

The literary *excursus* of *Velleius Paterculus* and the exaltation of the italic contribution to the grandeur of Rome

Federico RUSSO
Università di Pisa

Resumen

A partir de la lectura del *excursus* literario situado en los capítulos finales del libro I de la obra de Velleio, se ha procurado analizar las características del parangón Grecia – Roma y de la paralela comparación Atenas – Roma, dos temáticas que asumen una gran importancia dentro de la ideología adoptada por el autor en su narración. La exaltación de Roma, y aún antes de Italia, bajo el perfil específico de la producción literaria, resulta ser perfectamente coherente con el planteamiento de fondo de toda la obra velleiana, capaz de exaltar la comunión Roma – Italia.

Abstract

From a reading of the literary *excursus* found in the final chapters of book I of *Velleius'* work, I have sought to analyse the characteristics of the Greece - Rome comparison and of the similar Athens – Rome comparison, two themes that assume considerable importance in the ideology adopted by the author in his narration. The exaltation of Rome, and earlier of Italy, considered from the aspect of his literary production, are perfectly coherent with the undercurrent of all of *Velleius'* work, eulogy of the Rome – Italy communion.

Palabras clave: Velleio Patérculo, Roma.

1. The *excursus*, which *Velleius Paterculus* dedicated to the Roman colonization from the Gallic disaster to the age of Hannibal (I, 14-16), suggests the possibility that, among his sources, the historian used an “philoitalic” tradition, one that was favourable to his own family background. This theory is further supported by the presence throughout the work of various moments that appear to derive from

traditions of a similar position¹, especially in the second book, where the author deals with the narration of the Social War.

Gabba² dedicated an important article to this passage of *Velleius'* work, but in his point of view the list of Roman colonies in Italy has not a specific relation with the literary *excursus* of the paragraph 17 e 18. In the present paper, I will try to suggest the existence of a precise and common ideological structure for the final part of the first book.

The historian clearly declares his reason for choosing to place a list of colonies at the end of the first book of his work that infringes upon the chronological limits imposed by the book's conclusion. The *excursus* follows the account of the siege of Corinth and precedes the chapters of literary history that conclude book I, thus constituting (as Gabba has rightly pointed out³) a sort of historical-political recapitulation of the greatest age of Roman history. It is an outstanding arrangement in the structure of the first book of the work, since it was designed to give a concise yet significant idea of the progression of the Roman state in Italy. In my opinion, the fact that chapters 14 and 15 are dedicated to the exaltation of Rome and of her empire (presented, however, in most distinctive terms, since it is seen not as a domination, but rather as a communion of citizens of different cities) is demonstrated by the continuation of book I (chapters 16-18), where praise of the city is developed and brought to conclusion by means of an effective comparison between the great Greek literary intellects and the equally exceptional examples of Rome.

The object of the *excursus*, and especially its aim, must first be made clear. The *incipit* of chapter 14 immediately indicates the themes that shape the following chapters: *Cum facilius cuiusque rei in unam contracta species quam divisa temporibus oculis animisque inhaereat, statui priorem huius voluminis posterioremque partem non inutili rerum notitia in artum contracta distinguere atque huic loco inserere, quae quoque tempore post Romam a Gallis captam deducta sit colonia iussu senatus; nam militarium et causae et auctores ex ipsarum praeferunt nomina.*

1. The chapters that deal with this are II, 15-16, dedicated to the outbreak of the Social War. In this context as well, *Velleius* reveals his point of view to be explicitly Italophil. See also II, 27.

2. E. GABBA, "Italia e Roma nella storia di Velleio Patercolo", *CS*, 1 (1962), pp. 1-9 (= in *Esercito e società nella tarda Repubblica romana*, Firenze, 1973, pp. 347-360).

3. E. GABBA, *Italia*, cit., p. 3. See also J. HELLEGOUARC'H, *L'impérialisme romain d'après l'oeuvre de Velleius Paterculus*, in *L'idéologie de l'impérialisme romain*, Dijon, 1972, Paris, 1974, pp. 73-74.

Therefore, to make it easier for the reader to comprehend the history that had been narrated to that point, *Velleius* recapitulates the most salient points of Roman colonization in Italy. The reason for this is essentially practical, functional to the structure of the work, free of any sign of praise for the object of narration. However, the *incipit* plan of chapters 14 and 15 does not stop here, since *Velleius* clearly declares his second aim: *huic rei per idem tempus civitates propagatas auctumque Romanum nomen communione iuris haud intempestive subtexturi videmur*.

In effect, the account that follows (for chapter 14) proceeds within the two spheres that *Velleius* has indicated, following a chronological order: he speaks in turn of the founding of colonies and of granting citizenship (with or without the right to vote). Chapter 15, which begins with the exploits of Hannibal, is instead dedicated exclusively to colonization and makes no further mention of citizenship⁴.

I believe, therefore, that with the words *huic rei per idem tempus civitates propagatas auctumque Romanum nomen communione iuris haud intempestive subtexturi videmur* *Velleius*, clarifying further, has indicated the twofold theme of his *excursus*: on the one hand, Roman colonization by founding colonies decided upon by the senate, indicated as *civitates propagatas*; and on the other, the granting of citizenship, *auctumque Romanum nomen communione iuris*, without foundation of cities. The *communio iuris* is presented as the cause of the “quantitative” growth of the Roman people, because it is due to this that the number of Roman citizens was literally increasing. This expression is, thus, a praise of the process of extending the citizenship (as the laudatory tone of the chapter as a whole would seem to infer), but more importantly, it is a clear indication of what the *communio iuris* implied for the Roman state.

4. After the first decades of the III century, the Senate became decidedly opposed to granting citizenship which, because of too sudden an increase in Roman territory, would have led to a change in the nature of the Roman state. See E. GABBA, *Italia, cit.*, p. 5. For the relationships between Romans and Italic peoples, see E. GABBA, “Il problema dell’«unità» dell’Italia romana”, in E. CAMPANILE, *La cultura italica*, Pisa, 1978, pp. 11-27; E. GABBA, “Aspetti dell’assimilazione delle popolazioni italiche nel II secolo a. C.”, in E. CAMPANILE, *Lingua e cultura degli Osci*, Pisa, 1985, pp. 35-46. See also, with bibliography, A. GIARDINA, *L’Italia romana. Storie di un’identità incompiuta*, Roma-Bari, 1997; H. MOURITSEN, *Italian unification. A study in ancient and modern historiography*, London, 1998; N. TERRENATO, “The romanization of Italy: global acculturation or cultural bricolage?”, in *Proceedings of the seventh annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, Nottingham, 1997, Oxford, 1998, pp. 20-34.

