

THE SCOPE AND GENRE OF VELLEIUS' HISTORY

When first confronted by the *Historia Romana* of Velleius Paterculus, it is easy for a reader to assume on the basis of the title and the surviving part of the text that it is a history of Rome, albeit a short one. In the following discussion I intend to demonstrate, first, why that initial assumption should be rejected and, secondly, how the work fits into the tradition of Roman historical writing.¹

I

The evidence of the title can be easily dismissed. As G. V. Sumner points out, the title was invented by Beatus Rhenanus and carries no authority of its own.² This leaves us free to deal with the text alone.

The history must first be described as accurately as possible, so that we can see both what it is and what it is not. The fragmentary nature of the text and the loss of most of the historical writing before Velleius' time will make speculation necessary.

In Stegmann's second Teubner edition³ Velleius' text fills 132 pages, the mutilated first book taking up 19 and the second book 113. If the first book was originally about as long as the second, the complete text would have been approximately 225 Teubner pages long. Of the original work, then, over 40 per cent may have been lost. Aside from a few minor lacunae scattered throughout the volume, the text is seriously mutilated in only two places, at the beginning and in the middle of the first book. The first gap is much shorter than the second, which may have been equivalent in length to about 90 Teubner pages.

Velleius probably began his book with a preface, as Roman historians usually did.⁴ Certain important conjectures about its contents can be ventured with relative safety. Since M. Vinicius is addressed repeatedly throughout the work and is even honoured by having his consulate (A.D. 30) used to date various events (e.g. 49.1; 65.2), he undoubtedly appeared in the preface. The work may even have been formally dedicated to him: dedications are rare in Roman histories, but so is the use of direct address.⁵

¹ The following abbreviations are used for works frequently cited: Lana = I. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo o della Propaganda* (Torino, 1952); McGonagle = D. J. McGonagle, 'Rhetoric and Biography in Velleius Paterculus' (diss., The Ohio State University, 1970); Portalupi, edn. = Velleius Paterculus, *Storia Romana*, ed. with comm. by F. Portalupi (Torino, 1967); Sumner = G. V. Sumner, 'The Truth about Velleius Paterculus: Prolegomena', *HSCP* 74 (1970), 257–97; Woodman, edn. = Velleius Paterculus, *The Tiberian Narrative* (2.94–131), ed. with comm. by A. J. Woodman (Cambridge, 1977); Woodman, 'Questions' = A. J. Woodman, 'Questions of Date, Genre, and Style in Velleius: Some Literary Answers', *CQ* 25 (1975), 272–306. Velleius is cited from the Teubner text of C. Stegmann (second edition, Stuttgart, 1933) through 2.93 and from A. J. Woodman's edition from 2.94–131. Stegmann's orthography, however, is maintained throughout. In citations the book number is given only for Book 1 and for the first 18 chapters of Book 2. Fragments of the Roman historians are cited from H. Peter, *Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae* (Stuttgart, vol. 1² (1914), vol. 2 (1906); both rpt. 1967).

² Sumner, 280. On the title, see Woodman, edn. p. 95.

³ Stuttgart (1933).

⁴ cf. e.g. Livy, *praef.*; Sallust, *B.C.* 1–4, *B.J.* 1–5.3; Cato, *Origines* fr. 1–3P; see Sumner, 281.

⁵ T. Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions* (Stockholm, 1964), p. 67 and n. 10; see Coelius Antipater fr. 1P; Woodman, edn. p. 127, n. on 101.3; Woodman, 'Questions', 275; M. L. Paladini, 'Studi su Velleio Patercolo', *Acme* 6 (1953), 447.

Two passages in the second book suggest that the preface contained a promise of brevity:⁶

55.1: Admonet promissae brevitatis fides, quanto omnia transcurso dicenda sint.

89.6: nos memores professionis universam imaginem principatus eius oculis animisque subiecimus.

Such a promise was not unusual. Valerius Maximus, a contemporary of Velleius although not an historian, assures the reader in his preface that he will be brief. Florus' preface also contains an assurance of brevity.⁷

Finally, the preface probably emphasized the history's practical usefulness and the ease with which it could be used. Velleius inserts the two long digressions in order to help the reader understand complicated matters more easily:

1.14.1: Cum facilius cuiusque rei in unam contracta species quam divisa temporibus oculis animisque inhaereat.

38.1: Haud absurdum videtur propositi operis regulae paucis percurrere, quae cuiusque ductu gens ac natio redacta in formulam provinciae stipendiaria facta sit, ut quae partibus notavimus, facilius simul universa conspici possint.

Although those passages obviously prove nothing about the lost preface, they do indicate one of the historian's major concerns, which may well have figured in the opening of his work. The preface of Valerius Maximus provides an analogy if not a strict parallel.⁸

After the preface, the history proper began. The foundation of Metapontum by Epeus opens our text, with the Trojan War lurking in the background. The history probably started with the Trojan War or the fall of Troy, as 1.2.1 hints: 'tum fere anno octogesimo post Troiam captam, centesimo et vicesimo quam Hercules ad deos excesserat'. It has been suggested that Velleius started with Troy so that he could discuss the heroes who founded cities on their way home.⁹ Foundations were not unusual in historical works, Greek or Roman. Cato devoted the second and third books of his *Origines* to the subject 'unde quaeque civitas orta sit Italica', and hence his work took its name (Nepos, *Cato* 3.3). Among the Greeks Hellanicus had been interested in foundations, and a discussion of the founding of a city often began the history of a *polis*. Velleius was fascinated by foundation stories, as the opening chapters of our text testify (e.g. 1.1; 1.2.2-3), but I suspect that he would have begun his history with the Trojan War simply because it was an important, dramatic event with obvious relevance to Rome and a standard place for histories to begin.

