

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this survey is on oratory as a spoken phenomenon, intimately related to politics and government at Rome. Its chronological scope is roughly from the beginning of the second century B.C. until the end of the first century A.D.; it has no pretensions to offer a guide to oratory in the later Empire. Its geographical focus is firmly on Rome, reflecting the overwhelming bias in our source material. I start with the occasions for oratory in Rome and turn then to the issues which arise from the process of turning a speech, delivered in front of an audience on a particular occasion, into a written text which can be accessed and enjoyed in private and at any time. I then consider some of the means by which orators of the imperial period explored different means of preserving their oratorical activities for posterity. In the final two chapters I concentrate on orators themselves: how they carried out their task, and reflected upon it, as adult practitioners, and then how boys became the next generation of orators.

The relatively narrow compass of the series has led to some omissions, even within the chronological limits outlined. There is less in the way of analysis of individual speeches than might be expected; texts have had to give way to performances. Moreover, this is not a book on Cicero; I have no intention of replacing A. E. Douglas' volume in this series.¹ And one consequence of shifting the focus from written to spoken is that Cicero is dislodged from the position of unquestioned pre-eminence he otherwise must hold. I have largely neglected the oratory of the second sophistic, even though its beginnings fall into the first century A.D.; this is with some regret, as the speeches in Greek which survive from the imperial period have as much claim to be considered as examples of 'Roman oratory' as do the two surviving examples in Latin from this period. But the overall environment in which these sophists were operating has its own set of codes and expectations, and I have been able to include only some brief glances at this area. But the previous volume in this series provides an excellent guide to recent work. Finally, I have made no attempt to consider the role of speeches within Roman historiography.

¹ Douglas (1968).

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Catherine Steel,
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