

VELLEIUS' LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF HIS HISTORY

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When Velleius Paterculus began to write his history, he was faced with serious literary problems of organization.¹ How could he present hundreds of years of history² in only two books and neither inundate his reader with dates easily forgotten nor leave him with such a vague picture that it, too, might soon desert him? What methods of organization might make the author's task easier yet still keep the reader in control of the historical facts? The problems were many and large, and some of them were solved only partially or sporadically. The influence of the annalists is apparent, but so is Velleius' own attempt to present a brief, coherent account of his subject. This paper will examine the literary techniques Velleius uses to organize his material.³ We shall see that the rough chronology of his history is

¹ The following short titles will be used for frequently cited works: Münzer, "Komposition" = F. Münzer, "Zur Komposition des Velleius," in *Festschrift zur 49. Versammlung Deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner* (Basel 1907) 247–78; Woodman, edn. = *Velleius Paterculus, The Tiberian Narrative (2.94–131)*, ed. with commentary by A. J. Woodman (Cambridge 1977; Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, vol. 19). Velleius will be cited from C. Stegmann de Pritzwald's Teubner text (sec. ed., Stuttgart 1933) up to 2.93 and from Woodman's edition from 2.94 on. Stegmann's orthography, however, will be maintained throughout. I have tacitly corrected "Perperna" to "Perperna" at 2.4.1 (See Broughton, *M.R.R.* on 130 B.C.). In citations the book number will be given for all of Book 1 and for the first 18 chapters of Book 2.

² R. Starr, "The Scope and Genre of Velleius' History," *CQ* (forthcoming), argues that Velleius' history is universal in both time and subject, covering Roman and non-Roman history from the fall of Troy to 146 B.C. and then Roman history alone down to the historian's own time. Cf. Münzer, "Komposition" 250.

³ Throughout this paper I concentrate on the finished history of Velleius. His sources will appear occasionally but not as a primary part of my analysis. Some excellent work has been done on Velleius' sources, especially Münzer's "Komposition." Since most of the works hypothesized as Velleius' sources are lost, however, I have preferred to take the following stand: no matter what sources Velleius used, the selection and arrangement of material was, ultimately, his own choice. Source criticism can certainly be

supplemented by a *domi militiaeque* system of organization and that, on the smaller scale, Velleius composes in narrative units placed paratactically and ordered by several specific factors.

I

CHRONOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

On the large scale Velleius records events in chronological order. The Gracchi precede the Social War, the reign of Tiberius follows the reign of Augustus. On the smaller scale, however, although chronological order is usually preserved, one cannot assume that event X preceded event Y in time simply because it does so in the text.⁴ In many cases even if the order is correct the events' proximity to each other in time may remain unclear.⁵

Velleius was not interested in presenting a detailed chronology of the events he recorded. Nor does he follow the annalistic practice by which the names of each year's consuls come before the account of that year. Consular dating appears rarely in his work, used not to introduce the account of a year but both to pinpoint and to highlight particularly important events.⁶ *Ab urbe condita* dating is used in the same ways.⁷ It is frequently combined with consular dating or with an allusion to the number of years by which an event preceded the consulship of M. Vinicius in A.D. 30.⁸

illuminating, but I think our understanding of Velleius' history will profit from temporarily and consciously setting aside the question of his sources.

⁴ Cf. the vague (in fact, reversed) chronology in 2.5 (see note 19 below). Throughout this paper discussion must concentrate on the second book, where detailed observations can be made.

⁵ E.g., Velleius says only that the conspiracy of Egnatius Rufus took place *neque multo post* that of Caepio and Murena (91.3).

⁶ Cf. Woodman, edn. 132, note on 103.3. Consular dating is used at (excluding the digressions): 2.2.2; 2.4.5; 2.15.1; 2.17.1; 23.1; 27.1; 30.4; 36.1; 44.1; 47.3; 49.1; 53.2; 65.2; 84.1; 90.2; 100.2; 103.1; and 123.2. It is used almost exclusively to highlight important events, except in the digressions on the colonies and on the provinces (1.14–15; 38–39), where it serves to specify the dates of foundations and provinces.

