Cicero

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Introduction

In 106 BC,[1] a boy was born who would go on to be a major figure in the Late Roman Republic. Marcus Tullius Cicero, commonly known as Cicero, would rise to the most coveted office in the Republic, and be courted by most of the major players who ultimately brought the Republic to an end.

In this discussion we will be taking a broad overview of Cicero's life, with a particular focus on certain events such as the year of his consulship, which included the Catiline conspiracy. Given the importance of the cursus honorum on Cicero's life, we will also examine this in detail. Finally, we will discuss whether Cicero was a man who stuck to his principles and paid the ultimate price, or a poor politician who failed to see the winds of change and move with them.

The intensity of activity during the period under discussion (c. 106 - 43), and the volume of surviving literary and archaeological material, means that we will either mention briefly or skip altogether some of the events which occurred, and the people involved in them. Some suggestions for further reading are provided for those who wish to examine the period in more detail.

Roman naming conventions

Roman naming conventions during the Late Republic involved a *nomen gentilicium* (roughly equivalent to an English surname or family name), a *praenomen* (a forename, of which perhaps 15-30 were common amongst well-known families) and sometimes a *cognomen* (no equivalent in modern English - it can be a nickname of sorts but also a hereditary name used to distinguish between different branches of the same family). Usually the combination of three names, if available, is sufficient to distinguish between close male relatives, such as Marcus Tullius Cicero and Quintus Tullius Cicero (Cicero's brother) or Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus ('Pompey the Great') and Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo (Pompey's father). This is not always the case though, as Tiberius Claudius Nero was the full name of the grandfather and father of the second emperor, and of the emperor himself,[2] and Cicero had a son called Marcus Tullius Cicero. Cicero's *cognomen* comes from *cicer*, the Latin for chickpea, and would have been passed down from his ancestors.[3]

Cursus honorum

The *cursus honorum* ('course of offices') laid down the order in which the various offices (or magistracies) in the Republic must be held.[4] In theory each office (with the exception of the aedileship) was

[1] All dates are BC unless otherwise indicated.

[2] The emperor is usually referred to as Tiberius, and to add to the confusion there were emperors known as Claudius and Nero.

[3] Plutarch, *Cicero* 1

[4] As might be expected for this period of history, only male Roman citizens could hold office - women, slaves, and foreigners were excluded.

a prerequisite for the ones which followed, e.g. no one could be consul unless they had previously been praetor. Each office had a minimum age limit, which increased for higher offices. No man could hold multiple offices simultaneously, and there were at least two positions available for each office to prevent one man from controlling too much power.[5] Ten years had to pass before a man could hold the same office again.

However, the prerequisites for magistracies were not fixed and changed over time, e.g. as a result of the reforms initiated by Sulla. They could also be waived for exceptional individuals, such as Gaius Marius (several consecutive consulships), Cornelius Scipio (elected consul again before ten years had passed),[6] Scipio Africanus (aedile before the minimum age, likewise for consul), and Pompey (consul before the minimum age and no previous public office). The order remained unchanged throughout most of the Republic.

The first post was not an office, but ten years of military service, ideally involving appointment as a military tribune (effectively rotating commanders within legions). However, this had ceased to be compulsory by Cicero's time, although many men still used it as the first step on the road to the consulship.[7]

The cursus honorum after the reforms of Sulla (82-80) was:

1. Quaestor
2. Aedile (optional)
3. Praetor
4. Consul
5. Censor

With the exception of the censorship, all the magistracies were usually single year posts. Other offices existed, such as that of dictator, but were used infrequently and for irregular periods, and did not form part of the cursus honorum.[8]

One of the difficulties of climbing the cursus honorum was that the number of available slots reduced as you moved upwards, going from twenty quaestors to only two consuls. As such, not everyone could make it to the top, and if a man missed out the first time he would face even more opponents on his second attempt.

In addition to the magistracies, there was also the tribune of the plebs (not to be confused with the military tribune), which had limited direct power but was able to veto any act or proposal of any magistrate.[9] It was intended to act as a check on the consuls and Senate, who represented the upper classes.[10] Sulla's reforms curtailed this office by changing the rules such that anyone who had been a tribune could not hold any other magistracy, therefore making it far less appealing as a career path.

[5] In most cases, one magistrate could veto or block his fellow officeholder's actions, as well as the actions of lower magistrates.

[6] Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.19.81

[7] It is important to note that the Romans did not separate out the roles of military, law, and politics, as is the case in many modern societies. To have a successful political career, a man needed successes on the battlefield or in the court room, as these proved his skills and, just as importantly, won him clients. As Cicero would demonstrate, a lack of military glories would not stall or end a man's career if he could prove himself elsewhere. Caesar demonstrated that the combination of all three could make a powerful man, whereas Pompey was undoubtedly a great general but by most accounts a poor orator and politician. Augustus side-stepped the military requirement by attributing the victories of his generals to himself, despite apparently having little skill in this area (but he mastered the art of delegation whilst retaining the credit).

