From Village to Empire: an Introduction to the History of Rome

Lecture 11: Marius and Sulla

119	C. Marius tribune
115	C. Marius praetor
110	Mamilian enquiry; C. Mamilius
109	Q. Caecilius Metellus; M. Iunius Silanus
107	Marius consul for the first time (I)
104	Marius consul II
103	Marius consul III
102	Marius consul IV; battle of Aquae Sextiae
101	Marius consul V; Q. Lutatius Catulus; battle of Vercellae
100	Marius consul VI
91	M. Livius Drusus
90	L. Julius Caesar and P. Rutilius Lupus
89	Cn. Pompeius Strabo; L. Cornelius Sulla
88	P. Sulpicius Rufus; Mithridates VI, king of Pontus
87	L. Cornelius Cinna
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83	Sulla lands in Italy

Caecilii Metelli

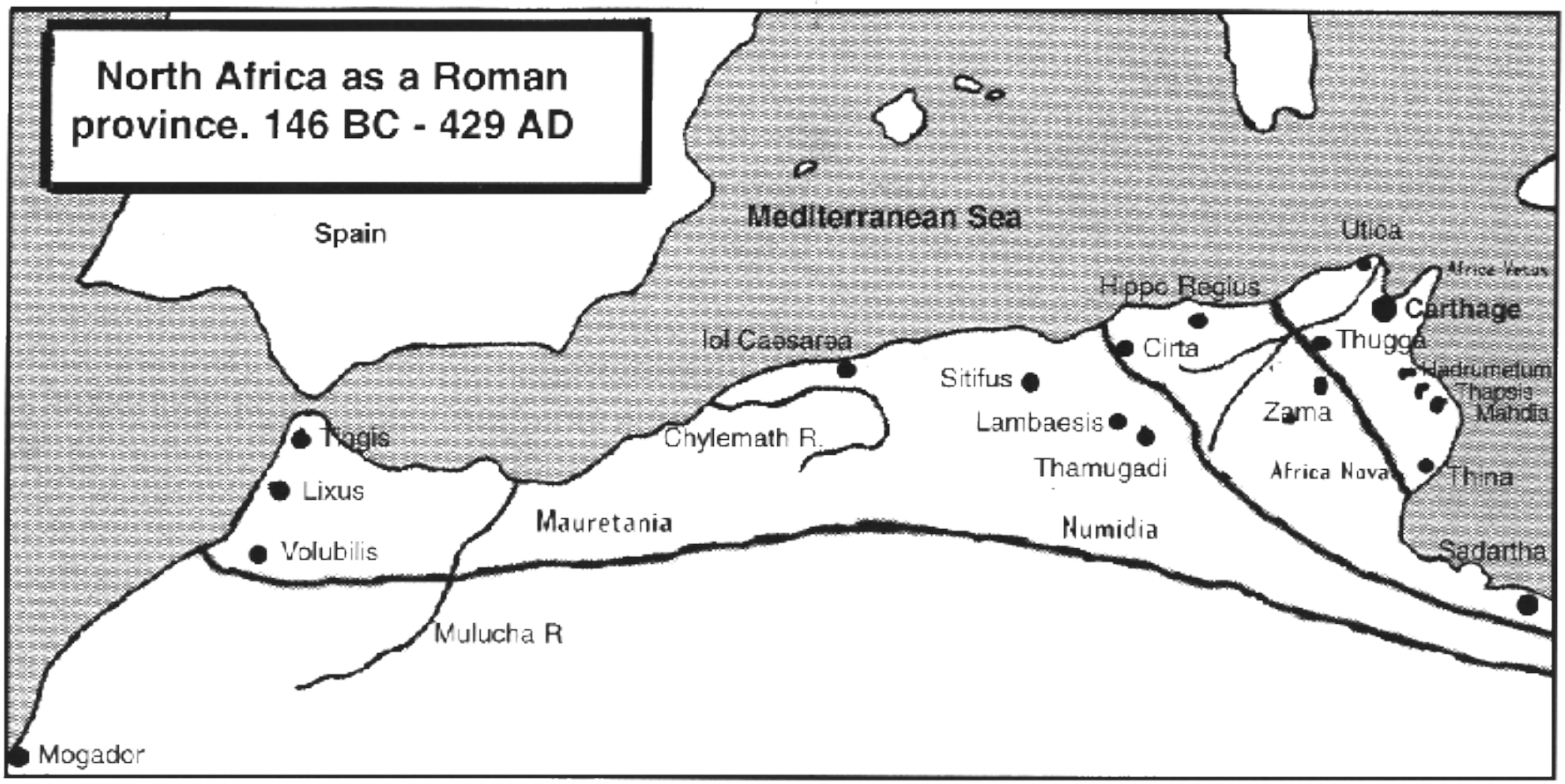
119 C. Marius tribune

115 C. Marius praetor

Julia

New man/ *homo novus*

Jugurtha
110 Mamilian enquiry; C. Mamilius
109 Q. Caecilius Metellus
107 Marius consul for the first time



Sulla arranges for the betrayal of Jugurtha

Plutarch, *Sulla* 3: Having been appointed quaestor to Marius in his first consulship [107 BC], he sailed with him to Libya, to make war upon Jugurtha. He was put in charge of the camp, and won great credit for himself, especially by improving a favourable opportunity and making a friend of Bocchus, the king of Numidia. For he hospitably entertained ambassadors of the king, who had escaped from Numidian robbers, and sent them on their way with gifts and a safe escort. Now Bocchus had for a long time hated and feared his son-in-law, Jugurtha, who had been defeated and had fled to him for safety, and was then plotting against him. He therefore invited [L. Cornelius] Sulla to come to him, wishing to have the seizure and surrender of Jugurtha effected through Sulla rather than through himself. Sulla imparted the matter to Marius, and taking with him a few soldiers, under-went the greatest peril; he put faith in a barbarian, and one who was faithless towards his own relations, and to secure his surrender of another, placed himself in his hands. However, Bocchus, now that he had both in his power, and had laid himself under the necessity of proving false to one or the other, although he vacillated long, finally decided upon his original betrayal, and handed Jugurtha over to Sulla. It is true that the one who celebrated a triumph for this was Marius, but those who envied him attributed the glory of the success to Sulla, and this secretly annoyed Marius. And indeed Sulla himself was naturally vainglorious, and now that he had for the first time emerged from his lowly and obscure condition and become of some account among his countrymen, and was enjoying a taste of honour, he was arrogant enough to have a representation of his exploit engraved on a seal-ring which he wore, and continued to use it ever after. The device was Bocchus delivering, and Sulla receiving, Jugurtha.

