

**AMBIENTE, NATURA E POLITICA
IN CICERONE PUBBLICO E PRIVATO**

**ENVIRONMENT, NATURE, AND POLITICS
IN CICERO'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE**

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ASPECTS OF THE NATURAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL
IN CICERO'S POLITICAL WRITINGS

1. *Introduction*

Cicero's political writings, including treatises (mostly in dialogue form) on political philosophy, speeches with a political dimension as well as letters and other pieces with a political element, might not appear to be the most obvious places to explore Cicero's handling of aspects referring to natural and supernatural phenomena, surroundings and events in surviving utterances. Indeed, these types of works do not include extended descriptions of such features, since, on their own, they are typically not relevant for the main topic or the primary argument. Such texts do, however, contain references to natural and supernatural elements integrated into the reasoning when these can be applied in support of the aim of the respective pieces. Thus, analysing examples of these types of writings might reveal less about Cicero's views of and attitude to natural and supernatural features, but can enhance the profile of Cicero as an orator and political writer when even such elements are adduced to strengthen a case. That is why various types of political writings, even though they do not form a recognized literary category within Cicero's oeuvre, are here considered together. For a study of the function of references to natural and supernatural elements in such a context these general terms are understood in a broad sense, encompassing the setting of a speech or a piece of writing, Cicero's location in the inhabited world, weather phenomena, food production and availability, events such as extreme weather conditions or divine (or divinely interpreted) interventions.

Within this framework, on the most straightforward level, comments on "natural surroundings" address the setting for the delivery of a speech or a scenario for a reported conversation. For instance, in the *First Catilinarian Oration* (63 BCE) Cicero, the consul, exploits the fact that the meeting of the Senate at which the speech was originally deliv-



ered is held in the Temple of Jupiter Stator, with a (deictic) allusion to Jupiter's protective force needed and expected on this occasion (Cic. *Catil.* 1, 11; 1, 33)¹. Even the *Second Philippic Oration* (44 BCE), a speech never delivered and not immediately published and instead sent to Cicero's friend Atticus, yet written as if it was given on 19 September 44 BCE (Cic. *Att.* 15, 13, 1; 15, 13, 7 [= 15, 13a, 3]; 16, 11, 1-2), includes references to the surroundings, emphasizing that the meeting takes place in the same temple (Temple of Concordia) in which discussions about Catiline were held in Cicero's consular year (Cic. *Catil.* 3, 21) and that armed guards are present (Cic. *Phil.* 2, 15-16; 2, 19; 2, 119). These comments, in line with other references to the fictitious performance situation throughout the speech (e.g. Cic. *Phil.* 2, 84), suggest that references to the surroundings as part of the argument were a standard element in such speeches. In several of Cicero's dialogic treatises a scenario for the conversations allegedly reported is outlined at the beginning. For instance, for *De oratore* (55 BCE), *De re publica* (54-51 BCE) and *De legibus* (begun in c. 54 BCE) the setting sketched (Cic. *de orat.* 1, 24-29; *rep.* 1, 14-18; *leg.* 1, 14) demonstrates the Platonic inspiration and indicates the social context, the status of the interlocutors and the relationship between them as a preparation for the ensuing conversation².

Irrespective of comments on specific surroundings, a more complex way of drawing on the circumstances in the argument consists in giving a function and a targeted interpretation to selected natural and supernatural events. Some passages relevant in this context have been looked at in connection with the role of religion in Cicero's works³, but not from the perspective of them being elements of a particular oratorical technique. Therefore, this paper will study selected key examples of this strategy and demonstrate the different types of occurrences and their functions within Cicero's political writings. Such an approach contributes to enhancing the understanding of the role of the natural and supernatural features in Cicero's political ar-

¹ On the role of Jupiter Stator in Cicero's argument in the *First Catilinarian Oration* see Vasaly 1993, 41-59; Dyck 2008, 88-89, 122-123; on Cicero's references to religion in that speech see also Goar 1972, 36-37; Sauer 2013; Berry 2020, 150.

