

# **Conceptual frameworks in historical analysis:**

## **Using reputation as interpretive prism**

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### **Keywords**

Historical analysis, reputation, interpretive prism, conceptual frameworks, ancient history, Rome

### **Abstract**

This paper advocates a revised perspective in historical analysis. The author calls for historians to apply the concept of reputation as interpretive lens in the analysis of historical processes and outcomes. Widely used in management and marketing writing, but also relied upon in political science, the concept of reputation helps predict behaviour of individuals and entities that are bound by political constraints to align their actions to the goal of generating a popular standing. The lens also serves to cast light on the actions engaged in by external stakeholders that are informed by reputational cues. This theoretical contention is illustrated in four case studies resulting from investigations into political decisions and military conflicts both in the republican and imperial period that ascertain how success and expansion as well as failure and decline of ancient Rome can be viewed and better understood by applying reputation as an instrument to direct and focus historical analysis. However, the purpose of this paper is not primarily to suggest

complementary angles and alternative answers to issues in ancient Roman history. The cases considered are intended to demonstrate how failure to recognise reputation as a significant concept in historical analysis does not only impair a comprehensive and balanced reflection of personal and organisational stakeholder behaviour, but also thwarts a full appreciation of the motivation that drives individual protagonists and institutional agents, whose decisions are central to historical processes and outcomes.

## **Introduction**

The need felt by individuals and organisations to build, protect and restore reputation as acknowledged in the practice of Public Relations is a driving force that appears to be critical in political and corporate contexts and shapes personal as well as institutional behaviour and relationships. This premise calls for a new or revised perspective in historical analysis – even in cases where communication management, PR or proto-PR are not ostensibly the theme or case under consideration. Reasons for and causes of decisions that lead to a shift in national politics and corporate strategy may be rooted in an appreciation of the need to seek and manage personal or organisational prestige or standing. Likewise, stakeholders' responses to organisational or individual behaviour are reflective of guidance informed by reputational patterns. As a result, historians are called upon to adopt a new interpretative lens to supplement the distinct perspectives currently deployed to make sense of the past, account for what happened and fathom what failed to occur.

This understanding of strategic priorities may add to and broaden the scaffolding that would conventionally shape historical interpretation. The resulting shift of angle and emphasis moulds the direction of enquiry and focus deployed by the historian. At the same time this requires inferences arrived at in the past to be reappraised. This paper feeds both on existing case studies and new material the author has scrutinized only recently and is intended as a preliminary exploration of what over time may lead to a more comprehensive re-evaluation of historical narrative and may eventually bring about the recognition of reputation as an indispensable concept and instrument of historical investigation.

### **Using conceptual frameworks in comparative historical analysis**

The methodology adopted for this paper is a comparative historical enquiry in the shape of a qualitative case oriented investigation which allows to generate explanations that transcend space and time by reflecting on causalities and ascertaining how processes of change are driven. The core of these investigations is constituted by phenomena and factors that are conceptualised through engagement with theoretical frameworks (Ragin, 2014) – in this instance the analytical focus is on reputation. This method of enquiry has been buoyant for the better part of the past two centuries, when at times social sciences were dominated by the tradition of comparative historical case studies that counted among its advocates illustrious figures ranging from Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Alexis de Tocqueville to Max Weber and Marc Bloch (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003).

It is the purpose of this comparative historical analysis to juxtaposition scenarios and search for conceptual patterns as well as causalities across the cases selected. While highly diverse incidents and settings were chosen, care was taken to ensure that similarities in processes could be identified (Pierson and Skogpol, 2002). This paper was informed by the intention to explain causal configurations that bring about tangible historical outcomes. By implication concerns with interpretive approaches were eschewed in favour of attempts to arrive at causal patterns. The adopted focus on a limited number of cases does not lead to nor aim for universally generalisable inferences, but recognises the study-set up as a trade-off to facilitate a mutual exchange between theory and evidence by allowing the historian to move back and forth between the two with a view to unearth and corroborate new explanations and match patterns (Campbell, 1975).

Comparative historical analysis has for decades found itself in the thick of methodological disputes that witnessed supporters of large-N methods pitched against those who sympathise with small-N methods. The view taken in this paper whereby inferences can be made from a small number of cases is strongly contested by social scientists wary of bias in the selection of sources and data (Goldthorpe, 1991; Lustick, 1996). These concerns can be allayed by demonstrating that investigations based on limited case numbers can live up to the standards set in statistical studies (Ragin, 2000; Braumoeller and Goertz, 2000). For this to be assured deep understanding of the cases investigated and critical engagement with archival work is intended to ward off criticism about the scientific robustness of case study analysis, minimise misunderstandings, allow to focus the investigation on the motivations of the historical protagonists and help overcome

historiographical biases and gaps in the sources used (Ferro, 2003; Amneta, 2009).

A dialogue is sought with the available sources in order to ascertain if and to what degree the researcher's intentions and initial hypothesis are corroborated by the data available (Donnelly and Norton, 2011). The value and quality attainable through careful scrutiny of primary sources and critical reading of secondary material is by now widely recognised not just among historians, but also by social scientists who choose to ground and test their models in data gleaned from historical cases (Amneta, 2009).

For Rorty (2002) historians need to concentrate and limit themselves to their genuine tools and resources, which he defines as historical sources and the ability to read critically. However, the pure empiricist's self-imposed constraint and exclusive focus on the mere analysis of sources, for all its advantages, always has had its detractors. Going as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Francis Bacon was allegedly underwhelmed by an undiluted empiricism who he likened to the obsession of ants with gathering material for the mere sake of piling up mountains of resources. Bacon found himself inspired by a bee that turns the collected raw material into something better – namely honey. Historians may recognise in Bacon's parable a suggestion as to how they should approach their work (Holland, 1983) and take it as a plea to draw on theoretical frameworks as stimuli that focus attention and raise questions the empiricist should pursue and be guided by.

