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The exemplary past in Roman historiography and culture

The modern reader of any Roman text that concerns itself with the Roman past—principally, but not only, narrative historiography—is inevitably struck by the prominence accorded “great deeds” and the actors who perform them. It is a familiar feature of Roman historical consciousness that, at any given time, the past could be regarded as a storehouse of practices, orientations, and values—sometimes referred to as the mos maiorum, “the custom of the forebears”—that were embodied in celebrated actors and deeds, and through them were made manifest and accessible to later ages. These acts and deeds could be adduced as cognitive or ethical models to provide guidance and standards to later Romans as they contemplated actions of their own, or evaluated the actions of others. These paradigmatic acts and deeds from the past are my subject here, and I aim to examine the consequences, for historiography and other commemorative forms, of regarding the past as “exemplary” in this way. I begin by distinguishing the “exemplary” mode of confronting the past from the “historiistic” modes that have characterized the academic discipline of history since the early nineteenth century. I then explore the ways exemplarity manifests itself in Roman culture generally (the broader context in which the specifically historiographical manifestations occur) by examining the case of Gaius Duilius, consul in 260 BCE, who was renowned for a naval victory over the Carthaginians. I conclude by considering to what extent, in Duilius’ case and more generally, “historiistic” elements can be identified alongside the “exemplary” ones in Roman historical consciousness.

The distinction between “exemplary” and “historiistic” views of the past was articulated in the 1960s in foundational essays by George Nadel and Reinhart Koselleck. Surveying the methods and assumptions that undergird historical writing from antiquity to the early nineteenth century, these scholars argue that virtually all such writing turns the past to moralizing, didactic ends. The past is regarded as offering lessons and models (exempla) to guide the reader in his own day; actors in any given present can discover from the successes and failures of past actors what their own duties and obligations are, and how to fulfill them. Enlightenment writers, in fact, often use classical quotations—particularly the Ciceronian tag historiae magistra vitae, “history is life’s teacher”—to authorize their ethical and pedagogical deployment of the past, and so align their own historiographical practice with what they perceive to be that of the ancients. Underlying this “exemplary” view of the past is the assumption that the past occupies a space of experience continuous with or homologous to the present, and therefore lies open to immediate apprehension by present actors. This homology or continuity—the framework that compellingly subsumes and connects past and present—is primarily ethical, since the moral values (piety, valor, trustworthiness, prudence, etc.) embodied in past actions are assumed to remain constant and diachronically valid. Thus a present actor may praise and blame past actors in the same way and on the same grounds as he would praise and blame his own contemporaries. It may also, however, be pragmatic, in that actions done by past actors—the actions that embody those ever-valid values—may themselves be held up to present actors as models for imitation. This idea that past actions can be reproduced in the present, to identical moral effect, presupposes that the horizons of possible action remain invariable over time, like the values they underpin.

The term “historicism,” meanwhile, embraces a set of approaches to the past that crystallized in German Romanticism of the early nineteenth century, and are central to the development of history as an academic discipline. A “historistic” view holds, contrary to the exemplary view, that societies and their value systems experience change over time, hence that a given past does not (necessarily) lie open to immediate apprehension by later actors, who inevitably operate in a different pragmatic and ethical environment. This view holds that past events and actors can only be understood and evaluated “in their own context”—within the value systems and horizons of possible action that prevailed at that time and place. Most varieties of historicism would grant that certain regularities persist over time, though with the caveat that these regularities are not sufficiently robust or “lawlike” to be used for prediction. Yet the historicist view remains fundamentally relativist in holding that historical inquiry must begin by reconstructing the distinctive social, material, and ethical individuality of a given period, as the proper context for interpreting the actions and events of that period. This task of reconstruction

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1 Classical authorities: Cic. De Orat. 2.36, along with Rhet. 11.2 (attributed to Dionysius of Halicarnassus); Polyb. 1.1.1–3.
2 For the “exemplary” view presupposing traditional practices (i.e., imitation of past actions) as well as traditional values, see Thuc. 1.22.4, Polyb. 3.32.6–10, Livy 9.9, with Hulsekamp 2001: 133, Hulsekamp 2003: 233–4, and Roller 2004: 32–5. Nadel 1964: 307 offers an Enlightenment example.
requires specialized methods and training, which are developed and imparted by professional scholars based in universities. 3

While dividing historical consciousness into “exemplary” and “historicism” modes is useful for this chapter’s purposes, other taxonomies are possible. 4 Nor are these two modes mutually exclusive: almost any discourse about the past, from any era, displays some admixture of both. For instance, there can plainly be no “pure” historicism in which a past is known to the present exclusively on its own terms, without any imposition of present frameworks or concerns. For no historian can avoid posing questions from within her or his own horizons of possibility and value, which ex hypothesi differ from those of the past in question. 5 Nor, probably, has “pure” exemplarity ever been attained. Even before the advent of historicism as an articulated philosophy of history, certain changes over time, or differences between past and present, could always be perceived. Certainly Roman historical consciousness, whose fundamental mode I will argue is exemplary, does manifest a certain awareness of change over time, as we shall see.

