

WHEN MEN WERE MEN

*Masculinity, power and identity in
classical antiquity*

Edited by
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- 23 The *locus classicus* is the case of Valentine in Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Act 4, Scene 1. Compare also Don José in Prosper Mérimée and Bizet, (H)ernani in Victor Hugo and Verdi (interestingly transformed into a real soldier in Shaw's *Arms and the Man*), the robber leaders in Schiller and Verdi, etc.
- 24 Very much as Newman Noggs retires with Nicholas and Madeleine at the end of *Nicholas Nickleby*.
- 25 Tac. *Ann.* 14. 30; Webster 1980, 74–5.
- 26 The point is well made by Hartog 1980 in his discussion of Herodotos' account of Skythian customs.
- 27 4. 62.
- 28 See, for example, Henrichs 1970.
- 29 Winkler 1980. Compare Arens 1979, Sanday 1986.
- 30 Easterling and Muir 1985, 17.
- 31 If not an 'imperium in imperio'. Compare Augustine's comments on banditry: 'When justice is removed, what are kingdoms, but large bandit bands; and what are bandit bands but small kingdoms?' (*De Civitate Dei* 4. 4).
- 32 On the concept 'noble robber', see Hobsbawm 1972, Chapter 3.
- 33 For an explicit statement of the punishment, see Paulus, *Sententiae*, 5. 21.
- 34 Brownmiller 1975 suggests that monogamy was instituted as a contractual protection against rape for women: the woman surrendered her sexual autonomy in return for guaranteed possession by one partner only.
- 35 There is now an extensive literature on the *ephēbeia*. See Brelich 1969, Tazelaar 1967, Vidal-Naquet 1981/1986.
- 36 Unlike the successful reintegration into society of Daphnis and Chloe (Longus 4. 36–40).
- 37 Spartan youths were grouped in *agelai* (herds).
- 38 For example, *Codex Theodosianus* 1. 29. 8.
- 39 On Caesar's decorous death see Suetonius, *Iulius* 82. 2; Plut. *Caesar* 66.

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Arms and the man

Soldiers, masculinity and power in Republican and Imperial Rome

Richard Alston

In many Western societies, the male is seen as powerful, sometimes all-powerful, and is defined by his ability to wield power. In many cases, the power that is wielded is violent. Violence has been seen as a particularly male attribute and the usually legitimated violence offered by the soldier has often meant that soldiers have been represented as ideals of manhood. In modern Western society the role of the soldier has been somewhat marginalized, but violence has remained important in asserting masculinity in both public and private spheres, and a linkage between the male capacity for violence and capability of exercising other forms of social power is common. Women's access to social power, either violent or non-violent, has often been systematically restricted and women who have come to exercise any kind of social power have been seen as masculinized.¹ In British society and in many other Western societies, femininity has been associated with a lack of power, either physical or social, or at least an avoidance of obvious manipulation of power and a deference to male authority. Men, conversely, have been seen as temperamentally and physically suited to wield power.

Each society defines legitimate power, and the debate over the precise definitions and boundaries of legitimate authority is the essence of political discourse. In many societies these are matters of continual dispute and are therefore in continuous but varying degrees of flux. Since definitions of masculinity are so involved with power in many societies – and Roman society is no exception – it follows that there may be debate about and concerning the masculine (Brittan 1989, 3). It also follows that societies undergoing political or social change are likely to undergo a re-evaluation of masculinity. Tosh (1991) demonstrates, using the Benson family, how middle class views of masculinity in the late Victorian era changed in a generation, so that instead of asserting one's masculinity in the domestic environment, more and more the home became associated with the feminine and masculinity was affirmed away from the family.

Notions of masculinity are, of course, normative and, like notions of the

feminine, often highly oppressive. Any disruption or change in notions of masculinity may be very personally disruptive and, if replicated across a considerable swathe of society, could produce political strains (Clarke, N. 1991). Attempts to define masculinity in times of social and political change can be seen as part of a discourse redefining social patterns and asserting a particular political and social ideology. Such a context could make discussions of masculinity highly personally and politically charged. Images of the masculine may reflect political struggles and attempts by various groups to assert their interpretation of correct male behaviour. In a complex and changing society, there may be several competing strands in the discourse on masculinity, and although we may be able to identify dominant strands, contrary views may never completely be suppressed.

This paper seeks to examine conceptions of masculinity, and in particular the relationship between soldiers and masculinity, in just such a society: Rome in the period around the so-called Augustan revolution. This was a period when Rome's political and social structures were affected by her military success in conquering the Mediterranean lands. The benefits of empire and its costs had a considerable impact on many sectors of Roman society. This period also saw a political revolution in that the oligarchy that controlled Rome became increasingly threatened. The result of the political turmoil at the end of the Republic was the eventual ascendancy of the generals and the reintroduction of monarchy into Rome under Augustus. In such a period of transformation, we see a certain questioning of traditional values and some changes in the dominant ideology of masculinity.

Conceptions of man

Latin has two entirely different nouns which are both normally translated into English as 'man'. Santoro L'Hoir's analysis (1992, 1–22, 63) of the usage of '*vir*' and '*homo*' in Latin prose points to rather significant Republican distinctions between the two concepts. Both '*homo*' and '*vir*' may be ideologically neutral in certain contexts but, in general, '*vir*' appears to have been used for more aristocratic men, or men worthy of praise, while '*homo*' seems to be used more often as the generic term or in hostile contexts.² '*Vir*' is the root of the abstract noun '*virtus*', a term overworked in Augustan literature, which ancient historians and Latinists struggle to translate, using words such as 'virtue' or 'manliness'. The *vir* is of higher status than the *homo* and it is the *vir* with whom we should identify the ideal man.

The concept of a *vir* appears, as we should expect, to be related to power (*potestas*). The man who wielded legitimate power was a *vir*. The *vir* was also to be as far as possible independent of the power of others. The ideal man should be legally, financially and personally autonomous.³ Once that autonomy was threatened, either through incurring debts (a serious problem for the political classes of the late Republic), or by loss of the means for

economic survival, or by loss of political freedom, one's status as a *vir* was also threatened. In a slave society, it is perhaps unsurprising that stress was laid on autonomy as a defining characteristic of masculinity, and many have seen the fundamental division in Roman society, and in other ancient societies, as being between the free and the servile.⁴ The characteristics of the ideal man were not, however, simply negative: a freedom from subjection to the power of others. They also relate to the demonstration of autonomy through the exercise of power over others. Most notably, the head of a Roman household, the *pater*, had, originally at least, sweeping legal powers over his dependants, his children and his slaves, though not normally his wife. In his own house, even if nowhere else, the Roman man was a *vir*, a status reflected in the use of '*vir*' rather than '*homo*' by wives to refer to their husbands.

