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052160687X - Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Volume I

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## INTRODUCTION

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## A. ATTICUS AND CICERO

As a schoolboy, setting a shining and stimulating example to his fellows,<sup>1</sup> T. Pomponius made friends with M. Tullius Cicero, some three years his junior.<sup>2</sup> Three years count for a lot at that time of life, and it is a point worth remembering that the friendship began with Pomponius as senior partner. Cicero too excelled in the class-room, and socially as well as intellectually they were well adjusted. Both were of wealthy equestrian family, not without tenuous aristocratic connections.<sup>3</sup> *Ex silentio* it may be inferred that their parents were not well acquainted, but there were doubtless common family friends in the capital.<sup>4</sup> One difference was personally and socially significant: the Ciceros were a country family, from Arpinum, whereas Atticus, to give him his later surname,<sup>5</sup> was Roman born, *ab origine ultima stirpis Romanae genitus*.<sup>6</sup> Nobody could call him *peregrinus*;<sup>7</sup> and not for him the suburban and country mansions where Cicero loved to lead Italian leisure, only two modest farms.<sup>8</sup> When in Italy Atticus preferred to stay in Rome.

From boyhood on, says his biographer, Atticus lived on the closest terms with Cicero.<sup>9</sup> But after his father's death (88 or

<sup>1</sup> *Nep. Att.* 1. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Atticus was born about November 110 (see R. Feger, *RE. Suppl.* viii. 503. 47), Cicero on 3 January 106.

<sup>3</sup> Atticus' cousin Anicia, herself possibly of consular family, married a patrician, Ser. Sulpicius Rufus, brother of the Tribune of 88 (*Nep. Att.* 2. 2). Cicero had a similar link with the consular Aelii Tuberones (Gelzer, *RE.* viia. 825. 17), not to mention his connection with the Marii (Münzer, *RE.* xiv. 1825. 41).

<sup>4</sup> The Augur and Consular Q. Mucius Scaevola, to whom Cicero was presented by his father on coming of age (*Leg.* 1. 13; *Amic.* 1), was also well known to Atticus (cf. 89 (iv. 16). 3).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Sen.* 1; *Fin.* v. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Nep. Att.* 1. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Sull.* 22 ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Nep. Att.* 14. 3. He occasionally thought of buying other properties in Italy: cf. 79 (iv. 8). 1; 176 (ix. 9). 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Nep. Att.* 5. 3 *cum quo a condiscipulatu vivebat coniunctissime.*

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earlier),<sup>1</sup> though not before the autumn of 86,<sup>2</sup> T. Pomponius left Italy for Athens, where he made his home for the next twenty years,<sup>3</sup> thus escaping civil war and its aftermath. Cicero's *Wanderjahre*, from 79 to 77, also included six months in Athens, where, along with his brother and cousin, Q. and L. Cicero, and another future Consul, M. Pupius Piso, he and Pomponius studied philosophy together.<sup>4</sup> During the rest of the latter's residence in Greece they will have met only on his, admittedly frequent,<sup>5</sup> visits to Rome. Their relationship in those days can hardly have been so intimate as it was later to become. That is the impression conveyed by the few surviving letters of this period (68–66), easy and amicable but comparatively jejune in matter and style. The match between Quintus and Pomponia had probably been made only a little while before the opening of the extant correspondence, according to Nepos by Cicero himself.<sup>6</sup> Though not a success for the principals it seems to have served what was perhaps its main purpose, to strengthen the ties between their brothers.

We have no letters for the years 64–62, during nearly all of which time Atticus was presumably in Rome. Thereafter, until the Civil War of 49, he paid frequent and lengthy visits to Epirus, where in 68 he had acquired an estate near Buthrotum on the coast opposite Corcyra. Business occasionally took him even further afield.

<sup>1</sup> Nep. *Att.* 2. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Drumann–Groebe, v, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Nepos (*Att.* 4. 5) puts the 'remigration' in 65, but doubtfully (*ut opinor*). Atticus was in Greece throughout at any rate the latter part of that year (11 (1. 2). 2). He doubtless had this step in mind when he bought his Buthrotian property in 68 (1 (1. 5). 7) and thought of buying a house in Naples (2 (1. 6). 1).

<sup>4</sup> Gelzer, *l.c.* 838. 47.

