

Cornelius Nepos' "Life of Atticus"

Post by "Cassius" of September 23, 2020 at 3:51 AM

Epitome of Roman History

Selection from Book XIV: "Atticus"

by Cornelius Nepos, c. 100 BCE - c. 25 BCE

English text prepared by Vincent Cook

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[Latin text also available at gmu.edu](#)

[text from Epicurism.info](#)

Titus Pomponius Atticus, descended from the most ancient Roman ancestry, kept uninterrupted the equestrian rank inherited from his forbears. His father was industrious, by the standards of those days wealthy, and greatly interested in literature. He, in accord with his love of letters, educated his son in all those branches of learning in which boyhood should be made to share. As a boy, in addition to a natural capacity for learning, he also had an exceptionally agreeable expression and tone, so he not only swiftly learned passages that were set, but also recited them extremely well. As a result he had a distinguished reputation among his peers and shone forth more brightly than his high-born schoolmates could bear with indifference. Thus he roused them all by his own zeal: among their number were - Lucius Torquatus, the younger Gaius Marius, and Marcus Cicero; with all of whom he became so close that no one was dearer to them throughout his life.

His father died early. As a young man, because of his being an in-law of Publius Sulpicius, who was killed while tribune of the plebians, he had some share in that danger; for Anicia, a cousin of Pomponius on his mother's side, had married Servius, Sulpicius' brother. So when Sulpicius was killed and Atticus saw that the state was thrown into strife by the disorder Cinna incited, and that he was given no opportunity to live in keeping with his rank without offending one side or the other - the citizens' loyalties were divided with some favoring the party of Sulla, others that of Cinna - he thought it was the right time to devote himself to his studies and moved to Athens. Nevertheless, when the younger Marius had been declared an enemy of the state, he helped him from his own resources and assisted his escape with money. And in order that his travels abroad should do his estate no harm, he moved a substantial part of his fortune to Athens. There he lived in such a manner that he became greatly beloved by all Athenians, and for good reason. For apart from his personal charm which was already abundant in his youth, he often relieved their public want from his own resources; when they were obliged to roll-over the public debt and were unable to obtain reasonable terms for it, he always intervened on terms where he never accepted usurious interest rates from them nor allowed them to remain in debt beyond the term fixed. Both conditions were advantageous to them, since he neither suffered their debt to become overdue by his leniency nor to grow through compounding of the interest. He augmented this service by a further act of generosity: he gave them all six modii [~50 liters] of wheat per person: the equivalent measure being called a *medimnus* at Athens.

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His behavior in Athens was such that he showed himself to be at one with the humblest and equal with the mighty. The result was that they bestowed upon him all the public honors possible and desired to make him a citizen. This gift he was unwilling to take advantage of, because the jurists hold that if one becomes a citizen elsewhere, Roman citizenship is forfeited. So long as he lived there, he opposed the erection of any statue to him, but when he left he could not stop them. And so they put up several statues to him and Phidiae in their most sacred places, for in all the administration of the state's business, they treated him as both agent and adviser. It was, therefore, fortune's foremost gift that he was born in that very city where rulership over the world resided, so that it was for him both his fatherland and home; on the other hand, it was a mark of his wisdom that when he moved to the city which surpassed all others in its antiquity, culture, and learning, he was dearer to it than all other men.

When Sulla came to Athens on his way back from Asia, he kept Pomponius by him as long as