

WAR, FAILURE, AND ARISTOCRATIC COMPETITION

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THIS is the fiftieth year since the publication of *The Roman Revolution*: it therefore seems only fitting that we devote the APA's initial history panel to political competition among the Roman aristocracy, for Syme's masterpiece has done more to shape the terms of the debate on this topic, in the United States and Great Britain at least, than any other work before or since. It is, however, an equally appropriate tribute to this pioneering work if we attempt to strike out in some new directions this morning. In that spirit I would like to look beyond the ebb and flow of particular conflicts, man against man or one faction against another, to the broader system of which such contests were a part and to some of the problems inherent in it.

Like modern capitalism, aristocratic competition at Rome required restraints to save it from its own internal contradictions: if allowed to proceed to its logical conclusion, it would sooner or later have self-destructed, as the most successful used the power they accumulated to defeat weaker rivals until one individual or a small group monopolized access to office and authority and so brought free political rivalry to an end. For its own good, therefore, and for the good of the aristocracy, the system had to impose limits; for as Syme long ago remarked, "No oligarchy could survive if its members refused to abide by the rules."¹ Yet to a very large extent, enforcement depended ultimately on the political class itself, and perhaps more often than not those who comprised it were either players in or interested observers of the contests. What, then, kept their struggles with one another within bounds, when violations could confer some immediate advantage in a specific conflict? The problem is crucial, not only because the system's brakes ultimately failed and left the Republic a casualty in the crash, but, more importantly, because down to that point the brakes had operated reliably for centuries. That not only ensured domestic peace and the smooth operation of the competitive engine over the long haul, despite the recklessness of some of the drivers, but thereby helped the engine propel the Roman juggernaut down the road to world empire.

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1. *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 57–58.

I would like to examine this morning one piece of this puzzle: the challenge that military failure posed to the need to restrict competition in one crucial area and the ways in which the system met this challenge. Aristotle observes in the *Politics* that one of the ills to which aristocracies and oligarchies in Greece often fell prey was the concentration of privilege and power in the hands of a smaller group within their ranks: whenever such an inner oligarchy formed, the upper class fractured, and stasis was the result.² One of the great strengths of the Roman aristocracy during the middle and even the late Republic lay in its ability by and large to obviate this danger and so avoid the threat to cohesiveness that it entailed. Doing so, however, required a fairly broad distribution of offices within the senatorial class, and aristocratic competition was the principal means of bringing this distribution about. The high rate of failure it entailed insured that access to *honores* and authority never became wholly a function of descent and hence highly exclusive.³ Within the highest echelons of the political elite, competition kept the hierarchy of the city's most prominent families fluid, so that none could ever achieve a permanent predominance; on the margins, by enabling new men and the scions of lesser families to gain consulates and so capture a place within the inner circles of the governing class, it allowed potential challengers to be co-opted. As for the rest, they too could anticipate some benefit from a frequent turnover among the holders of office—if not a post for themselves, then the victory of a family member or political ally—and that helped produce widespread support for the rules of the game as currently constituted.

Therefore various measures were in place to secure the necessary diversity among those who held *imperium*. Prominent among these measures was a rule regarding tenure of the same office more than once. Down to the mid-second century, holding the consulate two times within ten years was forbidden; thereafter, specific legislation debarred iteration altogether until 81, when Sulla's *lex annalis* restored the old limit.⁴ In unusual circumstances exceptions were made, but they merely underscore the general rule. This was perhaps only the best articulated instance of a broader custom against taking more than one turn in the same magistracy, for repetition of the praetorship is normally very rare, while holding a second censorship is practically unheard of. That put limits on the degree of political success the most powerful individuals could achieve and furnished opportunities for others to gain stature in their turn.

2. *Pol.* 1305b1–22; cf. 1306b22–24.

3. See P. A. Brunt, "Nobilitas and Novitas," *JRS* 72 (1982): 15–16; K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 107–16; cf. D. C. Earl, *The Political and Moral Tradition of Rome* (Ithaca, 1967), p. 14.

