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The Greatest Story Never Told

Alexander Plochocki
Trinity College

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The Greatest Story Never Told

Alexander Plochocki

Prologue

The following “auto-biography” of Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus is written as if one was actually speaking to Lucius, or he was addressing a public audience. This leads to a strong sense of pride that Lucius would have surely had for his lineage and friends. A lot of what is known of Lucius both now and during his lifetime is from the scandals that erupted as Cicero attempted so whole-heartedly to defame him. Therefore, Lucius would naturally desire to address these issues and fervently try to highlight his achievements and belittle his downfalls. As this “auto-biography” is designed to mimic what Lucius would have really said, Latin rhetorical devices are used multiple times, which leads to slightly awkward-sounding grammatical constructions in English. However, the goal of the rhetoric is to serve both the purpose of immersion and emphasis of certain words, ideas, and thoughts in a manner that may not be readily available in English.

The Greatest Story Never Told

It¹ began in Placentia, located in the province of Cisalpine Gaul, my grandfather set the tone for the Caesoninus family, doing good, honest business throughout Rome and accruing fortune and name over the years, creating roots throughout Rome that last even to this day (Lucius). Then, in the year 101 B.C., I, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, took root into this world (Ancient Worlds). I was born into this family, yet instead of rising into the Roman political machine using the accomplishments of my lineage, I began the journey from the bottom, the plebian stages. It was from here that I worked through the *cursus honorem* (honorable course) to climb the political ladder with my own hands, my own vigor, heart, and honor. This is where the story—my story—begins. The tale of a man noble and just whose strong intellect and fervent pacifism has been unjustly overshadowed by his boorish and unjust contemporaries.

I reached a turning point in my young life as I met a lifelong friend, philosopher, and role model. Living on the slopes of beautiful Vesuvius and on the bay of Naples, I was suitably situated in my villa to the west and right outside of Herculaneum (Lukas), a great city that was told to have been founded by the great Hercules himself and was home to many Greek immigrants. This environment created a city of the strong, the proud, and the intellectual.² When we are treated unjustly we take action, we fight for what is right and just, that is what we grew up with and that is what we saw Herculaneum do as it rebelled against Rome to assert its rights and its autonomy, as nothing is powerful enough to infringe upon the dignities of a people (De Franciscis).

¹ Ellipses of a formal subject for “it,” as Lucius would want to delve directly into his history and ancestry instead of wasting time on an exposition.

² The denizens of Herculaneum are viewed as strong, proud, and intellectual instead of a people who have only one or two of those defining qualities. Lucius would surely have pride in his hometown and would want to highlight this as much as possible and, through insinuation, imply that he and his family, as those who live in Herculaneum, are also strong, proud, and intellectual.

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It was around 75 B.C. when Philodemus and I crossed paths. Philodemus was born in Syria circa 110 B.C. and was extremely well-versed in all things Greek. Philodemus came to Italy around 75 B.C. and the Piso family, my family, took him in. Philodemus and I grew very close and he taught me everything there is to know about the Greek life, philosophy, and literature (Philodemus). We resided in my villa and, over time, began accruing papyrus scrolls. It was during this time and on these scrolls that we deposited our knowledge into posterity; Philodemus focused mostly on writing erotic character but delved into every topic imaginable, including art, aesthetics, psychology, and even composed books on philosophy and its history to help satiate my family's hungry minds. With a man this great it is no surprise I created an eclectic library in my villa, amassing over twelve hundred scrolls (Hazel). Over time I grew a strong affinity towards all things Greek and I became, through my learning, an Epicurean. During these times I was graced with the joy of fatherhood. I had my daughter, Calpurnia, a ravishing and loyal woman. My philhellenistic views dovetailed with those around me as many people gathered together in Naples and Herculaneum to listen and learn from Philodemus (Philodemus).

After imbibing all the great knowledge of the Greeks and learning and studying to my heart's content, I began my political career. I was quaestor in 70 B.C., I was aedile in 64 B.C., and I was praetor in 61 B.C. Then, in 58 B.C. I was finally granted and entrusted with the position of consul (Lucius).

It was then, in that year, that all hell began to break loose, with me at the reigns. I served my consulship with Aulus Gabinius, a headstrong and loyal man. We reached a critical decision when it came to the exile of this man they called Cicero.³ Publius Clodius Pulcher, a friend of Aulus and whom I would call a friend of mine,⁴ wanted Cicero cast out from Rome. Unwaveringly, I supported my fellow consul and Cicero was exiled. For my support I received Macedonia and Aulus received Syria (Calpurnius Piso (*RE* 90)). Yet the enticement of reward never harrowed my reason.

Then my relationship with Caesar reached a new level when, in the following year, I married my daughter, Calpurnia, to Julius Caesar in 59 B.C. This strengthened my bonds with Pompey but stressed mine further with Cicero. Cicero carried a strong anathema for Caesar with himself and I can only assume that I got caught up in the whirlwind of his rage (Ancient Worlds).

