

REPUBLIC IN DISCORD

BOOK 3

LOU SHOOK

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR SULLA SETS BLOODY PRECEDENT AS DICTATOR (81-78 BC)

As the year 81 BC began, Lucius Cornelius Sulla had been appointed *dictator legibus faciendis et reipublicae constituendae causa* ("dictator for the making of laws and for the settling of the constitution"). The Assembly of the People subsequently ratified the decision, with no limit set on his time in office. Sulla had total control of the city and republic of Rome, except for Hispania (which Marius's general Quintus Sertorius had established as an independent state). This unusual appointment (used hitherto only in times of extreme danger to the city, such as during the Second Punic War, and then only for 6-month periods) represented an exception to Rome's policy of not giving total power to a single individual.

Sulla can be seen as setting the precedent for Julius Caesar's dictatorship, and for the eventual end of the Republic under Augustus. In total control of the city and its affairs, Sulla instituted a series of proscriptions (a program of executing those whom he perceived as enemies of the state). Sulla now began to make blood flow, and he filled the city with deaths without number or limit. Many of the murdered victims had nothing to do with Sulla, though Sulla killed them to please his adherents. Sulla immediately proscribed eighty persons without communicating with any magistrate. As this caused a general murmur, he let one day pass, and then proscribed two hundred and twenty more, and again on the third day as many. In an harangue to the people, he said, with reference to these measures, that he had proscribed all he could think of, and as to those who now escaped his memory, he would proscribe them at some future time.

The proscriptions were a response to similar killings which Marius and Cinna had implemented while they controlled the Republic during Sulla's absence. Proscribing or outlawing every one of those whom he perceived to have acted against the best interests of the Republic while he was in the East, Sulla ordered some 1,500 nobles (*i.e.*, senators and equites) executed, although it is estimated that as many as 9,000 people were killed. The purge went on for several months. Helping or sheltering a proscribed person was punishable by death, while killing a proscribed person was rewarded with two talents. Family members of the proscribed were not excluded from punishment, and slaves were not excluded from rewards. As a result, husbands were butchered in the arms of their wives, sons in the arms of their mothers.

The majority of the proscribed had not been enemies of Sulla, but instead were killed for their property, which was confiscated and auctioned off. The proceeds from auctioned property more than made up for the cost of rewarding those who killed the proscribed, making Sulla even wealthier. Possibly to protect himself from future political retribution, Sulla had the sons and grandsons of the proscribed banned from running for political office, a restriction not removed for over 30 years.

The young Caesar, as Cinna's son-in-law, had become one of Sulla's targets and fled the city - being saved through the efforts of his relatives, many of whom were Sulla's supporters. Sulla noted in his memoirs that he initially regretted sparing Caesar's life, because of the young man's notorious ambition. When agreeing to spare Caesar, Sulla had warned those who were pleading his case, that he would become a danger to them in the future, saying: "In this Caesar there are many Mariuses."

Sulla, who opposed the Gracchian *popularis* reforms, was an optimate; though his coming to the side of the traditional Senate originally could be described as more reactionary when

dealing with the Tribune and legislative bodies; while more visionary when reforming the court system, governorships and membership of the Senate. As such, he sought to strengthen the aristocracy, and thus the Senate. Sulla retained his earlier reforms, which required senatorial approval before any bill could be submitted to the Plebeian Council (the principal popular assembly); and which had also restored the older, more aristocratic "Servian" organization to the Centuriate Assembly (assembly of soldiers).

Sulla, himself a patrician and thus ineligible for election to the office of Plebeian Tribune, thoroughly disliked the office. As Sulla viewed the office, the Tribune was especially dangerous and his intention was to not only deprive the Tribune of power, but also of prestige. (Sulla himself had been officially deprived of his eastern command through the underhand activities of a tribune.) Over the previous three hundred years, the tribunes had directly challenged the patrician class and attempted to deprive it of power in favor of the plebeian class. Through Sulla's reforms to the Plebeian Council, tribunes lost the power to initiate legislation. Sulla then prohibited ex-tribunes from ever holding any other office, so ambitious individuals would no longer seek election to the Tribune, since such an election would end their political career. Finally, Sulla revoked the power of the tribunes to veto acts of the Senate, although he left intact the tribunes' power to protect individual Roman citizens.