[8] Like many words from this time period, the Roman use of dictator differs from our modern usage. Roman dictators were appointed for a specific period – usually six months – or for a specific purpose such as holding elections. They were expected to resign gracefully at the end of their term, and most abided by these restrictions. The office was later discredited by Sulla and Julius Caesar (the latter becoming 'dictator for life' shortly before his assassination), who treated it more like the modern term where abuse of power is generally implied.

[9] There were a few exceptions to this rule, e.g. the decisions of dictators were, perhaps unsurprisingly, not subject to veto.

[10] Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.1.2-3

Clients

One thing that was incredibly important in a Roman's political career was the concept of *clients*. These were people who could be counted upon to support him in elections, not just in votes – though those were welcome – but also with money etc. Clients could be of lower or higher status, and whilst rich clients (more like a patron) were useful, significant support amongst the plebeian class was also helpful. Of course, clients often wanted something in return, and usually this would consist of helping them in various matters. A man running for office would open his house to people to come with their problems, and a queue outside would help signal his popularity (Romans always liked to back a winner).

Quaestor

The first office on the cursus honorum was *quaestor*, for which twenty positions were available and the minimum age was thirty. Originally this was a judicial office, but by the time of the Late Republic it was a financial function, with quaestors supervising the public treasury. Quaestors could remain in Rome or be appointed to the staff of a consul or provincial governor. After Sulla's reforms, quaestors were automatically granted membership of the Senate at the end of their term of office.

Aedile

The next office on the cursus honorum was *aedile*, for which there were four positions available and the minimum age was thirty six. Although an optional step on the road to the consulship, the office of aedile was useful politically as it involved putting on games and managing the grain supply. If done well, both could be popular with the masses and therefore deliver votes in later elections, however this could come at a significant financial expense as the cost was often partially met from the aedile's pocket (or those backing him).

There were two types of aedile, *plebeian* and *curule*, with slightly different duties. The curule aediles were also the lowest ranking magistrates to hold *imperium*, which was the authority to apply the law within the scope of the magistracy. However, this authority could be vetoed or overruled by a magistrate of equal or greater rank (e.g. a praetor could be overruled by another praetor, or a consul, but not by an aedile or quaestor), or by a tribune of the plebs. The most prominent indication of imperium was the number of lictors (armed bodyguards) accompanying the magistrates, for which curule aediles would have two each.

Praetor

The next office on the cursus honorum was *praetor*, for which there were eight positions available and the minimum age was thirty nine. The duties of the praetor varied, and they were often assigned tasks by the Senate. They were also involved in judicial proceedings and commanded armies in the field. Praetors held imperium and were usually accompanied by six lictors each. At the end of his term, a praetor could be sent to govern a province as *propraetor*.

Consul

The office on the cursus honorum that most men aspired to was that of *consul*, for which there were two positions available and the minimum age was forty two. Consuls held imperium and were usually accompanied by twelve lictors each. At the end of his term, a consul could be sent to govern a province as *proconsul*. As with praetors, the duties of consuls varied, including presiding over elections, religious rites, and commanding armies.[11]

[11]When two consuls were present with an army, they generally held command on alternate days.

Censor

The final office on the cursus honorum was the censorship, for which there were two positions available. Their main role was to maintain the census, which was a register of citizens and their property. The most important outcome from this was that the membership list of the Senate was updated, with names being added and removed as the censors thought appropriate.

Although it could be seen as the most senior magistracy, as the requirements for office included having held the consulship, the censors had limited power compared with praetors and consuls. Their ability to effectively remove senators was potentially powerful, but after Sulla's reforms their ability to draw up lists of membership of the Senate waned, as membership was automatic on completing the quaestorship. Most importantly, the censors did not hold imperium, and therefore were effectively subordinate to the consuls as they could not command armies or dispense corporal or capital punishment. However, whilst the opportunities for glory were non-existent, being chosen as censor was still seen as an honour.

Pro-magistrates

A pro-magistrate (*pro* in this case meaning 'in place of') was a position that granted the powers of the relevant magistracy, but generally only within a specific area or for a given campaign. For example, a provincial governor would often be made a proconsul or propraetor, enabling him to exercise the powers of that magistracy only within the confines of his province. Occasionally this mechanism would also be used to extend the command of a consul whose term of office was due to expire during an ongoing conflict. Although a pro-magistrate would usually have held the office immediately beforehand, this was not always the case.[12]

Being sent to govern a province was an important step for many men, because it enabled them to extort or embezzle money from the local population in order to pay back the debts the governor had racked up in running for office (e.g. by bribing electors or putting on extravagant games and festivals). In most cases the population of provinces did not have the right to vote, and this, combined with their physical remoteness from Rome, meant that rapacious governors often got away with extracting large sums from their province. Occasionally men would be put on trial for their actions whilst governor, but this required someone in Rome to be willing to take on the role of prosecutor. The likelihood of prosecution was low, and the prosecutor, judge and jury could all be 'persuaded' (often via bribery, threats or other inducements) to assist in obtaining a favourable verdict.[13]

Cicero's early life

We know little about Cicero's early life, possibly because he was born outside of Rome and the majority of interesting events occurred during his adult life. He was born in January 106 in Arpinum (modern day Arpino), a town approximately 100km from Rome (the same town also produced Gaius Marius in 157). His father was an equestrian, a property-based class one rank below senators, and therefore must have been reasonably wealthy. We know even less about his mother, other than her name, Helvia and that she ran an efficient household.[14] Cicero appears to have received the standard education for boys at the time, which would have involved tutoring in Latin and Greek and studying philosophers and historians.