Surrender of Jugurtha (right) by Bocchus (left) to Sulla

Cimbri and Teutones

109 M. Iunius Silanus

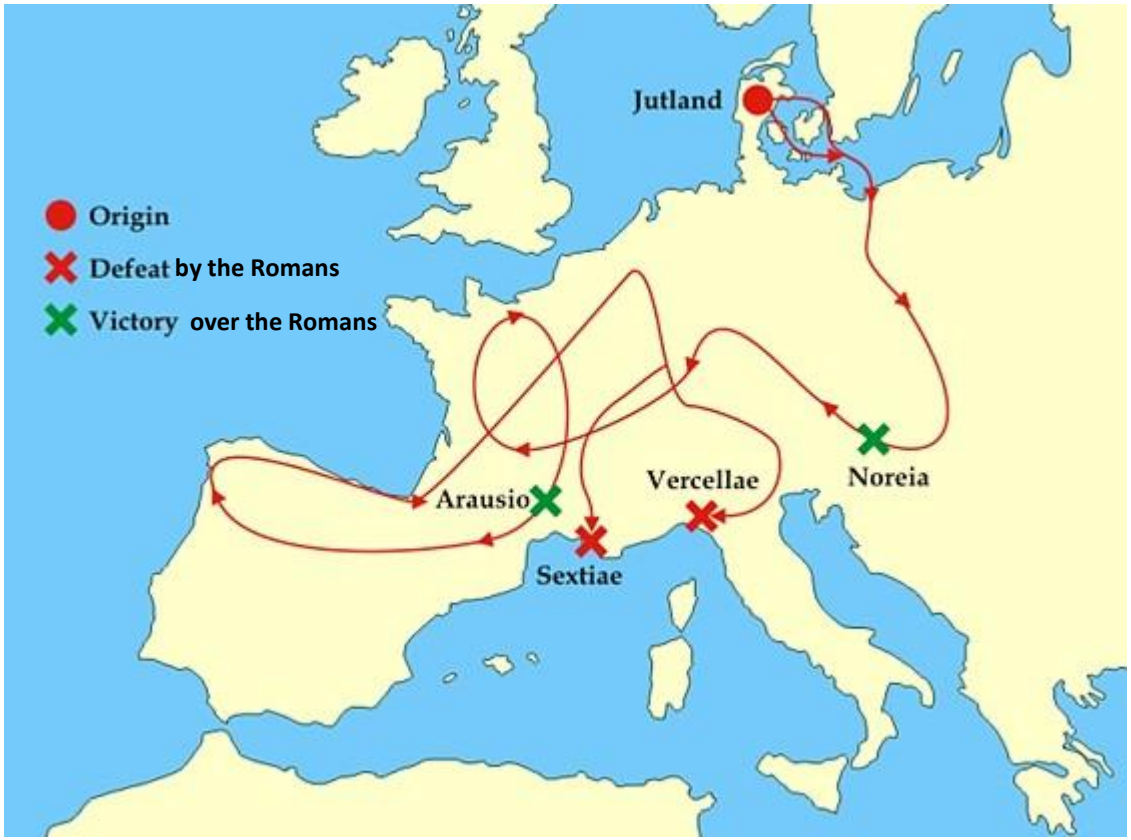
104 Marius consul II

103 Marius consul III

102 Marius consul IV; battle of Aquae Sextiae

101 Marius consul V; Q. Lutatius Catulus; battle of Vercellae

100 Marius consul VI



91 M. Livius Drusus

90 L. Julius Caesar and P. Rutilius Lupus

89 Cn. Pompeius Strabo; L. Cornelius Sulla

88 P. Sulpicius Rufus; Mithridates VI, king of Pontus

Marius and Sulpicius

Plutarch, *Sulla* 8: Marius now made alliance with Sulpicius who was a tribune of the people, a man second to none in prime villainies, so that the question was not whom else he surpassed in wickedness, but in what he surpassed his own wickedness. For the combination of cruelty, effrontery, and rapacity in him was regardless of shame and of all evil, since he sold the Roman citizenship to freedmen and aliens at public sale, and counted out the price on a money-table which stood in the forum. Moreover, he maintained three thousand swordsmen, and had about him a body of young men of the equestrian order who were ready for everything, and whom he called his anti-senate. Further, though he got a law passed that no senator should incur a debt of more than two thousand drachmas, he himself left behind him after death a debt of three millions. This man was now let loose upon the people by Marius, and after confounding all things by force and the sword, he proposed certain vicious laws, and particularly one offering to Marius the command in the Mithridatic war. To prevent voting on these, the consuls decreed suspension of public business, whereupon Sulpicius led a mob against them, as they were holding an assembly near the temple of Castor and Pollux, and, amongst many others, slew also the young son of Pompeius the consul in the forum; but Pompeius himself made his escape unnoticed. Sulla, however, after having been pursued into the house of Marius, was forced to come forth and rescind the decree for suspension of public business; and it was because he did this that Sulpicius, although he deposed Pompeius, did not take the consulship away from Sulla, but merely transferred the expedition against Mithridates to the command of Marius. He also sent military tribunes at once to Nola, who were to take over the army there and conduct it to Marius.