4. See A. E. Astin, *The Lex Annalis before Sulla*, Collection Latomus vol. 32 (Brussels, 1958), pp. 19–20; R. C. Calvert, "M. Claudius Marcellus, Cos. II 155," *Athenaeum* 39 (1961): 19–22. The date at which the ten-year rule was adopted is a notorious crux; see most recently R. Billows, "Legal Fiction and Political Reform in the Early Second Century B.C.," *Phoenix* 43 (1989): 112–33.

Yet what was necessary for the welfare of the aristocracy was fundamentally at odds with the needs of the city's warmaking. The highest public offices frequently entailed taking charge of serious military affairs—often at the praetorian level, almost always at the consular. War is a dangerous and uncertain enterprise, and experienced leadership is always an asset. Yet the need to insure that many different men held the state's chief magistracies denied the Republic this advantage. Once victory might seem to have proven a consul's aptitude for command, his opportunities to hold similar posts thereafter were highly restricted. Instead, the needs of the system dictated that competition for such positions be limited to men who might be without prior experience in command of an army, or whose earlier showings there had been mediocre at best. To be sure, praetors who had triumphed seem to have enjoyed a significant advantage over their competitors in rivalry for the consulate, but that only makes it all the more surprising that the superior claims of consular *triumphatores* could be largely denied.⁵

How, then, could a society that went to war virtually every year perpetuate a practice that—though essential for the cohesiveness of its ruling class—apparently handicapped its military effectiveness? A number of things might help. Older, more experienced *legati* could be sent along to advise; an oath could be required of the soldiers that they would stand firm in battle. Religious ceremonial was regularly brought to bear. And the Republic's long record of victorious warfare was surely important as well, for it demonstrated that such measures, and indeed the system itself, had worked successfully in the past and were likely to do so again. But when they did not, it was also imperative to prevent a general's role in causing the defeat from becoming an issue in subsequent rivalry.

Blaming a leader's inexperience or incompetence was in effect an argument for awarding such offices to those who had already demonstrated that they had what it took to win. Once criticism of a general's decisions became the subject of partisan strife, sooner or later the public was going to get the idea that some candidates were less qualified than others and that placing the conduct of important military affairs in their hands could lead to very unhappy results. If all contenders were not equal in this regard, then the voters might well come to see it as imperative to weigh demonstrated ability heavily when making their choice, particularly those who would go on to serve as soldiers under the winning candidate. Why take chances with an unknown? If no candidate had evinced any real aptitude for the job, then simple prudence dictated giving it to someone who had. In the long run, this kind of thinking would ultimately subvert the limit on iteration of office, as voters repeatedly sought generals of proven competence in order to avoid defeat and enhance prospects for victory. Public reluctance to gamble on

5. See W. V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 31–33.

untested leaders in turn would cause the distribution of honor and authority and political power within the upper class to become increasingly constricted. The needs of the system thus demanded a myth of universal aristocratic competence: to award military commands to individuals whose principal qualifications might lie in such seemingly irrelevant assets as high birth or rhetorical talent, it was imperative that the voters perceive all candidates as more or less equally able to undertake whatever tasks the office they were seeking entailed. This in turn required that the fact of having presided over a military defeat be denied any relevance in subsequent political contests, particularly those for public office.⁶

Although it may seem surprising, there is ample evidence to indicate that this last was precisely the case: the subsequent careers of defeated generals for the most part appear entirely normal.⁷ Many went on to hold the Republic's highest elective offices, the consulate and censorship. They did so, moreover, in proportions about equal to those of their undefeated peers: one in five of each group became censor; about a third of praetorians, whether defeated or not, went on to become consul in the period 197–81 B.C., when six praetors were elected annually. As nearly as can be determined, advancement to these offices came with roughly the same rapidity in either group. Furthermore, notwithstanding their earlier poor showings in command, defeated generals later secured consulships that entailed important military responsibilities, gaining their victories at the polls even at times when wars abroad were not going well. Evidence of their continued political strength is not restricted to the *comitia*, however. It was not uncommon for their peers in the senate to prorogue the commands of defeated generals or reappoint them to similar posts. They almost never suffered the indignity of having the conduct of a war taken out of their hands simply because they had lost a battle. Even those who did not hold another elective office or promagistracy nevertheless continued to conduct the city's business or otherwise remained active in public life. Finally, defeated consulars saw their sons achieve the praetorship and consulate about as often as the sons of other men who had held the consulship and sustained no military failure. By every conceivable measure, therefore, a defeat ordinarily had absolutely no impact on a political career.

