



INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY
AND ART HISTORY OF ROMANIAN
ACADEMY CLUJ-NAPOCA



UNIVERSITATEA TEHNICĂ
DIN CLUJ-NAPOCA

JAHA
JOURNAL OF ANCIENT HISTORY
AND ARCHAEOLOGY

editura
MEGA

Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology



Scopus®



Clarivate
Analytics



Central and Eastern European Online Library

EBSCO



ERIH PLUS
EUROPEAN REFERENCE INDEX FOR THE
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOAJ
DIRECTORY OF
OPEN ACCESS
JOURNALS

No. 12-1 / 2025

CONTENTS

STUDIES

ANCIENT HISTORY

Vasileios SPANOS

ANCIENT PHTHIA & MODERN PHARSALUS: LIVES PARALLEL OR OPPOSITE?.....3

Olivier HEKSTER

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST THROUGH THE PRESENT: THE CASE OF GAIUS SCRIBONIUS CURIO.....16

Matt A. CASADO

ON THE LOCATION OF URCI, MURGI AND THE BAETICA-TARRACONENSIS FRONTIER IN ROMAN HISPANIA.....22

Annamária-I. PÁZSINT

WORKING IN MOESIA INFERIOR. THE CASE OF SLAVES AND FREEDPERSONS.....28

Lucrețiu MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA, Ana ODOCHICIUC

THE MOBILITY VECTORS OF SOLDIERS RECRUITED FROM THE RURAL MILIEU IN MOESIA INFERIOR (OR THRACIA). II. THE INSCRIPTIONS FROM DOMITIANUS.....41

Florian MATEI-POPESCU, Peter ROTHENHÖFER

A NEW MILITARY DIPLOMA FOR A VETERAN OF THE EXERCITUS DACIAE POROLISSENSIS.....50

Péter KOVÁCS

PROCURATORES PANNONIAE, PANNONIAN PROCURATORS.....54

ARCHAEOLOGY

Akın TEMÜR

SYNCRETISM OF ANCIENT GOD-KINGS AND ANIMAL GODS: THE SPHINX.....66

Volkan ÖZTEKİN

SIDE'S EARLY IMPERIAL COLONNADED (?) STREET IN THE DIRECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS – SMALL “C” STREET STUDIES.....78

Marisa TIVADAR

ROMAN RURAL LIFE IN ANCIENT DACIA. A BRIEF HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW.....91

Geanina A. BUTISEACĂ, Ovidiu ȚENȚEA,

Veronika BRYCHOVA, Iuliana VASILIEV

NEW INSIGHTS IN THE ROMAN COLONISATION OF DACIA: DID THE ROMAN CLIMATIC OPTIMUM INFLUENCED THE ROMAN EXPANSION IN EASTERN EUROPE?.....102

Cristina-Georgeta ALEXANDRESCU, Albert BALTRES, Bogdan OLARIU

THE FIRST RECORDS ON LATE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE FORTIFICATIONS ON THE DUNAVĂȚ PROMONTORY, MURIGHIOL COMMUNE, TULCEA COUNTY (RO). CONSIDERATIONS ON LOCALIZATION AND USED LITHIC MATERIALS.....119

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Cătălin PAVEL

THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR BY THE BLACK SEA: A NEW KLEINMEISTERSCHALE FRAGMENT FROM HISTRIA.....148

Suhal SAĞLAN

HELLENISTIC PERIOD WHEEL-MADE TERRACOTTA LAMPS FROM THE SINOP MUSEUM.....162

Gabriel ANDREICA

POTTER OR ARTIST? CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF ROMAN POTTERY DECORATED WITH INCISIONS, IMPRESSIONS AND STAMPS FROM POTAISSA.....178

Vitalie BĂRCĂ, Sever-Petru BOȚAN, Anca MATIȘ

NOTES ON A GLASS BEAKER WITH APPLIED DECORATION FROM THE SARMATIAN CEMETERY OF TIMIȘOARA – HLADIK 1 (TIMIȘ COUNTY).....196

