CORRUPTION AND INTEGRITY IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Acta Classica Supplementum IV

Classical Association of South Africa
Klassieke Vereniging van Suid-Afrika
CORRUPTION AND INTEGRITY IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Edited by Philip Bosman

ACTA CLASSICA SUPPLEMENTUM IV

CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA
KLASSIEKE VERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA

Pretoria
2012
EDITORIAL BOARD OF ACTA CLASSICA

Editor
Prof. David Wardle, University of Cape Town

Chairperson of the Classical Association
Mr Michael Lambert, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Editorial Secretary
Prof. C. Chandler, University of Cape Town

Treasurer
Prof. P.R. Bosman, University of South Africa

Additional Members
Prof. W.J. Henderson, University of Johannesburg
Prof. J.L. Hilton, University of KwaZulu-Natal

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Prof. David Konstan, Brown University, USA
Prof. Lorna Hardwick, The Open University, UK
Prof. Stephen Harrison, University of Oxford, UK
Prof. Manfred Horstmannhoff, University of Leiden, The Netherlands
Prof. Daniel Ogden, University of Exeter, UK
Prof. John Scarborough, University of Wisconsin, USA
Prof. Betine van Zyl Smit, University of Nottingham, UK

PATRON

Justice D.H. van Zyl

HONORARY PRESIDENTS

Prof. J.E. Atkinson
Prof. L. Cilliers
Assoc. Prof. J.-M. Claassen
Prof. P.J. Conradie
Prof. W.J. Henderson
Prof. D.M. Kriel

HONORARY VICE-PRESIDENT

Prof. F.P. Retief
CONTENTS

PREFACE vii

PHILIP BOSMAN, Corruption and Integrity: A Survey of the Ancient Terms 1

DANIEL MALAMIS, Crimes of the Agora: Corruption in Homer and Hesiod 17

DONATO LOSCALZO, ‘Doro fig-sandaled’ (Cratin. Fr. 70 Kassel-Austin and Aristoph. Eq. 529) and Other Aspects of Comic Sykophantia 30

RICHARD EVANS, Nostalgia in Diodorus Siculus (16.82.5 & 16.83.1): Wishing for the Tyrant of Integrity 45

EMILY GREENWOOD, Corruption and the Corruptibility of Logos in Greek Historiography 63

MARTIN DEVECKA, Ambitione Corrupta: Sallust and the Anthropology of Corruption 84


†DENIS SADDINGTON, Under the Centurion’s Boot: Corruption and its Containment in the Roman Army 122

MARIA VAMVOURI RUFFY, Physical and Social Corruption in Plutarch 131

WILLIAM REES, Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely: Cassius Dio and the Fall of the Roman Republic 151

SHUSHMA MALIK, Ultimate Corruption Manifest: Nero as the Antichrist in Late Antiquity 169
PREVIOUS SUPPLEMENTS


PREFACE

This collection of articles stems from the Unisa Classics Colloquium of October 2010, which dealt with the theme ‘Integrity and Corruption in Antiquity’. The topic itself arose from a concern, worldwide and also in South Africa, about the infiltration into the fabric of current society of rampant corruption in all its various and destructive manifestations. The conference did not aim at offering the consolation that corruption has been present throughout the centuries. Rather, participants wished to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon by holding up the mirror of antiquity and perhaps see reflected aspects that would otherwise have remained understated. Such aspects indeed came to the fore:

- how the ancients conceptualised corruption in terms of body, disease and other metaphors;
- how the forces driving human nature (ambition, desire) were linked to corruption and how the vocabulary reflects social, political and personal motivations;
- how historians and their audiences are implicated in reporting, and often not reporting, corrupt practices;
- how watch-dog institutions themselves tend to be corrupted;
- how the gods function as a last resort when societies start feeding off themselves;
- how idealisation of the past influences descriptions of contemporary society and a disliked figure grows into an archetype of corruption;
- the grey area between gift-giving and bribery, between support networks and illegitimate privileging;
- even an arguable link between democracy and the very notion of corruption.

This collection does not pretend to present an exhaustive or a balanced view of ancient corruption (even less so of integrity), but we do hope that it may contribute towards an awareness of, a protest against, and informed evaluations of this social plague.

I would like to thank the College of Human Sciences and the Research Department at Unisa, the former for support for the colloquium, the latter for providing the publication costs for the supplement. All submitted contributions went through a peer review process (one local, one foreign reviewer) before acceptance, for which I wish to thank everybody who so kindly read and commented on the articles: your effort greatly enhanced
the overall quality of research presented here. Bill and Ann Henderson again devoted their considerable editing skills to get the manuscript into publishable shape, for which I am personally very grateful.

We are fortunate to be able to publish in this volume an article by Denis Saddington, our colleague who so unexpectedly passed away on 24 May 2011. Denis not only contributed greatly to classical scholarship in South Africa, often through times difficult for him personally, but had also been one of the staunchest supporters of the colloquium since its inception. We will all miss his warm and humble humanity, and wish to dedicate – in appreciation of the man and his work – this volume to his memory.

Philip Bosman
Pretoria, August 2012.
CORRUPTION AND INTEGRITY: A SURVEY OF THE ANCIENT TERMS

Philip R. Bosman
University of South Africa

It is in the nature of research that scholars start out on a formulated topic, but soon find themselves directed more by the nature of the evidence than by the theme they initially set out to explore. The problem, if one so wishes to call it, is exacerbated by the variety of assumptions and approaches at play in a collection of articles by scholars from various backgrounds and with various interests. This article intends to soften the likely effect of bewilderment caused by such variety by dwelling, if only cursorily, on the notions at the centre of this volume. The survey will remain restricted to lexical meaning (as opposed to phenomena), and will include the languages of English, Latin and Greek. The former is required as the language this collection of studies is presented in, while Latin is the direct forebear of their current lexical and semantic manifestations. Greek presents a somewhat different challenge from the other two languages owing to the difference in lexical form. In each case, the word groups consist of verbal as well as nominal forms, and each word group connotes a spectrum of meanings and nuances, some of which evidently receded into the background over time while others gained prominence and pushed boundaries into new semantic territory. Due to the frequent and widespread occurrence of the terms involved, in particular of the corrumpere group, a detailed evolutionary perspective of the ancient terms cannot be presented here.¹ The current purpose is merely to provide preliminary

¹ I hereby acknowledge assistance from the NRF IFRR for a brief period of research abroad. The greatly appreciated comments from two reviewers were incorporated into the text to the best of my abilities.

¹ Extensive though not evolutionary presentations of the ancient evidence are given in the TLL s.v. corrumpo and derived forms, s.v. integer, integritas, etc.; Stephanus's TLG (1954) s.v. διαφθείρω, ἀκέραιος/ἀκήρατος/ἀκεραιότης. The ancient notions of corruption and integrity have to my knowledge not been the subject of extensive investigation. I was unable to consult the study of Doganis 2007 which, judging from the review of Ménissier 2008:238-39, concerns voluntary as opposed to state prosecution in Athens; on the topic of sycophancy, see also Loscalzo in this volume.
orientation in the semantic field, which renders the findings of this survey all the more provisional.

To modern ears, the pairing of the two terms ‘integrity’ and ‘corruption’ appears self-evident, each presenting the antithesis and thus essential aspects of the other. Integrity precludes or obstructs corruption, and corruption undermines or casts a shadow on integrity. In common parlance, the immediate association with ‘corruption’ would probably be something like ‘the abuse of a public or an official position in one’s own interest’, but the relationship between this specialised use and the meaning of the term is not immediately evident. ‘Integrity’, on the other hand, seems in our times – in general cynical towards power – to have been scaled down to refer to the moral quality in a person, often a public figure, who appears able to make decisions or take actions in which the self-interested component is not immediately obvious. Strangely, though not surprisingly, when accused of acting in unprincipled self-interest, even the most opportunistic public figure (or, most often, his or her ‘spokesperson’) would invariably react with vociferous indignation, typically calling such ‘slanderous’ allegations ‘malicious’, ‘uncalled-for’, ‘devoid of any truth’ and – above all – a blatant attack on his/her integrity. Such a definition of integrity also remains unsatisfactory, amounting to little more than ‘not prone to corruption’; the more direct antonym ‘incorruptible’ sounds idealistic in our day and age in which everything has its price, especially among the financial, social and political élites involved in public domain power games. The very abuse of the term, though, indicates that integrity still matters very much. It constitutes the ultimate non-negotiable element of public reputation.

**Integrity and corruption in English**

Dictionaries of the English language list a wide range of meanings for both terms, through which their relationship emerges more clearly. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2007) s.v. distinguishes four senses of the adjective ‘corrupt’ and nine for the verb, while the noun ‘corruption’ can, according to the compilers, boast eight different senses. Such fine distinctions lend weight to a cognitive semantic approach, which, in a most basic form, asks what meanings a word conjures up in the mind of the native language user, including the various nuances that could be invoked by context. In this regard, the *OED’s* meaning 8 of the noun, namely a ‘departure from a state of original purity’, may perhaps serve as the most encompassing meaning into which more specialised and derived connotations fit.
Dictionaries usually distinguish between physical and moral application, with typical synonyms of the noun applied to the physical sphere being ‘decay’, ‘putrefaction’, ‘decomposition’, ‘degeneration’ and ‘deterioration’, while its moral uses may be described with equivalents such as ‘depravity’, ‘perversion’ and the like. Among the illuminating senses of the adjective are ‘turned from a sound into an unsound condition’ and ‘altered from the original or correct form … debased’ (for texts, language, data or code), while the verb has, among other senses, ‘mar’, ‘spoil’, ‘contaminate’, ‘infect’ and ‘defile’. The OED’s meaning 4 of the noun makes explicit the link with the other term under scrutiny: ‘perversion of a person’s integrity in the performance of (esp. official or public) duty or work by bribery etc.’

‘Integrity’, on the other hand, may be seen as referring to the original sound condition departed from. As reflected in the meaning of ‘integer’ (mathematical ‘whole number’), the word refers to a state of completeness, of ‘not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted.’ Transferred to the moral sphere, integrity signifies ‘freedom from moral corruption; innocence, sinlessness’ and correspondingly ‘soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue; uprightness, honesty; sincerity’. Flowing from these are the connotations that a person of integrity is honest, upright and devoid of duplicity, someone who displays consistency and strength of moral conviction, with a consequent resistance to acting against an internalised moral code.

The Latin terms

Both English terms have obvious Latin roots with significant semantic overlap between the ancient and the modern terms. The verb corrumpo (intensive prefix con + rumpere, ‘break, burst, rend, tear’; cf. ‘rupture’, ‘interrupt’), occurs with a wide range of meanings including ‘to destroy, damage, spoil’, hence ‘to ruin … undo, etc. (a person or his hopes, reputation, etc.)’ (OLD s.v.). Lewis & Short s.v. distinguishes between 1. ‘[t]o destroy, ruin, waste, bring to naught’ and 2. ‘to corrupt, mar, injure, spoil, adulterate, make worse.’ The latter can be further divided into literal

2 The OED mentions the interesting phrase ‘corruption of blood’ in British common law, connected to a person guilty of certain crimes (‘attainted’) who loses his civil rights and is not allowed to inherit, retain or transmit land; some conception of miasma seems to lie behind the notion, also since descendants were included in the punishments.

3 According to the OED, the moral use of ‘integer’ is restricted to the 17th century.
and tropical uses, of which the latter is said to be most frequent. Here it signifies ‘to render morally unsound, corrupt, deprave (a person, his character, etc.)’, and may consequently be used to connote seduction to disloyal and dishonest conduct, including sexual seduction, bribery and suborning (OLD). 4 Both dictionaries stress the ‘particular’ use of the verb to connote bribery (Cic. De offic. 2.15.53; Sall. Jug. 97.2; Hor. Sat. 1.9.57; Ov. Met. 6.461). The indicated range of meaning is more or less retained in the noun corruptio and the perf. passive participle/adj. corruptus, -a, -um, the latter referring to the state of being rotten, decayed, transferable to the morally unsound state of being degenerate, decadent and depraved. In the Tusculan Disputations 4.13, Cicero can in the same paragraph refer to both the corruptio of the body and of opinions, where the author draws similarities between the diseases of body and mind. 5

Regarding integritas, Lewis & Short s.v. establishes a basic meaning of an ‘undiminished or unimpaired condition of a thing’ with literal (‘completeness’, ‘soundness’) as well as tropical application, ‘soundness of mind’ (Cic. Ac. 2.17.52; Dig. 28.1.2); ‘blamelessness, innocence, integrity’ (Cic. Div. in Caecil. 9) and ‘chastity’ (Cic. Verr. 2.1.25; Flor. 2.6). The related adjective integer is illuminating for the term’s origins: derived from the negating prefix in + the verb tangere, ‘to touch’, it denotes an intact, unchanged, unblemished state, slanting to the meaning of ‘new’ or ‘unworn’ on the one hand, but also to ‘entire’ and ‘perfect’ on the other hand. The use of integritas as positive moral quality appears established in Cicero, who mentions the integritas et fides with which Quintus Ligarius governed his province (Cic. Lig. 1) and the general praise for his brother’s integritas, listed with other moral qualities such as aequitas, temperantia, severitas (Q. Fr. 1.1.16), virtus and humanitas (Q. Fr. 1.1.13). Cicero’s pairing of the term with innocentia (Div. in Caecil. 9) suggests that it retained the connotation of the absence of (moral) blemish, while strong moral character emerges as a secondary aspect. Behind the primary idea of being morally ‘blameless’, ‘irreproachable’, and ‘pure’, that of an unadulterated condition remains lurking. It would be difficult to pin down a single basic metaphor, but a case may be made for associations with young vegetation (new

4 Lewis & Short s.v. draws a similar distinction, with a further twofold but not very helpful division in the tropical uses between ‘personal objects’ (to corrupt, seduce, entice, mislead) and ‘of things as objects’ (to corrupt, adulterate, falsify, spoil, mar).

5 The idea of corruption as disease occurs also in Greek literature, as Vamvouri Ruffy indicates in the case of Plutarch (in this volume, pp. 132-151).
blossoms, fresh fruit) and virginity (untouched, whole).

**Corruption in Greek**

Coming to the Greek side of things, meanings are less obvious and consequently more intriguing. There are no self-evident equivalents in Greek for the Latin terms, at least not in early Greek, thus one has to establish the most likely candidates. In the case of a Greek equivalent for ‘corrupt’ and ‘corruption’ in its various forms and meanings, Woodhouse (1964) lists among others μοχθηρία (‘depravity’) and the verb λωβάσθαι (for the meanings of ‘to harm’ and ‘to seduce’; for the latter also διολλώναι), and δεκάζειν and [ἀνα]πείθειν for ‘to bribe’. Other terms expressing bribery are forms of δωροδοκία (‘taking bribes’). The δωροδόκος (the one taking bribes) is often a φιλάργυρος whose avarice renders him corruptible. Herodotus recounts two classic cases of bribery: when the Alcmaeonids ἀνέπειθον (‘bribed’) the Pythia to tell all visiting Spartans to set the Athenians free from Peisistratid rule (5.63), and when the Spartan king Leutychides secretly accepted a bribe (ἐδωροδόκησε ἀργύριον πολλόν) not to subdue Thessaly, but was caught in camp with a glove stuffed with silver (6.72).6

The word group generally taken to be the Greek equivalent of *corrumpere* is the verb διαφθείρειν and its derived forms.7 Though not etymologically related, it displays morphological similarities with *corrumpere*, namely an intensive prefix δια- added to a verb with similar ‘destructive’ connotations as *rumpere* (φθείρω = ‘to ruin, destroy, destruct’).8 Similarity extends to the group’s semantic range: its uses may be organised into a similar structure of ‘proper’ or physical meanings transferred to metaphorical/tropical meanings, the latter, however, apparently less developed than in the case of *corrumpere*.9 As an intensified form of φθείρειν, the

---

6 My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to these episodes. Pericles’ famous bribe is treated in this volume by Greenwood (in this volume, pp. 63-83), and the Athenian sycophants as δωροδόκοι by Loscalzo (in this volume, pp. 30-44).

7 The *TLL* s.v. *corrumpere* lists φθείρω, ὑποφθείρω, διαφθείρω; cf. also Woodhouse 1964 s.v. ‘corrupt’, ‘corruption’. Διαφθείρειν/διαφθορά survived into modern Greek to express corruption; Kyriakides 1909; Collins 2003; cf. also Vamvouri Ruffy (in this volume, pp. 132-51).

8 Διαφθείρειν derives from the Indo-European stem *dʰe₁₂h₁er*, ‘flow away, disappear’; Beekes 2010(2):1569-70.

verb occurs in Homer in the sense of ‘to destroy utterly’ (Il. 13.625, with πόλιν, ‘city’, as direct object); the same use occurs in Hdt. 1.36 (with ἔργα, ‘fields’) and in Hdt. 9.88 in the more restricted sense of ‘to put to death’. The sense of ‘to destroy, ruin’ continues to be applied widely, referring among other things to hearing (τὴν ἀκοὴν, Hdt. 1.38), sight (τὰ ὄμματα, Pl. Resp. 7.517a) and mental capacity (φρένες in Eur. Or. 297 and Hel. 1192; διάνοια in Isocr. Ad Demonic. 32.6; γνώμη in Aesch. Ag. 932). The general sense sprouted some specialised meanings, such as ‘to abort, cause miscarriage’ in medical texts (Hp. Epid. 7.73, Mul. 1.72; Is. 8.36), ‘to seduce’ a woman or a girl (Lys. 13.66), and ‘to bribe’ persons, in particular judges. In Hdt. 5.51, when the daughter of Cleomenes sees Aristogoras attempting to bribe him, she exclaims: Πάτερ, διαφθείρει σε ὁ ξεῖνος, ἢν μὴ ἀποστὰς ἴῃς (‘Father, the stranger will corrupt you unless you leave him and depart’). Aristotle may simply speak of διαφθοραὶ κριτῶν to refer to the bribing of judges (Rhet. 1372a; cf. also Lys. 28.9, Demosth. 18.45; Aeschin. 38.10).

Clearly, when the verb διαφθείρειν expresses the seduction of a woman or the bribing of a judge, the sense of ‘ruin’ remains present, whether the aspect being ruined is (outward) reputation or (inner) moral fibre. The morally transferred use of the verb is also present in tragic texts such as Aesch. Ag. 932, Eur. Hipp. 373-88 and Eur. Med. 1055.10 This was most probably the intended sense of the term when Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens.

Socrates’ corruption

Arguably, the most famous case involving corruption in antiquity was that of Socrates, brought to trial in an Athenian court after being charged by Meletus, Anytus and Lycon, found guilty and condemned to death in 399 BC. Ironically, this famed corruption case also became the one most passionately denied from almost immediately after Socrates’ death by, among others, Plato and Xenophon. The rhetoric of exoneration employed in these apologies gained momentum and Socrates became the paragon of integrity, destined to reverberate through the centuries to come.

The wording of the indictment against Socrates, as recorded by Diogenes Laertius 2.40, contains the verb διαφθείρειν:11

---

10 My thanks to Danie Lombard for drawing attention to the intricacies of word usage in poetic/tragic texts, to which the format of this survey cannot do justice.
11 Diogenes quotes Favorinus’ recording of the indictment kept in the Metroon in Athens.
Meletus son of Meletus of Pitthus indicted and swore the following against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus of Alopece: Socrates acts wrongfully by not recognising the gods the city recognises, and by introducing other new divinities: he also acts wrongfully by corrupting (διαφθείρων) the youth. The penalty [proposed] is death.

‘Corrupting the youth’ was not a prosecutable offence in ancient Athens; to get this third part of the indictment through the preliminary hearing, it had to be linked to and understood as the consequence of Socrates’ ἀσέβεια, that is, his influencing the young men gathering around him not to honour the city gods.12 But the corruption charge was the ‘really important part’ of the indictment:13 Socrates was charged not simply for holding the atheistic beliefs claimed by his prosecutors, but for teaching (παιδεύειν and διδάσκειν in Pl. Apol. 24e and 26b) subversive ideas that corrupted the minds of his pupils. This was not only upsetting to traditionalist minds, but was felt to have the graver consequences of irreverent and politically irresponsible actions (Socrates’ association with Alcibiades and Critias was not forgotten), and of causing intergenerational conflict in the city (Xen. Apol. 20; Plato Apol. 23c2-d2). Despite the amnesty following the 403/402 BC democratic restoration, political conditions in Athens remained volatile enough for the Athenians to wish to clamp down on and purge the city of possible destabilising factors, including those of the intellectual

---

12 This is, in fact, how Meletus interprets the charge in Plato’s rendition, Apol. 26b2-7, and was part of the old accusations against Socrates, as in Aristoph. Nub.; cf. Brickhouse & Smith 1992:17-18; Nails 2006:12-14. The charge may secondarily be linked to Socrates' inducing disrespect for the laws of the city, as may be deduced from the Crito 53c1-3; cf. Brickhouse & Smith 1992:18 who credit Vlastos for the insight.

13 Adam 1897:xxvii regards the impiety charge ‘to have been introduced simply in order to give a “legal foothold” to this graver accusation’; cf. recently Waterfield 2009:200-02.
variety. Socrates’ trial involves complicated issues, some of which Plato reflects in the *Apology*. Scholars remain divided on, for instance, how seriously Socrates’ speech ought to be taken as an attempt to be acquitted, and how much weight, to borrow Thucydides’ phraseology, should be given to the immediate causes of Meletus’ formal indictment relative to the truest reason, in Plato represented by the ‘old accusers’.

When considering the term διαφθείρειν, which occurs frequently in Socrates’ cross-examination of Meletus (*Apol. 24b-27e*), one should remain aware of possible Platonic distortion of the accusation and hence of his presentation of the notion itself. Did his accusers think of Socrates as a disease in the body politic, to be removed from society by judicial process as a surgeon would treat a malicious tumour? Plato does not employ such conceptuality, but rather sets up a contrasting relationship between διαφθείρειν and ‘educating’ and ‘improving’ the youth of the city. At the start of the interrogation (*Apol. 24d*), Socrates states as the aim everybody agrees to that ‘the youth should become the best’ (βέλτιστοι οἱ νεώτεροι ἔσονται), which serves as the opposite of ‘to corrupt’: a good teacher would aim to ‘make better’ (βελτίους/ἀμείνους ποιεῖ) and ‘to aid’ (ὡφελεῖν, 25b) his pupils to become worthy members of the citizen elite (καλοὺς κἀγαθοὺς ποιοῦσι; 25a). Διαφθείρειν is consequently defined as the opposite of this, namely ‘to make worse/wretched’ or ‘to hurt’ in the sense of inflicting moral damage. This meaning of διαφθείρειν is made explicit by the contextual synonyms within the text of πονηροτέρους/μοχθηρὸν ποιεῖν and βλάπτεσθαι (25d). Such an understanding of corruption (causing/fostering moral deterioration) is quite in tune with the broad sense of the term noted above, namely to alter an original intact/unblemished state for the worse. To Plato, however, the opposite of διαφθείρειν is not to leave intact an originally pure state, but rather the influence of the beneficent teacher.

---

14 Cf. Waterfield 2009:155-69 on Athenian attitudes to intellectuals, esp. 167: ‘… intellectuals, along with everyone else, were taken to court only on those very rare occasions when they were felt to be politically undesirable.’


16 Discussion in Brickhouse & Smith 1992:14, also n. 2 and n. 3; cf. recently, Waterfield 2009.

17 Isocr. *Antid.*, similarly concerned with διαφθείρειν τοὺς νεώτερούς and probably modelled on Plato’s *Apology*, employs the same opposites.
Socrates’ integrity

In the Meletus interrogation, Plato does not attempt to demonstrate the integrity of his protagonist, but rather makes Socrates claim that neither he nor anyone else would corrupt intentionally (ἔκών, 25e). But the Apology continues to elaborate on whether Socrates should or should not be ashamed that his philosophical enquiry led to his current predicament (28b), based on the premise that a person should in all actions consider only one thing: ‘whether he does just or unjust things’ (πότερον δίκαια ἢ ἄδικα πράττει, 28b) and Socrates lists ‘great proofs’ (μεγάλα τεκμήρια) that he would ‘not yield wrongly to anyone through fear of death’ (32a). One of these proofs claims that he refused to arrest Leon of Salamis when ordered by the Thirty Tyrants to do so:

τότε μέντοι ἐγὼ οὐ λόγῳ ἀλλ’ ἔργῳ αὐ ἐνεδειξάμην ὅτι ἐμοὶ θανάτου μὲν μέλει, εἰ μὴ ἄγροικότερον ἢν εἰπέιν, οὐδ’ ὦτιούν, τοῦ δὲ μηδὲν ἄδικον μηδ’ ἀνόσιον ἐργάζεσθαι, τούτου δὲ τὸ πάν μέλει. ἐμὲ γὰρ ἐκείνη ἡ ἀρχὴ οὐκ ἐξέπληξεν, οὕτως ἰσχυρὰ οὖσα, ὅστε ἄδικον τι ἐργάσασθαι.

On this occasion, however, I again made it clear not by my words but by my actions that death did not matter to me at all (if that is not too strong an expression); but that it mattered all the world to me that I should do nothing wrong or wicked. Powerful as it was, that government did not terrify me into doing a wrong action.
(Pl. Apol. 33c-d; transl. Tredennick 1969:65)

The notions of not sacrificing one’s moral principles under pressure and of maintaining correspondence between words and deeds approximate our understanding of a person of integrity. In the Crito (49a), Socrates similarly maintains, explaining why he would not flee his penalty, that doing injustice can never be justified,18 and in the Laches (188a-e) Socrates is praised for the harmony between his person and his speech (i.e., his deeds cast no shadow on the sincerity of his words). Maintaining unity and harmony within the soul becomes a major theme in Platonic philosophy and subsequently in the Socratic tradition.19

To the followers of Socrates, the verdict against him was glaringly unjust. Whether or not as a direct consequence of the trial, his depictions

18 An exposition of the various arguments in Santas 1979:10-29.
19 Cf. Resp. 4, recently discussed in detail in Brown 2012.
in Plato and Xenophon are consistently those of a person whose whole philosophical project aimed at the very opposite of ‘corruption’, namely to expose the hypocrisy of those pretending to know, himself adhering to the most stringent standards of correspondence between thought and action.\(^\text{20}\) However, this characteristic of Socrates was expressed by means of a spectrum of moral terms such as ἐγκράτεια, σωφροσύνη and δίκαιος (i.e., the cardinal virtues, Plato’s focus of interest in the early dialogues). When Plutarch, centuries later, has the character Galaxidorus describe Socrates, he resorts to terms such as ἀφελές (‘simplicity’), ἀπλαστὸν (‘sincerity’), ἐλευθέριον (‘freedom’) and φιλὸν ἀληθείας (‘affinity to truth’) (De gen. 580b; cf. also ἀνυφία καὶ ἀφελεία; ‘unpretentiousness and simplicity’, 582b).\(^\text{21}\) Other works of Plutarch point in the same direction. In the σύγκρισις of the Lives of Alcibiades and Coriolanus, for example, when Plutarch explains why the latter could not be bribed, he uses σωφροσύνη (‘moderation’) and χρημάτων ἐγκράτεια (‘self-mastery over money’). No term for our integrity seems to be ready at hand.

**Integrity in ancient Greek**

Little help is offered by searching for the Greek equivalent of the Latin root *tangere*: the Indo-European stem *teh₂g* (‘touch’, Beekes 2010:2.1472) survived in Greek only in the form of the reduplicated aorist participle *τεταγών* (‘seizing, grasping’). The evidence thus points to the Greeks employing several terms to express the idea. Among the contenders in the semantic domain would be the pair χρηστός/χρηστότης, denoting moral uprightness and honesty. Their meaning, however, being derived from χρή, ‘need’, ‘necessity’, ‘duty’, ‘custom’ (Beekes 2010:2.1648-49), veers towards the general idea of moral fitness, proficiency and decency. Other terms featuring in the domain include ὁλοκλήρος (‘whole’, ‘complete’); ὑγείας/ὑγιής and related (‘sound’, ‘wholesome’, ‘healthy’ in body and mind), ἄμεμπτος (‘blameless’, ‘without reproach’); ἀδολος (‘guileless’, ‘unaltered’, ‘genuine’) appears as a strong contender, used by Euripides (Suppl. 1029) in the sense of ‘pure’ (LSJ s.v.), and by Plutarch (Pel. 3) for ‘unpretentiousness’. One of the best-known expressions of the character of a person as ‘without fraud’ is when Jesus, on seeing Nathanael, could pierce

\(^{20}\) It has been suggested that Plato’s distancing Socrates from the sophists and even his presenting him as teaching no content (both in contrast to Xenophon’s depiction) should be read in this light; cf. Waterfield 2009.

\(^{21}\) On Plutarch’s depictions of Socrates, in particular his integrity, cf. Pelling 2005.
through the externals to declare him to be ἀληθῶς Ἰσραηλίτης ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν (‘truly an Israelite in whom there is no guile’, John 1.47).

In Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* 704, Athena speaks of the κερδῶν ἁθόκτον βουλευτήριον, the ‘council-chamber untouched by gain’, meaning ‘incorruptible’ (LSJ) and hence unbiased and fair. The word has an added sense of ‘holiness’, not merely ‘untouched’ but rather ‘not to be touched’ (Aesch. Ag. 371; Soph. OT 891, 897), so that its use as ‘virgin’ (Eur. Hel. 795) retains this nuance in addition to that of an original pure state. Εἰλικρίνεια denotes, as its opposite μίξις indicates (Arist. Col. 793a.10), purity in the sense of unmixedness (LSJ s.v.), and thus of moral ‘sincerity’, ‘uprightness’, the sense that Paul stresses in 2 Cor. 1.12 in combination with another contender emphasising the inner moral unity and hence the simplicity and sincerity of the person, namely ἀπλότης (‘singleness’).22

The term that finally managed to take over the mantle of ‘integrity’ in later antiquity and continuing into modern Greek, is the noun ἀκεραίοτης. It enters transmitted literature in Polybius in the sense of ‘freshness’ (of troops and foraging; Polyb. 3.73.6; 105.7; 6.40.9), but occurs with relative frequency in moral contexts only from the 4th century AD (cf. Basilius *Hom. sup.* Ps. 29.241.16). A better view of the stem is provided by the adjective ἀκέραιος and its poetic equivalent ἀκήρατος, which contained the senses of ‘integrity’ as ‘intact’ and ‘pure’ (Chantraine 1968:47; in modern Greek ‘unhurt, undamaged’, hence ‘intact, entire, whole’; morally applied ‘upright, just, honest’; Kyriakides 1909; Collins 2003).

As in the case of *corrumpere*/διαφθείρειν, ἀκέραιος has morphological similarities with integer, composed of an α-privans added to an adjectival form derived from a verb indicating harmful meddling. It goes back to the disyllabic stem κερα but in usage was influenced by the meaning of two verbs: κεραίω, ‘to destroy, damage’, and κεράννυμι, ‘to mix’.23 The dual meaning, of ‘intact’ on the one hand (Pl. Crit. 111b) and ‘unmixed’ on the other (Aesch. Pers. 614), recurs throughout its history.24 Wine and water (Hom. Il. 24.303; Aesch. Pers. 614; Soph. Oed. Col. 471; Diosc. 5.6; Arist. HA 605a15) can be ἀκήρατος/ἀκέραιος (= ‘unmixed, pure’) and so can be a city or a piece of land (Thuc. 2.18; Demosth. *Olynth.* 1.17, = ‘intact,

---


23 The epic/poetic ἀκήρατος was probably derived from ἀκέραιος by metrical lengthening; cf. Chantraine 1968:47; Beekes 2010:1.51.

24 Boisacq 1950:35 and Frisk 1960:52-53 have separate entries for the two meanings of the poetic ἀκήρατος, but Beekes 2010:1.51 sees no need.
unharmed’). In Eur. Hipp. 73-87, the protagonist’s devotio to Artemis hinges on the parallel between the ἄκηρατος λειμῶν (‘unspoilt meadow’) and his personal virginity. Famously, Epicurean pleasure is ἄκέραιος (Epic. Sent. 12.3; Diog. Laert. 10.143 = ‘unalloyed’).

Euripides’ Orestes offers an intriguing passage featuring ἄκέραιος in a moral context. The scene is a messenger speech (852-957) in which an old man reports to Electra on what he witnessed at the Argive assembly gathered to decide the fate of the matricide and his sister. First Talthibius spoke ambiguously on the matter, then Diomedes recommended exile; third in turn was an Argive babbler and finally an upright smallholder. The messenger describes him as follows:

μορφῇ μὲν οὐκ εὐωπός, ἀνδρεῖος δ᾿ ἄνηρ,
ὁλιγάκις ἀστυ καὶ κύκλοι, καὶ βίοι καταχράσσει.
αὐτουργὸς – οἵπερ καὶ μόνοι σώζουσι γῆν –
ξυνετὸς δὲ, χωρεῖν ὁμόσε τοῖς λόγοις θέλων,
ἄκεραιος, ἀνεπίπληκτον ἠσκήκὼς βίον …

he was not physically good-looking, but a manly man, one who rarely impinges on the town or the market-circle; a working farmer (it is these alone that ensure the land’s survival), but intelligent, willing to come to grips with the arguments, uncorrupted, self-disciplined to a life above reproach (Eur. Or. 919-23, transl. West 1987:123).

After relating his speech, which amounts to an appeal to crown Orestes for avenging his father and thus stopping the rot, so to speak, the messenger adds that his argument was appealing to decent folks (τοῖς γε χρηστοῖς). The ‘rot’ is explicated as that it would in future be dangerous to go to war if ‘those left behind are to ruin (φθείρουσιν) households by dishonouring the men’s wives’ (930). The passage thus contains the two terms under discussion: the ‘man of integrity’ speaking out against the ‘corruption’ or ‘damage’ to the city should Agamemnon’s death go unavenged.

The passage brings some aspects to the fore of how ἄκέραιος is to be understood.25 Firstly, the messenger’s own point of view significantly colours the depiction. He is firstly loyal to Agamemnon; secondly, he is

25 Willink 1986:235 suggests that the obscurity of the term made its combination with ἀνεπίπληκτον stick, as seen in Men. Epitr. 910, but required clarification as in Hesych. Lex. Alpha 2331: καθαρόν ἄκακον.
conservative in being intolerant towards the double-speaker and the babbler, but tacitly siding with the χρηστοί who agree with the αὐτουργός (that Orestes should be praised not blamed). He thus presents a positive picture of the αὐτουργός, including the fact that he is not adversely affected by city-talk while his relative backwardness (which even the messenger implicitly acknowledges) is offset by his keen intellect. West’s translation of ἀκέραιος is thus probably correct: the αὐτουργός is a straightforward, salt-of-the-earth type, unspoiled by the sophisticated decadence of the city and for that very reason able to assess the situation plainly and accurately. In the context of the play, however, Euripides’ positioning of the character is no doubt meant to be ambiguous, and the connotation of naïveté attached to the ἀκέραιος αὐτουργός much more pronounced.

Plato may describe τεχνή as ἀβλαβὴς ... καὶ ἀκέραιος (Rep. 1.342b) but does not, as we saw, use the term for the moral quality of his hero. Even in Plutarch, it has not managed to subsume the various ἄρεται nor has it evolved into the Greek counterpart of integritas. Plutarch speaks of a dinner, a statue and a city (Mulier. 263.C.7; Alc. 21.3.2; Cleom. 25.1.2), but also of an ἔργον and an ἤθος as ἀκέραιος (An virtus 439b).

The closest Plutarch comes to the notion of integrity is when he refers, in Dio 2.6.4, to the old belief that evil spirits terrify good men ‘so that they may not continue to remain erect and intact in what is good’ (ὡς μὴ διαμείναντες ἀπτῶντες ἐν τῷ καλῷ καὶ ἀκέραιοι).

New impetus in the evolution of the term seems to have been derived from the Jesus-logion in Matt. 10.16, in which Jesus advises his disciples to adopt this characteristic of doves:

Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς ὡς πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λύκων: γίνεσθε οὖν φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστεραί.

28 The parallels in An virtus 439b are illuminating: ἀμεμφὲς εἰς ἀρετήν with ἔργον; the latter has the phrase πάθους ἀκέραιον ἤθος ... ἀθικοῦ αἰσχροῦ βίον (a character untainted by passion ... a life untouched by shame). Other descriptive parallels are καθαρός (Cons. uxor. 611.A.2), υγιός (Quaest. conv. 699.E.2), ἀθραυστός (Quaest. conv. 722.E.3), while Ad princ. 782.E.10 has πεπονηκός as he opposite.
Look, I send you like sheep into the midst of wolves; therefore become wise like the snakes and unblemished like the doves.

Scholars and translators have over the centuries had difficulties with interpreting the term in this verse. Jerome’s Vulgate renders it with *simplices* and the King James Version opts for ‘harmless’; the obviously inappropriate latter option tops the list in modern translations together with ‘innocent’ and the odd ‘simple’ and ‘guileless’. (cf. Biblos, at [http://bible.cc/matthew/10-16.htm](http://bible.cc/matthew/10-16.htm). Commentators refer to the proverbial innocence of doves prevalent in ancient times, hence understanding the term as ‘unadulterated by evil/sin’, as in Rom. 16.19. The use may also contain the moral translation of ἄκεραιος as ‘unmixed’, indicating the absence of duplicity and hence ‘guileless’. However the early fathers understood the term, early Christian literature evidences a rise in frequency for the adjective (also in the comparative form ἄκεραιοτέροι as in Eus. Eccl. Hist. 7.30.9.3; Com. in Is. 1.57.11), presumably due to its New Testament use and general interest in moral purity. To what extent *integritas* exerted influence on its burgeoning Greek counterpart would be difficult to gauge.

The parallels between *integer/integritas* and ἄκεραιος/ἀκεραιοτης provide sufficient explanation for their eventual closeness. Neither term was directly brought to bear on the Socratic ideals of moral strength and harmony in the soul, and the connotation of ‘inner conviction consistently and transparently acted upon’ arose only gradually. Whether the connotation of ‘unmixedness’ found its way into the modern notion, would be equally difficult to prove, even though guilelessness as an aspect of integrity may point in this direction. The notion’s basis metaphor, however, remained that of the pristine condition untouched/undamaged by decay. The modern idea that one’s integrity is something to be guarded still plays on this ancient connotation.

**Bibliography**


Brickhouse, T.C. & Smith, N.D. 1992. ‘The formal charges against Socra-
CRIMES OF THE AGORA: CORRUPTION IN HOMER AND HESIOD

Daniel Malamis
Rhodes University

Introduction

This article locates institutional corruption, as described in early Greek epic, within the broader thematic area of wrong and redress, or of reciprocity as applied to negative actions.¹ By ‘institutional corruption’ I refer to the exploitation or subversion of political or juridical institutions by individuals in a position of authority: the corruption of ‘officials’ who use a public position to advance their private interests.² I begin with the broader area of wrongs in Homer, considering how they are addressed, and then attempt to identify where institutional corruption fits into that larger category by establishing how it differs from interpersonal crimes in its nature and the way it is addressed. I shall argue that, whereas interpersonal wrongs are remedied by redress negotiated or exacted by the parties involved, corruption belongs to a subset of crimes that are believed to attract divine retribution, and explore reasons for this distinction.

Wrong and redress

When a wrong is committed in the Homeric poems, when an individual or group performs an action that upsets a social or inter-social equilibrium, a counter-measure is deemed necessary to restore that equilibrium. Two species of counter-measure are available: punishment and compensation. Both to some extent quantify the wrong, or – more specifically – the loss to the person who has been wronged, and establish the redress necessary to make good that loss.³ Where a dispute involves two individuals, it is solved

---

¹ Wilson 2002:13-14; Donlan 1982:143-44. Donlan applies Sahlin’s categories of ‘generalised’, ‘balanced’ and ‘negative’ reciprocity to social interactions in the Homeric poems. According to this typology an unprovoked wrong is an instance of ‘negative reciprocity’ and redress one of ‘balanced reciprocity’.
² Transparency International defines ‘institutional corruption’ as ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain’ (www.transparency.org).
³ Punishment and compensation may be labelled τίσις and ποινή for the sake of convenience, but ποινή may refer figuratively to the former (see note 4 below),
by the interested parties, with or without the help of the community at large. It can be solved unilaterally, that is, by the wronged individual exacting harm for harm from the wronger through revenge or reciprocal punishment. It may alternatively be solved bilaterally, either by the wronged party seeking compensation, or by the guilty party offering compensation.4 If the dispute occurs within a social context, the parties may voluntarily refer their case to an arbiter, a δικασπόλος (‘judgment wielder’) or ἴστωρ (‘knower, expert’), who will evaluate the case and suggest an appropriate settlement with reference to the customs or judicial precedents of the community (θέμιστες).5 The sense of ἴστωρ6 very likely refers to these θέμιστες, knowledge of which is a prerequisite for an arbiter. Thus at Iliad 1.237-39, the sceptre on which Achilles swears is that which the ‘sons of the Achaeans’

ἐν παλάμης φορέουσι δικασπόλοι, οἵ τε θέμιστας πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύαται.

carry in their hands as δικασπόλοι, who guard the θέμιστες for Zeus.
(Il. 23.579-80)7

while cognates of τίσις (lit. ‘payment’) such as τινέσθαι and τιμή are often used to describe compensation.

4 Unilateral response to a wrong may take the form of punishment exacted (harm for harm), e.g. Menelaos and Paris at Il. 2.356, 590; 3.28, 351, 366 (τίνειν, τινέσθαι), and Achilles and Hektor at Il. 18.90; 22.271 (ἀποτινέσθαι), as well as threats made on the battlefield and prayers for vengeance made away from it, cf. Il. 17.34; 21.396; 22.20 (τίνειν, τινέσθαι). Unilateral response may alternatively take the form of exacted compensation (or the threat thereof), e.g. Agamemnon and the Trojans at Il. 3.288-91 (μαχήσομαι εἶνεκα ποινῆς), the communal form of reprisal pursued by Perithoos, Il. 2.743 and Neleus, Il. 11.669-761, and the figurative ποινή which is used to describe vengeance at Il. 13.656; 16.394 and 21.26. An example of bilateral response in which compensation is sought is the request that precedes Agamemnon’s threat in Il. 3.284, 459. Compensation is offered by Achilles to Agamemnon in Il. 1.128 (ἀποτινέσθαι), by Agamemnon to Achilles, Il. 9.120, within Αἰας’ exemplum, Il. 9.628-36 (ποινήν ἀποτίνειν) and in the shield trial, Il. 18.497-508.

5 Arbitration is sought by the anonymous disputants of the shield trial, Il. 18.497-508, and by Menelaos in his dispute with Antilochos, Il. 23.566-85.