The normal workings of social and political life in this highly stratified society in which patronage was socially and politically important, meant that even the Roman élite contracted financial and political obligations. Ideally, however, these obligations were not to interfere with their freedoms. The line over which a patron could not cross in his treatment of a client is obscure, but there were limits on patronal authority and, as Millar points out (1984a, 1986, 1989), patrons could not depend on the complete and loyal support of their clients. The Romans appear to have been sensitive to the relationship between obligation and independence, and the literature of the end of the first century AD abounds with discussion of the correct treatment of clients by patrons. Discussions of dinner parties and Martial's descriptions of and complaints about the ritual morning salutation, a ceremony which needed particularly careful handling as it dramatized social inequalities and obligations, are the most obvious examples.⁵ That such relationships were expressed in the language of friendship rather than through clearer expressions of status inequality reflects pre-eminent Roman aristocratic concerns with *libertas*, another term overworked in the Triumviral and Augustan periods.

For the non-élite, it was probably much more difficult to preserve even the illusion of independence, especially after the much debated decline of the free rural peasantry in the second century BC.⁶ *Libertas* was, however, an important rallying cry for popular agitators in the city of Rome. *Libertas*, as defended through the *ius provocacionis* by which the tribunes were called on to defend a citizen and prevent magisterial action against him, was a privilege that the Roman mob and, in fact, the Roman élite could be mobilized to defend. Thus, Cicero (*In Verrem* 2. 5. 160–73) alienated support from the corrupt governor Verres by stressing his breach of *libertas* in the public beating of the Roman *eques*, Gavisia, in Sicily; while Catiline and later Clodius were able to call on popular support against Cicero for threatened and previous breaches of the rights of citizens. Examples could easily be multiplied from the tribunician disputes of the last century of the Republic

and, of course, in the quasi-historical accounts of the development of tribunician power during 'the struggle of the orders' in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The politicians of the late Republic justified their actions in terms of *libertas*, and as Caesar's assassins celebrated their role as restorers of freedom, so Octavian presented his campaign against Antony as an attempt to free the state 'oppressed by the tyranny of a faction'.⁷ In the end, the triumphant Octavian annexed to himself the role of defender of liberty through his acquisition of tribunician power, and he and subsequent emperors made use of their status as guarantors of individual freedom both to monitor their governors by providing individual citizens in the provinces, such as Paul, with a final court of appeal, and to override the rights of individuals.⁸

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of *libertas* in the last two centuries BC, though the importance of the concept in the earlier period is less than certain. Nicolet (1980, 38) points to a great strengthening of the guarantees affecting the individual citizen in 'a series of laws which soon came to be regarded as the essential core of Roman *libertas* and the keystone of the constitution'. For Nicolet (1980, 320) *libertas* 'is perhaps the key concept of the Roman civic and political vocabulary'. *Libertas* came to define Roman citizenship, regulating the relationship between a Roman citizen and the sovereign authority (*imperium*) of a Roman magistrate. The absolute *imperium* of Roman magistrates continued to be exercised over non-Romans, allies and enemies alike, and it is no coincidence that the rights of Romans and the differentials between Romans and allies increased at the very moment when Rome's empire was decisively extended beyond Italy and Rome's armies began to direct the wealth of the Mediterranean towards Italy. The political superiority of Rome's citizens was seen not just in the conquest of East and West, but also in several well-publicized violent exercises of authority by magistrates in the towns of allies. The public beating of magistrates of politically friendly states for not providing adequate facilities for visiting Romans was a demonstration of the legal superiority of Roman citizens, defended as they were from these abuses by the bundle of privileges of *libertas*. Beating, especially public beating, was a dramatic demonstration of the subjugation of the person to the power of another and an important symbol of the servility of the victim and his community.⁹

In the second century, *libertas* was becoming a defining characteristic of the Roman *vir*.¹⁰ Social, political and economic changes probably further enhanced the importance of *libertas*. The growing wealth of the Roman aristocracy and changes in the organization of agriculture labour may have exacerbated tensions between upper and lower orders. Political disruption and the active use of the tribunate to mobilize political support probably focused attention on issues such as *libertas*. The violence that resulted from these political disputes, the driving of political groups from public areas by violence and the deaths of several prominent political figures, including

tribunes, brought into the open the issue of political representation in the Roman state. The aristocracy could defend *libertas* against the threat of popular tyranny, especially as the Roman political élite became more conversant with Greek political history and theory, and popular leaders defended *libertas* against the threats posed to the traditional guarantors of *libertas* by magistrates and the oligarchy. It was over this ideological ground that the civil wars that brought the Republic to an end were fought.

There were two possible exceptions to this association of the *vir* with freedom from the *potestas* of another and freedom to wield *potestas*: an adult son in the *potestas* of his father, and a soldier.¹¹ The former is something of a non-problem. A son was clearly not independent and could be subject to outrages of his person, such as being beaten.¹² With a young son, this demonstrated his current standing, but, after all, he was yet to become a man.¹³ On reaching adulthood, when a son might be expected to assume the status of a *vir*, paternal authority became a potential problem.¹⁴ Rates of mortality, however, reduced the significance of this potential difficulty. According to Saller (1994, 58, table 3. 2e) only 54 per cent of 20-year-old males would have had a living father.¹⁵ Ten years later, when aristocratic males would be entering magisterial posts, only 32 per cent would have had a living father, and towards the pinnacle of their careers, at aged 40, only 13 per cent would potentially have been under the authority of their fathers. Few sons would be in the position of the Prince Regent, waiting for his father to die before he could assume his rightful place in society. Even for this minority, potential problems could be avoided by formal manumission of the son or, as seems to be the more normal pattern, the creation of a separate, independent household for the son who would be given either an allowance or a portion of his inheritance (Gardner 1993, 55–72). Even if formally under the control of his father, a son could lead a largely independent life in which he could assert his status and exercise *de facto* authority over his own slaves and children.

