



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Rewriting Freedom of Speech: Greek Authors on Parrhesia in the Roman World, 150 BCE - 100 CE**

Vis, Thirza Celia Catharina

### **Citation**

Vis, T. C. C. (2026). *Rewriting Freedom of Speech: Greek Authors on Parrhesia in the Roman World, 150 BCE - 100 CE*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4292418>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# Rewriting Freedom of Speech

Greek Authors on *Parrhesia* in the Roman World, 150 BCE – 100 CE



Thirza Celia Catharina Vis BA

2492164

[t.c.c.vis@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:t.c.c.vis@umail.leidenuniv.nl)

Supervisor: prof. dr. C. C. de Jonge

Second reader: prof. dr. A. B. Wessels

21 January 2026

Research Master Thesis Classics and Ancient Civilizations

Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University

Words: 26.814

# Contents

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. *Parrhesia* beyond Athens: research question
- 1.2. *Parrhesia* in Classical Athens
- 1.3. Status Quaestionis
- 1.4. The semantics of *parrhesia*: a methodology
- 1.5. *Parrhesia* and *paideia* in the Roman world
- 1.6. Outline

## 2. Polybius on *parrhesia* and democracy in the Greek city states

- 2.1. Introduction
- 2.2. *Parrhesia* in Polybius' *Histories*
- 2.3. Polybius on democracy and *parrhesia*
- 2.4. Polybius and Demosthenes: *parrhesia* between Classical Athens and Hellenistic Greece
- 2.5. Conclusion

## 3. Bringing Greek *parrhesia* to Rome: Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities*

- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the Greek past
- 3.3. Dionysius writing as a Greek in Rome
- 3.4. *Parrhesia* in the *Roman Antiquities*
  - 3.4.1. From Greece to Rome: *parrhesia* and *eleutheria*
  - 3.4.2. *Parrhesia* and democratic equality
  - 3.4.3. Ambiguous and negative evaluations of *parrhesia*
- 3.5. *Parrhesia* and Augustan Rome
- 3.6. Conclusion

## 4. Between Monarchy and Tyranny: *parrhesia* in Plutarch's Roman Lives and the example of Cato Minor

- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Greeks and Romans: the *Parallel Lives* in context
- 4.3. Cato as a symbol for free speech
- 4.4. Political *parrhesia*: between a flatterer and a friend or a king and a tyrant?
- 4.5. Speaking to kings and tyrants
- 4.6. Conclusion

## 5. Conclusion

## 6. Bibliography

# 1.Introduction

## 1.1.*Parrhesia* beyond Athens: research question

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump was inaugurated for a second time as president of the United States. During his lengthy inaugural address, he vowed ‘to give the people back their faith, their wealth, their democracy, and their freedom’ and promised his audience to ‘bring back free speech to America.’<sup>1</sup> On his first day in office, he signed an executive order, promising to ‘restore freedom of speech’, with which he effectively banned all previous attempts to restrict hateful content and misinformation on social media platforms, which he deemed to be a form of censorship.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, just a few months later in June, millions of Americans took to the streets to protest against Trump’s repressive responses to activists and academics exercising their free speech to criticize the policies of the Trump administration. The occasion was quickly named ‘No Kings Day’, or in some places, ‘No Tyrants Day’.<sup>3</sup> Similar protests were held repeatedly during the summer and autumn of 2025 in response to what protesters viewed as attacks on free speech and American democracy.<sup>4</sup>

While Trump’s promise of free speech appeared to allow unrestricted and unchecked expression for some, while imposing negative consequences on his critics, many protesting Americans considered his actions a threat to constitutional liberties and the ability to safely criticize powerful individuals and institutions. Concerns about restrictions on free speech thus went hand in hand with concerns for constitutional rights in general. This is not surprising, since the modern concept of freedom of speech is generally considered one of the key parts of a healthy democracy. However, it is also a highly contested one that raises many questions; can or should there be limits to free speech? What if not everyone is granted equal opportunity to practice free speech? Can one practice free speech in undemocratic contexts?

This thesis will touch upon these and similar questions, while focusing, however, on the ancient Greek concept of freedom of speech, or *parrhesia* (παρρησία). The concept of *parrhesia* originates in classical Athens and in this context referred to the freedom to speak in the Athenian popular assembly. It is thus connected to a context of democracy and to ancient notions of equality (*isegoria/isonomia*) and freedom (*eleutheria*). But how did the use of this concept develop within a world in which democracy was under increased pressure or had even ceased to exist?

From the third century BCE onwards, Rome gradually conquered large portions of the Mediterranean world. As a consequence, people with diverse cultural backgrounds came to live under the influence of Roman political power. Greek writers who were interested in describing the Roman conquests and their history did so from a culturally Greek perspective and by using the language that was inspired by the history and literature of classical Athens. Athenian orators such as Isocrates and Demosthenes, who were closely associated with democratic discourse, were considered important exemplary figures. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Trump (2025a).

<sup>2</sup> Trump (2025b).

<sup>3</sup> Stelter (2025); Knoll (2025).

<sup>4</sup> Flenniken (2025).

however posed the problem of having to unite the realities of Roman political power with Greek *paideia*, which was strongly connected to this context of classical Athenian democracy.

In this thesis, I will examine how Greek intellectuals of the Hellenistic and early Imperial times use the concept of *parrhesia* while writing in and about the Roman world. How did thinking about *parrhesia* change and develop within a Roman political context? In the following chapters, I will explore the development of the concept of *parrhesia* in the works of Polybius of Megalopolis, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch of Chaeronea. I will pay specific attention to *parrhesia* and its changing relationship with concepts of freedom (*eleutheria*) and democratic equality (*isonomia*, *isegoria*). I will argue that, on the one hand, *parrhesia* became separated from connotations of equality and democracy. However, on the other hand, it remained closely connected to ideas about *eleutheria* and continued to be an important concept that enabled Greek intellectuals to reflect on political freedom and tyranny.

Before exploring the development of *parrhesia* in the Roman world, this introductory chapter will first give a brief overview of the various uses and definitions of *parrhesia* in classical Athens. Next, I will review previous attempts to sketch out a chronological development of *parrhesia*. These earlier approaches have not succeeded in giving a complete account of the full spectrum of nuances and meanings of post-classical *parrhesia*, because they tend to overlook the political significance of the concept in the Roman world. This thesis therefore aims to highlight that – even in a Roman context – speaking with *parrhesia* continued to be a highly political act.

## 1.2. *Parrhesia* in Classical Athens

*Parrhesia*, first attested in Euripides and Aristophanes, originated in the context of Athenian democracy and literally means ‘saying everything’ (coming from πᾶς/all and ῥῆσις/speech). The earliest attestations of the concept tend to stress the connection between *parrhesia* and citizenship status, and often equate not having *parrhesia* with being a slave.<sup>5</sup> This aspect of freedom is very important; whereas the earlier concept of *isegoria* emphasizes the aspect of equality, *parrhesia* emphasizes the freedom to speak openly and unrestricted. It was considered one of the key concepts of Athenian politics in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. That *parrhesia* was considered to be a public possession of democratic Athens, is illustrated quite literally by the fact that one of the Athenian triremes carried the name *Parrhesia* – other ships were named for example *Demokratia* or *Eleutheria*.<sup>6</sup> Every meeting of the *ekklesia* was opened with the question of whom of the citizens desired to speak; and speaking with *parrhesia* was considered an essential attribute for both democracy and the free citizen. Its close associations with democratic freedom reflect the underlying assumption – held by supporters of Athens’ democracy – that one could only have true political freedom under a democratic constitution. It is therefore not a coincidence, according to Kurt Raaflaub, that the origins of the word

---

<sup>5</sup> Scarpat (1964), 29-33; an example can be found in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* 387-391 where Polyneices says he lost his *parrhesia* because he was banned from his own land.

<sup>6</sup> McArthur (2024), 431.

*parrhesia* should be sought in the period leading up to and during the Peloponnesian War, which saw rising tensions and increased criticism of the Athenian democratic constitution. These circumstances supposedly produced an increased emphasis on freedom as opposed to the perceived threat of tyranny.<sup>7</sup>

The origins of *parrhesia* can also be connected with the contemporary development of rhetoric and sophistry in the Greek world. The increased attention for the possibilities and power of speech is exemplified by the popularity of people like Gorgias of Leontini, who emphasized the importance of speech as a powerful tool to convince other people.<sup>8</sup> *Parrhesia* is thus from the beginning closely related to the practice and teaching of rhetoric and formed an important part of the rhetorical toolkit of skilled orators such as Demosthenes, who in his speeches repeatedly stresses that he is speaking with *parrhesia*.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, *parrhesia* was also conceived to be in tension with – or even opposed to – the practice of rhetoric. Claiming to speak truthfully with *parrhesia* was also a way to present oneself as rejecting rhetoric and sophistry, which often carried associations of deceit.<sup>10</sup> In any case, speaking with *parrhesia* continued to be an important part of political oratory, both in the classical world and in later periods.

Within the context of democratic Athens, *parrhesia* was associated with a set of other concepts, such as *isonomia* (ἰσονομία) and *isegoria* (ἰσηγορία), concepts that existed earlier but gained important meaning after the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes (508 BCE), when they became closely associated with democracy and political freedom (ἐλευθερία). In this context, *isonomia* meant that all citizens were allowed to take part in the legislative process and that the laws protected all citizens equally, regardless of social or financial status.<sup>11</sup> Part of this involvement in the political process is the concept of *isegoria*, meaning that every citizen had an equal right to speak in the assembly.<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, these principles of equality did not extend to women, enslaved people, or the many others living in Athens without full citizenship.

In many of the passages that I will discuss in this thesis, *parrhesia* can be found in close association with the concept of *eleutheria*. Even though the Greek concept of *parrhesia* should not be conflated with a modern legal right to freedom of speech, it could in my opinion in some cases where it is associated with *eleutheria* and *demokratia* still be translated with ‘freedom of speech’. In this case *parrhesia* is used in a political sense and functions as the attribute of members of a political community.

However, the word *parrhesia* covers various other nuances as well, from ‘telling everything truthfully’ to ‘speaking frankly or boldly’. Someone who speaks with *parrhesia* can do so in a variety of contexts, ranging from highly public – for example in the popular assembly – to a private setting of conversations between friends or family members. In

---

<sup>7</sup> Raaflaub (1985), 278-281.

<sup>8</sup> Sluiter (2000), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> For example *Olynth.* 3. 3; *Olynth.* 3.32; *Philipp.* 2.31; *Philipp.* 3.3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Fields (2020), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Scarpat (1964), 11-21.

<sup>12</sup> Scarpat (1964), 22-28. Even though it is not uncommon to talk about *parrhesia* in terms of rights – Scarpat considers *parrhesia* a ‘diritto’ and Raaflaub talks about ‘freie Rederecht’ – we should be careful not to conflate the ancient concepts with our modern notions of rights; see also Carter (2004); Saxonhouse (2005), 12-14;

certain contexts the notion of 'speaking boldly' can be evaluated more negatively.<sup>13</sup> In these cases the person who speaks with *parrhesia* displays a lack of shame (*aidōs*) and transgresses certain social norms.<sup>14</sup> Speaking with *parrhesia* could thus also bring certain risks and - although indisputably an important part of Athenian democratic practice - *parrhesia* and its correct practice to some extent remained open for negotiation.<sup>15</sup> We thus see that *parrhesia* originated as an important part of Athenian democracy. However, already in its original context of classical Athens, *parrhesia* was a flexible concept that could refer to various different meanings and social settings. This flexibility of the concept will turn out to be very important when we are going to look at *parrhesia's* afterlife in Hellenistic and Roman times.

### 1.3. Status Quaestionis

So far, scholarship has mainly focused on discussing the origin of the concept in classical Athens and on establishing a chronology within the different uses or connotations of the word. Studies on *parrhesia* generally tend to focus on the classical period and on *parrhesia* within the context of Athenian democracy. The volume on *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, edited by Ineke Sluiter and Ralph Rosen, places the earliest phase of the concept within the context of ideas about language and the practice of rhetoric and sophistry in later fifth-century classical Athens and discusses a wide range of both positive and negative evaluations of the concept.<sup>16</sup> However, with its strong focus on classical Athens, with the latest Greek author discussed being Aristotle, it does not include discussions of *parrhesia* in a Roman context or more generally of post-classical Greek literature. Similarly, works by Arlene Saxonhouse and David Konstan firmly connect *parrhesia* to the context of classical Athens.<sup>17</sup>

There are also diachronic studies on the development of the concept of free speech after the classical period. These studies tend to emphasize discontinuity between classical Greece and Hellenistic and Roman times, as they suggest that the notion of *parrhesia* developed away from democracy; in this way, it is argued, *parrhesia* gradually developed into a more personal concept. The work on *parrhesia* by the famous Italian historian Arnaldo Momigliano has often formed the basis for later assumptions about the historical development of *parrhesia*. While Momigliano appreciates the different contexts and nuances of the concept in a classical context, he argues that only the more personal aspect of telling the truth survived into the post-classical period and that *parrhesia* became a 'virtue of philosophers'.<sup>18</sup> Momigliano's belief that political *parrhesia* simply did not exist in Roman contexts has exerted deep impact on later scholarship, such as Michel Foucault's published lectures on the topic of *parrhesia*.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Sluiter-Rosen (2004), 8; Raaflaub (1985), 281 n. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Momigliano (1971), 516; Halliwell (2004), 115-117; Saxonhouse (2005), 209.

<sup>15</sup> Konstan (2012), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Sluiter-Rosen (2004), 8-11.

<sup>17</sup> Saxonhouse (2005); Konstan (2012).

<sup>18</sup> Momigliano (1971), 519-520, 'parrhesia diventò una virtù di filosofi'.

<sup>19</sup> The publication is based on a series of lectures given by Foucault in 1983; James Pearson edited and published the lectures in 2001.

According to Foucault, *parrhesia* in classical times was mainly part of democratic culture, together with *isegoria* and *isonomia*, but he notes that from the Hellenistic time onwards, the place where *parrhesia* takes place moves ‘from the agora to the king’s court’. In this setting, *parrhesia* takes place between a ruler and his or her subject. Being able to tolerate *parrhesia* becomes the characteristic of a good ruler. Foucault places the beginning of this development rather early, stating that already in Demosthenes and Plato *parrhesia* is not an ‘institutional right’ but a ‘personal attitude’.<sup>20</sup> From the fourth century BCE onwards, *parrhesia* becomes a more ethical type of *parrhesia*, that mainly occurs in personal relationships where one person uses *parrhesia* to influence his interlocutors to live a better life.<sup>21</sup> Within Hellenistic philosophy, *parrhesia* has become a ‘*techne* of spiritual guidance’, part of what Foucault calls the ‘care for oneself’.<sup>22</sup> Although Foucault admits that there is not a very strict chronology and that different meanings can coexist in the same periods, he still makes a clear distinction between the different meanings, which he assigns to different periods. He thus sketches a chronological development in which the political type of *parrhesia* completely loses its connection to democratic culture and becomes absorbed by the philosophical type of *parrhesia* that has turned *parrhesia* into a personal ethical virtue.<sup>23</sup>

Foucault’s typology persists in more recent work, such as that of Hartmut Leppin. Leppin, however, slightly nuances Foucault’s ideas by emphasizing that political *parrhesia* in later times still had some political significance within the parrhesiastic dialogue between ruler and subject.<sup>24</sup> Renea Frey similarly echoes Momigliano’s view that the end of democracy in classical Athens generally brought about “a transition of *parrhesia* from the political, public realm to the more philosophic and private realm”.<sup>25</sup> For the Roman period, she distinguishes between two types of *parrhesia*; firstly, *parrhesia* in connection with poetic licence or *licentia*. Secondly, *parrhesia* in the work of Greek philosophers. Frey discusses Philodemus’ work, titled *On Parrhesia*, and Plutarch’s treatise *How to distinguish a flatterer from a friend* (*De discernendo adulatorem ab amico*).<sup>26</sup> Philodemus’ *On Parrhesia*, discovered on the fragmented papyri from Herculaneum, considers *parrhesia* from an Epicurean perspective as an essential part of good friendships, in which friends speak honestly to each other.<sup>27</sup> Partially inspired by Philodemus, Plutarch’s *How to distinguish a flatterer from a friend* discusses the importance of rejecting flattery (κολακεία) and of *parrhesia* as an essential characteristic of good friends.<sup>28</sup>

Scholarship on *parrhesia* in Greek literature in the Hellenistic and Roman world tends to focus disproportionately on the works of Philodemus and Plutarch, and it is no coincidence that the two works mentioned here confirm the idea of *parrhesia* as a personal philosophical virtue that is prevalent in existing scholarship. However,

---

<sup>20</sup> Foucault (2001), 23, 85-86; this is criticized by Mulhern (2004).

<sup>21</sup> Foucault (2001), 91-102.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault (2001), 23-24.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault (2001), 103-104.

<sup>24</sup> Leppin (2022), 177-178. “Die politische Parrhesie blieb stets ein Gegenstand der Erinnerung. Der Begriff evozierte Zustände der Vergangenheit, die mit Freiheit assoziiert wurden.”

<sup>25</sup> Frey (2024), 101.

<sup>26</sup> Frey (2024), 151-182.

<sup>27</sup> Konstan (1998).

<sup>28</sup> See also chapter 4 of this thesis on Plutarch and flattery.

scholarship has wrongly ignored the political dimensions of *parrhesia* in the post-classical period, which are highlighted in the Greek writings of other authors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It thus seems clear that there is need for scholarship that is dedicated to the unique and specific contexts of *parrhesia* in the post-classical world.

An important recent contribution is Dana Fields' study, *Frankness, Greek culture and the Roman Empire*, in which the author focusses on the political character of the parrhesiastic dialogue between rulers and subjects from the Hellenistic era onwards.<sup>29</sup> The important asset of her work is that it challenges existing scholarship by showing that *parrhesia* can also be a highly political concept in a Roman context. Her main focus is on *parrhesia* as the characteristic of advisers of monarchs. As personal relationships played a highly important role in Roman politics, Fields argues that the use of *parrhesia* in these contexts is also political.<sup>30</sup> While Fields's analysis is highly valuable because it acknowledges that *parrhesia* could have both ethical and political connotations (and that these are not mutually exclusive), her focus on *parrhesia* within personal relationships tends to obscure that *parrhesia* was not just used for a personal advisers, but also still used to reflect on the ideals of civic freedom, or *eleutheria*. Furthermore, Fields (like other scholars), puts much emphasis on Plutarch and authors of the second century CE onwards. As a result, the Hellenistic, Republic and early Imperial periods remain largely unaddressed. However, it is precisely the period between 300 BCE and 100 CE when the Mediterranean world transformed, as Rome changed from a Republic to a Principate. The Greek writings of this period are thus highly relevant for our understanding of the development of ideas about free speech after the classical age.

There are some further recent studies dedicated exclusively to *parrhesia* after classical Athens. These studies, however, continue to emphasize the personal or religious contexts of *parrhesia*. Irene van Renswoude's study on *parrhesia* and the rhetoric of free speech in late antiquity and the early middle ages is an important work on the period, yet it does not really break with existing ideas about political *parrhesia* and considers *parrhesia* still mainly as a personal virtue.<sup>31</sup> A similar approach can be found in the volume by Smit and Van Urk, which considers *parrhesia* mainly from a Christian perspective, as an important part of the relationship between individuals and God.<sup>32</sup>

In this thesis I intend to challenge the general picture that emerges from many of these studies. The existing view of post-classical *parrhesia* is not incorrect, but it is incomplete, because it tends to overlook the political uses of *parrhesia*. My goal with this thesis is to expand our understanding of the various uses of *parrhesia* in the Hellenistic and Roman world by showing how *parrhesia* was gradually adapted to new contexts, but at the same time remained a core political concept that was closely connected to ideas about freedom and tyranny.

---

<sup>29</sup> Fields (2020), 18.

<sup>30</sup> Fields (2020), 7-10.

<sup>31</sup> Van Renswoude (2019).

<sup>32</sup> Smit-Van Urk (2018).

#### 1.4. The semantics of *parrhesia*: a methodology

How can we conceptualize the various uses and contexts of *parrhesia* and their changes and continuities over time? Previous attempts to sketch out a chronological development and to define the concept of *parrhesia* tend to take a relatively traditional lexical approach, with a scheme that sharply distinguishes between different separate meanings and contexts, for example the distinction between *parrhesia* as a personal virtue of simply telling the truth and *parrhesia* as a political concept that refers to the possibility to speak in the assembly.<sup>33</sup> However, the ways in which *parrhesia* is actually used in texts fits somewhat awkwardly in this rigid chronology, because in practice these different 'meanings' or 'senses' tend to overlap; it is often hard to make a clear distinction between them.<sup>34</sup> For example, when Demosthenes announces in his speeches that he is going to speak with *parrhesia* he means that he is going to tell the truth, but mentioning that he is speaking with *parrhesia* is also part of his self-presentation as a virtuous person and also refers to his role as an Athenian citizen having the liberty to take part in the democratic process.

From cognitive linguistics we know that the semantics of a word entail more than just the referential meaning.<sup>35</sup> Words such as *parrhesia* are encyclopedic in nature, in the sense that they point to a certain set of information about related cultural beliefs, contexts and practices. So *parrhesia* does not just mean free speech, but it comes with a whole set of 'associated words, ideas and frames'.<sup>36</sup> When someone hears a word, specific information about the social context and the world in which the word is used is activated. The context of classical democracy and concepts such as *isegoria*, *isonomia* and *eleutheria* are one frame that is associated with the concept *parrhesia*. However, the word also has other usages, which can fit into different frames. These frames can also (partially) overlap and 'all other stored usages of a lexeme are temporally co-activated and so are the frames associated with these other usages'.<sup>37</sup>

Following this idea, I suggest that it would be wrong to assume that all political connotations of *parrhesia* disappear after 300 BCE or that the concept evolved into a singular meaning. While thus keeping in mind that *parrhesia* is a multifaceted concept that can evoke several social and political contexts, this thesis will mainly focus on *parrhesia* within a political framework and study *parrhesia* as associated with Athenian democratic practice and ideas such as *isegoria* and *eleutheria*. The creative ways in which Hellenistic and Roman authors play with this framework and adapt it to their own goals, agendas and contexts is at the core of this thesis.

