

## At the Center of the Republic: Learning from Cicero's Other *Rector Rei Publicae*

The fragments that we have of Cicero's *De Re Publica* are dominated by their leading speaker, the great military man of the second century, Scipio Aemilianus. That this is so is due to the chances of survival, for we retain those sections of the work which are primarily in Scipio's voice and deal, for the most part, with his prescriptions for the ailing Roman state, particularly his rationalizing view of Roman history and the sublime ideals of the *Somnium Scipionis*. But there are other distinct voices that deserve a hearing in this dialogue, particularly Scipio's fellow-statesman and ideal friend, Gaius Laelius.

This is, of course, neither the first nor the last time Cicero would employ the famous pair to illustrate his contemporary political philosophy. Indeed, the evolution and use of the 'Scipio-Laelius Myth' by Cicero has been well-detailed by A.M. Ward in his doctoral dissertation (Princeton 1968), with particular reference to the rather puzzling ending of Cicero's appeal to Pompey in 62 to, in effect, "let me be the Laelius to your Scipio" (ad fam. 5.7). This thought, the contrast between the Roman military man, exemplified by Pompey Magnus, on the one hand, and Cicero's man-at-home, the self-styled *dux togatus* of the Catilinarians, becomes a part of Cicero's identity and self-presentation between 62 and 51, the date of the *De Re Publica's* publication. It is not surprising, then, that this famous friendship, their mutual respect should re-appear in the considered characterization of Cicero's political manifesto: "*ut militiae [...] Africanum ut deum coleret Laelius; domi vicissim Laelium [...] observaret in parentis loco Scipio.*"

The two men, Scipio and Laelius, may share a mutual appreciation for the other, but they have distinct opinions on the matters of the day. Thus Laelius refuses in the end to fully accept Scipio's view on monarchy (Powell 2001) and quite noticeably takes issue with Scipio's construction of history in a famous passage of the second book (Most recently discussed in Fox 2000 and 2007). It is their discussion, then, and the interplay of these two opposing viewpoints that drives the *De Re Publica*. Thus the views of Cicero's main interlocutor, the glorious Scipio Aemilianus, are disputed and rather pointedly (though always with deferential politeness) challenged by another, equally authoritative *rector rei publicae*. This constitutes a clear authorial intervention in the text, a Laelian/Ciceronian challenge to the views of a Scipio/Pompey; it may be a deferential and diplomatic one, but it remains a challenge nonetheless. The Scipio of the dialogue may be, in fact, "the Pompey of Cicero's hopes and dreams" as How once characterized him (1930), but it should further be noted that the 'ideal' military commander is crafted by Cicero to be willing to engage with, listen to, and, crucially, learn from a civilian orator of the caliber of a Laelius or, one suspects, even a 'lesser orator' like Cicero.

## Works Cited

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