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Marius' Mules: Paving the Path to Power

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I

Gaius Marius (157-86 B.C.) has long been a controversial figure in Roman history. His spectacular life and career which included seven consulships has been subject to many different interpretations. After his death, debate still rages about how much of his life and actions set the stage for the slow death of the Roman Republic. Ancient historians such as Plutarch have credited Marius with number of military reforms paving the way for the increased political influence of the army. This paper discusses how Marius' effectively marshalled several ongoing changes occurring within the Roman army while using military glory to vault over rejection by the Senate to the heights of political power.

The defeat of Hannibal at the end of the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) left the Roman Republic poised for an unprecedented era of expansion. The annexation of Carthaginian holdings including Spain, Sardinia and Corsica brought wealth and opportunity to many. Families of senatorial rank continued to use military glory as a method of acquiring political power and prestige. The extensive series of wars all over the Mediterranean created the roots for several political and societal changes that are later reflected in Marius' reforms in the military. Families such as the Scipioni and Metelli produced several successful generals who won many impressive victories. However, the rate of expansion and large numbers of legions needed for conquest provided opportunities for leaders outside of the Senate to gain notoriety and power.

After the war, Rome was left with a very experienced army along with talented commanders to lead it. This army, tried and tested throughout the Punic War, now challenged the professional *phalanxes* favored by eastern powers beginning with the Second Macedonian War and continuing through the Fourth Macedonian War (200-148 B.C.). The legions sent to

Macedonia were no longer a simple militia force but a disciplined, cohesive fighting unit capable of defeating large phalanxes. Each battle led to larger and more impressive victories over powerful foes. Subsequent commanders used this fame to gain higher and higher status within the Senate and Rome. With the need for greater power and fame, each succeeding general needed to have a larger and more impressive victory than his predecessors. “Flaminius, Scipio Asiaticus, Manlius Vulso and Aemilius Paullus, all of whom had fought successful wars in the Hellenistic east, were each credited with staging a triumph that was greater than any that had preceded it¹.” By the end of the second century B.C., victorious commanders dominated public attention and Marius would prove to become one of the most successful generals.

This expansion during the second century was also time of discord among the Roman populace especially in the lower classes for whom much of the wealth of conquest had escaped them. The immensely successful campaigns in the east not only brought great wealth but large amounts of slaves. The farmer-soldiers who had provided the basis for the legions became under greater stress with their working farms. Small, single family farms were hurt by a soldier's increasingly longer absences and many were not able to maintain their land. Wealthy speculators were able to buy and build large landed estates (*latifundia*). These estates, however, were not worked by former soldiers returning from war but by fresh slaves acquired through subjugation of the newly forming provinces. The dispossessed farmers began to migrate to Rome placing the city under increasing economic pressure. The lower classes turned to popular leaders (*populares*) to push through legislation to restrict some of the activities of the wealthy ruling families (*nobiles*).

1 Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War 100 BC—AD 200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 91.

Tiberius Gracchus (168-133 B.C.) and his brother Gaius (159-121 B.C.) were grandsons of Scipio Africanus but chose to follow the *popularis* political style rather than side with the aristocratic, hard line *optimates* of the Senate. Both brothers pushed for land reform and relief for the thousands of dispossessed farmers and Roman poor. Tiberius was killed in a riot possibly started by members of the Senate while Gaius was killed after the Senate passed the *senatus consultum ultimum*. This decree reaffirmed the power of the Senate backed by physical might. The laws that were passed allowed later politicians like Marius methods to fight against the conservative *nobiles*.

The Gracchi reforms provided tools for Marius included new colonies for the urban poor, and allowed equestrians to provide juries for senatorial trials as well as collect taxes. The military reforms may have reflected a formalization of ongoing social changes. The changes directly involving the army included provisions for the state to pay for equipment and clothing, restrictions on the magistrates to inflict punishments, minimum age for recruitment reaffirmed at seventeen, and, finally, a reiteration of an older law requiring formal elections for military tribunes in the assembly.² All of these changes provided opportunities for Marius to overcome his *novous homo* (new man) status.

II

The information surrounding Marius' life has been clouded by centuries of conjecture, myth and political indignation. Although there are several sources of information, none were written during his lifetime. The trophies and monuments built during his stay in power were destroyed during the conflict with Sulla in the Social War (91-88 B.C.) or faded and were lost

² Lawrence Keppie. *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 58.

over the years. Of the surviving accounts about Marius, each author had a specific theme in their writings that illuminate only a portion of his life. Each author was also positioned in a different era of Roman history and was affected differently by the ripple effect of events stemming from Marius' spectacular career. For example, Cicero, in speeches closest to Marius' lifetime, used Marius' actions as historical examples to provide defenses for Cicero's actions and provided indirect information about Marius. Sextus Julius Frontinus (c. 40-103 A.D.) used several descriptions of Marius' strategies and tactics to provide clear examples of success for later Roman military leaders. Historians to Sulla's dictatorship such as Livy (*From the Founding of the City*) and Appian (*Roman History*, especially the section regarding the Civil Wars) include additional details of Marius' life during the Social War while other sources list brief statements of note.

