

QUINTILIAN ON SALLUST AND LIVY*

Abstract: The argument of a famous passage of Quintilian (2.5.19) on Sallust and Livy has been misinterpreted and does not mean that Livy is an easier read than Sallust.

Keywords: Quintilian, Sallust, Livy

When Velleius Paterculus in AD 30 surveyed the prominent authors of the late republic and early empire, the only historians whom he singled out were Sallust and Livy (36.2–3 ‘aemulumque Thucydidis Sallustium ... et consecutus Sallustium Liuius’). By *consecutus Sallustium Liuius* Velleius means not only that Livy was Sallust’s successor but that he equalled Sallust’s achievement,¹ and the two historians, like Herodotus and Thucydides, tend to get mentioned side by side (e.g., Sen. *Contr.* 9.1.14; *Suas.* 6.21; Ascon. 66.23C; Stat. *Silv.* 4.7.53–6; Quint. 10.1.32). As in the case of their Greek predecessors, however, the purpose of pairing Sallust and Livy is often to contrast them, as was done by Servilius Nonianus (*ap.* Quint. 10.1.102 ‘pares eos magis quam similes’). Such a contrast occurs in a famous passage where Quintilian is discussing the authors who should be read out in class by those students in their mid-teens who, having left the teaching of the *grammaticus*, are now beginning with the *rhetor* (2.5.18–20):²

[18] quod si potuerit optineri, non ita difficilis supererit quaestio, qui legendi sint incipientibus. nam quidam illos minores, quia facilius eorum intellectus uidebatur, probauerunt, alii floridius genus, ut ad alenda primarum aetatum ingenia magis accommodatum. [19] ego optimos quidem et statim et semper, sed tamen eorum candidissimum quemque et maxime expositum uelim, ut Liuium a pueris magis quam Sallustium (et hic historiae maior est auctor, ad quem tamen intellegendum iam profectu opus sit). [20] Cicero, ut mihi quidem uidetur, et iucundus incipientibus quoque et apertus est satis, nec

* For comments on earlier drafts of this paper I am most grateful to D. S. Levene, T. Reinhardt and an anonymous referee; their agreement should on no account be assumed.

¹ Cf. *OLD* *consequor* 3, 10.

² The punctuation and apparatus criticus are taken from the Oxford Classical Text.

prodesse tantum sed etiam amari potest; tum, quem ad modum Liuius praecipit,³ ut quisque erit Ciceroni simillimus.

a pueris (*sc. legi ?*) *AB: fort. delendum*

This is a testing passage, of which the articulation is liable to be misunderstood. What do scholars make of it?

The passage is rendered by D. A. Russell in the new Loeb edition as follows:⁴

If this point is won,⁵ what remains will be the comparatively easy question of what authors should be read by beginners. Some have recommended the less pretentious authors, because they seemed easier to understand; others, the more florid school, as being better suited to nourish the talents of the very young. I think the best should come both first and always, but among the best the most straightforward and accessible: for example, Livy for boys rather than Sallust. (Sallust indeed is the greater historian, but one needs further progress to understand him.) Cicero, in my view at least, is both pleasant reading for beginners, and perfectly accessible; he can not only be useful but can be a favourite. Next (to follow Livy's advice) should come whoever is most like Cicero.

The sentence in which Sallust and Livy are mentioned is translated similarly by H. E. Butler in the old Loeb edition:⁶

For my part I would have them read the best authors from the very beginning and never leave them, choosing those, however, who are simplest and most intelligible. For instance, when prescribing for boys, I should give Livy the preference over Sallust; for, although the latter is the greater historian, one requires to be well-advanced in one's studies to appreciate him properly. Cicero, in my opinion, provides pleasant reading for beginners ...

