territory of the historian and the lawyer unless that proves inevitable (thankfully she does that at various points in her discussion, and with some profit: more on this below). One is reminded of Giorgio Pasquali's old quip that there is no such thing as disciplines – it is all about the problems we face and the questions we ask.

The editors also make a point of not having been interventionist: as they put it (p. 8), they treasure ›varietas‹. They have therefore not expected contributors to follow a set of strict guidelines and a prescriptive template: some have chosen a mostly discursive format, while others follow a tabular model. The analytical focus has also changed throughout the volume. While most contributors are clearly interested in senatorial decisions, and especially in senatus consulta, some chapters focus more widely on the role of the Senate in a given author, or indeed in a literary genre. The collection is on the whole well produced; the only typo that stands in the way of the argument is ›XIX secolo‹ for ›XX secolo‹ (p. 191). Although some papers could have been more economical, not least in expression and style, the individual chapters are altogether rather long, typically beyond the thirty-pagemark; that is partly a function of the subject matter. This book has the not negligible merit of lining up papers that would have struggled to find a home in most academic journals simply on the grounds of their length. The collection follows a chronological sequence – from Polybius to Lucan; in what follows I shall pursue a different thread, which may hopefully bring out some overarching themes in this collection.

Cosimo Cascione's closing chapter (pp. 454–494) offers an elegant overview of the literary constructions of the Senate in Roman poetry from the origins to Lucan. This topic has been of interest to jurists, and now appears to have gained scholarly momentum in a number of quarters. It pertains more to the exploration of Roman political culture, and indeed to wider issues of intellectual history (see esp. the discussion of the council of the gods), than to the reconstruction of the corpus of the senatus consulta, but is nonetheless an important layer of meaning that gives further depth to the

symbolic centrality of the Senate. While the case for the constitutional significance of the insights drawn from poetry requires a further statement, there is no doubt that the dossier is a valuable one.

Eleanor Cowan also keeps a discursive focus (pp. 407–428): her interest is in the representation of the Senate in Velleius Paterculus, rather than in his evidence for senatorial activity. In fact, her discussion has little to say about *senatus consulta*. The centrepiece of her study is the exploration of *auctoritas*: she appears to express polite scepticism on Buongiorno's contention that Velleius' references to *auctoritas senatus* should be read as evidence for *senatus consulta*; in her view, *auctoritas* is best understood as a fluid, ultimately elusive notion, and Velleius' interest in the *auctoritas* of the Senate proves a complex interpretative strand of his work. There are no straightforward answers. The second part of her paper is somewhat eccentric from the topic of the volume, as it focuses on Velleius' evidence for elections and popular sovereignty: his interest is in electoral improprieties, and chimes with a wider lingering interest in Republican political practice that he seeks to apply to the Tiberian period. Cowan's focus is on representations and ideas, rather than on the realities of power.

Of course, the nature of the evidence often dictates the analytical framework. Ermanno Malaspina (pp. 429–454) focuses on the Younger Seneca and achieves a fine balance between tabular overview and big-picture analysis: this reader cannot help thinking that applying the same approach across the board would have yielded a stronger collection. As Malaspina concedes, the body of evidence in Seneca is narrow; yet he puts it to excellent use by charting the relevant terminology and providing a full list of the testimonies, first for senatorial interventions, then for the workings of the Senate. He then furthers the discussion by considering Seneca's take on the Republican past of the Senate and on the moral calibre of the members of the order. The paper reads more than a string of short commentary notes than a sustained discussion, but we are left with an invaluable set of material. In a welcome display of intellectual candour, Malaspina also includes an inventory of the passages that he deems irrelevant to his analysis (pp. 450–452).

Some of the strongest chapters adopt a similar framework, in which the identification of several key themes is not decoupled from a systematic overview of the material. Salvatore Marino does justice to the evidence of Valerius Maximus (pp. 347–406): his case for its historical significance is compelling, and his thematic partition (religious affairs, morals, international law, political matters, constitutional issues) is very elegant. The opening section on Valerius' engagement with his sources (chiefly Livy and Cicero) would have benefited

from close engagement with David Wardle's work, notably his commentary on Book I, which is surprisingly absent from the bibliography – a missed opportunity that is amply offset by what follows. Marino brings out a point of general import, which exceeds the significance of this individual study: Valerius Maximus has a sound understanding of legal matters, and his evidence deserves more serious consideration than it has usually been granted. If one is prepared to attempt the difficult transition from exempla to facts, and to appreciate the individual testimony within the framework of the work in which it belongs, they will be in for unexpected rewards.

