

## ANOTHER RHETOR FROM CALAGURRIS

J. Gómez-Pantoja

Fulvius Sparsus was a rhetorician who took part in some of the declamations Seneca the Elder attended. In fact, the *Controuersiae* are our only extant source for this minor speaker: they contain about twenty five samples of Sparsus' declamation and some scanty references of biographical interest<sup>1</sup>. According with Seneca, «*Sparsus autem dicebat uiolenter sed dure*» and though the length of the surviving *dicta*—with exclusion of *Contr.* 4.8-10—is not enough for us to get an accurate picture of Sparsus' style, it seems that he was fond of antitheses and oppositions resulting in affected—and sometimes unsavory—declamations<sup>2</sup>. Two instances may illustrate the point. When discussing the case of the unfaithful Vestal who survived her being thrown down from the rock, Sparsus' ingenuity summarized up «*a superis deiecta, ab inferis non recepta, in cuius poenam saxum extruendum est*»

<sup>1</sup> Quintilian mentioned (*Inst.* 6.3.100) one Fulvius, who had been held by several scholars as being Fulvius Sparsus. But since Radermacher emended the passage, such a possibility is untenable, cf. K. MÜNSCHER, *RE* VII, s.v. *Fulvius*, cols. 279-80, n. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Contr.* 10. *praef.* 11.3, but see now J. FAIRWEATHER, *Seneca the Elder*, Cambridge 1981, p. 10, who would like to emend *uiolenter*—the *lectio difficilior* preferred by many Seneca's editors—for *ualenter*, arguing that it seems hard to accept Seneca's using two expressions of *oprobium* linked by *sed*. A comparative discussion on the style of the various speakers recorded in the *Controuersiae*, in H. BORNECQUE, *Les déclamations et les déclamateurs d'après Sénèque le Père*, Lille 1902 (on Sparsus, cf. p. 167) and MÜNSCHER, *loc. cit.*, p. 280.

(*Contr.* 1.3.3); and the lack of taste is nowhere better displayed than in the description of Flamininus' drunken orgy and its sequels<sup>3</sup>.

Still Sparsus was not an odd character. Seneca recalled him as being a man of good sense and as a skillful speaker—but not especially gifted (*Contr.* 1.7.15). We also know that Sparsus profited from the teachings of M. Porcius Latro<sup>4</sup>, and how he appropriated the latter's ideas and *colores* and used them with a different wording, a practice Seneca certainly frowned at (*Contr.* 10. *praef.* 11). Notwithstanding this lack of inventiveness and innovation, Sparsus' declamation seems to have had strong appeal for his contemporaries as the number of his *dicta* quoted in Seneca's *Excerpta* seem to point to.

There is little evidence about Sparsus' life. Along with another colleague, he conducted a school of rhetorics (*Contr.* 10. *praef.* 11) but an accurate dating for his activities seems to be out of our reach, since the *Controversiae* renders little help and modern scholarship inclines to place him sometime during the Augustan period<sup>5</sup>. Seneca's noticing that Sparsus often contended with one Iulius Bassus—a declaimer that Seneca's children were still able to hear performing<sup>6</sup>—probably means that both speakers were active about a.D. 15. Furthermore, Quintilian records one Iunius Bassus whose personality is so similar to that of Seneca's Bassus that scholars have been inclined to identify the same man under both names<sup>7</sup>. If that possibility is accepted, a more

<sup>3</sup> Compare *Contr.* 9.2.5, with QUINT. *Inst.* 8.3.66, describing this very occasion according with Cicero. But a fair comparison of Fulvius Sparsus' style should be made among his peers: take for instance, *Contr.* 9.2.4.