Yet war and politics were closely linked: the ambitions of those who had won the city's victories often received an enormous boost as a result, and for that reason a lost battle might be expected to have brought with it a major political setback. Certainly this was true elsewhere. In Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries, unsuccessful war leaders regularly paid a heavy price when their missions ended in failure. At Carthage, the

6. A military defeat's lack of political impact will have been a feature of rivalry both for the consulship and for the censorship, since it is difficult to see how the phenomenon can have played a role in competition for the former but not the latter.

7. On what follows, see my monograph, *Imperatores Victi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990), chap. 1.

citizens evinced a singular brutality when their armies met defeat: Punic commanders were crucified. So at Rome, with its relentless competition among an intensely ambitious aristocracy, how could failure be kept from becoming an issue in subsequent rivalry and seriously damaging the aspirations of the individual who had been in command?

It was certainly not the case that the public remained quiescent when battles were lost. On the contrary, abundant testimony confirms what intuition would surmise: military disaster produced panic and rage among the civilian population.⁸ That ought to have been a potent force, for a hostile public had effective ways of lashing out. Most aristocratic competition took place under its arbitration, in elections for office or through the deliberations of judicial assemblies.⁹ To be effective, of course, such animosities needed to be marshaled and directed, but leaders would not have been lacking. Candidates anxious for office ought to have been quick to remind the electors of defeats sustained under an opponent's auspices and to rekindle the antagonism that had burned then. Enemies eager to settle old scores should have seized upon a defeat as an opportunity to prosecute a general in court. And in fact several *were* condemned in just this way in the aftermath of their failures.¹⁰ But their cases only sharpen the paradox, since most commanders never faced similar consequences despite losses equally or even more severe. Something, therefore, kept competitors from using the issue against rivals vulnerable on this count, even though other factors ought to have made such a move seem obvious and opportune. The question is what.

It does not seem to me very likely that over the long run any "gentlemen's agreement" simply to avoid raising the subject could have held firm against the constant pressure to gain an edge in any particular contest. Sooner or later, someone would have seized the advantage an opponent's defeat offered and set a precedent. Similarly, explanations based on the machinations of factional politics, even if one accepts their premises, also appear insufficient. To assume that a coalition could protect one of its members from paying the political price for a defeat just begs the question what gave it the power to do so. What kept public

8. See, e.g., Polyb. 3. 85. 7-9, Livy 22. 7. 6-14, 55. 3-56. 1, 27. 20. 11-13, 21. 1-5 (with Plut. *Marc.* 27. 1-4), 41. 6. 1-3, 7. 4-10.

9. See F. Millar, "The Political Character of the Classical Roman Republic," *JRS* 74 (1984): 1-19; cf. M. I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 70, 84-96. Although the voters who mattered in these types of assemblies were the wealthy, who were hardly representative of the populace as a whole, they also as a class bore a disproportionately greater burden of military service in terms of their actual numbers throughout most of the period: see C. Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), p. 111. One would therefore expect them to have been more alive to the consequences of military defeat and quicker to vent their anger against the men perceived to be responsible.

10. Generals brought to trial following defeats include: M. Aemilius Lepidus Porcina, procos. 136; C. Antonius Hibrida, procos. 62-61; P. Claudius Pulcher, cos. 249; Cn. Fulvius Flaccus, pr. 212; M. Iunius Silanus, cos. 109; L. Licinius Lucullus, propr. 103; (?) Cn. Mallius Maximus, cos. 105; (?) Cn. Papirius Carbo, cos. 113; C. Plautius Hypsaesus, pr. 146; Q. Pompeius, cos. 141, procos. 140; C. Porcius Cato, cos. 114; Sp. Postumius Albinus, cos. 110; C. Servilius, propr. 102; Q. Servilius Caepio, procos. 105.

outrage below the point where clients would refuse to heed the advice of patrons to cast their ballots for the man responsible? What stilled criticism so that *amici* could remain loyal to a candidate, instead of having to break with him now that he was the object of widespread censure in order to avoid being dragged down with him? Perhaps Rome's long string of successful wars and the distance of the frontiers might have made individual setbacks there seem matters of less immediate public concern and so less politically volatile. Yet such a hypothesis does not really fit the facts: the fate of defeated generals between 390 and 49 B.C. does not vary with the location of the defeat or the extent of Rome's empire at the time.¹¹ Forces far more consistent in their effect were required.

