

Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History*

Introduction

Velleius Paterculus hastily compiled his *Roman History* in 30 CE to commemorate the elevation to the consulship of his friend and fellow-Campanian, Marcus Vinicius. And yet, taken for what it is, a rapid sketch of some ten centuries of history, it is the most successful and most readable of all the abridgements of Roman history which have come down to us. Abridgements are usually little more than skeletons; but Velleius has succeeded, in spite of the brief compass of his work, in clothing the bare bones with real flesh, and in endowing his compendium with more than a mere shadow of vitality, thanks to his own enthusiastic interest in the human side of the great characters of history.

Velleius was a soldier who worked his way up to the praetorship under the command of the future emperor Tiberius. His compendium is divided into two chronologically unequal parts. The first book, preserved in a fragmentary condition, began with the times immediately preceding the fall of Troy, dealt rapidly with the early history of Greece in the first seven chapters, reached the founding of Rome in chapter viii, and ended with the fall of Carthage in 146 B.C. The second book covers the period from the time of the Gracchi to the consulship of Vinicius in 30 CE, and is on a much fuller and more comprehensive scale, especially from the consulship of Caesar to the end. This greater fullness as he approaches his own times is to be explained partly as a traditional proceeding, and partly because, as he himself says, he had in preparation a more comprehensive work covering the period from the beginning of the Civil War between Caesar and Pompey down to his own day, and in consequence he had larger amount of material to assimilate. Here and there he checks the rapidity of his narrative to dwell at greater length upon topics in which he had a personal interest, as for example the references to literary history, the two digressions upon the colonies and provinces of Rome, the participation of members of his own family in historical events, and his own share in the events of the last fifteen years of the reign of Augustus. His interest in history is biographical rather than strictly historical. He is particularly fond of making portraits of the personages of history, which he does with a considerable degree of success. The second book, in particular, is one long gallery of such portraits, which are brought into relation to each other by a slender band of historical data. In general, Velleius can be said to represent the psychological attitude toward the new empire of the group of administrative officers of the equestrian order who ardently supported it without any of the yearnings felt by the senatorial class for the old régime as it existed in the days before the empire had shorn them of their former governmental powers.

Velleius's Style

Velleius writes in an age when rhetoric was the vogue, and he employs all the colors of the poet and the rhetorician: rhetorical questions, exclamations, and even apostrophe; rhetorical rhythm, labored antitheses, glittering epigrams, sometimes far-fetched, and excessive hyperbole. The superlative is used with such considerable frequency that it has little more value than a positive. Furthermore his style is lacking in the clarity, the ease, and the poise of the experienced writer. The periods of Cicero, no matter what their length, are architectural units; in Velleius the nucleus of the period is often overloaded with phrases, clauses, and incidental parentheses. This is partly due to the attempt to condense into a single sentence the content of whole chapters that he finds in his sources. Yet, his periods can usually be broken up into smaller units that can be more readily handled. Yet, with all his faults, Macaulay, who does not admire his style and condemns his flattery, says: "Velleius seems to me a remarkably good epitomist. I hardly know of any work of which the scale is so small and the subject so extensive."

The Text

The text of Velleius depends upon a single manuscript found by Beatus Rhenanus in the Benedictine monastery of Murbach, in Alsace, in the year 1515. This manuscript has long since disappeared. Rhenanus in describing it testifies to the almost hopeless state of corruption of the text: "so monstrously corrupt that no human ingenuity could restore all of it"; "I am ready to swear that the scribe who copied it did not understand a word"; "there is no portion of it that is not corrupt." While modern scholarship has made progress in solving the enigmas, the text of Velleius, unless some long-hidden manuscript shall unexpectedly come to light, will always continue to be one of the most corrupt among the surviving texts of classical authors.¹

¹ Introduction excerpted and adapted from Frederick W. Shipley's introduction to his Loeb Classical Library edition (1924). The text and notes are modified, excerpted, and expanded from the on-line edition of John A. Stevens (<http://personal.ecu.edu/stevensj/LATN3001/>)