<sup>4</sup> On M. Porcius Latro, see L. RADERMACHER, *RE* XXII, s.v. *Porcius*, cols. 223-40, n. 49. This declaimer was closely tied to Seneca. Both were from *Baetica* and attended the same school, either somewhere in Spain (J. FAIRWEATHER, *op. cit.*, p. 5), or at Rome (cf. M. GRIFFIN, 'The Elder Seneca and Spain', *JRS*, 62 (1972), p. 6; L. SUSSMAN, *The Elder Seneca*, Leiden 1978 pp. 20 ff. Porcius Latro was probably born about 55 B.C. and according to Jerome (cf. *Chron.* 168 and R. HELM, *Philologus*, *Suppl.* 21-2 [1929], p. 69) he died in 4 B.C. Those datings have certain importance for Sparsus' own chronology for he was presumably among Porcius' students, cf. MUNSCHER, *loc. cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> As BORNECQUE, *loc. cit.*, p. 25 has stressed, the attempts at dating any discussion of the *Controversiae* on the grounds of the combined chronology of its participants are doomed by the anachronistic character of Seneca's work. The same could be said regarding the site or sites on which the declamations took place, although it is generally held that the discussions occurred in Rome. See MUNSCHER, *loc. cit.*, p. 579 for Sparsus' chronology.

<sup>6</sup> *Contr.* 1.2.21 and 10.1.13, and the references cited below in note 14. See also K. GERTH, *RE*, s.v. *Iulius*, cols. 178-180, n. 121 and L. PETERSEN, *PIR*<sup>2</sup>, IV 152, n. 204.

<sup>7</sup> QUINT., *Inst.* 6.3.27, 6.3.57, and 6.3.74. The identification was suggested by STEIN, *RE* x, s.v. *Iunius*, col. 966, n. 38, but not accepted by L. PETERSEN, *PIR*<sup>2</sup> IV, 330, n. 735.

convenient dating for Sparsus would be sometime during Augustus' late days or during Tiberius' reign.

Equally obscure is the question of Sparsus' *origo*. Seneca said nothing and modern scholars have paid little attention to such a point. It should be noted, however, what Syme has recently pointed out: the cognomen Sparsus, being «preternaturally rare», occurs several times in *Tarraconensis*, and it would seem very plausible to hold the bearers of the name as people born in or coming from Spain<sup>8</sup>. Griffin has accepted that, and—in the wake of Syme's suggestion—made of Fulvius Sparsus a Spaniard though she is quite aware of the weakness of an identification grounded on the likeness of the name alone<sup>9</sup>.

The name of *Calagurris* in Hispania Citerior is quite familiar to scholars as Quintilian's birthplace. Many also will remember the *Calagurritani*'s strong devotion toward Sertorius during his short-lived domination in Spain. Less known is the fact that during the Early Empire *Calagurris* was an important administrative center whose mint produced one of the most extensive series of local coinage of Spain<sup>10</sup>. I

---

Bassus was a *cognomen* more popular among the Iulii than with the Iunii; a quick survey in the indexes of CIL vi. provides eight instances of Iulii Bassi against only one of Iunii.