² On the detailed exposition of the setting in these early dialogues of Cicero see the commentaries on the respective works (esp. Leeman-Pinkster 1981 for *de orat.* and Dyck 2004 for *leg.*) and the contributions by G. Tsouni and E. McKnight in this volume.

³ For an overview of Cicero's expressions of his attitude to religion and the exploitation of this aspect in public utterances see Manuwald 2018; on the tension between philosophy and religion in the late Republic see Brunt 1989.

gument and thus to gaining further insights into the use of references to these as an oratorical technique.

2. Background

The basis for a rhetorical technique of adducing and interpreting natural and supernatural events in a meaningful way in public utterances can be inferred from a passage in the speech *De haruspicum responso* (56 BCE). Early in this speech Cicero refutes the view that he was engaging too much with philosophy and stresses the importance of Roman religion and the role of soothsayers (Cic. *har. resp.* 18-19)⁴:

For I must admit that I have been deeply impressed both by the awe-inspiring nature of the prodigy and the solemnity of its interpretation, and the firm and unwavering utterances of the soothsayers; and indeed, though I may perhaps appear to some to be a greater student of literature than others whose lives are as full of distractions as my own, my natural bent does not lead me to find any pleasure in, or indeed any use whatsoever for, such literature as tends to discourage and withdraw our minds from religion. In the first place, speaking for myself, I look for authority and guidance in religious observance to our ancestors. [...] 19 [...] And, indeed, who is so witless that, when he gazes up into heaven, he fails to see that gods exist, and imagines that chance is responsible for the creations of an intelligence so transcendent that scarce can the highest artistry do justice to the immutable dispositions of the universe? Or who, once convinced that divinity does exist, can fail at the same time to be convinced that it is by its power that this great

⁴ Cic. *har. resp.* 18-19, *ego enim fateor me et magnitudine ostenti et gravitate responsi et una atque constanti haruspicum voce vehementer esse commotum: neque is sum, qui, si cui forte videor plus quam ceteri, qui aequae atque ego sunt occupati, versari in studio litterarum, his delecter aut utar omnino litteris, quae nostros animos deterrent atque avocant a religione. Ego vero primum habeo auctores ac magistros religionum colendarum maiores nostros. [...] 19 [...] Etenim quis est tam vacors qui aut cum suspexit in caelum, deos esse non sentiat et ea, quae tanta mente fiunt, ut vix quisquam arte ulla ordinem rerum ac necessitudinem persequi possit, casu fieri putet, aut cum deos esse intellexerit, non intelligat eorum numine hoc tantum imperium esse natum et auctum et retentum? Quam volumus licet, patres conscripti, ipsi nos amemus, tamen nec numero Hispanos nec robore Gallos nec calliditate Poenos nec artibus Graecos nec denique hoc ipso huius gentis ac terrae domestico nativoque sensu Italos ipsos ac Latinos, sed pietate ac religione atque hac una sapientia, quod deorum numine omnia regi gubernarique perspeximus, omnes gentes nationesque superavimus [Loeb translation]. For the final point cf. Cic. *nat. deor.* 2, 8, *et si conferre volumus nostra cum externis, ceteris rebus aut pares aut etiam inferiores reperiemur, religione, id est cultu deorum, multo superiores.**

empire has been created, extended, and sustained? However good be our conceit of ourselves, conscript fathers, we have excelled neither Spain in population, nor Gaul in vigour, nor Carthage in versatility, nor Greece in art, nor indeed Italy and Latium itself in the innate sensibility characteristic of this land and its peoples; but in piety, in devotion to religion, and in that special wisdom which consists in the recognition of the truth that the world is swayed and directed by divine disposal, we have excelled every race and every nation.

