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a cura di
MARCO BETTALLI ED ELENA FRANCHI



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Libation scene, Musée du Louvre, MR 866 and Ma 965 (Department of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Antiquities of the Louvre). Photo Jastrow, 2007, public domain.

From Ancient Greece to Contemporary Europe. Cross-border Cooperation as a Tool for Stabilization *

BY ELENA FRANCHI
(University of Trento)

1. *From peacebuilding to stabilization. Ancient and Modern*

Just as studies of comparative federalism¹ have long questioned the potential of federalism as a means of conflict resolution, studies of ancient federalism have followed suit.² Aggregative federalisation processes would

* This article provides an overview of some preliminary results of research conducted in the framework of the ERC project “FeBo: Federalism and Border Management in Greek Antiquity” (COG PR. 2021 Nr. 101043954) funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. I’m grateful to Roy Van Wijk and the anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

1 See e.g. Rufus S. DAVIS, *The Federal Principle. A Journey Through Time in Quest of Meaning*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1978; John R. ONEAL, Bruce RUSSETT, «The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950-1985», *International Studies Quarterly*, 41 (1997), pp. 267-294; Harvey STARR, «Democracy and Integration: Why Democracies Don’t Fight Each Other», *Journal of Peace Research* 34, 2 (1997), pp. 153–162; Svante E. CORNELL, «Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective», *World Politics* 54, 2 (2001), pp. 245-276; Svante E. CORNELL, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Richmond, UK, Routledge 2001; Soeren KEIL, «Federalism as a Tool of Conflict-Resolution: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina», *L’Europe en Formation*, 363, 1 (2012), pp. 205-218; Ursula MAENNLE. «Preface», in Hanns BUEHLER, Susanne LUTHER, Michael SIEGNER (eds.), *Federalism and Conflict Management*, Munich, Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2017, 3-4; Alain G. GAGNON, «Multilevel Governance and the Reconfiguration of Political Space: Theoretical Considerations from a Multinational Perspective», in Guy LACHAPPELLE, Pablo OÑATE (eds.), *Borders and Margins: Federalism, Devolution and Multi-level Governance*, Opladen and Berlin, Germany, and Toronto, ON: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018, pp. 77-90; Jens WOELK, «Kooperativer Föderalismus, Bundesstreue und europäische Integration. Deutsche Erfahrungen für Bosnien und Herzegowina?», in *SVESKE ZA JAVNO PRAVO* 38 (2019), 12-25.

2 See, e.g., Arthur E.R. BOAK, «Greek Interstate Associations and the League of Nations»,

be an excellent means of pacifying different regions, nationalities, ethnic groups and religious ones often engaged against each other in deep-rooted conflicts.

With regard to contemporary federalisation processes it has been noted that federalization is more than a means of pacification an accelerator of pacification processes triggered by other factors, esp. in the case of so-called holding-together federalism.³ As far as antiquity is concerned, ongoing research is reaching similar conclusions.

From pacification per se, the focus of research has now shifted to stabilisation and the extent to which stability of a supra-state federal body is favoured by a balance and stability of relations between the member states.⁴ These relations are fostered by so-called cross-border cooperation, i.e. cross-border relations that implement and enhance multi-level (cultural, linguistic, religious, economic) forms of cooperation. The phenomenon of cross-border cooperation is as significant in the contemporary age as in antiquity. This article aims to show the heuristic potential of this concept with regard to Greek Antiquity and to outline similarities and differences between ancient and modern cross-border activities.

The American Journal of International Law, 15, 3 (1921), pp. 375-383; Jakob A.O. LARSEN, «Federation for Peace in Ancient Greece», 39, 3 (1944), pp. 145-162; DAVIS, cit.; Michael WHITBY, «Federalism, Common Peace, and the Avoidance of War in Fourth Century Greece», *Annals of the Lothian Foundation*, 1 (1991), pp. 71-94; Sheila AGER, «Peaceful Conflict Resolution in the World of the Federal States», in H. Beck, P. Funke (Eds.), *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 471-486; Ioanna KRALLI, *The Hellenistic Peloponnese: Interstate Relations. A Narrative and Analytic History, from the Fourth Century to 146 BC*, Swansea, Classical Press of Wales, 2017, p. 147; Emmanouil M.L. ECONOMOU, *The Achaean Federation in Ancient Greece. History, Political and Economic Organization, Warfare and Strategy*, Cham, Springer Verlag, 2020, p. 184. See already Edward A. FREEMAN, *History of Federal Government, from the Foundation of the Achaian League to the Disruption of the United States*, vol. I, London, Macmillan, 1863.

- 3 KEIL, cit., p. 205; Francesco PALERMO, «Federalism, Constitutionalism and Conflict Management», in H. Bühler, S. Luther, M. Siegner (eds.), *Federalism and Conflict Management: Concluding Reflections*, Munich, Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2017, p. 12. On holding-together federalism, see Michael BREEN, «The Origins of Holding-Together Federalism: Nepal, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka», *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 48, 1 (2018), available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjx027> (with further literature).
- 4 See e.g. Dawn WALSH, *Territorial Self-government as a Conflict Management Tool*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. See also the research conducted at the Institute for comparative federalism of the Eurac in Bolzano.

2. *Cross-border cooperation in contemporary Europe*

In the last few years scholars specializing in dynamics of territorialization and management of political communities that belong to supra-state organizations have become more and more interested in cross-border cooperation. This is not by chance: cross-border cooperation has a considerable potential for territorial convergence between the two sides of a border,⁵ that is for a decrease of distinctions between integrating related but different spatial units, and is therefore vital to understanding modern supranational spatial planning processes. This decrease is thought to be based on increasingly institutionalized forms of cross-border cooperation as well as the primarily functional feature of cross-border flows and interactions started by people with a variety of roles and collective actors.⁶ As such, it can be ideational as well as structural (with regard to urbanization, economic activity, and social composition). In these situations, the first dimension is as significant as the second since it is linked to border societies' collective perceptions and representations of both themselves and the neighbouring foreign societies to the point that these representations can occasionally result in the development of a transborder sense of shared identity.⁷

Territorial convergence can become a means of integrating people living on both sides of the border and thus have significant potential in stabilising inter-state relations in a Europe that was torn by conflict less than a century ago. It is therefore not surprising that the European Union started to value these occurrences of territorial convergence a few years ago. Since the EU's founding, one of its goals has been promoting cohesiveness among its members, and the latter is seen both as an effect as well as a potent instrument for cross-border collaboration.⁸ The establishment of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), a

5 Philip DE BOE, Claude GRASLAND, Adrian HEALY, *Spatial Integration. Study Programme on European Spatial Planning Strand 1.4, Final Report*, Stockholm, Nordregio, 1999.

6 Alice ENGL, Johanna MITTERHOFER, «Bridging National and Ethnic Borders: The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation as a Space for Minorities», *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online*, 12, 1 (2016), pp. 25-28.

7 Frédéric DURAND, Antoine DECOVILLE, «The EGTC as a Tool for Cross-border Integration», in G. Ocskay (ed.), *15 years of the EGTCs. Lessons learnt and future perspectives*, Budapest, Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives, 2020, p. 107.

8 ENGL, MITTERHOFER, cit., p. 28.

legal entity, elevates territorial convergence to the point of institutionalization.⁹ Establishing EGCTs in 2006 was done thus “to enable cross-border cooperation approaches to reach a new level, by creating supranational institutional structures with legal personality and their own financial and human resources”.¹⁰ They are intended to institutionalize the current occurrences of cross-border collaboration¹¹ as well as to encourage the formation of new forms of cross-border territoriality: EGCT are both a result and a tool for cross-border collaboration.¹² The latter is thought to present border regions with an opportunity: it can “aim to find win-win partnerships between regions, in particular to transform a border into a possibility of development”¹³. Since neighbouring territories have become interfaces, their border position is no longer a weakness.¹⁴ They are increasingly cross-borderised. Cross-borderisation means that previous social or economic interactions are re-activated in order to generate this effect. Therefore, the true crux of the issue is in these relationships, independent of any modern institutionalization that may strengthen and further motivate them. They may serve as a tool for fostering unity among supra-state body members.

One of many possible examples of EGCT is the ‘European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino’ EGCT, whose history will be briefly outlined here.¹⁵ Territorial

9 Alice ENGL, «Ein Instrument zwischen Gemeinschaftspolitik und nationalem Recht: Die Durchführung der Verordnung über den Europäischen Verbund für Territoriale Zusammenarbeit in ausgewählten EU-Mitgliedstaaten», *Europarecht*, 48, 3 (2013), pp. 285-306; ENGL, MITTERHOFER, cit., p. 13 (n. 13) and 14-16 (see esp. Regulation 1082/2006 and subsequent amendments [1302/2013]).

10 DURAND, DECOVILLE, cit., p. 104. See also Luis DE SOUSA, «Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: a Framework for Analysis», *Journal of European Integration*, 35, 6 (2013), pp. 669-687.

11 See ENGL, MITTERHOFER, cit., pp. 23-25.

12 Antoine DECOVILLE, Frédéric DURAND, Christoph SOHN, Olivier WALTHER, «Comparing Cross-border Metropolitan Integration in Europe: Towards a Functional Typology», *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28, 2 (2013), pp. 221-237.

13 DURAND, DECOVILLE, cit., p. 105. See also Alexander STUBB, «Foreword», in P. Järviö, *Cross-border Cooperation – Benefiting from Borders*, Helsinki, 2011, p. 1.

14 Antoine DECOVILLE, Frédéric DURAND, Valérie FELTGEN, *Opportunities of Cross-border Cooperation between Small and Medium Cities in Europe*, Luxembourg, 2015.

15 More at: <https://www.europaregion.info/en/>; ENGL, MITTERHOFER, cit., pp. 16-27. On cross-border cooperation with regard to this specific EGCT see the seminal article by Francesco PALERMO, Jens WOELK, «Autonomy: the Problem of Irredentism and Cross-Border Cooperation. Cross-Border Cooperation as an Indicator for Institutional Evolution of Autonomy: The Case of Trentino-South Tyrol», in Zelim SKURBATY (ed.), *Beyond a One-Dimensional*

cooperation has a long history in the Alpine Space and has grown in significance since the Second World War's conclusion. As a result, administrations' readiness to collaborate across borders has increased dramatically over the years. In this sense, the ground was prepared by the Arge Alp, the Working Community of the Alpine Countries, which was established in 1972 and comprises ten areas and cantons from Germany, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland. Since national governments were previously the only entities responsible for cross-border collaboration, ARGE ALP was the pioneer in establishing regional cross-border cooperation. In 2006, the Alpine region received additional prominence and clout inside the Union with the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). With a total population of almost 80 million in the Alpine area, the seven Alpine countries of Austria, France, Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein, as well as 48 of their regions, are included in the EUSALP. In 2011, the Land Tyrol and the two autonomous provinces of Bolzano and Trento availed themselves of the possibility of setting up an EGTC and transformed the already existing cooperation, for which the three territories had worked together in the past but without institutionalisation, into the legal form of the EGTC with its seat in Bolzano. Even if regulation (EC) No. 1082 of 5 July 2006, as amended and implemented by the Regulation of 17 December 2013 regarding the establishment and operation of the EGTC, is directly applicable in the Member States, some provisions are subject to an implementation reserve and must be applied by the member states: the Tyrolean law on the EGTC was adopted by the Landtag of Tyrol in summer 2010 and entered into force on 3 September 2010, while in Italy, on the other hand, the EGTC regulation was implemented by Law No. 88 of 7 July 2009. In October 2010, the Convention and the EGTC Statute were sent to Rome and the establishment of the EGTC and also the participation of South Tyrol and Trentino were then approved on 28 April 2011 by the Italian government. The formal authorisation by the Regional Government of the Land Tyrol took place on 10 May 2011.¹⁶ The founding act, the Convention and the Statutes, were solemnly signed on 14 June 2011 at Castel Thun in Trentino by the then presidents Günter Platter (Tyrol), Luis Durnwalder (South Tyrol) and Lorenzo Dellai (Trentino).

State: An Emerging Right to Autonomy?, Leiden, Martinus Nijhoff, 2005, pp. 277-304.
16 More at: <https://www.europaregion.info/it/euregio/chi-siamo/fondamenti/>.

The establishment of the Euregio Tirolo-Alto Adige Trentino takes on a special significance given the well-known events concerning South Tyrol, which was annexed to Italy after the First World War, tormented during the Fascist period and then progressively protected linguistic minorities and local cultural identities, for historical reasons connected to the (remaining) Austrian Tyrol. The Euregio was further enhanced through the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation, which in this case reveals all its potential for boosting local resources and smoothing out the inevitable tensions inherited from the troubled history of this region.

3. Cross border cooperation in ancient Greece

As already stated in the introduction, this article intends to provide some preliminary remarks on the usefulness of investigating cross-border activities in ancient Greece. This usefulness is one of the topics being investigated within the framework of the ERC Project “FeBo: Federalism and Border Management in Greek Antiquity” (COG PR. 2021 Nr. 101043954), which focuses on the topic of border management by ancient Greek federal states.

It is clear that in the case of ancient Greece, cross-border activities involved territories that were often not separated by a border that the ancients imagined as linear and identifiable in all its features,¹⁷ just as it is clear that the investigation will have to focus on informal and non-formalised, i.e. non-institutionalised, cross-border activities. Despite their low or more often no degree of formalisation, they nevertheless deserve special attention because in certain cases they seem to have facilitated processes of stabilisation in the area. We will focus here on three cases: the Ozolian Locrians; the southern Phocians; and the various actors at play in Cynuria, in the eastern Peloponnese. These three cases will be investigated in further detail in the upcoming months; at this time, we are only going to provide some preliminary results.

As far as the Ozolian Locrians are concerned, our focus is mainly on Oiantheia (and will shortly move on to Naupactus, an even more complex and promising case). Oiantheia, most likely to be identified with the modern site of Mathiou

¹⁷ See e.g. Christel MÜLLER, «Globalization, Transnationalism, and the Local in Ancient Greece», in Oxford Handbooks Online. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.42.

in the bay of Vittrinitsa,¹⁸ was considered by the ancients to be very important for Locrian identity, as seems to be indicated by the fact that it is enumerated among the first cities founded in Ozolian Locris by the eponymous hero Lokros.¹⁹ Given its location, however, Oiantheia's relations with the Aetolians were frequent, both politically (Thuc. 3.101) and economically (cf. Strouza Region Project)²⁰, as has already been remarked by Emily Mackil.²¹ At that point Oiantheia, quite possibly equipped with a port, became the most convenient hub (even more convenient than Naupactus, both for historical and purely odological reasons²²) for both the trade of surplus from the Aetolian hinterland and the import of products from outside to Ozolian Locris and southern Aetolia. Research conducted within FeBo is highlighting how precisely this intense cross-border activity of an economic nature favoured the stabilisation of this area of Ozolian Locris once it was

18 Lucien LERAT, *Les Locriens de l'Ouest*, vol. I, Paris, de Boccard, 1952, p. 208; Petros THEMELIS, «Ο Δαμοφών στην Οιάνθεια», in P. Themelis, R. Stathaki-Koumari (Eds.), *Το Γαλαξίδι από την αρχαιότητα έως σήμερα*, Αθήνα, Εταιρεία Μεσσηνιακών Αρχαιολογικών Σπουδών, 2003, p. 33. Further literature in E. FRANCHI, *Oiantheia in between. Cross-border Activities in Ancient Federal Greece*, forthcoming.

19 Aristot. fr. 561 ll. 14-20 Rose. See Elena FRANCHI, «Genealogies and Violence. Central Greece in the Making», *The Ancient History Bulletin*, Suppl. Vol. 1 (2020), p. 147, with further literature.

20 Sebastiaan BOMMELJÉ, Peter K. DOORN (Eds.), *Strouza Region Project. An Historical-Topographical Fieldwork. First*, Utrecht, SRP, 1981; Sebastiaan BOMMELJÉ, Peter K. DOORN (Eds.), *Strouza Region Project. An Historical-Topographical Fieldwork. Second*, Utrecht, SRP, 1984; Sebastiaan BOMMELJÉ, Peter K. DOORN (Eds.), *Strouza Region Project. An Historical-Topographical Fieldwork. Third*, Utrecht, SRP, 1985; Peter K. DOORN, «Geographical Analysis of Early Modern Data in Ancient Historical Research: The Example of the Strouza Region Project in Central Greece», *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 10, 3 (1985), pp. 275-291. The project is dedicated to eastern Aetolia and in particular Kallipolis [=modern Steno] and Aigition [= modern Strouza], working as an interconnecting hub between the Aetolian hinterland and the Locrian coastline; cfr. also Claudia ANTONETTI, «Problemi di geografia storica del territorio etolo-acarnano: appunti sulla base di nuove testimonianze epigrafiche», in P. Janni, E. Lanzillotta (cur.), *ΓΕΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ. Atti del secondo Convegno maceratese su geografia e cartografia antica (Macerata, 16-17 aprile 1985)* (=Atti di convegni 7; Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università degli studi di Macerata 45), Roma, p. 17. See FRANCHI, *Oiantheia in between*, cit., with further literature.

21 Emily MACKIL, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 2013, p. 288.

22 See FRANCHI, *Oiantheia in between*, cit., with sources and further literature.

‘annexed’ to the Aetolian League,²³ which did not hesitate to exploit its strategic importance later on, also militarily (see e.g. Polyb. 4.57.2). All this leads one to believe that the Aetolians’ success in expanding their control of mainland Greece was due not only to the creation of *tele*, which most likely re-functionalised the federal structures of the koina that then became ‘sub-koina’ of the Aetolian koinon (e.g., the Lokrikon telos)²⁴, nor only to the manipulation of genealogies (I am thinking of Lokros, which from the 4th century onwards became related to Aitolos: Plutarch. qu. Gr. 15²⁵), but also to the exploitation of previous forms of informal cross-border cooperation. The border areas (rather than borders) that divided Aetolians and Ozolian Locrians were frequently traversed by people and objects. These borderlands and their inhabitants had much more in common than what divided them. Exploiting these cross-border activities facilitates the integration and stabilisation, and thus control of these areas.

The second case concerns the Phocians, in particular the Phocians living in southeastern Phocis. The chronological period under consideration now will be primarily the Roman period, although the cross-border relations that constitute our focus, those between the Phocians and the Boeotians, are much older and should be recalled. In fact, relations between the Boeotians and the southeastern Phocians have always been quite intense.²⁶ For instance, eastern Phocis is often interpreted, together with the Opuntian Locris, as the northern periphery of My-

23 Lucien LERAT, *Les Locriens de l'Ouest*, vol. II, Paris, de Boccard, 1952, pp. 61-94; A. Brian BOSWORTH, «Early Relations between Aetolia and Macedon», *American Journal of Ancient History*, 1 (1976), pp. 164-181; John D. GRAINGER, *The League of the Aitolians*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill, 42-45.

24 Marta SORDI, «Le origini del koinon etolico», *Acme*, 6 (1953), pp. 442-445; Jakob A.O. LARSEN, *Greek Federal States. Their Institutions and History*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1968, p. 197; Thomas CORSTEN, *Vom Stamm zum Bund: Gründung und territoriale Organisation griechischer Bundesstaaten*, München, Oberhammer Gesellschaft, 1999, pp. 133-159; Jacek RZEPKA, *The Rights of Cities within the Aitolian Confederacy*, Valencia, Instituto Valenciano de Estudios Clásicos y Orientales, 2006, 33-45; MACKIL, cit., pp. 380-384; Peter FUNKE, «Aetolia and the Aetolian League», in H. Beck, P. Funke (Eds.), *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 95-96; Chiara LASAGNI, *Le realtà locali nel mondo greco. Ricerche su poleis ed ethne della Grecia occidentale*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2019, pp. 148-59.

25 See FRANCHI, «Genealogies and Violence», cit., pp. 148-50.

26 Jeremy MCINERNEY, «Delphi and Phokis: a Network Theory Approach», in J.-M. Luce (dir.), *Delphes, sa cité, sa région, ses relations internationales*, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2011, pp. 95-106, esp. fig. 2.



Fig. 1. Map of Phocis, Boeotia and Attica
from Gustav Droysen's *Historischer Handatlas*, 1886

cenaean Boeotia and findings such as the Late Helladic tombs of Elateia have been traced back to the cultural irradiation of the palaces of Orchomenos and Thebes.²⁷ Moreover, in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, southern Phocis

27 Pierre SALMON, «Les districts béotiens», *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 58 (1956), pp. 51-70, esp. pp. 58-70; Antonia LIVIERATOU, «Phokis and East Lokris in the Light of Interregional Contacts at the Transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age», in M. Iacovou (Ed.), *Cyprus and the Aegean in the Early Iron Age. The Legacy of Nicolas Coldstream*,

and in particular the settlement of Kastrouli played a prominent role for those travelling from northern Boeotia to the Gulf of Corinth.²⁸ However, it should be borne in mind that these relationships were often conflictual as well (the most striking example is the so-called Third Sacred War).²⁹ It is only in the Roman period that the evidence points towards a relationship more characterised by co-operation. There are several elements that point to different forms of cross-border frequentation and cross-fertilization.

First of all, we should mention figures such as Flavia Lanica, who, according to an inscription dating to the 3rd century AD, was a life-long priestess of both the koinon of the Boeotians for the cult of Itonia (at Coronea) and that of the Phocians (IG VII 3426, esp. ll. 3-5).³⁰ Another example is M. Ulpius Damasippus, mentioned in an inscription found at Amphikleia and dated to a period between the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 3rd AD., who was both beotarch and phocarch (IG IX 1, 218).³¹ As has been pointed out, the Boeotian koinon is at this stage more religious than political in character and also includes federal structures that retain their political autonomy (this is the case of the Phocian koinon):³² this clearly im-

Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, Nicosia, 2012, pp. 79-80 (quote on p. 79); Elena FRANCHI, «Mille e un modo di diventare focidese. La Focide tra tendenze centrifughe, vocazione unitaria e Delfi», *Orbis Terrarum*, 20 (2022), pp. 95-121.

28 Andrew J. KOH, Kathleen J. BIRNEY, Ian M. ROY, Ioannis LIRITZIS, «The Mycenaean Citadel and Environs of Desfina-Kastrouli: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Southern Phokis», *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 20, 3 (2020), pp. 51-52, 54, 56 and map 5a.

29 See e.g. John M. FOSSEY, *Topography and Population of Ancient Boiotia*, vol. I, Chicago, Ares, 1988, pp. 375-379 (on fortifications in border zones between Phocis and Boiotia); Giovanna DAVERIO ROCCHI, «Insediamento coloniale e presidio militare alla frontiera foce-se-beotica», *Tyche*, 8 (1993), pp. 1-8; Elena FRANCHI, *Die Konflikte zwischen Thessalern und Phokern. Krieg und Identität in der griechischen Erinnerungskultur des 4. Jahrhunderts*, München, Utz Verlag, 2016, ch. 4, and more recently Roy VAN WIJK, *Athens and Boiotia. Interstate Relations in the Archaic and Classical Periods*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, pp. 62-63 with previous bibliography.

30 See also John M. FOSSEY, Teiresias, *Epigraphica*, E 86.15 (1986); Denis KNOEPFLER, «L'exercice de la magistrature fédérale béotienne par des "étrangers" à l'époque impériale: conséquence de l'extension du koinon en dehors des frontières de la Béotie ou simple effet d'une multi-citoyenneté individuelle?», in A. Heller, A.-V. Pont (dir.), *Patrie d'origine et patries électives: les citoyennetés multiples dans le monde grec à l'époque romaine*, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2012, pp. 233-247, spec. pp. 233-234, pp. 237-240.

31 Cfr. KNOEPFLER, «L'Exercice...», cit., pp. 233-234.

32 Paul ROESCH, *Thespiens et la confédération béotienne*, Paris, de Boccard, 1965, pp. 93-94; Paul ROESCH, *Études béotiennes*, Paris, de Boccard, 1982, pp. 407-411; Denis KNOEPFLER,

plies that the borders, or rather, the border areas between Phocians and Boeotians have a political function, albeit a weak one, but do not connote a religious or cultural border. The political boundary, while still existing, loses importance in relation to cross-border activities of a, as we shall see, multiple character.

This would be reflected, for example, in the ritual performed by the Phocians of Tithorea and Thebans mentioned by Pausanias (Paus. 9.17.4-7). It is a ritual in which Phokos, the founding hero of the Phocians, and Antiope, the Theban princess with whom he falls in love, are commemorated. The myth of the love between Phokos and Antiope may date back to the 5th century BC,³³ but what is of interest here is the ritual that is performed to commemorate them. Phokos and Antiope, so Pausanias, are buried in Tithorea, which is located in southeastern Phocis, while the tomb of the children Antiope had before she met Phokos is located in Thebes. The periegete reports that every year, in spring, the inhabitants of Tithorea go to Thebes to try to steal earth from the tomb of Antiope's children while the Thebans try to prevent it. This ritual clearly displays tension and conflict, but presupposes cooperation; not only that, but the stage of ritual encom-

«Louis Robert en sa forge : ébauche d'un mémoire resté inédit sur l'histoire controversée de deux concours grecs, les Trophônia et les Basileia à Lébadée», *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 152, 4 (2008), pp. 1421-1462; KNOEFLER, «L'exercice...», cit., pp. 224-228 ; Christel MÜLLER, «A koinon after 146? Reflections on the Political and Institutional Situation of Boeotia in the Late Hellenistic Period», in N. Papazarkadas (Ed.), *The Epigraphy and History of Boeotia. New Finds, New Perspectives*, Boston-Leiden, Brill, 2014, pp. 118-146 (esp. pp. 122, 126, 129); Hans BECK, Angela GANTER, «Boiotia and the Boiotian Leagues», in H. Beck, P. Funke (Eds.), *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 132-157, esp. pp. 156-157; Denis KNOEFLER, «Le financement des Basileia et l'histoire du Koinon Boiôtôn à la basse époque hellénistique : à propos de la nouvelle apologia de Lébadée et d'un fragment resté inédit», *Horos*, 26-31 (2014-2019 [2020]), pp. 241-257; Albert SCHACHTER, *Boiotia in Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 141-143; Christel MÜLLER, «L'empreinte de Sylla : les conséquences de la première guerre mithridatique sur les territoires et paysages béotiens», in Th. Lucas, Ch. Müller, A.-Ch. Odon-Panissié (dir.), *La Béotie de l'archaïsme à l'époque romaine : frontières, territoires, paysages*, Paris, de Boccard, 2019, pp. 155-177; Christel MÜLLER, «Mort d'une confédération. Qu'est-il (vraiment) arrivé au koinon béotien en 172/171 av. J.-C.?», *Ktêma. Civilisations de l'Orient, de la Grèce et de Rome antiques*, 46 (2021), pp. 323-342.

33 Angela KÜHR, *Als Kadmos nach Boiotien kam: Polis und Ethnos im Spiegel thebanischer Gründungsmythen*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 2006, pp. 84, 118ff., 122ff.; John GIBERT, «Euripides' Antiope and the Quiet Life», in J.R.C. Cousland, J. R. Hume (Eds.), *The Play of Texts and Fragments. Essays in Honour of Martin Cropp*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, pp. 25ff. See also Wien KHM 382 with comment by Elena FRANCHI, «Genealogies and Politics: Phocus on the Road», *Klio*, 99, 1 (2017), pp. 1-25, esp. p. 10, n. 31.

passes southeastern Phocis and Boeotia and is thus configured as a cross-border activity, markedly ritual in this case.

Mythical manipulation is another terrain in which it is possible to bring into play (and thus, for us historians, to intercept) phenomena of mythical and even cultural cross-border cooperation on a broader spectrum. The eponymous hero of the Phocians, who in the most widespread traditions turns out to be a native of Corinth or Aegina,³⁴ but of whom a story preserved in Plutarch and most probably dating back to the Hellenistic age states that he is Βοιωτίος (...) τῷ γένει (Boeotian by birth), is significant. Such a Phokos would be father of Kallirhoe, the heroine at the centre of an affair that thematises intra-Boeotians tensions, but cannot fail to evoke, in those who have handed down and variously enjoyed this story, eponymic resonances with the Phocians. Imagining a Phokos of Boeotian origins was not perceived as an anomaly in Roman times, as there were so many different practices of inter-regional sharing that they are to be read as cross-border, because they ignore and thus depoliticise what had been, and now only partially remained, a politically relevant border. These cross-border activities must have facilitated the expansion of the Boeotian koinon, now more religious than political in character; we can imagine that the Boeotians actively exploited them in this sense, facilitating the integration and stabilisation of the new areas involved.

The third case to be briefly examined here concerns a region in the eastern Peloponnese, Cynuria (or Thyreatis, the northern part of Cynuria)³⁵ to be precise. This is notoriously a territory disputed between Argives and Spartans in the course of a centuries-long conflict, as it was repeated on several occasions and with alternating fortunes.³⁶ The warlike and violent side of the issue is and remains significant. However, it should also be noted that two epigraphs have been found in the disputed region that could testify to its ubiquitous frequentation by both Argives and Spartans. In particular, it cannot be ruled out that Argives and Spartans would have frequented the same places of worship at the same time.

I refer to ‘sanctuaries’ in honour of Apollo Pythaios, documented as early

34 FRANCHI, «Genealogies and Politics», cit., with sources and previous bibliography.

35 Graham SHIPLEY, «Lakedaimon», in M.H. Hansen, Th.H. Nielsen (Eds.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 569-598, esp. p. 571.

36 Elena FRANCHI, «Violence agonistique ? Guerre de frontières et anthropopoïèse des élites dans l’imaginaire grec», in V. Dasen, T. Haziza (dir.), *Violence et jeu, de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, Caen, Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2023, pp. 87-103, with sources and literature.

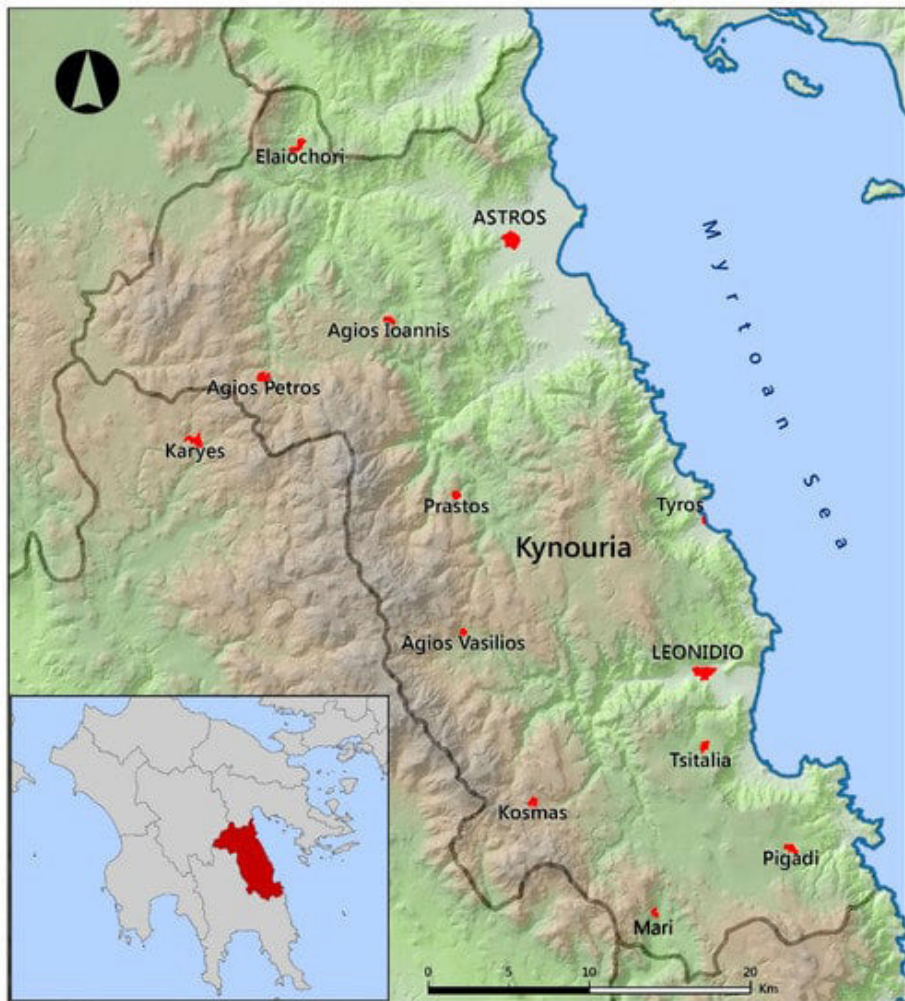


Fig. 2. Cultural Routes in Kynouria of Arcadia: from Boukouvalas, Lampros; Grigorakakis, Grigoris; Tsatsaris, Andreas. Cultural Routes in Kynouria of Arcadia: Geospatial Database Design and Software Development for Web Mapping of the Spatio-Historical Information. *Heritage* 2018, 1, 142-162. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage1010010>. License CC BY 4.0. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326635008>

as the Archaic period. A little bronze disc that may date from the 1st half of the 6th century BC, but most likely from a bit later,³⁷ is our first piece of evidence,

³⁷ Lilian H. JEFFERY, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 199, no. 14; *Revised edition with a supplement by A. W. Johnston*, 48. Cfr. Maria Letizia LAZZARINI, *Le formule delle dediche votive nella Grecia arcaica*, Roma, Accademia

which comes from Kosmas on the mountain of Prophitis Ilias. A certain Melas dedicates it to (Apollo) Pythaios.³⁸ There are similarities between the shapes of most of the letters and Laconian inscriptions; this is a hypothesis that hasn't been contested as far as I know. A tiny bronze hoplite, dedicated in the Laconian style to (Apollo) Maleatas (mid-6th century), another local cult, by a certain Charilos, has been discovered at the same location, which is most likely a cult site³⁹. In this context it should be recalled that a goat sculpture discovered in its vicinity was connected to a Laconian workshop.⁴⁰ From our point of view, this is intriguing since it appears that groups of Laconians or individuals acquainted with styles common in Laconia frequently visited the site. In this context, it is tempting to consider that one of the successes attained by the Spartan Damonon⁴¹ was one he achieved in his youth at the Maleateia at the games held in honor of Apollo Maleatas at Kosmas.⁴²

nazionale dei Lincei, 1976, p. 296, nr. 835.

- 38 *SEG XXXV* (1985) 294 [= *SEG XI* (1954) 890], ed. Th. A. Arbanitopoulou, Πολέμων III 1947/8, 152/4 c. im. ph. fig. 1: Μέλας μ' ἐνίκε Πυθαιεῖ. See Jeanne ROBERT, Louis ROBERT, «Bulletin épigraphique», *REG*, 63 (1950), pp. 121-220.; Charalampos B. Kritzas, «Remarques sur trois inscriptions de Cynourie», *BCH*, 109 (1985), pp. 709-716, (both emending in ἦνικε); LAZZARINI, cit., p. 296, nr. 835; Panagiotis B. PHAKLARES, *Archaia Kynouria*, Athinaï, 1990, pp. 181ff., fig. 104, 2; Massimo NAFISSI, «La stele di Damonon, gli Hekatombaia e il sistema festivo della Laconia d'epoca classica», in F. Berlinzani (cur.), *La cultura a Sparta in età classica*, Milano, 2013, pp. 105-174, esp. p. 133, n. 98.
- 39 Athens MN inv. 7598 (*IG V 1*, 927; JEFFERY, cit., no. 37 (194 and 200)). See Madeleine JOST, «Statuettes de bronze archaïques provenant de Lykosoura», *BCH*, 99 (1975), pp. 339-364, esp. p. 348 no. 10 and pp. 360-362; Claude ROLLEY, «Le problème de l'art laconien», *Ktéma*, 2 (1977), pp. 125-140, esp. pp. 129-130, t. 2, fig. 5; Marlene HERFORT-KOCH, *Archaische Bronzeplastik Lakoniens*, Münster, Archäologisches Seminar der Universität, 1986, pp. 56 and 116, no. K 131, t. 19, 1-2; Marie-Françoise BILLOT, «Apollo Pyhtëen et l'Argolide archaïque: histoire et mythes», *Archaiognosia*, 6 (1989-1990), pp. 35-100, esp. 83; PHAKLARES, cit., fig. 103 t. 93 γ-δ; Conrad M. STIBBE, «Gitiadas und der Krater von Vix», *BaBesch*, 75 (2000), pp. 65-114; Conrad M. STIBBE, *Laconian Oil Flasks and Other Closed Shapes. Laconian Blackgazed Pottery, Part III*, Amsterdam, Allard Pierson, 2000, p. 89, figs. 20-2; Rosa PROSKYNITOPOULOU, «Laconian Metalworking», in N. Kaltsas (ed.), *Athens-Sparta*. New York, 2006, pp. 155-180, esp. p. 163 no. 66; Nicolette PAVLIDES, «The Sanctuaries of Apollo Maleatas and Apollo Tyritas in Laconia: Religion in Spartan-Perioikic Relations», *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 113 (2018), pp. 279-305, esp. p. 280.
- 40 Athens, NAM, 7666 (late 6th B.C.) with comment of PHAKLARES, cit., p. 181 (see pl. 93α).
- 41 *IG V 1*, 213. On the chronology, see, recently, NAFISSI, cit., pp. 114-115; Paul CHRISTESEN, *A New Reading of the Damonon Stele*, Newcastle upon Tyne, *Histos*, 2019, p. 22.
- 42 On the Maleateia see Stephen HODKINSON, «An Agonistic Culture? Athletic Competition in Archaic and Classical Spartan Society», in St. Hodkinson, A. Powell (Eds.), *Sparta: New*

The Kosmas inscription must also be related to a bronze handle of a vase (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung Misc. 7668) found in Tyros,⁴³ with a dedication by a certain Menoitos to Pythaios,⁴⁴ dating back to the end of the 6th century⁴⁵ or to the 5th.⁴⁶ With regard to this inscription, there are two seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence to consider. On the one hand, five finger rings found around there decorated with spirals most probably dating back to the 8th and 7th B.C. have corresponding items at the Spartan sanctuary of Orthia, which leads us to suggest⁴⁷ that some local tastes were more similar to patterns also observed in the Eurotas valley⁴⁸. On the other hand, the alphabet seems to mix Laconian and Argive elements: did the movement of people who were accustomed to the Laconian or Argive alphabet lead to the emergence in Cynuria of a hybrid alphabet composed of elements from several local alphabets that at some point acquired their own unique local characteristics? The porosity of borders between Cynuria and Laconia in Archaic times can be an explanation of this familiarity⁴⁹:

Perspectives, London, Duckworth, 1999, pp. 147-188, esp. p. 178; NAFISSI, cit., pp. 132-133.

43 PAVLIDES, cit., p. 281, fig. 1.

44 IG V 1, 928: Μεν[οί]τι[ο]ς ἀνέθεκε τοῖ Πυθαίῳ.

45 JEFFERY, cit., p. 200 no. 36. See also Konstantinos A. RHOMAIOS, «Ἐρευνα ἐν Κυνουρίᾳ», *Prakt* (1911), pp. 253-279.

46 Karl A. NEUGEBAUER, «Reifarchaische Bronzevasen mit Zungenmuster», in *MDAI, Römische Abteilung*, 38-39 (1923-1924), 341-44, 369.

47 Gabriel BERNARDO, «Archaic bronze votives from Argolis and the east coast of Laconia», forthcoming.

48 Gabriel BERNARDO, «Archaic bronze votives from Argolis and the east coast of Laconia», forthcoming.

49 Needless to say, the permeability of borders after the Archaic era should be examined in light of fortifications (see e.g. by William K. PRITCHETT, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, vol. III, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980, pp. 105-110 and 135-138; Jacqueline CHRISTIEN, Théodore SPYROPOULOS, «Eua et la Thyréatide: topographie et histoire», *BCH*, 109 (1985), pp. 455-466; Jacqueline CHRISTIEN, «Promenade en Laconie», *DHA*, 15, 1 (1989), pp. 76-80; PHAKLARES, cit.; Yvonne C. GOESTER, «The Plain of Astros: A Survey», *Pharos*, 1 (1993), pp. 39-112; Graham SHIPLEY, «Site catalogue of the survey», in W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling, G. Shipley (Eds.), *Continuity and Change in a Greek Rural Landscape: The Laconia Survey II. Archaeological Data*, London, 1996, pp. 315-438; Graham SHIPLEY, «Archaeological Sites in Laconia and the Thyreatis», in W. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R. W. V. Catling, G. Shipley (Eds.), *Continuity and Change in a Greek Rural Landscape. The Laconia Survey, II, Archaeological Data*, London, 1996, pp. 263-313; Graham SHIPLEY, «The Extent of Spartan Territory in the Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods», *BSA*, 95 (2000), pp. 367-390; Jacqueline CHRIS-

Cynuria was a region with enough permeability for meaningful interregional connection to emerge. From the perspective of Argos as well as from the perspective of Sparta Cynuria is a borderland, but economic and ritual cross-border activities were intensive and this may explain that despite the frequency of conflicts no short periods in which this land is permanently controlled by the Spartans or Argives exist:⁵⁰ control over it was made less arduous by established and lasting forms of cross-border cooperation that on the one hand fostered integration and on the other did not obliterate the continued frequentation by individuals from the city that had lost control over it. Spartanized or Argivized Cynuria was easier to stabilize because of previous borders' porosity and cross-border activities.

4. *Cross-border cooperation as a tool for stabilization?*

Some preliminary remarks

The three case studies presented seem to indicate that starting to study cross-border relations not only with reference to contemporary Europe but also with reference to the ancient Greeks could be of some interest. The cases of Oiantheia, Tithorea and Cynuria show not only the significance of even informal cross-border relations but also their potential in relation to dynamics of territorial control and in certain cases even expansion. The penetration of the Aetolians into Ozolian Locris as well as the extension of the Boeotian influence into Phocis and the alternately Argive or Spartan control of Cynuria are facilitated by cross-border relations that in some cases may even have formed the underlying constant sometimes interrupted, and only partially and temporarily, by conflict.

TIEN, Bernard LEGRAS (dir.), *Sparte hellénistique – IVe-IIIe siècles avant notre ère*, Besançon, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2014; Jacqueline CHRISTIEN, «Roads and Quarries in Laconia», in A. Powell (Ed.), *A Companion to Sparta* (2 vols), Hoboken (NJ), Blackwell, 2018, pp. 615-642; Claire BALANDIER, Matthieu GUINTRAND, «L'apport de la teichologie à l'étude historique d'une région», *BCH*, 143, 1 (2019), pp. 425-445 (with further literature).

50 For example, no battles for Cynuria are documented between the battle of Sepeia (Hdt.6.75-81) and the negotiation conducted on the eve of the battle of Mantinea in 418 (Thuk.5.40-41); or between this negotiation and the arbitration of Philip II (Polyb.9.28.7; Paus.2.20.1).

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- ical Perspective», *World Politics* 54, 2 (2001), pp. 245-276.
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How to challenge the master of the sea

Reviewing naval warfare in the Classical period from a non-Athenian perspective

by ALESSANDRO CARLI *

ABSTRACT: Taking distance from previous studies where naval warfare in Classical period is considered as an Athenian uniqueness concerning her military results, this paper aims to review the battles which took place during the Peloponnesian War from a different perspective. After a brief analysis of the Athenian military tactics, understood as their specificity difficult to implement unconditionally, we try to shed light on the Others opted for their ways to conduct naval warfare.

KEYWORDS: PELOPONNESIAN WAR, THUCYDIDES, ATHENS, PELOPONNESIANS, SYRACUSE, NAVAL WARFARE

During the fifth and fourth centuries, did the Greeks lead the naval battles in a single and undifferentiated way? If we raised this question taking into consideration land fights with massive picked battles toward coalitions, skirmishes and ambushes, the swift reply would be negative without there being, it is assumed, conflicting reactions: interpreting the Greek world as monolithic reality falls into disuse even in its military history. In recent years, according to scholars it has been commonly accepted that the poleis, on the basis of their traditions and practises, could conduct warfare through some specific behaviours to route the enemies, who, conversely, opted for other ways for the same aim¹. However, this worthwhile approach is still enclosed within land

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1 Taking the cue from the preliminary remarks of Matthew LLOYD – Roel KONIJNENDIJK – Cezary KUCEWICZ, «Introduction: Beyond the Phalanx», in Roel Konijnendijk – Cezary Kucewicz – Matthew Lloyd (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2021, pp. 1-16, on this topic, see Joshua R. HALL, «The Western Greeks and the “Greek Warfare” Narrative, in Roel Konijnendijk – Cezary Kucewicz – Matthew Lloyd (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2021, pp. 266-292 highlights how we should avoid an universal narrative of Greek warfare.

warfare, meanwhile naval warfare carries on being dealt with a broader outlook focusing sole on Athens. She shines like the only beacon of nautical profitable skills against other contemporary fleets². Instead of being regarded as an Athenian specificity³, as we aim to prove, their tactics are the yardstick as the unique way of fighting toward Greeks: as a consequence, those who did not deal with sea battles employing the same tactics appear inexperienced or less efficient at first sight⁴. Before wondering if that is faithful, we shall put forward where and why this interpretation comes from. On this point, we believe that the viable solution lies in the Thucydidean narrative of what occurred at Sybota. The great naval battle which took place two years before the flare-up of the Peloponnesian War gets a hint of the problem. In the summer of 433, the Corinthian fleet was challenging Corcyra, their dissident colony stood by ten Athenian triremes which should not have step in unless strictly unavoidable⁵. Not unexpectedly if we bear in mind the tricky diplomatic period toward the poleis, Thucydides delves into the narrative highlighting the tactics opted for this battle⁶: both sides owned numerous hoplites on their decks, such as archers and javelin throwers, since the opponents

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- 2 This reading is predominant among the warfare's handbooks expressly or implicitly: cf. Louis RAWLINGS, *The Ancient Greeks at war*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007 p. 122. Philip DE SOUZA, «War at Sea», in Brian Campbell – Lawrence A. Tritle (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 377-378. This view is pervasive still in John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme. The history and reconstruction of an ancient Greek Warship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 69.
 - 3 In this regard, it is interesting the reflection of William L. RODGERS, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare. A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ship Design from Salamis (480 b.c) to Actium (31 b.c)*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1937, p. 11: «The Athenian skills in ship handling was such that their fleets depended more on the ram than on personal struggle, but this was a very brief period in the history of naval warfare».
 - 4 While admitting that they were maritime powers endure the weighty Thucydidean argument: see Hans VAN WEES, *Greek Warfare. Myth and Realities*, Duckworth, London, 2004, p. 227.
 - 5 Since the Athenian assembly ordered the admirals not to take action if Corcyra was not attacked firstly (Thuc., I 45.3), the fact that, during the battle, the Athenians were involved in the fight (Thuc., I 49.7) was probably a sensitive question especially after the return at home. Regarding the convoluted diplomacy: Giovanni PARMEGGIANI, *Atene e l'epimachia con Corcira (433 a.C.)*, *Erga – Logoi*, 4, (2016), 29-47.
 - 6 On this battle cf. Nicholas G. L. HAMMOND, «Naval Operations in the South Channel of Corcyra 435-433», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 65, (1945), pp. 30-37; John WILSON, *Athens and Corcyra. Strategy and Tactics in the Peloponnesian War*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1987, pp. 42-57.

were prepared rather inexperienced according the old-fashion way (πολλοὺς μὲν ὀπίτας ἔχοντες ἀμφοτέρω ἐπὶ τῶν καταστροφμάτων, πολλοὺς δὲ τοξότας τε καὶ ἀκοντιστάς, τῷ παλαιῷ τρόπῳ ἀπειρότερον ἔτι παρασκευασμένοι). Moreover, as the Athenian historian expressly dwells on, Corinth and Corcyra were facing a massive fight but not for their nautical ability, rather the combat was closer to a land battle (Ἦν τε ἡ ναυμαχία καρτερά, τῇ μὲν τέχνῃ οὐχ ὁμοίως, πεζομαχία δὲ τὸ πλεον προσφερῆς οὖσα). The enemy relied more on their soldiers deployed on the decks (μᾶλλον τι πιστεύοντες τοῖς ἐπὶ τοῦ καταστροφάματος ὀπίτας). Instead of employing διέκπλοι – in other words, as we will see, the Athenian way of achieving victories consistently with their perspective –, the challengers managed the naval battle more through bravery and strength than owing to nautical knowledge (διέκπλοι δὲ οὐκ ἦσαν, ἀλλὰ θυμῷ καὶ ῥώμῃ τὸ πλεον ἐναυμάχουν ἢ ἐπιστήμῃ). In the presence of this oriented description, we are in front of one specific standpoint, a child of Thucydides' military expertise⁷ as well as a predictable product of a person coming from the Athenian culture. Actually, this peculiar judgment could be delivered only from a society which, for the fifth years before this battle and maybe more, upgraded its military skills equally importantly brought about its own way of taking up naval situations⁸.

Therefore, by taking the cue from his Athenian background and delineating the Corinthian and Corcyrean fight style as antiquated, here Thucydides moulds a vertical framework: almost at the pinnacle, were settled the Athenians⁹ and,

7 On his military knowledge: cf. Simon HORNBLLOWER, *Thucydides*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1987, pp. 156-159; Peter HUNT, *Warfare*, in Antonios Rengakos – Antonios Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2006, pp. 385-413; Ugo FANTASIA, *La Guerra del Peloponneso*, Carocci, Roma, 2012, pp. 16-31 Edith FOSTER, *Campaign and battle narratives in Thucydides*, in Ryan K. Balot – Sara Forsdyke – Edith Foster (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp. 301-315; Jason CROWLEY, «Thucydides and War», in Polly Low (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023, pp. 129-131.

8 For the debate on the so-called “Athenian naval revolution” Barry O'HALLORAN, *The Political Economy of Classical Athens. A Naval Perspective*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 116-127.

9 As clearly exposed in the so-called *Archaeology* (Thuc., I 13.2-3; 14.1; 14.3), according to Thucydides, there is a straight connection between power and control of the sea: among the several see the analysis of Lisa KALLET-MARX, *Money, Expense, and Naval Power in Thucydides' History 1-5.24*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford, 1993, pp. 21-35. Regarding sea-power in the Greek thought always a starting point Arnaldo MOMIGLIANO, «Sea-Power in Greek Thought», *The Classical Review*, 58.1,

on the opposite side, the lowest one, he relegated the others. As a matter of fact, if it is pointless to call into question the Athenian naval skills and their trained use, at the same time the Thucydidean assessment may mislead his readers. At Sybota, in truth, the battle did not take place between land forces, such as notoriously for instance Sparta or Thebes, yet both the enemies were two naval powers with an enduring seafaring practice and well-established tradition. In conjunction with the proficient naval supply during the Persian Wars, Corinth was the main triremes' provider within the Peloponnesian League and the only real nautical challenger for Athens on the western front¹⁰. Similarly, in quality of troublesome naval power for her mother city, Corcyra emerged as possible enticing ally for both the coalitions due to her remarkable fleet¹¹. Therefore, cognizant of Thucydides' Athenian background, comes the problem up whether we can put faith in his judgment without hesitation or rather we should cross-examine the sources to work out this thorny question: firstly, given the diversified fighting ways according to the Sybota's battle, are we really entitled to appraise the only Athenian method as the unrivalled one to defeat the enemies by sea or should we be more

(1944), pp. 1-7. The bibliography on the *Archaeology* is endless: always fascinating the analysis of Jaqueline DE ROMILLY, *The Mind of Thucydides*, Cornell University Press, 2012, pp. 144-179 and the reflections of Virginia HUNTER, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, pp. 17-49.

- 10 On the Corinthian naval power in the period of Sybota: John B. SALMON, *Wealthy Corinth. A History of the City to 338 BC*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 286-288. Her pivotal role among the Peloponnesian allies during the Archidamian War: Caroline FALKNER, *Sparta and the Sea: A History of Spartan Sea-Power; c. 706 – c. 373 B.C.*, National Library of Canada, Edmonton, 1992, pp. 99-108.
- 11 In sight of the 120 ships available in the 433 (Thuc., I 25.4; cf. I 33.1), the same ambassadors stressed the opportunity of the Athenian affiliation with Corcyra instead of her alignment with the Peloponnesians (Thuc., I 36.3; cf. I 44.1-2). For their fleet: Selene E. PSOMA, «Corcyra's Wealth and Power», in Claudia Antonetti – Edorardo Cavalli (eds.), *Prospettive corciresi*, Pisa, pp. 158-162. On the Athenian advantages through this alliance: Silvio CATALDI, *Prospettive occidentali allo scoppio della guerra del Peloponneso*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 1990, pp. 16-17; James V. MORRISON, «Preface to Thucydides: Rereading the Corcyrean Conflict (1.24-55)», *Classical Antiquity*, 18.1, (1999), pp. 113-114; Ugo FANTASIA, «Formione in Acarnania (Thuc., II 68, 7-8) e le origini della guerra del Peloponneso», *Incidenza dell'Antico*, 4, (2006), pp. 84-85. On the Corinth's hate for her colony: Edith FOSTER, *Thucydides, Pericles, and Periclean Imperialism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 44-50; Jeffrey RUSTEN, «Four Ways to hate Corcyra: Thucydides I 24-55 against the Background of Odyssey 13, Herodotus III 48-53, and VII 168», in Georg Rechenauer – Vassiliki Pothou (eds.), *Thucydides – a violent teacher? History and its representations*, V&R unipress, Göttingen, 2011, pp. 108-111.



Fig. 1. Fragment of a bas-relief representing an Athenian trireme with 9 oarsmen, discovered in 1862 in the Acropolis near the Erechtheum by Lenormant and dated ca 410/400 BCE. Two other fragments of this relief exist in the National Museum and in apothèques. According to L. Beschi's reconstruction, the original composition represented a large trireme with its 25 rowers, the navigator and the commander. A young man on the right probably represents the hero Paralos, inventor of navigation. Photo Marsyas 2006, CC SA 2.5 Generic (Wikimedia Commons).

nanced case by case? Therefore, following a succinct review of the Athenian *modus operandi* in naval engagements in order to grasp what her enemies had to challenge, the aim of this investigation is to shine a new light on Greek naval warfare by considering the non-Athenian methodologies employed in battle scenarios.

The consummate execution of specific manoeuvres achieved through rowing coupled with the constant striving towards of the spaces in the sea, constituted the successful combination for the Athenian fleets. Primarily, among these manoeuvres there were the δῖεκπλους, wherein the Athenians rammed through the gaps of the enemy formation¹², and the περίπλους, when they rowed round either opponent's flanks¹³. A third dexterous manoeuvre was the ἀναστροφή, which was masterfully employed by one Athenian ship against one pursuing Leukadian triremes at the battle of Naupaktos: it consisted in a sort of rounding a real or imaginary weather mark being close-hauled and then, after the complete execution of the veer, the triremes gained speed again until the collision with the enemy¹⁴. The latter, a target of these manoeuvres, was always rammed on the broadsides where the oars were shorn off with the consequent unusableness of the ship as well as on the stern. Both two sections were the structural weakest points of the triremes and served as focal point for the Athenians¹⁵. After the targeted violent impact so as to undo the opponents' mobility, the Athenians should back off as fast as possible to avoid being rammed and then boarded by another enemy ship¹⁶. The impression

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- 12 The seminal research on the δῖεκπλους: John F. LAZENBY, «The Diekplous», *Greece & Rome*, 34.2, (1987), pp. 169-177. *Contra*: John S. MORRISON, «The Greek Ships at Salamis and the Diekplous», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111, (1991), pp. 196-200, is not resolute. Some objections are put forward then by Boris RANKOV, «Ancient Naval Warfare», in Michael Whitby – Harris Sidebottom (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Battles. Volume I*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, 2017, p. 29, however the study of Lazenby remains mostly accepted by scholars.
- 13 Following the theories of Lazenby regarding the δῖεκπλους, on the περίπλους although it is not always shareable: Ian WHITEHEAD, «The Periplous», *Greece & Rome*, 34.2, (1987), pp. 178-185.
- 14 Andrew TAYLOR, «Battle Manoeuvres for fast Triremes», in Boris Rankov (ed.), *Trireme Olympia. The Final Report. Sea Trials 1992-4. Conference Papers 1998*, Oxbow Books, Oxford – Oakville, 2012, pp. 236-237.
- 15 For the sources on some “structural” weakness up to the triremes cf. Peter HUNT, «Military Forces», in Philip SABIN – Hans VAN WEES – Michael WHITBY (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 125.
- 16 Among the exhortations, Phormio highlights how the ships should have the necessary space to retreat (Thuc., II 89.8). See Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide. La Guerra del Peloponneso. Libro II*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, p. 566. On the baking off: Barry S. STRAUSS, «Democracy, Kimon, and the Evolution of Athenian Naval Tactics in the Fifth Century B.C», in Pernille Flensted-Jensen – Thomas Heine Nielsen – Lene Rubinstein (eds.), *Polis & Politics. Studies in Ancient Greek History. Presented to Mogens Herman Hansen on his Sixtieth Birthday, August 20, 2000*, Museum Tusulanum Press, Copenhagen, 2000, p. 300-301.

is that they attempted any way to abstain from deck-fighting. In addition to the proficiency of the oarsmen, especially the θρανίται on the highest thwart¹⁷, in order to carry out the several manoeuvres, played a pivotal task the κυβερνήτης, the helmsman. As the master of the ship, he was metaphorically linked with the ship's safety due to his determining role¹⁸. In compliance with his expertise, given the esteemed counsel of the helmsman, it could happen that some generals may have still entrust him with the charge over the battle¹⁹. To team up with the κυβερνήτης there was also the crew, known as ὑπηρεσία, a highly qualified equipage²⁰. The helmsman and the crew constituted a real motive of pride for Athens²¹.

The effective employment of these manoeuvres hinged upon a congruous utilisation of the wide sea spaces, where still limited skilled ships could be resolute

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- 17 The encomiastic verses represent the public opinion on them: Aristoph., *Ach.*, 162-163: «Υποστένοι μὲντῶν ὁ θρανίτης λεώς, ὁ σωσίπολις», and the double pay they received in the 415: Thuc., VI 31.3: «τῶν <δὲ> τριηράρχων ἐπιφοράς τε πρὸς τῷ ἐκ δημοσίου μισθῷ διδόντων τοῖς θρανίταις τῶν ναυτῶν». On their highly performative role: Jean TAILLARDAT, «La trière athénienne et la guerre sur mer aux V^e et IV^e siècles», in Jean-Pierre Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne*, Seuil, Paris, 1968, pp. 199-201. On their special salary: Victor GABRIELSEN, *Financing the Athenian Fleet. Public Taxation and Social Relations*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994, p. 122, cf. Lisa KALLET, *Money and Corrosion of Power in Thucydides. The Sicilian Expedition and its Aftermath*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles, London, 2001, pp. 233-234. On their judgment in the Comedy: David PRITCHARD, *Athenian Democracy at War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 130-131.
- 18 Despite the traditional standpoint, even the so-called Old Oligarch concedes the nautical experience up to the helmsman (Ps.-Xen., 1.19). See Dominique LENFANT, *Pseudo-Xénophon. Constitution des Athéniens*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2018, pp. 101-102.
- 19 During the battle of Notium Alcibiades decided to leave the fleet under his trusted helmsman Antiochus (Xen., *Hell.*, 1.5.11). On the sources of this battle and how to harmonise them: Cinzia BEARZOT, *Alcibiade. Il leone della democrazia ateniese. Stratega, politico, avventuriero*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2021, pp. 177-179.
- 20 The whole ὑπηρεσία is mentioned by the Old-Oligarch (Ps.-Xen., 1.2) and the sources always highlight her subordination to the helmsman, as a consequence remains noteworthy the etymological study made by Leopold J. D. Richardson, «ΥΠΗΡΕΤΗΣ», *The Classical Quarterly*, 37.1/2, (1943), pp. 55-61. His interpretation is followed by John S. MORRISON, «Hyperesia in Naval Context in the Fifth and Fourth Century BC», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 104, (1984), pp. 48-59.
- 21 The Periclean words before the war are exemplary: Thuc., I 143.1: «νῦν δὲ τόδε τε ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὅπερ κράτιστον, κυβερνήτας ἔχομεν πολίτας καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ὑπηρεσίαν πλείους καὶ ἀμείνους ἢ ἅπανα ἢ ἄλλη Ἑλλάς». On this text: Arnold W. GOMME, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Volume I*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945, pp. 460-461. Cf. the reflections of Moshe AMIT, «The sailors of the Athenian fleet», *Athenaeum*, 40, (1962), pp. 168-169.

against a superior adversary fleet. In this context, the concept of εὐρυχωρία assumed an indispensable landmark for the Athenians. They were able to carry out their tactics inflicting substantial damage upon the enemies whilst sustain conspicuous harms. Owing to the vagueness of our sources pertaining the Pentecontaetia²² and, specifically, those detailing naval battles during that period²³, from the outset of the Peloponnesian War Athens had already improved her technics and was used to looking for the right place to challenge the enemy in consistence with her tactical requirements. Exemplifying this approach, at Patras Phormio sought out and damaged the Peloponnesian fleet taking advantage from the wide spaces. Then, some weeks later, at Naupaktos he made the same effort in spite of a different situation²⁴. In other circumstances, when it was feasible, εὐρυχωρία was always the first purpose²⁵. Conversely, the enemies exerted considerable

22 On Athenian naval and imperial grow during this period see the review of Philip DE SOUZA, «The Athenian Maritime Empire of the Fifth Century BC», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 412-425 with a detailed bibliography.

23 It needs to bear in mind how the sources go into the Eurymedon's battle: if the Thucydidean outline is extremely brief (Thuc., I 100.1: «Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἡ ἐπ' Εὐρυμέδοντι ποταμῶ ἐν Παμφυλίᾳ πεζομαχία καὶ ναυμαχία Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων πρὸς Μήδους; cf. Diod., XI 60), Plutarch delves into the narrative deeper, yet, intriguing, the fight consisted more in a land battle on the coastline (Plut., *Cim.*, 12.7). On Plutarch's sources: Carlo CARENA – Mario MANFREDINI – Luigi PICCIRILLI, *Plutarco. Le vite di Cimone e di Lucullo*, Mondadori, 1990, Milano, pp. 239-242. On this battle and the problems concerning the sources: Matteo ZACCARINI, *The Lame Hegemony. Cimon of Athens and the Failure of Panhellenism ca. 478-450 BC*, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2017, pp. 119-127. For the debated triremes' structural changes by Cimon: Matteo ZACCARINI, «Dalla "triere leggera" alla "triere pesante": l'evoluzione della flotta ateniese tra Temistocle e Cimone», *Rivista di Studi Militari*, 2, 2013, pp. 7-27. The same problems concern the Athenian expedition in Egypt and the Ctesias' laconic narrative BNJ 14(36); cf. the allusion in Hdt., III 12) on the naval battle against Persians at Papremis: cf. Dominique LENFANT, *Ctésias de Cnide. Le Perse – L'Inde*, Le Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004, p. 267; For this battle: Ennio BIONDI, *La politica imperialistica ateniese a metà del V secolo A.C.*, LED Edizioni, Milano, 2016, pp. 33-37.

24 Regarding this point, a section in his exhortation before the battle is pivotal (Thuc., II 89.8). On the Phormio's nautical expertise: cf. Henry D. WESTLAKE, *Individuals in Thucydides*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 43-59; John HALE, «General Phormio's Art of War: A Greek Commentary on a Chinese Classic», in Charles D. Hamilton – Peter Krentz (eds.), *Polis and Polemos. Essays on Politics, War, and History in Ancient Greece in Honor of Donald Kagan*, Regina Books, Claremont, 1997, pp. 85-104.

25 We can consider this goal a sort of tactic obsession (Thuc., IV 13.4; VII 36.6; VIII 102.1), and it is also connected with seafaring ability (Thuc., VII 49.2). As rightly highlighted by Hans VAN WEES, *Greek Warfare*, cit. p. 224 we should not grasp the intention of fighting in

effort to avoid the wide spaces and, when unpreventable, they usually placed themselves in a vast circle devoid of gaps to allow the Athenians to employ the movements²⁶. Despite the apparent initial efficacy of this defensive strategy, its shortcomings became manifest as soon as the Athenians launched the first attack “sinking” one admiral ship, and, few years later, the same questionable tactic was employed even when the situation did not necessitate such a defensive stance²⁷.

Unfortunately, we are not able to take in why the Athenians developed this way of fight, even though probably the several wars during the Pentecontaetia induced Athens to figure out how to avoid outrageous losses improving their mobility with ships, so as to avoid fighting on desks where the outcome could be more unpredictable²⁸. As we will see, it is likely they kept away from the customary enemy’s objective.

According to the interpretation just proposed, the Athenian fleet usually achieved proficient results against the enemies, whenever the situation allowed or rather when they could fight in an advantageous space and, therefore they could carry out their tactical movements. In confirmation of this way of naval

a wide space as a sort of “agonal” ideology, actually they looked for a place more fruitful for winning.

26 It is the *κυκλός*, employed the first time at the Artemisium’s battle (Hdt., VIII 11.1) and in the famous defeat of the Peloponnesian fleet in 429 (Thuc., II 83.5). For this tactical choice: William L. RODGERS, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare*, cit., pp. 131-132; Karl-Joachim, HÖLKEKAMP, «La guerra e la pace», in Salvatore Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia, cultura, arte e società*. 2. *Una storia greca. II. Definizione*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1997, pp. 508-509.

27 During the battle of Corcyra, despite a conspicuous numerical superiority, the Peloponnesian opted for the *κυκλός* in front of few Athenian ships (Thuc., III 78.1). We do not share the reading of Joseph ROISMAN, «Alcidas in Thucydides», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 36.4, (1987), pp. 408-409. Barry S. STRAUSS, «Sparta’s Maritime Moment», in Andrew S. Erickson – Lyle J. Goldstein – Carnes Lord (eds.), *China Goes to Sea. Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2009, p. 42 criticizes the Alcidas’ faults, but we should not forget how much the previous defeats in the Corinthian gulf biased the oarsmen’s moral.

28 Cf. Barry S. STRAUSS, «Democracy, Kimon, and the Evolution», cit., p. 317, although we do not share the author “democratic” view of military development. For the fallen during sea battles: BARRY S. STRAUSS, «Perspectives on the death of fifth-century Athenian seamen», in Hans van Wees (ed.), *War & Violence in Ancient Greece*, The Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2009, pp. 261-284. Remains, however, the question regarding the percentage of population employed in the fleet: for the debate see Ben AKRIGG, *Population and Economy in Classical Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 76-83.

warfare as specifically Athenians²⁹, it is necessary to investigate what took place when the others might carry out the same strategy. Apparently, the only occasion which the other Greeks, in that case the Peloponnesians, sought to employ the διέκπλοι and the περίπλοι was the battle of Arginousae. This fight, nevertheless, is the exception that proves the rule. First of all, even in that engagement, we are not certain if the Peloponnesians, on the practical side, employed the same Athenian tactics due to the over-condensed Xenophontean narrative. On the other hand, considering still the distinctive behaviour of the general, the “old-fashion” Spartan Callicratidas, it is very likely that the Peloponnesians did undertake the battle through a differentiated way, avoiding to take into account, as we will see at length, some nautical needs according to their way of war³⁰. Having shed light on these tactics whose we are entitled to consider an Athenian specificity, the thorny issue springs up whether, in absence of the right spaces for movements, the Athenians remained still proficient. Otherwise, we should question if this way stood as unique advantageous manner of fighting at sea. In this regard, it is necessary attempt to understand how the “Others” set about naval battles, what were the main goal, which situations were considered favourable according to their strategy and how they attained the hoped purpose.

Regarding the considerable efforts devoted to interdicting enemy coastlines and impending the transport of annexed boarded troops, the main objective of

29 Ingratiating words of Barry S. STRAUSS, «Naval Battle and Sieges», in Philip Sabin – Hans Van Wees – Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 230 who employs the expression “Athenian way of war”.

30 The Megarian helmsman Hermon suggested the Spartan admiral to flee away since the situation was not appropriate to engage the battle: «Ἐρμών δὲ Μεγαρεὺς ὁ τῷ Καλλικρατίδῃ κυβερνήτῳ εἶπε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι εἶη καλῶς ἔχον ἀποπλευσαι· αἱ γὰρ τριήρεις τῶν Ἀθηναίων πολλῶ πλείους ἦσαν». On this Spartan cf. Ughetto BERNINI, *ΛΥΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΙΔΑ ΣΥΓΚΡΙΣΙΣ. Cultura, etica e politica spartana fra quinto e quarto secolo a. C.*, Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1988, pp. 79-83. Noteworthy the reflection of John L. MOLES, «Xenophon and Callicratidas», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 114, (1994), pp. 81-82. Regarding this episode Angelos KAPELLOS, *Xenophon's Peloponnesian War*, De Gruyter, 2019, p. 127 notices that in this occasion Xenophon is moulding a parallelism between the helmsman Antiochus disobeying to Alcibiades, so here Callicratidas should not have fight. We ignore if it is the helmsman's point of view or a Xenophontean explanation (the reading relies on the γὰρ), however this idea is clearly not Athenian one. The Athenians were used to challenge many times the enemy despite the numerical inferiority. This judgment, as we will see, is based on a specific view of naval warfare where outstripping with the ships was a key tactical factor.

engaging in a naval battle was capturing the enemy ships as much as possible. In a world where the triremes brought on outrageous expenses from the construction to the ordinary repairs, the only Athens alone was capable of sustaining a systematic shipbuilding due to her incomes³¹. Therefore, the prospect of getting possession of a fleet fitted out by the enemies looked to be extremely enticing. In compliance with that goal, during the Archidamian war, the Peloponnesians regularly attempted to commandeer Athenian triremes, until the Persians provided the well-known financial support during the Ionian War³². However, even in this last period of the conflict, they persisted in the same attitude. As a result, it was not a coincidence that, during the first ten years when they owned few resources, the Peloponnesians undertook some expeditions in order to raise their fleet, as when they sailed to Corcyra in the late 427³³. Besides, when it happened that they lost the naval power recently collected after the Navarino bay's battle in the 425, they did not assemble again another fleet for years³⁴. Adhering to a strategic framework prioritizing the

31 For the Athenian naval spending for the fleet: among the countless studies, pivotal the synthesis of Vincent GABRIELSEN, «Financial and Human Material and Economic Resources Required to Build and Operate Navies in the Classical World», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 426-442. Cf. George STEINHAEUER, *Piraeus: Harbors*, «Navy and Shipping», in Jennifer Neils – Dylan K. Georges (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 231-243 and Eleonora PISCHEDDA, *L'economia pubblica di Atene. Stato, finanze e società nel IV secolo a.C.*, Carocci, Roma, 2022, pp. 133-140 with further bibliography.

32 Conversely, given some preoccupations, Athens made any effort to gain money (Xen., *Hell.*, I 1.12; 14; 20; 21; 22; II 4.17; III 2.4; 8; 9). On Persian financial support toward Sparta: see concisely Anton POWELL, «Sparta's foreign – and Internal – History. 478-403», in Anton Powell (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta. Volume I*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, 2018, pp. 315-316.

33 Thuc., III 69.2: «πλέον τὸ ναυτικὸν ποιήσασθαι». On this enterprise: Peter A. Brunt, «Spartan Policy and Strategy in the Archidamian War», *Phoenix*, 19.4 (1965), p. 272; Thomas KELLY, «Thucydides and the Spartan Strategy in the Archidamian War», *The American Historical Review*, 87.1, (1982), pp. 46-47; Michael P. FRONDA – Chandra GIROUX, «Spartan Strategies in the Early Peloponnesian War, 341-425», *Phoenix*, 73.3/4, (2019), p. 307; Paul RAHE, *Sparta's Second Attic War. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta, 446-418 B.C.*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 2020, pp. 124-125.

34 Thuc., IV 14. On the naval battle in the Navarino's bay: Henry D. WESTLAKE, «The Naval Battle at Pylos and its Consequences», *The Classical Quarterly*, 24.2, (1974), pp. 211-226; Loren J. SAMONS II, «Thucydides' Sources and the Spartan Plan at Pylos», *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 75.4 (2006), pp. 525-540; Philippe LAFARGUE, *425 av. J.-C. Athènes contre Sparte. La bataille de Pylos*, Alma Editeur, Paris, 2015, pp. 70-72.

enlargement of their naval forces, whenever situations rendered their own ships unmanageable, the Greeks were inclined to burn their unusable fleet³⁵. At first sight, this form of naval scorched earth strategy may seem drastic; nevertheless, at the same time, it highlights doubtless how much they prevented enemies to increase their naval capabilities³⁶. In compliance with this foremost objective, naval warfare during classical period and with his *formal* facet identified with the open battle embodied still a raid-oriented mentality³⁷ and even Athens was no exception in this approach on equal footing of other communities³⁸. It can seem paradoxical that, taking into consideration what has just emerged, the main opportunity to acquire additional triremes continued to be the battle itself. Thus, we can state that the engagement at sea was more oriented to hoarding than destroying. In addition, regarding this point, even when the ships were rammed in their vulnerable points, the complete wreck did not come about, allowing the attackers to tow away enemy boats to the coastline after the boarding³⁹. The inherent structure of the trireme avoided a possible sinking and even when the sustained damages were critical with a large quantity of bilge water on board⁴⁰. A corroboration of this conclusion lies in the losses' counting practices after the fights in Thucydides and Xenophon.

35 After Cyzicus, the Athenians captured all the ship excepts the Syracusans ones which were burned by their owners (Xen., *Hell.*, I 1.18). See Peter KRENTZ, *Xenophon. Hellenika I-II.3.10*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1990, p. 98. On this battles: Antony ANDREWES, «Notion and Kyzikos: The sources Compared», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 102, (1982), pp. 19-25.

36 During the exhortation before the battle of Naupaktos, Phormio incited to break down the enemy's aspiration to own a fleet: Thuc., II 89.10: «ὁ δὲ ἀγὼν μέγας ὑμῖν, ἢ καταλῦσαι Πελοποννησίων τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ ναυτικοῦ». Arnold J. GOMME, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. The Ten Years' War. Volume II. Books II-III*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956, p. 228; Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide*, cit., p. 567.

37 For the concept of raid-mentality see the reflections of Vincent GABRIELSEN, «Economic activity, maritime trade and piracy in the Hellenistic Aegean», *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 103.1/2, (2001), *Les îles de l'Égée dans l'Antiquité. Bordeaux, 12-13 novembre 1999*, pp. 223-228. Cf. briefly Philip DE SOUZA, *War at Sea*, cit., pp. 375-376; Jean-Marie KOWALSKI, «Thucydide, témoin des opérations navales dal la première phase de la guerre du Péloponnèse (431-415 av. J.-C.)», *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, 40.1, (2014), pp. 28-33.

38 For the epigraphical evidence see now Eleonora PISCHEDDA, *L'economia pubblica*, cit., p. 136.

39 Thucydides is clear-cut regarding the end of the Sybota's battle (Thuc., I 50.1; 3; 54.1) and what happened at one of the admirals at Arginusae (Xen., *Hell.*, I 7.32). See Boris RANKOV, *Ancient Naval Warfare*, cit., p. 29 for the quotation and explanation of these sources.

40 Philip DE SOUZA, *War at Sea*, cit., p. 377.



Fig. 2. Replica of Athenian trireme (trieres). Athens War Museum.
Photo Dimitri Kamaras 2025. CC SA 2.0 Generic. (Wikimedia Commons).

In contrast to land battles where casualties' count may be approximate with rounding off⁴¹, both the historians meticulously enumerate the ships sunk, captured with the oarsmen or without them⁴². Taking into consideration the primary objective of these fights, as a consequence the question arises whether the well-known Athenian tactical obsession for εὐρυχωρία was always required or the other Greeks, according to their standpoint, strived for alternative advantageous situations and how they benefited from them.

Capitalizing a conspicuous numerical superiority, a large fleet could arrange the battle in the tight spaces, aiming to drive the enemies towards the coastline and, if possible, culminate the fight on the land. They attained this purpose

41 Always pivotal the reflections of Catherine RUBINCAM, «Casualty Figures in the Battle Descriptions of Thucydides», *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 121, (1991), pp. 181-198. For the use of numbers by ancient historians regarding military matter, the most exhaustive research based on statistics is Catherine RUBINCAM, *Quantifying Mentalities. The Use of Numbers by Ancient Greek Historians*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2021, pp. 76-99.

42 Barry S. STRAUSS, *Perspective on the death*, cit., pp. 273-275 interestingly highlights how much Thucydides, for example, is more zealous to count the lost ships than the human casualties due to his some aristocratic-political biases regarding the oarsmen's social class.

through three specific tactics: encirclement, strengthening the ship's structure to cripple the enemy boats and, when feasible, concocting a deception.

To counter the Athenians to shove off on the open sea where they could carry out their dexterous tactics, larger fleets found successes confining the fight within restricted spaces⁴³. They might push the adversaries gradually toward the shore. As a result, if we bear in mind the systematic research of εὐρυχωρία pursued by Athenian admirals (maybe the outcome of the Arginousae battle was not a simple coincidence⁴⁴), the other Greeks indeed favoured her opposite, the στενοχωρία⁴⁵. Within such situations, teamed up ships could proficiently board the enemies, fight on the deck and consequently transport captured triremes. Rather than emulating Athens, they developed distinct ways to naval warfare. The strict similarities between the fights which took place at Naupaktos and Cynossema were evident in this context: during the battle of 429, the Peloponnesians initially mirrored the Athenian coastal sailing interrupting through an abrupt veer to port with the following enclosure of the Athenian triremes⁴⁶. They brought about a

43 Illustrative is the exhortation of Phormio before the battle of Naupaktos when the Athenian admiral stresses how much a conspicuous fleet could overwhelm an inferior one such as during a land battle. Thuc., II 89.8: «διέκπλοι τε οὐκ εἰσὶν οὐδ' ἀναστροφαί, ἄπερ νεῶν ἄμεινον πλεουσῶν ἔργα ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ ἀνάγκη ἂν εἴη τὴν ναυμαχίαν πεζομαχίαν καθίστασθαι, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ αἱ πλείους νῆες κρείσσους γίνονται». See Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide*, cit., p. 566.

44 When the deployment took place, the Athenians had the prows facing the open sea (Xen., *Hell.*, I 6.29: «οἱ δ' Ἀθηναῖοι ἀντανήγοντο εἰς τὸ πέλαγος»), since they have the chance to avoid the possible enemy encirclement. For a detailed description of the battle of Arginousae especially for the problems concerning the deployment: cf. Bernard W. HENDERSON, *The Great War between Athens and Sparta*, Arno Press, New York, 1973, pp. 457-460; KAGAN, Donald, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca – New York, 1991, pp. 343-353.

45 It was the real tactical problem for the Athenians admirals. The words of Nicias (Thuc., VII 62) are exemplary of the fact that the unavoidable τοῦ λιμένος στενότητι (in other words the στενοχωρία), from a simple bugbear from the Athenian point of view, becomes reality during the following battle (Thuc., VII 70). See at length Sebastiano AMATO, *Dall'Olimpeion al fiume Assinaro. La seconda campagna ateniese contro Siracusa (415-413 a.C.) Volume II 2. Il ciclo operativo inverno 414 – settembre 413 a.C.*, Verbavolant Edizioni, Siracusa, 2005, pp. 263-292. For this battle cf. the reflections of Pietro JANNI, *Il mare degli Antichi*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1996, pp. 169-181 regarding the different employment of the ram.

46 Cf. Thuc., II 90.5-6: «τὰς δ' ἄλλας ἐπικαταλαβόντες ἐξέωσαν τε πρὸς τὴν γῆν ὑποφενγούσας καὶ διέφθειραν, ἄνδρας τε τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἀπέκτειναν ὅσοι μὴ ἐξένευσαν αὐτῶν. καὶ τῶν νεῶν τινὰς ἀναδοῦμενοι εἶλκον κενὰς (μίαν δὲ αὐτοῖς ἀνδράσιν εἶλον ἦδη)» with Thuc.,

numerical superiority similar to the customary encirclement during land warfare. Indeed, at Cynossema, the last naval battle described by Thucydides in the *Histories*, the quick veer compelled the Athenians to row closer the coastline⁴⁷. Subsequently, the Peloponnesians overwhelmed them after a battle on the sand. Land fighting always lay as the preferred choice when feasible⁴⁸. However, if full-comprehensive enclosure by the outnumbering Peloponnesian fleet was not achieved, the escaped Athenian triremes could counterattack, owing to the fact that they had reached the desired εὐρυχωρία. As a compelling repercussion for the Athens' enemies, the fleet which had failed in the pursuing had to challenge again the Athenians fast manoeuvres. That happened partially at Naupaktos and, with more severe consequences, at Cynossema. Considering the divergent approach to the battle in comparison with the Athenians, if the first encirclement was not accomplished flawlessly, the Peloponnesians could fail into a panic with disastrous outcomes as a consequence of the enemy counterattack⁴⁹. Therefore, they should have achieved their tactic as soon as possible. They endured even the risk of being joined by enemy support troops on the shore if they were at disposal. At Naupaktos, meanwhile the Athenian left wing was escaping pursued by some fast triremes, the outnumbering Peloponnesians prevailed over the few enemy's ships, but the dexterous Messenians swam to the allied fleet to engaging in a deck-to-deck struggle and recapturing some triremes. Regarding this last point, which is a sort of unicum among our sources compared to the Athenian attitude

VIII 105.1: «προσπεσόντες οὖν οἱ Πελοποννήσιοι κατὰ τὸ μέσον ἐξέωσάν τε ἐς τὸ ξηρὸν τὰς ναῦς τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ἐς τὴν γῆν ἐπεξέβησαν, τῷ ἔργῳ πολὺ περισχόντες». On the manoeuvres at Cynossema: Marc G. DESANTIS, *A Naval History of the Peloponnesian War. Ships, Men & Money in the War at Sea, 431-404 BC*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2017, pp. 200-202.

47 For a full-detailed description of this battle, see John F. LAZENBY, *The Peloponnesian War. A Military Study*, Routledge, London – New York, 2004, pp. 196-199.

48 Even at Cyzicus, after the begging moments, then Mindarus chose to continue the battle by land, where he died at least (Diod., XIII 50.6-7). See Owen REES, *Great Naval Battles of the Ancient Greek World*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2018, pp. 116-117

49 Despite the interesting study of Brian BERTOSA, «The Social Status and Ethnic Origin of the Rowers of Spartan Triremes», *War & Society*, 23.1, (2005), pp. 1-20, the real origin of the Peloponnesian crews and oarsmen remains problematic. It is likely that ordinary people who were not used to usually row could be caught by panic at the first disadvantage. Regarding this point, the description of Lysias of a naval battle (Lys. 2.38) is pivotal: we can consider this account as the prototypical situation whom his audience was well-experienced. Cf. Barry S. STRAUSS, *Naval Battle and Sieges*, cit. pp. 233-237.

as we have seen, conversely the Others were many times zealous to have fresh troops on the seashore. Right here, as well as being a real encouragement for the comrades at sea⁵⁰, during several occasions other soldiers were all set to take action. They bore down against the enemies in route and supported their ships if the battle was taking a bad turn in contrast with the expectations⁵¹.

In connection with the presence of land troops, a clever method for overcoming a skilled fast enemy lay in arranging the battle near the coastline as well as in strengthening the structure of own triremes, with the so-called ἐπωτίδες, a sort of cat-heads⁵²: in addition to cushioning the impact with another ship and diverting it, they allowed the helmsman to mount a head-on ramming. The following collision disabled enemy ships with the outriggers shorn off, therefore, given the impossibility of shoving off, the Peloponnesians were eased in boarding and with subsequent ships' capture. Markedly, instead of reaching the alleged Athenian level according to the Thucydidean passage which we had seen at the beginning, the Others preferred to figure out a solution consistent with their customary meth-

50 The reference to a “friendly land” where the soldiers could take part in the fight until that time held at sea appears in the Gylippos’ intention: Thuc., VII 53.1: «βουλόμενος διαφθεῖρειν τοὺς ἐκβαίνοντας καὶ τὰς ναῦς ῥᾶον τοὺς Συρακοσίους ἀφέλκειν τῆς γῆς φιλίας οὐσης». The expression φιλίας οὐσης should be read in comparison with the next Nicias’ words: Thuc., VII 62.4: «ἄλλως τε καὶ τῆς γῆς, πλὴν ὅσον ἂν ὁ πεζὸς ἡμῶν ἐπέχη, πολεμίας οὐσης».

51 Gylippos’ decision of waiting the Athenians along the coastline, while they were struggling with the ships is prototypical (Thuc., VII 53.3). On this episode cf. Peter GREEN, *Armada from Athens*, Hodder and Stroughton, London – Sydney, 1970, pp. 301-302; Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca – London, 1981, pp. 325-326; Alexander O. BOULTON, *Democracy and Empire. The Athenian Invasion of Sicily, 415-413 BCE*, Hamilton Books, New York – Toronto – London, 2021, p. 122. For some quotations on this topic: Barry S. STRAUSS, *Democracy, Cimon*, cit., p. 118 n. 14, however we cannot share his view of what happened at Demosthenes in 424 when disembarked at Sycion, and the local soldier arrived on the coastline for killing the enemies. This episode, actually, does not fall within the tendency of having troops on the land during a naval battle.

52 For the noteworthiness of this structural improvement within the Thucydidean narrative Jaqueline DE ROMILLY, *Thucydide. Livre VI-VII*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1963, p. xxiii. Cf. John S. MORRISON – R. T. WILLIAMS, *Greek Oared Ships 900-322, B.C.*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 176-179. At length: John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme*, cit., pp. 163-167; Evangelos E. TZAHOS, «The Athenian Trireme: form and function of “epotides”», *Tropis VII. 7th International Symposium on Ship construction in antiquity. Pylos 1999*, Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition, Athens, 2002, pp. 775-789.

ods. A similar technical escamotage was employed in the 413 during the battle of Erineus by the Corinthians⁵³, who, after the earlier bitter defeat at Naupaktos for a long-standing naval power, made a pivotal step on the war at sea, becoming the advisers of the Syracusans subsequently⁵⁴. The ἐπωτίδες, indeed, proved to be an incisive thorn in the side for the Athenians, who due to the head-on ramming underwent a defeat pressed in the tight spaces and with the enemy waiting on the coastline to step in⁵⁵. Accordingly, instead of employing the Athenians tactics with emulation and adaptation, the enemies of Athens were consistent with their way of naval warfare adding one technical improvement. As tangible proof of this peculiarity, given his well-known Athenian milieu, Thucydides does not endorse the ἐπωτίδες along with the consequent head-on ramming, but, in the wake of his assessment of Sybota battle, the historian stigmatizes them as a real mark of naiveness by the helmsmen⁵⁶.

In order to seize more enemy ships and engaging the fight on land warfare, deception⁵⁷ emerged as an effective tool if the battle could be engaged with the

53 Thuc., VII 34. On this battle: John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme*, cit., 163-167; Marc G. DESANTIS, *A Naval History*, cit., pp. 157-159. Cf. Nicholas J. MCKENZIE, - Patricia A. HANNAH, (2013), «Thucydides' Take on the Corinthian Navy. οἱ τε γὰρ Κορίνθιοι ἠγήσαντο κρατεῖν εἰ μὴ καὶ πολὺ ἐκρατοῦντο. "The Corinthians believed they were victors if they were only just defeated"», *Mnemosyne*, 66.2, (2013), pp. 206-227.

54 On their effectiveness in the battle that took place in the Syracuse's harbour see John F. LAZENBY, *The Peloponnesian War*, cit., p. 155. Regarding the Syracusan naval power: cf. Andreas MORAKIS, «The Fleet of Syracuse (480-413)», *Historikà. Studi di Storia Greca e Romana*, 5, (2015), pp. 263-276; Ugo FANTASIA, «La potenza navale di Siracusa nel V secolo a.C.», in Carmine Ampolo (ed.), *La Città e le città della Sicilia Antica*, Edizioni Quasar, Roma, 2022, pp. 235-254.

55 On this battle: Daniel BATTISTI – Laurène LECLERCQ, «Les expéditions Athéniennes en Sicile, ou la difficulté pour une marine de garder sa supériorité», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 456-457.

56 Thuc., VII 36.5: «τῆ τε πρότερον ἀμαθία τῶν κυβερνητῶν δοκοῦση εἶναι, τὸ ἀντίπρῳρον ζυγκροῦσαι, μάλιστα' ἂν αὐτοὶ χρῆσασθαι· πλεῖστον γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ σχήσειν· τὴν γὰρ ἀνάγκρυσιν οὐκ ἔσεσθαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐξωθουμένοις ἄλλοσε ἢ ἐς τὴν γῆν». Arnold W. GOMME – Antony ANDREWES – Kenneth J. DOVER, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Volume IV. Books V 25-VII*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, pp. 415-416.

57 On the role of deception in Greek warfare: Peter KRENTZ, «Deception in Archaic and Classical Greek Warfare», in Hans van Wees (ed.), *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, The Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2009, pp. 167-200. For the concept of μῆτις during naval warfare: John R. HALE, *Lord of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the*

technical innovations or by land too. At Syracuse, the Corinthian helmsman Ariston put forward a sharp ruse, bring the supplies near the coastline to have lunch and then be prompt for the battle⁵⁸. The Athenians would be enticed away from the naval battle. Actually, since the enemy assumed that the Syracusans were retreating and putting off the fight, the Athenians put ashore and had the launch too. Yet suddenly the Syracusans sailed against them and, also with the employment of ἐπωτίδες on their strengthened triremes, achieved a deciding victory. It is likely this trick inspired Lysander when concocted his notorious deception at Aigospotamoi, where the Athenians lost definitively their naval power due to a land battle⁵⁹.

Returning to the first question posed at the beginning of this study, we are able to infer that, during Classical period, naval warfare was not the only Athenian apanage with absolute profitable military results, as it can seem at the first sight according to the Thucydidean judgment of the battle of Sybota. In this respect, taking advantages from specific situations which allowed them to employ some manoeuvres, the Athenians developed an own way to challenge their enemies. The positive outcomes produced by a methodical improvement are under everyone's eyes, yet their tactics did not work indiscriminately. Instead, despite alternative tactical needs and methods, the "Others", especially the Peloponnesians and the Syracusans who were compelled to face the Athenian fleets, were inclined to approach the fight in a different way so as to overwhelm an adversary deeply skilled in his own manner. As the several episodes occurred during the Peloponnesian war clearly reveal, in view of upcoming research a new understanding of seamanship should be conducted by sifting through the sources at our disposal, keeping in mind that there was not an only one way of handling naval warfare.

Birth of Democracy, Viking Press, New York, 2009, pp. 156-157.

58 Thuc., VII 39.2 sgg. Peter GREEN, *Armada from Athens*, cit., pp. 278-280; Paul A. RAHE, *Sparta's Sicilian Proxy War. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 418-413 B.C.*, Encounter Books, New York – London, 2023, pp. 206-207.

59 For a review regarding the source of the battle see: Jean-Françoise BOMMELAER, *Lysandre de Sparte. Histoire et traditions*, Bocard, Paris, 1981, pp. 103-111 and Elisabetta GRISANZIO, *Senofonte. Elleniche. EAAHNIKA. Libro II*, Edizioni di Pagina, Bari, 2023, pp. 72-74. For the reconstruction of this last fight: Barry S. STRAUSS, «Aegospotami Reexamined», *The American Journal of Philology*, 104.1, (1983), pp. 24-35. Cf. Eric W. ROBINSON, «What happened ad Aegospotami? Xenophon and Diodorus on the Last Battle of the Peloponnesian War», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 63.1, (2014), pp. 1-16.

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The Battle of Mycale (479 BC)

A Fitting Climax to Herodotus' *History* or Just a Brawl on the Beach?

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ABSTRACT. In their Commentary to Herodotus' *History*, How and Wells (1912) comment that the 'Story of Mycale given in H. evades detailed criticism by its slightness' (Volume 2, 395). The other major source for information, Diodorus, also offers no more than cursory treatment of this military engagement (See Green, 2006). The superficial coverage in the ancient literature is then reflected in the evident lack of interest of modern studies in their brief assessments of the battle. Considering the very clear literary construction in Herodotus' account (see Flower and Marincola, 2002) of what is universally regarded as a historical event, there has been too little consideration of the problems evident from a close inspection of the narrative. Moreover, since the works of Herodotus and Diodorus differ in the information they contain it is possible, as a result of a comparative reading of the texts, to advance new ideas about Mycale, the prelude to this event and of its aftermath.

KEYWORDS. Persian wars; Mycale; Miletus; Ionia; Troy; Herodotus; Diodorus Siculus; Athens; Sparta; Hellenic League; Xanthippus; Leotychidas; Xerxes; Helle-spont; triremes; Battle of Lade.

Introduction (Beginnings and Endings)

The expectation of an audience or reader is that the final act of a play or the final chapter of a book should bring about the denouement of the plot or narrative. In the course of 'nine' books,¹ Herodotus chronicled

¹ Books 1-4 contain background information on the reason why the Greeks and Persians came into conflict. Nine books since Antiquity, but not constructed in this way, of course, by Herodotus. In a paper exceeding 11,000 words, while a difficult choice, some episodes not directly relevant to the subject of discussion have been sacrificed. Thus, the siege of Sestos and a final example of the hubris of Xerxes complete the narrative of Herodotus, are concerned with further violent deaths inflicted on Persian generals, the second of whom surely presages Xerxes' own violent end. These events, if they contain a germ of history,

the rebellion of the Ionian cities of Asia Minor (Book 5), the Persian campaign to Marathon (Book 6), Xerxes' invasion of Greece and the battle at Thermopylae (Book 7), the sea battles at Artemisium and Salamis (Book 8), the battle of Plataea and Mycale (Book 9). A reader approaching Herodotus' 'story-telling' style should surely expect Mycale to be a suitably major military event seeing that it occupies the work's climactic spot. Therefore, Herodotus' history of the Persian Wars should, even if it was almost a prototype, satisfy that expectation of completeness, just as obviously a beginning is followed by an end. Why then did Herodotus apparently choose a relatively minor episode as a conclusion when he could have ended his account at Plataea, the place of the decisive Greek victory that ended Xerxes' imperial ambitions? Thucydides, in the next generation after Herodotus wrote, failed to complete his work, but would probably have ended his history with the capitulation of Athens, the fall of its empire, in 404. Xenophon, on the other hand, completed his *Hellenica* in just precisely the fashion that should be expected. In 363/2, following the inconclusive battle of Mantinea, he (*Hell.* 7.5.26) states that: '... exactly the opposite to what all men expected occurred ... Zeus contrived that both sides erected victory trophies ... and each side considered itself victorious ... there was in fact in Greece greater confusion and chaos than there was beforehand.'²

Herodotus chose to end by mentioning a number of minor incidents and, in particular, the battle of Mycale, the focus of the discussion here (Hdt. 9.90-105).³

may be linked chronologically to the battle at Mycale, but there is no causal connection, hence their exclusion here. Moreover, there seemed little new to add apropos to these episodes unlike for the Greek naval operations in Ionia in the autumn of 479. I wish to thank an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to the omission, and for the suggestion that some clarification ought to be made for why the murder of Masistes (Hdt. 9.107-113) and the siege of Sestos (Hdt. 9.114-120) found no place in this paper.

- 2 Diodorus Siculus ends his brief account of Xerxes' invasion (Diod. 11.34.1-11.37.6) with the same episode, but continues to include Greco-Persian affairs (Diod. 11.34.1-37.6) not least the battle of Eurymedon in 470/69 (Diod. 11.61.1-62.3), and a subsequent truce between the warring states in 449/8, later called the 'Peace of Callias' (Diod. 12.4.5). See Green (2006) for a commentary on Diodorus' Book 11. The general view has Ephorus as Diodorus' source. However, when account is taken of the way in which his narrative is hinged to events in Sicily and Magna Graecia, then Timaeus is more probably the author, albeit one who may himself have employed Ephorus.
- 3 See Tracey (2009) 109-115, who argues that Herodotus' account of Xanthippus at Sestos (Hdt. 9.115-120) occupies this prominent place in the narrative as a courtesy to Pericles, his patron, and that a positive bias towards the Alcmeonids is evident throughout the work.



1. Hellespont: View of the Hellespont looking West.
Note the absence of a beach on the Asia Minor side.
(Images 1-9 are property of the Author)

However, when measured against other military engagements which concluded great wars, for example the Battle of Waterloo (1815), the last Battle of the Somme (1918), the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945), Mycale seems very meagre fare. Indeed, modern scholarship has little to say about the battle at Cape Mycale, appearing to accept the account of Herodotus (9.96-107) without much criticism or scepticism of its veracity or accuracy. How and Wells tellingly observed that the: ‘story of Mycale given in H. evades detailed criticism by its slightness,’ while Burn’s comment that it ‘was a relatively small battle, but was followed by revolt in Ionia’ to a great extent sums up the available views.⁴

Notwithstanding this body of opinion, nonetheless, it is possible to subject the evidence found in Herodotus and Diodorus to some reinterpretation and, as a result, will enable new light to be cast on the episode of Mycale. For example,

4 How and Wells (1912) 395; Burn (1966) 192. Thus, How and Wells (1912) 390, are more concerned with the battle’s synchronisation with Plataea, although Herodotus’ interest in such phenomena, real or contrived, is quite plain throughout his history. See Marincola (1996) 600 n. 40; for the synchronisation of Mycale and Plataea. See, for example, Meiggs (1972) 33-34, and van Wees (2004) 297 n. 54, for a brief synopsis of Mycale. See also Flower and Marincola (2002) 20-28 for comments on Mycale, but no analysis of the battle.

the canonical version of the ‘Persian Wars’ begins with the rebellion of Ionia and concludes with Mycale, and yet Mycale is probably the least important military encounter in the entire period from about 500 to 479 BC. It is argued here that Mycale was no more than a skirmish, perhaps even just a brawl on the beach, and that the event was embellished by Herodotus to become an adequate finale to his history. Simultaneously, Herodotus fabricated a suitably heroic victory on land for the Athenians to commemorate in addition to their triumph at Salamis. By doing this, Herodotus, therefore, placed Athens and Sparta on the same status as defenders of Greece against Xerxes.

The Naval Forces

In order to appreciate the composition of what has become described as armies of Greeks and Persians at Mycale, it is necessary to first look briefly at the statistics for the opposing sides at the battles at Lade, Marathon, Artemisium and Salamis.

At Lade in 494 the fleet of the Ionian rebels and their allies was 353 in total (Hdt. 6.8) from left wing to right wing: Miletus 80, Priene 12, Myus 3, Teos 17, Chios 100, Erythrae 8, Phocaea 3, Lesbos 70, Samos 60.⁵ Herodotus (6.14) states that 49 Samian ships deserted the Ionian cause, followed by the 70 triremes of Lesbos. The specific number given of the Samian ships which remained loyal should probably be taken as a sign that a commemorative monument existed to the eleven loyal trireme crews at Samos, an island that Herodotus knew first-

⁵ See also Evans (2015) 28-33 for further discussion.

hand.⁶ The loss of the contingent from Lesbos signalled certain defeat. However, Herodotus ends his account with a throw-away dramatic line that the ‘majority of the Ionians’ also fled. This statement is false, and perhaps reflects the author adding some additional drama through his personal ‘story-telling’ having used Hecataeus for the details of the encounter. The Chians, Milesians and Phocaeans, and probably most of the rest, fought to the bitter end.

For the campaign against Eretria and Athens in 490 the Persian fleet consisted, probably, of as many warships as transports because Datis and Artaphernes intended landing and employing at least 10,000 heavy infantry, with substantial cavalry support.⁷ On the other hand, it is also worth noting that, compared to the Ionian cities and adjacent islands five years beforehand, the mainland Greek *poleis* possessed very few warships, and those they may have had in their possession avoided all contact with the enemy.

A decade later at Doriscus, Xerxes’ fleet is said to have had a total number of 1207 triremes (Hdt. 7.89). It consisted of 300 Phoenician triremes, 200 from Egypt, 150 from Cyprus, 100 from Cilicia, Lycians 50, Pamphylia 30, Dorians of Asia 30, Caria 70, Ionians 100, and the Islands 17, Aeolia 60, Hellespont and Bosphorus 100.⁸

At Artemisium the Greek fleet totalled 271 triremes (Hdt. 8.1): Athens provided 127 warships and a further 20 were crewed by the Athenian colonists at Chalcis (147) while the Peloponnesian League contributed 95 triremes (Corinth, 40; Megara, 20; Sicyon, 12; Sparta, 10; Epidaurus, 8; Troezen 5), and the other island states lent 29 triremes (Aegina, 18; Eretria, 7; Styra, 2; Ceos, 2). Herodotus claims that the Persian fleet at this stage numbered a little more than twelve hundred warships (Hdt. 7.184).

6 How and Wells (1912) 69. However, the crews of the eleven Samian triremes settled at Zancle (Messene) and, almost certainly, never returned to their original homes, Evans (2022b) 121-141. They were perhaps joined by some Milesians and the 3 ships from Phocaea commanded by Dionysius (Hdt. 6.17). See also, Evans (2015) 32 and n. 85.

7 Herodotus (Hdt. 6.95) gives a total of 600 triremes, but on the difficulty of assigning numbers and types of vessels for this fleet, see How and Wells (1912) 102-103; Evans (2015) 44-45.

8 The numbers, unlike those for the Greeks, appear rather contrived, and may be Herodotus’ estimations. Hence the appearance of rounded-up totals He states (Hdt. 7.60) that no official record was kept of the numbers in Xerxes’ forces. See further the discussion of How and Wells (1912) 363-366.

At Salamis the Greeks are said to have assembled 380 triremes (Hdt. 8.42-48, 8.81-82): Athens provided 180 and the 20 crewed by Chalcis (200 triremes), the Peloponnesian League had 109 triremes (Corinth, 40; Megara, 20; Sparta, 16; Sicyon, 15; Epidaurus, 10; Troezen 5; Hermione, 3); the others, 59 triremes (Aegina, 30; Eretria, 7; Styra, 2; Ceos, 2; Ambracia, 7; Leucas, 3; Naxos, 4; Cythnus, 1; Croton, 1; Tenos, 1; Lemnos, 1). The total is actually 368 triremes,⁹ more than the Ionians had mustered at Lade, but indicative of how little enthusiasm or financial resources there was among the Greek mainland cities for the development of naval power even after the defeat of the Asiatic Greeks at Lade, and the subsequent Persian campaign to Marathon.¹⁰

After their losses at Artemisium, the Persians are said to have still possessed a fleet of 600 triremes (Hdt. 6.9).¹¹ This number was reduced by the Greeks at Salamis to roughly 300 triremes (Hdt. 8.130),¹² or possibly to about 350, since, according to Diodorus (Diod. 11.19.3), in the battle the Greeks had lost 40 warships, while the Persians, lost or had captured, more than 200 triremes.¹³ The Persian fleet spent the winter of 480/79 at either Cyme or Samos, after it had transported Xerxes and his escort from the vicinity of Sestos to Abydos.¹⁴ In the

9 How and Wells (1912) 363 n. 1, offer a convincing enough solution rather than pronounce it an error of Herodotus. Since then other commentators do not appear interested in the problem.

10 The Corcyraeans promised to join in the defence of Greece, sending a fleet of 60 triremes, but these sailed no further than Pylos (Hdt. 7.168). The warships of Corcyra together with the 200 promised by Gelon of Syracuse (Hdt. 7.158) would certainly have made Xerxes reconsider a naval engagement against the Greeks in their home waters.

11 See also Wallinga (2005) 37; Evans (2015) 29, 62-63.

12 For a comprehensive analysis of Salamis, see Wallinga (2005) 114-148, and Persian losses 129-131.

13 Herodotus gives no figures for the Persian losses at Salamis. The Phoenician ships and those from Cyprus, which formed the right wing of the Persian fleet and hence were meant to attack the Greeks were particularly targeted by the Athenians. Once a large number of the Persian right wing had been forced to beach, the Greeks were able to attack the centre of the enemy causing much damage (Diod. 11.19.2-3). The remaining Phoenician ships are said by Diodorus (11.19.4) to have departed immediately after the battle, but Herodotus (Hdt. 9.96) states that they were still at Samos just before the battle at Mycale, where they were ordered to retire. Diodorus' evidence here is generally discarded in favour of Herodotus although neither has a clear view of the sequence of events. See Green (2006) 73 and n. 80 for the casualties among the Persian fleet. However, *contra* Haillet (2002) 29 n. 1, most if not all the crews of the Persian fleet were from coastal regions and no doubt with as much aquatic proficiency as the mainland Greeks.

14 Herodotus (Hdt. 8.130) states that the Persian fleet sailed directly from Phalerum to Asia,



3. Troy: The View from the Hill at Troy.

Note that the sea here has receded several kilometres. In the *Iliad* the beached ships of the Greeks would have been clearly observed from the Trojan fortifications.

spring of 479 the warships at Cyme moved down to Samos where the fleet was reunited under a trio of recently appointed commanders: Mardontes, Artañntes and Ithamitres (Hdt. 8.130).¹⁵ The ethnic composition of this fleet after Salamis

perhaps Samos, and then, all or a part, joined Xerxes at the Hellespont. The harbour at Cyme would not have accommodated the entire Persian fleet and since a large contingent came originally from Samos, it was to this home harbour that a substantial part of the fleet may have remained in the winter of 480/79. Just how the warships could have carried the Persian king's escort, still in tens of thousands, is not mentioned. It may be that for the most part merchant shipping was used to ferry the troops and especially cavalry and or chariots, and these vessels were protected by the triremes, whose crews would also have been alert to the possibility that the Greeks might well pursue them from Salamis. Xerxes may well have boarded a trireme, but not for the short crossing at the Hellespont, but rather to Cyme since from this city the road led directly to Sardis, then the king's initial destination.

15 See Munro (1939) 341-342 regarding the possible responsibilities of each commander. However, it is worth noting that Herodotus explicitly asserts that Artañntes co-opted Ithamitres, his nephew, as general. The Persian king evidently allowed his generals some discretion in their appointments, that is, if Herodotus' evidence is accurate. It would also indicate that Ithamitres was probably in an unofficial capacity and that his senior collea-



4. The coast between Alexandria Troas and Assos in the Troad (Biga Peninsula, Turkey)
There is no beach along this coastline.

plainly explains the Persian commanders' unease about another sea battle against the Greeks. Although numerically the Persian fleet might still pose a threat there was a visible lack of cohesion and loyalty among the remaining contingents, all of which would have suffered losses at Salamis. It is hardly remarkable that the Persian commanders after Salamis should regard the Ionians and the Greeks of the island states as of questionable loyalty, so recently enemies of Darius in the 490s.¹⁶ The numerical superiority of the Persian fleet by the time it reached Sa-

gues (Artañntes and Mardontes) actually shared the command, the one for the triremes, the other for the on-board infantry. Thus, in the campaign to Marathon in 490, Datis and Artaphernes clearly shared the overall command, but the former is given greater prominence in the sources and may have had the warships in his charge, while the latter commanded the infantry and cavalry that formed such a crucial part of the expedition. For further discussion of the Persian campaign to Marathon, see Evans (2015) 40-81.

16 Munro (1939) 312-313, 342, describes the fleet as 'Pontic' without being specific, although this may mean the warships drawn from the communities across the Hellespont and Bosphorus (Hdt. 7.95) although these cannot have been entirely unscathed in the recent battle with the Greeks, and there is no mention that these alone provided the warships for the Persian fleet up to Mycale. See also Wallinga (2005) 137.

mos also becomes difficult to ascertain since Herodotus claims (Hdt. 9.96) that the Phoenician contingent was sent away from Samos, but noteworthy is that he also stated earlier in the narrative that the same contingent had been disgraced at Salamis (Hdt. 8.90). The Phoenicians may also have been deemed to have become untrustworthy. Diodorus (11.19.4) claims that the Phoenicians, in fear of Xerxes' anger, fled soon after Salamis. There was plainly some uncertainty about the whereabouts of some of the Persian fleet from the time of its major defeat.¹⁷ Thus, if there were neither Phoenicians nor Egyptian warships at Samos in 479, it is also possible that other contingents had been ordered to return to their homes, to the Hellespont, Bosphorus, or Cyprus. This would mean, and it appears to be confirmed in the narratives, that the warships at Samos which were beached as Mycale were entirely of Ionian or Aeolian city-states, were rather few in number, perhaps less than 200 triremes.¹⁸ A great irony could have drawn comment here: that the battle of Lade was about to be re-enacted, but this time with Greeks fighting Greeks. As it happened, however, that was not to be the outcome.

The Persian fleet that sailed from Cyme is described as passing close to the

17 Regarding the Egyptian triremes after Salamis, see the discussion of Wallinga (2005) 138-141.

18 Cf. Barron (1988) 613, who suggests as few as 100 warships; cf. Munro (1930) 342, for 200 ships. Herodotus, having been very precise about Lade (Hdt. 6.8), probably because he had Hecataeus as his source, see Evans (2015) 29-38, now seems, by comparison, to be quite vague. However, he intimates that once the Phoenicians had departed, the Persian fleet remaining consisted of almost entirely Samians and Milesians. This may not be inaccurate. The prominence given to Samos and Miletus is not startling, seeing that these two alone had provided 140 triremes at Lade. Most of these warships probably survived that battle, however, it is unlikely that they would have been seaworthy fifteen years' later. It is, moreover, interesting to see such prominence given to Miletus in this episode, a city supposedly destroyed by the Persians in 493, according to Herodotus and dwelt on at some length (Hdt. 6.18-20). It indicates that the city on account of its important harbour remained as essential to the Persians in the 480s as it was to be for the Delian League in the following decades. For its supposed fate and that it was an invention either of Phrynichus or Herodotus, see Evans (2018) 16-30. How & Wells (1912) 330 also note Herodotus' misleading account (Hdt. 6.18-22, 6.100-102) of both the destruction of Miletus in 493 and of Eretria in 490. The Eretrians supplied triremes for Artemisium and Salamis and possibly for Mycale, but unrecorded for that last expedition. Miletus' continued significance as a naval power is clear in both 494 and 479, but its decline afterwards was a rapid one on account of the silt from the Meander River that choked its harbour. See Evans (2012) 63-64 for the decline of Miletus' economic status. Diodorus (Diod. 11.36.1-5) includes Milesians, Samians, Aeolians 'and many others from Asia' who deserted the Persians to join the Greeks in the battle. See further below.

temple of Samian Hera (Hdt. 9.96), although Herodotus cannot have been an eye-witness, nor does he acknowledge a source. According to Barron, the Persians did not trust the Milesians and therefore avoided their harbour,¹⁹ but Miletus, like all other cities in Ionia at this time, had a pro-Persian ruler and probably a Persian garrison so the use of any harbour facilities on the coast of Asia Minor, or on many of the islands was certainly not out of the question. Furthermore, Samos, ruled by a tyrant sanctioned by Xerxes (Hdt. 9.90-92), was where a part of the fleet spent the winter months.

Wallinga has observed that there is no mention of a contribution from Chios or any ships from Lesbos or indeed any other western Asia Minor city, including Halicarnassus, among the Persian warships in 479 prior to Mycale. Thus, Artemisia, notorious for her escape from Salamis, has completely disappeared from the narrative (Hdt. 8.107).²⁰ The Chians and Lesbians had provided vital numbers at Lade in 494, with nearly half the total warships (as noted above). In 494, as the Persian fleet gained the upper hand after the desertion of most of the Samian and Lesbian ships, the Chian contingent, severely battered, where it could eventually also withdrew and beached its ships at Mycale. The crews intended to march north to their home, but these mostly unarmed, were massacred by the Ephesians (Hdt. 6.16).²¹ The losses from this disaster in 494 may go some way to explain the apparent absence of a major Chian contribution in 480/79, although Chian exiles feature prominently in persuading the Spartan king Leotychidas to lead the Greek fleet to cross the Aegean in 479 (Hdt. 8.132). Lesbos is also not mentioned until

¹⁹ Barron (1988) 612.

²⁰ Wallinga (2005) 147. However, note that the trireme of Artemisia at Salamis could not have had a Persian presence on board since she was able to sink the warship of Calyndus, an ally, and escape detection (Hdt. 8.87-88). The lack of Persian infantry on board the warship of a Carian ally perhaps accounts for How and Wells (1912) 278 voicing unnecessary caution regarding Herodotus' comment (Hdt. 8.130) that the *epibatai* on the ships crewed by the Ionian and other Asian Greeks before Mycale were mostly Persians and Medes. Artemisia's trireme may well have been an exception granted to a loyal subject. And after Artemisia brought some of Xerxes' sons to Ephesus (Hdt. 8.107), she perhaps sailed directly to Halicarnassus, and remained there for the duration of the war.

²¹ See also Köster (1923) 239. Note also the comment of How and Wells (1912) 69-70 on the 'extraordinary ignorance' of the Ephesians concerning the result of the battle at Lade. On the fate of the Chians and probable Ephesian collusion with the Persians, see Evans (2015) 32-33. The Chians are reputed to have 40 armed infantry on their 100 ships at Lade (Hdt. 6.15), perhaps on pentekonteres rather than the recently developed triremes that had been adapted for that purpose.

after the battle was concluded, but like Chios, not because they had given aid to the Greeks at Mycale, but that later the island states: Samos, Chios and Lesbos provided warships for the Delian League (Hdt. 9.106).

After its great victory in 480, the triremes of the Hellenic League's fleet must have dispersed to their various home harbours, although the Athenian warships probably remained at or near Salamis in anticipation of a further Persian incursion after the winter.²² In late spring or early summer of 479 Herodotus places the reconstituted Hellenic League fleet at Aegina (Hdt. 8.131-132) where it is said to have gathered shortly beforehand. Herodotus states that the Spartan king Leotychidas had under his command a total of 110 triremes, and he does not augment that figure, although some modern commentators have argued that further ships were added at some later unspecified point.²³ Given the changed circumstances and different objectives in this year, it is hardly remarkable that the fleet at Aegina should be a little under a third of that assembled for Salamis. The Persians had already been defeated twice at sea and suffered huge losses, and so the Greek city-states may well collectively have believed fewer ships were necessary, seeing that they were expensive to maintain. Moreover, Mardonius and the Persian land forces were still active on the mainland, and so all members of the Hellenic League remained under serious threat of destruction. The Eretrians and the Athenian colonists at Chalcis were similarly handicapped in contributing to a Hellenic League for much of 479. The Plataeans who had crewed Athenian triremes had abandoned their *polis* and were refugees in the Peloponnese. Many states, including Athens, may well have been understandably reluctant to allow their warships to stray too far from the centre of hostilities in case these were required at short notice. There is no need to assume, on the basis of a remark by Diodorus (see further below), that the Greek fleet in 479 numbered more than 110 triremes.

It is also possible to venture some idea of the composition of this fleet, and of the cities who contributed, drawing on the placement of contingents in the line of attack against the Persians at Mycale. From Herodotus' evidence it can be argued that the allies contributed roughly half of what they had provided before, while the

²² Herodotus (Hdt. 8.125) gives the impression that Athens was reoccupied since he states that Themistocles 'arrived at Athens from Sparta' after the battle of Salamis. This is usually discounted, but if so the fleet would have gone to Phalerum, if not, it remained at Salamis. For a discussion of this episode, See Munro (1939) 318.

²³ See, Munro (1939) 341; Barron (1988) 595 and 599.

Athenians perhaps just a third. By this reckoning, 109 ships are accounted for of the total given by Herodotus. Thus, Xanthippus' command, by far the largest element in the composite fleet, was about 70, the rest would be half the original numbers: Sparta 8, Corinth 20, Troezen 3, Sicyon 8. Any remaining ships could have been provided by Aegina, other Peloponnesian League members such as Megara or Epidaurus, and of the islands, Naxos, the *polis* closest to Delos and Ionia.

Although the command was held by Leotychidas, Xanthippus exercised great influence because of the strength of his contingent. The identification of this Xanthippus is not without its problems. The evidence shows that a Xanthippus was the eponymous archon from summer 479 to summer 478, but an archon would not usually have commanded a naval force, and instead one of the board of the ten *strategoï* would have been chosen. Themistocles, who had been in command of the Greek naval forces at Artemisium and Salamis in 480/79, was not re-elected to the board of generals in 479.²⁴ The notice in Diodorus (Diod. 11.27.3) is especially lacking in precision or comprehension. Diodorus' source, probably Ephorus, would not have written what is presented in this narrative: 'that Themistocles having received gifts, the citizens of Athens removed him (in other words, did not vote for him in the annual election) from the office of general, and transferred the magistracy (τὴν ἀρχὴν) to Xanthippus, son of Ariphron.' The archonship (the eponymous archon in this instance) which Diodorus appears to have meant here was selected by lot, and not through an open election, and had an administrative not a military role. Diodorus may have wished to convey the notion that the people voted Xanthippus as general, but was plainly confused by the election of the archon Xanthippus, with whom in a single mention (Diod. 11.27.1) he begins this section of his text. Thereafter, all military and diplomatic affairs in 479/8 were those of the *strategos* Xanthippus, the father of Pericles. The archon is merely a dating mechanism for the year.²⁵

24 For the details of Themistocles' fall from power, the sources, and that Diodorus' account may be inaccurate, see Green (2006) 84 and n. 115.

25 For the eponymous archon Xanthippus, see Hill (1897) 358; Meiggs and Lewis (1969) 291. Plutarch (*Arist.* 5.7) refers to this figure as 'Xanthippides,' and hence, if used more comprehensively, would avoid further confusion. Surprisingly this is not mentioned by How and Wells (1912). Herodotus is no help here for, although having previously mentioned Xanthippus, son of Ariphron, as husband of Agariste (Hdt. 6.131), and as the parents of Pericles, he later refers to the Athenian general at Mycale without the affiliation. Plutarch's familiarity with the Athenian system of magistracies and knowledge of that city's



5. The Beach at Teos. The beach here plainly lacks sufficient depth to beach 200 triremes and any defensive structure to protect them.

According to Herodotus (Hdt. 8.132), while the Greek fleet was at Aegina, Chian exiles persuaded Leotychidas to support their bid to win power in their city, and remove the pro-Persian tyrant. The fleet sailed, but Herodotus then claims that the crews refused to go further east than Delos (Hdt. 8.132). The Greeks apparently stayed on here for several weeks, although Herodotus' account seems highly likely to have been his invention.²⁶ Herodotus has this fleet with its full complement of crews numbering more than 20,000 remaining on the island for

political past makes his evidence probably more reliable than that of Diodorus.

²⁶ Herodotus' comments about the Greeks being wary of moving further east because it was unknown territory to them is complete nonsense since he was born in Halicarnassus and was well aware of the complex and continuous interchange that occurred across the Aegean. The narrative here has drawn modern comment and speculation. Thus, see How and Wells (1912) 270; Marincola (1996) 597 n. 45, but it is simply an indication of Herodotus' attachment to the 'story-telling' element of his work, poetic and dramatic, but entirely contrived. Without Hecataeus as his source Herodotus becomes rather vague about events in Asia, and this episode is probably an attempt to enliven the narrative. Note that in 490 the Persians crossed the Aegean by precisely the same route from Samos via Delos to Euboea, which Herodotus describes (Hdt. 6.95-98). See also Evans (2015) 44-45.

a considerable period (Hdt. 9.90, using the verb *κάθημαι*). However, the Greeks cannot have beached their fleet there for long since Delos is a small island, barely 1.3 kilometres in width and 5 kilometres in length, water was scarce, and the necessary food supplies inadequate or not available.²⁷ In fact, for the Greeks to have remained stationed at Delos for more than a day or so is impossible since it was a cult centre and not then the commercial hub that it was to become in the Hellenistic period. There was probably either no place or insufficient place to replenish provisions, especially water, and for regularly purchasing large quantities of food at markets, or taking advantage of any facilities for repairs to their triremes.²⁸ The logistical problems involved in even a short visit to Delos were insurmountable, and would indicate that the fleet must instead have either dispersed to neighbouring islands such as Naxos, or moved more directly to Asia than Herodotus reports, or was aware of.²⁹ Herodotus relates that while at Delos (Hdt. 9.90) a second delegation arrived, this time from Samos, to request the aid of the Greek fleet in liberating Ionia. In support of these Samians, Leotychidas decided on an attack of the Persian fleet, and presumably the irrational fears of the Greeks were immediately overcome.³⁰

Diodorus' account of Mycale (Diod. 11.34.1-11.36.7) agrees broadly with Herodotus' narrative, but details of the forces that were engaged and of the battle itself differ considerably and, although on the whole it is less credible than the earlier source, it, nonetheless, provides some additional insight. Diodorus (Diod.

27 See Desruelles and Fouache (2014) 203-212. To add a modern perspective, today, Delos has no resident population.

28 The wealth of Delos, like that of Delphi and Didyma, was based on its cult and treasury, not on commerce, thus, Finley (1983) 72. Note that the Persian fleet in 490 made no use of the island even if they sailed past (Hdt. 6.95), and that Datis, after Marathon, paid a brief visit there, possibly not even leaving his trireme out of respect for the island's sanctity (Hdt. 6.118).

29 Herodotus (Hdt. 6.96) knew that the fleet of Datis in 490, albeit much larger than that commanded by Leotychidas, called at other islands such as Naxos along its chosen route. Note also Xenophon's comment (*Hell.* 2.1.25-26) and identical in Plutarch (*Alc.* 36.4-5) about the Athenian choice of a camp on the shore at Aegospotami and its unsuitable position for replenishing supplies, distance from harbour facilities, and a lack of discipline among the troops.

30 The second contact with the Asiatic Greeks may easily indicate a doublet since the earlier Chian objective was much the same, and appears completely forgotten by Herodotus, who draws no connection, perhaps of general discontent in Ionia. The second contact like the first was acted upon positively and sets the scene for the ensuing battle.

11.34.1) is in agreement with Herodotus that Xanthippus and the Athenian contingent were already present with the fleet before it sailed from Aegina (Hdt. 8.132: ‘πᾶσαι αἱ νέες’). On the other hand, Diodorus (Diod. 11.34.2) claims that the fleet totalled 250 triremes.³¹ I have argued above that the Greeks would not have committed so great a number in the year after Salamis, nor had the resources to do so. Furthermore, this number of warships is not only highly unlikely, but almost impossible to contemplate, because of the enormous number of personnel involved, mostly oarsmen, about 50,000 in total. Note further below the number also has an impact on the battle order of the Greeks once they were ashore. Finally, again there would have been the immense problem of servicing such a huge fleet, far from its home harbours, unlike at Artemisium or Salamis, and its crews at Delos where Diodorus also has them at anchor or beached (Diod. 11.34.2: ‘ὄρμούντων’), but without any stipulation of length of time.³² Diodorus (Diod. 11.34.2) has just a brief mention of the legation from Samos which convinced Leotychidas to attack the island. According to Diodorus, it was only on learning of the rapid approach of the Greeks that the Persians retired from Samos preferring not to engage in battle there, but still, seemingly, on the open sea (Hdt. 9.96).

31 This difference in total numbers, and the fact that the number given by Herodotus appears to be on the low side, has prompted much speculation about whether or not the Athenians joined the fleet later, that they had been deployed perhaps in the northern Aegean or stayed close to Salamis. Munro (1939) 341 references Diodorus, but seems uncertain about the total number in the Greek fleet; Barron (1998) 592-593 and 612 has the Athenians refusing to allow their fleet to join the rest until late; Wallinga (2005) mentions Mycale, but only for the numbers in the Persian fleet; Marincola (1996) 492 appears to accept Herodotus’ total, similarly How and Wells (1912) 278. It is common in modern scholarship to find Diodorus’ evidence dismissed when compared to that of Herodotus, although the latter is not always a secure guide. Remarkably, here, even when the evidence against a large Greek fleet is more compelling, Diodorus’ evidence is preferred, but surely incorrectly. There is no indication of Greek aid to Olynthus when it was besieged and captured by the Persians after Salamis (Hdt. 8.127), and so it is not believable that the Greeks would have sent a fleet to the northern Aegean until after Plataea.

32 It is possible that Diodorus, no expert in military matters, found Herodotus’ total inadequate to be believed because in the first century, when he wrote, Roman war fleets, such as those employed by Pompey in the war against the Cilician pirates would have been quinqueremes, much larger vessels than triremes, with far greater numbers in both rowers and fighting personnel. By the *lex Gabinia* of 67 Pompey was granted an extraordinary *imperium* to eradicate piracy with a fleet of 500 warships and 120,000 armed infantry (Plut. *Pomp.* 26.2). See also, for example, Seager (1979) 35-36.

Μάχη or Ναυμαχία

The commanders of the Greek fleet expected an engagement at sea, according to Herodotus (Hdt. 9.98) who notes that the crews readied their ‘boarding bridges,’ or ‘gangways’ or ‘landing bridges.’³³ The word ‘ἀποβάθρα’ could relate to the departure from a ship; therefore, Munro argued that the Greeks knew that the Persian fleet had beached at Mycale, and that they would also have to fight on land.³⁴ Yet Herodotus was clearly under the impression that a naval battle was expected and not a land battle and when the Greek ships approached the mainland of Ionia they were still unaware that the Persians had brought their triremes ashore. Thus, the crux of the matter here is, what was ‘ἀποβάθρα’ meant to convey in the text? The trireme was not designed for boarding if in battle, although this may well have occurred when an opposing vessel’s oars had been shattered by the ramming manoeuvre,³⁵ but there are few references to fighting between armed crews on board, even in the confined space of Salamis.³⁶ Nor were ‘landing bridges’ necessary since when triremes were beached, the crews simply jumped down onto the sand.³⁷ However, it is conceivable that in going into battle the decks, in other

33 Various in the available texts. Thus, De Sélincourt (1996) 492: ‘All gear - boarding gangways and so on ...;’ Godley (1925) 273: ‘... equipping themselves ... with gangways and all else ... for a sea-fight ...’ How & Wells (1912) 330: ‘Clearly the Greeks intended to fight in the old-fashioned way by boarding ... not trusting to the new manoeuvres.’ This view is plainly incorrect since boarding bridges would have been used only by a large number of fighters and not required for the usual ten to fourteen *epibatai*, who must have been present in the fleet commanded by Leotychidas.

34 Munro (1939) 342.

35 For the *diekplous* and *periplous*, see, for example, Evans (2015) 29-31, on the battle of Lade; Wallinga (2005) 109, 111-112, on Salamis; Lazenby (1987) 169-177, more generally.

36 Note Diodorus’ elaborate description (Diod. 14.60.1-4) of such a sea battle in 396 where Carthaginian and Syracusan crews battled across the decks of opposing warships ‘locked together.’ This battle occurred on the coast between Naxos and Catania and so not in a confined space, but it may be that the Carthaginian fleet was able to breach a defensive formation of the Sicilian Greeks and that this would account for the fighting at close quarters. For the *κύκλος*, see Lazenby (1987) 174; Whitehead (1987) 179-180. For the triremes in defensive formation, see also Herodotus (Hdt. 8.11). Diodorus or his source, probably Timaeus, described this engagement in such detail in comparison to other battles that the historian possibly regarded it as an unusual event. Battles at sea are certainly not all treated to such detail when probably much of that detail is hypothetical or based on hearsay.

