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THE

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Mission Statement

The Hill Classical Review (HCR) seeks to disseminate and celebrate the broad landscape of the classical world. This student-led annual publication hopes to uplift the history, literature, language, philosophy, society, and art of the classics for the enrichment of the entire Hill community. Further, we hope to provide a platform for students to kindle their passion for original research and writing outside the classroom. This will grant them skills that go beyond Hill. Finally, we believe that our dedication to preserving the knowledge of the past will inspire wisdom in both our writers and readers for the future.

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Religio in Augustan Rome: Tool of the Ruling Elite or Faith of the People?

by Ambrose Cole '26

The Latin word religio, traced back to relegere, meaning "to go through again in speech or thought," and religare, meaning "to bind together again," is translated by Lewis & Short as "reverence for God (the gods), connected with a careful pondering of divine things."[1] This reverence took many forms in intellectual pursuit, individual faith, and participation in rituals throughout Roman history, but the increasingly formalized system of religio under Augustus represents a unique manifestation of faith in society. The Augustan Age saw festivals flourish and religious traditions come to the forefront of common consciousness, but it also represented a shift of religio toward the obligatory nature of mos maiorum, with participation in belief and celebration expected more than ever. Likewise, amid the rise of popular mythological writing by Vergil, Horace, etc., piety emerged as a critically highlighted virtue among the elite and common people alike. That Roman religion changed so drastically without the design of an influential few, however, is the central point of contention. Vergil was deeply embedded in the circle of Gaius Maecenas, whose ambitions lay firmly in shaping Roman culture to favor Augustus's rule. Augustus himself is praised among the pages of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. These ancient texts and historical accounts reveal Roman religio as a dual system: while the ruling elite instrumentalized divine authority to establish legitimacy and cultural influence, religion also allowed common people to enjoy meaningful relationships with the gods and enriched their welfare through personal beliefs and communal rituals.

Augustan religio is cited historically as a tool used by the ruling elite to maintain authority and assert cultural control over Roman citizens, with these actors' influence and the legitimacy of their religious faith remaining crucial questions. Ancient and modern scholars alike expound this elite-instrumentalism model; according to Syracuse University Professor of Ancient History Dr. Craige Champion, "Concerning religion,

1 Charlton T. Lewis et al., A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary, new edition ed. (Nigel Gourlay, 2020), accessed February 2, 2026, https://latinitium.com/latin-dictionaries.

Cicero remarks that . . . Romulus' deification, according to him, served to cloak the senators' regicide . . . [and he claims] the well-being of the state requires that the people always be dependent on the advice and authority of the ruling class."[2] Augustus's deification of Julius Caesar and his subsequent claim to divine heritage serve as prime examples of his influence over Roman religion and willingness to use it to his own advantage. Furthermore, the involvement of Gaius Maecenas, an eques central to Augustus's cult of personality, expands the image of the Roman influential elite to those figures close to Augustus who used financial and political leverage to embed propaganda in popular mythology. Virgil's Jupiter deifies Caesar in the *Aeneid*, a work sponsored by Augustus and Maecenas: "Nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar, . . . vocabitur hic quoque votis,"[3] ("Trojan Caesar will be born of beautiful lineage, . . . this one also will be addressed with prayers,") exemplifying an elite-instrumentalism view of the Augustan golden age of literature—funded by the ruling elite, laden with propaganda, and uninterested in the gods beyond their utility in shaping an obedient populace.

The elite-instrumentalism model of Roman religion under Augustus provides for collective rituals and landmarks, such as temples, in their formal, hierarchical contexts, but it begins to show cracks in failing to account for the experiences of common Romans amid these pillars of religion. University of Delaware Professor of Art History Dr. Lauren Hackworth Petersen lays out this model of Roman religious tradition under Augustus:

> This is an emperor, after all, whose building complexes on the Campus Martius and the Palatine hill speak to an ostentation and self-glorification that we, for the most part, have refused to acknowledge (our debt to ancient literary sources, I suspect). If the power of the Forum of Augustus resides in its ability to suggest a microcosm of the empire, with Augustus at its ritualistic center, then we are compelled to rethink how some of

2 Craige B. Champion, "Elite-Instrumentalism: Persistence and Paradox," in The Peace of the Gods: Elite Religious Practices in the Middle Roman Republic (Princeton University Press, 2017), 8, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1vwmh0t.5.

3 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.286-270

> the emperors, as heirs of this new world and religious order, have fared, perhaps a bit unjustly, in the literary tradition. We may just begin to see deus Augustus as the architect of a bold new myth that subsequent emperors inherited.[4]

To claim that the Forum of Augustus, built for the worship of Mars Ultor and ceremonies celebrating young men's coming-of-age, operates as a microcosm for a larger Roman religious system built for its creators' pleasure is a profound indictment of religio. This formal image of Roman religion helps explain the framework Augustus constructed and the public ceremonies held in his honor to increase his authority. However, accounting for the system created by the emperor and established as part of his campaign for legitimacy says nothing of the religious experiences of the vast majority of Romans—a population dedicated to personal and communal relationships with the gods rather than political ends or cultural influence.

The lived experiences of common Romans participating in religious festivals, exploring personal relationships with the gods, and engaging with popular mythology reveal a distinct world of religio centered on communion and celebration. Ovid's *Fasti* depicts many images of Romans gathering to celebrate faith in the gods during the reign of Augustus, far from the formal framework of the emperor or the propaganda sponsored by Gaius Maecenas. The Feast of Anna Perenna is described as follows: "Not far from your banks, Tiber, far flowing river. The people come and drink there, scattered on the grass, and every man reclines there with his girl. Some tolerate the open sky, a few pitch tents, and some make leafy huts out of branches, while others set reeds up, to form rigid pillars, and hang their outspread robes from the reeds. But they're warmed by sun and wine, and pray."[5] The following connection of the festival's mythology to *Aeneid* removes any confusion—this is the same religio that Augustus's elite fostered to maintain authority and ensure the docility of a people. However, it undeniably depicts a more

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4 Lauren Hackworth Petersen, "INTRODUCTION: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND RITUALS in THE RELIGIONS of ROME," Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 56/57 (2011): 7, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24616434.

5 A. S. Kline, trans., Fasti (Poetry in Translation, 2004), accessed February 5, 2026, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Fastihome.php.

plural religious faith, revealing a worship that extends beyond the central pantheon. Likewise, the story of Baucis and Philemon presents the virtue of hospitality as indispensable to a pious citizen amid a personal, reciprocal encounter with the divine: "parva quidem, stipulis et canna tecta palustri, sed pia Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon"[6] ("a small [house] indeed, covered with straw and marshy reeds, but the pious old woman Baucis and Philemon of a similar age [lived there]"). Images of people enjoying revelry and shared welfare amid celebrations of central and minor gods abound in these works and beyond; regardless of the ruling elite's influence on religio and seemingly crucial role in shaping it to perpetuate authoritarian rule, a communal religious tradition flourishes in Rome under Augustus, bringing divine connection and personal meaning to common Romans.

Thus, how is Augustus's elite-instrumentalist religious framework to be reconciled with the communal, informal religious practices enjoyed by common Romans in a singular image of religio? Some scholars suggest viewing the two separately, as entities inspired by different origins and maintained by different social organizations.[7] However, the two traditions interact and conflict politically in many cases. Ovid's exile, while directly attributed to the

*The Aeneid*content of his poem *Ars Amatoria*, complicates the congruence of the common religious and mythological customs depicted in his works with Augustus's ambitions, further supported by his subliminal antagonization of the emperor in works such as the *Metamorphoses*.[8] Likewise, the Feast of Anna Perenna's connections to reveal that the two modes of religio complement one another in turn, with common faith supporting formal religion and the fruits of Augustus's cultural campaign breathing mythological life into widespread traditions. The interplay evolved as Rome's ruling elite continued shaping religio according to their ambitions, and equally so as common Romans adapted to the nurtured, if curated, religion.

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6 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.630-631.

7 Nelson de Paiva Bondioli, "Roman Religion in the Time of Augustus," Numen 64, no. 1 (2017): 51, accessed February 2, 2026, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44505322.

8 Elyse K. Lisznyai, A Popular Poet: Ovid's Challenge to Augustan Legal Reforms, honors thesis, University of Michigan, 2017, 13.

Religious belief systems and societal frameworks under Augustus were far from static during the emperor's rule and long after; the resulting social and cultural climate was kaleidoscopic. The elite-instrumentalism model isolates a significant source of religious influence during the period; popular accounts of common celebrations and decentralized faith nevertheless portray Romans enjoying meaningful relationships with the gods and enriched their welfare through personal beliefs and communal rituals. Citizens felt pressure from above to conform to increasingly authoritarian rule under Augustus, as the gods and the ruling elite alike seemed to extol Augustus's divine legitimacy. This coercion characterizes much of the memory and history of formal Roman religion; considering such a legacy and the plurality of Romans' faith across the city and growing empire, religio remains in categorical purgatory. Religio existed and was significantly influential for many, but whether such a concept comprised formal religion leaves much to be discovered and debated.

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The Epistemic Limit in Roman–Human Divine Relations

by Ryan Qiu '26

Ancient Roman literature repeatedly frames the human–divine relationship as a problem of knowledge before ethics. While gods shape events, mortals lack tangible access to divine motives, and the texts highlight that opacity rather than resolving it.[1] This epistemic gap makes "psychoanalyzing" gods into coherent moral agents inaccurate at best, because divine action is presented as authoritative in outcome but resistant to any human moral explanation.[2] In this framework, the central human task is not to psychoanalyze the gods but to live and act as if the gods' reasons remain beyond human reach; by reading signs, obeying commands, and performing duty without demanding moral explanations, humans succeed.

Across Vergil's *Aeneid*, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, divine action operates on a scale of power and time exceeding human categories.[3] Mortals cannot reliably judge or interpret divine motives by an ordinary human moral framework. Instead, all three works demand *pietas*, a practice of duty and reverence in which human agency survives chiefly as interpretation, endurance, and correct action toward the divine.

Vergil signals the epistemic limit at the very start of the *Aeneid*.[4] The narrator's question, "*tantaene animīs caelestibus īrae?*" ("Can there be such great anger in heavenly minds?") is the first evidence of mismatch between mortal and divine.[5] The poem does not treat this as an invitation to decode Juno's psychology, but rather as a boundary of what mortals (and readers aligned with mortal perspectives) can safely claim about the divine.[6] Scholar A.D. Botha explicitly treats the poem's opening as

1 A. D. Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy in Virgil's *Aeneid*," Akroterion 37, no. 1 (1992): 6–14.

2 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

3 Craige B. Champion, *The Peace of the Gods: Elite Religious Practices in the Middle Roman Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), Introduction.

4 Publius Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid* 1.1–11.

5 Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.11.

6 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

naming an "unsolvable enigma," so that the question functions as a signal of limitation rather than a puzzle the epic will solve.[7] In that setup, humans can experience divine power, but cannot turn that experience into knowledge about divine motives.[8]

Jupiter's Book 1 prophecy intensifies this structure by providing prophetic but nonetheless unusable information.[9] When Venus complains that Aeneas' suffering seems incompatible with his destiny, Jupiter replies by asserting the stability of fate and laying out the macro-trajectory that leads to Roman rule[10]: "manent immota tuorum / fāta" (the fates "remain unmoved"), and "*imperium sine fine* dedī" ("I have given empire without end").[11] That speech presents what looks like an explanatory frame, but its explanatory power is limited. It is not a disclosure of motives as much as a declaration of quotas and outcomes.[12] Botha describes Jupiter here as the "consummator" of fate, as he frequently anchors Rome's historical process in divine will while leaving the human pain and loss largely unredeemed.[13]

By the same token, the poem's moments of moral complaint tend to collapse into less rather than more understanding.[14] Aeneas' famous line to Dido, "*Italiam non sponte sequor*," is not a moral justification so much as a confession that divinity and fate override human reasons.[15] The line's purpose is that a mortal agent may feel conflict, grief, even guilt, yet still be compelled by forces with illegible rationales.[16] For the *Aeneid*, evidently, the relationship with the gods is not a dialogue between moral equals. Human agents perform submission to a destiny disclosed in broad strokes that are not made ethically legible.[17]

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7 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

8 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

9 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," on Aeneid 1.257ff.

10 Vergil, Aeneid 1.257–296.

11 Vergil, Aeneid 1.257–296 (esp. *manent immota…fata; imperium sine fine*).

12 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

13 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

14 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

15 Vergil, Aeneid 4.361 (*Italiam non sponte sequor*).

16 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14.

17 Bill Gladhill, "Gods, Caesars and Fate in Aeneid 1 and Metamorphoses 15," *Dictynna* 9 (2012).

Modern scholarship provides further explanations.[18] Scholar Bill Gladhill argues that Vergilian prophecy authorizes a synoptic, macro-historical perspective that can absorb narratives and tension into teleology, precisely because prophecy speaks from beyond ordinary human understanding.[19] Yet prophecies do not guarantee clarity for recipients; prophecy can regulate meaning but cannot dissolve the experience of bewilderment when countless people suffer and are ultimately exposed to interpretation.[20]

One might object that Jupiter, at least, seems purposeful and therefore morally intelligible. Researcher Julia Hejduk challenges the readerly impulse to moralize Jupiter; she argues that the poem's evidence does not sustain any moral characterization, instead aligning Jupiter's function with *imperium* and *fama*.[21] If Jupiter's dominant concern is the maintenance of an imperial horizon rather than the ethics behind each event, then interpreting him through an ordinary moral psychology becomes unreliable.[22]

Book 6 extends this structure into the underworld.[23] Anchises' parade of Romans converts individual lives into units in a historical procession. In this setting, the divine or semi-divine vision does not help Aeneas "judge" the gods ethically; it trains him to accept a burden and to subordinate events to fate—precisely the posture that later Roman tradition would identify with *pietas* in its most demanding form.[24] Even where the vision carries ethical language (e.g., Rome's mission to "spare the conquered and subdue the proud"), the speech functions to bind Aeneas to a destiny the individual did not choose.[25] The scene's power, then, is not that it explains the gods but that it re-scales the human perspective so that obedience becomes the only workable response to an otherwise

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18 Gladhill, "Gods, Caesars and Fate."

19 Gladhill, "Gods, Caesars and Fate."

20 Gladhill, "Gods, Caesars and Fate."

21 Julia Hejduk, "Jupiter's Aeneid: Fama and Imperium," *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (2009): 279–327.

22 Hejduk, "Jupiter's *Aeneid*," 279–327.

23 Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.756–853 (Anchises' parade).

24 Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.756–853.

25 Vergil, Aeneid 6.851–853 (*parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*).

unworkable problem.[26]

Livy's Romulus-and-Remus narrative supplies a different, slightly disputed model.[27] In the augury contest, Remus sees six vultures first, Romulus later sees twelve, and each party claims legitimacy before the dispute becomes violent and Remus is killed.[28] Even when the gods communicate, they do so in an uncomfortable format that demands human interpretation, and that interpretation is shaped by politics.[29] The result is not clear divine moral communication.[30] Livy's Rome begins as an argument over what the gods meant, which is precisely what the epistemic gap looks like in narrative.[31]

This logic aligns with scholarly accounts of Roman public *religio*n as a system that responds to uncertainty.[32] Scholar Craige B. Champion's discussion of *pax deorum* emphasizes that "peace with the gods" was central to Roman state *religio*n and that civic *religio*n aimed at maintaining that peace.[33] Crucially, the system does not assume knowledge of divine motives or guaranteed reciprocity.[34] J. B. Rives provides a vocabulary for this emphasis by contrasting "orthopraxy" (priority of correct practice) with "orthodoxy" (priority of correct belief), arguing that Roman *religio*n is better modeled through practical conformity in action than through policing a uniform belief.[35] Together, these scholars show that Roman stories can treat divine motives as unreachable without nihilism.[36]

Ovid's Baucis-and-Philemon episode elevates the role of the epistemic

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26 Gladhill, "Gods, Caesars and Fate."

27 Titus Livius, Ab Urbe Condita 1.7 (augury contest).

28 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.7.

29 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.7.

30 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.7.

31 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.7.

32 Champion, *Peace of the Gods*, Introduction.

33 Champion, *Peace of the Gods*, Introduction (on *pax deorum* as central).

34 Champion, *Peace of the Gods*, Introduction.

35 J. B. Rives, "Sacrifice and 'Religion': Modeling Religious Change in the Roman Empire," *Religions* 10, no. 1 (2018): article 16.

36 Rives, "Sacrifice and 'Religion'"; Champion, *Peace of the Gods*, Introduction.

gap to the engine of human behavior.[37] Jupiter and Mercury arrive in disguise, are refused hospitality by the wealthy villagers, and are welcomed by an impoverished elderly couple who share what little they have.[38] Ovid's Latin displays their ethos: "*paupertatemque fatendo* / effecere levem nec iniqua mente ferendo"; they "made poverty light" by acknowledging it and bore it without resentment.[39] The narrative's tension comes from ignorance. Because gods may be present without being recognizable, humans must act reverently toward strangers without certainty.[40] Scholar Alan H. F. Griffin points out that the episode functions as a theodicy-like pairing of piety and reward, one that "justifies the gods."[41] Yet even here, theodicy cannot be done morally. The gods' punishment of the wider community is catastrophic, and the narrative does not pause to weigh proportionality at all; the point is that humans must recognize the cost of disobedience.[42]

These stories illustrate that humankind's relationship with the gods is defined by asymmetry.[43] In such a world, the central human responsibility is not to make the gods morally coherent by human standards, but to live within constraints.[44] That is the distinctive lesson these Roman texts offer about the human–divine relationship: gods finally remain unreadable, but human obligations are knowable, and the gap between the two is where Roman *pietas* takes shape.[45]

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37 Alan H. F. Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Greece & Rome* 38, no. 1 (1991): 62–74.

38 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.611–724 (Baucis and Philemon).

39 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.631–633 (*paupertatemque fatendo*…).

40 Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis," 62–74.

41 Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis," 62–74.

42 Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis," 62–74; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.611–724.

43 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.7; Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis," 62–74.

