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a cura di Marco Bettalli, Elena Franchi e Gioacchino Strano



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Bronze statue (2nd/3rd century AD) of the genius of a legion.
Enns (Upper Austria). Museum Lauriacum.
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The republican legionary cohort once again. Tactical reform in the Roman republic?

by Gabriele Brusa

ABSTRACT. This paper aims to reassess the problem of the introduction of the legionary cohort in the Roman republican army. Following a status quaestionis that considers scholarly opinions from the late sixteenth century up to recent years, the relevant mentions in ancient authors referring to the period from the second Punic war to the age of Caesar are analysed. The main contention of this article is that no ancient sources provide evidence of a tactical reform during this period. It is argued, on the other hand, that the period of the social war and of the civil wars brought about a partial change in the recruitment practices of the Romans, which in turn led to an increase of the importance of the cohort within the Roman army.

KEYWORDS. COHORTS, MANIPLES, REPUBLICAN ARMY, TACTICAL UNITS, REFORM

Introduction

t some date between the time of Polybius and that of Julius Caesar, a major tactical reform of the Roman army took place". This is the beginning of an important paper by M.J.V. Bell, written in 1965. The main change, according to the author, was the switch from the arrangement of the legion by maniples to one by cohorts. The idea of a reform consisting in the introduction of the legionary cohort as the main tactical unit of the Roman army was nothing new in 1965. It had been put forth by scholars as early as the sixteenth century, and was the established opinion at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Bell himself took this idea as a given and as the starting point of his discussion. However, as he recognises, no ancient source examines the details of this reform, or even mentions any innovation in the Roman army in relation to the cohort. Despite this, the idea has been widely accepted and, at most, very rarely nuanced. The grounds for this line of reasoning seem to be

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¹ M.J.V. Bell, «Tactical Reform in the Roman Republican Army», *Historia*, 14 (1965), pp. 404-22 (p. 404).

sound and can be summarised by the two chronological termini taken by Bell: Polybius and Julius Caesar. In his discussion of the Roman army in his sixth book, Polybius never mentions the legionary cohorts and makes the maniples (and the centuries) the centre of the deployment by the Romans. Julius Caesar, in turn, very rarely mentions the maniples, takes the cohort as the principal unit of the legions, and often reckons the strength of his own armies in terms of cohorts. It is very difficult to gauge the reasons behind this change. As J. Lendon wrote, "we can only recollect the army of Aemilius Paullus, then examine the army of Julius Caesar, see what has changed, and venture a guess at the reasons why".² In modern historiography, this "guess" has always consisted in the idea of a tactical reform or, at the very least, of a major progressive change. In this paper, I would like to re-examine this issue. First, however, it is useful to review the different positions expressed by scholars about the precise nature, reasons, authors, and dates of the reform.³

In modern accounts, J. Marquardt is often said to have been the first to tackle the problem. In reality, the debate on this issue goes back to at least the last decade of the sixteenth century. While in 1560 C. Sigonio (Sigonius) just stated that the Roman legion was divided, since Romulus, into cohorts and maniples,⁴

² J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity*, New Haven, 2005, p. 212.

³ The following status quaestionis is not exhaustive. Roman cohorts are treated, for instance, in any manual of Roman military history. I have only tried to take into account the most important papers and theories. Most of the opinions expressed here have already been presented, in a larger but rougher form, in G. Brusa, *Le coorti nell'esercito romano di età repubblicana*, Pisa, 2020. Where relevant, I reference the longer discussion of some issues in that book.

⁴ C. Sigonio, De antiquo iure civium Romanorum Italiae provinciarum, Romanae iurisprudentiae iudiciis, tum privatis, tum publicis, eorumque ratione, libri IX, Paris, 1576, p. 60 (I have been unable to consult the original 1560 edition): "ut autem pedites in cohortes, equites in turmis distributi, sic cohortes in manipulos, turmae in decurias, manipuli in centurias". Scholars of the Italian Umanesimo seem to have generally adopted a similar, synchronic view. Already F. Petrarca, in his De viris illustribus (around 1343) stated (Scipio Maior, 6.47) that Syphax divided the soldiers into cohorts following the "consuetudinem Romane militie". Flavius Biondus, in the VI book of his Roma triumphans (1459) followed Gellius dividing the legion into ten cohorts, thirty maniples, sixty centuries, and only commented that "ex pluris manipulis copulatur cohors". N. Machiavelli, in his Dell'arte della guerra (1521), in the analysis of the formations employed by the Romans at the beginning of the third book, commented (3.25-26) "Usavano i Romani nel principio le falangi, e instruirono le loro legioni a similitudine di quelle. Dipoi non piacque loro questo ordine e divisero le legioni in più corpi, cioè in coorti e in manipuli". Machiavelli's aim was