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MAPPING

Casandra BRAȘOVEANU, Andrei ASĂNDULESEI, Radu-ALEXANDRU BRUNCHI

RESTORING THE BARROW LANDSCAPE OF NE ROMANIA: INITIAL REFLECTIONS.....211

Edmond NOGYI, Răzvan MATEESCU, Nica CIUBOTARU

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE NUMBER OF TERRACES IN THE AREA OF SARMIZGETUSA REGIA.....223

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOPOGRAPHY

Edmond NOGYI

THE ENSEMBLE OF FORTIFICATIONS FROM COSTEȘTI-BLIDARU: A VISIBILITY STUDY.....232

Metodi MANOV, Vassil DAMYANOV

AN UNKNOWN TYPE OF BRONZE COIN OF THE RULER OF THRACE – KAVAROS.....259

NUMISMATICS

Cristian GĂZDAC, Călin TIMOC

COINS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT (VI). POJEJENA – AN AUXILIARY FORT WITH A DIFFERENT PATTERN OF COIN CIRCULATION THAN THE PROVINCE OF DACIA.....265

REVIEWS

Fernando BLANCO-ROBLES

REVIEW: FERNANDO LÓPEZ SÁNCHEZ, MARISA BUENO AND DAVID MARTÍNEZ CHICO (EDS.), COINS, RICHES, AND LANDS. PAYING FOR MILITARY MANPOWER IN ANTIQUITY AND EARLY MEDIEVAL TIMES, OXFORD & PHILADELPHIA, OXBOW BOOKS, 2025, 265 P. ISBN 978-1-78925-990-2 (HARDCOVER EDITION) // 978-1-78925-991-9 (DIGITAL EDITION).....293

ISSN 2360 266x
ISSN-L 2360 266x

Design & layout: Francisc Baja



EDITURA MEGA | www.edituramega.ro
e-mail: mega@edituramega.ro

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST THROUGH THE PRESENT: THE CASE OF GAIUS SCRIBONIUS CURIO

Olivier HEKSTER

Radboud University, Netherlands
olivier.hekster@hotmail.com

Abstract: This article argues that the parallels between the last years of the Roman Republic and contemporary society can help us to better understand the past. Taking an explicitly presentist approach to history, it takes the difficulties that *modern* politicians and authors writing about politics have in understanding the behaviour of their allies and opponents as a starting point, and claims that *ancient* authors will have encountered the same problems. Modern authors, it seems, often describe the actions and intentions of opponents based on their own hopes and expectations. Taking Cicero's writing about Gaius Scribonius Curio as a case study, the article suggests that similar emotions may well have distorted Cicero's interpretation of Curio's intentions and actions, taking away much of the evidentiary basis for a crucial moment in late-Republican history.

Keywords: *Cicero, Gaius Scribonius Curio, presentism, fall of the Roman Republic, Roman Republican politics.*

THE ROLE OF PRESENTISM IN WRITING HISTORY

In many ways, the last years of the Roman Republic are strikingly comparable to those of contemporary society. In a heavily polarized political climate, issues of land reform, judicial control and expensive military engagements were vehemently discussed, with different men struggling to gain a dominant position in the state. Political discourse became increasingly antagonistic, and mob violence became part of the political repertoire. This is not a new observation. Especially the parallels between the late Roman Republic and the modern United States have been the subject of many papers and books.¹ The point of many of these is to draw lessons for now out of the past, in a similar way as the fall of the Roman Empire has been regularly employed as a warning of what may happen to current superstates.²

There is, however, another way in which the parallel functions. The modern world has an impact on historians' understanding of the past. After all, contemporary issues inevitably influence those studying past. As famously expressed by Benedetto Croce, 'The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of contemporary history because, however remote in time the events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present

¹ STRUNK 2022.