Obviously, in this speech, which deals with the interpretation of a report on prodigies by the originally Etruscan soothsayers called *haruspices*, such a statement has an immediate function and is triggered by the specific argumentative focus, but Cicero could not have had recourse to such an argument if it was not based on views he regarded as acceptable among Roman audiences at the time⁵. Cicero's comments show that the view that occurrences in nature are governed by the gods and therefore meaningful may be used as a valid argument. What Cicero thought about the respective value of philosophy and religion cannot be inferred from this passage, as it does not necessarily reveal his true opinion⁶, in line with a statement elsewhere that forensic orators say what is appropriate to the cause (Cic. *Cluent.* 139; *Quint.* 2, 17, 21). In any case references to and exploitation of natural and supernatural happenings as di-

⁵ For a detailed analysis of this well-known passage see Gildenhard 2011, 330-338. For a discussion on how this speech contributes to debates on Roman identity in relation to religious aspects see Cairo 2020; on Cicero's use of and attitude to religious matters as displayed in this speech see Goar 1972, 56-72; Gildenhard 2011, 326-343.

⁶ Scholars have observed that in some contexts Cicero's argument is in line with official Roman state religion and elsewhere rather with contemporary philosophical doctrines (for recent discussions of "Cicero's philosophy of religion", looking at his approach and attitude in a variety of works, see Wynne 2019; on the context see also Lévy 1997). Burriss 1924; 1926 had pointed out contradictions and parallel views to be inferred from the entire corpus of Cicero's writings, when, for instance, Cicero expresses scepticism of the interpretation of prophecies in some of his treatises, while he demonstrates support of such elements of Roman state religion elsewhere, often for political and social purposes. In the light of such observations Heibges 1969a tried to show that Cicero should not be classified as a "hypocrite" since there were parallels between different types of his works and it was clear that he used whatever suited his argument, but that did not mean that he was always entirely insincere. Latte 1960, 285-286, distinguishes three levels for Cicero's comments on religion: his alignment with official Roman state religion as an orator and magistrate, his philosophical discussions and his personal beliefs (as they can be inferred from the letters). Goar 1972, 61-62, 74-75, also stresses that, in order to establish Cicero's thoughts, all genres of his writings need to be considered (on the different appearances of religion in Cicero's work within a broader framework see Stroh 2010).

vine signs are clearly regarded as valid rhetorical arguments in public and as a potential resource to be adduced⁷.

3. *Divine interventions and weather phenomena*

One of the most obvious instances of deploying such phenomena to strengthen the argument occurs in Cicero's *Third Catilinarian Oration* (63 BCE)⁸. In this speech, in which Cicero informs the People about the discovery of incriminating evidence and the identification of some of the Catilinarian conspirators, he reminds them that a tempest two years ago had destroyed a statue of Jupiter near the Forum and that soothsayers had advised that it should be replaced; Cicero highlights that it had not been possible to restore the statue up to this time and that on this very day, when the alleged conspirators were led to a meeting of the Senate for questioning, the new statue was set up; moreover, this new statue was facing in another direction, so that it could watch what happens in the Forum and the Senate (Cic. *Catil.* 3, 19-21; cf. Cic. *F* 6, 60-72 *FPL*)⁹. Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether Cicero, in his role as consul, arranged this coincidence or whether he cleverly exploited something taking place¹⁰: in any case it would not be necessary to refer to the stat-

⁷ In philosophical treatises Cicero expresses a more sceptical attitude towards supernatural events, soothsaying and divination (e.g. Cic. *div.* 2, 28; on the views outlined in *De divinatione* see Guillaumont 2006).

⁸ There is a vague allusion to *non dubiis deorum immortalium significationibus* in the *Second Catilinarian Oration* (Cic. *Catil.* 2, 29, *quae quidem ego neque mea prudentia neque humanis consiliis fretus polliceor vobis, Quirites, sed multis et non dubiis deorum immortalium significationibus, quibus ego ducibus in hanc spem sententiamque sum ingressus; quoniam iam non procul, ut quondam solebant, ab externo hoste atque longinquo, sed hic praesentes suo numine atque auxilio sua templa atque urbis tecta defendunt*), but no indication of what these might consist of.