It is important to emphasize how, to *Velleius'* manner of thinking, the concession of citizenship to an already established community made a contribution equal to colonisation process, first to the growth of the power of Rome in Italy and then to the grandeur of Rome. These are two different manners of growth that *Velleius* not only joins together, but puts on an equal footing.

As Gabba has noted⁵, from this perspective, no mention is made of the wars that Rome was waging against the many peoples who were later received into her body of citizens. Similarly, *Velleius* does not even record the alliances that Rome entered into with many Italic populations, perhaps because the Roman-Italic confederation must have signified “una condizione di sudditanza o almeno di inferiorità⁶ to *Velleius* or his source. This is a historical interpretation based on the same view of the facts, both from the Roman and the “Italic” points of view. For *Velleius*, colonization (no matter whether Latin or Roman, to the extent that at times he does not specify which type he is speaking of) along with the granting of citizenship contribute to the grandeur of Rome. But it is to the theme of the granting of citizenship that *Velleius* devotes particular attention, as demonstrated by the historian’s total support for the reasons that drove the Italic peoples to rise up against Rome in the 1st century BC. Thus, the narration in II,15: *Quorum ut fortuna atrox, ita causa fuit iustissima: petebant enim eam civitatem, cuius imperium armis tuebantur: per omnis annos atque omnia bella duplici numero se militum equitumque fungi neque in eius civitatis ius recipi, quae per eos in id ipsum pervenisset fastigium, per quod homines eiusdem et gentis et sanguinis ut externos alienosque fastidire posset. Velleius* fully justifies the reasons for which the Italic peoples went to war against Rome, explicitly revealing his adoption of the Italic point of view: the principal reason for what he says is the defence of the “Italic” position against Rome. Yet, from *Velleius'* words we also see that the grandeur of Rome depends, at least in part, directly on the Italic peoples. Citizenship thus assumes a twofold function: on the one hand it is the just reward for service to the state, and on the other, and perhaps more importantly, it is an instrument for the growth in the power of the state itself.

It is true that elsewhere, for example in Livy⁷, there are references to the admission of the Italic populations to the Roman state through *civitas*, both *optimo iure*, and *sine suffragio*. However, Livy does not arrive at the same conclusions as

5. E. GABBA, *Italia, cit.*, p. 5 ss.

6. E. GABBA, *Italia, cit.*, p. 5.

7. E. GABBA, *Italia, cit.*, pp. 6-7.

Velleius and concentrates his narrative on very different events of the same years, thus revealing a point of view that differs from that of *Velleius*⁸.

2. That chapters 14 and 15 are dedicated to the exaltation of Rome and of her empire (presented, however in most distinctive terms, since it is taken to be a communion of citizens from various cities rather than a domination) is, in my opinion, confirmed by the course of book I (chap. 16-18) where praise of the city is developed and brought to conclusion by means of an effective comparison between the great Greek literary intellects and the equally exceptional examples of Rome. His praise is shaped around two aspects: the clearly political aspect, to which the *excursus* that relates to the colonization of chapters 14 and 15 is dedicated, and the more generally cultural aspect that, unlike the first, covers a much broader period of time, going beyond the chronological limits of book I. This twofold praise is rooted in a common ideological context that is identified in the concept of “communion of Italy and Rome”; this idea, so explicit in the paragraphs dedicated to colonization in Italy is also present, less evidently but equally compellingly, in the literary *excursus*. The object of the next paragraphs will be to indicate how this concept had a decisive, structural role also in the literary *excursus* on the greatest Roman intellects.

The criteria on which *Velleius* bases his choice of, for example, Terence and not *Plautus*, or the reason why *Ennius* is not mentioned, have often been questioned. It is generally believed⁹ that these lists were not compiled on the basis of *Velleius*'

8. Cicero *Pro Balbo* 31 is particularly close (E. GABBA, *Italia, cit.*, p. 5, nt. 18) to the words and concept that *Velleius* expresses in his *excursus*: *illud vero sine ulla dubitatione maxime nostrum fundavit imperium et populi Romani nomen auxit, quod princeps ille creator huius urbis Romulus foedere Sabino docuit etiam hostibus recipiendis augeri hanc civitatem oportere. Cuius auctoritate et exemplo numquam est intermissa a maioribus nostris largitio et communicatio civitatis*. There are very significant lexical correspondences between *Velleius*' passage and that of Cicero: in particular, in Cicero, just as in *Velleius*, the extension of citizenship brings about a growth of the *nomen populi Romani*, expressed with the verb *augere*.

9. F. DELLA CORTE, “I giudizi letterari di Velleio Patercolo”, *RFIC* 16 (1967), pp. 154-159; it is Della Corte's theory that *Velleius* was influenced in his judgements by *Publius Vinicius*, father of the dedicatee of the work. A. POCIÑA PÉREZ, “La ausencia de Enio y Plauto en los *excursus* literarios de *Velleius Paterculus*”, *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica* 9 (1975), pp. 231-240. See also E. NOË, “Gli *excursus* letterari nell'opera storica di Velleio Patercolo”, *Clio* 18 (1982), pp. 511-523. E. NOË, *Storiografia imperiale pretacitiana. Linee di svolgimento*, Firenze, 1984, pp. 93-97.

personal judgement, but rather on the example of a “canon” that the historian must have known, since it was already widespread, and to be found also in Horace¹⁰ and in Quintilian¹¹. However, if we compare, for example, the authors cited by Quintilian¹² with those mentioned by *Velleius*, we cannot help but notice that Quintilian refers to writers like *Plautus* who are absent from *Velleius*. Thus, as we can see, the problem has not been resolved: if *Velleius*, too, had access to a series of authors indicated as canonical, for reasons still to be made clear, he chose to omit some of them from the list while giving particular importance to others (for example, *Cato*)¹³.

