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**MOTIVES FOR IMPERIALISM: A CASE STUDY OF ROME (510-272BC)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Motives of Roman imperialism in the republican era have generated debate among scholars who criticize and counter-criticize one another. The debate has often been speared by two schools of thought being the defensive and the offensive schools of thought. Whiles the defensive school of thought view motives of Roman imperialism as purely self protective mechanism, others like Harris (2005) view Roman imperialism as being offensive and think RomanWars brought tangible economic benefits that influenced decision to go to war. The paper sought to explore the motives for Roman imperialism during the early republican era only which took place between 510-272 BC with emphasis on the Samnite and the Pyrrhic Wars.

**Key Words:** Imperialism, Roman, Motives, Comitia Centuriata, Concilium Plebis.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Remember, Romans, that it is for thee to rule the nations. This shall be thy task, to impose the ways of peace, to spare the vanquished, and to tame the proud by war.

Polybius 6.11-18 (Trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert)

Polybius points out what Rome's foreign policy should have been. Rome indeed thought she was designed to rule the world. Rome's mission was to spare the conquered and vanquish the proud in war (*Aeneid*1956: 6.856). Rome was to be the liberator who would free the vanquished and bring external harmony to the greater part of the known world (*Aeneid*1956:1.211-243). Any student of classical history and international relations would know that the only means available to achieve such great task was to engage in inter-state warfare, form military alliances with other states and control overseas trade. This is exactly what Rome might have done, but did the Romans fight wars just to impose peace, spare the vanquished, and tame the proud?

In response to their mission 'to rule the nations' and 'impose the ways of peace' Rome engaged in several wars. Rome fought hundreds of wars and suffered ninety severe defeats in the republican era alone. This means that victory was not always assured and there must be therefore compelling reasons to go to war (Ackah, 2010). Every state that has existed in history, whether a superpower or not, tends to relate with other nations and this relationship is always aimed at promoting the interest of such states. Aristotle (1950) an ancient Greek philosopher, in his *Constitution of Athens* describes a human being as a social animal, therefore friendships and

relations have existed between humans since the beginning of the human race. As organizations develop in human affairs, so also do relations between groups and nations. How a state relates with the other states is what foreign policy is all about. It thus goes back to primitive times. The inception in human affairs of foreign relations and the need for foreign policy to deal with them are as old as the organization of human life in groups. The literature from ancient times such as the Bible, the Homeric poems, the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides and many others show an accumulation of experience in dealing with foreigners.

A country's foreign policy consists of strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interests and to achieve its goals in international relations. The approaches are strategically employed to interact with other countries. In recent times, due to the deepening level of globalization and transnational activities, states interact with non-state actors. The aforementioned interaction is evaluated and monitored in attempts to maximize benefits of multilateral international cooperation. So far as national interests are dominant, foreign policies are designed by the government through high-level decision making processes. National interest's accomplishment could occur as a result of peaceful cooperation with other nations or through exploitation. Since some states or humans have despotic tendencies their foreign policies are shaped with imperialism. In modern times, creating foreign policy is the job of the head of government and the foreign minister (or equivalent). In some countries the legislature also has considerable oversight. In ancient times, foreign policies whether imperialistic or not were determined by state institutions, be it the monarchy, oligarchy or people assembly. The foreign policy in republican Rome was to a large extent determined by the senate (council of elders). The ultimate authority of the senate was derived from esteem and prestige (*Latin Lexicon* 1879:1668). The senate passed decrees which were called *senatusconsultum*. Though the senate technically had no official role in the management of military conflict, the senate ultimately was the force that oversaw such affairs. However, it was the people of Rome, through the legislative assemblies, who had the final decision regarding the election of magistracy, the enactment of laws, the carrying out of capital punishment, the declaration of war and peace, and the creation or dissolution of alliances. There were two types of legislative assemblies. The *comitia centuriata* being the assembly of all citizens and *Concilium Plebis*, which functioned as a legislative assembly, through which the plebeians could pass laws. Though Rome became a force to reckon with after the expulsion of kingship or monarchical system, Rome concentrated only on her internal affairs—internal security and protection. Thus most of the Roman Wars during the early republican period were basically to protect Roman territories, citizens or allies (Mommsen, 1895). Roman foreign policy and reasons for imperialism also became more aggressive and offensive following the invasion of Rome by the Gaul's in 390 B.C. and the defeat of Pyrrhus in the Pyrrhic War and, in the midrepublican era which took place between 264 BC and 131 BC.

This paper sought to explore if Roman Wars were wars of expansion and self-defense, in that when a diplomatic dispute between Rome and a Greek colony erupted into open warfare in a naval confrontation, the Greek colony appealed for military aid from Pyrrhus, ruler of the northwestern Greek kingdom of Epirus. Motivated by a personal desire for military

accomplishment, Pyrrhus landed a Greek army numbering twenty-five thousand men on Italian soil in 280 B.C. Despite early victories, Pyrrhus found his position in Italy unsustainable and later withdrew, but what were the motives that inspired the war. The conflicts with Pyrrhus would have a great effect on Rome. Rome had shown it was capable of pitting its armies successfully against the dominant military powers of the Mediterranean world and that the Greek kingdoms were incapable of defending their colonies in Italy and beyond. With this achievement, Rome quickly moved into south of Latium, subjugating and dividing the Greek colonies. Thus, Rome effectively dominated the Italian Peninsula and won an international military reputation by 272 B.C.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are several factors which make people do what they do and act in the way they must act be it within the family, community or society. Such factors may be political, cultural, religious and economic, health and even educational in nature. Some of these motives may either be positive or negative, individualistic, naturalistic or sometimes institutionalized. One may conclude that the tendency to dominate others may spur actions, movements and inactions of people, society and the state and how they relate to others. The question therefore is: what are the imperial motives that sparked and inspired Roman Wars within the early republican era?

