

Cicero - an Investigative Journalist

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Abstract

A great Roman scholar, Cicero was also a brilliant investigative journalist ahead of his time. By the Catilinarian Orations, as well as his speech against Verres, Cicero made not only one of the most beautiful, coursebook speeches, but also genuine journalistic investigations, using sources, means and instruments worthy of a detective. By exposing Catiline's *coniuratio* in the Roman Senate, Cicero thus made public his journalistic investigation, in the absence, at that time, of written or electronic newspapers, but having writing and words at hand. Like a fine political analyst, Cicero made public his investigation by the four memorable speeches in the Roman Senate, being a true advocate of the Roman state, as his speech ended with the arrest of Catiline.

Through *In Verrem*, the great Roman orator made an economic investigation, being this time a genuine economic journalist, collecting evidence and data, analyzing economic registers, thus investigating the route of finances etc., unmasking, all through the power of the spoken word, the corruption, embezzlement, economic crimes of Verres.

We have chosen as case studies these two famous speeches (*In Verrem* and *In Catilinam*) for shaping the image of this “universal journalist” that Cicero was.

Keywords: speeches, journalistic investigations, Cicero, *coniuratio*, corruption.

JEL: Z10, Y80

1. Introduction

Cicero was a universal man of culture. He distinguished himself both by his literary, philosophical, political work, and by his genius. He was a *homo novus*, a self-made man sustained by his own value at a time when Rome, his dear homeland, experienced political unrest, many fratricide armed conflicts, dictatorship, assassinations and social upheaval. “*O tempora! O mores!*” (Oh, what times! Oh, what customs!) was what this titan of Roman culture and politics lived. For his fellow citizens and especially for posterity, Cicero wrote about this time and social customs, he wrote like a real journalist who, without benefitting from the current mass media, used his talent and genius, rivalling even today the most redoubtable journalists.

For this study we have chosen, as case studies, *In Verrem* and *In Catilinam*, which even nowadays, after more than 2,000 years, remain standards of eloquence, the art of the word, in fact the art to impress through words.

2. Cicero, the journalist of Rome

Why was Cicero a journalist? This is the question that anyone who reads the title of our study may ask. We will demonstrate below that the great Roman scholar was not only a genuine journalist, but also a true founder of investigative journalism *avant la lettre*.

Thus Cicero falls within the major contemporary theories of the definition of a journalist, having first of all the qualities of a good reporter: “ideas and attitudes” (Randall, 2007, p. 29), and, like any journalist, Cicero had “passion for precision” (Randall, 2007, p. 30), he “reported accurately” (Randall, 2007, p. 32) the events of his time, had “empathy with his readers” (Randall, 2007, p. 33), had a steadfast “desire to win” (Randall, 2007, p. 33), recognized the “sense of urgency” (Randall, 2007, p. 34) in the facts that had to be disclosed before the entire Rome and had, first of all maybe, “character” (Randall, 2007, p. 34).

As a newspaper, Cicero used the Senate of Rome or the tribunal, giving one or another “fresh information about matters of public interest” (Randall, 2007, p. 55), especially since the Senate was the most important public institution of the Roman state, the Republic at that time. The classic of Latin literature gave the Roman senators not only mere information, but also real “news”, that is “something fresh, something that no one has heard of before ... something that is interesting.” (Randall, 2007, p. 56).

Like any journalist, Cicero had a “source”, “knowledge” and “synchronization” (Randall, 2007, p. 61) to inform his audience (his “readers”) and referred to the “context” (Randall, 2007, p. 62-63) of Catiline’s and Verres’ serious and harmful acts against the Roman state.

In investigating the actions of Catiline and exposing the corruption of Verres, Cicero made real journalistic investigations because he conducted “research”, investigated “details”, placed their acts against the general “background”, observed “the perspective” where everything happened, and in order to unmask them, he used “human sources”, the witnesses of the two men’s unlawful actions, as well as “printed sources” (Randall, 2007, p. 84-93), namely various official documents of the Roman state, to which he had access as a consul or lawyer.

