



Mendacity in Velleius

Author(s): Ronald Syme

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MENDACITY IN VELLEIUS

I. Dedicated to Marcus Vinicius, the consul of 30, the curious product of a quinquagenarian senator begins as a summary of history with the Trojan War and expands before the end into a panegyric of Tiberius Caesar. The predecessors of Cornelius Tacitus among the Roman annalists have perished, and there is a singular dearth of contemporary prose writing to document the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. The opusculum of Velleius Paterculus therefore acquires unique value.

Velleius exemplifies the long career open to an equestrian officer, admission to the Senate as quaestor (not all were so lucky), and service thereafter for five years as legate in the northern campaigns. He furnishes facts and names about the warfare in Illyricum and Germany not elsewhere on record; and, above all, he illustrates the language and attitudes now in normal usage towards ruler and government.

Selection and distortion is evident. Velleius has encountered wide distrust and a fairly general dispraisal. By contrast, he is now coming to benefit from a certain rehabilitation. Benevolence and ingenuity are enlisted in his defence.

Writers are vulnerable to censure for opinions that may range all the way from honourable conviction to arrant prejudice. To impute mendacity is a grave charge, arousing suspicion of anger or petulance. Its presupposition is that the author knew the facts. Therefore, before the term can be admitted, clear proof is required. A single specimen may be enough to disallow any pretension of honesty or honest prejudice.

II. By good fortune Velleius happens to deliver the document. Warfare in Africa is described in this wise:

magni etiam terroris bellum Africum et cotidiano auctu
maius auspiciis consiliisque eius brevi sepultum est
(2.129.4).

Two assertions can be segregated. First, a war 'magni terroris.' The rebellion of Tacfarinas broke out in A.D. 17, in the

wide lands of the Musulamii, south-west from Sicca, south-east from Cirta. It brought annoyance to the Roman government rather than a menace to the internal security of the province: the town that Tacfarinas besieged in his last foray was Thubursicu Numidarum, not the Roman *colonia* Tupusuctu.

This disturbance may be regarded as a resurgence of the Gaetulian War that had been terminated in A.D. 6 by Cossus Cornelius Lentulus—and it looks forward to a rising of the Musulamii early in the reign of Claudius. The Gaetulian War demanded a second legion to reinforce the army, viz. XII Fulminata, such is a valid conjecture.¹ In 20 Tiberius Caesar withdrew IX Hispana from Pannonia, and the legion stayed in Africa for three years.

The story of Tacfarinas earns from the historian Tacitus a full exposition, apportioned in four sections of his annalistic narrative.² The theme carried a strong seduction. For a variety of reasons, not least evocation of the Republic and the monograph of Sallustius Crispus. And the source may be divined: the archives of the Roman Senate, preserving the reports of proconsuls and the orations of the Princeps.³

Otherwise this war leaves sparse traces in the extant record. Nothing in Cassius Dio (the text breaks off in 17) or in his abbreviators, nothing in Suetonius. The biographer lacked interest in particulars that appealed to a historian and a senator: the selection of proconsuls, their right to confer certain 'dona militaria' as declared by Tiberius Caesar, a Camillus renewing the ancient glory of his line, a proconsul permitted to annex the title of 'imperator'.⁴

¹ The tribune of that legion, a son of L. Passienus Rufus (*cos.* 4 B.C.) previously proconsul, was honored at Thugga (*ILS* 8966). For this conjecture, *JRS* 23 (1933) 25; 31.

² *Ann.* 2.52; 3.20f. and 73f.; 4.23-26.

³ As is evident from many passages in those books, cf. Tacitus (1958) 278ff. There is no call to postulate a 'proto-Tacitus' who did the work. As for Africa, the historian Servilius Nonianus might have shown some interest: he was proconsul c. 47 (*AE* 1932, 24: Utica).

⁴ According to Suetonius, the Emperor 'hostiles motus . . . per legatos com-pescuit' (*Tib.* 37.1). Further, he blamed 'consulares exercitibus praepositos' because they neglected to send reports to the Senate and insisted on consulting him about decorations (32.1). The known and relevant item about decorations concerns a proconsul of Africa (*Ann.* 3.20.3, cf. Gellius 5.6.14).

By paradox, a pair of modest epitomators in late antiquity registers under Tiberius the 'latrocinia Gaetulorum.' That is, Aurelius Victor and the author of the *Epitome*.⁵ Which raises a question of sources and derivation. They also note (not in the *Vita Claudii* of Suetonius) 'caesa Musulamiorum manus.'⁶ The earlier of the two epitomators, namely Victor (writing in 360), was an African, and proud of his origin. Victor adds the name of Tacfarinas: unique in all literature, apart from Tacitus.

Now Velleius speaks of 'terror.' It is not to be believed that unrest in the empty lands along the borders of proconsular Africa excited any kind of interest at the capital.⁷ An insurrection in Gaul was another matter, charged with historical potency. That is, Aedui and Treveri in the year 21. Tacitus attests the alarm at Rome.⁸ Not to be gainsaid, and Velleius duly reports that the dangerous rising, 'quantae molis bellum,' was crushed, 'mira celeritate' (129.3).

