ACTA CLASSICA LX (2017) ISSN 0065-1141

Van der Blom, H. 2016. *Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. xiii + 377. ISBN 9781107051935. £74.99.

This stimulating study provides a history of Roman Republican oratory and offers a different approach from that of Cicero's *Brutus*, or at least a significant start in that direction. It does so by describing in detail the oratorical career of six Roman politicians (Gaius Gracchus, Pompey, Caesar, L Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus [cos. 58], Cato the Younger, and Mark Antony). According to the author, these were neither active in all fields of oratory throughout their careers, nor even necessarily outstanding orators, but all were proficient enough to achieve success in a political system in which public communication was essential. The book uses these six examples to analyse the various ways in which oratory could contribute during the Late Republic to political careers.

Their portraits constitute the heart of the book. Gaius Gracchus is portrayed as a capable politician who combined appeal to the people with a reputation for *pietas* toward his slain brother Tiberius in particular, but also to his distinguished forbears on both sides of his family. He was an innovator in rhetorical delivery, walking around on the *rostra*, with left arm uncovered (Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 2.2), and setting the pitch of his voice by a flute played by a slave in the background (Cic. *de Orat.* 3.225). Pompey propelled his career forward primarily through military glory, justifiably described by Velleius (2.29) as *eloquentia medius* ('ordinary as far as oratory was concerned'). Nevertheless, precisely because he 'perfected the skill of not speaking, or not speaking his mind' (p. 144), and even exhibiting a certain shyness (p. 116), he held the attention of his audience when he did speak. Caesar was a superb orator, not only in *contiones* but also in the courts and somewhat in the Senate, and in funeral orations, such as his speech for Julia, his aunt and the wife of Marius. He was also a theorist of language, defending analogy over anomaly as a measure of linguistic purity. Van der Blom refurbishes the reputation of L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (cos. 58), the target of Cicero's acerbic attack in 55 BC, about whom she has written before.[1] She maintains that he was in fact a respected figure who was not at a loss to defend himself against Cicero, a politician who knew how to make use of his family background and networks to win elections, and a man of moderation who after 50 BC played the role of diplomat and intermediary between the warring sides. She sees Cato the Younger as exhibiting more than just the Stoic single-mindedness and rigidity that we associate with him; he was an eloquent speaker who was able to turn electoral defeat and filibustering obstructionism to his advantage as proof of his deep principle. Mark Antony showed that he was able to seize the moment with his oratory, such as at Caesar's funeral, and in his response to the speech of Cicero published as the *First Philippic*. The author backs up these six portraits with detailed appendices for each one, listing his public speeches with date, place, topic discussed, and sources. The author has had access to the ongoing project *Fragments of the Republican Roman Orators*,[2] which promises to be an improvement over Malcovati's *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta (4th edition)* (p. ix).[3]

It is especially hard to escape the perspective of Cicero on Republican oratory, since his works offer scholars such a wealth of information. Nevertheless, it is desirable to do so in order to minimize the distortion that this exceptional orator and author on rhetoric imposes.[4] Van der Blom presents a view of Roman oratory and politics that is non-Ciceronian in four ways. First,

[1] Van der Blom, H. 2013. 'Fragmentary speeches: the oratory and political career of Piso Caesoninus.' In C. Steel and H. van der Blom (edd.), *Community and Communication: Oratory and Politics in Republican Rome*, 299-314. Oxford.

[2] http://www.frro.gla.ac.uk.

[3] E. Malcovati (ed.) 1976[4]. *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta Liberae Rei Publica*. Turin.

