THE FAILURE OF CATILINE’s CONSPIRACY

In memoriam V. Tcherikover

The accepted version, among Catiline’s adversaries, of the failure of his conspiracy, was summarized in the epitome of Livy by a short and pointed sentence: „L. Catiline failed twice in the consular elections. He conspired with the praetor Lentulus, with Cethegus and many others, in order to assassinate the consul and the senators, to oppress the Republic and set fire to the city. An army was prepared in Etruria, but thanks to Cicero’s watchfulness the conspiracy was discovered.”¹

Copious literature, reflecting a variety of opposing views, has been written on this subject. Each approach finds some justification in the different sources which too are profuse. Catiline’s conspiracy has made its imprint on Western European literature, especially in drama. From Ben Jonson to Ibsen, Catiline has been alternately vilified and glorified.² The various ways in historical literature of dealing with Catiline fall roughly into 4 categories:

a) Those who condemn Catiline completely, both morally and politically, promote the view that Catiline headed a band of corrupt aristocrats. Having nothing else in mind but his own pecuniary and political interests, he stirred up the masses to bring havoc upon the state.³

b) Those who exalt him largely justify their approach by criticizing the one-sidedness of the sources. (Both Sallust and Cicero were interested in maligning Catiline). According to this version Catiline is to be classified among the

¹ Liv. Ep. 102.
² For a good summary of all the West European Dramas on Catiline, from the Renaissance to the 20th century, see: H. Speck: Catilina im Drama der Weltliteratur, 1906.
social reformers of ancient Rome. Common to both views is their uncritical approach to the ancient phraseology. The first simply accepts Cicero's orations against Catiline without taking exception to the "mendaciuscula." The second accepts the social phraseology in its entirety, without discriminating between the catchword and the true intent. A few examples may illustrate this point: Negasset inveniri posse fidelem defenso: miserorum qui non ipse miser est... Publicam causam miserorum pro mea consuetudine suscepi... Dux et signifer calamitosorum... etc. These slogans cannot serve as starting points for an analysis of Catiline's intentions regarding social reform, for they are more apt to confuse than to clarify.

c) Attempts have been made to explain Catiline's conspiracy as having resulted from the struggles within the Roman aristocracy. According to this view, Catiline had no faction of his own. He was merely a tool in the hands of other leaders (e.g. Crassus). At the last moment the leaders of the faction withdrew their support from Catiline, and as a result the conspiracy failed. In other words: No one could act in the political arena of Republican Rome without a faction and clientela.

d) According to a fourth approach Catiline was the leader of the indebted aristocracy, and not a mere tool in the hands of Crassus or Caesar. This indebted aristocracy grew in numbers from year to year, especially after Sulla's administrative reform in 82 B.C. Thereafter, 20 new quaestors entered the senate each year, but only 2 of them were later to be elected consuls. In running for the consulship or praetorship, the candidates wasted sums of money, which could only be regained by receiving a propraetorship or proconsulship in a province. Failing this, their debts increased and their

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6 Cic. de orat. II. 59. 241.

6 For similar phraseology see e.g. Liv. III. 15. 9: "se miserrimi cuiusque suscipisse causam, etc..."  

positions became hopeless. As their numbers grew, they became restless, dissatisfied and eventually revolted under the slogan: *tabulae novae*. This slogan, however, was not popular with the urban masses, for these people, having no credit and no debts, were mainly interested in the distribution of land and cheap corn.\(^8\)

These last two views together make an important contribution to the understanding of the complicated relations among Roman aristocrats. However, one aspect remains unexplained, i.e. the large following enjoyed by Catiline. If the urban proletariat was indifferent to the slogan “*tabulae novae,*” why did they join Catiline?

This paper is concerned with an answer to this question, by analysing some of the social and political implications of the slogan “abolition of debts.”

There is general consent, regarding the participation of the Roman masses in Catiline’s conspiracy and their sympathetic attitude towards him. Let us examine some of the more significant passages from the ancient sources:

Cic. Cat. II. 4. 8: Non solum ex urbe, verum etiam ex agris ingentem numerum perditorum hominum collegerat.

Cic. Cat. iv. 3. 6: Huic si paucos adfines esse putatis, vehementer erratis. Latius opinione disseminatum est hoc malum. Cicero goes on to describe the influence of the conspiracy which has spread as far as the Allobroges beyond the Alps.

Cic. Mur. 78: Latius patet illius sceleris contagio quam quisquam putat...

Ad pluris pertinet.

Cic. Mur. 79: Non enim deseruerunt sed ab illo in speculis atque insidiis relict, in capite atque cervicibus nostris restiterunt.

