INTRODUCTION

THE ROMAN ELITE AND THE RHETORIC OF HISTORY

Throbbing excitement seemed to void their hearts
All beating high in appetite for glory.
Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.182–3 (Fitzgerald translation)

During the Republican period Romans vied with one another for economic security, social prestige, and political power: they competed for status.[1] The Roman governing class, like other elites, sought distinction both collectively and individually. Historical narrative was an important vehicle by which the Roman elite fashioned themselves vis-à-vis their peers, lower Roman orders, and non-Romans. Whereas the narratives of written history were generally restricted to an audience of literate aristocrats, historical art joined oratory to address a larger, often nonliterate public. A consideration of how Roman aristocrats construed both themselves and the usefulness of history in patterning their identity – a fundamental part of their *habitus* – will prove beneficial before examining specific monuments of Roman historical commemoration.

FASHIONING THE ROMAN ELITE

Today the social hierarchy of Republican Rome seems quite clear-cut: senators formed the highest class, equestrians composed the next highest, and the rest of the citizens lay beneath those two orders. Italians from other *municipia*, farmers from the countryside, foreigners, and slaves further swelled the city's population. Attaining high status in Rome depended on a number of factors. In the upper echelons of society, wealth was essential and ancestry played a significant role. Significant achievements brought increased political power (*auctoritas*) and, to some extent, the spectacle of culture could also be important. How, we may ask, did the Roman elite conceive of themselves?

Members of the Roman Senate and their families were largely seen as occupying the highest level of the social hierarchy. Senators held public office, commanded Rome's armies, and governed the provinces of the empire.[2] Magistrates

gained their posts by popular election, and by the late Republic higher magistrates automatically became senators for life. There were property qualifications for both senators and *equites*, the groups from which candidates for high office were elected.[3] Wealth was based primarily on land, but *auctoritas* also resided in a man's numerous *clientes*, who were morally and economically dependent on him, voted for him in the popular assemblies when he stood for office, and took up arms on his behalf in times of crisis. The *clientela* system,[4] one of the unique features of Roman society, could also in itself provide the basis for a man's political career. Heirs inherited clients, like property and, to a certain extent, even *auctoritas*. Although many senators came from families with a tradition of membership, a significant number failed to maintain representation in the Senate over the generations.[5] Thus, although it was always clear who was a senator, it was not always clear who should attain this prestigious position, a predicament that informed ongoing debates as to the relative importance of wealth, birth, and virtue demonstrated through achievement in determining a man's worth.

The equestrian order, which made up the second rank of Roman citizens, is rather more difficult to define than the senatorial.[6] Again, wealth was a prerequisite for membership. Some equestrians were grander than others, and the distinction between senators and the most illustrious equestrians was almost entirely a juridical one. Senatorial and equestrian families socialized together, intermarried, and shared many political and economic concerns, so that by the late Republic many senators came from equestrian families.[7] There was a certain amount of social mobility in the Republic; however, both family and state asserted power to control such movement.

The Roman ruling classes actively and vividly defined themselves as distinct from others, both Roman and non-Roman (barbarians). They were intensely preoccupied with their position and the recognition of status by the community. The intellectual, social, political, and even aesthetic structures of Roman society encouraged the elite to manipulate their class identities. Social conditions also encouraged them to craft their individual personae personally and purposefully. Stephen Greenblatt has suggested a comparably deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity in the literature of sixteenth-century England. He termed it the "autonomy" of self-fashioning: "the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own."[8]

Fashioning in this context suggests the achievement of a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, and a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving. For the Roman elite during the Republican period, self-representation is an aspect of what Clifford Geertz describes as "a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules instructions . . . – for the governing of behavior."[9] It is a cultural system of meanings governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment. Republican literature recounts a widespread self-consciousness among the elite about the fashioning

of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. Roman nobles recognized the need to control the ways in which they were publicly perceived. Their personal ambitions held public potential, and behavior therefore became a kind of iconographic program because it had been shaped by shared communal ideals.[10]