[4] For the bias of Cicero as a source for Roman oratory, see C. Steel, 'Lost orators of Rome', in W.J. Dominik and J. Hall (edd.) *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, 237-49, at p.238. Malden.

as far as possible, she makes use of sources other than Cicero, in addition to Cicero's works. Second, she expounds her view of the Roman Republic from the time of the Gracchi until 43 BC through biographies of six politicians other than Cicero. These Cicero regarded as falling short of his ideal *bonus orator*, and violently attacked two of them – Piso Caesoninus and Mark Antony. Accordingly, and third, she regards Cicero as an outlier in terms of his reliance on outstanding oratory as a means of political advancement, rather than as the norm to whom others should be compared. In particular, she analyses information from individual trials to show that generally as orators advanced through the *cursus honorum*, unlike Cicero they moved away from appearing in court as prosecutors and defence *patroni* to roles such as character witnesses (p. 32). Finally, in her conclusion she reveals the culmination of her argument: that we should think in terms of a new *Brutus*, that is, a history of Roman oratory that would not use oratorical skill and correct political stance as the criteria for selection and exclusion, but rather the overall ability to create a personal narrative that brought respect as a powerful individual with influence and accomplishments (p. 289). The result provides the reader with not only a broader view of Roman oratory as it functioned in public life, but also by contrast a clearer picture of Cicero's distinctiveness.

The role of oratory in Roman Republican politics has been brought to the fore by Morstein-Marx as the persuasive medium through which members of the Roman élite influenced ordinary Romans, whose votes they needed.[5] His thesis has stimulated valuable contributions. While it is true that candidates for office did not generally make campaign speeches (p. 111 and p. 123), Tatum has described the opportunities afforded to candidates for addressing voters.[6] By analysing the performance of the Scribonii Curiones, Rosillo López supports van der Blom's argument that oratory of middling quality could be conducive to success.[7] Likewise, though her emphasis on oratory in the career of politicians whose public speaking was sufficient to allow them to advance, even though they fell short of excellence, Van der Blom opens the way for a new history of oratory that would be different from Cicero's *Brutus*. Steel, cited by van der Blom (p. 282), has pointed out that in the *Brutus* Cicero omitted some significant orators – Marius, Sulla, Catiline, and Clodius – because of hostility or because their speaking expressed their military power; these could have been included since they met the criterion that they had died by the time when Cicero composed the work (*Brut.* 231).[8]

The author avoids the pitfall of exaggerating the importance of her subject. Public oratory was, according to her, just one of the tools that Romans used to promote their political careers. Others were wealth, connections, ancestry, patronage, military exploits, and personal charisma (p. 46). These political assets were, however, expressed through public communication, including oratory (p. 285), which became more important in the second century BC (p. 65).

Two points occur to me that could have been strengthened or stated differently. To highlight the importance of oratory that was 'good enough' without being outstanding, more could have been made of the contrast between that viewpoint and the idealized orator-statesman portrayed in the *De Oratore* (which is cited, to be sure, as one can see from the *index locorum*), especially in the person of L. Licinius Crassus (cos. 95). While the author follows generally accepted opinion that forensic orators delivered their speeches partly toward the *corona*, I have countered with a different view of the relevant passages from the *Brutus* (200, 290) that the *corona* provided not a target audience but an index of the orator's success.[9]

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[5] Morstein-Marx, R. 2004. *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic*. Cambridge.

[6] Tatum, W.J. 2013. 'Campaign rhetoric'. In C. Steel and H. van der Blom (edd.), *Community and Communication: Oratory and Politics in Republican Rome*, 133-50. Oxford.

[7] Rosillo López, C. 2013. 'The common (*mediocris*) orator of the Late Republic: the Scribonii Curiones', in C. Steel and H. van der Blom (edd.), *Community and Communication: Oratory and Politics in Republican Rome*, 287-98. Oxford.

[8] Steel, C. 2003. 'Cicero's *Brutus*: the end of oratory and the beginning of history?' *BICS* 46: 195-211, pp. 205-207.

[9] Alexander, M. 2002. *The Case for the Prosecution in the Ciceronian Era*. Ann Arbor, esp. pp. 35-36; Levene, D.S. 2004. 'Reading Cicero's narratives'. In J. Powell and J. Paterson (edd.) *Cicero the Advocate*, 117-46, esp. p. 122,

This book combines history and rhetoric with remarkable deftness, and enhances our understanding of communication as a tool in Roman politics. It enables us to move from a Cicero-centric outlook on public oratory toward a more synoptic perspective.

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Oxford; and *contra*, Powell, J. and Paterson, J. 'Introduction'. In J. Powell and J. Paterson (edd.) C*icero the Advocate*, 1-57, esp. p. 32.