

tum denique edentur: Cicero's Letters and Greek Epistolary Literature

Recent scholarship on Cicero's letters, having dispensed with the old assumption that they represent self-evidently sincere and authentically emotional records of daily life, has instead emphasized their literary and rhetorical craftsmanship, as well as their role as a strategic political and social tool within late Republican society (Hutchinson 1998, Hall 2009, White 2010). Yet despite this increased literary focus, little work has been done on the influence that Greek antecedents had on Cicero's epistolary practice. This paper will correct that imbalance, and will demonstrate that Cicero (and his editor's) knowledge of Greek epistolography had a hand in the decision to publish a carefully selected collection of letters as part of his literary legacy.

That Cicero intended to publish at least some of his letters is well-known; at *Att.* 16.5.5, written in July 44, he announces that his secretary Tiro has collected "about seventy" (*instar septuaginta*) to which will be added those received from Atticus. When these arrive "I must look them over and correct them—then and only then will they be published" (*eas ego oportet perspiciam, corrigam; tum denique edentur*). Cicero's emphasis here on the editing and polishing of the collection is significant, and White 2010 (31-61) has shown the extent to which an editor's hand can be detected in the shape of the extant collection. By focusing primarily on Cicero's political letters, and by including letters to Cicero from the most important political actors of the day, the editor of our collection tells, as White has demonstrated, a very particular story: the story of the political behavior of important men at a time of grave national crisis.

This is a story that is both fundamentally and uniquely Roman. And yet the medium in which it is told is, as is so often the case with Roman literary endeavors, borrowed from the Greeks. Letter writing in the Greek world was a genre that had had, by the first century BCE, many centuries to flourish (Rosenmeyer 2001: 19-38), and one that had long since acquired its

own stylistic guidelines and manuals (Poster 2007). It was also a genre with which Cicero was well acquainted: he quotes from Plato's famous Letter 7 (*Att.* 9.10, 9.13), and even briefly considers using Aristotle and Theopompus' letters of advice to Alexander as a model for his own letter to Caesar (*Att.* 12.40, 13.26, 13.28). More than this, Cicero saw how such letter collections could be used to shed light upon the biographies of their famous authors: he notes twice that we would not have proof Demosthenes had been Plato's disciple were it not for his letter collection (*Br.* 121, *Or.* 15).

It is well known that towards the end of his life, Cicero became increasingly concerned about the literary and political legacy he would leave behind, and sought means by which he might memorialize this legacy on his own terms. Indeed, the majority of his output of the 40s bears traces of this anxiety, whether overt (as in the *Brutus*) or more covert (as in the quotation of his poetry and speeches in *Orator*, *De Natura Deorum*, and *De Divinatione*). What this paper will argue is that his decision in 44 to publish a select collection of his letters went hand-in-hand with this maneuvering, and was prompted by his knowledge of the Greek epistolary tradition; while the eventual editor of the collection may not have complied with the letter of Cicero's wishes (presumably publishing more letters than Cicero originally intended), he certainly complied with the spirit. This paper will thus conclude that rather than seeing the publication of the letters as an accident of history, we should see instead a strategic act of (self-)promotion: a means by which Cicero (and his editor) could situate his political biography within the Greek tradition of well-known figures whose letters were essential for shedding light on the details of their public careers.

Works Cited

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