

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

SALLUST AND INTELLECTUAL INNOVATION

Edwin H. Shaw, *Sallust and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Historiography and Intellectual Life at Rome*. Historiography of Rome and Its Empire 13. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Pp. x + 506. Hardback, €132.00. ISBN 978-90-04-50171-3.

These are happy days for our cranky Roman historian (or are they?), as he has received rather more than his fair share of attention of late. Limiting myself to most recent monographs dedicated to Sallust specifically and as known to me, there are: Jennifer Gerrish’s 2019 *Sallust’s Histories and Triumviral Historiography: Confronting the End of History*, with its concept of ‘analogical historiography’, whereby Sallust addresses contemporary issues of the triumvirate under cover of his post-Sullan history; Rodolfo Funari’s 2019 *Lectissimus pensator verborum: tre studi su Sallustio*, with its discussions of Cicero’s linguistic influence on Sallust, the latter’s proclamations of doubt as expressions of his commitment to veracity, and his changing estimation of *superbia* (rounded off by Gerard Duursma’s comprehensive collection of *testimonia*, which replaces the one by Alfons Kurfess); and Andrew Feldherr’s 2021 *After the Past: Sallust on History and Writing History*, which offers historiographical and, more especially, intertextual and narratological interpretations of the monographs, where Sallust is primarily cast as ‘a hermeneut who wants his readers to participate in his hermeneutics’ (as I characterised the approach in a recent review). The last time Sallust received this much monographic attention was in the early 1960s.¹

The latest contribution is Edwin Shaw’s *Sallust and the Fall of the Republic*, whose rather bland title fails to do it justice: It is a thorough and in parts stimulating reappraisal of Sallust as a fully-fledged-and-versed man of letters with political experience and interests (‘politically astute but no longer personally invested’, Shaw calls him (202) happily), who engages with the ‘wider intellectual milieu’ in executing his political analyses. In particular, Shaw argues that the misnamed ‘digressions’ carry much of that intellectual weight, that they are, in fact, ‘central contributions to the argumentation of [each respective] monograph ... [and] play major roles within the articulation of the ideas which give the monographs meaning’ (211), and he offers a number

¹ Büchner (1960); Earl (1961); Syme (1964). Given that La Penna’s *Sallustio e la ‘Rivoluzione’ Romana* appeared in 1968, it may well have been the golden decade in studies of Sallust.

of innovative readings in support. This reevaluation of the digressions is the core of Shaw's substantive contribution, which no *Sallustiana/us* can afford to pass by—which is why it is all the more regrettable that it includes a few claims and much materia(l) that more prudent editing should have pruned, thus leaving readers to work unnecessarily hard to appreciate the forest.

I

The first two chapters sketch the two frames: here Sallust's Rome and its political and intellectual upheavals, there Shaw's methodology and interpretative framework. The introduction begins, in 'Intellectual Life between Republic and Principate', with a problematisation of periodisation in general, of the triumviral period in particular, before offering a summation of our knowledge about book collections and libraries. It then turns to 'Latin Literature and a Crisis of Roman Values', ultimately to highlight the contemporary belief in literary contributions to the maintenance or restoration of the *respublica*: *in litteris et libris ... gnauare rem publicam*, as Cicero (*Fam.* 9.2.5) phrased it memorably. The scene thus set, Shaw turns to 'Sallust and Literary Rome'. He argues that Sallust, however distant his *persona* appears, actually stayed in Rome (27–9). I was not convinced by Shaw's argumentation, missed a discussion of Sen. *Contr.* 9.1.13–14, and still cannot quite see why it matters. The heart of the matter is presented in "Among Intellectual Pursuits, by Far the Most Useful": History Reimagined', wherein Shaw sketches how several of the striking features of Sallust's historical writing—the monographic form, choice of topic, philosophical *proemia*, extensive 'digressions', and high proportion of direct speech—are best explained as his stretching the generic boundaries of traditional historiography to yield a 'sophisticated analytical form which could comment on and engage with political questions' (31). This is entirely convincing. If anything, I would add that Sallust's efforts to 'reimagine' Roman historiography can be discerned especially clearly in the tension between *carptim*, unattested before (*TLL* s.v. [Bannier]), and *perscribere* in one of his most-significant programmatic statements (*Cat.* 4.2): *statui res gestas populi Romani carptim, ut quaeque memoria digna videbantur, perscribere*; unsurprisingly, that *iunctura* is singular (*TLL* s.vv. *carptim, perscribere* [Foucher]). This tension is complemented by a second one, viz. between the associations of grandeur that Romans would typically have regarding *res gestae* and Sallust's subsequent specification of this, his *res gesta*, as *coniuratio Catilinae ... facinus in primis ... memorabile*. One may perhaps also wonder whether Shaw's argument would not have been strengthened, had he discussed the implications of the