² BURTON 2011; HEATHER/RAPLEY 2023.

situations wherein those events vibrate'.³ Many later historians have echoed the sentiment, noting how by necessity history is written 'through the eyes of the present'.⁴

In fact, the most famous analysis of the establishment of the Augustan totalitarian regime that would follow the political collapse of the Roman Republic, Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution* (1939), can only be understood as a reflection of early-twentieth-century history. Syme noted issues of propaganda and dictatorship in his own time and consequently saw similar patterns in the ancient world. The resulting analysis illuminated both his object of study and early-twentieth-century politics. Importantly, the very visible dictatorships of Syme's time, with their organized propaganda machines, allowed Syme to note the importance of 'the organization of opinion' in the Augustan age.⁵ Similarly, seminal works on the late Republic are clearly influenced by the times in which they were written, which ultimately allows them to note motivations and patterns in the past that previous scholarship had not noted. Fergus Millar's *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (1998) rightly and forcefully brought the democratic element into discussions of Roman republican politics, whilst being very much the result of Millar's own highly democratic ideals about how systems *should* function and their confrontation with contemporary political events and university politics.⁶ Likewise, it is tempting to link Christian Meier's famous *Res publica amissa*, in which he coined the notion of 'Krise ohne alternative' (crisis without alternative), both to events in the Weimar republic and to the simmering and much suppressed protest movements of Western Germany that would turn to violent action at the end of the 1960's.⁷

So contemporary circumstances influence historical thinking, regularly helping scholars to find a useful lens through which to analyse the past. Yet this influence of the present on writing history often remains implicit and apparently unintentional. This 'presentism', as it is called, remains suspect amongst professional historians. Recently some sort of countermovement against this negative attitude has developed, especially through the works of David Armitage, Naomi Oreskes and Laurent Loisson.⁸ They have pleaded 'in defense of presentism', especially of so-called 'motivational presentism' – effectively an explicit acceptance that all historians at least partly 'define our choice of historical subjects ... to answer

contemporary dilemmas or concerns'.⁹ But even recent advocates of presentism find fault with what Oreskes has termed 'methodological presentism', in which an historian explicitly uses 'current or recent events to understand the past'.¹⁰

This article is an experiment in embracing presentism, not just because it is unavoidable in its 'motivational' form, but also because when looking at the last days of the Roman Republic 'methodological' presentism may help settle some longstanding debates and complicate some longstanding assumptions. The current events at hand are upcoming populist movements in modern democracies, and the reactions of established politicians to them. These, I will argue, can help us better understand ancient descriptions of and reactions to the events leading to the fall of the Roman Republic.

PRESENTISM AND POLITICAL WRITING

Our understanding of the end of the Roman Republic is to a large extent still based on the writings of a few men who were heavily involved in the politics of their time, primarily Cicero.¹¹ Much academic discussion focuses on his speeches, letters and historical interpretations. But if modern politics has taught us anything, it is that what politicians express is a) not necessarily their actual opinion and b) not necessarily an accurate or rational analysis of the situation. The first point has been mostly incorporated into historical research – as is e.g. clear from recent publications about the literary self-presentation of Cicero (and Caesar, our other major source for the events).¹² Yet the basic assumption in most literature on the fall of the Roman Republic is still that the surviving literary testimonies present rational suppositions and reflections.¹³ If modern behaviour is a guide, this seems unlikely. Not only do specific feelings, moods and emotions influence our perceptions, we also find it difficult to accurately assess other people's (political) intentions.¹⁴

Recent American political events, moreover, show how people regularly expect an opponent to act on what they hope he or she might do, rather than on their past behaviour or even stated intent. There was, for instance, no shortage of public utterances before Donald Trump took up the presidency in 2017 and 2025 that he was unlikely to act on his political utterances – such as building a Wall at the southern frontier of the US, or 'being a dictator... on day one' of his presidency – and disappointment when he then did (try to) implement these measures.¹⁵ Simultaneously, there

³ CROCE 1938, 5: "Il bisogno pratico, che è nel fondo di ogni giudizio storico, conferisce a ogni storia il carattere di 'storia contemporanea,' perché, per remoti e remotissimi che sembrano cronologicamente i fatti che vi entrano, essa è, in realtà, storia sempre riferita al bisogno e alla situazione presente, nella quale quei fatti propagano le loro vibrazioni"[translation SPRIGGE 1941].

⁴ For a brief historiographical overview David Armitage, 'In Defense of Presentism', in: MCMAHON 2023, 44–69, esp. nn. 18–22; CARR 1961, 24.

⁵ SYME 1939; OSBORNE 2017, 220; HEKSTER 2020.

