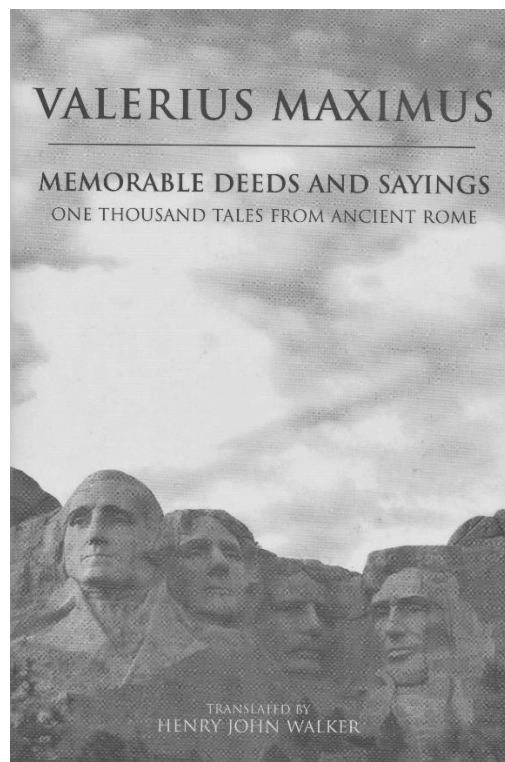


BELLARIA LII



Some editions Valerius Maximus, very popular in the Middle Ages, from 1527-1726

Valerius Maximus II



FACTORUM ET DICTORUM MEMORABILIVM LIBRI IX

Introduction

We continue our selection from Valerius Maximus with a look at extracts from his account of Roman customs, especially relating to the family, and then from items under the heading of 'Innate Characteristics'.

One striking thing about Valerius is the extraordinary popularity he enjoyed. Abridged versions of his text appeared in the 4th and 5th C AD, and enthusiasm for his work from the renaissance onwards resulted in more manuscripts of his work surviving than that of any other Latin prose text except the Latin Bible. But all good things come to an end: the taste for historical moralising died out from the 18th C to be replaced by a passion for 'scientific' history (the fashion affected the Bible too): certainly 'scientific' is not a term that could be applied to Valerius' rather cavalier treatment of his sources.

But what is history for? Most historians would strongly object to using history as a vehicle for moral improvement, yet we seem to be slowly returning to the Valerian view, given the emphasis placed on, for example, the evils of racism and doubtless many other moral and social practices, though there is little sign of a return to the other side of the Valerian coin, the admirable deeds to be excavated from a nation's past.

At least there is one aspect of ancient history, exemplified very strongly in Valerius' work, that makes it so much more pointed than fashionable political takes on our past or present: the ancients never blamed 'society'. They blamed (and praised) individuals: personal responsibility for behaviour guided their judgement of the world they inhabited. The section below on 'innate characteristics' will make that very clear.

ANCIENT CUSTOMS ***De institutis antiquis***

Preface. I have examined the rich and powerful realm of nature, and I shall now turn my pen toward the ancient and remarkable customs of our own city and of other nations: we must find out what were the origins of the happy life we now lead under the best of emperors (i), and by looking towards them, we may in some way benefit the morals of our own age.

(i) Tiberius, of course!

2.1 *praef.* *diues et praepotens naturae regnum scrutatus, iniciam stilum qua nostrae urbis qua exterarum gentium priscis ac memorabilibus institutis: opus est enim cognosci huiusce uitae, quam sub optimo principe felicem agimus, quaenam fuerint elementa, ut eorum quoque respectus aliquid praesentibus moribus prosit.*