The Gracchi

Preface

In the 140-130s BCE, a political struggle arose among two of Rome's leading factions. The conservative Optimates were led by Scipio Aemilianus, the conqueror of Carthage in the third Punic War (146) and of Numantia (133). The liberal Populares were led by Appius Claudius Pulcher, Tiberius Gracchus, and, after his assassination by his brother Gaius.¹ The putative issue that provoked the first great test of Senatorial authority in Rome's history was land reform. The real issue was political power. The city was overwhelmed with the poor, homeless, jobless, hungry and ripe for violence. Tiberius proposed land reforms that would have taken public land and divided it into small farms for the urban homeless. The conservatives opposed this, not least because senators, being forbidden to engage directly in business, made money by using public land. They had enormous estates, which they often leased out to large agri-business contractors in deals that involved financiers. Many of these lands were technically occupied illegally, but had been so used for generations that they were used as collateral, dowries, even inheritances. Tiberius' bill to create a land commission ("a three man board to establish settlements" triumvirum coloniis deducendis) proposed to take back any public lands beyond those legally occupied. He set a size limit. This would have had the effect of taking public land back from the senators, and of bankrupting them and their backers, in order to give the land to the idle poor, which would have had the attendant political consequence of creating a whole clientele of grateful landowners to vote with the Gracchan block in subsequent elections, while taking much of the resources of the opposition. The officials of the towns and municipalities all around were no happier about all of this.

¹ It is important to note that the terms "Optimates" and "Populares" do not indicate political parties in the modern sense, nor do they represent two side of a conflict between "elite" and "proletariat" economic classes. Rather, they indicate two antithetical approaches to governance by two factions of an entrenched ruling elite. Optimates generally sought to maintain the political and social status quo and sought to consolidate political power in the Senate and the upper magistracies; Populares sought to broaden the power of the popular assemblies and the tribunate.

The bill could never pass in the Senate, though it was customary at the time for all legislation to begin in the Senate. Instead Tiberius, a tribune of the plebs, as well as senator, introduced the legislation in the popular assembly, the concilium plebis. All legislation had to be approved by the people in order to become law. In bypassing the senate, Tiberius was implying that approval by the senators, the patres conscripti, the "fathers" of Rome, was somehow unnecessary. Moreover, when a fellow tribune, M. Octavius, vetoed the lex agraria and forbid its passage, after some days, Tiberius persuaded the people to depose him from the Tribunate and replace him. Still further, Tiberius needed funding for the operation and may have proposed using proceeds from the province of Asia, recently willed to Rome by Attalus of Pergamum. The senate regarded finance as its sole prerogative. Lastly he stood for re-election to the tribunate; back to back terms suggested to some ambition at perennial (some said "royal") power. In 133, as Tiberius was attempting to preside over elections on the Capitol and the other tribunes fled, Publius Scipio Nasica Serapio, the pontifex maximus, led senators out of their meeting up to the Capitol. Tiberius was killed near statues of the kings in front of the temple of Jupiter. His body and 400 others were thrown into the river by night.

Ten years later (123), his brother Gaius proposed similar legislation, again proposing a land commission, again opposed by the senate, and again passed in the popular assembly. It established a colony in old Carthage, to be called Junonia. At the same he proposed two other bills, one to give the Equites, the "knights" or business class, power over the extortion court (rather than the senators), and another, which did not pass, would have given full rights of citizenship to the "Latin allies", the cities of Italy, an issue which would lead to war in 30 years. Gaius, elected to a second term as tribune (122) went off to supervise the establishment of Junonia. Upon his return in 121, he had waned in popularity, enough so that he needed a bodyguard. In a scuffle, his retinue killed an aid to the hostile consul L. Opimius, who promptly persuaded the senate that it was an attempted coup. He secured the first formal senatus consultum ultimum, the "final decree of the senate" (in the form vide ne quid detrimenti res publica caperet) to preserve the state, a measure with no real authority beyond the senate's professed right to preserve the state in times of crisis—against anyone or anything. Gaius, fellow triumvir Fulvius Flaccus, and his men occupied the Aventine and were eventually defeated; Opimius put 3000 men to death without trial and demanded the head of Gaius for which he is reputed to have offered its weight in gold.

Velleius Paterculus, Historia Romana 2.2.1-3 on the character of Tiberius Gracchus and the establishment of the Agrarian Commission.

Throughout the middle of the first century BCE, Rome fought a brutal guerilla war against the tribes of the Iberian Peninsula. The Celto-Iberian resistance centered on the city of Numantia, and in 137 BCE the Roman army led by the consul Caius Hostilius Mancinus was surrounded by the Numantines and forced to surrender *en masse*. Tiberius Gracchus, then serving as a quaestor in Mancinus's army, negotiated their release in return for a cessation of hostilities. The treaty, however, was repudiated by Rome, and as compensation for violating the treaty, the Roman turned over Mancinus, bound and naked, to the Numantines. The repudiation of the treaty was a grave blow to T. Gracchus's young career.

