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ATTACKS DIRECTED AT CAESAR
IN CICERO'S *PARADOXA STOICORUM* 5

1. *Introduction*

Paradoxa Stoicorum (hereafter quoted *PS*) is a short essay written by Cicero in 46 BC focused on six Stoic *Paradoxa*. In this work Cicero does not limit himself to presenting the paradoxical statements of the Stoics: he also applies these Stoic *paradoxa* to his own Roman world. Thus, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* is rich in allusions and references to Cicero's contemporary Rome and to the social and political ills that plagued the Roman republic at that time.

Some scholars have noted that *Paradoxa Stoicorum* is in fact a «fighting work», also betraying Cicero's frustration and anger for being on the defeated side in the civil war¹.

At the time Cicero composed this text Rome was dominated by the figure of Julius Caesar: in April 46 BC Caesar was appointed dictator for 10 years and the dictatorship granted him near absolute power in both theory and in practice.

In 2000 one of the most astute scholars of Cicero, Emanuele Narducci², argued that *Paradoxa Stoicorum* is a thinly veiled attack on Caesar and on his regime.

Nevertheless, this aspect has not received further study from other scholars: this lack of attention is also reflected in the scarcity of publications concerning Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, which remains quite a neglected treatise among Cicero's philosophical writings. But the topic is interesting and deserves to be developed further.

¹ Molanger 1971, 24: «Ainsi les *Paradoxa* nous apparaissent comme une œuvre sérieuse et même comme une œuvre de combat»; MacKendrick 1989, 91: «this is a fighting work».

² Narducci 2005, 150: «In questo senso i *Paradoxa* sono carichi di coperte valenze di opposizione contro il dominio di Cesare e di polemica nei confronti delle tendenze e dei comportamenti che avevano favorito la degenerazione della repubblica».



As Cicero himself explains in the proemium³, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* was composed immediately after the *Brutus*, the literary work which marked his return to philosophical studies. Since according to Stem 2005, the composition of *Brutus* must be placed in the winter and beginning of the spring of 46 BC, and immediately afterward Cicero worked on the *Paradoxa*, it is reasonable to conclude that *Paradoxa Stoicorum* was written in the spring of 46 BC, more precisely in March and April⁴. Furthermore, considering that there is no mention in *Paradoxa Stoicorum* of Cato's suicide at Utica at the end of April, it is likely that the *Paradoxa* was completed before then⁵.

At the time when Cicero was writing the *Paradoxa*, an attitude of strong opposition to Caesar seems to have prevailed and the text reveals allusions, barbs and attacks directed at him⁶.

Using the cover of the philosophical discussion Cicero launches several attacks directed at Caesar and his views of ethics and society⁷: all these attacks are hidden beneath the surface of a philosophical discussion, camouflaged under the pretext of discussing the paradoxical statements of the Stoics. Therefore, what Fiori⁸ noted in his book *Bonus vir* is also true in the case of the *Paradoxa Stoicorum*: the disapproval of

³ PS 5, *Accipies igitur hoc parvum opusculum lucubratum his iam contractioribus noctibus, quoniam illud maiorum vigiliarum munus in tuo nomine apparuit.*

⁴ See also Malaspina 2004: «Kumaniecki 1970a, 170 i *Paradoxa* furono composti e pubblicati nella primavera del 46; Häfner 1928, 98 l'opera fu finita al più tardi a metà aprile 46; Molager (BL), 14-15: opera composta ad inizio primavera (probabilmente febbraio/marzo); D in DG 6, 246: Inizio aprile. Nel proemio dei *Paradoxa* Catone è presentato come ancora in vita, ma questo non basta per datare tutta l'opera all'anno 46, poiché Cicerone ha a disposizione vari proemi tra i quali scegliere per le sue opere: *Att.* 16, 6, 4. Decisivo è invece il fatto che Cicerone si avvicina a M. Bruto, dedicatario dell'opera, solo nell'anno 46; il contenuto, infine, per la sua affinità con il *De finibus*, fa pensare che sia stato scritto durante l'inizio delle ricerche per quell'opera, nell'anno 46: *Att.* 12, 6a; Büchner 1964, 349: Opera anteriore al *Cato*, che è composto probabilmente in estate. Gelzer 1969, 272».

⁵ See Malaspina 2004: «Bringmann 1971, 60: Opera spedita a M. Bruto come appendice al *Brutus* circa inizio maggio, prima di sapere della morte di Catone».

