

## Violence against Citizens in Republican Rome

Michèle Lowrie

Giorgio Agamben's work on the *homo sacer* and his theory of sovereignty draw much on ancient Rome, specifically from the Roman Republic. He argues that state-sponsored violence against citizens reveals sovereignty's dirty secret. The last century of Republican Rome was certainly a period of intense violence against and among citizens. Whether this violence demonstrates the structure of sovereignty or is rather a sign of political collapse, however, is unclear. In these meetings, we will be asking a number of questions that challenge Agamben's view. If the *homo sacer* is such an important figure of thought, why does it go underground in this period? Can the state of exception be used to define sovereignty in a state without a written or even a stable constitution? Can we understand the Augustan principate as a permanent state of exception? Conversely, we will ask why Rome provides such rich material for a theorist at the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our analysis will be at the same time historical and will draw from highly crafted texts with their own aesthetic agenda. The aim will be to see if we can come up with an alternative theory of state violence.

1. The *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*  
Cicero's *Catilinarian Orations*  
Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*  
Plutarch's lives of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus
2. Dictatorship  
Livy selections: 4.13-16 (Spurius Maelius)  
Plutarch's life of Sulla  
Suetonius' life of Caesar
3. *Auctoritas* and *potestas*: Augustus  
*Res gestae diui Augusti*  
Suetonius' life of Augustus

### Background reading:

- Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- (2005) *State of Exception*, trans. K. Attell. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press
- Fiori, R. (1996) *Homo sacer: dinamica politico-constituzionale di una sanzione giuridico-religiosa*. Naples: Jovene
- Galinsky, K. (1996) 'A Principal Concept: *Auctoritas*', in *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 10-41
- Heinze, R. (1972) 'Auctoritas', in *Vom Geist des Römertums*. Darmstadt (originally published 1925) 43-58
- Linderski, J (2002) *Athenaeum*
- Lintott, A. (1999) *Violence in Republican Rome*. Oxford (original publication 1968)

- (1999) *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*. Oxford
- Lowrie, M. (2007) 'Sovereignty before the Law: Agamben and the Roman Republic',  
*Law and Humanities* 1 (2007) 31-55
- Schmitt, C. (1985) *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*,  
trans. G. Schwab, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press (original publication 1922)

The readings above may be done in any language. I will be speaking in English and using English translations, but will refer back to the originals as needed.