<sup>5</sup> I see no sufficient reason to discredit, with Feger, *l.c.* 507. 12, Nepos' statements in *Att.* 4. 3 f.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 5. 3.

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In early days the two had chosen their ways of life: Cicero advocacy and the *cursus honorum*, Atticus *honestum otium*,<sup>1</sup> filled by the attentive cultivation of a large fortune and numerous friendships, not to speak of literature, art, and Athenian civic affairs. Neither mode required apology. The Senate contained plenty of ex-equestrian *novi homines* who had climbed one or more stages of the official ladder. A man with Cicero's advantages could reasonably reckon upon reaching the Praetorship. The Consulship was a very different matter. Generally monopolized by the nobility,<sup>2</sup> it went now and then to other senatorial families; but Cicero was to be the first consular *novus* for thirty years. On the other hand men of Cicero's and Atticus' class—a Papirius Paetus, a M. Seius, a L. Saufeius, a Cn. Sallustius—often preferred to keep out of the race for office. Their decision was perfectly respectable.<sup>3</sup> Public emergencies might arise, as Atticus recognized in 63, from which no citizen had the moral right to exclude himself. But in the normal run of things the choice was a man's to make. The prizes of active politics would not after all go a-begging—*locus, auctoritas, domi splendor, apud exterarum nationum nomen et gratia, toga praetexta, sella curulis, insignia, fasces, exercitus, imperia, provinciae*.<sup>4</sup>

Atticus, however, was no average *eques Romanus locuples honestusque*. Few if any such could compare with him in two connected points, his interest and flair for backstairs politics and the quality of his social circle. He was a politician by nature, so Cicero once told him,<sup>5</sup> and the correspondence amply corroborates Cicero's opinion. Even in his Athenian days he would

<sup>1</sup> 17 (I. 17). 5.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. direct descendants in the male line of a Consul or equivalent dignitary.

<sup>3</sup> *minime reprehendenda ratio* (17 (I. 17). 5): cf. *Cluent.* 153 ff. That will represent the ordinary Roman view. As a philosopher C. held otherwise (cf. *Rep.* I. 10 f., etc., and E. de Saint-Denis, *Rev. de Phil.* 3<sup>e</sup> S. 12 (1938), pp. 193 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> *Cluent.* 154.

<sup>5</sup> 83 (IV. 6). I.

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come to Rome at election times, to oblige his friends among the candidates,<sup>1</sup> but also, it is fair to assume, to keep himself *au courant*. At that period he spent a good deal of time and money on the state affairs of his all but adoptive countrymen,<sup>2</sup> reaping surely a reward in amusement and experience as well as in such honours as Athens had to offer.<sup>3</sup> Domiciled in Rome, he kept abreast of the news, with a keen scent for what lay underneath the rose.<sup>4</sup> During Cicero's absences from the capital it was upon Atticus he most relied for news of the town, and not news merely, but shrewd forecast and opinion. Atticus' letters, vivid and meticulous, gave him the sense of knowing what was toward better than the people on the spot.<sup>5</sup> When, for our illumination too seldom, their positions were reversed, Cicero did as much for Atticus, whose avidity for political intelligence was quite equal to his own.<sup>6</sup> His letters to Epirus are the most informative and entertaining of the series. But on the whole the other side of the correspondence might, as *rapportage*, have been even better worth posterity's while.

For Atticus' wide interests and easy manners, good sense and lively wit, made him a man of many contacts—the ideal lobby correspondent. Nepos<sup>7</sup> makes much of his adaptability in personal relations; it extended even to his wealthy, 'extremely difficult' uncle Caecilius.<sup>8</sup> With the dynasts of the fifties, it is true, he had little directly to do, though he was on terms of

<sup>1</sup> Nep. *Att.* 4. 4 (see above, p. 4, n. 5).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 4. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 3. 1 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 88 (iv. 14). 2 *soles enim tu haec festive odorari*.

<sup>5</sup> 32 (ii. 11). 1 *dies enim nullus erat, Anti cum essem, quo die non melius scirem Romae quid ageretur quam ii qui erant Romae. etenim litterae tuae non solum quid fieret verum etiam quid futurum esset indicabant*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 38 (ii. 18). 1 *intellexi quam suspenso animo et sollicito scire avenes quid esset novi*.