37 This habit plainly remained the usual method for leaving an ancient warship when it beached, especially in a confrontation imminent with the enemy. Note Caesar’s *Gallie War* (4.25) where, on arriving in Britain, seeing the numbers of hostile enemy on the beach,



6. View of the beach at Myonessus looking South. The beach is suitable for bringing triremes ashore, but is not even the depth of a single warship (approx. 36 metres). The cliff rises steeply except at this point where a small valley connects with the shore.

words, the gangways of the warships were cleared of all daily clutter so that the deck crew and the *epibatai* were allowed uninhibited movement; and this ritual must have been a necessary prelude to the commencement of all hostilities on the water. Moreover, neither Herodotus nor Diodorus note that the triremes in some fashion managed to carry additional weapons for arming the oarsmen, as did occur in the next century.³⁸ The triremes carried just the basic supplies of food and water, probably for a single day, few personal belongings, and no room for the armour of 170 oarsmen. No transport ships are mentioned for additional infantry, if indeed they could have been spared. The oarsmen did not possess the hoplite census, at least in Athens, and so would have, at best, to use whatever came to hand if, in fact, they could find anything effective against heavily armed infantry or Persian cavalry.³⁹

and uncertain of the terrain, the troops hesitated to engage until the standard bearer of the 10th legion jumped into the surf and waded ashore which spurred his fellow legionaries to do the same. The height of a beached trireme on the sand was about three metres, on water about two.

38 For Dionysius I at Pyrgi, see Evans (2009) 122, and Agathocles' invasion of Africa, 132-133. See also Evans (2020) 44-45.

39 See Wallinga (2005) 100-103 for a discussion of triremes used to transport troops.

The decision by Leotychidas to face the Persians on the beach at Mycale must then have been taken only after the arrival of the Greek fleet in the vicinity, and when the defensive attitude of the enemy became apparent (Hdt. 9.97; Diod. 11.34.3). The Persian triremes, or rather more exactly the Ionian triremes in the Persian fleet, had been brought ashore and a palisade behind a ditch quickly thrown up both as a camp and a protection for the warships (Hdt. 9.96).⁴⁰ Wallinga, following McDougall, suggests that the camp's defences had been constructed from the wood of some of the triremes, citing Herodotus (Hdt. 9.96) as evidence. However, Herodotus (Hdt. 9.97) is especially precise here, relating that the camp's walls were built up of 'stones and the trunks of fruit trees.' Herodotus knew the area well, and so his evidence should probably not be ignored. His account also supports the contention that here the Persians were hurried and breaking up trireme hulls, whatever their state of repair, would have taken much longer to achieve the required result. Not only this since it is worth noting that defences thrown up around 200 triremes involved a great deal of labour, and the perimeter would have been too long to secure effectively if, as is claimed, the Persians alone were armed. And even if the warships were stacked in lines of three, each of about 70, this would still mean, at 5 metres per trireme (plus a metre either side), that the defences would have been 500 metres in length and about 120 metres (approximately 38 metres for each trireme and some space between) from low to high tide mark. The fort was not especially large, but too great a space for the number of armed defenders and, moreover, a fort on the beach simply cannot have occurred in the Mediterranean where beaches are never 120 metres from land to water's edge, as noted above already.

The action of the Spartan king in sending ahead of the main fleet a trireme with a herald on deck to shout a message to the Ionians urging them to rebel (Hdt. 9.98; Diod. 11.34.4-5) suggests that it was only then that it became clear that the Persians had no intention of launching their ships (Hdt. 9.98) and hence

40 Wallinga (2005) 146, McDougall (1990). Building stockades for the protection of the triremes was normal practice when on a military campaign as Thucydides (6.66.2) shows plainly in the Athenian siege of Syracuse in 414/3. See also Evans (2009) 77-78; Evans (2015) 51, 66-67, and for maps, 86-89. The Athenians at Syracuse, with their more permanent structure, had a fleet of 199 triremes (Thuc. 6.42, 7.20). At the final sea battle in the Great Harbour at Syracuse in 413, the Athenians launched just 110 triremes, see Evans (2013) 73-74.

to win a victory over the enemy necessitated an assault on land.⁴¹ The speech as it is recalled differs in content between the two sources,⁴² but the intended effect of the message was identical in that the Persians lost any trust they may still have retained of the Ionian Greeks, and that these were quickly disarmed. However, the crews of the triremes would not have been armed, so the Samian and Milesian oarsmen may have been deprived of their oars, but not much else. The Milesians may well have been provided with some arms, but only if Herodotus is correct in having them ordered by the Persian generals to guard the mountain passes to prevent any attempted escape by the Greeks (Hdt. 9.99), who were optimistically assumed to have been defeated before the battle even began. Diodorus, on the other hand, has the Milesians and Samians agreeing to support the Greeks, but also taking some part in the fighting although this is described in a vague and unstructured way (Diod. 11.36.1-4). Nevertheless, Diodorus' account may be closer than Herodotus' version to a historical event where Samians and Milesians were probably merely onlookers until the Persian rout began.⁴³ Both sources recognise that, as a result of the Spartan king's subterfuge, the Milesians, Samians and any other Ionians present were denied any formal role in the battle. The attitude of the Ionians, with whom they had fought for nearly a decade just fifteen years before, can hardly have come as a surprise to the Persian commanders. Moreover, having

41 Cf. Munro (1939) 342 who states that the Persians decided on this strategy at an earlier stage arguing, without evidence, that they did this after hearing that the Athenians had joined the fleet at some later point than at Aegina. Herodotus (Hdt. 9.98) relates a far more risky tale of the Spartan king sailing past or rather alongside (*παραπλέω*) the beach and the Persian encampment at Mycale in his own trireme from which the message is relayed by the herald, the rowers having shipped their oars so that the ship slowed sufficiently. Diodorus' account probably makes more sense here, although both have essentially the same information.

42 Note that Herodotus has the king's herald address 'men of Ionia' while Diodorus has 'fellow Greeks.' Ephorus or Timaeus, the source for Diodorus, may have used 'fellow Greeks,' but it is perhaps more likely that this is Diodorus' own creation for readers or for an audience in an age where the name 'Greeks' had a meaning, but 'Ionian' possibly less so.

43 Diodorus has a much more vague account (Diod. 11.36.1-6) with two sides facing one another, the Greeks initially defensive, the Persians attacking. A rumour of Xerxes' arrival at the battlefield with his army is said to have caused great anxiety among the Greeks, but once quickly forgotten in the heat of the battle, seems to have helped rather than hindered victory. The Ionians are also said to have joined the Greeks, although to what extent is not related. Diodorus' short account is so formulaic that it provides hardly any additional material to that of Herodotus.

endured the defeat at Salamis these Greeks of Asia would have been sceptical of continuing support for, and loyalty to, Xerxes.

The Spartan king's message was delivered and when no move was made by the Persians to relaunch their ships to engage in battle, the Greek fleet, perhaps in a show of confidence in their military superiority, rowed past the Persian camp and went ashore, probably within sight of their enemy.

The Order of Battle and the Fight

Herodotus has the Greeks go ashore and, after a brief delay, launch an immediate assault, but Diodorus, in his narrative, interposes a day's break between the Greeks' beaching their triremes and the commencement of the battle. Given the logistics of what was effectively a sea-borne invasion, his account should be preferred.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Herodotus' dramatic opening onto a battlefield scene has clear poetic elements, interspersed with the divine and supernatural.⁴⁵ Again, it seems that Herodotus was recalling Homer's description of fighters who also rowed their ships, not triremes, perhaps pentekonters or even smaller ships. Thus, in the *Odyssey* for much of the earlier narrative, Odysseus is accompanied by fighter-rowers. With the invention of the larger trireme the older established custom was presumably abandoned in favour of speed and manoeuvrability in battles on the water rather than fighting on land. In Homer there are no battles on the sea, and here too Herodotus has the Greeks eager to do battle as if all were armed. This also gives rise to Herodotus' strange assertion that the Samians were disarmed while Milesians were armed for a specific duty. Neither the Samians nor the Milesians or any other rower had 'armour' (τὰ ὄπλα), and Herodotus knew this well enough just as he knew the ubiquitous triremes, all with their unarmed rowers. Hence the intrusion again of the story-telling element in place of history.

44 At Aegospotami in 405, the Spartans surprised the Athenians, aware but unconcerned about their enemy's presence, who were disorganised and unprepared for an attack launched as soon as the former beached their ships. Most of the unarmed Athenian crews were easy prey (Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.23-30; Plut. *Alc.* 37.2-3). Just eight triremes under the command of Conon, together with the *Paralus*, escaped. There is a certain irony here in that, at Aegospotami, history came full circle, the destruction of Athenian hopes and the demise of Xerxes' desire for territorial expansion both ended with battles on beaches.

45 Note Herodotus' frequent interludes in which the supernatural appears in his narrative. Thus, see Evans (2022a) 36-51.



7. View of the beach at Myonessus looking North. Sand dunes are the salient feature on this stretch of the shore. Some idea of high and low tide may be obtained from the wet sand and surf.

When additional hoplites were carried it is noted, for example, at Lade (Hdt. 6.15) but probably in that battle not on triremes, in the Sicilian expedition of Athens (Thuc. 6.43) in troop transports, or at Eurymedon (Plut. *Cim.*12.2) also transports.⁴⁶ It may safely be assumed that at Mycale the usual complement of ten to fourteen *epibatai* were attached to each trireme, and that these troops were all native to their *poleis*. The Greeks were hardly in a position to spare greater numbers for this fleet since they were engaged in the main campaign against Mardonius in Boeotia.⁴⁷ The main theatre of war lay in Greece while events in Ionia were of peripheral significance in the summer of 479. To have hostilities on two fronts would have been beyond the means of the Hellenic League cities for

⁴⁶ Thucydides (6.43) notes that for the attack on Syracuse 5100 hoplites were transported in 40 Athenian ships that he describes as troop carriers (‘ἄι ... στρατιώτιδες’), or triremes with probably two of the tiers of oars removed, and that there were also 700 *epibatai* of the Thetic class (‘θῆτες ἐπιβάται ...’) without the hoplite census who manned the remaining triremes. See also Evans (2013) 44-45.

⁴⁷ According to Plutarch (*Them.* 14.1) the Athenian ships carried 18 *epibatai* at Salamis, 14 hoplites and 4 archers, but Xanthippus’ command certainly had fewer precisely for the argument raised here.



8. Miletus with the Island of Lade in the distance.

Lade, no longer an island, is now a hill in an extensive plain, the result of the silting of the estuary of the River Meander. In the foreground is the theatre at Miletus.

the provisioning of troops and equipment. The immediate danger was from the Persian army, the fleet under Leotychidas' command was probably not intended to be engaged at all, but to play a watching role shadowing any activity by enemy warships. This strategy certainly accounts for the inactivity of the fleet for much of the summer rather than any dubious comments from Herodotus (Hdt. 8.132). News that the Persian fleet had been divided and had vacated the safety of Samos may well have drawn the Greeks east. However, unlike the previous four battles of the war (Thermopylae, Artemisium, Salamis, Plataea) Mycale was not a planned engagement.

The number of Greeks who fought against the Persians can be envisaged simply by counting the 10 hoplites from a fleet consisting of 110 triremes (Athenian 70; Corinthian 20; Sicyon 8; Troezen 3, Sparta 8).⁴⁸ Thus, the Athenians pro-

⁴⁸ Ten being the number of hoplites plus four archers. The archers would have covered the



9. The temple of Athena at Priene (Hellenistic)
with Mount Mycale in the background.

vided about 700 troops; Corinth 200; Sicyon 80; Troezen 30, Sparta 80 (Helots not Spartiates), plus some anonymous ‘others’ to the right of centre). The total number may have been roughly 1,100, yet it seems reasonably proportionate to the resources available to the Greeks in 479.⁴⁹ What also must become clear is that a wedge formation was formed in the line on account of the limited space on this beach, even at low tide not more than 20-30 metres in length (land to water’s edge) at the most.⁵⁰ In usual hoplite battle formation the infantry stood in ranks to

line at its ends or acted as skirmishers standing before the line, running back through one of the gaps to relative safety behind the infantry as the line closed in on the enemy.

49 The lower figure of Herodotus is chosen here since the total of 250 triremes provided by Diodorus (Diod. 11.34.2) is simply incorrect, as argued above, and the infantry could not have formed up in any meaningful way on a beach with such a huge discrepancy in numbers between the wings.

50 If the beach at Mycale was exceptionally long, especially at low tide, Herodotus would surely have mentioned the phenomenon, as he does so when relating the siege of Plataea just

a depth of about ten men, but given the disparity in Athenian and Spartan troops, the line at Mycale, if this normal line had been followed would have produced one very long end, and one very short end with little of substance in the centre, and altogether far too long for the space on such a beach. If a wedge formation was adopted by placing a depth of about 50 on one wing, and leaving the rest at the usual depth this becomes a distinct possibility for Mycale. This strategy, whose first use is often ascribed to the Thebans at Leuctra may easily have been adopted by Xanthippus and Leotychidas in 479 using the constrained space of the beach to their advantage.⁵¹ Allowing about a metre per hoplite, this would entail the 700 Athenians forming a block of 14 infantry in a row, but 50 deep (14 metres), alongside 20 Corinthian hoplites, 10 deep (20 metres), 8 infantry from Sicyon, 10 deep (8 metres), 3 infantrymen from Troezen (3 metres), Sparta 8 hoplites (8 metres). The total length of the line including some gaps between each section for the archers to retreat is 53 to 58 metres. Thus would illustrate how the troops in the line from ‘anywhere up to half way’ (Hdt. 9. 102: ‘μέχρι ους τῶν ἡμισέων’) were forced out of position into the dunes, arriving a little late to join the melee, but also fresh to add further impetus to the victory.⁵² This would mean that, although Herodotus claims only Spartans and a few others were to the other end from the Athenians, in fact the Spartans had too few infantry to occupy a whole wing, and must have been joined by troops from Troezen, Sicyon and

the year before (Hdt. 8.129). Notably beaches in the region have little difference in low to high tide and with ‘beaches’ of barely a metre or two, and quite unlike some coastal regions, for example, in the western British Isles. This means that the beach length taken in this paper is obviously hypothetical, but based on Herodotus’ own information that it could accommodate about half the Greek line of advance.

51 For Leuctra in 371, see Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.12) where the wedge was on the left wing facing the Spartiates and their king who usually occupied the right wing.

52 Note the problem of dividing the sections of an army in antiquity when the battle occurred along the shore as in Gela in 405. There the Syracusan fleet acted as an extension of the left wing and carried peltasts who attacked the enemy (Carthaginian) camp. The battle went in favour of the Carthaginians because the centre and right wings failed to coordinate and arrived late. Evans (2013) 101-105; Evans (2016) 155-159; Evans (2022c) 15-17. Note the nuances in the translations of this section: Barron (1988) 614 considers that the Spartans marched through mountainous terrain; How and Wells (1912) 33: ‘hills above’ the beach; Godley (1929) 279: ‘through a ravine and among hills;’ Munro (1939) 343: ‘over a gully and hills;’ Marincola (1996) 536: ‘up a watercourse and over high hills.’ It matters little where they went since this wing accounted for little in the strategy.

some of the Corinthians.⁵³ Still, Herodotus' attempt at precision here should alert the reader to a source knowing something of this aspect of the battle.

It is usually written that the Spartans, accustomed to holding the right wing as they did at Plataea (Hdt. 9.28), would have done so at Mycale,⁵⁴ and that means that the Greek fleet sailed past the Persians and beached near Priene.⁵⁵ This need not be the case at all since the Spartans may have been represented by their king, but their infantry were not Spartiates, but Helots, and their total number was very small for an offensive right wing.⁵⁶ It may actually have been considered far safer for the Greeks to land north of the Persian camp and closer to Samos than to sail into the estuary of the Meander where both Priene and Miletus were held by Persian garrisons. The Athenians' greater numbers and heavier pushing power surely ensured that they formed the right wing.

The Persian forces opposing the Greeks were commanded by the three assigned to the fleet and a certain Tigranes, the last of whom Herodotus provides only anecdotal comment (Hdt. 9.96). Said to have been in command of an army of 60,000 that Xerxes had left behind to police Ionia in his absence, more likely he had come to Mycale with a much smaller contingent raised from closer at hand, Miletus or Priene.⁵⁷ The arrival of the Greeks was sudden and unexpected, and to organise the movement of a large army would have taken several weeks, if not months. The actual Persian force, like their opponents, consisted of the *epibatai* of the roughly two hundred triremes beached at Mycale, providing approximately 2,300 armed infantry and or archers. Tigranes would have supplemented this total with his own force numbering as much again.⁵⁸ If Tigranes' participation

53 See Holladay (1988) 151 n. 2. The Spartans had no major naval power until just prior to the battle of Arginusae in 406 (Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.31).

54 Thus the order of battle may have been identical to that at Plataea (Hdt. 9.28; cf. 9.102), although Herodotus does not state this. However, the modern assumption makes no sense of the situation on the ground.

55 Thus Barron (1988) 614..

56 In 424-421 Brasidas, the most successful Spartan commander against Athens, also commanded a force composed of Helots. At Syracuse in 414/3 the sole Spartan was Gylippus who initially commanded a force of Helots numbering 700 oarsmen and 100 *epibatai* (Thuc. 7.1-2). See also, Evans (2013) 54, 58-59.

57 Diodorus (11.35.4) mentions only the prospect of Xerxes coming to aid the Persians at Mycale, although this remained just a rumour. Tigranes does not feature at all, nor are the other Persian generals named.

58 Note Munro's scepticism (1939) 342, regarding the size of Tigranes' command, and, 344,

in the battle is historical fact, then the Persian troops in total were probably a little more than 4,000, still a considerably larger force than the Greeks, but hugely outnumbered by the Ionians in their camp. This explains why the Ionians had to be removed from the battlefield area and the camp. They were not to be trusted and posed a threat by their mere presence, even if unarmed.

The two sides appear to have quickly closed ground between them and engaged just outside the Persian camp. The ease with which the Greeks broke the wicker shield (τό γέρρον) defence of the Persian infantry highlights the use of the wedge formation and its overpowering assault, the product of the great disparity in numbers of combatants. The Persian defensive line would probably have held against an assault of an opposing line of ten hoplites deep, but not fifty. This collapse led to the start of the rout, but also accounts for the heavy casualty rate among both sides, the Greeks in the front lines pushed forward into the enemy by those behind, the Persians thrown to the ground and trampled (Hdt. 9.102). The generals Tigranes and Mardontes were probably killed at this point, Artañntes and Ithamitres reached the safety of Sardis (Hdt. 9.107). Herodotus particularly notes that troops from Sicyon suffered large losses including their general (Hdt.9.103), but that the Athenian infantry, not surprisingly considering their numbers, won the day (Hdt. 9.105). Meanwhile, the Milesians are said to have been assigned guard duty inland on the hills away from the imminent hostilities, but Herodotus devotes considerable detail in describing their attacks on their former allies the Persians who, by then as fugitives from the battle, were trying to escape from Mycale (Hdt. 9.104).⁵⁹

The fate of the triremes in the Persian camp is not recorded. These may easily have been burned. It is just possible that the Ionians managed to retrieve some of their warships. In the newly created Delian League (Hdt. 9.106; Thuc. 1.96) Samos, Chios and Lesbos all provided ships for the fleet of this new alliance. Sig-

his overall caution regarding the historicity of the account of Mycale.

59 Diodorus (Diod. 11.36.1-4) clearly has the Ionians initially fighting for the Persians and then changing allegiance in time to take some credit for the victory. Mention is also made of 'Aeolians and many others of Asia' who participated in the Persian defeat. However, the overall lack of any clarity in the account renders it of little value. Thus, Diodorus states (Diod. 11.36.6) that Persians losses amounted to 40,000, a much exaggerated figure, that is designed to enhance the Greeks' victory. See further Green (2006) 93-94 and n. 148 for a more positive discussion of Diodorus' reliability here.



nificantly, perhaps, the Milesians preferred to pay the annual tribute for League membership, and so may not have rescued sufficient ships to be able to play a more active role.

Conclusion

Burn's remark at this paper's start captures the essence of Mycale, but there was no actual causal connection between the battle and the newest Ionian revolt. The Ionians did not rebel in 479 because of the result at Mycale, but because of the general and catastrophic defeat suffered by Xerxes in the course of 480/79 across the whole of the Aegean region. It is, however, accurate to state that in magnitude the battle of Mycale was a trivial affair. Not a brawl probably, because the customs of the time did not allow for the arming of oarsmen, and hardly more than a skirmish with perhaps five thousand heavily armed infantry fighting along the shoreline. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that while Lade, Artemisium and Salamis were all battles fought on the sea, Mycale is the first noted example of two opposing fleets that engaged on the beach.

Mycale may be some distance from Troy but the subject of Homer's *Iliad* Books 12-13, an attack on the Greek defences, a breach in these fortifications and fighting taking place on the beach among the warships does look as if Herodotus, having little good information about Mycale, took thematic elements from Homer here as a basis for the narrative. A further similarity is the physical landscape which is very similar to that of Thermopylae's location.⁶⁰ Thus, two infantry battles in narrow places hemmed in by mountains and the sea, the close engagement at barricades with defensive lines to be overcome, both with fleets nearby, both with Spartan kings in command. Mycale had actually much more in common with Thermopylae than it had with Plataea, but it concluded with a Greek victory, a triumphant Spartan king, with honours shared equally with the Athenians. Discussion of Mycale tends to present just another land battle when it was, in fact, a rather odd affair, not unique, but the first of its kind.

And as for Herodotus' choice of ending? Mycale is also near Miletus where it all began in about 500 with the intrigue of Aristagoras. The Milesians' prominence in the battle may well have some connection with Herodotus casting a

⁶⁰ See also Evans (2022a) 36-51.

glance back at the start of the hostilities that began and were to end in Ionia.⁶¹ Mycale also has a symbolic and religious importance in that it was also where the assembly of Ionian cities (Panionion) convened. Thus, from Delos to Mycale and from Delphi to Didyma, the cult centres of the Greek world dominate Herodotus' narrative at important structural points, although often in episodes that should be regarded as more his invention than historical fact. The account of the battle of Mycale certainly has its mix of history and fiction.

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61 The construct, if it was meant as such, starting and ending in Ionia, has provoked comment. Thus, see Meiggs (1972) 33-34. There is obviously an element of specifically Athenian or pro-Athenian propaganda which, if not mostly of an oral nature, but possibly from the work of Hellanicus of Lesbos, was included by Herodotus in his narrative to enhance the reputation of Athens in opposition to Sparta. This topic has been addressed (see above Notes 1 and 3) and while forming a part of the corpus of information for Mycale has little bearing on an analysis of the battle itself.

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Storia militare e mutamento religioso negli anni ateniesi di Demetrio Poliorcete

di CONSUELO FARÉ

ABSTRACT: The religious changes implemented during the years of Demetrius Poliorcetes in Athens can be situated within the framework of reciprocal *do ut des* between him and the city. This reveals the inherent connection between military and religious history, as evidenced by the phenomenon of ruler cults. Specifically, Athens bestows divine honors upon the individual in exchange for Demetrius providing military protection and action in support of the city. This dynamic is articulated in a distinctive manner through certain emblematic cultic (and civic) innovations introduced during the protagonist's Athenian career. These innovations serve as valuable tools for contextualizing the relationship between religious transformation and military history within the broader scope of the early Hellenistic period.

KEYWORDS: DEMETRIUS POLIORCETES; EARLY HELLENISTIC PERIOD; DO UT DES; ATHENS; ANTIGONIDS

Con la liberazione di Atene (307/06 a. C.) dalla guarnigione di Cassandro e dalla tirannia di Demetrio Falereo e la restaurazione della democrazia iniziava “un ventennale e tempestoso rapporto tra Atene e Demetrio Poliorcete che sconvolse tanto la politica quanto la religione ateniese”¹. Se, come sostiene Federicomaria Muccioli, i pur innovativi onori concessi al Falereo restano sul piano politico, è con la concessione al Poliorcete (L'Assediatore) del titolo di Salvatore (*Sotér*) che Atene, storico propugnacolo della democrazia e della libertà greca, accetta la venerazione religiosa del governante (*ruler cult*) che caratterizza la concezione alessandrina e poi ellenistica del potere².

1 Cfr. John D. MIKALSON, *Religion in Hellenistic Athens*, University of California Pr., Berkeley (Calif.), 1998, p. 75.

2 Cfr. Federicomaria MUCCIOLI, «Alle soglie del “ruler cult”»: Atene nell’età di Demetrio del Falero», *Erga-Logoi*, 3.1, 2015 p. 1. La riflessione di questo autore verte sul considerare o meno gli onori concessi a Demetrio del Falero dei *ruler cults*, anche in relazione ai suc-

Le innovazioni del lessico e del cerimoniale politico e religioso ateniese avvenute sotto il Poliorcete, già ben analizzate da Annika Kuhn³, e in particolare la vera e propria divinizzazione proclamata nell'Inno itifallico, sono state interpretate in chiave di antropologia culturale⁴ come un tipico esempio della logica del dono teorizzata da Marcel Mauss⁵, dimenticando peraltro che lo scambio tra sicurezza e assoggettamento è alla base della teoria hobbesiana del patto sociale, elaborata proprio attraverso lo studio di Tucidide.

In primo luogo, verranno analizzati alcuni punti della carriera ateniese del personaggio, in cui la sfera religiosa e la storia militare del periodo si incrociano in maniera evidente, sebbene con diversi obiettivi. Saranno quindi trattati i primi onori concessi al personaggio dopo la “liberazione della città”; il cosiddetto decreto di Dromoclide, in cui Demetrio viene definito oracolo e in cui viene fatto riferimento alla restituzione “degli scudi posti a Delfi”, spostati dai nemici Etoli alleati con i Tebani; l'inno itifallico dedicato a lui nel 291, in cui al dio Demetrio, associato ad Afrodite e Poseidone viene richiesto di intervenire contro la “Sfinge etolica”; il provocatorio spostamento ad Atene dei Giochi Pitici del 290 a. C, approfittando dell'occupazione etolica di Delfi. Rovesciando l'ordine cronologico, concludiamo con l'iniziazione ai Misteri eleusini (302), rinascita che anche simbolicamente Demetrio oppone al rivale Cassandro.

Inoltre, in maniera forse meno evidente e più sottile, il rapporto fra storia religiosa e militare è riscontrabile anche in altri due momenti della carriera del

cessivi culti di Demetrio Poliorcete: arriva tuttavia a postulare che la vera introduzione dei *ruler cults* avviene proprio con il secondo.

- 3 Annika B. KUHN, «Ritual Change during the Reign of Demetrius Poliorcetes», in Eftychia STAVRIANOPOULOU (Ed.), *Rituals and Communication in the Graeco-Roman World*, Kernos suppl. 16. Liège, Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 2006, pp. 268-281.
- 4 Cfr. Peter GREEN, «Delivering the Go(o)ds: Demetrios Poliorcetes and Hellenistic Divine Kingship», in Geoffrey W. BAKEWELL e Joan SICKINGER (ed. by), *Gestures Essays in Ancient History, Literature, and Philosophy presented to Alan L. Boegehold*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2003, pp. 258-77; e Angelos CHANIOTIS, «The Ithyphallic Hymn for Demetrios Poliorcetes and Hellenistic Religious Mentality», in Panagiotis P. IOSSIF, Andrej S, CHANKOWSKI e Chaterine C. LORBER (ed. by), *More than Men, Less than Gods. Studies on Royal Cult and Imperial Worship*, Leuven, 2011, pp. 157-195. Essi hanno applicato la teoria del dono controdonando soprattutto all'inno itifallico.
- 5 Marcel MAUSS, *Saggio sul dono. Forma e motivo dello scambio nelle società arcaiche*, Einaudi, Torino, 2016.



Ritratto in bronzo probabilmente rappresentante Demetrio Poliorcete.
Madrid, Museo del Prado (Inv. Real Museo, Sección Escultura, 1857. Núm. 735).
Foto ©Raymac 2006 CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED (wikimedia commons)

personaggio. Questo è dimostrabile nella sospensione, dopo Ipsos, della residenza di Demetrio nell'opistodomo (insieme, anche, alla temporanea rottura dei rapporti fra il sovrano e Atene) e nella notizia della compromissione di alcuni atti rituali durante la carriera ateniese del personaggio.

Demetrio come autorità rituale e simbolo civico dopo la “liberazione della città”

All’arrivo di Demetrio in Attica nel 307/306⁶, ancora prima di approdare e dopo la promessa di “liberare gli Ateniesi, espellere la guarnigione, restituire loro le leggi e le costituzioni patrie”⁷, egli viene accolto subito come “Salvatore” e “Benefattore”. Una volta sopraffatta la guarnigione di Munichia e smantellata la fortezza, Demetrio fa il suo ingresso ad Atene, convoca il popolo dichiarando il ripristino della forma di governo dei padri e promettendo da parte del padre il suo prossimo ritorno “cinquecentomila medimni di grano e una quantità di legname da costruzione per cento triremi”⁸.

È proprio nell’ottica di questa promessa di dono che si possono leggere gli onori che vengono successivamente concessi a lui e al padre, come viene confermato dalla notizia, leggermente diversa, presente in Diodoro Siculo, che sostiene che Antigono concede i doni promessi alla città solo dopo la notifica, da parte di ambasciatori, degli onori conferiti a lui e al figlio⁹. Sempre Plutarco, nello stesso paragrafo, ci riporta gli onori tributati “senza misura” agli Antigonidi subito dopo il suo arrivo. Innanzitutto, viene riportato come gli Ateniesi sono i primi a dichiarare re Antigono e Demetrio (appellativo che viene inizialmente rifiutato da questi ultimi per poi essere assunto dopo la battaglia di Salamina di Cipro) e, oltre a questo, sono i soli a dare loro il titolo di “dei salvatori”¹⁰. Viene

6 Per un inquadramento storico sugli anni ateniesi del personaggio v., innanzitutto, la completa monografia di Charlotte DUNN & Patrick WHEATLEY, *Demetrius the Besieger*, Oxford, Oxford U. P., 2020. Per un focus sul mutamento religioso cfr. MIKALSON. Per la tradizione letteraria si vd. ad es. Franca LANDUCCI, «La divinizzazione del sovrano nella tradizione letteraria del primo ellenismo», in Tommaso GNOLI & Federicomaria MUCCIOLI (cur.), *Divinizzazione, culto del sovrano e apoteosi. Tra Antichità e Medioevo*, Bologna, Bononia U. P., 2014, pp. 71- 84.

7 Plut. *Demetr.* 8, 7.

8 Plut. *Demetr.* 10, 1. sul complesso rapporto di Demetrio con Atene, si vd. ad es. Gianluca CUNIBERTI, *La polis dimezzata. Immagini storiografiche di Atene ellenistica*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2006, pp.64-72: in particolare l’inserimento dell’Antigonide nella vita pubblica ateniese viene letto come necessario e utile per Atene per recuperare una funzione militare e un ruolo di rilievo in politica estera, tali da potersi opporre a Cassandro.

9 Diod. XX, 46, 1.

10 Cfr. Diod. XX, 46, 2. Il materiale epigrafico, invece, parla solo di “Salvatori”. Questa notizia è quindi probabilmente dubbia, tantoché lo stesso Plutarco parla successivamente del “sacerdote dei salvatori”.

inoltre stabilita l'abolizione dell'arconte eponimo, sostituito dal "sacerdote dei salvatori"¹¹. Il popolo vota poi che le loro immagini siano ricamate sul peplo insieme a quelle divine¹² e consacra con un altare il punto dove era sceso per la prima volta dal carro Demetrio, dedicato appunto a Demetrio "Discensore"¹³, in possibile riferimento ad un tipico appellativo di Zeus¹⁴. In secondo luogo, si decide di aggiungere due nuovi mesi e tribù civiche a quelle attuali, rinominate in onore di Antigono e Demetrio. Come conseguenza di questo, i membri della *boulé* diventano 600 invece dei tradizionali 500. Antigono e Demetrio, in aggiunta, ricevono gli onori come eroi eponimi delle due tribù¹⁵. È interessante vedere come questi onori siano durati fino alla fine del III secolo a. C.¹⁶ e che questa sia stata la prima alterazione delle tribù attiche dai tempi di Clistene.

Per via epigrafica, viene la notizia dell'erezione di due statue d'oro di Antigono e Demetrio, dichiarati "Salvatori" e "Benefattori"¹⁷. Le statue, in particolare, vengono erette vicino a quelle dei tirannicidi. Questa decisione non ha un significato specificamente religioso, ma la collocazione delle statue dei due vicino agli eroi simbolo della libertà ateniese ha un significato civico importante:

11 La notizia è attestata solamente in Plutarco, mentre non è presente nel materiale epigrafico e in altri autori come Diodoro (ad esempio in, XX,45, 1) e Dionigi di Alicarnasso (*Dinarch.* 9). La notizia viene quindi smentita solitamente dalla dottrina.

12 Questo aspetto verrà approfondito successivamente.

13 La notizia è presente anche in Plut. *De Alex. Magni fort. Aut. virt.* 2, 338 a; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 4, 54, 6.

14 L'appellativo di Zeus Discensore è ben presente sia per via letteraria (si veda ad esempio, Paus. V, 14, 10; Athen. XII, 522f), sia per via epigrafica (cfr. *IG II²* 4965 per l'esistenza di un *abaton* dedicato a Zeus *Kataibates*); per un approfondimento su questo aspetto si veda: MIKALSON, pp. 85-86; 96; Vittorio PEDINELLI, «Celebrazioni della vittoria in Età Ellenistica. Demetrio Poliorcete tra strategie della comunicazione, memorie del passato e del presente», *Nuova antologia militare. Storia militare antica*, 3.10, mar., 2022, pp. 173-174 e n. 45. L'autore collega anche l'epiteto di Demetrio all'*apobate* panatenaico e quindi al mito di fondazione della città di Atene.

15 Per un'analisi approfondita di questo aspetto e del suo significato politico si vd. CUNIBERTI, cit. n.187.

16 Con Filippo V vediamo la *damnatio memoriae* degli Antigonidi.

17 Cfr. *IG II³*, 1 853 40-42. Il decreto in onore di Herodoros è databile nel 295/4. Esso fa menzione di una statua a lui dedicata vicino a quella dei tirannicidi e degli Antigonidi per la benevolenza a loro dimostrata. Plut. *Demetr.* 9,1 riporta gli stessi appellativi assegnati agli Antigonidi al loro arrivo in città, ossia "Salvatori" e "Benefattori". La notizia della statua vicino a quella dei tirannicidi viene confermata in Diod. XX, 46, 2. Cfr. MIKALSON, cit. p.79.

ciò, infatti, mette i due sovrani allo stesso livello dei tirannicidi e della loro portata simbolica. È una scelta nuova, mai fatta prima. Nel decreto per Asandros di Macedonia del 314/313, prima attestazione della triade d'onori di *megistai timai* (*sitesis*, *proedria* e statua onoraria), si prescrive infatti di erigere la sua statua nell'*agorà*, ma non vicino ad Armodio e Aristogitone¹⁸.

Questo onore e gli altri concessi a Demetrio, quindi, sono una novità importante che vuole sottolineare l'importanza delle sue azioni a favore della *polis*: la liberazione della città, ma anche i doni concessi a questa (grano e rifornimenti). Questi due aspetti fanno emergere come la distinzione fra mutamenti civici e religiosi sia forse utile, ma priva di senso per i contemporanei: la linea fra civico e religioso, se presente, è troppo sottile, e la giustificazione per questi onori è proprio l'azione e gli aiuti militari di Demetrio a favore della città.

Sempre in quest'ottica Stratocle, protagonista dell'attività assembleare pro-antigonide per tutti gli anni di Demetrio ad Atene¹⁹, propone su decreto che gli ambasciatori inviati a Demetrio e Antigono fossero i *theoroi*²⁰. Il senso della negoziazione fra Demetrio e la *polis* è comprensibile anche alla luce di questa scelta, essendo questi gli stessi ambasciatori delegati ai contatti con i santuari di Delfi e Olimpia²¹. Il politico, inoltre, stabilisce che ogni suo arrivo ad Atene sia accompagnato da culti pari a quelli di Demetra e Dioniso e da grandiose offerte votive, tanto che viene istituito un premio per la miglior offerta divina al Salvatore. Viene inoltre deciso di chiamare il mese di Munichione Demettrione e l'ultimo giorno del mese Demettriade. Infine, muta il nome delle Dionisie in Demetrie²².

18 *IG* II² 450.

19 Per un'analisi approfondita sul personaggio, cfr. ad es. Nino LURAGHI, «Stratokles of Diomeia and party politics in early Hellenistic Athens», *Classica et Medievalia*, 65, 2014, pp. 191-226.

20 La notizia viene riportata sempre da Plutarco (*Demetr.* 11; *de fort.*; *Alex.* 338 a). In età ellenistica i *theoroi* sono gli ambasciatori cittadini che hanno il ruolo di partecipare alle feste in onore dei sovrani e sollecitare i decreti di riconoscimento e di partecipazione di queste.

21 Cfr. A. KUHN, cit., pp. 277-280. L'autrice si concentra sull'analisi di questo decreto e di alcuni altri onori dedicati al personaggio.

22 La cronologia probabilmente è errata e anche la notizia dubbia. Duride (*FGrHist* 76 F 14, 11-12) e *Syll.*³ 485 attestano la presenza di Demetrie in Atene solo per il periodo successivo al 294. L'assorbimento delle Dionisie alle Demetrie viene smentita da Plutarco stesso (12, 5) che attesta la regolare celebrazione delle prime. Per gli anni successivi al 294 le testimonianze epigrafiche attestano la compresenza di Dionisie e

Ancora Stratocele nel 304/303²³ fa emanare un decreto che stabilisce che ciò che Demetrio ordina sia “cosa giusta” presso gli dèi e presso gli uomini. È proprio questo episodio a suscitare, secondo Plutarco, l’ironia pubblica di Democare di Leukonoe e il suo conseguente esilio, notizia che ci testimonia l’impatto di questo decreto sulla politica contemporanea²⁴. Questo decreto, oltre ad attribuire a Demetrio un’ autorità divina, giustifica i cambiamenti nella pratica rituale e politica del personaggio, sia retrospettivamente sia in vista delle azioni future. Non a caso questo onore viene collocato dopo la fine della cosiddetta Guerra dei quattro anni contro Cassandro²⁵: ancora una volta il riconoscimento dell’aiuto militare si accompagna all’onore divino.

Demetrie (*Syll.*³ 483). Ad ogni modo l’associazione Demetrio-Demetra-Dioniso è qui e in altri momenti della vita di Demetrio ben attestata, anche se l’associazione a Demetra è più probabilmente plausibile a partire dal 302, anno della sua iniziazione ai Misteri (si vedano per questi aspetti i paragrafi dedicati all’inno itifallico e all’iniziazione ai Misteri).

- 23 La notizia, riportata da Plutarco (*Demetr.* 24, 9), è infatti collocata dopo la soppressione dell’offensiva di Cassandro contro il potere antigonide in Grecia, iniziata già nel 307/306. Il tutto è inoltre databile nell’ultimo anno dell’assedio di Rodi. Cfr. *Marmor Parium* in *FGrHist* 239 B 24; Paus. 1, 57,7.
- 24 Democare era nipote di Demostene e si occupò del rafforzamento delle fortificazioni e dell’esercito in vista della guerra contro Cassandro (Ps.Plut., *Vitae X orat.* 851 d-e; *IG II*² 463), durante la quale fu probabilmente stratego negli anni fra il 307 e il 304 (Polyb. XII 13, 5). In questi anni è protagonista del partito antiantigonide. La monografia fondamentale sul personaggio rimane Gabriele MARASCO, *Democare di Leukonoe, politica e cultura in Atene fra IV e III sec. a.C.*, Firenze 1984: nelle pp. 39-59 si concentra in particolare sull’opposizione al Poliorcete. Sull’esilio di Democare si veda anche CUNIBERTI, cit. p.69.
- 25 L’offensiva di Cassandro contro il potere antigonide in Grecia, iniziata all’indomani stesso della ‘liberazione’ di Atene da parte di Demetrio nel 307, aveva raggiunto il culmine proprio durante l’anno dell’assedio di Rodi, nel 304/303, costringendo Demetrio a tornare in Grecia. Il periodo dal 307 al 303 è noto nelle in alcune fonti come la Guerra dei quattro anni (ad es. Plut. *Vita dec. orat.* 851 d). Essa si combatté su diversi fronti, dalla Grecia all’Asia Minore ed ebbe come teatro il Mediterraneo. Per un resoconto su questo momento storico, l’assedio di Rodi e il ritorno di Demetrio ad Atene cfr. ad es. Cfr. Charlotte DUNN & Patrick WHEATLEY, cit. pp. 228-277.

Demetrio come oracolo e il riferimento agli scudi posti a Delfi

L'autorità rituale del Poliorcete viene rafforzata in un decreto del 292/291 in cui a questi viene dato il ruolo di oracolo. Sempre Plutarco ci riporta il decreto²⁶ proposto da Dromoclide, identificato spesso dall'autore come un personaggio vicino a Stratocle:

Il più paradossale e straordinario fra gli onori fu quello proposto da Dromoclide di Sfetto, il quale fece decretare che si richiedesse un oracolo a Demetrio sulla consacrazione degli scudi a Delfi. Riferirò il testo stesso del decreto, che dice così: “Alla buona fortuna. È stato deciso dal popolo di eleggere fra gli Ateniesi un uomo, il quale, recatosi presso il Salvatore e offertogli un sacrificio con lieti auspici, consulterà il Salvatore sulla maniera più pia, più bella, più rapida con cui il popolo possa rimette al loro posto le offerte. Qualunque responso egli emetterà, il popolo lo porrà in atto²⁷.”

Come oracolo, Demetrio diviene del tutto inviolabile. Egli funge da portavoce degli dèi dell'Olimpo e ogni modifica di un rituale deve ora passare da lui, mediante la sua autorità divina. Bisogna notare che tutto ciò avviene in un periodo di inaccessibilità dell'oracolo di Delfi (occupato dagli Etoli) e che quindi Demetrio prende il ruolo della Pizia delfica come messaggero di Apollo²⁸.

La cornice rituale, inoltre, è impiegata dagli Ateniesi per chiedere a Demetrio di intervenire militarmente contro gli Etoli. Questo aspetto emerge nel decreto nel

26 Siamo nella conclusione dell'elenco degli onori conferiti al sovrano, volto ad esemplificare l'eccessivo comportamento adulatorio degli Ateniesi. Quanto alla fonte, si può pensare alla *Raccolta di decreti* di Cratero (*FGrHist* 342), direttamente nota a Plutarco (cfr. *Cim.* 13, 3; *Aristid.* 26, 4), ma anche a Filocoro (*FGrHist* 328 TI), da cui lo stesso Cratero può aver attinto. Cfr. *Plut. Nic.* 1, 4, dove Plutarco afferma l'utilità paradigmatica della testimonianza di epigrafi o antichi decreti. In questo punto viene riportato il testo e l'oggetto del decreto (a noi non pervenuto).

27 *Plut. Demetr.* 13: “Ὁ δὲ μάλιστα τῶν τιμῶν ὑπερφυῆς ἦν καὶ ἀλλόκοτον, ἔγραψε Δρομοκλείδης ὁ Σφιττιος, ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἀσπίδων ἀναθέσεως εἰς Δελφοὺς παρὰ Δημητρίου λαβεῖν χρησμόν. αὐτὴν δὲ παραγράψω τὴν λέξιν ἐκ τοῦ ψηφίσματος οὕτως ἔχουσαν· ἀγαθῆ τύχῃ· δεδόχθαι τῷ δήμῳ, χειροτονῆσαι τὸν δῆμον ἓνα ἄνδρα ἐξ Ἀθηναίων, ὅστις ἀφικόμενος πρὸς τὸν Σωτῆρα καὶ καλλιερησάμενος ἐπερωτήσῃ [Δημήτριον] τὸν Σωτῆρα, πῶς ἄν' εὐσεβέστατα καὶ κάλλιστα καὶ τὴν ταχίστην ὁ δῆμος τὴν ἀποκατάστασιν ποιήσῃται τῶν ἀναθημάτων. ὃ τι δ' ἂν χρήσῃ, ταῦτα πράττειν τὸν δῆμον. οὕτω καταμωκώμενοι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, προσδιέφθειραν αὐτόν, οὐδ' ἄλλως ὑγιαίνοντα τὴν διάνοιαν. Le traduzioni italiane sono di P. Orsi 1998.

28 Cfr. Lara O'SULLIVAN, «Le “Roi Soleil”»: Demetrius Poliorcetes and the Dawn of the Sun-King», *Antichthon*, 42, 2008, pp. 89-99: si concentra sulle associazioni fra Demetrio e diverse divinità, fra cui Apollo.

riferimento alla richiesta di restituire le offerte, ossia “gli scudi posti a Delfi”²⁹: Gli scudi in questione, infatti, sono quelli portati via dagli Ateniesi come bottino di guerra dopo la battaglia di Platea nel 480/479, dati in dedica al santuario insieme a un’iscrizione che ricorda ai Greci la vergognosa alleanza tra Tebani e Persiani. La richiesta va calata nella contemporaneità del Poliorcete: all’inizio del III secolo Delfi è sotto il controllo degli Etoli, alleati in questo contesto con i Tebani. Si può presumere che su istigazione di questi ultimi gli scudi vengano rimossi a causa della loro iscrizione. Gli Ateniesi, quindi, richiedono di rimettere al loro posto le offerte per provocare e stigmatizzare i Tebani e con loro gli alleati: si fa implicitamente appello al nuovo dio oracolare Demetrio per un intervento militare a Delfi.

In questi primi dati emerge come gli onori cultuali concessi a Demetrio abbiano anche un significato politico molto chiaro: agire militarmente in favore della *polis*. Il modo di comunicare con il sovrano e di definirlo si rivela quindi fondamentale nel richiedere interventi e benefici da parte dello stesso. In ogni caso ogni mutamento è proceduto da una ‘negoziazione’, talvolta testimoniata dai decreti onorifici, talvolta dalle fonti.

L'inno itifallico

La ritualizzazione o sacralizzazione della comunicazione politica di Demetrio è esemplificata anche dall’inno itifallico su Demetrio³⁰, con cui questi viene accolto dopo la presa di Corcira e il matrimonio con Lanassa³¹ nel 291³². Ateneo nei *Deipnosophisti* ci riporta due testimonianze su questo inno: una da Democare³³

29 Si veda anche KUHN, cit. p. 280, che fa riferimento agli scudi posti a Delfi.

30 Per una bibliografia minima sull’inno itifallico si veda KUHN, cit. p. 279 che analizza l’inno itifallico, ma anche GREEN, cit.; CHANIOTIS, cit.. Questi meglio si concentrano sul rapporto di dono e controdono che emerge da questo aspetto onorifico.

31 Figlia di Agatocle, tiranno di Siracusa e re di Sicilia, sposa inizialmente Pirro re dell’Epiro e in seconde nozze Demetrio.

32 Ancora una volta onori divini vengono concessi a Demetrio dopo un’impresa militare. La celebrazione della vittoria in età ellenistica, nello specifico in Demetrio, è ben analizzata da PEDINELLI, cit.

33 Democh. *FGrHist* 75 F 2 (= Athen. VI, 253 b-d). Per questa citazione e quella di Duride cfr. Gabriele MARASCO, *Appiano e la storia dei Seleucidi fino all’ascesa al trono di Antio-co III*, Firenze 1982, p. 129 n. 45.

e una da Duride di Samo³⁴. Nel primo caso Democare ci descrive il contesto dell'esecuzione dell'inno, descrivendolo come un atto di adulazione degli Ateniesi e riassumendone il contenuto. Invece, attraverso Ateneo, Duride ci riporta il contenuto dell'inno³⁵. Interessante è anche il commento aggiunto:

Queste cose cantavano, non solo in pubblico, ma anche in privato quelli che avevano ucciso chi si era prostrato davanti al re di Persia, coloro che avevano massacrato innumerevoli barbari!³⁶

Partendo da questo commento finale, si può notare come venisse percepita questa realtà culturale dalla critica politica contemporanea: un atto estremo di adulazione, da biasimare: questi Ateniesi, infatti, si distaccano dai guerrieri delle Guerre Persiane, onorandolo anche in privato. Questo dato, se non riportato per sottolineare la *kolakeia* degli Ateniesi, ci può dire molto sul significato religioso che la divinizzazione del Poliorcete ha per i contemporanei e permette anche di riflettere sul significato degli sviluppi dei *ruler cults* in età ellenistica al di là della sfera della religione pubblica.

Tornando invece al contenuto dell'inno, è opportuno analizzare il riferimento alla Sfinge etolica: essa, infatti, incarna la lega etolica che, come visto precedentemente, occupa Delfi e minaccia la Grecia. L'azione da parte della città è ancora quella di un *do ut des*: la gratificazione dell'inno e gli onori divini vengono dati richiedendo in cambio un'azione efficace in Etolia, per avere la tanto agognata pace. È quindi in quest'ottica che va vista l'adulazione di Demetrio e il significato della sua venerazione nel pubblico e (eventualmente) nel privato. Fondamentale in tal senso è l'analisi dell'inno di Chaniotis: rifacendosi al significato politico dell'inno, infatti, egli riflette sul generale mutamento religioso in età ellenistica. Demetrio nell'inno è un dio presente, efficace nel suo intervento e ben predisposto ad ascoltare le preghiere di chi lo invoca. Ciò che rende vero un dio è quindi la sua capacità di comunicare con i mortali e ascoltare le sue preghiere, al contrario delle immagini mute. Quindi, Demetrio è vero per la sua presenza visibile ed efficace, così come sono veri tutti gli altri dèi che

34 Douris, *FGrHist* 76 F 13 (= Athen. VI, 253 d-f).

35 Per una versione integrale del testo con traduzione inglese e commento filologico, cfr. CHANIOTIS, cit. pp. 159-160.

36 Athen. VI, 264: “ταῦτ’ ἦδον οἱ Μαραθωνομάχαι οὐ δημοσίᾳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατ’ οἰκίαν, οἱ τὸν προσκυνήσαντα τὸν Περσῶν βασιλέα ἀποκτείναντες, οἱ τὰς ἀναριθμούς μυριάδας τῶν βαρβάρων φονεύσαντες”.

sono presenti e manifestano il loro potere³⁷. Il poeta sfida Demetrio a mostrarsi all'altezza della sua divinizzazione e di agire in favore della città. Questo procedimento è definibile come una "strategia di persuasione"³⁸.

Per divinizzarlo e onorarlo, inoltre, il poeta lo associa a diverse divinità: in primo luogo a Demetra; in secondo luogo, lo collega implicitamente a Helios, a cui intorno gravitano i *philoï* come stelle (altrettanto, quindi, potenti); infine, viene definito figlio di Poseidone e Afrodite. In aggiunta, il contesto della performance dell'inno, per l'appunto itifallico, è esplicitamente un'associazione di Demetrio a Dioniso³⁹. Il parallelo con Demetra non deve stupire perché appare ovvio sia il collegamento con l'iniziazione ai Misteri e alle Dionisie-Demetrie, trattata precedentemente, sia il gioco etimologico con il nome del personaggio.

L'aspetto più rilevante al fine della trattazione è l'associazione polisemica a Poseidone e Afrodite, che allude alla vittoria navale di Cipro, ma pure alle nuove nozze con Lanassa⁴⁰ e all'unione tra il dominio del mare e quello del cosmo, richiamato da Afrodite Urania⁴¹. Mentre l'associazione a Helios rimanda alla

37 Cfr. CHANIOTIS, cit. pp. 179-180: l'autore nota, infatti, un errore di tradizione probabilmente nato da Democare: "Se la divinità di Demetrio sembra scioccante, è solo perché un re mortale, visibile, viene paragonato agli dèi immortali e invisibili. Ma questo paradosso - che un mortale sembra colmare il vuoto lasciato dagli dèi assenti - non esiste nella realtà. È il risultato della traduzione della frase decisiva *alloi theoi* come 'gli altri dèi' e non 'altri dèi'". L'autore, quindi, interpreta questo passo come un'associazione alle altre divinità e non un'opposizione.

38 CHANIOTIS, cit. pp. 181 e ss.

39 Su questo aspetto cfr. Peter THONEMANN, «The Tragic King: Demetrios Poliorketes and the City of Athens», in O. HEKSTER e R. FOWLER (ed. by), *Imaginary Kings. Royal Images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome*, Oriens et Occidens 11. Stuttgart. Steiner, 2005, pp. 63-86; CHANIOTIS, cit.

40 Cfr. Charlotte DUNN & Patrick WHEATLEY, cit. p. 436: nel capitolo dedicato agli onori divini di Demetrio, questa pagina si concentra sull'associazione fra Afrodite e le figure femminili (per la bellezza di queste ultime) intorno a Demetrio che vengono per lui divinizzate, con un'utile bibliografia di riferimento.

41 Cfr. John R. HOLTON, «Demetrios Poliorketes, son of Poseidon and Aphrodite: cosmic and memorial significance in the Athenian ithyphallic hymn», *Mnemosyne*, Ser. 4, 67.3, 2014, pp. 370-390: analizza l'aspetto della parentela con Afrodite e Poseidone, definendo la prima una divinità uranica, caratterizzazione che parte dalla filosofia contemporanea e che secondo l'autore avrebbe influenzato la concezione religiosa del periodo. Egli sottolinea anche il parallelo fra la vittoria di Salamina di Cipro e la vittoria ateniese nelle guerre persiane.

divinizzazione di Alessandro Magno e alla tradizione egiziana⁴², dove il sole indica l'arte del governo e il rapporto fra sovrano e *philoï*⁴³, che ne assorbono luce e potenza.

La connessione col "padre" Poseidone e la globalità del suo dominio su terra e su mare è anche testimoniata dalla numismatica⁴⁴. In particolare, è stato ritrovato un unico tetradramma in argento, proveniente da Tebe databile intorno al 290-289, rappresentante al dritto Demetrio con la testa diadematata e con corna e al rovescio Poseidone *Pelagaios* con il piede destro appoggiato sul globo e tridente alla mano sinistra.

La presenza della sfera è estremamente rilevante, perché collega Poseidone e quindi l'autorità marittima di Demetrio, a quella sul globo, ricollegabile nell'inno alla figura di Afrodite Urania. Leggendo questa immagine, si può notare che Demetrio, in quanto dichiarato figlio di Poseidone, proclama così le sue ambizioni politiche universali, in linea con il disegno espansionistico già delineato dal padre.

Bisogna notare come questo inno non solo riporti molti tratti di concetti religiosi sviluppati in età ellenistica, collegati tra l'altro con il concetto di regalità espresso dai *ruler cults*, ma che queste associazioni siano anche espressione di una precisa strategia di comunicazione politica che ancora una volta si inserisce nella dinamica del dono e contro dono.

I Giochi Pitici del 290 ad Atene e la "quinta" guerra sacra

42 Cfr. Laila OHANIAN, «Alessandro e l'Egitto: aspetti religiosi nell'ideologia politica», in *La pratica della religione nell'antico Egitto: atti del X Convegno Nazionale di Egittologia e Papirologia*, Roma, 1-2 febbraio, Aegyptus, Anno 85, No. 1/2, 2006, pp. 237-248: analizza gli aspetti religiosi dell'ideologia politica di Alessandro Magno, confrontando l'esperienza egiziana del personaggio ad aspetti della cultura greca a lui contemporanea.

43 O'SULLIVAN, cit. pp. 78-99: analizza il rapporto fra i *ruler cults* e l'associazione a Helios, partendo anche da un'analisi della filosofia di Platone.

44 Lo studio principale della monetazione del Poliorcete, ancora oggi si deve all'opera Edward T. NEWELL, *The Coinages of Demetrius Poliorcetes*, London, Oxford University Press, 1927 (1978²). Per questo tipo monetale nello specifico si veda anche lo studio di Cristina MIEDICO, «Comunicare il potere presso la corte di Demetrio Poliorcete», in Silvia BUSSI e Daniele FORABOSCHI (cur.), *Roma e l'eredità ellenistica: atti del convegno internazionale*, Milano, Università Statale, 14-16 gennaio, Studi Ellenistici, 23, Pisa, Serra, 2009, pp. 33-54: l'autrice meglio si sofferma su questo tipo monetale, altrimenti associato al tipo con Poseidone con piede su roccia nel primo autore, molto più diffuso.



Demetrio Poliorcete. Tetradramma in argento (17.08 g),
 proveniente dalla zecca di Tebe coniata attorno al 290-289 BC.
 Foto da Edward T. Newell, *Coinages of Demetrius Poliorcetes*, Oxford University
 Press, Humphrey Milford, 1927 (1978²), p. 125, tav. XV, 1.

L'importanza del fattore religioso nella strategia politica di Demetrio emerge anche dalla vicenda dei Giochi Pitici del 290. I Πυθιάς si svolgevano ogni quattro anni nel tempio di Apollo a Delfi, alle pendici del Parnaso, governato dalla più antica anfigionia panellenica. Situata a 130 km a Nord-Ovest e all'incrocio di antiche vie di comunicazione, Delfi aveva di per sé un notevole valore strategico, ma alla metà del IV secolo la sua importanza politica stava proprio nel sistema anfigionico, che offriva al tempo stesso un contesto formale e pretesti giuridico-religiosi ai disegni egemonici, prima tebani e poi macedoni, che portarono rispettivamente alla terza (356-346) e quarta (340-338) “guerra sacra”, concluse una con l'entrata di Filippo II nell'anfigionia (al posto degli sconfitti Focesi), e l'altra, otto anni dopo, col trionfo di Cheronea e l'egemonia sulla Grecia, riunita coercitivamente nella lega corinzia in vista della guerra contro la Persia⁴⁵.

Impadronitosi nel 294 del regno macedone e schiacciata nel 291 la ribellione tebana, pure Demetrio utilizzò l'anfigionia delfica contro gli Etoli che dal 301 occupavano Delfi e minacciavano Tebe e Atene. Pretese infatti, quale successore di Filippo e Alessandro, la direzione (*agonothesia*) dei Pitici

45 BUCKER, John, *Philip II and the Sacred War*, Leiden / New York, Brill, 1989.

che dovevano tenersi nel 290, ed essendo Delfi occupata dagli Etoli,

“con un azzardo senza precedenti” (πρᾶγμα καινότατον ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτῷ ποιεῖν) egli diresse personalmente i giochi e la festa ad Atene, dichiarando che era particolarmente opportuno che Apollo fosse onorato lì, poiché era una divinità protettrice degli Ateniesi e si diceva che fosse il fondatore della loro nazione⁴⁶.

Il fatto che un re macedone, venerato dall’itifallo ateniese come ultimo *praesens deus*, potesse mutare un culto a proprio arbitrio⁴⁷,

“testimoniava l’estinguersi nella coscienza associata ellenica del simbolo religioso di Apollo Delfico: e, dunque, insieme testimoniava l’instaurarsi, e nella politica e nella religione, di una nuova realtà, che è l’Ellenismo”⁴⁸.

Sostituendo il culto delfico con quello dell’Apollo *Patroos*, progenitore degli Ateniesi, Demetrio si accreditava come difensore del panellenismo violato dagli Etoli, e presentava la sua campagna militare come la “quinta” guerra sacra. Sconfitti rapidamente gli Etoli, Demetrio ostenta umanità: il trattato di pace del 289, scritto su un pilastro dedicato probabilmente a Perseo nel 171 a. C., sancisce il libero accesso di tutti i Greci al santuario di Apollo⁴⁹.

Tuttavia, questo episodio, così sconvolgente agli occhi di Plutarco, può dire molto di come l’atteggiamento di Demetrio nei confronti delle tradizioni religiose sia percepito dai contemporanei e dalle fonti: questi atti, un misto

46 Plut., *Demetr.* 40, 7-8. Τῶν δὲ Πυθίων καθηκόντων πρᾶγμα καινότατον ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτῷ ποιεῖν ὁ Δημήτριος. ἐπεὶ γὰρ Αἰτωλοὶ τὰ περὶ Δελφῶν στενὰ κατεῖχον, ἐν Ἀθήναις αὐτὸς ἤγε τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ τὴν πανήγυριν, ὡς δὴ προσῆκον αὐτόθι μάλιστα τιμᾶσθαι τὸν θεόν, ὃς καὶ πατρῷός ἐστι καὶ λέγεται τοῦ γένους ἀρχηγός.

47 “lawless piety” (Robert PARKER, *Athenian Religion. A History*, Oxford, University Press, 1996, p. 268). KUHN, cit. pp. 270-272. Già in passato le guerre fra i Diadochi avevano avuto effetti negativi sulla continuità rituale, fino ad arrivare all’interruzione e la cancellazione di sacrifici, feste e rituali. Nel 335, per esempio, gli Ateniesi interrompono i Misteri Eleusini “in segno di lutto” per la distruzione di Tebe a opera di Alessandro. Nell’86, inoltre, i Giochi di Delfi non sono celebrati per la guerra contro Mitridate.

48 Pietro TREVES, «Sacre, guerre», *Enciclopedia italiana*, 1936.

49 SEG 48, 588, l. 21-23. L’iscrizione recava il testo di antichi documenti che richiamavano alla memoria le relazioni ancestrali fra gli Antigonidi e la lega anfizionica. Il blocco contiene l’ultima parte di una lettera, forse la fine della lettera di Adimanto al re Demetrio Poliorcete o la fine della risposta di Demetrio, e un trattato di pace, per l’appunto, tra Demetrio e gli Etoli. Si veda anche SEG 45, 479 e il commento storico dettagliato di François LÉFÈVRE, «Traite de paix entre Demetrios Poliorcète et la confédération étolienne (fin 289?)», in *BCH*, 122, 1998, pp. 109-141. Egli sostiene che il trattato non va identificato con quello concluso nel 304 a.C. (Diod. XX, 100, 6), ma probabilmente fu concluso dopo il trattato di pace tra Pirro e Demetrio nel 289 a.C. (cfr. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 10, 2-5).

di comportamenti tradizionali e atti rivoluzionari, sono impressionanti. Come nota Mari⁵⁰, certi tratti di questi mutamenti hanno riscontro negli sviluppi futuri, mentre altri no: nel primo caso entrano: l'impiego sistematico del culto del sovrano come strumento politico, l'autorità conferita agli amici del re e alle *élites* locali che ne sostengono la politica e il gusto per i gesti 'teatrali'; nel secondo caso entrano la sua arroganza nel cambiare i calendari locali, nello spostare le feste, nell'usare santuari e spazi civici come proprie proprietà⁵¹. Demetrio rimane comunque un modello, negativo e positivo, per i futuri sviluppi dei rapporti fra religione, politica e storia militare: egli ha un ruolo nel definire il potere regale e il suo rapporto con la sfera religiosa in età ellenistica, in cui la dimensione del beneficio è centrale.

L'iniziazione ai Misteri Eleusini

Dopo il ristabilimento della lega ellenica a Corinto e un anno prima della battaglia di Ipso, Demetrio invia una lettera⁵² agli Ateniesi chiedendo di essere iniziato immediatamente dopo il suo arrivo ai Misteri Eleusini fino all'*epopteia*. L'iniziazione ai Misteri Eleusini è normalmente divisa in tappe: dopo la prima iniziazione (*myesis*) si è ammessi ai Piccoli Misteri, celebrati ad Agra nel mese di Antesterione (circa a febbraio); in secondo luogo si viene iniziati ai Grandi Misteri, svolti a Eleusi nel mese di Boedromione (circa settembre); solo un anno dopo, infine, si può accedere all'*epopteia*, l'ultima fase dell'iniziazione che consisteva nella silenziosa contemplazione di oggetti sacri come la spiga di grano recisa, simbolo dello status dell'iniziato, perfetto e 'nuovo'.

Nonostante la severa regolamentazione del culto di iniziazione, per Demetrio

50 Manuela MARI, «A "lawless piety" in an age of transition: Demetrius the Besieger and the political use of Greek religion», in Cinzia BEARZOT e Franca LANDUCCI (cur.), *Alexander's legacy: atti del convegno*, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore: Milano, Centro Ricerche e Documentazione sull'Antichità Classica, Monografie, 39, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2015, pp. 157-180.

51 Cfr. *infra* paragrafo successivo.

52 Plut. *Demetr.* 26, 1; cfr. anche Diod. XX, 110. Per un approfondimento si veda Franca LANDUCCI, «Demetrio Poliorcete e il santuario di Eleusi», in Marta SORDI (cur.), *Santuari e politica nel mondo antico*, Vita e pensiero, Milano, 1983, pp. 117-124. L'autrice ci dimostra chiaramente che il passo di Diodoro non viene dall'opera del filoantigonide Ieronimo di Cardia, bensì da quella Duride di Samo, insofferente nei confronti degli Ateniesi per la loro politica tirannica nei confronti della sua città natia.

Nella pagina a fianco: Trittolemo (al centro) riceve fasci di grano da Demetra, che porta nella mano sinistra lo scettro/bastone da pellegrino che rappresenta il viaggio per la ricerca della figlia. A sinistra, la figlia Persefone benedice il personaggio e porta nella mano sinistra una lunga fiaccola, propria dei Misteri Eleusini celebrati di notte per commemorare il suo ritorno.

Copia romana risalente al primo periodo imperiale di un originale del V sec. a.C. conservato al Museo Archeologico di Atene. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, (accession number 14.130.9). Foto ©Napoleon Vier 2005 CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED (wikimedia commons)

la procedura viene manipolata in due diversi modi. In primo luogo, viene alterato il calendario: infatti, Demetrio arriva nel mese di Munichione e quindi prima della data dei Piccoli Misteri; in secondo luogo, il rito viene abbreviato, oltre che cronologicamente, anche strutturalmente, comprimendo le diverse tappe dell'iniziazione in una singola. Bisogna notare che, nonostante l'accorciamento delle varie fasi, la cronologia e l'associazione dei Misteri con i due mesi sono così conservate formalmente⁵³. Lo sforzo per evitare una rottura completa con la tradizione riflette anche la grande importanza attribuita all'inalterabilità delle componenti cronologiche nelle celebrazioni religiose⁵⁴. Il sacerdote di Eleusi, Pitodoro⁵⁵, è l'unico a rifiutare l'iniziazione del re: Atene è pronta a soddisfare ogni desiderio del sovrano, andando anche contro all'autorità rituale del sacerdote⁵⁶. La fonte che ci riporta la sua iniziazione è sempre Plutarco, che sostiene che questo atto è non solo qualcosa di completamente nuovo, ma anche un'enorme

53 Si veda anche KUHN, cit. pp. 268-281, dove l'autrice riporta l'analisi dell'iniziazione dei Misteri Eleusini.

54 Pauline S. PAINTEL & Louise B. Zaidman, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

55 Egli è precisamente un daduco ('portatore di fiaccola'), il quale è, nella gerarchia sacerdotale eleusina, il secondo membro per importanza e funzioni dopo lo ierofante. La carica fu detenuta sino alla fine del IV sec. a.C. da una famiglia che si diceva discendente di Trittolemo, uno dei protagonisti del mito di fondazione dei Misteri, per poi passare alla famiglia dei Licomidi. L'epoca della daduchia di Pitodoro, quindi, coincide con questa fase.

56 A differenza dei sacerdozi determinati per elezione, per sorteggio o per acquisto, il sacerdozio del santuario di Demetra in Eleusi è in potere di due famose famiglie nobili, gli Eumolpidi e i Cerici, ed è sempre stato ereditario. Pitodoro è un sacerdote che ha il privilegio ereditario di rivendicare competenza e poteri rituali incontrasti, necessari per il culto misterico e per i suoi rituali specifici: per questo la concessione a Demetrio da lui ostacolata è ancora più sorprendente.



violazione del culto tradizionale⁵⁷. Nell'autore troviamo una eco della reazione popolare di questo gesto considerato sacrilego e dell'importanza fondamentale data all'alterazione del rituale.

È utile interrogarsi, ai fini di questa analisi, su che significato politico potesse avere questa iniziazione, sia per Demetrio, sia per il suo *entourage*. Dall'*Inno omerico* a Demetra è chiaro che l'*epopteia* trasforma l'iniziato in un essere umano nuovo, che si distingue dai non iniziati al di là della provenienza sociale. Inoltre, per partecipare ai Misteri è necessario essere puro (*katharos*) e padroneggiare la lingua greca. Landucci nota che questi elementi designano una "patente d'innocenza e greicità" rispetto al rivale Cassandro. In aggiunta, l'iniziazione dimostra l'appartenenza alla cultura greca e al gruppo degli iniziati, un tipo superiore di essere umano⁵⁸. La sua iniziazione avrebbe quindi un carattere propagandistico che si inserisce nel rapporto fra gli Ateniesi e il benefico sovrano, che assume quindi uno *status* superiore nei confronti del suo rivale militare, a vantaggio della città di Atene. Diodoro Siculo, infine, sostiene che gli Ateniesi vengono persuasi nel procedere all'iniziazione διὰ τὰς εὐεργεσίας: questo onore è concesso per i benefici dati da Demetrio alla città⁵⁹, parola ormai diventa chiave al fine di questa riflessione.

È interessante ora riportare il punto di vista di Versnel⁶⁰ sulla comunicazione con il divino nel mondo antico. La sua teoria, anche se non applicata al caso di Demetrio, permette di riflettere ancora di più in questa sede sul ruolo militare e religioso delle azioni della città per il sovrano. La comunicazione con il divino è letta dall'autore come una forma di manipolazione e di controllo sociale, secondo una strategia a doppio taglio. In primo luogo, una parte, che nel nostro caso è Atene, chiede aiuto a una terza parte, considerata divina e potente (Demetrio), contro una seconda parte avversaria (gli Etoli o Cassandro), influenzando il comportamento della prima parte che crede così di avere al suo fianco una figura

57 Cfr. Philochor. *FGrHist* 328 FF 69-70, che sottolinea l'ingiustizia arrecata alle "cose sacre" per l'irregolarità di procedura; Del resto, la pretesa di Demetrio era nella logica di quanto stabilito dal decreto ateniese del 304 analizzato precedentemente, dove le sue parole vengono definite legge.

58 LANDUCCI, *santuario di Eleusi*, cit. p. 124.

59 Diod. XX, 110, 1.

60 Hans S. VERSNEL, «Writing Mortals and Reading Gods. Appeal to the Gods as a Strategy in Social Control», in D. COHEN (ed. by), *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle im klassischen Athen*, München, Oldenbourg, 2002, pp. 37-76.

invincibile. In secondo luogo, il gruppo avversario viene informato che un attore divino è stato chiamato in aiuto contro di lui, condizionandone il comportamento facendogli credere che un'entità divina si stia muovendo contro di lui. In questo processo, la giustizia divina è considerata potente ed efficace, e Demetrio, insieme alla sua azione militare, sono considerati altrettanto potenti. È proprio in questa prospettiva che vanno lette anche le considerazioni successive, secondo un'ottica che si rifà direttamente al concetto di *nomizein* antico.

La residenza di Demetrio nell'opistodomo

È giunto dunque il momento di passare ad altri provvedimenti ateniesi negli anni del Poliorcete in cui il rapporto fra storia religiosa e militare è presente, ma più sottile. Dopo la guerra dei quattro anni (304/303), gli Ateniesi, in segno della loro reverenza e ossequio⁶¹, decidono di far risiedere Demetrio nell'opistodomo del Partenone⁶². In età ellenistica si è soliti onorare il re come *synnaos theos*: il dio simbolicamente condivide il tempio con la statua del sovrano che viene eretta vicino alla statua della divinità. Tuttavia, il caso di Demetrio, residente in persona nel Partenone, non trova paralleli nella storia religiosa del periodo. Sempre Plutarco ci riporta che Atena riceve Demetrio come *xenos*, ospite della divinità⁶³, ribaltando il concetto di *theoxenia* in cui è il mortale a ospitare la divinità. Lo stesso Demetrio chiama Atena "sorella maggiore": questo appellativo è presente nella critica al politeismo di Clemente di Alessandria che concepisce la loro unione (seconda un'idea ellenistica di sposalizio fra consanguinei) come un matrimonio con il divino, ironizzando con la presenza dell'etera Lamia all'interno del tempio⁶⁴. Le eventuali immagini degli Antigonidi cucite sul peplo panatenaico potrebbero confermare l'associazione fra i due personaggi⁶⁵. Ad ogni modo, essa non può che avere un significato simbolico importante per la città, intensificandone il potere. Tuttavia, egli non rispetta le regole di purezza del santuario e quindi

61 Plut. *Demetr.* 23, 2-3.

62 KUHN, cit. pp. 280-282.

63 Plut. *Demetr.* 23, 3

64 Clem. Al. *Protr.* IV, 54, 6.

65 Cfr. PEDINELLI, cit. pp. 178-181, che ben approfondisce e riassume lo *status quaestionis* rispetto alla tessitura delle immagini degli Antigonidi sul peplo (discutendo anche se si trattasse effettivamente del peplo con cui si vestiva la dea il giorno delle Panatenee).

la distinzione fra la sfera sacra e profana. Come dice Plutarco, egli è “un ospite poco ordinato e non occupa i suoi alloggi con il decoro dovuto a una vergine”⁶⁶, trasformando il tempio in un luogo di libertinaggio ed eccessi sessuali. La profanazione del luogo sacro, inoltre, porta direttamente a un *miasma*, a un turbamento della pratica del culto tradizionale e del dialogo rituale tra la comunità e la dea. Secondo Plutarco Demetrio

“riempiva l’acropoli di un trattamento così sfrenato di giovani nati liberi e di donne native ateniesi che allora si pensava che il luogo fosse particolarmente puro quando vi condusse la sua vita dissoluta con Criside e Lamia e Demo e Aticyra, le famose prostitute. I fatti sull’acropoli con giovani nati liberi e donne sposate dovevano essere considerati uno dei peggiori delitti sacrileghi, come si può dedurre da specifiche norme sulla purificazione nelle *leges sacrae*”⁶⁷

L’assimilazione di Demetrio ad Atena fallisce presto. Tuttavia, lo scandalo maggiore per la città non è la presenza (concessa dagli Ateniesi come ossequio al personaggio) di questi nel tempio, ma il modo in cui il sovrano si comporta. L’aspetto su cui ci si deve soffermare maggiormente, quindi, al di là dell’aneddoto⁶⁸, è il rapporto fra questo onore e le azioni militari di Demetrio. Infatti, questo onore gli viene concesso dopo la guerra dei quattro anni (quindi intorno al 304), all’apice del suo consenso ad Atene, mentre sembra essere sospeso, con gli altri onori e il generale rapporto fra Demetrio e il Poliorcete, dopo Ipso (301), battaglia dove il personaggio trova la sconfitta e il padre di questi la morte⁶⁹.

66 Plut. *Demetr.* 23, 4.

67 Plut. *Demetr.* 24, 1: “τοσαύτην ὄβριον εἰς παῖδας ἐλευθέρους καὶ γυναῖκας ἀστὰς κατεσκέδασε τῆς ἀκροπόλεως, ὥστε δοκεῖν τότε μάλιστα καθαρεύειν τὸν τόπον, ὅτε Χρυσίδι καὶ Λαμία καὶ Δημοῖ καὶ Ἀντικύρα ταῖς πόρναις ἐκείναις συνακολασταῖνοι. τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα σαφῶς ἀπαγγέλλειν οὐ πρέπει διὰ τὴν πόλιν, τὴν δὲ Δημοκλέους ἀρετὴν καὶ σωφροσύνην ἄξιόν ἐστι μὴ παρελθεῖν”.

68 Bisogna infatti notare che la notizia viene dal sacerdote Plutarco e che questa notizia è sicuramente eco di una tradizione ostile al personaggio.

69 Cfr. Plut. *Demetr.* 30-31, in particolare 30, 3-5. In questo passo è evidente il volta faccia di Atene nei confronti del personaggio dopo la sconfitta subita ad Ipso contro l’alleanza antiantigonide formata da Cassandro, Lisimaco e Seleuco, battaglia dove trovò la morte il padre Antigono I rapporti fra Demetrio e Atene, ad ogni modo, vengono ristabiliti, sebbene modificati, dopo la cosiddetta tirannide di Lacare, intorno al 295. Sulla situazione storica cfr. Cfr. Charlotte DUNN & Patrick WHEATLEY, cit. pp. 297-373, CUNIBERTI, cit. p. 70.

Marasco⁷⁰ sottolinea a proposito che dopo Ipso la possibilità per Demetrio di grandi elargizioni di grano deve venire meno: ancora una volta ci si può chiedere se questa sia la chiave di lettura per interpretare i rapporti fra il sovrano e Atene: un rapporto di convivenza basati sullo scambio di onori e utile appoggio.

La comunicazione del divino: non solo ira divina

Le azioni di Demetrio sono un terreno fertile ideale per le critiche dei contemporanei⁷¹. Una parte degli Ateniesi è convinta che i cittadini, travolti dal sentimento di gratitudine per il liberatore, gli abbiano dato onori eccessivi non meritati, soprattutto alla luce delle sue azioni empie. Questo viene riportato da una citazione plutarca del comico Filippide⁷², che ha come bersaglio proprio l'iniziatore primo di questi onori: Stratocele. In occasione dell'iniziazione ai Misteri egli lo critica per aver "ridotto tutto l'anno in un solo mese", mentre riguardo alla sua residenza nell'opistodomo si riferisce a Demetrio definendolo colui "che prese l'acropoli per un albergo, e presentò alla sua dea vergine le sue cortigiane"⁷³.

Plutarco ci riferisce di tre avvenimenti in cui l'esecuzione del rituale negli anni del Poliorcete è compromessa. Nel primo caso, il nuovo peplo con le immagini di Demetrio e Antigono viene distrutto durante una tempesta durante la processione delle Panatenee (probabilmente del 302/301)⁷⁴. In

70 Cfr. Gabriele MARASCO, *Studi sulla Politica di Demetrio Poliorcete*, «Atti e Memorie dell'Arcadia», VIII, 1984, p. 71.

71 Cfr. KUHN, cit. pp. 282-283; 287-289: riporta un'analisi di Plutarco che si concentra sulla critica al comportamento empio di Demetrio. Cfr. anche MARI, pp. 166-167.

72 Commediografo e uomo politico ateniese, la cui carriera ebbe culmine tra il 311 (vittoria alle grandi Dionisie) e il 283/282 (datazione del decreto in suo onore). Gli attacchi in versi a Stratocele e ai democratici radicali filodemetriaci (qui e in 26, 4-5; Plut. *Amat.* 750 f) completano quanto ci è noto dal suo decreto onorifico che riporta la sua attività negli anni immediatamente seguenti ad Ipso, quando rappresentò in Atene un orientamento ostile alla democrazia radicale filodemetriaca. Per limitarsi ad uno studio sul personaggio cfr. Nino LURAGHI, «Commedia e politica tra Demostene e Cremonide», in Franca PERUSINO e Maria COLANTONIO (cur.), *La commedia greca e la storia*, Atti del Seminario di studio, Urbino 18-20 maggio 2010, Pisa, 2012, pp. 353-376.

73 Plut. *Demetr.* 26, 5.

74 Le Panatenee si svolgevano nel terzo anno di ogni olimpiade; quindi, la lacerazione sarebbe avvenuta o nel 306/305 o 302/301.

aggiunta, Plutarco ci riporta l'anomala crescita della cicuta intorno agli altari dei *Soteres*, sottolineando che durante il giorno delle Dionisie, la processione deve essere abbandonata a causa di un freddo intenso fuori stagione che distrugge viti, fichi e raccolti di grano⁷⁵.

Per l'autore sono gli dèi stessi ad avere provocato il fallimento dei rituali nel primo e nel terzo caso o la distruzione dell'ambiente rituale nel secondo: come segno della loro disapprovazione, quindi, questi avrebbero interrotto la comunicazione con il mondo umano, aspetto fondamentale della religiosità antica. È significativa l'associazione fra gli incidenti e gli *isotheoi timai*: in precedenza, infatti, il peplo con la rappresentazione tradizionale della gigantomachia era stato modificato con l'inclusione dei ritratti dei re antigonidi e le Dionisie erano state ampliate dalla festa della neonata Demetria.

Per il sacerdote Plutarco l'osservanza dei culti garantisce coerenza sociale e ogni violazione della tradizione è un atto di violenza per l'essere umano⁷⁶. Per questo tutte le innovazioni di Demetrio gli risultano meritevoli di sdegno e indignazione, frutto della *kolakeia* della moltitudine che porta ad un impatto disastroso sul carattere del personaggio. Democare, Duride di Samo e Filocoro, fonti sottese in Plutarco, sono riconducibili allo stesso tipo di critica, centrata sugli iniziatori e agenti dei cambiamenti rituali, soprattutto Stratocle e il popolo di Atene. È importante notare qui che la loro opposizione si basa su motivi sia politici che religiosi. Secondo Parker “the language of the attack is religious, the motivation political also”⁷⁷. Più difficile è ricostruire il rapporto fra la critica politica in relazione alle azioni militari del personaggio, per quanto se ne possono trovare le tracce nell'azione (o meglio non azione) degli Ateniesi dopo Ipso e all'esilio di Democare dopo la guerra dei quattro anni.

75 Anche in questo caso l'autore cita Filippide che attacca Stratocle (Plut. *Demetr.* 12, 7): “δι’ ὃν ἀπέκασεν ἡ πάχνη τὰς ἀμπέλους, δι’ ὃν ἀσεβοῦνθ’ ὁ πέπλος ἐρράγη μέσος, ποιῶντα τιμὰς τὰς [τῶν] θεῶν ἀνθρωπίνως. ταῦτα καταλύει δῆμον, οὐ κωμῳδία.” “Per colpa sua la brina arse i vigneti/ per la sua empietà il peplo si è strappato nel mezzo, poiché egli ha attribuito a mortali gli onori che spettano agli dèi. Queste misure, e non la commedia, sovvertono la democrazia”.

76 Cfr. Plut. *Mor.* 756 A-B.

77 PARKER cit, p. 261.

Ad ogni modo, sono questi fatti e la critica politica che probabilmente ispirano i gesti opposti di alcuni re rivali dopo l'espulsione di Demetrio da Atene, in particolare quelli di Lisimaco, Pirro e Tolemeo II, che rendono omaggio ad Atene in modi diversi⁷⁸. In primo luogo, il decreto onorario per Filippide di Cefale testimonia il dono di Lisimaco alla città del pennone e l'albero della nave sacra che trasporta il peplo il giorno delle Panatene (probabilmente del 298⁷⁹). Questa concessione, insieme e al dono di diecimila medimni di grano⁸⁰, è collocabile nel periodo di alienazione dell'appoggio di Atene a Demetrio (dopo la sconfitta ad Ipsos). In secondo luogo, il decreto in onore di Callia di Sfetto ci riporta che Tolemeo II presenta, dopo le prime Panatene dopo la "liberazione della città"⁸¹, l'equipaggiamento necessario per il peplo. Infine, sempre dopo questo stesso evento, Pirro offre un sacrificio ad Atena *Polias* sull'acropoli⁸².

Nella critica dei contemporanei si sottolineano le concessioni eccessive date al personaggio che con il suo comportamento macchia e interrompe la dimensione culturale e, di conseguenza, la comunicazione con il divino. Le azioni dei sovrani e dei personaggi successivi sono invece delle concessioni date alla città: questi da una parte vogliono ristabilire quello che Demetrio ha compromesso a vantaggio della *polis*, dall'altra vogliono distaccarsi politicamente e militarmente dal personaggio, emergendo nella politica della città. Ancora una volta la dimensione del beneficio è centrale nel definire i rapporti fra Atene e i sovrani ellenistici, in stretto legame con le condizioni politiche e militari contemporanee.

78 I decreti riportati sono: *IG II³*, 1 877, ll. 14-16 (il decreto per Filippide di Cefale, 283/282); *IG II³* 1 911, ll. 64-69 (il decreto per Callia di Sfetto, 283/282). Per una presentazione generale di questi decreti in rapporto con questo passo plutarco, cfr. MARI, p. 166.

79 Ciò confermerebbe che questi fatti sono databili nel 302/301.

80 Sulle elargizioni di grano e il rapporto fra Atene, Demetrio e altri sovrani ellenistici coevi si vd. CUNIBERTI, cit. n. 210.

81 Si fa riferimento alla cacciata di Demetrio da Atene capeggiata da Olimpiodoro che riesce a liberare l'intera Atene con l'eccezione del Pireo. L'episodio è situato negli ultimi anni di vita del personaggio. Per un approfondimento storico della sua parabola discendente cfr. DUNN & WHEATLEY, pp. 503-543.

82 Plut. *Pyrrh.*, 12, 6-7.

Conclusioni

Il legame fra storia militare e mutamento religioso nell'Atene di Demetrio si può riassumere nel concetto di beneficio che trova espressione nel *ruler cult*, pratica caratteristica del versante politico del mutamento religioso in età ellenistica più in generale. Questa peculiarità, inoltre, trova rimandi anche nella divinizzazione di Demetrio, soprattutto nell'associazione di divinità nell'inno itifallico, nello specifico nell'associazione con Afrodite, Poseidone, Helios. Nel mondo greco già in precedenza, un'impresa ritenuta un servizio particolarmente prezioso poteva portare al culto sacro di una persona. Per esempio, Aristotele parla in questo contesto di onori uguali a quelli divini (*isotheoi*) nella sua *Retorica*⁸³. In epoca ellenistica queste forme di culto cominciano a prendere una forma diversa a partire da Alessandro Magno (anche lui divinizzato e associato a Helios, passando per la tradizione egiziana) e le prestazioni dei re per la *polis* cominciano a essere ricambiate, riconoscendo a questi forme di culto come quelle presentate per Demetrio Poliorcete. L'azione che è richiesta in cambio, o meglio, la "prestazione per eccellenza che portò a definire queste forme" è la liberazione di una città⁸⁴, o, in altri casi, la richiesta dalla tanta agognata pace, come è evidente nell'inno itifallico. In cambio, la venerazione nei confronti del *ruler* rappresenta un atto di lealtà riconosciuta per i benefici dati alla *polis*. In tal senso la figura di Demetrio Poliorcete appare significativa, così come appare significativo il rapporto altalenante fra Demetrio e la città quando le sue azioni non vengono considerate più "utili" per la città, come dopo Ipsos.

Il primo Ellenismo, quindi, è un periodo di mutamento, di transizione, dove prendono forma nuove condizioni politiche, sociali, religiose e culturali, con l'emergere dei grandi potentati dei re ellenistici. La nuova attenzione al sovrano ha un grande impatto sulle pratiche e sulle tradizioni rituali e lo sviluppo del *ruler cult* è una delle sue caratteristiche più importanti, di cui Demetrio sicuramente rappresenta la prima fase formativa del culto del sovrano dopo Alessandro. Questo può in parte spiegare la reazione critica delle fonti nei confronti degli eccessi di Demetrio, del suo comportamento autoritario in materia di culto e della *kolakeia* degli Ateniesi nell'onorare il personaggio con *isotheoi timai*. In

83 Aristot., *Rh.*, I, 1361 a.

84 Hans-Joachim GEHRKE, «Incontri di culture: l'Ellenismo» in A. Barbero (cur.), *Storia d'Europa e del Mediterraneo*, Roma, Salerno ed., vol. IV, 2008, pp. 651-702.

tal senso Atene con la figura di Demetrio appare un punto importante (anche se comunque non esclusivo) per interpretare i *ruler cults*. Demetrio, inoltre, permette di individuare, negli onori a lui concessi, la dinamica del beneficio, del dono e contro dono che caratterizza anche successivamente la regalità ellenistica. È fondamentale, in aggiunta, ricordare che gli onori dati a Demetrio fanno parte di una strategia comunicativa ben precisa, che si rifà non a caso al modello antico di comunicazione con il divino: Demetrio, in quanto dio, è potente e infallibile e Atene con lui, ma la loro infallibilità può essere messa in discussione, così come lo statuto divino del sovrano. Finché Demetrio è utile per la città tutto gli è concesso: la sua parola diviene legge divina, la sua iniziazione ai Misteri Eleusini accelerata, la residenza nell'opistodomo concessa e i suoi trionfi celebrati come quelli di un dio. In cambio, tuttavia, gli viene richiesto di agire, militarmente, per la pace e per la prosperità della città, come si è visto nell'inno itifallico, nello spostamento dei Giochi Pitici e nelle elargizioni date alla città da parte del sovrano: in questo risulta quindi evidente il legame fra storia religiosa e storia militare.

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Caere, Hunter on horseback, ca. 480 BCE. Rome, Villa Giulia, National Etruscan Museum. Photo Marco Prins, CC0 1.0 Universal

Early Roman Cavalry (8th- 4th centuries BCE), A Reappraisal

by JEREMY ARMSTRONG AND GIANLUCA NOTARI

ABSTRACT. This article reassesses the nature and importance of Rome's early cavalrymen, the archaic *equites*, in the light of new models for understanding early Italian warfare. Although the *equites* have always been understood to have represented Rome's social, political, and economic elite, militarily their role is thought to have been limited. On an ancient battlefield traditionally thought to have been dominated by massed heavy infantry, cavalry actions were typically considered little more than aristocratic display. But with the recent reinterpretations of the nature of ancient battle in Italy, and a resultant decline in the importance of massed infantry and a rise in clan-based raiding, Rome's archaic cavalry is due for a reappraisal. This article suggests that, in this new context and contrary to the traditional models, Rome's archaic *equites* may have been a vitally important and highly effective part of Rome's early armed forces down through the fourth century BCE. Their elite status, already accepted in the social, political, and economic realms, may have also been reflected in the military sphere as well.

KEYWORDS. CAVALRY; EQUITES; ROME; REGAL; EARLY REPUBLIC.

Early Roman cavalry has always occupied an interesting and somewhat marginal place in the historiography of the Roman army. Although clearly of social and political importance and entrenched as the preserve of the elite in the literary tradition from the time of Romulus (Livy 1.13; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.13; etc.), the cavalry is typically not thought to play a particularly important role in Regal or early Republican warfare. Duels between elites on horseback, like that between L. Junius Brutus and Arruns Tarquin at the start of the battle of Silva Arsia in 509 BCE (Livy 2.6), were important for the broader narrative and political context, but are usually considered peripheral to the battle itself. With a military system supposedly focused on heavy infantry, equipped with *aspides* (thick, circular, wooden shields covered in bronze) and bronze armour and assumed to operate in a manner comparable to contemporary Greek forces, the norms usually associated with Greek-style hoplite warfare were

thought to apply. In this context, cavalry action was often described as being a somewhat performative activity done by the elite, before the ‘real battle’ was actually decided by the massed heavy infantry of the phalanx.

Recently, however, the centrality of the hoplite phalanx in Greek warfare has been questioned,¹ and its very existence in archaic Italy has been challenged, opening the door for new and more diverse military models for early Rome – many of them featuring private or clan-based forces focused on raiding, in contrast to the traditional focus on state-based forces bent on conquest and control of territory.² In this new environment, however, the role of cavalry has yet to be properly reassessed.³ Although core organizing principles of Roman warfare have been challenged, many of the traditional assumptions about the composition of the Roman army – based on the Romulean and Servian ‘constitutions’ – seem to have been maintained by most scholars.

Given the problematic nature of our evidence for this period and, in particular, our reliance on the anachronistic literary tradition for so much of our detail, the continued acceptance of these assumptions is superficially forgivable. However, there is certainly more we can say on the subject. Far from being peripheral, warriors on horseback dominate many of the battle descriptions relating to early Rome and feature prominently in the iconography, while chariots and other pieces of equipment pertaining to horses form vital components of funerary assemblages for many of the archaic Central Italian elite. Indeed, from everything we know (or think we know), it is clear that warfare was effectively an elite monopoly in archaic Rome, and both warfare and horses (and likely horse-based warfare) were incredibly important to the men of this group.⁴ The present article is part of a broader reappraisal of the early *equites* and offers an initial reassessment of the evidence, position, and importance of early Roman cavalry (eighth through fourth centuries BCE)⁵ in light of recent shifts in our understanding of both early

1 See Mihajlov (2018) amongst many others.

2 See, for instance, Armstrong (2016), Drogula (2020), Helm (2021), etc.

3 The main work on the Roman cavalry of the Republic remains McCall’s 2002 study, now joined by the excellent work of Petitjean (2022). Most other books on Roman cavalry focus on the better-documented late Republican and Imperial periods (e.g. Speidel [2002] and Dixon and Southern [2013]).

4 This has been a long-standing issue in scholarship. See Momigliano (1969) 385-388.

5 The second half of the fourth century BCE has long been understood to be a significant transitional period for Roman warfare, with the dramatic expansion of Rome’s citizen and

Roman society and warfare, exploring the implications for this enigmatic group. We will explore the specific role and responsibilities of early Roman cavalry on the archaic battlefield in a future publication.

Literary Evidence

Early Roman cavalry, including the Roman *equites*,⁶ suffer from the same evidential problems as everything else in the archaic period. Looking first to the literary evidence, the very late start to Rome's native historical tradition *c.* 200 BCE, the cryptic and fragmentary nature of the evidence utilized by Rome's early historical writers, and indeed the enigmatic, adaptive, and flexible genre of early Roman history itself, all result in a collection of literary sources for Rome's archaic period which has consistently defied a unified methodology.⁷ No two modern scholars of the period ever seem to agree on how to approach our extant sources, or indeed the elusive 'sources of our sources', which has resulted in a myriad of different positions for their reliability.⁸ The variability has proved frustrating for those interested in topics like the 'Early Roman Cavalry', as the modern scholarly positions on this group range from the traditional, tacit acceptance of at least the basics of their origins and early organization as presented in the works of authors like Livy (1.15) and Dionysius (2.13) – who, it must be admitted, present a generally consistent picture which is supported by a range of other works (Var. *LL* 5.91, Plin. *NH* 33.8, etc.) – to those who argue that, despite the agreement of the literary sources, there is no way this type of information could have been transmitted intact and that the very concept of a highly organized and regimented cavalry

alliance networks throughout Italy – most recently see Helm (2021) for discussion. This expansion fundamentally changed the composition and nature of the Roman army, especially its cavalry, which is why it was selected as an endpoint in this study.

- 6 It must be noted that 'the *equites*' is not entirely synonymous with 'the Roman cavalry', although these groups certainly overlap. In the literature, the *equites* were part of a distinct social and political category, while 'cavalry' is a practical, and indeed tactical, designation. Although the *equites* seem to have made up the majority of the Roman cavalry, it is possible that Roman forces (i.e. not including the allies) contained men on horseback who were not part of the *equites*.
- 7 See Raaflaub (2005b) and Cornell (2005) in Raaflaub (2005a) for an overview of the core issues and positions. More recently see Armstrong and Richardson (2017) for discussion.
- 8 Cornell (1995) arguably represents the default position in modern Anglophone scholarship, although more optimistic (e.g. Carandini [2011]) and pessimistic approaches (e.g. Raaflaub [2005b]) certainly exist.

contingent, or indeed a ‘Roman army’ (at least as presented by the sources), in the Regal or early Republican periods is highly unlikely.⁹

But despite this variability in analysis, there is at least agreement on the actual literary evidence that exists. The literary sources are unanimous in attributing the creation of Rome’s cavalry, the *equites*, to Romulus (Livy 1.13, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.13, Var. *LL* 5.91, Plin. *NH* 33.9, Festus *Celeres*). As part of the organization of his newly founded city, Romulus supposedly created a group of 300 *equites*, which were often labelled the *Celeres* – a name deriving from the Latin *celer*, meaning swift or fast. In order to form this group, each of Rome’s three archaic tribes (the Ramnes, Tities, and Luceres) supposedly contributed 100 members, which was further broken down to 10 from each *curia*.¹⁰ The three tribal centuries of *equites* were then distributed into 10 *turmae* of 30 men each, with each *turma* containing 10 men from each of the tribes.¹¹ The cavalry was led by a magistrate called the *Tribunus Celerum*, which seems to have been closely associated with the office of the *rex* and may have had legislative powers (famously L. Junius Brutus held the office in 510 BCE, and he supposedly used the position to convoke the *curiae*, possibly to pass a ‘*lex tribunicia*’, Livy 1.59). The cavalry supposedly underwent a series of expansions under subsequent *reges*, with Tullus Hostilius evidently doubling their number to 600 following his conquest of Alba Longa (Livy 1.30), and Tarquinius Priscus doubling it again to 1200 (Livy 1.36).¹² The first expansion merely involved doubling the number of men in each

9 For the former, see for instance Keppie (1998) 14-17. It must be admitted that the present authors are likely closer to the latter position. See Armstrong (2016) for a more comprehensive discussion.

10 The archaic *curiae* are both fascinating and enigmatic as, while we know very little about them, they seem to have represented the foundation of archaic Roman society. The early city was evidently divided into 30 *curiae*, with each of the three tribes of Romulus supposedly containing 10. Their assembly, the *comitia curiata*, was the main assembly of the archaic community and elected/confirmed the *rex* as well as granted him *imperium*. While the *curiae* were gradually superseded by other entities, they survived down into the late Republic, albeit in a vestigial manner.

11 The origins of the word *turma* are ambiguous. Varro (*LL* 5.91) suggests that it was derived from the unit being composed of three groups of 10 men. Zair (2017, 263) suggests it may be connected to the same root found in the Vedic *tvárate* ‘hurry’, and so perhaps connected to the cavalry’s speed.

12 There is some ambiguity in the sources about the final number after the reforms of Tarquinius Priscus. Given the suggested math, the number of *equites* *should* be 1200, although this number is never given, and indeed some manuscript traditions suggest 1800 instead – a number which may have been derived from the explicit testimony of Cicero (*Cic. Rep.* 2.20).

century to 200,¹³ while the reform of Tarquinius Priscus supposedly involved the creation of three new tribal centuries (in contrast to the later centuries of the Servian system), labelled *posteriores*, with one for each of the three tribes.¹⁴

The cavalry, along with the rest of Rome's armed forces, were then completely reorganized as part of the so-called 'Servian Constitution,' supposedly instituted by Rome's sixth *rex*, Servius Tullius in the middle of the sixth century BCE. In these reforms, which are also often associated with a shift away from previous tribal/kinship associations and towards a more community-based military ethos, Rome's archaic tribal structure was reformed into four new urban tribes and an expanding number of rural tribes (possibly 17 originally, then increasing in 387 BCE and 241 BCE to the final total of 31), in addition to a new set of property classes.¹⁵ The new tribes formed the basis for Rome's new *comitia tributa*, while the property classes were utilized for Rome's other new assembly, the *comitia centuriata*. Each of the seven property classes in the 'Servian Constitution' was associated with a particular military panoply and contained a certain number of 'centuries' which were employed for both recruiting and voting. At the top of the classes in this new system, were the *equites*, which were required to be of "highest birth" (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.18), or the "principal men of the State" (Liv. 1.43), although, the text does seem to imply a required level of wealth as well – presumably at least comparable to the first class.¹⁶ Out of the "*primoribus civitatis*", Servius Tullius supposedly created 12 centuries of *equites*, which he combined with the 6 centuries of *equites* (the *sex suffragia*) that had previously existed. This created a cavalry contingent of 18 centuries, with each century supposedly contributing 200 men, for a nominal cavalry force *c.* 550 BCE of 3600.

There are, of course, varying traditions as well. Cicero famously attributed the most substantial reforms of the *equites* to Tarquinius Priscus, and indeed suggested that he gave the cavalry the organization which was retained until the late

13 As with the centuries of infantry (see Armstrong [2016] 76-86), while some traditions associate the unit with 100 men initially, this does not hold for long and it is clear that the authors of our sources assumed that, by the start of the Republic, a 'century' could contain any number of men.

14 Although we do not have the time to explore this here, the label *posterior* (lit. 'behind') is an intriguing one, as it may hint at a tactical designation and is shared with later centurions – although there is seems to relate to rank and prestige and not tactics.

15 Cornell (1995) 173-175.

16 See Armstrong (2016) 74-86 for more detailed discussion.

second century BCE (Cic. *Rep.* 2.20).¹⁷ According to Cicero, the elder Tarquin's reforms involved doubling the number of *equites* from 900 (how this starting number was achieved is uncertain) to 1800. All of this is made somewhat problematic by the fact that the organization that Cicero was describing likely related to the political structure of the *equites* and not the military organization, as by the mid-second century the citizen cavalry had evidently ceased to exist as a military entity.¹⁸ However, it does represent an interesting parallel tradition.

In every tradition though, the archaic *equites* seem to have existed somewhat outside of the normal military order: their classification in the census was ambiguous and seemed to include non-economic factors; even in the middle Republic they retained regal vestiges in their organization; when mobilized under a dictator they were assigned their own commander (*magister equitum*); at least some of the cavalry were also evidently supplied with a horse and fodder at public expense (the *equus publicus*), which ran counter to the longstanding tradition in Rome of each soldier providing his own equipment. Rome's archaic cavalry was therefore clearly exceptional in many ways.

The literary evidence for how the archaic *equites* were equipped and actually fought is almost non-existent. Our best evidence is very late, in the form of Polybius (6.25.3-8), which suggested that early Roman cavalry (although here, 'early' likely means late third century BCE) were lightly armed and armoured. Polybius notes:

ὁ δὲ καθοπλισμὸς τῶν ἰππέων νῦν μὲν ἐστὶ παραπλήσιος τῷ τῶν Ἑλλήνων· τὸ δὲ παλαιὸν πρῶτον θώρακας οὐκ εἶχον, ἀλλ' ἐν περιζώμασιν ἐκινδύνευον, ἐξ οὗ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καταβαίνειν καὶ ταχέως ἀναπηδᾶν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους ἐτοίμως διέκειντο καὶ πρακτικῶς, πρὸς δὲ τὰς συμπλοκὰς ἐπισφαλῶς εἶχον διὰ τὸ γυμνοὶ κινδυνεύειν. τὰ δὲ δόρατα κατὰ δύο τρόπους ἄπρακτ' ἦν αὐτοῖς, καθ' ἃ μὲν ἦ λεπτὰ καὶ κλαδαρὰ ποιοῦντες οὔτε τοῦ προτεθέντος ἠδύναντο σκοποῦ στοχάζεσθαι, πρὸ τοῦ τε τὴν ἐπιδορατίδα πρὸς τι προσερεῖσαι, κραδαινόμενα δι' αὐτῆς τῆς ἵππων κινήσεως τὰ πλεῖστα συνετρίβητο· πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἄνευ σαυρωτήρων κατασκευάζοντες μιᾷ τῇ πρώτῃ διὰ τῆς ἐπιδορατίδος ἐχρῶντο πληγῇ, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα κλασθέντων λοιπὸν ἦν ἄπρακτ' αὐτοῖς καὶ μάταια. τὸν γε μὴν θυρεὸν εἶχον ἐκ βοείου δέρματος, τοῖς ὀμφαλωτοῖς ποπάνοις παραπλήσιον τοῖς ἐπὶ τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτιθεμένοις·

17 “*Deinde equitatum ad hunc morem constituit, qui usque adhuc est retentus...*” (“Then he established that organization of the knights which we still retain...” [trans. Keyes, 1928, Loeb Classical Library].)

18 McCall (2002) 100ff.

οἷς οὔτε πρὸς τὰς ἐπιβολὰς ἦν χρῆσθαι διὰ τὸ μὴ στάσιν ἔχειν, ὑπὸ τε τῶν ὄμβρων ἀποδερματούμενοι καὶ μυδῶντες δύσχρηστοι καὶ πρότερον ἦσαν καὶ νῦν ἔτι γίνονται παντελῶς.¹⁹

This description is corroborated by Varro (*LL7.57*), who also seemed to hint that at least some early Roman cavalry was effectively ‘light cavalry’, suggesting that cavalry were called *ferentarii*, a term commonly used for light infantry in the second century BCE, noting *ferentarii equites hi dicti qui ea modo habebant arma quae ferrentur, ut iaculum*.²⁰ Additionally, there is a tradition of the early Roman cavalry being closely associated with the *velites*, with Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 9.3.43) claiming that the *velites* were thusly named from their habit of sitting on the back of a horse and ‘flying’ into battle (*volitando*) – although this etymology is obviously fraught.²¹ Other aspects of their equipment are harder to decipher with any certainty. It is possible that early Roman cavalry was accustomed to bringing extra mounts (*Festus* 247L), an innovation which the imperial writer Granius attributed to Tarquinius Priscus (26.2) – a point which will be returned to later. However, it is entirely uncertain how early one can push any of these descriptions. It is likely that many of these accounts likely refer to the

19 “The cavalry are now armed like that of Greece, but in old time they had no cuirasses but fought in light undergarments, the result of which was that they were able to dismount and mount again at once with great dexterity and facility, but were exposed to great danger in close combat, as they were nearly naked. Their lances too were unserviceable in two respects. In the first place they made them so slender and pliant that it was impossible to take a steady aim, and before the head stuck in anything, the shaking due to the mere motion of the horse caused most of them to break. Next, as they did not fit the butt ends with spikes, they could only deliver the first stroke with the point and after this if they broke they were of no further service. Their buckler was made of ox hide, somewhat similar in shape to the round bossed cakes used at sacrifices. They were not of any use against attacks, as they were not firm enough; and when the leather covering peeled off and rotted owing to the rain, unserviceable as they were before, they now became entirely so.” (trans. Paton, revised by Wallbank and Habicht, 2010, Loeb Classical Library).

20 “Cavalry were called *ferentarii* who bore only those weapons which are used up, such as the javelin” (trans. adapted from Sage, 2008). Varro hints that the word is derived from the Latin ‘*ferre*,’ meaning ‘to carry’, and is not strictly applied to the cavalry. Indeed, it should be noted that Cato (*Fr.* 6) and Sallust (*Cat.* 60.2) hint that *ferentarii* were not always cavalry, and indeed they are often considered simply ‘light-armed troops’. See also Non. Marc. 520.10M.

21 Sekunda and de Souza (2008). It is worth noting that Livy (26.4.4-9), in the context of the siege of Capua in 211 BCE, discusses the creation of the *velites*, claiming they originated as a unit of light infantry who would ride with the cavalry and leap down to fight when needed. This bears a striking resemblance to Polybius’ account of the *ferentarii*, which both supports the existence of this type of troop/unit and also the fluidity of terminology and deployment in the army.

Roman cavalry as they existed c. 300 BCE, and indeed there may be some corroborating evidence for at least aspects of these descriptions in the account of the Pyrrhic War. For instance, when describing the battle of Heraclea, Plutarch (*Pyrr.* 16. 6-10) makes particular note of the Roman and Italian cavalry operating in a highly fluid and independent manner.

οἱ δέ, ἄπερ ἐκεῖνος ἔγνω περιμένειν, φθῆναι σπεύδοντες, ἐνεχείρουν τῆ διαβάσει, κατὰ πόρον μὲν οἱ πεζοί, πολλαχόθεν δὲ οἱ ἵππεις διεξελαύνοντες τὸν ποταμόν, ὥστε δεῖσαντας τὴν κύκλωσιν ἀναχωρεῖν τοὺς Ἕλληνας... Ἐνθα δὴ Λεοννάτος ὁ Μακεδῶν ἄνδρα κατιδὼν Ἴταλὸν ἐπέχοντα τῷ Πύρρῳ καὶ τὸν ἵππον ἀντιπαρεξάγοντα καὶ συμμεθιστάμενον αἰεὶ καὶ συγκινούμενον, “Ὀρᾶς,” εἶπεν, “ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὸν βάρβαρον ἐκεῖνον, ὃν ὁ μέλας ἵππος ὁ λευκόπους φέρει; μέγα τι βουλευομένῳ καὶ δεινὸν ὁμοίος ἐστὶ. σοὶ γὰρ ἐνορᾷ καὶ πρὸς σὲ τέταται πνεύματος μεστὸς ὢν καὶ θυμοῦ, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἐᾷ χαίρειν. ἀλλὰ σὺ φυλάττου τὸν ἄνδρα.” καὶ ὁ Πύρρος ἀπεκρίνατο, “Τὸ μὲν εἰμαρμένον, ὦ Λεοννάτε, διαφυγεῖν ἀδύνατον· χαίρων δὲ οὔτε οὔτος οὔτ’ ἄλλος τις Ἴταλῶν εἰς χεῖρας ἡμῖν σύνεισιν.” ἔτι ταῦτα προσδιαλεγόμενον ὁ Ἴταλὸς διαλαβὼν τὸ δόρυ καὶ συστρέψας τὸν ἵππον ὥρμησεν ἐπὶ τὸν Πύρρον. εἶτα ἅμα παῖει μὲν αὐτὸς τῷ δόρατι τοῦ βασιλέως τὸν ἵππον, παῖει δὲ τὸν ἐκεῖνου παραβαλὼν ὁ Λεοννάτος. ἀμφοτέρων δὲ τῶν ἵππων πεσόντων τὸν μὲν Πύρρον οἱ φίλοι περισχόντες ἀνήρπασαν, τὸν δὲ Ἴταλὸν μαχόμενον διέφθειραν. ἦν δὲ τῷ γένει Φρεντανός, Ἰλῆς ἡγεμῶν, Ὀπλακος ὄνομα.²²

The sources are hopelessly muddled with regard to the tactics and combat duties of archaic Roman cavalry. The vast majority of early battle narratives are so inexorably intertwined with myth that extracting even the vaguest morsels of

22 “The Romans, however, anxious to engage the forces of Pyrrhus, who had decided to await, attempted the passage. The Roman infantry crossed the river by a ford, and their cavalry dashed through the water at many points so that the Greeks, fearing that they would be surrounded, withdrew...Here Leonnatus the Macedonian, observing that an Italian was intent upon Pyrrhus, and was riding out against him and following him in every movement from place to place, said: “Do you see, O King, that barbarian over there, riding the black horse with white feet? He looks like a man who has some great and terrible design in mind. For he keeps his eyes fixed upon you, and has his whole mind focused on reaching you, paying no mind to anybody else. So be on your guard against the man.” To him, Pyrrhus made this reply: “What is fated, O Leonnatus, it is impossible to escape; but neither he, nor any other Italian shall come to close quarters with me with impunity.” While they were still talking, the Italian levelled his spear, wheeled his horse, and charged at Pyrrhus. Then, at the same instant, the barbarian’s spear struck the king’s horse, and his own horse was struck by the spear of Leonnatus. Both horses fell, but while Pyrrhus was seized and rescued by his friends, the Italian, fighting to the last, was killed. He was a Frenatian, by race, captain of a troop of horse, Oplax by name.” (adapted from Perrin, 1923, Loeb Classical Library).

‘factually accurate’ information is extremely difficult – even as late as the Pyrrhic war incident offered above. It may be possible to suggest, following Oakley’s analysis of single combat in the Roman Republic, that the strong tradition of duelling between aristocrats on horseback may represent an accurate historical memory – although this is little more than a supposition for Rome’s earliest periods.²³ Moving slightly later, there seems to be a distinct tradition of Roman cavalymen dismounting and fighting on foot – explicitly recorded by Dionysius in his description of the battle between Rome and the army of Pyrrhus at Ausculum (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 20.2) – which generally supports the narrative of Polybius cited earlier.²⁴ While it is difficult to know what to make of this in these early periods (some analysis will be given in a future article), the literary tradition seems clear that cavalymen were expected to operate both off and on horseback – hinting that the ability to move between was important. This is something we will return to later in this article.

In general, then, as noted previously, the literary evidence seems to suggest that archaic Roman cavalry represented an aristocratic accompaniment to the main infantry army which, although symbolically important, had minimal importance when it came to the real flow of ancient battle. Elites on horseback would fight and duel, utilizing what seem to be light (and seemingly ineffective) armour and weapons, typically for personal glory in a mode of combat wholly out of touch with the norms of the battle, at least as they would exist in the second and first centuries BCE when our extant literary sources begin. Indeed, as Polybius notes, by his own time, the Romans had finally adopted cavalry arms and armour following the Hellenistic model, which included a heavier spear and shield, which were presumably deployed in a more Hellenistic mode of fighting.²⁵ But early Roman cavalry was remembered as being a very different type of entity – an archaic throwback that still seemed to preserve vestiges of Rome’s regal past well into the mid-Republican period.

23 Oakley (1985).

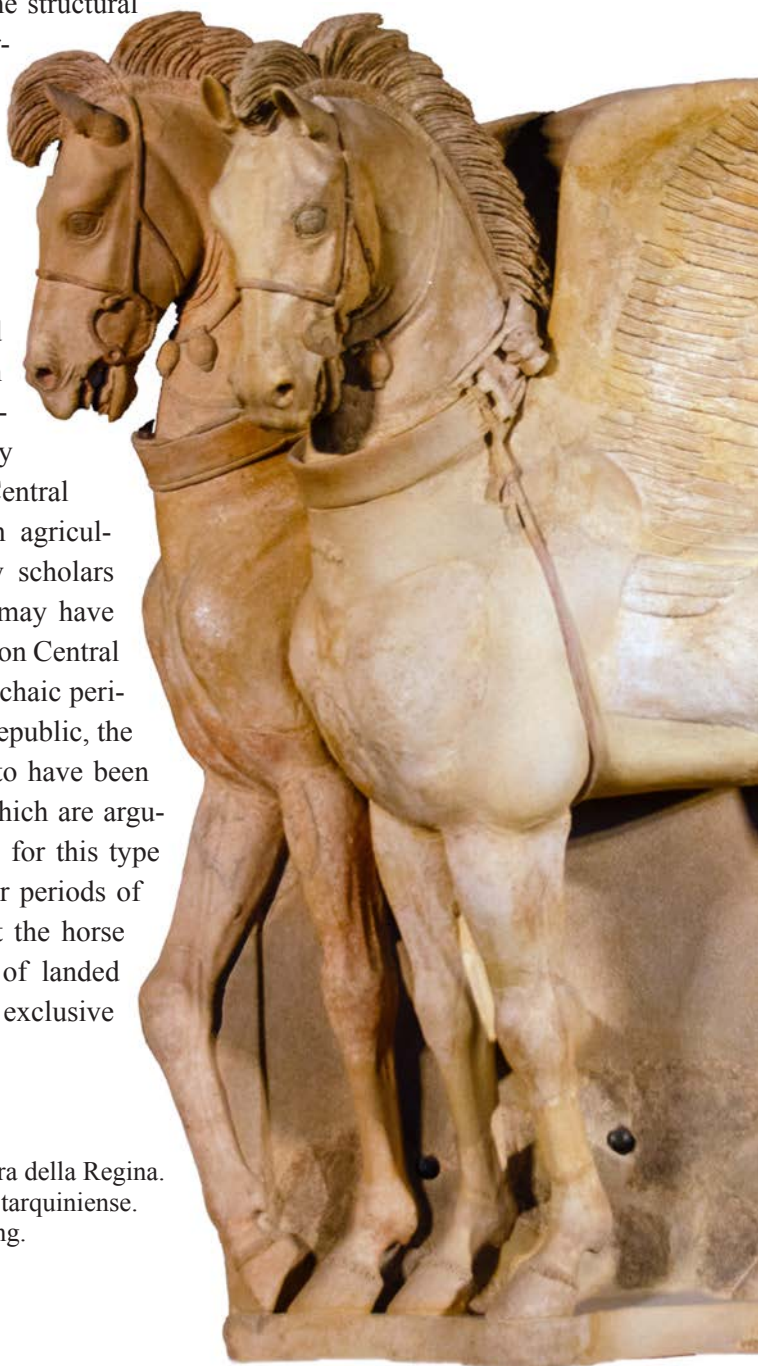
24 McCall (2002) 69–72.

25 Polybius’s use of the Hellenistic model is problematic here, as he generally used Hellenistic terminology and paradigms to describe the Roman army. This was not a singular, descriptive comment, but part of a wider approach. While Polybius had first-hand experience of both Roman and Hellenistic armies in the field, and evidently felt the comparison apt, the idealized nature of his military descriptions and their overtly comparative character raises some worries.

Archaeology

The archaeology for archaic Roman cavalry does not, unfortunately, provide the answers one might wish for after looking at the literary evidence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the archaeological evidence offers virtually nothing that can be used to flesh out and explain the structural questions offered up by the literary sources, while at the same time raising a whole new set of questions regarding the role and importance of cavalry in archaic Roman and Central Italian society.

The archaeological record suggests that horses formed an integral part of the archaic Central Italian economy. It is likely that the Romans, and other Central Italian peoples, used horses in agricultural contexts and quite a few scholars have suggested that the horse may have been the most important animal on Central Italian farmsteads during the Archaic period.²⁶ During the course of the Republic, the draught duties of horses seem to have been slowly taken over by oxen – which are arguably the more efficient animals for this type of work – but during the earlier periods of Rome's history, it is likely that the horse represented an important part of landed wealth (although, perhaps, not exclusive

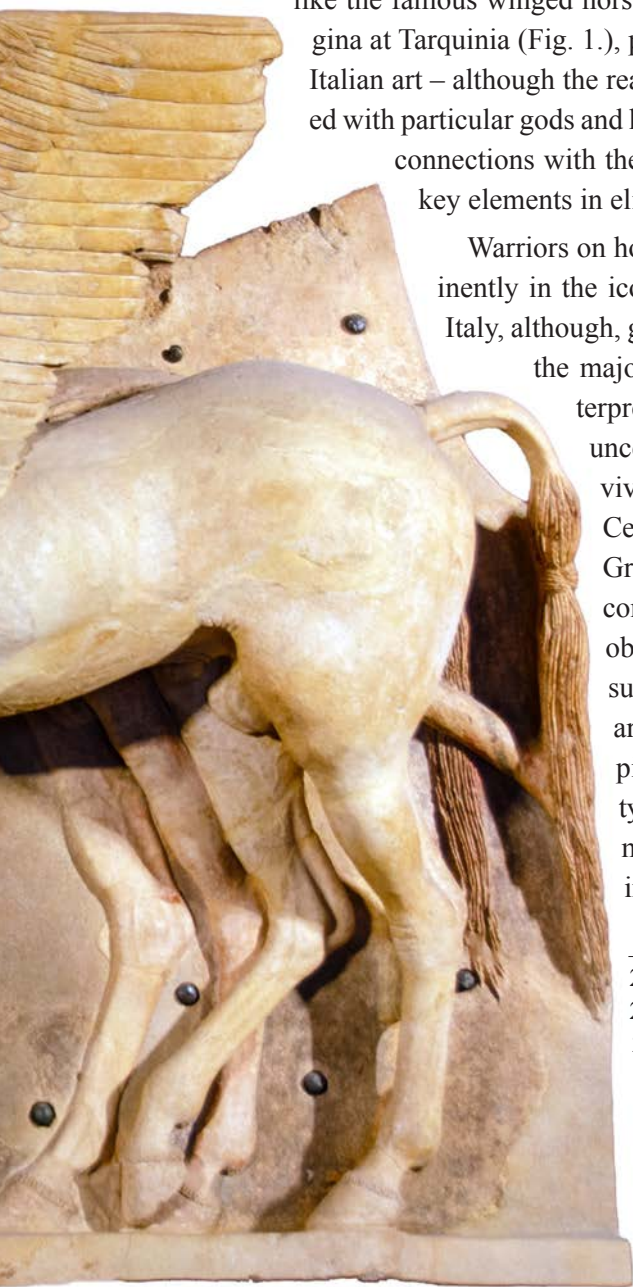


²⁶ Harrison (2013) 1091.

Fig. 1. Winged horses from the Ara della Regina. Museo archeologico nazionale tarquiniese. Photo by J. Armstrong.

to it).²⁷ Additionally, horses have a long tradition of being associated with symbols of prestige and wealth in Central Italy, which fits perfectly within the elaborate and ostentatious culture of display that seems to have accompanied elite warfare in the Archaic period.²⁸ In contrast to the general disregard for cavalry expressed in the literary evidence, horses, chariots, and cavalry all seem to have formed a significant part of elite military identity in archaic Central Italy. Horses, like the famous winged horses from the pediment of the Ara della Regina at Tarquinia (Fig. 1.), played an important role in archaic Central Italian art – although the reasons are obviously varied. Often associated with particular gods and heroes like the Dioscuri, horses also carried connections with themes like mobility, exchange, and travel – key elements in elite Central Italian society.²⁹

Warriors on horseback, or in chariots, also feature prominently in the iconographic evidence from archaic Central Italy, although, given the religious or mortuary contexts for the majority of the examples, the problems of interpretation are obvious.³⁰ Indeed, it is entirely uncertain whether the depictions that have survived reflect the reality of warfare in archaic Central Italy or merely artistic conventions, Greek ideals, mythic narratives, or some combination thereof.³¹ However, some broad observations may be possible. First, perhaps surprisingly, the iconographic evidence from archaic Rome actually seems to support the picture offered by Polybius for the majority of cavalry being lightly armed and armoured, and carrying a circular shield. For instance, the sixth-century frieze fragments



²⁷ Goldsworthy (1998) 294.

²⁸ Bernardini and Camporeale (2004) 134.

²⁹ Harrison (2013) 1092.

³⁰ See Stary (1981) and Winter (2009) 223-310 in particular.

³¹ See Winter (2009) for detailed discussion.



Fig. 2. Frieze fragments from the Forum Romanum.
Museo Nazionale Romano - Terme di Diocleziano
Photo by J. Armstrong.

unearthed in the *forum Romanum* and currently on display in the Museo Nazionale Romano - Terme di Diocleziano seem to show exactly this (Fig. 2),³² as does corroborating evidence from elsewhere in Latium, most notably Velletri and Satricum,³³ and even the Ager Faliscus.³⁴

Although many of these depictions have been interpreted as lightly armed horsemen and seem to support the literary mode, they have been somewhat confusing for archaeologists as they seem to illustrate an alternate façade to Central Italy's elite from that which is normally visible in the archaeological record. In funerary contexts going back to the early Iron Age, there is a consistent association between Central Italy's elite and 'heavy' bronze military equipment.³⁵ Given that there is also a strong connection between Central Italy's elite and cavalry, one might therefore expect to find an association between the cavalry and bronze arms and armour in the related artwork – but this is not the case.

The possible explanations for this disjunction are many and varied, with per-

32 Stary (1981) Taf. 43.

33 *Ibid.* Taf. 46-47

34 *Ibid.* Taf. 49.

35 For elite bronze armour going back to the early Iron Age (and beyond) see Bietti Sestieri (1992) for discussion. It is worth noting, though, that the bronze armour was not physically heavy – with most examples weighing under 2kg (see Armstrong and Harrison [2021/2023] for discussion).

haps the most obvious relating to artistic conventions (particularly from the Greek world). Indeed, it is possible that some burials of bronze armour from across Central Italy, commonly assumed to be of heavy infantry, may, in fact, be horsemen.

Perhaps the most famous warrior burial from archaic Latium, that from Lanuvium, is a prime example. Containing a bronze muscled cuirass and helmet, *kopis* (curved sword), and spear points, it is often assumed to be of an infantryman equipped in the classic ‘hoplite style’. However, as will be touched on again below, it is noteworthy that the disc buried with the warrior contains the image of a *desultor* (lit. ‘one who leaps down’, a warrior who leaps down from, or between, horses), while the reverse – the side usually seen by museum patrons – shows the disc thrower. While the mirror hints at a possible connection to horsemanship, it is actually the *kopis* that presents the more compelling evidence. While *kopides* were used by both infantry and cavalry, by the late fourth century BCE longer versions of the weapon were increasingly favoured by cavalry³⁶ – and the example from Lanuvium, at almost 90cm in



Fig. 3. Reverse of a silver didrachm from Taras (Roman: Tarentum, modern: Taranto) in Italy, one of the only colonies founded by Sparta.

The coin was likely minted c. 280 BCE. Coin from the University of Auckland Lacey Collection (Inv. G00). Photo by G. Morris.

³⁶ The evidence for this is not definitive, as the *kopis*-style sword was used across the Mediterranean in a wide range of contexts. However, as Quesada Sanz (1997) and Verčik's (2011) work has shown, the average length of *kopides* seems to grow between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, from 55-60cm in the sixth century BCE up to 80cm by 400 BCE, possibly in response to its changing role and the increased reach necessitated by use on horseback. Also in the fourth century BCE, we start to have explicit references to a *kopis* being used by cavalry in both literature – most famously by Xenophon (*Eq.* 12.11) – and in art.

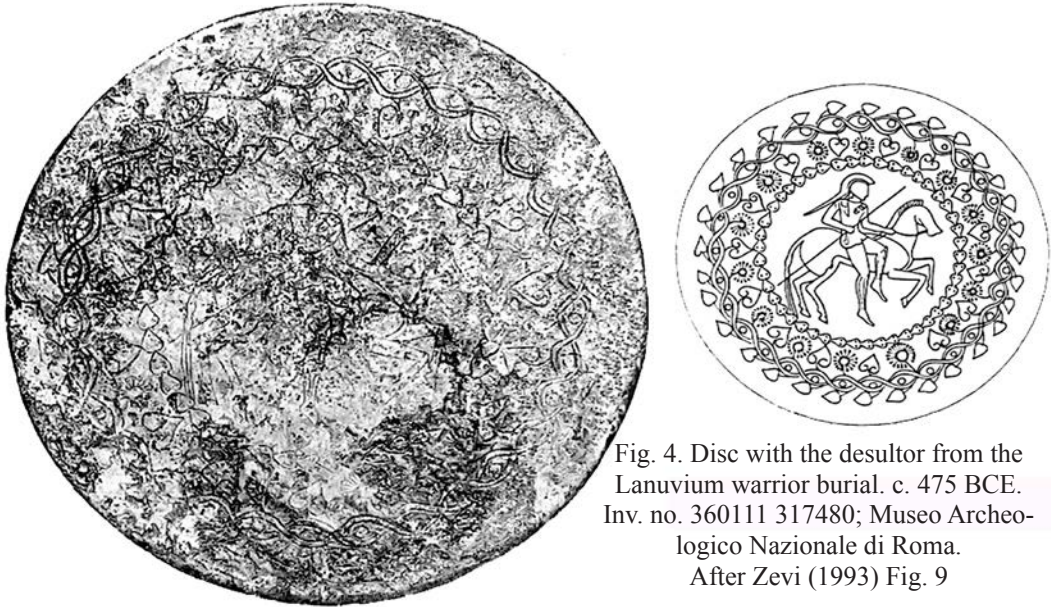


Fig. 4. Disc with the desultor from the Lanuvium warrior burial. c. 475 BCE. Inv. no. 360111 317480; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Roma. After Zevi (1993) Fig. 9

length, is one of the longest examples we have from around the Mediterranean, making it somewhat impractical to be used on foot but particularly effective when wielded on horseback.³⁷ Thus, it is likely that the grave belonged to a warrior who may have fought on horseback, suggesting that a re-evaluation of other bronze armour finds from the region may also be needed.

This is particularly evident at sites like Paestum, where the rich tomb paintings (see Fig. 7, below) generally support the interpretation that the bronze armour found in the graves should be associated with men who operated, at least part of the time, on horseback. The absence of local corroborating evidence of a similar type from other contexts makes the extension of this across the region uncertain, but it is worth noting that the styles of bronze body armour that we find in Italy – and especially southern Italy – are conducive to cavalry. From the triple-disc cuirass to the squared breastplates, flared bivalve,³⁸ and short Greek muscled varieties (Fig. 5), most extant examples could be used on horseback.³⁹

37 Quesada Sanz (1990). See also Colonna (1977) 150-5; Cristofani (1990) 269 for identification as infantry or cavalryman.

38 A two-piece, muscled cuirass which flares out around the waist, presumably to allow the wearer to sit – perhaps on a horse.

39 The possible exceptions might be some of the so-called ‘long’ cuirasses, which may have extended low enough below the waist to make sitting on a horse awkward or uncomfortable. However, our interpretation of the exact fit of these pieces of armour is uncertain, as

Fig. 5: Bronze Cuirass,
fourth century BCE, Apulian.
Metropolitan Museum of Art (
Accession Number: 1992.180.3)
Reproduced under OASC license.



