Cicero, Marcus Tullius

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Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), statesman, orator, and writer, is our main source for the culture and history of the Roman Republic in its last generation, and fundamental to the moral and political thought of the Latin Fathers (Augustine, Jerome, Lactantius), of the humanist renaissance of Italy, and of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in Europe and America.

Cicero was a "new man" (*homo novus*) in the Roman sense that his family had not held office at Rome; but it was a leading family in its hometown, Arpinum, and connected by marriage with Gaius Marius. Though in this sense an outsider, Cicero was educated and prepared for public life at Rome under the guidance of the ex-consul Lucius Crassus and introduced to religious and civil law by Rome's greatest legal experts.

Because most of Rome's Italian allies rebelled against it in the Social War (91–88), the urgent need for military reaction suspended normal judicial and political business at Rome, and after nominal military service as aide-de-camp to Pompeius Strabo (father of Pompey), Cicero had to delay his expected career as an advocate. He used the troubled years of the 80s to continue his education with Greek intellectuals who had come to Rome: the Rhodian orator Molo; Philo, head of the Academy; and a Stoic, Diodotus, who lived with him as tutor. His most significant brief in the Forum was the defense of Roscius of Ameria in 81 or 80, who was accused by his cousins of his father's murder (*On behalf of Roscius of Ameria*).

Sometime after 80 Cicero married Terentia, by whom he had a daughter, Tullia (born perhaps in 78) and much later, in 65, a son, Marcus. His divorce from Terentia in 46 was followed by a rash and short-lived marriage to his young ward Publilia. His closest confidants were his friend Pomponius Atticus (who remained politically neutral) and his younger brother Quintus, governor of Asia from 61 to 59 and legate to Caesar in the late 50s.

As he approached 30, Cicero's health hampered his delivery as a public speaker, and he travelled to Athens, Asia Minor, and Rhodes, spending time on philosophical study but relying on Molo to retrain him to use a style that would not strain his voice and lungs. When he returned, Cicero was elected to the junior magistracy of quaestor – the first step on the political ladder – in 75 (*see* CURSUS HONORUM, ROMAN) and served in Sicily, administering the export of grain needed to supply Rome. Having been popular there, he found himself forgotten in Rome but soon made his name by accepting a brief from the Sicilians to prosecute the corrupt governor Verres, guilty of extortion, corruption, and abuse of both Sicilians and Roman citizens.

This trial, held in 70, was a landmark for Rome, where for ten years senatorial juries had scandalously acquitted their guilty peers; and Cicero, now about to be elected aedile, had the support of his own class (wealthy non-senators, landowners and members of the powerful tax-companies), of many tribunes, and of Pompey, returned victorious from Spain. After a swift and thorough tour of Sicily gathering documentation, he presented the case with such a damaging dossier of evidence that Verres anticipated condemnation by exiling himself from Rome before the second installment of the trial. Cicero's subsequent publication (*Against Verres*, the opening speech followed by five narratives adapted from his undelivered material of Verres' offenses before and during his time as governor) is a superb source for the arbitrary powers of governors in the provinces.

This was one high point in Cicero's career. Soon after he was overwhelmingly elected praetor for 66 and made his first address (*contio*) to the Roman assembly, in support of Manilius' bill, which proposed an extraordinary command, covering most of Rome's eastern empire, for Pompey to defeat Mithradates of

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Pontos. This speech (*For the Manilian Law*, also called *On the command of Pompey*) treats diplomatically the recall of the current commander Lucullus and concentrates on the economic importance of the province of Asia. Although the inner circle of nobles still saw Cicero as an outsider, they were reconciled to supporting him as candidate for the consulship of 63 – as much by their mistrust of another leading candidate, L. Sergius Catilina, as by an acceptance of Cicero's own conformism.

Elected consul with an unsatisfactory colleague, Cicero, who would always oppose agrarian legislation to redistribute public land, began by opposing a bill that would have provided land for the veterans whom the now victorious Pompey would need to settle after discharge: this would be a recurring issue, and it was the opposition of Cicero and others that drove Pompey to make a private alliance with the wealthy M. Licinius Crassus and the expected consul of 59, C. Julius Caesar. But in 63 the main problem was the aspirations of Catiline, who again was rejected for the consulate and began to plan a coup exploiting the discontent of bankrupt young nobles and impoverished former soldiers. As consul, Cicero first denounced Catiline in the Senate, so that the latter fled from Rome; then he had him declared a public enemy. Catiline's leading supporters in Rome may have planned to assassinate Cicero; they certainly solicited the Gallic Allobroges to revolt against Rome, as was proved by documents and by their confessions. With the collaboration of the Allobroges, Cicero intercepted the correspondence and brought the conspirators before the Senate on December 3 and 5. By the *Lex Sempronia* of Gaius Gracchus, only the Roman people or a court authorized by the people could condemn a Roman citizen to death; Caesar, as praetor, had reaffirmed this law by the show-trial before the people of the aging Rabirius, who had claimed to kill the tribune Saturninus in 100: Cicero defended Rabirius some six months before this and the trial was aborted. Now, however, Cicero presided over a Senate that, despite Caesar's protest (Sall. *Cat.* 52), was rallied by the incoming tribune M. Porcius Cato into condemning the men to execution, which was carried out under Cicero' supervision. Cicero's four speeches (*Against Catiline* 1 and 4, addressed to the Senate, and 2 and 3, addressed to the people) cover the events of these three months.