Let us examine more closely the place of exemplary actors and deeds in Roman historical consciousness. I propose that exemplarity is a discourse, a (loosely) coherent system of symbols that organizes and represents the past in a particular way, and thereby facilitates a particular way of knowing it. 6 This discourse produces its characteristic objects and ways of knowing through four (notionally) sequential operations, which are as follows:

(1) Someone performs an action in the public eye – that is, before members or representatives of the Roman community, which consists of those who share a particular set of practices, orientations, and values (i.e., the mos maiorum).

(2) Upon witnessing the action, this audience evaluates its consequence for the community, judging it “good” or “bad” in terms of one or more of these shared values. Thus freighted with ethical import, the action is constituted as a normative “deed,” potentially capable of transmitting values or spurring imitation.


4 E.g., Rüsen 2004 proposes a fourfold taxonomy.

5 Theorists of historical method have long sought to understand and characterize this inescapable presentism: Gadamer 2004 (1960): 201–306; 1979: 152–60; Ricoeur 1976, 1981.

6 This articulation of “discourse” echoes aspects of the term’s usage by Michel Foucault, Roger Chartier, and other cultural historians.

This deed, its performer, and the judgment(s) passed upon it are commemorated, and thus made available to wider audiences of contemporaries and posterity, through one or more “monuments,” by which I mean any sign capable of summoning the deed to conscious recollection: scars, honorific names or titles, statues, toponyms, temples, rituals and other performances, narrative historiography, and so on.

(4) People who encounter such monuments, and thereby learn of a deed and its reception, are enjoined to accept the deed as normative – that is, either as a moral standard for evaluating the performances of other actors (the exemplum’s ethical dimension, described above), or as a model of action for themselves to imitate or avoid (the pragmatic dimension). Such viewers may, moreover, create further monuments to the deed, even at a distance in time or space. They may, for instance, restore an old statue, erect a new one, or write a historiographical text that narrates the deed anew or mentions another monument. To be sure, such viewers do not always agree with the judgments they find sedimented in the original monuments: they may deem the action in question badly rather than well done, or vice versa; or there may be uncertainty or disagreement regarding what exactly a monument commemorates, and what judgment it communicates. Such debate or disagreement, however, itself presupposes that monuments propound norms that are relevant to and accessible from the viewer’s own situation – indeed, relevant norms are identified and extracted from monuments precisely through such debate.

Thus operations (3) and (4) reveal how exemplary discourse assumes ethical and social continuity, or at least homology, over time and space. And with the transmission of moral standards and models for action, the stage is set for a new round of actions performed in the public eye, and their evaluation by members of the community – operations (1) and (2) again. In looping through its four operations, then, exemplary discourse produces and reproduces the actors, deeds, judging audiences, monuments, and values that collectively constitute this way of knowing self and past in relation to one another. 7

The dynamics of exemplarity are omnipresent in Roman historiography. One can readily find passage after passage in which reference is made to an action observed by a judging audience, a device for commemorating such action, the establishment of values or norms, or the imitation and emulation of a past action. I pick out a few high points. Polybius, in his famous

7 This is a modified version of the schema proposed in Roller 2004: 1–7; see there for additional caveats.
discussion of aristocratic funerals, asserts that the effect of displaying ances-
tor masks and narrating the achievements of the deceased and his ancestors is
to kindle in those who witness the ceremony the desire to win similar renown
for themselves (6.53.10–54.3, 6.55.4). Sallust echoes this judgment early in
his *Bellum Jugurthinae* (4.7), where he remarks that men were formerly
inspired to great deeds by contemplating their ancestors’ masks and recalling
their glory — though nowadays this emulation has grown perverted.8 Caesar
occasionally remarks on his centurions’ bravery, describing their valorous
performances under the gaze of their soldiers and commander and relating
that he himself, as commander, publicly praised and rewarded such deeds
(e.g., *Bellum Gallicum* 5.44, *Bellum Civile* 3.53, 91, 99). In Livy’s *Ab Urbe
Condita*, the dynamics of exemplarity are so central that they warrant special
mention in the preface: Livy writes (praeef. 10), “In the study of history, what
is especially salutary and fruitful is that you contemplate instances of every
type set out on a clear monument: from it you may take things to imitate for
yourself and your commonwealth, and things disgraceful in their beginnings
and outcomes to avoid.” The work itself burgeons with exemplary episodes,
where performances are observed and judged, monuments erected and inter-
plicated, values asserted and affirmed, and past actions imitated (for better or
correct worse).9 In Velleius Paterculus’ two-book universal history, virtually every
figure mentioned is framed as somehow exemplary. For instance, Velleius
makes Marcus Livius Drusus, the tribune of the plebs murdered in 91 BCE,
cast down an exemplary challenge in his dying words: “When, friends, will the
commonwealth again have a citizen like me?” (2.14.2). Even Tacitus declares
that historiography’s foremost task is to broadcast instances of *virtus*, while
deterring future misdeeds through fear of ill repute (*Annales* 3.65).

