

Cicero's De Republica

Jackson Dircks 4.26

Summary

- Cicero's *De Republica* was a collection of six books written from 54 to 51 B.C. Similar to many of Plato's works, it features a previous philosopher as the primary point of view character, in this case Scipio Aemilianus, who was a well known roman general from around 150 B.C.
- The text is largely a discussion between characters about the different aspects of a state: constitution (which Cicero has a notable perspective on, stating the ideal constitution draws from democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy), and also education, what it means to be a citizen, and how an ideal state would be run. A lot of the exact contents are missing because of the fragmented nature of the text.
- Book 6 contains a story where Scipio is visited by his dead grandfather and shown the structure of the heavens and the cosmos (celestial spheres, etc.), and it describes all the rewards awaiting dutiful roman soldiers who die in battle.
 - Possibly related: later in Cicero's lifetime was a civil war in Rome which ultimately ended in his death.

Surviving text

- What we have of the text is mostly from books 1, 2, and to a lesser extent, 3
- We only have a few relatively short quotes from books 4, 5, and 6 from other authors who had access to the full text and wrote about it, but we are able to tell what the books were about based on how other authors referenced them
- The only substantial excerpt we have of the later books is *Scipio's dream* in book 6

Macrobius

- Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, who lived in the 400s, A.D., wrote a commentary on *Scipio's Dream*, in which he elaborated on the excerpt's discussion on the structure of the universe to advance the stoic and neoplatonic understandings of astronomy into the middle ages.
- This commentary became popular, and was frequently published with a copy of Scipio's Dream attached to it at the end. As a result, we never really lost the text, and for most of modern history it was the only piece of *De Republica* we had access to

The Vatican Library

- Around 1819, Angelo Mai, an Italian Cardinal, discovered large portions of the first three books of the *De Republica* in a vatican palimpsest
 - Book 2 is a discussion on the political history and constitution of Rome, making it very valuable to classical scholars of the time
 - The text, at the time of its discovery, was actually a part of Saint Augustine's *Expositions on the Psalms*, but with writings of the De Republica faintly etched under it.
 - The monks that wrote texts like this didn't have the means to make paper, so they would take old manuscripts and erase the ink from them so they could be reused for new material.
- Later on, largely as a result of this discovery, the practice of recovering lost classic texts using palimpsests stored in the vatican became common and valuable.

