

CAECILIA-DÉSIRÉE HEIN, *Cicero als philosophischer Schriftsteller. Kommentar zu ausgewählten Briefen aus den Jahren 45–44*, Wissenschaftliche Kommentare zu Griechischen und Lateinischen Schriftstellern, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 251 pp., 58,00 €, ISBN 978-3-8253-6970-5.

Recent research in classical philology has not only been able to overcome the negative judgements that have characterised the scholarly discussion of Cicero's philosophical writings since the nineteenth century, but, based on their re-evaluation as philosophical achievements in their own right, it is also becoming increasingly clear that Cicero's engagement with and recourse to philosophical questions and patterns of argumentation were influential in all areas of his life and fields of activity. Moreover, they constituted an essential aspect of his self-fashioning within the Roman aristocratic culture. This result has sharpened awareness of the fact that an adequate study of the philosopher Cicero must not be limited to his philosophical writings, but should evaluate his entire oeuvre and, in the end, all sources that provide insight into Cicero's biography and actions. In this context, it has already been shown that Cicero makes broad use of philosophical argumentation in his speeches, admittedly in a strategically carefully balanced manner. This insight, in turn, is able to sharpen our perception of the fact that Cicero's dealing with philosophy in general and his philosophical writing in particular are to be seen in close connection with his political and social intentions.

One area of his oeuvre, however, is still overlooked by this broadening of perspectives, namely his extensive correspondence. Here, too, recent studies show that it is not only an excellent source of biographical and historical information, but also for those questions that pertain to the motivations and socio-cultural mechanisms of Cicero's actions in his diverse private and public spheres of activity. Nevertheless, Cicero's correspondence has so far rarely been consulted for a deeper understanding of the intellectual, biographical and social conditions of his philosophical work and the objectives associated with it. Consequently, there is still a need for further research in this regard, especially since the results of those more recent sociologically or culturally oriented approaches to Cicero's epistolary oeuvre promise a corresponding gain in knowledge.

The publication under review starts precisely here. Based on a dissertation submitted in Munich in 2017, it examines the significance of Cicero's correspondence for his understanding as a philosophical writer by commenting on ten letters from the years 46 and 45 BC – the subtitle of the work is thus

not entirely precise but rather misleading – and so from his particularly productive second period of philosophical writing during Caesar's dictatorship, during which most of Cicero's philosophical writings were composed in close succession. The author Caecilia-Désirée Hein assigns the letters she analyses to four thematic areas, which correspond to the main chapters of the work: the first is devoted to four letters to C. Cassius and explores how Cicero uses the letter as a medium of philosophical discussion (pp. 31-91), the second is also devoted to four letters, this time to Atticus, which portray the philosophical writer Cicero by giving insight into the choice of the interlocutors for the *Academici libri* (pp. 93-177), the third is devoted to only one letter, fam. 9,8, and poses the question of the extent to which this letter can be read as a dedication of that work to Varro (pp. 179-206), the fourth finally analyses one letter from a group of letters to Atticus, in which Cicero struggles with his friend over the adequate translation of Greek philosophical terms (pp. 207-24). All this is preceded by an introduction explaining the work's structure and approach (pp. 9-29).

The introduction begins with a brief overview of the current state of research as well as with a concise justification for the choice of a commentary, before the further historical and biographical background of the period from which the selected letters originate is outlined. The next two subchapters deal with theoretical aspects of ancient epistolography and Cicero's own understanding of it on the basis of his own statements, which can be found in no small measure in his correspondence. The author then presents the topics of the letters discussed according to the four chapters in which they are analysed and commented on in the following, before concluding her introduction with notes on the structure of the commentary.

The four chapters of the commentary are largely structured in parallel. They first present the framework, content and context of the letters, before their detailed lemmatic commentary follows. With C. Cassius, the four letters that the author examines in the first chapter are addressed to a follower of Caesar who, like him, was close to Epicurean philosophy (fam. 15.16-19). After an overview of Cassius' biography, Cicero's further correspondence with him and the political background of the four selected letters, the author first explores the Epicurean inclinations in Caesar's environment before focusing on the central object of discussion with Cassius, namely the meaning and political understanding of the term *καλόν* as well as, based on this, the fundamental ethical standards of political action in the latest phase of the Republic, and elaborating the different positions of the two interlocutors. In order to make clear the close relationship between Cicero's understanding of the *καλόν* and his political ideas, the author also consults two relevant letters from his correspondence with Atticus. Her analyses finally culminate in the question whether the letters to Cassius ought to be evaluated as philosophical letters in a narrower sense. The nuanced answer offers a precise determination

of the way in which Cicero addresses philosophy in his correspondence, namely not in the form of doctrinal treatises, but in close connection with political questions. A significant difference, moreover, from the philosophical didactic letter can be discerned.

The second chapter, which is the most comprehensive, has a more literary approach in accordance with the subject of the letters commented upon (*Att.* 13.12, 13.16 and 19). It first gives an overview of the formal characteristics of the Ciceronian dialogue, in order to take a look at the relationship between reality and fiction in the shaping of the *dramatis personae* in it. After a sketch of the complex genesis of the *Academici libri*, the author turns to the reasons that moved Cicero to change the interlocutors in the second version of the work. She rightly locates these in two motives: on the one hand, Cicero was keen to increase the appropriateness of the interlocutors for the complex epistemological subject, which seemed to him to be insufficiently guaranteed in the interlocutors of the first version. On the other hand, she makes socio-political motives responsible for the exchange, thus revealing once more how much social considerations and political action influenced Cicero's philosophical work.