⁶ Some scholars (Lévy 1982, Strasburger 1990, Wassmann 1996 and more recently Goldenhardt 2007) recognize in Cicero's philosophical works written in 45-44 BC a clear opposition to Caesar, especially in the choice of characters and historical examples. For a somewhat different interpretation, see Malaspina 2013.

⁷ Cicero hints at issues concerning freedom of speech when navigating Caesarian society in some of the Letters he wrote in 46 BC, especially in *Cic. fam.* 9, 22, and 9, 16, 3-4. Concerning these letters see McConnell, 2014, 181-183. McConnell notes: «At 9.19.4 he (Cicero) stresses to Paetus that any attempt to get past the limits on frank speech with humour and allusion is problematic, noting that Caesar is exceptionally skilled at identifying his jokes and barbs and that he requests reports on his comments and conversations daily» (182).

⁸ Cf. Fiori 2011, 32 ff.

Caesar's politics is never direct, but always mediated through philosophical considerations.

Cicero's criticism is never without purpose: because of his retirement from political life due to Caesar's dictatorship and his decision to return to his philosophical studies, Cicero's aim in this phase of his literary career was to offer new ethical models for Roman society, in order to oppose the moral disintegration he was witnessing with his own eyes.

2. Paradoxon 5

In my view, a strong attack directed at Caesar himself (always without naming him) can be found in *Paradoxon* 5 where Cicero discusses the Stoic *paradoxon* that every fool is a slave. The attack is filtered through a philosophical topic, people's enslavement to passions in contrast to the inner freedom of the Stoic Sage.

Cicero focuses on the Stoic *paradoxon stultos omnes servos*, describing opposite points of view on the topic, in agreement with the methodology of the New Academy which he also uses to structure the discussion of the other Stoic paradoxes in this work. Thus, the *paradoxon* has a dialogic structure: Cicero imagines a dialogue between an unnamed character who is not able to control his passions and Cicero himself, who vehemently criticizes him for being unworthy of ruling over others.

Cicero begins by addressing an unspecified interlocutor, telling him that he is unworthy of the title of *imperator*, since he is enslaved to his passions: *PS 33, Laudetur vero hic imperator aut etiam appelletur aut hoc nomine dignus putetur*. Immediately after he ironically asks: *imperator quo modo aut cui tandem hic libero imperabit, qui non potest cupiditatibus suis imperare?*

There is controversy over the identity of this addressee. Ronnick in her commentary remarks: «Some scholars suggest that Mark Antony is the target of this *paradoxon*. There are no clear indications that this is correct»⁹. In fact, at the date of composition of Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum* in March-April 46 BC, Mark Antony had not yet exercised a command under his own auspices and so could not have been referred to properly as *imperator*. Mark Antony had served as a highly capable *legatus* under Caesar in Gaul and especially in the Pharsalus campaign,

⁹ Ronnick 1991, 128.

but he had not yet exercised a command of his own in 46 BC, nor did he take any part in the campaigns in the civil war that came after Pharsalus, neither in Africa nor in Spain in 45 BC. Therefore, I agree with Ronnick that the characteristics of the figure Cicero hints at in this speech are not consistent with the portrait of Antony.

I believe instead that it is more likely that Cicero had Caesar in mind: Cicero is referring clearly to a character who notoriously had the title of *imperator* and Caesar was acclaimed *imperator* in 60 BC and again in 45 BC.

Also the words pronounced by Cicero's interlocutor in his defence make one think of Caesar. The interlocutor objects to the vehement criticism addressed to him, pointing out: *PS 37, Magna – inquit – bella gessi, magnis imperiis et provinciis praefui*. It is well known that Caesar became a powerful politician through a number of military accomplishments like, for instance, his victories in the Gallic wars by 51 BC.

Caesar also ruled important Roman provinces since he had been appointed governor of *Gallia Cisalpina* and *Transalpina* in 58 BC.

Cicero next develops the topic of enslavement analysing in a sort of overview the different passions people can be enslaved to. He describes passions which are typically Roman at the time he was writing. Some of the passions that Cicero mentions in this overview can reinforce the hypothesis that Caesar is the addressee of Cicero in this passage.

In the first place Cicero mentions enslavement to a woman¹⁰: *PS 36, An ille mihi liber cui mulier imperat, cui leges imponit, praescribit, iubet, vetat quod videtur, qui nihil imperanti negare potest, nihil recusare audent; dandum est; vocat, veniendum; eicit, abeundum, minatur, extimescendum*. This is a harsh attack directed at his addressee¹¹.

