

REVIEW

CATILINE REASSESSED

Gianpaolo Urso, *Catilina: le faux populiste*. Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2019. Pp. 240. Paperback, €19.00. ISBN 978-2-35613-336-6.

Catiline owes his fame, Gianpaolo Urso remarks at the start of this important new study, not to the events in which he was said to have been the leading actor but rather the fact that these events were reported by two of the greatest authors of Latin literature, Cicero and Sallust. Reliable evidence is scarce, Urso argues. Much of what we are told concerns Catiline's last year, and even then a lot of the information comes from an avowed enemy. The *Catilinarians* themselves were published only in 60 BCE, by which point Cicero's actions as consul were the subject of fierce controversy and he needed to justify them. Cicero was, in Urso's view, not above inventing new details to bolster his side of the story.¹

Deciding, then, that the evidence resists conventional biography, Urso provocatively starts this book at the end, with the attacks on Cicero that began in December of 63. Urso traces the controversies of the next twenty years, and uses less familiar Greek sources—especially Diodorus Siculus and Cassius Dio—to recover hints of accounts far less friendly to Cicero than Cicero's preferred version. Only Sallust made the Ciceronian view canonical. Then, in the second part of the book, Urso explores how the hardening of Catiline's image into arch-conspirator led to rewriting of the early history of the *gens Sergia*, most visible in Livy. The third part finally turns to Catiline's early life and political career up to his defeat in the consular elections of 64, while the fourth gives a brisk account of 'la dernière année'.

As Urso remarks, the usual proportions of studies of Catiline are reversed. Readers get an up-to-date discussion of Catiline's life. But, what is even more important, they are confronted with fascinating questions about how we know what we know, or think we know, and why one version of events knocked out others. The book encourages one to think carefully about almost every known 'fact' about Catiline. Anyone interested in Roman historiography, oratory, or the politics of the late Roman Republic should read Urso. Given how frequently Cicero's *Catilinarians* and Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* are taught, it

¹ On the question of how much the published *Catilinarians* reflect what Cicero actually said, see also now the stimulating study by D. H. Berry, *Cicero's Catilinarians* (Oxford, 2020).

would be of great benefit to most Latin teachers, too. Urso's prose is concise and elegant, the argumentation always clear. A brief review can only give highlights.

Part I, entitled 'Catilina "avant Salluste"', is especially impressive. Here Urso examines the different images of Cicero available already in 63 and the years following, ranging from *parens patriae* to executioner of citizens and fomenter of war. Cicero's one-sided account of the oath he swore on December 29 can be corrected by the account of Cassius Dio (37.38), which drew on a well-informed alternative source. As becomes almost a refrain in this book, 'Cicéron n'invente pas l'épisode, il le déforme' (18). Dio's speech of Calenus (46.1–28) reflects a fresh wave of polemic against Cicero brought on by the orator's attacks on Mark Antony in 44. Urso makes convincing arguments that the speech is not purely Dio's creation. Rather, just as Dio's 'Cicero' draws on contemporary sources (the *Philippics* certainly), so did 'Calenus' (anti-Ciceronian texts now lost, including writings of Antony).

The image of Catiline was hardly fixed in 63. Urso gives a list of contemporaries beyond Cicero and Sallust who wrote about the events of 63 (42–3). Of note is a fragment of Diodorus Siculus (40.5a Dindorf = 40.6 Goukowsky), which provides a view of the *First Catilinarian* and Catiline's response to it that diverges from the published speeches. The un-Ciceronian details of Cassius Dio's account of the conspiracy reflect sources, or at least a source, quite different from the Ciceronian/Sallustian version. Sallust himself deviates from Cicero in some ways, but his *Bellum Catilinae* should be regarded as an intervention in ongoing controversies that helped make the Ciceronian version canonical, until Dio. Vergil gives us the Ciceronian Catiline (as well as Antony).

The brief Part II ('Les ancêtres de Catilina') looks at how the history of the Sergii appears to have become homogenised in the Augustan age. Sergii are associated with a propensity for conflict with colleagues, extreme personal ambition, and defeat. Even Sergestus in the *Aeneid* is rash. Livy demonstrably suppresses the exploits of M. Sergius Silus, Catiline's great-grandfather, in the Second Punic War. The *gens Sergia*, despite their patrician background, had few accomplishments to boast of, making it all the easier to taint their whole history with the dark events of 63. Urso might have said more in this section on how the claim of Trojan ancestry (suggested by Vergil's *Aeneid*) likely reflects a strategy used by other faded families to make up for ancestral accomplishments—the Iulii, notably.² As the careers of Caesar and Sulla show, membership in a patrician family that had sunk into obscurity for centuries

² See especially K.-J. Hölkenskamp, 'Römische Gentes und griechische Genealogien', in G. Vogt-Spira and B. Rommel, edd., *Rezeption und Identität: die kulturelle Auseinandersetzung Roms mit Griechenland als europäisches Paradigma* (Stuttgart, 1999) 3–21.

could give one extraordinary pride—as well as a sense of inferiority that needed to be overcome.

