

Geography and The Construction of Character in Sallust's *Jugurtha*

Most of the narrative in Sallust's *Jugurtha* takes place in the African country side, where negotiation of the terrain is not only a very real, historical factor in the prosecution of the Jugurthan war by the Romans, but a rhetorical means by which Sallust might construct character. It is in regard to the latter that I propose an illustrative investigation of Sallust's use of geography to construct the character of Metellus, Jugurtha, and Marius.

Sallust emphasizes the campaigns of Metellus and Marius with a compositional ring dealt with most recently by Thomas Scanlon (Scanlon, 1990). As Scanlon points out, each of Marius' battles with Jugurtha recalls in chiasitic order a previous battle between Metellus and Jugurtha. Metellus' campaign reveals a marked alienation from the geography, which contrasts with the Numidian comfort with that same geography. Jugurtha and his army are able to engage the African landscape in ways that Metellus is not. Accordingly, Metellus betrays a preoccupation with concerns pertaining to the negotiation of the African geography, has difficulty operating at night, and finds his army obstructed by geographic features which do not seem to impede a Numidian escape. And even while Metellus does slowly become acclimatized to the African landscape, his general discomfort remains as the prevailing theme contrasting sharply with Marius' eventual comfort.

For brevity's sake, I shall focus on the beginning and end of the ring constituting Sallust's account of Metellus' and Marius' campaigns. The first episode sets Metellus against Jugurtha at the Muthul river. Or, more accurately, the first episode sets Metellus against the river valley of the Muthul. Throughout this episode, the Numidian forces are indistinguishable from their beasts of war, and their success is contingent on the forces of nature. Both of these observations are stylistically reinforced in Sallust's account. Metellus, moreover, primarily concerns himself with controlling the landscape, whose dynamics the Numidians find easier to negotiate. The last episode pits Marius against Jugurtha. Again, the geography of the site is important. Similar themes, night, hills, and water, point to Sallust's focus on similar issues. The players at this point, however, are reversed: Marius is most at home negotiating the forces of nature, whereas the same features that impeded Metellus from giving chase at the Muthul hinder the success of the Numidian army. As with just about everything else, this will have important ethical implications in Sallust's narrative, which in this case are drawn both from Sallust's philosophical prologue beginning the narrative and ethnographic assumptions forming the background of one of the work's major digressions, the African excursus (Morstein-Marx,

2001). Sallust's use of geography to construct character will thus turn out to be a dynamic device capable of evoking sophisticated judgement.

Select Bibliography

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