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is defined as the total strategy from the identification of the problem to the final plan for the data gathering and analyses (Burns and Grove 2001). The methodology comprised of the study area, instruments used to gather information and the target group or period. Study Area is one of the methodologies used in the study. This paper considered only two of the major wars fought within the early republican period which covered the Samnite and Pyrrhic Wars. Instrumentation is another methodology used in the study. The researcher employed the thematic and chronological approach of narration, whereby a thematic approach is to organize one's presentation or dissertation around topics and issues rather than the progression of time, however, the progression of time may still be an important factor in the approach. The chronological approach organizes materials or information according to when they were published or they occurred. As part of the methodology, the researcher used both the primary and secondary sources for the paper. The ancient sources were Livy, Polybius, Plutarch and Appian accounts. The modern sources are Champion, Cary and Scullard, Harris, Dorey and Dudley, *inter alia*.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The early republican period spans from 510 B.C. to 272 B.C. and our fullest source for this period is Livy. His approach was supposedly to write history not based on events or partisan politics but on human character. He accepted the tradition, dating Aristotle and to Thucydides, which explained historical events by the character of the person involved (Livy 1960). Instead of a barren list of unconnected events, Livy constructs a series of moral episodes which are designed to bring out the character of the leading figures because to him, these moral episodes made or unmade Rome. It is to be noted that many scholarly works have not been done on the motives of imperialism in early Republican era in that more attention is rather focused on most of the late

republican wars and the imperial reasons behind them, (probably) because most of the earlier wars fought by Rome were not large-scale and can only be described as inter-tribal wars.

The early republican period was characterized by Roman Wars with their neighbouring tribes such as the Latin and Etruscan cities as well as the nearby mountain tribesmen, who supplemented their pastoral economy with raiding of the fertile lowlands (Champion 2004). There were also sporadic marauding invasions of Celtic peoples that kept Romans in constant fear. To them, one of the significant events in this period was the ten-year long siege and conquest of the nearby Etruscan city of Veii, which gave the Romans control of the Tiber River (Champion 2004). This instance makes one to understand the Roman determination to control the nations around her. Mommsen (1895), Frank (1925), and Holleaux (1921) view Roman imperialism fundamentally as a defensive mechanism. They deny that Roman imperialism had any economic motives. To them, the principal factor which led Romans to war was the fear of powerful neighbors. In their own words 'No such motives can be seen on the whole in Roman policy': 'Strange as it may seem to a generation nourished on Marx, Rome sought no major economic benefits'; 'the whole myth of economic motives in Rome's foreign policy at this time is a fragment of modern anachronism based on ancient anachronism' (Harris 2005).

Badian (1968) also denies that desire for economic gain, whether public or private, was a motive that influenced Roman decision to go to war. The proponents of the idea that no economic motive exist for Roman imperialism are dismissed as having imposed doctrinaire views of imperialism on a set of facts that they do not fit. Moreover, Badian (1968) argues that Roman ideas of glory, virtue, honor and deference and hegemonial over lordship of weaker states are all far more important than crass economic drives in understanding Roman imperialism. Harris, however, disagrees with Badian and points out that our ancient sources are for the most part apologetic, and therefore serve to conceal the Roman motive for embarking on the various wars (2004). He acknowledges that economic or commercial motives were of slight interest to Rome in her imperial quest in this period, but stresses however that it will be totally wrong to put aside the fact that Rome's desire for economic advantages shaped the formulation of foreign policy. According to Frank's (1925), Roman expansion gradually became less aggressive and politically motivated in the early republican era as compared to the mid and the late republican era. Wars in this era were inter-tribal whereby they lasted for shorter periods and were less brutish and irregular. However, military services during this early republican period were primarily voluntary.

Not all scholars regard imperialism in the early republican era as merely defensive; as the defensive school of thought would want us to believe. Cary and Scullard are examples of such scholars. In (1975) on the Pyrrhic Wars, they asserted that it was Rome who attacked Tarentum and the latter pleaded with Pyrrhus for help. Thus, Rome's aggressiveness inspired the war. 'Pyrrhus came to Italy on behalf of the Greek city of Tarentum, the forces of which he took command and subsequently defeated the Romans twice before being driven off' (Cary and Scullard 1975). Proponents of the defensive imperialist theory often regard the eventual defeat of Pyrrhus as the Romans defending themselves from foreign invasion, but according to Plutarch,

Pyrrhus came to Italy at the behest of the Tarentines to assist them against the Romans with whom they had been fighting for some time (1864). Since the battles with Pyrrhus were the direct result of a peninsular war between Rome and Tarentum, it cannot truthfully be described as a foreign invasion on Pyrrhus part. Pyrrhus was invited by Tarentum; he came not as an invader but as an ally, much the way the Romans would in the case of the Greek cities in their disagreements with Carthage not long after. Pyrrhus had a long and relatively successful military career, and eventually died fighting at Argos in Greece, but his exploits in Macedonia, Sicily and Greece are not relevant to the subject of this paper except to establish just how severe a threat he was to Roman interests. The Romans were at one point ready to enter into treaty with Pyrrhus, but eventually refused due to the efforts of one old senator. Pyrrhus had insisted in his treaty offer that Rome leave Tarentum and Rome's response was that he must leave Italy before they would enter into treaty with him (Cary and Scullard 1975). The Roman insistence that she must be allowed to continue her war of conquest against Tarentum is grim to interpret as defensive.

