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Cato the censor and the construction of the *vir bonus*¹

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Introduction

Cato the Censor is one of the first figures to emerge from Roman history about whom we have significant biographical information.² Our sources construct a vivid picture of Cato's life and personality, recording not only his public and political actions, but also his habits, sayings, and a range of anecdotes from his personal life.³ Many of these sources draw upon the literary works of Cato himself for such details. The first free-born Roman to write literature in Latin, Cato produced a plethora of prose works and gave himself a singular prominence within them, employing the medium in an unprecedented manner.⁴ This paper will examine Cato's self-representation within these works, arguing that this carefully constructed image was more innovative and idiosyncratic than has previously been acknowledged. The paper is divided into three sections. The first discusses the climate of political competition and artistic innovation in which Cato lived and wrote. The second considers the way in which Cato used his broad range of literary works to construct a clear and coherent representation of himself. In particular, the authorial perspective of the *pater familias* introduced in the *Libri ad Filium* will be identified as central to Cato's persona. A third section will look in greater detail at the image which Cato constructs and its careful connections both to the traditional Roman ideals being formulated during this period,⁵ and to his own personal life and experience. Cato's profound influence over the politics

¹ I would like to thank Prof. Matthew Leigh, Dr. Bill Allan and Antony Smith, who all read and commented upon earlier drafts of this article.

² This article traces the main points of a much larger argument: see future publications.

³ The main sources for Cato's life are the histories of Livy and Polybius, the biographies of Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch, and Cicero's *De Senectute*.

⁴ So Livy relates of Cato: *haud sane detrectator laudum suarum* (34.15.9).

⁵ On the formulation of such traditions, see below. For a discussion of modern parallels, see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

of his own age and the lasting impact of his persona upon Roman thought and Republican ideals mark him as a master in the art of manipulation.

The *Novi* and the *Nobiles*

Born in 234 BC at Tusculum,⁶ Marcus Porcius Cato came from a relatively wealthy family which had held the rank of *eques*.⁷ Cato was born into an age of rapid Roman expansion: the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC had seen the Romans establish their control over the Italian peninsula through a series of decisive defeats both of domestic threats, in the form of the Latin league in the year 338 BC, and of foreign invaders, most notably Pyrrhus during the 280s and 270s BC. Rome's success in the First Punic War (264-41 BC) added Sicily to her territories. After the successful conclusion of a second conflict with Carthage in 201 BC, Rome's expansion continued in Gaul to the north, Spain to the west, and Greece, Macedonia and Asia Minor to the east. These constant military engagements created a wealth of opportunities for upwardly mobile young Romans to distinguish themselves on the battlefield. Such military achievement, and the financial rewards which accompanied it, could then form the basis for a successful public career. The particular availability of military command during this period thus created scores of new aspirants to political power. While the expansion of Roman territory naturally led to the creation of several new offices lower down the *cursus honorum*, competition for the highest offices became increasingly fierce.⁸ There was much debate about the order in which one ought to progress from office to office.⁹ How often an individual might hold a particular office was also an issue of concern, with Cato himself speaking in favour of restricting the number of times one could hold the consulship.¹⁰ As such, we see the first legislation to regulate the structure of the *cursus honorum*, the *lex Villia annalis*, which prescribed the sequence of offices and the age at which they could be taken

⁶ A small town some 15 miles south-east of Rome.

⁷ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 1.1. On the wealth and status of Cato's family, see Astin 1978: 2-3.

⁸ The number of praetors was increased to two, and then four, in 244 BC and 227 BC respectively, see Brennan 2000: 85-9; 91-5.

⁹ Livy 32.7.8-12.

¹⁰ fr. 139-40 = *ORF*³ fr. 185-6.

up, passed in 181 BC.¹¹ This period also sees a large volume of sumptuary legislation enacted, including the *lex Orchia* of 181 BC and the *lex Fannia* of 161 BC, which aimed to curb elite expenditure on banquets.¹² The need for such legislation strongly suggests that these banquets had become venues for excessive expenditure, motivated by inter-elite competition.¹³ Further evidence for increasing individual competition is found in the large number of disputed triumphs during this period, most famously those of Fulvius Nobilior in 187 BC and of Aemilius Paulus in 167 BC.¹⁴

This competitive culture seems to have been particularly orientated around a tension between the *nobiles*, the established aristocracy, and the *novi*, so-called new men, whose families had never before held senatorial rank.¹⁵ During this period the established *nobiles* display an increased tendency to emphasise publically the antiquity of their family lineage and their aristocratic breeding. One opportunity for such display was the *gratulatio*, the celebratory speech made by a triumphant general. The comic poet Plautus parodies these speeches, which seem to have made much of the celebrant's ancestors, by placing them in the mouths of slaves. Phrases such as *maiorum meum fretus virtute... ut vincam* (depending on the virtue of my ancestors... that I might conquer)¹⁶ then become ridiculous, since slaves (like Pseudolus, the speaker of this passage) had no such ancestors.¹⁷

In funerary monuments, too, extra emphasis seems to have been placed upon the antiquity of the *gens*. The tomb of the Scipiones,¹⁸ built in 312 BC, was one of Republican Rome's most prominent funerary monuments. The epitaph of L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, the tomb's founder, forms the focal point of the tomb and dates from the middle of the 3rd century BC. Remarkably, the

¹¹ Livy 40.44.1.

