

The concept *cum dignitate otium* in Cicero's writings

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Abstract. *The paper investigates the social and political concept 'cum dignitate otium' in Cicero's writings. The concept is commonly translated as "leisure with dignity". The meaning is not so simple. The concept can be either a political or a social category. As a political category, 'cum dignitate otium' means "peace with dignity" that the best citizens, optimates, wealthy and powerful statesmen had in the Roman society of Cicero's times. It was optimates' activity contrasted to other people's activities. Cicero also used the concept 'cum dignitate otium' in a social sense. It meant "peaceful leisure full of studies" or "peace in private affairs".*

Rezumat. *Autoarea investighează conceptul social și politic ,cum dignitate otium' în scrierile lui Cicero. Conceptul este adesea tradus ca „plăcere cu demnitate”. Înțelesul acestuia nu este totuși așa de simplu. El poate fi perceput ca o categorie politică sau socială. În primul caz (categorie politică), ,cum dignitate otium' înseamnă „pacea cu demnitate”, pe care o aveau cei mai buni cetățeni, optimates, cei mai puternici politic și financiar din statul roman în acea vreme. Era vorba despre activitatea acelor optimates în contrast cu activitățile poporului. Cicero utilizează de asemenea conceptul ,cum dignitate otium' într-un sens social. În acest caz însemna „plăcere liniștită a studiilor” sau „pace în afacerile private”.*

Keywords: Cicero, Rome, otium cum dignitate, social, political, optimates.

The paper investigates the social and political concept *cum dignitate otium*. We have chosen this concept mainly because it helps to understand the attitude to *otium* in the Roman society of the Late Roman Republic. Besides, the concept *otium cum dignitate* is worth considering because, on the one hand, it has many meanings² and, on the other hand, it is rather a debatable issue in the scientific literature.³

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² As RADFORD 2002, 36 has rightly pointed out, “This phrase *cum dignitate otium* is intentionally ambiguous. It has been translated variously as ‘peace with dignity’, ‘tranquillity with honour’, or ‘peace with worthiness’”. Cf. LEONHARDT 2013, 68.

³ About *cum dignitate otium* we can read in the works of RÈMY 1928, 113–27; BOYANCÈ 1941, 172–91; WIRSZUBSKI 1954, 1–13; WIRSZUBSKI 1968, 92–3; BALSDON 1960, 43–50; FUHRMANN 1960, 483–99; PETERSSON 1963 12 and 291; MITCHELL 1979, 198–9; WOOD 1988, 193–9; COLISH 1990, 77–8; DE STE. CROIX 1998, 370; RADFORD 2002, 35–6; BRAGOVA 2005, 83–7; KASTER 2006, 32; STROUP 2010, 34–42 and 48–9; LEONHARDT 2013, 68; JENKYNs 2013, 70–1; ZARECKI 2014, 57–8; MCCONNELL 2014, 33–4; ALTMAN 2016, 18 and other works.

Cicero used the concept *cum dignitate otium* in three of his works: in the oration *Pro Sestio* (98), in the rhetoric treatise *De oratore* (1.1) and in the letter to Lentulus (Cic. *Fam.* 1.9.21). Cicero wrote about *otium* and *dignitas* in the 10th Philippic (10.3) as well.⁴ As far as the mentioned works are functionally different, it can be concluded that Cicero used the concept systematically, as an element of his outlook. One more conclusion can be made on the basis of the time when Cicero used the concept: he wrote about *cum dignitate otium* in the period between 56 BC and 54 BC.⁵ It was the time when Cicero came back to Rome from the exile: he was to be grateful to Pompey for his return but he could not share Pompey's line of conduct because he still cherished the ideals of the Roman Republic. The ambiguity of Cicero's political position was reflected in his social and political writings in general and in his reflections about *cum dignitate otium* in particular. In *Pro Sestio* (98) Cicero wrote: *quid est igitur propositum his rei publicae gubernatoribus quod intueri et quo cursum suum derigere debeant? id quod est praestantissimum maximeque optabile omnibus sanis et bonis et beatis, cum dignitate otium.*⁶ Basing on the context of the passage we can translate the word *otium* as 'peace' or 'tranquillity': it is not 'leisure' as a social category, it is obviously a political category because it means 'peace between classes in the state'.⁷ In this passage of the oration Cicero described a certain *modus vivendi* of *optimates* which included *cum dignitate otium*. He specified the meaning of the term *optimates*. Earlier in the oration *Pro Sestio* (96–7) Cicero showed the difference between *optimates* and *populares*, characterizing the first category of people as *neque nocentes ... nec natura improbi nec furiosi nec malis domesticis impediti ... et integri ... et sani et bene de rebus domesticis constituti ... clarissimi et gravissimi cives ... et principes civitatis.*⁸ We can judge from Cicero's words that *optimates* were wealthy and powerful people. So it means that only the best people (well-off and influential) could have *cum dignitate otium*.⁹ The term

⁴ We should note that in the 10th Philippic the concept did not appear in the same word combination. The words *otium* and *dignitas* were used together or alone now and then in the oration. Nevertheless, the usage of the concept can help us to throw light on the meaning of *cum dignitate otium*.

⁵ This conclusion is possible if we do not take into consideration the terms *otium* and *dignitas* in the 10th Philippic which Cicero wrote more than ten years later, in 43 BC.

⁶ We can translate it this way: 'What is therefore prescribed for those statesmen of the Republic, what do they have to bear in mind and where do they have to make their way? Peace with dignity is the most important and desirable thing for all sensible, good and happy people'.