The third and fourth parts proceed through the known or alleged events of Catiline's life, with Urso always usefully foregrounding problems of evidence. For example, the alleged marriage of Catiline to Gratidia—on which was constructed the hypothesis that Catiline was a partisan of Cinna—is debunked through an illuminating study of the scholia of Lucan. Catiline's role as 'Sullan executioner', Urso also shows, was inflated by Cicero in 64, when the memory of Sulla increasingly was under attack. There is a good discussion of 'Catilina *legatus*' (the frequent view that Catiline served in this office under Sulla is shown to be very weak). And also of 'Catilina et la vestale': Catiline was tried in 73 for committing *incestum* with the Vestal Fabia and was then acquitted, with help from Q. Lutatius Catulus, most senior pontiff present in Rome at the time. Plutarch's story (*Cat. Min.* 19.5–6) of Clodius' attack on Fabia should be assigned to the Bona Dea scandal of 62/1 but looked back to 73. 'How dare Fabia attack me for sacrilege?', Clodius effectively was asking. As Urso remarks, the strong bond of friendship between Catiline and Catulus resurfaces constantly in the evidence. Down to 64, Catiline was a member of the Sullan establishment, and there was nothing subversive about his image, Urso argues. Sallust's account of Catiline's friends (*Cat.* 14.1–3) seems inspired by Theopompus on the circle of Philip II (125).

Two lengthy, parallel chapters look at the consular elections of 66 and the trial *de repetundis* and then the elections of 64 and the trial *de sicariis*. Politics played out in the courts is a key theme. Among many interesting points are the following. Catiline's willingness to withdraw (after late entry) from the contest of 66 likely was part of a deal with the ultimate victor Torquatus, who then defended Catiline in 65. Catiline did not think he would benefit from Cicero's offer to defend him. In 64, Catiline had a good chance of winning. But Cicero was helped by all the favour he won through years of advocacy—and his attacks on Catiline's Sullan past, which prepared the way for Catiline's trial *de sicariis*. Catiline was no *popularis* and was unlikely to have had Crassus' support and certainly not Caesar's.

In 'the last year', in Urso's view, Catiline only turned to conspiracy at the last possible moment—after he left Rome in early November, 63. And even then, he might have been planning to go to Marseilles—until, Urso speculates, he ran into a group of insurgents at Forum Aurelii. The Sullan veterans who came to Rome earlier in the year for the elections were only there to vote. Catiline was expanding his base by proposing debt reform, not cancellation. Catiline responded confidently to Cicero's critiques on the eve of elections.

The testimony of Dio becomes especially important for the aftermath of the elections. The Senate issued the *s.c.u.* in response to the anonymous letters brought to Crassus, and separately made a declaration of *tumultus* in response

to the uprisings in Etruria. Urso argues that a careful reading of Dio 37.31.1 implies that the letters to Crassus did not actually name Catiline: that was a later addition of Cicero to his *Περὶ τῆς ὑπατείας*, designed to make Catiline look even guiltier. The conspirators' plans to fire the city are dismissed by Urso as pure Ciceronian fiction, but this time from 63 itself: the aim was to terrorise the plebs. After Catiline's departure from the city, the conspiracy, at least in Rome, really was Lentulus Sura's. Appian and Dio say as much, and Lentulus' letter to Catiline can be read as supporting the interpretation.

A brief conclusion recapitulates that Catiline was, for most of his career, a Sullan, associated with diehards like Catulus. His populist turn was late—and maladroit. Echoing the ancient debates from where he began his study, Urso leaves us with questions about Cicero's conduct. In Urso's view, Cicero was ambitious—and also weak, but determined to appear strong. He wanted to become a senatorial leader, but went too far. He should have taken Caesar's advice and not executed Lentulus and the others. 'Si Cicéron n'a pas agi ainsi', Urso concludes, 'ce fut sans doute parce que les accusées auraient eu la possibilité de prouver que la plus grande partie de son histoire de grande conspiration relevait de la fiction' (213).

The portrait of Catiline that emerges is a refutation of earlier ones—not the great popular champion, *not* the dastardly conspirator. Despite many differences in detail, the picture is similar to what emerges in the recent and important article by Georg-Philipp Schietinger.³ Indeed, that Catiline was a serious reformer seems increasingly doubted by scholars. But on the issue of conspiracy, there are other ways to read the evidence. Catiline's flight from Rome in November of 63 and assumption of the *fasces*, not to mention his tactics in the preceding consular campaign, show how far he was prepared to go—either to win high office or if he was thwarted. It does not seem hard to believe, then, that already before the elections he was contemplating ways to secure office through violence, if he failed at the polls. The unrest in Italy was ready to be exploited. A recent and important article by John Ramsey has securely placed the consular elections in late September, only a month or so before the uprisings in Etruria began; this strongly suggests revolutionary plans were underway before the elections—with Catiline implicated in them.⁴ Cicero was well-informed but limited in what he could do. That a majority of senators believes their colleague innocent does not, unfortunately, make it so.

³ G.-P. Schietinger, 'Lucius Sergius Catilina: Karriereperspektiven und Karriere eines homo paene novus in der späten römischen Republik', *Klio* 99 (2017) 149–91.

⁴ J. T. Ramsey, 'The Date of the Consular Elections in 63 and the Inception of Catiline's Conspiracy', *HSCPh* 110 (2019) 213–69. Also see now A. J. Woodman, 'Sallust and Catiline: Conspiracy Theory', *Historia* 70 (2021) 55–68—a remarkable article that argues against the decades-old consensus that (1) the so-called 'First Catilinarian Conspiracy' is a later fiction and (2) Sallust retrojects events from 63 to 64.

It is important to question Cicero's conduct, but over years of study of his whole career I have come to see it as arising not from personal ambition alone but a real sense of danger he felt he had to stop, even at personal risk. That Sallust, the former officer of Caesar, reached this conclusion is revealing.

But if some scholars will ultimately take a different view than Urso's of Catiline and his final year in particular, they will still want to read and make use of this outstanding book. Many important articles, editions of texts, or monographs covering contiguous topics have appeared in recent decades but we have needed a fully documented monograph that takes account of new research. Urso supplies this. He also provides original solutions to old problems and has opened up invaluable new inquiries into such areas as Cicero's efforts to create a history through published speeches, the later Greek historiography of Republican Rome, and the writing and rewriting of family history.

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