Velleius' passion for foundation stories gives us Epeus, Teucer, Pyrrhus, Phidippus, and Agamemnon, whose murder is briefly related. None of these foundation stories is recorded by Livy or happens to occur in the fragments of the Roman historians. None of the men plays a significant role in Roman genealogical traditions. They have little or nothing to do with Rome.¹⁰

Power struggles in the Peloponnesus, Codrus, the first archon at Athens, and

⁶ Woodman, 'Questions', 284-5; Sumner, 281.

⁷ For later promises of brevity in prefaces, cf. Eutropius, *praef.*; Sulpicius Severus, 1.1; Festus, 1.

⁸ Contemporary comments like these no doubt refer to Livy and the voluminous historians of the later Republic. On Velleius' brief history as a reaction to such works, see below p. 169. For a later example of a promise of usefulness in a preface, cf. the preface to Ampelius' *Liber memorialis*.

⁹ M. Brozek, 'de Vellei Paterculi opusculo mutilato', *Eos* 52 (1962), 125.

¹⁰ One might argue that the trials of these heroes set Aeneas' labours in context (on Aeneas, see below, p. 164). The argument, however, seems fragile: why mention such a variety of men, especially Phidippus?

various non-Italian foundations fill the second chapter. Population movements and foundations in Greece (1.3) are followed by colonization, the founding of Cumae, and Greek colonization in Asia Minor (1.4). Chapter five is taken up by Homer, chapter six by the Medes' triumph in Asia, Lycurgus, the foundation of Carthage, and Caranus' seizure of Macedon. Little of this material relates to Rome, and some of it does not even relate to Greece. Next appears Hesiod, followed by a discussion of the date at which Capua was founded (1.7). The establishment of the Olympic Games and the beginning of the annual archonship at Athens come before the foundation of Rome in chapter eight, which breaks off with the rape of the Sabine women. The text picks up again hundreds of years later with the war against Perseus.

It is essential to observe that the opening of our text does not belong to a typical history of Rome. If we conjecture on the basis of surviving Roman historical writing, a typical history, although usually beginning with Aeneas and Troy, moves quickly to Romulus and the foundation of Rome and covers only Roman history. Velleius mentions Romulus and the foundation of Rome at 1.8.4, but between the opening of our text and the appearance of Romulus there is not a single element of the typical Roman history. This does not mean that Velleius omitted Aeneas, who undoubtedly was mentioned in the lacuna at the beginning of our text. Nevertheless, we are left with a long passage that relates to the history of the ancient world, not to the history of Rome. This is the opening not of a Roman history but of a universal history.

So far foreign history has been combined with Roman history. Did Rome monopolize Velleius' attention once its foundation had been recorded, thus making his work a typical Roman history (as defined above) with an unusual beginning? or did Velleius continue to combine foreign and domestic history? This question has rarely even been seriously considered.¹¹ Although the state of the text makes certainty impossible, four clues suggest that non-Roman affairs continued to be interwoven with the history of Rome.

First, Priscian preserves a fragment of Velleius in the *Institutiones grammaticae* (6.63): 'nec minus clarus ea tempestate fuit Miltiadis filius Cimon'. Elsewhere Velleius uses a similar phrase to introduce Lycurgus between the rise of the Medes and the founding of Carthage (1.6.3). Presumably, at the chronologically appropriate point in the narrative of Roman history an account was given of Cimon and, probably, of Athens. Such an account would be completely unrelated to Roman affairs at that time.¹² Since early in the first book Velleius tries to keep the histories of various countries parallel in time (cf. e.g. 1.6.1; 1.6.3), we must assume that Greek and Roman history were not treated in separate continuous accounts but rather in parallel synchronistic accounts.

The second clue comes in the digression at the end of the first book, where Velleius pauses to consider why genius flourishes so briefly. He mentions the Greek tragedians

¹¹ M. L. W. Laistner (*The Greater Roman Historians* (Berkeley, 1947, rpt. 1971, Sather Classical Lectures vol. 21), p. 108) confidently says, 'The first section, after a few introductory chapters on Greece, sketches Roman history down to 146 B.C.' McGonagle (p. 26) says that Velleius wrote a 'compendium of Roman history'. Woodman (edn. p. 42) refers to Velleius' work as a 'summary history of Rome' (cf., however, edn. p. 95, where Woodman says that Velleius' history belongs to 'the genre of the summary universal history' and accepts Bothe's suggestion of 'Historiarum ad M. Vinicium consulem' as the best title). H. Sauppe ('M. Velleius Paterculus', *Schweizerisches Museum* 1 (1837) = *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Berlin, 1896), p. 47) recognized long before that the title *Historia Romana* was too confining for Velleius' work, but he did not go far enough. Lipsius and Bothe in their editions both felt that *Historia Romana* was too restrictive. For a thorough discussion of the title, see Woodman, edn. p. 95. Sumner (282) discusses the question very briefly but very suggestively.

¹² Sumner (282) emphasizes the importance of this fragment.

and comic poets and then turns to the philosophers after the deaths of Plato and Aristotle: 'quos [the philosophers] paulo ante enumeravimus' (1.16.4). Since philosophers are not mentioned earlier in our text, the passage to which Velleius refers must be assigned to the gap in the middle of Book 1. Velleius frequently groups the literary figures of a given period at a chronologically appropriate point in his narrative.¹³ The philosophers no doubt came at their appropriate point in Greek history. Such a discussion would not be included if Velleius were interested only in Roman affairs.