Cary and Scullard (1975) however agree with other scholars that by the year 510 B.C. Rome had established a republic which gradually came to control all Italy. This process in their view was not achieved by military conquest alone (1975). Roman religious law (*ius fetiale*) did not countenance wars of aggression designed to gain new territory, but in alliance with neighbouring Latin cities, Rome did not hesitate to hit back when the hill tribes of central Italy began to press down against the more fertile plain of Latium. They thus indirectly agree to the argument that Rome's imperialism for most wars was ostensibly defensive. They explain that Roman interest extended throughout central Italy and ultimately throughout the peninsula very slowly, partly by accident and partly by design so that by 272 B.C. Rome had become the dominant political and military power.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This paper recounts the major wars as well as discussions on the imperial motives that inspired those wars within the period with emphasis on the Samnite and the Pyrrhic Wars. It is imperative, however, to examine the motives of the early republican inter-tribal wars fought within Latium. Most scholars have swept aside those wars with the view that they were sporadic, unplanned, short-lived and somehow disorganized. Rome had no professional military service during this period. Rome fought so many wars with the Volscians, Veientes, Aequians, the Latins, the Sabine Highlanders, and all the tribes around them. These were, however, not major wars as compared to the later wars with the Samnites and King Pyrrhus of Epirus. Roman's military activity in the period was confined to Italy whereby her warfare had an annual rhythm. For the most part it was restricted to the summer campaigning season. An army was levied, marched out to fight for a few months, and then returned to be discharged. The command was normally held by the chief magistrates of the state. They sometimes campaigned in separately but often they combined their forces. Rome nonetheless fought these tribes with imperial interest relevant to the paper.

Livy gives a vivid description after Roman victory. Commanders who brought home plunder after victory to boost the state's resources had their 'reputation greatly enhanced' (Champion 2004). In the early republican wars Rome benefited from plunder or booty. For example after the



siege and conquest of the Etruscan city of Veii in 406 B.C. to 396 B.C. Livy recount that ‘the Romans scattered, with the dictator’s permission, in quest of booty’ and ‘when this (booty) was brought before him, and he saw that it was considerably larger and of greater value than he had hoped or thought, he reportedly raised his hands to heaven and prayed that if any god or man deemed his good fortune and that of the Roman people to be excessive, it might be granted him to appease that envy with the least harm to his own private interests and to the public warfare of the Roman people’(5.21.11-22.8). Thus booty or plunder motivated the Romans to some extent, hence the decision to go to war. It should also be noted that Rome benefited from slaves acquired through these wars. Rome did not necessarily decide to go to war to acquire slaves but what victory brought were surviving prisoners who were ransomed or sold into slavery. These slaves provided cheap labour to the Roman aristocrats who acquired them (Cowell 1967). While some used them for domestic reasons, other households who bought slaves used them for agricultural purposes (as cheap labour on aristocratic farms). Again, Rome did embark on wars to gain opportunities and access to trade posts. This might not have necessarily informed formulating foreign policies. However, the paper cannot deny that certain territories once gained would offer trading opportunities to them. The defeat of the Veientes during the consulship of Verginius and Servilius offered Rome opportunity to trade with Campania. Rome imported grain (Cary and Scullard 1975). Rome thus benefited economically from the early republican wars.

One of the duties of a state is to defend itself against external aggression or invasion. States, in their bid to protect their own territories, resort to wars of conquest and signing of treaties. Rome was no exception to this defensive policy since her neighbours (Italian people) were dangerous to Rome. In the early republican days, almost ninety percent of wars Rome fought with the Italian tribes were either to defend Rome or her allies (Brunt 1971). Indeed earlier scholars such as Mommsen (1895), Frank (1925) and Holleaux (1921), and recent ones such as Badian (1968) and Jackson (1956) view Roman imperialism as simply defensive. Thus Rome responded to wars that were forced upon her. Rome engaged in such wars with the view of defending herself from external aggression. This research doubts the theory of defensive thinking was the dominant reason for Roman Italian Wars since most of the campaigns were fought outside the territory of Rome. Besides in the early republican era, Rome was busy with internal class struggles (between the Patricians and Plebeians) to be much interested in offensive attacks, whereby her involvements were basically to defend an ally or attempt to repel an invasion. Livy’s narrations point out that self-defense were the reason to respond to the invasions of the Volscians, Aequians, Veientes, Samnites and the Etruscans (1960). Wars within the period, though sporadic and unorganized was also motivated by the need to earn personal glory and huge reputation. The grand celebrations that proceeded war victory and the reputation accorded commanders and soldiers for their bravery did entice generations to go to war at the least of provocation, though the Romans had the policy of *ius fetiale* and *ius bellum*.

Success in war was the most glorious kind of achievement by which one could demonstrate his prowess. The Romans cherished bravery, military achievements, fame, glory and honour. The typical patrician measured his conduct by the standards of his ancestors hoping by his own achievement to add to their honour, fame and glory (Ackah 2010). Hence, he

kept the images or portraits of his ancestors in the household and displayed them at funerals as examples and witnesses to stimulate the young to imitate their ancestors. The need for fame, glory and honour motivated individuals' decision to join the army. Livy further asserted that those who came home with victory and plunder had their 'reputation greatly enhanced' (1960). In view of this, Rome with alacrity, responded to war invitations and Rome will also sometimes initiated attacks on other territories that notwithstanding the consequences of their actions in that war.

