Allusive Concord: Tacitus*, Histories* 2.37-38 and *Bellum Catilinae* 6.1

Tacitus, *Histories* 2.37-38 employs allusions to the *Bellum Catilinae* to suggest that concord in the Roman state must have been achieved at least once in its history and potentially could be again, specifically by the unification of ethnically and culturally different people. This paper identifies an allusion at *Histories* 2.37-38 to *Bellum Catilinae* 6.1, which previously has not been discussed and argues that the *Histories* raises the possibility that peace and stability in the Roman Empire could be attained by incorporating more fully into the state the non-Roman soldiers and subjects who play a major role in the civil wars.

Just before the first battle of Bedriacum, the decisive contest that determines whether Otho will remain emperor or whether Vitellius and his German armies will seize control of the Empire, Tacitus briefly steps back from the narrative of the Vitellian rebellion to relate a story that claims the two sides’ armies considered seeking a peaceful resolution to the question of who should be emperor. Drawing on the work of Ash 2010 and Wiedemann 1993, I first argue that a pause in the narrative at this climactic moment highlights the interpretive significance of the content of the digression. This observation establishes the basis for making a broader claim about the *Histories* from these two chapters. After citing pieces of *Histories* 2.37 and 2.38, I point out a well-known allusion to *Bellum Catilinae* 10.1 and cite the reading of the most recent commentary on *Histories* 2 which claims this passage establishes a “dark moralising framework” (Ash (2007) 177) that places the power struggle of AD 69 within the history of civil war since the late Republic. I then show that in addition and contrary to this interpretation a hopeful reading of Roman history is also present in this passage through another, heretofore unidentified allusion to the *Bellum Catilinae*, this time to *BC* 6.1. That passage notes with some astonishment (*incredibile memoratu*) that the origins of Rome supposedly lie with the amicable unification of the Trojans and native Italians. By a careful examination of the passages I will show that Tacitus directly and indirectly duplicates Sallust’s vocabulary and employs a similar authorial position that distances the narrator from the veracity of the stories presented. In particular, Tacitus alludes to Sallust when he writes that he doubts the ethnically and linguistically diverse Vitellians and Othonians could reach any kind of agreement:

neque…reor…neque aut exercitus linguis moribusque dissonos in hunc consensum potuisse coalescere…( 2.37.2)

These lines draw directly on *BC* 6.1:

Urbem Romam, sicuti ego accepi, condidere atque habuere initio Troiani, qui Aenea duce profugi sedibus incertis vagabantur, et cum his Aborigines…. hi postquam in una moenia convenere, dispari genere, dissimili lingua, alius alio more viventes, incredibile memoratu est quam facile coaluerint.

A close reading of the passages shows among other things that Tacitus’ *linguis moribusque dissonos* echoes Sallust’s *dispari genere, dissimili lingua, alius alio more viventes* (with *dissonos* replicating the sound and meaning of *dissimili* without repeating the same word) and that a form of *coalescere* is present in both passages. Thus, the allusion, which suggests concord between massively different peoples is possible, offers a message opposite to the explicitly expressed opinion in these lines. The conclusion of the paper draws out the wider implications of this allusion to argue that the *Histories* is pointing to a model for an internally peaceful and stable Roman state, one that specifically requires creating a new order through a broad incorporation of ethnically different (*linguis moribusque dissoni*) people.

Bibliography

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