Auspices

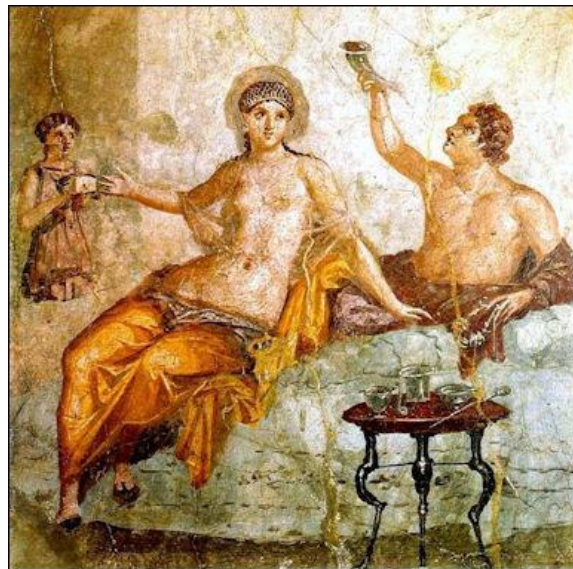


A rider surrounded with birds of good omen (Laconian, c. 550 BC)

2.1.1 Our ancestors never did anything without first taking the auspices, not only in public matters but even in private ones. Because of this custom, an *auspex* still takes part in our marriage ceremonies, but he is no longer required to take the auspices. Nevertheless, his name recalls the old custom.

2.1.1 *apud antiquos non solum publice, sed etiam priuatim nihil gerebatur nisi auspicio prius sumpto. quo ex more nuptiis etiam nunc auspices interponuntur, qui, quamuis auspicia petere desierint, ipso tamen nomine ueteris consuetudinis uestigia usurpantur.*

Dining practices



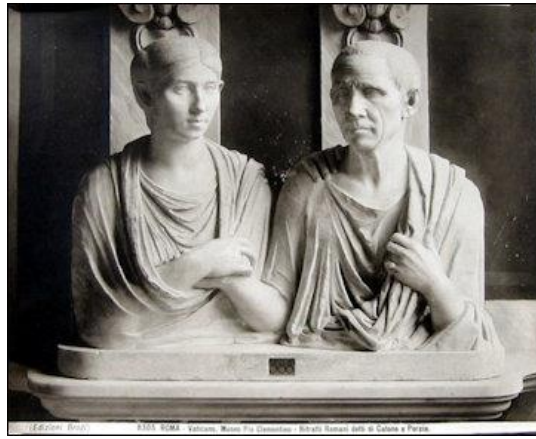
Sitting and reclining at home

2.1.2 Women used to dine with men, but women sat whereas men reclined. This custom, derived from the way people ate, has had an effect on our religion: at the banquet in honour of Jupiter, the god is invited to dine on a couch, whereas Juno and Minerva are invited to dine on chairs (i). Our era has kept this severe practice more diligently on the Capitol than in private homes, presumably because it is more important to maintain discipline among goddesses than among women.

(i) The banquet of Jupiter (*Epulum Iovis*) took place on September 13 each year at the triple temple of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva on the Capitol.

2.1.2 *feminae cum uiris cubantibus sedentes cenabant. quae consuetudo ex hominum conuictu ad diuina penetrauit: nam Iouis epulo ipse in lectulum, Iuno et Minerua in sellas ad cenam inuitabantur. quod genus seueritatis aetas nostra diligentius in Capitolio quam in suis domibus conseruat, uidelicet quia magis ad rem pertinet dearum quam mulierum disciplinam contineri.*

Coniuges univirae



2.1.3 Women who had restricted themselves to one marriage were honoured with the garland of modesty: our ancestors felt that the heart of a married woman was especially incorruptible and trustworthy if she refused to leave the bedroom in which she had lost her virginity, but they believed that to have experienced many marriages was a sign of legalized promiscuity.

2.1.3 quae uno contentae matrimonio fuerant corona pudicitiae honorabantur: existimabant enim eum praecipue matronae sincera fide incorruptum esse animum, qui depositae uirginitatis cubile [in publicum] egredi nesciret, multorum matrimoniorum experientiam quasi legitimae cuiusdam intemperantiae signum esse credentes.

