Asymmetric Warfare in Roman Antiquity
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Having successfully graduated from United States Marine Corps Officer Candidate School in July 2009 with intentions to commission as a 2nd Lieutenant upon my graduation from Bowdoin, I have a vested interest in understanding the way in which asymmetric warfare is waged, in both a modern and ancient context. As such, the goal of this project is to gain insights into how previous commanders and soldiers confronted the military, political and social challenges posed by insurgents and their supporters. This project has particular relevance given the current conflicts that American forces find themselves in around the globe on a daily basis. On a larger scale, this project aims to draw close and direct connections between a Bowdoin education, my approaching military service and my own larger sense of citizenship and civic service.

To accomplish these goals, I have drawn from a wide variety of sources, both ancient and modern. With regard to ancient sources in translation, I have gained a solid understanding of the history, development, organization and tactics of the Roman army through authors such as Polybius, Julius Caesar and Ammianus Marcellinus. This strong background is necessary for the close investigations of specific wars and battles, such as Caesar’s Gallic campaigns, which I have also undertaken. In addition, I have completed translations from the original Latin text to English of passages that I deemed to be consequential, in an attempt to gain a better sense of Roman tactical nuances that may not have appeared in translation.

In addition to analyzing the ancient sources, I have also completed a thorough investigation of modern texts on counterinsurgency strategy. Given the current American involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, there are a plethora of sources from which to draw. These sources have helped me to grasp the modern concept of counterinsurgency and thus have provided an excellent juxtaposition for when analyzing Roman tactics in similar historical situations. The study of these modern sources, particularly John Nagl’s Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife and Robert D. Kaplan’s Imperial Grunts, has allowed me to think in unique and different ways when considering the ancient Roman material. These connections between the analysis of both modern and ancient texts that have demonstrated the value of my project in ways other than simply a thorough knowledge of Roman history based on my approaching service as a Marine Corps officer.

Overall, this project has provided a unique chance for me to explore the Roman world with a focus on an aspect of Roman life that I find particularly fascinating. Through my research, I have gained new perspectives on the conduct of warfare throughout history. In addition to widening my knowledge of Roman history, I have also gained highly valuable personal knowledge through analysis of the counterinsurgency tactics that will be highly applicable in my initial career path after Bowdoin as a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps. I believe that my work with Professor Robert Sobak during this summer will provide me with an excellent basis for expansion of these studies into a senior honors thesis during the upcoming academic year.

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