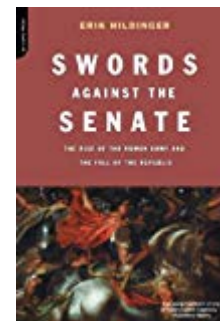


Erik Hildinger. *Swords against the Senate: The Rise of the Roman Army and the Fall of the Republic.* Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003. xiii + 240 pp. \$18.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-306-81279-8.



Reviewed by James Bloom

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The problem of how an idealized "Roman Republic" lost its compass and devolved into an empire with an autocratic ruler "advised" by the senate has been studied from several angles. One of the pioneers in this field is Ronald Syme, whose masterwork, *The Roman Revolution*, written in 1939, still is the definitive work on the transition from republic to empire from 60 B.C. to A.D. 14, the accession of Augustus, and the ineluctable movement from democracy to dictatorship. In contrast, Hildinger traces the fall of the republic back further, accentuating the role of the military and some of the military operations and factors that delineated its responsibilities and character. The topic has also been covered recently in *Caesar against Rome: The Great Roman Civil War* by Ramon L. Jiménez (Praeger 2000), though as the title indicates, Jiménez focuses on the final death throes of the republic just before the accession of Augustus. *Crossing the Rubicon: The End of the Republic*, by Tom Holland (Doubleday [2004]) covers the same ground as Hildinger's book but also embraces the operations between Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Octavius. Then there is the newly prefaced 1995 paperback edition of Erich S. Gru-

en's *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley [1974]). Where Hildinger differs from these other accounts is his emphasis on the role of the army in politics and his more narrow focus on the Jugurthine War, the Social War, and the civil war between Marius and Sulla—that is the period from the Third Punic War through the Mithridatic Wars, or 147 B.C. to 80 B.C. In fact, the book could be subtitled "The Road to Julius Caesar," since it tells how the social, political, and military turmoil preceding Caesar set things up for the final confrontation. In fact Caesar, a nephew of Marius, to a large extent perpetuated the Marian reforms—at least while it suited his ambitions.

In order to tell his story, Hildinger concentrates on three events that brought the republican crisis to culmination. These were either contributing factors to or reflections of the highlighted crises: (1) the public unrest that followed the murders of the Gracchi brothers, (2) the war against the North African prince Jugurtha, and (3) the civil wars resulting from the uprisings of Marius and Sulla against Rome. These all reflect, in Hildinger's view, "the relentless breakdown be-

tween aristocrats and plebeians during the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C."

The author begins by sizing up the problem; he does this by presenting a sketch of the development of the Roman state, especially focusing on the army and the role it played socially and politically. Hildinger next provides a concise general overview of the central figures and events of the period. The Gracchi, Marius and Sulla, and the Jurgurthan, Cimbrian/Teuton, Social, Mithridatic, and First Civil Wars are briskly presented as these events are related in the works of Appian, Sallust, and Plutarch. Since this is clearly a popular history appealing to a layman interested in Roman military affairs, Hildinger does not convey a systematic assessment of the sources. Nor does he distinguish the revisionist literature that challenges the traditional account of the events. However, he does make use of some solid modern military critiques such as Delbruck and Keppie. The subject matter is quite complex—one need only consult Syme and Gruen to appreciate the intricacy of the constitutional and organizational developments in this period. (Oddly, Syme's *opus magnus* and Gruen's more recent treatment are missing from the subject book's notes and bibliography.)

Indubitably, the age of Marius and Sulla (roughly 110-78 B.C.) is critically important to understanding the decline and collapse of the republic and the rise of Caesar Augustus and the empire. Hildinger clarifies the way that the Gracchi, Marius, and Sulla laid the groundwork for the Ides of March. Hildinger manages to blend the overlapping, complicated explanations of political and army reform, social convulsion, and a hodgepodge of unpopular and unsuccessful foreign entanglements with the lively narration of military operations and vicious conspiracies. The result is informative and entertaining popular history in the best sense of that term. Most importantly for the members of this list, he points the way to balance the old drum and trumpet school of military history featuring tactics and orders of battle with

the more modern "war and society" mode showing how the home front molded a people's style of warfare.

The notes are a useful blend of citation of sources and brief parenthetical comments on source discrepancies or side issues. A few maps could have been helpful to follow the campaign narratives. All in all, this book is recommended for readers needing a solid introduction to this crucial turning point in Roman history.

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