44 Champion, Peace of the Gods, Introduction; Rives, "Sacrifice and 'Religion'."

45 Botha, "Aspects of Prophecy," 6–14; Griffin, "Philemon and Baucis," 62–74.

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A Comparison of Ancient Greek and Roman Religion: Religion, Culture, and Society in Greece and Rome

by Evelyn Adler '28

Ancient Rome was one of the largest empires in history, spanning over 5 million square kilometers in AD 117 and containing around 20% of the world's population at its height. From Rome's early development in the eighth or seventh century BC to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476, the Romans conquered and integrated dozens of outside cultures into their own. Greek civilization had roots stretching back to the Bronze Age and continued through the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods before Rome conquered Greece in 146 BC. The Romans adopted many Greek mathematical, philosophical, and religious ideas into their own society. Although Rome adopted many Greek religious ideas, Greek and Roman religion remained distinct systems that shaped their societies differently through moral ideals, political structures, and cultural practices.

The ancient Greek gods were individualistic and had human-like psyches and emotions. Despite this similarity, Greeks were taught to venerate the gods without fully imitating them, since divine immortality remained forever out of human reach. The emotions and psyches of the gods appear throughout Greek mythos, where Greek gods are jealous or angry with humans in ways that resemble human interactions. Roman

religion, by contrast, often emphasized the gods' civic and protective functions more than their human-like emotional lives. These differences may help explain why the Greeks did not have one patron god for all of Greece. Rather, they had patron deities for particular cities, regions, and communities. Rather than proving that Greeks inherited individualism from their gods, Greek myths may reflect and reinforce Greek cultural values. Nevertheless, each culture's beliefs were reflected in its religion.[1]

The iconic statue known as The Winged Victory of Samothrace, originally an offering to the goddess Nike on the island of Samothrace, is currently on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, was often prayed to after battles as soldiers thanked her for leading them to victory. In this statue, Nike's pose makes it clear that her weight is placed on her right leg, showing that she is stepping down onto the warship. Her feet, if they still remained, would just barely touch the surface, making it seem as though she is floating down from the heavens. The statue is made from Parian marble, the most expensive and highly sought-after marble in Greece. The artistry and detail in the piece, especially in her robes, paired with the fact that much of the statue has survived for more than two thousand years, demonstrates how much care and time were put into divine offerings. Depicting gods in human form suggested a close relationship between

1 "Explore the Difference Between Greek and Roman Mythology," Penn College of Liberal and Professional Studies, February 19, 2024.

human experience and the divine. This encouraged ancient Greeks to feel closer to the ideas and teachings of the gods and led them to respect the gods even more. The absence of a known artist's signature also emphasizes that the statue functioned primarily as a divine offering rather than as an individual artist's self-promotion.[2]

The ancient Greeks had a vast number of philosophers and creative thinkers, and this intellectual curiosity is reflected in their mythos and in their attempts to explain why divine rule was legitimate. The influential Greek poet Hesiod used cosmogony, a narrative account of the origin of the cosmos. Through this, he examined the relationships among deities by birth, marriage, or alliance in order to explain why Zeus was the best king and how he succeeded when all his predecessors failed. This not only shows a complex understanding of cosmic order, but also demonstrates how Greek religious narratives could overlap with philosophical and cosmological questions about origins, order, and divine authority.[3]

Despite Greek interest in philosophy and natural explanation, magic remained deeply connected to the religious practices of the ancient Greeks and played a critical role in everyday life. Lindsay C. Watson explores this connection in Magic in Ancient Greece and Rome. The

2 "A Stairway to Victory: The Daru Staircase," *Musée du Louvre*.

3 A.W.H. Adkins and John Richard Thornhill Pollard, "Greek religion," Encyclopedia Britannica, December 29, 2025.

Greek Magical Papyri, often abbreviated PGM, are a corpus of magical texts preserved on papyrus. The spells in the PGM range from recipes to love spells to headache charms. Magic in ancient Greece and Rome served purposes beyond formal religion; it was integrated into daily society. The PGM also contains evidence of ancient Egyptian influence and language. This shows how magical traditions in the Mediterranean were culturally blended. Greek language and religion circulated widely across the Mediterranean, far beyond Athens. The Greeks played a large part in spreading magical beliefs and practices, and they consequently had an enormous impact on multiple cultures.[4]

A common type of magic in ancient Greece and Rome was the love spell. Many surviving erotic spells appear to have been written from a male perspective. This contrasts with many modern stereotypes that associate witchcraft primarily with women. Though originally written in ancient Greek in the PGM, this love spell has been translated into English. The following passage is a small portion of an exceptionally long spell.

> "[R]ouse yourselves, you daemons who lie here, and seek Isis… and bring her to me…in a state of frantic passion and fleshy love… For I have bound her brain and heart…to love me…and let her not be with any other man except me alone…"[5]

4 Lindsay C. Watson, *Magic in Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 11.

5 Watson, *Magic in Ancient Greece*, 23-4.

This spell is graphic in nature and, although described as a love spell, requests that Isis be violently compelled and brought immediately to Priskos, the person casting the spell. Furthermore, Priskos also threatens the daimones whom he asks to carry out his desires. In Greek religion, daimones were lesser divine or spiritual beings associated with forces, conditions, or abstract concepts. The spell's violent language reflects how magical practice could draw on coercion, threat, and domination. The spell also reveals Greek, Egyptian, and Roman influences. Isis was an Egyptian goddess whose worship spread widely in the Greek and Roman worlds. Additionally, Hades, the Greek name for the underworld, is mentioned by name. The spell shows how Greek, Egyptian, and Roman religious traditions could blend under the broader conditions of Mediterranean exchange and Roman rule.

Roman ways of life were promoted both among Roman citizens and across conquered territories. In addition to religion, one of the most important Roman concepts was pietas, which was embedded into religious practice. In contrast to Greek gods, who were often portrayed as individualistic, Roman religion often emphasized the gods' practical and civic functions. Their existence reinforced the Roman ideal of pietas, which held that Rome, the gods, family, and duty were to be honored before private desire. Pietas was the belief that Roman citizens needed to respect and honor Rome, the gods, and their family more than anything else. Romans were taught to honor the gods and embody virtues

associated with duty, discipline, and public service.[6]

Roman culture often relied on religion, ritual, and divine explanation to interpret events in the world. The classical scholar Robert Maxwell Ogilvie, educated at Oxford University, argues in his book The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus that Roman religion developed in a practical and ritual-centered culture. Unlike their Greek neighbors, the Romans often used religion to explain things they did not understand. Phenomena such as childbirth, harvests, and even happiness were all attributed to the divine. This emphasis should not be overlooked, for attributing common occurrences to the divine allowed for a more developed religion. Gods could have domain over multiple occurrences, and this granted people the ability to worship them for various reasons. Romans therefore had many reasons to worship particular gods for particular needs. Explaining events through the supernatural changed how people saw the world and their place in it.[7]

Rome's founding myth is marked by bloodshed. The twin brothers Romulus and Remus, sons of Mars, were abandoned in a river at birth. The boys were miraculously saved by a lupa, or she-wolf. Once grown, they discovered their heritage and fought in a revolt against the king, allowing their grandfather to reclaim his rightful place on the

6 Penn LPS, "Explore the Difference."

7 Robert Maxwell Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (London: W.W. Norton, 1969), 9.

throne. Romulus and Remus could not agree on where to found the new city and frequently argued. During one of these disputes, Romulus killed Remus and became the first king of Rome, naming the city after himself. This myth helped associate Roman identity with conflict, violence, and military power.[8]

Not only did religious teachings differ across Greek and Roman society, but similar gods could also hold very different cultural roles. For instance, Mars, the patron god of warfare and an agricultural deity, was much more important in Roman culture than Ares was in Greek culture. He was often venerated to a degree that Ares, his Greek equivalent, was not. Rome's founding was tainted with bloodshed, which contributed to a cultural identity strongly associated with war. Mars was offered significant sacrifices both before and after wartime, not only to ask for his aid in victory but also to thank him for victory afterward. Mars was also the patron of the month of March, which was associated with his agricultural qualities and connected to spring and regeneration. This is why many festivals were held in his honor during the spring. Where Ares was often portrayed as impulsive and destructive, Mars was more often imagined as a disciplined and protective force for Rome. He embodied the pietas that Roman citizens were also expected to embody, giving

8 Philip Matyszak, *The Greek and Roman Myths: A Guide to the Classical Stories* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 220.

them a god to look up to and emulate.[9][10]

Although religion remained important to Roman public life, its civic prominence changed over time until its revival by Octavian during his rule from 27 BC until his death in AD 14. While festivals and offerings to the gods were a large part of Roman life, many public rituals were managed by priests and magistrates rather than by ordinary citizens. Ordinary citizens' formal public duties were more limited, often including observance of holidays and participation in festivals. Although this may have made offerings easier to manage, it also pushed certain public displays of religion away from ordinary citizens' daily attention. During periods of military crisis in Italy and neighboring regions, religious anxiety also increased. Some Romans interpreted military crisis as a sign of divine displeasure. All of this changed when Octavian, also known as Augustus, restored peace to Italy around 29 BC. This lifted an enormous weight from citizens' shoulders, and their relief primarily manifested as gratitude to the gods, as Augustus claimed that the gods were the reason he was able to restore peace. When Augustus restored peace, it gave Romans the push they needed to begin practicing publicly again and thanking the gods for peace. Thus, Augustus helped initiate a revival of Roman public religion.[11]

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9 Kevin Murray McGeough, "Roman Pantheon," *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*, last modified 2026.

10 Penn LPS, "Explore the Difference."

11 Ogilvie, *The Romans*, 21.

After adopting Greek beliefs and practices, the Romans adapted Greek religious and philosophical ideas to fit Roman political values. Despite the rise and fall of religious authority and importance in Rome, religion always remained an integral part of Roman life. Religion remained central even after Christianity became dominant in the Roman Empire. To summarize Rome and Greece's relationship: Rome conquered Greece militarily, but Greece conquered Rome culturally. Though Rome overpowered the Greek people militarily, Greek culture dominated Roman life and shaped Roman philosophy and religion. Despite this, many of the inherently Greek ideas the Romans adopted are now associated not with the Greeks but with the Romans. The Romans conquered and assimilated cultures so successfully that they often took credit for other cultures' ideas. Even today, aspects of these mythological traditions remain present in our lexicon. Calling someone a narcissist stems from the Greek story of Narcissus. Roman and Greek culture is so deeply ingrained in modern society that many people no longer recognize the religious origins of common references.

Fig



12 *A Stairway to Victory*.

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Greek Myths: Perceptions of Femininity and Masculinity

by Emma Collingwood '27

Myths are more than stories; they reflect the cultural beliefs and social structures of a civilization. The mythological narratives of ancient Greece offer an understanding of how societies constructed and maintained complex ideas about human identity and social roles.

Ancient Greek men and women were significantly influenced by the stories shared during their lifetime. Heroines such as Athena, Penelope, and Helen provided an idealistic framework for Greek women while heroes such as Zeus, Odysseus, and Hercules gave men models of masculinity to emulate. Although some scholars emphasize the complexity of the relationship between myth, belief, and everyday life, Greek myths still helped shape cultural expectations for men and women. However, through the portrayals of the silent woman, the infamous hero, and the alienated outcast, it is clear that Greek myths played a pivotal role in perpetuating the ideas of "proper" masculinity and femininity in ancient Greek society.

The Silent Woman

Greek mythology deeply shaped ancient Greek ideas about women's lives and roles. Cultural standards in ancient Greek society appear throughout Greek myths, from how heroines are named to how goddesses are viewed by their fellow deities. In *The Position of Women in Classical Athens,* historian Donald C. Richter notes thatGreek men frequently reminded women that "silence is a woman's glory" in various mythological and historical works.[1] While women's roles within society can be viewed throughout mythology, Greek literary narratives should not be accepted uncritically, "since ancient literary evidence comes so overwhelmingly from male sources, we must be wary of accepting remarks in the area of female behavior at face value."[2] Richter goes on to say, "There is, of course, a healthy strain of misogyny and misogamy

1 Donald C. Richter, "The Position of Women in Classical Athens," *The Classical Journal* 67, no. 1 (1971): 4, JSTOR.

2 Richter, "The Position," 4.

running through Greek literature…"[3] which builds on the opinion that male authors in ancient Greece may have reinforced ideals of "correct" female behavior. Greek myth often places women in comparison or competition with one another.In both the Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy, there exists a "standard of comparison" between the heroines, be it by their cleverness or beauty.[4] Male-authored literary works helped shape restrictive standards of femininity and often portrayed women through comparison, rivalry, or dependence on men.

Though it may seem minor, examining naming in ancient Greek myth and culture sheds light on ancient Greek women's perceptions of their lives. The names of both heroes and heroines in Greek myth are formed by the same elements. However, what sets them apart is how those names are used. The same name can be used for two different females, or a single heroine can be given a different name in different versions of her myth. For instance, throughout Greek myth, there are more than three separate heroines with the name *Polykaste*. These distinct women will forever be seen as a unit instead of separate entities. The opposite of this is the few women whose names have been immortalized, remembered and scrutinized by later audiences:

> This apparent contradiction reflects the two poles of the heroine's situation: to be little more than a name in a genealogy, or to be distinct, to suffer, sometimes even to achieve immortality. This tension between the generic and the specific is inherent in the paradoxical nature of female *kleos [glory or renown]* and elucidates the connection between gender and the transcendence of mortality.[5]

Glory and its counterpart, legacy, are key pillars of ancient Greek

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3 Donald C. Richter, "The Position of Women in Classical Athens," *The Classical Journal* 67, no. 1 (1971): 5, JSTOR.

4 Deborah Lyons, "Heroines and Mortals," in *Gender and Immortality : Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 35, eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).

5 Deborah Lyons, "Heroines and Mortals," 52.

society for both women and men. However, they seem to be viewed and portrayed very differently between the sexes. For women, glory often appears through progeny, especially male sons. Women connected to Zeus often receive only passing mention in narratives centered on his sexual conquests. “When Zeus recites his list of conquests (Iliad 14.313-28), he identifies the women by the names of their husbands or fathers, and only occasionally by their names, while the names of their heroic male offspring are carefully recorded.” Naming in myth is not only important; it also promotes[6] negative perceptions of women’s significance within ancient Greek society, perpetuating a standard in which women are treated as ornamental to male identity and lineage.

Athenian women were largely confined to the household and had limited access to formal education, business rights, and public roles.[7] Because mythological stories often portrayed heroines in restrictive or harmful ways, women in ancient society were often represented as inferior to their male counterparts, reinforcing damaging ideas about femininity.

As mentioned, progeny and offspring were important in the lives of women in ancient Greeksociety. Reproduction can be seen throughout Greek mythology, from Athena’s birth to broader anxieties about the female body. Childbirth and female reproduction were troubling subjects for ancient Greeks and their perceived rules of bodily order. Studies have explored the intersection of female reproduction and its appearance in mythology, seeking an understanding of the realistic aspects within the fiction. Men are threatened by female reproduction, as in the myth of Pandora, women’s bodies conceal what cannot be controlled.[8] “Not only are women’s reproductive organs internal and hidden, but in the Greek

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6 Deborah Lyons, "Heroines and Mortals," in *Gender and Immortality : Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 54, eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).

7 Scott Rubarth, "Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 1 (2013): 30, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.1-1-2.

8 Adriel M. Trott, "The Feminine and the Elemental in Greek Myth, Medicine and Early Philosophy," in *Aristotle on the Matter of Form* (Edinburgh UP, 2019), 125, JSTOR.

organization of public and private spaces women's bodies are hidden away from men. This concealment makes women potentially deceptive." Because the female body was represented as hidden and difficult to control, Greek men often imagined it as threatening.[9] Greek culture often treated death in battle as more publicly glorious than death in childbirth. Reproduction did not grant any societal power to the women who heavily contributed to the process. In fact, men felt the need to control women due to their ability to reproduce.[10] As in the myth of Pandora, there lies a level of curiosity and misunderstanding for men and the female body. The fear of lacking control became, in turn, a fear of being controlled. As such, ancient Greekmen would not and could not allow themselves to be controlled. Thus, the power imbalance between ancient Greek men and women caused an unhealthy relationship between masculinity and femininity in Greek society and mythology.

Women in ancient Greek society had limited autonomywhen it came to their lives due to the harmful depictions of heroines in mythology. From the underlying bias of male writers in literary works to inherent societal distrust of women, Greek mythology often represents women as secondary to husbands, fathers, and sons. Heroines like Helen of Sparta are often villainized for seeking desire or agency outside the control of male kin. Goddesses like Athena challenge the ideas of the soft woman while remaining subordinate to her father, Zeus, king of the sky. Wives like Penelope persist as a pillar of the "perfect woman" while waiting patiently for her husband to return, despite receiving little recognition for managing an entire household in Odysseus's absence. Greek mythology as it pertains to women and their roles within society is complex and inherently complicated. Femininity has many different interpretations. What remains clear is the lasting impact of heroines and their depictions within ancient Greekmythology.

The Infamous Hero

9 Adriel M. Trott, "The Feminine and the Elemental in Greek Myth, Medicine and Early Philosophy," in *Aristotle on the Matter of Form* (Edinburgh UP, 2019), 125, JSTOR.

10 Trott, "The Feminine," 131.

Greek mythology has also greatly impacted the way men in ancient Greeksociety viewed masculinity in both themselves and in others. As mentioned before, there exists bias and misinterpretation in historical works. Due to the lack of authentic female voices, it is challenging to study ancient Greek women. In contrast, there is an abundance of poetry and prose about masculinity, making masculinity difficult to generalize or simplify.[11] Throughout history, there have existed different versions of masculinity, and countless ways to define manhood. Power can be viewed as knowledge or as strength, as seen with athletes like Hercules or strategists like Odysseus.

Another way to define masculinity is to define it negatively, as the absence of femininity. Much of ancient rhetoric and literature perceives female characteristics in men as an attack, an insult, or a form of moral criticism.[12] Regardless of the contradictions, male characteristics and masculinity in ancient Greecewere connected by their desire for *glory and legacy*. Though the two terms are similar, glory or recognition happened during a Greek's life while legacy was what was gained after it. Both attributes are prevalent in Greek myths and stories.

Ancient Greek men and women strove for some semblance of recognition in their lives. While vastly different in the grand scheme of things, both rely on kleos, "an important component of heroic immortality." Male kleos is especially prominent in Homer's Iliad[13], wherein the main protagonist, Achilles, son of Peleus, is intensely concerned with being remembered after death, as did many of his comrades in the Trojan War. Figures such as Patroclus, Hector, and Achilles defined what it meant to be a man: to fight, die, and hope that one's name would be remembered. Greek ideas of masculinity are closely linked to the virtue of courage in battle, or *andreia*, derived from the

11 Scott Rubarth, "Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 1 (2013): 21, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.1-1-2.