Loyalty and honour

2.1.4 No divorce took place between a wife and her husband from the origins of the city to its 520th year (i). The first man to divorce his wife was Spurius Carvilius, and he did it because she was barren. Although his motive seemed reasonable, he was criticized nonetheless, because people felt that even his desire for children should not have been put before loyalty to his spouse (ii). Our ancestors wanted to safeguard a married woman's honour with a fortress of modesty, so if anyone summoned a married woman to court, he was not allowed to touch her body (iii). Thus her dress was left untainted by the touch of another man's hand.

(i) The first divorce took place in 231 B.C., which strictly speaking was the 523rd year of Rome, but Valerius has rounded the year off to the nearest decade.

(ii) Spurius Carvilius Maximus Ruga was consul in 234 B.C.

(iii) The Laws of the Twelve Tables (passed in 451 and 450 B.C.) gave a plaintiff the right to seize the defendant and drag him to court, but apparently this applied only to male defendants.

2.1.4 repudium inter uxorem et uirum a condita urbe usque ad centesimum et quinquagesimum annum nullum intercessit. primus autem Sp. Carvilius uxorem sterilitatis causa dimisit. qui, quamquam tolerabili ratione motus uidebatur, reprehensione tamen non caruit, quia ne cupiditatem quidem liberorum coniugali fidei praeponi debuisse arbitrabantur. Sed quo matronale decus uerecundiae munimento tutius esset, in ius uocanti matronam corpus eius adtingere non permiserunt, ut inuiolata manus alienae tactu stola relinqueretur.

Alcohol and female modesty



2.1.5 Long ago, the use of wine was unknown to Roman women, presumably to prevent them from falling into any disgrace (i). The first step toward lack of restraint starts with father Liber, and drinking usually leads to illicit sexual behaviour (ii). The modesty of women, however, was not rough and severe, and it was tempered by an honourable sort of charm—they had, after all, indulgent husbands, an abundance of gold, and quite an amount of purple clothes—and they carefully dyed their hair with ashes to a golden red colour to make themselves look more attractive. In those days women did not have to fear the gaze of men who break up other people’s marriages. The sense of mutual respect in both sexes guaranteed that what married women saw and how they were seen was honourable.

(i) Elsewhere we read of a Roman who murdered his wife for drinking wine.

(ii) Liber (‘free’) was the Roman name for Bacchus, the Greek god of wine.

2.1.5 uini usus olim Romanis feminis ignotus fuit, ne scilicet in aliquod dedecus prolaberentur, quia proximus a Libero patre intemperantiae gradus ad inconcessam uenerem esse consuevit. ceterum ut non tristis earum et horrida pudicitia, sed [et] honesto comitatis genere temperata esset, indulgentibus namque maritis et auro abundanti et multa purpura usae sunt quo formam suam concinniores efficerent, summa cum diligentia capillos cinere rutilarunt: nulli enim tunc subsessorum alienorum matrimoniorum oculi metuebantur, sed pariter et uidere sancte et aspici mutuo pudore custodiebatur.

Marital disputes



Juno

2.1.6 If ever some argument arose between a man and his wife, they would go to the shrine of the goddess Viriplaca, which is on the Palatine. (i) There each of them spoke in turn, said whatever they wanted to, put aside their dispute, and went home reconciled. It is said that the goddess was given this name because she placates husbands. She should definitely be venerated and, in my opinion, honoured with special and choice sacrifices, since she is the guardian of our day-to-day domestic peace. Although the yoke of marriage is based on equal affection, the goddess, by her very name, gives masculine dignity the respect it deserves from women.

(i) Viriplaca means 'husband placater' (from *uir*, 'husband,' and *placare*, 'to placate'). It was applied to the goddess Juno.

2.1.6 quotiens uero inter uirum et uxorem aliquid iurgi intercesserat, in sacellum deae Viriplacae, quod est in Palatio, ueniebant et ibi inuicem locuti quae uoluerant contentione animorum deposita concordem reuertebantur. dea nomen hoc a placandis uiris fertur adsecuta, ueneranda quidem et nescio an praecipuis et exquisitis sacrificiis colenda utpote cotidianae ac domesticae pacis custos, in pari iugo caritatis ipsa sui appellatione uirorum maiestati debitum a feminis reddens honorem.

