

WERNER A. KRENKEL

SEXUAL ALLEGATIONS FOR POLITICAL ENDS

Cicero and the state - that means also: Cicero and down-to-earth politics

The history of sexual allegations begins with Timarchos, but it reached its peak at the end of the Roman Republic.

It is a bit hard for us to imagine the political impact of intentionally spread rumors and loudly proclaimed allegations. But it is also remarkable to see with what ease someone took recourse to such mean stratagems if he had run out of legal and legalistic arguments. Suetonius (*Claudius* 15, 4) relates a story that can best illustrate the proceedings: "It is a well known fact that, when a Roman knight was falsely accused of unnatural offenses against women (*obscaenitatis in feminas*) — the charge had been mischievously framed up by his enemies who could not bring him down by other means (*ab impotentibus inimicis conficto crimine*) — and when he saw that Claudius was admitting the evidence of common prostitutes, this Roman knight hurled a stylus and a set of wax tablets in Claudius' face". The Roman knight could not prevail over the allegations: he was in a no-win situation.

A second example tells more about the terrifying consequences of such intentionally circulated rumors, of such allegations. It is again Suetonius (*Julius* 20, 4) who has the story: "Lucius Lucullus (117-56, cos. 74 B.C.) went a little too far in opposing Caesar's policies, whereupon Caesar so terrified him by threatening to spread foul allegations (*tantum calumniarum metum iniecit*) that Lucullus fell on his knees and begged Caesar's pardon". Lucullus was the second wealthiest Roman of his time and 59 years old.

If allegations, be they sexual or general in nature, could lead to such devastating results, there is small wonder that Caesar's contemporaries turned to them and utilized them to the full.

Cicero's remarks on such allegations as rhetorical and political means are both short and to the point. In his speech *pro Caelio* 6, in 56 B.C., he states on behalf of his client: "That he has been reproached on account of his modesty and that this has been repeated over and again by all his ac-

users, not in official charges, but only in vociferations and abusive words, all this did not hurt Marcus Caelius so much that he would have been sorry to not have been born physically handicapped. For that sort of abusive slanging is fairly common against all of those whose attractive handsomeness and beauty as youths was befitting a freeborn. But it is one thing to speak ill of somebody, and it is quite another thing to call somebody to trial and indict him. An indictment needs an official accusation, stating the case, charging a person, backing up with arguments, confirmation through witnesses. Reviling, however, has no other objective than denigration: if this is uttered too impertinently, it is called a roguish insult, if delivered properly and wittily, urbane elegance”.

Some such charges, in other words, became part and parcel of any public conflict. They became standard jests, cherished and treasured by friends as well as enemies (cp. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 151). The fluctuations of personal and group allegiance, however, brought about startling clashes of testimony and surprising changes of judgement.

Antonius had maligned Dolabella, employing allegations of adultery. Cicero (*Philippics*, 2, 99) retorted: “In a crowded meeting of the Senate on the Kalends of January, in the presence of your uncle, you were so bold as to allege this as your reason for hating Dolabella: you discovered his attempted adultery with your cousin and wife (Antonia, Antonius’ second wife). Who can find out whether you were more impudent to utter this charge in the Senate, or more reckless to make it against Dolabella, or more base to make it while your uncle was in the audience, or more cruel to make it against that unhappy women in such a foul and wicked fashion?” As a matter of course, Antonius had insulted poor Dolabella in the most shameless way — according to Cicero.

A few months later, however, the scene has changed dramatically: Dolabella has changed his allegiance, has changed himself, and has become as mean and base as Antonius himself. For this new Dolabella (*Cic. Philippics* 11, 9), “from boyhood on, cruelty was a sport; then came such baseness of lust that he himself has always exulted that he was practicing sexual activities of such a nature that could not be held against him even by an enemy — provided this was a man of decency and modesty”. This is an almost verbatim repetition of what Cicero (*Phil.* 2, 47) had said against Antonius: “The acts, of which you have been guilty, are such as you would never hear from the lips of a modest enemy”. And again, as a matter of course, this now cruel sexual monster Dolabella did unspeakable things, things which could not even be spoken of without the greatest shame (cp. *Hist. Aug.* 17, 34, 6) — according to the selfsame Cicero.

