WRITING LITERARY HISTORY IN THE GREEK AND ROMAN WORLD

Covering a wide variety of Greek and Latin texts that span from the Archaic period down to Late Antiquity, this volume represents the first concerted attempt to understand ancient literary history in its full complexity and on its own terms. Abandoning long-standing misconceptions derived from the misleading application of modern assumptions and standards, the volume rehabilitates an often neglected but fundamentally important subject: the Greeks' and Romans' representations of the origins and development of their own literary traditions. The fifteen contributors to this volume evince the pervasiveness and diversity of ancient literary history as well as the manifold connections between its manifestations in a variety of texts. Taken as a whole, this volume argues that studying ancient literary history should not only provide insight into the Greek and Roman world but also provoke us to think reflexively about how we go about writing the history of ancient literature today.

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Published online by Cambridge University Press

Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Published online by Cambridge University Press

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009464529

DOI: 10.1017/9781009464543

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009464543

First published 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-009-46452-9 Hardback

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CHAPTER 4

Cicero as a Literary Historian

Elisa Romano

4.1 Introduction

Is it possible to speak of literary history in antiquity? The genre of literary history, understood as a corpus of systematic studies adopting a diachronic perspective, belongs entirely to the modern age. In this sense, it would not be appropriate to speak of literary history as a conceptual category and an intellectual pursuit before 1787, the year of publication of Friedrich August Wolf's *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*. With regard to classical antiquity, one should rephrase the question and ask whether it is possible to recognise, in some ancient texts, a historical perspective on literature and an intention to position specific literary figures on a timeline.[1] Once the concept of literary history is redefined in these terms, one may ask a second question: is it possible to speak of Cicero as a literary historian? His deep interests in literature, Greek and Latin alike, is widely attested in his writings, which feature many quotations from literary texts as well as references to, and short digressions about, literary themes and authors. This is a well-known aspect of Cicero's works, which sheds light on Cicero as a reader and, sometimes, as an interpreter of literature. Does the vast Ciceronian corpus enable us to sketch a profile of him as a literary historian as well? The purpose of this chapter is to provide a possible, albeit partial, answer to this question. My working hypothesis is twofold. First, as I will discuss, I believe that Cicero's view on the historical development of literary phenomena is to be contextualised within the broader issue of his

This chapter was translated from Italian by Giacomo Fedeli. The translations of Latin passages are from the Loeb Classical Library editions.

[1] The tendency to apply the modern concept of ancient literary history to ancient texts is summarised effectively by Russell 1981: 159 in an often-quoted statement: 'the historical study of literature in antiquity was very rudimentary by modern standards'. A noteworthy correction to this paradigm is that of Schwindt 2000, who draws attention to the existence of actual literary histories in Rome which had not been recognised as such precisely because of the fact that they do not correspond to modern conceptualisations. See further Fedeli and Spelman's Introduction in this volume.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009464543.005 Published online by Cambridge University Press

view on history and, more precisely, historiography. Second, I take the question of Cicero's historical consciousness of literature – that is, his understanding of the literary past – to be a matter worth discussing within the framework of the relativity of his perception of historical time. I am referring, in particular, to his use of synchronic events or watershed events to orient time and describe history. These are common features of pre-Newtonian chronologies which relate to the social mapping of the past, as widely shown by seminal studies such as Wilcox 1987 and Zerubavel 2003, on which Feeney 2007 capitalises; and it is on Feeney's work that I will often rely in this chapter, with a focus on Cicero's approach to literary history.

Cicero's interest in historiography is particularly strong in the major dialogues of the fifties. The worsening of the crisis of republican institutions, which he associates with a crisis of the Roman cultural tradition, makes him feel an urgency to cling to the tie with the past. It is not by chance that his first literary-historical digressions occur in the *De oratore* and *De legibus* and concern historiography as a literary genre. In more general terms, Cicero's writings in the fifties dedicate particular attention to the historical development of cultural phenomena, in line with a tendency that characterised the intellectual environment of those years. From this perspective, the literary-historical dimension of Cicero's oeuvre attests to a lively contemporary context in which various forms of historical knowledge and writing flourished. Cicero was at the centre of intellectual debates that led to the production of antiquarian and chronographic works, such as Varro's and Atticus'. His treatment of some aspects of what we may call literary history builds on the research results of these works, and leads him to adopt complex methodologies and intellectual tools that combine chronological schemes with the antiquarian study of texts. All this makes Cicero's profile as a literary historian unique in the panorama of classical antiquity.

4.2 A Historian *Manqué*

In a fragmentary passage from the *De historicis Latinis* (fr. 58 Marshall), Cornelius Nepos laments the fact that death prevented Cicero from dedicating himself to historiography and thus filling a lacuna in this area of *Latinae litterae*. One could hardly decide – Nepos says – whether Cicero's death caused a greater pain to the *res publica* or to *historia* itself. The biographical tradition about Cicero includes Plutarch's testimony (*Cic.* 41.1) that, in the years of forced inactivity during Caesar's dictatorship, Cicero was planning to write a history of Rome partly interlaced with

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a history of Greece, but he was diverted from this project by the numerous private and public difficulties which he had to endure.

Cicero's historiographical projects were a recurrent theme in the correspondence with Atticus. In 59 BC, for instance, Cicero announced to his friend his intention of dedicating himself to historiography (*Att.* 2.8.1).[2] Atticus himself, or better his dramatic *persona*, invites Cicero to write a historiographical work in the *De legibus*, composed towards the end of the fifties (*Leg.* 1.6: *adgredere, quaesumus, et sume ad hanc rem tempus, quae est a nostris hominibus adhuc aut ignorata aut relicta*, 'take up the task, we beg you, and find the time for a duty which has hitherto been either overlooked or neglected by our countrymen'); and he will urge him to do so till the end of his days, as suggested by his invitation in 46 BC at the beginning of the *Brutus*,[3] and by a letter of 44 BC (*Att.* 14.14.5) – an encouragement which Cicero himself explicitly accepted in November of that very year (*Att.* 16.13a.2 *ardeo studio historiae*, 'I am aflame with enthusiasm for a history').[4] More generally, the whole intellectual environment around Cicero was expecting him to produce a historiographical work which would compete with Greek equivalents and which was still missing in Latin literature. Not only Atticus but also Lucullus, amongst others, was pushing him in this direction, to judge from a very credible reconstruction of a passage from the lost dialogue *Hortensius*.[5]

The 'dossier' about Cicero as a historian *manqué*, or about the unmet expectations of his friends, may not matter a great deal as a biographical datum, but it certainly matters as evidence of what has been called 'la vocation historique de Cicéron'.[6] This 'vocation' emerges from an interest in the past which permeates his oeuvre as well as the high value which he attributes to history, famously described as *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis* (*De or.* 2.36: 'history . . . bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to

[2] What Cicero refers to in this passage is unclear; perhaps to the '*histoires inédites* (*anekdota*) . . . in the vein of Theopompus', about which he speaks at *Att.* 2.6.2?

[3] Cf. p. 100.