Status depended not only on satisfying relatively objective criteria, such as census requirements, but, what is more important, on securing the recognition of one's peers and superiors (and, for electoral purposes, that of the lower social orders). The term *nobilis* was ambiguous. On the one hand it suggested distinguished birth, specifically that one's family had at least one consul, yet it also implied preeminence in personal qualities.[11] Cicero (*In Pis.* 1) attacked Piso for having secured election to the consulship on the basis of his (allegedly) illustrious family background rather than his individual character.[12] The rhetoric of achievement played a key role in marking off the Roman elite (or at least its male members) from the rest of society. Aristocrats justified their privileged position by pointing not only to their superior birth but also to their many contributions to the *res publica*. Their superiority in this regard legitimated the control they exercised over others who, it was implied, were inferior to them. Members of the elite sought *fama*, a kind of immortality attained by securing the remembrance of one's accomplishments. They followed social codes of conduct and expectations that explicitly directed their actions in negotiating power relations among themselves and in securing public recognition of their *virtus*.

Virtus, or manly courage, may be thought of as the Latin equivalent of the Greek *arete* (excellence). It is one of those concepts like *auctoritas*, *libertas*, or *pietas* that are broad and rich in associations and can only be understood according to context. The term was heavy with significance for Roman writers, who construct it as the distinguishing feature of *Romanitas* (Roman-ness). It is the quality that individually marked out the good Roman, and consisted of a complex mixture of ancestry, wealth (as a sign of achievement), and personal merit: the very qualities the Roman elite used to distinguish themselves.

Roman authors represented Roman national identity in terms of their moral superiority, especially in comparison with other peoples.[13] The elder Pliny (*N.H.* 7.130) observes:

> Of all the peoples in the world, the Roman nation is unquestionably the one most outstanding in virtue. Mankind is not fit to judge what human being has had the greatest happiness, since different people define prosperity in different ways and each according to his own character.

For Pliny, the definition of happiness is open to interpretation but not the definition of *virtus*. Roman historians seem especially preoccupied with Roman virtue. Livy's history begins with praise of Roman virtue (1 *praef.* 11), and other authors such as Nepos (*Han.* 1.1) also emphasize Roman preeminence in virtue.

The elite therefore could justify their privileged position by pointing to their superior virtue. Achievements demonstrative of virtue, in turn, brought *gloria* (glory) to the individuals who had accomplished them, and by extension to their families, class, and nation. Conceptions of virtue and glory were central to the way elite Romans (the only ones whose views survive) thought about themselves, both in relation to non-Romans and as individuals in relation to the state and to one another. Romans themselves constructed the analysis of *gloria* as a characteristically Roman activity.

REPUBLICAN POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND *CUPIDO GLORIAE*

Roman discourses about *gloria* were profoundly implicated in the structures of power. The sociopolitical patterns of both Romans and the Italian peoples they conquered affected the course of Roman imperialism. The facts of a Roman political career are important and well known, but their essential role in engendering Roman historical art is less recognized. Roman magistrates, the political officials elected annually by the popular assemblies, had different titles according to their different functions and seniority. The term of office for each magistracy was only one year, with very limited possibilities for reelection to the same post, and magistrates normally shared power with a number of colleagues.[14] By the mid-second century B.C. the Roman magistracies were strictly ordered by seniority, a hierarchical series of offices (the *cursus honorum*).

A man pointed to his wealth and ancestry in his attempts to secure power and influence. In certain contexts, wealth and ancestry may have been more eloquent; certainly the voting assemblies gave disproportionately great influence to the wealthy.[15] Yet in some elections, demonstrating one's superiority in virtue made manifest through achievements could prove decisive. Oratory was one tool at a politician's disposal, and as Cicero (*Tusc.* 2.3) notes, "the aim of oratory is to win the approval of one's audience." Historical writings were another, but whereas it was other members of the elite who mainly bought and read texts, forceful oratory aimed to persuade a more inclusive audience; and historical art, whose argument did not depend on the singular delivery of a speaker, reached a still wider public.