However, this is not to say that so-called ‘light cavalry’ did not exist too.⁴⁰ As noted above, Varro (*LL* 7.57) speaks of *ferentarii*, and it is possible that lighter styles of armour were more suitable in some situations. Most notably while being heavily armoured might represent the ideal, especially for close combat, the practicalities of being on horseback and needing to mount and dismount quickly or using javelins may have precluded this. Some warriors may have chosen to prioritise mobility and speed over defence. However, this should not be pushed too far. Given that medieval knights, wearing more armour, were able to mount and dismount much larger horses without as-

it would have varied based on the torso length of the wearer and the musculature of the armour may not have matched the actual body underneath. While it is possible that some warriors only put their armour on when they reached the battlefield, and only wore it while on foot, the ability to mount and dismount a horse while wearing armour would have surely been an advantage (for example, the Prenestine Cistae show combat between horsemen equipped with armor – although it is hard to know how to understand these depictions).

40 The designations ‘light cavalry’ and ‘heavy cavalry’ are largely modern conventions that have been applied, not always consistently or accurately, to antiquity. The terms typically refer, first and foremost, to the amount of armour and equipment carried but also give an indication of a unit’s tactical function. ‘Light infantry’ is typically lightly armoured, moves quickly, and fights from a distance with javelins *vel sim*. ‘Heavy cavalry’ is typically more heavily armoured and primarily engages in close, hand-to-hand combat.

sistance, it is likely that even heavily armoured ancient cavalymen would have been relatively mobile.⁴¹

A second observation is that, although not mentioned in the literature in a military context, chariots also feature prominently in a number of iconographic representations, particularly in friezes from sites like Velletri and Palestrina.⁴² It is, again, entirely uncertain what these images are meant to portray, and it is possible (some might say likely) that what is being depicted in these images is either a ritual or victory celebration, like the Roman triumph, and not combat – as, of course, there is a long tradition in Rome of utilizing a chariot in this context. Religious associations are also possible, as the temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline, supposedly dedicated in 509 BCE, famously featured a statue of the god in a four-horse chariot on the roof. However, the sheer number of chariot depictions in contexts that also include warriors is notable.

The military equipment finds for cavalry in archaic Central Italy suffer from many of the same problems as the iconographic evidence, in large part because of their overtly ritual context, as they all come from either burials or votive deposits. As a result, it is uncertain what function they were actually intended to perform and what their relationship was to the practical landscape of archaic Roman warfare. That being said, the amount and range of evidence that has been unearthed from Central Italy is impressive, although unfortunately very little of it can be directly connected to Rome or even Latium. The vast majority of our evidence for cavalry and chariots comes from Etruscan contexts – a feature of the archaeological record that likely relates as much to local mortuary practices as it does to wealth and military practice. However, given that many of Central Italy's elite seem to have exhibited a high degree of mobility and were arguably not bound by the cultural paradigms of 'Etruscan' and 'Latin' (or, for that matter, 'Sabine' or 'Umbrian', etc.) as the more settled populations, evidence from Etruscan contexts can plausibly be applied to the wider region.

Evidence for military equipment relating directly to horses and cavalry can be categorized into two distinct areas: horse bridles/bits/spurs and chariots. The surviving horse bits from archaic Central Italy usually consist of a swivel-jointed mouthpiece, typically of bronze but sometimes iron (see below, Fig. 6), which

41 Clements (2012).

42 Stary (1981) Taf. 46.



Fig. 6: Iron Etruscan horse bit. Etruria. c. 550 BCE
Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accession Number: 03.23.51)
Reproduced under OASC license.

contains two rods linked together at the middle and ending in eyelets for the reins. These are present in Central Italian contexts going back to at least the eighth century BCE and were often quite elaborately decorated. They are often found either connected to or alongside cheek-pieces, also elaborately decorated, although of varying forms – including both hammered and cast bronze shapes. As with other evidence related to horses, these items are often argued to explicitly symbolize the high social status of the individual and so their interpretation is somewhat vexed.⁴³ While it seems clear (and perhaps obvious) that bridles/bits were important in the Central Italian use of horses, as Harrison has argued, their interpretation is far from clear-cut.⁴⁴ For instance, although many Etruscan sculptures “depict the head of a horse reigned in and deep, what we refer to today as ‘deep and round,’ a typical position of control that calms any horse into submission...these sculptures and metal bits [may not only be] indicative of the style of riding used by the Etruscans, but they may also serve as a visual attestation to the power the Etruscans wielded over their neighbours.” There is no evidence for the use of saddles in archaic Central Italy, with iconography suggesting that

43 Haynes (2000) 16-17. See also Turfa (2005) 115-116.

44 Harrison (2013) 1108.

at most blankets or light padding was in use. Even as late as the fourth century BCE, the tomb paintings from Paestum, so rich in their detail for other aspects of military equipment, do not indicate any change in the type of equipment for Central Italian cavalry (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 7. Tomb painting depicting a warrior's return
(Paestum, Tomba Adriuolo 12 – eastern slab, 375-370 BCE)
Picture from the National Archaeological Museum of Paestum.
Photo by Francesco Valletta and John Grippo.

The other finds that could plausibly relate to cavalry and the use of horses in warfare are the elaborate chariots found in the richest of Central Italian graves, typically from Etruria (see. Fig. 6). Usually designed for two horses to be yoked (although iconographic evidence suggests four horse versions were also in use), chariots may have provided an interesting point of union between the lightly armed cavalry and heavy infantry, as several temple friezes (for instance from Toscana⁴⁵ and Cerveteri⁴⁶) show armoured infantry riding on the back of chariots. Consequently, it has been argued as far back as the turn of the twentieth century that these chariots may have served as transport for infantry on the battlefield.⁴⁷ As noted above, however, it is entirely uncertain whether these vehicles would have ever been used in warfare itself and indeed, given the heavily forested and rugged nature of the terrain in much of archaic Central Italy and the elaborate decoration on those which have survived, it is likely that our extant examples were not. However, the strong association between chariots and victory parades, not to mention graves featuring weapons and armour, does suggest a somewhat martial character.



Fig. 8: Monteleone bronze chariot, inlaid with ivory and featuring scenes of the Greek hero Achilles. Etruria. Late sixth century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accession Number: 03.23.1) Reproduced under OASC license.

45 Stary (1981) Taf 34.

46 *Ibid.* Taf. 36.

47 Helbig (1904).

Leading the Equites

Looking across this collected evidence, the vital importance of horses to ancient elites, and elite warfare, seems evident – although we are arguably still no closer to understanding how the Roman cavalry operated. There are some clues, however, buried in rituals and remembered practices, which may help to shine a little more light on the situation. We can plausibly assume that members of the cavalry were connected, by social, political, and kinship (or pseudo-kinship) based bonds. One did not become a member of the *equites* or cavalry simply by virtue of owning a horse. Indeed, many of Rome's archaic religious and civil festivals revolve around the horse (*Equirria*, *Equus October*, *Consualia*⁴⁸, etc.). In addition to emphasizing the symbolic value of the horse, they were also a manifestation of the social, political, and military capacity of the *equites* and, in some cases – for instance, the *transvectio equitum* ('review of the *equites*') – may mark part of the initiation into the group. On the 15th of July, the *iuvenes* of the *equites* marched from the Temple of Mars in Clivo outside the *pomerium*, through the Porta Capena, past the Temple of Castor in the *Forum Romanum*, and up to the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline (Livy 9.46; *Vir. ill.* 32.2). Although the ritual described seems to have been the result of a late fourth century BCE reworking by the censor Q. Fabius Maximus Rullianus, as part of a reform associated with the census of the *equites* (Val. Max. 2.2.9; Plut. *Pomp.* 13.5), the wider tradition traces its origins back to the appearance of the Dioscuri after the battle of Lake Regillus in 496 BCE (Livy 2.9ff.; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.3; Cic. *Nat.* 2.6), giving it added prestige and hinting at an archaic importance. Indeed, within the wider citizen body of the emerging Roman state, the *equites* are consistently marked out as a distinct group.

The leader of the *iuvenes* in the *transvectio equitum* was the *princeps iuventutis*, who was ceremonially equipped with a shield and a spear, showing the clear martial associations. Indeed, leadership of the *equites* is a central issue, and something which we also know a bit about. As noted above, when under the overall command of a dictator, the *equites* were evidently commanded by a *magister equitum* ('master of the horse'). Sadly, we know very little about this

48 The Italic agricultural god Conso, in whose honour horse races were held from ancient times, was later identified with Neptune (the Greek Poseidon), said to be equestrian as the creator of the horse.

office, except that he is usually always paired with the dictator.⁴⁹ It was appointed by the dictator, although, it is largely modern scholarship that interprets this as evidence of a subordinate role. While he was subject to the *coercitio*, or control of the dictator, who could also limit his duties (Livy 8.36,1), there is no evidence that he was under his *imperium*. Although his term of office ended with that of the dictator, this required a separate *abdicatio* (Livy 4.34) and the original designation of the dictator as the *magister populi*, or ‘master of the *populus*/infantry’ (Cic. *Rep.* 1.40; Varro *LL.* 5.82) perhaps hints at equal footing. By the late Republic, the office seems to have been considered comparable to the praetorship (Cic. *Leg.* 3.3), with the holder entitled to six *lictors*.⁵⁰ However, in earlier periods, this notional equivalency is far from certain.

Although the narrative of the Regal period is deeply problematic, Dionysius of Halicarnassus records a tradition where whereby Taquinius Priscus was supposedly the “ἡγεμὸν ἰππέων” (*hegemon hippeon*, ‘cavalry commander’ - Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.41.4; 4.6.4) while serving during the reign of Ancus Marcius, and then went on to lead the cavalry himself as *rex* in the early years of his reign (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.48-53). As he aged, the young Servius Tullius is recorded as showing his value as a member of the cavalry before moving up to the position of ἡγεμὸν ἰππέων himself (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.3.2). Thus, the position of leader of the cavalry seems to have been comparable to that of an heir, and indeed we can see a similar situation with the *princeps iuventutis* touched on above. In 5 and 2 BCE, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, the adoptive sons of Augustus, were both acclaimed *principes iuventutis* by the *equites Romani*, and Ovid (*Ars.* 1,194) noted “*nunc iuvenum princeps, deinde future senum*” (‘today first among youths, tomorrow first among old men’, i.e. the senators).⁵¹ By the Flavian period, the *princeps iuventutis* (‘leader of the youths’, and often abbreviated ‘PI’)

49 “Paired” is the traditional understanding, although this may not be entirely correct – as the year 217 BCE hints. In this year, although somewhat exceptional in Roman history due to the situation and Hannibal’s invasion, the sources record the appointment of Q. Fabius Maximus Verrucosus as dictator, with M. Minucius Rufus as *magister equitum*. However, Rufus was then elected co-Dictator with Fabius through a law proposed by the tribune of the plebs, without being replaced (Polyb. 3.103.1-5; Liv. 22.25–26; Val. Max. 5.2.4; Plut. *Fab.* 7–9; App. *Hann.* 12; etc.). It is difficult to know how much to read into this set of events, but it suggests that by this point having a dedicated master of the horse was not required.

50 Brill’s New Pauly (BNP) ‘*Magister equitum*’.

51 BNP ‘*Princeps iuventutis*’.

was used to designate the young successors of the emperors. Thus, although one might consider the role junior, it was not minor. Rather, the leader of the cavalry was a vital part of the military system, entrusted to the notional heir apparent.⁵²

The *magister equitum* and *principes iuventutis* were not the only leaders of cavalry though. As noted above, our sources record that, when Romulus created the cavalry, he dubbed them the *Celeres* and put them under the command of the *tribunus celerum* (Livy 1.13; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.13; Varro, *LL* 5.91; Plin. *NH* 33.9; Festus, *s.v. Celeres*). This position seems to hold the same rough status and connotations as the other two cavalry commanders, as L. Junius Brutus was supposedly named *tribunus celerum* by Tarquinius Superbus and held this position when he led the revolt against the *rex*. Intriguingly then, despite the supposed parallels between the early Roman and Classical Athenian systems, this early Roman command system is markedly different from that present in Athens, where two cavalry commanders (*hipparchs*) were elected each year, each with control over the cavalry from five tribes (*Ath. Pol.* 61.5-6).⁵³

Below this overall commander, the system of command for the early Roman cavalry seems far more egalitarian – although it is also likely Hellenistic in date. As noted above, during the Republic, the Roman citizen cavalry was divided into *turmae* of thirty men each, which were in turn divided into three groups of ten.⁵⁴ Each group of ten cavalymen was then led by a *decurio* selected by the military tribunes, with the first decurion selected also taking command of the full *turma* (Varr. *LL* 5.91.1). Thus, for a cavalry force of 300 (the supposed size of the cavalry under Romulus) one would have 30 *decuriones* of notionally equal status, and for a force of 1200 (the supposed size of the cavalry under Tarquinius Priscus) one would have 120. Each *decurio* also selected an *optio*, who served as a sec-

52 If this holds true for the *magistri equitum* of the Republican dictators, it perhaps changes how we should view the appointment and relationship between the men and families involved.

53 This is not to say there are not strong resonances between the overall Roman and Athenian cavalry systems, for instance in number. Both began with 300 cavalry, later expanded to 1200, etc.

54 Allied cavalry maintained their own organization and command structures, which are largely lost to us. Although the allies evidently provided the majority of Rome's cavalry by the second century BCE, their number, importance, and relationship to the Roman *equites* before 338 BCE is uncertain, and so they do not play a major role in the present argument.

ond-in-command and, by the late Republic, was a ‘rear-officer’ who operated from the back of the file.⁵⁵ Thus, a full 20% of the *equites* was made up of ‘officers’ most of whom seem to have held roughly equal rank. Again, this contrasts with the Athenian system which, in addition to the two elected *hipparchs*, had 10 tribal cavalry commanders – one from each tribe – who acted in a similar way to the *taxiarchs* of the phalanx (*Ath. Pol.* 61.4-6).

The closest parallel for the early Roman system, as described by our sources, is the Hellenistic model, with a single, elite, overall commander – often either the king himself or the heir to the throne – with the cavalry itself, also composed of elites, divided into *ilia*, or squadrons comparable to *turmae*, on a regional/kinship basis (e.g. Arr. *Anab.* 3.11; Curt. 5.2.6; Diod. Sic. 16.85; 17.17).⁵⁶ This suggests two options, and arguably either is equally possible. First, much of the preserved tradition for the Roman cavalry organization dates to the Hellenistic period and mirrors comparable systems. Second, the Roman cavalry system had much more in common with the family-based, or tribal systems used by Hellenistic kings for their cavalry than it did with the state-based, elected systems used by the Greek poleis like Athens and Sparta. To the above we must add that the tradition condenses into a few lines, an institutional and tactical development of cavalry that we do not know.

The Early Equites

The nature of the *equites* within this command structure needs some attention as well. All our extant sources focus on the social, political, and economic aspects of the early *equites*, as this was largely how the group existed and operated by the late Republic. While the *Celeres* were an identifiable military unit in all the traditions, the *equites* were primarily a socio-political entity, defined by the census and placed into eighteen centuries within the *comitia centuriata*. Livy (1.43) records that Servius Tullius retained six archaic centuries, three of which had been established by Romulus (Titius, Ramnes, and Luceres) and subsequently doubled

⁵⁵ McCall (2002) 79.

⁵⁶ Alexander subsequently divided the *ilai* into two *lochoi* (Arr. *Anab.* 3.16). He also, after the execution of Philotas, split command of the Companion cavalry into two positions (Arr. *Anab.* 3.27). However, this seems to be due to his not having an heir to whom he could entrust this singular command.

by Tarquinius Priscus (Cic. *Rep.* 2.36), alongside twelve others. But while the rest of Servius Tullius' centuriate system was explicitly based on wealth, the selection criteria for the equites was more vague and, in any case, not exclusively based on the measurement of wealth. As noted above, the tradition records that the six archaic centuries used the old tribal affiliations, while the twelve new centuries of *equites* were drawn *ex primoribus civitatis* ("from the leading citizens" Livy 1.43.8). This marked change in tone, from the rigid property ratings noted in the lines before for the various infantry classes, suggests a fundamentally different organizational principle. While one would expect that members of the *equites* held wealth at least equivalent to the 100,000 *asses* of the first class, this was not their defining feature. Rather, men were selected for the *equites* according to different criteria, most likely related to their family affiliation and connections.

This picture aligns well with the model outlined so far, where the *equites* formed an important part of the elite landscape of Central Italy. As noted above, simply owning a horse or having sufficient wealth to do so was not necessarily enough to be part of the *equites* or the cavalry. Many families likely owned horses for agricultural, pastoral, or other practical purposes. From the social, cultural, and religious aspects of the group to the seemingly more tribal and yet also egalitarian nature of the military command structure reminiscent of Alexander's *Hetairoi* or 'Companion Cavalry', the Roman *equites* and cavalry relied upon a strong, pre-existing, set of relationships. Indeed, it is likely that the basic skills of horsemanship, particularly in a combat environment, were an elite preserve – hints of which can be seen in the wider references to the display of these skills in games and rituals.

Strabo (5.3) mentions equestrian competitions in Ardea and Lavinium, which seem to offer comparative support to the tradition relating to the institution of the *ludi equestri* (*Consualia*) in Rome, traditionally established by Romulus (Livy 1.9.6; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.31). Equestrian events were supposedly part of Central Italian traditions and customs since time immemorial – Dionysius (1.33) suggests they were connected with the heroic period – but the elder Tarquin was associated with an increase in their military significance. Indeed, the Tarquins' strong connection with cavalry and the *Campus Martius* may offer a plausible explanation for the somewhat problematic connection between the gods *Consus* and *Neptunus Equestris* (*Poseidon Hippios*) within the *Consualia* festival. Plutarch (*QR* 48) Dionysius (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.31) suggest that *Neptunus Equestris* and *Consus* were understood to be the same deity, despite their very

different associations: *Consus* with grain and *Neptunus Equestris* with horses. Tertullian, supposedly quoting an inscription on the altar used in the festival (*De Spect.* 5.7 – “CONSUS CONSILIO MARS DUELLO LARES COILLO POTENTES”) also indicates a direct association between *Consus* and both *Mars* and the *Lares*.⁵⁷ This festival was also associated with the *flamen Quirinalis*, thus perhaps linking in *Quirinus* as well, and was the context for the Rape of the Sabine Women (Livy 1.9.6), which has led some to connect it to marriage and even the census.⁵⁸ However, the festival’s location in the *Campus Martius* may also link it to the *ager Tarquinius*, which was famously taken from the Tarquins, after their removal, and consecrated to *Mars* through the sacrifice of crops (*Ager Tarquiniorum, qui inter urbem ac Tiberim fuit, consecratus Marti Martius deinde campus fuit. Forte ibi tum seges farris dicitur fuisse matura messi Quem campi fructum quia religiosum erat consumere, desectam cum stramento segetem magna vis hominum simul immissa corribus fudere in Tiberim tenui fluentem aqua, ut mediis caloribus solet.*, Livy 2.5.2-3).⁵⁹ Given the Tarquins’ association with the *equites* (in both a social and military guise), control of Rome during a period of expansion, and their direct connection with the festival’s location, it is possible that *equites* may sit at the centre of this complicated tradition.

But, of course, the religious elements of the early *equites* extend far beyond the Tarquins and the *Consualia*. Most notably, there is also the cult of the *Dioscuri*, who had temples in Latin sites like *Cori*, *Tusculum*, *Ardea* and *Lavinium*, as well as *Rome*, and were particularly important for the young male elite. The brothers are depicted on the *Francois vase*, an early sixth-century BCE Attic black-figure volute krater, although not on horseback. The first locally produced evidence of them is the sixth-century BCE altar at *Lavinium* and there is roughly contemporary evidence from *Etruria* where they were known as the children of *Tinia*.⁶⁰ The cult in *Rome* was famously dated to 484 BCE, as the result of an oath by the

57 See Dušanić and Petković (2002) for discussion.

58 Noonan (1990).

59 “The land of the Tarquini, lying between the City and the Tiber, was consecrated to Mars and became the *Campus Martius*. It happened, they say, that there was then standing upon it a crop of spelt, ripe for the harvest. Since this produce of the land might not, for religious reasons, be consumed, the grain was cut, straw and all, by a large body of men, who were set to work upon it simultaneously, and was carried in baskets and thrown into the Tiber, then flowing with a feeble current, as is usually the case in midsummer.” (trans. Foster, 1919, Loeb Classical Library).

60 Gartrell (2021) 11-12.

dictator Postumius during the Battle of Lake Regillus in 496 BCE (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13.1-4; Livy 2.20.12; 2.42.5). Interestingly, while there were *aeditui* or ‘caretakers’ of the temple of Castor (which seem to have been numerous), there is no solid evidence for a priesthood associated with the cult.⁶¹

Of particular interest to the present discussion, however, are the activities associated with the cultic activities. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (6.13.4-5) describes the *transvectio equitum* thusly:

...ὕπερ ἅπαντα δὲ ταῦτα ἢ μετὰ τὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελουμένη πομπῇ τῶν ἐχόντων τὸν δημόσιον ἵππον, οἱ κατὰ φυλάς τε καὶ λόχους κεκοσμημένοι στοιχηδὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἵππων ὀχούμενοι πορεύονται πάντες, ὡς ἐκ μάχης ἦκοντες ἐστεφανωμένοι θαλλοῖς ἐλαίας, καὶ πορφυρᾶς φοινικοπαρύφους ἀμπεχόμενοι τηβέννας τὰς καλουμένας τραβέας, ἀρξάμενοι μὲν ἀφ’ ἱεροῦ τινος Ἄρεος ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἰδρυμένου, διεξιόντες δὲ τὴν τε ἄλλην πόλιν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς παρὰ τὸ τῶν Διοσκούρων ἱερὸν παρερχόμενοι, ἄνδρες ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ πεντακισχίλιοι φέροντες ὅσα παρὰ τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἀριστεῖα ἔλαβον ἐν ταῖς μάχαις, καλὴ καὶ ἀξία τοῦ μεγέθους τῆς ἡγεμονίας ὄντις. ταῦτα μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς γενομένης ἐπιφανείας τῶν Διοσκούρων λεγόμενά τε καὶ πραττόμενα ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ἔμαθον· ἐξ ὧν τεκμήραιτ’ ἂν τις ὡς θεοφιλεῖς ἦσαν οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι, σὺν ἄλλοις πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις.⁶²

He thus emphasizes the direct military aspects, including their division by tribe and centuries (“as if they came from battle”) and displaying their “rewards for valour in battle”. We can see similar, overt martial aspects in the *Ludus Troiae*. As described by Virgil (*Aen.* 5.545-603), this seems to have been a simulated battle, with three *turmae* of young *equites* performing various, intricate manoeuvres. Thus, while clearly a ritualized display, there are strong hints that elements of the *equites* retained strong martial connections, and indeed practised and drilled to-

61 Gartrell (2021) 25-26.

62 “But above all these things there is the procession performed after the sacrifice by those who have a public horse and who, being arrayed by tribes and centuries, ride in regular ranks on horseback, as if they came from battle, crowned with olive branches and attired in the purple robes with stripes of scarlet which they call *trabeae*. They begin their procession from a certain temple of Mars built outside the walls and going through several parts of the city and the Forum, they pass by the temple of Castor and Pollux, sometimes to the number even of five thousand, wearing whatever rewards for valour in battle they have received from their commanders, a fine sight and worthy of the greatness of the Roman dominion. These are the things I have found both related and performed by the Romans in commemoration of the appearance of Castor and Pollux; and from these, as well as from many other important instances, one may judge how dear to the gods were the men of those times.” (trans. Cary, 1937, Loeb Classical Library).

gether. It is clear, as well, that the skills deployed by the *equites* were not those of amateurs or 'part time' cavalry, but rather experienced horsemen. For instance, as noted above, Granius (26.2) tells us that Tarquin's *equites priores* went into combat with two horses, and also connects this custom with the cult of Castor. The horse-rider relationship was built only through years of apprenticeship: knowing the potential and limits of the horse, taking care of it, and knowing how to direct and control it. Licinianus' suggestion of having two horses, however, may not solely be connected with this cult, as it may also connect to *desultores* – and indeed Hyginus (*Fab.* 80) explicitly connects all three.

As noted above, a *desultor* is one who jumps off or between horses.⁶³ Although it is often assumed that they were common in antiquity, and indeed the practice is referred to as far back as Homer (*Il.* 15.679-684), explicit literary evidence in a Roman context is limited. One of the only clear examples of their existence is in Caesar's triumphal games (Suet. *Iul.* 39), where they seem to be young members of the *equites*. However, they appear far more regularly in iconography. The theme of the *desultores*, represented in the moment of the leap from the horse, is frequent in iconography between the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, in the Tyrrhenian area. In southern Etruria the leap of the *desultores* is well documented in the tombs of Tarquinia and appears among the equestrian figures that act as acroteria, or roof decoration, on the temple of Apollo (510-490 BCE) in Veii and on the tympanum of the temple B of Pyrgi (510 BCE).⁶⁴ For Latium, there is the disc found in the famous warrior burial from Lanuvium and some of the cysts found in Palestrina. They are also found in iconography found on silver Roman coinage by the second and first centuries BCE, with their iconography often blurring with that of the Dioscuri which dominated previous issues. The association between *desultores*, and the tremendous skill and ability which it involves, with the *equites* is noteworthy. It reinforces, yet again, that this group was far more than a social, political, economic, or religious entity. It had practical aspects, which evidently included advanced horsemanship in a decidedly martial context.

63 Thuiller (1989).

64 Tomb of the Master of the Olympics in Tarquinia (c. 500 BCE), in Tomb no. 4255 in Tarquinia (480 BCE), from the Tomb of the Monkey in Chiusi (480-470 BCE) and from the Tarquinian Tomb of the Triclinium (470 BCE). See Steingraber (2006) for images and discussion.



Fig. 9: Reverse of silver denarius, 112 - 111 BCE. Minted in Rome by Ti. Quinctius. RRC 297/1. American Numismatic Society. Image is in the Public Domain.

The early Equites in Context

While the literary sources describe early Roman battles in epic terms, it is increasingly accepted that warfare likely operated on a much smaller scale. Warfare in archaic Central Italy was dominated by bands of, typically elite and gentilicially organized, warriors and was largely characterized by raiding for portable booty.⁶⁵ While a wide range

of goods would have been subject to seizure in this context, our sources regularly emphasize the importance of livestock – most notably cattle, as well as sheep and goats, and likely horses.⁶⁶ Famously, when Porsenna arrived at the gates of Rome in 508 BCE, Livy

(2.11.3) reports that “...*ut non cetera solum ex agris sed pecus quoque omne in urbem compelleretur, neque quisquam extra portas propellere auderet*”.⁶⁷

While livestock, and especially cattle, were a prime target of warfare, it was likely on an irregular basis. First of all, the traditional campaigning season was often thought to be based on the agricultural calendar – beginning in March and running until the summer harvest – as this is when the men, based on the farms, would have been available. However, this period not only aligned with a gap in the

⁶⁵ See Armstrong (2016) for discussion.

⁶⁶ Plutarch (Cor. 10.2) reports that Coriolanus was given a horse from the spoils of war after a battle with the Volscians. Amongst the many items offered to him, this was supposedly the only one he accepted.

⁶⁷ “...not only were they forced to bring all their other property inside the walls, but even their flocks too, nor did anybody dare to drive them outside the gates” (trans. Foster, 1919, Loeb Classical Library).

agricultural calendar, but was also an important period for pastoralists, as it was the period when they were most often on the move. While some animals may have stayed on the same farmstead for their entire lives, most were evidently subject to seasonal transhumance.⁶⁸ Thousands of animals moved on a regular cycle from summer pastures in the mountains to winter pastures on the coast, often moving hundreds of kilometres. This movement is attested by Roman laws like the *Lex Agraria* of 111 BCE (CIL I²: 585) or the second century CE inscription from Saepinum (CIL IX, 2438), as well as literary sources, like Cato's *De Agricultura* (149) – and indeed these basic rhythms and movements of people and animals are still evident in modern times.⁶⁹ It is also likely visible in the activities of (and conflict around) various mobile, tribal entities connected with the central Apennines.

While it is likely that groups of pastoralists contained both men on foot and horseback, horsemen would have represented an important component. Groups of horsemen and livestock can move, feed, and rest at the same pace. Indeed, the rearing of cattle and horses is often done in conjunction, as they require similar resources and activities. As comparative ethnographic examples indicate, horseback pastoralists are far more efficient and effective – they do not fatigue and maintain a high level of responsiveness, can quickly move about, observe territory, anticipate threats, and intervene promptly.⁷⁰ Conversely, those who wished to raid groups of pastoralists, be they members of other pastoral groups or of the agricultural communities they passed through, would have also benefited from being on horseback.⁷¹

The early *equites* in Rome, and across archaic Central Italy, likely played a key role in the competition over livestock – both raiding for animals and protecting their own animals from raids. This was, certainly, an economic concern – and very possibly a known and accepted risk. During these periods of movement, land, which was typically dominated and controlled by agriculturalists, would have been shared with pastoralists and their herds. Some limited predation by the agriculturalists on these herds may have been an accepted form of 'tax' for this limited use, and the damage it likely wrought. However, it is likely that preda-

68 Barker (1989).

69 Barker et al (1991).

70 Taylor et al. (2020).

71 Anthony and Brown (2014).

tion often exceeded acceptable limits, or pastoralists may have also preyed upon weaker settlements and groups during their journey, leading to violence. There were also likely social forces at play. Livestock is often the primary currency for exchange in social transactions amongst pastoralists. While other forms of wealth are known and used, livestock is often the most acceptable form of wealth used to pay dowries or a 'bride price' in pastoral societies.⁷² For those living in settled communities throughout the ancient Mediterranean, livestock was vitally important for ritual display and sacrifice. Thus, it is likely that young men on both sides of this pastoral/agricultural relationship would have been incentivized to raid for livestock during these periods of movement in order to increase their standing. Being part of the *equites*, or equivalent group, was likely an important step for young Central Italian elites in improving their social and economic status.

Conclusions

The early Romans *equites*, far from being strictly a social, economic, or political group, were likely an important military force in the Regal period and early Republic. However, the nature of this role was dictated by the nature of both war and society in the region. Archaic Central Italy featured a heterogeneous population, with both pastoralists and agriculturists (and likely a mixture of the two), as well as settled communities and more mobile *gentes* ('clan groups') and tribes. Warfare was dominated by raiding for portable wealth, and especially livestock, in which quick action by young men on horseback would have been central. They would have been able to quickly respond to both threats and opportunities, as well as keep up with and herd animals. Equally importantly, cavalry actions would have provided ample opportunity to display bravery and daring in combat situations. As Polybius (6.25) noted, the early Roman *equites* were remembered as being more lightly armed and armoured than the 'heavy' cavalry of the Hellenistic period. Instead, and as befitted their raiding function, many may have "fought in light undergarments, the result of which was that they were able to dismount and mount again at once with great dexterity and facility, but were exposed to great danger in close combat, as they were nearly naked" (Polyb. 6. 25.3, trans. Paton). But this did not necessarily apply to all of the *equites*. Some, like the warrior from

72 Anthony (2007) 239.

the Lanuvium burial, may have been equipped with full bronze panoply and long *kopis* as early as 500 BCE. Despite later writers' attempts to standardize things, the vast majority of military equipment was acquired and maintained personally (the *equus publicus* being a notable exception), meaning that individual warriors and families would have had significant control, likely resulting in a degree of diversity.

However, two broad conclusions are possible. First, if we accept that early Roman warfare was at least partly based around clan-based raiding, the early Roman *equites* seem to have embodied the elite warrior ethos which defined this period. Drawn from the top socio-political echelon of society, and focused on elite display – duelling, raiding, and feats of strength and daring – they were not a ‘sideshow’ within early Roman warfare, but the ‘main act’. The exact nature of this ‘act’ is the subject of a future paper, but its centrality and importance for early Roman warfare are worth emphasizing as the core point being made here. While it is likely that they were supported by infantry, the core goals and ambitions of the elites – who also dictated the time and nature of warfare – were actually accomplished by the cavalry. Indeed, in this context, they were seemingly quite effective. Highly trained, with the best available equipment, their role was important enough to be supported through the granting of mounts at public expense. Second, the changing role and position of the Roman cavalry is likely connected to the changing nature of warfare in Italy, most notably during the fourth and third centuries BCE. During this period, raiding was increasingly replaced by territorial expansion, and the composition of armies was altered by their increasing size, the rise of mercenaries, the increased role of allied troops, and a ‘democratization’ of violence. In this context, it made less sense for socio-political elites to risk life and limb in battle, when the bulk of the rewards were acquired *after* the battle, through treaties and diplomacy, in the form of land. While monomachy and duelling arguably remained an important aspect of warfare, and at least a vestigial part of elite display (especially for commanders), the wider appeal of cavalry actions for Roman elites seems to have declined. If they were not able to win individual glory on the battlefield, due to the changing nature of warfare, they would rather save their display for the much safer confines of ritual display in the city. However, this later ritualized version should not completely obscure the far more functional and effective nature of the early Roman cavalry as it existed in the Regal and early Republican periods.

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Marcellus at Nola and the employment of the ‘long spears of the naval soldiers’: trying to make sense of Plutarch, *Marcellus*, 12.2

by GABRIELE BRUSA

ABSTRACT. According to Plutarch’s *Life of Marcellus*, in 215 BC Marcellus won a battle against Hannibal at Nola, by distributing among his soldiers the ‘long spears of the sea-fighters’ (δόρατα τῶν ναυμάχων μεγάλα). This tactical device is otherwise unheard of in Roman history, and it is quite puzzling. This paper attempts to make sense of Plutarch’s text. First, the references to ‘naval spears’ (δόρατα ναύμαχα, or simply ναύμαχα) in the Greek world are considered, to provide some useful context. The next aim is to look at the reality of Roman sea fights, to see whether some instances of naval fighting with long spears can be detected in the Roman middle-republican world as well. Some passages lead to think that this was indeed the case, and that at least some of the Roman fleets might have been equipped with particularly long spears (*hastae longae* in Livy’s words) to this end. Going back to Marcellus at Nola, this paper argues that these were the weapons he employed, and that his plan was to array his soldiers in a phalanx and to outmatch the Punic phalanx using longer spears. In conclusion, this case study is briefly discussed as a confirmation of Wheeler’s theory according to which the Roman army, throughout its history, could be deployed in a ‘phalangitic’ formation.

KEYWORDS: MARCELLUS, NOLA, SEA FIGHTS, LONG SPEARS, PHALANX

Introduction

In 215 BC, the proconsul M. Claudius Marcellus was sent with one legion to Nola, to defend it from the forces of Hannibal, before being sent to Sicily, where he would become famous for the capture of Syracuse¹. This was the second time that Claudius was tasked with the defence of the Campanian city,

¹ According to Liv. 23.32.2 Marcellus, elected consul for 215, had to resign due to a bad omen, and he was sent to Campania *pro consule*.

but, while Hannibal's attempt during the previous year did not result in a large battle², this time the Roman and Punic forces fought. This battle is described, though not in much detail, by Livy and Plutarch, who agree on the main lines of the military confrontation, but whose texts present some discrepancies, nonetheless³. Plutarch's text is particularly interesting, as it contains a rather obscure detail about a tactical device employed by Marcellus:

διαδοὺς δόρατα τῶν ναυμάχων μεγάλα τοῖς πεζοῖς, καὶ διδάξας πόρρωθεν συντηροῦσι παίειν τοὺς Καρχηδονίους, ἀκοντιστὰς μὲν οὐκ ὄντας αἰχμαῖς δὲ χρωμένους ἐκ χειρὸς βραχείαις. διὸ καὶ δοκοῦσι τότε δεῖξαι τὰ νῶτα Ῥωμαίοις ὅσοι συνέβαλον καὶ φυγὴν ἀπροφάσιστον φυγεῖν.⁴

He had distributed long spears used in naval combats among his infantry, and taught them to watch their opportunity and smite the Carthaginians at long range; these were not javelineers, but used short spears in hand to hand fighting. This seems to have been the reason why at that time all the Carthaginians who were engaged turned their backs upon the Romans and took to unhesitating flight.

This passage raises some questions: what exactly were the spears of the sea-fighters? Why did Marcellus decide to abandon, at least temporarily, the normal Roman tactics based on the *pilum* and sword? Why didn't he simply use the spears of the *triarii*, the rear-most rank of a Roman *triplex acies*, which, according to Polybius, carried thrusting spears instead of *pila*⁵? How were these weapons normally (that is, in a sea fight) used? Unfortunately, Livy's account of the battle does not help to shed light on these questions: in his text, the reference to these spears is entirely missing.

Modern authors have not devoted much attention to this passage. To my knowledge, only three authors commented on it in passing. General works on the

2 Liv. 23.16 just relates some sallies from Nola, which compelled Hannibal to retreat; the historian himself expresses some doubts about some other versions, which reported the killing of 2,800 enemies.

3 Apart from the absence in Livy of the naval spears, Plutarch records just one battle, while Livy gives accounts of two different fights, the first of which was interrupted by a storm. Livy also inserts two speeches, one for each commander. According to Plutarch, Marcellus initially refused an engagement, while in Livy both parts are *avidī certaminis*. The two authors agree on the outcome of the battle, on the number of fallen men and on the desertion that this defeat gave rise to in the Hannibalic army. Livy's text is at Liv. 23.44.3-46.7.

4 Plut. *Marc.* 12.2-3. All the translations quoted in this text are from the *Loeb Classical Library*.

5 Polyb. 6.23.14.

Hannibalic war either vaguely relate Hannibal's and Marcellus' confrontations in Campania⁶, or take into consideration the relevant battle itself, even citing Plutarch's account alongside that of Livy, but do not comment on the employment of the spears⁷. Plutarch's comment about these spears has been analysed twice in relation to the sources of the *Life of Marcellus*: since this reference is not found in Livy, De Sanctis argued that Plutarch took it from another source, likely Polybius or Cornelius Nepos, and inserted it into an otherwise Livian account⁸. Klotz, instead, thought that Plutarch took all the details about the battle from Livy's source, Valerius Antias, and that Livy omitted the detail about the naval spears⁹. Clark, in his

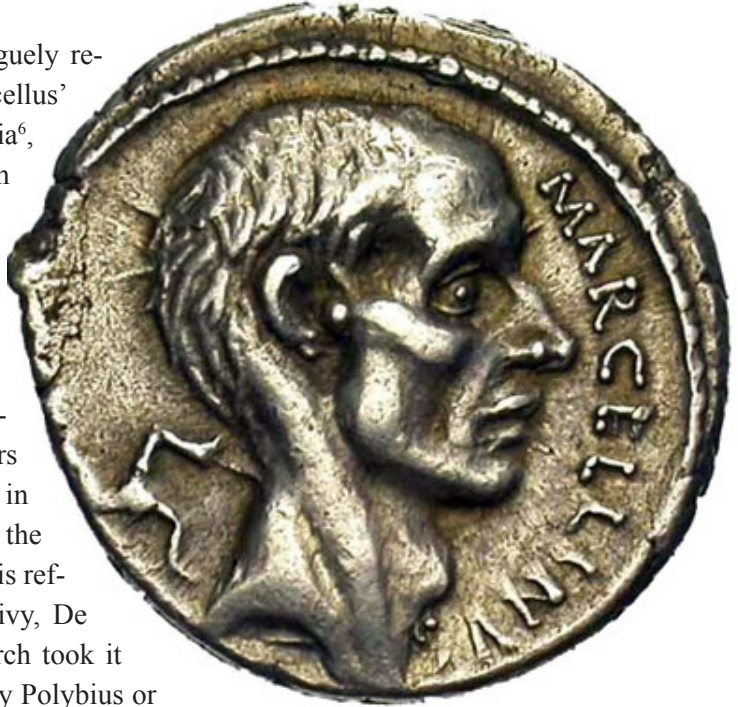


Fig. 1. Silver Denarius issued in 50 CE by Publius Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus in honour of the consul M. Claudius Marcellus for his campaign in Sicily (represented in the obverse by the triskele). Upload to wikimedia commons by Yuri Che.

6 Yann LE BOHEC, *Histoire militaire des guerres puniques, 264-246 avant J.-C.*, Éditions du Rocher, Monaco, 1996, p. 208; Nigel BAGNALL, *The Punic wars: Rome, Carthage, and the struggle for the Mediterranean*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2005, pp. 236-237 and 241-242; Giovanni BRIZZI, *Scipione e Annibale: la guerra per salvare Roma*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2007, pp. 82-85.

7 John F. LAZENBY, *Hannibal's war: a military history of the second Punic war*, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1978, pp. 96-97; Michael P. FRONDA, «Hannibal: tactics, strategy, and geostrategy», in Dexter Hoyos (Ed.), *A companion to the Punic wars*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, 2011, pp. 242-259 (p.248).

8 Gaetano DE SANCTIS, *Storia dei Romani*, vol. 3².2, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1964, pp. 320-321: «questo particolare non sembra invenzione d'annalisti [...] e deve ritenersi che Plutarco [...] lo abbia desunto sia da Cornelio sia da Polibio».

9 Alfred KLOTZ, «Die Quellen der plutarchischen Lebenbeschreibung des Marcellus», *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 83 (1934), pp.289-318 (pp. 302-303: «Da [...] dies unmöglich eine Ausschmückung Plutarchs sein kann, dem eine solche kriegerische Phan-

commentary to the *Life of Marcellus*, quotes these two views, without commenting. He then briefly goes on to inquire about the provenance of these spears¹⁰ – a detail about which some hypotheses will be put forward later in this text.

Apart from these three brief mentions, which do not deal with the reasons for Marcellus' choice, Claudius' tactical device has gone largely unnoticed. In modern works about Roman military equipment, these 'long spears' receive almost no mention at all, mainly because of the lack of archaeological evidence¹¹. Despite the scantiness of the sources about the employment of 'naval spears', it is worth trying to inquire what they were, how they were used, and why Marcellus decided to have his own soldiers armed with them in a land battle.

Δόρατα ναύμαχα

Plutarch is not the only author to refer to spears specifically intended for use at sea. However, the evidence, which is not abundant, comes mainly from the Greek world. The most important passages come from the *Iliad*, specifically from book 15, where the Achaeans find themselves compelled to defend their ships from the Trojans' attack. To do so, they fight directly from the decks, with very long spears, which Homer defines simply as 'ναύμαχα', adding that these were huge spears, whose shafts were composed of two parts glued and riveted together¹²:

tasie fehlte, so hat er nicht aus Livius geschöpft, sondern aus Antias").

10 Edward D. CLARK, *A historical commentary on Plutarch's Marcellus*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991, pp. 169-170.

11 About this lack of material evidence, see below. One should also note that modern scholarship has had the tendency to focus on the reconstruction of imperial weapons, rather than of the republican panoply. Even in works that do focus on the Republic, thrusting spears receive little attention compared to weapons such as swords and javelins. On Roman republican spears, see Otto FIEBIGER, «Hasta (2)», *RE* XIV.2 (1912), pp. 2503-2507; Paul COUISSIN, *Les armes romaines: essai sur les origines et l'évolution des armes individuelles du légionnaire romain*, Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion Editeur, Paris, 1926, p. 213; Mike C. BISHOP and Jon C. N. COULSTON, *Roman military equipment: from the Punic wars to the fall of Rome*, Batsford, London, 1993, pp. 52-53 (cf. p. 192, on the production of the spear shafts); Michel FEUGÈRE, *Les armes des Romains: de la république à l'antiquité tardive*, Editions Errance, Paris, 1993, pp. 169-171; Lionel PERNET, «Spear», in Yann Le Bohec (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of the Roman army*, vol. 3, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, 2015, pp. 911-915; Ian A. MARTIN, *Origin of Roman infantry equipment: innovation and Celtic influence*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Texas, 2019, pp. 164-168. Among these authors, Couissin is the only one to discuss some *hastae longae*: see below. Pernet mentions Plutarch's passage, without commenting on the spears of the sea-fighters.

12 On the construction of these weapons, see Richard JANKO, *The Iliad: a commentary*, vol-

οἱ δ' ἀπὸ νηῶν ὕψι μελαινάων ἐπιβάντες
μακροῖσι ξυστοῖσι, τά ρά σφ' ἐπὶ νηυσὶν ἔκειτο
ναύμαχα κολλήεντα, κατὰ στόμα εἰμένα χαλκῶ.¹³

But the Achaeans high up on the decks of their black ships to which they had climbed, fought therefrom with long pikes that lay at hand for them upon the ships for sea-fighting – jointed pikes, shod at the tip with bronze.

This depiction of the ‘naval pikes’ is echoed by another reference later in the same book, where such a weapon is wielded by Aias¹⁴. In both cases, these spears are used to repel assailants from land, but Homer seems to imply that they were normally used in proper sea-fights, even though he does not add any details. These Homeric passages influenced in some way the subsequent tradition. A whole wealth of scholia and lexica comment on the word ‘ναύμαχα’, explaining its meaning¹⁵. Dio Chrysostom borrows the Homeric image of the Achaeans smiting their opponents on the beach from their ships with naval spears, depicting Neoptolemus killing an Amazon in this way¹⁶. Nonnus of Panopolis writes of the same weapons during a sea battle in his *Dionysiaca*, where he also quotes Homer’s words about the construction of the long pikes¹⁷; it is worth noting that in this case the spears are employed in a proper sea fight, and not against foes on land.

ume IV: books 13-16, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 301-302.

13 Hom. *Il.* 15.387-389.

14 Hom. *Il.* 15.676-678: ἀλλ' ὁ γε νηῶν ἴκρι' ἐπόχετο μακρὰ βιβάσθων, / νόμα δὲ ξυστόν μέγα ναύμαχον ἐν παλάμῃσι / κολλητὸν βλήτροισι δυοκαιεκοσίπηχυ [But he kept faring with long strides up and down the decks of the ships, and he wielded in his hands a long pike for sea-fighting, a pike jointed with rings, of a length of two and twenty cubits].

15 Among scholia and commentaries, see both the *Scholia in Homerum vetera* and *recentiora*, Aelius Herodianus (*Il. Pros.*), Tzetzes' *Homeric Allegories*, Eusthatus' commentary to the *Iliad*: all of them comment on the two Homeric passages. Among the lexica, see those of Photius and Hesychius, Julius Pollux's *Onomasticon*, the *Etymologicum Magnum*, the *Lexica Segueriana* 6, the *Suda* and the anonymous *Συναγωγή λέξεων χρησίμων*, all of them *sub voce* ‘ναύμαχα’. All of these works only specify that these spears were intended for use at sea, with two recurring phrases: μακρὰ δόρατα πρὸς ναυμαχίαν ἐπιτήδεια and μακρὰ δόρατα, ὥστε ἀπὸ τῶν νεῶν μάχεσθαι.

16 Dio Chrys. 11.117. According to Dio's version, in his Trojan discourse, during the second invasion of the Troad an Amazon tried to assault the Achaeans' ships, but was killed by Neoptolemus with a naval pike (ναυμάχῳ δόρατι).

17 Nonn. 39.84. In a speech, Dionysius exhorts his men to fight with naval spears, which he describes, borrowing a Homeric verse, as ναύμαχα κολλήεντα, περὶ στόμα εἰμένα χαλκῶ. At 36.446, in another speech, the δόρυ ναύμαχον becomes a metaphor to describe a sea battle in general.

These references are literary in nature, and do not necessarily prove that the reality of Homeric naval battles still applied to the age of Dio or Nonnus. The *Iliad*'s text appears to prove that archaic Greece saw the employment of a long spear which was specifically intended for sea battles¹⁸, but the lexica and commentaries do not imply that such a weapon was still in use in classical or Hellenistic Greece. There is, however, evidence of soldiers fighting with spears from the deck of ships in this period. Most warships in classical Greece carried soldiers, and this is especially evident in the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides thought that the Athenians were particularly skilled at manoeuvres, while the Peloponnesians tended to rely on the embarked soldiers, and most modern authors tend to agree¹⁹. Even the Athenian triremes, however, were equipped with ten *epibatai*, naval hoplites, who carried a spear, alongside a sword, and (probably) some kind of missiles²⁰, and fought on the ships with these weapons²¹. Probably the best account of their fighting style (about which the sources do not provide much detail²²) comes from Diodorus Siculus' account of the battle of Abydos (411 BC):

18 JANKO, cit., p. 270 (more sceptical is Dorothea GRAY, «Seewesen», in Hans G. Buchholz (Ed.), *Archaeologia Homerica: die Denkmäler und das frügeschichtliche Epos*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1990, pp. G131-G133); see also Thomas BIGGS, «Naval battles in Greek and Roman epic», in Simone Finkmann and Christiane Reitz (Eds.), *Structures of epic poetry*, vol. 2, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston, 2019, pp. 320-321, on the Aristhonotos krater as an instance of a 'Homeric' sea fight.

19 See in particular Thuc. 1.50. Among modern authors, see for example Lionel CASSON, *Ships and seamanship in the ancient world*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, pp. 92-93; Barry STRAUSS, «Battle, B: Naval battles and sieges», in Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman warfare*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 233-247 (pp. 230-232); Matteo ZACCARINI, «Thucydides' narrative on naval warfare: *epibatai*, military thinking, ideology», in Geoff Lee, Helene Whittaker and Graham Wrightson (Eds.), *Ancient warfare: introducing current research*, vol. 1, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2015, pp. 210-228.

20 On the armament and fighting style of the *epibatai*, see Louis RAWLINGS, «Alternative agonomies: hoplite martial and combat experiences beyond the phalanx», in Hans van Wees (Ed.), *War and violence in ancient Greece*, Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2000, pp. 233-259 (pp. 236-237); ZACCARINI, cit., and above all Tristan HERZOGENRATH-AMELUNG, «Naval hoplites: social status and combat reality of classical Greek *epibatai*», *Historia* 66 (2017), pp. 45-64 (pp. 46-47 and 57-59). Spears are not listed in the lists of equipment for the triremes (CASSON, cit., pp. 265-266, nt.3): each *epibates* was probably expected to bring his own, as was the case for the regular hoplites.

21 To cite but one instance, Plutarch mentions two Athenians who fought on a ship at Salamis, and with their spears managed to prevent Ariamenes from boarding their own vessel (Plut. *Them.* 14.3).

22 For other instances, see HERZOGENRATH-AMELUNG, cit.; cf. STRAUSS, cit., pp. 231-232.

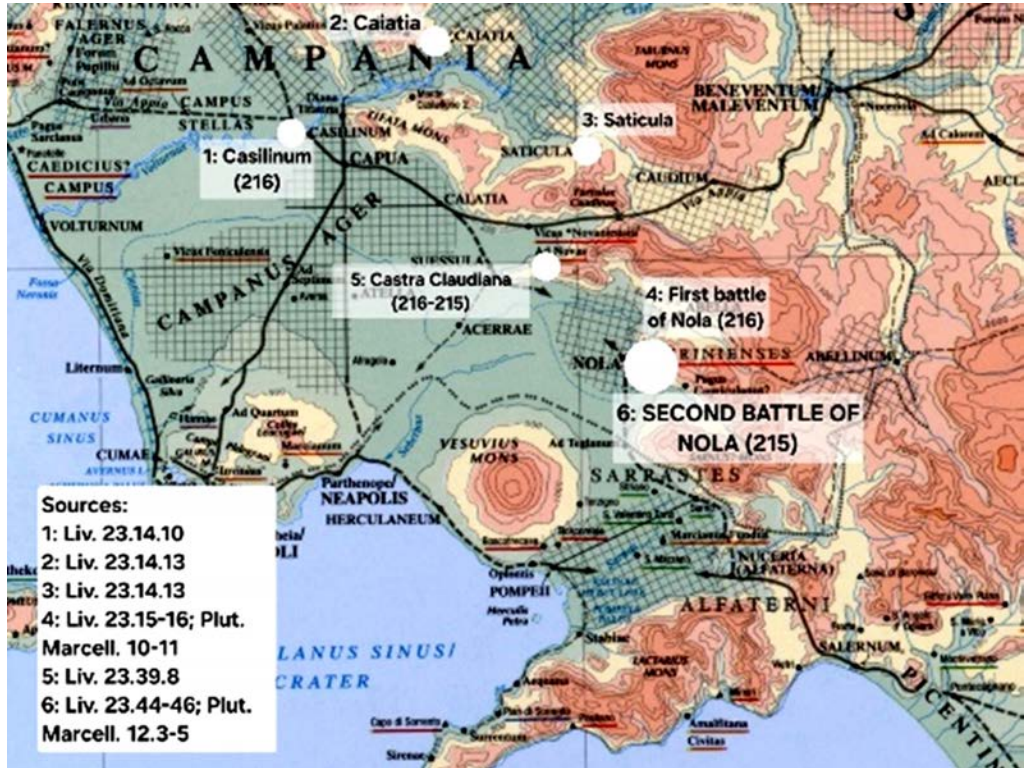


Fig. 2 : The map shows Marcellus' movements against Hannibal in the region around Nola between 216 and 215 BC. Livy, our main source, does not explain how Marcellus arrived at Casilinum (he was stationed in the area of Teanum Sidicinum earlier in 216). However, he surely started his campaign in Campania from this town. In 216, he marched along the Volturnus, crossed it near Caiatia, and headed to Nola, where he fought his first, smaller battle against Hannibal. After the battle, as Hannibal raided Campania, Marcellus encamped on the hills above Suessula (in an encampment defined by Livy "castra Claudiana"), where he remained until early 215, when Fabius Maximus sent him to fight Hannibal near Nola once again. (Elaboration by the Author of the map in Barrington's Atlas of the Greek and Roman world (n. 44).

οὐ μὴν οὐδ' οἱ τοῖς καταστροφάσιν ἐπιβεβηκότες ἄπρακτον εἶχον τὴν φιλοτιμίαν, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἐκ πολλοῦ διαστήματος ἐφεσθηκότες ἐτόξευον κατὰ τὸ συνεχές, καὶ ταχὺ ὁ τόπος ἦν βελῶν πλήρης; οἱ δ' αἰεὶ προσιόντες ἐγγυτέρω τὰς λόγχας ἠκόνηζον, οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀμυνομένους ἐπιβάτας, οἱ δ' ἐπ' αὐτοὺς βαλεῖν φιλοτιμούμενοι τοὺς κυβερνήτας; ὁπότε δὲ συνεισεῖαν αἱ ναῦς, τοῖς τε δόρασιν ἠγωνίζοντο καὶ κατὰ τὰς προσαγωγὰς εἰς τὰς τῶν πολεμίων τριήρεις μεθαλλόμενοι τοῖς ξίφεσιν ἀλλήλους ἡμίοντο.²³

23 Diod. 13.46.1.

Nor did the men whose position was on the decks fail to maintain the zeal which brooked no failure; but some, while still at a considerable distance from the enemy, kept up a stream of arrows, and soon the space was full of missiles, while others, each time that they drew near, would hurl their javelins, some doing their best to strike the defending marines and others the enemy pilots themselves; and whenever the ships would come close together, they would not only fight with their spears but at the moment of contact would also leap over the enemy's triremes and carry on the contest with their swords.

Diodorus' account is quite precise²⁴, and offers some precious insight into the fighting style of the marines at sea. While some (in all likelihood, the *toxotai*, the archers who constituted together with the *epibatai* the complement of marines on a trireme) shot arrows, the other soldiers could employ three different combat styles, depending on the distance between the triremes: they could either hurl javelins or, when the ships drew close, try to pierce the enemies with their spears, and eventually jump onto the enemy's deck and fight with their swords. This is a very interesting reference to the employment of spears (along with other weapons) in hand-to-hand fighting from one ship to another. In Diodorus' text, as well as in the other references to the *epibatai*, nothing implies that their spears were different to the normal hoplite spears, although one might suppose that the naval soldiers could benefit from longer shafts, which would allow them to reach the enemies more easily. However, Plato testifies to the possibility of experimenting with different kinds of long-range melee weapons on the ships. In his *Laches*, one of the characters, the experienced soldier Laches, ridicules a man named Stesilaus, an instructor in tactics, who went to sea with a *δορυδρέπανον*, a sort of halberd made up of a scythe mounted on a spear²⁵. This man tried to strike the enemies (while his comrades likely used spears) with this weapon, but it got entangled into the enemy's rigging, and he was unable to recover it, much to every-

24 According to the commentary of Delfino AMBAGLIO, *Diodoro Siculo, Biblioteca Storica, libro XIII: commento storico*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2008, p. 79, the abundance of details is due to Diodorus' reliance on a war bulletin: "continua la descrizione della battaglia con ricchezza di particolari certamente desumibile in origine da qualche bollettino di guerra". Ultimately, Diodorus' dependence on Ephorus is probable (AMBAGLIO, cit., pp. x-xi and 77-79), but it is likely that Ephorus himself took the details from another source (the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia?*), which in turn employed an Athenian war bulletin. The description of the battle is more detailed than – and different from – the one found in Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.1.4-7).

25 Plato *Lach.* 183c-184a.

one's derision. It is unclear what end Stesilaus had in mind for this weapon²⁶. At any rate, Plato implies that it was customary for the men on two enemy ships to try and hit each other as the vessels were passing by each other, and that weapons different from a regular spear could be used to this end. A passage in Herodotus about Egyptian marines attests to the existence, still at the time of Xerxes' expedition, of peculiar δόρατά ναύμαχα²⁷. As Herodotus does not describe them, it is unclear whether they were similar to Homer's ναύμαχα, and the author doesn't ever mention them as part of the panoply of the Greeks, although it is not impossible that some were used.

Overall, the scanty evidence allows to trace a picture of Greek naval battles in which spears could play an important role, and in which long pikes specifically intended for use at sea could be employed, although the evidence for the continuous existence of such weapons is lacking. This picture might prove helpful, as a reference for comparison, to understand the general context of Plutarch's statement about the employment of long spears by Marcellus' troops. The texts considered here show how spears could be useful in the event of a naval battle, and attest to the development of peculiar long pikes for these battles at least in some cases in the Greek world. On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that the evidence discussed in this section does not relate to Roman warfare. A more precise contextualisation and attempted explanation of Plutarch's comment must obviously be primarily based on evidence pertaining to the Roman world. It is therefore now time to return to this latter, to investigate the differences and similarities to this Greek picture, and to assess whether the employment of 'naval pikes' is detectable in Roman warfare as well.

26 Adam SCHWARTZ, *Reinstating the hoplite: arms, armour and phalanx fighting in archaic and classical Greece*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2007, pp. 230-232 supposes that this weapon might have been meant to bridge the gap between long thrusting spears and slashing weapons; interestingly, Strabo (4.4.1) uses the word δορυδρέπανον to define the hooks employed by Caesar against the Veneti (see below), while according to Polybius (21.27.4) it was used during sieges.

27 Herod. 7.89.3. These Egyptians formed part of the naval contingents raised by Xerxes for his invasion of Greece. Alongside the naval spears, they carried concave shields, big axes, and long swords.

The fighting style of the marines of the Roman republican fleets

For our sources, it was commonplace to assume that Roman soldiers, even when fighting at sea, were more courageous than the foreigners, and especially than the Carthaginians, who could, in turn, be better sailors²⁸. Another cliché, closely related to this one, is the idea according to which the Punic fleets tried to win their battles by manoeuvring, while the Romans tended to rely more heavily on their marines, fighting ‘as if on land’²⁹. It is undeniable that boarding operations were an important part of Roman naval battles³⁰, although one should be careful to trace a clear-cut distinction between Romans and Carthaginians in this regard³¹. Melee fighting on the enemy’s decks, as well as before and during the boarding operation, was very important, as was the exchange of missiles: the overall scheme is the same as the one which Diodorus depicts for the battle of Abydos. While the exchange of arrows and javelins is not particularly relevant here³², some passages concerning hand to hand fighting deserve to be highlighted.

Unfortunately, the sources provide extremely scanty details. In many cases, they just emphasise the *virtus Romana*, which points to some kind of melee (sometimes explicitly mentioned), but does not tell much about its characteristics³³. It is quite easy to find references to boardings, but, once again, these are

28 Polyb. 6.52.8-10 (who clearly adopts a Roman point of view); Diod. 23.2.

29 See Liv. 21.50.1-2: *ubi in altum evecti sunt, Romanus conserere pugnam et ex propinquo vires conferre velle; contra eludere Poenus et arte non vi rem gerere naviumque quam virorum aut armorum malle certamen facere* [“Once at sea, the Romans wanted to join battle and match their strength against the enemies at close quarters. The Phoenicians, on the contrary, preferred to manoeuvre; to conduct the affair by strategy, not by force, and to make it a contest rather of ships than of men or arms”].

30 John S. MORRISON, *Greek and Roman oared warships, 399-30 BC*, Oxbow, Oxford, 1996, pp. 49-50; Philip DE SOUZA, «Battle, B: Naval battles and sieges», in Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman warfare*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 434-460 (pp. 434-441); Domenico CARRO «*Transilire armati in hostium navem: il corvo di Polibio e l’arrembaggio romano, la più redditizia delle azioni tattiche in mare aperto*», *Nuova Antologia Militare* 1 (2020), pp. 3-28.

31 For the previous wars between the Carthaginians and the Syracusans in Sicily, Diodorus mentions some instances of Punic boarding operations in battle (Diod. 13, 88, 3-5; 19, 107, 2; 20, 5; 20, 32, 3-5 and above all 14.60.3).

32 Missile weapons are quite frequently mentioned (for instance, Polyb. 10.12.1; Liv. 28.30.9; 30.10; Caes. *Gall.* 4.25.1; App. *Pun.* 25); and this is a recurrent theme also in the epic descriptions of naval battles (BIGGS, cit., 327-346).

33 See for instance Liv. 36.44 and 37.30, where the commanders remind their men of the su-



Fig. 3. In this relief of the late I century C. E., the infantrymen appear armed with spear and shield, but it's impossible to tell whether the spear is a simple hasta or a true boarding pike. The relief was discovered in Palestrina in 1765 by Winckelmann, who held the marble tablet as part of a donation to the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia. Modern research, according to the latest studies, assumes that the relief was actually part of a tomb built by a citizen of Praeneste, who probably sailed in Octavian's fleet at Actium in 31 BC. Photo Rabax63, 2018. CC SA 4.0 International (Wikimedia Commons).

almost always very fleeting. Sometimes, one can safely infer that there was some kind of exchange of blows from one ship to another. Soldiers attempting to leap onto an enemy vessel, or employing boarding bridges, could be quite vulnerable: Polybius describes a kind of *testudo* that the legionaries employed while crossing their boarding bridges during the battle of Mylae³⁴. For his battle against the Ve-

priority of the Roman *virtus*; Caesar (and the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum*) emphasise this aspect of the naval battles (e.g., *Caes. Gall.* 3.14; *Bell. Alex.* 46): this is particularly evident for the battle against the Veneti, as argued by Brice ERICKSON, «Falling masts, rising masters: the ethnography of virtue in Caesar's account of the Veneti», *American Journal of Philology* 123 (2002), pp. 601-622).

³⁴ Polyb. 1.22.9-10. The description refers to the peculiar boarding bridges known as *corvi*,

neti at sea (56 BC), Caesar relates that his soldiers were able to grapple the Gauls' ships, much taller than the Romans' own, and then could scale them³⁵. The fight is compared to a siege, and it is easy to imagine the defenders' resistance to the boarding. In some cases, Caesar mentions hand to hand fighting in connection with boarding³⁶, without providing details. Going back to Polybius, who stresses the importance of a skilled force of marines³⁷, despite the lack of details, some cases of boarding can be detected³⁸. As in Caesar, in some of these instances some kind of fighting before the boarding should be presumed. A fight between the soldiers from opposing ships is mentioned for the battle of Chios (201 BC), during which the Macedonian marines defended themselves (presumably with their spears) from the assaults of the Rhodians. The Rhodians, on their part, were afraid of ramming the Macedonian ships, as the soldiers of King Philip were valiant and ready to strike the enemies as soon as they got close enough: indeed, Polybius says that they continued to fight, from their ships, even while they were sinking³⁹. This battle did not involve Roman units; its description, however, bears some resemblance to that of the battle of Cape Ecnomus (256 BC). In this instance, some of the Carthaginian ships were afraid of coming into close quarters with the Romans, as they feared they might be grappled and attacked⁴⁰.

Polybius implies that it was normally customary to get close to the enemies, either to ram them or to attack them. In this context, it is interesting to turn to Livy. During the naval battle of Lilybaeum (218 BC), according to the historian,

whose existence is contested (for two opposing views, see the most recent contributions by Christa STEINBY, *The Roman republican navy: from the sixth century to 167 BC*, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 2007, pp. 87-104 and CARRO, cit., who refute their existence, and Claudio VACANTI, *Guerra per la Sicilia e guerra della Sicilia: il ruolo delle città siciliane nel primo conflitto romano-punico*, Jovene, Napoli, 2012, pp. 70-75, who accepts it, with previous literature), but is not relevant here: it is safe to assume that this arrangement proved useful on any kind of large boarding bridge.

35 Caes. *Gall.* 3.14-15. To grapple the ships, the Romans had had to cut the enemy's riggings with long scythes, which Caesar compares to those employed during sieges (*falces muralles*). On Caesar's narrative, see ERICKSON, cit., pp. 611-613.

36 Caes. *Civ.* 1.57-58; 2.6; cf. *Bell. Alex.* 10-11; 16.

37 Polyb. 1.61.

38 E.g., Polyb. 1.23 (the famous battle near Mylae); 1.47.8; 1.51; 2.10.3-4.

39 Polyb. 16.4.13. The account of this battle is quite precise. For a discussion on Polybius' sources, see Frank W. WALBANK, *A historical commentary on Polybius*, vol. 2, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, pp. 503-504.

40 Polyb. 1.28.11.12.

the Carthaginians were inferior to the Romans in terms of their marines. Therefore, *sicuti conserta navis esset, haudquaquam par numerus armatorum ex ea pugnabat*⁴¹. Livy represents the struggle between the Romans, who grappled their enemies, and the Carthaginians, who fought from their own ship (*ex ea*), presumably to prevent a boarding, or just to defend themselves from the Romans.

The passages quoted lead one to think that fights between the marines of two opposing fleets, during the middle to late republic, were important in the event of a sea battle, either in the context of a boarding, or just in the attempt to kill or injure the opposing marines without boarding. As already remarked, however, the sources do not provide many details, and they appear to take the tactics and fighting style of the marines for granted. So far, none of the quoted texts provides a reference to the employment of spears. A few other texts, however, prove a little more telling.

The first one is Livy's account of the battle fought between the Roman fleet, commanded by D. Quinctius, and the Tarentine one, at the orders of Democrates (210 BC), and in particular of the confrontation between Quinctius' own ship and that of the Tarentine Nico Percon⁴²:

*Itaque ex utraque parte signo dato cum rostris concurrissent neque retro navem inhiherent nec dirimi ab se hostem paterentur, quam quis indeptus navem erat ferrea iniecta manu, ita conserebant ex propinquo pugnam ut non missilibus tantum, sed gladiis etiam prope conlato pede gereretur res. Prorae inter se iunctae haerebant, puppes alieno remigio circumagebantur: Ita in arto stipatae erant naves ut vix ullum telum in mari vanum intercideret; frontibus velut pedestris acies urgebant, perviaeque naves pugnantibus erant. [...] Hic Quinctium simul pugnantem hortantemque suos incautum hasta transfigit. Ille ut praeceps cum armis procidit ante proram, victor Tarentinus in turbatam duce amisso navem inpigre transgressus...*⁴³

Accordingly after the signal had been given on both sides, and they had encountered each other with their beaks and did not reverse their motion with oars nor allow the enemy to cast loose from them, a commander closing in on a ship would throw grappling-irons on it, and they engaged in a battle at such close quarters that they fought not only with missiles, but also with swords, almost man to man. The bows in contact would not de-

41 Liv. 21.50.3: "when a ship was grappled, the men at arms in her were greatly outnumbered by their enemies".

42 On the battle of Tarentum, see Luca BELTRAMINI, *Commento al libro XXVI di Tito Livio*, ETS, Pisa, 2020, pp. 377-384.

43 Liv. 26.39.12-17.

tach themselves, the sterns were swung about by the efforts of the enemy's oarsmen. So closely massed together were the ships that hardly a missile fell without effect between them into the sea. Forming each a front, like a battle-line on land, they tried to push each other back, and the ships were a highway for the combatants. [...] As Quinctius was fighting and at the same time encouraging his men, Nico ran him through with a spear while off his guard. When Quinctius with his weapons fell forward over the bow, the victorious Tarentine boldly crossed over on to the ship thrown into confusion by the loss of its commander.

This text is probably the best description of the operations of the Roman (and Greek) marines during a sea battle in the middle republic. The ships close in on each other, and they might be either grappled or held in place by the rowers. While the vessels are still distant, the crews shower missiles upon each other, and the exchange of projectiles goes on for the whole duration of the battle. As the ships become interlocked, the marines start to fight at close quarters, forming a sort of battle line on their decks, with their swords and (at least in the case of Nico) spears. If they are able to dispatch their opponents, they might leap onto the enemy's deck, and try to capture the ship. Livy's description shows very well, for once, how a boarding operation could be preceded by infantry combat among the marines from the ships. It is reasonable to think that spears could prove particularly useful, as they could enable the soldiers to stab each other from further afield⁴⁴. Once on the enemy's ship, they could probably use their swords, as Diodorus says⁴⁵. One must note, however, that in this passage the employment of a spear is explicitly mentioned only for Nico, that is, for a Greek soldier.

A specific mention of the employment of spears in a sea battle can possibly be detected in Silius Italicus' description of a fight near Syracuse (212 BC)⁴⁶. The poet mentions a blow dealt by Laronius to Polyphemus (a Greek admiral who was trying to steer his ship away from those of the Romans) with a spear (*hasta*). However, the poetic nature of this text makes it hardly decisive: indeed, Silius even calls javelins and throwing spears *hastae*.

A passage from Plutarch's *Life of Antony* is more revealing. According to the biographer, the battle of Actium (31 BC) was very similar to a land battle, or to a siege:

44 MORRISON, cit., 286.

45 Again, Diod. 13.46.1.

46 Sil. 14.534.

ἦν οὖν πεζομαχία προσφερῆς ὁ ἀγών: τὸ δὲ ἀληθέστερον εἰπεῖν, τειχομαχία. τρεῖς γὰρ ἅμα καὶ τέσσαρες περὶ μίαν τῶν Ἀντωνίου συνείχοντο, γέρροις καὶ δόρασι καὶ κοντοῖς χρωμένων καὶ πυροβόλοις: οἱ δὲ Ἀντωνίου καὶ καταπέλταις ἀπὸ ξυλίνων πυργῶν ἔβαλλον.⁴⁷

The struggle was therefore like a land battle; or, to speak more truly, like the storming of a walled town. For three or four of Caesar's vessels were engaged at the same time about one of Antony's, and the crews fought with wicker shields and spears and punting-poles and fiery missiles; the soldiers of Antony also shot with catapults from wooden towers.

Here the reader finds, as already in Caesar, the comparison between a sea battle and a siege. The reason is that the soldiers tried to hit each other from their decks with missiles and spears. This time, spears are mentioned (δόρυ, κοντός), together with arrows and catapult projectiles. Cassius Dio describes the weapons employed in a similar way (δόρατα μακρά)⁴⁸. Of course, their testimony does not allow to presume that spears were part of the normal equipment of the Roman marines, nor that they were already in use at the time of the second Punic war. One last text, however, helps to shed some light on this problem.

In 205 BC, Scipio, the future Africanus, was allowed to accept voluntary contributions from the allies to build and equip a fleet to hold Sicily, and then to invade Africa. The list of these contributions provided by Livy is very detailed⁴⁹; Arretium was particularly generous: among the other things, they promised

*tria milia scutorum, galeas totidem, pila gaesa hastas longas, milium quinquaginta summam pari cuiusque generis numero expleturos, secures rura falces alveolos molas, quantum in quadraginta longas naves opus esset.*⁵⁰

three thousand shields, an equal number of helmets; and that they would furnish a total of fifty thousand javelins, short spears and lances, with an equal proportion of each type; also axes, shovels, sickles, baskets and hand-mills, as many as were needed for forty war-ships.

47 Plut. *Ant.* 66.2.

48 Dio Cass. 50.34.7. The historian refers to a later phase of the battle. On the battle of Actium, see Carsten H. LANGE, «The battle of Actium: a reconsideration», *Classical Quarterly* 61 (2011), pp. 608-623, with cited literature.

49 It is impossible, unfortunately, to tell what Livy's source was. Some authors supposed that these 'voluntary contributions' were in reality sanctions imposed on the Etruscans for their filo-Punic stance (see the *status quaestionis* in Paul JAL, Tite-Live, *Histoire Romaine, tome XVIII: livre XXVIII*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995, pp. 138-139, nt. 15). In this case, one might suppose that these data originally came from some sort of official document.

50 Liv. 28.45.16-17; cf. MORRISON, cit., 354.

It is important to focus on the kind of weapons the Romans needed for their ships. Besides defensive armament (shields and helmets), marines were expected to have *pila*, *gaesa* and *hastae longae*. *Pila* and *gaesa* are missile weapons⁵¹: as seen, it is quite common to hear of javelins, throwing spears, and projectiles in general in the event of a sea battle. The long spears (*hastae longae*), on the other hand, are thrusting pikes⁵², presumably similar to the ones Plutarch mentions at Actium. Here a reader has the clearest mention of the employment of thrusting spears during naval battles of the middle republic. Once again, it would perhaps be rash to assume that these weapons were always present on Roman ships. After all, Livy mentions them in the context of the fitting of just one fleet, and the evidence is, as always, very scanty.

These texts, however, provide useful hints. Unfortunately, these hints are not definitively corroborated by the archaeological and iconographic evidence. While the employment of spears on Roman warships is both archaeologically and iconographically attested⁵³, weapon finds from Roman shipwrecks have been relatively scanty (at least in terms of melee weapons), and they do not allow modern historians to grasp a coherent picture of the reality of Roman sea-fighting during the Republic. Moreover, while some traces of wood are preserved, especially in the spearhead sockets, the remains do not allow to reconstruct the length of the shafts of the spears⁵⁴. Indeed, in modern-day manuals about Roman weapons, there is almost no mention of the long spears Plutarch writes about⁵⁵. In terms of iconography, on the same lines, clear representations of *naumachiae* from the republican

51 The *gaesum* appears to have been a type of javelin, used as a missile (Liv. 8.8.5 distinguishes it from the *hasta*, the thrusting spear; cf. Caes. *Gall.* 3.4.1). According to Servius (*Aen.* 7.664) it was originally a Gallic weapon.

52 Livy describes, for instance, the Macedonian *sarisae* as long *hastae* (Liv. 31.9.10; 32.17.13; 33.8.13; 36.18.7; 37.42.4; 44.41.7). This was also the name of the shorter thrusting spears of the *triararii* (Liv. 8.8.10). On the Roman thrusting spears, see again the authors mentioned above (nt. 11).

53 From an archaeological point of view, see Dhillon R. TISDALE, *A Catalog of Armament from ancient Mediterranean shipwrecks, 1⁴th - 1st centuries BCE*, Unpublished Master of Science thesis, University of Texas, 2021, pp. 101, 108 and 131. As for iconography, the catalogue in MORRISON, cit., is invaluable. See in particular pp. 243-245, where the presence of thrusting spears in the iconography of the sea-battles against the Carthaginians is highlighted.

54 TISDALE, cit., pp. 149-150, with further bibliography.

55 See again the authors cited above (nt. 11). A notable exception is COUISSIN, cit., p. 213: see below.

times are too few. Regrettably, the main body of the evidence for the employment of peculiar sea-pikes by the Roman marines comes from our literary sources.

The texts presented, in short, allow to state the importance of melee combat among the marines of the Roman fleets and those of their enemies. They also suggest that, in some cases at least, these fights involved long spears. Livy's passage appears to imply that these were part of the normal equipment of the naval soldiers; although this cannot be proved conclusively, the conclusions reached seem to make sense of one of the questions raised about Marcellus' tactical device at Nola: the 'long spears of the naval soldiers' employed by his legionaries were, in all likelihood, exactly these weapons.

Who were the naval soldiers?

Plutarch's reference raises another question, one less relevant to the issues considered here, but still worth exploring: who were the 'naval soldiers' who used the long spears? Were they regular legionaries stationed on the ships, or were there some units of marines? While in the imperial fleets the *classici milites* were surely separated from the legionaries⁵⁶, this is much less certain for the third or second century BC.

This issue is very difficult to address, as the sources are often quite imprecise in the terminology they employ to define legionaries and naval soldiers. For example, Polybius sometimes distinguishes the 'naval forces' from the 'land soldiers', also implying that the former comprised marines as well⁵⁷. However, he also refers to legionaries who were being transported by ship, and were meant to disembark and fight on land, as a *στράτευμα τῆς ναυτικῆς δυνάμεως*⁵⁸. The ma-

56 See Jasper OORTHUIJS, «Marines and mariners in the Roman imperial fleets», in Lukas De Blois and Elio Lo Cascio (Eds.), *The impact of the Roman army (200 BC – AD 476)*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2007, pp. 169-180. The author convincingly stresses the distinction between the naval soldiers and the rowers and sailors. See also p. 171, nt. 10, with some interesting comments on the creation of proper *legiones classicae* in the second half of the first century BC.

57 For the second Punic war, see Polyb. 3.76; 8.3.1-2. Regarding the first Punic war, see, for instance, Polyb. 1.21.4 and 1.23.1, where the *πεζικά στρατόπεδα* are distinguished from the *ναυτική δύναμις*, which comprised the marines who fought in the battle of Mylae.

58 Polyb. 1.26.4-7.

rines were surely a distinct group from the rowers⁵⁹, but even in this case ancient authors sometimes confuse the two groups⁶⁰.

The reader sometimes discovers that, during the second Punic war, groups of soldiers, or even entire legions, were raised specifically for service in the navy. This is particularly apparent in a Livian passage which refers to the period immediately after the defeat of Cannae. Marcellus, who was in command of a fleet, sent back to Rome as a defence force 1,500 soldiers, *quos in classem scriptos habebat*. At the same time, he sent a *legio classica* (the *legio tertia*, according to Livy) to Teanum Sidicinum⁶¹. This passage is very interesting, for several reasons. First, as noted, it leads one to think that a legion could be raised as a *legio classica*, a legion of marines. Second, it shows that, despite the original naval character of the force, it could be re-employed as a normal infantry legion: Marcellus left his fleet near Ostia, and the soldiers were sent to Teanum on land duty. Third, the mention of this unit as a numbered legion seems to imply that it had been raised in a normal way, and that it was no different from the other standard ones, apart from the fact that it was originally meant to serve on naval duty. On the one hand, then, the reader finds that the Romans could enlist soldiers as marines; on the other, one learns that these marines were probably interchangeable with the regular legionaries.

This picture appears to be confirmed by the – admittedly limited – remaining evidence. In some other cases, as said, soldiers seem to have been recruited specifically for the fleets⁶². Sometimes, this is not entirely evident, but the consistent mentioning of one legion or group of soldiers as attached to a fleet suggests that these soldiers had been enlisted as marines, as well⁶³. This is not surprising: from

59 *Contra* Alfredo VALVO, «I *socii navales* e l’affermarsi di Roma come potenza marittima», in Francisco de Oliveira, Pascal Thiery and Raquel Vilaça (Eds.), *Mar greco-latino*, Imprensa de Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, 2006, pp. 179-192 (pp. 185-188) and CARRO, cit., pp. 20-21. Valvo notes that Livy 9.38.2-3 says that the *socii navales* disembarked and raided the land. However, it was not impossible for rowers to be armed and re-assigned to military duty on land (Cato *Or. Fr.* 48Cug.; Liv. 9.38.2; 26.17.2; 27.17.2; 34.29.5; 37.16.11), and in other instances Livy makes clear that the *socii navales* and the marines were two different categories (Liv. 21.61.2; 23.1.2 and again, above all, 37.16.11).

60 Liv. 26.48.6, for instance, calls a marine a *socius navalis*, only to return to the term *classici milites* a little later.

61 Liv. 22.57.8.

62 Liv. 22.11.9; 30.27.8-9. *Classici milites* are also mentioned at Liv. 21.61.2.

63 Liv. 23.21.2; 24.44.5; 26.1.12; 27.8.15-16; 27.22; 30.41.

Livy's text, it is clear that, during the second Punic war, soldiers were levied whenever there was need of them. In the event of the fitting of a new fleet, it is only to be expected that a complement of soldiers was recruited to man it. This, however, does not mean that these soldiers were a separate group from the other legionaries. Another passage proves telling on the matter. In 203 BC, a new fleet of 40 ships was built for the defence of the coasts of Sicily. Another 40 ships were manned for Sardinia, and again 40 had to patrol the coasts of Italy⁶⁴. The marines for these ships were found in different ways. For the first fleet, M. Pomponius obtained 3,000 new recruits, probably from a new *dilectus*⁶⁵. For the second, led by Cn. Octavius, the praetor P. Cornelius Lentulus was required to provide 2,000 men from his land forces in Sardinia itself⁶⁶. For the third, the consuls were instructed by the senators to carry out another *dilectus*, recruiting 3,000 new soldiers⁶⁷. Clearly, then, the marines could be either recruited *ex novo* or be provided through the reassignment of land soldiers⁶⁸.

Indeed, the sources imply that the two categories of land soldiers and marines were highly interchangeable and not very different from each other⁶⁹. Soldiers could be enlisted to fight on land, and then be transferred to the fleet (as in the case of Octavius and Lentulus), or *vice versa* (as in the case of Marcellus). On the other hand, naval soldiers could disembark to fight together with the other legionaries⁷⁰, while land soldiers appear to have been often employed as marines⁷¹. In some cases, the sources point out that the best of them were selected to serve

64 Liv. 30.2.1-6.

65 Liv. 30.2.1: *tria milia militum sunt scripta*; 3.2.3: *M. Pomponius [...] novos milites ex Italia advectos in naves imposuit*.

66 Liv. 30.2.4: *Lentulus praetor duo milia militum dare in naves iussus*.

67 Liv. 30.2.6: *tria milia militum in eam classem ex decreto patrum consules scripserunt*.

68 Two instances of such a reassignment include the fleet in Sicily at the beginning of the war (Liv. 21, 49, 8-9: the praetor manned his ships with soldiers from the garrisons) and a new fleet created in 215, manned with soldiers from Varro's army (Liv. 23.38.7-9).

69 The only instance in which the differences are highlighted is the siege of new Carthage. Soldiers from the fleet took part in the siege, and a marine, Sex. Digitius, quarrelled with a legionary, Q. Tiberilius, over the honour of receiving the mural crown. According to Livy (26.48.5-13) this quarrel degenerated into a fight between all the naval soldiers and all the legionaries (*stare hinc legionarios milites, hinc classicos*). In this case, some degree of *esprit de corps* should be assumed by the two groups.

70 For example, Scipio's marines took part in the siege of New Carthage (Liv. 26.48). Cf. Polyb. 3.76 and, for the first Punic war, Polyb. 1.41.4.

71 The clearest case is a naval battle fought by Scipio in Africa: Liv. 30.10.

as marines for a specific battle⁷².

This extreme interchangeability leads one to think that, in actual fact, there were not two separate groups of soldiers. It is probable that the Romans simply recruited as many soldiers as they needed, and then split them between the land armies and the fleets. Indeed, at the beginning of a year, Livy often mentions the total amount of ships and soldiers, without any distinction among the latter⁷³. The same Roman citizens who were liable for military service on land could be recruited for the navy⁷⁴, and a soldier could be transferred from land to naval duty, or *vice versa*, and could fight on land or at sea depending on the circumstances. All of these soldiers were, in all likelihood, simply legionaries: as noted, Marcellus' *classarii* at Ostia were simply men from the third legion. The only slight difference might be that Roman colonists could be recruited as marines, but were exempt from land service⁷⁵. As for Latin and Italian allies, they were bound to provide crews and marines together with their ships⁷⁶.

This does not necessarily mean that, when they took up service on the ships, Roman legionaries were armed in exactly the same way as their colleagues. While it should be assumed that their panoply was overall quite similar, it is pos-

72 Liv. 22.19.4; Polyb. 3.95.5; for the first Punic war, see Polyb. 1.51.3 and 1.61.3.

73 See above all Liv. 21.17.2, at the beginning of the war; cf. Liv. 22.37.13; 24.11.5-6.

74 According to Thiel, a passage in which Polybius writes that the *capite censi* were not liable for military service, but were employed εις την ναυτικὴν χρειαὴν (Polyb. 6.19.3) entails that the *proletarii* served as marines, and not as legionaries (Johannes H. THIEL, *Studies on the history of Roman sea-power in republican times*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1946, pp. 12; 184-185; 189-190; 196; 277). As Frank W. WALBANK, *A historical commentary on Polybius*, vol. 1, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957, p. 698 notes, however, 'the more natural interpretation is of service in the crew'. One should note that in the only other instance in which Polybius writes of a ναυτικὴ χρεια (Polyb. 6.52.9), he refers to rowing.

75 Liv. 27.38.3-5 says that in 207 BC the *maritimi coloni* refused to provide *milites*, as they maintained that they had an exemption. The same happened in 191 BC (36.3.5-6); in this case, the senate *decrevit vacationem rei navalis eis colonis non esse*. Livy lists Ostia, Alsium, Antium, Anxur, Minturnae, Sinuessa, and Sena in the first case, Ostia, Fregenae, Castrum Novum, Pyrgi, Antium, Terracina, Minturnae, and Sinuessa in the second. It is probable, however, that the Roman colonists were employed, in the second case, as rowers rather than as marines. On the military importance of these maritime Roman colonies, see Saskia T. ROSELAAR, «*Assidui* or *proletarii*? Property in Roman citizen colonies and the *vacatio militiae*», *Mnemosyne* 62 (2009), pp. 609-623, with further bibliography.

76 Virgilio ILARI, *Gli Italici nelle strutture militari romane*, Giuffrè, Milano, 1974, pp. 105-114. See in particular Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.60.

sible that commanders armed their soldiers in a slightly differing manner when they were fighting a naval battle. According to Livy, Scipio Africanus trained his legionaries and marines in two different ways⁷⁷, which implies that they were meant to be able to fight with different techniques, and perhaps with different weapons. One of these differences may have been, as suggested by Plutarch and Livy, the employment of peculiarly long spears. This brings us back to the matter of Marcellus' battle at Nola: where could he have sourced these long spears from? Marcellus was not, after all, in charge of a naval unit. He had commanded a fleet, however, during the previous year, near Ostia. As mentioned, he had sent the marines partly to Teanum Sidicinum, on land duty, and partly to Rome, as a garrison⁷⁸. Clark, therefore, supposed that they might have left their maritime weapons at Nola⁷⁹. This is possible, although it might also be that some long spears were already present in Nola; after all, the long spears for Scipio's fleet in 205 BC were provided by Arretium, which was hardly a maritime city.

Making sense of Marcellus' tactical device

If the conclusions reached in the previous pages are correct, Roman naval soldiers could be equipped with long spears, the δόρατα τῶν ναυμάχων μέγала of which Plutarch speaks. There is no reason to refute his statement about the fact that Marcellus distributed these to the legionaries at Nola. What meaning, then, should one attribute to this decision?

According to Plutarch, Marcellus wanted to allow his own soldiers to pierce their enemies from afar, as they did not employ either javelins or long stabbing spears. This is, however, a weird statement, as Plutarch elsewhere agrees with Polybius (and with Livy) about the superiority of the Roman short stabbing weapons over the long thrusting spears of the Macedonians. It is well-known that Polybius, in the famous passage in which he investigated the advantages and disadvantages of the phalanx and legion, maintained that their short swords allowed the Romans to be more agile, and therefore to have the upper hand over the Mace-

77 Liv. 26.51.3-8. The legionaries trained on land, while rowers and marines were engaged in a mock-naval battle (cf. Polyb. 10.20). Something very similar is mentioned by Liv. 29.22.2 for the same Scipio's troops in Sicily.

78 Liv. 22.57.8.

79 CLARK, cit., pp. 169-170.

donians in any case, except in a head-to-head charge of the two formations⁸⁰. Livy repeats these concepts without altering them (as Polybius, he concedes the superiority of the phalanx only in a straight charge)⁸¹. Plutarch follows on the same lines, in his descriptions of the Roman battles in the East⁸². Moreover, the biographer's source in the passage about Marcellus was probably Polybius himself: the remark is not found in Livy, and it is known that Polybius was interested in the strengths and weaknesses of different weapons in relationship to each other⁸³. Indeed, in the *Histories* one can read a passage which is partially similar to Plutarch's comment: according to Polybius, in 223 BC, against the north Italian Gauls, C. Flaminius distributed to his first line of *hastati* the spears of the *triarii*⁸⁴. Polybius commends this decision⁸⁵, which was meant to check the first charge of the Gauls, whom, once arrested, could then be hit with the swords.

What, then, about Marcellus? Why does Plutarch (and maybe Polybius as well) think his decision to have been a wise one? As mentioned, Polybius con-

80 The famous excursus is at Polyb. 18.28-32. It has been quite extensively discussed: for a good interpretation, see Giovanni BRIZZI, «Ancora sul confronto tra legione e falange: qualche ulteriore considerazione», in S. Bianchetti *et al.* (Eds.), *Poikilma: studi in onore di Michele R. Cataudella in occasione del 60° compleanno*, Agorà, La Spezia, 2001, pp. 189-200. About the alleged superiority of Roman flexibility, see in particular 18.32.10-11. About the uselessness of a phalanx in any situation different from a frontal charge, see 18.31.2. About the discussions between the ancient supporters of the phalanx and those of the legion, see Gabriele BRUSA, «Macedonum phalangem et tunc stetisse et [...] semper mansuram invictam: la querelle culturale militare tra legione e falange dall'epoca della conquista romana al secondo secolo d.C.», in Isabella Bossolino and Chiara Zanchi (Eds.), *Decennalia dei Cantieri d'Autunno*, Pavia University Press, Pavia, 2023, pp. 203-214.

81 Livy repeats these Polybian concepts while discussing, as Polybius does, the advantages and disadvantages of the legion and phalanx (9.19.8-9). Writing about the battle of Pydna, he concedes that the Romans would have lost a frontal engagement (44.41.9).

82 Plut. *Flam.* 8 (on Cynoscephalae); *Aem.* 20 (on Pydna).

83 The entire comparison between legion and phalanx is centred on the armament. The Roman weapons are contrasted favourably with those of the Gauls as well (Polyb. 2.27.7-8; 2.33.1-4). However, even if Polybius was employed by Plutarch as a source in the passage about Marcellus, one has to think that the historian represented the outcome of the battle of Nola in a different way than Plutarch. According to the biographer himself, Polybius maintained that Marcellus never truly defeated Hannibal (Plut. *Comp. Pel. Marc.* 1.4-5).

84 Polyb. 2.33.4-6.

85 Although he attributes it not to Flaminius, but to his tribunes. On this bias against Flaminius in Polybius' account, see Rachel F. VISHNIA, «A case of "bad press"? Gaius Flaminius in ancient historiography», *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 181 (2012), pp. 27-45 (pp. 27-32), with further bibliography.



Fig. 4. A Punic gilded bronze cuirass from Ksour Essaf, 3rd-2nd century BCE. (Bardo National Museum, Tunisia) This image was first published on Flickr. Original image by Alexander van Loon. Uploaded by Mark Cartwright, published on 06 June 2016. The copyright holder has published this content under the following license: Creative Commons Attribution. This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation. When republishing on the web a hyperlink back to the original content source URL must be included. Please note that content linked from this page may have different licensing terms.

sidered the employment of long thrusting spears to be useful only in the case of a direct frontal charge, either by a Macedonian phalanx, or against the Gauls. As Plutarch appears to agree with him, two possibilities spring to mind in order to justify Marcellus' peculiar decision (and its appreciation by Plutarch). The first one is that, for some reason, the Carthaginians, more agile with their shorter weapons, could not outflank the Roman 'phalanx'. While Plutarch mentions only one battle, indeed, Livy divides the fight into two confrontations; the first one was just a sort of sallying forth from an entrance⁸⁶. It might be that, protected by the walls, the Romans chose to try to repel the Carthaginians with a vigorous charge. This interpretation is complicated by the fact that Plutarch's account appears to refer to Livy's second battle⁸⁷, which, according to the historian from Padua, was regularly fought on a plain and was hotly contested⁸⁸.

The other possibility is that the Carthaginians were fighting in a sort of phalanx, or at least that Plutarch (and Polybius) considered their formation to be a phalanx. In this case, Marcellus might have wanted to render it ineffective by deploying his own soldiers in a phalanx with longer spears, making the enemies unable to stab the Romans. This would explain Plutarch's praise: the battle would be a simple crush between two phalanxes, and the Roman one could have the upper hand thanks to the longer reach of its weapons. Indeed, Plutarch does not say that the Carthaginians were not lancers, but only that they fought with short spears (αἰχμαῖς), clearly shorter than those of the Romans⁸⁹. Two considerations might support this interpretation. The first is that Polybius thought of the Punic soldiers as phalangites: in his comparison between legion and phalanx, he cites Hannibal's victories as a possible way to postulate the phalanx' superiority to the legion⁹⁰. This is not a conclusive consideration, however, as the Polybian origin

86 Liv. 23.44.4.

87 In Plutarch, Marcellus attacked when he saw that the Carthaginians had dispersed to forage; this is the context of the second Livian battle. The number of the dead provided by the two authors is the same, as well.

88 Liv. 23.44.7: *sunt omnia campi circa Nolam*; 23.45.1: *proelium erat anceps; summa vi et duces hortabantur et milites pugnabant*.

89 LE BOHEC, cit., p. 195 compares their weapons to those of the Greek hoplites.

90 Polyb. 18.28.6.9. The author says that Hannibal then chose to arm his soldiers with Roman weapons (and does not consider the fact that some of his soldiers, like the Spaniards, were already equipped in a similar way to the Romans: Fernando QUESADA SANZ «Not so different: individual fighting techniques and small unit tactics of Roman and Iberian armies

of Plutarch's pass is probable, but not demonstrable. The second has to do with one of the questions raised in the introduction: why didn't Marcellus just use the spears of the *triarii*?

It is unclear when, exactly, the *triarii* swapped their spears for the *pila* already used by the *hastati* and *principes*. By the time of Caesar, there was almost certainly no difference in armament between the three lines⁹¹; Polybius and Livy, on the other hand, write that in the early and middle republic they carried thrusting spears⁹². Polybius' statement is the most important, as the author refers it to the period of the battle of Cannae⁹³, which was fought in 216 BC, the year before Marcellus' battle at Nola. It is very unlikely that some sort of reform had been carried out between the two battles, and at any rate, had Polybius known of such a reform, he would probably have mentioned it⁹⁴. There is no reason to believe, therefore, that Marcellus' *triarii* did not carry spears. These spears, however, were probably shorter than those of the Macedonians⁹⁵, as they were wielded with just one hand⁹⁶. They were probably comparable to those of the earlier Greek hoplites⁹⁷, and maybe to the Carthaginians' αἰχμή mentioned by Plutarch. The 'long spears of the naval soldiers' mentioned by Livy and Plutarch, on the other hand, were, in all likelihood, longer than these⁹⁸. Both authors define them as 'long', and in Livy this term, referred to a spear, describes the long Macedonian sarissa⁹⁹.

within the framework of warfare in the Hellenistic age», *Pallas* 70 (2006), pp. 245-263), but considers the Carthaginians, in origin, as phalangites.

91 Caesar never mentions any difference between the *triarii* (or *pili*, as they were now called: *Caes. Gall.* 3.5.2; 5.35.6; 6.38.1; *Civ.* 1.13.4; 1.46.5; 3.91.1) and the *hastati* and *principes*. In his works, there are no references to the *hastae*.

92 *Liv.* 8.8.10; *Polyb.* 6.23.14.

93 *Polyb.* 6.2 and 6.11.2.

94 In his account of his Roman army, where he states that the *triarii* employed spears, Polybius shows himself aware of change over time: he mentions the improvements made by the Romans to the cavalry spears (6.25.3-11) and the evolution in the recruitment of cavalrymen (6.19.9).

95 Livy, as mentioned, describes the spears of the Macedonians as extremely long; longer, that is, than those of the Romans. Once again, see the authors mentioned above (nt. 11).

96 Polybius (6.23.14) implies that they carried a shield which was identical to the oblong shield of the *principes* and *triarii*: it was thus impossible to wield the spear with two hands.

97 On these spears, see SCHWARTZ, cit., pp. 81-83.

98 Contra COUSSION, cit. 213, who thinks that the *hastae longae* mentioned by Livy are the same weapons as the *hastae* wielded by the *triarii*.

99 See above, nt. 52.

Moreover, as said, if the long spears of the sea fighters were the same as the ones employed by the *triarii*, Marcellus' decision to specifically employ the former would make no sense. If they really were longer, on the other hand, Marcellus may have intended to gain an advantage over the Carthaginian phalanx by using longer spears, which enabled his soldiers to stab the enemies while preventing the Carthaginians from doing so.

Of course, one should refrain from reducing the whole battle to this simplistic account. It is hard to believe that the Romans won the battle just because of the length of their weapons, and one has to bear in mind that Plutarch's description of the battle is very short and imprecise, and that he is just trying to cast his Roman hero in a positive light. One might ask, for example, why it should be assumed that the Carthaginians could only charge the Romans frontally (and therefore find themselves at a disadvantage), and not, for example, try to outflank them. While Plutarch and Polybius describe the Macedonian phalanx as a very static formation, modern scholarship has convincingly, although not unanimously, shown that a formation armed with the earlier hoplite spear and shield could be quite flexible¹⁰⁰. Marcellus' decision can hardly be considered the only, or the main reason for his victory. If Polybius really was Plutarch's source, it is a shame that his text is lost.

Conclusion

As far as Plutarch's description goes, the reconstruction proposed here appears to be the best way to make sense not only of Marcellus' peculiar tactical device, but also of Plutarch's appreciation¹⁰¹. Claudius' intention was probably to prevent a Punic charge, and to allow his own soldiers, in their turn, to charge the

100 Among the most important and most recent contributions on this matter, see Hans VAN WEES, *Greek warfare: myths and realities*, Duckworth, London, 2004; Peter M. KRENTZ «Hoplite hell: how hoplites fought», in Donald Kagan, Gregory F. Viggiano (Eds.), *Men of bronze: hoplite warfare in ancient Greece*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2013, pp. 134-156; Roel KONIJNENDIJK, *Classical Greek tactics: a cultural history*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2018; and Marco BETTALLI, «L'oplita nella storia greca», in Marco Bettalli and Giovanni Brizzi (Eds.), *Guerre ed eserciti nell'antichità*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2019, pp. 31-51.

101 CLARK, cit., p. 170 supposes that Marcellus' decision might have been due to the scarcity of regular weapons; in this case, however, one could hardly understand Plutarch's appreciation of his tactical decision.

Carthaginians effectively. Maybe, as did Flaminius' soldiers in 223 against the Insubres, the Romans ditched their spears after the first charge to switch to their swords (but did they manage to keep their shields together with their spears in the initial charge?); maybe, just a section of his army was equipped in such a way. It could also be that Plutarch misunderstood his source completely. Assuming that he didn't, however, I hope to have shed some light on this obscure and little studied tactical arrangement at Nola.

If this is correct, it is interesting to see that the Romans were able to adjust their tactics, and in particular to adopt a 'phalangitic' formation. In an important article, Wheeler focused exactly on this, showing that the Romans were often able to adapt their organisation to the situations they faced and, at times, to arrange their formations into phalanxes¹⁰². Tactical flexibility was an important value to the Roman armies. Plutarch's comment about the battle of Nola, as well as Flaminius' organisation in Gaul, appear to confirm Wheeler's reconstruction, and to testify to the fact that, in the middle Republic, a phalangitic formation was one of the tactical possibilities that a general could resort to; although, probably, not one that was very frequently employed.

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102 Everett L. WHEELER, «The legion as phalanx», *Chiron* 9 (1979), pp.303-318 (pp.303-309). The author attempts to prove that Arrian's array against the Alans was not an unprecedented organisation, and lists some instances in which the Romans adopted a phalangitic formation before the II century AD. The author, however, does not focus either on Flaminius' disposition, or on Marcellus' battle at Nola.

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Arabia Eudaemon ed Aethiopia: le altre facce della vittoria augustea

di MAURIZIO COLOMBO

ABSTRACT. Caesar Augustus did not need “spin doctors” because he himself was one of their number; his own work in the field of political propaganda, the celebrated Summary of the Deeds that his contemporaries were already used to call *Res gestae diui Augusti*, stands out conspicuously as an excellent means of self-promotion and a very interesting example of literary Latin. Here we will show how he made a rather shrewd use of two problematical expeditions for propaganda aims. Both military campaigns were fought by the Roman army of Egypt. Caesar Augustus gave the order to start the war in *Arabia Eudaemon*, but it ended in a strategical failure; the other in *Aethiopia* (scholarly known as kingdom of Kush or Nubia) was only a sudden counter-attack without his knowledge, but it brought home a brilliant victory. Nevertheless, Caesar Augustus dared to claim that both wars had been launched on his order and had achieved clean victories. The last part of the paper will be devoted to two military issues. After sharing some guesses on size and composition of the field armies in *Arabia Eudaemon* and *Aethiopia*, we will argue the peculiar place of the *exercitus Aegyptiacus* in the broader framework of Augustan strategy in the Near East.

KEYWORDS. *Res gestae diui Augusti*, *Arabia Eudaemon*, *Aethiopia*, *Aegyptus*, Caesar Augustus, Aelius Gallus, Publius Petronius, Roman army in Egypt.

Quando si menziona l’Oriente nel contesto storico del principato augusteo, il pensiero corre automaticamente al regno dei Parthi. Ciò dipende dalla prospettiva distortente della propaganda ufficiale, che ci influenza anche indirettamente attraverso la trasfigurazione letteraria delle vicende correnti nei poeti contemporanei. Riepilogando la politica estera di Cesare Augusto nel Vicino Oriente a partire dal 30 a.C., le *Res gestae diui Augusti* elencano debitamente al primo posto la conquista dell’*Aegyptus*, ma poi celebrano quasi esclusivamente i fatti principali delle relazioni diplomatiche e militari con i Parthi: più precisamente, l’instaurazione del protettorato romano sull’*Armenia maior*, i *signa recepta* di tre eserciti romani e l’*amicitia populi Romani* imposta ai

Parthi, i *supplices reges* dei Parthi, dei Medi e degli Adiabeni, gli ostaggi parthici della famiglia reale, i *reges* inviati a Parthi e Medi¹.

Nonostante il carattere pervasivo delle notizie circa il *regnum* parthico, ci sono due sorprendenti eccezioni, che precedono anche il protettorato romano sull'*Armenia maior*; una concerne le terre nilotiche a meridione dell'*Aegyptus*, l'altra una zona diversa dell'Oriente. Il primo capitolo della parte delle *Res gestae diui Augusti* dedicata alle guerre esterne e alla diplomazia (capitoli 26–33) registra appunto due imprese poco o male conosciute fuori degli ambienti scientifici²: la grande vittoria del *praefectus Aegypti* Publio Petronio sull'*Aethiopia* (detta altrimenti regno di Kush o Nubia) e la quasi simultanea spedizione del suo collega Elio Gallo in *Arabia Eudaemon*³.

[1] *Omniun prouinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi.* [2] *Gallias et Hispanias prouincias, item Germaniam, qua includit Oceanus a Gadibus ad ostium Albis fluminis, pacauit.* [3] *Alpes a regione ea, quae proxima est Hadriano mari, ad Tuscum pacificauit nulli genti bello per iniuriam inlato.* [4] *Classis mea per Oceanum ab ostio Rheni ad solis orientis regionem usque ad fines Cimbrorum nauigauit, quo neque terra neque mari quisquam Romanus ante id tempus adit. Cimbrique et Charydes et Semnones et eiusdem tractus alii Germanorum populi per legatos amicitiam meam et populi Romani petierunt.* [5] *Meo iussu et auspicio ducti sunt duo exercitus eodem fere tempore in Aethiopiam et in Arabiam, quae appellatur Eudaemon, magnaque hostium gentis utriusque copiae caesae sunt in acie et complura oppida capta. In Aethiopiam usque ad oppidum Nabata peruentum est, cui proxi-*

1 *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 27, 2–3; 29, 2; 32, 1–2; 33.

2 *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 26, 5.

3 La campagna nubiana: Strab. XVII, 1, 54; Plin. *nat.* VI, 181–182; Cass. Dio LIV, 5, 4–6. La spedizione arabica: Strab. II, 5, 12 e XVI, 4, 22–24; Plin. *nat.* VI, 141 e 160; XII, 55; Cass. Dio LIII, 29, 3–8. Cfr. inoltre Theodor MOMMSEN, *Res gestae diui Augusti ex monumentis Ancyrano et Apolloniensi*, Berolini 1883², apud Weidmannos, pp. 106–109; John George Clark ANDERSON, «The Eastern Frontier under Augustus», in Stanley A. COOK–Frank E. ADCOCK–Martin P. CHARLESWORTH (Eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. X: The Augustan Empire, 44 B. C.–A.D. 70*, Cambridge 1934, At the University Press, pp. 240–243 e 249–252; Jehan DESANGES, «Les relations de l'Empire romain avec l'Afrique nilotique et érythréenne, d'Augustus à Probus», in *ANRW* II 10/1 (1988), pp. 4–12; Eleanor G. HUZAR, «Augustus, Heir of the Ptolemies», *ibid.*, pp. 364–366; Erich S. GRUEN, «The expansion of the empire under Augustus», in Alan K. BOWMAN–Edward CHAMPLIN–Andrew LINTOTT (Eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. Second Edition. X: The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69*, Cambridge 1996, Cambridge University Press, pp. 148–151. Altra letteratura scientifica nelle nn. 34–35.

ma est Meroe; in Arabiam usque in fines Sabaeorum processit exercitus ad oppidum Mariba.

L'apertura del capitolo dichiara e introduce la materia generale della sezione. Poi l'esposizione augustea seleziona sapientemente otto casi specifici: *Galliae et Hispaniae prouinciae*, *Germania*, *Alpes*, la navigazione oceanica della *classis* fino al territorio dei Cimbri, la richiesta dell'*amicitia* romana da parte dei Cimbri e di altri popoli germanici, *Aethiopia*, *Arabia*. La semplicità della costruzione sintattica e dello stile cela bene la parziale distorsione della realtà storica; la definitiva pacificazione delle *Galliae* e delle *Hispaniae*, così come la totale conquista delle *Alpes*, erano risultati genuini, ma la *Germania* cristallizzava la situazione anteriore al disastro di Teutoburgo. La profonda diversità della *Germania*, già distretto militare in via di pacificazione e nuovamente teatro attivo di guerra, è abilmente resa attraverso la sola omissione del termine tecnico *prouincia*, che invece accompagna correttamente *Galliae* e *Hispaniae*.

Il nome geografico *Germania* e l'idronimo *Albis* riassumono le dieci o undici campagne militari contro i Germani nei ventuno anni prima di Teutoburgo: Druso quattro nel 12–9 a.C., Tiberio *priuignus* di Cesare Augusto due nello 8–7 a.C., Lucio Domizio Enobarbo una dalla *Raetia* nello 8/7 a.C. ovvero nel 7/2 a.C., Marco Vinicio una o due nel 2–3 (egli esercitò il comando dell'*exercitus qui est in Germania* almeno per questo biennio, visto che lo scoppio di un *immensum bellum* era avvenuto *ante triennium* rispetto al 4, cioè esattamente nello 1, quando il *legatus Augusti pro praetore exercitus qui est in Germania* era ancora Lucio Domizio Enobarbo⁴), Tiberio Cesare due nel biennio 4–5. Druso nel 9 a.C. e Tiberio Cesare nel 5 raggiunsero la riva sinistra dell'*Albis*, Enobarbo nello 8/7 a.C. ovvero nel 7/2 a.C. addirittura varcò il fiume. La conquista della *Germania* fu effimera, ma era stata genuina; le vittorie del recentissimo passato nascondono la rinnovata attualità del *bellum Germanicum*, un esempio parossistico di manipolazione propagandistica. Germanico Cesare fu acclamato *imperator* per la prima volta grazie a una vittoria altrimenti ignota sui Germani proprio nel periodo della redazione finale delle *Res gestae*⁵. Strabone ritiene il *bellum Germanicum* ancora

4 Vell. II, 104, 2; Cass. Dio LV, 10a, 3. Cfr. inoltre Tac. *ann.* I, 63, 4.

5 La prima *salutatio imperatoria* di Germanico Cesare risale allo 11–14: la bibliografia essenziale in Maurizio COLOMBO, «Ios. bell. Iud. 2, 366–387 e CIL XIV, 3608: note esegetiche e cronologiche», *Klio* 97 (2015), pp. 654–655 e nn. 49–52.

in corso al suo tempo e stima i Germani nemici attuali dei Romani⁶.

Galliae et Hispaniae prouinciae, Germania e Alpes sono disposte secondo un criterio geografico. *Galliae et Hispaniae prouinciae* e *Germania* vanno da sud-ovest a nord-est per noi, ma andavano da nord-ovest a nord-est nelle mappe dei Greci e dei Romani; quindi *Galliae et Hispaniae prouinciae* significano occidente, *Germania* settentrione⁷. Il maestoso oronimo *Alpes* varia il lessico e consente di costruire una perfetta simmetria dei riferimenti geografici in Europa; si noti che il corso delle *Alpes* va da est a ovest e chiude la sequenza geografica con un movimento speculare. Come la coppia *Galliae et Hispaniae prouinciae* rappresenta l'occidente romano, così la *Germania* e le *Alpes* esprimono i due aspetti del settentrione secondo l'ottica italo-centrica dei Romani, cioè il settentrione esterno (le *gentes* germaniche oltre il Reno) e il settentrione interno (le *gentes* celtiche, celto-liguri e retiche lungo l'intero arco delle Alpi⁸).

Due voci seguono lo stesso tipo di ordinamento spaziale, cioè *a Gadibus ad ostium Albis fluminis [...] a regione ea, quae proxima est Hadriano mari, ad Tuscum*; la terza, *ab ostio Rheni ad solis orientis regionem usque ad fines Cimbrorum*, varia leggermente la struttura, per aggiungere l'ulteriore e fondamentale dettaglio dei *finis Cimbrorum*. La navigazione della *classis* attraverso l'*Oceanus* (= Mare del Nord) è la prima apparizione del tema ricorrente in questa parte delle *Res gestae*, cioè 'una impresa/un risultato mai compiuta/mai ottenuto prima di me/prima del mio tempo'; esso già sottolinea anche due eventi della sezione politica (l'affluenza straordinaria di *ciues Romani* ai *comitia* per l'elezione di Cesare Augusto a *pontifex maximus* e la triplice chiusura del tempio di Giano sotto il suo principato), ma qui evidenzia due vittorie militari (la navigazione della *classis* fino ai Cimbri e la conquista delle *Pannoniorum gentes* per mezzo del *priuignus* Tiberio) e altrettanti successi diplomatici (le frequenti *ex India regum legationes* e il *legationum et amicitiae commercium* fondato con moltissime altre *gentes*)⁹.

Cesare Augusto, dal momento che omette completamente le tre campagne terrestri fino all'*Albis*, cancella coerentemente anche la spettacolare navigazione

6 Strab. VI, 4, 2 e VII, 3, 13.

7 Ad esempio, cfr. Plin. *nat.* II, 167; IV, 102 e 109; XIV, 149; XVI, 2 e 6.

8 Anche gli "euganei" Trumplini e Camunni, così come gli "illirici" Breuni e Genauni, facevano parte delle *gentes Alpinae* al tempo della conquista augustea: la lista completa in Plin. *nat.* III, 136–137 (l'iscrizione del *tropaeum Alpium*).

9 *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 10, 2 e 13 (politica); 26, 4 e 30, 1 (guerra); 31, 1 e 32, 3 (diplomazia).



Fig. 1 Soldati ellenistici del Regno Tolemaico, circa 100 a. C. Dettaglio del mosaico del Nilo, Museo Nazionale di Palestrina (Wikimedia Commons).

della *classis* su questo fiume dalla foce fino al corso medio; la doppia impresa della *classis* ebbe luogo durante la spedizione germanica di Tiberio Cesare nel 5, quando l'esercito si ricongiunse con la flotta appunto sull'*Albis* e la *Germania* sembrò essere stata finalmente *pacata*¹⁰. Il *princeps* preferisce assegnare crescente e massima evidenza all'etnonimo *Cimbri*, che in due periodi consecutivi prima indica la meta della *classis*, poi apre i *Germanorum populi* richiedenti l'*amicitia* romana. Il polisindeto del secondo periodo sottolinea l'ampiezza delle alleanze strette addirittura oltre l'*Albis*. Cesare Augusto suggerisce implicitamente il confronto tra l'invasione della penisola italiana da parte degli antichi Cimbri e la docile sottomissione dei loro discendenti ai Romani¹¹.

La completezza dello schema geografico imponeva di citare esattamente la guerra contro gli *Aethiopes* = meridione e la spedizione in *Arabia Eudaemon* = oriente. La navigazione della *classis* contiene due termini di riferimento geografico (*R. gest. diu. Aug. 26, 4 ad solis orientis regionem usque ad fines Cimbrorum*);

10 Vell. II, 106, 3 narra entrambe le imprese della *classis*, ma omette i Cimbri; Plin. *nat.* II, 167 ricorda soltanto la navigazione attraverso il Mare del Nord e lungo le coste germaniche fino al *Cimbrorum promunturium*.

11 Strab. VII, 2, 1-3 concede una digressione significativamente lunga ai Cimbri nell'ambito dei Γερμανοί e riporta con il debito rilievo la loro ambasceria a Cesare Augusto, ma li colloca erroneamente tra il Reno e l'*Albis* (Strab. VII, 1, 3).

il modello generale viene applicato anche all'*Aethiopia* e all'*Arabia Eudaemon*, ma ci sono sottili e significative differenze, che sottintendono la volontà di influenzare nascostamente la prospettiva del lettore. La localizzazione della guerra nubiana varia sostanzialmente questa costruzione, poiché una proposizione relativa prende il posto del secondo complemento di moto a luogo e fornisce separatamente il secondo termine di riferimento: *usque ad oppidum Nabata peruentum est, cui proxima est Meroe*, una informazione innocentemente didascalica e spudoratamente capziosa. Napata, la sede regia della Nubia settentrionale e la capitale religiosa del regno, era prossima alla Quarta Cataratta, dove il Nilo cessava di essere navigabile; Meroe, la capitale politica della Nubia, sorgeva molto vicina alla Sesta Cataratta.

Il linguaggio scarno e semplice di Cesare Augusto induce fallacemente il lettore a porre la spedizione araba sullo stesso piano dell'impresa navale nel Mare del Nord. Egli infatti individua il teatro bellico rielaborando leggermente l'espressione già adoperata per la flotta, *usque in fines Sabaeorum processit exercitus ad oppidum Mariba*, dove *usque in* prende il posto di *usque ad* e la sola preposizione *ad*, come accade talvolta anche in altri autori della tarda Repubblica e dell'Alto Impero, assume l'accezione propria di *usque ad*. Cesare Augusto attraverso la ripetizione apparentemente banale della forma linguistica in realtà maschera l'enorme sopravvalutazione della guerra in *Arabia Eudaemon*.

Un aspetto politico ha sicuramente influenzato la scelta dell'*Aethiopia* da parte di Cesare Augusto. Il famoso trionfo di Lucio Cornelio Balbo *ex Africa* nel 19 a.C. avrebbe offerto i candidati ideali al ruolo di meridione, cioè gli esotici e remoti Garamanti; ma Balbo aveva vinto quale *proconsul Africae* e aveva celebrato l'ultimo trionfo di un privato cittadino¹². La provincia senatoria dell'*Africa* non poteva rappresentare il meridione vinto dalle armi di Cesare Augusto.

La *prouincia Aegyptus* faceva parte delle province romane, ma allo stesso tempo era un possedimento personale del *princeps*¹³. In tutte le armate provinciali gli *equites* erano soliti comandare le *alae* e le *cohortes*, ma fino dal principio in Egitto anche il governatore civile e militare (*praefectus Alexandriae et Aegypti*), così come i comandanti (*praefecti castrorum*) e tutti i *tribuni militum* delle

12 Jehan DESANGES, «Le triomphe de Cornelius Balbus (19 av. J.-C.)», *RAF* 101 (1956), pp. 3–43.

13 HUZAR (n. 3), pp. 352–359 e 370–379.

legioni, furono tratti dai soli *equites*; l'esercito provinciale dell'Egitto sotto il comando di governatori e ufficiali equestri aveva combattuto e vinto in *Aethiopia* e in *Arabia*. Cesare Augusto, glissando abilmente sulla condizione ben distinta dell'Egitto rispetto alle normali *prouvinciae populi Romani*, poté completare il quadro dei punti cardinali appunto con due imprese della guarnigione egiziana.

I poeti augustei evocano più volte la spedizione contro l'*Arabia Eudaemon*; la Nubia è una presenza incerta, poiché il nome geografico *India* e l'etnonimo *Indus/Indi* può essere un ornamento iperbolico, fare riferimento ai genuini Indiani o alludere in forma dotta ai Nubiani. Properzio giustappone l'*India* e l'*intacta Arabia*, l'una trascinata in trionfo e l'altra atterrita da Cesare Augusto; l'*India* può essere la Nubia o una iperbole geografica, ma l'*intacta Arabia* allude certamente all'assoluta novità della campagna militare in *Arabia Eudaemon*¹⁴.

Virgilio fa due allusioni trasparenti alle vittorie romane in Arabia. Un breve catalogo di *hostes* (*Getae, Hyrcani, Arabes, Indi e Parthi* con i famigerati *signa*) contiene tre etnonimi sicuramente genuini su cinque, cioè *Getae* = Geti cisdanubiani, *Arabes* e *Parthi*; gli *Hyrcani* sono un esotismo ornamentale di provenienza parthica e gli *Indi* sono un ornamento iperbolico o alludono ai Nubiani. La raffigurazione di Azio sullo scudo di Enea include nelle file di Antonio e Cleopatra prima *Aegyptus, uires Orientis e ultima Bactra*, poi *Aegyptus et Indi, omnis Arabs, omnes Sabaei*. L'associazione con l'*Aegyptus* potrebbe indicare che gli *Indi* designino i Nubiani; ma essi possono essere anche qui un orpello esotico ed iperbolico, che amplifica coerentemente la precedente iperbole *ultima Bactra*¹⁵.

In un altro passo di Virgilio gli *Indi* possono essere i Nubiani, un ornamento esotico o Indiani genuini: *Aen.* VI, 794–795 *super et Garamantas et Indos | proferet imperium*. Se i due etnonimi non sono iperboli geografiche o esotismi ornamentali, Virgilio li inserì ambedue nell'ultimo anno della sua vita; Balbo infatti riportò la vittoria sui Garamanti al più tardi nel 20 a.C. e la famosa *legatio* degli *Indi* raggiunse Cesare Augusto sull'isola di Samo nell'inverno 20–19 a.C.¹⁶.

Orazio nomina un paio di volte gli *Arabes* come nemici reali o auspicati; il contesto della prima menzione è appunto una guerra imminente in *Sabaea*¹⁷. In

14 Prop. II, 10, 15–16.

15 Verg. *Aen.* VII, 604–606; VIII, 685–688 e 705–706.

16 *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 31, 1; Strab. XV, 1, 73; Suet. *Aug.* 21, 3; Cass. Dio LIV, 9, 8.

17 Hor. *carm.* I, 29, 1–4 e 35, 38–40 (dove i *Massagetae* possono essere un intruso esotico ed

un *carmen* anteriore al 23 a.C. i suoi *Indi* sono una semplice iperbole a scopo ornamentale¹⁸, ma in altri due *carmina* più tardi¹⁹, dove leggiamo esclusivamente etnonimi genuini²⁰, evocano certamente la già menzionata ambasceria degli *Indi* a Cesare Augusto sull'isola di Samo²¹. Alludendo con enfasi particolare al *bellum Actiacum*, egli usa l'etnonimo *Aethiops* quale sinonimo di *Aegyptius*, un'anomalia assolutamente isolata nel latino poetico: *Paene occupatam seditionibus | deleuit Urbem Dacus et Aethiops, | hic classe formidatus, ille | missilibus melior sagittis*²². Il nome erudito dei Nubiani riceve un significato eccezionale, per caratterizzare l'Egitto tolemaico in termini barbarici e creare una coppia omogenea con il *Dacus*. Questa licenza è un'eco lontana e indiretta della guerra contro l'*Aethiopia* oltre il confine meridionale dell'Egitto romano.

La fama contemporanea delle operazioni belliche contro i Nubiani trova finalmente riscontro certo nell'ultimo libro di Properzio; là due etnonimi variati nel numero e un toponimo interposto riassumono i barbari domati del settentrione (*Sycambri*), del meridione (*Meroe* = Nubiani) e dell'oriente (*Parthus*)²³. L'uso pregnante del toponimo nubiano Meroe da parte di Properzio prefigura il suo valore di riferimento geografico nelle *Res gestae diui Augusti*; l'esotismo lessicale soddisfa in pari misura le necessità stilistiche della poesia latina e le esigenze comunicative della propaganda politica.

Ritorniamo al testo delle *Res gestae*. L'espressione introduttiva alle due campagne, *Meo iussu et auspicio*, enuncia una mezza verità circa la loro origine e cela la diversità istituzionale dell'Egitto dietro una formula arcaizzante. Soltanto l'armata campale di Elio Gallo mosse le insegne effettivamente per ordine del *princeps*, andando incontro a un inaspettato e clamoroso fallimento. La travolgente controffensiva dei Romani in Nubia fu un'iniziativa personale ed estemporanea

esornativo oppure mascherare i *Getae* cisdanubiani o i Bastarni).

18 Hor. *carm.* I, 12, 53–56.

19 Hor. *carm. saec.* 53–56; *carm.* IV, 14, 41–43.

20 Anche l'apparentemente anacronistico *Scythes* di Hor. *carm. saec.* 55 e *carm.* IV, 14, 42 proviene dalla realtà storica. La testimonianza di *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 31, 2 è decisiva e concerne il ramo taurico degli Sciti: *Nostram amicitiam appetiuerunt per legatos Bastarnae Scythaeque et Sarmatarum qui sunt citra flumen Tanaim et ultra reges, Albanorumque rex et Hiberorum et Medorum.*

21 V. n. 16.

22 Hor. *carm.* III, 6, 13–16.

23 Prop. IV, 6, 77–79.

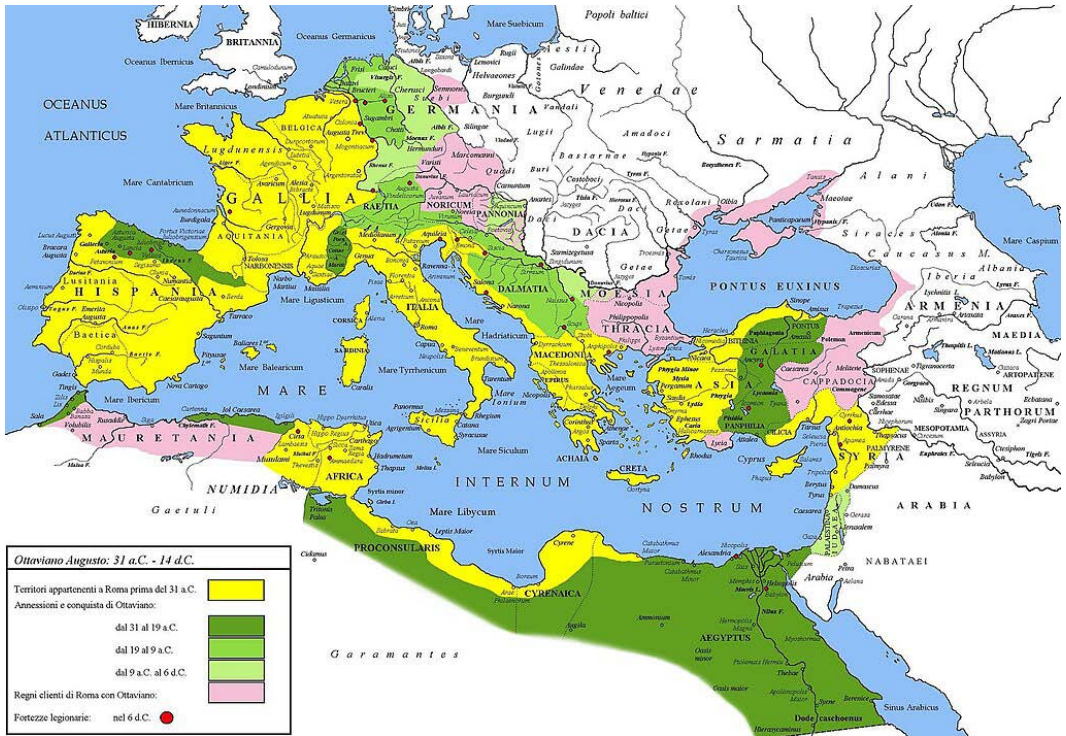


Fig. 2 Le conquiste di Augusto dal 30 a. C. al 6 d. C. (grande ribellione dell'Illyricum). Cristiano64, CC BY SA 3.0

di Petronio; non ci fu il tempo materiale di informare Cesare Augusto a Roma e di attendere il suo *iussus*, mentre i Nubiani occupavano l'estremità meridionale della *Thebais*. La prospettiva deformante delle *Res gestae* qui ha la massima cura di sopprimere la radicale diversità tra la campagna arabica e il contrattacco in Nubia.

Gli eserciti delle regolari *provinciae populi Romani* erano soggetti al *proconsulare imperium* di Cesare Augusto; i *legati Augusti pro praetore* dell'ordine senatorio li comandavano in sua vece ed erano soliti combattere sotto i suoi *auspicia*²⁴. Entrambe le armate campali della guarnigione dislocata in Egitto, che era una provincia peculiare del *princeps*, combatterono sotto il comando di un

24 *R. gest. diu. Aug.* 4, 2 e 30, 2; *Plin. nat.* III, 136. Anche il *proconsul provinciae Africae* Cossus Cornelius Lentulus combatté e vinse i *Gaetuli* sotto gli *auspicia* di Cesare Augusto: IRT 301 = AE 1940. 68. Cfr. inoltre Vell. II, 39, 1. 40, 1. 115, 3. 129, 4. *Plin. nat.* II, 167. *CIL* VI, 944. *Tac. Agr.* 33, 2; *ann.* II, 41, 1; XIII, 6, 4; XV, 26, 3. *Suet. Aug.* 21, 1.



Fig. 3 Denario d'argento di Ottaviano per celebrare la conquista dell'Egitto a seguito della vittoria di Azio, coniato a Brindisi o a Roma ca 27 a. C. Sul verso la testa di Ottaviano con la scritta CAESAR DIVI F. COS VI; Sul recto la scritta AEGVPTO CAPTA e il coccodrillo simbolo del Nilo.

praefectus Aegypti equestre e l'*auspicium* di Cesare Augusto. Il singolare *auspicium* proviene dall'uso linguistico del latino repubblicano, dove incontriamo le locuzioni *Ductu, auspicio, imperio felicitateque* (Lucio Emilio Regillo), *Imperio auspicioque* (Tiberio Sempronio Gracco padre), *ductu, auspicio imperioque* (Lucio Mummio)²⁵; Tito Livio utilizza quasi sempre la formula *ductu et auspicio, ducto atque auspicio* e soprattutto *ductu auspicioque*²⁶. L'apparenza repubblicana era il migliore camuffamento dell'anomalia egizia.