[12] Perhaps the most egregious example being the grant of proconsular authority to Pompey on several occasions.

[13] Appian reports that a measure intended to expand the rules against bribery failed as 'the practice of taking bribes was so prevalent and unchecked' (*Civil Wars* 1.35.158). Pompey again provides an example - he married the judge's daughter shortly after a trial in which he just happened to be found not guilty.

[14] Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 16.26

Legal career, oratory, and the cursus honorum

Before moving into politics, Cicero spent several years in the military, serving under Pompeius Stabo (father of Pompey the Great) and Sulla during the Social War.[15] Given the limited references to this time in the work of Cicero and others, we can probably assume that he did not consider it particularly important, and that he did not receive any significant awards or honours.

Defence of Sextus Roscius

Cicero's first major trial for which we have surviving evidence was in 80 and concerned the defence of Sextus Roscius, a Roman citizen who was accused of killing his father. This was a risky case for Cicero, as some of the people involved with the case were closely connected to Sulla, who was still dictator at the time. However, he secured his client's acquittal by demonstrating that there were other men with the means and motivation to have carried out the killing, whilst diplomatically suggesting that Sulla, like the god Jupiter, could not be expected to keep an eye on everything.[16]

Quaestor

By 76, Cicero was in a position to run for the office of quaestor, the first step on the cursus honorum. Although Cicero was beginning to establish a name for himself, his main obstacle was that he was a *novus homo*, or 'new man', which meant that no one in his family had served in the Senate or been consul. Romans placed great weight on family history and thought that positive traits ran down the male line, so a man whose ancestors – no matter how far back – had served with distinction could be assumed to have similar qualities. Whilst there are plenty of examples of this not being the case, a 'new man' would be at the disadvantage of having to prove his worth from scratch, rather than relying on his family history. In addition, having no ancestors in the Senate also meant that Cicero did not inherit a network of family connections, which would otherwise have been very useful in supporting his case for office. However, these obstacles could be overcome, as demonstrated previously by Marius – a fellow novus homo who went on to be consul an unprecedented seven times.

Despite these handicaps, Cicero secured his election as quaestor and was dispatched to Sicily in 75. He was particularly pleased to have finished *in suo anno* ('in his year', i.e. at the youngest possible age) and first among the candidates, a feat he would go on to repeat in every future election.

Prosecution of Verres

A few years after Cicero's quaestorship, a man named Gaius Verres was assigned as the provincial governor for Sicily. Even by Roman standards, he was a corrupt governor, with his conduct allegedly including: extortion and embezzlement, theft from temples and private homes, and arbitrary arrests and executions. Unsurprisingly, the victims of his misrule wanted justice, and they approached Cicero – who had treated them fairly when quaestor – to prosecute Verres.[17]

As with Sextus Roscius, taking on the case against Verres was a risk for Cicero. As well as taking on powerful vested interests, a prosecution could be seen as malicious or self-serving – unlike the honorable role of defending. Cicero would not be paid for his role as prosecutor either, so there was no immediate financial gain from taking on the case. However, success would raise his profile and ensure the eternal gratitude of the Sicilians.

[15]The *bellum sociale*, 'war of the allies', was fought against tribes in Italy who had previously been allies (*socii*) of Rome.

[16]Cicero, *Pro Roscio Amerino* 45

[17]There was no state prosecution service as is the case today (e.g. in the UK most criminal prosecutions are brought by the Crown Prosecution Service, in the name of the monarch - private prosecutions are possible but rare). In Rome, as in several other ancient societies, prosecutions were brought by individuals such as Cicero.

Once again, Cicero proved his competence as an advocate, employing a strategy of keeping his speeches short and instead relying on realms of evidence which he had collected with the help of the Sicilians. According to Cicero, the evidence was so overwhelming that the defence gave up and Verres became despondent. Eventually Verres realised that he had no realistic prospect of escaping conviction, and fled into exile with as much of his property as he could take with him. Some of his remaining assets were used to compensate the Sicilians, who would remain loyal supporters of Cicero.

Aedile

In 69, Cicero took up the office of aedile, to which he had been elected the year before. His term of office appears to have passed smoothly and without incident, and he fulfilled the two important political tasks of putting on games and keeping the cost of food down – possibly helped by generous gifts from the Sicilians.[18] Whilst aedile, Cicero also took on legal work, including his first defence of a client from the senatorial class.

Praetor

By 67, Cicero was in a strong position to seek election to the office of praetor. He had a wide range of supporters from across Roman society (and beyond), and the death of his father had made him both independent and wealthy. His oratory had raised his profile and benefitted men who could be relied upon to back him with their votes and the votes of their friends, families, and clients. Despite the fact that the elections were interrupted twice, Cicero managed to top the polls and finish first each time, and in doing so took one step closer to the consulship.

