

The Development of Cicero and Pompey's Relationship Through an Analysis of Cicero's Epistles

This paper examines the relationship of Cicero and Pompey, and the deterioration of said relationship through the analysis of Cicero's epistles to Atticus and his family members.

Although Pompey and Cicero were familiar with one another under the military service of Sulla, their paths had diverged as Cicero furthered his political and legal career and Pompey continued serving under Sulla until his death. These epistles, primarily written between 62 and 59 BCE, highlight the initiation of a political relationship as both men gained socio-political acclaim within the Republic- Cicero due to his consular role in the Catilinarian Crisis in 63 BCE and Pompey due to his victories in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Third Mithridatic War in 65 BCE. Not only do the epistles capture the development of the relationship between these two powerful men but also emphasizes Cicero's belief that, after Pompey's return to Italy, the prospects of expanding their joint influences publicly were a waste of time, and that Cicero views Pompey as an uncivilized power-hungry brute. In their first letter, *Fam. 5.7*, Cicero seeks to flex his consular *auctoritas* to establish the equality of his *auctoritas* with Pompey's military *imperium*, likening their relationship to Laelius and Scipio Africanus respectively (Cicero, 2001). Through their mutual ambitions to gain power within the Late Republic, Cicero sees value in deepening their relationship and ensuring a lack of ill will between them when Pompey returns to Italy. In the following letters, *Att. 1.13* and *Att. 2.14*, the initial *amicitiae* between both men has begun to sour in Cicero's perspective following the Bona Dea Scandal. Cicero directly insults Pompey's lack of subtlety and lack of political talent in *Att. 1.13* and in *Att. 2.14*; Cicero likens Pompey to Sampsiceramus, a foreign non-Roman king that helped Pompey in his Eastern conquests (Cicero, 2001). The same exploits he previously praised are now subjects for criticism:

“... *ne ille noster ‘Sampsiceramus,’ cum se omnium sermonibus sentiet vapulare et cum has actiones εὐανατρέπτους videbit, ruere incipiat.*” (...lest that one, our ‘Sampsiceramus’, when he will realize that he himself is in mud by the words of every man and when he will see these political acts easily overturned, would begin to commit violence”) [Cicero, 2001]. Cicero not only denies Pompey’s honors as *imperator* but also highlights his growing concern that like their many political contemporaries, Pompey might resort to political violence to ensure his status within the Republic (Seager, 1979). Political violence was the norm in the Late Republic, and these letters grant their reader a glimpse of what Cicero fears. Pompey, once the protégé of the dictator Sulla, has become like his master.

Works Cited

Cicero. *Letters to Friends, Volume I: Letters 1-113*. Edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton

Bailey. Loeb Classical Library 205. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001

Seager, Robin. *Pompey: A political biography*. Oxford England: B. Blackwell, 1979.