

SLAVES AND THE CONSPIRACY OF CATILINE

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THE support drawn upon by Catiline in his revolutionary attempt of 63 B.C. came from a variety of social contexts: senators and *equites*, those to whom Sulla had given and those from whom he had taken away—all clearly were there.¹ There is some evidence which suggests the additional involvement of slaves, evidence that has received various interpretations, including denial.² Here, giving special attention to the slaves' point of view, I shall try to show that some slaves were involved and to explain their involvement in a new way. The main concern will be with slaves used in agriculture or pastoral farming, non-urban slaves who, in general, were more likely to be rebellious than their urban counterparts.³

The major difficulty in the problem is motivation.⁴ What could slaves have seen in Catiline and his program that would have induced them to take part in the proposed rebellion? It is hard to see how either the personal, individual circumstances of slaves or their general conditions would have been improved had Catiline's attempt succeeded; for the sources show no certain sign that the conspirators wished to liberate any number of slaves,⁵

1. For recent literature on the conspiracy and conspirators, see Z. Yavetz, "The Failure of Catiline's Conspiracy," *Historia* 12 (1963): 485–99; K. H. Waters, "Cicero, Sallust, and Caesar," *Historia* 19 (1970): 195–215; D. Stockton, *Cicero: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 110–42; J. Annequin, "Esclaves et affranchis dans la conjuration de Catilina," in *Actes du colloque 1971 sur l'esclavage* (Paris, 1972), pp. 193–238; E. S. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974), pp. 416–33. For comprehensive bibliography, see N. Criniti, "Studi recenti su Catilina e la sua congiura," *Aevum* 41 (1967): 370–95.

2. See Cic. *Cat.* 1. 27; 2. 26; 3. 8, 14; 4. 4, 13. Sall. *Cat.* 24. 2; 30. 2; 46. 3; 50. 1, 2; 56. 5. Plut. *Cic.* 18. App. *BC* 2. 1. 2, 5. Dio 37. 33. 2. For acceptance without demur, R. E. Smith, *Cicero the Statesman* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 128; H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*³ (London, 1970), p. 113. For denial, Gruen, *Last Generation*, pp. 428–29.

3. The circumstances and expectations of urban slaves were generally much better than those of non-urban slaves: see briefly S. M. Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 106–7, and cf. the situation for nineteenth-century Cuba described by F. W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba* (Madison, 1970), pp. 59–62. The slight participation of urban slaves in the conspiracy is attributable to the direct control of masters also involved and hence is not representative of servile opinion elsewhere: cf. Sall. *Cat.* 50. 1–2; App. *BC* 2. 5; Dio 37. 35. 3; Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 429, n. 106.

4. This is well stated by Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 204, who, however, has difficulty in assessing the servile involvement in the conspiracy because of the assumption that slaves had to have some interest in Catiline's program. Annequin sees correctly (p. 211) that the nature of slave participation is the most important question, but his solution is not completely satisfactory because the slaves' point of view is not stressed enough. Waters, "Cicero, Sallust, and Caesar," p. 199, is skeptical about the conspirators' use of slaves but does not consider motivation. Nor is motivation given enough attention by H. Kühne, "Zur Teilnahme von Sklaven und Freigelassenen an den Bürgerkriegen der Freien im 1. Jahrhundert v.u.Z. in Rom," *StudClass* 4 (1962): 189–209, at 200; or by E. M. Staerman, *Die Blütezeit der Sklavenwirtschaft in der römischen Republik* (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 248–50.

5. For the unreliability of Plut. *Cic.* 18. 3, see Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 206. Yavetz ("Failure," p. 494) says, "The rumour of a possibility of manumission through participation in the conspiracy spread fast . . .," but the statement is unfounded.

and slaves did not stand to benefit in any political or economic way as did other groups of supporters⁶—the proposal of *novae tabulae*, after all, would appeal only to those actually in debt. There is no indication that the limited economic reform envisaged by Catiline extended to any alteration of the system of servile labor-supply. And even a general promise to improve the working conditions of, say, slaves used in agriculture, would have been impossible to effect since no way existed for supervising individual slave-owners and the treatment of their slaves. Further, in the absence of any rewards or incentives that could be held out to slaves, their possible use as troops in the uprising would have been as much a disadvantage as a benefit to the conspirators.⁷ Thus, little reason for servile participation can be seen from either side.

