

Africa as a Part of Europe? Sallust's Geographic Agenda in the *Jugurtha*

Near the beginning of the *Jugurtha*'s geographic digression on Africa (17–19), Sallust discusses Africa's position within its global context. He records that while the majority opinion is that Africa is a third part in a tripartite division of the world, there is a minority view that Africa is not a distinct continent, but a part of Europe (17.3). There is no further elaboration on this point; nothing seems to be gained or derived from it within its immediate context, so that if it were purged from the text, nothing would seem to be lost. This raises a question. Since Sallust is well known as an author who practices "strict concentration on what he deems essential to his theme" (Syme 1964, 149), what might his purpose be of suggesting an ambiguity of Africa's geographic identity? This paper argues that raising such an ambiguity is essential to Sallust's historiographical purposes: he argues from presuppositions that geography and human moral and political identities are inseparable; geography plays an active role in shaping human character, while human activity, especially in the form of political conflict, shapes and reshapes geography. The tension created by the ambiguity of Africa's geographic identity suggests that not only is its identity unresolved, but also that of Europe as Rome and Jugurtha come into conflict with each other. Thus, Rome's war with Jugurtha has cosmic dimensions affecting the very definition of the world the Romans live in as they extend their empire.

Sallust's remark belies an ongoing and dynamic debate in the ancient world concerning how to understand boundaries of the earth, including the internal boundaries separating one part of the inhabited world from another. Though physical features such as rivers, mountains and seas were used as a way to understand geographic divisions, there were other factors that were often just as important to understanding the divisions such as suggestions from mythology and human customs. There was no standard way of understanding the divisions, and Africa was often a

difficult crux sometimes being united to Asia or even as Romm (1992) points out to India in spite of their apparent geographic remoteness to one another (82).

An important clue in this debate comes by way of Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories*, who acknowledges both geographic traditions mentioned by Sallust. After acknowledging and adopting the tripartite division of the continents for his *periplous* (3.3), he discusses the alternate tradition of two continents: first he says that the current tripartite configuration of the continents was the result of a Herculean alteration of the very face of nature when the legendary hero cut the channel between what is now Europe and Africa and let in the waters of Ocean (3.4). Mythology, thus, contains the memory of a different continental landscape, while also establishing an explanation for the new configuration. The interior sea is, therefore, an intrusion of mythological Ocean into the domain of land reshaping the very face of the world. Furthermore, and very importantly, he notes that maintaining a bi-partite scheme of the world's is proper to the extent that it acknowledges Europe's standing as the mother of the world's conqueror, Rome (3.5). An underlying symmetrical framework that gives Europe an equal portion of land supports a Romano-centric view of geo-political power.

Sallust himself echoes the Herculean motif within his digression by including information from a problematic source known as the Punic Books (17.7) describing immigrations into Africa of Hercules' army, consisting of Persians, Medians and Armenians, following his death. A significant portion of the digression is devoted to describing how these immigrants both reshaped and were reshaped by Africa. with a special emphasis on the Persians as the cultural forbears of Jugurtha and the Numidians.

Thus, the very question of Africa's relationship to the other continents reveals that there are many possible criteria for drawing boundaries and describing geography, ranging from the

purely physical to the mythological to the ideological. And, for the one aware of the mythological tradition, as many would be, the statement is an oblique reminder that mytho-geographic forces have reshaped the face of the world and altered the natural balance of the world's order. Rome's attempted conquest over Jugurtha is part of a larger cosmological contest to restore the proper order with Rome at its head.

Bibliography

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