Chronologically ordered narrative is not the only historiographical vehicle
for presenting exemplary actors and deeds. Valerius Maximus, in his *Facta et
Dicta Memorabilia*, decants the diverse hodgepodge of noteworthy actions
from Roman and indeed world history into eighty-two tidy ethical categories,
“to free those who want to take an example from the labor of a long search”
(1.1.1). This categorizing impulse is also visible in more specialized histori-
ographical forms, such as Frontinus’ *Strategemata*: military strategems are
culled from narrative historiography and organized typologically, purp-
tedly to aid military commanders (1 praeef.). Finally, reversing this process, a
skeleton narrative history can be (re)constructed by assembling exemplary
anecdotes chronologically. Thus the anonymous *De Viris Illustribus*, written

8 See also *Bellum Catilinae* 7.6, 51.5–8, 51.27–36, 52.30–2.
9 For exemplarity in Livy, see Luce 1977: 247–9; Feldherr 1998: 82–111; and Chaplin 2000
passim.

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(Perhaps) in the fourth century CE, strings together eighty-six anecdotes
about such figures to create a narrative of the period from the Alban kings
to the battle of Actium. Aurelius Victor’s *Liber de Caesaribus* does likewise
for the imperial era from Augustus to the Tetrarchy, using the figures of
emperors and usurpers.

Historiography’s saturation with the elements of exemplary discourse is
unsurprising when we recall — for it bears repeating — that historiography is
itself a type of monument within that discourse (see Flower, this volume). As
such, it is one of many devices for retaining and transmitting ideas about the
past and its relationship to the present that collectively form an intercon-
ected, cross-referential network.10 To ask why and to what effect Roman
historiography manifests such ideas requires us to examine this network as a
whole — to consider how exemplary discourse functions more generally in
Roman culture, and how it is displayed in other monumental forms. Here
I examine a particular instance of an exemplary actor and deed: C. Duilius,
consul in 260 BCE, who defeated the Carthaginians in a naval battle off the
Sicilian town of Mylae during the First Punic War. I choose Duilius because
the monumental forms by which his achievements were commemorated are
especially rich and varied, forming precisely the sort of cross-referential
network that enables us to focus more broadly on the workings of exemplarity
in Roman culture.11

I begin with a “synthetic” account of Duilius’ story, which assembles the
basic elements in the tradition. We are told that he assumed command of
a newly built Roman fleet after the Carthaginians captured its previous com-
mander, Duilius’ consular colleague Scipio Asinum — or, perhaps, he received
this command immediately at the start of his consular year.12 In either case,

10 Purcell 2003: 14–18, 33–4 and passim similarly argues that Roman historical consciousness
extends far more widely than, and has many important manifestations outside of, formal
historiography.

11 Texts discussed or cited below: Polybius 1.2.2–3; Cicero, *De Senectute* 44; Livy *Peripecia* 17;
Valerius Maximus 3.6.4; Seneca the Younger, *De Brevitate Vitae* 10.3, *De Matrimoni
Fr. 42*; Vettore; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 34.20; Frontinus, *Strategemata* 2.3.24; Silius
Italicus, *Punica* 6.685–9; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.7.12; Tacitus, *Annales* 2.49; Florus,
*Epitome Bellorum Omnium* 1.18; Anon., *De Viris Illustribus* 38 (DV); Dio Cassius as excerpted
by Zonaras, 8.20–21; Ammianus Marcellinus 16.2.1; Eutropius 2.20; Orosius, *Historiae
Adversum Paganos* 4.7.7–10; Servius, *in Vergilii Georgica* 3.39; Anon., *Apophthegmata

Inscriptions: Columna Duilia: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) 1° 25 = vi 1300 =
Rei Publicae* 379 = H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 65. Forum Augustum elogium:
CIL vi 49053 (cf. 35161) = *Inscript* 13.3.13. Fasti Triumphantes, year 493 (260 BCE): CIL 1.1°
deeming his ships clumsy and unmaneuverable compared with the Carthaginians', which were better built and manned by more experienced crews, Duilius contrived spiked boarding-bridges (called cornu or κόπακες, "ravens") that could be dropped on to enemy ships to hold them fast and to provide Roman soldiers a passage onto the enemy's decks for hand-to-hand combat. When battle was joined, these devices produced a Roman victory, the destruction or capture of about forty Carthaginian ships, and much booty. Duilius went on to celebrate a "naval triumph."

