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Mithridates' Letter in Sallust's *Historiae*: Roman and Pontic Propaganda*

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According to the author of the article, Mithridates VI Eupator's letter to the Parthian monarch Arsaces in Sallust's *Historiae* does not reproduce the genuine document from the personal archives of the Pontic king as some researchers believe. The opinion that Sallust criticized Roman politics under Mithridates'mask is rejected; many scholars consider this letter to be a condemnation of deep moral decline of the Roman society. On the contrary, the Roman writer attributes to the Pontic king the weak and vulnerable arguments based on the false facts (at least from the Roman point of view) to discredit his (and not only his) criticism of Roman foreign policy. He calls the Romans "strangers without a homeland, without parents", but it is naturally that Romans themselves did not think in this way. The author objects to E. Adler, who believes that most of Sallust's readers did not know history well enough to mark the distortions of facts in Mithridates' letter. There is every reason to believe that Sallust was counting on an educated public that would be able to appreciate these distortions and their meaning. The author thinks that Mithridates' argumentation looks like a parody of the anti-Roman propaganda and it might have been perceived as such by Sallust's readers.

Keywords: Sallust, *Historiae*, Mithridates VI Eupator, anti-Roman propaganda.

From Sallust's *Historiae* four speeches and two letters as well as several fragments are preserved. The more voluminous of the epistles is attributed by the Roman author to Mithridates VI Eupator, the king of Pontus (*Hist*. IV. 69M), who unsuccessfully tried to persuade the Parthian king Arsaces — Arshak XII (= Phraates III) to ally against the

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Romans after the defeat at Tigranocerta in October 69 BC (Dio Cass. XXXVI. 3). A question immediately arises about the authenticity of the letter. Some scholars believe that Sallust somehow acquired the original which was translated and "adapted" for the Roman public.[1] At the same time it was pointed out that Sallust could not get acquainted with the text of the letter because of its secrecy,[2] since he did not have access to the Parthian archives.[3] However, other researchers object to this, arguing that a copy of the epistle must have remained with the king of Pontus, and many of those documents fell into the hands of Pompey.[4] Therefore, it is sometimes assumed "that the letter reflects a genuine document found by the Romans in the personal archives of Mithridates".[5] But a Mithridates' epistle preserved in the form of an inscription (RC 74) has little in common with what we find in Sallust,[6] and Fronto (*Ad Verum* 2) considered the letter of the Pontic king cited by the author of the *Historiae* to be an example of historiographical creativity.[7] However, B. McGing disagrees: "The distinction between real letters and those in historical writings by no means rules out the possibility that the latter, although composed by the historian, may be based on real letters." He also points out that Mithridates tried to enlist the support of the Parthian king (Mithridates II) even before his first war with Rome.[8] Yet this only suggests a possibility, but does not prove anything; as L. Raditsa cautiously wrote, the letter is authentic not in the sense that it represents "a word for word translation of a Pontic document, but rather that it is a Latin composition based on intimate knowledge of Eastern propaganda and historiography".[9] P. McGushin supposes that "Sallust may well have made use of pro-Mithridatic source material to present a version of these events suited to the aims of the letter".[10] According to B. McGing, the epistle of the Pontic king to the Parthian is "potentially one of the most important sources for Mithridates' propaganda".[11] A. La Penna puts it into the broader cultural and political context of anti-Roman propaganda with its primarily Eastern roots.[12]

So what does the letter represent? It is an example of *suasoria*, constructed according to the rules of rhetorical art with a prologue, where it is said that even in times of prosperity it is sometimes necessary to resort to arms in order to prevent future misfortunes (§ 1–4), a *narratio,* where the king demonstrates on the example of Roman aggression how insidious the Romans are, being the current source of danger (§ 5–15), an *argumentatio*, where Arsaces is given logical evidence for the necessity to oppose the Romans and to ally with him, Mithridates (§ 16–22), and a conclusion (§ 23).[13] This is a "diatribe classique

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[1] For the references see: Adler 2006, 387, n. 21.

[2] Paladini 1957, 147.

[3] Schmal 2001, 89.

[4] Plut. *Pomp*. 37; McGing 1986, 155.

[5] Olbrycht 2009, 178.

[6] Adler 2006, 388; 2011, 18.

[7] That was noted by Bikerman who concluded that there could be no question of any genuine letter to Arsaces (Bikerman 1946, 131). See also: Olivieri 1954, 245; Büchner 1960, 229; Adler 2006, 387–389, et al.

[8] McGing 1986, 155, 156.

[9] Raditsa 1970, 6.

[10] McGushin 1994, 178.

[11] McGing 1986, 154.

[12] La Penna 1963, 250.