¹² On the exact terms of these laws, which restricted both the number of diners, and the amount spent on food, see Macrob. *Sat.* 3.17.2-5.

¹³ Gabba 1988: 37-41.

¹⁴ On the many disputed triumphs of the early 2nd century BC, see Pittenger 2008: 168-274.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the term *novus homo*, see Wiseman: 1971: 1ff.

¹⁶ Plaut. *Ps.* 581-3.

¹⁷ For further discussion on slaves adopting the role of a Roman general, see Fraenkel 2007: 159-65.

¹⁸ The definitive discussion of the tomb of the Scipiones is found in Coarelli 1972.

text of the epitaph seems to have been edited at some point during the first half of the 2nd century BC: a verse and a half of Saturnians have been erased from the beginning of the epitaph (see fig. 1). It has been very plausibly suggested that Barbatus' descendants removed a reference to his political novelty from this passage, so that the Cornelii could emphasise the antiquity and aristocracy of their family line.¹⁹ The 3rd and 2nd centuries BC thus continue, albeit in a new, evolved form, the rivalry between plebs and patricians that had long characterised Roman politics.²⁰

An important element within such elite competition was artistic innovation. While the representation of living generals in honorific statues dates from the late 4th century BC,²¹ the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC saw a dramatic increase in the number and variety of such statues.²² The column of Duilius, erected shortly after the successful conclusion of the First Punic War, was Rome's first *columna rostrata*: this remarkable monument featured Duilius' statue on top of a column hung with ships' prows and decorated with anchors.²³ The *Aedes Herculis Musarum*, a temple complex dedicated by Fulvius Nobilior was similarly unique. The complex was adorned with captured booty, including statues of the Muses. It also featured one of the first pieces of original research in Latin: a *fasti*, seemingly in the form of a wall-painting. The *fasti* included a brief commentary on the Roman calendar, an etymology for each of the months, and a list of Roman consuls and censors, in which Fulvius prominently recorded his own terms of office.²⁴ A monument of a very different kind was erected in 181 BC, when Acilius Glabrio set up Rome's first gilded statue in honour of his father.²⁵ Monuments such as these became increasingly ostentatious and ornate over the course of the century, as competition between individuals intensified. Pliny records that, by 158 BC, the

¹⁹ Flowers 1996: 170-7.

²⁰ On the 5th century Conflict of the Orders and the continued struggle for plebeian equality, see Cornell 1995: 242-71; 327-344.

²¹ See Kondratieff 2004: 7 n.26 and the bibliography cited therein for a helpful discussion of Roman honorific statues.

²² Cato himself spoke against the popularity of such monuments in an oration, *De Signis et Tabulis* (XII = ORF³ XIX), given during his censorship in 184 BC.

²³ On the column and its innovative form and technique, see Kondratieff 2004.

²⁴ For discussion on the form and content of Fulvius' *fasti*, see Rupke 2006.

²⁵ Livy 40.34.4-6.

forum had become so cluttered that many of these monuments had to be removed.²⁶

The beginnings of Latin literature provided further opportunities for self-representation and self-promotion. It was during these early, experimental years of Roman drama that the poet Naevius established the genre of *fabulae praetextae*, historical plays which narrated great stories from Rome's past. Often these plays treated very recent episodes of Roman history: Naevius himself wrote a play entitled *Clastidium*, which narrated the victory of M. Claudius Marcellus over the Gauls in 222 BC; Ennius wrote a play on Fulvius' Nobilior's campaign at Ambracia, entitled *Ambracia*, and Pacuvius wrote on Aemilius Paulus' achievements in the Macedonian campaign in his eponymous *praetexta*, *Paulus*. Early Roman epic was also full of praise for prominent individuals. Ennius' *Annales* traced the achievements of countless Roman *nobiles* in the course of the city's history. In particular, the achievements of Fulvius Nobilior seem to have been treated at some length. Cicero informs us that Nobilior took Ennius with him on campaign in Ambracia,²⁷ and a description of Nobilior's actions on campaign, of his triumph and of his dedication of the *Aedes Herculis Musarum* are thought to conclude the work.²⁸ The *Annales* were later extended to include the deeds of various other Roman nobles, including T. Caecilius Teucrus and his brother.²⁹ Naevius' *Bellum Punicum* also narrated the exploits of individual commanders within the course of the First Punic War. Naevius mentioned Lutatius and the provisional peace which he arranged with Hamilcar,³⁰ an expedition of the consul Valerius Maximus,³¹ and even himself.³² Latin literature was thus quickly taken up by the Roman elite as a further source of self-advertisement.

We have seen, then, that this period saw rapid Roman expansion and increasing competition amongst the elite. This competition seems to have

²⁶ Plin. *HN*. 34.30-1.

²⁷ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3.

²⁸ See Skutsch 1985: 553.

²⁹ *Ann.* 16.6 (Sk).

³⁰ *ROL* fr. 41-3.

³¹ *ROL* fr. 29-30.

³² Gell. 17.21.45.

been particularly intense between members of the established aristocracy and new men. As part of this individual competition we find a period of artistic innovation and experimentation, particularly in the new medium of Latin literature.