The use of concepts is frowned upon by some in part for what disparagingly is referred to as jargon and in part for the concomitant

generalisations – intrinsic to theorising - that are taunted as speculative history (Barzun, 1974). Yet regardless of any apprehension, theoretical concepts are central to historical analysis as historians through their very language impose classifications on their sources and phenomena observed as testified through the widely used terms such as class, hegemony or social mobility, which are adopted in historical analysis as they help define more precisely phenomena, facilitate accurate differentiation and direct insights (Erikson, 1989).

Historians are expected to select, analyse and compare data they find and eventually arrive at more universal inferences. Indeed, as Evans-Pritchard reminds us, “events lose much, even all of their meaning if they are not seen as having some degree of regularity and constancy, as belonging to a certain type of event, all instances of which have many features in common” (Evans-Pritchard, 1962). Emerging theoretical concepts are thus grounded in the observation of commonalities between actions and individuals with a view to detect cumulative effects that result in an institutionalisation of behaviour and a taxonomy of phenomena (Tosh, 2010) which historians in turn avail themselves of when they refer to generalising concepts such as Absolute Monarchy, Feudalism or the Renaissance. Each of which serves as an ideal model that is instrumental in breaking down complex phenomena, identifying what is typical in a scenario and supplying the historian with a well-defined technical term that aids understanding (Erikson, 1989; Whitlam, 1995).

Clearly, as with all theoretical concepts drawn from the social sciences one needs to handle them with care, be discriminating about what tenets to espouse and avoid over-theorising at the expense of evidence

(Kraditor, 1972; Tosh, 2010). As neither is a neutral tool, all concepts come charged with assumptions. That is in part what explains their purpose: Indispensable in the historian's endeavour to raise new questions, they provide the lens that directs to new investigative paths, offer a coherent perspective and potentially allow the research to consider alternative explorative avenues and arrive at new answers. This, it could be argued, is a value in its own right, even though it should not be claimed that any one investigative lens exhaustively produces the right answer or, for that matter, the only answer (Donnelly and Norton, 2011) - but an answer that is complementary which is a merit in itself and beneficial to the explorative discourse rigorous historical analysis is predicated on.

Theoretical concepts do not just serve to predict future behavioural patterns, but they have also become irremissible instruments that lend themselves to understand, put into perspective and explain past behaviour and processes by proposing an angle that frames and accounts for action and outcomes. Against this backdrop it is argued in this paper that the concept of reputation should serve as an interpretive instrument that leads historians to judgements and conclusions which reflect a collective overriding concern of historical entities and individuals for and awareness of public appearance and image.

The adoption of reputation as a theoretical concept that serves to elucidate past events and predict upcoming developments appears to constitute a stimulus to the investigative method of historical analysis and readjust the focus of empirical enquiry. While sociologists would in this context talk of prestige, in management studies the term reputation

is widely used and familiar and it appears convenient to go with what is known and amply defined.

### **Reputation as a multidisciplinary concept**

A discussion of seminal literature and a review of the diverse purposes reputation is known to serve will subsequently assist the researcher in deploying the theoretical concept as a prism that refracts scenarios and helps guide analysis of historical processes and outcomes. Its established origins in management and business literature prevent us from applying the notion of *reputation* in a broader societal and political context without careful consideration and prior clarification of its definition which is somewhat ambiguous as a result of a variety of academic disciplines that have been instrumental in shaping the concept (Frombrun and Shanley, 1990; Fombrun, 1996; Rindova and Fombrun, 1999) Barnett et al., 2006).

Bromley (2001) defines reputation in terms of an explicit statement delineating collective images. This view matches Shenkar's (1997) earlier more instrumental angle that regards reputation an uncertainty resolving mechanism. A perspective subscribed to by Dowling (2008) who in his study on Australian corporations flags up reputation's function to lend orientation to internal and external publics – an assertion which commands particular pertinence in businesses associated with the service industry (Fombrun and Rindova, 1996; Roper and Fill, 2012), whose performance with regard to their respective quality is particularly complex to assess. Transcending the service sector, reputation can be drawn on as a tool deployed by third parties to arrive at judgements of



phenomena, organisations or individuals, whose quality and performance they have no personal and first-hand experiences with. Reputation's role extends into proffering cues for a range of publics and allaying particular stakeholders' concerns (Omar 2005) which results in the build-up of trust in current quality and performance as well as confidence in future satisfactory delivery of results (Eisenegger, 2009).

Furthermore, reputation is an asset that guarantees substantial benefits: It educates audiences on an organisation's most appealing traits and expands senior management's strategic choices (Fombrun, 1996). More recently, in a similar vein, Jensen and Roy (2008) demonstrate how external constituents draw on reputational information as a proxy to predict likely performance and anticipate behavioural patterns. Therefore, it seems justified to ascribe to reputation the potential of enhancing an organisation's competitive advantage in so far as it guides the behaviour of stakeholders who lack comprehensive information about an entity or individual and therefore rely for guidance on aggregated perceptions or reputation (Caves and Porter, 1977; Weigelt and Camerer, 1988).