⁶ NORTH 2002, 2–3 explicitly links Millar's 'intellectual commitment, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to searching for a better understanding of the Roman political system in the republican period' to his commitment to 'the democracy of our own day, not that of the past'. Cf. <https://pastandpresent.org.uk/the-political-narratives-of-britain-in-the-nineties/> (January 2021).

⁷ MEIER 1966. Note also the long introduction to the second edition of 1980; THOMAS 2003.

⁸ ARMITAGE 2023; ORESKES 2013; LOISON 2016. Also the various articles in *Past & Present* 234 (2017), especially WALSHAM 2017 and RUBIN 2017, and TAMM/OLIVIER 2019.

⁹ ORESKES 2013, 603.

¹⁰ ORESKES 2013, 600–601; ARMITAGE 2023, n. 48.

¹¹ On the importance of Cicero for our understanding of the late republic (and of Cicero), see still RAWSON 1983, xv: 'it is particularly hard to say how good his judgement and policy were'.

¹² LÄMLE 2017; ROSELAAR 2017; CORREA 2012. Cf. DIMITROVA 2018.

¹³ Even the careful observations in LINTOTT 2008, 2–3 mainly emphasise that Cicero was 'not a detached and impartial narrator', but do not challenge his capacity to understand what he was writing about. The point is not raised either in Peter White's convincingly cautionary remarks about the biases in Ciceronian letter writing: WHITE 2010, 3–29. ROSILLO-LÓPEZ 2018, 80, recognizes how difficult it is to 'determine [someone's] political views' but still assume that Roman politicians held consistent views, and that others were able to rationally assess what these were.

¹⁴ FORGAS 1991; BOWER 1991; SCHERER/WINDSCHITL/SMITH 2013. Cf. CARLSON/SETTLE 2022, 1–19.

¹⁵ SULLIVAN 2015; MCCASKILL 2016; RAMPPELL 2023.

<https://archive.nytimes.com/publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/>

was a substantial group of people writing down how they *did* expect him to keep to his political promises. Similarly, during attempts to establish a coalition government in the Netherlands in the aftermath of the November 2023 elections, anticipation on what the protagonists were likely to do seemed to depend on what people hoped the politicians in question were going to do as much as their past performance or promises. So prefixed ideas about what (opposing) political actors *ought* to do influence what people think they are *going* to do.¹⁶

HOPE AND POLITICS IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC: THE CASE OF CURIO

Can these current and recent events help us to understand the Roman past? At least they can supply a corrective to historical consensus. What happens if we allow for the possibility that politicians who lived through and wrote about events in the late Roman Republic mixed up their expectations about an opponent's or ally's actions with that person's actual behaviour, much like modern politicians seem to do?

An illustrative case is formed by the figure of Gaius Scribonius Curio (c. 85 BCE–49 BCE). His actions have been deemed to be crucial in the lead-up to the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Curio entered Roman politics in the 60s BCE as alleged member of young radicals (*barbatuli iuvenes*),¹⁷ but Cicero describes the young man's oratorical skills and fierce opposition to the so-called First Triumvirate with enthusiasm, which lead to something described by Cicero as friendship.¹⁸ There also (according to Cicero) seems to have been some antagonism between Curio and Caesar.¹⁹ Curio served as quaestor of Asia in 55 BCE, and upon his return to Rome, Cicero hints at great political expectations placed on Curio, whom, Cicero hoped, would help restore the *Res publica*.²⁰ Curio was then elected tribune of the people in 51 BCE.²¹ This election came at a time of intense discussion concerning the position of Caesar – whose period of *imperium* (and with it legal immunity) through his *provincia* in Gaul was coming to its end. In combination with the open antagonism between Caesar and Pompey, the end of legal immunity would leave Caesar open to serious charges against him, so he tried his utmost to avoid an even temporary loss of *imperium*. This situation would lead to massive legal machinations, and in 50 BCE to a proposal by Curio for both Caesar and Pompey to step down simultaneously – which was then vetoed by the consul Marcellus, who was

consequently to ask Pompey to raise an army against Caesar. At the end of his mandate, Curio fled to Caesar – giving the latter an excuse to march on Rome to 'protect the tribunes of the people' – and fought on the Caesarian side in the civil war, during which he would die.²²

