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The reception of republican political communication: Tacitus' choice of exemplary republican orators in context

Henriette van der Blom

Introduction¹

Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* depicts the role of oratory in the imperial period, but it does so by comparison with oratory in the Republic.² Through the speeches of his three main interlocutors, Tacitus debates the impact of the Principate on public oratory and questions the notion that oratory declined under the emperors.³ Certainly, his interlocutors admit that the political situation has changed and with it the framework for public oratory, but they are made to discuss whether the impact is felt the most in terms of oratorical education, venues

¹ I should like to thank the organiser of the conference on *Comunicación política en el mundo romano: transmisión e intercambio*, Dr. Cristina Rosillo-Lopéz, for the invitation and academic discussions, the participants at the conference for helpful comments on my paper, and Andrea Balbo for commenting on a draft of this paper.

² Major works on the *Dialogus* include Roland Mayer, *Tacitus. Dialogus de oratoribus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Christopher van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus: Aesthetics and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). More detailed studies include T. James Luce, "Reading and response in the *Dialogus*," in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. James Luce and Anthony J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11-38; C. O. Brink, "History in the *Dialogus de oratoribus* and Tacitus the historian: a new approach to an old source," *Hermes* 121 (1993): 335-49; C. O. Brink, "Can Tacitus' *Dialogus* be dated? Evidence and historical conclusions," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 96 (1994): 251-80; Sander M. Goldberg, "Appreciating Aper," *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 224-37; Sander M. Goldberg, "The faces of eloquence: the *Dialogus de oratoribus*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. by Anthony J. Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73-84; David S. Levene, "Tacitus' *Dialogus* as literary history," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134 (2004): 157-200; William Dominik, "Tacitus and Pliny on Oratory," in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, ed. Jon Hall and William Dominik (Malden and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), 323-338; Andrew B. Gallia, "Potentes and Potentia in Tacitus's *Dialogus de oratoribus*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139 (2009): 169-206; Thomas E. Strunk, "Offending the Powerful: Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* and Safe Criticism," *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010): 241-67; Patrick Kragelund, "Tacitus, Dio, and the 'Sophist' Maternus," *Historia* 61 (2012): 495-506; Christopher van den Berg, "Intratext, declamation and dramatic argument in Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus*," *Classical Quarterly* 64 (2014): 298-315. For discussions of Tacitus' work within broader discussions of imperial reception of the republican past, see Alain Gowing, *Empire and Memory: the representations of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 109-20; Andrew B. Gallia, *Remembering the Roman republic: culture, politics and history under the Principate*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144-77.

³ A decline was argued in the ancient sources: Cic. *Off.* 2.67; Vell. Pat. 1.16-18; Petron. *Sat.* 1-4, 88, 118; Sen. *Controv.* 1, *praef.* 6-7; Plin. *HN* 14.2-6; Pers. 1.15-18, 32-6, 121; Juv. 1.1-4, 1.12-14, 7.105-49; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.80; Long. *Subl.* 44; and by some modern scholars such as George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). Brink, "History in the *Dialogus de oratoribus*," 348 argues that the intellectual positions of the interlocutors are pre-Tacitean and historical. Dominik, "Tacitus and Pliny on Oratory," 325 discusses whether Tacitus himself believed in such a decline.

for oratory, content and style, or the prestige derived from oratory – and they do so in highly eloquent language as Tacitus’ implicit comment on the debate. To facilitate their dialogue, Tacitus’ interlocutors use examples of orators from the republican past and it is this group of republican orators on which this paper shall focus.

The purpose of this focus is to come closer to an understanding of one of the ways in which imperial authors viewed republican political communicators and the possible media through which they knew of republican orators. This shall be done through an analysis of Tacitus’ choice and employment of these oratorical examples within a context of other imperial works in Latin employing such republican oratorical *exempla*. Velleius Paterculus’ *History of Rome*, Quintilian’s rhetorical work *Institutio oratoria*, and Pliny the Younger’s letters contain passages which list republican orators as especially exemplary, and it is against these lists that Tacitus’ choice shall be examined. A comparison with Cicero’s exposition of exemplary republican orators in his treatise the *Brutus* shall provide further clues to questions of imperial canon(s) of exemplary republican orators, the media for disseminating knowledge of republican oratory and orators, and imperial perspectives on public speech in the republican period.

I shall argue that the extensive overlaps between these lists of republican orators in the four imperial works stem fundamentally from an awareness of Cicero’s own attempts at creating a history of oratory at Rome and from the survival of written versions of republican speeches surviving into the imperial period. This conclusion underlines the fact that the transmission of republican political communication took place outside its original oral setting and outside its original political context. The transmission in literary works helps to explain the imperial concern with the style rather than the content of these speeches, and the attention to a small selection of outstanding republican orators indicate both a narrow view of republican oratory and a variation in imperial periodisations of the republican period and its end point.

Republican orators in the *Dialogus*

Before we go into details of the republican orators mentioned, a brief summary of Tacitus’ dialogue itself will help to put the overall discussion in perspective. The work is prefaced by Tacitus’ introduction and scene-setting: the interlocutor Maternus has recited his new tragedy

Cato which caused offence because of its potential political overtones.⁴ His friends Secundus and Aper find him at his house and they start debating the role of oratory in three sections. In the first section, Aper and Maternus discuss whether poetry or oratory is better (5.3-13.6); in the second Messalla and Aper discuss the merits of past and present oratory (15.1-26.8); while in the third and final section, Maternus and Messalla discuss the education of orators in the past and present and the impact of education and political situation on oratorical qualities (28-41.5). Throughout their debates, the three interlocutors use republican and imperial orators to exemplify their points.