historian's allusions to the philosopher's seventh letter (*Cat.* 3.3–4.2, *Plat. Epist.* 7.324–6).²

Theory, then: 'Digression and Historical Argument' starts from the (re)assertions that (i) Sallust's histories are argumentative and (ii) much of that argument is made in the digressions (42–3). It then profitably draws on the rhetorical discussion of the *parecbasis/egressio (vel sim.)*, highlighting the feature's qualities of what could be styled as 'connected disconnectedness', i.e., pertinence (*ad utilitatem causae*) and nonsequentiality (*extra ordinem*), as well as its functions: to elaborate and/or embellish (*ornandi aut augendi causa*). This segues into an (unnecessarily lengthy) discussion of the (orator's first duty of the) finding of facts and other materials, i.e. *inuentio*, and, in the context of rhetoric and historiography in particular, its perilous relation to the concept of 'truth' (51–64).³ From there, Shaw steps up to propose that complementary attention be paid to *dispositio*—the (selection and) arrangement of the materials—in ancient historical writing (64–72). This follows naturally from the characterisation of the digression as being *extra ordinem*, and few will find this contestable. But there are two problems with further parts of the argument: first, neither the rhetorical tradition nor, in fact, the historiographical discussions are all that detailed when it comes to *dispositio* (Lucian, whom Shaw quotes, is an exception, but he is late and hardly representative), leaving us with little more than that the selection and arrangement of material matter. Second, I cannot share Shaw's hope (e.g., 78) that focusing on *dispositio* along with *inuentio* would reduce the problematic (from a modern perspective) tension between the rhetoric of Greek and Roman historiography and 'truth'. This rather extraneous discussion should perhaps have been left for another time and place. More pertinent to Shaw's endeavour are what follows: a clear and helpful narratological specification of the forms of digression (79–84), overviews of (i) digressions in Sallust's predecessors (84–95) and (ii) digressions in Sallust's own works (95–106). Shaw offers a clear definition along the way (83): 'In practice, digressions are therefore those passages which disrupt narrative chronology either by interrupting it to insert other material (narratological pauses) or by reporting events out of their proper sequence (anachronies, particularly external ones)'. This allows for the inclusion of passages (like biographical sketches) that some will object to counting as digressions.

² Going beyond Renahan (1976): 100–1.

³ Meeus (2020) may have come out too late for Shaw (whose bibliography is otherwise impressive).