Second, the African War dismissed as 'brevis sepultum.' The metaphor of a war brought to the quiet of the grave looks rhetorical and conventional. Velleius has it in four other places.⁹ It is absent from the Roman historians.¹⁰

The war in Africa went on for seven years (from 17 to 24). It was conducted by four proconsuls in succession, two pro-rogued and one of them by special appointment: Furius Camillus, L. Apronius, Junius Blaesus, P. Cornelius Dolabella. The first three earned the *ornamenta triumphalia*, by decree of the Senate on the motion of the Princeps; but Dolabella, who terminated the war, was passed over.¹¹

In the year 21 the Princeps put before the Senate two names for the governorship of Africa: Marcus Lepidus and Junius Blaesus. Lepidus declined. They knew the unspoken reason: Blaesus was the uncle of Sejanus. Again, when Tiberius pro-

⁵ Victor 2.3; *Epit.* 2.8.

⁶ Victor 4.2; *Epit.* 4.4. Suetonius records elsewhere a 'barbarorum tumultus' (*Galba* 7.1).

⁷ Cf. *Ann.* 1.74.1 (on the Frisii): 'neque senatus in eo cura an imperii extrema dehonestarentur.'

⁸ *Ann.* 3.44.1.

⁹ Velleius 2.75.1; 82.1; 89.3; 90.1.

¹⁰ Cicero has it once (*De imp. Cn. Pompei* 30). The nearest in Livy is 'sepultam tribuniciam potestatem' (2.55.2).

¹¹ *Ann.* 4.23.1; 26.1.

posed the *ornamenta triumphalia* for Blaesus, he did not omit Sejanus—‘dare id se dixit honori Seiani.’ Finally, when Tiberius denies the honour to Dolabella, it is ‘Seiano tribuens, ne Blaesi avunculi eius laus obsolesceret.’¹²

Velleius was a senator. No plea of ignorance, error, or inadvertence can intervene. Nor will the notion help that Velleius might have been absent from Rome all the time, or for some part of those seven years.¹³ When adverting on the mutinies in the autumn of 14, Velleius, duly approbatory about Blaesus (‘viro nescias utiliore in castris an meliore in toga’), refers to his subsequent proconsulate in Africa and the *ornamenta triumphalia* (125.5). Similarly, the author lavishes praise on Dolabella, then governing Dalmatia and not in trouble with the troops. He is labelled ‘vir simplicitatis generosissimae.’

By the same token, the astute Velleius chose not to reveal the fact that it was Dolabella who ‘buried’ the African war. For a plain reason, and by an obvious artifice. To adopt and repeat the phrase of Cornelius Tacitus, ‘Seiano tribuens, ne Blaesi avunculi eius laus obsolesceret.’

III. A single sentence thus conveys a double damnation: ‘magni terroris’ and ‘brevis sepultum.’ Velleius’ definition of the African War happens to escape notice from recent apologists. It is totally absent from a long study which advertises for title and programme ‘the truth about Velleius Paterculus.’¹⁴

The optimistic pronouncement encounters damage from the outset. Enough, therefore. Why go on, why insist? The African War should convince. However, with this guidance, it may be of use to call up for brief inspection a number of passages where Velleius is under suspicion or awaits exposure. Other writers such as Suetonius and Dio have their manifest failings. When there is a conflict of testimony, Velleius cannot claim benefit of the doubt. His motives being generally transparent, the examination will be sharp and summary—under the proviso that the facts can be ascertained, that Velleius through his time of life and his occupations was in a position to know them.

¹² *Ann.* 3.35.2; 72.4; 4.26.1.

¹³ Cf. below, p. 50.

¹⁴ G. V. Sumner, *HSCP* 74 (1970) 257-97.

Velleius furnishes precious details about his career down to A.D. 14.¹⁵ When appointed to the staff of C. Caesar in 1 B.C. he had been serving as a military tribune 'in Thracia Macedoniae' (101.3). His successive commanders were two senators of praetorian rank, P. Vinicius (*cos.* A.D. 2) and P. Silius (*suff.* 3). It was sometimes supposed that Vinicius and Silius were proconsuls of Macedonia.¹⁶ Better, and clearly, Caesar's legates in charge of the Balkan army, which at this time comprised two legions.¹⁷ The term 'Moesia' had not yet come into currency.

Velleius next saw service as *praefectus equitum* in the German campaigns of Tiberius from 4 to 6 and was elected quaestor for the year 7. The total of his equestrian *stipendia* does not lack precedent a generation earlier.¹⁸ And there are parallels in his own time.¹⁹

Velleius therefore did not begin as a *tribunus laticlavus*, destined for a senator's career.²⁰ After further continuous employment, as a *legatus* under Tiberius in Illyricum and on the Rhine (from 7 to 12), he had his due place at the triumph celebrated on October 23 of the year 12; and he was elected *praetor* among the candidates of Caesar at the elections held on September 17, A.D. 14.

Given long experience with the armies, a post in the provinces might appear likely enough. The author gives no sign. His summary of the reign of Tiberius, 'horum sedecim annorum opera' is compressed and selective (126-31), with a large portion engrossed by the laudation of *novi homines*, culminating with Sejanus (127f.). Since Velleius is so brief, what

¹⁵ Velleius 2.101; 104.3; 111.3f.; 121.3; 124.4.

¹⁶ Thus A. Stein, *Die Legaten von Moesien* (1940) 13. Stein in fact has only Vinicius, for he strangely omitted the testimony of Velleius.