A full list of republican orators mentioned in the *Dialogus* includes (in roughly chronological order according to first consulship):

Menenius Agrippa Lanatus (cos. 503 BC)
M. Porcius Cato the Elder (cos. 195 BC, cens. 184 BC)
Ser. Servius Galba (cos. 144 BC)
C. Sempronius Gracchus (tr. pl. 123, 122 BC)
C. Papirius Carbo (cos. 120 BC)
L. Licinius Crassus (cos. 95 BC)
Cn. Pompeius Magnus (cos. 70, 55, 52 BC)
M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 70, 55 BC)
M. Tullius Cicero (cos. 63 BC)
C. Iulius Caesar (cos. 59 BC)
M. Caelius Rufus (pr. 48 BC)
C. Licinius Macer Calvus (no magistracies but forensic orator)
M. Iunius Brutus (pr. 44, cos. desig. 41 BC)
C. Asinius Pollio (cos. 40 BC)
M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus (cos. suff. 31 BC)
the vague reference to Lentuli, Metelli, Luculli and Curiones.⁵

These orators are employed in a variety of ways to illustrate different points by different interlocutors in the dialogue, sometimes in groups and sometimes individually, and with both

⁴ Tac. *Dial.* 2-3; see discussion in Mayer, *Tacitus. Dialogus de oratoribus*, 92-3.

⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 12, 16, 17, 20-3, 26, 34-5, 37.

positive and negative comments on their oratory. Here, I shall not analyse all the specific usages, but rather mention the most striking types of employment of these references to set them into context of our question about the list of orators and the transmission of their oratory.⁶

Some republican orators are used to exemplify a certain oratorical phenomenon, such as that of very young prosecutors, including L. Licinius Crassus, C. Iulius Caesar, Asinius Pollio and L. Licinius Calvus.⁷ Others are used to compare the relative quality between them. For example, the interlocutor Aper argues a gradual refinement of oratorical style over time exemplified by the chronological list of Cato the Elder, C. Gracchus, L. Crassus, Cicero and Corvinus Messalla. Moreover, Aper expresses the hope that L. Licinius Calvus, Caelius Rufus and Cicero did not use the rough and inartistic orators Ser. Servius Galba (cos. 144) and C. Carbo (cos. 120 BC) as their models.⁸ In the most strident evaluation of republican orators, Aper argues that some republican orators such as L. Licinius Calvus, M. Caelius Rufus, Iulius Caesar, M. Iunius Brutus and Messalla Corvinus were good in their own time but that their speeches cannot stand up to scrutiny when compared to the level of imperial orators such as that of the interlocutors Messalla, Iulius Secundus and Maternus. Not even Cicero, whom Aper considers the only republican orator brilliant in all respects, can compete with the interlocutors' perfect oratorical style.⁹ This argument of Aper fits into his picture of a continued and inevitable positive development, but it is nevertheless clear that Aper is made to present Cicero as the best orator of the republican period.¹⁰ There are a few positive remarks about orators other than Cicero in the dialogue, but it would not be fair to say that Tacitus presents a canon of republican orators to stand as role models for imperial orators; the discussion is much more complex than that. Nevertheless, Tacitus' compilation of republican orators offers important clues to the reception of republican oratory and the extent to which

⁶ There is now some scholarship which discusses the structure of the individual interlocutors' speeches and, to some extent, their usage of republican orators; most recently van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*.

⁷ Tac. *Dial.* 34.

⁸ Tac. *Dial.* 17-18.

⁹ Tac. *Dial.* 20-3.

¹⁰ See van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 263-7, 275, 277-9, 286-93. For a discussion of Cicero's reception in the imperial period, see Alain Gowing, "Tully's boat: responses to Cicero in the imperial period," in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 233-50; and for Cicero's reception as an orator, see Henriette van der Blom "Creating a great orator: the self-portrait and reception of Cicero the orator," in *Autorretratos: la creación de la imagen personal en la antigüedad*, ed. Francisco Marco Simón, Francisco Pina Polo, José Remesal Rodríguez (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, forthcoming 3).

republican orators were known in the imperial period. In order to put Tacitus' compilation into context, it shall now be compared to lists of republican orators in other imperial texts.

Republican orators in imperial prose literature

By lists of republican orators are meant passages in which an imperial author has gathered a number of republican orators and mentioned general characteristics of their oratory, usually their style. This does not include passages where specific oratorical occasions, specific speeches or fragments of speeches, or specific oratorical phenomena are mentioned. Such passages would be important when analysing in full the reception of republican oratory in the imperial period, but they are not crucial for our question of specific lists. One example of such a list is a passage in Velleius Paterculus:

iam paene superuacaneum uideri potest eminentium ingeniorum notare tempora. quis enim ignorat diremptos gradibus aetatis floruisse hoc tempore Ciceronem Hortensium, antequam Crassum Antonium Sulpicium, moxque Brutum Calidum Caelium Calpurnium, et proximum Ciceroni Caesarem eorumque uelut alumnos Coruini ac Pollionem Asinium...