The fact that *homo novus* did not just believe his sources, he “checked” everything, he questioned whoever knew something about any of the anti-Roman actions of the two, in other words he “interviewed uncomfortable sources” (Randall, 2007, p. 116).

In his investigation, Cicero proved to be not only a simple journalist, but an inconvenient investigative journalist by his “original investigation” that he performed in the two case studies we have chosen due to the ‘weight’ of the two characters in the Roman state, the former was running for the consulship (i.e. the top of Roman magistracies), and the latter aspired to the office of governor of an old Roman province (former praetor, which was a Roman superior magistrate), having therefore “high stakes” in his investigation. He disposed, due to his authority as a consul, of “secret information”, and as a lawyer and specialist in law, Cicero “was familiar with the laws”. As a man serving the Roman state, Cicero had or created numerous “contacts”, following “persistently” the thread of events in both cases. All these things make Cicero distinguish himself as an investigative journalist. (Randall, 2007, p. 170-187).

His brilliant talent resided in that he turned the two investigated cases in true disasters for the Roman state, through the “chronological narration of events”, by bringing and taking “eyewitness testimony”, he transformed the Romans, by the power of words, into “victims” due to the actions of the two: Catiline and Verres. The unmasking of their actions constituted the “decisive coup” (Randall, 2007, p. 189-199; Stănescu, 2015; Voinea, Negrea & Teodorescu, 2016) of his disclosures.

Cicero’s style, both in the Catilinarian Orations and *In Verrem* is not only the style of a man of letters, but also of a journalist (Randall, 2007, p. 231-259) by the “planning” he proved in his investigations, by the “clarity”

with which he presented evidence, but especially by the “vivid language”; he addresses the two directly, subjecting them to a stunning series of questions, thus showing “honesty”, “accuracy” and “efficiency” in his journalistic investigation, in order to reveal wrongdoing.

Why was Cicero also a journalist? Because he observed the “journalistic process”, a process “involving: 1. selection of facts and actions; 2. verification; 3. preparation of the plot; 4. presentation of information.” (Vlăduțescu, 2006: 101). This means that he selected the actions with the greatest impact for the Roman state, the politico-military conspiracy of Catiline and the economic corruption of Verres, he checked these actions himself, he made a show of his disclosures and presented the senators and the Roman tribunal with the most sensitive information for the Roman public at that time.

In this journalistic process that he started, Cicero used, both in the Catilinarian Orations (mostly) and *In Verrem*, two unbeatable methods, namely “conviction and persuasion” (Vlăduțescu, 2006, p. 13). Within these, he used three types of arguments: 1. “*argumentum ad populum*”, i.e. he addressed the Roman people; 2. “*argumentum ad indicium*”, i.e. he used evidence in support of his words; 3. “*argumentum ab auctoritate*” (Vlăduțescu, 2006, pp. 92-94; Vladutescu, Budica, Dumitru & Stanescu, 2015; Basic, 2015) by the fact that he was part of the Roman state authorities, either as consul, or as the former governor of a Roman province.

All these turn Cicero into a real journalist of ancient Rome, as he perfectly fits the journalistic pattern through methods, style, procedures, arguments, ethics, etc.

3. Case studies – Cicero’s journalistic investigations: *In Catilinam* and *In Verrem*

3.1. *In Catilinam*

For this study, we used the variant of *In Catilinam* translated by Aristotel Pârcălăbescu, and the variant of *In Verrem* translated by Daniel Ganea, in an edition coordinated by the great professor of Latin, G. Guțu (Cicero, 1973), not the Latin edition, for a better reception of the article, but especially for the recognition and prestige of the editor and translators of the coursebook speeches, the Catilinarian Orations, or the speech unmasking corruption, *In Verrem*. They are both genuine journalistic investigations, as we will demonstrate below, which increases their cultural and discourse value. In fact, we intend to also interpret them in a journalistic key in order

to demonstrate once again the universality and genius of Cicero, the great scholar.