Eventually Cicero returned to Rome with a vengeance; Cicero stopped at no extreme to defame me. In 56 B.C., Cicero first spoke *De Provinciis Consularibus* against Aulus and me, fighting to usurp us of our lawfully given provinces (Encyclopedia Britannica). I was accused of misconduct and corruption during my time as Governor, yet even Catullus sings of my unbiased rule as those who left my province returned not a bit richer or wealthier than when they came (Catullus). My position was recalled as he argued that vicious raids and attacks by the tribes of Macedonia fell under my blame.

³ Purposeful downplay of the fame of Cicero, who would surely be well known throughout Rome. This also serves as part of Lucius turning these events over in his head and musing over all his decisions he made and the unforeseen circumstances.

⁴ A different phrasing for the relationship between Publius and Lucius is meant to show that Lucius would consciously want to make it known that Aulus was much better friends with Publius than he was.

After I had taken my place in curia, Cicero delivered *In Pisonem* (Clarck). Cicero was no fledging orator and his pride and bitterness have led him to say things so brash and biased, as he even once attacked Marcus Antonius, saying:

At first you were just a public prostitute, with a fixed price: quite a high one too. But very soon Curio intervened and took you off the streets, promoting you, one might say, to wifely status, making a sound, steady married woman out of you. (Constable)

I would not be surprised one bit if he is killed for saying something likened to that one day.⁵ He began to assault my Epicurean beliefs, making a hypocrite of himself for having many Epicurean friends. The greatest irony of all was Cicero's praise for Philodemus, yet his disdain for what he calls the gluttony and greed of Epicureans is nothing but a fallacy (Ancient Worlds). Even Philodemus writes of the feasts and gatherings and, for one who praises Philodemus, Cicero must have forgotten his writings, as Philodemus always sings of the joyful and just nature of these events (Gigante). I was called a philandering drunk yet what Cicero must have forgotten is that even the most distinguished Epicurean doctors prescribe wine as medication (Rawson). Cicero even assaulted my physical appearance, calling my bad features a sign of my character and my distinguishing features a deception (Clark). This argument could be made of anyone or anything, as if you say Rome's dilapidated buildings are its true essence and its temples are merely deceptions, yet neither can produce a just idea of the state of Rome. The torment that that man caused me, it must be nothing short of a miracle I have made it through it all.⁶

All I really desire, all I truly want, is for peace to be established. During the start of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in Rome, I offered myself as liaison, a mediator, between the two, but my attempts were futile (Calpurnius Piso (*RE* 90)). In 51 B.C., I was once again granted the amazing opportunity to serve Rome, as a censor in the following year.⁷ Two years later, I was graced with a son, duly name Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who inherited my wisdom, my respect for the Greek schools of thought, and my love for poetry (Calpurnius Piso (*RE* 99)). I made sure to stop at nothing to educate my children and give them everything I can offer them, hopefully ensuring their success no matter where fate brings them.⁸ I remember, the assassination of Caesar in 44 B.C. and I must side with Cicero that those who conspired were truly men with "the courage of men but the understanding of boys" (Constable). Once again, I was faced with strife as Marcus Antonius and Gaius Octavius, with the support of the senate, quarreled and a civil war was absolutely imminent. I attempted to mediate once again, but once again my attempts were fruitless (What Really Happened). Twice I have outstretched my hands for peace, twice have I brought them back empty.⁹

⁵ Lucius would never know of Cicero's eventual murder at the hands of Marcus Antonius, but the statement pokes fun at Cicero's demise to one were to be hearing this after Cicero's death.

⁶ In the past two paragraphs, Lucius would be recounting of his defamation in a cautious and defensive mindset as he laments and tries to not only assert his own merit but also attack Cicero and his arguments.

⁷ From the description of Lucius' character in *Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus*, Lucius would have great respect for gaining such a high and revered position in Rome.

⁸ Lucius' love of knowledge would surely manifest itself into a desire to educate his children. His children and grandchildren are praised as being successful in life and the environment Lucius would have offered them must be a large factor (Ancient Worlds).

⁹ Allusion to book 2 of Vergil's *Aenied*.

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My noble attempts at peace¹⁰ were even praised by none other than Cicero himself (Ancient Worlds), maybe now I can die a happy man,¹¹ having earned the praise of one of the most invective critics.¹² It is often said that history is determined by the victor,¹³ but remember truth will prevail in the end. *Fiat justitia, ruat caelum.* (Let justice be done, though the heavens may fall.)¹⁴

¹⁰ The idealism of personal sacrifice prominent in Greek religion therefore Lucius, with his philhellenistic tastes, would be extremely proud of his wholehearted attempts at peace while placing himself in the middle of the political fray (Pulleyn).

¹¹ Lucius is recorded to have died very soon after Cicero who would have praised him for his mediation between Marcus and Gaius.

¹² While Lucius definitely felt disdain towards Cicero, he may have refrained from calling him an enemy as in Risser's *Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus* Lucius is described as a man who is willing to look past any personal differences and work towards peace. This also coincides with Pulleyn's description of Greek ideals and thought, where putting oneself aside is viewed as a noble deed.

¹³ The "victor" is a reference to Cicero as Lucius would have probably known that Cicero and his speeches, being as famous as they were during his time, would go down in posterity.

¹⁴ While it is disputed if Lucius ever uttered these words, the evidence and his overwhelming education allow one to infer that he very realistically could have said this (Brewer).

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