

## INTRODUCTION

**T**O write the biography of a great historical character is always a somewhat difficult, and generally a rather unsatisfactory, task; for one is confronted with the problem of how to handle the early years, when the subject was playing either no part or only a very minor part in the events which constitute the history of his time. If one emphasises the subject, there is very little history, and if the history, very little of the subject; yet both aspects are important, if one is to understand the later years where the character plays an important, possibly a leading, part in his country's story. For an understanding of the fully developed personality one should know what influences affected and moulded the character and ideas of the subject; to understand the problems and difficulties with which in his later years he contended we need to know their background and perhaps their origin.

Both aspects are therefore necessary, though they cannot be blended; they must exist side by side in a rather unsatisfying combination in which what one hopes is a judicious selection has been made of those trends and elements of his early life and upbringing which are significant for the understanding of the later life, and of those historical events which are significant for interpreting the later history; the two streams then, one hopes, blend together to form the single river which is the mature career of the subject in his country's history.

This is particularly true of Cicero, whose country equestrian background did not introduce him to the circles and personalities in whose hands lay the power and the government of Rome; he came from a middle-class world which looked on with awe and, possibly, admiration at the great nobles and their proud position in society and government, but had little contact with them. His passport to that circle was to be his oratory, and the story of his

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

## CICERO THE STATESMAN

early life is largely the story of his developing oratorical powers, in which meetings with the 'great' tended to be few and coincidental, certainly not an essential part of his life; his early years had therefore little contact with the persons or events of historical importance.

The present biography is no exception to the pattern I have described; the first half is rather slow-moving and deals either with Cicero or with history, only rarely, as with the *Pro Roscio Amerino* or the *Verrines*, with both together; it attempts to explain the background both of the man and of the events in which he later took so great a part, and to indicate what seem to me to be the critical themes and influences of this fateful period of history. In the second half the narrative moves faster and more smoothly, for by now Cicero and the history have become one; to write of the one is to write of the other, and Cicero's central place in the politics and events of Rome from 63 B.C., even when he was not an active participant, enables the story to be written without distortion, and the tragedy of Cicero and the Republic to unfold itself without the help of the author's promptings.

The drawbacks of the biographical method are compensated by the ability it gives to focus the attention on the figure of the subject, when the subject's contribution to the events is of such importance as to warrant a central place; for in this way it is possible to show the influence he exerted on the persons and events of his time. In Cicero's case this is particularly valuable, since from 59 B.C. onwards, with rare and short exceptions, he took little active part in the events whose impact he felt so keenly; none the less his influence was known and wooed by both Caesar and Pompey, and it was this continuing influence in spite of powerlessness to act which made possible those glorious months from late 44 B.C. until his death. History must necessarily have little to say of Cicero in these years, since his importance lay only in his influence among groups in Rome and Italy, and must therefore leave largely unexplained how he was able to rally his country's forces against Antony without first having to stake a

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

claim to leadership; it was because he had never forfeited the claim. At intervals throughout his period of inactivity men had looked to him to give a guiding lead to their own behaviour; and it is this importance which this biography attempts to explain and illumine. He was a true lover of his country, as even Augustus would later admit, and he was not without greatness; I hope that something of these qualities emerges from this story of his life in the service of his country.

## CHAPTER I

## THE ITALIAN BACKGROUND AND ARPINUM

CICERO was born on 3 January 106 at Arpinum, a small country town about a hundred miles from Rome, in the territory of the Volsci, a people who had in earlier times been fierce enemies of Rome, but who had for many generations now been part of the Roman state. Arpinum itself had enjoyed the full citizenship of Rome since 188 B.C., and could thus feel itself to be politically a part of Rome and sharer of the achievements of the second century, during which Rome had risen first to primacy, then to exclusive domination within that Mediterranean world in which her destiny was cast. But to have shared in Rome's political achievement did not mean that this or other country towns had wholly absorbed the Roman attitude and outlook, or that their citizens were looked upon at Rome as truly equal to her own inhabitants, with equal opportunities of office, power and influence in the affairs of Rome and her empire. Before describing the early life and ambitions of Cicero, it will be well first to take a quick glance at Italy and her country towns; for Cicero's ambitions and career were decisively influenced by the circumstances of his birth and the forces which moulded his early years.

At the time of his birth Italy was politically divided into three: there were certain parts which enjoyed full Roman citizenship; others which had what is known as Latin status; finally there were the Italians, whose situation was by now the least advantageous. The Latins, though not full citizens of Rome, enjoyed a political status second only to that of a Roman in Italy; they contributed to Rome's legionary needs, and had the benefit of certain *iura*

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

## ITALIAN BACKGROUND AND ARPINUM

such as the right to marry with Romans and to enter into binding contracts which were recognised in Roman law. Since they were not Roman citizens, they could not hold office at Rome, and hence could not directly influence the policies of whose execution they were the instruments; but for their upper classes at least there was a means of entry to the citizenship of Rome through the holding of office in their own communities. On the whole they seem to have been reasonably content with their situation; when the Social War broke out in 90, hardly a Latin community joined the insurgents. These were composed almost entirely of those in the third category, the Italians.