[4] On the possible reasons why the project was never actualised see Rawson 1972: 42–4, according to whom we can get a sense of what a historiographical work would have looked like from the powerful section at the beginning of *De oratore* III.

[5] Cf. the dialogue which can be reconstructed between Lucullus (fr. 16 Grilli: *quare adgredere, quaeso, et gratificare rei publicae*) and Cicero, to whom fr. 23 is to be attributed (*tu me et alias nonnumquam et paulo ante adhortatus es aliorum facta et eventa conquirerem*). According to Grilli 2010: 37 and 135–6, fr. 16 contains an exhortation to write history, to which Cicero replies by saying that Lucullus had already urged him to do so more than once.

[6] This definition is part of the title of Chapter 1 of Rambaud 1953.

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recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days'). At the same time, however, one may wonder whether this vocation was anchored in an adequate understanding of the methods of historical research.[7] In order to answer this question, scholars have focused on two areas: first, the theoretical discourse about historiography which Cicero outlines in the epistle to Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) and in some sections of the *De oratore*; second, his extensive use of historical *exempla*. Relatively little attention has been dedicated to the historiographical digressions which can be found scattered across the Ciceronian corpus.

Cicero's interest in the past concerned various aspects of the human world, ranging from political and military history to the history of civil as well as religious traditions, public and private alike, to the history of legislation. His interest in cultural history is evident in numerous narrative sections, of varied scope, about the development of human civilisation, as exemplified by the first proem of his juvenile treatise *De inventione* and the very late *De officiis*.[8] His historiographical and/or antiquarian digressions enable us to sketch a portrait of Cicero as a political or legal historian.[9] His oeuvre offers insight into his perspective on the history of literary phenomena as well.

4.3 Literary History in the Fifties: *De oratore* and *De legibus*

A discourse about the past and its preservation through various forms of memory informs Cicero's major dialogues of the fifties. Therefore, it is not surprising that these writings show a particular interest in the literary genre which is most naturally concerned with the transmission of the past, namely historiography. Because of its connections to oratory, this genre is given particular attention in the second book of the *De oratore*. The *persona loquens* of Antony, after speaking about epideictic oratory, asks Catulus what oratorical skills a writer of history should possess (*De or.* 2.51). The reason why historiography is introduced as a theme becomes clear a few paragraphs later. Since historiography has never been the specific topic of a rhetorical treatise (2.62), Antony takes it upon himself to outline

[7] This is the question asked by Brunt 1993, who concludes by emphasising the rhetorical and literary dimension of history in Cicero.

[8] In addition to the proem of *De inventione* (1.2–5), cf. Cic. *Sest.* 91; *De or.* 1.33; *Rep.* 1.39; *Fin.* 3.62; *Tusc.* 1.62; *Nat. D.* 2.148; *Off.* 1.157 and 2.73.

[9] Examples include the digression about the history of Rome's institutions in *De republica* II, or about the norms concerning funerals in *De legibus* II, or Roman magistrates in *De legibus* III. On Cicero's historical and antiquarian interests, see the seminal work by Rawson 1972. On the antiquarian aspects of the *De legibus*, see Romano 2010. On Cicero as a legal historian, see Mantovani 2009.

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the unwritten norms of the genre regarding content as well as style. In these two speeches of Antony's dramatic *persona*, Cicero develops an excursus which covers, in general terms, the history of historiography in Greece and Rome. In his reply, Catulus highlights the gap between the excellent rhetorical skills of Greek historians and the low level of Roman historiography, which is so modest that it does not even aim at rhetorical sophistication but is limited to reporting the historical truth. Antony's response to this is an invitation not to scorn Roman historiography. Whereas Catulus speaks of inferiority, Antony prefers to speak of a delay and he explains the stylistic gap in chronological terms: that is to say, historiography in Rome started developing later than in Greece. Despite this temporal difference, the stages of the development were not dissimilar. The Roman annalists, who worked in the tradition of the *annales pontificum* and limited themselves to recording testimonies about epochs, people and facts with no concern for the style of their writings, correspond to the Greek logographers. Fabius Pictor, Calpurnius Piso Frugi and Cato with his *Origines* provide evidence of the existence, in second-century Rome, of a kind of historiography which developed much earlier in Greece and which is represented by Pherecydes, Hellanicus and Acusilaus. An exchange of opinions about Caelius Antipater between Antony, who highlights his artistic superiority to the annalists, and Catulus, who laments his poor style, leads the former to admit that a proper kind of Roman historiography with artistic merit does not exist yet (2.55). The reason for this is that the Romans, unlike the Greeks, have been pursuing the study of rhetoric only with regard to judicial oratory, with no concern for other areas – including historiography, which is stylistically akin to oratory (to the extent that it can be regarded as *opus oratorium maxime*)[10] and therefore needs to be practised by men with excellent rhetorical skills. Within this picture, and in light of the connection between historiography and rhetoric, Antony sketches a historical survey of Greek historiography. He starts from the historians of the fifth and fourth century (Herodotus, Thucydides, Philistus), then describes a bifurcation between a rhetorical *diadochē* (Theopompus and Ephorus, 'stemming' from Isocrates) and a philosophical *diadochē* (Xenophon from Socrates, Callisthenes from Aristotle), and concludes with Timaeus, whose excellence in style Antony praises.

This is the earliest example in the Ciceronian corpus of a diachronic outline of the development of a literary genre. It is of great interest because

[10] A work 'closer than any other to oratory', according to Cicero's famous definition at *Leg.* 1.5.

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the discourse about the history of historiography already entails a series of points on which Cicero will expand in his later works, most fully in the *Brutus.* First of all, the discourse is informed by a tendency to sketch two parallel histories, Greek and Roman, on the grounds that their development happened in different epochs but was ultimately similar. The idea of a delay and therefore an inferiority of Roman historiography immediately reveals the background of Cicero's whole discourse about the development of literary phenomena: a comparison between Greece and Rome. Furthermore, Cicero tends to map the core phases of a literary genre across a simple timeline with an approximate sequence of authors and without precise chronological references. Thus in the case of historiography he moves from Herodotus (the *princeps*) onwards (2.55–8): *post illum Thucydides* ('after his day Thucydides') ... *hunc consecutus est Syracusius Philistus* ('he was succeeded by Philistus of Syracuse') ... *postea* ... *Theopompus et Ephorus* ('afterwards ... Theopompus and Ephorus') ... *a philosophia profectus princeps Xenophon ... post Callisthenes* ('historians appeared who had begun as philosophers, first Xenophon ... afterwards Callisthenes') ... *minumus natu horum omnium Timaeus* ('Timaeus, the latest-born of all these').[11] Another feature which characterises Cicero's discourse is the grouping of authors in triads or short series.[12] Finally, his sketch of a diachronic development interweaves with literary judgements about the extent of their rhetorical sophistication. The great *eloquentia* of Herodotus is followed by the dense style and synthetic precision of Thucydides, and then the skilfulness of Theopompus and Ephorus, the rhetorical style of Xenophon (*rhetorico more*) and the pleasing lightness of Callisthenes.[13] Although a clear-cut line of ascending progress, of the kind which will inform the *Brutus*,[14] does not yet emerge, some of these judgements are comparative (particularly the one about Callisthenes, 2.58: *superior leniore quodam sono ... aliquanto dulcior*, 'a gentler kind of tone ... somewhat more pleasing'). In Roman historiography too, despite

[11] The same scheme occurs again at 2.92–5 (a passage which anticipates the *Brutus* also with regard to the concept of individual *aetates* marked by individual *genera dicendi*), where the survey of Greek historians described as models of oratory is interwoven with the survey of actual orators: *antiquissimi ... consecuti sunt ... ecce est exortus ... posteaquam ... inde ... tum ... hodie.*

[12] Citroni 2006 and in this volume has given attention to the cataloguing of past literature in brief series (sometimes triads), as is already visible in Varro (cf. fr. 40 Fun., on comic poets).