<sup>8</sup> R. SYME, «Pliny the Procurator», HSCP, 73 (1969), p. 232, n. 116 = *Roman Papers*, Oxford 1979, p. 769. SYME noticed three instances of Sparsus in CIL. One occurs in a inscription from Nemausus (CIL xii, 3558). The others are from *Tarraconensis*: CIL ii, 2648, *Asturica Augusta*, which records a *Licinia Sparsi f. Procilla*, married to a L. Lusius; and CIL, ii, 4198, *Tarraco* (= G. ALFOLDY, *Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco*, Berlin 1975, n. 320): [L.] L[i]cinius [Spar]sus, a provincial priest. Both people are probably related and they are commonly held as the ancestors of L. Lusius Sparsus, *cos. suff.* a.D. 156/57 (cf. L. PETERSEN, PIR<sup>2</sup>, v. 115 n. 443). Other recorded occurrences of Sparsus are: the owner of the *domus Petiliana* (cf. MART. 12.57), who could be identified either with Sex. Iulius Sparsus, *cos. suff.* 88 (AE. [1949] 23; L. PETERSEN, PIR<sup>2</sup>, iv. 281 n. 586) or with Iulius Sparsus, Pliny's friend (*Epist.* 5.5 and 8.3; see also R. SYME, «People in Pliny», JRS, 58 [1968], p. 149). Syme cited a coin from *Osca* on which one of the moneyers appears as Sparsus. The coin could be roughly dated between 2 b.C. and a.D. 14 (cf. A. VIVES, *La Moneda Hispánica*, iv, Madrid 1924, p. 51, n. 7 and pl. CXXXVI). Curiously enough, Syme overlooked the evidence I am presenting in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> M. GRIFFIN, *loc. cit.*, p. 42. In favor of such a hypothesis, she could press the fact that several of the people named in the *Controversiae* would seem to be of Spanish origin, as it was shown by the authoritative article of H. DE LA VILLE DE MIRMONT, «Les déclamateurs Espagnols au temps d'Auguste et Tibère», *Bull. Hisp.*, 12 (1910), pp. 1-22; 14 (1912), pp. 11-29, pp. 229-43, pp. 341-52; 15 (1913), pp. 154-69, pp. 237-67, pp. 384-40 (especially relevant are pp. 237-69).

<sup>10</sup> On Quintilian's birthplace, *vid.* AUSON, *Prof. Burd.* 1.7 (ed. Prete), and HIER., *Chron.* 211 (ed. Helm 186). On early *Calagurris*' history, cf. LIV., *Frag.* 91; VAL. MAX

would like to draw some attention toward one of these coins: an *as*<sup>11</sup> on which Tiberius' laureate head to the right was engraved along with the inscription *Ti. Avgvs. Divi Avgvsti F. Imp. Caesar* surrounding it. On the obverse, the motive is a bull to the right, with *IIVir* in front of it, *L. Satvrnino* below, *M.C.I.* behind, and *L. Fvl. Sparso* above.

The abbreviation *M.C.I.* on the reverse stands for *M(unicipium) C(alagurris). I(ulia)*, the regular designation of the city during the Early Empire. Except for Tiberius' odd titles, the remaining features of the coin conform to the standards of the mint<sup>12</sup>. The inscription on the obverse goes counterclockwise, occupying the whole perimeter of the coin, and the abbreviation *Ti*, was placed just at the tip of the neck of Tiberius' bust. Since such a position often marks the beginning of the inscription in several other coins struck in Calagurris, Vives opted to read Tiberius' titles as above indicated. Since it surely results in a strange combination of titles, other scholars<sup>13</sup> have preferred to read *Imp. Caesar Ti. Augus. Divi Augusti F.*, for which parallel titles may be found elsewhere. Some time ago, Mommsen called attention to certain milestones from *Africa Proconsularis*, dated in a. D. 14, on which Tiberius is designated as *Imp. Caesar Augusti. F. Augustus*, i.e. in the same fashion as Augustus (cf. CIL, VIII 10018 and 10023). A unique *dupondius* from Italica and several inscriptions from Africa<sup>14</sup> provide a most common title, closer to that of *Calagurris: Imp. Ti. Caesar Augustus*. Lamentably none of those instances have an explicit dating, although it was Mommsen's contention that such titles remained in use until it was widely known that Tiberius had rejected the use

7.7. ext. 3; FLOR. 2.10; and OROS. 5.23. Also see E. HÜBNER, RE III, cols. 1327-8. CIL II. 2959, v. 6987 and XII. 3167 point toward *Calagurris* as being the seat of the *Legati iuridici* of *Tarraconensis*, as R. KNOX McELDERRY, JRS, 9 (1919), p. 89 suggested some time ago. For a catalogue of the coins struck in *Calagurris*, see M. R. RUIZ-TRAPERO *Las acuñaciones hispano-romanas de Calahorra*, Madrid 1968, pp. 105-113.