The tyranny exercised by a demanding mistress can easily make readers think of Mark Antony: indeed, the enslavement to a woman was a motif often applied to Antony, who was famously subservient to a string of domineering women (Cytheris, Fulvia and Cleopatra)¹². However, Antony's fawning over his mistress Cytheris does not fit the compositional date of

¹⁰ For this topos cf. Hor. *sat.* 2, 7, 89-94, *Quinque talenta / poscit te mulier, vexat foribusque repulsum / perfundit gelida, rursus vocat: eripe turpi / colla iugo: «Liber, liber sum», dic age. Non quis: / urget enim dominus mentem non lenis et acris / subiectat lasso stimulos versatque negantem*.

¹¹ Cf. Cresci Marrone 2013, 3: «Soprattutto insidiosa per la stima e il credito goduto da un uomo politico era l'insinuazione di una sua sottomissione alle donne».

¹² Concerning this aspect with reference to Marcus Antonius cf. Cresci Marrone 2013, 2-4.

Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*: Antony made Cytheris his mistress in the summer of 48 BC, but their relationship did not last long and he was forced to give her up by the end of 47 BC. Instead, Plutarch described Fulvia, whom Antony married in 47 BC, as a woman who wanted to «rule a ruler and command a commander», but he also adds that thanks to her later Cleopatra found Antonius already taught to obey a woman¹³.

Cleopatra, then, seems a strong candidate for the role of the domineering woman because of her regal status as powerful queen of Egypt and her outspoken personality¹⁴.

It is likely that, at this time in the spring of 46 BC, Cicero had Cleopatra in mind as an example of a domineering woman. If so, then, Caesar seems more likely than Antony for the role of subservient man. Therefore, in this passage from *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, Cicero is alluding to Caesar, who was seduced by the allure of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and, according to his enemies, fell under her influence precisely at this time¹⁵. In the years 47-45 BC, in fact, Cicero and the Roman senators were greatly concerned about the influence the powerful Cleopatra exercised over Caesar¹⁶.

¹³ Plut. *Ant.* 10, 3, ἀπαλλαγείς γὰρ ἐκείνου τοῦ βίου γάμῳ προσέσχε, Φουλβίαν ἀγαγόμενος τὴν Κλωδίῳ τῷ δημαγωγῷ συνοικήσασαν, οὐ ταλασίαν οὐδὲ οἰκουρίαν φρονοῦν γύναιον, οὐδὲ ἀνδρὸς ιδιώτου κρατεῖν ἀξιοῦν, ἀλλ' ἄρχοντος ἄρχειν καὶ στρατηγοῦντος στρατηγεῖν βουλόμενον, ὥστε Κλεοπάτραν διδασκάλια Φουλβία τῆς Ἀντωνίου γυναικοκρατίας ὀφείλειν, πάνυ χειροῆθη καὶ πεπαιδαγωγημένον ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀκροᾶσθαι γυναικῶν παραλαβοῦσαν αὐτόν.

¹⁴ Concerning the description of Cleopatra as domineering woman cf. Tatum 2008, 112-113: «The legend of Cleopatra finds its origin in her own lifetime when Octavian, hoping to blacken the reputation of his daunting enemy Antony [...] directed his propaganda toward Cleopatra [...] Two forms of bigotry worked in Octavian's favour. The first was what we should now call orientalism. [...] The second prejudice, amplified by the first, was our old friend, Roman anxiety about dominant women. In Augustan propaganda, then, Cleopatra represented the most appalling specimen of foreign enemy [...]. And this story has, unfortunately for the biographer of Caesar, been retrojected, giving us the romantic legend of Caesar's passion for Cleopatra. Cleopatra epitomized two prejudices that repelled the Roman men of republican Rome: the first one concerning eastern empires considered evil, the second one was their apprehension about dominant women».

¹⁵ The historians mention a number of decisions, according always to his enemies, Caesar made under the influence of Cleopatra. Plutarch recalls the undertaking of the Egyptian war: cf. Plut. *Caes.* 48, 5, Τὸν δ' αὐτόθι πόλεμον οἱ μὲν οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον, ἀλλ' ἔρωσι Κλεοπάτρας ἄδοξον αὐτῷ καὶ κινδυνώδη γενέσθαι λέγουσιν. Suet. *Caes.* 79, 3 mentions the idea of transferring the capital of the empire to Alexandria. See also Nic. Damasc. *Vita Caes.* 20, 68. For an evaluation of these events cf. Zecchini 2001, 77-88. Concerning in general the influence Cleopatra exercised on Caesar cf. Collins 1955, 462 ff; Roller 2010, 72. See also Fletcher 2012, 194: «Cleopatra's influence on Caesar cannot be underestimated».