⁷ *A.u.c.* dating appears at 1.6.4; 49.1; 65.2; and 103.3, always to highlight important events.

⁸ 103.3. An extreme example will illustrate: *Lentulo et Marcello consulibus post urbem conditam annis DCCIII ante annos LXXVIII, quam tu, M. Vinici, consulatum inires, bellum civile exarsit* (49.1). Livy uses *a.u.c.* dating in much the same way; cf., e.g., 3.33.1 (the decemvirate), 4.7.1 (the first military tribunes with consular power), and 31.5.1 (the war with Philip). (See the note of J. Briscoe, *A Commentary on Livy Books XXXI–XXXIII* [Oxford 1973], on 31.5.1.) Marking major events with *a.u.c.* dating doubtless

For Velleius' purposes, a generalized chronology sufficed. The annalistic year-by-year narrative would have burdened him with unnecessary detail. An event may be placed in time with a phrase like *per eadem tempora* (e.g., 2.8.3), *eodem tractu temporum* (e.g., 2.9.1), *brevi interiecto spatio* (99.1), *circa eadem tempora* (2.8.2), or *deinde interiectis paucis annis* (2.13.1—which represents nine years). Such phrases are not uncommon in Livy.⁹ As the narrative approaches the author's own time the dating becomes more precise, since a greater number of events within a shorter span of time is recorded, thus making cross-references like *eodem tractu temporum* more exact. The superstructure of Velleius' work, then, is not annalistic, but it is chronological in a rough and ready way.

II

DOMI MILITIAEQUE ORGANIZATION AND THE ANNALISTS

Although Velleius does not follow the annalists in recording events year by year or in the frequent prefatory use of consular dating, he does adapt another of Livy's techniques. Livy tends, within the framework of his year-by-year narrative, to group events which took place in Rome in one section and events which took place abroad—wars and the like—in another section, frequently concluding with another section about events at home.¹⁰ Velleius, too, tends to present events which occurred in Rome or Italy separately from events which took place abroad. He frequently relates several years' worth of events at home, then turns his attention to events abroad, then returns to events at home, and so on.¹¹ This organizational scheme offers several advantages. First, it is sanctioned in a general way by the example of Livy. Second, it is easy to use, since the author need not trouble himself with precise dates: he can simply lump a period's events together according to a relatively straightforward rule: did they happen at home or abroad? Third, this simplicity of application, in turn, allows Velleius to pay more attention to literary considerations, such as the thematic grouping of material.¹²

was a standard annalistic device, as may have been the combination of two or more dating techniques for a particularly grand effect (again, see Livy 31.5.1).

⁹ E.g., *per eosdem dies* at 6.17.1, 10.30.1, 22.37.1.

¹⁰ See P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge 1961) 175.

¹¹ For examples and discussion, see below pages 290–94.

¹² Cf. Tacitus' grouping of more than one year's worth of events in Corbulo's

One might suggest that Velleius' organization is taken over wholesale from his sources, but whatever sources one can imagine Velleius using would not have been organized in this way. The organization is probably Velleius' own.¹³

The combination of loose chronology and a *domi militiaeque* organizational scheme can work quite well when the material is simple. For instance, the phrase *per haec tempora* opens an account of affairs at Rome (34.3). It provides a rough chronological transition between events abroad and the events at home to which Velleius now turns. The story of Catiline's conspiracy is told (34.3–35). The birth of Augustus merits a rhetorical flourish and a precise date (36.1). Then comes the short excursus on the literary figures of the late Republic and early Empire (36.2–3), inserted here because the consulship of the great writer Cicero affords it a natural home. At this convenient break Velleius turns from events at home to events abroad, again with a transitional phrase which roughly indicates the chronological relationship: *Dum haec in urbe Italiaque geruntur* (37.1). Pompey's war against Mithridates is picked up from where it had been left before affairs *in urbe Italiaque* were treated. After the digression on the provinces,¹⁴ further adventures of Pompey are recounted (40.1) before the general returns to Rome (40.2). The narrative returns with him. His adventures in the East form a natural unit, and his campaigns were the most important events to occur abroad during that time. The events are presented clearly, and the reader is left with an adequate understanding of what happened.