The same commitment to charting the evidence of an author as fully as possible is apparent in other contributions. Maria Teresa Schettino (pp. 13–35) provides a terse overview of Polybius' evidence for senatorial decisions, which builds on a valuable discussion of the Greek terminology and on a sound understanding of the need to place this study within the appreciation of the underlying literary strategy: in his vision the Senate is central to the Roman *πολιτεία*, especially after the Hannibalic War, and that is mirrored by the disappearance of comitial decisions in the context. Yet Polybius is more interested in senatorial debates than in senatorial decisions: in his view, that is the front through which the prestige of that body emerges most clearly.

Luca Fezzi (pp. 133–154) methodically inventories the references to the activity of the Senate in the corpus Caesarianum. He works on a much more compact body of evidence than Schettino and can make a straightforward and productive subdivision of his material: foreign policy decisions, supplicationes, and political deliberations (with the latter category straddling both *De bello Gallico* and *De bello Civili*). The paper is a catalogue raisonné, rather than a discursive analysis: tellingly, it ends without a conclusion. The closing overview lists under the heading *decisioni senatorie* any form of senatorial involvement, including references to speeches in the Senate; *senatus consulta* are clearly signposted and duly discussed. Alfredina Storch Marino (pp. 191–257) has a lengthy treatment of Diodorus, which has the great advantage of being framed in a clear sequence. The focus is not so much on *senatus consulta* as it is on senatorial activity more broadly; as the author herself concedes, there are no references to senatorial activity until Book 26. The discussion is lengthy and diffused, and is edged by a careful attempt to discuss Diodorus' wider literary and historiographical agenda, which builds upon the reappraisal of this author in the last three decades. The material is not organised thematically, but is handled book by book: readers of Diodorus will

find valuable insights, both by following the sequence of the discussion and by triangulating the text with the *index locorum*. The only tabular section (pp. 253 s.) is an overview of Diodorus' terminology on senatorial acts, which readers will do well to read alongside Schettino's valuable survey of Polybius' vocabulary in the same connection.

Other essays in this collection have a more specific focus. Francesca Cavaggioni discusses a substantial section of Livy's work, notably the whole third decade (pp. 259–345): no reason is given for the choice to exclude the earlier books, and one cannot help noticing the discrepancy between this approach and that of Storchi Marino. Yet the outcome is a substantial discussion, which is even more valuable since this section of Livy's work has not been well served by commentators. As in other chapters, *senatus consulta* are only part of the problem: what we are presented with is a comprehensive survey of any instance in which the Senate is involved in Livy's narrative. Here more than elsewhere, the prevailing mode is that of the inventory, rather than of the sustained argument; the conclusion that Livy is aware of the existence and significance of *senatus consulta* and does not resort to archival sources is rather underwhelming. It would have been instructive to see how Cavaggioni's survey might interplay with Jean-Louis Ferrary's study of the evidence for Roman legislation in Books 21–45 (in: T. Hantos [ed.], *Laurea internationalis. Festschrift für Jochen Bleicken zum 75. Geburtstag* [Stuttgart 2003] 107–142 = *Recherches sur les lois comitiales et sur le droit public romain* [Pavia 2012] 119–151). That would have also enabled her to tackle the issue of the fundamental reliability of Livy's evidence and of the annalistic traditions that he uses in his mid-Republican book. Ferrary reached a broadly positive conclusion on that count, with Peter A. Brunt and against Matthias Gelzer: this debate is altogether overlooked in Cavaggioni's paper.