12 Rubarth, "Competing Constructions," 30.

13 David J. Lunt, "The Heroic Athlete in Ancient Greece," *Journal of Sport History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 385, JSTOR.

Greek word for a man, *anêr/andros*, and translated as "manliness." This virtue was considered a male quality, as women were excluded from military roles in Greek society.[14] Achilles and his fellow soldiers, through their craving for glory, helped shape ancient Greek men's desire for the same level of renown in war and defined Greek masculinity in the process.

Masculinity in ancient Greek society was heavily influenced by the mythic heroes of the period. While many men in Greece worked as farmers, craftsmen, or smiths, many also sought heroic forms of recognition in the form of athletics and combat. "The sources suggest that, in some cases, great athletes sought to imitate the heroes of myth, intending to secure for themselves the same degree of glory and recognition." Greek men[15] strove for the sense of accomplishment that came with victories in sports and combat. They constantly used heroes like Herakles as models for ideal manhood:

> By means of their athletic prowess and victories, athletes sought and displayed *arete*, a complicated Greek word that referred to virtue, excellence, and general superiority. While complete equality with the awesome gods of Olympus was beyond their reach, ancient Greek athletes looked to the race of the mythic heroes as models for their own quests for glory and immortality.[16]

Greek athletes devoted themselves to physical prowess, striving for greatness that was arguably unattainable due to the nature of immortality given to gods and designated heroes. This imitation of heroic models, however, led many Greek men to associate athletes with heroic

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14 Scott Rubarth, "Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 1 (2013): 24, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.1-1-2.

15 David J. Lunt, "The Heroic Athlete in Ancient Greece," *Journal of Sport History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 388, JSTOR.

16 David J. Lunt, "The Heroic Athlete in Ancient Greece," *Journal of Sport History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 376, JSTOR.

figures such as Herakles. Herakles, often viewed as the heroic model, provided the ultimate example of a mortal athlete seeking immortality and legacy. In Greek mythology, the hero, upon his death, achieved immortality and was welcomed to Mount Olympus by the gods due to his triumphs in contests, both athletic and otherwise. Herakles held great cultural significance for the ancient Greeks.[17] Herakles provided Greek men with a heroic ideal toward which they could strive. This ideal was especially powerful for athletes, whose public victories already connected them to fame and recognition. The appealing prize of immortality through a heroic cult led many Greek athletes to connect themselves to mythic heroes along with achieving victories in sporting events and other contests.[18] Due to heroic athletes like Herakles, Greek men felt the need to strive for greatness in combat and sport. These mythological models helped shape ancient Greek masculinity.

While masculinity was defined universally by *glory and legacy*, there were differing views on how a Greek man should attain glory and legacy. These contrasting beliefs stemmed from intellectual Athens and militaristic Sparta. In Athens, being a man meant being the *kurios*, the head of the household, with control over family, slaves, and property. Failing to manage these responsibilities was seen as a failure in masculinity. In contrast, Spartan men didn't run households; Spartan women had more autonomy, overseeing estates and benefiting from luxury goods, while Athenian women had little domestic power.[19] Mythological figures such as Odysseus and Agamemnon reveal different models of masculine excellence: strategic intelligence on one hand and martial authority on the other. While it's well-known that the patron goddess of Athens was Athena, she was also venerated in Sparta. The Spartans, however, emphasized her martial power more than her association with cunning intelligence. Athenians, by contrast, placed greater value on rhetoric, strategy, and civic intelligence. Masculinity was defined by active involvement in state affairs, which went beyond just

17 Lunt, "The Heroic," 378.

18 Lunt, "The Heroic," 388.

19 Scott Rubarth, "Competing Constructions of Masculinity in Ancient Greece," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 1 (2013): 27, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.1-1-2.

voting. Political engagement required speech and critical thinking since rhetoric was a highly competitive public skill. A skilled speaker could not only defeat an opponent in debate or legal matters but also symbolically "unman" him with sharp language.[20] In stark contrast, Spartan men valued courage and strength above much else. They saw cowardice as a female attribute, and therefore shameful for a man in battle to display. Spartan mothers famously told their sons, "Come back with your shield or on it." While abandoning a shield also brought shame in Athens, where soldiers were expected to fight and die for their city, the consequences of cowardice were less severe in Athenian society than in Sparta.[21] These differing views of the "real" man lead scholars to believe that there was no single form of masculinity. However, due to the path to glory and the never-ending heroic worship, Greek mythology perpetuated a standard for men in ancient Greece to follow.

The Alienated Outcast

Throughout Greek mythology, there are characters who stand outside the perceived standard for both men and women. While it may at first seem like they contradict the roles imposed by Greek society, when looked at closely, they continue to reinforce the gender roles of the civilization. Gods like Gaia, Hera, and Zeus, while seemingly above trivial concepts such as masculinity and femininity, remain bound by these gendered categories, just like the rest of the mythological characters. Gaia in particular, a titan of the earth and Mother Earth herself, was imagined as a primordial creative force, but Greek myth often represents male figures as fearing female power that exceeds their control. "The maternal earth that is its own source of life is a scary earth, likely to be just as reckless as those who might overreach her bounds. Without parentage and able to conceive by herself [...] Gaia is the double-threat of woman, unlimited by parent or mate." She is feared[22] because she,

20 Rubarth, "Competing Constructions," 28.

21 Rubarth, "Competing Constructions," 25.

22 Adriel M. Trott, "The Feminine and the Elemental in Greek Myth, Medicine and Early Philosophy," in *Aristotle on the Matter of Form* (Edinburgh UP, 2019), 122, JSTOR.

in her simplest form, is a woman with untouched power. She can both create and destroy. Gaia is not the only woman with power who is only feared because of it. In mythology, childbirth is both revered and feared. A woman who gives birth alone is feared even more:

> Hera jealously speaks of her capacity to give birth on her own in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo,* and proceeds to bear Hephaestos and Typhon. [...] Typhon was the giant who had a hundred serpent heads on each hand and was eventually imprisoned by Zeus in the deep darkness of Tartaros. Without men, the story suggests, women might give birth to monsters.[23]

As mentioned, the female body leads to male fear due to the unknown. When a woman takes control of the future, she is stepping out of the mold and taking charge of her life. Although this independence might appear empowering, the myth frames it as dangerous. "The self-conceiving woman was a serious threat, the bearer of head-splitters and monsters, the mother of castrators, plotters all." The myths of Gaia and Hera allow Greek culture to present female independence as a warning and contribute to harmful depictions of femininity in ancient Greek stories.[24]

Zeus offers a different kind of gendered figure because he absorbs both masculine and feminine powers into his own authority. Zeus, however, is unique in that in multiple cases he perpetuates standard masculinity and femininity by occupying both masculine and feminine symbolic roles. The Birth of Athena is just one example. In a black-figure drinking cup by the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, Zeus dominates the center of the cup. Athena has just emerged from his head and now stands on his lap. She is in full war regalia and holds a spear and shield.

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23 Trott, "The Feminine," 123.

24 Adriel M. Trott, "The Feminine and the Elemental in Greek Myth, Medicine and Early Philosophy," in *Aristotle on the Matter of Form* (Edinburgh UP, 2019), 123, JSTOR.

Zeus assumes the image of both male and female. With tousled hair and loosened clothing, he is depicted as most women are during childbirth. However, his body from the waist down appears visually ambiguous, neither clearly male nor clearly female. In this myth, Zeus is allowed power from both gender roles.[25] Zeus can transform a dangerous female experience into a display of male authority, reshaping childbirth into a symbol of kingly power. Zeus is male while assuming the position of the woman during childbirth, and his throne-like birthing chair and kingly beard reinforce his authority. He is portrayed as calm and collected throughout the process. This contrasts with many depictions of female childbirth as emotional, dangerous, and physically overwhelming. The absence of emotion on Zeus's face presents him as more controlled than the women surrounding him. He is in control of his feelings and the events occurring, traits coveted by men in ancient Greek culture.[26] Zeus, while assuming female and male attributes, reinforces a framework that privileges masculine control over feminine vulnerability in ancient Greek society.

Conclusion

Heroines and heroes in ancient Greek mythology significantly influenced the development of masculinity and femininity in ancient Greek society. Male-authoredsources may also have contributed to this development because of the lack of female voices in classical Greek writings. Another factor contributing to harmful perceptions of female importance in Greece can be traced to the unequal ways heroines are named and remembered in Greek myth, which leads to women being valued primarily in relation to male lineage and reproduction. Many Greek myths represent male authority as driven by a desire for control and power. One important way men could gain recognition was through

25 Attributed to the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe, *Terracotta kylix (drinking cup)*, 550 BCE, terracotta; black-figure, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247515https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247515.

26 Attributed to the Painter of the Nicosia Olpe, *Terracotta kylix (drinking cup)*, 550 BCE, terracotta; black-figure, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247515https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247515.

kleos, or glory. Because of regional and political differences, differing perceptions of masculinity arose in Athens and Sparta. Athenian masculinity placed greater emphasis on rhetoric, strategy, and civic authority, while Spartan masculinity emphasized discipline, courage, and military endurance; however, these concepts of gender were reinforced by the stories Greeks told. These findings illustrate the significance of storytelling and history in shaping perceptions of normalcy and societal structure. By analyzing ancient texts, historians can gain insight into modern-day "heroes" and "heroines," including celebrities and public figures treated as cultural ideals. They reveal how the figures immortalized by a generation influence perceived societal standards, such as masculinity and femininity. Thus, the silent woman, the infamous hero, and the alienated outcast helped create and reinforce ideals of "correct" masculinity and femininity in ancient Greek civilization.

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The Life for the Life

by Norah Chen '29



Description

Inspired by a passage from Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico, Book VI,* this piece imagines the scene of a sacred human sacrifice, in a huge wicker statue, performed by the Druids. Caesar describes the Gallic belief that the gods required "the life of a man be offered for the life of a man". The Druids were priests, so they were employed to perform sacrifices of that kind ordained for national purposes. I was less interested in the ritual from a distance, so my work inhabits what it would feel like to be one of the many prisoners inside that structure, right before the flames take hold. Charcoal felt like an inevitable medium. Born of fire and ash, it allowed me to create stark contrasts of light and shadow, as if the smoke is already beginning to fill the space.

Echoes of War: Glory and Gender from Classical Antiquity to Contemporary Society

by Lola Ge '26

The complex interplay between martial glory and gendered identity constitutes a fundamental dialectic in the history of warfare, serving as a lens through which to examine social values and structures. From the epic traditions of classical antiquity to the institutional frameworks of modern militaries, the motivations for combat and the prescribed roles within it are deeply inscribed with cultural notions of honor, duty, and power. This paper traces the evolution of such complex relationships across a broad historical arc. It begins by deconstructing the ancient Greek ethos of *kleos aphthiton* (imperishable glory) that defined heroic masculinity, then recovers the often-overlooked yet critical contributions of women who operated within and against the strictures of their time. Finally, it bridges to a modern analysis, contrasting contemporary, pragmatic enlistment motivations with the ongoing struggle for gender equality within the United States military, one of the world's most powerful armed forces. Through this integrated analysis, this essay argues that while the pursuit of recognition and the constraints of gender have been perennial features of warfare, their manifestations have undergone a profound transformation: from a classical paradigm of poetic immortality and rigidly separate spheres to a modern reality of socio-economic mobility and contested, yet legally formalized, integration.

Male Glory in Ancient Warfare

From the solemn tombs of the Trojan War to the ringing songs winding their way across the Greek world, the memory of fallen warriors endured long after their deaths. In ancient Greece, to die gloriously in battle was not necessarily a tragedy. For some, it was a triumph – a path to immortality through everlasting songs of fame. In classical warfare, many were stirred by the aspiration for imperishable glory, even at the cost of their own lives. This concept, derived from *kleos*, meaning "glory, fame" or "poem or song that conveys glory", and *aphthiton*, or "imperishable", encapsulates the heroic ideal that governed values in Greek society both on and off the battlefield. This section analyzes the causes and consequences

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From the solemn tombs of the Trojan War to the ringing songs winding their way across the Greek world, the memory of fallen warriors endured long after their deaths. In ancient Greece, to die gloriously in battle was not necessarily a tragedy. For some, it was a triumph – a path to immortality through everlasting songs of fame. In classical warfare, many were stirred by the aspiration for imperishable glory, even at the cost of their own lives. This concept, derived from *kleos*, meaning "glory, fame" or "poem or song that conveys glory", and *aphthiton*, or "imperishable", encapsulates the heroic ideal that governed values in Greek society both on and off the battlefield. This section analyzes the causes and consequences

of imperishable glory by focusing on selected passages from Homer's *Iliad*, a foundational epic that reflects myriad martial and social values of the wider Greek world.[1] A close reading of representative selections from *The Iliad* demonstrates how the relentless pursuit of glory, due to its imperishable nature, shaped not only the literary portrayal of male heroism, but also the broader cultural values and societal practices—such as hero cults—that honored and perpetuated the legacy of fallen warriors in ancient Greece.

The pursuit of glory at all costs is captured most powerfully in the character of Achilles, whose lasting legacy is the central concern of the *Iliad*. In one of the epic's most poignant moments, Achilles reflects upon the two possible deaths predetermined for him by the fates. The following passage reveals the internal conflict and ultimate resolution narrated by a warrior who values *kleos* above life itself.

> But a man's life breath cannot come back again –
>
> no raiders in force, no trading brings it back,
>
> once it slips through a man's clenched teeth.
>
> Mother tells me,
>
> the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,
>
> that two fates bear me on to the day of death.
>
> If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
>
> my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
>
> If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
>
> My pride, my glory dies …
>
> true, but the life that's left me will be long,
>
> the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.

1 Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 5.

Iliad 9: 495 – 505.[2]

In his speech, Achilles recognizes that he is forced to choose between two inescapable fates that will define his future: if he remains to fight at Troy, he sacrifices his life and his return home, or νόστος, but secures great glory (κλέος); if he chooses to go home, his noble fame (κλέος ἐσθλόν) is lost, but he is promised a long life in his homeland.[3] His predicament stems from the power of the Fates—Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos—the daughters of Night who spun, measured, and cut the thread of each mortal life, rendering even a hero's destiny unalterable[4]. Achilles highlights theinner tension between these two choices through specific phrases. He first emphasizes the finality of death when life slips between "a man's clenched teeth," stressing the weight of mortality and the inevitability of great sacrifice for glory. In contrast, when contemplating his return home, Achilles speaks of his longing for "the fatherland [he] love[s]," suggesting that choosing death means giving up the happiness he cherishes. This juxtaposition of death and glory versus life and obscurity underscores the painful decision Achilles must make.

Though framed as a choice, Achilles does not exactly present the two options as equally appealing. While returning home promises a long life, Achilles downplays the positive side of this possibility by adding that "the stroke of death will not come on me quickly." This litotic expression is hardly celebratory. Achilles may live longer—but not forever. He presents the prospect of a longer life as merely postponing unavoidable mortality. Furthermore, by emphasizing that when he dies of old age, his pride and glory die as well, Achilles personifies these qualities as if they are living entities integral to his being. In doing so, he acknowledges that *kleos* is more than an abstract concept – it is a vital component of his identity. In this moment of his speech, Achilles understands that the immortality of his *kleos* is the only part of him that can transcend death and achieve lasting fame beyond his grave. In other words, by choosing to return home and live to an old age, he is not simply choosing life, but also

2 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 9: 495-505.

3 James A. Arieti, "Achilles' Alienation in 'Iliad 9'," *The Classical Journal* 82, no. 1 (1986): 1-27 (on 14-15).

4 "The Fates," *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 4, no. 19 (1854): 40.

relinquishing the chance for his glory to be immortalized. Thus, Achilles effectively rejects the notion of a long life on Earth, highlighting his belief that a Greek hero's true value lies in the immortality of fame, which can only be achieved through death in battle.

Achilles' fate and his choice between death and everlasting fame are among the central themes of the *Iliad*. However, Homer does not limit his exploration of *kleos aphthiton*, or imperishable glory, to the epic's main character. The following passage introduces Iphidamas, a young warrior who decides to abandon personal happiness for a chance to win glory on the battlefield.

Sing to me now, you Muses who hold the halls of Olympus,
who was the first to go up against King Agamemnon,
who of the Trojans or famous Trojan allies?
Iphidamas, the rough and rangy son of Antenor
bred in the fertile land of Thrace, mother of flocks.
Cisseus reared him at home when he was little –
his mother's father who sired the fine bearty Theano –
but once he hit the stride of his youth and ached for fame,
Cisseus tried to hold him back, gave him a daughter's hand
but warm from the bridal chamber marched the groom,
fired up by word that Achaea's troops had landed.
Twelve beaked ships sailed out in his command,
trim vessels he left behind him in Percote,
making his way to Troy to fight on foot
and here he came now, up against Agamemnon,
closer, closing ...

Iliad 11: 254 – 268.[5]

Just as Achilles faced a choice between long life and eternal fame, Iphidamas too decides to pursue honor on the battlefield rather than settle into a life of comfort and family. His story powerfully illustrates the sacrifices made in the name of *kleos*—glory. Iphidamas had every reason to remain home: "Cisseus tried to hold him back, gave him a daughter's hand." By joining the battle, Iphidamas leaves behind not only a newly wedded wife, but also the peace and stability such a marriage could bring. His departure "warm from the bridal chamber" emphasizes the immediacy and determination of his decision, as well as the inevitable tradeoff. His love for his wife may go cold upon his departure, yet this prospect causes little hesitation. Iphidamas replaces the warmth of love with rage, "fired up by word that Achaea's troops had landed." His subsequent choice to be the "first to go up against King Agamemnon" further speaks to his pursuit of eternal glory. Confronting Agamemnon, commander of the entire Achaean army and one of the most powerful warriors in the Greek world, meant purchasing great fame at the cost of his life. Yet Iphidamas steps forward without hesitation, which speaks to the depth of his commitment to being included in the epic glory of Greek song culture even if that meant dying.[6]

Despite appearing only once briefly in the *Iliad*, Iphidamas' account reveals that he, like Achilles, is willing to sacrifice his life for everlasting fame.[7] This brief account demonstrates that the pursuit of *kleos* is not reserved for the epic's central heroes, but rather serves as a shared aspiration among all warriors in battle, regardless of their physical ability, rank or narrative importance. The prevalence of such a belief among men in wider Greek society is further reinforced by the fact that these two men fight on opposite sides of the Trojan War—Achilles for the Greeks and Iphidamas for the Trojans. The fact that Iphidamas, a Trojan ally from Thrace, willingly makes the same sacrifice for imperishable glory

5 Homer, *Iliad*, 11: 254-268.

6 Mary Scott, "Pity and Pathos in Homer," *Acta Classica* 22 (1979): 1–14.

7 Frederic Will, "Objectivity in Homer," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 7, no. 1 (1965): 5–15.

as Achilles, a Greek hero, shows that this heroic code transcended regional barriers: the value of *kleos aphthiton* was not confined to one city-state or region, but was widespread across the ancient Greek world. Such common veneration of imperishable glory only further reinforced its cultural value. Men willing to die will be celebrated by other men willing to die – and so the (epic) cycle continues, spinning on the axes of honor and glory.

