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1: The Early Republic

Stephen P. Oakley

Origins will always fascinate. By 264 B.C. Rome was already governed by means of most of the constitutional arrangements that are familiar to us from the 'classical' period of republican history;[1] in that year it both completed the subjugation of peninsular Italy by capturing Volsinii (modern Orvieto) and began the process of Mediterranean conquest by sending its legions across the Straits of Messina into Sicily. Yet *c.* 509 B.C. it was just a large city in Latium with a constitution as yet undeveloped after emergence from a long period of monarchical rule. This chapter considers the origins of the Roman Republic and attempts to explain how the Latin city transformed itself into a nation ready and willing to grasp the prize of empire.

Before we begin, we must confront briefly the greatest problem in the study of early Rome, the notorious unreliability of our sources.[2] They are almost entirely literary, and among them Livy, the only surviving writer to present a detailed narrative of most of the period, is preeminent.[3] The reasons for this unreliability are easily explained: the Republic began *c.* 509 B.C., whereas Fabius Pictor, the first Roman historian, wrote *c.* 200; he and his successors in the second century B.C. had only very incomplete evidence, especially for the early period; many of Pictor's successors distorted what little material they had by reconstructing the history of early Rome so that it read like a history of their

This chapter deals with the history of the Republic between 509 and 264 B.C. The literature on the relevant topics is enormous, and each note cites only one or two recent and reliable discussions in English of the topic under consideration. The two fullest recent treatments in English of the early Republic are Walbank et al. (1989) and Cornell (1995); reference will not be made again to these works, but they should be consulted via their indexes for almost all the topics discussed in this chapter. My own views on many of the matters discussed here are expounded at greater length in *A commentary on Livy, Books VI–X* (Oakley, 1997–2004).

own times; and Livy unfortunately based his account on these writers rather than on the original evidence. Most scholars now agree that as a result of this process the details of Livy's political and military narrative are unreliable, amounting to reconstruction or plausible invention by Livy himself or by his sources. Yet many also believe that, once this reconstruction and invention has been stripped away, one is left with references to events that really did happen (e.g., the passing of a law or the agreement of a treaty or the capture of a town). To take a simple example, Livy (5.19–23), supported by other writers dependent on similar sources, gives a long description of how the Romans captured Veii in 396; few, if any, scholars doubt the fact that Veii fell to Rome in that year, but likewise few accept the historicity of all the legends with which the tale is embroidered in Livy and others. There remains much disagreement about what in Livy and others was transmitted reliably from the fifth, fourth, or third centuries and what was invented in the third, second, or first, but most scholars believe that our evidence gets better the further away the event in question is from 509 B.C. and that our evidence for the years after 300 B.C. is notably better in quality than that even for the period 350–300 B.C.

From all this it follows that much of what Livy and others say has been disbelieved or modified by modern scholars. Although few of the individual arguments that follow are very controversial, readers should always remember how uncertain the whole subject is.[4]

In Rome, as in all ancient and many mediaeval and modern states, public life may be seen in retrospect (even if it was not always apparent at the time) to have been dominated by three issues: how to divide the wealth of the state, how to determine who was to administer the state, and how best to secure the state against attack from those outside it.

Political conflict, what the Greeks called *stasis*, was as endemic in early Rome as it was in many cities of the Greek world, and it is important to be clear about what was at the heart of such conflict. The ancient economy was based on agriculture.[5] This is not to deny that some men and women devoted most of their working hours to other activities (e.g., labouring in a factory to make armour). Most families, however, owned land, in a society in which wealth and to a large degree social status were in proportion to the amount of land owned. It is a familiar fact that a member of the Roman élite of the first century B.C. is likely to have owned a large amount of land but is unlikely to have done much farming in person. In 500 B.C. the situation was very different: the landholdings even of the richest Romans will have been much smaller, and the owners themselves will have taken part in farming them. Only

towards the end of our period is it likely that aristocrats began to be more detached from the day-to-day running of their farms.