1. **inmanem... civitatis... dissensionem**: Velleius is fond of a stylized, often interlocking, word order in which a single word-group routinely begins and concludes a phrase (*hyperbaton*).
4. **quo...**: introduces a relative clause modifying T. Gracchus (line 2); N.B. it is impossible to translate this clause literally; try making the action active in your paraphrase
- quaestore et auctore**: "as *quaestor* and author"
5. **nunc...nunc...**: note the parallel construction.
- graviter ferens**: indicates an emotional state and, therefore, introduces an Indirect Statement (acc. + inf.).
7. **creatus**: here, as always in political contexts, "elected"
- alioqui**: adverb
- 9-10: **tantis... quantas**: despite the different cases, this is a typical *tanus... quantus* construction.
- et naturā et industriā**: ablatives of means
11. **P. Mucio Scaevola L. Calpurnio consulibus**: abl. abs. = 133 BCE; Romans indicated the date of historical events by the consuls for the year.
12. **bonis**: "the good," i.e. those nobles who had the best interests in the state at heart; cf. Greek kaloi k'agathoi ("best and brightest")
15. **summa**: note the short 'a'; the subject of **miscuit** is Tiberius
18. **abrogavit**: "take (something in the acc.) away from (someone in the dat.)"

[2] Inmanem deditio Mancini civitatis movit
dissensionem. Quippe Tiberius Gracchus, Tiberii
Gracchi clarissimi atque eminentissimi viri filius,¹ P.
Africanus ex filia nepos,² quo quaestore et auctore id
foedus ictum erat, nunc graviter ferens aliquid a se
pactum infirmari, nunc similis vel iudicii vel poenae
metuens discrimen,³ tribunus plebis creatus, vir alioqui
vita innocentissimus, ingenio florentissimus, proposito
sanctissimus, tantis denique adornatus virtutibus,
quantas perfecta et naturā et industriā mortalis condicio
recipit, P. Mucio Scaevola L. Calpurnio consulibus
(abhinc annos centum sexaginta duos)⁴ descivit a
bonis, pollicitusque toti Italiae civitatem, simul etiam
promulgatis agrariis legibus, omnibus statim
concupiscentibus, summa imis miscuit et in praeruptum
atque anceps periculum adduxit rem publicam.
Octavioque collegae pro bono publico stanti imperium
abrogavit, triumviros agris dividendis colonisque
deducendis creavit se socerumque suum, consularem
Appium,⁵ et Gaium fratrem admodum iuvenem.

¹ As often in Rome, Tiberius Gracchus has the same name as his father, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus.

² Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (236-183 BCE) defeated Hannibal at Zama in 202, ending the Second Punic War. His preeminence provoked many in the Senate, in particular Cato the Elder, to turn against him and he was tried for bribery. Only the influence of his son-in-law, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, saved him from ruin.

³ i.e. being surrendered to the Numantines as Mancinus had been.

⁴ Therefore, Velleius is writing this passage in 30 CE.

⁵ Appius Claudius Pulcher (? – c. 130 BCE), consul in 143 and censor in 136, and *princeps senatus* ("senior senator").

Velleius Paterculus, Historia Romana 2.3.1-3 on the death of Ti. Gracchus at the hands of senators led by P. Scipio Nasica Serapio.

1. **cognationi** "kin"; the Gracchi were 1st cousins to Scipio Nasica
cognationi: dat. with **praeferens**, placing [acc] before [dat].
2. **salutare** > salutaris, -e: "beneficial" "tend to preserve"
esset: subjunctive in indirect question.
privatim alienum "contrary to his personal interests"
- 4-5. **circumdatā laevo brachio togae laciniā**: abl. abs.; "with the hem (**laciniā**) of his toga draped over the left arm". The plain toga denotes that he holds no elective office.
- 5-6. **summis gradibus**: dat. with **insistens**.
hortatus est > hortor, -ari: a deponent verb
 understand **esse**, an objective infinitive after **vellent**, a subjunctive in a relative clause of characteristic.
7. "let them follow him". Velleius is reporting Scipio Nasica's original 1st person statement (Follow me!) in the 3rd pers. **sequerentur**: jussive subjunctive in secondary sequence after **hortatus est**.
8. **intacta** "who had not been taken in by"; lit. "untouched"
9. **inruere** = inruerunt "rushed"
10. **concientem** "inciting"; Ti. Gracchus is in the middle of a frantic speech to rally the mob when the *mêlée* breaks out.
12. **fragmine subselli**: "a piece of a bench" presumably stone.
ictus, participle of the defective verb *ico*
immaturā morte: abl. of means.
15. **gladiorum impunitatis**: "of the rashness of swords" i.e., the common occurrence of political murders