<sup>7</sup> *Att.* 16. 1 *adulescens idem seni Sullae fuit iucundissimus, senex adolescenti M. Bruto sqq.*: cf. 92 (iv. 18). 2 *nemo enim in terris est mihi tam consentientibus sensibus*.

<sup>8</sup> Nep. *Att.* 5. 1.

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nominal friendship with Pompey.<sup>1</sup> But he cultivated their intimates, Varro, Terentius Culleo, Theophanes, and Deme-trius in Pompey's case, Q. Arrius perhaps in Crassus', as later Balbus, Oppius and others in Caesar's. Naturally he had a large acquaintance among his own class and the less elevated Senators. But friendships with the optimate aristocracy were his speciality, closest of all with Q. Hortensius Hortalus (Cos. 70), whose chequered relations with Cicero, a rival in love of Atticus as in leadership of the Roman bar, he was sedulous to smooth.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was to Hortensius, whose daughter married Cato's half-brother, that Atticus owed his *entrée* into the Catonian circle. Cato himself he loved, admired, and assisted in matters of business.<sup>3</sup> Cato's half-sister, the influential Servilia, was his *familiaris*,<sup>4</sup> and her son Brutus, twenty-five years Atticus' junior, became his and later Cicero's closest friend among the following generation. With L. Lucullus (Ponticus), who married Servilia's sister, Atticus had ties of long standing. A literary conversation, probably dating back to 77 or 76, is incidentally recorded,<sup>5</sup> and Lucullus was not only the friend and benefactor but also the prospective heir of Atticus' uncle Caecilius. History does not tell Lucullus' reactions to the scandalous discovery in 58 that Caecilius had in fact left his

<sup>1</sup> Too much must not be made of half or more than half ironical expressions like *tuus ille amicus*, *ille noster amicus*, etc.; and the momentous political interview with Pompey on his return to Italy in December 62 (cf. H. Ziegler, *Atticus als Politiker* (Munich, 1926), pp. 13 ff.) is a figment of O. E. Schmidt's (*Briefe Ciceros und seiner Zeitgenossen*, I, p. 25). But private conversations in 58 and 50 are on record (53 (III. 8). 3; 125 (VII. 2). 5). There is little trace of personal contact with Caesar (see below, p. 49, n. 8—88 (IV. 14). 2 and 115 (VI. 1). 25 can be discounted: see notes, and below, p. 26, n. 1), none of any with Crassus.

<sup>2</sup> *Nep. Att.* 5. 4, confirmed in the correspondence.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 17 (I. 17). 9 *heros ille noster Cato*; 21 (II. 1). 8 *Catonem nostrum non tu plus amas quam ego*; *Nep. Att.* 15. 3 (see below, p. 8, n. 8).

<sup>4</sup> 389 (XV. 11). 2: cf. 97 (V. 4). 1.

<sup>5</sup> 19 (I. 19). 10.

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millions (and name) to his nephew instead of to his noble patron.<sup>1</sup> But in 60 he, and very likely his brother Marcus, will have been included among Atticus' 'fish-fancying friends'.<sup>2</sup> Atticus presumably had some acquaintance with Hortensius' brother-in-law Catulus (Cos. 78), and he was certainly on a friendly footing with Hortensius' nephew, the patrician M. Valerius Messalla Rufus (Cos. 53).<sup>3</sup>

Ties with the patrician Manlii Torquati were particularly close, Lucius (Cos. 65), his son (Pr. 49), and their distant kinsman Aulus (Pr. 70(?)). The elder Lucius was another school friend, bracketed as such by Nepos with Cicero and the younger Marius;<sup>4</sup> he and his son, a spokesman in the *de Finibus*, had congenial interests in the fashionable philosophy of Epicurus<sup>5</sup> and, perhaps, the no less fashionable composition of erotic verse.<sup>6</sup> That excellent person<sup>7</sup> A. Torquatus was one of a number whose affairs Atticus as *procurator* managed in their absence,<sup>8</sup> one of those too whom he befriended after Philippi<sup>9</sup>—all the Torquati were firm optimates.

<sup>1</sup> Val. Max. vii. 8. 5. Public reprobation of Caecilius' duplicity was such that they dragged his body through the streets.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 19 (i. 19). 6 *beatos homines, hos piscinarios dico amicos tuos*.