6 It is usually taken to be cognate with οἶδα; cf. Chantraine 1974 s.v. οἶδα.

7 Cf. Od. 9.215, where Poluphemus is described as ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας ἐν εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας, savage, with no knowledge of δίκαι (judgments, as shorthand for
The arbiter may be a person in a position of authority (a king or local notable), an elder, or merely one or more people that the disputants believe are qualified to make an impartial decision. They are, however, invariably individuals of status within the community, whether marked out by social rank, age or reputation for wisdom. In the cited passage, the ‘sons of the Achaeans’ are δικασπόλοι, but presumably this only refers to the Achaean leaders. The shield trial of *Iliad* 18 has a panel of elders, while in the dispute that follows the chariot race of *Iliad* 23, Menelaos calls on his peers, the ἡγήτορες and μέδοντες of the Achaeans, to judge (δικάζειν). Such an arbiter’s decision is the original sense of δίκη, but the term also becomes shorthand for the formal process of arbitration itself. An associated terminology describes whether a given δίκη-judgment is fair or not. A fair one is ἰθεῖα (‘straight’), and an unfair or biased one is σκολιή (‘crooked’). In the passage cited above, Menelaos decides he has a better idea than the appointment of arbiters: he will propose a δίκη himself (ἐγὼν αὐτὸς δικάσω), and no one will find fault with it, because ‘it will be straight’ (ἰθεῖα γὰρ ἔσται). Among various suggestions for the original sense of the straight/crooked-imagery, West associates it with the ideology of kingship. Several Indo-European words for king are derived from the verbal root *(H)reg-* (to straighten, direct, rule), and West argues for a semantic connection between guiding something in a straight line, governing justly or efficiently, and making a just decision. The core sense legal procedures) or θέμιστες (the customs, or customary laws, that inform those procedures). All translations of Greek texts are by the author.

---

8 Il. 23.573-80.
9 δίκη is usually derived from the same root as δείκνυμι, thus an ‘indication’, ‘judgment’; cf. Chantraine 1968 s.v. δίκη; Pokorny 1959 s.v. deik-; Palmer 1950: 149-50; Gagarin 1973:82.
12 Of course ‘upright’ and ‘crooked’ may also have this ethical sense in English. The straight/crooked metaphor may also have had a more specifically judicial basis, as illustrated for example in the Egyptian didactic poem of the 6th dynasty, ‘The Instruction of Ptahhotep’, transl. Lichtheim 1973:71:

If you are a magistrate of standing,
Commissioned to satisfy the many,
Hew a straight line.
When you speak don’t lean to one side,
Beware lest one complain:
‘Judges he distorts the matter!’
And turn your deeds into a judgment of (you).
of this ethical metaphor appears to be the idea that honesty is ‘straight-forward’ or ‘impartial’, while dishonesty involves deviation from, or the manipulation of the truth.

Where individual or interpersonal disputes are concerned, then, a sliding scale of redress runs from unilateral violent exaction or revenge, through privately agreed bilateral settlement, to formal arbitration conducted by a representative of the community and aimed at a solution to be endorsed by public opinion as conducive to social harmony. Violent redress always remains an option for the wronged party, but that may lead to feud. Throughout the *Iliad* δίκη, representing ‘fair’ and rational settlement, is valorised by public sentiment. This valorisation is implicit in the central νεῖκος of the poem between Achilles and Agamemnon. The advantages of consideration over impulse, of *rapprochement* over obstinacy, and of settlement over self-help, are constantly stated and explored – primarily in the first book by Athena and Nestor, and in the ninth by the embassy to Achilles. The illustration that Aias offers in support of this argument in Book 9 makes the case for settlement explicit:

\[
\text{αὐτάρ Ἀχιλλεὺς}
\text{ἄγριον ἐν στήθεσσι θέτο μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν}
\text{σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ μετατρέπεται φιλότητος ἑταίρων}
\text{τῆς ἢ μὲν παρὰ νηροῖν ἐτίομεν ἔξοχον ἄλλων}
\text{νηλής· καὶ μὲν τις τε κασιγνήτοιο φονῆος}
\text{ποινήν ἢ οὔ παιδός ἐδέξατο τεθνηῶτος·}
\text{καὶ δὴ μὲν ἐν δήμῳ μένει αὐτοῦ πόλλ᾿ ἀποτίσας,}
\text{τοῦ δὲ τ᾿ ἐρητύεται κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ}
\text{ποινήν δεξαμένῳ.}
\]

Achilles has made savage the proud heart in his chest, wicked, he is not swayed by the love of his companions with which we honoured him beyond others beside the ships. Pitiless. And yet a man will take ποινή for his murdered brother or his son slain, and the killer stays there in the δήμος when he has paid much, but the man’s heart and anger are curbed when he takes the ποινή.

*(Il. 9.628-36)*

---

13 Cf. *Il.* 1.210-14 (Athena); 254-84 (Nestor); also *Il.* 2.375-78 (Agamemnon); 9.63-64 (Nestor); 254-58 (Odysseus); and perhaps most emphatically, 496-512 (Phoinix).
Settlement and δίκη as a formal means of establishing settlement are valorised, but revenge remains an option, and there are several factors that determine which response is pursued in a given case. Social context is one determinant: does the wrong occur within the community or outside it? Within the community, as noted, public opinion favours δίκη; outside it, or between communities, the usual course is violent redress. The Trojan war itself is an example, as are the frequent threats and vaunts on the battlefield. A second important determinant is the type of wrong. The worst wrong Aiakos can think of in his argument for accepting material compensation is the murder of a brother or a son. In fact, most of the peacetime murders referred to in Homer result in the murderer going into exile to avoid revenge. Few other kinds of wrong are described in the *Iliad*. The insult to Achilles is settled by compensation. The cheating in the chariot race is made good by Antilochos’ apology and submission to Menelaus. In Book 3, the abduction of Helen would be settled by compensation but for the fact that the truce is broken and war is resumed. There is one case of theft: Nestor’s story of cattle rustling in Book 11, redressed by counter-rustling.

**Corruption**

Where does corruption fit into this picture? Corruption is a special kind of wrong and has a different kind of remedy in Homer. Individual wrongs are essentially bipolar. They have an offender and a victim, even when more than one person is involved, such as in disputes between communities. There is a loss, whether material or conceptual (e.g., loss of a loved one in the case of murder, or loss of status in the case of an insult) and that loss can be remedied by proportionate redress, whether by violently giving harm for harm or by accepting goods for harm by way of compensation. Institutional corruption, however, is a crime against the community itself. It is the exploitation of the institutions of a community by one or more

---

14 Cf. *Il.* 2.661-67 (Tlepolemos); 13.695-97 and 15.334-36 (Medon); 15.432 (Lucophron); 16.573-74 (Epeigeus); 23.85-89 (Patroklos); 24.480-82 (simile of the murderer). In the *Odyssey* 13.258 (Odysseus’ fictitious Cretan); 14.379 (Eumaios’ Aitolian); 15.224, 276 (Theoklumenos). Beye 1964:358 and Lesky 1966:27-44, however, argue that the ‘exile motif’ is a literary device that the poet employs to square two traditional locations associated with a character; a device Lesky calls a ‘Lokomotionssaga’; see also Schlunk 1976:199-209.

members of that community. It is the exploitation of an institution, such as a deliberative council or a court of arbitration, that exists to regulate interpersonal behaviour for the public benefit, for the private benefit of a person who has been entrusted with a position of authority within that institution. Hence the title of this paper, ‘crimes of the agora’: political or judicial corruption occurs, whether in council or court, in a communal context. It is located, together with those institutions, in the agora, the assembly place. Institutional corruption may then take the form of advice within a deliberative council that should operate in the community’s interest, but advice that actually promotes the interest of the adviser, either because it is personally beneficial or because the council member in question has been bribed. We have an example of just such a corrupt councillor in Antimachos, who is said to have advised the Trojan assembly not to return Helen, after receiving gold from Paris (Il.11.122-42). Corruption might also take the form of abusing one’s position as a judge or arbiter, of giving a δίκη that is σκολιή, unfair to one of the parties that has submitted their dispute, because of partiality again originating from simple self-interest or bribery. This second category, judicial corruption, is particularly interesting, because it supervenes on the class of individual wrongs I have discussed. It is a crime within and against the community’s mechanism for resolving individual wrongs, namely δίκη, the formal process of dispute settlement. This is a particularly serious matter, where application to settle a private dispute by arbitration is voluntary. Δίκη-type settlement in Homer has the weight of public opinion behind it, but it is never enforced. Δίκη is idealised (and anthropomorphised in Hesiod) as the spirit of fairness, essential to the harmony of the community. But it can be bypassed: an individual can always choose the path of violence. When corrupt judges undermine the value of δίκη in the eyes of the community, it loses its appeal and consequently its ability to draw

---

16 For the agora as a judicial setting in Homer, see Il. 11.807; 16.387-88; 18.497-508 and the judge simile at Od. 12.439-41. Council and court are closely associated at Od. 9.112, where the Cyclopes are said to have οὔτ᾿ ἀγοραὶ βουληφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες.
17 Whether or not the shield trial of Il. 18 describes a situation where the plaintiff may be compelled to accept settlement is a matter of ongoing debate; cf. Edwards 1991:214-17. The majority of critics maintain that settlement cannot be enforced, and interpret the trial accordingly. It is worth noting that in 7th-century Athens, according to Draco’s homicide law (cit. Gagarin 1986:87) a murder victim’s kin could not be compelled to accept ποινή; see Cantarella 2001:475-80.
disputants who will only participate in the ‘legal system’ in the expectation of a fair outcome. Δίκη thus loses its ability, by offering a non-violent means of dispute settlement, to prevent feud and to draw violence from the field of interpersonal dispute.

Like political corruption, judicial corruption undermines the effectiveness of the institution within which it operates. It is a crime against the community as a whole, in that it deprives the community of the benefits which that institution would otherwise confer. This is of course one of the central themes of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, in which the benefits of a successful system for settling disputes are allegorised in terms of prosperity and fertility (Hes. Op. 225-37):

> οἳ δὲ δίκας ξείνοισι καὶ ἐνδήμοισι διδοῦσιν
> ἱθείας καὶ μή τι παρεκθαίνουσι δικαίου,
> τοιοτέθηλε πόλις, λαοί δ’ ἀνθεύσιν ἐν αὐτῇ:
> εἰρήνη δ’ ἀνὰ γῆν κουρστρόφος, οὐδὲ ποτ’ αὐτοῖς
> ἄργαλεον πόλεμον τεκμαίρεται εὐρέοτα Ζεύς·
> οὐδὲ ποτ’ ἴλυδίκησι μετ’ ἀνδρᾶτι λιμός ὀπηδεῖ
> οὐδ’ ἀτη, βαλίςς δὲ μεμηλότα έργα γέμονται.
> τοιοτε φέρει μὲν γαία πολὺν βίον, οὐρεσι δὲ ὅρις
> ἄκρη μὲν τε φέρει βαλάνους, μέση δὲ μελίσσας·
> εἰροπόκοι δ’ ὁιες μαλλοῖς καταβεβρίθασιν·
> τίκτουσιν δὲ γυναίκες ἑοικότα τέκνα γονεύσιν·
> θάλλουσιν δ’ ἀγαθοῖς διαμπερές οὐδ’ ἐπὶ νηῶν
> νύσσονται, καρπόν δὲ φέρει ζείδωρος ἃρουρα.

But as for they who give straight judgments to strangers and to the men of the community, and do not go aside from what is just,
their city blossoms, and the people flourish within it:
Peace, nurse of children, is abroad in their land,
and all-seeing Zeus never decrees cruel war against them.
Neither famine nor disaster ever attends men of straight judgments;
but cheerfully they tend the fields which are all their care.
The earth bears much livelihood, and on the mountains
the oak
bears acorns on the top and bees in the middle.
Their woolly sheep are weighed down with fleeces;
their women bear children like their parents.
They flourish continually with good things, and do not travel on ships,
for the grain-giving earth bears them fruit.
So, too, in Book 19 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus likens Penelope to a king who is pious and just:

φέρῃσι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθῃσι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῷ,
τίκτῃ δ᾿ ἐμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχῃ ἱχθύς
ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ᾿ αὐτοῦ.

the black earth yields him
barley and wheat, his trees are heavy with fruit,
his flocks continue to bear young, the sea gives him fish,
because of his good leadership, and his people prosper
under him.

(*Od. 19.111-14*)

If this is what δίκη represents to the community, then what is the remedy for the public wrong of corruption? Is there a form of redress? The victim, the community, may be powerless to demand or exact redress if the offender, of necessity, occupies a position of authority. In the case of judicial corruption the difficulty of securing redress must be compounded in that the corrupted institution is the very one to which disputes or complaints may ordinarily be brought. The victim must appeal to a higher authority: the gods.

**Divine retribution**

The involvement of the Homeric gods in the realm of justice, of human right and wrong, is a well debated topic.\(^\text{18}\) It is complicated by the evident disjunction between the expectations of the human characters and the motives and actions of the gods as the narrator presents them. For the purposes of this topic, however, it will be sufficient to consider the expectations of Homer’s human characters in this regard. Certain areas of behaviour are believed to be upheld and guaranteed by Zeus: oath-taking, the guest-host relationship, the status of suppliants and δίκη itself. Each of these constitutes an area of behaviour where divine support is judged necessary because it falls beyond the regulatory scope of the community. Oaths, for epistemological reasons: the swearer may be lying, or may renege on the oath, and the sky-god sees all. Guests and suppliants are

strangers within a community, and their rights need divine support because a crime committed against a stranger, or one committed by a stranger, can have no sanction where it is the kin-group’s responsibility to seek or provide one.\(^{19}\) Δίκη, as a formal institution, belongs to this group for the reasons I have outlined above. As with oaths, there is an issue of trust involved: judges must be trusted to deliver a ‘fair’ verdict, and there may be no way of knowing whether a judge has acted σκολιῶς. More importantly however, wrongs committed by a person in a position of authority, in particular over the institutions that exist to evaluate wrong and redress, cannot be addressed by the community itself: they fall beyond its regulatory scope. Thus in the storm simile of \textit{Iliad} 16.384-93, Zeus sends a deluge, in anger at ‘those who with violence pick crooked θέμιστες in the \textit{agora}, who drive out δίκη, caring nothing for the regard of the gods.’ Similarly, in the shield trial of Book 18, the judges sit in a ιερός κύκλος, a circle sacred either to Zeus, the goddess Themis, or both.\(^{20}\) The phrase used in the storm simile, θεῶν ὄπις (‘the regard of the gods’), encapsulates this concept of divine support. "Ὅπις\(^{21}\) comes to mean ‘punishment’, frequently in the \textit{Odyssey} and invariably in Hesiod.\(^{22}\) It is tempting to see in that semantic shift – from passive awareness to active punishment – the consolidation of a concept of divine retribution. The gods are increasingly believed not only to supervise or guarantee these areas of behaviour, but actively to punish transgressions within them. As regards δίκη, the idea that it is protected by Zeus, already evident in the \textit{Iliad}, becomes fully articulated in the \textit{Works and Days}. Here Dike is a goddess, the daughter of Zeus, and she tells him when she is abused. In addition, ‘the eye of Zeus sees all’: he sees what kind of δίκη there is in a city, and he punishes the unjust, often together with their city as a whole.

\begin{quote}
oἷς δ’ ὕϐρις τε μέμηλε κακὴ καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα,
tοῖς δὲ δίκην Κρονίδης τεκμαίρεται εὐρύοπα Ζεύς.
τολλάκι καὶ ξύμπασα πόλις κακοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀπηύρα,
ὁς κεν ἀλιτραίνῃ καὶ ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάται.
tοῖσιν δ’ οὐρανόθεν μέγ’ ἐπῆγαγε πῆμα Κρονίων
\end{quote}

\(^{20}\) Edwards 1991:217; the T Scholia favour Themis. In \textit{Od.} 2 the assembly is convened in the name of both gods.
\(^{21}\) Originally ‘gaze’, ‘regard’; cognate with ὄψομαι; cf. Chantraine 1974 s.v. ὄπις; Pokorny 1959 s.v. okw-.
\(^{22}\) \textit{Od.} 14.82; 20.215; 21.28; \textit{Theog.} 222, the Moirai ἀπὸ τῷ δύωσι κακὴν ὄπιν, ὡς τὶς ἀμάρτη. Cf. also \textit{Op.} 187 and 706.
λιμὸν ὁμοῦ καὶ λοιμόν· ἀποφθινύθουσι δὲ λαοί,
οὐδὲ γυναίκες τίκτουσι …
Ὡς βασιλῆς, ύμεῖς δὲ καταφράζεσθε καὶ αὐτοὶ
tήνυδε δίκην· ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἐόντες
ἀθάνατοι φράζονται, ὅσοι σκολιῆσι δίκησιν
ἀλλήλους τρίβουσι θεῶν ὅπιν ὅυκ ἄλγοντες.

But for those who practise ill violence and wicked deeds
far-seeing Zeus, the son of Cronos, ordains a judgment.
Often even a whole city suffers for a bad man
who sins and devises recklessness,
and the son of Cronos lays great trouble upon them from
heaven;
famine and plague together, so that the men perish,
and their women do not bear children …
You lords, mark well this judgment;
for the deathless gods are near among men
and mark all those who oppress others with crooked
judgments,
and have no concern for the gaze of the gods.
(Hes. Op. 238-51)

In Hesiod, Δίκη is to an extent generalised as ‘justice’ or ‘fairness’, but it
also retains its concrete sense of dispute settlement.23 It is specifically
abused by corrupt, bribe-taking judges (δωροφάγοι). The appearance of
δίκη as an idealised process is maintained in such circumstances, but its
essence is subverted and corrupted. Hesiod expresses this idea graphically
at Op. 220-25:

τῆς δὲ Δίκης ῥόθος ἑλκομένης, ἡ κ’ ἄνδρες ἄγωσι
dωροφάγοι, σκολιῆς δὲ δίκης κρίνωσι θέμιστας,
ἡ δ’ ἔπεται κλαίουσα πόλιν καὶ ἠθεῖα λαῶν,
ἔρα ἐσσαμένη, κακὸν ἀνθρώποισι φέρουσα,
οἳ τε μιν ἔξελάσωσι καὶ οὐκ ἰθεῖαν ἔνειμαν.

There is a roar when Δίκη is dragged in, where bribe-eating
men lead her,
men who choose the θέμιστας with crooked judgments.
And she, wrapped in mist, follows to the city and haunts
of the people,
wailing, and bringing evil to the people.

who drove her out and did not dispense her straightly.

There are two ideas here: δίκη being co-opted, or the semblance of due process being brought into the agora to mask corruption; and δίκη as the ideal of due process being driven out of the agora, as in the Iliad’s storm simile. The allegorical conception, however, remains consistent: δίκη as an institution is being corrupted by the people operating it. Because of this corruption, a disjunction has occurred between the ideal of fair arbitration and the kind of arbitration that is actually being practised. There may be public outrage – this is probably the sense of ῥόθος (‘roar’) in the passage above – but in a society such as Hesiod’s, where βασιλῆες or individuals of high social status dominate the public mechanism for arbitration and dispute settlement, there is no recourse.

The only court of appeal is divine retribution: the belief that the gods are watching and have a care, and that they will, moreover, exact redress from the offenders on behalf of the community. Δίκη must be divinely protected because it is susceptible to corruption. There needs to be a means of ensuring a fair and impartial settlement process as a viable alternative to self-help, and that is to counter the corrupting motive of short-term gain with the religious belief that it will result in long-term harm.

Conclusion

In Homer and Hesiod, institutional corruption differs from ordinary wrongs. Crimes committed by an individual may be ‘righted’ by redress, either unilaterally by exacted vengeance or bilaterally by compensation, given and accepted. It may also be negotiated in a formal, public procedure by a third party representing the community. Corruption, however, is a crime against the community itself. It consists of the exploitation of an individual’s position of authority within the institutions that the community possesses to regulate interpersonal relations, the agora-based assembly

---

24 These two passages also have in common the image of violence or force, βιή. This association is interesting in itself: if βιή is opposed to δίκη, as is the case here, it may be because δίκη represents peaceful settlement as opposed to the violent impulse of self-help. βιή as the absence of δίκη is linked to the βιή of those who deal roughly with it.

25 Usually interpreted as ‘local notables’ – there cannot have been many kings in the village of Askra. Cf. Halverson 1985:134-36.
or court of justice. This exploitation benefits the individual, but under-
mines the function of these social institutions: the ability of an assembly to
act in the community’s interest, and the ability of a court to offer dispu-
tants the opportunity to settle their disputes fairly and without violence.
Since the resulting loss is to the community, to its harmony, and, in the
long-term, its prosperity, the wrong cannot be quantified and redress
cannot be sought. This is particularly true when the corrupt individual
occupies a position of authority within the institution that would
otherwise quantify a wrong and recommend suitable redress. The remedy
for this judicial corruption is punishment, but punishment by the gods.
Δίκη, idealised as ‘fair process’ and later as ‘fairness’ itself, is conceived of as
sacred to Zeus, subject to the θεῶν ὄπις, and part of a specific system of
divine retribution which includes other areas of behaviour beyond the
community’s power to uphold. When the dispute settlement process itself
is abused, when δίκη is ‘driven out’ of the agora, it is believed that Zeus
will take action to punish either the transgressor, or (if the problem is
systemic) the community as a whole. The forms that punishment might
take (plague, disaster, infertility) may seem rather untargeted, but they are
the antitheses of the ‘rewards of justice’, which are social harmony and
prosperity, figuratively conceptualised as peace and fertility. In fact, the
descriptions of divine punishment for the corruption of δίκη can be said to
have a material and contemporary significance. Behind the figurative
storms, floods, famine, plague and blight, it is perhaps possible to see a
rational evaluation of the destructive and socially corrosive effects of the
abuse of authority on both a community’s institutions and the community
itself.

Bibliography

Allan, W. 2006. ‘Divine justice and cosmic order in early Greek epic.’ JHS
126:1-35.
Beye, C. 1964. ‘Homeric battle narratives and catalogues.’ HSCP 68:345-
373.
Cantarella, E. 2001. ‘Private revenge and public justice: the settlement of
Introduction

The study of *sykophantia* in Classical Athens of the 5th and 4th centuries BC reveals striking similarities to the occurrence of corruption and blackmail in contemporary democratic systems. In an important article, Italo Calvino defined Italy as ‘a country that is held up by crime’ where everybody embezzles public money and then creates an interior personal ethic to justify the corruption. In Calvino’s view, it is typical of democratic systems to form manifold centres of power which require enormous flows of money to sustain the democracies themselves and the politicians who represent them.\(^1\) Democratic Athens of the 5th and 4th centuries BC appears to have been no exception. The phenomenon of corruption seems to have permeated every sector of the economy and politics. We know that during the 4th century BC many generals were charged with embezzlement, and that magistrates, politicians and other public figures were not exempt. The situation was reflected in the comic theatre of the times, in particular the comedies of Aristophanes. Comic texts also refer to a collateral effect of widespread corruption, namely that of συκοφαντία, or ‘accusation’. This article investigates Cratinus’ ‘Doro fig-sandaled’ as the first figure in which the two aspects of corruption and accusation became combined.

Doro is a personification of ‘gift-accepting’ which may, depending on context, be seen as a form of bribery. In Homeric times, ‘gift’ was ‘a cover-all for a great variety of actions and transactions which later became differentiated’.\(^2\) During the 8th and 7th centuries BC, relationships between people were often regulated by exchanges that were movers of the economy and of relations among citizens and states. In Homer, most of the transactions called gifts ‘had acquired their own specific appellations,
but not bribe. Hesiod mentions ‘kings’ (βασιλεῖς) who administered justice badly and were called δωροφάγοι: they ‘ate’ the gifts they received in exchange for favourable sentences (Op. 38-40). Some centuries later, Plato calls public officials ‘bribe-takers and money-lovers’ (Resp. 390d), quoting the following line: ‘Gifts move the gods and gifts persuade dread kings.’

In the parabasis of Aristophanes’ Equites (526-36), the chorus recalls how once the song ‘Doro fig-sandaled’ (Δωροῖ συκοπέδιλε) was sung at symposia; its poet, once so loved and applauded by the public, was now raving with a stringless lyre and with no-one taking pity on him. In this song, the incipit of Cratinus’ Eumenides (Fr. 70 Kassel-Austin), Doro represents corruption ‘wearing fig-sandals’ (συκοπέδιλος). The word is intended to recall the συκοφάντης, a vaguely defined figure often associated with false accusation. Lysias 25.3 offers an illuminating definition of the συκοφάνται: ‘[i]t is their practice to bring charges, even against those who have done no wrong, for from these they would gain most profit.’ They not only exposed corruption, but were often corrupt themselves.

The mirror of the social and political life of the polis held up by Old Comedy is no doubt distorting, which renders problematic any attempt to deduce accurate historical facts from these texts. Still, through their fantastic exaggerations and metaphorical images, the comic poets aimed at revealing and condemning the many real problems and defects they perceived in their society. Recurring characters may consequently be regarded as reflecting actual types arising from historical social circumstances. The συκοφάντης as a social type probably emerged as follows: in defending itself against crime and corruption, democratic Athens employed ordinary citizens as spies and informers. Eventually, whether through crisis or natural development, these people became overly powerful and – paradoxically – a danger to the city itself. In the texts of Old Comedy we find denouncements of their excessively accrued power.

3 Strauss 1985:69.
4 Some scholars consider comic texts, or, for that matter, poetry in general, inadmissible for historical reconstruction of Athenian civil life. Though indeed problematic, these documents should be allowed as corroborating evidence on historical issues, especially considering the central role fulfilled by dramatists in Athenian political life. See Rubinstein 2000:198-212 and Fisher 2008:197-99 for discussion and recent bibliographies on the historical figure of the συκοφάντης.
Συκοφαντία, which started as a deterrent to corruption, itself developed into a form of corruption that degenerated into two different types:

1. the συκοφάντης who uses knowledge of corruption to extort money from the corruptor in exchange for silence;
2. the συκοφάντης who uses his position to slander and damage the reputation of honest citizens, mostly in the service of political opponents or a greater power.

The second of these types occurs more frequently in the transmitted texts. In *Vesp.* 145-46, for example, Philocleon observes that fig-wood makes the most stinging smoke; Aristophanes evidently makes the point that gullible jurors, who believe everything prosecutors tell them, cause malicious accusers to flourish. Reporting corruption can serve to neutralise or eliminate political and other opponents, as is still the case today: in contemporary Italy the practice of discrediting political opposition is well known, even within the same coalition, when such persons are seen to hinder the mechanisms of politics. In democratic Athens, the συκοφάνται could similarly cast doubt on the moral integrity of public figures.

Scholars, wary of the pitfalls associated with comic/poetic texts, have tended to focus on evidence surrounding συκοφαντία from historians and orators of the 4th century. In the following, I will attempt to establish the

---

6 Christ 1998:53-62 and 104-16 devotes some pages to συκοφαντία in Old Comedy; also earlier Lofberg 1917:15-24. Ostwald 1986:209 believes that ‘since we depend on comic poets … we must expect a more liberal use of the term sykophantes and its cognates than the historical situation would have warranted’, while Harvey 1990:104 considers Aristophanes ‘unreliable and slippery material.’ Lofberg 1920:62 remarks on the New Comedy stock character, the sycophanta impudens, that ‘[d]emocracy was the soil in which sycophancy flourished’ so that its sphere of activity became limited after Philip and Alexander; cf. 63-64. According to Osborne 1990:92-93, the term συκοφάντης did not apply to any particular kind of prosecution as a profession, but ‘to any prosecutor, and it implied not that the prosecutor was acting from corrupt motives, unless that was additionally specified, but rather that the prosecutor did not have a good case’, while Harvey 1990:107, 116 argues that sycophancy ‘was a crime’ and that for men who lived off sycophancy it was ‘only their most conspicuous activity’; Osborne 2010:217-28 considers the sycophant ‘the creation of a comic type rather than the reflection of a particular late-fifth-century criminal;’ cf. also Allen 2000:156-67.
origin and the meaning of the term συκοφάντης in which, through the image of the fig-tree, corruption and accusation became closely attached. The following aspects of the συκοφάντης are to be investigated: the origin of the term and its first occurrences in Old Comedy; the sycophant’s duties and functions in Athenian democracy; his first appearance and establishment; and his sources of income.

The designation

Modern researchers differ on the meaning of the term συκοφάντης. This is mainly due to uncertainty among and the obscurity of the ancient sources. According to Plutarch, the name originated during the time of Solon, when the exportation of figs and other products was forbidden: ‘the one who reported, or pointed out such exporters, was called a συκοφάντης, or ‘fig-shower’ (Solon 24.2). Philomnestos (FGrHist 527 F 1) reports that συκοφάνται were so called because they collected fines and extraordinary tributes, paid with figs, oil and wine, to provide for the public administration and then distributed them to the public; for this reason they were chosen from among the most reliable citizens.’ The Suda provides two explanations. The first (s 1330 Adler) refers to an interdict on exporting figs during which accused transgressors were called συκοφάνται, meaning ‘those who show illicit traffic of figs’. The second (s 1331 Adler) reports a tradition according to which figs consecrated to the gods were picked during a famine in Attica; when prosperity returned, those who accused others of eating sacred figs were called συκοφάνται. Like Plutarch, Hesychius associates the term with false accusation (συκοφάντης· ψευδοκατήγορος, κακοπράγμων; s 2238 Hansen), while to a client of Demosthenes it suggests someone who makes many accusations, but proves none of them (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὁ συκοφάντης, αἰτιᾶσθαι μὲν πάντα, ἐξελέγξαι δὲ μηδέν, Dem. Or. 57.34). The explanations from late sources probably arose from attempts to explain the peculiar, even comical term, with the unlikely association of figs with accusation giving rise to fanciful interpretations and legendary stories.

9 To the various interpretations, both ancient and modern, Labarbe 1996:146-53 adds another: the fig indicates an aesthetic defect on the face, therefore the συκοφάντης would be a man who points out the defects of others, in particular their moral defects.
I would like to suggest a different explanation for the origins of the noun based on early evidence. Firstly, it is important to note that in archaic Greece figs were a symbol of poverty. In Fr. 250 West Archilochus uses the word ‘fig-nibbler’ (συκοτραγίδης; similar words in Hipponax, Fr. 167 West), probably to indicate people who ate modest food. Moreover, according to the Suda (s 1324 Adler) σύκινον, ‘of the fig-tree’, also means ἀσθενής, ‘weak’, from which the expression συκίνη μαχαίρα for συκοφάντης would be derived. In Theocr. 10.45 σύκινοι ἀνδρεῖς denote worthless men. We may therefore conclude that the first part of the word signifies ‘something useless’. The second part comes from the verb φαίνω, ‘bring to light’, extended to ‘inform against’, or ‘denounce as contraband’ (cf. Aristoph. Ach. 542, 819). In Aristoph. Ach. 719-28, after having made peace with the Spartans, Dicaeopolis delimits the zone for his private market and declares it forbidden to συκοφάνται and whoever is Φασιανός, that is, from Phasis, the name recalling φαίνω and suggesting the activity of the informer.

When the two words are combined, we may explain συκοφάντης as an appellation for someone who denounces others for little and unimportant things, or accuses others guilty of small misdemeanours, especially in commerce, for the purpose of slandering and damaging them. Aristoph. Ach. 523 supports the view that a συκοφάντης accused people of petty and local misdemeanours (καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὲ σμικρὰ κἀπιχώρια).

10 The Suda reports a second expression, συκινή ἐπικουρία, that indicated τὸ ἐντελὲς. Taillardat 1965:478 explains that this adjective means ‘mute’, ‘le bois de figuier étant sans valeur’; cf. also Athenaeus 3.75a, who quoted the Fr. 110 Kassel-Austin from the Aristophanic Georgoi as evidence for the poor quality of fig-wood; cf. Orth 2009:238-40.

11 Along similar lines, but coming to a different conclusion, Boeckh 1817:356 defined συκοφάντης as ‘der um einer Sache von geringen Wert eine Anzeige erstattet.’ To Bockisch 1981:11-12, this definition ‘ist insofern nicht zutreffend, als es bei den von Sycophanten im weitesten Sinne des Wortes inszenierten Prozessen oft um erhebliche materielle Werte oder um Rufmord ging.’ Allen 2003:87-90 suspects it to be a sexual metaphor referring to the perversions of the volunteer prosecutor, and so ‘the sycophant’s name hints at an eroticization of the angry process of prosecution.’

12 The scholium ad Ach. 522b (p. 73 Wilson) equates συκοφαντεῖν with μικρολογεῖν, ‘to quibble’, ‘discourse on needless things’, indicating its later association with chicaneries and quibbles, also in the philosophical sense. Olson 2002:207 calls the συκοφάντης in the Acharnenses ‘a malicious, self-interested abuser of the legal system’; Pellegrino 2010:78 argues that in Aristophanes the
phanes refers in this passage to reports of illegitimate commerce with Megara, so that the *Suda* (s 1330 Adler) uses it as proof that the word was first used in Attica. The *Suda* also mentions, regarding συκοφαντία, that it is specifically Athenian because the first fig-tree was found in Attica.\(^\text{13}\) The συκοφάντης may thus be defined as a person making insignificant accusations of little import that were nonetheless capable of defaming and destroying the reputations of even honest citizens. The phenomenon of συκοφαντία appears to have been peculiar to Athens (Aristoph. *Ach.* 904).

**Duties and functions**

The activities associated with the sycophant, always searching for little wrongs to be blamed on someone, were considered to be odious and destabilising. Considered an outsider and a social evil in Athens, his occupation was often linked with dishonesty and fraud.\(^\text{14}\) According to Peisthetaerus (*Av.* 1468), συκοφαντία is στρεψινυκοπανουργία, ‘cunning in the perversion of justice’,\(^\text{15}\) or sleazy shysterism. In the *Demi* of Eupolis (Fr. 99.79-120 Kassel-Austin), contemporary and rival poet of Aristophanes, the συκοφάντης was put on stage in contrast to Aristides the Just. Συκοφαντεῖν was, however, legal. In Athens, justice was administered by special judges, but there was no public prosecutor. Every citizen ὁ βουλόμενος (whoever wishes) could introduce a lawsuit against whomever he wanted without infringing on the law. It appears that the συκοφάνται made use of this opportunity particularly from the last quarter of the 5th century (Ar. *Plut.* 914).\(^\text{16}\)

---

\(^{13}\) *Suda* s 1330 Adler: συκοφαντεῖν· τὸ ψευδῶς τινος κατηγορεῖν· κεκλῆσθαι δὲ φασὶ τούτῳ παρ’ Ἀθηναίοις πρῶτον εὑρεθέντος τοῦ φυτοῦ τῆς συχῆς καὶ διὰ τούτου κωλυόντων ἐξάγειν τὰ σύκα … ὧδεν γὰρ Ἀθηναίων συκοφαντεῖν.

\(^{14}\) Pellegrino 2010:99. In the view of Christ 2008:170-71, ‘these individuals are outsiders in every sense … and not representative of the Athenian people and their shared values.’

\(^{15}\) Dunbar 1995:687 translates as ‘lawsuit-twisting villainy’.

\(^{16}\) Osborne 2000:75-78 thinks that ‘the Athenians were well aware that sycophancy went hand in hand with volunteer prosecution: *ho boulomenos* was the sycophant under another name’; Doganis 2001:226-27 doubts the identification of ὁ βουλόμενος (the volunteer accuser instituted by Solon; Plut. *Sol.* 18.6-7) with the sycophant: ‘Dans le Solon, l’institution du principe de l’accusation volontaire
The συκοφάντης was an Athenian citizen who wandered through the city and its subordinate πολείς in search of facts and actions to report on (Av. 1422-29). The portrayal in the Aves is typical. The character appears on the scene in the last sequences of the play (1410-69). He comes to Cloud-cuckoo-land, the new city founded in the air, because he needs wings so that he can spy better and move around quicker in order to catch his victims in the act. He inherited his occupation from his ancestors and he is not able, as Aristophanes ironically states, to dishonour his γενός. With wings he can even reach foreigners and then fly back to report on them. When he spots a foreign ship sailing towards Athens, he can fly back to appropriate its goods, turning like a βέμβιξ (‘top’, 1461).

In Aristophanes' comedies, a συκοφάντης is often brought on the stage, only to be driven off immediately by other characters. In Ach. 818-35 a συκοφάντης intrudes on the restricted trading area despite the warnings of Dicaeopolis, to report on pig-smuggling from Megara. A Megarian merchant recognises the usual routine of the reports and notifications (820) as the συκοφάντης tries to steal the sack in which the merchant had hidden two piglets. But Dicaeopolis asks the inspectors to chase off the informer for not having a lamp. The Megarian's opinion, that συκοφαντία is a calamity for Athens (829), is justified since this συκοφάντης not merely informs, but is also involved in illegal trafficking and the infringement of embargo regulations. So, the συκοφάντης sat in shops gossiping and searching for news: in Ach. 840 the chorus refers to Ctesias, known as a habitué of the market-place.

As Sutton observes, the συκοφάντης is not an actual government official, but in Aristophanic comedy he plays the part of a figure of authority since 'he invokes the machinery of social repression in an effort to thwart the hero.' In comedy he functions as an important antagonist because he represents the power that obstructs the plans of the comic hero. He symbolises the obtuseness of the law and the extremes of a police

---

17 Christ 2008:171: 'in each comedy a sycophant intrudes, is exposed as base and perverse, and is then expelled (Av. 1410-69; Pl. 850-958).'
18 Pace Ostwald 1986:210: 'having obtained an islander's conviction, he wants to confiscate his propriety before the condemned man can return home.'
Generally, the συκοφάντης is portrayed as an ignoble and deceitful citizen who tries to defame others, even by charging them with plots against the democracy. Aristophanes refers to abuses of the democratic system in the name of preventing tyranny. When democracy fares badly, it may give rise to fear of a return to absolute rule. This fear was sometimes exploited to attack and destroy political adversaries, so that innocent citizens could be exiled or condemned under the pretext of defending the city against absolutist rule. Such an accusation of anti-democratic conspiracy occurs in the Vespae, where Philocleon accuses the dog Labes of being both a συκοφάντης and a ξυνωμότης (conspirator, 953).

Fig-wood as a symbol of punishment for corruption, as in ‘Doro fig-sandaled’ makes another appearance: because Labes has stolen a Sicilian cheese, it deserves a fig-wood collar as punishment (897: τίμημα κλῳὸς σύκινος).

In the Acharnenses, the συκοφάντης Nicarchus is small, but vigorous. He accuses the Theban of importing lamp-wicks from enemy territory, after which the Athenian Dicaeopolis packs him up like a piece of crockery:

> It will be an all-purpose vessel:
> a mixing-bowl for evil, a mortar for pounding lawsuits
> a lampholder to show up outgoing officials
> and a cup
> in which to stir up trouble.
> 
> (Ach. 936-38, transl. Sommerstein)

The vessel for troublemaking refers to συκοφαντία as a serious problem for Athens and the συκοφάνται as disturbers of public peace.

In Vesp. 1091-110 the chorus of the old men, celebrating past times, note that συκοφάνται would in olden times have been of little use and would therefore not have survived. In those days, the Greeks beat their enemies in triremes, for which only the ability to row counted. The sycophant’s job displays neither virility nor courage, nor the all-important devotion to one’s country. The chorus laments that younger generations pay no attention to traditional Athenian values and squander the tributes that the Athenians received.

---

20 Loscalzo 2010:149-51.
In his own eyes, the συκοφάντης leads an active life devoted to the common good. When in Aristoph. Plut. 922-23 the ‘just man’ reproaches him for seeking a difficult and restless life, the συκοφάντης replies that he has abdicated the idle life of a sheep. In Nub. 920, a certain Pandeletus, συκοφάντης and ῥήτωρ (politician), is also called ‘devourer of sentences’, γνώμας τρώγων, in which, by an aprosdoketon, ‘sentences’ replaces bread.

Sycophancy was a form of hyperactivity the ancient Greeks called πολυπραγμοσύνη. The energetic goings-on of the συκοφάντης included gossip-mongering, sometimes for the purpose of confusing the city (Eq. 274: ἀεὶ τὴν πόλιν καταστρέφεις). This was in opposition to the image of the ἀπράγμων who desires a quiet life detached from politics. In Pax 191 Trygaeus introduces himself to Hermes as a skilled vine-grower, emphatically not a συκοφάντης nor a lover of πράγματα. In Av. 1423 the συκοφάντης is further said to be πραγματοδίφης, ‘one who hunts after lawsuits’. Av. 27-48 sees Euelpides and Peisthetaerus escape from Athens, that great and happy city common to everybody, not because they hate it, but because of the madness of its trials and its never-ending judicial processes.

Euelpides’ mention of the cicadas singing in the branches of fig-trees’ (κραδῶν) may be a reference to the practice of the συκοφάνται,
often connected to juridical life. Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 43.5, mentions that accusations (προβολαί) could be brought against συκοφάνται during the sixth prytany — an indication that they were considered prone to manipulate legal procedures for personal gain.

**Initial appearance**

Despite Plutarch’s claim that the institution goes back to the times of Solon (*Solon* 24.2), the earliest occurrence of the term συκοφάντης is in Old Comedy. Indeed, there is no evidence for the use of the term before the last quarter of the 5th century, with the first attestations going back to 426/425 BC, shortly before the production of the *Acharnenses*. The profession probably started making its appearance in Athens after the radicalisation of democracy from the middle of the 5th century, when the political system began to reckon with crisis. It was conceived as a way of enforcing Athenian law, particularly regarding crimes against the state rather than against individuals.

The Athens of Cleon emerges as a likely breeding-ground. Thuc. 3.36.6 describes Cleon as being the most violent politician and ‘most radical and severest in his policies toward the empire’. This unscrupulous politician and demagogue created a climate of reciprocal suspicion in Athens. In *Eq.* 860-66 Paphlagon/Cleon claims that no conspiracy or trick escapes him. Accusations and suspicion became the normal mode in Athens and Aristophanes compares this political situation with the fishers of eels, who prefer to fish in troubled waters.

Already in the *Equites*, Aristophanes hints more than once at the corruption that was at the time felt to be spreading through Athens and which he considered a consequence of exaggerated individualism and the pursuit of individual comforts. Paphlagon, for example, asks Lady Athena,

26 Dunbar 1995:149 thinks that Aristophanes ‘would expect at least some of his audience to … connect κραδῶν with the συκοφάνται who were for Ar. such a plague in Athenian life.’
28 Rhodes 1981:526-27 remains sceptical: ‘… there is no obvious reason why these accusations should be admitted once a year, in the sixth prytany’; Christ 1992:337 suggests that the προβολαί against sycophants and deceivers of the demos ‘were available against those who, while pretending to embrace the cause of the people, exploited the public trust for their own private purposes.’
29 Connor 1971:132-34.
patron goddess of the city, if he could dine in the Prytanaeum, since he held the same honours as Lysicles and the famous prostitutes Cynna and Salabaccho (763-69) and Demos is willing to entrust the reins of the Pnyx to whomever will treat him best (Eq. 1107-09), with evident reference to a politics of favours and corruption.30 Aristophanes thus portrays Athens in a paradoxical situation, where political and economic life was threatened by corruption on the one hand, and actions against honest citizens that limited the exercise of freedom of speech on the other. In Aristophanes’ portrayal, the institution of συκοφάντια that was meant to safeguard the democratic state became a real antidemocratic plague that legally promoted what it should have eradicated: blackmail and the embezzlement of public money. In Vesp. 504-06 Bdelicleon coins a neologism to describe his father’s illness. Indeed, he wants to cure him of his μανία so that he will wake up in the morning to associate with συκοφάνται and the courts (504-05): τῶν ὀρθροφοιτοσυκοφαντοδίκων ταλαπώρων τρόπων. This hendiadys well explains the close match and amalgam between judgement and accusation that had reached – in Aristophanes’ estimate – levels of extreme abuse and unscrupulousness.