⁹ On the rhetorical use of the statue as an element of the location in which the speech was delivered see Vasaly 1993, 81-86; Butler 2002, 97-101; Dyck 2008, 193-197; on the function of a statue as an element of religious discourse see Beltrão da Rosa 2020; on the exploitation of religious aspects in that speech see Goar 1972, 41-45; Gildenhard 2011, 278-292; Berry 2020, 153-158.

¹⁰ Cf. Berry 2006, 312 (more nuanced Berry 2020, 157); Dyck 2008, 197 vs. Goar 1972, 42-43; Vasaly 1993, 81; Butler 2002, 97; Gildenhard 2011, 291, with contrasting views (cf. also Heibges 1969b, 844). – In the discussion on the existence and role of divination in *De divinatione* the speaker Cicero claims «that there is no divination» (Cic. *div.* 2, 45, *divinationem nego*) and that its existence is not proved by the fact that the new statue of Jupiter was erected at the time when the conspiracy was about to be exposed in the Senate, thus suggesting that the simultaneity was not divinely engineered and a result of coincidence (Cic. *div.* 2, 45-47), which is not regarded as sincere either by some scholars (e.g. Butler

ue in the narrative about the conspiracy; by doing so Cicero endows the discovery of the conspiracy with a fateful aura and suggests that it is authorized by the gods (cf. also Cic. *Sull.* 86). Particularly in a speech to the People such a subtext strengthens the case against the conspiracy without Cicero having to go into further detail about the facts¹¹. That the speech has been preserved and was meant to be included in the selection of consular speeches outlined by Cicero in a later letter to Atticus (Cic. *Att.* 2, 1, 3 [60 BCE]) suggests that this was a view Cicero would like to see spread (in addition to the greater dramatic potential of this continuous narrative than shorter statements during the preceding questioning and discussion in the Senate, since what was said in the Senate is not included in the collection).

Similarly, the later speech *De haruspicum responso* (56 BCE) ends with the appeal to pay attention to divine signs, such as earthquakes sent by the gods and their interpretation; for if gods communicate with humans in such a way, it is meaningful and should be adhered to (Cic. *har. resp.* 61-63). Obviously, in the immediate context Cicero tries emphatically to persuade the audience to follow the response by the soothsayers in his interpretation as this strengthens his case in the controversy about his house and the reference point of the soothsayers' reply. Again, the fact that the response of the soothsayers is not only a relevant element in the political conflict, but can also be used in an argument with a general moral and religious imperative shows that a shared underlying value system can be exploited oratorically for political purposes.

Earlier, in one of the orations against C. Verres (70 BCE), which have a major political dimension although they are formally forensic speeches, Cicero uses a similar argumentative structure: in the first speech of the second *actio* Cicero reports a sacrilege committed by Verres, namely that he removed beautiful and old statues from the temple of Apollo on Delos. This action was followed by a sudden storm, so that the heavily laden ship suffered shipwreck and the religious items were found on the

2002, 97; see also Goar 1972, 43). In *De legibus* Cicero as the speaker proclaims «that an art of divination, which the Greeks call μαντική, exists» (Cic. *leg.* 2, 32, *divinationem, quam Graeci μαντικὴν appellant, esse*) and that the gods give indications of future events, which are interpreted by Roman augurs and others in similar positions (Cic. *leg.* 2, 32-33).

¹¹ In philosophical treatises the view is voiced that certain religious rites are maintained «because of the opinion of the masses and the great service to the *res publica*» (Cic. *div.* 2, 70).

shore, when Cn. Cornelius Dolabella (praet. 81 BCE, then provincial governor) ordered them to be put back (Cic. *Verr.* 2, 1, 46-47). Cicero does not provide much detail and does not comment on the events; he just gives a dramatic narrative in short, asyndetic sentences: the fact that he highlights a sudden tempest might insinuate that it was divinely triggered as revenge or punishment for Verres' deed¹².

