

Peter A. Brunt and the Social History of the Late Roman Republic

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Abstract

The paper analyses the work of Peter A. Brunt, Camden Professor at Oxford (1970-1982) and a very prominent figure in the study of the social history of the Roman Republic. I explore his conception of history—social history in particular—in addition to assessing his main contributions on the Late Republic, which addressed social conflicts and violence, as well as the *optimates-populares* confrontation and the so-called ‘Roman revolution’.

Resumen

El trabajo analiza la figura de Peter A. Brunt, Camden Professor en Oxford (1970-1982) y una destacada figura en la historia social de la República romana. El trabajo explora su concepción de la historia y de la historia social en particular. Seguidamente analiza sus principales aportaciones en torno a la crisis de la República, los conflictos sociales y la violencia, el enfrentamiento *optimates-populares* o la así llamada «revolución romana».

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Keywords

P.A. Brunt, Social History, Roman Republic, Social Conflicts, Roman Revolution.

Palabras clave

P.A. Brunt, Historia social, República romana, Conflictos sociales, Revolución romana.

Introduction

In the obituary of Peter A. Brunt (1917-2005) written by Oswyn Murray for *The Guardian* on 28th November 2005, he is described as «a classicist who transformed our understanding of the Roman Republic»¹. We can all agree on this statement when it comes to the social history of the Roman Republic, particularly in its final century. Peter Brunt studied History at Oxford, graduating in 1939, and was awarded the Craven Fellowship that same year for a project on the Roman Empire's rulers and ruled.² He later turned his attention to Ancient History, and had always shown an interest in Medieval and Modern history, as well as that of European architecture and art from the Middle Ages onwards. After the war, following his stay at the British School at Rome (1946-1947), he served as lecturer at St Andrews from 1947 to 1951, before finally joining Oriel College, Oxford, as Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History. In September 1970, he took up the Camden Chair at Oxford, after Sir Ronald Syme. He held this post until 1982, and was succeeded by Fergus Millar.

Alongside his academic work, he also held several important administrative roles, serving as Delegate of the Oxford University Press (1971-1979), Member of the Board of the British School at Rome (1972-1987), Chairman of the Committee for Ancient History in the Joint Association of Classical Teachers, and President of the Roman Society (1980-1983). In addition, he chaired the committee that published a report on the condition of the Ashmolean Museum in 1968, which led to important reforms³.

He retired early, in 1982—the year of what Professor Crawford described as «the Thatcher butchery of universities»⁴—although health issues may also have played a role. He spent the following years compiling three volumes of selected writings⁵.

1. Murray, 2005.

2. The brief biographical outline that follows is based primarily on the obituary written for the British Academy by Michael H. Crawford, who was his pupil at Oxford (Crawford, 2009).

3. Harrison, 1994. The editorial in *The Burlington Magazine* (CX, 1968, p. 375) stated: «It is a forceful document, modern, realistic and sane».

4. Crawford, 2009, 78.

5. The aforementioned *FRRRE* (1988), *Roman Imperial Themes* (1990) and *Studies in Greek History and Thought* (1993), all three published in Oxford by Clarendon Press. In the posthumous volume edited by Miriam

All of Brunt's written work is remarkable for its clarity, precision, and the bluntness of his assertions. These were always backed by sources, which he understood and handled with tremendous erudition. While his style has been described as Gibbonian⁶, he may also have emulated his mentor, Arnold H.M. Jones, whose prose he admired, declaring that «every sentence was crystal clear»⁷. Similarly, he praised the style of Geoffrey E.M. de Ste Croix, who «does not envelop us with cloudy metaphors and ill-defined abstractions or suppose that impenetrable verbosity will be taken for profundity of thought»⁸.

This direct and concise style that Brunt so admired comes across in his often razor-sharp—yet always well-argued—criticism of his peers⁹. A colleague once suggested he try to be more «eirenic» in his dealings, his predecessor in the Camdem Chair, R. Syme, declared him «Brunt by name and Brunt by nature»¹⁰. Whereas his personality was described as «skeptical and polemical» by M. Griffin in his introduction to the posthumous volume on Brunt's work on Stoicism¹¹, M. Crawford sees him as altruistic and generous, displaying the pessimism of Thucydides, and a degree of self-deprecation towards the end of his life¹².

Nevertheless, the robustness of Brunt's arguments is reflected in one of his favourite phrases, which constituted the basis for his historical methodology: «None of this can be proved». Among other examples, he applied it to Moses Finley's well-known thesis on the relationship between the abundance of cheap servile labour and the limited technological development in Rome.¹³

Griffin and Alison Samuel, with M. Crawford, the latter compiled Brunt's bibliography (Brunt, 2013, pp. 498-503).

6. Murray, 2005; Griffin, 2005.

7. Brunt, 2004, p. 442.

8. Brunt, 1982, p. 158. In contrast, he went on to say the following about Christian Meier's style in his *Res Publica Amissa*: «Unfortunately the lavish use of abstractions and metaphors, whenever he puts forward general interpretations, makes it hard to be certain what his views are» (Brunt, 1968, p. 230).

9. As an example, though he recognises Julius Beloch for the importance of his demographic studies in *Italian Manpower* (Brunt, 1971, VIII), he describes him on another occasion as someone «who saw Greek history through the eyes of a modern nationalist and who wrote the most scholarly and most fundamentally fake account we have of the fourth century» (Brunt 1967, p. 359, on his review of the *Terzo Contributo* by Arnaldo Momigliano).

10. Murray, 2005.

11. Griffin et al. 2013.

12. Crawford 2009. A paradigmatic example of this pessimism would be the last sentence of the panoramic essay that opens his *FRRE*: «The historian of Rome can be likened to a man standing at the entrance of a cavern of vast and unmeasured dimensions, much of it impenetrably dark, but here and there illuminated by a few flickering candles» (Brunt, 1988, p. 92).

13. Brunt, 1987, p. 712.

The conception of history

In the aforementioned obituary, O. Murray described Brunt as «one of the last great English positivists, believing that every question had an answer (and only one), which could be discovered by collecting all the evidence»¹⁴. Brunt mentioned the «academically empiricist environment of Oxford and London» in his review of Momigliano's *Terzo Contributo*, underlining the originality of the concerns raised by the great Italian historiographer exiled in the UK¹⁵. Perhaps alluding to his own approach, among his notes stored in the Oriel archive, he talks of the «empirical agnostic» in historical research¹⁶. In the endnotes to the first chapter of *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (hereafter referred to as *FRRE*), Brunt includes his *Excursus on historical facts and evidence*, essentially by way of a manifesto of his historiographical methodology, beginning with a direct reference to Ranke's famous principle: «the aim of the historian is to discover 'how things really were'»¹⁷. He adds that a key challenge to the study of ancient Greece and Rome is the scarcity and frequent bias of the sources, as observed by Thucydides (1.22).