[13] The stylistic comparison between Greek historians will be further developed a few years later in the *Hortensius*, as shown by Lucullus' words in fr. 15 Grilli (*quid enim aut Herodoto dulcius aut Thucydide gravius, aut Xenophonte copiosius aut Philisto brevius, aut Theopompo acrius aut Ephoro mitius inveniri potest?*). On this fragment, see Goldberg 2005: 76–7.

[14] On this aspect, see Citroni 2003, 2006 and in this volume.

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belonging to a rudimentary phase, Caelius Antipater is nonetheless a representative of progress in comparison with the previous annalistic phase because of the stronger tone of his writings (2.54: *addidit maiorem historiae sonum vocis*, 'he imparted to history a richer tone').[15] The idea of a historical and artistic process heading to a *telos* emerges, at least to some extent, with Timaeus, who closes the survey of Greek historiography: he is the latest author in chronological terms (2.58: *minumus natus*) and also the most learned, the most complete in terms of content, and the only one who deserves superlative attributes (*eruditissimus*, *abundantissimus*).

As we saw above, the starting point for this *excursus* on Greek historiography in the *De oratore* is a comment about a gap in Roman culture – an issue which Cicero will tackle again several years later, when his focus will turn to philosophy. Historiography, one of the two fields still available for the Romans to explore so as to reach cultural parity with the Greeks, constitutes Cicero's main concern in the fifties.[16] In the first proem of his *De legibus*, the starting point is again a comment about this lacuna and the necessity of filling it. Atticus' words at *Leg.* 1.5–6 (*dest enim historia litteris nostris*; *hanc rem . . . quae est a nostris hominibus adhuc aut ignorata aut relicta*, 'for our national literature is deficient in history . . . a duty which has hitherto been either overlooked or neglected by our countrymen') are equivalent to Antony's at *De or.* 2.55 (*ista res adhuc nostra lingua inlustrata non est*, 'this subject has never yet been brilliantly treated in our language'). From this comment arises an invitation to Cicero, the only one who can make sure that Rome does not yield to Greece in the genre (*Leg.* 1.5). The *synkrisis* between Greek and Roman historiography, which constituted the foundations of the dialogue between Antony and Catulus in the *De oratore*, stays in the background in the *De legibus*. The comparison to the greatest Greek historians remains implicit in the *excursus* in which Cicero, as he had done in other dialogue a few years earlier, briefly surveys the origins of Roman historiography from the annals of the *Pontifices Maximi* to Fabius Pictor and Cato, up to Caelius Antipater and Sisenna. Sisenna is described as a superior author (1.7), though not without some reservations about his flaws, because of which he is said to be still far from the *optumum.* The criterion for judgement is, once again, rhetorical sophistication; and, once again, the chronological sequence is interwoven with critical comments which do not delineate an ascending scale but instead remark on a phase of coarseness which has not been overcome yet. Nothing

[15] On the role of the Aristotelian idea of literary progress as a series of 'additions' (cf. *addidit*, a key word in this passage), see Citroni 2001, 2013 and in this volume.
[16] Another topic carefully discussed by Citroni 2003, 2006 and in this volume.

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is dryer (*ieiunius*)[17] than the pontifical annals, and Fabius Pictor and the other annalists, including Cato, are lifeless (*quid tam exile quam isti omnes?*). The history of Roman historiography does not feature any significant progress. For although Caelius Antipater had slightly more vigour than the others (*paulo inflavit vehementius*), Clodius and Asellio represented a phase of regression to the rhetorical feebleness and coarseness of the earliest annalists (*ad antiquorum languorem et inscitiam*), not to say anything of the dull and inopportune *loquacitas* of Licinius Macer. This historical trajectory is far from reaching a *telos* and achieving perfection: as we said, the last author in the survey, Sisenna, is far from the *optumum*. The task of bringing to completion this still incomplete history should be Cicero's concern (1.7: *quare tuum est munus hoc, a te expectatur*). It is only in this closing invitation by Atticus that one can see at least the shadow of the idea of a progress which could reach a degree of excellence, and thus the possibility for the Roman historians of competing with the great Greek historians.

In the *De legibus*, the history of historiography is a linear sequence accompanied by chronological markers (1.6: *post annales pontificum maximorum*; *ecce autem successerunt huic* [scil. *Antipatro*], 'after the annals of the chief pontiffs'; 'but lo and behold Antipater's successors'), as it was in the *De oratore*. However, it is also possible to notice connections between the authors mentioned, which go beyond a mere temporal sequence. These include strategies of 'anchoring' to relative chronology, such as the description of Fannius and Caelius Antipater as authors belonging to the same generation (1.6) or the reference to Sisenna's friendship with Macer (1.7). These are clues that reveal Cicero's interest in establishing more precise chronological criteria than the basic sequence informed by the opposition *antea* versus *postea*. Two ordering principles are visible, albeit slightly, which will be applied to literary history in the *Brutus*: that is, the focus on *aetates* (with the presentation of figures belonging to the same generation as a group) and the anchoring of the historical survey to biographical elements.

4.4 Parallel Histories and the Dawn of Roman Literature

A few years later, towards the beginning of the *Brutus* (19), Cicero will have Atticus say that he was moved to the study of the Roman past by reading the *De republica*: 'it was by that work that I too was fired with ambition to

[17] The word *ieiunius*, by which Cicero would be pointing at the dryness of the pontifical annals, is a successful conjecture by Orsini which has been adopted by most editors, including Powell (OCT 2006). Marincola 2015 defends the transmitted *iucundius*.