Discussions about Curio's political career inevitably revolve around this role as tribune and his apparent 'turning' for Caesar, which has been understood as the immediate cause for the breakout of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. Evidence for his behaviour comes from Cicero's writing and that of later imperial writers. The first of these imperial sources is Velleius Paterculus (c. 20 BCE–c. 30 CE), who describes Curio as corrupt and self-interested. He clearly, according to Velleius, changed alliance, and did so from the basest of motivations.²³ Such a shift in positioning between Pompey and Caesar may also be suggested in a letter from Caelius to Cicero from 51 BCE.²⁴ In the text, Caelius expresses hope that Curio would favour the *boni* and the senate, but also mentions that Caesar, who was in the habit of financing 'the lowest of men', had despised Curio (*ualde contempsit*). This has been interpreted, by some, as proof that Curio had approached Caesar for a bribe, which would have then been covered up.²⁵ Another letter from Caelius to Cicero also describes Curio as unexpectedly changing his position toward Caesarian goals.²⁶

This image of Curio as a turncoat has long and largely been shared by modern scholars.²⁷ Some notable alternative explanations to greed for Curio's changes of heart have been put forward, ranging from revenge because his proposals had been rejected to a personal quest for glory.²⁸ Recently, Loonis Logghe has suggested a more complex reconstruction. According to him, Curio had been an opponent of both Caesar and Pompey, pursuing his own political program after his election as a tribune, with plebeian interests at heart. There were no real 'turns', but rather attempts to pursue his own politics. In a progressively polarized environment, Curio found it impossible to have his decisions approved and his decision to 'turn' to Caesar – never really acritical or enthusiastic – was simply the best option for realizing his intended program.²⁹

This seems a likely scenario, but even this interpretation assumes consistent and well-considered choices from the part of Curio, and a realistic interpretation of events from the part of Cicero. For instance, the only evidence for Curio's critical attitude towards Caesar – or even disillusionment

com/2015/11/30/taking-trump-at-his-word/; <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/trump-symbolically-anthony-scaramucci-232848>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/11/13/trump-threaten-punish-enemies-president/>; <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/us/national/politics/2023/12/08/trump-s-vow-to-only-be-a-dictator-on-day-one--follows-growing-worry-over-his-authoritarian-rhetoric>; <https://www.vox.com/2023/11/14/23958866/trump-vermin-authoritarian-democracy>.

¹⁶ MASSEY/SIMMONS/ARMOR 2011; SLEAT 2013.

¹⁷ Cic. Att. I.14; GRUEN 1973; TATUM 1991; WILL 1991, 62–64.

¹⁸ Cic. Att. II.18.1, 19.3. For recent discussion on the relationship between Cicero and Curio, see; DANZER 2020; VAN DEN BERG 2021, 93–97.

¹⁹ so much so that Caesar would, according to Cicero, attempt to frame him in the Vettius affair: Cic. Att. II.24.2. On this, see CRISSANTHOS 2019, 79–80.

²⁰ Cic. Fam. II.1.2, II.3.1–2, II.4.2, II.5

²¹ Cic. Fam. VIII.4; VIII.10; II.7.

²² MORSTEIN-MARX 2021, 258–320. On Cicero's position and views:

LINTOTT 2008, 281–282; VAN DER BLOM 2016, 256–257.

²³ Vel Pat. II.48.3–5, with WOODMAN 1983, 77–81. This view of Curio is echoed in App. BC II.26–31; Cass. Dio XL.59–66; Liv. Per. CIX; Luc. IV.799–824; Plut. Ant. 5.1; Plut. Caes. 29–30; Plut. Pomp. 58; Suet. Iul. 29; Tac. Ann. XI.7.

²⁴ Cic. Fam. VIII.10.

²⁵ DETTENHOFER/IUVENTUS 1992, 54–55, but note LOGGHE 2016, 359–361 for cautionary remarks.

²⁶ Cic. Fam. VIII.6.

²⁷ LOGGHE 2016, 353, n. 2 for the list.

