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Cicero and Photius

An Analysis of the Survival and Influence of Cicero on Photius' *Bibliotheca*, at the Crossroads between History and Drama

Il passato [...] appartiene di fatto e di diritto, come possesso reale, all'uomo; e l'uomo può quindi ritornarne padrone e ospite
(L. Santucci, *Orfeo in Paradiso*, Milano 1967, 38)

To this day, the topic of the Latin authors read and cited by Photius in his *Bibliotheca* (or *Myriobiblos/Myriobiblion*) has been little investigated.¹ In this context, Cicero's case offers a privileged point of view at least for three main reasons: firstly, because Cicero is among the few non-ecclesiastical Latin authors mentioned by Photius,² who devotes a specific section to him;³ secondly, because Photius significantly contributed to show Cicero's enduring popularity and *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the Greek East;⁴ thirdly, because the figure of Cicero is a multifaceted and complex one, and therefore it is important to investigate which aspects of him stood out in the eyes of an exceptional reader such as the patriarch of Constantinople⁵ during the ninth century, so as to better understand Cicero's personality and genius. *Rebus sic stantibus*, it will be appropriate to proceed – for the first time in an analytical and organic way – with an examination of Cicero's presence in Photius,

1 Among the few contributions, besides Pade 2014, 532 and 548, it is worth mentioning Mendels 1986, which reflects the most common scholarly approach to the subject in question, although we have to consider that this investigation is limited to the context of historical sources only, whereas – as is well known – Cicero illustrates a case that goes well beyond the issue of historical influence.

2 Photius' interest in a Latin-language author like Augustine is explained precisely by the importance that this Christian author had from a spiritual and, above all, dogmatic point of view: in *Bibl.* 53 Photius quotes Augustine for his πίστις (14a) regarding the synod of Carthage (411 or 412 CE), against Pelagius and Caelestius and regarding the dispute over the denial of free will (*Bibl.* 54.15a).

3 In this regard, there is also an indirect mention of Cicero in the reference to Brutus (*Bibl.* 245.393b): by the words ἐν μὲν οὖν ταῖς πρώταις ἐπιστολαῖς τοιοῦτος ὁ Βρούτος (“therefore, in the first letters such as Brutus”; here and after transl. by the author), Photius is alluding to the first letters which Brutus himself (see Nogara 1991) wrote to Cicero “pour lui reprocher son empressement envers César” (Henry 1971, 175 n. 2).

4 Among Cicero's epigones in the ninth century, we only find the western Frank Hadoardus (who was obviously interested in Latin literature). See von Albrecht 1995, 552–553.

5 More properly, the future patriarch of the Constantinopolitan see, given that the *Bibliotheca* dates back to around the year 838, while Photius received his first patriarchal mandate at Christmas some time between 858 and 867.

so as to illustrate what consideration the main Latin orator enjoyed according to one of the sharpest readers of the Byzantine period.⁶

To approach this subject, it is first of all necessary to make a preliminary observation, namely that the Patriarch quotes Cicero at two very precise and distinct points of the *Bibliotheca*.⁷ we find a fleeting yet evocative reference to Cicero's final hours in the section devoted to Ptolemy Hephaestion (*Bibl.* 190) and a longer monographic section focusing on the Latin author in the context of a review of Plutarch's *Lives* (*Bibl.* 245).⁸ Photius here touches on topics ranging from the Ciceronian declamatory technique to various anecdotal details and the conspiracy hatched against the Roman orator. This introductory observation allows us to immediately highlight two aspects: a) for the most part, Photius' Cicero is not based on a first-hand reading of the great orator's Latin works (not least owing to the language barrier), but is rather filtered through Plutarch;⁹ b) not everything that Photius says about Cicero, however, is drawn from Plutarch,¹⁰ as is evidenced by the valuable information about the orator's death, which had been transmitted by Ptolemy Hephaestion. We shall begin our analysis from this last source. Photius writes:¹¹

ὁ μέντοι νομοθέτης Ἀρκάδων Κερκίδας συνταφῆναι αὐτῷ τὸ α' καὶ β' τῆς Ἰλιάδος κελεύσειν. Ὁ δὲ Πομπηῖος ὁ Μάγνος οὐδ' εἰς πόλεμον προίει, πρὶν ἂν τὸ λ' τῆς Ἰλιάδος ἀναγνώσειε, ζηλωτῆς ὦν Ἀγαμέμνονος· ὁ δὲ Ῥωμαῖος Κικέρων Μήδειαν Εὐριπίδου ἀναγινώσκων ἐν φορείῳ φερόμενος, ἀποτμηθεὶς τὴν κεφαλὴν.

well, Cercidas – the Arcadian legislator – would have given orders for Books α and β of the *Iliad* to be buried with him. And Pompey the Great would not even have started to go into battle before having read Book λ of the *Iliad*, since he was an imitator of Agamemnon; the Roman Cicero, moreover, would have his head cut off while he was being carried in a litter and reading Euripides' *Medea*. (transl. by the author)

⁶ Significantly, André Schott identified Cicero, along with Julian, Ptolemy II and Asinius Pollio, as interesting to Photius on account of the wide range of sources these authors drew upon (Carlucci 2012, 58).

⁷ For an overview of Photius' work and its genesis, see Bevegni 1996 and Nogara 1975, as well as the remarks on its encyclopedic and erudite character in Canfora 1999, esp. 409.

⁸ This finding is all the more important, given that Photius devotes little space to other highly prominent figures in the Latin tradition, as emerges, for example, from the few lines he reserves for Cato (395b), Caesar (396a) and Marius (398a).

⁹ On Photius' use of Plutarch in general and, more specifically, on his abridgement of the latter's writing, see Schamp 1995, esp. 158–161 (and the previous Schamp 1982).

¹⁰ The question of the sources which Plutarch draws upon when discussing Cicero has given rise to some extravagant views, starting from Alfred Gudeman's idea that Plutarch made use of a previous life written by Suetonius (Gudeman 1902, *passim*).