There is wide consensus that an entity's reputation is the result of an aggregate inference, resulting from a range of transactions and touchpoints sustained over a period of time between publics on the one hand and organisations on the other. (Harrison, 1995; Fombrun, 1996; Black and Carnes, 2000; Argenti and Druckemiller, 2004; Fill, 2009; Maarek, 2011). Going by this definition reputation can be regarded to be more stable and comprehensive a concept and evidently less flexible by comparison to erratic images which it is instrumental in amalgamating

(Fombrun, 1996). Murray and White (2004) add to this definition the insight that a recognition among stakeholders for consistency in demeanour, action and communications over time moulds a corporate or individual reputation and charges it with cues to render it distinctive and make it stand out from competition (Fombrun, 1996; Schweizer and Nachoem, 1999). To this pivotal role a risk is attached: There is consensus among writers in the field and abundant empirical evidence to conclude that reputation can erode abruptly, while constructing it requires time (Lang and Lang, 1988; Lang and Lang, 1990). Since reputation reveals itself as a cross-disciplinary idea that is committed to the core corporate objectives and operational processes of an organisation or individual and bound to reflect its mission, values and vision - in brief, its distinctiveness – it amounts to an instrument that minimises and fends off competition (Fombrun, 1998; Schwaiger, 2004).

Eisenegger et al. (2010) expanded the concept and grounded their conclusions in the assumption that reputation is a means to justify worldly power domestically. While it is understood that reputation does have a role to play as a vindication of unequal power distribution within a political entity, academic literature is still predominantly conceptualising its function in a modern business and consumerist context (Eisenegger et al., 2010).

In viewing reputation through the lens of political science Weisiger and Yarhi-Milo (2015) point out that national leaders consider a reputation for managerial and political decisiveness as a particularly desirable trait. They cite the example of the former US President Harry Truman who at the outset of the Korean conflict insisted on shaping his public perception by standing firm to the Communist adversary. He reasoned

that a visible unswerving stand in the face of a military challenge could mould his administration's reputation and translate into public support while in contrast images of weakness may be construed as an invitation to international aggressors elsewhere.

The case of Truman is reflective of the concept of reputation developed in international relations literature, research into the Cold War and issues related to deterrence. The argument advanced by Schelling (1981) suggests that countries with a record of following up threats with action, build a reputation as serious contenders at the international stage. The opposite may result from a scenario whereby a country becomes known for backing down in situations of conflict. The underlying assumption in this model is an acknowledgement that past action serves as proxy for future performance.

This theoretical assumption has been illustrated in records about the confrontational summit in 1961 which the Soviet leader Khrushchev used as a platform to issue his plan aimed at altering the status of Berlin (Dallek 2003; Khrushchev, 2000; Taubman 2003). It is interesting to note that the Soviet leader had raised the same proposals in 1958 but did not care to follow them up in the final years of the Eisenhower administration while waiting for a new President to take over with relatively limited experience and expertise in international politics. Kennedy – aware of the Kremlin's intentions - was keen to clarify publicly that under no circumstances would he concede defeat and allow the Soviet Union to take forward its plans of declaring West Berlin a neutral city (Dallek 2003).

The positions of both leaders has in recent years been interpreted in the context of reputation management by suggesting that Kennedy through bold and determined action hoped to hammer home the message that the new man in the White House would not allow himself to be pushed over by any international leader. This stance carried a strategic value as it intended to dissuade Khrushchev from challenging the international status-quo. In other words, Kennedy's response to this incident early on in his Presidency helped to establish his reputation and – if well managed – reduce the likelihood of similar external challenges being mounted in subsequent years (Khrushchev, 2000; Dallek, 2003).

Kennedy's stance appears to have been guided by the expectation that Khrushchev's tactics were not informed by an intimate understanding of his opposite, but rather a tentative reputational rationale: Kennedy was young in years and limited in experience, both features that defined his public persona at the time and were used as proxy for any judgment of his political acumen and strength of personality (Taubman 2003). It appears that external and internal stakeholders seek to put the resolve of a new incumbent to a test which is the defining moment for an emerging reputation. Aware of this challenge, new leaders engage in actual or virtual activities that nudge this process to bring about a desired reputational narrative that demonstrates resolve.

### **Applying reputation as an interpretive prism in historical analysis**

On the following pages it shall now be attempted to expand the disciplinary remit of reputation by proposing the concept as an interpretive instrument of history writing and historical analysis. To this end, prominent turning points in history will be zoomed in on in case

studies that assist in exploring how activities engaged in by political leaders may have been pursued as a result of concerns about organisational image and public persona. The paper also scrutinizes how external stakeholders' behavioural patterns are informed by their judgement of reputational information about an individual or political entity. Based on historical precedence the author proffers a hypothesis by suggesting that political reforms or the lack of them, declaration of wars and the strenuous efforts to forge a peace accord, pacifist demeanour as well as aggressive grandstanding may not be so much linked to an individual leader's personality, political circumstance or structural constraints, but may rather be understood through the lens of a theoretical concept that envisages strategic manoeuvres in the context of winning and losing reputation which is instrumental in shoring up the position of an individual or political body at the helm of a hierarchy.

By drawing on four cases it will be elucidated how applying reputation as an interpretive prism informs historical analysis in distinct ways.

1. The Second Punic War reveals the role reputation plays in shaping strategic decisions by informing the prediction of long-term security and political benefit.
2. An overview of Emperor Augustus' reign helps discern why particular communication strategy and tactics are pursued and how political choices can be understood against a background of imperial reputation building.
3. Claudius' move to occupy Britannia casts a light on reputation as a contributory factor for transformational political decisions and the underlying motivations leading to them.