Cicero further points out that as long as he remains consul, there is no need for trepidation. It is not Catiline who is to be feared, but rather his many followers. In other passages we are told of the effects of the conspiracy on the rural population of Southern Italy and expecially among the shepherds of Apulia.\(^9\) We may reasonable presume, that the slogan “*tabulae novae,*” attracted even the provincial population “publice privatimque aere alieno oppressi,” e.g. the Allobroges.\(^10\) It appears that Catiline promised them an abolition of debts. The truth is that most of these passages are taken from the writings of Cicero, and one might suspect that he deliberately exaggerated the dimensions and seriousness of the conspiracy, in order to prove again that he, the optimus

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\(^8\) This represents the view held by my late teacher, Prof. V. Tscherikover, who followed Max Weber: Agrargeschichte im Altertum, p. 239: “Catilina vertritt in Wahrheit die verschuldeten Junker,” and Cary in CAH. IX, p. 491: “Catilina’s programme was plainly not democratic, in the sense of being attractive to the urban proletariat, who had no assets, no credit, and therefore no debts.” For scrutiny of sources see: E. Schwartz: Hermes (32) 1897, p. 554 and E. G. Hardy: The Cat. Conspiracy, 1924.


\(^10\) Sall. Bell. Cat. 40. 1.
consul, had saved the Republic and that the title pater patriae had rightly been conferred upon him. Sallust, on the other hand, who in his monography on Catiline’s conspiracy, was not at all concerned with the praise of Cicero, and who allows him but a modest part in the whole play, clearly points out that the whole Plebs supported Catiline: Neque solum illis aliena mens erat qui consci coniurationis fuerant, sed omnino cuncta plebes novarum rerum studio Catilinae incepta probabat.\textsuperscript{11}

Catiline’s support did not come from lower population alone. Cicero divides Catiline’s supporters into 6 groups:

1. Those who, though greatly in debt, have still greater property. The appearance of these men is very honest, for they are rich, but their intentions and their principles are most shameless. These men are least to be feared. . . . since they are more likely to assail the state with prayers than with army.

2. Those who, although they are hard pressed with debts, still expect to rule. They wish to be masters of the state.

3. Men from colonies established by Sulla.

4. Some poor countrymen of small resources, who hope that confiscations will be renewed.

5. Those who are staggering under old debts, partly because of their laziness, partly by bad business, partly by extravagance.

6. Parricides, assassins and all sorts of criminals.\textsuperscript{12}

Curiously enough the urban plebs does not appear among the above mentioned categories. This omission deserves some attention: One may indeed take exception to the objectivity of Cicero’s categories. His vituperation gives evidence of two different aims: First, he is concerned with maligning all of Catiline’s supporters. Secondly Cicero intended to emphasize that the lower classes should not join a movement led by rotten aristocrats, whose interests did not conform with their own. For these reasons we must not be misled by Cicero’s omission of the urban plebs from his speech. For this speech “oratio habita ad Populum” – was directed to the city population. Having called Catiline’s followers murderers, bandits and adulterers, he could not identify his own listeners with this group, without defeating the whole purpose of his speech.

The truth is that in addition to the urban and rural plebs, Catiline’s following included Sullan colonists, who had become impoverished in the course of years,


\textsuperscript{12} Cic. In Cat. II (17–23).
indebted aristocrats and the jeunesse dorée of Rome.13 We have seen that Sallust pointed out that the plebs supported the conspiracy (37. 1.), but this is true only of the first stages of the uprising.

When the conspiracy was uncovered, the plebs extolled Cicero as having saved them from oppression and servitude: "Interea plebs, coniuratione patefacta, quae primo cupido rerum novarum nimis bello favebat, *mutata mente*, Catilinae consilia exsecrari, Ciceronem ad caelum tollere veluti ex servitute erepta, gaudium atque laetitiam agitabat."14

The question thus remaining is why the plebs who supported Catiline at the beginning of the conspiracy, did abandon him at the critical juncture?

According to ancient historians, fickleness was one of the basic characteristics of the plebs,15 and their inconsistency could be used as an explanation of their action. When Catiline’s intentions were unveiled, and the masses realized that their chances for success were seriously diminished, they joined Cicero. This answer seems to the present writer to be an oversimplification. Even fickleness has its causes, and a deeper examination of these causes may not be unwarranted.