[13] McGushin 1994, 174; also see Ahlheid 1988, 71–72. In Bikerman's opinion, the conclusion is § 20–23 (Bikerman 1946, 144–145). It sounds somewhat strange to evaluate the composition of the letter as *très simple* (Tiffou 1973, 560); I think it's more correct to say that it is traditional for ancient rhetoric.

contre l'impérialisme romain",[14] where an overview of Rome's foreign policy in the East is of particular interest. "All persons who in time of prosperity are entreated to enter into an alliance for making war ought to consider whether they are in a position to maintain peace at that time; next, whether what is being asked of them is sufficiently righteous, safe, and honorable or, on the contrary, disgraceful. (2) If you are in a position to enjoy uninterrupted peace, if you are not threatened by strategically placed and utterly treacherous foes, not destined to have outstanding renown if you crush the Romans, I would not venture to seek an alliance with you, and I would hope in vain to unite my own unfavorable circumstances with your favorable ones.[15] (3) But those considerations which seem able to give you pause, such as your anger against Tigranes in connection with the recent war, and my not very favorable circumstances if you are willing to make a true appraisal will be major incentives. (4) For Tigranes, since he is at your mercy, will accept an alliance on any terms you desire, while so far as I am concerned, although Fortune has deprived me of much, she has bestowed upon me the means of giving good advice." Then begins the enumeration of the evil deeds of the insidious Romans (a kind of *narratio*), each of which is a "miniature story", according to F. Alheid:[16] "(5) In fact, the Romans have one inveterate motive for making war upon all peoples, nations, and kings: namely, a deep-seated desire for dominion and for riches. For this reason, they first undertook war with Philip, king of the Macedonians, though they put up a pretense of friendship as long as they were being hard pressed by the Carthaginians. (6) When Antiochus came to Philip's aid, they craftily diverted him from his purpose by the surrender of Asia, and then, after Philip's power had been broken, Antiochus was robbed of all territory this side of the Taurus, and of ten thousand talents. (7) Next Perseus, the son of Philip, after many contests of varying results — after he had surrendered on good faith, as witnessed by the gods of Samothrace — was killed by those crafty inventors of faithlessness (*callidi et repertores perfidiae*) from want of sleep, since they had granted him his life according to a compact. (8) Eumenes, whose friendship they boastfully exhibit, they at first betrayed to Antiochus as the price of peace; later, having treated him as serving the function of a custodian of captured territory, they transformed him by means of imposts and insults from a king into the most wretched of slaves. (9) Then, having concocted an unholy will, they led his son Aristonicus in triumph like an enemy, because he had tried to recover his father's kingdom. Asia was taken possession of by them; lastly, on the death of Nicomedes, they snatched away Bithynia, although a son had unquestionably been born of Nysa, whom Nicomedes had addressed as queen (10) […] Because word had spread that I was rich and would not be a slave, they provoked me to war through Nicomedes, though I was by no means unaware of their wickedness […]. (11) But I took vengeance for the wrongs inflicted upon me; I drove Nicomedes from Bithynia, recovered Asia, the spoil taken from king Antiochus, and lifted oppressive servitude from Greece (*Graeciae dempsi grave servitium*). (12) My undertakings were frustrated by Archelaus, basest of slaves, who betrayed my army […] (13) When I realized that it was more a postponement of the struggle than a genuine peace that had been offered to me on account of the Romans' own domestic trou-

[14] Bikerman 1946, 132.

[15] The researchers see here a parallel to Corcyreans' speech in Thucydides (I. 32. 1; Adler 2011, 18–19, 217, n. 16 with bibliography); Perrochat (1949, 15, 17, 18) noted several Thucydides' reminiscences in *Historiae*, ignoring this one.

[16] Ahlheid 1988, 73.

bles […] I nevertheless commenced war anew […]. (14) While at Cyzicus […] I ran short of grain; no one in the neighborhood gave support; at the same time, winter cut me off the sea. When I, therefore, without compulsion from the enemy, attempted to return into my ancestral kingdom, I lost, by shipwrecks at Parium and at Heraclea, my best soldiers together with the fleets. (15) Then when I had reconstituted my army at Cabira and done battle with Lucullus with varying success, scarcity once more befell us both. He had at his disposal the kingdom of Ariobarzanes, unravaged by war, while I, since all the country round about had been devastated, withdrew into Armenia. And the Romans, pursuing not me but rather their custom of overthrowing all monarchies (*Romani non me, sed morem suom omnia regna subvortundi*), hold up Tigranes' lack of judgment (*imprudentia*) as if it were a victory because they kept Tigranes' massive forces out of the fight by means of the narrowness of the terrain."

In conclusion, when calling on Arsaces for help, Mithridates attacks the descendants of Romulus with accusations of all possible vices: "(17) Or are you not aware that the Romans turned their arms in this direction only after Ocean put an end to their westward progress? That from the beginning they have possessed nothing except what they have stolen: their homes, wives, lands, and dominion? That having been once upon a time refugees without a native land or parents, they have been established to serve as a plague upon the whole world, being men who are prevented by nothing human or divine from plundering and destroying allies and friends-those situated far away or nearby, weak and powerful too-and from considering as their enemies all powers not subservient to them and especially monarchies. (18) For in fact, while few men want freedom, a great many want fair-minded masters; we have fallen under suspicion as rivals to the Romans and as, in due course, avengers to be. […] But you, who possess the magnificent city of Seleucea and the kingdom of Persia with its renowned riches, what do you expect from them other than guile for the present and war in the future? The Romans have weapons against all men, the sharpest against those from whom conquest yields the greatest spoils; they have grown mighty by audacity and deceit and by sowing wars from wars. […] (22) In the course of having set out to aid great kings, you will attain the fame of having crushed the robbers of nations. I warn and urge you to do this and not to prefer merely to postpone your own ruin at the expense of ours rather than to be the victor by means of an alliance" (transl. by R. T. Ramsey).