In Livy and other ancient sources, the internal politics of the early Roman Republic are dominated by a dispute between two groups, the patricians and the plebeians; modern scholars have termed this the 'Conflict of the Orders'.[6] In the traditional narrative, after the expulsion in 510/9 B.C. of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, the government fell into the hands of a group of aristocratic families (the patricians), who elected from their number two annual magistrates called 'consuls' and occasionally in time of crisis appointed a dictator to take sole charge of military affairs. Other magistracies were few in number: the most important was the censorship, established in 443 and held at irregular intervals by two men in order to enrol citizens into the correct class for the purposes of military service. Between 494 and 287, patrician rule and dominance was challenged by plebeian agitation, which forced from the patricians at first concessions and then the granting of an equal share in power. The key disturbances and legislation in this period, as they are recorded in our sources, may be summarized as follows:

• In 494, in protest against patrician treatment of those in debt-bondage (the Romans called this bondage *nexum* and those in it *nexi*), the plebeians went on strike and withdrew to a hill outside Rome; this episode is commonly known as the First Secession of the Plebs. In a conciliatory response, the patricians granted them the right annually to elect their own leaders, who were called tribunes of the plebs; initially these were two in number, later ten. The tribunes were regarded as sacrosanct; that is, the plebeians took an oath to take vengeance on anyone who violated the person or obstructed the actions of a tribune. Thereafter the plebeians had their own assembly (the *concilium plebis*), to which patricians were not admitted but in which they were occasionally tried for crimes against the plebeians.

• In 451 and 450, a board of ten (*decemviri*) was appointed to publish a codification of Roman law, known as the Twelve Tables.[7] Henceforth it was easier for those who were not patricians to know exactly what was specified by the law. A notorious provision of the eleventh table forbade intermarriage between patricians and plebeians. Legend had it that the *decemviri* of 450 were different from those of 451 and were removed from office only by a Second Secession of the Plebs.

• In 449, a law was supposedly passed that guaranteed the right of appeal to the people (the technical term was *provocatio ad populum*)

against scourging or capital punishment by a magistrate. This reaffirmed a law supposedly passed in 509, the first year of the Republic.[8]

• In 449, a second law was passed that made plebiscites binding on the whole communty, patricians and their followers as well as plebeians.

• In 445, the law forbidding intermarriage between patricians and plebeians was repealed.

• Between 444 and 392, consuls were often replaced by three, four, or six military tribunes with consular power (consular tribunes) and in all years between 391 and 367 by six consular tribunes. According to Livy, plebeians as well as patricians were eligible for election to this office.

• In 367, the consular tribunate was abolished by a *lex Licinia Sextia* ('Licinio-Sextian law'), and the consular constitution was reestablished for 366; henceforth plebeians were eligible for election to one of the consulships, and in more than half the years between 366 and 342 a plebeian was elected. A third magistracy, the praetorship, was also established in 367.

• Another *lex Licinia Sextia* passed in 367 limited the amount of public land that could be held by an individual to 500 *iugera*.[9] It seems that some patricians had been holding far more than this amount.

• A third *lex Licinia Sextia* passed in 366 alleviated plebeian indebtedness. Similar laws are said to have been passed in 357, 352, 347, and 342.

• In 356, the first plebeian dictator (Gaius Marcius Rutilus) was appointed.

• In 351, the first plebeian censor (the same Marcius) was elected.

• In 342, a *lex Genucia* seems to have guaranteed the right of a plebeian to one of the consular posts in any given year.[10]

• In 339, the plebeian dictator Q. Publilius Philo passed several progressive measures, one of which, supposedly repeating a measure of 449 and anticipating one of 287, made *plebiscita* ('plebiscites' or 'decrees of the plebs') binding on the whole people and not just the plebeians.

• Another *lex Publilia* stipulated that henceforth one censor should be plebeian.

• In 336, Q. Publilius Philo became the first plebeian praetor.

• In 300, plebeians won the right to hold places in two of Rome's priestly colleges (the pontiffs and the augurs), both of which were enlarged.

• In 300, in a separate measure, the right to appeal to the whole people (*provocatio ad populum*) against decisions of consuls and other

magistrates was guaranteed; this law was said to have reinforced earlier laws of 509 and 449.

• In 287, the plebeians seceded again, in part because of the problem of indebtedness. A law was passed reaffirming that all citizens were to be subject to plebiscites.