It was not only enemies that practiced this sort of sexual mud slinging: Caesar came under friendly fire when his own beloved soldiers sang at his

triumph (Suet. *Iulius* 51): "Romans, lock away your wives: we bring home our bald whoremonger. The gold you took as a loan here, you spent in Gaul on sex orgies". This implies that the targets, the victims of witty invective, of elegantly coined allegations, did not always suffer damage. Sometimes jests of this sort became popular, and so did the unharmed victim.

Publius Vatinius, whom Cicero (*in Vatinius* 17, 32) had said in 59 B.C. "that he was born in filth" (*emersum e caeno*) and whom he had called "a traitor of this country" (*proditorem huius civitatis: Vat.* 18) and "the enemy among ourselves" (*domesticum hostem: Vat.* 25), seems to have borne Cicero no grudge for all these attacks. In 44 B.C., Vatinius wrote Cicero a friendly letter (*Cic. fam.* 5, 10 a), claiming: "Whatever I know you want done, I shall be careful to do".

Caesar went even a step further. Catullus had published lampoons of the juiciest indecency against the great man (Suet. *Iulius* 73): "When Caesar was given the chance, he would cheerfully come to terms with his bitterest enemies. He supported Gaius Memmius' candidature for the consulship, though they had spoken most damagingly against each other. When Gaius Calvus, after his cruel lampoons of Caesar, made a move towards reconciliation through mutual friends, Caesar met him more than half way by writing him a friendly letter. Valerius Catullus had also libelled him in his verse about Mamurra (*Catull.* 29, 57), yet Caesar, while admitting that those were a permanent blot on his name, accepted Catullus' apology and invited him to dinner that same afternoon, and never interrupted his friendship with Catullus' father".

Lampoons or invectives were primarily meant to make the audience grin or laugh, laugh at the expense of the attacked person (*Cic. De orat.* 2, 236): "It certainly is a speaker's objective to produce a laugh" (*est plane oratoris movere risum*). And since the lampoons and invectives, the libels and jests were the stock-in-trade of all Roman politicians, the laughing stock — if he was a powerful man — was expected to take them in good grace and humor: it was up to him to repay in kind.

How eager and ready the Roman Senate was to hear puns, wordplays, and jests of a sexual nature, is evidenced by Cicero's famous letter to Pae-tus (*Cic. fam.* 9, 22) of 46-44 B.C. Sometimes these venerable politicians even understood obscenities where there were absolutely none: "Shall I call this a greater fault or that? — *hanc culpam maiorem, an illam dicam?*" What could be more harmless? But the consular, the former consul, heard "*lan - dicam*", i.e. 'clitoris', and commented accordingly: "Could he have said anything more obscene?" (*potuit obscenius?*) High-strung, over-charged as they were, these senators were only too ready and willing to interpret harmless words as sexual puns and obscenities. As the general mood

was such and the audience expected speakers to make use of standard jests and coin new ones, the audiences were served accordingly.

One of the standard attacks centered on the boyhood of the opposing party (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 44): "Do you want us then to examine you from your boyhood?" (*Visne igitur te inspiciamus a puero?*) Cicero says that Antonius assumed a man's gown, but turned it immediately into a harlot's (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 44): "At first you were an ordinate prostitute, the fee for your disgraceful service was fixed, and that was not small". Antonius sold his favors for money. Cicero uses the term *stuprum* (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 47). *Stuprum* was, legally speaking, only possible with freeborn females (*Digest.* 48, 5, 6) and freeborn males (*Institutiones* 4, 18, 4: *qui cum masculis infandam libidinem audent*). Charge as well as reality were old hats. Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 3, 17, 3-5), speaking of the luxury law of as early as 161 B.C., says: "Things had already gone so far that many freeborn boys... sold their modesty and freedom" (*plerique ingenui pueri pudicitiam et libertatem venditarent*). Freeborn Roman boys earned their living through prostituting themselves. This is a fact established by other sources, too (Plaut. *Poen.* 658-694; Val. Max. 6, 1, 10 of 146 B.C.; Cic. *Att.* 1, 16, 5; *Phil.* 2, 105; *Corp. Gloss. Lat.* 4, 144, 24; cp. Liv. *praef.* 12).