The Construction of the *Vir Bonus*

Cato's political career developed out of the military successes of the late 3rd century BC. The public life of the *novus homo* was at the very centre of this increasingly intense, individualistic competition. Cato's engagement with this competition was remarkable. Cato famously refused to allow any statues or artistic monuments to be erected in his honour.³³ Instead he created his own personal impression through his literary works.³⁴ Cato was the first Roman to represent himself in this way in Latin literature: his predecessors had either written in Greek,³⁵ or had engaged foreign poets to write about them.³⁶ The core of Cato's literary image is constructed first and foremost in the series of prose works which he dedicates to his son: these will form the subject of this section's discussion.

Cato's relationship with his eldest son, Marcus Porcius Cato Licinianus, is well-documented by our biographical sources.³⁷ Plutarch affirms that Cato was a *πατήρ ἀγαθός* (a good father) to Licinianus, who was born in either 192 or 191 BC to his first wife, Licinia.³⁸ We are told that Cato took particular care of Licinianus' education: he taught Licinianus to read as early as possible, *ἐπειδὴ ἤρξατο συνιέναι, παραλαβὼν αὐτὸς ἐδίδασκε γράμματα* (when his

³³ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 18.3-5.

³⁴ Cicero also adopted a careful strategy of self presentation and promotion to foster his political success. He highlights the importance of a virtuous image, particularly for a *novus homo*, in order to succeed on Rome's political stage (*Verr.* 2.5.180-2); Cicero's own written works seem to have gone some way towards circulating his virtuous image. See the detailed study of Van Der Blom 2010: 1-59.

³⁵ See Cornell 2009 on the histories of Fabius Pictor and L. Cincius Alimentus and their autobiographical character.

³⁶ Such as in the case of Fulvius Nobilior and Ennius: see above.

³⁷ Plutarch dedicates a chapter of his biography to Cato's family life and Cicero mentions Cato's great affection for his son. It seems likely that Cornelius Nepos treated the subject at some length in his lost life of Cato.

³⁸ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.1.

understanding grew, he took charge of the boy himself and taught him how to read) and from then on took responsibility for all areas of the boy's instruction, *ἀλλ' αὐτὸς μὲν ἦν γραμματιστῆς, αὐτὸς δὲ νομοδιδάκτης, αὐτὸς δὲ γυμναστής* (but Cato himself was his tutor in literature, his teacher of law, his athletics-instructor).³⁹ Cato also wrote a series of didactic works for his son, which he seems to have circulated publically. These works promote an image of Cato as a *pater familias*, and, in the personal addresses to his son, construct a paternal relationship between the author and his wider readership. This paternal image is promoted throughout Cato's public career, forming the basis of his literary works and his political persona.⁴⁰

The first of these didactic works was a history of Rome, written in *μεγάλους γράμμασιν* (large letters), to help teach the boy Licinianus to read.⁴¹ Such a work thus dates from around 185-4 BC, when Licinianus was about six or seven years of age. The proclaimed purpose of the work, *ὑπάρχοντι τῷ παιδί πρὸς ἐμπειρίαν τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ πατρίων ὠφελεῖσθαι* (as a means to help train the boy in the ancient achievements of his forefathers), suggests that it would have narrated great exploits from Rome's past. The use of *πατρίων* strongly suggests a family history, and it may well be that Cato included the feats of the Porcii rather prominently within this work. Plutarch mentions that Cato made public acknowledgement of the work, *φησὶν αὐτός* (he himself says); such acknowledgement allows Cato to emphasise his dedication to the role of a father, and in particular, to his duty to provide fitting examples for his son's education.⁴²

Our sources also attest to a more substantial work addressed to Licinianus, which is usually referred to in our sources as the *Libri*, or *Liber, ad Filium*. The work seems to have been a collection of advice for Licinianus on a range of

³⁹ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.3-5.

⁴⁰ The works addressed to Licinianus were among the first which Cato circulated. They were quite possibly the first didactic works written in Latin: we cannot know whether Ennius first published the *Hedyphagetica* and the *Praecepta*, or Cato the *Libri ad Filium*.

⁴¹ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.5.

⁴² The *pater familias* took responsibility for his son's education. In particular, it was his role to provide appropriate examples of traditional Roman values and virtues for the boy. Cato notes the early practice of young boys in following their fathers to the senate house (fr. 127 = *ORF*³ fr. 172).

traditional topics, including medicine, oratory, and agriculture.⁴³ We find recurrent personal addresses to Licinianus in the vocative, *Marce fili* (Marcus my son).⁴⁴ The extant fragments are largely maxims and aphoristic sayings, all of which have a clear moral element: *vir bonus est, Marce fili, colendi peritus, cuius ferramenta splendent* (a good man, Marcus my son, is skilled in cultivation, one whose tools gleam).⁴⁵ The moral emphasis displayed here runs throughout the work: Cato advises against excess, *quod male emptum est, semper paenitet* (what is mis-purchased is always regretted);⁴⁶ and he has contempt for those who betray the trust of others, saying of Greek doctors that *mercede faciunt ut fides iis sit et facile disperdant* (they charge a fee, to win the trust of the patients and kill them off easily).⁴⁷ Evidently dedicated to his son, the book was probably presented to Licinianus at a significant point during his educational career. The most likely stage for such a presentation would be Licinianus' adoption of the *toga virilis* around the age of seventeen, c.175-4 BC. The *Libri*, then, act as an artful summary of the cultural and social education that Licinianus had thus far received from his father.⁴⁸ Its presentation marks Licinianus' achievement in adopting the *toga virilis* and celebrates the beginning of his public career. It also highlights Cato's paternal authority and affirms the moral and traditional upbringing which Licinianus received at his hands.