¹¹ Phot. *Bibl.* 190 on Ptolemy Hephaestion, 151a (the following text is taken from Henry 1962, 190).

After a learned quotation from *Eunides* by Cratinus and Hesiod's *Work and Days*, Photius continues with highly selected memoirs of an erudite and anecdotal nature. The first concerns the Arcadian lawgiver Cercidas,¹² who is said to have been buried together with Books One and Two of the *Iliad*. This leads – as though through a free flow of recollections – to another similar anecdote concerning the *Iliad*: we are told that a far better known personality from Classical antiquity, namely Pompey the Great, never went to war without first reading Book Eleven of the Homeric poem, which was evidently perceived as an *exemplum* and incitement to military virtue – particularly considering that Pompey is referred to as a lover of Agamemnon and his admirer (ζηλωτής).¹³ At this point, Photius introduces news pertaining to our topic, as he shifts his attention to Cicero; while in the case of Cercidas and Pompey the *Iliad* was the intermediate element linking the mention of the two subjects, now the medium between Pompey (just mentioned) and Cicero (mentioned immediately after) is their common trait of *Romanitas*. In a single, visually striking brushstroke, Photius reports that the Roman Cicero was beheaded as he was being carried in a litter and intent on reading Euripides' *Medea*.

The passage is relevant both for the information it provides – which would otherwise be unknown to us – and for its narrative construction of Cicero's character within the broader context of Photius' work. First of all, the source from which Photius draws this Ciceronian anecdote is Ptolemy Hephaestion, also known as Chennus (Χέννος, quail), an Alexandrian grammarian who lived under Trajan and Hadrian. He was the author – among other things – of a *Strange History* (Περὶ παραδόξου ιστορίας, a text of the paradoxical genre),¹⁴ and probably of a historical drama (or novel) entitled *Sphinx* (Σφίγξ) and of a collection of twenty-four poems entitled *Ανθόμηνος*.¹⁵ While the last two works by Ptolemy are lost, something from the six or seven Books that made up the *Strange History* has survived, thanks to Photius himself, who summarised this work in the *Bibliotheca*.¹⁶

¹² In addition to being a poet (*Meliambi*) and philosopher (of Cynical orientation, according to Diog. Laert. 6.76), Cercidas is especially known for having drafted the constitution of Megalopolis (Polyb. 5.93); on this figure, see Lomiento 1993 and Gerhard's entry in *RE*, s.v. *Kerkidas*, n. 1, 11 (1922), coll. 294–308.

¹³ Book Eleven of the *Iliad* was known in ancient times – according to Eust. *Il.* 3.133 – by the *titulus* of Ἀγαμέμνονος ἀριστεία, insofar as it recounted Agamemnon's deeds (the hero takes up arms and, with the support of Athena and Hera, enters into battle against the Trojans' champion, Hector).

¹⁴ All that remains of this text is what has been transmitted by Photius himself; Roulez 1834 remains the reference edition.

¹⁵ This can be inferred from *Suda*, Π 3037.

¹⁶ Phot. *Bibl.* 190; Photius says that the work is dedicated to a certain Tertulla, an otherwise unknown lover of Ptolemy's (I will refer here to Stein's entry for Tertulla, n. 24, in *RE*, 2nd series, 5 (1934), col. 848). What is most important to note is that Tertulla is celebrated by Ptolemy for her

What attracted Photius' interest was Ptolemy Hephaestion's erudition, that πολυμαθία which at 146b he enthusiastically describes as follows:

χρήσιμον ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ βιβλίον τοῖς περὶ τὴν ἱστορικὴν πολυμαθίαν πονεῖν ὠρμημένοις· ἔχει γὰρ δοῦναι συνειλεγμένα βραχεῖ χρόνῳ εἰδέναι, ἃ σποράδην τις τῶν βιβλίων ἀναλέγειν πόνον δεδεγμένοις μακρὸν κατατρίψει βίον.

the book is really useful for those who intend to undertake to have generally a form of historical culture: in fact, it offers the possibility of knowing in a short time, collected together, things that – scattered here and there among the books – would have taken a lifetime to accumulate for those who care. (transl. by the author)

Photius, therefore, drew on the grammarian with the enthusiasm of someone who knows all too well how difficult it is to find minute and detailed information on a specific topic. Ptolemy Hephaestion made it possible for Photius to find in a short time what otherwise he would have to have searched for with meticulous inspections in many books. Within these coordinates the entire pericope on Cercidas and Pompey is inserted in a perfectly harmonious way – particularly the reference to Cicero reading Euripides at the time of his torture.

Photius here goes further, however, because in the selection of the material that he cites he sets up a first tragic scenario, which finds Cicero as central focus; in the Photian redaction of our pericope we note a common tragic matrix that binds together all the literary works and figures mentioned: in the case of Cercidas, the *Iliad* is buried with him, while in the case of Pompey, Book Eleven of the same Homeric poem is still connected to a context of death (Pompey did not fail to read it before entering combat, which could only endanger his life). Likewise, Cicero is portrayed as reading *Medea* when he falls into the deadly ambush. In this first tragic plot built by Photius around Cicero it is possible to grasp a further important element: the fact that Cicero was intent on reading *Medea* is not neutral, since this Euripidean drama hinges on the bloody crime perpetrated by Medea against her children. In this way, a close parallel begins to emerge, which – by tragic irony, in the Aristotelian sense – foreshadows the story of Cicero himself, who shortly thereafter was to be assassinated by the very Rome that had nurtured and raised him: for the conspirators were *cives* like Cicero himself and he was destined to fall under the blows not of nature or of barbarians, but of members of his own *civitas*.

love of literature and scholarship, in full harmony with the nature of the work that is dedicated to her, one rich in ideas drawn from different doctrines, historical references, erudite information, and legendary and mythological *mirabilia*.