When the primary authorities are examined, nothing emerges from Cicero to show conclusively that slaves were part of the Catilinarian movement. Perhaps the most that can be said is that, if Cicero is essentially correct in his allegations (Cic. *Cat.* 4. 13) that P. Lentulus called on Gauls to take part in the uprising, that he arranged for the burning of the city, that he selected assassins for various victims, then he also made an appeal to slaves. Nothing more, however, can be made of references in the *Catilinarians*. The argument that Cicero would have repeatedly insisted on the fact of servile participation had it been genuine⁸ is not fully convincing: Cicero may, when his speeches were delivered, have deliberately avoided any but a passing reference as a precaution against further incitement of slaves, even though it would have been convenient for him to taint his opponents with a servile association.⁹

Sallust has more important, and definitive, evidence. At *Catilina* 56. 5 he makes the following statement:¹⁰

interea servitia repudiabat, quous initio ad eum magnae copiae concurrebant, opibus coniurationis fretus, simul alienum suis rationibus existumans videri causam civium cum servis fugitivis communicavisse.

If we assume that Sallust is not consciously falsifying here but reporting accurately (even allowing for a possible rhetorical touch), this text has to mean that some slaves were loosely implicated in the movement in that they presented themselves to Catiline in northern Etruria;¹¹ otherwise Catiline could not be rejecting them at the dramatic date of the passage. It is clear that *repudiabat* must be taken in a physical, not metaphorical, sense; for Sallust specifically says that slaves were actually present among Catiline's forces before the action of rejection was taken. *Repudiare servitia* cannot mean rejecting the *idea* of using slaves.¹²

6. See the works cited in n. 1.

7. Conceivably the conspirators hoped to create diversionary slave uprisings, but there is no evidence.

8. Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 428.

9. For slaves as a permanent danger to society, see Annequin, "Esclaves," pp. 199–200, 211.

10. Noted by Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 429, but not quoted in full.

11. For Catiline's position, see G. V. Sumner, "The Last Journey of L. Sergius Catilina," *CP* 58 (1963): 215–19. For Catiline's opposition to servile help, cf. also Sall. *Cat.* 44. 6.

12. Which may be the sense of Gruen, *Last Generation*, p. 429.

The rejection must have fallen after Catiline's arrival in Etruria (he had left Rome on 8 November 63) and before the battle of Pistoria in January 62.¹³ But the date of the arrival of the *magnae copiae* is less certain because of the ambiguity of *initio*, which must mean either at the beginning of the conspiracy (i.e., after the July elections of 63)¹⁴ or soon after Catiline's arrival in Etruria.¹⁵ Since supporters of Catiline were operative in Etruria from early July onward,¹⁶ the first alternative seems more likely; and the longer interval would make better sense for the accumulation of large numbers.¹⁷ The reason for their congregating in Etruria will be considered presently.

The remaining passages in Sallust's narrative, it must be granted, deal with no more than rumor and allegation;¹⁸ but one of them needs to be considered in detail nonetheless. At *Catilina* 30. 1-2 Sallust reports that L. Saenius introduced to the senate letters from Faesulae which contained the news that C. Manlius, Catiline's henchman, had entered open rebellion on October 27; at the same time slave uprisings were reported (but not confirmed) at Capua and in Apulia.¹⁹ Saenius' announcement was probably made late in October or early in November;²⁰ rumors about the slave disturbances must have been current in the city at the same time. The report of a *servile bellum* in Apulia was taken seriously enough by the senate to warrant the dispatch to that area of a military commander with troops (Sall. *Cat.* 30. 3), and similar arrangements were made for Capua (Sall. *Cat.* 30. 5). It is unlikely that such moves were authorized merely as precautions: the senate must have regarded the reported dangers as substantially true. Certainly the idea that the senate dispatched Q. Metellus Creticus to Apulia in order to prevent a personal breach with Q. Marcius Rex, who was sent against Manlius,²¹ does not explain such a decisive and committed step. Thus, to concentrate on Apulia, one is inclined to believe that there was a disturbance of slaves in that region, and that the beginnings of the uprising should be fixed between the July elections of 63 and the time of Saenius' report to the senate.²²