¹⁷ Thus *Rom. Rev.* (1939) 401; *JRS* 35 (1945) 110 (discussing Stein's book); *Danubian Papers* (1971) 68f. (a full statement).

¹⁸ C. Volusenus Quadratus is attested several times: at intervals between 57 and 48 (Caesar, *BG* 3.5.2; *BC* 3.60.4).

¹⁹ Thus the knight 'Jnius L. f. Le[m.],' with four stipendia as tribune militum, three as praefectus equitum (*CIL* XI.711; Bononia); and T. Junius Montanus had six of each before serving as 'pro leg. II' (*AE* 1938, 134; Emona).

²⁰ It is not expedient to assume that Velleius was elected *quaestor suo anno*, hence born as late as 20 or 19 B.C.

he happens to report is highly significant. At the same time, not much can be built on omissions.²¹

Inferences about his occupations are therefore to be deprecated. None the less, they have been hazarded. One of the rare items the author registers, to illustrate the 'prudencia' of Tiberius Caesar, is the affair of the Thracian prince Rhescuporis (in 19), skilfully managed through the agency of Pomponius Flaccus (129.7). Velleius, it is suggested, may have been commanding a legion in the army of Thrace.²² Why, he might be in fact identical with a certain P. Vellaeus, on record in 21, when he dealt with a minor insurrection.²³

Furthermore, the language in which Velleius refers to the prosecution of Cn. Piso in 20 and to the Gallic revolt the year after encourages the belief that he was out of Italy at the time.²⁴ Hence a 'legionary legateship' in Thrace could be postulated, from about 19 to 21.

This remodelling of history and of identities may be left to speak for itself. It is hardly necessary to point out that the mention of Thrace tells nothing about any special interest in that region. The subject is Pomponius Flaccus, introduced for the sake of shoving in an effusive compliment to the noble character of that person.²⁵

Consul ordinarius in 17, Flaccus is the first member of a new family to acquire that signal distinction since Poppaeus Sabinus eight years earlier. Flaccus was in Moesia under Poppaeus Sabinus, with a military exploit to his credit in 12, so Ovid reveals.²⁶ He had previously attracted the attention of

²¹ For example, Sejanus' going with Drusus Caesar to the camp of the Panonian legions in September of 14 (*Ann.* 1.24.2). It would have been irrelevant and an anticlimax after the laudation (27f.).

²² G. V. Sumner, *op. cit.* 276ff.

²³ *Ann.* 3.39, cf. Sumner, *op. cit.* 277. Tacitus names as 'legates of Moesia' three other senators in the period when Poppaeus Sabinus held the combined governorship of Moesia, Macedonia and Achaia: P. Vellaeus also held that position, it appears, cf. A. Stein, *op. cit.* 19. One of them in fact was of consular rank, Pomponius Flaccus.

²⁴ Sumner, *op. cit.* 278.

²⁵ Velleius 2.129.1: 'opera Flacci Pomponii consularis viri, nati ad omnia quae recte facienda sunt simplicique virtute merentis semper, numquam captantis gloriam.'

²⁶ Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 4.9.119ff., cf. 75f.

Tiberius in Germany or in Illyricum, so it might be conjectured.²⁷ Casual evidence shows Pomponius Flaccus a close and trusted friend of the Princeps.²⁸

No conjecture, however, about Velleius' absence from Rome at any time subsequent to his praetorship can with safety be conjured up to explain what is said about Thrace—or, for that matter, about the African War. Ten other passages may now be subjected to brief review. No account will be taken, by the way, of mere or patent defamation like the treatment accorded to M. Lollius (97.1) or to Quinctilius Varus the governor of Syria, 'quam pauper divitem ingressus dives pauperem reliquit' (117.2). Likewise bold assertions that alike defy ascertainment or denial: for example, Augustus wishing to confer on Tiberius the *tribunicia potestas* after the death of Lucius Caesar in A.D. 2 (103.3).

IV. (1) Clemency after Actium. None put to death save a handful, 'paucissimi,' who could not bear to beg for their lives (86.2). Cassius Dio states that many senators and knights were executed, while some were spared. For the rubric of victims he cites three names: Scribonius Curio (the stepson of Marcus Antonius) and Aquillius Florus along with his son.²⁹ Doubt about the excuse and definition alleged by Velleius is intensified by the longer apologia in the next item.

(2) Clemency at Alexandria. None of those who fought on the other side was executed either by Caesar or by his order (87.2). After mentioning in parenthesis D. Brutus and Sextus Pompeius (for whose deaths Antonius was responsible), and Brutus and Cassius, who both committed suicide, Velleius goes on to register two names. Canidius, he says, faced death without courage: 'timidius decessit quam professioni ei qua semper usus erat congruebat' (87.3). An odious story, though perhaps authentic, about a man's comportment in the 'suprema necessitas'—but not implying a voluntary end. Next

²⁷ Cf. Graecinus (*suff.* 16), the brother of Flaccus, absent from Rome in 8 (*Ex Ponto* 1.6.1f.), and also Rufinus, who had a part in the Pannonian triumph (3.4.5). The latter may be identified as C. Vibius Rufinus, with a suffect consulate in 22 or 23, cf. remarks in *History in Ovid* (1978), ch. 5.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Tib.* 42.1 (the notorious drinking party).