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put together a record of public men and events' (*ad rerum nostrarum memoriam comprehendendam impulsi atque incensi sumus*). Regardless of the fictional situation in the dialogue, the 'real' Atticus would have had good reasons to credit the *De republica*, published around five years earlier, with giving him the right stimulus not only to study the Roman past comprehensively (as he says), but also (we may add) to pursue that chronological research which had led him to produce the *Liber annalis* sometime before the publication of Cicero's *Brutus.* Unfortunately, the poor condition of the text of the *De republica* does not allow us to find any strong evidence in support of Atticus' words, with the exception of a historiographical section which is very limited but also very dense because of the problems that it addresses: that is, the section about Romulus in Scipio's speech. The background of this speech is the difficulty – if not the impossibility – of accessing a distant past, due to the lack of reliable sources as well as the tampering of fabrications. The character of Scipio attributes these fabrications to the poor culture of the men of old, who were prone to believe fantasies (*Rep.* 2.18): '[they] lived in ruder ages when there was a great inclination to the invention of fabulous tales (*ut fingendi proclivis esset ratio*), and ignorant men were easily induced to believe them'. In this epoch dominated by legends, the episode of Romulus' death and divinisation in supernatural conditions stands out for its credibility. What differentiates it from other episodes of alleged divinisation is the fact that it took place in historical times, when the fabrications of pre-civilised people had been eliminated by a consolidated tradition of written literary knowledge in Greece: 'but we know that Romulus lived less than six hundred years ago, at a period when writing and education had long been in existence (*iam inveteratis litteris atque doctrinis*), and all those mistaken primitive ideas which grew up under uncivilised conditions (*ex inculta hominum vita*) had been done away with' (*Rep.* 2.18).

What makes it possible to guarantee the historicity of Romulus' epoch is the existence of a literary tradition which had long been flourishing at that time. Accordingly, the chronology which informs the discussion about the historicity of the first king of Rome gives much importance to poetry, since the existence of written literature guarantees that a transition occurred between fantasising pre-history and documented history. The latter begins with Homer, who lived thirty years before Lycurgus, whose legislation is in turn dated to 108 years before the first Olympics (776). By means of these interrelated chronological references, Homer is dated to around 900, which entails that the foundation of Rome occurred in an epoch in which a rich poetic tradition already existed in Greece and in which people

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gave much less trust to mythical beliefs than they did before (2.18): 'Rome was founded in the second year of the seventh Olympiad, the life of Romulus fell in a period when Greece already abounded in poets and musicians, and when small credence was given to fables, except in regard to events of a much earlier time' (*minorque fabulis nisi de veteribus rebus haberetur fides*). The rationale behind Scipio's discourse is the idea of written literature as a watershed between pre-history and history: on the one hand, an *antiquitas* which was keen to accept mythical fabrications; on the other hand, an age dominated by culture and therefore keen to reject *fabulae*.[18] The historicity of the figure of Romulus and the credibility of his divinisation depend not only on the fact that he lived around one hundred and fifty years after the origins of Greek literature with Homer but also on the fact that other poets were active around the same time. The parallel between the earliest phase of Roman history and Greek history relies on a series of chronological references to key figures of Greek literature, such as Stesichorus and Simonides. It is unfortunate that a lacuna in the Vatican palimpsest makes it impossible for us to read the passage about the poets who lived after Homer and to appreciate the relationship between them and the historical context of the figure of Romulus. The only element which we can ascertain is the synchronism between Stesichorus' death in the first year of the fifty-sixth Olympics (556) and the birth of Simonides. Once again, this indicates that synchronisms were used as chronological references.[19]

The chronology of the foundation of Rome in the second year of the seventh Olympiad is attributed to a vague source, the *annales Graecorum* (2.18). Chronologies had been common since the early Hellenistic age, not only in specific chronographic works (*Chronika*) of the kind produced by Eratosthenes and Apollodorus, but also in historiographical writings such those of Timaeus and Polybius, who is doubtlessly a source for Cicero.[20] The source of Cicero's synchronisms could be a chronographic work,

[18] *Rep.* 2.19: 'Hence it is clear that Homer lived a great many years before Romulus, so that in the lifetime of the latter, when learned men already existed and the age itself was one of culture, there was very little opportunity for the invention of fables (*ut iam doctis hominibus ac temporibus ipsis eruditis, ad fingendum vix quicquam esset loci*). For whereas antiquity would accept fabulous tales, sometimes even when they were crudely fabricated (*fabulas, fictas etiam non numquam incondite*), the age of Romulus, which was already one of culture (*iam exculta*), was quick to mock at and reject with scorn that which could not possibly have happened.'

[19] On the synchronisation of the chronological schemes of Greek and Roman history, and on the function of this synchronisation within the broader picture of the cultural comparison between Greece and Rome, see Feeney 2007: 7–42.

[20] In Polybius (1.27.4) the foundation of Rome is dated to 751/750.

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perhaps the slightly earlier work by Castor of Rhodes (61 BC).[21] Leaving such hypotheses aside, what we can say is that Cicero's voice in the *De republica* is one of many testimonies to the flourishing of chronographic research which aimed at designing the fundamental tools for the systematisation of universal history. The need to establish chronological relationships between local histories within the broader picture of universal history had been felt in the Hellenistic era since the times of the Macedonian empire. Around the end of the first century BC, the same need was felt in Rome as a consequence of Pompey's conquests in the East. This renewed interest in chronography and universal history which emerges from Cicero's works also emerges from Cornelius Nepos' *Chronica* and Varro's writing, especially his *De gente populi Romani*.[22]

Within the universal picture, the history of Rome consists in a 'column'[23] of events (concerning politics, military history as well as culture, including literature) which is placed next to more ancient ones. The passage of the *De republica* considered above is very clear in this respect: at the time of Romulus, around the middle of the eighth century, Greece was already full of literary authors and other artists (2.18). As we have seen, the lack of alignment between the development of culture in Greece and Rome is part of a constructive argument for Romulus' historicity: if Greece was so advanced, the extent of Rome's under-development could not be such that incredible fabrications could still be believed. More commonly, however, the acknowledgement of this gap brings about a sense of inferiority and an urge to fill it in. An example of this feeling is the discourse about historiography which Cicero was developing around the same years in the *De oratore* and *De legibus.*

In the short 'essay' on literary history to be found in the first proem of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, the theme of the different timing in the development of Greek and Roman culture is treated in terms similar to those of the *De republica*. Cicero points out that the antiquity of Greek poetry is demonstrated by the fact that Homer and Hesiod lived before the foundation of Rome, and Archilochus during the reign of Romulus (*Tusc.* 1.3). The chronological scheme is more or less the same as the one used in

[21] On the influence of Castor of Rhodes on Roman culture, see Feeney 2007: 63–5.

[22] Feeney 2007: 20–3; cf. Brillante 2021. Cicero's use of Cornelius Nepos' *Chronica* as a source has been long debated and remains uncertain. Rambaud 1953: 62 (among others) excludes the possibility that Cicero relied on this work, whereas Fleck 1993: 181–94 regards it as uncertain but likely (particularly on the basis of the common dating of Homer at *Rep.* 2.18 and in fr. 2 Peter of the *Chronica*). More recently, van den Berg 2021: 55 and 70 is convinced that Cicero relied on and was influenced by Nepos not just in the *De republica* but also in the *Brutus.*

[23] Cf. Feeney 2007: 14.

