never extinct – found a new significance because of its age-old role in establishing the relative military quality of ethnic groups.[46] Greeks had always been contemptuous of the martial potential of non-Greeks, but before the conquests of Alexander they had never had at their disposal large numbers of non-Greeks whom they could, if they chose, enroll as soldiers. Yet Greek and Macedonian ascription of superior inborn prowess to themselves ensured that Hellenistic kings did everything they could to recruit as many ethnic Greeks and Macedonians as possible for their armies. This encouraged the use of Greek mercenaries – suspicion of mercenaries never died, but even bad Greeks were better than barbarians – and enforced upon the kingdoms elaborate measures for the care and breeding of scarce Greek and Macedonian soldiers, in an attempt to maintain European standing armies, a stage beyond the *ad hoc* employment of mercenaries. In Egypt this need manifested itself in a system of land-grants to soldiers,[47] in Asia Minor and further east in chains of military colonies in which colonists from Greece enjoyed lands in exchange for service.[48] Only slowly and reluctantly, in the face of an absolute scarcity of Greeks and Macedonians, did Hellenistic monarchs yield to the necessity of training their native subjects for the phalanx, and the subsequent revolt of the native Egyptian troops with whom Ptolemy IV had won at Raphia in 217 did not encourage repetition of the experiment (Polyb. 5.107.1–3). In the sandy penetralia of Alexander's empire all Greeks and Macedonians were nature's noblemen and war's adepts – at least compared to their subjects: among Greek-speakers themselves excellence was pursued by practice and training, as a craft.

III. THE ROMANS

By the third century Rome was a full member of the Hellenistic cosmos, trading and treating and fighting with Greece, the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Hellenized maritime power of Carthage. And if, unlike the Greeks and Carthaginians, the Romans employed mercenaries rarely,[49] this was hardly for want of the treasure to pay them: by 300 Rome dominated Italy, and could have laid her under tribute of money. In fact the Romans did not employ mercenaries for a deeper reason: they saw no cause to pay others to do something they yearned to do themselves, and they had allies who shared their outlook. For centuries Romans of all classes – and many of

[46] E.g. Polyb. 1.2.6, 2.38.2–3, 5.44.7, 6.52.10; Diod. Sic. 17.111.4, 19.101.1.

[47] Lesquier (1911); and economically on Hellenistic military settlements, Hamilton (1999) 177–80.

[48] Billows (1995a) 146–82.

[49] Griffith (1935) 234–5 gathers the clear instances, but there are other cases, in which the status of the Roman *auxilia* is unclear, where they might well be mercenaries, e.g. Livy 23.46.6–7 (215 BC), 24.47.11 (213 BC), 26.10.5 (211 BC), 27.8.15 (209 BC), 27.38.11 (207 BC), 28.20.1 (206 BC). Rarity of Roman use of mercenaries is noted by Diod. Sic. 29.6.1; Livy 24.49.8.

their Italian allies – felt a powerful urge to go to war in order to demonstrate their courage, their *virtus*.

1. Military excellence as virtue

The Romans never doubted that there was much that could be learned about fighting and commanding in battle, but early Romans did not conceive of military excellence primarily as a set of learnable skills. Success in battle was primarily the consequence of the inborn human quality that Romans most admired, *virtus* or masculine courage (from which, eventually, the English word virtue). *Virtus* is analogous to the Greek *andreia*, but is a value far more basic to the Roman sense of self than Greek *andreia* had been to Greek identity in historical times.[50] Sings a wife in a Roman play:

> I want my man to be cried as a victor in war: that's enough for me. *Virtus* is the greatest prize; *virtus* comes before everything, that's certain: liberty, safety, life, property and parents, homeland and children it guards and keeps safe. *Virtus* has everything in it: who has *virtus* has everything good.[51]

