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PAUL J. J. VANDERBROECK

Homo novus again

In her article «*Homo novus*: Un slogan de Caton à César?» (Historia 30 [1981] 22–81) M. DONDIN-PAYRE rightly concludes (52–53) that *homo novus* was not a political slogan during the late Republic. Another main theme of her article is a strong attack on T. P. WISEMAN's *New Men in the Roman Senate* (Oxford 1971). In a prosopography (54–79) Ms. DONDIN retains only nine out of WISEMAN's 79 *novi homines certi*. The reason for this huge discrepancy is DONDIN's application of a different definition of new men. Although her critique on details of WISEMAN's work and on some of his reviewers (e.g. 27 n. 26) is valid, I want to argue in this paper that, in the light of some recently published scholarly work, her definition of *homo novus*, at least for the Ciceronian age, is too limited.

It seems that there is a differentiation in the meaning of new men in ancient literature. There is no exact definition; the meaning depends on the context. As G. M. PAUL shows, Sallust used several different meanings of *homo novus* in his *Bellum Iugurthinum*.¹ The same goes for Cicero and Asconius.

Ms. DONDIN (39–47) argues that a new man was the first person of a family who attained the consulate, or who was of praetorian rank and highly *likely* to reach the supreme magistracy. She (70–71) removes Cn. Plancius (WISEMAN no. 321) from the list of new men, simply because he does not fit her definition. Let us take a closer look at the relevant passage, Cic. Planc. 67: «(*Plancius*) *fuit in oculis, petivit, ea est usus ratione vitae qua minima invidia novi homines plurimi sunt eosdem honores consecuti*». Thus, Cicero explicitly calls Plancius a new man, and there were more new men who had gained the same honors. Cicero elsewhere mentions these magistracies held by innumerable men of *an equal social status*: *quaestor, tribunus plebis, aedilis*.²

Another example is the case of L. Quinctius, pr. 68 (WISEMAN no. 351), whom Cicero (Cluent. 111) terms a *homo novus*. In order to fit him into her definition, i. e. that somebody was called a new man when he had reached the stage between

¹ G. M. PAUL, *A Historical Commentary on Sallust's Bellum Iugurthinum*, Liverpool 1984, 7. The relevant passages are: Iug. 23.6 and 63.7 (strict sense, i. e. consul of non-senatorial ancestry); Iug. 4.7 and 8.1 (newcomers to the senate); Iug. 65.5 (men of senatorial but not consular ancestry).

² Planc. 60: «*Sic igitur Plancius nihilo minus quaestor factus est et tribunus plebis et aedilis quam si esset summo loco natus, sed haec pari loco orti sunt innumerabiles alii consecuti*».

praetorship and consulate, Ms. DONDIN (40) postulates that Quinctius was considered a probable consular candidate. Quinctius, in fact, made an abortive attempt in 63 to secure the consulate. But nothing is known about a candidature of Quinctius before 63, and at the time of Cicero's speech, in 66, a candidature of Quinctius was neither likely nor certain. The only possible conclusion is that, for Cicero, Quinctius was a new man, because he was the first of his family to enter the senate and to become praetor.

Ms. DONDIN (76–79) convincingly shows that some of the *Fadii*, who appear in Cicero's works, are in fact *Fabii*, and that the T. Fadius of Fam. 5.18.1 is not among these. This exiled Fadius is comforted by Cicero with the words: «*propterea quod adeptus es, quod non multi homines novi, amisisti, quae plurimi homines nobilissimi*». According to Ms. DONDIN (79), Fadius was neither a noble nor a new man, and he had arrived at (*adeptus*) a certain position due to his wisdom or some cultural achievement. Still, it seems more plausible, considering Cicero's opposition of *homines novi* and *nobiles* in this passage, that Fadius belonged to the first group, and that he had obtained some political status (e. g. *honores adeptus*). This becomes the more likely, if we accept SHACKLETON BAILEY's identification of the Fadius of the letter with T. Fadius, q. 63 and tr. pl. 57 (WISEMAN no. 169).³

Next, there is Asconius 23 C on M. Aemilius Scaurus, cos. 115. Ms. DONDIN cites only part of this text: «*Scauro aequae ac novo homini laborandum fuit*».⁴ The rest of the text, however, is quite revealing: «*Possit aliquis quaerere cur hoc dixerit Cicero, cum Scaurus patricius fuit: quae generis claritas etiam inertes homines ad summos honores provexit. Verum Scaurus ita fuit patricius ut tribus supra eum aetatibus iacuerit domus eius fortuna. Nam neque pater neque avus neque etiam proavus – ut puto, propter tenues opes et nullam vitae industriam – honores adepti sunt. Itaque Scauro aequae ac novo homini laborandum fuit*». Asconius clearly distinguishes between *summi honores* and *honores*. In his point of view, patricians, because of their high social status, generally had no difficulty in becoming consul or praetor (*summi honores*; cf. Cic. *Sest.* 17), even if they were without talent. Yet Scaurus, despite his patrician status, had to toil like a new man, because for three generations none of his family had even attained one of the lower magistracies (*honores*). Indeed, there is no Scaurus known before Scaurus cos. 115, who had held any office whatsoever.⁵ This does not mean that there is a lacuna in our sources (cf. DONDIN 27); it simply means that Asconius is talking sense, and that he defines *homo novus* as somebody, who was the first of his family to obtain a magistracy *tout court*.

Evidently, more than one definition of *homo novus* can be found in the late Republic. A final example is the only clear case of a new man in Caesarian literature:

³ D. R. SHACKLETON BAILEY, *Cicero: Epistulae ad Familiares*, vol. I, Cambridge 1977, 350, and not 347 (DONDIN 78 n. 8).