Any man embarking on a political career generally started at the bottom of the *cursus honorum* and worked his way up, so long as he continued to win election, in the prescribed order through progressively more senior magistracies. Two distinctive characteristics were peculiar to the Roman system of office-holding. First, the age barriers attached to magistracies gave a defining edge to political life: a political career consisted of constant competition with men of one's own age and class.[16] From boyhood a Roman politician enjoyed close yet competitive associations with his direct contemporaries at school, at leisure, in military service, and in politics. Each generation of aristocrats, equal in age and theoretically equal in prestige, progressed through a series of elections in which they competed with each other for public favor and political power. This

principle of peer group contention in the political sphere lies at the heart of the more general competitive character of the Roman elite.[17] Second, the further a man progressed up the political hierarchy, the more intense the competition for office became.[18] The pyramidal structure created by having fewer offices at each higher level ensured that at each stage some of those who had started on a political career would fail to progress further. The sedition of Catiline, twice defeated at election for the consulship, illustrates the bitter reality of defeat.[19]

Social prestige was indispensable to a Roman elite that exercised control indirectly, through elections and assemblies. During the Republic, Roman aristocrats competed for the high esteem bestowed by their fellow citizens, for *laus* or praise on one level and for *gloria* on a higher one.[20] In his account of imperial growth during the Republic, Sallust describes the central importance of *cupido gloriae*:

> But it is incredible how much the state grew within a brief period, once freedom had been gained: so great was the desire for glory that had affected men. As soon as the young were old enough for war, they learned the business of soldiering by toiling in armed camp, and they took pleasure more in fine arms and cavalry horses than in whores and partying. So to men of this kind no toil was unusual, no ground seemed rough or steep, no enemy under arms seemed frightening: courage (*virtus*) had gained complete control. But there was intense competition among them for glory: each one of them hastened to strike down an enemy, to climb the rampart, and to be seen doing such a deed. . . . (*BC* 7.3–6, Harris translation)

"To be seen doing such a deed": the whole last sentence of Sallust's description enacts the crucial elision – or even fusion – among the notions of act, report, and interpretation that I discussed in the Preface. Here, social competition (*cupido gloriae* and the benefits to which it could lead) cannot be separated from the catalog of militant gestures, or from the simultaneous instant of desired witness, or from the implication of ensuing report, interpretation, and enhanced prestige.[21] Sallust shows us how impacted those occasions were as he imagines the yearnings of "the young." Sallust imagines an imagining of being "seen doing such a deed": this densely layered texture of perceptions, among which separable "fact" virtually disappears, comes intriguingly close to the theoretical explorations of ideology encountered in the Preface. In the historical commemorations discussed in the following chapters, it is often possible to distinguish among battle, image, and interpretation; yet we should always recall how unified are these elements as Sallust explores the sources of *virtus* in the early Republic.[22]

While the higher public offices and membership in the Senate conferred *laus*,[23] military success was the single most important way to achieve *gloria*. Not only was such achievement highly advantageous to the Roman state, it was

of vital importance to the personal aims and interests of Roman aristocrats.[24] Ambitious young men of the Roman elite were obliged to undertake military service. Polybius (6.19.4) reported that a man had to complete ten annual military campaigns as a junior officer before he could seek election to the lowest position in Rome's hierarchy of magistracies. Inscriptions (both epitaphs and *elogia*) indicate that during the Republic warfare was a normal part of the successful young aristocrat's career.[25] Additional evidence for the esteem earned from deeds of war is the ancient Roman practice of taking an extra name from the site of one's victory (e.g., Calenus, Messala, Africanus) or from one's actions in battle (e.g., Torquatus). The occasional practice of later members of a family adopting the honored title, and thereby trying to affiliate themselves with the *gloria* earned by their ancestors, underscores its significance. Although the formal obligation to serve ten campaigns had fallen into abeyance by the late Republic, considerable military service was still expected of young *nobiles*.[26]