<sup>3</sup> As shown by a number of references from 85 (iv. 9). 1 of April 55 onwards.

<sup>4</sup> Nep. *Att.* 1. 4 *quos consuetudine sua sic devinxit ut nemo his perpetuo fuerit carior*.

<sup>5</sup> Atticus (unlike, e.g., Cassius) was *anima naturaliter Epicurea*, but the flippant, sometimes contemptuous (e.g. 104 (v. 11). 6 *barones*), tone in which C. writes to him on this theme shows that his membership of the sect was not taken seriously. He may be supposed to have professed it partly to be in the fashion and partly because as a devotee of things Hellenic he had to have a philosophy and Epicureanism suited him better than any other.

<sup>6</sup> The younger Pliny's *Torquatium, immo Torquatos* (*Ep.* v. 3. 5) is likely to include at any rate the younger Lucius, the bridegroom probably of Catullus' *Epithalamium*.

<sup>7</sup> 94 (v. 1). 5 *optimum virum*.

<sup>8</sup> Nep. *Att.* 15. 3 *quo fiebat ut omnia Ciceronum, Catonis Marci, Q. Hortensii, A. Torquati, multorum praeterea equitum Romanorum negotia procuraret*. For the meaning of the last two words cf. *Fam.* xii. 24. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Nep. *Att.* 11. 2.

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Atticus also had his place in another aristocratic group of a different political complexion—the Metellus brothers and their Claudian relatives. The original link was probably Q. Metellus Celer<sup>1</sup> (Cos. 60), always an optimiate at heart.<sup>2</sup> With his brother Nepos (Cos. 57), the firebrand Tribune of 62, Atticus had influence to use on Cicero's behalf.<sup>3</sup> Through Celer's wife Clodia, the βῶπις whom Cicero could not abide,<sup>4</sup> Atticus at one time kept in touch with P. Clodius Pulcher himself.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence in 54 of amicable relations with Publius' elder brothers, Appius<sup>6</sup> (Cos. 54), whose daughter married Brutus, and Gaius<sup>7</sup> (Pr. 56).

With many other nobles besides these groups Atticus had more or less of acquaintance. He must have known and mourned with Cicero that great and good man L. Lentulus Niger, Flamen Martialis, of whom history has so little to tell.<sup>8</sup> He clearly knew P. Lentulus Spinther (Cos. 57) well.<sup>9</sup> In 48 he needed consolation for the supposed death of C. Fannius<sup>10</sup> (Pr. 54(?)). One way of fostering aristocratic friendships for a man of letters, an antiquary, was to write family histories. Atticus had so obliged Metellus Scipio (Cos. 52) and Q. Fabius Maximus (Cos. Suff. 45) in 58, and did the same for C. Claudius Marcellus (Cos. 50) and M. Brutus many years later.<sup>11</sup>

It stands to reason that Atticus did not lack opportunities to join behind the scenes in the political game of which he was a privileged spectator. But the indications are that he used them

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 20 (I. 20). 5 *Metellus tuus*.

<sup>2</sup> 21 (II. 1). 4 *consul φιλόποτρις et, ut semper iudicavi, natura bonus*.

<sup>3</sup> 67 (III. 22). 2; *Fam.* v. 4. 1. <sup>4</sup> 21 (II. 1). 5.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 17. Direct contact with Clodius is indicated, though hardly proved, by the ironical *istum tuum sodalem Publium* of 29 (II. 9). 3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Q.Fr.* II. 11. 2. <sup>7</sup> Cf. 90 (IV. 15). 2. <sup>8</sup> Cf. 83 (IV. 6). 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 67 (III. 22). 2; 69 (III. 24). 2—though *amicissimo homini* in the latter probably relates to Cicero rather than to Atticus. Spinther is often *Lentulus noster* in the letters of 50–49. <sup>10</sup> 217 (XI. 6). 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Nep. Att.* 18. 3 f.: see Münzer, *Hermes*, 40 (1905), pp. 93 ff.