The shared pursuit of *kleos* by warriors in ancient greek society, as illustrated by the examples of Achilles and Iphidamas, raises an important question: why did these heroes value glory to the point where it seemed self-destructive? To understand this, it is essential to reflect upon how glory was perceived in ancient Greek culture. Rather than brief recognition and praise, the Greeks believed that it offered mortal men a form of immortality that life itself cannot. Life was finite and destined to end, while *kleos*, especially as preserved through song culture, endures beyond death. As wistful as we may find this idea today in a world of information overload and ever-shortening attention spans, consider that the *Iliad* remains one of the most widely read poems in the world. Glory enjoys a permanence that life lacks. For Greek warriors desiring to leave a legacy beyond their time, the glory won in battle and captured in poetry is just as real and meaningful as life itself. As Harvard Greek Professor Gregory Nagy notes in *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, "For Achilles, … the infinite time of the artificial song, the *kleos aphthiton* or 'imperishable glory' at *Iliad* IX 413, is just as real to him as the finite time of his natural life."[8] In this worldview, to die after a long and uneventful life is to vanish entirely, but to die gloriously in battle is to live on forever in the memory of others. The power of poetry and song transforms mortal deeds into eternal legacy, making glory the only true path to immortality for ancient Greek men at war.

Recognizing the importance of glory's immortality to Greek men in battle, it is worth noting that death itself plays a central role in the transformation of a warrior into a hero in ancient Greek thought. In fact, for the Greeks, it is not life but death that defines the heroic identity. This perspective is rooted the ancient Greek language itself. The word "ὥρα" (hōrā) means "the right time" – a single moment when everything is perfectly aligned. Closely connected to this term is "ἥρως" (hērōs), or

8 Nagy, *Ancient Greek Hero,* 29.

hero, suggesting that a hero's defining moment, the moment worthy of incorporation into epic song, is not found in daily life, but in the precise and meaningful timing of death. As Nagy explains, "for the Greek hero, the ultimate real-life experience is not life but death, and it must not be feared but welcomed, since the hero must ultimately achieve the perfect moment of a perfect death."[9] In this context, a heroic death under the right circumstances is not a tragic end to one's mortality, but a culmination through which the warrior achieves *kleos aphthiton* – imperishable glory.

The understanding that death opens the pathway to eternal fame for Greek heroes sheds light on why warriors like Achilles and Iphidamas do not fear death in battle but instead embrace it when a chance for imperishable glory is offered. Consider another example from lyric poet Pindar, who illustrates in his *Isthmian Odes* that afterAchilles' death, the immortality of this hero was secured through the enduring power of song:

> Even when he was dead songs did not forsake him; beside his pyre and tomb the Muses of Helicon stood, and poured over him the many-voiced dirge. It proved to be the will of the immortals [60] to make a noble man, even when dead, a theme for the hymns of goddesses.
>
> *Isthmian* 8: 57-60.[10]

This passage reaffirms that Achilles' glory did not end with his life, but was instead elevated through poetic remembrance. In Greek tradition, poets began their works by invoking the Muses: the divine patrons of the arts, memory, and inspiration. The Greeks believed that the Muses were the source of all true poetic knowledge, and that without their guidance, no song or story could be properly told.[11] Therefore, the presence of the Muses

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9 Nagy, *Ancient Greek Hero,* 29-30.

10 Pindar, *Isthmian* 8.57–60, trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien, *Perseus Digital Library*.

11 H. W. Parke, "Apollo and the Muses, or Prophecy in Greek Verse," *Hermathena*, no. 130/131 (1981): 99–112.

at Achilles' tomb upon the hero's death signifies that his legacy will be preserved through divinely inspired songs.

In conclusion, the pursuit of *kleos aphthiton*, or imperishable glory, lies at the heart of ancient Greek conceptions of heroism, where death in battle is not a tragedy but a form of transcendence. Through the figure of Achilles, Homer's *Iliad* presents a hero who consciously embraces death to achieve eternal remembrance through song—a decision that encapsulates the cultural ideals of his society. This valorization of glory is further supported by minor figures such as Iphidamas, who willingly sacrifice their lives to be inscribed in the epic tradition. The Greeks believed that while life is fleeting, glory attained through heroic death is timeless, conveyed and preserved through poetry and song that were viewed as real and immortal. The linguistic and cultural link between "hērōs" and "hōrā"—the right time—underscores how death, when perfectly timed, was not merely the price of glory—it was the very path to it. For Greek men, in a world where mortality was inescapable, fame became the only means to outlive death, turning warfare into a stage for the pursuit of imperishable glory.

Ancient Women at War

Having closely examined how the pursuit of *kleos aphthiton* shaped male heroism in classical warfare, this paper now turns to the often-overlooked roles of women in the same context. While the previous section focused on a close reading of specific Homeric passages on selected male heroes such as Achilles and Iphidamas, this section necessarily adopts a broader and more schematic approach. The shift in methodology arises from the difference in the sources themselves: unlike their male counterparts, women in classical warfare are rarely granted the narrative spotlight in epic poetry and literary accounts. There is no single female character whose story can be analyzed in comparable detail. Nevertheless, Greek women's struggles and contributions were far from insignificant. Although women, confined by traditional gender norms, were forced to undertake more passive and socially constrained roles in classical warfare, they still engaged in creative forms of resistance by providing physical, logistical, and spiritual support in defending their communities and on foreign military campaigns. This section will explore how women, operating within

and against the constraints of their designated societal roles, shaped the dynamics of classical warfare in impactful and enduring ways.

Greek women were confined by severe gender biases that defined them as inherently inferior to men, especially in the context of warfare. Greek society treated the battlefield as a male domain, justified in part by the belief that women were physically unsuited for combat.[12] As Athenian philosopher and historian Xenophon observed in *Oeconomicus*, "since both the indoor and the outdoor tasks demand labour and attention, God from the first adapted the woman's nature, I think, to the indoor and man's to the outdoor works and cares."[13] His view reflects the societal expectation that women's roles in warfare ought to be passive or indirect and mostly centered around the domestic sphere. The mythical figure of the Amazons, a tribe of powerful female warriors, further reinforces the divergence in Greek societal perceptions of male and female capabilities. While few modern scholars believe such a tribe existed as described, they played a significant role in antiquity, especially in Classical Athens, serving as a common source of inspiration for artists and authors.[14] As classicist Susan Blundell points out in *Women in Ancient Greece*, a potential explanation for this enduring Greek fascination with a supposedly nonexistent tribe is that the Amazons, defeated by Greek men, represented all the traits that Greek women were expected to avoid.[15] They were therefore as much heroes as *antiheroes*, functioning as cautionary tales. The Amazon myth thus served to strengthen the Greek societal belief that, in a well-ordered and highly civilized society, women's duty laywithin marriage and the household, and that they ought to leave political and military affairs to men.

The deeply ingrained belief in women's physical inferiority also appears, though more indirectly, in surviving Greek women's writing. The surviving works of female authors suggest that women often wrote

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12 David Schaps, "The Women of Greece in Wartime," *Classical Philology* 77, no. 3 (1982): 193–213.

13 Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.23, trans. Edgar C. Marchant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 449.

14 W. B. Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 19–21.

15 Susan Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 61–62.

within these gender norms rather than directly challenging the idea that the battlefield was the exclusive domain of men. Instead of attempting to obtain a place in martial affairs, their poetry often focuses on domestic, emotional, and personal themes, reinforcing the traditional roles to which they were confined. For instance, the Greek poet Sappho writes in *Fragment 16*: "Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry, and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatsoever a person loves."[16] This comparison shows that although women like Sappho were aware of the traditional male admiration for war and its association with beauty and honor, Sappho redirects attention toward personal desire and emotional attachment. Rather than glorifying martial strength or aspiring to participate in it, Sappho elevates individual love and emotional connection as the highest ideal. Her words are representative of how women's aspirations were shaped by societal expectations—turning from the public, masculine domain of warfare toward private and intimate forms of value.

Because of traditional gender norms in Greek society, women were often limited to passive yet supportive roles in warfare. In many cases, women traveled with armies as camp followers. For instance, Xenophon narrates in *Anabasis* 5 that during the retreat of the Ten Thousand, the Greek mercenary army stranded deep in Persian territory after the failed expedition of Cyrus the Younger, "On board the ships they embarked the sick, those who were more than forty years of age, the women and children, and all the baggage which they did not need to keep with them."[17] Thus, women appear as dependents attached to male military movements rather than as independent actors in foreign military campaigns. Additionally, as Pasi Loman explains: "In general, women are often reported mourning the defeat or celebrating the victory with their men, as opposed to being grateful for peace *per se*, indicating that they had supported their men's action all along."[18] This observation highlights

16 Sappho, *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus,* trans. David A. Campbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 67.

17 Xenophon, *Anabasis*, trans. Carleton L. Brownson and John Dillery (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 399.

18 Pasi Loman, "No Woman No War: Women's Participation in Ancient Greek Warfare," *Greece & Rome* 51, no. 1 (2004): 35.

how women's roles in warfare were framed not around advocating for peace itself but around reinforcing the goals of their male kinsmen. Rather than acting as independent voices seeking to end violence or promote harmony, women were depicted as emotionally invested in the success of male warriors—sharing in their triumphs and sorrows. Their mourning of defeat or celebration of victory symbolizes their loyalty to the men's cause, further supporting the idea that women's wartime identity was often tied to the actions of male relatives and community members.

Women's indirect role in warfare is further reflected in how their safety served as a powerful stimulus for men defending their cities in war. Military leaders frequently invoked the threat posed to women and children to stir their soldiers to greater courage. For example, in 211 BCE, Lyciscus, an ambassador sent by the Acarnanians to Sparta, reminded his listeners of the dire consequences faced by their families: "So the Romans are carrying off the women and children to suffer, of course, what those must suffer who fall into the hands of the aliens."[19] Women, in particular, were often subjected to sexual violence, treated as spoils of war, enslaved, and exchanged as objects rather than respected as human beings.[20] Such appeals emphasized that the Greeks recognized appeals to male valor were often tied to the safety of families and households. Thus, women, serving as symbolic representations of the community warriors were sworn to protect, shaped wartime morale and conduct.

In addition, women's largely indirect yet influential presence in warfare is demonstrated by the profound significance men placed on their acknowledgment of male valor in battle. Every soldier desired to appear valiant and brave in the eyes of his wife or mistress.[21] Nowhere was this phenomenon more evident than in Sparta. As Sarah B. Pomeroy notes: "Spartan women were renowned for enthusiastically sacrificing their sons for the welfare of the state. Instead of lamenting at the death of

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19 Polybius, *Histories*, trans. W. R. Paton, F.W. Walbank, and Christian Habicht (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 101.

20 Maha El Hissy, "Of Maidens and Virgins, or, Sparking Military Alliance: The Affective Politics of the Pristine Female Body," in *Strategic Imaginations: Women and the Gender of Sovereignty in European Culture*, ed. Anke Gilleir and Aude Defurne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 85–108.

21 Loman, "No Woman No War," 38.

their sons, they took pride in the bravery that had led to that fate."[22] This intense connection between female recognition and male honor created a powerful social incentive for warriors to exert bravery on the battlefield. A prime example of this dynamic is the case of Spartan king Archidamus. While leading the Spartans against the Arcadians, he appealed to courage and shame to encourage his soldiers: "Fellow citizens, let us now prove ourselves brave men and thus be able to look people in the face; ... let us cease to feel shame before wives and children and elders and strangers, in whose eyes we used once to be the most highly honored of all the Greeks."[23] Archidamus' speech underscores that men's courage in battle was as much about recognition by women as it was about military success. Collectively, these examples illustrate how women's judgement provided crucial emotional and moral motivation for men's valor in classical warfare. Yet, despite their significant role in motivating warriors, women remained largely symbolic figures within the martial framework—serving as embodiments of what was to be protected – while their actual, active participation in warfare was constrained by the traditional gender norms that governed their societal roles.

Despite these gendered limitations, the broader picture of ancient women at war is more complex. Earlier scholarship on classical warfare largely marginalized or overlooked the roles of women – focusing almost exclusively on male heroism and the formal structures of war. As feminist historiography gained ground, especially from the 1970s onward, classicists and historians including Efi Avdela have challenged long-standing assumptions and uncovered evidence that Greek women were never merely spectators of war.[24] In fact, the physical, spiritual, and financial support they provided was so important to classical war efforts that, as Pasi Loman argues, warfare became "a business that needed women too—no woman, no

22 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57.

23 Xenophon, *Hellenica*, trans. Carleton L. Brownson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 7.1.30, 249.

24 Efi Avdela, "Η ιστορία του φύλου στην Ελλάδα. Από τη διαταραχή στην ενσωμάτωση [Gender History in Greece: From Subversion to Incorporation]," in *Φύλο και κοινωνικές επιστήμες στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα [Gender and Social Sciences in Contemporary Greece]*, ed. Venetia Kantsa, Vasiliki Moutafi, and Evthymios Papataxiarchis (Athens: Alexandreia, 2010), 89–117.

war."[25] Thus we must consider how Greek women, with great enthusiasm and patriotism, engaged in creative forms of resistance against gender norms and offered support to military campaigns: producing essential supplies such as food and armor, defending cities by hurling roof tiles at attackers, voluntarily providing financial support and, in some cases, even engaging in physical combat to protect their communities' honor. These examples reveal that by rewriting the boundaries of their prescribed roles, women helped shape the dynamics and outcomes of classical warfare in meaningful ways.

In classical antiquity, women of royal rank were often trained to participate actively in combat, challenging the notion that the battlefield was an exclusively male domain. Classicist Grace Harriet Macurdy points out that "Macedonian custom allowed women of royal rank to appear on the battlefield (Olympias, Cynane, and Eurydice, for well-known earlier examples) and to associate freely with men."[26] For instance, Eurydice, daughter of the warrior princess Cynane, famously led her forces into battle against Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great. This is one of the few recorded instances in history where two women directly clashed against each other as military leaders.[27] Such examples show that royal women could, in moments of political crisis, exercise direct military command and influence the course of war. Moreover, this phenomenon was not confined to the Hellenistic world. As classicist Jim Roy notes, ancient writers did not seem to regard the presence of royal women – such as Arsinoe II, sister and wife of Ptolemy IV – on the battlefield as unusual or inappropriate.[28] The absence of surprise or disapproval from ancientauthors suggests that the phenomenon of royal women participating in warfare seem to have been familiar enough in classical times that it did not warrant shock or

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25 Loman, "No Woman No War," 54.

26 G. H. Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932), 105.

27 Elizabeth Carney, "Foreign Influence and the Changing Role of Royal Macedonian Women," *Ancient Macedonia* 5, 1 (1993): 3-23.

28 J. Roy, "The Masculinity of the Hellenistic King," in *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity*, ed. L. Foxhall and J. B. Salmon (London: Routledge, 1998), 122.

scandal. Together these cases demonstrate that across the Greek world, the presence of royal women fighting in military conflicts was a widely accepted and sometimes expected extension of their political duties.

Even though women who directly engaged in warfare were usually of high social rank and stepped into the male-dominated sphere of power politics, this did not mean that women of middling or lower status simply accepted a passive role in times of war or allowed societal norms to silence their involvement. Despite their lack of political power and military resources, these women were also fiercely patriotic and took active measures to defend their cities and communities. According to Plutarch, Spartan women and girls underwent harsh physical training so that they could defend themselves, their children and their country in times of danger.[29] This emphasis on physical preparedness highlights how even in a highly gendered society, women took action to challenge inequities and to contribute to the survival of the city-state in times of crisis. Such determination is further exemplified in women's acts of defending their cities by throwing roof tiles at invaders from rooftops during invasions. As Plutarch wrote in *Pyrrhus*, when an elderly Argive woman saw that her son was engaged in battle with the Epirote king Pyrrhus, "lifting up a tile with both her hands threw it at Pyrrhus. It fell upon his head below his helmet and crushed the vertebrae at the base of his neck."[30] Similarly, Pausanias recorded in *Description of Ancient Greece* that the Macedonian forces were "bombarded with tiles and stones by the women" of Messenia, forcing them to retreat from Ithome.[31] Such examples demonstrate that the instinct to defend one's community was not confined to men and royal women, but extended to ordinary Greek women who, despite societal restrictions which deemed them less physically capable, found ways to engage in acts of resistance and courage.

Beyond direct physical resistance , in many cases Greek women

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29 Loman, "No Woman No War," 36.

30 Plutarch, *Lives, Volume IX: Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius,* trans. Bernadoote Perrin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 34.2, 459.

31 Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2,* trans. W.H.S. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 4.29.5, 331.

supported war efforts through indispensable roles that sustained and complemented military action. For instance, in the early third century BCE, rather than fleeing to safety in Crete when Sparta was falling to Pyrrhus, women took on critical tasks: they dug a third of the trenches, delivered weapons, nursed the wounded, and buried the dead.[32] Beyond these practical contributions, women also played key roles in religious and ritual ceremonies surrounding war. As Robert Garland notes, Greek women's participation in funerary rites and tomb cults was essential, particularly in the aftermath of battles that produced large numbers of casualties.[33] Through their active participation in funerary rites, women not only honored the dead but also reinforced the social memory of male valor. By performing mourning rituals, preparing tombs, and leading commemorative ceremonies, they ensured that the bravery and achievements of men killed on the battlefield were publicly recognized and celebrated. In this way, women acted as crucial mediators of reputation, shaping how a warrior's courage and sacrifice were remembered and glorified within the community. Their labor and devotion thus directly contributed to the construction and perpetuation of male honor in Greek society. Women's involvement extended to financial support as well. As Diodorus recorded, in times of warfare "The Carthaginian women contributed their gold jewelry … the whole populace felt that they were not losing their wealth but were by their gift re-establishing their own safety."[34] In some instances, women's work in provisioning armies was equally vital: during the Peloponnesian War, for example, when most of the Plataean population fled, 110 women stayed behind to prepare food for the four hundred men who remained to defend the city.[35] All these acts of voluntary service and sacrifice show how women, despite social limitations, used creative and essential forms of resistance to assert their value and agency within war efforts. By stepping beyond the private

32 Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, 27.4, 436-439.