Consul

Cicero chose not to go to a province after his praetorship (as *propraetor*), electing instead to remain in Rome, and therefore close to the political situation. Although this may have been a costly decision from a financial point of view – given how rewarding the governorship of a province could be – it was probably a wise decision politically for a man who needed to keep himself in the minds of the people who would, hopefully, be voting for him as consul in a few years time. This decision paid off, with Cicero reaching the consulship at the first available opportunity (aged forty two), and once again finishing first on the poll. His consular colleague was Gaius Antonius Hybrida, who was related to the more famous Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony).

Catiline conspiracy

The defining event of Cicero's consulship was the Catiline conspiracy.[19] The previous year, a man named Lucius Sergius Catilina (Catiline) had been unsuccessful in obtaining election to the consulship, being defeated by Cicero. Despite being a member of one of the oldest patrician families in Rome[20] – which would usually be an electoral asset sufficient to ensure victory – his chequered past appears to have lost him backing from the rest of his class.[21] His electoral policies also caused concern to many

[18] Juvenal drily noted that the plebs were only interested in 'bread and circuses', i.e. subsidised grain and gladitorial shows (*Satires* 10.77-81).

[19] Some sources – particularly Sallust – allude to a 'first conspiracy', and therefore the conspiracy in Cicero's consulship is sometimes referred to as the 'second conspiracy of Catiline'. Both the existence of this 'first conspiracy', and Catiline's alleged involvement in it, are disputed, and for the purposes of this discussion we will refer only to the conspiracy which took place during Cicero's consulship.

[20] Sallust, *The War With Catiline* 5.1

[21] Although acquitted each time, Catiline was put on trial on separate occasions for crimes including: murdering his son (Appian *Civil Wars* 2.2.4) and his wife, adultery with a Vestal Virgin (a capital offence), and abuse of office whilst governor of Africa. However, the latter offence was common, and there are many examples in the sources of men being prosecuted for their conduct as governor.

senators, including his proposed cancellation of debts.

Catiline stood for the consulship again in 63 – to take office the following year – but was defeated once more. Realising that his chances of achieving high office through legitimate routes was unlikely to succeed, and angry about losing the previous year to Cicero – a *novus homo* and *inquilinus*[22] – he brought together men who he felt would support his new cause, namely to take charge of the government of Rome by force. He gathered together a wide band of supporters, ranging from fellow aristocrats to veterans of Sulla. These included Publius Cornelius Lentulus Sura, Gaius Cornelius Cethegus, Publius Autronius Paetus,[23] and other former senators and magistrates. Their plans included setting fires at key locations in Rome, murdering a large number of senators (including Cicero), and fermenting civil disorder which would act as a cover for their grab for power. Once in power, they planned to cancel debts – a popular move amongst the men who had borrowed to attempt to win elections, or had fallen on hard times (not an unusual situation in an agrarian society, where a bad harvest could tip a farmer into penury) – and possibly institute land reform (another perennial problem). However, the primary supporters of the conspiracy appear to be mostly men who were disgruntled after failing to win office, or having lost office or membership of the Senate due to various offences.

Unfortunately for Catiline, some of those involved in his conspiracy were unable to keep matters secret. Cicero was initially informed of the conspiracy by the mistress of one of the men involved, who had been boasting about what was to come. Later, anonymous letters were delivered to Crassus, suggesting that he should leave the city at once and that an attack on key senators was imminent. Crassus – who was later suspected of having been involved in the conspiracy[24] – promptly turned the letters over to Cicero,[25] who read them aloud in the Senate. However, there was nothing at this point to conclusively link Catiline to the conspiracy. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Antonius had originally campaigned alongside Catiline for the consulship – for which Cicero had attacked him in a speech – but an arrangement was reached whereby Antonius agreed not to take an active role, in exchange for being granted Macedonia as his province at the end of his term of office.

Cicero decided to convene an emergency meeting of the Senate and denounced Catiline in a blistering speech intended to force Catiline to leave Rome. The same evening, Catiline departed the city and joined several thousand armed men, however he left behind many other men who were involved. Cicero continued to urge the Senate to take action, but this had little effect until he received information about the conspirators within the city. He convinced the men who had provided the information – envoys from a Gallic tribe – to play along and obtain whatever written evidence they could. At the same time, Cicero arranged for the envoys and their party to be stopped and arrested later, securing the evidence.

Once the written evidence – combined with confessions from the men involved – was placed before the Senate, the tide finally turned against the conspirators. The Senate passed a decree declaring what has become known (but was not referred to as such at the time) as the *senatus consultum ultimum*, or 'final decree of the Senate'. This effectively indicated to the magistrates, particularly the consuls, that they should take all measures necessary to protect the Republic.[26] Despite an attempt by Caesar to suggest

[22]Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.2.5-6; Sallust, *The War with Catiline* 31.7. *Inquilinus* was a term that was roughly equivalent to lodger, however Catiline was using it in a derogatory manner which implied that Cicero was not worthy of being consul due to having been born outside of Rome.