On this topic, Brunt jokes that Cicero would have thanked Roland R. Smith for how his ideas and deeds are portrayed in *Cicero the Statesman*¹⁸. In other words, a historian's work is highly subjective, taking into account only those facts deemed relevant. Historical research, then, can be considered scientific only if we apply techniques to confirm the reliability of the sources used. Once we have established what happened in the past—which is not always possible, given the aforementioned limitations—we then attempt to explain why it happened¹⁹. In the 1988 volume, he states, «The ideal history in my judgement would combine analysis of enduring physical and institutional factors with a narrative exhibiting the contingent effect of individual actions»²⁰.

In a text published after Brunt's death, he praises Hugh Last, who had been his mentor at Oxford in 1946, for his immense knowledge and attention to detail, as well as for taking a broad interest in all aspects of Roman society. Nonetheless, he also pointed out their differences²¹. Given the importance Brunt placed on providing facts based on the sources, he did not deem it necessary to review all the previous literature on a given subject. In this

14. Murray, 2005.

15. Brunt, 1967, p. 360.

16. Oriel Archive, Brunt's Legacy, folder 'Augustus', on a general discussion of Caesar, Augustus and the unpredictable nature of history, p. 2.

17. Brunt 1988, pp. 508-510.

18. Brunt, 1967, p. 345.

19. Brunt, 1974, p. 244.

20. Brunt, 1988, p. 91.

21. Brunt, 2012. In the introduction to the article, written by M. Crawford, he notes that the text corresponds to a seminar on various figures from Ancient History, in which Brunt discusses Last. In the text, Brunt refers to Last's criticism of the prosopographical method adopted by Syme, Scullard, L.R. Taylor et al. He mentions Last again with regards to an apostille to Syme's obituary written by Glen Bowersock, reprinted in *The Brazen Nose* (1995), underlining the unfriendly relationship between the two.

way, he followed in the footsteps of A.H.M. Jones, who was known for consistently and thoroughly referring to primary sources in his analyses, while showing relative disinterest in modern works on the topic²².

In terms of his conception of history, Brunt attaches importance to the role of chance and contingency, as well as certain decisions involved in historical processes. For example, regarding the late Republic, he observes the coincidental nature of the defeats against the Cimbrians and Teutons, or the rise of Marius following his victory in Numidia, and how the course of history can be changed by an illness, as in the case of Augustus. He underlines the influence of consuls who were particularly belligerent against Caesar in the years 50 and 49, unlike the Senate, which apparently preferred a more peaceful solution; or the decision to kill Caesar but spare Antony in 44, a move later criticised by Cicero.

In practice, historians must often resort to conjecture based on the information available for each situation, relying on a degree of imagination that can draw history towards the terrain of fiction, though the rules of play for a historian differ from those of a novelist. Brunt also draws on Thucydides' observations (1.76), understanding that the factors guiding human action are relatively similar across all ages; namely, honour, fear, and material gain. This can serve as a guideline amidst our general ignorance of the personal motivations of a given individual at a given time²³.

Thus, Brunt takes an interest in the history of ideas, as shown in his work on Stoicism (2013), and defends the need to treat politics as a subject in its own right²⁴. Moreover, he associates innovation and progress with freedom of thought and action, and autocracy with stagnation and a lack of ideas²⁵.

Brunt had a flawless command of literary sources, and while he showed little interest in areas such as archaeology, he recognised early on that it could fill gaps in our knowledge regarding ancient Italy's social and economic conditions. Thus, he valued the ongoing work of Bradford, Ward Perkins, Salmon and others in different areas of the Italian peninsula²⁶. In the abovementioned *Excursus on historical facts and evidence*, he reiterates that new epigraphic, papyrological and archaeological discoveries can shed fresh light on the social, economic

22. Brunt, 2004. Here the distance that separates Brunt from Momigliano is made clear. While he respected and valued his work, as we see in different reviews of Momigliano's *Contributi*, he deemed it to be far removed from his own concerns (and from those of most of his British peers; see Cristina Rosillo's contribution to this dossier, p. 72).

23. Brunt, 1988, p. 90. It is worth mentioning that Brunt gave several courses on Thucydides at Oxford between 1951 and 1954, apparently with the intention of writing a book about the Athenian historian (Crawford, 2009, p. 68).

24. Brunt develops this idea in particular in his 1976 article in *Didaskalos: The Journal of the Joint Association of Classical Teachers*.

25. In line with this, on the political and intellectual development of the Roman Empire, he stated «The ultimate beneficiary was Christianity. Its final success was also a by-product of the despotic system» (Brunt, 1988, p. 12).

26. Brunt, 1971, p. VIII.

and cultural problems of ancient Rome. In contrast, he believed political history, based on repeatedly examined sources, offered fewer possibilities²⁷.

Social history

The above discussion brings us to Brunt's take on social history. It is perhaps somewhat surprising to find such a profound sensitivity to social issues in someone so strongly committed to empiricist principles. Not only does this not seem to be tied to any particular ideology, but he explicitly distanced himself from Marxist postulations, and since we have no concrete information about his political views, we can merely speculate based on the ideas presented in his work. Several factors may have contributed to his outlook, including his education as a historian—not strictly limited to the field of Classical Studies—and his study of history beyond the realm of Antiquity, which likely fostered a broader perspective²⁸.

Furthermore, a number of individuals contributed to Brunt's knowledge. Examples include A.H.M. Jones, whom he regarded as adopting a moderate socialism²⁹, G. de Ste Croix, with whom he remained close despite their political and ideological differences, and M. I. Finley, the prominent social historian. Finally, we must recall the academic and political atmosphere at Oxford in the 1950s, which was marked by significant social and political unrest in opposition to the academic establishment. Oxford was a key hub for the 'British Marxist Historians', a group that was fundamental to the creation of history 'from the bottom up' and the study of the lower classes. This movement drew on the works of Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, George Rudé, and Edward P. Thompson, among others³⁰.

In addition, Oxford was the birthplace of *Past & Present*—one of the pioneering international journals in social history—founded in 1952. This journal was where Brunt published his fundamental piece entitled 'The Roman Mob'³¹, which was later included in *Studies in Ancient Society*, a collection of papers from the same journal. In his foreword to this collective volume, the editor, M. I. Finley, describes the contributors as «structuralists», in the sense that they all viewed societies as complex structures comprised of interconnected layers. In their view, to truly understand the workings of a society, one must examine these layers—or at least possess an awareness of their interconnectedness³². More recently, Spanish scholar J.A. Piqueras pointed out that social history «questioned the knowledge of the past through

27. Brunt, 1988, p. 510.

28. Martin Jehne has pointed to the influence in the 1960s of a general political climate in western societies towards more social perspectives (Jehne, 2006, p. 9).