Cicero had to surmount many obstacles during his consulship in 63 B.C. One of them was Rullus’ audacious proposal for the distribution of the ager Campanus and the ager Stellatinus. Moreover, Rullus proposed that more land be bought in Italy and distributed to the needy. In order to finance his plans he suggested the appointment of Decemviri with broad powers who would have the right to dispose of the lands recently conquered by Pompey in the East. As a matter of fact Rullus’ proposal has come down to us only through Cicero’s speeches “De lege agraria,” and we may assume that Cicero devitalized the original proposal by arbitrarily quoting from it. There is, however, no doubt that the points mentioned above were in the original proposal, and that Cicero directed his attack especially at them. One is astonished to find out, how completely Cicero’s demagogy defeated Rullus’ proposal. Mommsen sarcastically describes the scene where “der erste demokratische Konsul, in sehr ergötlicher Weise das liebe Publikum nasführend, ihm die richtige Demokratie entwickelt.”16

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13 The importance of the rural plebs in Catiline’s conspiracy is not emphasized in Appian e.g. BC II. 2: *συνήγε δὲ καὶ δημότας καὶ ἕξινους καὶ θεράποντας.* II. 5: *θεράποντες τε καὶ ἔξελθεσοι, χειροτέχνας πολλοὺς προσαλβάντες.* These statements should not be considered as mere τόποι. Speaking about Milo, in BC. II. 22, Appian explicitly points out that θεράποντες καὶ ἄγροικοι πλῆθος supported Milo. Mention is not made of the urban plebs because they belonged to Clodius’ supporters. Compare also App. BC. I. 31.

14 Sall. Bell. Cat. 48.

15 Cic. De Dom. 4.: “quod in imperita multitudine est vitiosissimum, varietas et inconstantia et crebra tamquam tempestatum sic sententiarium commutatio, . . . .”

Still, things were not quite as felicitous as they appear at first glance. It is to be doubted whether the masses were convinced by Cicero’s promises of pax, libertas and otium. Nor did the masses fear the wide powers which were to be given to the Decemviri, whom Cicero had since named “ten kings” (decem reges). When Cicero ironically described the appearance of the Decemviri in the East, auctioning “hasta posita” the lands conquered by Pompey, the people at the Forum might well have roared with laughter, but it is to be doubted whether these rhetorical artifices caused any fundamental change of mind in the urban plebs.

The following passage seems to have left a more lasting impression: “vos vero, Quirites, si me audire voltis, retinete istam possessionem gratiae, libertatis, suffragiorum, dignitatis, urbis, fori, ludorum festorum dierum, ceterorum omnium commodorum, nisi forte mavoltis relictis his rebus atque hac luce rei publicae, in Sipontina siccitate aut in Salpinorum plenis pestilentiae finibus – Rullo duce conlocari.”

Cicero’s powers of oratory were not always so successful. In the same year, while defending old Rabirius, he was churlishly interrupted by the crowd, while naming Saturninus “hostis Populi Romani.” But in speaking against Rullus Cicero played on the right strings. Not all the urban plebes were interested in distribution of lands; moreover, leaving Rome was to most of them actually repugnant. A large number of the Roman plebes were at that time serving in Pompey’s armies, far away from Rome. As a matter of fact, distribution of land gained popularity again, immediately after Pompey’s soldiers returned to Italy. And indeed, a lex agraria was carried out in 59 B.C. as a result of the presence of landless ex-soldiers who assembled in great number in the Forum. But in 63, the situation was quite different. At that time the lower classes were composed of working shopkeepers (tabernarii) and small artisans, as well as of “Lumpen-proletarians.” These people were by no means attracted by Rullus’ proposals to leave Rome and settle down in marshy and uncultivated grounds. In other words, it was not so much Cicero’s rhetorical ability which caused the defeat of Rullus’ proposal, but rather the unpopularity of the proposal itself. This situation was presumably understood by the “certi homines” whom Cicero dared not name, and who stood behind Rullus’ proposal. They allowed the bill to die a quiet death, and this is essential to proper understanding of Catiline’s slogan “tabulae novae.” The same social element which showed no enthusiasm for a “lex agraria,” might well have been attracted by the slogan “abolition of debts.” There is a hint in Cassius Dio that χρεῶν ἀποκοπή was proposed in 63 by one of the tribunes. The proposal may have been similar to the Lex Valeria of 86 B.C. However, it was quashed at its inception and Catiline renewed his demands with even greater vigour. Tabulae novae did not

17 Cic. De. leg. agr. II. 71. 18 Cic. Pro Rab. Perd. 18. 19 C. Dio. 37. 25.
mean merely a lessening of debts (Lex de aere alieno), but rather their complete abolition.\footnote{20}

One should not underestimate other factors which abetted Catiline's conspiracy: fierce competition among aristocratic factions; the expulsion of 64 senators by the censors Gellius Publicola and Lentulus Clodianus in 70 B.C.: the financial distress which frustrated the political aims of many of the audaces juvenes; the embitterment resulting from the lex Papia, all help to explain the insurrection itself, but they fall short in accounting for Catiline's choice of tabulae novae as his slogan. Mention should be made of the fact that Catiline timed his activity, propitiously taking advantage of Pompey's absence from Rome and fully exploiting the unstable political and economic conditions which prevailed to such an extent that in 67, Cicero could say: "Itineras quae per hosce anni in Italia per agros atque oppida civium Romanorum nostri Imperatores fecerint, recordamini."\footnote{22}

There were two additional causes for the worsened economy of Rome. The war against Mithridates drastically lowered credit facilities\footnote{23} and as a result of

\footnote{20} καύφιμας as opposed to χρεών ἀποκοπῆ – see Aeneas Tacticus XIV. On Lex Valeria: Sall. Bell. Cat. 33; Vell. Pat. II. 23; Liv. Ep. 82.

