

Lawless Republic: The Rise of Cicero and the Decline of Rome. By JOSIAH OSGOOD. New York: Basic Books, 2025. Pp. 385. Hardcover, \$32.00. ISBN: 9781541604254.

Lawless Republic tells the story of the decline of the Roman Republic by recounting the high and low points of Cicero's legal and political career. Each chapter's provocative title alludes to the details of the speech or episode that it covers: "Murder by the Baths of Pallacina" and "The Money Trail" (*Pro S. Roscio Amerino*), "Cover-Up" and "Heart of Darkness" (*In C. Verrem*), "The Wine Road" (*Pro Fonteio*), "Poison Was Detected" (*Pro A. Cluentio*), "Conspiracy" (*In Catilinam*), "Secrets of the Good Goddess" (excerpts from Cicero's letters to Atticus), "Sticks and Stones" (letters, *Cum populo gratias egit*, *Cum Senatui gratias egit*, *De domo sua ad pontifices*, *De haruspicum responso in P. Clodium*) "The Hidden Hand" (*Pro Caelio*), "Accident" (*Pro T. Annio Milone*), "Vengeance" (letters, philosophical works, *Philippics*). More than just summaries of what Cicero wrote, these chapters fill in background details with ample references to primary and secondary sources, all cited in copious endnotes. The book's conclusion, wittily titled "White Toga Crime", makes a strong argument for Cicero's complicated relationship to the corruption of the rule of law and the downfall of the Roman Republic.

I asked to review this book because I have been searching for a good companion text for my undergraduate course on Roman literature as a reaction to the political turmoil of the first century BCE. While developing the reading list, I found it difficult to limit my selection of Cicero's works. *Lawless Republic*, however, will make it much easier to give Cicero adequate coverage, and it will also serve as a useful and engaging supplement to the

topics of discussion. The chapter on the Bona Dea scandal (“Secrets of the Good Goddess”) also effectively demonstrates how a scholar can assemble a clear narrative from piecemeal evidence. The citations of primary and secondary sources will be useful for students motivated to engage in further reading. Especially welcome is Osgood’s practice of referring to Cicero’s epistles by their numbers in Shackelton Bailey’s Loeb Classical Library volumes.

General readers with an interest in Roman history will also benefit from reading *Lawless Republic*. Osgood’s introduction lucidly describes the workings of the Roman court system in Cicero’s time and it provides solid information on the book’s historical context. It also raises questions that should prompt readers to consider the relevance of learning about Cicero’s life and times:

How, after an outbreak of violence, do you restore the rule of law? How do you protect against the threat of domestic terrorism without suppressing civil liberties? How do you hold to account those who incite violence? When should voters decide a politician’s fate, and when should justice? (15)

Osgood’s book demonstrates that Cicero was a complicated man living in difficult times. Although he saw himself as a virtuous defender of his country, he was guilty of many of the same flaws that he so witheringly and gleefully exposed in others. Osgood makes it clear that Clodius and Milo shouldered much of the blame for the chaos and turmoil of the 50’s BCE, but he also implicates Cicero in their crimes: “By reckless demagoguery, politicians could turn their enemies into tyrants and justify their own acts of violence. Clodius did this,

and so did Milo and his supporters, including Cicero.” (309) The Cicero who emerges from *Lawless Republic* is vain, funny, brilliant, ruthless, thoughtful, zealous, pompous, short-sighted, brave, hypocritical, and opportunistic. In other words, he is a political player in tumultuous times.

I reviewed an advance, uncorrected copy of the book. It lacks an index, but the publisher’s website verifies that one is included in the published version. Eight maps help to visualize key places and events. I trust that the few typographical errors and typesetting issues that I encountered have also been corrected. In any case, I found no factual errors or problems with any of the translations.

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