It seems, then, that Photius found the information about Cicero that we are considering in an erudite source, namely Ptolemy Hephaestion. However, in all likelihood Photius altered this material, by giving it a tragic and proleptic framework that both speaks for itself and offers an initial outline of the idea of Cicero that Photius had developed, an idea which is further clarified in the Ciceronian section within the review of Plutarch's *Bioi*.

In *Bibl.* 245, focusing on Plutarch, Photius devotes (from 395a onwards) a specific section to Cicero, within the context of the Plutarchian juxtaposition of the *Lives* of Cicero and Demosthenes.¹⁷ Photius' text reads:¹⁸

ὅτι οὐ μικρά (φησὶν) ἐκ τοῦ ὑποκρίνεσθαι ῥοπή προσῆν εἰς τὸ πείθειν τῷ Κικέρωνι· καὶ τοὺς τῷ μεγάλα βοᾶν χρωμένους ῥήτορας ἐπισκώπτων ἔλεγε δι' ἀσθένειαν ἐπὶ τὴν κραυγὴν ὡσπερ τοὺς χλωλοὺς ἐφ' ἵππον πηδᾶν. Ὅτι τὸ μὲν πρὸς ἐχθροὺς ἢ πρὸς ἀντιδίκους σκώμμασι χρῆσθαι πικροτέροις δοκεῖ ῥητορικὸν εἶναι· τὸ δὲ οἷς ἔτυχε προσκροῦναι ἔνεκα τοῦ γελοίου πολὺ συνήγαγε μῖσος τῷ Κικέρωνι, καὶ ἐκ τούτου πολλοῖς γέγονεν ἐπαχθής, καὶ οἱ μετὰ Κλωδίου συνέστησαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην λαβόντες. Ὅτι τὸ λεπτότατον τοῦ χαλκοῦ νόμισμα κουαδράντην Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν. Ὅτι λέγεται, φησί, τὰς πρώτας ἡμέρας διαγωνισάμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ Κικέρωνος ὁ Καῖσαρ ἐνδοῦναι τῇ τρίτῃ καὶ προσέσθαι τὸν φίλον. Τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀντιδόσεως οὕτως εἶχεν· ἔδει Κικέρωνος μὲν ἐκστῆναι Καίσαρα, Παύλου δὲ τάδελοφου Λέπιδου, Λευκίου δὲ Καίσαρος Ἀντώνιον, ὃς ἦν θεῖος αὐτῷ πρὸς μητρός. Οὕτως ἐξέπεσον ὑπὸ θυμοῦ καὶ λύσσης τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπέδειξαν, ὡς οὐδὲν θηρίον ἀνθρώπου ἐστὶν ἀγριώτερον, ἐξουσίαν πάθει προσλαβόντος.

Cicero, says the author, drew considerable advantage from his talent as an actor in order to persuade; he laughed at the orators who spoke loudly by saying that they resorted to cries like lame people jump on horseback. To resort to rather harsh jokes against enemies or adversaries in court seems to be a rhetorical process. But the hatred of those his laughter happened to offend afflicted Cicero, and he became unbearable to quite a few people and Clodius' supporters ganged up against him because of such a grievance. The Romans call their lightest bronze currency a quadrant. It is reported, the author says, that after struggling for the first few days to defend Cicero, Caesar surrendered his friend on the third day and gave up. The terms of the deal were as follows: Caesar was to abandon Cicero, Lepidus his brother Paul, and Antony was to abandon Lucius Caesar, his maternal uncle. Thus, this rabid anger made them lose

17 Concerning his intended reading of Plutarch's *Lives*, Photius himself informs us that ἀνεγνώσθησαν ἐκ τῶν Πλουτάρχου παραλλήλων διάφοροι λόγοι, ὧν ἡ ἑκδοσις κατὰ σύνοψιν ἐκλέγεται διάφορον χρηστομαθίαν ("different passages from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* have been read, of which the edition synoptically chooses an anthology of differences") (*Bibl.* 245.393b). In this regard, it should be noted that while Photius certainly gives ample space to Cicero as a Latin author, on the whole he certainly focuses more on Demosthenes: the entire section 394a–b is devoted to Demosthenes, while the specific section discussing Cicero only runs to a length of twenty lines in the modern edition by Les Belles Lettres. Concerning the *syncries* of Cicero and Demosthenes in Caecilius of Calacte, Plutarch, Longinus and Quintilian, see also de Jonge 2019, 307–319.

18 Phot. *Bibl.* 245, in Henry 1971, 178–179 ἐκ τοῦ Κικέρωνος ("from Cicero").

human reason and they even demonstrated that there is no beast more ferocious than man when power is added to his passion. (transl. by the author)

Photius here carefully combines five extracts from Plutarch's biography of Cicero, offering not a mere juxtaposition but a coherent portrayal and self-enclosed narrative, a story within a story. Photius was able to accurately select the Plutarchian passages, so as to fashion his Cicero out of pre-existing material.

Photius achieves this result by cutting out and partially adapting the following passages from Plutarch:¹⁹

a) οὐ μικρὰ δὴ πρὸς τὸ πείθειν ὑπῆρχεν ἐκ τοῦ ὑποκρίνεσθαι ῥοπή τῷ Κικέρωνι καὶ τοὺς γε τῷ μεγάλῳ βοᾶν χρωμένους ῥήτορας ἐπισκώπτων, ἔλεγε δι' ἀσθένειαν ἐπὶ τὴν κραυγὴν ὡσπερ χωλοὺς ἐφ' ἵππον πηδᾶν. Ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰ σκώμματα καὶ τὴν παιδιὰν ταύτην εὐτραπέλεια δικανικὸν μὲν ἐδόκει καὶ γλαφυρὸν εἶναι, χρώμενος δ' αὐτῇ κατακόρως, πολλοὺς ἐλύπει καὶ κακοηθείας ἐλάμβανε δόξαν. (from Plut. *Cic.* 5.6)