Third, so far as can be judged, Velleius' treatment of non-Roman and early Roman material was equally spare, although the Roman must eventually predominate. Velleius' entire account of the founding of Rome up to the gap in the text takes only 12½ lines in the Teubner text (1.8.4-6). He here spends almost as much time in dispute as he does in narration (cf. 1.3.2; 1.7.2-3). Almost every feature of the account can be paralleled by earlier passages. The weighty dating technique appears at 1.2.1 and 1.8.1.¹⁴ The essential statement of the foundation takes less space than the account of Teucer and Salamis (1.1.1) or that of the children of Hercules and Lesbos (1.2.3). All of two lines is devoted to the aetiological item about the *patricii*, about the same amount of space as that given to the Medontidae at Athens (1.2.2). Indeed, the account is most striking for the stories it omits: no mention of the wolf, or of the celebrated vultures, or of Remus. The last words before the text breaks off ('raptus virginum Sabinarum') probably led into an anecdote, which would be the first extended Roman anecdote.¹⁵ This speaks strongly against the assumption that after a few introductory chapters Velleius concentrated on Rome. The space given to the foundation of Rome suggests, rather, that developed treatment is more dependent on proximity to A.D. 30 and less dependent on the subject being Roman than is generally thought.

Fourth, in the opening chapters of our text Velleius does not limit his discussion to monumental subjects. He goes to some trouble, for instance, to mention constitutional changes at Athens (1.2.1-2). Such material would be anomalous if non-Roman history were completely dropped after 1.8.4; it indicates that Velleius intends to continue his survey of non-Roman history.¹⁶ The conclusion must be that Velleius' history has a broader scope than a typical Roman history, that it might more accurately be termed a universal history.¹⁷

Nevertheless, although the first book clearly was more than a Roman history, the second book confines itself to Roman affairs. This need not be troubling, if the following hypothesis be accepted: the fall of Carthage was traditionally a turning point in Roman histories.¹⁸ Velleius ends the narrative portion of the first book with the sack of Carthage and the destruction of Corinth (1.12.-13). Those two events marked, for all practical, Roman purposes, the triumph of Rome and the end of Greece as a country with an independent history. All history after Carthage and Corinth must be solely Roman, and in Book 2 Velleius writes a history of Rome.¹⁹

¹³ Homer, 1.5; Hesiod, 1.7; authors of the earlier Republic, 2.9; of the later Republic and early Empire, 36.

¹⁴ The dating technique is, admittedly, used only for important events (cf., e.g., 49.1).

¹⁵ Vossius thought that 'raptus virginum Sabinarum' might be a marginal gloss which became incorporated into the text.

¹⁶ Sumner (282) emphasizes the non-Roman material at the beginning of the history.

¹⁷ Lana (p. 164) and Portalupi (edn. p. xii) refer to Velleius' work as a universal history, by which they mean that it included both Roman and non-Roman material. They provide no arguments to support this, however, nor do they attempt to describe how Velleius might have worked with his non-Roman material. Cf. Sumner, 282.

¹⁸ See D. C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 41 ff.

¹⁹ Sumner (282) says, 'By the time he [Velleius] reaches the second century and we are again able to see what he is doing, Rome dominates the stage. In the nature of things that was inevitable.' Although agreeing on the inevitability of Rome's domination of the stage, I would

Book 2 covers Roman history from the fall of Carthage to Velleius' own time. The topics characteristic of a Roman history are treated: the *res gestae* of men in political and military life. At two points (2.9, 36) there are discussions of literature, an unusual feature which had already appeared in the first book (1.5, 7, 16-18).

As Velleius comes closer to his own time, the narrative slows down markedly. After covering approximately 1,000 years in the first book, from the Trojan War (?) to the fall of Carthage, he devotes an entire book to the next 175 years. Even within the second book the scale of treatment increases. The first 20 chapters move from Mancinus in Spain (137 B.C.) to Cinna (87 B.C.; 2. 1-20), but the last 20 chapters cover only A.D. 6 to 29 (112-31). This slowing down is only to be expected, however, since Roman historians who covered long periods of time usually concentrated on recent history.²⁰

The method of treatment which Velleius chose is the *transcursus*, a dash through history, touching only upon the most important points. He is the first Roman historian to refer to his work as a *transcursus*, which should occasion no surprise, since he is the first Roman historian whose work could be so called. He emphasizes how confining the form is:

86.1: Quid ille dies terrarum orbi praestiterit, ex quo in quem statum pervenerit fortuna publica, quis in hoc transcursu tam artati operis exprimere audeat? (cf. 55.1; 99.3-4)

Velleius opposes such a work to a multi-volume history, understandably enough (e.g. 29.2; 46.1). It is also contrasted with a work 'iustis voluminibus' (48.5; 114.4; 119.1) and with a 'iustum opus' (99.3-4; cf. 89.1). In other words, it is opposed to a 'regular' history: Velleius perceived his work as a little odd, a little out of the ordinary.²¹

II

Now, having attempted to demonstrate that Velleius' history was actually a universal history in both time and subject, we can try to relate it to the tradition of historical writing at Rome. This will be difficult, since so little is known about the historians who wrote before him. Even when we know how many books a history embraced we remain ignorant of the work's absolute length, since we have no way of knowing how long the books were. Comparison with the (hypothetical) length of Velleius' history is thus prevented.²² Sallust and Livy provide no help, since we are searching for historians who covered (1) a vast subject (2) in narrative, (3) anecdotal form, including both (4) literature and (5) non-Roman history, (6) down to and including their own times (7) in a very short compass. Many historians meet one or two of these criteria, but the absence of the combination reveals the uniqueness of Velleius' work. The historians who meet either several of the criteria or the most important ones must be

suggest that Velleius interwove the two strands of Greek and Roman history until Rome finally did come to dominate, and that Carthage and Corinth represent the point at which the two strands finally fuse.

²⁰ If Livy's history were divided into two sections of 71 books each, the disparity between the times covered in the two halves would be even greater than in Velleius' two books. 1-71 reach from Aeneas to 91 B.C., 72-142 cover the 82 years between 91 and 9. Valerius Antias moved from the origins of Rome to Mancinus by Book 22; by Book 75 he had reached only 91. Claudius Quadrigarius, who probably began with the sack of Rome by the Gauls, reached 146 by Book 8 and 99 by Book 13, but in the next ten books he covered only about 17 years.