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the second book of the *De republica*: Cicero draws synchronisms and, as he had already done a few years earlier, frames the history of literature within a broader history which has the foundation of Rome as a core *terminus*. It is with reference to this *terminus* that Cicero mentions what happened before (Homer and Hesiod's lives), at the same time (Archilochus as a contemporary of Romulus), and afterwards – actually, much later: for Rome had to wait no fewer than 510 years for Livius Andronicus to stage the first-ever Latin play and thus initiate the history of Roman literature (cf. *Tusc.* 1.3: *serius poeticam nos accepimus. annis fere cccccx post Romam conditam Livius fabulam dedit, C. Claudio, Caeci filio, M. Tuditano consulibus* [= 240], *anno ante natum Ennium . . . Sero igitur a nostris poetae vel cogniti vel recepti*, 'poetry came to us at a later date. About five hundred and ten years after the foundation of Rome Livius produced a play in the consulship of C. Claudius, son of Caecus, and M. Tuditanus in the year before the birth of Ennius . . . At a late date then were poets either known or welcomed by our countrymen'). In comparison to one another, the two series – or, in chronographic terms, the two 'columns' – of events do not simply provide a list of dates but also evidence of a delay, which the double occurrence of the adverb *sero* highlights. The lack of a chronological alignment corresponds to a perceived cultural unevenness with respect to Greece: *doctrina Graecia nos et omni litterarum genere superabat; in quo erat facile vincere non repugnantes*, 'in learning Greece surpassed us and in all branches of literature, and victory was easy where there was no contest' (*Tusc.* 1.3). Behind these chronological calculations lies the theme of the *synkrisis* between Greece and Rome, which informs Cicero's perspective in the forties and which emerges particularly clearly from the proems of his *Tusculanae disputationes*.[24]

As we will see, the problem of the late origins of Latin literature had already been addressed in further detail by Cicero in the *Brutus*, written a short time earlier. In 45 BC, in the first and second proems of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, Cicero follows up on this problem by addressing a relevant matter (also discussed in the *Brutus*) which modern scholars have famously debated: that is, the question of the so-called *carmina convivalia* ('banquet songs').[25] While taking 240 BC to be the year of birth of Latin literature, Cicero nonetheless reports the important testimony of Cato's *Origines*, which leaves room for the possibility that epic poetry already

[24] Also of great importance, in this respect, are the proem of *De finibus* 1 and *De divinatione* II. On this proemial theme, and particularly on the proems of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, see Citroni 2003.
[25] On the so-called *carmina convivalia*, see Gale in this volume.

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existed in Rome in remote times, in the form of songs which used to be performed at banquets with the accompaniment of flutes in order to celebrate illustrious men: *quamquam est in Originibus solitos esse in epulis canere convivas ad tibicinem de clarorum hominum virtutibus*, 'though it is stated in the *Origines* that guests were in the habit of singing at banquets in honour of the virtues of famous men to the playing of a piper' (*Tusc.* 1.3). The word *quamquam* insinuates a doubt about the role of Livius Andronicus as *primus inventor* of Latin poetry. In line with his usual rigorous approach to the assessment and quotation of sources, Cicero cannot disregard a testimony as important as Cato's historiographical work. Therefore, he changes the grounds of this problem and he casts the question of the existence of these *carmina* as a pointless one. What matters is the social and cultural prestige of literature;[26] and there can be no doubt that in Rome, for a long time, poetry was not held in great esteem and attracted very little interest, as is indicated by Cato's reproach to Marcus Fulvius Nobilior because of the latter's dishonourable choice to take Ennius with him in his expedition to Aetolia (*Tusc.* 1.3).

Mario Citroni has outlined the reasons which must have led Cicero to regard Livius Andronicus as the initiator of Latin literature. He did not intend to question the principle by which Roman literature could be considered to have really started when the great Greek models began being imitated in Rome.[27] At the same time, however, Cicero's 'historiographical vocation' and antiquarian interests led him to look for a more remote origin.[28] This is how he encountered the authoritative testimony of Cato, which he could hardly dismiss if not by resorting to the ideological argument according to which *honos alit artes* ('public esteem is the nurse of the arts').

This is a matter to which Cicero turns again in the fourth proem of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, while talking about the influence of Pythagoreanism in Rome. In his discussion of the custom of outlining the precepts of Pythagoreanism in poems accompanied by music, he points out that a Latin parallel for these compositions was constituted by those *carmina* which used to be sung at Roman banquets to celebrate *clarorum virorum laudes atque virtutes*, the existence of which Cato authoritatively attests (*Tusc.* 4.3): 'Cato, a writer of great authority (*gravissumus auctor*), has stated [this] in his *Origines* . . . And from this it is clear that, in addition to poems, songs set to

[26] On social and cultural prestige as a criterion for ancient literary history, see also Gale in this volume.
[27] Citroni 2003: 176. [28] Cf. p. 88.

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music were already at that date written down to guide the voice of the singer' (*et cantus tum fuisse descriptos vocum sonis et carmina*).

This is, in my opinion, a passage of extraordinary importance. For here Cicero reflects on the origins of Latin literature by temporarily abandoning ideological preconceptions and by behaving as a historian who follows the traces of a remote literary past on the basis of the extant evidence – that is, Cato, but also the Twelve Tables (4.4), an ancient set of laws which prescribed a penalty for the authors of defamatory *carmina.* Within the context of the *synkrisis* between Greece and Rome, Cicero identifies a phase in which Roman culture was not late but proceeded in parallel with the Greek culture of *Magna Graecia* – that is, the cultural exchange dominated by Pythagoreanism, further exemplified by Appius Claudius Caecus' *carmen de sententiis* (fourth/third century).

Most modern historiographical surveys of Latin literature begin with the staging of the first *fabula* of Livius Andronicus in 240 BC, but they also feature an introductory chapter about the 'origins' or 'pre-literary forms', which generally include the *carmina convivalia*, Appius Claudius Caecus' works, and the *laudationes funebres* described in the *Brutus*.[29] This modern picture has an ancient equivalent in Cicero's differentiation between an 'official start', as it were, and a prior and less documented phase of Latin literature, which we may call pre-historical and which Cicero does not explicitly connect to the historical phase in a temporal *continuum*. The watershed marking the 'true' origin of literature in Rome is represented by the first work which creates a connection between Latin literary writing and the Greek tradition: that is, the script of a play re-adapted from a Greek model. At the level of cultural ideology, there could be no picture other than one in which Roman literature was born from an encounter with Greek literature. In truth, we know that it could be born only when literary production was paired with literary writing, which enabled the preservation of texts instead of just indirect testimonies. As Citroni rightly points out, this was the actual *discrimen* between pre-history and history, a *discrimen* which receives no attention within the ideological construction of the proems of the *Tusculanae disputationes* but of which Cicero was nonetheless well aware.[30] For in the history of oratory which he had previously outlined in the *Brutus*, Cicero had in fact taken writing to be the starting point of a history which could be entirely investigated and thus recounted.

[29] Cf. p. 107. [30] Citroni 2003: 179.