⁴ DONDIN 66 text no. 8; see also p. 47.

⁵ See MRR, and J. M. FLAMBARD, *Q. Asconii Pediani Commentarii*. Vol. II *Commentaire Historique*, Diss. Paris 1974, 80.

«*M. Aquinius, homo novus parvusque senator*» (Bell. Afr. 57). Aquinius was Caesar's legate in 46. It is stated that he had held *honores*, and he obviously was at the beginning of his career.⁶

Ms. DONDIN provides an important supplement to WISEMAN's work by adding to the new men the first praetor of a senatorial family.⁷ An example of this category can be found in Asconius 82 C. He lists the competitors for the consulate of 63, and distinguishes between their social status: two patricians (Catilina, P. Sulpicius Galba), two plebeian *nobiles* (C. Antonius, L. Cassius Longinus), «*duos* (Q. Cornificius, L. Licinius Sacerdos) *qui tantum non primi ex familiis suis magistratum adepti erant*», and Cicero, the only one who was *equestri loco natus*. Asconius does not use the term *homo novus* for any of the above mentioned persons, but it seems that he distinguishes between patricians, members of a consular plebeian family, and two sets of new men: those of a lesser senatorial family and those who had no senatorial ancestry at all. The distinction implies that those belonging to the first set were less handicapped in their career than those belonging to the latter.⁸

Homo novus rarely occurs in ancient literature (DONDIN 30 and 70). Basically, it was a vague concept of social and political status, usually with a pejorative connotation. A parallel can be found in the use of the word *cliens*. Like in social status, Roman society knew a rich variety of interpersonal relationships, many of which can be put under the heading of 'patron-client' relationships. The occurrence of *cliens*, however, is relatively rare. Cicero and Atticus obviously were *amici*, friends on an equal basis. But when Cicero calls the people who escort a candidate during his campaign *amici tenui* (Mur. 70), he is speaking of persons who are performing an *officium* to their patron.⁹ One tactfully declined to use the word *cliens*, especially *vis-à-vis* personalities with social and political pretensions.¹⁰ The low frequency of the word *homo novus* might be explained along the same lines.¹¹

The interpretation of *homo novus* by modern scholars has been deeply influenced by the preponderance of the Ciceronian evidence for the late Republic.¹² Only Cicero turned it into a political slogan (Cf. DONDIN 31 and 33). His low an-

⁶ DONDIN (51) mentions this case as the only exception to her definition.

⁷ DONDIN 43–47. WISEMAN excluded this category in his definition, *op. cit.*, 1. See now K. HOPKINS, *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History* Vol. 2, Cambridge 1983, 40.

⁸ Cf. P. A. BRUNT, *Nobilitas and Novitas*, JRS 72 (1982), 11 and 13. DONDIN (41–42) cites the passage of Asconius, but does not use it in her discussion of this category of new men.

⁹ On salutation by clients during the Republic, see R. P. SALLER, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire*, Cambridge 1982, 11 and 128–129. Another example: Cic. Pis. 25 on Cicero's *amici* in Capua, who called him their *patronus*.

¹⁰ Cic. Off. II.69. On this see SALLER, *op. cit.* n. 9, 7–15.

¹¹ On the importance and the diversity in meaning of vocabulary in Roman social relations, see C. NICOLET, *Les classes dirigeantes Romaines sous la République: ordre sénatorial et ordre équestre*, *Annales ESC* 32 (1977), 728.

¹² DONDIN 52; HOPKINS, *op. cit.* n. 7, 39–40.

cestry was employed as an invective by his political opponents.¹³ Therefore, Cicero gave <new man> a different and positive meaning. It was a rhetorical device Cicero used more than once: compare his use of *popularis*.¹⁴

We have seen that late Republican authors like Sallust and Asconius used several meanings of *homo novus*. Of course, most of Cicero's references to the word apply to the consul of non-senatorial ancestry, of which he himself was an example. But even he did not use a uniform definition. New men were people, whose political career was marked by the fact that they had to make up for a social deficiency (e. g. Com. Pet. 2–4; Cic. Mur. 17). *Homo novus* was a vague concept, and its definition depends on the context. WISEMAN, therefore, has been right in applying a broad definition, and his prosopography (with its distinction between *homines novi certi* and *incerti*), as a whole, still holds good. It should be supplemented, however, by the persons of senatorial ancestry who became the first praetor or consul of their family. Next to those, the *homines novi* included the first member of a family to enter the senate through an elective magistracy connected to the *cursus honorum*, i. e. after Sulla the quaestorship. Finally, there were the persons who were the first of their family not only to enter the senate, but also to reach the consulate: the quintessential new men.¹⁵

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¹³ E. g. Asc. 94 C; App. BC II.2; Sall. Cat. 31.7.

¹⁴ See R. SEAGER, Cicero and the Word *Popularis*, CQ 22 (1972), 328–338, esp. 335–336.

¹⁵ See also O'BRIEN MOORE, RE Suppl. 6 (1935), s.v. *senatus*, 697: «... *novus homo* wird zunächst gebraucht für den Ersten einer Gens, der ein Amt erhielt, aber besonders vom Consulat...»; omitted in DONDIN's detailed analysis (22–27) of modern definitions. BRUNT's article, op. cit. n. 8, is a critique of GELZER's concept of *nobilitas*. BRUNT alligns himself to MOMMSEN, who defined *homo novus* as the first of a family to hold curule office. R. J. A. TALBERT, The Senate of Imperial Rome, Princeton 1984, defines *homo novus* in his glossary as «the first member of a family to enter the senate», 526; see also 14 and 20–21.