This also means that we should pay attention to specific contexts and historical circumstances of the writings that refer to *parrhesia*. I will focus on three specific authors and through close reading analyze the rhetorical strategies and ways in which they employ the concept of *parrhesia* within their works. As I will argue, their ideas on free

---

<sup>33</sup> Evans-Green (2006), 207-209; Rademaker (2005), 16.

<sup>34</sup> See also Rademaker (2005) on similar problems with traditional semantic descriptions of the concept *sophrosyne*, 14-19.

<sup>35</sup> Langacker (1987), 154-158; Evans-Green, (2006), 206-213; Cienki (2010), 171-174.

<sup>36</sup> Peels (2015), 21;

<sup>37</sup> Peels (2015), 22-23; see also Fillmore (1976); Cienki (2010), 171-174.

speech are closely entangled with the historical context in which they originated.<sup>38</sup> In each chapter, I will thus explicitly connect ideas on *parrhesia* with contemporary developments in thinking about democracy. In doing so, I will also touch upon the complex roles of the Greek past in a world dominated by Rome.

### **1.5. *Parrhesia* and *paideia* in the Roman world**

Scholarship on Greek culture in the Roman world has traditionally been concentrated on the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, part of the so called 'Second Sophistic' (ca. 50-250 CE). As the name implies, scholarship has long emphasized that this period saw a sudden revival of classical rhetoric. Fields places the revival of *parrhesia* in this context, thereby obscuring the relevance of free speech in earlier periods.<sup>39</sup> In line with more critical stances towards the idea of a 'Second Sophistic', this thesis examines the concept of *parrhesia* from a broader diachronic perspective, roughly studying the period of 200 BCE until 100 CE, thus taking together what is traditionally considered the Hellenistic period, the Roman Republic, and the early Imperial period.<sup>40</sup> The few relatively recent attempts to study Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature as a whole have emphasized the need to study both change and continuities within the diverse corpus of literature from this period.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand this time is characterized by stark political changes in Roman politics, with the rapid expansion of Roman political power into the Mediterranean, several crises during the last century of the Roman Republic and the eventual transition to the monarchic system of the Principate. On the other hand, this period also saw continuity, with the ongoing expansion of Roman power in the Mediterranean and the continuing movement of people from the eastern Mediterranean towards Rome.

Scholarship has long tended to depoliticize the Greek responses to Rome. In response to the political dominance of the Romans, the Greeks supposedly separated themselves from politics and instead claimed for themselves the domains of literature and education.<sup>42</sup> Scholars' characterization of *parrhesia* in the post-classical period as a personal philosophical virtue, more or less separated from its original democratic context, should be seen in line with this tendency.

By stressing that Greek intellectuals in the Roman period only look to the Greek past with nostalgia, discussions tend to obscure the creative ways in which this past could be used in new contexts. Authors adapted core concepts from classical Athenian history, such as *parrhesia*, to their own specific time. Greek authors are thus not just rewriting Roman history by turning the Romans into an idealized version of classical Greeks, but they are also rewriting Greek history by adapting classical Athenian institutions and concepts to a Roman context. Examining the use of *parrhesia* in post-classical Greek texts thus enables us to see Greek culture in the Roman world not in terms of backward-looking nostalgia for

---

<sup>38</sup> See also De Dijn (2020), 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Fields (2020), 18-19.

<sup>40</sup> Goldhill (2001), 14-15; Whitmarsh (2013); Whitmarsh (2017); see Johnson and Richter (2017) for a concise overview of the debate.

<sup>41</sup> Whitmarsh (2017); König and Wiater (2022).

<sup>42</sup> Bowie (1970); see also Woolf (1994); Goldhill (2001), 8.

a glorious past but as part of a dynamic relationship between past and present, which allowed ancient concepts such as *parrhesia* to be creatively adapted to new contexts.

In a Roman context, practicing rhetoric in general was often considered to be an expression of Greek *paideia*, but especially the idea of free speech seems to have carried distinctly Greek associations. Strikingly, *parrhesia* does not have a literal Latin translation that captures all its different possible nuances and meanings – depending on the precise context in which it is used, Latin equivalents can for example be *licentia*, *libertas* or *eloquentia*.<sup>43</sup> Speaking with *parrhesia* and referencing the discourse of classical Athenian oratory could thus be an important way to express a Greek cultural identity.

This implies that Greekness in Rome could to some extent be consciously constructed. It is thus important to somewhat problematize our notion of ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’; what do we mean when we state that someone is a ‘Greek’ author?<sup>44</sup> Polybius, Dionysius and Plutarch can all be considered Greek in the sense that they wrote in Greek and did so in a type of Greek that is reminiscent of the language and culture of classical Athens. However, Polybius, apart from being a local from the Peloponnesian town of Megalopolis, actually lived in Rome for a long time, so he arguably also became ‘Roman’ at some point in his life. Dionysius, being originally from Halicarnassus, likewise migrated to Rome, where he learned the Latin language. Plutarch had close friends in Rome and likely became a Roman citizen himself. It can be misleading to suppose that these authors were exclusively ‘Greek’, if only because on a practical level, as Fields also points out, many of the authors from the Roman period were active in local politics and closely entangled with ‘Roman’ power structures.<sup>45</sup> The authors who will be discussed in this thesis thus illustrate that Greek and Roman are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories and that a Greek identity is often at least partially constructed and overlapping with Roman and local identities. The use of *parrhesia* is one way to refer to and construct this Greek cultural identity.

## 1.6. Outline

In this thesis, I will present in chronological order close readings of selected texts of three highly relevant authors, namely Polybius’ *Histories*, Dionysius’ *Roman Antiquities*, and Plutarch’s *Life of Cato*. My main focus is on passages in which the concept of *parrhesia* - or one of its cognates - occurs, with special consideration of possible connections between *parrhesia* and concepts of equality (*isegoria/isonomia*), liberty (*eleutheria*) and democracy. The authors that I will discuss all came from the Eastern Mediterranean, wrote in Greek and reflected in some way on the expansion of Roman political power. Despite their similarities, they came from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds and can therefore offer multiple perspectives on what it could mean to be Greek and to reflect on Roman history within a culturally Greek framework. They also lived in different time periods and thus lived through different phases of the expansion of Roman political power.

---

<sup>43</sup> Scarpat (1964), 109-116; Momigliano (1971), 521; see also Braund (2004) on *libertas* and *licentia*.

<sup>44</sup> For critical discussions of the term ‘cultural identity’ applied to the Greek world, see Goldhill (2001), esp. 15-20; Schmitz and Wiater (2011), 19-25.

<sup>45</sup> Fields (2020), 5-8.

This selection of authors and texts thus allows us to identify different perspectives and chronological developments .

The first chapter will discuss how Polybius (ca. 200 – 118 BCE) uses the concept of *parrhesia* in his *Histories*. In the political thought of Polybius, who wrote during the first phase of the expansion of the Roman imperium into the Mediterranean, *parrhesia* is still very much connected to ideas about democracy and *isegoria* and thus shows a degree of continuity with the classical Athenian use of the concept. However, in several passages of his work Polybius also seems to take a more critical stance towards Athenian democracy and culture.

The second chapter will discuss Dionysius of Halicarnassus' (ca. 60 – 7 BCE) *Roman Antiquities*, in which he recounts the early history of the Romans. Dionysius wrote during another crucial period in Roman politics, namely during the first decades of the principate. Within Dionysius' description of early Roman history, exercising *parrhesia* retains classical connotations of liberty and resistance against tyranny. When compared to Polybius, however, Dionysius' concept of *parrhesia* appears to be more separated from classical democracy and notions of equality. Dionysius employs the term *parrhesia* not only to describe Greek politics, but also to comment on the free speech of ancient Romans.

Whereas Plutarch (ca. 50 – 120 CE) is elsewhere taken as the starting point for discussions of post-classical *parrhesia*, this thesis will take Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* – and his *Life of Cato* in particular - as the end point of our history of *parrhesia*. Plutarch lived and worked when the Roman Empire was at the height of its power: the system of the Principate had become an accepted and largely unquestioned political reality. Nevertheless, Plutarch's reflections on the Republican hero Cato Minor suggest that the biographer felt that *parrhesia* continued to be an important framework for reflections on tyrants and monarchs.

The approach adopted in this thesis aims to broaden our view of practices of free speech in the Hellenistic and imperial world and of the many contexts in which *parrhesia* could be exercised. It is therefore important to consider both change and continuity; although *parrhesia* gradually lost its association with notions of democratic equality, speaking with *parrhesia* in the Roman world continued to be a highly political act.

## 2. Polybius on *Parrhesia* and Democracy in the Greek City States

### 2.1. Introduction

During his remarkably eventful life, Polybius (ca. 200-118 BCE) did not just describe the growth of the Roman imperium, but also experienced many of its consequences first hand. Polybius came from the Peloponnesian *polis* of Megalopolis, an active member of the Achaean League, a confederation of several *poleis* on the Peloponnese. Polybius' own father, Lycortas, was a general, who like Polybius himself, played an important role in the political life of the Achaean League. During the Third Macedonian War, Polybius and his father seem to have advised the Achaean League to adopt a position of neutrality and not side with the Romans. However, after the Macedonian king Perseus was defeated by the Roman general Lucius Aemilius Paullus in 168 BCE, Polybius was deported to Rome as part of a group of approximately thousand hostages who were suspected of Macedonian sympathies.<sup>46</sup> In Rome, where he enjoyed a degree of relative freedom, Polybius taught and befriended the two sons of Aemilius Paullus, Quintus Fabius Maximus and Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus. He was thus connected to the highest regions of Roman society and probably even accompanied Scipio Aemilianus during the Third Punic War, which led to the destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE. Shortly after the end of the Achaean War and the Roman conquest of Greece in the same year, Polybius returned to Megalopolis and supposedly played an important role in adapting Greek local politics to Roman rule.<sup>47</sup>

At some point during his life, Polybius started working on the *Histories*, which was initially supposed to cover the history of the expansion of Roman power in the Mediterranean from 220 BCE – shortly before the Second Punic War – until the Roman victory in the Third Macedonian War in 168 BCE. The exact timeline of Polybius' writing is disputed, but we know that the scope of the work was later extended until the year 146 BCE and that the total length of the work amounted to 40 books, of which only the first five have been completely preserved.<sup>48</sup>

Although it is not unlikely that Polybius indeed witnessed and participated in some of the events he describes, the *Histories* should not be considered a mere eyewitness account of the spread of Roman power.<sup>49</sup> In his introduction Polybius himself explains the vision behind his work and announces that he will discuss how and under what political system Rome conquered the whole inhabited world.<sup>50</sup> The work in general places a strong emphasis on political history and contains several digressions on the constitutions of

---

<sup>46</sup> Thornton (2020), 83-95.

<sup>47</sup> Pausanias records an inscription for Polybius set up at the agora in Megalopolis, commemorating Polybius as the initiator of peace between the Romans and the Greeks (Pausanias 8.30.8); see also Henderson (2001), 32; Thornton (2020), 25-26, 121-130.

<sup>48</sup> A discussion of problems with the chronology and timeline of Polybius' work can be found in Walbank (1957), 292-297; Derow et al. (2014), 86.

<sup>49</sup> Gray (2013), 324.

<sup>50</sup> *Hist.* 1.1.5.: τίς γὰρ οὕτως ὑπάρχει φαῦλος ἢ ῥάθυμος ἀνθρώπων ὃς οὐκ ἂν βούλοιο γινῶναι πῶς καὶ τίνη γένηι πολιτείας ἐπικρατηθέντα σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν οὐχ ὅλοις πενήτηκοντα καὶ τρισὶν ἔτεσιν ὑπὸ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἔπεσε τὴν Ῥωμαίων/ 'Because which person is so thoughtless and indifferent that he does not wish to know how and under what type of government in less than fifty three years almost the whole inhabited world came to fall under the sole power of the Romans?'

different political entities. Besides the famous example of book 6, in which Polybius elaborates on the political system of the Romans and his influential theory about the cyclical nature of constitutions, he also discusses at length the democratic constitution of the Achaean League in book 2. Furthermore, in his introduction Polybius emphasizes that he is writing a general history and that he will describe not just one geographical unit, but the entire inhabited world (οἰκουμένη). According to Polybius, the Roman conquests allowed for the first time an ‘interwovenness’ (συμπλοκή) between all the different parts of the Mediterranean world.<sup>51</sup>

Polybius thus aims to write a general history through the lens of the increased Roman expansion, which means that Rome takes a central position in his work. This has prompted scholars to reflect on the relationship between Roman power and Polybius’ own Greek background in the *Histories* and the question as to what Polybius’ thoughts were on the rapid growth of the Roman imperium and their conquests in the Greek world.<sup>52</sup> Polybius’ personal history, from his forced migration to Rome to his close friendship with Aemilius Paullus and Scipio Aemilianus, mirrors the somewhat ambivalent approach towards Rome in his *Histories*. While he describes the successful expansion of the Roman imperium and praises the Roman constitution, his personal experiences probably gave him all the reason to be critical towards Rome. On the one hand, Polybius’ work has been characterized as ‘voicing Greek resistance to Roman power’ as Craig Champion does in his 2004 monograph on *Cultural Politics in Polybius’ Histories*.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, it is also emphasized repeatedly – most notably by Champion himself – that the Romans in Polybius’ work tend to occupy a position between barbarians and full Greeks. It seems thus unnecessary to construct a sharp opposition between Greek and Roman; we should consider Polybius not in opposition to the Romans, but as a product of his time and historical circumstances that required a certain flexibility and a more dynamic vision of what was Greek and Roman.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.2. *Parrhesia* in Polybius’ *Histories*

This is also the context in which I will examine Polybius’ democratic thought and his use of the concept of *parrhesia* in particular. As we will see, Polybius’ use of this concept shows on the one hand similarities with the meaning of the term in the classical Athenian democratic context: in Polybius’ thinking *parrhesia* continues to be used as one of the key concepts of a democratic political system, usually closely associated with *isegoria* (equality) and *eleutheria* (liberty). Additionally, *parrhesia* seems to remain a mainly Greek concept. On the other hand, however, taking into account the influence of both the context of Roman political power and local Hellenistic democratic culture, I suggest that in Polybius’ work we could also discern a more critical stance towards democratic culture connected to *parrhesia*. Polybius adapts the frame of classical Athenian politics to his own context of the Hellenistic *poleis*, as exemplified by his critique on Demosthenes’ ‘athenocentric’ ideas about freedom and dependence. In this chapter, I will first discuss the concept of *parrhesia* and its democratic connotations within Polybius’ famous analysis

---

<sup>51</sup> *Hist.* 1.3.3-6.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Musti (1978); Henderson (2001); Champion (2004); Champion (2018b).

<sup>53</sup> Champion (2004), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Henderson (2001); Champion (2018b).

of the Roman constitution in book 6 and his analysis of the Achaean constitution in book 2. In the second part of this chapter, I will use Polybius' critique on Demosthenes to argue that Polybius to a certain extent distances himself from classical Athens and tries to rework *parrhesia*'s frame of classical Athenian democracy to fit the specific limitations and possibilities of the Greek *poleis* during the Roman expansion into the Greek mainland.

In the *Histories*, the use of *parrhesia* is generally evaluated positively. In 38.4.3., commenting on his own style of writing, Polybius compares the importance of *parrhesia* between friends with the honesty and directness that he owes to his readers:

οὐ δεήσει θαυμάζειν ἂν παρεκβαίνοντες τὸ τῆς ἱστορικῆς διηγήσεως ἦθος ἐπιδεικτικωτέραν καὶ φιλοτιμοτέραν φαινόμεθα ποιούμενοι περὶ αὐτῶν τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν. [...] ἐγὼ δ' οὔτε φίλον οὐδέ ποτ' ἂν ὑπολαμβάνω γνήσιον νομισθῆναι παρὰ τοῖς ὀρθῶς φρονούσι τὸν δεδιότα καὶ φοβούμενον τοὺς μετὰ παρρησίας λόγους, καὶ μὴν οὐδὲ πολίτην ἀγαθὸν τὸν ἐγκαταλείποντα τὴν ἀλήθειαν διὰ τὴν ἐσομένην ὑπ' ἐνίων προσκοπήν παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν καιρὸν· συγγραφέα δὲ κοινῶν πράξεων οὐδ' ὄλως ἀποδεκτέον τὸν ἄλλο τι περὶ πλείονος ποιούμενον τῆς ἀληθείας.

It should not be surprising if by putting aside the style of historical narrative we seem to give a more declamatory and ambitious statement about these things. [...] I believe that someone who is scared and afraid of words spoken with *parrhesia* should not be considered a true friend by those in their right mind, nor should he be considered a good citizen who abandons the truth because others will offend him at a certain moment; a writer of public works should absolutely not accept anything but the truth.<sup>55</sup>

Polybius writes that one would expect from a good friend that they speak with *parrhesia* and tell the truth. Accordingly, one expects the same from a good citizen and a historian. In this passage, we can identify several important characteristics of Polybius' use of *parrhesia*. Firstly, speaking with *parrhesia* can be considered a reference to Polybius' more rhetorical style, which is – as he writes himself – 'more declamatory' (ἐπιδεικτικωτέραν) than his readers might be used to from other historians. Secondly, as the last line emphasizes, speaking with *parrhesia* is equated with sincerity and truth telling, which Polybius considers an essential quality for a good historian. The use of *parrhesia* in this passage can thus be considered part of Polybius' self-presentation as a historian and his more polemical stance towards other historians.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the comparison between *parrhesia* in friendships and in the context of politics and political history reveals that *parrhesia* is important in both contexts. Although it is thus important to note that the distinction between a private and a public type of *parrhesia* cannot always be made very sharply, in this chapter, I will mainly focus on *parrhesia* in political contexts. A focus on passages in which Polybius' use of *parrhesia* evokes the frame of democratic Athens is especially relevant because Polybius' ideas about democracy and different constitutions have always been highly influential. Yet so far there has been no extensive study on the role of democratic concepts such as *parrhesia* in his *Histories*.

---

<sup>55</sup> *Hist.* 38.4.1-6.

<sup>56</sup> Walbank (1962).

### 2.3. Polybius on democracy and *parrhesia*

Let us thus take Polybius' famous constitutional theory from book 6 as a starting point. In book 6, Polybius explains how all societies in principle go through a constant cycle of different political constitutions. Each constitution at some point turns into a worse version of itself before it is replaced by a different political system. According to Polybius, there are in principle six different constitutions; there are three 'good' constitutions, namely a democracy (δημοκρατία), kingship (βασιλεία) and aristocracy (ἀριστοκρατία) and there are three negative counterparts to these, respectively mob rule (ὀχλοκρατία), monarchy (μοναρχία) and oligarchy (ὀλιγαρχία).<sup>57</sup> Polybius shows that all three constitutions have certain advantages and states in 6.3.8. that the best constitution is one that combines elements from several constitutions. Polybius is thus not in favour of a radical democracy and he emphasizes that a true democracy does not mean that 'the whole population has the power to do whatever they want or propose' and that it is important to respect the gods and the laws.<sup>58</sup> *Parrhesia* is mentioned as part of this true democratic constitution, before it turns into an ochlocracy:

καὶ τὴν μὲν πολιτείαν ἐξ ὀλιγαρχικῆς δημοκρατίαν ἐποίησαν, τὴν δὲ τῶν κοινῶν πρόνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ἀνέλαβον. καὶ μέχρι μὲν ἂν ἔτι σφύζονται τινες τῶν ὑπεροχῆς καὶ δυναστείας πεῖραν εἰληφότων, ἀσμενίζοντες τῇ παρουσίᾳ καταστάσει περὶ πλείστου ποιῶνται τὴν ἰσηγορίαν καὶ τὴν παρρησίαν· ὅταν δ' ἐπιγένωνται νέοι καὶ παισὶ παίδων πάλιν ἡ δημοκρατία παραδοθῆ, τότε οὐκέτι διὰ τὸ σύννηθες ἐν μεγάλῳ τιθέμενοι τὸ τῆς ἰσηγορίας καὶ παρρησίας ζητοῦσι πλέον ἔχειν τῶν πολλῶν·

They turned their state from an oligarchy into a democracy, and they took upon themselves the handling and protection of public affairs. And as long as there were still some left of those who had experienced the excesses of oligarchical government, they were content with the present situation and highly valued their *isegoria* and *parrhesia*. But when younger people succeeded them and the democracy was again handed over to all of their children, they had become so used to it that they no longer held *isegoria* and *parrhesia* in high regard and they strove to have more than the masses.<sup>59</sup>

*Parrhesia* is thus closely connected to *isegoria* and presented as a characteristic of good democracy. We can find similar ideas in Polybius' praise of the democratic constitution of the Achaean League in book 2.; *parrhesia* and *isegoria* are again explicitly mentioned together. In this passage, Polybius is answering the question as to why and how the Achaean League got named after the Achaeans. At first glance this might seem strange,

---

<sup>57</sup> *Hist.* 6.3-4.

<sup>58</sup> *Hist.* 6.4.4-6. παραπλησίως οὐδὲ δημοκρατίαν, ἐν ἧ ἅπαν πλῆθος κύριόν ἐστι ποιεῖν ὅ τι ποτ' ἂν αὐτὸ βουληθῆ καὶ πρόθηται παρὰ δ' ᾧ πάτριόν ἐστι καὶ σύννηθες θεοῦ σέβασθαι, γονεῖς θεραπεύειν, πρεσβυτέρους αἰδεῖσθαι, νόμοις πείθεσθαι, παρὰ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις συστήμασιν ὅταν τὸ τοῖς πλείοσι δόξαν νικᾷ, τοῦτο καλεῖν <δεῖ> δημοκρατίαν/ 'Similarly it is not a democratic state, in which the whole population has the power to do whatever they want or propose, but where they honor the gods, care for their parents, respect their elders, and obey the laws, in such a system, where the decision of the majority prevails, is it to be called a democracy.'