33 Robert Garland, *Religion and the Greeks* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1998), 68, 73.

34 Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, trans. Francis R. Walton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 32.9, 423.

35 Loman, "No Woman No War," 40.

sphere to engage in tasks vital to military survival, they actively challenged the gender norms that sought to confine them to passive, purely domestic roles.

Therefore, although classical warfare overwhelmingly foregrounded male heroism and largely excluded women from formal combat roles, it is clear that women were far from passive bystanders. Constrained by traditional gender norms that relegated them to the domestic and emotional spheres and portrayed them as mere symbols of encouragement for men in war, Greek women nonetheless found powerful and varied ways to engage with war. Whether through direct military action, logistical support, or patriotic encouragement, women demonstrated resilience, creativity, and agency. Their actions—ranging from throwing roof tiles and digging trenches to supporting spiritual rituals and financing campaigns—reveal a complex and active participation in warfare that traditional narratives have neglected. While elite royal women could defy gender roles by leading troops, even ordinary women subverted expectations by contributing to the war effort with steadfast loyalty and resourcefulness. In short, though denied the title of "warrior," many women in antiquity proved themselves warriors in deed, defending their families, cities, and values in ways both visible and unseen.

Modern Continuities and Departures

From the chants of Homeric warriors to the voices of modern recruits, the motivations for joining the military reveal both striking continuities and profound shifts. The following section turns from classical warfare to a cross-temporal analysis of contemporary motivations for military enlistment services and gender dynamics in modern warfare. Contrary to conventional opinions indicating a general lack of interest among young people, recent surveys suggest a more complex reality: In France, for example, young respondents are neither withdrawn into a timid individualism, nor locked into a civic apathy devoid of any empathy for the problems faced by society. Thus, the study "*Les jeunes et la guerre, représentations et dispositions à l'engagement* [Young people and war: representations and willingness to enlist]" conducted at the request of the *Centre d'études stratégiques aérospatiales* in April 2024 reveals that a majority of young people (56%) would consider a career in the armed

forces, particularly young men (69% compared to 43% of young women).[36] Nevertheless, ancient Greek warriors like Achilles viewed enlistment as a sure path to *kleos*, or imperishable glory, today's perspectives are shaped by new social, political, and economic realities. The following section will focus primarily on the United States, whose position as a leading military power provides a particularly revealing lens for exploring how modern enlistment choices intertwine classical ideals of honor with new pragmatic considerations. Ultimately, while personal advancement remains an important factor in military enlistment, it is no longer the sole driving force; contemporary motivations for military service are multifaceted, balancing aspirations for honor with practical concerns, patriotic duty, and personal background.

Similar to the classical pursuit of individual glory in war, many Americans cite personal advancement as their primary reason for joining the military. A study of high school seniors from the classes of 1984 to 1991 found that students who believed the military offered greater opportunities—to get ahead, pursue further education, take on more responsibility, find more fulfilling work, voice their ideas, and address unjust treatment by superiors—were significantly more likely to express interest in enlisting.[37] A similar pattern appears two decades later, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the onset of the War on Terror. Based on 64 interviews from the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, which includes interviews with soldiers who enlisted between 2001 and 2005, researchers found that many recruits were still primarily motivated by aspirations for personal growth and opportunity.[38] As Jeffrey Daniel Bartling, a veteran of the Iraq War, explained: "The Army really had the widest range of opportunities for me, jobs I could do …

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36 Lucille Caliman, "Young People and War: A Renewed Patriotism?" Polytechnique Insights, November 6, 2024, https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/en/columns/society/young-people-and-war-a-renewed-patriotism/.

37 Jerald G. Bachman et al., "Who Chooses Military Service? Correlates of Propensity and Enlistment in the U.S. Armed Forces," *Military Psychology* 12, no. 1 (January 2000): 1–30.

38 Martin Fransen, "Selling Military Service during Wartime: U.S. Army Recruitment Advertising and Enlistment Motivation during the War against Terror," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019): 178–92.

something I could use when I got out and continued in the civilian world."[39] Thus, similar to classical pursuit of individual glory, modern enlistment remains largely centered on individual advancement, though it reflects a different form of self-interest. With the evolution of society, motivations have shifted toward securing education, career advancement, and long-term stability rather than a pronounced emphasis on everlasting glory, indicating that military service has increasingly moved beyond purely honor-based motives to broader social and economic opportunities.

Nevertheless, many other major factors, either absent or less central in classical antiquity, now prompt people to join the modern military. Chief among these is patriotism, especially in moments of national crisis. Whereas Homeric warriors focused on fighting for individual honor or the favor of the gods , modern recruits put a heavier emphasis on civic duty or loyalty to their nation. For example, the aftermath of September 11 saw a surge of enlistments in the United States, as many young Americans perceived joining the armed forces as a means of directly defending their homeland and avenging the attacks. As Sergeant Austin John Tracy of the 451st Civil Affairs Battalion, who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, recalled: "I understood that it happened other places in the world, but not here in the US. So it sort of sparked my patriotic sense at that point."[40] His words capture the shock and subsequent surge in patriotic feeling that transformed 9/11 into a catalyst for military enlistment. For some, this sentiment was so powerful that it reshaped their life trajectories altogether. Noah Galloway, who served in the 101st Airborne Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom, explained how his plans shifted dramatically after the terrorist attacks: "And someone convinced me to go to college and I went to UAB ... and then September 11th happened in 2001. And that was – I didn't see it as a career change. I just saw it as I was 20 years old and I was physically fit. And I knew our country was going to go to war. So I

39 Jeffrey Daniel Bartling, Chuck Hagel, Kathy Arrants, and U.S. Senate/Chuck Hagel, *Jeffrey Daniel Bartling Collection*, 2002, Personal Narrative, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.29443/.

40 National Court Reporters Association, B.J. Shorak, Bill Cranford, and Austin John Tracy, *Austin John Tracy Collection*, 2002, Personal Narrative, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.96830/.

ended up joining the military."[41] Together, these testimonies underscore how patriotism after 9/11 was not merely a background sentiment but a decisive force that compelled individuals to commit to military service, often at the expense of previous personal ambitions.

Beyond patriotism, other determinants rooted in social background, such as race, geography, and family structure also play a significant role in shaping who is more likely to enlist. Statistics from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) project, an ongoing study of U.S. high school seniors military propensity in the classes of 1984 to 1991 conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan have shown that African American students consistently display the highest average levels of propensity and enlistment, followed by Hispanic students, while white students report the lowest.[42] Regional variation further reinforces this pattern, as the South has historically jad a stronger military culture than other parts of the United States, producing a disproportionate share of recruits.[43] Family background also exerts a powerful influence. Children from intact two-parent households, who are, on average, better positioned to afford college tuition, show the lowest likelihood of military enlistment. Similarly, parental education levels correlate inversely with military propensity: as parental education rises through high school and college, the likelihood of enlistment steadily decreases.[44] These patterns suggest that enlistment decisions are not made in a vacuum but rather closely tied to broader social and economic inequalities that shape educational and career options.

Taken together, the motivations behind modern military enlistment reveal a layered reality that both parallels and diverges from the ideals of classical antiquity. Whereas ancient warriors sought *kleos*

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41 Noah Galloway, National Court Reporters Association, B.J. Shorak, and Natalie Kijurna, *Noah Galloway Collection*, 2001, Personal Narrative, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.98312/.

42 Bachman et al., "Who Chooses Military Service?" 5.

43 Bachman et al., "Who Chooses Military Service?" 5.

44 Bachman et al., "Who Chooses Military Service?" 5.

as the ultimate reward, contemporary recruits weigh a far broader set of considerations, ranging from personal advancement and patriotism to structural factors such as race, geography, and family background. These complexities highlight how enlistment is shaped as much by individual choice as by the social and cultural contexts into which people are born.

Building on the comparison of classical and modern enlistment incentives for joining the military, it is equally important to examine how women's roles and attitudes have developed. Continuities and changes define this development too. At the most basic level, women have gone from marginalization in ancient Greece to formal integration and leadership in the modern U.S. military. Despite their unwavering commitment to service, however, they still face persistent structural and cultural barriers that undermine true equality.

In recent centuries, women have consistently demonstrated a level of determination and patriotism in warfare that not only matches but often surpasses the determination visible among women in ancient Greek society. As early as the American Civil War, women supported the war effort in both visible and hidden ways: cooking in army camps, sewing, laundering uniforms, and organizing donation campaigns. Around 1,000 women even disguised themselves as men to fight on the battlefield on both sides of the war.[45] This commitment continued into World War I, when women rapidly raised the number of nurses deployed to British-operated hospitals in France by the U.S. Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 403 to 3,000 just a year into the war, volunteering to work in dangerous conditions on the front lines to ensure the health and safety of Allied forces. Furthermore, around 12,000 women enlisted as yeomen in the U.S. Navy, taking on clerical work such as operating telephones and radios and serving as translators in the war effort, despite not yet having the right to vote.[46] These roles, though often behind the scenes, were crucial to maintaining the efficiency and communication of military operations. Together, these

45 Susan-Mary Grant, "To Bind Up the Nation's Wounds: Women and the American Civil War," in *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, ed. S. Jay Kleinberg, Eileen Boris, and Vicki L. Ruiz (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 106–25.

46 Helen Boak, "Women in the First World War," in *Women in the Weimar Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 13–62.

examples reflect not only women's unwavering sense of patriotic duty, but also their willingness to step into new and challenging roles, often long before they were granted full rights or recognition within society. This enduring spirit of service and patriotism mirrors women's determination seen in classical warfare, where, despite strict societal limits, women still found ways to support war efforts through religious, familial, logistical, or symbolic roles, demonstrating that the impulse to serve transcends both time and circumstance.

Nevertheless, marking a significant departure from the norms of ancient Greek society, women's widespread participation in modern warfare has been driven not only by individual resolve but also by increasing public support. Unlike in classical warfare, where women's involvement was discouraged or unacknowledged, modern women's desire to contribute to the war effort has often met with encouragement from families, communities, and national campaigns that celebrated their service and labor. For instance, the Military Women's Memorial's Oral History Collection, an independent nonprofit organization under the Military Women's Memorial established in 2000 and host to over 1400 oral histories of women who have served in and with the U.S. Armed Forces from World War I to the present day, preserved an oral history interview of Fae Adams conducted in November 2003, one of the first women to enlist in the newly formed Women's Army Corps (WAC), the first women's corps to serve within the US Army. Adams recalled her father's reaction to her decision, stating that "There was no objection, that was what I wanted to do. My brother was in the navy at that time, and we were all anxious to participate."[47] Adam's experience illustrate a profound leap in progress from classical times, as women's patriotism and willingness to serve in the military receive moral support from their families in modern contexts. This kind of encouragement was not limited to individual families like Adams's but was instead a broader societal embrace of women's participation in wars. During World War II, the figure of Rosie the Riveter, depicted as a strong, confident woman rolling up her sleeve to reveal her powerful bicep, became one of the most iconic symbols of the era. Rosie embodied the

47 Fae M. Adams, interview by Judy Bellafaire, November 12, 2003, Military Women's Memorial Foundation Oral Histories, audio, https://womensmemorial.starter1ua.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_bc7cf007-6043-4954-8222-20853235e62b/.

growing societal acceptance and expectation that women would step into active roles in aiding the war effort. She came to represent the nineteen million women who worked for wages during the war, five million of whom did so for the first time, filling positions in factories, shipyards, and offices to keep the wartime economy running.[48] The cultural embrace of figures like Rosie reflects a powerful new narrative: that women's labor and loyalty were essential to national survival, and worthy of recognition and pride.

While societal acceptance and encouragement played a crucial role in advancing women's participation in modern warfare, their contributions were increasingly secured and legitimized through legislative and political reforms. In the United States, women's growing enthusiasm for military service, bolstered by public support, was complemented by groundbreaking policy changes that progressively secured their power and rights within the Armed Forces. Such legislative measures began to take shape during World War II, when for the first time in history, all branches of the U.S. military formally enlisted women. This included the creation of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), initiatives that opened the door for nearly 350,000 American women to serve in uniform throughout the war. This momentum carried into the postwar period and culminated in a landmark legislative achievement during the early years of the Cold War.[49] In 1948, just three years after the end of World War II, President Harry S. Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law, officially allowing women to serve as permanent members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, marking a decisive shift from temporary wartime necessity to long-term institutional inclusion.[50] Truman's July 26, 1948, order framed this change in terms of the idea that "the armed services…maintain the highest standards of

48 Lynn Dumenil, "American Women and the Great War," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 1 (2002): 35–39.

49 Technical Information Division, WAAC, "Benefits to Women's Army Auxiliary Corps," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 227 (1943): 156–57.

50 Danielle DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military," United Service Organizations, February 28, 2023, https://www.uso.org/stories/3005-over-200-years-of-service-the-history-of-women-in-the-us-military.

democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all."[51] Thus, for the first time, women were no longer auxiliary participants but recognized as enduring and essential members of the military establishment. This steady march toward equality culminated in 2013, when then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta lifted the ban on women in combat roles.[52] For the first time, female service members were granted the legal right to serve in direct ground combat, placing them, on paper, on formally equal footing with men across combat roles, both on the battlefield and within the broader structure of the U.S. Armed Forces. Together, these reforms reflect how modern institutional policies have transformed women's role in the military, ensuringfull legal equality and recognition for all, regardless of gender.

Building on the foundation of legal equality, women have not only gained the right to serve but have also risen to positions of leadership within the military evaluated according to their own ability, something entirely unimaginable in ancient Greek society, where only a few elite women were granted the privilege to lead due to their high status of birth. The expansion of women's roles in the military was marked by a major legal breakthrough during the Vietnam War era, when, in 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized promotions for women to general and flag officer ranks. Just five years later, in 1972, women were officially allowed to command units that included male soldiers, breaking long-standing barriers that preserved male superiority and dominance in the military.[53] This trajectory reached a historic high in 2016, when Air Force General Lori Robinson assumed command of U.S. Northern Command, becoming the first woman to lead a combatant command and the highest-ranking woman in U.S. military history.[54] Her leadership not only reflected institutional

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51 Katie Reilly, "Trump Announces Transgender Military Ban on Anniversary of Truman Ordering Equality in Armed Services," TIME, July 26, 2017, https://time.com/4874333/donald-trump-transgender-military-truman-anniversary/.

52 DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service."

53 DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service."

54 "15 Women Making Modern Military History," United Service Organizations, March 3, 2020, https://www.uso.org/stories/1960-15-women-making-modern-military-history.

progress in the struggle against gender bias within military institutions, but also demonstrated that women were fully capable of holding strategic command over national defense operations. These milestones highlight the profound transformation from a history of gender bias and exclusion to one in which women can lead at the highest levels of military operations, based not on social status but on skill and achievement.

Yet despite the significant progress toward legal equality and leadership representation in the military, women have continued to face persistent setbacks and systemic struggles that reveal the persistent gap between ideals and realities. From the earliest stages of women's integration into the Armed Forces, expectations surrounding femininity were embedded into military culture. During World War II, with the creation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the WASP programs, women's were issued uniforms that emphasized skirts rather than slacks, and wearing nail polish, makeup, and styled hair was not only allowed but actively encouraged.[55] Women repeatedly voiced practical objections. For instance, in the spring of 1943, WAAC Director Oveta Culp Hobby appealed to the Army Service Forces: "It has become increasingly evident as larger numbers of WAAC units are assigned to the field … that a trousered garment for exercise, fatigue, and other heavy work is vitally necessary." This appeal underscores how institutional priorities often privileged maintaining a feminine image over addressing women's functional needs in military service. The popular belief was that women could contribute to the military effort, but only on the condition that they remained recognizably feminine and non-threatening to the dominant male authority. Deeper cultural attitudes embedded in the emphasis on traditional femininity continue to shape women's military experiences today. Existing research on women veterans shows that gender-based discrimination and harassment remain widespread across all branches of the military. Compared to their male counterparts, nearly three times as many women veterans report experiencing bias in performance evaluations, limitations in career advancement, or disparities in pay grade.[56] These challenges are not isolated incidents but are often regarded

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55 DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service."

56 Rachel N. Lipari, Philip J. Cook, Laura M. Rock, and Kristie Matos, *2006 Gender Relations Survey of*

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Life of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus: 106 BC-48 BC

by Winston Valentine '26

The life of Gnaeus Pompey Magnus towers over Roman history, but he is remembered only for his fall. The average student of Roman history knows only about his triumvirate with Julius Caesar and Marcus Licinius Crassus, his command of the Conservative forces in Caesar's Civil War, his military defeat at Pharsalus, and his ultimate murder in Egypt by the Ptolemy Dynasty. We only remember his decline and fall, not the parts of his life that made him the greatest Roman figure and general until the rise of Gaius Julius Caesar. Pompey is mainly a figure—a foe whom Caesar beats on his way to dictatorship; the tall statue under which, on that famous day in March, Caesar fell as he perished. He became the chief agent of the doomed Republic without realizing that it was doomed. This was a man who in his 20s rivaled the great achievements of Romans in their 60s, who was the only man to argue with Sulla; the man who subdued the Marians, slaves, pirates, Pontids, Syrians, Seleucids, Judeans, and the Ptolemies; and who, after not picking up a sword in a decade, almost bested the veteran Caesar.

His was a political career that had him dominate Roman politics for four decades, while his compatriots, like Caesar, at best dominated two. Pompey was a great Roman, but he did not have enough political talent to either end the republic as Caesar and Augustus did, or save it. He was the defender of a republic which, even if he had remained victorious on that fateful day at Pharsalus, would not last long due to the senate's corruption, oligarchy, and the constantly growing threat of mob rule. Another Clodius, Catiline, or Caesar would have emerged and finished what multiple decades of Roman history were leading to, and Pompey happened to be on the side forsaken by history and events. However, this man's life was a testament to the greatness and collapse of the Roman Republic, a story of triumph, ambition, and inevitable eclipse.