Unfortunately, the historical data are not always so tractable. Such a narrative structure demands tight control in order to prevent confusion. Even if events at home and events abroad could always be so easily separated, Velleius is often distracted from presenting a clear account. A dramatic incident catches his attention, or he follows up a theme or a subject or a person at the expense of clearly relating that item to other events. Since he tends to tell a story all in one place and then go on to the next story,¹⁵ the reader is frequently left wondering about interconnections, a problem Velleius does little to alleviate. The problems that arise and their probable causes can best

campaigns in the East, *Ann.* 13.9.3. In Velleius, note how he groups the conspiracies against Augustus (91.2–4).

¹³ *Contra* Münzer, "Komposition" 275.

¹⁴ 38–39, inserted here no doubt because Pompey's eastern activities provided an apposite place for it.

¹⁵ See Section III below on unit composition and the paratactic placement of narrative units.

be seen by examining a continuous passage—for example, the first ten chapters of the second book.

Book 2 opens with a rhetorical preface which marks the fall of Carthage as the beginning of moral decline for Rome (2.1.1–2). The Spanish war against Viriathus (2.1.3) and the first years of the Numantine war under Q. Pompeius and Mancinus (2.1.3–5) open the narrative proper. The moral turpitude of the Romans' conduct connects this material closely to the preface. The accounts are in chronological order. The narrative does not proceed as one might expect, however, to Scipio's sack of Numantia. At this point Velleius shifts to events at home, because, as he points out (2.2.1), Mancinus' exploits in Spain are intimately related to his new subject. Secondly, by breaking off the section on events abroad here Velleius creates a picture uniformly colored by disgrace, a picture which would be compromised by a chronicle of Scipio's success.

The story of Tiberius Gracchus fills the next two chapters (2.2–3). Velleius emphasizes the causal connection between the events in Spain and those he is about to narrate, something he usually does not do: *Inmanem deditio Mancini civitatis movit dissensionem* (2.2.1). The section ends with a passionate restatement of the theme of moral decline which opened the book (2.3.3–4). The story is a dramatic whole, complete with beginning (Gracchus leaves the *boni* and makes his proposals), middle (partial implementation of the proposals and ensuing chaos), and end (death of Gracchus). Velleius allows no other events at home to intrude upon the account. He switches to events abroad immediately after the rhetorical conclusion, which amounts to a peroration.

Chapter four begins thus: *Interim, dum haec in Italia geruntur, Aristonicus, qui mortuo rege Attalo, a quo Asia populo Romano hereditati relicta erat . . .* The chronological transition is loose, since the war with Aristonicus spanned the years 132–130 and began the year after Attalus' death. For Velleius, however, it relates the two spheres adequately and is fairly typical. The passing reference to the bequest of Asia to Rome, however, reveals a problem caused by Velleius' system of organization. Although the item is vital to a proper understanding of the resistance to Tiberius Gracchus, the place where the events occurred relegates it to the section on events abroad. No indication of its importance in domestic politics is given. The account of the war with Aristonicus is brought down to the war's end in 130, when the rebel was defeated by M. Perperna. Velleius does not mention that Perperna was consul at the time, although it would have been a handy chronological signpost. Nor does the historian

allude to the war's length, which, for him, was unimportant, since he tells the whole story in one piece.

Suddenly Scipio takes the stage and Numantia is destroyed (2.4.2). The passage begins, *et P. Scipio Africanus Aemilianus*; in other words, "And this happened abroad, too." There is no connection between the war with Aristonicus and Scipio's conquest of Numantia except that both events took place abroad, a connection sufficient for Velleius. Chronological order is violated slightly, but the mention of Scipio's second consulship prevents confusion.