Sulla then increased the number of magistrates elected in any given year, and required that all newly elected quaestors gain automatic membership in the Senate. These two reforms were enacted primarily to allow Sulla to increase the size of the Senate from 300 to 600 senators. This also removed the need for the censor to draw up a list of senators, since there were always more than enough former magistrates to fill the senate. To further solidify the prestige and authority of the Senate, Sulla transferred the control of the courts from the

equites, who had held control since the Gracchi reforms, to the senators. This, along with the increase in the number of courts, further added to the power that was already held by the senators.

Sulla also established definitively, the *cursus honorum*, which required an individual to reach a certain age and level of experience before running for any particular office. Sulla also wanted to reduce the risk that a future general might attempt to seize power, as he himself had done. To this end, he reaffirmed the requirement that any individual wait for ten years before being reelected to any office. Sulla then established a system where all consuls and praetors served in Rome during their year in office, and then commanded a provincial army as a governor for the year after they left office.

Finally, in a demonstration of his absolute power, Sulla expanded the "Pomerium", the sacred boundary of Rome, untouched since the time of the kings. Sulla's reforms both looked to the past (often re-passing former laws) and regulated for the future, particularly in his redefinition of *maiestas* (treason) laws and in his reform of the Senate. Near the end of 81 BC, Sulla, true to his traditionalist sentiments, stunned the Roman World (and posterity) by resigning the dictatorship, disbanded his legions and re-established normal consular government. He stood for office (with Metellus Pius) and won election as consul for the following year, 80 BC. He dismissed his lictors and walked unguarded in the Forum, offering to give account of his actions to any citizen.

Second Mithridatic War (83-81 BC) ends with the status quo.

#

Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius. Sulla's closest ally (ca 130 BC or 127 BC – 63 BC) was a pro-Sullan politician and general, Consul in 80 BC. During this entire period, he was shown to be one of Sulla's best subordinates. A traditionalist

supporter of the Senate's prerogatives, he had no other objective apart from fighting the populism of Marius and Cinna, and did not participate in the atrocious violence that marked the arrival of the dictatorship of Sulla. Finally, in 80 BC, he was appointed consul alongside Sulla. Metellus Pius used his position to reward Quintus Calidius (who had helped bring his father, Quintus Caecilius Metellus Numidicus, back from exile), by supporting Calidius' bid for the praetorship.

#

Sertorian War (80-72 BC). Following Sulla's return from the East in 83 BC, and the subsequent collapse of the Populares power, Quintus Sertorius had retreated to Hispania as proconsul, representing the Populares – and established Hispania as an independent state. Later, having been obliged to withdraw to North Africa, Sertorius carried on a campaign in Mauretania, in which he defeated one of Sulla's generals and captured Tingis (Tangier).

The North Africa success won Sertorius the fame and admiration of the people of Hispania, particularly that of the Lusitanians in the west (in modern Portugal and western Spain), whom Roman generals and proconsuls of Sulla's party had plundered and oppressed. These discontented Lusitanians decided to send envoys to Sertorius in North Africa. The Lusitanians chose Sertorius because of the mild policy he had pursued while governor in Iberia during 82 BC. The Lusitani offer grew out of an acceptance by the Lusitani that they would not be able to defeat Rome, and that their best hope was to assist the establishment in Rome of a regime sympathetic to them. A major reason for Sertorius' acceptance was that it was becoming clearer that there would be no amnesty for him and his followers, nor reconciliation with the regime set up by Sulla. In 80 BC, Sertorius, after defeating a naval force under Aurelius Cotta, landed in the Iberian Peninsula - arriving on their lands with additional forces from

Africa, assumed supreme authority and began to conquer the neighboring territories of Hispania (modern Spain). The Battle of the Baetis River (80 BC) was fought by a force of Democratic exiles under Sertorius, defeating the legal Roman army of Lucius Fulfidias in Hispania, starting the Sertorian War.