This is the text of *Velleius*, I, 17: (1) *Neque hoc in Graecis quam in Romanis evenit magis. Nam nisi aspera ac rudia repetas et inventi laudanda nomine, in Accio circaque eum Romana tragoedia est; dulcesque Latini leporis facetiae per Caecilium*

10. Or., *Epist.*, II, 1, 50 ss: *Ennius, et sapiens et fortis et alter Homerus, / ut critici dicunt, leviter curare videtur / quo promissa cadant et somnia Pythagorea. / Naevius in manibus non est et mentibus haeret / paene recens? Adeo sanctum est vetus omne poema. / Ambigitur quotiens uter utro sit prior, aufert / Pacuvius docti famam senis, Accius alti, / dicitur Afrani toga convenisse Menandro, / Plautus ad exemplar Siculi properare Epicharmi, / vincere Caecilius gravitate, Terentius arte; Ars, 270.*

11. See F. DELLA CORTE, *I giudizi, cit.*, pp. 155-156. A. POCIÑA PÉREZ, *La ausencia, cit.*, pp. 236-237.

12. Quint., *Inst. Or.*, X, 1, 97: *Tragoediae scriptores veterum Accius atque Pacuvius clarissimi gravitate sententiarum, verborum pondere, auctoritate personarum. Ceterum nitor et summa in excolendis operibus manus magis videri potest temporibus quam ipsis defuisse: virium tamen Accio plus tribuitur, Pacuvium videri doctiorem qui esse docti adfectant volunt; X, 1, 99: In comoedia maxime claudicamus. Licet Varro Musas, Aeli Stilonis sententia, Plautino dicat sermone locuturas fuisse si Latine loqui vellent, licet Caecilium veteres laudibus ferant, licet Terenti scripta ad Scipionem Africanum referantur (quae tamen sunt in hoc genere elegantissima, et plus adhuc habitura gratiae si intra versus trimetros stetissent).*

13. In the opinion of Pociña Pérez, the list furnished by *Velleius* would be due to the scant experience he had of Roman literature. A. POCIÑA PÉREZ, *La ausencia, cit.*, p. 238: “creemos que debe tenerse muy presente sempre el carácter impersonal y acrítico de las precisiones de Velleio en materia literaria, mero reflejo de unas ideas en boga en su tiempo”. For M. L. PALADINI (“Studi su Velleio Patercolo”, *Acme* 6 (1937), pp. 447-478, in part. pp. 448-449), *Velleius*’ position on literature demonstrates that he could not have been more than a dilettante on the subject... These literary *excursus* could have been introduced by the author because indications of this sort were present in the sources he was following; this is a rather sceptical evident attitude about *Velleius*’ original capacity to propose a literary picture, to his personal judgement or to an ideology of his own.

Terentiumque et Afranium sub pari aetate nituerunt. (2) Historicos etiam, ut Livium quoque priorum aetati adstruas, praeter Catonem et quosdam veteres et obscuros minus octoginta annis circumdatum aevum tulit, ut nec poetarum in antiquius citeriusve processit ubertas. (3) At oratio ac vis forensis perfectumque prosae eloquentiae decus, ut idem separetur Cato (pace P. Crassi Scipionisque et Laelii et Gracchorum et Fannii et Servii Galbae dixerim) ita universa sub principe operis sui erupit Tullio, ut delectari ante eum paucissimis, mirari vero neminem possis nisi aut ab illo visum aut qui illum viderit. (4) Hoc idem evenisse grammaticis, plasticis, pictoribus, sculptoribus quisquis temporum institerit notis, reperiet, eminentiam cuiusque operis artissimis temporum claustris circumdatam. (5) Huius ergo recedentis in suum quodque saeculum ingeniorum similitudinis congregantisque se et in studium par et in emolumentum causas cum saepe requiro, numquam reperio, quas esse veras confidam, sed fortasse veri similes, inter quas has maxime. (6) Alit aemulatio ingenia, et nunc invidia, nunc admiratio imitationem accendit, naturaque quod summo studio petitur, ascendit in summum difficilisque in perfecto mora est, naturaliterque quod procedere non potest, recedit. (7) Et ut primo ad consequendos quos priores ducimus accendimur, ita ubi aut praeteriri aut aequari eos posse desperavimus, studium cum spe senescit, et quod adsequi non potest, sequi desinit et velut occupatam relinquens materiam quaerit novam, praeteritoque eo, in quo eminere non possumus, aliquid, in quo nitamur, conquirimus, sequiturque ut frequens ac mobilis transitus maximum perfecti operis impedimentum sit.

I do not believe that an excessively “exclusive” value should be given to the words of *Velleius*: we need not think that the omission of an author must necessarily result from the absence of this author from the literary “canon” that *Velleius* possibly accessed and accepted. This is the case of *Pacuvius* who is not cited in the *excursus* of I, 17, but is praised in II, 9, when *Velleius* is specifically dealing with the period of those authors. The *excursus* of I, 17, precisely as such, is extremely succinct: for example, all the historians who flourished in the same era are mentioned together (with the important exceptions of *Livy* and *Cato*, as *Velleius*, himself, does not fail to point out), and then these same historians are indicated by name shortly afterwards in II, 9: (1) *Eodem tractu temporum nituerunt oratores Scipio Aemilianus Laeliusque, Ser. Galba, duo Gracchi, C. Fannius, Carbo Papirius; nec praetereundus Metellus Numidicus et Scaurus, et ante omnes L. Crassus et M. Antonius: (2) quorum aetati ingeniiisque successere C. Caesar Strabo, P. Sulpicius; nam Q. Mucius iuris scientia quam proprie eloquentiae nomine celebrior fuit. (3) Clara etiam per idem aevi spatium fuere ingenia in togatis Afranii, in tragoediis Pacuvii atque Accii usque in Graecorum ingeniorum comparisonem evecti, magnumque inter hos ipsos facientis operi suo locum, adeo quidem, ut in illis limae, in hoc paene plus videatur fuisse*

sanguinis, (4) celebre et Lucilii nomen fuit, qui sub P. Africano Numantino bello eques militaverat. Quo quidem tempore iuvenes adhuc Iugurtha ac Marius sub eodem Africano militantes in iisdem castris didicere, quae postea in contrariis facerent. (5) Historiarum auctor iam tum Sisenna erat iuuenis, sed opus belli civilis Sullanique post aliquot annos ab eo seniore editum est. (6) Vetustior Sisenna fuit Caelius, aequalis Sisennae Rutilius Claudiusque Quadrigarius et Valerius Antias. Sane non ignoremus eadem aetate fuisse Pomponium sensibus celebrem, verbis rudem et novitate inventi a se operis commendabilem.