Religion supplied one. The Romans thought of themselves as a very devout people and attributed much of their success to divine favor. That produced an instinctive tendency to look to the state of the *pax deorum* when things went wrong. Most of the Republic's greatest defeats were believed to have sprung from mistakes in religious procedure, and it seems fairly certain that this was the usual response to lesser reverses as well. The errors themselves fall into two broad categories: the unwitting and the willful. In the first, the Romans unconsciously commit some transgression with predictably dire results: for example, offering battle on a *dies religiosus* at the Allia in 390,¹² or failing to recognize that the unchastity of the Vestal virgins in 216 constituted a *prodigium* prior to Cannae.¹³ The disasters which followed thus became merely symptoms of a far more profound crisis in the state of relations between the Romans and their gods, and hence diminished the responsibility of the general in command. If the deities withheld their support, then the effect of human error on what had transpired on the battlefield was all but nil.

On the other hand, the sources attribute several disasters to a general's willful neglect of ritual, most notably Drepana in 249, after P. Claudius Pulcher decided to leave Rome *contra auspicia*,¹⁴ and the debacle at Lake Trasimene in 217, when C. Flaminius violated customary ceremonies.¹⁵ In most of these cases, the general died, so that in effect the

11. As late as 55 Cicero could make extravagant claims about the defeats his enemy Piso had allegedly suffered, in a clear bid to rouse *invidia* against him: see *Pis.* 91–92, *Sest.* 71, *Prov. cons.* 4–5.

12. Livy 6. 1. 11; cf. Cic. *Att.* 9. 5. 2, Varro *Ling.* 6. 32, *Fasti Antiatres Maiores* a.d. XV Kal. Sextilis (= *Inscr. Ital.* 13. 2, p. 15), *CIL* 9. 4192, 11. 1421. 25, Tac. *Hist.* 2. 91, Plut. *Cam.* 19. 1, *De vir. ill.* 23. 7. There is an alternative tradition that regards the error as sacrifice on a *dies ater*: Cassius Hemina frag. 20 P., Cn. Gellius frag. 25 P. (both ap. Macr. *Sat.* 1. 16. 21–24); cf. Verrius Flaccus ap. Gell. *NA* 5. 17. 2, Livy 6. 1. 12, Plut., *Cam.* 19. 8, *Mor.* 269F.

13. Livy 22. 57. 2–4; differently, T. Cornell, "Some Observations on the *Crimen Incesti*," in *Le délit religieux dans la cité antique*, ed. J. Scheid, Collection de l'École française de Rome 48 (Rome, 1981), pp. 27–37, who does not persuade: cf. A. M. Eckstein, "Human Sacrifice and Fear of Military Disaster in Republican Rome," *AJAH* 7 (1982): 71–73.

14. Polyb. 1. 52. 2–3, Cic. *Div.* 1. 29. 2. 20, 71; *Nat. D.* 2. 7, Livy frag. 12 (cf. *Per.* 19), 22. 42. 9, Val. Max. 1. 4. 3, 8. 1. abs. 4, Suet. *Tib.* 2. 2, Flor. 1. 18. 29, *Schol. Bob.* 90 St. The story is rejected by F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1957), pp. 113–14, and T. P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 90–92; accepted by F. Münzer, "Claudius (no. 304)," *RE* 3 (1899): 2858, and R. A. Bauman, *The Crimen Maiestatis* (Johannesburg, 1970), pp. 27–29.