¹⁶ See Fletcher 2012, 195: «For the Romans, a woman wielding more power than the men around her was simply unacceptable. So too was a woman covered in all the trap-

In the following passage Cicero hints at laws by which a dominant woman was able to keep men under her control: *PS 36, An ille mihi liber cui mulier imperat, cui leges imponit, praescribit, iubet.*

This could be an allusion by Cicero to the bill supposedly drafted by the tribune Helvius Cinna to grant Caesar the right to have an unlimited number of wives with the aim of producing a blood heir¹⁷: this law, according to Caesar's opponents, was useful to Cleopatra in preparation for her marriage to Caesar¹⁸ and for the recognition of Tolomeus Caesarion, the son she had with Caesar in 47 BC. In fact, at that time Caesar was married to Calpurnia, a descendant of a prominent Roman family.

Cicero concludes sarcastically that such a man cannot be considered free but is rather a slave of the worst kind. He also adds that nothing could avoid this ignominy, not even descent from a noble family: *PS 36, Ego vero istum non modo servum sed nequissimum servum, etiam si in amplissima familia natus sit appellandum puto.* This seems another reference to Caesar who was born in a patrician family, the *gens Iulia*, which claimed to be descended from Iulus, the son of Aeneas, believed to be a son of the goddess *Venus*.

Next Cicero criticizes passion for artworks: *PS 37, Atque, ut in magna familia stultorum, sunt alii lautiores ut sibi videntur servi, sed*

pings of royalty which the Romans associated with men»; «As Cicero and his fellow Republicans discussed how they should deal with this unnaturally powerful woman who wielded so much influence over Caesar and the future of Rome»; 202: «But as Rome's entire way of life was being transformed by the vision of one man under the influence of not just a foreigner, or even a woman, but a monarch too, die-hard Republicans were already discussing ways to put an end to the reforms. Rumours circulated that Rome as no longer good enough for Caesar, that he wanted to transfer the government to Alexandria and even make himself a monarch alongside his foreign partner» (196).

¹⁷ Cf. Suet. *Caes.* 52, 3, *Helvius Cinna TR PL. plerisque confessus est habuisse se scriptam paratamque legem, quam Caesar ferre iussisset cum ipse abesset, ut ei uxores liberorum quaerendorum causa quas et quot vellet ducere liceret*; Dio 44, 7, 3.

¹⁸ Cleopatra did come to Rome in the autumn of 46 BC and Caesar had her housed in his own estate at the *Horti* beyond the Tiber. See Fletcher 2012, 202: «It must have been clear that the couple, who appeared openly together in Rome, regarded themselves as married regardless of Roman law and Caesar's existing marriage to Calpurnia, particularly as Caesar was drawing up legislation to mend his marital status by making it legal for him to have more than one marriage». According to some scholars Cleopatra remained in Rome continuously for a year and a half. Cf. Gelzer 1959, 287: «Cleopatra with her husband, son and the rest of her court appeared in Rome at this time and was billeted by him for a long stay in the gardens on the far side of the Tiber». See also n. 3: «Suet. *Caes.* 52, 1 is wrong in saying that Caesar himself sent her home. For according to Cic. *Att.* 14, 8, 1; 20, 2; 15, 1, 5; 4, 4; 15, 2; 17, 2 she was in Rome until April 44 BC»; Gruen 2003, 259: «She was there, for a year and half, ensconced in luxury in Caesar's private quarters, an affront to all the Romans».

tamen servi, atrienses ac topiarii stultitiae suae, quos signa quos tabulae quos caelatum argentum quos Corinthia opera quos aedificia magnifica nimio opere delectant.

I believe that this too is an allusion to Caesar who, according to the historians, loved luxury and artworks and spent a lot of money adorning Rome with them, as, for instance, Suetonius tells us: Suet. *Caes.* 44, *Nam de ornanda instruendaque urbe, item de tuendo ampliandoque imperio plura ac maiora in dies destinabat.* Suetonius also underlines Caesar's personal love for luxury and artworks: *Caes.* 46, 2, *Munditiarum lautitiarumque studiosissimum multi prodiderunt*; 47, 1, *gemmas, toreumata, signa, tabulas operis antiqui semper animosissime comparasse.* In criticizing this kind of behaviour Cicero's point of view is typically Roman and it reflects the Roman ethic of blaming passion for artworks as unworthy of the *civis Romanus*: Cicero disapproves of a passion for artworks when it becomes an uncontrollable desire for private possession.