29. Brunt, 2004, p. 441.

30. Kaye, 1984.

31. In the first issue of the journal, A.H.M. Jones published 'The Economic Basis of the Athenian Democracy' (*P&P*, 1,1, pp. 13-31), the first of several articles he would go on to publish in the same journal.

32. Finley, 1974, p. IX.

political events whose protagonism fell on personalities—mostly male—and left aside the events of the great majority of the population in its multiple facets»³³.

It is against this backdrop that P. Brunt's work must be understood. Within this broader perspective, Brunt adopts a view that focuses on the popular classes, the common people, the poor, and the slaves. As one of his obituaries notes, he sparked a new vision of Roman history, centred on social conflicts and the lives of the poor³⁴. Brunt was acutely aware of the deep and persistent socio-economic inequalities in Roman society, and of the hardship endured by the vast majority of its population, largely due to the exploitation of the masses for the benefit of the few. In his opinion—perhaps following Finley—Rome's economy, under modern criteria, would be considered underdeveloped. He regarded Italy as a slave economy from the end of the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD³⁵, and concluded the same for the Roman economy «because total production depended largely and essentially on slave labour»³⁶. In *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic*, a masterful synthesis of its social history, he wrote that what distinguished Rome from other ancient societies was «neither economic inequality nor exploitation but the enormity in the scale of both»³⁷. Similarly, drawing on Thucydides (1.23), he assessed the magnitude of an event by the disasters and suffering it caused. Thus, for Brunt, the crisis of the Roman Republic was a pivotal period due to the immense distress these conflicts inflicted on all classes in both Italy and the provinces. At one point, he ponders whether modern historians who repeatedly criticise grain distributions—on the grounds that these would corrupt the *plebs*—would also reject welfare state measures, pointing out that «in Rome there were no charitable foundations for the poor and no unemployment benefits»³⁸.

In the obituary he wrote for J.P.V.D. Balsdon, Brunt reminds us that, in *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (1969), Balsdon became one of the first historians to challenge the stereotype of the urban *plebs* as only interested in *panem et circenses*, since even the recipients of the corn dole had to work hard to survive, the crowds at the Colosseum representing only a fraction of the urban population³⁹. Arising from this interest in non-elite social strata, Brunt wrote several articles on slaves, including synthesis texts, and pieces on topics like Aristotle's attempt at theorisation, Marcus Aurelius and slavery, and the realm of labour, as well as issues more specific to Roman Republican history. Brunt was well aware of the limited information in the sources regarding the common people, except when they are at the forefront of revolts, or when jurists discuss slaves as property. Therefore, the little

33. Piqueras, 2023, p. X.

34. Murray, 2005.

35. Brunt, 1983.

36. Brunt, 1987, p. 705.

37. Brunt, 1971, p. 40. The quote was cited in the review of *Italian Manpower* and *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic*, both from 1971, in the *Times Literary Supplement* (2 July 1971, p. 782).

38. Brunt, 1974, p. 92.

39. Brunt, 1980a.

information available comes to acquire great importance, such as the brief account in Suetonius about salaried workers in Rome (*Vesp.* 18)⁴⁰.

Thus, Brunt finds it reasonable to seek analogies—though always with caution—with other pre-industrial historical periods. With regard to identifying the social sectors involved in revolts and the importance of public construction as a source of temporary work in Rome, he draws comparisons with better documented periods, such as revolutionary France at the end of the 18th century. For instance, he makes several references to George Rudé's work on the crowd in history, which allow him to denounce Cicero's abusive and self-serving generalisations about Clodius' followers⁴¹. These Ciceronian descriptions (portraying them as slaves, bandits, beggars and fugitives) compare to those of conservative authors from the French Revolution, or those discussing popular revolts in 18th-century England. As demonstrated by George Rudé, on the occasions when such depictions can be evaluated against contemporary documentation, they are shown to be false⁴². With this in mind, Brunt expresses his astonishment at Ch. Meier's chapter on the plebs in *Res Publica Amissa*, which makes no mention of poverty in Rome, despite it being an important factor in the social upheaval of the time. In his words, this omission «simply astounds me»⁴³. In contrast, he praises G. de Ste Croix's *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* for addressing the poor and the popular classes, despite also rejecting many of his claims. Brunt underlines that class has often been ignored by modern historians, with the exception of Mommsen, Rostovtzeff and Jones⁴⁴.

This brings us to Brunt's position on Marxism. Despite the obvious links to his interest in the social history of the poorest, Brunt is sharply critical of Marxist theory. Despite using Ste Croix's definition of social class to illustrate the absence of change in the class structure of the Principate⁴⁵, he quickly turns to reproach the Marxists' notion of a revolution in the Late Republic: «But was there any revolution at all? This question has been debated in a waste of learned words best left in oblivion»⁴⁶. In his review of the book, he says that the

40. Brunt 1980b. In such limited information lies the difficulty in developing a social history for ancient Rome as advocated by Natalie Zemon Davis, combining macro and microhistory. In this sense, Brunt's social history took a classical approach (Zemon Davis, 1990).

41. G. Rudé is one of the most renowned British Marxist historians, author of *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959) and *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964), both cited by Brunt. On G. Rude, see Kaye, 1992, pp. 31-64.

42. Brunt, 1974, p. 98. In fact, Cicero himself mentions the shopkeepers and craftspeople in his criticism of Clodius' attempt to paralyse the city and fill the Forum with supporters (*dom.* 13. 54. 89; *Acad.* 2. 144).

43. Brunt, 1968, p. 229. «There are no slaves in this book», he also underlined (Brunt, 1968, p. 230). In the 'Einführung zur Neuausgabe 1980', Meier replies to Brunt (Meier, 1980, XVII, XIX).

44. Brunt, 1982a, p. 163.

45. Ste Croix, 1981, 43; Brunt, 1988, p. 9.

46. Brunt even has a political dig: «In a Marxist sense there was none. But Marxists are no more entitled to dictate the usages of our language than the forms of our government» (1988, p. 9).

author «writes as an evangelical Marxist», who sees Marx as the «Master»⁴⁷, and later spoke critically of «Marxist dogmas»⁴⁸. In general, Brunt underlines the ineffectiveness of general principles intended to explain social phenomena and historical events. Rather, he emphasises the role of individual personalities and contingency, and the empirical studies required for advancing historical understanding⁴⁹. In his view, Marxist theory is unable to explain the profound political shift from republican to monarchic institutions.