Both scholars understand 'ut ... Sallustium' as *exemplifying* the preceding statement ('For instance ...', 'for example ...'): in other words, Livy is one of

³ Cf. Quint. 10.1.39 'apud Liuium in epistula ad filium scripta, legendos Demosthenem atque Ciceronem, tum ita ut quisque esset Demostheni et Ciceroni simillimus' = Liv. fr. 90L (Levene (2023) 60–3 (text and translation), 282–3 (commentary)).

⁴ Russell (2001) 309, adopting the punctuation of the OCT.

⁵ Quintilian has been talking about the involvement of the *rhetor* in classroom delivery.

⁶ Butler (1920) 255.

the *optimi* whom Quintilian is recommending for the rhetorical *tiros*. This is made even clearer in the version of J. Cousin in the Budé edition:⁷

Personnellement, je proposerais volontiers de faire lire les meilleurs, dès le début, et toujours, en choisissant cependant parmi eux les plus limpides et les plus claires, comme Tite-Live, que, pour les enfants, je préférerais à Salluste, bien que celui-ci offre une meilleure garantie historique, mais, pour être compris, il exige une culture plus avancée. Cicéron, du moins à ce qu'il me semble, est à la fois agréable pour les débutants ...

It does not seem to have struck scholars as strange that, as Quintilian was casting around for examples of the 'clearest and most accessible' authors for oral delivery, the first author that came into his head was Livy rather than Cicero, though the latter is elsewhere described as 'the perfect orator' (12.1.19).⁸ Further awkwardness arises with the phrase *a pueris*. The first difficulty is that the *pueri* are assumed to be synonymous with the *incipientes*, whereas strictly *pueri* were younger boys under the charge of the *grammaticus* (cf., e.g., 2.4.1 'simile apud grammaticos puer didicerit') and were dealt with in Book 1 (cf. 10.5.1 'primo libro, quo puerorum ... studiis ordinem dedimus').⁹ Second, even if we accept the synonymy,¹⁰ the insertion of *a pueris* is not only impossibly clumsy but entirely redundant, since, on this interpretation, it is absolutely clear that Quintilian is still dealing with the *incipientes*. Third, *a pueris* 'has no obvious construction', according to W. S. Watt. 'If it means "by boys", one must either understand or insert *legi* somewhere (perhaps best either before or after *uelim*).'¹¹ The phrase is suggested for deletion in the Oxford Classical Text.

The passage needs to be seen from a different perspective. With 'ut ... Sallustium' Quintilian is drawing an *analogy* between whom he would recommend for *pueri* and whom he recommends for the *incipientes*,¹² and it is because the analogy is parenthetical that he writes *incipientibus* in §20, indicating by ring-composition that he is now returning to the topic which he left briefly at *ut*

⁷ Cousin (1975) 51.

⁸ See, e.g., Peterson on Quint. 10.1.73; La Bua (2019) 188; van der Poel (2021) 94.

⁹ Syme (1958) 202 misleadingly has Quintilian saying that 'Livy is best for boys to begin with in an apprenticeship to rhetorical studies'.

¹⁰ Quintilian elsewhere in Book 2 can refer to the *incipientes* as *pueri* (e.g., 2.2.14, 5.21), but these are understood to be the *adulti pueri* of 2.2.3.

¹¹ Watt (1998) 69.

¹² Compare, e.g., 2.4.15 'ut ... utile est pueris ...', 2.5.1 'quem ad modum a grammaticis exigitur', similar techniques.

*Livium ... opus sit.*¹³ Likewise, confirming the ring, *ut mihi quidem uidetur* picks up *ego*, and *apertus* picks up *maxime expositum*,¹⁴ from which, if correct, it follows that *iucundus* is substituted for *candidissimum quemque*. In other words, it is not Livy but Cicero who, unsurprisingly, is Quintilian's first choice for classroom delivery by the would-be rhetoricians; and his second choice is anyone who most resembles Cicero.¹⁵

