

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 19 (1962)

Heft: 3

Artikel: The damaging names in pseudo-sallust

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-17760>

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The Damaging Names in Pseudo-Sallust

By Ronald Syme, Oxford

If a direct assault has failed, why persist? That is silly. Also superfluous when other devices avail—and some confidence of victory in a good cause. Such is the happy posture of any who impugn the letter of exhortation ostensibly addressed to the proconsul of Gaul in 50 (the second *Epistula* in the manuscript order).

But perhaps the assault did not fail. If the defence ignores the fall of a bastion, or tries to explain it away, there is a plain duty to apply the art of gentle persuasion, rescue the recalcitrant and abate the carnage.

The author of Ep. II (so the attack claimed) is erroneous on political terminology. He includes Postumius and Favonius in the category of *inertissimi nobiles* (9, 4)¹. That is important. Whatever be the class and identity of Postumius, M. Favonius does not belong to the aristocracy of the consular families. He is patently municipal, in fact from Tarracina². Therefore this Suasoria was not written by Sallust—or by anybody else—in the year 50.

The negatory argument ran into opposition, quickly. The champions of authenticity (they are numerous and vocal) raise protest. They deny that the passage demands that interpretation³. So do others not of the faithful⁴.

It is therefore expedient to go back and examine the passage, for itself and in its context. The author drags in the *nobilitas* at the end of a lengthy disquisition on money and greed. *Avaritia*, he says, is a *belua fera immanis intoleranda* (8, 4). However, if only riches be discredited, why, morality will easily prevail over greed—*magna illa vis avaritiae facile bonis moribus vincetur* (8, 5). Such, he asserts, are the facts of the situation, admitted by everybody, though none the less Caesar will have to face a mighty contest with the oligarchs—*tamen tibi cum factione nobilitatis haud mediocriter certandum est* (8, 6). Then he proceeds to arraign the *factio*—*quia desidia et inertia, stupor eos atque torpedo invasit, strepunt obtrectant, alienam famam bonam suum dedecus aestumant* (8, 7).

On these words follows Chapter 9, which is a unit. Indeed, it is a digression, for the next chapter begins, not a little to the reader's surprise, with the statement *nunc quoniam, sicut mihi videor, de plebe renovanda conrigendaque satis disserui* (10, 1).

¹ R. Syme, *Mus. Helv.* 15 (1958) 46ff.

² CIL X 6316 = ILS 879.

³ E. Malcovati, *Athenaeum* 36 (1958) 176; W. Steidle, *Historia, Einzelschriften* 3 (1958) 101; M. Gelzer, *Caesar*⁶ (1960) 167; K. Büchner, *Sallust* (1960) 389; L. Ferrero, reviewing Büchner, *Riv. fil.* 39 (1961) 438; K. Vretska, ad. loc. (in his edition, Heidelberg 1961).

⁴ D. C. Earl, *Mus. Helv.* 16 (1959) 152; D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *CQ* 10² (1960) 256. The latter scholar describes the *Suasoriae* as 'these miserable productions'.

The subject of Chapter 9 is clear. Developing his attack on the *factio nobilitatis*, the author proceeds, *sed quid ego plura quasi de ignotis memorem?* (9, 1). He duly names three persons and describes them—Bibulus, Domitius, Cato (9, 1–3). There is no call in this place to advert upon all the various anomalies and disturbing features⁵. Let it suffice that the author adduces the names familiar in literature; that he accords undue prominence to Bibulus, who was absent in Syria; that he omits (as might others not alert to the historical conjuncture) the hinge of the combination, the great Ap. Claudius Pulcher—who also happens to be the censor who expelled Sallust from the Senate in 50.