The crisis of the Republic

Brunt's overall interpretation of the crisis

Essentially, Brunt's *FRRRE* (1988) provides a synthesis of all his prior work on the Late Republic. In the Preface, he makes reference to his *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* as well as *Italian Manpower*—both from 1971, and mentions that some pieces have been updated, while others are new, covering key topic such as *libertas*, *clientela* and factions. In the opening essay, as an overview of the subject ('The Fall of the Roman Republic', pp. 1-92), he asks some questions that may provide key insights into his interpretation of the Late Republican crisis: «Why did the Senate fail to achieve the consensus that Augustus did? It is clear that at times it alienated the Italian allies, the *Equites*, the urban plebs, the peasants and the soldiery. It did so because of its inability to solve the problems arising from Rome's expansion»⁵⁰, going on to say: «Thus, in the changing conditions created by imperial expansion, the senatorial aristocracy, blinded in part at least by short-term visions of its own political and economic advantage, failed to satisfy by timely concessions the needs or aspirations of the Italian allies, the better organised *Equites*, the urban plebs, the peasantry and the soldiery»⁵¹.

If, in earlier times, Rome's constitutional system brought about a degree of social harmony and consensus, this had disappeared by the Late Republic. Such is the main thrust of Brunt's radical critique of Meier's *Res Publica Amissa*. While he may agree with the German historian in his rejection of the *Faktionsthese* of Münzer, Syme, Scullard or Gruen—as expressed in the essay entitled 'Factions'—he rejects the consensus, stability and unity that Meier attributes to the Roman Republic, including in its last century. Hence Brunt's famous statement in his review of the *Res Publica Amissa* published in the *Journal of Roman Studies*: «If everyone was happy under the Republic, why did it fall?»⁵². It is within these pages that Brunt denounces the reality of the political confrontations of that time, which, as he reminds us, were acknowledged by contemporaries such as Cicero and Sallust themselves⁵³.

47. Brunt, 1982a.

48. Brunt, 1987, p. 708.

49. Brunt, 1988, p. 88.

50. Brunt, 1988, p. 68.

51. Brunt, 1988, p. 81.

52. Brunt, 1968, p. 229.

53. Sall. *Bj* 41.5; *Hist.* 1.12; Cic. *Rep.* 1.31; *Sest.* 97-108.

Having ruled out the existence in those times of political parties in the modern sense, today's historiography would question whether there was any political rivalry at all. Nonetheless, the ancients repeatedly observed the people's growing, persistent disaffection towards the Senate⁵⁴, which acquired real political scope when a member of the *nobilitas* became a leader *popularis*. Whether or not the Roman constitution was in any way democratic, as suggested by Polybius, the political significance of the people and their rights is undeniable. Public participation was clearly limited, particularly when it came to the *comitia centuriata*; however, the *comitia tributa* was another matter. Regardless of its real representativeness, this assembly, presumably made up of inhabitants of the city, served as a platform through which certain sectors of the population could convey their disagreement with the senatorial oligarchy. This is confirmed by the series of laws passed after the *lex Flaminia* of 232 BC, despite opposition from the Senate's majority.

This tension between the Senate's authority and the people's rights is evident throughout the Late Republic⁵⁵. For this reason, Brunt strongly disagreed with Syme's interpretation of the history of Rome. While Syme, who was Brunt's predecessor to Oxford's Camden Chair, claimed that «Roman History, Republican or Imperial, is the history of the governing class»⁵⁶, Brunt contended that this «statement is gravely exaggerated for the Republic»⁵⁷.

The significance of these conflicts cannot be dismissed merely on the grounds that no alternative to the existing system was ever proposed, nor simply because two sides shared a set of moral and political principles and slogans for the good of the *res publica* (referred to as «a stock of ideals»)⁵⁸. Such principles can develop in different—even opposite—directions: «Liberty was often on the lips of politicians. It meant different things for different people»⁵⁹. Brunt elaborates on this topic, which he revisited in a new chapter of his 1988 book⁶⁰. After comparing *libertas* and *eleutheria* and carefully analysing B. Constant's thesis on ancient and modern liberty, Brunt distinguishes between Cicero's *libertas* and that of the leaders *populares*. While, for the former, *libertas* represents the centrality of senatorial *auctoritas*, for the latter, it is associated with a set of rights, including individual sovereignty in the *res publica* or, at least, the ability to share political power⁶¹.

54. Brunt, 1968, p. 232.

55. Brunt, 1988, p. 4.

56. Syme, 1939, p. 7.

57. Brunt, 1988, p. 4. To some extent, Brunt's criticisms of Syme had been anticipated by Momigliano's early critical review in the 1940 *Journal of Roman Studies*.

58. Brunt, 1988, p. 49.

59. Brunt, 1988, p. 50.

60. Chapter 6, 'Libertas in the Republic', pp. 281-350.

61. On *libertas*, see now Valentina Arena, *Libertas and the Practice of Politics in the Late Roman Republic*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

The Italian question was another central theme in the crisis of the Republic, as Brunt addresses early on, in a well-known article published in 1965 in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (of which a revised and updated version is included in *FRRRE*)⁶².

Brunt traces the resentment of the Italics back to the second half of the 2nd century, a resentment exacerbated by their heavy military burdens. He also points out that they were likely negatively affected by the first Gracchan agrarian law. From then on, the reforms proposed by Fulvius Flaccus, Gaius Gracchus and later Livius Drusus—which were intended to extend Roman citizenship in one way or another—were rejected by both the senatorial and social majority, which would precipitate events. The Italian protests were largely driven by the aspirations of the elites, who sought Roman citizenship not only for the right to vote in Rome, but also to access political power through holding magistracies, or joining the *ordo equester*⁶³. These elites would rely partly on the weakness of the Roman administrative apparatus to maintain their local power. Though these *homines novi* would soon adapt to the new regime, the senatorial obstructionism to the regular registration of new citizens—a stance that Brunt does not fully comprehend—would lead to major tensions in Rome for the decades to come⁶⁴.

Over the centuries, the Roman aristocracy demonstrated an impressive capacity for adaptation and innovation. However, in the last century of the Roman Republic, they would appear blinded by their own class interests, making them unable, as a group, to take on and solve new problems.

Social conflicts

Along with the division of the ruling class, a fundamental factor in the crisis of the Republic was popular discontent and social unrest, which could only be channelled through noble individuals⁶⁵. In that sense, the discontent seen during the Gracchan crisis had likely built up over time, not having been sufficiently expressed until then due to a lack of leadership⁶⁶. While Syme rejects Sallust's description of social division as «schematic and defective»⁶⁷, Brunt approves of it, as it aligns with his concern for the poor, these terms being «epithets

62. Brunt, 1988, pp. 93-143. In the 1988 version, he includes the original acknowledgements made to M.W. Frederiksen and E.T. Salmon, and those more recent to A.N. Sherwin White and H. Galsterer, although he is most indebted to E. Gabba, despite some disagreements, for instance, regarding the role of commerce and the *negotiatores* in the aspirations of the Italics (*op. cit.*, p. 93).

