

## Marius and Sulla

Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla were two very different men whose paths converged first on the battlefield and then in the political arena. Marius was a *novus homo* from Arpinum whose ancestors were from a moderately distinguished equestrian background. He made a name for himself by not only capturing King Jugurtha of Numidia, but also by doing it his own way. Gaius Marius was responsible for employing the *capite censi* in his army, who until this point was not allowed to serve because of outdated property qualifications. One might even argue (with justification) that this revolution led to the downfall of the Republic. In this Jugurthian War, Marius had a lieutenant named Lucius Cornelius Sulla.

It is commonly believed that Marius' victory was due in large part to this man. Sulla was of the old patrician Cornelian family, but of the lineage that had not established itself in recent Roman politics. Sulla was a harsh and unfeeling man who is said to have made his money by killing both his step-mother and his mistress. He was well known for his blazing red hair and his two canine teeth that he would bare when angry.

At first, the two excellent Roman military geniuses got along well with each other, but when Marius took almost sole credit for the Jugurthian victory and gave almost no attention to Sulla's efforts, the latter became very bitter with his former general. Sulla then went on to distinguish himself in the Social War and was then given the command in the war against Mithridates of Pontus in 88. This command was then overturned in the Senate by Marius' ally Publius Sulpicius Rufus, whom had it transferred to Marius. The seeds of conflict were sown.

Sulla immediately rushed back to Rome from Asia and took control of the city by methods that were incredibly harsh by even Roman military standards. Sulla had Sulpicius Rufus murdered along with several other Marian supporters (Marius fled to Africa) and passed several laws *a vi* before leaving for what he hoped would be a lucrative campaign in Greece.

One of the new consuls immediately had Marius recalled to Rome and the two attacked the allies of Sulla and eventually captured the city. What followed was a slaughter like none other seen at that time. Marius and his army (remember the *capite censi*??) terrorized Rome while Sulla conquered much of the Aegean and Asia Minor. Marius was named consul for a seventh time but died soon after.

In 84 BC, Sulla renewed the civil war against the Marians, which he won soundly after his victory at the Colline Gate, and entered Rome as Dictator under the law of *interrex*. He then proceeded to gain immunity for all of his actions past and present and created a new kind of slaughter by posting proscription lists that itemized every Roman citizen Sulla wanted dead because of suspected Marian loyalties. In all, Sulla killed 10,000 people through the civil war and his proscriptions.

Despite this horrible onslaught, over the next three years, Sulla reformed much of the Roman political system to the benefit of the state and was hailed as Rome's savior by most of Rome. When Sulla died in 78 amidst retirement in Campania, after finishing his consulship of 79 and holding elections for the next year, a massive state funeral was given to him and his life was celebrated. It can be correctly argued that the Sullan reforms staved off the end of the Republic for another fifty years.

Possible Discussion Topics:

- Sullan reforms
- *Novus homo*
- *Capite censi*
- Social Wars
- *de vi* (Roman laws)
- life of Sulla (retirement, Metrobius, step-mother, family heritage)

### Scene I: Jugurthian Military Triumph

*Marius and Sulla are center-stage and facing the class receiving their military ovation from the crowd*

Crowd: Yeah!! Yeah!

*Marius steps in front of Sulla.  
Sulla attempts to step up next to him*

Marius: Be patient my dear Sulla, your time will come. This is my time now – I am the general and this is my triumph!!

*Marius waves to the crowd and Sulla steps back and looks very angry.*

Sulla (looks down; speaking to himself): We shall see my friend, we shall see. When you do not have me to win your battles for you, let's see how you handle your army.

*Marius, still waving at the crowd, walks offstage and Sulla follows him*

## **Scene II:** The Curia

*Lucullus and Rufus are facing the class*

Lucius Licinius Lucullus: So, it is settled then, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who has distinguished himself so adequately in the Social Wars as a capable commander, shall take command of the war against Mithridates of Pontus.

Sulpicius Rufus: We shall see about that!! The Senate may be able to elect commanders, but so can the *comitia* if persuaded by their beloved tribune!

*Rufus leaves the classroom, waits a second, and then comes right back in. The senators look confused.*

Lucullus: What is he doing?

*Rufus now back onstage after a few seconds.*

Rufus: I'll tell you what I'm doing! I just had the *comitia* give Marius the command against Mithridates – what are you going to do about that??

Lucullus: Oh no.... This is NOT good...

*All walk off stage*

## **Scene III:** Sulla in his office after marching on Rome

*The board has three marks on it and Sulla is standing by it with a marker in one hand. Lucullus enters.*

Lucullus: Well, Sulla, your march on Rome is basically complete, I have just received word that Sulpicius has been killed.

Sulla: *Optime!! (he says with a large smile)*

*Sulla puts another mark on the board*

Sulla: Okay, now that my position here is done, I think it is time to go on campaign.

*He turns to Lucullus*

Sulla: Lucius, you and our allies are now in charge

Lucullus: Certainly, Sulla.

*Both walk offstage*

**Scene IV:** A street in Rome

*Two citizens are talking to one another (Marius has marched on Rome now that Sulla has left)*

First citizen: *Me Hercule!* I can't take much more of this civil war! First Sulla marches on Rome, now Marius. I've heard that he is killing people left and right.

Second: You got that right. Have you heard about Gaius?

First: *Minime.*

Second: Well, let's just say that we won't be seeing him around the baths anymore.

First: What about Flaccus?

Second: Dead

First: Drusus?

Second: *Mortuus*

First: Cornelius?

Second: *etiam*

First: Publius?

Second: *non*

First: This is horrible.

*A messenger rushes onstage from the right side*

Messenger: Have you heard? Sulla just marched on Rome! Marius ran off to Africa and now Sulla's in charge!

First: That's it – I'm outta here!

Second: Me too!!

*All three leave the stage*

**Scene V:** Sulla's office

*Sulla is happily adding check marks on the board (there are so many checks that one cannot count them); his messenger enters*

*Need a chair placed against the front board.*

Messenger: Alright, *Domine*, as *interrex*, you have now proscribed 1500 people, and I have just received word that Marcus Domitius has been spotted, killed, and all of his property has been given over to the state.

Sulla: Outstanding!!

*Sulla adds one more check to board happily*

Sulla: This is too fun! Why didn't I do this the first time!

*Sulla sits down and picks up a piece of paper*

Messenger: *Domine*, do you mind if I ask what you are doing?

Sulla: Not at all. (*He holds up the piece of paper*) This is the future of Rome! Right here are all of the reforms which will cure the Republic of all its ails! I have abolished the courts and created a series of standing courts in which senators will be the jurors. Because of the need for the senators, I have also doubled the size of the Senate and increased the number of praetors from six to eight.

Messenger: That sounds like a great plan, *Domine*!

Sulla: Oh, this is just the tip of the iceberg, there is much more!

Messenger: Well, I certainly hope that you can save the Republic, what will we do without it?

End Play