Sources of income

According to Chremylus, protagonist of the Plutus, συκοφάνται counted with temple-robbers, politicians and other villains among those with a high income, while honest and pious men were poor (30-31).31 It was considered a lucrative business.32 In Av. 1432 the συκοφάντης declares he receives money for his accusations – his only source of income. They primarily earned their money by looking for situations in which somebody was breaking the law. For this they obtained financial rewards from the state. But they had other sources of income as well, such as from prominent families who wished some political adversary to fall from power. They could also receive blackmail money from their victims, who

30 According to Carter 1986:83-84, Aristophanes identifies the demos with the rural peasantry; in the Georgoi (Fr. 102 Kassel-Austin) the συκοφάντης can mislay the name of a farmer who wants to buy his way out of his civic duties.


paid for their silence, or as a third party,\textsuperscript{33} insofar as συκοφάντια had become a way for tricking citizens into giving them personal profits. In \textit{Vesp.} 1094-98 a συκοφάντις is even granted the art of delivering a beautiful \textit{rhesis}. In \textit{Av.} 285-86 the aristocrat Callias 'lost his feathers' after having been fleeced by συκοφάνται.

The fact that the profession could be hereditary (\textit{Av.} 1451-69) indicates a degree of stability in income. Their fortunes could, however, be fickle. In \textit{Plut.} 850-58 the συκοφάντις complains about losing his importance, his house and everything else since the god's recovery from blindness. Despite his promise to make everyone rich, instead he and many others have now been ruined. Before this new turn of events, the συκοφάντις had lived off his work, which consisted of taking care of the business of the city and of private citizens, for personal gain (907-908). He accuses Plutus of being a subversive god, who is destroying the democratic system without consulting the Assembly (\textit{Plut.} 944-50).

In conclusion, Athenian democracy created the profession of the sycophant for the purpose of ensuring observance of the law. Instead, in the hands of unscrupulous people searching for chicaneries, it became an abhorred institution that even posed a threat to normal civic life. Democratic rule in Athens, which extended freedom of speech to various advisory and deliberative organs, also tried to establish transparency in the management of public affairs. Paradoxically, the mechanisms put in place for such purposes often backfired by not only fostering corruption and abuse, but even becoming organs of crime. Συκοφαντία, that should have guaranteed an ample share of political control and parity of rights to citizens, became a vehicle of corruption and bad politics.

Bibliography


\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Lofberg 1917:1-10 and Sinclair 1993:73.
When the word ‘tyrant’ makes its first appearance in Greek history during the archaic period (c. 600-480 BC), it has a distinctly neutral meaning, being merely used to describe a ruler who did not assume the title of king. Only later did the name take on a negative connotation, most often in the subsequent generations of rule by the tyrant’s family through dynastic succession. Polycrates of Samos, Pisistratus of Athens, Cypselus of Corinth, Cleisthenes of Sicyon and Gelon of Syracuse were not remembered by later commentators such as Herodotus or Thucydides as oppressive rulers; on the contrary, for the most part they were praised for their positive efforts on behalf of their states and fellow citizens. Their successors such as Hippias at Athens, Periander at Corinth, Hieron II and Thrasybulus in Syracuse, however, acquired poor reputations. Through their more autocratic rule and hence corrupted principles, they lost the favour of their subjects and were either expelled or hated or feared by the people they ruled over. Greek tyrants could evidently be regarded as men who either possessed integrity or, in lacking this virtue, represented the negative of that ideal state.

In Book 16, Diodorus describes how Timoleon ended the instability in Sicily between 344/3 and 338. This followed the turmoil which had engulfed the island communities after the murder of Dion in 355/4 and the civil discord which had occurred because none of his successors was able to secure a long-lasting rule. His concluding comments raise interesting questions not only about historical writing in antiquity, but also about the way these events have been interpreted in the modern era. The object here is to suggest that Diodorus’ comments reflect nostalgia, not necessarily his own but rather that of his source, for what might be defined as that tyrant who possessed integrity.

1 They were no better, but no worse, than kings; see Lewis 2006:2-3; Hall 2007:137-43.
All the tyrants on the island were rooted out and the cities freed and made allied. He proclaimed throughout Greece that the people of Syracuse would give land and houses to those who wished to come and share their state and many Greeks came forward to receive allotments. (Diod. 16.82.4-5)

Having established peace everywhere in Sicily he caused the cities to increase their prosperity quickly. For many years, because of civil unrest and internal wars, besides which there had been a constant upsurge in tyrants, the cities had become deserted of inhabitants and the land had become a wilderness because of a lack of farming which produced no useful crops. (Diod. 16.83.1)

Diodorus' work has not acquired the reputation of a sound repository of evidence, largely due to scholars who regarded him as a facile copier of earlier material. Many have thought that his history lacks the depth of judgement and analysis of better historians such as Thucydides and Polybius. Current opinions are less adverse. The value of his coverage of Sicilian affairs, so obviously deficient in other surviving works, has been recognised. More generally, he is the sole literary voice for many events of the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman Republican periods down to at least the 50s BC. He is an indispensable guide where nothing else is available,

---

2 The view of MacDonald 1970 that his 'work is undistinguished, with confusion arising from the different traditions and chronologies, a compilation only as valuable as its authorities,' may be taken as representative of general scholarly opinion. The recent Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies (2009) contains just five entries for Diodorus, while J.W. Rich, in The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization (Cambridge 2006:276), concludes that Diodorus' personal input was 'of general observations, mostly banal'. Cf. the more sympathetic assessment of Pearson 1987:1: 'Diodorus may to some degree be dependent on intermediate or secondary sources ... but, except when he states otherwise, his ultimate source of information will generally be one of the established historians;' Duff 2003:49-50 hedges his view between 'not impressive' and 'most illuminating', while Jackman 2006:37 notes both the 'problem of how much trust historians can place in Diodorus' narrative' and that his reputation ... has improved significantly in the past twenty years.'

3 There are probably allusions to Rome and Italy in the 30s and 20s in Book 16 which was composed considerably later than Book 5.21.2, where Diodorus already makes a reference to Caesar as a god, a deification which occurred soon after the beginning of 42; cf. Broughton 1984:108. The audience or reader of Diodorus' work will surely have picked up the obvious parallels between Timoleon's rout of
acting not only as a corrective in the forty years down to the battle of Mantinea in 362 against the much less objective account found in Xenophon’s *Hellenica*, but also the sole source for much of the life and rule of Philip II of Macedonia. Moreover, he clearly gives one of the more sober accounts of Alexander, and again it is the one almost continuous account for the Diadochi and the rule of Agathocles (316-289) and Hieron II (276-215), where again his focus is quite plainly on internal Sicilian and especially Syracusan affairs.

The sources of Diodorus are the crux of the problem this paper seeks to elucidate and so they require some discussion in order to contextualise the argument. Unlike many other ancient historians, Diodorus periodically mentions the works of fellow writers. These might then be construed as his sources, but the situation is more complex than that. For example, Theopompus of Chios is noted in 16.3.8 and 16.71.3 for his history of Philip II, during the course of which he is said to have written about Sicilian affairs in three out of a total of fifty-eight books, covering the events from Dionysius’ seizure of power in 405 down to the expulsion of his son in 358/7. Theopompus concluded his continuous coverage of Sicilian affairs before Timoleon’s arrival in 344/3, and may not have included much from this quarter after that. Diodorus also employs Ephorus of Cyme, to whom he refers in 16.14.3 (cf. 14.54.6; 15.60.5) and mentions in 16.76.5 the termination date of his history as 341/0, which means that this writer also did not cover the end of Timoleon’s rule in Syracuse. The Athenian historian Dyllus is said to have covered Greek and Sicilian affairs from at least 355 down to 297/6 (16.14.5), while Demophilus son of Ephorus and Callisthenes of Olynthus, the court

---

tyranny and *stasis* in Sicily with Octavian’s similar and more recent triumphs in Italy and the Roman Empire Sicily. Bispham 2006:40 recognises the potential importance of Diodorus for Roman Republican affairs, but his coverage is very brief.

4 Hornblower 1994:8-12 mentions the problem of analysing Book 16 without offering more than general guidance.

5 Theopompus possibly covered events in Syracuse down to Dionysius’ final expulsion in 344/3 and may also have mentioned Timoleon later in his work: Diodorus notes that Books 41-43 were exclusively devoted to Sicily. However, Diodorus is generally thought not to have employed Theopompus to any extent elsewhere. If Theopompus completed his task in 336, he may have concentrated on the more newsworthy and momentous events including the Macedonian victory at Chaeronea, the establishment of the League of Corinth and Philip’s assassination, to the neglect of Sicilian affairs.
historian of Alexander, are noted as having written about the Sacred War in Central Greece (16.14.3-4). Despite all the sources mentioned (Diyllus appears to be the probable source for Diodorus’ narrative in the 330s), two other writers probably had more influence on Diodorus’ outlook and scheme, functioning as a sort of *vademecum*. The first, Timaeus the son of Andromachus of Tauromenion, is mentioned frequently (16.6.7; cf. for instance, 13.90.6; 14.54.6).⁶ The second is Philistus of Syracuse, a supporter of Dionysius I and his son (14.8.5; 15.89.3; 15.94.4). Philistus committed suicide or was killed in the *stasis* between Dionysius and Dion and so provided material for the earlier history of Syracuse especially during the Peloponnesian War.⁷ Timaeus on the other hand, writing probably as late as 250, covered the entire period in question and must therefore have provided Diodorus with his essential chronology for Sicilian history in the 4th century.⁸

While the mere existence of Timaeus’ and Philistus’ works was obviously important for Diodorus, arguably even more so were their political sympathies. Timaeus was the son of a tyrant and Philistus, initially perhaps of oligarchic sympathies, was to become one of the Syracusan tyrants’ staunchest supporters. Hence these two writers represent a branch in historical writing, which has tended to be ignored or treated with some disdain, since both were sympathetic towards tyranny as a form of government. Scholars of the modern era have a tendency to treat systems of government they find repugnant or dangerous in their own worlds, with little regard.⁹

So what has arguably been missed here is not only Diodorus’ interpretation of Sicilian affairs in about 338 BC, the time of Timoleon’s

---

⁷ Plut. *Dion.* 35.4-6 probably used Timaeus for his take on Philistus’ ‘torture and death’ at the hands of his fellow Syracusans, a dramatic denouement probably typical to this author’s history.
⁸ Talbert 1974:26-38 argues in detail for the existence for an unknown historian as Diodorus’ main source for this period, but admits that the historian could have employed a composite of known sources in a more exacting fashion than is sometimes admitted. He still concurs that Timaeus’ influence is bound to have been substantial.
⁹ Hornblower 1994:8-12 notes Diodorus’ use of Timaeus and possibly Philistus in addition to Ephorus for the period down to 362; cf. Lewis 1994:120-24 on Diodorus’ use of earlier Sicilian writers.
retirement and death, but also that it must have had some resonance with the historian’s audience: that events in the 30s and 20s in Italy and throughout the Roman Empire were perhaps on a larger scale but still similar to those in Sicily. A reader of Diodorus’ history in the 20s will have easily made the link between the newly-established Augustus and the benign rule of Timoleon. Thus for Sicily and indeed for Rome, tyranny was not a negative issue.

In the passage quoted above (16.83.1), Diodorus says that the inhabitants of Sicily, Greek or non-Greek, witnessed a prodigious increase in their wealth as a result of peace brought about by Timoleon, also implying that stasis was not symptomatic of life in general. Does this mean prosperity regained rather than acquired for the first time? It is also made plain that the unstable conditions on the island had been long-term, raising the question of the period of comparable peace that Timoleon returned Sicily to. Diodorus, following his sources, looks back to the times not of great freedoms or participative governance, but rather to times of power and influence. These times coincided with rule, not by the demos of Syracuse or any other major city, but by a tyrant, one who, I would suggest, possessed integrity. If there was to be a search for a Sicilian tyrant who might have possessed integrity, that search would easily conclude with Gelon. In response to Athenian and Spartan envoys petitioning for aid against an imminent Persian attack, Herodotus 7.158 reports Gelon to have said the following:

I am ready to help you with two hundred warships, twenty thousand infantry, two thousand cavalry, two thousand archers, two thousand slingers and two thousand light-armed troops. Moreover, I make my offer to provide food for the entire Greek army until we conclude the war.

Gelon’s accompanying demand for supreme command over the Greek forces, although surely not unexpected, was to be countenanced by neither the Spartans nor the Athenians and they went away empty-handed. Gelon was left to defeat the Carthaginians single-handedly at Himera on the same day as that on which the Greeks defeated Xerxes’ fleet at Salamis, and so

10 Timoleon’s death is dated as late as 330, based on the not very secure supposition that, since there is little or nothing to be found about Sicilian affairs in that decade, it must have been at peace under his leadership. Instability was certainly resurgent by the 320s and Sicily’s ‘revival’ was somewhat short-lived.
evolved Syracuse and with it Sicily from the status of residence for mediocre overseas settlers to a major Mediterranean power. Indeed this benign tyrant was so respected that he needed no bodyguard (Diod. 11.26.5). At his death

his body was buried on the estate of his wife in the Nine Towers as it is called … and the whole community accompanied the body from the city even though the place was a distance of two hundred stadia away. He was buried here and the people erected a tomb … but in later times this monument was destroyed by the Carthaginians during a campaign against Syracuse while its towers were demolished out of envy by Agathocles. (Diod. 11.38.4-5)

Gelon’s successor Hieron was clearly a capable ruler as well: in 474 he destroyed Etruscan power in Campania (Diod. 11.51.1-2) and went on to reconstitute the city of Katane, by whose citizens a founder’s shrine was evidently built in his honour when he died there in 467. He was therefore the ruler of a wider realm than simply a single city; although formally the tyrant of Syracuse, in later life he preferred to reside at Katane. While this probably indicates that any popularity he might have inherited from his brother had evaporated, it remains unrevealed whether it was because of his imperialist ambitions abroad or because of his personality. What is certain is that the rule of this family did not long survive his death: within a year his brother Thrasybulus was expelled from Syracuse and a democracy proclaimed. The tyrants of Syracuse had fallen into corrupt practices within little more than a decade.

Unlikely the Athenians, whose confidence in democracy was born after they had expelled their tyrant Hippias in 510/9, the Syracusans became oddly introspective and other Sicilian cities seem to have done the same. At Syracuse, besides erecting a statue to Zeus Eleutherios (Diod. 11.71.2), not much else is recorded except for an apparent decline in the population (Diod. 11.76.4), civil unrest between former mercenaries and citizens, reduction in military capability and a lack of enthusiasm for territorial acquisition. Indeed, when the Athenians launched their first expedition against the Syracusans in 427, they appeared incapable of putting into

11 The decline in population occurred when citizens of cities such as Gela, Akragas and Himera, forced by Gelon to join the population of Syracuse, were encouraged to leave after 466. On forced migrations by Sicilian tyrants, see Lomas 2006:95-118.
action a fleet of more than thirty warships (Thuc. 4.25). There was quite clearly a paralysis in reaching a common front against external threats, exemplified by the great debate at Gela in Thucydides 4.58-65. Moreover, there was a notable absence of a robust reply to a flotilla of ten triremes sent ahead from an Athenian fleet commanded by the strategoi Nicias, Alcibiades and Lamachus which sailed unchallenged into the Great Harbour in November 415 (Thuc. 6.50). Finally, the Syracusan response to Nicias’ invasion of Epipolai in April of the following year (Thuc. 6.96-99) was little short of disastrous. Eventually, with Spartan encouragement and tactical advice, the Syracusans were victorious against the invaders on whom they took a particular revenge, but from their spectacular defeat of the Athenian land and maritime forces they gained little tangible reward, and civil unrest persisted until Dionysius seized power in 406/5 (Diod. 13.92.1-95.1). Immediately, a clear change in the Syracusan psyche is noticeable. It is true that the initial months of Dionysius’ rule were chaotic because of an ongoing war with Carthage, a siege and warfare around Gela, an ignominious retreat to Syracuse and further civil unrest before he tightened his grip on power (Diod. 13.108.1-113.4). Then:

Realising that in the war with Athens the city had been blocked off from sea to sea by a wall, he took care that he should never, where caught in the same circumstances, be separated from the city’s chorē … he decided that he must fortify Epipolai at the place where there is now the wall with the Hexapylon. Wanting to complete the construction work on the walls quickly, he gathered people from the countryside and chose about sixty thousand men and allocated to them a space to be walled. For each stadium he assigned a master-builder, and for each plethron a mason and two hundred labourers. To ensure the enthusiasm of these men for the task, Dionysius offered expensive gifts to those who finished their section

---

12 While Gelon is reported to have possessed a fleet of 200 warships, Diodorus 11.88.4-5 notes a fleet of just 60 triremes by 454/3, and only half of that number was seaworthy by 427.
13 In 427 Hermocrates the Syracusan politician did manage to bring about a brief pact for joint action (Thuc. 4.58-65).
14 The Syracusans were drawn into battle when the Athenians landed at Daskon in the previous autumn and were worsted in the following engagement. They took no precautions to prevent the Athenian landing at Leon in the next spring, showing the level of ineptitude in leadership.
first … Also putting his hands to the hardest labour he endured the toils of his fellow labourers … As a result … the wall was completed in twenty days: thirty stadia in length and of a suitable height and the additional strengths made it impregnable for there were high towers at regular intervals.¹⁵ (Diod. 14.18.2-8)

Not only does this passage illustrate the use of bribery in the form of gifts to those building the walls and hence a method of obtaining and maintaining popularity, but it also shows how a new and charismatic leader, through his active participation in the activity, played to the populist gallery. Dionysius knew how to keep this support of the bulk of the citizenship by championing their cause through ensuring their future safety from external threat.

It is hardly surprising that Dionysius' popularity surged, but it is as well also to reflect on the fact that the walls were not simply for defence, since they were also a means of controlling the population of the city; and at this time there was a recurrence of that forced removal policy of people first encountered under Gelon and Hieron. The citizen body of Syracuse was augmented with numerous inhabitants from Naxos, Leontinoi, Katane and by men of servile origin.¹⁶ The need for an increase in the population surely stemmed from a need to increase all the materials required to fight a successful war against the Carthaginians, which in itself averted attention from shortcomings in Dionysius' rule. Mass employment of the population in conjunction with the patriotic fervour for revenge against a powerful enemy enhanced the tyrant's position and popularity.

Thinking that … this was a favourable time for war, he decided that preparations should first be made … At once he gathered skilled workmen from all the cities he controlled and also enticed them from Italy, Greece, even Carthaginian territory by offers of financial gain. His purpose was to make weapons in great quantities, all kinds of missiles, and also quadriremes and quinqueremes, no ship of this last size having yet been constructed. When he had collected many skilled workmen he divided them into groups according to their skills and placed them under the scrutiny of high ranking citizens … As for the armour he gave out models of each kind … for he was keen to have all his soldiers in the same gear … Not only was every...

¹⁵ The wall extended roughly 6 km or 3½ miles along the northern edge of Epipolai.
space such as colonnades, opisthodomoi, gymnasia and the stoas of the agora crowded with workers but also the homes of the most distinguished. (Diod. 14.41.1-6)

Not only warships were needed to fight a war, but also the various components which completed their outfitting plus all the paraphernalia of the soldiers, requiring every available space and absorbing all attention. No idle time would jeopardise the position of the ruler whose physical presence, encouraging and inspiring his fellow citizens to achieve optimum levels of effort, went down well. Diodorus says (14.42.1-5) that Dionysius was to be seen everywhere, eating with the workers, handing out gifts and so increasing his popularity. Siege machines were built, as well as two hundred warships and the means to service these around the harbour, all adding to the hustle and bustle of a contented and focussed community. This intimacy with all classes is a feature of Dionysius' rule. He was no remote leader, but very much the prototype of the tyrant born of the proletariat, a feature so common in the modern era.17 Dionysius is also said to have hired ten thousand mercenaries whom he housed on Ortygia, and who were employed as his bodyguard, and he made sure to confiscate all the weapons of his subjects in order to prevent any conspiracy against his position. He may well have been resented by aristocratic families but probably far less so by ordinary citizens who benefitted from his strong autocracy. He may have lived in a grand palace on the acropolis next to the island of Ortygia, but as long as some of the opulence rubbed off onto the common man he would have been respected more than feared.

It was expected of the ruler with integrity not only to be successful in war, by which his popular support was bolstered, but also to lead from the front line in typical warrior fashion. Throughout his long rule Dionysius certainly endeavoured to play this part, being particularly successful in his attack on Motya in 397 which he led in person (Diod. 14.51.1).18 On

17 Note Ure 1939:121, writing at a time when totalitarian regimes in Europe were indulging in the same sort of tactics to win approval and support, that the 'urban industrial class was the basis of the power of the tyrants.'
18 Ancient Motya and its siege pose a number of issues for the modern historian. The site does not fit with Diodorus' description which was plainly influenced by the accounts of Alexander's siege of Tyre in 333. Motya's surviving fortifications are not on the same scale as Tyre, nor is there any sight of the mole said to have been constructed on Dionysius' orders to join the land to the island. The whole episode, containing many dramatic and probably fictional elements, may have been derived from Timaeus. It may also have been 'worked up' during Dionysius'
another occasion Dionysius personally led a charge uphill in an attack on Tauromenion, although this was rebuffed and he suffered wounds in the defeat (Diod. 14.83.3). In modern times imperialist ambitions are a preoccupation of the tyrant who, if successful in his ambitions, also satisfies the craving of his people for the products of victory. The same may be said of Dionysius and the people of Syracuse in the first half of the 4th century. By setting up colonies in the Adriatic, merchant shipping was kept safe and so trade to and from Syracuse was unhampered by piracy (Diod. 15.13.1). During peace, the presence of the tyrant is ubiquitous, his public works and private talents for all to see and enjoy. But a shortage of funds necessitates further adventures, such as Dionysius’ attack on Pyrgi where a temple was ransacked and a thousand talents stolen in a piratical act which elsewhere Dionysius tried to prevent happening to his own possessions (Diod. 15.14.3-4). In old age Dionysius was able to enjoy the fruits of his labour:

… now that he was relieved of war with Carthage, [Dionysius] enjoyed great peace and leisure. As a result, he devoted himself to the serious composition of poetry and invited famous poets and gave them special honours … using them as instructors and advisers of his works. Ecstatic at their fulsome praise … Dionysius boasted more of his poetry than his successes in war. (Diod. 15.6.1)20

Dionysius’ building programmes, expansionist wars, the concomitant economic prosperity, and patronage of the arts all contributed to the wealth and well-being of the city. Of course, no opponent of the tyrant would have granted him much integrity, but the vast majority of his own subjects very likely considered him a successful ruler. Within a decade, the younger Dionysius alienated the citizen body at Syracuse. He may have lacked the skill of his father or simply preferred Locri in southern Italy, also a part of his ‘kingdom’, over Syracuse, just as Hieron had preferred to

rule by a writer such as Philistus into a propaganda piece. Consequently, it has entered the history books with little or no attention to the details relating to the historical event.

19 A phenomenon of course not confined to Syracuse: the beautification of Athens began under the Pisistratids, and Corinth acquired its reputation for wealth under the Cypselids.

20 More generally, Philostratus, Vit. Soph. 500, argues that a benevolent tyrant encouraged his citizens to act in a pacific manner with the result that, in turn, his position became more secure.
reside in Katane. His rule was disrupted by fighting within the tyrant’s family from which Dion initially emerged successful and Dionysius was forced, between 357 and 355, to relinquish control (Plut. Dion 37.1).21 Dion’s murder soon after left the city divided among factional leaders which brought mayhem to Sicily as a whole (Diod. 16.31.7; Plut. Dion 58.1). This was the state of affairs brought to an end by Timoleon after 344.

Diodorus is not very accurate in asserting many years of disorder; in fact, barely more than ten years elapsed between the death of Dion in 354 and Timoleon’s restoration of order (Diod. 16.83.1). Nor was a constant upsurge of multiple tyrannies habitual to Sicilian affairs: this situation arose because of the removal of the supreme sole tyrant.22 Timoleon’s renewal was actually just an interlude in the internal affairs of Syracuse before it returned to tyranny with the coup of Agathocles in 317/6. However, the only way that Timoleon was able to halt the infighting at Syracuse and over the entire island was by ruling as a benign tyrant himself.23 Diodorus is also being economical with the truth in asserting that tranquillity returned to Sicily: soon after Timoleon’s death, civil unrest resumed, from which Agathocles the next tyrant emerged. Plutarch’s account of Timoleon’s activities may appear rose-tinted, but, in fact, he is merely giving us another account of the activities of the successful tyrant who also possessed integrity.

When Timoleon had taken the acropolis, he did not repeat Dion’s mistake of sparing the buildings because of the beauty of the architecture or the money it had cost to build them. He was determined not to arouse the suspicion that had brought discredit and finally disaster to his predecessor [Dion], and so it was

21 Dion proved to be just as autocratic as his cousin Dionysius II. After the murder of Dion’s successor Callippus, Dionysius’ half-brothers Hipparinus and Nysaeus also briefly ruled Syracuse before Dionysius returned to hold Ortygia between 347 and 344, while Hicetas, another factional leader, held Akradina. Timoleon had Hicetas executed and Dionysius went into exile in Corinth.

22 There may have been multiple tyrannies in Sicily in earlier periods: Akragas, for example, produced tyrants like Theron at much the same time as Syracuse, but less accompanying instability is recorded, though the records are scanty, than during the 340s and between the death of Agathocles in 289 and Hieron II’s seizure of power in 270/69.

23 Timoleon was not unfamiliar with such a position, having been tyrant himself in Corinth for a brief spell in about 360; Diod. 16.65.2-6.
proclaimed that any citizen who wished could come with some tool and help break down that bastion of tyranny. At once the entire population went up to the fortress and, taking that day and its proclamation to mark a truly secure foundation of their freedom, tore down and demolished not only the acropolis but also the palaces and tombs of the tyrants. Timoleon immediately had the site levelled and had built the courts of justice over the ruins and thus delighted the people by displaying the supremacy of the rule of the people over tyranny.24 (Plut. Tim. 22)

Returning to the text of Diodorus, I should like to suggest that it is rather the frequency of the tyrants and not the institution itself which the historian thought ruinous for Sicily. Hence also my suggestion of a tone of nostalgia in his account, which seems to carry the underlying message that Sicilian affairs could only get better under the *de facto* tyrant Timoleon who, unfortunately for the people of the island, died soon after winning sole power.

When he first landed in Sicily, Timoleon was aided by the confirmed tyrant Andromachus of Tauromenion, which indicates that the so-called saviour of Syracuse had few qualms about tyrannical rule *per se*. The positive image of Timoleon still evident in the literary account probably comes from Timaeus, who again influenced Diodorus’ rendition. And so we find in the latter’s text a wish for better times not necessarily associated with great personal freedom in the modern sense of the term. A modern audience might disagree, of course, depending on where it resides, that the best times are those which are characterised by firm, stable and essentially authoritarian government which imposed order, but not necessarily law and order. It is possible that another ancient writer, for example, a fourth-century historian in Athens, would have given a different impression. On the other hand, an historian writing in late third-century Athens (such as Timaeus himself), might well have found little to be critical of in Timaeus’ appraisal of Sicilian political life. The use of one source over another by a writer like Diodorus could highly affect the outlook of the work, whether the writer has no preconception or indeed

---

24 Note the remarkable modern parallel in Freeman 1891:2.47 note 1: ‘At my visit to Syracuse in 1889, the spirit of havoc, which seems to be the very life of Sicilian municipalities, was glutting itself with the destruction of the walls of the Emperor Charles. Now, in 1890, the havoc has spread itself to the gates, and we have lost the lively impression of the work of the tyrant which was given us by the work of the Emperor on the same site.’
has a very definite preference. Diodorus does not provide us with an appraisal of his source but may well have felt comfortable with what he found and used.

This argument next calls into the analysis modern perceptions and preconceptions. The modern historian, like historians in any age, is for the most part encumbered with what he or she considers ‘good’ or ‘not so good’ politics. Athenian democracy, though hardly a commonplace in Greece let alone in the ancient world, has since the 19th century been held up as a paragon in English-speaking and much of European scholarship, while tyranny for the same was regarded as an odious political system. The post-Renaissance handling of single rule on the one hand, and of participative rule on the other, found in Greek and Roman writers a long and complex history; changes in opinion and interpretation are linked to currently prevailing and ascending forms of government. From the mid-19th through the 20th century, pro-democratic and anti-tyrannical comment takes clear precedence. For example, in his History of Greece, the liberal parliamentarian George Grote wrote, regarding tyranny in general, that it

... is not easy to imagine power more completely surrounded with all circumstances calculated to render it repulsive to a man of ordinary benevolence: the Grecian despot had large means of doing harm – scarcely any means of doing good. Yet the acquisition of power over others, under any conditions, is a motive so all-absorbing, that even this precarious and anti-social sceptre was always intensively coveted. (Grote 1861:3.26 note 1)

Specifically on the tyrants of Syracuse and the situation in Sicily from about 338, Grote gives this interpretation of the accomplishments of Timoleon:

Not Syracuse alone, but the other Grecian cities in the island also, enjoyed under their revived free institutions a state of security, comfort, and affluence, to which they had been long strangers. The lands became again industriously tilled; the fertile soil yielded anew abundant exports; the temples were restored from their previous decay, and adorned with the votive offerings of pious munificence. The same state of prosperous and active freedom, which had followed on the expulsion of the Gelonian dynasty a hundred and twenty years before, and lasted fifty years, without either despot within or invaders from without – was now again made prevalent
throughout Sicily under the auspices of Timoleon. (Grote 1861: 2.193-94)

This description of events, as already indicated above, is quite incorrect in simply accepting the sequence of events as related by Diodorus while at the same time assigning to Timoleon a democratic role he clearly does not deserve. The cities of Sicily hardly enjoyed democratic governments for any length of time, if they experienced them at all, because Timoleon’s influence extended far beyond Syracuse and he was de facto ruler of the entire island, and once he had died rivalries recurred as quickly as they had done after the expulsion of the Deinomenids in 466. Yet the opinion expressed by Grote has remained highly influential, for, nearly a century later, Ronald Syme writes of the rise of Caesar’s heir Octavian to supreme power that when

... a party has triumphed in violence and seized control of the state, it would be plain folly to regard the new government as a collection of amiable and virtuous characters. Revolution demands and produces sterner qualities.25

The point of Syme’s remark is surely that the rule of tyrants was not always harsh or to the detriment of the state. However, to be a tyrant necessitated an iron will and a desire to rule, and Octavian and Timoleon had these in equal measure. Augustus quite simply modelled his rule not on Alexander the Great, a constant and roving warrior, but on Gelon and Timoleon who were both popular and paternalistic, but at the same time ruthless in the pursuit of power and, once obtained, in preserving their supremacy. It is probably not remarkable that there has been much nostalgia for a ruler like Augustus throughout the two thousand years since he ruled, yet he was a tyrant in all but name; and the word coined to describe his position, princeps, while sufficiently vague, does not disguise

25 Syme 1939:509. Modern works show a distinctive lack of enthusiasm for ancient tyranny as if it were a modern political system. Thus Gray & Cary 1939:4.218: ‘The system of government by tyrants, which the Persians maintained in the Greek cities … had outlived its usefulness and had come to be resented as a burden and a humiliation.’ Yet tyrants in one guise or another abounded in Ionia and elsewhere in Asia Minor throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Xenophon, for example (Anab. 7.8), when he was a mercenary of the Spartans in 400, met various minor rulers in the Caicus Valley in Mysia all of whom could have styled themselves tyrants.
its origin. Therefore, it should similarly not be surprising that the inhabitants of Sicily, as described by Diodorus, might well have felt nostalgia for the rule of a tyrant such as Gelon or even Dionysius I, provided he brought back to the island stability and prosperity. The parallel between Augustus and Timoleon is again notable. Yet most historians of the modern era have difficulty in describing tyranny as an acceptable form of government, since it is so far from the ideals they would otherwise champion. The political preferences of modern commentators, usually dominated by the distinctly Western ideology of democracy, have caused ancient tyranny to be viewed as a wholly negative system of government and have overlooked the great advantages it might, and indeed did, bring to the ancient Mediterranean.26

To conclude: the average modern audience is likely to consider democracy, whatever its faults, a better system of government than tyranny whatever its benefits.27 Such a sentiment may easily be observed in the view of Sicilian tyranny expressed by Freeman writing towards the end of the 19th century from a British standpoint in a state he might have considered democratic, but which had still far to go by modern definitions of the concept.

The tyrants begin very soon after the foundation of the cities; they go on at intervals till Sicily passed under the dominion of Rome. Phalaris and Phintias had contemporary tyrants in old Greece; but in the age of Dionysios the tyrant was in old Greece all but unknown. This is one of the many marks of difference between Greece and her colonies. The constant appearance of tyrannies in Sicily is part of the general uncertainty of things, those constant changes of governments and of populations, which are marked in the fifth century … as distinguishing Sicily from old Greece. It is not wonderful that the tyrants of Sicily became proverbial.28

In antiquity there was no overriding belief in the efficacy of democratic forms of government and so what we see in Diodorus' account of events in

26 For Hackforth 1939:4.372, monarchy was 'a prouder title' bestowed on the 'unconstitutional' tyrant Gelon after the battle of Himera.
27 Lewis 2006:2-3, noting the changing perceptions about tyranny in antiquity, states that 'tyranny persisted in most cases because it had several benefits to offer'; it is, however, not entirely true that the ancient sources are unanimous in their criticism of tyrants.
28 Freeman 1891:2.55.
Sicily in the 4th century BC provides a glimpse of acceptance and popularity for systems of government quite alien to our own. While we, in the modern era, might have a tendency to associate corruption with tyranny and integrity with democracy, depending on the extent of personal experience or downright cynicism, such an assumption cannot be taken for granted in ancient authors and can easily be turned on its head. For the Sicilian Greeks tyranny as an institution brought many benefits, not least of which were military strength and prosperity on a unique scale. It probably brought most to Syracuse as the most influential city in that part of the Mediterranean for much of time. That this wealth filtered down to other cities can be seen not only in Diodorus’ proud comment about his own home town Agurium (16.82.5) which also received benefits from Timoleon’s rule, but also in surviving monumental structures of cities such as Akragas and Gela which date back to the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Neither Diodorus nor his main source Timaeus was Syracusan and so they cannot be accused of partiality or bias in their opinions. In order for a system of government to be considered successful, communal strength needed to wax. Democracies caused the power of the Sicilian poleis to wane, so it was no wonder that there was a hankering after the security and wealth that sole rule brought. Similarly, for many people of the modern world tyranny is not a despicable form of government, and its passing can be regretted by those for whom a more open government offers less protection or security. After the collapse of the tyranny of Dionysius II in Syracuse, Sicily experienced over a decade of violent instability, and it is therefore hardly surprising that in the events in the 340s BC Diodorus reflects lingering Sicilian nostalgia for a powerful single ruler, which they obtained through the supremacy of Timoleon. In a similar fashion, the Roman Republic, after the death of Caesar in 44 BC, experienced over a decade of civil strife which was brought to an end by the supremacy of Augustus. Diodorus lived through this second period, and from his source, probably Timaeus, experienced the earlier chaos on his Sicily. The parallel cannot have been lost on him or indeed that nostalgia for the tyrant of integrity to restore peace and equilibrium.

29 Timaeus was certainly no friend of Agathocles who had caused his exile to Athens, and is very likely to have been the origin of some of the more negative episodes attributed to this tyrant in Diodorus, 20.71.2-72.5, including the massacre of citizens at Segesta.
EVANS

Bibliography

Ure, P.N. 1939. ‘The outer Greek world in the sixth century.’ In Bury, Cook & Adcock, Vol. 4:83-123.
Introduction

This article is concerned with the themes of integrity and corruption in Greek historiography, but I start with a turn to the context in which it was first delivered – the University of South Africa’s annual Classics Colloquium in 2010, on the theme of ‘Integrity & Corruption in Antiquity’. To address the corruptibility of history in ancient Greece in the context of South Africa, a country that is beset with high levels of political corruption, is to raise deeper questions about the relationship between the historical account that we give of the ancient world and the corruption of power in the modern world.

All of us live in a world where corruption is a real and present threat to moral integrity, to the viability of civic and economic institutions, and to human welfare. Before the current global economic crisis, caused in large part by the deregulation of banks and financial service industries overseen by governments, it was possible for the general populations of so-called advanced, liberal market democracies to accept the fiction that significant instances of corruption were confined to a few private corporations. On the continent of Africa, the extent and consequences of corruption are...
considerably more acute, with the misappropriation of state wealth often meaning that larger populations are denied life-saving resources like food, medical care, and running water, as well as life-enhancing resources such as education, roads and electricity.2

When juxtaposed with these urgent political and social syndromes of corruption, the question of the corruptibility of logos in Greek historiography seems trivial and intellectually self-indulgent. But I will suggest that the two are connected. In the case of my own country, Britain, colonial administrators under the British Empire, othered corruption as part of the ideology of ‘the white man’s burden’, ascribing it uniquely to local cultures. They seldom stopped to reflect on their own complicity in this corruption, ranging from networks of patronage and preferment to the inherent corruption of empire. This legacy continues in the case of British multinational companies, which exploit and sustain ‘local’ cultures of corruption.

The continuing economic exploitation sanctioned by neo-imperialist networks of power makes it easy for governments in countries such as Kenya or Zimbabwe, to take two egregious examples where levels of political corruption have threatened the very viability of government, to accuse journalists and local politicians who criticise corruption of being in the pay of the West, or in the pay of international organisations such as Transparency International, which exist to monitor corruption at the global level. Zanu-PF ministers in Zimbabwe routinely accuse journalists, opposition MPs and anti-corruption campaigners of being in the pay of the British government, suggesting that it is trying to undermine the judicial organs of government with accusations of systemic corruption.3 In this climate of mutual mistrust, the practice of withholding or distributing foreign aid as a penalty for bad governance or a reward for good gover-

---

2 See Heath 2001:163 on the repercussions of systemic political corruption in South Africa: ‘Corruption in a developing democracy such as South Africa constitutes a violation of the most basic of human rights. Corruption deprives people of housing, education, medical treatment and their basic human needs. This is the unfortunate reality that faces our country.’ Ten years later this statement is no less true. I note that Heath’s short article also raises the role of history and historiography in tackling political corruption, since he argues that presenting clear accounts of corruption committed in the past, under Apartheid, is a prerequisite for political and economic accountability in the present.

3 For a recent discussion of these issues, see Michela Wrong’s analysis of the experience of John Githongo, Kenya’s anti-corruption czar from January 2003 until his resignation in February 2005 (Wrong 2009).
nance can be figured as foreign governments or international organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund of the World Bank, bribing governments in less developed countries to espouse a particular politics. The fact that economic policies on trade and aid are inescapably political and are sometimes inflected with neo-colonial condescension for the local, makes these accusations hard to dismiss. In this context a much franker discussion about the role of corruption in the history of democracy in the West, and an awareness of the corruptibility of the historiography of democracy, has the potential to diffuse some of the colonialist overtones of the debate.

The corruption of Pericles/Thucydides

Rather than examining the corruptibility of historical logos writ large, I will study a controversy in the historiography of the Athenian historian Thucydides as a case study in both historical and historiographical accountability. Given Thucydides’ status as the founding father of critical historiography in the West, the stakes are high in any enquiry into the integrity of his historical accounting. The linguistic turn precipitated no small crisis in scholarship on Thucydides, forcing scholars to confront Thucydides’ rhetoric of history and to concede that ‘bias’ in historiography was not something that could be confined to facts. The questions of whether or not Thucydides exaggerated the allies’ resentment of Athens’s empire, as Geoffrey De Ste Croix famously argued, or downplayed the provocative-ness of Athens’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Sparta in the period leading up to the outbreak of the Atheno-Peloponnesian War – an argument put forward by Ernst Badian – were disconcerting enough, let alone the postmodernist emphasis on the inherent fictions of narrative history.\footnote{De Ste Croix 1954; Badian 1993.} The desire to cling to an image of disciplinary integrity in which the historian’s commitment to the truth remains intact in spite of notable lapses, is evident in a particular version of doublespeak that was common in Thucydidean scholarship in the second half of the 20th century, fading out in the 1990s. In this version of Thucydidean apologetics, it was common to point out biases and misrepresentation in Thucydides’ account in one breath, only to qualify this admonition with the argument that Thucydides himself furnished scholars with the evidence to detect this bias. The subtext of this argument was that the intellectual integrity (often termed objectivity) of Thucydides was such that he could not help telling the
truth, thereby exposing his own misrepresentations. The classic example of this argument is De Ste Croix’s argument in the afore-mentioned article that the ‘news columns in Thucydides, so to speak, contradict the editorial Thucydides’:

This is what Thucydides wanted his readers to believe. It is undoubtedly the conception he himself honestly held. Nevertheless, his own detailed narrative proves that it is certainly false. Thucydides was such a remarkably objective historian that he himself has provided sufficient material for his own refutation. The news columns in Thucydides, so to speak, contradict the editorial Thucydides, and the editor himself does not always speak with the same voice.\(^5\)

De Ste Croix’s famous formulation elides two different categories: the intellectual quality of objectivity on the one hand, and the moral virtue of truthfulness, or broader intellectual integrity, on the other hand, and Thucydides’ partiality is mitigated in the process. This slippage between categories raises the question of what counts as integrity in ancient Greek historiography and what counts as corruption. Nor is this question confined to the historians of the past, since as modern readers and scholars we can choose how much importance we give to the study of integrity and corruption in our discussion of Greek and Roman historiography. In other words, our own integrity is at stake, depending on whether we fail to historicise integrity adequately in terms of values and concepts that are appropriate to Greek and Roman contexts,\(^6\) or we historicise it too much, losing sight of the involvement of contemporary values in the study of ancient history.

In order to address this question I will focus on the issue of why, in his depiction of the Athenian politician Pericles, Thucydides plays down the charges of corruption that were brought against Pericles in 430 BC. In addition to the integrity of Pericles, Thucydides’ own integrity as historian is under scrutiny. The final speech Thucydides attributes to Pericles is set in the summer of 430 BC, following the second Peloponnesian invasion of Attica. The speech is introduced in 2.59, occupies Chapters 60-64 and is followed in Chapter 65 by Thucydides’ summation and eulogy of Pericles’

\(^5\) De Ste Croix 1954:3.
\(^6\) In his summary of the themes of the conference at the roundtable session on 23 October 2010, Clifford Ando stressed the importance of studying ‘native’, historical taxonomies of corruption.
political career. In Thucydides’ account, Pericles responds to public anger over his strategy of not engaging the invading Peloponnesian forces in land battles in Attica by calling an assembly in which he offers a defence of his war strategy as well as a defence of his entire political philosophy. As Dionysius of Halicarnassus points out in his essay On Thucydides, to which I will return later, it is an offensive defence speech, because it shifts a lot of the blame onto the δῆμος.\(^7\) Corruption is a prominent motif in this speech in the form of Pericles’ protestations of his incorruptibility (2.60.5-7).\(^8\)

> I, the object of your anger, consider myself a man inferior to no one in judging what is necessary and explaining it; furthermore, a lover of my country and above money (φιλόπολις τε καὶ χρημάτων κρείσσων). For one who has ideas and does not instruct clearly is on the same level as if he had not thought of them; the man able to do both but ill-disposed toward his city cannot make any declaration with the comparable loyalty; and if he has that as well but he is conquered by money (χρήμασι δὲ νικωμένου), for this alone he can be bought in entirety (τὰ ξύμπαντα τούτου ἐνος ἄν πωλοῖτο).