It has long been observed that there is a similarity between these denunciations and the brief speech of Jugurtha in *Iug*. 81.1,[17] where he accuses the Romans of injustice, greed, aggressiveness, etc.[18] It is necessary to point out some differences — the words of Jugurtha are rendered by *oratio obliqua*, and they are pronounced after the union with Bocchus, while Mithridates is still only admonishing Arsaces. This must have caused the striking difference between the two texts in size, which, however, does not change the essence. It is much more important how to understand their meaning. Many scholars have interpreted the diatribe of Mithridates (as well as that of Jugurtha) as a reflection of the views of Sallust himself. R. Syme considers the philippic of Mithridates in the context of the critical judgments of Sallust himself and the denunciations the latter puts into the mouth of

[17] According to Adler, "a truncated version of the Letter of Mithridates" (Adler 2011, 29).

[18] Bikerman 1946, 146; Paladini 1957, 147; La Penna 1963, 251–252; McGing 1986, 105, n. 88; 158; Ahlheid 1988, 73; McGushin 1994, 177–179; Schmal 2001, 90 + Anm. 63; Adler 2006, 388; 2011, 29; Shaw 2021, 409, etc.

Cato, but makes a serious clarification: the criticism is directed against not only the ruling class but also the entire "imperial Republic".[19] E. Koestermann compares the rebukes of the Romans by Jugurtha and Mithridates with the words of Sallust himself and Cato the Younger in *Cat*. 12 *и* 52, concluding that Sallust reproaches his compatriots through the mouths of their enemies.[20] R. Oniga develops the idea of the universalism of the system of values in Sallust, which allows, on the one hand, to recognize *virtus* for non-Romans — for Jugurtha in his youth, for the Carthaginians Philaeni, who sacrificed their lives for the good of their native Carthage (*Iug*. 9.2; 79), on the other hand, to denounce the decayed Roman elite, an example of which is the epistle of the Pontic king along with the speech of Jugurtha.[21] According to J. Gerrish, "Mithridates articulates what Sallust avoids saying outright in his own authorial voice: because of the transgressive acts of their founder, Rome's discordant nature is fixed".[22]

E. Bikerman had a broader view of the problem. In his opinion, Mithridates' letter is a reminder of the growing Parthian danger, hence the revival of the idea dear to Sallust's heart that "le *metus hostilis* seul peut maintenir les Romains sur la bonne voie. Ainsi, par sa condamnation de la politique dépravée, le Mithridate sallustien rappelle le lecteur à la règle des vertus antiques, qui seule peut prévenir la revanche de l'Orient."[23] K. Büchner is no stranger to this idea either: "Die Mithridatesepistel regt die Selbstprüfung des Römers an."[24] F. Santangelo, developing on Bikerman's ideas, writes: "The theme of greed and injustice is crucial to Sallust's historical vision, and especially to his interpretation of the political history of the Republic. Second, giving voice to an anti-Roman, especially to Mithridates, was a challenging and inspiring task for an historian who owed so much to the Thucydidean method of confronting different interpretations of history through the medium of rhetoric. Sallust's fascination with the model of the corrupt king who meets a tragic destiny, as evinced by his portrayal of Jugurtha, must have played a part too."[25] J. Shaw considers Mithridates' letter as a conviction of the negative consequences of Roman expansion.[26]

D. Earl points out that the vocabulary in Mithridates' letter almost literally coincides with that in the description of the decline in morals after the destruction of Carthage (*Cat*. 10. 1–2). His further reasoning is somewhat contradictory: "Many of Mithridates' examples of [Roman] *perfidia* are taken from the period between the second and third Punic wars, when Rome lived '*optumis moribus*' and observed 'iustum imperium' with respect for '*fides*' and '*amicitia*'. It seems unlikely, therefore, that this letter represents exactly Sallust's own view, although it describes the Roman empire in terms of his general theory. The speeches of Memmius and Marius would provide parallels.[27] But its purpose is clearly to suggest that as Rome's internal political life had, since the breakdown of virtus and *concordia*, been dominated by *avaritia* and *ambitio*, so these same factors had dictated her

[19] Syme 1964, 250–251.
[20] Koestermann 1971, 284. Another opinion see Adler 2011, 30–31.
[21] Oniga 1990, 24–25.
[22] Gerrish 2019, 58.
[23] Bikerman1946, 148–151.
[24] Büchner 1960, 235.
[25] Santangelo 2009, 60.
[26] Shaw 2021, 409.
[27] See also Adler 2011, 28–29.

foreign policy."[28] This idea is shared by S. Schmal who emphasizes that although there are many distortions and misstatements in the text of the letter when it comes to presenting the facts, "eine klare Verfälschung der Faktum [ist] kaum nachweisbar".[29]

E. Tiffou generally does not believe that Sallust expressed his ideas through the mouth of Mithridates (he hardly ever identified himself with his heroes), whom he places on a par with such contemptible (in his view) characters as Lepidus and Pompey, admitting, however, that the writer seemed to share the criticism of Roman expansion, since the latter contributed to the further decline of morals. Objecting to E. Bikerman, he writes that in the conditions of the decline in morals, *metus hostilis* could hardly play a positive role, it is not even clear whether it could really have arisen.[30]