Virtus was proved in battle, and ideally by young men in single combat (Polyb. 6.54.4). The Romans imagined that the practice of single combat was handed down hallowed from their most remote antiquity: Romulus, the very founder of their city, was the first to win the honour of the *spolia opima*, a dedication made by a Roman leader who killed the enemy leader with his own hand. And seeking out single combat was a regular part of Roman warfare in historical times. The late third-century Roman general Marcellus fought many such fights, and the consul of 202, Marcus Servilius, killed no fewer than twenty-three men in separate single combats.[52] Victors in single combat hung the armour of their victims on their houses, as 'witnesses to their bravery'.[53] Under the Roman law such spoils could not be removed even if the house were sold (Plin. *HN* 35.7). King Pyrrhus of Epirus was a famous one-on-one fighter in the Macedonian royal tradition. But when fighting the Romans, after an attack upon his person by an Italian officer, even Pyrrhus wearied: he gave his cloak and armour to a friend who was promptly killed by another Italian (Plut. *Pyrrh*. 16.8–17.2).[54]

[50] Polyb. 31.29.1; McDonnell (2006); McCall (2002) 83–96.

[51] Plaut. *Amph*. 648–53, long recognized as a Plautine addition to his Greek original: Genzmer (1956) 123–5.

[52] Oakley (1985). [53] Quoted Polyb. 6.39.10; see Rawson (1991a).

[54] Since Hellenistic generals and monarchs sought out single combat as well (above nn. 43–4) can this practice be used to distinguish Roman martial culture from Greek? Eckstein (2006) 198–9 thinks not. But Greek single combats (which are fewer, and individual Greeks fighting more than a handful are unknown) mostly seem to involve supreme commanders: Hellenistic single combat was entwined with leadership, proving a leader worthy of obedience. At Rome single combat was a *rite de passage*.

The Roman sense that *virtus* was inborn was emphasized by their scornful treatment of their own soldiers who fled in battle or were taken prisoner. Romans taken prisoner in war lost their citizenship. Those who survived the blood offering of Cannae by flight were banished to Sicily and heaped with obloquy, despite Rome's need for men in that hard hour.[55] Those who surrendered to Hannibal the Romans refused to ransom, preferring to free and enrol slaves, which was more costly than paying Hannibal for the captives.[56] 'No state has ever held prisoners of war as more worthless than ours', Livy has an envoy from the prisoners admit to the Senate (22.59.1). Against the captives' plea for ransom Livy has the stern voice of Roman tradition inveigh, 'Fifty thousand citizens and allies lay fallen around you on that day! If so many examples of *virtus* did not move you, nothing ever will!' (22.60.14). Who has once failed in *virtus*, an innate quality, will do no better in future. The Greeks usually ransomed their prisoners: to them military excellence was in some sense exterior to the soldier, an acquisition. Greeks thought that bad craftsmen could be retrained in their craft, Romans that nothing could be done with born cowards.

The Roman cult of *virtus* manifests itself in the degree to which Roman society was adapted to the making of war.[57] The Roman religious calendar bristled with military festivals; the city of Rome was crowded with temples vowed to the gods in time of war and pompous structures built by victorious generals with the spoils of victory. Military decorations were worn in religious processions in the city (Polyb. 6.39.9). A coward in battle was mocked at home by his own relations (Polyb. 6.37.13). To run for political office a Roman had to have served in ten campaigns: for the first five at least he served in the ranks – of the cavalry if he was rich enough to have political ambitions – and only thereafter could he be elected an officer, a military tribune. It was during these youthful years that an ambitious Roman sought single combat, a famous single combat – recalling that of Manlius Torquatus or Valerius Corvus – being a launching pad to a meteoric political career (Plut. *Marc.* 2.1–2). Rome's aristocracy was narrowly military: until the late Republic only fighting brought advancement to an ambitious young Roman of high family. The sons of great Romans could not forswear violence and achieve eminence as jurisconsults or rhetoricians or bishops, as their descendants did: their choice was the sword or the shadows. Even the reputations of Romans known for accomplishments other than war – like Cato the Elder, say – were undergirded by military success (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 1). A great Roman was a warrior first, and a politician or an orator or a lawyer only second. The glory of military accomplishment

[55] Rosenstein (1990) 102–4. [56] Polyb. 6.58; Livy 22.57.11–61.2.