²⁹ Dio 51.2.5f.

and finally, Cassius Parmensis, labelled the last survivor of the company that assassinated Caesar the Dictator.

Canidius and the man from Parma recur in Orosius, who adds an entertaining item: the senator Q. Ovinus, who had been superintendent of woollen factories at Alexandria, shameful occupation.³⁰ Orosius goes back to Livy, or rather to a fairly copious epitome (as is shown by the account which both he and Florus furnish of Augustus' Cantabrian campaign in 26 B.C.). Indignation about Ovinus may suitably be accredited to the Patavine historian, whose *patria* was a notorious centre of the wool trade.

Valerius Maximus helps. Early in his chronicle of improving *exempla* he registers the ominous dream of Cassius Parmensis (at Athens, where he sought refuge after the Battle of Actium), and his execution in the near sequel.³¹ Cassius was not in fact the last of the assassins to suffer condign punishment, as stated by Velleius. There was Turullius, not omitted by Valerius Maximus. Turullius was sent to Cos, to be executed for sacrilege, 'imperio Caesaris': for the needs of the Antonian fleet this man had cut down trees in a sacred grove.³²

Dio reports that exemplary story.³³ But Dio in his account of transactions at Actium and at Alexandria has nothing to say about the consular Canidius (*suff.* 40), who commanded the legions of Antonius. Canidius remained loyal to the end, one opines but cannot prove. The contrary was put into circulation: 'sed et Antonio infidus,' according to Orosius. In the account of Plutarch, Canidius fades out after his arrival in Egypt.³⁴ Neither Plutarch nor Suetonius hint at any execution of senators.

The preceding remarks, not all requisite for impugning the veracity of Velleius, may carry some appeal to those who study the problems of sources and the vagaries of the tradition. Curiosity is aroused about the performance of the ingenuous Livy and his influence on subsequent writers.

³⁰ Orosius 6.19.20.

³¹ Valerius Maximus 1.7.7.

³² Valerius Maximus 1.1.19. whence Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 2.7.

³³ Dio 51.8.2.

³⁴ Plutarch, *Antonius* 71.

(3) Two legates in Spain. The pacification of the peninsula was achieved by Caesar Augustus, 'nunc ipsius praesentia, nunc Agrippae' (90.1). After an excursus about the history of the long subjugation, Velleius concludes as follows:

has igitur provincias tam diffusas, tam frequentis, tam feras ad eam pacem abhinc annos ferme L perduxit Caesar Augustus, ut quae maximis bellis numquam vacaverant, eae sub C. Antistio ac deinde P. Silio legato ceterisque postea etiam latrociniis vacarent.

Nothing more is said about the role of Marcus Agrippa. Augustus in fact conducted only one campaign in person, invading Cantabria in 26 B.C. Warfare went on, with campaigns on record in 25, 24, 22. The task was only completed by operations of Agrippa in 20 and 19. Of that, the author may be presumed fully aware: he states the figure of some fifty years antecedent to the time of writing.³⁵

The enigma is the obtrusion of Antistius Vetus (*suff.* 30) and P. Silius (*cos.* 20). Both were Caesar's legates in Tarraconensis, the former in 26 and 25, the latter from 19 to 17.³⁶ The cessation alleged, not merely of warfare but even of brigandage, can apply only to the governorship of P. Silius.³⁷

Velleius was eager at any cost to introduce compliments to families of high eminence and favour. In an earlier passage he had been careful to single out the parent of Antistius Vetus—and at the same time to bring in his son (*cos.* 6 B.C.) and also his grandsons (the consul of A.D. 23 and the *suffectus* of 26).³⁸

As for P. Silius, Velleius had been a military tribune in the Balkan army, but he gives no sign of a consular employment for his son. Which is noteworthy. In the context of honours won in Illyricum and elsewhere Velleius goes out of his way to insert a reference to the second son, A. Licinius Nerva

³⁵ Cf. the next item, 'dum pacatur Occidens,' etc. (91.1).

³⁶ For the list, *AJP* 55 (1934) 315f.; *Legio VII Gemina* (León 1970) 86f.; G. Alföldy, *Fasti Hispanienses* (1969) 3ff.

³⁷ Dio happens to record under 16 B.C. disturbances in Spain (54.20.3).

³⁸ Velleius 2.43.4: 'avo huius Veteris consulis atque pontificis, duorum consularium et sacerdotum patris, viri in tantum boni quantum humana simplicitas intellegi potest.'

Silianus (*cos.* 7), whose sterling merit was cheated of military renown by an untimely decease (116.4).³⁹ Velleius' former commander may have perished soon after his consulate (*suff.* 3). The plague was ranging for some years from A.D. 5 onwards. To complete the rubric it may be added that a P. Silius Nerva held the *fascēs* in 28, shortly before Velleius went in for authorship.

Not so close as with the Vinicii, the author's proximity to the Sillii is clear and attested. Surmise is baffled about Antistius Vetus (*cos.* 6 B.C.). No provincial occupation is on record except for the proconsulate of Asia.⁴⁰ The next two consuls in the family (in 23 and 26) are little more than names on the *Fasti*.

