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Ukraine and the “Social War”

By David Post

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For three years, beginning in 91 B.C., the Roman Republic was convulsed by the “Social War” – the war between Rome and its “Socii” (allies). These Allies were semi-independent states on the Italian peninsula which had treaty relationships with Rome, under which Rome granted them a large degree of (indeed, almost total) autonomy in their local affairs, in return for their promise to provide Rome with soldiers when needed. Many of these treaties had been in place for hundreds of years.

Two things make this war of particular interest. The first is how brutal and bloody it was. The Allies knew how to fight just like, and as well as, the Romans; they had formed the bulk of the Roman army for many, many years, and they understood all too well the many secrets of the mighty Roman military machine. So the war matched two armies that were basically carbon copies of one another, and the slaughter was prodigious because no one could gain the upper hand.

But even more astonishing, the Allies’ demand was simple — they were not fighting to throw off Roman domination and the yoke of the foreign power, they were fighting to get into, and under the umbrella of, Rome. They wanted full Roman citizenship – to which they believed they were entitled, given the services they had performed for Rome in helping it to conquer the entire Mediterranean basin. Fighting to get in, rather than to get out; maybe I’m just not that well-informed, but I can’t think of another war like it in history.

[And after three years of more-or-less stalemated military action, the allies largely prevailed and they became part of Rome, eligible for electing Rome's officers and legislators, and for the land and other benefits distributed to Roman citizens]

I have long thought that it is the crowning achievement, in a way, of the Roman Republic – that people wanted so much to become Roman citizens that they would die in the cause.

I thought of this when reading about the terrible events in Ukraine, which have too many earmarks of a catastrophe waiting to happen. The “rebels” in the streets of Kiev want in, also – to “Europe,” and all that entails. And though there are [many things about the way Europe governs itself and manages its affairs that one can be critical of](#), it is something of a tribute to its current incarnation that it means as much as it does to the demonstrators.

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