Soldiers, freedom and manhood

Soldiers are a far more complex case. Military service was part of the duty of a male citizen, and a large proportion of male citizens in the early and mid-Republican periods will have served in the army.¹⁶ Technically, the citizen under arms appears to have had very similar rights to the civilian, but in fact the soldier was subject to a whole range of more severe penalties for misconduct, and his right of appeal, and therefore his *libertas*, was limited (Nicolet 1980, 108–9). Bound by an oath, the soldiers were subject to greater authority and seem to have been in practice unable to call on the tribunes for support. Generals could, therefore, carry out exemplary punishments and even randomized punishments, such as decimation, without fear of tribunician interference or any legal consequences (political consequences were a

different matter) on laying down their powers. Such an abdication of legal and personal autonomy is difficult to reconcile with a view of the ideal man which emphasizes just such qualities.

In the early Republican period, when the army served to face threats real or imagined against the safety of Rome itself, the defence of the city and the citizens could be seen as collective action to preserve communal and individual freedom. The threats were always that the political power of Rome would be flouted or that Rome would be subject to the authority of another state or that the citizens would be enslaved and lose their freedom. In such a case, a compromising of the liberty of the individual through military service in order to ensure the freedom of the community was both reasonable and to be expected. Indeed, failure to ensure order or to serve loyally could endanger the *libertas* of the individual and the community, justifying savage punishments. Our first-century BC sources on the 'struggle of the orders' represent the various factions as manipulating this tension: in some cases, the invasion of Roman territory encouraged enlistment and the subsequent reduction in political strife, while in others the citizens show a marked reluctance to enlist.¹⁷

The potential anomalies of the soldiers' situation probably only gradually came to the fore in the second century BC and later, when it was no longer credible to represent Rome's campaigns as being in defence of the freedoms of the citizens, and soldiers came to serve further from their homes and probably for longer periods. It was also the period in which an increasing emphasis came to be placed on *libertas* as a political concept and as a mark of individual status. Livy's Spurius Ligustinus (42. 34), a soldier who intervened in a dispute between former centurions and the enlisting magistrate over the rank proper to their status, can be seen as a symbol of the old world. His extended service over many years, in many different campaigns, was selfless devotion to the state. He would enlist again in any rank the general thought fit to assign him, and his intervention prompted the other former centurions to do likewise. Ligustinus, with his small peasant homestead, was even in 171 BC a throwback to a mythic past. The future and, in fact, Ligustinus' present lay with those centurions who thought more of their honour and status than selfless devotion to the community. Sallust's similar, but non-specific, portrayal of the soldier of a previous age in *Bellum Catilinae* 7 depicts the heroic soldiers' selfless devotion in highly rhetorical terms, in contrast to his portrayal of contemporary soldiers and society.¹⁸

The increasing polarization of political debate in the second century BC may have increased and made more obvious tensions between free status and service, especially when magistrates attempted to conscript troops for unpopular campaigns. By the first century BC, the soldiers were becoming increasingly professionalized and the military increasingly separate from the rest of the population. In the last years of the Republic, the military had a distinct political agenda. The soldiers increasingly threatened the political

establishment and the constitution in pursuit of their own political and financial interests. The ideal of service to the wider community and the idea that the soldiers were simply citizens under arms with identical political interests to civilians were parts of a mythic past. Sallust, Livy and possibly Livy's source, writing in the first century BC, painted an ideal of military manhood which had, according to them, long departed.

Increasing social stratification and structural differentiation must also have had an impact. Politicians such as Cicero were men of letters and rhetoric, not primarily military leaders, though they may have held military appointments at various points in their careers. These men asserted their status and power in non-military areas, through culture, through civil politics and through their wealth. Command of troops was no longer the main area in which political reputations were made, and political careers did not necessarily culminate in military expeditions.

From the end of the second century BC, soldiers without property had been admitted into the army, but even before this the property qualification had ceased to have much significance. The army could be represented as being, and to a large extent probably was, composed of the poorer elements of society. The wealthy and largely hereditary oligarchy sought to legitimate and justify its power and the origins and trappings of its wealth. Birth and culture, notably Greek culture, were seen as markers of suitability to wield power.¹⁹ This gradual redefinition of masculinity would progressively exclude the ordinary soldiers from the status of paragons of masculinity. The very poverty of the soldiers increased their dependence on military service and their generals, and so reduced their autonomy. Their loyalty to the general in civil disturbances suggested a loss of political liberty. For Sallust, the soldiers had degenerated to become men of corrupted morals (*Cat.* 11. 7) and he could describe with horror soldiers elevated from 'the flock' to become senators (*Cat.* 37. 6; cf. Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 72), an alteration in status which threatened civic order. The soldiers were not of sufficient status to be capable of exercising control and power. For Cicero, they were rustics, unadorned by the civilized values and culture that became a man, and, in stronger moments, he could even describe them as beasts.²⁰

While there was probably no incompatibility between masculine respectability and service as a soldier in the third century BC and earlier, the increasing emphasis on *libertas* encouraged a growing disjunction between military service, especially among 'the herd', and the status of *vir*. The decline in the social status of soldiers in the last centuries of the Republic made it increasingly difficult for the ordinary soldier to be seen as a *vir*. Our sources are, on the whole, hostile towards soldiers whose power as non-*viri* threatened the whole fabric of society. In spite of the crucial role of military success in generating the prosperity and power of members of the élite, the soldiers did not conform to ideals of manhood.

Augustan masculinities: old men in a new world?

This tension between the socio-economic impact of the soldiers and their social status comes to the fore in the Augustan period. The confusion of ideals in the evidence from this period suggests that there was no agreed or dominant view of the *vir* or of the soldier. Augustus established the institutional framework for the professional army. After Augustus, most soldiers would have been away from Italy for their full term of service. That term was itself extended: Augustan troops could be expected to serve twenty years in the provinces, and many were even then unable to obtain discharge at the proper time, and a significant proportion of them would have died in service, even discounting the losses caused by enemy action. This geographical separation was enhanced by legal separation: soldiers were not allowed to marry, presuming that this was an Augustan regulation; their camp property was regarded as separate from any property held in civilian life; they were able to make wills to dispose of that property even if their fathers were still alive and they had not been legally manumitted.²¹ The latter may mark some recognition that it was improper for a soldier to be within the *potestas* of another apart from his general. The marriage ban, however, prevented the soldiers from forming separate households, an area crucial to the exercise of *potestas*. So, although none but the commander was able to exercise authority over them, the soldiers' own *potestas* was limited. This separation of soldiers completed their emergence as a distinct status group; but the limitations on their *potestas* and the authority exercised over them reduced their status in the eyes of aristocratic writers.