‘It can seem almost superfluous to mark periods of outstanding talents. For who does not know that at this time, separated by differences of age, flourished Cicero and Hortensius, and before Crassus, Antonius and Sulpicius, and afterwards Brutus, Calidius, Caelius and Calvus, and closest to Cicero, Caesar and, as if their pupils, Corvinus and Asinius Pollio...’¹¹

¹¹ Vell. Pat. 2.36.3; my translation, as throughout. ‘antequam Crassum Antonium Sulpicium’ is Manutius’ 1571 emendation of ‘†saneque† Crassum, Catonem, Sulpicium’, followed by William S. Watt, *Velleius Paterculus: Historiarum libri duo* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1998) in the Teubner edition. Maria Elefante, *Velleius Paterculus: Ad M. Vinicium consulem libri duo* (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, 1997) (with comm. p. 296) prefers the original reading and argues that Velleius is not always chronological in his narrative and that the coupling of Crassus and Antonius is based on Cicero’s coupling. However, I would argue that it makes sense to have an indication of an earlier period (‘antequam’), because these orators flourished before Cicero and Hortensius, and to replace ‘Catonem’ (presumably Cato Uticensis) with Antonius who belonged to the generation of Crassus and Sulpicius. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Velleius’ list of orators is not unquestionably attested.

Here, as part of his excursus on Latin literature, Velleius presents twelve republican orators in a short passage and characterises these orators as men of outstanding talent.¹² Velleius does not refer to any specific speeches or occasions of speech, but simply presents them as brilliant orators. He divides them into periods according to the height of their oratorical career. This is significant in comparison with Cicero’s history of oratory at Rome, the *Brutus*, as I shall come back to later.

This passage serves as an example of such lists of republican orators in imperial authors. The table below sets out all the republican orators mentioned in Tacitus’ *Dialogus* compared with lists of republican orators in Velleius, Quintilian and a letter from Pliny to Tacitus. The right-hand column sets out which orators were mentioned in Cicero’s *Brutus* which shall be important for the subsequent discussion of the background to these lists. Note that Tacitus’ republican orators are not all mentioned as part of any list; the full compilation of the orators mentioned by Tacitus shall serve as the starting point for the comparison. The table may not be entirely exhaustive in terms of such lists; nevertheless, the significant overlaps in republican orators mentioned in these four imperial works suggest that the comparison is indicative of the choice of republican orators in imperial works of this period.

Republican orators	Tac. <i>Dial.</i>	Vell. <i>Pat.</i>	Quint. <i>Inst.</i> 10.1.105-116; 10.2.25; 12.10.10-11	Plin. <i>Ep.</i> 1.20.4	Cic. <i>Brut.</i>
Menenius Agrippa Lanatus (cos. 503)	X				
M. Porcius Cato the Elder (cos. 195, cens. 184) (3 mentions)	X		X	X	X
Ser. Sulpicius Galba (cos. 144)	X				X
Ti. Sempronius Gracchus (tr. pl. 133) (2 mentions)			X	X	X
C. Sempronius Gracchus (tr. pl. 123, 122) (3 mentions)	X		X	X	X
C. Papirius Carbo (cos. 120)	X				X

¹² See Elefante, *Velleius Paterculus*, 45 on Velleius’ technique of inserting excursus on culture and literature in his historical narrative.

M. Antonius (cos. 99)		X			X
L. Licinius Crassus (cos. 95) (3 mentions)	X	X	X		X
P. Sulpicius Rufus (tr. pl. 88)		X			X
Cn. Pompeius Magnus (cos. 70, 55, 52)	X				X
M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 70, 55)	X				X
M. Hortensius Hortalus (cos. 69) (2 mentions)		X	X		X
M. Tullius Cicero (cos. 63) (4 mentions)	X	X	X	X	(X)
C. Julius Caesar (cos. 59) (4 mentions)	X	X	X	X	X
M. Calidius (pr. 57) (<i>RE</i> 4) (2 mentions)		X	X		X
Ser. Sulpicius Rufus (cos. 51) (<i>RE</i> 95)			X		X
Cassius? (C. Cassius Longinus, cos. desig. 41, <i>RE</i> 59? Or Cassius Severus, d. AD 32?)			X		
M. Caelius Rufus (pr. 48) (4 mentions)	X	X	X	X	X
C. Licinius Macer Calvus (no magistracies but forensic orator) (3 mentions)	X	X	X		X
M. Iunius Brutus (pr. 44, cos. desig. 41) (3 mentions)	X	X	X		(X)
C. Asinius Pollio (cos. 40) (4 mentions)	X	X	X	X	
M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus (cos. suff. 31) (3 mentions)	X	X	X		
Lentuli, Metelli, Luculli and Curiones	X				

Four orators are mentioned in all four imperial works: Cicero, Caesar, Caelius and Asinius Pollio (indicated in bold). Six orators are mentioned in three works: Cato the Elder, Gaius Gracchus, L. Crassus, Calvus, Brutus and Messalla Corvinus. Finally, three orators are mentioned in two works: Ti. Gracchus, Hortensius and Calidius. Although this is a rather crude measure for frequency of mention, this overview does give indication of which republican orators were well known and perhaps considered outstanding in the imperial period.

It is worth noting that two of these orators were operating in the period which modern scholars traditionally have considered transitional between the republican to imperial period, namely Asinius Pollio and Messalla Corvinus. In Tacitus' *Dialogus* and in the lists provided

by Velleius, Quintilian and Pliny, both are mentioned under republican orators.¹³ Apart from the practical perspective of dividing history up in manageable parts, the sources therefore themselves mandate the inclusion of Asinius Pollio and Messalla Corvinus in a consideration of republican orators, even if it presents problems in relation to changes in forensic oratory after Pompeius' court reforms of 52 BC as well as to traditional attempts at periodisation between Republic and Empire.¹⁴ On the other hand, Tacitus himself makes his interlocutor Aper point out that Pollio and Messalla Corvinus lived and spoke in the reign of Augustus and that they are therefore not so far back in time; evidently, periodisation was useful only to a certain extent.¹⁵

