

Metellus Numidicus on Gaius Marius in his Exilic Epistolography

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Abstract: A careful reading of Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 86-90, in conjunction with the known facts of the exile of Metellus Numidicus and the remains of his exilic correspondence, suggest that an important element in his performance of exile was his insistence that his behaviour was devoted to the preservation of law and order in Roman society. Metellus went so far as to claim that the slaying even of wicked citizens (read: Saturninus and his followers) by Gaius Marius was unacceptable, notwithstanding the very real threat posed by Saturninus. This argument helped to fashion Metellus as respectful of the right political order and aided his supporters in challenging the legitimacy of the position of the chief obstacle to Metellus' restoration to Rome.

Keywords: Cicero; Q. Metellus Numidicus; Gaius Marius; L. Apuleius Saturninus; Roman history; Roman oratory; exile; Roman epistolography

'Ours is a period', insisted Nadine Gordimer in 1984, 'when few can claim the absolute value of a writer without reference to a culture of responsibilities'. As a consequence, she continued, 'exile as a mode of genius no longer exists'. Gordimer's mode of genius refers to a *voluntary* posture of exile, be it ideological isolation or physical withdrawal, an intellectual and literary condition she distinguished from 'the broken cries of real exiles'.¹ In the Greco-Roman experience of exile, by contrast, this distinction was often confounded. Under the recurring rubric of consolation, it was asserted that the misfortune of exile presented an opportunity for refashioning oneself, not least through an elevated engagement with philosophy or literature, a new step forward which entrained an unmistakable personal reference to a culture of responsibilities. Exile, from this perspective, was far from destructive. Indeed, it could prove empowering, if managed wisely. How to do so was the object of an abundance of discourses, from profound Cynic disquisitions to uncomplicated manuals that laid out, even for unsophisticated readers, the correct approach to the experience of exile.² Which meant that, by the time of the late Roman republic, only the most obtuse or poorly educated Roman could be unaware of the proper performance of exile, at least according to the Greeks.

¹ Gordimer (1988), 288.

² Cynics on exile: Branham (2007). Manuals for the unsophisticated: e.g. Teles, on whom see (for text and commentary) Fuentes González (1998). See also the discussion by Nesselrath (2007). Exile as an opportunity for refashioning oneself (in imperial literature): Whitmarsh (2001).

This brings us to the celebrated exile of Metellus Numidicus, consul of 109 and bitter enemy of Gaius Marius.³ Exiled in 100 as a consequence of his resistance to a controversial — and, in Metellus' view, illegitimate — agrarian law advanced by the tribune L. Apuleius Saturninus (tr. pl. 103, 100), Metellus removed himself to Rhodes, where he passed his time in intellectual pursuits.⁴ Rome, by striking contrast, was racked by sedition on the part of Saturninus, an insurrection which was violently quashed by Marius.⁵ The elimination of Saturninus did not, however, alter Metellus' prospects. Marius, persistent in his hatred for Metellus, remained the chief obstacle to his restoration. Nevertheless, in 98 Metellus' allies succeeded in securing his recall.⁶ A diminished Marius departed on diplomatic duties in the east, whereas Metellus, upon his return to the city, was greeted by universal acclaim.⁷

Metellus' exile achieved nearly legendary status, and its importance was underlined early on by contemporary historians inclined to render it the central political issue of the early nineties.⁸ Writers thereafter dilated on the topic, and Cicero, as is well known, endeavoured to elevate the significance of his own exile by casting in the mould of his Metellan predecessor.⁹ It is important to recognize the extent to which Metellus scripted — for contemporaries and for posterity — the right reading of his experience of exile, both through his own actions and the actions of his family and supporters and through his publication of letters which defined the nature of his exile and his management of it.¹⁰ After all, Metellus was hardly the only ex-consul sitting in exile in the year 100: there were probably six others, but none of them attracted serious attention from contemporaries or later writers because none was able to transform his exile into a moral and political victory over his enemies.¹¹ And appeal it did, both in historical accounts of the nineties and in Metellus' own version of it. Even in the empire Metellus' star did not fade. Gellius, who quotes from his letters from exile, describes him as a *sapiens vir* (Gell. 7.11.1)¹² And no less a figure than Fronto could, in writing to Marcus Aurelius,

³ Metellus' exile: Liv. *Per.* 69; Val. Max. 4.1.13; [Aur. Vict.] *de vir. ill.* 62.3; Plut. *Mar.* 29.9-10. Full sources and discussion at Kelly (2006), 81-8.