This story can be analyzed in terms of the four aforementioned operations by which exemplary discourse produces its objects. Regarding actions, audiences, evaluation (operations (1) and (2), as described above), note that the consul, officers, and soldiers/sailors collectively form a cross-section of the Roman community. Each "performs" in battle the eyes of every other as all seek commendation for their virtus, martial valor (Frontinus, at any rate, assumes – reasonably – that virtus is the relevant ethical category). Several accounts also assert that the Carthaginians themselves, long dominant in naval warfare, were chagrined by this display of Roman valor – suggesting that the enemy too may be a legitimate judge of the Roman performance, corroborating and validating the Romans' self-judgment.13

Among the monumental forms through which Duilius' achievement was commemorated, and thereby made available to broader audiences of contemporaries and posterity (operation (3) in the scheme above), are all surviving texts – most of them listed in n. 11 – that provide modern scholars with information about his deed and the judgments passed upon it. These texts include epic poetry, oratory, theoretical and exegetical works, and three inscriptions, as well as brief references or more extended narratives in historiography. All but one of these texts postdate Duilius' deed by a century or more. These texts, in turn, "cross-reference" other, earlier monumental forms that no longer survive – monuments that actually reached far broader audiences than the texts, and had correspondingly greater commemorative impact.14 Specifically, several texts mention that Duilius celebrated a triumph, a spectacle that surely fixed his achievement in the memories of thousands of Roman spectators of every age, sex, and social class.15 We further learn that he dedicated a temple to Janus in the Forum Holitorium, presumably from victory spoils. A major monument, this temple stood on the triumphal route, thereby serving as a backdrop to future triumphs and reminding those later spectators of Duilius' own celebration. Moreover, it likely contained a painting and inscription commemorating his victory, thus identifying its dedicator clearly and summoning his deeds to the minds of all who approached the temple throughout the centuries that it stood.16

Again, we hear of an honorific statue of Duilius erected near the comitium in the northeast corner of the Forum Romanum. The statue stood atop a columna rostrata, a column affixed with bronze rams taken from captured Carthaginian ships. Like the temple, this was a substantial, durable, highly visible monument, which would have kept Duilius and his victory before the eyes of generations of Romans.17 And while we can know its overall form only in so far as surviving texts describe it (and through later imitations depicted on coins, imitations that incidentally reveal this monument's normative effect), one of the three surviving inscriptions comes from: this monument's base. This inscription dates to the Augustan era, but must represent aspects of an original version from Duilius' time, whose contents and style it clearly imitates; it narrates the victory, quantifies the booty taken, and refers to the triumph.18 Last, our texts inform us of a distinctive, unparalleled monumental form: for the rest of his life, whenever Duilius dined out, he was escorted home at night by a torchbearer and flute player, though the texts disagree on what exactly this ritualized procession commemorated, and how.19 The cross-references among these monuments, both lost and surviving – especially the citations of earlier monuments by later ones – create a network, a "meta-monument," from which viewers or readers who encounter it at any node can learn not only who performed what deed and how earlier judges evaluated it, but also in what other ways it was commemorated.

Finally, can we observe Duilius being deployed normatively – as a model for imitation, or a standard by which other actors are judged (operation (4) in the scheme above)? Let us begin with the Emperor Augustus' (Octavius') relationship to Duilius. In 36 BCE, he defeated his rival Sextus Pompeius in a naval battle off Nauplochos, like Mylae a town on the northeastern coast of Sicily. This battle in fact took place on much the same stretch of sea as Duilius'...
victory, since the two towns are less than 15 km apart. By public decree, this victory was commemorated with a rostral column surmounted by a gilded honorific statue, erected in the Forum Romanum. This column plainly replicated the form of Duilius' monument, while presumably surpassing it in certain respects (e.g., the gilding); it also stood not far from its model, hence must have encouraged direct comparison. In form and placement, then, it claimed that the recent victory bore comparison with the earlier one on the same battlefield—that it matched, indeed surpassed, its predecessor's significance. Yet the impressiveness of this claim depends upon Duilius being remembered as a glorious victor in a great battle. To this end, Augustus himself took pains to secure Duilius' memory as an exemplary doer of a normative, canonical deed. First, as already noted, Augustus transcribed and replaced—and perhaps altered—the original inscription from the Colonna Duilia. His efforts to ensure this monument's survival and legibility have special point if, indeed, his own columna rostrata derived meaning and significance from its relation to Duilius'. Second, according to Tacitus, Augustus restored the temple of Janus that Duilius originally dedicated. Third, he created an entirely new monument to Duilius by including him in the gallery of “outstanding men” (principes or summi viri), honored with statues and short inscriptions (elogium), in the Forum Augustum. Duilius' elogium, though fragmentary, can largely be reconstructed. Now, scholars generally agree that the summi viri were figures whom Augustus wished to present to other aristocrats as models for emulation, while (implicitly) claiming to have surpassed their achievements himself. In Duilius' case, the elogium mentions his military successes and lists several monuments that indicate the magnitude of that achievement. One of these is the Colonna Duilia and its statue; thus the elogium cross-references a monument that Augustus himself restored so as to ensure the future legibility of his own Naulochus monument. The elogium may also have mentioned Duilius' dedication of the temple to Janus, likewise recently restored by the princeps.