\footnote{21} Not a single law pertaining to the abolition of debts has survived. This fact presents an unsurmountable obstacle to a purely juridical analysis of the problem. I know of no definition of the concept "debt" to be found in the sources pertinent to the Republican period. Without such an authorized definition it is hardly possible to dertermine just what sort of debts were aimed at by the slogan Tabulae novae. One wonders whether the intent was directed solely at immediate and simple financial indebtedness, or whether it aimed as well at nullifying incomplete instalment transactions. As jurisdictional probing and analysis can find little to base itself upon, I should like to suggest a working hypothesis, which may render a clearer picture of the political atmosphere of the day. Between 133 and 44 BC. several proposals of reducing debts were put forward, which have been dealt with in some detail in my "Plebs urbana et tabulae novae" published in Hebrew (1958). Though the burden of indebtedness was lightened from time to time by legislation, a complete abolition of debts was never carried out. It would appear then, that Tabulae novae functioned more as a political catchword than as an actual policy. One may doubt whether the proposers of the slogan ever even intended clearly to define it juridically. Is it not rather to be thought that they preferred to obscure its real meaning, in order to make the slogan more palatable to the masses? The common people of Rome naturally made no effort to analyse catchwords juridically. Each applied the slogan to his own needs. This may afford an explanation for its popularity. The masses usually followed their leaders ἀνεπιστάτως (Polyb. XV. 21 on Molpagoress tyrant of Chios): See also the interesting passage in Plato's Politeia 565e: λαβών σφόδρα πειθόμενον χρόνων, μή ἀποσχημα ἐμφυλίου αἵματος, ἀλλ' ἀδίκως ἐπατιώμενος, οἷς δ' ἐφιλολογία, καὶ ἀνάβολητα καὶ ἀποκτεινότα, καὶ ὑποστηρικτὸν χρέων τε ἀποκοπᾶς, καὶ γῆς ἀναδικαιομένων τηλ. The Greek χρόνος was in sympathy with those leaders who proposed χρεών ἀποκοπῆ (Plat. Rep. 565–6; Leg. III 684 Xen. Mem. II 7. 2; II. 8. 1: Just. 16. 4; Diod. XIX 9. Liv. 32. 38; 42. 5; Polyb. 13. 1. 20. 6; App. Mithr. 62; Dio Chrys. 31. 70. Aelian 14. 24 etc.).

The situation in the Late Roman Republic was similar.

\footnote{23} Cic. De Imp. Pomp. 38. On the economic distress of the urban plebs see Sall. Cat. 37.

\footnote{22} Cic. De Imp. Pomp. 19; De leg. agr. II. 8.
the increased activities of pirates in the Mediterranean (until finally crushed by Pompey), the cost of shipping rose sharply, which was immediately felt in the price of grain.

It is small wonder that under such conditions the big money lenders, who belonged to the Equites were extremely unpopular and even Othos’s proposal concerning the special seats for the Equites led to cat calls and even riots. The general hatred of the money lenders led to a popular propaganda against the payment of debts. Cicero states: “Never were measures for the repudiation of debts more strenuously agitated than in my consulship,” and though we may take exception to Cicero’s “never” we cannot dismiss it entirely. We may conclude therefore, that Catiline used the slogan which seemed most attractive in the prevailing atmosphere of Rome in 63 B.C. Dio Cassius mentions a proposal of Catiline concerning the distribution of land, but there is no support to be found for this in the record of Cicero’s time. None the less there is no doubt, that “abolition of debts” was his main concern. Sallust appears to have been correct in stating that “cuncta plebes” supported Catiline. The commons of Rome were ready to join the “nobili genere natus” in the refusal to repay their debts. But shortly afterwards, they were led to understand, in some measure through Cicero’s speeches, that the abolition of debts was but part of Catiline’s plan, and this is a point which demands more careful study.