[57] For what follows see Harris (1979) 9–53, and Hopkins (1978) 25–37; but Rich (1993) adds important nuance and Eckstein (2006) 191–229 argues that Rome was not exceptional in this respect.

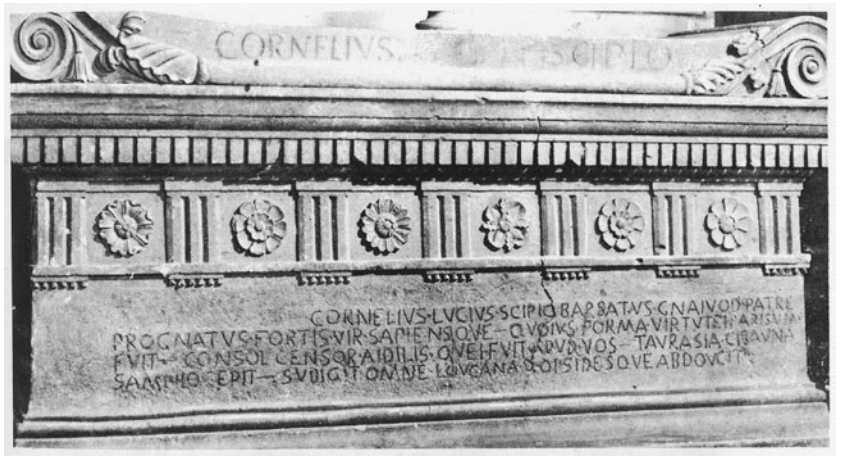

Figure 15.2 Sarcophagus of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus, consul of 298 BC, with an inscription dating to *c.* 200 BC which illustrates the competitiveness of the Roman élite: the text boasts that he 'captured Taurasia and Cisauna in Samnium, subdued all Lucania and brought back hostages'.

was indispensable to election to high office: candidates showed their honourable scars to the voters.[58] The ultimate reward of a successful political career was the consulship (fig. 15.2), and with it command of an army. And a successful consulship was crowned with a triumph, celebrating a bloody victory.

Their corporate behaviour lets us see the Romans beneath the highest classes following the same path of *virtus* as their superiors. Rome of the mid-Republic went to war nearly every year.[59] The Roman people voted wars in assembly – the *comitia centuriata*, itself a body with military origins – and no case is known of its refusing a war the Senate wanted.[60] Individuals might have resisted the call to arms with impunity, since the Roman state was quite incapable of compelling the unwilling to serve in the army, but Roman men did not (Polyb. 6.26.4). When there was widespread resistance to the call-up in 151 Polybius reports that this was new to Roman experience.[61] And comparison of the size of Roman armies to census numbers reveals that the Romans were able to mobilize a remarkably large proportion of their men for war. From 200 to 168, when the Republic faced nothing we would accept as a threat to its security, nearly one out of six adult male citizens was in the field every year. During the crisis of the Second Punic War

[58] McCall (2002) 91–5. [59] Harris (1979) 9–10, 256–7; Oakley (1993) 14–16.
[60] Harris (1979) 41, 263; Gabba (1984). The people were initially unwilling in 200, but the consul talked them around, Livy 31.6.1–8.1.
[61] Polyb. 35.4.2–6. He was not quite right, but close: Rich (1983) 316–18.

(218–201) the proportion had been higher – more than a quarter. Apply these figures to individuals and their terrible significance becomes clear: to field one-sixth of the adult male citizens, the average male citizen must spend one sixth of his adult life in the army (at least during campaigning season).[62] The conclusion to be drawn is that middling and even quite humble Romans – for the absolutely destitute were excluded from the army in the mid-Republic – were as eager to fight as their betters. If the aristocracy wore gold rings to signal their status, the commons wore iron rings as an emblem of their *virtus*.[63] *Virtus* was as central to their identity as it was to that of the noble families.

