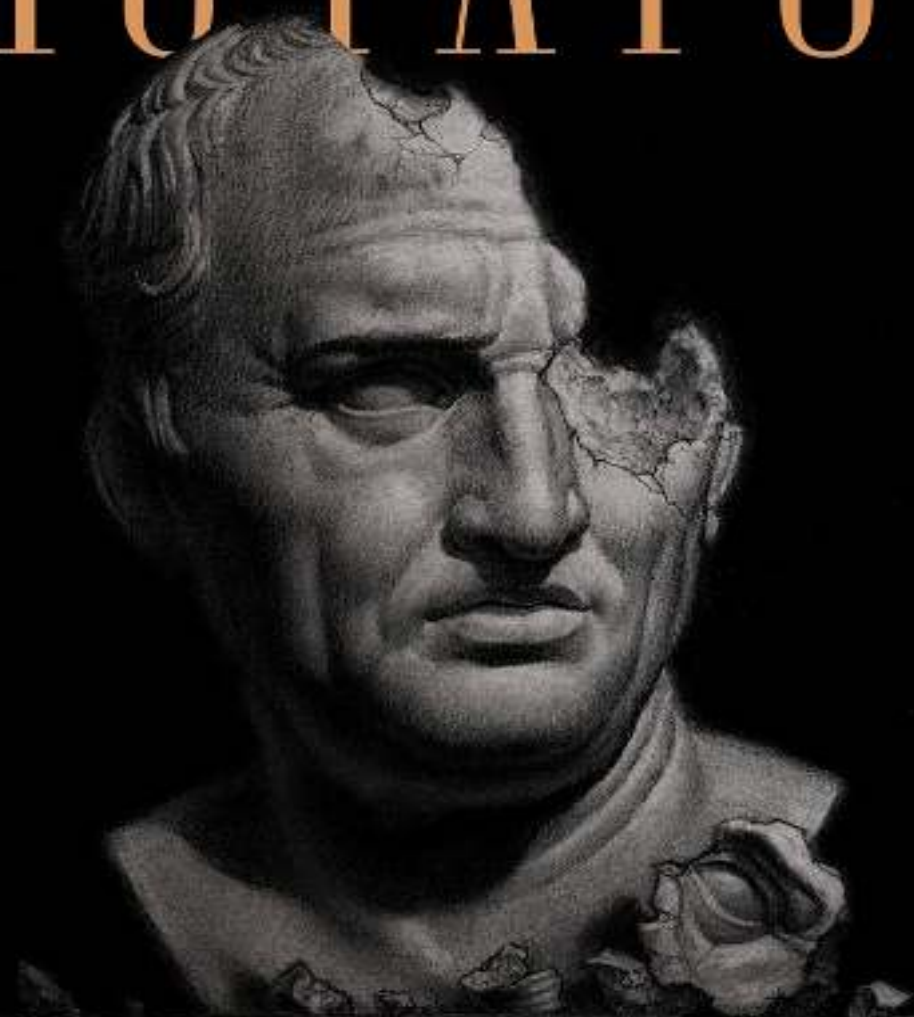


DICTATOR



A NOVEL

FROM THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
OF *IMPERIUM* AND *CONSPIRATA*

ROBERT HARRIS

Also by Robert Harris

FICTION

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The Fear Index

An Officer and a Spy

NONFICTION

Selling Hitler

A Higher Form of Killing (with Jeremy Paxman)

Dictator

Robert Harris



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Maps by Neil Gower
Cover illustration by Matt Buck

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To Holly

The melancholy of the antique world seems to me more profound than that of the moderns, all of whom more or less imply that beyond the dark void lies immortality. But for the ancients that “black hole” was infinity itself; their dreams loom and vanish against a background of immutable ebony. No crying out, no convulsions—nothing but the fixity of a pensive gaze. Just when the gods had ceased to be and the Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history, between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. Nowhere else do I find that particular grandeur.

—Gustave Flaubert, letter to Mme Roger de Genettes, 1861



Alive, Cicero enhanced life. So can his letters do, if only for a student here and there, taking time away from belittling despairs to live among Virgil’s Togaed People, desperate masters of a larger world.