E. Adler believes that although there are a lot of overstatements in Mithridates' accusations against the Romans, in many respects his criticism of the Romans is very convincing and, contrary to popular belief, tougher than that of Pompeius Tragus (Justin), although (due in no small way to the lack of context) it is difficult to judge whether Sallust agreed with the presented arguments entirely or in part. In any case, the predictions of Mithridates in the *Historiae* that the Romans would not stop and would attack Parthia after the victory over Pontus, as shown by the campaigns of Crassus and Antony, largely came true. The popularity of the letter of Mithridates as an example of rhetoric in the first and second centuries AD is remarkable: the readers may have welcomed the criticism of Rome. K. Heldmann, on the contrary, points out that it is not necessary to perceive the accusations of Mithridates against the Romans in Sallust (as well as those of Critognathus in Caesar and of Calgacus in Tacitus) as a reflection of the author's views, since they are put into the mouths of the enemies of Rome, who use facts, even if indisputable *per se,* for their political purposes.[31]

Let's have a closer look at the text of the letter. Mithridates claims that the Romans pretended to be friends (*amicitiam simulantes*) of Philip V of Macedon while they were at war with the Carthaginians (§ 5). In reality, there was no "friendship" between the Romans and Philip (even "pretended", let alone genuine) — except for a peace treaty at the end of the First Macedonian War, which might have encouraged the imaginary biased author of the letter to pass the former off as a *simulatio amicitiae*.[32] In addition, the text is silent about the fact that Philip was an ally of Rome's bitter enemy, Hannibal, and therefore the Romans considered themselves entitled to take hostile actions against him.[33] Reporting on the defeat of Antiochus, Sallust's Mithridates gives the estimation of the contribution as 10,000 talents, although Polybius, whose work he might well have known, writes about 15,000 talents (XXI. 17. 4)[34] — it is unlikely that real Mithridates or his propagandists could have written such a thing, they would rather have overestimated the true figure. The

[28] Earl 1966, 110. Pasoli's objections to Earl with reference to Sall. *Hist*. I. 11 (Pasoli 1967, 137) appear to be speculative. As far as I know his opinion so far has gained no acceptance among researchers.

[29] Schmal 2001, 90. As we will see below, it is not difficult to prove.

[30] Tiffou 1973, 559–565.

[31] Heldmann 1993, 50, Anm. 113.

[32] Paladini 1957, 152. In Raditsa's opinion, Sallust here conflated the events of two periods of Hannibalic War, the situation in 217–215 BC, when the Romans were in trouble (*dum a Carthaginiensibus premebantur*), and after 205 BC, when the treaty of Phoenice was concluded, which may have established an *amicitia* between Rome and Macedonia (Raditsa 1970, 87, 94).

[33] Raditsa 1970, 94; Adler 2006, 391; 2011, 21.

[34] Livy (XXXVII. 45. 14) gives the same figure as Polybius, while Eutropius (IV. 4. 2) followes Sallust (McGushin 1994, 182). See also Paladini 1957, 154.

Roman readers of Sallust would only smile at the statement (§ 7) that Perseus was treated contrary to the prior agreement, under the terms of which they allegedly promised him life (*quia pacto vitam dederant*). "In his account Mithridates conflates two historical incidents — Perseus' flight to the sacred island of Samothrace and his subsequent acceptance of an in fide relation to Rome — which are usually kept separate in the rest of the tradition. He does this in order to imply that the in fide relationship had religious guarantees."[35] However, according to the Roman version (in this case, it does not matter how reliable it is), the king surrendered to the Romans (*tradidit*) without receiving any guarantees from them,[36] except for an unofficial promise to save his life, which is implied by Mithridates.[37] In addition, the Roman tradition denounced the presumed cowardly behaviour of the king, who agreed to undergo humiliation only in order to save his life, while the Romans did not want to break the sanctuary and persuaded him to surrender voluntarily,[38] Mithridates does not mention anything like that (for a Roman reader, this silence would cause at least bewilderment), but he attributes to the Romans the killing of the king by sleep deprivation (*insomniis occidere*), about which no other author reports, except for Plutarch (*Aem*. 37. 2–3).[39]

The statement that the Romans "gave [Eumenes II to] Antiochus away for peace (*prodidere Antiocho pacis mercedem*)"[40] is an obvious distortion of the truth, not supported by any facts.[41] However, according to Raditsa, "by saying that the Romans betrayed Eumenes to Antiochus, Mithridates desires to show that Eumenes did not achieve any authentic independence when he rejected the Great King's offers of alliance and chose instead to violate the principle of the solidarity of kings and ally himself with Rome",[42] but even if Sallust had something like this in mind (perhaps by repeating the arguments of the opponents of Rome), in any case, neither he nor his readers would surely have understood such an approach — they would simply have stated the falsity of the accusations on the part of Mithridates. Further on, concerning Eumenes it is stated that the Romans, "entrusting him with the protection of the captured lands (*habitum custodiae agri captivi*), extorted and insulted the king (making him) the most miserable of slaves (*sumptibus et contumeliis ex rege miserrumum servorum effecere*)". However, Eumenes became the master of Phrygia, Lydia, Thracian Chersonese, a part of Pamphylia acquired after the victory over Antiochus III, but not their *custos*, as it is presented in the letter of Mithridates,[43] and that is presumably what in the eyes of the Roman reader played a decisive role, against which the tension between Rome and Pergamon in the last years of the reign of Eumenes II did not matter much: the king retained the acquired lands and remained their sovereign master until the end of his life, but not *miserrumus servorum*. Even more so, the audience of Sallust could not take seriously the statement that the will of Attalus III, not named in

[35] Raditsa 1970, 123; Adler 2006, 392.