From large to small. Lisa Piazzini (pp. 155–190) focuses chiefly on a single passage of Sallust (*Cat.* 29), where the passage of the *senatus consultum ultimum* of 21 October 63 is related. She rightly stresses the centrality – physical and conceptual – of this passage in the monograph and offers a close reading of Sallust's emphasis on the emotional context of the decision reached by the Senate, and brings out the significance of the chronological inversion in the narrative, which conveys the misleading impression that the attempt on Cicero's life of November 7th may be part of the background of the *senatus consultum ultimum*. There is some scope for doubt in the wider assessment of Sallust's wider agenda: pigeonholing him as a 'centrist popularis' (pp. 167–170) amounts to imposing a modernising slant on historiographical categories

that are intrinsically problematic. Moreover, the problem of the quality of Sallust's legal knowledge would have warranted further probing: he may be uninterested in legal matters (p. 182), but that does not entail that he was ignorant in such matters. It seems highly implausible, in fact, that someone who sat in the Senate for about fifteen years and reached the praetorship had no understanding of the implications of a *senatus consultum ultimum*. The nature of Sallust's evidence for legal matters should be probed in the context of his literary strategy, which does not receive much scrutiny in this context. The discussion is terse and clearly structured; it is not unduly encumbered by a large bibliographical apparatus, although the lack of any references to Ramsey's recent commentary is frankly surprising. The paper is closed by a useful list of Sallust's references to the activity of the Senate and its decisions; it is not quite clear why Piazzini labels it 'partial', unless she is seriously prepared to consider the 'suasoriae' to Caesar and the 'Invective against Cicero' as genuine works of Sallust (p. 185 note 94).

Cicero is of course the main source for *senatus consulta* and for the activity of the Senate in the Republican period – not just in its terminal phase. He duly receives the lion's share in this book, with three chapters being devoted to its careful scrutiny: Gesine Manuwald on the political speeches (pp. 37–56), Christine Lehne-Gstreinthaler on the forensic ones (pp. 57–78), and Andrea Balbo on the correspondence (pp. 79–132). A fourth paper on the rhetorical works was delivered at the original conference, but never handed in. The division into genres is a logical one, and all three papers contain very sound scholarship and offer clear arguments. Yet there was at least another way of going about this difficult brief, which would have both enabled a clearer historical insight and scored higher in terms of interdisciplinarity: following a chronological sequence and assessing the scope and weight of Cicero's evidence for the various phases of Roman history – from early Rome down to his own time. That approach – which could have been pursued in four or five interrelated pieces – would have facilitated the sort of summative overview that three pieces cannot possibly provide, and which many readers are likely to find wanting.

All three papers are informative and clearly argued. Manuwald's overview is not tabular, but enables the reader to track down the relevant bits of evidence very straightforwardly; the choice to discuss the 'Philippics' before other earlier speeches of comparable importance is surprising, and the argument that they should be prioritised because they contain the largest amount of evidence is not a strong one. Yet her general conclusions are both sound and stimulating. The political potential of

the oral reporting of a *senatus consultum* before its writing up is flagged up as an important theme and warrants further scrutiny against the backdrop of the extent of knowledge on political matters in late Republican Rome. Lehne-Gstreinthaler also falls short of providing a tabular overview. She chooses instead to focus on some carefully selected case studies and make the important point that the use of *senatus consulta* in Cicero's speeches should always be understood in the context of his wider literary strategy, and his focusing on ethos and pathos. She also argues that Cicero's readership will have already been familiar with the contents of recent *senatus consulta*, and that summarising them in any detail would have made little sense. Here we face again, from a different angle, the same issue on dissemination of knowledge that Manuwald raises: this is a point on which a summative discussion would have been especially valuable. Balbo covers the least trodden path and brings out – with admirable effectiveness and sheer gusto – the large body of evidence for *senatus consulta* in Cicero's correspondence. After a lengthy tabular overview (pp. 82–114), which students of the period are likely to find of great use, he focuses on two points of import: first some linguistic aspects, and then a discussion of two case studies.

Does this collection add up to more than the sum of its parts – or, to put it in plain English, does it amount to a project that is informed by a coherent and productive research agenda? Not quite. To attain that goal, it would have surely needed a more substantial introduction or a robust set of conclusions. Yet it offers a great deal of valuable scholarly insights and will be an important springboard for further work: the index locorum (compiled by Francesco Verrico) will prove a highly reliable tool. It is conceivable that the next instalments of the *Acta Senatus* series will put into clearer and sharper focus how this part of the project fits within the wider whole; the companion volume to the one reviewed here – focusing on the literature of the Principate – came out in early 2019 (P. Buongiorno / G. Traina [eds.], *Rappresentazione e uso dei »senatus consulta« nelle fonti letterarie del principato* [Stuttgart 2019]). Even in its own right, though, this book has much to offer; it will repay close reading and frequent consultation.