Small wonder, then, that sexual allegations show up even in ancient treatises and textbooks on rhetoric. The *auctor ad Herennium* (4, 67) has two closely related examples: "Emphasis is produced through Aposiopesis (*praecisio*), if we begin to say something and then stop short, and what we have already said leaves enough to arouse suspicion, as follows: 'He, who so handsome and so young, recently at a stranger's house — I am unwilling to say more' ". The same situation is alluded to in another passage (*ad Herenn.* 4, 41): "'You dare to say that, who recently at another's home — I should not dare tell, lest in saying things becoming to you, I should seem to say something unbecoming to me'. Here a suspicion, unexpressed, becomes more telling than a detailed explanation would have been" (Cp. Demosthen. *De corona* 129).

In his speech pro Flacco (Cic. *Flacc.* 5), in 59 B.C., Cicero defended his client whose youth had been reproached by Caelius: "As you have criticised his youth and covered later years of his life with blemishes or shame" (*cum adolescentiam notaris, cum reliquum tempus aetatis turpitudinis maculis adspergis istis?*)

In his speech *post reditum in senatu* 11, in 57 B.C., Cicero denigrated Lucius Calpurnius Piso, Caesar's father-in-law and consul of 58, by saying that nobody could possibly expect anything good from a man, "whose earliest youth was publicly accessible for the sexual cravings of everybody and who, even from the purest part of his body (i.e. his mouth), could not keep away the lusty intemperance of his lovers" (*cuius primum aetatis pa-*

lam fuisset ad omnium libidines divulgatum, qui ne a sanctissima quidem parte corporis potuisset hominum impuram intemperantiam propulsare).

In other words: Piso was said to have been a fellator in his youth.

Lucius Piso repayed in kind after his return from Macedonia in September 55 B.C., and Cicero was forced to swallow some truisms which he could not deny. But he mustered all his rhetorical tricks and all possible malice to retort in his speech *in Pisonem* of 55, which highlights the mud-slinging as practiced by the greatest rhetoricians of the time.

Cicero (*Pis.* 9) alleged Lucius Piso to have been constantly involved in adulteries of the most abominable kind (*homo in stupris inauditis nefariisque versatus*) and to have heard Epicurean philosophers (*Pis.* 42) only in the brothel, during sexual intercourse with feeborn women and freeborn Roman boys, during gluttonous parties and drinking bouts (*audis in praeseptibus, audis in stupris, audis in cibo et vino*). Cicero calls his enemy (*Pis.* 9) "a would-be human being mixed together from ashes and dirt" (*hic homullus ex argilla et luto fictus*, or, as Goethe describes (Faust, Marthens Garten) Faust's antagonist, "die Spottgeburt von Dreck und Feuer").

One of the fragments does not only refer to Piso's youth, but even to his birth (frg. 14): "Your mother, who was dragged hither from I do not know what nowhere, pushed you out of her belly as an animal, not as a human being" (*te tua illa nescio quibus a terris apportata mater pecudem ex alvo, non hominem affuderit*). This is reminiscent of what Lucilius cites from a verbal duel between two gladiators (frg. 119 K = 11 W.): "His mother did not bring him forth, but from the hinder part she sprawled him forth". In the Lucilian passage, this was mud-slinging between members of the lowest and most despised class; with Cicero, it is between two former consuls.

In 56 B.C., defending Marcus Caelius, Cicero formulated a passage (*Cic. Cael.* 6) which has already been quoted: "That sort of abusive slang-ing is fairly common against all of those whose attractive handsomeness and beauty as youths was befitting a freeborn" (*sunt ... ista maledicta pervulgata in omnes, quorum in adolescentia forma et species fuit liberalis*). In this speech Cicero criticises *istam maledicendi licentiam*, "that unbounded license of reviling", and he warns his opposing party not to say things about somebody which will make him blush if wittily refuted (*ea in alterum ne dicas quae cum tibi salse responsa sint, erubescas*).