It is striking that corruptibility is mentioned three times in close succession. Why else would Thucydides’ Pericles distance himself from corruption unless corruption charges were involved in the occasion for speaking?

In addition to these explicit references to bribery, we can count Pericles’ statement at 2.61.2 that ‘I am the same man and do not alter’ as a declaration of political incorruptibility.\(^9\) The preoccupation with corruption (or lack of corruption) continues after the speech (2.65.8), where Thucydides delivers his opinion that Pericles was ‘influential through both reputation and judgement and notable for being most resistant to bribery’ (δυνατὸς ὃν τῷ τε ἀξιώματι καὶ τῇ γνώμῃ χρημάτων τε διαφανῶς ἀδωρότατος). In 2.65, without giving us a precise chronology, Thucydides notes that the public anger which Pericles tried to address in his speech did not cease until the Athenians had fined him (οὐ μέντοι πρότερον γε οἱ

---

\(^7\) Dion. Hal. Thuc. 44 describes the manner of address that Pericles adopts in this speech as ἐπιτιμητικός (reproachful). Zumbrunnen 2008:98-99, with note 3, quotes the description of Connor 1984:65, of Pericles ’unabashed self-praise’, and cites recent discussions of Pericles’ arrogant and antagonistic tones in this speech.

\(^8\) Transl. Lattimore 1998:103. All translations of Thucydides are from Lattimore.

\(^9\) The Greek reads ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔξισταιμαι.
This reference to the Athenians fining Pericles is generally taken to refer to Pericles' impeachment on charges of embezzlement (γραφὴ κλοπῆς) some time in the summer of 430 BC, attested by Plato, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch. The specific detail of the charge of embezzlement (κλοπὴ, lit. 'theft') is mentioned in Plato's Gorgias. In the course of a critique of the failure of Athenian politicians to make the δῆμος better, Pericles included, Socrates mentions that 'near the end of his life, [the Athenians] voted to convict Pericles of embezzlement and came close to condemning him to death' (ἐπὶ τελετῇ τοῦ βίου τοῦ Περικλέους, κλοπὴν αὐτοῦ κατεψηφίσαντο, ὀλίγο δὲ καὶ θανάτου ἐτίμησαν, Gorgias 515e).

Under the influence of Thucydides, Diodorus gives us the circumstances for this trial – namely, the Athenians' frustration at Pericles' military policy and the fact that they were at war in the first place – but does not mention the charge of embezzlement:

After this the Athenians, now that the trees of their countryside had been cut down and the plague was carrying off great numbers, were plunged into despondency and became angry with Pericles, considering him to have been responsible for their being at war. Consequently they removed him from the generalship, and on the strength of some petty grounds for accusation they imposed a fine upon him of eighty talents (καὶ μικρὰς τινας ἀφορμὰς ἐγκλημάτων λαβόντες, ἐζημίωσαν αὐτὸν ὀγδοήκοντα ταλάντοις). After this they dispatched embassies to the Lacedaemonians and asked that the war be brought to an end; but when not a man paid any attention to them, they were forced to elect Pericles general again.

(Diod. Sic. 12.45.4-5, transl. Oldfather 2000)

Plutarch gives his version of the fine in Chapter 35 of his Life of Pericles, where he echoes Thucydides 2.65.3-4 in recording that the Athenians did not stop being angry with Pericles until they had fined him. Contrary to Diodorus' account, in which the figure is given as eighty talents, Plutarch reports that the amount of the fine varies in different historical sources, ranging from 15 to 50 talents (Per. 35.4). Plutarch also omits the tradition that Pericles was charged with embezzlement.

In addition to this specific charge, which Thucydides glosses over by mentioning the fine (2.65.3) but omitting the nature of the charge, Plutarch reports that Pericles had previously faced corruption charges,

---

which he associates with the prosecution of Anaxagoras, Pericles’ friend and teacher, on grounds of impiety, ἀσέβεια (Plut. Per. 32). Plutarch also represents the prosecution of Pheidias on a charge of embezzlement as a vicarious prosecution of Pericles (31.2-5). In a recent discussion of the historical evidence for these prosecutions, Kurt Raaflaub has emphasised the slender evidence on which Plutarch’s testimony rests and has concluded that there is no reliable evidence for an orchestrated series of trials against Pericles and his associates in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. But even if we read Plutarch’s account sceptically, this still leaves a prior prosecution of Pericles for corruption that goes unmentioned in Thucydides, but which would have been valuable for our understanding of Pericles’ relationship with the δῆμος. So Thucydides has effectively suppressed not just one, but two fines for corruption.

In addition to the formal charges of embezzlement, Plutarch also claims that Pericles faced repeated accusations of financial corruption put into circulation by Thucydides, son of Melesias, his chief political opponent: ‘Thucydides and his party kept denouncing Pericles for playing fast and loose with the public moneys and annihilating the revenues’ (ὡς σπαθῶντας τὰ χρήματα καὶ τὰς προσόδους ἀπολλύντος, Per. 14.1). These accusations would be entirely in keeping with what we know of the role of both accusations and formal charges of corruption in the defamation of one’s political rivals in Athenian politics, preserved best of all in the corpus of Aeschines and Demosthenes. In view of all this ‘noise’ about corruption on the part of Pericles, Thucydides’ categorical statement of his imperviousness to corruption at 2.65.8 (χρημάτων τε διαφανῶς ἀδωρότατος) is all the more remarkable, since it runs counter to a critical contemporary tradition about Pericles that is preserved in Plutarch. It might be objected that Thucydides, unlike Plutarch, routinely ignores rumours about the protagonists in his History, but elsewhere he admits the

11 Probably in 438/37 BC, but scholars have argued for later dates as well; see Stadter 1989:301-03.
12 Plut. Per. 31: Pheidias accused of embezzlement (κλοπαί) with Menon as the accuser.
14 See Taylor 2001b:159; for the wider context see Taylor 2001a and 2001b, passim.
relevance of popular perceptions in shaping the way in which the Athenian δήμος responded to its politicians (the clearest instance being the character sketch of Alcibiades at 6.15). He may well have judged such rumours and, indeed, actual prosecutions to be base and groundless, but in omitting them he makes the δήμος seem even more irrational in its attitude towards Pericles than Pericles accuses it of being in his final Thucydidean speech.

As for the most notorious instance of corruption, when Pericles is alleged to have bribed with public money the Spartan king Pleistoanax via the ephor Cleandridas, to withdraw from Attica in 446/445, Thucydides twice mentions the allegations of corruption (being in receipt of bribes) against Pleistoanax in Sparta (at 2.21.1 and 5.16.3), but does not mention the tradition that it was Pericles who had bribed him. In this instance Thucydides' silence is a version of what Simon Hornblower has termed 'narrative displacement', drawing on the concept of anachrony in narratology. Hornblower describes narrative displacement as 'the technique by which an item in Thucydides occasionally gains but more often loses its impact by being placed at a point other than we’d expect it.' Strictly speaking, there is no narrative displacement here, since Thucydides does not even connect the bribery of Pleistoanax with Pericles. But arguably it constitutes narrative displacement in a more fundamental sense: the downplaying of uncomfortable information by squirrelling it away in unmarked passages.

Plutarch gives us the details of the accusation in Per. 22-23. According to Plutarch, when Pericles gave his accounts as part of the εὔθυνα ('public examination') for his generalship for the year 446/445 BC, the δήμος accepted his evasive explanation that an expenditure of ten talents had been spent on ‘what was necessary’ (εἰς τὸ δέον):17

\[
\text{τοῦ δὲ Περικλέους ἐν τῷ τῆς στρατηγίας ἀπολογισμῷ δέκα}
\text{ταλάντων ἀνάλωμα γράψαντος ἀνηλωμένων εἰς τὸ δέον, ὁ δήμος}
\text{ἀπεδέξατο μὴ πολυπραγμονήσας μηδ’ ἐλέγξας τὸ ἄπόρρητον.}
\]

15 Also attested at Eph. fr. Hist. 70, F193; Diod. Sic. 13.106; Plut. Per. 22; Plut. Nic. 28. The Spartan invasion of Attica led by Pleistoanax is first mentioned at Thuc. 1.114, where no mention is made of the accusation that Pleistoanax withdrew his forces after receiving a bribe from Pericles.
16 Hornblower 1994a:139; the discussion of narrative displacement extends from 139-48.
17 For discussion see Stadter 1989:229-30.
When Pericles, in rendering his accounts for this campaign, recorded an expenditure of ten talents as ‘for sundry needs’, the people approved it without meddling and without even investigating the mystery.\(^{18}\)

In a well-known passage in Plutarch’s *Life of Alcibiades* (7.2), Alcibiades, calling to see Pericles and being told that Pericles was not at leisure to see him because he was considering how to present his accounts [for public office] to the Athenians, is reported to have advised him to consider how *not* to present his accounts:

> He once wished to see Pericles, and went to his house. But he was told that Pericles could not see him; he was studying how to render his accounts to the Athenians (ὅπως ἀποδώσει λόγον Ἀθηναίοις). ‘Were it not better for him’, said Alcibiades as he went away, ‘to study how not to render his accounts to the Athenians (ὅπως οὐκ ἀποδώσει λόγον Ἀθηναίοις)?’\(^{19}\)

In view of the anecdote about Pericles summarily passing off state expenditure as having been spent ‘on what was necessary’ (εἰς τὸ δέον) he evidently did not need lessons in evasive speech from Alcibiades. Pericles’ evasive response was famously parodied by Aristophanes in the *Clouds* (first version produced in 423 BC), where Pheidippides the son cross-examines his father Strepsiades about his scruffy appearance as a consequence of his hanging out with the sophists in the *φροντιστήριον* (lines 858-59, transl. Henderson 1998):\(^{20}\)

> Ph. And what have you done with your shoes, you idiot?  
> Str. As Pericles put it, ‘I’ve expended them as required (εἰς τὸ δέον ἀπώλεσα).’

Michael Vickers has mapped out in detail how aspects of the dynamics between Strepsiades and Pheidippides correspond to the relationship between Pericles and Alcibiades.\(^{21}\) This exchange in which the inept father, after a course at the *φροντιστήριον*, is able to outwit his creditors with evasive answers, chimes with one of the characterisations of Pericles

---


\(^{21}\) Vickers 1993, *passim.*
in Plutarch’s Life – his rhetorical skill and evasiveness, epitomised by the anecdote in which Thucydides son of Melesias is alleged to have responded to the question posed by the Spartan King Archidamus as to whether he or Pericles was the better, with the remark that ‘[w]henever I throw him in wrestling, he disputes the fall, and carries the point, and persuades the very men who saw his fall’ (ὅταν … ἐγὼ καταβάλω παλαίων, ἐκείνος ἀντιλέγων ὡς οὐ πέπτωκε, νικᾶ καὶ μεταπειθεῖ τοὺς ὁρῶντας, Per. 8.3-4).

Yet, in spite of the wealth of scurrilous anecdotes about Pericles which make the Life so readable, and in spite of recording allegations of corruption against Pericles, Plutarch offers us a highly idealised portrait of Pericles’ financial integrity, remarking, at 16.3, that Pericles ‘kept himself impregnable to money’ (ἐφύλαξεν ἑαυτὸν ἀνάλωτον ὑπὸ χρημάτων). Similarly, in his concluding comparison of the Lives of Pericles and Fabius Maximus, Plutarch is explicit in exonerating Pericles of charges of corruption, echoing Thucydides’ claim at 2.65.8 that Pericles was χρημάτων ἀδωρότατος (‘absolutely impervious to bribes’):

Περικλῆς δ᾿ οὐκ ἂν ἴσως εἴποι τις καὶ παρὰ συμμάχων καὶ βασιλέων ὁφελεῖσθαι καὶ θεραπεύεσθαι παρόν, τῆς δυνάμεως διδούσης, ἀδωρότατον ἑαυτὸν καὶ καθαρώτατον ἐφύλαξεν.

And Pericles, though he had opportunities, owing to his authority and influence, to enrich himself from obsequious allies and kings beyond all possible estimates, nevertheless kept himself pre-eminently superior to bribes and free from corruption.22

The disjunction between some of the details conveyed in the course of the Life as well as the idealising portrait that emerges, raise the question of the integrity of the biographer-historian in this process. The analogy between political corruption and the corruptibility of the historical record is suggested by a passage in Aeschines. In his prosecution of Ctesiphon in 330 BC for Ctesiphon’s allegedly corrupt proposal, in 336 BC, to award Demosthenes with a golden crown, Aeschines discourses at some length about the culture of corruption in Athenian political life. At 3.22, in response to Demosthenes’ claim that he had spent none of the state’s money during his tenure as commissioner of the walls, and that therefore there was nothing to audit,23 Aeschines contends that ‘[t]here is nothing in

22 Synkrisis of Pericles and Fabius Maximus, 3.3-4.
all the state that is exempt from audit, investigation and examination’
(ἀνυπεύθυνον δὲ καὶ ἀνεξέταστον οὐδὲν ἐστι ἐν τῇ πόλει).

Aeschines’ choice of language here, which is familiar forensic vocabu-
lary, may remind us of the forensic terms in which Thucydides frames the
search for the truth in historiography. When Thucydides uses legal
language to criticise the sloppiness with which the majority (hoi polloi)
approach the search for the truth, this is intended to contrast with his
account of his own painstaking attempt to establish accurate facts about
events (1.20.1-3):

Οἳ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν προγεγεγενημένων [...] ὁμοίως
ἀβασανίστως παρ’ ἄλληλων δέχονται ... οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς
πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας.

For men accept one another’s accounts of the past, ... with a
uniform lack of examination. ... So devoid of effort is most
people’s search for the truth.24

But, we might ask, how does Thucydides’ claim that he reconstructed
the speeches on the basis of how he thought each speaker would have said
what was needed (τὰ δέοντα, 1.22.1) – one of the most inscrutable phrases
in the History – differ from Pericles’ reported explanation in his public
accounts for 446/5 that he spent ten talents on what was necessary (τὸ
δέον)? Arguably in Thucydides’ account, Pericles’ political conduct be-
comes doubly inscrutable, since a tendency towards inscrutability in the
politician’s life gets reinforced by Thucydides’ dismissal of the larger
historical context for the hostility of the δῆμος towards Pericles in 430 BC.
In his idealising portrait of Pericles, is Thucydides not guilty of providing a
corrupt account of Pericles’ involvement in the war? This brings us to the
question of the corruptibility of logos in historiography.

Historiographical ethics

One of the most detailed definitions of the ideal historian in extant
classical literature is, ironically, Chapter 41 of Lucian’s satire How to Write

24 On legal language in Thuc. 1.20, see Connor 1984:28; on ἀβασανίστως at
1.20.1, see Hornblower 1994b:107.
History, where the ideal historian is described as, among other traits, ἀδέκαστος (‘incorruptible’).\(^{25}\)

This, then, is the sort of man the historian should be: fearless, incorruptible (ἀδέκαστος), free (ἐλεύθερος), a friend of free expression and the truth (παρρησίας καὶ ἀληθείας φίλος), intent, as the comic poet says, on calling a fig a fig and a trough a trough, giving nothing to hatred or to friendship, sparing no one, showing neither pity nor shame nor obsequiousness, an impartial judge (ἴσος δικαστής), well disposed to all men up to the point of not giving one side more than its due, in his books a stranger and a man without a country, independent, subject to no sovereign (ἀβασίλευτος), not reckoning what this or that man will think, but stating the facts.\(^{26}\)

This ideal historian will not be influenced by networks of patronage and friendship; instead he will be a friend to truth (ἀληθείας φίλος) to the extent that he is alienated from his polis (ξένος καὶ ἄπολις). In keeping with Thucydides’ stress on the legal connotations of the historiographical search for the truth, here Lucian gives us the impartial judge as a model for the ideal historian. While the motif of freedom in this passage echoes Athenian democratic ideology (ἐλεύθερος ... παρρησίας), the intellectual virtues are at odds with the practice of Athenian democracy, which emphatically did not extol truth for truth’s sake above the interests of the polis and the civic community. In Thucydides’ depiction of Pericles, an excess of free thinking put the Athenian politician on a collision course with the freedom of the δῆμος. Certainly, this is the train of thought at 2.65.8-10 where Pericles’ free control of the δῆμος is explained in terms of his refusal to speak to please them (πρὸς ἡδονήν), and is ultimately connected with the idea of ‘the rule of the first man’ (2.65.10). However, in the context in which Lucian was writing, the Roman Empire in the middle of the 2nd century AD, the ideal of being autonomous and not subject to monarchic rule (ἀβασίλευτος) is not so much pro-democratic as anti-imperial. According to this interpretation, the appropriation of Athenian intellectual models and their language allows for historical double-voicing in which the historian speaks over the heads of contemporary audiences to appeal to those of the past and the future.

\(^{25}\) Pelling 2002:144 reminds us that, according to the Lamprias Catalogue, Plutarch wrote a work on How We are to Judge True History.

\(^{26}\) This and following translations from Kilburn 1959.
Indeed, in answer to the question of not ‘How to Write History’ but ‘Why to Write History’, Lucian appeals to audiences of the future, whom the historian will gratify with his objectivity by not writing with a view to the immediate gratification (πρὸς χάριν) of his contemporaries. It turns out that the truth is not its own reward; instead, the historian will be rewarded by posterity who will continue to read his work. Elsewhere I have suggested that Lucian’s seemingly straight praise of Thucydides and the other impartial historians whom he praises is complicated by the fact that their impartiality is lauded as a means to fame rather than as an end in itself.27 However, there is a fundamental distinction between the rewards bestowed by posterity and the rewards bestowed by a patron on a living beneficiary. Scholarship on corruption recognises the varying duration of reciprocity in different forms of corruption and bribery: sometimes the quid pro quo relationship is immediate, but in other cases there can be a considerable delay between what one gives and what one hopes to get in return.28 Arguably, in the case of the historian’s death, the quid pro quo dynamic is ruptured by the author’s inability to benefit from the admiration/reputation that his work gains him. Although one might speak, figuratively, of gratifying posterity, no genuine charis can exist between author and the audience of posterity.29

The language of incorruptibility runs throughout Lucian’s praise of the ideal historian; previously, in Chapter 38, Lucian has counselled that the historian must keep his mind free, fear no-one and not look for anything; if not, ‘he will be like bad jurors who sell their verdict to curry favour or gratify hatred’ (ἐπεὶ ὅμοιος ἔσται τοῖς φαύλοις δικασταῖς πρὸς χάριν ἢ πρὸς ἀπέχθειαιν ἐπὶ μισθῶ δικάζουσιν). Similarly, in Chapter 47, in a passage that paraphrases the language of Thucydides’ statement of his methodology at 1.22.2-3, Lucian advises:

As to the facts themselves, he should not assemble them at random, but only after much laborious and painstaking investigation (ἀλλὰ φιλοπόνως καὶ ταλαιπώρως πολλάκις περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνακρίναντα). He should for preference be an eyewitness,

28 See Johnston 2005:21 (referring to Johnston 1979): ‘In some corrupt exchanges, such as patronage and nepotism, considerable time may elapse between receiving the quid and repaying the quo, and the exchange may be conditioned by many factors other than immediate gain.’
29 Here I am thinking of the link between charis and bribery; see Ober 1989:236-38.
but, if not, listen to those who tell the more impartial story (τοῖς ἀδεκαστότερον ἐζηγουμένοις), those whom one would suppose least likely to subtract from the facts or add to them out of favour or malice (πρὸς χάριν ἢ ἀπέχθειαν).

Here the phrase for ‘those who tell the more impartial story’ is ‘οἱ ἀδεκαστότερον ἐζηγουμένοι’ (lit. ‘those investigating with greater freedom from corruption’).

What I think has not been noticed in existing discussions of *How to Write History* is the subtle mockery of moralising criticisms of historiography, such as those that we find in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ essays on Thucydides, or Plutarch’s critique of the so-called ‘malice’ of Herodotus. The implication, I think, is that these moralising critiques are equally misguided and misleading because they impugn the integrity of the historian on issues that have nothing to do with his personal, moral integrity. As Lucian points out in wonderfully sardonic tones, in reporting the bad things that happened it is not the historian who makes the characters in history look bad:

He must not be concerned that Philip has had his eye put out by Aster of Amphipolis, the archer at Olynthus – he must show him exactly as he was. […] For he will think quite rightly that no man of sense will blame him if he gives an account of unlucky or stupid actions – he has not been responsible for them, he has merely told the tale. So that if they are ever defeated in a sea-fight it is not he who sank them and if they run away it is not he who drives them on, unless he neglected to say a prayer when he ought. Surely if by ignoring them or reversing them he could set them right it would have been very easy for Thucydides with one insubstantial pen (ἑνὶ καλὰμῳ λεπτῷ) to overturn the counterwall at Epipolae, and sink the trireme of Hermocrates, to transfix that cursed man Gylippus in the act of blocking the roads with walls and ditches, and finally to throw the Syracusans into the stone-quarries while the Athenians sailed around Sicily and Italy as Alcibiades had first hoped. No, when what is done is done I fancy that even Clotho could not unspin their destiny or Atropus change their course. The historian’s sole task is to tell the tale as it happened.30

Plutarch’s critique of Herodotus in *On the Malice of Herodotus* privileges patriotism over truth, preferring to gloss over humiliating defeats in the

past or episodes that contradict the myth of Hellenic unity in ‘classical Greece’ as a source of cultural identity in a present governed by Rome. Hence Dionysius’ criticism that Thucydides erred in his choice of subject (hypothesis) – an internal war in which Greeks killed other Greeks, and that Herodotus’ subject matter – a war in which Greeks triumphed over foreign invaders – is far superior.31

In Dionysius’ historiographical criticism we find a threefold model of integrity: (1) the integrity of the characters in history (which suggests a Platonic concern with the representation of exemplary characters); (2) the integrity of the historian in recording what happened; and (3) the integrity of the reader/critic in judging the quality of the historian’s account. Points 1 and 2 are illustrated in Chapter 8 of On Thucydides, where, after quoting book 1.22.4 of Thucydides’ History, Dionysius rephrases Thucydides’ commitment to ἀκρίβεια (1.22.1, 1.22.2) and τὸ σαφές (1.22.4) in terms of ἀλήθεια:

All, or at least the majority, of philosophers and rhetoricians support the historian’s claim. History is the High Priestess of Truth in our view, and Thucydides concerned himself above all with recording the truth, neither adding to nor subtracting from the facts unjustifiably (οὔτε προσομεθείς τοῖς πράγμασιν οὔτε δὲ μὴ δίκαιον οὔτε ἁμαρτῶν), nor allowing himself any literary licence (οὐδὲ ἐνεξουσίαζόν τῇ γραφῇ), but blamelessly and single-mindedly maintaining the principle of avoiding all malice and flattery (ἀπὸ παντός φθόνου καὶ πάσης κολακείας φυλάττων), especially when passing judgement on great men. For example, in his reference to Themistocles in the first book, he generously lists all his virtues, and when, in the second book, he considers the political achievements of Pericles, he writes an encomium worthy of the great man’s far-famed reputation.32

Contrary to Dionysius’ interpretation, it is notable that Thucydides does not use the abstract noun ἀλήθεια in 1.22. The only instance of this stem is the adverb ἀληθῶς, when Thucydides states that in his reconstruction of the speeches he tried to stick as closely as possible to the overall sense of the words that were actually spoken (τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς ἔχουσιν, 1.22.1-2). In Thucydides the stress on accuracy and painstaking research are intended as intellectual virtues, the virtues evoked when we

31 Dion. Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius 3.
32 Thuc. 8; (transl. S. Usher 2000).
refer to academic disciplines. In Dionysius the stress is on ethical virtues: hence Thucydides’ truthfulness consists first and foremost in the fair treatment of good people (ἐν ταῖς περὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν γνώμαις), with his representation of Themistocles and Pericles singled out.

As Dionysius’ appraisal of Thucydides progresses, it transpires that he does not regard Thucydides as completely blameless. In fact, he argues that readers who do not acknowledge Thucydides’ faults are themselves lacking in integrity, allowing adulation to warp their judgement:

Those who have admired Thucydides immoderately, crediting him with nothing less than divine inspiration, seem to have been affected in this way by the sheer multitude of his ideas. If you take a speech and relate it to the particular circumstances in which it was made, and point out that one argument was inappropriate for use by these persons on this occasion, and another was unsuited for use in these circumstances and at such a length, his admirers take offence. They are suffering from the same sort of infatuation as a man overcome with an almost frantic love of some face or other. [...] But those who keep an impartial mind and examine literature in accordance with correct standards (ὅσοι δ’ ἀδέκαστον τὴν διάνοιαν φυλάσσουσι καὶ τὴν ἐξέτασιν τῶν λόγων ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀρθοὺς κανόνας ἀναφέρουσιν), whether they are endowed with some natural power of appreciation (κρίσεως) or have developed their critical faculties (κριτήρια) by the help of instruction, do not praise everything alike or find fault with everything, but give due recognition to correct usage and withhold praise from any part that is seriously at fault.33

According to this view, corruptibility is also an issue at the level of the reader and critic as well, since a critic’s διάνοια might be corrupted through intellectual adulation. Instead, the ideal is to have an incorruptible intellect (ἀδέκαστον διάνοιαν), informed by the correct standards for the evaluation of literature. And yet when we turn to Dionysius’ most extensive case study – Pericles’ last speech in Thucydides (2.60-64) – these ‘correct standards’ are hard to square with our notions of what constitutes sound criticism. Essentially, Dionysius recommends that, although ‘Thucydides was quite entitled to describe the statesman’s qualities as he pleased’, he should not have made Pericles’ speeches conform to this description, remarking that in composing the speech at 2.60-

33 Dion. Thuc. 34.
64 in the way in which he has, Thucydides ‘is expressing his own opinion regarding the ability of Pericles, in the wrong context’ (Thuc. 45). Instead, he advocates that given the rhetorical context – Pericles defending himself in front of a jury of the Athenian assembly – Thucydides should have written a speech in which Pericles was genuinely apologetic: ‘Pericles should have been made to speak humbly and in such a manner as to turn away the jury’s anger’ (ibid.). Dionysius privileges rhetorical models and the didactic aspect of history over the specific nature of Thucydides’ analysis. Prior to this, in Chapter 44, he remarks that ‘political speakers should soothe, not inflame the anger of crowds’ (οὐ γὰρ ἐρεθίζειν προσήκει τὰς τῶν ὀχλῶν ὀργὰς τοὺς δημηγοροῦντας ἄλλα πραύνειν). According to Thucydides this was Pericles’ attempt to appease his audience, but not through pandering to them because, in Thucydides’ assessment, the dynamic of Pericles’ relationship with the δῆμος was that he led them, rather than being led (2.65.8, quoted above).

We can dispute the historical accuracy of Thucydides’ portrait, and scholarship on Thucydides is almost universally critical of the Thucydidean bias towards Pericles, which is compounded by anti-democratic sentiment. But it is not on these grounds that Dionysius criticises Thucydides; instead, he objects to the fact that this detracts from the usefulness of Thucydides’ History (he uses the adjective χρήσιμος) for rhetorical education: this is not an exemplary speech for readers seeking how to mollify an audience. The gap between the intellectual, historiographical virtue of truth and Dionysius’ criterion of truth is revealed when the latter states that Thucydides should have composed a conciliatory speech for Pericles because, ‘[h]is would have been the proper procedure for a historian concerned to imitate real life’ (τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν πρέπον τῷ μιμεῖσθαι βουλομένῳ συγγραφεῖ τὴν ἀλήθειαν). Here ἀλήθεια seems to consist in the ‘truth’ of rhetorical theory, which prescribes that speakers must speak a certain way in certain contexts dictated by occasion, institution and audience. As Bernard Williams emphasised in his discussion of the mode of truth (as opposed to the mode of myth) in Thucydides, this audience-centred conception of truth is completely antithetical to the commitment

---

35 See Pritchett 1975:128, commenting on the way in which Dionysius’ rhetorical training skews his historical criticism: ‘Dionysius’ preoccupation concerning τὸ πρέπον is the direct result of his rhetorical training and leads to criticisms which are not convincing …’
to the truth that Thucydides professes. However, we can still acknowledge Thucydides' serious commitment to exacting standards of truth in historical explanation while observing passages in which his judgement may have been fallible or partisan. In fact, in the case of his depiction of Pericles, arguably, Pericles' own conviction of the correctness of his policy and his sense that he understood the best interests of the δῆμος led to Thucydides' idealising portrait. In other words, the influence of Pericles on Thucydides' own intellectual character and judgement resulted in a prejudicial treatment, which meant that Thucydides summarily excluded or suppressed prosecutions that he regarded as groundless.

Arguably, Thucydides employed a notion of truth in which truth consisted in the higher ideals that Pericles stood for, whether or not these were realised in every speech that he made to the Athenian δῆμος. After all, this is a writer who stakes the authority of his account of the causes of the war on the distinction between the apparent causes and conflicts (αἱ αἰτίαι καὶ διαφοραι) and the truest pretext (ἡ ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις), which was least apparent in the speeches made at the time (ἀφανεστάτη δὲ λόγῳ, 1.23.5-6). In addition, another element of Thucydides' conception of the truth where Pericles is concerned, is not so much the faithful recording of what actually happened to preserve it from oblivion (a-lethē), but the creation of an unforgettable image of Pericles. Accordingly, scholars such as Simon Hornblower have stressed the affinities between Thucydides' portrait of Pericles and Plato's portrait of Socrates in the Apology.

In Chapter 8 of On Thucydides, Dionysius commends Thucydides for recording the truth; one of the ways in which he glosses this regard for the truth is in terms of Thucydides 'not abusing his writerly authority' (οὐδὲ ἐνεξουσιάζων τῇ γραφῇ). Modern criticism is more likely to say that part of Thucydides' appeal to us is precisely his idiosyncratic authorial voice and his forceful intellectual authority, but neither Dionysius' nor Thucy-

---

36 Williams 2002:165: ‘Truth is not audience-relative. In particular, the truth of a statement has nothing to do with whether a given audience will be pleased to hear it.’ Williams goes on to remark: ‘This is a special case of something that everyone implicitly and pre-theoretically understands about truth (even if their behaviour, quite often, does not make this very obvious).’


38 In his commentary on this passage, Pritchett 1975:5 and 58 translates this phrase as ‘nor does he take advantage of his position as a writer’, glossing ἐνεξουσιάζων as ‘showing his independence’.
dides' versions of the truth are likely to satisfy us entirely. The one allows
misplaced notions of moral and rhetorical integrity to interfere with
questions of historicity and intellectual judgement, and the other, in his
study of historical causation, does not subject all of his subject matter to
the same degree of accountability and transparency. Accordingly, the study
of corruption in contemporary geopolitics should involve a thoroughgoing
scrutiny of the history and historiography of the organs and concepts that
are used to censure corruption, in order to ensure that the terms of the
discussion are not themselves partial and prone to corruption. This itself is
a recognisably Thucydidean project: investigating the role of language in
the politics of the past and the present.39

Bibliography

Press.
Badian, E. 1993. ‘Thucydides and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War:
a historian’s brief.’ In Plataea to Potidaea: Studies in the History and
Historiography of the Pentecontaetia, 125-162. Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins University Press.
Indianapolis: Hackett.
Historia 3.1:1-41.
Duckworth.
(edd.), After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South

39 See Allison 1997:185: ‘He seems to have discovered how easily one's view of
the past can be altered, simply by altering the kinds of words one chooses: the
fault lies in the evaluation (dikaiosis) of the perceptions that led up to the
creation of the account.’


AMBITIONE CORRUPTA: 
SALLUST AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CORRUPTION

Martin Devecka
Yale University

There was a time, very long ago, when Sallust had pride of place in discussions of late-Republican corruption at Rome.¹ The reasons for his demotion since then are clear enough, namely, that he is tendentious, sensational, given to floating salacious rumours – in short, that Sallust is one of those ‘rhetorical’ historians who are always hampering the searchers after truth.² Looked at from another standpoint, though, he may still have much to offer the cultural historian, because just those elements of his historiographical style that render Sallust so untrustworthy as a source of facts make his work an extraordinary document for a study of the ways in which Roman intellectuals conceived of the corruption that they were sure was all around them in the last years of the republic.³

¹ A single sentence of Sallust counted for Montesquieu, Grandeur et Decadence des Romains, X, as a lapidary explanation of the whole phenomenon at Rome: ‘Ceux qui avaient d’abord été corrompus par leurs richesses le furent ensuite par leur pauvreté; avec des biens au-dessus d’une condition privée, il fut difficile d’être un bon citoyen; avec les désirs et les regrets d’une grande fortune ruinée, on fut prêt à tous les attentats; et, comme dit Salluste, on vit une génération de gens qui ne pouvaient avoir de patrimoine, ni souffrir que d’autres en eussent.’ Montesquieu was writing near the end of a long tradition that had recognized Sallust’s value as a source of explanatory devices and aphorisms – without, it should be said, necessarily accepting him as a source for historical facts. Compare, for instance, Machiavelli, Disc. 1.46. For the importance of Sallust to Christian (late-antique and medieval) accounts of the fall of the Roman Republic, see Pocock 2005:90-96, and, more generally, 137-39. By comparison, Cristina Rosillo Lopez in her recent monograph on Republican corruption dismisses Sallust’s evidentiary value in a single paragraph (2010:24) and makes only passing reference to the Bellum Iugurtinum in an otherwise quite thorough discussion of rhetorical tropes (ibid. 143-45).


³ Rosillo Lopez 2010:83-84. Readers of a theoretical bent may refer my use of the word ‘document’ here to Michel Foucault’s discussion at the beginning of Archaeology of Knowledge; as the rest of this paper should make clear, I am attempting to
Sallust writes about corruption – almost everywhere, but, for reasons that will become clear, especially in the *Bellum Catilinae* – he is usually speaking about bodies, their lusts, faults and desires. This strikes us as such a natural way of accounting for the phenomenon that, when we see it in Sallust, we hardly give it a second thought.\(^4\) I will argue, however, that

'...monumentalize'... Sallust's description of corruption, to divorce it from the question of historical truth, and to understand the circumstances under which such statements about corruption as we find in Sallust could have been made at all (Foucault 1982:6-7).

\(^4\) That the Romans had earlier, at a time when their economy had not been fully monetized, conceived of corruption differently may be suggested by an episode late in the life of Tiberius Gracchus which is attested both by Plutarch and by the Livian *Periochae*. On the day of his death, Gracchus attempts to signal to his supporters that he is in danger by pointing to his head; some members of the senatorial party interpret this gesture as a demand for a crown; a posse is then assembled by Scipio Nasica, with results that are well-known to everyone. Plutarch connects this episode explicitly to Gracchus' supposed earlier receipt of an actual diadem from a Pergamene ambassador. Gracchus is here supposed at once to be imitating an eastern monarch and to be re-enacting a tradition of corrupting the plebs that begins, if we can take Livy's portrayal as at all accurate, with Spurius Maelius. Such a corruption is recognisable *in actu* on the basis of historical exempla, rather than marking itself on the flesh and in the morals of the corrupt party. For details of the episode, see Plut. *Vit. T. Gracch.* 14-20 (ed. Flacière 1976); cf. Liv. *Per.* 58 (ed. Ogilvie 1974); Flor. 2.2 (ed. Jal 1967). Elizabeth Rawson 1975:159, situating this narrative in a broader history of late-Republican sartorial gesture, contends that the charges involved in it were probably contemporary with the events it describes. For Maelius, see *AUC* 4.13-14 and, for a direct comparison with Ti. Gracchus, *Cic. Cat.* 1. For Manlius Capitolinus, see *AUC* 6.11-12. For a genealogy of *regnum* charges at Rome and for Ti. Gracchus' place in it, see Erskine 1991:116-18; viz. also *Cic. Dom.* 38 and *App. Bel. Civ.* 1.2.16 (ed. White 1913). Renate Stolle 1999:98-99 sees the career of Gracchus itself as a reaction against a second-century wave of senatorial self-regulation that marked more and more of the 'classical' means of self-promotion as corrupt, eventually, perhaps, resulting in the less public forms of corruption with which we shall have to do in this paper. The argument is a powerful one as far as it goes, but the transition from Gracchus to Murena and Catiline should probably also be understood in terms of the increasing circulation at Rome of coined money, which Rosillo Lopez 2010:44 aptly calls 'un moyen discret' for corruption; this working in combination with the patrimonial forms of domination that Rome exercised over its provinces; cf. MacMullen 1988:102-21; Wallace-Hadrill 1989:74-75; and, for a classical systemic explanation, Weber *et al.* 1978:239-40.
Sallust's technique here reveals an anthropological dimension of Roman corruption that recent scholarship has more or less ignored, even as it has advanced our understanding of the social and juridical criteria by which a Roman could be judged corrupt. I will attempt to explicate it in the following pages by way of some analytical tools derived from the work of Mary Douglas, that can help us understand how the bodily symptoms of corruption, as Sallust describes them, might have signified to readers of his era not just the mere fact of corruption itself, but a stronger explanatory claim about the individual's place in the network of social relations that lay behind it. Sallust's rhetoric, I will argue, paints the symptoms of social disorder on individual bodies; these bodies manifest the effects of disorder on labile minds, while simultaneously giving that disorder access to an anima that might otherwise have lost itself in contemplation of purer things. So, at any rate, the historian seems to suggest in the autobiography with which he introduces the BC, and thus I will end by arguing that Sallust's anthropology of corruption works there not only as a tool for articulating the relations of individuals to a social and political phenomenon, but as a means of exonerating its expositor from the charges of corruption that clung to his own name and justifying his claim to write disinterested history.

Before we take off into these airy realms of discourse, I should begin with a brief word about 'real' corruption in late-Republican Rome. It

But this is merely to gesture towards an answer to a question that I cannot adequately address in the present paper.

5 I should say something here about the meaning I attach to 'anthropology,' 'anthropological,' vel sim. In this paper, I will use these terms to tag symbolic elements and complexes that lie at the interface between individual and culture—that help the individual to understand his cultural world, and that place the individual within it. This definition is basically that of Geertz 1973:3-32 ('Thick description: towards an interpretive theory of culture'). Among modern historians, Rosillo Lopez 2010:18 comes closest to a properly anthropological understanding of Roman corruption when she observes that the Romans themselves seem to have defined the phenomenon as lying at the intersection of public duty and private pleasure. Although Ramsay MacMullen 1988:102-07 establishes Roman corruption on a firm sociological footing, he seems less interested in what we would call 'emic' perceptions, the symbolic arrangements by which individuals relate themselves to a corrupt society.

6 Cf. Syme 2002b:33-39 for a treatment of these charges. For an account with particular reference to Sallust's encounter with Republican anti-corruption laws, see Allen 1954.
would be otiose to make my own contribution to the substantial existing
literature on how the Romans defined corruption, so I will limit myself to
concurring with the recent proposal of Rosillo Lopez, on which, however,
I would like to make a few remarks. Her argument, essentially, is that
Roman notions of corruption centred on the use of a public position for
private pleasure; but, as she admits, there was a significant body of
habitual practice or *consuetudo* at Rome that remained exempt from these
strictures. Traditional client-patron relations, to give one instance, often
overlapped with those of subject and magistrate or voter and candidate; in
such instances, an exchange of gifts for services that we would certainly
call bribery was considered more or less acceptable. Consider, for
instance, these remarks from Cicero’s defence of Murena:

> At sectabantur multi. Doce mercede; concedam esse crimen. Hoc quidem remoto quid reprendis? ‘Quid opus est’ inquit ‘sectatoribus?’ A me tu id quæris, quid opus sit eo quo semper usi sumus? Homines tenues unum habent in nostrum ordinem aut promerendi aut referendi benefici locum, hanc in nostris petitionibus operam atque adsestionem...tenuiorum amicorum et non occupatorum est ista adsiduitas, quorum copia bonis viris et beneficis deesse non solet.

But many followed him. Show that they were paid to do it; I will
admit that it is a crime. But if that is ruled out, what fault can you
find? ‘What does a man want with attendants?’ he asks. Do you ask
me why he needed what all the rest of us have used? Men of
humble means have only one way of deserving and repaying
favours from our order – by thus assisting and attending our
campaigns for office ... This is the loyalty of friends of rather
slender means unoccupied by business. They never fail men who
are upright and kind.

(Cic. *Mur.* 70)

---

8 Rosillo Lopez 2010:38-40. MacMullen 1988:102-09 echoes many of these
observations from a descriptive point of view, but places less emphasis on the
subjective difficulties that the Romans themselves faced in identifying corruption.
Earlier studies, such as Richard Joliffe’s, tend to define corruption in terms derived
from modern practice, and are therefore of little use for my project; cf. Joliffe
1919:ix-xi.
10 All Latin citations of the *Pro Murena* are from Clark 1922. All translations are
my own unless otherwise credited.
The crowd of supporters that follow Murena around in hopes of future favours, or in repayment of past ones, is a normal product of the Roman social hierarchy, as Cicero explains here and elsewhere in the speech.\textsuperscript{11} None of this public behaviour proves corruption, unless Murena had acquired these clients just by paying them, and so the defence can refute the charge with one simple command: ‘show me the money.’

What is important to take from the foregoing is that corruption at Rome was practically invisible against the traditional patterns of gifting, favour and patronage that sustained the social positions of the Roman elite.\textsuperscript{12} It caused, and was caused by, an increasing disorder in that life that people knew was ongoing.\textsuperscript{13} The agents of that disorder were hard enough to convict in a court of law, let alone in the text of a historian who might put himself at personal hazard by libelling powerful parties. In this connection it is worth noting that Sallust, with one exception to which we shall return, never attaches the label corruptus to individuals in the \textit{Bellum Catilinae} – though he is more than willing to do so in other works – because, one supposes, some of the people who would have fallen under that censure were still living when the \textit{Bellum Catilinae} was composed, and others were now honoured dead.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} For discussion, see Finley 1983:48; and Husband 1916:108-11, where the author raises but dismisses the possibility, suggested by a letter of Pliny (1.20.7) that more solid evidence came up at trial, but that Cicero removed all reference to it from the published version of his speech. But an equally reasonable construction of Pliny’s words would be that Cicero had excised from his published text a longer discourse on the legal definition of certain crimes.

\textsuperscript{12} For the troping of corruption in Roman historiography, see Rosillo Lopez 2010:139-45 and Flower 2004:5-8; for some interpretive debates as to the targets and scope of late-Republican corruption, see Yakobson 1992.

\textsuperscript{13} Networks of corruption could undermine and substitute for more traditional aristocratic hierarchies of patronage; see Yakobson 1992:34-36 and Lintott 1990:1-16. To this should be added the observation of Wallace-Hadrill 1989:71, that ‘the massive advance of bribery in the late-Republic struck at the heart of the traditional patronage system’; what all this suggests is that bribery mimicked the abstract structures, while undermining the concrete influence, of a Roman nobility based on tight control of patronage. For a broader discussion of corruption’s role in the political imaginary as an aetiology of political change, see Turner 2007:128-30.

