

History often acts in an accumulative way. In 88 B.C. a Roman general captured the city of Rome with his (mutinous?) army, capping an historical process begun almost a half a century earlier. Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix (the Fortunate!) took Rome captive some three hundred years after her last capture by the barbarous Gauls. How did this sorry state of affairs come about, and how irresponsible was Sulla in effecting this catastrophe?

In fact there were, as usual, a number of streams feeding this river of ruin for Roman republicanism.

One: Tribunician Violence

From the period of Tiberius Gracchus (tribune 133 B.C.) and his brother Gaius (tribune 123 B.C.) an example had been set of headstrong tribunes riding roughshod over the traditional constitution to effect what they saw as needed reforms. Both men were murdered in reaction, though tribunes were supposed to be inviolate. Later in 100 B.C. a pet tribune of Gaius Marius, Rome's greatest general at the time, was also murdered. All these tribunes were prepared to use some violence in achieving their ends but were trumped by their enemies in this field and killed. In 88 Marius had used another pet tribune, Sulpicius, to institute riots which resulted in the legitimate consul of the year 88, Sulla, losing his eastern command - a command which both Marius and Sulla yearned for.

Two: Greed of the Business Class (the Equites)

This class of society, the non-political aristocracy, had been politicized by the Gracchi, and putting their profits and lust for exploiting provincials before all else added to

the division in Roman society. They were not in favour of Sulla, who was a senator and a patrician, but saw more hope in Marius.

Three: The Soldiers

As a result of Marius' own army reforms, which about 15 years before Sulla's consulship legitimized the recruiting of the poorer citizens into the Roman army (before this all soldiers had to have a set minimum of property), soldiers now looked more to their generals for direction and reward after a campaign than to the state. Moreover, in 90 B.C. a Civil War in Italy had broken out between Rome and her allies, and these same soldiers had become brutalized and accustomed to attacking their former fellow soldiers.

Four: The War Lord mentality

With the above mentioned pressures exerting their influence the customary covetousness of Roman aristocrats for important military commands grew stronger. This competition had already been a factor in Roman politics but now it flared out of control.

Finale

Sulla in late 88 was near Naples, a legally elected consul with an army which he was legally entitled to lead east to Asia. Through violence and sharp political tricks his enemies in Rome relieved him of his command. He would not stand for this and appealed to his troops to uphold the legitimate rights of the consul and to take back the republic which his foes had stolen. Though his officers deserted him the men followed him to the capture of the city: the Age of the War Lords had begun. Marius fled to Africa and another sacrosanct tribune was murdered to inaugurate the new

age.

Indeed the very next year, 87, saw the deposed consul, Cinna, along with a raging Marius besiege and take the city once again. Enemies were liquidated out of hand and the government made ready to do battle against Sulla whose army was currently in Greece repelling the army of Mithridates, king of Pontus. Sulla's enemy, Cinna, the father-in-law of young Julius Caesar, was not destined to fight Sulla for Cinna's own troops murdered him when he tried to compel them to go east against Sulla. However, there were others of Cinna's party who were just as ready to engage in civil war, and in 83 Sulla returned to Italy to oblige them.

In a final bloody battle before the very gates of Rome Sulla prevailed over his foes in 82. Importantly nei-

ther he nor his army entered the city on this occasion. The territory within the city was the sacred pomoerium wherein no military power could be justly exercised. Sulla had grown scrupulous in victory for by law and custom he would forfeit his command and rank of proconsul the instant he entered the gates (unless during a duly sanctioned triumph). Consequently he waited outside the walls while the government within gratified him with a widesweeping dictatorship with no fixed term. With the niceties of the situation observed the dictator now entered Rome. Death lists (the infamous procriptions) were now posted. By June 81 some 5,000 citizens had been 'purged' i.e. killed. As the reader may observe, this third capture of Rome was the most civilized but, strangely enough, also the bloodiest.