The Pompeii were a recently ennobled family of Latin stock, originating from the Picenum region in Italy. Over the decades, this family gained estates, wealth, and influence in Picenum. Soon, the Pompeii were the most prominent family in the region. The Roman senate hated patricians who settled or were from the rest of Italy, but the Pompeii were

too prominent to ignore. The man who thrust the Pompeii into Roman predominance was Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo, or Pompey Strabo, the father of the famous Roman.[1]

Pompey Strabo was famously ugly and unlikable; the nickname Strabo came from the fact that he was cross-eyed.[2] However, he used his family's influence and money to rise through the ranks of Roman society, becoming the first in his line to enter the Senate. The Social War broke out in 91 BC between the non-Roman Italian Allies and Rome over citizenship rights. Pompey Strabo was a Roman citizen but was from a region filled with non-Roman Italian allies. He could have sided with the rebel Italians but chose to stay loyal to Rome and used his influence and wealth to raise a large army from the ranks of the people of Picenum. From 91 to 90 BC, Pompey Strabo won victory after victory against the native Italian armies. He was one of the few Roman commanders to be successful in this war against Rome's former allies. Because of these successes, he was elected consul for the year 89 BC. As consul, he took command of the whole Roman war effort and delivered the final set of victories that ended the war. He enriched himself through his political and military success, auctioning off the enslaved captives and seized lands from his victories.[3]

After celebrating a triumph, he retired to Picenum but did not disband his private army. By 88 BC, Pompey Strabo was one of the most important men in Roman politics, behind only Sulla, Cinna, and Marius. He controlled vast wealth, influence, and a private army more loyal to his money than to him; his soldiers famously hated him. As conditions grew for a Civil War between the Populares leader Marius and the optimates' leader Sulla, the senate sought to seize Pompey Strabo's private army. When it sent one of the two new consuls to take control thereof, Pompey's soldiers butchered him. The Senate could not punish this blatant act of violence because Sulla and his eastern army were marching on Rome.[4]

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1 Lee Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great: The Roman Alexander* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2025), 4.

2 Plutarch. "Lives, Volume V: Agesilaus and Pompey. Pelopidas and Marcellus," Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. *Loeb Classical Library* 87 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 119.

3 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 11.

4 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 14.

Pompey Strabo stayed out of the Sullan Civil War for the first few months, but eventually gathered his old army, left retirement, and marched toward Rome. Both sides of the conflict begged for his assistance and made him grand offers, which Pompey Strabo largely ignored. He positioned his large army right outside of Rome, intending to become a key player if one side made him a good enough offer. Instead, he died of dysentery in 87 BC.[5]

Nobody mourned his death; his avarice, disloyalty, and lack of regard for his soldiers' lives and well-being had made him deeply hated. When he died, his soldiers dragged his body around the army camp. Only an impassioned plea from Pompey Strabo's teenage son, whom the soldiers loved, prevented the body from being destroyed.[6] Strabo's son believed that the army should go home, so he led the half-dozen legions in his father's army back to Picenum. The nineteen-year-old boy who saved his father's body and led this massive army back to Picenum was Gnaeus Pompeius, eventually known as Pompey the Great.[7]

On one hand, Pompey Strabo was known as an ugly, hated man, with few known friends in the world. He was despised by the world; known to be vile both in character and action. The opposite was true of his son. Gnaeus Pompey was by 87 BC only nineteen years old, but he had grown up on his father's military campaigns; he had fought alongside his father's men and shared their hardships. Where his father was ugly, Pompey was famously handsome. He was tall, well-built, and had an aura of authority.

As Plutarch writes:

> "For never have the Romans manifested so strong and fierce a hatred towards a general as they did towards Strabo, the father of Pompey…On the other hand, no Roman ever enjoyed a heartier goodwill on the part of his countrymen, or one which began sooner, or reached a greater height in his prosperity, or remained more constant in his adversity, than Pompey did. And whereas there was one sole reason for the hatred felt towards Strabo, namely, his

5 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 17-18.

6 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 121-122.

7 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 2-5

> insatiable desire for money, there were many reasons for the love bestowed on Pompey; his modest and temperate way of living, his training in the arts of war, his persuasive speech, his trustworthy character, and his tact in meeting people, so that no man asked a favor with less offence, or bestowed one with a better mien. For, in addition to his other graces, he had the art of giving without arrogance, and of receiving without loss of dignity."[8]

Pompey was born in 106 BC in Picenum, the same year as Cicero. His family had benefitted from his father's wealth and influence but possessed not nearly the same amount of wealth as most of the senatorial class in Rome. After his father's death and bringing his father's army back to Picenum, Pompey was embroiled in numerous legal battles over his father's actions. His father had been accused of a vast amount of property theft, which, because of his death, was shifted onto Pompey. Pompey won the trial with a brilliant legal defense. The judge was so impressed with Pompey's charisma and charm that he arranged for Pompey to marry his daughter, Antistia. Pompey spent the following years organizing his father's business and estates until Rome's next political struggle drew him back into public life.[9]

Sulla had been victorious in his civil war against the Marians and left to campaign against Mithradates of Pontus in Asia Minor. Marius and Cinna, seeing the opportunity, marched on Rome and captured the city, executing Sullan loyalists. The elderly Marius died soon after, shifting control of the populares, or Marian, faction to the shoulders of Lucius Cornelius Cinna. Sulla, furious at what the Marians had just done, finished his victorious campaign in the East and turned his veteran army back toward Rome in 83 BC. Pompey, seeing that Sulla was both the stronger man to back and seeing that he himself had no allies on the Marian side, decided to support him. At the age of twenty-three, Pompey raised his father's veterans into his own personal army. Pompey was too young to even sit in the senate, yet he controlled an army equal in size and power to both Cinna and Sulla.[10]

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8 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 119.

9 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 121.

10 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 127-128.

Pompey's new army was surrounded by three large Marian armies. These three hosts tried to surround and destroy Pompey's forces before he could rendezvous with Sulla. Pompey routed all three. In each battle, Pompey personally sought the Gallic chieftain leading the Marian Gallic auxiliary cavalry and slew him in personal combat, causing the Gauls to flee and allowing Pompey's cavalry to rout the Roman infantry.[11] Pompey captured city after city as he marched south to join Sulla. One of the Marian consuls led an army north to defeat Pompey, but Pompey's aura of invincibility alone caused the army to desert. Sulla raced to meet Pompey because he feared that this impressive young man would perish at the hands of Marian arms before the two could join forces. When the two met, twenty-three-year-old Pompey showed Sulla a well-organized, trained, well-equipped army with high morale that had not existed just a few months before and had already won some of the most impressive victories of the period.[12]

Sulla was deeply impressed by the young man. Sulla, an archconservative who later formalized age requirements for the Roman magistracies, hailed Pompey as imperator, an honor usually reserved for praetors or consuls, not for men who had not yet entered the Senate. Sulla now wanted to use Pompey as an enforcer for his regime. Sulla pressured Pompey to divorce his wife and marry his stepdaughter; a demand Pompey quickly accepted. Sulla was aging, and increasingly ill, and increasingly concerned with how to leave a permanent mark on Roman politics. After fleeing Rome, the surviving Marians established bases in Spain, Africa, and Sicily.[13]

Sulla sent Pompey to Sicily to eliminate the last two major Marians: Gnaeus Papirius Carbo and Marcus Perperna.[14] When Pompey landed in Sicily, his arrival caused the Marian leaders to flee the island. The Sicilians had been treated harshly by the Marians during their rule. When some Sicilians told Pompey that he had no right to oversee them, he replied,

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11 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 126.

12 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 28-32.

13 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 32

14 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 33

"Cease quoting laws to us that have swords girt about us!"[15] Pompey used his charisma to win the local Sicilian population over to the Sullan cause.

After Pompey's success in Sicily, Sulla ordered him to invade the Marian-controlled province of Africa, roughly modern Tunisia. The province of Africa was a rich agricultural region critical to feeding Rome; if its grain supply stopped, the city could starve. With a small, outnumbered force, Pompey crossed the Mediterranean and began marching toward Carthage, the province's capital. When Pompey landed, seven thousand Marian soldiers deserted immediately. The massive Marian army faced Pompey at the Battle of Utica, and it was a disaster for the surviving Marians. Only three thousand out of the twenty thousand survived; their commanding officer lay slain on the field, and the remaining Marians in Africa committed suicide. Pompey then spent some time reorganizing the province before marching on Numidia, which had supported the Marian faction, where he crushed the Numidian army and killed the King of Numidia in battle.[16]

With each victory, Pompey's troops hailed him as Imperator. Pompey returned to Rome just forty days after his initial landing in Africa. At the age of twenty-five, Pompey had never held elected office, yet he had won campaigns rivaled in Roman history only by those of Sulla, Marius, and Scipio Africanus.

When he entered Rome, men competed for his affection and favor. Sulla outdid them all when he first saw Pompey on his return, calling him Pompeius Magnus, 'the Great.' On the surface, this seems a lesser honor than Maximus, 'the Greatest,' a title given to only a few other Romans. Yet those men had won the title for defending the Senate's supremacy over the plebs and masses of Rome, not for extraordinary military victories. Romans often won a cognomen for a specific place where they had triumphed: Scipio Africanus, Scipio Asiaticus, Metellus Numidicus. Pompey, by contrast, was simply 'Great.'[17] The title also had other motivations; it harkened back to Alexander the Great, who, like Pompey, was a young, handsome, brilliant general. Romans called Pompey by this new name for years before Pompey

15 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 139.

16 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 139-141.

17 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 37.

began to use it himself. History would no longer remember him merely as Gnaeus Pompeius, but as Pompey Magnus.

For all his achievements, Pompey demanded a Roman military triumph. Sulla, who by this point loved Pompey like a son, remained an arch-conservative and a believer in tradition. Tradition allowed triumphs only for praetors or consuls, not for men who had not yet been elected to the Senate or appointed to magistracies. Pompey opposed, telling Sulla that he did not care what tradition required and that his actions deserved a triumph, and famously told Sulla that men worship the rising sun, not the setting sun.[18] Sulla, knowing that Pompey had become too influential to deny, allowed him to celebrate the triumph. This debate over a triumph shattered the relationship between the two men. They remained allies, but they were no longer like father and son. Sulla retired from politics in 79 BC, leaving his allies to uphold the system he had created. That same year, Pompey's wife, Sulla's stepdaughter, died.

Pompey moved further away from Sulla's influence by using his own power to help Marcus Aemilius Lepidus win the consulship in 79 BC. Lepidus was openly anti-Sulla and despised the former dictator. Sulla was furious when Lepidus won the consulship because he knew Lepidus would work to destroy the system he had built to keep reformers out of power. Thus, when Sulla died in 78 BC, he excluded Pompey from his will. Lepidus tried to stop Sulla from being granted a state funeral, but the remaining Sullans and Pompey ensured that it took place. Lepidus tried to run again for consul in 78 BC and, during the campaign, revived the dead Marian faction of reform. When the Senate refused to allow him to run for a second term, Lepidus fled Rome, raised an army, and marched on Rome.[19]

Pompey received orders from the Senate to use his army to stop him. He moved north, but Lepidus slipped around him and continued his march south. Pompey continued marching north, knowing that other Roman armies would defeat Lepidus. In the process, Pompey besieged Mutina, Lepidus's former headquarters. Mutina was under the command of Lepidus's ally, Marcus Junius Brutus. Pompey, after hearing news of

18 Plutarch, Lives, V Pompey, Pg. 151

19 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 62-64.

Lepidus's defeat outside of Rome by other Roman armies, had his men storm Mutina and capture Brutus, whom he then executed. Lepidus fled to Sardinia, where he committed suicide. This Lepidus was the father of the future member of the Second Triumvirate, and this Marcus Junius Brutus was the father of the future assassin of Caesar.

Pompey kept his army and encamped it next to Rome to pressure the senate into giving him a command in Spain to crush Quintus Sertorius, the last Marian who had been fighting a guerrilla war in Spain for the past several years and defeating every Sullan general sent. The senate agreed, and Pompey landed in Spain in 77 BC with a massive army, determined to finally end what many other generals had failed to do. He would spend the next five years campaigning against Sertorius, during which he would face his first few defeats in the seemingly endless guerrilla war. However, Pompey made steady progress, pushing Sertorius away from the Mediterranean coast of Spain and into the mountainous interior.[20]

After several years, Pompey begged the senate for more men and money because this war had grown long and grueling. With more Senate reinforcements, Pompey and the consul in Spain, Metellus Pius, who was also cousin to Pompey's new wife, began capturing more cities from Sertorius. By 72 BC, it seemed certain that Pompey would be yet again victorious. To ensure that the war ended, Pompey encouraged some of Sertorius's disloyal and unhappy officers to betray him. Sertorius's second-in-command murdered him and took control of the Marian cause in Spain. Pompey then attacked the main former Sertorius army and destroyed it, capturing most of its leaders.

Sertorius's second-in-command begged for mercy and claimed that he had been working for a Roman general to betray Sertorius. Among the letters given to Pompey were messages from senators in Rome to Sertorius, hoping for an alliance. Pompey gained a greate deal of useful blackmail material on key senators this way but knew that releasing it could cause more instability.[21] Therefore, Pompey had the murderer executed, and the correspondence was destroyed. Pompey would spend the next year finishing his work in Hispania, before returning to Rome in

20 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 56-59.

21 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 65-68.

71 BC. Pompey returned to Rome with barely any of his once vast fortune, since all his previous campaigns were financed by himself rather than by Rome.

When Pompey and his veterans arrived in Italy, they found a peninsula on fire. Spartacus's massive slave revolt had begun a few years earlier, and the war between the Republic's armies and Spartacus's slaves had not been going the Republic's way. By 71 BC, however, the ambitious and tremendously wealthy noble Marcus Licinius Crassus had raised an army and was pursuing the remaining slave rebels.[22] When Pompey returned to Italy, Crassus had just won the final battle of the war, in which Spartacus was killed. Hunting for glory, Pompey found a band of surviving slave rebels and eliminated them, crucifying the survivors on the road back to Rome to suggest that it was he, not Crassus, who truly ended the slave revolt. Pompey needed the money that the consulship would provide, as well as the capabilities to pass legislation he had desired for years. Pompey was still too young for the consulship and technically ineligible because Sulla created rules requiring Roman politicians to climb through specific offices before reaching the consulship. These offices included quaestor, aedile, praetor, and tribune of the plebs. Pompey had held none of those offices and was barely a member of the Senate. He was thirty-six, which, for Roman political standards, was incredibly young. Pompey needed the senate pass a special law allowing him to run for consul.[23]

In the consular election, Pompey promised the people that he would dismantle much of the Sullan Constitution; the system Sulla had created during his dictatorship to prevent another Marius or populist from gaining control of Rome. Sulla had made the tribunate of the plebs a powerless and politically dead-end office, notably removing the right to veto, so no radical reformer with hopes of becoming consul would dare to enter. He ensured that only senators could serve on juries and that the popular assemblies would be dominated by wealthier citizens rather than by the poorer and middle-class urban plebs of earlier centuries. Pompey promised to reverse most of these Sullan policies. This stance made Pompey Rome's most popular politician and general, a man who possessed the undying love of the people of Rome. This was Pompey's

22 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 159.

23 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 86.

final break from the Sullan regime, which was becoming more unpopular each year. Pompey held a triumph in the months before the election to win popular support. Crassus, Rome's richest man and a descendant of one of its most important families, asked Pompey, a man he hated, whether he could run for consul with him in 70 BC. This alone demonstrates the scale of Pompey's influence by this point. Pompey approved, and both men won in landslides.

Crassus and Pompey differed on most issues and hated each other personally, but they worked together to remove several parts of the Sullan regime. Most importantly, they restored the tribunate's powers, including the right to veto. Crassus was beloved by the Senate, whereas Pompey's popularity came from the common people and soldiers. As consul, Pompey delivered a speech to the people declaring that he was retiring from the army and that his years as a soldier were over. The cheering crowd carried the victorious general back to his villa in triumph. Pompey spent the years after his consulship in a kind of pseudo retirement. He appeared in public accompanied by crowds of supporters. He was still the most influential man in Rome, but he used his status to gain some needed time for himself and his family.[24]

In 67 BC, three years after Pompey's consulship ended, piracy had become Rome's central issue. Pirates were raiding the merchant and grain ships that kept the city alive, and Rome had no real navy capable of stopping them. The year before, in 68 BC, a pirate king had raided Ostia, Rome's main port, and kidnapped two senators. Piracy had spread across the Mediterranean, and something has to be done. Pompey was called out of retirement by the masses to solve the pressing issue. A tribune of the plebs proposed the Lex Gabinia, which would give Pompey, then thirty-nine, consular authority over all Roman seas and over any province within fifty miles of the Mediterranean for three years, along with the power to appoint legates and command massive financial resources. The Senate was terrified of another Sulla or Marius, famous and popular generals who, with large commands, could march on Rome. Therefore, the Senate voted down the bill, but a tribune of the plebs took it to the Popular Assembly, passing it. A scenario Sulla had tried to prevent.

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24 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 94-97.

Pompey now held this massive command, but his main opponents were jealous governors who resented the reality that a man not equal to them in family status or wealth had been placed in command over them and their coastal provinces. Some tried to stop him from recruiting in their provinces, while others delayed implementing his policies for months. Pompey created fifteen Roman fleets and naval bases around the Mediterranean to destroy pirates and their bases of operation. He led a naval and land campaign in Cilicia, the pirates' main base in Anatolia.[25]

In three months, he destroyed most of the pirates, executed their leaders, and shattered their fleets. He gave clemency to tens of thousands of former bandits and pirates and had them settle in regions previously devastated by decades of war, all of which became prosperous and large towns that owed their survival to Pompey, and many named themselves after him. Pompey completed his three-year command in less than half a year, allowing him to return victorious to Rome at the age of forty.

Pompey again tried to enter retirement, but the people of Rome, acting through the tribunes of the plebs, recalled him into service. Back in 73 BC, Mithradates of Pontus, Sulla's old enemy from the northern coast of Anatolia, had declared war on Rome again. Lucius Licinius Lucullus, one of Sulla's best generals, had fought Mithradates successfully for several years and had won great victories. The Roman people, however, believed the war had been waging for too long and blamed Lucullus for prolonging it to enrich himself.[26] Rome appointed other commanders in the East, hoping the war would end, but by 66 BC, after seven years, the conflict was still bloody and unresolved. The plebs turned to Pompey to deliver a quick and easy victory over the combined forces of Pontus and Armenia. They gave him total power over Anatolia, placing the armies of Lucullus and other older Roman statesmen and generals under his command. The Senate and the optimates were horrified that the people had given this near-total command to a virtual commoner by birth and a populist by reputation, fearing another Marius or Sulla. Furious at his replacement, Lucullus called Pompey a vulture who stole glory from others.