At the end of book I, *Velleius* was evidently moved by criteria other than those of “completeness”; his declared purpose was to demonstrate how the most lofty intellects always flourish at the same time, which was something that he tries to explain.

3. It is likely that the choice to mention specific authors was due not only to the demands of literary criticism¹⁴, as Della Corte¹⁵ already sensed, but also to more political reasons¹⁶.

14. For *Velleius* “literary historian”, see P. SANTINI, “Caratteri del linguaggio critico-letterario di Velleio Patercolo”, in *Studia Florentina Alexandro Ronconi sexagenario oblata*, Roma, 1970, pp. 383-391. M. CAVALLARO, “Il linguaggio metaforico di Velleio Patercolo”, *RCCM* 14 (1972), pp. 269-279. P. SANTINI, *Storiografia e critica letteraria. I giudizi di Velleio Patercolo sugli scrittori greci e latini*, in POIKILIA. *Studi in onore di Michele R. Cataudella*, La Spezia, 2001, pp. 1131-1156. For Santini, the preference for these authors and the silence on *Plautus* and on the even more ancient writers of comedy seem to arise from the predilection of the cultural milieu of the Tiberian age for stylistically meticulous art forms; the authoritative critical evaluations of *Cicero* and *Horace* presumably had an influence on this predilection. P. SANTINI, *Storiografia e critica letteraria, cit.*, p. 1147 and nt. 35 for the indications of the passages of *Cicero*. U. SCHMITZER, *Velleius Paterculus und das Interesse an der Geschichte im Zeitalter des Tiberius*, Heidelberg, 1999, pp. 79-100, in part. pp. 82-85 and p. 100, instead, considers the motivations strictly literary.

15. F. DELLA CORTE, *I giudizi*, p. 157. Pocina Pérez instead, thinks that it is only literary reasons and *Velleius*' scant capacity of judgement on this subject that would have induced him to copy or synthesize *excursus* of other authors. A. POCIÑA PÉREZ, *Ausencia, cit.*, pp. 238-239.

16. In this regard see I. LANA, *Velleio Patercolo o della propaganda*, Torino, 1952, pp. 269-292, in part. pp. 279-280, who links *Velleius*' *excursus* to the cultural milieu that gravitated around *Tiberius*. According to the scholar, with this *excursus*, *Velleius* did nothing more than confirm his approval of the politics, even the cultural politics, of the emperor. It is, therefore, a further expression of *Velleius*' propagandistic intention towards the Tiberian principality. More recently, Noè offered yet another essentially literary historical reading, attributing to

We are led in this direction by the comparison with other literary *excursus* or judgements on Roman literature that show how the criteria on which the historian composed chapter 17 are not of a purely literary nature. We see *Velleius*' treatment of other authors¹⁷:

- I, 7 Mention of the historian *Cato* the Elder.
- I, 16 Problem of the literary genres in Greece. The crop of authors such as: *Aeschylus*, *Sophocles*, *Euripides* (for tragedy); *Cratinus*, *Aristophanes*, *Eupolis*, *Menander*, *Philemon*, *Diphilus* (for comedy); *Plato*, *Aristotle* (for philosophy); *Isocrates* (for oratory).
- I, 17 Similar phenomenon in Rome; we remember *Accius*, for tragic drama; *Caecilius*, *Terence*, *Afranius* for comedy; *Cato* and *Livy* for historiography; *Cato*, *L. Crassus*, *Scipio Aemilianus*, *Laelius*, the two *Gracchi*, *C. Fannius*, *Servius Galba* and *Cicero* for oratory. Considerations on the same phenomenon in other arts.
- I, 18 Pre-eminence of Athens over the rest of Greece.
- II, 9 List of Roman scholars up to the age of *Silla*: *Scipio Aemilianus*, *Laelius*, *Servius Galba*, the *Gracchi*, *C. Fannius*, *Papirius Carbo*, *Metellus Numidicus*, *Scaurus*, *L. Crassus*, *M. Antonius*, *C. Caesar Strabo*, *P. Sulpicius* and *Q. Mucius* as orators; *Afranius* as author of *Togatae*; *Pacuvius* e *Accius* as authors of tragedies; *Lucilius* as authors of satires; *Caelius Antipater*, *Sisenna*, *Claudius Quadrigarius*, *P. Rutilius Rufus*, *Valerius Antias* for historiography; *Pomponius* as author of *Fabulae Atellanae*.
- II, 16 Recalls *Hortensius*, author of the work entitled *Annales*.

Velleius no purpose other than that of indicating the most esteemed authors of his time, and at the same time, of trying to illustrate and clarify the development of cultural phenomena, treated as if they were historical facts. In this way, according to the scholar, the importance of *Velleius*' historiographic operation would be demonstrated. See NOË, *Gli excursus*, cit., p. 516. J. HELLEGOUARC'H, *Velleius Paterculus. Histoire Romaine*, 2 voll., Paris, 1982, p. LIII ss.. also centres his analysis on a strictly literary context; see also in this regard F. A. SCHÖB, *Velleius Paterculus und seine literar-historischen Abschnitte*, Tübingen, 1908, p. 11, who judges *Velleius* as an insignificant compiler who adhered totally to the doctrines of the schools of rhetoric of his time. R. J. GOAR, "Velleius Paterculus and Tiberius Caesar", *Latomus* 35 (1976), pp. 43-54 instead, sees political motivations (all, however, falling again within the age of Tiberius).

17. I omit from this list the citations of authors like Homer (I, 5), Archilocus (I, 5), Hesiod (I, 7), and others who are not directly related to our problem.

· II, 36 Latin prose writers of the generation of *Cicero* and Octavian; *Cicero*, *Hortensius*, *Crassus*, *Cotta*, *Sulpicius*, *Brutus*, *Calidius*, *Caelius Calvus*, *Caesar*, *Messalla Corvinus*, *Pollio*, Sallust, Livy; Poets: *Varro*, *Lucretius*, *Catullus*, *Vergil*, *Rabirius*, *Tibullus*, Ovid.

Let us emphasize a very important fact: of the three chapters dedicated entirely to literature (I, 17; II, 9; II, 36), only the last two can truly be considered brief “histories” of Latin literature, in chronological order and by genre¹⁸, while chapter I, 17 is a case apart, certainly not to be reduced to the simple category of literary *excursus* organized exclusively chronologically.