Cato also wrote a series of letters to Licinianus. At least one letter offered him medical advice,⁴⁹ continuing an aspect of instruction from the *Libri ad Filium*. Another offered advice on an aspect of martial law;⁵⁰ this also seems to have been very similar in both tone and content to the *Libri ad Filium*, combining instruction on a highly traditional subject, with personal address and a strong sense of paternal authority. Cato also wrote a congratulatory letter to

⁴³ On such traditional topics, see below.

⁴⁴ fr. 1 = Plin. *HN* 29.14ff = fr. 1 J; fr. 7 = Serv. ad Verg. *G.* 1.46 = fr. 6 J; fr. 18 = Quint. 12.1.1 = fr. 14 J.

⁴⁵ fr. 7 = Serv. ad Verg. *G.* 1.46 = fr. 6 J.

⁴⁶ fr. 16 = Plin. *HN* 18.24, cf. fr. 10 J.

⁴⁷ fr. 1 = Plin. *HN* 29.14ff = fr. J.

⁴⁸ It was particularly the job of a father, rather than a tutor or other figure, to instruct his son in such moral values and traditional occupations as are exemplified in the *Libri ad Filium*: cf. Plin. *Ep.* 8.14.6 and see n. 37.

⁴⁹ fr. 8 = Prisc. *Gramm.* 2. 337. 5. K = *ELM* LXVI fr. 8.

⁵⁰ fr. 6 = Cic. *Off.* 1.37 = *ELM* LXVI fr. 8; cf. Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 39.

Licinianus, commending him on the recovery of his sword during the Battle of Pydna: *καὶ Κάτωνος αὐτοῦ φέρεται τις ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν ὑπερφυῶς ἐπαινοῦντος τὴν περὶ τὸ ξίφος φιλοτιμίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ σπουδὴν* (and there is extant a letter from Cato himself to his son, in which Cato heaps praise on him for his courage and concern for his honour in the recovery of his sword).⁵¹ Such a letter of congratulation continues and culminates Cato's didactic exchange with his son: celebrating Licinianus' bravery on the battlefield simultaneously proclaims Cato's success as a father and educator to the boy. These letters, then, emphasise Cato's continued paternal role as a figure of authority who offers regular advice to his son from his own particular expertise.⁵²

These didactic works, circulated over a period of around twenty years, construct a clear image of Cato as a *pater familias*. This image was continued within Cato's later works, many of which were clearly connected with these early didactic treatises by a common style and subject matter. The subject matter of both the *De Re Militari* and of the *commentarius* which Cato wrote on legal matters finds an antecedent in his letters to Licinianus, which, as we have seen, often offered legal and military advice. The *Origines*, Cato's history of Rome in seven books, which he wrote during his political retirement, has a clear precedent in the very early history of Rome written to teach the young Licinianus to read. The *De Medicina* develops from Cato's initial claims about Greek doctors, who, he states, *iurarunt inter se barbaros necare omnis medicina* (they have collectively sworn an oath to kill all barbarians with their treatment);⁵³ Cato's treatise provides an alternative to the consultation of such professionals.⁵⁴ Some of Cato's later works even exhibit verbal parallels with these early works addressed to Licinianus. The preface to the *De Agri Cultura*, continues the idea of the high moral calibre of farmers, *maximeque pius quaestus stabilissimusque consequitur minimeque invidiosus, minimeque male cogitantes sunt qui in eo studio occupati sunt* (it is the most revered and secure of livelihoods, and so it is least dogged by envy, and those who are

⁵¹ fr. 7 = Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 20.8 = *ELM* LXVI fr. 7.

⁵² On Cato's interest in the law, medicine and in military matters, see below.

⁵³ fr. 1 = Plin. *HN* 29.7.14 = fr. 1 J.

⁵⁴ On the form and content of the *De Medicina*, see Cugusi 2001: *ad loc.*

engaged in such work are not at all ill-contented).⁵⁵ The didactic themes and tone with which Cato addressed his son pervade his later works. This continual emphasis on his paternal authority creates a remarkably coherent and consistent image of the Censor as the *pater* not only of his son, but also of his wider readership.

Cato's decision to represent himself in this role is particularly pointed within the context of contemporary systems of authority. The *pater familias* represented the highest form of Roman authority, holding legal responsibility for his children for the duration of his life, a concept enshrined in Roman legislation as *patria potestas*.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the absolute authority of the *pater* made paternity an apt metaphor for other forms of authority within Roman society.⁵⁷ In the military sphere, Roman troops would refer to their general as *pater*,⁵⁸ and winners of the civic crown were treated as fathers by those whose lives they had saved.⁵⁹ In the political realm, senators were widely referred to as *patres*,⁶⁰ consuls were advised to treat those holding subordinate offices as sons,⁶¹ Cicero was referred to as the *pater patriae* for his actions against Catiline,⁶² and Augustus gave himself the same title in 2 BC.⁶³ In religious terminology, the head of a sodality or chorus was referred to as the *pater familiae*.⁶⁴ More generally, the term *pater* was also used as a respectful address to any older man.⁶⁵ Cato's readership, therefore, would be ready both to accept the paternal authority of the author of these works and to assimilate themselves to the filial role of their original addressee. Cato's

⁵⁵ *Agr.* 1.1

⁵⁶ For a recent discussion of the authority of the Roman *pater familias* and the legal implications of *patria potestas*, see Cantarella 2003.

