



[Valerius Maximus, Memorable Doings and Sayings II.8.praef](#)

Rome's universal expansion.

Name of the author: Valerius Maximus

Date: 14 CE to 37 CE

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: Ethics and Rhetorical treatise

Title of work: Memorable Doings and Sayings

Reference:

II.8.praef

Commentary:

Valerius Maximus's *Memorable Doings and Sayings* has traditionally been presented as the work of a rhetorician and/or of a moralist gathering around 950 *exempla*, that is narratives of remarkable events or declarations, mainly from Rome's past and, to a lesser extent, from the past of various foreign nations. In the preface, we learn that Valerius Maximus places his work under the protection of the ruling emperor, Tiberius. Moreover, Valerius justifies his choice of gathering all these *exempla* by the fact that they were scattered in various sources, and because he wanted to furnish declaimers and rhetoricians of his time with material and arguments (for the link between *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, declamatory practice and the need to please the "new nobility" who benefitted from Octavian's success, see Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus*). However, to reduce *Memorable Doings and Sayings* to a simple pedagogic work is not correct. Valerius reminds in his preface that his work also has a moral purpose by providing some kind of review of the sayings and behaviours which were considered as moral or immoral for a Roman. As Jean-Michel David rightly recalls, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* is a work that has to be considered particularly interesting for historians. Firstly, the whole history of Rome is presented in a condensed and original form because Valerius organises this history through anecdotes and brief moral portrayals of Rome's great men. Secondly, the structure of the books and the choice of the various themes result in a wide range of familial and civic topics which are covered. The whole book can thus be studied as a useful tool to understand the values of the Roman society at the beginning of the first century CE (David, "Présentation," p. 5).

The work *Memorable Doings and Sayings* is organised on four levels: the entire work, each of the 9 books composing it, the chapters and every example. In each chapter, Valerius Maximus mostly deals with Roman *exempla*, which are followed by a smaller number of *exempla* regarding non-Roman characters, peoples or events. The second book deals with customary law and statutory law. The first three chapters are about ancient institutions, military discipline and triumphal law. The text presented here is the introduction of the chapter dealing with the legal framework regulating triumphs (II.8). It is an interesting text because Valerius Maximus proposes a general and eulogistic description of the Roman Empire and of its hegemony over the whole world.

The main aim of this introduction is to provide a transition between the theme of the previous chapter – military discipline – and the following one – triumphal law –, and it is also the occasion for Valerius Maximus to expose ideological commonplaces about Rome's hegemony on earth. This short text starts with a general praise of Rome's military discipline (*disciplina militaris*), which is presented as the main reason of Rome's successes abroad. Such a reference to military discipline as being one of the most exceptional qualities of the Romans may echo Livy's assessment in his comparison of Alexander the Great and Rome ([Livy, History of Rome IX.17.10](#)). Actually, when Livy tries to justify that, in the past, many Roman generals had been at least as courageous and strong as Alexander the Great, he highlights the fact that they also benefited from the advantages of Rome's military discipline (*disciplina militaris*). This discipline is presented as inherent to Rome's history, and thus it becomes a real advantage for the Roman generals. However, as previously mentioned, Valerius Maximus's work should rather be studied as a work reflecting specific aspects of the period during which it was composed, that is during Tiberius's reign. For instance, Marianne Coudry has rightly recalled that Valerius Maximus may have chosen to gather twenty Roman *exempla* illustrating the theme of military discipline while thinking about the mutinies in Pannonia and Germania which troubled Tiberius's accession in 14 CE (Coudry, "Conclusion," p. 190). Thus, in spite of the pedagogic and moralist objectives of the *exempla* chosen by Valerius Maximus, it is important to keep in mind that the choices and rewritings made by him are also linked with the political context of his time.