And that I, 17 does not fall within *Velleius*' historical narration, but comprises a consideration external to it is also demonstrated by the fact that while II, 9 and II, 36 are complementary and consequential (in the sense that the second is the logical continuation of the first), I, 17 has no chronological link to these, so much so that some of the authors cited in I, 17 turn up again in II, 9 as well. Similarly, some authors mentioned in II, 9 are not present in I, 17, as for example *Pacuvius*, writer of tragedies, mentioned with *Accius* in II, 9, but absent in I, 17 where only *Accius* recurs; again, *Afranius*, *Caecilius* and Terence are named as authors of comedies in I, 17, while in II, 9 we have only *Afranius*. The most important absence is that of *Cato*, mentioned more than once, but completely missing from II, 9.

Therefore, the literary *excursus* of *Velleius* are not reciprocally consequential, especially regarding the relationship between I, 17 and II, 9. Since it is impossible for I, 17 to be the first part of a three-part history of Latin literature (I, 17; II, 9; II, 36) because of the repetitions mentioned previously, it is likely that this chapter served another purpose, surely linked to the comparison between Greece and Rome. On the other hand we could think of it as a sort of “anthology” of Latin letters, even though some authors mentioned at the end of book I do not recur in II, 9 where we surely would have expected to find them.

If we accept the fact that chapters II, 9 and II, 36, which are expressly dedicated to the history of Latin literature, reproduce the literary taste of the era of *Velleius* (something that would explain the absence of *Plautus* or *Ennius*¹⁹), what was the criterion that formed this most singular *excursus* of I, 17? It does not seem to be chronological, specifically because, although *Velleius* sets the list of authors within the concept of “synchrony of intellects”, we find ourselves facing a combination of

18. U. SCHMITZER, *Velleius*, cit., pp. 85-100.

19. A. POCIÑA PÉREZ, *La ausencia*, cit., pp. 238-239.

authors who do not belong to the same period, such as *Cato* and *Livy* or *Cato* and *Cicero* or *Livy* and *Accius*. So *Velleius* betrays the criterion of “synchrony” with which he had set up the discourse in order to pursue a diachronic line of description. Or better yet, we could say that *Velleius*’ discourse is both diachronic and synchronic at the same time, in fact, it is not true that I, 17 is dedicated to the loftiest part of the tradition, as has been said²⁰. On closer inspection, we see that this chapter covers the period of time up to *Cicero*, which is reached, however, by moments delineated synchronically. The first group of authors mentioned (*Accius*, *Caecilius*, Terence and *Afranius*) is homogeneous both in genre (drama) and in chronology; the second point is dedicated to historiography, and particularly to the eighty years in which the great historians flourished. It is probably the period in which the historiographers mentioned in II, 9 lived; notice, though, that in I, 17 none of these historiographers is mentioned, while a primary position is reserved for two authors (*Cato* and *Livy*) who fall definitely outside of those eighty years. The same is true for oratory which flourished at the same time as historiography. Once again, specific names are not mentioned, but only two examples, *Cato* (again outside a chronological context) and *Cicero*, the most excellent in the eyes of *Velleius*.

But there is more. The list of Roman dramatists perfectly mirrors that of the Greek dramatists. In chapter 16 *Velleius* mentions *Aeschylus*, *Sophocles* and *Euripides* for tragedy and then *Cratinus*, *Aristophanes*, *Eupolis*, *Menander*, *Philemon* and *Diphilus* for comedy: similarly, in chapter 17, he immediately mentions *Accius* and “those around him” for tragedy²¹, followed by *Caecilius*, Terence and *Afranius* for comedy. The parallelism²², which could not be more evident, stops here, since *Velleius* dedicates space to two completely Roman genres, historiography and oratory, which flourished later, with the important exception of *Cato*.

Going back to the comparison between I, 17 and II, 9, we can explain the discrepancies between the two in the light of these considerations. *Cato*’s absence is easily explained by reasons of chronology; precisely because the *excursus* reaches the age of *Sulla*, we would have expected the mention of *Cato*, as *Pacuvius* and *Accius* are mentioned. However, with regard to historiography and oratory (the genres in which *Cato* could have been included), *Velleius* chooses later authors who were very

20. J. HELLEGOUARC’H, *Velleius, cit.*, p. VIII and p. 46.

21. *In Accio circaque eum Romana tragoedia est.*

22. For a comparison between the *excursus* dedicated to Greek literary history and that dedicated to Roman literary history see J. HELLEGOUARC’H, *Velleius, cit.*, p. 47. The scholar maintains that from this comparison we see that Greece has no historians to counter those of Rome, according to an evident pro-Roman vision.

distant from *Cato*. The method *Velleius* employs to organize this *excursus* is not so very different from that of chapter I, 17, in that the historian reasons along the line of literary genres (tragedy, comedy, oratory, historiography), and each of these is set in a particular moment in history. Since *Cato* is not a contemporary of those historians or authors *Velleius* speaks of in II, 9, he is not mentioned. Still based upon literary genre, *Caecilius* and Terence, writers of the *fabula palliata*, are not mentioned; in II, 9, the *fabula palliata* is not present in the *excursus*, whereas the *fabula togata* is (and, in fact, *Afranius* is regularly mentioned).

As mentioned above, it is possible that chapter I, 17 is a sort of “anthology” of the best authors: the most significant representatives of each genre that had its greatest development in a specific, limited period of time are indicated. If we then accept the modern theory according which *Velleius*’ taste in literature reflected that of his time²³, then we must admit that the authors mentioned in I, 17 were the best ones, chosen from a group of writers who were already the result of a preliminary selection. The fact remains, however, that chapter I, 17 presents a certain degree of incoherence: why organize a discourse based entirely upon chronological criteria and then choose to mention authors that fall outside of this organization? Thus, for *Velleius*, the golden age of historiography and of oratory coincide with the age of *Cicero*, and this can be deduced from various elements: in the course of chapter 17, *Velleius* asserts that²⁴ “as for the historians, inserting Livy, too, in the era of authors that preceded him, historiography cited them all, with the exception of *Cato* and a few other obscure, ancient writers, in a period of time equal to less than eighty years, just as the rich crop of poets neither precedes nor continues after this period”. Since, shortly afterward it is said that “eloquence, forensic art and the perfection and splendour of oratory prose, again excepting *Cato* (may *P. Crassus*, *Scipio*, *Laelius*, the *Gracchi*, *Fannius* and *Servius Galba* not be offended), all came to flourish during the time of *Tullius*, their greatest representative, since you could take delight in very few of the orators who preceded him,” we deduce that the periods of development and greatest flourishing of these genres coincided. Then, considering the *excursus* of II, 9 (where all those who in I, 17 are considered to be inferior to *Cato* and *Cicero* are mentioned) and II, 36, we can deduce that for *Velleius*, the golden age of these two genres, in addition to that of poetry, coincides with the age of *Cicero*. It is important to emphasize this fact, not only to have an idea of *Velleius*’ “taste” (or his source’s “taste”) in literature, but also to understand in what esteem our historian held *Cato*,

23. See P. SANTINI, *Storiografia e critica letteraria*, cit., p. 1147.

24. Translation of the author.

Cicero and *Livy*. He esteems them so highly that he mentions them within a classification from which all but *Cicero* would otherwise have been excluded.