When Cicero was leaving office three weeks later and appeared to make the customary oath that he had performed his duties properly, he was challenged by a new tribune, Metellus Nepos, who, with Caesar (now in office as praetor), conducted a campaign to denounce Cicero and to recall Pompey, in order to bring his army to Rome and restore order. This was quelled by the courage and prestige of the same M. Porcius Cato, who had ensured the condemnation of the conspirators. The conspiracy itself was soon defeated in an irregular battle in northern Etruria.

The consulship was the highest office available to a Roman of this period. Normally the consul, who would be 43 or 44 at the end of his office, was sent to govern a province where even an honest governor would become wealthy (though some provinces were more lucrative than others): he might also find an opportunity for successful warfare, as even Cicero would do in 51, and he would apply for recognition by a triumph. Even a bad governor, like Verres, could last for three years; but for former consuls there were no new career goals (except the censorship, which was breaking down at this time). They were consulted first in senatorial debates, and might be sent on prestigious embassies. But that was it. Many did not live beyond 50. Cicero had been heralded as a hero and "father of his country" for detecting the conspiracy, but he did not want to accept a province and be away from Rome and from his career as an advocate. He remained a private citizen, and found himself on the wrong side. Pompey needed legislation to ratify his provincial settlement in the Middle East, but it was opposed by partisans of his old rival Lucullus: he needed an agrarian law, but this was opposed on principle by Cicero. He lost the goodwill of the inner circle of the aristocracy and had become an obstacle to

Pompey and Caesar. Caesar, as consul in 59, offered Cicero a position on a commission that would have given him immunity and taken him from Rome, but Cicero declined and openly lamented the new balance of power. From Cicero's letters we know that this prompted Caesar to authorize the adoption, as a plebeian, of Cicero's personal enemy, Clodius, so that Clodius could get himself elected tribune of the plebs for 58. Cicero was promised support but received none and fled from Rome and Italy when Clodius passed his bill reenacting Gaius Gracchus' prohibition of executing a citizen without popular authorization. Clodius followed this up by prosecuting the absent Cicero and exiling him not only from Italy, but from most of Greece too. Cicero's house on the Palatine was demolished and part of it consecrated to the goddess Liberty, which was designed to put it beyond Cicero's recovery.

Five years had passed since Cicero's consulship, and it would take eighteen months to persuade the Roman people (voting in the centuriate form of assembly that privileged the wealthy) to recall him. Recalled, Cicero did not realize his loss of power and found his public voice: two speeches thanking the Senate and people, and others – to the college of priests, vindicating his right to his home (*On his House*), and to the Senate, reinterpreting an unfavorable oracle (*On the reply of the Diviners*) and defending the tribune Sestius (*For Sestius*), accused of public violence – a defense that included a substantial excursus on the nature of being a right-thinking citizen ("we are all conservatives!"). But when the warm reception of this last speech led Cicero to announce that he would raise the legitimacy of Caesar's agrarian law in the Senate, he was silenced by a brusque message from Pompey that he would not guarantee Cicero's safety if he spoke. From now on Cicero spoke in public in support of Caesar, notably in the *On the consular provinces* (June, 56), which praised Caesar's military successes in Gaul and proposed provincial assignments that would extend his command. He now cultivated Caesar, who gave Cicero's brother Quintus a position as legate; and, besides defending subordinates of Caesar and Pompey (Vatinius, Gabinius, the challenge to the citizenship of the Spaniard, Cornelius Balbus, in 56), he set himself to compose an epic poem in praise of Caesar's conquest in Gaul and raid on Britain. His only independent initiative was his rather desperate defense of Milo for ordering the murder of Clodius early in 52, when he found himself speaking before an armed guard set by Pompey and losing his nerve: the speech we have as *For Milo* was probably never delivered.