(4) The mission of Tiberius in 20 B.C. The stepson of the Princeps conducted and installed a vassal prince in Armenia. Velleius describes his mandate as 'ad visendas ordinandasque quae sub Oriente sunt provincias' (94.4). The word 'ordinandas' is a false and fraudulent augmentation. It implies supreme authority in the regions concerned. Thus it had been correctly applied in an earlier place to the ruler himself, who at the time was absent from Rome 'ordinandis Asiae Orientisque rebus' (92.2). The author persists in this flagrant misrepresentation: Tiberius for all his modesty ought to have celebrated a triumph for crowning a king in Armenia 'ordinatisque rebus Orientis' (122.1).

When Gaius Caesar went out in 1 B.C. he had proconsular *imperium*. Orosius correctly states his function and authority: 'ad ordinandas Aegypti Syriaeque provincias.'⁴¹ But observe the crafty Velleius. In this instance he avoids the word. Of Gaius he says 'ante aliis provinciis ad visendum obitis in Syriam missus' (101.1); 'omnibus ad Orientem visis provinciis' (101.3).

³⁹ Velleius 2.116.2. The text is corrupt—but it includes 'simplicissimus.' Observe 'simplex' for Pomponius Flaccus (129.1), 'simplicitas' for Antistius Vetus (43.4)—and 'nobilissima simplicitas' for the Domitii Ahenobarbi, the consuls of 16 B.C. and A.D. 32 (10.2; 72.3). Something happens to be known about the character of the two Ahenobarbi (Suetonius, *Nero* 4f.).

⁴⁰ *PIR*², A 771.

⁴¹ The term belongs to standard prose: eschewed by Tacitus, who says of C. Caesar 'missoque ad res Orientis' (*Ann* 2.42.2).

Supreme authority in the eastern lands for Tiberius, that was not enough. The Parthian monarch in alarm surrendered his sons as hostages 'tanti nominis fama territus liberos suos ad Caesarem misit obsides' (94.4). Now the delivery of the four sons of Phraates occurred when M. Titius (*suff.* 31 B.C.) was Caesar's legate in Syria, so Strabo records.⁴² On the evidence of Josephus, the governorship of Titius must fall within the limits of 13 and 9 B.C.⁴³ To postulate for Titius an earlier tenure of Syria c. 20 B.C. is no remedy.⁴⁴ The surrender of the hostages can be put without discomfort about 10 B.C.

(5) The Alpine War of 15 B.C. It was conducted by Tiberius, so Velleius alleged, 'adiutore operis dato fratre ipsius Druso Claudio' (95.1). False. Drusus was not a subordinate or auxiliary of his elder brother. Operating from northern Italy, he held an independent command (under the auspices of Caesar Augustus). It carried the higher prestige, in view of the past history of Italy—and it earned more publicity. Such was the design of the ruler, and it was not lost on the astute Horace.

Two poems in the fourth book of the Odes are devoted to the campaign. The first celebrates exploits of Drusus, at some length, beginning with

videre Raetis bella sub Alpibus
Drusum gerentem Vindelici (4.17f.).

The brother is subsumed under the word 'Nerones' (4.27). The second piece also begins with Drusus (14.10), but soon goes on to a panegyric of the 'maior Neronum' (14.14ff.).

That elder brother, it will be taken, was not imperceptible. As in relations with another poet, a distinct 'frigus' might well ensue.⁴⁵ There is a curious item that few scholars have been tempted to exploit: Horace is absent from Velleius' short list of Augustan poets that admits Ovid (36.3).⁴⁶

⁴² Strabo 16, p. 748.

⁴³ Cf. now Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. G. Vermes and F. Millar, 1973) I, 257.

⁴⁴ An earlier governorship c. 20 B.C., along with the elogium found near Tibur (*ILS* 918), was assigned to Titius by L. R. Taylor, *JRS* 24 (1934) 161ff.

⁴⁵ Seneca, *Epp.* 122.11 (Julius Montanus).

⁴⁶ See now R. J. Goar, *Latomus* 35 (1976) 54.

(6) The lovers of Julia. Iullus Antonius perished by his own hand (100.4). But, despite the enormity of their offence, 'clementia' was extended to the other members of this band of delinquents. They suffered only the normal and legal penalty for adultery, 'quasi cuiuslibet uxore violata poenas pependere, cum Caesaris filiam et Neronis violassent coniugem' (100.5). By contrast, the testimony of the historian Tacitus: the Princeps punished the lovers of his daughter and his granddaughter with death or exile, 'nam culpam inter viros ac feminas vulgatam gravi nomine laesarum religionum ac violatae maiestatis appellando clementiam maiorum suasque ipse leges egrediebatur.'⁴⁷

Not therefore 'mere adultery,' to use the gentle term of Tacitus. Of Iullus Antonius, the prime offender, it may not be quite certain whether he was executed or persuaded to take his own life. Cassius Dio, in a fragmentary text continued by an epitomator, indicates that Iullus was put to death for high treason; and he proceeds to state that a number of other men of rank were executed.⁴⁸ The whole affair is intricate, and not to be gone into in this place.⁴⁹

It would be no help to condone Velleius' assertion on grounds of ignorance, of absence in the Balkans in the autumn of 2 B.C. Apart from Iullus Antonius, Velleius is able to furnish the names of four *nobiles*: an Appius Claudius, a Sempronius Gracchus, a Scipio along with the consular Quinctius Crispinus (*cos.* 9 B.C.), the latter 'singularem nequitiam supercilio truci protegens.'