[23]Convicted of bribery after being elected consul (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 36.44).

[24]Crassus was named by an anonymous man (Plutarch, *Crassus* 13) or Lucius Tarquinius (Sallust, *The War With Catiline* 48.5), but this was rejected by the Senate due to a combination of some men not believing the story and others not wanting to provoke such a powerful man – particularly if they owed him money (Sallust, *The War With Catiline* 48.5-9). Years later, Cicero would write a book denouncing some of the activites of Crassus (and Caesar), but was sensible enough to ensure it was not published until after his death (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 39.10)

[25]Plutarch, *Crassus* 13

[26]Whether or not this decree legally empowered the consuls beyond what they could already do, it made it clear that they had the backing of the Senate, which in effect meant many of the most powerful men in Rome.

an alternative punishment, the Senate agreed that the only appropriate penalty was execution.[27] Cicero had five of the conspirators taken away and strangled, reporting the deed with the single word: *vixere* ('they have lived'). Although it may have seemed reasonable at the time, and Cicero clearly had the backing of the Senate, this decision would later return to haunt him.

As a result of his actions in exposing Catiline and saving Rome, Cicero was hailed by the Senate as *pater patriae* ('father of his country'). This honour appears to have been conferred on only two men before Cicero – one of whom was Romulas – so it was a significant achievement, though Cicero may have been less pleased when it was later granted to Caesar (and, had he still been alive, when it was granted to Augustus). We must also be conscious of the fact that our accounts of the conspirary come from Cicero and Sallust – we have nothing from the conspirators and so we are only hearing one side of the story.

Post-consulship

The last day of Cicero's consulship ended badly, as one of the tribunes, Quintus Metellus Nepos, deprived Cicero of his opportunity to address the Roman people, on the grounds that such an honour should not be extended to a man who had executed Roman citizens without trial. However, Cicero could look back with justifiable pride on his political career, having made it from novus homo to consul as quickly as was possible without breaking the rules. Post-consulship, Cicero was a *consular* – an ex-consul valued for his wisdom and experience who would be called upon early, if not first, in Senate deliberations.

Whilst there was one final step on the cursus honorum, Cicero did not hold the office of censor, and does not appear to have even contemplated doing so.

Exile

Although Cicero was lauded by many in the Senate and beyond, the rise of Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar (often referred to as the First Triumvirate) was changing the balance of power in Rome, with individual men rising above the Senate as a whole. In addition, Cicero made an enemy of a man called Publius Clodius Pulcher, which would eventually result in Cicero's exile from Rome.

Clodius was prosecuted for infiltrating the festival of *Bona Dea* (the 'Good Goddess'), an event intended only for women, which the young man snuck into using a disguise. Unfortunately for Cicero, he was pulled in as a witness (reluctantly by his own account) to counter Clodius' assertion that he had not been in Rome at the time. Although Clodius was eventually acquitted – by the tried and tested method of bribing the jury – Cicero's evidence had made an enemy of him. Whilst Clodius lacked influence and talent in his own right, he was close to both Crassus and Caesar, and thus by association Cicero was making an enemy of two of the most powerful men in Rome.

Some time later, Clodius got his revenge by having a law passed to exile anyone who had executed Roman citizens without trial.[28] Whilst the original bill did not mention Cicero specifically, it laid the ground for a second bill which targeted Cicero by name. He was not simply exiled from Rome itself, but from anywhere within 400 miles of Italy, as well as having his property seized and sold or destroyed (for example, his new residence on the Palatine Hill was knocked down and replaced with a shrine to Liberty). Cicero fled, leaving almost everything and everyone behind.

[27] Orosius, *History Against the Pagans* 6.6.5
[28] Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.45

Return to Rome

Fortunately for Cicero, Clodius had powerful enemies of his own, including Titus Annius Milo, who was tribune of the plebs in 57. Milo organised a vote in the Senate, with the end result that Cicero was recalled from exile.[29] He returned in August of 57, and was relieved to be back – he even managed to persuade the College of Pontiffs that the consecration of the land of his former property was invalid, thus allowing the shrine to Liberty to be removed.

Although Cicero attempted to return to politics as an independent man, much had changed during his exile, and the Senate was no longer in control. The relationship between Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus was showing signs of strain, but they managed to patch up their alliance at a meeting in Luca.[30] The result of this meeting was an agreement that Pompey and Crassus would stand for the consulship, and once elected they extended Caesar's command in Gaul by five years, granted Pompey command in Spain (though ruling through legates *in absentia* so he could remain close to Rome), and Crassus the governorship of Syria.