—D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero*, 1971

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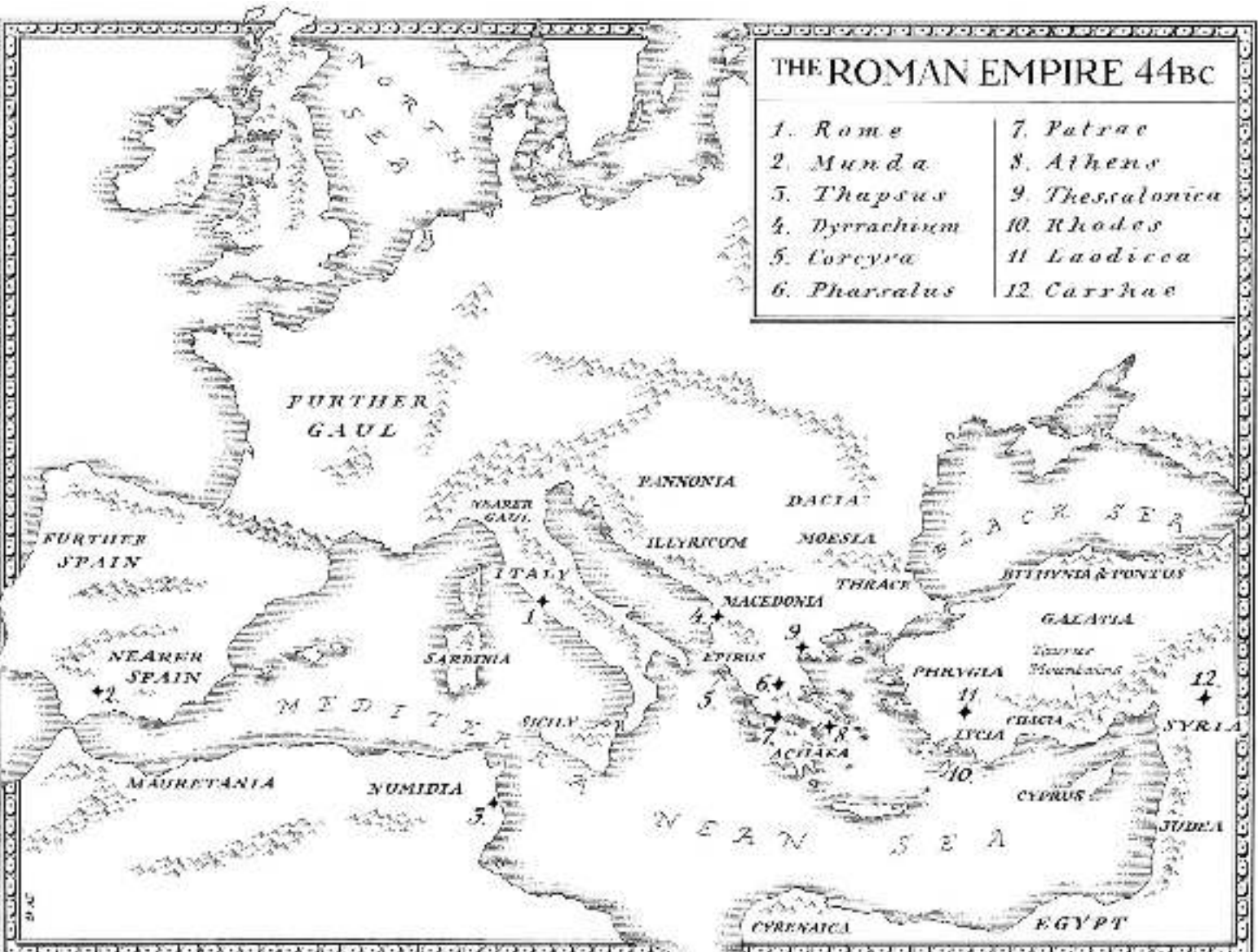
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THE ROMAN EMPIRE 44BC

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| 1. <i>Rome</i> | 7. <i>Patrae</i> |
| 2. <i>Munda</i> | 8. <i>Athens</i> |
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CICERO'S ITALY





AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dictator tells the story of the final fifteen years in the life of the Roman statesman Cicero, imagined in the form of a biography written by his secretary, Tiro.

That there was such a man as Tiro and that he wrote such a book are well-attested historical facts. Born a slave on the family estate, he was three years younger than his master but long outlived him, surviving, according to Saint Jerome, until he reached his hundredth year.

“Your services to me are beyond count,” Cicero wrote to him in 50 BC, “in my home and out of it, Rome and abroad, in private affairs and public, in my studies and literary work...” Tiro was the first man to record a speech in the Senate verbatim, and his shorthand system, known as *Notae Tironianae*, was still in use in the Church in the sixth century; indeed some traces of it (the symbol “&,” the abbreviations etc., NB, i.e., e.g.) survive to this day. He also wrote several treatises on the development of Latin. His multi-volume life of Cicero is referred to as a source by the first-century historian Asconius Pedianus; Plutarch cites it twice. But, like the rest of Tiro’s literary output, the book disappeared amid the collapse of the Roman Empire.