The two primary sources for this paper are Sallust's *The Jugurthine War* and Plutarch's *The Life of Marius*. Both authors bring unique perspectives to their work and are influenced by both political events during their lifetime and changing perceptions over time. During the intervening years between his death and the various authors, Marius' legend changed and grew in military prominence while his political life became more hidden.

Gaius Sallustius Crispus (86-35 B.C.) was born in central Italy and became a *quaestor* c. 55 B.C. during a time of violent political turmoil in Rome. He showed himself to be a supporter of *populares* and of Julius Caesar. He had a checkered career as a senator, was thrown out by the censors for immoral behavior, but was reinstated through Caesar's influence. After his governorship in North Africa (Numidia), he was accused of mismanagement and again escaped punishment because of his association with Caesar. After Caesar's death, he retired from politics

and began writing. Fragments of his histories exist but his two largest surviving works are about Cataline's conspiracy and the Jugurthine War and demonstrates his disdain for Roman nobility. Sallust's account of the Jugurthine War does have errors in dates and sequence of events, but does give a fair description of Metellus and presents a strong image of Marius³. Sallust was an opponent of the senatorial families and used his study of the Numidian War to emphasize various weaknesses of the elite and contrast the weaknesses against Marius, a soldier of the people.

Plutarch (46-c.120 A.D.) was born in the Greek town of Chaeronea to a wealthy family. He was able to study in Athens and became fascinated with Rome. After traveling for a period of time, he settled in his hometown and devoted himself to writing. Unfortunately, most of his works are lost. The two remaining include *The Moralia*, a series of eclectic essays about customs and moral questions and *Parallel Lives*, where he compares a famous Greek with a famous Roman and then summarizes the two subjects. *The Life of Marius* comes from this work although the summary section has been lost. Plutarch used the biographies to demonstrate different values and faults of his subjects and Marius was no exception. He emphasized Marius' humble birth outside of the *nobiles* and his great skill as a general as objects of virtue, but he showed fault with his temper and lack of diplomacy. Plutarch, writing in the imperial period well after the fall of the Republic, helps to pass on elements of the legend of Marius as well as laying blame on him for providing the opportunity to allow the army to become major influence in Roman politics.

Marius was credited with many military reforms that turned the Roman army from farmer-soldier to professional fighting force. These reforms included recruiting, training, and

3 Sallust, *The Jugurthine War/The Catalinarian Conspiracy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 7-10.

supplying arms to the *capite censi* (landless Roman citizens). He also is credited with reinstating hard training and using the *cohort* (legion subunit of 480 men) instead of the older *manipular* (older, smaller subunit) formation. He is also credited with the alteration of the javelin that allowed the weapon to break after being thrown and not used against the legion in return fire. . . . Marius did not create these reforms and in fact, several had been in use at different times and places for many years before him. He was the first to put all the changes together in a short period of time and with great success.

III

The traditional method to rise in political influence and power was through the *cursus honorum*. This path consisted of holding different offices starting with lower offices (*questor* and *aedile*) slowly moving up to more prestigious positions (*praetor* and hopefully, *consul*). Although the desire of most entering the *cursus* was to rise to one of two consul positions elected for a year, very few were chosen for the highest of offices. Even old patrician families such as the Julii Caesares had difficulty becoming consul (they had one elected during the second century). The beginning of the path began with military service and then election to a low level office. Marius appears to have followed this traditional format at the beginning of his career.

Marius was born in the region around Arpinum and, although mentioned by Plutarch as the son of a laborer, he was from a prominent local family of equestrian status. It is from this point that legend and misinformation creep into different accounts of his life. Plutarch states that Marius was the son of obscure parents “poor people who lived by the labour of their own hands⁴.” This viewpoint may have appealed to Plutarch's desire to provide Marius with a

4 Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives: IX*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) 467.

stronger contrast between nobles and common people. A simple background may also provide a suitable excuse for Marius' portrayal as a “general rather than a 'politicus', a man unmellowed by the graces and made harsh by anger⁵.” However, Marius had sufficient familial connections to serve with Scipio Aemilianus as a cavalry officer in Numantia, Spain. The uneven treatment of his early life shows some of the different purposes Plutarch had in writing about Marius and demonstrates that caution is needed in evaluating Plutarch's information.