Cicero drew considerable advantage from his talent as an actor in order to persuade; he laughed at the orators who spoke loudly by saying that they resorted to cries like lame people jump on horseback. This disposition to jokes and irony was effective and pleasant in the trials, but, used with excessive insistence, it annoyed many people and was judged malignancy. (transl. by the author)

b) τὸ μὲν οὖν πρὸς ἐχθροῦς ἢ πρὸς ἀντιδίκους σκώμασι χρῆσθαι πικροτέροις δοκεῖ ῥητορικὸν εἶναι· τὸ δ' οἷς ἔτυχε προσκρούειν ἔνεκα τοῦ γελοίου πολὺ συνήγαγε μῖσος αὐτῷ. Γράψω δὲ καὶ τούτων ὀλίγα. (from Plut. *Cic.* 27.1)

to resort to rather harsh jokes against enemies or adversaries in court seems to be a rhetorical process. But the hatred of those his laughter happened to offend afflicted him. I will also list a few examples of his offensive jokes. (transl. by the author)

c) ἐκ τούτου πολλοῖς γέγονεν ἐπαχθής, καὶ οἱ μετὰ Κλωδίου συνέστησαν ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην λαβόντες (from Plut. *Cic.* 28.1)

and he became unbearable to quite a few people and Clodius' supporters ganged up against him because of such a grievance (transl. by the author)

d) ὅτι τὸ λεπτότατον τοῦ χαλκοῦ νόμισμα κουαδράντην Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν (from Plut. *Cic.* 29.5)

the Romans call their lightest bronze currency a quadrant (transl. by the author)

e) ὅτι λέγεται, φησί, τὰς πρώτας ἡμέρας διαγωνισάμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ Κικέρωνος ὁ Καῖσαρ ἐνδοῦναι τῇ τρίτῃ καὶ προέσθαι τὸν φίλον. Τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀντιδόσεως οὕτως εἶχεν· ἔδει Κικέρων-

¹⁹ Plutarch's Greek text (here and elsewhere) is quoted from Ziegler's edition (Ziegler 1971). Generally speaking, see also the introductions of Magnino 1963 and Geiger *et al.* 1995.

νος μὲν ἐκστῆναι Καίσαρα, Παύλου δὲ τὰδελφοῦ Λέπιδου, Λευκίου δὲ Καίσαρος Ἀντώνιον, ὃς ἦν θεῖος αὐτῷ πρὸς μητρός. Οὕτως ἐξέπεσον ὑπὸ θυμοῦ καὶ λύσσης τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπέδειξαν, ὡς οὐδὲν θηρίον ἀνθρώπου ἐστὶν ἀγριώτερον, ἐξουσίαν πάθει προσλαβόντος (from Plut. *Cic.* 46.5–6)²⁰

it is reported, the author says, that after struggling for the first few days to defend Cicero, Caesar surrendered his friend on the third day and gave up. The terms of the deal were as follows: Caesar was to abandon Cicero, Lepidus his brother Paul, and Antony was to abandon Lucius Caesar, his maternal uncle. Thus, this rabid anger made them lose human reason and they even demonstrated that there is no beast more ferocious than man when power is added to his passion. (transl. by the author)

Photius reworks the Plutarchian material (which had the undisputed merit for him of transmitting information about a Latin author such as Cicero in Greek) with minimal adaptations. It may be observed that in a) Photius greatly reduces the pathos of Plutarch's description of Cicero's salacious or even satirical²¹ verve by leaving out the expansion that begins with ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰ σκώμματα. Likewise, in b) he drops the explanatory parenthesis introduced by γράψω δὲ καὶ τούτων ὀλίγα; without then dwelling on mere formal adaptations, such as – again in b) – the substitution of Cicero's name for the pronoun αὐτῷ (which in the Plutarchian text had a clear antecedent, which would have been lost in the new Photian redaction).²² Where Photius' intervention becomes more noticeable is rather in the selection of the episodes from the Plutarchian tale and in the overall effect these create, once assembled.

In the first place, it may be noted that the passages selected by Photius follow the succession of Plutarch's biography, but do not include Cicero's birth and education. It follows that Photius presents a nuanced picture of Cicero as a fully trained orator and politician. Text a) presents Cicero as a rhetorician who greatly benefits from the influence of theatrical acting. This trait alludes in an implicit yet decisive way to a kind of deficiency in the argumentative force of words alone, as if argumentative rigour requires support from an element foreign to logical persua-

²⁰ In Plutarch the passage is introduced only by λέγεται, to which Photius, for obvious editorial reasons, alongside a further φησί (quotation in the quotation) adds an initial connective ὅτι. On the concept of the apex of brutality, see also Plut. *Ant.* 194: οὐδὲν ὠμότερον οὐδ' ἀγριώτερον ("nothing rawer nor wilder"), about the destruction of the horrible market which Antony's political events gave rise to.

²¹ See Corbeill 1996, 174–217, Corbeill 2002b, and also, generally speaking, Guérin 2011, 146–154.

²² From an ecdotic point of view, Photius allows us to focus on which text of Plutarch should circulate: on the manuscript tradition of Plutarch in which Photius is to be inserted, Ziegler 1907 remains valid and, specifically, the contribution that Photius gives to the reconstruction of the text of the Plutarchian *Lives*, see Severyns 1937.

sion, namely the actor's *actio* (analogously to a lame person having to jump onto a horse, in order to move forward).²³ This point is further strengthened by the fact that in the passage just before the pericope quoted by Photius, Plutarch refers that Cicero carefully sought to draw inspiration from the comic actor Roscius²⁴ and the tragic actor Aesopus.²⁵ With regard to the latter, Plutarch recounts a negative episode: one time, when he was starring as Atreus on stage and had come to the point in the play when the character is plotting revenge against Thyestes, he walked, passed an attendant, struck him with his sceptre and killed him, because "he was beside himself with the impetus of acting".²⁶ Clearly, while it is true that the element of pathos is generally neither foreign to nor unseemly for an orator – who in the fullness of his role is indeed also required to know how to draw upon this resource in view of persuading his audience – we are here dealing with a case marked by excess, whereby the actor is caught in a frenzy which clouds his mind. Read in its context, therefore, the passage gives the idea of an opposition between oratory and theatricality, the former being presented as a rational activity and the latter as one that can lead to a loss of composure.

