

Critical Commentary of Cicero's *In Verrem* 2.1.62-4

In Verrem is a series of speeches delivered and written by Marcus Tullius Cicero against Gaius Verres in a trial for extortion and corruption during his time as governor of Sicily. The primary purpose of the governor of Sicily was to be responsible for the shipment of corn to Rome¹, and Verres is accused of engaging in extortion through this process. The speeches, however, do not just detail the events at Sicily, but also of other events throughout Verres' career, including other extortion claims outside of the ones at Sicily. Cicero dedicates a significant amount of time discussing aspects of Verres' character through the description of other actions, such as the hoarding of paintings and statues. The first speech consists of an attack against the defence for their attempt to postpone the proceedings. The second speech discusses Verres' crimes in detail. Cicero accuses Verres of having stolen and seized paintings and statues from various settlements that Verres claims to have bought, but, as Cicero states, would have no proof of purchase for². It continues by discussing the events of Lampsacus, before moving on to the specifics of Verres' time as governor of Sicily.

In the lines 2.1.62 to 2.1.64, Cicero first implies that Verres used his position to abuse women, both married and unmarried. He chooses the events at Lampsacus to emphasise the abuse as it, in his own words, allows him to "come quicker at last to Sicily."³ He outlines the reasons for Verres' presence in Lampsacus and describes him as travelling on behalf of Dolabella but truly for his own gain. Cicero introduces one of Verres' followers into the event, which is an important inclusion to the later series of events. Verres is said to be housed with a man named Ianitor, and is unable to find a suitable excuse to leave the house, so sends his follower Rubrius to scout for women on his behalf. He hears of a man by the name of Philodamus and his unmarried daughter and hatches a plan to have Rubrius moved from his current host house to the house of Philodamus. Cicero states that Verres cites "lodgings of insufficient quality"⁴ as the reasoning behind Rubrius' move, a decision Philodamus disagrees with.

The lines before this passage are, as Gildenhard suggests, a transitory paragraph between the detailing of Verres' lust for artwork and for women⁵. The specific mistreatment of

¹ (Pritchard, 1971)

² (Cicero, 2.1.61)

³ (Cicero, 2.1.62)

⁴ (Cicero, 2.1.64)

⁵ (Gildenhard, 2011)

statues of Diana and Juno foreshadow his poor behaviour towards women, and, in the case of Lampsacus, Philodamus' daughter. The lines after detail letters from Verres to Nero. As a result of Verres' supposed actions at Lampsacus, the residents of the territory attack the house Verres is staying in⁶, resulting in Philodamus and his son being executed, an act which the people do not oppose for fear of Dolabella⁷. This upheaval is discussed in the letters to Nero, but Cicero emphasises that the reasons for the upheaval are never stated⁸.

Cicero heavily implies that Rubrius was acting on the orders of Verres. The intended result of this is likely to be that the blame for the actions of Rubrius, regardless of whether Verres intended the following series of events, should fall to Verres. As Steel says, it matters more to Cicero and the audience that Verres' thoughts and intentions are disingenuous, especially as Cicero implicitly never states that Verres is present for the events at Philodamus' house⁹. Rubrius arrives at Philodamus' residence on the orders of Verres with the intended mission of finding Philodamus' daughter to bring back to Verres so that he may defile her. On discovery that women were not attending the party Rubrius forces upon Philodamus' household, as is Greek custom, a fight breaks out among Rubrius' men¹⁰. This fight results in a death and many injuries, which consequently leads to the condemnation of Philodamus and his son, who rushed to the household to aid his father in defence of his sister. Despite Verres involvement in only the order to Rubrius to bring him Philodamus' daughter, Cicero frames the discussion to make the audience agree that he should be responsible for all of Rubrius' following actions, and the consequences of those actions. He defends his argument that Rubrius was acting on Verres' orders through concluding that if Rubrius was acting of his own accord, the residents of Lampsacus would have attacked him instead of Verres¹¹. However, one of the largest issues with Cicero's speech is the fact that he was not present in Lampsacus and can not know the true series of events that occurred. The people of Lampsacus may have known Rubrius was a man of Verres and attacked Verres as the man responsible for Rubrius instead of as the man who ordered Rubrius to do what he did. Cicero also defends his argument by stating that Verres failed to discuss the reasons for the upheaval of the Lampsacus citizens in his letters to Nero, the implication being that if it were Rubrius' fault, it might have been mentioned¹².

The choice by Cicero to discuss Lampsacus introduces the audience to the types of activities Verres engages in. It allows Cicero to later skim over details that he might

⁶ (Cicero, 2.1.69)

⁷ (Cicero, 2.1.74)

⁸ (Cicero, 2.1.80)

⁹ (Steel, 2004)

¹⁰ (Cicero, 2.1.66)

¹¹ (Cicero, 2.1.80)

¹² (Cicero, 2.1.80)

otherwise include as the audience is already aware of Verres' previous actions and thus takes further instances at face value. Lampsacus specifically is described as "among the best of the provinces in Asia,"¹³ and therefore their violence as a response to the actions of Verres can be seen as a one-off action fuelled by reason rather than a violent people attacking a Roman for simply being Roman. Additionally, as Steel states, the case at Lampsacus is a case of unfinished business¹⁴. Verres obviously offended the people there, and his actions resulted in the death of two innocent men. The implication is that Verres has not yet been punished for his actions there, and the jury have the opportunity to do so by convicting him in the extortion case¹⁵. Cicero uses the specific events of Lampsacus and manipulates the information available about them to present Verres as poorly as possible, and in later parts of the second speech even discredits Verres' side of the story. Additionally, Cicero implies that Verres is simply insane even before discrediting his side of the story, through the use of the Latin *indomitas*¹⁶. Choosing to discuss Verres' sexual crimes in such length and detail is likely a strategy by Cicero to win over the audience in the prosecution of Verres for unrelated crimes. The figure of the man within sexual ethics was important to the Romans and their understanding of morality¹⁷. To be as lustful Cicero describes Verres to be is to not be in control of one's desires, and almost beastlike, as the etymology for *indomitas* implies – *in-domitus* meaning untamed¹⁸ – a trait the Roman people would have looked down upon.

Throughout the discussion of Lampsacus in *In Verrem*, Cicero manipulates the details of the events of Lampsacus and abuses the fact that the audience likely have no knowledge of what occurred to present Verres as negatively as possible, despite also having no way of knowing exactly what happened himself. Cicero is likely to have been convincing to a Roman audience, especially with his emphasis in the 'shock factor' of the sexual crimes Verres supposedly committed.

Bibliography

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¹³ (Cicero, 2.1.63)

¹⁴ (Steel, 2004)

¹⁵ (Steel, 2004)

¹⁶ (Gildenhard, 2011)

¹⁷ (Langlands, 2006)

¹⁸ (Gildenhard, 2011)

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