Brave, noble, and gifted with eloquence, Sertorius was just the man to impress them favorably, and the native warriors, whom he organized, spoke of him as the "new Hannibal". His skill as a general was extraordinary, as he repeatedly defeated forces many times his own size. Many Roman refugees and deserters joined him, and with these and his Hispanian volunteers he completely defeated several of Sulla's generals (Fufidius, Domitius Calvinus - and to some less-direct extent, Thoranius) and drove Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius, who had been specifically sent against him from Rome, out of Lusitania (Hispania Ulterior).

Sertorius owed some of his success to his prodigious ability as a statesman. His goal was to build a stable government in Hispania with the consent and co-operation of the people, whom he wished to civilize along the lines of the Roman model. He established a senate of 300 members, drawn from Roman emigrants (probably including some from the highest nobles of Hispania) and kept an Hispanian bodyguard. For the children of the chief native families, he provided a school at Osca (Huesca), where they received a Roman education and even adopted the dress and education of Roman youths. This followed the Roman practice of taking hostages and, late in his campaigns, a revolt of the native people arose and Sertorius killed several of the children that he had sent to school at Osca, selling many others into slavery.

Sertorius gave an example to his followers, "that in the same way a horse's tail can be picked out hair by hair but not pulled out all at once, so smaller forces could defeat the Roman armies".

Although he was strict and severe with his soldiers, he was particularly considerate to the people in general, and made their burdens as light as possible. It seems clear that he had a peculiar gift for evoking the enthusiasm of the native tribes, and we can understand well how he was able to use the famous white fawn, a present from one of the natives that was supposed to communicate to him the advice of the goddess Diana, to his advantage. Sertorius claimed to receive messages from Diana via the white fawn.

For six years, he held sway over Hispania. In 77 BC, he was joined — at the insistence of the forces he brought with him — by Marcus Perperna Vento from Rome, with a following of Roman nobles and a sizeable Roman army (fifty-three cohorts). Also, that year, Pompey was sent to help Metellus conquer Hispania and finish Sertorius off. Contemptuously calling Pompey, Sulla's pupil, Sertorius proved himself more than a match for his adversaries: he razed Lauron, a city allied to Rome, after a battle in which Pompey's forces were ambushed and defeated. He nearly captured Pompey at the battle of Sucro, when Pompey decided to fight him without waiting for Metellus Pius, but was indecisively beaten at Saguntum. However, Pompey wrote to Rome for reinforcements, without which, he said, he and Metellus Pius would be driven out of Hispania. But from 74 BC on, Pompey was gaining the upper hand, and he and Metellus began to capture city after city. Though he was still able to win some victories, Sertorius was losing the war, and his authority over his men had declined. He himself lost much of his acumen and authority, descending into alcoholism and debauchery.

Sertorius, in league with the Cilician pirates (who had bases all across the Mediterranean), was negotiating with the formidable Mithridates VI of Pontus, and was in communication with the insurgent slaves in Italy. But due to jealousies among the Roman officers who served under him, and the Hispanians (of higher rank) who began to weaken his

influence with the Lusitanian tribes - these people grew jealous of Sertorius' power. Marcus Perperna Vento, aspiring to take Sertorius' place, encouraged that jealousy for his own ends. These jealous people took to damaging Sertorius' measures for victory, or oppressing the local Iberian tribes in his name. This stirred discontent and revolt in the tribes, which resulted in a cycle of oppression and revolt - with Sertorius none the wiser as to who was creating such mischief. Perperna then proceeded to invite Sertorius to a feast to celebrate a supposed victory. While under most circumstances, any festivities to which Sertorius was invited were conducted with great propriety, this particular feast was vulgar, designed to offend the skillful general. Disgusted, Sertorius changed his posture on the couch, intent on ignoring them all. At this, Perperna gave the signal to his minions, and they murdered the unsuspecting Sertorius on the spot. At the time of his death, he was on the verge of successfully establishing an independent Roman republic in Hispania, which crumbled with the renewed onslaught of Pompey and Metellus, who crushed Perperna's army and eliminated the remaining opposition.

#

After Lucius Cornelius Sulla's second consulship, he withdrew to his country villa near Puteoli to be with family. From this distance, Sulla remained out of the day-to-day political activities in Rome, intervening only a few times when his policies were involved (e.g., the execution of Granius shortly before his own death).

