

Synkrisis in Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum*

The *synkrisis* of Caesar and Cato in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* is perhaps the historian's best known passage—and for good reason. It is a penetrating examination of the differences in *mores* of the two men deemed by the historian as “towering in virtue” (*ingenti virtute*, *BC* 53.6). However, Sallust makes no mention of the important future events which the rivalry in that senatorial convention only foreshadowed: Pharsalus, Thapsus, Utica. Is this a failure of Sallust's historical method, that he does not give a fuller picture of the historical overview? Rather, this is the *synkrisis*' great strength: the omission of these future events casts a powerful sense of inevitability and helplessness as the ideological clash captured in the *synkrisis* exploded violently into the Civil War of 49 – 45 BCE. Sallust's narrative, as he presents it, forces the audience to contemplate the cultural and ideological *gravitas* embodied in the rivals and the Roman *zeitgeist* which had brought these people in this situation together.

As I will demonstrate, Sallust uses a similar device to great literary effect in *Bellum Jugurthinum*. Much of my work is inspired by D.S. Levene's study of the *BJ* as an intentional fragmentation, a work “written and presented as something finished and whole, but which at the same time draws the reader's attention in a more or less systematic fashion to the fact that it is incomplete” (Levene 1992, 53). The *synkrisis* of *BC*, of course, relies entirely upon this “fragmentary” writing style, and I believe that Levene's work has revealed an important way of examining Sallustian history as a tightly controlled, selectively told exercise in bringing events and people into sharp contrast—or similarity, as I will discuss below.

The ending of the *BJ* has been severely understudied even as interest in the monograph in general increases. Like the *BC*, the *BJ* closes with a confrontation between two individuals, Jugurtha and Sulla (*BJ* 112-113), but with a significant difference from the *synkrisis* of the *BC*.

Unlike the two embodiments of *virtus* presented in the *BC*, the *BJ* features two embodiments of vice, more specifically, virtuous men turned bad by ambition. An examination of this all-important difference will show that the confrontation of Jugurtha and Sulla is not in the form of a *synkrisis*, that is, a side-by-side comparison of differences, but a *synkrasis* (LSJ 1968: “σύγκρᾱσις, εως ἤ, a mixing together, commixture, blending, tempering.”), a scene illustrating the conglomeration of the character and actions of Sulla and Jugurtha to the point where they are no longer distinguishable in virtue, as opposed to the antithetical, yet complementary, differences between Caesar and Cato. I would like to discuss the importance of this crucial difference from the *synkrisis*, then examine the *synkrasis* as the defining literary structure of the *BJ*, and how this informs our perspective on the Sallustian corpus in general.

Bibliography

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