Photius chooses to introduce Cicero, therefore, by sending ambiguous signals about his rhetorical skills: on the one hand, Photius presents him in close connection with Demosthenes – who is explicitly said to have been proficient in delivery²⁷ but, on the other hand, he raises some suspicion towards this Ciceronian practice, given that Photius must have known the broader context of the quotation offered. This is the first relevant element to bear in mind when it comes to the Patriarch's idea and opinion of the Latin orator, given that previously Cicero had been compared to Medea (who, as is well known, killed her own children in a fit of mad-

²³ See on this also Plut. *Reg. Imp. apoph.* 204F.

²⁴ He is Quintus Roscius Gallus, a native of Silonium, perhaps near Lanuvium, on the slopes of Mount Albanus (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.79; *Div.* 1.79 and 2.66), defended by Cicero in the *Pro Roscio comoedo*. Roscius was a friend of Cicero's (Cic. *Leg.* 1.11), an element that highlights the orator's affinity for the world of theatre – and hence acting.

²⁵ Like the aforementioned Roscius, Clodius Aesopus was also a friend of Cicero's, as we read in Cic. *Div.* 1.80; *Sest.* 120–123, where his name appears among those who voted in favour of his return from exile imposed on him by the tribune Clodius (see also Plut. *Cic.* 31–33). Aesopus stood out for his *gravitas* (Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.111 and Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.82) but also for his passionate character, which fits well within the idea of a loss of rationality we find in the episode quoted by Plutarch in this passage.

²⁶ See Plut. *Cic.* 5.5: ἐξω τῶν ἑαυτοῦ λογισμῶν διὰ τὸ πάθος ὄντα τῷ σκῆπτρῳ πατάξει καὶ ἀνελεῖν ("he killed him by hitting him with the sceptre, since he was out of his mind because of the impetus of acting").

²⁷ Plut. *Cic.* 5.4: λέγεται δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐδὲν ἥττον νοσήσας τοῦ Δημοσθένους περὶ τὴν ὑπόκρισιν ("it is said, however, that he lacked no less than Demosthenes in delivery").

ness)²⁸ and that the *passiones* typical of theatrical performances can produce consequences of the sort seen with the actor Aesopus.

It should be noted that this subsection is followed by another essentially critical note: Cicero is portrayed in his propensity for jokes and quips, even when this habit could lend itself to unpleasant outcomes. Indeed, irony is close to sarcasm or denigration and has an ambiguous character, since it can please the person it targets but also annoy him or her. Now, Photius appears here to be presenting this characteristic of Cicero from a different perspective: that the Latin orator attributed importance to *facetia* and *iocus* can easily be deduced from many passages in his writings²⁹ and, for sure, a similar disposition must also be corroborated by his close acquaintance with the aforementioned comedian Roscius; after the simile of the lame man, Plutarch dwells on Cicero's salaciousness³⁰ (a description omitted by Photius, who draws on another Plutarchian passage highlighting the same feature), but inserted this list of Cicero's character traits in the broader context of data about his life and career. Indeed, immediately afterwards – with the beginning of ch. 6 – Plutarch goes on to present the period in Cicero's life covering his years as *quaestor* in Sicily during a time of famine.³¹ The editing and the communication strategy by which Photius restructures this information about Cicero produce a very different effect: after mentioning Cicero's inclination towards *Witz*, Photius attacks Plutarch's idea that it earned the Roman orator quite a lot of opposition and enmity (ἐκ τούτου πολλοῖς γέγονεν ἐπαχθής; “hence he became unbearable to quite a few people”), to the point that a faction was formed to oppose him, gravitating around Clodius (καὶ οἱ μετὰ Κλωδίου συνέστησαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην λαβόντες; “and Clodius' supporters ganged up against him because of such a grievance”). Thus, a clear climax is outlined in the Photian text, whereby Cicero is presented first as prone to theatricality, then as a figure who did not fail to offend his audience and, finally, as someone who, as a consequence of this behaviour, was disliked by many people. In doing so, Photius skillfully shifts his gaze

28 Concerning the infanticide planned by Medea, cf. the lamentation in Eur. *Med.* 1010–1079.

29 It should be borne in mind that what Cicero admired about Caesar's eloquence was specifically its taste for quips, as stated in Cic. *De or.* 2.216–217. On Cicero's propensity for scathing words, see Haurly 1955, esp. 116.

30 This propensity did not fail to lead to *vituperatio*, which earned Cicero many people's hatred and the name of gossipmonger, as noted by Achard 1981, 223–229. The use of ridicule, for instance by targeting the physical defects of one's opponent, is functional and very useful, as Cicero himself notes in *De or.* 2.236; Aristotle also says that effective ridicule requires mocking deformity (*Poet.* 5.1449a; cf. Gudeman 1934, 144) – but without exaggerations, Cicero adds in *De or.* 2.237–239 and *Orat.* 88–90.

31 The office of *quaestor* – the first step of the *cursus honorum* – was filled by Cicero in 75 BCE (Cic. *Brut.* 318; *Cat.* 4.15).

from Cicero's personal life to the political level of the opposition set up against him.