15. Coelius Antipater frag. 20 P. (ap. Cic. *Div.* 1. 77; cf. frag. 19 P. ap. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2. 8), Livy 21. 63. 5–14, 22. 1. 5–7, 3. 7–14, Val. Max. 1. 1. 6, Plut. *Fab.* 3. 1; and note esp. the verdict of Q. Fabius

gods themselves might be thought to have punished the guilty party, and someone now conveniently unable to answer charges wound up shouldering the blame. Yet two, at least, came back alive, and their dissimilar fates are highly instructive. The Claudius Pulcher just mentioned faced trial and, after narrowly escaping a capital sentence, sustained a heavy fine. M. Terentius Varro, however, who ordered the attack at Cannae on August 2, a *dies ater* and so inappropriate for warfare, received the senate's thanks—and two further commands—after the catastrophe.¹⁶ Yet Pulcher had defied the auspices, whereas Varro almost certainly had sought the gods' approval for his decision.¹⁷ It was not uncommon for generals to play fast and loose with religious regulations; the Romans understood that both sides were bound by the rites and made every attempt to exploit that fact.¹⁸ But when defeat indicated that the gods had become angry, auspication supplied a way to avoid the imputation that such antics had been the cause. No source so much as mentions Varro's choice of date in connection with the religious genesis of the disaster; attention centers instead on prodigies and expiation as the senate sought explanations in the realm of unwitting error. As long as a general was told that the chickens had eaten with gusto before a battle, as far as he was concerned the gods had turned a blind eye to any procedural irregularities. The *pax deorum* was still in place, and the gods would lend their support. There were no grounds for criticism here.

However, few at Rome can have imagined that victory was simply a matter of performing the right rituals flawlessly and letting the gods do the rest. Human actions mattered, and that meant blaming failure on religious error was, so to speak, only half the battle. It was also necessary to discover its mortal causes elsewhere than in an untried commander's ignorance or folly, and to provide some means of validating his performance, notwithstanding the result. Two things made this possible. One was the conviction that battles turned on the discipline, courage, and determination of the legions.¹⁹ The key to victory in the

Maximus ap. Livy 22. 9. 7. This story, too, is usually rejected, but its importance lies in the impulse to invent it and in what its form reveals about the Roman frame of mind.

16. The date is preserved only in Claudius Quadrigarius frag. 53 P.; cf. A. J. Holladay and M. D. Goodman, "Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare," *CQ* 36 (1986): 151–71. Varro was a promagistrate in 215–13 and 208–7.

17. At 22. 41. 1–42. 12, Livy relates how the Romans very nearly fell into an ambush prepared by Hannibal shortly before Cannae. The incident is almost certainly fictive, since Polybius omits it entirely and Livy's account is clearly intended to illustrate Varro's rashness, which impels him to rush into Hannibal's trap. He and the Romans are saved only by his colleague's opposition and the sacred chickens, which refused to eat (Livy 22. 42. 7–9). But on a more subtle level this tale also demonstrates that Varro was no Flaminius or Pulcher: note esp. 22. 42. 9. Unlike them, he heeded the auspices when the gods withheld permission to act. It is difficult to imagine how such a story could have arisen if there was the slightest belief that Cannae had proved disastrous because Varro had entered battle without the express approval of the gods.

18. Cf. H. D. Jocelyn, "The Roman Nobility and the Religion of the Republican State," *JHR* 4 (1966–67): 102–3; J. North, "Conservatism and Change in Roman Religion," *PBSR* n.s. 30 (1976): 5–7; J. Linderski, "Cicero and Roman Divination," *PP* 37 (1982): 32; A. Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft among the Romans* (Baltimore, 1982), pp. 42–52.

19. On what follows, see esp. P. Culham, "Choices, Constraints, and Chaos in Ancient Military Engagements," *World Futures* 27 (1989): 191–205. By far the best analysis of combat between armies of

sorts of large-scale, set-piece battles that decided most of Rome's conflicts was the ability of its soldiers to stand firm, maintain the integrity of their tactical formations, and bring sufficient pressure to bear on their opponents to compel them to break ranks and flee. This was emphatically warfare by position: in effect, once the lines were drawn up and the fighting had begun, the battle largely belonged to the legions to win or lose. Generals skilled or foolhardy enough to seek a victory by means of some daring strategy seem to have been few and far between at Rome. Most appear to have been content to let their soldiers do the real work, while perhaps they themselves—like Octavian and Brutus at the second battle of Philippi—raced about behind the lines, “exciting the men by their ardor, exhorting the toilers to toil on, and relieving those who were exhausted” (App. *BCiv.* 4. 128 Loeb trans.; cf. Caes. *BGall.* 5. 33).

