

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *Epistulae ad familiares* (*Letters to Friends*) (62 of the 435 letters)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment
Northern Italy (South Tyrol?), c. 1450

ii (parchment) + 80 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, upper outer rectos, 1-80, complete (collation i-viii¹⁰), vertical catchwords, lower inner versos, traces of quire and leaf signatures, mostly cropped away, ruled very faintly in ink and lead with full-length vertical bounding lines, written below top line in a well-formed humanistic hand on twenty-one long lines (justification 103-105 x 58-61 mm.), capitals touched in red, pink rubrics, opening and closing rubrics written in display script in Roman capitals in pink (f. 80) or alternating lines of blue and pink (f. 1), two- or, occasionally, one-line initials in red or blue with contrasting pen flourishing in pink, followed in q. i by up to a line of display script written in pink in Roman capitals, space for five-line initial on f. 1, followed by a line of display script written in blue in Roman capitals, arms and other heraldic decorations drawn in brown ink in lower margin of f. 1 and tinted in red, blue, and faded gold, marginal and interlinear annotations in at least two humanist hands, one possibly that of the scribe, marginal drawing somewhat faded and rubbed and partially cropped, some staining and soiling of margins, larger stain partially obscuring text on f. 29, pen trials and ink blots on ff. 42v-43, slight worming in the lower outer corner of ff. 78-80, small traces of vegetal matter stuck to f. 22v, edges slightly trimmed before binding, otherwise in very fine condition. EARLY ITALIAN BINDING of brown leather, blind tooled with a rectangular double-fillet frame bisected horizontally, vertically, and diagonally with double fillets, on wooden boards, spine with three raised bands, five small round metal bosses on upper and lower boards, with one now lacking from lower board, remains of fore-edge clasp, front to back, with broken leather strap extending from upper board and metal clasp, decorated with flowers and a Gothic "S", on the lower board, spine rebacked with peeling leather exposing the top and lower third of the spine, v-shaped gash in leather of upper board, leather stained and worn away along edges and corners, traces from pastedown with Gothic script (now lacking) on the inside of the upper board. Dimensions 154-155 x 105 mm.

This elegant volume, intact in what is likely its original binding, bears witness to the Italian Renaissance's interest in Cicero's letters. Admired for his eloquence and his mastery of the Latin language, Cicero was rediscovered by humanists in the fourteenth century and much copied during the fifteenth century. In the present volume, a painted coat of arms points to ownership by a member of a noble family in the South Tyrol, and the extensive early annotations suggest that its owner studied the volume carefully.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and decoration make it possible to localize this manuscript's creation to northern Italy, around the middle of the fifteenth century, c. 1450. The binding, also characteristic of Northern Italy in the fifteenth century, was likely completed not long after the manuscript's production.
2. This volume belonged early on to – and was perhaps made for – a member of the Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn family, whose fifteenth-century seat was in the northern Italian town of Laives, in South Tyrol just south of Bolzano. The coat of arms in the lower margin of f. 1 – azure, a pile argent, with the crest of a crowned helmet with five plumes – was used at the time by the Counts of Liechtenstein (and, indeed, the current arms of the town of Laives were adapted from the arms of the Liechtensteins). The arms appear here supported on the left by a golden lion rampant and with three red and gold flowers, their leafy stems entwined within a blank scroll (presumably for a motto that was never

added) appearing on the right. Judging from extensive marginal commentaries added in a relatively early hand (see Text section below), this book was likely being used for study, perhaps even for the education of a nobleman in Latin.

3. Two names inscribed on the recto of f. i, "Jo. Dari[...?] dal uitti[?]" and "Zarzi Na[...?]," may have been added by other early users of the book.

TEXT

ff. 1-80, MAR[CVS] TVLLIVS CICERONIS [sic] SALVTEM D[ICIT] AD LENTV[LVM] EPISTOL[E?] FAMILIARIVM FELICITER INCIPIVT [sic], incipit, "[P]ERIOCVNDE fuerunt michi littere tue quibus intellexi te perspicere meam in te pietatem ... Et si salui redierimus et salua illa offenderimus. Vale. Kalendas Sextiles"; f. 79v, Marcus trebacio Salutem dicit, incipit, "Execremeni in eternum nec ita benedicamini ... inbutos sceleribus non uirtute et honestate pollentes inimici certe non mei domini et patres carissimi. Vale et ualeas et cetera. MARCII TVLII EPISTOLE FELICITER EXPLICIVNT"; [f. 80v, blank].