Even summarized as briefly as this, the traditional account of escape from patrician dominance is not likely to be completely correct. For instance, although it is certain that in the fourth century B.C. the patricians tried to monopolize the holding of magisterial office and were challenged by another group who called themselves plebeians, it is less certain that these two groups had existed without much change from the 490s. In particular, scholars have questioned, largely on account of certain nonpatrician names in our lists of the earliest consuls, whether at the beginning of the Republic the patriciate was quite the exclusive band that it had become by the time of the decemvirate. They have questioned, too, whether all those who were not patricians were always known as plebeians or whether the plebeian organization grew from being a small pressure group to become the dominant voice of opposition to the patricians in the generation before the passing of the Licinio-Sextian laws.[11]

Nor can we be certain that our information about the consulship is accurate. First, many of the names of those who are said to have held the office before the 440s may be unreliable;[12] second, the original name of the office may have been not 'consul' but 'praetor'.[13] As for the consular tribunate, it is one of the great enigmas of early Rome.[14] Livy knew of two explanations for it: one was political and held that it was established to allow plebeians a share in Rome's chief magistracy, the other was military and claimed that it was established to allow Rome more commanders in the field. Neither explanation is satisfactory. The first fails because few men who were not patricians were elected to the post, the second because dictators were still appointed in years of military crisis. All that can be safely said about these officials is that for sixty years it suited the Romans to have them rather than consuls running the state. Finally, our sources are full of duplication, as in the case of the three laws on *provocatio* and also the three laws guaranteeing the validity of plebiscites for the whole people, which are noted in the preceding list. That before 300 B.C. there were laws guaranteeing *provocatio* is generally disbelieved, and in 449 plebiscites can hardly have been binding on the whole people. However, it is conceivable that Livy's account of

the *lex Publilia* of 339 regarding plebiscites is fundamentally reliable and that the law of 287 was merely a reinforcement or modification of it.

Despite all these difficulties, it is possible to make some generalizations about the course of Roman political history in this period. First, the power of the patricians was steadily eroded so that by *c.* 300 B.C. the political advantages of being a patrician were slight. This raises the important question of how the patricians were able to cling to so much power for so long. That they were supported by their clients and retainers seems clear; otherwise their numerical inferiority to the combined forces of the other citizens of Rome would have made it impossible for them to withstand political opposition. It is also very likely that patrician power was rooted in possession of land and maintained by appropriation to themselves of a disproportionately large share of land that had accrued by conquest to the Roman state. The power of patricians probably declined in part because patrician families were unsuccessful in reproducing themselves but also in part because patricians were less successful in forcing their will on their retainers.

As for the plebeians, it has long been obvious that the interests of their leaders, who were probably men of substantial property, were very different from those of the masses. These leaders wished to be able to fulfil their political aspirations and to have a share in the government of the state from which they were excluded simply by birth. Most of the reforms and legislation mentioned were in their interest and struck blows at patrician exclusivity: plebeians were eventually allowed to marry patricians and vice versa; they may have been allowed election to the post of consular tribune; and they were successively allowed to become consuls, dictators, censors, praetors, pontiffs, and augurs. By 300 B.C. the plebeian élite had largely achieved equality with the patricians.

Less progress was made in helping the poorer plebeians. These desired an amelioration of the conditions in which they lived. To this end laws were passed that helped debtors, and finally debt-bondage was abolished. The massive programme of colonization undertaken by Rome in the late fourth and early third centuries suggests, however, that there was still a substantial number of plebeians attracted by the prospect of escape from their current conditions and by the lure of pastures new. How far even this programme led to a significant reduction in debt is uncertain, since we are told that it was one of the causes of the third and final secession of the plebs, in 287. Despite various attempts in various epochs, the Roman Republic was never able to rid itself of its poor.