In contrast to the gradual professionalization and social segregation of the ordinary soldiers, there was an attempt to inculcate a military ideology in the Roman aristocratic youth. The addition to the *cursus honorum* of junior military posts in charge of cavalry units and in the legions and the development of vigorous military exercises for aristocratic youths demonstrate Augustus' policy of generating an aristocracy fit to campaign. Yet, in attempting to spread military experience among the élite, Augustus created the paradoxical situation by which a professional soldiery was commanded by a largely amateur officer corps, which further enhanced the division of the *vir*i from the soldiers. The debate over whether generals should be allowed to take their wives with them on campaign in Tacitus (*Annales* 3. 33–4) shows that the aristocratic man should be able to exercise his authority over both the troops and his wife.²²

By his reforms, Augustus may have been trying to create in the aristocracy an ideology of service and duty, an echo of the attitude of Spurius Ligustinus, which would override concerns over their status and encourage service in a state in which all freedom had been lost. As the men of his family laboured under his auspices, so the aristocracy also had its duties to fulfil. This Augustan concern with devotion to the state may be reflected in

the emphasis placed in Augustan literature on *pietas*, another concept which Latinists and historians struggle to translate. The great Augustan epic, the *Aeneid*, presents a *pius vir*, a hero who was devoted to his people and followed his disciplined fate through the disasters and wars to an ultimate triumph. *Pietas*, meaning something like duty to the gods, to the people and to the family, defines Aeneas' character.²³ Although he is far from being a mirror image of Augustus, the hero's moral character has implications for that of his descendant. *Pietas* defined Virgil's Augustan *vir* and became one of the conspicuous virtues of the emperor himself (*RG* 34). Other concerns, personal concerns, were to be put to one side in devotion to the nation as Augustus put his private welfare to one side when he sought to fulfil his manifest duty, first to avenge his father and second to govern the state. Suetonius (*Divus Augustus* 28) represents Augustus as having twice wished to lay aside the burdens of power for personal reasons; but, on both occasions, he was persuaded to return to the task for the good of the state. So Aeneas had to gather his future Romans and leave Carthage and Dido. Aeneas' rejection of the alluring Dido and her expanding city to face his destiny was an act of *pietas* and *virtus*. He was a man governed by his duty, not his passions.

The elegiac lovers also become voluntarily subservient to an ideal, their lover. Whatever one makes of the conventions of the genre, the stress on loss of liberty on the part of the elegiac lover is remarkable.²⁴ The very first line of the Propertian corpus (1. 1. 1) has Cynthia capturing the lover, and in the capturing Propertius loses his freedom. With remarkable frequency the elegiac poets return to the theme of their powerlessness in the face of the woman. In nearly all cases, it is the woman who has power to grant her favours to the man. The man is dependent, a slave to the woman. Propertius represents himself as struck, in a very physical metaphor, by Love who tramples him underfoot (1. 1. 3–4). Again, the lover is habitually betrayed by his woman who, like the traditional Roman male, is allowed free licence in her partners. Propertius is even assaulted by Cynthia herself, who storms Propertius' house in her chariot and breaks up a private party, driving away his two prostitutes and leaving him to beg for mercy (4. 8). In another standard poetic scene, the lover is excluded from the woman's house. He must beg entrance as a client. The client came to the house where his patron's power and authority were displayed. In Propertius, Cynthia exercises power by excluding the lover from her house. Propertius is unable to exclude Cynthia from his house and, on his own territory, is displayed as servile through the beating that Cynthia inflicts on him. The traditional, engendered exercise of power is reversed. Cynthia controls the house. Cynthia exercises power. Cynthia has adopted the role of a *vir*.

It is, of course, to be accepted that these events are elaborate fictions, and their relationship to any historical truth may be remote (Wyke 1987, 1989), but in Augustan propaganda, Antony's involvement with Cleopatra was

represented as a form of devotion in which Antony was enslaved. It is not impossible that this was believed by some in Rome. Even if the social situation depicted by the elegists could not be replicated exactly, the image of the man enslaved to the romantic ideal that was the elegiac woman, certainly a non-traditional role for the *vir*, may have had a certain appeal for Roman men in the changed political circumstances of the very late Republic and Augustan period.

This new masculinity carried certain political implications. At face value, the elegiac lover rejects a military career and is bemused by others who follow the military path. Devotion to the lover could lead to a withdrawal from public life, and this could be seen as anti-Augustan, though in life the first of the four Augustan elegists, Gallus, reconciled the demands of governmental and poetic careers. The lover is, however, happy to experience and even celebrate the triumphs of the emperor, even if such celebrations are sometimes ironic (Prop. 3. 4). Nevertheless, there is in both Propertius and Ovid a remarkable abstraction from military matters. War is carried out by others, in districts remote from Rome, against tribes and peoples who are merely names on placards and exotica to be processed before the people of Rome. This abstraction parallels what must have been the real situation for very many of the Roman people. Although the amount of conflict in the early principate is frequently underestimated, even the officially active may have either avoided involvement in warfare or been involved in active warfare for only very brief periods. After the civil wars, in spite of the continual campaigning of the Augustan period, the age was one of relative peace for the majority of the population.

Given the increasing remoteness of warfare, the extensive use of military language by the elegists is surprising. The lover continually uses the language of camps, sieges and capture, and sometimes uses military imagery for more explicit purposes.²⁵ There is an element of violence in the depiction of sexual activity: battles are fought on the couch. The language of military activity and capture may have been part of popular parlance in discussing sexual activity, but the metaphor is extended beyond what could reasonably be regarded as popular usage. For the lover, his devotion to the loved one, his camping outside the door, and his besieging of her affections are similar devotions to that of military service. The soldier serves by conquering the Parthian; the lover serves by conquering his mistress. In this way, the devotion to one service automatically excludes participation in the other. Military duty took lovers away from their women and the two are depicted as incompatible.²⁶ The activities are only opposed to this limited extent. In fact, the activities are paralleled. Both require the man to abandon his independence and allow another to have power over him. Both can lead to physical suffering. Both visions of the masculine role would seem to have had only limited appeal for the *libertas*-loving Roman aristocracy in the longer term.