63. Brunt, 1988, p. 125.

64. Brunt, 1988, p. 71. Brunt's views on the subject of the Italics have been thoroughly analysed by F. Wulff in his recent comprehensive monograph (Wulff Alonso, 2021, pp. 309-320). In his opinion, despite the undeniable value of his contributions, Brunt continued to fall prey to an overly Romanocentric and nationalising vision of the problem, without attending to what the Italic identities really were, to their continuity and the imperialist nature of Roman power.

65. Brunt 1988, p. 14.

66. Brunt, 1988; Sall. *Jug.* 41.

67. In his 1964 monograph *Sallust*, 17ff.

that best applied to an analysis of Roman politics that ignores or depreciates the grievances and aspirations of the common people»⁶⁸.

Brunt sets out from the hypothesis that imperial expansion exacerbated the differences between the rich and the poor, and seems to follow Apianus' account of the situation in Italy prior to the Gracchan reforms. The gravity of the situation is reflected in the agrarian and frumentary laws first promoted by the Gracchi brothers—aimed at the rural and urban plebs, respectively. Furthermore, despite their failure, Tiberius Gracchus' proposals signify a turning point that paved the way for later popular demands⁶⁹. Saturninus reframed the agrarian question in relation to the veterans of Marius, who became a new political force in both the city and the assemblies. The Senate would systematically oppose this type of legislation, except for fear of violent outbreaks, such as in the case of the Terentia-Cassia frumentary laws of 73 BC and the *lex* proposed by M. Porcius Cato, *tribunus plebis* of 62 BC.

Brunt reminds us that the main concern of the urban plebs was the price of grain, and posits a potential correlation between famine (the scarcity of bread) and outbreaks of violence⁷⁰. The Catilinarian conspiracy serves to illustrate the scale of the crisis and the socio-economic inequalities affecting both the rural and urban plebs. In a popular article published in *History Today*, Brunt highlights the reality of the social conflict at the time and is highly critical of Cicero for conflating poverty with vice and crime⁷¹. Meanwhile, Catiline was not a social reformer *per se*, but his proposals for debt cancellation gained strong support among the plebs.

In relation to other conflicts, Brunt sees the diverse interests that set the *equites* against the Senate as another consequence of imperial expansion, with Gaius Gracchus' judicial proposals constituting an important milestone in the rise of the institutional role of knights. Nevertheless, their common economic and political interests ultimately united them against most of the popular reforms.

With regard to the various social interests at play in the late Republican period, Brunt highlights those of the soldiers, stating that «the most fatal error that the Senate made was thus its failure to keep the soldiery content»⁷². Whatever their ideology, which was likely ambiguous, the soldiers hoped to secure a livelihood after their discharge, such as a plot of land. Caesar became aware of this issue, which would ultimately only be resolved under Augustus.

Another key aspect of social relations in Rome was *clientela*, which Brunt argues was likely more important in earlier times, particularly for the election of the higher magistracies. However, he questions its significance in the Late Republic, suggesting that its importance is exaggerated by many modern historians, who speak of 'clients' despite the fact that the sources

68. Brunt, 1988, p. 504, endnote 3.

69. Brunt, 1988, p. 74.

70. Brunt, 1974, p. 101. Once again, he draws on the works of George Rudé, mentioned earlier, and his thesis on scarcity and the rising price of bread as having triggered social upheavals in 18th- and 19th-century France and England (*supra* n. 41).

71. Brunt, 1963, p. 18.

72. Brunt, 1988, p. 77.

do not confirm this relationship⁷³. The supporters of any leader would have included political supporters, slaves—for example in the armed escorts—and veterans, rather than clients in the traditional sense⁷⁴. In fact, fundamental aspects of political and social conflict in the Late Republic (the *Bellum Sociale*, *popularis* legislation, disputes between senators and *equites*, the participation of soldiers in civil wars, etc.) are at odds with the idea of strong patron-client ties⁷⁵.

In any case, Brunt acknowledges that the material living conditions of the majority of the population in Rome and Italy remain largely unknown, due to a lack of information in the sources. On this matter, he deems Yavetz's «The Living Conditions of the Urban Plebs in Republican Rome» (*Latomus* 1958) the most valuable article written to date⁷⁶.

Optimates and populares

In 1982, L. Perelli published *Il movimento popolare nell'ultimo secolo della Repubblica*, receiving a generally positive review by Brunt in the *Journal of Roman Studies*⁷⁷, in which he mentions that readers of his *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (1971) will not be surprised by the two seeing eye to eye. Both share the ancient authors' view of the split between *optimates* and *populares* as being the main cause of political division in the Late Republic. The non-existence of political parties in the modern sense does not detract from Cicero's and Sallust's assertions that Rome was divided into two sides⁷⁸. Popular initiatives were sporadic, since such actions had to be carried out by leaders from the *nobilitas*, which occurred infrequently⁷⁹. Perelli and Brunt also agree that it is not significant that the leaders of the movement came from the elites, this being rather inevitable in the ancient world. Nor did they consider their motives to be fundamental, especially given the fact that these are difficult to identify, and were generally distorted by antagonistic sources, particularly Cicero (see *Sest.* 96-105).

What is significant are the events, the discontent they echoed and the specific measures they put forward—measures which implied that the assemblies had the right to set state policy over and above the Senate. Brunt had previously underlined that therein lay the essence of *libertas* for the *populares*: in the ability to decide on everything that concerned the people, without

73. Brunt, 1988, p. 31.

74. Brunt, 1988, p. 431ff.

75. Brunt, 1988, p. 441.

76. In private correspondence between the two in February of 1967; however, staying true to his critical nature, Brunt also called him «imprudent» for accepting some of Vitruvius' ideas (Brunt's legacy, Oriel archive, box 8/9 ROME; cf. Brunt, 1974, p. 84, n. 30, stating that «his [Yavetz] references and interpretations of texts are not all reliable».

77. Brunt affirms that Perelli writes «lucidly, concisely and thoughtfully» (Brunt 1983, p. 206).

78. In his article 'The Roman Mob', to confirm the fact that no party existed, nor a lasting, organised *popularis* party of any kind, Brunt refers to the article by Ch. Meier entitled '*Populares*' in the *RE* (Supplement X, 1965, pp. 550-567; Brunt, 1974, p. 79, n. 15).

