

Sallust and the Outsiders: The Role of Audiences in the *Histories*

Contemporary Romans are terrible students of history, according to Sallust. Readers accuse historians of bias or exaggeration (*Cat.* 3.2), and unlike the heroes of old, no one emulates the virtue of past *exempla* (*Jug.* 4.4-8). Instead, Sallust and his speakers present numerous examples of how the Romans fail to live up to their ancestral models or choose to imitate negative *exempla* (i.e. *Cat.* 5.6; *Jug.* 85.15-17; *Hist.* 1.16=13, 55=48.2-3).¹ While this certainly matches the picture of moral decline in the Late Republic that the historian paints for his reader, are there any internal audiences in Sallust's work that properly use history?

In order to justify his own capability to write history, Sallust places himself outside mainstream Roman society and its attendant moral corruption (*Cat.* 3.4, 4.1-2; *Jug.* 4.3). In the *Histories*, I believe, we find that Sallust continues to portray an internal audience of outsiders and outcasts as correctly assessing and responding to historical *exempla*: old men, women, barbarians, and the gladiator Spartacus are shown to be acting just as Q. Maximus, P. Scipio, and the other Roman heroes once did. By characterizing these outsiders as a working audience narrative in contrast to mainstream society, Sallust especially highlights how broken the current generation of Romans really is.

Book Two of the *Histories* offers us two examples. In the first, Metellus Pius attends a lavish banquet in his honor that culminates in his receiving a crown from a statue of Victory (2.70=59). Because of this behavior, the old and pious men, who lie outside of the mainstream, which is "all equally corrupt" (*Hist.* 1.12=12), harshly judge Metellus. Later in the second book, Sallust describes the Celtiberian tribes who allied with Sertorius against Pompey. We are told that the women of these tribes are responsible for preserving ancestral *exempla* (2.92=75). This becomes more important when the male elders urge surrender to Pompey – in response, the

¹ Fragments of the *Histories* are cited according to Maurenbrecher=McGushin.

women leave and occupy a secure location, claiming that their feminine duty now falls to the men. Sallust tells us that the youth were inflamed (*accensa*), which is the proper response to inspiring *exempla* and leads to imitation (*Jug.* 4.5).

The *exemplum* of secession – and the failure to live up to it – is an important theme in Sallust's writing. In the *Jugurtha*, the tribune C. Memmius criticizes the plebs for not emulating their ancestors (31.17) and compares the relationship they have with the nobility as one between slaves and masters (31.11, 20, 22). Sallust introduces this in the proem to the *Historiae* (1.11=10-11), and it appears in the oration of M. Aemilius Lepidus (1.55=48.2-3, 6, 10-11, 23, 25). It is also an important aspect of the tribune C. Licinius Macer's speech (3.48=34.1, 9, 11-13, 15-20, 26-28). The constant repetition of the themes of secession and slavery, especially in Macer's oration, leads right into the Spartacus narrative. Just as Sallust uses other outsiders who follow positive *exempla* to contrast with the failures of mainstream Roman society, I think that we are to see Spartacus as following the *exemplum* of secession. The fact that a slave, the lowest member of society, learns from Roman history makes the weakness of the Roman people that much more damning.

Through the use of outsiders, and his own self-portrayal as an outsider, Sallust adds another aspect to his critique of contemporary Rome. Whereas in the past, prominent citizens imitated the positive *exempla* of history, now mainstream Romans are concerned only with satisfying their greed and ambition. By showing that those on the fringe are closer to the past heroes than the Romans themselves, Sallust demonstrates the great depths of the moral crisis that faced the Late Republic.

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