Evaluations of republican orators in imperial texts

In order to understand this selection of outstanding republican orators, it is necessary to combine the quantitative approach with a more qualitative consideration of the reasons given for the inclusion of these orators in the lists. If we take the four top orators – Cicero, Caesar, Caelius and Pollio – Cicero is most often presented as the best of all. Quintilian starts off his excursus of great republican orators with a long discussion of Cicero and he argues that it is not without good reason that posterity understands the name of Cicero as the name of eloquence itself ('ut Cicero iam non hominis nomen, sed eloquentiae habeatur'). Quintilian highlights Cicero's polish and charm ('nitor et iucunditas') and maintains that he should be taken as an *exemplum* of good oratory.¹⁶ Pliny mentions the longer speeches of Caesar,

¹³ It is worth mentioning that although the oratorical careers of these orators will not be covered beyond 27 BC in the *Fragments of the Roman Republican Orators* edition, their exclusion from Andrea Balbo, *I frammenti degli oratori romani dell'età augustea e tiberiana* I-II (Alessandria: Ed. dell'Orso, 2004-7) suggests that also some modern scholars solved the problem of periodisation between republican and imperial period as did the ancient sources.

¹⁴ For more discussion of the problematic inclusion of Pollio and Messalla under republican orators, see van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 199, and pages 263-7, 275, 277-9, 286 for a further discussion of these orators in relation to Tacitus' challenge of periodisations through his interlocutors Aper and Messalla. Pompeius' court reform limited the speaking time for prosecution and defence and this may have had an impact on Pollio's and Messalla's forensic oratory as their forensic careers took place mostly after 52 BC.

¹⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 17. For discussion of periodisation in Tacitus and Pliny the Younger in particular, see Matthew B. Roller, "The difference an Emperor makes: notes on the reception of the Republican Senate in the Imperial age," in *The Legacy of the Roman Republican Senate* (Classical Receptions Journal 7), ed. Catherine Steel (Oxford, 2015), 11-30.

¹⁶ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.112-113. In other parts of his work, Quintilian uses Cicero as the most frequent and qualitatively best example of great (republican) oratory. For discussion of Quintilian's use of Cicero, see the more general discussions in Michael Winterbottom, "Cicero and the Silver Age", in *Éloquence et rhétorique chez Cicéron*, (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 28) ed. Wilfried Ludwig (Geneva: Fondation Hardt 1982), 237-66; George Kennedy, "Cicero's oratorical and rhetorical legacy", in *Brill's Companion to Cicero*, ed. James

Pollio, Caelius, and ‘above all Cicero’ (‘in primis M. Tullium’) as argument against the proposition that good speeches are always short and concise.¹⁷ While Velleius does not single out Cicero,¹⁸ Tacitus certainly does and he places great emphasis on Cicero’s style. He even lets his interlocutor Aper argue that Cicero was the only republican orator who was brilliant in all aspects, including style, even if he had his problems too.¹⁹ Evidently, all authors had particular points to make with their emphasis on specific aspects of Cicero’s oratory, but none of them questioned Cicero’s position as the best republican orator. The emphasis on style, charm and polish probably reflects Cicero’s careful choice of words, attention to correct style, and concern for rhythm in period endings, which imperial readers of his speeches could observe, but certainly also an imperial focus on oratorical style rather than content of speeches.²⁰

Caesar is said by both Tacitus and Quintilian to be the one orator who could have competed with Cicero for the position as best orator of his day had he devoted the necessary time to do so.²¹ Quintilian suggests that Caesar’s oratorical strengths lay in his *uis* (strength), *acumen* (cleverness), *concitatio* (motivation), and *elegantia* (elegance in choice of words and in speaking).²² This evaluation is supported in other imperial authors such as Suetonius and Gellius, and Tacitus makes his interlocutor Messalla suggest that it was Caesar’s mother Aurelia who was responsible for the good language of her son, even if we also have information about his excellent education at Rome and abroad.²³ As with Cicero, it is mostly

M. May (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 481-501; Rita degl’Innocenti Pierini, “Cicerone nella prima età imperiale: luci ed ombre su un martire della repubblica”, in *Aspetti della fortuna di Cicerone nella cultura latina: atti del III Symposium Ciceronianum Arpinas: Arpino, 10 maggio 2002*, ed. Emanuele Narducci (Florence: Le Monnier, 2003), 3-54. For Quintilian’s paradigm-shifting portrait of Cicero as orator, see Gowing, “Tully’s Boat.”

¹⁷ Plin. *Ep.* 1.20.4. Pliny uses Cicero’s oratory as a foil for his own oratorical activities in *Ep.* 1.2, 1.5, 1.20, 3.21, 9.26. For discussion of Pliny on Cicero as an orator, see Andrew M. Riggsby “Pliny on Cicero and oratory: self-fashioning in the public eye,” *AJPh* 116 (1995): 123-135.

¹⁸ For discussion of Velleius’ use of Cicero, see Alain Gowing, “The imperial republic of Velleius Paterculus,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola (Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), 411-18; Gowing, “Tully’s Boat,” 237-8.

¹⁹ Tac. *Dial.* 22.1-2, 25.3.

²⁰ And not necessarily a positive attitude to Cicero’s style, as pointed out by Kennedy, “Cicero’s oratorical and rhetorical legacy,” 484-7. For a discussion of the reception of Cicero’s oratory in the imperial period, see van der Blom, “Creating a great orator.” For a discussion of the reception of Cicero generally, Tadeusz Zieliński, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*. Leipzig: Teuber, 1912 is a classic.

²¹ Tac. *Dial.* 21.5; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.114. Plutarch echoes this view: Plut. *Caes.* 3.1-2.

²² Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.114, 10.2.25.

²³ Suet. *Jul.* 55; Gell. *NA* 16.8, 19.8.3; Tac. *Dial.* 28.4-6. Caesar’s education: Cic. *Brut.* 252; Plut. *Caes.* 3.1; Suet. *Gram. et rhet.* 7; Suet. *Jul.* 4.1. For scholarship on Caesar’s oratory, see Eduard Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), 209-12; Alfred Klotz, “Julius (Caesar),” in *RE* 19 (1917): 186-275; Karl Deichgräber, “*Elegantia Caesaris*, Zu Caesar’s Reden und Commentarii,” *Gymnasium* 57 (1950): 112-23; Anton D. Leeman, *Orationis Ratio* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1963), 156-9; Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, 283-92; Anton D. Leeman, “Julius Caesar, the Orator of Paradox,” in *The Orator in Action and Theory in Greece and*

Caesar's style that is emphasised, although we do also hear something about this acumen and motivation.

Lower down from Cicero and Caesar, but nevertheless in the top of republican orators mentioned, Caelius Rufus is said by Quintilian to have had *ingenium* ('talent') and *urbanitas* (which we can translate as 'wit').²⁴ Tacitus' Aper is made to argue that Caelius' speeches possess some of the *nitore* ('polish') and *altitudo* ('elevation of style') which is otherwise a characteristic of imperial oratory. On the negative side there are his commonplace phrases, his clumsy arrangement and his badly constructed periods, which all seem rather old-fashioned to Aper ('sordes autem reliquae uerborum et hians compositio et inconditi sensus redolent antiquitatem').²⁵ This is not an entirely flattering portrait of Caelius' oratory, but it fits into Aper's argument of the development of oratory over time and the focus on style that we observed in the evaluations of Cicero and Caesar.²⁶

Asinius Pollio is credited by Quintilian with outstanding *inuentio* (ability to think up arguments) and *diligentia* ('diligence'), as well as substantial *consilium* ('good sense') and *animus* ('spirit').²⁷ But Tacitus' Aper suggests that Pollio must have developed his style by reading the speeches of the early and rough orators Menenius and Appius (Claudius Caecus) since his style is harsh and unadorned ('durus et siccus').²⁸ This is as much as we hear about Pollio and neither Vellius nor Pliny specify what made Pollio's oratory stand out. The reason is not that there were no speeches of Pollio in circulation since the interlocutor Maternus mentions a forensic speech of Pollio *pro heredibus Urbinae*, which must have been in circulation since Quintilian and later grammarians refer to specific arguments and formulations made by Pollio in this speech. And there were other speeches by Pollio in

Rome: Essays in Honor of G.A. Kennedy, ed. Cecil W. Wooten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 97-110; Catherine Steel, "Lost Orators of Rome," in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, ed. Jon Hall and William Dominik (Malden and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), 244; Elaine Fantham, "Caesar as an Intellectual," in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. Miriam Griffin (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), esp. 145-8; Michael von Albrecht, "Caesar und die Macht des Wortes," in *Cesare: precursore o visionario?*, ed. Gianpaolo Urso (Pisa: ETS, 2010), 223-39, who discusses Caesar's rhetoric across a selection of speeches, letters and *commentarii*-passages. For a full discussion of Caesar as an orator, see Henriette van der Blom, *Oratory and Political Career in the late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1).

²⁴ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.115.

²⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 21.3-4.

²⁶ See van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 281-2 for discussion of Aper's characterisation of Caelius as orator, and pages 263-7, 275-82 on Aper's view of oratory's development over time.

²⁷ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113, 10.2.25.

²⁸ Tac. *Dial.* 21.7. Tacitus also refers to Pollio as an orator in §§ 12, 15, 17, 25, 34, 38. Van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 282-3 discusses the context of Aper's characterisation of Pollio.

circulation, too.²⁹ Quintilian does not focus entirely on Pollio's style in his evaluation, but style is considered. Together with the evaluations of Cicero, Caesar and Caelius as exemplary republican orators, the imperial sources seem to focus on style to a considerable degree.

Implications of the lists of republican orators

This imperial focus on style and our question about the choice of exemplary republican orators in these imperial sources raise at least two further questions: one is about the extent to which republican speeches were read and circulated in the imperial period and the impact such a possible circulation may have had on the imperial impression of republican orators; and the second is whether there was a tradition of good republican orators which was less dependent on careful readings of specimens of republican speeches.

Answering the first question would demand a full study of all republican speeches circulating in the imperial period. This is a task which will become possible to do once the *Fragments of the Roman Republican Orators* project is complete.³⁰ What can be said at present is that Cicero's speeches circulated in the first century AD because they were seen as examples of good Latin prose and good Latin oratory.³¹ Caesar circulated some of his speeches himself, including his *divinatio* and court speech from his early prosecution of Dolabella. Other orations were examined by Augustus in an attempt to sort out his adoptive father's oratorical

²⁹ Quint. *Inst.* 4.1.11, 7.2.4-5, 7.2.26; Charisius *Gramm.* 98.3-5 (*ORF* no. 174, frs. 29-31; Balbo, *I frammenti degli oratori romani* vol. I, F26-28). Other speeches of Pollio mentioned for specific elements too: Quint. *Inst.* 9.2.34-5, 9.3.13, 10.1.22 (*ORF* no. 174, frs. 26, 32, 36; Balbo, *I frammenti degli oratori romani* vol. I, F30, F34); Charisius *Gramm.* 100.23-5, 124.4-7 (*ORF* no. 174, frs. 40-1). Indeed, Andrew Wright, "Velleius Paterculus and L. Munatius Plancus," *CPh* 97 (2002): 178-84 has suggested that Velleius used Pollio's speeches as a supplementary source for this Roman history. For Pollio's oratory, see Jacques André, *La vie et l'oeuvre d'Asinius Pollion* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1949), 68-73. For a discussion of the dialogue's theme on centumviral courts, see van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 190-202.