⁴ On the legislation and other activities of Saturninus in 100, see *MRR* 1.575-6; *MRR* 3.20-3; Cavaggioni (1998), 87-171.

⁵ On the *sedition Appuleiana*, Badian (1984) remains fundamental.

⁶ On Metellus' recall by Q. Calpurnius (tr. pl. 98), see *MRR* 2.5. Badian (1984), 137, dates his tribunate to 99.

⁷ Marius vacates Rome before Metellus' return: Plut. *Mar.* 31.1-2. Metellus' return: App. *BCiv.* 1.33.149.

⁸ Important to the installation of Metellus' exile in the historiography of the period was P. Rutilius Rufus (cos. 105), on whom see Candau (2011), esp. 139-47, and Cornell (2013), 278-81.

⁹ Cicero and the *exemplum* of Metellus: Kelly (2006), 153-5; Blom (2010), 195-203.

¹⁰ On Metellus' public letters, see Cugusi (1970a), 113-14; Cugusi (1970b), 73-4; Degli'Innocenti Pierini (2000), and below. On public letters in Roman aristocratic and political discourse, see Hall (2009), 24-5, and White (2010), 90-99, each with further references.

¹¹ Consular exiles in 100: Q. Fabius Maximus Eburnus (cos. 116); Q. Servilius Caepio (cos. 106); Cn. Mallius Maximus (cos. 105); C. Porcius Cato (cos. 114); L. Calpurnius Bestia (cos. 111); Sp. Postumius Albinus (cos. 110); see Badian (1984), 27-8.

¹² On Metellus' literary reputation, see Suerbaum (2002), 514-5.

adduce Metellus' writings as an example of famous literature, likened by Fronto to the works of the elder Cato and Cicero (Fronto, *Ep.* 1.7.4).¹³

Now we shall never recover the full particulars of Metellus' exile. But we can retrieve enough to know that Metellus' performance of exile was a brilliant combination of show and tell: his famous public letters to Rome did the telling, while his deployment of spectacle, both at Rome and Rhodes, did the showing. And Metellus' exit from the city was anything but understated. After his final public clash with Saturninus, Metellus demonstrated the extent of his personal resources in friends, connections, and clients by way of an extraordinary procession to the Capitoline, after which he was accompanied to his home by the same bulky retinue.¹⁴ In Rome's 'culture of spectacle and performance', as Harriet Flower has put it, there were few actualisations of clout more redoubtable than a parade exhibiting the grandeur of an aristocrat at the top.¹⁵ Metellus made it clear in his departure that he was not going quietly — even if, thereafter, he struck a pose of cultured quietude.

Metellus removed himself to Rhodes, a gesture which, as Gordon Kelly has rightly observed, signalled his unwillingness to wait on events in the city or to supplicate for pardon.¹⁶ Instead, as we have seen, he devoted himself to cultural pursuits. Despite its distance from Rome, Rhodes was an ideal choice because it was a heavily frequented city through which many Romans passed when conducting business or diplomacy in the east. For this reason, Metellus could remain confident that his dispassionate demeanour would be reported in the city. In this way, it could hardly have been lost on anyone how this grand Roman's performance of exile enacted the sound if by then conventional moral advice of Hellenistic philosophers.

This pose of serene detachment was far from impracticable for a Roman enjoying Metellus' resources. After all, Metellus could rely on the unrelenting efforts of his powerful family as a forceful means of securing his recall. And he was not disappointed. His son, the future consul of 80, earned the cognomen *Pius* for his conspicuous, even melodramatic, appeals on his father's behalf (Vell. 2.15.3).¹⁷ Nor did he act alone. Public solicitations but also prosecutions and public violence were put to use in

¹³ See the discussion by Hout (1999), 40-1.