All ancient states were far more bellicose – they devoted proportionally far more of their attention, energy, time and resources to war – than contemporary democracies. Yet even among ancient states Rome of the middle Republic seems to stand out for its warlike culture. When and why did Rome become so singularly concentrated upon war? At any rate before 338, when Rome's victory in the Latin War set the stage for her rapid march to dominate Italy. Had Rome once been a more ordinary place – as some think – driven to a bloody way by the alarms of the previous century and a half?[64] This is to see Rome in the shadow of Sparta, where the terrible Messenian Wars are supposed to have made a glade of the muses into a barracks-state. Or did Rome's domestic politics – in particular the conflict of the orders, which opened offices and commands previously the domain of a hereditary caste to a wider circle of the wealthy – exacerbate aristocratic competition and so encourage war?[65] Or was Rome driven to perpetual war by her alliance system?[66] We know too little about Rome in the fifth and early fourth centuries ever to be certain.

2. Consequences

One consequence of envisaging warfare as a contest in *virtus* may have been to discourage rapid innovation in one realm of military technique. Polybius praises the Romans for being very quick to embrace new methods of fighting, and instances their adoption of Greek cavalry equipment (Polyb. 6.25.3–11). But the way the infantry of the middle Republic fought battles on land – in the array we call the manipular legion (see ch. 11 in this volume, pp. 349–51) – is a striking exception to this flexibility. We do not know exactly when the Romans adopted the manipular system: probably some time in the fourth century. But they were still using it at the turn of the first century: they fought in this way, with some small adjustments, for

[62] Rosenstein (1999) 206; Hopkins (1978) 31–5.
[63] Livy 22.12.1–2 vs. Plin. *HN* 33.9.
[64] Raaflaub (1996) contra Eckstein (2006) 229–37.
[65] Harris (1990) 505–6; Hölkeskamp (1993).
[66] Momigliano (1975) 45–6; and now Cornell (1995) 365–6.

two centuries at least. Such a lack of change is a puzzle, given the different peoples – with their different styles of fighting – the Romans faced in battle over those hundreds of years. Might not a people as adaptable as the Romans have modified or abandoned the formation after defeats by the Macedonian-style phalanxes of Pyrrhus and Hannibal, and some very narrow victories in Greece?[67]

One reason for the longevity of the manipular legion is that it responded to a cultural imperative: the pressure to prove *virtus* in single combat left its mark on Roman tactics. The Roman cavalry often dismounted to fight on foot, so that its members – the sons of Rome's great families – could fight single combats.[68] The manipular array accommodated the identical desire of Rome's less superb youth.[69] We may never fully understand the working of the manipular legion. But we know that the youngest soldiers fought in a swarm in front of the formed array of the maniples. These *velites* often wore a wolf skin on their heads, or some other distinguishing mark so that their brave deeds could be recognized (Polyb. 6.22.3). As for the decorations given to Roman soldiers, for wounding and stripping or killing a foe,

> these are not given to a soldier if in the formed array . . . he should wound or despoil one of the enemy, but to those who in the skirmishing or in similar circumstances in which there is no need to engage in single combat, have voluntarily and by choice placed themselves in danger.
>
> (Polyb. 6.39.4)

The *velites* were placed in front of the array, then, partly so that the boldest of the young men could distinguish themselves in the ancestral fashion by seeking out single combat with individual enemies.[70] This is why they needed to be identifiable, and why they, rather than the soldiers in the array behind them, were awarded decorations. The *velites* performed two different roles: the first parallel to Greek skirmishers, harassing the foe before the onslaught of the formed infantry and forming a fast-moving body that could be sent on independent missions. To fulfil this role any Roman soldier, of whatever age, who could not afford the equipment of the formed array, was enrolled in the *velites* (Polyb. 6.21.7). But the young warriors – however wealthy, as long as they could not afford to serve in

[67] Even after the Roman victories over the phalanx in the early second century, it seems – since Polybius had to argue the opposite (18.28.5, 31–2) – that most Greeks thought the phalanx superior to the manipular system, and attributed Roman success to fortune.

[68] Polyb. 3.115.3; McCall (2002) 69–72 on the Roman custom of dismounting. The Roman cavalry also fought single combats mounted, and many recorded Roman single combats are on horseback, McCall (2002) 84–5: given our sources, it is naturally the single combats of the highest class that we hear about.