The motive of hatred, enmity and rivalry that existed between Rome and her neighbours sparked off some of the wars (Livy 1960). For instance, the wars between Rome and the Italian tribes were sometimes based on rivalry. Most of the neighbours were considered as enemies and would attack in the least provocation. In this regard the treaties signed by them were sometimes broken with impunity leading to confrontations. The rivalry was also due to ideological differences. Rome, after the overthrow of kingship, hated monarchy in every form. Some of her neighbours, on the other hand, practiced kingship and had wanted to restore monarchy back to Rome. Wars with Lars Porsena, an Etruscan king who harboured the Tarquinii dynasty and offered help in bid to reclaim their throne authenticate the argument. Livy writes 'the coming of peace elsewhere found Rome and Veii fearing each other with such mutual hatred and ferocity that none could doubt but that defeat for either would mean extinction' (1960). The hatred that existed between the tribes also provoked so many of the unplanned wars. The level of the hatred was such that alliances were formed by them just to undo one another (Livy 1960). Mutual hatred that existed between the Romans and the Volscians, Aequians, Veientes, Sabines among others partly explains these several wars fought between them.

Roman foreign policy within the period 510 B.C. and 272 B.C. were partly driven by the need to assert and maintain Roman superiority and to inspire awe and fear in the enemy. So if this image were challenged by invasion, defeat or revolt, the Romans reasserted it with the maximum possible brutality and ferocity. This explains why the Aequians after a truce would not even concede defeat easily in a war against Rome. 'But they were no more inclined to admit defeat: on the contrary the rank and file abused their commanders for their folly in risking an action in the field' (Livy 1960). Further, the Aequians in one of their battles with Rome during the consulship of Titus Aemilius and Quintus Fabius attacked Rome and were defeated. Aequi admitted defeat and asked for a truce which was granted. However, 'they promptly broke it by a sudden raid into Latium' sparking off another tension. This clearly indicates feeling of superiority such that no one would easily 'back down' (Cary and Scullard 1975). In fact, none of her neighbors also considered themselves inferior to Rome. Therefore, Roman Wars were then perceived to be wars of proven superiority.

### **The First Samnite War (343BC-341 BC)**

For centuries the Sabellian highlanders of the Apennines had struggled to force their way into the plains between the hills and the Mediterranean, where the Etruscans and the people of Latium had held them in check. However, for the past hundred years the direction of their expansion had been not towards Latium but east and south-east. They had begun to stream into Campania where they

had become accustomed to a more civilized life, and in turn had become less warlike and ill-fitted to cope with their kinsmen of the hills. In the middle of the fourth century B.C., the most powerful group of the highlanders, the confederated Samnites, were swarming down upon their civilized precursors in Campania. Farther east and south, Lucanians and Bruttians were pressing upon the Greek colonies of *Magna Graecia*. The Samnite warrior-herdsmen from nearby hills wished to use the grasslands of the plains for their animals, land that the plainspeople had fenced. The Greeks appealed for help to Epirus, those on the plains (the Campanians) appealed to Rome and Rome came to their rescue. Roman envoys went to leaders among the hillpeople for discussions and were boorishly treated. War between Rome and the Samnites hillpeople followed. The first Samnite War was brief and lasted for two years (343-341 B.C.) whereby it was marked by Roman victories in the field and by a mutiny on the part of the soldiery, which was suppressed by the military strategist and the distinguished dictator Marcus. The war ended with a hasty peace as the Romans deserted the Campanians to put down a revolt by their Latin allies (Childe 1964). The members of the Latin league had been forced into the Samnite Wars and they resented their dependence on Rome. The first Samnite War resulted in Roman acquisition of the rich land of Campania with its capital of Capua. Campania now became firmly attached to Rome, whereby it was granted Roman citizenship without the right to vote in Rome. Campania therefore became a major addition to Rome's strength and manpower (Gordon, [www.militaryonline.com](http://www.militaryonline.com), 2005).

### **Motives for the First Samnite War**

Ally and non-ally groupings are always formed by states in relation to issues that border on international conflicts and wars (Brunt 1971). Whereas some states may decide to heed the call for intervention by other powerful states in crises or war with other nations, some may decide to mind their own business provided such conflicts do not mingle with its internal affairs. States call on the support of their allies provided they are assured of their support. Situations may therefore arise in international scenes that require military action from other states. Some may respond to such a military help while others may decide to take a neutral or non-ally stand. The call by Campania for Rome assistance was not new to international politics then. It appears that the study will probably be correct to state that the Campanians, when fighting over the town of Capua with the Samnites, allied themselves to Rome in order to utilize her might to settle the quarrel. If so, this may then have been the first of many instances in which Rome went to war after being invited into an alliance by a weaker state already at war. Once invited, Rome absorbed the allied state after defeating the adversary. Consequently, Campania somehow became firmly attached to Rome. It may have been granted Roman citizenship without the right to vote in Rome. It also became a major addition to Rome's strength and manpower. Rome's response to Samnites invasion of Campania was to honour an invitation by people in trouble (Cary and Scullard 1975).

Thus it is obvious that the Capuans sought to play off the Romans against their former allies (Samnites). Notwithstanding their recent treaty, the Romans opened hostilities against the Samnites on behalf of a state to which they have no previous political ties. In addition to the gain of territory, Cary and Scullard write that the Romans adopted the manipular military formation of the Samnites as a result of their early successes (1975). This was a flexible system that allowed great maneuverability on all sorts of terrain and conditions. This system was in use throughout



the entire republican epoch and later evolved into the cohort formation that would conquer Europe. Roman willingness to learn new military strategies indicates her readiness to embark on expansionist policy. Rome of course did not only consider honoring the invitation for no other reason than to protect her territory from a powerful neighbour who was on a conquering spree. The Samnites did attack and conquered the people of the plains and were on the verge of defeating and annexing Campania. Rome's failure to respond, it might have been thought and feared, could lead to the defeat of Campania and subsequent attack on Rome itself by the Samnites (people who were powerful in arms and resources and were in for expansion).

