

## Being Atticus: The Politics of Friendship at the End of the Republic

This paper examines the political effect of Nepos' references to Cicero's *De Amicitia* in the *Life of Atticus* when recounting the eponymous subject's dedication to personal friendships.

The characterization of Atticus as a friend *par excellence* is a theme that runs throughout the *Life* (Stem 2005). Indeed, through the course of the biography Atticus emerges as a contemporary Laelius. This character resemblance and the long held scholarly perception of Nepos as a weak minded copyist has led Horsfall to argue that Nepos' version of friendship is a reiteration of the Ciceronian cultural conception voiced in his *De Amicitia* (Horsfall 1989). This reading, however, fails to consider the political and ideological unrest that was occurring during the composition of the *Atticus* (36/35 BCE), as well as Nepos' elite readership. The triumviral period was a time of continual renegotiation and reinvention for the (formerly) ruling elite who still populated the Roman political landscape. Considering, therefore, the political transformation Rome had undergone in the years following Cicero's death, one may wonder why Nepos chose to recall the former enemy of the ruling triumvirs.

In this paper, I will argue that Nepos appropriates and redeploys Cicero's language of friendship to underscore the changing political framework for elite males from a governmental system based on equality to a new order of hierarchical relationships. I begin by examining the different political associations of the vocabulary of friendship used by both Nepos and Cicero (*amicitia, familiaritas, similitudo*). From there I proceed to a close, theoretically informed analysis of the recollections (or lack thereof) of the Ciceronian language of friendship in the *Atticus* where we find Nepos actively engaging with, and ultimately questioning, Ciceronian friendship. Through Nepos' references to the *De Amicitia*, therefore, we can read the *Atticus* as a didactic political text for a radically changing time.

### Works Cited

- Horsfall, N. 1989. *Cornelius Nepos: A Selection Including the Lives of Cato and Atticus*. Oxford.
- Stem, R. 2005. "Nepos' *Atticus* as a Biography of Friendship," in Carl Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XII*. Bruxelles. 115-129.