²¹ Velleius also alludes to a future work of his own which will be a regular history of a larger size (48.5; 96.3; 99.3; 103.4; 114.4; 119.1). This future work has exercised numerous scholars. The best discussion is that of Woodman, 'Questions', 287-8.

²² Compared to Livy's books, Velleius' second book is extremely long. For a handy chart of the length of Livy's books, see P. A. Stadter, 'The Structure of Livy's History', *Historia* 21 (1972), 304-5.

surveyed.²³ Their similarities to Velleius will be emphasized, although it is impossible to know precisely what he borrowed from whom.

L. Cassius Hemina, an annalist at the time of the Third Punic War, wrote a history of Rome in four or more books (fr. 39P) which stretched from early Italian times (fr. 1P) to contemporary events. He mentioned literary figures and attempted to fit Greek history into the chronological framework of Roman (or Italian) history, as fragment 8 shows. Although he seems to be close to Velleius, the first citation of his work appears in the Elder Pliny (e.g. fr. 12P), which might suggest that he was little known except to voracious readers.

The work of L. Scribonius Libo was apparently a chronological table of magistrates. Since Cicero refers to it in the singular (*ad Att.* 13.30.3, 'in Libonis annali' = fr. 1P), it was probably very short, which largely eliminates the use of anecdotes. The size is extraordinary in an age of immense works and is to be explained by the form of the work. The terminal points are unknown, but if the work were to be useful it probably covered a broad span of Roman history. In Libo, as in Velleius, a great deal of information was conveyed within a very short compass.

The four books of M. Terentius Varro's *De gente populi Romani* began with the Ogygian flood and concluded with Roman history (fr. 3P). Obviously, such a work included non-Roman material. The founding of Rome ended the third book, and Roman history, in drastically abbreviated form, occupied the final book. The *De gente populi Romani* may indicate a trend toward shorter, more compendious works like that of Velleius. It also attempted to coordinate Roman and non-Roman chronology (fr. 17P), as Velleius does, perhaps a significant resemblance.

Varro's *Annales* in three books are important for this study primarily because of the size of the work. Only two fragments survive, the first dealing with the reign of Servius Tullius, the second with the execution of M. Manlius in 384 B.C.. The *Annales* presumably treated Roman history from Aeneas or the founding of the city to Varro's own time. It is unknown whether non-Roman material was included, although it probably was not.²⁴

Cornelius Nepos gives further proof of a trend toward small size and comprehensiveness. Catullus says of his work:

...cum ausus es unus Italorum
omne aevum tribus explicare cartis
doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis (1.5-7).

The first-quoted line indicates the boldness of Nepos' attempt to survey history in only three books.²⁵ 'Omne aevum' suggests that the work was a universal history, not just a Roman history. The fragments bear this out. Early Italy appears (fr. 1P), as do Homer (fr. 2P) and Archilochus (fr. 4P; cf. Velleius 1.5). Nepos attempted to establish a chronological framework into which both Greek and Roman material could be inserted (fr. 4P). Here is a work which meets most of our criteria, but the title *Chronica*, found in fragment 2, might suggest that the work was probably more concerned with chronology than with the narrative history found in Velleius.²⁶ It may have influenced Velleius none the less.

The *Liber annalis* of Atticus, of which eight fragments survive, apparently began

²³ Woodman ('Questions', 286 n. 4) discusses Nepos, Atticus, Varro, and Ateius Philologus very briefly.

²⁴ Peter (*HRR* 2. xxxviii) suggests that Varro's *Annales* may have supplemented or amended the works of Nepos and Atticus (on whom see below pp. 167-8). I do not think that necessary or probable.

²⁵ Woodman, 'Questions', 286 n. 4.

²⁶ The title *Chronica* does not prove conclusively that it was only a chronological work; see Woodman, 'Questions', 284 n. 4, on *breviaria* and *chronica*.

with Aeneas and the fall of Troy (fr. 1P). The latest fragment (8P) concerns Carneades' visit to Rome in 155, but there is no reason to assume that Atticus did not continue his survey further. The scope in time was vast. The subjects treated were civil and military affairs with particular emphasis on chronology and genealogy (Nepos, *Att.* 18.1-2). Nepos implies that only Roman history was treated, but a passage in Cicero indicates that at least some non-Roman history was probably included.²⁷ It seems reasonable that Atticus would have mentioned, at the appropriate places in his survey, the outstanding historical events of his adoptive home.²⁸ Literary figures were included.²⁹ The parallels to Velleius are numerous. But given Atticus' interest in chronology, mentioned by both Nepos and Cicero, and the size of the work, it may have been little more than a chronological table of magistrates and important figures and events. Few if any anecdotes could be expected in such a work. Certainly a masterpiece of style was not the goal: *utilitas* is the key to understanding the work (cf. Cicero, *Brutus* 4.15).

L. Ateius Praetextatus Philologus deserves mention only because of the presumed shortness of the *Breviarium rerum omnium Romanarum* with which he aided Sallust (Suet. *de. gram.* 10). The specific contents of the work, the only surviving fragment of which concerns the change from the name Valentia to Rome, are unknown.

If one considers the large number of Roman historians who wrote before Velleius, it is striking that only three writers, Varro, Nepos, and Atticus, are known to provide significant parallels to Velleius. Not even their works are exactly parallel. Varro's *Annales* probably did not contain non-Roman material or literary history, while Nepos and Atticus were both apparently chronographers rather than narrative historians. In any case, these three men wrote approximately 75 years before Velleius. Cicero (*de or.* 52-4), speaking of earlier Roman historians, makes it clear that 'barebones' histories had been common, but one should remember that Cicero is speaking both of brevity and of the lack of stylistic ornamentation, with the emphasis on the second element. The curious work of Velleius does not fit easily or comfortably into the tradition of Roman historical writing. To explain the phenomenon of Velleius' history, Roman historiography is not enough.