²⁸ LACEY 1961 attributed the *volte-face* to the rejection of his proposal as *pontifex*, in 50 BCE, for an intercalary month in the same year, which would have turned him vengeful;

DETTENHOFER/IUVENTUS 1992 1992 instead focused on Curio's quest for glory and special *honores* from Caesar. Cf. GRUEN 1973, 466–488.

²⁹ LOGGHE 2016.

with him – is from a letter by Cicero to his friend Atticus. In it, Cicero describes a conversation he had with Curio, with the latter criticizing Caesar's actions and expressing that 'there was no hope left' for the future.³⁰ But this very letter shows Cicero in a quandary about what course he himself is to take and how events will unfold, hoping that Caesar will fall, 'by the hands of his opponents or by his own', and explicitly stating 'I only hope it may happen while we are still alive'.

In this letter, Cicero's hopes and expectations are foregrounded, and may well have influenced his understanding of the conversation he held with Curio. Likewise, other letters mentioning Curio's opposition to Caesar and Pompey in their 'First Triumvirate', and Cicero's own relationship with Curio were written in times of extreme unrest, in which Cicero saw his world change beyond measure. Moreover, as cannot be sufficiently emphasized, Cicero was not a member of the traditional Roman elite, but a 'new man' who had reached an important position in Roman politics without the benefits of family-ties. In many ways, he was to remain an outsider throughout his political career.³¹ So his interpretations of events may have been skewed in different modes.

In other words, it is wholly possible that Cicero's description of Curio's actions tells us more about Cicero's expectations than Curio's intentions. Moreover, later authors, like Velleius, wrote their histories with the benefits (or hindrance) of hindsight – influenced among others by Cicero's published letters.³² Indeed, Velleius presents Cicero as symbol for the Republic in his own attempt to come to terms with a political system in flux.³³ So our evidence simply does not seem to suffice to support any of the possible scenarios reconstructing Curio's behaviour. One can assume that Cicero is accurate about the actual proposals put forward by Curio, but the purposes behind them remain unknowable.

If one looks at those proposals, these consist on the one hand of measures relating to the position of Caesar which seem to aim at avoiding a collision between Caesar and Pompey. Curio supported a decree that postponed debates about the situation in September 51 BCE and was the instigator in 50 BCE of the proposal to discuss the *provinciae* of Caesar and Pompey in one go (leading to the idea that both Caesar and Pompey should step down simultaneously).³⁴ Without Cicero's – quite possibly skewed – interpretation it is difficult to assess whether that really shows a very clear position of Curio in the debate. On the other hand, Curio put forward measures that are difficult to categorize as systematic or typically 'plebeian'. There were some land reform measures, a proposal to incorporate Numidia into the empire, and an attempt to insert an intercalary month between February and March 50 BCE.³⁵ These were the types of debates that were common for the late Republic, and without Cicero's (and later imperial authors') interpretations we could simply see Curio as reacting ad hoc to affairs as they

were put forward; a politician looking at what was popular and would help him in his career.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST THROUGH THE PRESENT

It is well known that ancient authors made literary choices in the way they presented their evidence, and used their writing for self-representation as much as, if not more than, the communication of historical events. But underlying modern reconstructions of ancient political narratives is the idea that we can read through these literary and political choices – reading against the grain. That is to say, as long as we know the positionality of the ancient author, we can read through his (and occasionally her) biases to reconstruct ancient developments. The often implied assumption, however, is that the ancient authors interpreted and reflected on events rationally and accurately – even if they then chose to describe these events in a biased way. Written and spoken interpretations of events by modern politicians, however, make abundantly clear that this need not be the norm. Hope that matters may turn out better than expected and fear that they may take a turn for the worse influence the way in which events are perceived.