We could think that *Cato*, for example, was cited within this context because *Velleius* was particularly fond of him and used him as a source²⁵.

It is possible that the choice to cite *Cato* and *Livy* and to define them as indeed the best representatives of the genres in which they exercised their art cannot be attributed merely to literary motivation, nor can the motivation be traced back exclusively to the use that *Velleius* made of their works (at least of *Cato*'s).

What do *Velleius*' "favourite" authors, who are mentioned at the end of book I, have in common? In my opinion, what links these names (*Cato* first of all and then *Livy* and *Cicero*) is not chronology, given that they are not contemporaries, but geography: they are authors who are not strictly Roman, but come from small Italic towns.

4. Let us look at the chapter that concludes the first book (I, 18): (1) *Transit admiratio ab conditione temporum et ad urbium. Una urbs Attica pluribus omnis eloquentiae quam universa Graecia operibus usque floruit adeo ut corpora gentis illius separata sint in alias civitates, ingenia vero solis Atheniensium muris clausa existimes.* (2) *Neque hoc ego magis miratus sim quam neminem Argivum Thebanum Lacedaemonium oratorem aut dum vixit auctoritate aut post mortem memoria dignum existimatum.* (3) *Quae urbes [et in Italia] talium studiorum fuere steriles, nisi Thebas unum os Pindari inluminaret: nam Alcmana Lacones falso sibi vindicant.*

The concept of the sterility of the Greek cities compared to Athens, expressed in the final chapter of the book, leads us to believe that in his description of the Roman literary talent, *Velleius* also wanted to make up for that lack that he attributes to the Greek experience. The theme of the uniqueness of Athens as the "mine" of great literary personalities also returns in *Cicero*'s *Brutus* (49-50: *Et Graeciae quidem oratorum partus atque fontis vides, ad nostrorum annalium rationem veteres, ad ipsorum sane recentes. nam ante quam delectata est Atheniensium civitas hac laude dicendi, multa iam memorabilia et in domesticis et in bellicis rebus effecerat. hoc autem studium non erat commune Graeciae, sed proprium Athenarum.* (50) *Quis enim*

25. However, it must also be said that the historian does not seem to follow the work of *Cato* (probably the *Origines*) blindly and acritically: in I, 7 *Velleius* is openly sceptical towards what he finds in the work of *Cato* regarding the founding of Capua and Nola, and prefers to follow different traditions. It is, however, certain that *Velleius* has information that originates from *Cato*.

aut Argivum oratorem aut Corinthium aut Thebanum scit fuisse temporibus illis? nisi quid de Epaminonda docto homine suspicari lubet. Lacedaemonium vero usque ad hoc tempus audivi fuisse neminem. Menelaum ipsum dulcem illum quidem tradit Homerus, sed pauca dicentem. brevitatis autem laus est interdum in aliqua parte dicendi, in universa eloquentia laudem non habet), but with one significant difference: in this case the words on the cultural “sterility” of the Greek cities serve to exalt Athens, lone beacon of cultural production (principally of oratory, given the discussion in *Brutus*); instead, in *Velleius*, this concept does not turn out to be praise of Athens, but criticism of the other Greek cities, which becomes even more bitter when it controversially robs Sparta of its prestige as the birthplace of Alcman²⁶.

There is an undeniable resemblance between chapter 18 and the passage from *Brutus* mentioned above²⁷, a resemblance that recalls a very similar discourse that recurs in the *Dialogus de oratoribus* of Tacitus (40, 4²⁸): here, too, the author speaks

26. L. ALFONSI, “La dottrina dell’aemulatio in Velleio”, *Aevum* XL (1966), pp. 375-378. L. ALFONSI, “Ancora su Velleio I, 17”, *Euphrosyne* 3 (1967), pp. 183-186. Both studies proceed to a detailed analysis of the Velleian passage in the light of the many testimonies from *Cicero* (but not only) in which the theme of *aemulatio* recurs. For this reason, Alfonsi, leans toward a strong dependence of *Velleius* on *Cicero* which, in his opinion, is also borne out by specific lexical references. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the theme of the *aemulatio* between Greece and Rome is indeed present in the two Velleian chapters, but it is not the only ideologically important concept to shape the structure of the conclusion of the first book. See L. ALFONSI, *Dottrina, cit.*, p. 376, for a brief review of the most important testimonies of the concept of *aemulatio* in Latin literature. See also in this regard SCHÖB, *Velleius Paterculus, cit.*, pp. 34-43. More recently, for this concept, especially in *Cicero*, E. FANTHAM, “Imitation and Evolution. The discussion of rhetorical imitation in *Cicero De Oratore* II, 87-97 and some related problems of *Ciceronian* theory”, *CPh* 73 (1978), pp. 1-16; U. SCHMITZER, *Velleius, cit.*, pp.81-82.

27. P. SANTINI, “Spunti di critica letteraria nel *Dialogus de oratoribus*”, *A&R* IV (1969), pp. 21-30. The scholar demonstrates the conceptual and ideological closeness between the language of *Velleius*’ literary criticism and some passages from *Cicero*, to emphasize the dependence, which had already been encountered from other points of view, of the historian from the Arpinate.