¹⁴ Metellus' procession is recorded by Claudius Quadrigarius, fr. 78 (*FRHist*): *contione dimissa, Metellus in Capitolium venit cum mortalibus multis; inde domum proficiscitur, tota civitas eum reduxit* (Gell. 13.29.1). This passage is ordinarily associated with Metellus' return from exile, primarily on account of Quadrigarius' use of the word *reduxit*, but Tim Cornell is surely right in connecting it with the events of 100; see his discussion, with bibliography, at *FRHist*, vol. 3, 324-5.

¹⁵ The quotation is from Flower (2014a), xxxi; see further Flower (2014b). On the political importance of attendance, see the sources assembled at Hellegouarc'h (1963), 161-3, and, more recently, Östenberg (2015). On the importance of display as a signal of clout, see Tatum (2015), with further references.

¹⁶ Kelly (2006), 153-5. On the significance of Rhodes as a place of exile, see Peachin (2016).

¹⁷ On the appeals of Metellus Pius and his kin, see Cic. *Red. Sen.* 37; *Red. Quir.* 6; Kelly (2006), 84-5; Blom (2010), 196-7. Numidicus' cause was championed by L. Metellus Diadematus (cos. 117; cens. 115), C. Metellus Caprarius (cos. 113; cens. 102), and Q. Metellus Nepos (cos. 98).

harassing political figures who stood in the way of Metellus' recall from exile.¹⁸ Of this crusade in the city Metellus will have been well aware — indeed, in private he may have directed it. But from the public's perspective, he had no part or even interest in it. His concentration lay elsewhere.

This complementarity, between the philosophical tranquillity of Metellus' Rhodian exile and the perturbations of political contention within the city, is sustained in Metellus' public correspondence with Rome. Again we can spy out Metellus' devising: he was joined in his exile by the grammarian L. Aelius Stilo, an intellectual who also penned speeches for the great and the good, including, though a lacuna in the text of Cicero's *Brutus* prohibits complete certainty in the matter, our Metellus.¹⁹ There is no reason to doubt that Aelius was good company for a man intending to devote his time to high culture. At the same time, it is highly likely that he also joined Metellus in order to apply his editorial talents to Metellus' literary compositions.

We possess only two explicit quotations from Metellus' correspondence. Each comes from a letter addressed to Cn. and L. Domitius, brothers who were the future consuls of 96 and 94 respectively. They are preserved by Gellius:

fr. 1a (Cugusi): at cum animum vestrum erga me video, vehementer consolor, et fides virtusque vestra mihi ante oculos versatur (Gell. 15.13.6).

fr. 1b (Cugusi): illi vero omni iure atque honestate interdicti, ego neque aqua neque igni careo et summa gloria fruniscor (Gell. 17.2.7).

Fragment 1a, through its emphasis on Metellus' seeing with his mind's eye the noble but abstract qualities of the Domitii, emphasizes their mutual affection as well as the physical distance that separates them. These were natural and common epistolary themes, but especially affecting in a letter from an exile.²⁰

Fragment 1b, by contrast, is novel. By way of a strikingly creative combination, Metellus puts to work concepts grounded in Roman legal culture — in particular, interdiction from water and fire — as his vehicle for the adaptation of the Cynic conceit that the condition of exile is in fact a delusion.²¹ Metellus also reprises the longstanding notion that the exile of a good man is a disgrace — *not* for the exile but for the evil men who banished him. Like Metellus, Cicero, in his *Stoic Paradoxes*, makes the point that a lawless man is an exile even if he has not been banished. Another Greek convention is Metellus' apparent reprisal of the Cynic view of *autarkeia* in exile as a virtue.²² Still,

¹⁸ For instance, the tribune P. Furius, after he rejected Metellus Pius' public plea to aid his father (App. BCiv. 1.144), was prosecuted by Metellan supporters and lynched by a mob: App. BCiv. 1.148; Dio 28, fr. 95.2-3.

¹⁹ Aelius and Metellus: Suet. *Gramm.* 3.3; Cic. *Brut.* 206

²⁰ Letters inscribe friendship: Demetr. *Eloc.* 225, 231; Koskenniemi (1956), 35-7. Letters inscribe separation: Trapp (2003), 36-8.