(7) Tiberius and Gaius. During the seven years Tiberius spent on Rhodes no proconsul or legate proceeding to the eastern provinces neglected to put in at the island; and when interviewing Tiberius ('eum convenientes') they always lowered their *fasces* (99.4). A general and confident asseveration of this type impels one to wonder whether there were not any exceptions to the rendering of homage. That doubt accords with Tiberius' emphatic testimony to the behaviour of Sulpicius Quirinius, delivered many years later.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ann.* 3.24.2.

⁴⁸ Dio 55.15.15. And Tacitus is explicit about Iullus, 'ob adulterium Iuliae morte punito' (*Ann.* 4.44.3); cf. briefly, 1.9.f.

⁴⁹ Cf. 'The Crisis of 2 B.C.' *Bayerische S-B*, 1974, Heft 7.

⁵⁰ *Ann.* 3.48.1: 'Tiberium quoque Rhodi agentem coluerat.'

Before reaching Syria in 1 B.C., Gaius Caesar had a meeting with Tiberius: 'convento prius Ti. Nerone' (101.1). As in the previous passage, the verb 'convenire' implies a visit to Rhodes. Other evidence contradicts. In Suetonius the island of the interview is Samos. Tiberius went there to meet the prince, and had a cool reception. The biographer offers a fairly full account of the fears and the embarrassments of Tiberius at this time and in the sequel.⁵¹

According to Dio, Tiberius came to Chios and abased himself before Gaius and his entourage.⁵² Chios or Samos, in any event not Rhodes, as Velleius was well aware. He was in the company of Gaius Caesar on the voyage through the Aegaeon from the Propontis to Syria (101.3). The deference exhibited by the prince 'ut superiori' is a fiction, like the visit implied by the language of Velleius.

(8) The campaign of A.D. 5. Velleius presents the following statement:

denique quod numquam antea spe conceptum, nedum opere temptatum erat, ad quadringentesimum miliarium a Rheno usque ad flumen Albim, qui Semnonum Hermundurorumque fines praeterfluit, Romanus cum signis perductus exercitus.

(106.2).

After that he goes on to narrate the expedition of the fleet, which went up the Elbe and effected a junction with the army:

et eodem mira felicitate et cura ducis, temporum quoque observantia, classis, quae Oceani circumnavigaverat sinus, ab inaudito atque incognito ante mari flumine Albi subvecta, cum plurimarum gentium victoria, cum abundantissima rerum omnium copia, exercitui Caesarique se iunxit.

(106.3).

The statement that a Roman army had never before reached, or hoped to reach, the Elbe looks peculiar indeed. Drusus had marched as far as that river in his last campaign, and Domitius Ahenobarbus had crossed it c. 2 B.C. Velleius, it is generally held, was wishing to mislead.⁵³

⁵¹ Suetonius, *Tib.* 12f.

⁵² Dio 55.10.19.

⁵³ Cf. C. M. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus* (1972) 159. But further, below, p. 61.

(9) The end of Agrippa Postumus. In his account of the campaign against the Pannonians in A.D. 7 Velleius inserts this notice:

hoc fere tempore Agrippa, qui eodem die quo Tiberius adoptatus ab avo suo naturali erat et iam ante biennium, qualis esset, apparere coeperat, mira pravitate animi atque ingeni in praecipitia conversus patris atque eiusdem avi sui animum alienavit sibi, moxque crescentibus in dies vitiis dignum furore suo habuit exitum.

(112.7).

The notice conveys three statements about Postumus, viz. (a). He began (as affirmed in the relative clause) to show his true nature two years previously. That corresponds with his being sent away to Surrentum, the 'abdicatio' reported by Suetonius.⁵⁴ (b). Next, with the main verb in the sentence ('alienavit'), Postumus by his intolerable conduct turned Augustus and Tiberius completely against him. That is, in 7 ('eodem tempore'). It corresponds with rigorous banishment to the island Planasia, sanctioned by a decree of the Roman Senate.⁵⁵ (c). The final phrase 'moxque crescentibus in dies vitiis dignum furore suo habuit exitum.' It is a device to veil the fate of Agrippa Postumus and disjoin from its known occasion and date the 'primum facinus novi principatus' that occurred seven years later.

(10) The campaign of A.D. 10. Tiberius went to the Rhine early in the year after the disaster of Varus. Velleius describes in forceful language an invasion of Germany: 'penetrat interius, aperit limites, vastat agros, urit domos, fundit obvios.' Not a man was lost—'incolumi omnium quos transduxerat numero.' (120.2). In the campaign of the next year 'eadem virtus et fortuna' is exhibited (121.1).

⁵⁴ Suetonius, *Divus Aug.* 65.1 (that is, the 'abdicatio').

⁵⁵ Suetonius, *Divus Aug.* 65.4; cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.6.2; Dio 55.32.2 (under the year 7). The 'biennium' stated by Velleius may be a little too long if an entry in the *Fasti Ostienses* under A.D. 6 refers to the initial relegation, i.e. the 'abdicatio': 'Agrippa Caesar' (*Inscr. It.* XIII.1.83). For the two stages cf. now R. Seager, *Tiberius* (1972) 46; B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (1976) 57f. The latter scholar argues firmly for 'abdicatio' in the autumn of 6.