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4.5 The 'Breakthrough' of 47–46 and the *Brutus*

What prompted Cicero to investigate and reconstruct the past was not just his historiographical interests but also the influence of the lively debates and antiquarian research amongst contemporary intellectuals and friends, which had intensified between the fifties and his new literary production from 46 BC. In the previous year, 47, two works had been published, to which Cicero will owe a great debt, as he will acknowledge: Varro's monumental *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum* and Atticus' *Liber annalis*. Varro and Atticus are described in the *Brutus* almost as tutelary numina. The former – *Varro noster*, as Cicero calls him – is explicitly quoted twice. The first quotation, in which he is defined a *diligentissimus investigator antiquitatis* (*Brut.* 60), concerns the dating of Naevius' death, which Varro had set at a later time than other sources had (*in veteribus commentariis*) on the basis of his antiquarian research.[31] The context of the second quotation is that of the acknowledgement of Varro's role in the field of antiquarian studies in the wake of his teacher Aelius Stilo (205).[32] Varro's presence in the *Brutus*, however, extends beyond these two explicit references. For instance, he is the source of the chronology of Livius Andronicus.[33]

The other point of reference is Atticus, who, as Cicero puts it, had made the knowledge of the Roman past more accessible by means of a single volume which included chronological details concerning the previous seven hundred years (*Orat.* 120): 'here our task has been lightened by the labour of our friend Atticus, who has comprised in one book the record of seven hundred years, keeping the chronology definite and omitting no important event' (*conservatis notatisque temporibus, nihil cum inlustre*

[31] *Brut.* 60: 'In the consulship of [Cethegus and Tuditanus], as early records show, Naevius died; though our friend Varro, with his thoroughness of investigation into early history (*Varro noster diligentissimus investigator antiquitatis*), thinks this date erroneous and makes the life of Naevius somewhat longer. His reason is that Plautus, his contemporary, did not die until the consulship of Publius Claudius and Lucius Porcius, twenty years after the consuls named above, when Cato was censor.' There is a degree of inconsistency in this statement, which is based on the idea – an assumption, not a datum – that Naevius and Plautus were contemporaries. Cicero is probably oversimplifying Varro's argument while summarising it, or he is confused in reporting it. According to van den Berg 2021: 128–34, the inconsistency is the result of an ideological operation: Cicero independently came up with a date for the death of Naevius which would enable him to create a synchronism with Plautus and above all Cato, censor in 184 BC.

[32] For the influence of Varro on the *Brutus*, see Citroni in this volume. See also Fleck 1993: 194–8. Contra, van den Berg 2021: 61–2 and *passim* attributes less importance to Varro; according to him (164), the apparent praise at *Brut.* 205 actually diminishes Varro's role by making him a continuator of Aelius Stilo's work and therefore simply an antiquarian, not a literary historian.

[33] Cf. note 45.

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praetermitteret, annorum septingentorum memoriam uno libro conligavit). Atticus is one of the protagonists of the *Brutus*, together with Brutus and Cicero himself; the dialogue is, to some extent, dedicated to him. Cicero associates the genesis of the work with a renewal of some old interests (*pristina studia*) caused by that book in which, as the dramatic persona of Brutus puts it, Atticus had synthesised the entire past (14: *eum* [sc. *librum*] *... quo iste omnem rerum memoriam breviter et ... perdiligenter complexus est*, 'that work in which he sets forth all history so briefly and ... so faithfully'). That book, Cicero says (15), was full of novelties and had been very useful to him, since it had enabled him to behold the whole history of Rome, arranged in chronological order (*explicatis ordinibus temporum*), in one comprehensive view (*uno in conspectu*).

The *Liber annalis* is thus presented as the link between the *De republica* and the *Brutus*, and as an important element in the dialogue between two friends.[34] Atticus has been stimulated by reading the *De re publica*, as we have seen, and Cicero now reciprocates. To his friend, who is asking him to write something after years of silence and who has urged him more than once to apply himself to historiography, Cicero responds with the work which is generally recognised as the most historical in his oeuvre.[35] But what exactly are the *multa nova* which Cicero had found in Atticus' book, and how did this book bring about a breakthrough? The survey of the orators in the *Brutus* follows a chronological order,[36] but chronology had already emerged from the *De republica* and, as we have seen, the dialogues written in the fifties show a familiarity with the cultural history of Greece and Rome in terms of parallel histories to be investigated within a chronological framework. It has been thought that Atticus' chronographic work provided a clearer idea of the chronological relationship between the two cultures thanks to a more accessible layout.[37] This improved legibility, in comparison to Castor's and Cornelius Nepos' *Chronica*,[38] perhaps consisted in a better disposition of the parallel columns, which made the gap between the two cultures particularly visible and provided a direct picture of the late origins of Latin culture. If so, the breakthrough with respect to the fifties would be the substitution of the

[34] For the role of the *Brutus* within the dialogue between Cicero and Atticus, see Steel 2002–2003 and Marchese 2011.

[35] See, amongst others, Rambaud 1953: 100; Rawson 1972: 43 ('Cicero's most sustained, sensitive and successful historical achievement'); Ledentu 2014: 72.

[36] On the use of chronology in the *Brutus*, see Rathofer 1986 and the recent summary of Brillante 2021.

[37] Habinek 1998: 45.

[38] Whether Cicero used Nepos' *Chronica* as a source is uncertain: cf. note 22.

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paradigm of 'likeness' with the paradigm of 'unlikeness':[39] in other words, the search for criteria of parallel development were replaced by the ascertainment of a disproportionate and unaligned development. What is most likely is that Cicero exaggerates the influence of the *Liber annalis* for the sake of the dialogue's fiction. He credits this work with having given him the stimulus to address the topic which he develops in the *Brutus*, a tactic by which he also resumes the narrative of the intellectual exchange with Atticus which had been interrupted since the years of the *De legibus*. By the author's declared intention, the *Brutus* is a new moment of this dialogue. However, regardless of the emphasis placed by Cicero on the influence of the *Liber annalis*, the *Brutus* is also and above all the work in which many and different lines of thought and research converge: the Aristotelian and Peripatetic scheme of progress;[40] the classification in canons and triads of Alexandrian type; the annalistic and specifically Catonian historiography; the study of Roman antiquity which had been cultivated since the end of the second century and which was now thriving in the so-called second flowering of antiquarianism;[41] the universal histories which had originated in the cultural environment of the Hellenistic era; and the chronographical works which were related to them, and which were particularly popular at the time.

If we look for literary history in the *Brutus*, we find evidence of not one but two histories. The first and main literary history concerns a specific genre, oratory. This had been anticipated at *De or.* 2.92–5, in the digression about the variety of styles connected to each generation of orators in Greece (*cur aetates extulerint singulae singula prope genera dicendi*, 'why … nearly every age has produced its own distinctive style of oratory').[42] The history of Greek oratory is taken up and expanded upon in the new dialogue, this time with an introductory function and therefore on a smaller scale than the history of Roman oratory (30 Greek orators, 221 Roman ones). Some sections of this main narrative are interwoven with short sections of a second literary history, about poetry (as well as other arts, such as painting and sculpture), in line with a comparative scheme anticipated, once again, by a passage of the *De oratore* (3.26–8).

[39] According to the categories of Feeney 2007: 25–8, who points at *Rep.* 2.18 (discussed above, pp. 93–4) as a particularly indicative passage: there, Cicero's argument is based on the idea that even the most ancient period of Roman history was contemporary to an epoch of highly sophisticated Greek culture, and somehow belonged to it.