It would be an automatic, but wrong, step to attribute responsibility for

13. For the dates, cf. R. Syme, *Sallust* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), p. 78 and n. 79; Sumner, "Journey," pp. 215-19.

14. Cf. for the postponement E. Hardy, "The Catilinarian Conspiracy in its Context," *JRS* 7 (1917): 182; T. Rice Holmes, *The Roman Republic* (Oxford, 1923), 1:458-59.

15. Cf. the use of *initio* at Sall. *Cat.* 56. 2.

16. Cf. Syme, *Sallust*, p. 77.

17. In this case the *ad eum* of the quoted text would be understood metaphorically. Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 212, suggests that slaves were not called upon until a very late stage of the conspiracy, but such a chronology gives no explanation for the gathering of large numbers.

18. Gruen, *Last Generation*, pp. 428-29.

19. "simul . . . alii portenta atque prodigia nuntiabant, alii conventus fieri, arma portari, Capuae atque in Apulia servile bellum moveri."

20. Cf. Hardy, "Context," p. 190; Syme, *Sallust*, p. 78.

21. Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 212.

22. There is support here from the dispatch of other commanders to areas definitely affected by the conspiracy: cf. Sall. *Cat.* 27. 1, 30. 1-5. The report from Capua must have been genuine, too, and one is obviously reminded of the beginnings of the rebellion led by Spartacus. The evidence is not so clear for Capua as for Apulia that the outbreak may have been due to Catiline's influence, though cf. Cic. *Sest.* 9. Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 204, also believes in a genuine uprising in Apulia.

the movement to Catilinarian agents,²³ because Catiline is known at an early stage of the conspiracy to have sent to Apulia a certain C. Iulius (Sall. *Cat.* 27. 1, *dimisit*). Sallust has not given the precise details of Iulius' mission and there is no other evidence to show what it was. But, as we have already seen, Catiline had nothing to offer slaves and was opposed to their use late in the year; hence it is not likely that Catiline gave instructions to Iulius in July to arouse slaves in southern Italy. Further, the success of Iulius' efforts in gathering support from the free population of Apulia seems to be recorded at Sallust *Catilina* 42. 1–2:

. . . in Gallia citeriore atque ulteriore, item in agro Piceno Bruttio Apulia motus erat. namque illi, quos ante Catilina dimiserat, inconsulte ac veluti per dementia cuncta simul agebant. . . .

Here *dimiserat* clearly echoes the earlier *dimisit* (Sall. *Cat.* 27. 1), but there are no correspondences to link the account of Catiline's agents in 27. 1 with the report of the *servile bellum* (Sall. *Cat.* 30. 2). It begins to look, therefore, as if the servile unrest had nothing to do with Catiline or with his agents in any direct sense.

Moreover, although both Sallust and Cicero know of another conspirator, M. Caeparius, who was delegated to go to Apulia to incite slaves (Sall. *Cat.* 46. 3; Cic. *Cat.* 3. 14), this man cannot have been responsible for the unrest in Apulia. He was arrested, together with other conspirators, in Rome itself and so never reached his destination.²⁴ In fact, Caeparius cannot even have been responsible for the rumor of the *servile bellum*, which perhaps circulated before Catiline's departure from Rome and certainly was current before Caeparius was chosen for the Apulian mission.²⁵

The conclusion must be, therefore, that, if the report of the slave uprising in Apulia was true, as is likely, the movement must have been spontaneous on the part of the slaves—not attributable to the efforts of the conspirators to recruit slaves for the conspiracy and not related to the whole Catilinarian nexus.