³⁰ Except for Cicero's speeches which are excluded in the edition.

³¹ Quintilian's extensive references to Cicero and a large number of his speeches testify to the widespread use of Cicero in rhetorical training, while the references in Seneca's *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae* and in Asconius' works illustrate the speeches available to the declamatory schools of the Augustan period and in the AD 50s: Robert A. Kaster, "Becoming 'CICERO'", in *Style and Tradition: Studies in Honor of Wendell Clausen*, ed. P. Knox & C. Foss (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 253-4; Bruce A. Marshall, *A Historical Commentary on Asconius* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), 20. Papyrological evidence from late first century BC up until the fifth century AD shows that the reception of Cicero was not only within the literary elite, but was widespread in schools: Richard Seider, "Beiträge zur Geschichte und Paläographie der antiken Cicerohandschriften," *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* 13 (1979): 101-49. See also Leighton D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission: a survey of the Latin classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 55-6; Teresa Morgan, *Literate education in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 96-100; Kennedy, "Cicero's oratorical and rhetorical legacy," 481, 488; van der Blom, "Creating a great orator."

record, and further speeches were read by later imperial authors such as Gellius.³² No imperial source says directly that orations of Caelius were circulated, but Quintilian and Seneca seem to quote from some speeches. This does not mean that full speeches were circulating, but there was at least some knowledge of details in Caelius' orations.³³ Finally, as mentioned above, several speeches of Pollio appear to have been in circulation. There seems to have been substantial differences in both quantity and quality as to speeches surviving from these four orators with Cicero dominating the field. This might then help to answer the second question in due course.

The second question would also necessitate a full study of all imperial mentions of republican orators. What shall be offered here are some considerations of the relative chronological relationship between the four imperial authors included in this small-scale study. Velleius is our first author, writing under the emperor Tiberius. Although the passage from his work discussed above does not give any indication of the relative quality of the twelve orators mentioned, his subdivision of them into periods is striking and evokes Cicero's *Brutus*. The relative chronology between Quintilian's *Institutio*, Tacitus' *Dialogus* and Pliny's letter to Tacitus is difficult to ascertain because the dating of all three works are relatively uncertain yet all around AD 100. Quintilian's work was probably finished in AD 95,³⁴ while Tacitus' was written after Quintilian's and probably between AD 98 and 103.³⁵ Pliny, who was a pupil of Quintilian and a friend of Tacitus, wrote his letters between AD 96 and 108. Sherwin-White suggests that letter 1.20 is impossible to date for certain but may belong to the earliest group of Pliny's letters.³⁶ If this is true, Pliny's letter to Tacitus was written after Quintilian's work but before Tacitus' dialogue. Although the three authors may not have agreed about the state of oratory in their own day, they operated within the same intellectual circles, probably read the same literature and therefore may have tapped into the same tradition of republican orators.³⁷ Velleius' list overlaps considerably with those in the later imperial authors. Only

³² Schol. Bob. *Sest.* 130.9-12St; Suet. *Jul.* 6, 55.1-4; Quint. *Inst.* 1.5.63; Tac. *Dial.* 21.6; Gell. *NA* 4.16.8, 5.13.8, 13.3.5; Diom. *Ars Gramm.* 400.20-21.

³³ Quint. *Inst.* 1.5.61, 1.6.29, 1.6.42, 4.2.123-4, 9.3.58; Sen. *Ep.* 113.26.

³⁴ The dating is based on various internal references, see Donald A. Russell, *Quintilian: the orator's education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), vol. 1, 2-3.

³⁵ Brink, "Can Tacitus' *Dialogus* be dated?"

³⁶ Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: a Historical and Social Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 132. There is also a link in terms of content between Tacitus' *Dialogus* and Pliny's *Panegyricus* to Trajan; cf. Dominik, "Tacitus and Pliny on Oratory," 328-9.

³⁷ Van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 241-93 (esp. 245-7) compares the selection of republican orators in Quintilian's work with that of the *Dialogus*.

two out of the 22 orators listed in the table above figure in Quintilian, Pliny and Tacitus, but not in Velleius (Cato the Elder and C. Gracchus), while four orators figure in Velleius, Quintilian and Tacitus, but not in Pliny (Licinius Crassus, Macer Calvus, Iunius Brutus and Messalla Corvinus). This overlap suggests that the tradition of exemplary republican orators was established already at the time of Velleius, that is, in the early part of the first century AD.

The tradition may not have developed very smoothly, however, but may have fluctuated. A parallel may be found in the reception of Cicero generally in the first century AD: the sporadic references to Cicero in the first part of the first century AD contrast with the more sustained attention given to Cicero as orator, author and, eventually, politician in the late first century AD, until becoming an *exemplum* of the great orator around AD 100 when Quintilian, Tacitus and Pliny were writing.³⁸

Origin of a tradition of republican orators

There are good reasons to suggest that the tradition of republican orators going into the imperial period derived, at least partly, from Cicero. Cicero's careful circulation of written versions of his speeches and of rhetorical and philosophical treatises meant that his public profile as a brilliant orator was widespread in his own time and afterwards: his speeches became school book exercises already in his own day and, together with the treatises, these works argued and exemplified Cicero's oratorical skills.³⁹ Apart from Cicero himself as an oratorical *exemplum*, his works contain a great number of historical *exempla*, including examples of orators.⁴⁰ Most notably, his rhetorical works *De oratore* and *Brutus* discuss and project Cicero's understanding of oratory at Rome in historical and contemporary perspectives. The *De oratore* sets up several generations of orators as exemplary with L.

