THE LETTERS OF CICERO
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Assignment

- As a preliminary task, and in order to contextualize your reading of these letters, look at the presentation found here (in Echo=Presentation 5: Ancient Shorthand). This presentation will orient you to the kinds of letter-writing practiced in the western tradition, and it will also offer some contextualizing comments about the Adams-Jefferson correspondence, which should prove helpful once we begin to examine these letters more carefully on Wednesday. After you have studied the presentation, choose one ancient or medieval letter-writer mentioned in it and prepare a presentation on that figure, attending to biography but also to a close examination of a handful of letters owed to that figure. Post your presentation on your blog.
Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in 106 BCE in what is now Arpino Italy, and lived 63 years until 43 BCE. He was a “Roman statesman, lawyer, scholar, and writer who vainly tried to uphold republican principles in the final civil wars that destroyed the Roman Republic. His writings include books of rhetoric, orations, philosophical and political treatises, and letters. He is remembered in modern times as the greatest Roman orator and the innovator of what became known as Ciceronian rhetoric.”
Early Life and Career

- Cicero was born into a wealthy family in the Roman town of Arpinium.
- In the year 89 BCE, he began military service under Pompeius Strabo who was the father of statesman and general Pompey.
- In 81, Cicero began his career as a lawyer, defending Publis Quinctius.
- In 80 and 81, Cicero defended Sextus Roscius from fabricated charges of parricide. It was this defense that earned him his reputation as an excellent lawyer.
- Cicero’s political career began in Sicily in 75, when he earned the title of quaestor, which was a financial administration position in Sicily.
- In 63, he was elected to consul.
Early Life and Career Cont...

- While in consul, a plot was formed against Cicero, and the city of Rome. The plot was lead by a rival of Cicero; a senator named Lucius Sergius Catilina.

- A female citizen came to Cicero and informed him of Catiline’s plot, and Cicero brought it to the attention of the senate.

- At first, there was not enough evidence to convict Catiline of any crimes, however, when it became apparent that Catiline was in fact plotting to overthrow Rome, he was run out of the city.

- Catiline’s coconspirators were later revealed and ordered to be executed by Cicero.

- Following these events, Catiline assembled an army of 20,000 men, and a battle was fought between Rome and Cataline’s army.

- Cataline’s army was defeated, and Cataline, himself, killed.
Cicero’s Letters

- Cicero wrote many letters of various types; some to family, and those close to him, but also many were formal letters, or letters addressed to the public.

- The letters written by Cicero take place over the course of a very interesting time in Roman history, and Cicero was a central figure in many of the events that happened in Rhome at the time, making his work a tremendous resource for scholars studying this period today.
Cicero’s Letters to Atticus

- Cicero wrote many letters to Titus Pomponius Atticus, an editor and a banker, and one of Cicero’s closest friends.

- In his conversations with Atticus, Cicero talks about politics, and his race for office against P. Sulpicius Galba and several other candidates. However, he is encouraged by the fact that he has many good friends and supporters.

- In another letter to Atticus he informs him of the recent election of L. Julius Caesar and C. Marcius Figulus to consul. He also talks about his rival, Catiline, and how he is considering whether or not to come to his defense against the charges that have been brought upon him. He asks for Atticus’s opinion on the matter, and says that if he is acquitted of the charges, and if they are not able to work productively together, he will have no choice but to resign.
Bibliography

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