By referencing these specific monuments, the elogium may subtly remind attentive viewers of Augustus' own efforts to preserve them, thus insinuating that Augustus is appropriately pious before the legacy of past heroes. But Augustus' new monuments and restorations also create an interlocking sign-system that re-frames the older monuments and charges them with new meaning. For Duilius' newly restored temple and column are drawn by the Augustan monuments (the Forum Augustum statue elogium, the Naulochus column) into a new, teleological story—one in which the great deeds of the past hero stand as precursors to the similar yet greater deeds of Augustus himself.

Yet posterity is not always so deferential to its predecessors' judgments. Indeed, it may not understand them. We noted that the exemplary discourse surrounding Duilius includes the claim that, after dining out, he was escorted home by a flute player and torchbearer. This procession, which is widely attested (perhaps thanks to its very oddity), is only ever mentioned in the context of his victory, hence seems to have been understood as a monumental device. But our texts diverge on how this commemoration works, and on what kind of norm it sets. The most explicit interpretation comes from Florus: he writes, “What joy there was [sc. in the victory]! The commander Duilius, not happy with a triumph of a single day, ordered that throughout his whole life, whenever he returned from dinner, torches should shine and flutes should play before him, as though he were triumphing every day (quasi cotidie triumpharet).” By this account, the after-dinner procession is a re-performance, or repeated re-evocation in miniature, of the triumphal procession. It therefore commemorates not the victory per se, but another monument—the triumph—that, being ephemeral, came into and passed out of existence in a single day. Livy (or his epitomator), meanwhile, may have understood this monument differently. This account asserts that, because Duilius won his battle and celebrated the first naval triumph, “he was also granted an honor without end” (“ei perpetuus quoque honos habitus est”), namely the torch-and-flute escort. This implies that the procession was itself a victory monument, but differed from the triumph by being iterable (perpetuus) and additional (quoque) to it. The procession seems, therefore, not to be understood here as a re-performance, though no alternative explanation is offered.

reader to walk this short distance to examine the earlier (but recently restored) monument—whereupon, presumably, he would notice the Naulochus column...

For the restoration, see Tacitus and elogium, l. 7 (n. 32), fragment placed and text supplemented by Chiolfi.


Being ephemeral, triumphs tended to be richly cross-referenced in other, more durable monumental forms (e.g., statuary, paintings, funerary or other elogia, historiography) to maintain their viability: Hölkeskamp 2003: 332, Künzl 1988: 119–33.
What kind of norm does this puzzling monument establish? Ammianus Marcellinus (26.3.4–5) discusses a senator of the fourth century CE who was convicted of apprenticing a slave to a teacher of poisoning techniques (malae artes), yet secured impunity with bribes. This senator then paraded about on a decorated horse with a procession of slaves, “as we hear that old Duilius, after his glorious naval contest, claimed for himself the right to return to his house after dinner with a flute player going slowly in front.” By juxtaposing similar modes of self-monumentalization, while comparing the senator’s disgraceful deed with Duilius’ “glorious” one, Ammianus seems to present the current procession as a travesty of its model—a morally vicious imitation of a monument that, he assumes, conveys a positive evaluation of Duilius’ deed. In other texts, however, whiffs of disapproval can be detected. In Cicero’s De Senectute, the speaker Cato says that, as a boy, he observed the aged Duilius coming home in this manner (§44). This statement follows the assertion that “old age is able to enjoy (delectari) moderate dinners,” and Duilius is clearly supposed to exemplify this assertion in some way. But what Duilius actually enjoys (delectabantur), Cato says, is his “wax torches and flute player, which without precedent he had claimed for himself as a private citizen; his glory gave him this much value.” Having thus tied Duilius’ convivial “enjoyment” to a form of personal “license” (licentia) rather than moderation, Cato passes on to discuss his own convivial practices, which more nearly exemplify the original assertion about enjoyment in moderation. While this passage does not condemn Duilius overtly, its rhetoric and structure present him as an imperfect (at best) instance of the value in question, in contrast to Cato’s superior instantiation. These texts thus show how those who encounter monuments (re)interpret and (re)value them to meet contemporary needs.