A conventional view of warfare that placed the principal onus on the rank and file thus fit neatly into a system of rotational command within the political elite. On the one hand, it suggested that special expertise or ability, as demonstrated by prior success, was largely irrelevant to winning battles. On the other, it meant that in defeat attention tended to focus principally on the soldiers' shortcomings, as opposed to the tactical or strategic errors of their commander. So, for example, the senate sent the survivors from Cannae to Sicily in disgrace to serve out the remainder of the war because they had elected to save themselves by flight once the battle was lost (Livy 23. 25. 7–8; cf. 31. 2; 25. 5. 10–7. 4, esp. 7. 3). In the eyes of the *patres*, that was no excuse: good soldiers stood their ground at all costs and, if necessary, died where they stood (cf. Polyb. 3. 84. 7, Livy 24. 14. 7; Caes. *BCiv.* 1. 44. 3). When they did not, it was their own fault, not the fault of the inexperienced or incompetent general who had led them into a position where victory was impossible and the instinct to survive left them no means of escape besides running away.

Yet within a deeply competitive political culture this view alone would scarcely have been enough to nullify the domestic repercussions of defeat for very long. Certainly, all aristocrats shared an interest in perpetuating such notions because they helped justify their own pretensions to command. But there was always a danger that in the heat of competition this common advantage would take a back seat to the more immediate gains to be derived from whipping up antagonism against an enemy. Public anger would not necessarily scruple over the niceties of culpability. Something beyond just a general's ability to claim that it was not his fault would seem required to account for the failure of a defeat to have any impact on his subsequent career. Equally crucial, in my view, were the role of an aristocratic ethos in shaping public perceptions

heavily armed infantry is W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, vol. 3 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974), pp. 1–93, who focuses on Greek phalanges; however, he illustrates the principles by reference to the second battle of Philippi as described in App. *BCiv.* 4. 128.

of a commander's performance, and a belief in *virtus* as the preeminent qualification for public office.

Proper deportment in war, as Flamininus explained to the Aetolians, required gentlemen to be "stern and hot-blooded in combat, noble and high-minded in defeat, and moderate, mild, and benevolent when they conquer" (Polyb. 18. 37. 7). Certainly in 197, when he reportedly spoke these words, the last elements were uppermost in his mind, but the rest of the passage also reveals an awareness that a particular stance was required during and after a crisis. The idealization of fierce combativeness and great reluctance to bow to defeat occurs repeatedly in the sources, perhaps nowhere more strikingly than in the remarkable transformation in their portrait of C. Flaminius' final hours. Polybius, working from hostile, contemporary accounts, pictures him as distressed and largely inert while the fighting swirls around him at Lake Trasimene (3. 84. 6). But in Livy's telling more than a century later, the consul is conspicuous in the thick of the fray, struggling courageously and lending his aid wherever the fighting is hottest, until he is at last cut down in single combat (22. 6. 2-4). The change is not likely to have resulted from writers' becoming generally more sympathetic in the interval. Rather, the annalists knew how a Roman general facing catastrophe ought to behave, and so they remolded their accounts to reflect the qualities required. The resulting portrait clearly manifests in concrete terms precisely the qualities Flamininus commended to the Aetolians.

How many others measured up to the ideal it is impossible to know, but the evidence suggests most probably did. Generals died in their defeats frequently enough during the last two-and-a-half centuries of the Republic to indicate that crisis often led commanders to put themselves in harm's way. Very few allowed themselves to be taken alive. That those who survived fought sternly and with passion as long as the battle raged cannot of course be demonstrated. What is clear, however, is that generals who fell egregiously short of expectations in this regard saw their military defeats turn into political nightmares. The praetor Cn. Fulvius Flaccus, for example, was indicted in 211 for losing his army to Hannibal in the previous year. He became the object of widespread public outrage, however, only when witnesses revealed that he had been the first to run when the attack commenced (Livy 25. 21. 1-10, 26. 1. 9, 2. 7-3. 12, 27. 1. 9, Oros. 4. 16. 17). A central theme in the prosecution of Q. Servilius Caepio, one of the generals at the Arausio in 105, appears to have been a similar charge of cowardice, to judge by the fact that a decade later the orator Antonius based his defense of Caepio's prosecutor Norbanus on censure of Caepio's flight and a lament for the destruction of his army. Antonius intended thereby to rekindle old animosities (Cic. *De or.* 2. 199; cf. 2. 124, 200, 203), so it seems fair to surmise that these were the issues Norbanus himself had used to set them ablaze in the first place. Nor was a general safely out of the woods once he had broken off the fight. As Polybius explained to his Greek readers, it was the Romans' peculiar and ancestral custom to appear at