³⁸ Gowing, "Tully's Boat"; van der Blom, "Creating a great orator."

³⁹ Especially in the *Orator* Cicero sets himself up as an oratorical role model. For discussion, see Henriette van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models: the Political Strategy of a Newcomer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 303-7. For Cicero's circulation of speeches as school book examples, see Wilfried Stroh, *Taxis und Taktik. Ciceros Gerichtsreden* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1975), 21, 52-4; for Cicero's reasons for publishing a speech or not, see Jane W. Crawford, *M. Tullius Cicero: The Lost and Unpublished Orations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 3-9; for Cicero's speeches as school book examples of good Latin oratory after Cicero's death, see Reynolds, *Texts and Transmission*, 55-6.

⁴⁰ On Cicero's use of *exempla*, see van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models* with further references.

Licinius Crassus and Marcus Antonius (consuls in the 90s BC) as the most prominent.⁴¹ Van den Berg has recently discussed the influence of *De oratore* on Tacitus' *Dialogus* and while he does not discuss the selection of exemplary orators in either work in detail, he carefully and convincingly shows the close relationship between the two works; the *Dialogus* is written within a tradition of rhetorical works in which the *De oratore* played a major part.⁴²

However, it is in the *Brutus* that the links with the later imperial lists of republican orators become most prominent. Tacitus himself has the interlocutor Messalla mention the treatise as a repository of earlier orators.⁴³ In his description of orators throughout Roman history, Cicero offers knowledge of a large number of republican orators, an attempt to divide these many orators into groups according to the period in which they operated, and a framework for evaluation of orators based on oratorical skill and political outlook.⁴⁴ While the periodisation is not taken over indiscriminately by Tacitus, his interlocutors use periods themselves when discussing earlier orators, yet point out some of the problems of periodisation in a dual response to Cicero's *Brutus*.⁴⁵ Quintilian's references to republican orators are also characterised by divisions into periods, while Vellius explicitly splits up his list into eras. Moreover, Cicero's descriptions of orators and language are reused by his imperial successors, most notably by Quintilian's inclusive approach to republican history and by Tacitus' more exclusive approach.⁴⁶ Finally, all of the orators mentioned four, three or two times in our imperial lists of republican orators, apart from Pollio and Messalla Corvinus who peaked after the *Brutus* appeared, are given considerable space in the *Brutus*. The table above

⁴¹ For discussion of these generations in light of a Ciceronian history of oratory at Rome, see Henriette van der Blom, "Ciceronian constructions of the oratorical past," in *Omnium Annalium Monumenta*, ed. Kai Sandberg and Christopher Smith (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, forthcoming 2).

⁴² Van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 208-40 discusses the intertextuality, including the themes of paucity of good orators, education and cultural acquisition as well as the Ciceronian language and dialogue framework adopted by Tacitus. See also Michael Winterbottom, "Returning to Tacitus' *Dialogus*," in *The Orator in Action and Theory in Greece and Rome: Essays in Honor of G.A. Kennedy*, ed. Cecil W. Wooten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 138 for further parallels between *De oratore* (and *Orator*) and the *Dialogus*.

⁴³ Tac. *Dial.* 30.3: 'notus est uobis utique Ciceronis liber qui Brutus inscribitur, in cuius extrema parte (nam prior commemorationem ueterum oratorum habet) sua initia suos gradus, suae eloquentiae uelut quandam educationem refert.' ('You certainly know Cicero's book, which is called *Brutus*, in which he narrates in the final part (for the first part contains a commemoration of the older orators) his beginnings, his stages, and the education, as it were, of his eloquence.'). See van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 243 for discussion of this passage.

⁴⁴ On Cicero's criteria for inclusion of orators in the *Brutus*, see Catherine E. W. Steel, "Cicero's *Brutus*: the end of oratory and the beginning of history?," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 46 (2003): 195-211.

⁴⁵ On Tacitus' interlocutors' discussion of periodisation seen in context of the *Brutus*, see van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 263-7, 275, 277-9, 286-93.

⁴⁶ Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.22. On the parallels between Cic. *Brut.* and Quint. *Inst.* / Tac. *Dial.*, see van den Berg, *The World of Tacitus' Dialogus de oratoribus*, 241-93.

shows which orators were mentioned in the *Brutus* but not the extent or quality of Cicero's mention. However, it is notable, when reading the *Brutus*, that the orators covered by most of our four imperial sources receive more attention from Cicero himself than those covered by just one imperial source. On the basis of these lists, it would seem that Cicero helped shape the history of oratory at Rome in a way which influenced these imperial authors in their selection and description of republican orators.