two years earlier (1558) O. Panvinio (Panvinius) had already proposed Marius as a military reformer, who created the cohorts.⁵ In 1591 H. Savile (Savilius) already noted most of the elements exploited by later scholars, most notably the absence of mentions of the cohort in Polybius' sixth book, the mentions in the context of the early republic in Livy, and Caesar's focus on cohorts. His conclusion, expressed with a good degree of caution, was that Caesar's army, organised by cohorts, was fundamentally different from the previous manipular army. Cohorts, however, might have occasionally been formed, as a detachment of the legion, even before the first century.⁶ The difference between the army described by Polybius and Caesar's legions was again stressed, soon later, by F. Patrizi (Patricius).⁷ Two years later, J. Lips (Lipsius) proposed a different perspective. According to him, cohorts were a normal feature of the manipular army; the only difference between the middle and the late republic was that, with the increase of the number of legions, intervals and gaps in the formation started to be created between cohorts rather than maniples.8 Lips' most interesting contribution was his idea that cohorts, being simple sums of three maniples, could easily be formed in the context of a manipular army: 9 indeed, a very similar view will be put forward in this paper. In 1614, du Praissac set forth a reconstruction along the same lines of Lipsius'. 10 The presence of cohorts in the middle-republican army was again negated, around forty years later, by C. Saumaise (Salmasius), who neatly

to propose a model army, in which he wanted to divide "il battaglione in dieci battaglie, come i Romani la legione in dieci coorti" (3.32). These cohorts were structured by *ordines*, each with its maniples.

⁵ O. Panvinio, *Reipublicae Romanae commentariorum libri tre*s, Venezia, 1558, p. 813: "legio vero in decem cohortes divisa est a C. Mario primum, ut opinor, neque enim ante Marii tempora ulla cohortium in legione, neque apud Polybium, neque apud alios mentio est".

⁶ H. Savile, *The Ende of Nero and Beginning of Galba, Fower Bookes of the Histories of Cornelius Tacitus, the Life of Agricola*, Oxford, 1591, p. 52.

⁷ F. Patrizi, *Paralleli militar*i, Roma, 1594, pp. 207-8.

⁸ J. Lips, *De militia Romana libri quinque, commentarius ad Polybium*, Antwerp, 1598, pp. 153-5. I have been unable to consult the first edition of the text, which appeared in 1596.

⁹ Lips, cit., p. 155: "quid enim facilius quam manipulos iungere, disiungere, abducere?". A similar view seems to be present in a work that appeared the following year, G. Valtrini, *De re militari veterum Romanorum libri septem*, Cologne, 1597. In his discussion "de peditum legionariorum ordinibus", although not delving into the problem in detail, he wrote that "cum autem cohortes instituendae erant, eae tribus ex manipulis, uno hastatorum, altero principum, tertio triariorum, velitibus adiunctis fiebant" (p. 98).

¹⁰ Du Praissac, Les discours militaires dediez à sa Majesté, Paris, 1614, pp. 200-6

separated the Roman army of the time of the Scipios from the formation adopted "sub Caesaribus",¹¹ and again supported, soon later, by H. Schele (Schelius). The fifteenth section of his book on Roman castrametation, a digression "De cohortibus legionis antiquae", is again extremely interesting. Not only did Schele notice a real debate among his predecessors on this issue; to support Lips' theories, he also offered, for the first time, a collection of passages mentioning the cohorts, mainly taken from Livy.¹²

This early debate was centred on the possibility to recognise a clear difference in the structure of the armies of the middle and late republic. Discussions went on, in the following century, along the same lines, and often with quite bitter tones. In 1724, J.-C. de Folard criticised Lips (and Machiavelli) because of their description of the middle-republican army arranged in three lines (*ordines*). Applying the evidence he found in Caesar to the earlier times, he stated that the cohortal formation was the only existing one both in the middle and in the late republic, rather than a possible mutation of the manipular formation. Rouillé may have had de Folard's account in mind when he criticised, two years later, "plusieurs modernes" that had assumed the existence of the cohort in the early and middle republic. In his footnotes to F. Catrou's sixth book of the *Histoire romaine*, Rouillé wrote that the first mentions of Roman cohorts are found in relation to Julius Caesar's army. De Folard's position (and his book in general)

¹¹ C. Saumaise, *De re militari Romanorum liber*, Leiden, 1657, pp. 8-29. The author seems to have placed the change in the times of Caesar. He also expressed a peculiar theory according to which, of the ten cohorts of a legion, three came from the old *ordo* of the *hastati*, three from the *principes*, three from the *velites*, and one from the *triarii*.

¹² R.H. Schele, *Hygini gromatici et Polybi Megalopolitani de castris Romanis quae extant, cum notis et animadversionibus, quibus accedunt dissertationes aliquot de re eadem militari populi Romani*, Amsterdam, 1660, pp. 312-17.