Respect



2.1.7 That was the sort of respect that existed between spouses. Well, is it not clear that the same kind of respect existed in other relationships? I want to show how great its force was from a small piece of evidence: for a long time a father would not bathe with an adult son, nor a father-in-law with his daughter's husband. It is obvious, therefore, that they paid the same sort of religious respect to relations by blood or by marriage as they did to the immortal gods themselves, since they thought it no less wrong to be naked within those very sacred family ties than to be naked in some sacred space.

2.1.7 *huius modi inter coniuges uerecundia: quid, inter ceteras necessitudines nonne apparet consentanea? nam ut minimo indicio maximam uim eius significem, aliquandiu nec pater cum filio pubere nec socer cum genero lauabatur. manifestum igitur est tantum religionis sanguini et adfinitati quantum ipsis dis immortalibus tributum, quia inter ista tam sancta uincula non minus quam in aliquo sacro loco nudare se nefas esse credebatur.*

Disputes between relatives



Coriolanus and family stand-off (Soma Petrich, 1869)

2.1.8 Our ancestors also established a formal banquet called the *Caristia*. Only relatives by blood and by marriage could take part in it. If any quarrel had arisen among these close relatives, it was resolved at these ritual banquets where everyone was in good spirits and had come to promote reconciliation (i).

(i) The *Caristia* was a family reunion celebrated every year on February 22. It was, therefore, somewhat similar to the American festival of Thanksgiving and its name actually derives from the Greek word *kharistia*, which means 'thanksgiving.'

2.1.8 *conuiuium etiam sollemne maiores instituerunt idque Caristia appellauerunt, cui praeter cognatos et adfines nemo interponebatur, ut, si qua inter necessarias personas querella esset orta, apud sacra mensae et inter hilaritatem animorum et fautoribus concordiae adhibitis tolleretur.*

Learning manners

2.1.9 Young people used to shower thoughtful honours on the elderly, as if all the older men were shared by the young as their fathers. That is why, on days when the Senate was in session, young men would invariably escort one of the Conscript Fathers, who was a relative or a friend of their father's, to the Senate house. The young men stayed there beside the doors until they could be of service to the senator by escorting him back home.

Their voluntary guard duty gave those young men the physical and mental strength to take up active service on behalf of the state, and from this training in hard work and modesty, they taught others those virtues that they themselves would soon display. Whenever young men were invited to a dinner, they would carefully inquire who was to be at the party; they did not want to rush ahead and sit down before some older man arrived. When the table was cleared, they allowed the older men to stand up and leave first. From this it is clear that even at dinnertime young men were accustomed to speaking very rarely and always modestly in the presence of older men.

2.1.9 *senectuti iuuenta ita cumulatum et circumspectum honorem reddebat, tamquam maiores natu adolescentium communes patres essent. quocirca iuvenes senatus die utique aliquem ex patribus conscriptis aut propinquum aut paternum amicum ad curiam deducebant adfixique ualuis expectabant, donec reducendi etiam officio fungerentur.*

qua quidem uoluntaria statione et corpora et animos ad publica officia inpigre sustinenda roborabant, breuique processurarum in lucem uirtutum suarum uerecunda laboris meditatione ipsi doctores erant. inuitati ad cenam diligenter quaerebant quinam ei conuiuio essent interfuturi, ne seniorum aduentum discubitu praecurrerent, sublataque mensa priores consurgere et abire patiebantur. ex quibus apparet cenae quoque tempore quam parco et quam modesto sermone his praesentibus soliti sint uti.

INNATE CHARACTERISTICS

De indole

Preface

I shall now discuss the cradle (as it were) and the first beginnings of virtue. I shall show how certain personalities revealed their innate characteristics and gave a foretaste of the way in which they would, as time went by, attain the highest reaches of glory.

