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CAESAR'S MEN IN CICERO'S CORRESPONDENCE

Cicero set out from the house he had rebuilt on the Palatine to be the reluctant governor of a province in Asia Minor in the spring of 51 B. C. He was not to see it again for four and a half years. The Civil War intervened, and did not end with Caesar's victory at Pharsalia(1) in August 48. But for Cicero, on the losing side, enough was enough. By Caesar's special permission or invitation, conveyed through Cicero's son-in-law Dolabella, he returned to Italy. But Caesar was in Egypt, and Cicero was not authorized to proceed to Rome. He had to spend a miserable year in Brindisi before Caesar returned and graciously released him from limbo.

It was not until the autumn of 47 then that Cicero could begin to pick up some of the threads of his old life. The senate and the law-courts, which had made up so large a part of it, were no more for him under the new autocracy. In his private world too there were empty spaces. After over thirty years of marriage, he and his wife Terentia had become estranged and were divorced in 46. Her successor lasted only a few months. A bitter quarrel with his brother and nephew, with factual and psychological roots traceable far into the past, had broken out in 48, and the reconciliation a year later was merely superficial(2). His daughter, the much-prized Tullia, died early in 45. As for old friends: «Am I to have recourse to my friends?» he asks a correspondent. «How many do I have? You know, since most of them were yours too. Some have perished, others have somehow grown less feeling(3)». And again: «Some of my friends are dead, others away, others changed toward me(4)». In his inner circle there remained only an eighteen-year old son, with whom he had little in common, Atticus, friend of a lifetime, and Tiro, the ever devoted secretary and literary aide.

Perhaps for the first time, Cicero found himself in Rome with leisure on his hands. Literary activity was his chief resource. During these

(1) «*Pharsalus*, the modern title for the battlefield, is not merely in itself an error both gross and gratuitous; it is implicated with another that is more serious still» (J. P. Postgate, *Lucan De bello civili VIII* 1917, xcvi).

(2) D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero*, 1971, 182-185.

(3) *Fam.* 5, 15, 2.

(4) *Fam.* 5, 21, 1.

Caesarian years 46-44 works on rhetoric and philosophy streamed from his stilus. But as he remarked, one cannot spend all one's life reading and writing. Cicero was a social animal. His wit and vivacity, the breadth of his culture and the variety of his experience, made him excellent company. A moderate eater and drinker, he loved dinner-parties. In 43, back once more in the thick of politics, he writes to an old friend, Papirius Paetus:

«I am sorry to hear that you have given up dining out ... My dear Paetus, all joking apart, I advise you, as something I regard as relevant to happiness, to spend time in honest, pleasant, and friendly company. Nothing becomes life better or is more in harmony with its happy living. I am not thinking of physical pleasure but of community of life and habit and of mental recreation, of which familiar talk is the most effective agent; and talk is at its most agreeable at dinner-parties(5)».

Here is a vignette of Cicero's day-to-day life in 46:

«In the morning I receive callers, both loyal republicans (numerous but depressed) and these jubilant victors, who I must say are most obliging and friendly in their attentions to me. When the stream has stopped flowing, I absorb myself in literary work, writing or reading. Some of my visitors listen to me as a man of learning, because I know a little more than they do. All the rest of my time is given to the claims of the body(6)».

Cicero's letters do not provide much in the way of description at large of the social climate in Caesar's Rome, but a few hints are easily expanded. The *boni*, the 'honest men', republicans who sympathized with Pompey even if they had not actually joined him, were naturally in eclipse. In their place sat the jubilant victors, making the most of their hour. It must have been something like Paris under the Directory, when the revolutionary terror was over and those who had managed to survive it set about celebrating their luck with more gusto than good taste. Caesar's following included many aristocrats (he was one himself, of course), but the leading nobles, apart from some stay-at-homes who might count as neutrals, had been Pompeians to a man. The few Consulars who actively supported Caesar were returned exiles who had fallen foul of the law-courts. But many of his principal adherents were obscurities, some needy and disreputable, parvenus, hungry adventurers. Cicero writes of them to Atticus in March 49:

«Gods! What an entourage, what an Underworld, to use your favourite expression ... What a gang of desperados(7)!»

