

The Conspiracy Narrative and Cicero's *Verrines*  
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In this paper I shall demonstrate that the *Verrines* of Cicero (70 BCE) are our first evidence of an extensive use of a specific narrative and *topos* in Roman literature, that of the conspiracy or *coniuratio*. That Roman conspiracy narratives present secret and subversive intrigue as an attack upon the established public order is well-known from the accounts of Catiline by Cicero and Sallust, Livy's narrative of the Bacchic Conspiracy (Livy 39.8-19), and that of Tacitus' Calpurnius Piso in the *Annales* (15.48-71). In the case of Verres, however, his actions at first sight would seem to be poor material for a conspiracy story; for the circumstances of the case evince that the poles of public and private usually found in conspiracy narratives are reversed, as are those of hidden and open. To accomplish this, Cicero will fit the abuse of *private* individuals by a corrupt *public* authority, personal enrichment and flagrancy into a narrative structure of conspiracy that uses as its fundamental elements private subterfuge vs. public order, insiders vs. outsiders, and concealment vs. discovery. I will argue that Cicero's artful management does indeed formulate a conspiracy story out of seemingly unsatisfactory material: that such language and tropes are an intentional rhetorical manipulation on Cicero's part to suggest conspiracy in a non-conspiratorial context--an extortion trial in which a Roman official is accused of stealing from individuals and provincial communities.

In so doing, Cicero chooses to fashion a recognizable portrait of Roman conspiracy that represents Verres and his *societas* as a group of like-minded co-conspirators, although they have committed no act that suggests political revolution, the usual conspiratorial purpose in *coniuratio* stories. And so in order to paint a portrait of conspiracy Cicero must vitiate major facts of the case that work against expectations of conspiracy: first, that Verres is the state, and thus is open to public view and review; second, his collusion in Sicily is obvious not occult; and third his goal is private gain not covert rebellion.

In this paper I shall address all three facts of the case and their inversion to fit the polarities of the conspiracy narrative and suggest that in the telling of conspiracy the *Verrines* have a significant place. Because of its date, the presence of conspiracy motifs suggests their basic elements are already being employed before the first complete surviving example of such a story (Cicero's four orations). Certainly the evidence from the so-called *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus* (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, 581 and *ILS* I, 278) demonstrates that by the early second century BCE it was recognized that *coniuratio* had an internal structure, and its members clearly bound by tie of mutual obligation similar to that of Verres' conspiratorial *societas* (see *CIL* I<sup>2</sup>, 581.14-15). Without these notions of subversive association already in place, he could not have expected his audience readily to equate Verres and his men with a conspiracy. It is Cicero's subtle manipulation of these elements out of materials that at first glance seem unsuitable to a conspiracy that make his contribution unique.