3. praef. *adtingam quasi cunabula quaedam et elementa uirtutis, animique procedente tempore ad summum gloriae cumulum peruenturi certo cum indolis experimento datos gustus referam.*

A 15 year old's bravery



Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (City Hall, Reggio Emilia, which he founded, in Italy)

3.1.1 When he was just a boy, Aemilius Lepidus went off to battle, killed an enemy soldier, and saved the life of a fellow citizen (i). This memorable deed is recalled in a statue set up on the Capitol by decree of the Senate. The statue is wearing the locket and striped toga of a boy (ii). The Senate thought it would be unfair to consider him too young for this honour since he had shown he was old enough for courageous deeds. Lepidus anticipated the responsibility of adulthood by the speed with which he started fighting bravely. He won double glory from this battle although at his age he should hardly have been allowed even to see a battle.

The shields of the enemy, their swords drawn from the scabbards, the spears flying, the thunder of their cavalry charges, and the impact when the armies come together—these things can even strike considerable terror into mature young men; but in the midst of all this, a boy from the Aemilius family was brave enough to seize spoils and earn a crown.

(i) Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (cos, 187 B.C.) performed this exploit during the Second Punic War when he was only fifteen years old.

(ii) All freeborn boys wore a special locket (called a bulla) and a toga with a purple stripe along its edge

3.1.1 Aemilius Lepidus puer etiam tum progressus in aciem hostem interemit, ciuem seruauit. cuius tam memorabilis operis index est in Capitolio statua bullata et incincta praetexta senatus consulto posita: iniquum enim putauit eum honori nondum tempestiuum uideri, qui iam uirtuti maturus fuisset. prae<cu>currit igitur Lepidus aetatis stabilimentum fortiter faciendi celeritate duplicemque laudem e proelio retulit, cuius eum uix spectatorem anni esse patiebantur: arma enim infesta et dstricti gladii et discursus telorum et aduentantis equitatus fragor et concurrentium exercituum impetus iuuenibus quoque aliquantum terroris incutit, inter quae gentis Aemiliae pueritia coronam mereri, spolia rapere ualuit.

The (very young) Cato the Younger



Marcus Drusus



Coin issued during Social War (Poppaedi?)

3.1.2 Cato of Utica was not lacking in the same spirit. When he was a boy (i), he was being reared in the house of Marcus Drusus, his maternal uncle, who was a tribune of the plebs (ii). Some Latins had come together to ask Drusus about getting Roman citizenship (iii), and Quintus Poppaedi, the leading man of Latium and a friend of Drusus, asked Cato to help the allies in getting around his uncle (iv). With a stern look on his face, Cato said he would not do it. He was asked again and again, but he kept to his decision.

Then Poppaedi brought Cato up to a high part of the house and threatened to throw him down if he would not give in to his request, but even this could not move Cato from his decision. So Poppaedi was forced to make this remark, 'Let us be glad, my fellow Latins and allies, that this boy is so small, because when he becomes a senator, we will not even be allowed to hope for Roman citizenship.' At this tender age Cato's personality had already adopted the dignity of the entire Senate house, and his determination dismayed the Latins who wanted so much to get their hands on the right to Roman citizenship.

- (i) He was 4 years old in 91 BC!
- (ii) Tribune of the plebs in 91 BC, Drusus supported the Italians in their campaign for full citizen rights.
- (iii) Rome's Italian allies are called Latins.
- (iv) Poppaedius was an Italian activist.

3.1.2 *hic spiritus ne M. quidem Catonis pueritiae defuit: nam cum in domo M. Drusi auunculi sui educaretur, et ad eum tribunum pl. Latini de ciuitate inpetranda conuenissent, a Q. Poppedio Latii principe, Drusi autem hospite, rogatus ut socios apud auunculum adiuuaret, constanti uultu non facturum se respondit. iterum deinde ac saepius interpellatus in proposito perstitit.*

tunc Poppedius in excelsam aedium partem leuatum abiecturum inde se, nisi precibus obtemperaret, minatus est: nec hac re ab incepto moueri potuit. expressa est itaque illa uox homini: 'gratulemur nobis, Latini et socii, hunc esse tam paruum, quo senatore ne sperare quidem nobis ciuitatem licuisset'. tenero ergo animo Cato totius curiae grauitatem percepit perseuerantiaque sua Latinos iura nostrae ciuitatis adprehendere cupientes reppulit.