It cannot be conclusively proved that the *servile bellum* in Apulia occurred, but circumstantial evidence suggests that it did. At the period in question, the economy of Apulia was largely dominated by pastoral farming; and the herdsmen (*pastores*) who provided manpower for estates were mostly slaves of the type that had helped to make earlier rebellions in Sicily and under Spartacus so formidable: *servi agrestes et barbari*.²⁶ It is possible that many of these men were first-generation slaves, and it is likely that the relative

23. A step implicitly taken by Kühne, "Zur Teilnahme von Sklaven," p. 200 and by Štaerman, *Blütezeit*, p. 249; cf. Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 211.

24. Sall. *Cat.* 46. 3, 47. 4. There is thus no basis for Yavetz' remark ("Failure," p. 494): "In accordance with Lentulus' orders, Caeparius of Terracina stirred up slaves in Apulia." Despite Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 203, Sall. *Cat.* 42 does not mention servile agitation, and the conditional statement of Cic. *Sest.* 12 is evidence only of Ciceronian rhetoric, not of Catiline's real intentions.

25. The implication of Sall. *Cat.* 46. 3, 47. 4 is that Caeparius was selected to go to Apulia shortly before the arrests of early December.

26. See in general P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 366–75. The quotation is from Cic. *Mil.* 26.

freedom of movement they enjoyed as *pastores* and the general unruliness of their condition made them a constant threat to established society in spite of their economic importance.²⁷ Potential for unrest and disturbances must always have been present among slaves of this type:²⁸ Tacitus (*Ann.* 4. 27) describes a *tumultus* in Apulia in A.D. 24, sparked by a former member of the Praetorian Guard; the rising was quickly suppressed, but the unrest it represents is plain enough. Thus, the *servile bellum* reported in Sallust is neither unrealistic nor improbable. It might even be suggested that C. Iulius, or others like him, although they did not recruit slaves directly, triggered the uprising in seeking support for the conspiracy among the free population.²⁹

If the hypothesis of a spontaneous servile rebellion in Apulia, prompted indirectly but not sought deliberately by the agents of Catiline, is permissible, then the rebellion should be related to the general theme of servile resistance in a slave-owning society and should be seen outside the context of the Catilinarian conspiracy itself. The *pastores* in Apulia may well have used the uncertainty created by the development of the conspiracy in their area to rebel to their own advantage—to protest against their condition or even perhaps to try to acquire the freedom which neither Catiline nor anyone else would offer them.³⁰ Open rebellion, after all, is one of the ways in which slaves in any slave-owning society are able to display hostility, or at least opposition, to the system in which they are victimized. No numbers are available, of course, to determine the scale of the rising in Apulia, but the senate's response is comparable to other swift actions where the real dangers of servile insurrections were understood.³¹

Furthermore, the idea of an independent slave uprising makes sense of some questions raised by Sallust's narrative. *Catilina* 42 shows that Catiline's agents met with some success in fostering support in several areas outside Rome, and although this agitation led to some arrests in Gaul and Picenum (*Cat.* 42. 3) no arrests are specifically recorded for Apulia. Now if C. Iulius had been successful in gaining support in Apulia, which is likely,

27. For brigandage, see Brunt, *Manpower*, pp. 551–57. Given the tendency for slave laborers to be worked to death and then replaced (cf. K. Hopkins, "Slavery in Classical Antiquity," in A. de Reuck and J. Knight [eds.], *Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches* [Boston, 1967], p. 170), the majority of men must have been recently enslaved, despite the effects on the slave trade of Pompey's suppression of piracy.