For many of the years about which Livy wrote in his history, the Conflict of the Orders is described in such violent terms that it seems

a wonder that the Roman state survived at all in face of the numerous external foes that beset it. Doubtless his account is exaggerated, but we shall see that it was only after 366, a turning point after which the conflict between patricians and plebeians moved into a less violent phase, that Rome began to make significant conquests abroad. During the most violent phase of the conflict, the plebeian organization, led by the tribunes of the plebs, had functioned almost as a state within a state. The final years of the struggle are marked by the increasing integration of the plebeians and their tribunes into the management of the state. First there were plebeian consuls. Then, after a mechanism had been found in 339 whereby the decrees of the plebeian assembly could be made binding on the whole state, the senate – which consisted of ex-magistrates, priests, and other leading men of the state and which *c.* 339 would still have been dominated by patricians – began to work in harmony with the tribunes to introduce new measures. Livy (8.23.12, 9.30.3–4) records such measures for 327/6 and 311, and in the later years of the Republic this was to become the most common method of introducing legislation, the revolutionary instincts of tribunes being harnessed to the collective will of the aristocracy. However, the tribunate never lost its role as protector of the plebs and remained apart from all other magistracies. It is noteworthy that, when a magistrate failed in his duty (often in command of an army), he was liable to be prosecuted by a tribune.[15]

The opening up to the plebeian élite of the senior magistracies and the more important of the priestly colleges led to the creation of a new nobility that replaced the old patrician aristocracy. The values of these nobles, dominant among which were the desire for military repute, the advertisement of one's own achievements and those of one's family, the refusal to allow any one member of the governing class to become preeminent for too long, and a suspicion of outsiders, were probably not strikingly different from what had gone before. What was different was the success of this new nobility in maintaining a dominant position in the state, which it did from 287 (at the latest) more or less until Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 B.C. The most interesting Latin inscription to be written in this period comes from the tomb of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, who was consul in 298. Its words illustrate very well the ideology of the Roman nobility in the early third century:[16]

> Cornelius Lucius Scipio Barbatus, born with Gaius as his father, a brave and wise man whose appearance was equal to his bravery, who was your consul, censor, and aedile, captured

> Taurasia and Cisauna from Samnium (?), subdued all Lucania and took away hostages from it.

Note here the references to the dead man's family, his aristocratic appearance, his record in office holding, and his achievements in war.[17]

Everyone knows that the language spoken by the Romans was called Latin. It is less well known that originally Latin was not spoken all over ancient Italy but was the native tongue only of those dwellers on the splendid plain that is bounded by the Tiber in the north, the Monti Lepini in the east, and the peninsula of Circeii in the south. Other Latin towns were Antium, Ardea, Aricia, Cora, Lanuvium, Lavinium, Nomentum, Pedum, Praeneste, Satricum, Tibur, and Velitrae. All these were united with Rome in the Latin League; they played a significant role in early Roman history, and in the regal period Rome was hardly more than their equal.

Whether Rome was still only their equal in 509, the traditional date for the beginning of the Republic, has been much debated. For those scholars who believe that the city was already large and dominant in Latium, a prime witness is the Greek translation of Rome's first treaty with Carthage, incorporated by Polybius into his history (3.22.4–13). A reasonable interpretation of the treaty suggests that Rome had hegemony over several Latin cities, including Antium and distant Tarracina. Those who deny such power to Rome argue that Polybius was either taken in by a forgery or misdated the treaty.[18] But whether Rome was dominant in Latium in 509, it is clear that any dominating power that it may have possessed did not continue long; in either 499 or 496 it had to fight the other members of the Latin League at Lake Regillus. The literary tradition claims that Rome was victorious, but the subsequent course of fifth-century history provides no great evidence that Rome reasserted the control over the Latins implied in the first Carthaginian treaty, and it is better to regard this battle and the Cassian treaty (*foedus Cassianum*) that followed it in 493 as laying the foundations for the stable relationship between the Romans and the Latins that was maintained for the next hundred years. Some modern scholars think that Rome and the Latins were equal partners in this league, others that Rome was once again just one among several Latin cities that were members of it; all agree that Rome and the other speakers of Latin combined forces for many wars and together founded colonies with the intention of protecting their territory against common foes.[19]

This stable relationship with the Latins was much needed. For in the early fifth century, both Rome and the Latins came under acute

pressure from the Aequi and Volsci, dwellers in the mountains inland from the Latin plain. They raided Roman and Latin territory and even invaded the Latin plain, taking over Latin settlements at Satricum, Antium, and Tarracina. Rome's other principal foe in the fifth century was the Etruscan city of Veii, with whom Rome often clashed. If the other Latin cities were more affected by the incursions of the Aequi and Volsci, it was Rome that was exposed most to Veii.