II

The first two material chapters deal with what many will consider the most significant digressions. In Chapter 2, ‘Setting the Scene: Rome and Africa’, Shaw first turns to ‘Rome from the Outside: The *archaeologia* (*Bellum Catilinae* 6–13)’ (119–34), arguing that that section, being highly abstract,⁴ de-individualised, and in detail idiosyncratic (*urbem Romam ... condidere ... Troiani* [!]), not only differs strikingly from other accounts of the same period but also allows Sallust to focus on historical processes (as opposed to agents), to emphasise—against Cicero, for instance—the discontinuity of past and present, and ‘to conceive of Rome in more universal terms’ (152). One could add that thereby it ties back to the similarly universal (philosophical) proem. The distance that Sallust creates from Rome’s past is enhanced by (as the next section, ‘Looking with the Eye of the Ethnographer’, proceeds to argue) the several ethnographical elements he incorporates—as if Rome’s past were a foreign country (to borrow David Lowenthal’s famous title). Shaw here continues recent interpretations of Roman autoethnography to good purpose: on occasion, he overstates his case, so regarding *urbem Romam*, which no Roman would have suspected of suggesting *origo* as ‘the standard component of ethnographic accounts’ (142); and his emphasis on the singular in *sicuti ego accepi* overlooks identical uses leading up to it (*Cat.* 2.7, 4.4). But such quibbles aside, in sum, when I reread Sallust’s digression, I was struck by how many possible resonances there were, in fact. Shaw’s last point regarding the archaeology (‘Morality and Causation’) identifies *translatio imperii* from one ‘state’ to another (as Konrad Heldmann has argued),⁵ to which Sallust alludes (*ita imperium semper ad optimum quemque a minus bono transfertur* (*Cat.* 2.6)) as the inevitable (international) consequence of an inevitable (internal) descent once the summit of excellence is reached: *saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit* (10.1). This is why Scipio wept when Carthage fell (Polyb. 38.22). But here Shaw fails to convince. On the one hand, just before Sallust remarks on the *translatio*, he asserts the possibility of its avoidance (*Cat.* 2.4): *nam imperium facile iis artibus retinetur, quibus initio partum est*. He then adds: *verum ubi pro labore desidia, pro continentia et aequitate libido atque superbia invasere, fortuna simul cum moribus immutatur*. On the other hand, Shaw detects a contradiction between 2.4 and 10.1, as in the latter passage ‘Rome’s moral decline began only after *fortuna* began to turn savage’ (160); but the following sentence complicates things: *qui labores, pericula, dubias atque asperas res facile toleraverant, iis otium divitiaeque optanda alias, oneri*

⁴ ‘[E]ine Geschichte ohne geschichtliche Tatsachen’, as Leeman (1967) 111 put it memorably. For Shaw’s subsequent point, note also Leeman’s ‘Geschichte der politisch-moralischen Kräfte’ (ibid.).

⁵ Heldmann (1993) esp. 15–26.

miseriaequae fuere. Sallust varies the expression, not the thought, and his writing merely seems to prioritise *fortuna*: Those who had been used to hardship fell to (and for) leisure; *with* that change *fortuna* began to change everything. There is no contradiction. Lastly, given Shaw's interest in the intellectual milieu and tragic resonances elsewhere in Sallust's work,⁶ I missed comments on the (likely) relevance of the concept of *peripeteia*.

Turning to 'The African Digression (*Bellum Jugurthinum* 17–19)', whereby Sallust contextualises his second monograph spatially just as the archaeology contextualises his first monograph temporally, Shaw highlights Sallust's showing off his mastery of various models, techniques, and sources ('Forms of Knowledge'), thereby solidifying the 'persuasiveness of the narrative and the historian's *persona*' (186). Once again, Sallust can be observed as sketching a rather abstract and idiosyncratic African/Numidian history, wherein the absence of Carthage in particular contributes to it being no less than 'A New History' (as per the first part of the title of that section (186–94)). Shaw could perhaps have strengthened this point by emphasising that it is Sallust himself who—with a classic *praeteritio*—calls his readers' attention to this (*Jug.* 17.2): *nam de Carthagine silere melius puto quam parum dicere*.

With 'Politics, Expediency and Thucydides' Theorem' (197–285) Shaw then turns to Sallust's two pictures of Roman morals drawn in Dorian gray, 'The Political Digressions: *Bellum Catilinae* 36.4–39.5, *Bellum Jugurthinum* 41–42'. There, if anywhere, Sallust should be expected to set out 'models for understanding the political situation of his own period' (203); and he does not disappoint, 'expand[ing] the intellectual possibilities of historiography' (204) along the way. Both digressions are rather central, in fact (in terms of their place within their respective narratives as well as their argumentative contributions to the whole). For the *Cat.*, Shaw demonstrates how Sallust adapts (rather than adheres to) the Thucydidean model of the Corcyrean *stasis*, moving the analysis of self-interest past the factions down to the level of individuals, and how Sallust disagrees with Cicero on the role of the *plebs*, who are as much at fault as anyone in Sallust's book, wherein the tribunate too is shown almost exclusively in its 'destructive and seditious capabilities' (232). In consequence, Sallust re-emerges as someone of no political loyalties other than to this vigorous political analysis, and Shaw is right to emphasise Sallust's criticism of the *plebs* as much as the *nobiles* (but he goes too far when he claims that Sallust 'makes no reference to social or economic factors', 226).⁷ He also attractively proposes the shorthand *malum publicum* to refer to the pattern Sallust lays out of 'cyclical strife [sc. based on individual advantage] with

⁶ E.g., Dué (2000).

