Cato, Marcus Porcius (Cato the Younger)

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Marcus Porcius Cato (95–46 BCE), great-grandson of M. Porcius Cato the Censor, was one of the most influential figures in the Late Roman Republic. Although he attained neither the highest office in Rome nor any significant military distinction, his political authority doubtless stemmed from a powerful combination of aristocratic connections and steadfast character. Cato achieved lasting fame and martyrdom following his suicide at UTICA in Africa (hence the cognomen "Uticensis"); for he chose death rather than be pardoned by JULIUS CAESAR. He thus became a symbol of liberty and anti-monarchical sentiment. The fullest account of his life is PLUTARCH'S *Cato Minor* which, although highly anecdotal, provides good evidence for Cato's authority and career. He is often known as Cato the Younger to distinguish him from his great-grandfather (*see* CATO, MARCUS PORCIUS (CATO THE ELDER)).

Cato's parents died when he was young, and he was raised in the household of his uncle, M. Livius Drusus (tribune 91). Valerius Maximus (2.10.8) states that Cato's patrimony was small; yet Cato bought a house and later received further inheritances from which he lent money to his friends free of interest. Some time before 67, he married his first wife Atilia, the daughter of Atilius Serranus, whom he later divorced for infidelity. His climb up the ladder of offices (*cursus honorum*) was relatively modest for a man of his class. In 64, he was quaestor: a role that he took seriously (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 16–17). His staunch ideals were displayed in 63, when he argued for the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators (Sall. *Cat.* 50–53; *see* CATILINARIAN CONSPIRACY). In the same year, he successfully ran for the tribunate; he may have been motivated, as Plutarch suggests (*Cat. Min.* 20–21), by a desire to check the power of Q. Caecilius Metellus Nepos, an agent of POMPEY. During his tribunate in 62, Cato passed a law that increased the number of those eligible to receive cheap grain.

In all other matters, Cato was conservative and uncompromising. His strategy was one of continued obstructionism against the ambitions of powerful individuals. Cicero once accused him of living in "Plato's Republic" (Cic. *Att.* 2.1.8) and many have seen Cato's obstinacy as a contributing factor to the formation of the so-called "First Triumvirate." Cato continually opposed the ratification of Pompey's eastern settlements following his return to Rome in 62. He blocked M. Licinius CRASSUS' efforts to revise the Asian tax contracts in 61. In 60, Cato prevented Caesar from achieving both a triumph for his Spanish conquests and nomination for the consulship. Caesar abandoned the triumph and drew Pompeius and Crassus into a political alliance with himself (App. *B. Civ.* 2.8–9).

Caesar obtained the consulship for 59, during which Cato continued to oppose his measures. In particular, Cato opposed Caesar's land bill and he was temporarily imprisoned as a result of his protestations (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 33). The following year, aiming no doubt to remove Cato from the political scene, P. CLODIUS PULCHER appointed him to undertake the annexation of CYPRUS: he was probably sent as a proquaestor with the power of a praetor. In the event, king Ptolemy of Cyprus killed himself and Cato lost all records of his financial dealings on the journey home. Nevertheless, when Cato returned to Rome in 56, his reputation for fairness and scrupulous administration remained intact.

Cato was now emerging as the leading figure of the *Optimates* (*see* OPTIMATES, POPULARES). In the 60s, this group had been steered by Q. Lutatius Catulus, Q. HORTENSIUS HORTALUS, and L. Licinius LUCULLUS. Catulus died in 61/60 and Lucullus in 56; but the relationship between Hortensius and Cato was very close. Cato famously divorced his second wife, Marcia, with whom he had three children, so

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that Hortensius could marry her (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25). Cato continued his policy of opposition towards the triumvirs after the conference of Luca and rallied his supporters towards greater action against them. In 55, he attempted to block the second joint-consulship of Crassus and Pompey. When all the other candidates declined to stand for election, Cato urged his brother-in-law, L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, not to withdraw; but Domitius' campaign ended following a program of violence and intimidation against him (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 41–2).

Although Pompey and Crassus obtained the joint-consulship, Cato continued the propaganda against the triumvirs. In 54, Cato attained the praetorship (after an unsuccessful attempt the previous year). By 52, however, a sharp change in the political climate forced Cato to abandon his former principles; instead he supported Pompey's election as sole-consul, hoping he would restore stability in Rome. Cato failed in his campaign for the consulship for 51, yet his powerful influence in the Senate was unharmed. Cato remained a foe to Caesar and surely contributed to the incurable rift that formed between him and Pompey.

In the wake of the civil war, Cato followed Pompey, who now represented the republican cause. He first took command of Sicily but, refusing to engage in bloodshed, was expelled by C. Scribonius Curio. Cato took charge of Dyrrachium during the battle of PHARSALOS. After Pompey's defeat and subsequent death, Cato led the Pompeian forces along the coast of Cyrene to Libya and later to Utica. There Cato allocated the command to Q. Caecilius Metellus Pius Scipio, an ex-consul, while he fortified Utica. When he learned of Caesar's victory at THAPSOS in 46, Cato committed suicide, having first urged his followers to accept Caesar's pardon. Plutarch (*Cat. Min.* 72) states that Caesar's reaction was to claim: "Oh, Cato, I begrudge you your death, for you begrudged me the sparing of your life."

Throughout his life, Cato remained a strong adherent to Stoic philosophy. Cicero famously mocked him in the speech *Pro Murena*, but elsewhere praises him as being worth a hundred thousand men (Cic. *Att.* 2.5.1). Upon his death, Cicero composed an encomium entitled the *Cato*, to which Caesar responded with the *Anti-Cato* (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 52). The ludicrous content of the latter only served to elevate Cato in the eyes of posterity, and he became emblematic of the fight for liberty and the republic.

SEE ALSO: Cicero, Marcus Tullius; Pomponius Atticus, Titus; Stoicism.

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