After the end of the Numantine War (143-133 B.C.), Marius attempted to build a political career with mixed success. Although he was of the equestrian class, “he was a born soldier, coarse and consumed by two desires: to fight and to hold high office⁶.” According to Plutarch, he was singled out by Scipio Aemilianus for bravery and high military honors. Marius asked Scipio who would be able to follow him as Roman leader and Scipio responded by, “. . . gently tapping him on the shoulder as he reclined next to him, said: 'Here, perhaps⁷.” However, after his appearance in the Numantine War, Marius seems to fade into the background for several years. Richard Evans states that after a military tribune position in c. 130 B.C., Marius may have used his *equestrian* status to gather money as a *publicani* (tax collector) in preparation for pursuing higher offices.⁸

With the assistance of his patrons, the Metelli, he was able to win election as a tribune in 119 B.C. Marius immediately attempted to make a name for himself by “seizing his chance in his tribunate, he did not hesitate to turn against them <the Metelli> in order to become *popularis*:

5 Alan Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 97.

6 Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2006), 59.

7 Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, 469.

8 Richard Evans, *Gaius Marius,, A Political Biography*. (Pretoria: University of South Africa 1994) 29.

though, by opposing a corn bill, he kept the door open⁹.” However, his efforts to support popular policies caused a rift between himself and the Metelli and may have created difficulty in moving to his next political post. This rift may have been exaggerated by later writers who wanted to create a stronger champion of the people and as a contrast against the elite nobles of the Senate (*optimates*). After his tribunate, Marius attempted election to the first of the lower offices, the *aedile* (magistrates responsible for public works).. Plutarch notes that he failed to win election to both the *curule aedile*, but also the plebian *aedile*¹⁰.

Marius remained undeterred after these defeats and threw his energy into the campaign for the praetorship. He was forced to use his own wealth to be elected to the sixth and last position of *praetor* in 115 B.C. Although he was prosecuted for election fraud prior to taking office, Marius was not convicted on a tie vote. He was allowed to take office and his time as praetor seems to be quiet and unremarkable and, unlike his tribunate, did not seem to generate any actions worthy of special note. After his term as praetor, he was allocated far Spain by the Senate. This allocation demonstrated a mixed message of his overall position as a rising member of the political scene. He was given a province that had a military command in a very volatile area and the chance for military glory. However, Spain was not a province that many aspired too compared to the wealthier provinces in the east. Even the public and army were reticent to travel to Spain.

The legions sent to Spain did not have the same level of success during the first half of the second century B.C as their eastern counterparts. They did not confront large disciplined armies as in the east but were confronted with a series of undisciplined tribes vying with each

9 Ernst Badian. “From the Gracchi to Sulla (1940-59),”*Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 11, no. 2 (1962): 216.

10 Evans, *Gaius Marius*, 44.

other as well as the Romans for control. The elite commanders used political pressure to be assigned the choice positions in the east, while lesser commanders were sent to Spain. Lawrence Keppie states, “. . . <Spain> was marked by frequent reverses; everywhere there was evidence of greed, cruelty, and insensitivity towards the half-conquered tribes¹¹.” The tumultuous political conditions between tribes forced Rome to leave two legions in the region and later expanded them to four. This duty became a drain on Roman manpower and support and posting here was considered, “. . . an ancient equivalent of the Russian front—where hard fighting in an inhospitable terrain might bring little reward¹².”

Marius was allowed to travel to Spain and his previous military experience under Scipio Aemilianus may have helped to achieve moderate success as governor. During this time, he seemed to realize “that further progress was impossible, unless he made up his quarrel with his old patrons¹³” or unless he found another path to follow his ambitions. Upon his return to Rome he continued to build his *cursus honorum* and his political connections. Marius' had enough wealth and political status to be able to marry into the lesser patrician family of the Julii Caesares in 112 B.C. It seems that he was also able to repair his relationship with the Metelli, because he was soon chosen to accompany Quintus Caecilius Metellus as legate during preparations for the Jugurthine War (112-106 B.C.).

IV

The Jugurthine War (112-106 B.C.) provided an excellent opportunity to provide the military glory necessary to lift Marius' career to new heights. This war began very badly for Rome and included the defeat of two armies sent to quell the Numidian king, Jugurtha.

¹¹ Keppie, *Making Roman Army*, 44

¹² Keppie, *Making Roman Army*, 44.

¹³ Badian, *Gracchi to Sulla.*, 216.