²¹ *Aquae et ignis interdictio*: discussion in Kelly (2006), 25-39 (with further references). Metellus interdicted: App. BCiv. 1.31.139-40; see also Cic. *Dom.* 82; Liv. *Per.* 69.

²² On Cynic approaches to the condition of exile, see Branham (2007), who assembles texts and discussion. On the true economy of disgrace in exile from a Greek philosophical perspective, see Nesselrath (2007), esp. 88-91. On the lawless man who is an exile even if not exiled, see Cic. *Parad.* 31. On Cynic *autarkeia* in exile, see Branham (2007), 77.

Metellus has hardly gone Greek. The usual Greek move in addressing the condition of exile involves rejecting the reality of an actual fatherland or claiming that each of us is, in reality, an exile. That is not Metellus' approach: he grounds the force of his letter in the priority of the moral reckoning of Roman law. Rome remains the centre of his moral universe. And this letter, through its Roman formulation, its Roman destination, and its Roman audience, situates the absent Metellus in the thick of Roman aristocratic competitiveness. This is not quite the same move as Cicero's *post reditum* assertion that his own exile was no real exile because the republic had ceased to exist in his absence,²³ though it is obvious even in this fragment that Metellus is putting forward the view that, owing to his banishment, Roman law is no longer operating soundly.

These meagre lines hardly exhaust Metellus' epistolary output during the two years of his exile, a conclusion of which we may be confident not least because Cicero, in adducing Metellus' example, is helpful in filling in gaps. It is obvious from what Cicero tells us that Metellus must have underscored how *peaceable* his exile was. He certainly boasted of his exile's glorious nature. And Metellus apparently made clear his devotion to its lawfulness, fittingly inasmuch as his banishment was predicated on what, in his view, was illicit legislation.²⁴ Naturally, inferences like these can never be unqualified. But they are difficult to resist, and we are probably right in trying to read *through* Cicero in order to get at Metellus. And it is my aim, keeping in mind Cicero's recurrent if self-serving deployment of familiar features from Metellus' exile, to strain out a bit more of the historical Metellus' representation of his exile from Cicero's markedly distinctive representation of it in his *Pro Plancio*.

In sections 86 through 90 of *Pro Plancio*, Cicero defends his manliness. The prosecutor in this case, because he anticipated from the defence yet another rehearsal of Cicero's exile (when Cicero was banished from Rome, Cn. Plancius had offered him valuable assistance), attempted to deflate his opponent's emphasis on that episode by alleging that the orator's withdrawal from Rome had been cowardly: Cicero's nerve had failed, he complained, and consequently the orator had failed his ardent supporters (*Planc.* 86: *nunc quasi reprehendere et subaccusare voluisti. dixisti enim, non auxilium mihi, sed me auxilio defuisse*). This speech must have hit a nerve, because Cicero responds by stressing his very real political isolation in 58, when his allies, he contends, were suppressed. Cicero sets the scene of his rebuttal by populating it with *exempla* remembered for their use of lethal political force, or, in the case of P. Mucius Scaevola (cos. 133), his approval of it (*Planc.* 88). Cicero aligns himself with their courage and policy.

It is at this delicate point in his speech that Cicero introduces Metellus and his just concern over citizen slaughter in a familiar deployment of what by this time had become a favoured *exemplum* (*Planc.* 89):

hisce ego auxiliis salutis meae si idcirco defui quia nolui dimicare, fatebor id quod vis, non mihi auxilium, sed me auxilio defuisse; sin autem, quo maiora studia in me bonorum fuerunt, hoc eis magis consulendum et parcendum putavi, tu id in me reprehendis quod Q.

²³ On Cicero's identification of his exile with a virtual exile of the *res publica*, see Cohen (2007).

²⁴ Metellus' peaceable exile: Cic. *Sest.* 37; *Pis.* 20; *Planc.* 89. Metellus' glorious exile: Cic. *Dom.* 87; *Sest.* 37; *Planc.* 89. Metellus and lawfulness: Cic. *Sest.* 37.

