

A NOTE ON SALLUST, *CATILINA* 1. 1

Omneis homines qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus, summa ope niti decet ne vitam silentio transeant veluti pecora, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit.

ONE of Sallust's main points in this preface is that individuals should strive to attain *gloria* (*gloriam quaerere*, 1. 3, etc.), i.e. should be spoken highly of by others.¹ With this (the immediate context) in mind, the commentators seem agreed that *silentio* in the opening sentence must be taken in a passive sense: '*silentio* expresses not a state in which one says nothing, but a state in which nothing is said about one, i.e. "obscurity"' (Neatby and Hayes; cf. E. W. Fabri [2nd edn., 1845], 'so daß sie sich nicht bemerkbar machen'; R. Jacobs-H. Wirz [1877], 'die Menschen sollen von sich reden machen'; F. Antoine and R. Lallier [1888], 'sans faire parler d'eux'; E. Malcovati [2nd edn., 1945], 'senza far parlare di sè, quindi, con altra immagine, "nell'oscurità"'). The sequence of ideas in the first chapter makes this interpretation seem certain. Yet the most important argument of the preface is that one can legitimately seek this *gloria* through words no less effectively than through deeds (3. 1, 8. 3 ff.). Sallust manipulates, with exceptional control, the commonplaces of the preface to defend his choice, not of politics, but of historical writing, as his own course for seeking *gloria*.² A reference to *silentium* in the active sense at the very beginning is thus highly appropriate: it is the key to much of the subsequent argument.³ It was after all a common *topos* that eloquence is the main quality which distinguishes man from the beasts,⁴ and Sallust, who knew his Isocrates well, seems to be making a clear allusion here to a well-known passage of Isocrates in which eloquence is exclusively the subject under discussion (*Pan.* 48):⁵ τοῦτο μόνον ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν ζώων ἴδιον ἔφυνεν ἔχοντες, καὶ διότι τοῦτω πλεονεκτῆσαντες καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν αὐτῶν διηγέκαμεν. The proper conclusion is that the word *silentium* is here equivocal and that the older translators were right in rendering it as 'in Scilence or Oblivion' (T. Heywood, 1608), 'in Obscurity or Silence' (J. Rowe, 3rd edn., 1725). Such pregnant ambiguity should cause no surprise; it is one of the subtler characteristics of Sallustian *brevitas*.

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¹ This is well brought out in 7. 6 'se quisque hostem ferire, murum ascendere, *conspici*': the ancients, says Sallust, not only performed these sterling actions, but were *seen* to be performing them. In the prefaces of Sallust almost every word has a bearing on his argument.

² So too, rightly, R. Syme, *Sallust* (1964), 241, 'The prologues argue and defend the writing of history' (with further references).

³ We should not be put off by the fact that Sallust does not return to the topic of eloquence until 3. 1; compare how the reference to *fortuna* at 8. 1 is not properly elaborated until 10. 1.

⁴ e.g. Cic. *Inv.* 1. 5 'homines . . . hac re

maxime bestiis praestare quod loqui possunt', Quint. 2. 16. 12 'deus ille . . . nullo magis hominem separavit a ceteris, quae quidem mortalia essent, animalibus quam dicendi facultate'. Cf. A. S. Pease on Cic. *N.D.* 2. 148, adding Xen. *Mem.* 1. 4. 12, 4. 3. 12; Call. *Iambi* fr. 192 Pf. ll. 1 ff.

⁵ Cf. P. Perrochat, *Les modèles grecs de Salluste* (1949), 69. For Sallust's knowledge of Isocrates see further W. Avenarius, 'Die griechischen Vorbilder des Sallust', *S.O.* 33 (1957), 79 f. We should also remember the great importance given to eloquence at Rome; Cicero ranked it as one of the three main claims to the consulship (D. C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* [1961], 23).