[69] For this interpretation of the manipular array, see Lendon (2005) 178–91.

[70] In a confused passage (8.8.6) Livy describes the first line of the manipular array, including the skirmishers, as the *florem iuvenum*, the 'flower of the youth'.

the cavalry – fought in the *velites* also as an expression of Roman ideals; and the highborn cavalry might dismount to fight on foot amongside the *velites* (Livy 31.35.5). The articulation of the rest of the manipular array into lines according to the age of the warriors (Polyb. 6.21.7) so that the younger fought in front, also reflected the need for young Roman men to display their *virtus*, to compete with their elders who had proved theirs in campaigns long ago.[71] The manipular legion was a way of fighting embedded in the martial culture of the Romans. Traces can be seen of intense resistance to another aspect of the Roman way of war that seemed contrary to *virtus*: the use of strategy and trickery in warfare,[72] which manifested itself most clearly in the opposition to Fabius Maximus' strategy of delay against Hannibal, denounced as cowardly and cast jeeringly aside by the Romans who rushed to slaughter at Cannae.[73] Nor did the Romans all learn their lesson there: eight years after Cannae the Senate still puzzled as to where it could find cautious generals (Livy 27.33.9–11). No surprise, then, that the manipular array lasted so long: it could hardly be changed until the cultural need it met weakened, when the ambitions of young Romans shifted in the late Republic.

If the Hellenistic conception of military excellence as craft had the potential to be socially disruptive, the Roman reverence for *virtus* might contribute to social cohesion. *Virtus* was an ideal shared between high and low and played a part, as a common core value, in the remarkable consensus of the Romans of the mid-Republic. All praised *virtus*, all agreed that it should be rewarded.[74] *Virtus* was expected to be hereditary, and the young men of the ruling families vindicated that claim with their blood on a hundred stricken fields.[75] So the nobles excelled in a quality that the commons admired, and as a result the nobles were not merely richer, but seemed better – like Greek aristocrats they called themselves 'the good' – and the commons regarded them with deference. At the same time the contest of *virtus* was open to all Romans who served in the army: not just to the richest, but to all but the poorest, who were not allowed to serve. The swarms of the *velites*, again, their fighting the particular arena of *virtus*, were constituted of the young and the least well-off.

On a practical level the societal urge to demonstrate *virtus* produced brave armies (Polyb. 1.64.6), large armies, and armies that could be reconstituted year after year even in the wake of bloody defeats, as during the Second

[71] In the same confused passage (8.8.8) Livy describes the *triarii*, the furthest back and oldest line, as 'veterans of tried valour' (*spectatae virtutis*), and the *rorarii*, an older name for the *velites*, as *minus roboris aetate factisque*, 'weaker in age and deeds', i.e. young and yet to prove themselves.

[72] Polyb. 13.3.7, 36.9.9; which is not to say that there were not Romans who advocated trickery: Wheeler (1988c); Lendon (2005) 193–211; the Romans were conflicted.

[73] Polyb. 3.89.3, 90.6, 94.8, 103.3–4; cf. 3.80.4. [74] Cf. Diod. Sic. 31.6.

[75] Hereditary: e.g. *ILLRP* 316; Plaut. *Pseud.* 581; and implied by the provision in the Twelve Tables that the military decorations of a son may be worn by his father: Cic. *Leg.* 2.60 = Crawford 1996: 708–10.

Punic War. Roman manpower poured forth like a fountain (a Greek might observe); fighting the Romans was like fighting the hydra, cut one head off, and others sprung forth in its place.[76] Roman opinion demanded that wars that were going badly should not be settled, but fought more fiercely.[77] The consequence was eventual victory over all the foes the Romans faced during the middle Republic. And in the short term victory reduced the tension between rich and poor – a salient characteristic of Rome in the fifth century – as the confiscation of Italian land made it possible to settle poor Romans confortably on conquered farms.[78] Eventually the unequal distribution of the treasure of conquest was to have terrible consequences – the rich, who got more of it, were moved to push the poor from their land – and the resulting agrarian crisis is often thought to be a central cause of the fall of the Republic. But before the Romans choked on the surfeit, the bounty of conquest bought their nation centuries of social tranquillity.