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sparingly and seldom, nearly always for private purposes. One such occasion arose in 64. With an excitement visible in his letters<sup>1</sup> Cicero approached the electoral campaign for which his whole previous career had been a preparation; for in the story of his uninterrupted rise I believe it idle to look for any more abstract aim. The powers that were after Sulla, a coterie composed from, though by no means coextensive with, the nobility, could not be expected to find room voluntarily for a *novus homo* from Arpinum who would be nobody's Sancho. That fact enforced a semblance of opposition, temperamentally uncongenial, to the exclusive 'few'. Cicero's first major political manifesto, the Verrine speeches of 70 (the juvenile *pro Roscio Amerino* hardly qualifies), presents him as the spokesman of a Roman people at the limit of its patience with corrupt senatorial courts and governors. Not, to be sure, as an out-and-out *improbis*; that role never flattered Cicero's instincts or ambitions. As a senatorial advocate before a senatorial jury he testifies regard and respect for the Order. Even so, the tone of militant menace,<sup>2</sup> even of class rancour,<sup>3</sup> is sufficiently acrid. Sulla and his institutions come in for rough handling.<sup>4</sup> The other important political speech from the pre-consular period, the *pro lege Manilia*, gives quite a different impression. Unrestrained panegyric of Pompey is primary of course, but Lucullus gets his due and the leading opponents of the bill, Hortensius (so scathingly assailed in the Verrines) and Catulus, are treated with notable respect. Times had changed. The optimate leaders,<sup>5</sup> chastened by events, might not after all be im-

<sup>1</sup> 10 (I. 1; especially §4) and 11 (I. 2).

<sup>2</sup> Especially in II. 2. 77, 174, 3. 207 f., 5. 126 f., 173 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. II. 3. 7 ff. (n.b. *ceterorumque hominum magnorum atque nobilium*), 4. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. II. 1. 123 (sympathy for the children of the proscribed), 2. 77 (*praeclarae leges Corneliae*) 3. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Asc. 60. 20 *dixerunt... principes civitatis qui plurimum in senatu poterant*, Q. Hortensius, Q. Catulus, Q. Metellus Pius, M. Lucullus, M'. Lepidus. L. Lucullus, being outside the city with *imperium* in 66, could not appear in the list.

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placably obstructive. In favouring circumstances, perhaps even in 66 to be approximately envisaged, Cicero might yet find himself where his inmost sentiments and hopes tended to place him, beside old adversaries in defence of established institutions.

That at any rate was to happen. Menaced by a revolutionary patrician, the *principes* consented<sup>1</sup> to the pollution<sup>2</sup> of the Consulate by a new-comer, a self-proclaimed *consul popularis*,<sup>3</sup> and Cicero was elected by unanimous vote of the Centuries.<sup>4</sup> But the possibility of such a dénouement was only embryonic when he wrote to Atticus about his prospects in midsummer 65. Not that they were by any means bad. His probable competitors were blackguards or nonentities, and he could draw on a vast store of *gratia* zealously accumulated through the years. Cato's brother-in-law<sup>5</sup> Domitius Ahenobarbus, already in 70 *adulescens clarissimus ac princeps iuventutis*,<sup>6</sup> was a mainstay.<sup>7</sup> But Cicero had cause for uneasiness on two sides. Pompey's intentions were dubious, and Atticus is facetiously<sup>8</sup> asked to let him know that he will be forgiven if he does not come back from the East to attend the election; and the nobility had not yet shown their hands.<sup>9</sup> A subsequent letter expresses more concern on the second count. Referring to a strongly current belief that Atticus' noble friends would oppose his candidature, Cicero appeals to him to return to Rome, where he could be of the greatest service in winning them over. The fluidity of the

<sup>1</sup> Plut. *Cic.* 10.<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sall. *Iug.* 63. 7.<sup>3</sup> *Leg. Agr.* II. 6, etc.<sup>4</sup> *Off.* II. 59.<sup>5</sup> Later at all events. The date of Domitius' marriage to Porcia is uncertain.<sup>6</sup> *Verr.* II. I. 139. On Cicero's interest with the younger nobles cf. *Comm. Pet.* 6, 33 (the authenticity of this tract is *sub iudice* and likely to remain so).<sup>7</sup> *IO* (I. I). 4 *in quo uno maxime ambitio nostra nititur.*<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 2. This whole passage about Pompey, including the admonition to Atticus (*illam manum cura ut praestes sqq.*), ought not to be taken literally: see note *ad loc.*<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* *cum perspexero voluntates nobilium, scribam ad te.*