So far, I have argued that exemplary discourse constitutes the figure of Duilius as a norm or model (if sometimes contested) for later generations to appropriate and re-deploy to their own ends. This discourse molds, packages, and delivers the past to any given present as something accessible, comprehensible, and relevant to contemporary Romans in their own deliberations and evaluations. Yet I also suggested that Roman historical consciousness can manifest an awareness of temporal distance and change. To conclude this chapter, I examine aspects of the Duilius legend and of Roman historiography more generally that exhibit such an awareness, and consider to what extent this awareness can be deemed “historicizing.”

“First” might seem a good starting point. To acte (as Roman historical writing frequently does) the “first” occurrence of something seems to imply the writer’s awareness of an innovation or turning point, a shift from an earlier, less familiar configuration of social practices and values to a later, more familiar one. To note a “first,” then, might seem to mark a point where “historicism” awareness supervenes to interrupt the smoothing, amalgamating assumptions of continuity/homology that characterize the exemplary view. Now, Duilius is regularly credited with one or more “firsts”: the first Roman to fit out a fleet, join battle at sea, contrive boarding-bridges, win a naval victory, celebrate a “naval triumph.” These firsts arouse no obvious anxiety in the authors who describe them; they generally seem to have met with the judging audiences’ approval. Moreover, they are imitated by subsequent naval commanders who likewise fit out fleets, fight naval battles, use boarding-bridges, win victories, and celebrate naval triumphs. In this respect, “firstness” appears to function like virtus, pietas, or any other moral category within the mos maiorum, providing a moral basis upon which an actor can be evaluated, imitated, and thus subsumed into exemplary discourse. Thus we seem to arrive at a paradox. For if an actor’s moral obligation, within exemplary discourse, is to seek praise by imitating or emulating deeds that have earlier been performed and praised, how can a “first” — which ex hypothesi is unexampld — ever be presented as an exemplary quality, and evaluated positively? Yet Duilius are. Seemingly, his non-imitation is praised and presented as imitable, and his disregard for norms is presented as normative. How can this be?

To address this paradox, let us examine more closely how Duilius’ innovations are represented. Several texts locate his deeds within a larger narrative relating how and why the Romans first undertook naval warfare. This narrative asserts that the Romans lacked all such experience until hostilities with Carthage commenced in 264 BCE; the prospect of fighting “overseas” in Sicily and North Africa spurred the Romans to build their first warships. Polybius offers a version of this narrative: he declares that he will inform

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29 Other attestations of Duilius’ procession: Valerius Maximus (perhaps betraying ambivalence); also Silius, DVI, and the Forum Augustum elogium, none of which evaluates or attempts to explain it. Mommsen’s ingenious explanation for this honor (1887: 1, 423) does not account adequately for our sources’ puzzlement.
his readers “how and when and for what reasons the Romans first embarked upon the sea” (1.20.8). According to Seneca (Brev.), the question “Who first persuaded the Romans to board ships?” is an antiquarian’s riddle, to which the answer is “Appius Claudius Caudex” (consul. 264 BCE); Suetonius (Tib. 2), Dio (Zonaras), and Florus likewise assert Caudex’s priority.31 Dullius represents the next stage: the first to fight and win. He accomplishes this, our historiographical texts say, by eschewing conventional naval tactics of maneuver and ramming, at which the Carthaginians excelled, and employing instead tactics derived from infantry combat, the Romans’ forte. Consider the boarding-bridges (corvi) by which legionary soldiers, who had embarked on the Roman ships, ensnared and crossed over to the Carthaginian vessels for hand-to-hand combat. Polybius (1.23.6), Dio (Zonaras), and Florus remark that the corvi made the engagement like a battle of infantrymen; Frontinus says that they allowed the soldiers to exercise their virtus (presumably of the foot soldier’s traditional sort); and Eutropius says they allowed the Romans to extend their terrestrial military dominance on to the sea. The devices themselves appear elsewhere as terrestrial siege engines, and so seem (like the tactics accompanying their use) to have been transferred from infantry warfare.32 Corvi appear again four years later (256 BCE) in the naval battle at Ecnomus, where — according to Polybius (1.26.5–6, 1.28.11) — they again participated in a wholesale transference of infantry tactics on to naval warfare. The historiographical narratives of these early naval battles, then, credit Dullius for an innovation that unexpectedly enabled the Romans to defeat the Carthaginians, but stress that this innovation merely transferred traditional Roman military skills and values from land to sea. Furthermore, the triumphus navalis that honored this victory may be regarded not as a new kind of triumph for a novel kind of victory, but rather (and literally) as “a triumph for a victory won on ships,” differing from a “normal” triumph only in that the battlefield floats.33