(5) *Fam.* 9, 24, 3.

(6) *Fam.* 9, 20, 3.

(7) *Att.* 9, 18, 2.

And a few days later:

«You may take my word for it that every shady character in Italy is with Caesar. I saw the whole crew at Formiae and I assure you I thought them more like beasts than men(8)».

Three years later these people appeared to Cicero in a different light. To an ex-Pompeian waiting for Caesar's pardon and leave to return to Italy:

«The fact is that, opportunely enough, I have Caesar's intimates all linked to me in familiar intercourse and friendship. Pansa, Hirtius, Balbus, Oppius, Matius, and Postumus carry their regard for me to really extraordinary lengths. If I had had to bring this about by my own efforts, I should not regret my trouble, considering the times we live in. But I have done nothing in the way of time-serving. I have long-standing friendship with all of them(9)».

Cicero overstates a little. Except for his charming, detrimental son-in-law, his closer Caesarian contacts were not with nobles like Mark Antony and Lepidus, but with the upstarts. All the six he names were Caesar's creatures, and the list could have been longer.

«I go on dining every night with our present rulers», he writes to the learned Varro, another returned Pompeian(10). One of his best known letters was actually written on such an occasion, spiced by the presence of a notorious actress, formerly Mark Antony's ranking mistress(11).

Cicero's company was clearly in demand. His social gifts were one reason. «It's the party I enjoy. I talk about whatever comes uppermost, as they say, and transform sighs into shouts of laughter(12)». But the new, raffish order could well do with countenance, however informal, from so distinguished a survival as Cicero, whose name still counted for something in respectable circles. Some of his Caesarian dinner-companions no doubt genuinely liked and admired him and some were former clients with grateful memories. They knew, moreover, that courtesies to Cicero would be far from displeasing to Caesar.

On his side, Cicero was well aware that his familiarities with the ruling clique called for apology, especially since in spite of his disclaimer he had done his best to promote them. «Let me assure you, my dear Paetus», he wrote in the summer of 46, «that whatever art could do ...

(8) *Att.* 9, 19, 1.

(9) *Fam.* 6, 12, 2.

(10) *Fam.* 9, 7, 1.

(11) *Fam.* 9, 26, 2.

(12) *Ibid.*

toward gaining and garnering the good-will of these gentry, has been achieved by me, no effort spared(13)».

Apart from his enjoyment of convivial society, Cicero valued his relations with influential Caesarians as an insurance against disagreeable personal contingencies. On hearing of Caesar's victory at Thapsus and the execution of Caesar's republican kinsman Lucius Caesar, he wrote to Varro:

«I said to myself "What can I expect?" So I go on dining every night with our rulers. What am I to do? One must go with the times(14)». In the same summer he was giving lessons in declamation to Hirtius and Dolabella, whereby among other advantages «I gain some protection against the hazards of these times(15)». Even his choice of a second wife seems to have had a prudential motivation. To quote Elizabeth Rawson: «A modern scholar has convincingly suggested that Publilia's family also stood usefully high in Caesar's favour(16)».

At the same time these connexions could be put to an altruistic use. Many ex-Pompeians received Caesar's clemency, which some repaid by conspiring his assassination. Cicero helped all he could. Aware that many republicans blamed him, as he put it, for being alive, he salved an uneasy conscience and indulged a naturally kindly disposition by interceding for old friends in distress. One of them wrote: «My entire hope lies in you ... You are so indefatigable on your friends' behalf that they have come not merely to hope for your help, as I do, but to demand it, as I am doing(17)». After his return Cicero spent most of his time in Rome until grief for Tullia drove him to seek seclusion in the country. Consequently the correspondence with Atticus during that period is sparse. In the numerous letters of 45, most of them to Atticus, references to Caesar and his regime become sour and hostile, reflecting the writer's darkened mood following the disappointment of political hopes and the loss of his daughter. But he continued to cultivate the good relations. The influential Dolabella had proved an unsatisfactory son-in-law and his marriage to Tullia had been dissolved not long before her death. But Cicero continued to correspond with him in terms of warm affection. Then there was his and Atticus' unspeakable nephew, the younger Quintus Cicero («was there even ever such an out-and-out good-for-nothing as that young

(13) *Fam.* 9, 16, 2.