The first Samnite War might also have been fought on the issue of superiority. Rome could not allow her hard won reputation destroyed by the Samnites who were another emerging power in the central Italian peninsula. Rome did want to prove her superiority that she was better than the Samnites, Rome wanted to prove that Campania, relying on her and trusting her help and deliverance, was not a coincidence. Again Rome could not stand the possibility of arrival powerful neighbours who would match her superiority. The Romans felt insulted by the boorish treatment meted to their envoy by the Samnites. Rome had sent envoys to Samnium for discussion and they were insolently treated and humiliated. During these periods diplomacy was characterized by sending emissaries to another state for discussions. This could be for a truce, trade links or alliance among others. Treating Roman envoys dismally meant disregard and contempt. Rome could not accept that hence the outbreak of war. Any state with national pride would not accept such a situation. Rome thus got angry with the issue and responded.

### **The Second Samnite War**

The Romans expanded into the territory of the Aurunci and Sidicini to the south of the Volsci after the end of the Latin War in the 330's B.C. They also tried to reassert control of Campania by moving south across the Liris River. In 328 B.C., the Romans, posted colonies at Fregellae and at Cales in 334 B.C. (Cary and Scullard 1975). The Samnites found this to be an unacceptable intrusion by Rome but were too pre-occupied to respond immediately. They were involved in a conflict with the Greek colony of Tarentum and its ally, King Alexander of Epirus. At the end of this war in 331 B.C., the Samnites decided to deal with the reality of Roman expansion. The Romans claimed that the Samnites were encouraging the people of Neapolis to expand into the territories of Campania and necessitated the creation of colonies in disputed areas. The Samnites did send troops to garrison Neapolis (modern day Naples). However, people of the plain sought Rome's assistance and Rome went to war against the Samnites. In 327 B.C., a Roman army arrived and threw out the Samnite garrison (Cary and Scullard 1975). It is obvious that the Romans' purpose in attacking Naples in 327 B.C. was to resist the spread of Samnite power. Initially the war went clearly in favour of Rome, prompting Samnium to sue for peace in 321 B.C. The over-confident Romans offered terms that were so lopsided that the Samnites rejected them, and the war continued. While seemingly in dire straits, the Samnites learned to use their mountainous terrain to their advantage and turn the tides. In 321 B.C., the two consuls for that year advanced a Roman army deeper into Samnite territory. The territorially advantaged Samnites, at what would become the Battle of the *Caudine Forks*; soon trapped the Romans in a mountain pass (Ackah 2010). Finding themselves completely

surrounded and faced with annihilation, the Romans capitulated and were forced to march out *sub iugum* (under the yoke). The Romans were forced to give up their spears and marched under them, a sign of ultimate battlefield humiliation (Livy 1960). Six hundred equites had to be handed over as hostages and the Romans had to pledge a five-year treaty while also giving up her colonies at Fregellae and Cales (Livy 1960). Later, Roman historians such as Frank tried to claim that these terms were rejected, but it is quite clear that operations against Samnium ceased until 316 B.C. (1925). The final decade of the fourth century was the culmination of resistance to Roman domination by several neighbours. The Aequi and Hernici both revolted and joined the Samnites. Several other previously unmolested tribes, the Marsi, Marrucini, Paeligni, Frentani and Vestinians also joined Samnium against Rome. Their efforts were too late to stop the spread of Roman expansion and in 305 B.C. Roman victory led the Paeligni and Hernici to surrender (Heitland 1909). In 304 B.C. the Aequi were defeated and in the same year the Samnites sued for peace, and all the other tribes of central Italy did make alliances with Rome within another two years. Rome thus conquered central Italy in order to protect herself from military cooperation by the Samnites, Etruscans, and Veians *sinter alia*. The Samnites were still at hand on the side of Rome. Conflict would however be renewed within the decade.

#### **Imperial Motive for Second Samnite War**

The imperial motive for the second Samnite War was to establish and consolidate Roman power within the central Italian region. This is clearly evident in their actions following the end of the first Samnite War. After the end of the Latin War in the 330's B.C., the Romans expanded into the territory of the Aurunci and Sidicini to the south of Volsci (Cary and Scullard 1975:93). They also attempted to reassert control of Campania by moving south across the Liris River. In 328 B.C. the Romans, clearly looking for another fight with Samnium, established a colony at Fregellae on the Liris and another at Cales earlier in 332 B.C. (Frank 1925). The Samnites found this to be an unacceptable intrusion by Rome and were threatened, but were too preoccupied to respond immediately. They were involved in a conflict with the Greek colony of Tarentum and its ally, king Alexander of Epirus. At the end of this war in 331 B.C. the Samnites were free to deal with the reality of Roman expansion. The Romans had claimed that the Samnites were encouraging the people of Neapolis to expand into the territories of Campania and necessitated the creation of colonies in disputed areas. The Samnites in response, sent troops to garrison Neapolis (modern day Naples), and the elite class called on Rome for help. In 327 B.C., a Roman army arrived and threw out the Samnite garrison setting off the second Samnite War. The effort by Rome to establish colonies on disputed areas meant Rome was looking for an opportunity to create conflict and possibly expand and consolidate her power within the Italian region. In 318 B.C. Rome absorbed two more regional tribes, the Oufentina at the south of Volsci territory and the Falerna at the north of Capua. They also surrounded the Samnites with Roman allies by attacking Apulia and Lucania to the east and south of Samnium (Cary and Scullard 1975). Several tribes took allied status with Rome. During the period 334-295 B.C. Rome founded thirteen colonies against the Samnites and created six new tribes in annexed territory.