This picture – a decisive one, as we will soon see – nevertheless experiences a momentary interruption, at least apparently: for Photius suddenly moves on to make an observation that *prima facie* seems rather out of context and incomprehensible, by borrowing from Plutarch's passage d) the idea that τὸ λεπτότατον τοῦ χαλκοῦ νόμισμα κουαδράντην Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν. One wonders why Photius may have wished to report this piece of antiquarian erudition here, according to which a bronze coin (or copper coin, since bronze is an alloy of copper and tin) of a smaller cut is called a quadrant in Latin. To understand how things stand, it is necessary to bear in mind what Plutarch writes about Clodia, the sister of the aforementioned Clodius.³²

πολλή δ' ἦν δόξα καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις δυσὶν ἀδελφαῖς πλησιάζειν τὸν Κλώδιον, ὃν Τερτίαν μὲν Μάρκιος ὁ Ρήξ, Κλωδίαν δὲ Μέτελλος ὁ Κέλερ εἶχεν, ἣν Κουαδρανταρίαν ἐκάλου, ὅτι τῶν ἐραστῶν τις αὐτῇ χαλκοῦς ἐμβαλὼν εἰς βαλάντιον ὡς ἀργύριον εἰσέπεμψε· τὸ δὲ λεπτότατον τοῦ χαλκοῦ νόμισμα κουαδράντην Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν. Ἐπὶ ταύτῃ μάλιστα τῶν ἀδελφῶν κακῶς ἤκουσεν ὁ Κλώδιος.

it was rumored that Clodius had illicit relations also with the other two sisters: Tertia, married to Marcius Rex, and Clodia, married to Metellus Celer. The latter was nicknamed Quadrantaria, because one of her lovers had sent her a purse of copper instead of silver coins; in fact, the Romans call the smallest copper coin quadrant. Clodius had a bad reputation especially on account of his sister. (transl. by the author)

The picture that is obtained from Plutarch's continuous narrative is clear: Clodius – who had developed a fierce hatred of Cicero – is presented as the brother of Tertia and, above all, of Clodia, a character with a rather dark reputation.³³ Although married to Metellus Celer, she had affairs with various lovers,³⁴ which earned her the nickname of Quadrantaria (Κουαδρανταρία).³⁵ This offers Plutarch the chance

³² Plut. *Cic.* 29.5.

³³ Clodia, the Lesbia of Catullus (Apul. *Apol.* 10.3), was the wife of Quintus Metellus Celer (see esp. *Cic. Fam.* 5.2.7 and *Att.* 2.1.5); in 56 BCE she was involved in the trial against Caelius, whom she had accused of attempted poisoning and Cicero defended in his *Pro Caelio*.

³⁴ With a refined wink, Cicero (*Cael.* 32) defines Clodia as *amica omnium* (lover of all). One of Clodia's love affairs was her incestuous relationship with her brother Clodius, who in the same passage is ironically defined as both *vir* and *frater* for this reason (cf. also *Cic. QFr.* 2.3.2; *Har. resp.* 9; *Dom.* 92; *Pis.* 28; *Vell. Pat.* 2.45.1). More generally, Clodius was accused of incestuous relations also with his other two sisters (on which see Plut. *Luc.* 34.1 and 38.1, as well as *Caes.* 10.6), providing an even more rounded picture of his debauchery.

³⁵ Indeed, according to Battaglia 1990, 9 col. a, s.v. *quadrantario*, the word *quadrantaria* in Italian has become a sophisticated synonym for 'messalina', a woman of easy virtue or harlot (albeit often

to offer an erudite explanation:³⁶ since one of her lovers had paid her with a very small coin (the quadrant), she had been given the nickname of Quadrantaria, that is, of ‘cheap woman’.³⁷ Given this picture, it is easy to understand Plutarch’s intention to discredit Clodia and, *de facto*, also Clodius as low-ranking and unreliable characters. By contrast, within the framework of Photius’ account, where this contextualisation is lacking, the reference to the quadrant becomes difficult to understand,³⁸ as it bears no direct relation – or at least no explicit relation – to the figure of Clodia, who is linked by kinship to the Clodius quoted by Photius in the previous sub-section.

At this point Photius brings in the longest pericope written by Plutarch (*Cic.* 46.5–6), the one presenting the way in which the fatal conspiracy against Cicero was hatched. It is worth quoting the Photian text in full again, as an aid to our analysis:

τὰ δὲ τῆς ἀντιδόσεως οὕτως εἶχεν· ἔδει Κικέρωνος μὲν ἐκστῆναι Καίσαρα, Παύλου δὲ τάδελοφου Λέπιδου, Λευκίου δὲ Καίσαρος Ἀντώνιον, ὅς ἦν θεῖος αὐτῷ πρὸς μητρός. Οὕτως ἐξέπεσον ὑπὸ θυμοῦ καὶ λύσσης τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀπέδειξαν, ὡς οὐδὲν θηρίον ἀνθρώπου ἐστὶν ἀγριώτερον, ἐξουσίαν πάθει προσλαβόντος.³⁹

of high rank), as we find in Gabriele D’Annunzio (“Le stanze sembrano quelle delle meretrici quadrantarie”, *Taccuini*), Giosue Carducci (“Non potendo altro, fanno dello scandalo borghese per le quadrantarie poco alfabete di cotesta spregevole aristocrazia romana”, *Lettere*), and in Gian Pietro Lucini (“Messalina, squaldrina imperiale, quadrantaria ospitale alli angiporti”, *Prose e canzoni amare*; “Atleti di sobborgo, rigonfi di muscoli, le braccia pugnaci [...], mantenuti dall’amore anormale delle quadrantarie”, *Antidannunziana*; “Venere è quadrantaria”, *Gian Pietro de Core*), as well as in *Tradimento e fedeltà* by Augusto Monti (“Poveri ma onesti [...] e non solo l’arte quadrantaria gli manca”).

36 Forcellini 1965, s.v. *quadrantarius*, only quotes Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero*, besides Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.6, and perhaps (“*fortasse huc pertinet*”) *Cic. Cael.* 62. According to *OLD*, s.v. *quadrantarius* (b), we only read, as far as our point is concerned: “of or costing a quarter of an *as* (in quotes., referring to the entrance-fee to the baths)”, besides again *Cic. Cael.* 62 and mainly *Sen. Ep.* 86.9.

