

### **‘*Optimus Civis*. A model citizen and ruler of Rome in the republican and imperial periods’. Introduction**

In May 2018, the Institute for History and Archival Studies in Toruń hosted a conference entitled ‘The *Optimus Civis*. Power and Magistrates in Ancient Rome’ (see: “Klio” 2018, vol. 47, no. 4). At the conclusion of this very fruitful meeting, the participants agreed that it was worth following up on this topic. Therefore, we suggested another conference on the *optimo civi* (best citizen) in 2020, this time to be dedicated to the image of a perfect ruler and citizen of ancient Rome in the republican and imperial periods. Thus broadly defined, the topic invited a multifaceted approach to Roman ideals of a citizen and ruler, seen against the background of everyday realities. Unfortunately, the conference was prevented by the pandemic, but the historians who had already responded to the call for papers, contributed the articles presented here in this volume.

Each paper focuses on a different aspect of a model citizen or ruler. Just like in the present day, being a citizen in Rome implied living in a community. The benefits of community life, however, are paired with burdens and duties. Thus a citizen is a ‘soldier who may be called up, taxpayer, elector, and potential candidate for specific roles’.<sup>1</sup> Among ‘ordinary’ citizens,

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<sup>1</sup> C. Nicolet, *Obywatel, polityk*, in: *Człowiek Rzymu*, ed. A. Giardina, trans. P. Bravo, Warszawa 1997, p. 35. It is noteworthy that the first holistic approach to the various areas of activity of a Roman citizen with references to ideal types was taken by C. Nicolet,

there are also many people distinguished by valour, special gifts, political engagement etc. The image of a model citizen varies across different ages, power structures and success stories. The works of ancient writers (Livy, Plutarch, Tacitus) provide descriptions of heroic deeds, illustrious generals or eminent *homines novi*. There are also numerous portraits of perfect rulers in philosophical, historical or didactic works (in particular in Cicero, Sallust, Velleius Paterculus, Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Tacitus).

The papers collected in this volume present various models of *cives Romani*.

Tomasz Ładoń is the author of an article on the Valerii Flacci, one of the most influential Roman families in the first two decades of the 1st century BC, referred to by Cicero as the *nobilissima familia*, considering that they were the pick of the Roman aristocracy and would be regarded as the best citizens (*optimi cives*). During the first civil war, they were initially on the Marian side. L. Valerius Flaccus (the consul of 100 BC) held the office of the *princeps senatus*, and a relative of his, also by the name of L. Valerius Flaccus, replaced C. Marius in the consulship (as a *consul suffectus* in 86 BC) following the latter's death. His own brother, C. Valerius Flaccus, the consul of 93 BC, served for many years as the governor of Spain during Cinna's rule in Rome, and later also of Gallia Transalpina. It was the Valerii Flacci who attempted to ensure a compromise between Sulla and the Marians, and eventually opted for Sulla after having failed in their efforts. Tomasz Ładoń brings the Valerii Flacci out of the shadows of history, analyses the origins of their adherence to the Sullans, and delineates the significance of those *cives optimi* among Sulla's supporters in the early period of his dictatorship.

In the republican period, the Roman concept of citizenship relied on four pillars, one of them being the duty to serve in the military. The soldier citizen in the Roman Republic is the topic of Michał Norbert Faszczka's article. The author emphasises in particular that – contrary to a view which is still popular in the literature that a professional army based on voluntary enlistment was established as early as the late republican period – it was

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*Le Métier de citoyen dans la Rome républicaine*, Paris 1976. Cf. also C. Nicolet, *Rome et la conquête du monde méditerranéen 264–27 av. J.-C.*, vol. 1, Paris 1978.

not until Emperor Augustus' decision that such an army actually came into existence. He was the very person who authored this far-reaching reform with a direct impact on the entire political and social system of the state. Therefore, M. N. Faszczka believes that our understanding of the nature of the Roman military in the republican period should be redefined in order to consider all phenomena which shaped the citizens' approach to military duties and the manner in which they were fulfilled, with a particular focus on cultural aspects. He has analysed narrative sources in order to establish whether or not a Roman soldier was indeed always so devoted to the motherland's cause, so well-disciplined and well-armed as depicted in the literature. And, most importantly, how such an idea of a perfect soldier translated into the performance of the Roman military.

Hanna Appel, in turn, deals with a widely-debated research topic known as the *plebs contionalis*. A coinage by Christian Meier, the term itself never appears in the ancient sources. For many present-day historians, however, it is a perfect description of those citizens who, on a regular basis, frequented popular assemblies known as *contiones*. Such assemblies served as the key information channel and contact point between the senate and the people. Meier took the view that the *plebs contionalis* was a group composed of the representatives of the urban plebs who supported the political goals of various politicians. Hanna Appel gives an account of the debate among the historians who, notably, saw the participation in the *contiones* in a much broader context than Meier. The debate shows that both the nature and the participants of the assemblies changed over time and under various circumstances, and that a well-motivated frequenter could be the perfect participant for every occasion.

Joanna Marciszyn in her contribution focuses on female characters presented by Livy in *Ab Urbe Condita* (Hersilia, Tarpeia, Sabine women, Cloelia, Veturia) in order to discuss the position of women in the public life of ancient Rome. The marginalisation of women in the public sphere was one of the reasons why female characters so rarely grace the pages of male-written history. We know, however, that many women in fact played an active role in public life. In her article, Joanna Marciszyn seeks to answer the question whether Roman women of the period could still be regarded as exemplary citizens today. She quotes excerpts from *Ab Urbe Condita*

showing that many women participated in the public life of ancient Rome, which means that they, too, deserve the name of ‘model citizens’ in the present-day understanding of the term.

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