\textsuperscript{14} For the individual instance, see Sall. Cat. 3 (\textit{ambitione corrupta}) and pp. 11-12 below. For instances of corrupt collectives, see Sall. Cat. 5 (\textit{corupti civitatis mores}), 11 (\textit{corruptis moribus}), 14 (\textit{corrupta civitate}), 53 (\textit{civitas corrupta}). For
Here, then, is where Sallust’s rhetoric intervenes to solve a double problem. If corruption is written on the body, all these questions of charge and counter-charge, of legitimate and illegitimate behaviour, evaporate into thin air, and finding corruption becomes a matter of medical diagnosis. Moreover, Sallust can thereby forge a link between city-wide corruption and the evil character of individuals without mentioning more than the necessary names. Consider for example this passage from the Bellum Catilinae, in which Sallust describes the mirror-like correspondence between Catiline and the city he wants to destroy:

In tanta tamque corrupta civitate Catilina, id quod factu facillumum erat, omnium flagitiorum atque facinorum circum se tamquam stipatorum catervas habebat. Nam quicumque inipudicis, adulter, ganeo, manu, ventre, pene bona patria laceraverat quique alienum aes grande conflaverat, quo flagitium aut facinurus redimere, praeterea omnes undique parricidae, sacrclegi, convicti iudiciis aut pro factis iudicum timentes, ad hoc, quos manus atque lingua periurio aut sanguine civili alebat, postremo omnes, quos flagitium, egestas, conscius animus exagitabat, ii Catilinae proxumi familiaresque erant.

In a city so great and so corrupt Catiline found it a very easy matter to surround himself, as by a bodyguard, with troops of criminals and reprobates of every kind. For whatever wanton, adulterer, whoerer, ruffian, glutton, or satyr had wasted his patrimony in play, feasting or debauchery; anyone who had contracted an immense debt that he might buy immunity from disgrace or crime; all, furthermore, from every side who had been convicted of murder or sacrilege, or feared prosecution for their crimes; those, too, whom hand and tongue supported by perjury or the blood of their fellow citizens; finally, all who were hounded by disgrace, poverty or an evil conscience – all these were nearest and dearest to Catiline. (Sall. Cat. 14.1-3)

We recognize, speaking in broad terms, some of the same social symptoms of corruption – Sallust’s stipatorum catervae come almost

examples of individual corruption in Sallust’s other works, see e.g. Sall. Iug. 34: C. Baebius tribunus plebis, quem pecunia corruptum supra diximus (ed. Jacobs 2001) and Sall. Hist. 4 f68 (ed. Maurenbrecher 1967).

15 All Latin citations of Sall. Cat. are from Ramsey 1984.
directly out of Cicero – as we observed in the Pro Murena. Here, however, there is an additional set of behavioural markers that seem to come out of a different lexicon entirely. His supporters are marked as monstrous bodies: gluttons, sex addicts, murderers, even vampires – to take *sanguine civili alebat* perhaps more literally than it was meant. No question here about whether Catiline has acquired this clientele by legitimate or illegitimate means. They are corrupt *per se*.

Descriptively speaking, that model gives Sallust a rather evocative external index to corruption, while at the same time localising a distributed social phenomenon in particular bodies. Does it tell us anything at all about the way things actually were at Rome, in Sallust’s time or in Catiline’s?

The work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas provides us with a finer set of tools for approaching this problem. In 1966, with *Purity and Danger*, she was one of the first to remark the importance of bodies for marking social categories and distinctions; in *Natural Symbols*, published seven years later, she extended those observations to the analysis of writing and discourse. Relying particularly on sociolinguistic studies carried out by Basil Bernstein, she suggests that every discursive mode may be placed on a grid, one axis of which distinguishes fixity of social roles while the other axis distinguishes relative freedom of speech patterns. She goes on to place the ‘classical’, broadly speaking, in the lower-left hand quadrant of this grid, which is characterized by high role fixity and relative freedom of linguistic usage; the discourse most appropriate to this position is one that recapitulates traditional or ritual patterns as ‘rational’ duties and which, recapitulating these ideological gestures at the physical level, re-establishes social control over ‘free’ bodies with sometimes shocking violence.

Clearly, these passing observations will not do for a description of the classical world as a whole. With a bit of development, though, they are

---

16 Compare e.g. Cic. *Mur*. 49, Catiline accompanied by *stipatum choro iuventutis*, and 69, Postumus accompanied by *magna caterva sua* at election time.
17 Douglas 1973:40-58. Compare Douglas’s lapidary statement, regarding the effective power of bodies in unreflective social life, in the preface to a recent edition of *Purity and Danger* (2002:4): ‘The implicit theory is that physical nature will avenge the broken taboos: the waters, earth, animal life and vegetation form an armory that will automatically defend the founding principles of society, and human bodies are primed to do the same.’
18 Bernstein 1964:56-60; Douglas 1973:50.
well-suited to describe the Rome of Sallust: a society where roles are still, ideally speaking, rather differentiated and indeed almost sacralised, but whose literate classes had begun to adopt a highly self-reflective intellectual discourse derived, in large part, from alien sources. Late-Republican Rome, indeed, represents almost an ideal type of the ‘classical’ society that Douglas describes, whether we look to actual phenomena of violently-enforced social distinction or to contemporary textbooks of rhetoric that recommend the characterisation of defendants, plaintiffs and witnesses based on their positions in a social grid. And corruption, on this reading, would count as a symptom of the distance that separated real social performance from an idealized model of duties and obligations such as Cicero sets forth in, for example, *De Officiis* or *De Amicitia* – works that, when read against his speeches, seem almost designed to preserve a model of ‘moral’ aristocratic behaviour in a society where good examples were increasingly hard to find.

---

20 For the increasing influence of Greek ideas and intellectuals on Roman cultural life, see Rawson 1985:3-18; and compare Tac. *Dial.* 19.


22 See e.g. Laelius’ concise statement at *De Am.* 100 (ed. Powell 2006):

_Virtus, virtus, inquam, C. Fanni, et tu, Q. Muci, et conciliat amicitias et conservat. In ea est enim convenientia rerum, in ea stabilitas, in ea constantia; quae cum se extulit et ostendit suum lumen et idem aspexit agnovitque in alio, ad id se admovet vicissimque accipit illud, quod in altero est; ex quo exardescit sive amor sive amicitia; utrumque enim dictum est ab amando; amare autem nihil est aliud nisi eum ipsum diligere, quem ames, nulla indigentia, nulla utilitate quae sit; quae tamen ipsa efflorescit ex amicitia, etiam si tu eam minus secutus sis._

Virtue, says I, Caius Fannus, and you, Quintus Mucius, both convokes and conserves friendship. In this, too, is a harmony of affairs, in this is stability, in this constancy; which when it makes itself evident and shows forth its own life and sees and knows the same in another, it moves itself towards that and receives in turn that which is in another; on account of which it burns with either love or friendship; both of which are so called from loving; but loving is nothing else but picking out that one whom you love, with no regard for need or utility; which itself grows up out of friendship, even if you have hardly pursued it.

A system of exchange without utility or exploitation is envisioned. For a stricter but similar ideal, see Cicero’s discussion of *deus* in Cic. *De Off.* esp. 1.149-51
Douglas offers, as correlated with this framework, a second grid, which indexes social control against the complexities of social classification. These last, Douglas argues, are often projected upon the body as a set of ritualised rules or behaviours – a kind of discourse transmuted into symbolic gestures.\textsuperscript{23} The grotesqueries of the Sallustian body indicate its dissidence from prevailing modes of social classification, just as Sallust’s language sometimes indicates a dissidence from polite and elliptical discourse about the body.\textsuperscript{24} A body that refuses the reins of prevailing social classifications is an index, Douglas says, of a spirit that rejects social pressure or the authority of the group and is likely to rebel.\textsuperscript{25} The historian has taken advantage of the body’s function as a locus of social significations to bind up corruption, on the one hand, with conspiracy and rebellion on the other: a corrupt body is a rebellious body and, we are meant to think, vice-versa.

So the wild bodily urges of Catiline’s *catervae*, I would argue, show that these bodies belong to men who are ‘out of grid’: a natural reserve army for would-be rebels. Then a more conventional mechanism of corruption appears to take over. The structure of the passage cited above suggests a schema by which young men waste their inheritance on bodily pleasures,

\begin{flushleft} (ed. Winterbottom 1994). *Decus* itself was, for Cicero, a kind of bodily metaphor: Cic. *De Off.* 98-100, 126-27. \end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{23} E.g. among the Nuer as described in Douglas 1973:114-22.

\textsuperscript{24} For example, his use of the word *penis* in the passage already cited might be read in light of Cicero’s remarks at *Fam.* 9.22:

\begin{quote}
*Caudam antiqui ‘penem’ vocabant, ex quo est propter similitudinem ‘penicillus’; at hodie ‘penis’ est in obscenis. ‘At vero Piso ille Frugi in Annalibus suis queritur adolescens penit dedit esse.’ Quod tu in epistula appendas suo nomine, ille tectius ‘penem’; sed, quia multi, factum est tam obscenum quam id verbum, qua tu usus es.\end{quote}

The ancients used to call a cock a ‘penis’, from which, by way of likeness, ‘little penis’; but nowadays ‘penis’ is obscene. ‘But Piso Frugi complains in his *Annals* that young men are given over to their penises.’ What you in your letter call by its name, he more delicately calls ‘penis’; but, because many [have so used it,] it has become as obscene as the word you used. (tr. Watt 1982).

To use *penis* in a history was acceptable at some point in the past, but no longer; now (in Cicero’s day) it is obscene. Should Sallust’s usage therefore be understood as both archaising and an affront to the literary decency of his contemporaries?

\textsuperscript{25} Douglas 1973:146-47.
thereby falling into dependence on credit or crime for their living: *quicumque inpudicus, adulter, ganeo, manu, ventre, pene bona patria laceraverat quique alienum aës grande conflagverat, quo flagitium aut facinus redimeret* (Sall. Cat. 14.2). This indebtedness gives Catiline a handle, so to speak, by which to get hold of his clientele.

So addiction to bodily pleasures is both symbolic of corruption and, as Sallust claims, instrumental to corruption’s progress by less metaphorical means.

But if the naked, permeable body lies at the beginning of all corruption, the spirit, here as elsewhere, marks its most extreme extent. A *conscius animus* drives the Catilinarians to undertake all manner of crimes for their leader. And Catiline himself, according to the biography Sallust writes for him, has beaten this path for the rest of them:

*Iam primum adulescens Catilina multa nefanda stupra fecerat, cum virgine nobili, cum sacerdote Vestae, alia huiusce modi contra ius fasque. Postremo captus amore Aureliae Orestillae, cuius praeter formam nihil umquam bonus laudavit, quod ea nubere illi dubitabat timens rivignum adulta aetate, pro certo creditur necato filio vacuum domum scelestis nuptiis fecisse ... Namque animus inpurus, dis hominibusque infestus, neque vigiliis neque quietibus sedari poterat: ita conscientia mentem excitam vastabat. Igitur color ei exsanguis, foedi oculi, citus modo, modo tardus incessus: prorsus in facie vultuque vecordia inerat.*

Even in youth Catiline committed many shameful violations – with a maiden of noble rank, with a priestess of Vesta – and other affairs equally unlawful and impious. At last he was seized with a passion for Aurelia Orestilla, in whom no good man ever commended anything save her beauty; and when she hesitated to marry him because she was afraid of his stepson, then a grown man, it is generally believed that he murdered the young man in order to make an empty house for this criminal marriage ... his guilt-stained soul, at odds with Gods and men, could find rest neither waking or sleeping, so cruelly did conscience ravage his overwrought mind. Hence his pallid complexion, his bloodshot eyes, his gait now fast,

---

26 'For whatever wanton, adulterer, whorer, ruffian, glutton, or satyr had wasted his patrimony in play, feasting or debauchery; anyone who had contracted an immense debt that he might buy immunity from disgrace or crime.'

now slow; in short, his face and his every glance showed the madman.
(Sall. Cat. 15)

His career begins with a series of sexual crimes, the *penis* being a powerful instrument of corruption for him as for others. Spurred on by that obstinate organ, as, it is implied, by the hope of profit, he progresses to murder, the guilt of which renders his soul *impirus*. Here, however, the circle closes: his guilt (*conscientia*; compare *conscius animus* at Sall. Cat. 14.2, quoted above) wrecks his mind, and Catiline's body, by a kind of inverse *Dorian Gray* effect, ends up showing outwardly the signs of his spiritual corruption.

If body and mind can corrupt one another mutually, it seems nevertheless clear that Sallust locates the origin and chief sign of corruption in bodies and their desires. As soon as these break out from under what Douglas would call the grid pressure imposed on them by the staid public morality of Republican Rome, they begin to pull after them the minds that ought to be commanding them; their trajectory, inevitably, is toward antisocial violence. Catiline's *catervae* of leaky bodies, on this reading, come to look almost like actors in a parable, out of control at first and then condignly punished. Moreover, the stark outward marking of their corruption makes them easily recognisable. Sallust's readership was hardly in danger of identifying with such monsters.

Speaking of identification, we said before that Sallust drew a somewhat self-exculpatory moral from all this. Now let us turn to his autobiography in the preface to the *Bellum Catilinae*, where we find, incidentally, the sole instance in the entire work of *corruptus vel sim* as applied to an individual:

```
Sed ego adulescentulus initio, sicuti plerique, studio ad rem publicam latus sum ibique mihi multa adversa fuere. Nam pro pudore, pro abstinentia, pro virtute audacia, largitio, avaritia vigebant. Quae tametsi animus aspernabatur insolens malorum artium, tamen inter tanta vitia imbecilla aetas ambitione corrupta tenebatur; ac me, cum ab reliquorum malis moribus dissentirem, nihil minus honoris cupidis eadem, qua ceteros, fama atque invidia vexabat.
```

When I myself was a young man, my inclinations at first led me, like many others, into public life, and there I encountered many

---

28 On which as a topos, see Rosillo Lopez 2010:143-45.
obstacles; for instead of modesty, chastity and honesty, shamelessness, bribery and rapacity he held sway. And although my soul, a stranger to evil ways, recoiled from such faults, yet amid so many vices my youthful weakness was corrupted and held captive by ambition; for while I did not consent in the evil practices of the others, yet the desire for preferment made me the victim of the same ill-repute and jealousy as they.

(Sall. Cat. 3.3-5)

Beneath the superficial argument of Sallust’s *apologia*, we can discern a whole physic of bodies at work. The cardinal vices themselves – *audacia, largitio, avaritia* – are described in a vitalist language; *vigebant* points, both phonomically and etymologically, to the *vis* that Sallust identifies, here and elsewhere, with the power of the body. The soul, on the other hand, stands apart, as the innocent and, as we shall shortly have occasion to show, the ‘true’ self. That lack of experience that marks a strength and resistance in the spirit, however, reappears in the body as weakness: the *imbecilla aetas* falls easily into the grip of corrupting ambition, and gives the latter its power over the course of Sallust’s early life.

The redemptive movement that follows this chronicles Sallust’s escape from corruption through a re-assertion of control over his body, which he accomplishes with the aid of historiography:

*Ignor urbani animus ex multis miseriis atque periculis requievi et mihi reliquiam aetatem a re publica procul habendum decrevi, non fuit consilium socordia atque desidia bonum otiu conterere neque vero agrum colundo aut venando, servilibus officiis, intentum aetatem agere; sed, a quo incepto studioque me ambitio mala detinuerat, eodem regressus statui res gestas populi Romani carptim, ut quaeque*

29 E.g. Sall. Cat. 1: *Sed diu magnum inter mortalis certamen fuit, vine corporis an virtute animi res militaris magis procederet* (But for a long time there has been an argument among men as to whether military matters proceed better by bodily force or by mental virtue). For parallel vocabulary, cf. Catiline’s speech at *Cat.* 20: *Victoria in manu nobis est: viget aetas, animus valet; contra illis annis atque divitiis omnia consenuerunt* (Victory is within our grasp; we are strong in age, and our minds have power; on the other hand for them, with their years and fortunes, all things wax old). It should be conceded that the association is not so strong as to be exclusive, and that Sallustian *animi* also sometimes have *vim*; but in the more metaphysical (and, dare we say, considered?) sentences of his prefaces, force seems to go with the body; cf. e.g. Sall. *Iug.* 2.
memoria digna videbantu, perscribere, eo magis, quod mihi a spe, metu, partibus rei publicae animus liber erat.

Accordingly, when my mind had found peace after many troubles and perils and I had determined that I must pass what was left of my life aloof from public affairs, it was not my intention to waste my precious leisure in indolence and sloth, nor yet by turning to farming or the chase, to lead a life devoted to slavish employments. On the contrary, I resolved to return to a cherished purpose from which ill-starred ambition had diverted me, and write a history of the Roman people, selecting such portions as seemed to me worthy of record; and I was confirmed in this resolution by the fact that my mind was free from hope, and fear, and partisanship.

(Sall. Cat. 4.1-2)

The prevalence of ablative nouns in these lines gives us a grammatical diagnosis of Sallust’s own emphasis on separation and distancing. The animus, a subject position previously involved in an oppositional encounter with the political vices (quae ... aspernabatur), now follows a line of flight from these disasters; simultaneously, the authorial first person, which had been submerged in a series of third person passives and periphrastics, re-emerges as the subject of verbs (decrevi, statui) that place it in control of its own destiny.

Striking, at least by comparison with the extant remains of the Latin tradition, is his devaluation here of hunting and farming, two pursuits that earlier writers had regarded, and Sallust’s contemporaries continued to regard, as innocent and even laudable dispositions of free time. When Cato tells us that: Maiores nostri ... virum bonum quom laudabant, ita laudabant: bonum agricolam bonumque colonum ('When our forefathers praised a man, they praised him thus: [that he was] a good farmer and a good planter', Cat. Agr. Praef. 2; ed. Goujard 1975), he might well be suspected of having a partie prise; when Cicero or Virgil confirms this, we should admit that Sallust has gone pretty sharply astray from what we might call a national ideology.

30 A tangled sentence, says McGushin 1977, ad loc, ‘characteristic of the unwieldy period-structure of early Latin’. But he helpfully points up the sovereign implications of decrevi, a word more commonly associated with the official acts of senates and monarchs than with the decisions of private individuals.

31 E.g. Cic. De Off. 1.151: Omnium autem rerum, ex quibus aliquid adquiritur, nihil est agri cultura melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius, nihil homine libero dignius (Of
Taking note of this inversion, Ronald Syme argues that the pursuits Sallust denigrates here had by the Late Republic acquired a strong class coding, as indeed seems to have been the case: as early as the mid-second century BC, Greek habits of recreational hunting had begun to make inroads among the nobles at Rome, and Cato’s *De Agri Cultura* is itself symptomatic of an expanding latifundia system that enriched those same nobles even as it exacerbated the land disputes that helped end the Republic.\(^{32}\) By now, though, it should hardly surprise us if what looks like social coding turns out to have a corporeal dimension as well – a fact that, according to a Roman metaphor which associated the labouring classes with the limbs of a body that was managed by the patrician élite, he only emphasizes by calling them *servilia officia*.\(^{33}\) Indeed, Sallust begins his work by drawing a distinction between mind and body in suggestively similar terms: *animi imperio*, he writes, *corporis servitio magis utimur* (*Sall. Cat.* 1.2).

So Sallust uses the body in the *Bellum Catilinae* not only as a ‘natural symbol’ to mark divergence from the grid, but also, at least in the passages just cited, as a tool to work against the grid itself; he shows, in his own life history, that a lateral move away from the grid could work as a restorative against the corrupting influence of late-Republican political life. This claim is not unrelated to our earlier observation that the *Bellum Catilinae* never explicitly labels anyone as *corruptus* except its own author. Where the text locates personal knowledge of the disease, it also locates authority to recommend a cure. Predictably, too – at least on Mary Douglas’s analysis – Sallust conducts his attack on the Roman grid in a language that is alien to that grid; the connections between Sallust’s autobiographical rhetoric and

---

\(^{32}\) Reay 2005:335-48; Flower 2010:71-78. For the aristocratic valence of hunting and agriculture in Sallust’s preface, see Syme 2002b:43-46. The alternative argument, presented by McGushin *ad loc.*, that Sallust writes here in ‘unthinking imitation of his Greek sources’ is unsatisfying on several counts, but most of all because no Greek source gives the pairing of hunting and farming that Sallust here employs. Which is hardly surprising: hunting, of course, was an aristocratic pursuit in Greece as well as Rome.

\(^{33}\) *AUC* 2.32.9-12; Reay 2005:353-58.
that of Plato in his letters are well known.\textsuperscript{34} We may have to do here, I would suggest in passing, with one of those rare and vanishing points of articulation by which Greek thought exerted a real influence on the social structures of Rome, and not only upon its literature.

How seriously, in the end, should we take Sallust’s picture of corruption? As a direct representation of facts, hardly at all. I hope to have shown, however, that the \textit{Bellum Catilinae} can tell us much about how corruption worked in the mental world of late-Republican Rome, and to have suggested that Sallust’s descriptive art, especially in his autobiography, was not without its implications for Rome’s future. In setting down the outward symptoms of corruption and by suggesting the liberal arts as a means of curing these, Sallust may have been drafting an outline of early imperial propaganda. The moral rectitude of an Augustus, the propriety of his household, all marked him out as uncorrupted and incorruptible; meanwhile, as Suetonius among others suggests, his pursuit of learning and patronage of the arts did much to mitigate the well-attested cruelty of his youth.\textsuperscript{35} And if, as we have argued, an out-of-control body could serve as a symbol in late-Republican Rome for revolution, the body subjected to settled social categories could equally signify civil peace. Sallust’s apologia, in short, went not only for himself, but for the new Roman order that was about to be born. The stubborn problem of invisible corruption could be laid to rest once somebody had discovered its outward corporeal signs.

\textbf{Bibliography}

Bernstein, B. 1964. ‘Social class, speech systems, and psychotherapy.’ \textit{British Journal of Sociology} 15.1:54-64.

\textsuperscript{34} E.g. McGushin 1977:3.4 \textit{ad loc}. For a consideration of these connections in the context of other Sallustian borrowings, see Renehan 1976. Renehan’s claim that Sallust’s allusions, including that under discussion here, generally contain a critical content available only to those who recognize their source tends to confirm my own reading above.

\textsuperscript{35} Suet. \textit{Aug.} 84-89, esp. 86 (ed. Carter 1982); for the Augustan sumptuary and moral laws, see Syme 2002a:442-45; for Augustan laws against electoral bribery, and a brief explanation as to why these were more than a mere gesture, see Wallace-Hadrill 1989:79.


Erskine, A. 1991. ‘Hellenistic monarchy and Roman political invective.’ CQ 41.1:106-120.


THE CORRUPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION: 
THE LEX GABINIA AND LEX MANILIA AND THE 
CHANGING RES PUBLICA*

Hannah J. Swithinbank
Visiting scholar, UNISA

Introduction

Pompeius’ commands against the Mediterranean pirates and Mithridates in the 60s BC have long been considered together. They are often seen as an important, possibly an ‘extraordinary’ moment in the decline of the Roman Republic, when one man’s popularity gained him unrivalled power, a moment that was important in the ongoing destabilisation of the Republican political system.¹ This article will discuss the way in which the statutes that established these commands – the lex Gabinia and lex Manilia – were part of a long-running process by which the constitution evolved over time and through which Rome changed from Republic to Principate. It will also argue that it is valid to think in terms of Rome as having a constitution, without having to refer to it in ‘scare quotes’.² An examination of the statutes shows that the Romans interpreted and argued about the nature of their constitution as they responded to the challenges facing their city. These laws were, fundamentally, an ad hoc solution to long-running problems; at the same time, the nature of the solution altered the Roman understanding of what was possible and permissible in their res publica. Effectively, they changed the constitution, although they did not intend to. The question is whether this process and these changes were integral to Rome’s constitution or a corruption of it – or both. The statutes allowed Rome to respond to immediate problems and secure the res publica. At the same time, the nature of this response contributed to larger

* Many thanks are due to the Fondation Hardt for providing resources and support during my research for this article, and to Christopher Smith, R.J. Covino, Laurie Wilson and Clifford Ando for their advice during the course of my work on it.


problems, fuelling a conflict between the Senate and the People and putting Pompeius in a position of unrivalled power that made him both a potential threat to Rome and a model for others to emulate and equal. In this way they also contributed to the growing instability in Rome during the 1st century BC which led, ultimately, to the end of the Republican period and the establishment of the Principate.³

Constitutional change

Before we can talk about the Roman constitution, we first need to establish what a constitution is and what it does within a society, and decide whether Rome — which, famously, had no written constitution — can be said to have had one. We can then consider the ways in which constitutions change and what the ideas of integrity and corruption might mean in relation to this.

In modern politics the term ‘constitution’ is often used to refer to a written document or a codified body of legislation that lays out the way in which a political system or government functions. We assume the existence of defined structures and institutions that work in a set and predictable manner in order to uphold the political system of the society in question, and expect legislators and judges to be able to refer to it in the performance of their duties, leading to consistency in political practice.⁴ We expect ‘[t]o see politics as working within a constitutional order rather than working out that constitutional order.’⁵

³ It is important to note that our conception of the Roman ‘republic’ is contemporary. The Romans referred to their political system as the res publica, and the term continued to be used to refer to Rome into what we refer to as the Empire. When we refer to a republic now, we tend to mean that a state has a particular kind of constitution distinguishing it as a republic, which the Oxford English Dictionary describes as ‘[a] state in which the supreme power rests in the people and their elected representatives or officers, as opposed to one governed by a king or similar ruler’. The term res publica, which can be literally translated as ‘public thing’ (Atkins 2005:492), does not of itself specify a particular kind of constitution — be it monarchy, oligarchy or democracy. However, the Romans knew something had changed in the res publica in this period: we have applied the terms ‘republic’ and ‘empire’ or ‘principate’ to describe these changes, and it can be helpful to use them so long as we do not import our conceptions of these systems and map them directly onto the res publica.

⁴ North 2006:257; Roberts 2005:356.
⁵ Leonard 2002:15.
There is, however, a different way of thinking about a constitution, outlined in the following definitions by Anthony King and Lawrence Lessig.

[A constitution is] the set of the most important rules and common understandings in any given country that regulate the relations among that country’s governing institutions and also the relations between that country’s governing institutions and the people of that country.6

[By] ‘constitution’ I mean an architecture – not just a legal text but a way of life – that structures and constrains social and legal power, to the end of protecting fundamental values.7

In this understanding, a constitution is not simply the institutions, structures and processes within which political activity takes place, but also the political culture that embeds them in their society and enables them to function. Such cultural and constitutional principles are rarely written down or codified, but they are standards that are generally understood by the citizens to exist and to be important to the maintenance of their society, and they are worked out through the political life of a community.8

It is this concept of a constitution that I wish to pursue. Rome’s political system may have been uncodified and complex,9 but there was an architecture of institutions, processes, rules and principles which supported the community that was the res publica. Political life was directed by a nexus of authorities: statutes passed by the people, decrees issued by the Senate, legal interpretations of jurists and edicts of magistrates, precedent, custom and moral and ethical values out of which an understanding of something that we can call ‘the Roman constitution’ was constructed and embedded in the society of the res publica.10 Moreover,

---

6 King 2007:3.
9 King 2007:5 stresses the difference between ‘uncodified’ and ‘unwritten’, arguing that most constitutions we think of as ‘unwritten’ actually incorporate a good deal of written material (statutes and judgements, for example) which are not codified formally into a ‘constitution’.
10 Cic. Top. 28 describes the authorities of the ius civile, which was but one element in the complex legal system governing political praxis in the res publica;
the Romans believed they had such a well-established, entrenched political system that its rules and principles were important to their success as a political society, and they continually debated how best to act in accordance with this throughout their decision-making processes (as we will see in discussing the *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia* below).

The way that this collection of rules and principles worked in practice had to be interpreted by those participating in Rome's political life in a process Hölkeskamp has called a 'making sense' of the environment. It regulated the behaviour of Rome's political bodies and the relationships between them, and established conventions about the way things should work and the values that were important in Roman society. This 'making sense' took place through a discursive process of interpretation, debate and decision-making in the forum, Senate and courts, with each decision building on those that had gone before it and reforming the constitution as it came to reflect the decision that had been made. Claims were made for and against proposals on the grounds that they were legal or illegal, and these were rooted in appeals to the various authorities noted above. If a particular argument was accepted by the audience – be it by the election of a candidate to office, the judgement of a court case, or the passage of a

however, the sources of authority are largely the same when considering appropriate action within the *res publica* as a whole, with the *ius civile* taking its place as an authority guiding such action. Cic. *Rep.* 1.39 presents the *res publica* as being formed of the *populus* and instituted out of their desire to form a society; 1.45, 54 and 65 note the benefits of a mixed political system and 2.1-37 describes the growth of this system at Rome. Polyb. 6.11-18 also presents Rome's political system as an interconnected collection of elements, focusing on the magistrates, the senate and the people. See Hölkeskamp 2010:17-22 for discussion of the construction and embedding of this system in Rome.

11 Bleicken 1975:13-14 argues throughout that, although there was no 'officially entrenched' constitution, the fundamental order at Rome was entrenched in practice; Straumann 2011:283-84 argues that there was a constitution in Roman political thought and in reality – not least because the thought impacted upon the political reality through the things that the Romans said and the ways that they acted.

12 Hölkeskamp 2010:54. This is equivalent to the idea that a society 'works out' its constitutional order; Leonard 2002:15. This process takes place through elections, debates about legislation, the passing of legislation and legal judgements – see Sunstein 2009:3, 23 for a description in the modern sphere. See also King 2007:5-6, 8-9, who notes the way that constitutional change may pass unnoticed through the passing of 'ordinary' legislation, as opposed to specific legislation dealing with the constitution.
law – its legality was accepted and it might be seen as constitutional. It then entered a body of knowledge about Rome’s constitution that was drawn upon and interpreted in making future decisions. Through the deliberative process and the negotiations and compromises it often entailed, conflicts were resolved, consensus formed and new rules and conventions became – gradually – a part of Rome’s constitution.⁰¹

This is not to say that this process was consciously constitutional. Cicero claimed that Rome’s ancestors were invariably guided by expediency, ‘always meeting new emergencies by fresh developments of policy’,⁰² suggesting contingency rather than fully conceived or intentional constitutional reform. Ando has argued that there was ‘a fundamental incapacity’ in Rome to conceive and articulate meaningful reform on a broad scale. It might rather be said, not that the Romans could not conceive and articulate meaningful constitutional reform (Cicero’s treatises of the 50s show that he, at least, was thinking about the political system as a whole), but that they could not enact it in a wholesale manner – something that is difficult for any state.⁰³ The majority of decisions made and actions taken in Rome were responses to current problems – such as the growth of piracy in the Mediterranean or the Mithridatic war – and they subtly, if unintentionally, altered Rome’s constitutional arrangements through the nature of these responses and the way they created new arguments and precedents.

Constitutional change can occur in several different ways: by formal processes such as those established in some codified constitutions (such as Article Five of the constitution of the United States), but also by the passing of other statutes that are not specifically about the constitution, the pronouncement of legal judgements, and the changing of public opinion and political values over time.⁰⁴ This is not necessarily a negative process that destroys a constitution but one that alters it gradually, allowing it to change over time and with the times. King has argued that the term

---

⁰¹ Hölkeskamp 2010:41. The narrative history of Roman politics as told by Roman historians also highlights the way in which Rome’s constitution was altered over time as new laws were passed and new decisions were made.
⁰³ Ando 2010:46-50. Perhaps the only obvious exception to this claim was Sulla; but Sulla was in a most unusual position as dictator, being able to attempt to ‘reset’ Rome’s political system through the passage of a large number of leges Corneliae.
'unconstitutional' has no precise meaning in an uncodified constitution because it is not a benchmark against which ideas and actions can be measured, it is ‘what happens’. Indeed it is difficult to argue that any statute passed or decision made is ‘unconstitutional’ if it is accepted through the decision-making processes of the society in question, whether these are established in statute or are conventions accepted by consensus. In an uncodified constitution such as that of Rome, the evolutionary process can be particularly hard to identify or to challenge (especially from within the society), for change occurs through the ‘normal processes’ of government. This is, in fact, an integral part of an uncodified constitution, and one can regard developments in Rome’s constitution, such as those to which the lex Gabinia and lex Manilia contributed, as possessing constitutional integrity of this kind. At its best this can allow a constitution to adapt to changing circumstances, the stability of society ensured by the forging of a consensus around the successful interpretation. At the same time, however, it can also create problems, as the decisions made and the precedents set may destabilise or corrupt the ideals and institutions and damage political relationships the constitution is supposed to uphold.

To talk about the integrity or corruption of a constitution presupposes that a constitution is supposed to do something within a society. Its purpose, in terms of the ideals and systems it is supposed to uphold, depends upon the society or the ‘type’ of political system the constitution is underpinning (be it democracy, monarchy, or so on). However, this purpose can be hard to identify in communities with uncodified constitutions, as they are not established conscientiously or to do something specific: they emerge as the community they support develops. Generally speaking, however, constitutions may be supposed to uphold certain key principles and to ensure stable, regular government of a society, both of which are desirable features of a stable state. This leads us to two further questions: (1) If either or both of these things are undermined, can we then consider the constitution to have been corrupted, and (2) if the answer to this is ‘yes’ (which I think it is), how do we identify such corruption of the constitution?

I suggest that corruption can be identified in two main ways: in the presence of political instability and in the undermining or overriding of key political principles. The former is more easily noticeable for it can be seen in the growth of political and social rifts and even violence and civil

---

war. The latter is harder to identify, as the key principles in a society are formulated and understood in a process similar to that through which the constitution itself is interpreted: principles being matters of negotiation and of consensus, and subject to change over time. Think, for example, of the ideas libertas or virtus, or of the ideological debates over the role of the ‘people’ in Rome, which changed and developed over time, but which were critical to Roman politics.\textsuperscript{19} These ideas were often explored in the different interpretations of the constitution put forward in the decision-making process, and so a successful argument could claim to be upholding them because it was endorsed through accepted processes. Arguing about the unconstitutional nature of a proposal or a statute on these grounds is difficult and often a matter of personal perspective. Perhaps the one thing we can securely say about Rome’s constitutional principles during the 1st century, is that the res publica was not a monarchy and that collegiality, annuity and a balance of power between magistrates, Senate and People were particularly important principles in relation to office holding. This may help us in considering the impact Pompeius’ Eastern commands had upon the constitution of the res publica, for these statutes gave him great personal power, and the opponents of these bills were concerned that it was too much power for one man to hold.

The lex Gabinia and lex Manilia.

The lex Gabinia and lex Manilia each intended to enable Rome to deal with two long-running problems, the Mediterranean pirates and the Mithridatic War, with each tribune identifying Pompeius as the best man to hold the commands.\textsuperscript{20} Piracy had been a persistent problem for Rome since the end of the 2nd century – the result of Rome’s weakening of the Eastern monarchies and powers who had previously kept the problem under control whilst refusing to become fully involved in administering


\textsuperscript{20} Williams 1984:222-34 discusses the way that Pompeius’ appointment to both commands came about, emphasising the separateness of these two laws and arguing that there was no Pompeian master plan to see him hold both commands in quick succession.
the region.\(^{21}\) During the Mithridatic Wars, which rumbled on from the early 80s, the threat increased as Roman attention in the Eastern Mediterranean focused on him rather than on the problem of piracy. Although the pirates may not have been as directly associated with Mithridates as Appian suggests, they still benefited from the instability his actions caused in the Eastern Mediterranean.\(^ {22}\) In order to enable Pompeius to tackle these problems, both Gabinius’ and Manilius’ proposals made certain provisions for him as a commander: they ensured that he had the *imperium* he needed to command, allotted his *provinciae*, and also established the forces that he would have at hand.\(^ {23}\) The *lex Gabinia* established a three-year command to be held by a former consul who would be granted proconsular *imperium* and have the authority to act against the pirates across the Mediterranean and up to 50 miles inland. It also provided for 15 legates with propraetorian *imperium*, 200 ships, full control over his levy and the right to take as much money as he needed from the public treasury and taxes.\(^ {24}\) The *lex Manilia* added the provinces of Bithynia and Cilicia, along with the Mithridatic command and gave Pompeius the right to ‘make

\(^{21}\) Sherwin-White 1976:3; Ormerod 1997:199-207. For comprehensive accounts of Rome’s activities and developing empire in the East, see Magie 1950; Sherwin-White 1984; Gruen 1984; and Kallet-Marx 1995. The last is particularly important in considering the commands of Pompeius in relation to the development of the Roman Empire (291-334), seeing Rome’s presence in the East was part of an ongoing process of maintaining and defending the *imperium Romanum* and arguing that the campaigns of Pompeius marked a changing conception of empire and an increased commitment to it.


\(^{23}\) The *provinciae* allotted by the *lex Gabinia* have been the subject of much debate, given that Pompeius had the power to act within 50 miles of the coast in other commanders’ *provinciae* (Plut. *Pomp.* 25.2; App. *Mith.* 94), leading to speculation as to whether he possessed *imperium maius* (Last 1947:160-62; Ehrenberg 1953:114; Loader 1940:134-36; Jameson 1970:539-43; Syme 1939:336; and Brennan 2000:408). This debate falls outside the scope of this article, but it seems that the functional element of the *provinciae* ought to have been enough to separate Pompeius’ field of action from those of his peers where they overlapped geographically, and that problems only emerged in Crete because Pompeius and Metellus were both responsible for dealing with piracy; see Richardson 1986:4-5; Lintott 1993:22; Stewart 1998:95-136 on the importance of function to the *provinciae*.

peace and war as he liked, and to proclaim nations friends or enemies according to his own judgement.\textsuperscript{25}

Tribunician legislation – the passing of plebiscita – was not itself unusual, but tribunician legislation dealing with the foreign and military affairs of the res publica was not a Roman norm and had in the past been controversial.\textsuperscript{26} Traditionally, these matters were the responsibility of the Senate: they dealt with embassies and decided upon the provinciae to be allotted each year and the forces and funds commanders received for their activities in these areas.\textsuperscript{27} Provinciae were then shared out amongst the annual magistrates through a ritual allotment, the imperium they required to carry out their roles established through their election to office. Such a system allowed equity of opportunity in a highly competitive system and also ensured that no one individual gained too much power within the Republic.\textsuperscript{28}

Of course, these norms were not absolute. Privati had been appointed to military commands when it was deemed necessary in the past, particularly during the Second Punic War when more commanders were needed than was provided for by the annual magistracies – the most famous example being the appointment of the future Scipio Africanus to a proconsulship in Spain in 210.\textsuperscript{29} Exceptions had been made to the usual regulations of the cursus honorum in order to allow certain men to hold particular commands, notably Scipio Aemilianus, elected consul for 147 because of the popular view that he would be able to defeat Carthage, and Marius, elected to successive consulships so that he could hold the

\textsuperscript{25} App. Mith. 94-95; Plut. Pomp. 25.2; 30.1-2; 45.2; Dio 36.42.4; Vell. 2.31.2; 33.1. Pompeius added Pontus and Syria to his provinces through his military campaigns.

\textsuperscript{26} Sandberg 2001:97-113 argues that in the mid-Republic all civil legislation was in the hands of the tribunes, although Crawford 2004:171-72 notes that this might simply reflect the fact that the tribunes were in the city all year. The appointment of Marius to the Jugurthine Command (Sall. Jug. 73.7) and the Pontic command under the lex Sulpicia of 88 (Plut. Mar. 35, Sull. 8-9; App. BCiv. 1.55-60) are the obvious predecessors of these plebiscita.

\textsuperscript{27} Polyb. 6.12-13. Lintott 1999:65. Hölkeskamp 2010:65, who also notes (26) that this tradition was established by consensus, not statute law.


\textsuperscript{29} Livy 26.18-19.
command against the Cimbri and Teutones after defeating Jugurtha. Pompeius himself had held commands ‘out of turn’ in the past – leading his own army on Sulla’s behalf in the 80s, and then being assigned to help deal with Lepidus and Sertorius in the 70s.

The notable difference in the 60s was that the majority of the Senate opposed the lex Gabinia and lex Manilia. In acting despite this opposition, Gabinius and Manilius were part of a slow-building increase in tribunician involvement/interference in foreign affairs that had begun to use the people to direct Rome’s imperial activities. In 133 Tiberius Gracchus had sought to use a plebiscite to accept the Pergamon legacy; in 107 a tribunician proposal granted the command of the Jugurthine war to Marius, even though the Senate had already prorogued Metellus’ command, and in 88 the tribune Servius Sulpicius Rufus proposed to transfer the Mithridatic command from Sulla to Marius. The lex Gabinia and lex Manilia built upon the political and legal legacies of such previous examples and, as such, did not present a radically new interpretation of the constitution but a stage in an ongoing process. Indeed, the constitutional precedents and arguments supporting the lex Sulpicia, which gave a major command to a popular privatus through a law passed by the assembly, may well have been similar to those supporting the lex Gabinia and lex Manilia. That the lex Gabinia did not incite civil war as the lex Sulpicia had done, seems likely to have been due to the fact that it did not remove the command from one consul in order to give it to another man, and to a fear of further civil war deterring the opponents of the bill from taking their opposition as far as Sulla had done. The lex Gabinia and lex Manilia contributed to and confirmed a move towards popular legislation and popular sovereignty in Roman politics and government, changing the nature of Rome’s constitution as it did so.

By putting their bills to the people without the backing of the Senate, Gabinius and Manilius implicitly argued that the people (led by their tri-

---

31 Plut. Pomp. 6, 10-11, 16-17. Evans 2003:46-48, 62 argues that the senate’s use of Pompeius was a matter of political and constitutional necessity, allowing them to deal with problems without unpicking Sulla’s arrangements for the cursus honorum and magistracies.
32 Sall. Jug. 73.7; Sull. 8-9; App. BCiv. 1.55-60.
33 Dio 36.37.1 notes that the senate reluctantly ratified the measures passed by the assembly regarding Pompeius’ command against the pirates.
34 Ando 2010:51.
bunes) not only had the right to pass legislation but also could and should direct Rome’s administration of its Empire, both in terms of deciding what *provincia* should be allotted and in terms of the choice of commander and acted upon this argument. Their claims were not uncontested. As can be seen from Cicero’s speech *Pro lege Manilia*, the debates over the statutes saw the presentation of different interpretations of the constitution for and against them – the key differences being in the understanding of the way that the Empire should be governed (or rather, by whom) and the underlying nature of Rome’s constitution itself. The *Pro lege Manilia* shows Cicero’s response to the arguments of Catulus and Hortensius. The later account of Dio, which recreates some of the speeches made on the subject of the *lex Gabinia*, reflects these arguments in the speech of Catulus, illuminating the debate when examined in conjunction with the *Pro lege Manilia*.35 In the simplest terms, the ‘constitutional’ debate features the Senate (represented by Hortensius and Catulus) arguing that it ran counter to the usual practice, as enshrined in the *mos maiorum*, for Pompeius to be given these commands, suggesting that it would give one man too much power, and favouring the conventional process of allotting *provinciae* to the annual magistrates. Meanwhile the people (led by Gabinius and Manilius and in 66 encouraged by Cicero) saw it as constitutionally legitimate for Pompeius to be appointed to the commands and placed emphasis on the power of the people to respond to the situation and direct Roman policy regarding the empire.