[36] Liv. XLV. 6. 10; 8.5; McGushin 1994, 183. "It may be that the King of Macedonia actually confused *venire in fidem*, especially in its Greek translation, with Greek agreements which involved guarantees whose violation did, in fact, ἀσέβεια" (Raditsa 1970, 130).

[37] Raditsa 1970, 131.

[38] Plut. *Aem*. 26; Raditsa 1970, 124.

[39] The Roman historians write about the natural death of Perseus. See Paladini 1957, 155–156; McGushin 1994, 184 (both with a survey of sources).

[40] Cf. or. Lep. 2: *servitium… mercedem dant* (Pasoli 1967, 142).

[41] Paladini 1957, 156; McGushin 1994, 185; Adler 2006, 393;2011, 23.

[42] Raditsa 1970, 141.

[43] See: Paladini 1957, 156.

the text, was forged by the Romans (*simulatoque inpio testamento* — § 8).[44] Accordingly, the statement that Aristonicus was led in triumph like an enemy (*hostium more per triumphum duxere*), looked like a curiosity — he found a weapon against the Romans, refusing to give them what they thought rightfully belonged to them, and therefore his fate is well deserved.[45] The same applies to the words of Mithridates that Nicomedes and Nysa allegedly had a son, and therefore the Romans had no legal grounds for seizing Bithynia, the act called plunder (*postremo Bithyniam Nicomede mortuo diripuere, quom filius Nysa… genitus haud dubie esset*). This should have made the Roman reader grin all the more,[46] since Sallust certainly writes about the will of Nicomedes in the *Historiae*, as well as about the plans of Mithridates himself regarding Bithynia.[47]

There are many similar episodes in the story of Mithridates' relations with Rome. To put it mildly, the king's assertion that he "regained" Asia (*Asiam… recepi* — § 11) sounds in a strange way — after all, the Pontic monarch had not owned it before. It is true, he stipulates that Asia is the "trophy" (*spolium*) of Antiochus (between the lines: the Romans took it from him), and this allows him to portray himself as his avenger,[48] but it is not difficult to imagine what such an argument looked like in the eyes of the Romans. The same can be said about the king's statement concerning the liberation of Greece by him (§ 11), which in itself no longer sounded very plausible out of the mouth of the Eastern despot[49] and was refuted by the fact of the establishment of tyranny in Athens, while the Romans probably also recalled the massacre of *togati* in Asia and on Delos.[50] In § 14 Sallust's Mithridates again draws a wrong picture, assuring that he decided to retreat from Cyzicus solely because of a shortage of food, and not under the enemy's pressure — suffice it to say that it was the cause of this shortage, not to mention the "driving" blows of the Roman troops during the withdrawal (Plut. *Luc*. 9. 2–3; 11. 2–8; App. *Mithr*. 72–75).[51] The king's mentions of difficulties with the transportation of provisions indicate his lack of foresight (see famous Iphicrates' apophthegm: Plut. *Mor*. 187a).[52] In § 15, Mithridates exaggerates claiming that there were battles between him and the Romans near Cabira "with varying success" (*variis… proeliis*, cf. c § 7) — only one cavalry skirmish turned out to be

[44] As Raditsa writes, "Eumenes had often asserted […] that his kingdom had been enlarged by Rome. By pointing to the eventual fate of Pergamon, Mithridates desires to expose the illusory character of such an interpretation of the history of Pergamon in the first half of the second century" (Raditsa 1970, 145). It is unlikely, however, that Sallust was going to convey to the readers such subtle hints (even *cum grano salis*) — from the Romans' point of view Pergamum became the Roman possession in quite a legal way, the version of Attalus III's will's falsification looked like a terrible lie (and perhaps it really was), everything else just did not matter.

[45] The emphasis on the appearance in the triumphal procession as something painful is important; in the ancient authors' opinion it was the unwillingness of this destiny that caused the suicide of Mithridates VI Eupator as well as of Vibius Virrius and Cleopatra VII (see Beard 2007, 114–117). But it is not quite evident that this motivation was actual indeed.

[46] From Stier's point of view, "fast totale Verdrehung der Geschehnisse" (Stier 1969, 445).

[47] Adler 2006, 393.

[48] McGushin 1994, 189.

[49] Stier 1969, 446; Schmal 2001, 90, Anm. 61; Adler 2011, 24.

[50] Paladini 1957, 159; Stier 1969, 446; Schmal 2001, 90, Anm. 61.

[51] Paladini 1957, 162; McGushin 1994, 193; Adler 2006, 395. Pasoli missed these details in his commentary on the passage under discussion (Pasoli 1967, 144).