Such reproaches, however, were possible only for a limited period of time. In 56, Cicero said (*Cic. Cael.* 9): "As long as Marcus Caelius' youth could invite such suspicion" (*quoad aetas Marci Caelii dare potuit isti suspicioni locum*). Once the beard was shorn, a youth male was considered to be out of the ἐρώμενος, stage. As Plutarch (*Dial.* 770 bc) puts it: the beard, appearing on the ἐρώμενος, "liberates the erastes from the tyrant".

ny of eros" (Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 86). Pliny the younger, talking of a young heir to a considerable fortune (Plin. *epist.* 7, 24, 3), states: "Though conspicuous for his good looks, he spent his youth and early manhood untouched by scandal; then he married before he was twenty-four". The maximum age for an ἑρῶμενος was thought to be twenty-eight years (Athenaeus 13 p. 563 E). It was in the prime of life (*in illa aetatis flore*: Cic. *Cael.* 9), that Caelius was constantly accompanied by his father, by Cicero, or lived in *Marci Crassi castissima domo*. Caelius was then active as a young politician for so many years *sine suspicione, sine infamia*. But however closely chaperoned he was by his relatives and friends, he could not avoid serious sexual charges (*tamen infamiam veram effugere non poterat*). In other words: his enemies had successfully employed a rhetorical means of old standig: they had made sexual allegations. The catchwords were *luxuria, libido, vitia iuventutis, mores, incontinentia, intemperantia*: the whole gamut (Cic. *Cael.* 25). But Cicero blocks their attacks (Cic. *Cael.* 30): "There is no foundation for these incriminations, no basis at all" (*nullum est enim fundamentum horum criminum, nulla sedes*). In 63 B.C., Cicero had defended Rabirius on similar grounds (Cic. *Rab.* 8): "Rabirius, however, was never accused of such disgrace, not even the slightest suspicion was ever whispered about him" (*ipse vero Rabirius non modo in iudicium horum criminum, sed ne in tenuissimam quidem suspicionem verbo est umquam vocatus*). Shameless, scandalous lies are brought forth by the accusing party against his poor, pure, maltreated, and innocent clients. It is incredible how they can utter such foul incriminations — this is what Cicero said in 56 B.C. when he defended Caelius.

Twelve years later, in 44, when he attacked Antonius, Cicero took the opposite stance employing all the popular and cherished double entendres, jests, and standard sexual allegations of old.

Philippic 2, 44 contains the whole bag of tricks. Cicero starts with an examination of Antonius's boyhood, the age-bracket from about twelve years to about twenty-five: "You assumed a man's gown, and at once turned it into a harlot's". Cicero calls Antonius a pathic, *qui muliebria patitur*: "At first you were a common prostitute, the fee for your infamies was fixed, and it was not small. But Curio (your lover) quickly turned up, who withdrew you from your meretricious traffic, and, as if he had given you a matron's robe, established you in an enduring and stable wedlock" (*tamquam stolam dedisset, in matrimonio stabili et certo collocavit*). This means nothing less than that Curio and Antonius had lived, according to Cicero, as a married couple, that they had lived in a male homosexual marriage. Such couples are known from Suetonius (*Nero* 28, 1-2) and from Juvenal (2, 117-142).

Antonius has such a foul character and behaves in such an abominable

way that his decency forbids Cicero to speak about these things (*sunt quaedam, quae honeste non possum dicere*). This is the most comprehensive and direst sexual allegation that could be made.

In 70 B.C., comparing Verres' foul and wicked character with his right-hand man Apronius, Cicero (*Verr.* 2, 3, 23) had mentioned the latter's "unspeakable indulgence in every kind of vileness" (*omnium flagitiorum nefariae libidines*): "Others could not drink out of the same cup with him, and the disgusting smell of the man's breath and body, which we are told not even animals could endure, to Verres, and to Verres alone, seemed sweet and pleasant". The phrase "unspeakable things" stands for "oral sex", for *cunnilingus* and fellation.

The elegant Ovid (*epist.* 15, 133) leaves everything open to imagination: "Shame holds me back from relating the rest, but all is being practiced" (*ulteriora pudet narrare: sed omnia fiunt*). Or Ausonius (*epigr.* 85, 3-5 p. 320 Prete): "To name the infamy in Latin becomes me not" (*dicere me Latinum non decet opprobrium*). Or Martial (9, 27, 13-14): "I am ashamed to relate, Chrestus, what you are doing with your Cato-like tongue" (*pudet fari / Catoniana, Chreste, quod facis lingua*). Arnobius (*adv. nat.* 2, 42) makes use of the same vagueness and the same innuendo: "He is giving his pederasts permission to do everything unspeakable" (*emasculatoribus suis ad omnia infanda morigerus*: cp. WZ Rostock G 30, 1981, Heft 5, 44, § 17).