(14) *Fam.* 9, 7, 1.

(15) *Fam.* 9, 18, 2.

(16) *Cicero*, 1975, 224; see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero*, 203.

(17) *Fam.* 6, 7, 6.

man?»)(18), who had been much taken up in Caesarian circles. In August 45, after some overtures on Quintus' part, Cicero consults Atticus: should he spurn the fellow off or, to quote Pindar, employ 'crooked wiles'? (19) Crooked wiles had it. The following year, after Caesar's death, brought a formal reconciliation. Cicero gave the young man a letter addressed to Atticus professing confidence in his good intentions. At the same time he sent Atticus a private warning not to be taken in (20). He might have repeated a line from Euripides which he had once quoted in a different context: «such are the sorry works of woeful war».

Pansa, Hirtius, Balbus, Oppius, Matius, and Postumus. Let us take a look at those names.

Pansa and Hirtius are linked historically by their joint consulship in 43 and almost simultaneous deaths in the fighting around Mutina. Although they had been prominent supporters of Caesar, as consuls they stood firmly by the republic and Cicero against the new would-be autocrat, Mark Antony.

Aulus Hirtius had served with Caesar in Gaul and the civil war, according to one theory as head of secretariat, since he is not heard of at that time as commanding troops in the field. Later as governor of Transalpine Gaul he conducted a successful campaign against Germans and proved his generalship against Antony in 43. Whether active or chairborne, he was no simple soldier. Just before the civil war broke out he came to Rome as Caesar's confidential emissary, and his consulship in 43, by Caesar's nomination, crowned the usual *cursus honorum*. As a man of letters he wrote a conclusion to Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War* and, probably, an account of the war in Egypt in 48-47, both extant. When Cicero published a eulogy of the republican hero Cato in 46, Hirtius replied with an *Anticato*, which paved the way for a similar publication by Caesar himself. Another facet of Hirtius' personality was his ferocious connoisseurship of food. Cicero wrote to Paetus in 46 that he had actually ventured to ask Hirtius to dinner and his cook had managed to match Hirtius' own cuisine, except for one item (21).

The original of Hirtius' friendship with Cicero is not recorded, but it was doubtless of long standing and superficially warm. Their correspondence, extant in antiquity, ran to at least nine 'books'. St Jerome mentions a proposal on Hirtius' side that Cicero should marry his sister after Terentia's divorce. Cicero's dialogue *On fate*, composed shortly after

(18) *Att.* 12, 38, 2.

(19) *Att.* 13, 38, 2.

(20) *Att.* 16, 1, 6.

(21) *Fam.* 9, 20, 2.

Caesar's death, was dedicated to Hirtius, who is called in the surviving fragment «a great friend of mine, devoted to the studies in which I have lived from boyhood», and made to say that Cicero's wishes had never diverged from his own – public affairs presumably left out of account. In the *Philippics*, Cicero always refers to Hirtius with esteem, describing him in the first of them as «the delight of his friends». Most striking testimony of all, another ex-Caesarian and governor of Gaul, Lucius Munatius Plancus, founder of Lyons, whose family friendship with Cicero went back two generations, wrote to him after Hirtius' death: «All I ask of you is that you take me as Hirtius' successor in affection on your side and in respect on mine» (22).

If Plancus meant what he wrote, he was deceived. Cicero had no affection for Hirtius. His true feelings are laid bare in a letter to Atticus written shortly after Tullia's death: «It is nice that Hirtius has written sympathetically to you about me (that was kind of him), and much nicer that you did not send me his letter – that was even kinder of you» (23). In his sorrow Cicero had no use for the sympathy of a man for whom he really felt nothing positive.

He had a nickname for Hirtius which he uses in letters to Atticus, a Greek word of doubtful import (24). It seems to refer to Hirtius' propensities as a gourmet or gourmand. 'Five-gullet' is one suggested meaning, 'lick-all' another (if the latter is right, something further could be implied).

However that may be, Cicero's nicknames were generally unflattering and he did not bestow them on people he genuinely valued.