What must it have been like, one wonders? Cicero’s life was extraordinary, even by the highest standards of the age. From relatively lowly origins compared to his aristocratic rivals, and despite his lack of interest in military matters, deploying his skill as an orator and the brilliance of his intellect, he rose at meteoric speed through the Roman political system, until, against all the odds, he finally was elected consul at the youngest-permitted age of forty-two.

There followed a crisis-stricken year in office—63 BC—during which he was obliged to deal with a conspiracy to overthrow the republic led by Sergius Catilina. To suppress the revolt, the Senate, under Cicero’s presidency, ordered the execution of five prominent citizens—an episode that haunted his career ever afterwards.

When subsequently the three most powerful men in Rome—Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great and Marcus Crassus—joined forces in a so-called triumvirate to dominate the state, Cicero decided to oppose them. Caesar in retaliation, using his powers as chief priest, unleashed the ambitious aristocratic demagogue, Clodius—an old enemy of Cicero’s—to destroy him. By allowing Clodius to renounce his patrician status and become a plebeian, Caesar opened the way for his election as tribune. Tribunes had the power to haul citizens before the people, to harass and persecute them. Cicero swiftly decided he had no choice but to flee Rome. It is at this desperate point in his fortunes that *Dictator* begins.

My aim has been to describe, as accurately as I can within the conventions of fiction, the end of the Roman Republic as it might have been experienced by Cicero and Tiro. Wherever possible, the letters and speeches and descriptions of events have been drawn from the original sources.

As *Dictator* encompasses what was arguably—at least until the convulsions of 1933–45—the most tumultuous era in human history, maps, a glossary and a cast of characters have been provided to assist the reader in navigating Cicero’s sprawling and collapsing world.

—Robert Harris
Kintbury, 8 June 2012

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



Afranius, Lucius an ally of Pompey's from his home region of Picenum; one of Pompey's army commanders in the war against Mithradates; consul in 60 BC

Agrippa, Marcus Vipsanius Octavian's closest associate, aged twenty

Ahenobarbus, Lucius Domitius patrician senator; praetor in 58 BC; married to Cato's sister; determined enemy of Caesar

Antony, Mark (Marcus Antonius) renowned as a brave and enterprising soldier under Caesar's command in Gaul; grandson of a famous orator and consul; stepson of one of the Catiline conspirators; executed by Cicero

Atticus, Titus Pomponius Cicero's closest friend; an equestrian, an Epicurean, immensely wealthy; brother-in-law to Quintus Cicero, who is married to his sister, Pomponia

Balbus, Lucius Cornelius wealthy Spaniard originally allied to Pompey and then to Caesar, whose *homme d'affaires* he became in Rome

Bibulus, Marcus Calpurnius Caesar's colleague as consul in 59 BC, and his staunch opponent

Brutus, Marcus Junius direct descendant of the Brutus who drove the kings from Rome and established the republic in the sixth century BC; son of Servilia, nephew of Cato; the great figurehead of the constitutionalists

Caesar, Gaius Julius former consul; a member of the "triumvirate" with Pompey and Crassus; governor of three Roman provinces—Nearer and Further Gaul and Bithynia; six years Cicero's junior; married to Calpurnia, daughter of L. Calpurnius Piso

Calenus, Quintus Fufius an old crony of Clodius and Antony; a supporter of Caesar and an enemy of Cicero; father-in-law of Pansa

Cassius, Gaius Longinus senator and able soldier; married to Servilia's daughter, Junia Tertia, and thus Brutus's brother-in-law

Cato, Marcus Porcius half-brother of Servilia; uncle of Brutus; a Stoic and a stern upholder of the traditions of the republic

Cicero, Marcus Tullius Junior Cicero's son

Cicero, Quintus Tullius Cicero's younger brother; senator and soldier; married to Pomponia, the sister of Atticus; governor of Asia, 61–58 BC

Cicero, Quintus Tullius Junior Cicero's nephew

Clodia daughter of one of the most distinguished families in Rome, the patrician Appii Claudii; the sister of Clodius; the widow of Metellus Celer

Clodius Pulcher, Publius scion of the leading patrician dynasty, the Appii Claudii; a former brother-in-law of L. Lucullus; the brother of Clodia, with whom he is alleged to have had an incestuous affair; at his trial for sacrilege Cicero gave evidence against him; transferred to the plebs at the instigation of Caesar and elected tribune