Rome and its Latin allies made few advances during the fifth century, although they established some colonies, most notably at Norba and Setia, hilltop towns that stand on the foothills between the Monti Lepini and the Latin plain and at which one can still see the magnificent Latin defences. They drove back the Aequi, who posed much less of a threat after their defeat at the Algidus Pass in 431; they kept the Volsci at bay; and in the 430s and 420s they (or perhaps Rome alone) wrested Fidenae, a small town that was just nine kilometres from Rome and overlooked a crossing of the Tiber, from the control of Veii. But at the beginning of the fourth century there were two victories of consequence: the Volsci who lived on the Latin plain were defeated, and some land was clawed back from them. More importantly, Veii was captured by Rome in 396 (apparently without Latin aid), and all her territory was incorporated into the Roman state. Rome's stature and power in Latium were thereby increased.

Then in 390 a band of marauding Gauls marched south from the valley of the Po, defeated the Romans at the battle of the river Allia (a stream just north of Rome), and sacked Rome itself. Only three things are certain about this episode: that it happened, that it left Rome with a long-lasting fear of Celts, and that virtually everything that our sources say about it is unbelievable. Following the departure of the Gauls, Rome faced further difficulties: in 389 some Latin cities threw off their alliance, and Rome found itself fighting the Aequi, Volsci, and Etruscans. Yet it survived, and by 366, when the Conflict of the Orders had begun to abate, it was ready to expand. Doubtless the territory of Veii, on which a new generation of soldiers had grown up, played a key role in this.

The next century saw Rome expand from being the dominant power in Latium to being the mistress of Italy. The speed and comprehensiveness of this conquest are best evoked simply by listing in chronological order the more important of the wars that Rome fought:

- the Hernici in the valley of the Sacco (366–358);
- the Etruscans, especially Tarquinii (359–351);
- the Latin League, especially Tibur and Praeneste (358–354);

- the Volsci on the Latin plain (358–357, 346);
- Sora, the Volscian town in the middle valley of the Liris (345);
- the Aurunci (345);
- the Samnites (343–341, a war started after Rome had gained control of Capua and its satellite towns in 343);
- the Latins (340–338, this being the last Latin war);
- the Campani, Sidicini, Aurunci (all in alliance with the Latins [340]);
- the Aurunci and/or Sidicini (337–334/3);
- Acerrae, a city neighbouring Capua (332);
- Fundi and Privernum (330–329);
- Neapolis (327–326);
- the Samnites (it was during this war [326–304] that Rome, though ultimately victorious, suffered her celebrated defeat in the Caudine Forks);
- the Marsi and other tribes of the central Abruzzo (312–298, intermittently);
- the Etruscans (311–308);
- the Umbrians (310–308);
- the Hernici (307–306);
- the Aequi (304–298);
- the Umbrians (303–295, intermittently);
- the Etruscans (302/1–292, intermittently);
- the Samnites (298–290);
- the Sabines (290);
- the Etruscans (very intermittently from 283 to 264);
- Tarentum, the Samnites, the Lucanians, and the Bruttians (282–272);
- the Picentes (268);
- Sarsina (267); and
- the Sallentini (267–266).

Add to this, first, several campaigns against the Gauls (initially on or near Roman territory [361, 360, 358, 349, 329] but then further north [especially in 296–295 and 283]) and, second, the battles against King Pyrrhus of Epirus, the famous ally of Tarentum (281–278, 275).[20]

For anyone interested in stories of battles and heroism, Livy and our other sources for the wars of conquest in Italy provide tales aplenty. However, it is the task of the historian to stand back from these details and analyse the process as a whole.[21]

In this long series of wars, two decisive turning points present themselves. The first is the settlement after the last Latin war ended in 338. In this settlement, Rome organized its juridical relationship with the Latins and other peoples whom it had conquered in such a way that they fell into the following three categories:

- The old Latin League was disbanded. Henceforth all Latin states would look to Rome for leadership. Several Latin states (e.g., Aricia, Lanuvium, Nomentum, and Pedum) were forcibly incorporated into the Roman state. Although they each continued to be governed locally, their citizens were full Roman citizens and enjoyed all the privileges and were expected to fulfil all the duties of Roman citizenship.
- A few Latin towns (e.g., Tibur and Praeneste) were left as independent states; however, now surrounded by Roman territory, they were no longer able to have any meaningful foreign policy of their own.
- Several large tracts of territory (especially Capua and its satellite towns) were incorporated into the Roman state, but in such a way that their citizens, although liable or eligible for other duties or privileges, could not vote (they were *cives sine suffragio*, 'citizens without the vote'). In other words, their citizenship was defective.[22]

Although the context of this settlement was one of aggressive Roman imperialism (something that would have been quite clear to those Campanians who suddenly found themselves Romans), the settlement was successful in providing a secure juridical framework within which Rome could dictate limits to the freedom that these defeated states now enjoyed. Further, the settlement, for the first time in Roman history, established on a large scale the concept of 'municipality' – the idea that a man or woman could have dual citizenship (be a citizen of both Rome and a provincial town) and that a provincial town could enjoy its own local government but at the same time be wholly part of the Roman state.

Another important feature of the settlement was that the concepts of 'Latin' and 'citizen without the vote' were to prove dynamic and capable of further development. In 334, when it sent a colony to Cales (modern Calvi) on the borders of Campania, Rome reestablished the concept of Latin colonization – colonization in which members of other Latin towns as well as Rome could take part – and showed that it was prepared to found colonies far from old Latium itself. Numerous other Latin colonies were to follow, both before and after the First Punic War,

and the success of the idea can hardly be overestimated. These colonies were the fetters by which the Samnites and the other recalcitrant tribes of Italy were bound, since any revolt was difficult for a people who had a large settlement of Latins placed in their midst. When Italy blazed in revolt and Roman power crumbled after Cannae (216 B.C.) and in the Social War (91–89 B.C.), these colonies held firm and proved to be Rome's salvation. They fulfilled an important economic role (see below), and they were also instrumental in spreading the Latin language and culture throughout Italy, thus helping to pave the way for the spread of the Latin rights throughout the Roman empire. Interestingly, several are still provincial capitals, including Beneventum (modern Benevento), established in 268, and Aesernia (modern Isernia), established in 263. Whether at first the burghers of Aricia and Nomentum liked their incorporation into the Roman state we cannot know, but the settlement with the Latins worked, bringing a stability to Roman and Latin relations that proved the bedrock on which the rest of the conquest of Italy was founded. With the Latins securely by its side, Rome had a larger pool of manpower on which to draw, and to the east and south its territory was now cushioned by that of its allies.

The concept of citizenship without the vote was also capable of further use. In 333, Acerrae (modern Acerra), a neighbour of Capua on the Campanian plain, was incorporated on these same terms, as was Arpinum (modern Arpino, later to be the birthplace of Cicero and Marius) in 303. However, this concept proved less successful than the expansion of the Latin name; some of the states incorporated were unhappy with their second-class status and loss of sovereignty (most famously, Capua rebelled in 216 B.C., after Cannae), and others pushed for upgrading (granted to Arpinum in 188 B.C.).

Not all states with whom Rome had dealings during its conquest of Italy were incorporated as *civitates sine suffragio*: some (e.g., Camerinum, modern Camerino) were prudent enough to make an alliance at an early date and enjoyed a favourable treaty; others (e.g., the Samnites) made terms only after fighting and had a less favourable treaty. For many states, the juridical relationship to Rome is uncertain, but it is possible that some had no formal treaty, being simply Rome's 'friends'. A map of the states of Italy in 264 compiled on the basis of their juridical relationship to Rome looks like a rather confusing mosaic but displays one striking feature: an unbroken strip of Roman territory ran from Ostia to the Adriatic, separating Rome's old foes in northern and southern Italy from each other and giving a solid territorial base to its power. By the battle of Telamon, fought at the very latest in 225 against a massive

army of invading Gauls, and perhaps as early as the First Punic War, the states that Rome had conquered provided it with manpower. These troops were the basis of the army that Rome used for conquest of the Mediterranean.