Now, after the characterisation of Cato (9, 3), comes the vital passage:—*reliqui de factione sunt inertissimi nobiles, in quibus sicut in titulo praeter bonum nomen nihil est additamenti. L. Postumii M. Favonii mihi videntur quasi magnae navis supervacuanea onera esse: ubi salvi pervenere usui sunt; si quid adversi coortum est de illeis potissimum iactura fit quia pretii minimi sunt* (9, 4). How shall these two sentences be interpreted? There is no excuse for fragmentary quotation—that might only obfuscate the issue.

At first sight, there is a clear train of thought—from the named leaders of the *factio* the author proceeds to the rest, *reliqui de factione*, and they are likewise exemplified, by named persons⁶. The language is in consonance. *Inertissimi nobiles* are described by metaphor in the next sentence as people like Postumius and Favonius, who can be jettisoned, for they are *supervacuanea onera*. Further, they contribute nothing, they are only labels—*sicut in titulo praeter bonum nomen nihil est additamenti*. The corresponding phrase in the second sentence is *quia pretii minimi sunt*. The two metaphors, the commercial and the nautical, combine and corroborate.

Therefore, it appears, the *reliqui de factione* are people like Postumius and Favonius. How can that conclusion be got round? The attempt is made. Some argue that there is no sequence of thought and expression, only a slight case of asyndeton⁷. The author, they suggest, is introducing a new class of persons, distinct from the leaders of the *factio*, and distinct from the *reliqui de factione*.

On the contrary, and with appeal to the whole context. The subject of Chapter 9 is unitary—the *factio nobilitatis*. The author gives no sign that he is bringing on a new category of persons who are not *nobiles*. Therefore the assault directed against this passage was true and valid. There is no escape.

In a desperate cause, to be sure, recourse can be had to emendation. Orelli proposed to end the first sentence with *nihil est*. He continued with *additamenta L. Postumii M. Favonii*. That remedy was long neglected. It has been adopted in

⁵ As emphasized in Mus. Helv. 15 (1958) 52.

⁶ Such was the standard interpretation or translation—before the emergence of the difficulty about Favonius.

⁷ K. Vretska, ad. loc.: 'zwischen den beiden Sätzen besteht leichtes adversatives Asyndeton'. Cf. K. Büchner, o. c. 389.

one modern edition⁸. And it has been eagerly acclaimed, to redeem Pseudo-Sallust⁹. But it is not a good emendation¹⁰. Nor is it admitted by the latest editors¹¹.

The *factio nobilitatis* was supported by adherents not of noble birth. That is obvious and conceded (but is here irrelevant). The author in a later place happens to mention *homines nobiles cum paucis senatoriis quos additamenta factionis habent* (11, 6). But the author in Chapter 9 is concentrating on the *factio nobilitatis*, and he moves to the climax of their futility. He is not (be it repeated) concerned with anybody outside the *factio*.

At the risk of being rated obtuse or pertinacious, one must insist on the meaning of language, the sequence of thought. Reckoning Postumius and Favonius among the *reliqui de factione*, the author of Ep. II gives himself away. That is welcome.

Yet, it can be said, why bother to indict the fellow for anachronism and absurdity? or, for that matter, why go on to adduce his foreknowledge (the war, Caesar supreme, Caesar increasing the size of the Roman Senate), or his notion of introducing the secret ballot in the high assembly¹²? The Suasoria is "Sallustian" in style and manner. That is enough—plain pastiche.

To write history in emulation of Thucydides, Sallustius Crispus contrived with much labour a style that was both archaic and innovatory. The ancients knew and duly noted its components. That style emerged with the first monograph in 42, new, abrupt and startling. And, by the same token, seductive and seizing, all too easy to imitate or parody.

⁸ That of V. Paladini (1952).

⁹ A. Rostagni, *Riv. fil.* 36 (1958) 102f.

¹⁰ E. Malcovati, *Athenaeum* 36 (1958) 177.

¹¹ A. Kurfess (Teubner, ed. 5, 1959); K. Vretska (Heidelberg 1961).

¹² Cf. *Sallust* (Sather Lectures, Univ. of California, forthcoming), Appendix II.