¹³ It should be noted, however, that other works on the Roman army or Roman antiquities of the same period continued to adopt a more simplistic synchronic view, just stating that there were ten cohorts in a legion, each composed of three maniples (for instance, P.-J. Cantel, *De Romana republica, sive de re militari et civili Romanorum*, Paris, 1684, p. 263; B. Kennett, *Romae antiquae notitia, or the antiquities of Rome, in two parts*, London, 1696, pp. 185-6).

¹⁴ J.-C. de Folard, *Nouvelles découvertes sur la guerre dans une dissertation sur Polybe*, Paris, 1724, pp. 55-8.

¹⁵ F. Catrou and J. Rouillé, *Histoire romaine depuis la fondation de Rome*, vol. 6, Paris, 1726, pp. 135-8: "dans les tems que nous parcourons, les légions étoient divisées par manipules. Alors on ne connoissoit point encore la distribution des soldats légionnaires par cohortes.

was explicitely criticised by C. Guischardt, who again postulated a huge difference between the army of Aemilius Paulus and that of Caesar. He also stated that the last battle fought in a manipular formation was the battle of the Muthul river, fought by Metellus. He thus placed the switch from the manipular to the cohortal organisation firmly in 107.16 De Folard's Découvertes were defended by R. De Lo-Looz. On the issue of the cohorts, however, while supporting de Folard's theory of the persistence of a checkerboard disposition, he still distinguished the "deux époques des manipules et des cohortes", again placing the switch in the time of Marius.¹⁷ In the meantime, in 1767, P.-J. Joly de Maïzeroy had proposed a similar theory, again based on a switch, in the age of Marius and Sulla, from the maniple to the cohort as the basic tactical unit of the Roman army. 18 A few years later, J.F. von Rösch rivisited the issue, founding his interpretation on Vegetius' description of two lines of five cohorts each. Having identified Cato the Elder as Vegetius' source, he theorised an intermediate stage between the Punic wars and the age of Marius, in which the army was deployed in this way. The last stage begun in the age of the civil wars, when soldiers were hastily recruited in mass and enrolled into bigger cohorts.19

On n'en trouve les premiers commencements que dans la milice de Jules César". The author took it for granted that each cohort was composed of three maniples of the same *ordo*, and therefore assumed that a cohortal division was incompatible with a traditional manipular structure. It is interesting to note that, in the two previous volumes (both from 1725), this opinion had been completely contradicted: in volume three (p. 18), in an excursus on the republican army, the reader finds that "chaque légion avait dix cohortes. [...] Une cohorte comprenait trois manipules" (cf. p. 315). In volume four, in a digression about the legions of Manlius Torquatus, it is argued that the lines were arranged "sans aucune espace, qui distinguât entr'elles les cohortes, ou autrement les ordres, les centuries, et les manipules". Even after the sixth book, Roman cohorts are sometimes mentioned before the time of Caesar. The confusion might be partially due to the composite nature of the work.

¹⁶ C. Guischardt, *Mémoires militaires sur les Grecs et les Romains*, vol. 1, La Haye, 1763, pp. 13-14: "d'exactes observations fixent l'époque de la naissance de la nouvelle [tactique] après le consulat de Metellus, et en font attribuer l'honeur à Marius".

¹⁷ R. de Lo-Looz, Récherches d'antiquités romaines, avec la défense du chevalier Follard, contre les allegations insérés dans les Mémoires militaires sur les Grecs et les Romains, Paris, 1770, pp. 103-4; 149-57 and 160-1 (with nt. 1).

¹⁸ P.-G. Joly de Maïzeroi, *Traité de tactique pour servir de supplément au cours de tactique théorique, pratique et historique*, vol. 1, Paris, 1767, pp. 38-9. His reconstruction involved peculiar statements, such as the division of all cohorts into five centuries and the disposition for battle in three lines of five, three, and two cohorts (later, two lines of five cohorts each).

¹⁹ Rösch in J.J.H. Nast and J.F. von Rösch, *Römische Kriegsalterthümer aus ächten Quellen geschöpft: ein Beitrag zur Aufklärung der römischen Taktik*, Halle, 1782, pp. 126-37.

