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**Father, Master, and Commander: Cato the Censor and the Making of the Roman Elite Male**

Cato the Censor's *De Agricultura* has long been read as a document of the decline of small-plot farming and the rise of slave-powered cultivation that took place during Rome's expansion in the late third and early second century BCE. This text, however, is more than just an historical document; in fact, it encodes a list of commands addressed to an anonymous *dominus/pater familias* on how to command the *vilicus*. My aim in this paper is to take the relationship between commanding and writing that informs the *De Agricultura* as a starting point for a discussion of how Cato's peculiar use of the written medium made it possible for him to intervene in the general project of making Roman manhood. My paper will ultimately suggest that if we are to fully understand why the history of Roman virtuous masculinity is pervasively marked by invocations of "Cato", we must also try to come to terms with the "reproductive" power of his writings.

Fifty years ago Antonio Mazzarino (*Introduzione al De agricultura di Catone*) constructed an editorial history for the *De Agricultura* by drawing the attention to the so-called *Ad Filium* and the *commentarii* that Cato supposedly produced for domestic use (Pliny *NH* 29.15-16). In the *commentarii*, Cato noted information and events by drawing on his own life experience. From this raw material, Cato derived the *Ad Filium*, a text that preserves a number of precepts covering various subjects and addressed more or less explicitly to his son. Finally, he produced the *De Agricultura*, a literary work meant for a larger audience, in which he included some of the previous materials.

At the time Mazzarino was trying to account for the *De Agricultura*'s textual unevenness and to counter those scholars who interpreted the *Ad Filium* as an "encyclopedic" project divided by subject (agriculture, medicine, rhetoric, and possibly military science). Mazzarino's conclusions, however, may also enable us to imagine Cato producing transcripts of those performances that allowed him to construct his dominant position over his subordinate "others". These performances include the management of his household, the care of his body and of those of his extended family, the molding of an authoritative voice, and his experiences as a military commander.

By acknowledging Cato's post-performance use of writing, this paper underscores its long-term cultural and social effects. By textualizing the performances through which and the scenarios within which Cato asserted his own dominance, he extended the memory of his own authoritative identity over time and set the conditions for the re-enactment of his transcripts. In this sense, it is important to recognize that the textual and chronological separation between the *Ad Filium* addressed to the son and the *De Agricultura* directed to an anonymous *dominus/pater familias* proposed by Mazzarino both obscures and highlights Cato's self-conscious attempt to control the reception of his writings. In fact, besides his own son, only a freeborn Roman male would be in the position "to read" (or rather re-perform) his transcripts and thereupon construct his own authoritative identity. By the same token, any aspiring freeborn Roman male who did so was to automatically figure himself as Cato's metaphorical son.