What may count as a divine indication of a person's character or things to come can be extended widely in order to suit the argument. Thus, in one of the speeches given to the People in the fight against Mark Antony at the end of his life (44 BCE), in the *Fourth Philippic Oration*, Cicero confirms that the gods demonstrate the future in advance to human beings by signs, and he goes on to say that the gods have now shown that Mark Antony will be punished and the rest of the Romans will win, adducing the overwhelming consensus of everyone as evidence (Cic. *Phil.* 4, 10): this is not one of the standard divine signs, but it is here given the status of one on the basis of the extraordinary extent of this consensus¹³. Thereby, the range of types of meaningful external factors is increased to enhance the argument, which shows clearly that in political contexts references to natural or supernatural circumstances are not neutral descriptions.

As regards positive political activities, Cicero claims in the first speech he ever delivered to the People, when he was praetor (66 BCE), in *Pro lege Manilia* or *De imperio Cn. Pompeii*, that Cn. Pompeius Magnus (Pompey) has been so favoured by the gods and good fortune that even the winds and tempests obey him (Cic. *Manil.* 47-48). While Cicero does not give examples or proofs, this description may be connected with the success of Pompey's military activities. Adducing this aspect generally enhances the emphatic statement that Pompey is favoured by the gods without the need for further elaboration. This status demonstrates that he should therefore be given the extraordinary command under discussion¹⁴.

¹² Cf. Heibges 1969b, 841: «The sacrilege gains in importance when it is confronted with the respectful behavior of the "godless" Persians, and one detects a sarcastic tone when Cicero implies that the gods did not allow the thief to get away with his loot». – On Cicero's presentation of this scene see Ricchieri 2019, 106-107; Ricchieri 2020, 330-337.

¹³ On this passage see also Manuwald 2007, 516-518.

¹⁴ Cf. Heibges 1969b, 843-844: «The *contio* given in support of the Manilian Law frequently alludes to the special qualifications of Pompey as gifts granted to him by the gods. His *uirtus* is called *diuina* (33; 36), while his *felicitas*, a concept which in itself has religious overtones, is singled out as an illustration of the *potestas deorum* in regard to an individual (47-48). Since the gods bestow this gift freely on their favorites, they can easily

4. “Divine” qualities

Earlier in the same speech *Pro lege Manilia* Cicero outlines Pompey’s “divine” or “superhuman” qualities, to the extent that people in other countries regard Pompey not as having been sent from Rome, but as having come down from heaven (Cic. *Manil.* 33-41). While this is partly a hyperbolic characterization, the repeated insistence and the description of the impact on others suggest that there is a supernatural background to Pompey’s successful activities, which qualifies him for the task at hand. These strategies seem to go further in presenting Pompey as a semi-divine general than the standard depiction of such figures in contemporary texts¹⁵. Hence they can have a particular impact for the argument without the need for the orator to present further details to back up the claim.

Similarly, in the *Philippic Orations* delivered against Mark Antony (44-43 BCE), Cicero presents the young Octavian as a god-sent saviour, endowed with “divine” or “superhuman” qualities: Cicero claims that, if Octavian had not been born in that country and had not successfully intervened when it was completely unexpected for everyone, the *res publica* would not have survived (Cic. *Phil.* 3, 3-5)¹⁶. Again, Cicero adduces such a hyperbolic description, suggesting divine determination, to emphasize the value of Octavian’s deed and thus to justify the intervention despite the lack of official legitimization. In this case it is particularly obvious that the supernatural is adduced for oratorical purposes since in (private) letters Cicero talks about Octavian more sceptically and in a more nuanced way¹⁷. The claim of a “divine” nature in the speeches is most effective in moving the audience to support, even without further justification.

take it away. It is, therefore, with utmost caution that Cicero introduces the topic. But when he later summarizes the qualifications that make Pompey so eminently suitable for the command in the East, he beseeches the assembly not to refuse this gift of the gods (49). To vote for the man whose person reflects divine favor becomes then identical with obedience to the will of the gods (50)».