Cornutus, Marcus one of Caesar's officers, appointed urban praetor in 44 BC

Crassipes, Furius Tullia's second husband; a senator; a friend of Crassus

Crassus, Marcus Licinius former consul; member of the "triumvirate"; brutal suppressor of the slave revolt led by Spartacus; the richest man in Rome; a bitter rival of Pompey

Crassus, Publius son of Crassus the triumvir; cavalry commander under Caesar in Gaul; an admirer of Cicero

Decimus properly styled **Brutus, Decimus Junius Albinus**, but not to be confused with **Brutus** (above); brilliant young military commander in Gaul; a protégé of Caesar

Dolabella, Publius Cornelius Tullia's third husband; one of Caesar's closest lieutenants—young, charming, precocious, ambitious, licentious, brutal

Fulvia wife of Clodius; subsequently married to Mark Antony

Hirtius, Aulus one of Caesar's staff officers in Gaul, groomed for a political career; a noted gourmet; a scholar who helped Caesar with his *Commentaries*

Hortensius Hortalus, Quintus former consul, for many years the leading advocate at the Roman bar until displaced by Cicero; a leader of the patrician faction; immensely wealthy; like Cicero, a civilia

politician and not a soldier

Isauricus, Publius Servilius Vatia a patrician, son of one of the grand old men of the Senate, who nevertheless chose to support Caesar; elected praetor in 54 BC

Labienus, Titus a soldier and former tribune from Pompey's home region of Picenum; one of Caesar's ablest commanders in Gaul

Lepidus, Marcus Aemilius patrician senator, married to a daughter of Servilia; member of the College of Pontiffs

Milo, Titus Annius a tough street-wise politician, an owner of gladiators

Nepos, Quintus Caecilius Metellus consul at the time of Cicero's return from exile

Octavian, Gaius Julius Caesar Caesar's great-nephew and heir

Pansa, Gaius Vibius one of Caesar's commanders in Gaul

Philippus, Lucius Marcius consul soon after Cicero's return from exile; married to Caesar's niece Atia, and thus the stepfather of Octavian; owner of a villa next door to Cicero's on the Bay of Naples

Philotimus Terentia's business manager, of questionable honesty

Piso, Lucius Calpurnius consul at the time of Cicero's exile, and thus an enemy of Cicero's; Caesar's father-in-law

Plancius, Gnaeus quaestor of Macedonia; his family were friends from the same region of Italy as the Ciceros

Plancus, Lucius Munatius close lieutenant of Caesar, appointed governor of Further Gaul in 44 BC

Pompey, Gnaeus Magnus born in the same year as Cicero; for many years the most powerful man in the Roman world; a former consul and victorious general who has already triumphed twice; a member of the "triumvirate" with Caesar and Crassus; married to Caesar's daughter, Julia

Rufus, Marcus Caelius Cicero's former pupil; the youngest senator in Rome—brilliant, ambitious, but unreliable

Servilia ambitious and politically shrewd half-sister of Cato; the long-term mistress of Caesar; the mother of three daughters and a son, Brutus, by her first husband

Servius Sulpicius Rufus contemporary and old friend of Cicero, famed as one of the greatest legal experts in Rome; married to Postumia, a mistress of Caesar

Spinther, Publius Cornelius Lentulus consul at the time of Cicero's return from exile; an enemy of Clodius and friend of Cicero

Terentia wife of Cicero; ten years younger than her husband, richer and of nobler birth; devout and religious, poorly educated, with conservative political views; mother of Cicero's two children, Tullia and Marcus

Tiro Cicero's devoted private secretary, a family slave, three years younger than his master, the inventor of a system of shorthand

Tullia Cicero's daughter

Vatinius, Publius a senator and soldier famed for his ugliness; a close ally of Caesar

Part One

Exile

58 bc–47 bc

Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum. Quid enim est aetas hominis, nisi ea memoria rerum veterum cum superiorum aetate contextitur?

To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?

—Cicero, *Orator*, 46 BC

I

I remember the cries of Caesar's war-horns chasing us over the darkened fields of Latium—the yearning, keening howls, like animals in heat—and how when they stopped there was only the slither of our shoes on the icy road and the urgent panting of our breath.

It was not enough for the immortal gods that Cicero should be spat at and reviled by his fellow citizens; not enough that in the middle of the night he be driven from the hearths and altars of his family and ancestors; not enough even that as we fled from Rome on foot he should look back and see his house in flames. To all these torments they deemed it necessary to add one further refinement: that he should be forced to hear his enemy's army striking camp on the Field of Mars.