[52] The mention of one's own failures in such a context is hardly productive (see Ahlheid 1988, 71 — on § 3–4).

successful for the Pontians, after which success accompanied the Romans.[53] Below is an attempt to downplay the victory of Lucullus at Tigranocerta, which although exaggerated by the latter still does not raise doubts.[54]

E. Adler expressed the opinion that not all of Mithridates' arguments, whose groundlessness is obvious to modern scholars, were perceived in the same way by Sallust's contemporaries. He notes, for example, that with all the distortions of the true state of affairs by Mithridates, when it comes to Philip V's relations with the Romans, the main thing remains unchanged — the latter were aggressors. The reference to the liberation of Greece from the Romans, at first glance strange in the mouth of the king, may mean the cruelty of Roman oppression, since the country can be liberated from it. The reproach of the Romans that they set Nicomedes against him, thus provoking the beginning of the First Mithridatic War, was a poke in the eye, being very close to what Appian tells about these events (*Mithr*. 11). As regards the places when the Pontic king gave an incorrect picture of events, in most cases these are plots not covered by the *Historiae*, and the reader of Sallust would need truly encyclopedic knowledge to see the distortion of historical facts.[55]

The assertion is paradoxical: it turns out that the writer wanted to denounce Roman foreign policy, but at the same time he cited undoubtedly false facts and constructions, although he could have used genuine ones for greater persuasiveness. It is quite obvious that the readers of Sallust, having met several examples that were incorrect or implausible in their eyes, would similarly perceive all the others. For example, hardly a single respectable Roman, even if he did not remember in detail the history of international relations of the second century BC, would consider true (and, presumably, quite rightly) the information about the murder of Perseus or the forgery of Attalus' will.[56] In addition, Sallust counted primarily on educated readers (suffice it to recall his countless Greek reminiscences). As regards the most "inconvenient" fact for the Romans — their inciting Nicomedes against Mithridates, which caused the First Mithridatic War, Adler himself admits that we do not know the context of the letter[57] — it is likely that Sallust saw the beginning of the conflict differently from Appian, the latter reproducing the same version as the epistle of Mithridates.

Of particular interest is the characterization of the Romans by Mithridates. They crave dominion and wealth (*cupido profunda imperi et divitiarum* — § 5), robbers who plunder

[53] Paladini 1957, 163; McGushin 1994, 193–194.

[54] Paladini 1957, 164–165; McGushin 1994, 194. Paananen's assumption that the words of Mithridates about the folly of Tigranes as the cause of the victory of Lucullus expresses a skeptical attitude of Sallust toward the Armenian king (Paananen 1972, 76) is disputable.

[55] Adler 2006, 390, 391, 394; 2011, 20, 21, 24, 32.

[56] As regards this approach, it is quite remarkable that in Sallust there are distortions, which were hardly perceived by Roman readers as such due to the orientation of the former favourable to the *res publica Romana*. For example, Caesar claims that the Romans made allowance for the Rhodians who showed hostility to Rome during the Third Macedonian War and repeatedly committed injustice to the Carthaginians in times of peace (*Cat*. 51. 5–6). Nevertheless, the Romans by no means let the Rhodians avoid punishment, as Sallust writes (*inpunitos eos dimisere*): the Roman Senate deprived them of Lycia and Caria and undermined the Rhodian trade, having declared Delos a *porto franco*, and not for active support of Macedonia, but only for diplomatic initiatives in favour of Perseus which did not have any real consequences. The distortion of the truth when it deals with the Carthaginians is even more obvious: one can remember a violent capture of Sardinia and Corsica by the Romans after the First Punic War or the unscrupulous interpretation of the defensive measures of the Carthaginians in the war against Massinissa as aggressive (see Vretska 1976, 516–519, where the famous example of Sardinia and Corsica is however strangely missing).

[57] See also: Ahlheid 1988, 92.

nations (*latrones gentium* — § 22),[58] their ancestors "were refugees without a native land or parents" (*convenas olim sine patria parentibus*), from the very beginning they possessed nothing except what they have stolen (*neque quicquam a principio nisi raptum habere*) — their homes, wives,[59] lands, dominion (*imperium*)", and in general they are a plague upon the whole world (*pesti conditos orbis terrarum*)" (§ 17), they are always ready to fight with anyone (*Romani arma in omnis habent*) (§ 20), and are especially hostile to kingdoms (*regna*), *eo ipso* kings (§ 17). The Romans certainly did not consider themselves as robbers of nations. In addition, reproaching their ancestors for having obtained everything they have by in a dfferent way robbery (of course, the *Quirites* themselves interpreted Romulus' exploits in a different way),[60] Mithridates clearly hints that Roman aggression began from time immemorial, and not with the war against Philip V, since which in § 5 he starts his story about the machinations of the hateful enemies.[61] Neither Sallust nor his readers could agree with this. In addition, the criticism extends to all the Romans, and not only to those at the top, as R. Syme noticed (see above), yet this does not show the "objectivity" of the writer, but that he does not take such judgments seriously — it is no accident that they are put into the mouth of Rome's worst enemy. After all, Catilina also denounces the ruling class in the same terms as Sallust (*Cat*. 13. 1 *и* 7; 20.8; 11; *Iug*. 41.7),[62] which by no means implies the identity of their positions.[63] In this context, there is little evidence that the corruption of the elite had a bad influence on Rome's foreign policy and provided grounds for the criticism that comes out of the mouths of Jugurtha and Mithridates. The material of '*Bellum Iugurthinum*' demonstrates that the moral decay of the ruling elite led, according to Sallust, not to unjust wars, but to the rejection of the just ones, and therefore it is unlikely that the writer appealed to the rejection of aggression against Parthia or even reflected in the letter the corresponding sentiments in Rome.[64] Bikerman refers to Horace (*Carm*. III. 6. 9), complaining about the defeat of the Romans by Pacorus and Mones,[65] however, this place should be understood in the opposite sense, because in the same way, one can also meet the desire that the Romans turn their weapons not against each other, but against the Parthians (*Carm*. I. 2. 22).[66] It should be noted that during the Third Mithridatic War, the situation of Jugurthine war already described by Sallust was repeated, when Pompey took away command from Lucullus,[67] like Marius from Metellus, as for Arsaces, here we recall the proposal to Bocchus of giving away Jugurtha: the first time, when the latter offered him an alliance against Rome, the Mauretanian king agreed (as well as