[40] Cf. pp. 90–1; Rawson 1972: 34 highlights the influence of Dicaearchus, with whom Cicero shares his primarily historical and cultural interests.

[41] Cf. Rawson 1972: 35; Romano 2010: 32–6. [42] Cf. note 11.

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The fragments of this second literary history are concentrated in two digressions, at *Brut.* 57–60 and 70–6. The former is an excursus about Marcus Cornelius Cethegus, the earliest orator whose eloquence is attested by a reliable source, a passage from the ninth book of the *Annales* of Ennius, who had the opportunity to hear him speaking (*Brut.* 57: *cuius eloquentiae est auctor et idoneus quidem mea sententia Q. Ennius*, 'the authority for this statement [about Cethegus'] eloquence], and an adequate one I fancy, is Quintus Ennius'). After quoting and commenting on the relevant lines (=304–8 Skutsch), Cicero opens a digression on literary history which is subordinate to the main narrative about the history of oratory. Cicero refers to another witness, Naevius, whose poetic language can give an idea of the language of Cethegus, who belonged to the same generation (60: *illius autem aetatis qui sermo fuerit ex Naevianis scriptis intellegi potest*, 'the language of that period can be learned from the writings of Naevius'). At this point we find the discussion, mentioned above, about the dating of Naevius' death.[43] So far, the history of literature broadly understood can only be seen in the background of the history of oratory to which it provides the support of textual evidence.

The figure of Naevius, here a chronological marker, as it were, appears again in the famous critical judgement which compares the *Bellum Poenicum* to Miro's statues (75) in the excursus about the paradigms of artistic development in sculpture, painting and poetry.[44] The evolutionary trajectory on which Cicero positions the poetry of Livius Andronicus, Naevius and Ennius is discussed in detail by Citroni in the present volume. Starting from the well-known idea that *nihil est simul et inventum et perfectum*, 'nothing is brought to perfection on its first invention' (71), Cicero maps the poetry of the mid-Republican period across an ascending line on the basis of a series of critical judgements. This critical dimension dominates over the literary-historiographical one. However, Cicero is fully aware of the chronological axis along which this artistic development is outlined. It is not by chance that he adds to the excursus a new reference to the *Liber annalis*, when he apologises for introducing an issue which may not be relevant to the broader discussion and attributes the responsibility for this to Atticus, who had stirred up his enthusiasm about chronology (74: *haec si minus apta videntur huic sermoni, Brute, Attico adsigna, qui me inflammavit studio inlustrium hominum aetates et tempora persequendi*, 'if

[43] Cf. p. 99 and note 31.

[44] For the comparison between poetry and figurative arts, which is not uncommon in the language of Hellenistic literary criticism, see Prioux in this volume.

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this discussion seems ill-suited to our conversation, Brutus, put the blame on Atticus, who has inspired me with interest in tracing out the successive generations of famous men and their time in relation to one another'). The technical matter which may be *minus apt*[*um*] but which Cicero has nonetheless addressed is that of the chronology of Livius Andronicus, a crucial matter for the establishment of the origins of the history of Latin literature. The reference is to the famous passage in which Cicero refutes Accius' later dating, according to which Livius Andronicus arrived in Rome in 209 and staged his first play eleven years later, in 197 – a serious mistake, Cicero says, because this dating would make Livius Andronicus a contemporary of Ennius and younger than Plautus and Naevius: 'in this the error of Accius is so great (*tantus error Acci fuit*) that in the consulship of these men [scil. Gaius Cornelius and Quintus Minucius = 197 BC] Ennius was already forty years of age. But suppose that Livius was his contemporary: it will appear then that the first one to produce a play at Rome was somewhat younger than the two who had already produced many plays before this date, Plautus and Naevius' (73).[45] This question about chronology is dealt with and solved with regard to the dating of other literary figures. What we have here is a chronological scheme based on mutual relations between figures linked to other figures,[46] thus expanding on a tendency of which, as we have seen, Cicero had already shown some signs of in the *De legibus*.

4.6 Cicero as a Literary Historian: Methods and Problems

The survey of orators in the *Brutus* is not, strictly speaking, a literary history, since Cicero's focus is not (or not simply) on oratory as a literary genre, but as a form of literary knowledge that is profoundly interwoven with political and legal knowledge. In this sense, the *Brutus* outlines the history of a cultural practice. However, it is possible to regard this work as the archetype of the modern genre of literary history. It is the work that gives us the most comprehensive profile of Cicero as a literary

[45] Varro, contra Accio, had already supported the date of 240: cf. the evidence of Dahlmann 1962: 29–38, to which Citroni 2013: 185–7 adds the convincing *comparandum* of Varro *Ling.* 5.9, drawing a parallel between Livius Andronicus and Romulus. Van den Berg 2021: 135–64 argues that Cicero intentionally manipulated Accius' testimony in order to diminish its credibility in his own favour. One of the theses of this volume is that Cicero intended to backdate the origins of Roman poetry in order to highlight the slower development of oratory: the former would somehow derive from the Greek tradition, whereas the latter, despite some Greek influences, would be an indigenous form of knowledge which would therefore require more time to develop.

[46] On the variety of chronological markers used by Cicero, including some dates of his own career, see van den Berg 2021: 6–7.

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historian,[47] by finalising and systematising in a unitary picture various elements which had already characterised his approach in the dialogues written in the fifties. The traits of Cicero's profile as a literary historian emerge with clarity from the sections discussed above, which are most explicitly concerned with literary history, but also from the dialogue as whole.

Cicero's search for and assessment of his sources, which are sometimes generically mentioned and sometimes specifically quoted, are the first elements of his historiographical methodology and antiquarian enquiry. To the examples considered above of Ennius' testimony about Cethegus (57–9) and Varro's about Naevius (60), we may add Cato's testimony about the *carmina convivalia* (75), Fannius' about Scipio Africanus (299), and the pontifical annals (55) as well as other sources to which Cicero refers in more general terms as *annales* (49), *commentarii* (60; 72) or *monumenta* (28; 52). An antiquarian and philological attitude also emerges from the comparison between different critical opinions and the refutation of those opinions which Cicero rejects, as in the case of the *inter scriptores controversia* about the chronology of Livius Andronicus.

Cicero is interested in positioning literary figures on a timeline according to correct chronology. This is why he refers to chronological schemes and uses synchronism as a critical tool. In the *Brutus* we can notice two uses of this tool: one aiming at comparisons between Greek culture and Roman culture and another aiming at comparisons within either culture, of the kind we considered above (Naevius – Plautus; Livius Andronicus – Plautus – Naevius). Examples of the former rather traditional use of synchronism include Solon and Pisistratus, who lived during the reign of Servius Tullius, when Athens already had a longer history than Rome did in Cicero's times (39); or Themistocles, who lived in the same epoch as Coriolanus (41).