The developing autocracy in Rome presented the Roman aristocracy with a considerable problem: how was a *vir* to behave if the state was controlled by a single man and the only politically free man was the emperor himself? Not all *viri* could hope to become emperors. Political circumstances forced a limited adjustment in the concept of a *vir*, an adjustment which took the Roman aristocracy some considerable time to accomplish. Correct behaviour under a tyrannical ruler is a major theme of the historical writings of Tacitus, who traced the relationship between aristocracy and emperor from AD 14 to 96. He emphasizes his view that freedom, in the old Republican sense, disappeared in the Augustan period. He suggests that there was a thin line that a *vir* could tread between insubordination and servility. Few managed this honourable middle course, notably M. Lepidus (*Ann.* 4. 20), L. Piso (*Ann.* 6. 10) and his own father-in-law, Agricola.²⁷ Some preserved their freedom and their status as *viri* at the cost of their lives.²⁸ The majority never achieved this status, as Tiberius made clear by calling them 'men ready for slavery'. The phrase was supposedly delivered in Greek, but Tacitus renders it in Latin as '*o homines ad servitutem paratos*' (*Ann.* 3. 65). In the difficult conditions of the reign of Domitian, Agricola remained a *vir* by following his duty towards the state meekly and neither threatening nor praising the emperor (*Tac. Agr.* 1, 40–1, 44–5). Virility was preserved by a withdrawal into silence, a silence in public, among friends and even in the intimacies of the house where the *potestas* of the *vir* was threatened by informers even among his own slaves (Pliny, *Ep.* 1. 12. 7–8). Under a tyrant, the *vir* could no longer control even his own household. His only freedom was in silence. The restoration of liberty, as both Tacitus and the Younger Pliny emphasize, was a restoration of the voice of the aristocratic male.²⁹

The imperial period saw an increasing internalization of *potestas*, which adapted ideas current in Greek philosophy (Foucault 1986, 45). Power was to be exercised on one's own person. Those who sought to sate hedonistic desires in sexual or other activities were scorned by the conservative élite (Brown 1988, 18–19). This abandonment of the person to desire was a form of slavery. A man who could not control himself was not capable of controlling others and certainly not suitable to control an empire (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3. 34). Emperors such as Nero and Gaius were not, therefore, *viri*, in spite of their power, as can be seen through their 'effeminate' behaviour, but were slaves to their own passions (Suet. *Gaius* 52; *Nero* 29, 51). The lover of wisdom was the man who sought to control his emotions and his body. It is often noted that members of the élite appear increasingly concerned with their bodily weaknesses and with illness in the second century AD and later, but it is notable that the weakened bodies were forced to perform feats of endurance and work.³⁰ This exercise of *potestas* over the body, aided by philosophers, doctors and athletic trainers, became an aim and a distinguishing characteristic of the élite, an aim replicated in Christian ascetic attitudes.³¹ The new man of the empire compensated for his loss of political

freedom by extending his *potestas* over his own person. Virility became domesticated.

Tacitus' account (*Ann.* 1. 16–49) of the mutinies on the Rhine and Danube that followed Augustus' death in AD 14 provides us with an opportunity to assess the soldiers of the new imperial army against the ideals of masculinity. Tacitus displays a limited fellow-feeling with the soldiers, who clearly had legitimate grievances and were subject to flagrant abuses; but his narrative, editorial voice is hostile to the mutineers. They were led by men of low status, trouble-makers and rabble-rousers. They were men who were subject to beatings and who were unfree. Interestingly, Tacitus emphasizes their physical imperfections by noting how their general was forced to touch their toothless gums and to observe their scarred bodies. Scars from battle were marks of honour in the republican period, but these were scars from beatings administered by the centurions. The impact of Greek ideas of the perfection of the physical form, so obvious from Augustan statuary, must also have affected attitudes towards the body and disfigurement. Toothlessness, with its associations with old age, symbolized the natural loss of physical power. Their wild swings of mood, their violence towards social superiors, and their lack of a coherent policy suggest a further lack of personal control. The soldiers were enslaved to their officers and to their emotions. True, they were slaves in a world becoming enslaved to the emperor, but the soldiers were no more *vir*i than those senatorial *homines* ready to be slaves. Thus, their show of independence, especially in the presence of a real *vir* (Germanicus, the hero of the early books of the *Annales*), was to be scorned.

Contrasting masculinities

For Dio Chrysostom, soldiers were a useful way of focusing attention on the problem of freedom, since although they were certainly not slaves, they were not completely free either, being subject to the power of their generals.³² They were subject to military discipline, but famously could not discipline themselves. Writers frequently complain of the ill-discipline of the soldiers and of generals and emperors pandering to their needs. Since they were not capable of exercising control for themselves, they needed to be controlled by others; and those generals and emperors who used archaic and very firm disciplinary measures against the soldiers are usually praised. Corbulo's savage disciplining of the soldiers of the East apparently cost the lives of several of his soldiers, but he is not condemned for these actions (*Tac. Ann.* 13. 35). The introduction of a strict disciplinary régime became a *topos* associated with the actions of a good general.³³ Emperors who looked primarily to the troops for support or attempted to buy their support, such as Domitian and the Severans, are subject to scathing attacks. Dio Cassius (75. 2. 5–6) seems to speak from the heart when describing the soldiers who

formed Severus' new praetorian guard.³⁴ They were boorish and bestial. Soldiers did not have the power and the control that came with being a man (Brown 1988, 9–12). They did not have the culture which allowed the *vir* to exercise self-control. Examples could be multiplied without difficulty. Juvenal's *Satire* 16 is an indictment of the privileges granted to soldiers. The soldiers were brutal and violent, attacking men in the street and then using violence to deny their victims justice. Apuleius (*Metamorphoses* 9. 39–42) shows the soldier attacking a gardener and then, his assault having surprisingly failed, using the full force of the state against his victim. Petronius gives us two stories of the brutality of soldiers. A soldier robs one of the main characters (*Sat.* 82). More dramatically, a man is accompanied on a journey by a soldier who, among the tombs outside the city, turns into a wolf (*Sat.* 62). Once again the soldier is associated with the inhuman.

