

New Men and Old Politics: Scipio Aemilianus as a Model for Gaius Marius

This paper argues that Gaius Marius' career, usually interpreted in the light of its startling aftermath, was the product of 2nd-century political traditions and must be understood within those traditions. More specifically, I argue that Marius was not revolutionary in his approach to politics but instead worked deftly within an existing political framework, at many times modeling his tactics on those of the patrician Scipio Aemilianus. It was in part Marius' masterful use of precedents set by Scipio that made his career so successful, so stunning, and so consequential for Roman history.

The career of Marius has been treated as the starting point for a new chapter of Roman politics, but scholars have paid little attention to Marius' relationship to the preceding chapter. Although long-term processes that led to the military reforms have been thoroughly explored (e.g. Brunt 1971, Gabba 1976), in political matters scholars have continued to follow imperial Roman sources in viewing Marius as anti-aristocratic and somewhat revolutionary in his outlook. Even Richard Evans, who has most carefully reconstructed Marius' conventional tactics in his early career, views Marius' efforts to obtain the commands in the wars against Jugurtha and Mithridates as radical breaks with precedent (Evans 1994). My argument, on the other hand, shows that Marius' political career, like his military reforms, marked not a sharp break but a continuation of second-century developments.

My argument begins with the context of Marius' rise to prominence. As a new man making his way in an aristocratic world, Marius had to establish himself by playing within the rules of Rome's senatorial establishment (Spielvogel 2004). He could not succeed without support, and he needed to find an approach both acceptable to the aristocracy and available to a *novus homo*. He found a suitably respected model in the *popularis* political tactics of Scipio

Aemilianus, which relied on bold use of popular power no less than family associations. Though it was perhaps Scipio's name that gave him the latitude to engage in political schemes displeasing to many senators (Zahrnt 2000), his success demonstrated the efficacy of popular tactics.

The argument continues by identifying specific parallels between Marius and Aemilianus. These extend from the uncontroversial focus on both men on discipline as the foundation of military success (App. *Ib.* 84, Plut. *Mar.* 14) to seemingly more revolutionary activities like seeking a military command as a private citizen (Cic. *Phil.* 11.18, Plut. *Mar.* 34). Between these extremes, we find the orchestration of letter-writing campaigns to stir popular support in consular elections (App. *Pun.* 112, Sall. *Jug.* 65, 73), the arrangement of special votes to transfer military commands against the wishes of the senate (App. *Pun.* 112, Sall. *Jug.* 84), and unorthodox methods of recruiting troops to circumvent senatorial obstruction (Appian *Ib.* 84, Sall. *Jug.* 84.3). At virtually every moment of political difficulty, Marius adapted or stole from the Scipionic playbook to achieve his ends. Thus, even at the height of his career, Marius' populist tactics were nothing new, and they should be seen not as a break with tradition or the start of a new era of populism in Rome but as a virtuoso performance in an established political art-form.

I conclude by discussing the difficulties of our sources, especially for the career of Scipio. I acknowledge that some of Scipio's reported actions may not be historical but instead retrojections from the career of Marius, but I argue that even in this case they provide evidence that the Romans themselves saw a connection between the two men, their achievements, and their careers. Though Plutarch's story (Plut. *Mar.* 3) that Scipio Aemilianus once designated

Gaius Marius as a potential successor has rightly been dismissed as fiction (Evans, 1994; Carney, 1970), it too reveals that the two men were linked in the Roman historical imagination.

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