Even though he was the oldest of our party Cicero kept up the same fast pace as the rest of us. Not long ago he had held Caesar's life in the palm of his hand. He could have crushed it as easily as an egg. Now their fortunes led them in entirely opposite directions. While Cicero hurried south to escape his enemies, the architect of his destruction marched north to take command of both provinces of Gaul.

He walked with his head down, not uttering a word and I imagined it was because he was too full of despair to speak. Only at dawn, when we rendezvoused with our horses at Bovillae and were about to embark on the second stage of our escape, did he pause with his foot in the doorway of his carriage and say suddenly, "Do you think we should turn back?"

The question caught me by surprise. "I don't know," I said. "I hadn't considered it."

"Well, consider it now. Tell me: why are we fleeing Rome?"

"Because of Clodius and his mob."

"And why is Clodius so powerful?"

"Because he's a tribune and can pass laws against you."

"And who made it possible for him to become a tribune?"

I hesitated. "Caesar."

"Exactly. Caesar. Do you imagine that man's departure for Gaul at that precise hour was coincidence? Of course not! He waited till his spies had reported I'd left the city before ordering his army to move. Why? I'd always assumed his advancement of Clodius was to punish me for speaking out against him. But what if his real aim all along was to drive me out of Rome? What scheme requires him to be certain I've gone before he can leave too?"

I should have grasped the logic of what he was saying. I should have urged him to turn back. But

was too exhausted to reason clearly. And if I am honest there was more to it than that. I was too afraid of what Clodius's thugs might do to us if they caught us re-entering the city.

So instead I said, "It's a good question, and I can't pretend I have the answer. But wouldn't it look indecisive, after bidding goodbye to everyone, suddenly to reappear? In any case, Clodius has burned your house down now—where would we return to? Who would take us in? I think you'd be wiser to stick to your original plan and get as far away from Rome as you can."

He rested his head against the side of the carriage and closed his eyes. In the pale grey light I was shocked by how haggard he appeared after his night on the road. His hair and beard had not been cut for weeks. He was wearing a toga dyed black. Although he was only in his forty-ninth year, the public signs of mourning made him look much older—like some ancient, mendicant holy man. After a while he sighed. "I don't know, Tiro. Perhaps you're right. It's so long since I slept I'm too tired to think any more."

And so the fatal error was made—more through indecision than decision—and we continued to press on southwards for the remainder of that day and for the twelve days that followed, putting what we thought was a safe distance between ourselves and danger.

We travelled with a minimal entourage to avoid attracting attention—just the carriage driver and three armed slaves on horseback, one in front and two behind. A small chest of gold and silver coins that Atticus, Cicero's oldest and closest friend, had provided to pay for our journey was hidden under our seat. We stayed only in the houses of men we trusted, no more than a night in each, and steered clear of those places where Cicero might have been expected to stop—for example at his seaside villa at Formiae, the first place any pursuers would look for him, and along the Bay of Naples, already filling with the annual exodus from Rome in search of winter sun and warm springs. Instead we headed as fast as we could towards the toe of Italy.

Cicero's plan, conceived on the move, was to make for Sicily and stay there until the political agitation against him in Rome subsided. "The mob will turn on Clodius eventually," he predicted. "Such is the unalterable nature of the mob. He will always be my mortal enemy but he won't always be tribune—we must never forget that. In nine months his term of office will expire and then we can go back."

He was confident of a friendly reception from the Sicilians, if only because of his successful prosecution of the island's tyrannical governor, Verres—even though that brilliant victory, which launched his political career, was now twelve years in the past and Clodius had more recently been magistrate in the province. I sent letters ahead giving notice of his intention to seek sanctuary, and when we reached the harbour at Regium we hired a little six-oared boat to row us across the straits to Messina.

We left the harbour on a clear cold winter morning of searing blues—the sea and the sky; one light, one dark; the line dividing them as sharp as a blade; the distance to Messina a mere three miles. It took us less than an hour. We drew so close we could see Cicero's supporters lined up on the rocks to welcome him. But stationed between us and the entrance to the port was a warship flying the red and green colours of the governor of Sicily, Gaius Vergilius, and as we approached the lighthouse slipped its anchor and moved slowly forwards to intercept us. Vergilius stood at the rail surrounded by his lictors and, after visibly recoiling at Cicero's dishevelled appearance, shouted down a greeting, which Cicero replied in friendly terms. They had known one another in the Senate for many years.

Vergilius asked him his intentions.

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