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The Early History of Faith, History 150-50

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Climbing the Roman Ladder to Success

Everyone was ready. After months of preparation and research our group finally attempted to usurp Roman powers. With all the confusion and contempt surrounding the politics of home, we could only wonder what democracy was like in the republic, similarly thought to be a bastion of democracy in its era. Each person reported back on their experience and progress. We sought to conquer Rome and then apply those lessons to our own troubles. We gathered around the eternal timeline, gave the signal, and off we went.

I was the first to arrive in 106. It felt odd to see so many other men dressed in armor and carrying a shield. My first order of business was to find a horse and then join the ranks of the cavalry under a man known as Sulla.[[1]](#footnote-1) Walking down the stone streets, I saw so many people rummaging about. I finally got up the nerve to ask another man, dressed similarly to me where I could purchase a horse. He directed me to a market where I selected a stallion. Afterward, I approached the encampment and enlisted.[[2]](#footnote-2) Looking for some quick answers, I came across a pale guy with fiery red hair. He was assisting a soldier in setting camp.[[3]](#footnote-3) I joined in and then managed to have a word with him about how everything worked. My story was that I was the grandson of a recent Roman Citizen eager to fight for the Republic.[[4]](#footnote-4)The man explained how the ranks worked. I may have made a crude comment about how the officers would no doubt enjoy beating me into shape as a proper Roman soldier. You can only imagine my surprise when the man laughed and replied, “So long as you have a sense of humor, I will have you. What’s your name again?” I gave him my alias just as he rushed off. Seems that Sulla was just as savvy as any modern politician, cheerful to his supporters, willing to help out in order to appeal to the masses, and highly charismatic.[[5]](#footnote-5) I wonder though if he was building his reputation or just genuinely affable. I tried to ask the other recruits, but they seemed content that their commanding officer could take a joke and left it at that.

I arrived just shortly after the end of the fighting in Jugurtha with the remaining members of our exploit. Derek, sent out under Sulla, should return soon. In the meantime, Jessica has been sent (disguised as a man) to the forum under a name just similar enough to one whose military exploits in battle might be accidentally attributed in the morphing of oral information.[[6]](#footnote-6) Well versed in the logic of argument and official proceedings of governing bodies, she was excited to infiltrate the Senate.[[7]](#footnote-7) Meanwhile Nathan, Gene, and I have purchased an estate off a few down and out farmers who are hoping to join the ranks of the army, allowing us to build our latifundia.[[8]](#footnote-8) Turns out the United States’ Senate is not the first millionaires club in the history of politics.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Yesterday, my granddaughter, Taylor took me out to buy the farm we would be living at. She said I was the one to do it as the Paterna familia, whatever that means.[[10]](#footnote-10) I spoke to a few of the other guys around us, and they suggested we take on some clients and buy some slaves to work the land. I was about ready to smack that kid across the face in outrage, until I saw Nathan walk back red as a tomato surrounded by people dressed in rags.[[11]](#footnote-11) The other guy nearly laughed going on about how I nearly fooled him into thinking I was clueless while my boy was already out rounding up everything I needed. That night I had a talk with Taylor.

Gene was clearly upset when Nathan came home with the slaves. I could tell they both needed some clarification. I sat them down and explained that slavery in our history was different from here. Not only that, but eventually when we all went home, we were going to set them all free and leave behind a plot of land with enough money to start small farms of their own if they wanted.[[12]](#footnote-12) It seemed to appease them.

I will definitely get into the Senate. Last night, I gave Taylor a list of all the big names and potential clients in the forum. Some men walked in with thirty or more people surrounding them. Meanwhile, I picked up all the men who Gene had rented land to. Part of the agreement was apparently them supporting me, although none of them had much status. Walking in on your first day with about ten or so others at your side was apparently a big deal because people were staring.[[13]](#footnote-13) They would be happy to know that comparing sizes with staff is a tradition alive and well in their descendants.[[14]](#footnote-14) Meanwhile, I was caught staring at the temples that adorned the hilltops. One of the clients leaned in to my ear and whispered out the names of gods while pointing out various statues and temples.[[15]](#footnote-15) No separation of church and state there.

The meeting was called to order and at first, I just listened. I waited to see what kind of talk they got up to and what proposals tended to yield the best results. By the end of the day, I had given my opinion in a debate and voted without catastrophic failure.[[16]](#footnote-16) As I went to leave, I was approached by several men looking to get out from under their patron’s influence. They noticed that I had many farmers with me and took it as a sign to follow. I indulged myself with a hint of Socrates asking rhetorically about the ideal form of a patron.[[17]](#footnote-17) This caught the attention of some decidedly powerful individuals including a man named Marius who requested to meet at a later date.