At this point Velleius' passion for biography¹⁶ diverts the narrative to two *dicta memorabilia* of Scipio, the historical context of which is left completely obscure.¹⁷ Scipio's mysterious death comes next, followed by a disputatious passage on his age at death. The smooth flow of the narrative has been slightly interrupted, but the account as a whole is relatively clear and straightforward.

Velleius continues the account of events abroad: *Ante tempus excisae Numantiae praeclara in Hispania militia D. Brutus fuit* (2.5.1; 137 B.C.). The indication of time is vague, and chronological clarity is lost. Since Velleius is in the middle of a section on events abroad, he indicates the date only by relation to other events abroad. No attempt is made to coordinate Brutus' campaign with events in Rome. Velleius has simply begun a section on other famous generals in Spain, for which precise chronology is unimportant.

The campaign of Q. Macedonicus comes next (2.5.2), tied loosely to that of D. Brutus by the phrase *ante eum [D. Brutum] paucis annis*—in fact, five years before, in 142. Another famous general in Spain. Their moral examples are to be contrasted with the disgraceful conduct of Q. Pompeius and Mancinus and with the moral decline at Rome in general, but that does not help the reader understand the historical events. The final sentence of the record of events abroad does little to aid the situation: *hic [Q. Macedonicus] virtute ac severitate facti, at Fabius Aemilianus Pauli exemplo disciplinae in Hispania fuit clarissimus* (2.5.3). Q. Fabius Aemilianus (cos. 145) fought against

¹⁶ On which see Woodman, edn. 28–29 (with notes); D. J. McGonagle, *Rhetoric and Biography in Velleius Paterculus* (diss., The Ohio State University, 1970) 115 ff.; and R. Starr, *A Literary Introduction to Velleius Paterculus* (diss., Princeton University, 1978) 134–43.

¹⁷ 2.4.4. For recent discussions attempting to discover the historical context of the *dicta*, see A. E. Astin, "Dicta Scipionis of 131 B.C.," *CQ* 10 (1960) 135–39, and M. Deissmann-Merten, "Zu einem Ausspruch des Scipio Aemilianus," *Chiron* 4 (1974) 177–81 (on the *noverca* remark only).

Viriathus in 145–144 and served as a legate for his brother Scipio at Numantia in 134–133. He is not mentioned at any other point in the narrative of the Spanish wars, although he does appear at 1.10.3 in another connection. Velleius' statement merely adds another famous general in Spain.¹⁸

Why are these generals not mentioned at the chronologically appropriate points in the continuous narrative? First, it would have produced a narrative even more choppy than what Velleius has already given us. Second, such successful and moral generals would have lightened the gloomy atmosphere of failure and moral disgrace which Velleius creates at the beginning of the book in the section on the Spanish wars. Third, the grouping of the three generals here caps off the record of Spanish affairs and events abroad, which have been, for Velleius, treated sufficiently.¹⁹

Here Velleius switches back to events at home and the story of C. Gracchus. It begins with a chronological reference to Tiberius Gracchus which places the account in time (2.6.1). The story takes the same dramatic form found with the elder Gracchus: revolutionary proposals, chaos, and death. Two related stories, one about L. Opimius and one about the *fides* of a certain Pomponius to Gaius, are inserted in the main account, which concludes with an explicit parallel between the fates of the two brothers (2.6.7).

Although the account is dramatically complete at that point, Velleius continues, first to present a brief epitaph on the brothers (2.7.1) and then to mention the sad fate of Fulvius Flaccus' son and the

¹⁸ Velleius gives more space to Q. Macedonicus than to either of the other two famous generals, since the story of the men making their wills in the face of apparently certain death adds particular vividness to the chapter.