Sulla marches on Rome

Plutarch, *Sulla* 9: But Sulla succeeded in making his escape and reaching the camp first, and his soldiers, when they learned what had happened, stoned the tribunes to death; in return for which, Marius and his partisans in the city went to slaying the friends of Sulla and plundering their property. Then there were removals and flights, some passing continually from camp to city, and others from city to camp. The senate was not its own master, but was governed by the dictates of Marius and Sulpicius, and when it learned that Sulla was marching against the city, it sent two of the praetors, Brutus and Servilius, to forbid his advance. These men addressed Sulla with too much boldness, whereupon his soldiers would have gladly torn them to pieces, but contented themselves with breaking their fasces, stripping them of their senatorial togas, insulting them in many ways, and then sending them back to the city. Here a terrible dejection was produced by the mere sight of them, stripped of their praetorial insignia, and by their announcement that the sedition could no longer be checked, but must run its course.

Sulla marches on Rome

Marius and his partisans, then, busied themselves with preparations; while Sulla, at the head of six full legions, moved with his colleague from Nola, his army, as he saw, being eager to march at once against the city, although he himself wavered in his own mind, and feared the danger. But after he had offered a sacrifice, Postumius the soothsayer learned what the omens were, and stretching out both hands to Sulla, begged that he might be bound and kept a prisoner until the battle, assuring him that he was willing to undergo the most extreme penalty if all things did not speedily come to a good issue for him. It is said, also, that to Sulla himself there appeared in his dreams a goddess whom the Romans learned to worship from the Cappadocians, whether she is Luna, or Minerva, or Bellona. This goddess, as Sulla fancied, stood by his side and put into his band a thunder-bolt, and naming his enemies one by one, bade him smite them with it; and they were all smitten, and fell, and vanished away. Encouraged by the vision, he told it to his colleague, and at break of day led on towards Rome.

Sulla marches on Rome

When he had reached Pictae [a place a few miles to the south of Rome], he was met by a deputation from the city, which begged him not to advance to an immediate attack, since the senate had voted that he should have all his rights; he therefore agreed to encamp there, and ordered his officers to measure out the ground, as was usual, for the camp, so that the deputation returned to the city believing that he would do so. But no sooner were they gone than he sent forward Lucius Basillus and Caius Mummius, who seized for him the city-gate and the walls on the Esquiline hill; then be himself followed hard after them with all speed. Basillus and his men burst into the city and were forcing their way along, when the unarmed multitude pelted them with stones and tiles from the roofs of the houses, stopped their further progress, and crowded them back to the wall. But by this time Sulla was at hand, and seeing what was going on, shouted orders to set fire to the houses, and seizing a blazing torch, led the way himself, and ordered his archers to use their fire-bolts and shoot them up at the roofs. This he did not from any calm calculation, but in a passion, and having surrendered to his anger the command over his actions, since he thought only of his enemies, and without any regard or even pity for friends and kindred and relations, made his entry by the aid of fire, which made no distinction between the guilty and the innocent. Meanwhile Marius, who had been driven back to the temple of Tellus, made a proclamation calling the slaves to his support under promise of freedom; but the enemy coming on, he was overpowered and fled from the city.

87 L. Cornelius Cinna
86 Marius consul VII
85, 84 Cinna consul with Cn. Papirius Carbo
83 Sulla lands in Italy

Sulla's proscriptions

Plutarch, *Sulla* 30: But when the night was now far advanced, messengers came to the camp of Sulla from Crassus, to fetch supper for him and his soldiers; for after conquering the enemy, he had pursued them into Antemnae, and was encamped before that city. When, therefore, Sulla learned this, and also that the greater part of the enemy had been destroyed, he came to Antemnae at break of day. There three thousand of the inhabitants sent a deputation to him to sue for mercy, and he promised them safety if they would do some mischief to the rest of his enemies before coming to him. So they, trusting to his promise, attacked the rest of the people in the city, and many were slain by one another's hands. However, the survivors of both parties alike, to the number of six thousand, were collected by Sulla in the circus at Rome, and then the senate was summoned by him to meet in the temple of Bellona, and at one and the same moment he himself began to speak in the senate, and those assigned to the task began to cut to pieces the six thousand in the circus. The shrieks of such a multitude, who were being massacred in a narrow space, filled the air, of course, and the senators were dumbfounded; but Sulla, with the calm and unmoved countenance with which he had begun to speak, ordered them to listen to his words and not concern themselves with what was going on outside, for it was only that some criminals were being admonished, by his orders.