Pompey gathered the massive Roman army already present in

25 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 175.

26 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 192-197.

Anatolia and invaded Pontus, while allying with the Parthians to pressure Armenia. Mithradates, after years of war, saw his kingdom on the verge of collapse and offered terms. Lucullus, serving as his adviser, demanded that Pompey accept them, but Pompey refused and continued the march, chasing Mithradates into the mountains and hills of Armenia. Pompey caught up with the fleeing king and annihilated his army at the Battle of Lycus.[27]

Mithradates fled to Crimea, where his kingdom still possessed a few colonies, while the rest of Pontus fell to Rome. He spent the next few years in Crimea trying to build a new army, but he angered the local nobles, who eventually forced him to commit suicide.

The son of the king of Armenia fled his father, joined Pompey, and allied himself with Rome, giving Pompey a Roman puppet to place on the Armenian throne. This threat forced Tigranes the Great of Armenia to come to terms and become a Roman client. Tigranes then promptly killed his traitorous son, whom Pompey had returned to him as a token of their new alliance. In 65 BC, Pompey spent the year conquering hill tribes and kingdoms in the Caucasus, defeating peoples who had not even been conquered by Alexander the Great. Pompey then shifted south and waged war against the dying Seleucid Empire. The empire, which had once stretched from Thrace to Pakistan and had been one of the successor states of Alexander the Great, was now a dying shell of itself, limited to Syria and its capital at Antioch. By the end of the year, Pompey had destroyed this ancient empire and annexed Syria as a Roman province.[28]

It was at this point that Pompey learned of Mithradates's death in Crimea and rewarded the nobles who had killed him with their own Crimean kingdom, which became a Roman client state. In 63 BC, Pompey left Antioch with his victorious army and advanced south along the Mediterranean coast of the Levant. He captured city after city as he moved down the coast before entering Judea.

Judea had been overtaken by a bloody civil war between two brothers who both desired their mother's throne. Phoenicia had been

27 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 104-112.

28 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 117-124.

ravaged by the war, and neither side seemed close to victory. Pompey met with both brothers and supported the one who seemed most pliable to Rome's will. With Roman support, that brother became victorious, though Jerusalem was damaged after a Roman siege later that year.[29]

Pompey annexed the northern and coastal parts of Judea into Rome and left the remaining brother in charge of a small area around Jerusalem. He then returned to Antioch to begin organizing his new eastern conquests. He added the former territories of Pontus to the new province of Bithynia et Pontus. He created the province of Syria, which stretched from the Taurus Mountains to the Sinai Peninsula. Pompey also granted new lands to Roman client kingdoms such as Cappadocia, Galatia, Armenia, Judea, Nabatea, Palmyra, and the Kingdom of the Bosporus.[30]

Through this reorganization, Pompey gained immense wealth, connections, and influence across the East, while building a strong network of Roman control through client kings and local rulers. Before leaving the East, Pompey gave his conquering soldiers a massive bonus, but unlike Sulla, he dispersed them as soon as they arrived in Italy in 62 BC. In just four years, he had completely changed the eastern Mediterranean, annexing ancient kingdoms, creating new kings, defeating old foes, and adding two new provinces to Roman control.

Wherever Pompey went in Rome, massive crowds followed him, cheering and praising him. His conquest of the East made Rome vastly wealthier and dramatically increased his own personal fortune, making him probably the second-richest man in Rome, behind only Crassus. With this new money, Pompey sponsored vast building and infrastructure projects across Italy, culminating in the massive Theatre of Pompey complex just outside Rome.[31]

Pompey was at the height of his popularity and wealth, but the Senate still opposed him. Hating his success and jealous of his victories, men like Cato and Metellus Celer worked to block his projects. They refused to ratify the treaties and settlements he had arranged in the East,

29 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 123.

30 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 218.

31 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 221.

and they also refused to grant farmland to his veterans as payment for their years abroad. To the conservative senators, Pompey's whole career and everything he had achieved seemed like an abomination because of his low family standing.

The Senate feared and envied a general as successful as Pompey, so it plotted to stop his emerging political dominance and ensure that no single man could control Roman politics. The Senate hated what Pompey had done in the East because it would make him the patron of the entire region. It also refused to resettle his veterans because doing so would give Pompey a vast voting and patronage network throughout Italy, making him the most powerful and influential man in the Republic, which, in fairness, he already was. Pompey could have brought this legislation before the people and had them pass it, but he refused to act like a populist dictator in the style of the Gracchi or Marius. He also refused to use military force to compel the Senate into actions that favored him, as Sulla had done. Pompey was a great general, but he had no desire to become another dictator. Still, he believed that his achievements and reputation as Rome's leading man deserved to be honored by the Senate through the passage of these two measures.[32] Pompey was unable to force through either piece of legislation, which deeply upset both him and his veterans.

If the Senate would not give Pompey what he wanted, then he would need allies who could get it for him. He soon met with a relative of one of his former enemies. The son-in-law of Cinna was planning to run for consul in 59 BC and wanted Pompey's support in exchange for passing Pompey's legislation once in office. Pompey saw the young, ambitious man as a way to get his legislation passed without great political loss, so he agreed to the alliance. That man was Gaius Julius Caesar.[33]

In 60 BC, three men who dominated Roman politics needed one another. Pompey needed a younger politician to pass his legislation. Caesar wanted to become consul, but he needed money and popular support for the election. Marcus Licinius Crassus dreamed of glory and political power, which he had been unable to achieve on his own over the previous decade. Caesar was the architect of this deal, the triumvirate, which mostly

32 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 221-240.

33 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 239.

favored him in the long term but gave short-term benefits to Crassus and Pompey, the two more senior partners in the alliance. Pompey and Crassus hated each other, so any alliance between them required a charismatic intermediary: Caesar.

The conservatives hated all three men in the triumvirate. They hated Pompey because of his victories and low social standing, Caesar because he tried to pass reforms and would do so in a forceful and reckless way, and Crassus because he had bought his way into the senatorial class in a manner they found intimidating. This hatred, followed by constant obstruction, prevented the three powerful men from achieving their goals individually and forced them to work together. The optimates, through their broad obstruction of anyone unlike themselves, planted the seeds of their own ruin by creating the conditions for the triumvirate. This three-man alliance would recruit allies and junior partners to influence many areas of Roman politics and carry out its plans. For the next decade, it would dominate Roman public life.

Caesar, with the support of Pompey and the money of Crassus, won his election to consul in 59 BC. Caesar had made large promises to both Pompey and Crassus and promised to deliver where previous politicians had failed. He proved far more talented than anyone had imagined. The year 59 BC was officially the year of Caesar and Bibulus, but it was mockingly called the year of Julius and Caesar because Caesar so quickly reduced his co-consul to irrelevance.

In his single year as consul, Caesar passed Pompey's legislation despite massive senatorial obstruction. He did this partly by having allies of the triumvirate threaten Bibulus and his family into staying home on the day of the vote. During his term, Caesar forced legislation through either the Senate or the Popular Assembly. He essentially placed Bibulus under house arrest after the arch-conservative co-consul tried to stop several pieces of triumviral legislation.[34]

As a reward for Caesar's success in passing their desired legislation, Pompey and Crassus used their patronage networks to secure Caesar three provinces and multiple legions after his consulship ended. This gave Caesar the chance to launch a military campaign and pursue

34 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 152-155.

glory for himself. Caesar received three provinces thanks to Pompey and Crassus, even though governors normally received only one. When Caesar's chaotic consulship ended in 58 BC, and before he departed for his provinces near Gaul, Caesar's daughter Julia married Pompey, who had been divorced for three years.

Pompey had lost much of his influence because of his alliance with Caesar. His marriage alliance with the Metelli, one of Rome's most powerful and influential noble families, ended with divorce in 61 BC. Many moderates and conservatives despised him for supporting Caesar, whom they saw as a dangerous populist autocrat. Meanwhile, the conservative optimate faction, terrified of this new alliance, began repairing old rivalries among elite families in order to build a united front against it. Because Pompey had supported Caesar, many noble families that had once sought his favor and support now allied against him.[35]

The triumvirs then turned to the radical reformer Publius Clodius Pulcher. Clodius was a member of the ancient and immensely wealthy Claudii family. He was the kind of man who seemed to want to watch the world burn. After several scandal-filled years, he decided to run for tribune of the plebs. To qualify for the office, he renounced his patrician heritage and made himself legally a plebeian. Clodius won election to the tribunate in 58 BC thanks to the support of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus's money. After only a few months, however, he broke from the triumvirate and began acting independently.[36]

Clodius began rallying popular support for reform bills and worked to exile Cicero from Rome because of Cicero's actions during the suppression of the Catilinarian Conspiracy in 63 BC. Using pressure from the plebs, and benefiting from the fact that two reformers had followed Caesar as consuls, he passed a bill giving poor Roman citizens free bread, a measure that deeply offended the conservatives. He also passed a bill annexing Cyprus from the Kingdom of Egypt and sent Cato, one of the reform faction's greatest enemies, to oversee the annexation in order to remove him from Rome. Then he pushed through another bill giving the two current reform consuls better governorships after their terms,

35 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 159.

36 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 150-152.

ensuring that they would remain on his side.[37]

To complete his revenge against Cicero for executing Roman citizens during the Catilinarian Conspiracy, Clodius passed a law making it illegal to execute Roman citizens without trial. The law applied both to the past and the future, allowing Cicero to be punished retroactively. After the bill passed, Clodius convinced the consuls to charge Cicero with the murder of Roman citizens. Cicero had executed traitors and rebels, but those rebels had been friends of Clodius, so Clodius wanted revenge. Cicero was banished, and all of his property was seized.

In 58 BC, Clodius had essentially taken over the Republic as tribune of the plebs because of his support among the people and the reform faction, which forced the Senate into terrified compliance. Pompey liked Cicero; the two men were the same age and moved in similar social circles. Clodius then learned that Pompey was gathering senators into an alliance to overturn Cicero's banishment, so he had his gang surround Pompey's house, forcing him to live for months under something close to house arrest.

Clodius had become the darling of Rome's urban poor, who saw him as their champion and backed him as foot soldiers in his gang war against both the optimates and the triumvirate. This failed ally, however, focused his street violence mainly on Pompey and attacked Caesar only verbally, because Crassus was secretly bankrolling his gang. Clodius wanted to become the leading man in Rome, not merely the tool of the other two.[38]

When Clodius stepped down from the tribunate in 57 BC, he still controlled Roman politics thanks to his massive gang. At the start of the year, Cicero's younger brother came to Pompey and asked him to convince the other triumvirs to support Cicero's return. If they did so, Cicero would become their ally. Caesar, then winning victories in Gaul, agreed. Crassus, even though he had been supporting Clodius, had no objection to Cicero's return. Early that year, one of Pompey's remaining allies, who was serving as consul, introduced a bill allowing Cicero to come home, and it passed.

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37 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 154.

38 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 161-172.

However, Clodius appeared at the Popular Assembly with armed mercenaries carrying swords, weapons banned inside Rome, and attacked the voters. Hundreds were killed by Clodius's mercenaries. Cicero's brother barely escaped alive, and several tribunes of the plebs were beaten, an offense that could carry the death penalty.

On that day, a moderate conservative tribune of the plebs, Titus Annius Milo, swore to stop Clodius's rampage. He formed a gang of his own and fought Clodius's gangs in the streets of Rome almost every day. Across the city, hundreds died in these gang battles. For weeks, the Roman Forum and the Tiber were filled with bodies. Anarchy overtook the streets of Rome. Pompey was shocked into action by the chaos. He believed that Cicero's law-and-order conservatism was badly needed, and that Cicero had to be allowed to return.[39]

Pompey escaped Clodius's pressure and delivered speeches across Italy, calling on ordinary Romans to go to Rome and make their voices heard in favor of Cicero's return. When Pompey returned, he had his consular ally introduce the Cicero legislation again. It passed the Senate, and when it went before the Popular Assembly, Milo had his armed gang surround the voting area to ensure that Clodius could not attack. Pompey and dozens of other prominent Romans appeared to give speeches demanding Cicero's return from banishment. Clodius was scared off by Milo's show of force, and the bill passed, allowing Cicero to come home.

When Cicero returned to the Senate, he thanked Pompey above all others for helping pass the legislation that restored him. Rome during this period of chaos was also suffering from a grain shortage, worsened by Clodius's free-bread law from the previous year. To fix the crisis, Cicero asked the Senate to appoint Pompey as a special commissioner with total authority over Rome's grain supply. The idea quickly became law. Pompey now had to save the city from starvation. He left Rome and, within weeks, improved the situation by implementing reforms in Sicily and Africa that allowed more grain to be shipped to Rome. He also made an agreement with the king of Egypt to send Egyptian grain to the city.[40]

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39 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 174.

40 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 181.

Clodius was furious at being outmaneuvered by Pompey and Cicero, so he had his armed thugs burn down part of Rome and attack Cicero. Cicero was only saved by a group of friendly citizens fighting off the attackers. This chaos caused elections to be postponed for weeks, but when they finally were held, Clodius was elected to aedile.

Clodius's gang began going around Rome, spreading lies that the people were starving because of Pompey, and Pompey wanted to go on campaign in the East again to grow richer. Pompey had made the grain situation better so that the attack fell flat, but the senate did want to send a general and an army against Egypt to better secure Rome's grain supply, and Pompey would have gotten the job. However, the part that freaked Pompey out the most was Clodius's agents saying that Crassus should get the job instead. Crassus's support of Clodius was hidden by that point, and Crassus had always been hated by the common people of Rome, so it was now clear to Pompey that his fellow Triumvir had been sponsoring all of this chaos and the attacks against him. Pompey was terrified by this point and told Cicero that he feared Crassus would try to assassinate him.[41]

Pompey had lost most of his major political allies, his popularity among the people died away as memories of his great victories vanished, and his closest ally and father-in-law, Caesar, was campaigning in Gaul, winning great victories; he wanted to get out of Rome quickly. The Triumvirate was on the verge of collapse when the conservatives appointed a candidate for consul for the election to the year 55 BC. This conservative was Cato's brother-in-law, Domitius. Domitius ran on recalling Caesar from his war in Gaul due to charges of illegal warfare. If he won the election, everything Caesar had spent years fighting for in Gaul would collapse, and he would go to prison; this would undo everything the Triumvirate had worked for. It was this which forced Caesar to call Pompey and Crassus to meet with him at Lucca to renew their alliance.

When they met, Caesar healed some of the wounds between Pompey and Crassus and convinced them, for the sake of his own political survival, to run for consul on a joint ticket. If they were victorious, they could extend Caesar's command in Gaul and secure commands and governorships for themselves, allowing them to escape the ugliness of

41 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 253.

Roman politics. The three men agreed to mend their rift, and when the elections came, Pompey and Crassus both won.

When the Senate decided which governorships the future consuls should receive, Pompey received Spain. Crassus, who wanted to launch a war like Caesar's for his own prestige and fame, chose Syria so he could campaign against Pompey's old allies, the Parthians. Caesar then secretly met with Clodius and, through a series of promises, convinced him to support Pompey and Crassus as consuls. With his governorships and commands secured, Caesar could now invade Britain.[42]

After passing the legislation the triumvirate wanted and securing comfortable governorships for themselves, Pompey and Crassus did little for the rest of their terms. When the time came to leave for their posts, Crassus left for Syria, never to return. Pompey, however, did not leave for Spain as he had agreed with Caesar and Crassus. Pompey's view was simple: let Crassus win victories in the East, and let Caesar win victories in the West. Pompey Magnus had already won victories in both halves of the empire, so he did not need any more triumphs to preserve his legacy.

Pompey now intended to become the leading man in Rome. Free from Caesar and Crassus, he could finally claim the dominant position in Roman politics that he believed should have been his nearly a decade earlier. It was now 54 BC, and Pompey was the richest, most prominent, and most accomplished general left in the city of Rome. He was only fifty-two.

Pompey sponsored massive games to win back the love of the people he had lost over the previous years, and the effort worked. He was now one of the most popular figures in Rome, behind only Clodius. It was at this moment of renewed supremacy that his greatest personal tragedy occurred. Julia, Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife, died in childbirth. It had been an arranged marriage, but Pompey loved Julia far more than any of his other wives and mourned her death for months. Caesar had just returned from his disastrous invasion of Britain and was devastated that his only child had died. The legal and familial bond between the two

42 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 187.

greatest men of their generation was gone.[43]

In 54 BC, all consular candidates were discovered to have been bribing election officials, and the entire election had to be pushed back half a year as all the candidates were barred. At the same time, the street battles between Clodius and Milo intensified. With corruption rampant and mob violence spreading, the Senate and the people of Rome began to turn to Pompey as the man who could save them from the crisis. The crisis culminated in late January 53 BC, when Milo's gang and Clodius's gang encountered each other just outside Rome. The two groups fought and killed one another until Milo's gang gained the advantage, pursued the fleeing Clodius, and killed him. The people of Rome loved Clodius, and his death caused massive riots across the city. Rioters stormed the Senate house, placed Clodius's body on a massive wooden pyre inside, lit the fire, and burned the structure down.[44]

The Senate was horrified that the Capitol Building of Rome had just been burned down by a mob. Rome truly seemed to be in an ungovernable state of anarchy. The Senate again approached Pompey with the idea of dictatorship. The conservatives realized that they needed a man to save them, but they did not want to grant that man dictatorial powers. Instead, they appointed Pompey as sole consul without elections, simply by senatorial decision. It was illegal, but Rome was in such a state of anarchy that nobody opposed the decision with any true fervor. The legal ten-year gap between consulships, meant to prevent men from dominating Roman politics like authoritarians, was ignored. In 52 BC, Pompey assumed power as Rome's only non-elected sole consul.

In the opening days of the year, Pompey received news from the East. Crassus had gone to war with the Parthians in 53 BC with a massive army. As the army crossed the Mesopotamian desert, however, it was ambushed, harassed, and butchered over several days by Parthian horse archers. Crassus was captured and, according to later tradition, had molten gold poured down his throat. In just a few days, thirty thousand Romans had perished, and the eastern borders of Rome, which Pompey had spent years creating and organizing, were left nearly defenseless.

43 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 201-212.

44 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 226.

Most importantly, the triumvirate, which had always been balanced by the presence of a third member, was now an alliance of two.[45]

The deaths of Julia and Crassus caused Pompey and Caesar to begin drifting into separation and rivalry, for there was no longer a third man to balance them. Meanwhile, Pompey had to save Rome. Through the Senatus Consultum Ultimum, he gave himself emergency powers, raised an army of his old Picenum veterans, and marched them into Rome to occupy the city. Soldiers fought and killed gang members, restored order, and allowed grain shipments and business to resume.

