Gaius Duilius

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Case for Examination

In a gallery of the Capitoline Museums in Rome stands a block of white Luna marble, a little over a meter high, carved with nineteen lines of Latin so old-fashioned in its spelling that Roman schoolmasters were already using it as a grammar lesson in the first century AD.[1] The stone once formed part of the base of a column that stood at the northwest corner of the Forum Romanum, near the ancient altar of Vulcan, with bronze rams from captured Carthaginian warships mounted in sockets along its shaft and a bronze statue of a man on top. The man was Gaius Duilius, consul of 260 BC, and the column commemorated the afternoon on which Rome, a city that five years earlier had possessed no navy worth the name, destroyed the myth of Carthaginian supremacy at sea.[2]

The inscription is the oldest substantial honorific text in the Latin language. It is also a catalogue of firsts, and it says so with a blunt-

ness that still carries across twenty-two centuries: Duilius was the *first* consul to succeed in war with ships at sea; the *first* to equip and train naval crews and fleets, and the celebrant of the first naval triumph in the history of the city. The word *primos*—'first,' in the old spelling—tolls through the text like a bell.[3] The ancient tradition added more firsts of its own. He was the first Roman honored with a *columna rostrata*, a rostral column. He was the first, and so far as the record shows the only, Roman granted the perpetual right to return home from dinner by torchlight and to the music of a flute, at public expense, as if his triumph never ended. And if a modern argument examined later in this volume is correct, he was the first Roman politician to put his own achievement on money—a century and a quarter before the moneyers of the Gracchan age supposedly invented the practice.[4]

Then the first stops, and so, abruptly, does the career. After his censorship of 258 BC, Duilius disappears from the magisterial record for twenty-seven years, resurfacing exactly once, in 231 BC, as a dictator appointed for the few days needed to conduct elections. The First Punic War dragged on for nineteen years after Mylae. It was decided, in the end, at sea, in precisely the arm of warfare Duilius had created. Rome recycled its commanders freely in those years—it even returned his old colleague Scipio Asina, captured igno-

miniously in the war's first naval action, to a second consulship and a fleet. It never again employed the man who had won its first victory. That silence is a historical puzzle in its own right, and this volume devotes a chapter to it.[5]

No English-language book on Duilius exists. The reason is not the poverty of the record—Polybius's account of 260 BC is among the most detailed campaign narratives to survive from the third century, and no figure in this series has left a primary document to compare with the column inscription. The reason is that the tradition preserved a victory and a monument but not a man. Duilius enters the sources, in Kondratieff's phrase, out of nothing, in his consular year; he leaves them without a death notice. Between those points stand his actions, his honors, and his stone. This volume assembles them, and then attempts, with the caution the evidence demands, the harder task: to ask what kind of man the actions imply.

The Problem of the Tradition

The ancient memory of Duilius is not neutral, and it is not unified. One tradition, whose most attractive witness is Cicero, made him a moral example: the self-made victor who wore his glory openly and harmed no one by it. In the De Senectute, Cicero has the elderly Cato recall watching Duilius, an old man by then, walking home from dinner be-

hind his torchbearer and his flute-player—the only eyewitness image of Duilius that survives. 'Glory gave him that much license,' Cato says, and the tone is a smile.[6] A second tradition found the same nightly ritual insufferable. Florus claims Duilius ordered the escort for himself because he was 'not content with a single day of triumph'; Valerius Maximus files him among men who indulged themselves 'more freely than ancestral custom permitted'; a late notice preserved in Ammianus repeats the charge of self-assumption.[7] The same fact—the torches, the flute, the decades of use—supports both portraits. Deciding between them, or holding them together, is one of the tasks of this book.

There is a subtler distortion as well. Polybius, our narrative spine, wrote under the patronage of the Scipionic circle, and the one Roman who comes out of the 260 campaign badly is a Cornelius Scipio. The chapter on the historiography examines the case, made in different forms by Thiel, Lazenby, and Bleckmann, that parts of the Polybian account were shaped to soften that embarrassment—perhaps even to reassign credit for the corvus. The inscription, meanwhile, is not a disinterested document either: it is self-presentation in stone, whether Duilius or the Senate chose the words. Reading Duilius means reading monuments and narratives that were all, in their different ways, arguing something.[8]

The Plan of This Volume

The structure follows the pattern of the series. The opening chapters examine the sources and the historiographical problems, then set the scene: Rome and Carthage stumbling into war in 264, and the obscure plebeian family from which the new consul of 260 came. The central chapters reconstruct the record—the building of the fleet, the corvus, the disaster at Lipara, the land campaign at Segesta and Macella, Mylae, the triumph, the extraordinary distribution of booty to the Roman people, and the column that fixed it all in bronze and stone. The later chapters follow the censorship, the long silence, the dictatorship of 231, and the afterlife of Duilius's memory from Cicero to Augustus to the antiquarians who dug his inscription out of the Forum in 1565. The final chapter, 'The Man,' gathers what the actions permit us to say about character—explicitly, and with the speculative passages labeled as such. Duilius left no words. He left decisions, and decisions can be read.

Notes

1. Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, I.7.12, cites the inscription for its archaic spelling. On the stone and its museum history: Kondratieff (2004), pp. 10–11; Gordon (1983), pp. 124–127.

2. CIL I².25 = CIL VI.1300 = ILS 65 = ILLRP 319 = Inscr. Ital. XIII.3.69. Location prope aream Volcanam: Inscr. Ital. XIII.3.13; Kondratieff (2004), pp. 8–9.

3. Inscription, lines 6–7 (PRIMOS twice). Degrassi's restoration is printed with translation in Appendix C.

4. First naval triumph: Fasti Triumphales, Inscr. Ital. XIII.1, p. 77; Livy, Periochae, 17. The torch-and-flute honor: Cicero, De Senectute, 44; Florus, I.18.10; De Viris Illustribus, 38. The coinage argument: Kondratieff (2004), pp. 26–34.

5. Censorship 258: Broughton (1951), I, p. 206. Dictatorship 231: Broughton (1951), I, p. 226. The problem of the silence: Kondratieff (2004), pp. 32–33.

6. Cicero, De Senectute, 44 (tantum licentiae dabat gloria). The passage is given in full in Appendix C.

7. Florus, I.18.10; Valerius Maximus, III.6.4; the Ammianus notice (as cited in Kondratieff [2004], p. 6 n. 20). On the divided tradition: Kondratieff (2004), p. 6 n. 20; Roller (2009).

8. On the Scipionic problem in Polybius: Thiel (1954), p. 181; Lazenby (1996), pp. 66–67;

Bleckmann (2002). On the corvus sequencing: Kondratieff (2004), p. 4 n. 13.