During the last years of the war, the Romans also extended their power into north Etruria and Umbria. Roman military engagements with the Samnites were to unify tribes under Roman rule. Rome might have possibly engaged the Samnites with the motive of unifying Italian region

should they succeed in winning the war. Rome sought to unify the whole Italian Peninsula under Roman authority. This probably explains why alliances with other tribes were made by Rome. When the Samnites responded to Roman intrusion by sending troops to garrison Neapolis, the elites appealed to the Romans for assistance (Heitland 1909). The swift response given by Rome in the form of Roman army immediately arriving in Neapolis and subsequent overthrow of the Samnites influence indicates her readiness to form colonies, allies, gain control, expand and unify Italy under Roman domination.

Rome was simply honoring an invitation by one of the allies. In 327 B.C. war broke out again between Samnite hill people and those on Campania's plain. The Samnites established a garrison in Naples- a city inhabited by Greeks (Cary and Scullard 1975). Again the people of the plain sought Rome's assistance and Rome went to war against the Samnites. The Samnites were soon confronted in the Middle Liris Valley, sparking the second Samnite War which lasted twenty years and was not an easily defensive venture for Rome. Honouring such an invitation meant Rome would have unlimited access to Naples and other territories should they succeed in winning the war. It has been asserted that the Roman's purpose in attacking Naples in 327 B.C. was to resist the spread of the Samnite power (Dion. Halicarnassus 15). Rome probably sought to resist and control Samnite power in order to consolidate her ascendancy in Latium and also establish her supremacy. Again the Samnites were hostile to Rome. Thus the Romans established their supremacy by defeating the Samnite which led to the capture of central Italy in order to protect herself from military cooperation by the Etruscans *inter alia*. Cary and Scullard often describe the Samnite Wars as largely the result of Samnite pressure on Rome (1975). It is however very doubtful whether Etruscans and Samnite, not the most natural allies, joined forces on any previous occasion.

### **The Third Samnite War**

According to Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the third Samnite War originated with a Samnite attack on the Lucanians (Livy 1960; Dionysius 1767). Unable to resist, the Lucanians sent ambassadors and hostages to Rome to look for an alliance. The Romans decided to accept the alliance offer and sent an embassy to the Samnites to evacuate Lucania but the Samnites refused and the war began. In Dionysius' opinion the true cause of the war was not Roman compassion for the wronged, but fear of the strength the Samnites would gain if they subdued the Lucanians (Hallicanasus 1767). Rome deliberately sought a new war with Samnium by allying with the enemies of Samnite. The war did start near Neapolis where possession of the plains of Campania had been a constant source of conflict. The threat to Rome was very real in that Rome had to face newly coordinated enemies from all sides, the Samnites to the south and east, and the Etruscans and the Gaul's to the north. Until then, Rome had mostly been able to stand against single enemies but unification of these old foes made the challenge more difficult.

### **Imperial Motives for the Third Samnite War**

In order to consolidate and unify the Italian region, Rome had to quell the threat from the Samnites who were hindering Rome's ambitions. The Samnites felt they needed to intervene to stop the spread of Roman power. It was a desperate attempt of the Samnites to remain

independent and was able to convince Rome's old enemies to join against them once again. Frank writes that the Etruscans, the Umbrians, the Gauls and other regional tribes joined arms with Samnium to check Rome's ever increasing regional authority (1925). Indeed during the interwar years (304-299 B.C), the Roman republic continued to expand power into central Italy. The Aequi were crushed in a short campaign in 304 B.C. The neighbouring tribes of the Abruzzi, the Marsi, Paeliquii, Marrucini and the Frentani concluded permanent treaties of alliance with Rome that same year and the Vestini in 302 B.C. Rome consolidated these gains by founding colonies at Forth Alba, Fucens and Carseoli (Frank 1925). The Samnites felt threatened as Rome gradually expanded. They therefore decided to frustrate Roman expansionist ambition by attacking one of Rome's allies, the Lucanians to draw her attention. It is no wonder that the third Samnite War represent the first attempt by the people of Italy to unite against Rome as the Samnites joined forces with the Etruscans, Umbrian's and the Gaul's to the north (Dionysius 1767).

Another imperial motive was to honour invitation by an ally who badly needed Roman help. The Samnites in their bid to quell the expansion of Rome and to gain more strength for future confrontation with Rome launched an attack on the Lucanians (Dionysius 1767). Unable to resist, the Lucanians sent ambassadors and hostages to Rome to plead for an alliance. The Romans accepted the alliance offer and sent *fetiales* to insist the Samnites evacuate Lucania, the Samnites refused and the war began (Livy 1960). Honouring such an invitation offered the Romans the opportunity to conquer and gain more territories. Harris writes that Rome emerged dominating the entire Italian peninsula except for the Greek cities in Italy's extreme south and the Po Valley (1979). Frank avers that fear might have been the imperial motive that inspired the third Samnite War (1925). The Samnites had given the Romans a nightmare within the first two Samnite Wars. During the first half of the second Samnite War, Rome suffered serious defeats but the second half saw Rome's recovery, reorganization and ultimate victory. With such bitter struggle, Rome feared that if the Samnites gained control over Lucania, the latter would be in a better position and condition to attack Rome. In Dionysius' opinion the true cause of the war was not Rome compassion of the wronged but the fear of the strength 'the Samnites would gain if they subdued the Lucanians' (1767). Rome sought a new war with Samnium by allying with her enemies to allay their fear of her possible rise (Dudley 1975). It was therefore a war to allay the fear of Roman interests and security. This confirms Mommsen's assertion that Roman Wars were wars of protection (1895:49).