The (slightly older) Cato the Younger



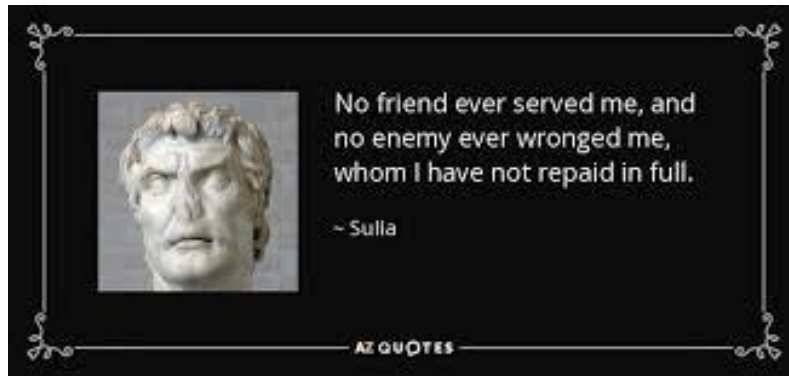
Sulla

3.1.2 When Cato of Utica was still wearing the striped toga of a boy, he went to pay his respects to Sulla (i). There he saw the heads of outlawed political enemies that had been brought into Sulla's living room, and he was shocked by this horrifying sight (ii). He asked his tutor (whose name was Sarpedo) why nobody could be found to assassinate so ruthless a tyrant. Sarpedo replied that people did not lack the will to do so but rather the opportunity, as Sulla had a large number of bodyguards to keep him safe. Cato begged Sarpedo to give him a sword and pointed out that he could easily kill Sulla since he usually sat on Sulla's couch.

- (i) Cato of Utica was thirteen years old in 82 B.C., when Sulla became dictator.
- (ii) The dictator Sulla massacred his political enemies in 82 B.C.

idem, cum salutandi gratia praetextatus ad Sullam uenisset et capita proscriptorum in atrium adlata uidisset, atrocitate rei commotus paedagogum suum nomine Sarpedonem interrogauit quapropter nemo inueniretur, qui tam crudelem tyrannum occideret: cumque is non uoluntatem hominibus, sed facultatem deesse, quod salus eius magno praesidio militum custodiretur, respondisset, ut ferrum sibi daret obsecrauit, adfirmando perfacile se eum interfecturum, quod in lecto illius considerare soleret.

Cato's spirit



3.1.2 His tutor had to admire Cato's spirit, but he was horrified at his proposal. From then on, he always searched the boy before bringing him to Sulla. Nothing could be more admirable than this: a boy, in the headquarters of a brutal regime, was not afraid of the conqueror, even though Sulla was at that very time murdering consuls, populations of entire cities, whole legions, and the greater part of the equestrian order. If you had put Marius himself in that place, he would quickly have started making plans for his own escape rather than planning to assassinate Sulla (i).

(i) Marius was Sulla's great rival.

3.1.2 *paedagogus et animum Catonis agnouit et propositum exhorruit eumque postea ad Sullam excussum semper adduxit. nihil hoc admirabilius: puer, in officina crudelitatis, deprehensum uictorem non extimuit, tum maxime consules, municipia, legiones, equestris ordinis maiorem partem trucidantem. ipsum Marium illo loci statuisses, celerius aliquid de sua fuga quam de Sullae nece cogitasset.*

Next week: Valerius Maximus on the vital role of the office of *ensor*: 'Cities may be sacked, nations may be overrun, kingdoms may be seized, but if a sense of duty and shame does not exist in our public life and in our Senate house, then all the wealth we have accumulated, even if it reaches heaven itself, will not rest on a stable foundation.'