For Cicero the key arbiter of constitutional innovation was the best interests of Rome. According to the interpretation he put forward in the *Pro lege Manilia*, if something was essential for the maintenance of the *res publica* then it must be regarded as legitimate, and this war, which threat-

---

35 Dio 36.23-45. Using Dio’s much later account as evidence for the debates of 67 and 66 is fraught with all the usual historiographical problems regarding his use of sources, his bias and the veracity of his speeches. Dio’s speeches are inevitably influenced by the role the historian wanted them to play in his work, especially in his account of the end of the Republic, including the rise, rivalry and civil wars of other individuals who saw Pompeius as an *exemplum* to be emulated and surpassed (Millar 1964:77-83 and Gowing 1992:34-35, 93). That said, it is unlikely that Dio simply invented the speech and its opinions. It is more probable that he added his own rhetorical style and colour to the basic arguments found in his sources (for example, the arguments of Catulus as seen in Cicero’s speech) and related the speech to his own thematic concerns; see Wiseman 1979:28-29, 51-52; Fornara 1983:142-68 and Woodman 1988:117.
ened Rome’s security, honour and revenues, *must* be won.\textsuperscript{36} Cicero claimed that Rome’s *maiores* had always developed new policies and passed new laws to deal with crises, and cited the examples of Rome’s previous wars to justify his argument; this was, in his view, how Rome worked.\textsuperscript{37} In the current situation, Cicero reasoned, the Romans needed to send the best military commander they had to deal with the situation – Pompeius: ‘The war is necessary … it is an important war and … all the requisite qualifications are in the highest perfection in Cnaeus Pompeius.’\textsuperscript{38} This being the case, Manilius (and for Gabinius before him) was entirely justified in taking the measures necessary to ensure Pompeius’ appointment.

Countering the claim of Hortensius and Catulus that it was not proper to appoint one man to hold so large a command, especially a man who had held several other major commands, Cicero commented:

> I will say nothing about how two wars of the highest importance, the Punic and Spanish wars, were successfully terminated by one and the same general, at that time when two most formidable cities, Carthage and Numantia, each a terrible menace to our Empire, were both destroyed by Scipio Aemilianus. I refrain likewise from reminding you of the more recent occasion when you and your fathers decided to vest the entire hopes of the Roman world in Gaius Marius, so that this single individual was loaded with a multiplicity of commands against Jugurtha, the Cimbri and the Teutones. And finally, let us pass on to Gnaeus Pompeius himself. Here is the man for whom Quintus Catulus objects that no new precedent ought to be established. But just consider how many new precedents have already been created in his favour – with Catulus’ full approval.\textsuperscript{39}

In arguing that the *maiores* had always done what was necessary to protect Rome, Cicero argued that any innovation in this proposal was constitutionally legitimate and secondly that, because of the historical precedents for Pompeius taking up the Mithridatic command, the bill was actually not

\textsuperscript{36} Cic. *Leg. Man.* 6, 14, 20-51, 71.
\textsuperscript{37} Cic. *Leg. Man.* 6, 11, 14, 60.
\textsuperscript{38} Cic. *Leg. Man.* 51.
\textsuperscript{39} Cic. *Leg. Man.* 60.
particularly innovating at all. Evolution, for Cicero, was a legitimate and integral part of the Roman constitution.

The difference on this occasion, as the Pro lege Manilia acknowledged, was that the Senate had supported Pompeius’ previous appointments. However, Cicero claimed that the Roman people had the right to appoint Pompeius to this command and warned his opponents to be careful not to overrule the judgement of the people, especially after their previous employment of him. Cicero’s words unwillingly admit the complexity of the constitutional relationship between Senate and People in terms of who was ultimately in charge of deciding upon Rome’s best course of action, arguing that if the people were making the wrong decisions, then the Senate should counsel them, but if the people were making the right decisions then the Senate should bow to the authority of the populus. At the same time he tries to avoid this complexity and any questions on how to judge whether the people were making the right decision, by simply declaring that, on this occasion, the people had been proved right by Pompeius’ success in the piracy command, to which he had been appointed by the people against the wishes of the Senate.

Catulus and Hortensius, along with other members of the Senate, appear to have argued for an alternative interpretation of the constitution. In the Pro lege Manilia Cicero comments that Hortensius had argued that there was no need to give one man the kind of power that the lex Manilia would have given Pompeius and that Catulus had argued that ‘[i]nnovations … must not be made contrary to the precedents and principles of our ancestors,’ and so no precedents should be set for Pompeius. Dio’s

40 Blösel 2000:68-87 argues that by this kind of argument Cicero succeeded in broadening the concept of the maiores to apply to the whole people, previously ‘owned’ by the aristocracy as a justification of their authority (in the way that Catulus and Hortensius may well have done); Morstein-Marx 2004:79 note 56 and Stemmler 2000:141-205 argue for a less restricted use of maiores.

41 Cic. Leg. Man. 63: ‘Let them [the senate] take care that it is not considered a most unjust and intolerable thing, that their authority in matters affecting the dignity of Gnaeus Pompeius should hitherto have been constantly approved of by you [the people], but that your judgement, and the authority of the Roman people in the case of the same man, should be disregarded by them. Especially when the Roman people can now, of its own right, defend its own authority with respect to this man against all who dispute it, because, when those very same men objected, you chose him alone of all men to appoint to the management of the war against the pirates.’

42 Cic. Leg. Man. 52 (Hortensius), 59 (Catulus).
representation of Catulus’ position in the debate on the *lex Gabinia* reflects Cicero’s presentation of his views and provides an opposition between the two points of view that shows two different understandings of Rome’s constitution. Catulus focuses on two interconnected themes: the importance of acting in accordance with historical precedent to maintain the ancestral constitution, and the danger of setting the kind of precedent that was inherent in the *lex Gabinia*, because it would give Pompeius more power than was legal or safe, and because it would create resentment amongst others seeking magistracies and commands.\(^{43}\)

Dio shows Catulus arguing in favour of a convention by which election to a magistracy was followed by allotment of *provinciae* in a process that provided for the administration of Rome’s Empire and allowed the Republic to respond to threats. Thus, Catulus asks, ‘To what end, indeed, do you elect the annual officials, if you are going to make no use of them for such occasions?’\(^{44}\) It seems safe to suggest that Catulus’ interpretation of the constitution placed emphasis on tradition, continuity and the maintenance of constitutional convention (in contrast to Cicero’s view of an evolving constitution), shown in his desire to preserve the traditional role of the annual magistracy in the constitution and the competition for election that accompanied it, rather than creating a special command.

The different ways in which Gabinius and Manilius, Catulus and Cicero interpreted Rome’s constitution provide an insight into Rome’s political decision-making process and into the role that it played in constitutional evolution. Different arguments could be drawn from the same pool of laws and precedents to present an audience with different understandings of constitutional action. This is particularly clear if one looks at how Dio presents Catulus using Marius as an *exemplum* to draw the opposite conclusion to that which Cicero put forward in the *Pro lege Manilia*. For Cicero, Marius was a positive example in showing the way the constitution allowed Rome to respond to remarkable events and preserve the *res publica*.\(^{45}\) For Dio’s Catulus, Marius was a negative figure whose positions and power created problems in Roman politics and damaged the political system.\(^{46}\) It is, of course, very possible that Dio chose Marius as Catulus’ example exactly because of Cicero’s use of him,

\(^{44}\) Dio 36.33.2.  
\(^{45}\) Cic. *Leg. Man.* 60.  
\(^{46}\) Dio 36.31.3-4.
but this only serves to emphasise the point that there was more than one way to interpret the Roman constitution from its various constituent parts.

Indeed, the debate over the *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia* seems to have centred on the ideas of the integrity or corruption of the constitution in relation to the power held by an individual.\(^\text{47}\) On one side was the argument that constitutional change, as it occurred through Rome's various political processes, was an integral part of the constitution of the *res publica* and that Pompeius was the right man for the right time. On the other side was the argument that these changes would corrupt the *res publica*'s constitution, creating political instability by allowing an individual citizen to wield great personal power that, its proponents feared, could not be balanced by the rest of the political system. In my view, each of these laws offered an immediate solution to an ongoing problem, and called on historical precedent and Roman values in an interpretation of the constitution that privileged the role and power of the people. However, they did not lead to the establishment of a new consensus and constitutional norm, but were accompanied by violence and increasing friction between Senate, People and magistrates, and they raised Pompeius to a position of power greater than that held by any other citizen. While the *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia* may have been constitutional within the *res publica*, since they argued their case and were passed into law, their impact was negative in terms of the stability of Rome and they were a part of its corruption in the form we understand as republican.

**Corruption and integrity: the legal destabilisation of Rome's constitution**

In passing the *lex Gabinia* and the *lex Manilia*, the *populus Romanus* (taken, for the purpose of voting, as being represented by the *concilium plebis*) accepted the tribunes' interpretations of the constitution in a way that was itself a traditional part of Rome's political system, making the *plebiscita* constitutional and confirming their interpretation of the constitution in practice. It is possible, therefore, to regard them as an integral part of the evolution of the constitution of the Roman *res publica*. They were certainly a part of a process of underlying constitutional change that was integral to the transformation of Rome from the Republic to the

\(^{47}\) As a 'stage' in a long-running process, these bills provide a particularly useful example because the surviving evidence, especially Cicero's speech *Pro lege Manilia* allows us access to the political and constitutional ideas expressed in the debate.
Principate. The argument that popular support legitimised decisions would later allow Augustus to argue that the establishment of the triumvirate *rei publicae constituendae* was constitutionally legitimate within the *res publica* because it was sanctioned by the people in the passage of the *lex Titia*.  

In a system where the decision-making processes depended upon discourse and argument, and where the constitution was interpreted and developed out of a body of legal precedents, historical examples and traditional practices, the clash of interpretations that can be seen in 67 and 66 was almost certainly inevitable. However, the destabilisation of a society is not the inevitable result of constitutional debate and evolution; indeed, the constitution of the Roman *res publica* had slowly and steadily evolved for centuries. The ideal end of debates such as those that took place in 67 and 66 was for the negotiation to be followed by an acceptance of the ‘winning’ argument and the re-establishment of consensus around it. This was the process that had been integral to Rome’s ongoing development. But things are rarely ideal and in the 60s Rome, still dealing with the consequences of the civil wars of the 80s and Sulla’s dictatorship, was already riven by discord and violence. It was not the kind of situation in which a consensus could easily be reached and so, regardless of the ideological legitimacy of the successful argument or the political legitimacy of the process by which the bill was passed, the result was increased instability in the Republic, which may be viewed as evidence of constitutional corruption.

The *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia* overrode the traditional authority of the Senate in foreign affairs and exacerbated ongoing and increasing tension between members of the Senate and the people and their champions. Although similar *plebiscita* had been passed before, they remained a matter of political debate, and these set new constitutional precedents for further tribunician and popular action in the government of the Empire which had the potential to authorise further action in this area and

---

48 Aug. *RG* 1.4; App. *Civ.* 4.7.27; Ando 2010:50-52, although, as Appian shows, the *lex Titia* violated the requirement for there to be a break between the *promulgatio* and *rogatio* of the bill.

49 This tension was not simply between the Senate and the People, as neither body was homogenous, nor between *Optimates* and *Populares*. See Stone 2005:59-94 and Robb 2010:1-33 on the nature of the so-called *Optimates* and *Populares*, and Morstein-Marx 2004:119-203 on the complex relationship between the *populus* and their leaders.
also to create future civil strife. When Roman tribunes (and others) argued successfully for the rights and powers of the people and acted upon it by appealing to the people for support for their proposals without the explicit backing of the Senate or in opposition to the majority view of the Senate, they altered the balance of power in the relationship between the Senate and People as bodies within the *res publica*, and created the kinds of situation where violence might occur, destabilising Roman political life.

In addition, by allowing the people the right to select the men they thought best for major commands, regardless of whether or not they were an elected official, the statutes threatened the link between regular magistracies and major commands and challenged conventions about the way power was held in Rome and by whom; and in particular, how much could and should be possessed by an individual citizen. They unbalanced the existing system of competition among Rome’s élite, encouraging those ambitious for honour and glory (the vast majority) to appeal to the people in pursuit of their goals.\(^5\) In allotting the commands to Pompeius, they further altered the standards for a ‘successful’ career in Roman public life by placing him far ahead of the competition. They deliberately sidelined existing magistrates, promagistrates and other members of the senatorial élite in favour of Pompeius, who then had the opportunity to accrue even greater glory. This both engendered greater rivalry and competition amongst the élite and also threatened to put too much power into the hands of one man, something that may be seen as undermining the principles of collegiality and annuity in office holding. This situation threatened the Republic in two ways: firstly, there was always the threat that Pompeius might abuse his power, something factored into many deliberations (for example, in the debate over the ratification of Pompeius’ settlement of the east in the late 60s); and secondly, there was always the danger that others might seek to emulate him and attain similar positions – as Caesar would do in the following years. The statutes created instability in Roman politics by the position they gave to Pompeius and by contributing to a changing understanding of what one citizen could achieve in his career.

The passage of the *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia* set new precedents for future debate and action in Rome. The statutes themselves became constitutional authorities and altered the possible interpretations of the constitu-

\(^5\) North 1990:18 notes how divisions in the oligarchy and the Senate strengthened the people’s voice at Rome, as men turned to the *populus* in pursuit of their goals.
tion. They were legally passed, through regular constitutional processes and were successful in terms of Rome’s ability to control the Eastern areas of the Empire. However, not all precedents are equal in terms of maintaining the integrity of a constitution. In the case of the *lex Gabinia* and *lex Manilia*, they significantly weakened and can also be said to have corrupted the constitution of the Roman Republic. They destabilised the relationship between the Senate, the People and the magistrates, and undermined the traditional balance of power within the elite. Under these statutes Pompeius held a remarkably large amount of power, which created problems in Rome’s traditional competitive system of office holding and ran contrary to the fundamentals of that principle of the *res publica* which said that monarchy had no place at Rome. Pompeius was not a monarch, nor does he seem to have been inclined to become one, but his career was part of the rise of powerful individual figures at Rome that preceded the establishment of the Principate. The statutes also altered and contributed to unbalancing the constitutional relationships between Rome’s three primary political bodies: the magistrates, the Senate and the People, which created uncertainty and instability in political life. The *res publica* continued and its constitution continued to be reinterpreted and renegotiated through the Imperial period, but the Republic – that society marked by the absence of single, all-powerful rulers – came to an end, having failed to preserve the integrity of its constitution.

**Bibliography**


den Formen der Identitätsstiftung und Stabilisierung in der römischen
University Press.
Loader, W. 1940. ‘Pompey’s command under the lex Gabinia.’ CR
Magie, D. 1950. Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
McDonnell, M. 2007. ‘Response to Kaster, R. ‘Review of Roman Man-
liness: Virtus and the Roman Republic by Myles McDonnell.’ BMCR.
(issue: 2007.03.38; accessed 11.10.2010)
Meier, C. 1966. Res Publica Amissa: Eine Studie zu Verfassung und Ge-
schichte der späten römischen Republik. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag
GMBH.
Millar, F. 1998. The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic. Ann Arbor:
University of Michigan Press.
Morstein-Marx, R. 2004. Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late
Roman Republic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
North, J.A. 1990. ‘Democratic politics in Republican Rome.’ P&P 126:3-
21.
North, J.A. 2006. ‘The constitution of the Roman Republic.’ In N. Rosen-
stein & R. Morstein-Marx (edd), A Companion to the Roman Republic,
256-274. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
Ormerod, H.A. 1997. Piracy in the Ancient World: An Essay in Medi-
Richardson, J.S. 1986. Hispaniae: Spain and the Development of Roman
Richardson, J.S. 2008. The Language of Empire: Rome and the Idea of
Empire from the Third Century B.C. to the Second Century A.D.
Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.


UNDER THE CENTURION’S BOOT: 
CORRUPTION AND ITS CONTAINMENT IN THE ROMAN 
ARMY

†Denis Saddington
University of the Witwatersrand

Roman soldiers were unpopular with the civilian population of the 
Empire, especially in the provinces. They could requisition transport and 
supplies, demand to be billeted in one’s home and extract corvée labour. 
All these activities were open to abuse and corruption. In addition, bribery 
and corruption took place in the army itself. How prevalent were such 
abuses and how were they contained by the authorities?

In one of his speeches against Antony, Cicero contrasted Antony’s army 
with the official army or – as we would term it – State army. Antony 
promised his men, bandits and boors in the eyes of Cicero, booty of every 
kind. Against this Cicero claimed that ‘our armies’ were promised the rule 
of law, world-wide empire, dignity and peace, in fact, everything 
sanctioned by the gods, plena pietatis (Cic. Phil. 8.9-10). Of course, this 
description was made to a senatorial audience and not to the men 
themselves, but it does represent the ideal.

A provincial point of view on army corruption can be found in 
Plutarch, a man of prominence in Greece. Plutarch had served on its 
provincial council and may even have been chairman. He held one of the 
most prestigious priesthoods in Greece: that of Delphi, a shrine that even 
the Romans treated with the deepest respect. His standing in Roman 
society was also very high. He had been granted Roman citizenship at the 
instance of a consul, L. Mestrius Florus (PIR² M 531), whom he had 
accompanied on a tour of the battlefields of the AD 69 civil war in North 
Italy, and even seems to have been accorded the exceptional honour of the 
standing of a consul.¹ Plutarch wrote a treatise on improving city govern-
ment in Greece, in which he could be brutally realistic. His advice to 
mayors and city councillors in the famous cities of the region was never to

¹ For Plutarch, cf. PIR² P 526; RE 21.636-962 [2] at 657-62; for his standing in 
Plut. Oth. 14.2. That he was awarded the ornamenta consularia is implied by the 
statement in the Suda (n. 1793) that Trajan gave him ἡ ὑπάτων ἀξία. As Jones 
1971:29 points out, this surely implies that he was of equestrian status.
forget to keep one's eye on the βῆμα, that is, the platform from which the governor administered justice, ‘seeing the κάλτοι above your head’.² Κάλτοι was (Sicilian) Greek for *calcei*, the distinctive shoes worn by Roman senators and hence proconsular governors. Courteous and respectful as governor and local magnate were to be to each other, as can be seen from Pliny's letter (8.24) to a younger friend going out to govern the province, the realities of power remained clear and stark.

If you had to accept governors' authoritarianism, you would also be wary of their officials. In the Roman world these would be basically military personnel. Juvenal presents a picture of the overweening soldier, ready to resort to force against any civilian who failed to comply with his demands. One should not discount this as a stock rhetorical theme. Juvenal himself came from a social class nearly all of whose members spent at least one year with the legions. The tradition that Juvenal served in Egypt should probably be discounted, but an inscription from Aquinum (Aquino) in Italy, where he owned property, recording a D. Junius Juvenalis in command of a cohort of Dalmatians, probably the Coh. I Delmatarum in Britain, could well refer to him or to a relation.³ Juvenal advised against seeking legal redress if you were assaulted by a soldier: you would appear before a military court and face a jury of hobnailed centurions, and you dare not provoke so many jackboots and hobnails, *offendere tot caligas, tot milia clauorum*.⁴

The sort of situation that lay behind Juvenal's satire may be illustrated by a scene from the novelist Apuleius.⁵ A gardener in Thessaly in Northern Greece was riding on his ass when a tall, insolent legionary accosted him, not in Greek, the language of the province, but in Latin. Not understanding, the gardener rode on. The soldier, possibly a centurion – he was

---

³ *ILS* 2926; for Juvenal's military service, cf. *PIR* I 765; *PME* I 146; for his possible British post, cf. Jarrett 1966:36-37. There may be a further reference to military matters in Juvenal, in the last line of Satire 3, *auditor gelidos ueniam caligatus in agros* (as now usually read), where *caligatus* refers to a soldier's footwear. But Mayor 1880/81 *ad loc.* has pointed to the reading *audiutor* (for *auditor*) in some MSS, which would refer to a junior military rank, ‘an adjutant’ (cf. *OLD* s.v. 2).
holding a *uitis*, the centurion’s staff of office – took this as insolence and struck the gardener with his staff and thrust him off his ass. The gardener made a humble reply in Greek. The soldier then commandeered the ass, saying that he needed it to transport the governor’s baggage. The gardener resisted and surprisingly was able to beat the centurion off.

Such requisitioning was known as ἀγαρεία, a term going back to the Persian Empire. Epictetus advised civilians in such situations not to resist, otherwise they faced being beaten.\(^6\) The institution features in non-Classical writers as well. In the New Testament, the provincial was not only advised not to resist, but even to go ‘the extra mile’, and Simon of Cyrene seems to have been ordered to carry the cross of Jesus under this procedure (Mt. 5.41; 27.32).

The official position at the time of Tiberius is known from an edict of Sotidius Strabo (*PIR*² S 790), a governor of Galatia.\(^7\) It stipulates the number of transport vehicles to be provided and the rate of remuneration for the villagers supplying them, as well as the maximum distance involved. There was to be remuneration for the men and the draught animals pressed into service. The governor specified the abuses he was attempting to suppress: the soldiers involved were exhibiting ‘unruliness’ (*licentia* or πλεονεξία), some not paying for the services rendered and others attempting to requisition more wagons and animals than allowed. The problem continued: Claudius found it necessary to issue an edict (*ILS* 214) condemning the fact that he had been unable to remedy abuses in the system due to *nequitta hominum*, ‘human criminality’.

The billeting of troops by the Romans on civilians in the provinces, frequently accompanied by abuse, was of course deeply resented. A flagrant case occurred in Asia after the First Mithridatic War in 85 BC. Not only did the soldiers billeted on the provincials ruin them by extortion, but Sulla even compelled the Asians to pay the soldiers billeted on them 14 drachmae a day, which was greatly in excess of the soldier’s daily wage.\(^8\)

Corruption arose in connection with another burden borne by the provincials: supplying the army with corn and other items. In Britain the system was abused by the military, who compelled the Britons to deliver grain to granaries at great distances from their farms and then forced them to pay large sums to be excused from the cost of the transport involved.

---


\(^7\) *AE* 1976, 653; cf. the detailed publication by Mitchell 1976:106-31.

The governor of Britain in the 80s AD, Agricola (PIR² I 126), put an end to the abuse (Tac. Agr. 19.4).

Some cases of what may be called paramilitary abuse may be noted. Procurators were responsible for the collection of monies owing to the emperor. In 4 BC, Sabinus (PIR² S 33), the procurator of Syria, was sent to Judaea to claim the property of Herod the Great, who had just died. This he did with such brutality that he almost sparked a revolt: he was even accused of deploying legionaries to assist his activities (Jos. BJ 2.41, 46). Under Tiberius a former army officer, Herennius Capito (PIR² H 103), was appointed procurator of Tiberius' mother Livia, who owned an estate in Jamnia (Yavneh). Later he became a procurator of the emperor himself. Agrippa I was in heavy debt to the Imperial fiscus: although a king, Capito sent a force of soldiers against Agrippa I to arrest him (Jos. AJ 18.158). Also under Tiberius, a much more important official, the procurator of Asia Lucilius Capito (PIR² L 381), plundered the provincials there (Tac. Ann. 4.15). Not only did he usurp the powers of a governor but he used military violence as well, for which he was condemned by Tiberius. The scale of his depredations can be deduced from the fact that the cities of Asia actually erected a temple to Tiberius, Livia and the Senate in gratitude for his condemnation.

In AD 60, during the revolt of Boudicca, the procurator of Britain, Catus Decianus (PIR² C 587), had made such large exactions in the province for himself that he decided that it would be politic to flee to the continent. That he used soldiers in his depredations is known by the fact that when the revolt broke out, the Roman colonists in Camulodunum (Colchester) turned to him for military assistance and he sent 200 troops (Tac. Ann. 14.32). Tacitus (ibid. 31) mentions two incidents that helped to spark the rebellion: the plundering of the royal palace by slaves, probably those of the procurator, and the devastation of the kingdom by the centurions.

Corruption also occurred internally in the army. The soldiers' actual remuneration was fairly low so that one of the main attractions of military service was the acquiring of booty. Livy 42.32-35 provides an instructive instance which occurred in 171 BC, during the Third Mithridatic War. The problem was so acute that even the Senate and the consuls became involved. Twenty-three retired leading centurions (primipili) had enlisted with the hope of acquiring large amounts of booty from the war in the rich East: they knew of others who had become locupletes in earlier wars in the region (42.32.6). A century later, Cicero, presenting Pompey as the ideal general, praised him for not selling centuronates (Leg. Man. 76).
Corruption might be found even at the level of ordinary auxiliaries. Caesar, with some embarrassment to himself, relates the story of Roucillus and Egus, two Allobrogian leaders in his service (BC 3.59-60). They had distinguished themselves in various campaigns and had been handsomely rewarded by Caesar. He entrusted them with the payment of the Allobrogians under their command. They responded by embezzling money by inflating personnel returns, cheated the men of part of their pay and even kept all the booty they captured for themselves. Caesar did not proceed openly against them, but gave them time to repay their extortions. They then borrowed a sum large enough to repay their frauds, but instead of so doing defected to Pompey. Incidentally, this shows how much money might be available in the camp of an army on campaign.

At an even lower level, an ordinary Egyptian, who wished to be enrolled in an auxiliary cohort rather than in the fleet, and who even had a letter of recommendation, could not achieve this ‘without gold’, as he complained (P. Mich. 8.468).

Large-scale suborning of the army is usually first ascribed to Sulla. Sallust describes how he corrupted the army in Asia during the Third Mithridatic War. The rough peasant soldiers of Italy began to acquire expertise in evaluating sculpture, paintings and embossed plate. Open bribery of soldiers continued until the late Republic. The warlords of the Second Triumvirate found themselves having to offer ever more frequent and more substantial incentives to the soldiers. Cicero describes an incident when Octavian was attempting to wrest control of the Caesarian forces from Antony (Cic. Att. 16.31). He went to soldiers recently settled by Caesar in two colonies, Casilinum (at Capua) and Caiatia (Caiazzo) (where Caesar had confiscated the lands of the locals for his men). Octavian offered each of them 500 denarii to join him; this was more than two years’ salary. Meanwhile, Antony was leading a legion, not of normal soldiers, but of Gauls irregularly enlisted from north of the Po (the 5th Alaudae), towards Rome, plundering the Roman municipia in Italy en route. During the Second Triumvirate, post-discharge benefits had to be increased. The soldiers’ demands were especially large if the wars they were involved in did not produce much booty, the traditional source of military enrichment.

However, once he was securely in control of the state Octavian, now Augustus, attempted to reverse the trend. A stated, and definite, length of service was announced: 15 years for a legionary, later extended to 20 (not

---

that soldiers might not be kept under the standards afterwards, either as volunteers or by compulsion). Pay levels were also fixed, and discharge benefits in the form of land for settlement or a cash sum in lieu thereof were determined. The cost of these measures to the treasury was enormous and, in spite of special measures, there were often periods when there were delays in implementing the packages offered.

Things came to a head on the death of Augustus in AD 14. With the change of regime the soldiers had 'hopes of prizes', as Tacitus (Ann. 1. 16) put it. They wanted what he called 'luxuriousness' (ibid.). Some even ravaged towns and villages near the camps. In particular, the quality and location of the land offered for post-discharge settlement were heavily criticised (17, 35). The centurions were corrupt – the ordinary rankers had to bribe them for exemptions from the worst fatigues and for permission to have leave (31, 32, 35).

Centurions, of course, were the kingpins of the legions. The senatorial commander, the 'legate', was in post for two or three years at most, and the six equestrian tribunes for only a year. But the 60 centurions spent their whole career in a legion. They are very prominent in Caesar's Gallic Wars, and during the civil wars of the Second Triumvirate they even assumed semi-political functions. It was a centurion who forced the Senate to give the under-age Octavian the consulship (Suet. Aug. 19). The particular problem of centurions extorting money for favours from the ordinary rankers mentioned above in the mutiny of AD 14, became increasingly oppressive. By 69 it had developed virtually into an annual tax on the men, who even resorted to undertaking slave-type work or banditry to raise the money demanded. Tacitus (Hist. 1.46) says that Otho felt it politic not to alienate the centurions by banning the practice. Instead he funded the illicit perk from the treasury: his soft approach was not unlike that of Caesar's with the corruption of the Allobrogian leaders described above.

A new means of negating military unrest developed in the early Principate was the making of an ex gratia payment in a lump sum. Such a gratuity or largesse was of course not regarded as a bribe, but a sign of the commander's gratitude to the men. Called donatives, these became the

---

preserve of the emperor.\textsuperscript{11} Initially they were disbursed only at accessions
or for special occasions, but they became increasingly common, almost an
element of the soldiers’ regular remuneration. The Imperial maxim
became ‘enrich the soldiers and ignore the rest’ – or such were the last
words Septimius Severus is alleged to have used to his sons on his
deathbed, in the military headquarters of Britain in York, in AD 211 (Dio
74.15). The most bizarre instance of blatant military bribery had occurred
in 193 just before Severus became emperor, when after a mock auction
the Praetorian Guard gave the Empire to Didius Julianus (\textit{PIR}\textsuperscript{2} D 77): he
offered each soldier HS 30 000, the equivalent of five years’ salary (\textit{SHA}
\textit{Did. Jul.} 3).

Mutinies and increases in salary extorted by violence became rarer as
the Principate advanced. The army was becoming less of an invading force
foraging and demanding billets on the way, and more of an army of
occupation. Increasingly the military became involved in what are now
regarded as essentially civilian occupations, such as road building and other
improvements to the infrastructure. Soldiers were even involved in
building in towns, especially in colonies where veterans would be settled.
Social links were established with the communities which grew up outside
legionary headquarters and auxiliary forts. And although by law Roman
soldiers could not enter into marriage on active service, many in fact
formed extra-legal unions and had families in the \textit{canabae} and \textit{uici} outside
the forts. But perhaps the greatest check on military corruption was the
ever-increasing bureaucratisation of the army. The position of scribe in a
unit was sought after. Those who occupied it often had themselves shown
holding tablets or book rolls on their tombstones. One instance alone of
military record-keeping may be cited: the bronze military diplomas
recording a grant of Roman citizenship to an auxiliary or a sailor who had
served a minimum of 25 or 26 years. However, although it is probable
that some 300 000 were issued from the 1st to the early 3rd century, less
than 800 survive – less than a quarter percent. The survival rate of
documents on pottery shards or wood is, of course, almost infinitesimal.\textsuperscript{12}

We even hear of auditing. However, this was done not by a separate
government department, but by regimental officers. When serving as a
military tribune in Syria (\textit{ILS} 2927), Pliny the Younger was detailed off to
examine the accounts, not of the legions, but of the auxiliary regiments in

\textsuperscript{11} The first was that issued by the still insecure Claudius at his accession; Suet. \textit{Cl.}
10.4 accords it a \textit{praemium}, ‘bribe’.
\textsuperscript{12} For documentation in the Roman army, cf. Stauner 2004.
the province. We know of one which was commanded by a friend of his there, Claudius Pollio (ILS 1418; PIR² C 966), the Ala Flavia Milliaria. Not being named after a provincial people, like most auxiliary regiments, but after the Imperial house, and being 1000 strong (rather than the usual 500), marks it out as a special unit. Its accounts were, of course, in an excellent condition, while those of the other non-legionary units showed both shameful profiteering and even falsification of records.

As far as the soldiers’ own money was concerned, each had a personal account detailing the balance of his pay after deductions – Roman soldiers had to pay for the food and clothing issued to them – and loans taken out. The accounts were kept by special soldiers, the signiferi or standard-bearers (who led companies into battle) and the actual monies owing to the soldiers – including their discharge bonuses – were kept in a strongroom in the aedes or sacred shrine in the camp where the standards were housed. Military travel came to be controlled by the emperor (cf. Plin. Ep. 10.45-46, 65, 120).

Of course, military corruption continued in the Principate. Two small items illustrate it even at village level. An Egyptian papyrus under Tiberius records an attestation under oath by the village secretary that the soldiers in the area had not committed extortion. However, one suspects that there had been cause for suspicion. A private account of the 2nd century includes, in a list of mundane items of expenditure, an amount for extortion and three amounts for soldiers ‘on demand’, as if they were quite routine.¹³ But the factors mentioned above taken together meant that there were more checks on military extortion during the Principate than in the Republican period. The army had settled into a routine institution with its meticulously documented procedures. Governors, like Sotidius Strabo and Agricola cited above, were prepared to intervene decisively and publicise their decisions. This emperors did as well, publishing edicts like that of Claudius quoted above. A further important factor was the accessibility of the authorities. In the Republic, it was extremely difficult, and very expensive, to get beyond an autocratic governor. But during the Imperial period even unimportant communities petitioned the emperor directly, as evidenced by a 3rd century AD inscription (SIG³ 888) from the remote community of Scaptopara (Blagoevgrad) in Thrace, complaining of abuses by soldiers similar to those checked by Sotidius Strabo in Galatia under Tiberius.

¹³ Poxy 240; SB 9207; the term used is διασεισμός, which also appears in Luke 3.14 where John the Baptist urges soldiers not to oppress civilians.
Bibliography


PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CORRUPTION IN PLUTARCH

Maria Vamvouri Ruffy
University of Lausanne

Introduction

The notion of ‘corruption’ in antiquity is extremely complex. It may refer to practices and concepts that are as divergent as the historical contexts and the legal systems where these concepts appear. Its conceptualisation may also depend on the ideological commitment of the author who describes these practices and concepts, as well as on the context of communication of his account. Indeed, texts are the result of an act of communication that occurs in a specific context. They contain the marks of this act as well as the ethos and ideology of the ‘autorité auctoriale’.1 Only a close reading of the occurrences and uses of the words referring to ‘corruption’ within the works of a specific author can illuminate the particular meanings of this complex notion in a particular historical context and for that author. Such a textual analysis allows us to understand the ideological views of the author, for, as Bakhtin and Volochinov have pointed out, ideology is a matter of words:2

Dans la réalité, ce ne sont pas des mots que nous prononçons ou entendons, ce sont des vérités ou des mensonges, des choses bonnes ou mauvaises, importantes ou triviales, agréables ou désagréables, etc. Le mot est toujours chargé d’un contenu ou d’un sens idéologique ou événementiel.

In this article, I shall focus on the semantic field of the verb διαφθείρω in Plutarch’s works, one of the words which describe the act of corrupting. I shall analyse the particular meanings this specific author attributes to the word and I shall try to understand his ideological stance about διαφθορά, corruption. Plutarch’s works are an important source for the study of this notion because they include detailed information on the political history of

Note: English translations of quoted Greek texts are from the LCL, with occasional slight modifications.


Greco-Roman cities, on the institutions and customs as well as on the characters of various public figures. Plutarch makes extensive references to cases of accepted or offered bribery in public or private affairs, as well as to the penalties related to these practices.3

In Plutarch, as in Aristotle, διαφθείρω may have a physiological meaning and in this sense corruption refers to a process of alteration of beings.4 Furthermore, as in Plato, διαφθείρω can be related to the notion of disease that may strike a person or a city in a metaphorical sense. Finally, διαφθείρω may be used in the moral sense and can refer to the social and political sphere and, more precisely, to human conduct and social practices such as bribery, denunciation, and even seduction. In such cases, corruption is equivalent to unworthiness and moral depravity, and its presence can be dangerous to public life and the integrity of the city.

So, in Plutarch, διαφθείρω designates both physical and moral or political corruption. Physical corruption is related to alteration that may often provoke serious illness, thereby requiring the eradication of the corrupt and compromising element. In other words, what is corrupt has to be eradicated. However, in political and social life a person’s or a group’s corruption does not necessarily lead to the compulsory expulsion from the community, nor does it always lead to a negative judgement by authorities or even by the authorial authority who describes the act. Thus, there seems to be a moral ambiguity about corruption in Plutarch’s works. When corruption takes place for the good of the city and outside its frontiers, it is not necessarily criticised as reprehensible. When it takes place within the community, however, it is blameworthy as being dangerous to the city, which is about to suffer and be contaminated by a political illness (for example, discord or civil war).

In the following article, I shall first investigate the physiological metaphors of moral corruption in Plutarch’s works and then his recommended physiological and social remedies. Finally, I shall discuss his ambiguous moral judgements about corruption in the political arena and formulate some suggestions about the ideological reasons for this ambiguity.

3 Other terms describe corrupt practices; see for example, χρηματίζεσθαι and δωροδοκεῖν.
4 In the treatise De generatione et corruptione, Aristotle posits ‘corruption’ (φθορά) and ‘generation’ (γένεσις) to be characteristic of the nature of beings, the consequences of the inevitable and progressive process of ‘alteration’ (φθορά); see Arist. Gen. 1.3.317a31-319b5; 2.9-10.335a24-337a33.
Physiological metaphors of moral corruption

In Plutarch’s works, political and moral corruption looks like an illness and, more precisely, like a moral disease. The Life of Agis offers some interesting examples. Agis IV is the Spartan king who during the second half of the 3rd century BCE tried to find a solution for the agrarian problems of his city. The concentration of land ownership had compromised the political system of Sparta to such a degree that the young king tried to convince the rich to abandon their agrarian possessions in order to proceed to reforms and the redistribution of Spartan land. However, vice and corruption had already influenced the Spartans to such an extent that they were unwilling to follow Agis’ initiative. The author uses the term διαφθορά and specifies:

And here I may say that the Lacedaemonian state began to suffer distemper (τοῦ νοσεῖν) and corruption (ἀρχὴν/διαφθορᾶς) soon after its subversion of the Athenian supremacy filled it with gold and silver. (Plut. Agis 5.1)

Moral corruption struck the whole community like a disease (τοῦ νοσεῖν). The reason for this was, according to Plutarch, money and excessive wealth. The medical metaphor which ascribes physical symptoms to moral corruption is not surprising for Plutarch. Medicine is an important source of inspiration for our author and moral depravity and vice are very often presented in his works as equivalent to ill health. For example, in Table Talk it is said that passions distort the complexion and affect health (λύπαι δὲ καὶ φιλαργυρίαι καὶ ζηλοτυπίαι τὰ χρώματα τρέπουσιν καὶ καταξαίνουσι τὰς ἕξεις, Plut. Quaest. Conv. 681e). The word πάθος in Plutarch indicates emotion, feeling or suffering and, more precisely, the emotion that affects the soul. The word is used synonymously with the words νόσος and νόσημα,

---

‘illness’. Plutarch embraces a tradition which makes the immoral soul a sick soul in a sick body. Where the irrational and passionate part of the soul controls rationality, passions overwhelm man and there is a risk of the body being affected since the irrational element penetrates and mingles with it (καταμεμιγμένον).

The reactions of corrupt Spartans to Agis’ proposition look like the symptoms of illness. In paragraph 6 where the word διαφθορά appears once again, it is said that when Agis made his proposal to re-establish the egalitarian system, the older people:

since they were now far gone in corruption (ἄτε δὴ πόρρω διαφθορᾶς γεγονότων), feared and shuddered at the name of Lycurgus as if they had run away from their master and were being led back to him. (Plut. Agis 6.2)

Fear and trembling are two symptoms displayed by people who are suffering in their souls. But why do they shudder at the name of Lycurgus ‘like slaves who are caught after having run away’? Lycurgus fought against moral and physiological corruption by establishing an egalitarian system of land ownership and public messes as explained in the tenth paragraph of the Life of Lycurgus. His aim was in fact to fight against corruption and it was this undertaking the older people in Agis’ Sparta were afraid of:

With a view to attack luxury still more and remove the thirst for wealth, he introduced his third and most exquisite political device, namely, the institution of common messes, so that they might eat with one another in companies, of common and specified foods, and not take their meals at home, reclining on costly couches at costly tables, delivering themselves into the hands of servants and cooks to be fattened in the dark, like voracious animals, and corrupting not only their characters (διαφθείροντας ἅμα τοῖς ἠθεσι ντοίς ἦθεσι)

---

7 See Plut. Quaest. Conv. 630c and 681c.
8 A close interaction is assumed between a man’s character and the functioning of his body. In De Virt. Moral. 450e-451b, Plutarch claims that both young and old people’s temperaments depend on the body and the passions which are seated there. This point of view is reminiscent of Plato, Aristotle and Posidonius; cf. Pl. Tim. 86b; 88b; Arist. Prior An. 2.27.70b; Posidonius, Fr. 153 Edelstein Kidd. See also Babut 1969:54-62.
9 In Plut. De Tranq. An. 475e-f it is said that when the helmsman of a ship is not able to master the waves, he starts trembling and shivering, thus feeling the physical effects of fear.
but also their bodies, by surrendering them to every desire and all sorts of surfeit (πλησμονήν), which call for long sleeps, hot baths, abundant rest, and, as it were, daily nursing and tending (καὶ τρόπον τινὰ νοσηλείας καθημερινῆς δεομένην). (Plut. Lyc. 10.1)

Lycurgus’ aim was to purify the corrupt characters of Spartans by changing their eating habits.10 As the vocabulary used here attests, moral and physiological corruption are closely linked. Wealth drives people towards excessive pleasures and luxury which lead to vice and corruption. Corruption in its turn provokes illness, as the words νοσηλεία, ‘nursing’ and πλησμονή, ‘repletion’ or ‘surfeit’ suggest. The Hippocratic authors considered excessive fullness as a cause of disease. Food, for example, which remains inside the body, causes flatulence and when repletion increases, the body gets ill.11 For the guests in the Table Talk, repletion is linked to bodily pains. It causes the compression of canals (σφηνώσεως διὰ τὴν πλησμονὴν οὔσης) and holds up the drainage system.12 The narrator, who discusses with others the appearance of new illness, associates repletion with the creation of an excess of waste material responsible for various diseases (732d-e).

If we read the paragraph of the Life of Agis in the light of the one from the Life of Lycurgus, we can easily understand the reasons why the old and rich Spartan people shuddered at the name of Lycurgus. If Agis carried out his reforms, as Lycurgus did, they would be obliged to divide up their properties and renounce their overindulgent lives.

Finally, it was Agesilaus, the new ephor of Sparta, who prevented Agis’ plans to eliminate debts and to proceed to a new distribution of land. Agesilaus thus acted in his own interest: he was the owner of a large tract of

---

10 On the social and educational value of συσσίτια, cf. Figueira 1984:87-109; Lombardo 1988:263-86; Di Vasto 2002:362-64. For Plato, the συσσίτια were part of the military organisation of Sparta, also to be part of the ideal city of the Laws; cf. Pl. Leg. 1.625c, 633a, 636a; 6.780a-b, d-e. Arist. Pol. 7.1330a also integrates this institution into his presentation of the ideal city; cf. also Arist. Pol. 2.1263b-1264a, 1265a-b, 1271a, 1272a-b, 1274b; 7.1330a, 1331a-b.

