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978-1-107-05193-5 — Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic  
Henriette van der Blom  
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## ORATORY AND POLITICAL CAREER IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC

*Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic* is a pioneering investigation into political life in the late Roman Republic. It explores the nature and extent to which Roman politicians embraced oratorical performances as part of their political career and how such performances influenced the careers of individual orators such as Gaius Gracchus, Pompeius Magnus and Julius Caesar. Through six case studies, this book presents a complex and multifaceted picture of how Roman politicians employed oratory to articulate their personal and political agendas, to present themselves to a public obsessed with individual achievement and, ultimately, to promote their individual careers. By dealing specifically with orators other than Cicero, this study offers much-needed alternatives to our understanding of public oratory in Rome. Moreover, the assessment of the impact of public speeches on the development of political careers provides new perspectives on the hotly debated nature of republican political culture.

HENRIETTE VAN DER BLOM is Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Birmingham. An expert in the fields of Roman republican history, politics and oratory, her research focuses on political life, the ways in which Roman politicians presented themselves to the public and the complex role of oratory in politics. She is involved in a project to collect, translate and comment on the surviving fragments of all non-Ciceronian oratory from the republican period, and she has previously published *Cicero's Role Models: The Political Strategy of a Newcomer* and *Community and Communication: Oratory and Politics in Republican Rome* (edited with C. Steel).



ORATORY AND  
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REPUBLIC

HENRIETTE VAN DER BLOM

*University of Birmingham*



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*For my family*



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## *Preface*

This study examines the role of oratory in political career-making during the late Roman republican period through a close analysis of the nature and extent to which Roman politicians embraced oratorical performances as part of their political career and how such performances influenced the careers of these politicians. The aim of this study is to present the multifaceted ways in which oratory was used by elite politicians in their careers and, at the same time, to showcase alternatives to Cicero's model of what oratory could and should be used for in politics and in a political career.

The study begins with a discussion of the role of oratory in Roman republican politics, the possibilities and limitations of oratory, and the ways in which we can approach the orators of the republican period through the extant source material. This leads into a discussion of the oratorical situations and locations available to politicians and the ways in which politicians could exploit these situations to push forward their careers: the courts, the *contio* (popular assembly) and the senate offered different possibilities in terms of audience, timing and accessibility which ambitious politicians could exploit to their own advantage. There were other routes to political success, and factors such as ancestry, wealth, patronage and networks, military exploits and intangible factors such as charisma shall be discussed as potential factors for a politician's success. The second part of the book offers six case studies of politicians active during the late Republic: C. Sempronius Gracchus, Cn. Pompeius Magnus, C. Julius Caesar, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, M. Porcius Cato (the younger) and Marcus Antonius (the triumvir). The analyses of their oratorical activities within the context of their political careers demonstrate the sheer variety in oratorical skills, approaches to oratory, the effects of oratory and the complexities of public oratory for career-promoting purposes. They also show that there was no standard way of forging a political career because each politician had to work with the career factors and



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constantly changing possibilities available to him. These case studies ultimately show the crucial importance of creating and maintaining a credible and powerful public profile to promote a political career.

In the case studies, the references to biographical studies of the six orators in question have been limited for three reasons: the lives of these orators are well known already and it would be straightforward for anyone interested to identify the relevant biographies; second, the scholarship on, for example, Caesar is vast and would clutter up the footnotes unnecessarily; and, finally, the focus in this study is not to provide a full biography of these orators' lives but rather to analyse their oratory as part of their careers.

This book was, for the most part, written when I was a Carlsberg Fellow and recipient of a post-doctoral award by Carlsbergfondet in Denmark. This award allowed me to continue my research as senior member of the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford, and, first, lecturer at Merton College, Oxford, and later research fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford. I am most grateful to all four institutions and their members for their generosity and unfailing support of research. The book was finished after I had taken up a post at the University of Glasgow, and I should like to thank the institution and my colleagues for believing in me and my project. My work has also benefited greatly from the excellent library collections at the British School at Rome, the library at the University of Glasgow and, especially, the Sackler and Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford.

I have been fortunate in receiving feedback on some of the ideas in this book from conference and seminar audiences in Zaragoza, Glasgow, Newcastle, Oxford, Amherst and Münster. I should like to thank the organisers of these events for the kind invitations to speak and the audiences for their questions and suggestions.

During the period in which I worked on the book, a project of crucial importance for the book was set in motion. The *Fragments of the Roman Republican Orators* (FRRO) project, conceived years before its formal start in 2012, aims to provide scholars and students of republican Rome with the material necessary to reassess the role of non-Ciceronian oratory. As such, writing this book would have been quite a lot easier if FRRO had been completed before I started writing, but I have been fortunate enough to have been on board the project from its start as editorial board member, advisory board member and (for 2012–13) Research Fellow. This book has benefited enormously from the research and discussions we have had on the FRRO project, especially but not exclusively with Catherine Steel. Catherine also generously read the entire book in draft and offered



characteristically honest and incisive suggestions, for which I am tremendously grateful.