<sup>11</sup> VIVES, *loc. cit.*, p. 99, n. 25 and pl. CLIX n. 5; RUIZ-TRAPERO, *loc. cit.*, p. 112, n. 24.

<sup>12</sup> M. GRANT, *From Imperium to Auctoritas*, Cambridge 1946, p. 165, and RUIZ-TRAPE-RO, *loc. cit.*, p. 112, n. 24.

<sup>13</sup> So A. BANTI-L. SIMONELLI, *Corpus Numorum Romanorum*, x, Florentia 1976, p. 44 n. 514, following Cohen's suggestions.

<sup>14</sup> VIVES, *loc. cit.*, p. 127, n. 9 and pl. CLXVIII 8, and F. CHAVES, *Las monedas de Itálica*, Sevilla 1973, n. 144. In this particular case, there is no doubt that *Imperator Caesar* was intended to be the first part of the name. The inscriptions are CIL VIII, 10492 (with Mommsen's supplements, cf. 11052), from *Tacapa, Africa Proconsularis*; 685 (with *add.* 11912), from *Mograwa, Africa Byzacena*; and 26518, from *Thugga, Africa Proconsularis*.

of *Imperator Caesar* as a part of his personal name<sup>15</sup>. In any case, whether Vives' reading should be preferred, the coin from Calagurris may confidently be dated to the first year of Tiberius' rule.

The name of one of the moneyers of the coin immediately recalls that of the declaimer Fulvius Sparsus. The coincidence is even more striking bearing in mind how infrequent that *cognomen* is, and the dating of the coin gives further confirmation. The identification of Seneca's rethorician with Calagurris officer cannot be pressed further, for we neither know the declaimer's *praenomen* nor his precise chronology, but it is very reasonable to hold them as somehow related.

The surviving information about Calagurris is painfully scarce. Only two inscriptions are recorded as found in the whereabouts of Calagurris—and both concern two non-Spanish soldiers who presumably died while billeted there during one of Augustus' campaigns in North-western Spain (CIL II 2983-4). Another inscription from Tarraco honors a Calagurritanus who had served his term of office in a distinguished manner (CIL II 4245). The most valuable information about the city comes from her coins. They give us the names of 34 moneyers, their offices, and sometimes a dating for the *collegium*. Even so, the standing roster only covers the Augustan and Tiberian period.

Considering the available evidence, little could be said about the moneyer Sparsus, his family and station. There was a C. Fulvius Rutilus who also served as a moneyer sometime during the Augustan period<sup>16</sup>, and most likely, he was a relative of L. Fulvius Sparsus. If this is accepted, it points toward the Fulvii as being one of the leading families in town and it surely helps to explain the presence of the declaimer in Rome among the exclusive circle of people for whom declamation was a fashionable activity. The fact that an important number of Spaniards were in Rome at that time needs no further comment. People like Seneca the Elder and Porcius Latro, Martial and Quintilian found their way from Hispania to Rome. Fulvius Sparsus, a lesser declaimer from Tarraconensis, should be included among the

<sup>15</sup> T. MOMMSEN, *Staatrecht*, II-2 p. 769, n. 2. M. GRANT, *Aspects of the Principate of Tiberius*, New York 1950, p. 24, cites among other instances, this very coin from Calagurris. For the fanciful titles used by some of the most conspicuous characters of the Late Republic and Early Empire, see R. SYME, *Historia* 7 (1957), pp. 172-88.

<sup>16</sup> VIVES, *op. cit.*, p. 99, n. 21 and pl. CLIX, 1. I am dating the officer on the grounds of Augustus' titles, which allow a dating between 2 b.C. and a.D. 14.

Spaniards living or working at Rome during the early years of the Empire. Being from a sufficiently well-to-do family as to afford the local *cursus honorum*, he rather attempted to pursue a rhetorician career in Rome. Ultimately, that was what his more famous countrymen, L. Valerius Martialis and Q. Fabius Quintilianus, did a generation later.