¹⁵ On the characterization of Pompey as almost “divine” in this speech and its context see Gruber 1988; on aspects of Pompey’s presentation see also Ricchieri 2021, esp. 345-350.

¹⁶ On this passage see also Manuwald 2007, 327-338. Cf. also Cic. *Phil.* 4, 3; 4, 4; 5, 23; 5, 43; 5, 47; 5, 50; 12, 9; 13, 18-19; 13, 46; 14, 25; cf. *ad Brut.* 1, 3, 1; 2, 5, 2.

¹⁷ E.g. Cic. *Att.* 14, 12, 2; 15, 12, 2; 16, 8; 16, 11, 6; 16, 14, 1-2; *fam.* 12, 25, 4; *ad Brut.* 1, 3, 1; 1, 10, 3; 1, 10, 5; 1, 15, 6.

Although this is not made explicit in this speech, the argument incorporates a point outlined in a later *Philippic Oration* with reference to M. Iunius Brutus and C. Cassius Longinus, namely that according to a law sanctioned by Jupiter everything of benefit to the *res publica* is legitimate and just and that, in certain circumstances, individuals striving for public welfare have to make decisions on their own on how best to realize what is good for the *res publica* (Cic. *Phil.* 11, 26-28). While this is a potentially problematic concept in a society governed by the rule of (positive) law, it emphasizes the view that there are individuals destined by their divine gifts to perform outstanding deeds for the public good, but also supernaturally given laws that are being followed and justify their actions. The argument is based on the idea, outlined in *De legibus*, that there is an underlying original law linked to the divine and preceding any written laws (Cic. *leg.* 2, 10)¹⁸. Again, a general point with a divine dimension is regarded as sufficient for justification.

5. *The supernatural and Cicero*

In the cases discussed so far Cicero does not hesitate to adduce natural and supernatural events in his own interpretation to further his argumentative goals, while these events are generally not linked to his personal situation. In other contexts he creates such connections, typically in order to justify his actions or his situation.

When in the *Catilinarian Orations* Cicero notes the coincidence of the erection of the new statue of Jupiter and the discovery of the conspiracy (Cic. *Cat.* 3, 19-21), the description is not directly linked to his activities, yet contributes to justifying his intervention. In the epic poem *De consulatu suo*, presenting similar material, Cicero even introduces himself as being called into the council of the gods and thus divinely authorized in his actions, according to the surviving testimonia (Quint. 11, 1, 22-24). While the poem was not thought worthy of Cicero by a scholiast (Schol. Bob. ad Cic. *Planc.* 74 [165, 7-9 Stangl]) and met with ridicule already in antiquity as a result of the hyperbolic self-praise (Quint. 11, 1, 24; Ps. Sall. *in Tull.* 6-7), with Cicero possibly indeed having transcended even the ancient conventions of the genre of historical epic, the argumenta-

¹⁸ On the concept of “natural law” in Cicero and other ancient philosophers see Lévy 1992, 509-521.

tive principle is similar to that applied in the speeches, namely that supernatural intervention is adduced to justify political measures¹⁹. The longest surviving fragment, a speech by the Muse Urania, quoted later (44 BCE) by Cicero in *De divinatione* (Cic. *div.* 1, 17-22: Cic. F 6 *FPL*⁴), refers to the prodigies preceding Cicero's consulship as well as others, followed by the advisable actions in response, again stressing the coincidence of the erection of the new statue of Jupiter (Cic. *div.* 1, 21: F 6, 60-72 *FPL*⁴). The passage confirms the view that everything is guided by a divine mind and that the consul acted rightly in offering sacrifices to the gods and obeying natural phenomena interpreted as signs, such as an eclipse of the moon, lightning or earthquakes (Cic. *div.* 1, 18-19: F 6, 11-32 *FPL*⁴)²⁰. The support of the gods for fighting the Catilinarian Conspiracy is hinted in the speeches, but not elaborated on in detail (e.g. Cic. *Catil.* 2, 19). Still, divine justification trumps any other argument in support, so that no further elaboration is needed.