28. *Quem enim oratorem Lacedaemonium, quem Cretensem accepimus? Quarum civitatum severissima disciplina et severissimae leges traduntur. Ne Macedonum quidem ac Persarum aut ullius gentis, quae certo imperio contenta fuerit, eloquentiam novimus. Rhodii quidam, plurimi Athenienses oratores extiterunt, apud quos omnia populus, omnia imperiti, omnia, ut sic dixerim, omnes poterant. Nostra quoque civitas, donec erravit, donec se partibus et dissensionibus et discordiis confecit, donec nulla fuit in foro pax, nulla in senatu concordia,*

of the uniqueness of Athens and of its oratory. What is striking about these three cases is that they speak of oratory and never of the other literary genres. *Velleius* himself specifies twice that he is dealing with the eloquence of oratorical art, just as Tacitus and *Cicero* do. Therefore, up to this point we could speak of a simple dependence of *Velleius* on *Cicero*, something that is perfectly plausible given the historian's admiration of the orator²⁹. However, *Velleius'* chapter concludes with a statement that is hardly coherent with what was said shortly before about the Athenian orator: the Greek cities are, in fact, defined as *steriles talium studiorum*, and, therefore, of oratorical art, but then the cases of Pindar in Thebes and of Alcman in Sparta are cited. Why include two poets in a discourse that speaks of the meagreness of Greek oratory? Since we are certain that the concept of the uniqueness of Athens as an example of oratory productivity was a *topos* already in circulation, accompanied by the comparison with Roman oratory³⁰, we are led to believe that the statement that ends chapter 18 is an intervention of *Velleius'* own.

It is true that in *Cicero* as well³¹, whom we have cited several times as a possible direct or indirect source for *Velleius*, we find the theme of the proximity of oratory and poetry, that could justify the passage in *Velleius'* chapter; but, it is also true that in *Cicero* we never find the union of the two themes, nor is one ever used to sustain the other. In our case, it would seem more likely to attribute to *Velleius* the consecutive mention of these two concepts that lead him to conclude that, except for Athens, the cities in Greece had no important literary expression. This is a very strong assertion that can be meaningful only for an exclusively Velleian comparison of Greece and Rome.

In order to make what is said in chapter 18 more useful for the comparison of Greece and Rome, and especially to allow Rome to stand out against Greece, the

nulla in iudiciis moderatio, nulla superiorum reverentia, nullus magistratum modus, tulit sine dubio valentior eloquentiam, sicut indomitus ager habet quasdam herbas laetiores. Sed nec tanti rei publicae Gracchorum eloquentia fuit, ut pateretur et leges, nec bene famam eloquentiae Cicero tali exitu pensavit.

29. The fact that the theme of *aemulatio* expressed by *Velleius* in chapter 17 takes its cue, even lexically, from certain passages of *Cicero* leads us in this direction. See L. ALFONSI, *Dottrina, cit.*, pp. 377-378.

30. In *Cicero's Brutus*, after setting forth this *topos*, the author proceeds to a detailed history of Roman oratory. Tacitus, instead, limits himself more succinctly to a comparison of the situation of Athens with that of Rome.

31. Cic., *De or.*, I, 16, 70; III, 7, 27. *Cicero* speaks of the *cognatio* between oratory and poetry. See P. SANTINI, *Linguaggio, cit.*, p. 386; P. SANTINI, *Spunti, cit.*, p. 22.

historian would make a broader cultural sterility of the oratory sterility of the Greek cities, which certainly conflicts with what is said about Roman literary flourishing in the immediately preceding chapter. To this same aim, he would turn the praise of Athens into a criticism of the other Greek cities.

That *Velleius'* aim was to continue with the comparison outlined in the preceding chapters is demonstrated by two factors. First of all, the very essence of the comparison, which is not coherent to the actual conclusion of the first book. In fact, it has been said that starting with the *excursus* on colonization, *Velleius* praises the best Roman times, to which he adds, by means of comparison with Greece, exaltation of the literary production, not of that specific period, but of all Roman civilization. The book ends unexpectedly with a chapter that seems conceptually mutilated. Let us look again at the structure of the last chapters of book I:

- Chapters 14 and 15: *excursus* on the expansion of the power of Rome.
- Chapter 16: synchronic flourishing of the literary intellects in Greece.
- Chapter 17: anthology of the most outstanding authors of the Roman milieu classified by genre.
- Chapter 18: uniqueness of Athens within the context of Greek oratory. Cultural sterility of the Greek cities.

Based on the organization of these chapters and the revelation of the clear intent to exalt Rome at the expense of Greece, at the end of chapter 18, where *Velleius* seems to intervene more actively upon his source, we would have expected an ending more in keeping with what had been previously said: further reference to Rome would have been logical to reconfirm once and for all her superior grandeur compared to Greece. And here we arrive at another point: the concept of the uniqueness of Athens, as opposed to the sterility of the Greek cities, leads *Velleius* to introduce a third element, that of Greece in general, into his comparison. Thus, he no longer pursues the Athens-Rome comparison in which Rome had nothing to envy of Athens, but rather a broader comparison between Greece and an unmentioned equivalent. At this point we would logically expect the introduction of the concept of Italy in contrast to that of Greece. Now *Velleius'* text becomes problematic. Continuing in this manner, we have two lessons that are clearly related: A, *Quae urbes et in Italia talium*

studiorum fuere steriles, nisi Thebas...; B, *Quae urbes et initialia*³².... Modern editors agree in not accepting *et in Italia*, proposing various corrections. Hellegouarc'h directly strikes out the expression, considering it a gloss, as does Watt³³; Shipley³⁴ proposes *eximiae alias*, Burer³⁵ *et multae aliae* or *item alias*, Sauppe³⁶ *et in alia*³⁷. Concerning the theory of a gloss, it seems to me that there are no elements in the text that could have lead a copyist or a reader to introduce, of his own free will, a reference to Italy that is totally unjustified, since the author is speaking of the Greek cities. Nor can we think of a possible reference to the Greek cities of Magna Graecia, since Thebes and Sparta are mentioned immediately afterward. Therefore, I would tend to exclude the idea that it is a gloss inserted into the text by mistake, and I also find the other corrections proposed to be unsatisfactory. What we must, instead, emphasize is that the unanimous lesson of the manuscripts is *et in Italia* of A, given that *et initialia* of B is strictly linked to *et in Italia* of A (just as Hellegouarc'h, who refers to preceding proposals). We must remember that A and B are two copies, written by different hands (Bonifacius Amerbach and J. A. Burer, respectively) at different times and in different contexts, of the same manuscript that was discovered by Beatus Rhenanus and from which he took his *editio princeps*, a manuscript that has since been lost³⁸ (the Murbacense). A and B are, therefore, two particularly important

32. Beatus Rhenanus, in the *editio princeps* of the work, directly omits the expression. The manuscripts A and B, as well as the *editio princeps*, derive from R, a copy of the manuscript that was discovered by Beatus Rhenanus. See D. POTTER, *ClassRev* 1997.