In the third decade of the nineteenth century, B.G. Niebuhr tackled the issue of the mutations in the Roman republican army in his lessons delivered at the University of Bonn.²⁰ Interestingly, Niebuhr identified three different stages of the existence of the cohort. In the first of these, which he identified as the army created by Camillus, or around his time, each of the three "Abtheilungen der Legion" of the principes, hastati, and triarii was called a cohort.²¹ Polybius, however, describes a different scenario. In the army of the late third and second centuries BC, the *velites* were introduced, the *hastati* lost their spears and took up the *pila*, and each ordo was divided into ten maniples. One maniple of each of these ordines, together with a tenth of the light infantry, built up a cohort, 22 which, in Niebuhr's reconstruction, was a sort of miniature legion, which could be detached to fight alone. This tendency was taken to the extreme by Marius. On the occasion of his campaign against the Cimbri and Teutones, he abolished the velites, cancelled any distinction between the three ordines, and made the cohorts truly uniform and independent units: as Niebuhr noted, from the first century BC onwards, the strength of the armies starts to be reckoned by cohorts.²³ While cohorts had existed for a long time before him, it was Marius, according to Niebuhr, that truly turned them into proper tactical units.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, L. Lange again proposed Marius as the reformer who introduced cohorts in the Roman army.²⁴ By this time, the view that Marius was responsible for this reform had clearly become the prevailing opinion. It was accepted, very briefly, by Mommsen in his *Römische Geschichte*,²⁵ It was taken as such by Marquardt, whose *Römische Staatsverwaltung*

²⁰ These lessons were only published after Niebuhr's death. For his discussion of the Roman "Kriegswesen", see his 1825-1830 lessons, published in B.G. Niebuhr, *Vorträge über römische Alterthümer, an der Universität zu Bonn gehalten*, Berlin, 1858, pp. 482-560 (see esp. pp. 485-504).

²¹ Niebuhr, cit., pp. 491-7. Each cohort, therefore, was an *ordo*, but there were also two ordines, those of the *ferentarii* and of the *accensi velati*, that "did not count as cohorts" (p. 496). Only the soldiers of the first of these three cohorts (probably the *principes*) carried *pila*, while the other two were structured as phalanxes.

²² Niebuhr, cit., pp. 497-501: "Die ganze Legion bildete zehn Cohorten, und jede dieser Cohorten bestand aus einem Zehntel der Schwergerüsteten und einem Zehntel der Velites".

²³ Niebuhr, cit., pp. 501-4.

²⁴ L. Lange, *Historia mutationum rei militaris Romanorum inde ab interitu rei publicae usque ad Constantinum Magnum*, Göttingen, 1846, pp. 14-19.

²⁵ T. Mommsen, Römische Geschichte, vol. 2 (viertes Buch), Berlin, 1855, pp. 185-6. This

had a huge influence over subsequent research. According to Marquardt the term cohors already existed in Polybius' time as a way to define three maniples taken together: these units, however, "hatten nur im agmen, nicht in der acies, eine Bedeutung". 26 His reasoning was that, as Polybius employs the term to define a column of three maniples on the march, but then never mentions the cohort in his sixth book, this word did not define a tactical unit. According to him, once again, C. Marius should be credited with the introduction of the cohort as a tactical unit; this reform was just part of a wider programme, whose main point was the recruitment of the *proletarii*. The specific reason for the innovation was the need to build up stronger units to face the powerful charges of the Cimbri and Teutones more effectively. Marquardt's theory was largely reminiscent of Niebuhr's reconstruction, and it found immediate and widespread support (the notable, if partial, exceptions of J.N. Madvig²⁷ and A. Von Domaszewski should be noted²⁸), although many historians, drawing on the occurrences of the term cohors (referring to Roman soldiers) in Livy, especially in Spain, theorised a transition phase, as done by scholars before Marquardt as well, in which the cohort was sometimes used as a special tactical device on a few occasions.²⁹ This trend was accentuated

opinion was repeated, ten years after the publication of Marquardt's work, in T. Mommsen, «Zu Domaszewski's Abhandlung über die römischen Fahnen», *Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn*, 10 (1886), pp. 1-11 (pp. 7: "Dass die Cohorte erst im Laufe des siebenten Jahrhunderts zur ständigen Unterabtheilung der Legion geworden ist, ist bekannt und unbestritten").

²⁶ J. Marquardt, Römische Staatsverwaltung, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1876, pp. 421-4.

²⁷ J.N. Madvig, Kleine philologische Schriften, Leipzig, 1875, pp. 506-7; J.N. Madvig, Die Verfassung und Verwaltung des römischen Staates, Leipzig, 1882, pp. 490-3. While starting from Marquardt's same premises, Madvig criticised Niebuhr, Lange, and Marquart himself, and put the transition in the context of the social war, underplaying the importance of Marius and suggesting that the change itself might not have been particularly important.

²⁸ A. von Domaszewski, *Die Fahnen im römischen Heere*, Wien, 1885, pp. 18-21. The author refused as wrong or anachronistic every mention of the legionary cohort before Sallust, and placed the switch from the maniple to the cohort around the same time as Marquardt, but before Marius (p. 20: "die erste sichere Nachricht über die Legionscohorte findet sich bei Sallustius, b.J. 51, 3. [...] Demnach ist sie keine Neuerung der marianischen Heeresreform"). This reconstruction was criticised by Mommsen, *Zu Domaszewski's*, cit., pp. 7-11.