Success in war was therefore the most glorious kind of achievement by which an aristocrat could prove his virtue, and it was often in his economic interests to favor expansionist policies.[27] War extended the tax base and provided income to financiers, plunder to soldiers, promotion for officers, and extra distributions of wheat or money to the Roman *plebs*, but first and foremost it increased *gloria* to the commander, who could additionally win the highest distinction of the state, the right to hold a triumph.[28] Finally, Roman politicians did not receive a salary for holding office, and many magistracies involved the holder in considerable expense. For example, the *ludi* or games organized by the aediles usually included chariot races, gladiatorial shows, and theatrical performances.[29] Romans felt that the generous financing of *ludi* could influence success in subsequent elections.[30] Magistrates vied with one another, each striving to appear richer and more generous than his rivals did. Historians note how fierce competition led to ever more extravagant displays toward the end of the Republic.[31] This could become a great financial burden.[32] In 28 B.C. there were no candidates for the aedileship, as none of the potential candidates had the resources to stage the lavish entertainments that were by then required.[33]

The final decades of the Republic witnessed escalation in the already high level of competition embedded within the Roman political structure, in part due to the value of the potential prizes. Election to office, for example, might lead to a military command in the eastern Mediterranean, where victory could bring immense wealth and prestige.[34] As the profits of empire flowed into Rome in the late Republic, status was increasingly maintained by conspicuous consumption. The gap between the successful and the unsuccessful politician widened; failure became even more devastating and winning even more important.[35] As the competition became more intense and as the fruits of success increased, more members of the Roman elite resorted to illicit tactics to secure the offices they wanted, until by the last decades of the Republic violence eroded the institutions of political life and disrupted the machinery of government. The explosion of competition threatened to destroy the political system from which it had grown.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD

Hellenization permeated Roman culture during the late Republic. From the vantage point of the Augustan principate, Horace (*Ep.* 2.1.156) cast the situation in characteristically Roman terms of military triumph:

> When Greece surrendered she took control of her rough invader,
> and brought the arts to rustic Latium.

The relationship between Greece and Rome remarked by Horace was one of acculturation. Acculturation designates the various and subtle consequences of historic situations that are also consequences of complicated and varied stratagems. It is a constant and universal phenomenon: every society is constantly promoting its example to its neighbors. Paul Veyne has suggested that the postcolonial political situation of the twentieth century has tended to circumscribe our understanding of acculturation to limited models of power relations: the weaker party receives from the stronger, and in terms of national originality the people who give their culture are foreigners. He argues that there was a time when, on the contrary, foreign values belonged to the victorious nation like a kind of booty. "Acculturation is not always a violence worked on a nation; it is always supported by a feeling of legitimacy (even if only the legitimacy of booty), that is by a relation of power."[36] Horace was correct to distinguish Hellenization as the defining quality of Roman cultural development during the Republican period.

Rome had always been on the fringes of Hellenism. Art existed in Rome before the late Republic, but it is difficult to distinguish from that produced by other adjacent Italic peoples. Early Roman construction, both domestic and religious, and manufacture of pottery and metalwork paralleled that of its Etruscan neighbors. Etruscans did not perceive the Hellenizing style as some foreign superiority to be caught up with or as a charming exoticism. Rather, it was a language in which every craftsman worked in his own fashion, even occasionally looking to models brought in from Greece: the Etruscans imported Greek vases as well as making them themselves. Etruscan civilization was one of the cultural sectors of international Hellenism that encompassed many other zones of the Mediterranean basin, including Caria, Sidon, Lycia, Cyprus, and even Egypt. It is only in the third century B.C. that we may properly speak of specifically Roman developments in art, not coincidentally determined by Rome's growing contact with Greek centers of civilization.