11 Hp. Vict. 3.70 = Littré 6, p. 606-09.

12 Plut. Quaest. Conv. 654a; see also 655a-b. According to Marcion (Quaest. Conv. 663e), surfeit is harmful and provokes diseases. Cf. Plut. Bru. Anim. 991a-b and De Tuenda Sanit. 127c. In De Tuenda Sanit. 123e, it is said that we have to avoid excesses of food (πλησμονῆς), of drink (μέθας) and of sensuality (ἡδυπαθείας); cf. also 125f and 128a. See also Arist. Probl. 1.865b, where it is said that residues (περίττωμα) inside the body must be expelled (ἀπαλλάτεσθαι) because what stays behind is rotten and causes illness.
land, but at the same time he owed a lot of money and was unable to pay his debts. He was also unwilling to give up his lands and pay the money he owed to others. He therefore persuaded Agis not to proceed simultaneously with both reforms, but first to institute the remission of debts so that the men of property would afterwards accept the distribution of land without demur. Agesilaus' real motivation was to have his own debts discharged and to prevent Sparta from instituting a new distribution of land by influencing Agis. The author criticises Agesilaus' action by using the term διαφθείρω:

Thus the enterprise of the kings was making good progress and no one tried to oppose or hinder them, when one man, Agesilaus, upset and ruined everything. He allowed the most shameful disease (αἰσχίστῳ νοσήματι) of avarice to wreck (διαφθείρας) a most noble and most truly Spartan plan. (Plut. Agis 13.1)

Once again the act of διαφθείρειν is the consequence of a vice, the love of wealth, that is described as a νόσημα. The term διαφθείρειν is translated here as 'to ruin' or 'to wreck' but it also appears to sketch a case of corruption similar to the corruption of the Spartans, since behind Agesilaus' manipulation is a love of wealth, and secrecy characterises his acts. Secretiveness often characterises the acts of corrupt people. Such is the case of the corrupt Spartans who ran away like slaves and who hid from others when they heard the name of Lycurgus. Many other cases of corruption are related to some sort of secrecy, hiding the true motives or the true character of a person. Take, for example, what Leonidas did to Agis his fellow king. As the author suggests, Leonidas was as corrupt as the other Spartans:

For although the corruption of the constitution (τῇ διαφθορᾷ τοῦ πολιτεύματος) had already led to a general decline in manners, there was in Leonidas a very marked departure from the traditions of his country, since for a long time he had frequented oriental courts and had been a servile follower of Seleucus, and now sought to transfer the pride and pomp which prevailed abroad into Hellenic relations and a constitutional government, where they were out of place. (Plut. Agis 3.9)

Leonidas was contaminated by oriental, barbarian manners as opposed to Greek values. With his inclination to behave like a powerful and proud man, he became a representative example of the general corruption of the Spartans and of the city's constitution. In the case of Agis' reforms, Leonidas was influenced by the Spartan women who were opposed to Agis' plans,
because they would be stripped of the luxuries they were accustomed to and thus lose the honour and power which they enjoyed. The women tried to hinder (διακολύει) Agis’ plans by asking Leonidas for help:

He therefore made no open opposition to Agis, but secretly sought to damage his undertaking and bring it to nought (οὐδὲν ἀντέπρατε φανερῶς, λάθρα δὲ τὴν πράξιν ἐζήτει κακουργεῖν καὶ διαφθείρειν) by slandering him to the chief magistrates, declaring that he was purchasing a tyranny by offering to the poor the property of the rich, and by distribution of land and remission of debts he was buying a large body-guard for himself, not many citizens for Sparta. (Plut. Agis 7.5-8)

We see here that Leonidas did not reveal either his own or the women’s motives, but acted secretively. The verb διαφθείρειν, which is here translated as ‘to damage’, correlates with false public denunciations of the state’s magistrates, of secrecy and of a hunger for profit. What Leonidas did would have been described in Athens as συκοφαντία and would have been severely punished by law. Even if Sparta did not have the same laws and, normally, did not punish the same crimes as Athens, the author of the Life of Agis suggests, by using the verb διαφθείρω which in other texts describes the act of συκοφαντία, what Leonidas did was in fact a case of corruption.

To sum up my remarks about cases of corruption in the Life of Agis: the old Spartans, Agesilaos, Spartan women and Leonidas all tried to ruin Agis’ plans. The common motive was their love of wealth and they all acted secretively. Whatever leads to a corrupt act finds its origin in vice and moral depravity, which for Plutarch is a symptom of a sick soul. Corruption has a harmful effect on the laudable project of the equal division of wealth and wrecks it, just as illness sometimes brings a body to the point of death.

---

13 Plut. Quaest. Conv. 703b underlines the connection between corruption and secrecy. The verb διαφθείρω means ‘to ruin’ and refers to dissimulation of what can be shared and may be useful. This action is morally reprehensible and revealing of a selfish character. Cf. also, Plut. Lyc. 10.1.


15 See also Plut. Max. cum Princ. 778D.
Dangers and remedies for physical and moral corruption

For medical authors, any corrupt and compromising element requires removal from the body in order to prevent it from doing further harm. In many Hippocratic treatises, what is corrupt is either expelled by itself or it has to be extracted. For the author of *Appendix on regimen for acute diseases*, corrupt blood (διαφθαρέντος τοῦ αἵματος) inside dried and distended veins is one of the consequences of the influx of black bile and acrid humour, which occurs when pain appears in a certain part of the body. Air cannot circulate, the patient becomes extremely cold while experiencing vertigo, loss of speech, convulsions and other kinds of symptoms. The remedy is to bring on bleeding in order to flush out the corrosive vapours and humours, after which the doctor has to try to restore the patient to good health. Removing corrupt blood from the infected patient’s body enables the purging of elements that compromise his health.

In Plutarch’s works, that which is corrupt inside the body has to be removed. Menses in women’s bodies is presented as ‘corrupt blood’ of which the body purges itself automatically (Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 651d). *Table Talk* includes a discussion of a woman’s constitution: ‘Is women’s temper hotter or colder than that of men?’ (Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 650e). Avitus, the doctor who starts the conversation, thinks that their temper is hot, while Florus believes it to be cold. In his view, menses are not the result of an abundance of blood, as Avitus thinks, but of ‘corrupt and vicious’ blood (651d: ή δ’ ἡ δ’ ἐμμήνος κάθαρσις οὐ πλήθους, ἀλλὰ διαφθοράς καὶ φαυλότητός ἐστιν αἵματος). The evacuation of this corrupt blood is called κάθαρσις, ‘purgation’, which is a physiological process whereby a superfluous element is expelled from the body either naturally or by cathartic remedies. What is interesting is that the terms φαυλότητος and κάθαρσις, used here in a physical context, also refer to moral considerations in Plutarch’s works. This is not very surprising, for Plutarch often uses the same vocabulary to describe physiological processes or illnesses and moral values or vices, as well as political behaviour, thereby establishing an implicit link between

---

16 Hippoc. *Acut. (Sp.)* 5 = Littré 2, p. 404-09.
18 Van der Stockt 1992:132-42 has shown that *catharsis* in Plutarch is simultaneously psychosomatic, ethical and intellectual. It refers to purification within the body or to the cleansing of the soul and spirit through literature and philosophy.
what happens in the body, the soul and the political arena.\textsuperscript{19}

If corruption inside the body remains hidden and is not removed, it causes disease and sometimes even results in death. Belated medical intervention is then fruitless. This was the fate of Sulla, the ambitious, violent, but successful Roman who lived a debauched life.\textsuperscript{20} In the Life of Sulla Plutarch says that Sulla did not realise he had a disease which remained hidden until all his flesh had been contaminated:

By this mode of life he aggravated a disease (νόσον) which was insignificant in its beginnings, and for a long time he knew not (ἠγνόει) that his bowels were ulcerated. This disease corrupted his whole flesh also and converted it into worms (τὴν σάρκαν διαφθαρεῖσαν εἰς φθεῖρας πᾶσαν), so that although many were employed day and night in removing them, what they took away was as nothing compared with the increase upon him, but all his clothing, baths, hand-basins, and food, were infected with that flux of corruption (ἀναπίμπλασθα ι τοῦ ῥεύματος ἐκείου καὶ τῆς φθορᾶς) so violent was its discharge. (Plut. Sulla 36.2-3)\textsuperscript{21}

Sulla finally died because of maggots eating his flesh. More precisely, he died when a blood vessel burst because of his excessive excitement after having murdered someone in his bedroom. In other words, he died from an apoplectic fit. What is interesting here is that Sulla’s infection is presented as the outcome of a debauched way of life. In other words, disease and debauchery, moral and physical corruption are in this text presented in a cause-and-effect relationship. Earlier in the text, the author pointed out how corrupt Sulla was by using the same verb διαφθείρω. He drove his own soldiers to debauchery and immoderation (ἐπὶ τῷ διαφθείρειν), corrupting their behaviour with money and lavish expenditure (εἰς ἀσωτίαν διαφθείρων

\textsuperscript{19} See Vamvouri Ruffy 2012.

\textsuperscript{20} On the contribution of Sulla to the development of Roman hegemony, on his systematic administrative reorganisation and his role in the relationship between Rome and local elites in Italy and in the Greek East, cf. Santangelo 2007.

χρημάτων δεῖσθαι πολλῶν) so that he might seduce and attract soldiers under the command of others, who would become traitors in order to earn the money offered by Sulla (Plut. *Sulla* 12.14). The author speaks disapprovingly of Sulla’s brutality and immoral life:

It was this laxity (ἀνέσεως) as it seems, which produced in him a diseased propensity (νόσημα) to amorous indulgence and an unrestrained (ῥύσις) voluptuousness, from which he did not refrain even in his old age. (Plut. *Sulla* 2.6)

The author uses a medical metaphor as the terms νόσημα, ῥύσις and Ἀνέσις reveal. Ἀνέσις, translated as ‘laxity’, is often used in medical writings to mean ‘remission’. Ῥύσις in this passage refers to Sulla’s emotion but it is often used by physicians and by Plutarch himself to refer to physiological processes.22 These terms establish a subtle link between Sulla’s corrupt way of life and the corrupted flesh which caused his death. The reference at the beginning of the *Life* to the corruption of P. Cornelius Rufinus, his ancestor, prefigures Sulla’s own corruption (Plut. *Sulla* 1.1).

Such examples as these serve as evidence that, in Plutarch, corruption or disease of a person’s body is closely linked to its moral equivalent. As long as it stays hidden, corruption is able to wreck a plan, to destroy a body or a society. Its eradication is proposed as the most appropriate remedy for the body or the body politic to recover.

In Plutarch, the danger of corruption in the sphere of the city is similar to the dangers experienced by the human body when a corrupt element resides in it. The remedy is the same for the city as for the body, that is, the extraction of what is corrupt. In other words, in the political and social sphere, the corruption of a person or a group must be resolved by compulsory removal from the community, just as is the case with the physical body. An important passage of the treatise *Political Precepts* illustrates this mechanism clearly. The narrator, who is giving useful advice to future statesmen, speaks about discord (στάσις). He explains that stasis is not always kindled by contention over public matters, but frequently arises from private affairs and offences which then ‘pass into public life and throw the whole state into confusion.’ It is then up to the statesman to cure these issues. The whole passage employs a medical metaphor, for the city is likened to a human body suffering from disease. The narrator mentions two

---

historical examples, of which one is particularly interesting:

And at Syracuse there were two young men, intimate friends, one of whom, being entrusted with his friend’s beloved for safe-keeping, corrupted him while the other was away (διέφθειρεν ἀποδημοῦντος); then the latter, as if to repay outrage with outrage, committed adultery with the offender’s wife. Thereupon one of the elder men came forward in the senate and moved that both be banished before the State reap the result and be infected (ἀναπλησθῆναι) with enmity through them. His motion, however, was not carried, and from this beginning disorder arose which caused great distress (στασιάσαντες) and overthrew a most excellent government ... Therefore the statesman should not despise such offences as they may, like diseases in a person, spread quickly, but he should take hold of them, suppress them, and cure them (ὡσπερ ἐν σώματι προσκρουμάτων διαδρομὰς ὀξείας ἐχόντων, ἀλλ ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι καὶ πιέζειν καὶ βοηθεῖν). (Plut. Praec. Ger. 825c-d)

The corruption in question here is not bribery nor political corruption, but rather a case of seduction which induced both friends to disrespect their commitment to one another. Διαφθορά here entails vengeance, a private conflict that leads to city-wide conflict. The effects are fatal because Syracuse sank into civil war (στασιάσαντες). Here discord is metaphorically presented as a disease which strikes the body (ἐν σώματι προσκρουμάτων). The word ἀναπλησθῆναι as well as the word stasis confirm the physiological dimension of the passage; both are often used in medical texts, in Plato and in Plutarch in order to explain the origin of a disease. Only the eradication of corrupt elements can prevent such a disaster. This is exactly what the old man proposes when he asks the Senate to banish both friends.

Plutarchian ambiguities about corruption

Yet there are some cases where Plutarch seems to be ambivalent about his attitude to political corruption. This kind of corruption is not always clearly and explicitly disapproved of by the author, and it does not always lead to a compulsory removal of offenders from the community. There are in fact some cases where corruption is judged to be opportune, especially when it is undertaken for the sake of the community outside the frontiers

23 Cf. Cambiano 1983:441-58; Brock 2000:24-34. See also Hdt. 5.28; Thuc. 4.61.1.
of the city, and when it is instigated by a virtuous statesman whose character traits are generally positive. Therefore, whereas physical corruption leads to disease and death, and moral corruption is metaphorically described as a disease, this is not necessarily so in the case of political corruption.

When corruption takes place within the city, the author disapproves just as the citizens and the laws do. We find an example in fourth-century Athens at the time when the strategist Phocion became Alexander’s favourite spokesman. When the city was under Macedonian domination and Phocion its chief statesman, Harpalus arrived in Athens to seek refuge after embezzling a large sum of money while he was Alexander’s treasurer. As soon as he arrived in Athens, the orators, accustomed as they were to selling their services in the Assembly, tried to draw his attention and offered themselves as candidates for bribery:

And when Harpalus, who had run away from Alexander out of Asia with great sums of money, landed in Attica and those who were wont to make merchandise (χρηματίζεσθαι) of their influence as orators, came running to him at breakneck speed (φθειρομένων πρὸς αὐτῶν), to these men he dropped and scattered small morsels of his wealth by way of bait, but he sent to Phocion and offered him seven hundred talents and everything else that he had, and put himself with all his possessions at the sole disposal of Phocion. But Phocion answered sharply that Harpalus would rue it bitterly if he did not cease trying to corrupt the city, and for the time being the traitor was abashed and desisted from his efforts. (Plut. Phoc. 21.2-3)

Contrary to Harpalus, Phocion continued until the end to stand firm against corruption; he is metaphorically described in the text as a real fortress, defended from all sides. The author does not explicitly condemn Harpalus’ efforts to corrupt an official, but his story, as in the whole of the Life of Phocion, treats Phocion positively and emphasises his steadfast moral qualities by contrasting them to Harpalus’ flatteries as well as to the orators’ corruption. The admiration of the author is such that he does not

---

24 In this Life, Phocion is shown as a courageous man who was frequently opposed to the Athenians when they were contemplating war; see Phoc. 8.1-10.4 and Duff 1999:145-47.
hesitate to compare Phocion to Socrates. Harpalus, on the other hand, personifies the danger of corruption. It was he who corrupted Demosthenes by offering him a barbarian cup after detecting a passion for gold in his eyes. Demosthenes went over to Harpalus’ side but his venality and bribery led to reproaches, anger and tumult against him. Later, the Areopagus condemned him to exile (Plut. Demosth. 25.1-26.1).

Also, in the Life of Pompey, the author gives a generally positive portrayal of his subject, but admits that Pompey’s efforts to dissolve the assembly and corrupt the tribunes with money (ἀργυρίῳ τὰς φυλὰς διαφθείραντες) reveal his dishonesty and improper behaviour (οὐδὲ τἆλλα κοσμιώτερον ἔπραττον, Plut. Pomp. 52.2). Pompey wanted the tribunes to proclaim Vatinius praetor instead of Cato and to introduce laws which would allow Caesar to continue his control over his provinces for five more years.

In the Life of Cicero, we find another example of the author’s disapproval of corruption: Lentulus’ bribery of judges he corrupted (διαφθείρας ἓνιους τῶν δικαστῶν) when he was under prosecution and his own corruption by vain hopes held out to him by false soothsayers and quacks (προσδιέφθειραν). According to the author, these are indicative of his immoral character (τοῦτον ὄντα τῇ φύσει τοιοῦτον, Plut. Cic. 17.1-5). Lentulus brought together the men who had been corrupted by Catiline and were left behind in order to kill all the senators and as many of the other citizens as they could, and to burn down the city and seize power.

In all these cases, the effort to corrupt or the acceptance of corruption within the city and the community group is morally problematic and emphasises negative character traits, contributing to the formation of moral judgements. Moreover, in the case of Lentulus, corruption shows itself to be dangerous, as it leads to conspiracy, death and the overthrow of legitimate power. Plutarch’s moralism in these cases is ‘exploratory’ or ‘descriptive’, since, according to Christopher Pelling, it points to ethical

---

25 Duff 1999:141-45 points out that the figure of Socrates provides an important link between the Life of Phocion and the Life of Cato Minor and that the Socratic parallels are to be found in Plutarch’s sources; cf. Delvaux 1988:27-48. For Duff, the Socratic parallel enhances the virtues of Phocion, the mix of firmness and softness of his character, and underlines his unfair death.


issues without explicit praise or blame.\textsuperscript{28}

In Plutarch, however, it is interesting that although incorruptibility is an important virtue, especially for statesmen, corruption is not always morally reprehensible.\textsuperscript{29} Sometimes it is judged opportune, especially when it comprises an intervention for the sake of the city and does not directly concern its citizens. Plutarch’s treatment of Pericles’ attempts to corrupt the Lacedaemonians is the most striking example of this. In the \textit{Life of Pericles}, the author praises the military exploits of Pericles, admiring his calmness as well as his ability to restrain the imperialistic ambitions of Athenians in favour of security (Plut. \textit{Per.} 22).\textsuperscript{30} He also refers to his decision to keep the Athenian military forces within Greece so that their already-won conquests could be consolidated. He then notes that Pericles corrupted the Lacedaemonians:

Accordingly, Pericles brought his forces back with speed from Euboea for the war in Attica. He did not venture to join battle with hoplites who were so many, so brave, and so eager for battle, but seeing that Pleistoanax was a very young man, and that out of all of his advisers he set most store by Cleandridas, whom the ephors had sent along to be a guardian and an assistant to him by reason of his youth, Pericles secretly (κρύφα) made trial of this man’s integrity, speedily corrupted him with bribes (διαφθείρας χρήμασιν αὐτόν), and persuaded him to lead the Peloponnesians back out of Attica. (Plut. \textit{Per.} 22.2-3)

When Pericles rendered his account for his generalship, the Athenians approved it without investigating (ὁ δῆμος ἀπεδέξατο μὴ πολυπραγμονήσας μηδ’ ἐλέγξας τὸ ἀπόρρητον) why he spent ten talents ‘for sundry needs’ (εἰς τὸ δέον). Those talents were in fact used to corrupt the Spartan Cleandridas: the author cites the philosopher Theophrastus, according to

\begin{footnotes}
\item See for example, Plut. \textit{Pel.} 30.8-13; \textit{Phoc.} 18.1-8; \textit{Phil.} 15.6-12.
\item The author does not present Pericles positively throughout – cf. Stadter 1987; Duff 1999:90, 265-66 – but in general his portrayal is admiring; see Breebaart 1971. In \textit{Per.} 15.1 Pericles acts as a physician who cures the city’s disease, and in \textit{Per.} 9.1, Pericles is said, à la Thuc. 2.65.9, to have established in the democratic city a harmonious aristocratic government, close to monarchy. On the influence of Thucydides on this \textit{Life}, see Stadter 1989:90-91.
\end{footnotes}
whom Pericles paid the Lacedaemonians ten talents annually in order to conciliate them and thus to gain time for preparing the Athenian forces for war at his leisure. Plutarch does not leave any doubt as to Pericles’ act, unlike Thucydides and Diodorus who use terms intended to undermine the claim’s validity. Thucydides does not mention Pericles’ part in the bribery at all, only noting Pleistoanax as ‘being suspected to have taken a bribe to withdraw his army out of Attica’ (δόξαν τι χρήμασι πεισθῆναι), and as ‘thought to have gone back for money’ (μετὰ δῶρων δοκήσεως ἀναχώρησιν). Diodorus, mentioning Clearchus, only says that ‘was believed’ to have accepted a bribe (ocrisy τι παρὰ Περικλέους λαβεῖν χρήματα). In Plutarch’s account, Cleandridas’ bribery by Pericles did not cause any particular reaction, and we are led to deduce that the Athenians indirectly approved of all Pericles’ actions. Plutarch himself refrains from passing any explicit moral judgement upon Pericles’ act, but mentions in Per. 22 that Pericles was right (ὀρθῶς συνεῖχεν) to confine Athens’ forces to Hellas and in Per. 15 that Pericles was renowned for being ‘one who was manifestly proven to be utterly disinterested in and superior to bribes (ἀδωροτάτου)’. He expresses the same opinion in his comparison of Pericles and Fabius, where he asserts that Pericles kept himself superior to bribes and free from corruption (ἀδωρότατον ἑαυτὸν καὶ καθαρώτατον ἐφύλαξεν). On this particular issue, however, any moral issues it raises remain implicit and subtle, serving to stimulate moral reflection.

The moral ambiguity surrounding Cleandridas’ bribery is not unusual in the Lives. As Duff notes, interpreting Plutarch’s moralism can be challenging because the boundaries between right and wrong are often not clearly defined. In some Lives, as here, the standards of conventional morality do not seem to apply to morally questionable actions undertaken to benefit one’s country. That is probably one of the reasons why, as Duff asserts, it is difficult and inappropriate to evaluate a particular Life as wholly negative or positive. In this case, the ambiguity created by Plutarch’s lack of moral judgement concerning Pericles’ act suggests that he does not necessarily disapprove of Pericles’ resorting to bribery.

31 Plut. Per. 23.1; commentary on these paragraphs in Stadter1989:225-29.
32 Thuc. 2.21.1-2; 5.16.3; see also 1.114.2. Plutarch probably consulted Ephorus, 70 fr. 198, according to whom the sum was 20 talents, or Diod. 13.106.10; cf. also Aristoph. Neph. 858-59.
33 As Frazier 1996:46 also notices.
34 Duff 1999:54-63, 70.
Why might this be the case? On the one hand, Plutarch’s neutral and tolerant reading of Pericles’ act may reflect his admiration for and fascination with Athenian policy in the mid-5th century BCE and the achievements of its statesmen. Such an idealisation of Classical Athens was common to many authors of the Second Sophistic, who wished to maintain in their work some continuity with Hellenic history. Plutarch’s specific rewriting of the Athenian past surely betrays a similar ideological self-positioning. It is also possible, however, that Plutarch does not explicitly disapprove of Pericles’ act because this particular case of corruption was advantageous to Athens and took place outside its own borders. Pericles’ act of bribery may accordingly stand, in Plutarch’s eyes, as a paradigmatic example of political expediency and pragmatism, undertaken to the advantage of one’s own city. Plutarch’s attachment to his home town of Chaeroneia, where he chose to stay in order that this small city ‘might not become smaller’, is well known; perhaps the ‘patriotic’ corruption of the Spartans by Pericles was not so morally problematic.

In conclusion: if we want to understand the mechanisms and causes of, as well as the remedies for political and moral corruption in Greek thought and particularly in Plutarch’s works, we have to focus on particular terms (in this case, διαφθείρω) and also take into account the author’s conception of the analogous physiological corruption. Such an analysis shows that similar rules apply to healthy physical bodies and healthy social bodies. Plutarch adopts a holistic conception of man since the rules that govern the human body also govern man as a social being. The parallel does not extend to include all forms of political corruption, on which Plutarch seems to hold an ambiguous view. While political corruption is generally considered to be dangerous to the city, some instances may be beneficial. The fact that both the Athenians and Plutarch in the Life of Pericles refused to consider bribery as categorically ‘bad’ suggests that, although Plutarch usually interprets moral corruption as equivalent to physical illness, on occasion he seems to condone such corruption and thus avoids this particular metaphor. Such a stance may be attributed to his reverence for the Athenian past as well as to his

35 On this point, see Bowie 1970:3-41; Duff 1999:265; Swain 1996:66-100, who shows that the emphasis on the Greek past served Roman interests as well; Whitmarsh 2001a:1-38; 2001b:269-305; 2005:74-85.
36 Plut. Dem. 2.1-2. On Plutarch’s life and career in Chaeroneia and elsewhere, see Ziegler 1964, cols. 4-60; Jones 1971:3-64; Swain 1996:134-36. König 2007:43-68 demonstrates the importance of local identities in Table Talk particularly.
ideological commitment to Realpolitik when the future of one’s own city depends upon it. The example of Plutarch shows that the notion of social and political corruption is fluid and that its evaluation depends on the historical circumstances and the ideological commitment of the author who describes it.

Bibliography


Harvey, D. 1990. ‘The sycophant and sycophancy: vexatious redefinition?’ In Cartledge, Millett & Todd, 103-121.


Second Sophistic, Cultural Conflict and the Development of the Roman Empire, 269-305. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
This paper attempts to show how Cassius Dio’s reading of the fall of the Roman Republic is conditioned by his views on human nature and man’s love of power. Scholarly convention holds that Dio followed the Livian theory on decadence, namely that Rome’s demise began after 146 BC due to the wealth accrued following the destruction of Carthage and Corinth. This theory is not satisfactory, as has been argued by Hose, and fails to take into account Dio’s emphasis on the negative influence of human nature on politics throughout his republican narrative. I propose instead that Dio combines the ‘moral’ view of Rome’s decline found in our other sources with the views on human nature he inherits from Thucydides. This leads him to develop a view of republican politics where the collapse is caused by the invigoration of its main catalyst – human ambition – through empire, power, wealth and the process of moral change in a rapidly evolving society.

For Cassius Dio, democracy is the worst of constitutions, despite its mirage of goodness. Comparing monarchy to democracy after the assassination of Caesar, he says:

Democracy, indeed, has a fair-appearing name and conveys the impression of bringing equal rights to all through equal laws, but its results are seen not to agree at all with its title. Monarchy, on the contrary, has an unpleasant sound, but is a most practical form of government to live under. For it is easier to find a single excellent man than many of them, and if even this seems to some a difficult feat, it is quite inevitable that the other alternative should be acknowledged to be impossible; for it does not belong to the majority of men to acquire virtue. And again, even though a base man should obtain supreme power, yet he is preferable to a crowd of equals as, I would argue, the history of the Greeks, barbarians and even the Romans themselves proves. For successes have always

---

been greater and more frequent in the case both of cities and of individuals under kings than under popular rule, and disasters do not happen so frequently under monarcies as under mob-rule. Indeed, if ever there has been a prosperous democracy, it has in any case been at its best for only a brief period, so long, that is, as the people had neither the numbers nor the strength sufficient to cause insolence to spring up among them as the result of good fortune or jealousy as the result of ambition (ὥστε ἢ ὕβρεις σφίσιν ἢ εὐπραγίας ἢ φθόνους ἐκ φιλοτιμίας ἐγγενέσθαι). But for a city, not only so large in itself, but also ruling the finest and the greatest part of the known world, holding sway over men of many and diverse natures, possessing many men of great wealth, occupied with every imaginable pursuit, enjoying every imaginable fortune, both individually and collectively — for such a city, I say, to practise moderation under a democracy is impossible, and still more is it impossible for the people, unless moderation prevails, to be harmonious (ἀδύνατον μὲν ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ σωφρονῆσαι, ἀδυνατώτερον δὲ μὴ σωφρονούσαν ὀμονοῆσαι).

(Cass. Dio 44.2.1-4; transl. Cary). ²

In the speech which Dio puts into the mouth of Maecenas in Book 52, widely regarded to represent the thoughts of Dio himself, he expands upon this idea. ³ Maecenas is made to advise the new Emperor Augustus on how to set up power in his favour:

Thus, [in a monarchy] whatever business was done would be most likely to be managed in the right way, instead of being referred to the popular assembly, or deliberated upon openly, or entrusted to partisans or exposed to the dangers of ambition (φιλοτιμία); and we should be happy in the enjoyment of the blessings which are

² This and the following passage are quoted at length because they are vital for understanding Dio’s conception of the fall of the Republic. Translations from Dio and other ancient authors are slightly adapted where deemed necessary.

vouchsafed to us, instead of being embroiled in hazardous wars and unholy civil strife. These evils are found in every democracy; for the more powerful men, reaching out after the primacy and hiring the weaker men, turn everything upside down. They have been most frequent in our country, and there is no other way to put a stop to them than the way I propose. And the evidence is that we have now for a long time been engaged in civil wars and strife. The cause is the multitude of our population and the magnitude of the business of our government; for the population embraces men of every kind in respect both to race and character and both their tempers and desires (τὰς ὀργὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας) are manifold; and the business of the state has become so vast that it can only be administered with great difficulty. Witness to the truth of my words is borne by our past. For while we were but few in number and differed in no great way from our neighbours, we were governed well and subjugated almost all Italy; but ever since we were led outside the peninsula and crossed over to many continents and many islands, filling the whole sea and the whole earth with our name and power, nothing good has been our lot. At first we broke into factions and quarrelled at home and within our walls, but afterwards we carried this plague into the legions. (ἀφ’ οὗ δὲ ἔξω αὐτῆς ἐξήχθησαμεν, καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ καὶ τῶν ἡπείρων καὶ τῶν νῆσων ἐπεραιώθησαμεν, καὶ πᾶσαι μὲν τὴν θάλασσαν πᾶσαι δὲ τὴν γῆν καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ἡμῶν ἐνεπλήσασαμεν, οὐδενὸς χρηστοῦ μετεσχήκαμεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οἴκοι καὶ ἐντὸς τοῦ τείχους κατὰ συστάσεις ἐστασάσασαμεν, ἐπειτὰ δὲ καὶ ἐς τὰ στρατόπεδα τὸ νόσημα τοῦτο προηγάγαμεν). Therefore, our city, like a great merchantman manned with a crew of every race and lacking a pilot, has now for many generations been rolling and plunging as it has drifted this way and that in a heavy sea, as though it were without ballast.

(Cass. Dio 52.15.4-16.3; transl. Cary).

In recent years much scholarly attention has focused on Dio’s conception of human nature. First, Meyer Reinhold argued that Dio’s interest in human nature is part of his broader attempt to emulate Thucydides.4 Martin Hose developed the argument further,5 and in the last decade, two works on the subject by Barbara Kuhn-Chen and Karin Sion-

---

5 Hose 1994:381.
Jenkis have explored the various terms Dio uses to discuss human nature. The main terms are ‘psychological’, related to political ambition or political competition among either members of the élite or the different social classes in Rome. These are φιλοτιμία (ambition), πλεονεξία (greed), φιλονεικία (quarrelsomeness), ἐπιθυμία (desire), ἔχθρα (hatred), φθόνος (jealousy) and ὀργή (anger or passion). Many of these words occur in the two passages above.

In 1988 Detlef Fechner argued that the commonplace theory of moral decline after 146 BC and the removal of metus hostiles, as found in Sallust, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Florus and others, could also be seen in Dio. This theory was, however, rejected by Hose, who claims that from Dio’s perspective, influenced by Thucydides’ ‘fixed, ineluctable modalities’ of human nature, such a sense of moral evolution would have been inconceivable:


6 Kuhn-Chen 2002 identifies an ‘exogene Kraft’ and an ‘endogene Kraft’ in Dio’s conception of historical causation. On the latter, Dio felt the worst effects of human nature could be mitigated through education and self-control. In Hose’s view, the ideas in Dio are strictly analytical, not paradigmatic, his point being that the circumstances of the late Republic did not allow moderation and self-control and that those politicians who chose to remain ‘upright’ (e.g. Cato – who may not have been all that upright: see Cass. Dio 39.22.1 – and Catulus) ultimately failed to restore decency to the state. Hose underestimates the possible moral and paradigmatic value/intent of Dio’s analysis: he is keen to demonstrate democracy’s unsuitability for empire, while the value of monarchic government is predicated on the interplay between constitution and human nature. Monarchy (in the Augustan fashion) tames human nature and converts its negative effects into positive ones. The set of lessons about constitution, good government and the relationship between emperor and senate from this analysis would have struck a chord with Dio’s audiences both contemporary and future; see 72.23.4.

8 The phrase is from Reinhold 1988:215.
9 Hose 1994:405.
In short, Hose rejects the idea that Dio could have espoused an analysis of moral decline in the Republic because it would jar with the view, found throughout his history and ultimately deriving from Thucydides, that human nature is a constant. The passages Fechner selects in support of his argument 'führen diese Momente einer moralisierenden Betrachtungsweise der römischen Geschichte nicht zu einer Strukturierung der Vergangenheit unter moralischer Sicht.'

It is, however, questionable that Thucydides himself believed unchanging human nature to be incompatible with some kind of moral or political change in circumstances. In his famous analysis of the Corcyraean stasis, Thucydides states:

Many terrible things beset the cities during stasis, as happens and always will happen while human nature is what it is, though there may be different degrees of savagery, and as different circumstances arise, the general rules will admit of some variety. In times of peace and prosperity cities and individuals alike follow higher standards (ἀμείνους τὰς γνώμας), because they are not forced into a situation where they have to do what they do not want to do. But war is a violent teacher; in depriving them of their daily good fortune, it levels the passions of the majority of men to their present circumstances.

(Thuc. 3.82.2; transl. Warner)

The Latin equivalent for ἀμείνους here is praestantior, which captures the sense of moral excellence inherent in the word ἀγαθός. As Hornblower notes, 'there can be no doubt that here we have a clear case where Th. in his own person is assimilating states and individuals in a moral judgement.' If, as I am suggesting in this article, Dio believed that changes could be wrought upon the expression of a person’s nature by external circumstances, then he would not have been the first to apply this concept to the fall of the Republic. Tacitus, for example, notes in his Histories:

The old greed for power, long ingrained in mankind, came to full growth and broke bounds as the empire became great. When prosperity was moderate, equality was easily maintained; but when the world had been subjugated and rival states or kings destroyed,
so that men were free to covet wealth without anxiety, then the
first quarrels between the senate and the people broke out ... The
same divine wrath, the same human madness, the same motives to
crime drove them on to strife.
(Tac. Hist. 2.38.1; transl. Moore).\textsuperscript{13}

Dio's point, then, as it appears from the two passages cited at the
beginning of this article, is that the wealth, power and opportunities for
internal conflict and ambition offered by the growth of empire, made the
Republic into an untenable system of government. Whereas before some
kind of \textit{σωφροσύνη} had been possible because the Roman aristocracy had
been deprived of money and opportunity, the competitive, ambitious
instincts of the Roman nobility were able to run riot after Rome ascended
to a position of untrammelled power. In other words, what we see is not
so much a belief that human nature changes, but that the intensity of its
effect on political life as well as the way it manifests itself (in a loosely
'positive' or 'negative' way) can change. In Dio's view, the republican
system of government was predicated upon the notion of a competitive
aristocracy, which was also the cause of its instability and lack of suitability
to running an empire. Equally, Dio did espouse that constant aspects of
human nature have an eternal impact upon history, but he did not believe
those conditions that would culminate in the destruction of the Republic
and unleash the full fury of man's worst characteristics, could have come
about until after Rome's rise in power, greatness, size and wealth. In what
follows, I will re-examine three passages which constitute the so-called
'epochal dates' in Dio's history, episodes which he held as important in
changing the constitutional circumstances under which human nature
operated and, therefore, changing its effect upon history.

**Epochal date 1: 264 BC**

In the speech quoted above from Book 52, Maecenas claims that the
problems of the Romans started in earnest when they began to expand
into the Mediterranean to conquer a foreign empire. Maecenas refers to
the First Punic War, after which Rome won its first overseas provinces,
Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. As Hose notes, such a claim ignores Dio's own

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. also Sall. \textit{Cat.} 2.1-2; 9.1-12.2 (part. 11.1-2); \textit{Iug.} 1.4; 41.3.
violent and bloodthirsty accounts elsewhere.\textsuperscript{14} We should, however, recognise that Maecenas' rhetorically exaggerated claims do not necessarily have to map out \textit{exactly} onto Dio's own historical account of the period in Book 11. Dio's history is, roughly speaking, divided into decades, and he here begins the second decade with an event he later states to have been pivotal in the collapse of the Republic, suggesting that he had planned his history within this theory of decline. Equally relevant is that the third decade begins with the fall of Carthage in 146, the fourth with the civil war between Marius and Sulla (as far as we can tell given the fragmentary nature of Book 31), the fifth with the civil war between Caesar and Pompey and the sixth with the reign of Augustus. In fact, these decades map onto Maecenas' explanation of the collapse of the Republic: first the seeds of empire, then imperial mastery (the destruction of \textit{aemulatores}), finally, civil strife boiling over into civil war.

The similarities become more apparent when we read Dio's introduction to the First Punic War, which survives only in the Byzantine summary of Zonaras, an imperial courtier-turned-monk. Though using Zonaras as a source for Dio may be dangerous, we can in this case be fairly sure that he recorded Dio faithfully:\textsuperscript{15} apart from significant similarity between the passage and Maecenas' speech, the rest of Zonaras' account of the outbreak of war is faithful (bar being abbreviated) to the fragments from Dio that survive.\textsuperscript{16} Zonaras' record is as follows:

\begin{quote}
At this time the Romans began their struggles overseas; previously they had had no experience at all in naval matters. They now became seamen and crossed over to the islands and to the other continents (ἐπὶ τὰς νῆσους τὰς τε ἄλλας ἄπειρους ἐπεραιώθησαν).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} E.g. fr. 17.1-3; 17.6; 17.14; Zon. 7.15; see Hose 1994:405. Examples provided are mine.

\textsuperscript{15} Millar 1964:3. Libourel 1968:35 notes that 'his omissions are ... apparently guided by no specific historical principles except a certain desire to preserve the more picturesque and dramatic incidents of the history of Rome.' On Zonaras as a source for Dio's history, cf. Vrind 1923:7; Libourel 1968:17; Banchich & Lane 2009. Simons 2009:29-32 notes three ways in which Zonaras distorts Dio: \textit{Kürzung}, \textit{Zusammenfassung} and \textit{Konkretisierung}. Where Dio's fragments accord with Zonaras' narrative, the excerptors have frequently done more to summarise Dio than Zonaras himself, who remains quite reliable for details and language; cf. Cass. Dio fr. 43.4 with Zon. 8.8.4-9.3.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Cass. Dio fr. 43.1-3 with Zon. 8.8.3.
The passage is evidently contracted, as can be seen from the fact that
the various assertions read like *non sequiturs*. However, the last clause is
strikingly similar to the Maecenas speech. Maecenas claims that the
Romans ‘crossed over into many foreign lands and islands’ (ἐπὶ πολλὰ καὶ
tῶν ἠπείρων καὶ τῶν νῆσων ἐπεραιώθημεν), almost exactly the same as
Dio’s claim in Zonaras that the Romans ἑπὶ τὰς νῆσους τὰς τε ἄλλας
 ἠπείρους ἐπεραιώθησαν. Cary’s rendering, ‘other divisions of the main-
land’, is not an adequate translation of ἄλλας ἠπείρους (which rather refer
to ‘other continents’), as it obfuscates the importance of this moment in
Dio’s conception of Roman imperialism: the conquest of Sicily gave them a
taste for further conquest around the Mediterranean.\(^1\) The first fragment
to survive of Book 11 confirms this idea:

The causes responsible for the dispute were, for the Romans that
the Carthaginians had helped the Tarentines, and for the
Carthaginians that the Romans had made a treaty of friendship with
Hiero. But these they merely put forward as excuses, as those are
inclined to do who are in reality seeking their own advantage but
are ashamed of its reputation: the truth is otherwise. For the
Carthaginians had for a long time been a powerful people, whilst
the Romans were already growing powerful, and both sides looked
on each other with suspicion. They were encouraged to make war
partly through the desire to continually acquire more (in accordance
with the instinct of the majority of men, particularly whenever they
are successful), and partly also by fear. Both sides alike thought that
the one sure salvation for their own possessions lay in obtaining also
those of the others. If there had been no other reason, it was
extremely difficult, nay, impossible, for two peoples, being free and
powerful and proud, and being separated, so to speak, by such a
short distance, considering the quickness of the voyage, to rule over
others, on the one hand, but to want to leave each other alone, on
the other.
(Cass. Dio fr. 43.1-3).

The division between αἰτίαι and πρόφασεις is very Thucydidean and it
is perhaps no coincidence that Dio here recasts Thucydides’ pivotal verdict

\(^{1}\) Polybius likewise sees the (slightly later) Roman capture of Agrigentum as the
deciding moment in their desire to conquer the rest of Sicily (1.20.1-2) and claims
shortly thereafter that the Roman victory in 241 inspired in them a desire for
world domination (1.63.9). Dio’s account may owe more to Livy, however; cf.
Flor. 2.1.2-2.3.
on the causes of the Peloponnesian War at 1.23.6 for his own historiographical concerns regarding the causes for the death of the Republic.

Epochal date 2: Asiatic decadence after 187 BC

The second passage for analysis takes us seventy-seven years further into the future, to Dio’s account of Gnaeus Manlius Vulso’s triumph over Antiochus III in 187 BC:

The Romans, when they had had a taste of Asiatic luxury and had spent some time among the possessions of the vanquished amid the abundance of spoils and the licence granted by success in arms, rapidly came to emulate the prodigality (ἀσωτία) of these peoples and before long to trample underfoot their own ancestral traditions. Thus this terrible influence (τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτ’ ἐκείθεν ἁρξάμενον), starting in that quarter, invaded the city as well. (Cass. Dio fr. 64).

It was something of a cliché among the ancient Roman historians to cite the influx of Asiatic wealth as a cause of Rome’s decline but Dio is not entirely in step with other historians about what exactly went wrong after 187. Livy, for example, states that:

For the beginnings of foreign luxury were introduced into the city by the army from Asia. They for the first time imported into Rome couches of bronze, valuable robes for coverlets, tapestries and other products of the loom, and what at that time was considered luxurious furniture – one legged tables and abacuses. Then female players of the lute and the harp and other festal delights of entertainments were made adjuncts to banquets; the banquets themselves, moreover, began to be planned with both greater care and greater expense …Yet those things which were then looked

18 E.g. Polyb. 31.25.4; Livy 25.40.1-3; 34.4.4; 36.6.3-7.5; Lucan 1.160-67; Plin. HN. 34.14. See Petrochilos 1974:69. Hose 1994:400-401 puts the fragment in either 189 or 187, but Simons 2009:144-45 in 187, based on the similarities with Livy. Simons 2009:152 also claims that Dio derives his account from Livy and another source mentioning the dangers of martial power for stability and law. However, there is no need to assume that Dio took over the idea wholesale from a previous source, as it is in keeping with his summary of the fall of the Republic given above.
upon as remarkable were hardly even the germs of the luxury to come.
(Livy 39.6.7; transl. Sage).