To Roman eyes, then, Dullius’ naval firsts may differ little in substance from his other achievements as consul. For he also operated on land, raising the Carthaginian siege of Segesta, routing a Carthaginian force, and taking the town of Macellus.34 In these engagements, too, legionary soldiers had the opportunity to join battle, display their virtus, and deploy siege engines. Even the honorific rostral column and statue, though apparently the first such monument, was assembled from pre-existing forms, as scholars have noted: C. Maenius, consul in 338, had been honored with a column — perhaps surmounted by an honorific statue — for defeating the Latins; he also took rams (rostra) from Antiate ships surrendered under the peace agreement and mounted them on the speaker’s platform in the comitium. So Dullius, in affixing rostra directly to his column, merely amalgamated elements from Maenius’ two monuments into a single form.35

This analysis holds true more generally for Romans’ claims of “firstness.” Géza Alföldy, in a detailed study of imperial-era inscriptions that credit their commemorands with firsts, contends that these assertions do not necessarily imply that new types of action have been pioneered, or new domains of social value established. Rather, they imply that the commemrand went beyond others within established, long-accepted categories of action and value. The primus may differ from prior actors in degree, rather than categorically.36 Thus the actions of the primus can be taken as exemplary — as consistent with a discourse in which the past is continuous with and comprehensible to the present — because these actions may ultimately offer new structures, no novel values or practices that might transform the mors maiorum itself and thereby render past actions and values incomprehensible. On the contrary, they re-affirm the validity of traditional values. So while the primus claim assuredly marks a change over time, the “historist” dimension of that claim is relatively weak.

Change over time is also assumed by another familiar feature of Roman historiography, namely the assertion of decline in the moral status of the commonwealth. Livy announces such decline as one of his work’s themes (praef. 9), and T.J. Luce has argued that the later surviving books (34–45) depict the beginnings of this decline in Rome’s intensifying engagement with rich Greek kingdoms. By this account, Livy ties a significant moral change to a specific historical circumstance (namely, a certain kind of cultural contact).37 Such a perception of change does not, however, keep Livy from offering his Augustan readers countless figures from early Rome as exempla, many

31 The categorical claim that the Romans never put warships to sea before Caudex is historically false: see Thiel 1954: 9–10, 23–8 on the dasarmati navales of the fourth-third centuries, and the squadrons they commanded.
33 This may be the implication of the phrasing “navalis victoriae triumphus” (Livy), where navalis modifies victoria, not triumphus. The differences between the regular triumph and the triumphus navalis (ten more are attested: Inserls 33.1 pp. 76–81, 548–56; list at 636) are obscure; for plausible conjectures see Östenberg 2003: 45–6.
34 Polyb. 1.14.1–2, Cullum Duilia inscription II.1–5 (n. 22), Fasti Triumphales, Dio (Zonaras).
positive but some negative (a project thematized in praef. 10, quoted above). For to assume moral decline does not render past actors incomprehensible to the present: they are perfectly comprehensible as being, generally, “better.” Indeed, their exemplary force is all the greater on this assumption, since the challenge cast down to posterity—“try to match our standards of performance!”—is that much harder to meet. The categories of action and value within which evaluation takes place do not change under the “decline” model; the same categories whose validity everyone has always accepted persist, and actors past and present are always commensurable within this fixed, unchanging system. The “decline” model consequently works like the primum model but in the opposite direction, marking a downturn rather than upturn in the value of contemporary performance compared to past performance. Its historicist dimension is equally weak.

Historicist elements may, however, lurk elsewhere in Roman thinking about the past, including within the Duiilus legend. Consider the conceptual model by which Polybius and others explain the early Roman naval victories at Mylae and Ecnomus: the projection of infancy tactics and values on to naval combat. It is questionable whether Duiilus and his contemporaries would have conceptualized naval warfare in these terms, since small squadrons of warships under Roman command are attested from earlier (see footnote 31). Moreover, the Columna Duiilia inscription, with its expansive narrative of the battle of Mylae, gives no such indication. Since the original inscription probably dated within a generation of Duiilus’ victory, it likely represented the views of people—perhaps including Duiilus himself—who participated in or remembered the battle. It declares (in its Augusta version) that the consul was “first to perform a noteworthy deed with ships,” and “first to fit out and equip crews and fleets of warships”; also, “with those ships he defeated the Punic fleets and mightiest forces ... in battle on the high seas.” The emphasis here is on the unprecedented magnitude of the preparations, forces, and achievement; it does not present naval combat per se as being completely novel, nor does it suggest a projection of infancy tactics on to naval combat. So let us suppose that those who participated in or remembered the battle comprehended it as an outsized instance within an established tradition of (limited, small-scale) naval warfare, and not as an utter novelty involving tactical innovation. How and why, then, would the latter explanation appear in Polybius’ account, over one hundred years later?

