

*Ex ipsis visceribus causae*: The Exordium of Cicero's *De Provinciis Consularibus*

*De Provinciis Consularibus*, Cicero's speech in the senate in June or (less probably) July of 56 supporting the retention of Caesar in his Gallic command, is not the orator's finest hour. Following the "palinode" that Cicero mentions at *Att.* 4.5, this oration publicly marks a complete reversal of his recent opposition to Caesar. While the speech has great value for all students of the history of this period, it deserves greater attention as an example of Ciceronian persuasion. Luca Grillo's new and long-needed rhetorical and historical commentary (Grillo 2015) brings a salubrious focus upon the formal rhetorical expectations of Cicero's audience, the orator's persuasive goals, and the rhetorical challenges he faces. This paper will build upon Grillo's treatment of the rhetorical expectations for the exordium (*Prov.* 1-2) to argue that these two sections are far more integral to Cicero's argument, and so more consonant with canonical rhetorical expectations, than has heretofore been realized.

Grillo (2015:75), marshaling the prescriptions of ancient rhetorical theory, notes that an exordium should be taken "ex ipsis visceribus causae" (*de Or.* 2.318). He further notes that the exordium of *Prov.* makes no mention of Caesar or of the allocation of the Gallic provinces, even though these matters take up two thirds of the speech. Instead, these first two sections justify what will be Cicero's *sententia* to recall from their provinces the orator's *bêtes noires*, Gabinius and Piso, the consuls of 58 whom he holds responsible for his exile. The apparent disjunction of §§1-2 from principal themes of the speech noted by Grillo had been heavily emphasized by Loutsch in his study of Cicero's exordia (1994:351-355). Loutsch argued that Cicero tries to divert criticism from his support of Caesar by using the exordium to make clear that his motive in the speech is to attack his enemies, not to accommodate the triumvirs. The orator nonetheless emphasizes that he will restrain the hostility that he (and all in his audience) feel towards

Gabinius and Piso because his duty is to focus on the best interests of the republic. Cicero's claim to subordinate his private feelings to the good of the republic, while manifestly insincere in his treatment of Gabinius and Piso, introduces the emphasis on *communis utilitas* that will be necessary for the treatment of Caesar that comprises most of the speech; since the orator's guiding principle is *communis utilitas*, as a senator and statesman he must support extending Caesar's command as the best policy for the state, irrespective of personal wrongs he may have suffered. Thus Loutsch.

But this exordium is much closer to *ipsa viscera causae* than has been recognized. This is so because the speech, even as it does assert *communis utilitas* as a blanket justification for Cicero's support of Caesar (e.g., §§20, 24-25, 30, 35, 40), also asserts rather more. The orator stakes out for himself a vestige of independence from the triumvirs, as Kurczyk (2006:242-246) and especially Steel (2001:156-160, 181-189) have argued in detail. In this context, Cicero's generous treatment of Caesar following his savage attack on Caesar's father-in-law Piso shows that the orator can still push back within his constraints. Cicero's further acknowledgement of the remark of a senator (probably the consul Philippus) that Gabinius had done him less harm than Caesar had (§18) does not cite this remark simply in order to refute it; it is vividly clear beneath the surface of Cicero's argument that Caesar could easily be placed much closer to the execrable Gabinius and Piso than the orator is placing him

Thus Cicero's transparently insincere claim of restraint towards the enormities of Piso and Gabinius, ostensibly for the common good, sends a powerful signal to his audience and to Caesar that regard for the common good is the only reason that Caesar's own deportment can be set aside. This holds for Caesar's past actions. But it also holds for his behavior in the future. In a manner that will be more fully developed a decade later in the Caesarian orations, Cicero

implicitly urges Caesar's continuing action for the common good as the only justification for his exceptional position. So the treatment of Gabinius and Piso in the exordium adumbrates Cicero's central argument not only *about* Caesar but *to* Caesar. In that sense it comes, canonically and powerfully, *ex ipsis visceribus causae*.

### Bibliography

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