79. Brunt, 1971, p. 95.

the necessary prior sanction of the Senate⁸⁰. In this sense, the *populares* were not merely social reformers, but leaders who defended the people's right to have a say on issues of all kinds⁸¹. An example of this challenge to the traditional role of the Senate would be the designation of *imperia extra ordinem* through the assemblies, such as those assigned to Marius for Numidia and again in 88; to Pompey in the 60s; to Caesar in 59; and Pompey and Crassus in 55BC.

Nonetheless, Brunt does not fully agree with Perelli in defining the *popularis* movement as democratic—something about which he is expressly sceptical—nor with the supposed Greek democratic influence on Tiberius Gracchus through figures such as Blossius of Cumae⁸². Rather, Brunt argues that we cannot speak of democracy in Rome, given the scant representativeness of the assemblies, except on very rare occasions—perhaps only in 133, surrounding the *lex Sempronia agraria*. In fact, as previously mentioned, he is equally sceptical of Polybius' theory that there was any democratic component in the Roman constitution at all⁸³.

Nevertheless, the scope of the *populares*' proposals is undeniable, from the improvement of the material conditions of the plebs, to the defence of citizens' rights and the rejection of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, in addition to foreign policy and military command⁸⁴. Meanwhile, the political division between *optimates* and *populares*, described as a moral division in terms of good and bad citizens, would offer another interesting angle on the problem. In this regard, Cicero's thoughts on the plebs, which reflect the ideology of the aristocratic elites, highlight the socio-economic and class division of the conflict⁸⁵. According to Brunt, this interpretation would confirm the existence of such a social division, with opinions such as Cicero's helping to cement Clodius' popularity at the time⁸⁶.

In relation to the development of the late Republican crisis, the Gracchan legislative proposals triggered the process of revolution and set a precedent for all later *populares*⁸⁷. In any case, as we will analyse below, the old conflict between *optimates* and *populares* would

80. Brunt, 1971, p. 94.

81. Brunt, 1988, p. 32.

82. Brunt, 1983, p. 207.

83. In any case, as observed recently by Yakobson, it is one thing to portray Rome as a democracy and another to recognise that there were democratic components in the Roman constitution (Yakobson, 2022, p. 100). As Yakobson himself admits, perhaps it would be best to use the term 'popular' rather than 'democratic'—a suggestion with which we think Brunt would have agreed. On democracy as having always been a strange idea in Rome, see now Pina Polo, 2019.

84. On this matter, in his review of *FRRRE*, T. P. Wiseman (1990) questions Brunt's statement that the *populares* never aspired to resolve the debts of the plebs; to this end, he refers to Manlius' letter in Sallust (*Cat.* 33; cf. Liv. 2.23).

85. Brunt reminds us that Cicero could see that the plebs were hungry (cf. *dom.* 61), but simultaneously accused them of using up the public treasure; on several occasions he defines them as *egentes* or *perditi* (*dom.* 45; *Flac.* 18; *Att.* 1,16,11; *off.* 1,150).

86. Brunt, 1988, pp. 53f.

87. Brunt, 1988, pp. 23, 33.

evolve into the opposition between republicanism and autocracy and, eventually, between rival *imperatores*.

Violence

Brunt's interpretation of violence in the late republican crisis is consistent with his view of social history. His pioneering approach frames violence within its political, social and economic context. In his early paper in *Past & Present* (1966), later included in the collective volume edited by M.I. Finley (1974), Brunt approaches the subject of violence from this novel perspective.

Brunt identifies three factors that explain the spread of violence in Rome. Firstly, the fact that it was impossible to carry out reforms by exclusively legal means, given the characteristics of the system; secondly, the absence of law enforcement in the *Urbs*; and, finally, the extreme poverty affecting the majority of the population⁸⁸.

Regarding the first factor, Brunt argues that a political system that was clearly designed to favour the elites pushed reformist leaders into a dilemma. Typically tribunes of the plebs, these politicians were obliged to use force, or at least to create the conditions in which the Senate might fear it. This was particularly evident in the case of the Gracchi brothers and their followers, who were massacred by the senatorial bloc opposed to their measures.

Meanwhile, the absence of police forces to maintain public order in Rome is particularly significant in a city of around 750,000 inhabitants⁸⁹. Brunt suggests that the Senate's reluctance to make any decisions in this regard may have been due to the senatorial oligarchy's fear of entrusting such responsibility to any individual, as it might give them excessive power⁹⁰. As is well known, and as Brunt reminds us, it was Augustus who finally resolved the issue by establishing a series of permanent fire-fighting, police and military units in Rome, all under his direct control⁹¹.

Finally, the third factor explaining the violence were the miserable living conditions endured by a significant portion of the population in Rome. For Brunt, these conditions—found especially in run-down neighbourhoods—were conducive to outbreaks of violence: narrow streets and unhealthy, poorly ventilated housing; no heating, running water or connection to sewers; frequent fires, building collapses and flooding from the river. The inequality was both vast and glaring. Brunt underscores the stark contrast between this situation and Cicero's rental income from properties on the Aventine and Argiletus, which enabled him to finance his son's stay in Athens⁹².

88. Brunt, 1974.

89. This is the figure proposed by Brunt for the period (1971b, p. 383).

90. On this subject, Brunt, 1974, p. 83, n. 26, refers to Meier and his *Res Publica Amissa* (Brunt, 1966, pp. 157ff.). Upon tackling the question in *FRRRE* (Brunt, 1988, p. 76), he cites Nippel's article published in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (Policing Rome, *JRS*, 74, pp. 20-29).

91. Brunt, 1988, p. 76.

92. Brunt, 1974, p. 86. Cic. *Att.* 12.32.2; 15.17.1; 20.4; 16.1.5.

In the opening chapter of his 1988 book, Brunt gives an overview of the violence that marked the final stage of the Roman Republic⁹³.

Tiberius Gracchus was lynched and Gaius Gracchus' supporters massacred. With the Gracchi brothers made martyrs, the *quaestio Mamilia* somehow compensated for the Senate's prior arrogance. Later, Saturninus and Glaucia were lynched despite promises of protection from the consul Marius, and Livius Drusus was assassinated. Next, Sulpicius resorted to violence, followed by Sulla, and later Marius and Cinna. From the late 90s to the 70s BC, violence engulfed Italy, from the Social War to the confrontation between the Sullans and the Marianists, the dictatorship of Sulla, the uprising of Aemilius Lepidus and the revolt of Spartacus. The Catilinarian crisis can be connected to the social and economic consequences of this earlier unrest. In the 50s BC, violence became endemic in both Rome and the countryside, with violent clashes between armed gangs becoming widespread. In 49 BC, most of the *boni* wanted peace, and once it was confirmed that Caesar—master of Italy—would not act against his opponents or their property, a large number of them chose to take his side.