Concluding thoughts and further perspectives

The quantitative approach to orators mentioned in the imperial sources has suggested not only which orators were remembered but also which orators were more likely to have been overlooked or perhaps even forgotten. It is striking that Tacitus' interlocutors do not mention Tiberius Gracchus, M. Antonius or Hortensius, who were all highly influential orators in their own time, according to Cicero's *Brutus*, but limited the circulation of their speeches in written form.⁴⁷ While Quintilian refers to them (even if not all in the passages scrutinised above), his very inclusive approach is perhaps not representative of the general reception of republican orators without a written record to sustain their memory.⁴⁸ Moreover, his use of Marcus Antonius shows his debt to Cicero's rhetorical treatises rather than to written speeches circulated by the orator himself.⁴⁹ Tacitus' selection of republican orators in the *Dialogus* indicates clearly that the memory and reception of such orators in the imperial period was highly dependent on their written presence. The example of Cicero's fluctuating reception in the first century AD suggests, however, that the relationship between the political significance of these orators in their own time and their (changeable) popularity in the imperial period was more complex and would merit further study. Furthermore, this

⁴⁷ According to Cicero, Antonius refused to circulate written speeches because he wanted to keep open the option of denying earlier statements (Cic. *Cluent.* 140). Cic. *Brut.* 91-2 discusses further possible motivations for not circulating written versions of speeches. Cic. *Brut.* 104 says that there were written speeches of Tiberius Gracchus in circulation (*Gracchi habemus orationes*) but not which ones or how many; by comparison with the testimonia about circulation and seemingly verbatim fragments of his brother's oratory (testimonia: Cic. *Brut.* 125-6; *Tusc.* 3.49; Plin. *HN* 8.33; fragments: no. 48 in Enrica Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta Liberae Rei Publicae* (Torino, Paravia: 1976 (4th ed.) and discussion in van der Blom, *Oratory and Political Career*, ch. 3), it seems that Tiberius circulated a limited number of speeches. We only know of one of Hortensius' many speeches, his defence of Messalla in 51 BC: Cic. *Brut.* 328; Val. Max. 5.9.2.

⁴⁸ Ti. Gracchus: Quint. *Inst.* 5.13.24 (not as orator), 7.4.13; M. Antonius: Quint. *Inst.* 2.15.7, 2.17.6, 3.1.19, 3.6.45, 7.3.16, 8.pr.13, 9.3.8, 9.3.171, 12.1.21, 12.9.5; Hortensius: Quint. *Inst.* 1.5.12, 2.1.11, 3.5.11, 4.5.24, 6.3.98, 8.3.35, 10.1.23, 10.5.13, 10.6.4, 11.2.24, 11.3.8, 12.7.4, 12.10.11, 12.10.27.

⁴⁹ Van der Blom, "Ciceronian constructions of the oratorical past."

conclusion about written speeches influencing the imperial memory of republican oratory has a further implication, namely that the transmission of republican political communication (whether speeches delivered in the senate, the *contio* or the courts) and its practitioners took place outside its original political context and instead within a literary context of historical writing, literary letters and treatises on oratory.⁵⁰

The discussion of these lists of republican orators have raised questions about periodisation and style, too. Cicero and his imperial successors lived in a society much concerned with the past and, since Cicero's time if not before, with creating chronologies and periods of history.⁵¹ Cicero's periodisations in the *Brutus* must be seen in this cultural context, but Tacitus questions this concept through his interlocutors who present conflicting notions of periods as either static (Maternus) or developing (Aper) and as strictly defined (Maternus) or blurred (Aper). Already here we see a change in attitude to republican oratory as one which cannot simply be understood as neatly divided into periods, but has to be qualified and questioned. This explains, among other things, the inclusion of Asinius Pollio and Messalla Corvinus in the lists of republican orators: where does the Republic end and the imperial period begin?

Another concern of our imperial authors is style, especially in the *Dialogus*. The republican orators included are characterised mainly on the basis of their style and to some extent their delivery, much less on their selection of material and arguments (*inuentio*), arrangement of arguments (*dispositio*) or memory (*memoria*) which were all discussed at length in Cicero's rhetorical treatises. This seems related to the new political situation, where orators of the imperial age tried to obtain oratorical fame and prestige through their brilliant displays of style rather than well-thought out arguments.⁵² As Aper is made to say in the dialogue, there

⁵⁰ Since we do not have extant political speeches from the imperial period, apart from Claudius' speech on the Gallic senators captured on the Lugdunum Tablet and Pliny's *Panegyricus*, it is unclear to what extent republican oratory and political communication was employed within a political context. Close scrutiny of the fragments in Balbo, *I frammenti degli oratori romani*, might give a little information, but hardly the full picture. For the debt to Cicero in the *Panegyricus*, see Gesine Manuwald, "Ciceronian praise as a step towards Pliny's *Panegyricus*," in *Pliny's Praise: the Panegyricus in the Roman World*, ed. Paul Roche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵¹ Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 7-42 on the cultural habit of creating timeframes and, on pages 22-23, on the works of Cornelius Nepos and T. Pomponius Atticus, the latter directly influencing Cicero's *Brutus*: Cic. *Brut.* 15; Nep. *Att.* 18.1-2.

⁵² Jean-Michel David, "Formes du prestige oratoire à Rome, sous la République et le Haut-Empire," in *Le Prestige. Autour des formes de la différenciation sociale*, ed. Frédéric Hurlet, Isabelle Rivoal, and Isabelle Sidéra (Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 2014), 35-45.

is no longer time for long-winded speeches because the audience demands snappy and elegant speeches which satisfy their highly developed taste for aesthetics and literature.⁵³ Not even Cicero, the pinnacle of republican oratory and famous for his stylistic lustre, would have been tolerated. Did style really replace content or does the imperial focus on style cover up ongoing concerns with the possibilities for political communication through oratory? And, finally, to what extent has the imperial reception of republican oratory through a written record coloured the presentation of republican orators? The engagement through written speeches only may help to further explain the focus on style rather than memory and gestures, and perhaps even content. The written medium and the changed political situation made oratorical style the more accessible and the more prudent choice of focus for authors and oratorical practitioners of the imperial period interested in republican orators and their speeches.

⁵³ Tac. *Dial.* 20.1-3.

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