

## How to Read History:

### Echoes of the Future in Sallust's *de Coniuratione Catilinae*

Sallust's historiographical style contrasts strongly both with Cicero's prescriptions for the writing of history and the general encomiastic historiography argued for by Roller (Cic.*Arch.*14; Roller, 2018). Where Cicero holds the purpose of history is to provide *exempla* of good deeds and *encomia* of great men, Sallust provides ambiguous *exempla* and avoids any entirely positive or negative characteristics of the actors in his history (Batstone, 1988). Sallust's complicated portrayals can be read as a response to the encomiastic historiography which Cicero promoted (Garrish, 2012; Syme, 1964; Woodman 1988). While Sallust rejects *encomia* as the primary mode of writing history, he still emphasizes *exempla* (Woodman 1988; Roller 2018). Sallust's *exempla*, however, are complex and ultimately ambivalent: undermining positive *exempla*, and including praiseworthy aspects in negative *exempla* (Garrish, 2012). Fortunately, Sallust does not present these *exempla* without guidance. In the speeches of Caesar and Cato, Sallust has both men discuss issues of *exempla* which are just as applicable to historiography as they are to the rhetorical context they occur in.

The meta-historical nature of speeches in ancient historiography has been well discussed (Marincola, 2010; Grethlein, 2012). Ancient historians use the speeches of a historical character, composed for the historical work to discuss contemporary issues or issues of historiography itself. The common use of *exempla* in speech writing lends itself to comment on historiography, as both genres are concerned with this technique. Sallust, moreover, not only has Caesar and Cato employ *exempla* in their speeches, he even has both men discuss the nature, use, and

interpretation of *exempla*. Through the comments of Caesar and Cato, Sallust provides his own commentary on the use of *exempla* and, by extension, the use of history as genre.

Both the speeches of Caesar and Cato deal heavily with *exempla*. Caesar uses history, through *exempla*, to inform deliberations in the present, but his problematic choice and interpretation of *exempla* suggest that the conclusions are not so simple. Cato's speech adds more to the issues surrounding *exempla*, imagining, as Feldherr argues, that the current generation is "unable to comprehend the actions of the *maiores*" due to cultural and linguistic changes, but he presents himself as fully capable of such interpretation (Feldherr, 2012). While Cato and Caesar argue for opposite motions, they both present *exempla* as something requiring in-depth inspection, and Caesar's simplistic *exempla*, which contradict the historical nature of the events they are drawn from, present a counter-example to Sallust's complex, ambivalent *exempla*. Both speeches warn about the potential pitfalls of interpreting *exempla*, and, as usual, Sallust does not give an easy answer. Clearly, the historian cannot provide a simplistic *encomium*, else Sallust would not refrain from ever presenting a straightforward description of any character (Batstone, 1988). The conclusion is, therefore, that the reader must deliberate on more complex *exempla*. Sallust's complicated portrayals force the reader to think about each character and trait, in short, it forces them to deliberate. This deliberation, then is the purpose of *exempla* and historiography in general. The reader uses the precedents of the past not in an attempt to imitate them, but as a tool to think through complex current events and arrive at their own conclusion.

Given the date of Sallust's composition in the late 40's B.C.E., I would like to suggest that his account of the Catilinarian Conspiracy is offered as a tool for thinking through the events following the death of Caesar in 44 B.C.E. (Syme, 1964). Sallust describes the political

machinations against Caesar before his reported speech in the senate, culminating with swords brandished against him in the senate less than one OCT page before his speech. This event, which took place after the senate debate, clearly echoes the future assassination of Caesar then lets him speak on the very subject that will lead to that assassination: conspiracies. How these allusions relate to Caesar's death are not clear, but Sallust provides a mode of reading the past and using *exempla* as a means of thinking about the complex issues, if not providing a clear solution.

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