⁵⁷ Such a metaphor was particularly easily transferred given the low emphasis which the Romans placed on biological paternity. On the practice of adoption for political reasons under the republic, see Lindsay 2009: 169-73.

⁵⁸ Livy 2.60.1-3, 4.42.7-8; Plin. *HN* 7.143; Tac. *Ann.* 2.55.5, 2.80.2, 3.13.2; Suet. *Cal.* 22.1. On the phenomenon in general, and the case of Aemilius Paullus in particular, see Leigh 2004: 175-89.

⁵⁹ Polyb. 6.39.6-7.

⁶⁰ Cic. *Verr.* 2.95, *Phil.* 1.38, 13.28; Livy 22.60.27, 23.12.8; Tac. *Hist.* 2.52.

⁶¹ *dignum esse iuvenem quem more maiorum in filii locum adsumas* (Plin. *Ep.* 4.15.9).

⁶² Juv. 8. 244

⁶³ Suet. *Aug.* 58.

⁶⁴ Hor. *Sat.* 2.8.7; Prop. 2.32.38; Cat. 21.1.

⁶⁵ Dickey 2002: 120-2.

construction of himself as a *pater familias* is thus a very powerful one, asserting his moral and legal authority over a wide readership.⁶⁶

Roman Tradition and Catonian Innovation

Cato's self-representation in the figure of the *pater familias* is a remarkably traditional choice of image. The *pater* was, as noted above, responsible for providing a *bonum exemplum*, and for transmitting moral and cultural values to his sons: he preserved the Roman past for the present generation. Cato's literary works embody many of these moral and cultural values and treat highly traditional occupations. The particular manifestation of these values and occupations, however, is often shaped by the contemporary needs of Cato's age and is strongly determined by his own life and experiences. The following discussion will consider four such elements, tracing Cato's use of *exempla*, his discussion of agriculture, praise of frugality, and his medical expertise.

The use of personal example was central to Roman didactic methodologies.⁶⁷ The retelling of particular personal achievements provided models for the younger generation to emulate, and was integrated into a variety of important civic and religious occasions, including aristocratic funerals and formal services of commemoration and celebration.⁶⁸ Cato makes particular use of himself as such an example. Cato often discussed his own achievements in his speeches, which were given titles such as: *Dierum Dictarum de Consulatu Suo* (On the appointed days of his consulship), *De Sumptu Suo* (On his expenses), *De Triumpho ad Populum* (To the people, on the occasion of his triumph) and *De Suis Virtutibus contra L. Thermum* (On his own virtues, opposing L. Thermus). Significantly, the final title suggests that Cato even used his own conduct as an example with which to admonish other members

⁶⁶ Cato's paternal persona seems to have greatly influenced later Roman ideas about education and didactic literature. See Lemoine 1991; Bernstein 2008.

⁶⁷ See Quint. 12.2.29-30.

⁶⁸ On the aristocratic funeral, its use of such *exempla* and its strongly didactic aims, see Polyb. 6.53-4.

of the elite, rather than simply to defend himself. Plutarch informs us that Cato saw τὸν δὲ λόγον ὡσπερ δεύτερον σῶμα (his oratory as a second body),⁶⁹ in which we may see a reference to this continued practice of making himself and his conduct exemplary in such speeches. Cato also emphasised the achievements of his ancestors and the admiration which he held for them:⁷⁰

αὐτὸς ὁ Κάτων καὶ τὸν πατέρα Μάρκον ὡς ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα καὶ στρατιωτικὸν ἐπαινεῖ, καὶ Κάτωνα τὸν πρόπαππον ἀριστείων πολλάκις τυχεῖν φησι καὶ πέντε πολεμιστὰς ἵππους ἐν μάχαις ἀποβαλόντα τὴν τιμὴν ἀπολαβεῖν ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου δι' ἀνδραγαθίαν.

Cato himself praises his father Marcus as a good man and a worthy soldier, and he says that his great-grandfather Cato often won prizes for his valour, and because of his bravery, received from the treasury the price of the five horses killed under him in battle.

Cato may even have retold some of these feats in the history of Rome which he wrote for his son Licinianus.⁷¹ Cato's use of *exempla* is a highly traditional, well-established Roman practice: his attempts to make both himself and his ancestors exemplary reflect part of Cato's broader endeavour to compete with the Roman aristocracy on their own terms. However, this strategy is, by necessity, rather different in the case of Cato. The contexts in which he makes particular use of these examples are very different to traditional aristocratic spheres: the realm of forensic oratory, and the circulation of written texts based on this oratory, are well removed from the funeral of a great general or a grand family occasion. While the practice of using these *exempla* is long-established, Cato's particular use of such figures is the innovative strategy of a new man.

Agriculture forms an important part of Cato's literary persona. He advises his son about good husbandry in the *Libri ad Filium* and treats the subject in a separate work of its own, the *De Agri Cultura*. By the 2nd century BC agriculture had come to be regarded as the quintessentially Roman occupation: the source of Rome's special virtue and military valour. Stories of

⁶⁹ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 1.4.

⁷⁰ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 1.1.