¹⁹ Since literary reasons explain why the generals are handled in this way, there is no need to think that Velleius put them here simply because he did not know the precise dates of their campaigns. The reversed chronological order might be explained by imagining Velleius looking back through his sources to see who else beside Scipio had fought successfully in Spain. Münzer, "Komposition" 255–56 and 262, explains Velleius' curious treatment of Spanish affairs in the first five chapters of Book 2 by hypothesizing that Velleius was using a combination of a continuous chronological source and a biographical collection. All of these considerations combine to refute McGonagle's analysis of 2.5 (above, note 16, 109): "Chapter five relates two events in Spain which occurred before Numantia but which escaped [Velleius'] notice. There was no time to go back and insert them in their proper order, so Velleius introduced them here." On Velleius' much-discussed haste, see the detailed discussion of R. Starr, "Scope and Genre" (above, note 2).

crudeles quaestiones of the Gracchi's allies (2.7.2–3). Opimius' eventual fall—no one felt sorry for him *memoria ipsius saevitiae*—is recorded (2.7.3). Velleius then notes that *invidia* later crushed Rupilius and Popilius, who as consuls raged against the *amicos* of Tiberius Gracchus (2.7.4). These items are grouped together because they all relate in some way to the Gracchi. At this point Velleius cannot resist mentioning that Opimius gave his name to Opimian wine, although he admits that the item should probably be left out (2.7.4–5). With a note on Opimius' diminished *auctoritas* (2.7.6) the section on the Gracchi should be over. It has lost much of its force in this final grab-bag chapter.

But still Velleius does not stop. He proceeds to a brief discussion of the Gracchan law on extra-Italian colonization (2.7.6–8), apparently because colonization fascinated him (cf., e.g., 1.14–15). Just as Livy frequently ends the account of a year with a miscellany of events, so Velleius adopts that technique here and adds several chapters of miscellaneous information (2.8–10) to the section on the Gracchi before moving on to the next major event, the Jugurthine war (2.11).

Although several individual stories in these ten chapters are told effectively, the section as a whole is not consistently successful. Velleius has not kept a tight rein on his narrative, and as a result he has fallen prey to some of the dangers inherent in carelessly combining a loose chronological structure with an organization vaguely based on the alternation of events at home and events abroad. The chronology within the sections is vague, and the precise chronological relation of the two spheres to each other is frequently unclear. A demanding reader might have become confused, but few demanding readers, one suspects, would have perused Velleius' history. The difficulties have been compounded by the lack of unity evident in some of the chapters. Velleius is at his best when telling a single, well-defined story. Without the prop of plot he often degenerates into what almost appear to be lists of items that came to mind, recorded with little or no attempt at organization.

This is not to say, however, that Velleius would have avoided these dangers even if he could have done so easily. His loose, wandering narrative probably did not trouble him very much. Apologize as he may, for instance, he nonetheless includes the item on Opimian wine. His use of the traditional and accurate methods of dating, however sparse, shows that he could place an event precisely in time if he wished to do so. But he was more interested in the parts than in a carefully organized whole.

III

UNIT COMPOSITION, PARATAXIS,
AND THEMATIC GROUPING

We can now turn away from how Velleius combines chronological and *domi militiaeque* structures to the way he handles smaller pieces of material. Two techniques, evident even in the examples discussed above, form the basis of Velleius' approach: first, what I shall call "unit composition" and, second, the paratactic placement of those narrative units.

"Unit composition" refers to Velleius' habit of narrating an event in a single unit at a single place, frequently even in a single sentence. The technique can be traced back to the historian's desire to cover as much ground as possible within the smallest possible space: one short unit for one subject, another for another, and so on. It is also probably related to the Romans' fondness for brief, self-contained *exempla*. When Velleius tells the story of how Popilius Laenas restrained Antiochus (1.10.1–2), for instance, he uses only three sentences, two for the story itself and one for a concluding *sententia* (cf. Livy, 45.12.3–6). The death of Marcellus takes only one sentence, complete with a character sketch (93.1). A single sentence suffices for the rise and fall of Pseudophilippus and even includes an explanation of his name (1.11.1–2). On the larger scale, Tiberius Gracchus holds the stage alone, as we have seen, although his tale (2.2–3) is longer and more detailed than many others; no interruptions are allowed. Velleius prefers to discuss one subject at a time. Yet the practice of unit composition encouraged Velleius to write long, over-stuffed, wandering sentences in order to include all the necessary (and some unnecessary) details in a single unit (cf., e.g., 2.18).