Since Velleius lived in the bilingual world of the early Empire, Greek historiography as well as Roman must be taken into account. As with the Roman historians, it is easy to find parallels to certain aspects of Velleius' work. Ephoros wrote the first universal history more than 350 years before Velleius, but it took him 30 books. At an unknown date Menandros of Ephesus wrote his 'Actions which took place under each of the kings [of Phoenicia?]' among both the Greeks and the barbarians', which is parallel in scope to Velleius' work, but its span in time is unknown. Around 50 B.C. Castor of Rhodes published his *Chronika*, which was made up of synchronistic tables of Oriental, Greek, and Roman history from Belus and Ninus to Pompey. This is parallel in scope, but not in form, since it was not a narrative history. Close to the time of Velleius, one Thallus (perhaps Augustus' secretary or Tiberius' freedman)³⁰

²⁷ *Orator* 34.120: Cognoscat [the orator] etiam rerum gestarum et memoriae veteris ordinem, maxime scilicet nostrae civitatis, sed etiam imperiosorum populorum et regum inlustrium; quam laborem nobis Attici nostri levavit labor, qui conservatis notatisque temporibus, nihil cum inlustre praetermitteret, annorum septingentorum memoriam uno libro conligavit (cf. *Brutus* 3.4).

²⁸ Peter, *HRR* 2. xxiii-xxv; F. Muenzer, 'Atticus als Geschichtschreiber', *Hermes* 40 (1905), 84-5; O. Hirschfeld, 'Velleius Paterculus und Atticus', *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin, 1913), pp. 778-9.

²⁹ Fr. 5P discusses the playwright Livius Andronicus. This, of course, is not conclusive. Livy, who has no interest in literary history except for the digression on the origin of drama (7.2), also mentions Andronicus (27.37.13). Presumably Atticus also mentioned Greek literary figures.

³⁰ A. H. McDonald, *OCD*², s.v. Thallus.

published a chronological work in three books which covered the period from the Trojan War to the 167th Olympiad (112–109 B.C.).

There are Greek parallels to Velleius' inclusion of material traditionally considered to be outside the scope of *res gestae*. The *Chronographiae* of Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 257–194 B.C.) included literary history but did not take the form of Velleius' work. Apollodorus of Athens (born c. 180 B.C.) based his work on Eratosthenes and covered the period from the fall of Troy to 144 B.C., embracing a variety of topics including philosophical schools – yet he wrote in comic trimeters.³¹

The historiographical traditions of Greece and Rome do not yield a single historian who is a complete parallel to Velleius. Various writers share certain features with him, but none of them could be considered his over-all model.³²

Although historiographical traditions have given us little help through clear parallels, they can aid us through contrast. The number of books required by Roman historians had steadily increased from the seven of Cato to the 142 of Livy. By the time of Velleius, there was little point in trying to compete in scale with previous Roman historians; indeed, no one ever tried to surpass Livy's history. But since Nepos, 80 years or more earlier, had been the last summarizer, there was room for a brief history.³³ Such considerations no doubt influenced Velleius' decision to write a short history, even though he chose to be more comprehensive in time and subject than the regular Roman historians. The early Empire saw a trend toward brevity generally,³⁴ but further reasons must be sought to explain why Velleius' history is so extremely short and why it has the curious features discussed above.³⁵

Could the pressure of time have driven Velleius to write a very short history? The

³¹ In some cases there is simply too little known about an author even to speculate: C. Sulpicius Galba, the grandfather of the emperor, apparently wrote an abridgement of a universal history (F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, vol. 2C (Berlin, 1926), p. 295). But only two fragments survive. How long was it? How much did it include?

³² Woodman ('Questions', 284–5) examines Orosius, Festus, Florus, Sulpicius Severus, and Eutropius and then extrapolates a tradition backward, citing such similarities as emphasis on brevity and the works' scope in time. Orosius, who wrote about 400 years after Velleius, produced a work which is far longer than that of our historian and explicitly a Christian polemic. The work of Festus, written about 350 years after Velleius' history, is hardly a history at all. It is only 495 lines long in the latest edition (*The Breviarium of Festus, A Critical Edition with Historical Commentary* by J. W. Eadie (London, 1967)); the first half is devoted to the acquisition of the provinces and the second half to Rome's wars with Parthia. Florus, who at least wrote within a century of Velleius, records Rome's wars. He is solely concerned with Rome. Sulpicius Severus, whose history stretches to A.D. 400, makes no bones about presenting a summary of the early books of the Old Testament. Eutropius, writing about 350 years after Velleius, produced a work which, although not even half as long as Velleius', does survey a long span of Roman history. The subject, however, is only Roman history. The works of these authors cannot be said to prove the existence of a tradition that predates Velleius and to which he belongs.

³³ Woodman, 'Questions', 286.

³⁴ Woodman, 'Questions', 285–6. Woodman comments ('Questions', 286n. 5), 'The apparently recent popularity in epitomes is a useful parallel', and cites as examples the epitomes of Dionysius, Livy, Fenestella, and Vibius Maximus. As Woodman carefully cautions (*ibid.*), however, questions about how the last three of these works should be dated make the situation less than completely clear. The dates of the epitomes of Livy are unclear; Martial 14.190 proves that at least one existed by the poet's time. The date of the epitome of Fenestella is also unclear, while Vibius Maximus was a contemporary of Statius and is thus too late to prove 'recent popularity'.

³⁵ Lana (pp. 199–205), followed by Portalupi (edn. p. xviii), suggests that Velleius chose the form of the universal history as a response to anti-Roman universal histories like that of Pompeius Trogus. Yet, as Lana admits, there were other universal histories which were not anti-Roman (notably those of Diodorus and Nicolaus of Damascus). That Velleius would show such subtlety seems to me unlikely.

date of the composition of Velleius' history is a vexed question.³⁶ Various hypotheses have been advanced, usually contending that Velleius must have written very quickly. A. J. Woodman has dealt with most of the arguments already,³⁷ so they need not detain us here. Two arguments, however, remain.