Finally, as well as contributing to social stability, the Roman cult of *virtus* was a structural cause of war in the middle Republic.[79] A nation in which the most admired human quality could best be displayed in war naturally made war frequently. All wanted to compete in *virtus*: the rich also needed war for political advancement, while the poor yearned for loot. There is therefore a certain unreality to the scholarly industry of investigating the 'origins' of individual Republican wars, if to look for origins is to seek grave causes adequate to get a modern, and peaceable, democratic state to go to war. The Romans (at least judging by their reports of themselves) did not cheerfully attack their neighbours crying that they were doing it to display their courage. Like us, they liked to think (and to convince others – for they cared what others thought of them) that their wars were justified, and to Romans justified wars were those fought to defend the state or its allies or to avenge an insult. But the Roman cult of *virtus* manifested itself instead in extreme tenderness about their and their allies' security and national honour. Nearly any act that could be construed as unfriendly or inadequately deferential, however weak and distant its practitioner, was a potential justification for war.[80] Given the rough-and-tumble of international politics, the Romans always had an enticing collection of potential opponents at their disposal (Polyb. 32.3.12). The trick was to choose which wars to fight in a given year (so as not to over-tax Roman resources) (Polyb. 32.13.4), to select which wars could not be fought, and to decide which wars (like the Second Macedonian War against Philip of Macedon) would have be postponed with quiet regret until a greater war (that against Hannibal's Carthage) had been brought to a victorious end.[81]

[76] Plut. *Pyrrh.* 21.10, 19.5. [77] Polyb. 3.118.7–9, 6.52.7. [78] Rosenstein (1999) 197–8.
[79] Harris (1979) 9–53. [80] Polyb. 1.6.5, 35.2–3; Mattern (1999) 213–22; see Vol. II ch. 1.
[81] Livy 31.1.8–10; cf. Polyb. 1.7.9, 36.2.1; Diod. Sic. 30.8. Although the Romans fought somewhere nearly every year, the size of their wars and the number fought simultaneously did vary: Rich (1993) 53–65.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the old days, the belief that the Romans were like us, and that we were good, blinded us to the Roman taste for blood. But eventually we came to suspect that we were not so very good, and so the Romans were not constrained to be good either. And now we suspect that the Romans were not much like us, anyway: so for twenty years a picture of the Romans has been wrought by many hands, a picture nearly of a river of driver ants, pure appetite, careless of their own single lives, irresistible as a body and destructive of everything in their path. This conception by the very force of contrast encourages a vision of the Romans' Hellenistic Greek contemporaries as peace-loving and flower-sniffing. Not so: the Greek cities of the Hellenistic world fought petty wars among themselves just as the cities of the classical world had done.[82] They fought for territory and they fought for revenge; they fought for freedom and they fought for loot. Leagues of cities fought to defend themselves and to bring other cities under their domination just as the Athenian empire had done in the fifth century. And just as in classical times, wars were also fought against invading barbarians: the Gauls, who crashed down into the Greek world in the third century, and the Romans. But added to these conflicts were wars on a whole new plane: the wars of the kings. The Hellenistic world was a world where war was pervasive.[83] It was only pacific in contrast to Rome, where war was continuous.[84]

For war held a different place in Roman than in Hellenistic culture. If the Romans were like the shark, the Greeks were like the dolphin: both ravening predators, but the one morose and single-minded, the other playful and inquisitive. In the Greek world war had become a craft and therefore a choice: other choices might be made, other arts exercised. In Rome war was the ground of masculine self-respect: a Roman's choice was battle or disgrace. Civilian Greeks might hire journeymen of war – mercenaries – to do their fighting for them. The Romans did not. In Italian wars and foreign, in disaster and in triumph, *virtus* manned the legions.

[82] Ma (2000). [83] Lévêque (1968); Eckstein (2006) 79–117.
[84] For what it is worth, Polybius hints (31.29.1) that Rome was especially warlike, 'a reputation for courage being important in any state, but especially at Rome'; cf. 1.37.7.