²⁹ See, most notably, M. Jähns, Handbuch einer Geschichte des Kriegswesens von der Urzeit bis zur Renaissance, Technischer Theil: Bewaffnung, Kampfweise, Befestigung, Belagerung, Seewesen, Leipzig, 1880, pp. 235-7; Mommsen, Zu Domaszewski's, cit., pp. 7-11; W. Votsch, Caius Marius als Reformator des römischen Heerwesens, Berlin, 1886, pp. 31-7; A.E. Masquelez, «Cohors», in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio (eds.), Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines, vol. 1.2, Paris, 1887, pp. 1287-9; F. Fröhlich, Das

by Bell's 1965 paper. According to Bell, the cohort was not only introduced, but also consistently employed in Spain from the end of the third century. Starting from a review of the ancient evidence about the presence of cohorts in Spain from the Second Punic War, Bell contended that this tactical unit was introduced as a way to deal with Spanish warfare and not as a measure against the Germans.³⁰ In the Iberian military theatre, the Romans had to face both the threats of guerrilla warfare and pitched battles between heavily armed formations. The cohort was thus introduced as a way to build up more compact units and make the Roman army both flexible and tough. This theory was supported and developed first by I. Kertész³¹ and then by G. Brizzi. The latter rejected the idea of a progressive

Kriegswesen Cäsars, vol. 1, Zürich, 1889, pp. 13-14; T. Steinwender, «Zur Kohortentaktik», Rheinisches Museum für Philologie, 70 (1915), pp. 416-40 (pp. 416-17); E. Lammert and F. Lammert, «Schlachtordnung», RE 2.A.1 (1921), pp. 436-94 (pp. 487-8); W. Kubitschek, «Legio», RE 12.1 (1924), pp. 1186-210 (pp. 1201-2); G. Veith in J. Kromayer and G. Veith, Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen und Römer, München, 1928, pp. 376-7; F.W. Walbank, A Historical Commentary on Polybius, vol. 2, Oxford, 1967, p. 302; E. Gabba, Esercito e società nella tarda repubblica romana, Firenze, 1973, p. 1; P. Fraccaro, «L'ordinamento a coorti», in Id., Opuscula, vol. 4, Pavia, 1975 (posthumous), pp. 137-60; P. Connolly, Greece and Rome at war, London, 1981, pp. 213-15; L. Keppie, The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire, London, 1984, pp. 63-4; L. Keppie, «The Roman Army of the Later Republic», in J. Hackett (ed.), Warfare in the Ancient World, London, 1989, pp. 169-91 (pp. 171-2); J.M. Roldán Hervás, El ejército de la república romana, Madrid, 1996, p. 48; P. Erdkamp, «The Transformation of the Roman Army in the Second Century BC», in I. Arrayás and T. Ñaco del Hoyo (eds.), War and Territory in the Roman World – Guerra y territorio en el mundo romano, Oxford, 2006, pp. 41-51 (p. 45); P. Cagniart, «The Late Republican Army (146 – 30 BC) », in P. Erdkamp (ed.), A Companion to the Roman Army, Malden, 2007, pp. 80-95 (pp. 85-6); G. Breccia, I figli di Marte: l'arte della guerra nell'antica Roma, Milano, 2012, pp. 66-70. There were also more "traditional" accounts, with a more exclusive focus on the role of Marius: H. Delbrück, Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte, vol. 1, Berlin, 1900, pp. 378-81; W. Liebenam, «Exercitus», RE 6.2 (1909), pp. 1587-679 (p. 600); T. Rice Holmes, Caesar's Conquest of Gaul, Oxford, 1911, pp. 43 and 563; H.M.D. Parker, The Roman Legions, Oxford, 1928, pp. 26-7; M. Marin y Peña, Instituciones militares romanas, Madrid, 1956, pp. 55-9; A.J. Toynbee, Hannibal's Legacy: the Hannibalic War's Effects on Roman Life, vol. 1, London, 1965, p. 516, nt. 3. However, the difference between those who put emphasis on Marius and on Spain is often just a matter of degree. J. Harmand, L'armée et le soldat à Rome de 107 à 50 avant notre ère, Paris, 1967, pp. 236-7, despite his very traditional approach to the Marian reforms, does not conclusively decide about his supposed introduction of the cohort.

³⁰ Bell's arguments against a Marian reform are the mentions by Polybius, the fact that Marius' military career is well documented, the presence of cohorts in Sallust before Marius, and the contention that German tactics did not differ from that of, say, the Gauls.