4. A discussion of the fall of the Roman Empire zooms in on how reputation assists in understanding the reconfiguration of political and military power balances as a result of reversed collective behavioural patterns among adversaries.

The cases are selected in reflection of the author's area of historical expertise. The scenarios outlined represent prominent turning points or high-profile conflicts in history which should allow both the non-expert reader and scholars with a specialisation in management and communication to grasp the chronology, context and merit of the arguments advanced.

### **Reputation's role in making long term predictions: Who is credible and trusted to deliver?**

The Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage was characterised in the first phase by major battles across the Italian peninsula that culminated on August 2nd 216 BC in the Carthaginians' spectacular victory in Cannae. What followed during the second phase of the conflict was a war of attrition until 211 BC when the tide turned against the Carthaginian under the command of Hannibal.

It will be scrutinized in the following paragraphs how in this context the concept of reputation could be critical in enhancing the understanding of the conflict and its outcome with particular attention being cast at the numbers and supply of soldiers that throughout the war remained a core concern for Hannibal. Polybius (1923) believes the numbers of Roman and allied soldiers in 225 amounted to 700.000 infantry and 70.000 cavalry (Baronowski, 1993). Brunt even contends that Rome for its levy

could draw on an Italian population of 875.000 adult males (Brunt, 1971). By contrast, Hannibal's army had shrunk in size on its march from Spain until the crossing of the Alps and by the time he arrived in the Po valley he was left with 20.000 infantry and 6000 cavalry under this command, complemented by 14.000 Gallic soldiers (Lazenby, 1998).

Polybius (1923) argues that Hannibal realised with frustration that his armies' victories in the field had not brought about defections in large numbers among the Italian cities tied to Rome in a network of alliances. There may be two ways of explaining why this anticipated meltdown never materialised: In part, local states were still in awe of Rome's military record and in part Hannibal's heavy handed approach did not suggest an alliance with him would be a better alternative. Upon the realisation that initial military prowess did not make the anticipated inroads, Hannibal resorted to propaganda and posed after the battles of Trebbia and Lake Trasimene as Hellenic liberator who promised privileges and freedom to the cities of Capua, Locri and the Lucanian tribes (Livy, 1929).

Fronza (2010) argues that this reformed approach indeed helped along Hannibal's cause in as far as it won him new allies and ultimately recruits for this depleted army. What, however, appears even more important to consider is the message that reverberated across Italy as a result from the Carthaginian's victories over some of the smaller Roman allies. This stirred questions as to whether Rome could still deliver on the promised protection from an adversary which nudged municipal leaders to reconsider the benefits that came with defection (Goldsworthy 2000). According to Livy, raising these doubts may well have been part of a plan pursued by Hannibal (Polybius, 1923; Livy, 1929).

In the months ensuing the victory at Cannae the Carthaginians availed themselves of the unique opportunity to make up for their persistent lack in manpower and indeed they appeared to be making some headway in persuading nearly all Greek towns along the coast of modern day Calabria to side with Hannibal. However, this success was clouded as the Carthaginians had to divert forces to bludgeon some cities such as Petelia and Consentia into swapping sides. Even more daunting for Hannibal was the relative loyalty among most cities elsewhere in Italy as a result of the close relationship the local aristocracy entertained with Rome (Fronza, 2010).

The bulk of cities in the Roman alliance must have followed attentively news of recent confrontations as well as the developments of the conflict and blended this information into an emerging judgement of likely outcomes. Posturing and grandstanding of both rivals may have fed into that equation as did images moulded by past experiences and encounters with either war party. This reputational information was further moulded in Rome's favour in the immediate aftermath of the Roman backed revolt in the city of Capua which demonstrated that Hannibal was short of the military means or the political acumen to hold on to large cities when faced with opposition. Rome followed up this tangible success by placing garrisons in various municipalities. While their military role is disputed, it seems clear that the show of force and physical presence had a symbolic value as it suggested the leading Italian city meant to stay loyal to its partners. While loyalty was perhaps not a category local elites may have espoused, their perusal of diplomatic options and military alternatives may well have been guided by the desire to end up on the winning side of the conflict. Member cities



within the alliance therefore grounded these crucial decisions in reputational information that mirrors symbolic and actual behaviour.

Hannibal's mistakes in the struggle for reputational superiority, it may be argued, started earlier than the discomfiture at Capua. He appears not to have considered the reputational gain a pursuit of the survivors after his victory in Cannae would have earned him when he stood a chance to eliminate the remaining 10.000 Roman legionaries and capture the surviving consul Terentius Varro (O'Connell, 2011; Miles, 2012). While the loss in manpower – as was demonstrated earlier on – may not have forced Rome onto its knees, the message of a complete Roman annihilation could not have been lost on his allies, particularly as the exit of Varro from the scene would imminently have signalled that Carthage's adversary is without a leader.

In a nutshell, Hannibal was outnumbered throughout the war and growing the ranks was a vital task. No amount of strategic manoeuvring and military ingenuity would have made up for the inequality in manpower. It may be inferred from the evidence reviewed that Hannibal's strategy in the long run could therefore not have been exclusively military, but had to be communicative in kind, predicated on drawing on reputational credit as an instrument to encourage large scale defections among Rome's allies. Indeed, Fronda (2010) sees the causes of the ultimate Carthaginian defeat in Hannibal's inability to win over more Italian communities which contributed significantly to his overall strategic failure in the Italian theatre of the war and thus accounts for Rome's victory over Carthage in the Second Punic War.