⁷ *quibus opes nullae sunt ... egestas facile habetur sine damno ... patrimonii amissis ... homines egentis* (*Cat.* 37).

changing political dynamics' (237). However, while it is true that the sardonic *malum publicum* sounds so Sallustian that it would have to be his, as Syme thought ((1964) 327), and Shaw reaffirms (it 'appears in classical Latin only in the *Cat.* and *Hist.*' (236 n. 186)), it is not.⁸

The interpretation of the major political digression in the *Jug.*, '*mos partium et factionum*: Structuring Crisis in the *Bellum Jugurthinum*' (240–85), follows similar lines in that it connects the major interpretative points in the digression to the narrative surrounding it. But Sallust's analysis in the *Jug.* emerges as not only more sophisticated (as has often been remarked) and more expansive, developing further the idea of 'a descending spiral of partisan strife driven by self-interest' (282) and formulating the theorem of *metus hostilis* (256); it is also, Shaw argues, 'elevated to the status of a structuring device for the whole monograph' (281). This both convinces and represents a particularly clear example of the importance of *dispositio* (as articulated in the first chapter). Unfortunately, Shaw's discussion is less stringent in this second half of the chapter than in the first: too lengthy are his retellings of Sallust's own narrative (243–53).

III

Because of his broad definition of digression, Shaw can then turn to the biographical sketches ('Windows on the Soul: Psychology, Philosophy and Sallust's Portraiture'). The characters, whose choice falls into the remit of *dispositio* (290), are not just descriptive but also, once again, '*loci* of moral and historical analysis' (291); undoubtedly. Turning to Catiline's '*ritratto paradossale*' (in La Penna's influential 1976 expression), Shaw highlights the counterfactual gestures Sallust includes to suggest different turns Catiline, with his eminent talents, might have taken; but he overstates his case when he claims that Sallust's portrait (unlike Cicero's) 'allows the possibility that [Catiline's] *ingenium* had once been sound' (299): *L. Catilina, nobili genere natus, fuit magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo pravoque. huic ab adolescentia bella intestina, caedes, rapinae, discordia civilis grata fuere ibique iuventutem suam exercuit* (*Cat.* 5.1–2). In discussing Sempronia, Shaw attractively proposes that she 'exemplifies a stage of decline not motivated by power or wealth; her participation is to satisfy *luxuria* and *inopia*' (312); she 'offers and illustration of the workings of [Sallust's] moral system in practice' (313).⁹ Jugurtha, by

⁸ Briscoe gets it right in his comment on Sisenna *FRHist* 26 F 92 *eos qui hoc malum publicum clandestinis consiliis comparauerunt*: '*malum publicum*, modelled on *bonum publicum*, in Cato (speeches) and Coelius 15 F 17, once in Cicero and twice in Sallust'.

⁹ Shaw's 'you could scarcely tell whether she cared less for her fortune or her reputation' hardly captures Sallust's *pecuniae an famae minus parceret, haud facile discerneres*.

Sallust's pen, is most clearly the victim of circumstance, as the moment of his corruption is specified. Shaw then links the careers of these promising but misguided protagonists back to Sallust's discourse on *gloria*, fatally severed from *virtus* (329). He attractively suggests that his problematisation of 'gloria above all' is informed by Cicero's differentiation between true glory and a mistaken form preferred by many amongst his contemporaries (338); he ends with a discussion of the *synkrisis*, concluding that it, too, represents a 'commentary on the fundamental forces motivating Republican politics, with no simple resolution' (361). Shaw's interpretation, even if many of its aspects have been advanced before, convincingly reveals the numerous argumentative ties to Sallust's 'main' narratives, and the dialogue with Cicero's *De Officiis* situates Sallust once again within his wider intellectual milieu. But, speaking of the latter, I would have liked him to address the place of *notatio* (*Rhet. Her.* 4.63–4) within the rhetorical tradition as another likely influence on Sallust's portraits, especially given that such characteristics as greed or dissimulation, important as they are to the historian, are frequently addressed in rhetoric as well (cf., e.g., Cic. *Top.* 84 *qualis sit avarus, qualis assentator ceteraque eiusdem generis, in quibus et natura et vita describitur*). And what about the types—e.g., the glutton, the miser, the spendthrift—in Horace's roughly contemporary satires?