Cesare Augusto con un banale complemento di tempo determinato, la locuzione generica e apparentemente oggettiva *eodem fere tempore*, offusca magistralmente la successione cronologica e la relazione causale delle due campagne militari. La guerra nubiana (24–22 a.C.) era scoppiata nel corso e a causa della spedizione araba (25–24 a.C.); proprio la massiccia e prolungata riduzione della guarnigione egiziaca a vantaggio dell'esercito inviato in *Arabia Eudaemon* aveva scatenato l'attacco dei Nubiani contro la *Thebais*²⁷. I combattimenti ebbero luogo quasi simultaneamente nel 24 a.C., ma la partenza delle truppe inviate in Arabia risale all'estate 25 a.C. Elio Gallo portò con sé circa 10'000 fanti tra sol-

25 *Tab. triumph. Aemil.* 1 = Liv. XL, 52, 5; *Tab. triumph. Gracch.* 1 = Liv. XLI, 28, 8; CIL VI, 331. Cfr. anche Plin. *nat.* VII, 140.

26 In soli quattro passi di contenuto analogo troviamo il plurale *auspiciis*: Liv. VII, 6, 8; VIII, 33, 22; XXI, 40, 3; XXX, 14, 8.

27 Strab. XVII, 1, 54. Una datazione differente in Shelagh JAMESON, «Chronology of the Campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius», *JRS* 58 (1968), pp. 71–84.

dati romani e σύμμαχοι²⁸. Come vedremo l'armata provinciale contava circa 23'000 uomini e quasi un terzo delle truppe regolari partecipò alla guerra in *Arabia Eudaemon*. Petronio guidò appena 800 cavalieri e meno di 10'000 fanti contro 30'000 Nubiani²⁹. I *mandata* di Cesare Augusto a Elio Gallo ordinavano di "esplorare" i popoli e i luoghi dell'*Arabia Eudaemon* e dell'*Aethiopia*; il verbo διαπειράομαι significa 'sperimento, investigo, metto alla prova', ma assume anche il senso ostile di 'metto



alla prova delle armi, sperimento in combattimento³⁰. I piani di guerra augustei andarono a rotoli, poiché i Nubiani decisero di 'esplorare' la *Thebais* e la potenza romana sfruttando la lunga assenza di Elio Gallo.

L'ordine inverso della menzione *Aethiopia*–*Arabia Eudaemon* si inserisce bene nello schema geografico (*Galliae* e *Hispaniae* = occidente, *Germania* e *Alpes* = settentrione, *Aethiopia* = meridione, *Arabia Eudaemon* = oriente), ma mira a cancellare ogni memoria del genuino legame tra i due fatti. Cassio Dione, che narra concisamente entrambe le guerre, dimostra l'efficacia della propaganda augustea; egli infatti colloca giustamente la spedizione araba prima della campagna nubiana, ma presenta i due conflitti come episodi privi di relazione e separati nel tempo³¹.

Cesare Augusto riassume con elegante e veridica sobrietà gli eventi positivi di ambedue le campagne militari, ma oscura opportunamente i dettagli spiacevoli: *magnaeque hostium gentis utriusque copiae caesae sunt in acie et complura op-*

28 Strab. XVI, 4, 23.

29 Strab. XVII, 1, 54.

30 Strab. XVI, 4, 22.

31 Cass. Dio LIII, 29, 3–8 e LIV, 5, 4–6.

pida capta. La narrazione di Strabone, benché sia breve, tramanda tutti i dettagli essenziali, ma li condisce con una buona dose di pregiudizi in favore di Elio Gallo, di cui egli era amico personale³². La campagna militare attraverso l'*Arabia Eudaemon* fu una guerra di aggressione, ma la schiacciante vittoria in una battaglia campale e tre πόλεις occupate non furono sufficienti a evitare l'ingloriosa ritirata da Mariba (Marsiaba secondo Strabone) e il fallimento strategico. Per una singolare ironia della Storia la guerra contro gli *Aethiopes* vide lo stesso numero di vittorie tattiche (una grande battaglia in campo aperto e tre πόλεις espuguate), fu coronata dalla distruzione di Napata e approdò al successo strategico, ma rappresentò soltanto la controffensiva romana, dopo che i Nubiani avevano invaso la *Thebais* conquistando Syene, Elephantina e Philae.

I *complura oppida* di Cesare Augusto, nonostante le apparenze, rispettano la sostanza dei fatti. Plinio il Vecchio attribuisce la distruzione di otto *oppida* arabi a Elio Gallo, ma da un lato include erroneamente Mariba e Caripeta, dall'altro omette significativamente Athrula, che fu la base logistica del fallito attacco contro Mariba (Cassio Dione ritiene Athrula stessa il termine dell'avanzata romana); poi egli riconosce l'espugnazione di sette *oppida* nubiani a Petronio³³. La discordanza tra Strabone e Plinio deriva dal criterio selettivo: l'uno nomina esclusivamente le località principali, l'altro enumera tutti gli insediamenti. Plinio menziona Caripeta come punto estremo dell'avanzata romana; ma il nome di Mariba, benché fosse legato a un insuccesso tattico, possedeva maggiore risonanza tra le persone colte e risultava molto più utile sul piano propagandistico.

Il pari peso delle due spedizioni nelle *Res gestae*, accomunando artatamente due eventi totalmente diversi secondo la prospettiva militare, costituiva una implicita compensazione a fini politici; esso toglieva molto rilievo alle imprese nubiane di Petronio, per aggiungere altrettanto lustro all'insuccesso arabo di Elio Gallo. Napata fu espugnata, saccheggiata e distrutta da Petronio; Elio Gallo dopo soli sei giorni abbandonò l'assedio di Mariba. Petronio arrestò volontariamente l'avanzata vittoriosa in *Aethiopia* per una valutazione oggettiva della situazione logistica e tattica; Elio Gallo fu costretto a interrompere la campagna militare

32 Strab. II, 5, 12. Anche l'opportunità politica può avere influenzato la benevolenza di Strabone nei confronti del suo amico, poiché Elio Gallo sembra essere stato il padre adottivo di Lucio Elio Seiano, il famigerato *praefectus praetorio* di Tiberio dal 14 al 31: PIR² I, pp. 27–28 nr. 179 e pp. 41–43 nr. 255.

33 Plin. *nat.* VI, 160 e 181.

in *Arabia Eudaemon*, per salvare i superstiti della sua colonna e riportarli al più presto in Egitto.

Le due campagne militari offrono due esempi paradigmatici: da un lato abbiamo la genesi e lo svolgimento di un'offensiva programmata, dall'altro un esercito provinciale nell'esercizio operativo delle funzioni difensive. Un piatto della bilancia ospita le vittorie tattiche e il fallimento strategico di una impresa pianificata³⁴, l'altro le vittorie tattiche e il successo strategico di una guerra impreveduta³⁵. L'invasione dell'*Arabia Eudaemon* e la controffensiva in Nubia presentavano pari difficoltà; come la penisola arabica era terra vergine per un esercito ellenistico o romano, così le truppe dei Tolomei non avevano mai oltrepassato il Triakontaschoenus (la regione profonda appunto 30 σχοῖνοι a meridione di Syene, 1 σχοῖνος = 60 στάδιοι e 8 στάδιοι = 1 miglio romano) ed esso ormai da molto tempo faceva parte dell'*Aethiopia*.

Il vizir nabateo Syllaenus avrebbe tradito l'esercito romano in *Arabia Eudae-*

34 Steven E. SIDEBOTHAM, «Aelius Gallus and Arabia», *Latomus* 45 (1986), pp. 590–602; Kai BUSCHMANN, «Motiv und Ziel des Aelius-Gallus-Zuges nach Südarabien», *WO* 22 (1991), pp. 85–93; Christian MAREK, «Die Expedition des Aelius Gallus nach Arabien im Jahre 25 v. Chr.», *Chiron* 23 (1993), pp. 121–156; Philip MAYERSON, «Aelius Gallus at Cleopatra (Suez) and on the Red Sea», *GRBS* 36 (1995), pp. 17–24; Andreas LUTHER, «Medo nectis catenas? Die Expedition des Aelius Gallus im Rahmen der augusteischen Partherpolitik», *OTerr* 5 (1999), pp. 157–182; Róbert SIMON, «Aelius Gallus' Campaign and the Arab Trade in the Augustan Age», *AOrientHung* 55 (2002), pp. 309–318; Michel DEBIDOUR, «Un général romain au-delà des frontières: l'expédition d'Aelius Gallus en Arabie (26/25 av.J.C.)», in Bernadette CABOURET–Agnès GROSLAMBERT–Catherine WOLFF (Éds.), *Visions de l'Occident romain: hommages à Yann Le Bohec*, II, Paris 2012, De Boccard, pp. 765–785; Philipp SEUBERT, «L'image de l'Arabie Heureuse dans la tradition géographique grecque à l'épreuve de l'expédition d'Aelius Gallus», *GeogrAnt* 30 (2021), pp. 23–45.

35 Inge HOFMANN, «Der Feldzug des C. Petronius nach Nubien und seine Bedeutung für die meroitische Chronologie», in Erika ENDEFELDER–Karl-Heinz PRIESE–Walter-Friedrich REINEKE–Steffen WENIG (Hrsgg.), *Ägypten und Kusch. Fritz Hintze zum 60. Geburtstag gewidmet*, Berlin 1977, Akademie-Verlag, pp. 189–205; Stanley M. BURSTEIN, «The Nubian Campaigns of C. Petronius and George Reisner's Second Meroitic Kingdom of Napata», *ZÄS* 106 (1979), pp. 95–105 e id., «Cornelius Gallus and Aethiopia», *AHB* 2 (1988), pp. 16–20 (soprattutto pp. 18–20); László TÖRÖK, «Geschichte Meroes. Ein Beitrag über die Quellenlage und den Forschungsstand», *ANRW* II 10/1 (1988), pp. 275–279; id., «Augustus and Meroe», *Orientalia Suecana* 38–39 (1989–1990), pp. 171–185; id., *Between Two Worlds. The Frontier Region between Ancient Nubia and Egypt, 3700 BC–AD 500*, Leiden–Boston 2009, Brill, pp. 427–435 e 441–442; Josef LOCHER, «Die Anfänge der römischen Herrschaft in Nubien und der Konflikt zwischen Rom und Meroe», *AncSoc* 32 (2002), pp. 73–133.

mon esponendo scientemente i suoi alleati a molti disagi e pericoli, per coltivare ambizioni personali di potenza nella stessa area; secondo lo stesso Elio Gallo il tradimento di Syllaeus era stato il solo e determinante ostacolo sulla strada verso la conquista integrale dell'*Arabia Eudaemon*³⁶. La mancanza di sicurezza tormentò sia la navigazione sia il cammino; il corpo di spedizione sperimentò l'assenza di strade, i giri tortuosi, l'attraversamento di terre desertiche, le coste rocciose senza porti, le acque basse o piene di scogli sommersi, i flussi e i riflussi della marea³⁷. Ma i disagi e i pericoli della navigazione e della marcia avevano coinvolto lo stesso Syllaeus, che aveva comandato personalmente 1000 fanti nabatei al seguito di Elio Gallo.

Le sei cause ambientali di disagio e di pericolo erano fattori ordinari e formavano una combinazione peculiare della penisola arabica. Il vicario regio della *Nabataea* sapeva certamente reperire nocchieri esperti e guide competenti, ma i mercanti nabatei conoscevano soprattutto la sponda arabica del Mar Rosso e le guerre del regno nabateo non si erano mai spinte verso l'*Arabia Eudaemon*. Strabone stigmatizza per due volte proprio la presunta incapacità delle guide arabe trascurando volontariamente i limiti oggettivi delle loro conoscenze.

Il fittizio tradimento di Syllaeus fu utile a coprire quattro questioni piuttosto sgradevoli della spedizione *in Arabiam*: la grave carenza di informazioni vitali sul teatro bellico, l'organizzazione piuttosto approssimativa delle operazioni militari, le forze insufficienti, infine lo scopo incerto della guerra, che doveva imporre il protettorato romano agli Arabi o conquistare l'*Arabia Eudaemon*. Si noti che i Nabatei, aiutando attivamente i propositi imperialistici di Cesare Augusto verso un'altra regione della penisola arabica, tutelavano obliquamente la propria indipendenza. Il sabotaggio intenzionale della campagna in *Arabia Eudaemon* non soltanto avrebbe messo a rischio la vita e l'incolumità dello stesso Syllaeus, ma inoltre sarebbe stato un atto gratuito di autolesionismo politico.

Andiamo in ordine. La costruzione di 80 navi da guerra assolutamente inutili precedette la necessaria costruzione di 130 navi da trasporto sprecando materia-

36 Strab. XVII, 1, 53.

37 Anche gli animali velenosi della penisola arabica (scorpioni, serpenti e ragni) misero in costante pericolo i soldati romani, ma due antidoti di Elio Gallo, che potrebbe essere identificato con lo stesso *praefectus Aegypti* o piuttosto con un suo liberto, ne salvarono molti: Galen. XIV, pp. 189 e 203 Kühn.

li e tempo; dal momento che il legno delle costruzioni navali doveva essere importato in Egitto, la perdita di tempo fu doppia. Poi la semplice traversata del Mar Rosso da Arsinoe/Cleopatra in Egitto a Leuke Kome in *Nabataea*, quattordici giorni ricchi di peripezie e di fatica, provocò l'affondamento di molte navi da trasporto; alcune trascinarono con sé gli equipaggi e i soldati imbarcati. Due malattie endemiche (Strabone le imputa all'acqua e alle piante dell'Arabia) colpirono in massa i soldati romani subito dopo lo sbarco in *Nabataea*. La crisi sanitaria causò la lunga e sterile sosta a Leuke Kome dall'estate 25 a.C. all'estate 24 a.C.

Il sacrificio di un anno intero per la guarigione e la convalescenza dei malati non ottenne l'acclimatazione delle truppe accampate a Leuke Kome. Cassio Dione crede che l'ambiente desertico, il sole, la cattiva qualità dell'acqua locale e una misteriosa malattia avessero determinato il collasso finale delle forze romane sul campo di battaglia davanti al contrattacco arabo. La versione di Strabone suona molto meno melodrammatica, ma risulta raggelante: le due malattie, le fatiche, la fame e la "cattiva condizione delle strade" falciarono il corpo di spedizione romano molto più dei combattimenti. La grande vittoria nella battaglia campale presso Negrana (10'000 caduti tra gli Arabi sembrano essere un veniale arrotondamento per eccesso piuttosto che una grossolana esagerazione o un'invenzione gratuita, dal momento che nel 67 Malik II

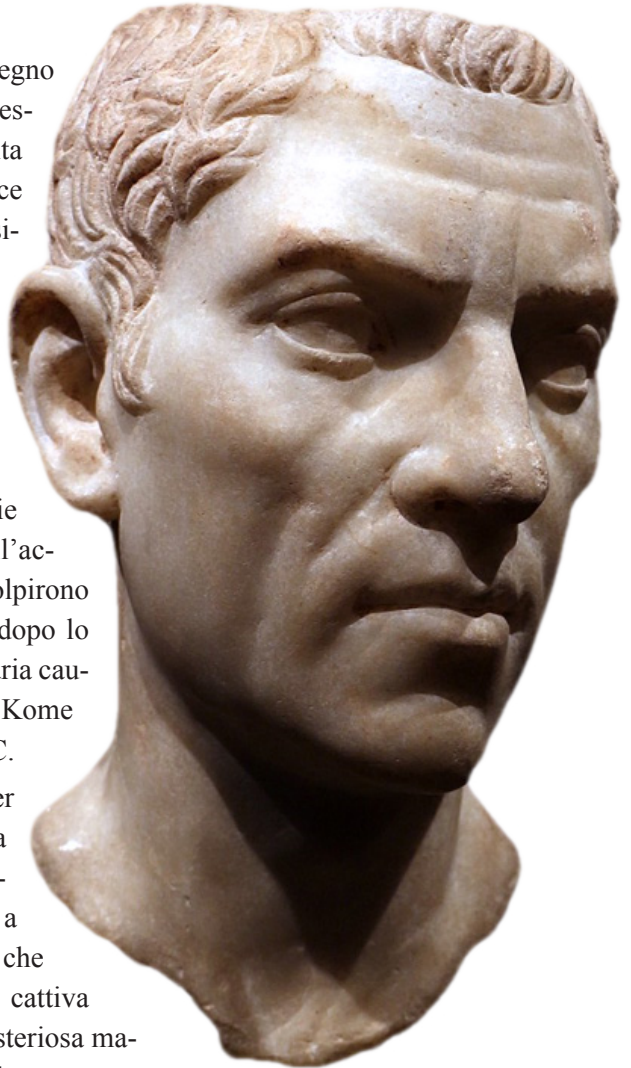


Fig. 4 Presunto ritratto di C. Cornelio Gallo, Praefectus Alexandriae et Aegypti. Cleveland Museum of Arts. Photo Sailko CC BY 3.0 (Wikimedia Commons).

di *Nabataea* fornì ben 6000 uomini all'armata campale di Vespasiano³⁸) e i sette *oppida* occupati (Negrana, Nestus, Nesca/Asca, Magusum, Caminacum e Labaetia di Plinio il Vecchio più Athrula/Athlula di Strabone e di Cassio Dione) non poterono compensare lo stillicidio quotidiano delle perdite e la graduale erosione delle forze effettive.

Le speranze residue dell'armata romana si infransero contro le mura e la resistenza di Mariba, poiché Elio Gallo interruppe le operazioni ossidionali dopo soli sei giorni per mancanza di acqua. I prigionieri arabi riferirono che Mariba “distava appena due giorni dalla terra delle piante aromatiche e delle spezie”. La ritirata da Mariba, il solo gesto di buon senso in tutta la spedizione, salvò le truppe superstiti dal tracollo fisico, ma fu una scelta coatta in totale assenza di alternative; il fallito assedio di Mariba compendia il senso generale della campagna araba.

Plinio elenca Caripeta all'ultimo posto tra gli *oppida* distrutti e la considera il punto estremo dell'avanzata romana, ma la sua lista include Mariba al settimo posto; il grave errore di Plinio circa Mariba coinvolge anche Caripeta, poiché l'armata campale di Elio Gallo, se avesse mosso le insegne verso Caripeta lasciando Mariba intatta dietro di sé, avrebbe corso il pericolo letale di essere circondata o di venire tagliata fuori dalla via della ritirata. Inoltre prima dell'assedio di Mariba un assalto a Caripeta avrebbe gratuitamente sprecato tempo, energie, cibo, acqua e uomini in un momento critico, mentre dopo il fallimento di Mariba un'avanzata ulteriore verso l'interno sarebbe stata una mossa aberrante e totalmente priva di scopo. Elio Gallo, prima di attaccare Mariba, molto probabilmente inviò una colonna esplorante a compiere una ricognizione verso “la terra delle piante aromatiche e delle spezie”, per verificare le informazioni ricevute dai prigionieri arabi; i suoi esploratori raggiunsero appunto Caripeta, ma poi si riunirono al resto dell'esercito per l'assedio di Mariba. Lo scenario risulta perfettamente congruo alla disorganizzazione della logorante campagna in *Arabia Eudaemon*.

La “cattiva condizione delle strade” significava eufemisticamente l'itinerario massacrante e troppo lungo dell'avanzata; l'obiettivo era stato l'*Arabia Eudaemon*, ma le marce romane erano iniziate da Leuke Kome. L'avanzata fino a Mariba era durata sei mesi, la ritirata impiegò appena sessanta giorni; anche il tragitto marittimo del ritorno fu diverso e più breve, undici giorni dal villaggio nabateo di Egra al porto egizio di Myos Hormos. L'avanzata romana era cominciata da

38 V. n. 73.

un punto troppo settentrionale e aveva impiegato ben quattro mesi più del necessario, poiché Elio Gallo aveva percorso verso meridione una parte della strada allora consueta ai commerci nabatei con la penisola arabica e l'India. Le navi e le carovane arrivavano appunto a Leuke Kome, poi raggiungevano Petra e di là Rhinocolura, da dove le merci venivano trasportate in Egitto e in *Syria*. La colonna romana di 10'000 fanti aveva marciato da Leuke Kome all'*Arabia Eudaemon* lungo le rotte carovaniere dei mercanti nabatei.

Ma al tempo di Strabone la principale strada dei commerci romani con la penisola arabica e l'India approdava al porto egizio di Myos Hormos, via terra attraverso Coptus giungeva a Tebe e infine scendeva il Nilo fino ad Alessandria³⁹. Elio Gallo, levando l'ancora dal villaggio nabateo di Egra, utilizzò appunto questo itinerario per la ritirata; è arduo capire perché egli non lo avesse adoperato in direzione inversa anche per l'avanzata, salpando da Myos Hormos verso Egra e l'Arabia.

L'imposizione del protettorato romano agli Arabi o la conquista dell'*Arabia Eudaemon*, cioè un regno-cliente o una *prouincia*, erano obiettivi molto diversi; l'instaurazione dell'uno portava quasi sempre alla costituzione dell'altra nel lungo periodo (come infine accadde alla *Nabataea*), ma le necessità militari del presente divergevano ampiamente per ordine di grandezza. Ancora peggio, già la sola imposizione del protettorato romano all'*Arabia Eudaemon* avrebbe richiesto un numero maggiore di truppe regolari; anche l'esercito più piccolo di un *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, due legioni con i relativi *auxilia* (circa 15'000 uomini, se assegniamo un'*ala* e tre *cohortes* a ciascuna legione), era molto più consistente dei 10'000 fanti agli ordini di Elio Gallo, nonostante la presenza dei σύμμαχοι orientali nel corpo di spedizione romano. Perciò dobbiamo considerare non soltanto gli errori tattici di Elio Gallo (il presunto tradimento del vizir nabateo Sylaeus) nella preparazione e nella gestione della campagna militare, ma anche un errore madornale di valutazione strategica da parte di Cesare Augusto e dei suoi consiglieri. I soldati regolari erano troppo pochi per la spedizione arabica, ma la loro assenza fu sufficiente a scatenare un'altra guerra.

Le attività diplomatiche di Gaio Cornelio Gallo nel Triakontaschoenus e nei

39 I traffici commerciali erano soliti utilizzare questa via già prima della campagna arabica: Strab. II, 5, 12.

confronti della Nubia avevano gettato i semi dell'attacco nubiano⁴⁰. Dopo avere schiacciato la ribellione della *Thebais*, nel 29 a.C. Cornelio Gallo aveva varcato la Prima Cataratta alla testa dell'armata provinciale; poi egli aveva condotto i negoziati con gli ambasciatori nubiani a Philae. Il fatto certo è che i Nubiani non attaccarono alla prima occasione, ma attesero un quinquennio e scelsero il momento più opportuno; due cause alternative, cioè una reazione ritardata contro le pesanti ingerenze di Cornelio Gallo negli affari nubiani o una difesa preventiva contro i progetti imperialistici di Cesare Augusto, possiedono il maggiore grado di probabilità.

La passeggiata militare di Cornelio Gallo a meridione della Prima Cataratta aveva violato il confine settentrionale dell'*Aethiopia*. Le sue trattative a Philae avevano prodotto un ambiguo rapporto tra lo Stato romano e il regno di Nubia; il testo latino di Cornelio Gallo (*eoque rege in tutelam recepto*) e la versione greca della sua cancelleria (καὶ προξενίαν παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως λαβόν) escludono la stipula di un *foedus*, la condizione di *socius* o la concessione dell'*amicitia*. Le parole *tutela* e *προξενία* descrivono un legame personale, in cui Cornelio Gallo era il *patronus* e il re della Nubia il *cliens*. Le due parti molto probabilmente nutrivano opinioni assai diverse sui rispettivi ruoli in una relazione così anomala. La questione non riguardava la sola forma, poiché i fatti avevano dichiarato apertamente i piani di Cesare Augusto ai danni del regno nubiano. Cornelio Gallo aveva nominato arbitrariamente il *tyrannus* del Triakontaschoenus, benché esso fosse una regione dell'*Aethiopia*. Ancora peggio, egli aveva imposto un tributo all'intera Nubia; la pretesa di ricevere φόροι da un regno mai tributario dei Tolomei fu sufficiente a innescare l'incendio della futura guerra.

Altrimenti le radici della guerra ebbero carattere esclusivamente geopolitico. L'escursione armata di Cornelio Gallo a meridione della Prima Cataratta aveva allarmato i Nubiani, che però avevano ritenuto opportuno rinunciare al Triakontaschoenus e pagare il tributo in attesa di tempi migliori. Dopo due o tre anni una seconda circostanza versò olio sul fuoco⁴¹. I *mandata* di Cesare Augusto a Elio Gallo, come abbiamo già detto, includevano il compito di “esplorare” anche l'*Aethiopia*⁴². Dal momento che questi *mandata* erano di dominio pubblico, i Nubiani

40 CIL III, 14147⁵.

41 Elio Gallo fu nominato *praefectus Aegypti* dopo la destituzione e il suicidio di Cornelio Gallo nel 27 a.C. (Hier. *chron.* 164 c Helm) ovvero nel 26 a.C. (Cass. Dio LIII, 23, 5–7).

42 V. n. 30.



Fig. 5 Denario di Marco Antonio 32 a. C. Legio III Cyrenaica, Sul verso una galera con la scritta ANT AVG III VIR R P C, sul recto le insegne e il nome della legione. Classical Numismatic Group, CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported.

ricevettero il preavviso delle ostilità con molto anticipo. Il secondo *praefectus Aegypti*, viaggiando in compagnia di Strabone, ispezionò la sua provincia fino a Syene e ai confini della Nubia; in quelle circostanze l'ordinario assolvimento di un dovere ufficiale poté apparire l'inizio dei preparativi bellici⁴³. Infine, quando nel 25 a.C. Elio Gallo partì via mare per l'*Arabia Eudaemon* con una parte dell'esercito provinciale, i Nubiani capirono di essere i prossimi della lista e colpirono per primi.

Davanti a una simile situazione la *candace* Amanirenas poté soltanto ordinare l'invasione della *Thebais*, finché Elio Gallo e una porzione delle truppe romane erano assenti dall'Egitto. Le tre *cohortes* degli *auxilia* stanziati a Syene furono attaccate e molto probabilmente distrutte dai Nubiani. Syene, Elephantina e Philae furono conquistate e saccheggiate. Gli abitanti vennero catturati e ridotti in schiavitù; le statue di Cesare Augusto furono rovesciate o asportate.

La recentissima rivolta della *Thebais* nel 29 a.C. e la successiva ribellione di Heroonpolis, anche se erano state represses facilmente da Cornelio Gallo⁴⁴, sembravano testimoniare l'insofferenza degli autoctoni verso i nuovi padroni. Ai tempi di Tolomeo IV e di Tolomeo V la rivolta della Θηβαϊς e la secessione dell'Alto Egitto avevano letteralmente spalancato le porte davanti ai Nubiani,

43 V. n. 32.

44 CIL III, 14147⁵; Strab. XVII, 1, 53.

che allora avevano temporaneamente occupato il Triakontaschoenus con la forza delle armi e Syene in cambio dell'aiuto militare ai secessionisti dell'Alto Egitto. Però nel 24 a.C. l'armata nubiana cozzò contro due ostacoli imprevisti: la *Thebais* non insorse una seconda volta contro i Romani e l'esercito augusteo si rivelò molto più efficiente delle forze tolemaiche.

L'arrivo sorprendentemente celere di Petronio e di un'armata campale nella *Thebais*, nonostante l'assenza di Elio Gallo con una parte della guarnigione egiziana, determinò la rapida ritirata dei Nubiani entro i propri confini; le truppe romane proseguirono l'avanzata e l'inseguimento oltre la Prima Cataratta su suolo nubiano. Nei pressi di Pselchis, una città del Dodekaschoenus (la parte settentrionale del Triakontaschoenus), Petronio tentò approcci diplomatici, che ottennero risposte insoddisfacenti e dilatorie; egli dunque diede la parola alle armi e obbligò i Nubiani, forti di 30'000 uomini, a ingaggiare una battaglia in campo aperto. L'esito dello scontro fu tanto catastrofico per l'armata nubiana, che soltanto pochi fortunati sfuggirono alla morte o alla cattura. Gli stessi generali delle forze nubiane caddero prigionieri. L'insieme dei Nubiani catturati a Pselchis fu mandato subito ad Alessandria. Poi l'esercito egiziano espugnò metodicamente una dopo l'altra Pselchis stessa, Primis nel Triakontaschoenus meridionale e Napata; Plinio il Vecchio aggiunge Bocchis, Forum Cambusis, Attena e Stadissis nel tratto da Primis a Napata. Proprio la presa e la distruzione di Napata fu la risposta molto eloquente di Petronio alle proposte diplomatiche della *candace* Amanirenas, che aveva proposto ai Romani sia la sua φιλία sia la restituzione dei prigionieri catturati e delle statue sottratte nella *Thebais*. Il figlio di Amanirenas in quel momento risiedeva a Napata e fuggì dalla città prima della sua caduta⁴⁵.

Un esercito straniero non si avventurava nel cuore della Nubia dai tempi lontanissimi di Psammetico II, quando i mercenari greci e le truppe egizie avevano raggiunto vittoriosamente la Quarta Cataratta del Nilo⁴⁶. Dopo 567 anni la presa e la distruzione di Napata a opera di Petronio replicarono la medesima impresa di Psammetico II⁴⁷. Fino al principio del VI secolo a.C. Napata era stata la capitale

45 L'odierno scetticismo circa la presa e la distruzione di Napata (v. n. 35), per usare un eufemismo, è un caso esemplare di wishful thinking in campo scientifico.

46 Così interpreto Syll.³ I, 1 a rr. 3–4 = SEG XVI, 863 rr. 3–4.

47 Serge SAUNERON–Jean YOYOTTE, «La campagne nubienne de Psammétique II et sa signification historique», *BIFAO* 50 (1952), pp. 157–207; Hassan S. K. BAKRY, «Psammetichus II and His Newly-Found Stela at Shellal», *Oriens Antiquus* 6 (1967), pp. 225–244;

politica e religiosa della Nubia; proprio la sua caduta nel 591 a.C. aveva causato lo spostamento della capitale politica a Meroe. Negli anni Venti del I secolo a.C. Napata era la sede regia della Nubia settentrionale e il centro religioso dell'intero regno; la sua presa ancora rappresentava un bel trofeo. È molto probabile che i Romani fossero tranquillamente inconsapevoli di avere rinverdito un alloro così remoto e tanto prestigioso, dal momento che lo stesso Erodoto aveva accennato con sbrigativa sintesi alla spedizione nubiana di Psammetico II⁴⁸. La sola alternativa in greco a Erodoto era Manetone, ma è lecito pensare che gli Αἴγυπτιακά fossero altrettanto concisi su Psammetico II. Dal momento che i sacerdoti egizi sapevano leggere i geroglifici delle stele commemoranti la trionfale vittoria di Psammetico II, forse la campagna nubiana di Petronio ebbe l'effetto collaterale di legittimare Cesare Augusto come vero faraone agli occhi della classe sacerdotale e di accelerare il consolidamento del dominio romano sull'Egitto.

La ritirata romana dalla Nubia, dopo avere preso e distrutto Napata, fu una decisione pragmatica e saggia, poiché il superamento della Quarta Cataratta e il proseguimento dell'avanzata fino a Meroe eccedevano le capacità logistiche e tattiche dell'esercito egiziaco in quel momento; anche il bottino e i prigionieri consigliavano di volgere le insegne verso l'Egitto. Un atto molto significativo fu compiuto da Petronio durante il ritorno ad Alessandria. Egli rinforzò le difese di Primis nel Triakontaschoenus meridionale, vi dislocò una guarnigione di 400 soldati e li rifornì con due anni di scorte alimentari⁴⁹. Il piccolo e agguerrito presidio di Primis costituiva una rivendicazione esplicita della sovranità romana sul Triakontaschoenus.

Petronio, rientrato ad Alessandria, inviò mille prigionieri nubiani a Cesare Augusto "recentemente tornato dai Cantabri". Questa notizia tramanda due dettagli molto importanti. I mille Nubiani appositamente selezionati per Cesare Augusto

Hans GOEDICKE, «The Campaign of Psammetich II against Nubia», *MDAIK* 37 (1981), pp. 187–198; Thomas G. H. JAMES, «Egypt: the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties», in John BOARDMAN–Iorwerth E. S. EDWARDS–Nicholas G. L. HAMMOND (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. Second Edition. III 2: The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, Cambridge 2006, Cambridge University Press, pp. 726–730.

48 Hdt. II, 161.

49 Strab. XVII, 1, 54. Per quanto riguarda il solo pane, la τροφή di due anni per 400 uomini richiedeva (5 *modii Italici* di grano x 400 uomini) x 24 mesi = 48'000 *modii Italici* di grano.

implicano un totale dei prigionieri molto più alto, poiché altri furono venduti e una parte morì per varie malattie prima della vendita. Le operazioni militari contro la Nubia ebbero sicuramente luogo nel 24 a.C., poiché nel biennio 26–25 a.C. Cesare Augusto comandò personalmente il *bellum Cantabricum* e il *bellum Asturicum* risiedendo a Tarraco.

La *candace* Amanirenas decise di continuare la guerra, ma un intero anno fu necessario a riorganizzare le milizie nubiane; la distruzione di Napata non aveva piegato i Nubiani, ma la disfatta a Pselchis li aveva letteralmente dissanguati. La lunga pausa delle ostilità trova il contesto adatto, se accettiamo i 30'000 uomini di Strabone come una stima approssimata e attendibile dell'esercito nubiano nella battaglia di Pselchis; le forze regie furono quasi annientate in un solo colpo e dovettero essere ricostituite dalle fondamenta. Primis, ora sede di una guarnigione romana, era il bersaglio più ovvio, per ottenere una rivincita tattica in tempi brevi e rivendicare il possesso del Triakontaschoenus; nel 22 a.C. la *candace* poté finalmente radunare una nuova armata e la guidò verso la città fortificata.

La prontezza di Petronio impedì alle forze nubiane di riconquistare la roccaforte nilotica e il Triakontaschoenus meridionale; egli infatti marciò immediatamente in soccorso del presidio minacciato. La colonna romana raggiunse Primis molto prima dei Nubiani e attrezzò ulteriormente le sue difese; Amanirenas ebbe la saggezza di evitare un'altra battaglia in campo aperto e si ritirò con il suo esercito. L'abortito attacco delle forze nubiane contro Primis segnò la fine dei combattimenti e fu seguito dall'arrivo degli ambasciatori nubiani presso Petronio. Questo atto aprì ufficialmente la fase della diplomazia e trasferì la soluzione politica del conflitto nelle mani di Cesare Augusto, cui il *praefectus Aegypti* indirizzò molto volentieri i *legati* nubiani. In quel tempo (inverno 21–20 a.C.) il *princeps* era sull'isola di Samo; là egli stava tessendo la ragnatela diplomatica e militare, per imporre il protettorato romano all'Armenia e recuperare i *signa* catturati dai Parthi.

La grande generosità di Cesare Augusto con i Nubiani in sede diplomatica esprime coerentemente il suo cambiamento dei piani strategici. Lo spettacolare fallimento nell'*Arabia Eudaemon* era già stato archiviato; la conseguente guerra con il regno di Nubia doveva essere chiusa al più presto. Perciò il *princeps* condonò il tributo e restituì la maggior parte del Triakontaschoenus alla Nubia, ma estese la sovranità romana al Dodekaschoenus nel pieno rispetto delle usanze locali; come al tempo dei Tolomei, la regione apparteneva formalmente alla dea

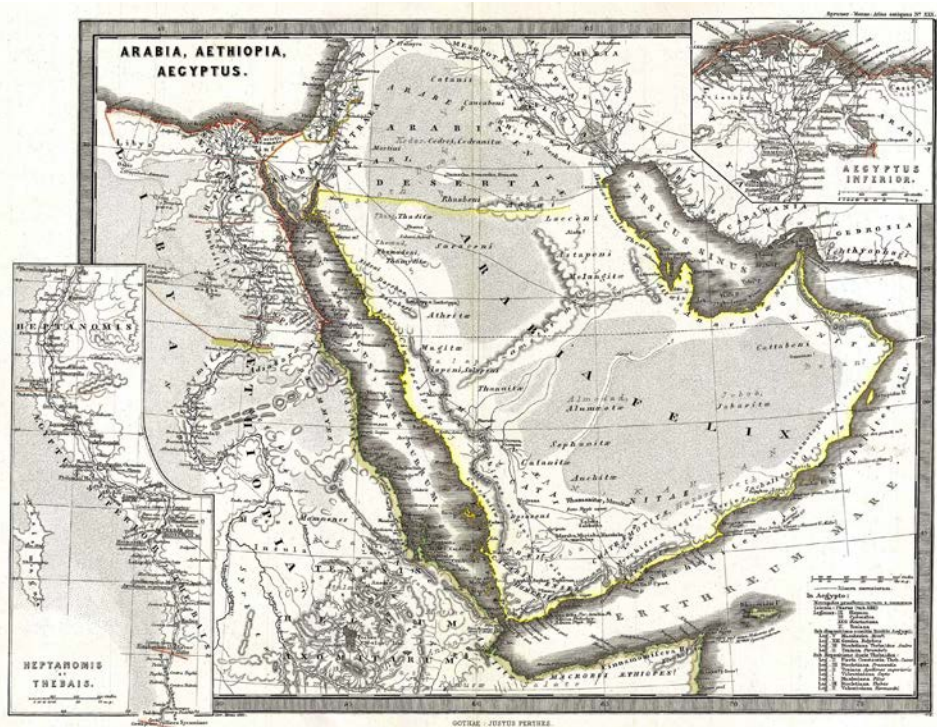


Fig. 6 Mappa di Arabia, Aethiopia e Aegyptus da Karl Spruner von Metz e Theodor Menke, *Spruner-Menke Atlas Antiquus: Karoli Spruneri Opus Tertio Edidit Theodorus Menke*, Gotha, Justus Perthes, 1865. Public domain (Wikimedia Commons).

Iside in Philae e l'imperatore era il suo 'procuratore'. Il confine ufficiale dell'Egitto romano con la Nubia restò a Syene, ma quello reale avanzò verso meridione dalla Prima Cataratta a Hiera Sykaminos; ora un esercito nubiano, per attaccare Syene, avrebbe dovuto percorrere 90 miglia romane. Nell'inverno 21–20 a.C. il compromesso territoriale con il regno di Nubia fu la soluzione più utile per gli interessi romani, poiché la libertà di concentrare le risorse militari in Armenia valeva pienamente la rinuncia al Triakontaschoenus meridionale.

A questo punto possiamo vagliare meglio le motivazioni ufficiali della guerra nella penisola arabica. Partiamo da una constatazione strettamente materiale. Il fallimento strategico della campagna militare in *Arabia Eudaemon* fu pagato dal governo imperiale tre volte con risorse finanziarie, beni e uomini sprecati direttamente in quella impresa, persi a opera dei Nubiani durante l'invasione della *Thebais* e investiti nella profonda controffensiva in Nubia. La propaganda augustea poté manipolare l'aspetto militare, ma dal punto di vista economico la prima

voce restò una onerosa passività; infatti è lecito dubitare fortemente che il bottino della Nubia, la vendita dei prigionieri nubiani e i proventi del Dodekaschoenus abbiano potuto ripianare anche le spese della spedizione arabica.

Cicerone, quando appoggiò il conferimento dell'*imperium* speciale a Pompeo nella terza guerra contro Mitridate VI, formulò con la massima lucidità le ragioni economiche di una guerra romana⁵⁰. La *populi Romani gloria*, la *sociorum salus* e la *imperii/rei publicae dignitas* affollano quel discorso, ma l'autorappresentazione tradizionale dell'imperialismo romano evidenzia ulteriormente per contrasto la consapevolezza ciceroniana delle cause economiche. La capacità di intendere correttamente il rapporto tra costi e benefici nelle guerre di conquista costituiva la norma già tra politici e condottieri romani della tarda Repubblica. La *gloria/δόξα* degli oratori e degli storiografi nella realtà storica andava a braccetto con la razionale e oculata ricerca di beni materiali, che portassero sostanziosi introiti all'*ae-rarium* della *res publica* e alle casse private del trionfatore. Strabone enuncia apertamente per due volte il movente economico della malaugurata spedizione su suolo arabico⁵¹. L'argomento dei benefici economici per le casse statali poteva essere adoperato anche in un senso ben diverso, quando un'impresa solennemente annunciata a soli fini di propaganda interna doveva essere messa sugli scaffali o la ricerca della *gloria/δόξα* per motivi politici non approdava agli allori sperati.

La fantomatica spedizione di Cesare Augusto contro i Britanni fu un'impresa ripetutamente strombazzata dalla propaganda ufficiale e da Orazio, ma il *princeps* non coltivò mai la reale intenzione di conquistare la Britannia⁵²; Strabone scrive serenamente che la conquista delle Britannia era superflua e inopportuna appunto per ragioni economiche⁵³. La pressante insistenza di Strabone sulle enormi ricchezze dei *Sabaei* va nella direzione opposta, ma echeggia con pari fedeltà le argomentazioni camaleontiche della propaganda augustea. Soltanto i guadagni materiali dell'eventuale conquista poterono giustificare degnamente il vistoso fallimento in *Arabia Eudaemon*, un'impresa progettata esclusivamente per ragioni di politica interna.

50 Cic. *Manil.* 4–7 e 14–19. La parola *uectigalia* ricorre diciassette volte nel discorso; ben quattordici occorrenze figurano nelle due sezioni citate.

51 Strab. XVI, 4, 19 e 22.

52 Maurizio COLOMBO, «Marcus Vinicius, Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus e i Daci: una revisione della dottrina corrente», *NAM* 10 (2022), pp. 394–399, soprattutto pp. 398–399.

53 Strab. IV, 5, 3.

Una situazione eccezionale, la crisi politica per gli *spolia opima* di Crasso⁵⁴, indusse Cesare Augusto ad abbandonare disastrosamente il consueto realismo dei suoi piani e a fare un passo molto più lungo della gamba. I τόποι più grandiosi della propaganda augustea, come i Daci e la Britannia, furono quasi sempre esche per l'opinione pubblica⁵⁵, ma purtroppo in questa occasione una vera guerra alimentò la produzione lirica di Orazio⁵⁶. Benchè gli studiosi ora tendano a sottovalutare il peso e l'impatto della crisi politica per gli *spolia opima* di Crasso⁵⁷, in campo militare questo incidente favorì una decisione molto sensata (completare la conquista della penisola iberica) e una alquanto irrazionale (invadere una parte della penisola arabica), poiché era diventato necessario ribadire risolutivamente che Cesare Augusto era il solo *imperator* del nuovo regime⁵⁸.

Le campagne iberiche di Cesare Augusto iniziarono nel 26 a.C., ma Elio Gallo cominciò la lunga sosta a Leuke Kome soltanto nell'estate 25 a.C., benchè egli avesse ricevuto l'ordine di "esplorare" l'*Arabia Eudaemon* e l'*Aethiopia* al principio stesso della sua *praefectura*, come è ovvio. La cronologia di Cornelio Gallo gioca un ruolo fondamentale, per chiarire la mancata sincronia tra le campagne iberiche e la guerra arabica. Le fonti antiche discordano: Cassio Dione data la caduta e il suicidio di Cornelio Gallo al 26 a.C., Girolamo il solo suicidio al 27 a.C., ma forse entrambi comprimono erroneamente le vicende di due anni consecutivi sotto un unico anno⁵⁹.

Se la destituzione di Cornelio Gallo avvenne già nel 27 a.C., l'incompetenza di Elio Gallo determinò anche la posticipazione della spedizione arabica; egli infatti, per costruire 80 navi da guerra totalmente superflue e 130 necessarie navi da trasporto, consumò integralmente la stagione bellica del 26 a.C., provocando

54 Hermann DESSAU, «Livius und Augustus», *Hermes* 41 (1906), pp. 142–151; Martin P. CHARLESWORTH, «The Triumph of Octavian», in COOK–ADCOCK–CHARLESWORTH (n. 3), pp. 117–125; Ronald SYME, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1939, Oxford University Press, pp. 308–310 e id., «Livy and Augustus», *HSPH* 64 (1959), pp. 43–47.

55 V. n. 52.

56 V. n. 17.

57 Ad esempio, John A. CROOK, «Political history, 30 B.C. to A.D. 14», in BOWMAN–CHAMPLIN–LINTOTT (n. 3), p. 80.

58 Maurizio COLOMBO, «La steppa pontica e il Danubio in età augustea: tre proposte esegetiche per l'appellativo atipico della *IV Scythica*», *NAM* 6 (2021), pp. 21–22. GRUEN (n. 3), p. 163 attribuisce uno scopo prevalentemente propagandistico anche alle campagne iberiche di Cesare Augusto.

59 V. n. 41.

l'involontaria procrastinazione della guerra araba all'anno successivo. Se invece il primo *praefectus Aegypti* fu esautorato nel 26 a.C., allora il ritardo della campagna araba fu causato dallo stesso Cesare Augusto, che incaricò Elio Gallo di invadere l'*Arabia Eudaemon* soltanto dopo l'inizio delle operazioni belliche contro i Cantabri.

Ambedue le spiegazioni avallano la medesima conclusione. Le circostanze politiche e le esigenze propagandistiche sembrano avere indotto Cesare Augusto a concepire l'idea eccessivamente ambiziosa di rivendicare simultaneamente il coronamento delle guerre iberiche e l'imposizione del protettorato romano agli Arabi o addirittura la conquista dell'*Arabia Eudaemon*; la necessità politica di abbinare gli allori iberici con un qualsiasi trofeo in Oriente produsse il secondo errore strategico di Cesare Augusto e dei suoi consiglieri, la perniciosa vaghezza dell'obiettivo finale.

Abbiamo esaminato la raffigurazione propagandistica e la realtà storica delle due campagne militari. Ora possiamo ricostruire in maniera approssimata la forza e la composizione delle armate romane in *Arabia Eudaemon* e in Nubia, per osservare il funzionamento operativo dell'esercito augusteo. La guarnigione egiziana in origine contava tre legioni, tre *alae* e nove *cohortes*⁶⁰. La dislocazione delle tre legioni risulta molto significativa: Nicopolis presso Alessandria, Babylon nelle vicinanze di Menfi e Coptus nella *Thebais*⁶¹. I *castra* legionari individuano le tre zone critiche della nuova provincia nei primi anni del dominio romano: la metropoli, il collegamento fluviale del Basso Egitto con l'Alto Egitto e il confine meridionale.

Tre *auxiliares cohortes* erano stanziate ad Alessandria, altrettante a Syene e le restanti nella ἄλλη χώρα. Il presidio romano di Syene fu attaccato dai Nubiani⁶². È molto probabile che la caduta di Syene nelle mani degli invasori abbia comportato la distruzione dei tre reggimenti, poiché il saccheggio nubiano della città e la sopravvivenza della guarnigione romana rappresentano circostanze insanabilmente contraddittorie. Strabone precisa che ai suoi tempi le tre unità di Syene non erano presenti al completo⁶³.

60 Strab. XVII, 1, 12.

61 Tomasz DERDA–Adam ŁAITAR–Tomasz PLÓCIENNIK, «Where did the third legion of Augustan Egypt have its base?», *Palamedes* 9–10 (2014–2015), pp. 99–105.

62 Strab. XVII, 1, 53–54.

63 Strab. XVII, 1, 53.

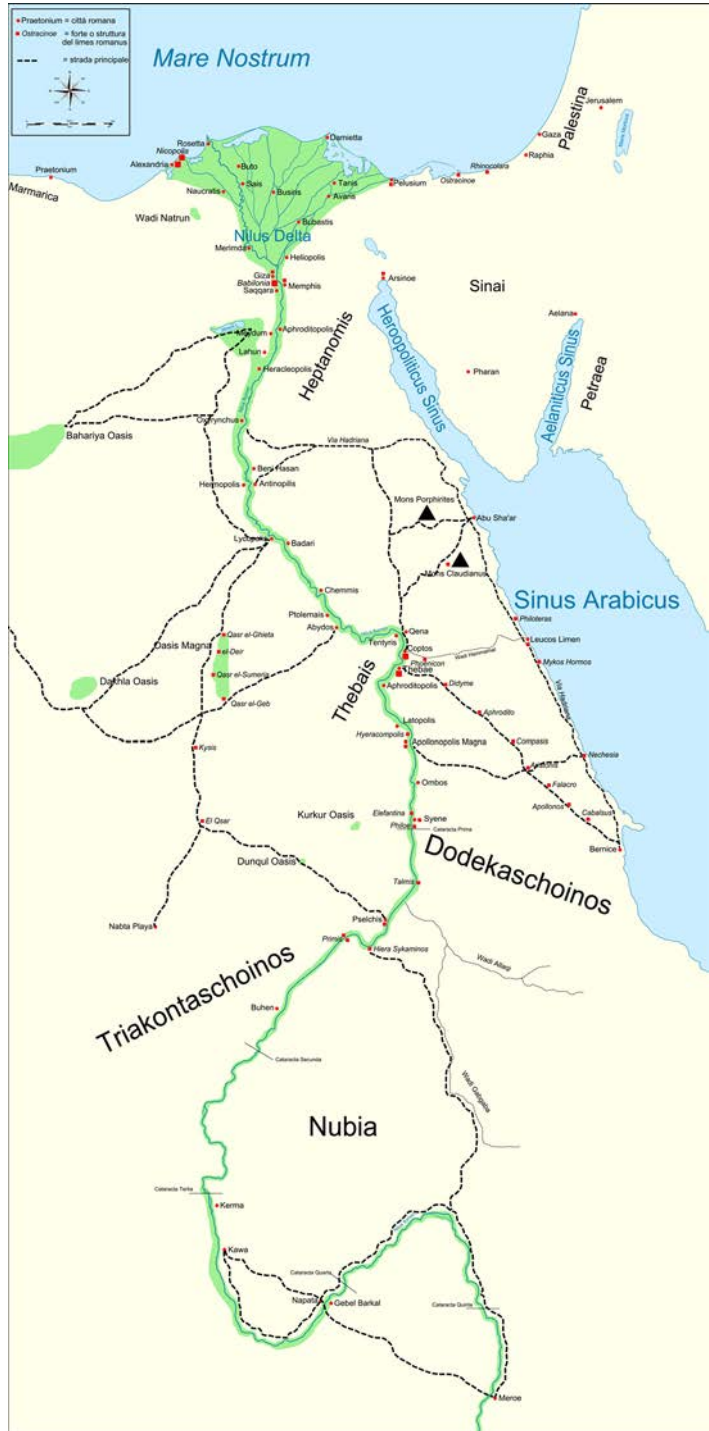


Fig. 7 Jeff Dahl, *Map of Ancient Egypt, showing the Nile up to the fifth cataract, and major cities and sites of the Dynastic period (c. 3150 BC to 30 BC)*, 2007. GNU Free documentation license (Wikimedia Commons).

CIL III, 6627 = 14147 documenta una “Arbeitsvexillation” dell’intera guarnigione: due legioni, tre *alae*, sette *cohortes*, di cui almeno due o tre già erano *equitatae*. L’epigrafe fu incisa negli ultimi anni di Cesare Augusto o nei primi anni di Tiberio. La successiva riduzione delle legioni da tre a due rende piena ragione delle due *cohortes* mancanti all’appello. La terza legione, quando fu trasferita altrove, lasciò una *ala* e una *cohors* dei suoi *auxilia* in Egitto, ma portò con sé due *cohortes*; gli *auxilia* della terza legione furono suddivisi in due parti praticamente uguali sul piano numerico.

Le sette *cohortes* suggeriscono due scenari molto differenti a Syene. Le tre *cohortes* furono totalmente distrutte e altrettante *cohortes* furono appositamente arruolate o vennero trasferite da altre province, per rimpiazzare le unità perse. Altrimenti già le tre *cohortes* travolte dai Nubiani erano presenti a ranghi incompleti e furono ricostituite partendo dai distaccamenti superstiti. La liberazione dei prigionieri romani, quando il contrattacco romano raggiunse Napata, diede l’occasione di recuperare anche i soldati sopravvissuti. Nel 98 la *cohors I Hispanorum equitata*, la *cohors II Ituraeorum equitata* e la *cohors I Thebaeorum equitata* erano dislocate a Syene⁶⁴; CIL III, 6627 elenca la *cohors I Thebaeorum* tra le sette *cohortes* della “Arbeitsvexillation” e una *cohors Ituraeorum* presidiava Syene nel 39⁶⁵. Ma è lecito dubitare che proprio le tre *cohortes* attestate nel 98 fossero stanziare a Syene già negli anni Venti del I secolo a.C.

La storia degli *auxilia* romani su suolo egizio invita a una breve digressione. Anzitutto un dettaglio minore di particolare rilevanza dal punto di vista politico. Cesare Augusto formò due sole unità con gli Egizi autoctoni, la *cohors I Thebaeorum equitata* e la *cohors II Thebaeorum*. Entrambe le *cohortes Thebaeorum* prestarono servizio esclusivamente entro i confini dell’*Aegyptus* fino al 105, quando un diploma militare attesta il trasferimento della *cohors I Thebaeorum equitata* nell’esercito provinciale della *Iudaea*⁶⁶. Anche questa anomalia rispecchia fedelmente la condizione separata e speciale della provincia nilotica dentro lo Stato romano.

64 CIL III, 14147² = ILS 8907.

65 CIL III, 14147¹ = ILS 8899.

66 RMD I 9. La *cohors I Hispanorum equitata* e la *cohors I Thebaeorum equitata*, le due unità simultaneamente trasferite dall’*Aegyptus* in *Iudaea*, erano ancora dislocate insieme a Syene nel 98: v. n. 64.

Purtroppo il termine più vicino di paragone per gli *auxilia* augustei o tiberiani della guarnigione egiziaca cade soltanto verso la metà della dinastia flavia, ma il confronto offre un risultato altamente significativo. Nello 83, quando due legioni erano ancora dislocate in *Aegyptus*, troviamo tre *alae* con sette *cohortes*⁶⁷. Quattro epigrafi e un diploma militare registrano sempre in Egitto la *cohors scutata ciuium Romanorum*⁶⁸. Durante i primi anni di Domiziano le *cohortes* in realtà erano otto, ma una, la *cohors I Flauia Cilicum equitata*, porta un gentilizio denunciante la sua creazione a opera di Vespasiano o Tito; quindi fino al termine della dinastia giulio-claudia il numero degli *auxilia* egiziaci, tre *alae* e sette *cohortes*, rimase pienamente identico all'assetto definitivo di Cesare Augusto⁶⁹.

Come abbiamo già detto, tre legioni (due erano la *III Cyrenaica* e la *XXII Deiotariana*, la terza è ancora ignota, forse la *XII Fulminata*), tre *alae* e nove *cohortes* costituivano la forza originaria dell'esercito provinciale. Dal momento che entrambe le guerre ebbero luogo proprio all'inizio del principato augusteo, sembra legittimo considerare tutte le *cohortes* degli *auxilia* ancora *peditatae*. Al tempo di CIL III, 6627 almeno due *cohortes* erano già *equitatae*; entro la fine del I secolo tre *cohortes* appartenenti al nucleo augusteo dell'armata egiziaca risultano sicuramente *equitatae*⁷⁰. Pertanto le forze romane in Egitto annoveravano a pieni ranghi 16'560 legionari, 360 *legionarii equites*, 1584 *alares equites* e 4536 *auxiliares pedites* per un totale teorico di 23'040 uomini. Il computo può essere arrotondato per difetto a 4500 *auxiliares pedites*, 1500 *alares equites* e 16'500 legionari per un totale di 22'500 uomini⁷¹.

Elio Gallo condusse con sé in *Arabia Eudaemon* circa 10'000 fanti, di cui possiamo congetturare la composizione tenendo conto dei σύμμαχοι inclusi nella forza totale; conosciamo soltanto una parte dei σύμμαχοι, cioè 500 uomini scelti dei

67 CIL XVI, 29. A questo proposito cfr. Sergio DARIS, «Le truppe ausiliarie romane in Egitto», in *ANRW* II 10/1 (1988), pp. 743–766.

68 CIL III, 6610 e 12069; VIII, 25846; XI, 3801; AE 2012, 1960 = 2018, 1988.

69 Tre *alae* e otto *cohortes* anche nel 105, quando la *cohors I Hispanorum equitata* e la *cohors I Thebaeorum equitata* risultano già trasferite in *Iudaeam*, ma la *cohors I Augusta praetoria Lusitanorum equitata* e la *cohors II Thracum* ne hanno già preso il posto in *Aegyptus*: v. n. 66.

70 V. n. 64.

71 Queste cifre si fondano su Maurizio COLOMBO, «La forza numerica e la composizione degli eserciti campali durante l'Alto Impero: legioni e *auxilia* da Cesare Augusto a Traiano», *Historia* 58 (2009), pp. 96–98. Le dimensioni e la composizione dell'esercito dislocato in *Aegyptus*: *ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

σωματοφύλακες di Erode e 1000 Nabatei⁷². Nel 67 i σύμμαχοι orientali (quattro re-clienti: Antioco IV di Commagene, Agrippa II, Soemo di Emesa e Malik II di *Nabataea*) fornirono 15'000 uomini all'armata campale di Vespasiano; ben 6000 erano Nabatei, 1000 cavalieri e 5000 fanti, di cui i τοξόται formavano la maggioranza. Gli altri tre re-clienti fornirono 3000 uomini ciascuno, 1000 cavalieri e 2000 πεζοὶ τοξόται⁷³. Si può ipotizzare che i 1000 fanti nabatei di Elio Gallo fossero appunto τοξόται. Inoltre la proporzione vigente nel 67 tra i Nabatei e gli altri alleati di Vespasiano suggerisce di attribuire 2500 σύμμαχοι a Elio Gallo, cioè 500 σωματοφύλακες scelti di Erode, 500 Commageni, 500 Emeseni e 1000 Nabatei. Perciò le truppe romane dovevano annoverare i *uexilla* di tre legioni (6048 legionari, da ogni legione quattro delle *cohortes II-X*) e tre *cohortes* (1512 *auxiliares pedites*) ovvero i soli *uexilla* di tre legioni (7560 legionari, da ogni legione cinque delle *cohortes II-X*), che sommati con i 2500 σύμμαχοι danno un totale teorico di 10'060 fanti. In cifre approssimate: 6000 legionari e 1500 *auxiliares pedites*, ovvero 7500 legionari.

La totalità o il grosso di tre *cohortes*, come abbiamo visto, fu distrutto dai Nubiani a Syene. Strabone attribuisce 800 cavalieri e meno di 10'000 fanti a Petronio⁷⁴. 800 cavalieri rappresentano la metà di tre *alae* lievemente arrotondata per eccesso ($1584 : 2 = 792$ *alares equites*); meno di 10'000 fanti sono le *aquilae* di tre legioni, cioè 9000 legionari (da ciascuna legione la *cohors I* con quattro delle *cohortes II-X*, 3000 legionari), ovvero 7488 legionari (da ogni legione la *cohors I* e tre delle *cohortes II-X*, 2496 legionari) e 1512 *auxiliares pedites* (tre delle sei *cohortes* rimanenti). La seconda opzione in cifre approssimate: 7500 legionari e 1500 *auxiliares pedites*.

Le recentissime rivolte della *Thebais* e di Heroonpolis sotto Cornelio Gallo obbligarono a prendere precauzioni militari⁷⁵. Petronio dunque lasciò prudentemente in Egitto gli *equites* delle tre legioni, la metà delle tre *alae* (altrimenti i 360 *legionarii equites* seguirono i propri commilitoni e un numero più o meno uguale di *alares equites* rimase a guardia della provincia), una *cohors* di ciascuna legione e tre *cohortes* degli *auxilia*, ovvero due *cohortes* di ogni legione o sei *cohortes*

72 Strab. XVI, 4, 23; Ios. *ant. Iud.* XV, 317.

73 Ios. *bell. Iud.* III, 67–68. Le composizioni percentuali dell'esercito romano in *Iudaea* sotto Vespasiano nel 67–69 e poi agli ordini di Tito nel 70: COLOMBO (n. 71), pp. 102 e 105.

74 V. n. 29.

75 V. n. 44.

degli *auxilia*, cioè perlomeno 4176 uomini (più precisamente 1152 cavalieri e 3024 fanti), cui dovremmo eventualmente aggiungere i distaccamenti superstiti delle tre *cohortes* annientate a Syene. In cifre approssimate: almeno 4000 uomini, più precisamente 1000 cavalieri e 3000 fanti. La consistenza della guarnigione residua, mentre l'esercito egiziaco combatteva simultaneamente su due fronti, diventò pericolosamente bassa; ma Petronio seppe gestire bene le poche forze a sua disposizione per la fase difensiva, che in quella congiuntura si identificava esclusivamente con la prevenzione delle ribellioni interne. Questa necessità comunque significò che fino dall'inizio la controffensiva romana ebbe carattere consapevolmente limitato nei mezzi e nei fini.

La grande vittoria di Petronio possiede un valore abitualmente trascurato quale testimonianza capitale e controcorrente sulla storia dell'esercito romano in Oriente. CIL III, 6627 attesta chiaramente che negli ultimi anni di Cesare Augusto o nei primi anni di Tiberio le province orientali, Alessandria e soprattutto la *Galatia* in senso stretto provvedevano quasi tutti i *tirones* delle legioni egiziache; ancora verso la metà del IV secolo i Galati saranno soliti fornire *milites boni* a Costanzo II⁷⁶. Quando si dibatte sulla pari o minore efficienza delle legioni orientali rispetto a quelle occidentali⁷⁷, le imprese dei legionari egiziaci in Nubia all'alba stessa del principato augusteo dovrebbero occupare il primo posto delle testimonianze antiche.

Le operazioni belliche contro l'*Aethiopia* produssero due conseguenze strategiche a lungo termine. Il principale risultato fu la sicurezza duratura della *Thebais* e dell'Egitto a meridione. Cesare Augusto e i suoi successori, fatta eccezione per Nerone⁷⁸, non mostrarono più nessun interesse verso il regno nubiano, che a sua volta accettò la sovranità romana sul Dodekaschoenus e si astenne scrupolosamente da nuovi atti di aggressione contro l'Egitto. Dal punto di vista romano la conquista dell'*Aethiopia* avrebbe richiesto una concentrazione di mezzi militari e

76 *Expos.* 41 *Inde obuiat Galatia prouincia optima sibi sufficiens. Negotiatur uestem plurimam; aliquotiens uero et milites bonos dominis praestat.* Per valutare esattamente il peso della notizia, occorre rammentare che una simile annotazione accomuna i soli Traci con i Galati: *expos.* 50 *Post Bithyniam iterum Thracia prouincia et ipsa diues in fructibus et maximos habens uiros et fortes in bello; propter quod et frequenter inde milites tolluntur.*

77 La lettura fondamentale è Everett L. WHEELER, «The Laxity of Syrian Legions», in David BRAUND–David L. KENNEDY (Eds.), *The Roman Army in the East* (JRA Suppl. Ser. 18), Ann Arbor 1996, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, pp. 229–276.

78 Plin. *nat.* VI, 181 e Cass. Dio LXIII, 8, 1–2.

di risorse economiche assolutamente sproporzionata al vero valore dell'obiettivo; dal punto di vista nubiano i Romani si erano rivelati molto più forti dei Tolomei e il gioco delle incursioni in *Thebais* non valeva la candela della rappresaglia romana. Appena tre *cohortes* continuarono a presidiare il confine con la Nubia, il punto più esposto del territorio provinciale⁷⁹. L'impero romano e il regno nubiano intrattennero stabili e cordiali relazioni di convivenza pacifica per più di due secoli e mezzo; quando la guerra rimise piede da meridione su suolo egizio, i nemici furono non i Nubiani, ma i Blemmyes.

L'altra conseguenza fu posteriore di tre decenni alla guerra nubiana e mutò permanentemente la consistenza numerica dell'armata romana in Egitto. La terza legione con due *cohortes* dei suoi *auxilia* fu trasferita altrove e l'esercito provinciale dell'*Aegyptus* fu ridotto stabilmente a due legioni (11'040 uomini e 240 *legionarii equites*) con tre *alae* (1584 uomini) e sette *cohortes* (3528 uomini), che a pieni ranghi formavano un totale di 16'392 uomini. In cifre approssimate: 11'000 legionari, 1500 *alares equites* e 3500 *auxiliares pedites* per un totale di 16'000 uomini. Come vedremo, il trasferimento della terza legione egiziaca in un'altra provincia può essere avvenuto nel 9.

Già prima che la terza legione e due *cohortes* fossero trasferite altrove, la funzione strategica dell'*exercitus Aegyptiacus* risiedeva esclusivamente dentro i confini della sua provincia. La pace con la Nubia aveva eliminato la sola fonte di una guerra in grande scala contro nemici esterni. Anche la difesa della contigua *prouincia Creta et Cyrenae*, che veniva amministrata dal Senato ed era priva di una propria guarnigione, richiese appena un paio di campagne militari contro i nomadi del deserto libico, i Marmaridi; una ebbe luogo prima del 12 a.C., l'altra nello 1. Prima del 12 a.C. il comando fu esercitato da Publio Sulpicio Quirinio, che allora era *proconsul* pretorio della *prouincia Creta et Cyrenae* e ottenne il consolato eponimo del 12 a.C. come ricompensa della sua vittoria sui Marmaridi⁸⁰. Nello 1 soltanto un anonimo *tribunus* delle *cohortes praetoriae* fu capace di stroncare le incursioni dei Marmaridi⁸¹. Dopo questa data non abbiamo più notizie di guerre ai confini dell'Egitto romano.

79 Michael P. SPEIDEL, «Nubia's Roman Garrison», *ANRW* II 10/1 (1988), pp. 767–798.

80 Flor. *epit.* II, 31. In questo senso già MOMMSEN (n. 3), p. 171.

81 Cass. Dio LV, 10a, 1. Cfr. inoltre OGIS 767 = IGRR I, 1041; SEG IX, 63 = XXVI, 1835; Gaspare OLIVERIO–Giovanni PUGLIESE CARRATELLI–Donato MORELLI, «Supplemento Epigrafico Cirenaico», *ASAA* 39–40 (1961–1962), pp. 280–283 nr. 105.

Il taglio dell'esercito provinciale significò il ridimensionamento delle sue mansioni sul piano operativo: ormai l'armata romana dell'*Aegyptus* doveva assolvere due soli compiti, cioè il mantenimento dell'ordine interno e l'eventuale invio di *uexillationes* in Oriente. Durante il I secolo le unità egiziache fornirono sicuramente *uexillationes* a un'armata campale soltanto in due occasioni; ciò accadde in Armenia nel 63 (Corbulone) e in *Iudaea* nel 70 (Tito)⁸².

L'esercito augusteo e giulio-claudio dell'*Aegyptus* fu il solo caso, in cui il ruolo più ristretto di "Besatzungsheer" prevalse rispetto ai compiti più vasti di "Bewegungsheer". Nel medesimo periodo il caso della *III Augusta* fu molto diverso. Una sola legione con i propri *auxilia* per tutto il territorio dell'Africa romana era naturalmente votata a diventare un "Besatzungsheer", ma l'enorme diversità delle condizioni strategiche rispetto all'Egitto rese necessario che la *III Augusta* e i suoi *auxilia* continuassero a essere un "Bewegungsheer" nell'ambito circoscritto della *prouincia Africa*. Le sette guerre combattute in Africa settentrionale dal 34 a.C. al 6 e le quattro campagne contro il ribelle Tacfarinas dal 17 al 24 bastano a riassumere la differenza tra i due eserciti⁸³.

La nuova sede della terza legione stanziata in Egitto deve essere identificata certamente con la *Syria*⁸⁴; il terminus post quem è il 4 a.C., quando ancora tre sole legioni erano a disposizione del *legatus Augusti pro praetore* Publio Quintilio Varo in *Syria*⁸⁵. Una congettura molto plausibile è che in età augustea la guarnigione originaria della *prouincia Syria* avesse contato cinque legioni come nella *prouincia Macedonia*⁸⁶. Poi un evento accidentale in Asia Minore aveva causato la riduzione dell'esercito siriano a tre sole legioni, per adeguare il dispiegamento dell'apparato militare all'imprevista espansione del territorio romano in Oriente.

82 Tac. ann. XV, 26, 2: Corbulone aveva con sé *uexilla delectorum ex Illyrico et Aegypto*. Ios. bell. Iud. V, 44: 2000 legionari della *III Cyrenaica* e della *XXII Deiotariana* rimpiazzarono gli altrettanti uomini tratti dalle quattro legioni di Tito e inviati con Muciano verso l'Italia (cfr. anche Ios. bell. Iud. V, 287 e VI, 238; Tac. hist. V, 1, 2).

83 CIL I², pp. 50, 76 e 180–181 registra quattro trionfi *ex Africa* dal 34 a.C. al 21 a.C. Per la vittoria e il trionfo di Lucio Cornelio Balbo sui Garamanti v. n. 12. CIL VIII, 16456 = ILS 120; Vell. II, 116, 2. AE 1940, 68 = IRT 301; Vell. II, 116, 2; Flor. epit. II, 31; Cass. Dio LV, 28, 3–4. Tac. ann. II, 52; III, 20–21 e 73–74; IV, 23–26.

84 Michael P. SPEIDEL, «Augustus' Deployment of the Legions in Egypt», CE 57 (1982), pp. 120–124 = id., *Roman Army Studies*, I, Amsterdam 1984, Gieben, pp. 317–321.

85 Ios. ant. Iud. XVII, 286; bell. Iud. II, 40 e 66–67.

86 Per l'armata campale della *prouincia Macedonia* nel biennio 29–28 a.C. cfr. ora COLOMBO (n. 58), p. 33.

Proprio nel 25 a.C., quando Elio Gallo e il suo corpo di spedizione erano partiti per l'*Arabia Eudaemon*, Aminta, il valoroso re-cliente della *Galatia*, era repentinamente caduto vittima di un agguato nel corso di una campagna vittoriosa contro i feroci Homonadenses del Tauro; la sua morte aveva determinato l'immediata e precoce annessione della *Galatia* all'impero romano. La nuova provincia comprendeva la *Galatia* propriamente detta, l'*Isauria*, la *Pisidia*, la *Lycaonia* e la *Pamphylia*; la sua armata annoverava due legioni con i relativi *auxilia* ed era stata tratta dall'esercito provinciale della *Syria*⁸⁷.

Per un trentennio le due legioni della *prouincia Galatia et Pamphylia* vigilarono sui barbari interni dell'Asia Minore, le tre legioni della *prouincia Syria* custodirono il territorio romano e i regni-clienti dalla *Cilicia* alla *Iudaea*. In questo arco di tempo l'esercito della *prouincia Galatia* riportò perlomeno due successi decisivi contro le popolazioni montane del Tauro; esso infatti soggiogò gli Homonadenses prendendo i loro quarantaquattro *castella* uno dopo l'altro e debellò gli Isauri in una guerra regolare⁸⁸.

Nonostante il rilievo esagerato dei Parthi nei poeti contemporanei e nella propaganda ufficiale, Cesare Augusto non progettò mai una guerra aperta o indiretta con il *regnum Parthorum* né commise mai l'errore di sopravvalutare le proprie forze in Oriente⁸⁹. La consistenza e la distribuzione delle truppe romane nelle province asiatiche dimostrano il pragmatismo del *princeps*. Cinque legioni avevano fronteggiato i Parthi in *Syria*, ma le tribù montane del Tauro rappresentavano un pericolo molto più concreto per il territorio romano e i regni-clienti in

87 Ronald SYME, «Galatia and Pamphylia under Augustus: the Governorships of Piso, Quirinius and Silvanus», *Klio* 27 (1934), pp. 122–148; Stephen MITCHELL, «Legio VII and the Garrison of Augustan Galatia», *CQ* 26 (1976), pp. 298–308; Karl STROBEL, «Zur Geschichte der Legionen V (Macedonica) und VII (Claudia pia fidelis) in der frühen Kaiserzeit und zur Stellung der Provinz Galatia in der augusteischen Heeresgeschichte», in Yann LE BOHEC–Catherine WOLFF (Éds.), *Les légions de Rome sous le Haut-Empire. Actes du Congrès de Lyon, 17–19 septembre 1998*, II, Paris 2000, De Boccard, pp. 515–528; id., «Die Legionen des Augustus. Probleme der römischen Heeresgeschichte nach dem Ende des Bürgerkrieges: Die Truppengeschichte Galatiens und Moesiens bis in Tiberische Zeit und das Problem der Legionen Quintae», in Philip FREEMAN–Julian BENNETT–Zbigniew T. FIEMA–Birgitta HOFFMANN (Eds.), *Limes XVIII. Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies* (BAR Int. Ser. 1084), I, Oxford 2002, Archaeopress, pp. 51–66.

88 Strab. XII, 6, 5; Tac. *ann.* III, 48, 1. Cass. Dio LV, 28, 3.

89 ANDERSON (n. 3), pp. 254–265 e 273–285. In senso analogo GRUEN (n. 3), pp. 158–163.

Fig. 8 Imperatore romano con le insegne di faraone. Scultura in basalto del I secolo d. C. Musée du Louvre, esposto ad Arte Canal, Madrid, in “Cleopatra y la fascinación de Egipto” (Foto Ángel M. Felicísimo, Mérida, 2016 CC 2.0 generic (Wikimedia Commons)).



Asia Minore; dal 25 a.C. tre legioni dovettero bastare alla *prouincia Syria*. Nel biennio 26–25 a.C. perlomeno sei legioni stavano combattendo contro Cantabri e Astures⁹⁰. La permanenza delle sei legioni nella penisola iberica durò fino al 19 a.C. La semplice proporzione tra le armate campali delle province iberiche e l'esercito provinciale della *Syria* chiarisce bene le genuine priorità della strategia augustea già negli anni Venti del I secolo a.C. Poi dal 12 a.C. fino al 6 la dispo-

90 Ronald SYME, «The Spanish War of Augustus (26–25 B.C.)», *AJPh* 55 (1934), pp. 298–301. Le legioni sicure sono *I Augusta* (nel 19 a.C. degradata a *legio I*, poi rinominata *I Germanica*), *II Gallica/II Augusta* (è difficile capire se il nuovo soprannome preceda o segua le campagne iberiche), *IV Macedonica*, *V Alaudae* (i legionari più fedeli di Marco Antonio), *VI Victrix*, *X Gemina* (il grosso della *legio X* antoniana); altri studiosi aggiungono la *IX Hispaniensis* (talvolta *IX Hispana*) e la *legio XX* (poi *XX Valeria Victrix*), ma nutro gravi perplessità a questo proposito.

sizione delle altre legioni diventò ancora più eloquente a questo riguardo: una sola legione in *Africa*, quattro legioni nella penisola iberica, cinque in *Germania*, due in *Raetia*, cinque in *Illyricum*, tre in *Moesia*. Quindici legioni erano dislocate lungo il Reno e il Danubio, in Oriente appena otto.

Le tre legioni stanziato in Egitto formavano una guarnigione sovradimensionata rispetto alle necessità strategiche della propria provincia e alle due armate delle province asiatiche; perfino un *leue praesidium*, che avesse occupato gli accessi terrestri e marittimi al Delta, avrebbe potuto tenere la Valle del Nilo contro *ingentes exercitus*⁹¹. Le dimensioni abnormi dell'esercito provinciale riflettono pienamente il peso economico e politico dell'Egitto per il regime e le casse di Cesare Augusto a partire dal 30 a.C. Ogni anno 20'000'000 *modii Italici* di grano egizio alimentavano gli abitanti dell'Urbe per quattro mesi⁹²; perlomeno 4'000'000 *modii Italici*, un quinto del totale, erano destinati ai beneficiari delle *frumentationes* gratuite⁹³. Per lungo tempo la custodia armata della provincia nilotica ebbe la precedenza non soltanto sui fantomatici progetti di guerra contro i Parthi, ma anche sulle concrete esigenze delle altre province in Oriente. Gli eserciti della *prouincia Syria* e della *prouincia Galatia* erano sufficienti a presidiare efficacemente le rispettive zone, ma non avevano autonomia operativa contro i Parthi o gli Armeni.

Le campagne militari di Tiberio e di Gaio Cesare in Armenia furono le sole offensive del principato augusteo a oriente dell'Eufrate superiore. L'*exercitus Syriae* partecipò sicuramente alle operazioni militari in entrambe le occasioni, poiché la *Syria* fu la base strategica di ambedue le spedizioni⁹⁴. Non sappiamo se nell'una o nell'altra circostanza l'armata campale della *prouincia Galatia* e la guarnigione egiziana abbiano contribuito al corpo di spedizione; qualora ciò sia avvenuto, qualsiasi ipotesi sulla consistenza dei rinforzi è estremamente aleatoria. Una intera legione della *prouincia Galatia* potrebbe essere stata distaccata temporaneamente al seguito di Tiberio o di Gaio Cesare, ovvero le cinque legioni dell'Egitto e della *Galatia et Pamphylia* potrebbero avere fornito complessivamente cinque *uexil-*

91 Tac. *ann.* II, 59, 3.

92 *Epit. de Caes.* 1, 6; *Ios. bell. Iud.* II, 386.

93 Ogni mese poco più di 200'000 (*R. gest. diu. Aug.* 15, 4) ovvero 200'000 abitanti di Roma (*Cass. Dio LV, 10, 1*) usufruivano delle *frumentationes* gratuite e ricevevano cinque *modii Italici* di grano a testa.

94 *Suet. Tib.* 14, 3; *Cass. Dio LV, 10, 19, 10, 21, 10a, 4.*

lationes equivalenti a una legione con i suoi *auxilia*. In ogni caso anche due offensive limitate all'Armenia imposero la mobilitazione di truppe occidentali, per rafforzare in misura consistente l'esercito della *prouincia Syria*. Tiberio condusse certamente due o tre legioni macedoniche⁹⁵; Gaio Cesare sembra avere portato con sé almeno una legione della *prouincia Thracia et Macedonia*⁹⁶.

Nel triennio 11–9 a.C. (altri preferiscono 13–11 a.C. ovvero 12–10 a.C.) l'armata campale della *prouincia Galatia* era stata temporaneamente trasferita in *Thracia*, per affiancare una parte delle legioni macedoniche in un *atrox bellum*; le forze combinate dei due eserciti avevano represso la ribellione generale dei Traci contro il protettorato romano e la dinastia regia dei *Sapaei*⁹⁷. Dopo la fine del *bellum Thracicum* nel 9 a.C. l'esercito della *prouincia Galatia* era tornato in Asia Minore⁹⁸. Poi nel 7 le due legioni della *prouincia Galatia* furono trasferite un'altra volta nella penisola balcanica, per aiutare gli eserciti dell'*Illyricum* e della *Moesia* a domare la grande ribellione dei Pannoni e dei Dalmati. Nel 9 il disastro di Teutoburgo, l'istituzione dei due *exercitus Germanici* e la riorganizzazione degli altri eserciti provinciali in Europa escludono il ritorno delle due legioni nella *prouincia Galatia et Pamphylia*; una (*V Gallica*, poi *V Macedonica*) fu dislocata con la *IV Scythica* nella *prouincia Moesia*, l'altra (*VII Macedonica*, poi *VII Claudia Pia Fidelis*) affiancò la *legio XI* (poi *XI Claudia Pia Fidelis*) nell'esercito provinciale dell'*Illyricum superius/Dalmatia*⁹⁹.

Il trasferimento di una legione e di due *cohortes* dall'Egitto alla *Syria* può essere datato appunto al 9; l'aggiunta di una quarta legione alla guarnigione siriana perseguì lo scopo evidente di bilanciare per metà la massiccia e stabile diminuzione delle forze romane nelle province asiatiche. La riduzione dell'esercito egiziano a vantaggio della *Syria* testimonia il buon senso di Cesare Augusto, che in una fase di gravissima crisi seppe anteporre le necessità statali agli interessi

95 Suet. *Tib.* 9, 1 e 14, 3.

96 Nello 1 a.C. Gaio Cesare visitò gli eserciti dislocati presso il Danubio: Cass. Dio LV, 10, 17. Velleio Patercolo, *tribunus militum* di una legione nell'esercito della *prouincia Thracia et Macedonia*, lo seguì in Asia conservando il grado: Vell. II, 101, 2–3.

97 Vell. II, 98, 1–2; Cass. Dio LIV, 34, 5–7. A partire dal 12 a.C. le altre legioni della *prouincia Macedonia* (molto probabilmente due) erano al seguito di Tiberio in Pannonia: COLOMBO (n. 58), p. 34.

98 Le vittorie su Homonadenses e Isauri furono appunto posteriori al *bellum Thracicum*: v. n. 88.

99 COLOMBO (n. 58), pp. 31–33.

privati; in quei giorni l'utilità di tutelare il possesso dell'Egitto passò in secondo piano rispetto all'opportunità di irrobustire le capacità militari della *Syria*¹⁰⁰. Ma la disponibilità di una legione egiziana per la *Syria* al momento opportuno nel 9 derivò proprio dalla lontana vittoria di Publio Petronio sui Nubiani.

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100 L'*exercitus Syriacus* già sotto Tiberio e Claudio dovette rimpiazzare il defunto esercito della *provincia Galatia et Pamphylia* nella lotta contro le popolazioni montane del Tauro: Tac. *ann.* VI, 41, 1 e XII, 55, 2.

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The Camp at Pooh Corner. Ancient Environmental Warfare

by MIKE DOBSON¹

ABSTRACT. Environmental concerns are relatively recent. Ancient armies would have little or no concept that they caused environmental damage. Such armies were ‘eco-warriors’ nevertheless, but in the sense of against the ecosystem, not for it. An army’s success may result from marching on its stomach, but what those stomachs produced could also conduct environmental warfare. Surprisingly little has been published about ancient armies’ daily bodily waste – urine and faeces – or the environmental impact where they encamped. An encamping army would cause rapid local and increasingly extending environmental change and devastation. Woodland would be steadily consumed, water security a constant concern, disease from pollution a threat. Food supplies would be sucked into camps from nearby and increasingly further afield. As for a camp’s growing smell, an enemy’s nose would have been more than adequate to find their foe. Using the example of Roman armies in the succession of camps mainly associated with the 2nd century BC campaigns against the Celtiberian city of Numantia, Spain, eye-watering sewage statistics emerge for when an army encamped, and its general environmental impact.

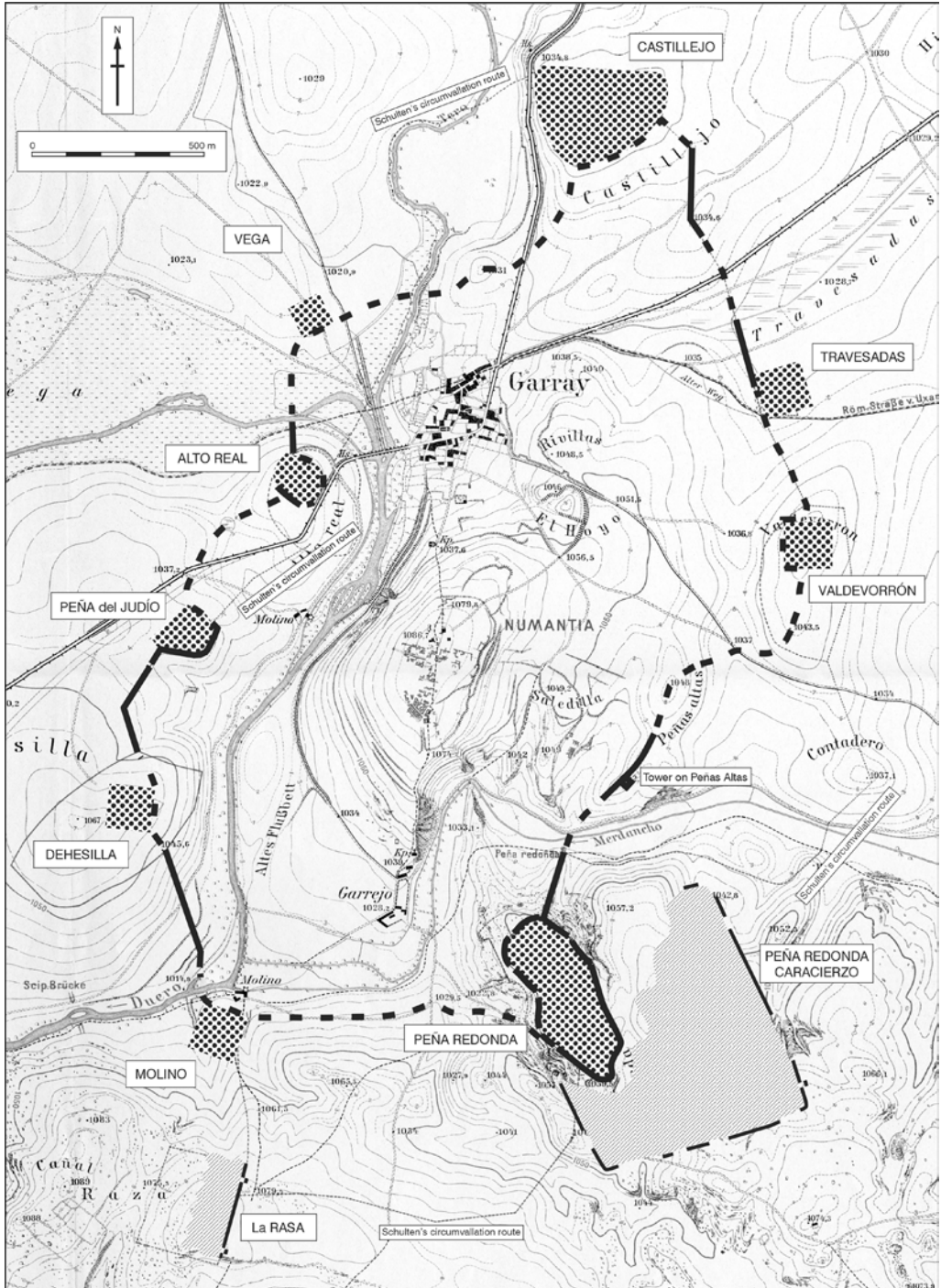
KEYWORDS. ENVIRONMENT – SEWAGE – DEFORESTATION – WATER SECURITY – ROMAN REPUBLICAN ARMIES – ROMAN CAMPS – NUMANTIA, SPAIN

Today, environment and sustainability are hot topics. This is relatively recent. It is hard to imagine such concerns worrying people in the ancient world, especially for those in armies, where mere survival and victory (probably in that order for the ordinary soldier in most periods²) were only what mattered, rather than preserving the landscape. Yes, ancient armies were eco-warriors, but against the ecosystem, not for it.

An army’s success may result from marching on its stomach, but what came out of it could maim an army and also conduct environmental warfare. Ancient

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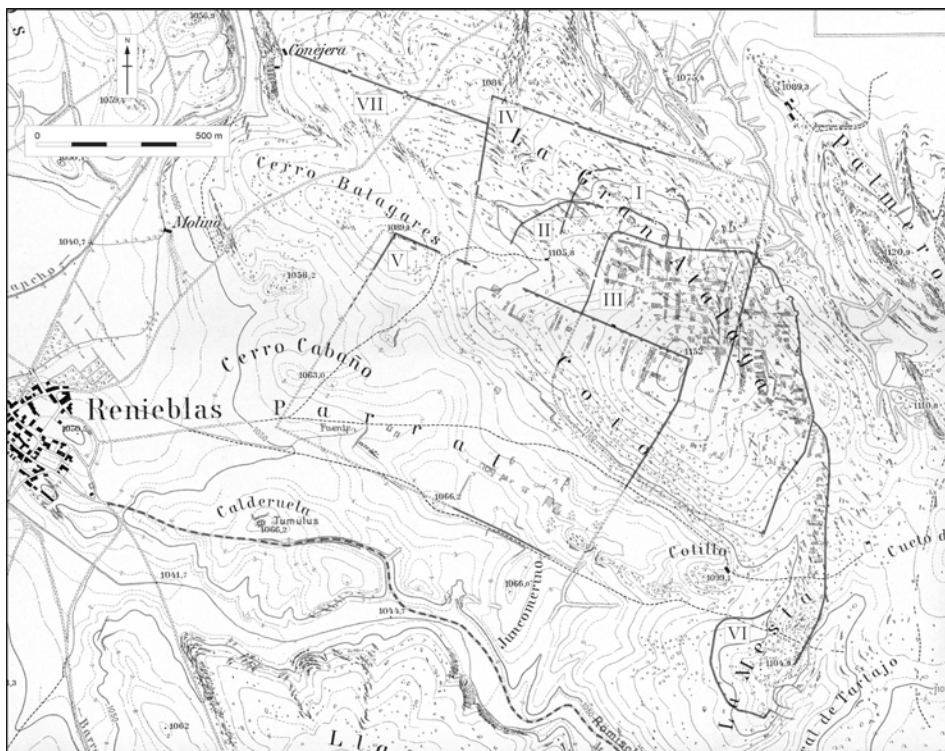
2 John KEEGAN, *The Face of Battle*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1976.



armies seem to have been well aware of this. Using the example of Roman armies in the succession of camps near Soria, Spain, created mainly for campaigns of the second century BC against the Celtiberian city of Numantia, culminating in the infamous siege with the inhabitants committing suicide rather than being captured (Figs 1 and 2), some eye-watering sewage statistics emerge for when an army encamped, and the general environmental impact on the local area is astonishing. The conclusions can be applied to other ancient armies – sewage and ‘harvesting’ the locality for everyday things were as much part of all their everyday lives, as eating, drinking and sleeping.

- ◀ Fig. 1 Numantia and the Roman camps, with alternative Scipionic siegeworks (heavy dashed line and dot-filled camps) to those proposed by Schulten (based on SCHULTEN 1927 cit., plan I; DOBSON 2008 cit., fig. 269. Peña Redonda-Caracierzo plotted by Dobson from LiDAR image in HESSE, COSTA-GARCÍA cit., fig. 3 and fieldwalking of Morales Hernández and Dobson).

- ▼ Fig. 2 Camps at Renieblas, with VI and VII proposed as separate camps, differing from Schulten’s interpretation (after SCHULTEN 1929 cit., plan I; DOBSON 2008 cit., fig. 39).



Sewage

Much has been written about the Roman army. This is frequently about its development, organisation, arms and equipment, fortifications, tactics etc. In contrast, relatively little has been published about the minutiae of soldiers' daily life. One particular aspect of this is what was done about bodily waste products – urine and excrement. Indeed, the whole subject of toilets and latrines in Roman civilian life, let alone the military, was largely ignored until the late 1980s, when Jansen and Koloski-Ostrow realised from their work at especially Pompeii and Herculaneum that this was an overlooked theme that needed studying³. Since then, more researchers have started looking at this 'down-to-earth' aspect of Roman life, and also extending into looking at waste, filth and pollution⁴. A result of such interest was the first conference on Roman toilets and sanitation in 2007⁵, looking at the Mediterranean area, followed by one looking at the north-western Roman Empire in 2009, stimulated by Hoss's research⁶.

There are many known examples of toilets, latrines and cesspits in Roman civil contexts⁷. In Roman military contexts, there are also buildings identified as latrines. The published evidence for fort latrines in Britain is particularly indic-

3 Gemma JANSEN, «Systems for the disposal of waste and excreta in Roman cities. The situation in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia», in Xavier DUPRÉ RAVENTÓS, Josep-Anton REMOLÀ (Eds.), *Sordes Urbis, La liminación de residuos en la ciudad romana: actas de la Reunión de Roma, 1996*, Bibliotheca Italica, Monografías de la Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma 24, Rome, «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 2000, pp. 38–49; Gemma JANSEN, Ann Olga KOLOSKI-OSTROW, Eric MOORMANN (Eds.), *Roman Toilets. Their Archaeology and Cultural History*, Bulletin Antieke Beschaving (BABESCH), Leiden, Peeters, 2011; Ann Olga KOLOSKI-OSTROW, *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy: Toilets, Sewers, and Water Systems*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2015; Stefanie HOSS (Ed.), *Latrinae. Roman Toilets in the Northwestern Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 31, Oxford, Archaeopress Publishing, 2018, p. 3.

4 E.g. Xavier DUPRÉ RAVENTÓS, Josep-Anton REMOLÀ cit.; Alain BOUET, *Les latrines dans les provinces gauloises, germaniques et alpines*, Gallia Supplément 59, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2009; Barry HOBSON, *Latrinae et Foricae: Toilets in the Roman World*, London, Duckworth, 2009; Mark BRADLEY (Ed.), *Rome, Pollution and Propriety. Dirt, Disease and Hygiene in the Eternal City from Antiquity to Modernity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; Jodi MAGNESS, «What's the Poop on Ancient Toilets and Toilet Habits?», *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75, 2012, pp. 80–7.

5 JANSEN et al. cit.

6 HOSS cit.

7 HOBSON cit.; JANSEN et al. cit.; KOLOSKI-OSTROW cit.; HOSS cit.

ative of how common such structures must have been on military sites, as 40% of them (137 examples) have yielded latrines or latrine-related features⁸. Perhaps the best-known of these is the well-preserved and relatively technically elaborate communal stone ones at Housesteads, Hadrian's Wall⁹, but there are also well-preserved communal examples at Bearsden, Caerleon, Castlecary, South Shields and Vindolanda¹⁰. Military latrines or associated features are also known outside Britain, e.g. Künzing¹¹, Oberaden¹², Trier-Petrisberg¹³ and several in the Netherlands¹⁴. Such structures are often of some size, accommodating a number of sitters at one time. They are frequently found close to fort perimeters and at the lower end of sloping sites, which makes good practical sense regarding drainage, and smell and hygiene, with them away from accommodation areas. A number of smaller latrines are also known from barrack blocks, particularly in officers' areas, and the size of some suggests they were not just for his personal use but shared with his unit¹⁵. There are also latrines that seemed to have served only the *contubernium* ("tent-group", the smallest unit of men), where they were located in the front room (*arma*)¹⁶. In addition, and reflecting developments in the social hierarchy and segregation of toilet usage (below), there are individual latrines for

8 Adam GOLDWATER, Ann Olga KOLOSKI-OSTROW, Richard NEUDECKER, «Users of the toilets: Social differences», in JANSEN *et al. cit.*, p. 136; HOBSON *cit.*, pp. 33–41; KOLOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, 58–59.

9 Anne JOHNSON, *Roman Forts of the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD in Britain and the German Provinces*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1983, pp. 211 ff.; HOBSON *cit.*, 34–35.

10 HOBSON *cit.*, pp. 33–41; GOLDWATER *et al. cit.*, p. 136 with detailed refs; David BREEZE, *Bearsden. A Roman Fort on the Antonine Wall*, Edinburgh, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2016; HOSS *cit.*

11 Hans SCHÖNBERGER, *Kastell Künzing-Quintana: die Grabungen von 1958 bis 1966*, Limesforschungen Römisch-Germanische Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts 13, Berlin, Gebr. Mann, 1975, p. 88.

12 BOUET *cit.*, pp. 373–83.

13 Thomas FISCHER, *Army of the Roman Emperors. Archaeology and History*, Oxford, Oxbow, 2019, p. 244.

14 Monica DÜTTING, Frits LAARMAN, Wim WOUTERS, Wim Van NEER, «Spanish mackerels and other faunal remains from two Augustan latrines at the Kops Plateau (Nijmegen, the Netherlands)», in Jos BAZELMANS, Eelco BEUKERS, Otto BRINKKEMPER, Inge van der JAGT, Eelco RENSINK, Bjørn SMIT, Marja WALRECHT (Eds.), *Tot op het bot onderzocht. Essays ter ere van archeozoöloog*, Nederlandse Archeologische Rapporten 70, Amersfoort, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, 2020, pp. 73–86.

15 GOLDWATER *et al. cit.*, p. 137; KOLOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, p. 59.

16 GOLDWATER *et al. cit.*, p. 138; KOLOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, p. 59.

commanding officers¹⁷.

These are structures or features in ‘permanent’ forts rather than temporary camps, or, as in the case at Numantia, in siege installations. The creation of human (and also animal) waste and its disposal, must have been of equal requirement, be the troops in temporary or permanent installations. How was this material dealt with in camps? For a ‘marching camp’ occupied for merely one night, it was perhaps less of an issue (though still important), but for longer-occupied camps it would have been no trivial matter, since such installations could have been occupied for weeks, if not months, especially in the case of sieges, and so quantities of waste would have been significant.

To assess the scale of what modern attitudes would regard as a problem, estimates of the overall quantity of waste produced can be attempted. It is obviously difficult to calculate such figures, as the amount of human excrement and urine generated daily, depends on many and varying factors, including diet, health, climate, lifestyle, body mass, ethnicity and age. A modern study of faeces and urine showed that the main factor in the amount of faeces produced is the quantity of fibre consumed, with the median daily production per person in high-income, low-fibre countries being 126 g of faeces, of which 28 g was dry mass and the rest water, and in low-income, high-fibre countries it was 250 g, of which 38 g were dry mass¹⁸. For both faeces and urine, it was found that the dietary composition of food and liquids is the major influence in variation of quantity and composition¹⁹. Another influence on faeces is that hot conditions reduce the proportion of water, becoming very small in desert heat²⁰. The data also showed that people produced faeces at least once a day; a median of 1.1 motions in a 24-hour period, but more frequently with a higher fibre diet, and the UK data showed that most were relatively early in the morning²¹. The daily amount of urine produced aver-

17 GOLDWATER *et al.* cit., p. 137; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW cit., p. 62.

18 Christopher ROSE, Alison PARKER, Bruce JEFFERSON, Elise CARTMELL, «The characterization of feces and urine: A review of the literature to inform advanced treatment technology», *Critical Reviews in Environmental Science and Technology* 45, Issue 17, 2015, pp. 1827–79.

19 ROSE *et al.* cit., pp. 1827 ff.

20 Gabriel MOSS, *Watering the Roman Legion*, unpubl. MA Diss., Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2015, p. 3.

21 ROSE *et al.* cit., p. 1838.

aged 1.42 litres per person, of which 59 g were dry solid content. The volume and composition of urine varies, though, depending on especially the amount of fluid and particularly water drunk, the amount of physical exertion and perspiration, environmental conditions and the quantity of salt and high protein consumed²². For lower volumes, extreme heat or desert conditions can reduce daily urine to below 0.5 litres a day²³. Data on the number of times people urinate is limited, but may be of limited value anyway, as frequency is greatly affected by the amount of fluid intake, hydration levels and general health, but five or six urinations per 24-hour period may be typical²⁴, though becoming less frequent as ambient temperature rises and quantity of urine reduces. A modern experimental march in full Roman army equipment in hot conditions (21° C and above) observed that despite drinking hourly about 0.25 litres, urination occurred rarely or not at all²⁵.

These figures are for modern societies. It is unknown how they relate to ancient ones. The data from low-income, high-fibre areas are presumably more indicative in this respect, as they are likely to avoid refined modern western diets and lifestyles etc., and be closer to past practices.

To estimate the amount of sewage produced by the Roman army at Numantia, the data from low-income, modern areas could consequently be used as a guide, since Roman military diets (and ancient diets in general) would probably have been high in fibre, and largely unrefined and unprocessed. The Roman military food ration had 60–75% of its weight made up of wheat and is estimated to have been a daily personal ration of approximately 850 g²⁶; wheat was one of the main human fuels in the ancient Mediterranean world²⁷. The military wheat ration pro-

22 Dick PARKER, S. GALLAGHER, «Distribution of human waste samples in relation to sizing waste processing in space», in Wendell MENDELL (Ed.), *The Second Conference on Lunar Bases and Space Activities of the 21st Century*, NASA Conference Publication 3166.2, Houston, NASA, 1992, pp. 563–8; John GARROW, W. Philip JAMES, Ann RALPH, *Human nutrition and dietetics* (10th ed.), Edinburgh, Churchill Livingstone, 2000; ROSE *et al.* cit., pp. 1850 ff.

23 MOSS cit., p. 3.

24 ROSE *et al.* cit., p. 1851.

25 David ATKINSON, Len MORGAN, «The Wellingborough and Nijmegen Marches», in Michael DAWSON (Ed.), *Roman Military Equipment: The Accoutrements of War*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 336, Oxford, BAR Publishing, 1987, p. 102.

26 Jonathan ROTH, *The Logistics of the Roman Army at War (264 BC–AD 235)*, Leiden–Boston–Cologne, Brill, 1999, p. 24.

27 Geoffrey RICKMAN, «The Grain Trade under the Roman Empire», *The Seaborne Com-*

vided the same proportion of daily calories as its weight²⁸. When the wheat was ground, it could yield about 760 g of actual flour²⁹, and would presumably have resulted in our modern equivalent of wholemeal flour, since it would have been both wasteful and time-consuming to remove the nutritional bran. Wholemeal flour is high in fibre; modern wholemeal flour has approximately 11 g of fibre per 100 g. The current recommended daily intake of fibre is at least 30 g³⁰. Consequently the Roman allowance of 850 g of wheat would have been more than adequate to provide a very good healthy fibre diet, with potentially more than twice the modern recommended amount.

Using the low-income, high-fibre data, a single Roman soldier would consequently have daily produced about 250 g of faeces and 1.42 litres of urine (assuming ‘average’ European conditions and not extreme heat). That means that the smallest units of the Roman army, a *contubernium* of 8 infantry, would produce 2 kg of faeces and 11.36 litres of urine, and a *contubernium* of 3 cavalry troopers would produce 0.75 kg and 4.26 litres each day. In terms of cubic volume, which is more the problem being faced as regards disposal, and easier for us to visualise, this equates to a cube with sides of about 12 cm for the faeces of each infantry and 9 cm for each cavalry *contubernium*. Such quantities are significant, as this is the daily amount needing disposal. If they are scaled up to a legion with its associated cavalry, which for the period of Numantia was a ‘paper strength’ of about 4,200 infantry and 300 cavalry³¹, the quantities start to become concerning: 1.125 tonnes of faeces and 6,390 litres of urine every day. This equates to about 1 m³ of faeces and 6.4 m³ of urine.

merce of Ancient Rome: Studies in Archaeology and History. Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 36, 1980, p. 262.

28 ROTH cit., p. 18.

29 It has been calculated that a kilogram of ancient wheat could yield about 900 g of flour (J.K. EVANS, «Wheat production and its social consequences in the Roman world», *The Classical Quarterly* 31, 1981, p. 432, n. 24). Modern conversion rates, to be expected, are higher, at about 950 g.

30 BRITISH NUTRITION FOUNDATION, «Fibre», <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthy-sustainable-diets/starchy-foods-sugar-and-fibre/fibre/> [accessed November 2023].

31 Mike DOBSON, *The Army of the Roman Republic. The Second Century BC, Polybius and the Camps at Numantia, Spain*, Oxford, Oxbow, 2008, pp. 47 ff.

Size of armies at Numantia and their sewage

To scale the figures up for the size of armies at Numantia is unfortunately not straightforward as their actual size is uncertain. The best source of troop numbers is Appian *Hisp.* 45 ff., but his accuracy and reliability are questionable³². There is also little in the way of detail, with, for example, no indication of whether the infantry was organised as maniples or cohorts, or about the internal organisation of the non-citizen forces³³. Similarly, the nature or size of the garrisons in each installation are never indicated³⁴. The scale of the sewage problems at Numantia, and specifically at each site, is consequently uncertain. The available information suggests that the armies associated with the Numantine campaigns mostly comprised about 30,000 men³⁵; Appian's claim that Scipio's siege army numbered 60,000 is questionable, and it was probably also in fact about 30,000³⁶. These armies tie in with the theoretical strength of the typical consular armies at the time, with two legions, allied forces and foreign troops³⁷.

The potential daily sewage generated by such armies is astonishing:

Faeces: 7.5 tonnes (approx. 7.5 m^3 = a cube with sides of 1.96 m)

Urine: 42,600 litres (42.6 m^3 = a cube with sides of 3.49 m)

Putting this into meaningful perspective, in just under a month, a football pitch would be covered with 3 cm of faeces and the urine would fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool one metre deep.

32 DOBSON cit., pp. 41–42.

33 DOBSON cit., p. 42.

34 DOBSON cit., p. 42.

35 App. *Hisp.* 45 ff.; DOBSON cit., pp. 43–44.

36 Mike DOBSON, «A green and pleasant land. Not once the Romans arrived!», in Toni ÑACO DEL HOYO, Jordi PRINCIPAL, Mike DOBSON (Eds.), *Rome and the North-Western Mediterranean. Integration and Connectivity c. 150–70 BC*, Oxford, Oxbow, 2022, p. 70.

37 Polyb. 6.19.1 ff.; DOBSON 2008 cit., pp. 56 ff. The calculation is: legion (I) 4,200 + legion (II) 4,200 + legionary cavalry (I) 300 + legionary cavalry (II) 300 + allied infantry (I) 4,200 + allied infantry (II) 4,200 + allied cavalry (I) 900 + allied cavalry (II) 900 = 19,200. Plus senior officers, their staff, non-combatants. Plus unspecified number of foreign troops. Could reasonably round up to about 30,000.

Manure

To these figures should be added the dung and urine produced by the cavalry horses, transport mules and any other animals (e.g. cattle on the hoof for food) accompanying the army.

The amount of dung and urine a horse produces will vary depending on diet, climate, working conditions, breed and size, etc. As regards the size of cavalry horses in the Roman army, skeletal remains suggest they varied between 10 and 15 hands (102–152 cm)³⁸, possibly sometimes larger³⁹. Some scholars interpret the evidence to form an average and say that all cavalry used horses of about 14 hands (142 cm), but as Dixon and Southern warn, this could distort discussions and a wider picture should be retained; also size may have varied during the Roman period⁴⁰. Noting their warning, it is useful for the purposes of calculating the amount of waste generated by the cavalry, if an average of 14 hands is used.

A modern horse of 14 hands typically weighs 350–420 kg⁴¹. Cavalry horses of the Roman army may have differed from this, but it seems reasonable to take the mid-point in this range for the purposes of the following calculations, and perhaps lower it a little as nutrition, feed quality and conditions may have been poorer in the past; so resulting in an average weight of about 380 kg.

Modern horses typically produce 4 to 13 piles of manure a day. On average, a horse daily produces 31 g of faeces and 19.7 ml of urine per kilogramme of body weight. A typical 380 kg, 14-hand horse would thus daily produce about 19.25 kg of wet manure (60% solids and 40% urine, with a density of about 954 kg per cubic metre), equating to 11.7 kg of faeces (0.012 m³) and 7.6 litres of urine (0.0071 m³), resulting in the overall wet manure of 19.25 kg being 0.019 m³. To that can be added the straw/grass/etc bedding, which requires regular changing. In modern calculations, the volume of bedding is about twice the amount of manure. It is uncertain how frequently Roman soldiers cleaned their stables,

38 Hands are measured from ground to top of withers, the ridge between shoulder bones above the front legs.

39 Karen DIXON, Pat SOUTHERN, *The Roman Cavalry. From the First to the Third Century AD*, London, Batsford, 1992, pp. 165 ff.

40 DIXON, SOUTHERN cit., pp. 167 ff.

41 EQUINE WORLD UK, «Horse Body Weight», <https://equine-world.co.uk/info/horse-care/horse-body-weight> [accessed November 2020].

but daily would have been advisable to maintain horse health, especially their hooves, which become soft and weak in wet conditions⁴². That results in a daily amount of material of 23–27 kg (0.057 m³, a cube of about 39 cm), but clearly less if the cavalry were on manoeuvres outside the camp. That may not seem much, but it would result in a single horse filling a 3.5 x 3.5 m stall to a depth of 1.83 m after a year if it were not cleaned out!⁴³ It is unclear which buildings were occupied by cavalry at Numantia, but for this period it can be suggested that combined stable/barrack accommodation blocks existed, probably similar in form to how the horses and men were arranged in the stable/barrack blocks being increasingly suggested in Imperial forts⁴⁴. Such blocks at Numantia can be reconstructed with each stable room holding three horses. The rooms' internal dimensions are difficult to assess, due to the nature of the surviving remains and the uncertainties about reconstruction, but rectangular areas between 3 to 5 m across are possible⁴⁵. Using the above figures, three horses in such areas would have daily generated a depth of about 12 cm of combined manure and bedding (a staggering 4.48 m a year). The requirement for daily cleaning would have been imperative, not just to maintain horse health, but after a day, the accumulated debris would have been over ankle-deep for the soldiers.

Removing the daily 75 kg of stable material must have been very arduous in the high Numantine summer heat, especially as it must have required being taken outside of the camp since it would soon have blocked streets and hindered troop movement. Collectively, a camp which included cavalry would have generated huge quantities of manure each day. In terms of the cavalry at Numantia, exact numbers are uncertain (above) and would have varied between the armies. Consular armies at the time would theoretically have had 600 legionary and 1800

42 Ann HYLAND, *Equus: The Horse in the Roman World*, London, Batsford, 1990, p. 124.

43 Data from various sources, especially Eileen FABIAN, Jennifer ZAJACKOWSKI, «Horse stable manure management», 2019, <https://extension.psu.edu/horse-stable-manure-management> [accessed October 2020].

44 C. Sebastian SOMMER, «Where did they put the horses?» Überlegungen zu Aufbau und Stärke römischer Auxiliartruppen und deren Unterbringung in den Kastellen», in Wolfgang CZYSZ, Claus-Michael HÜSSEN, Hans-Peter KUHNEN, C. Sebastian SOMMER, Gerhard WEBER (Eds.), *Provinzialrömische Forschungen. Festschrift für Günter Ulbert zum 65. Geburtstag*, Espelkamp, Marie Leidorf, 1995, pp. 149–68; Nicholas HODGSON and Paul BIDWELL, «Auxiliary Barracks in a New Light: Recent Discoveries on Hadrian's Wall», *Britannia* 35, 2004, pp. 121–57; DOBSON 2008 cit.

45 DOBSON 2008 cit.

allied cavalry⁴⁶. Armies at Numantia could have exceeded this, from the extras that Appian notes (above). The cavalry would also have needed remounts to cover injured or sick animals⁴⁷. The number of these is uncertain, but even if it was only one per ten-man squadron (*turma*), a sensible minimum number, it means that the total number of cavalry horses becomes 2,640 in a consular army. The daily amount of combined manure and bedding consequently produced could have been approximately 66 tonnes, 150 m³. To that would be added horses for the senior officers etc., but also less an (uncertain) amount for while the horses were out of camp, e.g. on active duties, watering or grazing⁴⁸.

A significant amount of material would also be produced by the pack animals, with one or possibly two mules per *contubernium*⁴⁹. Associated officers (centurions and decurions) may also have had their own mule for transporting their tents etc. This produces a total of 3,220 mules for the troops of a consular army⁵⁰, but this should be seen as a minimum figure, as it is based on only one mule per *contubernium* and does not include pack animals for senior officers, their staff, non-combatants etc.

The mules probably generated similar quantities of manure and bedding to the cavalry horses, i.e. about 80 tonnes, 180 m³ a day. A staggering combined horse and mule daily total is 146 tonnes, 333 m³ (less an amount while the animals were out of camp). To repeat the football pitch analogy, one would be covered to a depth of 1 metre every three weeks. It may have been even quicker, as there would also be manure from the oxen probably used for drawing wagons⁵¹. And not to forget the elephants in some of the armies!

46 DOBSON 2008 cit., pp. 50 ff.

47 DIXON, SOUTHERN cit., pp. 156 ff.

48 Veg. *Mil.* 3.8 refers to horses grazing outside the camp.

49 App. *Hisp.* 85–86; ROTH cit., pp. 77 ff.

50 The calculation is: legion (I) 525 *contubernia* + 60 centurions + legion (II) 525 *contubernia* + 60 centurions + legionary cavalry (I) 100 *contubernia* + 10 decurions + legionary cavalry (II) 100 *contubernia* + 10 decurions + allied infantry (I) 525 *contubernia* + 60 centurion + allied infantry (II) 525 *contubernia* + 60 centurion + allied cavalry (I) 300 *contubernia* + 30 decurions + allied cavalry (II) 300 *contubernia* + 30 decurions = 3,220.

51 App. *Hisp.* 85; ROTH cit., p. 83.

Camp cleanliness – location of toilets

Although it seems obvious that the debris produced by the horses must have been regularly taken out of the camp, for the sake of simple practicalities would the same have applied to the human-produced waste?

There is very limited literary evidence about Roman toilet habits⁵². The few examples are usually crude or derisory observations made about activities in public toilets, e.g. by Martial. The impression, though, is that they were social places; Martial even mocks someone for spending so much time in them hoping to gain a dinner invitation⁵³. The archaeological evidence of toilets with several seats indicates the social aspect of this basic human activity. The presence of gaming boards scratched between seats also implies that people would spend some time sitting in these areas. Going to the toilet can consequently be regarded as a social thing by Romans⁵⁴. This is not only unexpected with our modern Western notions wanting privacy for such activities, but also surprising that anyone would want to spend time in what must have been exceedingly smelly environments, as attested at the time⁵⁵.

Private toilet facilities inside houses generally ranged from chamber pots, which could be specifically made vessels or recycled ones,⁵⁶ to individual seats over a cesspit⁵⁷. These, however, often lacked a sense of privacy, with a frequent arrangement being a seated cesspit next to the kitchen stove or in the kitchen area. Such cesspits also functioned as rubbish pits for kitchen waste⁵⁸. A totally unimaginable configuration and practice to our modern sensibilities. There were also latrines away from the kitchen, frequently in a room next to the street (drain-

52 HOBSON cit., pp. 133–47.

53 Mart. 11.77.

54 JANSEN *et al.* cit.; MAGNESS cit.

55 E.g. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.56.141; Columella *Rust.* 1.6.11, 9.5.1; Jérôme CARCOPINO, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1956, p. 54; HOBSON cit., pp. 106–108 with a very graphic description of his own experiences of extreme smells while emptying a Pompeii latrine used by tourists.

56 E.g. Varro *Sat. Men.* 192.104 refers to *amphorae* being reused.

57 HOBSON cit., 46–60; Beatrix PETZNEK, Silvia RADBAUER, Roman SAUER, Andrew WILSON, «Urination and defecation Roman-style», in JANSEN *et al.* 2011, pp. 95–111; MAGNESS cit., p. 81; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW cit.; Beatrix PETZNEK, «Roman chamber pots», in HOSS 2018 cit., pp. 127–35.

58 MAGNESS cit., p. 82; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW cit.

ing into a cesspit under the pavement to allow easy emptying), but probably not for the slaves or servants, whose latrines remained in their work areas⁵⁹. Such segregation and social hierarchy of usage increased from the late Republic and especially into the second century AD⁶⁰.

Consequently, we need to distance ourselves from modern Western practices of a separate and potentially secluded location for performing toilet activities; the sense of ‘privacy’ is very culturally determined and complex⁶¹. Indeed, the evidence of Roman graffiti and wall signs suggest that Romans would potentially simply urinate and defecate anywhere, not only outside but also even inside a building, as the texts request refrain from doing this⁶². Related to this, is that Roman culture lacked the modern obsession with toilet privacy, general cleanliness and hygiene, all of which change between cultures and over time, with also variable definitions of pollution and dirt⁶³. Indeed, Roman streets may have been more alike to open sewers and rubbish dumps, of unimaginable smell for our noses⁶⁴, than to the clean, uncluttered streets that can nowadays be walked down in Pompeii and Herculaneum, for example, though street cleaning in Rome and presumably other cities was meant to have occurred, but often ignored⁶⁵. No longer does the modern visitor have to face the threat, according to Juvenal, of falling rubbish or a soaking from a chamber pot being emptied onto the street from a

59 HOBSON *cit.*, 79 ff., p. 168; GOLDWATER *et al. cit.*; JESUS PÉREZ, MIKO FLOHR, BARRY HOBSON, JENS KOEHLER, ANN OLGA KOŁOSKI-OSTROW, SILVIA RADBAUER, JEROEN VAN VAERENBERGH, «Location and contexts of toilets», in JANSEN *et al.* 2011, pp. 113–30; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, p. 6.

60 GOLDWATER *et al. cit.*, p. 141; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, p. 6.

61 ALEXANDER KIRA, «Privacy and the bathroom», in HAROLD PROSHANSKY, WILLIAM ITTELSON, LEANNE RIVLIN (Eds.), *Environmental Psychology: Man and his Physical Setting*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, pp. 269–75.

62 HOBSON *cit.*, p. 142 ff.; MAGNESS *cit.*, p. 82.

63 KIRA *cit.*; LOUISE MARTIN, NERISSA RUSSELL, «Trashing rubbish», in IAN HODDER (Ed.), *Towards Reflexive Method in Archaeology: The Example at Çatalhöyük*, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 28, 2000, pp. 57–69; HOBSON *cit.*, pp. 79–87; BRADLEY *cit.*; MAGNESS *cit.*, p. 80; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*; *Die übelriechende Metropole? Olfaktorische Perspektiven auf die Großstadt der Vormoderne*, International Conference, Universität Regensburg, November 2023.

64 Though arguably “smell is in the nose of the smeller, but also in the culture of the smeller”; ANTHONY SYNNOTT, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society*, London, Routledge, 1993, 193.

65 Juv. 3.248; HOBSON *cit.*, pp. 92 ff.

window above⁶⁶; this could well be Juvenal's satirical exaggeration, but there was presumably some truth behind it⁶⁷. But the 'problem' as we would see it today, was likely to have been the norm in all the ancient world, not just the Roman. In ancient Palestine it was even necessary to prevent the reciting of religious texts in alleyways soiled with excrement, it must have been that common, though some Jewish sects were very particular about privacy, isolation and cleanliness when defecating, including making sure the faeces were properly covered by soil in a pit in a remote spot⁶⁸. So, a Roman soldier walking through the Celtiberian streets of Numantia would probably have felt 'just as at home' as in his own home city, wherever that was, with perhaps only just different culinary smells.

Such uncleanliness would clearly have been perilous as a source of disease and health conditions, though perhaps not fully appreciated in the ancient world⁶⁹. Diseases associated with inadequate sanitation account for 10% of modern disease problems⁷⁰. Poor sanitation and management of waste also affect the environment through contaminating water sources, soils and food sources⁷¹.

Our modern views of cleanliness need to be dispelled when considering the appearance of Roman camps. There is probably a tendency to think of these like modern army camps and barracks, with clean and ordered streets. Such a view would also be fuelled by modern reconstructions of Roman forts; the streets and building interiors are pristine (and rightly so to maintain visitor health). We should think perhaps not of the 'clinical' Saalburg, Germany (Fig. 3), but the shanty towns and slums in parts of the Third World, to more accurately appreciate the appearance and atmosphere of Roman military installations. Archaeological evidence to support this comes from excavations in the fort at Carlisle, Britain. It was noted that although the interior of buildings was relatively clean, there was what would now be called 'litter' in all the streets and large quantities of butch-

66 Juv. 3.269–277; CARCOPINO cit., pp. 54–55.

67 Laura NISSIN, «Smellscape of a Pompeian neighborhood», *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 35, 2022, pp. 625, 641; ÜBELRIECHENDE METROPOLE cit.

68 Albert BAUMGARTEN, «The Temple Scroll, Toilet Practices, and the Essenes», *Jewish History*, 10.1, 1996, 9–20; MAGNESS cit., pp. 82 ff.

69 HOBSON, cit., pp. 147–154

70 Annette PRÜSS-ÜSTÜN, Robert BOS, Fiona GORE, Jamie BARTRAM, *Safer water, better health: Costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health*, Geneva, World Health Organisation, 2008.

71 ROSE *et al.* cit., 1828.

ery and industrial waste were allowed to accumulate along especially the minor streets (though this may represent the final dumps in a sequence of dumping and regular clearance), and make-up layers and dumps associated with clearance and rebuilding contained industrial and other debris from elsewhere, suggesting the clearance and moving of middens inside the fort⁷². Some pits accumulated human and/or animal sewage “on a fairly casual basis”⁷³. Another toilet-link for these pits is that they also contained moss. Moss was commonly used for bottom-cleaning in the West before toilet paper became readily available in modern times, and is being found increasingly in Roman military installations⁷⁴. Moss is very suitable as it is highly absorbent and coincidentally its high iodine content makes it naturally anti-bacterial. The widespread distribution and location of bones suggests that butchery could have taken place along street edges; perhaps carcasses were issued to units and then butchered by or for each *contubernium*. It is consequently no surprise that the environmental evidence indicates large numbers of flies and other insects were breeding in what are seemingly puddles of rotting waste in areas of Carlisle fort. Some of the identified insect species are known to carry pathogens and eggs of human parasites (e.g. *Trichuris* worms) into housing, the two commonest being the house fly (*Musca domestica*) and stable fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*), which can spread salmonella, typhoid, diarrhoea and possibly even poliomyelitis, and so would have directly impacted on human health⁷⁵. Evidence of both roundworm (*Ascaris*) and whipworm (*Trichuris*) was found in human-sewage deposits at Bearsden fort, Scotland⁷⁶. This fort also yielded similar evidence of what would now be regarded as squalor, indicated by beetles which

72 Christine HOWARD-DAVIS, *The Carlisle Millennium Project. Excavations in Carlisle, 1998–2001*, Lancaster Imprints 15, Lancaster, Oxford Archaeology North, 2009, p. 520.

73 HOWARD-DAVIS cit., p. 527; presumably meaning they were used as toilets or for receiving such waste as required.

74 Elizabeth HUCKERBY, Frances GRAHAM, «Waterlogged and Charred Plant Remains», in HOWARD-DAVIS cit., p. 929; BREEZE cit., pp. 327–330, 384; Camilla DICKSON, James DICKSON, «Plant remains», in BREEZE cit., p. 234; for other methods see PETZNEK *et al.* cit., 102–104.

75 Harry KENWARD, Allan HALL, «Biological evidence from Anglo-Scandinavian deposits at 16–22 Coppergate», *The Archaeology of York 14.7*, York, Council for British Archaeology, 1995, p. 762; HOWARD-DAVIS cit., p. 527; David SMITH, Emma TETLOW, «Insect Remains», in HOWARD-DAVIS cit., pp. 925–6.

76 Andrew JONES, Jef MAYTOM, «Parasitological investigations of the east annexe ditch», in BREEZE cit., pp. 301–303.



Fig. 3 The pristine reconstructed Saalburg fort, being visited by its main initial financial patron, Kaiser Wilhelm II (copyright Römerkastell Saalburg; reproduced by permission).

fed on rotting hay, perhaps bedding, and on the dung of large herbivores, either horses or cows⁷⁷. Both sites also had evidence of human fleas⁷⁸.

It should therefore be no surprise that a large number of Pompeius' troops suffered from and even died of dysentery in winter camp at Numantia in 141/42 BC⁷⁹. Appian also comments that some of Nobilior's troops died "inside the camp from the shortage of space and from the cold" in their winter camp in 151/52 BC⁸⁰, which presumably relates to health-impacting living conditions.

In a Roman military context, contemporary practice meant there would have been little notion of the soldiers wanting privacy or to be distant from their col-

⁷⁷ BREEZE cit., p. 371.

⁷⁸ HOWARD-DAVIS cit., p. 527; BREEZE cit., p. 371.

⁷⁹ App. *Hisp.* 78.

⁸⁰ *Hisp.* 47; trans. John RICHARDSON, *Appian. Wars of the Romans in Iberia*, Warminster, Aris and Phillips, 2000.

leagues for toilet purposes (Fig. 4). This institutional practice would also have the beneficial effect of reinforcing the relative unimportance and anonymity of the individual⁸¹, making the ordinary soldier simply part of a slave-like military team (just like the latrines for slaves being in their work areas in houses; above). So where and how far away did they go? There is no obvious literary evidence for the Roman army in this respect. There is some for the Spartan army⁸². This indicates that since sentries were to be constantly ready for action, they were forbidden to go further from their weapons and comrades for toilet purposes than to avoid giving offence⁸³; this would have been a very sensible regulation from the military aspect⁸⁴. But in general, the Spartans seemed to have allowed soldiers to go outside the camp in the morning for toilet purposes, as a Spartan-trained Greek army is recorded as suffering defeat by a calculated surprise attack while the troops were dispersed in this way⁸⁵. For the ancient Middle East, a Dead Sea Scroll, the War Scroll, specifies that the toilets for camps occupied by the army of the Sons of Light (Qumran Jewish sect) should be placed 2,000 cubits (about 900 m) from camps⁸⁶. There is an interesting detail in Old Testament law, which specifies that soldiers have a specified area outside the camp for going to the toilet, and they should have a trowel as part of their equipment to dig a hole and bury the excrement⁸⁷. Similarly, Josephus comments that new members of the Essene Jewish sect were given a pick to dig a small trench in the ground for toilet purposes⁸⁸. Such toilet cleanliness and desire for privacy was, however, unusual to Jewish religious practice (though probably derived from excellent practical commonsense) and very different from the Roman world. But even Jewish practice seems at times to have had a very practical approach to the matter, and required going some distance for toilet purposes only during the day, for one Talmud text advises going to the toilet early in the morning or in the evening so that a cleared

81 KIRA cit.

82 John ANDERSON, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970, p. 61.

83 Xen. *Lac.* 12.4.

84 Anderson, though, seems to view this regulation as a general requirement rather than just for the sentries (cit., p. 61).

85 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.6; ANDERSON cit., p. 66.

86 MAGNESS cit., p. 83.

87 *Deuteronomy* 23.9–14.

88 *BJ* 2.137; 2.147–149; BAUMGARTEN cit., 11–12.

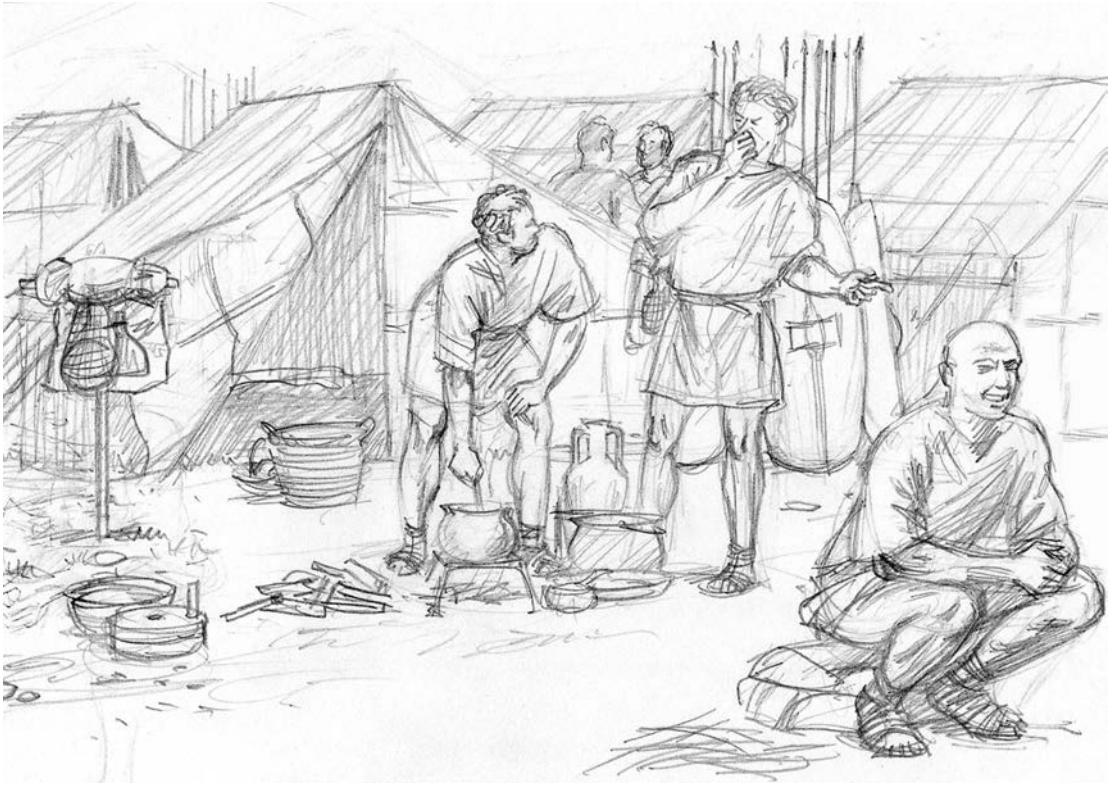


Fig. 4 Sketch reconstruction of the area in front of an infantry tent, with latrine/rubbish pit amusingly in use (artist and copyright: William Webb; reproduced with permission).

spot in the nearby street or behind a building could be used and so avoid having to go some distance for such needs⁸⁹.