This has implications for our understanding of the past. As we saw in the case study of Gaius Scribonius Curio, if we allow for the possibility that emotion distorted Cicero's interpretation of Curio's actions, that takes away much of the evidentiary basis for a crucial moment in late Republican history. It is possible that Curio genuinely tried to keep the peace with his proposals, and equally that he completely misjudged the threat and merely tried to please the people who had elected him. The point is that as historians we cannot tell on the basis of the evidence that we have. What we *can* do is reconstruct how Cicero presented the problems in the late Republic, and the way these events were interpreted and remembered in later periods. But reconstructing the intentions of people described by Cicero (and the later imperial authors who were influenced both by knowing the outcome of events and by Cicero's writing) can only work if Cicero had an awareness of, and emotional detachment from, the events through which he lived to an extent that seems extremely unlikely. Methodological presentism, then, allows us to recognize more sharply the limits of our evidence. It may even do more. In many different modern societies – independent of political system or dominant religion – politicians seem to react ad hoc, swayed by the opinion of the people whom they find important, not necessarily in a consistent way and often with a certain moral flexibility. Such a reading could easily apply to the events of Curio's tribunate, or indeed to those of much of the late Roman Republic. The result would be an even more chaotic and unplanned political scene than scholarship often assumes, with unexpected consequences of on-the-spur decisions. This, of course, remains speculation – but that also applies to careful analyses which are based on unreliable source material.

³⁰ Cic. *Att.* X.4, 6–12.

³¹ VAN DER BLOM 2010; ROSELAAR 2017.

³² See LINTOTT 2008, 4–8 on Cicero's letters as historical events.

³³ DOMAINKO 2015.

³⁴ Cic. *Fam.* VIII.8;

³⁵ Cic. *Fam.* VIII.10.4; App. *BC* II.80; Caes. *BC* II.25.4.

REFERENCES

- ARMITAGE 2023
Armitage, D., In Defense of Presentism. In: MCMAHON 2023, 44–69.
- BOWER 1991
Bower, G. H., *Mood congruity of social judgements*. In: Forgas, J.P. (ed.), *Emotion and Social Judgments* (London – New York: Routledge), 31–54.
- BURTON 2011
Burton, P., Pax Romana/Pax Americana: Perceptions of Rome in American Political Culture, 2000–2010, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18, 66–104.
- CARLSON/SETTLE 2022
Carlson, T. N./Settle, J. E., *What Goes Without Saying. Navigating Political Discussion in America* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press).
- CARR 1961
Carr, E. H., *What Is History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- CORREA 2012
Correa, S., Cicero imperator: estrategias de autofiguración epistolar en el viaje a Cilicia (Cic., Att. 5. 1–15), *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 44, 48–61.
- CRISSANTHOS 2019
Crissanthos, S. G., *The Year of Julius and Caesar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- CROCE 1938
Croce, B., *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari: Laterza).
- DANZER 2020
Danzer, T., Politik aus der zweiten Reihe: Ciceros Briefe an C. Scribonius Curio'. In: Müller, G. M./Retsch, S./Schenk, J. (eds.), *Adressat und Adressant in antiken Briefen. Rollenkonfigurationen und kommunikative Strategien in griechischer und römischer Epistolographie* (Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter), 95–119.
- DETTENHOFER/IUVENTUS 1992
Dettenhofer, M. H./Iuventus, P., *Zwischen den Generationen von Caesar und Augustus* (Munich: Beck).
- DIMITROVA 2018
Dimitrova, M., *Julius Caesar's Self-Created Image and Its Dramatic Afterlife* (London: Bloomsbury), 29–66.
- DOMAINKO 2015
Domainko, A., The conception of history in Velleius Paterculus' *Historia Romana*, *Histos* 9, 76–110.
- FORGAS 1991
Forgas, J. P., Affect and social judgements: an introductory review. In: Forgas, J.P. (ed.), *Emotion and Social Judgments* (London – New York: Routledge), 3–30.
- GRUEN 1973
Gruen, E. S., *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- HEATHER/RAPLEY 2023
Heather, P./Rapley, J., *Why Empires Fall: Rome, America, and the Future of the West* (London-New Haven: Yale University Press).
- HEKSTER 2020
Hekster, O., When was an imperial image? Some Reflections on Roman Art and Imagery. In: Russell, A./Hellström, M. (eds.), *The social dynamics of Roman imperial imagery* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press), 275–288.
- LÄMLE 2017
Lämle, C. S., Last words: Cicero's late works and the poetics of a literary legacy. In: Gavrielatos, A. (ed.), *Self-Presentation and Identity in the Roman World* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 17–36.
- LACEY 1961
Lacey, W. K., The tribunate of Curio, *Historia* 3, 318–329.
- LINTOTT 2008
Lintott, A., *Cicero as Evidence. A Historian's Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- LOGGHE 2016
Logghe, L., The gentleman was not for turning, *Latomus*, 75, 353–377.
- LOISON 2016
Loison, L., Forms of Presentism in the History of Science: Rethinking the Project of Historical Epistemology, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 60, 29–37.
- MASSEY/SIMMONS/ARMOR 2011
Massey, C./Simmons, J. P./Armor, D., Hope Over Experience: Desirability and the Persistence of Optimism, *Psychological Science* 22, 274–281.
- MCCASKILL 2016
McCaskill, N. D., Trump adviser: Don't take Trump literally, 'take him symbolically', *Politico* 20.12.2016.
- MCMAHON 2023
McMahon, D. M. (ed.), *History and Human Flourishing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- MEIER 1966
Meier, Ch., *Res publica amissa. Eine Studie zu Verfassung und Geschichte der späten römischen Republik* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner).
- MORSTEIN-MARX 2021
Morstein-Marx, R., *Julius Caesar and the Roman People* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press).
- NORTH 2002
North, J., Introduction: Pursuing Democracy. In: Bowman, A. et al. (eds.), *Representations of Empire: Rome and the Mediterranean world* (London: Oxford University Press), 1–12.
- ORESQUES 2013
Oreskes, N., Why I Am a Presentist, *Science in Context* 26, 595–609.
- OSBORNE 2017
Osborne, R., Classical presentism, *Past & Present* 234, 217–234.
- RAMPELL 2023
Rampell, C., *The Washington Post* 13.11.2023.
- RAWSON 1983
Rawson, E., *Cicero: A Portrait*, 2nd ed (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press).
- ROSELAAR 2017
Roselaar, S., Pride and prejudice in Cicero's speeches. In: Gavrielatos, A. (ed.), *Self-Presentation and Identity in the Roman World* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), 37–53.
- ROSILLO-LÓPEZ 2018
Rosillo-López, C., Political participation and the identification of politicians in the Late Roman Republic. In: van der Blom, H./Gray, C./Steel, C. (eds.), *Institutions and Ideology in Republican Rome. Space, Audience and Decision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 69–87.
- RUBIN 2017
Rubin, M., Presentism's useful anachronisms, *Past & Present* 234 (2017), 236–244.
- SCHERER/WINDSCHITL/SMITH 2013
Scherer, A. M./Windschitl, P. D./Smith, A. R., Hope to be right: Biased information seeking following arbitrary and informed predictions, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49, 106–112.
- SLEAT 2013
Sleat, M., Hope and Disappointment in Politics, *Contemporary Politics* 19, 131–145.