⁷ RÈMY 1928, 113–27 has assessed *cum dignitate otium* in the same way thinking that *otium* meant 'peace' and *dignitas* – 'the duties of the ruling class'. WIRSZUBSKI 1968, 93 has clearly shown that 'in the *Pro Sestio otium cum dignitate* means peace for all and distinction for some'. About the political meaning of *cum dignitate otium* see: WIRSZUBSKI 1954, 12; FUHRMANN 1960, 483–99; MITCHELL 1979, 198–9; WOOD 1988, 197; DE STE. CROIX 1998, 370; BRAGOVA 2005, 83; LEONHARDT 2013, 68.

⁸ Literally: 'not committing crimes ... not dishonest by nature, not uncontrollable, not having difficulties with domestic affairs ... and incorruptible, and reasonable, and taking a good care of domestic affairs ... the most famous and influential citizens ... and rulers in the state'.

⁹ As KASTER 2006, 32 has put it, 'These good people (*optimates*) are guided by their leaders (i.e. the senate: *Pro Sest.* 137) toward the common goal of tranquillity joined with worthy standing' (*cum dignitate otium: Pro Sest.* 98), a personal

dignitas in this passage also needs interpreting. In the *Pro Sestio* (98) Cicero mentioned the word combination *rerum gerendarum dignitate*.¹⁰ He meant to say that those *rerum gerendarum* were some actions for the sake of the Roman Republic.¹¹ To sum up, Cicero suggested that *otium* and *dignitas* in the Roman state should not be supposed for everyone. They were associated in the best citizens who were wealthy, powerful people, who took an active part in governing the Republic.

The next passage with *cum dignitate otium* runs as follows: *mihi ... perbeati ... illi videri solent, qui in optima re publica ... eum vitae cursum tenere potuerunt, ut vel in negotio sine periculo vel in otio cum dignitate esse possent* (Cic. *De orat.* 1.1).¹² The meaning of the concept is quite different from the one in the previous passage. The antithesis *negotium - otium*¹³ makes us think that Cicero used *otium* in the meaning of 'leisure' which is 'full of studies'. He elaborated further and wrote that he could have *initium requiescendi atque animum ... praeclara studia referendi* (*ibidem*).¹⁴ The quotation again proves the use of *otium* in the meaning of 'leisure'. If we carefully look at the opposition *in negotio sine periculo* versus *in otio cum dignitate*, we understand that *dignitas* is opposed to *periculum*, therefore the concept *cum dignitate otium* signifies 'peaceful leisure full of studies in absence of danger' having no political sense.

In the letter to Lentulus written in December 54 BC (Cic. *Fam.* 1.9.21) Cicero remarked that *in administranda re publica propositum esse debeat ... cum dignitate otium*.¹⁵ It is clear that Cicero used the concept in a political sense. When we read the whole letter, we realise that the concept has two major meanings: a political and a social one. The political connotation of *cum dignitate otium* is concerned with an ability to adapt to political circumstances: in the letter Cicero wrote about his aptitude for making peace with the triumvirs—Caesar, Pompey and Crassus—, as well as for serving his own interests and defending the form of Republican government. On the contrary, the social sense of the concept is somehow linked with Cicero's private affairs: his peace with Caesar could help (at least he thought so) his brother Quintus in his career as Caesar's legate.

Cicero also discoursed on *otium* combined with *dignitas* in the 10th Philippic. Although we do not find the exact word combination *cum dignitate otium* in the oration, we think that the

and communal state in which the best men serve the public interest and enjoy the appropriate reward of personal prestige'. Also see ZARECKI 2014, 57.

¹⁰ 'dignity thanks to fulfilled deeds'.

¹¹ Also see Cic. *Pro Sest.* 99.

¹² 'Those usually seem to me the happiest who were able to lead such a way of life in the best Republic as they could either work without any danger or rest with dignity'.

¹³ About the opposition *otium - negotium* see STROUP 2010, 49; JENKYNs 2013, 70.

¹⁴ 'A starting point for a rest and nice studies'. Here we agree with ALTMAN 2016, 18 who has written that Cicero's *otium cum dignitate* is 'a happy sunset of philosophical research'. About *cum dignitate otium* as time to private pursuits see PETERSSON 1963, 12. Cf. MCCONNELL 2014, 33.

¹⁵ 'Peace with dignity must be suggested in governing the Republic'.

context is important for our research. Cicero wrote: *Cur ... cum te et vita et fortuna tua ad otium, ad dignitatem invitet, ea probas, ea decernis, ea sentis, quae sint inimica et otio communi et dignitati tuae?* (Cic. Phil. 10.3).¹⁶ The main idea of this passage correlates with the concept *cum dignitate otium* signifying 'peace with dignity' and thus having a political sense.

To sum up, the translation of *cum dignitate otium* as 'leisure with dignity' does not fully correspond to the meaning of the concept. In some passages of Cicero's writings it has a political meaning ('peace in the Roman Republic'), in others it is a social category ('peaceful leisure full of studies' or 'peace in private affairs'). The concept *dignitas* adds an important connotation to the meaning of Cicero's *otium*. It means that only the best citizens, *optimates*, wealthy and powerful statesmen, could have *cum dignitate otium* in the Roman society of Cicero's times.

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¹⁶ 'Why do you approve, do you defend, do you feel something hostile to the universal peace and your dignity when your life and your fortune call you for peace and dignity?'

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