According to Sallust, the Roman historian who left the most complete record of the war, Jugurtha was the grandson of Massinissa, who had been a great ally of Rome. He was excluded from the throne because of his illegitimate status, nevertheless, he was cherished in his uncle Micipsa's court and was eventually sent to assist Scipio in Spain with a contingent of allied cavalry¹⁴. He proved to be a worthy soldier and returned home with honors. However, after Micipsa died, Jugurtha fought his uncle's two sons for control of Numidia. Although the civil war was an internal matter, Jugurtha overstepped his place when his forces slaughtered an enclave of Italian merchants in the town of Cirta. It was this action that drew the ire of the Senate.

By the end of the second century, the Roman army had developed a series of standard tactics and moderately talented commanders could challenge other phalanx style armies easily. However, the skill of the commander became vital when the forces facing the army used unorthodox tactics and guerrilla style warfare such as in Spain, Numidia and Gaul. Jugurtha became a huge challenge to marginally talented commanders because of his style of fighting. He had learned Roman military tactics well and understood the local geography and the strengths and weaknesses of his forces. Several generals were sent to Numidia to stop this upstart king who had the audacity to slaughter Italian merchants. According to Sallust, he took advantage of the incompetent and greedy Roman commanders, Calpurnius Bestia and Postemius Albinus through the skilled use of his cavalry. He also fought and defeated Aulus Albinus and forced the Romans to walk under the yoke in total defeat. The *nobiles* were having difficulty in finding a commander skilled enough to engage an unorthodox enemy.

During the Numantine War in Spain, after an entire legion was surrendered to the enemy by Hostilius Mancinus, Rome was forced to send their best commander, Publius Cornelius Scipio

14 Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, 40.

Aemilianus (185-129 B.C.) to put down the revolt. During the Jurgurthine War, the Senate turned to Q. Caecilius Metellus and sent him with freshly levied troops to put down the rebellion.

Metellus was a son of the Metelli family whose conquests “served as an index of Roman expansion during the second century¹⁵.” Sallust advises that he was energetic, had an excellent reputation and was above the temptation of succumbing to wealth. Metellus' professionalism caused Jugurtha great concern. He was no longer able to bribe the legions and he recognized that he would face a competent commander who minimized the chance for easy victories. Metellus proved to be a competent and cautious commander but met with mixed success.

Although he was able to take the town of Vaga and had inflicted several defeats on Jugurtha, he was no closer to capturing Jugurtha than when he arrived. The Numidian king could take a defeat better than what the Roman forces lost in winning a battle. As long as he remained free, the conflict would continue. Metellus' greatest success was taking the city of Thala but the escape of both Jugurtha and his treasure allowed the war to continue. This was the report that Rome was receiving by the end of the second year and frustrations were mounting over the slowness of the campaign.

Metellus' lieutenant, Gaius Marius, saw the opportunity for election to consul in Rome and began to request and push to be allowed to leave for Rome to stand for election. Metellus growing discontent with Marius allowed him to go to Rome to run for the consulship in 108 B.C., although he delayed in releasing Marius until the last moment in the belief that Marius would not arrive in Rome in time. Marius was able to arrive in Rome in record time and with assistance from the tribunes was elected consul. Marius' rough and direct style won him favor with the soldiers and assisted him in remaining in touch with the common people. It also

15 Keppie, *Making Roman Army*, 58.

provided an opportunity to separate himself from the nobles as noted by Sallust, “Metellus's noble birth, which formerly had been regarded as a distinction, now made him unpopular, while his rival's humble origin won him increased favor¹⁶.”

Although Metellus had proven himself as a capable commander against a challenging foe, Marius was able to overcome Metellus' accomplishments by counting him with the previous incompetent generals and focused on the repeated escapes of Jugurtha. Sallust's speech attributed to Marius describes the situation after the election, “Hitherto Jugurtha has been saved from defeat by the greed, incompetence, or vanity of your generals; but you have now changed all this¹⁷.” With this speech, Marius was able to focus on his professionalism and experience over the aristocrats who spent more time on the less practical studies of Greek and rhetoric.

After election, Marius then began to create his army and petitioned the Senate for more soldiers. The Numidian War was unpopular and traditional recruitment was difficult. The Senate did permit Marius to attempt to raise more troops. The Senate believed that the populace would begin to turn against Marius if he forced them to join an unpopular war. However, Marius, by opening recruitment to the landless voters, the *capite censi*, he was able to recruit enough volunteers. Plutarch records the event as, “Contrary to law and custom he enlisted many a poor and insignificant man, although former commanders had not accepted such persons, but bestowed arms, just as they would any other honor, only on those whose property assessment made them worthy to receive these¹⁸. . . .”