<sup>59</sup> *Hist.* 6.9.3-5

because the Achaeans did not possess much land and did not have a powerful military.<sup>60</sup> The answer, according to Polybius, lies in the superior political system of the Achaeans:

ἔστι δ' οὖν, ὡς ἐμὴ δόξα, τοιαύτη τις, ἰσηγορίας καὶ παρρησίας καὶ καθόλου δημοκρατίας ἀληθινῆς σύστημα καὶ προαίρεσιν εἰλικρινεστέραν οὐκ ἂν εὔροι τις τῆς παρὰ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ὑπαρχούσης. αὕτη τινὰς μὲν ἐθέλοντὴν αἰρετιστάς εὔρε Πελοποννησίων, πολλοὺς δὲ πειθοῖ καὶ λόγῳ προσηγάγετο· τινὰς δὲ βιασαμένη σὺν καιρῷ παραχρῆμα πάλιν εὐδοκεῖν ἐποίησεν αὐτῇ τοὺς ἀναγκασθέντας. οὐδενὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν ὑπολειπομένη πλεονέκτημα τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ἴσα δὲ πάντα ποιούσα τοῖς ἀεὶ προσλαμβανομένοις ταχέως καθικνεῖτο τῆς προκειμένης ἐπιβολῆς, δύο συνεργοῖς χρωμένη τοῖς ἰσχυροτάτοις, ἰσότητι καὶ φιλανθρωπία.

The [origin of the name] is thus, as it seems to me, as follows. You could not find a system or ideology of *isegoria*, *parrhesia* and true democracy that is purer than the system of the Achaeans. They found that some of the Peloponnesians chose to join voluntarily, and brought many over to its side with persuasion and argument. And at the opportune moment they immediately made peace again with those that were forced by violence. Because they reserved no advantage for those that were there from the start and because they made everyone equal as if they had always been partners, they soon accomplished their plans, using their two strongest weapons, equality and humanity.<sup>61</sup>

Polybius recounts here that the political system of the Achaean League was successful because it was characterized by *isegoria* and *parrhesia* and true democracy. Alluding to the (democratic) art of rhetoric, Polybius notes that the League succeeded in winning over many other *poleis* by persuasion (πειθῶ) and argument (λόγος). Subsequently Polybius emphasizes the aspect of equality by stating that even the *poleis* who did not join the League voluntarily were treated equally and eventually came to support the League because of its commitment to equality (ισότης). That *parrhesia* for Polybius is closely associated with other democratic concepts is also made clear in the following passage, in which Polybius emphasizes the importance of retaining both freedom and *parrhesia*:

ἐγὼ γὰρ φοβερὸν μὲν εἶναί φημι τὸν πόλεμον, οὐ μὴν οὕτω γε φοβερὸν ὥστε πᾶν ὑπομένειν χάριν τοῦ μὴ προσδέξασθαι πόλεμον. ἐπεὶ τί καὶ θρασύνομεν τὴν ἰσηγορίαν καὶ παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ τῆς ἐλευθερίας ὄνομα πάντες, εἰ μηδὲν ἔσται προουργιαίτερον τῆς εἰρήνης; οὐδὲ γὰρ Θηβαίους ἐπαινοῦμεν κατὰ τὰ Μηδικά, διότι τῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀποστάντες κινδύνων τὰ Περσῶν εἴλοντο διὰ τὸν φόβον [...].

I indeed confirm that war is horrible, but not so horrible that we should endure everything in order to not be at war. Because why do we boast of our *isegoria* and *parrhesia* and all that we mean by freedom, if nothing would be more profitable for us than peace? For we do not praise the Thebans for what they did during the Persian war, because they deserted Greece when she was in danger and chose to side with the Persians out of fear [...].<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> *Hist.* 2.38.4-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Hist.* 2.38.5-9.

<sup>62</sup> *Hist.* 4.31.3-5.

Here *parrhesia* is again mentioned together with *isegoria* as an essential part of what constitutes *eleutheria*. According to Polybius, it is better to fight for this type of freedom than to choose peace.<sup>63</sup> While he is referring in this passage to the First Macedonian War (214-205 BCE), the comparison with Thebes and the Persian War evokes the image of classical Athens and the battles of Marathon and Salamis, and further strengthens the idea that the freedom that is to be defended here is to be associated with classical democracy.<sup>64</sup>

As becomes clear from his theory on the constitutional cycle, Polybius was very much aware of the possible dangers of a democracy and the ways in which a democracy could deteriorate. Democracy can easily – and will inevitably, according to Polybius’ theory – turn into an ochlocracy. In this situation of ‘mob rule’, politicians tend to blindly follow the will of the people and are afraid of criticizing the *demos*. A healthy democracy, according to Polybius, thus needs good leaders, who do not simply follow the *demos*, but who address them frankly and with *parrhesia*.<sup>65</sup> As the following remarks illustrate, Philopoemen, one of the most prominent politicians of the Achaean League and one of Polybius’ personal examples, was such an exemplary politician:

“Ὅτι Φιλοποίμην τετταράκοντ’ ἔτη συνεχῶς φιλοδοξήσας ἐν δημοκρατικῷ καὶ πολυειδεῖ πολιτεύματι, πάντῃ πάντως διέφυγε τὸν τῶν πολλῶν φθόνον, τὸ πλεῖον οὐ πρὸς χάριν, ἀλλὰ μετὰ παρρησίας πολιτευόμενος· ὁ σπανίως ἂν εὔροι τις γεγονός.

Philopoemen spent forty years under a democratic constitution in different forms, continuously striving for honour, and at all times he avoided the ill-will of the people; he usually engaged in politics without looking for favours, but with *parrhesia*; which is something that you rarely find.<sup>66</sup>

Polybius considers it rare that politicians speak with *parrhesia*. The fact that Philopoemen was able to use his *parrhesia* to speak frankly to the people therefore strengthens his image of a good democratic politician. Leaders who speak with *parrhesia* form an important part of a well-functioning democracy. This again illustrates *parrhesia*’s intrinsic connection with democratic politics, since politicians who speak with *parrhesia* form the main distinction between a functioning democracy and its negative ochlocratic counterpart.

#### **2.4. Polybius and Demosthenes: *parrhesia* between classical Athens and Hellenistic Greece**

Despite these continuities, Polybius also adapts his ideas on *parrhesia* in a way that shows his awareness of the political realities of his own time. This is best illustrated by Polybius’ digression on treason in 18.13-15. Book 18 is part of the narrative on the Second Macedonian War (200-197 BCE), in which Polybius among other things gives an account

---

<sup>63</sup> As Walbank also points out in his commentary, this passage is not unproblematic, since it contradicts other statements of Polybius about war and collaboration with foreign powers (Walbank (1957), 478).

<sup>64</sup> Walbank suggests that this passage is possibly a later addition by Polybius, added around 150, to advise the Achaeans and urge them to join the Fourth Macedonian War (Walbank (1957), 478). The idea that this passage is meant as advice for contemporary politics is strengthened by 32.9-10, shortly after this passage, where Polybius explicitly states that he is advising Messenia and Megalopolis how to stay in possession of their land in the future.

<sup>65</sup> *Hist.* 2.39.11-40.2. See also Miltsios (2023), esp. ix-xii, on the importance of exemplary leadership within Polybius’ work. Unfortunately Miltsios barely mentions Philopoemen.

<sup>66</sup> *Hist.* 23.12.8-9.

of how the Achaean League – comprised of several smaller Peloponnesian *poleis* - exchanges its alliance with Macedonia for an alliance with Rome. In 18.13 he announces a discussion of the correct definition of *πρόδοσις* (treason). The underlying question is whether the decision of the Achaean League to side with the Romans in 198 BCE should be considered treason. As we will see, this question of treason touches upon a broader discussion about the right form of democracy and the circumstances under which it can allow *eleutheria* and *parrhesia*.

Polybius compares the alliance between the Romans and the Achaeans in his own time with the alliance between the Greek city states and Philip II of Macedon several centuries earlier, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and continues with a lengthy discussion of this particular case of alleged treason. He criticizes the Athenian policy – proposed by Demosthenes – to refuse an alliance with Macedonia and remain independent. Polybius references Demosthenes' famous speech *On the Crown*, in which the orator strongly condemns the city states who sided with Philip II, among which also Polybius' hometown of Megalopolis.<sup>67</sup> Whereas Demosthenes considered the alliance with Macedonia a form of treason and a danger to Athenian democracy, Polybius argues against him and defends the decision of the Greek city states to side with Philip II:

εἰ μὲν οὖν ταῦτ' ἔπραττον ἢ φρουρὰν παρὰ Φιλίππου δεχόμενοι ταῖς πατρίσιν ἢ καταλύοντες τοὺς νόμους ἀφηροῦντο τὴν ἐλευθερίαν καὶ παρρησίαν τῶν πολιτῶν χάριν τῆς ἰδίας πλεονεξίας ἢ δυναστείας, ἄξιοι τῆς προσηγορίας ἦσαν ταύτης· εἰ δὲ τηροῦντες τὰ πρὸς τὰς πατρίδας δίκαια κρίσει πραγμάτων διεφέροντο, νομίζοντες οὐ ταῦτ' ὀνυμφέρον Ἀθηναίοις εἶναι καὶ ταῖς ἑαυτῶν πόλεσιν, οὐ δῆπου διὰ τοῦτο καλεῖσθαι προδότας ἐχρῆν αὐτοὺς ὑπὸ Δημοσθένους. ὁ δὲ πάντα μετρῶν πρὸς τὸ τῆς ἰδίας πατρίδος συμφέρον, καιπάντας ἡγούμενος δεῖν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀποβλέπειν πρὸς Ἀθηναίους, εἰ δὲ μή, προδότας ἀποκαλῶν, ἀγνοεῖν μοι δοκεῖ καὶ πολὺ παραπαίειν τῆς ἀληθείας.

And if by doing this they would have either received troops from Philip into their cities or abolished the laws and deprived their citizens of freedom and *parrhesia* for the sake of their own greediness and political domination, then they would have deserved the name of traitor. However, if they, while keeping in mind what was right for their fatherland, differed in their judgement of the situation, meaning that the interest of their own cities is not the same as that of the Athenians, then they should not for this reason have been called traitors by Demosthenes. He measured everything by the interest of his own land, and meant that the whole of Greece should have its eyes on Athens, and if not, that they should be called traitors, and it seems to me that he was mistaken and very far from the truth.<sup>68</sup>

According to Polybius, the decision of the Achaean towns to side with Macedonia in the fourth century should not be considered treason, because it was in their own interest and

---

<sup>67</sup> Dem. *De Corona* 18.295; before Demosthenes gives a list of the politicians that allied themselves with Macedonia, he emphasizes that, according to him, 'they abandoned the common good for their own greediness, they each deceived and corrupted the citizens under their influence, until they had turned them into slaves' / τῆς ἰδίας ἔνεκ' αἰσχροκερδίας τὰ κοινῇ συμφέροντα προΐεντο, τοὺς ὑπάρχοντας ἕκαστοι πολίτας ἐξαπατῶντες καὶ διαφθείροντες, ἕως δούλους ἐποίησαν.

<sup>68</sup> *Hist.* 18.14.9-12.

it eventually preserved their *parrhesia* and freedom. Polybius implies that while Athens was defeated and lost its power, the Achaean city states actually preserved their liberty. Referring to a possible military threat from Sparta, he writes that by establishing an alliance with Macedonia, they gained ‘general security and relief from the Lacedaemonians and for each of them many advantages for their fatherlands’.<sup>69</sup> Athens was indeed eventually defeated at Chaeronea in 338 BCE, which is commonly considered a key event in the end of Athenian democracy. However, Polybius’ own Achaea was politically in roughly the same situation and politically completely dependent on Macedonia. Nevertheless, it is here presented by Polybius as a place of freedom and democracy, in line with his characterization of the Achaean League as a true democracy in book 2. As becomes clear from this passage, the political situation of freedom and democracy that Polybius attributes to the Achaean League can apparently at the same time be combined with an alliance with Macedonia. Freedom and democracy can thus exist in a situation in which the Achaean League is dependent on other political powers.

In contrast, freedom – and particularly political freedom – in the context of classical Athens is often defined as meaning the freedom to govern yourself and as having a certain degree of independency.<sup>70</sup> While this might be at least partially applicable to *eleutheria* in classical Athens, we see that this is not entirely correct when it comes to Polybius. This means that Polybius is not simply echoing the classical Athenian use of the concept, which tend to equate *eleutheria* and democracy with independence from foreign powers. Instead, Polybius emphasizes in his critique on Demosthenes, that cities who are dependent on bigger powers such as Macedonia can enjoy just as much freedom and democracy – perhaps even more – as classical Athens. This discussion about Athens in the 4<sup>th</sup> century is therefore connected to similar cases of alliances with hegemonic powers in Polybius’ own time, in which most cities had changing alliances with either Rome or Macedonia. Polybius thus aptly reconceptualizes Demosthenes’ classical concept of freedom to fit within the local context of the Achaean League and its relationship with Rome in his own time.

In stepping away from classical Athens, Polybius shows how democratic concepts such as *parrhesia* and *eleutheria*, do not necessarily correspond to a strictly democratic political practice. By reframing these concepts, they become applicable to the historical context of Polybius’ own time. Even though Polybius uses concepts such as *parrhesia* and *isegoria* to describe democracies, in practice democracy had become a more flexible concept and cannot be equated to democratic practice in fourth century Athens. Active participation in democratic politics had become more and more something for the elite, prompting some scholars to go as far as to suggest that in Polybius’ time, democracy was not more than ‘a commendatory political tag with little substance’.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, inscriptional sources show that democratic language was still in use and many *poleis* considered themselves to

---

<sup>69</sup> *Hist.* 18.14.15. κοινῆ [...] ἀπὸ Δακεδαιμονίων ἀσφάλεια καὶ ῥαστώνῃ παρεσκευάσθη, κατ’ ἰδίαν δὲ ταῖς αὐτῶν πατρίσι πολλὰ καὶ λυσιτελεῖ. Traditionally, Sparta formed the greatest military threat to the *poleis* in Arcadia and Messene. However, as Walbank remarks in his commentary, Polybius’ reference to ‘Lacedaemonian aggression’ seems somewhat out of place here, as by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Sparta’s military power had significantly weakened since the battles at Leuctra (371 BCE) and Mantinea (362 BCE), Walbank (1967), 566.

<sup>70</sup> Raaflaub (1985), 71-102; Patterson (1991), 82-94; De Dijn (2020), 19-42.

<sup>71</sup> Champion (2018a), 138.

be in name a democracy.<sup>72</sup> However, it seems like in practice the political life of the *polis* increasingly became the domain of the socio-economic elites, with fees for participating in juries, assemblies being abolished and a growing importance of local benefactors.<sup>73</sup> In Polybius' world, democratic ideology thus became increasingly separated from democratic practice; this forms an essential step towards a broader use of concept and application to other contexts.

## 2.5. Conclusion

In Polybius' work, the concept of *parrhesia* is closely connected to *isegoria* and democracy. Despite these similarities with classical Athenian democratic thought, Polybius' use of *parrhesia* also sometimes points to a more critical stance towards classical Athens and its democratic practice. *Parrhesia* and the democratic culture connected to it should not be considered synonymous for independency and self-rule. Instead Polybius considers *parrhesia* as part of a democratic culture that is compatible with the historical context of Hellenistic democracies and its changing relationship with Roman power. While *parrhesia* thus remains an important part of Polybius' reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of a democratic constitution, it also shows how *parrhesia* and its frame of democratic Athens can be adapted to new political realities.

---

<sup>72</sup> Grieb (2008); Gray (2022).

<sup>73</sup> Walbank (1957), 222; Ando (2018);

### 3. Bringing Greek *Parrhesia* to Rome: Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities*

#### 3.1. Introduction

In his *Roman Antiquities* Dionysius sets out to give an account of the first 500 years of the history of Rome, from its foundation until the First Punic War. Beginning even before the foundation of Rome – with a description of the supposedly Greek *Aborigines* - the *Roman Antiquities* covers the time of the kings, the end of the monarchy and the first centuries of the Roman Republic. In his first paragraphs, Dionysius tells his readers that he is writing the *Roman Antiquities* to show to his Greek audience that Rome did not become a great power 'through some chance and unjust fate' and that the Romans are not barbarians, but that they are actually Greeks, both by descent and because they have embraced their Greek *paideia*.<sup>74</sup>

Like many others of his time, Dionysius was an admirer of the orators of democratic Athens, most prominently Isocrates and Demosthenes. The Romans he describes act as if they participate in an Athenian assembly and in their speeches sometimes announce their use of *parrhesia*. At first glance, this concept, with its strong connections to classical Athenian democracy, might seem somewhat out of place both in the context of a Roman history and also in the context in which Dionysius wrote. Having come to Rome somewhere around 30 BCE,<sup>75</sup> Dionysius wrote in a context in which democracy and *parrhesia* had acquired different meanings. On the one hand they were strongly connected to the prestige of Greek classical culture, which was also in Augustan Rome held in high regard and had an important role within Augustus' cultural program.<sup>76</sup> However, its strong ties to democratic practice seem to clash with the political realities of the principate. In this chapter I will analyze how Dionysius of Halicarnassus employs the concept of *parrhesia* in his *Roman Antiquities*. I will show that Dionysius attaches great importance to the classical past and that the use of classical Greek concepts for writing a history of the Romans is intrinsically connected to issues of political legitimacy and cultural identity. On the one hand, the passages in which speakers in the *Roman Antiquities* appeal to their *parrhesia*, indicate a continuity with classical Athenian ideas about *parrhesia* as closely connected to *eleutheria* and opposition to tyranny. On the other hand, the concept also acquires new connotations in Dionysius' Augustan context and becomes more separate from classical Athenian notions of democratic equality.

#### 3.2. Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the Greek past

Learning from the past is a core feature of Dionysius' educational program and his views on the role of literature in society. As an admirer of the Attic orators, most prominently Demosthenes and Isocrates, Dionysius stresses the importance of a Greek cultural

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 1.4.2. δι' αὐτοματισμόν τινα καὶ τύχην ἄδικον.

<sup>75</sup> See *Ant. Rom.* 1.7.2. ἐγὼ καταπλεύσας εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἅμα τῷ καταλυθῆναι τὸν ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον ὑπὸ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ Καίσαρος ἐβδόμης καὶ ὀγδοηκοστῆς καὶ ἑκατοστῆς ὀλυμπιάδος μεσοῦσης, 'I sailed to Italy when Caesar Augustus had ended the civil war, in the middle of the one hundred and eighty-seventh Olympiad.'

<sup>76</sup> Spawforth (2011), esp. 18-33, 271-274. Spawforth even credits Augustus with giving a such a new impulse to the prestige of classical Greek culture in Rome that he names it a 'cultural revolution'.

education (*paideia*) that is rooted in classical texts.<sup>77</sup> In the preface to *On the Ancient Orators* – a text that is also considered Dionysius’ *klassizistisches Manifest*– Dionysius describes most explicitly how the Augustan age has seen the revival of classical Athenian *paideia*.<sup>78</sup> The time between the death of Alexander the Great and the beginning of the Augustan principate is characterized as a time of general decline in which – according to Dionysius – ‘the old and native Attic muse’ (ἡ μὲν Ἀττικὴ μουσα καὶ ἀρχαία καὶ αὐτόχθων) was largely abandoned in favour of an inferior type of rhetoric, coming from ‘some sort of hell hole in Asia’ (ἐκ τινῶν βαράθρων τῆς Ἀσίας).<sup>79</sup> In this tripartite conception of the Greek past, also sometimes referred to as the *klassizistische Dreischnitt*<sup>80</sup>, the time of Augustus means a return to the classical ideals, articulated by Dionysius as the return of the Attic muse and old rhetoric.<sup>81</sup> It is implied that the age of Augustus, that is, Dionysius’ own time, is ‘great again’ because of its creative imitation of the classical past. Learning from and imitating the classical past thus has strong implications for the legitimacy of political power in Dionysius’ own time.

In his critical works Dionysius explains to his readers how this creative imitation – or *mimesis* – should be done. One should not simply copy the classical exempla, but one has to be selective and combine the best aspects of different authors to create a new whole. This process of selective *mimesis* should eventually lead to surpassing the original imitated material. It is important to note that this underlying principle of Dionysius’ critical thought is broadly applicable to his oeuvre.<sup>82</sup> If we connect this idea of selective *mimesis* to the above mentioned *klassizistische Dreischnitt* and Dionysius’ own context, it implies that the Augustan era is not just an imitation of the classical past, but a version of it that surpasses its predecessors. Applied to our analysis of the concept of *parrhesia*, it becomes clear that for Dionysius the use of classical concepts such as *parrhesia* does not necessarily mean endorsing its original context and meaning. His method of selection and rewriting allows for the adaptation of existing ideas to new contexts in a way that emulates their original context. According to Dionysius it is thus possible and even preferable to use classical concepts such as *parrhesia* within a new and preferably better context.

### 3.3. Dionysius writing as a Greek in Rome

This new context is provided by the world in which Dionysius lived and worked. Despite his admiration for classical Greek orators and presenting as Greek himself, Dionysius lived and wrote mostly in Rome. His exact social circle can only partially be reconstructed, but it must have consisted of a varied network of both Greek and Roman intellectuals.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Wiater (2011b), 60-119.

<sup>78</sup> See Hidber (1996).