³¹ I. Kertész, «The Roman Cohort Tactics: Problems of Development», Oikumene, 1 (1976),

evolution, instead crediting Scipio the Elder with the invention of this formation and its name.³²

This Spanish/Scipionic theory has found supporters,³³ although the older Marian theory still has its advocates,³⁴ and is still widespread in manuals, textbooks, and general works about Roman republican history,³⁵ as well as in common popular culture and among enthusiasts.³⁶ Both theories were, however, recently chal-

pp. 89-97. Kertész started to attribute much importance to Scipio (but also to L. Marcius).

³² G. Brizzi, «I *Manliana imperia* e la riforma manipolare: l'esercito romano tra ferocia e disciplina», *Sileno*, 16 (1990), pp. 185-206. Brizzi revisited the topic in many other contributions: most notable are G. Brizzi, «Roma e la Spagna: considerazioni su un fronte difficile», in V. Gennaro Lerda (ed.), *Le stelle e le strisce: studi americani e militari in onore di Raimondo Luraghi*, Milano, 1998, pp. 23-30; G. Brizzi, «Gli Iberi nell'armata di Annibale: armamento e funzioni», in A. Sartori and A. Valvo (eds.), *Hiberia-Italia, Italia-Hiberia*, Milano, 2006, pp. 157-66.

³³ Y. Garlan, *La guerre dans l'antiquité*, Paris, 1972, p. 101; H. Aigner, «Gedanken zur sogenannten Heeresreform des Marius», in F. Hampl and I. Weiler (eds.), *Kritische und vergleichende Studien zur alten Geschichte und Universalgeschichte*, Innsbruck, 1974, pp. 11-23 (p. 16); C. Nicolet, *Rome et la conquête du monde méditérranéen*, vol. 1, Paris, 1977, p. 317; A.E. Astin, *Cato the Censor*, Oxford, 1978, p. 30; P. Connolly, «The Roman Army in the Age of Polybius», in J. Hackett (ed.), *Warfare in the Ancient World*, London, 1989, pp. 149-168 (pp. 163-165); A.K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War*, 100 BC – AD 200, Oxford, 1996, p. 35, nt. 91; Y. Le Bohec, *Histoire militaire des guerres puniques: 264-146 avant J.-C.*, Monaco, 1996, pp. 235-6; D. Hoyos, «The Age of Overseas Expansion (264 – 146 BC) », in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army*, Malden, 2007, pp. 63-79 (p. 70). E. Rawson, «The Literary Sources for the pre-Marian Roman Army», *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 39 (1971), pp. 13-31 (p. 19) criticised Bell's theory in passing.

³⁴ Most notably, C.A. Matthew, *On the Wings of Eagles: The Reforms of Gaius Marius and the Creation of Rome's first Professional Soldiers*, Newcastle, 2010, pp. 30-7: a very traditional reconstruction of "Marius' reforms".

³⁵ Sticking with popular textbooks and general works in English, see e.g. M.T. Boatwright, D.J. Gargola and R.J.A. Talbert, *A Brief History of the Romans*, New York-Oxford, 2006, p. 104; K. Bringmann, *A History of the Roman Republic*, Cambridge-Malden, 2007, p. 174; D.M. Gwinn, *The Roman Republic: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2012, p. 81; M. Dillon and L. Garland, *The Ancient Romans: History and Society from the Early Republic to the Death of Augustus*, London-New York, 2021, pp. 198-9. During my (admittedly, short) teaching experiences in Italian high schools, I have always seen the theme of the Marian reforms treated in a traditional way by textbooks. See, for instance, the manuals by G. Di Caro, N. Cristino, I. Castellano, I. Geroni, *Il tempo ritrovato*, vol. 1, Torino, 2010, p. 337; F. Cioffi, A. Cristofori, *Sette mari: corso di storia e geografia*, vol. 1, Torino, 2016, p. 394; E. Cantarella, G. Guidorizzi, *Oriente Occidente: corso di geostoria*, vol. 1, Milano, 2018, pp. 422-3; G. Cuniberti, A. Cazzaniga, C. Griguolo, *Meridiani e millenni: corso di geostoria*, vol. 1, Milano, 2019, p. 389; A. Barbero, S. Carocci, Storia in chiaro, vol. 1, Bari, 2023, pp. 333-4.

³⁶ A simple web search looking for "Marian reforms" will lead to a plethora of pages, articles,

lenged. F. Cadiou criticised both theories and showed that the peculiarity of how the Spanish peoples waged war had been largely overestimated.³⁷ As for Marius, he again rejected, as Bell did, the novelty of the Germanic infantry charges, and challenged the very idea of a Marian reform of the army. On this last point, Cadiou's arguments seem convincing:38 if one wants to credit Marius with the introduction of the cohort, this should be done without referring this measure to a wider reform of the organisation and, especially, the recruitment of the Roman legions. Cadiou's criticism was shared by F. Gauthier, who also maintained that Marius did not abolish the *velites*.³⁹ Lastly, M. Taylor proposed another theory, namely, that the disposition by cohorts was progressively adopted in the last century of the republic, taking as a model the cohorts of allied extraordinarii. The disappearance of the *velites* meant that the Roman legions became vulnerable to attacks while they were switching from marching to battle formation. At first, they employed four cohorts of extraordinarii, to act as a screen behind which the legions could deploy. With time – and especially after the social war – these allied cohorts were replaced with Roman legionary cohorts, which became the first line of a 4-3-3 triplex acies. 40 Taylor's theory, as will be discussed below, had two