Tum P. Scipio Nasica...patriam cognationi praeferens et quidquid publicē salutare non esset, privatim alienum existimans, (ob eas virtutes primus omnium absens¹ pontifex maximus factus est), circumdatā laevo brachio togae laciniā, ex superiore parte Capitolii² summis gradibus insistens, hortatus est, qui salvam vellent rem publicam, se sequerentur. Tum optimates, senatus atque equestris ordinis pars melior et maior, et intacta perniciosi consiliis plebs inruere in Gracchum stantem in areā cum ceteris suis et concientem paene totius Italiae frequentiam. Is fugiens decurrensque clivo Capitolino, fragmine subsellii ictus, vitam, quam gloriosissimē degere potuerat, immaturā morte finivit. Hoc initium in urbe Romā civilis sanguinis gladiorumque impunitatis fuit.

¹ P. Scipio Nasica was the first man to be named Pontifex Maximus (chief priest of Roman religion) in absentia.

² The Capitolium, the temple complex atop the Capitoline hill included the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (dedicated to the triad of Juppiter, Juno, and Minerva), a surrounding Area Capitolina (I.10, a walled enclosure around the temple area), and countless smaller temples, altars, columns, and statues. The street that led up to the temple mount from the forum was the Clivus Capitolinus (I.11-12) which wound in front of the Temple of Concord and behind the Temple of Saturn. It is not exactly clear from ex superiore parte where Scipio Nasica is standing, but he seems to have the high ground, since Ti. Gracchus is sent fleeing down the Clivus Capitolinus.

Velleius Paterculus, Historia Romana 2.4.3-5 on the death of the P. Scipio Aemilianus

Scipio Aemilianus (186-129 BCE), grandson of Scipio Africanus (the conqueror of Hannibal, 202) was the leading Optimate of his day, who had celebrated triumphs over Carthage (146) and Numantia (132), had been censor (141) and had served on a remarkable commission (137) that settled the thrones of Egypt, the Seleucid empire, and Asia. He achieved as much glory as man could achieve in Rome, and as with most famous men, including his grandfather, jealousy bred hatred and he was murdered, most agree, by a Gracchan agent. He suffered in a loveless marriage to their sister, Sempronia and their mother, Cornelia, sister of his adoptive father, especially hated that he rather than her sons was titular head of her family. He was a brilliant general, but not so brilliant a politician as the following passage shows:

1-2. **clariore urbium excidio**, "by a greater distinction for destroying cities"; lit. "by a more famous destruction of cities"

nomen suum, acc.

perpetuae... memoriae: another example of an atypical hyperbaton.

6-7. **occipandae rei publicae animum habuisset** "had the intention of taking over the state"

caesum, understand *esse*, infinitive with an understood acc. subject in indirect statement after *respondit*.

9. **vestro**, understand *clamore*

10. **noverca** "stepmother"; Scipio is calling the crowd a bunch of "adopted" if not outright "illegitimate" children of Italy, presumably to make an immigrant slur against the urban plebs who were the *clientes* of his political enemies.

11. **M(anus) Aquilio...consulibus**,

14. **elisarum facium** "strangulation" lit. "a crushing of the throat"

Nec quisquam ullius gentis hominum ante eum clariore urbium excidio nomen suum perpetuae commendavit memoriae: quippe, excisā Carthagine ac Numantiā, ab alterius nos metu, alterius vindicavit contumeliis.¹ Hic, eum interrogante tribuno Carbone quid de Ti. Gracchi caede sentiret, respondit, 'si is occupandae rei publicae animum habuisset, iure caesum.' Et, cum omnis contio acclamasset, 'Hostium, inquit,² armatorum totiens clamore non territus, qui possum vestro moveri, quorum noverca est Italia?' Reversus in urbem intra breve tempus, M'. Aquilio C. Sempronio consulibus, post duos consulatus duosque triumphos et bis excisos terrores rei publicae, mane in lectulo repertus est mortuus, ita ut quaedam elisarum faucium in cervice reperirentur notae. De tanti viri morte nulla habita est quaesito...

