CAESAR AND LENTULUS CRUS

ABSTRACT

The career of L. Cornelius Lentulus Crus (cos.49) was by no criterion a success story. He is given particularly harsh treatment in Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, where he takes the lead in opposing Caesar in early 49. The reason may be that Caesar had expected his support as consul, and continued to hope for it until 48, using Balbus as a go-between.

By any criterion L. Cornelius Lentulus Crus was not one of the late Republic's most successful politicians. Praetor in 58, he was defeated in the election to the Xvirate in 51, despite his hopes of success, and he did not become consul until 49, when he left Italy and went with Pompey to Greece, then to Egypt. He was arrested there and killed in prison after Pompey's death. To add to this catalogue of misfortune, much of our information on his consular activities in early 49 comes from the hostile pen of Caesar. That Lentulus joined the senatorial side in the Civil War is not surprising. He had helped prosecute Clodius in 61, together with two other Lentuli, and tried to save Cicero from exile in 58. What is surprising is that he is given such prominence by Caesar. In Caesar's propaganda account it is Lentulus who in early January *incitat senatum*, who attacks those speakers who took a more lenient approach (*omnes convicio ... correpti exagitabantur*) and refuses to put the moderate proposals of M. Calidius, Caecilius Rufus and M. Marcellus (cos. 51), the last of whom is *perterritus convicii*. Most of the senators, we are told, are in fact *compusi inviti et coacti* by Lentulus, but also by the presence of an army and Pompey's friends, and agree that Caesar should dismiss his army or be declared Rome's enemy. Anyone taking a less hard line is opposed by Lentulus, Metellus Scipio and Cato, Lentulus' motive being the magnitude of his debts, the prospect of an army and a province, bribes from would-be kings, and a desire to be another Sulla. It is Lentulus who later tries to get money from the Treasury and then flees to Capua, where he wants to free Caesar's gladiators and provide them with horses, a proposal he abandons in the face of widespread criticism.

In this brief note, it is not my intention to discuss Lentulus' actions in 49 and 48, which are adequately treated in any account of these years. Rather, I want to consider why Caesar has stressed his role in 49 to the complete exclusion of his colleague C. Marcellus, brother of the very active anti-Caesarian consul of 51, cousin of the equally anti-Caesarian consul of 50. Is it just because Lentulus was the presiding consul? Perhaps, but more is, I think, involved. Caesar's hostility is also caused by the fact that he had hoped for Lentulus' support. Cicero reported in October 50 that Lentulus, consul designate, was believed to be on Caesar's side. Events
on January 1st proved that was wrong, but even after leaving Rome with Pompey, Lentulus was still being wooed by Caesar. In late February Balbus the younger was despatched post haste on a secret mission to enlist his support, with the promise of a province in exchange for Lentulus’ return to Rome. On the way, Balbus took the time to call on Cicero, to enlist his help. About 1st March Balbus the elder wrote to Cicero, thanking him for wanting Lentulus to stay in Rome. Lentulus is described in this letter as consulem meum . . . non Caesarem magis diligam . . . quem ante me diligo. With Cicero’s help Lentulus can perhaps achieve a reconciliation between Caesar and Pompey. The link with Balbus the elder, for whose citizenship Lentulus had probably been indirectly responsible nearly thirty years earlier, in the Sertorian war, was obviously regarded as crucial. Later in March, Balbus told Cicero that Caesar had absolved him from service in any army fighting against Lentulus and Pompey, quorum beneficia maxima haberem, and that he was now looking after Lentulus’ affairs in Rome, thus repaying officium, fides and pietas. When Lentulus left Italy before Balbus minor was able to reach him, Balbus followed him to Dyrrachium, still hoping to induce him to change sides. Caesar obviously never forgave him for refusing, and singles him out for his luxurious living at Pharsalus.

The role of Balbus and his nephew in 49 and 48 raises the question of whether Lentulus really had been expected to favour Caesar before the Civil War. Lentulus had every reason to dislike Caesar. He did not achieve the consulsiph suo anno, for even if 58 was the right year for his praetorship, then he could, or should, have been consul in 55. We know of one prominent nobilis who missed out that year because of the agreement at Luca which led to the second consulsiph of Pompey and Crassus. Despite his patrician birth, Lentulus did not have the unbroken line of consular ancestors of which Domitius Ahenobarbus, consul designate since birth, could boast. He may not have stood. But the bribery and violence attendant on the elections for the next few years obviously made candidacy difficult for everyone. As mentioned earlier, Lentulus was even beaten for the quindecimvirate, and by Dolabella, a younger man who had held no magistracy. Dolabella subsequently fought on Caesar’s side. Was he backed by Caesar in 51? Caelius told Cicero that at the elections for the augurate in 50, in which Antony defeated Domitius Ahenobarbus, the voting was conducted ex partium sensu. Why not also in 51?

