

Mos and res publica
Roman Historiography and Political Thought

by György W. Hegyi

Debrecen

Abstract

Mos is one of the most interesting concepts of our Latin sources written under or referring to the Republic. It appears with almost every author when they speak about the fate of Rome, the essence of Roman history or the characteristic of the Roman People. At the same time, however, it is much more difficult to define than the other concepts in similar context and of similar importance (for example: *auctoritas*, *virtus*, or *pietas*). This difficulty can be detected in the modern language translations and the textual analyses, too. It is certainly due to the wide and complex semantic field of *mos*, and, on the other hand, it can be explained by the relatively large number of the not yet explored elements in the Roman political thought.

The thesis takes two main tracks of inquiry: a historiographic and a socio-political one. The Roman historiographers not only presented *mos*, for example as the basic component of the censorian *regimen morum*, but they also used this concept when describing, among other things, the important features of the Roman history: it was *mos* they—primarily—resorted to when they wanted to capture the special features, the changes and the substance of the Republic's history. With a slight digression from the scope of research so far, one of the important elements in the investigation to be summarized below is that it distinguishes the historiographical use of *mos*, and with the help of this key concept it goes on to explore the Roman People's cultural memory.

The thesis aims to define the different meanings of *mos* and their interrelation by analysing the ancient *auctors'* texts. The important sources include: Cato, Plautus, Lucilius, Polybius, Cicero, Livy, Sallust, Virgil and Horace. That is, the investigation

primarily focuses on Republican texts since the most distinct layer of the rich meaning of *mos* is inseparable from the *res publica*.

The first chapters (I—IV) examine how past is depicted by the Roman historiographers and epic poets, in their vision *mos* is a basic component: successive events come to be organized into history by *mos*.

The next chapters (V—VI) examine the role of the concept in the political thought. *Mos* is the code determining the political elite's behaviour and way of thinking. And as such, it played a basic role in the stability of the *res publica*.

The VIII—X chapters want to show the relationship between *mos* and other institutionalized forms: *ius*, censorian *regimen morum*, *pompa funebris* and *lex*.

Finally, the last chapter (XI) examines the use of *mos* in a source which has a different point of view, in Plautus' *Trinummus*.