In Valerius Maximus's short introduction of the chapter dealing with triumphal law, the military discipline is presented as the main factor for Rome's successes abroad. Robert Combès highlights that Valerius's praise of Rome's expansion may recall how Augustus himself publicly presented the results of his conquests (see Combès, *Valère Maxime*, p. 13). Actually, under Augustus flourished an oecumenical conception of the Roman Empire (on this question, see Nicolet, *L'inventaire*, p. 27-40, esp. 28). The *Res Gestae* – and more particularly the chapters 25 to 33 which enumerate Rome's foreign actions, conquests, victories and diplomatic successes – is one Augustean project which faithfully reflects this conception. The completion of the *Res Gestae* has to be seen as some kind of final step in a general process according to which Rome was destined to conquer and control the whole world. The enumeration of 55 geographical names was nothing else but the concrete illustration of this process which was also clearly exposed in the title of the document: "Copy presented below of the achievements of the deified Augustus, by which he submitted the whole world to the rule of the Roman people..." (on the *Res Gestae* and Rome's conquest of the world see Nicolet, *L'inventaire*, p. 27-40). This universal conception of the Roman Empire also appears in the text of Valerius Maximus presented here, when he writes that military discipline turned Rome from "Romulus's small hut" (*parvula Romuli casa*) into "the keystone of the whole world" (*totius terrarum orbis columen*). It is interesting to note that Valerius Maximus is the first author who uses the architectural metaphor of Rome as being the "keystone" (*columen*) of the whole world. Such a metaphor clearly fits in with a more usual practice of presenting Rome as the "head" (*caput*) of the (whole) earth / world / empire (on this vocabulary, see Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, p. 3, n. 7). The choice of Romulus's hut (*casa*) as the memorial site which best symbolized the origins of the city of Rome, can be explained by the fact that it embodies very efficiently the idea of the very modest origins of Rome, and, by consequence, of its extraordinary development (on Romulus' hut, Walter, *Memoria*, p. 179-183, esp. p. 181; for other references to *Romuli casa*, see Themann-Steinke, *Valerius Maximus*, p. 443).

The brevity imposed by the introduction logically implies that Valerius Maximus could not list or allude to all the peoples or foreign regions Rome submitted – as Augustus did in the *Res Gestae*. Valerius Maximus restrains himself to state that, thanks to its military discipline, Rome obtained the leadership (*principatus*) of Italy and "bestowed rule over (*regimen largita est*) numerous cities, great kings and very powerful peoples". It is interesting to note that Valerius Maximus does not use the vocabulary of war, conquest and submission, as it is often the case in the *Res Gestae*. Valerius Maximus only uses aggressive expressions to imply that Roman armies went beyond various natural elements (Alps, Taurus and the straits of the Pontic gulf). For what concerns cities, kings and very powerful peoples, Valerius chose to refer to their political submission, a step which comes after conquest and pacification. Such an assessment finds an echo in Marianne Coudry's analysis of the representation of the Roman Senate in many *exempla* of Valerius Maximus. Marianne Coudry actually defends the idea that there were many parallels between the orientations of the foreign policy of Tiberius and the role that Valerius gives to the Roman Republican Senate – which implies various distortions of the historical events and of the real functioning of the senatorial assembly. One example of this process is that Valerius Maximus gives an image of the Republican Senate which is absolutely not aggressive. The notions of faith (*fides*) and of just war (*bellum iustum*) – frequently used during periods of conquests or to deal with period of conquests – are quite absent in Valerius Maximus's narrative. The only time when he refers to the notions of loyalty and justice in association with the Senate is in the framework of diplomatic negotiations (Coudry, "Conclusion générale," p. 189). Coming back to our text and to the content of the chapter it introduces – namely the legal framework regulating triumphs –, it is striking that Valerius Maximus does not mention important Roman triumphs, nor exalt the diversity of the peoples conquered by Roman armies. Actually, in the seven *exempla* of chapter 8, Valerius does not mention triumphs celebrated by Roman generals to praise Rome's military capacity or to highlight the wide scope of Roman conquests. He only refers to specific triumphs when he recalls the story of a rivalry between a consul and a praetor for deciding which one would celebrate the triumph for a victory over the Carthaginian fleet in 242 BCE (*exemplum* 2), or when he writes that Sylla celebrated a triumph to commemorate his victories in Greece and in Asia but not his successes during the civil war (*exemplum* 7). In the various *exempla* of this chapter, Valerius Maximus prefers to recall stories of military commanders who refused triumph (*exemplum* 3), or of triumphs which should have been granted to valorous commanders (*exemplum* 5), or to explain why the submission of Capua or Fregellae, which had once rebelled against Rome, could not be celebrated, as a triumph had to be celebrated *pro aucto imperio*, that is for the extension of the Empire, and not for the repossession of territory which had been previously controlled by Rome (*exemplum* 4). Thus, the absence of any praise of Rome's policy of conquests in the whole chapter 8 may confirm Marianne Coudry's assessment about the very limited use of the vocabulary of war, conquest and submission by Valerius Maximus.