In directing the election campaign, there is little doubt that Catiline used the slogan Tabulae novae, but it is very unlikely that he publicly recommended robbery, murder, arson and rape as accused by his opponents. However, after his failure in the elections, the course of his plan became clear. It was no longer a secret that armed forces were concentrating in Etruria, and that his followers in Picenum, Bruttium, Apulia and Gallia were all prepared for action. But there is room for doubt concerning Lentulus’ alleged plan to set fire to Rome. Statiliius et Gabinii uti cum magna manu duodecim simul opportuna loca urbis incenderent… In so far as the burning of Rome became the central theme in Cicero’s counterpropaganda, we may assume that the authorities were interested in spreading this rumour, in order to blacken Catiline even in the eyes of his supporters. Cicero felt no consternation about the concentration in Etruria, but he was seriously upset by the passivity of the city population,

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25 Cic. de off. II 84: “Numquam vehementius actum est, quam me consule, ne solveretur.
27 Sources of indebtedness may have pertained to the need of working capital, inability to pay rent etc. See my article in Latomus T. XVII, 1958, pp. 500–517: The living conditions of the urban plebs in Republican Rome.
29 Sall. Cat. 42. Cic. In Cat. II. 20.
and even of some of the optimates who failed to see the imminent danger of insurrection. Moreover, the populares felt that Cicero exaggerated the danger and blamed him for the prevailing tension. At this point Cicero was favoured by a stroke of good luck. The Allobroges afforded him the opportunity of delivering his third speech, after the arrest of Catiline's accomplices. In this speech, delivered ad populum, Cicero capitalized on the theme of setting fire to Rome. He reminded his listeners of the afflictions resulting from the civil disturbances of the last years. Many could still remember the hardships connected with names of Marius, Sulpicius Rufus, Octavius Cinna.\textsuperscript{31}

But Cicero was not content to stop at that point. He carefully distinguished Catiline from his predecessors. They were interested in affecting changes within the frame-work of the Republic, Catiline aimed at its destruction. They were concerned with the rebuilding of a flourishing Republic in accordance with their view—Catiline wanted to burn the city: “Atque illae dissensiones erant huiusmodi, Quirites, quae non ad delendam, sed ad commutandum rem publicam pertinenter. Non illi \textit{nullam esse rem publicam}, sed in ea quae esset, se esse principes, neque hanc urbem conflagrare, sed in hac urbe florere voluerunt.”\textsuperscript{32}

This distinction, convincing as it may seem, should not be taken too seriously. Cicero was extremely tolerant of all dead Populares. In his attack on Rullus, he praised the Gracchi, and when assailing Catiline he gave praise to Sulpicius Rufus. Again when Clodius was at the height of his power, Cicero spoke of Catiline in a far more moderate manner than in 63 B.C., and finally in his swan-song, the Philippics, while attacking Antonius, it seemed to Cicero, that if Clodius were alive in 43 B.C., there would have been no divergencies between them.\textsuperscript{33}

To see the major danger in his immediate adversary was axiomatic to Cicero's rhetoric, and in this case he succeeded in pointing to the very danger. Though real proofs of Catiline's intention to burn Rome were lacking, Cicero convinced his listeners that Catiline's aim was anarchy (nullam esse rem publicam). His strongest argument emerged from the fact that runaway slaves joined Catiline's camp.

There is ground for the belief that among the leaders of the conspiracy there were serious differences of opinion in regard to whether slaves should be permitted to participate or not. Lentulus supported their taking part: “All this time at Rome Lentulus, following Catiline's directions, was working, personally and through others, upon those whom he thought ripe for revolution by disposition of fortune, and not merely citizens but all sorts and conditions of men, provided only that they could be of any service in war.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Cic. In Cat. III. 24, 25; Luc. Phars. II. 540–3. \textsuperscript{32} Cic. ibid. \textsuperscript{33} Cic. ad Att. XIV. 13 B. 4... Si viveret, mihi cum illo nulla contentia iam maneret. \textsuperscript{34} Sall. Cat. 39. 6.
From this passage we may infer that there was a general tendency to broaden the basis of the uprising. At this point, there is no mention of slaves, but rather of "cuiusque modi genus hominum, quod modo bello usui foret." None the less, the time was soon to come when slaves were made use of.