This action has been cited as one of the keys leading to the eventual downfall of the republic. The use of the *capite censi* did create a new center for power that would have great

16 Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 107.

17 Keppie, *Making Roman Army*, 121.

18 Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*: 483.

effect in the following century. Early legions were marshalled by citizens defending their farms and land and “it should be remembered that throughout the Roman Republic the soldiers fighting for Rome were her own citizens for whom defence of the state was a duty, a responsibility and a privilege¹⁹.” However, the *capite censi* did not have the same tie to Roman lands and fought for different reasons. The great danger of the *capite censi* was what to do with the soldiers after their time of service was completed.

The legions began to look for ways to share in the plunder of conquered territories and began to look towards their general instead of the Senate for support. The more successful the general, the more the army would look to him for leadership. The Senate did not ingratiate themselves to veterans with repeated refusals to allocate land to discharged veterans especially in view of the tremendous wealth pouring into Rome from the conquered territories. Marius attempted to acquire land for both his Numidian units and his northern Roman army. Marius' tremendous military success allowed him more latitude in forcing the Senate to agree to some of his demands. After a hard fought battle with the Senate, he was able to provide land for his Numidian units, although he was never able to procure land for his northern army. This battle continued to strain the already tense relationship between Marius and the Senate.

V

In an initial comparison of the military actions of Metellus and Marius, there seems to be little difference between the two. They both employed the fast marching capabilities of the legions, were able to adjust to the well planned attacks of their opponent (which required strong discipline and training), and used Jugurtha's associates against him. Each employed current military tactics to the situation and seemed to achieve the same results. Although there

¹⁹ Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, 17.

has been some debate about whether or not he truly won the Numidian War²⁰, a side by side comparison of Metellus and Marius shows that Marius was able to be more effective in each engagement.

Marius took advantage of the Gracchan reforms by using state funds to arm and equip his new troops. Because of the standardization of equipment, his new forces became heavy infantry and the cohort formation works very well for that level of equipment. Beginning with his recruitment of additional forces for Numidia and the later Gallic wars, he needed to blend the existing legion with the raw recruits. Plutarch points out the extensive training of his forces before traveling to northern Italy (but was also used in Numidia):

Setting out on the expedition, he laboured to perfect his army as it went along, practising the men in all kinds of running and in long marches, and compelling them to carry their own baggage and to prepare their own food. Hence, in after times, men who were fond of toil and did whatever was enjoined . . . were called Marian mules.²¹

However, he was not the first general to have to integrate or train new legions. Scipio Aemilianus was forced to retrain demoralized and defeated legions in Spain and integrate four thousand new volunteers. Metellus also had to retrain the defeated forces in Numidia and, according to Sallust, used very similar means, “. . . he decided not to take the field until he had inured the men to hard labour by putting them through a course of old-fashioned training²².” Metellus also changed the number of support people surrounding the camp by sending away camp followers, servants and beasts of burden. Each soldier was required to “carry his food and

²⁰ Michael Holroyd, “The Jurgurthine War: Was Marius or Metellus the Real Victor?” *The Journal of Roman Studies*. 18 (1920) 1-20.

²¹ Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, 495.

²² Sallust, *Jurgurthine War*, 81.

arms²³.” Even the forces used later to stop the Cimbri and Teutones were originally gathered and trained by gladiators brought in by Pubilius Rutilius Rufus.

. Although Marius' had been given credit for the change to using cohorts, Polybius and Livy use both cohort and *maniple* descriptions frequently throughout the second century B.C. army²⁴. Both men had access to this long series of tactical changes in the structure of the legion itself. The uneven, guerrilla style of warfare occurring in Spain and Gaul began to show a weakness in the *manipular* system of legion organization. The smaller fighting forces of the various Spanish and Gallic tribes were often too large for a detached *maniple* (120 soldiers) to handle but were too small for the entire legion to effectively address. Michael Dobson states that a frequently used tactic was the charge and “against this the *manipular* formation was too open and a deeper, more concentrated and continuous front was required²⁵.” *Maniples* were then combined into cohorts which consisted of three *maniples* and a contingent of *velites* to form a 480 man unit. Throughout the legion, ten cohorts could form still allowing flexibility in movement but also be large enough to present a strong battle line. Another advantage of using cohorts was a simplified chain of command. Instead of trying to relay orders to thirty individual *maniples*, a legion divided into cohorts only had ten units needing to receive orders

Metellus used the cohort as well as light armed infantry in defending an ambush set by Jurgurtha. During the ambush the Romans were confused by a new tactic from Jugurtha's cavalry. When the cavalry encountered resistance, they would scatter in all directions and reform elsewhere prior to returning. This tactic caused problems in maintaining cohesion for the Roman

23 Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 82.