Cicero's attack of Antonius through sexual allegations had some additional implications and ramifications, if I am not mistaken. Cicero relates Antonius' sexual misdemeanor in his youth. But this identical Marcus Antonius, according to Dio Cassius 51, 8, 1, had sent Octavian "a detailed account of all amorous adventures and youthful pranks, which they had experienced together", in order to reconcile with Octavian. If Antonius and Octavian had done these things together, then Cicero's attack of Antonius' youthful trespasses should have hurt Octavian as well — if such allegations were ever taken seriously among the Roman VIPs.

To which extend sexual allegations had become the stock-intrade of invective can also be seen in the little tract of Pseudo-Cicero against Salustius (13): "I will only relate how you spent your youth: because, if this has been demonstrated, it is easy to see how from this wanton youth you grew up into an impudent and shameless young man. Afterwards, when the money you earned with the prostitution of your body could not suffice your boundless gluttony and when you had reached the age to let another man do to you what he pleased (*ad ea patienda, quae alteri facere collibisset*), you were overcome by a boundless lech to practice with others what you had deemed not disgraceful to your own body" (*quae ipse corpori tuo turpia non duxisses, in aliis experieris*). A former *puer meritorius* had

gone to become a notorious adulterer and pederast (Ps. Cicero in *Sall. in- vect.* 21): *omnium cubiculorum in aetate paelex et idem postea adulter*: this was only to be expected — according to Cicero.

On the other hand, it would appear that Cicero, in his old age, in the *Philippics*, is making less and less use of sexual allegations. *Philippic* 2, 44-46 is the ne plus ultra in this field of rhetorical catch-as-catch-can. What Antonius, in his youth, had permitted others to do with and to him, he practiced as an adult himself (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 105). Speaking of the house of the Roman polymath Varro, Cicero thunders against Antonius: "In your tenancy, the whole place rang with the voices of drunken men; the pavements swam with wine; the walls were wet; boys of free birth were consorting with boy-prostitutes, harlots with freeborn Roman women" (*ingenui cum meritoriis, scorta inter matres familias versabantur*). Similar charges flicker up again (Cic. *Phil.* 3, 28): "What is there in Antonius save lust, cruelty, insolence, audacity?" (*quid est in Antonio praeter libidinem, crudelitatem, petulantiam, audaciam?*). A bit later (Cic. *Phil.* 3, 31), Antonius is accused of devastating fields, plundering villas, carrying off and giving to soldiers freeborn women, virgins, boys of good birth (*pueri ingenui*). But with the political situation becoming more and more precarious, the use of sexual allegations is petering out. As late as the thirteenth *Philippic* (Cic. *Phil.* 13, 19), the worn-out magical hat produces another rabbit. Cicero is talking of Antonius and Octavian: "For it was the incredible and heaven-inspired valor of Caesar that stayed the cruel and maddened attacks of a brigand — the valor of Caesar, whom that madman then thought he was hurting by edicts, not realising that whatever false charges he was aiming at that most modest of young men (*in sanctissimum adulescentem*), in truth recoiled on the memory of his own boyhood" (*ea vere recidere in memoriam pueritiae suae*). But Antonius and Octavian had joined forces in their "amorous adventures and youthful pranks", according to Dio Cassius.

Once again Cicero takes recourse to the infamous "unspeakability", now attacking Antonius' brother (Cic. *Phil.* 14, 9): "My mind recoils, Conscript Fathers, and dreads to utter what Lucius Antonius did to the children and wives of the men of Parma. For the infamies to which the Antonii willingly submitted to their own disgrace, they rejoice to have inflicted by violence on others!"

The next steps in political denigration through sexual allegations were adultery, pathic homosexuality, prostituting one's wife, cunnilingus, incest, and fellation. All these activities are alluded to in Cicero's works. These allegations were made in public to damage the position of the enemy, to bring him down by all means. The philosophy was: the political end justifies the rhetorical means. "The orator only aims at the semblance of

truth" (*orator simile tantum veri petit*: Celsus ap. Quintil. 2, 15, 32); "for the reward of the party to a law-suit is not a good conscience, but victory by all means" (*non enim bona conscientia, sed victoria litigantis est praemium*).

Although they did not produce any decisive effect, sexual allegations came in handy and were used accordingly. They were brought into play during the Roman Empire, against the Christians, against heretics, against all sorts of enemies. Even in recent years, sexual allegations for political ends have been resuscitated. Though as old as the hills, ancient tricks die hard.