

Flaminius, Gaius (*RE* 2)

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Gaius Flaminius (ca. 265–217 BCE) was a “new man” (*novus homo*) in Roman politics; that is, he did not rise from an established political family at Rome, having produced consuls, censors, and triumphators in its past. Elected tribune of the plebs in 232, he carried a land-law in the Tribal Assembly against senatorial opposition, which distributed individual allotments to indigent Roman citizens in the *ager Gallicus* (between Sena Gallica and Ravenna). His more conservative senatorial colleagues hated him for this measure, as reflected in Polybius’ condemnation of it and allegation that it led to the Gallic invasion of 225 (*Histories* 2.21). In 227 Flaminius was elected praetor and served in Sicily – the first to do so on an annual basis. As consul in 223, Flaminius was recalled to Rome, along with his consular colleague P. Furius Philus, in order to resign his magistracy because of reports of unfavorable portents, after he had already taken the field against the Insubrian Gauls. Ignoring this senatorial injunction, Flaminius won a military victory over the Insubres and celebrated a triumph for his victory by popular vote in the face of senatorial attempts to obstruct it (Zonaras 8.20). His fame was assured by his public building projects as censor in 220: the *via Flaminia*, the great northern highway stretching more than two hundred miles from Rome to Ariminum (Livy, *Epitome* 20), and the Circus Flaminius, which served not only as the site for popular entertainments but also as the setting for occasional, non-voting Roman political assemblies (*contiones*). Throughout his career Flaminius was an independent-minded renegade in the Senate. Livy (*Histories* 21.63) states that he was the only senator to support the *lex Claudia* of 218, which prohibited senators and their sons from owning sea-going ships of more than seven tons carrying capacity. He was elected to the consulate for the second time in 217, at the beginning of the Second Punic War and during the early stages of Hannibal’s invasion of Italy. The hostile Roman annalistic tradition alleged that Flaminius flouted religious imperatives repeatedly by neglecting to take auspices at Rome, assuming his *imperium* at Ariminum, and ignoring unfavorable omens. He followed Hannibal with his army through Etruria, but was hampered by poor visibility and caught in an ambush at Lake Trasimene, perishing with some 15,000 of his men. The sources attribute the disaster at Trasimene to Flaminius’ general incompetence (see, e.g., Polybius, *Histories* 3.77–84). Gaius Flaminius is an enigmatic figure in Roman republican history. The hostile ancient source tradition, viewing him as a rabble-rousing, demagogic politician who undermined the Senate’s authority and paved the way for the destructive *populares* of the later Republic, impedes a balanced assessment of his career.

SEE ALSO: Annalists, Roman; *Novus homo*; *Optimates*, *populares*; Punic Wars; Trasimene, battle of

References and Suggested Readings

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