<sup>79</sup> *De Or. Vet.* 1. 6-7; See also De Jonge (2014), 393-398.

<sup>80</sup> Gelzer (1979); Hidber (1996), 14-22.

<sup>81</sup> *De Or. Vet.* 2.

<sup>82</sup> Delcourt (2005), 47; De Jonge (2008), 19-20; see also the preface to *On the Ancient Orators*, 4.2, in which Dionysius summarizes his object of study with the following questions: *τινες εἰσὶν ἀξιολογώτατοι τῶν ἀρχαίων ῥητόρων τε καὶ συγγραφέων καὶ τίνες αὐτῶν ἐγένοντο προαιρέσεις τοῦ τε βίου καὶ τῶν λόγων καὶ τί παρ’ ἐκάστου δεῖ λαμβάνειν ἢ φυλάττεσθαι;* / ‘Who are the most remarkable of the ancient orators and writers and what manner of life and writing style did they choose and what parts from each should we adopt and what should we avoid?’.

<sup>83</sup> Fromentin (1998), xiv-xxii; Wiater (2011b), 22-24; De Jonge and Hunter (2018), 7-9.

Dionysius also writes that he learned Latin in order to be able to read Latin literature.<sup>84</sup> We are here not interested in a precise reconstruction of his sources, but it is important to note that despite his emphatically Greek cultural frame, he was also very much part of the intellectual milieu of Augustan Rome, in which Greek and Roman intellectual traditions were not so strictly separated.<sup>85</sup>

In fact, the central argument of the *Roman Antiquities* is that the Romans should actually be considered Greeks. To prove that the Romans are Greek Dionysius needs to show that they are of Greek descent and besides this, that they are also in possession of Greek *paideia*.<sup>86</sup> At the beginning of the *Roman Antiquities*, Dionysius recounts how the Romans descend from no less than five different groups of people who once came from the Greek world to Italy and he mentions in chronological order the Aborigines, the Pelasgians, Euander and the Arcadians, Hercules and his company and finally Aeneas and the Trojans.<sup>87</sup> However, the *Roman Antiquities* do not only convey the message that the Romans are Greek because of their supposedly Greek ancestry, the work also shows the Romans acting as Greeks and employing concepts such as *parrhesia*, that are typically associated with Greek democratic practice. The use of the language of classical Athenian oratory should thus be seen in light of the general argument that the Romans possess a form of the Greek *paideia* that is so important to Dionysius.

In this chapter I will at several points briefly refer to Livy's version of the events as described in *Ab Urbe Condita*. Livy, whose work is roughly contemporary with Dionysius, is for many episodes described in the *Roman Antiquities* our most important Latin source and therefore also deserves to be mentioned here. Although this chapter is not the place for an extensive comparative study of both works, we can notice some general trends. Whereas this chapter discusses several passages in which Dionysius describes historical characters referring to their *parrhesia* or *eleutheria*, Livy generally tends to be less explicit in referencing free speech or freedom - if it is mentioned at all. In describing the same episodes as Dionysius, Livy at times shortens or omits speeches at moments where Dionysius reports lengthy speeches with references to freedom and *parrhesia*. As we will see, these comparisons with Livy thus support the argument that Dionysius' references to *parrhesia* form a particular part of his use of a Greek cultural frame for writing a Roman history.

Dionysius writing his *Roman Antiquities* should therefore be considered closely connected to the issue of the place of Greekness in a world that was politically dominated by the Romans. On the one hand, Dionysius' work seems to fit neatly within the persistent idea about Greeks writing under the Roman empire who idealized the Greek past in response to the Roman political dominance in their own time.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, it is also important to note that Dionysius writes in a relatively positive manner about the Romans

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 1.7.2.

<sup>85</sup> See also the volume by De Jonge and Hunter (2018), which explicitly places Dionysius in the context of broader intellectual trends in Augustan Rome.

<sup>86</sup> In line with Isocrates *Pan.* 4.50, Dionysius defines Greekness as having both a Greek descent - connected to Athenian ideas about *autochtonia* - and as possessing *paideia*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 9.2-52.

<sup>88</sup> Delcourt (2005), 122-196.

and their culture.<sup>89</sup> This more positive stance towards the Roman Empire has historically given Dionysius a reputation of being merely Roman propaganda. Others have pointed out that Dionysius' positive description of early Roman history could also be considered a form of subtle critique on Augustan Rome.<sup>90</sup> More recent work tends to stress the ambiguous approach towards the legitimacy of the Romans within Dionysius' historical project. Dionysius gives political legitimacy to the Romans, but he does so by placing Greek *paideia* at the core of this legitimacy.<sup>91</sup> However, this interpretation raises the question how Dionysius can fit Rome into an ideal that is presented as thoroughly Greek.

So far, research on the *Roman Antiquities* has mainly asked what Dionysius thinks of the Romans, but because it has long been assumed that Dionysius has a standard idealized image of classical Athens, the place of the Greek past within the work has been somewhat understudied. Wiater, nuancing his earlier work in the process, tries to turn away from Dionysius' idealized idea of the past and argues that in the *Roman Antiquities* Dionysius is constructing a new Greek identity that is less anchored in classical Athens and more in a universal ideal of Greek *paideia* that transcends the historical time and place of classical Athens.<sup>92</sup> I on the other hand argue that considering Dionysius' Greekness as a universal timeless trait tends to obscure the creative and specific way in which Dionysius adapts core concepts from classical Athenian history, such as *parrhesia*, to his own specific time. Dionysius is not just rewriting Roman history by turning the Romans into an idealized version of classical Greeks, but he is also in a way rewriting Greek history by adapting classical Athens to a Roman context. I will discuss in more detail Dionysius and the context of the Augustan principate at the end of this chapter. Let us first turn to an analysis of *parrhesia* in the *Roman Antiquities*.

### **3.4. *Parrhesia* in the *Roman Antiquities***

As mentioned above, the use of *parrhesia* in Dionysius' history of Rome is part of the expression of Greekness and suggesting a continuity between the Romans and the heritage of classical Athens. Throughout the *Roman Antiquities*, the substantive *parrhesia* and its cognates occur 22 times. It most often occurs in crucial moments within the narrative, often in the context of political discussions or trials. We find it four times in book 4 in the narrative about Tarquinius and his rise to (tyrannical) power, four times in book 7 on the trial of Coriolanus and two times in book 9 on the trial of general Servius Servilius, who was charged for his military defeats by the popular tribunes. In books 6-10 it occurs in total seven times in the context of debates between plebeians and patricians and finally it occurs 3 times in book 11 in the context of the decemvirate. The final two occurrences can be found in book 9 in a story about a soldier getting punished by the consuls for speaking too freely and in book 14 in the context of an inhabitant of the besieged city of Privernum speaking freely to the consul Marcius.

The references to *parrhesia* seem to be mainly connected to key moments in the *Roman Antiquities* when the existing social or political order is under threat, either by tyranny or

---

<sup>89</sup> Spawforth (2011), 32 even states that Dionysius' work 'is fervently pro-Roman'.

<sup>90</sup> Hidber (1996), 78-79.

<sup>91</sup> Wiater (2011a), 83-85.

<sup>92</sup> Wiater (2011a), 87-88; Wiater (2018), 230-236.

by the plebeians demanding more political power.<sup>93</sup> It is often evoked in connection with preserving *eleutheria*. However, it becomes clear that the *eleutheria* that is referred to in those situations is mainly the *eleutheria* of a specific social group, namely the patricians, when they speak about situations in which their *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* are taken away by Tarquinius or the decemvirs, or by the plebeians.

In line with this, persons who appeal to their *parrhesia* in the *Roman Antiquities* are always male and usually people with a higher social status. This is not too surprising, given the fact that *parrhesia* is usually connected to an act of public speaking, which in antiquity is usually reserved for a select group of male citizens.<sup>94</sup> It is also in accordance with classical associations between exercising *parrhesia* and holding citizenship of a democratic *polis*, which also means that lower social groups who do not hold citizenship are generally excluded from exercising *parrhesia*.

Furthermore, *parrhesia* is usually mentioned by the speaker at the beginning or ending of their speech. These are the appropriate moments to reflect and comment on the contents of the speech. Besides this, referring to *parrhesia* and its connection to truth-telling is also a way to convince the audience of the truth of what is being said and to convince them to believe this. I suggest this is also because mentioning that one is going to speak openly and honestly generally adds to the *ethos* of the speaker. Connected to this is the aspect of risk-taking involved with speaking openly. Speakers in the *Roman Antiquities* who announce that they are going to speak with *parrhesia*, often also clearly state that they know that they are doing something that could potentially have negative consequences for themselves. This personal risk is often contrasted with the importance of speaking for the common good. The fact that the speaker nevertheless chooses to speak with *parrhesia*, despite being aware of the risks, strengthens the *ethos* of the speaker.<sup>95</sup>

Let us now analyse more closely the passages that mention the use of *parrhesia*. I will pay attention to what a speaker says when they announce they will speak with *parrhesia*, and I will also analyse how the use of *parrhesia* is evaluated within the text. My analysis will be divided into three sections. Firstly, a reading of the relevant passages will show that the concept of *parrhesia* retains its classical connotations of freedom and opposition to tyranny, suggesting a continuity between Rome and classical Athens. Secondly, we will see that despite this proposed continuity, it also becomes strictly separated from classical notions of equality (such as *isonomia* and *isegoria*) and democratic politics and becomes more exclusively reserved for the social elite as a way to stress the importance of existing social hierarchies. Thirdly, it is important to note that the *Roman Antiquities* at times tends to display a certain ambiguity towards the exclusive use of *parrhesia* by the patricians and asks the reader for a more negative evaluation of its use. At the end of this chapter, I will return to the historical context of Augustan Rome and argue that we have to consider Dionysius' use of *parrhesia* in the context in which he wrote. Writing during the Augustan

---

<sup>93</sup> Pelling (2018).

<sup>94</sup> Fields (2020), 45-49. The one exception to this rule is Tullia, the wife of Tarquinius Superbus and daughter of his predecessor Servius Tullius. It is telling that she emphasizes that she is using her *parrhesia* in a private situation (*Ant.Rom.* 4.29).

<sup>95</sup> Fields (2020), 2.

Principate, Dionysius tries to adapt the heritage of democratic Athens to the political realities of his own time.

### 3.4.1. From Greece to Rome: *parrhesia* and *eleutheria*

Throughout the *Roman Antiquities*, *parrhesia* is found in close association with a situation of *eleutheria*, which in these cases can be defined as some degree of political freedom and as the absence of tyranny or oligarchy. Multiple passages make clear that when this *eleutheria* is taken away by the establishment of an oligarchy or tyranny, it also becomes impossible to exercise *parrhesia*. We encounter the first elaborate example of a tyranny in *Ant. Rom.* 41-85, in Dionysius' account of the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, usually dated to the end of the sixth century BCE. According to Dionysius, Tarquinius should be considered a tyrant. He mentions among other things that Tarquinius has the habit of exercising his function from home and that he is difficult to reach.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, we are told that he holds fake trials and kills or banishes people in order to take their possessions. Tarquinius is thus portrayed as being solely focused on his own private domain and increasing his own power and possessions at the expense of others. When Tarquinius seized complete control, Dionysius describes how the patricians first hoped that the reign of Tarquinius would work in their favour. However, when they realised they had lost their *parrhesia*, they finally realised that they had lost their political freedom as well and that they were now unable to exercise any political power.<sup>97</sup>

In *Ant. Rom.* 4.45-48, Dionysius tells us about a meeting between Tarquinius and a group of representatives of the other Latin peoples. Tarquinius has organized the meeting in order to convince the members of the Latin League that he is the lawful king of Rome. However, Turnus, one of the leaders present, refuses to be his ally and rejects Tarquinius' claims to power in the following way:

διεξελθὼν δὲ πολλὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ δεινὰς κατηγορίας τελευτῶν ἐδίδασκειν, ὡς οὐδὲ τὴν βασιλείαν εἶχε τὴν Ῥωμαίων κατὰ νόμους παρ' ἐκόντων λαβὼν ὥσπερ οἱ πρὸ αὐτοῦ βασιλεῖς, ὅπλοισι δὲ καὶ βία κατισχύσας τυραννικὴν τε μοναρχίαν καταστησάμενος τοὺς μὲν ἀποκτείνει τῶν πολιτῶν, τοὺς δ' ἐξελαύνει τῆς πατρίδος, τῶν δὲ περικόπτοι τὰς οὐσίας, ἀπάντων δ' ἅμα τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀφαιροῖτο·

After Turnus had recounted the many terrible accusations against him, he ended by saying that Tarquinius did not hold the kingship over the Romans by taking it from them according to the laws, as the kings before him had done, but that he by using weapons and force had established a tyrannical monarchy and that he was putting some of the citizens to death, banned others from their fatherland, took their possessions and took from all of them their *parrhesia* and freedom.<sup>98</sup>

Turnus emphasizes that according to the *nomoi*, Tarquinius is not the lawful king, since he took the kingship by violence.<sup>99</sup> Instead of a monarchy, Tarquinius has thus established a

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 41.3-4; cf. the story of Deioces, the first king of the Medes, and the construction of his private palace in Herodotus' *Hist.* 1.98-99.

<sup>97</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 42.

<sup>98</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 4.46.4.

<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, these same events are discussed by Livy in *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.49-50. Livy's account of Tarquinius' reign closely resembles Dionysius' version of the events and Livy also notes – among other

τυραννικήν μοναρχίαν. An important characteristic of this ‘tyrannical monarchy’ is that Tarquinius has deprived the Romans of both their *parrhesia* and their *eleutheria*.

Another example of this close association between *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* occurs during a debate in the senate about the political power of the *decemviri*. This committee of ten men was initially elected to codify Roman laws, but supposedly refused new elections and turned into an oligarchic regime. One of the speakers is announced as ‘Marcus Horatius, also called Barbatus, a descendant of the Horatius who was consul with Publius Valerius Publicola after the expulsion of the kings’.<sup>100</sup> Horatius begins his speech by accusing the leader of the *decemviri*, Appius, of acting like Tarquinius himself – who was described as a tyrant in book 4 - and of taking away the possibility for *parrhesia*:

Θᾶπτόν μ’ ἀναγκάσετε, Ἄππιε, τοὺς χαλινοὺς διαρρηῆσαι οὐκέτι μετριάζοντες, ἀλλὰ τὸν Ταρκύνιον ἐκεῖνον ἐνδύόμενοι, οἳ γ’ οὐδὲ λόγου τυχεῖν ἔατε τοὺς περὶ σωτηρίας τῶν κοινῶν βουλομένους λέγειν. Πότερον ὑμῶν ἐξελέλυθεν ἐκ τῆς διανοίας, ὅτι σώζονται μὲν οἱ Οὐαλερίων ἀπόγονοι τῶν ἐξελασάντων τὴν τυραννίδα, λείπεται δὲ διαδοχὴ τῆς Ὁρατίων οἰκίας, οἷς πατριὸν ἐστὶν ὁμόσε χωρεῖν τοῖς καταδουλουμένοις τὴν πατρίδα καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ μόνοις; ἢ τοσαύτην κατεγνώκατε καὶ ἡμῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ῥωμαίων ἀνανδρίαν, ὥστ’ ἀγαπήσειν ἐάν τις ἐᾷ ζῆν ἡμᾶς ὅπωςδὴ ποτε, ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας δὲ καὶ παρρησίας μήτ’ ἐρεῖν μήτε πράξειν μηθέν;

Very soon you will force me, Appius, to break through all restraint because of your lack of moderation, you who are acting like Tarquinius, you who do not grant a word to those who wish to speak about the welfare of the Republic. Has it slipped your minds, that there are still descendants left of that Valerius that drove away the tyranny, and that there is still a successor to the house of the Horatii, for whom it is hereditary to oppose those who try to enslave their fatherland, both with others and alone? Or do you think that we and the other Romans are such cowards that we will be content if someone lets us live our lives by any means whatsoever and that we will not do or say anything to defend our freedom and *parrhesia*?<sup>101</sup>

In this passage, Horatius repeatedly stresses the connection between *eleutheria* and *parrhesia*. He states that the absence of *eleutheria*, which would be the case under a tyrannical regime, thus also means being deprived of the possibility to speak openly in public and to exercise one’s *parrhesia*.<sup>102</sup> This *parrhesia* can be defined more specifically as not just speaking out in public, but as speaking in favour of the common good (περὶ

---

things - that Tarquinius uses violence to deprive others of their possessions. Livy, however, does not make explicit mention of tyranny, freedom or free speech in this passage. The explicit incorporation of these concepts thus seems to be specific to Dionysius’ (Greek) narrative of the events.

<sup>100</sup> 11.5.1.: Μάρκος Ὁράτιος ὁ Βαρβάτος ἐπικληθεὶς ἀπόγονος Ὁρατίου τοῦ συνυπατεύσαντος Ποπλίῳ Οὐαλερίῳ Ποπλικόλῳ μετὰ τὴν ἐκβολὴν τῶν βασιλέων. Cf. Livy *Ab Urbe Condita*, 3.39.3.: *Nec minus ferociter M. Horatium Barbatum isse in certamen, decem Tarquinius appellentem admonentemque Valeriis et Horatiis ducibus pulsos reges.* / ‘And Marcus Horatius Barbatus was no less outspoken during the discussion, calling them ten Tarquins and warning them that under the Valerii and Horatii the kings had been expelled.’

<sup>101</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.5.2-3.

<sup>102</sup> While Livy does not go as far as to explicitly compare the decemvirate to a tyranny, he does address the aspect of free speech by remarking that the decemvirs try to deprive the senators of their possibility to speak freely (*libere loqui*) in the *curia*: *Ab Urbe Condita*, 3.39.6. *Viderent ne vetando in curia libere homines loqui extra curiam etiam moverent vocem* / ‘They should see to it that they will not, by forbidding the people to speak freely in the curia, force them to use their voice outside the curia.’

σωτηρίας τῶν κοινῶν λέγειν) and thus forms a stark contrast with the behaviour of the tyrant, who only works for his own personal gain. The impossibility of exercising *parrhesia* under a tyranny is emphasized in other words in the passage that follows the one quoted above, where Marcus Horatius predicts that if the decemvirs will be granted power, they will 'take away Valerius' possibility to speak and that of any other of the senators' and they will 'prevent anyone from saying whatever he wants to say for the safety of his fatherland'.<sup>103</sup>

Because of this close association with political freedom (*eleutheria*) in contrast with tyranny and with speaking out in favour of the common good (*to koinon*), the concept of *parrhesia* in these passages seems to remain quite similar to the classical definition of *parrhesia* as a key attribute of the free democratic citizen. This connection between *parrhesia* and being a citizen with an amount of political power is made very clear in *Ant. Rom.* 6.72.5. This is part of a key passage, in which Manius Valerius addresses the plebeians during the first plebeian secession (495-493 BCE).<sup>104</sup> He begins his speech by stressing the importance of speaking out for the common good, even if this brings personal risks. Then he continues by urging the plebeians to speak out, because they should behave as is fitting for them as free men and finally announces that he himself will now use his *parrhesia* to speak openly to the senators:

τί οὖν ἔτι καταπέπληχθε αὐτοὺς καὶ σιωπᾶτε, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐλεύθερα φρονεῖτε καὶ διαρρήξαντες ἤδη ποτὲ τοὺς χαλινοὺς λέγετε εἰς τὸ κοινόν, ἃ πεπόνθατε πρὸς αὐτῶν; ὧ σκέτλιοι, τί δεδοίκατε; μὴ τι πάθητε ἡγεμόνι τῆς ἐλευθεροστομίας ἐμοὶ χρώμενοι; κινδυνεύσω γὰρ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰπεῖν τὰ δίκαια μετὰ παρρησίας ἐγὼ πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ οὐδὲν ἀποκρύψομαι. [...] ταῦτ' ἀποκρινοῦμαι πρὸς αὐτόν, ἅπερ ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα εἰρησθαι.

Why then are you still terrified by them and do you remain silent, why do you not think like free men and after finally breaking your restraints speak publicly about what you have suffered from them? Miserable men, what are you afraid of? That you will suffer something if you take my example in speaking freely? For your sake I will put myself in danger and speak to them with *parrhesia* about your just arguments and I will not hold anything back. [...] I will answer him with these things, namely with the truth and with what has to be told.<sup>105</sup>

Besides other typical aspects of *parrhesia* – risk taking, speaking freely and telling the truth – Valerius here also emphasizes that exercising *parrhesia* is an essential part of behaving like free men. Interestingly, Valerius says that the plebeians have *parrhesia* now that they have been granted more freedom by the senate. This is quite a unique passage, in which *parrhesia* for the people is associated with freedom and truth in a positive sense.

The close association between *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* is part of the suggested continuity between Rome and classical Athens. This should be considered a part of Dionysius'

---

<sup>103</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.5.3-4. Οὐαλερίου λόγον ἀφελείσθε ἢ τῶν ἄλλων τινὸς βουλευτῶν; κωλύετε λέγειν, ὅποσα βούλεται τις ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος. Cf. Livy 3.39.9.

<sup>104</sup> Valerius' speech and his references to *parrhesia* are completely absent in Livy's – much shorter – account of the plebeian secession, cf. *Ab Urbe Condita*, 2.32.