Granius, a decurion at Puteoli in 78 BC, who resisted imposing Sulla's levy on the municipia, intended to restore the Capitol at Rome, which had been burnt five years earlier during the civil war between Sulla and the supporters of Marius. News of Sulla's death was expected at any time, but instead, Sulla summoned Granius to his house at Cumae, where he ordered the decurion to be strangled in his presence.

Sulla's goal had been to write his memoirs, which he finished in 78 BC, just before his death. They are now largely lost, although fragments from them exist as quotations in later writers. Ancient accounts of Sulla's death indicate that he died from liver failure or a ruptured gastric ulcer (symptomized by a sudden hemorrhage from his mouth, followed by a fever from which he never recovered), possibly caused by chronic alcohol abuse. Accounts were also written that he had an infestation of worms, caused by the ulcers, which led to his death. His funeral in Rome (at Roman Forum, in the presence of the whole city) was on a scale unmatched until that of Augustus in AD 14. His epitaph reads "No friend ever served me, and no enemy ever wronged me, whom I have not repaid in full".

Sulla is generally seen as having set the precedent for Caesar's march on Rome and dictatorship. Cicero comments that Pompey once said, "If Sulla could, why can't I?". Sulla's example proved that it could be done, and therefore inspired others to attempt it; and in this respect, he is seen as another step in the Republic's fall. Further, Sulla failed to frame a settlement whereby the army (following the Marian reforms allowing non-landowning soldiery) remained loyal to the Senate rather than to generals such as himself. He attempted to mitigate this by passing new laws to limit the actions of generals in their provinces. Although these laws remained in effect well into the imperial period, they did not prevent determined generals such as Pompey and Julius Caesar from using their armies for personal ambition against the Senate, a danger of which Sulla was intimately aware.

While Sulla's laws such as those concerning qualification for admittance to the Senate and reform of the legal system and regulations of governorships remained on Rome's statutes long into the Principate, much of his legislation was repealed less than a decade after his death. The veto power of the tribunes and their legislating authority were soon reinstated, ironically during the consulships of Pompey and Crassus.

#

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (120 BC – 77 BC) was a Roman statesman. After the death of Sulla, he attempted to undermine the Sullan constitution and revive the *populares* faction. His forces were defeated in a battle on the Campus Martius.

Lepidus gained wealth and power by politically allying himself with Lucius Cornelius Sulla, but once the dictator had resigned in 79 BC, Lepidus attempted to undermine the Sullan constitution. He was elected consul for the year 78 BC with the support of Pompey, and tried to stop Sulla from being buried in the Campus Martius. However, Pompey turned against his candidate and used his influence to ensure that the full funeral and burial went ahead. Lepidus passed several resolutions during his term that firmly placed him in the camp of the populares – which put him at odds with his fellow consul, Quintus Lutatius Catulus (120-61 BC). Lepidus offered to restore land to the Italians, that had been taken by Sulla. He proposed the overthrow of Sulla's constitution, the re-establishment of the distribution of grain, the recall of the banished, and other democratic measures - attempting to reinstall democratic rule.

Catulus had inherited his father's hatred of the leading statesman, Gaius Marius, and was a consistent though moderate supporter of the aristocracy. He was one of the very few consules who survived the civil wars and the purges of Sulla. Therefore, he became a very influential person in the Senate. Catulus vigorously opposed Lepidus, and a temporary compromise was effected.

The two factions came so close to war that the senate made them swear not to fight, and sent Lepidus to administer the province of Transalpine Gaul. The terms of their oath would not prevent Lepidus from returning the next year with an army, so he agreed to leave. Before he left, he offered a chance to return for those Sulla had sent into exile, a move

which alarmed the Senate. They correctly judged that he was attempting to gather his allies around him to start a civil war.

But Lepidus, having levied troops in his province of Transalpine Gaul, returned to Rome at the head of an army. Catulus defeated him at the Milvian bridge and near Cosa in Etruria, and Lepidus made his escape to Sardinia, where he died soon afterwards.

