

Cicero as Advocate

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The subject of this lecture is Marcus Tullius Cicero's activity as an advocate. Cicero was the most renowned speaker of his time, and he acted as an advocate in numerous trials, many of which had a political background. When the accused had several advocates, Cicero was usually the last to speak, as it was believed that the last speaker was the most influential as far as the attainment of an acquittal was concerned. Cicero's activity as an advocate is illustrated above all by the speeches given for the defence of his clients. A considerable number of those speeches survive.

The lecture first touches upon the typical features of a Roman trial as well as the most important trials in which Cicero acted as an advocate. The most attention is, however, given to Cicero's speeches, their structure and the relation of their structure to Cicero's rhetorical theory, as well as to the methods used by Cicero in his speeches. In general, the only objective of a Roman defence speech was to attain an acquittal of the accused, whether guilty or not, and Cicero's methods were aimed at this goal only. According to what we know from the outcomes of the trials, they also turned out to be effective. In addition to concealing and obscuring facts – Cicero himself once boasted that he had “cast mist over the eyes of the judges” – he used a wide variety of other methods. This is illustrated with a few examples in the latter part of the lecture. One of Cicero's tours de force is the so-called dilemma, a situation in which the opponent is asked to answer a question for which Cicero offers two possible answers, both of them disadvantageous to the opponent.