After his return to Rome, and especially after the 'Conference of Luca', Cicero was effectively forced to operate as the voice of the Triumvirate. He defended men close to Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus, as well as pushing forward their legislation and opposing proposals which were against their interests. As a possible 'reward' – though he did not see it as such – Cicero was sent to Cilicia as proconsul, where he managed to impress the local population with his frugality and by persuading previous governors and their staff to return property which they had embezzled from the province. Despite his lack of military experience, as well as his general distaste for military affairs, he achieved some minor victories and was hailed as *imperator* by his men.[31]

Civil war

By the time Cicero returned from his province, the relationship between Pompey and Caesar had soured to the point where Pompey was blocking Caesar from standing from election as consul unless he first relinquished command of his army. Caesar was understandably reluctant to do this, as it would leave him open to prosecution.[32] Caesar took one of his legions up to the Rubicon, a river which marked the boundary of Italy, and is reported to have said either 'the die is cast' or 'let the die be cast', before crossing the river and igniting civil war.[33]

Prior to the civil war, both Pompey and Caesar had courted Cicero – a demonstration of the fact that he was still highly valued by the most powerful men in Rome.[34] Cicero felt a degree of obligation to both men, whilst also having reservations, but appears to have been more closely aligned to Pompey as the side which championed the continuation of the Republic. However, he also recognised that 'absolute power is what he [Pompey] and Caesar have sought',[35] and lamented that 'I have a foe to flee from, but no friend to follow'.[36]

[29] It is not entirely clear why Milo recalled Cicero, but one suggestion is that Pompey wished for the orator to be back in Rome, and Milo was one of Pompey's allies (predominantly as the leader of armed gangs of thugs who could use the threat of violence to intimidate people).

[30] Although the triumvirate was unofficial, by this point it appears to have been an open secret in Rome, with over two hundred senators attending (Plutarch, *Caesar* 21).

[31] Being hailed as *imperator* was a necessary – but not sufficient – step to receive a triumph on returning to Rome, and therefore was important to any Roman politician who wished to advance their career. The English word *emperor* derives from imperator (via Old French).

[32] Whilst holding office, magistrates were generally immune from prosecution, however the moment they returned to life as a private citizen there was the risk of court cases, particularly if they had powerful enemies.

[33] Plutarch, *Caesar* 32; Suetonius, *Caesar* 32

[34] Cicero writes: 'both [Pompey and Caesar] have sent me letters [...] in terms that would appear to make more of me than of anyone at all.' (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 7.1)

[35] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.11

[36] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 8.7

During the civil war that ensued, Cicero's letters understandably dry up – the difficulty in getting them delivered and the consequences of a critical letter falling into the wrong hands were major impediments to a flow of conversation. Cicero appears to have attempted to continue his search for a peaceful solution, even though it seemed highly unlikely that he would be successful.

Unfortunately for Cicero, his side lost the civil war. Pompey retreated to Greece, rather than stay and defend Rome and Italy, on the grounds that he had allies there and could raise troops. Caesar and his generals won the majority of battles though, and gradually pushed Pompey back. After a decisive defeat at Pharsalus in Greece, Pompey retreated to Egypt, with Caesar in pursuit. Unfortunately for Pompey, the Egyptians felt that the most expedient course of action would be to assassinate him in order to please Caesar, and he was killed on his ship, with his body dumped overboard. However, Caesar is reported to have been appalled by the assassination, and burst into tears on being presented with Pompey's ring.[37]

After the war, Cicero had to await an official 'pardon' from Caesar, who was cautious in allowing former supporters of Pompey to return to Italy. Eventually Caesar returned from Egypt in September 47 and was met by Cicero, whom he was delighted to see and spoke to privately.[38] However, Caesar's power and position meant that the Senate was sidelined, and Cicero was left with little to do. He held out initial hopes that Caesar might restore the Republic, but it soon became clear that this would not be the case, especially when Caesar appointed himself sole consul for 45 BC.

Downfall

There were many senators, including Cicero, who were uncomfortable with Caesar's seemingly unlimited power. His behaviour, if accounts written after the event can be believed, certainly did not help. As well as the oft-told story that Mark Antony offered Caesar a diadem with a laurel wreath attached,[39] Caesar is also reported to have behaved disrespectfully towards both the tribunes and senators, refusing to rise when the latter came to greet him.[40]

In the background, a number of men were conspiring to bring Caesar's reign to an early end. Despite it being obvious that Cicero would be sympathetic towards the removal of Caesar,[41] he does not appear to have been included in the conspiracy, although Mark Antony allegedly claimed that Cicero was behind the assassination, and that Brutus called on Cicero by name as he raised his bloodstained dagger.[42]

After the assassination of Caesar, Cicero led the Senate to a compromise: an amnesty for the assassins in exchange for the ratification of all Caesar's measures and appointments. Although this appeared to stabilise matters for a short while, and probably averted greater chaos, it left Mark Antony as temporarily the most powerful man in Rome. However, Caesar had left approximately three quarters of his estate to Octavian,[43] and the young man took charge of several legions containing veterans of Caesar's campaigns.

[37] Plutarch, *Pompey* 80

[38] Plutarch, *Cicero* 39

[39] Plutarch, *Caesar* 61

[40] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 44.8; Suetonius, *Caesar* 78

[41] Cicero later wrote to Gaius Trebonius, expressing his wish that 'you had invited me to that most glorious banquet on the Ides of March' and praising 'the magnificent service which you men then did the state' (i.e. the assassination of Caesar) (Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 10.28).

[42] Cicero, *Philippics* 2.25-28. Why Cicero was excluded is a matter for speculation, though it is possible that he was considered too squeamish to take part and too indiscrete to keep quiet.

