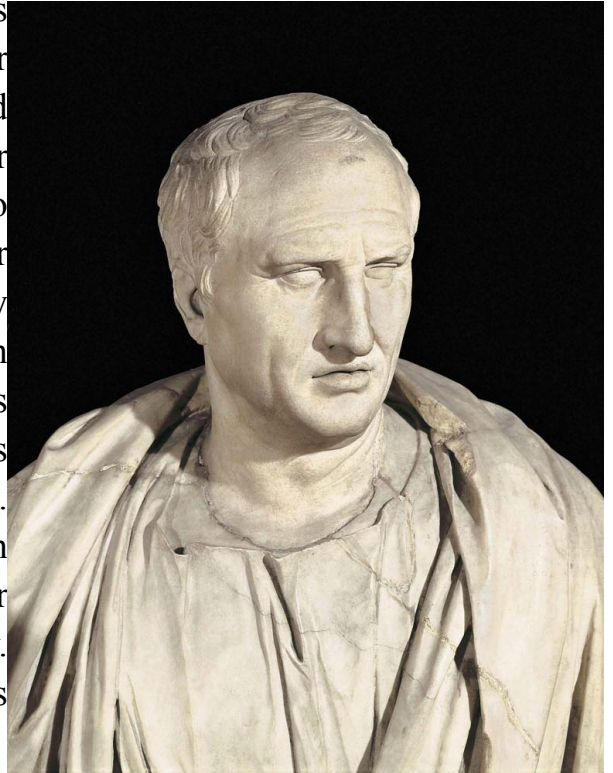


MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

It is a particular pleasure when a U3A member offers to give a talk at one of our monthly meetings. This month we were privileged to learn a great deal from Mike Head about Marcus Tullius Cicero, the Roman lawyer, orator, administrator, politician, philosopher and writer who lived between 106 and 43 BC. This was the era of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. Drawing on his own knowledge and further research, Mike provided a detailed and balanced analysis on Cicero's various roles in this crucial stage of Roman history when its empire was rapidly expanding and the government was under strain from rival groupings espousing the republican or imperialist causes.

Born into a wealthy family, Cicero had a first class education which gave the young and gifted scholar the chance to develop his considerable prowess and he greatly impressed his teachers. As a young lawyer he won several prominent cases contrary to expectations. These legal speeches were later published, often embellished by Cicero, and they reveal his powerful arguments written inimitably in his clear Latin style. Cicero is often regarded as having perfected the form of written Latin and his writings have been studied by countless generations. He was drawn into politics despite not coming from any of the 'ruling elite' families and he tried to steer his own line between the rival groupings of his day. First a praetor and then a consul, Cicero's talents drew him into the leading echelons of power but he drew back from joining Caesar in his triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus.



Marcus Tullius Cicero, detail of a marble bust;

in the Capitoline Museums, Rome.

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For a period, Cicero governed Cilicia, a province east of Rome in Anatolia, winning praise for his judicious control, but on his return to Rome the

power struggles were continuing. He did not give his full backing to either Pompey (whom he usually favoured) or Caesar but neither was he one of the latter's assassins. However, Cicero, a republican, fell foul of the next triumvirate of Mark Anthony, Octavian (later Augustus) and Lepidus who were regarded as imperialists. This rift ultimately led to his execution in 43BC and the Roman republic gave way to the Roman empire. The manner of Cicero's death shows his courage in offering his head for execution and then, with unnecessary brutality, his hands were also severed and displayed alongside his head as a warning against criticising Mark Anthony.

Whilst he was undoubtedly a very intelligent, ambitious and able person, Cicero tended to avoid the foremost political roles. His reputation is based on his clever legal reasoning, his

oratory and political skill and for his superbly stylish writing. He was one of the greatest proponents of Greek philosophy. One quarter of all of the Latin which survives is from Cicero's pen and for many centuries it is Ciceronian Latin which has been regarded as the best model of Latin prose of the golden era.

Mike's talk was praised by his audience for its breadth and depth of knowledge and he offered much to think about. Cicero may have lived over 2000 years ago but he has left a great legacy on which we may still draw.

June 2021, Sue Tomlinson