⁷¹ See above.

great Republican heroes who were originally farmers populate the early books of Livy: the patrician Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was called from his plough in 460 BC and in 439 BC to take up office;⁷² Manius Curius Dentatus, who defeated the Sabines in 290 BC, was a self-sufficient, and very frugal farmer,⁷³ and Gaius Fabricius Luscinus demonstrated similar frugality and incorruptibility during his embassy to Pyrrhus in 278 BC.⁷⁴ It is Cato who first articulates an explicit connection between Rome's martial and agricultural activities. Cato prefaces the *De Agri Cultura* with an image of this farmer-soldier, which he neatly projects back to an indefinite point in Rome's history, attributing its formulation to the *maiores*, whom he claims would praise a good man as:⁷⁵

bonum agricolam bonumque colonum; amplissime laudari existimabatur qui ita laudabatur... at ex agricolis et viri fortissimi et milites strenuissimi gignuntur, maximeque pius quaestus stabilissimusque consequitur minimeque invidiosus, minimeque male cogitantes sunt qui in eo studio occupati sunt.

A good farmer and a good husbandman; he who was praised in such terms was thought to be well praised indeed... and from this farming stock the bravest men and most virile soldiers were sprung, this is the most revered and secure of livelihoods, and so it is least dogged by envy, and those who are engaged in such work are not at all ill-contented.

That the Romans were engaged in both military and agricultural activities from an early date is made clear by our archaeological evidence.⁷⁶ It is also clear that, as Rome's martial endeavours expanded, small-scale farmers became the basis of her citizen army.⁷⁷ However, the connection which Cato makes between military and agricultural activities, and its clarity of expression, is the first statement to this end. This expression may have been influenced by contemporary concerns over the decrease in the number of these small

⁷² See Ogilvie 1965: 416ff.

⁷³ Livy *Per.* 11; Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 2.1-2.

⁷⁴ See Enn. *Ann.* 6.11 (Sk.) and Skutsch 1985: *ad loc.*

⁷⁵ *Agr.* 1.1.

⁷⁶ See Cornell 1995: 48-80 on the earliest settlements on the site of Rome.

⁷⁷ The *assidui* were the lowest property class eligible, under normal circumstances, to serve in Rome's army and made up a large proportion of her forces. See Brunt 1971: 391-415.

landowners, who made up such a significant section of Rome's army.⁷⁸ It certainly seems to have been shaped by Cato's own personal history. In the *De Suis Virtutibus* Cato describes his youth spent in agriculture: *omnem adulescentiam meam abstinui agro colendo* (I scrimped and scraped away my youth in agricultural work).⁷⁹ Such a clear expression of the connection between farming and military valour, and the validation of this connection by means of the *maiores*, allows Cato to portray his upbringing as one rooted in Rome's traditional past. The traditional ideas to which Cato connects himself are thus carefully formulated in his own image.

Cato consistently emphasises the virtue of frugality. He recommends a sparing approach for landowners: *patrem familias vendacem, non emacem esse oportet* (the head of the household needs be a seller, not a buyer).⁸⁰ He practised personal frugality:⁸¹

neque mihi aedificatio neque vasum neque vestimentum ullum est manupretiosum neque pretiosus servus neque ancilla. si quid est quod utar, utor; si non est, egeo.

Nor do I own any highly wrought buildings or vases or clothes, nor any valuable slave or slave girl. If a commodity is there, I will use it, if not, I go without.

Cato was also a strong supporter of the sumptuary legislation of 181 and 161 BC. His attitude towards money and possessions even earned him a reputation: he was seen as *θαυμαστός* (remarkable), and his conduct was readily contrasted with that of other Roman *nobiles*.⁸² The virtue was an important Roman ideal which finds parallels in contemporary oratory and comedy. The funeral oration of Lucius Caecilius Metellus, delivered by his son in 221 BC, praises the careful acquisition of money, claiming that a good man,

⁷⁸ The effects of the Hannibalic War on the Roman population and the Italian countryside caused a sharp decrease in the number of small-scale farmers during the 2nd century BC. The exact extent of this decrease has been an issue of great scholarly debate. See Toynbee 1965, fiercely criticised by Brunt 1971, and largely convincingly defended by Cornell 1996. For a recent survey of the evidence, see Roselaar 2010.

⁷⁹ fr. 93 = ORF³ 128.

⁸⁰ *Agr.* 2.7.

⁸¹ fr. 218a = ORF³ 174.

⁸² Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 6.1-2.

pecuniam magnam in bono modo invenire (acquires great wealth in a worthy manner);⁸³ while the saving habits of Terence's Demea are emphasised.⁸⁴ *conserva, quaere, parce, fac quam plurimum / illis relinquo, gloriam tu istam optine* (save, seek, scrimp, leave as much as you can in inheritance, have that renown for yourself).⁸⁵ Cato strongly connects this frugal aspect of his character with his upbringing:⁸⁶

ego iam a principio in parsimonia atque in duritia atque industria omnem adolescentiam meam abstinui agro colendo, saxis Sabinis silicibus repastinandis atque conserendis.

I spent my whole youth, even from my earliest years in austerity and severity and hard work, scrimping and saving in agricultural work, sowing and digging over the stones in Sabine territories.

Cato emphasises the *parsimonia* and *duritia* of his youth by locating them in Sabine territory. While Cato's family had been established in Tusculum for several generations, he draws attention to the fact that he spent his youth on Sabine land.⁸⁷ The rugged landscape of stretched of the Sabines' territory seems to have given them a reputation for a harsh style of life: Cato is keen to exaggerate this reputation further. In the *Origines* he constructs a genealogical link between the Sabines and the Spartans, attributing the best of Roman discipline to this ancestry:⁸⁸

Cato autem et Gellius a S<a>bo Lacedaemonio trahere eos originem referunt; porro Lacedaemonios durissimos fuisse omnis lectio docet, Sabinorum etiam m[ai]jores populum Romanum secutum idem Cato dicit: merito ergo 'severis', qui et a duris parentibus orti sunt et quorum disciplinam victores Romani in multis secuti sunt.