Nevertheless, the decade following Caesar's death was marked by proscriptions and a new civil war. Eventually, aspirations of peace and stability helped Octavian to consolidate his regime, even among those who might initially have opposed him (Tac. *Ann.* 1.2; 3.28).

Brunt blames much of this violence on the senatorial oligarchy's refusal to reform: «The first open act of illegal political violence came from the nobility». In *FRRRE*, he adds: «The senate succumbed to force, which it had been the first to employ»⁹⁴.

From his correspondence with Y. Yavetz in February 1967, we know that Brunt had intended to update his article 'The Roman Mob', published the previous year in *Past & Present*, and turn it into a small book on violence in the Republic aimed at a wide readership.⁹⁵ Presumably, the arrival of Andrew Lintott's monograph, *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford, 1968), was what caused him to change his mind.

93. Brunt, 1988, pp. 78-81.

94. Brunt, 1974, p. 92 and Brunt, 1988, p. 78, respectively.

95. Both Yavetz and Brunt coincide in their critique of J.W. Heaton's *Mob Violence in the Late Roman Republic* (1939). For Brunt, Heaton's work is «almost useless», having previously described it as «inaccurate in details and superficial in interpretation» (1974, p. 74, n.1). In their written exchange, Yavetz recalls that he had met Brunt in Oxford in 1963 through G. de Ste. Croix. Despite this apparent academic familiarity, Yavetz includes a reference to Brunt's 1966 work in his monograph published in Oxford in 1969 (*Plebs and Princes*, OUP, VII), but surprisingly not in its second edition in 1982, wherein he fails to name Brunt's article when listing recommended reading on the topic published between the first and second edition (Yavetz, 1982, pp. VII, XX).

The Roman Revolution and Augustus

Brunt uses the term ‘revolution’ to refer to (gradual) transcendental change, such as the Industrial Revolution. In this sense, he is similar to Syme and, perhaps, to Mommsen⁹⁶. He compares Augustus’ ‘revolution’ with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which would consolidate a parliamentary (aristocratic) regime, and later give way to democracy and the welfare state, though that of Augustus took the opposite direction⁹⁷. For Brunt, his was a purely political revolution, replacing oligarchy with monarchy, without altering the social and economic structure of the system⁹⁸, but nonetheless having «momentous consequences both for good and ill»⁹⁹.

Both historically and methodologically, it is also interesting to observe how Brunt integrates the rise of the *imperatores* into how the ‘revolution’ unfolded. In his view, besides Caesar, none of the others (Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Crassus) would have sought such an outcome. However, all of them contributed to the formation of an autocratic regime¹⁰⁰. On the one hand, this evolution of events allows Brunt to highlight the importance of circumstance in history (such as the irruption of the Cimbrians and Teutons, the conquests of Mithridates, the pirates, and the defeat of Crassus). Simultaneously, the prominence of these *imperatores*, their alliances and their political positions cast doubt on the very existence of closed, stable aristocratic factions.

The historical reality of the ongoing evolution of a system which, paradoxically, sees tradition as a guarantee of legitimacy, made it easy for Augustus to disguise the radical changes to the system as simple modifications¹⁰¹. Brunt participated in the ‘Inchiesta’ put forward by the journal *Labeo* on the 40th anniversary of the publication of Syme’s *The Roman Revolution*. There, he insists on how Augustus presents himself as «the first citizen», the continuator of the republican system, with his powers and honours always granted by the Senate and the people¹⁰². Unlike Caesar or Antony, he maintained a clear distance from the *regnum*, alongside a great respect for the senatorial aristocracy. In fact, this respect would prove crucial to his success, as republican sympathy remained significant among the upper classes.

However, Brunt disagrees with Syme about the new Roman ruling class completely replacing the old *nobilitas*. For Brunt, much of this *nobilitas* had disappeared during the wars and

96. Duplá, 2006.

97. Brunt, 1988, p. 10. On the whole, this was the stance of the review of *FRRRE* by J. North, reflected in the title: ‘The Roman Counter-Revolution’ (1989).

98. Brunt, 1968, p. 232.

99. Brunt, 1988, p. 12. In the Oriel College archive (box AUGUSTUS), there is a lot of typed and hand-written material specifically about Augustus, possibly as the foundation for a book, with notes on works by Kelly, Wiekert, Kienast, Boulwert, Alföldy, De Martino and Suohlati, among others; this includes drafts about ‘Cicero and Augustus’, ‘The Equites in the Augustan System’ as well as ‘Augustus and the *res publica*’, presumably the beginnings of his article in the ‘Inchiesta’ in *Labeo* (1982).

100. Brunt, 1988, pp. 82 ff.

101. Brunt, 1988, p. 13.

102. Brunt, 1982; cf. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 34.

proscriptions, making them the true losers in the revolution. Nevertheless, once the new regime was stabilised, Augustus would show respect and trust in the remaining noble families¹⁰³.

Already in the opening pages of his 1988 book, Brunt gave his central thesis on the revolution—namely, the transformation of the Republic under Augustus. The *princeps* managed to reconcile a number of competing interests and have their aspirations met, something that the senatorial *nobilitas* of the Late Republic did not achieve (or did not consider)¹⁰⁴. Thus, the tensions, discontent and protests underlying the crisis of the Roman Republic were neutralised. In this sense, he points out that, in reality, Augustus implemented the *fundamenta rei publicae* coined by Cicero more effectively than the late Republican Senate, based on the general consensus among all ‘respectable’ sections of the community, with special consideration for the Senate. The crucial difference was that Augustus was now the supreme ruler, though disguised—to some extent—as merely the first citizen¹⁰⁵. The *otium cum dignitate* prescribed by Cicero (*Sest.* 96) would thus be fulfilled, making Augustus responsible for restoring peace after decades of war and chaos.

In any case, Cicero could tolerate the new changes in the army, provincial governance, and tax collection, but presumably his *moderator rei publicae* would be very different from the new autocrat. His constitutional proposal always implied the collective management of the Senate, always with a *summus civis*, but never a monarch¹⁰⁶. Hence, one of Augustus’ main concerns, in addition to satisfying the urban plebs and soldiers, was to attend to these upper strata of society. In this regard, Brunt underlines the differences in the way the figure of Augustus is viewed by two Roman historians: Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.2) and Velleius Paterculus (2.89). The latter—denoting the emergence of new sectors in the elite—seems impressed by the measures of the *princeps* and less aware of the autocratic features of the regime¹⁰⁷.