The most obvious connection between Cicero's situation and supernatural influences is established in connection with Cicero's so-called exile, when he had to leave Rome as a result of the activities of the Tribune of the People P. Clodius Pulcher in 58-57 BCE in a backlash against his confronting the Catilinarian Conspiracy as consul. Supernatural intervention in this context is claimed in a number of ways: as discussed especially in the speeches *De domo sua* (57 BCE) and *De haruspicum responso* (56 BCE)²¹, the reason for P. Clodius Pulcher to justify maintaining his appropriation of Cicero's house in Rome, where he built a shrine to the goddess Libertas, was the interpretation of certain signs, seen as warning against reversing this religious act, in contrast to what Cicero demanded upon his return in the light of what he had been granted. In these speeches Cicero sets his own interpretation against Clodius' views, outlining his reading of the signs as highlighting Clodius' wrongdoing. Irrespective of which of these views is more in line with the conventions of Roman religion, the controversy shows

¹⁹ For a comparison of the *Catilinarian Orations* and the epic fragments with respect to Cicero's presentation of himself see Kurczyk 2006, 93-103 (with references to earlier literature).

²⁰ On the role of religion in *De consulatu suo* see Gildenhard 2011, 292-298; Berry 2020, 158-162.

²¹ On the argument in *De domo sua* see e.g. Classen 1985; Stroh 2004; Gildenhard 2011, 300-326; on the speech in relation to Cicero's presentation of himself see Kurczyk 2006, 219-230; on the way in which religious aspects feature in this speech see Goar 1972, 45-56.

the importance of supernatural events in Roman public discourse and their potential to be exploited in a political argument.

Cicero also suggests that his return to Rome was divinely sanctioned and thus fully and unquestionably justified: at the beginning of the speech on his return to the People (*Post reditum ad Quirites*; 57 BCE) Cicero describes his return as the fulfilment of a prayer of his: that, if his attitude and actions had always been supportive of the *res publica*, he should not be exposed to eternal punishment, but be able to return (Cic. *p. red. ad Quir.* 1)²². Thus, now that he has been recalled by the gods, the Senate, the People and all of Italy (these entities being put in parallel), he describes his previous activity on behalf of the *res publica* as confirmed and justified. Thereby he not only implies that his return is divinely ordained, but also that his previous activity (non-specified, but clearly referring to his consulship) is vindicated, and it is insinuated that the world is ruled by gods who listen to prayers and ensure justice²³.

At the time of Cicero's return from Rome the price of grain fluctuated; therefore, in his references to this situation details of the reasons and of the chronology vary (Cic. *p. red. in sen.* 34; *p. red. ad Quir.* 18; *dom.* 6-18; *Att.* 4, 1, 6-7)²⁴. In *De domo sua* (57 BCE) Cicero claims that, when the price came down after the decision to recall him, some people (including himself) interpreted it as divine approval of that decision; he also mentions that others thought that Cicero's return would lead to more internal peace and quiet (Cic. *dom.* 14-15). Still, the structure of the presentation and the emphasis given to Cicero's view is another form of highlighting divine intervention or sanctioning of Cicero's return.

By his way of presenting the situation Cicero personifies the *res publica* and gives it an active role in relation to this fate. He claims that both he and the *res publica* were absent from Rome together and returned together, with different nuances: sometimes they are described as moving together, sometimes the *res publica* recalls Cicero or brings him back (Cic. *p. red. in sen.* 34; 36; *p. red. ad Quir.* 14; 18; *dom.* 72-76; 87; 141; *Sest.* 52; *parad.* 4, 27-30). In any case the *res publica* becomes an external entity influencing Cicero's position and role. This construct serves as a clever mechanism to justify that Cicero did not withdraw from political ac-

²² On this passage see also Manuwald 2021, 236-240.

²³ On Cicero's depiction of his return to Rome in the two speeches given immediately afterwards see e.g. Benvenuti 2020 and Benvenuti in this volume.

