CHAPTER 16

Oratory and Political Debate in the Last Decades of the Roman Republic: Cassius Dio’s Reconstruction (with Some Notes from Remigio Nannini’s *Orationi Militari*)

Ida Gilda Mastrorosa

1 Introduction

The *Roman History*, composed between the second and fourth decades of the third century CE by Cassius Dio, historian, member of the Senate, and consul on two occasions, contains numerous speeches attributed to the leading figures of the political scene considered in the work. Although most scholars regard these pieces as fictitious, allegedly segments of narrative appositely introduced by the historian to express his own position on significant questions or subjects, they provide insights into how Dio interpreted the attitudes of some of the key protagonists of ancient Rome, as well as the way he used earlier classical sources that recorded information about them. Moreover, these speeches may contribute to the study of Dio’s opinion about the use of oratory in both political and military contexts during some of the most critical

---

1 There is a substantial bibliography on Cassius Dio and his work. In addition to Gabba (1955) and Millar (1964), see especially among the most recent monographic studies, Freyburger-Galland (1997); for Dio’s consulates, cf. Leunissen (1989) 163 n. 147; for the date of the composition of the *Roman History*, see especially Millar (1964) 28–40 and Letta (1979); for recent remarks, cf. also Schettino (2001) 555–558 and Letta (2003) 616–618.

2 In this respect, Cassius Dio follows a well-known tradition; for a recent overview of the meaning and use of speeches in classical historiography, see Marincola (2007). It goes without saying that the presence of these speeches is not a guarantee that they were in fact delivered on the various occasions in question.

3 As highlighted by Millar (1964) 83: “Their interest must lie not in what they can contribute to historical knowledge, but in the insight they can give into the mind of a senator writing under the Severi, the political questions which were uppermost in his mind and the sort of reasoning they could apply to them.” For further discussion on this matter, among the many contributions, besides Schwartz (1899) 1718–1719, see especially Millar (1961), A.V. van Stekelenburg (1971), Martinelli (1990), and, more recently, Burden-Strevens (2016).
phases of the Republican period, and also his reception of publicly debated topics and trends from the earlier tradition.

As regards the last century of Roman Republican history, and more particularly the years between the biennium after the so-called First Triumvirate and the Battle of Actium (from 58 to 31 BCE), the Roman History includes various speeches delivered by Caesar, Cicero, Antony, and Octavian, among others.

In the sixteenth century, the orationes that Cassius Dio attributes to some of these leading figures of ancient Rome's political arena attracted the attention of Remigio Nannini, a Florentine Dominican known for his activity as a compiler, who worked for Giolito de' Ferrari, the renowned bookseller and publisher from Venice. Nannini selected many of these rhetorical pieces and included them in both his anthologies of classical and modern speeches, namely the Orationi militari and the Orationi in materia civile e criminale, very probably using Nicolò Leoniceno's Italian translation of Dio.

The first of these works, published in 1557 and then again in a second augmented edition in 1560, was dedicated to the condottiere Giovanni Battista Castaldo and was conceived as a collection of military orationes taken from Greek and Roman sources and some modern texts. It also includes, among other things, the Italian translations of the speeches attributed by Cassius Dio to Caesar, Cicero, and to Antony and Octavian before the Battle of Actium.

---

4 For the role played by oratory in the period of the Republic, see, among recent studies, Osgood (2006), David (2007), and M.C. Alexander (2007); and the contributions included in Steel and van der Blom (2013).

5 For Dio's interpretation of late republican Rome, besides Gowing (1992) 289–297, who stresses the historian's tendency to evaluate the past in relation to his own times, see especially Lintott (1997).

6 For a recent sketch of this period, see Tatum (2006) 202–209.

7 Further biographical details on the figure of Nannini and his activity are found in Hester (2003) and Tomei (2012).

8 For a fuller discussion on Giolito's activity, see especially Coppens and Nuovo (2005).


10 Cf. Nannini (1561).

11 As suggested by Hester (2003) 240, and actually confirmed by an analysis of the speeches attributed by Dio to the above mentioned figures included in the Orationi militari. Nannini's translations are from Dione historico Delle guerre e fatti de Romani, tradotto di Greco in lingua vulgare, per M. Nicolò Leoniceno, impresso in Vinegia per Nicolò d'Aristotile di Ferrara detto Zoppino, 1533.

12 For this figure, see De Caro (1978).

13 The Italian translations of the speeches made by Octavian-Augustus after Actium are included in the Orationi in materia civile e criminale.