The other great turning point was the battle of Sentinum (Sasso-Ferrato), fought in 295 B.C. in the further reaches of Umbrian territory. Although even after this year Rome was to fight many difficult battles, it was never again confronted with so powerful a coalition of enemies as that comprising the Samnites, Etruscans, Gauls, and Umbrians who ranged themselves against it in that year. Defeat at Sentinum could have altered the course of history in Italy and put a permanent check on Rome's ambitions. As it was, after that year the Italian states were able to resist Rome effectively only when they had outside help from a Pyrrhus or a Hannibal.

The Pyrrhic War was not exactly a turning point in Rome's fortunes (Rome was already in control of most of peninsular Italy when the war began), but it, too, deserves comment. For the first time it brought Rome face to face with a Hellenistic foe, and the fact that Rome finally emerged victorious announced to the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Greek cities, and Carthage that there was now a new power in the western Mediterranean. Eleven years after the end of the war, Rome was to fight Carthage for the first time.

A remarkable feature of the process by which the Romans conquered Italy is that between 343 and 241 they went to war in almost every year. The exceptions are 331, 328, 288, 287, and 285 (but our sources for the last three of these years are very poor, and we should not rule out the possibility that fighting occurred in some of them). A pattern of this kind must have encouraged the expectation that in any given year the Romans would go to war, and it must have proved a powerful spur to conquest.

Rome profited very greatly from her successful warfare. First and most important, a large amount of land was confiscated from the states that it defeated. Much of this land was put to use in Rome's programmes of colonization. The colonies (mostly Latin but also some smaller settlements consisting almost entirely of Roman citizens) allowed those who were impoverished the chance to make a new life. This in turn led to an improvement in social conditions in Rome, and it may be no accident that between 342 and 287 we hear little about indebtedness and social unrest in the city. Land taken from defeated foes could also be acquired or leased by Romans of the upper class, who used it to increase their own wealth and standing.

Slaves were another reward of successful warfare. The abolition of debt-bondage in either 326 or 313 should not be ascribed merely to a new humanity emergent in the Roman governing élite. Rather, warfare had produced an abundant supply of slaves who could be put to work on the estates of the rich. That Roman agriculture in the late Republic was heavily dependent on the labour of slaves is well known, but it is not always appreciated that this phenomenon has its origin in the fourth century B.C.

Booty and money were yet another reward, both for individuals, who could invest it in land or elsewhere, and for the central treasury, which could use it to finance further warfare. Cash acquired in this way financed the construction of a remarkable series of temples built in the years around 300 B.C. (e.g., the temple of Bellona, vowed in 296, and the temple of Jupiter Victor, vowed in 295). These increased the splendour and prestige of the city and provided employment for the urban poor. Still larger in scale was the construction of the Appian Way and Appian Aqueduct by the censor Appius Claudius Caecus in the years immediately after 312 B.C. All this construction encouraged the growth of the city of Rome, providing employment for immigrant labour and attracting more of it. Soon the city was to be a dominant force not just in the politics and warfare of Italy but also in the economy.

Another impulse to expand was provided by the competitiveness of the emerging patricio-plebeian nobility. Prestige depended upon election to office, and in the bellicose society of Rome there was no greater source of prestige than success in warfare. It is easy to see that the prospect of success will have encouraged many Roman generals to campaign more adventurously than might have been expected at the beginning of their year in office. Whether one wishes to apply the label 'imperialistic' to Rome in the hundred years before the First Punic War is less important than understanding the potential rewards of warfare and the long-term effect that they had on the Roman economy. Yet when we make conjectures about the intentions of the Romans, both as individuals and collectively, it is hard to imagine that they conquered Italy by accident.

Individuals have barely been featured in this chapter, and indeed our sources give us no secure idea of the personality of any Roman who lived before the Second Punic War.[23] It may be helpful, however, to end with a glance at Manius Curius Dentatus, who at the time of his death in 270 was unquestionably the most famous Roman of his day and whose career illustrates many of the themes of this account of the early Republic. Curius was a 'new man': no ancestors of his are