However Cato and Gellius say that they take their origin from the Spartan Sabus; furthermore, any casual reading shows that the

⁸³ Plin. *HN* 7.140.

⁸⁴ The terms in which Demea is mocked may echo those of senatorial debate, and specifically Catonian speech. See Lentano 1993.

⁸⁵ Ter. *Ad.* 813-4.

⁸⁶ fr. 93 = *ORF*³ 128.

⁸⁷ See Astin 1972.

⁸⁸ *Orig.* 2.59 = Serv. ad Verg. *A.* 8.638 = *Orig.* 2.22.

Spartans were most austere, this same Cato even says this of the later customs of the Roman people: that they are deservedly called 'severe', therefore, such men who are sprung from severe parents and whose discipline victorious Romans have followed in many ways.

Such a connection was surely a Catonian fiction,⁸⁹ which seems to have been created to emphasise his own personal experience and the qualities with which it endowed him. Once more we see the crystallisation of contemporary ideas of tradition into a distinctly Catonian form.

Cato seems to have had a particular personal interest in medicine. He vehemently warns his son Licinianus against the perils of Greek doctors in the *Libri ad Filium*:⁹⁰

iurarunt inter se barbaros necare omnis medicina, sed hoc ipsum mercede faciunt, ut fides iis sit et facile disperdant. nos quoque dicitant barbaros et spurcius nos quam alios Opicon appellatione foedant. interdixi te de medicis.

They have collectively sworn an oath to kill all barbarians with their treatment, but this they do at a charge, to win the trust of the patients and kill them off easily. They typically count us, too, as barbarians and even worse they befoul us, like others, with the name Opici. I forbid you to have dealings with doctors.

Instead Cato offers his own medical advice in a letter to Licinianus. He made medicine the subject of a specialised treatise, the *De Medicina*,⁹¹ and medical advice, recipes for ointments, and instructions for particular treatments make up a substantial portion of the *De Agri Cultura*.⁹² Cato was the first Roman writer to compose such extensive and varied works about medicine.

Plutarch tells us that Cato often spoke of his medical skills, and in particular, of his expertise in nutrition: *τοιαύτη δὲ θεραπεία καὶ διαίτη χρώμενος ὑγιαίνειν μὲν αὐτός, ὑγιαίνοντας δὲ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ διαφυλάττειν* (he says that by following

⁸⁹ See Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001: *ad loc.*

⁹⁰ fr. 1 = Plin. *HN*. 29.14ff = fr. 1 J. See above.

⁹¹ On such a work, see Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2001: *ad loc.*

⁹² Chs. 70-1, 73, 102-3, 114-5, 122-3, 125-7, 151-60.

such a treatment and diet both he has kept both himself and his household in good health);⁹³ so much so that his boasting may have caused offence: *καὶ περὶ γε τοῦτο φαίνεται γεγωνῶς οὐκ ἀνεμέσητος· καὶ γὰρ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν ἀπέβαλεν* (such boasts seem not to have been unpunished: for he lost both his wife and his son).⁹⁴ In particular, Cato made use of medical imagery in his campaign for the censorship:⁹⁵

ἡξίου τοὺς πολλοὺς, εἰ σωφρονοῦσι, μὴ τὸν ἡδιστον, ἀλλὰ τὸν σφοδρότατον αἰρεῖσθαι τῶν ἰατρῶν· τοῦτον δὲ αὐτὸν εἶναι καὶ τῶν πατρικίων ἓνα Φλάκκον Οὐαλλέριον.

He urged the people, if they were wise, not to choose the nicest, but the most earnest of physicians; this was himself and the patrician Valerius Flaccus.

This imagery clearly made a significant impression on the Roman *populus*: after Cato's term as censor was complete, the people erected a statue in his honour in the *Aedes Salutis*.⁹⁶

Cato's appropriation of a traditionally Greek art form⁹⁷ may have been as a response to contemporary fears over Greek medical practitioners. Pliny records the case of Archagathus, the first Greek doctor to come to Rome; Archagathus was a surgeon, who, after his initial welcome to the city, quickly gained a reputation for his *saevitia secandi urendique* (savagery in surgery and cautery) and came to be known as a *carnifex* (executioner).⁹⁸ Cato's medical treatments, which explicitly avoid surgery, even in the case of a dislocation,⁹⁹ offer a viable alternative to such practitioners. Cato also seems to be making a gesture of cultural superiority, presenting a Roman equivalent to an established Greek art. The gesture also contains a claim to tradition on Cato's part: he produces simple treatments, with straightforward ingredients,

⁹³ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 23.4.

⁹⁴ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 24.1.

⁹⁵ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 16.5. Cato furnishes the first use of this metaphor in Latin.

⁹⁶ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 19.3.

⁹⁷ The medical profession retained its Greek identity throughout antiquity: many inscriptions set up by Roman doctors were written in Greek (often in Ionic), even those erected in the far west of the empire. See Adams 2003: 356-8.

⁹⁸ Plin. *HN* 29.12-3.