blogs, and videos mainly repeating the more traditional opinions. It should be noted that the Wikipedia page "Marian reforms" is an exception. While it was until recently a summary of all the traditional opinions about these supposed "reforms", it was updated around July 2023, and it now takes into account, with moderation, modern criticism against these "reforms" (wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_reforms). For a discussion on the older version, see the excellent page by B. Devereaux, "The Marian Reforms Weren't a Thing" (acoup. blog/2023/06/30/collections-the-marian-reforms-werent-a-thing/), in which the author very clearly deconstructs common misconceptions about these supposed "reforms". The page is a very good starting point for anyone interested in any of the developments and changes within the Roman army in the late republic.

³⁷ F. Cadiou, «Les guerres en Hispania et l'émergence de la cohorte légionnaire dans l'armée romaine sous la république: une révision critique», *Gladius*, 21 (2001), pp. 167-82.

³⁸ Cadiou, cit., pp. 167-8, and, above all, F. Cadiou, *L'armée imaginaire: les soldats prolétaires dans les légions romaines au dernier siècle de la république*, Paris, 2018 (esp. p. 36, nt. 3): a comprehensive and compelling deconstruction of modern assumptions about a Marian reform of the recruitment.

³⁹ F. Gauthier, «The Changing Composition of the Roman Army in the Late Republic and the so-called Marian Reforms», *The Ancient History Bulletin*, 30 (2016), pp. 103-20; F. Gauthier, «The Transformation of the Roman Army in the Last Decades of the Republic», in J. Armstrong and M.P. Fronda (eds.), *Romans at War: Soldiers, Citizens, and Society in the Roman Republic*, London-New York, 2020, pp. 283-96; F. Gauthier, «Did *Velites* Disappear in the Late Roman Republic?», *Historia*, 70 (2021), pp. 69-82.

⁴⁰ M.J. Taylor, «Tactical Reform in the Late Roman Republic: The View from Italy», *Historia*, 68 (2019), pp. 76-94.

important merits – namely, the importance given to the *socii* and the social war, and the idea of a gradual evolution over time with the absence of a real "reform". About this last point, it has to be noted that he was the first among recent historians, ⁴¹ although these arguments are not developed at length, to challenge the idea according to which the cohort was fundamentally different from the maniple in that it was more "phalangitic" in nature. ⁴² In this paper, I develop these two suggestions to contend that there was no such thing as a "tactical reform" in the middle and late Roman republic.

The legionary cohort in the third and second centuries BC

Most discussions of the introduction of the cohort start with, or at least consider, two mentions by Polybius referring to the last decade of the third century. To be sure, it is well known that our sources mention cohorts starting much earlier. These occurrences, however, are generally described as anachronisms, especially by Livy, 43 who along with Frontinus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, refers to the existence of the cohort way back to the early republic. These mentions are surely problematic, especially because of the imprecise or anachronistic way in which these historians employed military terms. While it is far from impossible that the early republic saw the occasional employment of bodies of troops larger than maniples called cohorts, this paper focuses on the middle and late republic. 44 A suitable starting point is the Spanish part of the Hannibalic war.

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that, while in the sixteenth and seventeenth (and partly the eighteenth) centuries the discussion was centred around the question *whether* a tactical reform could be detected, modern historians took the answer to this question for granted and instead debated *when* and *why* this tactical reform took place.

⁴² This approach is shared by all mentioned authors, most notably Bell and Brizzi, but also by E.L. Wheeler, «The Legion as Phalanx», *Chiron*, 9 (1979), pp. 303-18; Lendon, cit., pp. 229-32. Another view that I challenge is the idea that the cohort allowed for more elaborate manoeuvres than the maniple (Cadiou, *Les guerres*, cit., p. 179; Lendon, cit., pp. 224-8; Breccia, cit., p. 68). Behind these theories is the idea that the cohort was fundamentally different from a simple grouping of three maniples (Keppie, *The Making*, cit., p. 64; Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, cit., pp. 33-5).

⁴³ E.g. R.M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy: Books 1-5*, Oxford, 1965, p. 261; Bell, cit., p. 407. A notable exception is D. Sierra Estornés, «La táctica del ejército romano centuriado a través de las fuentes literarias», *Aquila legionis*, 14 (2011), pp. 37-68 (p. 42), although this does not discuss the characteristics of the cohorts in the early republic.