In Catilinam (Pârcălăbescu, 1973) are actually four memorable speeches exposing Catiline's conspiracy. The acts of the plotters were unmasked by Cicero as a fine political analyst, and especially as a skilled investigative journalist. In exposing the conspirator and his organized crime group, Cicero supervised Catiline by the "night guard of the Palatine", seeking sources and information to monitor the meetings of the conspirators. Like any investigative journalist, Cicero was also a real detective, day by day, step by step: "Which one of us, do you think, does not know what you did last night, what you did the night before, where you were, who you called, what decisions you made?" (*Ibidem*:277). For more than 20 days Cicero makes inquiries, follows the wrongdoers, collects evidence to expose their actions, demonstrating that it is not only Catiline that conspires against the rule of law in the Roman state, but also an organized crime group, the actor of this famous *coniuratio*. Like any journalist, he brings the most appropriate arguments, i.e. "*argumentum ad populum*", demonstrating that, in fact, the actions of the conspirators are aimed against the Roman people; moreover, Cicero speculates the sensitivity of Roman public opinion, namely the fear of a new civil war after having witnessed two: "There arose in Italy, in the straits of Etruria, a camp against the Roman people." (*Ibidem*:279)

"*Argumentum ab auctoritate*" was fully used by Cicero in his journalistic investigation, because as a consul he had military powers, therefore the possibility of gathering information, some secret, from reliable sources, including the Roman troops, let us call them special, that supervised the republican order in Rome (it is not accidentally that the dictum *Hospes, hostis* –the guest is an enemy - is Roman). Through these militarized and truthful sources, Cicero monitored Catiline step by step, in order to collect evidence against him: "Well, Catiline, what else are you waiting for now, if night with its darkness cannot hide your infamous meetings, nor can a private house close between its walls the voices of your conspiracy?" (*Ibidem*: 279). So Cicero's technique is just his skill in gathering information, news, especially because in those days Cicero did not have the facilities of current media techniques. But he had many reliable human sources that were his eyes and ears

The amplitude of Catiline's conspiracy is proved by the unmasking the entire criminal group with paramilitary branches, but also with the involvement of foreigners, which turns this conspiracy into a true catastrophe for the safety of Rome, Cicero providing the Roman public

opinion with the ‘bomb’ of this news: “Can you deny that, surrounded by my guards that very day, by my watch ... when you were convinced that you could occupy the city of Praeneste in a night attack ... So you were in Laeca that night, Catiline, you divided Italy by regions, you decided where each had to go, you chose those who should stay in Rome and those who should go with you; you decided the districts of the city which had to be set fire to.” (*Ibidem*:280-281.) So he addresses Catiline directly, the initiator of the plot, the one who wanted to act so as to destabilize the country with a “gang of villains” (*Ibidem*:287.)

The second speech of the Catilinarian Orations focuses on the defamation of the conspirator, for Cicero is a gifted journalist and writer as well: “What a poison, what a gladiator, what a highwayman, what a paid assassin, what a parricide (killer of a person of equal status – our emphasis), what a forger of wills, what a crook, what a tavern pole, what a squanderer, what a debauchee, what a lost man.” (*Ibidem*:294).

In analyzing the causes that brought followers to Catiline in his infamy, Cicero makes a true sociological survey (proving that a good journalist is a good sociologist too), while dividing the followers of the most famous conspirator in the history of Rome (because of Cicero’s exposing them) into five categories:

The first category comprises those who are “stuck into large debts” (*Ibidem*:298) and for this reason they are easy to handle; the second category consists of those who “although burdened with debts, are still awaiting a dictatorship” (*Ibidem*:298), thus joining destabilizing movements against the Roman state; the third category is that of Catiline, that of “thieves and looters” (*Ibidem*:299), therefore the category of opportunists, ready for anything; the fourth category is “varied, mixed and ready for sedition ... those who never get rid of hardships ...” (*Ibidem*:300), a category of those with social problems, without any horizon and destitute, and the last category, the fifth is that “of parricides, assassins, of all villains.” (*Ibidem*:300). If after the two speeches, Cicero obtains the declaration of Catiline as a public enemy, in the third speech, Cicero brings witnesses and written evidence against the conspirator. The witnesses are some Gallic tribes, the Allobroges, who bring evidence of letters with the conspirators’ orders and also weapons belonging to the conspirators. By all these, Cicero won the Roman public opinion, for the role of a journalist, in Cicero’s view, is also one of defender of the fatherland. The journalist can make history by what he reveals, as he prophetically declared: “My actions, citizens, will live in your memory, will rise by your words, will last over time and will gain