Both Cicero and Sallust, mention an exchange of letters between Lentulus and Catiline. The former advised the latter: "Vide ecquid tibi iam sit necesse et cura ut omnium tibi auxilia adiungas, etiam infimorum." A subsequent passage states that Lentulus supported the use of slaves in the rebellion. Having been declared an enemy of the people by the senate, Lentulus sent an oral message to Catiline, wherein he asked him, why he was opposed to the use of slaves for their purpose. We should not however regard Lentulus as propagating the idea of freedom for the slaves. No one in this period conceived of a slaveless society, not even Spartacus himself. Lentulus was primarily motivated by utilitarian considerations. He needed man-power, and the slaves were willing to fight on any side where they saw the least chance of procuring their freedom. The rumour of a possibility of manumission through participation in the conspiracy spread fast, and slaves crowded around Catiline’s camp in Etruria. Catiline, however, fearing the reaction of the free population turned them away. Even after Lentulus’ arrest in Rome, Catiline remained firm on this point: “interea servitia repudiabat, quouis initio ad eum magnae copiae concurrebant, opibus coniurationis fretus, simul alienum suis rationibus existumans videri causam civium cum servis fugitisvis communicavisse.” One may conclude by saying that there were divergencies among the leaders of the conspiracy and it seems that Lentulus disregarded Catiline’s opposition to the use of slaves. In accordance with Lentulus orders, Caeparius of Terracina stirred up slaves in Apulia. And in Rome itself the incitement of slaves and hirelings (opifices atque servitia) continued even after Lentulus’ arrest. Their primary purpose was to free Lentulus from prison by force. After all hope was lost Catiline had no choice but to agree to the participation of slaves, even though he had opposed it from the beginning. Dio summed this up neatly: πρῶτον μὲν ἐκ τῶν ἔλευθερων, ἐπείτα δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν δουλῶν προσεποιεῖτο.

All this was presumably known in Rome and left its mark on the free

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35 Cic. In Cat. III. 12. 36 Sall. Cat. 56. 5.
37 Ibid. 30. 2; 46. 3; Cic. In. Cat. III. 14.
38 Sall. Cat. 50. 1; Cic. In. Cat. III. 14; IV. 4; Cass. Dio XXXVII. 35.
39 Cass. Dio XXXVII 33. App. BC. II. 2. The participation of slaves in the conspiracy is not to be doubted. There is nothing exceptional in that. Slaves were used in civil wars before Catiline, and even subsequent leaders were not adverse to using them in this way (e.g. Clodius, Sextus Pompeius etc.). Some scholars, however, have thought that the correspondence between Catiline and Lentulus may have been a forgery. This view is based on the assumption, that Cicero would be interested in publishing letters of such content. It is nevertheless of greater moment to understand the importance of using "participation of slaves" as a major item in Cicero’s counterpropaganda.
population. The Memories of the Spartacus Uprising were still alive. Many
even recalled the chaos resulting from the release of slaves in Marius’ time,
when Cinna and Sertorius succeeded in restoring law and order only after great
efforts. The memories of Sulla’s Corneli in still struck a powerful note; and many
years later Lucan recalled with sorrow the days when the use of slaves in civil
war was not found abhorrent.40 There is a continuous apprehension of slave
revolts throughout classical history, and this feeling is applicable to Catiline’s
and Clodius’ time in particular.41 Under these conditions we may hardly infer
that the firing of Rome was premeditated by the conspirators, but Cicero
succeeded in striking terror into the hearts of the free citizens of Rome, by
pointing to the concentration of runaway slaves in Catiline’s camp, as evidence
in support of his propaganda: conflagration, burglary and the release of slaves
were all of the same cloth. It was difficult to control freed slaves in their fight
against Roman citizens, and this is the reason why Cicero’s warnings bore
fruit. It was not difficult to raise a concordia ordinum or a consensus omnium
bonorum. Senators and especially knights42 stood at the front in the fight
against Catiline. For the knights the safety of the republic symbolized the
defence and safety of their property. Cato the younger also called upon his
peers to spare no efforts in putting down Catiline, for otherwise “nostra an
nobilscum una hostium futura sint.”43 The propaganda of the optimates called
upon all those ready to fight “in defence of their country, their children, their
altars and their hearth,”44 laying emphasize upon the fact that the opposing
side was composed of latrones and perditi homines. As a matter of fact, non
propertied classes, such as displaced farmers, or people who had been expelled
from their homes,45 proletarians and runaway slaves, remained loyal to Catiline
to the bitter end. Support for this can be found in Sallust’s testimony: “For in
spite of the two decrees of the senate, not one man of all that great number was
let by the promised reward to betray the conspiracy, and not a single one
deserted Catiline’s camp. Such was the potency of the malady which like a
plague had infected the minds of many of our country men.”46

Thus a split occurred among the participants of the conspiracy: When
Catiline proposed abolition of debts, he was supported by omnino cuncta
plebes. Such an abolition could have lightened the burden of shopkeepers and