Metello laudi datum est hodieque est et semper erit maximae gloriae? quem, ut potes ex multis audire qui tum adfuerunt, constat invitissimis viris bonis cecis, nec fuisse dubium quin contentione et armis superior posset esse. ergo ille cum suum, non cum senatus factum defenderet, cum perseverantiam sententiae suae, non salutem rei publicae retinisset, tamen ob illam causam, quod illud voluntarium vulnus accepit, iustissimos omnium Metellorum et clarissimos triumphos gloria et laude superavit, quod et **illos ipsos improbissimos civis interfici noluit** et ne quis bonus interiret in eadem caede providit; ego tantis periculis propositis cum, si victus essem, interitus rei publicae, si vicissem, infinita dimicatio pararetur, committerem ut idem perditor rei publicae nominarer qui servator fuisset?

In the case of Metellus, Cicero stresses, there is no doubting *his* capacity to prevail had he resorted to arms — but he refused. Pivoting on this ostensible parallel, Cicero then goes on to draw important distinctions between himself and Metellus, all of which work to define the orator's uniqueness and, inevitably, his superiority: Metellus acted in defence of himself, not of the senate, as Cicero did; Metellus struggled to preserve a personal political principle, not the welfare of the republic, as Cicero did. Thus Cicero emerges as at once bold and, for the second time in his life, saviour of the republic.

But there is something unusual in Cicero's portrayal of Metellus here: unexpectedly, and unparalleled in Cicero's other references, we are told that Metellus was unwilling to countenance the destruction of *any* citizens, even the most wicked, by which expression Cicero clearly indicates Saturninus amongst Metellus' other evil enemies: *et illos ipsos improbissimos cives interfici noluit* (*Planc.* 89).²⁵ Now there was always an element of risky business whenever Cicero introduced the topic of killing Roman citizens. Consequently, its occurrence here cannot fail to attract our attention. Although it may be less than immediately obvious, Cicero is once again marking a distinction between himself and Metellus. In deflecting the prosecution's charge of cowardice, Cicero had stated, in section 88, that it would have been glorious had the wicked men opposing him been vanquished by the righteous, if simple violence could have settled the matter once and for all (*Planc.* 88: *vinci autem improbos a bonis fateor fuisse praeclarum, si finem tum vincendi viderem: quem profecto non videbam*). It is obvious that the Metellus of section 89 holds a different view.

This extraordinary assertion creates a contrast between Cicero, the consul and consular who never shrinks from lethal force when the situation calls for it, and Metellus, a consular of a different stripe when it comes to *salus reipublicae*. Now I want to suggest that here Cicero is not fabricating but is instead extracting a sentiment he found expressed in Metellus' correspondence. After all, if this sentiment was not somehow associated with Metellus' reputation in the late republic, it is hard to see what rhetorical purchase Cicero got from making Metellus into such an unnatural foil to himself. Still, this suggestion can only be speculative. But it raises an interesting question: why should Metellus want to exhibit a strong aversion to the killing of *evil* citizens? The matter invites conjecture.

Metellus' is a sentiment that will have been topical after the rebellion of Saturninus, when the senate passed its final decree and Marius, notwithstanding his profound ties of friendship to the man, brought the city a bloody deliverance in what came to be

²⁵ On the distinctive quality of the *Pro Plancio* Metellus, see Blom (2010), 201.

described as a virtual battle in the Forum.²⁶ It was hardly possible for anyone involved in Roman affairs, and we have seen how even the philosophical Metellus continued to involve himself in Roman affairs, to avoid having an opinion on this exercise of sanctioned political violence.