[58] Calgacus in Tacitus calls the Romans *raptores orbis* (Agr. 30. 5); Curtius Rufus (VII. 8. 19) repeats Sallust's expression verbatim: *omnium gentium latro* (Paladini 1957, 169).

[59] The evident hint at the rape of the Sabin women (McGushin 1994, 197).

[60] It should be noted that Sallust's Mithridates does not mention such a good argument as Romulus' fratricide (because it is very painful for Romans themselves). For this reason Gerrish is not quite right when she says that "the 'curse' of Romulus and its treacherous and infectious character may also be operative in the Letter of Mithridates" (Gerrish 2019, 57).

[61] La Penna 1963, 253–254; Ahlheid 1988, 79; McGushin 1994, 197.

[62] Ramsey 2007, 120–121.

[63] See Adler 2006, 396; 2011, 32.

[64] Bikerman 1946, 148–151; Olivieri 1954, 245–246; Adler 2006, 394–395.

[65] Bikerman 1946, 149.

[66] La Penna 1963, 253.

[67] According to Rosenblitt's suggestion, Pompey "could almost become metonym for Mithridates' vision of Rome" (Rosenblitt 2019, 109). This approach means that Mithridates' letter reflects Sallust's opinion, but it is very doubtful, see above.

Tigranes who supported Mithridates), but the second time he preferred not to tempt fate again and gave Jugurtha over to the Romans — in the same way Arsaces rejected Mithridates' urgent requests for an alliance without repeating Tigranes' mistake. The ominous predictions of the Pontic king that the Romans would not stop and after defeating him they would definitely begin the conquest of Parthia did not come true, neither Lucullus nor Pompey attacked the latter.[68] However, Adler, recognizing this fact, notes that in any case, Rome threatened Parthia after the Third Mithridatic War, recalling the campaigns of Crassus and Antony and Caesar's plans.[69] Nevertheless Mithridates appeals to Arsaces, even though the Romans did not commit aggression against him; it should be noted that not a word is said in Mithridates' letter about the possibility of an attack against his successors, which could be expected if Sallust wanted to condemn Rome's actions against Parthia. However, he clearly set himself quite different tasks — to show the boundless hatred of the Pontic king for Rome[70] and the blatant injustice of his (and not only!) attacks against the foreign policy of the Romans. The fact that the latter is not free from the vices mentioned in the letter does not in the least mean justifying hostile actions against Rome, whether it is an internal enemy (Catilina) or an external one (Mithridates).

To what extent does Sallust's letter represent the real propaganda of Mithridates? In Justin, the king's speech to the army on the eve of the First Mithridatic War is cited, and the coincidence of some of its provisions with what is said in Sallust allows us to assume here a reflection of the *loci communes* of Pontic propaganda. In particular, both authors speak about the Romans' ill-treatment of their faithful ally Eumenes of Pergamon — however, Justin is more specific; both condemn their war against Aristonicus (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 8; Iust. XXXVIII. 6. 3–4);[71] the same is the case of Nicomedes' attack against Pontus at the instigation of the Romans (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 10; Iust. XXXVIII. 5. 10),[72] as well as considering the Romans as people hungry for wealth and power (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 5; 17; 20; 22; Iust. XXXVIII. 6. 8; 7.7), insidious (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 17; Iust. XXXVIII. 5. 3; 6.3), especially hostile to kings (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 17; Iust. XXXVIII. 6. 7).[73] It is worth mentioning the speech of Mithridates before the beginning of the third war in Appian (*Mithr*. 70. 296–298) that also refers to the greed of the Romans as its cause and their unwillingness to ratify the Dardanian Treaty, which allows us to call it only a truce (*dilata proelia* — Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 13; cp. App. *Mithr*. 70.297). The thesis about the liberation of Greece by the king (Sall. *Hist*. IV. 69. 11) and the explanation of the defeats in the first war with Rome by the betrayal of Archelaus also go back to Mithridatic propaganda (§ 12; see Plut. *Sulla* 23.2).

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[68] Ahlheid 1988, 90.

[69] Adler 2011, 27, 32.

[70] In Bikerman's opinion, Velleius' characteristic of Mithridates (II. 18. 1: *odio in Romanos Hannibal*) was taken from Sallust (Bikerman 1946, 150, n. 7).