40 Luc. Phars. II. 94–100. 41 On Clodius see Cic. ad Att. IV. 3.2.
42 On knights and their opposition to Catiline see: Cic. Post Red. in sen. 12; In Cat.
I. 21; II. 25; IV. 22; In Pis. 7; Pro Sull. 51; Pro Sest. 28; Pro Flacc. 96; ad Att. I. 14. 4;
II. I. 7; Sall. Cat. 49. 4; Plut. Cic. 14. Nep. Att. 4. 43 Sall. Cat. 52. 10.
44 Ibid. 59. 5: pro patria, pro liberis, pro aris atque focis suis certare. 45 Ibid. 73. 5.
46 Ibid. 36. 5. It is difficult to arrive at an accurate figure concerning the casualties in
the battle of Pistoria. Dio C. (XXXVII. 40. 1) states that there were 3000, Appian
(II. 44) – 10,000; Diod. (apud Phot. 638) – 6000. Sallust gives no number but praises the
small artisans, who often found themselves in debt because of a lack of working. capital. Exorbitant rentals were an additional cause of frequent indebtedness for the lower classes, whose daily expenses rose as a result of the rising cost of living. However there were limits to the support the tabernarii were prepared to give Catiline. They were certainly interested in the cancellation of debts, but not at the cost of anarchy or the liberation of slaves. It was not fickleness but rather common sense which forced part of the plebs to turn again to the Republic and to Cicero. This is the picture that emerges from the fourth Catilinarian speech, where Cicero described the freed men, who were mainly tabernarii.48 “Qua re si quem vestrum forte commovet hoc quod auditum est, lenonem quedam Lentuli concursare circum tabernas, pretio sperare sollicitari posse animos egentium atque imperitorum, est id quidem coeptum atque temp- tatum, sed nulli sunt inventi tam aut fortuna miseri aut voluntate perditi qui non illum ipsum sellae atque operis et quaeestus cotidiani locum, qui non cubile ac lectulum suum, qui denique non cursum hunc otiosum vitae suae salvum esse velint. Multo vero maxima pars eorum qui in tabernis sunt, immo vero – id enim potius est dicendum – genus hoc universum amantissimum est oti. Etenim omne instrumentum, omnis opera atque quaestus frequentia civium sustentatur, alitur otio; quorum si quaestus oculus tabernis minui solet, quid tandem incensis futurum fuit?”

This passage brings us to the core of the problem suggested at the beginning of this article: Why did the plebs, who had supported Catiline in the first stages of the conspiracy, abandon his at the critical moment? The tabernarii were a significant and an integral part of the urban plebs. Cicero calls them “egentes,” the literal meaning of which is needy or very poor people. However, there is evidence for Bolkestein’s conjecture that this term was used to describe a situation of indebtedness. This supposition is supported by the fact that “egentes” often appears in context with aes alienum.49 The tabernarii were not entirely without property which could serve as security for loans obtained; in a condition of chaos they would have been among the first to have suffered. A perusal of the sources shows that with the outbreak of riots the tabernae were closed.50 This adds new light to the passage of Sallust mentioned above,

47 I have dealt in some detail with the lack of working capital in my “Plebs urbana and Tabulae novae.” For indebtedness caused by high rentals see Latomus, 1958 (note 27).
48 Cic. In Cat. IV 16/17. For freedmen as tabernarii see M. Park: Plebs in Cicero’s Days, Bryn Mawr. Diss., 1918, Z. Yavetz: Plebs urbana et tabulae novae, Tel-Aviv, 1957 (Hebrew). Though a substantial number of the Roman tabernarii might have been manumitted, slaves, the importance of this is primarily legal. Economically these people should be equated with the Roman citizens of the lower middle class.
49 H. Bolkestein: Wohltätigkeit u. Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum, Utrecht, 1939. See Cic. Phil. II. 36; 50; Pro Sest. 38; Pro Rab. Post. 4. Liv. VI. 2. etc. A further semantical investigation of “egentes” would be desirable.
50 E.g. Liv. III. 27; IV. 31 IX. 7; XXIII. 25; Plut. Caes. 67, etc.
who said that initially all the plebs – “omnia cuncta plebes” – supported
Catiline but later: mutata mente, Catilinae consilia exsecreari, Ciceronem ad
caelum tollere.\textsuperscript{51}

In conclusion: Abolition of debts did not imply basic social reform. It was
merely an alleviation at a time of economic crisis. A one time cancellation
of debts was not a guaranty against subsequent indebtedness. Tabulae novae
did not stabilize credit nor did it establish a maximum interest rate. For so
superficial an end the tabernarii were not prepared to sacrifice what they had.
They preferred the “otium” to any radical change (res novae, τὴν πολιτείαν
νεώτεραν οὐκ ἔχουσαν),\textsuperscript{52} and hoped that Cicero’s pax, libertas and otium would afford
a solution for their pressing economic problems. However, their disappointment
did not take long to come. Catiline’s revolt was not suppressed in order to
assure the safety of the tabernae, nor did it lead to a guarantee of reasonable
living standards for the tabernarii. The suppression of the revolt saved the
money lenders, but the condition of the tabernarii remained the same. In
saying that he had rescued the faeneratores, Cicero was right.\textsuperscript{53} In his de
officiis, he summarized the results of the suppression of the revolt thus: “For
there is nothing that upholds a res publica more powerfully than its credit; and
it can have no credit, unless the payment of debts is enforced by law. Never
were measures for the repudiation of debts more strenuously agitated that in
my consulship. Men of every sort and rank attempted with arms and armies to
force the project through. But I opposed them with such energy, that this
plague was wholly eradicated from the republic. Indebtedness was never
greater. Debts were never liquidated more easily or more fully. For the hope
of defrauding the creditor was cut off, and payment was enforced by law.”\textsuperscript{54}
It is not surprising therefore, that only a year after Catilne’s death, his tomb
was decorated with flowers,\textsuperscript{55} and but a few years later Caesar became the
idol of the crowds; his immense popularity, he at least partly owed to the
hope that he would abolish debts and rentals.