28. Cf. the remarks of T. P. Wiseman, "*Viae Anniae*," *PBSR* 32 (1964): 34–35.

29. Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 3. 1. It might be objected that Iulius was supposed to use the potential for unrest to the advantage of the conspiracy; but, in addition to arguments already made against that interpretation, one can observe that Catiline sent agents to areas of Italy other than Apulia: Etruria, Picenum, and apparently Bruttium (Sall. *Cat.* 27. 1, 42. 1). These were regions where it might already have been known that certain sections of the free population had been afflicted by economic misfortune. Etruria had Sullan *coloni* and dispossessed, and perhaps Picenum and Apulia did, too. See Brunt, *Manpower*, pp. 300–312; cf. W. V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 259–67.

30. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4. 27. 1 *ad libertatem vocabat*.

31. Cf. Livy 32. 26. 4–14, 33. 36. 1–4; Oros. 5. 9. 4; Diod. Sic. 36. 2. 1, 2a. 1, 2. 6. Note in addition that a good proportion of the rather limited number of slave rebellions in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries occurred at times of crisis for the white establishment, when slaves were able to exploit divisions or tensions among the ruling class: see E. D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York, 1972), pp. 592–93.

and if he had been sent there at an early stage of the conspiracy, which is true, why was it necessary for Lentulus in Rome to wish to send Caeparius to the same area near the end of the year? Why were slaves to be involved at that late juncture? At the time when Catiline left Rome, the disagreement with Lentulus on the issue of using slaves had not been settled (cf. Sall. *Cat.* 44. 6). To assume that Lentulus simply—on his own and for no reason—gave instructions to Caeparius after Catiline's departure is not enough to explain the action, given the conspirators' apparent successes in the south.³² It is not clear when the disagreement between Catiline and Lentulus began, but there is nothing to show that it antedated the information concerning Apulia which arrived in Rome at the time of Saenius' announcement to the senate. It is possible, therefore, that the news of a spontaneous servile uprising in Apulia precipitated the dispute between the conspirators.³³ Lentulus may have reasoned that the slave rebels could be used to the benefit of the conspiracy; for, if they were encouraged to harry the forces under Creticus, they might conveniently distract troops which could otherwise be recalled against Catilinarians in Etruria or elsewhere. The argument probably gained in intensity after the arrests in Gaul and Picenum. Catiline may have understood the dangers in such a plan better than his colleague; yet, once out of Rome, he was in no position to prevent Lentulus from issuing orders on his own initiative. The instructions were thus given to Caeparius, though, from the conspirators' point of view, they were given too late.

If a reasonable picture of the *servile bellum* in Apulia thus emerges, based on the idea of servile resistance, the same notion can also be employed to explain the presence of slaves with Catiline in Etruria.

In studies of slave resistance in slave-owning societies of the New World, it has been clearly shown that slaves commonly protested their condition, gained revenge on masters, and attempted to secure their freedom not so much by open revolt as by the simple act of running away from the location of their enslavement.³⁴ The immediate cause of flight varied from individual to individual: a desire to try for permanent freedom, the hope of joining a community of maroons, or just a wish to see a relative or friend on a nearby estate. But in all cases the result was that slave-owners were deprived, temporarily at least, of the economic usefulness and value of the absconded slave. Simple analogy suggests that fugitivism was a common form of servile resistance in the Roman period; and, indeed, some evidence has been assembled to suggest so.³⁵ Given the extensive importation of foreign slaves to Italy and Sicily during the late Republic and the prominence of

32. Cf. Yavetz, "Failure," p. 494.

33. Cf. Cic. *Sest.* 12.

34. See, e.g., K. M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956), pp. 109–124; O. Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery* (London, 1967), passim; Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba*, pp. 79–80; G. W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion* (New York, 1972), passim; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 648–57; R. Price (ed.), *Maroon Communities* (New York, 1973), passim.

35. Cf. Staerman, *Blütezeit*, pp. 238–43; K. D. White, *Roman Farming* (London, 1970), p. 356; H. Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im römischen Kaiserreich* (Wiesbaden, 1971).

the latifundist system,³⁶ flight was perhaps more prevalent in this period than in others.