power through the testimonies of history ... there is now a strong support on the part of people of good faith, which we have ensured forever, there is a great authority in the republic, which, in silence, will protect me relentlessly.” (*Ibidem*:321).

Cicero was also a war journalist, he waged “an endless war against the infamous citizens” who, “corrupted by madness, became the enemies of homeland.” (*Ibidem*:336.) The quality of the journalist as a warrior can be noticed in the fourth speech, where besides being a warrior, he is familiar with the laws, thus requiring in this position the exemplary punishment of all those undermining the Roman state, ruthlessly and without mitigating circumstances, because they are traitors of the Roman state, who wanted: “...to deprive us all of life, to destroy our state, to destroy the name of the Roman people, they must not enjoy life and the air we breathe even for a moment.” (*Ibidem*:328) Their crime is an attempt on *maiestas populi Romani* (sovereignty of the Roman people), this is why the journalistic investigations of Cicero were so extensive, documented and serious, since they were made for Rome “this city, the light of the whole earth and the citadel of all nations.” (*Ibidem*:330)

3.2. In Verrem

In the speeches entitled *In Verrem*, the subject of the journalistic investigation of Cicero, the Roman orator found the essence of Roman corruption, which he revealed in his speech as an advocate of the Sicilians, those who brought an action against Verres. This was the example of the corrupted politician, who served only his own interests, allied with those that he could use, during troubled Roman history, springboards for his ascension, who stole from the Roman public property, from the pays of the army, gave bribes, trafficked in whatever could be sold, reaching the top of Roman political life as praetor, later as the governor of Sicily, where he continued his infamous practices. But the Sicilians cannot endure the excesses of this character, they signal his actions in an action before the authorities of the Roman state and choose as a lawyer the illustrious *homo novus*. (Guțu, 1973: 151-154.)

In Verrem precedes *In Catilinam*, so we can consider that the journalist Cicero perfected his talent as an investigative journalist. Moreover, in the former, Cicero combines the talent as a lawman, (economic) investigator with that of a man of letters. By the lawyer’s skill and professionalism, he obtains a period of 110 days for collecting evidence in favour of his clients, but in 50 days he gets all the evidence, he finds all

appropriate witnesses and masterly supports his investigation, achieving the complete file of Verres' crimes. (*Ibidem*) The speeches against Verres were not delivered orally, as were later the Catilinarian Orations, they were written, so Cicero was a journalist for the written press, for Verres was convicted due to the witnesses and evidence brought by Cicero, the lawyer.

In Verrem contains five speeches: 1. *De praetura urbana* (On the praetorship of the city), 2. *De praetura Siciliensi* (On the praetorship of the Sicilians); 3. *De frumento* (On wheat – wheat supplies); 4. *De signis* (On statues) and 5. *De supliciis* (On tortures).(*Ibidem*.) In these written disclosures, Cicero exposes the entire criminal activity of Verres and the group of economic crime organized by him, for his own interests. The edition we consulted, it was Daniel Ganea that translated two of the speeches, namely *De signis* and *De supliciis*, which we analyze in our case study.