¹ **metu** refers to Carthage, more from the lingering memory of the 2nd punic war than its actual danger to Rome in the 3rd; **contumeliis** refers to Numantia which had defeated a Roman army in 137 and taken it captive. Ti. Gracchus negotiated terms for their release, but they were so humiliating that the senate wouldn't ratify them (the so-called "Mancinus Affair"). Even before that, the war had proven so difficult that Rome had had to institute a very unpopular draft. And after the hostage surrender, the Roman army was thoroughly demoralized, until that is, Scipio appeared on the scene, whipped them into shape, and reduced Numantia to submission and razed it in a mere 15 months.

² The quotation is not spoken by the contio; it is Scipio's response to them.

Velleius Paterculus, Historia Romana 2.6.1-5 on the death of the Gaius Gracchus

2. **idem... furor**: another hyperbaton
tam...quam: "to the same degree [x], as [y]"
similem: with datives (**virtutibus** and **errori**)
4. **gratiā**: prep. + gen. "for the sake of"
vindicandae fraternae... praemuniendae ("securing") **regalis potentiae**: gerund phrases; note that technically **fraternae** and **potentiae** should be accusative objects of **vindicandae** and **praemuniendae** respectively and must of understood in that way, but, as is typical in gerund phrases, they have been "attracted" to the case of the gerund.
6. **longē maiora et acriora**: "things far more serious and divisive"
dabat: probably "conative" imperfects "tried to give"
7. **eam**: sc. **civitatem**.
8-9. **quingentis iugeribus** "500 jugera", about 300 acres
9. **aliquando**, "formerly"
9-10. **cautum erat** "was stipulated"
portoria "taxes"
12. **frumentum dari**, not quite a "dole"; Gaius proposed that "grain be sold at under market price".
13. **unā**, adv. "together with"
14. **consularem** "a man of consular rank"; he attained the consulship in 125.
aequē prava "equally improper things"
16. **triumvirum** "triumvir" in the land commission
18. **proditum** > prodo "reported to have been done"
quod "namely that"
19. **daturum...repensurum** (esse) infs. in indirect statement dependent on **proposuit**.
auro > aurum "gold"
20. **proposuit** > propono "declared"

Decem deinde interpositis annis, qui Ti. Gracchum,¹ idem Gaium fratrem eius occupavit furor, tam virtutibus eius omnibus quam huic errori similem, ingenio etiam eloquentiaque longe praestantiorem... vel vindicandae fraternae mortis gratiā, vel praemuniendae regalis potentiae, eiusdem exempli tribunatum ingressus, longē maiora et acriora repetens, dabat civitatem omnibus Italicis, extendebat eam paene usque Alpes, dividebat agros, vetabat quemquam civem plus quingentis iugeribus habere, quod aliquando lege Liciniā² cautum erat, nova constituebat portoria,³ novis coloniis replebat provincias, iudicia a senatu transferebat ad equites, frumentum plebi dari instituerat... Hunc L. Opimius consul... persecutus armis unāque Fulvium Flaccum, consularem ac triumphalem virum, aequē prava cupientem, quem C. Gracchus in locum Tiberii fratris triumvirum nominaverat, eum⁴ socium regalis adumpserat potentiae, morte adficit. Id unum nefariē ab Opimio proditum, quod capitis, non dicam Gracchi, sed civis Romani, pretium se daturum idque auro repensurum proposuit. 20

¹ furor qui (occupavit) Ti. Gracchum

² landmark legislation of 365 BC, by the tribune C. Licinius Stolo which included the right of plebeians to become consul and decemviri, cancellation of debts etc. cf. Roman Civilization 118-120.

³ Gaius passed legislation awarding the collection of taxes from the province of Asia to the Equites. "Tax-farming" was conducted as follows: the highest bidder would pay the treasury directly and then collect what he could from the province to recoup his expenses. The rapacity of the tax agent could be checked only by the provincial governor. At the same time Gaius gave control of (jury membership on) the court which oversees the governors' financial management to the Equites (I.10-11), thereby setting up the Equites as a financial rival to the political power of the senators.

⁴ the text is uncertain; eum does not fit well; translate "and whom"