How then to explain Cicero’s remark in 50, that Lentulus favoured Caesar, which is directly contradicted by Hirtius, who wrote that Lentulus and Marcellus were elected consuls to rob Caesar of his honor and dignitas? To emphasise their hostility, he added that they defeated the Caesarian candidate Ser. Sulpicius Galba, praetor in 54. There is a further complication, for Suetonius tells us that Caesar was responsible for Galba’s defeat, and he therefore joined Brutus and Cassius in 44. Cicero, Hirtius
and Suetonius cannot all be reconciled, and if one of them is mistaken it is most likely to be Suetonius, writing well over a century later, and wanting a reason for a Caesarian legate to turn against his general. The contemporary writers ought to be more reliable, and Cicero's remark can in fact be reconciled with what Hirtius wrote. Caesar was obviously anxious to have magistrates on whom he could rely to be at least neutral if not friendly. In 50 he acquired one of the consuls, L. Paullus, and a tribune, Curio. In 49 he hoped for Galba, who as a former legate might be expected to prove loyal. When Galba was beaten, Caesar would certainly have looked for a new ally, and Lentulus, who seems to have been alienated from Pompey in the mid 50s, was the obvious choice. Balbus, who was active on Caesar's behalf in Rome in 50, was the obvious go-between. According to Dio, the consul C. Marcellus persuaded the consuls-designate, his cousin C. Marcellus and Lentulus, to support Pompey which, if this is true, confirms that Lentulus' hostility to Caesar could not be taken for granted. It may be that at the end of 50 Lentulus was being wooed by both sides. An approach from Caesar explains what Lentulus, according to Caesar, said early in January: that if the Senate decided to favour Caesar, then he too could have recourse to Caesar's gratia and amicitia.

Confirmation of amicitia can perhaps be provided. Lentulus Cruscello is regarded as Lentulus Crus' son, and he continued the anti-Caesarian fight by escaping to Sextus Pompey when proscribed, and served with him until 38. Valerius Maximus records the loyal behaviour of his wife Sulpicia, daughter of Julia, who wanted to follow her husband to Sicily, a story amplified in Appian, but without her name. Sulpicia's father has been identified as P. Sulpicius Rufus, one of Caesar's legates in Gaul and a Caesarian praetor in 48. Obviously there is considerable uncertainty here, but it seems that Lentulus Crus gave his daughter in marriage to a committed Caesarian. When Cruscello's marriage took place is unknown, but surely before 49.

Nevertheless, Lentulus refused all of Caesar's offers in 49, which is what Cicero expected. Why? Lentulus certainly had debts, and Caesar's offer of a province ought to have been tempting. If Pompey won, however, the debt problem would be solved, either by a profitable proconsulship or a share in the proscriptions, for Cicero said Lentulus had promised himself Hortensius' house, Caesar's gardens and a villa at Baiae. It was not obvious in 49, or at Dyrrachium, that Pompey would lose, and Lentulus was at heart an Optimate. He was also a proud patrician. We cannot know for certain exactly when Caesar first approached him. What we do know is that Caesar chose to single out Lentulus for very harsh treatment in his Civil War commentary, and a reasonable explanation is that he felt Lentulus betrayed him. Velleius Paterculus continued the pro-Caesarian line, reporting that Lentulus placed his own (financial) safety before the
safety of the republic and that when approached by Balbus at Dyrrachium, he was still holding out for the best offer. No mention that he refused again.\textsuperscript{29} It is too easy to remember Lentulus’ debts and forget that he stuck loyally not only to the senatorial cause but to Pompey, and that loyalty led to an ignominious death in an Egyptian prison.\textsuperscript{30}

**NOTES**

1. Cic. fam. 8.4.1 for his defeat in 51. In flight after Pharsalus, he was refused permission to land in Rhodes (Cic. Fam. 12.14.3). Biographical details in RE 4, 1381ff. (Cornelius 218). Understandably, concentration is on Lentulus’ actions in 49 and 48. See also E. Meyer, Caesar Monarchie, Stuttgart and Berlin 1919, 281ff. for these years.