Ultimately, despite carrying out certain popular demands in the socio-economic field and being something of an innovator¹⁰⁸, Augustus was a conservative, except in his establishment of the Principate¹⁰⁹.

103. Brunt, 1988, p. 5.

104. Brunt, 1988, pp. 8-9.

105. Brunt, 1988, p. 56.

106. Cic. *fam.* 7.3.5; Brunt, 1988, p. 56.

107. Brunt, 1988, 67. In the ‘Inchiesta’ in *Labeo*, Brunt mentions that Augustus took a series of measures recommended to the tyrant by Aristoteles as a means to win the favour of his subjects (Brunt, 1982, p. 240; Arist. *Pol.* 1314b).

108. Brunt, 1988, p. 87.

109. Brunt, 1982, p. 37, n. 7. We do not know what Brunt would have made of Augustus being portrayed as the most authentic *popularis*, as in the recent monograph by T. P. Wiseman (2019).

Summary

Karl J. Hölkenskap has recently offered a brilliant approach to the historiographical debate on the political regime of the Roman Republic¹¹⁰. Throughout his book, political culture is seen as a complex multidimensional tool for the reinterpretation of Roman Republican history¹¹¹. If we attempt to situate Brunt within Hölkenskap's historiographical exploration, it becomes clear that he played a role in overcoming the systemic, 'constitutional' model originally developed by Theodor Mommsen. Brunt was also sharply critical of the prosopographical methods of Münzer, Gelzer or Syme, as mentioned earlier. His work reflects a sustained interest in combining the study of structures and events with that of the social dimension of politics. He also recognised the importance of studying concepts rigorously, as demonstrated in several chapters of his *FRRRE*. However, it must be acknowledged that he did not take the step from concepts to political culture—as Hölkenskap advocates in chapter 5 of his book. Indeed, Brunt may even have disagreed with the implications of the chapter's title, 'The Benefits of Theory'¹¹².

In the last chapter of the book, Hölkenskap discusses the paradigm shift that occurred in the study of the Roman Republic in the mid-1980s. Arguably, Brunt remains on the threshold of the new Ancient History and the centrality of the concept of political culture advocated by Hölkenskap.

Furthermore, in his very recent *Companion to the Political Culture of the Roman Republic*, Alexander Yakobson offers a comprehensive review of the same subject as Hölkenskap, summarising the ongoing debate on the political culture of the Roman Republic since the publication of Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution* in 1939¹¹³. In this overview, Yakobson assigns Brunt a preeminent role in the phase leading up to the real turning point, «the watershed of the 80s», led by Fergus Millar¹¹⁴. Brunt's work directly questioned the 'oligarchic model' of the old orthodoxy advocated by Syme and others, in its deconstruction of the role of the *clientela*, the *factiones* and the (imagined) absolute political hegemony of the senatorial

110. We refer to the Spanish edition, Hölkenskap, 2019. The original German edition was published in 2014 (Rekonstruktionen einer Republik: Historische Zeitschrift Beiheft 38, R. Oldenbourg Verlag) and the English edition in 2010 (Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research, Princeton University Press).

111. Hölkenskap, 2019, p. 87.

112. Hölkenskap, 2019, pp. 87-112.

113. Yakobson, 2022.

114. Yakobson, 2022, p. 93. Brunt's agreement with Millar's first article is mentioned in North's review of *FRRRE* (JRS 1984 (1988, p. 18, n. 33: «Millar [JRS 1984], with whom I agree in general»; North 1989, p. 153). It is significant that F. Millar's *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (Ann Arbor, 1998) is dedicated to Peter Brunt.

oligarchy¹¹⁵. In the same vein, T.P. Wiseman (2009, 31) had already portrayed Brunt as a dissident from the prevailing orthodoxy regarding social conflicts¹¹⁶.

Nonetheless, Yakobson points out the limitations to Brunt's overall explanatory framework and portrayal of the system, which he considers vaguer than what Millar would provide later on¹¹⁷. This criticism overlaps with the objections raised by John North in his review of *FRRRE*¹¹⁸. Having highlighted the book as a fundamental contribution to our understanding of the crisis of the Roman Republic, the UCL-based historian points out how Brunt ultimately fails to develop all the questions he raises, perhaps constrained by his pessimism and, I would add, his empiricism¹¹⁹.

According to Yakobson, our judgement of the political culture of the Roman Republic depends, among other factors, on the political weight we give to the social and economic gap between the elite and the common people. Here, I believe, lies the greatest ongoing value of Brunt's work: it enriches the study of the Roman Republic by incorporating an understanding of the social history of those 'lower down'.

Needless to say, some of his theories have been questioned, such as those on the impact of war and military service on Roman and Italic agriculture in the second century BC¹²⁰. However, we have deliberately set this matter aside, since it does not detract from our main line of argument regarding Brunt's role. Irrespective of any doubt cast on his ideas, Peter Brunt reshaped our understanding of the study of the Roman Republic, particularly its final crisis. As we have mentioned, his contribution was decisive in overcoming the 'oligarchic model' in this field. Moreover, his groundbreaking work in the 1960s and 70s emphasised the importance of the non-elite sectors and their protests and demands in the political and social evolution of the system; because without taking into account the ordinary people, the workers, or the poor, one cannot fully understand the functioning of Roman society. Similarly, without understanding their interests and how these were channelled by the *populares* and

115. Even, maybe, having an influence over Syme himself, as pointed out recently by F. Santangelo (2013, p. 11).

116. Other dissenting voices would be Wirzubski, Ste Croix and Millar (l.c.). The pioneering nature of Brunt's work, in particular his *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic*, is also highlighted in Duplá, 2007.

117. Yakobson, 2022, p. 98.

118. North, 1989.

119. North, 1989, pp. 153ff. North's argument coincides with that of R. Saller in his review of *FRRRE* (1992): Brunt would seem more interested in pointing out the defects of others than better developing his own ideas. Something similar had been suggested previously by K. Hopkins in his—initially positive—review of *Italian Manpower*: «He is more concerned to do justice to the sources than to make sense of Roman society» (1972, p. 193).

120. A recent review of the literature can be found in L. de Light 2006. Nevertheless, in the same field, Brunt's points of view are occasionally misinterpreted. In this regard, Crawford points out that in N. Rosenstein's review, *Rome at war: farms, families, and death in the Middle Republic*. *Studies in the history of Greece and Rome* (2004, in *BMCR* (2004.07.56), the idea of the decline of the small farm owner is incorrectly attributed to Brunt, when he states the opposite in *Italian Manpower* (1971b, p. 353; Crawford 2009, p. 75).

rejected by the *optimates*, one cannot understand the crisis of such a system. This, in my view, constitutes Peter Brunt's most significant contribution.

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