Livy, unlike Dio, makes no reference here to the effects of power upon the Romans. Dio’s claim, that problems arose for the Romans from their military supremacy, matches that in Book 44 that power and greatness led to ὑβρίς, φθόνος and φιλοτιμία in political life. It also matches the claim of Maecenas that Rome’s venture into foreign lands led to strife and civil war inside the city and outside. Likewise, Dio’s assertion about the ἀσωτία of the Romans is backed up by the claim that excessive wealth corrupted the republic irreparably. As the use of epulae in Livy is ambiguous, possibly referring to private excess, but also perhaps talking about the effects of luxuria in encouraging politicians to provide extravagant banquets (and, thus, moving beyond private decadence to make reference to socio-political changes like ambitus), a similar effect can be witnessed in Dio’s use of the term ἀσωτία. Whilst ἀσωτία generally means private gluttony or extravagance, ambitus and bribery become notable problems in Dio’s account of the late Republic and ἀσωτία is used of a law passed by Caesar regulating political expenditure. Certainly, in the Maecenas speech (Cass. Dio 52.30.3), Augustus is advised to curtail excessive public expenditure in the provinces because of its role in encouraging political strife.

There are two statements in Dio’s claims that stand out as arguably problematic. First is that the Romans abandoned their ancestral customs and, second, that this malaise started in 187. The first is dealt with below; the second is rather easier to explain. Τὸ δεινὸν τοῦτ’ surely only refers to ἀσωτία, not to some kind of definitive moral change. Likewise ἐκεῖθεν has a more locative than temporal force, suggesting that the malaise invaded Rome from a place, i.e. the East. The effects of wealth upon the history of

19 Dio 57.19.5 claims it for a courtier of Nero, for example, who killed himself upon learning that he only had HS 10 000 000 in the bank because he felt he would shortly starve to death!
20 Particularly in the 50s BC when the Romans start meddling in Egyptian politics; see Cass. Dio 39.58.3-63.5. Siani-Davies 1997:306-40 notes Dio’s exaggerated emphasis on bribery and corruption here.
21 Cass. Dio 43.25.1-2. The immediately preceding chapter mentions Caesar’s lavish expenditure on and introduction of luxury into public festivals. The two passages (Caesar’s actions and dictates) jar, which coheres with Dio’s broader portrait of Caesar’s dictatorship.
the Republic were recognised by Dio and play a significant role in his narrative of the last hundred years (in particular in Gabinius’ actions in Egypt as mentioned above). To assume, however, that this passage equates to a complete moral volte-face is wrong. It should be seen, rather, as an evolution of the political strains placed upon the competitive and greedy desires of the Roman people, leading to the collapse and destruction of the Republican government.

**Epochal date 3: the fall of Carthage in 146 BC**

The last of the ‘epochal dates’ passages at issue concerns Rome’s destruction of Carthage in 146 BC. The text of the senatorial debate which prefaces the destruction of Carthage is, sadly, entirely lost. We do, however, possess a very cursory summary in Zonaras, who refers to a debate between Cato the Elder and Scipio Nasica, the former in favour of destroying Carthage and the latter of saving it. A commotion erupts in the senate house and an unnamed senator argues in favour of sparing Carthage to protect Roman manliness and virtue from corruption and decadence:

Someone declared that they should consider it necessary to spare them if for no other reason than for their own sake, for, by possessing an opponent who could rival them, they would practise valour (ἀρετή), and they would not turn towards pleasures and luxury (ἡδονή καὶ τρυφή); however, if those who were able to compel them to practice warlike pursuits should be removed from the scene, they would become worse by lack of practice, not having worthy enough opponents in war. As a result of the discussion, all were of like mind to destroy Carthage, since they could not trust the Carthaginians to be entirely at peace.  
(Zon. 9.30.7-9).

Zonaras’ account is contradictory in that a senator gives a speech in favour of saving Carthage, to be immediately followed by all his fellow senators ‘concurring’ that Carthage needed to be destroyed. It has been plausibly speculated by Simons 2009:179 that there may, in fact, have been a fourth speech recorded by Dio, though the plural τῶν λόγων might suggest that the senate came to its conclusion after listening to all three speeches. Zonaras’ paraphrasing of Dio is possibly unreliable, then, although it provides us some useful information in the broader context of Republican historiography.
Hose argues that Dio’s account differs from the traditional account in two ways: instead of focusing on moral decadence, Dio focuses on the effects upon military life of ἡδονή and τρυφή. Secondly, he argues that Dio cannot have conceived of a period of strife after the fall of Carthage because strife is already endemic in his narrative of the Roman world. In Hose’s view, Dio is referring to a military, not a moral decline:

Demgegenüber ist die Gefahr bei Zonaras anders gelagert: zwar drohen auch hier ἡδονή und τρυφή, indes wird eine Degeneration der Römer als Folge nicht hierin konstiiert, sondern eine Verschlechterung tritt ein infolge von ἀνασκησία, d.h. die militärische Leistungsfähigkeit … ist gesunken.

I would argue that such a distinction is pointless. The decline of public morals and of martial capability are obviously related here: claiming that pleasure and luxury are destructive to military valour is a moral assertion, since it hardly refers to a loss of tactical ability or a decline in the quality of weaponry. Words like ἡδονή and τρυφή used together imply moral discourse, particularly given the generally hostile reaction they arouse in the historiography of the period. Decisively, Florus’ account of the destruction of Carthage refers to Scipio mentioning the dangers of luxuria, the Latin equivalent of τρυφή.

Hose’s argument rests on the nature of the ἄρετή lost after the destruction of Carthage. He claims, unconvincingly in my view, that Roman virtus was a public, not a private virtue and without moral force. While by and large true for the 2nd century BC, when a man’s virtus could often be contrasted with his moral worth, the word was already (and certainly from Cicero’s time on) beginning to pick up connotations derived from ἄρετη. By Dio’s day, virtus certainly had a solidly moral meaning as well as a martial one. Furthermore, even if translating from Latin, Dio

22 Hose 1994:402-404; ‘Zonaras aber läßt den Anonymus vor einer sinkenden militärischen Leistungsfähigkeit warnen, d.h. daß hier nicht der Gedanke der securae opes vorliegt, sondern die Möglichkeit einer weiteren Gefährdung insinuiert wird.’ That hazard, Hose argues to be ‘Konsistent mit Dios Sicht auf die inneren Verhältnisse im republikanischen Rom’ (404).
23 Hose 1994:404, also stating that ‘Dio behandelt die innerrömischen Konflikte mit all ihren Auswüchsen bisweilen in singulärer Weise.’
25 McDonnell 2006:74; 110-11 claims that virtus began to be compared in a moral sense with ἡδονή and τρυφή from the second century BC onwards.
would have been aware of the moral tones of ἀρετή and should have, if Hose is to be believed, preferred a ‘safer’ word like ἀνδρεία. Moreover, ἀρετή in Dio has the very clear sense of personal excellence and is tied in with his claims about σωφροσύνη, ‘moderation’, in the passage from book 44 cited above.²⁶ Indeed, Dio’s belief in a loss of ἀρετή among the political élites is suggested by his claim that Catulus was the ultimate Romanorum when he died in 61 BC²⁷ and is perfectly in keeping with his claim that the many are not disposed to possess ἀρετή and that a powerful and wealthy democracy lacks both σωφροσύνη and harmony.

**Epochal date 4: Rome’s zenith in 218 BC**

One final passage still needing consideration comes from Dio’s account of the outbreak of the Second Punic War (218 BC) and seems, at first glance, to contradict the claim that Dio dates the origins of Rome’s problems to 241 and the conquest of the major islands of the Western Mediterranean. However, we shall see that this passage, too, fits into Dio’s depiction of the fall of the Republic:

> The Romans were at the height of their military power and enjoyed absolute harmony among themselves, so that those things which, for the majority of men, bear them from unadulterated good-fortune to over-boldness, but from powerful fear into good behaviour, differed for the Romans at that time: the more they were successful, the more they possessed self-control, and they displayed daring, which is a part of bravery, against their enemies, but enjoyed good behaviour, which goes together with good order (εὐταξία)²⁸ towards one another: for they used their power for the exercise of safe moderation and their order for the acquisition of true bravery, and they did not permit either prosperity to develop into arrogance nor good behaviour into cowardice. Thus, they reckoned that self-control was ruined by bravery and boldness by fear (θαρσοῦν ἐκ θάρσους),²⁹ whereas with them, conversely, moderation was made

²⁶ Kuhn-Chen 2002:146-58.
²⁷ Cass. Dio 37.46.3-4.
²⁸ Boissevain replicates the manuscript’s εὐψυχία, assuming borrowing from Thucydides; Bekker and Cary prefer εὐταξία, reproduced here because it (re?)appears a few lines later. Notice also τὸ κόσμιον in the succeeding clause.
²⁹ Boissevain states θύρσους mihi spectum, espectes synonymum ἐπιεικείας, δέους, also favoured by Cary. Simons 2009:134 note 47, however, notes that all extant versions of this fragment have ὣθαρσοῦν ἐκ θάρσους, implying an early
more secure by bravery and good fortune surer by good order. It was due to this in particular that they both conducted the wars so successfully which fell upon them and they governed their own affairs and those of their allies so well.

(Cass. Dio fr. 52.1).

That this passage is part of an analysis of decline needs little justification. Moreover, the passage talks of a zenith – Rome is at its height, the implication being that it will not remain so for too very long. Simons argues that this passage suggests 218 as the first ‘epochal’ date in Dio’s history, rather than the first Punic War, since Dio sees growing arrogance after this date. While this is a prevalent feature of the first Punic War as well, Dio may not have meant that the conquest of Sicily immediately led to the decline of Rome. He could have recognised 241 as the first cause, the effects of which were only felt much later. Such a claim is made, for example, in Florus:

Such are the events overseas of the third period of the history of the Roman people, during which, having once ventured to advance outside Italy, they carried their arms over the whole world. The first hundred years of this period were pure and humane and, as we have said, a golden age, free from vice and crime, while the innocence of the old pastoral life was still untainted and uncorrupted, and the imminent threat of the Carthaginian enemy kept alive the ancient discipline.

(Florus 1.3.12; transl. Forster)

Though it is difficult to tell from Zonaras whether there was an equivalent passage in Dio, the similarities between aetas populi Romani transmarina and Zonaras’ claims about the Romans crossing over into other lands and islands would suggest the possibility. At the very least, it would not have been impossible for him to claim a hiatus between the hugely significant invasion of Sicily and later, more destructive moments.

mistake. Simons 2009:133 also draws attention to the seemingly idiosyncratic switch in the meanings of θάρσος and θράσος in this passage; the former traditionally signifies ‘courage’ and ‘manliness’, and the later over-boldness often leading to tragedy. While Dio may here be reversing their meanings, confusion in the copying process seems more likely given the state of the manuscript.

30 Simons 2009:123.
32 Cf. also Sall. Cat. 9.1-5.
Dio's assertion that the Roman experience to this time was unique is critical for understanding the purpose of the passage in his history. Unlike other peoples, the Romans were not led by good fortune (or 'prosperity') into boldness, or by fear into good behaviour. Dio thus rejects the idea that the Romans at this point in their history were kept in check by *metus hostilis* as well as Thucydides' idea that prosperity leads to better motivations. But the idiosyncrasy of the Roman position will change as new circumstances arise. Ἐὐπραγία arises, as we have seen, in 187, when the Romans gain the *περιουσία τῶν λαφύρων* and learn to abide by the ἀσωτία of the Easterners. This moment breaks down two central parts of Dio's 'formula' for Roman behaviour in 218. Firstly, the Roman experience can no longer be identified as unique — they have borrowed a vice from a foreign race — and they are no longer resistant to the corrupting effects of good fortune. Dio's emphasis on the loss of the unique nature of Roman self-control is perhaps the point of his claim that after 187 the Romans lost τὰ πατρία ἔθη — they were now no different from other peoples. Logically, therefore, if the Romans had lost their unique self-control in times of prosperity, it follows that the other part of the claim — no need of fear to keep them in check — must also be altered, hence Dio's emphasis on the destruction of Carthage. Rome in 218 may have had no need of an *aemulator*, but it did after 187, as suggested in Book 44. The reappearance here of Ἐὐπραγία must surely be in reference to his earlier claims. Moreover, he argues that the history of the Greeks, barbarians and even the Romans themselves proves his assertion. This could only have made sense if the experiences of the Romans after 218 began to resemble those of other peoples.

We have seen then, that Dio's impression of the outbreak of the First Punic War, the conquest of Asia by Vulso and the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC are all consistent with the model of acceleration and exaggeration in the problems facing the Republic.

In conclusion, then, I hope to have shown that Hose was wrong to believe that Dio could not have believed in Thucydidean *physis* and Roman moral decline; there is no contradiction between the two positions, not least because Thucydides himself did not shy away from judgements about morals in public life. Likewise, I hope to have shown that Dio believed that the moral decline and imperial augmentation of Rome caused an acceleration in the problems 'inherent' in Republican politics, caused by human nature. Dio believed that constitutional change could affect human nature, either suppressing its worst elements or exaggerating its effects: the change experienced in the Republic, caused by the influx of
wealth, power and opportunity was a *de facto* constitutional change, related in inverse proportions to the positive change instituted by Augustus and an explicit factor in the growth of stasis and civil war in the late Republic. For Dio, as for Thucydides, moral decline was a symptom of changing factors, related to and symbiotic with the exaggeration of the negative aspects of human character. The stance Dio adopts here is the only way his history could have ‘worked’. Dio claimed that Augustus saved the Romans from themselves by establishing the monarchy. Monarchy, as we saw above, was to be preferred to democracy precisely because human nature could not run amok and because empire had caused the Romans to transcend the outmoded institutions of their state; institutions could only have worked whilst Rome was weak and poor. Indeed, after Augustus comes to power, two terms of particular importance to this study drop almost entirely out of Dio’s history (viz. φιλοτιμία and φιλονεικία), both of which were of the highest importance to his discussion of the Republic. Dio’s admiration for and idealisation of Augustus’ reforms was so great precisely because he strove to suppress and transform both the competitive urges of the Roman people and their gross expenditure and corruption. It is this analysis of decline and restoration that is central to the educative purpose of Dio’s history.

**Bibliography**


ULTIMATE CORRUPTION MANIFEST: NERO AS THE ANTICHRIST IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Shushma Malik
University of Bristol
Visiting scholar, UNISA

In 1873 the French historian and philosopher Ernest Renan wrote, ‘[t]he name for Nero has been found; it shall be THE BEAST ... Nero shall be the Anti Christ.’ Renan did not invent this association himself; he was in fact reviving a concept that had been prevalent in the late-antique Christian tradition into the 5th century AD.

According to Christian texts, the Antichrist will bring about the ultimate act of corruption: the destruction of the earth. The apocalypse depends upon disaster on an eschatological scale; the sins of those who succumb to the powers of the Antichrist on earth make the destruction of the world and the ascension of the righteous essential. In this article I explore the ultimate act of corruption in apocalyptic literature of Late Antiquity and how that literature came to utilise Nero as the perpetrator of the apocalypse.

In Late Antiquity the Antichrist became irrevocably associated with the emperor Nero, as the varied corruptions of his reign transformed from earthly crimes with earthly consequences into crimes against God and his people, with grave eschatological consequences. In the pagan historiographic tradition, Nero was accused of corrupting moral, sexual, social, political, religious and ethnic norms in Rome. These crimes characterised the emperor’s continuing reputation when pagan historians and biographers portrayed Nero as the archetype for future bad emperors: terms such as ‘more foul than Nero’ were common analogies in the biographies

1 Renan 1899:89.
2 Corruption deriving from the word *corrumpo* meaning to destroy or ruin, both physically and morally (Lewis & Short s.v.).
3 For a detailed examination of the term ‘Antichrist’ and its tradition, see Jenks 1991; Peerbolte 1996.
4 I am dating Late Antiquity from the 3rd century, specifically from the end of the third-century crisis leading into the reign of Diocletian. Late Antiquity has been dated in various ways by scholars, see particularly Brown 1971; Cameron 1993; Mitchell 2007:1-12.
5 For Nero’s reign more generally, see Griffin 1984; Champlin 2003.
of later despots. However, the nature of the corruption levelled against Nero dramatically changed in the hands of Christian writers who transformed Nero from a despot into an Antichrist figure. The late-antique Christian tradition drew upon the Antichrist tradition of *Revelation*, 2 *Thessalonians*, *Daniel*, John’s *Epistles* and the *Sibylline Oracles*, and identified Nero as the Antichrist figure found within these texts. This article will examine the tradition in which the Nero-Antichrist paradigm appears, in order to establish why Nero was chosen and how the paradigm was explained.

Why Nero became the Antichrist figure in Late Antiquity can be answered quite simply. Nero was the first emperor to persecute the Christians in the aftermath of the AD 64 fire in Rome. Although the persecution may not have been the most ferocious in Christian history, his role was made distinctive through the influence of millennialism on early Christian writing, in particular, an aspect of millennialism known as ‘recapitulation’, which tied the first persecutor of Christians to the last in the apocalypse. As millennialism was an important influence on biblical exegesis and Christian history, Late Antiquity proved to be a period in which the Antichrist was under frequent discussion and the Nero-Antichrist paradigm emerged as a possible component of millennialist theories.

The second question can be answered by tracing pre-existing motifs concerning Nero and the Antichrist in order to establish a common method of describing an ‘anti’ figure, whether an anti-Augustus or an Antichrist. Both these types of ‘anti’ figures are deceptive, cruel, violent and unpredictable, and their impact upon those around them is necessarily destructive. In pagan sources, Nero is portrayed as an anti-Augustus *par excellence*, displaying all of these traits during his reign. Similarly, the descriptions of the Antichrist figure that appear in *Revelation*, 2 *Thessalonians*, *Daniel* and John’s *Epistles* are illustrated with the same kind of dangerous behaviour. The *Sibylline Oracles* are more specific in their portrayal of Nero as the Antichrist figure; their use of detailed motifs suggests that they utilised the pagan biographical tradition directly, thus creating a precedent for late-antique writers to call upon. These factors allowed later historians and exegetes to draw parallels between Nero and the biblical Antichrist, solidified by Nero’s portrayal in the *Sibylline Oracles*.

---

Nero as the first and last persecutor

Late Antiquity was a momentous time in Christian history, both in terms of historical events (persecution followed by legitimisation) and the evolution of Christian literature. The 3rd century AD saw a turning-point in apocalyptic literature specifically. During this period the apocalypse progressed from a ‘living form of Christian literary composition’ to a literature that warranted substantial interpretation. Daley argues that this occurred as Christian communities gained an increasingly unified and organised presence in the Mediterranean. A sense of stability within the Christian community negated the need for apocalyptic composition. Furthermore, Revelation was gaining authority as an important apocalyptic narrative in the 3rd century, as exemplified by Victorinus of Pettau’s first ever commentary on the book written sometime before Diocletian’s persecution. Works featuring the Nero-Antichrist paradigm spun across the 3rd to 5th centuries AD. The paradigm was not universally accepted, but its very dismissal as a popular belief of the less educated reveals its persistence.

As Christian writers tried to negotiate the repeated references to an Antichrist figure in biblical literature, discussions of the Nero-Antichrist paradigm found their way into biblical exegesis, histories of Christianity and the Christian Church, and treatises on Christian theology and philosophy, all of which dealt with eschatological concerns and apocalyptic events. Such events were discussed in both Greek and Latin texts, although the influential Revelation was distrusted by Greek exegetes prior to its official canonisation at the Council of Carthage in AD 397.

Nero’s prominence in Christian history often comes back to his role as the first persecutor of the Christians in AD 64. Nero blamed the Christians for starting a fire in Rome that destroyed a significant part of the city. The

---

7 Daley 1999:5. Also see McGinn 2009:86-89 in which he describes the shift in the millennialist concerns of this period going from materialistic, focusing on the events themselves, to spiritual, focusing on the wider implications of what the events mean to the Christian faith.
8 Victorinus was also the first biblical exegete to write in Latin, see Daley 1991:65.
9 A significantly later date than other parts of the Bible, see Metzger 1987:314-15; also see 210-12. For distrust of Revelation in the Greek tradition see Euseb. HE 7.25.1; 3.25.1-7; Daley 1999:5. The exceptions to this are Irenaeus’ Adversus Hæreses and Hippolytus’ De Antichristo, which commented upon the books of the Bible in Greek and mention Revelation, but do not feature it prominently.
persecution is well documented in Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio, and although Tacitus chose not to speculate about who actually started the fire, Suetonius and Cassius Dio laid the blame firmly at Nero’s door.\(^\text{10}\) Peter allegedly suffered during this persecution and Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and killed on Nero’s orders. Neither death features in pagan literature, but both are extremely prevalent in the late-antique Christian history.\(^\text{11}\)

While Nero’s persecution was of utmost concern for Christian writers, his place in Apocalypticism was only consolidated when late-antique writers tied this first persecution to the last ever in Revelation. Its significance for an apocalyptic framework can be explained by an aspect of millennialism, namely recapitulation. Millennialism refers to the belief, based on Revelation 20, that an apocalyptic event will be followed by the rule of Christ for a thousand years, at the end of which the final judgement will occur.\(^\text{12}\) Recapitulation, usually ascribed to Irenaeus, dictates that beginnings and endings had to be matched; the first resurrection of Christ will be mirrored by the second, the end of the world will recall its beginnings.\(^\text{13}\) Irenaeus understood recapitulatio as representing an epitomised version of a proemium: the promises made at the beginning of the Bible (proemium) must be fulfilled at the end (recapitulatio).\(^\text{14}\) Crucially, this means that no new information can be added to the text. Furthermore, Irenaeus understood the eschatological scope of biblical accounts as working within an historical framework, meaning that past historical events would repeat themselves exactly in the future.\(^\text{15}\) Since Nero was the first persecutor, he had to be the last persecutor as well. Irenaeus’ take on recapitulation and millennialism was influential in the 3rd century, but writers of the 4th and 5th centuries rejected millennial literalism or advised that Revelation’s prophecies do not apply to specific historical events.\(^\text{16}\) This includes the intellectual writers who refuted the historical

\(^{10}\) Tac. Ann. 15.44; Suet. Ner. 38.1-3; Cass. Dio 62.16.1-2.

\(^{11}\) The suggestion that Nero killed an apostle as part of his crucifixion first appears in the Ascension of Isaiah 4.2. Later, Eusebius first mentions that Paul was beheaded in Rome under Nero and confirms that Peter was crucified during his reign, see HE 2.25.5. Also see Rougé 1978:79-87 for Paul’s last days in Rome and its influence on exegetes of 2 Thess.


\(^{13}\) Iren. Adv. Haer. 3.18.1.

\(^{14}\) Iren. Adv. Haer. 3.18.1; Lössl 2009:34.


\(^{16}\) See Jerome Comm. in Dan. 2.7.17; Tyconius in Burkitt 1894:66-70; Pollmann
framework of recapitulation. However, the ‘many’ who these writers refer to as perpetuating the Nero-Antichrist paradigm, continued to relate eschatology to historical events.

The influence of persecution and recapitulation on the discussion of the Nero-Antichrist paradigm is evident in a range of late-antique writers. Commodian’s *Poem about Two Peoples* (3rd century) justifies his association between Nero and the Antichrist by naming Nero as the punisher (*punuiit*) of Peter and Paul. In the 4th century, Lactantius’ *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* records how each of the Roman emperors who persecuted Christians met their ends. He stresses that Nero was the first persecutor, a crime further exacerbated by Peter’s crucifixion and Paul’s trial, condemnation and execution under Nero’s watch. He goes on to say that some believe Nero will also be the last persecutor by virtue of his mistreatment of the Christians during his reign, thus presenting the association even if he himself did not find it entirely plausible. In the 5th century Nero appears as the first and the last persecutor in Sulpicius Severus and the *Liber Genealogus*. Sulpicius Severus’ *Chronicles*, or *Sacred History*, consisted of two books on the history of the Christian Church, paying particular attention to the persecutions. The focus of his account is on Peter and Paul in Rome and the Christian persecution of AD 64, with the opening of the chapter suggesting that Nero, the first persecutor, is expected by many to carry it on at the end. Finally, the Nero-Antichrist

---

1999:167-68.

17 Comm. *Carm. Apol.* 827-64. Dating Commodian’s life and works is contentious, the late 5th century AD is also suggested as a possibility; see Moreschini & Norelli 2005:1.381; Daley 1999:34.

18 Probably written during the reign of Constantine between 313 and 315; see Creed 1984:xxxiii-xxxv.


20 Lact. *Mort. Pers.* 2.8. The late fourth-century exegete Ambrosiaster identified Nero as the Antichrist figure in 2 Thess. in his *Commentary on the Letters of St Paul*; on his dating see Moreschini & Norelli 2005:2:296-97. Ambrosiaster, Comm. 2 Thess. 2.7 justifies his identification of the Antichrist and Nero with Nero being the first in a list of pagan persecutors culminating in Julian; Nero does not feature as last persecutor. This approach is echoed by Orosius (*Adv. Pag.* 7; 5th century), who numbers each pagan emperor-persecutor according to his position after Nero.


paradigm is addressed in the AD 438 recension of the *Liber Genealogus*, written by an unknown Donatist from North Africa. The writer mentions Peter and Paul and the first persecution as reasons for discussing the Nero-Antichrist paradigm in further detail. Without the qualms of Lactantius or Sulpicius Severus, the Donatist says that the persecution is going to be repeated when the two witnesses are sent down from heaven.

From this range of texts, the influence of recapitulation in Late Antiquity is evident. Nero became the brackets around hundreds of years of Christian persecution. Nero’s role as the first and the last persecutor depended upon contextualising apocalyptic literature with an historical framework, while the scepticism of some writers to accept the Nero-Antichrist paradigm is explained by a reluctance to do this.

**The pagan tradition, the Antichrist tradition, and Nero**

The persecutor-Nero’s association with the Antichrist initiated a search for further motifs from his portrayal by Roman historians to solidify the paradigm. Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio depict Nero as an ‘anti-Augustus’ – an emperor who could never live up to the dynasty’s founder. In Late Antiquity, the success of the Nero-Antichrist paradigm depended upon discovering traits within the biblical narratives that contained references to the Antichrist, and matching them to Neronian traits in pagan literature. The *Sibylline Oracles*, utilising both apocalyptic literature and the pagan tradition’s portrayal of Nero, provided the precedent for recognising traits shared between Nero and the Antichrist figure. As the volume of Christian works interpreting the apocalypse increased, this precedent gained momentum.

Recent scholarship has devoted some attention to the relationship between Christian and pagan traditions on Nero. Van Kooten (2005) is certain that Nero is meant as the first beast in *Revelation* and the Antichrist figure in 2 *Thessalonians*, on the basis of the many parallels between these texts and the depictions of Nero in Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius.

---

23 See Gumerlock 2006:349-50. On the *Liber Genealogus* and the Donatists more generally, see Dearn 2007:127-35. This text is particularly important in offering a viewpoint from beyond Constantine’s Nicene Creed Christianity; on the Donatist schism, see Frend 1971; Merdinger 1997; Tilley 1997.


Dio, which go beyond the ‘stereotypical attributes derived from the ancient topos of the tyrant’.\footnote{Van Kooten 2005:177-215, esp. 187; 2007:205-48.} He thus agrees with the late-antique writers in crediting John and Paul with recognising the ‘true’ character of Nero. The methodology of accepting both Christian and pagan texts as essentially ‘true’ biographical pictures is, however, problematic. Concerning the relationship between the historical Nero and his literary depiction, Elsner and Masters remind us that ‘it is hard in the end to believe that any historical figure could have been so uniformly depraved, or any era so hopelessly steeped in crime and sycophancy’.\footnote{Elsner & Masters 1994:1-2, the italics are theirs.} In their view of the historiographical tradition, all emperors are measured against the model of Augustus and always destined to fall short. As the last Julio-Claudian, Nero can be nothing other than the negative opposite of the dynasty’s founder and his whole biography is constructed around this rhetorical principle. In other words, the Nero Van Kooten finds in Revelation and 2 Thessalonians cannot be taken to represent the ‘real’ Nero as his conception of the emperor is founded on a historiographical literary construct. Instead, the Nero-Antichrist paradigm was a non-biblical Christian invention, whose writers, themselves educated in Classical rhetoric or at least well read in Classical literature, were familiar with the pagan biographical tradition of Nero and able to draw on its rhetorical treatment to merge the tropes of the anti-Augustus with that of the Antichrist.\footnote{Lactantius, for example, was well-versed in Latin rhetoric and was tutor in Latin letters to Constantine’s son Crispus, see Creed 1984:xxxv-xxvii. Sulpicius Severus makes extensive use of pagan sources; see Moreschini & Norelli 2005:2:351-52; above n. 24. Jerome studied with the famous grammarian Aelius Donatus; cf. Moreschini & Norelli 2005:2:299; Jer. Ep. 22.30.}

The construction of Nero as an anti-Augustus hinges upon inverting qualities attributed to Augustus. Nero is set up as an Augustan figure who desperately fails. At his predecessor Claudius’ funeral, Suetonius’ Nero claims that he will rule ‘according to the principles of Augustus’ – as a measured and fair emperor who will take every opportunity to show generosity and mercy – thus building up an expectation for Nero’s reign that makes the damning account that follows even worse.\footnote{Suet. Ner. 10.1, Rolfe (tr.) 1914:97.} His Augustan characteristics falter quickly, and Nero soon becomes selfish, volatile and cruel.\footnote{On Nero’s cruelty: Suet. Ner. 33.2-3; 34.1-5; 35.2-4; Tac. Ann. 13.15-16; 14.3-8, 60, 64; 16.5. Selfishness: Suet. Ner. 38.1-3. Volatility: Suet. Ner. 23.2. On the}
an archetype for future bad emperors. Juvenal describes Domitian as ‘a
hairless Nero’, 31 while the Historia Augusta brands Commodus as ‘more
savage than Domitian, more foul than Nero’, 32 and laments that Elagabalus’
reign resembled that of ‘a Caligula, a Nero, and a Vitellius’. 33 Christian
authors exploited this literary depiction for characterisations of the
Antichrist. Victorinus, Lactantius and Augustine point to the circum-
stances of Nero’s death, which for the despotic Nero of the pagan tradition
could not have been from natural causes. Instead it was necessarily violent
and, by virtue of the false Nero, sometimes perceived as ambiguous. 34
Victorinus’ Commentary of the Apocalypse states that the emperor was
driven to slit his own throat by members of his senate, who were chasing
him at the time. 35 Lactantius writes that the Nero-Antichrist paradigm
was believed because the emperor disappeared in AD 68 and had not
died. 36 Similarly, Augustine explains the Nero-Antichrist paradigm in the
popular imagination as hinged upon Nero’s continued life; that instead of
committing suicide he hides in waiting to be restored at the time of the
apocalypse. 37 Sulpicius Severus’ history details Nero’s crimes with exten-
sive use of pagan sources, singling out the accusations that Nero murdered
his mother, that he played the bride in his marriage to the freedman Pytha-
goras, and that his crimes were so heinous that his own conscience could
not reconcile with them. 38

Despite their distinct literary histories, the pagan Nero as anti-Augustus
shares traits with the biblical Antichrist, which allowed late-antique
writers to insert the Nero figure into the biblical narratives. Many of our

---

33 S.H.A. Heliogab. 1.1, Magie (tr.) 1924:105; see also S.H.A. Heliogab. 33.1, 34.1.
34 On the false Neros (pretenders from the East claiming to be the emperor after
he was supposed to be dead), see Tac. Hist. 2.8-9; Cass. Dio 66.19.3; Suet. Ner.
The notion was picked up in Sib. Or. 5:216-17. Nero’s death by sword is
described in Suetonius, Ner. 48-49.
37 Aug. De Civ. Dei 20.19. Augustine regards 2 Thess. as not referring to Nero but
rather to the Roman Empire as a whole.
34.1-4. The marriage to Pythagoras: Tac. Ann. 15.37; Cass. Dio 62.28.3. His
conscience: Tac. Ann. 15.36; Cass. Dio 63.28.4.
late-antique writers reference the Johannine books and 2 Thessalonians when discussing Nero because they believe that John and Paul were thinking of Nero during composition. Revelation’s use is best exemplified by Commodian, whose Poem about Two Peoples 827-935 references Revelation by imitating its vocabulary, but substitutes Nero for the beast.39 The poem mirrors Revelation 11.7-13 and 13.5-6, which depict a beast who is murderous and destructive when he destroys a city and the seven thousand people in it,40 and hubristic when he ‘utter[s] blasphemies against God’ (ESV). Biblical exegetes, including Ambrosiaster, John Chrysostom (4th century) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, (early 5th century) often identified Nero as τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας (the mystery of lawlessness) of 2 Thessalonians 2.7.41 The man of lawlessness42 embodies various Antichrist traits simultaneously; he is the ‘son of destruction’ (ESV), disregards God in order to promote himself and wins followers through deceit.33 Finally, the Liber Genealogus concludes its account of Nero by referencing the Antichrist of 1 John 2.18-19.44 1 John 2.18-24 and 2 John 1.9-11 warn against the power of an Antichrist who already dwells amongst the

39 The authorship of Revelation is disputed, but traditionally attributed to the apostle John, who composed it on Patmos, either in AD 68-69, or the reign of Diocletian, AD 80-90; see Barr 2010:636-37. Several scholars have discussed Nero as the beast in Revelation, see particularly Rojas-Flores 2004:375-92; Bauckham 1993:384-452; Court 1979:122-53. For further examples of Revelation’s use in Late Antiquity, see Vict. Comm. in Apoc. 17.11; 17.16; Sulp. Sev. Chr. 2.29.5-6 and Rev. 13.3; Lib. Gen. 615-19 and Rev. 13.18; Quodvultdeus in CCSL 60:201 and Rev. 17.8.
40 Cf. 17.16 in which the beast kills the whore of Babylon by devouring her flesh and burning her with fire.
41 Ambrosiaster, Comm. 2 Thess. 2.7; John Chrys. Hom. 2 Thess. 4; Theodoret in Migne’s PG 82.665. Also see Aug. De Civ. Dei 20.19. On the various datings, see Moreschini & Norelli 2005:2:164, 296-97, 314. 2 Thessalonians is considered to be either by Paul before his death in the 60s AD, or by another writer in the 90s AD; see Krentz 2010:523.
42 Peerbolte 1996:75 regards the phrase to refer less to a disregard for law than to a general sense of ungodliness.
43 2 Thess. 2.4-10. Some modern scholars interpret the lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians to have existed during Paul’s time, facilitating a Nero connection; see Mitchell 2003:61; Hartman 1990:481. However, Koester 1990:457 maintains, ‘[n]or is the antichrist identified with the Roman emperor. References to the political world are consciously avoided.’
44 Lib. Gen. 620. The authorship of the Johannine epistles is disputed, but dated probably to the late first or early 2nd century AD, Painter 2010:367.
righteous: anyone who so much as greets him will fall prey to his deceit, causing them to deny both God and Christ.

Jerome and Victorinus tie Nero to the eschatological figure in the Old Testament’s *Daniel* 11. Unlike other authors, they could not have considered Ps.-Daniel to have meant Nero; the chronology does not allow it. Recent scholarship argues for a mid-2nd century BC date for chapters 7-12 of the multilingual Hebrew-Aramaic version, with the Old Greek translation appearing in the late 2nd century BC.45 Instead, Jerome and Victorinus reference *Daniel* due to pre-existing associations between Old Testament and New Testament eschatological figures. New Testament writers shaped their Antichrist figures according to *Daniel* 7-11, principally the beast in *Revelation* and the ‘man of lawlessness’ in 2 *Thessalonians*.46 In their texts, Jerome portrays the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes as the forerunner of the Nero-Antichrist,47 and Victorinus cross-references *Daniel* with *Revelation*, both of which he takes as speaking of Nero.48 *Daniel* 11.32-44 prophesies that ‘he shall go out with great fury to destroy and devote many to destruction’ ([ESV]), magnify himself above any other god, and deceive his followers. Both late-antique and modern writers rightly note the parallels between the biblical texts and the historiographical depictions of Nero as the archetypal anti-Augustus. However, such similarities are due not to a substantial comparison between Nero and the Antichrist in the 1st century, but rather to their shared use of motifs for depicting bad rulers.

The biblical texts simply use existing *topoi* and are significantly vague, neither mentioning Nero by name nor any specific events from his reign.49 They could be attributed to any tyrannical figure, depending upon the context of the interpreter. Beyond similar behavioural motifs, scholars often point to the number of the beast, 666, as the defining connection

48 Vict. *Comm. in Apoc.* 17.11; 16.
49 The head wound of both Nero (Suet. *Ner.* 49.3) and the beast (*Rev.* 13.3) may be one possible exception, but is considered tenuous and disputable by some, particularly as the beast’s wound would not have been self-inflicted whereas Nero’s was, cf. Minear 1953:93-101.
between Nero and the beast.\textsuperscript{50} Throughout history, however, this association has been anything but fixed. First, the number itself is not consistent: in some versions of \textit{Revelation} it is 666, in others 616.\textsuperscript{51} Then, how the number comes to mean Nero is debated: the \textit{Liber Genealogus} 615-19 argues that ‘Antichristus’ adds up to 154, which when multiplied by 4, the number of letters in Nero’s name, results in 616. Others use \textit{gematria}, the principle that every number corresponds to a letter in Hebrew, and Nero Caesar adds up to 666.\textsuperscript{52} Finally, the number has been variously attributed to many people throughout history, depending upon the context; particularly popular in the Middle Ages were papal Antichrists.\textsuperscript{53}

The \textit{Sibylline Oracles} cannot be accused of the same vagueness as the biblical texts. Nero remains unnamed, but unmistakable events from his reign were conflated with an apocalyptic narrative to create the Nero-Antichrist paradigm, adding detail from pagan sources and so paving the way for later writers to do the same with biblical texts. The Oracles themselves were championed in Late Antiquity by Lactantius, who quotes them extensively.\textsuperscript{54} In \textit{On the Deaths of the Persecutors}, Lactantius cites the Oracles when describing the Antichrist figure as the slayer of his own mother, referring to the well-known anecdote of Nero’s involvement in the murder of Agrippina.\textsuperscript{55}

The \textit{Sibylline Oracles} discuss Nero in two contexts, as a historical Roman emperor-tyrant, and as a returning Antichrist figure, Nero \textit{redivivus} (Nero reborn).\textsuperscript{56} The historical Nero of the pagan tradition is used to

\textsuperscript{51} See Iren. \textit{Adv. Haer}. 5.30.3
\textsuperscript{52} The best explanation of this is offered in Watt 1989:373-74.
\textsuperscript{53} McGinn 1978:160.
\textsuperscript{54} McGinn 1979:21-22 states that Lactantius cites the \textit{Sibylline Oracles} at least 51 times in his surviving works, which is 1.5 more times than he cites the Old Testament. Cf. Bowen & Garnsey 2003:17-18. Other Christian texts that reference the Oracles include Justin Martyr, \textit{Quaest. et resp. ad Orthodoxos} 74; \textit{Apol.} 1.20, 44; Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Strom}. 6.5; Augustine, \textit{De Civ. Dei} 18.23.
\textsuperscript{56} Van Henten 2000:3-17 argues that Nero \textit{redivivus} would be better described as Nero \textit{rediturus} as the Nero-Antichrist figure does not die, but instead returns from exile. For a brief overview on the suggested nature and purpose of the \textit{Sibylline
inform the Antichrist-Nero: the murder of his mother, the canal he attempted to dig at the isthmus in Corinth, and his exile to the east, from which he will return in order to bring destruction to the west.\textsuperscript{57} The Oracles ensure the historical Nero is unmistakable by invoking further motifs: murdering his wives and members of his wider family, the emperor as an athlete, a charioteer and a singer.\textsuperscript{58} The Oracles are distinctive in their exploration of the historical figure who will become the returning Antichrist; biblical texts chose to focus on the figure’s eschatological role. This exploration meant they required a definite historical figure; vague motifs were not enough.

The \textit{Sibylline Oracles} are notoriously hard to place and date and arguments based upon these factors are contentious.\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, determining why the Oracles founded their historical Antichrist using anecdotes about Nero specifically can only be speculative. As we have seen, the pagan tradition did a spectacular job in setting Nero up as an archetypal ‘anti’ figure. Lightfoot argues that Oracles 1-3 often drew upon the pagan mythic tradition in their prophecies, making their continued appeal to the pagan tradition plausible if not provable.\textsuperscript{60} Furthermore, the parts of the Oracles using the pagan tradition may well have been composed in the early 2nd century, roughly contemporaneous with Tacitus’ and Suetonius’ works, allowing time since Nero’s death for set motifs to become fully established.\textsuperscript{61} Although these answers are not necessarily definitive, it

---


\textsuperscript{59} As Lightfoot 2007:x states, ‘For the most part, though, dates, places, and contexts are not to be had from Sibylline oracles.’

\textsuperscript{60} Lightfoot 2007:203-19. Collins 1983:393 note 1, has conceded that in the ‘review of history’ at the beginning of the \textit{Sib. Or.} 5, Nero is described as a snake because the writer of the oracle had been influenced by Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} 11.11.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Sibylline Oracles} 8 can be dated to c. AD 175 and \textit{Sibylline Oracles} 12 to the reign of Severus Alexander in the early 3rd century; see Collins 1983:418, 443; Kreitzer 1988:103, 112. Collins 1983:390 dates the parts of Book 5 containing the Nero-Antichrist references to the 70s and 80s AD, but other parts of the same book, which mention events from Hadrian’s reign, to around AD 132. His early dating, however, assumes that the beast in \textit{Revelation} refers to Nero. Kreitzer
remains true that the *Sibylline Oracles* were the first to advocate the historical Nero as an Antichrist figure by amalgamating specific details from Nero's reign with apocalyptic motifs.

Thus, in Late Antiquity, writers had a variety of literature to draw upon when explaining the Antichrist. Already established as the archetypal anti-Augustus, Nero became a fitting candidate for an Antichrist figure as well. To authors of the 3rd to the 5th centuries AD, both pagan and Christian, Nero was suited for an 'anti' type. The parallels in the motifs between the anti-Augustus and the Antichrist are fuelled by the explicit identification of Nero with the Antichrist in the *Sibylline Oracles*. Late-antique writers found themselves with a motive – Nero’s AD 64 persecution; a precedent – the exploitation of the pagan tradition in the *Sibylline Oracles*; and a literary model – Nero as an anti-Augustus with which they could build their Nero-Antichrist. This was accelerated as emerging works of Christian history used millennialist recapitulation to define a relationship between history and eschatology, and achieved by calling on the emperor whom they considered to have started the wave of anti-Christian acts to fulfil the role of the ultimate corruptor, the first and the last, the anti-Augustus and the Antichrist.

**Bibliography**


1988:100-03 has argued compellingly that Nero passages should also be dated to AD 132. More recently Klauck 2001:687 has also advocated c. AD 130 as the date of composition for Book 5 of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Even more recently, Lightfoot 2007:99 has questioned the early date Collins gave to the third *Sibylline Oracle* based on the Nero material.


Grabbe, L.L. 2001. ‘A Dan(iel) for all seasons: for whom was Daniel important?’ In Collins & Flint 2001:229-246.


Kreitzer, L. 1988. ‘Hadrian and the Nero redivivus myth.’ Zeitschrift für die


Mommsen, T. (ed.). 1892. Liber Genealogus. Monumenta Germaniae Histor-


