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Preface

More of Cicero's works survive than those of any other Roman author. We know more about the late Roman Republic than almost any other period of Roman history, and much of that knowledge derives from Cicero himself. His varied and prolific writing enables us to learn about many aspects of Roman life (politics, religion, oratory and philosophy). Although Cicero is best known as the greatest Roman orator, he also wrote poetry, and works on oratory and philosophy. Then there are his letters, some nine hundred of them (see the note on p. 9), which provide a unique insight into his life and into the times and society in which he lived. No other figure from antiquity can be known so well.

Cicero was an important politician in republican Rome, where there was no division between those who shaped events and those who wrote about them. The major political figures (for example Caesar and Cicero) could also be major authors. They have, for this reason, to be read with a critical eye. It is possible to do this in the case of Cicero because we can compare what he said in the senate with what he said on the same subject before a meeting of the people, or we can compare a public speech with his private correspondence. These letters also allow us a first-hand look at other figures of the late Republic (Caesar, Crassus, Pompeius, Cato, Marcus Antonius, Brutus and Cassius, and Octavianus).

The late Republic was a crucial period in Roman history that saw the transition from a republican system of government (the Senate and the Roman People, which had been in place for centuries) to the Principate (the emperor, Augustus, ruling over a notionally restored republic). It was to the Roman Republic that the Founding Fathers looked when they wrote the American constitution and set in place a system of checks and balances, while it was on Augustan imperialism that Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, modelled his regime in Italy in the 1920s. This contrast, perhaps, helps us to understand the radical change that was taking place during Cicero's lifetime and why he felt so strongly about the *respublica*, to the extent of paying for his convictions with his life.

The chapters in this book follow a chronological outline. The extracts shed light on Cicero's family and education and his political and social life, while at the same time seeking to show the strains and pressures on the Republic which eventually led to the rule of one man. The book concludes with notes on ancient authors other than Cicero and a glossary explaining the terms used in the book.

That I was able to study and then for some three decades to teach Roman history is due to the good fortune of enjoying a traditional English classical education. Thereafter I learned much from the many colleagues with whom I worked in the

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Joint Association of Classical Teachers, especially when I was a member and then chairman of the Ancient History Committee. It was there that I first met Professor Michael Crawford, whose work on Roman republican coinage and Roman statutes has made a lasting contribution to the subject. I have benefited from his vast knowledge of Roman history and his generous friendship. The General Editors have been generous with their time and help. James Morwood originally persuaded me to undertake the book. He has kept a close eye on its progress and reined in my follies. I am grateful too for the efficient and professional help of Fiona Kelly at Cambridge University Press.