The existence of latrines in so many Roman forts (above) obviously shows that there was provision for the soldiers to go to the toilet within the confines of a fort, and this may have been normal practice. Though this does not mean that soldiers used only this facility; they are arguably rather small to have accommodated the daily requirements of a garrison. There remains the possibility of soldiers going outside the fort (though walking distance and security probably rendered that impractical), or perhaps using other receptacles (e.g. refuse pits/cesspits or chamber pots) within the fort. Presumably the soldiers were not allowed simply to follow civilian practice and use the streets as open toilets; certainly, modern notions of

⁸⁹ MAGNESS cit., p. 86.

military discipline and cleanliness could never countenance this (below).

Since the layout of forts and camps was closely related, and the former was simply the physical ‘permanent’ transposition of the ‘temporary’ former in both essence and layout⁹⁰, perhaps there were designated latrine areas within them, as in the forts. Soldiers could have followed the Greek and Jewish practice mentioned above, and gone out of the camp, perhaps even some distance from it. This made good hygiene sense, but as the successful attack on the Greek troops shows, it would have been a very risky thing to do in hostile territory. From a practical and military point of view, it also made little sense and would undermine security of the whole camp, as it would have meant a very large proportion of the troops being out of camp in the early morning, when most men are prone to require to defecate; modern figures indicate 61% of men between 6 and 10 a.m. and 20% of those between 7 and 8 a.m.⁹¹ Hence, a likely scenario is that the toilets were closer to accommodation. In that sense, it would have mirrored civilian practice and that found in forts.

Presumably, total freedom in the camp to follow civilian practice and urinate and defecate anywhere and in the streets would not have been encouraged and may even have been forbidden. If the streets were like those in towns, and covered in sewage (and rubbish) they would become both slippery and slow to traverse by troops. This would hinder troop deployment, a vital requirement and one to be performed as quickly as possible. Polybius, in his digression on the Roman camp⁹², actually indicates that importance was given to such requirements, since he says that two maniples (about 240 men) were required to keep the ground in front of the tribunes’ tents swept clean and watered with great care, as this was the general resort of the troops during the day⁹³. What Polybius does not specify is that this area was actually the main street through the camp⁹⁴ and so logistically vital to be kept clear; and hence also the labour requirement of that many men to keep such a long and wide street clean.

If the evidence from forts is used, a toilet model for camps can be suggested.

90 DOBSON 2008 cit.

91 ROSE *et al.* cit., p. 1838.

92 Polyb. 6.26–42.

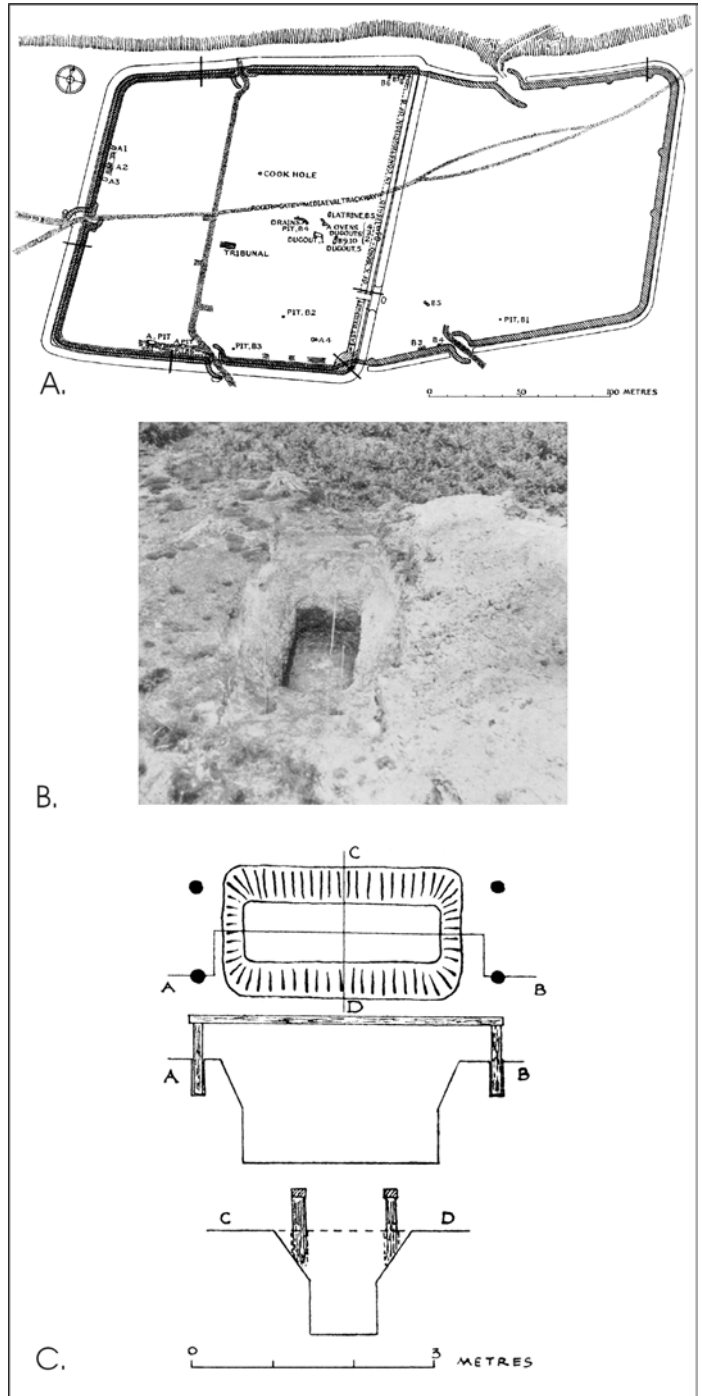
93 Polyb. 6.33.3–4.

94 DOBSON 2008 cit., pp. 68 ff.

Fig. 5 Cawthorn, Britain.

A) camps A and B with numerous pits inside.
 B) and C) photograph and drawing of possible latrine trench B5 of camp B (after RICHMOND cit., plates XX, XVII, fig. 18).

The camp *intervallum*, like the fort one, would have been a very convenient and practical location for the communal latrine facilities as found in forts. In the camps at Cawthorn, Britain, for example, several pits were interpreted as latrines, in part as they were very close behind the ramparts⁹⁵ (Fig. 5). Perhaps these were similar to the communal latrine trenches dug by armies in World War One, with a long horizontal pole as a seat over the trenches, seen in photographs of the period and with frequent horror stories when the poles broke! (Fig. 6). Such facili-



95 Ian RICHMOND, «The Four Roman Camps at Cawthorn, in the North Riding of Yorkshire», *Archaeological Journal* (for 1932) 89, 1933, pp. 17–78.



Fig. 6 German soldiers using a pole latrine during World War One
(source: <https://www.vintag.es/2019/03/wwi-latrines.html>; accessed November 2023).

ties are described in detail, including specifying the pole, and illustrated in a 1911 British army manual⁹⁶ (Fig. 7). One pit at Cawthorn (though about 25 m distant from the rampart), interestingly resembled the shape and form of a British army trench latrine, complete with post-holes near either end for supporting a seat along the trench, as the excavator noted, “the type corresponds closely to that dug by the modern army in the field”⁹⁷, though it is significantly bigger than those specified in the manual (below). Consequently, some Roman camp latrines could have consisted of a series of open trenches in the *intervallum*, with users squatting along the sides, or on some form of timber pole or seating (Fig. 8).

96 *Manual of Field Engineering. 1911*, London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911, pp. 57–58, plate 38.

97 RICHMOND cit., pp. 68–69.

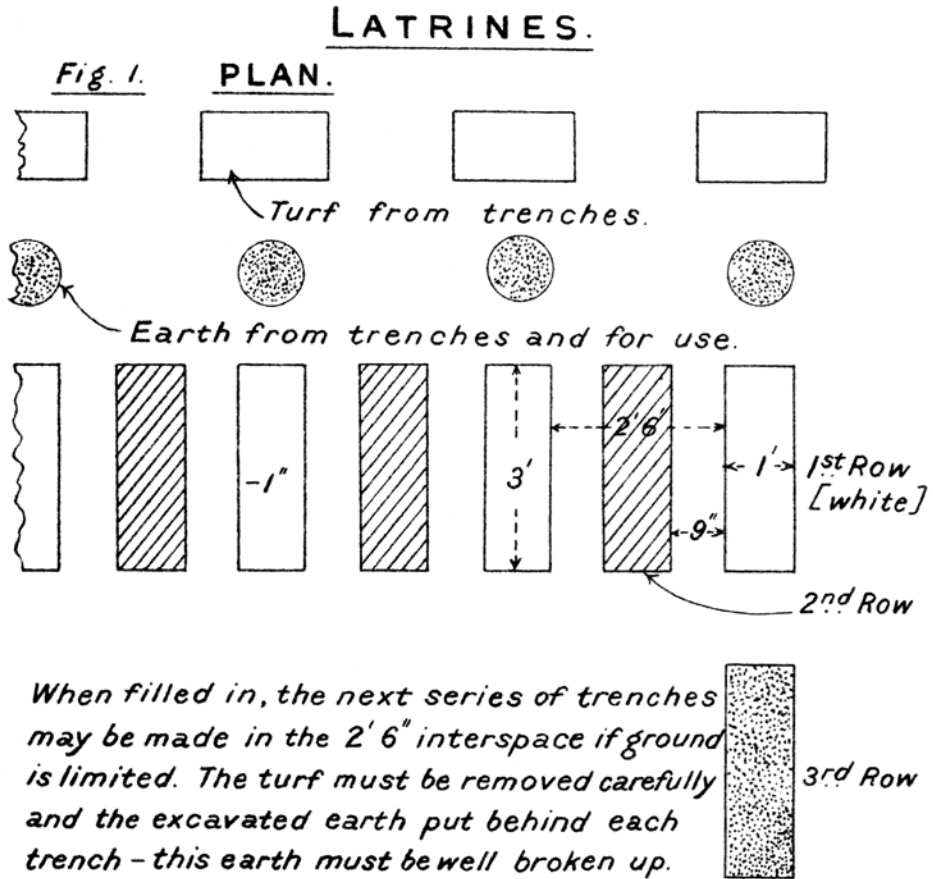


Fig. 7 British army field manual diagram of how to construct latrines (MANUAL 1911 cit., plate 38).

It is interesting to note the high importance the British army placed on the timing of latrine construction: “Latrines should be dug as soon as possible after the troops reach their camp or bivouac”⁹⁸. The Roman army may have felt the same, but the great care and precision described by the British is probably more a hallmark of modern, disciplined and cleanliness-driven armies.

The British specified five trenches, 3 by 1 feet and at least 1 feet deep (0.9 x 0.3 x 0.3 m), to be provided for 100 men for one day, and ideally new trenches

98 MANUAL cit., p. 57.

dug each day, with the previous day's trenches backfilled; if any remained in use beyond a day, it was recommended that 2 inches (5 cm) of dry earth were used to cover smell and reduce flies⁹⁹. If the Roman army adopted this for the armies at Numantia, it would have required hundreds of trenches. There is no known evidence for such trenches at Numantia, however. This may be due to the excavation techniques at the time of Schulten's excavations in the early 1900s¹⁰⁰ or because the ground is generally rocky¹⁰¹ and so digging trenches would have been impractical. As an alternative, perhaps the latrines here consisted simply of designated areas in the *intervallum*, perhaps with the material confined within a ring of stones or earth etc. Fortunately, nearly all the installations at Numantia were on raised ground, with slopes leading away from the defences on most sides. Consequently, latrines near the defences would easily allow liquids to drain out of the camp. The siege forts at La Vega and Molino were unusual exceptions, being on level ground, but they were so close to rivers that liquids would soon find their way into those (though river pollution would be a potential hazard; below). The solid material in such 'surface' latrines would require removal, if only for the practicality of retaining capacity in these areas. Even if the latrines were trenches, there would have been insufficient space in the longer-occupied sites to be able to have a sequence of British-army-style new and back-filled trenches along the *intervallum*. It has often been stated that a first century AD duty roster of Legio III Cyrenaica in Egypt shows the soldier M. Longinus being on latrine cleaning duty¹⁰², and it is reasonable to suppose that such duties may have long been in place. But, as Juntunen convincingly argues, in this case, it is more likely that *ad stercus* means Longinus is working at the dung heap by the stables or at a general waste dump outside the fort¹⁰³.

As well as latrines in the camp *intervallum*, the practice in forts of smaller latrines within barrack complexes (above) could well have had equivalent within

99 MANUAL cit., pp. 57–58.

100 DOBSON 2008 cit., pp. 28–29.

101 At Renieblas, for example, today the bedrock is very close to the surface and often even forms the surface; it can be seen in the right-hand part of Fig. 12.

102 ROBERT FINK, «papyrus 9, 32g», in *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*, Cleveland, American Philological Association, 1971, pp. 110–111; JOHNSON cit., p. 214; GOLDWATER *et al.* cit., p. 138.

103 KAI JUNTUNEN, «The meaning of *stercus* in Roman military papyri – dung or human faeces? Or: who is supposed to clean *this* shit up?», in HOSS 2018 cit., pp. 143–51.

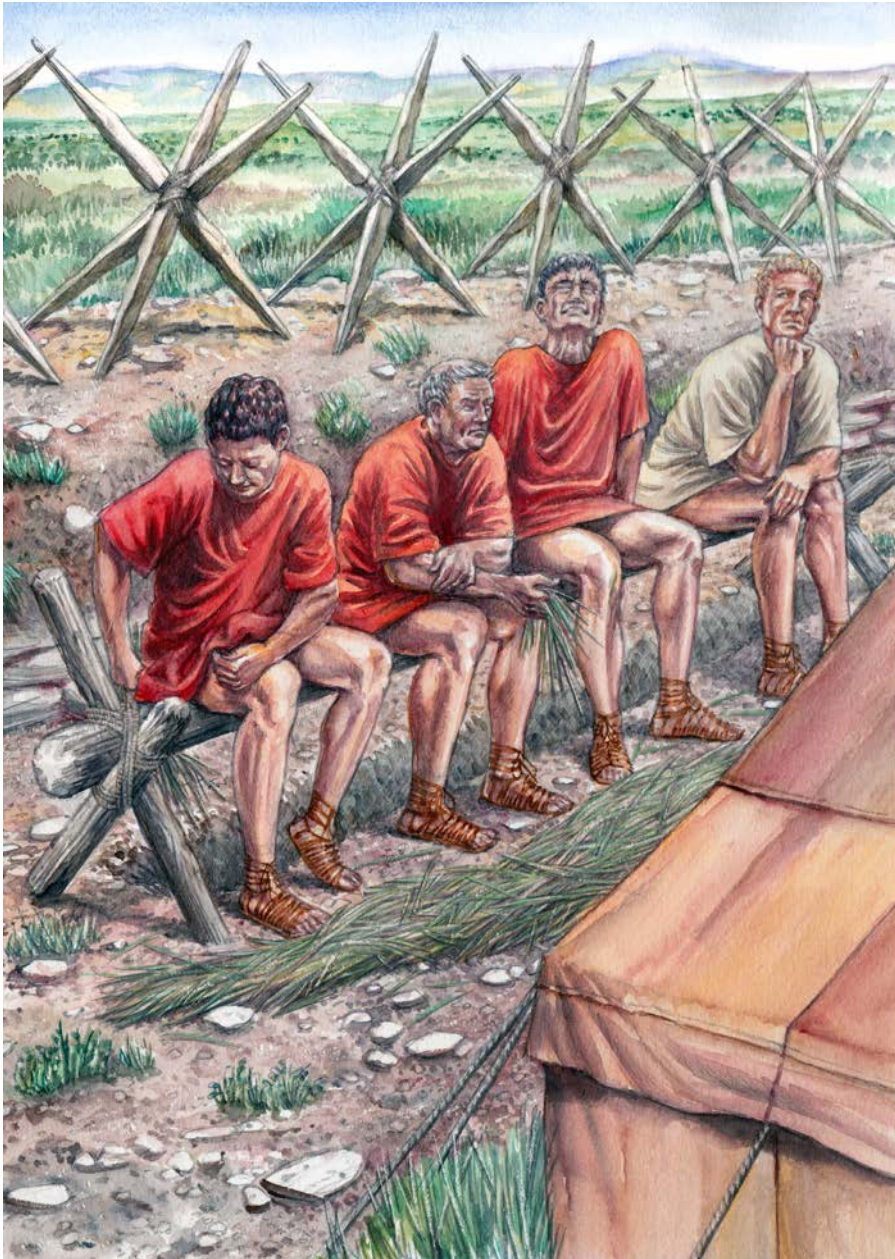


Fig. 8 Reconstruction of a Roman pole-seat trench latrine in the *intervallum*. A timber-stake, *chevaux-de-frise* can be seen on top of the low stone/earth rampart behind the sitters (artist: William Webb; copyright: William Webb and Karwansaray Publishers; reproduced with permission).

and at the end of the rows of tents in camps. Numerous pits are usually found in camps and some could potentially have functioned both as rubbish and cesspits (e.g. as at Carlisle, above). Perhaps each *contubernium* had its own receptacle, placed in front of each tent, like the small latrines found in the *arma* of forts (above; Fig. 4). They would then have been convenient from a practical point of view. Although cooking would have been performed in these areas in front of the tents¹⁰⁴, a toilet in the same area would have simply mirrored the situation found in civilian Roman kitchens (above), would consequently have seemed normal to the troops and provided a similar very convenient combined rubbish and cesspit. As with the absence of latrine trenches in the *intervallum* of camps at Numantia, no such pits have been found inside these camps, for the same reasons. As an alternative, perhaps the debris just formed a pile on the ground, or more sensibly confined within a circle of stones or shallow depression in the ground. Large pots, recycled or intended for that purpose, or recycled *amphorae* (many sherds were found at Numantia) could also have been used as containers. An example of a ‘toilet/rubbish pot’ could be the large Iberian *dolium* found upright in the ground against a wall at Travesadas (Fig. 9)¹⁰⁵, though clearly this could have been a storage vessel for anything.

As with the *intervallum* latrines, whatever was used near the tents to contain the sewage and rubbish would have needed periodic emptying. Some of the contents may have been useful. Urine was used at the time in some manufacturing process (though possibly not as extensively as often claimed¹⁰⁶) and general cleaning. Appropriate to Numantia, the Celtiberians were known to use urine for teeth cleaning:

“Egnatius, who has shiny, white teeth, grins forever everywhere [...] Now you’re a Celtiberian: and in the Celtiberian land early in the morning they piss and scrub their teeth and pinky gums with it, so that the higher the polish on your teeth, the more it proclaims that you have drunk your piss.”¹⁰⁷

104 ROTH cit., p. 59.

105 Adolf SCHULTEN, *Numantia. Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1905–1912. Band III. Die Lager des Scipio*, Munich, Bruckmann, 1927, p. 224, fig. 29.1; Dobson 2008 cit., p. 302.

106 Andrew WILSON, «The economy of ordure. The uses and value of excrement», in JANSEN *et al.* 2011, pp. 147–8.

107 *Catull.* 39; trans. PERSEUS, «C. Valerius Catullus, *Carmina*», *Perseus digital library translation, based on Leonard SMITHERS and Richard BURTON, The Carmina of Gaius Valerius Catullus*, 1894, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0472.phi001>.

Fig. 9 Iberian *dolium* set in the ground by a wall of a building in Travesadas camp, Numantia (SCHULTEN 1927 cit., plate 29.1).



Consequently, urine may have been collected separately in a pot, convenient for subsequent use¹⁰⁸. As for the faeces, these could have retained their physical form for some time¹⁰⁹, despite 75% of their contents being water rather than solid matter¹¹⁰. They would have dried to a greater or lesser extent over those days, depending on the climate, but this would have been relatively quick in the case of the very hot Numantia summer, when temperatures frequently reach the high 30s Celsius. In a dry state, the amount of organic material, including undigested plant matter, means that dried faeces have between 44% and 55% of their dry mass as carbon¹¹¹. They could consequently have provided very convenient fuel. Human faeces were used as cooking-fuel in some areas of the ancient world, as indicated in the Old Testament: “I will let you have cow’s dung instead of human dung on which you may prepare your bread”¹¹². The Roman army at Numantia may have done the same, but there is no actual literary evidence to indicate that human faeces were used as fuel in the Roman world¹¹³. Also, the faeces may have been mixed up with rubbish in the pits

perseus-eng2:39 [accessed November 2023].

108 This practice is often cited happening in Roman towns, with collecting pots placed along streets, but this is actually probably unlikely (NISSEN cit., p. 634, n. 82).

109 ROSE *et al.* cit., pp. 1859–1860.

110 ROSE *et al.* cit., p. 1839.

111 ROSE *et al.* cit., pp. 1840 ff.

112 *Ezekiel* 4.12–15; MAGNESS cit., p. 85.

113 WILSON cit., p. 147.

(e.g. as at Carlisle), so extracting them for fuel may not have been viable. There is, however, evidence of a Roman army using cow-dung as fuel¹¹⁴, so armies at Numantia may have used their dung heaps for the same purpose.

Environmental impact of sewage and manure

The environmental impact on the locality outside camps would have been significant, as huge manure and rubbish dumps probably near the defences can be envisaged; it would have been impractical to carry the material any distance. The smell must have travelled far. It is tempting to suggest that scouts in ancient armies could compensate for the lack of modern technology to find their enemy by simply putting their noses into the air. The runoff caused by rain and natural decomposition would be significant. It was probably too concentrated to act as fertiliser for nearby vegetation and may even have killed it. If it flowed into water courses, it would have polluted those, killing fish and probably rendering the water undrinkable. Once the army had left, though, and the area was peaceful, it can be imagined that local farmers relished the dumps as a welcome source of manure; the use of excrement as fertilizer was widely practiced in the ancient world¹¹⁵. If, however, what they used included human sewage, it was likely to have spread eggs from human intestinal parasites and active disease bacteria onto the fields and then into the human food chain, as well as directly into the body when handling it¹¹⁶; the Romans would effectively have left behind them hidden germ warfare. It is now known that excrement is safe to handle only if it is fully composted, requiring at least six months, and it has become odourless¹¹⁷; but would this be known in antiquity?

114 Army of Manlius Vulso in 189 BC (Livy 38.18.4).

115 NISSEN *cit.*, pp. 643–644.

116 HOBSON *cit.*, pp. 150–151; Horst ASPÖCK, Ingrid FEUEREIS, Silvia RADBAUER, «Detection of eggs of the intestinal parasite *ascaris lumbricoides* in samples from the Roman sewers of Carnuntum», in JANSEN *et al.* *cit.*, p. 163; Elly HEIRBAUT, Andrew JONES, Kathleen WHEELER, «Archeaometry: Methods and Analysis», in JANSEN *cit.*, pp. 16–17; KOŁOSKI-OSTROW *cit.*, 86; Piers MITCHELL (Ed.), *Sanitation, Latrines and Intestinal Parasites in Past Populations*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016.

117 Peter MACKIE JENSEN, Pham PHUC, Line KNUDSEN, Anders DALSGAARD, Flemming KONRADSEN, «Hygiene versus fertiliser: The use of human excreta in agriculture — A Vietnamese example», *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health* 211, Issues 3–4, 2008, p. 437, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2007.08.011> [accessed November 2023].

The internal area of camps would also have been polluted due to the leaching of the contents of the numerous cesspits/rubbish pits and latrines into their surroundings, even if frequent emptying occurred; and the army probably left most of these unemptied when they departed. The area potentially only became 'neutral' after a period of at least 6 to 12 months, when the contents of the pits would have naturally composted, aided if they contained carbon, such as from the remains of cooking fires which could have been periodically cleared into the pits during a camp's occupation to make space for a fresh fire, and if the contents were aerated by pottery sherds, bones etc., thrown in as rubbish, which would also help reduce smell¹¹⁸.

Environment as provider

As well as dumping large quantities of waste in the area of Numantia, the Roman army also extracted many resources from it. All ancient armies depended on the local environment for the basic resources to keep them alive, dry at night, at times warm, at others cool, adequately fed and watered, protected and in as good a state of health as could be expected. The environment also had to provide raw materials to actually wage war by effective fieldworks. The consequence was the powerless environment fell to these armies of uncaring, but necessarily self-preserving eco-warriors, yielding its natural and often age-old treasures to be repaid by polluted and reeking desolation. Anything 'untimely ripped', but then unwanted, was simply dumped behind by the departing troops. But in turn, despite years to recover completely, the environment could at least smile to see such thoughtless rubbish soon become new valued resources to less hostile occupants.

The amount of environmental impact caused by a Roman army, indeed by armies of any period, would be especially intense during sieges. Clearly, the longer an army encamped in an area, the more degradation. As the stay lengthened, not only would the amount of rubbish, sewage and manure build up in the vicinity of each camp, since it would have been impractical to take it any significant distance away, it would also cause the area of impact to extend beyond the immediate locality as resources close by became exhausted and things had to be brought in from increasingly further away. Sadly, there would have been many examples of this happening.

118 Like modern gardeners' compost-heap practices.

Deforestation

Shakespeare warns Macbeth that his doom would come when Birnam woods moved. Inhabitants standing on the walls of ancient cities besieged by Rome must have felt the same foreboding, as they watched their adversaries steadily move the surrounding woodland into camps and construct siegeworks.

Relating this to Numantia, Appian refers to the area being dense woods¹¹⁹, in stark contrast to today. Deforestation did not really occur until the early sixteenth century, with ship-building requirements¹²⁰. Roman military activity in the area nevertheless would have had a very significant effect on the number of trees remaining by the end of the Numantine Wars. At the bare minimum, woodland within each camp area would have been mostly cleared to make space for tents and streets (though presumably larger tree stumps would have to remain and be inconvenient obstacles).

Camps were various sizes at Numantia, but several were between 50 and 60 hectares, resulting in a significant amount of clearance. This would have been achieved quickly, as indicated by a British army manual stating that a soldier could fell a tree up to 12 inches (30.5 cm) in diameter at one minute per inch (2.5 cm) of diameter, using hand saw and felling axe or two minutes per inch with just an axe¹²¹. The time increases over 12 inches; the manuals even specify a formula to calculate this: minutes = diameter in inches, cubed, divided by 144; doubled if only axes are used¹²². Roman troops had similar types of tools (below), so felling times could have been comparable. With so many men and horses/mules available, the Romans could also have soon cut up the woodland and removed any unusable material from the camp. Several such scenes are shown on Trajan's Column¹²³.

119 *Hisp.* 76.

120 John RICHARDSON, *Hispaniae. Spain and the Development of Roman Imperialism, 218–82 BC.*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 12–13.

121 MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 106; E. John SOLANO (Ed.), *Field Entrenchments. Spadework for Riflemen. Hasty Fire-Cover, Fire-Trenches, Communications, Concealment, Obstruction, Shelters*, Imperial Army Series, London, John Murray, 1915, p. 210; *Manual of Field Engineering Vol. I (All Arms)*, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1933, p. 111.

122 MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 106; MANUAL 1933 cit., p. 111.

123 Conrad CICHORIUS, *Die Reliefs der Traianssäule*, Berlin, Georg Reimer, 1896–1900.

Deforestation – Firewood

At the ‘domestic’ level, there was a daily need for firewood¹²⁴ for cooking and heating (very necessary with winter temperatures of potentially -10° C); Appian comments that some of Nobilior’s soldiers were killed collecting firewood and dying from cold¹²⁵. Consequently, it is not surprising that there is evidence in the camps for hearths in sleeping areas; such features are common in later Roman barracks.

The armies at Numantia could each have had about 3,000 tent groups, each cooking and eating as mess units and using fires for heating. Additionally, there were fires for officers and any non-combatants. That is a huge number of fires, each daily requiring wood. Estimating actual quantities is challenging, as it depends on the type and density of available woodland, burning conditions, duration of fire, etc. British army manuals¹²⁶ say that one soldier could clear a square yard (0.84 m²) of brushwood and small trees (up to 12 inches (30.5 cm) in diameter) in 2.5 minutes using hand saws, axes and billhooks, and this would yield about 5 lbs (2.27 kg) of brushwood; a 1933 manual changes this to a square yard every 2.4 minutes, but more realistically for trees up to only 2.5 inches in diameter¹²⁷. Weight and hence amount of firewood, its type and burning time clearly vary, but experiments by the current author showed that 5 lbs could be sufficient for one fire to cook one meal. Significantly more would be needed if the fires continued for heating at least at night. Roman troops had similar types of cutting and clearance equipment to the early twentieth-century British army (indicated by remains of tools found at Numantia and later Roman military sites) so the tent-groups at Numantia could very quickly have daily cleared about 3,000 square metres of light woodland for firewood; i.e. the area of a football pitch about every two days. The amount of area clearly varied, depending on density and type of woodland, so may have spread even wider if the area was poorly wooded.

124 ROTH cit., pp. 59 ff.

125 *Hisp.* 47.

126 MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 106; SOLANO cit., p. 210.

127 MANUAL 1933 cit., p. 111.

Deforestation – Construction timber

Construction requirements would have consumed vast quantities of timber, as although tents were probably used for some of the Numantia camps (e.g. Renieblas Lager II, IV, VI and the new Peña Redonda-Caracierzo¹²⁸; Figs 1 and 2), other, longer-occupied ones contained buildings or tents roofed over in some way, all requiring timber to a greater or lesser extent¹²⁹ (Fig. 10).

The exact nature of building construction in the Numantia camps is uncertain, but was probably adobe (mud and straw) walls placed on stone sill walls, with thatched roofs, rather like the ones reconstructed in the city of Numantia (Fig. 11), and many seem to have been well-appointed¹³⁰. These would have required timber components. How much timber is uncertain, in part as the detailed overall plans of the camps are unknown, so the number and size of buildings are uncertain. Calculations for timber needed for Inchtuthil fort, Scotland, indicate that thousands of cubic metres were needed there¹³¹, though the half-timbered form of construction compared to the adobe-walled buildings of the Numantia camps could have used different amounts, it nevertheless indicates a very sizeable quantity would have been used at Numantia, especially as so many camps were built in the area during the Numantine Wars, each steadily encroaching on available timber supplies and before much regrowth occurred (below).

128 DOBSON 2008 cit.; Ralf HESSE, José COSTA-GARCÍA, «LiDAR-Daten als Grundlage archäologische Prospektionen in der *Hispania romana*», *Kleine Schriften aus dem Vorgeschichtlichen Seminar Marburg* 61, 2016, pp. 37–38.

129 SCHULTEN cit.; Adolf SCHULTEN, *Numantia. Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1905–1912. Band IV. Die Lager bei Renieblas*, Munich, Bruckmann, 1929, especially fig. 3; DOBSON 2008 cit., pp. 122–123; Mike DOBSON, «Tents, huts or houses? Soldiers' accommodation at Numantia. The work of Adolf Schulten and beyond», in François CADIOU, Milagros NAVARRO CABALLERO (Eds.), *La guerre et ses traces. Conflits et société en Hispanie à l'époque de la conquête romaine (IIIe–Ier s. av. J.-C.)*, *Colloque International, Institut Ausonius, Bordeaux, 2010*, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2014, pp. 57–87.

130 SCHULTEN 1927 cit.; 1929 cit.; DOBSON 2014 cit., pp. 71 ff.

131 Elizabeth SHIRLEY, *The Construction of the Roman Legionary Fortress at Inchtuthil*, British Archaeological Reports British Series 298, Oxford, BAR Publishing, 2000.

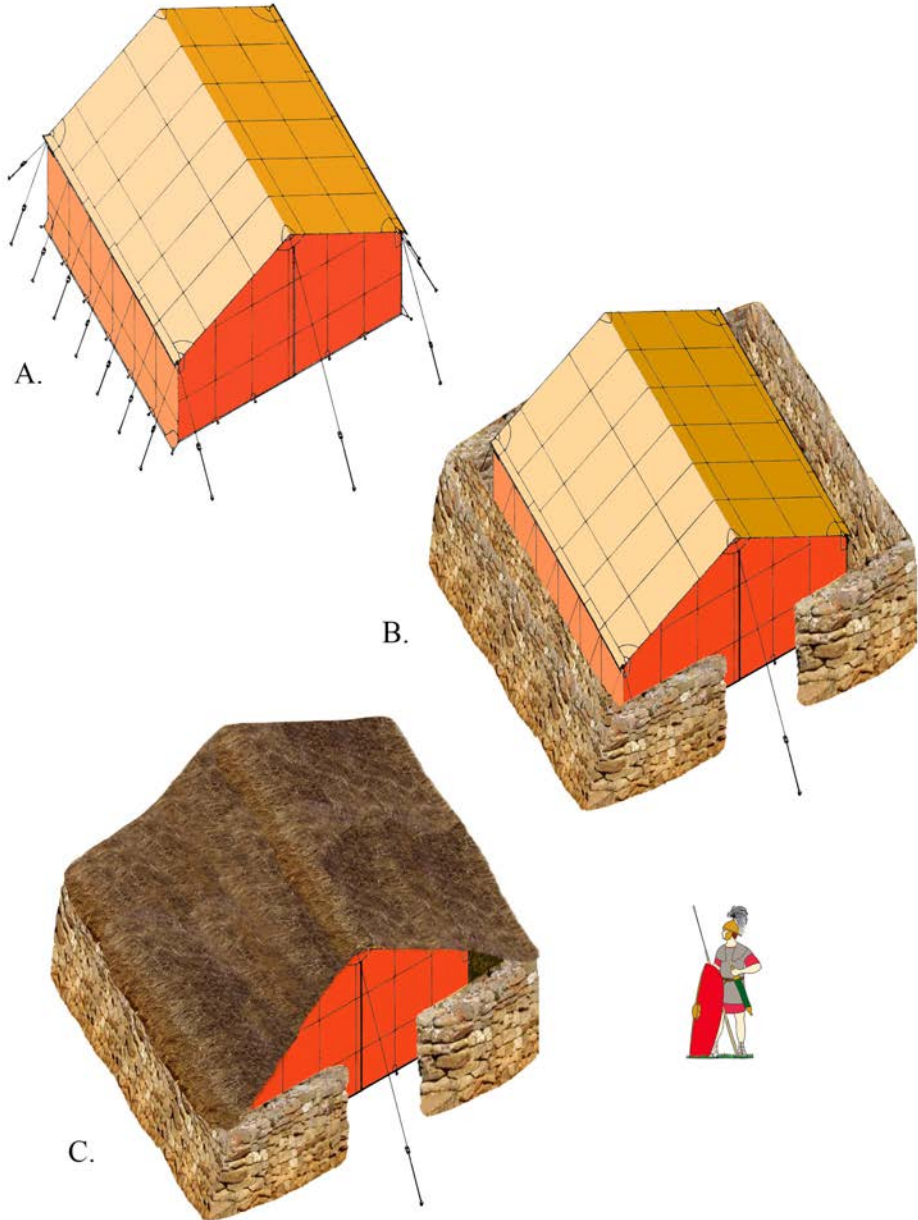


Fig. 10 Accommodation types at Numantia and Renieblas. A) Tent. B) Tent surrounded by low stone wall. C) Tent surrounded by low stone wall and thatched over (drawn: Dobson. Tent reconstruction after Carol van DRIEL-MURRAY, «A Roman army tent: Vindolanda I», in Valerie MAXFIELD and Mike DOBSON (Eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies 1989*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1991, fig. 70.4).

Deforestation and re-landscaping – Defences

All the camps are likely to have used some form of timber defensive palisade or *chevaux-de-frise* formed from stakes¹³² on top of a low rampart of stone/earth/turf, according to local conditions, usually gained from digging a ditch in front of the rampart (Fig. 8).

Creating the ditch and rampart meant that a Roman army would have hand-dug and basket-carried thousands of tonnes of material in the construction of a

¹³² Veg. *Mil.* 3.8; C. (Kate) GILLIVER, «Hedgehogs, caltrops and palisade stakes», *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* 4, 1993, pp. 49–54; C. (Kate) GILLIVER, *The Roman Art of War*, Stroud, Tempus, 1999, 77–78.

Fig. 11 Modern reconstruction of adobe thatched house on stone sill walls, Numantia city (photo: Dobson, 2017).



camp's defensive ditch and rampart. When on the march, new camps could be required each day, meaning that such huge earth-moving occurred daily. Arduous work, but the field operations of the Roman army were like ants achieving amazing structures relatively easily and quickly – each ant moves little, but collectively thousands of ants move a great deal. In the case of sieges, this defensive effort meant a truly mammoth manual undertaking, with the defensive circuit around the city also being required; at Numantia this was about 9 km long¹³³. At least at Numantia, troops may have been spared digging the customary ditch, as the ground is generally too hard, but there would still have been the arduous collec-

133 48 *stades* – Appian *Hisp.* 90.





Fig. 12 Remains of stone rampart of Renieblas, camp III. Numantia lies to the top-right of the photograph (photo: Dobson, 2018).

tion and carrying of stones and loose surface material to form the rampart (Fig. 12). The result would have been a significant change to the visual appearance of the landscape.

Literary evidence indicates that the soldiers may each have carried one or two palisade stakes with them¹³⁴, but not always or there were insufficient and so would need to source them locally¹³⁵. They would almost certainly not have had enough stakes to construct the initial palisade Scipio used for encircling Numantia and the one on the main defensive circuit. There was also all the other timberwork required in creating effective siegeworks, such as the towers built every 100 Hellenistic feet (35.5 m)¹³⁶.

134 Livy 33.6.1; Nicholas FUENTES, «The mule of a soldier», *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* 2, 1991, pp. 65–99.

135 E.g. by Caesar's army; *BGall.* 5, 39.

136 App. *Hisp.* 90; DOBSON 2008 cit., 46.

Deforestation – Extensive

It is consequently no surprise that Josephus claims the Roman four-month siege of Jerusalem used all the timber within a 15 km radius¹³⁷. In the case of Numantia, the area affected could have been even larger, as numerous armies operated there every few years, at times annually, over a period of 20 years, which would have been insufficient for trees to have regrown adequately, and so resources would have to be brought in from increasingly further away. Similar effects of deforestation are attested elsewhere¹³⁸, so it is likely to have been a common problem¹³⁹.

Lucan brings out such destruction in very emotional terms in his account of Caesar's siege of Massilia (Marseille), almost taking the stance of a modern eco-warrior:

“Now all the woods were felled and the forests stripped of their timber far and wide.”

“This grove was sentenced by Caesar to fall before the stroke of the axe; for it grew near his works. Spared in earlier warfare, it stood there covered with trees among hills already cleared. ... Ash trees were felled, gnarled holm oaks overthrown; Dodona's oak, the alder that suits the sea, the cypress that bears witness to a monarch's grief, all lost their leaves for the first time; robbed of their foliage, they let in the daylight; and the toppling wood, when smitten, supported itself by the close growth of its timber. The peoples of Gaul groaned at the sight; but the besieged men rejoiced; for who could have supposed that the injury to the gods would go unpunished? But Fortune often guards the guilty, and the gods must reserve their wrath for the unlucky. When wood enough was felled, waggons were sought through the countryside to convey it; and the farmers, robbed of their oxen, mourned for the harvest of the soil left untouched by the crooked plough.”¹⁴⁰

The situation at Massilia was made even worse by deforestation also ‘being reversed’, as Caesar's opponents cut down “all of the trees far and wide” to deprive his army of timber¹⁴¹.

The Numantines probably felt the same as they witnessed such wanton destruction around their city.

137 *BJ* 5.263.

138 E.g. Caesar *BCiv.* 1.42; *BGall.* 5.39.

139 ROTH cit., pp. 60–61.

140 Luc. *BCiv.* 3.395, 3.426 ff., Loeb trans.

141 Caes. *BCiv.* 2.15.

Food, fodder, hay, etc

Similar strain on local resources must have existed for straw and grass, or similar, for bedding of both animals and men, as well as for thatching buildings and tents¹⁴² (Fig. 10). A minor, but important requirement for grass in hot and dry areas where moss was unavailable (which includes the Numantia area in summer), would be for toilet-cleaning purposes (above); the Palestinian / Yerushalmi Talmud mentions using grass for this¹⁴³.

Morales Hernández convincingly argues that Scipio deliberately timed the start of his campaign to coincide with harvest-time so that his army had sufficient food and fodder¹⁴⁴, though action and foraging a little distant from Numantia seems to have been slightly earlier, as Appian reports him foraging in fields and cutting ‘still unripe grain’¹⁴⁵. The necessity and logistics for adequate provisions have been well-discussed by Erdkamp¹⁴⁶ and Roth¹⁴⁷. In short, the army would have sucked in almost as much food and fodder as it could acquire from the surrounding areas, amicably or otherwise (in Scipio’s case seemingly the latter more than once¹⁴⁸) and with increasing distances beyond, with any lengthened stay such as a siege. A vision of unfolding hectares of empty fields and orchards etc., comes to mind. Local inhabitants must have experienced significant resulting hardship.

Water consumption and security

The supply of water was vital. The 1984 experimental march in full Roman military equipment and hot summer temperatures of at least 21° C, caused significant water loss through profuse sweating¹⁴⁹. One of the participants wore steel body armour, which allowed little bodily air circulation. He suffered from nausea

142 SCHULTEN 1929 cit., p. 26; DOBSON 2014 cit.

143 yT *Shabbat* 82a (11c 2–20); Stefanie HOSS, «Jewish and Christian texts on ancient latrines», in JANSSEN *et al.* 2011, p. 47.

144 Fernando MORALES HERNÁNDEZ, «Comentarios en torno a las dos llegadas de Escipión a Numancia: deconstruyendo a Schulten», *Cuadernos de Arqueología de la Universidad de Navarra* 29, 2020, pp. 1–58.

145 *Hisp.* 87. Troops reaping is shown on Trajan’s Column; CICHORIUS cit., scenes 291–292.

146 Paul ERDKAMP, *Hunger and the Sword. Warfare and Food Supply in Roman Republican Wars*, Amsterdam, Gieben, 1998.

147 ROTH cit.

148 App. *Hisp.* 87; 89.

149 ATKINSON, MORGAN, cit.

and dizziness after about three hours of marching. He also suffered excessive weight loss on one very hot day's 42 km march, losing just over 3 kg. Such weight loss was associated with dehydration and could be simply remedied by increased water consumption through small amounts frequently throughout the march rather than overloading the stomach with too much water before marching. An ideal was found to be about 0.28 litres per hour, i.e. 2.27 litres a day.

The effects of dehydration are serious¹⁵⁰. They are measured in terms of the percentage loss of body mass, with a loss of 1 kg equating to a loss of 1 litre of fluids¹⁵¹. Dehydration up to 10% of body weight is unpleasant, will incapacitate, but is not fatal. 12% weight loss through dehydration requires medical intervention of fluids to recover. Between 15% and 25% loss is fatal, as the body cannot regulate its temperature through sweating and it overheats¹⁵². The weight of the adult experimenter is not given, but presumably the 3 kg loss would have been far less than 10% of his body mass, since it is unlikely he weighed merely 30 kg. He was probably more than the presumed weight of a typical Roman soldier, 55 kg¹⁵³, so the loss could in fact have been less than 5%, but it clearly demonstrates the incapacitating nature of dehydration at well below critical levels and hence the necessity to provision troops with sufficient water.

The experimenter's suffering was accompanied by temporary blindness and disorientation. This and the nausea were attributed to salt deficiency, associated with 10% dehydration¹⁵⁴. Salt is vital to human (and animal) functioning, preventing potentially fatal hyponatremia; a daily intake of about 5 g is usually adequate¹⁵⁵. Its importance is usually ignored or undervalued in Roman military studies, though Roth discusses it¹⁵⁶. The Romans were well aware of its dietary importance, though lacked the underlying science, and that it should be frequent-

150 Carl GISOLFI, «Water Requirements During Exercise in the Heat», in Bernadette MARRIOTT (Ed.), *Nutritional Needs in Hot Environments: Applications for Military Personnel in Field Operations*, Committee on Military Nutrition Research, Institute of Medicine, Washington, National Academies Press, 1993, p. 87; Melissa BEATTIE, *Just Deserts: Roman Military Operations in Arid Environments (108 BC–AD 400)*, unpub. MPhil thesis, Cardiff University, 2011, p. 35; Moss cit., p. 4.

151 Moss cit., p. 4.

152 Moss cit., p. 4.

153 BEATTIE cit., p. 30.

154 ATKINSON, MORGAN cit.; Moss cit., p. 4, n. 7.

155 Moss cit., pp. 24–25; ROTH cit., p. 41.

156 ROTH cit., pp. 25, 40–41.

ly issued to soldiers¹⁵⁷. Vegetius includes it as a necessity for army provisions¹⁵⁸. Caesar regarded good, local salt provision as making a location especially suitable for encampment¹⁵⁹. Relating to the Celtiberian wars in Spain, Appian lists the absence of salt for Lucullus' soldiers in 153 BC as serious and contributory to causing dysentery¹⁶⁰. Salt could even form an environmental weapon, as a Gallic tribe in the Val d' Aosta had to surrender when Octavian's forces blocked their salt supply in 35 BC¹⁶¹.

The huge numbers of men and animals daily required a huge amount of water. Calculating the quantity is challenging, with understandably no ancient sources about this, so estimates have to be based on modern practices. The experimental Roman march (above) concluded there was a minimum daily requirement of 2.27 litres. Engels and Roth similarly estimated 2 litres per day for ancient armies, rising according to circumstances¹⁶², but their methodology and sources for arriving at that are questionable¹⁶³. The essentially 'pre-modern', early twentieth-century British army allowed 4.5 litres per man for daily drinking and cooking purposes¹⁶⁴. Modern US army guidelines say that typical drinking requirements are between 4 and 6 litres a day, with more in higher temperatures and activity levels¹⁶⁵. The most recent British military guidance states "that daily water requirements can increase from 2–4 litres to as much as 8–12 litres in extreme conditions, depending on physical activity levels"¹⁶⁶, but also that hydration must not exceed more than 1.25 litres per hour when undertaking very heavy work or more than

157 ROTH cit., pp. 25, 41.

158 *Mil.* 3.3.

159 *BCiv.* 2.37.5.

160 *Hisp.* 9.54.

161 *App. Ill.* 4.17.

162 DONALD ENGELS, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, p. 125; ROTH cit., pp. 35–40.

163 MOSS cit., p. 5.

164 *MANUAL 1911* cit., p. 53.

165 US ARMY, *Nutrition Standards and Education*, Washington, Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, 2001, p. 5; MOSS cit., p. 7.

166 MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, «Heat illness prevention, Annex F, Hydration guidance. Water requirements for working and exercising in the heat», *Management of health and safety in defence*, Joint Service Publication 375, Vol. 1, Chapter 41, 2022, p. 2, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jsp-375-health-and-safety-handbook-volume-1> [accessed November 2023].

12 litres a day, since over-hydration can also be dangerous¹⁶⁷. Junkelmann's reconstructed legionary march in 1985 concluded that a daily requirement was 4.5 litres and increased to 8.5 litres in hot temperatures, with suggestions of 2 litres only being appropriate for inactive soldiers¹⁶⁸. Junkelmann's amounts overlap with the British and US army's allowances, and so his 4.5 litres per day can reasonably be taken as a minimum for Roman troop consumption at Numantia, but his findings and available military guidance suggest it could range up to at least 8 litres, especially with the hot summer temperatures there.

Water requirements for horses were significantly more than for the men. The early twentieth-century British army manuals vary in their daily water allowances for horses. The army's veterinary department allows 22.7 to 68.2 litres a day, according to the temperature and work being done, with an average being 36.4 litres, but "hot weather and hard work or both combined, will nearly double ordinary requirements"¹⁶⁹. Slightly later army guidelines daily allow 45.5 litres per horse when in camp¹⁷⁰. These amounts may have been generous, as modern experience shows that in normal circumstances, horses drink 23 litres, but it is variable, drinking considerably more in hot conditions and more according to whether the feed is dried grain or hay, or they are getting some water via grazing¹⁷¹; Dixon and Southern give a range of 27–36 litres¹⁷², but some modern horse authorities state as much as 38–45 litres daily¹⁷³.

Whatever the amount, the Roman army had to provide significant quantities, especially as horses are capable of drinking large quantities per session (potentially almost 7 litres¹⁷⁴). Water would also have to be provided several times a day,

167 MINISTRY OF DEFENCE cit., p. 2.

168 Marcus JUNKELMANN, *Die Legionen des Augustus*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1986; Marcus JUNKELMANN, *Panis Militaris*, Mainz, Philipp von Zabern, 1997, pp. 172–175; Moss cit., p. 6.

169 *Animal Management*, Army Veterinary Department, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1908, 129.

170 MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 53)

171 HYLAND cit., p. 96.

172 Cit., p. 206.

173 E.g. UMT, «Managing and composting horse manure», University of Minnesota Extension, <https://extension.umn.edu/horse-care-and-management/managing-and-composting-horse-manure> [accessed November 2020].

174 MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 53.

though the intervals could be infrequent. Three waterings are a daily average, two for cool weather or the horses were not working, but when working and especially in warm conditions, potentially four waterings would be needed¹⁷⁵. Thankfully, the effects and treatment of heat-exhaustion and dehydration in animals were known in antiquity¹⁷⁶.

The Roman army's pack animals would also require water. The mule was probably the normally used pack animal. They generally drink less than horses, on average 18–35 litres a day, but could drink the same amount per session as horses (above). They tolerate thirst well as they can store water longer than horses, potentially for a few days in hot conditions¹⁷⁷.

The oxen used as draught animals would also have required water, between about 21 and 28 litres a day, and needed watering at least three times daily in summer, twice in winter¹⁷⁸.

Scipio learnt to his cost being unable to find sufficient water while in action before the siege at Numantia, as several of his horses and pack animals died from thirst on one occasion¹⁷⁹. Other similar events are attested for Roman armies: thirst affecting military action; suffering from lack of water; battle occurring to secure water; battle delayed until water supply secured¹⁸⁰. And the famous 'rain miracle' that saved the Romans during Marcus Aurelius' wars against the Sarmatians when surrounded without water¹⁸¹.

The recognised importance of water for ensuring the effectiveness of ancient

175 MANUAL 1908 cit., 129.

176 Varro *Rust.* 2.1.22–23; MOSS cit., p. 11.

177 MANUAL 1908 cit., pp. 270, 273; MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 53; ROTH cit., pp. 62, 65–66; BROOKE, «Horses, donkeys and mules vital in providing water», Brooke Action for Working Horses and Donkeys, <https://www.thebrooke.org/our-work/water-provision> [accessed October 2023]; CHESAPEAKE, «Caring for mules», Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/choh/learn/historyculture/mule-care.htm> [accessed October 2023]; MOSS cit., pp. 10, 22.

178 MANUAL 1908 cit., p. 296; Abdou FALL, R. Anne PEARSON, P.R. LAURENCE, Salvador FERNÁNDEZ-RIVERA, *Feeding and Working Strategies for Oxen used for Draft Purposes in Semi-arid West Africa*. Nairobi, International Livestock Research Institute, 1997, p. 25; ROTH cit., pp. 62, 66–67.

179 App. *Hisp.* 89.

180 E.g. Amm. 16.12.11; Caes. *BCiv.* 1.84; *BAfr.* 18, 41; Tac. *Ann.* 4.49; Dio Cass. 37.3.6 and 49.6.1; App. *BCiv.* 2.7.45 and 5.12.114; Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 23; Sall. *Iug.* 48.

181 Depicted on Marcus' Column; Dio Cass. 72.2.

armies is well illustrated by Vegetius' military treatise. He emphasises the important relationship between good water and soldiers' health: an army, "must not use bad or marsh water, for bad drinking water, like poison, causes disease in the drinkers"¹⁸². Similarly, *De Metatione Castrorum*¹⁸³ says there must be a river or spring by the camp. Vegetius also notes that local water supplies may be insufficient for very large armies¹⁸⁴. Hence, limited water at a settlement could simply protect it from being attacked¹⁸⁵. Persian armies suffered similar water problems, with Xerxes' large army drinking at least seven rivers dry¹⁸⁶; this may not have been unusual, as Herodotus was not at all surprised about rivers running dry, but tellingly, he was surprised that the food supplies were sufficient despite the huge size of Xerxes' armies¹⁸⁷. This all suggests that the threat of water-related problems was a constant concern for Roman and indeed all ancient armies.

These water consumption figures scale up to significant quantities for the armies at Numantia. The 30,000 men could daily consume 135,000 litres¹⁸⁸ and the horses and pack animals about 200,000 litres¹⁸⁹. This total of 335,000 litres should probably be regarded as a minimum, as it does not take account of the senior officers etc., as mentioned in previous calculations. This equates to 165 m³. In more meaningful terms, a two-metre deep Olympic swimming pool would be consumed almost weekly.

In the hot summer months there, when rainfall is low, the quantity may have put a strain on rivers and springs. In such Mediterranean areas, springs can even dry up in summer¹⁹⁰ and when running, springs have limited supplies¹⁹¹. During

182 *Mil.* 3.2.

183 57. This tract about laying out a camp is often referred to as 'Hyginus' or 'Pseudo-Hyginus'. The authorship is uncertain, however, so Grillone's title for his 1977 Teubner edition is used here; DOBSON 2008 cit., p. 5 n. 3.

184 *Mil.* 3.1.

185 E.g. Singara (Mesopotamia), Thysdra (Tunisia) and Ursao (Spain); *Amm. Marc.* 20.6.8–9; *BAfr.* 76; *BHisp.* 41; Moss cit., pp. 26–27.

186 *Hdt* 7.21.1, 43.1, 58.3, 108.2, 127.2, 196.

187 7.187.

188 30,000 men x 4.5 litres = 135,000 litres

189 5,860 horses and mules x 34 litres = 199,240 litres, using the suggested average consumption in the range of 23 to 45 litres.

190 *Caes. BCiv.* 3.49; *Veg. Mil.* 3.8.

191 A spring was exhausted in Thrace by a barbarian army, causing casualties; *Tac. Ann.* 49.

Scipio's siege at Numantia though, it seems at least the river Duero remained at good levels, as Appian says it had a current and the Numantines used boats on it to bring in provisions, requiring Scipio to block it¹⁹². Not all the camps at Numantia were close to rivers, or those as large as the Duero, and the rocky ground probably prevented digging wells in the camps if there were no convenient springs; only one well was found, in the low-lying, less rocky area of Renieblas, Lager V¹⁹³. Consequently, there could have been a daily arduous requirement to bring water up to some camps, most of which were on hills. Hopefully, the troops fared differently to those during the siege of Jerusalem, where the seriousness of water security caused significant suffering from thirst and water-carriers being attacked¹⁹⁴.

Stresses on the water systems could also have come from pollution. Since horses and pack animals were probably taken at least twice daily to rivers for watering, as the only practical way of providing sufficient (above)¹⁹⁵, this would inevitably have led to river fouling. Over time, this could have impacted on water quality and animal health if the same watering spots were used regularly, as they would probably have to be. Even if the men drew water upstream from the animals, dictated by common sense and so was probably ancient practice, men and animals in siege camps downstream would have suffered. Significantly, British army manuals are very precise about watering practice in rivers; perhaps a disciplined ancient army such as the Roman was also:

“When a stream is the source, the watering place will be below the men's drinking water [...]; have a sound bank and bottom; wide approaches and exits; be capable of watering as many horses as possible, and not liable to be fouled by upstream drainage [...] If the bank and bottom are muddy, stones and gravel should be liberally used to make a firm, clean standing. Watering should always commence at the lowest part of the allotted length of water, so that each succeeding batch may procure a clean supply by entering a pace or two higher up. In watering, horses should be walked in single file across the river till its whole width is occupied, their

192 *Hisp.* 91.

193 SCHULTEN *cit.*, p. 171. The Romans seemed generally unwilling to dig wells. This is understandable, as the effort involved creating them is immense, they could not be guaranteed to actually find water and if they did, it may be poor quality and was usually low in volume (MOSS *cit.*, pp. 32–34).

194 Cass. Dio 65.4.5.

195 DIXON, SOUTHERN *cit.*, pp. 206–207.

heads turned up stream to give them a clean drink, and when satisfied, they should turn about and leave at the lowest part for the reason given above.

Watering from ponds or other stagnant pools may be necessary, but it is to be avoided if another source is obtainable, for it is not possible to prevent such a supply being greatly fouled.¹⁹⁶

The comment about needing to create firm and clean positions at watering points may be paralleled by the Roman army, with Trajan's column twice showing a soldier collecting water at a river bank, crouching on a firm surface (possibly planks), so that mud is not stirred up in the water¹⁹⁷.

The problem of water-fouling was known in antiquity, since Vegetius notes:

“If a large number of soldiers stays too long in autumn or summer in the same place, then drinking-water contaminated by a polluted water-supply and air tainted by the general foul smell give rise to a most deadly disease.”¹⁹⁸

– meaning probably cholera or typhoid. Vegetius' solution recommended frequent changes of camp; unfortunately not an option for besieging armies. It may surprise us that Vegetius reveals there was an awareness in antiquity of foul-smelling camps, as we tend to believe that people in the past must have been ‘nose blind’ to their dirty surroundings, but other ancient authors also comment on the smell of camps: Sallust says that one Roman army in the war against Jugurtha only moved camp “when the stench or need for fodder” compelled it¹⁹⁹; and Onasander comments that the smell from especially summer camps occupied for any length of time will taint the surrounding air²⁰⁰.

Camp-followers

The environmental impact of a Roman army and probably most ancient armies was not limited to the camps. There would doubtless have been camp followers in the form of traders, merchants and ‘entertainment providers’ etc., eager to profit from the presence of the army, and are often referred to, including at Numantia²⁰¹.

196 MANUAL 1908 cit., pp. 141–142. Similar in MANUAL 1911 cit., p. 53, but with characteristic modern military precision, it specifies 5 minutes should be allowed per horse to drink.

197 CICHORIUS cit., scenes 36, 285.

198 *Mil.* 3.8.

199 *Jug.* 44.4.

200 *Onas.* 9.1.

201 E.g. App. *Hisp.* 85; *BAfr.* 75; Frontin. *Str.* 2.4.8 and 4.1.1; Sall. *Iug.* 45.2; non-Roman ar-

The numbers of such people are uncertain and probably varied during a camp's occupation, but may have been numerous²⁰². Their quarters, effectively the *vicus* and *canabae* settlements by Imperial forts, must have had environmental consequences and similar to those of camps, but on a scale depending on numbers. If the camp-followers moved on with the army after hostilities, they too would have left behind a potentially polluted and despoiled landscape.

Rubbish or resources?

It is tempting to see the state of areas vacated by the army and camp followers in totally negative terms today, but what is regarded as pollution etc., is culturally influenced and changeable²⁰³. Yes, the environmental nature of the landscape had been changed. It was also changed physically by the associated military defences, which were not all levelled when the army departed, as remains of many survive (Fig. 12). The occupants probably also left behind large quantities of material impractical to transport or no longer wanted (e.g. pottery, broken items, faulty equipment), or simply dropped and lost during occupation (hence now found archaeologically). We might see the areas as rubbish-strewn, despoiled, but for local inhabitants they could have been regarded as rich in easily obtained valuable recyclable and upcyclable resources, e.g. metal for re-smelting, ready-cut timber, building materials, cloth and leather pieces; just like the practice of modern rubbish-heap pickers in India and Egypt etc²⁰⁴. Consequently, the locals may even have regarded the deserted camps as a good thing, almost 'shopping centres'.

The recovery of such material may have gone on long after the army left. Stones were being extracted around Numantia into modern times, e.g. many of the older buildings in the local villages are thought to have been built from the stones, and sheep pens and bird-shooting hides have been constructed from them (Fig. 13)²⁰⁵.

my – Hdt. 7.187; ROTH cit., pp. 91 ff.

202 ROTH cit., pp. 113–114.

203 BRADLEY cit.

204 William RATHJE, Cullen MURPHY, *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*, New York, University of Arizona Press, 1992; HOBSON cit., p. 89.

205 SCHULTEN 1927 cit.; 1929 cit.; Adolf SCHULTEN, *Numantia. Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1905–1912. Band II. Die Stadt Numantia*, Munich, Bruckmann, 1931; Morales Hernandez pers. comm.



Fig. 13 Modern bird-shooting hide constructed at Renieblas from the stones of camp V (photo: Dobson, 2016).

Dust and ashes

Environmentally, an increasingly barren land can be imagined in and around the Numantia camps, continuing in such a poor state once the armies departed. The amount of destruction would have been more concentrated and perhaps consequently longer lasting at the camps occupied by whole armies, such as at Renieblas and the huge camp at Peña Redonda-Caracierzo (Fig. 1). But perhaps worse, it would have been spread over a much bigger area by the numerous siege installations placed by Scipio around Numantia itself. The inhabitants of the city would have literally watched their natural surroundings disappear or die off.

The devastation caused by an encamping army was well-known in the ancient world. The Spartans may have moved camp frequently simply because the ground became too foul for themselves, but also it was used as a weapon to destroy enemy territory, though could limit localised damage in friendly areas by not being in each place for long²⁰⁶. One Spartan commander even moved camp

206 ANDERSON cit., p. 61.

several times a day to force his allied contingent to ravage the ground and destroy as many trees as possible in areas they were loath to²⁰⁷.

Near the end of Cervantes' play about the siege of Numantia, Marius says: "Of this dead city, turned to dust and ashes, with all its fruits and flowers turned to thorns!"²⁰⁸. He could have said similar about the areas in and around the camps. Sadly, such environmental devastation would have been repeated wherever the Roman army spread its locust-like wings.

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207 Polyaeus *Strat.* 2.1.21; ANDERSON *cit.*, p. 61.

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Saint Maurice (wearing mail-suit and coat-of-plates) in the Cathedral of Magdeburg, next to the grave of Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. The sculpture was created around 1250, and is considered to be the first realistic depiction of an ethnic African in Europe. Unfortunately, the figure is no longer complete and misses the lower legs and an item in the right hand, presumably a lance. (Photo Acoma, GNU Free Documentation License, Wikipedia Commons) Among the martyr saints venerated by the Christian Churches there are many military men, such as Saint Marcellus of Tangier, Saint Sebastian and Saint Maurice, commander of the Theban Legion which, according to the *Passio Acaunensium martyrum* by Eucherius bishop of Lyon, was composed of Christian Egyptians. After taking part of the Gallic campaigns of general Maximian, the legion would have been repeatedly decimated at Agaunum (now Saint-Maurice, Switzerland) for having refused to exterminate the Christian populations of Valais.

Upholding faith in isolation: Christians in the Roman Army – Japan’s “Hidden Christians”

by WINFRIED KUMPITSCH¹

ABSTRACT: The Christian discourse in antiquity about the possibility of being a Christian and conducting sacrifices is unsurprisingly dominated by the theological elite, which took a firm stance against the compatibility thereof. However, this discourse cannot conceal that there were Christians who thought it possible. In the elite’s counterarguments to such opinions, there are seldom remarks in regard to the situation faced by Christian soldiers, but when they do appear, they are focused on the rank and file, not officers, although the later had to actively perform sacrifices. Meanwhile there are martyrdom reports of Christian officers, which implies that these must have, up to a certain point, been at ease with the fulfillment of their duties as cultic functionaries and their Christian belief. Modern scholarship has explained this by the lack of rigor in their faith, but in this paper, it will be argued, that the “hidden Christians” of Japan form an ideal comparative scenario. This comparison makes it all the more plausible that the Christian officers were not only able to understand the theological gravity of their actions, but also to find ways to amend them, therefore upholding their self-perception as Christians.

KEYWORDS: ROMAN ARMY RELIGION, IDOLATRY, CHRISTIAN MILITARY SERVICE, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS, BAN ON CHRISTIANITY, HIDDEN CHRISTIANS, E-FUMI, APOSTASY, MARTYRDOM, UPHOLDING FAITH, SOCIAL ISOLATION.

Introduction

The title will probably cause astonishment, as more than a thousand years lie between the last persecution of Christians² in the Roman Empire and the beginning of their persecution in Japan. And yet there are aspects in

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2 In regard to the first three centuries AD the term “Christians” is used here as an umbrella term for all the different groups. This use is not out of ignorance of the plurality of thought and practice of Christianity during this period, but rather because of the lack of detailed

how the Japanese “hidden Christians” handled the distress of conscience, caused by performing actions imposed by the social environment but contrary to their faith that, on closer examination, seem transferable to antiquity and the situation of Christian soldiers, especially officers. The following discussion is based on a proposition that I put forward in my master’s thesis in response to the question of how Roman soldiers were able to reconcile their cultic obligations and their Christian faith.³ Therefore this paper attempts to highlight similarities between these two social, geographical and chronological distinct groups, in order to search for lessons on how to deal with the case of Christian Roman soldiers.

1. Dealing with Idolatry as a Christian in the Roman army

The Roman army is known to have been characterised by a close-knit network of cult practices. On important occasions of the official army cult, for example, soldiers had to dress in full parade uniform.⁴ The military cult also encompassed a variety of different occasions, including the birthday of the emperor and the divinised emperors;⁵ important dates in the life of the ruler or great victories of his predecessors;⁶ *sacramentum*, the oath of allegiance taken by the tribune at the muster; *nuncupatio votorum*, the renewal of the oath of allegiance, recorded in the Feriale Duranum for 3 January and the *dies imperii Caesarii*;⁷ *rosaliae signorum*, the ritual crowning of the signa, which had developed from an ancient purification rite after victories;⁸ as well as festivals for the state gods and Rome.⁹

information about the stances of the individual groups, especially in regard to the topic of Christian military service. The preserved positions of Church fathers about this topic are to be understood as individual positions, not as uniform doctrine. As such it is often difficult to assess definitely how their sentiments relate to the opinion of the majority in their geographical region, let alone to other Christian groups in the wider empire.

- 3 Winfried KUMPITSCH, *Christen im römischen Heer. Der christliche Kriegsdienst und seine Wahrnehmung vor Konstantin*, Erfurt, Akademikerverlag, 2018, p. 89-91.
- 4 Oliver STOLL, *Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung: Die Religion des römischen Heeres im Nahen Osten: Studien zum Verhältnis von Armee und Zivilbevölkerung im römischen Syrien und den Nachbargebieten*, Habilitation, St. Katharinen, Scripta Mercaturae, 2001, p. 195-96; 230.
- 5 Manfred CLAUSS, *RAC XIII* (1986), col. 1089 s.v. Heereswesen.
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- 9 CLAUSS, 1986, cit. col. 1089.

The officers were obliged to perform the rituals on behalf of their subordinate soldiers, just as a magistrate performed them on behalf of his district¹⁰ – they played a mediating role between the gods, the emperor and the soldiers.¹¹ However, rituals were not only performed in times of peace, but also at important or critical moments before, during and at the end of a military campaign.¹² A Christian who served as a soldier in the first three centuries was thus inevitably confronted with a variety of polytheistic practices and the danger of being accused of apostasy by his fellow believers.

There has been much discussion in scholarship about the relationship of ancient Christianity to military service, with two aspects emerging as the main focus of ancient Christian criticism. First, the abhorrence of the shedding of human blood, which some scholars have wrongly interpreted as an expression of a pacifist attitude in early Christianity.¹³ The second is idolatry, which was omnipresent

10 Oliver STOLL, *Offizier und Gentleman. Der römische Offizier als Kultfunktionär*, in: Oliver STOLL (Hg.), *Römisches Heer und Gesellschaft: Gesammelte Beiträge 1991 – 1999*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 2001, p. 94; STOLL, *Integration*, 2001, cit. p. 197; 233; Yann LE BOHEC, *Die römische Armee*, (Translated by Cécile Bertrand-Dagenbach), Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, 2016, p. 275; for the influences of these cultic duties onto the duties of officers in the post-Constantinian period see Winfried KUMPITSCH, *The late antique Roman officer as a religious functionary in the Christian Roman army*, *Nuova Antologia Militare* 10,3 (2022) p. 449-70.

11 STOLL, *Gentleman* 2001, cit. p. 83-84.

12 LE BOHEC, 2016, cit. p. 278-80; for the process in which the ritual-framework of the Roman army developed into a Christian one see Winfried KUMPITSCH, „*Adiuta! – Deus!*“ *Die Christianisierung des römischen Heereskultes im 4.-6. Jahrhundert*, Diss., Rahden/Westf., Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH, 2024 (= *Pharos – Studien zur griechisch-römischen Antike* 51).

13 e.g. Adolf VON HARNACK, *Militia Christi: Die christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963 (=Reprint, Tübingen, Mohr, 1905); Cecil John CADOUX, *The Early Christian Attitude to War: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics*, London, Headley, 1919; Cecil John CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World. A History of the Christian Attitude to Pagan Society and the State down to the Time of Constantinus*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1925; Roland Herbert BAINTON, *The Early Church and War*, *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 39,3 (1946), p. 189-212; Hans VON CAMPENHAUSEN, «Der Kriegsdienst der Christen in der Kirche des Altertums», in: Klaus PIPER (Hg.), *Offener Horizont. Festschrift für Karl Jaspers*, München, Piper, 1953, p. 255-64.; Luis J. SWIFT, «War and the Christian Conscience I: The Early Years», *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 23,1 Berlin, De Gruyter, 1979, p. 835-868; Louis J. SWIFT, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, Wilmington, M. Glazier, 1983; Frances YOUNG, «The Early Church: Military Service, War and Peace», *Theology* 92 (1989), p. 491-503; John Howard YODER, *Christian Attitude to War*,

in the army.¹⁴ When considering the ancient discourse, however, it is essential to bear in mind that none of the sources dealing with this topic were written by men with a military background, but all of them presented exclusively theologically based arguments or demands coming from the perspective of a civilian life. And while these writings form the basis for our understanding of the organised discourse, they at best offer only glimpses at the opinions and practices of the ordinary Christians.¹⁵ Furthermore, there was no uniform attitude to military ser-

Peace and Revolution, Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2009; Ronald James SIDER, *The Early Church on Killing. A comprehensive Sourcebook on war, abortion, and capital punishment*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2012; Richard Alan BAKER, *Christians: War and Military Service: From the New Testament to Emperor Constantine*, 2015, in: <https://www.churchhistory101.com/docs/Christians-War-Military-RABaker.pdf> [last accessed: 29.8.2023].

- 14 e.g. Andreas BIGELMAIR, *Die Beteiligung der Christen am öffentlichen Leben in vor-constantinischer Zeit: Ein Beitrag zur ältesten Kirchengeschichte*, London, Forgotten Books, 2015 (= Reprint, München, Verlag J.J. Lentner, 1902); John HELGELAND, «Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337», *Church History* 43,2 (1974), p. 149-63; John HELGELAND, «Christians and the Roman Army from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine», *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 32/1, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1979, p. 725-834; John HELGELAND, Robert J. DALY, J. Patout BURNS, *Christians and the Military. The Early Experience*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985; Hanns Christof BRENNECKE, ««An fidelis ad militiam converti possit»? (Tertullian, de idolatria 19,1): Frühchristliches Bekenntnis und Militärdienst im Widerspruch? », in: Dietmar WYRWA (Hg.), *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche: Festschrift für Ulrich Wikert zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1997, p. 45-100; Heinz-Lothar BARTH, «Das Verhältnis des frühen Christentums zum Militär», in: Wilhelm BLÜMER, Rainer HENKE, Markus MULKE (Hg.), *Alvarium. Festschrift für Christian Gnilka*, Münster, Aschendorff, 2002, p. 1-25; Hanns Christof BRENNECKE, «Kriegsdienst und Soldatenberuf für Christen und die Rolle des römischen Heeres für die Mission», in: Andreas HOLZEM (Hg.), *Krieg und Christentum. Religiöse Gewalttheorien in der Kriegserfahrung des Westens*, München, Schöningh, 2009 p. 180-201; Heinz-Lothar BARTH, «Die Haltung des Christentums zum Krieg. Antike Stimmen und spätere Entwicklung», *Civitas* 17/18 (2013), p. 1-138; KUMPTSCH, 2018, cit.; Andreas GERSTACKER, *Der Heeresdienst von Christen in der römischen Kaiserzeit: Studien zu Tertullian, Clemens und Origenes*, Diss., Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021 (= Millennium Studies 93).
- 15 For example, the Church Orders, who are of especially prominence in the eastern provinces, all contain the excommunication of Christians becoming soldiers, since they are either translations of, or influenced by the *Traditio Apostolica*. In *Trad. Apost.* 16 the baptism of soldiers not willing to abstain from using their sword, nor from oath-taking is prohibited, whilst a Christian wanting to become a soldier shall be cast out, since he has already denounced God. For the topic of Church Orders see Paul Frederick BRADSHAW, Maxwell E. JOHNSON, L. Edward PHILLIPS, Harold W. ATTRIDGE (Ed.), *The Apostolic Tradition: A commentary*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002; Alan KREIDER, «Military Service in the

vice among the Christian groups in the pre-Constantinian period.¹⁶ Accordingly the few surviving sources, who not only set up rules in regards to Christians and the military service, but also try by argument to explain why Christians are supposed to act this way, most often show that they represent a position which is apparently contrary to the position of the local majority. Interestingly from this majority even fewer writings about this topic are known to us.¹⁷ This dynamic is particularly evident in Tertullian's widely cited text *De Corona Militis*, written around 211. In this work, Tertullian († after 220) takes the martyrdom of an unnamed soldier, who had refused to wear the customary wreath during an official ceremony, as an opportunity to show that military service was inadmissible for Christians simply because of the intrinsic compulsion to idolatry associated with it.¹⁸ Although Tertullian's aim in this writing is to demonstrate the impossibility of Christian military service, he shows that the demands he makes are not shared by the majority of Christians, when he complains that the martyr's Christian comrades look on his behaviour with incomprehension,¹⁹ since for them the limited presence at this ceremony was simply part of their official duties without any deeper religious significance. Tertullian had already voiced his disagreement with the widespread view that mere passive participation or not taking the oath was not to be considered participation in idolatry²⁰ in *De Idolatria* around 207, when

Church Orders», *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31,3 (2003) p. 415-442; Alistair Stewart SYKES, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, Crestwood, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001; SIDER, 2012, cit. p. 119-125. On the other hand, testifies archaeological evidence from the eastern provinces the possibility of spatial and individual relations between the Roman army and Christian communities in the third century A.D.: In today's Kefar 'Othnay a room was found inside a building used by the military, which turned out to be the prayer room of a group of local Christians including at least one Centurion. See Yotam TEPPER, Leah DiSEGNI, *A Christian Prayer Hall of the third Century CE at Kefar 'Othnay (Legio). Excavations at the Megiddo Prison 2005*, Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2006, p. 31-43.

16 KUMPITSCH, 2018, cit. p. 101-102; GERSTACKER, 2021, cit. p. 353-360.

17 From these most notably is Clement of Alexandria, for an overview see SIDER, 2012, cit. p. 32-42; KUMPITSCH, 2018, cit. p. 48-52; GERSTACKER, 2021, cit. p. 207-256.

18 TERT. *coron.* 1, 1-2.

19 TERT. *coron.* 1, 4.

20 «Plerique idololatriam simpliciter existimant his solis modis interpretandam, si quis aut incendat aut immolet aut polluceat aut sacris aliquibus aut sacerdotiis obligetur, quemadmodum si quis existimet adulterium in osculis et in amplexibus et in ipsa carnis congressione censendum aut homicidium in sola sanguinis profusione et in animae ereptione reputandum.»

he proclaimed that even tacit participation in polytheistic ceremonies was to be considered an act of apostasy.²¹ Because of this, all service for the state (including administrative civilian service!) was to be associated with idolatry and therefore not appropriate for a Christian.²² However in the same writing Tertullian had to make the concession that witnessing sacrifices when being a guest at private festivals (such as the white toga, espousals, nuptials and naming ceremonies) was not to be considered apostasy, as long as the invitation received was in regard to the event, not the sacrifice.²³ This not only illustrates, that there was a discourse within Christianity which actions were to be considered apostasy, but it turns Tertullian into a crown witness for the influence of the opinion that mere passive participation as well as not taking the oath were not to be considered participation in idolatry.²⁴

And if one or the other had doubts about the salvation of his soul, he may have made the sign of the cross or said a prayer during the ceremony, like the Christian servants did in Lactantius's account about the cause of Diocletian's persecution, a behaviour that Lactantius († c. 325) seems to agree with, since he reports that the haruspicy was unsuccessful because the demons were driven away by these signs of the cross and prayers.²⁵ If this was the case with a haruspicy, why would

«Most men simply regard idolatry as to be interpreted in these senses alone, viz.: if one burn incense, or immolate a victim, or give a sacrificial banquet, or be bound to some sacred functions or priesthoods; just as if one were to regard adultery as to be accounted in kisses, and in embraces, and in actual fleshly contact; or murder as to be reckoned only in the shedding forth of blood, and in the actual taking away of life.» (TERT. *idol.* 2, 2 trans. THELWALL)

21 *«Nam aequae quiescendo confirmas maiestatem eorum, cuius causa videberis obligatus. Quid refert, deos nationum dicendo deos an audiendo confirmes, iures per idola an ab alio adiuratus adquiescas?»*

«For you equally, by remaining quiet, affirm their majesty, by reason of which majesty you will seem to be bound. What matters it, whether you affirm the gods of the nations by calling them gods, or by hearing them so called? Whether you swear by idols, or, adjured by another, acquiesce?» (TERT. *idol.* 21, 1-2 trans. THELWALL).

22 TERT. *idol.* 10; 17.

23 TERT. *idol.* 16.

24 CLAUSS, 1986, col. 1097; BARTH, 2013, p. 23.

25 *«Cum ageret in partibus Orientis, ut erat pro timore scrutator rerum futurarum, immolabat pecudes et in iecoribus earum ventura quaerebat. Tum quidam ministrorum scientes dominum cum adsisterent immolanti, imposuerunt frontibus suis immortale signum; quo facto fugatis daemonibus sacra turbata sunt.»*

«Diocletian's anxious disposition made him an investigator of future events; and while he

it not apply to any other cult act? Such a diverse practice of protection could well explain why some of the soldierly martyrs described as devout had such long careers before conflicts arose.

So, while there were individual groups who also regarded passive presence as an act of apostasy, for the majority the mere presence was only morally dubious from the point of view that one could be tempted, but in itself it wasn't an act of turning away from God. For both groups, however, the actively performed act of sacrifice was equally problematic. It is known from the writings of Cyprian of Carthage († 258), but also from various martyr reports, that not only the Roman authorities but also some Christians argued that the sacrifice performed under duress did not cause any harm to the person making the sacrifice.²⁶ Against this background, the question now arises as to how Christian officers were able to harmonise their faith and their duty of sacrifice. However, there are no direct sources to answer this question, as the reflections of the civilian Christian authors are written from a civilian perspective, and against the background of the demands for sacrifice that was associated with the persecution of Christians. Any active sacrifice was thus regarded as apostasy.

In the first two centuries anti-Christian riots had only occurred locally, but in the third century Christians were for the first time put under pressure throughout the empire. The so-called Decian Edict of Sacrifice in 250 called on the entire population of the empire to sacrifice to the gods before a commission under threat of punishment.²⁷ The attractiveness of sacrifice for Christians was reinforced by the seemingly liberal attitude of the sacrificial commissions,²⁸ for at least in the

*was busy in the regions of the East, he was once sacrificing cattle and looking in their entrails for what was going to happen, when certain of his attendants who knew the Lord and were present at the sacrifice, placed the immortal sign on their foreheads; at this the demons were put to flight and the rites thrown into confusion.» (LACT. *mort. pers.* 10, 1-2 trans. CREED).*

26 CYPR. *laps.* 12-13 testifies to this reasoning of Christians, but fiercely resists its correctness, because unless one has really been tortured, one has no hope of forgiveness; in *PASSIO IULI VETERANI*, in: Herbert A. MUSURILLO (Ed.): *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972, 260-65 the *praeses* Maximus tries in *PASS. IUL.* 2, 5 to convince the Martyr Julius that if he would perform the sacrifice, he would be free of any responsibility since the responsibility would lie upon Maximus as the superior ordering this; CLAUSS, 1986, cit. col. 1097.

27 Reinhard SELINGER, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaiser Decius. Anatomie einer Christenverfolgung*, Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang, 1994, p. 29.

28 Johannes HOFMANN, *Zentrale Aspekte der alten Kirchengeschichte*, Würzburg, Echter Ver-

Egyptian *libelli* it occurs more than once that «[d]ie Kommissionen [...] nicht nur den beim Opfer persönlich Anwesendem [bestätigten], dem Befehl des Kaisers nachgekommen zu sein. Der Opfervollzug durch ein Familienmitglied genügte, um die Bestätigung der Opferkommission für die ganze Familie und deren Gesinde zu erlangen.»²⁹ The effectiveness of this liberal approach in signing the *libelli* is exemplified by the complaints of Christian authors of the time about the masses of *lapsi* who preferred to save their worldly lives rather than devote themselves to martyrdom.³⁰ Despite, or perhaps precisely because of this, those who persevered in faith are always praised in such contexts too.³¹ An unforeseen side effect of the Decian edict was the theological division over how to deal with *lapsi* within the church.³² Six years after the death of Decius, Valerian issued two edicts in 257 and 258, which enabled harsh action to be taken against the Christian clergy and believers. He tightened the old Decian measures by imposing a special sacrificial requirement on Christian priests and a general ban on Christian gatherings.³³ The last empire-wide wave of persecution of Christians by Diocletian began in 303³⁴, after he had previously purged the army and court of Christians.³⁵

This compulsion to sacrifice, initiated by the emperors throughout the empire, deeply shook the Christian communities. In the numerous texts that were written in response to this, calling on the faithful to steadfastly refuse to sacrifice, only the situation of persecution is ever addressed, but not the constantly repeated practice that was a reality in the Roman army. On the one hand, it is of course understandable why this was the case, because from the point of view of the church leaders, no one could regularly and actively perform acts of pagan worship and be a Christian at the same time. On the other hand, the regular performance of acts of pagan worship was a reality for the officers, which begs the question of how Christians within their ranks saw this topic.

lag, 2012, p.82-83.

29 SELINGER, 1994, cit. p. 103.

30 CYPR. *laps.* 8-9; 13-14; Werner PORTMANN, «Zu den Motiven der diokletianischen Christenverfolgung», *Historia* 39 (1990), p. 240.

31 CYPR. *laps.* 1-3.

32 PORTMANN, 1990, cit. p. 240.

33 ACTA PROC. CYPR. 1, 1-8; CYPR. *ep.* 76-81; EUS. *hist. eccl.* VII 10- 11, 4.

34 EUS. *hist. eccl.* VIII 2, 4.

35 LACT. *mort. pers.* X; LACT. *div. inst.* IV 27, 4.



Tribunus Julius Terentius Performing a Sacrifice (Dura Europos Fresco).
Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery, Public Domain

Among the soldier martyrs of the 3rd century are also people who were in this position. According to Eusebius, in 260 the soldier Marinus was reported to the governor in Caesarea in Palestine as a Christian when he was to be promoted to centurion, because he would not be able to fulfil his cultic military duties since he was a Christian. The governor gave Marinus a few hours to consider apostasising, but Bishop Theoteknos managed to persuade Marinus to choose martyrdom.³⁶ Apparently Marinus, contrary to the reasoning of the one accusing him, had not seen a problem between his Christian faith and the upcoming cultic duties following his promotion. It was only the intervention of the bishop that

³⁶ Eus. *hist. eccl.* VII 15.

made him decide against his career.³⁷ In 298, in a garrison within the Hispanic province of Gallaecia, the centurion Marcellus threw down his *cingulum* and *balteum* and broke his *vitis* in front of the gathered troops during the ceremonies in honor of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian. In the first questioning by the *praeses* and during the following questioning by the *praefectus praetorio* in Tingis, Mauretania, he declared that as a Christian he could not continue to sin and serve in the army.³⁸ The *actae Marcelli* don't give any information about how long Marinus had been a Christian as well as a centurion. But even if one suggests that the change in mind regarding his service, which had greatly surprised his superiors, was brought about by the zeal of the newly convert, forcing him to break with his past sins most spectacularly, even then he would have had to perform at least some cultic acts (for example participating in the daily so-called "morning reports") without raising suspicion before this event. And if one assumes that he had been Christian and centurion for a longer time, then this implies that he was at ease with his cultic duties in the same way as Marinus seemingly would have been four decades earlier. This interpretation of the literary testimonies is strengthened by the epigraphical evidence found by the excavation of Y. Tepper and L. DiSegni in Kefar 'Othnay. During the 2005's excavation in the Megiddo Prison a Christian prayer room, with four mosaic inscriptions, was found in the Roman *vicus*. One of them reads the following: «Γαιανός ὁ καὶ Πορφύρι(ο)ς (ἑκατιντάρχης) ἀδελφὸς ἡμῶν φιλο/τειμησάμενος ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἐψηφολόγησε. Βρουτι(ο)σ ἠργάσετα[ι].»³⁹ The building was abandoned at the end of the third century A.D., most probably when the Legio VI Ferrata got relocated, and the floor mosaic got apparently carefully covered up to protect it from damage before

37 That said, it is also possible that the whole dynamic of the story is a creation of Eusebius in order to exemplify the importance of the bishop to be ever watchful and ready to intervene like a good shepherd if one of his flock is in danger of going astray. The possible literary design, however, does not rule out that this stance, attributed to Marinus, could have been found being shared by some groups of ordinary Christians, it only is a warning against taking the report at face value.

38 Acta Marcelli. A. Recensio M, in: Herbert MUSURILLO (Ed.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972, 250-254; Acta Marcelli. B. Recensio N, in: Herbert MUSURILLO (Ed.), *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972, 254-258.

39 «*Gaianus, also called Porphyrius, centurion, our brother, has made the pavement at his own expense as an act of liberality. Brutius has carried out the work.*» (Translation from TEPPER, DiSEgni 2006, cit. p. 34)

the building was dismantled.⁴⁰ This mosaic thus demonstrates that, despite the resolute position of the Christian elite against the active performance of pagan rites, officers of the Roman army could participate prominently in the life of their local Christian community. Thus, the information provided by these two martyr accounts and the mosaic are indications, that not only Christian officers could see no difficulties in combining their cultic duties and their faith, but that also the same sentiment could be shared by their civilian brethren. However, they provide no reason as to why this could be so.

M. Clauss explains this by suggesting that the Christian soldiers had come to terms with the army cult in general, and the imperial cult in particular.⁴¹ He bases this assumption primarily on two points: Firstly, in his opinion the uneducated Christian soldiers would have understood the invitation of Romans 13 as a permission to practice the imperial cult,⁴² secondly, he refers to Origen († 253 or 254), who, in chapter 46 of his *Exhortatio ad martyrium*, speaks out against the pagan view, widespread among some Christians, that the names of the gods are arbitrary and that they conceal a single deity, so that every act of worship is only granted to this one deity.⁴³ According to Clauss, these two lines of thought, in combination with the polytheistic practices prevalent in the Roman Empire, meant that ordinary Christians in particular did not take monotheism very seriously. «Wenn aber die Überzeugung beim Kaiserkult keine Rolle spielt, weshalb sollte man dann nicht dem Kaiser geben, was des Kaisers ist, einen aus christlicher Sicht formalisierten Kult, und dennoch guten Gewissens der christlichen Gottheit, was einer Gottheit zukam, eine Verehrung aus Überzeugung?»⁴⁴ However, Clauss' thesis presupposes only two possible attitudes: the first is that the Christian soldiers were not aware of the problematic nature of their actions, i.e. that they lacked awareness of their new monotheistic confession. The second is that they did not even care and that their career and survival were all that mattered to them. And while the existence of people with these attitudes can be

40 TEPPER, DiSEGNI 2006, cit. p. 42-44)

41 Manfred CLAUSS, *Ein neuer Gott für die alte Welt. Die Geschichte des frühen Christentums*. Berlin, Rowohlt, 2015, p. 295.

42 Manfred CLAUSS, *Kaiser und Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich*, München - Leipzig, K. G. Saur, 2001, p. 446-47.

43 CLAUSS, 1999, cit. p. 445.

44 CLAUSS, 1999, cit. p. 448.

assumed with a clear conscience, the general attribution to all Christian soldiers must be firmly rejected, as it creates a polarity between true Christian faith and corresponding actions or untrue faith. While at the same time this notion ignores the complex psychological background behind human decision-making and pretending that breaking the norms of one's own group would mean disregarding or inadequately understanding the norms in question. Furthermore, this argument perpetuates the ancient theological discourse of the ecclesiastical elite, for whom the only options in this topic are to die in faith or to apostasise. Although knowledge of this discourse is important in order to know and understand the framework in which the ancient Christians operated, it is only of limited value when it comes to discussing the agency of individuals in applying these norms in their everyday lives. However, by adopting this elite discourse in the scholarly view, Christian soldiers are denied the agency to make informed decisions in religious and moral matters.

In order to approach an answer to the question of whether it is possible, despite the regularly repeated idolatrous acts of worship and the knowledge of the problematic nature of these acts, to still see oneself as a Christian, and how one could deal with the distress arising from the knowledge of this wrongness, we must not only change the geographical space but also the time under consideration.

2. *"Hidden Christians" in Japan*

The chosen comparison is the fate of Christians in Japan between the late 16th and the late 19th century. The reason for this comparison is, that after the initial success in bringing Catholicism to Japan, the hopes of the missionaries were crushed when the newly established Shogunate proclaimed a ban of Christianity. This ushered a period of nearly 300 years in which Japanese Christians could only survive by masking themselves as faithful Shinto and Buddhist practitioners. This creates a parallel, worthy of investigation, between the Roman officers who too had to comply with expectations of cultic conformity.

2.1. Historical Overview of Christianity in Japan⁴⁵

When the Portuguese Jesuit Francis Xavier († 1552) landed in Japan in the harbor of Kagoshima on the island of Kyūshū in 1549, he quickly achieved missionary success in this province as well as in the residence city of Kyōto.⁴⁶ In the following decades, the number of Christians increased steadily, especially as at the beginning it was mainly local lords and their entire retinue who were baptised, hoping to gain trade advantages with the Portuguese.

The anti-Christian proclamations issued out of the blue in 1587 by the previously Christian-friendly Daimyō Tyotomi Hideyoshi († 1598) were therefore aimed at expelling the Jesuit priests from Japan and exerting pressure on Christian lords.⁴⁷ However, as implementation outside the areas controlled by Hideyoshi himself was the responsibility of the lords, persecutions, such as the martyrdom of the "26 Martyrs of Japan" near Nagasaki on 5th February 1597, only took place locally.⁴⁸ At the same time, the number of ordinary believers in the territories of Christian lords increased to such an extent that it is assumed that by 1615 there were around 370,000 Christians in Japan.⁴⁹ After Hideyoshi's death in 1598, a five-member committee took over the guardianship of his son Toyotomi Hideyori († 1615), which was headed by Tokugawa Ieyasu.⁵⁰ After Ieyasu († 1616) defeat-

45 The changing fate of Christianity in 16th and 17th century Japan was the result of various socio-political, religious, societal and economic developments within Japan and the European states, as well as the interactions between the various religious orders, mercantile organisations and individuals, which can't be addressed to their full extend in the following overview. For further information consult the cited literature.

46 Elisabeth GÖSSMANN, *Religiöse Herkunft, Profane Zukunft? Das Christentum in Japan*, München, Hueber, 1965, p. 58; Andrew OBERG, «The Sacred Disguised: An Instance of the Double Use of Space by Japan's Hidden Christians», *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (2/2021), p. 216.

47 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 119; Otis CARY, *A History of Christianity in Japan: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant Missions*, Two volumes in one, Rutland, Vermont – Tōkyō, Tuttle Company, 1976, p.103; Ikuo HIGASHIBABA, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, Brill, 2001, p. 127; Miyazaki KENTARŌ, «Roman Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan», in: Mark R. MULLINS (Ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2003, p. 10; OBERG, 2021, cit. p. 216.

48 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 121-22; CARY, 1976, cit. p. 128; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 133-34; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 10.

49 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 138.

50 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 135.

ed the lords loyal to Hideyori in the Battle of Sekigahara on 21st October 1600, he was proclaimed the new Shōgun and established the *bakufu* in Edo in 1603. Since the arrival of a Dutch ship under the English captain William Adams in 1600, Ieyasu was able to make himself independent of the Portuguese in terms of trade by trading first with the Dutch and then, from 1613 onwards, also with the English.⁵¹ Adams, who rose to become a confidant of Ieyasu, endeavoured to denigrate the Portuguese and Spanish, reinforcing Ieyasu's existing distrust of the ambitions of the Spanish and Portuguese kings in Japan.⁵²

On 17th March 1612, the announcement of a decree in response to a court intrigue involving two high-ranking Christian confidants of Ieyasu led to a further aggravation of the Christians' situation. Fourteen previously influential Christian lords were sent into exile.⁵³ This was followed on 21st March by a ban on the practice of the Christian religion in the areas controlled by the Shōgun. On 6th August of that year, this provision was promulgated throughout Japan, making it the first nationwide law.⁵⁴ In 1614, the ban on Christianity was confirmed for a third time: the ban was redefined and the previous decrees were issued in the form of perfectly composed legislation for persecution and punishment, which now for the first time also aimed (primarily) at the common people. The reason for these actions are seen in the Buddhist or rather Neo-Confucian conviction of Ieyasu which led him to reject Christianity as incompatible with Japanese culture, since it could not guarantee the unity of religion and state.⁵⁵ By the end of the year, most of the missionaries had been expelled from the country and there were no longer any publicly visible traces of Christianity anywhere in Japan: the period of the "hidden Christians" had begun.⁵⁶ Despite the ban on entering the country under threat of the death penalty, numerous missionaries attempted to enter Japan in secret over the following decades, with their attempts ending in apostasy or martyrdom.⁵⁷

51 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 124-32; CARY, 1976, cit. p. 140; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 136-37; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 12.

52 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 140-154.

53 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 164; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 138.

54 KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 139.

55 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 131; 157; CARY, 1976, cit. p. 176; Stephen TURNBULL, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day*, Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2016 (first published 1998) p. 40; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 139.

56 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 132-33.

57 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 143-44.

After Ieyasu’s death in 1616, his son Tokugawa Hidetada († 1632) not only confirmed the previous anti-Christian legislation, but also stipulated that it was to be regarded as the legal canon of the Tokugawa dynasty, i.e., that its validity did not need to be confirmed in the event of a change of ruler.⁵⁸ In 1632, his son Tokugawa Iemitsu († 1651) took over the government and proved to be an extremely determined persecutor of Christians. The first mass execution took place in Edo, and led to the increasing use of torture to raise the number of apostates.⁵⁹ In 1637, the peasant uprisings in Amakusa and Shimabara were propagated by Iemitsu as proof of the anti-Japanese intentions of the Japanese converts to Christianity due to the high participation of Christian samurai and peasants, which in turn was used as justification for numerous aggravations.⁶⁰ In 1639, all Portuguese ships were banned from landing on Japanese shores on pain of death. In 1641, the Dutch trading base was relocated from Hirado to the artificial island of Deshima near Nagasaki. As non-Catholics they were allowed to trade but were still distrusted as representatives of a foreign power.⁶¹ In 1644, the Jesuit Mantio Konishi, the last remaining missionary in Japan, was martyred.⁶² A special ministry, the *Kirishitan Shumon aratame-yaku*, was established in 1640 in Edo for the purpose of investigating Christians. A separate prison, the *Kirishitan Yashiki*, was set up for convicted Christians and offices were created in each region to monitor Christians. Until the final abolition of the ban on Christians in 1873, Japanese Christians not only had to make do without instruction and assistance from clerics, but also had to keep their Christian identity secret. Despite this, there were repeated waves of persecution known as *kuzure* “crumbling”, which led to numerous mass executions.⁶³

After 1853 Japan began to open up again. Initially, trade agreements were concluded with the USA and then with various European countries. Priests were again allowed to enter the country, though only to provide pastoral care for the foreigners traveling there and so in 1865 the French were granted permission to construct the Oura cathedral in the foreigner district of Nagasaki. Soon groups of Japanese

58 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 190; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 140.

59 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.135-36; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 42.

60 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 222-28; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 13; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 43.

61 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 232

62 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.139-40; on p.143 she dates, however, the last martyrdom of an European priest to 1639; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 4 dates it 1644.

63 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.140-45; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 43-49.

also came to this church and revealed themselves as Christians, which caused the missionaries to fulfill their pastoral duties to them too in secrecy.⁶⁴ The last persecution occurred in 1867-69, after a group of such “hidden Christians” asked for their declarations of apostasy to be nullified.⁶⁵ In 1873, the ban on Christians from 1614 was lifted under international pressure,⁶⁶ however it took till 1889 that Christianity became an officially accepted religion with the Meiji Constitution and its 28th article.⁶⁷ Based on the surviving documents, it is assumed that until then at least 5,000 had found martyrdom, with many more tortured choosing apostasy.⁶⁸ Subsequently, the Japanese Christians split into «revived *Kirishitan*», who integrated themselves again into the Catholic Church, and the «*kakure*, i.e. hidden *Kirishitan*», who wanted to maintain the traditions of their forefathers.⁶⁹

2.2. *Survival of Christians in Japan during the Time of Persecution*

Like the Christians in the Roman Empire, Japanese Christians were fundamentally aware that martyrdom was the path to follow in the face of persecution. The few surviving Christian-Japanese writings include the writings «*Recommendation of martyrdom*» (*maruchiriyo no susume*)⁷⁰ and «*Instructions on martyrdom*» (*maruchiriyo no shiori*).⁷¹ The original names and dates of these writings are uncertain, but they were probably written before 1600.⁷² They describe the short earthly suffering of martyrdom, followed by endless bliss, in contrast with the eternal suffering that follows the sin of apostasy. A distinction is made between permissible (flight or only providing information when asked about one’s faith) and impermissible behaviour (practising Buddhist rites in order to conceal one’s own faith, denial of being a Christian when asked directly, feigned apostasy) in

64 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.148-56.

65 KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 16.

66 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.157-58; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 16.

67 Keiji OGAWA, «Japan», in: Gerhard MÜLLER (Hg.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Band XVI: Idealismus – Jesus Christus IV, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1987 p. 530-31.

68 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 154.

69 KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 5.

70 The original titles are lost, these names were given for their edition by Anesaki MASA HARU, 切支丹宗門の迫害と潜伏/*Kirishitan shūmon no hakugai to senpuku*, Tōkyō, Dōbunkan, 1925, p. 173-228.

71 MASA HARU, 1925, p. 229-239.

72 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 148; OBERG, 2021, cit. p. 219.

situations of persecution.⁷³ While the *Recommendation* is more concerned with answering the question of why martyrdom occurs, and providing examples of the fates of martyrs and persecutors from the Roman times, the *Instructions* talk about concrete actions to be undertaken if one apostasised. They recommend restoring faith in the case of such sinful behaviour by immediately repenting, asking for forgiveness and resolving not to apostasise in the future, and making confession.

In other words, the hidden Christians in Japan were aware that they were doing something wrong. But since they not only wanted to survive, but also wanted to keep the Christian faith alive in Japan,⁷⁴ they had to find a way to reconcile the demands of their faith with their actions forced by social constraints and their guilty conscience arising from this incompatibility. This was necessary, for the system finalised by Iemitsu to suppress hidden Christians was a highly effective mechanism for controlling the people. The administrative system was called *bakuhau* and consisted of the central *bakufu* (Shogunate) and the administrative territories of the local lord's *daimyo* or *han*. In the religious sphere this administration was strengthened by the *danka* system and the mandatory affiliation with a Buddhist temple.⁷⁵ The system created the iron grasp onto the "hidden Christians" through the implementation of six strategies:

1. Whistleblowers could expect a monetary reward, the amount of which depended on the status of the accused within the Christian community. Such rewards are first documented for Nagasaki in 1619.⁷⁶
2. The five-family groups *goningumi/gonin-gumi* were a particularly effective element of social control. According to this system, the fate of each individual of the group consisting of five families is closely interlinked. If a member commits an offence and is reported to the authorities from outside the group, all members of the five families are punished.⁷⁷
3. The use of *fumie/fumi-e* or *e-fumi* that is the practice of stepping on images of Mary or Jesus. It was initially only applied in the course of questioning by the inquisitors, later also in Kyōto, Nagasaki and the province of

73 OBERG, 2021, cit. p. 219.

74 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.142-43; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 34-36.

75 TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 40.

76 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.142; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 143; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14.

77 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.142; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 143; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14; KENTARŌ, «The Kakure Kirishitan Tradition», in: Mark R. MUL-LINS, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2003, p. 20; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 44.

Kyūshū as a New Year's ritual. The person in question had to step on a painted image, since 1669 lead tablets were used instead, with Mary or the crucified Jesus. While the New Year's ritual was mostly considered a formal act, the performance in front of the inquisitors was faced with more scrutiny, when the body language and facial expressions of the person acting were observed for telltale signs.⁷⁸

4. Introduced in the Buzen province in 1614, pro-forma declarations of apostasy had to be signed and deposited with the magistrate by all Japanese throughout Japan since 1635.⁷⁹ That the hidden Christians took those declarations seriously is shown by the fact that the persecution of 1867 had been triggered by a group of hidden Christians who, after celebrating mass with a Portuguese priest, had gone to the magistrate and asked for the nullification of their declaration of apostasy.
5. One had to possess a *tera-ukejo* "temple guarantee/certificate", a annually renewed confirmation of the good Buddhist way of life, issued by a Buddhist temple. In the course of the anti-Christian measures, a nationwide Buddhist temple network was established (completed in 1635), so that one temple was responsible for several villages. It was now the monks' task to be present at all religiously framed family events and to certify the correct performance of Buddhist rites and regular personal contact.⁸⁰
6. Lists were kept to control apostates. In 1687, this system was introduced by recording up to five generations of descendants of members of the five-family group of apostates as well as those executed for Christianity and documenting them for stricter surveillance.⁸¹

The reaction of the hidden Christians to this all-encompassing system of surveillance and persecution, which made even Diocletian's persecution pale in comparison, was to remain as invisible as possible, and to do everything that was actually forbidden for Christians: they performed the Buddhist rituals purely outwardly, used Buddhist burial customs, images and prayer chains, stepped on the images of Mary and Jesus, signed the declarations of apostasy and visited the Buddhist temples.⁸² In short, they did everything that Tertullian and other church

78 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.142; CARY, 1976, cit. p. 228 gives 1658 as earliest mention of the practise; however HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 144 gives 1631 as earliest mention; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14; Hubert CIESLIK S. J., in: Margret DIETRICH, Arcadio SCHWADE (Hg.), *Publikationen über das Christentum in Japan. Veröffentlichungen in europäischen Sprachen*, Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang, 2004, p 71-73; 352; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p.41.

79 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 145; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14.

80 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p. 132; HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 147; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14; 21; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 40-41; 44.

81 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 158; KENTARŌ, Roman Catholic Mission, 2003, cit. p. 14.

82 GÖSSMANN, 1965, cit. p.147; KENTARŌ, Kakure Kirishitan, 2003, cit. p. 22; OBERG, 2021,



Fumi-e to Expose Christians by Tokugawa Shogunate,
Circa 1870 (Meiji period print) - Unknown Author
Photo Credit: Camellia Tea Ceremony @camelliakyoto, Public Domain.

fathers would condemn them for and accuse them of not sufficiently understanding the meaning of a monotheistic confession. But they did so neither out of ignorance of the gravity of their actions nor out of contempt for the prohibition. It was only during the centuries of isolation, that their teachings became more syncretistic, but they still saw themselves as Christians.⁸³

This is demonstrated by the fact that after more than two centuries of isolation, the first act of that group of hidden Christians was to request the nullification of their declarations of apostasy, as well as that the hidden Christians sought to minimize the severity of their performance of *e-fumi*, from the introduction of the practice till its abolishment.

Some washed their feet particularly thoroughly beforehand, others washed them afterwards or burned their straw sandals, mixed the ash with water and then drank it while giving thanks for the divine grace that they had been allowed to touch the holy images.⁸⁴ People tried to perform the act of stepping with as much reverence as possible, which in the New Year ritual could mean only stepping on the edge of the picture,⁸⁵ a course of action that was impossible in the inquisitorial procedure.⁸⁶ After the act, prayers from the *onchrisan* and *orashio* prayer corpora memorised by each hidden Christian were recited and other acts of penance were performed to express one's remorse.⁸⁷ In short, even if the hidden Christians did everything they could to survive, they were fully aware of the moral significance of their actions despite the lack of clerical supervision and endeavoured to atone for their misconduct. They had the agency to deal with external constraints and moral and religious demands themselves. This agency was evident in the fact that during the period of isolation and persecution, a distinction was drawn between formal apostasy and actual renunciation of the faith.⁸⁸

cit. p. 217-220; for a collection of material Kirishitan objects in the Iyo-region see Yasunori FUKUDA, David R. BOGDAN, *Hidden Christians of Iyo: A Preliminary Report*, in: <https://core.ac.uk/download/230499855.pdf> [last accessed: 29.8.2023] p. 39-55.

83 TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 223-27.

84 CARY, 1976, cit. p. 229; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 41.

85 CIESLIK, 2004, cit. p. 72.

86 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 144.

87 KENTARŌ, *Kakure Kirishitan*, 2003, p. 21; CIESLIK, 2004, cit. p. 72; TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 41.

88 HIGASHIBABA, 2001, cit. p. 155.

3. *Parallels between the Hidden Christians in Japan and the Christian Roman Officers*

The question that now arises is to what extent the situation of the hidden Christians can be compared with the situation of Christian Roman soldiers, especially officers. In my opinion, there are some good reasons for taking the hidden Christians as an example of how Christian Roman officers could have reconciled the performance of their duties as cult functionaries with their Christian confession.

First and foremost is the isolation of Christians from the clergy. While in Japan after 1639/1644⁸⁹ the "hidden Christians" were absolutely cut off from other Christians, the isolation of the Christian soldiers as a whole must be categorised as relative, as the soldiers stationed in a town with a Christian bishop were certainly able to make contact with the congregation. At the same time, however, the isolation of a Christian soldier stationed in a place without a Christian congregation must be considered almost absolute. While we do know from the correspondence of Theodoret († around 460) that, at least in the 5th century, soldiers could correspond privately with bishops,⁹⁰ this does not indicate how common such interaction was in general and especially in the first three centuries, when the persecutions took place. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that most Christian soldiers only had close contact with Christian clerics during their preparation for baptism. In other words, they were dependent on their own judgment or the opinion of their comrades when making their decision.

This was somewhat different for the hidden Christians in Japan, who could rely on a fixed secret congregational structure, that had been established by the missionaries. These congregations were led by elders (*chokata*), baptismal catechists (*mizukata*), catechists (*oshiekata*) and preachers (*kikiata*), who baptised in the absence of the clergy, administered the calendar and announced the Christian dates, as well as presided over the communal rituals.⁹¹ In other words, the individual could still turn to an authority figure with their questions and needs. The commonality is therefore the interrupted or limited contact with theologically educated clergy, not the potential social isolation.

Then there is the control exercised by the social environment. The soldiers

89 see footnote 62.

90 THEOD. *ep.* CXLIV.

91 KENTARŌ, *Kakure Kirishitan*, 2003, cit. p. 20; 23.

of the Roman army formed a tight-knit community. They slept, ate, exercised, marched and fought together, which inevitably meant that they knew a lot about their comrades. On the one hand, this meant that the comrades were possibly prepared to turn a blind eye in times of persecution and overlook the Christian confession; on the other hand, knowledge of a comrade's faith could also be used as a weapon against him in the event of disagreements.⁹² Such control of behaviour, as represented by the five-family group system in Japan, was unknown in Roman civil society and, with its legal consequences, also exceeded the internal mechanisms of control enacted by the Roman army. In both cases, however, obvious deviation from the behavioral guidelines could not be tolerated by comrades/family members. However, it has to be noted, that the five-family group system was actually supporting the survival of the "hidden Christians" in the more isolated rural areas, if the majority of a group or village was Christian.⁹³

It therefore seems permissible to conclude that there were similar intentions guiding their actions, when the Roman Christians sought to protect themselves against potential dangers by making the sign of the cross when passively participating in ritual acts, when the hidden Christians performed acts of atonement after the performance of the *e-fumi* in order to do penance, as well as when the Christian officers, aware of the problem, performed their ritual duties but employed practices for penitential purposes during or after them.

At the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th century, Ambrose of Milan († 397) and Augustine of Hippo († 430) discussed the problem of self-imposed acts of penance. While Ambrose argues that it is the sole responsibility of the bishop to impose acts of penance and to decide on the end of penance,⁹⁴ Augustine is in favor of the faithful being able to impose acts of penance on themselves for minor offences, but insists on episcopal primacy for serious sins.⁹⁵ Even if concrete forms of the penitential acts addressed only took shape in the context of the

92 Marinus suffers martyrdom because a competitor for the promotion to the centurionate denounces him as a Christian: *EUS. hist. eccl.* VII 15; and envious comrades inform the emperor about the Christian believe of Sergios and Bakchos: *BHG* 1624; *BHL* 7599.

93 TURNBULL, 2016, cit. p. 44; Jan Levin PROPACH, «Japans verborgene Christen», *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 72 (2021) p. 27.

94 Philipp Gerald WYNN, *War and Military Service in Early Western Christian Thought, 200-850*, PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2011, p. 203-09.

95 WYNN, 2011, cit. p. 258-59.

4th century, it can certainly be assumed that the basic idea of this self-imposed penance, namely the new reconciliation with God, dates back longer, because the demand for moral reflection on the conduct of life was always part of Christian teaching. If one therefore assumes that, regardless of the official stance of the clergy, some Christians in the civilian environment took reconciliation with God into their own hands, one can also assume that Christian soldiers who were partially cut off from civilian society, also developed similar practices. This assumption that it was perfectly possible for Christian soldiers to fulfill their cultic obligations in the knowledge of the theological problems of doing so, but to repent on a personal level, means to acknowledge that Christian soldiers also possessed agency in regard to the organisation of their religious lives. However, this agency had been denied to them by the polarised interpretation of the ancient ecclesiastic elite discourse in previous research.

Conclusion

Looking at the situation of Japan's hidden Christians and how they dealt with the states demands for apostasy, their Christian confession and the resulting sense of guilt opens up the possibility of reconstructing the behaviour of Christian Roman soldiers and officers beyond the information provided by ancient sources. For, as has been shown, while there is evidence for the neutralisation strategies of Christian soldiers when they passively participated in acts of worship for the roman period, the active performance of such acts was always regarded as apostasy, regardless of the circumstances. And if the army is mentioned in the idolatry discourse, it is only with regard to soldiers in general, but not to officers in particular. Following the argument of the ancient church fathers that one was either a Christian and a martyr or an apostate, Christian soldiers before Constantine were considered by scholars to have a low level of Christian moral awareness. The comparison with the hidden Christians shows, however, that it could have been possible for a Christian officer who understood the problems of sacrifice and Christian monotheism to develop behavioral patterns in order to remove the stigma that had arisen through the performance of their cultic duties, regardless of whether this approach was accepted by church doctrine or not. However, since this behaviour, if it existed, was anchored in the individual practices of the respective officer, it was not noticed or commented on by the Church Fathers. The

fact that Ambrose and Augustine dealt with private penitential practices at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, which were in rivalry with episcopal hegemony, shows the relevance of this theoretical reconstruction. The reality of life allows the individual Christian to realise his agency to a certain extent by being able to evaluate his own faith and actions and take corrective measures, influenced but not predestined by dogmatic decrees. This will have been even more the case for those Christians who, like the hidden Christians, found themselves in a life situation separated from the clergy and their teachings.

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Una “riforma” militare di Teodosio?

di GIULIO VESCIA

ABSTRACT. This article aims to expose the main consequences that occurred in the military field following the battle of Adrianople. In this sense, we tend to highlight elements of continuity and discontinuity in the transition from the 4th to the 5th century, trying to find the main factors underlying the evolution. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the Roman military response, especially by the emperor Theodosius. A reaction occurred not only in military activities aimed at containing the problems, which go beyond this discussion, but also in the reorganization of the Roman command. In this sense, it is fundamental to question the extent of this change, which is sometimes given the definition of “Theodosian military reform”.

KEYWORDS: THEODOSIUS, VEGETIUS, NOTITIA DIGNITATUM, GOTHs, PARS ORIENTIS, PARS OCCIDENTIS

L'organizzazione del comando militare

Tra le immediate conseguenze della catastrofe di Adrianopoli¹, avvenuta nella provincia romana di Tracia il 9 agosto 378, quelle più vistose riguardarono la cosiddetta riforma militare di Teodosio, consistente nel decentramento geostrategico dell'alto comando militare a seguito alle concessioni territoriali a favore dei Goti e dei *foedera* conclusi direttamente dall'imperatore nel 378/82, che rendevano impossibile controllare tutti i fronti aperti lungo i confini mediante un numero limitato di ufficiali di corte.

La nostra tesi è che questa riforma rappresenta in realtà il culmine di una lunga evoluzione dei vertici militari (*magisteria*) istituiti da Costantino, passati dalle funzioni di semplici ‘ispettorati d’arma’ a quelle di capi di stati maggiore dei Ce-

1 Alessandro BARBERO, *9 Agosto. Il giorno dei barbari*, Il Mulino, Bari, 2005; Peter HEATHER, *La caduta dell'Impero Romano*, Garzanti, Milano, 2008; Noel LENSKI, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century A.D.*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002.

sari degli Augusti e infine a quelle di veri e propri comandi operativi regionali². Già nel 318 i *magisteria peditum* ed *equitum* inizialmente stabiliti da Costantino a Treviri e a Milano furono infatti sostituiti da un primo *magisterium militum per Gallias* attribuito direttamente al primogenito e “Cesare” Flavio Giulio Crispo, mentre Costantino conservò il comando diretto del resto delle forze esercitato attraverso nuovi *magistri peditum* ed *equitum* istituiti a Serdica (Sofia) e Sirmio (in Serbia). Nel 325 Crispo, giustiziato dal padre, fu sostituito dal parigrado e fratellastro Costantino II, mentre un altro capo di stato maggiore generale (*magister militum praesentalis*) fu istituito presso l'imperatore (con sede a Nicomedia e poi a Costantinopoli). Probabilmente nella stessa circostanza i *magisteria* di Serdica e Sirmio furono riuniti in un *magisterium militum per Illyricum*, e ne fu creato uno analogo *per Orientem* ad Antiochia.

Nel 335 l'amministrazione periferica dell'Impero fu ripartita fra i quattro Cesari, assegnando a ciascuno un *magister militum* con funzioni di capo di stato maggiore: Costantino II a Treviri (*per Gallias*), Costante I a Sirmio (*per Illyricum*), Flavio Giulio Dalmazio a Serdica (*per Thracias*) e Costanzo II ad Antiochia. Morto Costantino nel 336 e perito Dalmazio, Costante I assorbì anche la Tracia e nel 337 i tre Cesari superstiti si proclamarono Augusti dividendosi comandi e forze, ciascuno con un *magister praesentalis* (Milano, Costantinopoli, Antiochia) e un *magister regionale* (Treviri, Sirmio, Antiochia). Morto Costantino II nel 340, Costante I riunì Gallia e Illirico e Costanzo II Tracia e Oriente, ciascuno con due *magistri regionali* e un *praesentalis* (a Milano ed Antiochia). Questo assetto, determinato più da ragioni familiari che da esigenze militari, fu ripetutamente modificato dopo il 350 e nel 367 fu nuovamente ripartito fra Graziano (Gallia), Valentiniano I (Illirico) e Valente (Tracia e Oriente) con 4 regionali e 3 *praesentales*.

Gastone Breccia inquadra questa riforma “geostrategica” dell'alto comando romano (per certi versi analoga ai sei *Unified Combatant Commands* “geografici” degli Stati Uniti) nella vasta analisi della politica militare di Teodosio che apre il suo recente volume sulla grande strategia bizantina³. Eppure, a prescindere dagli

2 Giusto TRAINA, «L'impero d'Occidente e l'identità etnica dei *magistri militum*. Brevi osservazioni», in Fabrizio OPPEDISANO (cur.), *Procopio Antemio imperatore di Roma*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2020, pp. 221-227.

3 Gastone BRECCIA, *Lo scudo di Cristo. Le guerre dell'Impero Romano d'Oriente*, Roma-Bari, Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 2018.

sviluppi della politica militare teodosiana, ben poco sappiamo sulla data e le circostanze della creazione dei *magisteria utriusque militiae*. Dipendiamo infatti unicamente da un passo di Zosimo⁴, parte di un lungo *excursus*⁵ in cui l'autore deplora il miserevole stato dell'impero, incolpandone l'avidità e gli sperperi di Teodosio, “af-famatore del popolo”. Con le usuali forzature polemiche⁶, lo storico bizantino afferma che, quando “ancora risiedeva a Tessalonica”, l'imperatore avrebbe aumentato il numero dei *magistri* (στρατηγοί) a “cinque e più” e raddoppiato il numero dei comandanti superiori delle truppe (ἀρχόντες τοῦ στρατιώτας)⁷. Con l'unico effetto, scrive Zosimo, di appesantire il carico fiscale dell'*annona* e peggiorare la condizione dei soldati, esposti alle malversazioni di un maggior numero di ufficiali che privavano la truppa di viveri e foraggio. L'asserito raddoppio di *comites* e *duces* non trova peraltro riscontri e resta nel complesso alquanto dubbio⁸. Al di

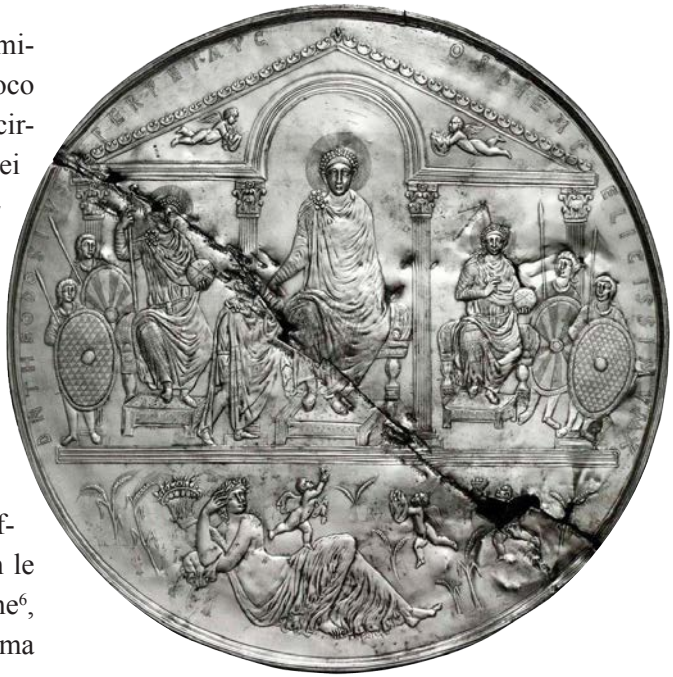


Fig. 1a Teodosio rappresentato fra i due Augusti, alla sua sinistra Arcadio con due scutati che alludono ai *magisteria militum per Orientem e per Thraciam*, a sinistra Valentiniano II, coi *magisteria militum per Illyricum e per Gallias*. Replica del Missorium di Teodosio nel Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida. Riprod. E dettagli dei milites, Italica Res, 2022. Wikimedia Commons.

4 Alexander DEMANDT, *Magister Militum*, *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (RE)*, XII, (1970), pp. 553–790.

5 Zos. IV, 27-32.

6 Zos. IV, 27.

7 Zos. IV, 27, 3: καὶ ἰλάρχας καὶ λοχαγοὺς καὶ ταξιάρχους.

8 Molto scettico DEMANDT, cit.; più possibilista Hartmut LEPPIN, *Teodosio il Grande*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2008, p. 65.

là dell'odio dell'autore contro tutti gli imperatori cristiani, qui siamo in presenza di un *topos* della storiografia di stampo senatorio, come già si intravvide nell'interpretazione di un'altra grande riforma con probabili riflessi in materia militare, la *Constitutio Antoniniana* di Caracalla.

Una certa ambiguità riguarda pure il modo leggermente differente in cui Zosimo indica, nello stesso passo, il numero dei comandi generali istituiti da Teodosio: prima scrive "più di cinque" (πλείσσιν ἢ πέντε), poi "cinque e più" (πέντε καὶ πλείσσιν)⁹. Forse l'autore intendeva esprimere concetti differenti, ad esempio che Teodosio normalmente aveva cinque *magistri militum*, ma talvolta anche un numero maggiore. In questo caso, Zosimo sarebbe infatti piuttosto preciso: Teodosio, tra i generali di Valente, conservò Giulio, Saturnino e Vittore, quindi nominò Maioriano e Modare.

Più tardi, quando il *comes* Ricomere (*Flavius Richomeres*) non era ancora stato promosso *magister*, a Tessalonica c'erano cinque *magistri*, e poiché Zosimo attribuisce la riforma al primo soggiorno dell'imperatore in questa città, non sussistono motivi validi per posticiparne la data. In base alla ricostruzione di Demandt, essa va posta tra il giugno del 379 e il novembre del 380. In seguito, il numero complessivo di *magistri* restò invariato, con l'eccezione degli ultimi anni di regno quando, nel periodo in cui l'Illirico orientale fu reintegrato nell'impero d'Occidente, scese a quattro.

Restano controversi, in ogni caso, i "più di cinque" citati da Zosimo: forse egli allude alla nuova creazione di un *magisterium Africae* per Gildone, poi abortita, oppure l'espressione è ancora una volta una forzatura polemica. In ogni caso, l'istituzionalizzazione definitiva di un così alto numero di capi di stato maggiore non implicò ancora, sotto Teodosio, che l'imperatore non restasse a tutti gli effetti il comandante supremo dell'esercito, presente sul campo in tutte le occasioni più importanti.

Quando Giovanni Lido affermava che per primo Teodosio promulgò una legge¹⁰, in virtù della quale l'imperatore non poteva combattere personalmente sul campo di battaglia, ma doveva inviare i suoi generali, quasi certamente proiettava

9 Entrambe le formule in Zos. IV, 27, 2, a distanza molto ravvicinata, ma la seconda in un inciso, non nel discorso principale. Trad. con testo a fronte di Fabrizio CONCA, *Storia Nuova di Zosimo di Panopoli*, Milano, Rizzoli, BUR, 2007, p. 423.

10 Lyd., *De mag.*, II, 11.

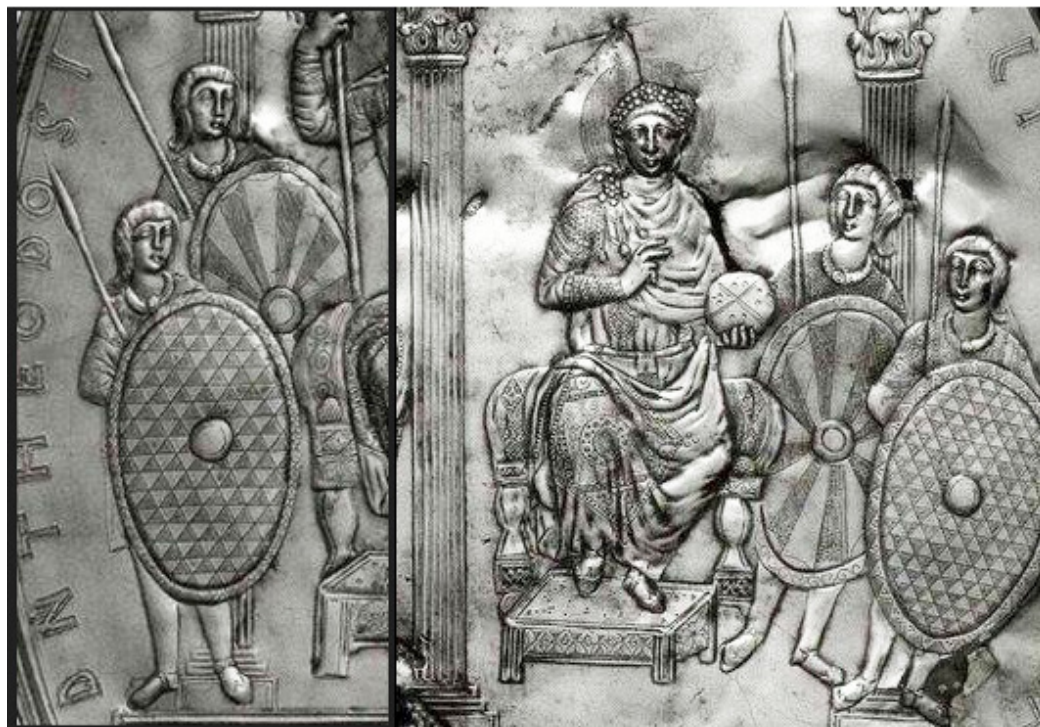


Fig. 1 b Dettagli degli scutati che rappresentano i *magisteria militum*, Italica Res, 2022.

in un passato già piuttosto remoto uno stato di fatto di pieno VI secolo.

La conferma alle parole di Zosimo deriva dagli organigrammi della *Notitia Dignitatum*: nelle liste orientali, infatti, l'esercito comitatense-palatino risulta composto da cinque nuclei autonomi, forniti di forze prestabilite e miste di cavalleria e fanteria d'élite. Si tratta dei due eserciti presentali di corte, dotati di forze uguali¹¹, e dei tre eserciti regionali di Oriente, Tracia e Illirico orientale (dopo la spartizione del 396 d.C.)¹². I due generali di corte possiedono il titolo di

11 Si veda Dietrich HOFFMANN, «Der Oberbefehl des spätrömischen Heeres im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.» *Actes du IXe congrès international d'études sur les frontières romaines. Mamaïa, 6-13 septembre 1972*, Bucaresti-Köln-Wien 1974, pp. 381-397.

12 In concomitanza con la cessione formale all'Oriente dell'Illirico orientale (diocesi di Dacia, Tracia e Macedonia) e la costituzione della diocesi di Pannonia in Illirico occidentale, sancite da Stilicone. Si veda Arnaldo MARCONE, «L'Illirico e la frontiera nordorientale dell'Italia nel IV secolo d.C.», in Gianpaolo URSO (cur.), *Dall'Adriatico al Danubio. L'Il-*

praesentalis (o *in praesenti*), ma è scomparsa la specificazione *peditum* ed *equitum*, sostituita da due numeri progressivi, *I* e *II*. Secondo lo Hoffmann è evidente che, nella nuova organizzazione, dal punto di vista gerarchico i due generali di corte erano stati equiparati ai generali regionali, pur restando indipendenti, il che sottintende un notevole ridimensionamento del loro potere e prestigio, come si diceva all'inizio.