Closely related to unit composition is the paratactic placement of narrative units. Little attention is given to connecting one unit with the next; they are simply set down one after another with vague chronological links. Paratactically placed narrative units are especially clear in the stories of Egnatius Rufus and C. Sentius Saturninus. The colorful wretch who gained power with a private fire-fighting company gives Velleius a chance to let himself go (91.3–4). He lambastes the conspirator with evident relish and provides a dramatically complete account ending with Egnatius' death (91.4). In the next chapter (92) Velleius moves on to a *praeclarum factum* of C. Sentius Saturninus

(cos. 19 B.C.). The account's opening (92.1–3) is confused, but it eventually becomes clear that the *factum* is the suppression of Egnatius Rufus (92.4), who died in prison a chapter earlier. Velleius gives us two accounts of the same event, one told from the conspirator's point of view and one from that of the man who crushed him. Although this seems odd at first, literary reasons explain it. First, Velleius usually treats one narrative unit at a time, and since the two accounts have different protagonists he handles them as two separate units. Second, in the first account Velleius emphasizes the conspiracy's threat, which would have seemed much less significant if Saturninus' vigorous and successful response to it were integrated into the earlier story.²⁰ Yet the end result is confused. Instead of concentrating right from the start on Saturninus' role in suppressing the conspiracy, Velleius lets himself get distracted while introducing the account.

The treatment of M. Livius Drusus the Younger shows that Velleius could use unit composition and parataxis effectively. It begins with Drusus, who, having been spurned by the Senate, decides to give citizenship to the Italians (2.14.1). The rest of the chapter is made up of three stories. The first recounts his return from the forum, his assassination, and his death (*intra paucas horas decessit*, 2.14.1). One might assume that the end had come, but Velleius reverts to the story of Drusus' last words, spoken as he looked at the crowd of grieving people standing around him (2.14.2). This could have been easily integrated into the first story, but Velleius prefers to tell it separately, since the two stories have different foci. Drusus' last words center on his character as a Roman citizen: *ecquandone, inquit, propinqui amicique, similem mei civem habebit res publica?* This leads Velleius into the story of Drusus and the architect (2.14.3),²¹ which confirms the excellence of character and removes most of the onus of conceit from the dying man's words: he actually was a fine man. The three stories follow each other in quick succession and flow smoothly from one to the next, even if their cumulative force might have been greater had they been integrated.²²

²⁰ Cf. above page 291 on the Spanish wars, Mancinus, and Scipio.

²¹ *Hunc finem clarissimus iuvenis vitae habuit: cuius morum minime omittatur argumentum* (2.14.3).

²² For such a short history with such a large subject, Drusus is allotted an unusually large amount of space, undoubtedly because he was Tiberius' ancestor (I. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo o della Propaganda* [Torino 1952] 234; Münzer, "Komposition" 273, note 2; H. Sauppe, "M. Velleius Paterculus," *Schweizerisches Museum* 1 [1837] 168 = *Ausgewählte Schriften* [Berlin 1896] 64).

Sometimes narrative units are placed in parataxis without any further attempts at a larger unity. At other times, Velleius groups narrative units according to their content or for other particular reasons. For example, in chapter 91 he discusses two conspiracies against Augustus, first that of Caepio and Murena (91.2) and then that of Egnatius Rufus (91.3–4, discussed above). The stories are placed together because they share conspiracy as their subject. Time is only indicated by the *neque multo post* which introduces the second conspiracy. The arrangement is paratactic, and each story is told from beginning to end without interruption. We have already seen how the other famous generals in Spain are grouped together.²³

The order and prominence of individual narrative units within a group depend on a variety of factors. For instance, the period 16–7 B.C. presented Velleius with significant problems in foreign affairs. From 16–7 a war was going on in Germany, from 13–9 in Pannonia, and from 13–11 in Thrace.²⁴ Did all the wars need to be treated? If so, in what order? With how much detail? With what emphases? Velleius decided to follow his usual practice and treat each event separately, first the Pannonian war, then the German, then the Thracian.²⁵ The key is the role of Tiberius, whom the historian greatly admired (see, e.g., 129).