## **Reputation in the Augustean era: Discerning the rationale for imperial communication and politics**

It will be argued that the behaviour of Augustus seems to be consistent and aligned with a goal: The establishment of an unassailable position of personal political command and the engineering of the public recognition that he is the benefactor of the republic – not its enemy, which Caesar had been discredited as by his detractors. Applying a reputational lens in historical analysis may therefore allow the observer to discern how this goal fed both into imperial communication and politics in the Augustean era.

Once he had put an end to civil war, Augustus turned his attention to a restoration of traditions, religion and values and the identity of the republic itself. By directing and coordinating his policies and communications he carefully associated himself with symbols and terminology that widely represented the old republic which he claimed to restore, thereby meeting a deeply felt popular sentiment (Petersen, 2005).

Augustus' ability and willingness to meet widely voiced political expectations visibly affected the public sentiment towards him. His key strategy in his autobiographical notes *Res Gestae* was to portray himself as modest, pious and abiding by republican traditions (Augustus, 2009). Historians found evidence to confirm that images of heavy-handedness towards the established elites were consistently avoided (Holland, 2005; Galinsky, 2012) and that Augustus "went to a great deal of trouble to conceal the thoroughly un-republican reality of his absolute authority" (Everitt, 2006, 247). The statues that throughout Augustus' reign were

erected in cities across the empire were not willed by the Emperor; instead it has been argued that they were the tangible expression of popular sentiment (Galinsky, 1996). Their erection reflects a dialogue between the ruler and subjects who wanted to venerate their leader. In turn Augustus gradually conceded to have himself portrayed as an object of veneration (Alföldi, 1977). Arguably, the statues were intended as focus points for imperial reverence, rather than means for the divulgation of complex messages.

There seems to be agreement that architectural projects in the capital Rome were directed by the Emperor himself. Yet Augustus' vision for the city did not envisage his images at the centre of lavish palaces, squares and temple districts (Weber et al 2003). Instead his message was consensus and a united society. He was a man who did not force public opinion, but favoured architecture as a symbolic tool to bring about a sense of gratitude and popular approval (Levick, 2010). While he hoped to achieve applause and recognition, he refrained from commanding it. Hölscher (2000) termed this approach a ritual of orchestrated plurality under the supervision of Augustus. The Ara Pacis, a splendid altar dedicated to harmony and prosperity embodied Augustus' image as the guarantor of peace. On the Augustus Forum he had statues of his ancestors lined up, thus tracing back his family to Rome's Trojan founding fathers. By integrating his family into the tradition of Roman ancestry he secured himself the symbolic pedestal of the quasi untouchable and thus justified his position at the helm of the empire.

As far as explicit communication objectives are concerned there was among Augustus' advisers - as indeed among the entire elite in Rome - an understanding that the republic needed to be restored in name at

least and that the traditional values and old gods had to be revived to consolidate order and peace within. These were throughout his career the political objectives Augustus wanted his public persona to be identified with and his decision to restore the ancient temples was testimony to this goal. The strategy adopted was one of reciprocal negotiation and consent between Augustus and his key publics in an attempt to create the impression that the restoration of the republican order was a project the entire elite as well as the plebs would participate in under his guidance. The campaign to achieve this objective ran over a period of 20 years and incrementally led to a recognition among the elite that the political success of Augustus would benefit the state and was therefore worthy their support (Zanker, 1990; Eich, 2000). A collateral effect of his policies was a largely favourable coverage in the literature produced by his contemporaries. Augustus dominated prose and poetry by dominating public opinion, not by heavy handed interference (Weber et al, 2003).

The scrutiny of evidence suggests that policy and communications management become instruments a leader resorts to in order to earn reputational credit which in turn serves as a strategic tool deployed to secure access to power and to justify their respective position at the apex of the political system. The strategy adopted by Augustus to generate his reputation can best be appreciated against the backdrop of the historical context, particularly Caesar's murder by assassins who saw in him a threat to the republic. Whilst Caesar's war report *De Bello Gallico* was a skilful tool to create images of him as a war leader, Augustus had to adopt a more sophisticated communication strategy that took into account popular sympathy for the republic and the elite's wariness of monarchical rule. His approach hinged on relationship

management and mutual communications that aimed at meeting the expectations of critical publics. In consequence, his position of power was not secured through the force of oppression, but buttressed by societal support and trust which is – as has been sketched out above – rooted in reputational judgements and serves as guidance for current behaviour.

The features of political and communications management in the case of Augustus suggest that both messages and behaviour were guided by a necessity to preserve and create reputational credit. This conclusion may be indicative of the mind-set and approach taken by subsequent decision makers in politics. Arguably, this insight may provide a perspective that feeds into an interpretive framework which helps understand and make sense of political decisions and motivations for decisions taken not just by Augustus' contemporaries but by leaders in a broader historical context.

### **Claudius or how action shapes perception**

For long the debate about the motivation of Emperor Claudius' decision for the Roman Empire to invade and occupy Britannia centred on natural resources, military strategy and a culturally innate drive to expand. By adopting reputation and reputation management as a concept and interpretive perspective the narrative is shifted and a plausible alternative account of causality presents itself: Claudius as a result of diverse ailments and physical shortcomings was by many seen as unfit to govern from the outset of his tenure. His reputation teetering on the brink of collapse was an open invitation for challenges to this authority. A decision to invade Britannia – a province not even conquered by the

great Julius Caesar – would have strengthened Claudius’ relationship with critical stakeholders who may have taken this bold decision as a cue to allay fears the Emperor may not be up to the job. In other words, a thus strengthened reputation may be strategically the most desirable windfall from the campaign in Britannia.