His fellow rebel, Marcus Junius Brutus the Elder, the father of Caesar's famous murderer of the same name, remained at Mutina, in Gaul. Pompey marched to destroy him, but Brutus surrendered before a battle had to be fought. Brutus was soon killed by one of Pompey's men, named Geminius.

#

Towards the end of the year, the Consuls elected for next year, MamerCUS Aemilius Lepidus Livianus and Decimus Junius Brutus, met with this year's surviving Consul, Quintus Lutatius Catulus, to review progress made this year, and to plan ahead for the next year. After much bantering, back and forth concerning Rome's progress, Catulus assumed the lead. "This past year has continued to illustrate the divide between the Optimate supporters of Sulla, and the Populare supporters of Gaius Marius. In my case, I inherited my father's hatred of Gaius Marius, and have been a consistent though moderate supporter of the Optimate aristocracy.

"On the other hand, my fellow Consul, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, was adamant in pursuing the Populare ideals promoted by Gaius Marius. This difference between us culminated in battle, which was lost by Lepidus, and he died soon afterwards.

"The tenor of this conflict between Optimates and Populares does not bode well for Rome. Instead of we two Consuls working together for the betterment of Rome, we basically wasted our year."

Livianus then joined in the discussion. “I certainly agree with the situation you present, Castulus – the inability of our government to work together. In my case, I am even more drawn to the side of the Optimates, being married to Sulla’s daughter, Cornelia. Furthermore, as such, I was able to intercede with Sulla on the young Julius Caesar’s behalf, getting Sulla to spare Caesar’s life.

“Looking ahead to this coming year, while I firmly support the Optimates, we need to evolve our relationship such that we Optimates work together with the Populares for the good of Rome.”

Decimus Brutus added his thoughts, “It seems that all three of us are on the side of the Optimates. In my case, twenty three years ago, I fought with others against Lucius Appuleius Saturninus (a political ally of Gaius Marius) - resulting in the death of him and his followers in the Curia Hostilia. I have been a supporter of Sulla, and been criticized for this support of Sulla (after Sulla’s death) by Lepidus.

“I agree with you, Livianus. For the good of Rome, we Optimates need to work together with the Populares. We two need to strive together to achieve this reconciliation.”

This discussion went on at length, with no conclusion. At last, Catulus took time to sum up the situation as best understood. “The problem faced here, is contention between two points of view, which may be impossible to reconcile. On the one hand, we Optimates are in favor of strong government in Rome, and in our provinces. The Populares promote the needs of the people – at the expense of our strong government. We may never be able to bring these two sides together.

“On top of this, we have another example against the Populares. Just recently, Lepidus’ Populare compatriot, Marcus Junius Brutus the Elder, remained at Mutina, in Gaul –

after the defeat of Lepidus. Pompey marched to destroy him, but Brutus surrendered before a battle had to be fought.”

This seemed to conclude the discussion, but Livianus spoke up for one final input. “We all seem to agree concerning Rome’s problems. But we need to remember how we got here - the tremendous hostility between the Optimates and Populares, which climaxed with the seventh consulship of Gaius Marius, nine years ago. Marius’s return to power was a particularly brutal and bloody one, with the consul’s anger increased day by day and thirsting for blood, Marius kept on killing all whom he held in any suspicion whatsoever. He must have been somewhat mentally deranged.

“Then this was followed four years ago, with Sulla’s election as Dictator. Sulla ordered proscriptions, widely perceived as a response to similar killings which Marius had implemented while he controlled the Republic during Sulla’s absence. Proscribing or outlawing every one of those whom he perceived to have acted against the best interests of the Republic while he was in the East, Sulla ordered some 1,500 nobles (senators and equites) executed, although we believe that as many as 9,000 people were killed. (With this large number of our Roman leaders executed, it is amazing that we continue to have competent leadership.) Sulla, true to his traditionalist sentiments, resigned his dictatorship, disbanded his legions and re-established normal consular government. He dismissed his lictors and walked unguarded in the Forum, offering to give account of his actions to any citizen. Difficult for us to understand, is the regard that Marius and Sulla continued to hold for each other, in spite of the hatred held between the Optimates and the Populares.

“Hopefully, we have now reached a period of stability, where we can exert our efforts in bringing our Optimates together with the Populares, for the good of Rome.”