2. Cic. har. resp. 37; Val. Max. 4.2.5; Schol. Bob. Stangl p. 89; Cic. Pis. 77; Cic. Qf Pr. 1.2.16.

3. Caes. BC 1.1-2. The words Caesar uses are deliberately pejorative but Plutarch also gives prominence to Lentulus and his hostility (Pomp. 59; Caes. 29-33). Cicero characterised Lentulus’ oratory as \textit{plena ... animi et terraris} (Brut. 266).


5. ibid. 1.14. For a different version of the Treasury incident see Cic. Att. 7.21.2; for the gladiators, Att. 7.14.2. My colleague Patrick Tansey has pointed out that Caesar’s portrait of Lentulus Crassus is similar to that later given by Sallust (amongst others) of the Catilinarian Lentulus Sura. There is reference to Sura’s desire to renew the proscriptions, of inciting gladiators to fight, and of a desire to be a second Sulla. The accusations are probably derived from Cicero, but the similarities are no doubt meant to be evocative of another, earlier Lentulus who was a ‘traitor to his country’. I am grateful to Mr. Tansey for his comments and help in general.

6. The silence concerning C. Marcellus, who also followed Pompey to the east, is reflected in Velleius Paterculus 2.49.3: \textit{cum alter consul (not named) curso esset ferox, Lentulus vero salva re publica salvus esse non posset.}


11. Cic. Att. 9.7b.2. Balbus uses this to try to persuade Cicero not to take arms against Caesar, to whom he owed beneficium.

12. Cic. Att. 9.6.1; Fam. 10.32.3 (Asinius Pollio in 43. Pollio had every reason to dislike Balbus, the embezzling quaestor who had deserted him.)


14. J.M. Carter takes it for granted that Lentulus was prevented (Caesar Civil War, I and II, ed., tr., and comm., 154). For R. Evans, Lentulus’ candidacy was very likely (‘Candidates and competitions in consular elections at Rome between 218 and 49 BC’, Acta Classica 34 (1991) 122).

15. Cf. Cic. Att. 4.8a.2 on Domitius. Lentulus’ stemma is not unequivocally clear. See the discussion and stemma in G.V. Sumner, The orators in Cicero’s Brutus.

16. Particularly evident in 54, when Domitius was consul, together with Ap. Claudius Pulcher. Another praetor from 58, C. Memmius, was heavily involved in the bribery scandal that year and was defeated. So too M. Scaurus, son of the great princeps senatus.


18. Caes. BG 8.50.


20. On the basis of Cicero’s remark (Att. 9.9.3), Galba is usually regarded as being on Caesar’s side in 49 (four augurs who will support Caesar’s belief that a praetor can preside over consular elections). D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ‘The Roman nobility in the second civil war’, CQ 10 (1960) 253–267, lists Galba as a Caesarian. See also Cic. Fam. 6.18.3 and Val. Max. 6.2.11 (Galba a Caesarian in 45?). Appian BC 2.113 names Galba as a senatorial, not Caesarian, member of the assassins in 44. T. R. S. Broughton, ‘Candidates defeated in Roman elections: some “also rans”: TAPA 81 (1991) 18, n. 3 agrees that Suetonius is wrong.


22. Dio 40.66.2.


24. Val. Max. 6.7.3; Appian BC 4.39.

25. RE Sulpicia no. 117; Julia no. 544; P. Sulpicius Rufus no. 33. I owe these references to Mr. Tansey.


27. Cic. Att. 11.6.6.

28. Cicero in early 50 referred to Lentulitas and Appietas as the qualities inherent in P. Lentulus Spinther, cos. 57, and Ap. Claudius Pulcher, cos. 54 (Pam. 3.7.5). Lentulus Crus presumably possessed some at least of the same arrogance which Cicero regarded as a family characteristic. Cf. E. Gruen, op. cit. 103.


30. An exception to the often hostile attitude of the ancient sources is Lucan, who, in his Pharsalia 5.16–48 and 8.328ff., gives Lentulus two long and patriotic speeches before and after Pharsalus. Lentulus in Book 8 (modo consule) is usually identified as Crus (Münzer, RE 4.1384; the Loeb and the Shackleton Bailey editions, for example). Apparently feeling that Crus is too unimportant for this context, R. Graves has Lentulus Spinther in the Penguin translation — the ultimate indignity for the consul of 49.

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