It is possible that the importance of Catiline’s conspiracy is over-estimated
by some modern historians. The somewhat unique fact, that Sallust’s mono-
graphy and Cicero’s speeches are extant may explain the prolific research on
this topic. For the 20 remaining years of his life, following the failure of Catiline’s
revolt, Cicero never missed an opportunity to remind his listeners or readers,
that he, and he alone, had been the saviour of the Republic. This personal
claim soon proved too much for his audiences, and his opponents ironically

\textsuperscript{51} Plut. Cic. 22; Sall. Cat. 48.  \textsuperscript{52} Cass. Dio XXXVII. 10. 4.
\textsuperscript{53} Fam. V. 6. Qu. Fr. I. 1. 6.
\textsuperscript{54} De off. II. 84; see also Baugans: Le pret et l’interet, 1888; Th. Streube: Der Zinsfuß
\textsuperscript{55} Cic. Pro Flacc. 95.
referred to Cicero as “omnia comperi.” “He praised his consulship without end, though not without reason.”66 It is possible therefore that it was largely due to Cicero’s self-praise that Catiline became more famous in history than Saturninus, Drusus, Sulpicius Rufus or Sertorius. Catiline’s conspiracy was but a single episode leading to the eventual fall of the Republic. None the less Catiline’s part in the history of the “tabulae novae” is unique in its importance. This was in effect the first attempt to abolish debts, not through legislation, but through armed revolt.

An alliance was made between indebted aristocrats and the plebs chiefly against the money lenders who belonged to the ordo equester. The upper classes were not the only ones who hoped to profit by the abolition of debts. Had the plebs not felt similarly, the slogan tabulae novae would not have had an echo. The Catilinarian conspiracy demonstrates the truth of Aristotle’s” (Pol. 1304b) συνάγει γὰρ τοὺς ἐχθρίστους ὁ κοινὸς φόβος.

It is difficult indeed to evaluate the personality of Catiline. Needless to say that Cicero’s condemnation is excessive. Sallust relates that after the execution of the Catilinarians Cicero’s position became awkward:67 “Non nulli ficta et haec et multa praeterea existimabant ab eis qui Ciceronis invidiae quaes postea orta est, leniri credebant, atrocitate sceleris eorum qui poenas dederant. Nobis ea res pro magnitudine parum comperta est.”

The mutual abuse which pervaded the political atmosphere of Republican Rome should not mislead us. If only Clodius’ speeches had survived, the younger Cato would have been known to us, not as a symbol of Roman virtue, but as carnifex civium.68 However, we cannot grant Catiline the title of social reformer, because this title should be reserved for a man’s accomplishments and not only for his good intentions. It is impossible to ascertain what the result might have been, had Catiline been successful. Several possibilities were open to him. He might have chosen to follow Sulla or Cinna; he might have anticipated Caesar; nor can we eliminate the possibility that he may have contented himself with a one time cancellation of debts, and after terminating his consulship, left Rome for a province without unduly disturbing the foundations of the Republic. But Catiline failed. Tabulae novae excited the plebs, but his methods met with only partial support. Senators and Knights united with a single purpose to destroy him, and Catiline’s followers could not be called an army.69 After his death Cicero praised Catiline’s abilities as a leader.60 But this too should be taken not without reserve. As a matter of fact, Catiline proved hesitant at the most crucial points of the revolt, and the ignavia of his followers,61 was a factor contributing to his failure.

60 Sall. Cat. 43. See also Gelzer op. cit.: “Nirgends begegnet uns ein neuer und ursprünglicher Gedanke, und die Durchführung war, abgesehen von Pistoria, jämmerlich.”
Throughout this episode, Caesar stood on the side lines, learning from Catiline’s mistakes which he was never to repeat.

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* My thanks are due to Mr. J. P. V. D. Balsdon and Mr. G. Bowersock who kindly read the manuscript and to Mr. R. Reisman who helped me with the English text of the article. They are not to be held responsible for the views expressed in this paper.