Sulla’s proscriptions

This gave even the dullest Roman to understand that, in the matter of tyranny, there had been an exchange, but not a deliverance. Marius the elder, at any rate, had been naturally harsh at the outset, and power had intensified, not altered, his disposition; but Sulla had used his good fortune moderately, at first, and like a statesman, and had led men to expect in him a leader who was attached to the aristocracy, and at the same time helpful to the common people. Furthermore, from his youth up he had been of a merry temper, and easily moved to tears of pity. Naturally, therefore, his conduct fixed a stigma upon offices of great power, which were thought to work a change in men's previous characters, and render them capricious, vain, and cruel. However, whether this is a change and reversal of nature, brought about by fortune, or rather a revelation, when a man is in authority, of underlying baseness, were matter for determination in some other treatise.

Sulla's proscriptions

Plutarch, *Sulla* 31: Sulla now busied himself with slaughter, and murders without number or limit filled the city. Many, too, were killed to gratify private hatreds, although they had no relations with Sulla, but he gave his consent in order to gratify his adherents. At last one of the younger men, Caius Metellus, made bold to ask Sulla in the senate what end there was to be of these evils, and how far he would proceed before they might expect such doings to cease. 'We do not ask you,' he said, 'to free from punishment those whom you have determined to slay, but to free from suspense those whom you have determined to save.' And when Sulla answered that he did not yet know whom he would spare, 'Well, then,' said Metellus in reply, 'let us know whom you intend to punish.' This Sulla said he would do. Some, however, say that it was not Metellus, but Fufidius, one of Sulla's fawning creatures, who made this last speech to him. Be that as it may, Sulla at once proscribed eighty persons, without communicating with any magistrate; and in spite of the general indignation, after a single day's interval, he proscribed two hundred and twenty others, and then on the third day, as many more. Referring to these measures in a public harangue, he said that he was proscribing as many as he could remember, and those who now escaped his memory, he would proscribe at a future time. He also proscribed any one who harboured and saved a proscribed person, making death the punishment for such humanity, without exception of brother, son, or parents, but offering any one who slew a proscribed person two talents as a reward for his murderous deed, even though a slave should slay his master, or a son his father.

Sulla's proscriptions

And what seemed the greatest injustice of all, he took away all civil rights from the sons and grandsons of those who had been pro-scribed, and confiscated the property of all. Moreover, proscriptions were made not only in Rome, but also in every city of Italy, and neither temple of god, nor hearth of hospitality, nor paternal home was free from the stain of bloodshed, but husbands were butchered in the embraces of their wedded wives, and sons in the arms of their mothers. Those who fell victims to political resentment and private hatred were as nothing compared with those who were butchered for the sake of their property, nay, even the executioners were prompted to say that his great house killed this man, his garden that man, his warm baths another. Quintus Aurelius, a quiet and inoffensive man, who thought his only share in the general calamity was to condole with others in their misfortunes, came into the forum and read the list of the proscribed, and finding his own name there, said, 'Ah! Woe is me! My Alban estate is prosecuting me.' And he had not gone far before he was dispatched by some one who had hunted him down.

Relevant reading:

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- Lintott, A. (1994), 'The crisis of the republic: sources and source-problems', in J. A. Crook, *et al*., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History,* volume 9: The last age of the Roman republic 146-43 B.C., second edition, 1-15.
- Lintott, A. (1994), 'The Roman empire and its problems in the late second century', in J. A. Crook, *et al*., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History,* volume 9: The last age of the Roman republic 146-43 B.C., second edition, 16-39.
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