

Sallust's Re-evaluation of Sulla in the *Bellum Iugurthinum*

The character of Sulla looms symbolically large in all of Sallust's writings often seeming to represent, though not always coherently, the onset of a rapid moral and political deterioration of Roman society and the spread of an ethos that diffuses throughout society and threatens the Republic itself (e.g., Sal. *Cat.*5.6, 11.4, *H.* 1.48¹). While the narratives of the *Bellum Catilinae* and the *Historiae* are set in the post-Sullan years and reflect an advanced stage of the process of moral decline, the *Bellum Iugurthinum* affords Sallust the opportunity not only to bring the character of Sulla vividly to life within the narrative, but to do so within a context that precedes the future effects of Sulla's deleterious influence upon Roman society.

Sulla's entrance into the narrative is late by design and inaugurates a "new level of action" in the narrative (Santangelo 2019, 107) that rapidly moves the war narrative to its conclusion. The general, Marius, will find in his newly arrived Lieutenant skills necessary to bring the protracted war to an end. Thus, the successful conclusion of the war will be based upon the cooperation of Marius and Sulla, or rather the general's recognition and willingness to use the younger man's skill set. This potential exemplum is disallowed before the events of the story play out in this direction; Sallust has introduced Sulla with a sophisticated and diffused syncrisis that reveals Sulla as the antithesis of Marius based on birth, education, experience and temperament. As Batstone (1988) has demonstrated, Sallust's technique of syncrisis "sees the virtues as mutually responsive, revealing the complementary but fragmented parts of the greater whole (1). While revealing a richer and more complex character in Sulla, nevertheless, the resulting antithesis of character in the text raises the expectation of antagonism, rather than

¹ References to the *Cat.* and *Iug.* follow the OCT text of Reynolds; in the *Historiae*, I'm using McGushin.

cooperation, between them. That the antagonism does not manifest itself within the narrative boundaries of the *Bellum Iugurthinum* is in keeping with the larger purposes of the monograph. Sallust has already explicitly informed the reader that the events occurring within the course of the Jugurthine War represent a beginning point of something that will be worked out and brought to an end only by the devastation of all of Italy (Sal. Jug. 5.1-2; cf. Levene, 1992). Furthermore, the antagonism allows for a more satisfying historical analysis that reveals a dynamic of competing characters at the heart of Rome's political demise. A Catline who is a protégé of Sulla may be only one side of the truth in the Roman Republic's last days.

Works Cited

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