After Caesar's death, as consuls-elect for following year, Hirtius and Pansa professed to favour a constitutional regime, and their subsequent conduct in office proved their sincerity. Cicero did not trust them a yard. «I am not much taken with these designates of ours», he wrote to Atticus five weeks after the Ides of March (25). And a few weeks later:

«You say Brutus and Cassius want me to make a better republican out of Hirtius. Well, I am doing my best and he speaks very fair; but he and Balbus (who also speaks fair) live in one another's pockets. You will judge for yourself what to believe (26)».

And in the next letter:

«Tomorrow I propose to dine with Hirtius, Hirtius Lick-all. That's

(22) *Fam.* 10, 21a.

(23) *Att.* 12, 44, 1.

(24) *Att.* 14, 21, 4.

(25) *Att.* 14, 12, 2.

(26) *Att.* 14, 20, 4.

the way I plan to bring him over to the optimates. A pack of nonsense! That lot are scared of peace, every man of them(27)».

The next day:

«As for my pupil [meaning Hirtius], who dines with me this evening, he is mightily attached to the person in whom our friend Brutus stuck his dagger. And if you want to know (it's plain as daylight to me), they are scared of peace(28)».

At the end of May:

«Cassius requests me urgently to make Hirtius as good a republican as I can. You can't change a leopard's spots(29)».

A few days later:

«Our friend Brutus and Cassius too have written to ask me to make Hirtius, who they say, has been «sound so far», still sounder. I don't know that he *has* been sound so far, and have no confidence that he will be made any sounder by my influence. He may be somewhat out of humour with Antony, but he's a firm friend to that cause(30)».

It was much the same story with Gaius Vibius Pansa Caetronianus. He too was old acquaintance – «my friend Pansa» occurs in a letter of 53(31). To Cassius at the end of 46 Cicero writes of Pansa's humanity and kindness to political opponents in distress(32). But after Caesar's death he distrusted Pansa as he distrusted Hirtius. «Pansa talks sternly», he writes to Atticus in May «– if you care to believe him(33)». True, a few days later he changed his mind: «I saw a lot of Pansa in Pompeii. He quite satisfied me of his loyal sentiments and desire for peace(34)». But not for long. In June: «Which side will Pansa take if war comes?(35)». In July: «Well then, are we to look to the 1st of January and put our trust in Pansa? A puck of nonsense. Those fellows think of nothing but boozing and sleeping(36)».

A still more unfavourable verdict on the Consuls-Elect came from Cicero's brother Quintus in a letter to Tiro(37):

(27) *Att.* 14, 21, 4.

(28) *Att.* 14, 22, 1.

(29) *Att.* 15, 5, 1.

(30) *Att.* 15, 6, 1.

(31) *Fam.* 7, 12, 1.

(32) *Fam.* 15, 17, 3.

(33) *Att.* 14, 19, 2.

(34) *Att.* 14, 20, 4.

(35) *Att.* 15, 22.

(36) *Att.* 16, 1, 4.

(37) *Fam.* 16, 27.

«I know them through and through. They are riddled with lusts and languors, utter effeminate at heart. Unless they give up the helm, there is every risk of universal shipwreck. It is unbelievable the things they did to my knowledge on active service, with the Gauls encamped right opposite. Unless a firm line is taken, that bandit [Antony] will woo them over by comradeship in vice. The position needs to be fortified by the tribunes or by private initiative. As for that precious pair, you would hardly trust one with Caesena or the other with the cellars of Cossutius' taverns».

The precise significance of Caesena, a small town in eastern Italy, and Cossutius is beyond knowledge, but the general purport is plain. Quintus had always been given to verbal intemperance and Marcus Cicero cannot be held answerable for his brother's opinions. But Quintus would hardly have used such language to Tiro about persons whom Marcus genuinely liked and esteemed.

Grudgingly Cicero let himself be convinced of the good faith of the consuls of 43, but continued private carping at their lack of energy and ability – without much justification, so far as we can judge. His final view is summed up in a letter to Marcus Brutus (38): «We have lost two loyal consuls – but 'loyal' in the most one can say». He goes on to use an ungenerous word, 'flight', to denote Pansa's withdrawal from the fighting at Forum Gallorum after receiving a wound of which he died a few days later. No sign of personal grief, nor yet, incidentally, any apparent awareness of the fatal significance of the consuls' deaths for his cause and himself (39).