I am also grateful to Chris Pelling who read several chapters in early draft and kindly allowed me to read parts of his commentary on Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* in advance of publication; Lindsay Driediger-Murphy for help with religious aspects; Lynn Fotheringham, Miriam Griffin and Kit Morrell for commenting on my work on Cato; Carsten Hjort Lange for help with aspects of the Roman triumph; Annelies Cazemier for reading and discussing various parts of my work; Robert Morstein-Marx for sharing with me his views on promulgation of laws; Karl-J. Hölkeskamp for advising me on Caesar and the late Republic more generally; Erich Gruen for reading through several draft chapters and giving support and helpful advice; Henrik Mouritsen for positive and helpful feedback at a time when the project needed it; Martin Jehne for a wonderful discussion of the project and Caesar's career in front of Dresden's beautiful Frauenkirche; Wolfgang Blösel for sharing with me central chapters of his unpublished Habilitationsschrift on the demilitarisation of the Roman elite; and Chris van den Berg for sharing with me his book on Tacitus' *Dialogus* before publication. At the final stage of writing, Francisco Pina Polo, Kathryn Tempest and Amy Russell generously read the entire typescript and offered typically sound suggestions and cheerful support. Needless to say, none of these experts are to blame for any infelicities or errors in the book.

Michael Sharp and his team at Cambridge University Press as well as the anonymous readers have offered generous and professional advice throughout the process.

Nicholas Cole has been involved with the project from the very beginning as a source of inspiration, critical questions and encouragement, and as a good friend willing to spare time for yet another discussion over coffee and cake of what the Romans were really up to.

My friends and family have offered unfailing support of all kinds during the years it took to write this book. I would have wished my wonderful father-in-law, Rolf Norstrand, to have seen this book, but at least he knew of its beginnings. It is to my family that this book is dedicated.



## Abbreviations

References to ancient authors and texts follow the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edn) followed by Arabic numerals. All references to Cicero's letters are given with vulgate numbers and, in parentheses, the numbering provided in Shackleton Bailey's editions of the letters – for example, Cic. *Fam.* 12.4.1 (SB 363).

Quotations are taken from the most recent edition in the Oxford Classical Texts series unless otherwise stated or, in the case of quotations, from later grammarians or Fronto where the relevant editions are given under the abbreviations below. Translations are my own except when indicated otherwise.

References to modern literature follow the Harvard style ('Author (Date)'); the full bibliographic data are to be found in the Bibliography. Abbreviations of periodicals follow the conventions of *L'Année Philologique*. In addition, the following abbreviations have been adopted:

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (1972–). Berlin.
CAH IX <sup>2</sup>	J. A. Crook, A. W. Lintott and E. Rawson (eds.) (1994) <i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i> , vol. IX, 2nd edn Cambridge.
Char.	K. Barwick (1925) <i>Charisius: Ars Grammatica</i> . Leipzig.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin.
FRHist	T. J. Cornell et al. (2013) <i>The Fragments of the Roman Historians</i> , vols. I–III. Oxford.
GL	H. Keil (1857–80) <i>Grammatici Latini</i> , vols. I–VIII. Leipzig.
Gloss. Lat.	W. M. Lindsay (1926–31) <i>Glossaria Latina</i> . Paris.
Insc. Ital.	<i>Inscriptiones Italiae</i> (1931/2–)
ILLRP	A. Degrassi (1957–63) <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae</i> . Firenze.
ILS	H. Dessau (1892) <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> . Berlin.



xii	Abbreviations
<i>LTUR</i>	E. M. Steinby (ed.) (1993–9) <i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae</i> . Rome.
<i>MRR</i>	T. R. S. Broughton (1951–2, 1986) <i>The Magistrates of the Roman Republic</i> , vols. I–III. New York and Atlanta.
<i>RE</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll (eds.) (1893–) <i>Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . Stuttgart.
<i>RhL</i>	K. Halm (1963) <i>Rhetores Latini Minores</i> . Leipzig.
<i>RRC</i>	M. H. Crawford (1974) <i>Roman Republican Coinage</i> , vols. I–II. Cambridge.
<i>St.</i>	T. Stangl (1912) <i>Ciceronis orationum scholiastae</i> . Vienna.
<i>v. d. Hout</i>	M. P. J. van den Hout (1954) <i>M. Cornelii Frontonis Epistulae</i> . Leiden.



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