Etruria was the principal center of Catilinarian activity;³⁷ Sullan *coloni* and victims there provided fodder for the conspiracy. While neither in this region nor in Picenum was the economy so heavily dominated by one agricultural form as in Apulia,³⁸ it is nevertheless beyond doubt that both areas contained large numbers of agricultural slaves.³⁹ So it could easily follow that the activities of the Catilinarians in Etruria were sufficiently well known to slaves as to make the prospects for successful flight more propitious and attractive than they would be in normal circumstances. As noted earlier, the sources do not suggest that slaves had any hopes of manumission from the conspirators. But in their own eyes, slaves automatically became "free" as soon as they had escaped; likewise, they automatically deprived their masters of their labor, gaining revenge in the process for the harshness of the conditions under which they had previously worked. If, then, slaves were to escape and to join Catiline's army, they had before them the prospect of sharing whatever spoils the army might come upon if victorious; even if the army were defeated, the slaves might always contrive to stay on the loose. Their long-term prospects did not improve significantly, to be sure, but neither did they deteriorate; and the immediate attractions of freedom of movement and possible plunder may for some have seemed preferable to continued labor in slave gangs. Perhaps some slaves also took the opportunity to escape without trying to join Catiline's forces; but there is no way of being certain. Nevertheless, there is no need to believe that the conspirators called directly on slaves to join the revolution actively at any point,⁴⁰ because no text specifically states that they did and the probabilities are against it. But neither can it be denied that slaves did become associated with the conspiracy. It is better, consequently, to explain their association by stressing that the slaves present with Catiline were *fugitivi*, which is precisely what Sallust calls them (*Cat.* 56. 5), by emphasizing the unrest created in certain areas of Italy by the momentum of the conspiracy, and by looking at forms of resistance available to slaves. In other words, the reason for the participation of slaves in the conspiracy is to be found in the independent actions and aspirations of the slaves themselves, not in recruitment by the conspirators or in their plans.

A final point. It is not known if Catiline's rejection of the fugitives before

36. Cf. Brunt, "The Roman Mob," *P & P*, no. 35, 1966, p. 9; *Manpower*, pp. 283-84.

37. Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 201; cf. Gruen, *Last Generation*, pp. 421-22; Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria*, p. 294.

38. Cf. Brunt, *Manpower*, pp. 350-53; A. Toynbee, *Hannibal's Legacy* (Oxford, 1965), 2:252, 543-44.

39. Brunt, *Manpower*, pp. 350-53.

40. As Annequin, "Esclaves," p. 212, insists. It is here that the language of summoning needs cautious treatment. Cf. Syme, *Sallust*, p. 82. It does not seem likely that the conspirators could simply call on slaves at any time since the latter did not comprise a passive, homogeneous group; thus their "positive role" in the conspiracy is overestimated (Annequin, p. 208).

Pistoria meant that they all left him in actuality; but the description of the improvised arms of some of Catiline's troops at Sallust *Catilina* 56. 3 sounds rather like a description of the makeshift arms normally carried by *pastores*.⁴¹ In the final crisis, Catiline may not have been fully averse after all to drawing on servile help.⁴²

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41. Cf. Diod. Sic. 34/35. 2. 29.

42. The suggestions in this paper were offered at the seventh meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians at Stanford University on May 7, 1976. In a comment, Professor R. E. A. Palmer made the alternative suggestion that Catiline induced slaves to support him by offering land which would have been secured in a successful conspiracy. This must remain a possibility—though a doubtful one on the view given here—particularly since there is no direct evidence that Catiline offered land to anyone. Sall. *Cat.* 21. 2, *proscriptionem locupletium*, though vague, could mean that supporters of the conspiracy were to be given confiscated estates; but, if so, the estates would have gone only to those supporters eligible also for *magistratus* and *sacerdotia*. I should like to thank Professor Palmer for kindly allowing me to use the text of his comment, as well as Professor E. S. Gruen and the *CP* readers, from whose criticisms the article has benefited.