By the end of the second century, the army had been transformed and bore little relationship to its mid-Republican forbear. The soldiers were mostly recruited from the frontier provinces, not from the heartlands of Greek and Roman culture from which most of the senators came (Mann 1983). Most of the aristocracy would have had little experience of warfare and few dealings with troops. The troops were a remote and threatening group. They were seen as cultural and moral inferiors, one step above the barbarians, and antithetical to the aristocratic *vir*.

Others could choose to represent the soldiers in different ways and thus offer competing views of the role and status of soldiers, and possibly of masculinity. The low status of soldiers in literary representations contrasts with imperial representations of soldiers. Augustus chose to distance himself from soldiers by dropping the term 'comrades' (*commilitones*) in favour of 'soldiers' (*milites*) in addresses to the troops (*Suet. Aug.* 25). But this habit was not universally followed: Trajan, an emperor who is idolized by our literary sources, referred to the troops as *commilitones*.³⁵ In the Severan period, Septimius Severus raised the status of soldiers and famously advised his sons to look to the support of the soldiers before all others (*Dio Cass.* 76. 15). Soldiers enjoyed an elevated legal status in the provinces as Roman citizens, and then as *honestiores*, a status which placed them on a par with the local élites of the empire. Yet the history of the legal status of soldiers is complex, and is certainly not one of straightforward aggrandizing of the position of soldiers (Alston 1995, 53–68). One of the most distinctive aspects of the legal status of the soldiers, the inability to contract a legal marriage, may have been ameliorated by various measures, but was not disposed of until AD 197 (Garnsey 1970; Campbell 1978). Similarly, although soldiers and veterans received significant privileges from the time of Augustus, there was continual pressure on those privileges from local and government officials, and several supposed grants of privileges in the second century may be simple restatements of rights obtained in earlier reigns; some privileges, such as rights of children of veteran auxiliary men, were reduced

in the second century. The emperors had an obvious interest in securing the loyalty of the troops, and granting privileges was a comparatively cheap way of showing their regard for soldiers' interests, but convincing those who had to abide by those privileges, government officials and local élites, that the soldiers deserved to be treated as high status individuals was an entirely different matter (Alston 1995, 64–8).

Popular images of soldiers are more difficult to obtain. In Jewish sources, the soldiers were not only representatives of an alien and hostile power, but were also gentiles and could not, therefore, be represented as ideal men. In Christian sources, soldiers were most often associated with persecutions, and by the fourth century both the army and the dominant ideology had undergone significant change. Documentary material, inscriptions and papyri, present significant problems to the historian of *mentalité*. Soldiers' letters preserved on papyrus do not appear to show any consciousness that military service was a loss of independence and therefore posed a threat to the autonomy and masculinity of the recruit. On the whole, in the first two centuries AD, military service appears to have been a desirable alternative to working the land. The economic rewards were certainly sufficient inducement for the non-élite of Roman Egypt. Military service also brought some local status. Soldiers were representatives of the Roman state and were, therefore, people of some influence (Alston 1995). The loss of independence that came with military service appears not to have led to a reduction in status; rather individual power, and hence status, was enhanced.

Soldiers themselves appear to have been proud of their status. We cannot, of course, know how many soldiers and veterans avoided commemorating their military careers on tombstones, and the use of the designation '*veteranus*' by former soldiers in the communities of Roman Egypt is certainly not systematic. Nevertheless, we have a considerable number of military tombstones from many provinces of the empire giving the particular soldier's name, age, length of service and sometimes unit. The inscriptions also often note who erected the inscription: the soldier's heirs, freed or relatives. These individuals chose to be commemorated as soldiers. Frequently, these tombstones carry a rather formulaic depiction of the soldier. One of the most interesting and common of these depictions is of a cavalryman, frequently himself of barbarian stock, riding down a crudely portrayed and often naked, sometimes animalistic, barbarian warrior (*RIB* 109, 121, 159, 201). Military service was for these men a self-defining role. Service differentiated them from barbarians. It made them men.

Military service also gave soldiers increased power to inflict violence. 'Thuggery' is a characteristic of soldiers in élite depictions in this period. But violence is intimately associated with *potestas*. The élite exercised violence within their own homes. Their ability to inflict beatings and their immunity from such physical chastisement was a marker of the free man, but the soldiers, though liable to be beaten by their superiors, were also

empowered to act violently towards provincials. This can be seen not only in warfare or the suppression of rebellion, but also in the actions of soldiers as police. Another of the stereotypical images of the soldier on tombstones shows him carrying not a sword but a stick; he also sometimes writes tablets. These soldiers were policing officers who, acting with centurions, dealt with many local disputes (Millar 1981; Šašel Kos 1978). The sticks were to chastise. They were as much a symbol of their superiority as the riding down of the barbarian.

This violence was not confined to the provinces, and the soldiers were in a position to exercise their authority in Rome itself. The praetorian guard provided the emperor with a ready means of dealing with his opponents which could be used against non-élite and élite. The élite had no answer to this physical violence. Soldiers could penetrate even within the household, either secretly as spies or openly as representatives of imperial power. By the imperial period, the élite had lost control over violence in the public sphere. Violence could be exercised in the home, in a controlled fashion, without anger, but not elsewhere. Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 29) tells us of a boxer who won all his fights. The man showed such exemplary control of his body that he was able to win all his fights without recourse to the crudity of actually hitting anybody. He would dodge and weave all day until his opponent was worn down. Uncontrolled violence was savage and no part of the aristocratic image of the *vir*. Yet at the heart of Rome was the arena, the theatre of violence. The role of games in the presentation and enactment of power in Roman society has been thoroughly explored.³⁶ Here, the Roman people assembled under the control of the magistrate or emperor. As suppliers of the venue, as patrons of the games, and often as the ultimate arbiter of the fates of the performers, the emperors dominated the event. It was not just the emperor and those few aristocrats who participated who displayed their power in the arena; gladiators also publicly demonstrated *potestas* by successfully using violence to overcome opponents. Men of the lowest social status graphically demonstrated their virility before the Roman population. As a result, gladiators and others who took part in games developed considerable followings. Understandably, such men came also to be associated with magic, another form of illegitimate power. Such power, so publicly displayed, had obvious attractions for certain members of the élite, and it should come as no surprise that some emperors and aristocrats demeaned themselves in the eyes of many of their social equals by participating in the arena.³⁷