This paper further agrees that the Samnite Wars were to serve both offensive and defensive purposes. Rome wanted to consolidate her power within central Italy, unify the region, punish the wrong and defend the cause of the wronged.

### **Conclusion on the Samnite Wars**

Many scholars regard Roman Wars within the early republican era as mere defensive. Hence the Samnite Wars and the Pyrrhic Wars which characterize the period are wars for Rome's defense. Mommsen, Frank and Holleaux share this assertion. There is more to the motives for the wars than purely defensive. The first Samnite Wars were attempts by Rome to consolidate her power within the central Italian region and unify the whole region under Roman confederacy. Rome also benefited through invitation to gain more allies. It was not always to fight and defend

the course of the wronged but sometimes the motives were clothed in fear, theneed to expand and economic benefit. Rome's response to the Lucanians appeal for assistance was due to fear of Samnium gaining more strength should they succeed against the Lucanians(Dionysius 1767).

### **The War with Pyrrhus of Epirus**

The Lucanians and Bruttians in the early third century B.C., continued attacks on the Greek colonies and in 283 B.C. the Greek colonies appealed to the regional power, being Rome for help. The most influential city of *Magna Graecia* was Tarentum. Its position in south eastern Italy made it an important hub for Mediterranean Sea trade and also isolated it from Roman naval activity on the Tyrrhenian Sea, between Rome and the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. Due to its position and relationship with Greece, Tarentum possessed the most powerful navy of any Italian city at the time and a standing treaty with Rome had been in place since 302 B.C. This treaty denied access of Roman fleets into the bay of Tarentum (in Italy's heel), assuring the autonomy of the Greek navy (Holleaux 1921). Heeding the call for aid from city-states such as Locri, Rhegium, Croton and Thurii against the Lucanians, Rome sent troops in support of, by way of the sea to garrison the town of Thurii in 282 B.C. Despite the call for aid, Tarentum considered Rome's action as a breach of the treaty as well as a hostile act of aggression. Tarentum's immediate reaction was to sink the Roman fleet and expel the garrison from Thurii. In response, the Roman senate sent an embassy to Tarentum under I. Postumius Megellus to demand amends. During the exchange the Romans appeared to have been insulted (a recurring theme in the histories of Livy and Polybius to justify Roman aggression) and Rome declared war (Polybius 1966). Tarentum, unable to defuse the situation mustered her own army and began creating trouble among the Greek cities and other Roman interests. Fearing Roman retaliation, Tarentum soon turned to king Pyrrhus of Epirus for assistance. It seems the motives for the Romans and the Tarentines are uncertain. The Romanships were possibly on an innocent mission of showing the flag or they may have intended to lend moral (or even physical) support to the pro-Roman oligarchs in Tarentum.

Using his own forces and those pledged from other regional Greek kings, on the understanding that they would be used abroad, Pyrrhus took up the invitation from Tarentum and sailed across the Adriatic. In 280 B.C., the Epirotes landed in Italy with twenty-five thousand men including three thousand cavalry and two thousand archers. Also shocking to the Romans, Pyrrhus brought twenty war trained elephants, the first time the Italian people had seen such a beast. Knowing the devastation they had caused among the Persians under Alexander, Pyrrhus thought that the Italian invasion was the perfect opportunity to emulate that success (Plutarch 1864:22). The Romans, however, had no intention of giving up their regional authority and prepared to fight. Rome was encouraged by the surrounding Greek cities, who expressed no interest in Pyrrhus' interference (Plutarch 1864).

The first engagement of the war took place at the small coastal town of Heraclea. The Romans under Publius Laverius Laevinius drove into Lucanian territory with fifty thousand men to prevent Heraclea from joining Pyrrhus. When the battle was joined the match was fairly evenly fought. The Epirotes eventually used their elephants to drive through the Roman lines creating panic and driving cavalry back upon its own troops. The Pyrrhic forces advanced and the Roman



army was almost destroyed save for the timely intervention of a wounded elephant that caused panic among the others. The elephants turned on Pyrrhus' own troops and he was forced to call off the pursuit of the Romans to preserve his own army. In the end, the Romans lost between seven thousand and fifteen thousand men but then the Epirotes also lost between four thousand and thirteen thousand men (Cary and Scullard 1975). The second battle took place at Asculum. At the end Rome gained victory over Pyrrhus who had to return home empty without bulk of his army or gains in Italy and having also lost his holdings in Sicily (Plutarch 1864).

This study agrees with the defensive imperialists that, the war with Pyrrhus of Epirus by the Romans is based on defense. Although Pyrrhus came as an ally and not an invader, the Romans were determined to protect their frontiers by putting up a strong resistance in order to maintain their regional power and to protect their sovereignty.

### **Motives for Pyrrhus of Epirus War**

On the imperial motives it can be argued that the two states that sparked the war might have been misinformed by the action of each other. The people of Tarentum were misinformed about the presence of Roman warships on her territorial waters (Cary and Scullard 1975). They were misinformed about Roman imminent attacks on her. Rome's reaction was due to a response of a perceived attack. Rome resorted to violence based on false alarm and failure to even dialogue. This broke her treaty with Tarentum with the view of defending an ally which portrayed her intentions and disregard for her which brought about the war. More so, Rome and Tarentum may have misunderstood each other's intention. Tarentum was just defending her territory against external aggression. Rome, however, was using Tarentum's territory not to attack her but to aid a different ally who was in difficulty with another state. Besides Rome engaged in the Pyrrhic War to defend her territory against external aggression from King Pyrrhus who saw himself as another Alexander the Great and was embarking on an expansionist policy. Pyrrhus anxiously looked to Italy for fame, prestige and glory.