<sup>105</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 6.72.4-5.

broader project of applying a Greek framework to his account of Roman history – it is therefore not surprising that we do not find similar references to Athenian history in Livy’s account.<sup>106</sup> This continuity becomes most clear at the beginning of book 11. Since this is the beginning of the second half of the *Roman Antiquities*, it occupies a prominent place within the work as a whole. Book 11 begins with an account of the second decemvirate. In the first paragraph Dionysius mentions both the outcome of the Persian and of the Peloponnesian Wars. References to famous moments from Athenian history – such as the defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the subsequent installation of the Thirty Tyrants – introduce the general theme of fighting for *eleutheria* and overthrowing tyranny.<sup>107</sup> After some short statements about the importance of history for philosophical and rhetorical education, Dionysius announces that he will give an account of how the Romans disbanded the oligarchy – in this case meaning the decemvirate:

διὰ ταύτας δὴ μοι τὰς αἰτίας ἔδοξεν ἅπαντα ἀκριβῶς διελθεῖν τὰ γενόμενα περὶ τὴν κατάλυσιν τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας, ὅσα δὴ καὶ λόγου τυχεῖν ἄξια ἠγοῦμαι. ποιήσομαι δὲ τὸν περὶ αὐτῶν λόγον οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν τελευταίων ἀρξάμενος, ἃ δοκεῖ τοῖς πολλοῖς αἴτια γενέσθαι μόνατῆς ἐλευθερίας [...] ἀλλ’ ἀφ’ ὧν ἤρξατο πρῶτον ἡ πόλις ὑπὸ τῆς δεκαδαρχίας ὑβρίζεσθαι.

Because of these reasons, I have decided to recount in detail all the events surrounding the overthrow of the oligarchy, as far as I consider them worthy of my account. I will start my narrative of them not with the final events, which many consider to be the sole cause of freedom [...] but I will begin with those insults that the city endured under the decemvirate.<sup>108</sup>

Dionysius frequently refers to the decemvirate with the word ὀλιγαρχία. The text thus strongly suggests a continuity between Athenian history and the history of the Roman Republic by referring to a common theme of overthrowing an oligarchic regime and subsequently establishing *eleutheria*.

### 3.4.2. *Parrhesia* and democratic equality

The reference to *parrhesia* and its close connection to *eleutheria* thus establish a connection with classical Athens. In a classical Athenian context, ending tyranny and establishing a situation of *eleutheria* and *parrhesia* implies a context of democracy. However, concepts that are closely connected to the original democratic context of *parrhesia* – such as *isegoria* and *isonomia* – are mostly used in a distinctly negative sense in the *Roman Antiquities*. The words *isegoria* and *isonomia* occur several times in the *Roman Antiquities* and Dionysius seems to use them largely as synonyms to refer to a general concept of equality. *Isegoria* and *isonomia*, attested respectively 11 and 4 times in the work as a whole, most prominently occur in passages discussing the conflict between the plebeians and the patricians in which the tribunes demand more equality on behalf of the plebeians. This equality is always strongly opposed by the patricians (and often by Dionysius himself) and it is never actually realised.

<sup>106</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 3.36-55.

<sup>107</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.1.2-3.

<sup>108</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.1.6.

Not just concepts of democratic equality acquire a distinctly negative meaning, but also democracy itself occurs remarkably often in a context where it is associated with tyranny and ‘mob rule’. In a lengthy excursion at the beginning of book 7 – the book mainly dedicated to the story of Coriolanus – Dionysius gives an account of the rise to power of Aristodemus, the tyrant of Cumae. Dionysius describes how Aristodemus murdered the largest part of the local aristocracy and promised the people to give them more power and turn the city into a democracy.<sup>109</sup> In reality, as Dionysius shows, these promises to the people marked the beginning of his tyranny. The story seems to emphasize the danger of tyranny and to introduce this as a prominent theme within the rest of the book. It functions as a general warning against tyranny by showing how easily one man can come into power if he has the support of the people.

In another passage, Appius Claudius calls democracy a form of tyranny and ‘the worst of all constitutions’.<sup>110</sup> He accuses supporters of democracy of ‘flattering the people and desiring tyrannical acts; because everyone knows that every tyrant arises from a flatterer of the people, and an easy road to power for those who want to enslave their cities is that one which leads through the worst of the citizens.’<sup>111</sup> Tyranny is here thus associated with flattery, generally seen as the opposite of *parrhesia* and with the enslavement of one’s country.<sup>112</sup> It thus creates a clear contrast with the situation of *eleutheria* and *parrhesia* that is found elsewhere in the work. Ironically, concepts that were once intrinsically connected to classical Athenian opposition to tyranny, in a Roman context come to be more closely associated with tyranny.

However, it must be noted that Appius Claudius is portrayed as a highly controversial and morally questionable person, who figures throughout the *Roman Antiquities* as an extreme opponent of the plebeians and later as the leader of the decemvirs assumes tyrannical power himself.<sup>113</sup> Complicating the image of democracy further, a fascinating fragment of book 19 – the exact context of this fragment is unfortunately unknown to us – suggests that it is not so much democracy itself that is the problem, but rather its vulnerability for demagoguery:

Ἄπασαν τὴν πολεμίαν διεξήει ἀρούρας τε ἀκμαῖον ἤδη τὸ σιτικὸν θέρος ἐχούσας πυρὶ διδοῦς καὶ δένδρα καρποφόρα κείρων. Παραπλήσιόν τι πάσχουσιν αἱ δημοκρατούμεναι πόλεις τοῖς πελάγεσιν· ἐκεῖνά τε γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνέμων ταραττεται φύσιν ἔχοντα ἡρεμεῖν, αὐταῖ τε ὑπὸ τῶν δημαγωγῶν κυκῶνται μηδὲν ἐν ἑαυταῖς ἔχουσαι κακόν.

He went through the whole territory of the enemy and set fire to the fields with ripe crops of wheat and he cut down the trees with fruit. Democratic cities undergo

<sup>109</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.7-8.

<sup>110</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 6.60.2: τῆς κακίστης τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις πολιτειῶν δημοκρατίας.

<sup>111</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 6.60.2: δημοκοπίαν καὶ τυραννικῶν ἔργων ἐπιθυμίαν. οὐδενὶ γὰρ δὴ ἄδηλον ὅτι πᾶς τύραννος ἐκ δημοκόλακος φύεται, καὶ ταχεῖα ὁδὸς ἐστὶ τοῖς καταδουλοῦσθαι τὰς πόλεις βουλομένοις ἢ διὰ τῶν κακίστων ἀγούσα πολιτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς δυναστείας.

<sup>112</sup> Distinguishing between *parrhesia* and flattery (*κολακεία*) becomes a prominent *topos* in thinking about *parrhesia* in the Second Sophistic and forms the core part of Plutarch’s work about *parrhesia*, titled ‘How to distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend?’. See also Konstan (2012), 4; Fields (2020), 142-143.

<sup>113</sup> Dionysius follows here a broader historiographical tradition that consistently portrays the Appii Claudii as conservative opponents of the plebeians and attributes to this Appius Claudius typical characteristics of a tyrant; Vasaly (1987), 217-221.

something similar, just like the sea. Because just as the latter is disturbed by winds, while being calm in nature, similarly democracies tend to be confounded by demagogues, while they have nothing bad in themselves.<sup>114</sup>

Despite these ambiguities, in the *Roman Antiquities* both ideas of democratic equality and democracy itself become highly controversial and generally occur in a negative sense. In the Roman context of the *Roman Antiquities*, the possibility for *parrhesia* becomes less connected to democratic politics and is more closely associated with preserving the status quo and adhering to existing *nomoi*.

To illustrate this, let us first return to the account of Tarquinius' reign in book 4. When the Latin League rejects Tarquinius' claim to power, they do so by characterizing the Roman constitution under Tarquinius as a τυραννικὴν μοναρχίαν (4.46.4). As part of this 'tyrannical monarchy' Tarquinius did not only take away people's possessions, but he also took their *parrhesia* and *eleutheria*. What does this say about the presence of *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* under the previous kings, so under a 'normal' monarchy? Taking away *parrhesia* implies that it used to be there before Tarquinius' reign. It seems to imply that under a monarchy apparently there can be *parrhesia* (and *eleutheria*) as long as this monarchy does not end up becoming tyrannical. This could also be read as an interesting warning in the context of the Augustan principate. It seems thus that *parrhesia* was not entirely dependent on one constitution. Even though it is often suggested that we should see the Roman Republic as a second Athenian democracy, this passage seems to suggest that *eleutheria* and *parrhesia* can also be present under different constitutions. Dionysius also seems to say that both the kings before Tarquinius Superbus and the constitution of the Roman Republic were in line with the *nomoi* of the ancestral constitution. *Parrhesia* seems to be present in political situations in which the *nomoi* and principles of justice are respected and not exclusively in situations with a degree of political equality, such as a democracy.

This is illustrated in the next passage, from the account of the trial of Coriolanus, usually dated to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Coriolanus was a famous Roman general, who was well known for his victory over the Volscians. However, after opposing handing out grain during a food shortage, he became highly unpopular with the plebeians, and was put on trial.<sup>115</sup> While Livy only discusses this episode very briefly, Dionysius gives an elaborate account of the trial and includes the speeches that were supposedly given.<sup>116</sup> In this specific passage, Minucius, one of the consuls, advocates for giving Coriolanus a lenient sentence. He accuses the plebeians of planning several things to punish the patricians and upsetting the existing institutions. He emphasizes that this is undemocratic and against the laws and principles of justice:

τί οὖν παθόντες ἐπιχειρεῖτε πάντα συγγεῖν ταῦτα νυνί; καὶ τίνι δικαίῳ πιστεύοντες τὰς τιμὰς ἡμῶν ζητεῖτε ἀφαιρεῖσθαι; εἰ γὰρ [ἐν] τοῖς μετέχουσι τῆς βουλῆς φοβερὸν ποιήσετε τὸ [μὴ] μετὰ παρρησίας ἃ φρονοῦσι λέγειν, τί ἂν εἴποιεν οἱ προεσθηκότες ὑμῶν ἐπιεικέες; ἢ ποῖῳ χρησάμενοι νόμῳ θανάτῳ ζημιοῦν ἢ φυγῇ τῶν πατρικίων τινὰς

---

<sup>114</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 19.7.2.

<sup>115</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.19-30.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 2.34-35.

ἀξιώσουσιν; οὔτε γὰρ οἱ παλαιοὶ νόμοι ταύτην διδόασιν ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν, οὔθ' αἰνεωστὶ γενόμεναι πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν ὁμολογία. τὸ δ' ἐκβαίνειν τοὺς νομίμους ὄρους καὶ τὴν βίαν κρείττονα ποιεῖν τῆς δίκης οὐκέτι δημοτικόν ἐστίν, ἀλλ' εἰ τἀληθῆ βούλεσθε ἀκούειν τυραννικόν.

What has gotten into you then, that you now attempt to upset all these things? And relying on what type of justice do you seek to take away our positions? Because if you will make the senators afraid of expressing with *parrhesia* what they think, how can your leaders say something useful? Or based upon what law do you think it right to punish any of the patricians with death or banishment? For neither the old laws give you this power, nor those that were recently agreed upon by the senate. Transgressing lawful bounds and using a force stronger than justice is not part of a democracy, but – if you wish to hear the truth – of a tyranny.<sup>117</sup>

From his description of impending tyranny caused by the plebeians we can derive what would be a good constitution according to Minucius. In a good constitution it is possible for the senators to speak with *parrhesia*, in line with the existing *nomoi*. Interestingly, Minucius implies that this constitution could be characterized a democracy, however it seems to be not one that adheres to classical principles of *isonomia* and *isegoria*, but rather a constitution that maintains the existing institutions and safeguards the current political power and social standing of the patricians. Taking away *parrhesia* and stripping patricians of their political offices is – as we saw before – seen as the characteristic of a tyranny. In line with this, *parrhesia* is in the *Roman Antiquities* often used in speeches in which patricians advocate for the importance of ancestral *nomoi* and maintaining existing hierarchies.

Other instances in which patricians explicitly employ their *parrhesia* to oppose the plebeians are for example *Ant. Rom.* 9.32.2 and 9.32.7, where the former general Servius Servilius is put on trial by the tribunes and has to defend himself. Furthermore, in *Ant. Rom.* 9.53.7 Appius Claudius invokes his *parrhesia* while giving a speech in which he opposes land allotments to the plebeians. As we saw before, while he argues against measures proposed by the tribunes and the plebeians, he emphasizes that he does so for the common good, even though he is aware of the personal risks involved. In *Ant. Rom.* 11.55-56 Gaius Claudius speaks with *parrhesia* to argue that the patricians should not give more political power to the plebeians, referring to the importance of the established laws and customs: 'Because all who try to change traditional customs and destroy the old political order are hostile and enemies of the *polis*.'<sup>118</sup> He emphasizes that he is using his *parrhesia* against the plebeians and the tribunes to speak in favour of the common good: 'I will give an opinion opposed to that of the tribunes, using all my *parrhesia*, because this is beneficial for the common good.'<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.30.3-4.

<sup>118</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.55.3: ἅπαντας γὰρ τοὺς ἐπιχειροῦντας τὰ πάτρια κινεῖν ἔθνη καὶ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ πολιτεύματος τὸν ἀρχαῖον διαφθεῖρειν ἀλλοτρίους καὶ πολεμίους εἶναι τῆς πόλεως.

<sup>119</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 11.56.5: ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν τὴν ἐναντιουμένην γνώμην τοῖς δημάρχοις ἀποδείξομαι πάσῃ τῇ παρρησίᾳ χρώμενος,—τουτὶ γὰρ τῷ κοινῷ συμφέρει;

### 3.4.3. Ambiguous and negative evaluations of *parrhesia*

Interestingly, this use of *parrhesia* as an exclusive attribute of the patricians seems to be problematized in a discussion on a speech given by Coriolanus in the senate. This is a key part of the story about Coriolanus, since it is this speech that became the reason for his trial. In the speech he vehemently opposes handing out corn to the plebeians for free and he refers to the creation of the office of tribune as giving tyrannical power to the plebeians. He accuses them of planning to take away the possibility for free speech and he asks his audience: ‘What other name should sensible men give to this constitution than the one that is true and that all of you would agree with: a tyranny? And if we are living in a tyranny not of one man, but of the entire populace, what then is the difference?’.<sup>120</sup> At first glance, Coriolanus’ words seem to be quite similar to what we have seen elsewhere. He speaks to oppose the plebeians and characterizes measures to give them more power as unjust and against the established laws. Without explicitly mentioning the word *parrhesia*, he also emphasizes that a tyranny will take away the possibility for both speaking and acting as free men.

In general, when the speaker is of high social status and uses his *parrhesia* to speak negatively about the rights of the *demos*, it is considered an expression of the speaker’s status as free man and is thus evaluated positively– at least by his peers. However, Dionysius’ account of Coriolanus’ speech suggests that readers of the *Roman Antiquities* are not necessarily asked to have the same appreciation for Coriolanus’ words and appeals to *eleutheria*. Dionysius describes Coriolanus and his supporters as being *ὀλιγαρχικότεροι* (strongly oligarchical) and characterizes Coriolanus’ way of speaking as direct and bold (*ἄντικρυς καὶ θρασέως*).<sup>121</sup> Especially this last word occurs more often in cases where *parrhesia* is used in a negative sense.<sup>122</sup>

Furthermore, it is clear that by some – namely the people who sympathize with the plebeians – Coriolanus’ speech is not qualified as *parrhesia* or *eleutheria*, but simply as madness (*mania*), while the majority of the senators judges it to be good use of *parrhesia*.<sup>123</sup> A little further in the narrative, Dionysius emphasizes the difference of opinion between the patricians and the plebeians:

οἱ μὲν γὰρ πατρίκιοι κράτιστον ἀνδρῶν λέγοντες ἐπήνουν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῇ παρρησίᾳ καὶ μόνον ἀπέφαινον ἐξ ἀπάντων σφῶν ἐλεύθερον, ὃς οὔτε πολεμίων ἔδειξεν ἐπιόντων ὄχλον οὔτε πολιτῶν αὐθάδεις καὶ παρανόμους ἐκολάκευσεν ὀρμάς· οἱ δὲ δημοτικοὶ

---

<sup>120</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.22.2: τί προσῆκεν ὄνομα θέσθαι τῇ δυναστείᾳ ταύτῃ τοὺς νοῦν ἔχοντας ἕτερον ἢ τοῦθ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀληθῆς καὶ πάντες ἂν ὁμολογήσαιτε, τυραννίδα; εἰ δ’ οὐχ ὑφ’ ἐνὸς ἀνδρός, ἀλλ’ ὑφ’ ὅλου τυραννόμεθα δήμου, τί τοῦτο διαφέρει;

<sup>121</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.20.4.; 7.21.1.

<sup>122</sup> See for example Euripides’ *Orestes* v. 903, where a demagogic orator is characterized as being ‘a man with no check on his tongue, strong in his brashness, relying on noise from the crowd and the obtuse license of his tongue; *καπὶ τῷδ’ ἀνίσταται/ἀνήρ τις ἄθυρόγλωσσος, ἰσχύων θράσει/ [..] ἠναγκασμένος/ θορύβῳ τε πίσυρος κάμαθεῖ παρρησίᾳ* (Sluiter/Rosen (2004), 4-5); For the *Roman Antiquities*, see 4.29.6. where Tullia convinces Tarquinius to kill her father: ἐρῶ δὴ μετὰ παρρησίας, καὶ εἴ με φήσεις θρασεῖαν/ ‘I will speak with *parrhesia*, even if you call me insolent.’

<sup>123</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.25.2. *μανίαν τ’ ἀπέφαινον αὐτοῦ τὴν συμβουλήν, οὐ παρρησίαν οὐδὲ ἐλευθερίαν*, ‘and it seemed to them that his advice was madness, not *parrhesia* or *eleutheria*’.

δυσανασχετοῦντες ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνειδισμοῖς βαρὺν καὶ πικρὸν καὶ πολεμίων ἀπάντων ἔχθιστον αὐτὸν ἀπεκάλουν.

For the patricians called him the strongest of men and praised him for his *parrhesia* and said that he was the only free man among all of them, since he had not feared a mass of approaching enemies and had not given in to the insolent and unlawful urges of the citizens. The plebeians, however, angered by his reproaches, called him offensive and bitter and the most hateful of all enemies.<sup>124</sup>

The patricians can clearly appreciate Coriolanus' speech. For them, Coriolanus' use of *parrhesia* is what makes him a free man (ἐλεύθερον). However, the plebeians want to put him to death. It is thus clear that the evaluation of Coriolanus' use of *parrhesia* is largely dependent on the social status of his audience. As in other cases, the use and positive evaluation of *parrhesia* is largely reserved to the patricians.

A rare example in which *parrhesia* is used by a plebeian against his superiors can be found in book 9:<sup>125</sup>

Ἀνὴρ τις ἐκ τῶν δημοτικῶν τὰ πολέμια λαμπρὸς, Βολέρων Πόπλιος, ἡγεμονίαν ἐσχηκὼς λόγων ἐν ταῖς προτέραις στρατείαις, τότε ἄντι λοχαγοῦ στρατιώτης πρὸς αὐτῶν κατεγράφετο. ὡς δ' ἠναντιοῦτο καὶ οὐκ ἤξιον χώραν ἀτιμότεραν λαβεῖν οὐδὲν ἡμαρτηκὼς ἐν ταῖς προτέραις στρατείαις, δυσανασχετοῦντες οἱ ὕπατοι τὴν παρρησίαν αὐτοῦ τοῖς ῥαβδούχοις ἐκέλευσαν τὴν ἐσθῆτά τε περικαταρρηῆσαι καὶ ταῖς ῥάβδοις τὸ σῶμα ξαίνειν.

A certain man from the plebeians, famous for his deeds in war, Volero Publius, had held the post of commander in the last military campaigns, but instead of leading the army, he was now enlisted with them. Because he objected to this and did not find himself worthy of a lower rank, since he had done nothing wrong in the previous campaigns, the consuls, who were angered by his *parrhesia*, ordered the *lictors* to take of his clothes and beat his body with their rods.<sup>126</sup>

Publius' use of *parrhesia* is seen as an offence by the consuls and Publius is consequently punished for speaking out. This is in line with the pattern that we have identified previously, where *parrhesia* is generally reserved for the patricians. However, Dionysius also tells us that the punishment by the consuls incites the anger of the plebeians, who start attacking the consuls and their *lictors*. They are supported by the tribunes, who also think that Publius was treated unjustly and want to get justice.

While the same incident is elsewhere only mentioned briefly, in Dionysius' account the incident triggers an intense situation of internal conflict (στάσις) and a fight about the correct form of government (ὕπερ τοῦ κόσμου τῆς πολιτείας ἀγῶνα).<sup>127</sup> While the patricians

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 7.35.2.

<sup>125</sup> See also *Ant. Rom.* 14.13.2.; this seems to be the only case in which *parrhesia* from someone with a lower social status seems to be evaluated positively, and the person does not face negative consequences. However, the person speaking is an inhabitant of the defeated city of Privernum, so this should maybe be seen as somewhat separate from the context of a Roman political assembly in which we usually find people speaking with *parrhesia*.

<sup>126</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 9.39.1.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 2.55.4-11.

respond to this by demanding the execution of the plebeians who attacked their *lictors*, the plebeians urge each other to advocate for their own liberty:

οἱ δὲ δημοτικοὶ συστρέψαντες αὐτοὺς κατεβόων τε καὶ παρεκελεύοντο μὴ προδιδόναί σφῶν τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν βουλὴν τὸ πρᾶγμα ἄγειν καὶ τῶν ὑπάτων κατηγορεῖν καὶ δίκης τινὸς παρ' αὐτῶν ἠξίουσαν τυχεῖν.

The plebeians, assembled together, shouted and urged each other not to betray their freedom, but to bring the matter to the senate and to accuse the consuls and to try to obtain some justice from them.<sup>128</sup>

It is interesting to note that the roles seem to be somewhat reversed and that the patricians choose a more violent solution, while in this case the plebeians are presented as advocating for *eleutheria* and justice. Thus, even though the consuls do not accept Publius' use of *parrhesia*, the text as a whole seems to give a more ambiguous message. In general, responses to *parrhesia* are dependent on the status of the person who exercises *parrhesia* and the status of those towards whom it is exercised. The evaluation of the use of *parrhesia* thus also seems to depend on its specific context, specifically on the social hierarchy among speakers and addressees.

