

Marcellus' Marbles: Dynamism in *Exempla* and Memory

Perhaps the greatest exploit of Marcus Claudius Marcellus—the capture and looting of Syracuse—was a flashpoint for ancient Roman moralists and historians in their discussions concerning the degradation of Republican values. The *praeda* from Syracuse, at least as is interpreted from Livy's statements on it, began the slow decline of the Roman state and would ultimately lead to civil war and the loss of the Republic (*AUC*, 25.40.2). Marcellus, of course, would be immortalized by the Augustan regime as one of the *summi viri*, honoring the general in the hopes of magnifying the Republican past of Augustus' hopeful heir. It is this tradition of Marcellus, in particular, which has found the greatest hold on scholars' minds in the past.

There has been a recent emphasis, however, on Livy's particular characterization of Marcellus as a general and his actions as *exempla* in *ab Urbe Condita*, especially in reference to his martial tactics. Much has been said concerning the delaying strategy which was utilized by both Marcellus and Fabius Maximus as well as Livy's depiction of these two men in contrast with the reckless Flaminius and Varro (Carawan 1985: 133). The scholarly consensus has thus arisen that Marcellus' actions as a military leader are favorably portrayed in Livy's *magnum opus*. Beyond this commentary on the presumed worth of a particular military strategy, the representation of Marcellus' siege and subsequent sack of Syracuse has also been treated at length. Particularly popular is Marcellus' personal mourning at seeing perhaps the most beautiful city in the Mediterranean reduced to a mere shadow of its former self, drawing parallels with the Scipionic episode at Carthage while bringing to the fore issues of human transience (Marincola 2005: 222-223). Livy's favorable characterization follows Marcellus even here, but only so far; there has been relative agreement that Livy portrayed Marcellus' conduct at Syracuse as being tarnished by his insistence on seizing *signas sacras profanasque* as the spoils of war,

whether through comparison with the Shield of Marcius (Jaeger 1997: 130), Fabius' restraint at Tarentum (Marincola: 226), or other portrayals by ancient historians.

This essay, however, seeks to deconstruct this largely accepted tradition of Livian 'shaming' of Marcellus' actions in respect to the construction of exempla and their impact on the collective and public memory of the Roman state in flux—civil war, economic upheaval, and social strife included. Specifically, I trace the development of the *Marcelli exemplum* through several authors, most notably Cicero's *in Verrem* and Livy's *ab Urbe Condita*, and the respective treatments this episode receives: does Marcellus abandon Roman virtue, or does he embrace it? If the latter is the case, what fault then lies with Marcellus' actions? Even further, to what end is the memory of Marcellus utilized? By scrutinizing the language used by various authors in their description of the *Marcelli exemplum* and by considering the episode itself within a larger historical narrative as opposed to treating it independently, I will show that the *Marcelli exemplum*, when interpreted through Chaplin's (2005) exemplary criteria, was itself an act rooted in the imitation of precedent. After all, the taking of *spolia opimia* for the *Res Publica* was a particularly Roman phenomenon, especially in connection with the *evocatio* (Gruen 1992: 86). Further, there seems some reason to believe that Livy himself understood this very fact and—in commenting upon the transience of human material fortune through the character of Marcellus—that Livy was also expressing a similar concern for the transience of *memoria*. Thus, through this interpretation, Livy's characterization of Marcellus at Syracuse, as opposed to being a *malum exemplum*, becomes a warning to his readers as to the dynamic nature of *exempla* themselves—notably, that an *exemplum*, once *bonum*, does not always remain so.

Bibliography

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