The Pannonian war is treated first (96.2–3) because Tiberius finished it first. The choice reveals how closely Velleius focuses on his hero. If Tiberius were not the key, why not treat the German war first, since it began three years earlier? Or the Thracian war, which was finished before the others? Velleius wants to chronicle the victories of Tiberius, not simply wars, so Pannonia must take first place.

Next comes the German war (16–7 B.C.; 97). Since this war eventually fell to Tiberius, it is placed before Piso's Thracian war. In the account of this conflict Velleius does not and cannot concentrate exclusively on Tiberius,²⁶ since the future emperor took over after his brother Drusus had made much progress, but he presents his

²³ 2.5, discussed above, pages 292–93.

²⁴ On the wars, see Woodman, edn. 106, note on 96.2; pages 110 ff.; and 114, note on 98.

²⁵ Woodman, edn. 96, note on 94–98, suggests that Velleius treats the three wars by area of activity under pressure from the need for brevity. Although the difference is small, I would say that the passage is organized by narrative unit, following Velleius' regular habit.

²⁶ Woodman, edn. 95, note on 94–98.

hero as much more than the man who mopped up.²⁷ The facts suffer no distortion, but Tiberius' role is strongly highlighted.

Since Tiberius was not involved, Piso's Thracian war comes last (13–11 B.C.; 98). A remark of Velleius' suggests why the account is given so much space: *quem [L. Pisonem] hodieque diligentissimum atque eundem lenissimum securitatis urbanae custodem habemus* (98.1). Piso's importance in A.D. 29–30 may have led Velleius to highlight his earlier exploits. The implication is that the virtues of Piso and Tiberius naturally sought each other out later, a subtle compliment to both men.

The two and one-half chapters devoted to the three wars form a larger unit made up of three smaller units. Each war receives about the same amount of space (discounting the sketches of Drusus and Piso), and each story is told in approximately the same way: lofty language and few facts. Each account moves from beginning to end without interruption. The arrangement is paratactic, but the items are, first, grouped by their shared subject of war, and, second, ordered by the involvement of Tiberius.

Unit composition and parataxis provide Velleius with substantial flexibility. The length of the individual units could be varied to suit the demands of the material. The foci of the units could also be varied to fit the subject and the light in which Velleius wished to present it. Paratactic placement and unit composition, I imagine, made it possible for Velleius to work up large amounts of material quickly and easily, since long-range coherence was not an issue. Each section or subsection might be prepared almost independently of the material that would finally surround it and then simply inserted with a phrase like *circa eadem tempora* as a connector. Yet at the same time these techniques encouraged Velleius to concentrate on the story he was telling and to leave units hanging in mid-air. Given the early Empire's fondness for short, concentrated stories, this tendency was natural in the historian, if at times harmful.

The thematic grouping of narrative units, however, greatly benefits the reader. As Velleius himself points out (38.1), individual data are easier to follow and remember if they are presented in groups of

²⁷ *Contra* Woodman, edn. 95, note on 94–98. Velleius attributes *virtus* and *fortuna* to Tiberius in addition to such a great concern for his army that he traversed Germany *sine ullo detrimento commissi exercitus* (97.4). Tiberius concludes the conflict vigorously and successfully: *sic perdomuit eam [Germaniam] ut in formam paene stipendiariae redigeret provinciae. tum alter triumphus cum altero consulatu ei oblatu est* (97.4).

related items. The three foreign wars, for instance, are more memorable presented together than they would be if noted separately. The danger to the narrative's coherence arises when the items' connection is not made evident. The confusion about Saturninus' *praeclarum factum* comes from the struggle of independent unit composition with thematic grouping: the two conspiracies and Saturninus' *factum* form a single group, but Velleius does not make that clear until too late.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

In the passages which have been examined we have seen Velleius now writing a tightly organized, dramatic narrative, now tacking an ill-fitting piece onto an effective passage, now losing control of his material partially or completely. Several general observations can now be made.