### 3.5. *Parrhesia* and Augustan Rome

While writing about the Roman kings and the Republic, Dionysius himself composed the *Roman Antiquities* during the first decades of the principate of Augustus and given the political implications of his historical project, it is important to briefly discuss the *Roman Antiquities* within this context too.

Firstly, it is interesting to note that because *parrhesia* becomes more separated from democratic politics, a culture of *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* becomes more compatible with other constitutions, such as a monarchy. This also fits into Dionysius' Augustan context, because it tries to unite on the one hand the heritage of classical Athens and key features of the culture of classical Athenian oratory with on the other hand the political context of Augustus' principate.<sup>129</sup> Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities* shows how classical Athenian democratic heritage can be imitated without necessarily imitating the democratic constitution itself. The emphasis on continuity and the restoration of existing *nomoi* is also in line with the image of Augustan politics as more of a restoration of the old *mores* instead of the beginning of a new regime.<sup>130</sup>

However, we should perhaps also leave space for some ambiguity and not consider the *Roman Antiquities* to be simply Augustan propaganda. At times Dionysius seems to invite his readers to question the exclusive use of *parrhesia* by the patricians, as we learn, for example, from the mixed responses to Coriolanus' use of *parrhesia*. While Dionysius introduces the use of *parrhesia* as a way for the patricians to advocate for maintaining the established social hierarchy, he simultaneously seems to call this into question by showing

---

<sup>128</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 9.39.4-5.

<sup>129</sup> Spawforth (2011), 33.

<sup>130</sup> See also *Res Gestae* 8: *Legibus novis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi*/ 'As the initiator of different new laws I have brought back many examples of our ancestors that were falling out of use in our time.'

negative responses this generates from their audience. Cutting ties between democratic notions of equality and the use of *parrhesia* was for Dionysius maybe not as natural as it might seem. Furthermore, the general association between classical Athens and the Roman Republic – as is made most explicit in the *prooimion* of book 11 – also leaves open a more subversive interpretation of Dionysius’ historical project, because it implies a comparison between Rome under the Principate and Athens after it had lost most of its classical prestige.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

In his *Roman Antiquities*, Dionysius tries to present the political culture of Rome as a continuation of a Greek democratic tradition that associates public use of *parrhesia* with a state of *eleutheria* in opposition to tyranny. However, the use of rhetoric that is closely associated with Athenian democracy does not automatically mean that a democratic constitution is generally considered a preferable option. In this Roman context, democratic concepts such as *isegoria* and *isonomia* are mostly used in a negative sense and *parrhesia* is mainly used by patricians to advocate for adherence to existing *nomoi* and social hierarchies. However, this use of *parrhesia* is sometimes evaluated negatively and it remains rather ambiguous whether Dionysius completely endorses the strict separation between *parrhesia* and democratic equality that is present in the *Roman Antiquities*.

On a textual level, Dionysius thus has adapted the Greek concept of *parrhesia* to his account of Roman history, while this is mirrored on a contextual level by Dionysius’ own position as Greek adapting to the Roman context in which he wrote. Dionysius has produced a Greek take on Augustan historiography that shows how Greek concepts can be employed to describe key moments in the early history of Rome. However, stressing the connection with the Augustan context does not necessarily lead us to old interpretations of Dionysius as mere Roman propaganda. Instead it provides us with a more complex – and at times perhaps positive – image of Dionysius’ relation with Augustan politics. Our analysis of *parrhesia* in the *Roman Antiquities* enables us to appreciate how Dionysius puts his selective *mimesis* into practice and creates an interesting interplay between admiring classical Athens and adjustment to the political realities of his own time. The result is a dynamic reworking of one of the core concepts of Athenian democracy in a context in which democracy had become a rather complicated concept.

## 4. Between Monarchy and Tyranny: *Parrhesia* in Plutarch's Roman *Lives* and the Example of Cato Minor

### 4.1. Introduction

Whereas Polybius was the first Greek author to write about the expansion of Roman power into the Mediterranean and Dionysius wrote during the very first decades of the Augustan principate, Plutarch lived in a world in which the Roman imperium was at the height of its power. While individual emperors could count on critical or negative portrayals, the political system of the principate was well established and had become a generally accepted reality. In the previous chapter on Dionysius we have seen how in the Augustan period *parrhesia* loses its classical connections to notions of equality. This more hierarchical relationship between the person who speaks freely and their powerful audience is a development that we also see at work in Plutarch. However, as for Dionysius, classical Greek history was still important and functioned as a highly important frame through which one could describe and understand the Roman world as well. As Plutarch's comparisons of Greek and Roman historical figures in the *Parallel Lives* will show, speaking with *parrhesia* remained a highly political act and functioned as a framework to distinguish between monarchy and tyranny.

In this chapter I will take Plutarch's descriptions of the life of Cato Minor (95-46 BCE) as a focal point. Cato forms an excellent starting point to sketch out some general ideas about free speech in Plutarch. Plutarch portrays Cato as a free speaker par excellence. As one of the last politicians of the Roman Republic, Cato is presented as a vocal and eloquent defender of the Republican political system. However, Plutarch is writing about him in the context of the principate, roughly a century and a half later. What does it mean in this imperial context to write about the type of Republican politics and free speech that Cato represents? What does this exemplary free speech look like?

First I will briefly discuss the exemplary function of the *Lives*, which raises questions about the role of free speech within its didactical program and the context of Graeco-Roman politics that it presupposes with its audience. Then I will zoom in on the figure of Cato Minor and the characteristics of free speech that are attributed to him. My main source is Plutarch's *Life of Cato*, but I will also take into account the references made to him or to relevant ideas in Plutarch's other *Lives*. We will see that for Plutarch, exercising free speech is closely connected to his ideas – that we also find in other works – about flattery and the education of politicians. Consequently, in contrast to what some scholars have argued, also in this context using *parrhesia* can still be a highly political act, connected to speaking out for an ideal of political freedom.

### 4.2. Greeks and Romans: the *Parallel Lives* in context

*The Parallel Lives* is a collection of biographies, written after 96 CE and consisting of 23 pairs of famous men from Greek and Roman history. Generally, one pair is made up out of an earlier Greek life and a later Roman life, which are implicitly and explicitly compared. Plutarch's goal is not so much to write a correct history, but rather to present a biography

that can serve as a starting point for philosophical reflections on what it means to live a good life. In recent decades there has been a scholarly tendency to consider his work as one project and to deemphasize the distinction between 'Plutarch the biographer' and 'Plutarch the philosopher'; the *Lives* should thus not be taken at face value as historical sources, but they can be considered a part of Plutarch's broader philosophy, and more precisely, as the practical component of his moral and ethical theory.<sup>131</sup> The set up of the work and the use of different exemplary figures can also be considered part of a broader tradition of historical examples, which is closely connected to rhetorical culture and education.<sup>132</sup> This strongly supports the idea that the *Lives* form a practical part of the philosophical education of a politician. Plutarch mainly writes for an audience of elite Romans and Greeks who likely all in some way participated in the political structures of the principate. What place could free speech have in this context? Looking at the past in this way, like Plutarch does in his *Lives*, references to *parrhesia* raise the question as to how one can think about Greek democratic values within a system in which at first glance they would seem of no practical use anymore.

It would be mistaken, however, to think about the connection between Greek history and culture and its Roman context purely in terms of an opposition between Greek concepts and Roman political practice. First of all, Plutarch himself was inextricably bound up with this Roman political system. While Plutarch spent his life mainly in Greece, became a priest in Delphi and held various local political positions, he also obtained Roman citizenship and dedicated his works on a range of philosophical and cultural topics to his wide circle of friends with political positions in Rome.<sup>133</sup> In Plutarch's world, Greek and Roman and local and global were not so strictly separated.<sup>134</sup> This was probably also the case for many of the addressees of Plutarch's political ideas. A politician such as Plutarch himself was not only in contact with higher political officials, but also had to deal with more local politics, in which contact with the local *demos* still played an important role.<sup>135</sup> In his *Political Precepts*, which aims to give concrete advice to beginning politicians, Plutarch makes it clear that a good politician should not just be 'looking at the boots of the Roman magistrates above his head', but that he should also maintain a good relationship with the *demos* and strive for *harmonia* within the Greek *polis*.<sup>136</sup> Thus, reflections on communicating with the *demos* and on democratic practices were highly relevant for local Greek politics in the first century, and not just something from a distant Greek past.<sup>137</sup> However, while acknowledging the importance of being able to have good contacts with the *demos*, Plutarch was very critical of classical Athenian politics and underscored the

---

<sup>131</sup> Nikolaidis (2008), 6-7; Cooper (2008).

<sup>132</sup> Brenk (2008), 240-244.

<sup>133</sup> Plutarch likely obtained Roman citizenship through a Lucius Mestrius Florus, who was a close associate of the emperor Vespasian. As was customary, Plutarch probably took up the name of his patron, so that his full name became Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus; see Stadter (2015), 34-36, on Plutarch's relationship with Florus in the context of Roman patronage.

<sup>134</sup> Jones (1971), 125. "Plutarch's attitude to Rome is in a sense both Greek and Roman: Greek in that he saw himself as a Greek by birth and language, Roman, in that his interests and sympathies are bound up with the empire". See also p. 48 for a concise overview of Plutarch's Roman acquaintances.

<sup>135</sup> Teodorsson (2008); Erskine (2018), 256-257.

<sup>136</sup> Plutarch, *Political Precepts*, 813F: ὁρῶντα τοὺς καλτίους ἐπάνω τῆς κεφαλῆς; Dillon (2008); Desideri (2011); Catanzaro (2024).

<sup>137</sup> Oppeneer (2024).

danger of giving too much power to the *demos*.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, Plutarch seems to be not necessarily negative towards a monarchy and considers it a natural part of the universe.<sup>139</sup>

Plutarch's use of *parrhesia* can be seen in line with this continuous combination of 'Greek' and 'Roman' elements. On the one hand it retains connotations of freedom and opposition to tyranny. On the other hand it gains new significance in the political context of the Roman Empire, as it becomes a way to reflect on the difference between monarchy and tyranny, as the example of Cato Minor illustrates.

### 4.3. Cato as a symbol for free speech

Cato Minor – not to be confused with his great-grandfather Cato Maior (234 -149 BCE) – lived during the last decades of the Roman Republic. This period was characterized by episodes of intense civil unrest, during which multiple important generals and politicians tried to gain more power for themselves, among them Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Within this context, Cato is portrayed by Plutarch as someone who defends the customs and laws of the Republic and is strongly attached to the ideal of Republican liberty. His death roughly coincides with the end of the Roman Republic. Interestingly, Cato's Greek parallel and the rest of the collection of Parallel Lives seems to indicate that we should compare the end of the Roman Republic with the end of democracy in Classical Athens. The protagonist of Cato's parallel Greek Life is the 4<sup>th</sup> century Athenian general Phocion (402-318 BCE); a relatively unknown figure who played an important role in Athenian politics at the time of the Macedonian expansion in Greece. After the death of Alexander, Phocion oversaw the installation of a new political system that had the support of the Macedonian general Antipater. While this political regime has also been described as oligarchic by its opponents, Plutarch praises the new constitution and Phocion's role in it, because it brought about a period of safety and order.<sup>140</sup> After the death of Antipater, a riot breaks out in Athens and Phocion is sentenced to death by the *demos* in a chaotic assembly meeting.<sup>141</sup> Phocion is presented by Plutarch as a tragic victim of the unpredictable *demos* and as an illustration of the dangers of radical democracy. The point of comparison with Cato seems to be that both men were virtuous politicians who eventually fell victim to the political extremes of their own time, Phocion as a victim of the *demos*, Cato as a victim of Caesar's tyrannical rule.<sup>142</sup> More broadly, the Lives of Cato and Phocion form part of a broader cluster of Lives in which Greeks from the fourth century are paired with Romans from the late Republican period.<sup>143</sup> This evokes a comparison between the time of Phocion and the time of the late Republic as periods in which previously flourishing political systems – the Athenian democracy and the Roman Republican system – lost power and eventually disappeared.

---

<sup>138</sup> Erskine (2018).

<sup>139</sup> Dillon (2008); Jones (1971 [1972]), 101; Meins (2019), 25 ff.

<sup>140</sup> Plut. *Life of Phocion*, 29.4

<sup>141</sup> Plut. *Life of Phocion*, 34-35.

<sup>142</sup> Erskine (2018), 255-256.

<sup>143</sup> Erskine (2018), 248; The other pairs are Alexander and Caesar, Demosthenes and Cicero, Demetrius and Antony.

Just like his great-grandfather, Cato is traditionally associated with conservative politics and a sober lifestyle, in line with Stoic principles. According to Plutarch, he was considered to be a skilled speaker and an avid philosopher. In Plutarch's *Life* he is presented as a fierce opponent of tyranny and as someone who speaks out against several figures that threaten the Republican system by gaining more power for themselves; Julius Caesar is his most prominent opponent, but Plutarch already presents Cato as a strong opponent to tyranny – and as a potential tyrannicide – much earlier in his life. In 3.3-5 he refers to an episode from Cato's childhood, in which he encounters Sulla and bluntly offers his teacher to assassinate him.<sup>144</sup> Even though Cato – unlike Brutus – did not succeed in defeating Julius Caesar, Plutarch nevertheless associates him with Brutus by mentioning at the end of the *Life* that one of Cato's daughters married Brutus and that one of his sons died in the battle of Philippi, while fighting on Brutus' side.<sup>145</sup> The dramatic story of Cato's suicide in Utica at the moment of Caesar's victory in 46 BCE once again confirms his status as an exemplary opponent of tyranny.

Cato's main strategy of opposition is his use of free speech. Although his use of free speech often evokes violent responses from his opponents, Plutarch portrays Cato as someone who stubbornly continues to speak and goes to – sometimes rather extreme – lengths to be heard. Plutarch records an instance in which Cato spoke out against a proposed law to divide the provinces among the consuls, while no one else dared to speak. Plutarch recounts how Cato with great difficulty obtained permission to speak, spoke for two hours and was eventually dragged away from the rostra and the Forum. But Cato 'the instant that he was released, he turned back and strove to reach the rostra, shouting, commanding the citizens to help him'.<sup>146</sup> This situation is repeated several times, according to Plutarch, and eventually Cato is ordered to be put in prison, which is only prevented from happening by protests from the crowd present at the scene.<sup>147</sup>

Immediately after Cato's death in 46 BCE, Cicero was urged by Brutus to compose a eulogy on Cato, in which he praised his virtue and his political ideals. Of Cicero's eulogy only a few fragments have survived, but in one of his letters to his friend Atticus Cicero himself states that 'one cannot truly praise that man if one does not appreciate that he foresaw both our present situation and the future, tried to avert it and left his life so that he would not witness it'.<sup>148</sup> Cicero's praise was followed by Caesar's *Anticato* – probably written as a response to Cicero – in which Caesar sharply criticizes Cato and characterizes him as someone who was severely out of touch with the customs and morals of his own time.<sup>149</sup> There are indications that more texts were written about Cato, both by those who praised his Republican outspokenness and by supporters of Julius Caesar. Already in the period

---

<sup>144</sup> *Life of Cato*, 3.3-5.

<sup>145</sup> *Life of Cato*, 73. 3.

<sup>146</sup> *Life of Cato*, 43.3: καὶ οὐκ ἔφθη πρῶτον ἀφεθείς, καὶ πάλιν ἀναστρέψας ἴετο πρὸς τὸ βῆμα μετὰ κραυγῆς ἐγκελευόμενος τοῖς πολίταις ἀμύνειν.

<sup>147</sup> *Life of Cato*, 43.

<sup>148</sup> Cicero Att. 12.4.1: *sed vere laudari ille vir non potest nisi haec ornata sint, quod ille ea quae nunc sunt et futura viderit et ne fierent contenderit et facta ne videret vitam reliquerit.*

Corbeill (2017), 215; see Kierdorf (1978) for a reconstruction of the contents of Cicero's *Cato*.

<sup>149</sup> Berthold (1968), 130-140; Corbeill (2017), 217-221; For a critical edition of the fragments of Caesar's *Anticato* and a reconstruction, see Tschiedel (1981).

immediately following his death, Cato's legacy thus became the subject of heated political debates.

From the references to Cato in literature from the first century, it becomes clear that also after his death during the principate he continued to be associated with Republican *libertas* in general and with free speech in particular.<sup>150</sup> A striking example is the figure of Maternus in Tacitus' *Dialogus*, who has written a tragedy about Cato, but is advised to cut out certain parts that might be dangerous and upset the emperor.<sup>151</sup> This seems to implicate that also after his death, Cato was considered a political symbol that was closely associated with free speech. This made him particularly suited for Plutarch to use him as an exemplum on which to project contemporary concerns and ideas about free speech.

However, Plutarch's assessment of Cato's eloquence is not completely uncritical. While praising Cato for his skills as a speaker, Plutarch shows that Cato was not always effective and that he did not in all cases succeed in winning over his contemporaries. Plutarch seems to acknowledge that Cato was sometimes quite extreme and that it can be more effective to be slightly more moderate in order to appease to the audience.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, Plutarch also implies several times that Cato was somewhat out of place in his own time and was therefore not always able to understand his audience, possibly influenced by the more critical strand of the literary tradition on Cato, as exemplified by Caesar's *Anticato*.<sup>153</sup> Plutarch comments on this most clearly in the preface of the *Life of Phocion*, in which he says about Cato:

ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν Κικέρων φησὶν αὐτὸν ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Πλάτωνος πολιτείᾳ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῇ Ῥωμύλου πολιτευόμενον ὑποστάθμη τῆς ὑπατείας ἐκπεσεῖν· ἐμοὶ δὲ ταῦτό δοκεῖ παθεῖν τοῖς μὴ καθ' ὥραν ἐκφανεῖσι καρποῖς. ὡς γὰρ ἐκείνους ἠδέως ὀρῶντες καὶ θαυμάζοντες οὐ χρῶνται, οὕτως ἡ Κάτωνος ἀρχαιοτροπία, διὰ χρόνων πολλῶν ἐπιγενομένη βίῳ διεφθορόσι καὶ πονηροῖς ἔθεσι, δόξαν μὲν εἶχε μεγάλην καὶ κλέος, οὐκ ἐνήρμοσε δὲ ταῖς χρεῖαις διὰ βάρους καὶ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀσύμμετρον τοῖς καθεστῶσι καιροῖς.

Indeed, Cicero said that Cato did not win the consulship because he engaged in politics as if he lived in Plato's Republic and not in the dregs of Romulus. But I think that he underwent the same fate as fruits that appear out of their season. For just as one does not eat them, even though they are pleasant to look at and to admire, so Cato's old fashioned persona, which appeared after a long time among corrupted lifestyles and bad habits, had great fame and reputation, but was not suited for people's needs, because of the weight and grandeur of its virtue, disproportionate to the present moment.<sup>154</sup>

Interestingly, speaking with *parrhesia* is certainly a virtuous thing to do; however, this passage also seems to express a subtle critique on Cato's politics, as Plutarch here also acknowledges that Cato might not have been as effective in the context of his own time. Comparing Cato with fruit that appears out of season (τοῖς μὴ καθ' ὥραν ἐκφανεῖσι καρποῖς)

---

<sup>150</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 8.670, 'dantem iura Catonem', presents Cato as a lawgiver in the Underworld; see also Sen. *Ep.* 14 [14.] and Luc. *Bel.Civ.* 1.128.

<sup>151</sup> Tac. *Dial.* 2-3; Goar (1987), 60-61.

<sup>152</sup> *Life of Cato* 30-31.; *Life of Phocion*, 2.5.

<sup>153</sup> See for example *Life of Cato* 42-43; 52.

<sup>154</sup> *Life of Phocion*, 3.1-3.

has negative undertones and also seems to imply a dissonance between image and reality, as the fruits look good, but are not supposed to be eaten. Similarly, Cato might present himself as a principled philosopher in his speeches, but in the realities of his time this was not always as effective and makes him an anachronism. Additionally, while Plutarch notes the greatness of Cato's virtue, he also states that it is dissonant with the immediate moment (καιρός). These words assume extra significance in a rhetorical context, where it is seen as an essential skill for a speaker to be able to match his speech to the right moment at which it is given.<sup>155</sup> Despite Cato's virtuousness and *parrhesia*, this passage implies that his way of speaking does not meet this rhetorical standard. This image of Cato as someone who is slightly out of touch with the realities of his own time has seemingly also influenced modern scholarship, with Theodor Mommsen comparing Cato to the tragic figure of Don Quixote and others even classifying Plutarch's relative positive assessment of Cato's free speech 'an over-estimate of his ability'.<sup>156</sup>

In the remaining part of this chapter, I will examine several aspects of Plutarch's descriptions of Cato as a champion of free speech. As a starting point I will take the contrast between free speech and flattery; this has traditionally been used to analyze *parrhesia* in personal relationships, but I will argue that this motive is also highly relevant in political contexts and that for Plutarch speaking with *parrhesia* is an essential quality for a good politician such as Cato. Subsequently, I will discuss how Cato's use of *parrhesia* in his confrontations with several rulers. These situations indicate that speaking with *parrhesia* can be a way both to advise virtuous rulers and to oppose tyrants, as the confrontations between Cato and Julius Caesar illustrate.

#### **4.4. Political *parrhesia*: between a flatter and a friend or a king and a tyrant?**

The contrast between flattery and free speech is an important motive in thinking about free speech, especially in post-classical contexts.<sup>157</sup> Scholarship on the post-classical history of *parrhesia* and free speech in Plutarch, has focused on his work *De adulatore et amico* or *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*. The central question of this treatise is how one can distinguish between someone who flatters and a good friend who speaks honestly with *parrhesia*. This work has been influential when it comes to general ideas about *parrhesia* in the post-classical period as a personal virtue. However, this exclusive focus on only a particular part of Plutarch's oeuvre limits our understanding of post-classical *parrhesia* as more than a personal virtue and as a political concept.