For the year 10 Dio (who is only Zonaras in this instance) says that Tiberius did not cross the Rhine; for the next year he denies any victory or the subjugation of any tribe.⁵⁶ Allowance must here be made for a source that is patently hostile. The account of Suetonius is highly favourable to Tiberius. He subsumes the two years in a lengthy exposition that lays emphasis on the extreme caution of the general and his care for discipline. It mentions battles and a success ('re prospere gesta'), but is not decisive for apportioning any military operations.⁵⁷

Strong doubt therefore overhangs a vigorous resumption of active warfare in A.D. 10.⁵⁸ For what it may be worth, an imperial salutation was not registered until the next year (namely XX for Augustus, VI for Tiberius).⁵⁹

The government stood in need of military credit, however tenuous the justification. That holds for the next and last acclamation, recorded before the death of Augustus. It may be assigned to the year 13.⁶⁰ The occasion happens to leave no trace in the written record—unless, by paradox, in Ovid. Writing to his friend Rufinus and referring to his poem on the Panonian triumph (of October 23, A.D. 12), now, so he opines, being read at Rome, Ovid goes on to hail with conviction the near approach of a second celebration, this time from Germany.⁶¹

V. That Velleius writes as a panegyrist is no new discovery. This feature and definition of the author has recently been the subject of a full and erudite exposition.⁶² In any age it is a question whether a performer in that genre can without scandal be given credit for honesty. None the less, Velleius has been accorded a singular measure of indulgence.⁶³ Indeed, his mili-

⁵⁶ Dio 56.24.5a; 25.2f.

⁵⁷ Suetonius, *Tib.* 18f.

⁵⁸ That Tiberius 'remained behind the Rhine' in this year is assumed by C. M. Wells (op. cit. 240). Cf. also M. Gelzer, *RE* X, 494.

⁵⁹ The famous inscription from Cabo Torres in Asturias indicates 9/10 by the trib. pot. (*CIL* II.2703). It is aberrant.

⁶⁰ T. D. Barnes, *JRS* 64 (1974) 24f.; P. A. Brunt, *ZPE* 13 (1974) 180.

⁶¹ Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 3.4.86ff., cf. *History in Ovid* (1978), ch. 4.

⁶² A. J. Woodman, *CQ* 25 (1975) 272-305.

⁶³ Thus *CAH* X (1934) 871: 'an honest man, as Velleius was.'

tary career has been taken as guarantee of veracity and integrity.⁶⁴ That conventional and ingenuous prepossession fails to find support in the experience of the recent time. Hierarchy in the armed forces puts a premium on intrigue as well as deference; and the bluff exterior may conceal enough guile to outwit the smoothest diplomat.

Velleius was anything but a plain man. He enjoyed a good education and imbibed happily the persuasive arts of the rhetoricians. Long years as a senator gave lessons in dissembling—and models of adulation in the comportment of exponents of ‘bonae artes’ such as the orator Q. Haterius or the lawyer Ateius Capito, not to mention the ‘magna nomina,’ the sons of Messalla Corvinus.

As with Pliny, the exuberance and the cleverness become fatiguing. Still, various qualities of style deserve appraisal.⁶⁵ Velleius has been highly successful in imposing on historians a number of his opinions and formulations.

Some of the defects could be put down to brevity and haste, the author being eager to pass on to the major work he had in mind. Yet that ‘festinatio’ which he several times invokes may be also a literary device.⁶⁶ Indeed, that would be a necessary conclusion if it were argued that Velleius began to write, not in 29 or 30, but several years earlier.⁶⁷ However, ignorance or inadvertence is not the gravamen.

Velleius’ propensity to laudation nowhere leads to any verifiable distortion of facts, so it is maintained in a standard manual of classical learning.⁶⁸ Again, a recent biography of Tiberius Caesar, bearing all the marks of careful erudition, adjudicates on this count: in all the chapters concerned with

⁶⁴ H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Latin Literature* (1936) 355: ‘his tone is simply that of an honest soldier.’

⁶⁵ A. Dihle, *RE* VIII A, 647ff. For the debt to Sallust, A. J. Woodman, *Hommages Renard* II (1969) 785ff.

⁶⁶ For ‘festinatio’, 1.16.1; 2.117.1; ‘festinantem,’ 2.52.3; 124.1. Observe that Cornelius Nepos adduced the plea of ‘festinatio’ (praef. 8). The device was also used by Jerome and by the author of the *Historia Augusta*.

⁶⁷ The notion is put forward by Woodman, *CQ* 25 (1975) 303.

⁶⁸ A. Dihle, *RE* VIII A, 646: ‘die panegyrische Tendenz aber führt nirgends zu einer nachgewiesenen Entstellung der Tatsachen.’ By contrast, Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der r. Literatur* II⁴ (1935) 584: ‘wir können ihm nicht wenige Entstellungen der Wahrheit nachweisen.’

Tiberius 'there are perhaps only two major instances of dishonesty.'⁶⁹ Those words raise a second question about honesty in a panegyrist. They inspire curiosity about the criteria employed or permissible when degrees of delinquency are assessed. However, let that pass. The two instances where the concession is made are the campaign of A.D. 5 and the matter of Agrippa Postumus. They call for brief attention.