Literary developments provide analogous phenomena. In contrast to the visual arts, although there remain a few meager traces of an unrefined native dramatic tradition before the end of the third century B.C., there was no early development of a native Latin epic or ballad. Less than 200 years before Cicero, literary output in Latin was something new, barely extending beyond translations or adaptations from Greek epic poetry and drama and the first pioneering efforts by Romans at the creation of original epics, dramas, speeches,

and histories. By the late Republic, Roman literary production was rich in depth and range: Cicero's public speeches, treatises on rhetoric and philosophy, autobiographical poetry and so forth, and the verses of Catullus, the histories of Sallust, and the philosophical poetry of Lucretius ushered in the Golden Age of Latin literature.[37]

The first stage of Roman cultural development – the first phase in the creation of something typically Roman – can be characterized as one of translation from the Greek.[38] Beginning in the third century B.C., the Romans initiated a double practice indicative of the systematic use of Greek literature: not only did they translate Greek works into their own language, they also adapted such works to their own cultural needs. The distinction between two Latin words encapsulates these two aspects of reception: *exprimere* was the verb applicable to literal translation; *vertere* was applicable to translation involving modifications and adaptations of original meanings.[39] Exemplary of this phase is the work of L. Livius Andronicus (? ca. 290–ca. 205 B.C.), significantly of South Italian Greek origin and yet the first author known to have written in Latin. He made available to Romans the established genres of Greek literature; fragmentary remains indicate that his works included free translations of Homer's *Odyssey* and of various Greek plays. The prominence of drama demonstrates that this phase of Hellenization at Rome was in no way an upheaval. The works of early dramatists such as Plautus (who died in or after 184 B.C.) and Terence (ca. 190–159 B.C.) seem to be adaptations of Hellenistic plays filled with allusions to Greek culture.[40] Yet in a very Roman way they served both collective and individual ends: the plays were staged at festivals as part of public acts of worship, but they also brought glory to the individual magistrate who was responsible for the festival and paid for the dramatist.[41] Naevius, Ennius, and their peers dramatized subjects close to the hearts of Roman nobles, specializing in heroic themes like Romulus, Aeneas, and the *Sabine Women*. They also dramatized less mythological events (*Bellum Punicum*), and personages like *Brutus* and *Decius* (the hero of Sentinum), and *triumphatores* such as Marcellus of *Clastidium*, Aemilius Paullus, and Fulvius Nobilior in a tragedy entitled *Ambracia*.[42] Their theatrical productions commemorated the accomplishments of distinguished men, broadcasting their ideological justifications for *laus* and *gloria*, but always drawing on the models of classical tragedy and later on the great spectacles of Hellenistic dynasts.

Translation remained a significant element of cultural development throughout the Republic and beyond, even alongside more complex and original forms of cultural production. For example, although Cicero was strikingly innovative in developing a distinctively Roman philosophical tradition, he also paraphrased Greek poetry and, like many of his peers, continued to import into Italy originals and copies of Greek works of art.[43] Such importation, though, had its origins centuries earlier, at the very beginning of Roman territorial expansion. Manius Curius Dentatus, after a successful campaign in the Greek area of South Italy in the 270s B.C., brought back to Rome major works of Greek sculpture

as booty, thus beginning the process of familiarizing the Romans with Greek artistic masterpieces.[44] The first influx of art objects from Roman conquests in the Greek world stimulated the contemporary development of artistic practice in Rome.

How did Romans come to embrace so many aspects of Greek culture at the very moment they began to exercise ever greater military and political power over Greek territory? Although a neighboring people might be looked down on as weaker, foreign, and therefore barbarian, its customs could be adopted by others without scruple. Veyne argued that all that is necessary is that these cultural manifestations (being the better way of doing things)[45] be considered the property of all, or even that they have become – like the sculptures, gold and silver vessels, and other forms of booty – the property of the conqueror.[46] The Hellenized art of Etruria, Campania, and Magna Graecia (let alone its early presence in extant Roman traditions) attested to the international quality of the culture. Hellenistic civilization was not Greek or foreign. Rather, it was what some argue western civilization is today to the Third World: civilization, pure and simple.[47] The Greek way of doing things was taken to be the best and the truest in all domains, from diplomacy to religion.