Soldiers and gladiators did not conform to aristocratic ideals of virility. They were not free, even in the limited sense of the imperial period, and were not in control of their own bodies. They were unsuited by education and temperament to hold power, and any power they did have was illegitimate and a danger to the social fabric. Soldiers were more often described by members of the élite as beasts than as *viri*. Nevertheless, the power of

soldiers and gladiators, though limited, was real and publicly displayed. As wielders of *potestas*, soldiers qualified as *vir*.

Conclusions

This rapid survey of attitudes to masculinity and soldiers over approximately four centuries around the Augustan revolution has touched on the various, multiple images of masculinity in the period. With the aristocracy, soldiers and gladiators we have different, competing, but closely related ideologies of masculinity. Most views of the *vir* emphasized *potestas* as a characteristic. The *vir*, as in so many other cultures, was a man of power. Yet it is unsurprising that in four centuries of cultural and political change the nuances of this definition were competed over and reordered. The transformation of Rome from a powerful city state ruled by an oligarchy to a world empire ruled by a monarch was bound to affect all aspects of Roman society, including masculinity. In the new climate generated by the loss of *libertas* and the impact of new ideas from the East, there appears to have been a questioning of traditional masculine roles. Characteristically, the response of the Augustan circle was to look back and found their new image of the *vir* in their vision of the past. The later elegists looked elsewhere and produced an alternative. These two new mythic discourses both dealt with traditional issues of *virtus* and *potestas*, but the political *rapprochement* between élite and emperor, the ultimate triumph of the early emperors, allowed the élite to adopt a course less radical than that of the elegists.

In writings which consider the correct behaviour for a man and the role of soldiers, we are looking at what is essentially a political discourse. The élite justified their power by representing themselves as *vir*, men suitable to hold power; they thus defined the characteristics of the *vir* by the characteristics that defined the élite themselves (Veyne 1987, 119). The shifts of political power at the end of the Republic led to shifts in the characteristics of the élite *vir* as the élite itself changed. As the political power of the élite became less central, so their ideological hegemony may have been questioned. Alternative centres of power emerged and, inevitably, alternative views of the *vir*. Masculinity, power and politics were inextricably intertwined.

Perhaps in some societies, some comparatively stable societies, ideas of masculinity remain stable. A boy learns how to behave from watching the men who surround him. He copies his father's walk, gestures, and demeanour. Bourdieu's notion (1977) of the *habitus* shows how such social structures can be generated and perpetuated.³⁸ Rome, however, was undergoing rapid and radical change in this period. The society of the city was large. The society of the empire was immense. There was more than enough scope for variation. In the circles of the élite, the soldiers had no claim to be *vir*, for they did not behave as *vir* should, but the circles of the élite were

but a small part of the Roman Empire. In some parts and among the soldiers themselves, the soldiers' control over violence and their relatively high status as representatives of the empire qualified them as *vir*. Political events in the first two centuries AD demonstrated forcibly to the élite that the ultimate arbiters of empire were not the élite themselves but the soldiers. The emperor could use his troops to rob them of their wealth, their homes and ultimately their lives. The hostility of the élite towards soldiers stems from this threat to their political power and to their definition of and status as *vir*.

Notes

- 1 Examples are easily found: Elizabeth I claimed in her finest hour (an occasion when her courtier compared her to an Amazonian Queen) that she had risen above her 'weak and feeble body of a woman' and developed the stomach of a King (Neale 1979, 302); cartoon and puppet depictions of Mrs Thatcher were often in male dress; allegedly domestically powerful women were colloquially described 'as wearing the trousers' in particular households.
- 2 There is a problem of terminology in what follows. As L'Hoir's analysis makes clear, the Romans were far from consistent in their use of these terms, and although we may say that '*vir*' is generally used of aristocratic men who may be taken to be ideals of manhood, it is sometimes used in other contexts as '*homo*' is sometimes used in contexts in which we would expect '*vir*'. For instance, as I shall argue below, soldiers of the late republican and early imperial periods are not generally recognized in our literary sources as men worthy of respect, yet '*vir*' is commonly placed in the mouths of generals who wish to emphasize the strength of their forces. We should beware of an over-mechanical interpretation of Latin usage. For the purposes of this essay, '*vir*' is used to refer to an 'ideal of manhood' and I have attempted to make clear those occasions on which '*vir*' appears in the texts to be discussed.
- 3 Petronius, *Satyricon*, 57. This is a long and comic passage in which a freedman asserts his masculinity: 'I am a man amongst men. I walk bare-headed' (i.e. without the freedman's cap or, more freely, 'with head held high'). 'I owe no-one a bronze ass . . .' (the lowest denomination coin). The joke lies in the parallel with 39. 4, where the same words are used by the gauche freedman host of the dinner party, and in the pretensions of this freedman who presumably behaves in the same servile manner as the other guests at the dinner party.
- 4 Fisher 1993, 1, 'the consciousness of the division between slaves and free men was one of Greek society's most fundamental and determining ideas'; Wiedemann 1987, 5, 'an Athenian or a Roman saw society primarily in terms of the polarity between slaves and free citizens.'; Wiedemann 1981, 1; Finley 1985a, 62-94; Herbert 1993.
- 5 There are many examples; a rapidly gathered selection: Martial, 1. 20, 43, 80, 108; 2. 5, 18, 68; 3. 82; 5. 22; 6. 88; 9. 100; 10. 10, 74; Pliny, *Epistles* 2. 6; Juvenal, *Satires* 1. 95-103; 5.
- 6 Even if there was no decline in absolute numbers of free men on the land, the rapid growth of the urban population and especially the population of Rome suggests a fundamental shift in the distribution of the free population towards the city.