Rome engaged in the Pyrrhic War to defend herself against external aggression from King Pyrrhus who was embarking on an expansionist policy. Pyrrhus anxiously looked to Italy for expansion and glory (Plutarch 1767). The fertile soil of Sicily rather than Italy was probably the real objective but the excuse to do battle with the fledgling power of Rome was too good to pass up (Plutarch 1767).

Certain factors might have influenced the decision of Pyrrhus to honour the invitation of Tarentum and attack Rome. The Epirotes maintained the most modern and well equipped armies of the time and were far more advanced than their Roman counterparts. Besides, Pyrrhus realized he could count on the support of those Roman enemies and had hoped that his invasion would lead to rebellion from them (Latins). Using his own forces and that pledge from other regional Greek Kings on the understanding that they would be used abroad, Pyrrhus took up the challenge from Tarentum and sailed across the Adriatic in 280 B.C. The Epirotes landed in Italy with

twenty-five thousand men including three thousand cavalry and two thousand archers. Also shocking to the Romans, Pyrrhus brought twenty war elephants, the first time that the Italian people had seen such a beast (Plutarch 1864). Rome had to defend her territories hence the starting of the war in a small coastal town of Heraclea. Rome lost the first two confrontations (The one at Heraclea losing over seven thousand men and that of the Battle of Asculum) and her decision to negotiate an alliance with Carthage who had reason to be concerned over Pyrrhus' activities in Sicily showed her determination to defend her territories at all cost (Cary and Scullard 1975). The involvement of the Carthaginians helped the course of Rome greatly who later chalked success and subsequently led to the defeat of Pyrrhus. It is evident that, Roman decision to honour invitation sparked the war between the two states. With the conclusion of the Samnite Wars, Rome consolidated her position as master of central Italy. With her rising power in Italian Peninsula, conflict with the Greek city-states of southern Italy was inevitable.

The Lucanians and the Bruttians in the early third century B.C. continued attacks on these Greek colonies and in 283 B.C. the Greek colonies appealed to the Roman regional power for help. Heeding the call for aid from regional city states, Rome sent troops in support by way of sea to garrison the town of Thurii in 282 B.C. They passed through the territorial waters of Tarentum a breach to an initial standing treaty with Rome which had been in place since 302 B.C. (Frank 1925). The people of Tarentum acted on false alarm that Rome was launching an attack and called for the assistance of King Pyrrhus. Rome was however honouring an invitation to help allies who needed Roman protection and support. The war therefore was sparked by Rome's decision to honour an invitation. Scholars such as Livy and Polybius are of the view that the Pyrrhic War was basically defensive. Rome was just protecting herself against external aggression (1960). Mommsen, Frank and Holleaux share the same view.

This paper however agrees with such conclusion, that it was Pyrrhus who specifically marched on Italy to fight Rome. Failure on the part of Rome to even accept peace terms offered by Pyrrhus after the latter won two major Battles of Heraclea and Asculum, unless Pyrrhus moved out of Italy showed her readiness to defend her territories through Roman aggrandizement. There is the possibility that Rome might have harbored offensive motive. Rome was gaining grounds in Italy and had mastered central Italy. Having gained such control, attention shifted to southern part where most Greek city-states were situated. Rome formed alliances with some of them. Conflicts with those who hated Roman dominance became inevitable hence the Pyrrhic War. The refusal by Rome to even accept peaceful terms offered by Pyrrhus after his costly victories at the Battle of Asculum and Roman demand to only accept after Pyrrhus leaves Italy indicates her readiness to control Italy without external influence. Above all, the advice of Appius Claudius, a former consul and commissioner of the Appian Way urged Rome to refuse the simple terms of independence for Tarentum and the southern Greek cities, shows Roman unwillingness to allow any secession.

Roman decision to negotiate alliance with an outsider- Carthage (who was outside the Italian region and across the Mediterranean) to unite and fight Pyrrhus meant her seriousness in stopping Pyrrhus from frustrating Roman ambitions and aims. The alliance was so deep and well instituted that attempts by Pyrrhus to turn Rome and Carthage against one another failed, finding rather himself the target of both states' enmity. Thus, the war with Pyrrhus brought home to the Romans the importance of the region of Sicily to the security of Rome.

In effect, this paper agrees with scholars that the Pyrrhic Wars were wars of defense. Rome was attacked by King Pyrrhus of Epirus and Rome needed to defend her territories and that of her allies with whom she had military alliances. The cause of the war is shrouded in misinformation and misinterpretation by actors in the war. Tarentum was misinformed by the presence of Roman fleets on her territorial waters and regarded the acts as that of aggression against her and therefore declared war. Tarentum did not accept Roman explanations indicating a clear mistrust of Roman intentions. The Pyrrhic War according to Gruen was an offensive war to expand Roman territories (2004).

In conclusion, as much as economic ambitions of most Romans were limited to land, the wars fought by the Romans during the early republican was mainly based on defense. However, this paper doubts that defense was the dominant reason for the early republican wars since most of the wars were fought outside the territory of Rome. It is obvious that most Roman campaigns were done on the enemy soil. Above all, most of the wars fought during this era were regarded by the senate as unavoidable work to suppress the disobedient and to repel invaders.

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