[71] It is true that Mithridates in Justin (XXXVIII. 6. 4) speaks here, as Adler (2011, 48) aptly points out, 'a half-truth' when stating that the Romans waged the war with Aristonicus because they considered it shameful (*deforme*) to oppose his father.

[72] According to Adler (2011, 47), in Sallust Nicomedes' incitement to war against Mithridates as a pretext for war with the latter is presented much more pointedly than in Justin, but this does not change the meaning of the latter's text, which, I think, is more important in this case.

[73] McGing 1986, 108. The Hellenistic monarchs accused the Romans of this as early as the second century BC (Polyb. XXI. 11. 2; Liv. XXXVII. 25. 5–7), the same statement was put by Sallust into the mouth of Jugurtha (*Iug.* 81.1), although the latter, quite possibly, had not used it in his propaganda. In any case, representatives of the Roman elite, on whom Sallust was primarily focused, perceived such a reproach rather as a praise for their attitude, which the writer obviously expected (Adler 2011, 26, 32).

However, this propaganda was designed for the inhabitants of the Mediterranean areas, but not for the Parthians. Of course, Mithridates could have approached the composition of the letter in some way improperly, but it is unlikely that he had such a bad idea of the addressee that he would have written so much about the details of the Roman foreign policy of the past decades (modern events would have been sufficient), and even more so about his defeats, restricting himself only to stating the overall advantage of the Romans, on whom it would be better for Arsaces to inflict a preventive strike in the current conditions. It is absolutely impossible to imagine that Mithridates would have written to Arsaces about the "liberation" of Greece he was indifferent to, and on the other hand, silence about the Second Mithridatic War unleashed by Murena is characteristic — the defeat (or at least the lack of victory) of the Romans was too obvious for Sallust to remind about it in such a context, and for Mithridates this would be a very advantageous argument. The underestimation of the amount of the indemnity taken from Antioch has already been mentioned. The deliberate absurdity of many accusations is striking — at least from the point of view of the Romans (e. g., feigned friendship with Philip, the "extradition" of Eumenes to Antiochus, the forgery of Attalus' will).[74] All this suggests that the letter hardly has anything to do with the original, although it reflects many of the provisions of Mithridates' propaganda. Apparently, it is not a call for a self-critical revision of the foreign policy of *res publica*, but a parody of the criticism of the Romans by their enemies, which was probably perceived in this way by the readers who were contemporaries of Sallust. Suffice it to recall, on the whole, a very benevolent image for Rome of its foreign policy in the third and second centuries BC by Livy.

The situation seems to have changed during the empire period. The letter of Mithridates, as it was already mentioned, was considered one of the brilliant examples of rhetoric. In addition, it must be taken into account that it is withdrawn from the context, in which the absurdity of many accusations by the king against the Romans became much less obvious. Anyway, the public liked to read texts full of anti-Roman attacks.[75] It is difficult to disagree with this, given that the composition of the audience changed a lot compared to the times of Sallust. On the other hand, the invectives against the Romans themselves were now perceived quite differently from the first century BC — if somebody may have been inspired by the idea to fight the Roman power, it was unlikely because of reading the philippics of Mithridates by Sallust and Pompeius Trogus, especially since the fate of the king of Pontus himself showed what consequences such a struggle was fraught with.

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[74] According to Ahlheid 1988, 73, "an objective presentation of the facts [in § 5–15] is no more to be expected here than in a *narratio* in a forensic speech". However, if in court the orator seeks to present them in such a way as to win the case, Sallust makes Mithridates describe the events in order to show his failure.

[75] Adler 2006, 402–403; 2011, 57.

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Письмо Митридата в «Истории» Саллюстия: римская и понтийская пропаганда*

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Письмо Митридата VI Евпатора парфянскому царю Аршаку в «Истории» Саллюстия не отражает подлинный документ из архивов понтийского монарха, как считают не-

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которые исследователи. Распространенное в литературе мнение о том, будто Саллюстий критиковал римскую политику устами Митридата, неверно. Многие ученые рассматривают это послание как один из примеров осуждения глубокого морального упадка римского общества. Однако римский историк приписывает понтийскому царю весьма слабые и уязвимые аргументы, основанные на искажении фактов (по крайней мере с точки зрения римлян), чтобы дискредитировать его (и не только его) критику внешней политики Рима. Стоит отметить, что Митридат называет римлян «пришлецами без родины, без родителей», но сами римляне, разумеется, так не думали. В статье представлена подробная критика точки зрения Э. Адлера, который полагает, будто читатели Саллюстия в большинстве своем не знали истории настолько, чтобы обратить внимание на искажения фактов в письме Митридата. Есть все основания считать, что Саллюстий, напротив, рассчитывал прежде всего на образованную аудиторию, способную должным образом оценить эти искажения и их смысл. Кроме того, критика Митридатом римской внешней политики направлена зачастую против действий римлян, относящихся к тому периоду, который Саллюстий считал вполне благополучным (III — первая половина II в. до н. э.). Как считает автор, аргументация, представленная в письме Митридата, выглядит как пародия на антиримскую пропаганду и как таковая воспринималась современниками.

Ключевые слова: Саллюстий, *Historiae*, Митридат VI Евпатор, антиримская пропаганда.

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