- 7 *Res Gestae* 1. It is possible that the designation of Antony as 'a faction' was deliberately ambiguous and may have been intended to refer to his campaigns against the conspirators as well.
- 8 See Lintott 1993, 116–18 and Garnsey 1966 for general discussions of the emperor's control over rights to punish.
- 9 Nicolet 1980, 39; Saller 1994, 139.
- 10 For *libertas* as a political concept see Wirszubski 1950, especially 2–4, and Brunt 1988, 281–350. The latter quotes Ennius fr. 300–3 V, which links *libertas* with maculinity: 'It is proper for a man to be inspired by true manliness (sed virum virtute vera animatum addeceat) and strongly stand blameless against adversaries; this is freedom, when he carries a heart pure and steadfast, all else is shameful and lies in the shadow of night' (my translation).
- 11 Lacey 1986 argues that there was an equivalence between the family and the state, so that a son was in the same position with regard to a father as a citizen to the state. This, he argues, does not compromise individual freedom. It seems to me, however, that such power structures must limit personal freedom.
- 12 Dio Chrysostom, *Oratio* 15. 18–19.
- 13 It is notable that the word for boy was used in both Greek and Latin to mean 'slave', suggesting a certain equivalence in relationship to the *pater*: Finley 1980, 96.
- 14 This is dramatized by Livy 24. 44, where a consul is met by his own father who is to serve as his deputy. The lictors fail to tell the father to dismount when he approaches his son until ordered to do so by the son. In so doing, the son demonstrates that his consular authority overrode his father's paternal authority, an action applauded by the father.
- 15 It is probable that those whose father was dead but whose paternal grandfather still lived would amount to less than 2 per cent and were even less significant in later age groups.
- 16 Hopkins 1978, 31–6, reckons that an average of 30–60 per cent of male citizens between 225 and 23 BC had served in the army.
- 17 In books 2, 3 and 4 of Livy, the normal account for each year commences with a discussion of political disturbances in which the people oppose conscription. The problems are settled or put off and then troops are raised to meet the foreign enemy. There are numerous examples; see, for instance, Livy, 2. 23, 32, 42–4; 3. 10, 42, 66; 4. 4.
- 18 *Cat.* 7–11 describes the moral decline of Rome in masculine/feminine terms as a softening of the Roman people, which is partly a result of the *luxuria* introduced to Rome by Sulla's soldiers.
- 19 Momigliano 1975, 1–21 details the relationship between Hellenization and ability to wield imperial power. Rawson 1985 shows the growing interest in intellectualism in the late Republic, but cautiously notes (38) that intellectual attainment was not in itself regarded as justification for political authority. Suetonius' biographies of the Caesars devote chapters to the intellectual attainments of the emperors; and by the time of Pliny the younger and Fronto, the display of culture was an important claim to social respectability.
- 20 *Ad Familiares* 11. 7; *Pro Archia* 24; *Orationes Philippicae* 8. 9; 10. 22.
- 21 Campbell 1978; 1984, 207–29; Alston 1995, 53–68.
- 22 The issue had been raised because of several cases in which wives of provincial governors were seen to be exercising improper authority; it may also be related to the role of women of the imperial household who had accompanied their husbands to the provinces and there wielded some ill-defined authority.
- 23 One may note the emphasis placed on *virtus* in the *Aeneid*. The famous first three words 'Arma virumque cano' (I sing of arms and a man) establish the main

- themes. Compare the echoing of this in the first phrase of Tacitus' *Agricola*, a work also concerned with the relationship of the individual and duty: 'Clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere' (to transmit the deeds and customs of famous men to posterity). See below, 215.
- 24 Propertius 1. 4. 3–4; 5. 19–20; 2. 23. 23–4; 3. 11; Ovid, *Amores* 1. 2; 2. 3, 4.
- 25 Prop. 1. 5. 21; 2. 1. 13–14, 45–6; 2. 8. 39–40; 12–15; 25. 5–10; 3. 3, 5–6, 8, 20, 25; 4. 1. 131–50; Ov. *Am.* 1. 2; 6. 35–40; 9; 2. 1. 21; 6. 13–14; 12. See Gale 1997.
- 26 Prop. 2. 7; 3. 12, 20; 4. 3, 5; Ov. *Am.* 1. 8. 41–2; 2. 9. 19–24; 10. 31–8.
- 27 For other examples see Cluvius Rufus (*Historiae* 1. 8), a *vir* experienced in the arts of peace, and Arulenus Rusticanus (*Hist.* 3. 80), whose wounding in a riot was made more shameful because of his status as a *vir*.
- 28 *Ann.* 16. 25 describes how Thræsea Paetus was urged by his closest friends to provide the Roman people with an example of a *vir* by facing up to Nero. Similarly, *Ann.* 3. 44 describes Sacrovir's rebellious followers in Gaul as *viri* who will depose the tyrannical Tiberius. Note also Boudicca's speech to her British rebels (*Ann.* 14. 35), in which Tacitus exploits the paradox of a woman leading men to freedom: 'id mulieri destinatum: viverent viri et servirent' ('that is the destiny of a woman: let the men live and slave'). The alliteration emphasizes 'vir'.
- 29 Tac. *Agr.* 3; Pliny, *Ep.* 1. 10, 13; 2. 6.
- 30 Pliny, *Ep.* 1. 12; 2. 11; 3. 5. Such concerns feature throughout the correspondence of Fronto.
- 31 Veyne 1987, 36; Gleason 1990.
- 32 *Or.* 14. 1–6; cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 2. 48.
- 33 This was generally praised, but could be taken too far, so that generals would lose control over their troops (Tac. *Hist.* 1. 18; Suet. *Galba* 16).
- 34 Severus recruited his guard from the Danubian legions rather than using the troops who had supported his predecessor. This added to Dio's alienation, but the troops recruited in Italy are not an exception to this discussion.
- 35 Pliny, *Ep.* 10. 20, 52–3, 100, 103.
- 36 Hopkins 1983, 1–30; Coleman 1990, 1993.
- 37 Hopkins 1983, 20–7 and Plass 1995, 72–5 discuss the issue of the anomalous status of gladiators.
- 38 Bourdieu 1990, 53–74, emphasizes the role of the *habitus* in perpetuating social structures through time, but also allows for the possibility of change in the *habitus* since it exists in part as a generated result of socio-economic factors.