A principal focus in the controversy lay in the deaths of the ringleaders themselves, Saturninus, C. Servilius Glaucia (pr. 100), and C. Saufeius (q. 100) — a sitting tribune, praetor and quaestor. As Badian pointed out more than thirty years ago, it is easy to forget, from a modern perspective desensitized to domestic violence in Rome by the enormities of later proscriptions and civil war, how unaccustomed Romans of the year 100 were to the application of lethal violence in the suppression of aristocratic revolt.²⁷ And unlike the circumstances of the fallen Gracchi, Saturninus and his associates had not fallen in the heat of conflict: they had peaceably surrendered themselves to the authorities, having procured guarantees for their personal safety and for due process.²⁸

Our sources for the death of Saturninus are incomplete and incompatible. Even the fundamental question of who exactly it was who killed them eludes an answer.²⁹ In no source are Saturninus and his associates slain by Marius. And yet, remarkably, in all our sources it is Marius who incurs blame for their deaths, either on the grounds of his deceitfulness or his ineptitude — or both. Marius' suppression of Saturninus ought to have rendered him — again — the saviour of Rome, as has rightly been observed, but instead the man found himself stymied in the senate, where his stature declined to the point that his opponents were able to recall his bitter enemy Metellus, and he was unpopular enough amongst the voting public that he prudently elected not to stand for the censorship in 97.³⁰ Now we must not commit the error of imagining that Marius' stature collapsed in the nineties.³¹ Still, it cannot be denied that, in crushing Saturninus' sedition, Marius made himself vulnerable: as Badian has put it, 'when he saved the Republic from his friends, he saved it for his enemies',³² and it is as obvious to us as anything from this period can be that, in the aftermath of Saturninus' death, feelings ran very hard, amongst the aristocracy and the public at large.³³

Still, it is not the *defeat* of Saturninus our sources treat as disturbing but the manner of his death. This is the one issue on which our sources agree. Even Cicero's over-the-

²⁶ Virtual battle in the forum: Oros. 5.17.7-8; Florus 2.4.5; Liv. *Per.* 69 (...*bello quodam*...); cf. Plut. *Mar.* 30.4; [Aur. Vict.] *de vir. ill.* 73.10.

²⁷ Badian (1984), 188-9.

²⁸ App. *BCiv.* 1.32.144; Florus 2.4.6; cf. Plut. *Mar.* 30.4; [Aur. Vict.] *de vir. ill.* 73.10. Liv. *Per.* 69, however, insists that they did fall during the conflict, and according to Orosius, both Cn. Dolabella (Saturninus' brother) and the patrician L. Giganus were cut down while in flight (Oros. 5.17.10).

²⁹ Who killed Saturninus? App. *BCiv.* 1.32.145 (the crowd, or everyone *except* Marius, if one presses the logic of his Greek); Oros. 5.17.9 (*equites*); Florus 2.4.6 (*populus*); Cic. *Rab. perd.* 31 (Scaeva, slave of Q. Croton); T. Labienus (C. Rabirius); see, further, Cavaggioni, (1998), 157-60.

³⁰ Marius diminished after 100: Plut. *Mar.* 30.5-31.2; see Badian (1964), 34-70.

³¹ Marius still formidable in the nineties: Passerini (1934), 348-54.

³² Badian (1964), 57.

³³ Badian (1964), 34-70. On Marius' attempts at conciliating the public after the death of Saturninus, see Plut. *Mar.* 32.1-6.

top account of Saturninus' death in *Pro Rabirio* must make a gesture in this direction. In the Livian tradition, the Saturninus gang formally surrenders, entrusting themselves to the *fides* of Marius or of the senate. That *fides* was subsequently violated — even Cicero, in defending Rabirius, concedes that (and places the responsibility on Marius). Plutarch goes so far as to claim that it was a matter of *fides publica*, which is a grant of legal immunity, and goes on to insist that Marius did all he could to save his former friends — though he failed. Appian's account is not dissimilar in this particular at least: everyone cries out for immediate executions, but Marius strives to behave in accordance with the law — though, once again, he fails.³⁴

Two trends, then, emerge, one endeavouring to sanitize Marius' conduct, another the senate's. We need not invoke here the tired dichotomy of *popularis* and *optimatus* traditions. The legal shambles of Saturninus' death required a repository for responsibility, and it is obvious how Marius' remaining allies, like his enemies, in developing their competing narratives of this dismal episode, concentrated their attention on the actions of the consul of 100. And it is obvious how Metellus' epistolary pronouncements, and his emphasis on dignified lawfulness, fit into this struggle to control the story.