An important attempt at a more 'political reading' of *De Adulatore* has been done by Van Meirvenne.<sup>158</sup> Van Meirvenne shows convincingly how central ideas about *parrhesia* in *De Adulatore* are also applicable in political contexts, and not just in the context of personal friendship. She argues that Plutarch attributes similar characteristics to a good friend and a good politician, such as choosing the opportune moment to speak (καιρός) and

---

<sup>155</sup> Sipiora (2002), 1-15.

<sup>156</sup> Mommsen (1932), 966: 'Es erhöht nur die tiefe und tragische Bedeutung seines Todes, daß er selber ein Tor war: eben weil Don Quichotte ein Tor ist, ist er ja eine tragische Gestalt. Es ist erschütternd, daß auf jener Weltbühne, darauf so viele große und weise Männer gewandelt und gehandelt hatten, der Narr bestimmt war zu epilogieren'; McDermott (1970), 65.

<sup>157</sup> Konstan (2012), 4; Fields (2020), 142-143. See also Cic. *Amic.* 88-100.

<sup>158</sup> Van Meirvenne (2002); Fields (2020), 142-157.

combining *parrhesia* with some flattering words when necessary.<sup>159</sup> The contrast between flattery and free speech can thus also have wide ranging implications in a variety of political settings. This is also what we find in the *Parallel Lives* and in Plutarch's descriptions of Cato.

At the beginning of the *Life*, Plutarch gives the following description of Cato's character:

λέγεται δὲ Κάτων εὐθύς ἐκ παιδίου τῆ τε φωνῇ καὶ τῷ προσώπῳ καὶ ταῖς περὶ τὰς παιδιὰς διατριβαῖς ἦθος ὑποφαίνειν ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀπαθὲς καὶ βέβαιον ἐν πᾶσιν. ἰσχύον τε γὰρ εἶχον αὐτοῦ παρ' ἡλικίαν τελεσιουργὸν αἱ ὀρμαί, καὶ τοῖς κολακεύουσι τραχὺς ὦν καὶ προσάντης, ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐκράτει τῶν ἐκφοβούντων.

From his early youth onwards, Cato is said to have displayed in speech, in expression and in other youthful activities a nature that was unchangeable, undisturbed and altogether stable. And he successfully completed his actions with a strength beyond his years, and being very harsh and hostile towards people who would try to flatter him, he was even more so towards those who tried to intimidate him.<sup>160</sup>

Speaking with *parrhesia* and rejecting flattery is not just an important characteristic of a good friend, but also of a good politician. It becomes clear that it is also a part of Cato's education, when Plutarch tells us the following:

περὶ πᾶσαν μὲν ἀρετὴν ὥσπερ ἐπινοία τινὶ κατάσχετος γεγονώς, διαφόρως δὲ τοῦ καλοῦ τὸ περὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἀτενὲς καὶ ἄκαμπτον εἰς ἐπιείκειαν ἢ χάριν ὑπερηγαπηκώς. Ἦσκει δὲ καὶ τὸν ὀργανικὸν εἰς πλήθη λόγον, ἀξιῶν ὥσπερ ἐν πόλει μεγάλη τῆ πολιτικῆ φιλοσοφία καὶ μάχιμον εἶναι τι παρατρεφόμενον.

He had become possessed with a certain passion for every virtue, but most of all he espoused a certain goodness, that is striving for justice and does not bend to clemency or favor. He also practiced a style of speaking that is appropriate for speaking to the masses, having the opinion that in political philosophy, as in a great city, it is fitting that there is a certain warlike element.<sup>161</sup>

As this passage makes clear, Cato is not only a diligent (Platonist) philosopher, focused on goodness and justice, but this also makes him a good politician, because he is someone who does not flatter the masses, but instead is straightforward and says the right things. The type of outspokenness that is here attributed to Cato is important both in political and in philosophical contexts, and apparently contributes to maintaining a 'warlike' element. This suggests that Cato's use of *parrhesia* evokes discussion and debate and thus contributes to a political situation in which opposition is possible.

However, Cato rejects flattering in such an extreme way that it makes him very unpopular with the people. Plutarch recounts that Cato was so virtuous that when he held the position of *praetor*, he forbade politicians from using bribery to obtain public functions.

---

<sup>159</sup> Van Meirvenne (2002).

<sup>160</sup> *Life of Cato*, 1.2

<sup>161</sup> *Life of Cato* 4.1. See also *Life of Publicola* 10.3: ὅσον οὖν ἐν ἀρχῇ καὶ πράγμασι μεγάλοις ἀγαθὸν ἦν ἔχειν ὅτα παρρησίαν ἀντὶ κολακείας προσίεμενα καὶ λόγους ἀληθεῖς, ἔδειξεν/ 'He showed how noble it is in politics and in important business to have ears that are open for free speech and for the truth, instead of flattery'.

This made him very unpopular with everyone; not only with the politicians seeking office, but also with the people, because 'if he took not only their financial reward, but also refused to bestow favors (τὸ δίδοναι χάριν) on them, he had made the *demos* both poor and without honor.'<sup>162</sup>

This can be understood if we take into account Plutarch's somewhat ambiguous idea that, while speaking freely is the most virtuous thing to do, it is not always the most pragmatic option, because the audience is not always able or willing to appreciate frank advice. Therefore, in some circumstances it is better to mix complete honesty and *parrhesia* with a little bit of flattery in order to retain some goodwill. Interestingly, Plutarch thus seems to be aware of political realities in which a certain degree of flattery is sometimes necessary. This more pragmatic stance could at least partially be seen as part of the more hierarchical political culture in the Roman Empire, where flattering could become an attractive option because speaking freely to someone with more power could have negative consequences.<sup>163</sup> Additionally, Plutarch's pragmatic attitude should also be considered in connection with his highly critical views on the *demos* and democracy. On the one hand Plutarch strongly rejects flattery in politicians, because one of the worst things of a democracy is that politicians tend to flatter the people instead of being honest with them. On the other hand, Plutarch also has outspoken negative views of the *demos'* capacity to act rationally and reasonably and acknowledges that it is sometimes necessary to use an amount of flattery in order to ensure the general welfare of the city.<sup>164</sup> While reflecting on the characteristics of a good politician, he states in the introduction of the *Life of Phocion*:

οὕτως ἄρα τῆς πολιτείας ὁ μὲν ὀρθὸς ἄγαν καὶ πρὸς ἅπαντα τοῖς δημοτικοῖς ἀντιβαίνων τόνος ἀπιηνῆς καὶ σκληρός, ὥσπερ αὖ πάλιν ἐπισφαλὲς καὶ κάταντες τὸ συνεφελκόμενον οἷς ἀμαρτάνουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ συνεπιρρέπον· ἢ δ' ἀνθυπείκουσα πειθομένοις καὶ διδοῦσα τὸ πρὸς χάριν, εἴτ' ἀπαιτοῦσα τὸ συμφέρον ἐπιστασία καὶ κυβέρνησις ἀνθρώπων, πολλὰ πρῶως καὶ χρησίμως ὑπουργούντων, εἰ μὴ πάντα δεσποτικῶς καὶ βιαίως ἄγοιντο, σωτήριος, ἐργώδης δὲ καὶ χαλεπὴ καὶ τὸ σεμνὸν ἔχουσα τῷ ἐπεικεῖ δύσμεικτον.

And just as leading a city too strictly and against all the wishes of the people is a rough and cruel course, so it is similarly dangerous and pointless to follow or tolerate the mistakes of the masses. The best government and authority over people listens to those who obey and gives them something pleasing, then asks in return a contribution; and they will gently and aptly help them in many ways, if these things are not done despotically or violently. Then this type of government can be secure, but it is also troublesome and difficult and has a type of authority and gentleness that is difficult to combine.<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> *Life of Cato*, 49.5.: εἰ μὴ μόνον λαβεῖν μισθόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ δίδοναι χάριν αὐτοῦς ἀφηρημένος, ἄπορον καὶ ἄτιμον ὁμοῦ τὸν δῆμον πεποίηκε.

<sup>163</sup> Konstan (2012), 4.

<sup>164</sup> Erskine (2018), 243-246; See also a passage from Plut. *Solon* 5, in which the Scythian Anacharsis remarks that 'among the Greeks, the wise men pleaded causes, but the fools decided them' (ὅτι λέγουσι μὲν οἱ σοφοὶ παρ' Ἑλλήσι, κρίνουσι δὲ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς).

<sup>165</sup> *Life of Phocion*, 2.4-5.

Plutarch considers it an important task of the politician to control the *demos* and he acknowledges that a moderate amount of flattery can be an effective instrument to do so. On the one hand Plutarch thus sees the ability to speak with *parrhesia* as an essential virtue of good politicians such as Cato. On the other hand he also recognizes that the circumstances in which politicians find themselves can make it difficult and even dangerous to stick to this ideal. The conclusion seems to be that one should ideally find a middle way between flattery and extreme frankness.<sup>166</sup>

#### 4.5. Speaking to kings and tyrants

Besides being able to speak with *parrhesia*, it also becomes important for a politician – and more specifically for rulers – to be able to accept and appreciate *parrhesia*. In Plutarch we find many scenes in which a (philosophical) adviser uses *parrhesia* to address and educate a ruler. The ruler, who is typically on the receiving end of this *parrhesia*, should ideally recognize the advice that is given to him. This scene goes back to older existing motives, such as the famous scene between Solon and Croesus that we find in Herodotus. However, the interactions between rulers and their advisors seem to have become extra relevant in Plutarch's own time, in which this scene and the figure of Solon came to function as a model for contemporary philosophical advisors in approaching and conversing with rulers.<sup>167</sup> *Parrhesia* is considered to be an essential quality for this type of advisor, not only in order to educate the ruler, but also to oppose politicians when their power become tyrannical. This is aptly illustrated in the *Life of Solon*, where Plutarch describes Solon as the only one of the Athenians who dares to speak out against the tyrant Peisistratos.<sup>168</sup>

This does not necessarily need to imply that Plutarch's ideas only apply to interactions with emperors and kings; we could probably assume that for Plutarch's audience this could also be more generally applied to interactions in which there is a power imbalance and the one person is above the other in the political hierarchy.

The importance of a philosophical education for a politician is widely acknowledged, but it is obviously very fitting within Plutarch's Platonist philosophy.<sup>169</sup> An adviser who exercises *parrhesia* plays a crucial role within this philosophical education. Cato is recurrently portrayed in the role of the adviser who uses *parrhesia* to share his wisdom with others. One typical example is the interaction between Cato and Ptolemy XII of Egypt:

---

<sup>166</sup> According to Demetrius *On Style*, 294, this middle way can be called 'figured speech'. See also Ahl (1984) on figured speech.

<sup>167</sup> Klooster (2018), esp. 259-261.

<sup>168</sup> *Life of Solon*, 30.3.

<sup>169</sup> A very explicit reference to this can be found in the Comparison between Demosthenes and Cicero, 3.4: ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ τῇ Ῥώμῃ λόγῳ μὲν ἀποδειχθεὶς ὑπατος, ἐξουσίαν δὲ λαβὼν αὐτοκράτορος καὶ δικτάτορος ἐπὶ τοὺς περὶ Κατιλίαν, ἐμαρτύρησεν ἅμα τῷ Πλάτωνι μαντευομένῳ παῦλαν ἔξιν κακῶν τὰς πόλεις, ὅταν εἰς ταῦτὸ δυνάμεις τε μεγάλη καὶ φρόνησις ἕκ τινος τύχης χρηστῆς ἀπαντήσῃ μετὰ δικαιοσύνης. 'And when in Rome itself he [Cicero] was made consul in name, and had taken the power of a dictator and sole ruler against Catiline's supporters, he witnessed the truth of Plato's prophecy that cities would be free from bad things, when in one and the same person, by some happy fortune, great power and wisdom will be combined with justice.'

ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ διαλέγεσθαι περὶ τῶν καθ' αὐτὸν ἀρξάμενος ἠκροάσατο λόγων νοῦν πολλὸν ἐχόντων καὶ παρρησίαν,[...], οἷον ἐκ μανίας τινὸς ἢ παρακοπῆς ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων ἔμφρων καθιστάμενος, καὶ κατανοῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὥρμησε μὲν χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἐκείνου λογισμοῖς, ἀνατραπεῖς δ' ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων αὐθις, ἅμα τῷ πρῶτον ἐν Ῥώμῃ γενέσθαι καὶ θύραις ἐνὸς ἄρχοντος προσελθεῖν ἔστενε τὴν αὐτοῦ κακοβουλίαν, ὡς οὐκ ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ λόγων, θεοῦ δὲ μαντείας καταφρονήσας.

But after Ptolemy had started to talk about his situation, he heard an argument spoken with much wisdom and *parrhesia*, [...], and he was brought to his senses by the words, as if cured from a type of madness or delirium, and after he understood the truth and intelligence of the man, he was eager to use his suggestions, but his friends talked him out of it again, and just when he arrived in Rome and came to the door of a magistrate he lamented his own misjudgment, as he seemed to have ignored not the words of a good man, but the prophecy of a god.<sup>170</sup>

While Cato seems to be the perfect frank adviser, Ptolemy does not listen to him and only later recognizes the value of Cato's advice. Another remarkable aspect of this passage is its description of the strong effect of *parrhesia*, that is said to cure Ptolemy's delirious state or *mania*. At the end, when Ptolemy realizes that Cato's words were correct, they are even compared to the prophecy of a god (θεοῦ δὲ μαντείας). The fact that μαντεία often refers to the words of an oracle – something that Plutarch as a Delphic priest surely was well aware of – seems especially relevant in this context, because just like Cato's words here, the true meaning of an oracle is often not properly understood or ignored. Being able to understand and appreciate *parrhesia* is thus an important characteristic of a well-educated ruler.<sup>171</sup>

However, more often than not rulers cannot appreciate Cato's advice or they even forbid him to speak with *parrhesia*. Rulers who take away or dismiss *parrhesia* are generally considered to be tyrants. In these cases, *parrhesia* becomes a crucial way to oppose tyranny and defend political freedom. This association of using *parrhesia* with an amount of political freedom is also present in the *Life of Cato*. Besides being portrayed as a typical free speaker, Cato is presented as a defender of liberty, mainly in connection with the growing influence of Julius Caesar, who is often portrayed as a tyrant who is taking away the possibility for *parrhesia*:

ὁ Καῖσαρ ἄλλον εἰσέφερε νόμον, τὴν Καμπανίαν σχεδὸν ὅλην προσκατανέμοντα τοῖς ἀπόροις καὶ πένησιν. ἀντέλεγε δὲ οὐδεὶς πλὴν τοῦ Κάτωνος, καὶ τοῦτον ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος ὁ Καῖσαρ εἶλκεν εἰς δεσμοπήριον, οὐδὲν τι μᾶλλον ὑφιέμενον τῆς παρρησίας, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ βαδίζειν ἅμα περὶ τοῦ νόμου διαλεγόμενον καὶ παραινόμενον παύσασθαι τοιαῦτα πολιτευομένους.

Caesar introduced another law, which demanded that almost the whole of Campania be divided among the poor and needy. No one argued against this, except Cato, and Caesar dragged him from the speaker's platform to prison; rather than

---

<sup>170</sup> *Life of Cato*, 35.4-5.

<sup>171</sup> For other examples of similar scenes involving Cato, see also *Life of Cato* 10.7; 60.3; 67.3; *Life of Pompey*, 44.2.

giving up any of his *parrhesia*, Cato continued arguing about the law while walking and encouraged the citizens to put a halt to the situation.<sup>172</sup>

Cato's use of *parrhesia* thus comes with great personal risks and he is punished and imprisoned for his opposition against Caesar. The risks of speaking out against tyrants here acquires a strong physical dimension, as the Greek implies that Caesar himself actively dragged (εἴλκεν) Cato down from the rostra and put him in prison. As this highly immersive passage makes clear, people with tyrannical aspirations, such as Julius Caesar, often try to repress and punish people who speak with *parrhesia*, which can make it a dangerous act in such situations. That Cato nevertheless continues to speak out contributes therefore to his exemplary status.

Caesar eventually decides not to persecute Cato, but he does succeed in bribing the people to give him the proconsulship of Illyria and Gaul. As a response, Cato warns the people by saying that 'they themselves by their own votes were establishing a tyrant in their city'.<sup>173</sup> In what follows – especially after the outbreak of the Civil War in 49 BCE - Cato repeatedly refers to Caesar's growing political power as a 'tyranny' and considers himself to be fighting for liberty.<sup>174</sup> When Caesar has almost won, and Cato has retreated to the city of Utica, he appoints himself as leader of the people who are willing to fight Caesar's approaching army. Plutarch recounts Cato's speech as follows:<sup>175</sup>

ισταμένων δὲ πρὸς τὰ δεινὰ καὶ δεχομένων τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐλευθερίας κίνδυνον, οὐκ ἐπαινεσόμενος μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ θαυμασόμενος τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ παρέξων ἑαυτὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ συναγωνιζόμενον, ἄχρι οὗ τὴν ἐσχάτην τύχην τῆς πατρίδος ἐξελέγξωσιν, ἢν οὐκ Ἴτύκην οὐδ' Ἀδρούμητον οὔσαν, ἀλλὰ Ῥώμην [...].

if they would face the terrible things and accept danger in defense of their freedom, he would not only praise them, but he would also admire their virtue and make himself their leader and fellow soldier, until they had fully tested the fortune of their fatherland, which was not Utica, nor Adrumetum, but Rome [...].<sup>176</sup>

Towards the end of the *Life*, when Caesar has almost defeated his opponents, it becomes more unlikely that Cato will actually succeed in preserving this type of *eleutheria* for the Roman Republic – and obviously Plutarch's readers are already aware of this. Despite it being very clear to both people around Cato and the readers of the *Life*, Cato nevertheless continues to claim that he is victorious and unconquered by Caesar, because he does what is good and right.<sup>177</sup>

Cato's freedom seems to be of a Stoic, more internal kind. This is further emphasized by Plutarch's description of the hours leading up to Cato's suicide. Over dinner conversation

---

<sup>172</sup> *Life of Cato*, 33.1.

<sup>173</sup> *Life of Cato*, 33.3. ὡς εἰς ἀκρόπολιν τὸν τύραννον αὐτοὶ ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ψήφοις ἰδρύουσι.

<sup>174</sup> See also *Life of Cato*, 55.2; 58.4;

<sup>175</sup> He uses similar words in *Life of Cato* 21.1; 27.6; 41.2; 41.5; 54.4.

<sup>176</sup> *Life of Cato*, 59.5.

<sup>177</sup> *Life of Cato* 64; this statement by Cato is echoed by the people in Utica after his death in 71.1: μιᾷ φωνῇ τὸν εὐεργέτην καὶ σωτήρα καὶ μόνον ἐλεύθερον καὶ μόνον ἀήττητον καλοῦντων. 'With one voice they called Cato their champion and saviour, and the only man who was free and unconquered'.

Cato argues very strongly in favor of the Stoic dogma that only a good man can be free, after which a heated discussion breaks out:

καὶ μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον ὁ πότος ἔσχε μοῦσαν πολλὴν καὶ χάριν, ἄλλων ἐπ' ἄλλοις λόγων φιλοσόφων κυκλούντων, ἄχρι οὗ περιῆλθεν ἡ ζήτησις εἰς ταῦτα δὴ τὰ παράδοξα καλούμενα τῶν Στωϊκῶν, τὸ μόνον εἶναι τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἐλεύθερον, δούλους δὲ τοὺς φαύλους ἅπαντας. ἐνταῦθα δὴ, ὡς εἰκός, ἀντιβάντος τοῦ Περιπατητικοῦ, σφοδρὸς ἐμπεσὼν ὁ Κάτων καὶ τόνον προσθεὶς καὶ τραχύτητα φωνῆς ἀπέτεινε πορρωτάτω τὸν λόγον, ἀγῶνι θαυμαστῶ χρησάμενος, ὥστε μηδένα λαθεῖν ὅτι τῷ βίῳ πέρας ἔγνωκεν ἐπιθεὶς ἀπαλλάττεσθαι τῶν παρόντων.

And after dinner the wine brought much amusement and pleasantness, while one philosophical argument followed another, until the question came up about what are called the paradoxes of the Stoics, namely that only the good man is free, and that the bad are all slaves. After the Peripatetic made an objection there, as was usual, Cato interrupted fiercely, sharply raised his voice and continued his argument, displaying such an admirable power, that it was clear to all that he had decided to make an end to his life and free himself from his present circumstances.<sup>178</sup>

After this discussion, Cato decides to commit suicide. Plutarch makes it clear that Cato's death is intended to be consciously modelled after philosophical – mainly Stoic – examples. Shortly before his death, Cato talks to the Stoic philosopher Apollonides and the Peripatetic Demetrius and proclaims that he is going to 'find a resolve' with the help of the doctrines that they as philosophers adopt. While Cato remains calm and composed, the two philosophers do not respond but both start to cry. The implication seems to be that Cato is the better philosopher here – or at least the better Stoic.<sup>179</sup> Cato seems especially eager to follow the example of Socrates' death, and Plutarch mentions that he reads the *Phaedo* twice in the night leading up to his death.

However, as scholars have pointed out, it is not entirely clear whether Cato actually succeeds in imitating Socrates. As becomes clear from Plutarch's narrative, Cato's last moments were not as smooth and serene as Socrates' example. After attempting to kill himself with his dagger, Cato lashes out at the servants and the physician that rush to help him and eventually ends his life by frantically pulling out his own bowels.<sup>180</sup> It has been noted that Cato's Greek parallel, Phocion, actually seems to be a much better imitation of Socrates' serene philosophical death. Apart from their similar method of execution – namely by hemlock poisoning – Phocion remains calm and is 'admired for his calmness and greatness of spirit'.<sup>181</sup>

The account of Cato's death should be seen in a longer literary tradition of forced suicides, as exemplified for example by the wave of Stoic deaths after the Pisonian conspiracy, described in Tacitus' *Annals*.<sup>182</sup> Among them was also Thrasea Paetus, who wrote a (now

---

<sup>178</sup> *Life of Cato*, 67.1-2.