First, it has been argued that Velleius' use of the words *brevitas* and *festinatio* and his references to the restricted nature of his work show that he wrote under the pressure of time.³⁸ Neither the words nor the concept, however, actually applies to physical haste in composition, as we can see from an examination of a few passages.

(1) 'cogit enim excedere propositi formam operis erumpens animo ac pectore indignatio' (66.3). These words introduce the first-person attack on Antony for the murder of Cicero. Velleius says that he is so angry that he must leave the form of the brief history to denounce the villain directly. The passage has nothing to do with physical haste of composition.

(2) 'hoc opus servet formam suam' (96.3). These words occur immediately after Velleius has promised to set forth in a future work various glorious military exploits of Tiberius. Here he merely says that the present brief work should remain brief, which would be impossible if he were to chronicle all the victories of Tiberius. There is no reference to haste of composition.³⁹

(3)

Quid tunc homines timuerint, quae senatus trepidatio, quae populi confusio, quis orbis metus, in quam arto salutis exitiique fuerimus confinio, neque mihi tam festinanti exprimere vacat neque cui vacat potest (124.1).

These words immediately follow the death of Augustus. Velleius emphasizes that everyone was afraid of what would happen. *Festinanti* merely means that Velleius is moving through history so fast that he does not have the space necessary to do justice to the general terror – indeed, even if he had the space, it would be impossible. The passage has nothing to do with writing quickly (cf. 1.16.1; 41.1; 108.2). In no place does Velleius refer to physical haste of composition. He merely talks about the shortness of his book and the speed with which he is moving through history.

Does the crux lie in M. Vinicius and his designation to the consulship? The root of this problem lies in the assumption that Vinicius is vital to Velleius' history, that Velleius began it only when he knew that Vinicius would become consul. The assumption is questionable. Velleius does speak of Vinicius in flattering terms, uses his consulship to date many events, and mentions with evident pleasure the beginning of his military service under the elder Vinicius (101.3). It was honorific to address Vinicius during his consulship and to present that consulship as the culmination of an age.⁴⁰ But none of these statements proves that it was only the knowledge of Vinicius' impending consulship that made Velleius decide to write his history. Proof

³⁶ See e.g. Sumner, 284–5. Woodman, 'Questions', 275–82, is particularly good, arguing for a date in the mid twenties and hence *not* contending that time pressed Velleius.

³⁷ 'Questions', 275–7.

³⁸ E.g. Sumner, 284–5. Woodman ('Questions', 278–84) discusses the words in ancient literary criticism and concludes that, 'Thus "speed" and "brevity" are simply technical ways of describing the selection of material or the pruning down of subject matter, and Velleius' references to precisely these two features of his work need not imply fast writing in the literal sense at all. He might very well be claiming for his work a quality which was recommended in the handbooks of historiography' (280). Although the words are clearly important in ancient literary criticism, and although Velleius may be using them to claim recommended virtues, I think that there may be an even simpler solution (see below).

³⁹ cf. 1.16.1; 29.2; 38.1; 52.3; 55.1; 86.1; 89.1; 99.4; 103.4.

⁴⁰ Woodman, 'Questions', 294.

is provided only for the statements that Velleius wanted to flatter or praise Vinicius and that the work was probably finished just before, during, or shortly after his consulship. A sharp distinction must be drawn between composition and presentation. An equally reasonable hypothesis would be that Velleius may have begun writing at any time and then at some point, either during the course of composition if he wrote, say, in 29, or after composition was completed if he wrote much earlier, inserted the references to Vinicius.⁴¹

The references to the consulship of Vinicius have been seen as conclusive proof against such a theory. Many of them could be later additions, since other chronological indications are given (e.g. 1.8.4; 49.1; 65.2); but 1.8.1 is thought to settle the question, since Vinicius' consulship appears to be integral to the sense.⁴² The passage in question reads as follows:

Clarissimum deinde omnium ludicrum certamen et ad excitandam corporis animique virtutem efficacissimum Olympiorum initium habuit, auctorem Iphitum Elium. is eos ludos mercatumque instituit ante annos, quam tu, M. Vinici, consulatum inires, DCCCXXIII.

This passage does not settle the question. First, *deinde* by itself dates the event sufficiently for Velleius, especially in the early part of the history, which makes the reference to Vinicius anything but integral to the sense.⁴³ Secondly, the reference to Vinicius is in a sentence of its own, completely separate from the sentence that precedes it. It is exactly what one might suspect of being a later addition.⁴⁴

According to another argument, the references to Vinicius could not be later insertions because, 'He [Velleius] could always have changed or, if the worst happened [i.e. if Vinicius never became consul], deleted the references to Vinicius altogether. Changing or deleting references is quite different from adding them.'⁴⁵ Although different, adding references hardly requires genius. The sentence at 1.8.1 could have been added very easily. The same is true of, for instance, 49.1: 'Lentulo et Marcello consulibus post urbem conditam annis DCCIII ante annos LXXVIII, quam tu, M. Vinici, consulatum inires, bellum civile exarsit.' The words from *ante* through *inires* could have been added later without even disrupting the syntax of the sentence.