Politically speaking, Claudius was in a bind: His predecessor, the inept Caligula, had been removed and assassinated for blatant incompetence (Sueton, 2001). The stakeholders an Emperor needed support from – the army, the senatorial class and the people of Rome – expected a new leader’s military and political prowess to outshine Caligula’s. Otherwise the elite might have entertained thoughts of reverting to senatorial rule, doing away with imperial authority altogether.

Initially, Claudius’ best claim to the throne were the backing of the praetorian guard, notorious for its fickle loyalty, and his Julio-Claudian imperial ancestry (Dio 1927; Josephus, 1983; Sueton, 2001). Neither was a strong enough pillar to maintain his reign in the long run if the army, the Senate and the Roman populace refused to be won over. In fact the political landscape abounded with serious opposition to the new Emperor: A general in Spain and the governor of Dalmatia were both ready to scramble for the imperial crown. Sulpicius Galba, commander of 25.000 men at the upper Rhine, also was thought to be scheming (Wiseman, 1982).<sup>1</sup>

The populace in Rome expected to see someone at the helm who could credibly lead the empire politically, morally and militarily. For Spinrad

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<sup>1</sup> How real the threat by potential usurpers was at the time, become clear with hindsight, when the very Galba declared himself emperor following the death of Nero in 68 AD.

(1991) a charismatic leadership figure was defined by these traits, none of which however one could associate with Claudius who was burdened by a charismatic deficit. Claudius knew he had to attain early on in his tenure a reputation for competence, likability, morality, potency and intimidation – five features Leary (1995) believes are essential for a leader's efforts in garnering recognition and support among stakeholders. The new Emperor was a voracious reader and gifted historian and certainly aware of how the military reformer and general Marius – venerated, just as Scipio for his victories over Carthage - had built charismatic bonds with the legions and gained popular backing as a result of his military exploits. Julius Caesar, perhaps more than anyone else, had generated his charismatic public persona in the course of his triumphant campaign in Gaul (Livy, 1989; Froman, 1963).

Bromley (1993) flags up the close relationship between charisma and reputation, with the latter hinging on the former. We are reminded of political public relations' contribution to managing and safeguarding reputation - widely acknowledged by Strömbäck et al. (2011), Griffin (2008) and Cornelissen (2008) – by Claudius' attempt to alter his public image through a rhetorical ploy. By referring to himself as Caesar he hoped to promote publicly his links with the reputable Julio-Claudian family line (Koster, 1994) and tap into his ancestors' widely esteemed heritage as military leaders (Timpe, 1994). This need to establish personal political legitimacy – defined in this paper in the Lockean sense as originating from the consent of the governed (Ashcraft, 1991) - by drawing on the reputational mantle must have been seen by Claudius as the key to his survival at the apex of the political structure. Pandering to audiences and nurturing relationships with publics that appreciated

strong military leadership and skills was in the view of Momigliano (1961) a means for the new Emperor to entrench his position.

Against this backdrop Claudius' decision to invade Britannia could be understood. The responses among the Roman elite and populace to his successful campaign would suggest that his reputation – his primary policy concern - had received a tangible and enduring boost. Dio (1927) reported how, upon Claudius' return to Rome, the Senate proclaimed him triumphant. It announced annual games to commemorate his achievement and awarded him the honorary title Britannicus. The crowds flocked to the circus to see fights between wild animals from Africa, a spectacle staged in the name of Claudius who also had his victory re-enacted on the Field of Mars, the traditional assembly square (Sueton, 2001; Coleman, 1993). In honour of his military exploits in Via Flaminia an arch was erected to display the Emperor's political and military record (Wallace-Hadrill, 1990). The invasion of Britannia remoulded Claudius' public persona and suggested here was a man who did not hesitate to take courageous decisions, promote the empire's expansion and add to the glory of Rome.

Veterans brimmed with pride for their share in the victories and were keen to display the honorary medals they had received at the hands of Claudius and his generals for their participation in the invasion (Kent, 1966; Smallwood, 1984; Tacitus, 2008). The number of his political acolytes swelled and extended beyond the army as is evidenced by statues likening Claudius to Jupiter. These monumental busts and figures crept up all over Italy, commissioned by people who were willing to ignore the Emperor's ungainly physique and contorted facial expression. Moreover local officials and dignitaries printed flattering



images of the Emperor on coins (Erim, 1986; Kent, 1966; Smith, 1987). Thus, even the remote provinces accepted Claudius as a charismatic leader who deserved their support and adoration (Sueton, 2011).

Evidence that the invasion of Britannia dramatically changed Claudius' public persona and established his reputation as a competent administrator and courageous leader would assuage doubts about his skills and ability and provide him with the legitimacy required to command support from the Senate, the army and the populace. One may conclude, therefore, that the impact of military and political action on an individual's reputation is significant. Leaders who are cognisant of this correlation and aware of a need to build up and protect their respective reputational credit may allow this rationale to guide their decision making processes.

### **The end of Rome – when the reputation declined, the city fell**

The concept of reputation entails an inbuilt dichotomy as it serves to anticipate behaviour while it is also deployed as interpretative tool in an analysis of the past. In other words our understanding of reputation management's function in guiding behaviour of protagonists and conditioning responses among stakeholders mirrors both its predictive as well as its interpretative dimension. Both the former and latter are of use not just in an executive context and invaluable for activities related to organisational auditing with a view to discern problems and best practice. Both dimensions assist historians in drilling to the core of what really happened by ascertaining causes, triggers and consequences. To this end the following paragraphs aim to discuss an alternative

interpretive lens for the fall of the western Roman Empire, which ever since 476 has stirred intense and controversial debate among historians.

