

## WINNING WHILE LOSING IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

CLARK (J.H.) *Triumph in Defeat. Military Loss and the Roman Republic*. Pp. xviii + 240, maps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Cased, £48, US\$74. ISBN: 978-0-19-933654-8.

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The Romans lost a great number of battles yet still won enough wars to establish an enduring imperial system. Unlike many societies, who must deal with the agony of defeat without the mitigating circumstances of eventual victory to assuage their grief, the Romans of the Republic had the privilege of digesting their losses in the overarching context of hegemonic success. C. explores the role of defeat in Roman political culture and historiography in her thought-provoking volume, a revised version of her Princeton Ph.D. dissertation.

The Romans did not leave physical monuments to defeat, unlike, for example, the Athenian casualty lists honouring those who died in the Sicilian expedition. C. therefore seeks Roman responses first in the narratives that they told about defeat, and secondly in their immediate policy responses to military setbacks. Of course a policy response could be pragmatic while also reflecting and constructing an overarching socio-political narrative. For example, a narrative of redemption might prompt re-engagement of the enemy in the hope of avenging the loss, while a narrative of accountability might call for the defeated commander to face trial for his incompetence.

C. notes that victory is enormously difficult to define, not a startling conclusion for those who remember the bitter irony of 'Mission Accomplished'. Yet the converse of the elusive definition of victory is that 'defeat' is likewise a slippery concept. Roman defeats covered a wide spectrum, from stalemated military operations, to minor tactical setbacks (sometimes with sharp losses), to military catastrophes with severe demographic implications (i.e. Cannae). One weakness of the book is a failure to parse sufficiently this spectrum of defeat, given that the Romans, ironically, seem to have dealt far better with sudden, severe defeats than with ongoing frustrations. Compare the resolve after Cannae in contrast to the bitter political trials that followed various setbacks in Spain.

C. detects changes in the narratives that the Romans used to shape their response to defeat. In the early second century B.C., she argues that the Romans, owing to the experience of the Second Punic War, developed the book's titular trope of 'triumph in defeat'. After all, the near-catastrophic defeats inflicted by Hannibal had been wiped clean by the eventual Roman victory. In subsequent wars, commanders who suffered defeat were encouraged to re-engage the enemy and absolve the setback through a redemptive victory.

One of the most important aspects of this section is C.'s provocative assertion that the Roman triumph was in many ways a response to previous defeats rather than an expression of unadulterated victory. The triumph in C.'s formulation was designed to mark the point where prior defeats were expunged by the final success. The victory celebrated by the triumph was supposed to be permanent. A rogue commander could even face prosecution for engaging a people over whom a triumph had been celebrated, given that the ceremony marked them as defeated, and therefore no longer legitimate targets of Roman military operations.

Yet as the second century progressed, C. finds that the neat formula of triumph in defeat became increasingly problematic, as peoples who had in theory been beaten increasingly refused to stay beat. The Romans as a result sought to make their narratives of victory permanent through increasingly brutal measures. After the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War made mockery of Titus Flamininus' triumph over Philip V, the Romans responded by

dismantling the Antigonid monarchy altogether. Aemilius Paullus' unusually splendid three-day triumph may have been designed to emphasise the genuine finality of the war. C. sees the destruction of both Carthage and Corinth in 146, as well as Numantia in 133, as the awful climax of the same phenomenon. The savage turn of Roman imperialism in the mid-second century has always been a historical problem. There was no reason permanently to destroy these cities out of military necessity (although violent sacks had many precedents and more obvious motivations). C.'s explanation of Rome's new brutality is compelling.

C. suggests that the Romans confronted new political problems as their hegemony became increasingly ensured: they stopped winning, at least the sort of dramatic victories worthy of a triumph. The Roman people now lacked the triumphant catharsis to undo the various setbacks and occasional disasters that characterised provincial occupations, particularly in Spain. C. argues that the infrequency of redemptive victory contributed to the poisonous political atmosphere that marred the end of the century. A vindictive accountability regime for failed commanders emerged. The chummy old days of vanquished commanders given a second shot to win the day gave way to trials for treason and corruption, increasingly in the emerging system of standing courts. Gaius Marius' election (and re-elections) to the consulship, running on the failure of the *nobiles* to beat either Jugurtha or the Germans, was the culmination of a frustrated political narrative that seemed to have run out of triumphs to annul the defeats.

The book maintains a strictly Republican context, from the Second Punic War to the Cimbric Wars. This time frame is entirely sensible, although I suspect there is sufficient evidence for Rome's response to devastating defeats in the First Punic War. But C. is surely correct when she argues that the military disasters from 218–16 set the tone for the period that followed. This book represents an important and welcome contribution to both the history and historiography of the mid-Republic.

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## THE VILLA IN CONTEXT

BECKER (J.A.), TERRENATO (N.) (edd.) *Roman Republican Villas. Architecture, Context, and Ideology*. (Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 32.) Pp. vi+146, ills, maps. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012. Cased, US\$60. ISBN: 978-0-472-11770-3.

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This slim volume owes its origins to a joint symposium of the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Philological Association at San Diego in 2007 and contains seven chapters, topped and tailed by an introduction and concluding remarks. Given the volume's title, the instant reaction is one of almost dismay given the burgeoning corpus of literature already available on the subject in general. However, this innocuous title belies a series of essays that go beyond the standard re-presentation of classical sources applied to archaeological finds in mutual support of each other and the reader should note the subtitle *Architecture, Context and Ideology*, for it is this on which the volume focuses.