Polybius, writing for a Greek readership, aims to explain Rome’s vertiginous rise to Mediterranean dominance (1.1.2). He himself must have wondered how the Romans won these naval battles, since he was apparently unaware of their prior naval experience. Perhaps his thinking was, “In those days they could certainly fight effectively on land, so they must have used infantry combat as a model for naval combat.” If so, an “historicist” model is at work here. It posits change over time by supposing that, between Duiilus’ day and Polybius’, the Romans did eventually adopt “conventional” naval tactics (though leaving unexplained how and when, if not with Duiilus). It then attempts to understand past actors and actions within the horizons of possibility implied by this assumed change over time. The sense of continuity and comprehensibility between past and present seems little perturbed by this awareness that practices and world views change over time. Nevertheless, the historicist credentials of this model of change—particular and localized as it is—are stronger than for the broader “decline” or primum models, which posit that change occurs only in levels of performance within unchanging and persistent categories of action and value. That Polybius’ “historicizing” analysis of the events of 260 is possibly incorrect provides a salutary reminder that historicist approaches do not automatically bring us closer to “how it actually was”: for if they reconstruct past horizons of possibility incorrectly, they ultimately provide just a more sophisticated form of anachronism than the exemplary view provides.

Further reading

The distinction between “exemplary” and “historicist” modes of encountering the past is described in foundational essays by Nadel 1964 and Koselleck 1985 (1967); Rüsen 2004 sketches a more complex taxonomy of types of historical consciousness (which this scholar develops in other work). Gadamer 2004 (1960) and (less impressively) Hamilton 1996 discuss the emergence and varieties of historicism. Roller 2004 and Hölkeskamp 2003 offer overviews of exemplarity as a distinctively Roman mode of historical consciousness; Hedrick 2006 discusses the historicism/exemplarity antinomy more briefly but in a broader classical context. On the exemplary dynamics of Livy’s narrative in particular, see Jaeger 1997,

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38 For the battle, see II. 1-13: *en que edom mac[istrad bene]/[f]om navebo marid consol primus clesi copisique/[os]aque navales primos ornatos parvateque / comque eis navebus classis Poenisas om[nis item ma]/[x]ora copias Cartaciensiis praeertet/Hannibaled/dictatores o[i]-

39 This conceptual model has also been ascribed to the historiographer Fabius Pictor, c. 200 BCE (Walbank 1957: 1, 85–6, Bleckmann 2002: 33 n. 3). However, Polybius’ situation seems to offer better motivation for such an invention. Sordi 1967 offers a different view of Polybius’ sources.

I4

ELLEN O'GORMAN

Intertextuality and historiography

The _Annals_ of Tacitus begin at the death of Augustus, whose funeral is narrated in chapters 8–10 of the first book. The ninth and tenth chapters, beginning “ther ther was much talk about Augustus himself,” record various interpretations of the emperor’s life current at the time of his death; as has been “recognized” for nearly a century, these chapters contain precise and pointed allusions to Augustus’ self-representation in the text entitled _Res Gestae Divi Augusti_ (henceforth _RGDA_).¹ Chapter 10 of the _Annals_, in particular, tellingly re-phrases Augustus’ account of his activities in the aftermath of _Julius Caesar’s_ death:

At the age of nineteen I raised an army on my own initiative and at my own expense, with which I recovered the freedom of the Republic, which had been suppressed by the domination of a faction. On account of this the Senate, in the consulship of Gaius Pansa and Aulus Hirtius, decreed in my honor that I be enrolled as a senator, giving me the right to speak in the consular position, and bestowed on me _imperium_. The Senate also commanded me as _praefectus_, together with the consuls, to see to it that no harm should come to the state. But the people, in the same year, when both consuls had fallen in battle, made me consul and _triumviri_ for the maintenance of the Republic.  

_ RGDA i.1–4_

It was said, on the other hand, that piety towards his adoptive father and the needs of the Republic were adopted as a pretext, but it was because of his desire for domination that the veterans were conscripted with bribery, an army was raised by a private citizen, a young man, the consul’s legions were corrupted, the favor of the Pompeian party was feigned. Then when by decree he had taken possession of senatorial power and praetorian rights, when Hirtius and Pansa had been killed (whether by the enemy, or poison poured into Pansa’s

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¹ Here I follow the Teubner text of Tacitus (ed. Hübner); of the _RGDA_, Brunt and Moore 1967. All translations from Greek or Latin are my own.


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