I remembered the temples lining the forum and suggested that we make a sacrifice to Zeus. That was when one of the men pulled me aside and asked if I was Greek. I realized my error and responded with a question on how he knew of Greek culture. He laughed claiming that most educated men knew of the Greeks and their philosophers.[[18]](#footnote-18) To save face, I announced that we would be heading to the temple of Jupiter. Inside the temple was a statue, painted in red and raising a thunderbolt. The temple was one of the few stone buildings outside the forum itself. It was curious that from the steps I had a perfect view of the forum. I asked a priest if the setting was meant to mean that the gods were watching over the Romans. The man explained that the Romans were in the favor of the gods and slipped in that good Romans should make a regular habit of supporting the temple and checking in with sacrifices.[[19]](#footnote-19) Before I knew it, I had basically agreed to return regularly.

With Jessica’s list of potential clients in hand, I began work on two parties, each with a specific guest list. If politicians in Washington could make moves at Galas and celebrations, perhaps we could do the same and play the optimates and populares to our advantage.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The war was gruesome. I had extensive notes in a journal, but we were caught in an ambush.[[21]](#footnote-21) In a panic I tucked the book into my armor and took up my sword. In the melee we were called back into formation and before I could raise my shield, I was stabbed in the shoulder. Another man came up to take my place when a surge of adrenaline kicked in and I jumped back into position with a vengeance.[[22]](#footnote-22) It was not until after the enemy had been driven back that I realized the bleeding was minimal due to the pressure of the journal. The leather covers and thick paper made penetration difficult and probably saved my life. My notes on the other hand were a bloody mess. After months of trudging around in a uniform, I can finally come home to warm bed and my old friends.[[23]](#footnote-23) What I did not expect was a celebration at a large estate filled with strangers.

“A toast to a soldier’s safe return home!” I called out as I saw Derek approach on horseback. Taylor ran up to him first, filling him in on everything that had happened and handing off the stallion to a slave. I watched as the men parted for him to come in and congratulated him on his first successful military campaign.[[24]](#footnote-24) I continued to make announcements throughout the night. Being five foot eleven had its disadvantages, but it certainly got others’ attention.[[25]](#footnote-25) In addition to being rather tall, I was made acutely aware that the training I was forced to endure at the gym had also payed off. A local sculptor asked if I was willing to be his muse. I was onboard and rather flattered, until I realized that all the statues in our estate had a particular element of nudity.[[26]](#footnote-26) I pulled Taylor aside for a moment and was advised against being sculpted. On her way back out she also mentioned that I should avoid the decorated cups. The guests expected their wine to be sweetened with lead, and she was willing to oblige so long as it did not slip into our cups.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Honestly, I am not sure how these Romans survived. When I was back in the market place looking for slaves, I was lost repeatedly! The saving grace of my trip was the knowledgeable slaves. I know that we are going to release them eventually, and we have all agreed to a higher standard of treatment than most of the day, but I am still uncomfortable. I talked it over with Derek and he is concerned too. He heard from the other cavalry men about slave revolts and uprisings. He also noted the distinctive appearance he had seen before in the faces of his enemies on the battle field. I had bought prisoners of war without even knowing.[[28]](#footnote-28) The statues we bought for the house had me for a loop too. We were faced with a huge number of choices.

1. Keaveney, Arthur, 1982, *Sulla, the Last Republican* Classical Lives, London: Croom Helm, pp.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I order to win the war in Jugurtha, Marius extended enlistment of the army even to those without property. Although the cavalry was typically of a higher social status, the circumstances would make it simpler for a new man to enlist. Scullard, H. H. 1988. *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 B.C. to A.D. 68*. 5th ed. London: Routledge. p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sulla was known to be a charming man who was known to assist readily and often even without being asked. Rarely asking favors, Sulla built up an informal reserve of owed favors among his men. Keaveney, Arthur, 1982, *Sulla, the Last Republican* Classical Lives, London: Croom Helm, pp.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Roman Citizens were generally expected to serve in the military though service was not compulsory. Marius is credited with the reforms that officially converted the farmer-soldier force into a professional army of paid career soldiers. Goldsworthy, Adrian Keith, and John Keegan. 2005. *Roman Warfare*. Smithsonian History of Warfare. New York: Smithsonian Books/Collins.pp106. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Despite having no previous military service, Sulla endeared himself to Marius who saw fit to entrust the cavalry to the newly elected quaestor. Keaveney, Arthur, 1982, *Sulla, the Last Republican* Classical Lives, London: Croom Helm, pp.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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17. Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World,* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 133-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Although Marius himself was known not to have learned Greek, this diversion from the norm was notable enough that Plutarch thought it prudent to record in his biography. Plutarch, Robin Waterfield, and Philip A. Stadter. 1999. *Roman Lives: A Selection of Eight Lives*. Oxford World’s Classics. Oxford: OUP Oxford, p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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