Is there a connection between Marius' perceived role in the violent deaths not simply of Roman citizens but of men who were sitting magistrates and the Metellan principle of not killing citizens even if they are *improbissimi*?³⁵ Saturninus' rebellion will have made it easy for Metellus to remind Rome that he was right to oppose the man over a point of law when others would not. Saturninus' violent death, moreover, gave Metellus an opportunity to disapprove of lawlessness in any form and to come down strongly on the rights of citizens to due process. Metellus' position was hardly incompatible with the principle of the *senatus consultum ultimum*: his was a criticism of its immoral application — by Marius. And his criticisms can only have been useful to those who wanted to condemn Saturninus and at the same time diminish Marius. It will not have mattered that Metellus' position was hypocritical.

Now it would be going too far to propose that Metellus' correspondence was solely responsible for distorting the outcome of Marius' suppression of Saturninus either in its public perception or its subsequent treatment by historians. And again it must be stressed that Marius' decline in the nineties was a gradual thing. Nevertheless, Metellus' opportunistic idealism offered a perfect foil to those enemies of Marius, old and new, who were hankering to harass him. It is probably only coincidence that the two keynotes of Metellus' surviving correspondence — *amicitia*, with its implicit connection to *fides*, and legality — are also amongst the central themes of the criticisms levelled against Marius. But it can hardly be a coincidence that, in all our sources (and, so far as we can tell, in their sources as well), there is keener interest in Metellus, his exile, and its

³⁴ Violated *fides*: Florus 2.4.6; [Aur. Vict.] *de vir. ill.* 73.10; Cic. *Rab. perd.* 28. *Fides publica*: Plut. *Mar.* 30.4 (δημοσίας πίστεως); on *fides publica*, see Mommsen, *Straf.* 456-8. Marius fails to preserve legality: App. *BCiv.* 1.32.145 (Μάριος ... ὡς ἐννομώτερον ἐργασόμενος).

³⁵ This Metellan principle, it is worth noting, also finds expression in a fragment of a Metellus' speech *de triumpho*, preserved by Gellius (12.9.4): ...*quanto probi iniuriam facilius accipiunt quam alteri tradunt...* (cf. Pl. *Gorg.* 473A; 489A; 508B).

resolution than in Saturninus' sedition and its suppression. One strand of this story apparently mattered more than another.

Naturally, none of this was of any interest to Cicero in his defence of Plancius. The orator's purposes in exploiting Metellus' sentiments were very different from the motives animating Metellus' contemporaries or historians like Rutilius Rufus and Poseidonius and Claudius Quadrigarius as they wove the legend of Metellus' exile into the fateful sedition of Saturninus and Marius' subsequent political struggles. It is not Metellus' aggression that Cicero wishes to register, but rather his lack of it — a deficiency no one should complain of in the consul of 63.

When looking back at Metellus Numidicus, the Romans agreed that his performance of exile was his greatest triumph.³⁶ And they were right. Unlike his incompetent dealings with Marius during the Jugurthine War, Metellus' conduct as an exile, like its communication to his fellow citizens, was as exquisite as it was cunning. Bookended by purely Roman spectacles — his parade through the city and his glorious reception at the gates of the city — Metellus, in Rhodes, observed the detached life of the mind recommended by the advice of the best philosophers, an operation so faithful to Greek handbooks that its message could hardly be missed by his Roman contemporaries. At the same time, in his public correspondence, the absent Metellus exploited the medium to inscribe himself into the city's 'culture of responsibilities' by way of a dispassionate message affirming the importance of genuine *amicitia* and the proprieties of Roman law — declaiming all of this while his genuine friends and family remained anything but dispassionate in their gritty exertions on his behalf. Marius was the chief obstacle to Metellus' recall, especially in the aftermath of Saturninus' death. And Metellus' allies could find in their friend's public utterances the moral equipment they needed to shame Gaius Marius — not just during the two years of Metellus' exile but in the enduring memory of his role in the death of Saturninus. A mode of genius indeed.

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³⁶ Metellus' legacy: *nec triumphis honoribusque quam aut causa exilii aut exilio aut reditu clarior fuit Numidicus* (Vell. 2.15.4).

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