When Cicero was sent under Pompey's new law to govern Cilicia (southwestern Turkey), it may have been for a lack of alternative, or perhaps to get him out of Rome. This time it is Cicero's letters to Atticus and Caelius (with Caelius' replies) that offer a vivid picture of Roman provincial administration, including the extortion and abuse of his predecessor Appius Claudius. He struggled to get a successor; but, even returning prematurely, Cicero reached Rome on the verge of civil war, as Caesar marched his forces into Italy. With much anxiety Cicero followed Pompey and the "republicans" to Greece, but after the defeat at Pharsalos and Pompey's death (48) he tried to return to Italy, where Antony kept him confined to Brundisium until Caesar himself returned. Cicero had told Caesar that he would only come to Rome and attend the Senate if he could say what he thought was right; when Caesar said he did not want that, Cicero refused to countenance the new regime.

Before Caesar's assassination Cicero made only three speeches, each time addressed to Caesar: in the Senate in September, 46, to thank him for agreeing to the return of M. Marcellus (*For Marcellus*); to defend Ligarius, accused by a rival of opposing Caesar; and to defend the Pompeian client King Deiotaros, accused by a grandson of plotting to assassinate Caesar.

After the assassination, in 43 Cicero consumed his energies in defending Brutus and

Cassius (now assigned Macedonia and Asia as provinces) and in attacking the actions of Mark Antony, now consul: his *First Philippic* was delivered in Antony's absence; his *Second Philippic*, a reply to Antony's attack, was not delivered but circulated in writing. Cicero's animosity against Antony led him to trust and promote the devious Octavian, who was given praetorian rank by the Senate and joined the consuls in fighting to relieve Decimus Brutus, besieged by Antony in Mutina. Their deaths led to the new long-term collaboration of Octavian with Antony and Lepidus and to Cicero's proscription: he was murdered late in 43.

In the introduction to Book 2 of *On divination*, written after Caesar's death, Cicero lists his theoretical treatises, but out of sequence. Most important to historians are *On the Republic*, in six books, of which Books 4 and 5 are lost, composed by 51, and its sequel, the undatable *On the laws*, in three books, which gives much attention to religious law. Both works argue that the Roman constitution, as it evolved before the Decemvirate of 451/0, and Rome's moral laws are the best, corresponding to Plato's ideals. Book 6 of *On the Republic* is modeled on the vision of Er in Plato's own *Republic* (Book 10) but focuses on the ideal of service to the Roman state and on the rewards of honorable statesmen in the afterlife; it contributed to the inspiration of Anchises' vision in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Book 6.

Under the domination of Caesar, Cicero set himself to write systematically on epistemology (*Academica* 1 and 2), on moral ends (*On the ends of life*), on theology (*The nature of the gods, On divination, On fate*); he also produced several more accessible works of practical morality: *Tusculan disputations* – a Stoic inspired set of five books on virtue, resistance to pain (Book 2), control of the emotions (3 and 4), and death (5); *On obligations* – a study of proper behavior in society in three books, written for his son Marcus, who was approaching 20 when Cicero died; and add to these *Laelius on friendship* and *Cato on old age*.

Cicero's literary works range from *On the orator* – a broadly based dialogue in three books on educating the statesman – and more narrowly rhetorical works – his youthful *On invention* and two dialogues from 46 BCE: *Brutus*, a history of Roman oratory grounded in valuable summaries of Greek oratory and early Roman epic, drama, and historical works; and *The orator*, which answers Brutus' advocacy of plain style with a defense of stylistic variety, especially the grand style and elegant rhythm. And there are also the technical works *Topics* and *Partitions of oratory*. Equally precious for historians of culture and politics are Cicero's sixteen books of *Letters to Atticus*, sixteen books of *Letters to friends and family*. Important are two letters intended for a wider public: *Fam.*1.9, explaining his enforced political reversal in 56, and 5.12, asking the historian Lucceius to compose a monograph on Cicero's experiences from consulship to exile and return. Together with *On the orator* 2.38–65, this outlines Cicero's theory of historical writing. There are also three books of *Letters to his Brother Quintus* and one to Marcus Brutus.

SEE ALSO: Aediles; Agrarian laws; Antonius, Marcus (Mark Antony); Augustus; Catilinarian conspiracy; Education, Greece and Rome; Gracchus, Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius; *Inventio*; Julius Caesar; Licinius Crassus, Lucius; Marius, Gaius; Lucullus, Lucius Licinius; Mithradates I–VI of Pontos; Pharsalos, battle of; Pompey; Pomponius Atticus, Titus; Rhetoric, Roman; Social War, Roman Republic; Vergil; Verres, Gaius.

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