In Occidente, invece, il comando supremo nella *Notitia Dignitatum* è tuttora esercitato da un *magister equitum* (*praesentalis*) e da un *magister peditum* (*praesentalis*), accanto ai quali sono posti i comandanti regionali, sia il *magister gallico*, sia i vari *comites*, tra i quali di nuovo uno per l'Illirico (occidentale), come prima del 359. In sostanza, quindi, venne mantenuto il sistema precedente, con la creazione di un *comes* per l'Illirico, dato che il corrispondente *magister* era definitivamente passato all'Oriente nel 396. Va notato, però, che in Occidente, soprattutto a partire dal regno di Graziano, assunse una posizione predominante il *magister peditum*, in particolare Merobaude¹³, con la parentesi di Arbogaste.

Lo si evince anche dal fatto che il suo capitolo precede quello del *magister equitum*; inoltre, anche nella *distributio numerorum* le unità di fanteria, diversamente dall'Oriente, vengono enumerate prima dei reparti di cavalleria; infine, il *magister peditum* possiede un comando aggiuntivo, indiretto, su tutti i comandanti di frontiera occidentali¹⁴.

La nomenclatura dei reparti, fornita dalla *Notitia*, permette innanzitutto di individuare alcune nuove unità comitatensi e palatine create da Teodosio in Oriente. Si riscontra, inoltre, la scarsità di nuovi reparti limitanei, e soprattutto una forte presenza di cavalleria e *auxilia* barbarici, tendenza che si nota, del resto, anche nella fase precedente ad Adrianopoli.

Risultano, tenendo conto del lavoro di Clemente, almeno 6 *vexillationes pala-*

lirico nell'età greca e romana. Atti del Convegno internazionale, Cividale del Friuli, 25-27 settembre 2003, ETS, Pisa 2004, pp. 343-359.

13 Il franco Merobaude, che servì gli imperatori Giuliano e Valentiniano I sul confine renano, giocò un ruolo importante nell'elevazione al trono di Valentiniano II dopo la morte del padre (Amm. XXX, 10; Zos. IV, 19, 1), e pertanto è ricordato come il primo *Kaisermacher* tra i *magistri militum* germanici. Cfr. John M. O'FLYNN, *I generalissimi dell'Impero romano d'Occidente*, Ar, Padova, 2020 (trad.it.).

14 *Not. Occ.* V, 125-143; sulla strana assenza, in questo elenco, dei comandanti regionali di Gallia, Spagna e Illirico occidentale si veda HOFFMANN, *Der Oberbefehl*, cit.

tinae, 10 *auxilia palatina*, 1 *legio comitatensis*, 3 *legiones pseudocomitatenses*, 2 reparti di *equites*, 1 *cuneus equitum*, 5 *alae*, 2 *cohortes*, come unità interamente attribuibili a Teodosio¹⁵.

In base a questi dati, non può non colpire un tale numero di unità di nuova formazione, concentrato nella sola parte orientale. A maggior ragione ciò desta sorpresa tenendo in conto le crescenti difficoltà di reclutamento ed economiche dell'impero. Bisogna comunque considerare che la *comparatio tironum* di barbari esterni all'impero, iniziata da Costantino e ripresa da Valentiniano I e Valente, è certamente continuata sotto Teodosio: basti pensare alle notizie relative alla massiccia presenza barbarica anche nell'esercito occidentale; tuttavia, il pesante onere finanziario costituito dalle truppe era ora accresciuto dalle forti spese in *annona* e doni per i nuovi federati; per questo motivo l'elenco dei nuovi reparti continua comunque a destare stupore.

Si può ritenere, quindi, che la maggioranza delle nuove unità teodosiane fosse formata, in realtà, da truppe dell'esercito occidentale che Teodosio incorporò in quello orientale, dopo la campagna del 388¹⁶. Come spesso accadeva in questi casi, l'imperatore potrebbe averle ribattezzate con un'onomastica diversa dalla precedente, per fortificare l'identificazione e la fedeltà verso la figura imperiale. È possibile che alcune unità occidentali avessero già una nomenclatura legata alla dinastia imperiale, per volontà di Graziano, di Valentiniano II o dello stesso Magno Massimo, nel periodo in cui costui cercava legittimazione presso la corte orientale. Dopo la sconfitta di quest'ultimo, molti soldati, con i loro ufficiali, pas-

15 La critica testuale del regesto è concorde nell'assegnare con sicurezza a Teodosio tutti i reparti orientali la cui onomastica richiami quella dell'imperatore e dei suoi due figli, Arcadio e Onorio, per un periodo che va dalla nascita di quest'ultimo nel 384 alla morte di Teodosio. Altre unità attribuite a questi imperatori in base ad altri criteri, poco sicuri, non sono qui considerate. Allo stesso modo non si considerano gli *Honoriani* occidentali, attribuiti concordemente al regno di Onorio e, quindi, all'attività di Stilicone. Si veda Guido CLEMENTE, *La Notitia Dignitatum*, Fossataro, Cagliari, 1968.

16 Zos. IV, 47, 2. Si veda Dietrich HOFFMANN, «Die spätrömischen Soldatengrabschriften von Concordia», *MH* 20 (1963), pp. 22-57. per un'ipotesi di identificazione delle unità interessate dai trasferimenti, tra le quali non sembrano essere considerate quelle di *Theodosiani/Theodosiaci*, *Arcadiani*, *Honoriani*. Poiché la proposta di Hoffmann è fondata in massima parte sulla sua teoria relativa alla nascita dei *seniores/iuniores* nel 364, oggi non più accettabile, evidentemente ne risulta indebolita l'intera argomentazione. Cfr. Roger TOMLIN, «Seniores-Iuniores in the Late-Roman Field Army», *AJPh* XCIII (1972), pp. 253-278.

sarono più o meno spontaneamente dalla parte di Teodosio¹⁷, quindi non dovette essere difficile per l'imperatore trasferirli a proprio piacimento nelle armate d'Oriente, soprattutto quelle presentali e quella del *magister militum per Illyricum*. Del resto, operazioni simili non costituivano una novità in quegli anni di grave crisi. Già prima di Adrianopoli, a causa della crisi gotica, Graziano inviò alcune unità occidentali in Tracia, sotto il comando di Ricomere¹⁸. Il *comes domesticorum* aveva dovuto rinunciare all'aiuto di reparti gallici, per volontà del *magister* Merobaude, ma era riuscito comunque a portare con sé un piccolo contingente, al quale va aggiunto anche un certo numero di soldati illirici, al comando di Frigerido¹⁹. Nonostante le pesanti perdite che probabilmente questi reparti occidentali subirono ad Adrianopoli, è probabile che i sopravvissuti siano rimasti in Oriente anche negli anni seguenti²⁰. Nella fase successiva alla battaglia, si verifica il passaggio dell'Ilirico orientale alla *pars Orientis*, quindi a Teodosio. Ciò comportò l'accoglimento delle truppe qui dislocate nell'esercito orientale. Ancora una volta, non stupisce la presenza di ben tre legioni pseudocomitatensi di *Theodosiani* proprio a disposizione del *magister militum per Illyricum*; probabilmente reparti limitanei preesistenti, promossi a *legiones pseudocomitatenses* ribattezzate con nuova onomastica, al momento del passaggio alle dipendenze della *pars Orientis*. Del resto, dopo la distruzione di unità di *comitatenses* e *palatini* ad Adrianopoli, promozioni di questo tipo erano più che mai necessarie²¹.

A proposito dell'esercito comitatense-palatino occidentale, invece, Émilienne Demougeot²² notava che la *Notitia Dignitatum* non sembra affatto fotografare, per esso, la situazione di età teodosiana: alcune unità, come i *Placidi Valentiniani*

17 Cfr. *Pan. Lat.* XII, 36, 3-4 Galletier.

18 *Amm.* XXXI, 7, 4.

19 Frigerido, generale barbaro esperto e prudente, inviato in Tracia da Graziano, nel momento di maggiore crisi gotica, nel 377 riuscì a isolare e massacrare un gruppo di Greutungi e Taifali, i cui superstiti furono deportati nei territori di Parma, Modena e Reggio Emilia: vd. *Amm.* XXXI, 7, 3; 7, 5; 9, 1-4; 10, 21; *CIL* III, 3761 a-k; 10676 a-e. In seguito, Frigerido sarebbe diventato *magister equitum per Illyricum* in sostituzione di Equizio. Cfr. Noel LENSKI, «Initium mali Romano imperio: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople», *TAPhA* 127, (1997), pp.129-168.

20 Una possibile ricostruzione in HOFFMANN, 1963, cit.

21 Si veda Maurizio COLOMBO, *Auxilia e Legiones. La fanteria romana nel IV secolo*, Società Italiana di Storia Militare, Collana Fucina di Marte N. 5, Nadir Media, Roma, 2022.

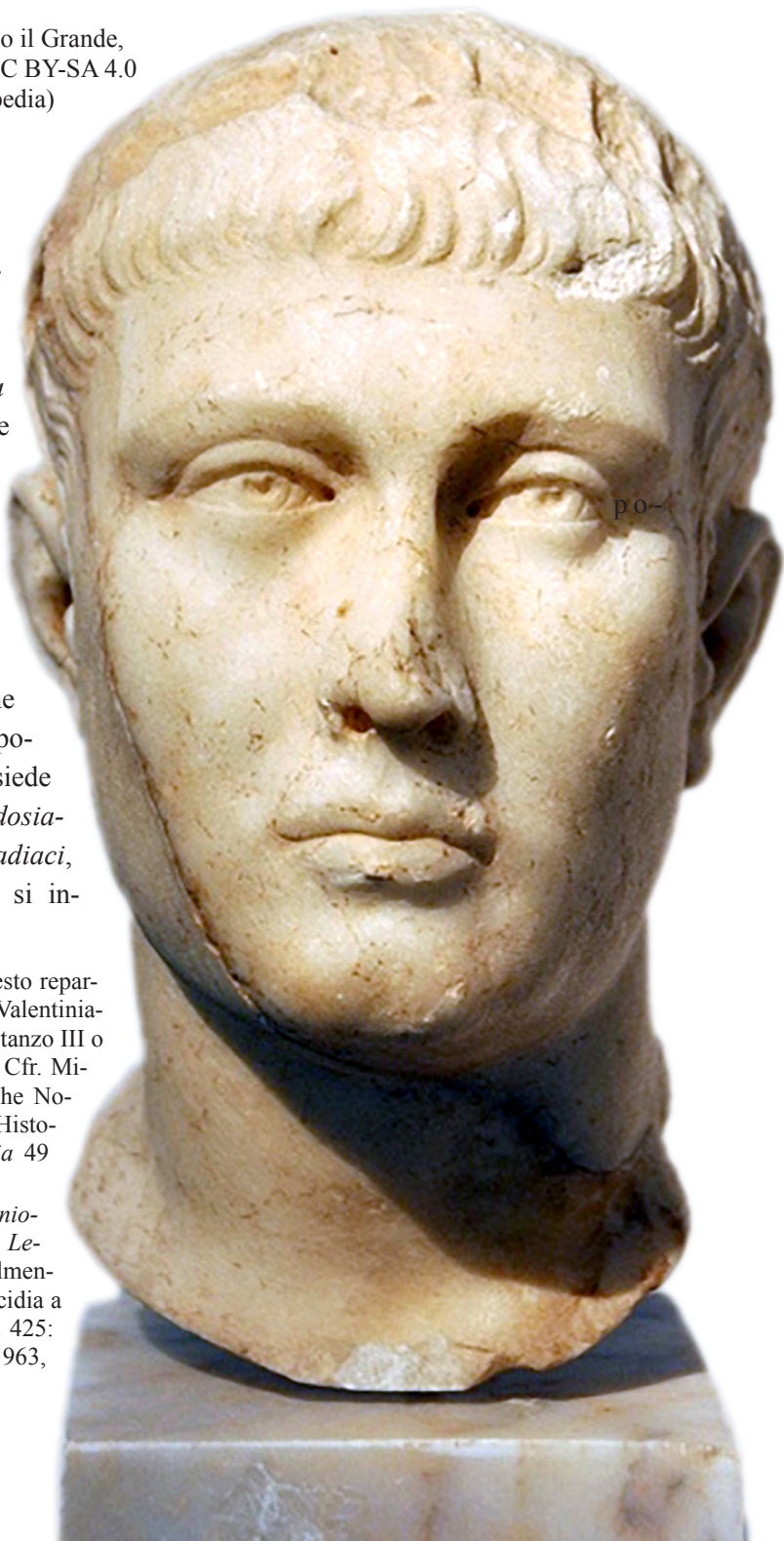
22 Émilienne DEMOUGEOT, «La Notitia Dignitatum et l'histoire de l'Empire d'Occident au début du Ve siècle», *Latomus* 34 (1975), pp. 1079-1134.

Fig. 2 Busto di Teodosio il Grande, trovato ad Aphrodisia. CC BY-SA 4.0 (Common Wikipedia)

Felices, furono formate tra 421 e 425²³, date in cui tre corpi occidentali che la *Notitia* attesta in Occidente erano in realtà presenti a Costantinopoli²⁴, e nel complesso l'esercito occidentale corrisponde a quello del regno di Onorio (395-423 d.C.), tranne pochissime aggiunte posteriori. Esso non possiede reparti dal nome *Theodosiani/Theodosiaci* o *Arcadiaci*, che, come si diceva, si in-

23 *Not. Occ.* VII, 36; questo reparto fu costituito o da Valentiniano III, o dal padre Costanzo III o dallo zio Teodosio II. Cfr. Michael KULIKOWSKI, «The *Notitia Dignitatum* as a Historical Source», *Historia* 49 (2000), pp. 358-377.

24 Si tratta dei *Cornuti seniores*, *Primi sagittarii* e *Leones iuniores*, probabilmente inviati da Galla Placidia a Teodosio II prima del 425: si veda HOFFMANN 1963, cit.



contrano soltanto nell'esercito orientale, insieme ad alcuni *Honoriani* risalenti al regno di Teodosio, però presenta ben quindici reparti di *Honoriani* formati da Onorio stesso²⁵, più altre unità destinate agli eserciti regionali occidentali dopo il 396, forse tra 398 e 402²⁶. Concludendo, se è corretta l'ipotesi che la gran parte, se non la totalità, dei reparti teodosiani orientali fossero in realtà corpi occidentali preesistenti, trasferiti e integrati nell'esercito d'Oriente, e considerando che già prima di Adrianopoli erano già avvenuti simili trasferimenti, allora si può credere che il bilancio delle forze militari complessive dell'impero sotto Teodosio non mutò rispetto ai decenni precedenti, nonostante le apparenze. Inoltre, le nuove unità potrebbero aver avuto singolarmente un numero di effettivi ancora inferiore rispetto al recente passato²⁷. Nel complesso, quindi, non è affatto escluso che le forze armate regolari romane fra il 376 e il 395 abbiano subito una flessione di effettivi anche piuttosto sensibile, a tutto vantaggio dei primi nuclei di *foederati* barbari. Infatti, se l'esercito d'Oriente rimediò alle gravissime perdite degli anni 376-382 con l'accoglimento di Goti, Alani, Taifali e Unni, con i trasferimenti dall'Occidente e con la creazione di pochissime nuove unità, l'esercito d'Occidente, invece, fu indebolito in modo sensibile dalle sconfitte patite sotto Massimo ed Eugenio e dal successivo salasso di truppe sottratte da Teodosio. La questione, di capitale importanza, servirà successivamente, come vedremo, da pretesto al *magister peditum* Stilicone per alcune delle sue rivendicazioni ai danni di Arcadio e Rufino²⁸, e probabilmente concorre a spiegare l'inusuale debolezza militare

25 Le nuove unità create da Onorio in Occidente, ormai, erano costituite per lo più da barbari di varia provenienza e statuto.

26 Cfr. Dietrich HOFFMANN, *Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia dignitatum*, Rheinland-Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1969, pp. 168-169; 359-365; Guido CLEMENTE, «La Notitia Dignitatum: L'immagine e la realtà dell'Impero tra IV e V secolo», in Giorgio BONAMEN-TE e Rita LIZZI TESTA (cur.), *Istituzioni, carismi ed esercizio del potere (IV-VI secolo d.C.)*, EdiPuglia, Bari, 2010, pp. 118-140.

27 Si veda Roger TOMLIN, «The Mobile Army», in Peter CONNOLLY (cur.), *Greece and Rome at War*, Greenhill, London, 1998, pp. 253-255.

28 Sulle questioni militari nel periodo stiliconiano si vedano: Ernest STEIN, *Storia del tardo impero romano, Vol. I: Dallo Stato romano allo Stato bizantino (284-476)*, Aragno, Torino, 2021 (trad. it.), pp. 219-254; Santo MAZZARINO, *Stilicone. La crisi imperiale dopo Teodosio*, Rizzoli, Roma, 1942, pp. 60-63; 91-95; Stephen WILLIAMS, Gerald FRIELL, *Theodosius. The Empire at Bay*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 143-158; Stephen MITCHELL, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641: The Transformation of the Ancient World*, Wiley Blackwell, Malden-Oxford, 2006, pp. 89-93; Ian HUGHES, *Stilicone, il vandalo che salvò Roma*, Leg, Gorizia, (trad.it.), 2018.

dimostrata dalla *pars Occidentis* in Gallia, Italia e Pannonia all’inizio del V secolo. Rispetto al 378, quindi, le parti risultavano ormai completamente rovesciate, e gli eventi successivi avrebbero solo rafforzato ulteriormente questa tendenza.

Perdita di disciplina?

È plausibile che tra la fine del IV secolo e gli inizi del V secolo l’aumento dei reparti barbarici *foederati* e le concomitanti criticità militari, a partire da Adrianopoli, comportarono il parziale abbandono dei modelli militari romani, in particolar modo in Occidente, ed il superamento di questi a vantaggio di nuove tradizioni e modelli bellici²⁹. Appaiono illuminanti, in tal senso, le parole di Vegezio, quando dichiara che *pedites constat esse nudatos. Ab urbe enim condita usque ad tempus divi Gratiani et catafractis et galeis muniebatur pedestris exercitus. Sed cum campestris exercitatio interveniente neglegentia desidiaque cessaret, gravia videri arma coeperunt, quae raro milites induebant; itaque ab imperatore postulant primo catafractas, deinde cassides se deponere*³⁰. Come risultato di questa pratica, attribuita implicitamente a Teodosio e a Graziano³¹, ne conseguono alcune disfatte romane per iniziativa di arcieri goti: a causa dell’assenza di elmi ed armature a protezione della fanteria, gli eserciti imperiali erano costretti alla fuga o alla resa³².

Una simile “riforma” militare, incomprensibile per quando concerne gli armamenti, è confutata inoppugnabilmente dalle evidenze archeologiche e storico-ar-

29 Si vedano a tal proposito Hugh ELTON, *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350-425*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996.; Alan Douglas LEE, *War in Late Antiquity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2007; Alexander SARANTIS, Neil CHRISTIE, *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity. Current Perspectives*, I-II, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2013.

30 Veg., I, 20, 2-4.

31 Cfr. Timothy BARNES, «The date of Vegetius», *Phoenix* 33 (1979) p. 254-257; Maurizio COLOMBO, «La datazione dell’*Epitoma rei militaris* e la genesi dell’esercito tardoromano: la politica militare di Teodosio I, Veg. r. mil. 1.20.2-5 e Teodosio II», *AncSoc* 42 (2012), pp. 255-292; Michael CHARLES, «Vegetius on Armour: the *pedites nudati* of the *Epitoma rei militaris*», *AncSoc* XXXIII (2003), pp. 127-167. In particolare, Michael Charles è dubbioso rispetto all’effettiva responsabilità di Graziano nell’eventuale abbandono di armi difensive.

32 Veg., I, 20, 4: “*Sic detectis pectoribus et capitibus congressi contra Gothos milites nostri multitudinem sagittariorum saepe deleti sunt; nec post tot clades quae usque ad tantarum urbium excidia pervenerunt, cuiquam curae fuit vel catafractas vel galeas pedestribus redere*”.

tistiche. Non si può non tenere in considerazione che vi siano prove del progressivo e graduale abbandono delle armature da parte della fanteria romana³³. Si nota questa tendenza anche nell'iconografia funeraria: numerose sono le lapidi militari di III e IV secolo in cui il defunto è raffigurato con lancia e tunica, senza panoplia³⁴. Il passo di Vegezio, dunque, sembra fornire una conferma di una tendenza iconografica³⁵. Ritornando alle fonti archeologiche ed iconografiche, un riesame complessivo di queste, condotto a partire da Coulston, ha permesso di riconsiderare il problema della carenza di armamenti difensivi³⁶. Questa incognita risulta

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- 33 Sulla questione si vedano J. HARMAND, «L'armement défensif romaine de metal dans le nord-ouest de l'empire, de la conquête au Ve siècle», *Caesardunum* 22 (1986), pp. 189-203; Yann LE BOHEC, *Armi e guerrieri di Roma antica. Da Diocleziano alla caduta dell'impero*, Carocci, Roma, 2008; Adrian GOLDSWORTHY, *The Complete Roman Army*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2003; Michael CHARLES, *Vegetius in Context*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2007, pp.160-171. L'analisi di Charles tende a dimostrare che Temistio, Claudiano e Zosimo attestano l'uso di armature nella fanteria della *pars Orientalis* contro i Goti anche dopo Adrianopoli e durante il regno di Teodosio. Per questa ragione lo storico, che propende per una datazione dell'Epitoma al regno di Valentiniano III piuttosto che di Teodosio I, ipotizza che Vegezio, nella sua visione italo-centrica della tarda storia romana, per "Graziano" intenda in realtà "Onorio", e con il riferimento alle ripetute sconfitte subite ad opera degli arcieri goti alluda non alla guerra balcanica del 376-382, ma alle campagne contro i Visigoti in Occidente, a partire dal sacco di Roma del 410.
- 34 Ad esempio, un cospicuo numero di steli funerarie presenti ad Aquileia, in cui i defunti sono raffigurati come "stehende Soldaten". Cfr. Lorenzo CIGAINA, «Le stele aquieiesi con "stehende Soldaten" e il problema del reimpiego», *Aquileia Nostra* 83-84 (2012-2013), pp. 299-316. Tuttavia, in alcune di esse compaiono gli elmi, indossati o ai piedi del defunto, e talvolta anche le *loricae*, solo molto raramente interpretabili come effetto dell'influenza artistica "ellenistica". Seppure in un numero di esemplari molto inferiore, la stessa tendenza è rilevabile anche nelle steli funerarie di soldati nel IV secolo. Si veda Jonathan C. N. COULSTON, «How to Arm a Roman Soldier», in Michel AUSTIN, Jill HARRIES, Christopher SMITH (cur.), *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman* (BICS Suppl. 71), University of London Press, London, 1998, pp.167-190.
- 35 Lo stesso passo è stato ritenuto una prova inconfutabile dell'abbandono di armi difensive nella fanteria. Occorre considerare che Vegezio utilizza la sua opera per lamentare la rilassatezza generale dell'esercito e l'abbandono della disciplina. Si vedano Johnathan C. N. COULSTON, «Later Roman Armour, 3rd-6th centuries AD», *JRMES* I (1990), pp. 139-160; Adolfo Raúl MENÉNDEZ ARGÜIN, José BELTRÁN FORTES, «Sobre el armamento defensivo de los soldados romanos en el siglo IV d.C.: a propósito de un relieve de Córdoba», *Habis* 32 (2001), pp. 505-520.
- 36 Sempre COULSTON, *Later Roman Armour*, cit. Tra gli altri studi che hanno affrontato il problema si menzionano Philippe RICHARDOT, *La fin de l'Armée Romaine (284-476)*, Economica, Paris, 1998; Giovanni BRIZZI, *Il guerriero, l'oplita, il legionario. Gli eserciti nel mondo classico*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2008, pp. 206-208; Michel FEUGÈRE, *Weapons of the Romans*, Tempus, Stroud, 2002 (Engl. Transl.).



Fig. 3 Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Ms Canon. Misc 378, *Notitia Dignitatum*, CC-BY-NC 4.0. Fol. 91v, Insignia viri Illustris Magistri Militum Praesentalis I

particolarmente interessante poiché esula dal contesto prettamente tecnologico, presentando ricadute sulla strategia e sulla “barbarizzazione” dell’esercito nella fase successiva ad Adrianopoli, dal momento che già nelle fonti di I secolo veniva riportato che elmi ed armature erano poco diffusi tra le popolazioni barbare³⁷.

Partendo dall’analisi dell’arco di Settimio Severo a Roma, è stato osservato che tutti i soldati rappresentati durante combattimenti, con l’eccezione di cinque figure in uno dei pannelli, indossano *loricae segmentatae, squamatae, hamatae*, oltre agli elmi. Quest’ultima osservazione affossa innanzitutto le conclusioni relative al disuso delle armature in epoca severiana, tanto più che sull’arco di *Leptis Magna* sono presenti tutti e tre i tipi di armature citati, sia per i legionari sia per gli ausiliari³⁸. Allo stesso modo, come visto precedentemente, nelle numerose stele funerarie di soldati di III secolo, di solito molto attente a dettagli come quelli riguardanti tuniche, mantelli e cinture, l’assenza di armature va interpretata come una mera convenzione stilistica, talvolta estesa anche ai cavalieri e intesa a veicolare un messaggio di integrazione con la società civile³⁹. Se nei monumenti propagandistici tetrarchici la gran parte della fanteria e della cavalleria vengono rappresentate senza elmi o armature, anche in scene di battaglia, va però detto che sull’arco di Galerio, a Salonicco, non solo alcuni ufficiali e personaggi imperiali vestono corazze anatomiche, ma anche i soldati sono rappresentati con i contemporanei elmi ad arco e con *lorica squamata*⁴⁰. Il rilievo di un piedistallo superstite dell’arco di Diocleziano a Roma presenta un soldato semplice in corazza anatomica con elmo, e forse proviene dal medesimo monumento una scul-

37 Tac., *Germ.*, 6. 1: “*Ne ferrum quidem superest, sicut ex genere telorum colligitur. Rari gladiis aut maioribus lanceis utuntur: hastas vel ipsorum vocabulo frameas gerunt angusto et brevi ferro, sed ita acri et ad usum habili, ut eodem telo, prout ratio poscit, vel comminus vel eminus pugnent*”. Questo, probabilmente, a causa della scarsità di ferro e di materie prime delle zone abitate, almeno fino al III secolo.

38 Tuttavia, gli ausiliari vengono raffigurati solamente con la tunica nell’arco di Roma. Cfr. Matthias BRUNO, Fulvia BIANCHI, *Marmi di Leptis Magna (Studia Archeologica 204)*, L’Erma di Bretschneider, Roma, 2016, pp. 80-83; Maria LLOYD, «The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum: A Re-Consideration», *AJAH* 6-8 (2007-2009, pubbl. 2013), pp. 541-571.

39 Simili rappresentazioni si ritrovano, tra l’altro, nelle steli funerarie di Adamklissi già nel II secolo. Cfr. Valerie HOPE, «Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier», *World Archaeology* 35 (2003), pp. 79-97.

40 Si veda Margret S. ROTHMAN, «The Thematic Organization of the Panel Reliefs on the Arch of Galerius», *AJA* 81, No. 4 (1977), pp. 427-454; Theodosia STEFANIDOU-TIVERIOU, «Il piccolo arco di Galerio a Salonicco», *ArchClass* 46 (1994), pp. 279-304.



Fig. 4 Bodleian *Notitia Dignitatum*, fol. 92v, Insignia viri Illustris Magistri Militum per Orientem.

tura raffigurante due soldati equipaggiati con corazza a scaglie e cotta di maglia, entrambe lunghe fino ai polsi⁴¹.

Nelle rappresentazioni iconografiche dell'arco di Costantino a Roma si ritrovano molte similitudini con quelle tetrarchiche: vi prevalgono le corazze anatomiche, sia per alcuni ufficiali sia per l'imperatore, ed anche le figure prive di armatura qui indossano spesso l'elmo crestato di foggia attica; l'armatura di scaglie compare solo sul fregio del Ponte Milvio, dove i catafratti di Massenzio che precipitano nel Tevere indossano elmi e corazze di scaglie lunghe fino ai gomiti⁴². Il vero exploit della rappresentazione di corazze anatomiche sui soldati nella scultura propagandistica si ha sulla colonna di Teodosio a Costantinopoli, dove esse, insieme ancora una volta agli elmi di tipo attico⁴³, si aggiungono alle tuniche a maniche lunghe e ai larghi scudi, tratti tipici dell'equipaggiamento militare tardoromano. Non si può ignorare quindi che tali armi, effettivamente raffigurate sulla colonna di Teodosio, fossero utilizzate, anche se in quantità inferiore, alla fine del IV secolo⁴⁴. Rimangono, inoltre, i dati delle lapidi funerarie e dei sarcofagi⁴⁵, alcune conferme provenienti dagli affreschi di Dura Europos⁴⁶, oltre che

41 Cfr. Theodore BUTTREY, «The Dates of the Arches of “Diocletian” and Constantine», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Vol.32 (1983), pp. pp. 375-383; Marco ROCCO, *L'esercito romano tardoantico. Persistenze e cesure dai Severi a Teodosio I*, Libreria Universitaria, Padova, 2012, p. 465.

42 Cfr. Mark Wilson JONES, «Genesis and Mimesis: The Design of the Arch of Constantine in Rome», *JSAH* 59, N. 1 (2000), pp. 50-77; Stefano TORTORELLA, «Archi di Costantino a Roma», *ArchClass* 64 (2013), pp. 637-655; Per il rapporto tra Costantino e l'iconografia per fini propagandistici, e in generale per la politica costantiniana si veda Alessandro Barbero, *Costantino il Vincitore*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2016.

43 Per una catalogazione degli elmi tardo antichi si veda Silvia LUSUARDI SIENA, «Gli elmi tardoantichi (IV-VI sec.) alla luce delle fonti letterarie, numismatiche e archeologiche: alcune considerazioni», in Maurizio BUORA (cur.), *Miles Romanus: dal Po al Danubio nel tardoantico; atti del Convegno internazionale, Pordenone-Concordia Sagittaria, 17-19 marzo 2000*, Lucaprint, Pordenone, 2002, pp. 21-62.

44 Ormai non è più seguita l'idea secondo la quale ad un abbandono progressivo delle panoplie da parte dell'imperatore Graziano, avrebbe fatto seguito un riutilizzo da parte di Teodosio. Cfr. Michael CHARLES, «The pedites nudati again: two matters pertaining to late-Roman infantry equipment», *AncSoc* 38 (2008), pp. 221- 234; ROCCO, *L'esercito*, cit.

45 Sul rilievo di un frammento proveniente da un sarcofago romano della necropoli tardoromana di Corduba, datato al IV secolo, è chiaramente visibile un soldato che indossa una cotta di maglia lunga fino ai polsi, accanto ad altri due senza armatura, mentre tutto il gruppo porta uno scudo rotondo. Cfr. MENÉNDES ARGUIN, BELTRÁN FORTES, «Armamento defensivo», cit.

46 Cfr. Stefanie WEISMAN, «Militarism in the Wall Paintings of the Dura-Europos Synagogue:



Fig. 5 Bodleian *Notitia Dignitatum*, fol. 94r, Insignia viri Illustris Magistri Militum per Thraciam

le illustrazioni della *Notitia Dignitatum* e del *De rebus bellicis*⁴⁷. Frammenti di *loricae* metalliche, non di semplice cuoio, pur in quantità inferiore rispetto ai secoli precedenti, continuano ad emergere dagli scavi di forti e accampamenti romani anche nel III-IV secolo. Attestazioni di armature sono presenti, peraltro, nelle fonti letterarie di IV secolo⁴⁸. Ad esempio, Giuliano riporta la descrizione dell'esercito di Costanzo II nella battaglia di Musa, definendo ὀπλίται le *legiones comitatenses*, quindi corazzate⁴⁹. La definizione *armati* di Ammiano Marcellino⁵⁰, ha permesso a Sylvain Janniard di individuare una categoria di soldati di prima linea armati pesantemente, utilizzati almeno nella seconda metà del IV secolo⁵¹. Le stesse fonti letterarie attestano la continuità d'uso di parti di armatura anche nel tardo IV secolo, compresi i regni di Valente e Graziano⁵², ma l'elemento che più di altri induce a ritenere elmi e corazze tuttora in uso in questo periodo è l'esistenza di numerose *fabricae armorum* statali destinate alla produzione di questi articoli⁵³. È possibile, dunque che corazze ed elmi fossero usati solamente in caso di necessità. Per questo motivo pochi militari appaiono rivestiti di armatura nelle lapidi funerarie di III secolo, favorendo così la convenzione artistica

A New Perspective on Jewish Life on the Roman Frontier», *Shofar* Vol. 30, N. 3 (2012), pp. 1-34.

- 47 Si vedano Robert GRIGG, «Inconsistency and Lassitude: the Shield Emblems of the *Notitia Dignitatum*», *JRS* 73 (1983), pp. 132-142; Maurizio COLOMBO, «*La datazione*», cit.; Massimiliano VITIELLO, «The “Fear” of the Barbarians and the Fifth-Century Western Chroniclers», *MAAR* 66 (2021), pp. 115-150.
- 48 Cfr. CHARLES, *Vegetius* cit.
- 49 Iul., *Or.* 3.57 B-D.
- 50 Amm., XXII, 2, 4: “*Exceptus igitur tertium Iduum Decembrium verecundis senatus officiis et popularium consonis plausibus, stipatusque armatorum et togatorum agminibus, velut acie ducebatur instructa, omnium oculis in eum non modo contuitu destinato sed cum admiratione magna defixis*”.
- 51 Cfr. Sylvain JANNIARD, «Les formations tactiques en éperon et en tenaille dans l'armée romaine», *MEFRA* 116 (2004) pp. 1001-1038. Inoltre, Janniard sostiene inoltre che il ritorno all'utilizzo di una lunga lancia come arma principale, unito ad un grande scudo ovale o rotondo e allo schieramento serrato dei ranghi, coincide con il ritorno a formazioni “parafalangitiche”. Si veda Sylvain JANNIARD, «Végèce et les transformations de l'art de la guerre aux IV^e et V^e siècles après J.-C.», *AntTard* 16 (2008), pp.19-36. La tesi che accomuna gli *armati* di Ammiano con gli ὀπλίται di Giuliano, è comunque contrastata da Maurizio Colombo. Cfr. COLOMBO, «*La datazione*», cit.
- 52 Tra cui Anon., *De reb. bell.*, 15; Amm. XVI, 10, 8; XIX, 8, 8; XXIV, 6, 9; XXV, 1, 16; XXVI, 6, I 7; XXXI, 10, 14; 13, 3.
- 53 Si veda Piotr LETKI, «The state factories (*fabricae*) during the time of tetrarchy», *Studia nad Kulturą Antyczną* V (2009), pp. 49-63; LE BOHEC, *Armi e guerrieri* cit., p. 342.



Fig. 6 Bodleian *Notitia Dignitatum*, fol 96r, Insignia viri Illustris Magistri Militum Praesentalis II.

“senza armatura”. Inoltre, le frequenti sconfitte e le scorrerie dei barbari, nel III secolo e alla fine del IV, probabilmente causarono la perdita di molto equipaggiamento, distruggendo per lunghi periodi il sistema di rifornimento, mentre lo stesso incremento dell’attività militare aveva effetti negativi sulla disponibilità di armi in buono stato. In questo senso, la testimonianza di Vegezio sarebbe stata dettata dalla situazione, temporaneamente disastrosa, in cui versavano l’equipaggiamento e la logistica romane all’indomani di Adrianopoli⁵⁴.

Nondimeno, è possibile anche un’interpretazione alternativa del passo dell’*Epitoma*. Innanzitutto, bisogna considerare che la critica di Vegezio rispetto al rilassamento della disciplina militare consiste in un comune topos letterario sull’argomento⁵⁵, motivo per cui la descrizione dell’abbandono di corazze ed elmi e l’attribuzione della colpa di questo degrado ad un preciso imperatore, in realtà probabilmente si inscrivono all’interno di un discorso inteso a sostenere la tesi dell’autore⁵⁶.

Tuttavia, non bisogna considerare la testimonianza di Vegezio come inattendibile, rovesciando il punto di vista tradizionale sulla questione. Continuando la lettura del passo già citato, si nota, infatti, che l’autore indica con precisione quali erano i soldati interessati dall’abbandono delle armature. Se, inizialmente, Vegezio parla genericamente di *pedites* e di *pedestris exercitus*⁵⁷, subito dopo, quando affronta nel concreto le conseguenze della “riforma”, egli approfondisce i casi dei *sagittarii* e dei *draconarii atque signiferi* riportati non a titolo di esempio ma, sembra, come esaustivi per la questione⁵⁸. Dopo pochi paragrafi l’autore tor-

54 Cfr. COULSTON, «Later Roman Armour», *JRMES* I (1990), pp. 139-160. La datazione della stesura dell’*Epitome* è comunque dibattuta. Recentemente, Maurizio Colombo ha proposto una datazione successiva al 425, sotto il regno di Teodosio II. Si veda CHARLES, *Vegetius*, cit.; COLOMBO, «La datazione», cit.; MAURIZIO COLOMBO, «Nuove prove per la datazione di Vegezio sotto Teodosio II e la sua collocazione nell’impero romano d’Oriente», *Klio* 101 (2019), pp. 256-275.

55 Così sostiene Everett L. WHEELER, «The Laxity of Syrian Legions», in David BRAUND, David L. KENNEDY (cur.), *The Roman Army in the East* (JRA Suppl. Ser. 18), Ann Arbor 1996, pp. 229-276.

56 Si veda Nicholas MILNER, *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1996, p. 19.

57 Anche “*vel catafractas vel galeas pedestribus reddere*” in Veg. I, 20, 6 e il “*gravis pediti lorica videtur*” in Veg., I, 20, 8.

58 Veg., I, 20, 6-7: “*Quid enim pedes sagittarius sine catafracta, sine galea, qui cum arcu scutum tenere non potest, faciat? Quid ipsi draconarii atque signiferi, qui sinistra manu*



Fig. 7 Bodleian *Notitia Dignitatum*, fol. 99v, Insignia viri Illustris Magistri Militum per Illyricum.

na sull'argomento, per paragonare la situazione presente con quella dell'*antiqua legio*. Ancora una volta i protagonisti sono i *sagittarii*, oltre ai *pedites scutati*, i quali come si è visto vanno identificati in Vegezio con la fanteria leggera della terza e quarta linea⁵⁹. Anche in riferimento ai Goti, Vegezio parla solo dei danni inflitti ai Romani dalla loro *multitudo sagittariorum*⁶⁰, non da altro tipo di guerrieri, né a piedi né a cavallo, come se l'uso di elmi e corazze restasse invece sottinteso per quanto riguarda la mischia in ordine chiuso e il corpo a corpo, destinati soprattutto alla fanteria pesante e alla cavalleria⁶¹. Una tale univoca insistenza, unita alla precisione dei dettagli forniti, induce a supporre che, se pure l'adozione di elmi e corazze decadde presso la fanteria durante il regno di Graziano, non si trattò di una tendenza uniforme ed estesa a tutto l'impero, ma probabilmente restò un fenomeno circoscritto all'Occidente e alle truppe armate alla leggera. In alternativa, si potrebbe sostenere che Vegezio confondesse l'abbandono delle armi difensive con il vistoso incremento di quelle truppe barbariche che, necessitando di non essere impacciate dal peso delle armature, erano naturalmente propense a non indossarle, a scapito della fanteria pesante corazzata, la cui presenza si ridusse sempre più, confinata alle primissime linee dello schieramento, dove ormai fungeva solo da falange di protezione per arcieri ed artiglieria.

In ogni caso, il contesto archeologico generale, se da un lato evidenzia un netto calo di ritrovamenti di elmi e, soprattutto, armature nel IV secolo, dall'altro conferma le testimonianze letterarie, in quanto tali armature continuarono ad essere in uso, almeno agli inizi di V secolo.

hastas gubernant, in proelio facient, quorum et capita nuda constant et pectora?"

59 Veg., I, 20, 12: "Usque eo ut sagittarii sinistra brachia manicis munirentur, pedites autem scutati praeter catafractas et galeas etiam ferreas ocreas in dextris cruribus cogerentur accipere". Si veda SARANTIS, CHRISTIE, *War and Warfare*, cit.

60 Veg. I, 20, 4.

61 Cfr. ROCCO, *L'esercito*, cit.; SIMON McDOWALL, *Gli ultimi cavalieri di Roma. 236-565 d.C.*, Leg, Gorizia, 2015.

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La “guerra civile” isaurica

di FABIANA ROSACI

ABSTRACT: The article attempts to reconstruct an episode of crisis experienced by the Pars Orientis at the end of the 5th century AD, to which modern historiography has dedicated little space. This is the so-called “Isaurian civil war”, which exploded following the death of Zeno. The Tauric group attempted to place its own exponent on the throne, while at the top of the Empire every attempt was made to oust and expel the Isaurians. From here began a long and bloody war, of which only fleeting traces reach us.

KEYWORDS: Civil war, Isaurians, Emperor Zeno, Longinus, Illus, Warlords.

Il presente contributo mira a recuperare dall’oblio della Storia uno dei tanti conflitti per il controllo del potere esplosi nel corso del V d.C., che costituiscono una prova del fatto che entrambe le *partes imperii* attraversarono fasi di instabilità politica nel corso del secolo¹. A tal riguardo, il regno di Zenone Isaura (474-491 d.C.)² fu caratterizzato da una serie di rivolte interne

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- 1 Sul tema, a fronte di una vasta bibliografia, si rimanda ad alcuni tra i principali contributi: Umberto ROBERTO, «Prospettive di ricerca sul quinto secolo», *Koinonia*, 46 (2022), pp. 461-468; Michèle Renée SALZMAN, *The Falls of Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021; Umberto ROBERTO, «L’usurpatore e i barbari in età tardoantica: alcune riflessioni tra diplomazia e politica», *Occidente/Oriente*, I (2020), pp. 165-184; Umberto ROBERTO - Laura MECCELLA (a cura di), *Governare e riformare l’impero al momento della sua divisione*, Roma, Publications de l’Ecole française de Rome, 2016; Orazio LICANDRO, *L’Occidente senza imperatori. Vicende politiche e costituzionali nell’ultimo secolo dell’Impero Romano d’Occidente*, Roma, Erma di Bretschneider, 2012.
- 2 Sul personaggio si rimanda ad alcuni tra i principali studi: Stefania PIETRINI, *La legislazione di Zenone (474-491)*, Palermo, New Digital Frontiers, 2023 (che ha tentato di rivalutare il giudizio topico sul regno di Zenone attraverso lo studio delle costituzioni emanate dalla sua cancelleria); Fabiana ROSACI, *L’ascesa e il declino politico degli Isauri nel V secolo d.C.*, PhD Thesis, 2020; Peter CRAWFORD, *Roman Emperor Zeno: the Perils of Power Politics in Fifth Century Constantinople*, Philadelphia, Pen & Sword, 2019; Rafael KOSINSKI, *The Emperor Zeno. Religion and Politics*, Cracow, Byzantina et Slavica Cracoviensia, 2010; Karl FELD, *Barbarische Bürger. Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005.

(Basilisco³, Marciano⁴, Illo⁵), finalizzate tutte all'usurpazione del trono. La ribellione di Illo (484 d.C.), in particolare, paleserebbe alcune dinamiche che caratterizzarono il regno di Zenone⁶, rendendo evidente, così, come il primato raggiunto dal sovrano isaurico avesse, in realtà, alla base un fragile equilibrio: la sua affermazione ai vertici dell'Impero⁷ era, probabilmente, dovuta anche ad una supremazia militare ed economica che questi deteneva nella sua *regio* natale e che non gli garantiva automaticamente una preminenza sugli altri "capi isaurici"⁸. Le sfuma-

- 3 Sulla rivolta di Basilisco (475 d.C.) che, nata in seno alla casata dinastica, si ammantò fin da subito di motivazioni di carattere religioso, si vedano: CRAWFORD, cit., pp. 113-123; Philippe BLAUDEAU, «Antagonismes et convergences: regard sur les interprétations confesantes du gouvernement d'un usurpateur: Basilisque (475-476)», *Mediterraneo Antico*, 6 (2003), pp. 155-193; Wolfram BRANDES, «Familienbande? Odoaker, Basiliskos und Harmatios», *Klio*, 75 (1993), pp. 407-473.
- 4 La rivolta scoppiò nel 479 d.C. per motivi dinastici, in quanto Marciano (figlio dell'imperatore d'Occidente Antemio e genero di Leone I, come lo stesso Zenone) rivendicava di aver sposato l'unica delle figlie porfirogenite di Leone I, ovvero Leonzia. Cfr. ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis.
- 5 Laura MECCELLA, «Il filosofo e l'usurpatore. Neoplatonismo e partecipazione politica nell'età di Zenone», *Occidente/Oriente*, 1 (2020), pp. 245-266; Beatrice GIROTTI, «Sul ruolo di Ariadne e Zenone nella rivolta di Illo e degli Isauri. Vicende militari e spunti storiografici a partire da Jordanes, Romana, 348-352», *Rivista di Studi Militari*, 5 (2016), pp. 7-27; Ariane KIEL - FREYTAG, «Betrachtungen zur Usurpation des Illus und des Leontius», *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 174 (2010), pp. 291-301; Umberto ROBERTO, «Sulla tradizione storiografica di Candido Isaurico», *Mediterraneo Antico*, 3 (2000), pp. 685-727.
- 6 Durante la rivolta di Basilisco, Illo prese in ostaggio Longino, fratello del sovrano isaurico (cfr. Thphn., a.m. 5975 DE BOOR), e lo tenne prigioniero per dieci anni nel castellum Papirii (Malch., frg. 20 CRESCI). Più in generale, sul ruolo giocato dalle reclusioni coatte nei torbidi politici di questi anni si veda Julia HILLNER, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 233 – 241.
- 7 L'ascesa di Tarasicodissa, che assunse il nome greco di Zenone, fu favorita, anche attraverso legami dinastici, da Leone I, che si servì della compagine militare isaurica per controbilanciare il potere del gruppo alano-germanico di Aspar, cfr. ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis. Nello specifico, su Aspar si rimanda a Umberto ROBERTO, *Aspar e il suo gruppo: integrazione dei barbari e lotta politica nell'Oriente romano di V secolo*, Lezione tenuta nella Sede napoletana dell'AST il 21 aprile 2009, pp. 1-15.
- 8 Sul carattere "isaurico" della rivolta si rimanda a Ioh. Antioch., frg. 214 ROBERTO: Ὅτι Ζήνων τῆς πρὸς Ἰλλοῦν ἔχθρας κατάρχεται, πρῶτα μὲν Λογγίνον λαβεῖν ἐξαιτούμενος, ἔπειτα Ἰωάννην τὸν Σκύθην διάδοχον αὐτῷ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀποστεῖλας. Δημηγορεῖ δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸν δῆμον ὅσα ἐχθρὸς κατὰ τοῦ Ἰλλοῦ, καὶ κελεῖται τοὺς οικειοτάτους αὐτοῦ τῆς πόλεως ἀπελαύνεσθαι, καὶ τὰς περιουσίας τούτων δωρεῖται ταῖς Ἰσαύρων πόλεσιν. Cfr. ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis; William Douglas BURGESS, «Isaurian Factions in the Reign of Zeno the Isaurian», *Latomus*, 51 (1992), pp. 874-880; ID., *The Isaurians in the fifth century A.D.*, Wisconsin, UnPubbl. Thesis, 1985.



Fig. 1. Tremissis di Zenone. Zecca di Costantinopoli, Secondo Regno (476-491 DC).
Classical Numismatic Group, In, CC BY-SA 4.0 (Wikimedia Commons)

ture dei rapporti tra i due *leaders* Illo e Zenone, infatti, sono difficili da cogliere a causa della frammentarietà delle fonti a nostra disposizione, ma questi si fecero sempre più articolati e complessi, finché non si arrivò a un tentativo di rivolta da parte del primo, che rappresentò, verosimilmente, il momento più critico della stagione di potere degli Isauri a Costantinopoli. L'ambivalente atteggiamento reciproco dei due *warlords* isaurici, infatti, sarebbe una cartina di tornasole delle profonde lacerazioni interne alla compagine isaurica. Tutta la storia del regno di Zenone, del resto, è indissolubilmente legata ai rapporti che il sovrano ebbe con Illo. Questi, infatti, finì per attirare a sé tutte quelle “forze centrifughe” di opposizione al legittimo imperatore, che resero la *basileia* zenoniana uno dei momenti più instabili della storia dell'Impero tardoromano⁹. Già nei frustoli a noi pervenuti della riflessione dello storico Candido Isaurico, che si è ipotizzato fosse membro dell'*entourage* dello stesso Illo¹⁰, emerge chiaramente come il potere e l'autorità di Zenone si fondassero sul consenso degli Isauri, e dunque sull'intesa con Illo¹¹. Sembra, quindi, evidente come Zenone, durante il suo regno, non abbia

9 ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis. Cfr. Burgess *Isaurian factions* ha ricostruito come le aristocrazie isauriche si fossero schierate rispetto ai due rivoltosi.

10 ROBERTO, cit., pp. 685-727. La tesi che Candido facesse parte dell'*entourage* di Illo era già stata avanzata da Rudolf ASMUS, «Pamprèpios ein byzantinischer Gelehrter und Staatsmann des 5 Jahrhunderts», *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 22 (1913), pp. 324-325.

11 ROBERTO, cit., pp. 685-727.

dovuto soltanto mantenere solida la propria posizione sul trono imperiale, ma anche, e forse soprattutto, la sua *leadership* in Isauria, che rischiava di essere da più parti minata: anche quando ottenne la porpora, continuò ad essere, prima di tutto, un “capo isaurico”¹². Come tale, è bene ricordarlo, fu sempre giudicato soprattutto dall’*élite* costantinopolitana, che continuava a vedere negli Isauri giunti al potere dei rozzi e montanari *parvenu*¹³.

Nel 491 d.C., alla morte di Zenone¹⁴, che non aveva eredi diretti, gli Isauri tentarono, quindi, di mettere la loro *longa manus* sul soglio imperiale, nominando erede Longino¹⁵, fratello del defunto sovrano. Di questo personaggio rimane a noi un ritratto nel frammento 20 (ed. CRESCI) di Malco di Philadelphia. Lo storico, dopo aver affermato che Longino aveva dato aiuto economico ai peggiori delinquenti, che aveva un carattere irascibile, che si accompagnava a ubriachi e lenoni e che, addirittura, aveva insidiato delle monache in un convento, conclude in maniera lapidaria che καὶ ἄλλων δὲ πολλῶν κακῶν αἴτιος ἐγεγόνει ὁ Λογγίνος οὗτος¹⁶. È plausibile che lo stesso Zenone avesse indicato il fratello come suo

12 ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis evidenzia come, dalla moderna storiografia, l'imperatore Zenone sia stato definito “Isaurian Chieftain”, “le chief isaurien”, “the Isaurian chieftain”, “a typical powerful baron of the Isaurian mountains”.

13 Sarebbe opportuno interrogarsi se l'appartenenza degli Isauri ad una comune etnia abbia costituito una premessa all'ascesa di questo popolo, in un'età come quella tardoantica, in cui ebbe luogo la riemersione di sostrati culturali mai del tutto realmente “romanizzati”. Nel caso specifico, l'“isaurianismo” è stato un segno distintivo, ma potrebbe non essere stato autoprodotta. Vale a dire che la coscienza etnica degli Isauri si può presumere che fosse soltanto una *forma mentis* di una *Romanitas* che continuò sempre a vedere negli Isauri dei semi-barbari, dediti ad azioni di saccheggio e banditismo, e che ricondusse al loro “essere *latrones*” anche le linee del loro governo. Gli studi, in generale, si sono mossi lungo questa linea interpretativa: gli Isauri sarebbero sempre stati un gruppo marginale di briganti, progressivamente assimilato ai barbari fuori confine, e così percepito dai Romani in età tardoantica. In parte, diversa lettura si ravvisa in Hugh ELTON, «Illus and the Imperial Aristocracy under Zeno», *Byzantion*, 70 (2000), pp. 393-407, che, analizzando più nel dettaglio la figura di Illo, ha negato l'“isaurianismo” come elemento caratterizzante e in qualche modo determinante l'emersione politica dei *warlords* isaurici del V secolo d.C.

14 Zenone sarebbe morto il 10 aprile del 491 d.C., per un attacco di dissenteria o epilessia, cfr. EVAGR., *h.e.* 3, 29 WHITBY; Ioh. Mal., *frg.* 15, 391, 1-4 THURN; Ioh. Lyd., *de mag.* 3, 45 WUNSCH. Cfr. CRAWFORD, cit., pp. 224-228.

15 Ioh. Mal., *frg.* 35 THURN; Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214, 7 ROBERTO; Theoph., *a.m.* 5983 DE BOOR. Cfr. *PLRE* 2, pp. 689 s.v. Fl. Longinus 6.

16 La testimonianza dello storico di Philadelphia su Longino rientrerebbe, più in generale, in una presentazione non certo favorevole, da parte degli storici antichi, dell'entourage di Zenone, a cui si attribuivano ruberie e costumi assai corrotti. Cfr. Thphn., *a.m.* 5966 DE BOOR: χαλεπῶς δὲ ὁ Ζήνων μεταχειρισάμενος τὴν ἀρχήν, ἐν προοιμίῳ Μεσοποταμίαν

erede, favorendone la carriera e nominandolo *magister militum praesentalis* e due volte console (nel 486 e nel 490 d.C.)¹⁷. Il fatto che, contrariamente alla prassi, Zenone non abbia, però, mai condiviso il consolato con Longino potrebbe anche essere spia di una scelta non così scontata e automatica da parte del sovrano. Alla sua morte, in ogni caso, in seno alla dinastia imperiale non vi erano molte alternative a Longino, che era anche una figura di spicco all'interno del Senato costantinopolitano, come testimoniano le parole di Teofane il Confessore, τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς πάσης ἡγούμενος (*a.m.* 5983 DE BOOR). È molto plausibile che Longino potesse contare sulla lealtà della compagine isaurica e delle forze armate isauriche, e in particolare del suo omonimo Longino di Cardala¹⁸, la cui carriera, stando alle informazioni riportate da Giovanni Antiocheno, era iniziata dopo la disfatta di Illo¹⁹ e che sembra disponesse di un ingente patrimonio²⁰ da mettere, eventualmente, al servizio del suo sodale. Il fratello di Zenone sarebbe potuto diventare, dunque, un imperatore “troppo forte” agli occhi dell’*élite* costantinopolitana e, quindi, la scelta fu subito ostacolata dai vertici della burocrazia e dalle gerarchie militari²¹. La folla, radunatasi nell’Ippodromo la sera stessa della dipartita di Zenone, espresse sentimenti anti-isaurici, giacché nell’Impero doveva esservi un imperatore romano: Ρωμαῖον βασιλέα τῆ οικουμένη²². La morte senza

μὲν Σαρακηνοί, Θράκην δὲ κατέδραμον Οὔννοι σφόδρα τοῖς πράγμασι λυμαινόμενοι, τοῦ βασιλέως ἡδοναῖς ἀτόποις καὶ πράξεσιν ἀδίκους σχολάζοντος.

17 Ioh. Mal., *frag.* 15, 12 THURN; Ioh. Antioch., *frag.* 214, 7 ROBERTO; Theoph., *a.m.* 5983 DE BOOR.

18 Cfr. *PLRE* 2, p. 688 *s.v.* Longinus 3.

19 Ioh. Antioch., *frag.* 214, 6 ROBERTO.

20 Ioh. Antioch., *frag.* 214 ROBERTO.

21 I dignitari di corte, i senatori e il patriarca Eufemio si riunirono nel portico antistante al Grande Triclinio – la più vasta delle sale del palazzo imperiale costruito da Costantino. Dal Grande Triclinio, l’imperatore accedeva alla sua tribuna che dava sull’Ippodromo, dove si era radunata la folla dopo aver appreso la notizia della morte di Zenone. I soldati, invece, presero posto nello “stama”, una piattaforma situata sulla pista dell’Ippodromo, cfr. Giorgio VESPIGNANI, *Il circo di Costantinopoli nuova Roma*, Spoleto, Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2001, pp. 149-157.

22 Const. Porphyr., *de caer.* 1, 92 REISKE. La fonte riferisce che Ariadne, nel rispondere, sottolineò di aver in qualche modo già “prevenuto” le richieste che le erano state fatte. Pertanto, probabilmente a ragione, Carmelo CAPIZZI, *L’Imperatore Anastasio I (491-518): studio sulla sua vita, la sua opera e la sua personalità*, Roma, Casa editrice Vaticano, 2014, pp. 73-74 presume che la folla fosse stata aizzata dagli agenti del partito anti-isaurico presente a corte ed entrato in azione ancor prima che Zenone morisse. Sul crescente ruolo politico che le fazioni del circo assunsero nel corso del VI sec. d.C. si veda VESPIGNANI, *cit.*, pp.

eredi del sovrano venne salutata, infatti, come un'occasione propizia per sbarazzarsi finalmente di un *ethnos* considerato ancora di rozzi *latrones*, nonostante da quasi un ventennio questi avessero raggiunto i vertici imperiali²³. Sullo stesso Zenone, del resto, gravava un giudizio negativo: Malco di Philadelphia affermava che “non aveva esperienza degli affari di Stato né possedeva le conoscenze necessarie per reggere saldamente l'Impero”²⁴. Il giudizio di Malco su Zenone fa da cassa di risonanza dei sentimenti di ostilità generale verso gli Isauri e, nello stesso tempo, esemplifica l'esigenza, da più parti avvertita, di evitare l'emergere di rozzi *parvenu* privi di esperienza di governo. Il discorso programmatico di Ariadne, conservato nel *de ceremoniis* di Costantino Porfirogenito²⁵, dimostra quanto, alla morte di Zenone, fosse sentita l'esigenza di un sovrano che avesse una più ampia base di consensi. Nel momento in cui le fu chiesto di esprimere il nome di un candidato al soglio imperiale, l'Augusta enunciò i principi che erano alla base della sua scelta: un ritorno al buon governo dopo la rovinosa parentesi isaurica, attraverso la preferenza per un imperatore che mettesse d'accordo tutte le parti, Senato, esercito, popolo e patriarchi²⁶. L'imperatrice Ariadne e l'eunuco Urbicius²⁷, quindi, d'accordo con il Senato e l'esercito, proclamarono imperatore il *silentarius* Anastasio²⁸, giudicando Longino incapace di regnare e palesando

131-136. È noto che la dignità imperiale dovesse essere trasmessa dall'imperatrice vedova, che non avrebbe potuto governare da sola ma avrebbe dovuto scegliere il futuro legittimo imperatore, cfr. Judith HERRIN, «The Imperial Female in Byzantium», *Past & Present*, 169 (2000), pp. 20-25.

23 Ernst KORNEMANN, *Geschichte der Spätantike*, München, FiscalBook, 1978, p. 168 definisce la parentesi isaurica della seconda metà del V sec. d.C. come un vero e proprio *Isaurierjoch*. Sull'ascesa politica degli Isauri nella seconda metà del V sec. d.C. si veda anche Fabiana ROSACI, «Un Isaurico alla corte di Teodosio II. Premesse e cause dell'ascesa politica di Flavio Zenone», *Peloro*, 4 (2019), pp. 19-29.

24 Malch., *frg.* 9 CRESCI: οὐ μὴν οὔτε ἔμπειρος τῶν πραγμάτων ἦν οὔτε εἶχεν ἐπιστήμην, δι' ἧς ἔστιν ἀσφαλῶς τὰς βασιλείας ἰθύνεσθαι. Analogo giudizio è riferito anche da Evagr., *h.e.* 3, 3 WHITBY.

25 Const. Porphy., *de caer.* 1, 91 REISKE.

26 A parere di MECCELLA, cit., pp. 245-266, il richiamo alla necessità di una legittimazione da parte dei principali organi dello stato ha spesso fatto considerare questo passaggio istituzionale come “uno dei momenti di maggiore incisività del senato costantinopolitano, chiamato ad esercitare un ruolo di primo piano nella nomina dell'imperatore”. Sul ruolo assunto da Ariadne durante l'elezione dell'imperatore si rimanda a LORENZO MAGLIARO, *Ariadne. La garante della porpora*, Milano, Jaca Book, 2013.

27 PLRE 2, pp. 1188-1190 s.v. Urbicius 1.

28 Anastasio era stato legato alla dinastia imperiale attraverso le nozze con Ariadne, vedova di Zenone, cfr. Thphn., *a.m.* 5983 DE BOOR. Di fatto, alla morte di Zenone, il potere passò



Fig. 2 Bodleian Library, MS. Canon. Misc. 378 *Notitia Dignitatum*, fol. 114v, *Comes et praeses Isauriae*.

così la vulnerabilità della compagine taurica nel momento in cui era venuto a mancare il loro *leader*²⁹.

La reazione degli Isauri davanti all'elezione di Anastasio I fu, però, immediata³⁰ e Longino non sembrò intenzionato a rinunciare al trono. Questi fu, dunque, arrestato e inviato in esilio nella Tebaide, in Egitto, dove morì otto anni più tardi³¹; la madre di Longino (e Zenone) si ritirò in un convento in Bitinia, assieme alla moglie e alla figlia di Longino³². Gli Isauri presenti a Costantinopoli furono espulsi e coloro i quali, contando su un certo tipo di clientela che li legava al sovrano loro correggionale, avevano ricoperto cariche politiche, come per esempio Longino di Cardala³³, furono estromessi³⁴. Non si rivelò una decisione previdente: fu proprio la loro espulsione da Costantinopoli, infatti, a spingere gli Isauri a riunirsi nella loro patria montuosa riorganizzando il denaro e le truppe, un esercito di 15.000 unità con al comando i due omonimi Atenodoro³⁵,

nelle mani di Ariadne, alla quale venne imposto di individuare un imperatore che fosse più ortodosso rispetto al defunto marito. Cfr. Daniela ΜΟΤΤΑ, «L'imperatore Anastasio tra storiografia ed agiografia ed agiografia», *Mediterraneo Antico*, 6 (2003), pp. 195-234.

- 29 A parere di Fiona HAARER, *Anastasius I. Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World*, Cambridge, Caims 2006, p. 21, vi era stato un cambiamento nell'equilibrio di potere della *pars Orientis*: era venuta meno la costante lotta per il potere che a Costantinopoli aveva contrapposto gli Isauri ai Goti. Infatti, il fatto che i Goti fossero ormai impegnati nello scacchiere occidentale aveva annullato la necessità di una controforza isaurica nei giochi di potere orientali.
- 30 Al momento dell'elevazione di Anastasio I, i "demi" di Costantinopoli espressero in modo violento il loro malcontento nei riguardi del nuovo *praefectus urbi* Giuliano. I capi dei "demi" diedero fuoco all'Ippodromo e agli edifici vicini, Marcell. *comes*, a. 491 *M.G.H. a. a.* 11: *bellum plebeium inter Byzantium ortum parsque urbis plurima atque circi igne combusta*, cfr. Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO. Non è sicuro che i responsabili di tale sedizione siano stati gli Isauri, ma Anastasio I li considerò come tali e agì di conseguenza, cfr. CAPIZZI, *cit.*, p. 96.
- 31 Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO.
- 32 Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO
- 33 Longino di Cardala è menzionato in quanto μάγιστρος durante il regno di Zenone da Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214 ROBERTO e, rivestendo tale carica, a lui fu indirizzata dal sovrano una legge riportata in *C.I.* 12, 29, 3. Fu destituito da Anastasio I, poiché sostenne Longino nella nomina al soglio imperiale, cfr. Thphn., *a.m.* 5983 DE BOOR.
- 34 Evagr., *h.e.* 3, 29 WHITBY.
- 35 Uno, indicato da *PLRE* 2, pp. 178-179 *s.v.* Athenodorus 2, era membro del senato, cfr. Theoph., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR, sull'altro, appellato da Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214 ROBERTO Αθηνόδορος ἕτερος per distinguerlo dall'omonimo, non si hanno informazioni specifiche, cfr. *PLRE* 2, p. 180 *s.v.* Athenodorus 3.



Fig. 3 John Edwin Davis, *Life in Asiatic Turkey: A Journal of Travel in Cilicia (Pediæ and Trachæa), Isauria, and Parts of Lycaonia and Cappadocia, Map and illustrations, from original drawings by the author and Mr. Ancketill*, London, Edward Stanford, 1879, p. 30. British Library HMNTS 010075.h.4. Mechanical curator Collection, released to Flickr Commons, Public Domain.

Longino di Selinunte³⁶ e Longino di Cardala³⁷. Nel frattempo, a Costantinopoli si presero misure tempestive contro la fazione isaurica. *In primis* fu immediatamente soppressa la donazione annuale di cui questi godevano fin dal tempo della rivolta di Illo³⁸ e che gravava sulle casse dello stato: la cifra ammontava a 1400 libbre d'oro stando a Candido Isauro³⁹ e Giovanni Antiocheno⁴⁰, o a 5000 libbre d'argento secondo Evagrio⁴¹, e sulla quale gli storici antichi avevano espresso

36 Theoph., *a.m.* 5987 DE BOOR.

37 Theoph., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR.

38 Zenone, dopo la vittoria su Illo, non avrebbe abolito tale concessione. Probabilmente il mantenimento di questa rientrava in un patto stipulato tra Zenone e quei suoi connazionali che avevano abbandonato Illo dopo la sconfitta., cfr. CAPIZZI, cit., p. 94.

39 Candid. *apud* Phot., *Bibl.* 79 HENRY.

40 Ioh. Antioch., *fig.* 308 ROBERTO.

41 Evagr., *h.e.* 3, 35 WHITBY.

aspre condanne⁴². Furono venduti all'asta i beni personali di Zenone, compreso il suo guardaroba imperiale⁴³. A tutto ciò fece immediato seguito una ribellione in Isauria, che finì per diventare una sanguinosa "guerra civile"⁴⁴, protrattasi per anni, su cui tuttavia le fonti forniscono scarse informazioni. Gli Isauri non erano più ormai soltanto dei razziatori, ma un vero e proprio esercito che voleva rovesciare il governo. Longino di Cardala, espulso dalla capitale, ritornò in Isauria, dove gli furono messi a disposizione armi e soldi per combattere⁴⁵, a dimostrazione del fatto che i *leaders* taurici, anche se avevano raggiunto la supremazia a Costantinopoli, mantenevano sempre una base di potere economico – militare nella loro *regio* natale, dove rimpatriavano ogniqualvolta la loro autorità era minata. Un esercito di insorti isaurici⁴⁶, al comando di Lilingis⁴⁷, fratellastro di Illo e *comes et praeses Isauriae*, e Atenodoro, avanzò verso Costantinopoli, ma fu annientato a *Cotyaeum*, nell'autunno del 492 d.C., da un'armata imperiale al comando del *magister militum praesentalis* Giovanni Gibbus⁴⁸ e del

42 Malch., *frg.* 6 CRESCI scrisse che durante il dominio isaurico "il tesoro arrivò a tal punto di crisi che non vi restò più niente. Le risorse che Leone alla sua morte aveva lasciato nel tesoro pubblico erano state ben presto esaurite da Zenone, che aveva concesso agli amici molte elargizioni e d'altra parte non si curava di indagare se per caso qualcuno di essi fosse anche un ladro". Stando alle parole del cronista di Philadelphia, la situazione era di una tale gravità che il prefetto Erutrio preferì abbandonare la carica per non essere responsabile di un aggravio della pressione fiscale sui contribuenti. Tuttavia, le fonti letterarie, che risultano spesso faziose, non sembrano confermate dal dato legislativo, in cui non vi sarebbe prova che Zenone avesse aggravato l'onere fiscale sulle comunità e avesse aumentato la tassazione, cfr: PIETRINI, cit.; ROSACI, cit., PhD Thesis.

43 Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO.

44 Lo scontro tra Anastasio I e gli Isauri è descritto in termini di guerra civile da Mischa MEIER, «Candidus: um die Geschichte der Isaurier», in B. BLECKMANN - T. STICKLER (hg.), *Griechische Profanhistoriker des funften nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, Historia - Einzelschriften, 2014, pp. 171-193, che parla nello specifico di *Bürgerkrieg*.

45 Thphn., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR.

46 Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO conteggia centocinquantamila unità isauriche, a fronte di duemila soldati imperiali (tra questi vi era il futuro sovrano Giustino, che allora ricopriva la carica di *comes rei militaris*, cfr. Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214 ROBERTO).

47 Thphn., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR; Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214 ROBERTO. Cfr. *PLRE* 2, p. 683 s.v. Lilingis.

48 Sulla carica di *magister militum per Orientem* ricoperta da Giovanni Gibbus si vedano Ioh. Mal., *frg.* 393 THURN e Thphn., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR, il quale precisa che questi avesse ai suoi comandi anche delle truppe reclutate in Tracia, sebbene non fosse *magister militum per Thraciam*. Della sua attività bellica contro gli Isauri rimangono testimonianze in Ioh. Mal., *frg.* 393 THURN; Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b ROBERTO; Thphn., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR. Cfr. *PLRE* 2, pp. 617-618 s.v. Fl. Ioannes Gibbus.

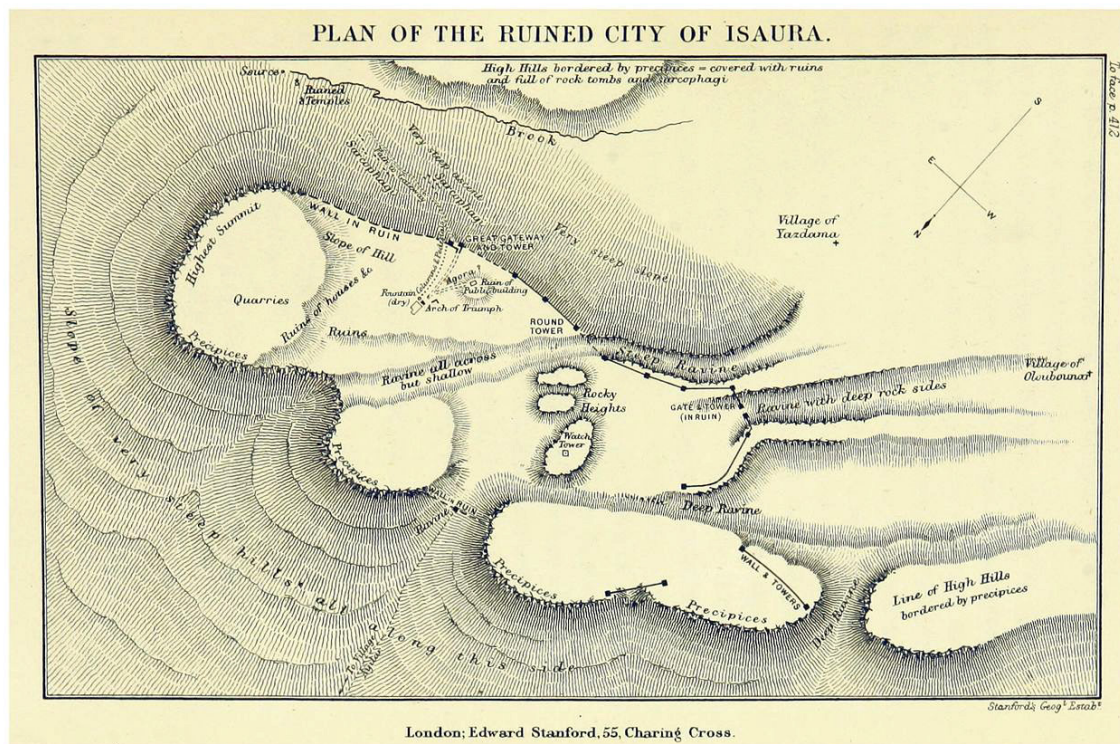


Fig. 4 Piano della città di Isaura. Davis, *Life in Asiatic Turkey*, cit., p. 469.
British Library HMNTS 010075.h.4. Mechanical curator Collection,
released to Flickr Commons, Public Domain.

magister militum per Orientem Giovanni Scita⁴⁹, composta da contingenti traci, goti e unni⁵⁰. La guerriglia in Isauria si protrasse, però, fino al 497 – 498 d.C. e lo scontro finale avvenne sul monte *Cragus*⁵¹, quando il *comes* Prisco catturò il capo isaurico Longino di Selinunte, che si era asserragliato nella fortezza marittima di Antiochia⁵². Il *castellum Papirii*, simbolo del dominio militare isaurico, fu

49 Sulle azioni militari di Giovanni Scita, che sostituì Illo nella carica di *magister militum praesentalis* a partire dal 483 d.C. (cfr. Ioh. Antioch., *fig.* 214, 1 ROBERTO), si vedano Ioh. Antioch., *fig.* 214b ROBERTO; Thphn., *a.m.* 5985 DE BOOR. I suoi meriti contro gli Isauri furono tali che Anastasio I lo onorò con il consolato nel 498 d.C., cfr. Thphn., *a.m.* 5988 DE BOOR. Più in generale, su Giovanni Scita si rimanda a *PLRE* 2, pp. 602-603 s.v. Ioannes Scytha 34.

50 Evagr., *h.e.* 3, 35 WHITBY; Theoph., *a.m.* 5984 DE BOOR.

51 Thphn., *a.m.* 5986 DE BOOR.

52 Evagr., *h.e.* 3, 35 WHITBY; Thphn., *a.m.* 5988 DE BOOR. Cfr. *PLRE* 2, p. 906 s.v. Priscus 2.

distrutto⁵³, assieme ad altre 22 torri di difesa che costellavano la regione taurica⁵⁴. La demolizione delle fortezze degli Isauri segnò la fine del loro potere⁵⁵, ma non della loro vicenda, poiché soltanto per un breve periodo si riuscì a porre fine all'espandersi delle loro imprese aggressive al di là dei limiti regionali⁵⁶.

L'insurrezione scoppiata sotto Anastasio I può essere considerata, quindi, come il punto finale di una linea ascendente, il cui apice era stato raggiunto con l'avvento al trono di Zenone. Risulta probante a tal proposito l'analisi offerta da E. Patlagean⁵⁷, la quale interpreta questo scontro etnico svoltosi tra Costantinopoli e l'Isauria attraverso parametri economici e demografici: "tra il IV e il VI secolo d.C., gli Isaurici si spingono fuori dal loro nido tra le montagne, le cui risorse sono chiaramente insufficienti a garantire la sopravvivenza [...] L'ultimo terzo del V secolo è per loro un periodo di ribollente aggressività, che culmina nella lunga rivolta, spietatamente repressa da Anastasio. Durante tutto questo periodo, essi si rendono insopportabili agli abitanti della città capitale con i loro atti di brigantaggio. Respinti a sassate in uno scontro svoltosi tra il 467 e il 470, massacrati nel circo nel 473, finiscono per essere espulsi dalla città nel 492, nel momento in cui l'insurrezione regionale tende ad esaurirsi".

53 Ioh. Antioch., *frg.* 214b, 4 ROBERTO. A tal proposito in *A.G.* 9, 656, 1 Anastasio I viene definito *τυραννοφονος* in riferimento alla sconfitta che inflisse agli Isauri.

54 Theoph. *a.m.* 5988 DE BOOR. I *phrouria*, o *castella*, erano strutture architettoniche simili a torri di guardia, disseminati nel territorio dell'Asia Minore e in particolare dell'Isauria. Questi, con il tempo, persero la loro primaria funzione militare, divenendo la "base di potere" dei briganti locali. Per i *latrones* possedere uno dei numerosi *castella* dislocati nella provincia significava divenire *leaders* e non più semplicemente banditi: avere a disposizione una fortificazione era simbolo di forza e mezzo per autorappresentare il proprio potere di fronte all'autorità romana. Si è discusso ampiamente, infatti, del fatto che gli Isauri avessero una complessa struttura di potere nella loro *regio*, dove diversi gruppi a base familiare e tribale si dividevano l'autorità sul territorio circostante, puntellato da questi centri di controllo. Cfr. Ramsay MACMULLEN, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 141-142.

55 Thphn., *a.m.* 5988 DE BOOR; Ioh. Mal., *frg.* 393 THURN; Marcell. *comes*, a. 498 *M.G.H. a. a.* 11. Gli Isauri furono deportati in una zona della Tracia e venne assegnata loro una città, fatta costruire appositamente, della quale non ci è giunto né il nome né l'indicazione esatta del sito, cfr. Procop. *Gaz., pan.* 10 CHAUVOT: πόλιν ἐδίδους, ἣν αὐτὸς ἐδημιούργησας, καὶ χώραν ἐδδαίμουνα

56 Non è il caso in questa sede di approfondire il ruolo degli Isauri in età giustiniana, per cui si rimanda a Proc., *B.G.* 2, 14 e *B.P.* 1, 18 HAURY – WIRTH, cfr. John TEALL, «The barbarians in Justinian's armies», *Speculum*, 40 (1965), pp. 294-322. Violenze perpetrate da banditi montanari ancora alla fine del V sec. d.C. sono narrate anche da *Mir. Thecl.* 28 DAGRON.

57 Evelyne PATLAGEAN, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e-7e siècle*, trad. ital., Paris, La Haye, 1977, p. 116.

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Byzantium's amphibious ways of war, 810-961

by MARK CHARLES FISSEL

ABSTRACT. The period 810-961 witnessed amphibious warfare's central role in the resurgence of the Byzantine Empire. Tailored to Byzantium's defensive strategic culture and resilient imperial institutions, the Byzantines relied upon multifarious types of amphibious ways of war: major expeditions, defensive operations, and raiding. Attempts to reconquer Crete from the Andalus-Arab Emirate frequently managed to deploy forces upon Crete but failed to re-establish Byzantine hegemony. This essay proposes that precise synchronization of leadership and logistics finally made possible the reconquest in 960-961. We assess the failed expeditions, Nikephoros Phokas' triumph, and other amphibious actions (defensive as well as offensive). Military leadership stemmed from an aristocratic military elite as well as commanders of genius who understood the management of material capabilities. Another factor in Byzantium's ways of war were successive incarnations of its marine troops. The latter fought not only major campaigns but excelled in limited actions that harnessed long distance force projection serving the Empire's changing strategic position. In the course of our analysis we consider how traditional military history might come to terms with the unique nature of Byzantine primary sources, written and illustrated.

KEYWORDS. CRETE, AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS, MARINES, NIKEPHOROS PHOKAS, LOGISTICS, LEADERSHIP, COMMAND, INSTITUTIONS, CHANDAX, THESSALONIKI, CONSTANTINOPLE, EMPIRE, NARRATIVE, GIOVANNI SKYLITZES, GIOVANNI KAMINIATES, DAMIETTA, EMIRATE, ARABS, EXPEDITI

For roughly 137 years, even the formidable and resilient Byzantine Empire found reconquest from the Emirate occupying Crete to be a frustratingly elusive objective. Six, perhaps seven, reasonably well-equipped expeditions against Crete failed.¹ The imperial policy of careful management

¹ One should not be surprised regarding the legend circulated, that he who conquered Crete would be elevated to the purple. Meredith Riedel, "Nikephoros II Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrs", *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41, 2, (2015), p. 128. The author is indebted to Georgios Theotokis for counseling a non-specialist in his field. Errors



Fig. 1. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.38r. Arab amphibious force enroute to Crete, circa 824-828. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p. 45 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed., Cambridge, CUP, 2010.

of limited resources (manpower, ready money, victuals, vessels, etc.) was sorely tested in these amphibious operations (which were inherently extraordinarily complex, demanding precise planning and thus easily thrown into disarray). Failed expeditions worsened the strategic position of the Empire by squandering resources needed elsewhere for requisite defensive purposes.²

Nikephoros Phokas' successes upon Crete in 960-961 are a paradigm of how Byzantium's utilization of amphibious operations illumines the Empire's strategy, tactics, logistics, and more. The undertaking in 960 illustrates a principle of amphibious operations, that both quantitative and qualitative requirements must

and misinterpretations are entirely the responsibility of the present author. Profuse thanks, too, to Virgilio Ilari, for translation, an impromptu tutorial and so much else.

2 John Haldon, *Byzantium at War AD 600-1453*, Oxford, Osprey, 2002, pp. 36-41.



Fig. 2. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.39. Skylitzes relates that Andalus-Arab Abu Hafs (“Apochaps”) burned his boats after the successful landing on Crete. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p. 45 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

be met or exceeded. Quantitatively, Phokas’s invasion and siege were of greater scale than what had been attempted before. Qualitatively, the campaign proves John Guilmartin’s assertion “that in amphibious operations success is highly - perhaps uniquely - dependent on the skill, competence and foresight of senior commanders”³ The campaign that commenced in 960 got everything right: amphibious operations and siegecraft well-executed, timely resupply from Constantinople, all overseen by an exemplary commander. That comparatively rare decisive victory prompts military historians to inquire why the enterprises of circa 824-826, 843, 866, 911-912, and 949 faltered. Did the ill-fated campaigns founder due to (1) lapses in leadership and/or (2) formidable logistical challenges involving both amphibious landings and a lengthy siege (that of Chandax [Heraklion])? Precise synchronization of command and logistics is essential in amphibious warfare.⁴

3 “The Siege of Malta, 1565”, in D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel (eds), *Amphibious Warfare 1000-1700. Commerce, State Formation and European expansion*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 179, italics mine.

4 D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel, “Conclusion” in D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel, (eds), *Amphibious Warfare*, pp. 432-439; On logistics, Lucas McMahon, “Logistical modelling of a sea-borne expedition in the Mediterranean: the case of the Byzantine invasion of Crete in AD 960”, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 36, 1, (2021), pp. 63-94.



Fig. 3. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.34. Michael II the Stammerer, Emperor from 820-829, was an expert military commander and spent most of his reign at war. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p. 46 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

Failed expeditions

Muslim control of Crete, initiated around 824 and accomplished in stages, empowered additional Arab incursions against imperial territories launched from that island.⁵ [Fig. 1 e 2] From its increasingly well-fortified capital at Chandax, the Anadlusi-founded Emirate lorded over Aegean commerce. Trade routes became vulnerable to predators operating out of Cretan ports. The Emirate was supported materially by Arab communities in Egypt and North Africa, spheres of influence that Byzantium had lost in the seventh century. Furthermore, the Emirate was as economically viable as it was optimally situated. According to Vassilios Christides, “. . . the non-monetary economy of Byzantine Crete was changed to a strong monetary economy, raising highly the standard of living of its inhabitants”⁶. Coupled with its losses of Sicily and Cyprus, Byzantium faced a

5 Chronology remains controversial. See Warren Treadgold, “The Chronological Accuracy of the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete for the years 813-845”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 33, (1979), p. 167, citing evidence that the process of the conquest of Crete may have occurred 826-828.

6 Vassilios Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (CA. 824). A turning point in the struggle between Byzantium and Islam*, Athens, Cyprus Research Centre, 1984, p. 121.



Fig. 4. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 39ra. The death of Damianos and rout of the Byzantine expeditionary force.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p. 46 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

growing strategic predicament. Crete had to be regained, necessitating a complex and expensive offensive action utilizing amphibious operations in what had become strategically speaking a comparatively distant theater. Muslim expansionism further impacted the *Kibyrrhaeotic* fleet (referenced below), renewing the need to see it “refitted and reorganized”⁷.

Michael II [Fig. 3] dispatched forces to repulse the Arab presence spreading from Crete’s southern coast. The imperial “favorite” Photeinos voyaged to the island and reconnoitered the location and size of Arab forces. He returned to Constantinople, obtained reinforcements under the command of *protospatharios* Damianos, Count of the Imperial Stables. This combined command descended upon Crete. The two men disembarked their forces and risked battle⁸. Damianos was slain in combat and Byzantium’s forces routed.⁹ [Fig. 4] A second attempt followed *circa* 825-6: Krateros, general of the *Kibyrrhaeotae*, the above-men-

7 T. C. Lounghis, *Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean: Safeguarding East Roman Identity*, Nicosia, Cyprus Research Centre, 2010, p. 84.

8 Makrypoulias, “Byzantine Expeditions”, pp. 348-351,

9 Dimitris Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete. From the 5th Century to the Venetian Conquest*, Athens, Historical Publications St. D Basilopoulos, 1988, p. 34.



Fig. 5. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 40ra. Krateros descends upon Crete, gains initial victory. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See pp 47-48 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

tioned naval theme, conveyed by perhaps seventy vessels, executed an amphibious landing, engaged and defeated the defenders. [Fig. 5] However, insufficient post-battle wariness allowed a nocturnal counterattack by the Emirate's rallied forces, scuttling Byzantine victory¹⁰ [Fig. 6]. Scale and operational expertise did not foment the calamity for either Photeinos' and Damianos' expedition, nor for Krateros' invasion. Both "involved considerable naval forces"¹¹. Krateros' demise [Fig. 7] sealed the fate of the *Kibyrrhaeotae*. The first *Kibyrrhaeotic* period (732-825/6) ended in failure.¹²

On 18 March 843, *logothetes* Theoktistos (the foremost member of the regency council, but not a career military man) put to sea as had his predecessors with a substantial flotilla¹³ [Fig. 8]. Theoktistos' operational commander was *magister* Sergios Niketiates, who put troops ashore on Crete and temporarily re-established imperial authority in that vicinity. According to Dimitris Tsougarakis,

10 Skylitzes, John, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, (ed) Cambridge, CUP, 2010, p. 48.

11 Tsougrakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 43.

12 Lounghis, *Byzantium*, pp. 84-85.

13 Makrypoulias, "Byzantine Expeditions", p. 351; Tsougrakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 46.



Fig. 6. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 40rb. Cretan Arabs execute a surprise night attack, slaughtering the drowsy Byzantines. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p 48 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

“Theoktistos landed safely on a part of the island not yet subjugated by the Arabs (...)”¹⁴. Theoktistos (again, who was a co-regent) was supposedly deceived into sailing for Constantinople by a tale of intrigue in which Empress Theodora had elevated a new Emperor. The Byzantine garrison would be overcome and massacred. Flawed command figures here: “The army, left behind without a leader, was attacked by the Arabs and annihilated”¹⁵. Imperial politics again confounded a Cretan expedition, in 866, organized by the *de facto* ruler Bardas the Caesar (although led in person by Michael III)¹⁶. The forces sojourned as far as the mouth of the River Meander, at Kepoi. There Bardas was assassinated, witnessed by Michael III, at the hand of the future Basil I and his entourage. [Fig. 9] With the architect of the expedition dead, that operation was stillborn.

Leo VI [Fig. 10] in 911 turned to *logothete* Himerios to mobilize an attack on Crete. The ensuing hostilities lasted inconclusively for eight months. In April-May 912 Himerios withdrew, despairing that he had been unable to achieve a comprehensive occupation of the island. Enroute to Constantinople his fleet was

¹⁴ Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 47.

¹⁵ Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 47.

¹⁶ Makrypoulis, “Byzantine Expeditions”, pp. 351-352; Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 49



Fig. 7. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 41a. Narrowly escaping the carnage, Krateros flees but is hunted down and crucified on Kos. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p 48 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

waylaid and heavily damaged off Chios¹⁷. An operational history could determine causes of failure, but no such evidence survives, apparently.

In 949 Constantine Gongyles commanded more than 100 vessels, crews (including marines) numbering nearly 20,000 men. Although not quite the scale of the 911 expedition, still Gongyles succeeded in landing his troops. However, he committed an error inexcusable in conducting the art of amphibious warfare: he did not adequately secure his army and establish a defensive position, nor conducted reconnaissance. Recognizing the vulnerabilities of the Byzantines, the Arabs fell upon and routed the imperial forces. [Fig. 11] “The sources agree that the responsibility for failure fell upon the commander-in-chief”.¹⁸ The leaders of the failed Cretan expeditions were not, as far as I can understand, members of Byzantium’s military elite.¹⁹ The latter knew tactical fundamentals and would

17 Makrypoulias, “Byzantine Expeditions”, p. 352; Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, pp. 53-55.

18 Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 2008, p. 359; Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan, (eds), *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century* Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 2005, pp. 58-59; Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, pp. 54 note 128, 58.

19 For example, John Skylitzes’ observations in *Synopsis* p. 229, including note 18, and pp. 236-237.



Fig. 8. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.70. Theoktistos *logothete* advised, as depicted, three consecutive emperors on matters of religion, diplomacy, and strategy. It is argued that he became the most influential personality in the Empire, especially during the minority of Michael III. He would be assassinated by Bardas, who then inherited the problem of taking Crete by amphibious means. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 9. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 80a. Setting out on campaign with the Emperor to reconquer Crete, Bardas is slain and mutilated by the chamberlain (the future Basil I) and co-conspirators. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See pp 112-113 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

have fared better than court-appointed commanders. Command faltered, hand in glove with logistical weaknesses, stymying vaunted Byzantine institutional strength. Nevertheless, Byzantine efficiency in mounting amphibious campaigns and executing difficult disembarkations remains evident.

The achievement of 960-961

Nikephoros Phokas' campaign of 960-961 was likely double the size of 949's expedition, for which an inventory of the latter survives.²⁰ Reportedly every theme in the Empire contributed. Possibly the Imperial Fleet of Constantinople sailed with 100 dromons, 200 *chelandia*, 308 transport ships, wafting to Crete perhaps 77,000 soldiers (an estimation that seems rather excessive). The expeditionary forces rendezvoused, rallied, and set sail from Phygela (according to Skylitzes) near Ephesus on 13 July 960.²¹ No Muslim navy intercepted the flotilla.

²⁰ Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood. The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade*, Oxford, OUP, 2017, p. 36.

²¹ Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, pp. 62-63; Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 240, note 4; in the latter



Fig. 10. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 105. Leo VI commissioned Himerios first (apparently) to destroy Arab naval forces wherever they were in the eastern Mediterranean, and second, the reconquest of Crete was a subsequent endeavor, according to research by John Haldon. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See pp. 185-186, especially footnote 128 on p 185 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed. Also, Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p 52.

Intelligence-gathering was performed well, a testament to Byzantine adeptness at amphibious expeditions. Cartography had been refined from the experiences of previous assaults on the island. Reconnoitering commenced as soon as men were ashore. The landing went unopposed, according to Theophanes Continuatus and Theodosios the Deacon (both sources being “variants of the continuation of the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete”).²² Leo the Deacon, however,

footnote the editors of Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, suggest “250 vessels” made up the expeditionary force.

²² Anthony Kaldellis, “The Byzantine Conquest of Crete (961 AD), Prokopios’ Vandal War, and the Continuator of the Chronicle of Symeon”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 39, 2 (2015), p. 302; see also Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan, (eds), *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 2005, p. 61, note 43.



Fig. 11. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 138ra. Cretan Arabs capitalize on the unwary encampment of Byzantine amphibious troops, killing some and driving the remainder back to their ships. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See pp. 236-237 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

details an engagement near the littoral.²³ Leo relied upon the above-mentioned sources, particularly Theodosios' poem. That latter source, Anthony Kaldellis has discovered, cribbed from Procopius' account of Belisarius' 533-534 expedition into North Africa.²⁴ Similarly, Leo's recount of the siege of Chandax "is modelled on a siege in Agathias" derived from Procopius, as John Haldon's research revealed.²⁵ Kaldellis also suggests that Leo's tantalizing martial details derive from military manuals. "It is suspicious that he uses more technical terms and information about battle arrays than any other Byzantine historian".²⁶ How are Leo's descriptions of the amphibious landing as well as the besiegement of value to historians?²⁷ According to Kyle Sinclair, "Leo's report of a battle on shore is rather improbable" given that Nikephoros Phokas appears to have succeeded in

23 Leo's work does assume a utilitarian approach that makes tactical detail desirable in history-writing. Leonora Neville, "Why Did the Byzantines Write History?," *Proceedings of the 23 International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016*, The Serbian National Committee of AIEB (2016-7), p. 268.

24 Kaldellis, "Byzantine Conquest", pp. 302-311.

25 Kaldellis, "Byzantine Conquest", p. 311, note 24.

26 Kaldellis, "Byzantine Conquest", p. 310.

27 The philological dimension, in terms of historical development and the language that attempts to explain it, is not addressed herein; Wahlgren, Staffan. "Symeon the Logothete: Some Philological Remarks", *Byzantion*, 71, 1 (2001) pp. 251-62, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44172551>. Accessed 22 Oct. 2023.

arriving offshore undetected.²⁸ Still, a chance sighting of the Byzantine convoy under sail might have alerted the Andalus-Arab defenders sufficiently to muster troops at the likely point of disembarkation.

Whether Byzantine amphibious operations fought against Vandals in 533 or Andalus-Arabs in 960-1, Leo's account conveys the Empire's amphibious ways of war. According to his representation, Nikephoros secured a beachhead, formed up his forces briskly, and was prepared for battle when Muslim forces appeared. If the Byzantine cataphract cavalry charged the enemy, that is particularly impressive, as disembarking



Fig. 12. Nikephoros Phokas, master of combined operations. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

and arraying equine troops was complicated and time-consuming (“For he had brought ramps with him on the transport ships, which he set up on the beach, and thus transferred the army, fully armed and mounted, from the sea on to dry land”).²⁹ The tripartite advance of Byzantine infantry formations (“studded . . . thickly with shields and spears”) cracked the defenders’ configuration, sending the “*barbaroi*” scurrying behind the walls of Chandax.³⁰ John Skylitzes, too, acknowledges a clash at the landing (“[I]mmediately upon disembarkation [Nikephoros Phokas] became embroiled with the Hagarenes who were there and offering him resistance. These he put to flight and safely disembarked both himself and

28 Kyle James Sinclair, *War writing in Middle Byzantine historiography. Sources, influences and trends*, University of Birmingham PhD thesis, 2012, p. 53.

29 *Leo the Deacon*, p 61; see analysis on p. 40.

30 *Leo the Deacon*, p. 61.



Fig. 13. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 140. A tripartite illustration: amphibious craft protected, maintained and at the ready; a secure and orderly siege camp; the improved fortification around Chandax. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See pp. 240-241 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

his army”).³¹ Leo reports a set piece battle; Skylitzes credits the defenders with (wisely) attacking when Byzantine “marines” transferred, precariously, from the rolling surf to the unsteady sands of the littoral, when the assault was assailable. Although chronicling different types of operations, both Leo and Skylitzes portray Nikephoros Phokas as a skilled amphibious warrior who observed strictly the protocols of Byzantine amphibious operations [Fig. 12].

The commander understood that the key to defeating the Emirate was to take the capital, no mean feat. Phokas further consolidated his initial position: he “ (...) set up a strong camp which he fortified with a deep trench and wooden palisade” near Almyros beach (located just to the west of his objective).³² Having safeguarded their landing zone, the Byzantines marched straightaway to Chandax, thinking to storm it immediately, whilst driving the rural inhabitants before them. Again, mindful of his army’s exposure, a siege camp was erected “ (...) which [Nikephoros Phokas] securely fortified on all sides with a palisade and

³¹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 240.

³² McGeer, *Sowing*, p. 352, quoting Leo the Deacon; Skylitzes, *Synopsis* describes “a strong palisade surrounded by a deep ditch fortified with stakes and staves”, p. 240.



Fig. 14. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vit. 26-2, f. 32ra. Detail of sappers wielding pickaxes from operations against Constantinople by Thomas the Slav. See also, Christos G. Makrypoulias, "Siege Warfare: The Art of Re-capture", *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300-1204*, edited by Yannis Stouraitis, pp. 356-393.

trench".³³ [Fig. 13] Operations around Chandax, such as Nikephoros Pastilas's fatal reconnoitering in force, are critiqued via an *adlocutio* delivered by Nikephoros Phokas.³⁴ Skylitzes, too, heaps encomia upon Nikephoros: "For seven months in all he employed every kind of siege-engine; he threw down the walls of the

³³ McGeer, *Sowing*, p. 352, quoting Leo the Deacon; see the comments of the editors of *Leo the Deacon* on why and when the camp was established, p. 62, note 47.

³⁴ The differing treatment of Pastilas by Theodosius and by Leo exemplifies the challenges posed by primary sources when used by modern military historians, as in these pages. See Sinclair, *War writing*, pp. 53-54.

cities and occupied the strongholds. On 7 March (...) he ravaged the strongest city of all (...) Chandax (...) and took prisoner the emir of the island”.³⁵ In the end those grimy agents of siegecraft, sappers and catapultists, breached Chandax’s towers and walls, allowing foot soldiers to batter their way through and sack the city.³⁶ [Fig. 14 e 15]

Given near-contemporaneous accounts, how reliable are chronicles of the Cretan campaign?³⁷ As in studying the warfare of ancient Egypt, accounts of the reconquest do not lend themselves to the composition of traditional military history in the Western European model. Confirming factual accuracy and tracing causation through linear narrative are problematic given the nature of the sources.³⁸ That said, Theodosios the Deacon claimed access to manuscripts of the greatest relevance, “frontline dispatches from Nikephoros to the Emperor”.³⁹ However, possession of primary evidence did not keep Theodosios from telling the story in a fashion that resonated Biblical motifs suiting his literary purposes.⁴⁰ While Leo the Deacon’s representations of Nikephoros Phokas’ discourses (and other vignettes) are imaginative, tangible principles of the Byzantine approach to amphibious warfare (and siegecraft) are expressed explicitly throughout (and subtly referenced albeit obliquely to written works from classical antiquity). Despite Leo’s embellishments (consider his estimation that the Muslim force discovered lying in wait to counterattack the Byzantines numbered 40,000!), the martial protocols that Leo credits to Nikephoros Phokas’s prosecution of the siege, such as surveying the landscape in person and clandestinely reconnoitering an enemy

35 Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 240; see also p. 241, note 7.

36 Kaldellis, *Streams*, p. 37; analysis of Leo the Deacon’s description of the besiegement of Chandax is pp. 33-36 in *Leo the Deacon*.

37 See the seven “unwritten rules for historical accuracy” in Warren Treadgold, “The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History”, *Proceedings of the 23 International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016*, The Serbian National Committee of AIEB (2016-7), p. 292

38 On Byzantine narrative, “unhistory”, and more, see Anthony Kaldellis, “The Manufacture of History in the Later Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Rhetorical Templates and Narrative Ontologies”, *Proceedings of the 23 International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016*, The Serbian National Committee of AIEB (2016-7), pp. 294-296, 303-304.

39 Arie Neuhauser, “‘For Such Was the Wailing Lamentation of Crete’: Theodosios the Deacon’s Praise of a Massacre during the Conquest of Crete”, *Diogenes* 12 (2021), p. 40.

40 *Ibid*, p. 46 especially.



Fig. 15. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 72; Rather stylishly dressed Byzantine pickaxe-carrying sappers at the siege of Samosata in 859, the campaign led by Bardas and Michael III.

position, suggest that the author knew the art of war not only from firsthand accounts but also from Byzantium's substantial literature of military science. "The high quality of training of officers . . . was based on a plethora of very important military manuals the contents of which was being continuously, systematically and methodically updated and enriched."⁴¹ Lucas McMahon suggests that by distinguishing the classical Roman models in Byzantine military manuals from more contemporary practices and innovations recorded in the accounts, a more accurate rendering of the art of war emerges.⁴² Indeed, Byzantine military manuals emphasized leadership and the complexity of warfare. The latter themes, dominant in the Byzantine conceptualization of war, address a fundamental challenge for a multiplex type of warfare such as amphibious operations.

An interplay clearly exists between historical narratives on one hand, and util-

41 John Karkazis, "The Byzantine Navy. A synopsis of battles, admirals, and tactics (preprint edition, unpaginated) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339487745>; also, Salvatore Cosentino, "Writing about War in Byzantium", *Revista de Historia das Ideias*, 30 (2009), pp. 83-99, especially 94-99.

42 McMahon, "Logistical modelling", pp. 65-66.



Fig. 16.
Nikephoros
Phokas, master
of the art of war. Source:
Wikimedia
Commons.



Fig. 17. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 127a; A twelfth century depiction of tenth-century poliorcetics as an example of Byzantine siegecraft where swordsmen scale assault ladders. General John Kourkouas *circa* 934 lays siege to Melitene in a series of campaigns expanding the Empire. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

itarian military treatises on the other. Of what use is visual evidence, specifically the above-mentioned Madrid Skylitzes illuminated manuscript created at the court of Roger II, a Norman? This essay incorporates drawings from that source, an artistic achievement that “transforms Byzantine history to suit Sicilian needs by subverting imperial ideology . . . and denying Constantinople’s providential favor and political preeminence”.⁴³ Obviously, we cannot categorize as “traditional” military history the iconography and representations of amphibious operations found in the hundreds of drawings in the Madrid Skylitzes MS.⁴⁴ Although parallels exist between Norman amphibious operations and the mid-Byzantine art of amphibious warfare, the illustrations presented in this essay are renderings of the actions of one amphibious Eastern Mediterranean power by a court culture that postured as heir.⁴⁵

43 Elena N. Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past. The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses*, Cambridge, CUP, 2015, p. 10

44 Skylitzes, John, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional d’España, Vitr. 26-2. A pdf file from the BN provided via the Library of Congress by hyperlink was used for this essay: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021667859>.

45 On Norman amphibious actions, Georgios Theotokis, *The campaigns of the Norman dukes*



Fig. 18. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.32rab. Archery and Byzantine siege warfare as illustrated in Thomas the Slav's assaults on Constantinople, "a" showing mounted archers providing cover for sappers (see also Illustration 14 above); "b" presenting a siege engine used in tandem with foot archers to protect sappers hammering at the walls of the Blachernae quarter of Constantinople. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 19. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.151. Detail of Byzantine catapulters bombarding fortifications, possibly the artist's impression of a tenth to eleventh-century equivalent of a trebuchet. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

A host of artists from differing backgrounds and cultures interpreted through respective “social meanings” the vignettes they were commissioned to depict. Variations in artistic style, skill, ethnocentric orientation, and even pigments, make the Madrid Skylitzes MS idiosyncratic. Elena Boeck observes something significant for military historians: “Divergences in representations of Byzantine imperial costumes and Arabs indicate that each artist working in isolation drew

of southern Italy against Byzantium, in the years between 1071 and 1108 AD, <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/1884/>; Georgios Theotokis, *Warfare in the Norman Mediterranean*, Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 2020; Georgios Theotokis, “The Norman invasion of Sicily (1061-1072): Numbers and Military Tactics,” *War in History* 17 (2010), pp. 381-402. And, Matthew Bennett, “Amphibious Operations from the Norman Conquest to the Crusades of Saint Louis, c. 1050-1250”, D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel (eds), *Amphibious Warfare*, pp. 51-68.



Fig. 20. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.31ra. Representation of the imperial fleet when commanded by Thomas the Slav. Source: Wikimedia Commons. See p. 36 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed.

upon his training and experience in translating designers' instructions into imagery".⁴⁶ The "freeze-framed" narratives of battle remain, as we would expect, extremely suspect and technical detail (Byzantine or Norman) is unreliable.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the helmets, shields, etc. are not fanciful. Rather they were inspired by iconographic and archaeological sources, such as *sarcophagi*. Ada Hoffmeyer concluded that the Madrid Skylitzes drawings are "a significant connexion with and a continuation of Mediterranean Antiquity combined with strong cultural currents from the various civilizations not even of the Near East but with Central Asia and now and then the Far East".⁴⁸ In other words, the respective artists knew

46 Boeck, *Imagining*, pp. 32-42, quotation from p. 37.

47 Note the observation regarding variations in vessel design in depictions of amphibious warfare in the Skylitzes drawings. Lucas McMahon, "Smoke on the Water: The Emirate of Crete", *Medieval Warfare- Naval warfare and piracy in the Middle Ages*, 5, 5, (November-December 2015), p. 39.

48 Ada Bruhn Hoffmeyer, *Military Equipment in the Byzantine Manuscript of Scylitzes in Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, Gladius*, 5 (1966), p. 151, published in Granada by the Instituto de Estudios sobre Armas Antiguas of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. Hoffmeyer's meticulous cross-referencing of militaria far exceeds what used to be labelled antiquarianism. Her ideas now benefit greatly from the information and interpretation found in Elena Boeck's *Imagining the Byzantine Past* (2018). For example, should the MS even be labelled "Byzantine", despite its textual substance? Furthermore, there are factual errors, such as Nikephoros Phokas conquering Sicily rather than Crete in



Fig. 21. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.41b. Although Admiral Niketas Oöryphas is celebrated as a master of “naval” warfare the bulk of his operations were ship-to-shore, coastal, and littoral. In other words, Oöryphas’ campaigns against Muslim forces can be characterized as amphibious warfare. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

of artifacts from their eleventh century perspective and incorporated such details to achieve a satisfactorily near-contemporaneous decoration.

As in the case of Leo the Deacon, a broad Mediterranean-centered interpretation intimates the centrality of amphibious operations for those who would rule. The spectrum of representations of amphibious warfare underscores how ubiquitous was that operational mode: inshore, estuarine, riverine, coastal, etc.⁴⁹ The images impart that the fortunes of empires were dictated by multiplex amphibious warfare; nothing less than survival might be decided by the degree to which a state assimilated this art of war at the interface of land and sea.

Command, logistics, organization, and resources

The coordination necessary to navigate the intrinsic complications of amphib-

961 (p. 24). Still, Hoffmeyer’s 1966 tome deserves greater attention from mainstream military historians.

49 For detailed subsets see Vladimir Shirogorov, “A True Beast of Land and Water: the gunpowder mutation of amphibious warfare”, M.C. Fissel (ed.), *The Military Revolution and Revolutions in Military Affairs*, Berlin, DeGruyter, 2023, pp. 207-311.

ious warfare depended upon firm and visionary command.⁵⁰ Leadership and logistics were the salient dimensions in Byzantium's administration of amphibious warfare. Command frequently determined success or failure, provided that the material requirements of the expedition were met. Amphibious operations are precarious and complicated; command must be virtually flawless. The complexity and fluidity of operational management meant that those overseeing amphibious actions learned from trial and error, painfully through 810 to 961.⁵¹ Given the miscarriages of the previous 136 years and Nikephoros Phokas's disciplined and informed generalship, doubtless he went "by the book" in conducting operations [Fig. 16]. His respect for orthodoxy and love of precision suggests adherence to the conventionalities of Byzantine military arts. Indisputably the Byzantines managed siegecraft admirably [Fig. 17, 18 and 19], even if resupply logistics were strained (or occasionally stalled). Neither side foresaw a circumvallation lasting through winter. Stretched supply lines held because Phokas had the foresight to ally with an administrative advocate in Joseph Bringas (the *parakoimomenos* active in Constantinople throughout the war). Bringas secured politically and institutionally the expeditionary force's sustenance at a critical moment.⁵² The *ad hoc* partnership between Phokas and Bringas (obscured by their later falling out) reifies how battlefield command meshed with political bureaucracy to ensure material support for a successful war effort.⁵³

Experiential training undergirded the ethos of the elite that (traditionally) marshalled armies and navies. Byzantine generalship, such as that practiced by Nikephoros Phokas, fused the military exceptionalism of classical Rome with the spiritual sanction derived from Christian institutionalization (as set in motion by Constantine I at the Milvian Bridge).⁵⁴ Such tradition, grounded in military

50 Salvatore Cosentino, "Writing about War in Byzantium" *Revista de Historia das Ideias*, 30 (2009) pp. 96-97; Trim and Fissel, "Conclusion", pp. 432-439.

51 On amphibious warfare and learning from failure, see John Stapleton, "The Blue Water Dimension of King William's War: Amphibious Operations and Allied Strategy during the Nine Years' War, 1688-1697", in D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel (eds), *Amphibious Warfare*, p. 317.

52 Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, pp. 61-62; on Bringas, see Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 239, note 2.

53 However, see below, note 71.

54 On classicizing and literary imitation in the context of the conquest of Crete's evidential sources, see Kaldellis, "Manufacture", pp. 297-298.



Fig. 22. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 33r. Spectacular (and strategic) instances of defensive amphibious operations occurred in defending Constantinople for seaborne invasion. Here the sea walls that were a critical component of the defensive walled system (Τείχη της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως) blunt Thomas the Slav's assault from the Sea of Marmara. See also Fig. 18. See also pp. 37-39 in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

expertise, brought success within a long-standing defensive strategy. Continuity was also fostered by well-conceived bureaucratic regeneration, e.g., in the 700s and after 920. Institutional durability and calculated organizational restructuring undergirded Byzantine logistics on land, sea, and littoral.⁵⁵ The Isaurian emperors bequeathed to their successors a strengthened navy [Fig. 20]. During the reign of Constantine V (741-775) these “new naval units and commands” were integrated within existing institutional structures. For example, the *Kibyrrhaeotae* were fortified by the creation of the *Droungarios* of Dodekanessos (“a subordinate

⁵⁵ According to John Haldon, “It is clear . . . that the basic fiscal mechanisms in the sixth and the ninth centuries were almost identical: the terminology had changed, and the administrative relationships between the different departments responsible for the procedure was slightly different, but in essentials the later system was very obviously derived from the earlier.” “The Organisation and Support of an Expeditionary Force: Manpower and Logistics in the Middle Byzantine Period”, *Byzantium at War* (1997), n.p.: <https://deremilitari.org/2014/05/the-organisation-and-support-of-an-expeditionary-force-manpower-and-logistics-in-the-middle-byzantine-period>.



Fig. 23. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.130. In 941, Byzantine amphibious forces repulsed the Rus, in what may be deemed successful defensive amphibious warfare on the Black Sea, near the Bosphorus, and at a rivermouth. *Nota bene* the use of “swimmers” in combat. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

command of the existing naval forces”) around 780-781.⁵⁶ During the 700s the *Kibyrrhaeotae* theme and fleet that fended off Arab incursions proved “sufficient to keep all attempts of the Arab fleet at bay without any new arrangements, adjustments or reforms to the state military and the naval administration . . . This meant that the creation of the theme and fleet of the *Kibyrrhaeotae* had been a success”.⁵⁷ The dominion of an “agrarian and militaristic regime” from the 820s onward further buttressed Byzantine naval power and amphibious operations.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lounghis, *Byzantium*, p. 81.

⁵⁷ Lounghis, *Byzantium*, p. 79.

⁵⁸ Lounghis, *Byzantium*, p. 84.



Fig. 24. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.202r. Georgios Maniakes carried on the tradition of amphibious generalship in Sicily *circa* 1038-1040. See in John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, John Wortley, ed., pp. xxvii, 109, 360-361, 365-366, 374-383, 392, 400-406, 410, 414, 436, 452, and 458. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Aquatic warfare in this era was conducted by a professional warrior class. For example, two admirals, Niketas Oöryphas and his successor Nasar, embodied sea-going generalship. They built upon the naval organizational reforms of the 700s. Oöryphas (serving *circa* 842 to *circa* 886 and possibly participating in the sack of Damietta in 853, discussed below), while commanding the imperial fleet defended the Cyclades and other island outposts. Notably he crushed a formidable contingent of Muslim raiders in the Gulf of Corinth in 872.⁵⁹ [Fig. 21]. His celebrated amphibious *stratagem* of the portage of his fleet across the isthmus probably did not occur (again, the chroniclers' attribution of an amphibious feat accomplished during antiquity to the legendary reputation of a prestigious Byzantine general). Nevertheless, the ascription of such heroics underscored reverence for amphibious command as well as equation of the virtues of a contemporary *droungarios* with the cleverness of the ancients.

⁵⁹ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, p. 48; Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete*, p. 50



Fig. 25. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.212rb. The Byzantines, supported by mercenaries, engaged frequently in amphibious warfare during the campaign to reconquer Sicily. Depicted here is the siege of Messina in 1038, ironical because if indeed the Madrid Skylitzes MS was a product of Roger II's reign, paleographical and stylistic evidence suggest that the monastery at which much of the illuminated manuscript was crafted was located in the vicinity of Messina. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Nasar achieved notable victories whilst patrolling coastal Dalmatia, and near Cephalonia *circa* 880 by the ruination of the Muslim flotilla operating out of Tunis that preyed upon the Ionian islands. In coordination with the latter expedition, Nasar waged successful ship-to-shore operations against enemy forces in Sicily.⁶⁰ The point is that these above-mentioned operations involved offshore and littoral amphibious operations and succeeded largely due to the direction and management of material resources. Byzantium's amphibious expertise extended to defensive warfare, as should be expected given the Empire's strategic culture, there being diverse situations where Byzantine forces repelled enemies that descended upon the water's edge. Constantinople's seawalls and the Golden Horn were defended successfully more than once against Arab interdiction and assaults, for example in 674 to 678, and 717 to 718. Defensive amphibious measures were taken during the revolt of Thomas the Slav in 822 [Fig. 22]. The "combined" defense of Constantinople is that much more remarkable due to the absence of a large land-based force garrisoned within the Empire's capital.⁶¹ Consider, too,

⁶⁰ Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, pp. 149-150.

⁶¹ John Haldon, "The Blockade of Constantinople in 813", *Byzantion'dan Constantinop-*



Fig. 26. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f.105 Basil I and Leo VI on horseback. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Byzantine inshore defensive amphibious operations fought against the Rus along the coastline of the Black Sea, near Ierop at the mouth of the Bosphorus in June 941. Dromons under *Patricius* Theophan allowed the Rus boats to encircle the Byzantine flotilla, and once in tightening formation the Rus received a taste of Greek Fire. Inshore fighting became an amalgam of riverine and estuarine warfare when the Rus vessels were pressed into the river mouth of the tributary Riva, Çayağzı. It would appear that the shallower draught Rus ships navigated up river whilst the dromons could not follow. Although that clash was not decisive, in September the Rus flotilla was waylaid by Theophan again and greatly damaged. Byzantine defensive amphibious warfare was successful in keeping the Rus from assailing Constantinople, though riverine settlements suffered depredations at the

olis'e İstanbul Kuşatmaları, Murat Arslan and Turhan Kaçar, (eds), İstanbul, İstanbul Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2017, pp. 263-279.



Fig. 27. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 111r. The sack of Thessaloniki in 904 understandably might be regarded as an immense failure of Byzantine defensive amphibious warfare. However, complacency was not an issue. The inhabitants had attempted to build an underwater barrier that might tear up the hulls of invading ships. The sea wall was being reinforced even as Leo of Tripoli's Arab forces appeared on the horizon. During the attack itself the Thessalonians put up a stiff resistance with dropping stones and any weapons they could manage. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

hands of the Rus⁶². [Fig. 23] There are, of course, cases of unsuccessful defensive amphibious warfare, e.g., the Arab landing and attack at Thessaloniki (904), set forth in detail by an eyewitness, at the end of this essay.⁶³

In 920 generalship was further reinforced by the accession of Lekapinos as Emperor, only the second admiral to occupy the throne, in the style of Tiberius III. Lekapinos, predictably, enhanced his fleet through institutional reform and expansion. Despite episodes of political instability amphibious operations were prioritized, especially the maintenance (and improvement) of capabilities enabling military undertakings. Oversight was critical in harnessing resources.

62 Иванов С.А. «Византийский нарратив о войне 941 г.» [в] Иванов С.А. *Византийская культура и агиография*. Москва: ЯСК, 2020, pp. 407-414. Translated into English as S.A. Ivanov "The Byzantine narrations on the war of 941," in Ivanov S.A. *Byzantine culture and hagiography*. Moscow: YaSK, 2020. The author is indebted to Vladimir Shirogorov for this reference and analysis. However, the present writer is entirely responsible for any errors of fact, interpretation and spelling.

63 Lucas McMahon, "Smoke on the Water: The Emirate of Crete", *Medieval Warfare- Naval warfare and piracy in the Middle Ages*, 5, 5, (November-December 2015), pp. 38-43; John Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki* (translated by David Frendo and Athanasios Fotiou) Leiden, Brill, 2017.

The survival (indeed, prosperity might be a better term) of an elite military leadership coupled with collective memory and efficiency (e.g., the 911 and 949 inventories, with the caveat that the inventories are also “confusing, inconsistent, and incomplete”) saw a revitalization of Byzantine maritime ascendancy.⁶⁴ The *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae* inventories shed light upon relative percentages of troop strength, pay arrangements, classifications of armaments, and miscellaneous accoutrements. Even if the expeditions prior to 960 disappointed the imperial court, still they demonstrated the remarkable fortitude of Byzantine amphibious operations, provided that timely and sufficient logistical support undergirded offensives, even in winter.

The steady consistency of Byzantium’s bureaucracy in empowering amphibious operations is remarkable because the state did not prosecute wars upon credit. Liquid capital, coinage of precious metals, had to be proffered up front. An amphibious enterprise of magnitude could swallow up an entire year’s imperial revenues, with potentially “catastrophic” consequences.⁶⁵ Poliorcetics in the ninth and tenth centuries necessitated capital investment in siege trains, skilled artillery crews and sappers, not to mention infantry and cavalry, the latter to patrol surrounding territory.⁶⁶ That expeditions managed to be funded, equipped, launched and landed testifies to Byzantium’s institutional sophistication in waging amphibious warfare. With dependable officers in place, supply arrangements then had to ensure that the besiegers possessed all the equipment, food, and money they needed. In short, serious difficulties in maintaining lengthy sieges, including assembling, transporting, servicing a siege operation, were understandably best managed by “professional” supervision and fully committed supply lines from Constantinople.⁶⁷ Regarding victualling, Lucas McMahon notes that the Byzantine

“intention was for the final expedition against the Emirate of Crete to acquire its own provisions from the island. Some of this would have come at the expense of the local population, although marine protein, a significant aspect of the Byzantine diet, could have provided a large amount of food. The resource assessments carried out for the earlier campaigns indicate that mechanisms were

64 Kaldellis, *Streams*, p. 35.

65 Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450*, Cambridge, CUP, 1985, p. 223.

66 See Figures 15 and 18.

67 Makrypoulias, “Byzantine Expeditions”, p. 361.

in place to distribute military expenses across the empire. That this was not done in 960 suggests a deliberate strategy was in place to set the burden firmly upon the populace of Crete”.⁶⁸

Civilian resources exploited for amphibious warfare were not limited to systematic “foraging”. The obligation was extended to the lifeline of the Empire, namely to the “merchant marine”, when amphibious expeditions requisitioned such vessels into their flotillas.⁶⁹ The relationship between naval campaigns and maritime trade was delicate. The wheels of commerce had to be kept turning, even at the risk of diverting the stowage capabilities of the merchant marine (so to speak) into expensive amphibious expeditions that might yield nothing for that immense investment and strenuous effort (as indeed was the case for the offensives of 911 and 949). Economic realities make the Byzantine logistical achievement more impressive when linking commercial expansion to amphibious warfare and state formation.⁷⁰ Equally impressive is the scale of the 960 campaign, which exceeded in size its predecessors, and thus escalated costs and administrative complexity. Scale is dependent upon executive management of resources; the larger the expedition, the greater the logistical challenge both for support institutions but also for those in command of the enterprise. The more formidable the logistical challenge, the higher the likelihood of administrative breakdown. Byzantium’s economy (and tax base) had to be sufficiently resilient to finance the recapture of an island essential to the macroeconomics of the Empire.

To sum up: excepting the campaign led by Bardas the Caesar in tandem with the Emperor in 866, forces were deployed consistently upon Crete even if victory eluded them due to failures of command and/or the limits of logistical support being exceeded in the exhausting labors of siegecraft. Nikephoros Phokas himself might have failed in 960-961 save for delivery of crucially needed supplies in the bitter cold of the last stages of the besiegement of Chandax (credited to the persuasiveness and elocution of Joseph Bringas as was noted above).⁷¹ The rela-

68 McMahan, “Logistical modelling”, p. 79; on the abundance of Crete, see *Leo the Deacon*, p. 63.

69 McMahan, “Logistical modelling”, pp. 70, 78.

70 D.J.B. Trim and M. C. Fissel, (eds), *Amphibious Warfare 1000-1700. Commerce, State Formation and European Expansion*, Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp 1-6, 13, 38-44, 80-94, 219, 257, 421-426, 452-454.

71 The historical substance of the Bringas speech should be taken with a grain of salt,



Fig. 28. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 111r, detail. See David Frendo and Athanasios Fotiou, eds., *John Kaminiates: The Capture of Thessaloniki*, Leiden, Brill, 2000 for analysis of what appears to be a firsthand account of the sack of Thessaloniki, detailing atrocities.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

tionship between siegecraft and amphibious warfare empowered the Byzantines to shift from a generally defensive strategy to a highly mobile one that delivered quickly and forcefully in a distant theater. In other words, amphibious operations permitted swift transversal followed by a powerful blow, sea to land. This symbiotic art of war resulted, ultimately, in successes in Crete, Sicily and elsewhere [Fig. 24 e 25].

however. See Sinclair, *War writing*, p. 52.

Marines

Byzantium inherited the efficacious amphibious capabilities of Imperial Rome. In the lands adjoining the ancient Mediterranean Sea, marines were as ubiquitous and indispensable as were infantry.⁷² The land-sea power projection of Byzantine navies was well established by 532. Generally, and comparatively speaking, amphibious fighting forces develop as an appendage to a larger command. Marines, more specialized than most auxiliaries by definition, came from various military populations settled in the Empire and were interspersed within various maritime themes. One group is foremost, however, the *Karabisianoï* (*Καραβισιάνοι*), which appear on the scene as a prototypical maritime corps in the 600s, and were quartered in Rhodes, the south coast of Anatolia, and elsewhere in the Aegean.⁷³ The *Karabisianoï* (derived from *karabis* or *κάραβος*, a term for a seagoing vessel, the term sometimes translated as “ship troops”) enjoyed distinction as they served at the beckon call of the Emperor, forming the “core of the middle Byzantine state’s provincial naval power”.⁷⁴ The marines/oarsmen/sailors of the *Karabisianoï*, being a standing organization, can be regarded as more “professional” than their diverse predecessors. Their unique identity might explain at least partially the *Karabisianoï* intrusion into dynasticism, for example their role in attempts to destabilize Leo III *circa* 717–741. Political engagement likely led to their demise.

The *Karabisianoï*’s successor, around the 690s, was the above-mentioned *Kibyrrhaeotae* maritime theme, anchored geographically (named after Kibyrrha in coastal Caria) and utilizing a naval bureaucracy more closely tailored to the imperatives of the ruling dynasty.⁷⁵ As the Empire’s contingencies (and strategic culture) mutated, institutional innovations (often initiated directly from the Emperor) enabled Byzantium to meet new challenges. For example, tactical organizational innovation melded with extant institutions in recruitment, arming, training, and deployment of marines. For example, the *Caravisiiani*, the imperial

72 M.C. Fissel, “The Egyptian Origins of Amphibious Warfare: Out of Africa”, in Kaushik Roy and Michael Charney, (eds), *Routledge Handbook of the Global History of Warfare*, London, Routledge, 2024, pp. 217-241.

73 Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284-1081*, Stanford, SUP, 1995, p. 23.

74 Quoted in John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 74; also Treadgold, *Byzantium*, p. 23.

75 Haldon, *Warfare*, p. 77.

naval presence that had buoyed the Empire into the early 700s, was replaced with the “provincial fleet” of the *Kibyrrhaeotae*. The strategic range of the *Caravisiani* extended widely across the Mediterranean, whereas the *Kibyrrhaeotae* concentrated on the East Roman theater (largely because Arab depredations had eroded Byzantine power in that part of the world).⁷⁶ Basil I and Leo VI, [Fig. 26] reacting to new strategic realities, undertook the “subjugation of all existing units of the fleet to the new priorities of the dynasty”.⁷⁷

The presence of Byzantine marines can be identified by terminology, e.g., *polemistia*. Seventy marines would be carried aboard the average dromon. The 949 inventory includes what appears to be the dromon’s standard habiliments provided to the vessel’s marines. The inventory lists 70 *klibanial* (lamellar corselets) and 70 sewn shields. We might surmise that, given the number, these were exclusively marine accoutrements. An abundance of archery weapons (50 “Roman” bows with double strings, hand-spanned crossbows, and silk strings, and 10,000 arrows) suggest that marines discharged missile weapons, especially if battling enemy vessels, as well as practicing various forms of hand-to-hand combat aboard ship: 80 *corseques* (trident pikes), 20 *longchodrepana* (lance-sickles and rigging cutters), 4 grapnels with chains, etc. Marines appear from this inventory to have worn visorless helmets (80 helmets listed, distinguished from 10 helmets equipped with visors). That is not to say that there was a standard “uniform” or equiptage for marines.

Muslim fleets had around this time (the late seventh century or the commencement of the eighth century) developed “marines” as is documented by an “Arabic papyrus by Yusuf Ragib, from Aphrodito of Southern Egypt (...) dated from 710 A.D.”.⁷⁸ An imperial response to Arab innovations in utilization (arming and tactical use of marines resulted).⁷⁹ Michael II during the 820s mobilized the *Tessarakontarioi*, a special marine unit. According to Georgios Theotokis, *Tessarakontarioi* were recruited by Michael II for “special service”, not necessarily as a

76 Lounghis, *Byzantium*, p. 77.

77 T.C. Lounghis, “The Byzantine War Navy and the West, Fifth to Twelfth Centuries” in Georgios Theotokis and Aysel Yildiz, (eds), *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea. Aspects of War, Diplomacy, and Military Elites*, Leiden, Brill, 2018, p. 22.

78 Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, p. 54.

79 Angus Konstam, *Byzantine Warship versus Arab Warship 7th-11th centuries*, Oxford, Osprey, 2015, p. 23.

long-term institutional change. Theotokis refers to them as “special naval troops” and does use the term “marines”.⁸⁰ Warren Treadgold points out that the Imperial Fleet itself did not possess its own such corps until 870, when 4,000 “professional marines” were attached directly to the Fleet⁸¹ in the midst of the decades-long struggle over Crete. Perhaps the Emperor increased his marine forces at least partially as a response to the persistent failures to take Crete, though that is speculation. In the time of the 911 expedition under Himerios, mentioned above, marine contingents were mobilized from numerous and diverse themes that buttressed the Imperial Fleet. 4,200 marines were deployed from the Imperial fleet itself and then complemented by 5,087 Mardaites drawn from the Peloponnese community where 4,000 “marine” families had been granted lands in 809, as well as from Epiris and Nicopolis. An additional 1,190 from Anatolia, likely from the vessels of the *Kibyrrhaeotae* theme, also served in the 911 expeditionary force to Crete. The *anno* 949 inventory states: “The dromon should have 300 men, of these 230 men of the ship [should be] oarsmen and also marines, and the other seventy men marines from the cavalry *themata* and the barbarians”.⁸² Therefore, the success of the 960-961 campaign benefited from the lengthy and deliberate development of marines that adapted to Byzantium’s mutable strategic objectives.

Amphibious raiding and the Byzantine strategy of defense

Another vehicle of Byzantine amphibious warfare succeeded: raiding. The Empire’s strategic position dictated the type, scale, and frequency of its amphibious operations. The immensity and porousness of the Empire encouraged its defensive strategy. Arguably Byzantium’s most affordable approach (in terms of resources) to counter Muslim expansionism was raiding. The Empire tailored its force projection via selective attacks on ports and coastal “march-lands” *circa* 810-813, particularly during summer 812 against North African outposts, especially Egyptian territories.⁸³ The loss of Crete then precipitated a seismic “turning

80 “Σώκοç- An Unusual Byzantine Weapon”, in *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea*, Georgios Theotokis and Aysel Yildiz (eds), Leiden. Brill, 2018, p. 168.

81 Treadgold, *Byzantium*, pp. 33, 76.

82 John Pryor and Elizabeth Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon. The Byzantine Navy ca 500-1204*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, p. 557.