24 Keppie, *Making Roman Army*, 63.

25 Michael Dobson, *The Army of the Roman Republic: The Second Century BC, Polybius and the Camps at Numantia, Spain* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 63.

lines but Jugurtha was unable to press home an overwhelming attack. Metellus was able to reform four cohorts and, sensing weakness in the Numidian infantry, forced his way back through the high ground. The final edge in the battle was described by Sallust, “Metellus could rely on the courage of his soldiers, but the ground was against him. Jugurtha had everything in his favour except the quality of his troops²⁶.”

Metellus was able to inflict several defeats on Jugurtha but none of the defeats included any long term damage. The taking of the city of Thala was important but the money and Jugurtha escaped. The scheme to have Jugurtha's lieutenant Bomilcar betray him failed and increased Jugurtha's paranoia and lack of trust; thereby making any further attempts of betrayal extremely difficult. The key to ending the Numidian War was not defeating Jugurtha on the field but to capture Jugurtha himself. He was the key to the resistance. In this regard, Metellus was no closer to succeeding than he was at the beginning of his campaign.

In 108 B.C. Marius returned to Numidia and after a period of extensive training for his legion, he began campaigning and took a series of small fortresses and settlements. These sorties were in the nature of skirmishes but it did allow the army to achieve some easy victories as well as experience. Marius' first major attack was against the city of Capsa. It was chosen as a target because it was an important city and strongly defended, but also the surrounding land was desolate and required careful provisioning and tactical skill to support the legions. With this attack, Marius was also attempting to neutralize Metellus' victory at Thala²⁷ which was taken under similar circumstances. Marius was successful at taking the city.

During Marius' second year, he also attempted to capture a treasure city. This one was far

²⁶ Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 88.

²⁷ Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 124.

to the west of previous engagements and heavily fortified in the mountains. The siege lasted for an unknown length of time and would have proven fruitless except for the good fortune of a Ligurian soldier finding a secret way into the city and the arrival of Sulla with his Roman (allied) cavalry. Unlike Metellus' attempt two years earlier, this time Jugurtha did lose a great fortune and was forced to ally with the neighboring King of Mauretania, Bocchus. The loss of money also forced Jugurtha back into skirmish style fighting.

Because of the ongoing raiding, Marius had to move cautiously heading towards his winter quarters along the coast. The army marched in a square with native scouts working in all directions. The local scouts were able to find Jugurtha's ambush and Marius' stopped his army in time. Jugurtha had split his forces into four groups and was hoping to surround the Romans. He was able to attack the Roman rear with Bocchus' infantry units while his cavalry assaulted Sulla's horsemen. Marius was able to hold his cohorts until Sulla finished driving off the Numidian horse and returned to rout the infantry. Jugurtha was trapped and reduced to trying to convince the Romans that he had defeated Marius in combat on the field. He finally was able to flee and retreated with Bocchus. The defeat and Sulla's assistance in convincing Bocchus to hand over Jugurtha, finally ended the war and Marius was declared the victor.

Metellus returned to Rome and received accolades for his efforts. However, Marius returned in triumph and brought the elusive Jugurtha back in chains and cemented his role as the potential savior for Rome in forthcoming battles against the Cimbri and Teutones. The Jugurthine War also proved that the Roman army was already well on the way to becoming a professional army before the arrival of the *capite censi*. The tactics devised for a *manipular* army and the ongoing changes using cohorts were shown to be well developed standard tactics

for the army. Ultimately, victory depended upon the commander's skill in battle. For example, the Carthaginian general Hannibal (248-182 B.C.) ravaged the Italian peninsula during the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) and left several *manipular* armies completely destroyed. Adrian Goldsworthy notes, "Hannibal's skill as a general inflicted several massive defeats on this army, yet the same type of army, when better led and with higher morale, beat him in turn²⁸." In the defeat of Jurgurtha, the equestrian Marius proved to be a more successful commander than his former patron, Metellus. However, Marius' greatest success was yet to come.

VI

Beginning in 113 B.C., northern Italy experienced a wave of migrating Germanic tribes, the Cimbri and Teutones. Several armies had been sent to defeat them but through a combination of incompetence, internal jealousies and poor commanders, each army was soundly defeated. The worst defeat occurred at Arausio in 105 B.C. when Rome lost two consular armies and the way to Rome was left completely open to attack. It was fortunate that the migrating tribes did not press forward and attack choosing to wander off to the west for a couple of years.

