THE NOBILITY IN THE FIRST PUNIC WAR

B. BLECKMANN: *Die römische Nobilität im Ersten Punischen Krieg. Untersuchungen zur aristokratischen Konkurrenz in der Republik*. (KLIO Beihefte, Neue Folge 5.) Pp. 271. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002. Cased, €64.80. ISBN: 3-05-003738-5.

This densely written study aims to show that *nobilis* competition—defined as between aristocrats of consular rank (pp. 11–12)—was strenuous during the First Punic War, and the third century B.C.as a whole, even to the point of chicanery.

Thus Ap. Claudius Caudex, keen on booty and personal glory to match his colleague's, defied the Senate's majority in 264 to launch the war, and eagerness for booty and glory impelled the consuls of 261 to seek to expel the enemy from Sicily (pp. 63–4, 85–94, 100–7). Regulus in Africa in 256–255 manoeuvred, entirely out of *Ehrgeiz*, to get his colleague Manlius recalled and to impose peace on Carthage, ironically to his own ruin (pp. 159–68); while the many, and sometimes disastrous, naval expeditions of the 250s were due to consular eagerness for *Beute* and *Ruhm* (pp. 145–58, 168–85). So the arrogant incompetence of P. Claudius Pulcher, responsible for the 'sacred chickens' disaster at Drepana in 249, was merely the most egregious example of a universal *nobilis* ethos (pp. 186–91). Even Lutatius' victory in 241 and the peace he then made with Carthage were further cases of self-centred ambition—and the peace almost came unstuck thanks to opposition from oligarchic rivals equally *Ehrgeiz*-driven (pp. 205–24).

This vigorous thesis is well worth considering, even if sometimes over-argued. There is certainly much evidence of independent-minded behaviour by third-century magistrates and citizen assemblies. B. gives us not the 'received picture' of a piously cooperative aristocratic *Kollektiv*, with only an occasional Claudius, or later Flaminius, injecting wilfulness and impiety, but a *Nobilität* still nourishing traditions of past grandees operating with their *sodales* independently of, or only lightly controlled by, the young Republic (though he does not mention Satricum's Poplios Valesios or the Fabii at the Cremera). It would take the national crisis of Hannibal's invasion to make the Senate dominant over a reluctantly tamed aristocracy, and even then only partially and briefly (pp. 225–42).

Such a picture is not in our main source for the war, Polybius. B. views him with asperity. Scipio-influenced and a Hellenistically rationalizing idealist (pp. 131–9, 19–33), his portrayal of third-century Rome as a high-minded unified polity has mistakenly—B. holds—coloured all ensuing assessments. To correct him, B. makes heavy demands on the exiguous contemporary, or plausibly contemporary, evidence of *tituli* (Duilius' and the early Scipios') and Naevius, and, still more controversially, on Roman annalistic tradition as revealed by Livy's epitome, late writers like Orosius, and above all Dio, largely transmitted in Zonaras' epitome (pp. 34–56).

Ap. Caudex's campaign in 264, for instance, he judges more reliably reported by Zonaras (pp. 79–82). If so, Appius waged a difficult war against Syracuse while leaving a strong Punic army in his rear outside his base, Messana—hardly a safe or sensible act, nor a scenario in either Fabius Pictor or Philinus, the earliest authorities (Pol. 1.12.3, 15.3–4, *FGrH* no. 174; cf. Diodorus 23.3); and B. himself (p. 83) then discards Zonaras' picture of overall failure by Appius to accept a Polybian reference (1.16.1) to 'successes'. Polybius has the Romans in 242, despite exhaustion, create a new fleet because the land war was stalemated; B. instead uses Dio's mention of Roman privateering after 249 to argue that privateering proceeds had restored financial

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.487 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prosperity, the new fleet was simply the existing navy which had been loaned to privateers, and Lutatius' offensive was due to hopes of booty more than to patriotism (pp. 205–14).

Other scepticisms are equally risky. B. rejects that Roman forces in Sicily were halved following peace with Hiero in 263 (Pol. 1.17.1), because both consuls of 262 went there—and because Dio-Zonaras has no reduction (pp. 96–7). That Duilius in 260 had the land forces and his colleague Scipio the fleet is denied in favour of Dio's opposite report (pp. 113–17), even though it was Scipio who was then captured at sea. Nor does B. like Regulus and Manlius sending to Rome for further orders from the Senate after reaching Africa. Consuls, he holds, did not seek such orders (pp. 163–4).

B. does have grounds for accepting Roman annalistic evidence in places, for Polybius tends to focus on certain major campaigns and pass lightly over others. Annalistic evidence, if just as selective, at times gives extra details, as for various events in 248–243. Polybius can make mistakes, too: most egregiously, perhaps, in claiming that Iunius Pullus, Pulcher's equally disastrous colleague in 249, was consul in 248 (1.52.5). Overall, B.'s emphasis on the potential value of Roman tradition, even in comparison with the sober Polybius, is important. Re-evaluation, however, needs to be pursued cautiously. Simply as a question of method, it is controversial how much preference should be accorded to late sources over one who wrote a century after the events using contemporary or near-contemporary accounts. That Dio managed to reflect mostly the early, 'good' annalists while Orosius and others fell, too often, for the later, Antias-type ones is more a wishful assumption than a probability, despite B.'s lengthy arguments (pp. 36–50).

There are some surprising omissions. The Fabii, with consuls in 265 and 247–245, earn little notice. There are no broad assessments of groups, interests, and families, for instance in 264 and around 242—patricians and plebeians, the place of *novi homines*, balances and tensions between different sectional interests—which would have been valuable. Again, B.'s forte is German-language scholarship, with less use made of recent non-German scholarship than could be expected.

B.'s essential thesis would still be defensible with less *Korrektur* from late authors. It would also be easier to follow in a less dense writing style; sixty- and seventy-word sentences, and a full panoply of portmanteau phrases, make for slow comprehension. The interest of his theme, all the same, more than makes up for these difficulties.

University of Sydney DEXTER HOYOS

REPUBLICAN CAVALRY

J. B. McCall: *The Cavalry of the Roman Republic. Cavalry Combat and Elite Reputations in the Middle and Late Republic*. Pp. viii + 200. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Cased. ISBN: 0-415-25713-1.

Since 1990 there have been several book length studies of Roman cavalry. K. R. Dixon and P. Southern, *The Roman Cavalry* (London, 1992), provided an overview of the mounted troops of the principate, S. MacDowall, *Late Roman Cavalryman* (Oxford, 1995), a well-illustrated, popular introduction to its subject, and A. Hyland, *Equus* (London, 1990), an eccentric and often inaccurate general survey. Yet M. is the first serious treatment of Republican cavalry since

The Classical Review vol. 54 no. 2 © The Classical Association 2004; all rights reserved

https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.487 Published online by Cambridge University Press