their most stubborn and severe whenever they were beaten.²⁰ Down to the end of the Republic, it remained a point of honor even among defeated generals to refuse negotiations with an armed enemy, no matter how desperate the situation (Sall. *Cat.* 34. 1, Caes. *BGall.* 5. 36. 3, 39. 1–52. 6). Thus C. Hostilius Mancinus, Sp. Postumius Albinus, and C. Popillius Laenas got into trouble not because they suffered defeat but because they decided afterwards to capitulate rather than order their men to fight their way out or die trying.²¹

The charges of cowardice and dishonor prominent in these and other trials of generals should not be dismissed as merely the common stuff of political invective, irrelevant to the real issues. In these cases, they *were* the real issue. They represent the only factor that to my mind can adequately explain why the enormous public anger their defeats generated could be directed against these few individuals, whereas the *inimici* of other defeated generals were unable to do the same against them. That strongly suggests that the latter had satisfied public expectations on this point and so rendered themselves proof against similar accusations. Conforming to the posture required in defeat, in turn, had two effects within aristocratic competition. In the first place, it furnished grounds for commending a general's performance. Defeat, like the rest of the *res publica*, became an arena for the display of *virtus*. A commander who resisted courageously won *gloria* thereby and deserved praise, not censure. More important in practical terms was the clear parallel that could be drawn between the courage and steadfastness expected of a commander and the analogous qualities demanded in his soldiers. In a crisis, honor dictated precisely the conduct that, in view of the paramount importance the Romans placed on the soldiers' efforts, would do most to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. At such moments, generals became avatars for their men. That made it difficult to find grounds for complaint, particularly for an aristocracy that looked upon *virtus* as one of the principal sources of legitimacy for elite status.

In the second place, these same considerations helped instill the confidence necessary to elevate untested men, or even those who might be deemed to have failed the test, to positions of command and so to circulate such offices widely within the upper class. Rome never developed anything like a formal military academy to identify promising individuals and train them in the technical skills necessary for command. To be sure, young aristocrats spent a decade or more at war before they ever sought election to positions that would place them in charge of an army, but few if any of those years need have been spent actually leading troops into battle.²² What young aristocrats could and did do, however,

20. Polyb. 27. 8. 8; cf. Livy 42. 62. 11; cf. also Polyb. 21. 17. 1 (with Livy 37. 45. 12 and F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 3 [Oxford, 1979], p. 109) and Polyb. 3. 75. 8.

21. N. Rosenstein, "Imperatores Victi: The Case of C. Hostilius Mancinus," *CA* 5 (1986): 233–36.

22. B. Campbell, "Teach Yourself How to be a General," *JRS* 77 (1987): 20–22; differently, Harris, *War and Imperialism*, pp. 10–16.

was pursue *virtus* and *gloria*, particularly by striving to win a reputation for courage, something positively vital for anyone intending to embark on a political career. Thus the one thing that voters could know about a candidate was his moral character. Being satisfied that he measured up on this score thus bolstered confidence that he could be entrusted with weighty military responsibilities, for personal bravery had a direct bearing upon a general's principal duty in an emergency: to serve as a model for his men. Again, holding defeated generals to a moral standard of judgment helped confirm the central importance of *virtus* as the quality that fit a man for public office and enabled him to benefit the Republic, and so contributed to the ideological underpinnings of the aristocracy's collective dominance. But in so doing, this standard also furnished a way for defeated generals to maintain and possibly even enhance their reputation for *virtus*, and thus preserve a basis for further success in the competitive arena.

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