My argument has been essentially negative: none of the reasons advanced for the

⁴¹ H. J. Steffen ('Die Regierung des Tiberius in der Darstellung des Velleius Paterculus' (diss., Kiel, 1954), p. 2) suggests the hypothesis that Velleius' history happened to be completed just as Vinicius' consulship was announced in 29 and that Velleius then inserted the appropriate references (my thanks to *CQ*'s referee for providing a photostat of this material). Paladini (op. cit. in n. 5 above, 447) contends, I think correctly, that the desire to pay literary homage to Vinicius was only a pretext for writing the history. Apostrophe of a patron is very unusual in Roman historical writing if not unique to Velleius at this time. One might note that Lucretius would presumably have written his poem Memmius or no Memmius. C. Jodry ('L'utilisation des documents militaires chez Velleius Paterculus', *REL* 29 (1951), 271) says that he sees no reason that Velleius could not have begun before 29, perhaps on his retirement from active military service in A.D. 14/15, but no arguments are provided (followed by Portalupi, edn. xvi, without argumentation). Lana (p. 299) says without argument that Velleius may have begun before 29.

⁴² Sumner, 284 and n. 145; followed by Woodman, 'Questions', 282 n. 1.

⁴³ Cf. 1.5.1: 'Clarissimum deinde Homeri inluxit ingenium'. Yet one would expect Velleius to date an event as important as the beginning of the Olympic Games more precisely than by *deinde*. This, however, does not affect my point: Velleius may have had a precise indication of the date and then later substituted the reference to Vinicius. See n. 44 below.

⁴⁴ Consider 1.8.2: 'hoc sacrum eodem loco instituisse fertur abhinc annos ferme MCCL Atrous, cum Pelopi patri funebres ludos faceret, quo quidem in ludicro omnique generis certaminum Hercules victor extitit.' This passage cuts both ways: it proposes an alternative to the date suggested in 1.8.1 and an alternative to the founder suggested in the sentence before Vinicius is mentioned. In any case, the passage could have been added later.

⁴⁵ Woodman, 'Questions', 282 n. 1.

date at which Velleius began to write is completely convincing. He could have started at any time. This, however, does not prove at what particular time he did begin. The mid twenties may be correct,⁴⁶ but so may 29. One cannot argue that the nature of Velleius' history was affected by the limitations of time. Brevity was not necessarily imposed on him by the need to produce a history in a few months. Brevity was probably a conscious choice.

III

A work's content, style, and approach to its subject matter give clues about the type of book the author thought he was writing. If we examine Velleius' history with these three features in mind, we can come closer to answering the question of genre and other related questions.

Velleius tells few anecdotes which, tested by comparison with Valerius Maximus, were wholly new to his readers.⁴⁷ One might push further and say that he presents very little information of any kind which would not be relatively familiar to the average educated Roman. The autobiographical material, although new to the reader, is not so extensive or so fascinating that it would attract readers. The contemporary history was probably new at least to the extent that some of it, particularly the material on Tiberius, had not been treated before in a history. Yet at the same time, since it was contemporary and since it is told fairly cursorily, it by itself would not win readers for the whole of Velleius' history. They probably already knew much of what he had to say about Tiberius, although personal touches based on Velleius' own involvement in Tiberius' campaigns might be unfamiliar.⁴⁸ Velleius' history is simply too short to attract readers by virtue of any new facts it might present.

In style and literary quality Velleius is overwhelmed by his predecessors, particularly Livy. The reader interested in artistic presentation and literary quality would turn to Livy. Considerations of space limit Velleius to two books and demand that he restrain himself on many occasions when a more fully developed narrative would have been more artistically pleasing.

Some of the literary deficiencies can be attributed only to Velleius' lack of skill and experience, but not all of them. One imagines that he knew he was not writing a literary masterpiece, but rather a book that would recount, in a form that was at least not unpleasant, the history of the ancient world. If one wanted a detailed, colourful, lengthy account of, for instance, the fall of Numantia, one would turn to Livy, not to Velleius, who treats the subject in less than a page. On the other hand, if one sought a quick discussion of the Second Punic War, Velleius would answer the need, but not Livy. Although Velleius' readers may have wished for more stylistic polish, one suspects that they would have accepted its lack in exchange for the brevity of the work, which made it much more useful to them than a full-dress history.⁴⁹

Practical, everyday usefulness is the key to Velleius' history. His history, although frequently moralizing, is devoid of the moral foundation of a history like Livy's.

⁴⁶ So Woodman, 'Questions', 281-2.

⁴⁷ For the parallels, see McGonagle, pp. 35 ff.

⁴⁸ E.g. Tiberius' generosity with the use of his bathtub (114.2) or the story of the old German crossing the Elbe to see Tiberius close at hand (107.1-2).

⁴⁹ Velleius' history does contain carefully crafted passages (see A. J. Woodman's discussion of 2.85.2-5, 'Actium in Velleius', *Latomus* 25 (1966), 564-6), but it also contains some extremely awkward writing (e.g. 2.18). S. F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Berkeley, 1949), p. 160, points out 2.18.4-6 as poor writing, and Woodman in the article just cited, p. 564, admits that that passage is 'hardly exemplary'. The clumsiness of which Velleius was capable on occasion is best seen by examining the whole of 2.18.

Velleius' reader will not be a better person after skimming the two books. But that reader would find the history useful in a practical way: it would save him time and effort. By reading this one short *transcursus* he could get some idea of Greek and Roman history, with bits of the history of other countries such as Lydia thrown in. Velleius clearly wanted his reader to learn easily from his book. He introduces both long digressions with expressions of his concern that the reader should understand a complex question more easily.⁵⁰ A parallel passage from the preface of Valerius Maximus indicates that such a concern for saving trouble was not unique to Velleius at that period. The paucity of surviving Tiberian literature makes it difficult to see whether such a concern was general. In the next generation after Velleius, Pomponius Mela implies that he is presenting a useful, succinct work instead of a thorough one: 'dicam autem alias plura et exactius, nunc ut quaeque erunt clarissima et strictim' (1. *praef.* 2). When Pliny wrote his compendious *Natural History*, he took the trouble to include a table of contents with the expressed purpose of saving the reader trouble (*praef.* 33). None of these authors is a true parallel to Velleius, since their works are of a different nature or written later or much longer. The very length and complexity of Pliny's work make a table of contents a practical necessity. But these authors may well indicate a general trend in the early Empire.