If, then, a reference to *pueri* is required by the articulation of the passage, what of the notion that the phrase *a pueris* is grammatically deficient and requires *legi* to be understood or inserted? This question prompts the prior question of why *legi* is in the infinitive form: the answer can only be that *uelim* in the main clause likewise needs to be understood in the *ut*-clause, from which it follows that the main clause is also deficient and *legi*—a verb not mentioned since the first sentence of the paragraph—is required there too, as Watt proposed. The passage is, however, much more straightforward than this. *uelim* means 'I would like to have' (*OLD* 2), i.e., 'I would prefer': it governs the three accusatives *optimos*, *candidissimum quemque*, and *expositum*, and has to be taken also with *Livium* and *Sallustum* (just as *probauerunt* in the preceding sentence has to be taken also with *alii floridius genus*). But this does not leave *a pueris* without an 'obvious construction', as Watt alleged, since the preposition *as* used here means 'in the case of'.¹⁶ In my opinion the passage should be translated along the following lines:

If this point can be carried, there will remain the not-so-difficult question of who should be read by beginners. Some people, you see, have given their seal of approval to those lesser authors, because understanding them seemed easier, while others have approved of the more florid type, as being more accommodated to nourishing youthful talent. My own preference, unhesitating and unwavering, would of course be for the best authors, but, all the same, I would prefer the clearest and most accessible of them (just as I would prefer Livy rather than Sallust in the case of boys—and the latter is the greater historical author, although at this stage one needs to progress to understand him).

¹³ The structure of the passage seems entirely to have escaped the translators, whose introduction of Cicero is limp in the extreme.

¹⁴ Parallels for the combination of the two terms are quoted by Reinhardt and Winterbottom (2006) 136 (henceforth R–W).

¹⁵ *ut quisque erit Ciceroni simillimus* makes it clear that the whole passage is about Cicero and Ciceronian oratory. When Quintilian goes on to mention the Gracchi and Cato as examples of archaic writing (§21), the juxtaposition of the two names strongly implies that he means Cato's speeches, not the *Origines* (so R–W ad loc.).

¹⁶ Cf. *OLD* ab 25; e.g., Cic. *Att.* 7.15.3 'sumus ... flagitiose imparati ... a militibus', 'in the case of soldiers we are outrageously unprepared'.

It is Cicero, at least as it seems to me, who is pleasant even for beginners and sufficiently approachable, able not only to be beneficial but also to be loved; thereafter, as Livy prescribes, whoever is most like Cicero.

The purpose of the analogy is to make it clear that, although Quintilian himself prefers that the very best authors ('optimos') should be used for oral delivery by the pupils of the *rhetor*, the best are not a monolithic group: there are differences between them which make some of them preferable to others, and it is to emphasise this point that he introduces a more stark comparison from the curriculum of the *pueri*.¹⁷ Both Sallust and Livy have become canonical authors, equivalent to the *optimi*, but there are differences between them: Sallust is in fact *greater* as a historian ('hic historiae maior est auctor'), but it is Livy whom Quintilian prefers for *pueri*. And the words which follow, 'ad quem tamen intellegendum iam profectu opus sit', now no longer seem an irrelevant addition (as on the traditional interpretation), but are highly germane if Quintilian is referring to the younger *pueri* rather than to the rhetorical beginners.¹⁸

Where does this leave Quintilian's contrast between Livy and Sallust? He may mean that Livy is *candidus* and *expositus*—'clear' and 'accessible'—and that Sallust is neither; and, since it is evident from the reference to 'floridius genus' that Quintilian is talking about the way in which authors write Latin,¹⁹ the inevitable conclusion is that Livy's Latin is being described as easier than that of Sallust. Although this may seem the obvious conclusion, it is precluded by the fact that it is not true: few readers today would regard Livy's Latin as clearer and more accessible than that of Sallust.²⁰ Nor is this simply a modern perception. The *Exempla Elocutionum* of the fourth-century teacher Arusianus Messius is 'a handbook of usage, consisting of quotations from the four central school authors';²¹ and these school authors—described by Cassiodorus (*Inst.*

