In his recent monograph on Mithridates VI Eupator, McGing describes the propaganda with which the king of Pontus tried to obtain support in his wars against Rome\(^1\). Among the texts discussed by McGing, Sallust Hist.4,69 Maurenbrecher figures as ‘potentially one of the most important sources for Mithridates’ propaganda, as it purports to be a personal letter of the king himself’ (154,178). On the other hand, it is probably not based on an authentic document and encompasses several ideas of a ‘general rhetorical nature’, which Sallust easily could have thought out without any knowledge of Greek and Mithridatic anti-Roman propaganda, by just putting himself in Mithridates’ situation. (McGing 154-160). We think it probable that the form in which the arguments of Mithridates are presented is also Sallustian invention of the same general rhetorical nature. Apart from the opening formula (Rex Mithridates regi Arsaci salutem), the text is an elaborate specimen of deliberative oratory. As such, it has been analysed with the help of Aristotel’s Rhetorica and handbooks written by contemporaries of Sallust by E. Bikerman in an article written in 1941 and published in REL 24 (1947): La Lettre de Mithridate dans les “Histoires” de Salluste. The purpose of this paper is to modify and

supplement this still indispensable article—if only because of its
great number of references to rhetorical theory,—on the principle
that the method of analysing forensic oratory demonstrated by C.
Neumeister, Grundsätze der forensischen Rhetorik gezeigt an Gerichtsreden
Ciceros (München 1964) offers a sound starting point for the inter-
pretation of deliberative oratory as well. Like the specimens of
Ciceronian forensic oratory discussed by Neumeister, this letter
will be analysed as a process of persuasion during which the orator
proceeds step by step to his final aim, the decision to be taken by
Arsaces to join the war against Rome. This process is not only
determined by its aim but also by the situation in which the letter
is placed by Sallust. Little is left of his account of the events
preceding Mithridates’ letter to Arsaces (i.e. Phraates III, king of
Parthia since 70-69, Ziegler 24). But it is possible to get an idea of
Sallust’s version of this part of the third Mithridatic war by combin-
ing the short fragments and the letter itself with the facts mentioned
by authors who rely more or less on the Historiae: Plutarch, Dio
Cassius and, possibly, Appian2). In the spring of 73 (McGing 139
and 145), hostilities between Rome and Mithridates break out
again. After initial successes, reverses and disasters on land and sea
follow one another. A Roman army under Lucullus invades Pontus
and forces Mithridates to flee to Armenia. By 70 Pontus is occupied
by the Romans (Hist. 4,4-19 Maurenbrecher; Plutarch Lucullus 15-
19). The Armenian king, Tigranes, gave refuge to his father-in-
law, but refused to get involved in the war to help him regain his
kingdom. Lucullus, in order to solve the Mithridatic problem once
and for all, demanded his surrender in such a way that Tigranes
could not comply, and invaded Armenia (Hist. 4,56-57; Plutarch
Lucullus 21). Tigranes tried to stop the Roman invasion by ventur-
ing a formal battle near Tigranocerta and suffered a crushing
defeat. In the winter 69-68 he levied a new army, the command of
which was entrusted to Mithridates, and it is in this period that
Sallust makes Mithridates write his letter to the Parthian king to
persuade him to join forces against the Romans (Hist. 4,58-69;

2) For the debt of these authors to Sallust Hist. cf. B. Maurenbrecher, Pro-
legomena (Leipzig 1891, repr. Stuttgart 1967), 47 ff.; J. van Ooteghem, Lucullus
(Brussel 1959), 215 ff.; McGing 176 ff.