

Constructing the Early Roman State in the Preface to Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*

Sallust, in the opening paragraphs of his *Bellum Catilinae*, introduces the Catilinarian conspiracy by constructing a model that conveys how the state and the individual ought to relate. In doing so, he articulates his historical understanding of how the early Roman state operated and why the early Romans achieved a great degree of military and domestic success. Sallust's model first posits an interactive relationship between vibrant language and virtuous deeds, then offers exaggerated (and likely ahistorical, as Earl 1961 and Syme 1964 note) depictions of early Roman soldiers who should not be read as literal figures, but rather as exemplary ones for Sallust's contemporary audience.

By constructing a model that explains the relationship between the individual and the state in Sallust's opening paragraphs, I thus directly engage with Earl 1961, who also constructs a morally-informed political model in which Earl argues that *egregia facinora* stem from virtue by means of *bonae artes* (Earl 1961: 10-16). This reconfiguring of virtue as dependent upon good deeds rather than family history is the basis for Sallust's political thought, according to Earl: a *novus homo* does not need a compelling family history so long as he acts with virtue. Yet, Earl does not fully examine the relationship between virtuous deeds and the language that reports them. By contrast, scholars since Earl, in particular Batstone 1988, Sklenar 1998, and Gunderson 2000, read the *Bellum Catilinae* as despairing of language's decline in the late Republic. When these scholars do engage with Sallust's presentation of language in the early Roman state, they typically do so through readings that anticipate language's subsequent decline. This focus on the failure of language forces them to favor the role of language more than deeds Sallustian thought.

Through an examination of Sallust's preface, I argue instead that Sallust presents a reciprocal nature of a nascent relationship between healthy language and virtuous deeds in the

creation of the early Roman state. Starting from the premise that humans are different from beasts due to their *animus*, Sallust conceives of the early republic as a society that is composed of multiple men acting with virtue, since virtue derives from the rational aspects of one's *animus*. To be properly human is to exercise this virtue in ways adjudicated by the *animus* (BC 1.1-4). The exercising of the *animus* expresses itself in two forms: language and deeds. When one acts according to one's *animus*, the result is a virtuous deed (2.7-9). Language, which is to weigh the virtuous merits of any act and preserve it for posterity, provides the necessary context for understanding a deed, since it too comes from the *animus* (3.1-2). When in both word and deed the citizens of a state act virtuously, their society benefits, and the social and political institutions of that state change, mirroring the virtue of the citizen body. According to Sallust, this is the method by which the early Roman state was created (6.6-7). Its citizens acted in accordance with their *animus* in both words and deeds, and so political offices (like the Senate) came about in response. Virtue was built into the political system, and thus explains the success of the early state, and in particular, the republic (*Duabus his artibus, audacia in bello, ubi pax evenerat aequitate, seque remque publicam curabant* 9.3).

By mapping out the ways in which virtue, language, and deeds interacted in the early Roman state, this paper demonstrates that Sallust portrays certain early Roman soldiers (7.6-7 and 8.5) and himself as narrator (7.6-7) as exemplary models for Sallust's readers. Thus, while I would agree that Sallust despairs over the loss of language's decline, he writes a preface to his monograph that could fight off the decline through his representation of a healthy language that preserves for subsequent generations the virtues of men's deeds.

Works Cited

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