Marius was reelected for the consulship for the second time within a ten year period. Although this was illegal, there were numerous precedents including the illegal election of Scipio Aemilianus and his assignment to Spain in 133 B.C. The people wanted him to lead the army and the Senate did not seem to strongly protest. It is possible that the Senate did not have a candidate strong enough to challenge the man who just won a triumph for the defeat of Jugurtha and completed a mission that the competent but unspectacular Caecilius Metellus could not finish.

Marius took over the legions that had been selected and trained by Pubilius Rutilius

²⁸ Adrian Goldsworthy, *Roman Army*, 33.

Rufus who had turned over Metellus' army to Marius in Numidia was forced to hand over his newly trained army once again. Rutilius Rufus had added to the training of the legions by using gladiators to instruct the soldiers. Frontinus states that Marius used Rutilius' troops over his own from Numidia because although “fewer in number, <he chose them> because he deemed them of trustier discipline²⁹.” During this time, the expected invasion did not occur and Marius went to Rome to campaign for his fourth consul seat.

This election was not as easy as the previous three. Plutarch describes the situation thusly, “Here many men of great merit were candidates for the consulship, but Lucius Saturninus, who had more influence with the people than any other tribune, was won over by the flattering attentions of Marius³⁰.” Elfrieda Frank notes that the nobility did attempt to end Marius' reelection as consul by “claiming that Sulla, and not Marius, was the real victor in the Jugurthine War³¹”. Past attempts for reelection such as by the Gracchi had been thwarted by violence instigated by the *nobiles*. Marius' demonstrated military ability and the support of the people denied the *nobiles* the same recourse of removal and forced them to use indirect attacks on Marius' reputation. Without the direct threat to emphasize his usefulness as the general, support slowly drained away and unless the tribes returned to force a confrontation, Marius would need other political support. “It certainly appears as though Marius required Saturninus' considerable oratorical skills to make sure that the result was³² . . .” the consulship.

Plutarch describes the working relationship as obviously staged with Marius claiming not to want the position and Saturninus responding by calling him a traitor for abandoning the people in

29 Frontinus, *The Stratagems and the Aqueducts of Rome*. Translated by Charles Bennett. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) 287.

30 Plutarch, *The Life of Marius*, 500.

31 Elfrieda Frank, “Marius and the Roman Nobility”, *The Classical Journal*, 50 No. 4 (1955) 151.

32 Evans, , *Gaius Marius*, 85.

such a desperate hour. The people “. . . seeing that the occasion required the ability as well as the good fortune of Marius, voted for his fourth consulship³³”

This conflict created the seeds of discord that would come back to haunt Marius soon after his return from campaign. While Marius was away, Saturninus passed the land law for the Numidian veterans. “However, the Optimates used force against his corn law, hoping they could deal with him as they had with the Gracchi. Saturninus . . . used the Marian veterans to full effect³⁴.” Marius' veterans prevented the violent opposition against the tribune but the *optimates* were now in a position to wait until after the war to regain the consulship.

The return of the migrating tribes in 102 B.C. provided the final opportunity for military glory and the ability to retain his consulship. In a well executed tactical plan, Marius split his forces and sent his co-consul, Quintus Lutatius Catulus with the second army to hold the alpine passes. The Teutones and Ambrones tried to draw battle near Marius' position; however, he refused battle and waited until they moved on and followed. At Aquae Sextiae, Marius choose the battle site, created a smaller force of cavalry to hold disrupt the other army with a surprise attack on the rear. The attack was very successful and both the Teutones and the Ambrones were completely defeated. News of this success arrived in time for the people to reelect Marius' for his fifth consulship.

However, his co-consul, Catulus had retreated from the alpine passes and was attempting to confront the Cimbri. Marius went to his aid and they confronted the Cimbri at Vercelles. After a fierce battle the Cimbri were defeated, but the victory was not entirely sweet. According to Plutarch, Catulus had obtained the enemies standards and trumpets and his men, with marked

33 Plutarch, *The Life of Marius*, 501.

34 Badian, “Gracchi to Sulla”, 218.

javelins, had finished the attack. However, this victory was given to Marius on the basis of his previous victory and his current rank of consul over Catulus' proconsul³⁵. Evans notes that Plutarch's source for the Battle of Vercelles came from Sulla's memoirs. Sulla may have been continuing the attack on Marius' reputation by emphasizing Catulus's role in leading the victory.