[43] Suetonius, *Caesar* 83. No specific reason is attested for *why* Caesar decided to bequeath the majority of his wealth to Octavian, or to adopt him as heir. Caesar was Octavian's great uncle (Suetonius, *Augustus* 4-7), so not a particularly close relative, though Romans did place great weight on family ties. Octavian has also delivered a funeral oration for this grandmother, i.e. Julius Caesar's sister, which may have warmed him to to Caesar (Suetonius, *Augustus* 8).

Although they would later fall out, for now Antony and Octavian, together with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, formed the Second Triumvirate.[44] The alliance was cemented by the agreement of Octavian to marry Antony's stepdaughter, Clodia.[45] In order to eliminate political opponents and raise money, the three men drew up a list of several hundred senators and knights who were to be killed, in a similar manner to Sulla's proscriptions.

Unfortunately for Cicero, he had previously delivered a series of bitter attacks on Mark Antony, known as the *Philippics*.[46] As a result, Antony worked for revenge by placing Cicero's name prominently on the list of proscriptions. Although Octavian is said to have held out against this, after two days he relented, and from that moment on Cicero was doomed.[47] He was hunted across Italy, and eventually caught en-route to a ship bound for Macedonia. He was killed, and his head and hands (which penned the Philippics) were removed, at Antony's request, to be displayed in the Forum.[48] Antony's wife, Fulvia, is said to have also taken out Cicero's tongue and jabbed pins into it, as revenge for his invectives.[49]

Legacy

Despite his unfortunate end, Cicero's legacy was secure. Even Augustus was said to have perhaps regretted Cicero's death, and two occasions stand out as demonstrating his respect for the man. First, we are told of a story whereby Augustus found his grandson hiding a copy of Cicero's works, fearing that Augustus would be angry at him for reading them. Instead, Augustus took the book and read it at length, finally telling the young boy that Cicero was 'a learned man and a lover of his country'.[50]

Second, and more importantly, Augustus pardoned Cicero's son, held the consulship with him in 30 BC,[51] and ensured his appointment to a province. During his consulship, the honours bestowed upon Mark Antony were revoked, his statues were taken down, and it was decreed that no future members of his family would bear the name Marcus. In this way the family of Cicero had their revenge for the treatment of their most famous member.[52]

Conclusions

Cicero was without a doubt one of the most successful politicians in Rome – not many men could claim to be a new man (*novus homo*), to reach every stage of the cursus honorum in the first year possible (*suo anno*), as well as finishing first each time. Despite his ultimate fate, we must not forget that Cicero rose from nothing (in Roman terms) to the highest office, and did so largely on his own merits, without relying on inherited wealth, family history, bribery, or threats of violence - something

[44]Unlike its predecessor, the Second Triumvirate was legalised via the passing of the *Lex Titia*, and it was to last for ten years (43-33 BC). In Rome it was simply referred to as *tresviri rei publicae constituendae* ('triumvirate for organising the state'), abbreviated on coins of the period as: *III VIR R P C*.

[45]Plutarch, *Antony* 20. Marriages made for political purposes were common in Rome. This fact, combined with the risk of death during childbirth, meant that an ambitious man could end up marrying several times – Pompey for example had five wives during the course of his life.

[46]Named after the denunciations of Philip II of Macedon by Demosthenes, an Athenian orator (384-322). Demosthenes was also condemned to death as a result of his orations, though he took his own life before he could be executed.

[47]Plutarch, *Cicero* 46

[48]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 47.8.3

[49]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 47.8.4

[50]Plutarch, *Cicero* 49

[51]Although by this point Augustus was still known as Octavian, he was emperor in all but name, having defeated Antony at the Battle of Actium. The consulship was therefore an office with significantly less power and influence, however it was still considered an honour to hold it, and Appian reports that the appointments were made by Octavian 'by way of apology for his betrayal of Cicero [the father]' (Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.51).

[52]Plutarch, *Cicero* 49; Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.51

which few other men in the Late Republic could claim.[53] At the height of this powers he was sought after by many of the great and powerful – including the likes of Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus – and could have easily secured an active role or a comfortable retirement.

However, Cicero's misguided belief in the continuation of the Republic, despite clear evidence that things were changing, led to his downfall and ultimately his rather ignoble end. With hindsight, he should have allied himself with the likes of Caesar and Augustus, even if this felt unpalatable – political groupings were fluid and he would not necessarily have been considered to have 'sold out' by doing so. Attacking a member of the Second Triumvirate was his greatest mistake, and without powerful supporters he met an inevitable end.

Ultimately the question is: was Cicero a staunch republican and a resolute politician in an era where money bought power and influence? Or was he simply unable to realise the rules of the system he found himself in had changed, and he could not (or would not) adapt?

Chronology

All dates are BC.