83 Wladyslaw B. Kubiak, “The Byzantine Attack on Damietta in 853 and the Egyptian Navy in the 9th Century”, *Byzantion*, 40 (1970), pp. 145-166. www.jstor.org/

point” and deteriorated substantially imperial security. Driven out of Sicily and Crete, the Byzantines’ defensive strategy could best be implemented via amphibious strikes. Defense of areas close to the center of the Empire was subordinated to aquatic strikes against Arab presences at boundary points, many of which were now peripheral, even distant, from Byzantium’s control. T.C. Lounghis writes, “the neglect of ‘minor’ territorial losses near the central core of the empire in favour of remote expeditions meant no less than an absolute priority for overseas domination and relevant remote boundaries rather than a narrow and step by step defence (...)”.⁸⁴

Seagoing trade routes remained vulnerable to predators operating out of strongholds at Candia. Between 824 to 827, in the wake of the above-mentioned Muslim conquest of *circa* 824, raiders based in the Emirate preyed upon Byzantine territories and shipping, causing commercial disruption at the hand of Islam. A Muslim-controlled Crete was buttressed by Islamic settlements in Egypt and North Africa, spheres of influence that the Empire had lost in the seventh century. From Chandax the Anadlusi-originated Emirate radiated a sphere of influence that disrupted and sometimes hijacked Aegean trade, including the periodic occupation of Aigina, Kos, Karpathos, and Kythera. Merchants trading through Rhodes and Cyprus, too, contended with piracy and plundering. Imperial countermeasures failed repeatedly, for example the reverse suffered off Thassos in 839. Once-relatively secure continental European ports were left exposed.

Against the Egyptian march-lands the Byzantines exercised well-conceived raids, more methodical than random raiding or sporadic harassment of Fatimid territory. In 852-853, an expedition commanded by the eunuch *patrikios* and *para-koimomenos* Damianos disrupted Muslim logistical support for Crete by striking the Egyptian coast at Damietta and later at al-Farama. The forays of 852-853 synchronized three flotillas that assembled between 85 to 300 vessels. The raid on Damietta in 853 saw the Byzantines ashore for three days, during which they plundered: “(...) the Greeks came to Damietta and pillaged it (...) [T]he landing party was made up of 5,000 ‘marines’. They remained there for three days, then they went away to the land of the Greeks with captives, gold and silver”.⁸⁵

[stable/44170285?seq=1.](#)

⁸⁴ Lounghis, *Byzantium*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Christides, *Conquest of Crete*, p. 165; See also Kubiak, “Byzantine Attack”, p. 56.

The comparative slowness of communication in this era made coordination of amphibious operations difficult and risky. Thus, the perfectly timed assault upon Damietta, when its garrison was absent, was impressive. Intelligence gathering additionally contributed to the successful 3-day sack of Damietta, enabling the discovery and destruction of materials destined for the Emirate of Crete. In short, the burning of Damietta demonstrated the range and efficiency of Byzantine amphibious raiding. The element of surprise encouraged the targeting of multiple objectives. For example, in the wake of the assault on Damietta, the fleet(s) threatened the island of Tinnis. Next, a descent upon the formidable defenses of Usutum reduced that outpost's military capabilities, though being merely a raid, besiegement was out of the question.⁸⁶

Follow-up expeditions against Damietta occurred in 854 and 855, apparently. In 859, Farama was similarly preyed upon, and Damietta yet again that same year.⁸⁷ To reiterate, the 853 strike upon Damietta exhibited operational expertise, especially in command and logistics, qualities subsequently apparent in the Phokas expedition of a century later. A greater challenge, of course, was to exceed raiding and achieve an amphibious landing that laid the groundwork for occupation, as would be the situation in Crete in 960 to 961, described above. Byzantine offensive successes were avenged by the devastating plunder by Cretan Arabs of Thessaloniki, arguably the second largest imperial city, at the beginning of the tenth century (again, described below).

The witness of Ioannes Kaminiates

In 904, a formidable Muslim force won a spectacular victory, but experienced difficulty overcoming terrified defenders struggling against even a well-executed raid. Despite enjoying advantages, such as the number and expertise of its "marines", and the vulnerability of Thessaloniki to amphibious assault, the Muslim

⁸⁶ E. W. Brooks, "The relations between the empire and Egypt from a new Arabic source", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 22, 1, (1913), pp. 389, 391, https://ia600708.us.archive.org/view_archive.php?archive=/28/items/crossref-pre-1923-scholarly-works/10.1515%252Fbyzs.1912.21.1.268.zip&file=10.1515%252Fbyzs.1913.22.2.381.pdf, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/byzs.1913.22.2.381/html>; Kubiak, "Byzantine Attack", pp. 57-59; Kubiak reprints a Muslim papyrus account of the Byzantine raid against Damietta, on p. 56

⁸⁷ Kubiak, "Byzantine Attack", p. 59.



Fig. 29. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 110ra. “Once these barbarians were inside, they slew all those whom they found writhing about on the ground in the vicinity of the wall (...).” See John Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki* (translation, introduction and notes by David Frendo and Athanasios (eds), Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 63. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

attacking force met spirited resistance. The city had been bulwarked to withstand land-based sieges, which were to be expected in that theater of the Empire. Ioannes Kaminiates, a priest of Thessaloniki who experienced the raid and later wrote his witness⁸⁸, opined that the architect discounted the possibility of assault from the sea, as the southern barriers facing the Mediterranean were inferior to the rest of the fortifications. Kaminiates concluded that the lowness of the seawalls could be surmounted by archers positioned in the rigging of attacking vessels and thus had a tremendous height advantage over defenders manning Thessaloniki’s Mediterranean ramparts⁸⁹. [Fig. 27, 28, 29 e 30]

The Andalus-Arab invasion force (from Crete, ironically) did not have the advantage of surprise; the Byzantines had been alerted. Feverish efforts were made to improve the walls facing the sea. The inhabitants frantically erected tim-

88 Ioannes Kaminiates, *Eis την άλωσην της Θεσσαλονίκης (Ioannis Cameniatae, clerici ac capellani, de excidio Thessalonicensi narratio)*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), Bonnae, 182, 8, pp. 487-600; John Kaminiates, *De Expugnatione Thessalonicae*, Gertrud Böhlig (ed), *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae IV*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1973; John Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki* (translation, introduction, and notes by David Frendo and Athanasios Fotiou [eds]), Leiden, Brill, 2017.

89 Kaminiates, *Excidio*, 9, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), p. 500; J. Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, D. Frendo and A. Fotiou (eds), p. 31.

bered towers at the weaker points of the seawall. Tragically, the newly-arrived supervisor of defenses was thrown from his horse and gravely injured, thus he could not oversee the enhancement of Thessaloniki's fortifications. Assistance was rendered by the *strategos* of the Strymon, more accustomed to facing land-based threats from the direction of Bulgaria. However, he understood the value of missile weapons in defensive amphibious warfare and dispatched archers to stiffen Thessaloniki's preparations. These reinforcements, it was hoped, might stem the tide of the first wave of attack⁹⁰.

The Cretan Arab flotilla, capturing favorable winds, descended upon Thessaloniki at dawn. They struck their sails and paralleled the walls closely. Having identified the most vulnerable sections of the defensive architecture, the ships rowed into their assault, shouting and beating drums in anticipation of unnerving the defenders. Both sides exchanged projectiles. The Muslim assault commenced with shield-bearing swimmers pulling a ladder to the base of the wall as a hail of stones and arrows cascaded upon them. This barrage was more than the attackers could withstand, and assault troops were dashed from the ladder and pierced by Byzantine archers. Withdrawing, the assailant vessels stood off but continued launching arrows at Thessaloniki's battlements. Byzantine catapults kept most of the ships at bay but renewed amphibious assaults combining stone-throwing contraptions and assault ladders were attempted at the various bulwarks. These failed as miserably as the initial foray. Hostilities continued into the night. On the morrow the attack recommenced, and assault teams swarmed against sections of wall wherein gates were sealed. At one location, where according to Kaminiates, seven stone-throwing devices concentrating upon the perceived most vulnerable outer gate. When assault troops made headway in ascending their ladders, a daring counterattack riposted. Byzantines wielding spears leapt down from the ramparts and impaled the invaders. The shock of the repulse compelled the Arabs to abandon their ladder and fall back, assuming a defensive infantry formation⁹¹.

Blunted, the attacking force resolved to burn the outer gates, penetrate the outworks, and have their best archers pick off the defenders atop the battlements

90 Kaminiates, *Excidio*, 19-20, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), pp. 512-515; J. Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, D. Frenzo and A. Fotiou (eds), pp. 35-37.

91 Kaminiates, *Excidio*, 23-29, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), pp. 519-528; J. Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, D. Frenzo and A. Fotiou (eds), pp. 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53.



Fig. 30. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 26-2, f. 110ra. Another detailed rendering of the aftermath of the Muslim raid. Those not put to the sword were whisked off to slave markets. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

that would peer down and return fire. Carts were heaped with flammables (wood, brush, pitch and sulfur). Those combustibles were covered with overturned boats, concealing and protecting the incendiaries. These deadly devices were pushed up against the outer gates, despite withering fire from above, and ignited from beneath their carriages. The sappers, covering themselves with their shields, fell back and sheltered behind the archers. The carts burst into flame, and fire lapped at the wooden gates. The conflagrations intensified, and the iron-plating upon the portals became white hot. The timbers blazed and the gates collapsed. Alarmed, the inhabitants erected makeshift walls behind the threatened inner gates and brought up buckets of water to extinguish further fiery attempts on the gateways⁹².

⁹² Kaminiates, *Excidio*, 30-31, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), pp. 529-531; J. Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, D. Frenodo and A. Fotiou (eds), pp. 55, 57.

That night the attackers lashed together ships, raising their steering paddles aloft alongside their masts, and assembled platforms. The finest archers again went into action, raining down their shafts on Thessaloniki's defenders. These were seconded with catapults that heaved stones into the inner circuit of the defenses, along with incendiary projectiles fashioned from earthenware and filled with flammables. The defenders likewise had prepared ignitable weapons, including quicklime. When the paired ships, conjoined with cables and chains, moved their towers close to the walls, the combatants on both sides set about heaving stones and burning devices at each other. A pair of vessels bearing an aquatic turret found sufficiently deep water to butt up against the fortifications. The attackers swept the battlements with missile fire and a type of primitive flamethrower (propelled through the air via tubes), clearing a landing spot atop the wall. Sword-bearing Arabs leapt from the ship towers onto Thessaloniki's fortifications. Now the amphibious attackers were safe to disembark and torch the inner gates. Through the breach they surged, putting to the sword the unfortunates fallen from the parapet. The sack of the city commenced⁹³.

Thessaloniki's dogged (but ultimately futile) defensive amphibious measures make an appropriate bookend for the aggressive (and supremely successful) offensive amphibious operations of Nikephoros Phokas, discussed at the outset of this essay. Characteristics of amphibious warfare are evident in the capture of Thessaloniki. Despite significant weaknesses in shoreline security, a stout albeit spontaneous resistance nearly thwarted a well-organized amphibious assault. A testament to the quality of the Arab offensive is evident in terms of the impressive amount of material the attackers brought to bear: a portable coastal siege "train", a staggering number of arrows, incendiary devices, and specialized personnel. The probing of Thessaloniki's defenses, the tactical coordination displayed repeatedly, and the sheer tenacity of the storming of the city suggests that the Andalus-Arabs were as adept at amphibious warfare as were Byzantine marine and naval forces.

93 Kaminiates, *Excidio*, 32-35, B.G. Niebuhr (ed), pp. 532-535; J. Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, D. Frenzo and A. Fotiou (eds), pp. 57, 59, 61, 63.

Conclusion

Amphibious operations are precarious and complicated. Command must be virtually flawless. Though not the sole cause of the failure of the expeditions prior to 960-961, leadership determined success, with the caveat that the material requirements of the expedition were met. (2) Byzantium's institutional resilience, particularly in relation to logistics, is impressive, particularly factoring frequent civil wars and a primarily agriculturally based economy. The Empire's material capabilities were enhanced by the longevity of the Empire's existence, however, and further strengthened by its fundamentally conservative strategies (which minimized risk to scarce resources). To summarize, Byzantium mastered amphibious operations that suited the defensive strategy of the Empire. Command and supply were the twin pillars sustaining this art of war. The Empire thus produced a unique and paradigmatic amphibious warfare that contrasted with the strategic assumptions of Western Europe whilst simultaneously demonstrating at the very least an operational parity.

Specifically, we further posit these tentative conclusions: (a) amphibious warfare played a rather different kind of role, particularly strategically, in the Empire than was practiced in Western Europe due to strategic culture and geography. (b) Byzantium possessed remarkably more institutional continuity (and probably, expertise) than Western European states (my own field of early modern Britain did not witness the splendid successes on a scale that compares with the Cretan expedition of 960-961).⁹⁴ (c) Byzantine military science dovetailed amphibious operations with siegecraft and created viable strategies for the survival of the Empire. (d) A military aristocracy existed that contributed to, and revised, the aforementioned literature. (e) The longevity and continuity of Byzantine institutions did not greatly inhibit organizational reform, for example reconfiguration of the fleets and the contingents of warriors who sailed upon those vessels. (f) While the orthodox western military history, with its emphasis on empirically verifiable factual narrative, is foreign to Byzantine "war-writing", still a schematic of the Byzantine art of amphibious warfare exists, for example Leo the Deacon's embroidered account of the 960 landing upon Crete, with its detailed set-piece battle. And that art of war was considered universal in that it imitated

⁹⁴ M. Fissel, "English Amphibious Warfare, 1587-1656", in D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel, (eds), *Amphibious Warfare*, pp. 217-261.

the ancients, thus Byzantine historians could incorporate classical narratives and contemporary military manuals. (f) Byzantine (and Norman) perceptions of military history emerge from the extant visual evidence, such as the Madrid Skylitzes manuscript. Admittedly, the latter reveals much more about the court of Roger II of Sicily rather than Byzantine concepts. Still the Normans, expert in amphibious operations, document in the Skylitzes illustration exemplary (positively and negatively) evidence of amphibious arts in Byzantine history from 811 to 1057. Both cultures shared the firm conviction that amphibious warfare was, naturally, essential and integral to Mediterranean strategies. Leo the Deacon sets forth an orthodox model of Byzantine amphibious military science. The Madrid Skylitzes is an illuminated panorama that affirms the centrality of amphibious warfare in the Mediterranean. Johannes Kaminiates provides a rare if imperfect eyewitness case study of defensive amphibious warfare. (g) The development of a corps of marines furthered the development and maintenance of dedicated mobile contingents flexible enough to expedite Byzantine successes in major expeditions and raids. (h) And finally, the refinement and conduct of (affordable) raiding such as that which was performed at Damietta in 853 was adapted successfully when the Empire's strategic position mutated.

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Insights
Storia Militare Antica



Potenze nel Mare di Ponente¹

Una valutazione strategica sulla storia romana

di GIOVANNI BRIZZI

Quanti sono, nel mondo, i Mediterranei? Ha giustamente osservato Franco Cardini² che Mediterraneo «non è una parola, non è un nome o una definizione; è una non-definizione»; sicché, in fondo, Mediterranei sono un po' tutti quei mari — quello tra Cina e Giappone, quello tra il subcontinente indiano e il Corno d'Africa, così come l'universo raccolto a mezzaluna attorno al mare caraibico... — compresi fra terre nelle quali, non a caso, si sono sviluppate le grandi civiltà. Vero; e, però, sono davvero tutti uguali? Mi permetto, rispetto all'amico Franco, di suggerire un altro termine, greco questa volta, che, riferito ai primissimi viaggi per mare, sottolinea una ben precisa differenza: quello di *periplous*. Attraverso la presenza della preposizione iniziale *peri*, questa nozione sottintende il carattere circolare e il ritorno su sé stessa della navigazione per così dire compiuta e perfetta³, che si svolgeva idealmente seguendo la costa, percorsa fino a tornare su sé stessa, e sottolinea quindi la natura in fondo totalmente chiusa dello specchio di cui si parla. Nessuno degli altri mari possiede un carattere tanto raccolto ed esclusivo, avendo, tutti, almeno una dimensione proiettata sul fuori che, ben diversamente dagli angusti «riguardi» stabiliti da Ercole (e spalancati da lui: nel mito in origine il Mediterraneo era chiuso...), suggerisce almeno la possibilità di una fuga *in apertum* rispetto a questo «cortile meticcio» che null'altro è se non lo «stagno delle rane» di una celebre definizione platonica⁴.

Tutt'intorno al «continente liquido» di Braudel si accalcarono per secoli, fino

1 Pubblicato in inglese («Powers in the Western Mediterranean. A Strategic Assessment in Roma History») in Jeremy Black (Ed.), *The Practice of Strategy. A Global History*, Collana Fucina di Marte N. 17, Roma, Nadir Media, 2024, pp. 63-86.

2 CARDINI 2003.

3 BRIZZI 2003

4 Plato, *Phaid.* 109b.

a tempi recenti, gli inquilini delle sue sponde, uniti e ad un tempo divisi da rancori secolari, radicati nella memoria: «turchi, spagnoli, berberi, francesi, *moriscos* ebrei, mori, veneziani, genovesi, fiorentini, greci, dalmati, albanesi, rinnegati, corsari»⁵. Nel ‘nostro’ (prendo, malvolentieri, a prestito il termine, precisando che non ho sottintesi di sorta da proporre né voglio insinuare alcun ambiguo riferimento...) Mediterraneo le talassocrazie, quando vi furono, furono per lo più effimere e soprattutto parziali, sempre: quella bizantina, ad esempio, si vide limitata da quella araba, musulmana, e successivamente quella veneziana non poté mai liberarsi del tutto dell’ingombrante presenza genovese, mentre la Potenza spagnola dovette confrontarsi sempre in queste acque con la Mezzaluna e persino con il Leone di San Marco.

Così anche in antico, prima di Roma, a questo mare mancò a lungo un padrone unico. Più o meno duraturi, i poteri che se ne contesero il dominio furono infatti quasi sempre soltanto parziali. L’*archaiologia* di Tucideide, in effetti, registra una serie di ben dodici successive talassocrazie⁶, due soltanto delle quali riguardano il mondo al di fuori dell’Ellade, vale a dire la Persia e Cartagine. Quanto a Diodoro⁷, egli ne computa addirittura diciassette tra l’assedio di Troia e le guerre persiane; anche se il suo elenco, che dipende probabilmente dal cronografo del I secolo a.C. Castore di Rodi, è in genere ritenuto sprovvisto di un vero valore storico⁸. Pur se la lista delle talassocrazie compilata nel corso del v secolo è del tutto indipendente da quella della successione tra gli imperi, che oltretutto non prende mai in considerazione le potenze greche neppure dopo la loro vittoria contro i Persiani⁹, il mondo greco resta però legato alla nozione di *pontos*, il mare alto ed aperto dunque, con «la sua natura di passaggio, di tramite, di elemento che collega»¹⁰. Così, come è stato opportunamente osservato¹¹, «l’idea che il dominio del mare sia il presupposto fondamentale di ogni potenza politica non è solo e soltanto un’invenzione tucididea, dato che già in Erodoto (3,122) vi è nozione delle talassocrazie di Minosse e del greco Policrate».

5 PÉREZ-REVERTE 2009.

6 Thuc. i,4,

7 7,11.

8 ASHERI 2003, p.23.

9 LANDUCCI 2023, p.16.

10 BRIZZI 2003, p.45.

11 *Ibid.*

L'unica tra queste realtà della quale ci occuperemo brevemente qui prima di dedicarci a Roma sarà comunque quella di Cartagine, sul mare d'Occidente; uno specchio, quello del Tirreno, che vide imporsi per secoli il pur "riluttante"¹² imperialismo dei Punici e la loro invece consapevole talassocrazia, lo strumento fondamentale attraverso cui, secondo una logica non dissimile da quella dei Greci, essi cercarono di acquisire, gestire e conservare il loro dominio. Fondata secondo la tradizione ad opera di coloni provenienti da Tiro sullo scorcio del IX secolo, la città libica nacque non come testa di ponte verso l'ultimo Occidente o l'estremità del Maghreb, ruolo che appare riservato ai centri più antichi, Gades (Cadice), Lixus, Utica, né come punto di scambio o sede di una vera e propria agenzia commerciale, ma come scorta a protezione di un fascio di rotte vitali, lungo il tragitto che da Tiro portava ai giacimenti minerari scoperti nel meridione della Spagna

Con la perdita della libertà politica per la metropoli Tiro e per la Fenicia intera e, ad un tempo, con la scomparsa della civiltà di Tartessos, nel sud della penisola iberica, che aveva a lungo alimentato il commercio soprattutto dei metalli con l'Oriente, Cartagine cominciò a pensar di riunire sotto la propria egemonia le realtà sorelle d'Occidente, sostituendosi ad una madrepatria ormai remota e impotente¹³. Sottolinea questa situazione un passo, pur riferito ad un'età assai più tarda, di Aristotele: "Gli uomini... non si associano più semplicemente per formare un'alleanza difensiva contro ogni forma di ingiustizia e tanto meno soltanto in vista di scambi commerciali e di rapporti d'affari gli uni con gli altri; poiché, a questo proposito, i Tirreni e i Cartaginesi, così come tutti quei popoli che sono legati tra loro dai trattati di commercio sarebbero come cittadini di un solo Stato. Ora, è reale il fatto che presso di loro esistono, in verità, delle convenzioni che disciplinano le importazioni, dei trattati che proibiscono le ingiustizie reciproche e delle alleanze rese ufficiali per iscritto"¹⁴. Benché fosse lontana anni luce dai ben più solidi vincoli posti poi in essere da Roma per la sua federazione, e soprattutto dalla nascita di un'autentica *civitas* comune, questo sistema suggerisce tuttavia l'esistenza di un vero e proprio *commonwealth* punico.

Pur non priva di qualche significativa durezza (la città egemone intervenne a reprimere, a volte, non solo i violatori esterni, ma anche gli alleati e i tributari

12 MOSCATI 1972.

13 GRAS 2008;

14 *Polit.* 1280a

ribelli), l'unione dell'Occidente fenicio sotto Cartagine dovette essere agevolata dalle istanze difensive dei singoli centri, isolati all'interno di contesti non sempre amichevoli, e dall'opportunità del momento; e si realizzò, di norma senza eccessiva violenza, almeno tra le colonie fenicie, cercando a lungo rispondenze di carattere soprattutto mercantile. In quest'ambito, tuttavia, Cartagine puntò poi sovente a realizzare condizioni di monopolio: al sommo della potenza la città non esitò a controllare le sponde del Mediterraneo occidentale con una durezza talvolta spietata. Secondo Eratostene¹⁵ le navi che si accostavano troppo alla Sardegna o alle Colonne d'Ercole venivano colate a picco senza pietà; e l'espressione *Tyria maria*, passata in proverbio, è stata spiegata¹⁶ col fatto che *Tyro oriundi Poeni adeo potentes mari fuerunt ut omnibus mortalibus navigatio esset periculosa*.

Decisivo per esercitare una talassocrazia effettiva e consapevole su quello specchio d'acqua fu il controllo esercitato infine su una parte almeno delle due isole maggiori. Quanto alla Sardegna, essa era stata toccata secoli prima da un vasto processo di colonizzazione ad opera dei Fenici: a Sulki e Tharros, sorte nell'VIII secolo, erano seguite durante il secolo seguente Carales, Nora e Bithia e l'occupazione si era estesa poi alle coste settentrionali, dove era nata Olbia. L'isola, comunque, entrò da ultimo ormai definitivamente nell'orbita cartaginese. Se i resti di Antas evidenziano una profonda penetrazione ideologico-religiosa, i rinvenimenti di Monte Sirai documentano una crescente presenza militare che, al tempo della massima espansione di Cartagine, si estese fino a controllare di fatto gran parte dell'isola: l'archeologia ha rivelato una lunga e continua serie di fortezze che, dall'altezza di Padria alla zona di Muravera, tagliava la Sardegna in diagonale, assicurandone ai Punici il pieno controllo¹⁷. L'isola era preziosa di per sé: estesa e popolosa, fertilissima e ricca di miniere, soprattutto d'argento, fu a lungo forse il più importante tra i dominî oltremare di Cartagine; che, al fine di mantenerne il controllo, cercò di stabilire una forma accettabile di simbiosi con le diverse etnie che la popolavano. Ciò che sembra essere riuscito con le genti indigene: tra il V e il III secolo, durante un secondo momento coloniale, la Sardegna si aprì via via al flusso di genti provenienti dal Nord Africa e dirette verso regioni

15 frg. 1B 9 BERGER *ap.* Stabon. XVII, 1, 19, 802. Cfr. GSELL 1918; MEYER 1960⁵; CASSOLA 1962.

16 Fest., p. 484 L.

17 BARRECA 1978, pp.120-128; 1986, pp.71-72; 79-88.

non toccate dalla precedente colonizzazione¹⁸. Questa fase, più propriamente punica, fu capace di coinvolgere larga parte delle stesse élites nuragiche¹⁹; mentre da Cartagine finirono per distaccarsi, scontenti delle modalità del suo dominio, quasi tutti i nuclei fenici originari; decisione che avrebbe avuto pesanti riflessi sulla loro scelta di campo, sistematicamente favorevole ai Romani al momento dell'invasione dell'isola²⁰. La Sardegna costituì a lungo, comunque, sia uno dei perni per la gestione delle rotte nell'alto Tirreno, sia un antemurale contro l'ingerenza di chi, lungo quelle rotte, mirasse ad inserirsi; come i Focei o gli Etruschi (e i Romani...), che in momenti diversi ne furono accuratamente rimossi.

Contemporaneamente, Cartagine aveva cominciato via via a interessarsi della Sicilia. Era vitale, per la città, controllare almeno la punta occidentale dell'isola, fra Trapani e Capo Lilibeo; che, a neppure 150 chilometri dal Capo Bon, costituiva il secondo punto focale da cui vigilare lo stretto di Sicilia. A ciò si aggiunga il fatto che occupare almeno questa porzione dell'isola avrebbe permesso a Cartagine di chiudere circolarmente le sue rotte e di controllare l'insieme dei suoi traffici nel mare d'Occidente.

La loro penetrazione in Sicilia era cominciata, secondo Tucudide, in epoche remote, ancor prima che vi si impiantasse stabilmente la presenza greca; ed era continuata all'inizio nel segno di una certa prudenza: «a stabilirsi sulle coste di Sicilia vennero, parimenti, i Fenici. Essi si impadronirono di un certo numero di promontori e di isolotti situati nei pressi, per commerciare con i Siculi. Ma, quando i Greci cominciarono a sbarcare in gran numero nell'isola, evacuarono la maggior parte dei loro insediamenti e si raggrupparono a Mozia, Solunto e Palermo, in prossimità degli Elimi, sulla cui alleanza potevano contare»²¹.

In seguito però, con il crescere della potenza di Cartagine e con l'accentuarsi dei suoi interessi in Sicilia, l'incontro tra le due realtà era divenuto via via prima confronto, soprattutto con le città greche del centro e dell'est dell'isola, Agrigento e Siracusa in particolare, poi scontro vero e proprio. Si giunse così alla guerra. Sul campo di Imera le forze di Terillo, tiranno della città, e quelle dell'alleata Cartagine si opposero agli eserciti di Terone di Agrigento e soprattutto di Gelone

18 BONDÌ 1987, p.183 ss. (con bibliografia precedente a p.445).

19 BARRECA 1985, pp.308-312; BONDÌ 1987, p.189.

20 BRIZZI 1989.

21 Thuk. VI, 2, 6

di Siracusa, che puntava a raggiungere l'egemonia sull'intera isola. Erodoto²² prima, Diodoro Siculo²³ poi, propongono la versione di un episodio che, verificatosi, secondo loro, in un contemporaneamente alla vittoria ateniese di Salamina. Riesaminato di recente²⁴, questo sincronismo perfetto, che tende a configurare una sorta di proiezione occidentale dello scontro avvenuto ad oriente tra Greci e barbari Persiani, si è rivelato in realtà come un'elaborazione della propaganda politica siracusana.

Comunque sia, pur dopo la disastrosa sconfitta, che vide il suicidio rituale di Amilcare, comandante in capo dell'armata punica (e, più ancora, il diffondersi in proporzioni sempre più massicce dell'impiego di truppe mercenarie da parte di Cartagine)²⁵, non risulta che vi sia stata alcuna concessione alle potenze greche da parte dei Cartaginesi; i quali riuscirono invece, malgrado tutto, a mantenere le loro posizioni pagando un tributo di 2.000 talenti. Imilcone, figlio dell'Amilcare caduto ad Imera, riuscì addirittura a condurre contro i Dinomenidi, il clan di *tyrannoi* che avrebbe retto Siracusa fino al 460, alcune operazioni vittoriose.

Avendo ormai consolidato il suo controllo sulla Sicilia fenicia e in particolare su Mozia, Cartagine lasciò una certa autonomia alle città sorelle, cui consentì di continuare a batter moneta fino alla fine del IV secolo a.C., quando rese poi via via più stretto il proprio controllo. La città libica pareva comunque ormai in grado di prendere via via il controllo dell'isola. Le due grandi spedizioni del 409 e del 406 inflissero alla grecità siceliota guasti spaventosi, distruggendo Selinunte e quella Agrigento che Pindaro aveva definito la più bella delle città mortali, nonché Gela e Camarina al Sud, Imera a settentrione. Più in generale, se i successi riportati da Annibale di Giscone ottennero di veder confermata in un trattato del 405 l'egemonia punica sulla Sicilia occidentale, la vittoria riportata al Capo Kronion, forse presso Palermo, da Imilcone figlio di Magone costrinse Dionisio di Siracusa a cedere ai Punici un'ampia porzione di territorio, che comprendeva le greche Selinunte, Eraclea Minoa e Terme, accettando il confine del fiume Halykos. Il tiranno siracusano riprese la guerra; ma morì prima di poter cacciare

22 7, 366:

23 11, 20.

24 MELLITI 2016.

25 BRIZZI 1995.

i Punici dalla Sicilia²⁶. Con loro suo figlio stipulò un trattato di pace²⁷; e il limite che lasciava ai Punici quasi un terzo dell'isola fu poi confermato nel 373.

In Sicilia si era ormai fissata una ben precisa frontiera fisica, che delimitava i possedimenti dei Cartaginesi e quelli dei Greci. A partire dal trattato del 373 si posero verosimilmente le basi di una *epikráteia*, di un definitivo possesso territoriale punico nell'isola²⁸. Era un dominio che neppure le campagne prima del corinzio Timoleonte (344-337), poi quelle a lungo vittoriose di Agatocle (317-289), il quale giunse a minacciare la stessa Cartagine, riuscirono a scuotere: il trattato del 306 ratificò, infine, il controllo cartaginese su quei territori.

La strategia adottata nella Sicilia occidentale prevedeva di unire al possesso territoriale lo sfruttamento agricolo del suolo; che, affidato a gruppi di immigrati Libi, finì per conferire un assetto di tipo africano al paesaggio. Questo mentre sorgevano nuovi centri fortificati, come la seconda Solunto e la potente Lilibeo. Cartagine andava ormai consolidando e organizzando le sue dipendenze territoriali, non solo in Africa, ma anche in Sardegna e in Sicilia. Restava però, per quanto potentissima, una città-stato; e persisteva, limite grave alla sua forza, una struttura politica che sembra non aver previsto per nessuno che non ne fosse nativo l'accesso alla piena cittadinanza.

E Roma? La città tiberina rimase a lungo legata a Cartagine, e fu ammesa all'inizio ad affiancarne alcune iniziative. Il primo trattato con i Punici (509 a.C.) le consentì, sembra, di spingersi oltremare a rimorchio della Potenza libica. Se in un momento presumibilmente anteriore allo scorcio del IV secolo — data in cui scrive quel Teofrasto che riferisce la notizia — la *res publica* inviò, pare, una squadra di venticinque navi in Corsica²⁹, secondo Diodoro Siculo³⁰ nell'anno 378/7 (386 liviano) sempre Roma avrebbe tentato di fondare una colonia in Sardegna, forse la *Pheronìa polis* la cui traccia si conserva in un tardo toponimo tolemaico³¹. Promosse senza dubbio dapprima all'ombra della potenza marittima ceretana³², a sua volta amica di Cartagine, queste iniziative proseguirono poi con

26 Diod. 15, 73; Iust. 20, 5.

27 Diod. 16, 5.

28 MELLITI 2016.

29 Theophr., *Hist. plant.* 5, 8, 2.

30 15, 27, 4.

31 Ptol. 3, 3, 4.

32 HUMBERT 1978.

i Romani nella veste di protagonisti diretti³³; con limiti resi infine assai più stretti da uno Stato punico fattosi geloso in modo crescente in occasione del secondo trattato.

A spingere Roma a cercare un nuovo trattato fu il rinnovarsi della politica egemonica di Siracusa; che ricominciò gli attacchi verso il litorale etrusco e soprattutto laziale, protraendoli fino al momento critico del 349 varroniano. Malgrado Livio parli di uno scontro —dubbio, ma non impossibile— che si sarebbe verificato tra Galli e Greci alla foce del Tevere³⁴, l'azione di un'orda celtica, operante dalla zona dei Colli Albani (e quindi da basi latine...), era invece probabilmente coordinata con quella di una flotta siracusana che incrociava al largo: i Senoni della zona di Ancona erano, in effetti, dal 386 la *longa manus* di Siracusa, nel settore tra le Marche e il Lazio e non solo... Il bersaglio primo della minaccia non era tuttavia più Caere, come all'inizio del secolo, ma Roma stessa; che, risorta dalla distruzione subita proprio nel 386, aveva guadagnato un ruolo di preminenza nei confronti della stessa città etrusca. Fu in questa circostanza, nel 348, che Roma, in rotta con i Latini e bisognosa di aiuto contro la minaccia di un attacco dal mare ad opera della flotta greca (e incapace di battersi sul mare quanto i Greci erano imbelli in terraferma)³⁵ stipulò il secondo trattato con Cartagine. La vittoria frattanto riportata dal console del 345 a.C., L. Furio Camillo, contro i Galli eliminò il pericolo terrestre; e, poco dopo, l'azione intrapresa insieme in Sicilia dalle forze di Cartagine e del tiranno Iceta di Leontini costrinse anche la squadra navale siracusana a ritirarsi. Stretto in condizioni di necessità, questo secondo patto comportò, tuttavia, per Roma un significativo inasprimento delle clausole che ne limitavano movimenti e commercio in area punica: oltre alla Sardegna, era adesso sostanzialmente interdetta loro anche l'Africa, salvo Cartagine.

Roma andava però frattanto in modo sia pur esitante accostandosi al mare. L'anno 338, lo stesso assegnato per tradizione alla conclusione della grande guerra latina, avrebbe visto secondo alcuni anche la prima vittoria per mare sui Volsci e sugli stessi Latini³⁶: a riprova dell'evento si ricorda che *naves Antiatium partim in navalia Romae subductae, partim incensae, rostraque earum suggestum in*

33 TORELLI 1981; BRIZZI 1989.

34 Liv. 7, 25, 3-6.

35 Liv. 7, 26, 14: ...*nec illi* (= i Greci), *nec Romanus* (= Camillo) *mari bellator erat*.

36 PITASSI 2011.

*foro exstructum adornari placuit, rostraque id templum appellatum*³⁷. Ma come erano stati presi i rostri collocati poi a decorare nel Foro la tribuna degli oratori? Come è stato osservato³⁸, il primo trionfo navale ricordato nei Fasti è quello di Caio Duilio; e la natura del tutto nuova dell'evento ha conferito alla celebrazione della vittoria a Mylae caratteri assolutamente particolari³⁹. Nessun accenno di sorta si riscontra invece nei cronisti; i quali, nel caso di Menio, non registrano in alcun modo una vittoria navale. Non potrebbe darsi che i Romani «simply managed the matter...by land»⁴⁰, e che i rostri poi affissi al *suggestum* nel foro siano stati strappati a navi catturate nel porto di Anzio al termine di una fortunata operazione terrestre? Tale sarebbe stato poi sempre anche in seguito, in effetti, il loro orientamento prevalente...

Del resto, se certo una tappa ancor più importante sulla stessa via segnò l'anno 326, con la conquista di Neapolis, anche in questo caso la flotta romana brilla per la sua assenza⁴¹. Consegnata al console Publio Filone, che l'assedava, dai demarchi Carilao e Ninio, *principes civitatis*⁴² ed esponenti di un'aristocrazia locale favorevole a Roma, la greca Neapolis offrì alla *res publica* una serie inestimabile di vantaggi sul mare. Base saldissima e di per sé quasi inespugnabile, in posizione eccellente per controllare il sud, Napoli assicurava strutture portuali importanti, una grande cantieristica, marinai esperti; sicché, in cambio dell'impegno a pattugliare la costa, ebbe garantita la piena autonomia, l'integrità territoriale, il mantenimento della propria moneta, l'*asylum* per gli esuli da Roma

Nasce ora per la prima volta un sistema ben definito di logistica navale, e quella che era stata finora, per così dire, solo una sezione galleggiante, imbarcata, dell'esercito sembra assumere da questo momento in poi una fisionomia sua propria. Vengono istituiti, nel 311, i *duumviri navales*⁴³, incaricati di occuparsi di un gruppo di navi operative in permanenza e dunque da seguire costantemente anche negli inattivi mesi invernali, assicurandone la necessaria manutenzione. E' il primo vero e proprio nucleo fisso della marina da guerra, per la *res publica*; che

37 Liv. 8, 14, 12.

38 THIEL 1954.

39 HINARD 2000.

40 THIEL 1954, p.8.

41 THIEL 1954.

42 Liv. 8, 25, 9.

43 Liv.9, 30, 4.

a rafforzarsi ulteriormente dovette forse esser stimolata, in seguito, prima dal disastro cui andò incontro la squadra inviata (282 a.C.) nelle acque di Taranto⁴⁴, poi dalla ‘visita di cortesia’, al tempo della guerra con Pirro (278 a.C.), dell’ammiraglio punico Magone, il quale esibì nelle acque di Ostia una flotta di ben centoventi navi da guerra⁴⁵. A impressionare il senato furono certo le pressioni che l’ospite «era in grado di esercitare, e in effetti esercitò sui successivi negoziati»⁴⁶; ma intervenne fors’anche il ricordo di quanto fosse costato, in termini politici, l’aver avuto bisogno per l’addietro del sostegno navale cartaginese. Certo, è consentito dubitare della notizia polibiana circa la quinquereme punica che, arenata, fu presa e ‘copiata’ dai Romani⁴⁷. Forse tratto da Fabio Pittore, l’episodio potrebbe in realtà ricalcarne, retrodatandolo, un altro, posteriore e decisivo per comprendere la svolta favorevole a Roma durante l’ultima fase del primo conflitto: l’incagliarsi di una modernissima tetrera sotto Lilibeo che permise la cattura della nave del violatore di blocco Annibale Rodio (evento su cui torneremo...), contribuendo di lì a poco a cambiare definitivamente le sorti della guerra. Anche se certo eccessiva pare l’affermazione⁴⁸ secondo cui per costruire le navi di Duilio bastarono soltanto sessanta giorni, controllando oltre ai cantieri di Ostia anche quelli di Neapolis e Taranto, Roma disponeva ormai senz’altro delle cognizioni (ivi compresa la tecnica della costruzione prefabbricata) e degli impianti dei *socii navales* italoti, necessari ad accelerare al massimo i tempi di lavoro e i ritmi di produzione della *res publica*.

Rispetto a Cartagine la sua particolare struttura politica assicurava a Roma un inestimabile vantaggio. Composte inizialmente di cittadini, a quanto si dice piuttosto fieri dei loro meriti bellici al punto da portare tanti anelli quante erano le campagne militari cui avevano partecipato⁴⁹, le armate puniche erano state via via integrate da unità di alleati e tributari; e poi, in misura sempre maggiore, da mercenari. Contingenti di questo tipo erano presenti fino dalla seconda metà del

44 Dion. Hal. 19, 4, 2; App., *Samn.* 7; Cass. Dio frg. 39, 5; Zon. 8, 2; Oros. 4, 1, 1.

45 Iust. 18, 2, 6; Val. Max. 3, 17, 10.

46 PITASSI 2011, p.98.

47 Pol. 1, 20, 7-21, 3. Cfr. anche Enn., frgg. 225, 226, 227, 230, 231 VAHLEN²; Aur. Vict., *de vir. illustr.* 37, 4 (quinquereme davvero straordinaria, se dovessimo credere che Appio Claudio vi stipasse un’intera legione durante il passaggio in Sicilia).

48 Plin., *nh* 16, 192; Flor. 1, 18, 7; Oros. 4, 7, 8.

49 Arist., *Pol.* 7,2,6.

VI secolo, quando Magone li arruolò in gran numero, forse pensando che truppe straniere fossero meglio disposte a secondarne le personali ambizioni di potere. E certamente forti unità di mercenari presero parte alla battaglia di Imera (480 a.C.), quando l'armata di Amilcare schierò ad un tempo, oltre ai cittadini e ai sudditi di Cartagine, Iberi, Elisici e Liguri⁵⁰.

La via era tracciata: come suole accadere negli Stati più prosperi, l'arruolamento per mercede andò costantemente aumentando, fino a che, a partire dal III secolo, la presenza oltremare dei cittadini si ridusse agli alti ufficiali soltanto. A coartare gli equilibri interni a Cartagine, limitandone gravemente le possibilità strategiche, era una particolare mentalità. Il vincolo, diretto e strettissimo, che esisteva da sempre nelle città-stato greche e a Roma tra diritti politici e doveri militari, per cui le assemblee popolari inquadravano di fatto l'esercito civico chiamato ad esprimersi politicamente, fu un fatto a lungo ignoto a Cartagine, e comunque sostanzialmente escluso fu l'impiego di milizie civiche nelle terre oltremare⁵¹.

Ciò comportava un diverso atteggiamento verso la guerra, la cui causa prima va forse cercata nella spiccata vocazione mercantile della città libica: così, è stato detto, «l'avventura militare non era tra quelle che seducano un popolo votato piuttosto alla navigazione e al commercio»⁵²; e l'attività bellica perseguita per il semplice gusto dell'azzardo sembra essere stata a lungo fuori dalle corde dei Punici. Cartagine si augurava intimamente che le guerre «fossero di breve durata, e si rassegnava, senza darsene troppo pensiero, a concluderle con una sconfitta quando la fortuna non l'aveva favorita [...]. Una sola città, per quanto popolosa, non poteva fornire senza esaurirsi gli eserciti di cui questa politica di conquiste avrebbe avuto bisogno. Era impossibile strappare i cittadini alla loro famiglia, al loro mestiere, ai loro interessi, per esporre o sacrificare la loro vita in spedizioni frequenti e lontane. Avrebbe voluto dire distruggere il commercio e l'industria che si intendeva sviluppare aprendo loro dei nuovi mercati».

Era una tendenza che rendeva la guerra «ancillare» rispetto all'economia; e, come si è detto, condizionava l'imperialismo di Cartagine fino a renderlo esitante

⁵⁰ Per tutti: BRIZZI 1995.

⁵¹ BRIZZI 1995.

⁵² LAUNEY 1949, I, p. 541 (trad. mia).

e pronto alla rinuncia⁵³. Tale particolarissima debolezza, politica ben prima che militare, avrebbe fatalmente condizionato la città africana fin dal primo scontro con Roma.

Con la straordinaria creazione di un primo embrione di diritto, incentrato sull'accettazione del «prestatuale» valore di *fides* e del complesso di *iura*, di regole, che se ne strutturavano, norme consuetudinarie condivise da un numero vieppiù crescente di *clan* gentilizi, Roma aveva saputo coagulare le intese tra le aristocrazie dell'Italia soprattutto tirrenica. Lo Stato romano che ne era sorto aveva esteso la *civitas* sia deducendo tribù civiche su territori confiscati al nemico, sia soprattutto elaborando e diffondendo la forma del *municipium sine suffragio*; e aveva così accresciuto enormemente il serbatoio dei cittadini reclutabili nelle legioni. Si era contemporaneamente garantito la fedeltà di élites che spedivano loro esponenti a raggiungere i fasci in Roma stessa e ad essere inseriti come *consortes imperii*, partecipi del potere, nel senato della *res publica*. Se allora in Sicilia questa forma di simbiosi non era ovviamente ancora in alcun modo concepibile, la solidità e l'affidabilità dei valori proposti da Roma fece tuttavia pendere abitualmente dalla sua parte, durante il primo conflitto con Cartagine, le scelte dei Sicelioti⁵⁴.

Quanto ai *socii* italici, i *foedera* con Roma, relativi a momenti e a condizioni politiche diverse, non potevano ovviamente rispondere ad una categoria omogenea. Così, ve n'erano alcuni che, sia per le condizioni particolarmente favorevoli stabilite dall'Urbe nei confronti degli interlocutori, sia per ragioni propagandistiche o diplomatiche, erano definiti *aequa*, come il trattato con Camerino, quello con Eraclea, forse quello con Napoli. Quasi sempre però tra le clausole aveva grande importanza quella con cui Roma imponeva al *partner* di avere gli stessi alleati e gli stessi nemici della *res publica*; e, con ciò stesso, ne decretava lo stato di inferiorità. Conclusi con una medesima Potenza, Roma, attorno alla quale, come è stato detto (Lübtow 1955), gli staterelli italici si ponevano «come i pianeti rispetto al sole», questi *foedera* costituivano la struttura che, definita abitualmente confederazione italica, era in effetti «merely an agglomeration of bilateral treaties of various form between Rome and individual Italian tribes and cities»⁵⁵. Pur

53 MOSCATI 1972; LORETO 2001.

54 VACANTI 2012.

55 BADIAN 1958, p.142.

difformi l'uno dall'altro, i rapporti tra la *res publica* e i suoi alleati italici rispondevano quindi in sostanza ad un'unica categoria, quella di *societas-symmachia*, fissata di norma mediante un *foedus* perpetuo; una condizione che imponeva la costante fornitura a Roma di contingenti in armi, aumentabili in caso di necessità. I *foedera* rappresentavano dunque la fonte dei relativi obblighi militari⁵⁶; obblighi che, pare per la prima volta alla vigilia della grande calata gallica del 225, furono codificati tramite la *formula togatorum*. Concepita forse semplicemente, dapprima, come l'albo ufficiale delle comunità italiche legate a Roma da un *foedus*, tale lista si trasformò in seguito in una vera e propria matricola militare, che computava, secondo la cifra, pur incompleta e imprecisa fornita da Polibio⁵⁷, le forze —un totale immenso— eventualmente mobilitabili popolo per popolo in caso di *tumultus*, di leva globale, e l'entità massima dei contingenti da fornire a Roma previsti per ciascuno degli alleati. A parte e problematica resta la categoria dei cosiddetti *socii navales*, che pure operarono ed ebbero gran peso nella guerra per la Sicilia⁵⁸, sopportando probabilmente buona parte delle perdite in mare.

Quando, a partire dal 261, fu costretta ad affrontare, nelle acque circostanti l'isola, la più forte ed esperta tra le marine militari del tempo, la *res publica* superava dunque Cartagine sia per la sua mentalità, sia per le immense risorse potenziali di cui poteva disporre. Se la neonata *armada* romana al comando del console Caio Duilio riportò già al primo vero impatto nelle acque di Mylae-Milazzo (260) un'importante vittoria, probabilmente agevolata dalla presunzione dei Punici, che «pieni di disprezzo per l'inesperienza dei Romani, mossero tutti con la prora al nemico, come se andassero a fare un sicuro bottino e non valesse neppure la pena di schierarsi a battaglia»⁵⁹, più incerto e comunque non risolutivo fu l'esito di un secondo scontro presso Tindari⁶⁰. Ma a stupire è soprattutto il terzo, immenso fatto d'arme verificatosi quattro anni dopo (256). Nelle acque di fronte al capo Ecnomo, presso Finziade (Licata), si affrontarono le due flotte più numerose e potenti che avessero mai solcato il Mediterraneo, forse non solo quello d'Occidente.

56 ILARI 1974; BRIZZI 2016.

57 Pol. 2, 24. Cfr. BRUNT 1971.

58 Per tutti ILARI 1974; BRIZZI 2016, con bibliografia.

59 Pol. 1, 23. Altre fonti, con qualche differenza riguardo alle perdite: Eutr. 2, 20, 2; Oros. 2, 7, 10. Di età imperiale, l'iscrizione della colonna rostrata di Duilio (CIL I 195 = DESSAU, ILS 65), è però verosimilmente copia di un testo coevo all'evento.

60 BADIAN 1958, p.142.

Spropositate appaiono, certo, le cifre fornite da Polibio⁶¹, che parla di 330 navi romane contro le 350 di Cartagine e di una forza imbarcata di 300 mila uomini in tutto. Ma, anche volendo logicamente ridimensionare questo dato, come hanno fatto, secondo me, a ragione Tarn⁶² e soprattutto De Sanctis⁶³, a 230 e 250 navi rispettivamente, si parla comunque di uno scontro epocale. Tentare un computo esatto degli uomini impegnati pare impossibile, dovendosi rispondere in via preliminare ad una serie di quesiti spesso irrisolvibili. Quanta parte delle rispettive armate era composta di quinqueremi-pentère, le navi-simbolo della prima guerra punica, e quanta di triremi o di naviglio minore di altro tipo? A quanto ammontava l'equipaggio normale di una quinquereme? Computando a 300-320 uomini la dotazione normale di una pentera punica, credo che una valutazione, non implausibile anche se largamente aleatoria, delle forze messe in campo allora dalla città africana possa oscillare tra i 65 e gli 80 mila uomini, anche se orientativamente propendo verso la cifra più bassa. Qualcosa in più, forse, per la flotta della *res publica*, anche se su un minor numero di navi. La tattica dell'abbordaggio prescelta dai Romani (e la sagoma più larga e massiccia dei loro scafi...) ⁶⁴ prevedeva 'ufficialmente', infatti, 120 fanti di marina per ogni vascello di primo rango. Anche se, verosimilmente, avendo progettato di far sbarcare Regolo in Africa, i consoli dovevano averne già preso a bordo le truppe, legioni e *socii*, e dovevano secondo logica averle ripartite tra le navi da battaglia, adibendole all'opportuno compito di fanteria imbarcata, gli equipaggi romani erano, di norma, comunque più numerosi. Si può dunque concordare in sostanza con De Sanctis quando afferma che quella di Ecnomo fu «una delle maggiori e più accanite battaglie che la storia ricordi, alla quale parteciparono forse centocinquantamila, certo non meno di centomila uomini»⁶⁵. Più sicure sono le cifre della vittoria romana, che parlano di trenta vascelli punici affondati e, dato assolutamente significativo, di sessantaquattro catturati, evidentemente per abbordaggio, contro la perdita di ventiquattro navi romane soltanto⁶⁶

61 Pol. 1, 25, 9. Con cifre simili seppur non identiche, App., *Lib.* 3; Oros. 4, 7, 6. Cfr. anche Diod. 23, 15, 4.

62 TARN 1907; TARN 1930.

63 DE SANCTIS 1967², p. 137 e note 98 e 101.

64 VACANTI 2012.

65 DE SANCTIS 1967², p. 139.

66 Pol. 1, 28, 14. Cfr. Eutr. 2, 21, 1; Oros, 4, 7, 6,

Malgrado si fosse dotata, e certo non senza successo, di una forte marina da guerra, Roma restava però *in interiore corde* una potenza essenzialmente terrestre. Lo fu all'inizio, quando orientò le modalità del conflitto mirando a trasformare le battaglie sul mare in scontri ravvicinati tra fanterie imbarcate; e, pur a lungo (e forse inopinatamente...) vittoriosa sul mare, pur dopo i trionfi di Mylae ed Ecnomo, a quella sua vocazione tornò decisamente in seguito. Al primo venir meno di certezze evidentemente non consolidate appieno, la *res publica* parve infatti colta da uno scorcamento per lei inconsueto. Il *discrimen* fu costituito dal disastro di Drepana⁶⁷, nel 249, prima e in fondo unica vera sconfitta navale subita durante quel conflitto. Qui, come è stato detto, «la lentezza delle navi romane», che negli scontri precedenti «non aveva impedito la vittoria», divenne «fattore determinante della disfatta»⁶⁸: in questo caso, come rileva Polibio⁶⁹, se pur influirono anche altri fattori, come l'accorta manovra dell'ammiraglio punico Aderbale e l'impreparazione delle ciurme, reclutate in fretta⁷⁰, a rivelarsi decisiva fu soprattutto la pesantezza e la lentezza delle imbarcazioni romane⁷¹.

Ora alla sprovveduta inesperienza di ammiragli che, apparentemente ottimi comandanti, erano però maldestri come marinai, capaci di vanificare le loro vittorie incappando spesso —come a Camarina (255) o a Capo Palinuro (253)— in spaventosi fortunali che distrussero flotte intere, si era venuta aggiungendo, preannunciata dalle ripetute violazioni del blocco su Lilibeo⁷², la palese superiorità di un naviglio punico più snello e veloce, in grado quindi quasi sempre di eludere gli abordaggi dei più lenti e massicci scafi romani, rendendo inutile l'azione dei corvi, che non poteva più costituire una sorpresa. Potendo tornare alle predilette manovre di *periplous* e di *diekplous* in cui eccelleva, la perizia marinara cartaginese ridiventava determinante.

A marcare una seconda e decisiva svolta nell'andamento del conflitto è la vicenda di Annibale Rodio. La velocissima nave di questo privato punico si dimostrò infatti capace dapprima di infrangere ripetutamente il blocco romano attorno a Lilibeo e di entrare e uscire dal porto della piazza assediata, irridendo quasi

67 Pol. 1, 49-51.

68 VACANTI 2012, p.77.

69 1, 51, 6.

70 Pol. 1, 49, 1-2.

71 Pol. 1, 51, 3-10. VACANTI 2012.

72 BRIZZI 2014.

per sfida la caccia delle squadre romane⁷³ e tenendo testa «con una sola nave a tutta la flotta nemica»⁷⁴; e, peggio, con i suoi successi incoraggiò ben presto la pericolosa emulazione di altri violatori, le cui iniziative rischiarono addirittura di compromettere l'assedio⁷⁵. A catturare il corsaro i Romani riuscirono infine solo grazie ad un colpo di fortuna. Un vascello punico «di mirabile fattura»⁷⁶ si arenò su un basso fondale; e poté essere recuperato e riarmato, imbarcando fanti di marina. Vistosi inseguito da una nave che evidentemente conosceva e la cui velocità aveva motivo di temere⁷⁷, Annibale tentò la fuga; ma invano. Raggiunto, venne sopraffatto e catturato; e la sua nave, come quella già allestita dai Romani contro di lui, servì poi ad intercettare quanti cercassero nuovamente di entrare in Lilibeo⁷⁸. Più ancora, di quella tecnologia nautica si avvalese infine per risorgere la marina romana⁷⁹, da ultimo definitivamente vittoriosa alle Egadi.

L'esemplare capace di irridere da solo l'intera flotta romana non era dunque evidentemente l'unico, se è vero che, impiegando il vascello catturato, gli inseguitori poterono disporre di una maneggevolezza e di una velocità almeno pari alle sue, così da riuscire a raggiungerlo. In quest'ultimo caso si trattava, per esplicita testimonianza di Polibio⁸⁰, di una tetrera, così come probabilmente una tetrera era la nave del Rodio: se fosse stata una quinquereme, infatti, difficilmente avrebbe potuto, data la maggiore altezza dello scafo, essere abbordata da una nave dalle murate molto più basse⁸¹. Il soprannome Rodio di cui si fregiò l'audace capitano punico ha fatto inoltre pensare che rodia fosse, appunto, la tecnologia navale che, per un sia pur breve periodo, restituì a Cartagine la supremazia sul mare⁸². Grazie al doppio ordine remiero inclinato, detto *alla sensile*, la tetrera rodia non superava i quattro metri di larghezza: era dunque più snella e filante di qualunque nave romana, ed era molto più veloce poiché i due vogatori per

73 Pol. 1, 46, 4-13.

74 Pol. 1, 46, 12.

75 Pol. 1, 47, 3.

76 Pol. 1, 47, 5.

77 Pol. 1, 47, 6.

78 Pol. 1, 47, 11.

79 Pol. 1, 59, 8.

80 Pol. 1, 47, 5.

81 Liv. 30, 25, 5-6. Cfr. MORRISON 1996; VACANTI 2012.

82 BASCH 1987; MORRISON 1996; BONINO 2006 citati in VACANTI 2012.

remo le conferivano al contempo potenza e spunto maggiore⁸³. Un'altra arma nuova a disposizione di questo tipo di naviglio avrebbe potuto esser poi il rostro abbassato, anch'esso adottato dai Rodii⁸⁴, capace di colpire al di sotto della linea di galleggiamento e che avrebbe potenziato ulteriormente la risorta capacità cartaginese nelle manovre di speronamento. Comunque sia, dopo Drepana si assiste «ad un sostanziale», anche se momentaneo, «collasso del sistema navale romano»⁸⁵. Quando la flotta di Giunio Pullo, che già stava evitando il contatto con le navi del Punico Cartalone, fu distrutta da una nuova, tremenda tempesta⁸⁶, che risparmiò secondo Diodoro⁸⁷ due navi soltanto (249/48), Roma, stremata, decise di rinunciare a condurre operazioni navali su larga scala⁸⁸; e conservò in apparenza solo una flotta a protezione del litorale italico⁸⁹, concedendo a privati singoli scafi perché conducessero una guerra da corsa⁹⁰, la sola attività offensiva di cui sentisse allora all'altezza.

Meno di sette anni intercorrono tra il momentaneo ritirarsi della *res publica* dal mare e il definitivo trionfo di Lutazio Catulo nelle acque delle Egadi; sicché siamo indotti a chiederci cosa mai abbia potuto imprimere alla guerra una nuova svolta, tanto repentina e radicale. Per ricostruire l'ultimo episodio della guerra possiamo contare soprattutto su Polibio⁹¹; assai meno valgono infatti i brevi resoconti di Diodoro⁹² ed Eutropio⁹³, che riporta solo la consistenza delle opposte flotte, mentre del tutto superficiali sono i cenni di Zonara⁹⁴ ed Orosio⁹⁵.

Lutazio Catulo giunse in Sicilia alla testa di un'*armada* imponente e in gran parte nuova —Polibio parla di duecento quinqueremi di ultima progettazione⁹⁶,

83 BONINO 2006.

84 WALBANK 1967.

85 VACANTI 2012.

86 Diod. 24, 1, 7; Pol. 1, 53-54, 8.

87 24, 1, 9.

88 Pol. 1, 55, 1-2.

89 LORETO 2007, p.73, n.114.

90 Zon. 8, 16, 3.

91 Pol. 1, 59-61

92 Diod. 24, 11, 1; 3.

93 Eutr. 2, 27, 2.

94 Zon. 8, 17, 1-2.

95 4, 10.

96 Pol.1, 59, 8.

mentre Diodoro attribuisce al console trecento «navi grandi» e ben settecento navi da trasporto⁹⁷— al cui allestimento avevano contribuito finanziatori privati, che dovevano essere rimborsati dallo Stato a vittoria ottenuta⁹⁸. La momentanea inerzia dei Cartaginesi, che solo sul far della primavera successiva riuscirono a raccogliere e ad inviare una flotta adeguata, permise inoltre a Catulo di alloggiare convenientemente le sue navi tra il porto di Drepana e le cale attorno a Lilibeo⁹⁹ e di addestrare a dovere gli equipaggi.

Assai meno preparati erano nella circostanza, ufficiali e ciurme agli ordini di Annone. Quando, dopo aver fatto scalo nell' «Isola Sacra»¹⁰⁰, questi prese il mare diretto verso il monte Erice, base allora di Amilcare Barca, per rifornirlo e sbarazzarsi dei mercantili che scortava¹⁰¹, Catulo, conoscendo le intenzioni dell'avversario, mosse ad intercettarlo e riuscì a coglierlo di sorpresa *in aperto* quando ancora il Punico aveva al seguito, ad impacciarlo, il naviglio mercantile. Lo scontro si concluse con una completa vittoria romana. Totali in fondo analoghi tra loro riportano Polibio¹⁰², che parla di cinquanta vascelli punici colati a picco e di settanta catturati; e Diodoro. A dire del Siculo, che annota anche le perdite di parte romana —ben ottanta navi, trenta distrutte e cinquanta danneggiate¹⁰³— la flotta di Annone ebbe venti vascelli affondati «con tutti gli uomini» e ne perdettero un totale di centodiciassette¹⁰⁴.

Quali furono i fattori che rovesciarono l'andamento della guerra? Della battaglia alle Egadi si è detto che si trattò, in sostanza, di un'imboscata ben riuscita¹⁰⁵; e credo che questo aspetto possa ben difficilmente sottovalutarsi, poiché le navi puniche, sorprese durante il tragitto, furono costrette a dividersi tra il compito di proteggere i mercantili sotto scorta e la necessità di difendere sé stesse contro attaccanti pienamente liberi, invece, di manovrare.

97 Diod. 24, 11, 1.

98 GNOLI 2012.

99 Pol. 1, 59, 9.

100 Favignana o Levanzo: GULLETTA 2005.

101 Benché, forse, non per imbarcare le truppe di Amilcare, che avrebbero dovuto, per questo, abbandonare una base preziosa: Pol. 1, 60, 7-8.

102 Pol. 1, 61, 6

103 Diod. 24, 11, 1 La sua fonte è quanto meno sospetta, trattandosi del filopunico Filino

104 *Ibid.*

105 Così Loreto 2007, citato da Vacanti 2012, che in parte lo confuta.

Per qualche tempo obsoleti e dunque gravemente vulnerabili, i vascelli romani erano probabilmente, ora, il prodotto di una tecnologia del tutto nuova, adattata «sul modello della nave del Rodio»¹⁰⁶. Per le duecento navi di ultimo impianto i Romani avevano, secondo Polibio¹⁰⁷, «cambiato il sistema di costruzione», lasciando «tutto ciò che era pesante, salvo quanto occorreva per una battaglia navale». Queste navi però erano quinqueremi, non quadriremi; quinqueremi che sono state non a torto definite superquinqueremi¹⁰⁸ perché ricavate adattando la tecnologia della quadrireme rodia¹⁰⁹, ma in modo da dar vita ad «uno scafo di nuova concezione», che fruiwa di soluzioni tratte e poi adattate «da un altro genere di nave»¹¹⁰. Era nato così un vascello più potente e ad un tempo più veloce del suo modello. A soccorrere la *res publica* favorendo la realizzazione di un simile capolavoro nautico intervenne forse la scienza e la cantieristica siracusana (Archimede?)¹¹¹ Potrebbe essere.

Ad ogni modo lo stato d'animo ultimo ora si capovolve: erano i Punici, adesso, che, pur tuttora «per ardore e orgoglio...pronti a combattere...», sul piano razionale non riuscivano a trovare soluzioni»; in particolare «non erano...più in grado di rifornire le truppe in Sicilia, poiché i nemici dominavano il mare»¹¹². Sarebbe stata dunque la nuova, inaffrontabile tecnologia romana a disanimare Cartagine, generando tra i suoi cittadini il senso di impotenza che li spinse infine alla rinuncia? Di nuovo, credo senz'altro che questo fattore abbia almeno in parte concorso alla vittoria della *res publica*.

E, però, è certamente vero, altresì, che non tutta la flotta punica era andata perduta¹¹³ e che, comunque, l'efficiente tecnologia marinara della città africana non era stata minimamente intaccata: sia pure in nome del suo particolare accanimento, dell'avviso che si sarebbe potuto e dovuto proseguire la lotta, *Siciliam nimis celeri desperatione concessam*¹¹⁴, era, tra l'altro, Amilcare Barca. Credo

106 Pol.1, 59, 8.

107 Pol. 1, 61, 3.

108 LORETO 2007.

109 BONINO 2006A; 2006B.

110 VACANTI 2012.

111 VACANTI 2012.

112 Pol. 1, 62, 1-2.

113 LORETO 2001.

114 Liv. 21, 1, 5.

quindi che per la rinuncia punica vada individuata almeno un'ulteriore concausa, e forse addirittura la più importante. Partendo dal numero esiguo di prigionieri cartaginesi riportato da Diodoro¹¹⁵, dieci mila in tutto, Thiel¹¹⁶ ritiene che l'esito dello scontro alle Egadi sia stato determinato dal fatto che le navi puniche erano «undermanned as well as ill-manned». A lui si è replicato, non senza fondamento, che, mentre egli «partiva dal presupposto che le navi puniche fossero penterì... è probabile che una parte non trascurabile della flotta cartaginese fosse costituita dalle nuove quadriremi rodie»¹¹⁷. Possibile senz'altro anche questo, pur se i diecimila Cartaginesi catturati di cui parla la fonte greca parrebbero comunque un bottino piuttosto esiguo per quasi un centinaio di navi catturate. Non vi è dubbio però — e ad essere categorico, in proposito, è questa volta proprio Polibio¹¹⁸ — che esse fossero nella circostanza «ill-manned», sicché si impone un quesito: questa scarsa efficienza era dovuta ad una semplice mancanza di addestramento o va invece imputata al fatto che Cartagine aveva ormai raschiato il barile, riducendo il vino alla feccia? Dunque la superiorità romana non si traduceva, o almeno non si traduceva soltanto in un salto tecnologico, rispetto al quale lo squilibrio, pur al momento grave, non era del tutto incolmabile, bensì anche su quello demografico?

A certificare quanto detto partiamo da un dato, discutibile quanto si vuole ma indubbiamente assai significativo: le cifre fornite da Polibio per quanto riguarda i costi della guerra. Secondo lo storico acheo a fronte di cinquecento vascelli perduti dai Punici sarebbero ben settecento quelli romani distrutti dal nemico in combattimento e soprattutto affondati a causa dei ripetuti, disastrosi fortuali in cui incapparono le flotte della *res publica*; e per l'uno e per l'altro dei contendenti si tratterebbe sempre di quinquere mi o penterè¹¹⁹. Certo, il bilancio è stato rivisto in dettaglio da numerosi autori, a cominciare da De Sanctis¹²⁰, Thiel¹²¹ e Walbank¹²²; ma le cifre proposte oscillano comunque tra le 600 e le 694 navi per la *res publica*, tra le 450 e le 490 per la *polis* africana. Cifre davvero imponenti.

115 Diod.24, 11, 1.

116 THIEL 1954.

117 VACANTI 2012.

118 Pol. 1, 61, 3-4.

119 Pol. 1, 63, 6.

120 DE SANCTIS 1967².

121 THIEL 1954.

122 WALBANK 1957.

Qui sta, secondo me, la chiave del problema; che ci rinvia ad un ulteriore diverso computo, quello del prezzo, altissimo, pagato in vite umane dai due contendenti. Certo, l'entità reale di queste perdite è, al solito, destinata a rimanere per noi discutibile e comunque aleatoria. Sappiamo che, malgrado l'asserto di Polibio, da ambo le parti non tutte le unità schierate erano quinqueremi; ignoriamo però assolutamente proporzioni e composizione del naviglio minore. Del pari ignota è la quota di quanti, tra i marinai, colata a picco la loro nave, perirono tra i flutti; o, e la situazione non muta poi di molto nei riflessi sull'andamento del conflitto, fatti prigionieri, non rientrarono in patria fino almeno alla fine della guerra, rendendosi comunque indisponibili per la continuazione delle ostilità. È certo però che il livello delle perdite dovette essere molto alto: gli scontri in mare sono ancor oggi particolarmente crudeli, e assai più dovevano esserlo in antico, quando i mezzi di scampo sulle navi da battaglia erano quasi inesistenti. Ma, anche a fissare in via del tutto ipotetica il numero delle perdite al quaranta per cento solamente nell'organico delle flotte e computando il resto tra il naviglio minore; anche ammettendo per assurdo che il cinquanta per cento degli equipaggi abbia potuto in qualche modo scampare, giungeremmo comunque alla stima, del tutto prudente, di 75/80 mila vittime romane contro oltre 50 mila di parte punica. Ha dunque ragione chi¹²³ sostiene che «the difficult appears to be in assembling the crews rather in building the ships».

A ciò va aggiunto un altro, ineliminabile fattore. «Di estremo interesse — si è detto¹²⁴ — è la constatazione, tramandataci dalle antiche fonti, che, mentre gli eserciti cartaginesi erano composti di mercenari assoldati nelle varie regioni del Mediterraneo, gli equipaggi delle navi erano invece costituiti esclusivamente da cittadini cartaginesi». Certo gravoso anche per Roma, che rispetto al nemico avrebbe subito addirittura il quaranta per cento di perdite in più, il sacrificio era, per la *res publica*, in fondo sopportabile: nel suo caso il costo in vite umane ricadde in larga e forse prevalente misura su quei *socii* che fornivano un contributo importante sia per la formazione delle ciurme, sia per la composizione delle fanterie imbarcate. Ben diverso era il caso di Cartagine: la città africana restava una *polis* e, in nome del presupposto fondante che abbiamo ricordato sopra, le riuscì da ultimo impossibile sostenere uno sforzo del genere.

123 WALBANK I, 1957.

124 BARTOLONI 1988; cfr. BARTOLONI 1995.

A commento e ad un tempo a stimolo per un'ulteriore riflessione sia consentito citare integralmente un paragrafo, esplicito, di Polibio:

«Ma allora, ci si chiederà, per quale ragione oggi, quando sono ormai definitivamente i signori del mondo e sono cento volte più potenti di quanto fossero allora, i Romani sono incapaci di fornire equipaggi per tante navi e di prendere il mare con flotte tanto poderose? Le ragioni di questo stato di cose appariranno chiaramente quando verremo a trattare della costituzione romana»¹²⁵

La risposta dello storico acheo non è giunta fino a noi; sicché si può essere tentati, forse non senza una certa esibizione di superbia intellettuale, di proporre qui una del tutto personale noi stessi. Come è stato acutamente osservato¹²⁶, «at the very outset of his history P. was awake to signs of deterioration at Rome after her acquisition of world dominion, i.e. after 167». Deterioramento solo politico, tuttavia. Polibio non sarebbe giunto a conoscere né la risposta data dall'Urbe circa settant'anni dopo il suo tempo al fenomeno dei pirati, né il trionfo ultimo della marineria occidentale sulle mastodontiche flotte d'Oriente al tempo di Azio (31 a.C.).

Della soverchiante potenza navale esibita un secolo prima contro Cartagine al tempo di Polibio Roma aveva conservato ormai appena quanto le bastava per mantenere immutato il suo predominio durante la seconda guerra punica, quando, fors'anche perché ormai conscio dell'inferiorità dimostratasi incolmabile sul mare, Annibale aveva scelto di aggredirla via terra e di minarne le strutture in Italia, fondandosi sulla sua inarrivabile supremazia tattica e sulle assai più agevolmente sacrificabili truppe mercenarie. La *res publica* aveva potuto poi sopraffare agevolmente, con l'aiuto dei Rodii, la marina siriana. Ma in realtà, già all'indomani del secondo e ancor più spaventoso incubo punico, il tema dominante nel dibattito che l'aveva spinto ad agire era divenuto un altro, quello del *metus*, della paura, che aveva profondamente influenzato l'intera linea geopolitica romana. Al tempo dello scontro con Filippo V di Macedonia, prospettato come inevitabile, il dilemma proposto dal console Sulpicio Galba ai comizi riguardava la scelta del teatro delle operazioni, se avere, cioè, di nuovo guerra e nemico in casa, con tutte le inevitabili conseguenze che ciò avrebbe comportato, o esportare offensiva e

125 Pol. 1, 64, 1-2.

126 WALBANK 1957.

rischi in campo avverso¹²⁷. Pur senza fondamento, lo spettro di una nuova invasione dell'Italia venne agitato con successo da Galba per primo proprio ai danni del sovrano macedone; e forse in questo caso «l'essere al sicuro dalle aggressioni...», che era certo «l'aspirazione sincera dei più numerosi», costituì però anche «il manto sotto cui i meno numerosi e più potenti coprono agli altri e in parte forse a sé la propria bramosia di guerra»¹²⁸. Indiscutibile rimane però la presenza esplicita e la spinta, potente (e non solo sulle masse...) del *metus*, della paura; che fu poi esasperata oltre ogni limite, fino alla «psychose antiochique», dallo sbarco delle armi siriane in Grecia (e, forse soprattutto, dalla presenza di Annibale alla corte del sovrano seleucide...), fino a costituire l'argomento decisivo capace di trascinare Roma in vere e proprie guerre preventive contro le principali potenze ellenistiche.

In questa temperie la supremazia marittima servì soprattutto a liberare le acque orientali dalle flotte altrui, favorendo il passaggio oltremare delle legioni; che portarono poi perfettamente a termine in proprio l'azione principale, trionfando *in acie* a Cinoscefale e a Magnesia. Al «cauchemar des coalitions»¹²⁹, al sospetto di eventuali alleanze tra Macedonia e Siria, al costante timore di sbarchi ostili in Italia si rispose allora sia disarmando le flotte altrui —di Cartagine e della Macedonia, della Siria e (non senza ingratitudine...) di fatto persino dei Rodii— sia, da ultimo, instaurando contro la sopravvivente minaccia (?) di Filippo e Perseo una serie di colonie dall'asse della via Emilia e dando vita al primo vero confine politico per terra dell'Italia, quello appenninico¹³⁰, con la nascita di una struttura che anticipava, nelle sue diverse componenti, i futuri *limites* dell'impero. Dunque, di nuovo, la sempre più pronunciata capacità della *res publica* di risolvere i problemi proposti dal mare con operazioni «by land»?

Pur necessariamente supportata da una squadra navale importante, necessaria a bloccare la città africana dal mare, la pluriennale campagna che portò infine alla distruzione di Cartagine (146) si articolò una volta ancora su operazioni prevalentemente terrestri. Intrapresa poco avanti la metà del secondo secolo, la creazione da parte dei Punici del grande porto militare rotondo il cui invaso è ancor oggi

127 Liv. 31, 7

128 DE SANCTIS 1969².

129 CARCOPINO 1934; WILL 1972; BRIZZI 1997; ZECCHINI 2011.

130 BRIZZI 1979; BRIZZI 2008; BRIZZI 2009b; BRIZZI 2020

ben visibile sulla costa tunisina aveva inevitabilmente creato in Roma sospetto e apprensione. In violazione aperta rispetto ai limiti imposti dal trattato del 201, il quale concedeva a Cartagine il possesso di non oltre dieci navi da battaglia, l'impianto nascente era progettato per ospitarne ben duecentoventi secondo Apiano¹³¹, non meno di centosettanta secondo il riscontro dell'archeologia; ed era destinato inevitabilmente a suscitare il dubbio che la sua nascita preludesse al risorgere di una talassocrazia punica. Il ridestarsi di quella paura produsse allora la più celebrata, isterica e terribile delle reazioni: Roma medicò il *metus Punicus* decidendo di reprimere senza pietà il sogno cartaginese e avviando la più crudele delle guerre preventive, terminata con la distruzione della stessa Cartagine¹³².

Si potrebbe dir dunque che l'unica grande talassocrazia antica nel mare di Ponente, animata però sempre da un imperialismo irrisolto o «riluttante», venne prima sconfitta, poi travolta e infine inesorabilmente cancellata da una nemica il cui imperialismo fu forse inizialmente difensivo, ma sempre spaventosamente risoluto, mentre la sua vocazione marittima rimaneva costantemente irrisolta? Dopo avere distrutto Cartagine e avere scongiurato l'ultima possibile minaccia proveniente dal mare, Roma ripiombò in quella che Thiel ha mirabilmente definito la sua «traditional and almost innate maritime lethargy», adagiandosi in un torpore durante il quale consentì ai pirati mediterranei, utili fornitori per lei di manodopera servile, di dominare di fatto, sostanzialmente indisturbati, circa l'intero Mediterraneo per ottanta anni circa. Quando decise di risvegliarsi, la «bella dormiente» prima cancellò in tempi rapidissimi, con Pompeo, il fenomeno piratico; poi umiliò con Marco Agrippa ad Azio le elefantiache flotte orientali, chiuse infine a doppia mandata, con la conquista dell'Egitto, il cerchio delle terre attorno al mare interno. Come già nel caso di Anzio e dei Volsci, ma ora su scala ecumenica, Roma aveva acquisito il controllo dell'intero «periplo» mediterraneo, unificando quell'*orbis* di cui andò poi sempre fiera.

Come fanno, a Roma, i marinai? In realtà, in queste pagine alla domanda non ho assolutamente risposto. Si potrebbe chiederlo forse solo a Marco Agrippa¹³³, l'unico uomo di mare che, a quanto ne so, sia stato pubblicamente effigiato in sembiante di Nettuno. Da parte mia ho cercato di rispondere ad un'altra domanda:

131 App., *Lib.* 16, 459.

132 BRIZZI-CAIRO 2014.

133 RODDAZ 1984.

come fanno a Roma gli ammiragli? Vincono sul mare, ma talvolta rovinano tutto proprio nella veste per loro scomoda di marinai. Fino al momento in cui l'Urbe, che si è data una flotta per davvero solo in presenza di momenti e sfide epocali come il confronto con Cartagine e con i pirati, rovescia l'idea unitaria quale l'hanno concepita i Greci: il mare resta, certo, *pontos*, tramite e collegamento anche per loro, ma ad unire veramente il tutto è il cerchio ideale, l'anello che incastona il Mediterraneo, rendendolo un mare davvero interamente compreso «tra le terre» e, rispetto ad altri lontani Mediterranei, un mare senza vere alternative.

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Suggestions
Storia Militare Antica



Insights into the Writer Vegetius

By S. H. ROSENBAUM

ABSTRACT. This paper, “*Insights into the writer Vegetius*” aims to introduce to fellow scholars provocative information hidden within a Late Roman military treatise. It has long been known by commentators and translators that the writer Vegetius composed his most famous work, *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, in the shadow of some recent catastrophic defeat of imperial arms. The inability to properly identify this battle has led to much erroneous speculation regarding the date of this document, the purpose for which it was originally written, the origins of the writer himself, and the anonymous emperor to whom it was later sent. Answer to these problems were found rather inadvertently during research into an unrelated subject. The following observations, having been refined over the course of a decade or more, rely on close comparison of the parent material in the original Latin to numerous geographical, linguistic and literary cognates. Conclusions are based on rational weight of evidence. While one matching factor can be rightly ignored, and multiple similarities dismissed with sound arguments, dozens of verifiable parallels demand the attention of the most incredulous historian. Much work remains to be done. Review and further investigation into the sources cited by individuals on a personal basis is strongly encouraged. The insights offered by this paper towards our dim understanding of events in the fifth century A.D. are, as of yet, unmeasured. It would seem that the events recorded by Vegetius have an additional hidden potential. Like a dark age “Rosetta stone”, other obscure historical material, once undecipherable, can perhaps be identified and placed into proper context. Such a unusual suggestion, that long sought information has lain quietly within the *Epitoma*, will hopefully stimulate no small growth of curiosity.

The work of Flavius Publius Vegetius Renatus known as *Epitoma Rei Militaris* suffers from neglect disproportionate to its outstanding value. To the students of the Late Roman empire, one province in particular, Vegetius’ writings offer a singular view into hitherto forgotten military events crucial to our comprehension of this period in European history. It is not the purpose of this paper to re-evaluate the sources or methodology used by Vegeti-

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us,¹ rather to bring into context data either unknown or disregarded by previous scholars. This insightful material has the incredible potential to greatly illuminate certain words, phrases, and passages that have been, until now, considered incongruous or even irrelevant. Historical investigation at its best is a collective effort. It is not the purpose of this work to disassemble, but build upon in a traditional fashion, all the efforts of former commentators. By doing so, every aspect of this subject will hopefully benefit.

Tragic Indicators of a Forgotten Battle

In the first three books of the *Epitoma* of Vegetius there is a background element, a substratum that has not gone unnoticed. Scholars such as Milner agree that, due to multiple and repetitious indicators, it is certain that Vegetius writes in the aftermath of some catastrophic defeat.² That this observation is intuitively correct will be shown presently.

The preface aside,³ it is clear that Vegetius had personal impressions of this disaster foremost in his mind when his composition, book 1, was initiated. The first pertinent statement occurs almost immediately at I. 1: “*rudis et indocta multitudo exposita semper ad caedem.*” Vegetius starts not with the beginning of a chain of events, but with a tragic outcome. Note that a “rude and untrained multitude” does not match what we know of the crack regiments of the elite eastern field army which took the field at Adrianople under Valens. Another quip at I. 9, speaks of a “divided and disordered” army, followed closely in chapter 10 by the first of numerous references to “rivers not always traversed by bridges” necessitating among the unskilled “swimming ability” for the sake of their own lives, I.

1 W. Goffart “*Rome’s fall and after*”, London 1989, p. 47. Mr. Goffart recognized that “the positive approach towards the book became a hunt for its sources”; admirable work concerning transmission also being accomplished in this respect.

2 N. P. Milner “*Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*”, Liverpool University Press 1993, introduction xxvi. Milner notices this “repetition of wider subjects” but passes it off as Vegetius’ editorial method; admitting later at p. 84, note 1, “V. was writing in the aftermath of some disastrous pitched battle”, assuming Adrianople. See note 5, p. 90, on irregularities that both Schenk and Milner could not account for.

3 Scholars agree that book IV as well as the various prefaces were written far later; the obscure Eutropius has been rightly suggested by the sagacious Mr. Charles to be the original consolidator of all four works. See; M. B. Charles, “*Vegetius in context, etc.*” Stuttgart 2007, p. 37.

10, fin. After this chapter there are two statements, I. 13 fin., and I. 20: “*fugam*” and “*fuga*”; i.e. precipitous flight.

Next is chapter 21-5 on camp building, awkwardly fitted into the book, as noted by Milner⁴ but actually fitting the mental chronology from which Vegetius was recollecting. Indeed one finds Vegetius elaborating on camps in a most peculiar manner that begins to demonstrate a pattern.⁵ The dangers of an unfortified camp, its vulnerability to surprise attack especially at night, its poor choice of location in terms of sanitation and drainage, and the necessity of adequate provisions against unforeseen contingencies, all seem to indicate personally witnessed episodes recalled with great detail. It can be argued at this point that these allusions, to which Vegetius obviously expects his readers to understand, are far better evidence for familiarity than a war story told at full length. There are not just one or several allusions, but very, very many. Vegetius briefly refers back, at I. 26, to the midst of the unknown final battle, “*Nam et constipati perdunt, etc.*” before touching on serious issues that occurred at the outset of the nameless campaign at II. 2: “*Auxiliares cum ducuntur ad proelium, ex diversis locis, etc.*” The proceeding section puts these events in order by way of emphasizing what *should* have happened. The mention of a *legion* being involved, and in the present tense, is striking.⁶

Is Vegetius really speaking of an actual event he witnessed? Suspicions are at this point, just that. A relative sequence is needed to prove the veracity of all tentative observations. Vegetius provides the needed review, an abridged expose’, at III. 1:

“For a greater multitude is subject to more mishaps. On marches it is always slower because of its size; a longer column often suffers ambush even by small numbers; in broken country and at river crossings it is often caught in a trap as a result of delays caused by the baggage train. Also it is an enormous labor to collect fodder for large numbers of animals and horses. Difficulties with the grain supply, to be avoided on any expedition, afflict larger armies sooner. For however thoroughly rations may have

4 N. P. Milner “*Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*”, p. 23 note 1. Vegetius inserted these chapters on camp-building for the subject of the undefended camp weighed heavily on his mind.

5 Heed the strange comment at III. 10, “*Respondebitur: Si fuisset ista cautela, nihil nocturni aut diurni superuentus hostium nocere potuissent.*” This resembles in its precise legal wording transcripts from a military court of inquiry, further adapted by Vegetius.

6 Vegetius tells that this *legio* had not campaigned for some time; its veterans were like fresh draftees.

been prepared, they run out more quickly, the more they are distributed to. Finally water itself sometimes hardly suffices for too large a number. And if for some reason the battle line should turn tail, more casualties must inevitable occur to more men, and those who escape, once terrified, thereafter fear battle.”

In the following chapters, Vegetius elaborates on these same issues in a first hand manner; see III. 1, “never in camp should federates outnumber our countrymen”⁷ and III. 2, “pestilential marshes”, “disease” and “deprivation”, exactly as in book I. These comments have every hallmark of recalled memories (dwelling, as memories tend to do, upon the experiences of bodily suffering). These concepts will be explored fully in an upcoming paper, “*Identifying the Battle Behind The Epitoma Rei Militaris*”.

Events of the Campaign as outlined by Vegetius

Even if there were nothing further to base these deductions upon, (which is not the case), from this point in the *Epitoma* one can offer a brief reconstruction. It seems some emergency arose. An expeditionary army was assembled of a *legio*⁸ and all too numerous federate *auxilia*, and with untrained draftees a campaign was launched into rough highlands, a place of forests, moors and bridge-less rivers.

The “multitude” tarried too long, wasting away at a diseased camp well into winter. sudden night attack on this unfenced, soggy camp was followed by an unplanned retreat in adverse weather. During this retreat the crossing of swollen rivers was accomplished with a great many drowning. Despite the perilous fording, a delayed baggage train led to the disordered column being ambushed at another river crossing. There was a final battle with signals ignored and unit confusion; a collapsed fighting line left survivors surrounded. The expedition ended in a total rout and tragic massacre. Once these features are recognized, they appear throughout the *Epitoma* with a regularity that renders further cataloging pointless.

Several points must now be made clear. This campaign does not in its particu-

7 Annotated English translations are personal efforts, the result of some discrepancy. The rest are based mostly on Milner’s translations.

8 This legion (or two) was probably of the late type, comprising of regiments of 1,000 men, created by the division of the original parent unit and capable of simultaneous deployments on multiple fronts.

lars resemble, *in any way*, that of Adrianople in A.D. 378.⁹ In fact, no documented battle during the Roman Empire, at any time period or in any province, matches the vivid descriptions of Vegetius, *except for one*. Although most experts in the field of Roman studies quite likely have never heard of this particular battle, its location has never been forgotten and can be visited today.¹⁰ Similarities between it and the *Epitoma* material are too frequent and precise, immediately ruling out the possibility of coincidence. The fever-ridden camp, the debilitating stay and tragic retreat, actually allow similar comments to be observed in other respected sources.¹¹

This battle and its relationship to the works of Vegetius has remained concealed for a host of reasons; ambiguity of date, obscurity in location and literature, and stubborn conceptual discrepancies that preclude objective investigation. Accurate comprehension of past events must change with new information.¹² With that in mind, it is to *Ayrshire, Scotland* one must now turn.

The Clades Caeliana

Local traditions in Ayrshire, which are reinforced by colorful place-names, excerpts in early Scottish histories and actual battlefield artifacts, all tell of a long forgotten conflict in this area.¹³ A certain Coilus, leader of the northern

9 Vegetius does in fact mention Adrianople at III. 11, in the context of marching fatigue, but does not use the details of this campaign for his works. The battle of the Frigidus River in AD 394 is also spoken of at III. 14; it is indicatively, told from the standpoint of *the defeated*.

10 While the creation of unique place-names does not automatically indicate a battlefield, dozens of such names increases the probability of a factual historic event lurking in the background.

11 Gildas "*De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*" section 19: "*Statuitur ad haec in edito arcis acies, segnis ad pugnam, inhabilis ad fugam, trememntibus praecordiis inepta, quae diebus ac noctibus stupido sedili marcebat etc.*" Note both *tela*, (used in the context of archery cf. of Veg. III. 8), and *fratrum pignorumque*, poetically describing the federate auxiliaries.

12 Newfound evidence of forgotten battles, such as the *Harzhorn* in Germany, can rather painfully force scholars to reconsider the existing historical record.

13 Place-names are preserved in cartographic resources, the works of Boece and Fordun are extant but spurned while the existence of the "Caprington Horn", found on the battlefield, has been ignored. A war horn with an intriguing metallic composition, a twin resides at the Bonn *Rheinisches Landesmuseum*, and a similar mouthpiece can be found at the *Scottish National Museum*, Edinburgh.

Britons, stirred strife between the Picts and Scots.¹⁴ (compare to III. 10: “*Inter hostes discordiarum serere causas sapientis est Ducis*”). The effort miscarried¹⁵ and resulted in a general rising, III. 1: “*infinita multitudo ex gentibus ferocissimis rebellasset*”, in a place where the “provinces had been extended”, III. 10: “*propagantur prouinciae*.”¹⁶ A “raw and untrained horde” (I. 1) comprised of at least one legion and auxiliaries then gathered to retaliate: “*Sed cum legiones auxilia uel equites ex diuersis aduenerint locis*” (III. 9). Vegetius makes clear that problems with discipline arose immediately, before the army even set out; II. 2: “*peruenire qui discrepant, antequam dimicent*.” and III. 4: “*Interdum mouet tumultum ex diuersis locis collectus exercitus etc.*”

Despite these inauspicious setbacks, the campaign began. From the outset it seems the leadership strategy of the Picts and Scots was to deny this army provender as well as opportunity for decisive action,¹⁷ and this receives confirmation at III. 9:

“For sometimes the enemy hopes that the campaign can be ended quickly, and if it becomes long-drawn out, is either reduced by hunger, called back to his own country by his men’s homesickness, or through doing nothing significant is compelled to leave in despair. Then very many desert, exhausted by effort and weariness, some betray others and some surrender themselves since loyalty is less common in adversity and in such case an army which was numerous on taking the field insensibly dwindles away to nothing.”

This expedition of the Britons and their allies encamped close by the lower reaches of the River Doon,¹⁸ south of the modern town of Ayr.

It can be surmised based on this passage at III. 4, “*Seu mare siue fluuius uic-*

14 Hector Boece “*Historia gentis Scotorum*” 1575, folio edited By Dana F. Sutton, I. 27. “(Coilus) delayed the project for the better part of two years, seeing if perhaps fortune would give the Britons a suitable opportunity to fight, if either nation (Pict or Scot) would commit some wrong against the other.”

15 Boece I. 28; “At length the Britons’ responsibility was brought to light”.

16 More details on this subject may be found in another forthcoming paper by S. H. Rosenbaum: “*The Location of Valentia, the Fifth British province*”. Note Vegetius at III. 6; “provinces in which the emergency occurred”.

17 Boece I. 28; “(Fergus) commanded his soldiers that the Britons should be worn down by delay and lack of supplies”.

18 Boece I. 28; “(Coilus) and his army encamped on the bank of a stream known as Duneaton Water, sending men to scour the region and bring back any Scot or Pict they found for punishment.”

inusest sedibus aestiuo tempore ad natandum cogendi sunt omnes” that the sea was close at hand; a fact confirmed by scattered artifacts.¹⁹

The Camp at Cambusdoon

The numerous statements of Vegetius offer rich details concerning this camp. It was too small for the army and its train, (I. 22. fin.) it was located on low ground, too close to bad water, and too far away from good water. Certain comments indicate there was a hill or ridge near, putting the camp within bowshot; see I. 22 and III. 8: “*ne ex superioribus locis missa ab hostibus in eum tela preueniant.*” This data, along with place names, should allow the ready discovery and positive identification of this camp on the ground.²⁰

Vegetius warns of the predominance of auxiliaries in camp, and even hints that there was dissent there as well; see III. 4: “*si qui turbulenti uel seditiosi sunt milites*” and “*segregatos a castris.*” The situation deteriorated steadily at this camp, (III. 2, III. 8) and as autumn turned to winter, severe shortages of food, fodder, firewood and clothing began to arise.

The sentence located at III. 3 implies that the Picts and Scots were as equally hungry: “*Frequenter autem necessitas geminatur et obsidio saepe fit longior, quam putaris, cum aduersarii etiam ipsi esurientes circumsidere non desinant quos fame sperant esse uincendos.*” Vegetius seems to indicate that at this time

19 “*Royal commission on the Ancient and Historical monuments of Scotland*” NSA Vol. 5, p. 40, archaeological notes, NS31NW93219 to 3322; Throughout the whole of the area along the coast from the River Ayr to the Doon, “Roman and British places of sepulture are found, with Roman armor, swords, lances, daggers and pieces of mail, and *brazen camp vessels*, intermixed with urns of rude baked clay, hatchet and arrowheads, and other implements of warfare used by the Caledonians” (NSA 1845 A. Cuthill). One may expect that funerary remains are to be found in the vicinity of a diseased camp. The site was believed to be haunted. See “Tam’O Shanter’s ride”.

20 Samuel Lewis, “*A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland*” 1846 Vol. I, p. 88, “There are evident traces of the old Roman road leading from Galloway into the country of Ayr, and passing within a half a mile of the town, and other portions of it are still in tolerable preservation. A tract on the coast, called “*Battle Fields*”, is supposed to be the scene of a fierce conflict between the natives and the Romans, both Roman and British implements of war, urns of baked clay, and numerous other relics of Roman antiquity, have been found at this place.” Burials would have taken place away from camp along the road; the camp itself could not have been too far away, placenames here include “Cunning Park”, “Gear Holm”, “Wright field”, “North Park” and “*Cambusdoon*”.

desertions became a problem, III. 9: “*Tum fracti labore et taedio plurimi deserunt, aliquanti produnt, aliquandi se tradunt, quia aduersis rebus rarior fides est et nudari incipit qui copiosus aduenerat.*” The final and unendurable crisis, the flooding of the low lying camp as winter rains set in, served to convince the leadership of the necessity of retreat (III. 8).

Scottish sources are somewhat silent about the flooding,²¹ but speak of a force of five thousand Britons, “*accustomed to moving about in steep country*” sent against their nearby highland refuge. This was possibly a diversion by a crack British light infantry regiment to cover the retreat. Vegetius speaks of it at III. 22:

*“Some would retreat with the army by night along routes they had reconnoitered; when the enemy realized at dawn, they were unable to overtake those who had gone ahead. Of course, the light, nimble soldiery was sent beforehand to the hills, in order that at short notice the entire army could withdraw, and if the enemy wished to pursue, they were routed by the light troops who had occupied the place earlier.”*²²

In any case, according to the Coilsfield story, the evacuation plan failed. The Picts and Scots resolved to strike first, at the now vulnerable and unsuspecting camp.

The Night Attack on the Camp

It was decided at council²³ that Fergus and his Scots should make an attack on the camp during the “first vigil of the night”, and create a commotion. The Picts were to cross the River Doon at a ford, hike through “impassable stony places” and fall upon the rear of the camp. This description of the assault may be quite accurate, but it is suspected, by the nature of the terrain, to be in reverse order.²⁴ Imagine the turmoil as shelters and tents were set alight, men were cut

21 Local tradition does relate that the Coyle Water was so flooded that Coilus could only cross it far to the south at a place called to this day, “The King’s Steps”.

22 Milner had translation difficulties at this section; indeed it makes no sense outside the context of the Ayrshire campaign. It is with great effort that the similarity of these two separate passages can be dismissed as mere coincidence.

23 Boece I. 29; “Thus varying advice was offered on all sides, and in the end they decided that Fergus and his soldiers should attack the Britons’ watchmen during the first vigil of the night”.

24 To attack the rear of a camp with its back to the sea, approach must be logically made from along the shore; rocky and difficult stretches of which actually exist just to the southwest, at the “Heads of Ayr”.

down, horses and draft animals escaping, whole units deserting, the uncontrollable havoc. The successful *night* attack on the *unfortified* camp, plus the ensuing chaotic fighting in the darkness, is what was most memorable. It obviously left an impression on Vegetius *and* the federate auxiliaries. Their unique recollections allow this disastrous campaign to be traced in other potentially overlooked sources.²⁵ Frequent statements concerning a night attack on an un-fenced camp was the suspicious clue that led me to the initial analysis of the disaster-exempla found within the *Epitoma*.

The Army Retreats

The references of Vegetius, combined with place-names in Ayrshire, indicate that the army of Coilus did not perish at the ruined camp. That dubious honor would go to a rolling landscape about nine miles away that is traditionally known as *Coilsfield*.²⁶ The sequence of events leading to the final dissolution is actually described in some detail by a vernacular poem:

*“The Britones marchet, tuo days before the field, to Marrok’s mote for
easement and beild;
Afore the night they waughtet liquor fine, Lyke filthie beasts lying like
drunken swine.
Quhen Fergus heare they were in sutch a pley, Doune fra Craigsbian he
came right suddenly,
And took his will upon his traitorous foes, quhair thousands lay skatteret
like windlestroes.
Coylus he fled unto the river Doune, quher drownet were many yt thair did
runn,
And northward held quhil they cam till a muir, and thair was stayet be Scots
that on him fuir.
Fergus he followet and came right heastilie, quhair Coyll was killet and*

25 Saxo Grammaticus, “*Gesta Danorum*” Editio Princeps I. 8. 7: “*Itaque Danis in extremas desperationis angustias compulsis, nocte concubia sine auctore tale castris carmen insonuit.*” These passages tell the whole story from the auxiliaries point of view: an inauspicious start, a desultory campaign, a starving army, omens during the first watch telling the *auxilia* to flee, nocturnal battle, slaughter during flight and a final disastrous battle. A forthcoming paper, “*Insular Source Material in the Gesta Danorum*” will treat this difficult subject and further define my observations.

26 It means the field or battleground of Coilus. For more on this subject of place-names, see “*Scottish Place-Names*”, W. F. H. Nicolaisen, Edinburgh 2001, and G. T. Flom, “*Scandinavian Influence on Southern Lowland Scotch*”, New York, 1900.

his hole armie..”.²⁷

While the initial movements and preparations may have been planned,²⁸ the decision to retreat in the night, in the aftermath of the attack, was possibly spontaneous.²⁹ In any event, Vegetius makes clear that secrecy was not kept concerning this withdrawal, and the route was not properly reconnoitered or trusted guides procured; chapter six in book III concerns this march exclusively.

Immediately following this is a chapter on crossing rivers, allowing one to place the various comments on swimming in their proper context. Earlier comments by Vegetius regarding the flooded camp and “*Saepe repentinis imbribus uel niuibus solent exundare torrentes*” at I. 10 show not only meteorological correlations³⁰ but point to the downstream, and wider and deeper, reaches of the River Ayr being at the time impassable.³¹

This idea is backed by local lore that maintains the army of Coilus retreated south and east from the Doon-side camp, down and around the aptly named “Craigs of Coyle” and crossed the Water of Coyle well upstream from the hamlet of Coylton. The Ayr was eventually crossed somewhere as well, for when the final battle ensued the column was on the north bank of said river. Etymological evidence may well implicate the crossing at the location called *Stair*. Setting aside the supposed “Stuarts of Ayr” contraction, the M.E word *steir* comes to mind. It can mean disturbance, tumult, confusion, etc. Apt remarks for what must have been the chaotic crossing of a swollen river by a panicked army, being

27 This excerpt originates from a lost collection of poems and writings by Ayr schoolmaster John Bonar, c. 1631. It is greatly desired that the full text be found, as it preserves details remembered by untold generations of locals concerning the whole affair.

28 Vegetius indicates that preparations to retreat were underway, most certainly after the camp flooded.

29 It could be argued, based on diverse comments, that the superstitious and disgruntled Germanic auxiliaries, immediately following, (or during?) the night attack on the camp, were the first to bolt.

30 The same storms that made the rivers impassable and flooded the low-lying camp, if seasonal, could offer aid in determining closely the time of year. Vegetius merely indicates that autumn passed and winter had begun.

31 William Scott Douglas “*In Ayrshire: a descriptive picture etc.*,” 1874 p. 8. “The usual velocity of the Ayr is about a mile an hour, but when swelled by a heavy fall of rain or the melting of snow from the higher localities around, its velocity is increased to six or seven miles an hour”. Cf. Vegetius I. 10, “*Saepe repentinis imbribus uel niuibus solent exundare torrentes.*”

pursued, in the dark. Many current roads may well overlie earlier pathways and tracks, perhaps even Roman roads from two centuries prior. The goal seems to have been, what is now, the modern B743 and its exit from Ayrshire.

The Ambush

Some idea of the situation is provided by Vegetius:

“For a greater multitude is always subject to more mishaps. On marches it is always slower because of its size; a longer column often suffers ambush even by smaller numbers; in broken country and at river-crossings it is often caught in a trap as a result of delays caused by the baggage train.”

Vegetius explains what happened twice more:

“One thing to avoid is the column being severed or thinned out through the negligence of one group setting a fast pace while another is moving more slowly” and “soldiers divided while crossing a river.”

A study of the battle-field allows us see exactly where this ambush likely occurred. It is perhaps no coincidence that the river spoken of by Vegetius is today called by the peculiar name of “Fail” at the place aptly named *Failford*.³²

It is possible to reconstruct events with some precision up to this point. The column was dangerously long, but the terrible night of the camp attack and tumultuous retreat had passed. Sometime during the following day (or days) the faster paced lead division that had crossed Water of Fail, (being thus separated from the rest of the army by the river-bed), was ambushed.

By describing the ideal trap at III. 22: *“In transfretatione fluuiorum qui praecedit illam partem temptat oprimere, quae prima transiuerit, dum reliqui alueo separantur; qui autem sequitur festinate itinere, illos, qui nondum potuerunt transpire, conturbat,”* Vegetius obliquely explains everything that happened.

In retrospect, this was a most ideal location; the River Ayr, running high in its gorge south of the road, made escape in that direction difficult. The Water of Fail and Fail loch provided obstacles to the east and north. The generally wooded and broken nature of the valleys all around facilitated the concealment and deployment of the ambusher.³³ It is likely that the remainder of the column, stretching

32 The singular word, “fail”, perhaps of Latin derivation, can mean “to deceive”, as well as unsuccessful. It might refer to the riverine ambush set by the Picts and Scots.

33 If this battlefield is ever properly investigated, iron artifacts will logically be found in these

from at least Failford back towards Stair, also suffered from some manner of attack at this time; see III. 6: “*nam insidiatores transuersos frequentur incursant.*”

The Battle of Coilsfield

These attacks resulted in combat formations being ordered. The position of particular regiments in the column logically determined their deployment on the line. The lead divisions marched rapidly and had gone too far ahead. After recoiling from the ambush now they, “wish to get away rather than go back” (III. 6). These “*deteriores bellatores*” (III. 20) were put on the right flank while the heavily armed infantry and choice cavalry were deployed on the left flank. This is shown in odd comments throughout chapters 15-21. Vegetius remarks about the handicap of the left position several times as well as its vulnerability. Elite units normally set aside for reserves “must sometimes out of necessity be assembled on the left” (III. 20). Note also the comment “*Si quando alam sinistram longe habueris meliorem*” that appears in the same section. The battle line as formed was on the higher ground, and probably stretched in a south facing arc from the high-ground at Coilsfield Mains to the west end of Carngillan hill.

Vegetius describes this very deployment and its weaknesses also at III. 20: “*quia, in prolixo spatio cum tenditur acies, non aequalis semper campus occurrit, et si hiatus aliqui in medio uel sinus aut curuatura fit, in eo loco acies frequenter inrumpitur.*”

The front of the army was thus about a kilometer long, quite possibly more if terrain is factored in. This might even allow an expert in these matters to arrive at a rough estimate of numbers involved.³⁴ The arrangement was fairly strong except the left flank, which was in the air. A competent general with the adept use of cavalry could have potentially turned this situation to his advantage, a concept Vegetius would later ponder.³⁵

There is one more location on this battlefield that must be mentioned. Dead-

uncultivated areas, scattered accoutrements of those who fled and perished in the rout. There is the possibility that bodies remained *in situ* for some time.

34 The army of Coilus, even after hunger, disease, desertions and drowning, may still have been in the tens of thousands. Not to mention camp followers.

35 Vegetius insists that the creation of reserves, their timely deployment to the left flank, and the subsequent destruction of the enemy right wing, could in the future insure victory; III. 17, III. 20.



Coilsfield, Bloody Burn, Water of Fall, River Ayr (Google Maps)

men's Holm, or *riverbank of the dead men*, is a tract of ground traditionally identified on the east side of Fail Water opposite the mouth of the Bloody Burn. It figured in this battle somehow as well. It is detached from the primary sites of combat and Vegetius makes no allusions about it. One possibility arises. Was this the place where the survivors of the ambushed division, unable to rejoin their comrades, perhaps rallied?

If the nationality of these trapped units is considered, pending that these were indeed Germanic auxiliaries from the advance guard, subsequent movements on the battlefield proper could be explained.³⁶ Vegetius implies, by insisting on strict obedience to signals throughout his works, that signals *were not* followed, especially during the ensuing combat.³⁷ An intentional disregard of communication is not unheard of in military history; units often advance or retreat despite orders.

³⁶ One must be aware of Germanic ties of loyalty, kith and kin; if friends and relatives were trapped, *especially if that location was visible or audible from the main battle lines*, disobedience to Roman orders can be understood. Deadmen's Holm has in the past produced armor, weapon and bone fragments.

³⁷ It is quite likely that the Germanic term for Roman signal horns was the Vulgar Latin word *pipa*; such disrespectful military slang is indicative of scornful association. "*Pipa*" denotes the begging squawk of helpless young birds, i.e. Romans calling on their auxiliaries in battle. It remains to this day in our vocabulary.

He also describes, at III. 20, “the fourth action”, a general forward movement that tends to thin the middle of the line; “*Sed hoc genus certaminis, licet cito superset, si exercitatos fortissimosque produxerit, tamen periculosum est, quia mediam aciem suam qui sic dimicat nudare compellitur et in duas partes exercitum separare.*”

It seems logical that this risky forward movement and the shuffling of regiments could be related; Vegetius reminds us of these mistakes over and over, III. 17: “*Once you start transferring soldiers of the line from their stations, you will throw everything into confusion.*” III. 19: “*Beware also of deciding to change your ranks or transfer certain units from their stations to others at the moment when battle is being joined. Uproar and confusion instantly ensue, as the enemy press more easily upon unready and disordered forces.*”

Broken Battle Line

This transfer, perhaps an attempt to get the whole column moving east again, also coincides with a flanking maneuver by enemy “drungi”³⁸ on the “strong infantry” holding the open left flank. This also is stated twice, “*de quibus sinistrum cornum semper extendat, ne circumueniatur ab hostibus*” and “*Cauendum uel maxime, ne ab ala cornuque sinistro, quod saepius euenit,*” respectively, at III. 18, and III. 19. There was other activity on the field to be sure. Serious trouble apparently developed in the middle of the line, possibly by the Bloody Burn.³⁹

Vegetius then tells us that the enemy made a successful attack that fragmented the battle aryline, I. 26: (soldiers) “*...when too thinly spread and showing the light between them provide the enemy with an opening to breach. It is inevitable that everything should at once collapse in panic if the line is cut and the enemy reaches the rear of the fighting men.*”

Again this is repeated in a way that defies suggested coincidence; see III. 15: “*If the line is too thinly deployed, it is quickly broken through*

38 It is a Celtic word, akin to Old Irish “*drong*”, and is used *twice* by Vegetius to describe only *enemy* combat formations. The popularity of Vegetius’ work in high circles ensured that this fresh exotic term quickly became ingrained into the military vocabulary both east and west.

39 If bodies so choked this portion of the field that this rivulet ran with blood not water, it could be indicative of the heavy, oscillating, nature of the fighting; indeed the battle may have lasted several hours as Vegetius states they often do (III. 9).

when the enemy makes an assault, and after that there can be no remedy.”

No further review of the ensuing rout is needed. Statements regarding the slaughter of those who took flight are far too numerous to be indicated individually.⁴⁰ Place-names at Coilsfield even preserve the fate of unarmed people from the baggage train. Carngillan Hill, literally means “hill of the servants (camp followers) cairns”. The fate of those who did not flee is of some interest however. Vegetius tells us this, at I. 26: “*next they are commanded to form circles, which is the formation commonly adopted by trained soldiers to resist a hostile force that has breached the line, to prevent the entire multitude from being turned to flight and grave peril ensuing.*”

Note several other interesting comments at III. 21; “*But trapped men draw extra courage from desperation, and when there is no hope, fear takes up arms. Men who know without a doubt that they are going to die will gladly die in good company*” and “*Whereas trapped men, though few in number and weak in strength, for this very reason are a match for their enemies, because desperate men know they can have no other recourse.*” Logically, it can be deduced that Vegetius was among these trapped men.⁴¹

Aftermath of Coilsfield

We are even fortunate to have an accurate account of this situation’s conclusion from Boece, I. 29: “*In the morning, after the battle, the Scots and Picts retired to their standards. On a high hill the Britons who had survived the panic, in the night collected together, and hearing that their king was dead and the greater part of their army lost, sent a herald to the enemy generals in order to request peace.*”

The following statements by Boece indicate that the survivors *and* the remnants of the baggage train were allowed to depart, Vegetius no doubt among them, their brave stand a balm on wounded pride. Though Vegetius admits the defeat and even describes the aftermath at III. 25, this slip “*...quasi uictor ex omni parte*

40 If, as Vegetius indicates, the Picts and Scots reached the “rear of the fighting men”, the fate of the stationary baggage train is clear. Pertinent iron artifacts should be located along B743 westwards to Carngillan hill.

41 His familiarity with pack animals (see “*Who was Vegetius?*”) likely places him with the baggage train. His knowledge of the course of the battle stems from his vantage point on Carngillan hill. No doubt many of the camp followers, or *galearii* as Vegetius calls them, perished when the *acies* was over-run.

discesserit.” preserves true personal sentiment.⁴²

It is obvious that Vegetius used the Ayrshire debacle as parent material for his books. His examples inadvertently document this otherwise lost and forgotten campaign. Extraneous elements are identified easily; standardized methods, dictated by the cosmopolitan and cultured nature of the intended audience, being common to the time period, resulted in the intended ambiguous sophistication.⁴³ If one excludes his countrymen and odd bureaucrats who were aware of the disaster, it becomes most probable that the provenance of his *exemplum* was as unknown then as now.

The fate of Coilus is, according to tradition, split two ways. One version of events puts him in flight only to die ignominiously, like others in the moor a short distance north the battlefield. Other lore has Coilus falling on the swell of ground that claims his sepulchre, Coilsfield Mains.⁴⁴

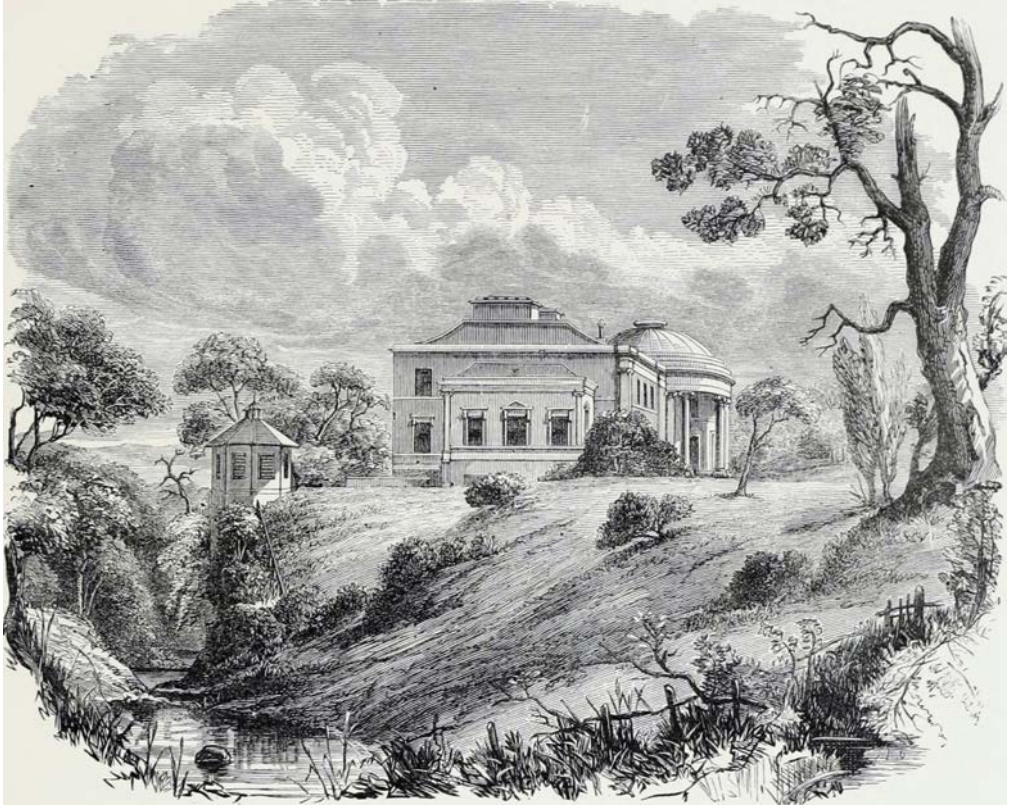
Vegetius, perhaps out of prudence does not directly state anything about his death, but does indicate his responsibility for the disaster: “*He who is beaten in battle in a general engagement, though there too art is of very great advantage, can nevertheless in his defence accuse Fortune; he who suffers sudden attack, ambushes or surprises cannot acquit himself of blame, because he could have avoided these things*” (III. 22).

One final remark, (at III. 10) “*Si quid enim illis eueniat in bello, et ipsius culpa et publica uidetur iniuria.*” sums up the official verdict, but there are other scattered words that hint of darker aspects influencing these forgotten events. There is a sentence located at section III. 9, “So let the general be vigilant, *sobber* and prudent.” that raises an eyebrow; *sobrius* does not automatically imply merely “sensibility” in this context. An equally disturbing comment also found in the same chapter warns of flattery influencing war councils to ill effect; a final warning among the maxims, “*Quid fieri debeat, tractato cum multis, quid uero facturus sis, cum paucissimis ac fidelissimis uel potius ipse tecum.*” implicates

42 The general sentiment displayed by Vegetius is: “the enemy did not carry the *entire* field”, referring to the brave defensive action of which he likely took part.

43 References to the obscure, exotic, and distant, serve to prepare the work for diffusion across the Roman Empire; largely within army circles and the highly militarized imperial administration. Merobaudes’ *Panegyric I*, c. 440’s show familiarity with it.

44 The funerary urn of rude baked clay found there under a tumulus bears the item number RMSEA19, and has been assigned a Bronze Age date on stylistic grounds.



Coilsfield, Tarbolton, Ayrshire (now Montgomerie). The Mansion of Colonel Hugh Montgomery, afterwards Earl of Eglinton, from Francis Hindes Groome, *Ordnance gazetteer of Scotland : a survey of Scottish topography, statistical, biographical, and historical.*, Edinburgh, 1882 (Wikimedia Commons)

someone both manipulative and untrustworthy close to the general.

Coilus, Caelus, Celæs, and Coel

Coilus as a historical figure can no longer be relegated to the realm of fairytales by modern scholars. As well as appearing in Welsh material,⁴⁵ his Latin name survived *as an Anglo-Saxon kenning* preserving phonetically what is likely

⁴⁵ The name Coilus is cognate to Coel Hen or “Old Cole” and is familiar to those who study the Welsh genealogies; the name, of various *pronunciations*, lent itself also to the region of Kyle in Ayrshire.

his actual name: *Caelus*.⁴⁶ The possibility of alcoholism at the highest level of command, combined with the known Germanic contempt of Roman signal horns, casts a rather macabre or even *sinister* shadow over a venerable *English* nursery rhyme. It likely recounts the death of Coilus in traditional oral fashion.

A British Locus

Certain comments made by Vegetius in the course of his works, aside from the myriad campaign specifics, can be explained only by realizing a British *locus*. This setting of a land filled with highlands, forests, moors and tidal estuaries, yet always in oceanic proximity, shared by developed cities as well as fierce tribes, is unique.

The statements of Vegetius (especially at III. 8), describe a land littered with old fortifications, with *castella* and *burgi* along the roads. Experts could analyze passages in I. 9, and IV. 39, referring to the amount of daylight. Scholars might find they correspond to Britain's latitude. Climatic indicators abound. Winters with incessant rain *and* snow necessitating roofed training halls do not quite correspond to continental situations. Descriptions of the surrounding Irish and North Sea can be found in IV. 38-41. Vegetius mentions collecting "round river stones" suitable for catapults at IV. 8. Such stones are abundant in rivers flowing through once glaciated lands, a fact well known to those who live in such places.

A true red flag concerning his provincial origins is the passage concerning the navy of the Britons (IV 37.). When studied contextually, we can even deduce the purpose, ethnicity, and station of these *scaphae exploratoriae*.⁴⁷ These units known personally by Vegetius appear un-coincidentally in the British sections of the *Notitia*.⁴⁸ Any scholar familiar with the state run weaving mill listed in Brit-

46 "*Finsburg Fragment*" line 29, "*celæs bord*" i.e. the shield of Caelus. In turn a kenning, *Caelus*' *shield* could imply his bodyguard as well. The context of these lines, (lying within the initiation of a tragic last stand and described with allusions familiar to the audience), including the unique word "*banhelm*", (the poetic opposite of a "*sighelm*") will be addressed in a short separate work, "*Footnote # 50*".

47 By his description, the oared vessels resemble the boats from Nydam, Denmark, but with sails. These are true predecessors of the Norse maritime tradition.

48 These units at Portus Adurni will later figure prominently in the Anglo-Saxon settlement narrative. They have been thoroughly exposed by the late, brilliant Mr. Tolkien. See: "*Finn and Hengist: the fragment and the episode*".

ain should recognize the *gynacea* reference in I. 7. Possible linguistic abnormalities need to be briefly pointed out;⁴⁹ note the use of the word *civitates* (I. 16),⁵⁰ *mattiobarbuli* (I. 17),⁵¹ *tiro* as found throughout,⁵² and *drungi*. The word *adgestus* as used in IV. 3, actually describes the composite town walls well known to any student of Roman Britain. A translation to “siege ramp” is unremarkable.⁵³ Please note the following section on modifying existing town ditches as well. Other words that need investigation include *metallae*, *tribuli*, *campigeni*, *servo*, *eligendum*, *docetur*, *vineae*, *sudatum*, *musculi*, etc. The comfortable use of Germanic words such as *cautia*, *burgi*, and *scaphae* is also noteworthy.

Conclusion

A difficult situation faces those trying to introduce new historical information. These hurdles include disinterest, preconceived opinions, unfounded skepticism and outright ridicule. Such disaffection has resulted in the complete fragmentation of traditional historical understanding. The isolated regional genres which have emerged over the last forty years (each defensive in outlook, unsympathetic in bearing, and protective of demarcations) must someday re-coalesce. The matter of the *Clades Caeliana* requires scholastic collaboration amongst all requisite fields. It is believed that these insights concerning Vegetius and his works show untapped historical potential, the unfettered dissemination thereof being a worthy goal in its own right.

49 Vegetius cannot hide his provincial dialect; there is a tendency to change clausula: *tium* becomes *tum* or *dum* (see *eligendum* III. 6.) and a use of odd spellings such as “*recreabuntur*”; (Veg. *Mul.* I. 50. I.)

50 Gildas and Bede both use it comfortably in place of the more common “*urbs*” to describe the urban landscape in Britain.

51 British familiarity is shown by the numbers of these weapons found at Wroxeter; Milner’s *unfamiliarity* with this fact is found on p. 17 note 2, of “*Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*”

52 Cf. Gildas *tironem*, “recruits”, i.e. Romano-British Christian, *not heathen barbarian*, soldiers.

53 John Wacher “*The Towns of Roman Britain*” London 1974, chap. 2 pp. 72-8. If the word *adgestus* is, as Milner thinks it is at note 1 p. 122, ‘generally means a siege ramp’, why does Vegetius at IV 15, use the term *agger* to describe a siege ramp? *Adgestus* was the Latin term used by Britons to specifically describe components of their urban defenses; the earthen bank later upgraded, by the insertion of a masonry wall at the front, and in the lifetime of Vegetius, by artillery bastions and wider ditches.

THE CAPRINGTON BRONZE HORN.

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IV.

NOTE ON THE CAPRINGTON BRONZE HORN. BY R. W. COCHRAN-PATRICK, Esq., B.A., LL.B., F.S.A. Scot.

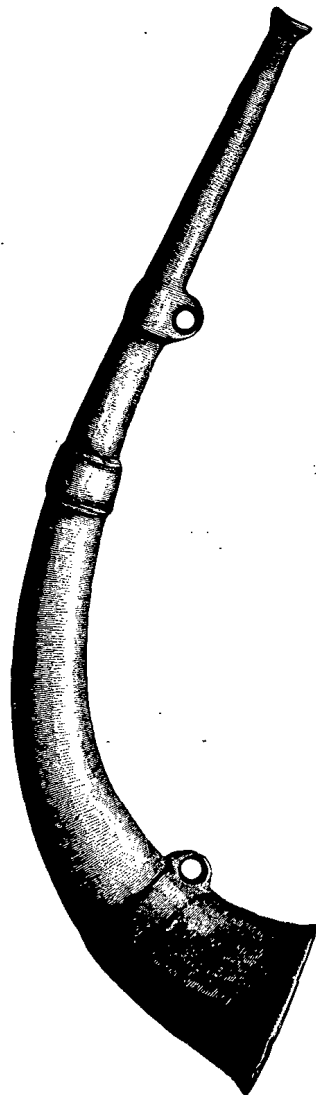
The bronze horn or trumpet, of which an illustration is here given from a woodcut presented to the Ayrshire and Wigtownshire Archæological Association, by Mr Smith Cunningham of Caprington,¹ was found some time before 1654² on the estate of Coilsfield, in the parish of Tarbolton, in Kyle.

It is thus referred to by Sir Robert Gordon, in the description of Kyle given in Bleau's Atlas, published at Amsterdam in 1654 :—

“In campo ubi decertatum lituus incurvus figura sua cornu referens, in primus canorus, multo post annis effosus est, quo comarchi Caprintonii, quorum ædes primariæ nostris Coilsfield dicitur, ad cogendos rusticos suos et operarios utuntur.”³

Defoe says : “ A trumpet resembling a crooked horn, which has a very shrill sound, was dug up in the field of battle, and is still kept in the Laird of Caprington's house, called Coilsfield.”⁴

The writer of the “New Statistical Account” notes that “this horn, so minutely



¹ “Ayrshire and Wigtownshire Archæological and Historical Collections,” vol. i.

² “New Statistical Account of Ayrshire,” p. 753.

³ Vol. vi. p. 50.

⁴ “Tour through Britain,” vol. iv. p. 130.

Out of the East, Darkness

Ex Oriente Tenebrae: Byzantine presence in video games (A chapter in contemporary Orientalism)

By BIHTER SABANOGLU

Drawing inspiration from the exhibition curated by Emir Alışık of Istanbul Research Institute, titled *What Byzantinism Is This in Istanbul!*¹ and held at the Pera Museum from November 23, 2021 to March, 13, 2022, which showcased Byzantine-themed video games and various instances of Byzantine influence in popular culture, I delve into the representation of Byzantine presence in *Assassin's Creed* and *Civilization V*.



*Theodora from the game Civilization V,
What Byzantinism is this in Istanbul! exhibition in Istanbul, Pera Museum*

1 “What Byzantinism Is This in Istanbul!” borrows its title from Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu’s novel *Panorama I-II* (1953–1954), where his protagonist exclaims these lines, being frustrated with postwar Turkish society. <https://www.peramuseum.org/exhibition/what-byzantinism-is-this-in-istanbul/1280>

In the early months of 2011, eagerly anticipating the new *Assassin's Creed*, I scoured gaming forums and Reddit threads for any tidbits of information about the game. The thrill was palpable when I discovered that the fourth installment, *Revelations*, would transport players to 16th-century Istanbul. Upon the game's release in December, I forsook all my pending tasks and succumbed to a trance that endured for weeks. I meandered aimlessly through the virtual streets of the city segmented into four main axes – Constantinople, Beyazit, Topkapı, and Galata – I explored every corner from Gül Mosque to the Grand Bazaar. With a rope securely fastened around my waist, I jumped from roof to roof in relentless pursuit of the keys to the library bequeathed by my ancestors. *Assassin's Creed*, centered on the struggle between the power-hungry autocratic Templars seeking to subjugate humanity and the assassins defending his free will and honor, features in this latest installment a flirtatious and resourceful Florentine nobleman, Ezio Auditore, along with a witty and charismatic but juvenile Suleiman the Magnificent, Piri Reis, portrayed as a bomb expert prepared to utilize his know-how for the benefit of assassins, the brutal and rebellious Shakhkulu, and the formidable Manuel Palaiologos, the last heir of the deposed Byzantine dynasty.



Fig. 2. Attila, *What Byzantinism is this in Istanbul!* exhibition, Pera Museum

Although not set in the Byzantine Empire, the narrative, abundant with numerous Byzantine references, commences with Ezio's arrival in May 1511 to an Istanbul enveloped in fog, adorned with domes, minarets, and palm trees, and thus begins to fulfill its promise of a potpourri of orientalism from the very first moment Konstantiniyye graces the screen. Perusing his leather-bound book on the deck of the sailboat as it approaches Galata, Ezio looks to Suleiman, whose identity he has yet to discover, observes him examining the astrolabe held toward the sun, and remarks, "A magnificent sight!". In response, Suleiman comments, "It is a work in progress", and the duo promptly engages in delving into the perennial theme that has always captivated travelers. As Ezio remarks "No city in Europa has a skyline quite like this", a half-offended Suleiman responds, "Well to be precise, that is Europa" gesturing towards one section of the city, and proceeds to point at the other, remarking, "That is Asia."



Fig. 3. Ezio Auditore & Suleiman the Magnificent, screenshot from the Assassin's Creed game. In my view, the astrolabe that occupies Suleiman in the opening might have been inspired by a real 1645/55 astrolabe present (No. 56821) in the Science Museum Group's collection.

Exploring the East-West dichotomy even before setting foot in Istanbul, the protagonists subject the concepts of “conquest” and “fall” to a semiotic analysis, causing players to overlook errors like the incorrect count of minarets on Hagia Sophia and the peculiarities of Istanbul’s vegetation. Sultan Suleiman expresses unease over Ezio’s use of the phrase “the fall of Constantinople”, and counters with “I believe you mean ‘the conquest of Konstantiniyye’?”, thereby introducing the enduring political issue of the city’s naming. Despite this minor disagreement, these two tolerant men conclude the discussion by mutually acknowledging that the mentioned concepts are intricately tied to the narrator’s identity and lack an internal meaning.

In the spirit of the travelers, artists, and adventurers who would visit the city Ezio responds to inquiries about his journey to Istanbul by expressing that he came seeking “inspiration”. As the game progresses, we realize that this ambiguous concept translates into actions such as committing homicide, engaging in an affair with a foreign woman, and becoming entangled in Eastern intrigues. Certainly, this is natural as Constantinople embodies what Bakhtin terms the carnivalesque; there, norms are inverted, and principles are slippery. Ezio indeed becomes ensnared in a Byzantine intrigue, as the treacherous triumvirate, consisting of the janissary lord Tarik Barleti, Turkmen Shahkulu and Manuel Palaiologos, collaborate with the malevolent Templars, to orchestrate an attack against the Ottoman throne. The troops of Shahkulu, who is depicted as an executioner devoid of empathy and the Templars linger somewhat in the background, while the game presents the Byzantines and the janissaries as the true allies. The coalition formed by these two factions not only remains evident in their mentality but is also reflected in their appearance.

The attire worn by the janissaries in the game mirrors the Western collective consciousness; they have a “börk” adorning the head, wear loose trousers on the legs, and carry a thick belt around the waist with a yataghan, the notorious Ottoman saber, tucked in. However, there is a noticeable absence; the long, magnificent mustache fetishized by Europeans is missing, substituted by an unusual mask that combines elements of Sparta and Venice. The excessive fetishization of the Oriental mustache by Westerners can indeed be traced in the firsthand account of D’Aubignosc, a French soldier who visited the Ottoman Empire to train the soldiers tasked with replacing the abolished janissary corps following

Mahmud II's reforms.² In his book titled *La Turquie Nouvelle jugée au point où l'ont amenée les réformes du sultan Mahmoud* (The New Turkey judged at the point reached by the reforms of Sultan Mahmud), D'Aubignosc shared his observations devoting an entire chapter to the disappearance of the janissaries' mustache. He elaborated on how these mustaches were meticulously grown and maintained by the strong and imposing men, lamenting for pages about the loss of this symbol of masculinity due to Mahmud II's reforms aimed at presenting his new troops with a revitalized image.