This group included the greater part of the Italian peninsula up to the river Po. Originally independent, they had for very many years been Roman 'allies', bound to her by treaties of varying degrees of sternness but following a certain number of patterns. A feature common to all these treaties was, however, a requirement to help the Roman armies with such cavalry and troops as Rome might from time to time enjoin. During the second century this requirement had been a real burden owing to the many wars in which Roman arms had been involved; the empire's growth and the immense accumulation of wealth during these years had been possible only because of the loyalty and support of the Latins and Italians, who had with hardly a murmur or protest followed Rome into wars in whose making and concluding they had no part or say, even though the cost in men and money was for all alike great, and the economic consequences sometimes grave.

Yet while they made their equal contribution to these wars, they did not equally share the profits; these went chiefly to Rome. True, the Italians found greater scope for their business and mercantile interests in an expanding empire; by Cicero's time the Italici were to be found in every part of the Roman world. But this was scant help or consolation to all those Italici who continued to live in Italy, on whom the burden fell directly, and who now began to feel themselves in a position of inferiority with

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## CICERO THE STATESMAN

respect to Rome. Subject as they were both at home and in the army to the *imperium* of the Roman magistrate, they were not seldom the victims of unjust and high-handed behaviour against which they had no appeal, and of demands to which they must unquestioningly submit. Compelled to follow Rome in a foreign policy for whose creation they had no responsibility and from which their own gains were slight compared with those of Rome, they began to feel indignant after so many years of loyalty and to demand an equality of privilege with those who were Roman citizens. With Caius Gracchus in 122 began the first phases of a struggle for this equality of status which was to end in 90–89 with the Social War and the gift of Roman citizenship to the whole of Italy as far as the Po.

For thirty years the struggle lasted, and such was the complex of conflicting interests that a solution short of war became progressively more doubtful and difficult. This is not the place to describe the details of that struggle, the different causes of exacerbation, the various efforts of the politicians to find a solution; but we must briefly consider the outlook and attitude of these people, which brought them to open war with Rome. For even though they finally achieved their object, the hatred bred by thirty years of increasingly resentful frustration could not expect to be dissipated by the signing of a treaty; for years they must feel differently from other Roman citizens; and this fact had importance for the age of Cicero.

Until they won the citizenship their position had become unenviable. Committed to policies in which they had no say, subjected to the orders and not infrequently the insolence of Roman magistrates, from whom there was for them no appeal, they could only smart, suffer and obey. Their interests were often ignored in the politics of Rome; if land was needed for allotment to the poor at Rome or to veteran soldiers, public land in allied territory was not unlikely to be used for the purpose. For although they were in theory allies, bound to Rome by treaty, but otherwise independent, the truth was very different; Rome's primacy

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## ITALIAN BACKGROUND AND ARPINUM

in Italy had brought it about that by the end of the second century Rome governed the whole of Italy; whether she gave orders to the allies with tact or not, orders they remained, which must be carried out; nor did Rome allow of the possibility of ending the treaty; they were bound, it seemed, for all time. They wanted neither independence nor subordination, but equality in a partnership of centuries; only if this were denied them, were they prepared to fight for independence from the thankless tyrant.

And what of the thankless tyrant? Why was she so mulish or so selfish in her treatment of allies whose loyalty was above suspicion and to whose help she owed so much? The reasons were many, some the result of insolence and selfishness, others deeper and mirroring the greatest political problem that confronted the ancient world, a problem which Rome did finally resolve, as Greece did not. Without doubt Rome's governing class had tended to become arrogant and contemptuous of others, to regard themselves conceitedly, and to assume that their superior position gave them both opportunity and right to behave with an insolence that was often intolerable towards Rome's allies and her subjects. Thirty years before the Social War broke out C. Gracchus could castigate the barbaric insolence of Roman magistrates and others; such conduct was not exceptional, and became more common in the ensuing thirty years. Such behaviour could breed only hate and enmity in the hearts of its victims, and there is evidence enough that such had been its offspring; nor was it by any means dispelled by the reluctant gift of citizenship, extorted by a short but bitter war.