In 'Imperial History in the *Historiae*' Shaw takes on the daunting task of interpreting the geographical digressions in Sallust's final (and, many think, most sophisticated) work, interpreting them, too, as argumentative, innovative, and contributory to (another area of) the contemporary intellectual milieu. Therein he is hampered by the fragmentary state, of course, not just of the *Historiae* themselves (366–8) but also of (Greek and especially) Roman geographical writing within and beyond historiography prior and contemporaneous to Sallust. Nevertheless, many readers will happily concede that, with his at least five digressions (as detailed in 'The *corpus*', 371–80), Sallust engages with the flourishing geographical interests and enthusiasms of the time and may contribute to 'the [wider] translation of knowledge' (395–406) from Greece to Rome—even if, as Shaw acknowledges, geographical discussion was also a generic expectation of historiography ('Geography and Genre', 380–392). But this latter fact severely complicates Shaw's further claim that Sallust innovated 'by incorporating [geography] into a distinct historiographical form', viz. the annalistic form. This is not only an *argumentum ex silentio* (in part); it furthermore must downplay Cato's and especially Caesar's most recent geographical writing within 'historiographical' contexts (with the necessary qualifications in the case of the *commentarii*).¹⁰ In consequence, I doubt that either Sallust or his contemporaries would have thought of the inclusion of

¹⁰ On Caesar's significant contributions to geography, see Krebs (2018).

geography in the ‘annalistic’ *Historiae* as innovative (389, 424).¹¹ As for Sallust’s various uses of different modes of geographical knowledge—once again adapting Thucydides rather than adhering to him—their meaningful integration into the critical moralistic and imperialistic history seems intuitive enough. Unfortunately, Shaw overreaches in his interpretation of *Hist.* 1.9 claiming that ‘[i]t establishes an opposition between the status of the centre and the empire which surrounded it’ (409): *res Romana plurimum imperio valuit Ser. Sulpicio et M. Marcello consulibus, omni Gallia cis Rhenum atque inter mare nostrum atque Oceanum, nisi qua a paludibus invia fuit, perdomita. optimis autem moribus et maxima concordia egit inter secundum atque postremum bellum Carthaginiense.*

IV

The digressions in Sallust had, of course, received scholarly attention before; a kindred spirit, Perrochat had, some seventy-five years ago, taken a particular but rather brief interest in their links to their respective narratives. But Shaw’s interpretations go well beyond this or any other earlier works (with which he is admirably familiar): Thanks to his efforts, few will doubt that the digressions ‘should be read as central *loci* of the historian’s articulation of the ideas developed in his historiography’ (425), and ‘as *loci* of the historian’s interpretative activity’ (4); and Sallust himself emerges clearly as a politically attuned (but no longer engaged) highly versatile man of letters, who is somewhat eager to profile his competence in the various knowledge spheres and demonstrably at pains to modify the generic conventions of historical writing to make it a suitable medium for his own critical and analytical needs: while scolding Rome for its moral decline, he converses with Thucydides, Varro, *et al.*

In consequence, anyone interested in the Sallustian digressions and their author’s intellectual profile will have to turn to Shaw’s discussion. However, while he also succeeds in refocusing our attention on the importance of *dispositio* within the historiographical tradition, the same cannot be said of his larger claims as to its ‘rivalling’ *inventio*, let alone its being a solution to the much-discussed truth dilemma of classical historiography. The latter unfortunately represents the outgrowth (and substantial undergrowth) in Shaw’s work; cutting some of which as well as a few of the many *actual* digressions and lengthy retellings would have made this an even better book.

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¹¹ Shaw often gives the impression that *Historiae* and *Annales* were basically the same (e.g., 368, 370). But Sallust may have disagreed (Krebs (2015) 519–20).

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