«As far back as my memory extends», writes Cicero to Gaius Matius, «no friend of mine is older than yourself. But length of acquaintance is something which many share in some degree, affection is not. I cared for you from the first day we met, and believed that you cared for me». That comes from a celebrated exchange of letters in the late summer or autumn of 44. It had come to Matius' ears that Cicero was speaking ill of him. So he sent a younger common friend, C. Trebatius Testa, to Cicero at Tusculum to remonstrate. The result was a long letter from Cicero to Matius, much of it consisting in a recital of Matius' past services to himself, and concluding with an assurance that, while there were two ways of looking at Matius' loyalty to Caesar's memory, Cicero himself always rallied to its defence:

«If you do not believe in the sincerity of this letter, you will be setting me down as a stranger to all sense of obligation and good feeling.

(38) *Brut.* 1, 3a.

(39) *Fam.* 11, 27, 2.

Nothing could be more wounding to me than such a judgment, or more uncharacteristic of yourself».

Matius' reply, much admired by posterity and much misunderstood(40), speaks of Cicero's «straightforward and most friendly attitude». Tongue in cheek? He had not read a letter of Cicero's to Atticus a few months earlier, shortly after Caesar's death:

«I have broken my journey at the house of the person of whom we were talking this morning. Utterly deplorable! ... In short he said Rome was finished – I am inclined to agree, but *he* said it with relish(41)».

A second letter concludes:

«Well, there you have him – a most peace-hating, which is to say Brutus-hating, Baldie(42)». Cicero had a nickname for Matius too: 'Calvenna', that is *Calvus*, 'bald', with the Etruscan termination *-enna*. Presumably Matius came from Etruria or Campania.

Of the other three names on Cicero's short list of personally attentive Caesarians there is less in this context to say. Balbus, the crafty careerist from Cadiz, and Curtius Postumus, that 'enthusiastic and militaristic Caesarian', as Graham Summer dubbed him, had been clients. Cicero's occasional references in familiar correspondence tend to be depreciatory and sarcastic, and the latter is one of four scandalous war profiteers named in a letter of 44(43). Oppius comes off best of the six. His discretion after Caesar's murder is set in favourable contrast with Matius' outspoken reprobation of that, to Cicero, heroic exploit.

There were others. Trebatius Testa, already mentioned, was a special case. When he went to Gaul in the spring of 54 armed with an unusually warm letter of recommendation from Cicero to Caesar he was in his thirties, about fifteen years Cicero's junior, but already a distinguished jurist. 'He leads the pack in civil law', wrote Cicero. But he needed money and went to Gaul to make some. A string of letters to him there, friendly, jocular, at times avuncular, shows that after some initial grumbling he settled down. In early 49, soon after the outbreak of the civil war, Caesar gave him a message for Cicero, urging the latter to stay in Rome. Cicero comments to Atticus: «What surprises me is that Caesar did not write to me himself, or through Dolabella or Caelius. Not that I despise Trebatius' letter. I know he has a particular regard for me». Some weeks later he and Matius are found anxiously advising Cicero how to

(40) *Fam.* 11, 28; see my commentary on ss. 5-8.

(41) *Att.* 14, 1, 1.

(42) *Att.* 14, 2, 3.

(43) *Att.* 14, 10, 2.

handle a forthcoming meeting with Caesar. Nothing is known of his further activities until after the war, when he appears as closely in touch with the Dictator. Suetonius has an anecdote(44) about an occasion when Caesar received the assembled senate who were bearing a number of decrees in his honour in the temple of Venus Genetrix. Some think, says Suetonius, that he tried to rise but was held back by Cornelius Balbus, others that he did not even try, and gave C. Trebatius, who was admonishing him to do so, a distinctly unfriendly look. There cannot have been many who would have presumed to admonish the autocrat, but we can believe it of the crusty personage portrayed in Horace's *Satires*. Perhaps it was such independence and self-respect that allowed Cicero to call him, Caesarian though he was, 'a thoroughly good man and a good citizen'. And he never refers to Trebatius in the sarcastic, censorious tone used of others of the group in his familiar letters.