<sup>179</sup> *Life of Cato*, 69-70.

<sup>180</sup> *Life of Cato*, 70; Roskam (2017), 127-128; Pelling (2005), 115-116.

<sup>181</sup> *Life of Phocion*, 36.1: 'They admired the man's calmness and greatness of spirit' / ἐθαύμαζον τὴν ἀπάθειαν καὶ μεγαλοψυχίαν τοῦ ἀνδρός; Erskine (2018), 252-254.

<sup>182</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.59-16.21.

lost) work on Cato and was likely one of Plutarch's sources.<sup>183</sup> The important point of comparison here is that these suicides were forced by (tyrannical) authorities and contribute to the image of philosophers who live in a political setting in which their frank advice was dangerous and – euphemistically put – not appreciated.

As Cato also states before his death, his philosophical suicide is inspired by the Stoic dogma that only a good man can be free (τὸ μόνον εἶναι τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἐλεύθερον).<sup>184</sup> From this perspective, death seems a way to not compromise on morals and therefore an ultimate attempt to choose freedom in the face of tyranny. Towards the end, it becomes clear that under a tyranny, *eleutheria* and exercising *parrhesia* are made almost impossible. It can be doubted to what extent Cato should be considered successful in conveying a convincing image of the perfect Stoic. Nevertheless, as part of a tradition of heroic philosophical suicides, Cato's death becomes a dramatic but fitting ultimate attempt to preserve his own freedom. In line with his general presentation as a user of *parrhesia* and stubborn free speaker, Cato claims to be a free man until the very end.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

In the context of Plutarch's *Life of Cato*, speaking with *parrhesia* becomes closely connected to ideas about educating rulers and the correct behavior of politicians within the political hierarchies of the Roman empire. Speaking with *parrhesia* continues to be an essential quality for virtuous politicians such as Cato, both in interactions with the *demos* and in confrontations with rulers, such as Julius Caesar. Plutarch employs *parrhesia* and its frame of *eleutheria* and opposition to tyranny to portray Cato as an exemplary free speaker, who uses *parrhesia* as his main mode of opposition to Caesar's attempts to end the Republican system. The exact implications of these ideas for Plutarch's own context remain somewhat ambiguous; is the tyranny in question here simply Caesar's rule or could the term tyranny also be applicable to the Roman principate as a whole? Whether or not the Roman emperors should be considered tyrants or philosopher-kings depends perhaps on their ability to accept exactly the type of education on *parrhesia* that Plutarch is trying to give here.

---

<sup>183</sup> Berthold (1968), 134; Ker (2009), 54-56.

<sup>184</sup> *Life of Cato*, 67.1.

## 5. Conclusion

'Like freedom in general, freedom of speech is not negative, but positive, not about the barriers but the person, not about an absence but a presence. We protect free speakers because truth threatens the power of tyrants.'<sup>185</sup>

As this quote by the American historian Timothy Snyder implies, free speech is not simply a static ideal, but an active practice, bound to a changing framework of ideas and actively shaped by the people who practice it. Studying the continuous development of *parrhesia* can thus highlight its versatility as a political concept. From its origin in classical Athens, *parrhesia* was continuously renegotiated and adapted to specific contexts; although it was generally positively valued within a democratic framework and closely associated with ideas about freedom and democratic equality, the practice of free speech has also always entailed a certain risk. The later development of the concept in the Hellenistic and early imperial era is characterized both by continuity and by creative adaptation to new contexts.

On the one hand, this thesis has shown that (despite scholarly claims to the contrary) in Hellenistic and Roman times *parrhesia* continued to have political relevance through its close association with civic freedom. On the other hand, we have seen that different authors adapt the concept and interpret the practice of *parrhesia* depending on the particular possibilities for democratic practice and free speech in their own context.

Polybius explicitly distances himself from Demosthenes and democratic Athens, illustrating how *parrhesia* was adapted to the context of Hellenistic local politics. Writing from a local perspective during the Roman and Macedonian expansion, he critiques the Athenian conception of freedom. *Parrhesia* is presented as possible and important not only in conditions of independence and freedom from larger powers, but also in hierarchical relationships of dependence. By separating *parrhesia* from the context of Athenian democracy, Polybius sets in motion a development that becomes clearer in the work of Dionysius, who not only separates the concept from classical Athens but also applies it to a Roman context. As part of his argument that the first Romans were Greeks, Dionysius presents them as the active practitioners of *parrhesia*. In this context, *parrhesia* loses its connection with democracy and equality, as it is primarily used by elites to support existing hierarchies. At the same time, it remains closely associated with resistance against tyranny, as is illustrated by Dionysius' account of the reign of Tarquinius and the decemvirate. *Parrhesia* also figures prominently in Plutarch's *Life of Cato*, in which it is adapted to fit the context of the late Roman Republic. Plutarch presents Cato Minor as an exemplary free speaker, who uses his *parrhesia* to advocate against the repressive politics of Julius Caesar. Because of its intrinsic connection with political freedom, *parrhesia* here emerges as an important tool to distinguish between monarchy and tyranny.

Within these developments, it is possible to identify important continuities between *parrhesia* in classical Athens and *parrhesia* as conceived by the Hellenistic and Roman authors that have been discussed in this thesis. From Polybius onwards the concept loses

---

<sup>185</sup> Snyder (2024), 18-19.

its connections with democracy and *isegoria*, thereby turning into a quality that is applicable to Roman contexts. *Parrhesia* however remains closely connected to notions of political freedom (*eleutheria*) and in this sense becomes an essential tool to claim a degree of freedom, even under tyranny.

The lasting connection between *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* and the continued use of *parrhesia* as a political concept show that the chronological scheme constructed by Foucault and others is in need of revision. In the Hellenistic and early imperial world, *parrhesia* remained a multifaceted concept: not only in personal contexts, as has often been asserted, but also in its continued political relevance. This insight broadens our understanding of the history of democratic concepts and political thinking. In the Roman world, *parrhesia* is not just a way to distinguish between a flatterer and a friend, but also between a king and a tyrant. Reconsidering the development of *parrhesia* like this, as I have done in this thesis, raises exciting possibilities for further study, by opening up texts for the study of *parrhesia* that have thus far often been overlooked. As I have aimed to demonstrate by analyzing Plutarch's *Life of Cato* as a source for political *parrhesia*, it is worth to look beyond more philosophical treatises such *De Adulatore* and to consider a broader range of authors and genres.

As I have argued, the history of free speech did not end with Athenian democracy and free speech remained a powerful idea well into the time of the Roman emperors. However, the history of free speech also did not end with Plutarch or with antiquity: it went on in the age of modern democracies and continues even today. Throughout history, important political figures such as Brutus and Cato have continuously been reused and adapted for new goals and new ideals. And whereas authors discussed in this thesis found in the rhetoric of *parrhesia* a language that they could adapt for communicating their own ideas, the idea of free speech also remains powerful in our time and continues to be used for a variety of political goals.

Even though ancient free speech is different from our modern constitutional right, it could potentially offer inspiration: the ancient examples discussed here demonstrate an ideal of speaking the truth and accepting the risk that comes with it that can also be relevant for our modern times. Modern democracies know all too well the crippling effect on the democratic process that is caused by politicians that choose to flatter their electorate with easy solutions and simplifications, instead of doing the hard work of speaking honestly and explaining the complicated nature of problems and solutions. Free speech is thus not a static concept that is simply fixed in democratic constitutions and history books. It is a fluid, and sometimes rather elusive idea; rather than simply being part of history, it is created and shaped by those who practice it - and it asks all of us to take part in it.

## Bibliography:

- Ahl, F. (1984). 'The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome', *American Journal of Philology* 105, 174-208.
- Ando, C. (2018). 'The Political Economy of the Hellenistic Polis. Comparative and Modern Perspectives', in H. Börm and N. Luraghi (eds.), *The Polis in the Hellenistic World*, Stuttgart, 9-26.
- Berthold, H. (1968). *Cato von Utica im Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen*, Wroclaw.
- Bowie, E.L. (1970). 'Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic', *Past & Present* 46:1, 3-41.
- Braund, S.M. (2004). 'Libertas or Licentia? Freedom and Criticism in Roman Satire', in I. Sluiter and R. Rosen (eds.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden/Boston, 409-428.
- Brenk, F.E. (2008). 'Setting a Good Exemplum. Case Studies in the *Moralia*, the *Lives* as Case Studies', in A. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, Berlin/New York, 237-254.
- Catanzaro, A. (2024). 'Avoiding Tyranny through Education: Plutarch's, Dio Chrysostom's, and Seneca's Drugs for the Illness of the Roman Principatus', in K. Jazdzewska and F. Doroszewski (eds.), *Plutarch and his Contemporaries. Sharing the Roman Empire*, Leiden/Boston, 46-59.
- Champion, C.B. (2004). *Cultural Politics in Polybius's Histories*, Berkeley/Los Angeles.
- Champion, C.B. (2018a). 'Polybius on Classical Athenian Imperial Democracy', in M. Canevaro and B. Gray (eds.), *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought*, Oxford, 123-138.
- Champion, C.B. (2018b). 'Polybian Barbarology, Flute-Playing in Arcadia, and Fisticuffs at Rome', in N. Miltsios and M. Tamiolaki (eds.), *Polybius and His Legacy*, Berlin/Boston, 35-42.
- Cienki, A. (2010). 'Frames, Idealized Cognitive Models and Domains', in D. Geeraerts and H. Cuyckens (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, Oxford, 170-187.
- Cooper, C. (2008). 'The Moral Interplay. Between Plutarch's Political Precepts and Life of Demosthenes', in A. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, Berlin/New York, 67-84.
- Corbeill, A. (2017). 'Anticato', in L. Grillo and C.B. Krebs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar*, Cambridge, 215-222.
- Delcourt, A. (2005). *Lecture des Antiquités romaines de Denys d'Halicarnasse*, Brussels.
- Derow, P., A. Erskine and J. C. Quinn. (2014). 'Polybius: (205?-125? b.c.)', in A. Erskine and J.C. Quinn (eds.), *Rome, Polybius, and the East*, Oxford, 85-106.

- Desideri, P. (2011). 'Greek Poleis and the Roman Empire. Nature and Features of Political Virtues in an Autocratic System', in G. Roskam and L. van der Stockt (eds.), *Virtues for the People. Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics*, Leuven, 83-98.
- Dijn, A. de. (2020). *Freedom. An Unruly History*, Cambridge MA.
- Dillon, J. (2008). 'Dion and Brutus. Philosopher Kings Adrift in a Hostile World', in A. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, Berlin/New York, 351-364.
- Erskine, A. (2018). 'Standing up to the Demos: Plutarch, Phocion, and the Democratic Life', in M. Canevaro and B. Gray (eds.), *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought*, Oxford, 237-260.
- Evans, V. and M. Green (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics. An Introduction*, Edinburgh.
- Fields, D. (2020). *Frankness, Greek Culture and the Roman Empire*, London.
- Fillmore, C.J. (1976). 'Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 280:1, 20-32.
- Flenniken, E. (2025). 'Seven Million People Unite at No Kings Protests to Defend Our First Amendment Rights', *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*, via <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/seven-million-people-unite-at-peaceful-no-kings-protests-to-defend-our-first-amendment-rights> (12-1-2026).
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, Los Angeles.
- Fox, M. (2018). 'The Prehistory of the Roman polis in Dionysius', in C.C. de Jonge and R.L. Hunter (eds.), *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome*, Cambridge, 180-200.
- Frey, R. (2024). *The Theory, History, and Practice of Parrhesia*, Cham.
- Fromentin, V. (1998). *Denys d'Halicarnasse. Antiquités Romaines. Tome 1. Introduction Générale et livre 1*, Paris.
- Gelzer, T. and H. Flashar. (1979). *Le Classicisme à Rome aux Iers siècles avant et après J.-C. neufeposés suivis de discussions*, Geneva.
- Goar, R.J. (1987). *The legend of Cato Uticensis from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D.*, Brussels.
- Goldhill, S. (2001). 'Introduction: Setting an agenda: 'Everything is Greece to the wise'', in idem (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome*, Cambridge, 1-26.
- Gray, B. (2013). 'Scepticism about community. Polybius on Peloponnesian exiles, good faith (*pistis*) and the Achaian League', *Historia* 62:3, 323-360.
- Gray, B. (2022). 'Civic and Counter-Civic Cosmopolitanism. Diodorus, Strabo and the Later Hellenistic Polis', in J. König and N. Wiater (eds.), *Late Hellenistic Greek Literature in Dialogue*, Cambridge, 149-177.
- Grieb, V. (2008). *Hellenistische Demokratie. Politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Großen*, Stuttgart.

- Halliwell, S. (2004). 'Aischrology, Shame, and Comedy', in I. Sluiter and R. Rosen (eds.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden/Boston, 115-144.
- Henderson, J. (2001). 'From Megalopolis to Cosmopolis. Polybius, or there and back again', in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome*, Cambridge, 29-49.
- Hidber, T. (1996). *Das klassizistische Manifest des Dionys von Halikarnass*, Stuttgart.
- Johnson, W.L. and D.S. Richter (2017). 'Periodicity and Scope' in idem (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic*, Oxford, 3-10.
- Jones, C.P. (1971). *Plutarch and Rome*, Oxford.
- Jonge, C.C. de. (2008). *Between Grammar and Rhetoric. Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Language, Linguistics and Literature*, Leiden/Boston.
- Jonge, C.C. de. (2014). 'The Attic Muse and the Asian Harlot: Classicizing Allegories in Dionysius and Longinus', in C. Pieper and J. Ker (eds.), *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World. Proceedings from the Penn-Leiden Colloquia on Ancient Values VII*, Leiden/Boston.
- Jonge, C. C. de, and R.L. Hunter. (2018). 'Introduction', in idem (eds.), *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome*, Cambridge, 1-33.
- Ker, J. (2009). *The Deaths of Seneca*, Oxford.
- Kierdorf, W. (1978). 'CICEROS "CATO": Überlegungen zu einer verlorenen Schrift Ciceros', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 121:2, 167-184.
- Klooster, J. (2018). 'Solon of Athens as a Precedent for Plutarch's Authorial Persona', *Mnemosyne* 71:2, 247-264.
- Knoll, C. (2025). 'No More Trump!: Protesters Denouncing the President Unite Across the Country', *New York Times*, via <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/18/us/protests-trump-no-kings.html> (12-1-2026).
- König, J. and N. Wiater (2022). 'Introduction', in idem (eds.), *Late Hellenistic Greek Literature in Dialogue*, Cambridge, 1-35.
- Konstan, D. et al. (1998). *Philodemus. On Frank Criticism*, Atlanta.
- Konstan, D. (2012). 'The Two Faces of Parrhêsia. Free Speech and Self-Expression in Ancient Greece', *Antichthon* 46, 1-13.
- Langacker, R.W. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, Vol. 1. Theoretical Prerequisites*, Stanford.
- Leppin, H. (2022). *Paradoxe der Parrhesie. Eine antike Wortgeschichte*, Tübingen.
- McArthur, M. (2024). 'How to Name a Trireme', *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 119, 419-434.
- McDermott, W.C. (1970). 'Cato the Younger: loquax or eloquens?', *The Classical Bulletin* 46:5, 65-75.

- Meins, F. (2019). *Paradigmatische Geschichte. Wahrheit, Theorie und Methode in den Antiquitates Romanae des Dionysios von Halikarnassos*, Stuttgart.
- Meirvenne, van, B. (2002). 'Plutarch on the healing power of (a tricky) παρρησία. Observations in favour of a political reading of *De adulatore et amico?*', in F.A. Stadter and L. van der Stockt (eds.), *Sage and emperor. Plutarch, Greek intellectuals, and Roman power in the time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.)*, Leuven.
- Miltsios, N. (2023). *Leadership and Leaders in Polybius*, Berlin/Boston.
- Momigliano, A. (1971). 'Libertà di parola nel mondo antico', *Rivista Storica Italiana* 3, 499-524.
- Mommsen, T. (1932). *Römische Geschichte. Gekürzte Ausgabe*, Vienna/Leipzig.
- Mulhern, J.J. (2004). 'ΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ in Aristotle', I. Sluiter and R. Rosen (eds.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden/Boston, 313-339.
- Musti, D. (1978). *Polibio e l'imperialismo romano*, Naples.
- Nikolaides, A. (2008). 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, Berlin/New York, xiii-xviii.
- Oppeneer, T. (2024). "Speaking to the People in Theory and Action. Plutarch's Political Precepts and Dio of Prusa's Assembly Speeches", in K. Jazdzewska and F. Doroszewski (eds.), *Plutarch and his Contemporaries. Sharing the Roman Empire*, Leiden/Boston, 33-45.
- Papademetriou, K. (2018). 'The Performative Meaning of the Word παρρησία in Ancient Greek and in the Greek Bible', in P. Smit and E. van Urk (eds.), *Parrhesia. Ancient and Modern Perspectives on Freedom of Speech*, Leiden/Boston.
- Patterson, O. (1991). *Freedom. Volume 1: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, New York.
- Peels, S. (2015). *Hosios. A Semantic Study of Greek Piety*, Leiden/Boston.
- Pelling, C. (2005). 'Plutarch's Socrates', *Hermathena* 179, 105-139.
- Pelling, C. (2018). 'Dionysius on Regime Change', in C.C. de Jonge and R.L. Hunter (eds.), *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome*, Cambridge, 203-220.
- Raaflaub, K. (1985). *Die Entdeckung der Freiheit. Zur historischen Semantik und Gesellschaftsgeschichte eines politischen Grundbegriffes der Griechen*, München.
- Rademaker, A. (2005). *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint. Polysemy & Persuasive Use of an Ancient Greek Value Term*, Leiden.
- Renswoude, I. van (2019). *The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge.
- Roskam, G. (2017). 'Plutarch's Reception of Socrates', in A. Stavru and C. Moore (eds.), *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue*, Leiden/Boston, 744-759.

- Saxonhouse, A. W. (2005). *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*, Cambridge.
- Scarpato, G. (1964). *Parrhesia. Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*, Brescia.
- Schmitz, T.A. and N. Wiater. (2011). 'Introduction: Approaching Greek Identity', in idem (eds.), *The Struggle for Identity. Greeks and Their Past in the First Century BCE*, Stuttgart, 15-45.
- Sipiora, P. (2002). 'The Ancient Concept of Kairos', in P. Sipiora and J.S. Baumlin (eds.), *Rhetoric and Kairos. Essays in History, Theory and Praxis*, Albany NY, 1-22.
- Sluiter, I. (2000). *Taaltheorie en vrijheid van meningsuiting*, Oratie Universiteit Leiden.
- Sluiter, I. and R. Rosen. (2004). 'General Introduction', in idem (eds.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, Leiden/Boston, 1-18.
- Smit, P. and E. van Urk. (2018). *Parrhesia. Ancient and Modern Perspectives on Freedom of Speech*, Leiden/Boston.
- Snyder, T. (2024). *On Freedom*. London.
- Spawforth, A.J.S. (2011). *Greece and the Augustan cultural revolution*, Cambridge.
- Stadter, P.A. (2015). *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, Oxford.
- Stelter, B. (2025). "Anti-Trump protests cap a week of free speech stress tests across America", *CNN*, via <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/06/14/media/no-kings-protests-trump-free-speech-first-amendment-rights> (12-1-2026).
- Teodorsson, S. (2008). "The Education of Rulers in Theory (Mor.) and Practice (Vitae)", in A. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, Berlin/New York, 339-350.
- Thornton, J. (2020). *Polibio. Il politico e lo storico*, Rome.
- Trump, D.J. (2025a). *The Inaugural Address*, via <https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/> (12-1-2026).
- Trump, D.J. (2025b). *Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship*, via <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-freedom-of-speech-and-ending-federal-censorship/> (12-1-2026).
- Tschiedel, H.J. (1981). *Caesars "Anticato": eine Untersuchung der Testimonien und Fragmente*, Darmstadt.
- Vasaly, A. (1987). 'Personality and Power: Livy's Depiction of the Appii Claudii in the First Pentad', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117, 203-226.
- Walbank, F. W. (1957). *A historical commentary on Polybius. Volume 1. Commentary on books i-vi*, Oxford.
- Walbank, F.W. (1962). 'Polemic in Polybius', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 52:1-2, 1-12.

- Walbank, F. W. (1967). *A historical commentary on Polybius. Volume 2. Commentary on books vii-xviii*, Oxford.
- Walbank, F. W. (1979). *A historical commentary on Polybius. Volume 3. Commentary on books xix-xl*, Oxford.
- Whitmarsh, T. (2013). *Beyond the Second Sophistic. Adventures in Greek Postclassicism*, Berkeley.
- Whitmarsh, T. (2017). 'Greece: Hellenistic and Early Imperial Continuities', in W.L. Johnson and D.S. Richter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic*, Oxford, 11-24.
- Wiater, N. (2011a). 'Writing Roman History – Shaping Greek Identity: The Ideology of Historiography in Dionysius of Halicarnassus', in N. Wiater and T.A. Schmitz (eds.), *The Struggle for Identity. Greeks and their Past in the First Century BCE*, Stuttgart.
- Wiater, N. (2011b). *The Ideology of Classicism. Language, History and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, Berlin/New York.
- Wiater, N. (2018). 'Getting over Athens. Re-writing Hellenicity in the *Early Roman History* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus', in M. Canevaro and B. Gray (eds.), *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought*, Oxford, 209-236.
- Woolf, G. (1994). 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek. Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40, 116-143.

### **Image:**

Cover image: detail of an engraving by B. Barloccini (1849), 'The Secession of the People to the Mons Sacer'.