

Caesis nulla iam publica arma: Tacitus' Cassius and Brutus

In her reevaluation of Clark's (1981) work on Brutus, Rawson (1986) surveys the nuanced historiographical treatment of Brutus and Cassius in imperial literature. Following Syme (1958), Rawson sees the appearance of Brutus and Cassius in *Ann.* 1.2.1 as a demonstration of Tacitus' concern with constitutional issues. Pursuing this line of inquiry, I would like to examine how Tacitus portrays Cassius and Brutus and how Tacitus responds to other imperial treatments of these two men. I shall argue that Tacitus in his *Annales* revitalizes Cassius and Brutus as standard bearers of the Republic by linking them metaphorically to other persons or institutions that come into conflict with the principate.

The paper begins by examining the literary tradition hostile to Cassius and Brutus, particularly Velleius Paterculus. Paterculus states that the Liberators acted without senatorial authority (Rawson 1986) (Woodman 1983), and he writes that the Liberators made a *coniurationem* (Vell.2.58.1). The term *coniuratio* implies that Brutus and Cassius privately planned to overthrow the state.

In contrast, Tacitus portrays Cassius and Brutus as public figures connected to the institution of the Republic as a form of government in *Annales* 1.2. F.R.D Goodyear (1972) has noted that Tacitus sets up a contrast between Cassius and Brutus and the triumvirs in which it is the Liberators who have *publica arma*, or legitimate authority. With the death of the Liberators (*caesis*), the state fell into private hands of Augustus.

Cassius and Brutus appear again in *Annales* 3.76, the obituary of Junia. Here, Tacitus dates her life from the battle of a Phillipi, creating a symbolic connection between the death of Junia and the death of the Republic (Thomas E. Strunk III 2005). Furthermore, for her offense, the emperor Tiberius prohibits the *imagines* of Cassius and Brutus to be displayed during her

funeral. The act of prohibiting the *imagines* of Cassius and Brutus causes the two liberators to stand out even more (*praefulgebant*). The absence of *imagines* in funeral processions under Tiberius is not unique to Cassius and Brutus. The funeral procession of Germanicus, whose republicanism is documented (Kraus 2009), also doesn't have his *imago* displayed (Strunk III 2005). The once public funeral procession of Roman aristocrats (Flower 2004) falls under the control of the private sphere *via* the emperor. The absence of the defenders of the Republic marks the erosion of the aristocratic and Republican funeral procession.

For a third time, Cassius and Brutus emerge in the narrative of the trial of Cremutius Cordus on the charge of *maiestas*. Following Moles (1998), pace Wirszubski (1968), the case sets up a contrast between the principate and free speech (*libertas*). Significantly, Tacitus has Cordus commit suicide just as Cassius and Brutus commit suicide when they are unable to prevail over Augustus. Tacitus metaphorically constructs the trial of Cordus as a trial on the Liberators. Although they are guilty of *maiestas*, Tacitus absolves them in literature. Tacitus tells the reader how foolish it is to burn books since they are preserved anyways. Tacitus, the new Cordus, continues the memory of the Liberators.

These three scenes are Tacitus' play on the nature of the public and private in Roman society. The absence of Cassius and Brutus from the public, either by their deaths at Philippi or their missing *imagines* or their post mortem trial, only helps to keep them conspicuous. As other cultural features erode in the public eye, Brutus and Cassius appear to remind the reader of the fallen Republic, creating a metaphorical link between past and present and establishing the Liberators as defenders of the Republic.

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