A particularly interesting case of synchronism is a comparison between Greece and Rome which is internal to Greek history. I am referring to a topic which Cicero had already addressed in the *De republica* and which he now takes up again: the chronological calculation which, on the one hand, marks the distance between the Homeric poems and Romulus, and, on the other hand, attempts to establish a dating for Homer in relation to the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus. The exact epoch in which Homer lived is uncertain, but it certainly dates to many years before Romulus, if not to a time immediately after Lycurgus (*Brut.* 40). A few lines earlier, Homer

[47] *The Invention of Literary History* is the subtitle of van den Berg 2021, a book about the *Brutus*; but cf. also Aubert-Baillot and Guérin 2014: 8, who had already described Cicero's work in similar terms.

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had been cited as evidence that public oratory had always been considered very important in Greece since the very beginning of historical times – for, otherwise, 'even in Trojan times Homer would not have allotted such praise to Ulixes and Nestor for their speech' (*Brut.* 40). Here, as at *Rep.* 2.18, Homeric poetry marks the moment in which history begins; but the origin of the great tradition of oratory is dated more precisely to the subject of Homeric poetry, namely to the *Troica tempora*, rather than to Homer himself. The reference is not coincidental, because the Trojan War was generally taken to be the starting point of history (the most common dating was 1184 BC).[48]

Although universal histories attempted to determine a starting point for history, it was difficult if not impossible to investigate the most ancient phases. This problem, which was regarded as a major one by the Roman intellectuals in the forties,[49] underlies the entirety of the *Brutus*, where Cicero reveals himself fully aware that this difficulty arises from the absence of written evidence. Without writings, memory cannot be preserved; and without memory, the past cannot be investigated. The knowledge of the past can be gained only through writing and memory. This is why it is difficult to know about the origins of Greek oratory: there are no written testimonies (*littera nulla est*) of oratory before Pericles, a few of whose writings have been transmitted to posterity (27). When no direct testimonies are available, one needs to rely on common opinion and conjectures: it is commonly believed (*opinio est*) that Pisistratus, Solon and Clisthenes were good orators. The same applies to those ancient Roman orators about whom it is difficult to know more than what historical records say (*Brut.* 52). The earliest witness is Ennius on Cethegus; before that, one can only rely on conjectures (56: *tantummodo coniectura ducor ad suspicandum*, 'I am only led by conjecture to suspect it was so'). About Appius Claudius Caecus, Tiberius Coruncanius or Manius Popilius, one can only *suspicari* or trust the oral tradition (57: *dicitur etiam C. Flaminius . . . ad populum valuisse dicendo*; *Q. etiam Maxumus Verrucosus orator habitus est temporibus illis*, 'it is reported too that Gaius Flaminius . . . was a valiant speaker before the people. Also Quintus Maximus Verrucosus was by the standards of that time accounted an orator').[50]

[48] Cf. Feeney 2007: 77–86.

[49] As suggested, for instance, by Varro's idea of an *adelon*, a remote phase of the human world which pre-dates history (*apud* Censorinus, *DN* 21), and by the proem of *De lingua Latina* V, where the difficulties of learning about the most remote past is compared to a path in the darkness of a forest (5.5).

[50] There is an undeniable inconsistency in identifying the beginning of Roman oratory with Marcus Cornelius Cethegus (consul in 204), whose speeches were entirely lost, rather than with Appius Claudius Caecus, whose speech against Pyrrhus of 280 was still extant, as emerges from *Brut.* 61.

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This history founded on conjectures is partial, inconsistent and uncertain. Cicero realises that the history which he outlines is full of gaps. He knows that he is passing over some ancient orators who would deserve praise, but he cannot do otherwise, because he does not know them. His *ignoratio* is due to the absence of testimonies. What could one possibly write about men of the past about whom we have no testimonies written by them or by other sources (181)? Without writing, and therefore without memory, the unavoidable natural law of time takes over and condemns them to oblivion. Cethegus would have been condemned as well, were it not for Ennius' testimony (60): 'unless the knowledge of his eloquence were known to us by the sole testimony of Ennius, time would have consigned him to oblivion as it has doubtless many others' (*hunc vetustas, ut alios fortasse multos, oblivione obruisset*).[51]

One reason why the *Brutus* is commonly and rightly considered a historiographical work is that it addresses a crucial problem of historiography, namely the accessibility of knowledge about the past. The question, in other words, is from what point one could start writing history – not only universal history but also the history of culture, oratory and poetry. This question informs and pervades the *Brutus*. In order to answer it, Cicero had to identify the initial moments of a historical process (that is, a process about which historical evidence exists), moments which mark discontinuity with regard to a pre-history that is not ascertainable or not at all knowable. This is why it becomes so important to identify watershed events or figures. The watershed in universal history is the *Troica tempora* and the poet who sang about them. In the history of Roman oratory the watershed is Cato, who was not the first orator but the earliest whose written works can be referenced (61).

As we have seen, Cato's role in Roman oratory is equivalent to Livius Andronicus' role in Roman poetry. There is a phase before Cato about which it is possible to make conjectures or rely on testimonies such as Ennius' on Cethegus. In the same way, poetry has its pre-history as well, about which it is only possible to make guesses on the basis of conjectures: the existence of epic poems recited by bards at banquets before Homer can be inferred by the characters of Phemius and Demodocus in the *Odyssey* (71: *nec dubitari debet quin fuerint ante Homerum poetae, quod ex eis carminibus intellegi potest, quae apud illum et in Phaeacum et in procorum*

Van den Berg 2021: 135–51 tries to explain this inconsistency on the basis of ideological reasons: oratory must have started after poetry (cf. note 45).

[51] The theme of *vetustas* burying everything into oblivion is also present in Varro, who develops this theme in the proem of *De lingua Latina* V (cf. also *obruta vetustate* at *Ling.* 6.2).

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epulis canuntur, 'we cannot doubt that there were poets before Homer, as we may infer from the songs which he introduces into the feasts of the Phaeacians and of the suitors'). This primigenial epic tradition of Greek banquets finds an equivalent in the epic poetry sung at Roman banquets (*in epulis*), namely the *carmina* to which Cato refers, the same testimony which Cicero will later discuss in two passages of the *Tusculanae disputationes*, as we have seen. All this, however, is part of a pre-history which is not documented by any direct tradition, without which it is difficult to verify the indirect tradition. Although Cato is an authoritative source, there is no text prior to the third century reporting celebratory poems about illustrious men; and, for other reasons, the exceptional cases of preserved texts are to be rejected as products of a pre-historical culture filled with myths. This is the case with the *mortuorum laudationes*, a primigenial corpus of speeches belonging to the genre of epideictic oratory. Although these have been preserved (61: *eae quidem exstant*), Cicero regards them to be unreliable evidence, since they are filled with self-celebratory fabrications devised by aristocratic families.

To conclude, Cicero's vocation as a historian and an antiquarian leads him to wonder about the origins of literature and to reconstruct, as best as he can, an 'archaeology' of literature in line with his approach to oratory. His idea of history, however, entails that the available data can only be studied from an antiquarian and philological perspective, not a historiographical one. Yet what we read in his works about these origins – whether in the form of reported testimonies or as Cicero's own thoughts – constitutes an important contribution to ancient literary history, perhaps the most important contribution he offered.

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