Milo was arrested for Clodius's murder and exiled, partly to show that Pompey was being fair to both sides of the gang wars. Peace was restored to Rome through military force, and Pompey became the most powerful man in the Republic. He had now obtained almost everything he had wanted in life: military victories, wealth, influence, prestige, the love of the people, and the support of the Senate and the conservative optimates, whom he had opposed for so long. Pompey declared the crisis over and stepped away from his sole consulship.

Pompey remarried to the daughter of the staunch conservative leader Metellus Scipio and appointed him as his co-consul for the remainder of the year. Pompey then began passing legislation to prevent Caesar from running for political office in absentia and began to target populares politicians and senators. Pompey was now the leading man in Rome by openly abandoning the Caesarian reform faction that he had been friendly with for nearly a decade. He had instead entered the waiting arms of the conservatives, the very men he had hated for decades.

Why this sudden change?

The first blow to the Triumvirate was the death of Julia in 54 BC, Caesar's daughter and Pompey's wife. She had married Pompey when the alliance was created and served as the living symbol of the bond between the two men. Her death destroyed that legal and familial connection. To preserve the bond, Caesar offered Pompey other female relatives in marriage, but Pompey said he was too overcome with grief to marry and that no woman could replace Julia in his heart. From that point, the

45 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 255.

relationship began to drift, especially as Pompey was consumed by events in Rome and Caesar was busy winning his wars against the Gauls.

When Crassus died fighting the Parthians in Syria in 53 BC, his death removed the only buffer between the ambitions and egos of Pompey and Caesar. The triumvirate effectively ceased to exist. The three-man alliance had become a two-man rivalry. In the chaos of 53 BC, the optimates were searching for a strong leader, but they did not possess one. For all their bluster about being the best men, they had nobody they believed could save the Republic and their movement from chaos. Therefore, they had to turn to Pompey as their savior.

The optimates began spending more time socially with Pompey, and both sides started to appreciate one another. The optimates had hated Pompey for decades because of his social status and victories, but he was not their greatest threat at that moment. They could put aside the status argument because of his position as a three-time consul. More importantly, they liked him because he was not the kind of conquering general and politician Caesar had become. Caesar was far more dangerous to them. The optimates rehabilitated Pompey's image among themselves in order to prove to themselves how evil and different Caesar was in Gaul. Still heartbroken, Pompey agreed with the optimates that he should remarry and chose the daughter of Metellus Scipio. Scipio was among the noblest men in Rome, heir to both the Scipios and the Metelli, and by 52 BC he was also the leader of the conservative movement. In a political faction obsessed with rank and lineage, a man with these connections would naturally become its leader. Pompey now had a family connection to the wealthiest and most prominent conservative in Rome.[46]

Pompey had never been an idealist with firm ideals that he held dear. He allied with Sulla to gain advancement, then, as soon as Sulla began to fade physically from the political scene, Pompey began disobeying him and allying with Sulla's foes. He was always an opponent of the conservatives, but would switch his support to the reformers in Rome. He had been the enemy of the optimates faction since Sulla's death, but now was their close ally because he saw them as his way toward prestige and prominence. Pompey's only true ideal was himself, though not in the same

46 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 259-261.

sense of lusting for power. His goal was instead to become Rome's greatest general and leading citizen while ensuring that Rome remained stable and wealthy. He did not want to rule a failing state.

This quote sums it up best:

> "The great irony of the late Republic is that Pompey was basically of conservative mentality. Like Scipio Africanus, Scipio Aemilianus, and Marius before him, he was willing to countenance extraordinary measures, but only to assure his Dignitas and preeminence within the confines of the establishment."[47]

Caesar kept wondering why Pompey was aligning himself, both politically and personally, with Caesar's enemies, but Pompey never gave him direct answers. By this point, Pompey was jealous of Caesar and concerned that his own reputation would be eclipsed by the man he had helped create in 59 BC.

Since 59 BC, Caesar had grown enormously in power and reputation. He had spent nearly a decade at war with Rome's long-standing enemies, the Gauls, fighting across modern-day France. He had won brilliant campaigns and battles. He had crossed the Rhine and crossed the Channel into Britain, both firsts for a Roman commander. He had sent a steady supply of slaves and loot back to the Roman people, who loved him and practically deified him for these feats.

Caesar had also gathered massive armies that were loyal to him personally rather than to the Senate. Pompey's title as Rome's greatest living general was being overtaken, especially after Caesar's miraculous victory at Alesia, where Vercingetorix, the leader of the Gallic coalition, surrendered. Pompey's popularity with the people was also being surpassed. Around this point in the late 50s BC, a rivalry in the truest sense of the word developed between the two men.

By 50 BC, the last pockets of Gallic resistance were being eliminated, and Caesar could begin refocusing his efforts on Rome. He had eight veteran legions loyal to him. Pompey, meanwhile, had three in Spain and none in Italy. As negotiations began over Caesar's planned run for

47 Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 23.

the consulship in 49 BC, the optimates ignored this military fact. Pompey understood it, but the foolish optimates around him refused to treat it as important. When anyone raised the issue, Pompey, in his overconfidence, would say, "In whatever part of Italy I stamp upon the ground, there will spring up armies of infantry and cavalry."[48] From this point forward, it is useful to speak of Caesarians and Pompeians, since the two men dominated their respective factions.

From 52 BC to 49 BC, the Caesarians and Pompeians debated over the terms of Caesar's possible consulship. Caesar had been consul in 59 BC, and no Roman could run again until ten years had passed That ten-year interval was now approaching, and Caesar would likely win in a landslide if he stood for election. However, why does this matter so much?

Caesar had done many questionable or possibly illegal actions as consul and governor in Gaul, including threatening a fellow consul, inciting mob violence, and engaging in illegal warfare against Roman allied tribes during his Gallic Wars, etc. These were things the Pompeians wanted punished; however, Roman Consuls and Governors had imperium, meaning they were unable to be charged with crimes until they left office. This, above all, was why Caesar had demanded two five-year terms as governor of Gaul: as soon as imperium no longer protected him, he could be prosecuted by conservative-aligned courts and either executed or exiled. If Caesar could run for consul in 49 BC, he could then receive another long governorship somewhere else in the Republic. In that case, he could spend the rest of his life using imperium to protect himself from Pompeian prosecution.

Was Caesar guilty of these crimes? Probably.

Was the prosecution also a political attack by opponents who hated him? Yes.

To stand for election as consul, Caesar had to enter the city of Rome. Yet no general could hold imperium inside the city, so most generals resigned their commands before entering Rome and standing for election. If Caesar did that, he would immediately be put on trial. A few years earlier, when the Senate was controlled by Caesarians, Caesar had

48 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 268.

received an exemption allowing him to run for consul in absentia. In 52 BC, however, Pompey passed a law banning candidates from running for consul in absentia. These two laws counteracted one another, and both parties believed their own law was supreme.

The Pompeian-controlled Senate demanded that Caesar give up his legions and stand trial, but Caesar refused. They asked several times, and each time he refused. Caesar's position was simple: he wanted to be elected consul in absentia in 49 BC, then become governor in the East and avenge Crassus's defeat. To the Pompeians, however, Caesar had to be punished for his actions. Therefore, he had to abandon his imperium and return to Rome for trial.

By this point, Caesar saw himself at the peak of his power and influence, and he imagined the future Parthian campaign as the culmination of his career. Caesar no longer wanted to be merely a politician. He wanted to be a conqueror like Alexander. Instead of recognizing this, despite Caesar making it clear, the Pompeians under the disastrous leadership of Metellus Scipio insisted that he face trial.[49]

After the Senate issued one final decree giving Pompey the authority to strip Caesar of his legions and command and force him to stand trial, Caesar decided he had had enough. In early 49 BC, he crossed the Rubicon. The Rubicon was a small river dividing Italy from Cisalpine Gaul, Caesar's main province, and it was illegal for a general to bring military forces across it. If Caesar crossed it, he would be declared an outlaw and an enemy of Rome. Caesar gathered his army, said the fateful words, "Let the die be cast," and marched on Rome, crossing the river with one legion while the rest of his army remained in Gaul and prepared to join him.

As noted earlier, Italy was largely defenseless, and Caesar commanded the only veteran legions on the peninsula. Pompey and the Senate were caught off guard because they foolishly believed Caesar would wait until spring to cross, rather than crossing in winter. As Caesar marched south, city after city, including much of Pompey's home region of Picenum, opened its gates to him. When Caesar encountered resistance and captured Pompeians, he offered clemency as long as they remained

49 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 238.

loyal to him. This policy of mercy rather than bloodshed, unlike the violence Sulla had used decades earlier, caused city after city to open its gates.[50]

Pompey realized that Caesar was only days away from Rome and that he had no military forces capable of defending the capital. He gathered the Senate, the treasury, and what soldiers he had been able to muster, then fled to Greece. Men like Cicero, Marcus Junius Brutus, Cato, Scipio, and much of the Senate followed him while sneering that he was the man who had lost Rome, even though their own foolishness had created the disaster. Caesar captured Rome and declared himself dictator. Pompey sent men across the Roman world to rally opposition to Caesar. Most of Pompey's loyal veteran legions from his decades of military experience were stationed in Spain and Greece. The Spanish legions were cut off from Pompey's base in Greece, so they were on their own, while Pompey would need months to rally his loyal forces in Greece.

Caesar had two options for the rest of 49 BC: he could either face Pompey's veteran Spanish legions or attack Pompey's rebuilding army in Greece. Caesar described the situation as an army without a general in Spain and a general without an army in Greece.[51] He knew Pompey would need a year to build a strong army in Greece before attempting to recapture Rome, while the Spanish legions were the more immediate threat. Caesar marched half his army toward Spain and spent several months besieging Massilia, present-day Marseille. Then, moving into Spain, he destroyed Pompey's veteran Spanish legions at the Battle of Ilerda, granting clemency to those captured after the battle. Meanwhile, several newly raised Caesarian legions tried to invade Africa, a Pompeian stronghold, and were annihilated.

The Spanish legions, however, had bought Pompey enough time to gather legions from the East, along with soldiers from the client kings he had created a decade and a half earlier. In Greece, Pompey built a massive host of fifty-four thousand men, twice the size of the force Caesar was preparing to bring across the Adriatic.[52]

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50 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 271.

51 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 275.

52 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 273.

In January 48 BC, Caesar crossed the Adriatic with half of his army, about fourteen thousand men. Pompey quickly moved to annihilate him, but the two armies maneuvered around Dyrrachium for weeks without committing to a decisive battle. During this time, Pompey trained and supplied his forces, ensuring that when he delivered the killing blow, it would be quick and final, just like in his earlier campaigns. His plan was to win first through organization and then on the battlefield, but only when every factor favored him.[53]

Caesar's army was starving and close to collapse when Mark Antony crossed with more than half of Caesar's remaining forces. Now numbering about twenty-eight thousand men, Caesar could make strategic moves that had previously been impossible. The two armies moved south into Thessaly. In every minor engagement, Pompey's troops emerged victorious over the starving and demoralized Caesarians.

Months had passed, and summer was approaching. Everyone viewed Caesar as being on the edge of defeat. His army had set up camp near Pharsalus and was starving. Pompey pursued him and later arrived with forty-five thousand men. The two armies set up camp across from each other and waited for someone to make the first move.

After a few weeks of letting Caesar's army starve, it appeared that Pompey could win the war simply by waiting. Pompey wanted to delay longer and let Caesar's army collapse on its own. However, the optimates in his headquarters, including Cato, Cicero, and Scipio, urged him to attack. They argued that letting an enemy starve to death was un-Roman and mocked him as cowardly for refusing to face Caesar in open battle.

Pompey endured these remarks for weeks, but as the only man among them with serious military experience, and as Pompey Magnus for a reason, he ignored them. Eventually, believing that Caesar's army was already severely weakened and yielding to the demands of his political allies, Pompey chose battle. On August 8, 48 BC, he ordered his army to form its lines.

Pompey had faced Caesar in campaigns over the previous eight months and had usually emerged with the advantage. He had his enemy

53 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 275.

trapped and starving. Now, under pressure from Scipio, Cato, and Cicero, he would try to deliver the killing blow in the Roman style they demanded.[54]

Normally, Roman generals deployed their infantry in three lines of cohorts. At Pharsalus, a river anchored Pompey's right flank, so he placed all his auxiliary archers, cavalry, and light infantry on his left flank under Labienus, Caesar's former friend and right-hand man. His strongest legions stood in the center, and he distributed his old eastern veterans throughout the army to raise the spirits and fighting quality of his recruits. His lines were thick, with each cohort ten ranks deep.

Pompey's goal was to hold Caesar's front while his cavalry and archers on the left shattered Caesar's right. Pompey himself took a position on the field, leading many of his old eastern veterans into battle. Caesar was outnumbered two to one, so he had to stretch his line thin to match Pompey's length, leaving little depth in his formation. His men had experience, but they had barely any cavalry and were starving. Caesar's only advantage was that if his soldiers lost this battle, they would all die as traitors, so they would fight with desperate intensity. Pompey believed that Caesar's soldiers, though more experienced, were older than his own and would tire more quickly. For this reason, he chose to let Caesar come to him.

Seeing that Pompey was not advancing, Mark Antony led Caesar's infantry forward. As they drew closer, they stopped, rested, and then charged the Pompeian ranks. The two sides clashed in a giant melee as the lines met, pushed, and stabbed at one another. At this point, Pompey ordered his cavalry and light infantry to flank Caesar's right and attack from the side. The Pompeian cavalry shattered Caesar's small cavalry force and turned to crush Caesar's right flank. Then Caesar revealed his coup de grâce: a hidden fourth line of infantry armed with spears. The Pompeian cavalry was caught in a pincer as Roman archers and javelin men covered the attack, and hundreds began to fall. Then the spearmen charged in, cutting down Pompey's cavalry and eventually routing it from the field. This fourth line then advanced and struck Pompey's left flank. His men broke. Then his center began to collapse as Caesar's trap fully sprang shut. Pompey's best men in the center fought hard, but they were being attacked

54 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 281-283.

from the front and the left, so after some time they fled. By the end of the day, the whole Pompeian force was in flight, dropping its weapons and losing the will to fight.[55]

Pompey, mentally broken by the disaster, was forced to flee the battlefield. He gathered his family, some gold, and a few allies, then fled as his army dispersed. Caesar's men followed up their victory by storming the Pompeian camp, looting it, and killing any man they found inside.[56]

That fateful day in August 48 BC became the worst day of Pompey's life and legacy. Throughout that year, he had outmaneuvered Caesar, and by the time both armies reached Pharsalus, he held nearly every advantage. His army was well fed, motivated, supplied, trained, and massive compared to Caesar's starving, poorly supplied, veteran, and outnumbered force. Pompey might have become the hero of Rome if he had not listened to the poor advice of Scipio, Cato, and Cicero. If he had simply waited for Caesar to starve and come to terms, the outcome might have been different. Yet Pompey's successful maneuvering in Greece has largely been forgotten, while the stain of Pharsalus still follows his legacy. Fifteen thousand of his men were killed, twenty-five thousand were captured and mostly pardoned by Caesar, and Caesar achieved this victory at the cost of only about twelve hundred men.[57] Pharsalus destroyed the Pompeians' best chance to win the civil war.

That night, the Pompeians met and discussed their options. Cicero, Brutus, and many others decided to accept Caesar's clemency. Cato and Scipio decided to continue the fight in Africa, the last bastion of Pompeian power. Most of Pompey's client kings and lords had been killed or captured at Pharsalus, meaning that his influence network throughout the East had been destroyed. The last remaining option was the boy king of Egypt, Ptolemy XIII, who was still a young teenager.

Pompey had done great services for the boy's father throughout the 60s and 50s BC in Rome and had helped the Ptolemies remain on the throne. Therefore, he believed that if he went to Egypt, he would be taken

55 Fratantuono, *Pompey the Great*, 285-291.

56 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 301.

57 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 303.

care of and would have a place where he and his family could consider their next moves.

Pompey was still only fifty-eight. He could still have lived a good life in political exile, joined the remaining Pompeians in Africa, or made peace with his old friend Caesar. Instead, he sailed from Greece to Cyprus, then from Cyprus to Egypt.

Pompey made landfall outside the city of Pelusium. He went ashore to greet a delegation the boy king had sent him. The delegation was led by Lucius Septimius, a Roman soldier and officer who had fought with Pompey for years and now worked for the Ptolemies. Pompey felt safe entering the company of a former ally and the kingdom of a man whose father he had considered a friend.

As Pompey stepped onto the shore to greet Lucius, he was stabbed in the side and then again in the chest while his children watched from a boat offshore. Pompey Magnus, one of the greatest Roman generals and political figures, a man who had dominated Rome from 88 BC to 48 BC, was dead, assassinated as a gift to win Caesar's favor. The assassins cut off his head, threw the rest of his unclothed body into the water, and left it for the animals. According to Plutarch, his body was later found and given a proper Roman cremation. Caesar chased after Pompey and arrived in Egypt a few weeks later. When he arrived, he was presented with the head of his former son-in-law, ally, friend, rival, and enemy. Instead of being pleased that his rival was dead, Caesar reacted with disgust and ordered that Pompey's body be located and given a proper Roman funeral. This was not how he wanted the civil war to end, not with Egyptian courtiers murdering a three-time consul of Rome in such an unceremonious fashion.[58]

Such was the tragic downfall of Pompey the Great, one of history's greatest and most humane conquerors, yet perhaps the least equipped to bear the burden of his own significance. He was a great man, but not the man needed to save the declining republic, which had been doomed since the Gracchi. He was controlled by the way of things, not a master of fate and destiny. A victory over Caesar at Pharsalus might have prolonged the structures of republican rule in Rome for a time, but the system ultimately

58 Plutarch, "Lives: Volume V," 317-323.

doomed. Pompey evidently possessed great talents and skills, but he was not the decisive man of action that was needed to save Rome or rebuild it. Through his failed alliance with Caesar and his alliance with the optimates at the wrong moment, he is forever linked with the fall of Rome and a defender of a decadent and stubborn nobility which he had despised for decades. As the Republic crumbled under corruption and civil strife, Pompey's fall at Pharsalus and his ignominious death in Egypt symbolize not just personal defeat, but the eclipse of an era.

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