37 But Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.6.53) associates the name with Clytemnestra, who is called *quadrantaria* (Clodia too may have killed her husband, Quintus Metellus Celer, who died mysteriously in 59 BCE: cf. *Cic. Cael.* 59–63). *Quadrantaria*, viz. cheap (*Cic. Cael.* 62 and 69), since the *quadrans* was a quarter of an *as*.

38 Nor – given the linguistic erudition of Photius’ annotation, at least in the form in which it has reached us – should we overlook the importance of Photius from a purely lexical perspective. Indeed, Photius also wrote lexicographical texts (see Naber 1864, perhaps an early work, as may be inferred from the *Patrologia Latina* (PL), 101, 153C) in some respects comparable to the *Suida* (cf. Bossi 2002). He also had many lexicons at his disposal, such as that by Aelius Dionysius and the Platonic one pertaining to the *Timaetus* (both in *Bibl.* 151), in addition to the lexicons mentioned in *Bibl.* 145–158 (cf., *inter alia*, Nogarà 1975, 234 and 240 n. 80 on Helladius’ lexicon in *Bibl.* 145).

39 For the translation of this passage, see above pp. 127–128.

It is immediately clear that Photius carefully reports the conditions of the plot against Cicero and the conspirators' names. In doing so, however, Photius overlooks the political background: before the pericope reproduced above,⁴⁰ Plutarch had focused on the establishment of the second triumvirate to restore the *res publica* (*triumviri* or *tresviri rei publicae constituendae*), through the agreement ratified on 27 November 43 BCE by the *lex Titia*, aimed at consolidating this special magistracy (the triumvirate was to have a five-year duration and the faculty to elect magistrates; see Livy *Per.* 120; App. *B. Civ.* 4.1.2). Precisely because Photius is not interested in the broader historical context and problems,⁴¹ he uncritically borrows Plutarch's claim that the agreement was reached in three days, when instead Appian asserts that it was reached in two.⁴² As can be seen, Photius focuses on the conspiracy itself, rather than the reasons behind it; therefore, he takes from Plutarch the elements he needs to refashion the event as a tragedy in the making: in the first instance, Photius takes from Plutarch an introductory sentence with a strong dramatic impact, in which he says that Caesar initially tried to save Cicero but eventually abandoned him to his fate. Secondly, Photius – like Plutarch – offers a list of the names of the *triumviri* and of the victims allotted to each, in a sinister division of roles.⁴³ Finally, Photius selects a *sententia* with a universal character from Plutarch, underlining how man is the most brutish living creature of all when he lets himself be dominated by anger and irrational instincts.

⁴⁰ Plut. *Cic.* 46.4. Among the many possible parallels, cf. Livy *Per.* 120; Flor. 2.16.6; Suet. *Aug.* 12; 27; 96.1; Plut. *Brut.* 27.5 and *Ant.* 19.1; Oros. 6.18.6; Eutr. *Brev.* 72; Vell. Pat. 2.65.1–67.1; App. *B. Civ.* 3.14.96 and 4.1.2; Cass. Dio 46.42.

⁴¹ Photius does not devote a single word to the geographical context in which the meeting took place, whereas Plutarch recounts that it was held near Bologna, in a place far from the camps and surrounded by a river (Plut. *Cic.* 46.5: *περὶ πόλιν Βονωνίαν ἐφ' ἡμέρας τρεῖς, καὶ συνήσαν εἰς τόπον τινὰ πρόσω τῶν στρατοπέδων, ποταμῷ περιρρέομενον*; “they met for three days near the city of Bologna, in a place far from the fields and surrounded by a river”). Similarly, Cassius Dio (46.55.1) speaks of an islet in a river near Bologna, and Appian (*B. Civ.* 4.2.4) refers to a river called Lavinium; Florus (*Epit.* 2.16b) mentions two rivers between Modena (*Perusiam* for a textual error) and Bologna, perhaps referring to a small peninsula between the Rhine and the Lavinium. It was in Bologna that a proscription list was drawn up with only a few names (12 or 17: see App. *B. Civ.* 4.6.21), including that of Cicero.

⁴² App. *B. Civ.* 4.1.2.

⁴³ On the whole affair, see Livy *Per.* 120; Flor. 2.16.4; *De vir. ill.* 85.3; Oros. 6.18.11; Vell. Pat. 2.67.3; Cass. Dio 47.6.3 and 8.5. Lucius Aemilius Paulus was *quaestor* in 60 BCE, then *aedilis* in 55 BCE and *consul* in 50 BCE; Plutarch reports that Lepidus desired the death of Paulus' brother (*Ant.* 19.3). Lucius Julius Caesar was *quaestor* in 77 BCE and *consul* in 64 BCE and was the brother of Antonia's mother, Julia, to whom his salvation is attributed (Plut. *Ant.* 20.2 and again Cass. Dio 47.8.5). On the political period, referring to the rhetoric of consent, see Schwartz 1898 (still remarkable).

In general, therefore, this is a section full of historical references, as can be deduced from a comparison with the many historical sources underlying the Plutarchian passage. However, it emerges that in Photius' redaction the historical element is almost left out, as it does not constitute his primary interest. Rather, Photius draws from Plutarch the section we are examining, extrapolating it from the context in such a way as to deprive it – almost 'cleanse' it – of its main function of providing historical confirmation, with the result of heightening its tragic character. The Plutarchian section, once inserted into Photius' context, becomes a miniature drama, where the story of Cicero becomes an almost mythical – yet at the same time very real – narrative of someone who faces death at the hands of his political opponents. While in Plutarch the killing of Cicero is only a moment – albeit an important one – in his life experience, in Photius it is instead the culmination of all the argumentative tension accumulated from the beginning. It may be argued that the episode of Cicero's killing is for Photius the only relevant element in the orator's biography and that all the other elements contribute to this ending. Furthermore, all the other elements introduced serve to prepare and, in a certain way, to justify (or at least to explain) the decision to kill Cicero: as we have seen, he is initially presented by Photius as a lover of theatre with a particular inclination towards jokes; this propensity for quips earned him not a few enemies, which fuelled the anger of Clodius and his associates; finally, we arrive at the real conspiracy of which Cicero was the victim.⁴⁴ At this point, Photius – like Plutarch before him – only offers a resigned observation concerning the brutality in which man often indulges, in spite of himself: man is indeed superior to all animals thanks to the light of reason but, when this light is obscured or, worse still, extinguished by the instinctual part, then man is more ferocious than any beast, as the case of the anti-Ciceronian conspirators demonstrates.