The investigation-speech *De signis* begins with the verb “say”, which offers precision and clarity, persuades and provides truth through disclosures verified by witnesses. Cicero reveals Verres' trafficking offences involving artwork, not only with the statues of Sicily (actually *signis* can also be translated as insignia, ornaments, etc.): “I say that in all of Sicily, such a rich province, so long conquered, with so many cities, with so many wealthy families, there was no silver vase, no vase made in Corinth or Delos, no gem or pearl, nothing made of gold or ivory, no statue of bronze, marble or ivory, I say that there was no painting on wood, no tapestry that he would not seek, examine, steal.” (Ganea, 1973: 155-156) This is how Cicero, the journalist, begins to expose the thefts of a Roman authority representative in the territory, who does not spare any state property, either public or sacred (in the temples of the province): “All the statues that we talked about ... were stolen by Verres ... from the sanctuary, he left, I say, none of them.” (*Ibidem*:158.)

Like any journalist, Cicero asks questions. His merciless questions use a vivid and rough language “what is this impudence? ... So many praetors, so many consuls were in Sicily in peacetime and in wartime, so many people of all kinds ...” (*Ibidem*:159.)

He reveals not only Verres' crimes, but also those of his entire organized criminal group specialized in stealing valuable things throughout the province: “You stole from Lilybaeum, ... you stole from Lilybaeum openly ...” (*Ibidem*:168) with the help of specialists “he took them ... with him to Sicily. After arriving there, with an amazing skill (you could call

them hunting dogs) they were sniffing and tracking all objects of art step by step ...” (*Ibidem*:165)

Cicero makes the criminal profile of Verres over time, revealing the problems of Roman politics of his time: corruption, bribery, extortion, influence peddling, “You who ... having given 300,000 sesterces to electoral agents, so that you would be proclaimed praetor, and 300,000 to the accuser, so that he would not interfere in your business ...” (*Ibidem*:172.)

The mission of the journalist is that of giving the alarm when state institutions skid, or as they say today, “the press is the watchdog of democracy”, so Cicero makes public the weakening of state institutions, because of Verres’ iniquities: “the reputation and prestige of the power of the Roman people are weakened, the hospitality relations are robbed and betrayed, the mischief of this man alienated from us all kings completely devoted to us and all peoples who are under their rule and command.” (*Ibidem*:173.)

The house of the person representing Roman authority in the province became the headquarters of organized crime, “the house where the misdeeds of prostitutes and pimps are swarming incessantly”, a group that trafficked in everything, especially with objects of art, statues of Roman deities from the temples of Sicily such as Diana, Mercury, Ceres, Juno, Minerva etc. which was a crime and news that Rome had to hear, for it was yet a republic, a democracy.

In his speech *De suppliciis*, Cicero first of all reveals Verres’ abuses, abuse in the service of Rome, against Rome, as well as the covering up of events by the authority of his office as governor, who did not provide any justification at the central level. Thus Cicero brings to light the weak action of Verres in the conflict with the pirates, the promotion of incapable persons in key positions, concealment of problems before the Roman centralized administration: “Nothing of course was brought before the Senate and the Roman people, nothing of which Verres wrote officially to Rome.” (*Ibidem*:206) The investigative journalist does not spare Verres of direct questions: “What did you get? How much or how did you get?” (*Ibidem*:207)

Moreover, Verres is exposed for having punished Roman citizens unfairly, for having humiliated the pride of the Romans and prejudiced the Roman state by “punishing untried Roman citizens” because “it is a mischief to put a Roman citizen in chains, a crime to beat him with rods, almost a parricide to kill him.” (*Ibidem*:239.)

The Republic with its values and laws was the deontology of Cicero, the journalist, therefore he did not bear that it was harmed by “That Verres,

old traitor of a consul, seller of quaestorship, embezzler of public funds ...” (*Ibidem*:232.)

Cicero ends his theatrical speech against Verres by invoking all the gods whose statues were stolen by the defendant, “acts of criminal impulse, impudence, bad faith, lust, greed, cruelty, let your judgment give him due reward.” (*Ibidem*:248.)

4. Conclusion

Cicero was not only a scholar, a great politician, a lawyer, *homo novus*, but also a true teacher of journalism, from whom the experts in the field have a lot to learn even today, especially as his means were talent, intelligence and the art of the word, and his deontology was the public good and his homeland.

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