¹⁷ It seems to be accepted that history as such was not taught by the *grammaticus*, and on this assumption scholars have eliminated the apparent statement to the contrary at 2.1.4 (the transmitted *historicum* was deleted by Winterbottom (1970) 68–9, followed by Russell (2001) and by R–W ad loc.); but in a later passage (2.5.1 'non omittendum uidetur id quoque, ut moneam quantum sit conlaturus ad profectum discentium rhetor si, quem ad modum a grammaticis exigitur poetarum enarratio, ita ipse quoque historiae atque etiam magis orationum lectione susceptos a se discipulos instruxerit') the words *ipse quoque* seem clearly to imply that the *rhetor* will continue with the teaching of history which has been begun by the *grammaticus*, and this in turn will lead to the pupils' progress ('profectum').

¹⁸ *iam* means 'at this stage' (*OLD* 7a) and refers back to the stage denoted by *a pueris*.

¹⁹ See R–W on the terms *floridius* and *candidissimum*.

²⁰ For an example of the difficulty involved in unravelling a Livian sentence see Woodman (2022).

²¹ Zetzel (2018) 281. For the work see Keil (1880) 449–514.

1.15.7) as the ‘quadriga Messii’—are Virgil, Terence, Cicero and Sallust: of Livy there is no sign. Admittedly Sallust had a reputation for obscurity (Sen. *Ep.* 114.17 ‘obscura breuitas’; Suet. *Gramm.* 10.6 ‘obscuritatem Sallusti’), and Quintilian does indeed proceed to say that, in order to understand Sallust, one needs to be more advanced than are *pueri* (‘ad quem tamen intellegendum iam profectu opus sit’); but Seneca’s reference to *breuitas* suggests that it was not the historian’s Latinity which attracted comment but his thought-processes: his ‘amputatae sententiae’, as Seneca calls them.²²

The fact is that, on this new interpretation of his argument, Quintilian leaves unmentioned the grounds on which Livy is to be preferred to Sallust. What might these unspoken grounds be? Of course we do not know, but this passage from Book 2 is not the only place in which Quintilian juxtaposes the two historians. In Book 10 he famously contrasts *illa Sallustiana breuitas* with *illa Livi lactea ubertas* (10.1.32). Here too it was thought that Quintilian was talking in terms of their respective Latinity, until it was shown that *lactea ubertas* is a reference to the educational potential of Livy’s history.²³ It is counter-intuitive to infer that in Book 2 Quintilian is saying that Livy’s Latin is easier than Sallust’s; if the alternatives are a work of ‘healthy and fruitful’ exemplarity, from whose heroic stories the reader can learn life-lessons for himself and the *res publica*,²⁴ *vis-à-vis* narratives such as the *Bellum Catilinae* and *Historiae* in which the author ‘attacks his own times and criticises their failings’,²⁵ the great educator might well have decided that a *grammaticus* should expose his young *pueri* to the former rather than to the latter.²⁶

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²² I hope to argue this more fully elsewhere.

²³ Hays (1986–7). E. A. Freeman described his *Old English History for Children* (London, 1869), based on his stories for his teenage daughters, as ‘milk for babes’ (Howsam (2009) 13, 30–2).

²⁴ Cf. Liv. *praef.* 10 ‘hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri: inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias’.

²⁵ Gran. Licin. 36 ‘tempora reprehendit sua et delicta carpit’.

²⁶ By contrast Ausonius in the fourth century advised his grandson to read precisely these two works (*Protrep. ad Nepotem* 61–5): ‘iam facinus, Catilina, tuum Lepidique tumultum, | ab Lepido et Catulo iam res et tempora Romae | orsus bis senos seriem conecto per annos. | iam lego ciuili mixtum Mauorte duellum, | mouit quod socio Sertorius exul Hiberio’.

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