33. W. S. WATT, *Vellei Paterculi Historiarum ad M. Vinicium consulem libri duo*, Leipzig, 1988, *ad loc.*

34. F. W. SHIPLEY, *Velleius Paterculus, Compendium of Roman History*, Cambridge Mass., London, 1979, *ad loc.*

35. J. A. BURER, *Emendationes in appendice editionis principis prolatae*.

36. H. SAUPPE, *M. Velleius Paterculus*, Frauenfeld, 1837. See also the edition of J. C. ORELLI, Leipzig, 1835.

37. D. R. SHACKLETON BAILEY, "Notes on *Velleius*", *CQ* 34 (1984), pp. 445-448, in part. p. 445.

38. In a monastery in Murbach (Alsace) Beatus Rhenanus found a manuscript containing a text that was completely unknown until that point, written by an equally unknown author. Having had a copy of it made, before publishing it, Rhenanus waited to be able to compare it with another manuscript which he heard had been found in Milan by Giorgio Merula. Tired of waiting, Beatus Rhenanus published the *editio princeps* from the work in Basel in 1520, which he entitled *Historia Romana*. In the meantime, the humanist Bonifacius Amerbach made a copy of the manuscript discovered by Rhenanus, which had been rediscovered by Orelli in 1834 in the library of the University of Basel and published by him the following year. This second

testimonies that agree in their presentation, in this case, of an absolutely similar reading.

Given that the lesson, as it stands, makes no sense, it appears to me that a reference to Italy right at the end of chapter 18, and hence, at the end of book I, in a statement that most probably is the result of a direct intervention by *Velleius* upon his source³⁹, seems completely plausible, precisely because, at that point, we would expect a consideration on Italy, suitable for concluding the comparison that begins with paragraph 16. We can hypothesize a phrase such as *aliter ac in Italia* ("unlike"): there would be the mechanical drop of *aliter* (easily confused with the following *Italia*) and the substitution of *ac* with *et*, considered to be a synonym of *et*, once the link between *ac* and *aliter* was lost. Thus we would have a text such as this: "these cities⁴⁰, unlike what occurred in Italy, were all sterile". The comparison between Greece and Italy ends in a perfectly coherent way: first Athens and Rome are compared, then Greece and Italy. For this reason, I feel it is necessary to preserve the mention of Italy in this passage, even if with opportune corrections, given the homogeneity of the manuscript tradition that is in conflict with the poor logic of the proposed corrections.

Velleius concludes the first book asserting that in Greece, all of the great intellects of any one of the arts were born and lived exclusively in Athens. This conclusion brings with it a further consideration that enriches and elucidates the preceding Rome/Greece comparison: unlike the Greek intellects, the Roman did not all come from Rome, but from cities throughout Italy. Herein lies the most substantial difference between the Greek and the Roman worlds: *Velleius* maintains that whereas the Greek world is expressed exclusively through the flourishing of a single city, and limited to a certain period of time, the Roman world is made up of a convergence of numerous different actualities (spatial and temporal), that nevertheless find a single rule in Rome.

So this is the final meaning to attribute to chapter 18, which would otherwise remain outside of the comparison outlined from chapter 16, a comparison which turns

copy is still in Basel, but the manuscript used by Rhenanus for his *editio princeps* has long been lost. For the history of the editions, see M. ELEFANTE, *Velleio Patercolo. I due libri al console M. Vinicio*, Napoli, 1999, pp. 13 and 43.

39. It is certainly an intervention on the part of *Velleius* that turned an original praise of Athens into a criticism of the Greek cities.

40. That is, of Greece.

out, once again, to favour of Rome. Chapters 16 and 17 follow a chiasitic structure⁴¹: chapter 16 begins with the theory of synchrony of the intellects, confirmed by a series of *exempla* taken from the Greek world; instead, chapter 17 starts off right away with the *exempla* of the Roman world, still in support of the theory presented in the preceding chapter, to then conclude with a theoretical part dedicated to the concept of *aemulatio* as cause of the synchrony of the intellects. The meticulous and intricate manner in which *Velleius* has constructed the two chapters leads us further to maintain that chapter 18 as well followed the same criterion of parallelism. For this reason, the mention of Italy in contrast to Greece, is not just plausible, but expected and necessary.

The spirit that imbues the comparison of Greece and Rome is indeed the Roman *aemulatio* of Greece, but the comparison of these two worlds does not end in a situation of equality: Rome is superior to Greece, since she is identified with the intellects born throughout Italy, while Greece finds only in Athens the sublime example of cultural productivity.

The difference between Greece and Italy functions only to demonstrate the literary “sterility” of Greece as a whole (with important exceptions), that contrasts significantly with the situation in Italy whose cities gave birth to illustrious writers. Perhaps it is here that we find one of the inspirational principles which are the basis for *Velleius*’ composition of the anthology of Latin letters that occupies chapter 17. The great writers he cites, or rather, “the greatest” representatives of each genre, come from various Italian cities, as do *Cato*, *Livy* and *Cicero*. And do not forget that *Cato* is the author of the *Origines*, whose ideology joins perfectly with that of the Velleian *excursus*. The canon adopted by *Velleius* is thus explained on the basis of the continuance of the comparison between the Greek world and the Roman world. The conclusion of chapter 18, in particular, provides us with the key to reading the preceding chapter, and at the same time reconnects itself to the chapter 14 ideological inspiration that permeates the *excursus* on the colonization and spread of citizenship: Just as Roman colonization allowed Rome to extend her power, but not her dominance, so too, the contribution of all of Italy made literature flourish in Rome.

The praise of the growth of Roman power, which is nothing more than praise of the extension of citizenship through establishment of the colony, is a significant *pendant* to the concept expressed in chapters 16, 17 and 18.

41. P. SANTINI, *Storiografia e critica letteraria, cit.*, p. 1146, in regard to chapters 16 and 17, asserts that they are “meticulously structured, according to rhetorical taste, as we understand from the chiasitic arrangement of the section”.

Therefore, chapters 14-18 are an ideologically homogeneous block in which *Velleius* celebrates and exalts the Rome-Italy communion.