- SPRIGGE 1941
Sprigge, S., *History as the Story of Liberty* by Benedetto Croce (book review), *The Journal of Philosophy* 38/23, 635–641.
- STRUNK 2022
Strunk, T. E., *On the Fall of the Roman Republic: Lessons for the American People* (London: Anthem Press).
- SULLIVAN 2015
Sullivan, M., *Taking Trump at His Word*, *The New York Times* 3.12.2015.
- SYME 1939
Syme, R., *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- TAMM/OLIVIER 2019
Tamm, M./Olivier, L. (eds.), *Rethinking historical time: new approaches to presentism* (London: Bloomsbury).
- TATUM 1991
Tatum, W. J., Cicero, the Elder Curio and the Titinia case, *Mnemosyne*, 44, 365–371.
- THOMAS 2003
Thomas, N., *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford – New York: Berg).
- VAN DEN BERG 2021
van den Berg, Ch. S., *The Politics and Poetics of Cicero's Brutus: the Invention of Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- VAN DER BLOM 2010
van der Blom, H., *Cicero's Role Models. The Political Strategy of a Newcomer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- VAN DER BLOM 2016
van der Blom, H., *Oratory and Political Career in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- WALSHAM 2017
Walsham, A., Introduction: Past and ... presentism, *Past & Present* 234, 213–217.
- WHITE 2010
White, P., *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- WILL 1991
Will, W., *Der römische Mob: soziale Konflikte in der späten Republik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
- WOODMAN 1983
Woodman, A. J., *Velleius Paterculus. The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).