⁹⁹ *Agr.* 160.

as though they were ancient Roman lore.¹⁰⁰ This connects Cato with the ancient Roman past and allows him to assert his antique knowledge and attitudes.¹⁰¹

Cato's persona, therefore, plays upon many ideas which were perceived to be traditional. Picking up on the thoughts and concerns of contemporary politics, Cato seems to have been a great force for determining exactly what this tradition meant and for formulating it in his own image. This close connection with perceived tradition served to emphasise his age, conservatism and antiquity, which acted as a balance to his political novelty.

Conclusion

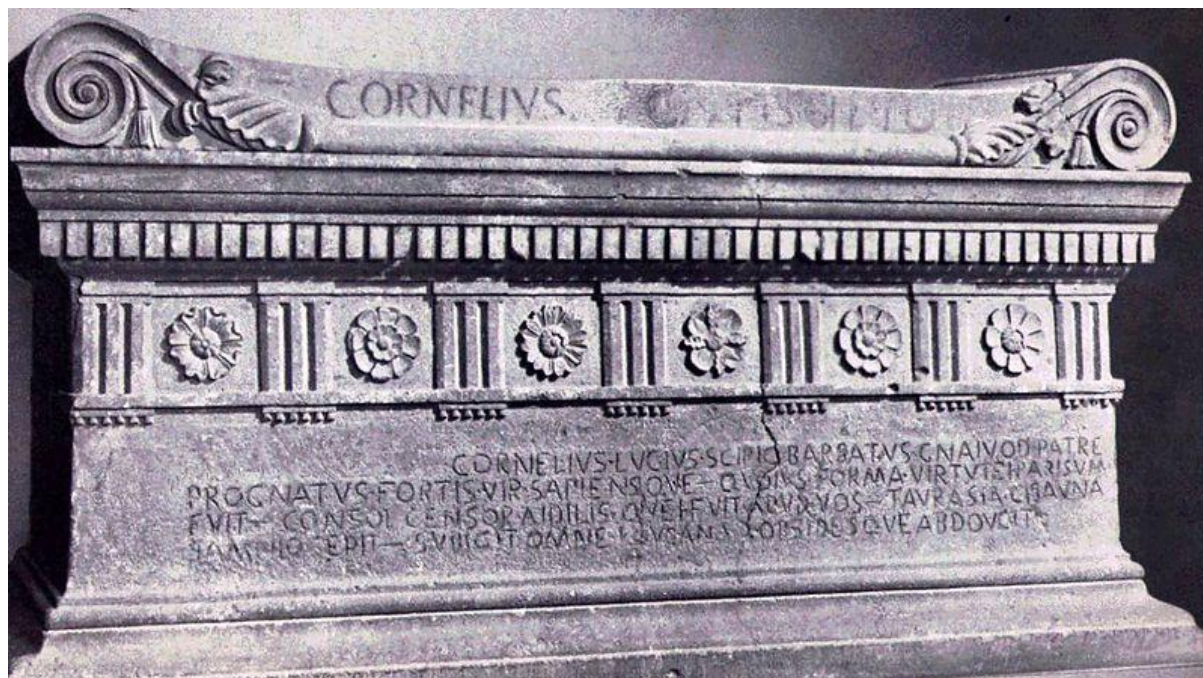
Cato was born into an age of rapid Roman expansion: the dynamics of this age created a climate of intense elite competition in which self-advertisement took on many new and varied forms. Cato made use of Latin literature, one of these new forms, to create a clear political persona for himself. Cato wrote a series of didactic works, addressed to his son Licinianus, which affirm him in the authoritative role of the *pater familias* over his readership. His works as a whole closely connect Cato to contemporary ideas of tradition and Cato himself had no small part in shaping these ideas, often in accordance with his own life and experience. Cato emerges from Roman history as a master manipulator, making the most of Rome's military situation, of the new literary medium, of figures of authority and of the idea of tradition, in his heady ascent of the *cursus honorum*.

¹⁰⁰ Cato's medical treatments are based around ointments made predominantly of cabbage, eggs and herbs (*Agr.* 73); they also involve ancient mystic elements such as fasting, the use of wooden utensils and administration standing up (*Agr.* 71).

¹⁰¹ In spite of his extensive use of Greek medical writings as a source for the treatments prescribed in the *De Agri Cultura*, Cato makes a show of distancing his expertise from that of Greek doctors, who he sees as a threat to Roman lives, moral values and societal structures. Instead Cato associates his treatments with a long-standing tradition of popular folk medicine. See Von Staden 1996.

Images

Fig. 1.



Sarcophagus of Scipio Barbatus, Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican.

Note on the Editions of Cato

The edition of Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi (2001) has been used throughout. Alternative numberings, where appropriate, are provided from: Malcovati 1953 for the speeches; Chassignet 1986 for the *Origines*; Jordan 1860 for the *Libri ad Filium*; Cugusi 1970 for the letters, and Dalby 1998 for the *De Agri Cultura*.

All translations are my own.

Abbreviations

All abbreviations are those used by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, with the following exceptions:

ELM – Cugusi, P. (1970) *Epistolographi Latini Minores: volumen I aetatem anteciceronianam amplectens*, Turin: Paravia.

J - Jordan, H. (1860) *M. Catonis praeter librum de re rustica quae extant*, Leipzig: Teubner.

ROL – Warmington, E. H. (1936) *Remains of Old Latin*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

All abbreviations for journal titles are those used by *L'Année philologique*.

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