Hundreds of letters written by Cicero have been preserved. This is only the tip of the iceberg, since Cicero sent thousands of letters throughout his life that are now lost. His was not an exceptional case. On the contrary, the Roman elite communicated with relatives and friends by letter. Of course, the Roman state always maintained a regular correspondence with magistrates serving in different areas of the Mediterranean, employing military personnel to carry out the communications. However, an official postal service (cursus publicus) only existed after Augustus. During the Republic, a sender had to use private means.

* All dates are B.C.


2 The writing of letters must have been one of the usual occupations of the elite. In one of his letters of the summer of 59, Cicero told Atticus that never before had his friend read a letter that had not been written by his own hands (cf. *Att.* 5.19.1: “epistulum ... scriptam mea manu”; 10.17.2; 11.24.2). Cicero had dictated that letter in exceptional circumstances because he was very busy at the time (*Cic.* *Att.* 2.23.1; cf. 4.16.1; 5.14.1; 8.12.1; 10.34.1; 13.25.3; 14.21.4; 16.15.1). Guy Achard, *La communication à Rome* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1991) 139, points out that a member of the Roman elite would have written or dictated around ten letters per day. The figure is speculative and must have depended upon circumstances, but in the case of Cicero one might imagine that he would actually have written a number of letters every day.

3 A.M. Ramsay, "A Roman postal service under the Republic", *JRS* 10 (1920) 79–86, suggested that perhaps Caius Gracchus may have promoted an official postal service and that Popilius Laenas (cos.132) could have implemented it in Southern Italy. Ramsay’s thesis has not gained acceptance. In any case, an official postal service did not exist in the first century. If this had been the case, we can suppose that Cicero would have used it and mentioned it in his letters. On the *cursus publicus* Anne Kolb, *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römischen Reich* (Berlin: Klio Beihefte 2, Akademie Verlag, 2000) 49–226; “Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *cursus publicus*”, in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, eds. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence (London: Routledge, 2001), 95–105; "Communications and Mobility in the Roman Empire", in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, eds. Chister Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 660–63.
to dispatch a letter.\textsuperscript{4} Probably only the wealthiest families had at their disposal *tabellarii*, that is, freedmen or slaves employed as private couriers. These *tabellarii* were frequently shared among close friends to facilitate the circulation of correspondence but also to reduce costs, although this does not seem to have been a major concern. A letter could be given to a friend travelling in the same direction as the addressee. In exceptional cases, the network of private carriers created by the *publicani* could be used, particularly in certain provinces of the Empire. Anyway, a letter could only be entrusted to a person whose confidence could be relied upon, in order to ensure that the missive reached its destination without interference. All in all, security and speed of the correspondence depended on a variety of circumstances: distance, travel by earth or sea, conditions on the route, bandits, reliability of the courier, and so forth.

Apart from his forced stays in Sicily and Cilicia as a quaestor and as governor, Cicero preferred to remain in Rome as long as possible, although he usually spent time in some of his properties in Latium and Campania. Part of the year 59 and especially 58—also 57, of course, but we do not have any correspondence for the last months of his exile—were quite exceptional in Cicero’s life, since most of the time he lived outside Rome, so they provide a good example of the way in which political information circulated from the city to Italy and other regions of the Empire.

During the spring of 59, Cicero lived in his *villae* of Antium and Formiae, far away from the political scene in Rome, which was dominated by the consul Caesar with the help of his allies Crassus and Pompey. Throughout this time his correspondence with Atticus allows us to verify to what extent Cicero kept informed of what happened in Rome. We do have indirect information through Cicero’s own letters, since Atticus’ correspondence has not survived. So, we know Cicero’s responses to Atticus, as well as his requests, but not the first-hand information itself. We can guess that Atticus endeavoured to report to his friend anything that might be of interest to him, but we do not know his selection of events and facts, because Cicero himself, with his letters, is usually our main source of information for this period.\textsuperscript{5} In June 59 Cicero was back in Rome, while Atticus was outside the city. From this moment on,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item On Cicero as a historical source see Andrew Lintott, *Cicero as evidence. A historian’s companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially for the period 59–57 see pages 167–82.
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