First, the very variety which has been observed shows that, beyond a rough chronology, an alternation of affairs at home and affairs abroad, and narrative units, Velleius did not have or develop a single, uniform technique which he would apply mechanically to whatever material confronted him. Working with his narrative units Velleius can follow now a theme, now a person, now a subject as the material and other factors suggest. A fixed approach to the confused mass of historical data might have offered advantages. The author of *De viris illustribus* could go from one biographical sketch to another. The annalists (and probably Nepos and Atticus in their chronological works) could work within the narrow but comforting bounds of the consular year. It is to Velleius' credit that he recognized that none of these organizational schemes would provide the flexibility he would need in the course of his history. Although the methods he chose to organize and structure various parts of his work may not strike us as the most effective possible, the combination of methods works better than any single method would have. That he can cover such a vast span of time in such a small volume and make any sense of it at all is a tribute of a sort to his methods of organization.

Second, although no one will accord Velleius' history the first rank among literary works, it exhibits more care in its organization than is

generally admitted.²⁸ Such success suggests that Velleius gave at least some thought to what he was going to write before he wrote it, and that he did not mindlessly condense a lengthy source or equally mindlessly expand the terse entries in a chronological table into complete sentences.

Third, the history's quality varies greatly from passage to passage. One section may be impeccable, but the next may be uniformly poor or only sporadically good. Such variation could spring from any of a variety of causes, few if any subject to proof: carelessness coupled with sporadic but close attention; switching from one source to another without careful consideration of how the accounts might be combined;²⁹ varying degrees of interest on Velleius' part in his rapidly changing subject; hasty composition; or, last and perhaps most probable, simple inexperience at the arduous work of writing. Long years spent on military campaigns separated Velleius from the school he had attended as a boy. Although some men did engage in literary pursuits while in the field—e.g., Caesar and Brutus—the artistic deficiencies of Velleius' history suggest that he did not. The wonder is not that the structure and organization of the history are so bad, but that they are so good.

Yet none of these considerations obscures the fact that Velleius did not produce a well-organized work of history.³⁰ Although individual stories may be vividly and effectively told, although sections of the narrative may be carefully organized, the history as a whole is not a consistent artistic success. On too many occasions we have seen the narrative collapse. The story of the Gracchi disintegrates into a mass of only vaguely relevant details. Opimian wine distracts Velleius too easily. The sections dealing with events abroad and events at home are frequently left in a vacuum, unrelated to the events around them except by a vague chronology. Velleius tends to concentrate on the story he is telling to the detriment of its relationship to other events.

But, as I have suggested earlier, one must wonder whether these objections would have bothered Velleius. Since he apparently had some interest in a narrative that was not artistically unsatisfying, they

²⁸ Woodman, *passim*, is one modern scholar who often comes to Velleius' defense.

²⁹ Münzer, "Komposition" 250, argues that Velleius' narrative is choppy and unpalatable because the historian was engaged in a continual struggle to combine material from a continuous chronological source with material from biographical collections, although more inclined to biography.

³⁰ Cf. Münzer's concluding analysis of Velleius' history as a whole ("Komposition" 275–76).

probably would have troubled him, but perhaps not to a great degree. Velleius wrote a history that moves from the fall of Troy (?) to his own time in only two books, and he no doubt would have tolerated much vagueness and lack of connection in such a work. The nature of his task made such an attitude both necessary and practical.³¹

³¹ I would like to thank Professors T. J. Luce and E. J. Champlin of Princeton University for reading an earlier version of this essay, *TAPA*'s anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions, and Wellesley College for a grant which aided my research.