It is being argued that one potential cause for the demise of Rome can be found by reviewing the developments in the 5<sup>th</sup> century which led to a transformation of the perception hostile tribes across the border had of the empire. As a result of negligent reputation management the images circulating among tribal leaders suggested Rome was - in contrast to previous centuries – neither willing nor capable of retaliating forcefully against threats to its authority and territorial integrity. This reticent use of force had both a strategic and symbolic effect which unleashed a vicious cycle by growing confidence among tribes that gradually coalesced until a critical mass emerged whose onslaught the Roman forces in the end found themselves overwhelmed by. It is suggested that during the heyday of the empire adept communications – through pageant and action – secured images of and a reputation for robust border defences, ruthless military policy and unheard of organisational skill which on aggregate did not go unnoticed beyond the border and in total substantially decreased the likelihood of actual physical attacks and raids that in turn allowed the Roman army to prevail over those limited numbers of raiders whose thirst for a confrontation could not be thwarted by displaying icons of power alone.

Over centuries the belief among chieftains was such that a challenge to Rome would be costly and eventually futile. In the late 4<sup>th</sup> century this judgement was up for a comprehensive reconsideration as the Völkerwanderung (Barbarian invasion) loomed and manifested itself in unheard of convulsions throughout eastern and central Europe which unleashed migratory dynamics upon the populations to the west of the

Dniro River. The epochal confrontation had been kicked off by the onslaught of migrant horse people, referred to as the Huns, and their westward trajectory (Kulikowski, 2007; Halsall, 2008). As their advancement gained in thrust several tribes felt geographically and militarily sandwiched by their main adversaries - the Huns and the Romans. The subsequent moves engaged in by several chieftains were informed by reputational information and cognisant of an emerging strategic map that mirrored recent events such as the drubbing of the Romans in 378 AD during the battle of Adrianople at the hands of the Goths and Rome's flawed attempts to push back the intruders. News of similar incursions the Romans failed to rebut and tales of raiders returning home with generous booty to the praise of their fellow tribesmen led to Rome's incremental association with images of weakness and loss of military capacity which in turn informed the tribal decision-making process on who to turn against when the pressure from the Huns mounted (Geuenich, 2005; Schallmayer, 2011).

Gradually, a new narrative was emerging that shaped predictions about the future behaviour of the empire in case of an attack. The consequences were staggering: Soon after the battle of Adrianople had crippled Rome's reputation, the imperial army found itself engaged in various theatres of war to an extent that resources were stretched to breaking point (Goldsworthy, 2009). Suggestions that the ascendancy of Rome's adversaries resulted from the numerical shrinking of the army have been confuted by Jones (1986), Elton (2006) and Duncan-Jones (1990) who agree that the numbers of soldiers enlisted in the late imperial period surpassed the army size earlier emperors had at their disposal by 30 to 100 per cent.

In other words and in line with conventional definitions of the concept, reputation awarded the Romans for the better part of their history with what in management studies one may refer to as competitive advantage, which – as has been outlined above - over time was reversed as images emerged of ineptitude among Roman officials and military leaders. The decision of tribes which neighbour to turn against may have been led by reputational cues, based on past behaviour as a proxy for the kind of resistance they were likely to expect.

Hence the argument could be advanced that a comparative reputational evaluation helped tribes resolve uncertainty and permitted them to take strategic decisions on who to align themselves with and who to raid for booty and territorial gain. By now images of Roman demise had become entrenched which informed strategic inferences arrived at by tribal chieftains and shaped collective action among tribes. While during Rome's rise to an empire reputation served to keep external challenges at a minimum, the empire had now become associated with traits of incapacity which attracted a plethora of challengers and hostile forces it would not even in the heyday of its history have had the military and material means to stave off contemporaneously (Schnee, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The cases presented in this paper expand on the concept of reputation, define the instrumental value of reputational information in explaining behaviour and decision making processes and proffer reputation as interpretive prism for historical analysis. In light of the cases discussed a number of inferences can be made in relation to approaches to historical

analysis, practice of organisational management, societal implications, the significance of this study as well as the need for further research.

The broader implication of the findings presented above may require historians to recast the net of analysis, integrate the concept of reputation into their existing range of analytical instruments and reconsider the premise, perspective, process and outcome of historical developments wherever the interpretive angle proposed by reputation management has so far not been given full consideration. Failure to recognise reputation as a significant concept in historical analysis does not only impair the fair and balanced reflection of personal and organisational stakeholder behaviour, but also thwarts a full appreciation of the motivation individual protagonists and institutional agents are driven by, whose decisions are central to historical processes and outcomes

Historians' quest to identify the motor of change will need to reflect the leverage exerted by concerns for personal and organisational reputation in moments of political precariousness that occur when solutions to conflictual processes are pending and dynamic environments or military conflicts cause scenarios of uncertainty. The concept advanced and explored in a range of four cases may be applicable more broadly and through further corroboration evolve into a 'model of comparative reputational evaluation' that lends itself as a tool to historical analysis. This model can be instrumental in casting light on causal action, decisions and outcomes in as far as it frames historical processes as a struggle for recognition and deference between competing holders of organisational and individual reputations. In other words, action and inaction are seen to illustrate in two distinct ways the competitive setting

of reputational phenomena: They mirror efforts to build reputation and encapsulate stakeholders' efforts to align themselves (as detected most vividly in the case study about Rome's demise) with organisations and individuals whose reputational cues are most compelling, likely to bring about reward and tipped to prevail over adversaries – initially at a perceptual level which in consequence and accelerated by a gain or loss in reputational credit translates into a tangible reality of physical success and failure.