Velleius' statement that the march to the Elbe was 'numquam antea spe conceptum, nedum opere temptatum' (106.2) generally comes under condemnation. At first sight defence seems neither obvious nor easy. One explanation that has been proffered betrays by its language a patent inadequacy.⁷⁰ A new and novel interpretation now emerges, namely to take that initial phrase to apply, not merely to the first sentence (about the Elbe), but to the second, which begins with 'eodem mira felicitate' (106.3). Hence what had not been previously hoped or achieved is the combined operation of army and fleet.⁷¹ The solution is not unattractive. Its validity must be left to individual judgement, to the impression resulting when the passage is read as a whole. Some hesitation might subsist.

Next, Agrippa Postumus. The sentence concludes with 'moxque crescentibus in dies vitiis dignum furore suo habuit exitum' (112.7). That has universally been understood as a veiled reference to the execution of the youth. A different notion is now put forward. The word 'exitus,' it is pointed out, can mean not only 'death' but 'the final state of a person.' Hence, so it is argued, the 'final state' of Postumus was exile—which in fact occurred in the year 7.⁷²

This interpretation can be dismissed without further ado. It lapses when the whole sentence is put under inspection.⁷³ As was demonstrated above, the long sentence in Velleius indicates two stages in the removal of Postumus (that is, in 5 or 6 to

⁶⁹ R. Seager, *Tiberius* (1972) 268.

⁷⁰ G. V. Sumner, *op. cit.* 271: 'the essential meaning would be, not that Tiberius' army was the first to march to the Elbe, but that it was the first to achieve a real conquest of the whole region from the Rhine as far as the Elbe.'

⁷¹ Woodman, *op. cit.* 304f.

⁷² Woodman, *op. cit.* 305.

⁷³ It is unfortunate that Woodman's quotation is truncated and ignores the structure of the sentence. He quotes 'hoc fere tempore . . . crescentibus in dies

Surrentum, in 7 to Planasia) before concluding ('moxque') with his final condition—which was death.

VI. The apologia for Velleius runs into trouble. Close frequentation of an author often fosters sympathy and indulgence. Some of the friends of Velleius, it appears, have been led a long way through amiable prepossessions.

The stock figure of the military man, enthusiastic in loyalty towards his old commander, but inexpert when he took up the pen, has been sensibly modified, it is true. Ceasing to be regarded as a historian, Velleius acquires another role. He deserves to be defended because he was a panegyrist, and he is credited with unusual skill and subtlety.

The character sketch of Sejanus (127.3f.) now comes up for revision. It is far from being pure eulogy. Doubts and reservations are detected.⁷⁴ Further, so it can be affirmed, Velleius had conceived an 'active distaste' for the imperial minister.⁷⁵

By corollary, enhancement of the person to whom the opusculum is dedicated: M. Vinicius (*cos.* 30), that quiet and blameless character. In the year 33 Vinicius married Julia Livilla, youngest of the three daughters of Germanicus Caesar. The betrothal, it is supposed, may belong a number of years before his consulate. Why not?⁷⁶

The answer is negative: only if the decisive piece of evidence about the marriage is ignored. When casting about for husbands for two princesses in 33, Tiberius Caesar proceeded with great circumspection. As Tacitus says, 'diu quaesito.'⁷⁷ If Vinicius was long since the known and destined husband, the Princeps had no problem.

It is therefore permissible to infer that the author was composing an unreserved eulogy of Sejanus. Two facts would be worth knowing. First, at what time in the course of 30 was

vitiis dignum furore suo habuit exitum.' The first three words indicate A.D. 7—but they go with 'alienavit' not with 'habuit' in the phrase beginning with 'moxque', which vital word has been left out.

⁷⁴ Sumner, *op. cit.* 292ff., cf. Woodman, *op. cit.* 300.

⁷⁵ Woodman, *op. cit.* 304.

⁷⁶ Sumner, *op. cit.* 295.

⁷⁷ *Ann.* 6.15.1.

Sejanus designated for the consulate of the next year. Second, whether or no Velleius when writing his last chapters was aware of that prospect.⁷⁸

Velleius terminates with a prayer to the gods. May they vouchsafe a successor strong enough to bear the burden of empire,

destinate successores quam serissimos, sed eos quorum
cervices tam fortiter sustinendo terrarum orbis imperio
sufficiant quam huius suffecisse sensimus
(131.2).

Not the sinister Sejanus, so it is now claimed. The author ventures a direct allusion to the prospects of the unobtrusive Vinicius.⁷⁹

The study of Velleius' opusculum does not always conduce to brevity.⁸⁰ The present paper was designed to examine in strict economy the credentials of a writer who professed 'iustus sine mendacio candor' (116.5). A number of specimens have been adduced to show how Velleius behaved in the face of facts he knew and could not ignore. To return to the point of inception: the truth about Velleius is disclosed in the single short sentence that describes the African War.⁸¹

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY

⁷⁸ That Velleius knew about Sejanus' designation is inferred by Sumner, *op. cit.* 286. Against, Woodman *op. cit.* 301.

⁷⁹ Sumner, *op. cit.* 295f.: 'he hopes to have planted the idea that Vinicius is a powerful candidate.'

⁸⁰ For example, the book of I. Lana, *Velleio Patercolo o della Propaganda* (1952) 320.

⁸¹ No account was taken of this item by any of the three recent apologists.