- **106** Birth of Cicero (and Pompey).
- **80** Defence of Sextus Roscius.
- **75** Quaestorship of Cicero (Sicily).
- **70** Prosecution of Verres.
- **69** Aedileship of Cicero.
- **66** Praetorship of Cicero.
- **63** Consulship of Cicero. Catiline conspiracy.
- **58** Cicero exiled.
- **57** Cicero recalled and returns to Rome.
- **50** Cicero returns from his province in Cilicia.
- **48** Caesar crosses the Rubicon. Civil war breaks out.
- **44** Assassination of Caesar.
- **43** Cicero killed as a result of the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate.

Sources and further reading

We are fortunate that the events of Cicero's life are well documented, including by Cicero himself, and many of the primary sources are still available to us. There is also a wide range of further reading, from popular histories to academic works.

Primary sources

Our primary sources are a mixture of Latin and Greek. This period of history is well served by English translations, particularly of the most important works, and in several cases there are multiple translations available. The majority are available as Penguin Classics or Oxford World Classics, although some of Cicero's letters and less well-known works are only available as part of the Loeb Classical Library.

Cicero: Our extant sources are dominated by the man himself, who produced a prodigious amount

[53] Other major players for comparison: Pompey (violence), Crassus (bribery), Caesar (violence, family history, bribery), Octavian (violence, family history, inherited wealth).

of work, much of which has survived (possibly because of its quantity).[54] Whilst we must be careful of bias and Cicero's attempts to show himself in the best light possible, having documents written by a contemporary is invaluable in understanding the fall of the Republic. In particular, Cicero's private letters to friends such as Atticus are of interest, as they show a side of the man which would not necessarily come across in materials intended for publication.

Suetonius: Private secretary of Hadrian who wrote biographies of twelve men who held the office of emperor or its near equivalent, starting with Julius Caesar.

Plutarch: Greek (later Roman) biographer known for his 'Parallel Lives' which discuss and compare individuals whom Plutarch felt to be worthy of note, including Cicero, Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar. Care must be taken as Plutarch wrote biographies as opposed to history, and in places he can digress on a moral tangent.

Sallust: Roman politician and historian, whose *Bellum Catilinae* (The War with Catiline) gives us another viewpoint on the Catiline conspiracy.

Appian: Roman historian of Greek origin whose *Roman History* covers the beginning of Rome to the time of Trajan (c. 100 AD). Books 8-17, which cover the Civil War, have come to us intact, and Cicero is mentioned in many of them.

Velleius Paterculus: Roman soldier, historian, and senator who wrote a history of Rome. Although not generally considered a careful historical study, it is useful for its connected narrative of certain periods.[55]

Cassius Dio: Roman statesman of Greek origin who wrote a history of Rome from the founding of the city to around 229 AD. Most of the 80 volume work exists only in fragments or quotations in other sources, but books 36-45 are largely complete and cover the period in question.

Orosius: Priest who wrote a history from a Christian perspective, approximately five centuries after Pompey.[56]

Further reading

For those who wish to delve into Cicero's life in more detail, there are some modern works which may be of interest.

Books focusing solely on Cicero are thin on the ground, especially when compared with men such as Caesar, but there are a few which are accessible to a wider audience.

Cicero: Politics and Persuasion in Ancient Rome, Kathryn Tempest. Probably the best and most up to date coverage of Cicero's life.

Cicero's Catilinarians, D.H. Berry. A detailed examination of the four speeches delivered by Cicero against Catiline (*In Catilinam*), as well as an overview of the Catiline conspiracy.

Cicero and the Roman Republic, Manfred Fuhrmann. An overview of Cicero's life, with references to primary sources but not modern works. Appears to be out of print and difficult to obtain.

Catiline: Rebel of the Roman Republic, James T. Carney.

The Life of Cicero, Philip Kay-Bujak.

[54] In total we have over 50 speeches, 800 letters, and approximately 90 replies. Around 90 speeches are thought to be lost or never published. This is far more than Caesar, who left us the Gallic Wars and Civil Wars, and Pompey and Crassus pale in comparison.

[55] Unlike the other authors listed here, Velleius Paterculus is not widely available with an English translation, however it does appear as volume 152 of the Loeb Classical Library, together with the *Res Gestae* of Augustus.

[56] The most up to date English translation of Orosius, with an introduction and notes, is by A. T. Fear and published by Liverpool University Press.

In addition, books focusing on the Late Republic include parts of Cicero's life, albeit interwoven with other characters and events. Cicero is, alas, often not given the same coverage as men such as Pompey and Caesar.

From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome 133 BC to AD 68, H. H. Scullard. Standard undergraduate text for this period, written at a level which is accessible to those with an existing background understanding of the subject.

The Roman Republic, Michael Crawford. Slimmer and less academic alternative to Scullard.

Sulla: The Last Republican, Arthur Keaveney. Modern biography of Sulla, with extensive notes and bibliography. Useful for its coverage of Sulla's reforms to the magistracies and cursus honorum, which laid down Cicero's career path.

Fiction

Although not serious works or sources, a fictional biography of Cicero by Robert Harris is an entertaining read for those who would like a lively account of the era. The three books are entitled: *Imperium*, *Lustrum* and *Dictator*. An unrelated audiobook series, entitled *Cicero*, is also available from Big Finish Productions.

Notes

The notes from this and other talks can be found online at: www.ancienthistory.org.uk