²⁴ See further Manuwald 2021, 214-215.

tivity when he left Rome in 58 BCE, since he could not have done anything meaningful even in Rome while the *res publica* was away (i.e. while conditions did not allow effective political activity in Cicero's understanding) and to demonstrate that Cicero is entitled to resume the influential position of an ex-consul upon his return when political intervention is again possible.

In a similar, though less explicit way, Cicero justifies his departure from and return to Rome in the *Philippic Orations* in 44 BCE. After C. Julius Caesar's assassination on 15 March 44 BCE and Mark Antony's subsequent assumption of power, Cicero left Rome in April and only returned in late summer 44 BCE. At his first public appearance after his return, at the delivery of the *First Philippic Oration* on 2 September 44 BCE, he therefore felt obliged to provide reasons for his departure and return in the first section of this speech (Cic. *Phil.* 1, 1-10). As regards the journey, Cicero notes that, when he was on his way from Sicily, winds forced him first to land at Leucopetra, a promontory near Rhegium on the southwestern tip of mainland Italy, and then, at another attempt at navigation, to return; the enforced stay there meant that he heard recent news about Rome from people in Rhegium; what he learned prompted him to travel back and made him so eager to get to Rome that the journey could not be fast enough (Cic. *Phil.* 1, 7-9)²⁵. While Cicero might also have decided to turn back for other reasons or may have heard about events at Rome by other means, this dramatic narrative creates the impression that it was a series of propitious events as a result of particular weather phenomena that enabled him to resume his work for the *res publica* at that point. Thus, this way of structuring the story not only provides a reason for Cicero's behaviour, but also gives his current intervention additional significance²⁶.

6. Conclusion

The review of selected examples of mentions of natural and supernatural features in Cicero's political writings confirms that they are typ-

²⁵ On the circumstances of Cicero's journey and Cicero's depiction see Ramsey 2003, 98-107.

²⁶ On Cicero's journey see also Cic. *Phil.* 2, 76; *Att.* 15, 25; 16, 1, 3; 16, 2, 4; 16, 3, 4-5; 16, 7, 1-2; 16, 7, 5; *fam.* 10, 1, 1; *ad Brut.* 1, 10, 4; 1, 15, 5-6; *off.* 3, 121; Plut. *Cic.* 43, 4; Cass. Dio 45, 15, 4.

ically adduced as elements of an argument. Thus, there is no intention to describe any specifics if these are not conducive to the point to be made; it may even be preferable to gloss over too much detail in case this might make the outlined scenario look less obvious or persuasive. Such an argumentative structure relies on the fact that natural and supernatural interventions, along with their approved interpretation, are accepted as valid elements in Roman Republican discourse. In all cases the construct enhances a particular argument, which does not rely on this element only, but is considerably strengthened thereby. Within the contemporary value system references to natural or supernatural contexts provide seemingly obvious justifications of the view presented without the need for a detailed argument presenting a lot of evidence.

Several of these instances occur in speeches given before the People, and it is generally thought that such orations make more use of divine interventions since the People are regarded as being more susceptible to arguments of this kind. There may be such a tendency; but since similar argumentative structures also occur in speeches given in the Senate and in court cases, they do not seem to be restricted to specific audiences.

The advantage of looking at these argumentative techniques not from the perspective “religion” is that an approach focused on strategy relegates the question to what extent Cicero or his audience might have believed these scenarios largely to the background and enables a discussion about the role of such elements for the impact of the argument. Such a study also illustrates the fact that the natural and the supernatural in the ancient world can encompass a wide range of tangible and more intangible aspects, which may affect people’s circumstances.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in Cicero’s case it turns out that he was aware of the discourses and value systems of his time and thus potentially plausible arguments within this framework. Accordingly, as an accomplished orator, he did not hesitate even to draw on the gods or the weather to further his cause if natural and supernatural occurrences could be presented as justifying the favoured view and thus remove the need for detailed arguments of different kinds.

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