This desire to be useful may help to explain the presence of both the non-Roman history and the literary history, included perhaps because Velleius wanted to be as comprehensive as possible. No reader would come away from Velleius' history with a thorough grounding in Greek and Roman literature, for instance, but at least he would have been exposed to the names of the major authors in the most important genres.⁵¹

But to whom would a book that emphasized its practical usefulness be addressed? A professional *rhetor* would know most of the stories Velleius tells and, because of his own store of general knowledge, would have little use for a summary as abbreviated as Velleius'. For much the same reasons, a highly educated Roman would not need Velleius' history. Three groups suggest themselves as at least potential audiences for the history.

First, Velleius' history would have proved useful to men who might for various reasons want a brief review of history. Such men might be years away from their formal education, separated from it by long periods spent on military campaigns or in the imperial service. If they had not continued reading during that time, they might well want to refresh their memories with a quick survey of some of the most important events of both Roman and non-Roman history.

Second, the history could aid men who had had little or no formal education but who wanted to have at least a skeleton knowledge of history. A variety of people might fall under this category: those provincials who had not benefited from a Roman education but who felt that their positions demanded at least a certain degree of acquaintance with the past, or those men in Rome or elsewhere who had risen on the

⁵⁰ 1.14.1 and 38.1, quoted above p. 163. Lana (p. 288) says bluntly that Velleius was not concerned with truth, *utilitas*, the edification of the reader, or conveying information. Such a view is not supported by the text and is directly refuted by the statements which introduce the two long digressions.

⁵¹ Portalupi (edn., p. xxiv) contends without argument that Velleius includes literature because he felt it was 'a vital manifestation of the vitality of a people'. It is possible that literature is included under the influence of a source which discussed it. Yet if the source was a chronological table, presumably the authors would not have been grouped as they are in Velleius but rather placed at the times appropriate to the individual authors. In any case, Velleius chose to include literary history whether it was in his sources or not.

social scale and needed a brief survey. Perhaps the real-life equivalent of someone resembling Petronius' Trimalchio?

The third group is schoolboys proper. Velleius' history could provide them with a quick and serviceable overview, complete with many famous *exempla* which they could use in their rhetorical exercises. The boys would soon outgrow their need for Velleius, but he would be useful early in their education.

Both Velleius' fondness for *exempla* and the many individual *exempla* he shares with Valerius Maximus⁵² suggest the historian's involvement in the rhetorical school tradition which was so active under the early Empire.⁵³ Another clue can be seen in the rhetorical denunciation of Antony for the murder of Cicero (66.3-5), since the conflict of the two men was a favourite topic of the declaimers and takes up two of the seven preserved *Suasoriae* of Seneca.⁵⁴ Valerius Maximus wrote his *Facta et dicta memorabilia* for just such an audience. Yet we must remember that *exempla* and the rhetorical style in general were not the exclusive property of the rhetorical schools. Since the topic of artistic decline was a common one at the time, the digression on artistic genius at the end of the first book (1.16-18) may also reflect the influence of the rhetorical milieu.⁵⁵

A final factor helps to explain the nature of the work: Velleius himself.⁵⁶ He may have included literature, for instance, simply because he was interested in it. He introduces the digression on artistic genius with a statement which points to just such a reason: 'nequeo tamen temperare mihi, quin rem saepe agitatam animo meo neque ad liquidum ratione perductam signem stilo' (1.16.1).

Certainly Velleius' interests affected the content of his history. As a Campanian (2.16.2), he shows unusual interest in Capua and includes a lengthy digression on the city's history (1.7.2-4). He discusses his own family at many points (2.16.2; 69.5; 76.1; 104.3), even though the subject can hardly be called essential. He admits by implication that the information is included for reasons of family pride: 'neque ego verecundia domestici sanguinis gloriae quidquam, dum verum refero, subtraham' (2.16.2; cf. 76.1). Velleius appears to show unusual interest in Spanish affairs (1.2.3; 51.3; 78.3; 90; 125.5), but the reasons behind this interest are unknown.⁵⁷

What, finally, is Velleius' history? The most apt description calls it a 'miniature universal history'.⁵⁸ All three words in the phrase are important. The history is extremely short; it is universal both in subject and in time; and it is a history. It was written to be useful to people who did not have the patience or the curiosity or the time to read an historian like Livy or Nicolaus of Damascus and who read history for reasons different from those of a reader of monumental histories. It is a different kind of history for a different kind of reader with different needs.⁵⁹

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⁵² See McGonagle, pp. 35 ff.

⁵³ For rhetorical influences in Velleius, see, in addition to the works cited in note 54 below, L. Castiglioni, 'Alcune osservazioni a Velleio Patercolo', *RAL* 7 (1931), 269-73.

⁵⁴ 6 and 7. See A. J. Woodman, 'Velleius Paterculus', in *Empire and Aftermath: Silver Latin II*, ed. T. A. Dorey (Boston, 1975), p. 11; Lana, p. 282.

⁵⁵ Woodman, 'Velleius Paterculus' (above, n. 54), p. 10 and n. 40.

⁵⁶ Paladini, op. cit. (above, n. 5), 454.

⁵⁷ Sumner (276-8) suggests that Velleius throws special emphasis on Thrace and hypothesizes that Velleius may have served there under Pomponius Flaccus and that he may indeed be the P. Vellaeus of Tac., *Ann.* 3.39, who commanded in Thrace in A.D. 21. This is possible, but, as Sumner recognizes, not subject to proof.

⁵⁸ The phrase is Sumner's (282), although he does not discuss the question in detail.

⁵⁹ I would like to thank Professors T. J. Luce and E. J. Champlin and *Classical Quarterly's* referee for invaluable advice and criticism in the preparation of this paper.