How much or little Cicero liked individual Caesarians hardly mattered. One of them he detested, Pansa's father-in-law Fufius Calenus. To Atticus, May 44(45):

«A courier from Quintus Fufius arrived about 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the 24th with a note from him asking resume friendly relations – clumsily enough as usual; or is it that when one dislikes a man, everything he does seems clumsy? I replied in a way that I think will meet with your approval».

We can be sure Fufius was not rebuffed.

Beneath personal liking or disliking lay a necessarily covert animus against Caesarians as such, and of course above all against Caesar himself. Caesar's autocracy affronted Cicero's deepest political convictions, rooted in the traditional code of the city-state, according to which a 'tyrant', who seized and kept power over the community, was the worst of malefactors, and to strike him down, along with his family and supporters, not only no crime but an act of exalted patriotism. And there were psychological factors at work. To quote from my biography(46):

«If Cicero had simply approved of Caesar's killing as an act of supreme justice and necessity, he would merely have been conforming to his code. But certain terms in his letters, as when he writes to Atticus of having «feasted his eyes on the just death of a tyrant» or to Cassius of the late Dictator as a «blackguard», point to warped emotions. Cicero had solicited generous treatment from the man he now vilified – and resented it. Was it not Caesar, as he had written to Atticus in 49, who had robbed

(44) *Jul.* 78, 1.

(45) *Att.* 15, 4, 1.

(46) P. 228.

him not only of what he had but of what he was? It was Caesar, not Cicero, who had lived Achilles' slogan: «Aye to excel, out-topping all the rest», and whose success in wicked courses had reduced the premier Consul of 62 to something like a sycophant – not only of Caesar but of Caesar's creatures... Even so, a happier man might have resisted the temptation to gloat. The desert of Cicero's domestic life did not engender the flower of magnanimity».

He was no stranger to social diplomacy. His letter to the 'Triumvir' Marcus Crassus in 54(47) is no less hypocritically effusive than that one in 44 which its recipient Mark Antony was so ungentlemanly as to read aloud in open Senate(48). The contribution of politicians, especially successful ones, to that always small percentage of civilized human beings which allows itself the luxury of candour in personal relationships can never have been disproportionately large. In his dialogue *On friendship* Cicero observes through the principal speaker that true friendships are very hard to find among those whose time is spent in office or in public business(49). David Lloyd George was often heard to say that there is no friendship at the top. Under Caesar, and even after Caesar (by force of habit, it might seem), duplicity in day-to-day intercourse became part of the pattern of Cicero's existence. Inner resentment against the need for it can be traced not only in the hatred he bore Caesar's memory but in the fanaticism with which he fought Antony. That is not to say that both are not defensible in political terms.

The dialogue *On friendship* has been a deservedly popular work. Cicero approached the subject from an ideal standpoint and doubtless drew much more from his Greek sources than from his own experience – as was his way when writing on general themes. It is a far cry from Cicero and the Caesarians, and indeed from the realities of Roman *amicitia* in general, to such a passage as this (mainly in W. A. Falconer's Loeb translation):

«Now the support and stay of that unswerving constancy which we look for in friendship is loyalty; for nothing is constant that is disloyal ... And so the truth of what I said in the beginning is established: "Friendship cannot exist except among good men". For it is characteristic of the good man, whom I may also call the wise man, to maintain these two rules in friendship: first, let there be no feigning or hypocrisy. For it is more worthy of a free-born man to hate openly than to mask his thoughts with a lying face. Secondly, let him not only reject charges preferred by another,

(47) *Fam.* 5, 8.

(48) *Phil.* 1, 7.

(49) *Amic.* 64.

but also let him avoid even being suspicious and ever believing that his friend has done something wrong (50)».

At the same time it is well to remind ourselves that among Cicero's numberless *amicitiae* and *necessitudines* one deserved to be called *vera*. His relationship with Atticus, though not altogether simple and not without its ups and downs, was unique. But that is another story, which has been told elsewhere.