The second phase of cultural development, when Rome established its protectorate over the Greek world, brought with it an important innovation: cultural adaptation and development beyond mere translation soon occurred in those areas where literature and art could serve the individual and collective needs of the governing class. Rome, like Greece, developed a learned culture that celebrated rhetoric, and political and judicial eloquence became the most honored artistic genre in society. In oratory, for example, politicians used the texts of speeches to publicize their views, and as political competition became fiercer during the second century B.C., Romans placed higher value on rhetorical techniques (of Greek derivation) that added to the force and persuasiveness of public speaking.[48] Historical commemorations actualized in the gloss of Hellenizing styles were merely one more weapon in the rhetorical arsenal of self-fashioning.

The major change in this second phase of Hellenization is that the Greek genres most important to Rome, such as literature and philosophy, were no longer articles to be ordered from a craftsman on demand. Instead the Roman aristocracy itself had to yield these values. The leading class became one that tried to be cultivated as well. Romans experienced that alliance between learned culture and political power that is found in so many preindustrial societies, such as the China of the poet Mao Zedung.[49] In such societies, superiority was cumulative because careers were not yet specialized, enabling the rich to exercise them all – including politics – at the same time, without bending under the burden. Cicero's pursuit of multiple careers as a gentleman farmer, historian, philosopher, orator, politician, art collector, and military man was not extraordinary. A politician was not the shadow of the people who had elected him, nor was he a bureaucrat or technician; he commanded by virtue of his demonstrable excellence, his *virtus*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A ROMAN HISTORICAL TRADITION

Rome's expansion into southern Italy and throughout the Mediterranean from the late third century B.C. led to increased involvement in the Greek world, and the Roman elite now faced, as adversaries or allies, communities with a developed sense of their own past and a strong feeling of identity. The conquerors appropriated from the Greeks a powerful tool of persuasion: they began to project a history.

Historical writing illustrates the profound depth to which Roman culture assimilated the model of Greece. The senator Fabius Pictor took part in the Second Punic War and subsequently inaugurated the practice of Roman historiography by recording his nation's past (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *Ant. Rom.* 1.6.2; Cicero, *De Div.* 1.43). Fabius wrote his *History of Rome* in Greek (ca. 200 B.C.), a fact generally explained by the need to justify to a Greek audience Roman expansion into the Greek world.[50] Fabius also sought to explain Roman moral qualities (*virtus*) to the Greeks and thus to further Roman policy, but he never disregarded his Roman audience.[51] He was proudly conscious of his senatorial status and fashioned his work to glorify his own family.[52] It seems likely therefore that such Romans used Greek affectations to impress one another rather than the Greeks.

Roman history was the product of a restricted social class and therefore shared its limited vision, but it is also unconsciously revealing of aristocratic assumptions and preconceptions. Other Roman senators wrote early histories in Greek, including L. Cincius Alimentus, a close contemporary of Fabius; in the next generation P. Scipio, son of Africanus; and in the mid-second century B.C. C. Acilius and A. Postumius Albinus.[53] These were political writers, *narratores*, not professional historians or *exornatores rerum*. That they wrote in Greek not only implies the existence of a cultured elite of Romans who could read Greek, it also demonstrates that both authors and readers found it entirely acceptable that their nation's records and traditions should be so rendered and transmitted in a Hellenized idiom.[54] This mentality also sanctioned paintings commemorating Roman achievements rendered in visual languages Rome appropriated from Greek models. Indeed, the employment of well-known forms suggested, in and of themselves, analogy with a celebrated past and, by implication, that the accomplishments of the present recorded in those forms made them worthy of memory.

The historical tradition of the Roman Republic was not an authenticated official record or an objective critical reconstruction; rather, it was an ideological construct designed to control, to justify, and to inspire.[55] It was a part of that overarching category Michel Foucault perceptively called a "politics of truth": the construction and attempted monopoly of truth by elites and their competitors;[56] conflicting versions of events ensured that all renderings remained unstable. Traditional Roman historiography, in contrast to Greek practice, was characterized by its focus on the community of Rome as its theme; and