To these accusations by Cicero the interlocutor replies by affirming – puffed up with pride – his power: *PS* 37, *Et «sumus – inquit – principes civitatis».* This seems to me a clear allusion to Caesar since the title *princeps civitatis* hints at someone having a prominent role in Roman politics: *princeps civitatis* designates a statesman of the highest calibre like, for instance, Pericles in the classical Athens, which, given the contemporary context discussed above, would naturally evoke Caesar.

Cicero also continues with passion for moray eels. Many wealthy Romans were fond of moray eels and it was well known that Caesar was among them. Caesar's friend Gaius Hirrius, who had ponds dedicated to raising moray eels, supplied six thousand of them to Caesar for his triumphal banquets¹⁹. It seems that Cicero is alluding directly to Caesar when in this *paradoxon* he writes *PS* 38, *Revivescat Manius Curius [...] et videat aliquem summis beneficiis populi usum barbatulos mullos exceptantem de piscina.* The periphrasis *aliquem summis beneficiis populi usum* alludes clearly to Caesar, since Cicero uses the same expression with clear reference in one of his letters: see Cic. *Att.* 2, 1, 7, *si etiam Caesarem cuius nunc venti valde sunt secundi reddo meliorem, num tantum obsum rei publicae? Quin etiam si mihi nemo invideret, si omnes, ut erat aequum, faverent, tamen non minus esset probanda medicina quae sanaret vitiosas partis rei publicae quam quae exsecaret. Nunc vero, quom equitatus ille*

¹⁹ Cf. Plin. *nat.* 9, 171, *Murenarum vivarium privatim excogitavit ante alios C. Hirrius, qui coenis triumphalibus Caesaris dictatoris sex milia numero murenarum mutua appendit.*

quem ego in clivo Capitolino te signifero ac principe conlocaram senatum deseruerit, nostri autem principes digito se caelum putent attingere si nulli barbati in piscinis sint qui ad manum accedant.

But in this *paradoxon* Cicero focuses especially on enslavement to power and glory, remarking that these are passions which can strongly enslave: *PS 40, Quid iam illa cupiditas, quae videtur esse liberalior, honoris, imperii, provinciarum, quam dura est domina, quam imperiosa, quam vehemens!* In his *De officiis* Cicero later explains that a passion for glory sometimes takes the form of monetary greed, but it is principally associated with military or civil offices and glory (*imperatorum, honorum, gloriae cupiditas*)²⁰. Cicero seems to allude directly to Caesar as a principal example of this kind of behaviour: Caesar's pursuit of glory was a spectacular example of what, according to Cicero, was a misunderstanding of true glory. In a passage of his *De officiis*, where Cicero notes the most frequent presence of this desire in people who are most gifted by nature, he seems to have Caesar foremost in mind: *Cic. off. 1, 68, Vera autem et sapiens animi magnitudo honestum illud, quod maxime natura sequitur, in factis positum, non in gloria iudicat, principemque se esse mavult quam videri; etenim qui ex errore imperitae multitudinis pendet, hic in magnis viris non est habendus. Facillime autem ad res iniustas impellitur, ut quisque altissimo animo est, gloriae cupiditate; qui locus est sane lubricus, quod vix invenitur, qui laboribus susceptis periculisque aditis non quasi mercedem rerum gestarum desideret gloriam.* In his *Pro Marcello* Cicero praises Caesar as one most avid of glory: *Cic. Marcell. 7, At vero huius gloriae, C. Caesar, quam es paulo ante adeptus, socium habes neminem: totum hoc quantumcumque est (quod certe maximum est) totum est, inquam, tuum. Nihil sibi ex ista laude centurio, nihil praefectus, nihil cohors, nihil turma decerpit: quin etiam illa ipsa rerum humanarum domina, Fortuna, in istius societatem gloriae se non offert: tibi cedit; tuam esse totam et propriam fatetur.* Lust for wealth ranks a close second to lust for glory in Cicero's diagnosis of the Republic's ruin. Cicero came to believe that glory, instead of being earned by actions benefiting the state, was the fair-sounding pretext for the self-aggrandisement of those who were destroying the Republic. Cicero believed both of these, singly or in combination, were the primary threats to justice. Cicero also wrote a book *De gloria*, of which we have

²⁰ Cf. Long 1995, 213-240.

just a few surviving fragments: according to Büchner that work involved an attack on Caesar, too²¹.

In conclusion, all these motifs support the thesis that the addressee of Cicero's speech in this *paradoxon* is Caesar.

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²¹ Cf. Büchner 1964, 430.

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