After the introduction of the second chapter has elaborated the reasons for Varro's choice as interlocutor in the second version of the *Academici libri*, the third chapter focuses on that one letter of Cicero to Varro in which he informs the latter of his choice as speaker in this dialogue (*fam.* 9.8). The sections preceding the commentary shed light on the complex relationship between Cicero and Varro, but above all pursue the question of whether the letter under discussion can be addressed as a dedicatory letter, although it only accompanied the *Academici libri*, sent to Varro. To this end, the author offers fundamental considerations on the social dimensions of dedications in literary communication in antiquity. A contextualisation of the letter in Cicero's correspondence with Varro, which helps to further illuminate the relationship between the two, and a discussion of its genesis and its relationship to the proem of the second version of the *Academici libri* round off the detailed introduction to the commentary on the letter.

Finally, the last chapter takes *Att.* 13.21 as an example of a letter, in which Cicero discusses the adequate Latin translation of Greek philosophical terms with Atticus and comments on his friend's suggestions. In this specific case, it is a question of the appropriate Latin rendering of the process of the final withholding of judgement (*ἐποχή* or *ἐπέχειν*), which is central to academic scepticism, for which Atticus brought up the verb *inhibere*, while Cicero prefers the verb *sustinere*.

The four main chapters of the monograph cannot be judged otherwise than excellently done. The lemmatic commentary devotes equal attention to the grammatical, linguistic and stylistic, argumentative, and structural aspects. It also deals convincingly with the peculiarities of content of the

selected letters and offers a careful, comprehensive and detailed analysis of them. The sections leading to the commentaries illuminate the contents and contexts of the letters under discussion in philosophical, literary, biographical and social terms and thus sketch the horizon of understanding against which the detailed analyses of the commentaries are set. They testify to the author's broad knowledge both with regard to the problems and questions relevant to Cicero's self-fashioning as a philosopher and his philosophical writing and to the relevant research, which is also consulted and competently discussed in the detailed analyses of the commentary sections, right down to special topics.

One of the most relevant benefits of the work, apart from the comprehensive indexing of the letters dealt with, is that it demonstrates in an exemplary manner the fundamental value of the correspondence for a better understanding of the philosopher Cicero. The examples used by the author show how closely philosophical interests and political communication are interwoven in Cicero's work and how closely the two areas interact with each other; then, to what extent the literary composition of his philosophical dialogues also takes political and social considerations into account, for example with regard to the choice of interlocutors; and furthermore, how prudently and judiciously Cicero endeavours to appropriate Greek philosophy and to render it adequately in the Latin language. Finally, the work provides impressive proof that meticulous analyses of the sources are of fundamental significance in order to make the specific signature of the philosopher Cicero recognisable in all its facets. In doing so, the work sheds light on precisely those aspects on which research has based its longstanding and powerful condemnation of Cicero's philosophical lack of independence and superficiality. Caecilia-Désirée Hein thus makes an important contribution to a re-evaluation of Cicero as a veritable representative of ancient philosophy, and does so by exploiting Cicero's correspondence from a perspective that is only rarely chosen.

If some criticism must nevertheless be voiced at the end of this review, then it does not concern the consistently detailed and competent commentaries on the selected letters, but rather their insufficient embedding in the broader context of Cicero's philosophical work as a whole, against the background of which the author herself wishes her analyses of the letters to be set. This shortcoming is due to an introduction that is altogether too brief. It briefly clarifies, as already mentioned, the essential historical, biographical and theoretical aspects in relation to the letters analysed. But it omits to look, at least to some extent, at the treatment of philosophy and Cicero's philosophical writing as well as philosophical argumentation in general in his entire correspondence. Furthermore, the commentary could have been supplemented by a concluding chapter. For it lies in the nature of comprehensive commentaries that it is rather difficult to maintain focal

points in them because they make a claim to equally explaining all levels of a text, which in itself is very welcome of course. The introductory sections of the four main chapters undoubtedly provide a comprehensive account of the value of the letters commented on in relation to the focus of the work. However, they also remain largely related to them. A concluding chapter would have provided an opportunity to summarise and systematise the essential results of the analyses. Since these bring to light numerous results that clarify the image of the philosopher and philosophical writer Cicero, there would also have been an opportunity to fundamentally highlight the specific source value of Cicero's correspondence for this purpose. In the absence of such a broader perspective, the work falls short of its potential. It constitutes an excellent commentary on a certain selection of letters, but does not sufficiently elucidate the benefit of Cicero's correspondence as a whole for his characterisation as a philosopher and his philosophical work.

Finally, some editorial flaws in the work certainly go beyond what is tolerable. The text is marred by too many errors of orthography and the notes suffer from occasionally inconsistent or incomplete references. In addition, authors and titles in the bibliography are not always reliably researched. These problems could easily have been remedied by more thorough proofreading.

Despite these few points of criticism, concerning content and form, there is no doubt that Caecilia-Désirée Hein's work offers profound analyses of the selected letters and offers a competent and inspiring contribution to understanding Cicero as a philosopher and philosophical writer. In particular, it sharpens the view of the usefulness of Cicero's epistolary oeuvre for this purpose, which should definitely be further deepened.

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