For incumbents survival at the apex of an organisational structure appears to require ruthless and immediate action right at the outset of one's tenure which in the case of Claudius seems to have been critical in securing his position. We may infer that the taxonomy of executive decision making will be almost exclusively oriented towards preservation of reputation, which in the four cases analysed appeared to be the primary predictor of outcomes and critical for a leader's ability to perform and meet objectives. For this overarching emphasis to be attained other managerial considerations take second stage, whilst the recruitment and concentration of organisational resources intended to shore up and protect the leader's reputational integrity takes centre stage

What emerged, therefore, in all four case studies, is an understanding of 'reputation bound immediacy' which suggests that right at the beginning of a leader's tenure or at the outset of conflict the incentive to invest resources on reputation building and protection is at a premium. Considerations of policy that are not contributory to this objective are a perilous distraction from the agenda. The scenario surrounding Claudius's unlikely rise to power and the overwhelming opposition waiting in the wings probably makes the strongest case for the

managerial pertinence of 'reputation bound immediacy', which blends reputation management with an insight into the most propitious timing. In the case of Hannibal's campaign, too, the cues sent out to potential allies about the Carthaginians likely destiny and chances to carry victory would have had most impact in the early phase of the conflict, which is equivalent with the formative phase of Hannibal as a military leader and thus decisive for the growth of his reputation with stakeholders on the Italian peninsula.

History's role in explaining and accounting for reality past and present renders a historical analysis of the function ascribed to reputation in the moulding of political processes just as pertinent as an enquiry into the consequences of reputation with a view to understanding their societal fallout and impact on political discourse. Yet concern with images and public perception is not new to historical enquiry and known to affect personal lives and organisational management (Goffman, 1959). However, the cases studied here cast a light on how an anxiety to defend reputation has led to outcomes of epochal dimensions whose legacy makes itself felt over the course of centuries. Four hundred years of Roman rule in Britain has left its traces in the nation's language and identity and the demise of the Roman Empire is a pivotal turning point in European history and the origin of a system of tribal kingdoms that paved the way for the subsequent emergence of nation states that shape the continent's destiny to the present day.

In another respect the findings in this paper are noteworthy in as far as they corroborate arguments in a more current debate: The idea of a promotional society (Davis, 2013) has elsewhere been comprehensively described as a paradigm for a contemporary discourse of Public

Relation's and impression management's role in power distribution and political decision making. These phenomena may witness in the empirical data analysed in this paper their antecedents in as far as it has been suggested - in line with the emphasis placed on image management in the modern promotional society - that a robust reputation turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy of political success and organisational ascendancy. Reputation thus is at the core of a taxonomy of resources both democratic and authoritarian authority hinge on: Its making and breaking is contingent on reputation. This conclusion is an extension of an earlier debate about the balance of reality and image and their impact on the masses (Lippmann, 1922). Yet the argument advanced here transcends the traditional discourse in two ways: By highlighting both the role of reputational credit as a resource leaders and political entities accumulate and spend in pivotal moments of national and international history and by flagging up the large-scale consequences engineered by those who have superior access to this resource.

The significance of this study particularly lies in its attempt to broaden the applicability of a concept that is widely used and comprehensively researched in a comparatively limited remit. Reputation – its antecedents, potential and consequences – is understood and discussed by authors in management and communication related disciplines, yet the focus of this discourse has traditionally been limited to cases of corporate impression management in the broadest sense. The pertinence of reputation and the weight of its impact has not been fully appreciated for lack of a wider perspective and limited interest among the community of management scholars in scenarios of national and international political consequence. By contrast, political scientists



for years did draw on notions of impression, image and reputation, yet they fell short of engaging with the range of facets the concept had been ascribed to in management literature.

The four cases drawn on above provide a more ample testing ground for the concept of reputation to demonstrate its versatility and level of impact. It becomes clear that reality we experience now and the narratives of past events are potentially much more the result of reputational considerations than might have been expected hitherto. In short, both a revised view of the concept in its own right as well as its highlighted role in determining societal outcomes and managerial constraints constitute ample evidence for the relevance of the findings presented in this study.

In management literature reputation is conceptualised as a resource and the findings of this study suggests that political entities and leaders through action and communications appear to accumulate reputational credit which they subsequently spend with a view to attain objectives. This process raises questions for further research, foremost it should be asked how reputational credit is be put to use by leaders who intend to overcome opposition to necessary but unpopular reforms. In other words, can reputational credit be a tool that is drawn on by leaders to achieve beneficial policy objectives. This is a hypothesis raised by Schnee (2017) that could benefit from corroboration through historical case studies analysis. A related perspective for prospective research should be a concern with the antecedents and array of tools that allow for reputation to be built up and safeguarded. This question requires a closer look at a micro-organisational level that ascertains the mechanics of reputation building as well as the skills and knowledge political entities

and leaders deploy in order to shore up and manage efficiently reputational credit.

The set-up chosen for this paper casts a light on the critical role of reputational credit in highly conflictual situations. If we were to adjust the analytical zoom once more to the macro level it is to be seen if a different selection of cases were to confirm the findings presented here which originate exclusively from scenarios that witness highest stakes such as war and imperial power. The question is warranted as to whether the emphasis on reputation as a pivotal resource capable of preserving or tipping a fragile power structure is replicated once the protagonists were placed in a less conflictual environment and the stakes minimised. It would, therefore, be valuable to ascertain in a future study if under altered circumstances systematic reputation management were still the overriding strategic option and causal in organisational ascendancy and a leader's success.

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