Therefore, the fact that in the preface of chapter 8, Valerius Maximus sums up in a few lines the settlement of Rome's universal hegemony by highlighting the political subjection of the peoples, kings and cities to Rome, rather than the military and aggressive aspects of the conquests, would fit in with the global context of Tiberius's reign.



The necessities of the time and the policy followed by Tiberius made him the 'protector emperor' of the Empire and the guarantor of the peace which had emerged from Augustus's conquests (for discussion about the nature of Tiberius's foreign policy, see Levick, *Tiberius*, p. 125-147, esp. 142-147). By then, the policy followed by Tiberius (based more on peaceful settlement of conflicts than on confrontation, see Suetonius, *Tiberius* XXXVII.8-9; Tacitus, *Annals* II.64-65; IV.32.1-2) and the way he represented himself seem clearly different from the Augustean propaganda which exalted the recent pacification of the Empire by recalling proudly the numerous and victorious conquests of Rome (see Coudry, "Conclusion générale," p. 188, n. 21 and 189). This context may explain why, in this short introduction dealing with Rome's hegemony on earth, Valerius Maximus does not deal more at length with the ideas of conquests and submission by strength.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Alpes](#)
- [columen](#)
- [disciplina militaris](#)
- [gens](#)
- [imperium Romanum](#)
- [Italia](#)
- [ius triumphandi](#)
- [orbis terrarum](#)
- [ortus](#)
- [ponticus](#)
- [principatus](#)
- [regimen](#)
- [rex](#)
- [Romuli casa](#)
- [taurus](#)
- [triumphus](#)
- [urbs](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [military discipline](#)
- [Roman expansion](#)
- [Roman hegemony](#)
- [Roman power](#)
- [Romulus' hut](#)
- [Tiberius](#)
- [triumph](#)
- [universal rule](#)

Bibliographical references:

[Valerius Maximus & the Rhetoric of the New Nobility](#)

Bloomer, W. Martinbook *Valerius Maximus & the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* London Duckworth 1992

[Valère Maxime. Faits et dits mémorables. Tome I. Livres I-III](#)

Combès, Robertbook *Valère Maxime. Faits et dits mémorables. Tome I. Livres I-III* edition and translation by Robert Combès Paris Les Belles Lettres 1995

["Conclusion générale: Valère Maxime au coeur de la vie politique des débuts de](#)



[l'Empire](#)

Coudry, Marianne *article-in-a-book* Valeurs et mémoires à Rome. Valère Maxime ou la vertu recomposée Jean-Michel David 183-192 "Conclusion générale: Valère Maxime au coeur de la vie politique des débuts de l'Empire" Paris De Boccard 1998

["Les enjeux de l'exemplarité"](#)

David, Jean-Michel *article-in-a-book* Valeurs et mémoires à Rome. Valère Maxime ou la vertu recomposée Jean-Michel David 9-17 "Les enjeux de l'exemplarité" Paris De Boccard 1998

[Slaves to Rome. Paradigms of Empire in Roman Culture](#)

Lavan, Myles *book* Slaves to Rome. Paradigms of Empire in Roman Culture Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2013

[L'inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'Empire romain](#)

Nicolet, Claude *book* L'inventaire du monde: géographie et politique aux origines de l'Empire romain Paris Fayard 1988

[Valerius Maximus. Ein Kommentar zum zweiten Buch der Facta et Dicta memorabilia](#)

Themann-Steinke, Andre *book* Valerius Maximus. Ein Kommentar zum zweiten Buch der Facta et Dicta memorabilia Trier Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2008

[Memoria und res publica. Zur Geschichtskultur im Republikanischen Rom](#)

Walter, Unde *book* Memoria und res publica. Zur Geschichtskultur im Republikanischen Rom Frankfurt am Main Verlag Antike 2004

["Présentation"](#)

David, Michel *article-in-a-book* Valeurs et mémoires à Rome. Valère Maxime ou la vertu recomposée Jean-Michel David 5-6 "Présentation" Paris De Boccard 1998

[Tiberius the Politician](#)

Levick, Barbara *book* Tiberius the Politician Dover Croom Helm 1976
Realized by:

[Marie Roux](#)



Source URL: <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/valerius-maximus-memorable-doings-and-sayings%C2%A0ii8praef>