If we revisit the attire of the Janissaries in *Assassin's Creed*, the hybrid mask with a Spartan undertone worn on their faces for anonymity not only imparts a Hellenistic touch, aligning them with Greek soldiers but also, with their pointed chins and noses, evokes thoughts John VIII Palaiologos. An engraving, entitled *El Gran Turco*, attributed to Antonio del Pollaiuolo, which presents a fantastical depiction of Mehmet the Conqueror with dragon-themed headgear, found inspiration in John VIII Palaiologos, thereby amalgamating Ottoman and Byzantine elements in a visual.³ In a parallel manner, *Assassin's Creed* also merged these two civilizations in the Janissaries' attire, marked by the hat known as "börk" and the iron mask reminiscent of Spartan design.

As for Manuel Palaiologos, to whom the Janissary Agha Tariq supplies arms and ammunition, he embodies all the vices traditionally associated with Byzantium. Representing the alleged Byzantine corruption and opulence, he is so overweight to the extent that his purple kaftan cannot conceal it, he exudes extravagance by adorning a ring of various colors on each finger and displays cruelty without regard for the sacrifice of women and children. He stands thus in stark contrast to the athletic, humble, and conscientious Prince Suleiman. The janissaries, in their turn, execute secret plans with Manuel Palaiologos, eliciting public disapproval through their arrogance, confiscating the possessions of impoverished merchants, and openly expressing their contempt for the Ottoman people by branding them as parasites. In the middle of the game, a riot erupts as a vendor, having lost his fruits to the janissaries, ignites a torch. The crowd storms

2 L. P. B. D'Aubignosc, *La Turquie nouvelle jugée au point où l'ont amenée les réformes du sultan Mahmoud, Volume 1* (Paris: Delloye, 1839), 269-276.

3 For a detailed discussion, please refer to Victor Stoichita's lecture held at Collège de France, titled "Gentile Bellini: un peintre chez les 'Turcs'".



Fig. 4 (a). *El Gran Turco*, ca 1470 (Topkapi Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi Hazine 2153 yaprak 144). According to Nancy Ewart (on her Pinterest page) «The name El Gran Turco, the epitaph given to the Sultan, helps to identify this engraving as Mehmet II, since it is not a real likeness, upon closer inspection, scholars agree that the Sultan's features are probably recalling (b) Pisanello's medal of John VIII Palaiologos (1438)», I esemplare del Bargello, Firenze. Photo Saiko 2014, CC SA 3.0 Unported (Wikimedia Commons). [Editor's note].

the janissary quarry, shouting “sons of donkeys,” and the fusion of the Byzantines and the janissaries, vying in cunning, is fully realized in collective consciousness when the crowd exclaims, “You are even worse than the Byzantines, traitors!”.

However, the resolution of the game's narrative takes an unexpected turn; it becomes evident that the janissaries, demonized due to Mahmud II's political maneuvers and even rebranded as bloodthirsty and brutal entities, returning to haunt the people in the guise of vampires/witches,⁴ could have been ordinary members of the Ottoman Empire all along, merely seeking to earn a living through small-scale commerce. We then realize with astonishment that the Janissary Agha Tariq never betrayed the Ottoman Sultan. He was in fact on a covert mission to eliminate Manuel, intending to thwart the Byzantine enemy by persuading him that they were allies. Tarik, in his agony, as he succumbs in Ezio's arms, even whis-

4 Edhem Eldem, “Yeniçeri Taşları Ve Tarih Üzerine”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 188, 2009.

pers “For God’s sake, protect my homeland”. In that moment, we are grateful for the relief, realizing that *Assassin’s Creed* also challenges the “decline discourse” associated with janissaries, as well as the “purity-corruption paradigm that posits a pure version of Ottoman institutions in a presumed state of original sturdiness versus their later corrupt versions,”⁵ as expressed by the Turkish historian Cemal Kafadar, who extensively studied the subject. There is no abrupt turning point when the virtuous janissaries suddenly become corrupted by involvement in commercial-productive activities. In both the Ottoman period and the game, the janissaries do not constitute a homogenous entity, not all of them are traitors, not all rebel against the state, and not all are tainted by corruption. In the game’s finale, the unjust murder of the janissary lord Tarik is counterbalanced by the executions of Manuel and Shahkulu, and *Assassin’s Creed: Revelations* ends with the consolidation of the Ottoman rule.

Assassin’s Creed was certainly not the first game to explore the Byzantines. In 1991, *Medieval Lords: Soldier Kings of Europe* introduced the iconic Byzantine purple to the gaming world, and in 1999 *Age of Empires II* added Latin-speaking Eastern Romans to its gameplay scheme.⁶ *Crusader Kings II: Legacy of Rome*, launched in 2012, also incorporated Byzantine elements; acquiring the Byzantine package granted players access to innovative torture methods such as “castration” and “blinding”, cleverly playing on the notion that evil rising from the East is always a bit more sinister.

In 2011, in Sid Meier’s renowned game, *Civilization V*, Byzantine Empress Theodora took on the role of one of the leaders. The *Civilization* series is a game rooted in a linear progressive historical approach, where players endeavor to advance their civilization from humble beginnings to a vast empire through the incorporation of technological, intellectual, and cultural sophistication as well as military, diplomatic, and economic prowess. In its core principles, the game aligns with the 4X order in gaming terminology: Exploration, expansion, exploitation, extermination.⁷ *Civilization V*, featuring Theodora in a prominent role,

5 Cemal Kafadar, “On the Purity and Corruption of the Janissaries”, *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1991), 273–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43385269>.

6 For further reading, Marco Fasolio “Between History, Exoticism, and Enlightened Prejudices: Some Aspects of Byzantine Presence in Video Games, *What Byzantinism is this in Istanbul!* (İstanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayınları, 2021), 232-263.

7 For a detailed discussion, please refer to the podcast *Byzantium & Friends* by Anthony

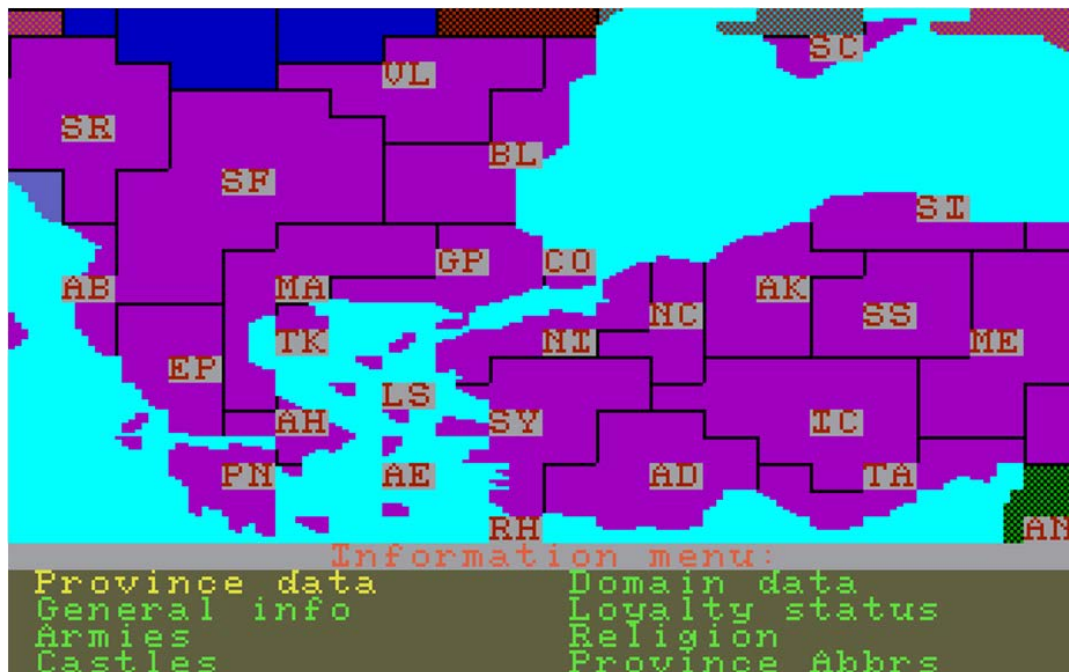


Fig. 5. *Medieval Lords*: from the game *Soldier Kings of Europe*

offered the Western audience three elements they desired most in a Byzantine narrative: religious devotion - the game had a faith bonus -, abundant use of purple, and the inclusion of the Hippodrome. The depiction of Theodora showcased in a video on one of the screens at the Pera Museum exhibition, draws inspiration from Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant's painting *The Empress Theodora at the Coliseum*. The queen is also adorned with the same crown seen in the mosaics of the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna.

In the game, Theodora frequently emphasized cultural dominance over victories achieved through force, prioritizing the cultural and religious upliftment of her people. The historian Procopius' demonic depiction of the empress is mirrored through her role as an ally capable of switching sides at any moment. Meanwhile, her charismatic aspect, a source of endless inspiration for the French playwright Victorien Sardou for his eponymous theatre play, is embodied in her intimidating and unpredictable demeanor. Theodora in *Civilization* rarely sought

Kaldellis, episode "Byzantium in Video Games, with Troy Goodfellow".

help, occasionally displaying extreme friendliness before suddenly becoming enraged. Considerable effort was also invested in accurately representing the Attic Greek spoken by the empress, including the incorporation of the middle voice, a linguistic feature found in few languages globally, into her dialogues. *Civilization V*, in line with its concept of “civilization” that serves as the foundation for the game, offered a depiction that undoubtedly relies on clichés but managed to exhibit sufficient nuance for a video game.

In his work *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, Montesquieu characterizes Theodora as a woman who engaged in prostitution for many years, asserting that the passions and fantasies of her gender eclipsed the most glorious victories of the empire.⁸ The language he employed to articulate his overall opinions about the Byzantine officials was also centered on continual deterioration and corruption. Having weathered centuries of disparaging portrayals by Montesquieu, Procopius, and others, I aspire to witness Theodora finally receiving her rightful recognition and playing a leading role in a fourth-wave feminist game. Envisioning the Byzantines as protagonists in a strategy game that transcends mere conniving tactics would be a welcome change as well.

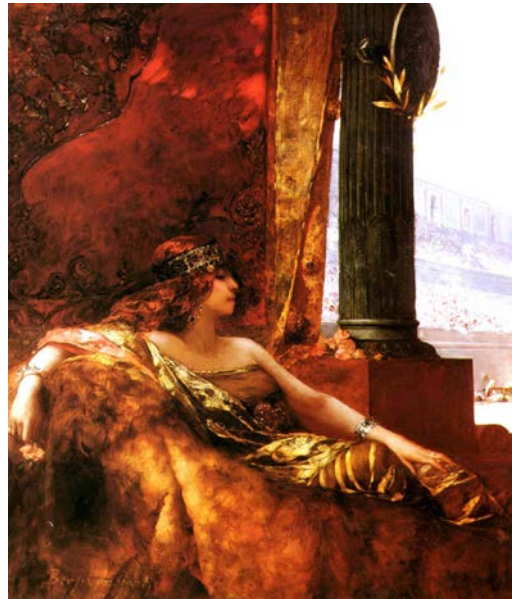


Fig. 6. Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1845-1902), *The Empress Theodora at the Coliseum*, c. 1889. Private Collection. Art Renewal Center Museum, image 7554. Public domain.

⁸ Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des romains et de leur décadence* (Paris: Poussielgue, 1907),187.



Fig. 7. Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, *La Emperatriz Theodora*, 1887, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires (Wikimedia Commons).

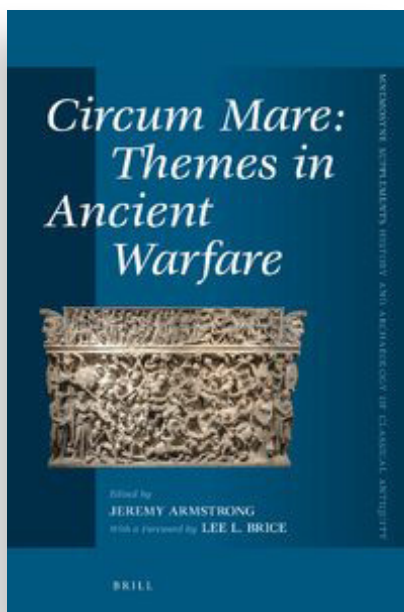
Recensioni / Reviews
Storia Militare Antica



JEREMY ARMSTRONG (ED.),

Circum Mare: Themes in Ancient Warfare

Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2016, pp. viii + 320.



È sempre impegnativa la recensione di un libro, specie se si tratta di un'antologia, come in questo caso. “Circum Mare: Themes in Ancient Warfare” è il primo della serie “Warfare in the Ancient Mediterranean World” che ha, nelle parole della casa editrice Brill, l’obiettivo di diffondere “le ricerche più recenti in volumi organizzati in modo tipico per una facile consultazione, Il pubblico a cui si rivolge è composto sia da specialisti che da non specialisti”. Obiettivo indubbiamente ambizioso che, a conclusione di questa recensione, valuteremo se è stato raggiunto.

Questo volume, frutto di una conferenza tenutasi nel 2012 presso l’Università di Auckland, riunisce i contributi di studiosi in vari settori e periodi temporali diversi, dall’Egitto faraonico o l’egemonia navale Ateniese del V° secolo fino all’Impero Romano d’Occidente e li giustappone all’interno di sei temi della guerra antica, con casi di studio su argomenti tradizionali, tra cui l’economia della guerra o gli assedi,

ma anche relativamente inesplorati - come la guerra irregolare e la coesione militare.

Nell'introduzione di Jeremy Armstrong, curatore del volume, si sottolinea come lo studio della guerra sia importante per comprendere le dinamiche sociali, culturali e materiali che agitano i gruppi umani in conflitto. La guerra, come costruito sociale, è un momento di confronto e scontro, ma anche di interazione interculturale e questo volume si propone "di illustrare sia i punti di sinergia sia quelli di divergenza". L'introduzione si conclude con un esplicito paradigma di analisi, "ognuno dei sei temi trattati (narrazioni di guerra, economia di guerra, coesione militare, autorità militare, guerra irregolare e fortificazioni) contiene due studi che analizzano lo stesso tema di base dal punto di vista di due società.

Il primo tema trattato, "Military narratives", comprende i lavori di A. Spalinger e D. Nolan. e racconta l'esperienza della guerra antica attraverso diversi tipi di fonti (letterali e figurative) in contesti e tempi diversi. Il contributo di Spalinger (*Simple Words, Simple Pictures: The Link between the Snapshots of Battle and the War Diary Entries in Ancient Egypt*) si concentra sulle rappresentazioni dei faraoni durante le loro campagne asiatiche sotto il Nuovo Regno. Collegando fonti epigrafiche, iconografiche e letterarie di guerra, l'A. evidenzia come queste abbiano un ruolo complementare nella creazione di un'unica narrazione storica ("parallelismo di tecniche narrative" le definisce l'A.), che non è continua, ma è una sequenza dei soli eventi segnati dalla presenza o meno del Faraone. Per esempio, "il carro del re", nella rappresentazione pittorica o letteraria, è un mezzo per collegare un'immagine o una semplice voce verbale a quella successiva. La successione degli eventi è, secondo l'A., caratterizzata dalla presenza del faraone. Solo "quando il re è in luoghi diversi, le cose accadono", non è la successione degli eventi che guida la narrazione temporale e geografica, ma gli eventi o i luoghi sono degni di essere ricordati solo se il re è presente.

Nel capitolo successivo, D. Nolan (*Caesar's Exempla and the Role of Centurions in Battle*) affronta il tema della narrativa bellica concentrandosi sul ruolo degli *exempla* dei centurioni nel *Bellum Gallicum*. La descrizione della battaglia da parte di Cesare è illustrata frequentemente attraverso l'uso dei centurioni come strumenti interpretativi, soprattutto nella loro capacità di riassumere, attraverso l'aneddoto, lo stato di salute dei Romani. Per Nolan gli *exempla* di Cesare suggeriscono un ruolo dei centurioni forse più importante di quello normalmente attribuito di ispirare, attraverso dimostrazioni aggressive, la *virtus*; piuttosto, la loro normale responsabilità era quella di controllare i loro uomini e garantire ordine e stabilità nei reparti. Per Nolan le perdite dei centurioni, che indicherebbero la loro partecipazione a situa-

zioni ad alto rischio, sono menzionate solo quando un'unità perde coesione o si avvicina al collasso o all'annientamento. Quando e dove combattono i centurioni è per Nolan indice di una situazione disperata; la costante registrazione dei centurioni caduti sembra essere un artificio letterario di Cesare per minimizzare la gravità della situazione o una sconfitta agli occhi dei lettori con poca esperienza militare.

Nel secondo tema trattato "Economics of Warfare", M. Trundle e N. Rosenstein si concentrano sull'interdipendenza tra la sfera militare e quella economica, in particolare sul peso finanziario ed economico della guerra. Trundle (*Coinage and the Economics of the Athenian Empire*), esamina il ruolo dell'economia monetaria nel mantenimento della marina Ateniese nell'ambito della Lega di Delo nel V secolo a.C. L'A., partendo dall'evidenza che la quasi totalità dei depositi monetari Ateniesi contemporanei provengono soprattutto dall'Egitto e dal Vicino Oriente, evidenzia come la diffusione della moneta ateniese sia il risultato di un'economia centralizzata all'interno della Lega. Mantenere una flotta è sempre stato un investimento costoso e ad alto rischio e la potenza navale di Atene era costosa. I tributi degli alleati e l'argento di Laureion finanziavano la marina, ma le guerre e le rivolte potevano mettere in crisi il sistema. La soluzione fu di "forzare" l'uso della moneta ateniese. Per Trundle Atene esigeva un tributo sotto forma di argento e monete ateniesi, che molti alleati acquisivano (ad esempio) vendendo cibo ad Atene o servendo nelle flotte ateniesi. In questo modo la moneta ateniese circolava in tutto l'impero e Atene poteva mantenere un ampio controllo sulle risorse finanziarie e militari della Lega.. Potremmo sostenere che la circolazione "forzosa" all'interno della Lega della moneta ateniese, contribuì al passaggio della marina ateniese da una marina economica (dove possiedo tutte le risorse ed i mezzi per armare una flotta) ad una finanziaria e mercenaria (dove tutto può essere comprato, navi, equipaggio, specialisti, materie prime, cibo, ecc..). Un approccio innovativo, dinamico e facile da alimentare, ma con una debolezza di fondo che portò alla sconfitta nella Guerra del Peloponneso. A causa dell'andamento incerto della guerra, conclude l'A., molti alleati disertarono la causa ateniese, i tributi affluirono sempre meno nelle casse ateniesi, il sistema finanziario crollò e Atene perse la guerra.

Il contributo di N. Rosenstein (*Tributum in the Middle Republic*) affronta la questione del finanziamento delle guerre romane tra la il IV e il II secolo a.C. L'A. sostiene che, contrariamente alla storiografia dominante, la maggior parte delle operazioni militari di questo periodo non erano pagate dalla guerra stessa (bottino e compensi di guerra) ma soprattutto dal tributo pagato dagli *assidui*. Stimando il costo annuale del mantenimento delle legioni romane (basato in gran parte sulla va-

lutazione del peso dello *stipendium*) e l'importo pagato dagli *assidui*, Rosenstein, attraverso un'elaborata serie di tabelle e calcoli matematici, sostiene che il *tributum* era relativamente modesto per le singole famiglie. L'entità relativamente modesta del *tributum* era in funzione dell'ampiezza del bacino degli *assidui*, derivata a sua volta dal costante allargamento del corpo dei cittadini nel corso del secolo precedente, specie dopo la fine della rivolta latina del 338. L'aumento della base produttiva degli *assidui* generò un aumento della produzione, con conseguente necessità di scambiare il surplus con moneta. Questo surplus monetizzabile, a sua volta, portò alla creazione o all'espansione dei mercati in cui queste transazioni potevano avvenire. In conclusione, il tributo, complessivamente modesto, accelerò il processo di monetizzazione dell'economia romana e, conseguentemente, contribuì all'espansione della classe degli *assidui* che pagavano il *tributum* per finanziare le guerre. Il risultato netto fu la creazione di una solida capacità finanziaria e di manodopera che consentirono alla Repubblica di affrontare e vincere le sfide poste dalla lotta contro Annibale e di espandersi nel Mediterraneo Orientale.

Il terzo tema, "Military Cohesion", che è uno dei più recenti approcci interpretativi alla storia militare antica, si apre con il contributo di J. Armstrong, che mette in discussione il posto del senso civico come principale fattore esplicativo della coesione degli eserciti romani arcaici e si completa con il lavoro di M. Hebblewhite che esamina il significato del *sacramentum* per soldati e imperatori tra il 235-395. Secondo Armstrong (*The Ties that Bind: Military Cohesion in Archaic Rome*) gli eserciti della Roma arcaica, tra VI e V secolo a.C., nonostante le molte sconfitte e i gravi momenti di crisi, alla fine furono vittoriosi. Un risultato notevole, per un esercito con un'identità civica mutevole, un'unità politica in via di definizione e con strutture di comando caratterizzate da legittimità diverse come *patria potestas* e *imperium*. Sebbene l'unità di comando (coesione verticale), comunque esercitata, dava direzione di intenti e contribuiva al legame globale, la coesione orizzontale tra gli uomini di un reparto rappresentava il legame vitale per l'efficacia in combattimento. L'A. sottolinea che la coesione orizzontale in questi eserciti arcaici non si basava solo su legami familiari o religiosi o di tipo gentilizio, ma anche su altre motivazioni sentite come comuni a tutti i combattenti. Per individuare queste "motivazioni comuni", l'A. si avvale dei risultati di recenti studi militari per i quali il fattore principale della coesione sarebbe l'impegno legato al compito (task-based) e non i legami sociali preesistenti. Partendo da questi studi e dalla considerazione che la guerra nella Roma arcaica ruotava intorno alle razzie, l'A. sostiene che la dimensione personale nell'impegno alla difesa del territorio dai raid e i benefici individuali tangibili del bottino, avrebbero costituito per i soldati arcaici un compito

naturale. L'A., consapevolmente, non conclude che i legami sociali o civici non fossero inesistenti o determinanti al successo militare di Roma, né che la coesione basata sul compito fosse parte rilevante di questo successo, ma solo che essa "should not be discounted".

M. Hebblewhite (*Sacramentum Militiae: Empty Words in an Age of Chaos*) esamina il giuramento militare romano (*sacramentum militiae*) nel rapporto tra l'esercito e l'imperatore romani nel turbolento periodo compreso tra il 235 e il 395, quando la lealtà era incerta e l'usurpazione frequente. L'A. ricorda che il giuramento era dichiarato al momento dell'arruolamento, all'inizio del regno di un nuovo imperatore e poi di nuovo, almeno una volta all'anno, per tutto il suo regno e l'analisi dei riferimenti letterari dimostra che i soldati, gli ufficiali e persino le truppe federate prestavano giuramento. L'A. sostiene che il *sacramentum militiae*, formulato in termini anche di dovere religioso e sempre più cristiano, era una componente costante della fedeltà militare tardo-imperiale. Tuttavia, il resoconto delle usurpazioni e delle ribellioni – reali giuramenti infranti - dimostra che la reale efficacia del giuramento dipendeva dall'atteggiamento che l'esercito aveva nei confronti imperatore, dalla sua capacità vincere guerre e mantenere saldi i confini. Usurpazioni e ribellioni erano sempre eventi o rotture che accadevano a livello di unità, mai di singoli. Era la sfiducia in un imperatore a far decadere, di fatto, il legame con l'esercito, che invariabilmente giurava fedeltà al generale ribelle di turno. In conclusione, per l'A., il *sacramentum* poteva rafforzare la fedeltà dell'esercito all'imperatore, ma non poteva di per sé garantire fedeltà.

Nella quarta parte, "Military Authority," R. Covino affronta i limiti giuridici posti all'*imperium* dei magistrati romani nelle provincie di età repubblicana e J. Kierstead analizza la natura del potere e del controllo esercitati da Atene sui suoi alleati nell'ambito delle leghe navali del V e IV secolo a.C..

Covino (*Circumscribing Imperium: Power and Regulation in the Republican Province*) sostiene che la transizione da un *imperium* militare a un governo amministrativo fu il risultato di una lunga stratificazione legislativa e consuetudinaria. Mentre l'attuale paradigma storico sostiene che la limitazione del potere dei governatori è principalmente il risultato delle leggi *repetundae* e della *lex Porcia*, per Covino già dai tempi della Repubblica arcaica i magistrati con *imperium* furono sottoposti a vari limiti, a riprova di una costante attenzione della Repubblica alle loro azioni. Utilizzando la Sicilia come caso, l'A. dimostra come, almeno dall'inizio del III secolo a. C., i *consulta* senatoriali, gli editti dei governatori e le norme consuetudinarie provinciali, fossero degli strumenti di controllo per limitare l'*imperium* e ridurre gli abusi da parte dei governatori. L'A. conclude che, nonostante l'*imperium* fosse ancora un

fattore determinante nell'espressione del potere di Roma, le province più pacificate e civilizzate vennero progressivamente governate da uomini il cui *imperium* era vincolato da una molteplicità di limitazioni.

Nel contributo successivo, J. Kierstead (*The Delian and Second Athenian Leagues: The Perspective of Collective Action*) mette in discussione l'approccio tradizionale che, in genere, dipinge le leghe navali di Atene come strumenti dell'imperialismo ateniese e Atene stessa come un profittatore ed egemone. Kierstead mostra, invece, che le dinamiche delle Leghe navali del V e IV secolo a.C. sono conformi ad alcuni principi della teoria dell'azione collettiva. Secondo tale teoria i gruppi funzionano in modo diverso a seconda delle loro dimensioni, la coercizione è spesso necessaria per l'azione collettiva e che i costi dell'attività comune sono spesso sostenuti in misura sproporzionata dai membri più grandi dei gruppi. Pertanto, secondo questa prospettiva, le Leghe navali potrebbero essere concepite come gruppi di stati che comunemente cercano i benefici comuni della sicurezza e dell'accesso al mercato e per i quali i membri più potenti sopportano la maggior parte dei costi. Kienast differenzia la Lega di Delo, le cui grandi dimensioni (400 stati) imponevano una modalità di azione gerarchica con poteri significativi concessi ad Atene, dalla Seconda Lega, che era di dimensioni più piccole (60 stati) e operava in modo più cooperativo. Gli alleati "collaborarono alla propria subordinazione" perché apprezzavano i benefici derivanti dal funzionamento dalla guida di Atene e perché riconoscevano come legittima la coercizione esercitata da Atene contro gli alleati recalcitranti (i "profittatori" del modello collettivo) e spesso partecipavano a tali azioni. Inoltre, secondo l'A., Atene si è assunta oneri sproporzionati nel mantenere il sistema di alleanze e nel fornirne i benefici attesi. In senso generale, lo schema dei contributi alla lega di Delio mostra che meno di un terzo dei membri pagavano quasi il 90% dei tributi e il 70% degli alleati contribuivano a poco più del 10% dei fondi della Lega. È chiaro, conclude l'A., che i profitti, se ci sono stati, difficilmente possono essere definiti come uno sfruttamento e che qualsiasi narrazione accurata dell'ascesa e della caduta delle leghe navali ateniesi, dovrà bilanciare l'evoluzione dell'azione collettiva a lungo termine con la visione egemonica basata esclusivamente sulla violenza.

Nella quinta parte, "Irregular warfare", J. Wijnendaele sostiene che il *comes* Bonifacio del V secolo è stato il primo "signore della guerra" dell'esercito romano occidentale, mentre L. Rawlings contribuisce con un capitolo sulla "guerra irregolare" nelle guerre puniche.

J. Wijnendaele ('Warlordism' and the Disintegration of the Western Roman Army) applica il concetto di "signore della guerra", mutuato dalla scienza politica e dagli studi sul terzo mondo, per illustrare le dinamiche che stanno dietro le trasfor-

mazioni dell'esercito romano nella prima metà V sec d.C.. Utilizzando l'ascesa di Bonifacio (*comes Africae*) come caso di studio, Wijnendaele mostra come questi abbia utilizzato il suo seguito di *buccellari* per costruire una base di potere e agire con crescente autonomia dall'autorità imperiale. L'A. evidenzia come l'esercito romano del V secolo, fosse, nella sua struttura di base, sostanzialmente lo stesso esercito che mantenne la sovranità dell'imperatore orientale e consentì a Giustiniano riconquistare l'Africa, l'Italia e la Spagna. Quello che cambiò, fu l'introduzione di corpi di truppe semi private e parzialmente autonomi dal potere imperiale, chiamati dalle fonti *buccellari*, truppe imperiali guidate e retribuite dai rispettivi ufficiali. L'A. sottolinea come Bonifacio dovette molto della sua carriera ai Goti, prima come tribuno di un'unità di *foederati* Goti e successivamente utilizzando un seguito (*Gefolgschaft*) di guerrieri Goti, portato in dote dalla nobile moglie gota. La vittoriosa campagna contro i Mauri e il permesso di saccheggiare la popolazione locale per potersi mantenere, rafforzarono prestigio di Belisario sul suo seguito gotico. Anche se non ne conosciamo il numero, secondo l'A. questa forza militare permise a Belisario di affrontare con successo tre eserciti imperiali in meno di cinque anni, di stabilire un dominio locale in Africa e di intervenire in Italia. L'A. conclude che Bonifacio e altri signori della guerra come Ezio, assunsero una posizione autonoma senza dichiararsi imperatore e spianarono la strada alla progressiva disintegrazione dell'esercito romano occidentale nella seconda metà del V secolo.

Per L. Rawlings (*The Significance of Insignificant Engagements: Irregular Warfare during the Punic Wars*) le operazioni irregolari durante le prime due guerre puniche sono considerate irrilevanti dagli autori antichi rispetto alle grandi battaglie o i più famosi assedi. Nonostante il disinteresse degli autori antichi e moderni, Rawlings sostiene che queste attività erano molto importanti per gli eserciti romani e cartaginesi. Infatti, come evidenzia l'A., nelle narrazioni antiche, le forze romane e cartaginesi si impegnarono spesso in incursioni, scaramucce e imboscate. Ognuna di queste azioni poteva influenzare sia le operazioni sul campo che la strategia. Infatti, per esempio, raid e imboscate potevano incidere sulla logistica; i reparti che erano sconfitti nelle scaramucce o venivano molestati potevano subire dei colpi al morale; infine, le incursioni nei terreni agricoli potevano incoraggiare gli alleati a disertare. Ognuna di queste operazioni poteva essere condotta da forze composte da gruppi di guerrieri reclutati appositamente o, in alternativa, potevano essere mercenari o truppe regolari. L'A., in considerazione dei numeri, dei tipi e delle capacità delle truppe presenti negli eserciti romani e cartaginesi (fanteria leggera, cavalleria e irregolari), ritiene che l'organizzazione di operazioni minori non possa essere semplicemente casuale o dettato esclusivamente da situazioni di opportunità tattica cioè, legato alle

operazioni maggiori in corso o pianificate. In realtà, secondo l’A., sebbene i comandanti romani e cartaginesi fossero consapevoli dei limiti della guerra irregolare, riconobbero che l’effetto cumulativo di azioni minori poteva comunque influenzare il corso di una campagna o di una guerra.

Nell’ultimo tema trattato “Fortifications and Sieges”, B. Heagren e di J. Lee affrontano il ruolo chiave svolto dalle fortificazioni negli imperi antichi, sia nella conquista che nella difesa. Il contributo di Heagre (“Siege Warfare” in Ancient Egypt, as Derived from Select Royal and Private Battle Scenes) è dedicato alle opere di fortificazione e alle tecniche di assedio illustrati nei rilievi egiziani del Nuovo Regno (1570-1085 a.C.) e illustra come la guerra d’assedio fosse essenziale alla strategia egiziana. Per Heagren le fortezze, situate in punti geografici e strategici chiave, servivano per proteggere il territorio e assicurare le linee di comunicazione con le zone di confine, ma servivano anche come basi operative per conquistare nuovi territori. Senza dubbio, dice l’A., gli Egizi sapevano come assaltare con successo un luogo fortificato e sapevano anche come porre un assedio efficace. Le diverse testimonianze pittoriche, nonostante le difficoltà di interpretazione, mostrano l’ampiezza degli strumenti e delle tattiche d’assedio impiegate dagli Egizi. Troviamo rappresentati tutti i mezzi e le tecniche note nell’antichità: torri d’assedio e scale, pali d’ariete e arieti o anche armi a mano per rompere le serrature delle porte o per minare e farle crollare le mura. In conclusione, la capacità di conquistare e difendere delle fortezze o città fortificate è stata determinante per l’espansione imperiale e la protezione dei possedimenti asiatici del Nuovo Regno.

L’ultimo contributo è di J. Lee (Tissaphernes and the Achaemenid Defense of Western Anatolia, 412–395 b.C.) e tratta le difese persiane in Anatolia occidentale tra il 412 e il 395 a.C., cioè dalla nomina di Tissafarne a satrapo di Sardi, fino alla spedizione di Agesilao nel 395. Già nell’introduzione l’A. evidenzia come la frontiera dell’Anatolia fosse probabilmente tra le più difficili da difendere, per la conformazione geografica (coste e monti) e per le diverse popolazioni che la costituivano, dinastie locali in Caria, città greche sulla costa e bellicosi montanari. Obiettivo dello studio è valutare il contesto politico e militare che Tissafarne, come governatore, doveva affrontare, le risorse che poteva utilizzare e i modi in cui ha integrato tutti questi elementi per una difesa efficace dei confini imperiali. L’A. descrive le i principali eventi militari e la conseguente reazione persiana; dalla spedizione ateniese alla fine della Guerra del Peloponneso nel 409 a.C., passando per i cambiamenti, sostanzialmente negativi, apportati dal suo successore Ciro il Giovane, tra il 407 e il 401 a.C. per finire con l’esame del secondo periodo di co-

mando di Tissaferne di fronte all'invasione spartana nel 400-395 a.C. Lee sostiene che Tissaferne mostrò una profonda conoscenza delle realtà strategiche e geografiche della frontiera occidentale e che riconobbe l'impossibilità di essere forte ovunque e difendere tutto. Per tanto, se necessario, abbandonava le aree vulnerabili, presidiava le città più importanti e si affidava alle forze locali il più possibile. In conclusione, l'A. mostra che la difesa di Tissaferne dell'Anatolia occidentale contro la minaccia greca fu ben condotta e, a parte l'avventura di Ciro, complessivamente efficace. La strategia difensiva avviata da Tissaferne, basata sulla conoscenza della geografia e della politica locale e non solamente su potenti fortificazioni o numerose truppe, permise di consolidare e mantenere il controllo dell'Impero persiano sulla regione fino all'invasione di Alessandro il Grande.

Concludiamo questa breve recensione con una considerazione complessiva. Il principale punto di forza di questo volume è rappresentato dai singoli contributi che sono, nel complesso di alta qualità. Molti di questi tracciano nuove direzioni di analisi o includono i contributi recenti da altre discipline (le scienze sociali o la storia militare moderna). Anche se la scelta dei temi aggreganti potrebbe essere irrilevante, non possiamo fare a meno di notare uno squilibrio a favore di contributi relativi al mondo romano-greco, con nove contributi su dodici, svalutando in parte il senso del "circum mare". Inoltre, non tutti i capitoli sono perfettamente abbinati, ad esempio la comparazione tra Rawlings e Wijnendaele non è evidente e praticamente inesistente per i lavori di Lee e Heargen.

Ma la mancanza maggiore, a nostro avviso, è l'assenza di un'analisi comparati tra i diversi lavori, soprattutto se si considera l'enfasi posta sul confronto nella stimolante introduzione Armstrong. Sarebbe stata utile, specie per un non specialista, una conclusione generale che legasse alcuni dei contributi. Ad esempio, il capitolo di Trundle sulle dinamiche dell'imperialismo ateniese è cronologicamente legato con il capitolo di Kierstead sull'azione collettiva. Sarebbe stato utile, sempre per i non specialisti, evidenziare il legame tra il capitolo sulla coesione di Armstrong, con quello di Hebblewhite sul *sacramentum* e la fedeltà all'imperatore, per arrivare a Wijnendaele e il "signore della guerra" Bonifacio.

Nel complesso, questo libro ha notevoli punti di forza e può essere uno strumento di lavoro e di riflessione molto utile, per gli specialisti, sia come aggiornamento della ricerca attuale sulla guerra antica, che per la possibilità di un'analisi comparativa grazie al formato accoppiato.



Amazonomachia, seconda metà del IV sec. E. C., da Daphne, sobborgo di Antiochia di Oronte, Museo del Louvre, MA3457, Ala Denon, pianterreno, stanza 30.

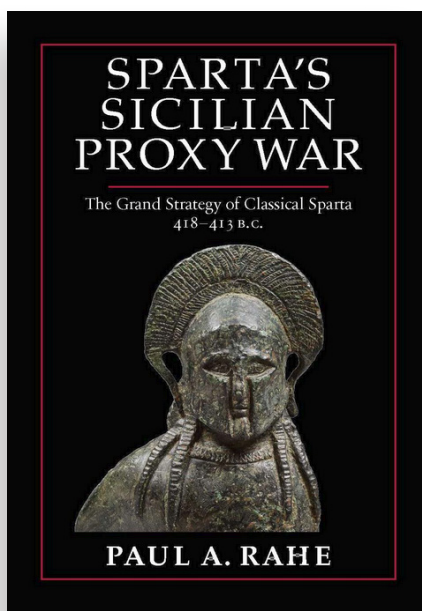
Foto © Marie-Lan Nguyen (User: Jastrow), 2007.

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PAUL A. RAHE,

Sparta's Sicilian Proxy War
The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 418-413 B.C.

Encounter Books, New York – London, 2023, ISBN 9781641773379



The Spartans doted on their collective way of life and one could even state they strived to keep a specific status quo by taking up several strategies in foreign relations. Paul A. Rahe advances this systematic focal assumption in his Sparta's Grand Strategy series: from the first book on the war against Persians to the preliminary series' volume regarding Spartan society, until the two next texts concerning the struggle with Athens, this latest edited one carries on with this theorisation concerning the Athenian expedition to Sicily. The author's standpoint, however, remains Spartan or it is preferable to speak about Peloponnesian, due to the close tie concerning foreign and military between the polis settled on the Eurotas' riverside and her league. Taking the footsteps from the conclusions put forward in the previous book, where the battle of

Mantineia in 418 B.C was rightly regarded, by the Spartan perspective, as a turning point within the struggle against Athens, Rahe portrays the majestic preparations ahead of the expedition to Sicily. Still in this section, he does not dismiss to review the well-known Herms scandal, sorting out some convoluted topics. Within this preliminary chapter more turned toward the Athenian side in comparison with the main of the volume, it is proper to highlight the author's insight concerning the Thucydidean text. In fact, as a sharp reader of the ancient historian especially when he reviews the discourses ascribed by the historian to Alcibiades and Nicias, the author's analysis dwells on the inborn enterprising behaviour of the Athenians. It goes without saying that this reading crops up as the notorious offshoot of the characterisation that Thucydides outlines regarding his fellow citizens especially in the first book of the *Histories*. In this regard, through a neglectful attitude as concerns the foresighted advices by Pericles, at least the Athenians opted for sailing against Syracuse in grand style. Notwithstanding, again following the footsteps of the Athenian counterpart, the collateral Spartan enterprise in Sicily owned its roots in the bold strategy which the chameleonic Alcibiades wisely encouraged during his stay at Sparta. As a matter of fact, in these reflections Rahe follows the Thucydidean narrative step by step, not sometimes lessening his attention on Diodorus and Plutarch. Rather than being simply biased by the Thucydidean standpoint which difficultly allows different accounts from the *Stories* for his reader, it should be noted that the author fits himself in a current of thought which assumes the Thucydides' interview of Alcibiades. As a consequence, the latter's agency as a political refugee weighs on the balance argued by the author. Yet, still, within this reading mainstream among scholars, Rahe does not abstain from adhering to the alleged grand strategy perpetuated by the Spartans, who were compelled, time by time, to reshape their plans to face Athens. In the author's words, Sparta simply learned the lesson from the Archidamian war. In our opinion, even if Rahe consistently follows his theory, however, it would have been appreciable if he had clarified this point with more detail. After all, the peace signed some years before the Gylippus' mission should not be underweighted. Furthermore, we believe it is profitable to not overshadow that the Spartans would have smelled out some Athenian weakness when they accomplished the suggestions by Alcibiades. In other words, even when the so-called Peace of Nicias was up to that period into effect, the Spartans remained congruous with previous occasions when they had embarked on expeditions as long as

Athens was troubled in some way.

Before inspecting how the Spartans opted to support Syracuse in some ways, Rahe expands the narrative on the Athenian measures to encircle the enemy and the following countermeasures by the latter. As well-known among the main topics regarding the Sicilian expedition, scholars always puzzle over the Thucydidean narrative for the topography's problems and alleged inconsistencies. Yet, Rahe faces this challenge by reviewing the debate in the footnotes with an exhaustive bibliography as well as putting forward new readings, not forgoing sometimes authorial comments based on his first-hand survey in Sicily. "Autopsy" in historical research is not only a Ancient Greek anapanage, This section regarding the complex siege measures is worth highlighting due to the topographical reflections which fit in the narrative without impairing the readability.

In the analysis suggested by the author, after the Spartans had resolved to take part in the operations in Sicily, the situation turned more on the besieged side after the Gylippus' arrival. The Spartiate, in fact, after having gathered other allies with his landing in Sicily and joining the Syracusans, promptly started to arrange some undertakings. The building of a counter-wall and a land victory were a turning point. As a consequence, compared to a few weeks before when some defenders were prone to reach an agreement, the hopes for the Syracusans increased exponentially and, by converse, the Athenians became gradually "besieged". On this point, the judgment reserved for Nicias is particularly severe. Rahe stresses many times the faults of the son of Niceratus, even when the author analyses the well-known letter sent to Athens to ask for aid.

According to the author who many times in the following account continues to call attention to Nicias' lack of foresight and his mistakes even for naval warfare, the next months of operations should not be read as a mere continuation of the siege, but as a counter-offensive by the smart Gylippus and his soldiers. Actually, after a naval defeat not resolute for their enemies, the Syracusans seized the so-called Plemmyrium, achieving a key goal. From this moment, neither the Demosthenes' arrival could bypass the unavoidable defeat now. Again, following the Thucydidean narrative where the events become gradually dramatic for his compatriots and their allies, Rahe outlines the defeat representing all the steps forward to the surrender.

In order to reach the conclusion of this review, we can summarise some high-

lights of Rahe's analysis. Firstly, the entire volume is strictly based on Greek sources, especially on the Sicilian books of Thucydides, whom the author proves to be a perceptive reader due to his knowledge of the Greek language. This point is pivotal to appreciate this latest work as well as the entire series. Regarding the latter, consistently Rahe persists in following the Grand Strategy theory applied to the Spartan foreign policy in order to maintain her social *status quo*. If it is appreciable the author's evenness with this modern theory applied to an ancient reality, nevertheless some explications sometimes would have been needed. In addition to an appreciable prose which helps the reader to grasp all the siege operations, honestly, the endnotes are the real backbone of Rahe's work. Here, besides his integration into the academic debate, he proves completeness, quoting not only the major anglophone works on Thucydides but also German and Italian ones. Needless to say, the insiders know how much it is appreciable and a sign of great effort.

ALESSANDRO CARLI

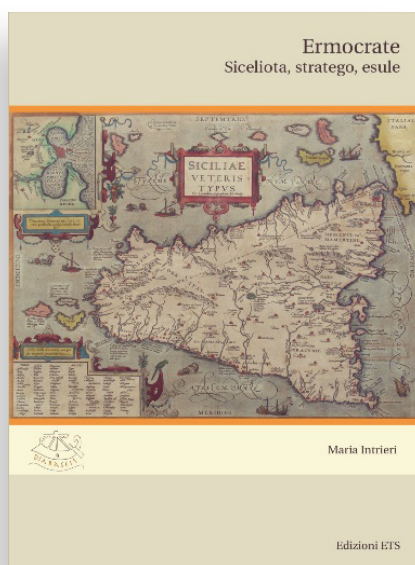
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MARIA INTRIERI,

Ermocrate
Siceliota, stratego, esule

Venezia, Diabaseis, Edizioni ETS, 2020.



Nella prefazione della prima edizione del suo testo più celebre, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, Arthur T. Mahan fa un'interessante osservazione:

Historians generally have been unfamiliar with the conditions of the sea, having as to it neither special interest nor special knowledge; and the profound determining influence of maritime strength upon great issues has consequently been overlooked. This is even more true of particular occasions than of the general tendency of sea power. It is easy to say in a general way, that the use and control of the sea is and has been a great factor in the history of the world; it is more troublesome to seek out and show its exact bearing at a particular juncture. Yet, unless this be done, the acknowledgment of general importance remains vague

and unsubstantial; not resting, as it should, upon a collection of special instances in which the precise effect has been made clear, by an analysis of the conditions at the given moments.¹



Mahan ha rivolto la propria attenzione a un'epoca e a fatti ben diversi da quelli presi in esame da Maria Intriery in questo bel volume sul siracusano Ermocrate, tuttavia anche il pensatore americano non ha potuto, e lo fa nell'introduzione, evitare di parlare delle galee in quanto dotate di fonte di propulsione autonoma e cioè i remi. Osserva, però, che:

The motive power of the galley when in use necessarily and rapidly declined, because human strength could not long maintain such exhausting efforts, and consequently tactical movements could continue but for a limited time.²

1 Arthur T. MAHAN, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, Boston, Little Brown And Company, 1890, p. III.

2 Ivi, p. 3.



La galea nasce come evoluzione e adattamento della trireme di epoca classica ed è significativo che per spiegarne il suo limite principale Mahan ricorra proprio a Ermocrate:

Thus Hermocrates of Syracuse, advocating the policy of thwarting the Athenian expedition against his city (b.c. 413) by going boldly to meet it, and keeping on the flank of its line of advance, said : “As their advance must be slow, we shall have a thousand opportunities to attack them; but if they clear their ships for action and in a body bear down expeditiously upon us, they must play hard at their oars, *and when spent with toil* we can fall upon them.”³

3 Ibidem, n. 1

L'episodio secondo Mahan, che cita in modo molto approssimativo, si svolgerebbe come si nota nel 413, mentre il testo di Tucidide⁴ lo colloca nel 415, quando cioè la notizia della flotta ateniese all'ancora a Corcira è appena arrivata a Siracusa. Il racconto tucidideo, in realtà, è decisamente più ampio e ricco di spunti rispetto all'uso fattone da Mahan. Ermocrate, infatti, suggerisce ai suoi perplessi concittadini, di anticipare le mosse del nemico, che deve ancora affrontare la traversata verso l'Italia, per sorprenderlo a Capo Iapigio, attuale Capo Santa Maria di Leuca. Qui gli Ateniesi arriveranno per forze di cose sgranati, dato il numero delle navi e la difficoltà a tenerle unite in convoglio. Quindi, i Siracusani, compatti, potranno affrontare il nemico scaglionato e comunque stanco per il tragitto già compiuto. Godendo pure del vantaggio di contare, alle proprie spalle, sull'amica Taranto e la possibilità, poi, di poter continuare a insidiare sul bordo lato mare gli Ateniesi, se questi fossero riusciti comunque a passare, procedendo di cabotaggio lungo la costa ionica. Giustamente, Ermocrate non prende in considerazione la possibilità che gli Ateniesi compiano la traversata direttamente da Corcira a Crotona, a causa della sua lunghezza e delle difficoltà che aspettano un grande convoglio durante la navigazione in altura.

Quanto successo a Mahan dimostra la necessità di ritornare alle fonti e di analizzarle con precisione. In realtà, il cuore dell'osservazione del pensatore statunitense resta valida e introduce un argomento assai suggestivo, che riguarda direttamente il volume di Maria Intriari. Perché in tutta la questione si parla di triremi. Le quali:

Defeated by the Phoenicians, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians developed the first specialist warship, the trireme.⁵

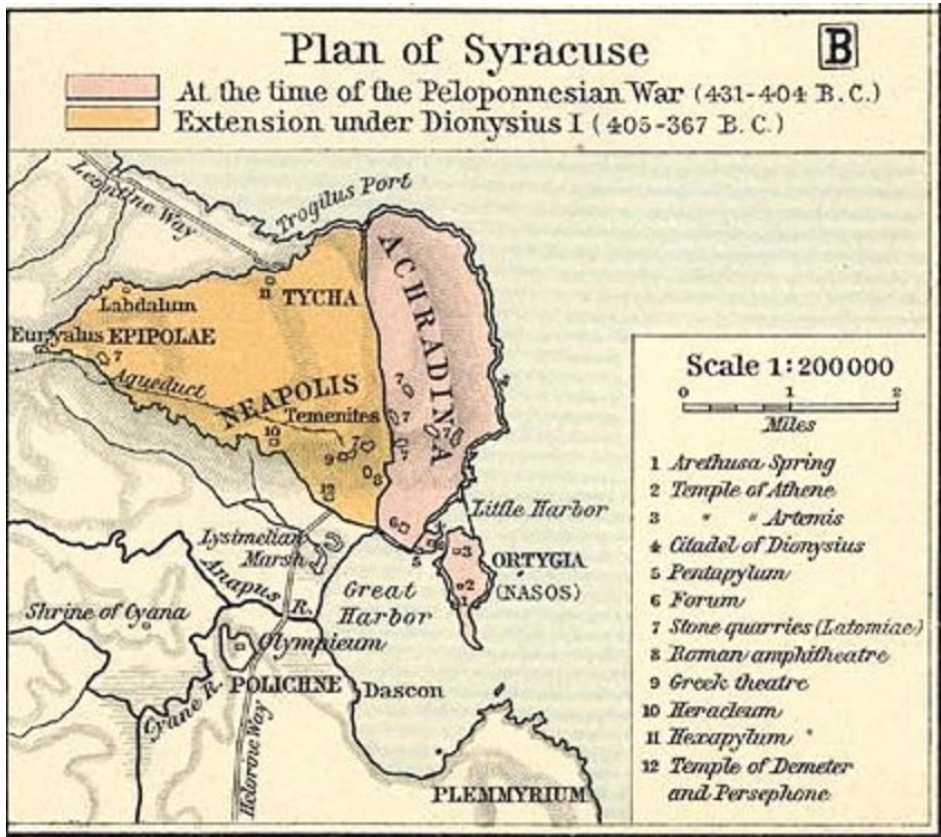
Si introduce, quindi, il convitato di pietra dell'intera vicenda siciliana sul finire del Quarto secolo e cioè Cartagine, mentre sullo sfondo aleggia il problema che, probabilmente, segnerà il destino di Ermocrate e cioè il fatto che:

Trireme navies required new harbours, shipsheds for maintenance, large stocks of shipbuilding timber and other supplies, along with effective administration. In sum, just as navies became capable of implementing a sea power strategy their operating costs rose exponentially.⁶

4 Vd. Thuc. 6. 34, 4-5.

5 Andrew LAMBERT, *Seapower States. Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, Yale-London, Yale UP, 2018, p. 49.

6 Ibidem; cfr. proprio riguardo ad Atene, Vincent GABRIELSEN, *Financing the Athenian Fleet*:



L'adozione, quindi, di una nuova postura marittima e, come conseguenza, la costruzione e il mantenimento di un'adeguata flotta da guerra provocano profondi mutamenti in campo economico e sociale. Quanto succede ad Atene e la ragione per cui Sparta rifuggirà sino al limite della sconfitta militare dal percorrere la stessa via, viene da osservare. Il libro di Maria Intrieri ci permette di penetrare proprio tale questione. Affronta, infatti, le dinamiche politiche e le emergenze sociali alla radice dell'azione di Ermocrate, collocandole sul loro orizzonte strategico e allungando lo sguardo fino alle ultime conseguenze di lungo periodo. *Stratego ed esule*, appunto, di una democrazia che tornerà tirannide. Si tratta, del resto, della missione della collana *Diabaseis*, frutto della collaborazione di cinque università

italiane: Venezia Ca' Foscari, che ospita la sede editoriale; Roma La Sapienza; Università della Calabria, di Parma e di Napoli Federico II. Avviato nel 2009, il progetto nazionale di ricerca *La 'terza' Grecia e l'Occidente*, cui la collana dà voce, si propone di indagare «tutti quei percorsi che attraversando i mari – il Golfo di Corinto, il Mare Ionio e l'Adriatico, ma anche lo Stretto di Messina e il Canale di Sicilia – collegano terre ed esperienze in un continuo e reciproco contatto, svelando volti inediti di una grecità che si suole definire 'periferica' ma che si dimostra invece vitale e originale.»⁷

Siamo di fronte a un obiettivo importante, soprattutto alla luce della successiva affermazione per cui «fin dai suoi primi volumi la collana ospita i risultati delle indagini che indicano con chiarezza la dinamicità di mari già percorsi verso Occidente in età arcaica e classica e protagonisti, a partire dall'età ellenistica, di un movimento complementare che dall'Occidente guarda di nuovo alla Grecia propria.»⁸ Siamo, quindi, in presenza di uno strumento utile a individuare la catena di fatti che porta alla comprensione degli sviluppi più lontani. L'utilizzo pratico della storia, si potrebbe osservare, e la ragione per cui questa resta imprescindibile quando si debbano prendere decisioni.

Benché di livello scientifico, il libro permette anche al lettore meno esperto di muoversi senza difficoltà nell'intricata vicenda di quello straordinario personaggio che fu Ermocrate di Siracusa. Un protagonista politico e militare del suo tempo, ma di cui il *Siceliota* del sottotitolo evidenzia subito l'importanza culturale. Perché qualunque agire teso a forgiare una nuova dimensione umana e statale, inevitabilmente, costringe a fare i conti con le basi ideali di quelle scelte. Il Mito quale fondamento della potenza, per usare un concetto caro all'americano Ralph Waldo Emerson, ripreso di recente in un articolo da Giuseppe De Ruvo.⁹ Non c'è alcun dubbio che nel discorso di Gela del 424, messo in bocca a Ermocrate da

7 Maria INTRIERI, *Ermocrate, Siceliota, Stratego, Esule*, Venezia, Edizioni ETS, 2020, p. IV.

8 Ibidem.

9 «Il mito è fondamento della potenza. Serbatoio di possibilità per ogni attore che si voglia pienamente storico. I momenti in cui una comunità si ripiega su sé stessa, scavando nel suo passato alla ricerca di un mitologema, sono geo-politicamente decisivi: è grazie a questo scavo archeologico, infatti, che le grandi potenze riportano alla luce un credo, una certa idea di sé che, in larga parte, determina il loro modo di porsi di fronte al mondo e alla storia. Allo stesso modo, la messa in discussione di un mito, specie se fondativo, significa che una comunità, nelle profondità della sua psicologia collettiva, sta rivalutando le sue priorità». Giuseppe DE RUVO, «Niente innocenza, niente impero», *Limes*, 11-2022, p. 214.

Tucidide, vi siano tutti gli elementi utili a fondare un mitologema costruito per l'occasione «[...] un credo, una certa idea di sé che, in larga parte, determina il loro modo di porsi di fronte al mondo e alla storia.» Perché a Gela Ermocrate inventa il mito dei *Sicelioti*, una nuova nazione¹⁰ sciolta dalle radici originarie, siano esse doriche o ioniche di Siracusani e Calcidesi, e prodotta dalla comunanza di interessi geo-economici fondati sul fatto di aver vissuto ed essere cresciuti, politicamente e non solo, in Sicilia. Quindi, con interessi e prospettive che li portano a confliggere con gli Imperi di Mare, tutti alla ricerca dell'egemonia mediterranea in quello scorcio del V secolo. Si parla, evidentemente, di Cartagine e, soprattutto, Atene.¹¹

Giustamente, l'autrice dedica molto spazio, come Tucidide del resto, a questo particolare evento. Il quale di per sé potrebbe non sembrare poi di così grande importanza. In definitiva, a Gela nel 424, i rappresentanti di tutte le città siceliote sono riuniti solo per cercare di porre alle guerre che li dividono. Niente di più sbagliato, ci ricorda Maria Intrieri. A Gela Ermocrate celebra il tentativo di creare una nuova identità *siceliota* basata sulla comunanza di interessi. L'espulsione de-

10 Nuova nazione secondo le indicazioni della Scuola di Vienna: «Nelle scienze sociali “identità” designa la miscela, potenzialmente esplosiva, composta dall'immagine di sé, dall'immagine dell'altro e da un'immagine desiderata. L'identità non è qualcosa che possa essere imposta, nella quale si venga coinvolti senza un proprio intervento, ma al contrario è qualcosa che deve essere voluta e perseguita in modo attivo dal singolo», Herwig WOLFRAM, intervista Giuseppe Albertoni (cur.), «Reti Medievali Rivista», IX-2008/1, p. 12, <http://www.rivista.retimedievali.it> cfr. anche Walter POHL, «Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique: identités en transformation entre Antiquité et Moyen Age», *Annales: Histoire, Sciences sociale*, 60 (2005) 1, pp. 183-208; per quanto riguarda l'etno-genesi, «(...) il divenire e anche il continuo mutamento delle identità (...) caratterizzano questi popoli (germanici, ndr.) come processi aperti, mai conclusi, in chiara contrapposizione con la precedente visione dell'immutabilità, condizionata geneticamente, delle identità etnico-nazionali. Un'etno-genesi può essere considerata, temporaneamente, efficace quando ha prodotto un nuovo nome specifico di popolo, quando per esempio non si parla più “degli Slavi”, ma degli Slavi che sono chiamati Boemi (...)» Ivi WOLFRAM 2008, p. 13. Si tratta, per esempio, del caso dei Veneziani: prima non ci sono in quanto tali e poi sì. Wolfram rinforza poi il concetto dicendo che «Nessun germano si è mai definito germano e, qualora lo abbia fatto, ha pensato in “romano”.» Ivi, p. 23. Per il concetto di etno-genesi cfr. in antropologia Fabio DEI, *Antropologia culturale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012; in sociologia, Mario DE BENEDETTIS, *Sociologia della cultura*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2013, mentre per una voce contraria, che non condivido perché ripropone la tesi pur limitandone il raggio d'azione del carattere nazionale basato su alcuni dati di fondo del passato ancestrale, cfr. Anthony D. SMITH, *The ethnic origins of nations*, New Jersey, Blackwell Pub, 2009.

11 LAMBERT 2018, pp. 45-79 e 80-109.

gli Ateniesi da Sicilia e Magna Grecia fino oltre Capo Iapigio non ne rappresenta il corollario, anche se inevitabile, bensì la premessa, in quanto necessario collante geostrategico: bisogna eliminare chi abbia l'intenzione d'impadronirsi dell'isola, delle sue ricchezze a partire dal legname e dal grano, e ricompattarsi attorno a un principio fondativo forte. Ermocrate pare persino disponibile a trovare un accordo con i nemici di sempre della grecità siceliota, vale a dire Siculi e, in particolare, Cartaginesi, piuttosto che con gli Ateniesi. Come mai?

La risposta arriva sempre da Tucidide, osserva l'autrice, là dove fa sottolineare a Ermocrate l'importanza dell'oro e dell'argento per alimentare le ambizioni politiche,¹² ma anche, in un modo che sorprenderà qualcuno, rimarcando l'*homoiotropia*, cioè l'inclinazione a guardare verso i medesimi orizzonti, di Ateniesi e Siracusani.¹³ Nel senso che gli Ioni dell'Attica e i Dori di Sicilia condividono la stessa cultura marittima e quindi danno analoghe risposte politico-militari agli interrogativi strategici di fronte a loro: in quanto entrambi attori tesi ad assumere il controllo del medesimo spazio, il Mediterraneo centrale. Gli Ateniesi perché trascinati dall'espansione del loro Impero verso Occidente, necessaria per la dipendenza della metropoli attica dalle rotte a lunga distanza verso gli scali portuali padani di Spina e Adria; i Siracusani in conseguenza del loro essere naturalmente collocati nel baricentro del Mediterraneo. L'ultimo vertice del triangolo geopolitico del periodo, Cartagine, non per caso anch'essa in posizione chiave per imporre la propria egemonia sulle medesime rotte, è sia nemica strutturale di Atene ma pure, situata com'è nella parte più interna dell'attuale Golfo di Tunisi, destinata alla collisione con la grecità di Sicilia. Tuttavia resta una realtà estranea alle due realtà elleniche per via delle diverse radici culturali e, di conseguenza, per la tipologia di risposte che ci si può aspettare. Con essa, in definitiva, Siracusa potrebbe anche raggiungere una qualche forma di intesa, se non altro temporanea. La Geografia spiega le costanti di lungo periodo che solcano questo angolo di Mondo. Non per niente la Guerra del Peloponneso, in cui la maggior parte della vicenda di Ermocrate si colloca, viene innescata dall'appena vista necessità ateniese di mantenere il controllo delle vie d'acqua verso gli empori granari padani. I quali sono anche i terminali della via dell'Ambra, che unisce da sempre Baltico e Mediterraneo, e dove questa incrocia la via di Eracle verso e dalla Penisola Ibe-

12 Thuc. 6. 34,2

13 Per es. Thuc. 7. 55,2.

rica. Aiutare Corcira contro Corinto, come gli ambasciatori dell'isola fanno del resto subito presente ad Atene, diventa per la città attica necessità ineludibile.¹⁴

Non può sfuggire, del resto, come il conflitto abbia la svolta finale quando, dopo l'insuccesso a Siracusa delle campagne condotte tra il 415 e il 413, Atene viene colpita nei propri rifornimenti alimentari dall'occupazione spartana di Decelea. Non per caso uno dei suggerimenti, forse il più prezioso, dato dal traditore Alcibiade ai mortali nemici sull'Eurota. Neppure, però, che l'evento conclusivo sia la Battaglia navale di Egospotami: proprio Ermocrate aveva mostrato come la sconfitta di Atene passasse dal taglio delle rotte marittime, in questo caso verso il Ponto Eusino oggi Mar Nero. Allo stesso modo, è palese quanto gli Ateniesi, sin dall'inizio della Guerra Archidamica, abbiano puntato all'aggiramento strategico della Lega Peloponnesiaca: via Corcira e quindi Pilo, infine per ben due volte prendendo la strada della Sicilia, nel 427-424 e poi nelle fatali campagne del 415-413. Scelta naturale per un Impero di Mare, ma la risposta speculare poteva venire solo da chi condividesse la medesima impostazione di base: occorreva la Siracusa di Ermocrate. La cui *homoiotropia* con Atene non è solo di regime politico interno, bensì di orizzonti geopolitici. Entrambi sono tese, infatti, all'imperialismo espansionista di ogni Impero di Mare.

Una parte di grande interesse del volume di Maria Intrieri è rappresentata dallo spazio dedicato alla figura e alle idee di uno dei grandi avversari interni di Ermocrate e cioè Atenagora. Un personaggio, comunque, sulla cui semplice esistenza pesano non pochi dubbi, come giustamente rileva l'autrice. Diciamo che, in ogni caso, rappresenta eventualmente un bell'espedito utilizzato da Tucidide per dare corpo a una linea politica di sicuro presente a Siracusa, specie alla vigilia della seconda spedizione ateniese contro la Sicilia¹⁵. Perché Atenagora, *prostates* del *demos* e cioè guida della parte popolare, dà voce agli increduli. A quanti non credono affatto che Atene stia per scatenare il suo potenziale militare contro la Sicilia, in generale, e Siracusa, in particolare. Secondo tale fazione si tratta di un mero espedito, messo in atto da Ermocrate e dai suoi sostenitori per stravolgere la costituzione siracusana e imporre, sotto la spinta delle urgenze per

14 Secondo la lezione di Nicholas J. SPYKMAN, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, Piscataway, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 2007.

15 Thuc. 6. 35, 1-2.

la sicurezza, una svolta oligarchica. Forse, addirittura, la tirannide. Maria Intriери è particolarmente brava in questo punto a mettere in guardia dalla facilità con cui si può cadere nella trappola di trarre conclusioni alla luce di quanto noi sappiamo poi essere accaduto. In realtà, non c'è dubbio che dopo sei anni di Pace di Nicia e vista la scarsa propensione spartana a correre l'alea della guerra, a Siracusa non pochi potevano sentirsi autorizzati a non "vedere" la minaccia ateniese. Solo chi condividesse la medesima cultura imperialista degli Ioni d'Attica, però, era in grado d'individuare. Serviva, appunto, Ermocrate. La posizione di Atenagora, ed è uno dei passi più densi tanto di Tucidide che del libro di Maria Intriери, si rispecchia nelle parole messe in bocca a uno degli strateghi chiamati a comandare la spedizione ateniese: Nicia. Il quale, a Siracusa, finirà per perdere guerra e vita dopo essersi opposto in ogni modo all'operazione, utilizzando proprio gli argomenti portati, sul fronte opposto, da Atenagora per sollevare i suoi dubbi.¹⁶

Collocazione geografica, cultura nazionale, carattere del governo e della popolazione quale prodotto della scelta marittima, cioè le radici dell'*homoiotropia* di Atene e Siracusa, permettono di decodificare quanto avvenuto nell'ultimo quarto del V secolo nel cuore del Mediterraneo. La personalità di Ermocrate illumina l'intero contesto della Guerra del Peloponneso e lascia intuire quanto presto accadrà, quando a Siracusa gli eredi della fazione dei *philoï*, che ne hanno supportato la visione e le ambizioni politiche, troveranno in Dionisio I il Vecchio l'uomo capace, attraverso la sua tirannide, di dare corso al grande disegno imperiale solo abbozzato dal predecessore. Anche perché la fortuna di Ermocrate si avvia presto al declino. Passato il pericolo, tramonta anche l'unità d'intenti e azione che questo riesce sempre a generare. Riprendono, violente, le lotte di fazione, caratteristica prima e ineliminabile di ogni democrazia e in realtà endemica nella società siceliota, in generale, e siracusana, nello specifico, trasformando l'eroe di Porto Grande ed Epipole nell'esule in cerca di rivincita. Forse, però, la funzione di Ermocrate, semplicemente, è finita. Liquidata Atene con la resa del 404, l'avversario principale torna a essere l'altro perno del triangolo geopolitico mediterraneo e cioè Cartagine. *Ermocrate, Siceliota, stratego, esule*, un libro che non può mancare nella biblioteca dello studioso o del semplice appassionato.

FEDERICO MORO

¹⁶ Thuc. 6. 36-37.

OMAR COLORU,

Il regno del più forte
La lunga contesa per l'impero di Alessandro Magno
(IV-III sec. a.C.).

Salerno Editore, Roma, 2022. Pp. 152 ISBN 9788869736759. E. 16,00



Nella sua ultima monografia *Il regno del più forte. La lunga contesa per l'impero di Alessandro Magno (IV-III sec. a.C.)* l'Autore Omar Coloru¹ (d'ora in poi, l'A.) ripercorre in maniera chiara e con uno stile accessibile le vicende della sanguinosa successione ad Alessandro Magno (323-281 a.C.). Il saggio si inserisce a pieno diritto nel solco dell'interesse di

¹ Omar Coloru insegna attualmente Storia Greca ed Epigrafia Greca presso l'Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro.

lunga data verso le origini dell'Ellenismo, come dimostrano alcuni recenti e importanti studi, tra gli altri, di Robin Waterfield, Victor Alonso Troncoso e Franca Landucci².

Nel suo riesame di un'epoca di netta transizione, l'A. intende porre l'accento sul carattere agonistico e militare della contesa per il potere: esso è giustificato già a partire dal sottotitolo, che intenzionalmente denuncia anche la lunga durata dei conflitti tra i Successori di Alessandro. Infatti, nel primo dei tre capitoli centrali che compongono il volume, *Al migliore* (pp. 15-29), è riservato adeguato spazio alle riflessioni preliminari (e propedeutiche) sui concetti di *kratos*, *aristeia* e *dignitas*, già noti alle epoche precedenti ad Alessandro, ma che incarnano pienamente anche lo spirito dell'età ellenistica. L'esercizio della forza, la vittoria in battaglia e il governo su un territorio (cfr. il concetto di *doriktetos chora*), tre degli elementi discriminanti per l'*identikit* del sovrano ideale di quest'epoca, acquistano nuovo senso proprio con le lotte dei Successori e degli Epigoni: non stupisce, dunque, che la successione ad Alessandro fu caratterizzata soprattutto dai (fallimentari) tentativi di dimostrazione di essere "il più forte" (*kratistos*), come si evince in più punti del capitolo.

Il secondo capitolo, non per caso intitolato *I deboli* (pp. 30-94), passa in rapida ma efficace rassegna gli effimeri e impotenti attori della successione ad Alessandro. Se non potevano mancare i paragrafi sugli eredi più diretti del Macedone, ovvero il fratellastro Filippo III Arrideo, e i figli Alessandro IV e Eracle, non scontata è l'attenzione che l'A. rivolge alle donne di rango reale, tra regine e principesse. La lettura attenta e critica delle fonti coinvolge sia le iraniche Barsine, Parisatide, Rossane e Statira, che giocarono un ruolo fondamentale nella politica matrimoniale di Alessandro e nel più ampio progetto di fusione tra il mondo macedone e quello persiano, sia le *basilissai* argeadi ed epirote. Pagine dense di ri-

2 Mi riferisco a VICTOR ALONSO TRONCOSO, Edward M. ANSON (eds), *After Alexander. The Time of the Diadochi (323-281 BC)*, Oxford, 2009; ROBIN WATERFIELD, *Dividing the Spoils. The War for Alexander the Great's Empire*, Oxford, 2011; FRANCA LANDUCCI, *Il testamento di Alessandro. La Grecia dall'impero ai regni*, Roma, 2014; Ead. *Alessandro Magno. Sovrano ambizioso, guerriero invincibile; il più grande conquistatore di tutti i tempi*, Roma, 2019. Vd. anche il recente MIKE ROBERTS, *Alexander the Great's Legacy. The Decline of Macedonian Europe in the Wake of the Wars of the Successors*, Philadelphia, 2022, e in lingua italiana, segnalo anche i recenti manuali di Federicomaria MUCCIOLI, *Storia dell'Ellenismo*, Bologna, 2019, e Manuela MARI (ed), *L'età ellenistica: società, politica, cultura*, Roma, 2019.

costruzione evenemenziale e allo stesso tempo interpretativa interessano le figure di Cinnane, Cleopatra, Tessalonice e soprattutto di Olimpiade ed Euridice, le due protagoniste della cosiddetta “Guerra delle regine”: la loro importanza fu grande nel contesto degli scontri tra i Successori, poiché l’alleanza con l’una o con le altre determinava il provvisorio sopravvento, nelle varie fasi della guerra, del partito ‘legittimista’ di contro a quelli non ‘ufficiali’. Nel capitolo vi è anche spazio per Eumene di Cardia, “condottiero forte in una posizione debole” (p. 75), che offre lo spunto per ripercorrere le fasi del conflitto fino alla sua morte, occorsa nel 316 a.C. nella battaglia della Gabiene. È da notare, come giustamente fa l’A., che tutti questi personaggi orbitarono attorno all’*oikos* reale macedone nel senso più ampio del termine: con titoli e gradi differenti (madri, mogli di primo e secondo letto, compagni d’arme) essi rivendicarono la parentela e i rapporti con Alessandro per la *quest for legitimacy*, soprattutto ricorrendo a crimini e violenze.

Il terzo capitolo *Violenza e terrore* (pp. 95-116), pertanto, chiude il corpo centrale del volume soffermandosi in primo luogo sulla “pratica senza tempo” (p. 95) dell’esercizio della brutalità non solo in guerra, ma anche dentro l’*oikos* reale, una pratica tanto vistosa anche per l’epoca ellenistica. Nel presentare alcuni esempi di violenza, terrore e crudeltà, soprattutto nella loro “dimensione spettacolare” (p. 105), l’A. si sofferma sulle cruente vicende della famiglia di Lisimaco (le uccisioni del figlio Agatocle e di Tolemeo Cerauno); Antigono Monofalmo (le torture ai corpi di Alceta, fratello di Perdicca e di Antigene, capo degli Argiraspidi); Agatocle di Siracusa; Olimpiade e Euridice; e infine del tesoriere Arpalò. Conclude questa sezione la riflessione sul potere deterrente della forza bruta: il dispiego di imponenti eserciti (per esempio, l’assedio di Rodi da parte di Demetrio Poliorcete) e le minacce di sanguinose repressioni si fanno i messaggeri di una *crudelitas* già sperimentata e nota, tale da volgere a proprio favore situazioni potenzialmente rischiose, e con uno sforzo minore.

A corredo del volume, si contano tre cartine che ritraggono l’assetto geopolitico dell’impero di Alessandro nelle varie fasi delle guerre dei Successori (in particolare, prima della battaglia di Ipso del 301 e dopo quella di Curupedio del 281), alcune genealogie dei Successori, oltre a una *Introduzione* e una *Conclusione* ricche di spunti di ricerca. Infatti, l’A. non manca di proporre opportuni ed equilibrati paralleli tra le vicende dei Successori e quelle di consimili momenti storici (ma non necessariamente coevi), già prestati nel corso delle pagine precedenti: tra i vari, si segnalano i ricorrenti riferimenti al *coté* iranico dell’impero

di Alessandro, o a quello indiano, nella forma di rimandi al trattato di politica *Arthasāstra*; le citazioni da *Il Principe* di Machiavelli, che a modo di esergo introducono alla lettura dei tre capitoli principali; e i rimandi alla Cina degli “Stati combattenti” (453-221 a.C.) e di Sun Tzu (pp. 119-120). Le fonti antiche, di tradizione greco-romana e di altra provenienza (e.g. i diari babilonesi), sono costantemente segnalate nel corpo del testo o nelle note, e sono accompagnate da una bibliografia aggiornata e centrata sul tema.

In conclusione, *Il regno del più forte* apporta un notevole contributo alla letteratura sulla successione ad Alessandro Magno: oltre a proporre una rilettura degli eventi in maniera lineare, originale e in forma monografica, il volume presta particolare attenzione all’Ellenismo delle culture, tra mondo greco e mondo orientale, in pieno accordo con gli interessi scientifici dell’A., esperto conoscitore della “grecità di frontiera”³, e in linea con le ricerche specialistiche condotte negli ultimi decenni. Il saggio compendia in maniera egregia la minore attenzione su quest’epoca da parte della manualistica di settore: in questo senso, il volume approfondisce in maniera sintetica e competente uno dei più decisivi *turning point* della storia greca⁴, con il duplice obiettivo di manuale di formazione per gli studenti e di agile approfondimento per gli specialisti.

VINCENZO MICALETTI

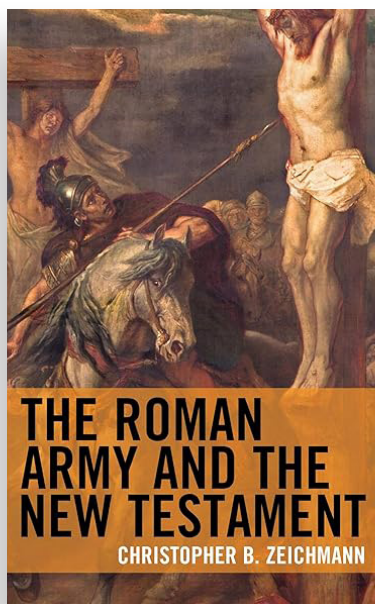
3 Tra i contributi più rilevanti su questo tema, si segnalano le monografie Omar COLORU, *Da Alessandro a Menandro. Il regno greco di Battriana*, Pisa, 2009; Philippe CLANCIER, Omar COLORU, Gilles GORRE, *Les mondes hellénistiques. Du Nil à l’Indus*, Paris, 2017, oltre a svariati contributi su rivista sui regni battriani e indo-greci e sui Seleucidi. Tra gli interessi ‘orientali’ dell’A., è da menzionare anche la monografia Omar COLORU, *L’imperatore prigioniero. Valeriano, la Persia e la disfatta di Edessa*, Bari-Roma 2017. Ulteriori recenti spunti bibliografici sul tema della ‘grecità di frontiera’: Claudia ANTONETTI, Paolo BIAGI (Eds), *With Alexander in India and Central Asia*, Oxford, 2017.

4 La crescente attenzione sulla transizione tra epoca post-classica e ellenistica è in costante crescita: segnalato, tra i volumi più recenti, il catalogo di esposizione di una mostra sulla battaglia di Cheronea organizzata ad Atene da Panagiotis IOSSIF, Ioannis D. FAPPAS (Eds), *“Chaeronea, 2 August 338 BC: A Day that Changed the World”*, 2023.

CHRISTOPHER B. ZEICHMANN,

The Roman Army and the New Testament

Lanham Maryland, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018, pp. 185.



La possibilità di investigare il vissuto di una comunità storica sta diventando sempre più importante, proprio per il suo tentativo di avvicinamento, quando possibile, alla percezione dal basso di un avvenimento o di una situazione determinata e prolungata nel tempo. In questo, la *storia sociale* ha dato modo di integrare lo studio delle fonti letterarie, di solito privilegiate se non esclusive, con quello di una moltitudine di documenti diversi, variegati, intrecciando metodologie per restituire un quadro completo e complesso di realtà locali, ma non necessariamente ristrette, partendo effettivamente *dal basso*. Ed è proprio in questo filone di studi che si inserisce il lavoro di Christopher B. Zeichmann, nel rinnovato interesse verso la presenza, e la resistenza, sul vasto territorio dell'Impero Romano dell'esercito, considerato tanto quanto *istituzione* quanto come *individualità*, tanto nella sua operatività quanto nella sua rappresen-

tazione e reazione da parte della popolazione con la quale intesse una vasta molteplicità di relazioni. Il tutto, ponendosi però in un campo scivoloso e incrinato come quello della regione palestinese durante la presenza romana¹.

Infatti, la ricerca nasce da un progetto di natura più vasta di analisi e catalogazione di materiale e di documenti di carattere militare nell'area utilizzando tecniche di *Digital Humanities* e di archiviazione, sfidando una tendenza storiografica che ha voluto investigare l'insediamento romano sul territorio secondo un'ottica di controllo sempre più capillare partendo da una base di *proxy rule*, privilegiando le note di ritorsione, di critica e di resistenza a delle politiche repressive. Per quanto l'impostazione *anti imperiale* e *post-coloniale* abbia concesso di gettare luce su una molteplicità di aspetti e di far risuonare la voce di moltissimi attori non considerati, questa non ha permesso di prestare la giusta attenzione all'*occupazione silenziosa* che l'esercito di Roma dispose nella regione, e ai suoi contatti con la popolazione. E questo, secondo l'autore, per una chiara connotazione dei precedenti lavori sull'area geografica.

Come per la questione tematica, il *focus* del volume nel *Nuovo Testamento* nasce non semplicemente dall'esigenza di riclassificare il sistema relazione tra forza militare e popolazione in una regione specifica non ancora toccata, ma dalla necessaria rivalutazione di una serie di fonti letterarie manipolate al limite della decontestualizzazione, che devono essere riportate al loro *background* autoriale per poter davvero essere interrogate con criterio storico. La tendenza allo studio della dominazione romana di I d.C. in Palestina sotto la lente biblica, infatti, ha reso non solo difficile una visione oggettiva del fenomeno, stratonata tra la Storia del Cristianesimo e la Teologia, ma anche praticamente impossibile non cadere in uno schematismo che è connaturato nella tipologia testuale della fonte, elementi che hanno connotato la maggior parte dei lavori anche di carattere storiografico. Invece, proprio a seguito della maggiore sensibilità sul tema, sembra necessario, per l'autore, ripartire dai testi, *Vangeli* e non, in quanto espressione e produzione di un determinato ambiente sociale in momenti particolarmente complicati per la regione, e metterli *alla prova* delle altre documentazioni riguardo la presenza dei militari romani in Palestina. Tenendo sempre a mente che il *soldato*, con il

1 Buona parte della prima sezione è dedicata alla scelta terminologica sia per la descrizione dell'intervento romano, sia per i nomi storici della regione, che a livello generale deve essere intesa come *Palestina*.

suo ruolo e la sua istituzione, passa la maggior parte del tempo fuori dal campo di battaglia.

Questa esigenza, quindi, di rileggere e rivalutare lo statuto del soldato in Palestina deve passare, prima di tutto, da una solida e stratificata analisi dei quadri militari, elemento che occupa la prima parte del volume, composta da due capitoli proprio riguardo le diverse tipologie di truppe nella regione e le loro rispettive *agency* in relazione con la popolazione. Il tutto per rispondere alla rappresentazione del *cattivo soldato con accento britannico nei confronti del buon ebreo dall'accento americano* tipica delle produzioni cinematografiche. Infatti, il riconoscimento di una multiforme dimensione di provenienza, di paghe, di inquadramenti e di linguaggi è la partenza obbligatoria per un qualsiasi studio sul tema, che deve anche mettere in conto il fatto che la partecipazione militare potrebbe essere divisa in categorie: da una parte i *legionari*, gli *ausiliari* e i *pretoriani*; dall'altra, i *soldati reali* delle istituzioni clienti, i *guardiani* dei templi e le *guardie del corpo* delle principali figure religiose e politiche. La distinzione tra i due gruppi non solo implica distinzioni di cittadinanza, di origine e di statuto generale, ma anche l'ammissione di un universo che ha esigenze diverse per compiti diversi, e che non può essere appiattito in una singola dimensione.

Tra forze locali e dislocamenti romani, il tessuto sociale della regione non può, in questo metodo, non sganciarsi da molti dei pregiudizi degli studi, come ad esempio quella della correlazione *nome-origine*, oppure dell'immediata assimilazione nel sistema romano, permettendo di riconoscere un affresco di *generale continuità* fino alla prima vera cesura, cioè quella della Guerra Giudaica. L'analisi approfondita, in particolare dei documenti epigrafici e papiracei, permette, in questa sezione, di dare il giusto peso ad una progressiva trasformazione locale nella quale l'eredità etnica serviva come un punto di continuità identitario tra gli Ebrei e altri Palestinesi nel mondo militare, smarcandosi anche dal preconcetto di *non-ebreo* e, quindi, *gentile* solo per il fatto non osservare *in toto* i dettami, amplificando le sfaccettature e permettendo di penetrare davvero nella percezione interna di una potenza esterna. Il servizio militare assume effettivamente quello statuto di *effettiva scelta* e di *ascesa sociale* che deve essere riconosciuto alla luce di un mondo distante come quello romano, dove non era la fuga dalla povertà la motivazione del reclutamento quanto invece la ricerca di una stabilità e l'accesso ad un gruppo relativamente privilegiato ed elitario che, nel primo periodo, segnò effettivamente la principale, se non l'unica, forza bellica sul territorio sotto forma di ausiliari.

Per questo, a livello prettamente storico, il vero momento di cesura fu la Guerra Giudaica, dopo la quale si venne a formare un *sensu di alterità* tangibile a seguito delle nuove politiche di dislocamento delle legioni, che vennero percepite come *forza di occupazione* e come motore di un processo di assimilazione, da una parte, e di netta distinzione. A tal proposito, cominciò ad assumere una forma sempre più di mediazione il centurione, il quale, tramite la sua estrazione locale e il suo statuto, divenne l'interlocutore privilegiato in una situazione di convivenza nella quale la visione di imposizione, e di *terrore*, che si potrebbe ricavare ad una lettura impressionistica delle fonti, risulta limata. Nella rivalutazione, allora, del rapporto *soldato-cittadino*, devono essere messe in conto: le azioni *dirette* delle forze militari romane (in particolare, in risposta ad una *lectio di brigantaggio sociale*), che nel tempo si sono andate a concentrare in luoghi precisi quali gli accampamenti e le fortificazioni locali (di fatto, diminuendo il senso di tensione e oppressione capillare); le attività infrastrutturali, di costruzione delle opere pubbliche e di partecipazione alle misure di controllo fiscali e burocratiche; l'influenza indiretta, tanto in senso di monetizzazione di un'economia in dissesto dopo la distruzione di Gerusalemme, quanto di riorientamento dei costumi di produzione e di mercato. Si intravede, nella trattazione, una profonda comprensione del valore e dell'influenza di una *istituzione totale* che assunse un ruolo di primo piano in tre periodi distinti, cioè una prima fase tra la conquista di Pompeo e la spedizione di Tito, una seconda tra la Guerra Giudaica e quella del Bar Kokhba, e infine una terza nella definitiva provincializzazione, e proprio alla luce di queste attenzioni si potrà arrivare ad una comprensione migliore del vissuto, giorno per giorno, tanto in senso positivo quanto negativo.

La seconda parte del volume, invece, trae linfa dalla profonda e tecnica analisi, corredata anche da un pregevole apparato iconografico e infografico, per addentrarsi in una precisa rilettura degli episodi presenti nei testi dei *Vangeli Canonici*, degli *Atti degli Apostoli*, di alcune lettere paoline e del complesso *Apocalisse*, ponendo una forte attenzione al contesto di produzione, all'autorialità, di conseguenza, al valore che i vari episodi di carattere militare possono recare. La particolarità della fonte, infatti, non è solo quella di avere una chiara difficoltà interpretativa, anche a seguito di sovraesposizione e di complesse vicende esegetiche, ma anche di riportare gli stessi episodi con elementi molto diversi, questione che richiede una revisione totale e singolare. Le *voci distinte* davanti al medesimo evento, allora, devono portare direttamente ad una rilettura della

presenza militare nei testi del Nuovo Testamento che superi gli stessi ostacoli che sono stati riconosciuti nella prima sezione del lavoro, e facendo molta attenzione alla cornice cronologica.

La progressiva analisi dei *Vangeli*, proprio per questa necessità di contestualizzazione e di riconoscimento di una griglia interpretativa cronologica, porta l'Autore a riconoscere anche un lento cambiamento d'immagine nei confronti dei soldati, in particolare in risposta alla distruzione di Gerusalemme e alla necessità di creare un senso di comunità, di vicinanza e, quindi, anche di responsabilità di fronte l'accaduto. Alla prova dei fatti, solo in *Marco* la figura di Gesù assume i caratteri del *rifugio*, del *raccoglimento* e della *ritualità*, nelle ceneri del trauma della guerra e di una Gerusalemme *depravata*, ma adottando una particolare descrizione del conflitto e dello stato di occupazione *agentless*, senza un effettivo riferimento a nomi, persone o colpevoli (in particolare, a seguito di una raffinata analisi del passo del *Demone del Geresane*). La violenza del mondo bellico si veste di una metafora della lotta tra Dio e Satana che non implica, però, un'assimilazione tra Roma e *Il Male*, dove, anzi, la *vera responsabilità* scompare in maniera definitiva per sottostare ad un modello di predeterminazione: questa *climax* pone le condizioni per la venuta del *Figlio dell'Uomo*, una visione da una parte di una massa violenta, ostile e pericolosa, ma *senza volto* e agente di un volere esterno, dove gli unici riferimenti ad individui coincidono con il quadro *normale* del sistema relazionale tratto dalle altre fonti.

Con una voce distante venti anni dal conflitto, *Marco* fa confluire tanto una visione precedente, inaspettata, della guerra quanto una successiva, di concretizzazione e comprensione, in una commistione di politica, teologia e storia ben esemplificata dalla narrazione del *falso storico* della Strage degli Innocenti. Nonostante, quindi, ci sia una sorta di distacco, e conseguente accettazione, della vicenda romana, che si riversa in un atteggiamento di condanna della *violenza terrestre*, i personaggi romani individuali, come il famoso *Centurione* o come Ponzio Pilato, diventano sempre più espressione di una migliore accettazione del messaggio di Gesù, come se si stesse avvicinando il momento della conversione, contrariamente all'allontanamento, marcato, dalla popolazione ebraica, che assume i connotati dei veri responsabili.

Ed è proprio questa tendenza al contatto e all'avvicinamento ai *gentili* a connotare *Luca* e gli *Atti degli Apostoli*, che inseriscono per la prima volta la narrazione

cristiana con il contesto imperiale romano, arrivando ad una sorta di emulazione degli stilemi della storiografia e a dei toni positivi e apologetici. Tra le parole dei protagonisti della Vita di Gesù si riesce a configurare un *topos* di rappresentazione utopistica e ideale dei militari, aperti all'ascolto e a un comportamento nuovo, in particolare grazie alla forza persuasiva della preghiera e della conversione, che nonostante l'idealizzazione trasmette l'intenzione di una nuova fase delle relazioni soldati-civili. Questa consapevolezza segue, in un tono profetico, il passaggio di testimone della comunità *gentile* cristiana su quella ebraica nella *Storia della Salvezza*, dove al compassionevole comportamento verso i Romani ne segue uno colpevolizzante verso Antipa e alle istituzioni locali non latine, elemento che trova negli *Atti* la piena raffigurazione monocromatica, e sempre coerente, del soldato romano come *tipico buon uomo*.

Luca e *Atti* rappresentano, quindi, la voce più coerente e coesa del militare, e nonostante i soldati non siano esenti da difetti hanno una serie considerevole di figure esemplari, alimentando la critica nei confronti degli Ebrei, i veri colpevoli delle crudeltà della Passione. L'Impero Romano diventa un contesto di missione ricettivo e fertile, mentre Erode e Antipa assumono la figura del *nemico*, e se questo può essere inteso come un approccio moderato di *filo romanismo*, dovrebbe essere inteso invece come accusa diretta contro la sconfitta realtà ebraica. In sintesi, un *cristianesimo che sopporta Roma* o *Roma che può sopportare il Cristianesimo*.

Ultimo dei Sinottici, *Giovanni* rappresenta sicuramente la fonte più difficile per il tema in questione, tanto per la composizione stratificata quanto per la sua generale indipendenza dagli altri Vangeli, anche grazie alla sua cornice. Asse centrale della storia, la personale, e singolare, figura di Gesù detiene non semplicemente il *main stage* ma anche il ruolo di motore diretto ed indiretto del comportamento di tutte le persone che gli stanno accanto, sia in qualità di attori che di meri spettatori, e il mondo militare non è da meno, il quale in maniera totalmente strumentale risponde dei dubbi del fedele e delle decisioni di Dio, esemplificato in maniera magistrale dalla figura di Pilato e dalla questione, dalle tinte politiche, dei *due regni*, cioè quello di Roma e di Dio. A questo proposito, la questione di *essere amici di Cesare* non implica, in *Giovanni*, una critica o un'accusa, di carattere rivoluzionario, sui termini specifici del lessico diplomatico degli stati clienti, bensì un riconoscimento di sfere di competenza e di una nuova fase storica che non tocca le vicende escatologiche di Dio, e dove i soldati rimangono un elemen-

to narrativo per portare avanti una Storia, della lotta tra il *bene* e il *male*, nella quale i *gentili*, in quanto tali, non hanno ruolo.

Di grande interesse sono anche le *Lettere* del *corpus* paolino, le quali presentano una chiara distinzione nel rapporto con militare romano tra i testi originali e quelli attribuiti a Paolo di Tarso, elemento che pone come necessario *caveat* il mettere da parte buona parte della trattazione cristologica e spirituale, elementi privilegiati nella maggior parte delle trattazioni su questi documenti. Per quanto riguarda le lettere originali, il risultato che si può trarre è quello di una generale familiarità nei confronti del mondo romano per mera frequentazione, dove la metafora militare serve esclusivamente alla formazione di una comunità, e per la quale rimane velata la questione della resistenza ad un *nuovo mondo*. Se le metafore militari di Paolo erano, allora, per battaglie cosmiche o individuali, invece, nel *Paolo "disputato"* si amplifica la tendenza elogiativa delle virtù del soldato, secondo quel modello riscontrato nei testi successivi alla caduta di Gerusalemme e che hanno, nella loro connotazione evangelica, una serie di scopi e obiettivi testuali che li distanziano dalla riproduzione oggettiva.

Ultimo, non per importanza, *Apocalisse* è chiaramente il libro più complicato e oscuro, e questo non fa altro che limitare le considerazioni che potrebbero essere ricavate dal rapporto fra il mondo militare e quello civile. Nonostante questa evidente difficoltà, l'ampio uso di metafore ha portato molti autori a cercare, forse in errore, una latente tensione *anti-romana* che, invece, deve essere sfumata in nome del contesto di produzione, e in particolare proprio per la finalità dell'opera, di nuovo volta quasi esclusivamente alla raffigurazione di una lotta che non compete alla realtà storica di Roma ma che ha profonde radici nel *côte* profetico delle scritture di *Antico Testamento*, e che potrebbe essere letto in una generale contestazione all'imperialismo. Certamente, la distruzione di Roma, e la sua caduta verso il *nuovo mondo*, rappresenta il punto apicale e, in seguito, di ripartenza della realtà in *Apocalisse*, ma, oltre il sovversivo messaggio di speranza, è difficile non riconoscere il desiderio di un nuovo impero dopo quello presente, in un vortice di violenza che non ha risoluzione.

Nel tirare le somme di questa analisi, rigorosa e completa, non sembra sbagliato riconoscere come le voci, distinte, dei testi in realtà siano perfettamente inquadrare nel loro contesto di produzione e di risposta al periodo storico, se non ancora di più alle loro finalità di documenti rivolti ad una comunità in forma-

zione. *Apocalisse* critica l'imperialismo romano direttamente, anche sul lato più violento della distruzione; il dittico *Luca-Atti* minimizza la tensione tra soldati e primi cristiani, creando un ritratto positivo e rispettoso; infine, *Marco* e *Matteo* presentano una stereotipica visione violenta lasciando solo dei dettagli favorevoli verso i sotto ufficiali, come i centurioni, rimarcando in maniera parallela il completo anonimato delle schiere di soldati in un senso di *agentless*. Il *Nuovo Testamento*, quindi, non solo offre una risposta negativa e positiva al mondo militare in base al momento o al *focus*, ma anche una di disinteresse generalizzato, rendendo necessaria una contestualizzazione e l'analisi delle singole mani, elemento reso possibile solo con una profonda conoscenza delle istituzioni del primo impero.

Questa *ambivalenza*, come riporta la conclusione del volume, nei confronti degli agenti della violenza di stato può essere istruttiva per pensare alle politiche di resistenza attuali, partecipando in maniera cosciente e consapevole ad un dibattito che, intravisto nelle prime pagine del libro, non può essere messo da parte (in particolare, in un momento storico come quello attuale). La macchina da guerra romana ha influenzato su molti elementi distanti e spesso dissonanti, assumendo il ruolo di catalizzatore e di mutamento di fattori istituzionali, sociali ed economici, ma proprio la diversità del vissuto, e dell'esperienza, rintracciabile in particolar modo dalle fonti non letterarie, connota tutto il quadro impressionistico nei confronti del mondo militare. In definitiva, una storia sociale fatta con i suoi precisi stilemi e le sue tecniche deve tenere ben a mente il proprio *campo* (non sembra sbagliato, in questo caso, rivolgersi a dei termini di natura antropologica) per non cadere in errate interpretazioni di un periodo distante, e complesso, come quello della prima occupazione romana della regione palestinese.

È importante, in definitiva, *respingere* le descrizioni di un mondo cristiano antico e di quello ebraico come connotati da un dualismo tra un impero opprimente e un piccolo centro di resistenza ben definito, proprio per poter aprire una stagione di studio che può giovare delle nuove evidenze di carattere epigrafico, papiroaceo e archeologico, sganciandosi dalla forte intenzionalità letteraria (nel corso del testo non è stato ricordato, ma rimane sempre ingombrante anche l'ombra di Flavio Giuseppe). Se la *postura* di uno degli evangelisti risulta, allora, diversa nei confronti del mondo militare, tale differenza è tale anche proprio per il suo diverso stilema narrativo e il suo diverso scopo di scrittura, un elemento estremamente importante da ricordare anche per lo stesso *contenitore*, cioè il *Nuovo Testamento*, che non produsse un testo omologante e coerente nel trattare il comportamento

da seguire, essendo semplicemente il prodotto di interessi sociali umani mondani.

In conclusione, secondo l'Autore, si potrebbe ripartire, nello studio sistematico di queste diverse interpretazioni dell'esperienza romana da parte della popolazione palestinese solo utilizzando come struttura di pensiero l'idea di Slavoj Žižek, cioè quella della falsa eticità del capitalismo sostenibile e dell'accettazione di un sistema che di fatto si rimodula e si ripresenta per essere compreso e sopportato nonostante le storture. Come, quindi, l'uomo moderno, e in questo caso il *proletario*, si omologa in una griglia di pensiero del genere, si potrebbe provare a riflettere sull'ambivalenza e la complicità nei confronti della violenza dell'Impero nel *Nuovo Testamento*, ammettendo la confusione davanti alle evidenze letterarie. Per questo non sarebbe necessario leggere i *Vangeli* come opera sostenuta e costruita *a priori*, bensì come insieme di diverse assimilazioni e interiorizzazioni del vissuto in un sistema imperiale, e per questo degni testimoni di una realtà molto più complessa e stratificata di quanto siamo abituati a pensare.

HAN PEDAZZINI

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ANNA Busetto,

La “sezione romana” della Tattica di Arriano
Introduzione, nuovo testo critico, traduzione e commento,

Roma, Tab Edizioni, 2023, pp. 177



Il lavoro di Anna Busetto si presenta, come dichiara l’A. stessa (p. 10), «come la prima monografia specificamente incentrata sulla ‘sezione romana’ della *Tattica*» di Arriano. In effetti si tratta di un’opera la cui prima edizione a stampa vide la luce solo nel 1664 (a Uppsala ad opera di Johannes Scheffer), vale a dire quindici secoli dopo la sua composizione, a dimostrazione della scarsa attenzione ad essa prestata dagli eruditi, che fino a quel momento avevano rivolto il loro interesse per lo più agli scritti dedicati dal Nicomediense alla figura e alle gesta di Alessandro, a cominciare dall’*Anabasi*. È poi il caso di segnalare che, quando l’erudito cremasco Vincenzo Racchetti pubblicò il suo *Trattato sulla milizia dei Greci antichi*, si limitò a presentare la prima sezione della *Tattica* (capp. 1 – 32, 2, dedicati alle antiche formazioni dell’esercito greco e macedone), influenzato anche dalla bipartizione interna che risultava dalla tradizione manoscritta.

La “sezione romana”, invece, che comprende i capp. 32, 2 – 44, 3 e contiene una descrizione dettagliata delle esercitazioni della cavalleria romana di età adrianea, omessa ancora a metà Ottocento da Hermann Köchli e Wilhelm Rüstow, che non la inclusero nella prima grande edizione critica dei *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*, conobbe la prima traduzione in una lingua moderna, il tedesco, solo nel 1964, mentre le prime traduzioni in inglese e in francese risalgono ai primi anni Novanta e quella in italiano a cura di Antonio Sestili addirittura al 2011.

La fortuna disomogenea vissuta dalle due sezioni dell’opera arrianea si può spiegare tenendo presente che, diversamente dalla prima parte, «il contenuto della seconda è poverissimo di riscontri nel panorama letterario antico e disomogeneo rispetto non solo alla *Tattica*, ma anche alla produzione arrianea superstite» (p. 10); subito dopo l’A. aggiunge che «un’analisi attenta dimostra tuttavia che la seconda parte del trattato, proprio in virtù di questa sua eccezionalità, presenta elementi di interesse storico, filologico e linguistico del tutto sconosciuti alla prima».

Muovendo da queste premesse, il volume presenta un primo capitolo (*Arriano: il filosofo, il letterato, il politico*) dedicato alla poliedrica personalità di Arriano, la cui biografia, pur gravata da numerose incertezze, restituisce comunque il profilo di quello che alla tradizione bizantina, ben rappresentata da Fozio (*Bibl. cod. 58, 17b 11-23*) e dalla voce Ἀρριανός del lessico Suda (α 3868), appare innanzitutto come un φιλόσοφος, al quale però, secondo Temistio (*Or. 34, 8*), non fu consentito dedicarsi esclusivamente alla riflessione e allo studio, poiché fu promosso fino alla στρατηγία, tanto da diventare protagonista di importanti operazioni militari. Se è vero che sull’attendibilità delle tre fonti menzionate si deve essere molto cauti, bisogna tuttavia riconoscere – scrive l’A. – che «esse costituiscono prova del legame che già l’antichità riconosceva tra la carriera politica e la formazione culturale di Arriano» (p. 16). Segue pertanto un paragrafo in cui viene ricostruita la carriera pubblica e politica dell’autore, di cui vengono ricordati il possesso della cittadinanza romana (rivelati dal *praenomen* e dal gentilizio), la probabile appartenenza al rango equestre, la nascita a Nicomedia durante il regno di Domiziano (presumibilmente tra l’85 e il 90), il trasferimento a Nicopoli d’Epiro (dove fu allievo di Epitteto tra il 105 e il 113) e a Delfi (dove fu uno dei cinque membri del *consilium* del governatore romano d’Acaia), nonché la *militia equestris* che potrebbe aver dato inizio alla sua carriera militare nel Norico e nella Pannonia, come l’A. sembra propensa a ritenere sulla scorta della posizione assunta da Pierre-Olivier Leroy nella sua edizione della *Tattica* (*Arrien, L’art tactique. Histoire de la succession d’Alexandre*, Paris 2017, 16-17), e la probabile partecipazione alla guerra partica

intrapresa da Traiano nel 114, dopo la quale andrebbero collocate la conoscenza di Adriano (nel 117 o nel 123/4, sempre che questo non fosse accaduto già nel 110, come ritiene A. R. Birley, *Hadrien. The restless Emperor*, London-New York 1997, 60) e la successiva *adlectio* in senato, dovuta, secondo A. B. Bosworth, *Arrian's Literary Development*, *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972), 175, proprio alla *παιδεία* di Arriano e alla sua fama di letterato (ma l'A. evidenzia la difficoltà di giungere a conclusioni certe a causa della problematica datazione dell'*Anabasi* e delle altre opere arriane); il proconsolato che avrebbe ricoperto (negli anni '20) nella Betica «resta solo un'affascinante ipotesi» (p. 19), mentre si può affermare con un discreto margine di certezza che nel 129-130 Arriano abbia ricoperto il consolato, per poi soggiornare dal 130 al 138 in Cappadocia in qualità di *legatus Augusti pro praetore* e fronteggiare, al comando di due legioni, l'invasione degli Alani (a cui si riferisce lo stesso Arriano nella sua *Acies contra Alanos*). Mentre nessuna testimonianza permette di affermare con certezza che il Nicomediense fosse caduto in disgrazia con l'ascesa al potere di Antonino Pio né che tra il 138 e il 141 fosse stato governatore della Siria, risulta per via epigrafica che nel 145-146 fu arconte ad Atene; per il resto, sulla base dei dati disponibili non si può fare altro che ipotizzare che la morte lo abbia colto prima del principato di Commodo. Alla luce dell'impossibilità di datare molte delle opere composte da Arriano, l'A. ritiene «sufficiente pensare che la sua fama di filosofo e di letterato fosse pregressa all'assunzione delle cariche del *cursus honorum* romano e che la sua intensa attività letteraria, non necessariamente incompatibile con quella politica, si sia distribuita lungo l'intero arco della sua vita, tutt'al più concentrandosi dopo il ritiro a vita privata» (p. 22).

In particolare, come si può desumere dal cap. 44, 3, dove afferma che Adriano *εικοστὸν τοῦτ'ἔτος βασιλεύει*, Arriano compose la *Tattica* nel 137, verso la fine del suo governatorato in Cappadocia. La struttura bipartita dell'opera permette di rilevare per la prima sezione notevoli analogie con la *Τακτικὴ θεωρία* di Eliano e con la più antica *Tattica* di Asclepiodoto, opere che probabilmente Arriano avrà letto nell'ambito di quell'incarico e che lo avranno spinto a concepire il proposito di scrivere un'opera analoga; questo spiegherebbe l'approccio «volutamente mimetico e non sostanziale, come per Eliano», alla materia della “sezione ellenistica”, che «ha un sapore di esercitazione retorico-filosofica» (p. 24, sulla scorta di L. Loreto, *Il generale e la biblioteca. La trattatistica militare greca da Democrito di Abdera ad Alessio I Comneno*, in G. Cambiano, L. Canfora, D. Lanza [a cura di], *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*, vol. II, *La ricezione e l'attualizzazione del*

testo, Roma 1995, 589), mentre ben diverso è lo spirito col quale Arriano, *vir militaris*, compone il λόγος τακτικός della seconda sezione, nella quale egli «riversa la sua conoscenza diretta di una coeva e specifica realtà bellico-addestrativa» (p. 25) e la cui *ratio* può essere meglio compresa tenendo conto del condizionamento che su Arriano devono aver esercitato le figure di Senofonte e dell'imperatore Adriano. Secondo E. L. Wheeler, *The Occasion of Arrian's Tactica*, in *Greek, Byzantine and Roman Studies* 19 (1978), 365, si potrebbe considerare la *Tattica* «a subtle plea to prolong his [Arrian's] military career» in un momento in cui, quando stava per concludere il proprio governatorato in Cappadocia, Arriano avrebbe avuto interesse a manifestare lealtà e pieno accordo con Adriano in vista di eventuali ulteriori cariche che questo gli avrebbe potuto conferire. Del resto, come scrive Tim Rood (*Black Sea Variations: Arrian's Periplus*, in *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 57 [2011], 142), nel *Periplo del Ponto Eusino* (dal quale l'A. desume «buoni indizi di una conoscenza *de visu*» dell'imperatore [p. 25]) Arriano delinea «un'immagine di Adriano funzionale anche per tracciare, correlativamente, la propria auto-presentazione come amico dell'imperatore ed enucleare gli interessi da essi condivisi con l'élite grecofona costituente il vero destinatario dell'opera» (p. 26). Il principale interesse culturale che avvicinava l'imperatore allo scrittore, per l'appunto, era Senofonte: Arriano «giunse ad appellarsi Ξενοφῶν e ad attuare una sostanziale *mimesis* senofontea non solo nelle sue opere ma nella stessa costruzione della propria identità autoriale» (pp. 28-29). È probabile che il primo contatto di Arriano con l'opera di Senofonte fosse avvenuto presso la scuola di Epitteto: come osserva l'A. (p. 30), «un primo tratto comune ad Arriano e Senofonte è proprio l'iniziale formazione filosofica sotto la guida di un grande maestro, che passerà poi in secondo piano»; inoltre «la ripresa di alcuni titoli senofontei per le proprie opere (sicura per il *Cinegetico*, forse spuria per l'*Anabasi*) proverebbe l'intenzione di Arriano di creare un parallelo e istituire un esplicito legame, anche formale, con quei testi, fatti oggetto di aggiornamento e rettifica». A questo proposito l'A. considera i primi tre capitoli dell'*Ipparchico* per instaurare un confronto con la seconda parte della *Tattica* in merito ai temi dell'ἄσκεϊν e del μελετᾶν (Xen. *Hipp.* 1, 19; 1, 26; 8, 5; 8, 8; 1, 18; 1, 21; 1, 25; 8, 5; 8, 16; Arr. *Tact.* 44, 1-2), all'esaltazione degli aspetti attraenti della cavalleria per suscitare l'emulazione dei giovani e l'ammirazione degli spettatori (Xen. *Hipp.* 3, 1; Arr. *Tact.* 40, 12), e al ruolo fondamentale che la capacità di disporsi in una formazione ordinata e di cavalcare con eleganza riveste tanto nell'addestramento senofonteo quanto in quello arrianeo (Xen. *Hipp.* 2, 1; Arr. *Tact.* 38, 3).

Il primo capitolo si chiude con un esame della lingua e dello stile che caratterizzano il testo. Dal punto di vista strettamente linguistico l’A. rileva la prevalenza delle forme attiche rispetto a quelle ioniche e di κοινή, mentre l’analisi stilistica porta a concludere che la semplicità e la σαφήνεια proprie della trattatistica tecnica non hanno impedito ad Arriano di adottare alcuni accorgimenti che denotano un certo grado di elaborazione retorica: allitterazioni, parallelismi, poliptoti, figure etimologiche, iperbati ed ellissi non compromettono, nel complesso, la chiarezza espositiva che ci si aspetta da una trattazione così tecnica, e anzi conferiscono a questo testo un tratto di omogeneità rispetto alla restante produzione dell’autore.

Nel secondo capitolo vengono considerati gli aspetti codicologici e paleografici del manoscritto *Laurentianus plut.* 55.4, che è il testimone più importante della polemografia greca, dal momento che conserva Enea Tattico, Asclepiodoto, Eliano, nonché la *Tattica* e l’*Acies contra Alanos* di Arriano. Il manoscritto risale agli ultimi anni di Costantino VII Porfirogenito e proprio allo *scriptorium* imperiale di Costantinopoli riconducono la datazione su base paleografica e l’aspetto lussuoso del codice, nonché la distribuzione dei testi in esso contenuti; si tratta di una pergamena di ottima qualità, sulla quale un’unica mano ha vergato una minuscola elegante e scarna di abbreviazioni, prima che lo danneggiassero umidità e macchie d’inchiostro e che venisse mutilato soprattutto degli *incipit* – mutilazione che ha colpito anche la parte iniziale della *Tattica* di Arriano – e degli *excipit*, probabilmente da un collezionista di miniature (così, sulla scorta dell’erudito seicentesco Lukas Holste, Laura Mecella in M. Wallraff, L. Mecella [a cura di], *Die Kestoi des Julius Africanus und ihre Überlieferung*, Berlin 2009, 86 n. 6). Dopo l’*editio princeps* del 1664, la *Tattica* fu ripubblicata in un’edizione complessiva degli scritti minori arrianei a cura dell’olandese Nikolaas Blankaart già nel 1683, ma dovette passare oltre un secolo e mezzo prima che vedessero la luce nuove edizioni dell’opera tutte provenienti da area tedesca (delle quali solo quella curata da Alfred Eberhard nel 1885 tenne conto, per la *constitutio textus*, del *Laur. plut.* 55.4); tra queste merita di essere ricordata quella curata da Anton Gerard Roos, apparsa nel 1927 e rimasta l’edizione di riferimento prima che Gerhard Wirth la sottoponesse a revisione critica. Il capitolo si conclude con una sintesi del dibattito a cui gli studiosi (Hermann Köchli, Robert Förster, Alphonse Dain, Filippo Di Cataldo, Andrew Devine) hanno dato vita nel tentativo di ricostruire le questioni genealogiche che interessano la *Tattica* arrianea in relazione alle opere di Eliano, di Asclepiodoto e di Polibio.

L’A. passa quindi a considerare gli *ἱππικὰ γυμνάσια* descritti da Arriano, evi-

denziando come essi «non costituissero esercitazioni ordinarie, ma una competizione sportiva ad alto tasso di spettacolarità», come «è dimostrato sia dagli insistiti riferimenti agli spettatori e al piacere in essi suscitato dalle manovre perfette e dalle sfarzose armature, sia dal pregiato equipaggiamento di uomini e cavalli, la cui dettagliata menzione precede l'analisi delle varie fasi dei γυμνάσια» (p. 55). I riferimenti ad Adriano e i punti di contatto con l'*adlocutio* che questi tenne a Lambesi non più tardi del 128 d. C., allorché assistette ad una spettacolare esercitazione dei reparti di stanza in Numidia (*Legio III Augusta, cohors VI Commagenorum, cohors II Hispanorum, ala I Pannoniorum*), e che ci è giunta per via epigrafica (*CIL VIII, 2532 e CIL VIII, Suppl. Prov. Numidia, 18042*) inducono a ritenere non solo che «Arriano fosse presente durante l'ispezione imperiale a Lambesi e avesse ascoltato il discorso poi oggetto della registrazione epigrafica o, perlomeno, ne fosse venuto a conoscenza e ne fosse stato condizionato nella stesura della *Tattica*» (p. 59), ma anche che, concependo la *Tattica* come rielaborazione letteraria dell'*adlocutio*, Arriano intendesse «attirare l'attenzione di Adriano» per «ottenere il consenso e l'apprezzamento, tanto più per la sua possibilità di offrire un'eco più vasta, rispetto alla registrazione epigrafica, dei *desiderata* dell'imperatore e costituire così un ulteriore strumento di propaganda della sua politica militare» (p. 61).

La seconda parte del volume è occupata dal testo critico dei capitoli 32, 2 – 44, 3, a cui è affiancata la traduzione, in merito alla quale l'A. osserva opportunamente che «una efficace “transculturazione della *Tattica* si scontra inevitabilmente con le mutate condizioni di vita contemporanee» (p. 65), pertanto risulta senz'altro efficace la scelta di riportare tra parentesi il lemma greco corrispondente alla traduzione italiana fornita.

Il commento, che costituisce la terza parte del volume, è condotto prestando attenzione, oltre che ai *loci* filologicamente problematici, a tutti gli aspetti utili per un corretto inquadramento del testo sia in termini di intertestualità rispetto ad altre fonti antiche e, in particolare, agli altri trattati di polemografia sia per quanto riguarda le armature, le manovre e i reparti impiegati nelle esercitazioni descritte da Arriano.

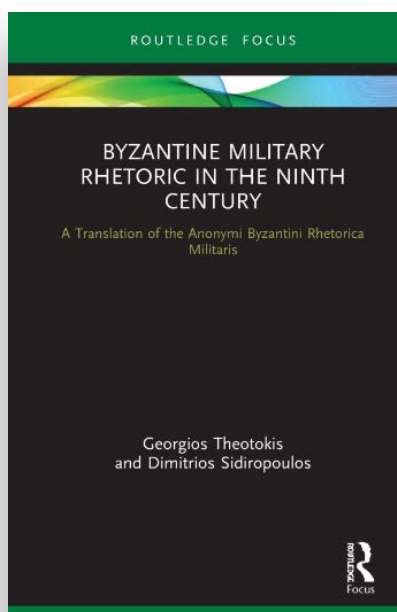
Il volume è completato da due appendici, in cui vengono riportati i *loci similes* della *Tattica* rispetto all'*Ipparchico* di Senofonte (p. 145) e all'*adlocutio Hadriani* (p. 147).

GEORGIOS THEOTOKIS, DIMITRIOS SIDIROPOULOS,

*Byzantine Military Rhetoric
in the Ninth Century.*

A Translation of the Anonymi Byzantini Rhetorica Militaris

London-New York, Routledge, 2021. 96 p. ISBN 978-0-367-90208-7.



In the *Index Lectionum in Literarum Universitate Turicensi* of 1855 and 1856 Hermann Köchly published the *editio princeps* of a small treatise written by an anonymous which he called *Rhetorica militaris*. It is no surprise that Byzantine military technical texts were not published until modern times. Suffice to say that Maurice's *Strategicon*, the best known and perhaps most significant military manual of the Eastern Roman Empire, was first published by Johann Scheffer only in 1664, together with Arrian's *Tactica*, and *De militari scientia* by Karl Konrad Müller in 1880. Regarding the *Rhetorica militaris*, in the same year of 1855 Köchly published the text and its translation of only the first three chapters in his edition of the *De re strategica* (in *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller*,

1855, II,2, with Wilhelm Rüstow). Since then scholars have refrained from focusing their attention on this writing until the publishing of my own edition, with Italian translation and commentary (*Siriano. Discorsi di guerra*, con una nota di L. Canfora, Bari 2010).

I am delighted that my edition has awoken the attention of scholars to this short treatise. Indeed, Syrianus' compendium had previously been studied only in its entirety, particularly due to problems concerning authorship and dating. I am also equally delighted that only 11 years later – a relatively short period of time, considering the commitment such works require and especially in comparison with the centuries that elapsed between the *editio princeps* and my edition – the English translation by Georgios Theotokis and Dimitrios Sidiropoulos will allow scholars around the world to learn more about the rhetorical section of Syrianus' compendium: reading the *Rhetorica militaris* in the «*lingua franca* of our time» (p. 55), scholars will no longer have to grapple with reading the Italian translation or test themselves directly with Syrianus' Greek text.

The authors have provided a very clear and fluent translation, which is perfectly understandable even by a non-native speaker. The style has the merit of simplifying some places where the Greek instead creates problems of understanding. For instance, at 27.1 *οὐχ ἡ τυχοῦσα ζημία*, «a non-incidental harm», in the sense of «a harm of no small importance» becomes only «harm», where the authors prefer not to translate *τυχοῦσα*, which is indeed not immediately clear. Likewise, they translate *ἐνθύμημα* as «syllogism», simplifying the meaning of *ἐνθύμημα* as much as possible; indeed, *ἐνθύμημα* is not generically a syllogism, but specifically a figure of parallel (*σχῆμα συγκριτικόν*: see Ps.- Hermogenes, *De inventione* 3.8) invented for each exposition according to place, time, manner, person, cause, or act, and which has the function of confirming the demonstration. At 39.2-3 *τὰ θρέμματα ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς βόας*, they translate *τὰ θρέμματα* as «animals»; in this case, the translation does not enhance the juxtaposition of *θρέμματα* and *βόας* greatly, *βόας* also being generically «animals» in addition to «cattle». A closer look, however, leads one to give *θρέμματα* the meaning of «small animal», or better «sheep»: see *LSJ*, *s.v.*, «nursling, creature, [...] mostly of tame animals, esp. sheep and goats» and *Lampe*, *s.v.*, «creature, offspring, 2. sheep». At 24.1 they translate *τὸ ἐπιχειρημάτων μόνον καὶ ἐργασιῶν καὶ ἐνθυμημάτων* as «with the use of arguments and syllogisms, as they develop», while more correctly, in my opinion, at 7.1 they interpret the tricolon *ἐπιχείρημα, ἐργασία καὶ ἐνθύμημα*

as «argument, development and syllogism» (also at 48.1). However, these are relatively insignificant details.

This book is not just a translation, as the first pages contain a long essay (pp. 1-54) on the author and his work and on the tradition of the protreptic speeches («The history of exhortation and exhortative speeches»). Readers can finally obtain a rich summary of all the problems that not only the *Rhetorica militaris*, but also the entire compendium of Syrianos poses, as well as some of the solutions to these problems.

Concerning the tradition of the protreptic speeches, here too I have reason to be pleased that my short *excursus* on the tradition of harangues in historiographical works (in «Talia Dixit» 2010, pp. 25-44) has been a starting point for a broad repertoire, which also includes Byzantine authors such as Theophylact Simocatta, George of Pisidia, and Leo the Deacon. Therefore, the section where the authors review numerous examples of the concept of «just war» in the Eastern Roman Empire is particularly noteworthy. I would make a brief observation on this point: *Sylloge Tacticorum* 1.27 cannot be considered as an independent significant piece of evidence, since here the author is paraphrasing Onasander's *Strategikos* (4.1-2, which is quoted immediately before), modernising the text as is often done and thus turning Onasander's *θεοί* into *θεός* and associating the hope of gain and profit with the just cause. Unfortunately, the English translation does not highlight the close relationship between these two texts, or rather the dependence of the *Sylloge Tacticorum* on the *Strategikos* in this context, which is instead clear if one looks at the Greek text or simply consults Alphonse Dain's edition of the *Sylloge Tacticorum*.

The introduction dedicates great attention to the question of dating, which I believe to be the most important issue regarding the compendium and probably the one that will again divide scholars in the future. The authors are firmly convinced that the work of Syrianus must be dated to the 9th century AD, so much so that they immediately highlight this fact on the title page of the book. For dating they largely rely on Philip Rance's article («Byzantinische Zeitschrift» 2007), which they consider to be «the latest academic study concerning the debate about the dating of Syrianos' compendium» (p. 6). They do not mention the doubts I expressed about this dating in my 2011 article (*Sul compendio militare di Siriano Magister*, «Rivista Storica dell'Antichità» 41, 2011, pp. 201-222), all dedicated

to the problem of dating Syrianos' compendium. Unfortunately, this has escaped the authors and has failed to be included in an albeit rich bibliography; just as Salvatore Cosentino's translation of the *Naumachiae* published in *Storia della marineria bizantina* edited by Cosentino himself and Antonio Carile (Bologna 2004, pp. 275-287), which can rightly be considered the current Italian translation, replacing Francesco Corazzini's old 1883 translation. However, this is rather connected to the limited spread of the Italian language.

Going back to the issue of dating, most of the section dedicated to this topic focuses on recounting the events of the second half of Basilus I's reign, between 875 and 886, in detail. According to the authors, these years are more suitable to define the chronological period that those suggested by Salvatore Cosentino, who more prudently hypothesized the years after the death of emperor Theophilos («Bizantinistica» 2000, pp. 273-274). The strongest, indeed the only, argument they put forward to support their hypothesis is that the compendium dedicates a section to naval warfare, which was – as the authors well demonstrate – the most common form of war in the ten mentioned years of Basil's reign, so much so that a section on naval warfare is also found in Leo VI's *Tacticae Constitutiones* (*Constitutio* XIX), a military manual composed in roughly the same cultural milieu (see p. 21). However, the authors overlook the fact that classical military literature has already dedicated specific attention to the nautical field and devotes a separate section to it located next to the chapters dealing with land battle. In the tactical manuals of tactics by Asclepiodotus, Aelian and Arrian, there are references to a nautical section, although it is unclear if it is a new work or a part of the same manual. Aelian announces a subsequent and separate work, Asclepiodotus and Arrian merely point out the two different fields in which war occurs. On the other hand, Aeneas Tacticus' *Poliorketika*, as it is handed down, is interrupted *ex abrupto* exactly in the passage of a writing regarding a nautical subject (40.8, «as I have dealt with all this, now I will speak about nautical formation. There are two ways to organize the navy ...»). It seems that this work, if it really existed, would have dealt specifically with naval tactics.

These works or parts of works (if they existed) were lost, above all because the men of letters of the East Roman Empire chose to organize all military knowledge into thematic corpora; tactics (on land and at sea), poliorketics and stratagematics. Regarding the naval section, some clues lead us to believe that there were two different corpora. The first, which Alphonse Dain called *Corpus nauticum*,

was not handed down, but we know of it through the paraphrase included in chapters 119-123 of Nikephoros Ouranos' *Tactica*. The other corpus, the so-called *Collectio Ambrosiana*, is the result of an operation of propaganda, sponsored by Basil Lekapenos in order to support his candidacy for the command of the expedition to Crete in 960. In this collection, we also find Syrianos' *Naumachiae*. We cannot therefore exclude that other works or sections of works concerning naval warfare actually existed but were then lost because they were assembled in a separate corpus, what Dain called *Corpus nauticum* (I would refer to my *Syrianus' Naumachiae. Tactics, Strategy, and Strategies of Composition*, «HiMA» 5, 2017, pp. 139-154).

In this direction we cannot underestimate the evidence of Leo VI *Ἦδη δὲ περὶ ναυμαχίας διαταξόμεθα, οὐδὲν μὲν ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς τακτικοῖς περὶ αὐτῆς κεκανονισμένον εὐρόντες· ἀφ' ὧν δὲ σποράδην ἀνέγνωμεν καὶ διὰ μετρίας πείρας τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ παρὰ τῶν πλωϊμῶν στρατηγῶν ἡμῶν ἀνεμάθομεν, τὰ μὲν πεποιηκότων, τὰ δὲ πεπονθότων, ἀναλεξόμενοι μικρά τινα καὶ ὅσον ἔμφρασιν δοῦναι ξάμενοι μικρά τινα [...] μέλλουσι ἐν ὀλίγοις διορισώμεθα* «Now we will give instructions for naval warfare, as we did not find them in the ancient tactical books, but from what we have read here and there and what we have learned from the ordinary experience of our admirals at the present time, their successes as well as their failures, we have selected a few examples, enough to give this presentation to those who aim to fight at sea». Regarding naval warfare, Leo found no precepts in the «ancient tactical books». He certainly refers here to Aelian's manual, which is his favoured «ancient tactical book», but he probably found nothing *κεκανονισμένον* in more recent authors either, since he is forced to derive these precepts from sporadic (*σποράδην*) observations and the ordinary experience of the admirals of his time. This passage only seemingly contradicts what Leo argues at XIX,59, where he cites *παλαιοί* and even *νεωτέροι* authors, since he is evidently in that case referring precisely to those sporadic (*σποράδην*) and disorganised (*κεκανονισμένον*) information mentioned at the beginning of *Constitutio* XIX. However, Leo's statement in XIX,1 could mean that Syrianos' work was subjected to a thematic selection and unification before the writing of Leo's *Tactica*, which indeed, also on the basis of the textual comparison, does not refer to the *Naumachiae*.

On the other hand, the authors do not consider the beginning of the *De re strategica*, unfortunately surviving only in its final part, which deals specifically with

πολιτεία and thus might be, precisely because of the subject matter, the most useful part for the dating of the entire compendium. For instance, when Syrianos denies the character of τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη for the νομικόν (the legislative function), he might perhaps be referring to legal controversies that developed immediately after Justinian's years and concerned some internal contradictions in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. In the same passage, when Syrianos refers to the variability of law on the basis of the διαθέσεις of those who legislate, he might perhaps be referring to another issue at that time being discussed by the *iuris periti*, namely the problem of the sovereign's independence before the law (Iust. 6, 23.3); in short, all issues that would seem to fit a political and philosophical-juridical climate dating back to the years following Justinian's reign, as a 2006 article by Fausto Gorla well argued (*La definizione del diritto di Celso nelle fonti giuridiche greche dei secoli VI-IX e l'Anonimo sulla strategia*, in «Aequitas. Giornate in memoria di Paolo Silli. Atti del Convegno, Trento, 11 e 12 aprile 2002», ed. by G. Santucci, Padova 2006, pp. 275-306). This essay is also unfortunately little known by Syrianos' scholars.

These notes serve not so much to support the thesis of a date different from that proposed by the two authors, but to show that the question is by no means settled. It is necessary to dwell on several elements to obtain a somewhat clearer picture, which, however, can never be definitive in my opinion.

A less experienced reader will find the concise notes at the foot of the text very useful, in line with the editorial criteria of the series, which better explain the meanings of more complicated or ambiguous terms and give reasons for many translation choices. It is a little misleading that there are more extensive commentary notes (e.g. n. 26 p. 62, n. 47 p. 67, n. 67 pp. 73-74, n. 76 p. 78), which I personally particularly appreciate, as they take inspiration from the notes in my edition: this confirms that my work has proven useful.

A more experienced reader who wishes for further insight will either have to resort again to my edition, with its possible limitations, or will have to wait for a commentary, finally available in English, by Georgios Theotokis and Dimitrios Sidiropoulos, who will surely be able to complete the excellent work already carried out in this book.



So called Missorium of Kerch, 4th century Found: Bosphoran Necropolis, vault on the Gordikov estate. Near Kerch, the Crypt in the North-Eastern Slope of Mount Mithridates, 1891 This silver dish was a diplomatic gift from the Byzantine Emperor to a representative of the Bosphoran government. In this fine example of the early Byzantine art traditional Classical themes are combined with a new artistic style. The vessel shows a composition typical of Roman coins: the Emperor on horseback is piercing the enemy with a spear. The rider was usually accompanied by one or several warriors and Nike crowning the winner. In contrast to the Classical composition showing the final scene of a battle, here we see the scene of triumph: Emperor Constantius II sits on a horse, triumphantly raising his spear. To emphasize the Emperor's highest rank and divine power, the artist used special pictorial devices including, for example, the distortion of proportions. The images were produced by a chisel. Part of the ornamentation is nielloed. The outer surface is gilded and a loop is soldered onto it. Hermitage Museum. Saint Petersburg. CC BY-SA 4.0 (Wikimedia Commons).

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