Chapter 14

Litterae Datae Blandenone: A Letter in Search of a Posting Address

Jerzy Linderski

For the sender and the addressee we need not search. They are Quintus Cicero the sender, and Marcus Cicero the addressee. The letter itself is somewhat of a phantom: it does not exist, and is known only from the reply of Marcus. But even phantoms are in need of full and exact documentation, the date and the place of origin or apparition, and, for a letter, of the return or posting address. Cicero writes to his brother (Q Fr. 2.14 (13).1) [= SB 18]):

*A.d. IIII Non. Iun., quo die Romam veni, accepi tuas litteras datas Placentia, deinde alteras postridie datas Blandenone cum Caesaris litteris refertis omni officio, diligentia, suavitate. . . . Litterae vero eius una datae cum tuis, quarum initium est quam suavis ei tuus adventus fuerit et recordatio veteris amoris, . . . incredibiliter delectarunt.*

Four days before the Nones of June [June 2], the day I got back to Rome, I received your letter posted from Placentia, and then another letter posted the following day from Blandeno together with Caesar’s letter full of all manner of courtesy, attentiveness, and charm. . . . [a few lines below] His letter dispatched along with yours indeed pleased me extraordinarily. He begins by writing how delighted he was at your arrival, . . . and the remembrance of old affection.

---

1 The consensus of best manuscripts (including the most important Mediceus) is reported by various editors as *blande(n)non(n)e*. This appears to mean that the most frequent *lectio* is blandenone, but that other readings are also attested. Consequently, editors opt mostly for Blandenone, but also Blandennone, Blandenonne, Blandennonne.

2 We have to keep in mind that the Romans counted the dates inclusively. I oppose introducing in translations concepts totally alien to the Romans. Thus I follow the Latin idiom, and supply the dates in their modern guise in square brackets.

3 Or, alternately, depending on whether we combine *postridie* with *accepi* or *datas*: “and then next day (I received) another letter posted from Blandeno.”
In May of 54 Cicero sojourned in Campania; he returned to Rome on second June, and on the same day he received a letter from his brother who was on his way to join as a legatus the army of Caesar and participate in the campaigns in Gaul and in the invasion of Britain. Soon afterward another letter from Quintus arrived, and a letter from Caesar. The mention of Caesar lifts this correspondence from the level of brotherly chatter and gossip to the plane of history. For just recently in an extraordinary reversal of sentiment a rapprochement has occurred between Cicero and Caesar. The old and fading consular attempted to attach his prospects and the prospects of his brother to the shining star of the proconsul in Gaul. Cicero, an erudite and eloquent upstart, never felt comfortable with the haughty ancient nobility; ultimately, repelled by the brashness and vulgarity of the Caesarians, he ended up on the losing side. The catastrophe lay in the future, but the future now fleetingly looked bright indeed. In the letter to Quintus Cicero expresses his wishful conviction that this new political conjunction would open a path ad gloriam et ad summam dignitatem, (“to glory and the highest standing.”) He mentions not only Caesar’s warm feelings (Caesaris tantum in me amorem), but also cryptically alludes “to all the distinctions Caesar wants me to expect.” We can only guess what those future honores Cicero and his brother hoped to gain with Caesar’s help might have been: very likely the censorship for Marcus, and the elevation to the high priestly college of the augurs (which he did indeed achieve, though rather through Pompey’s agency); and for Quintus possibly the election to the consulate. There were also literary plans. Cicero intended to compose an epos ad Caesarem, singing of the imperator’s looming exploits in Britain. Caesar was receptive, and generous in his literary reciprocity. Traversing from his provinces of Gallia Citerior and Illyricum back to Gaul he completed a linguistic treatise and dedicated it to Cicero: De analogia libri ad Ciceronem. A peculiar gift, a peculiar interest, and a peculiar timing—for Caesar was just about to embark on his second expedition to Britain. As Quintus was to accompany him in this adventure, Cicero entreats his brother to provide a colorful stuff for his poem, his quadriga poetica (“poetic chariot”): “just only give me Britain to paint—with your

4 Constans (1950) 257; Németh (1968) 50–54; and Shackleton Bailey (1980) 198 suggest a second consulship, but it is hard to believe that Cicero would have seriously entertained such a far-fetched idea. Lossmann (1962) 60–65 offers an analysis of the whole letter.
7 Suet. Iul. 56.5. See Garcea (2012) esp. 78–124 on “Cicero and Caesar’s De analogia,” philologically a marvelous study, but somewhat divorced from the politics of the day.