Sixty-two letters from Marcus Tullius Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares* (*Letters to Friends*), all drawn from the first seven books of the sixteen-book collection. In order of their appearance in this volume, these are I.9.1-4 (extract); II.1-2, 4, 6-7, 11, 13-14; IV.5-6, 10-12; V.9, 11-13; II.9-10, 12, 15-16, 18-19; I.3, 5-6 10; III.1-2, 5, 13; IV.1, 13-14; V.1-2; IV.7-9, 15; V.3-7; VI.5, 9, 1; VII.4-5; V.8, 10a-b, 15-19; I.5a.1-3 (extract); and VII.15 and 19. The final letter, though attributed here to Cicero, is in fact a much later composition, likely written by a humanist. It appears in at least three other fifteenth-century manuscripts, copied alongside other letters, and has elsewhere been attributed to Johannes Fauconius, chancellor of Bergamo. The reasons for this arrangement of letters are a matter for further study.

There is a modern critical edition of the *Letters to Friends* by Bailey (1988); Bailey also translated *Friends* into English (Bailey, 2001). After it was "rediscovered" by humanists (see below) the text circulated widely in manuscript form in the fifteenth century. It was immensely popular in print as well, with at least thirty-five editions of the text before 1500 (GW nos. 6799-6833), and twenty-four further editions of the text with commentary before 1500 (GW nos. 6834-6857).

Letters to Friends is a collection of 435 letters written to friends and public figures over a period of twenty years, between 63 and 43 BCE, by the great Roman orator, lawyer, politician, and prose stylist Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE). Originally issued as pieces of semi-public or private correspondence, the letters furnish candid insights into life in the final years of the Roman republic and into the life of one of Rome's great statesmen. Cicero's secretary and freed slave, Marcus Tullius Tiro, assembled and published them after Cicero was killed in 43 BC.

Friends became an immediate sensation in humanist circles after the humanist chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), came upon the complete collection in 1392 in a ninth-century manuscript at Vercelli (now Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms Pluteo 49.9). When, decades earlier in 1345, the early humanist, scholar, and poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) had come across Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* in a manuscript in the cathedral library of Verona, this discovery ignited humanists' interest in searching for and copying manuscripts preserving classical works. It also whetted humanist interest in Cicero and in his correspondence, both for the witness it bore to Roman history and for its style. Cicero's letters

provided Petrarch and other humanists with a new model of letter-writing, one in which personal and spontaneous engagement with friends – rather than an official purpose and accompanying formula – provided the justification for writing and supplied the content for epistolary exchange. Petrarch would adopt this model, in fact, in a letter he composed soon after his discovery – and addressed to the long-dead Cicero.

The fifteenth century saw a profusion of manuscript copies of *Friends*, as well as anthologies of, collections of excerpts from, and commentaries upon Cicero's letters. One reason for this was that humanists held Cicero's prose in extremely high regard; they saw in Cicero's Latin a purer, more elegant form of the language to which they sought to return. For this reason, humanists turned to them as instructional texts. The sixteenth-century humanist Orazio Toscanella (c. 1520-1579), for example, had his students read, memorize, and analyze the letters as a way of mastering Ciceronian Latin.

This volume may well have been used in this way, as a volume for study. An early reader left a series of annotations in the margins of two letters addressed to Gaius Scribonius Curio (II.6-7, ff. 4v-8). These annotations are all keyed to particular phrases in the text (usually copied out at the beginning of the marginal note, though sometimes written at the note's conclusion) and they offer varied analysis of the letter's parts. Some, if not all of them, appear to derive from sixteenth-century humanist commentaries on the letters; the annotations for II.6, for example, are all attributed in a sixteenth-century edition of *Friends* (Brescia, 1550) to the Protestant intellectual and reformer Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), and one annotation appearing at the beginning of II.7 is attributed in the same edition to the Renaissance humanist Francesco Robortello (1516-1567). These annotations suggest that an early owner of the book was reading the letters carefully and alongside recent commentaries.

LITERATURE

Bailey, D. R. Shackleton, ed. *M. Tulli Ciceronis Epistulae ad Familiares, Libri I-XVI*, Stuttgart, 1988.

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Burton, Gideon. "From *Ars dictaminis* to *Ars conscribendi epistolis*: Renaissance Letter-Writing Manuals in the Context of Humanism," in *Letter Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell, Columbia, South Carolina, 2007, pp. 88-101.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

M. Tulli Ciceronis Epistulae ad familiares, The Latin Library [full Latin text]
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/fam.shtml>

TM 914