While the *optimates* tried to downplay Marius' military skill, several of his tactics and methods survived and were cited by Frontinus. Many of the notations of Frontinus showed an exceptional level of detail in his preparations including making sure his army was fed before battle or keeping patrols constantly moving near the enemy encampment to keep them awake all night before battle. Marius was also a master at encouraging his men to fight. In one instance, camp was placed so far from water and the nearest water source was controlled by the German tribes. When the soldiers demanded water, Marius pointed and told his soldiers to go through the enemy to get it³⁶. Even Plutarch noted several examples of encouraging his men to fight well including holding his men behind fortifications when they first contacted the strange and ferocious tribesmen. After becoming used to the strange war cries, Marius' soldiers were begging to fight, and “Marius was delighted to hear such expressions³⁷”

These victories remained his greatest accomplishment and were revered many years later by the populace. “Many a veteran, reading the inscriptions recounting the victories of Campi Kaudii, Aquae Sextiae, and over Jurgurtha, would recall the memory of the greatest soldier of the age, the deliverer of Italy, and the sturdy supporter of popular rights³⁸.” He seemed a champion

35 Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, 539.

36 Frontinus, *Stratagems*, II, vii, 11.

37 Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, 507.

38 John Henderson, *Caesar's Bellum Gallicum: Books I & II* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, Ltd. 1890) viii.

of the people and their protector and was even hailed as “the third founder of Rome³⁹.”

However, he was never accepted among the *optimates* and was forced to use the *concilium* to have legislation passed by tribune. His unorthodox rise to power skirted many roadblocks placed by the *optimates* to ensure they remained in control and created a dangerous and unpredictable imbalance in the existing political system.

VII

However, the victories represented the height of Marius' career , but in many ways, they were short lived. Although he was elected for a sixth term as consul, rumors appeared stating that he had to buy the consulship. The old soldier proved to be vulnerable to political attacks from this level. Despite the strong popular support which easily allowed him to win the first three consulships, there was a movement from some in the nobility to negate his military success by claiming others actually won the battles. This attack was a attempt to undermine his strongest attributes, his generalship and reputation. It seems that the attack was successful in creating political problems for the general.

Marius' initial impact on politics would soon change. In his attempt to gain election for a sixth time, Marius was challenged by his former patron, Metellus Numidicus. After a bitter battle, Marius was elected but not after strong complaints about extensive bribery to win the election. His continued contact with L. Appuleius Saturnus soon forced him to make a dangerous political choice.

Saturinus, in association with Servilia Glaucia, challenged the Senate swear an oath to abide by the people's wishes. Metellus refused and Saturinus had him exiled. The close association with Saturinus damaged Marius political reputation and as consul, he was forced to

39 Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, 539.

try to arrest Saturninus for the public good. A mob arrived first and Saturninus was killed. The land bill was revoked and Marius was never able to obtain land for his northern troops. He left and went into a brief exile.

Marius' rise to power was created through increasingly growing cracks in the Roman political system and enforced by both his skill as a general but also the need for a savior for the city from outside threats. The rapid expansion and wealth created opportunities for wealthy *optimates* to gain power but the expansion was so large, others could follow the same path. The increased length of time and the far away locations of campaigns demanded a full time soldier. When coupled with technical (equipment) and tactical (cohorts) changes, the army was on the brink of becoming a true professional fighting force. When Marius accepted the *capite censi* into his forces, he provided a way to fill the need for expanding the armies and also filled a need for protection of the lower classes to combat a rising violence by the Senate against popular causes. Although the army did not become directly involved at the end of the second century, Sulla took the next step towards that power when he marched on Rome in 88 B.C.

It is difficult to tell how much direct influence Marius had on all of these historical trends. He represents much what many Romans consider to be morally wrong (desire for power and military glory) and essentially was a dictator for six years. However, much of what was written about him was from later sources who were writing near or well after the Civil Wars. Despite attempts to turn him into a villain, the Roman public seemed to have adored him, and he was able to work with the Senate on some things. The Senate also created this conflict by not accepting him more fully despite his equestrian status (as they did later with Pompey).

Marius' spectacular rise to six consulships⁴⁰ was because of his skill leading the Roman army and he provided a model that was followed with each successive generation of military leaders pushing the edges of the Republic further and further towards an inevitable collapse. The re-elections of Marius to consul in the face of military dangers did set a dangerous precedent that did not end until Augustus. The Senate began to use the concept of a “hired gun” or general to handle a variety of difficult situations including Mithradates, Spartacus, Mediterranean pirates, etc. The Senate also opened itself to conflict by repeatedly giving power to one man and in doing so, “ the senators had begun to cede one of their greatest responsibilities to a section of society unfit to exercise it, and the Roman Republic—so finely balanced by tradition, law and social division—began to wobble.⁴¹” .

40 His seventh consulship was after the Social War and occurred near the end of his life and is outside the scope of this paper.

41 Erik Hildinger, *Swords Against the Senate: The Rise of the Roman Army and the Fall of the Republic* (Da Capo Press, 2002) 94.

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