In all this, Photius skillfully reworks the material he has selected from his source, so much so that the guiding thread that runs through his choice of passages can be traced back to his desire to create a tragedy centred on Cicero, a tragedy already anticipated – as we have seen – by his reading of Medea during the final hours of life, as reported by Ptolemy Hephaestion. Cicero was fated to live a story similar to that of the Euripidean drama shortly thereafter, transferring into concrete history what until then had been only a literary fancy.⁴⁵ In Photius'

44 For Photius the bloody end that Cicero met is, therefore, due to his bold speech first of all and, secondly, to his political attitude; Plutarch had already highlighted ambition as a peculiar trait of Cicero's *animus*: φιλότιμος ὢν ("being ambitious"; Plut. *Cic.* 5.3). Cf., e.g., Lucan's presentation of the figure of Cicero in *La Bua* 2020, 81–84.

45 In this perspective, however, Plutarch devoted himself to a particularly faithful reconstruction of Cicero's last hours because – as Levi 1933, 2, 206–208, already recalled – Plutarch is the most

artistic reinterpretation – much more than a simple summary – Cicero’s existential parable brings myth to reality and poetry to history.

From Photius’ narrative about Cicero a consistent yet partial portrait emerges: if Photius’ writing were our only source about Cicero’s life, we would know nothing about his skills and prestige as an orator, which are completely blotted out by Photius. Cicero is also a rather unique Roman author, inasmuch as he had an excellent command of the Greek language:⁴⁶ this trait – which could not have been insignificant for a writer as versed in Greek as Photius – is nevertheless neglected by our author. From what has been said so far, it is clear that Photius instead shapes a story within a story, creating his own Cicero starting from the narrative and the information that he could draw mainly from Plutarch, who for the Patriarch must have served as a treasure trove of information as well as a Greek source of Latin material. One point especially stands out: Photius presents Cicero more than anything else in terms of his political engagement.⁴⁷ While it is true that only minimal space is assigned to Cicero’s oratory technique, no mention at all is made of the great weight that he had in the philosophical field:⁴⁸ Photius is anx-

faithful source about the orator’s death, notwithstanding the fact that Plutarch must also have drawn upon testimonies very close to the events described, such as Octavian (who turned to Cicero to find a way out of the dangerous isolation he had been forced into: cf. p. 218, which considers Plut. *Cic.* 45.6 as being drawn *ex sermonibus Augusti*) and Tiro, Cicero’s own freedman (the fact that the latter did not mention Philologus’ betrayal could only come from Tiro himself: cf. Plut. *Cic.* 49.4). On Plutarch’s working habit of reading and taking notes while reading, cf. Plut. *De tranq. anim.* 46.4F and *De cohib. ira* 45.7D.

⁴⁶ Plut. *Cic.* 4.6 reports that in Rhodes the rhetorician Apollonius Molon, not understanding the Latin language, asked Cicero to speak in Greek. Cicero then offered a performance that astonished all onlookers and earned him the highest praise: λέγεται δὲ τὸν Ἀπολλώνιον οὐ συνέντα τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν διάλεκτον δεηθῆναι τοῦ Κικέρωνος Ἑλληνιστὶ μελετῆσαι [...] ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐμελέτησε, τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἐκπεπληγθαι καὶ διαμιλλᾶσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους τοῖς ἐπαίνους (“it is said that Apollonius, not understanding the Latin language, asked Cicero to declaim in Greek [...] after he finished the talk, the others were amazed and competed to praise him”). Cicero himself does not fail to speak of his knowledge of Greek (cf. *Cic. Brut.* 310 and *Fin.* 1.6 where he remembers that the Greek language proved to be of great use to him in carrying out his activities; cf. Boldrer 2003 and also Grimal 1987, 23–24). In *Cic.* 40.2, Plutarch describes the finesse with which Cicero translated the technical Greek lexicon of philosophical works into Latin. On Cicero’s deep knowledge of all things Greek, see Marrou 1948, 350–355, Boyancé 1956, 119–120, and Desmouliéz 1976, 99. More generally, see also Bishop 2019.

⁴⁷ In the light of Photius’ taste, it can therefore be said that the *Bibliotheca* presents Cicero neither as a Roman Plato nor as a Latin Demosthenes (to take up the discussion and expressions found in Bishop 2015), but as a politician destined to meet a tragic fate.

⁴⁸ This should not be surprising, if it is true that Photius was the direct heir to the shining Greek tradition that gave birth to philosophy: in this perspective, a Roman like Cicero could only offer a mere reflection of the philosophical tradition that had arisen in Greece (that philosophy was a pe-

ious to grasp only Cicero's political side – and he does so from an essentially tragic perspective, constructing a dramatic cameo of Cicero.

cularly Greek thing is also be demonstrated by the fact that philosophy teachers in Rome were sometimes regarded as immigrants and strangers, albeit belonging to an intellectual class; see Hunger 1987, 18–20 and 25). On Cicero and philosophy, see mainly Lévy 1992, Vesperini 2012, 410–421, Auvray-Assayas 2018, and Steel 2018, as well as Tsouni and Oliva in this volume.