There seemed, moreover, in the circumstances of Rome's political organisation, to be a reason for her exclusive attitude towards the gift of citizenship to so many thousands, scattered over so wide an area. In the past she had been generous in this matter; but the communities to whom she had made the gift were not far distant from Rome, and could within limits exercise its privileges and enjoy its advantages. But Rome, although she

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## CICERO THE STATESMAN

was now the mistress of an empire, was still in her constitution a city-state, ruled by annual magistrates elected by all the citizens, and passing her laws in assemblies at which every citizen had the right to vote. Each allied community had similarly its own organisation for the conduct of its life and its affairs; from time to time they would receive from Rome directives, possibly couched as requests, on matters of foreign or other policy; but otherwise they ruled themselves. Their citizens' lives were centred in their own community; there was the focus of their social life, the place in which they earned a livelihood, whose property and well-being were their chief concern, whose public offices their leading citizens held. Their own community was their fatherland, as Rome was for a Roman, nor did their pride and patriotism wish to find a different country for its outlet.

The city-state presumed a limit in terms of size and numbers. Every citizen had full political rights and was free to attend the council or assembly of his city; how, then, could a citizen who lived a hundred miles or more away hope to play his part in his city's affairs, if he was seldom or never in his city? Certainly Rome herself had citizen communities at great distances from Rome, the so-called Roman colonies; but they were not indigenous growths as were the allied cities, and their relation to Rome had been defined at the moment of their birth. From the outset they were colonies of Roman citizens, building a community in some area in Rome's interest, modelling themselves on Rome, and recognising her as their true country, to whom they looked for advice and from whom they received instructions. But though these colonies were different in origin and purpose from allied towns, they could none the less serve to illustrate that communities of citizens might exist at a considerable remove from Rome. Similarly the Latin colonies, to whom the Latin rights were given, showed that there could be a development of communities more favourable than that which the Italians enjoyed, at a distance from Rome.

But so long as Rome remained in her political structure a city-

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## ITALIAN BACKGROUND AND ARPINUM

state, the consequence of admitting the whole of Italy to her citizenship must appear in itself almost revolutionary. For tens of thousands of voters would be added to the electoral rolls, and this would have for the Roman plebs and noble families alike seemingly dire results; in prospect it might seem to spell the doom of that control of the elections which these noble families had contrived to establish; for while they might influence by bribery and patronage the Roman plebs, who represented so great a part of those that normally voted, how could they hope to widen that control to cover the whole of Italy? Nor would the plebs be any better pleased; their vote was worth something to them as an object for sale at the moment; but either the price must of necessity go down, or it would be beyond the powers and purse of candidates to attempt the purchase. We need not therefore be surprised that the broader vision of justice and gratitude to faithful allies should have been narrowed or obscured by meaner and more petty calculations of politics and gain. Few only at Rome had courage to rise above what seemed their selfish interests; the greater number, thinking of their own advantage, preferred to deny justice to their allies rather than risk the loss of their privileged position.

In fact their calculations were astray, for they supposed that a large number at least of these persons would, if enfranchised, come to Rome to cast their votes in the electoral and legislative Comitia. But this, as we have seen, was not their aim; equality of privilege and position was their goal, to end the humiliations they suffered at the hands of Rome and to be equal partners in the empire in whose creation they had played an equal part with Rome. This was their aim and their determination; the elections and legislation of Rome were in general of no greater interest to them than their own affairs were to Roman citizens. Only if matters of particular interest to themselves were the subject of legislation, would many of them make the journey to Rome to vote: and even then most would not come; the way to Rome was long and tedious, expensive and not always safe; most men

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13143-8 - Cicero the Statesman  
R. E. Smith  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## CICERO THE STATESMAN

could not afford the time and money or the retinue to assure their safety; only on rare occasions would many come to Rome.

Their civic interest lay with their own community; the Roman elections were not likely in normal times to stir them to heated discussion or angry passions; the successful candidate would, unless things went awry, be some scion of a noble family, seeking glory for his family, and profit for himself; once the Italians had Roman citizenship, his precocious temper and his immoderate insolence could not vent themselves on them; the unhappy provincials would be the victims, not they; it was not then worth a time-consuming journey to Rome to cast a vote of very dubious value on behalf of any candidate. Rome, in fact, and all the antics of its politicians left the new citizens largely unmoved; and the country-town morality would find much that went on in the great cosmopolis dangerous and alien to their simpler ways. In a world where communications were slow and precarious, unaided by all the modern means of translating men and words from place to place, there must always be vast differences between the outlook and manners of the country-town and the great capital; this was true of England until the twentieth century, and was certainly true of Italy in the first century B.C. The towns of Italy lived a simpler life, largely untouched by the political and moral corruption of Rome, governed by a moral code long superseded at Rome by one that gave a sanction to all the improprieties in politics and life that were the currency that bought success and wealth. To the countryman Rome was a rather fearsome place, likely to taint any that lived there; most of them had neither been nor ever would go there. Hearing the stories of the great city they felt perhaps a little envious of her glamorous marvels; but their roots were deep in the country, and they saw life through the country's eyes.

None the less incorporation within the polity of Rome opened the door to wider horizons for many of them; they could move about the Roman Empire as equal partners and enjoy the fruits of conquest as business men and tax collectors more than they