⁴⁴ On the cohort in the early republic, and on the occurrences in the mentioned works, see Brusa, cit., pp. 14-30.

The first commander credited with the employment of the cohort in Spain is L. Marcius, who reorganised and rallied the Roman forces after the defeat of the two Scipios. Livy writes that he hid a *cohors Romana*, together with some cavalrymen, in a wood, while he was attacking a Punic encampment so he could intercept any fugitives from the camp itself.⁴⁵ The same commander is also credited by Frontinus, in an unspecified battle against the Carthaginians, with the decision to *manipulos laxare* to let his enemies escape.⁴⁶ Bell thought that this manoeuvre proves that Marcius' maniples were united in larger and compact bodies – that is, cohorts. This will not do: this expression might just mean "to make the spaces between the maniples larger" and should probably just be translated, in a generic way, as "to open up the ranks".⁴⁷ Moreover, the cohort mentioned by Livy, hidden in a wood, deployed against fugitives, and fighting in tandem with cavalry, does not resemble at all the compact bodies of men fighting in close order theorised by Bell, and even less the phalanx-like units that Brizzi supposed.

By far the most interesting mentions of the cohort in the Spanish context, however, refer to the campaigns of Scipio, the future Africanus.⁴⁸ In 206, after the conquest of New Carthage, he faced the Punic army led by Hasdrubal, son of Gisco, at Ilipa. Livy and, above all, Polybius have left us detailed accounts of the movements of Scipio's army.

Polybius writes that Scipio deployed his army with his Spanish allies in the centre and the Romans (and Italian *socii*?) in the wings, while Hasdrubal's Punic soldiers were stationed in the centre and the Spanish infantrymen in the wings.⁴⁹ Scipio's army was clearly deployed by maniples, as Polybius twice employs the corresponding term, σημαία. However, in the first phase of the battle, Scipio ex-

⁴⁵ Liv. 25.39.

⁴⁶ Frontin. Strat. 2.6.2 (Frontinus wrongly calls this commander Titus).

⁴⁷ Bell, cit., p 408-9; cf. Kertész, cit., 93-4. Bell compares this manoeuvre to the order given by Caesar to his own soldiers against the Nervii (Caes. *Gall.* 2.25.2) to *manipulos laxare*, *quo facilius gladiis uti possent*. In context, however, this phrase shows that Caesar did not just want to distance its maniples: he tried to open the order of the men within each maniple (so they could fight with their swords more effectively). The phrase (as other similar ones, *laxare ordines* and *laxare agmen*, found in Frontin. *Strat.* 1.5.16; 2.6.6; 4.7.42) must be generically translated as "to open up the ranks".

⁴⁸ The first mention is in the context of the battle of Baecula (Liv. 27.18; cf. Polyb. 10.38-39). It is impossible to decide, however, whether the *cohortes duae* detached by Scipio were Roman or allied units.

⁴⁹ Polyb. 11.22-33; Livy's much simpler account: Liv. 28.14.

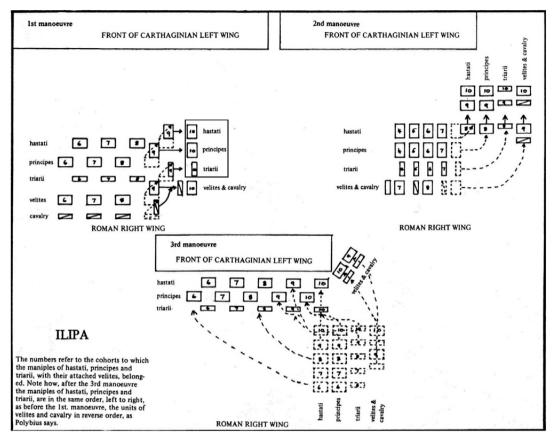


Table 1: Map of the battle of Ilipa, taken from Lazenby 1978, map 17. In my opinion, this is a very good schematic depiction of the movements of the Roman units

tended his wings and led them forward to attack the (supposedly weaker) wings of the enemy with his legionaries, while the Spaniards were ordered to advance very slowly, so that they did not come to blows with the Carthaginians. The wings were extended, with the soldiers making a conversion and marching outwards (ἐπιστρέφειν, *extendere cornu*); and this manoeuvre was also carried out by maniples (παρήγγειλε τὰς σημαίας), as well as by the troops of cavalry (καὶ τὰς ἴλας) stationed behind them. Then, after another conversion, ⁵⁰ Scipio took the first three σπεῖραι of the column and marched against the enemy directly, in column, while the others followed (προσέβαλλον τοῖς κέρασιν ἀμφοτέροις ἄμα τοῖς τῶν ὑπεναντίων ὀρθίαις ταῖς Ῥωμαϊκαῖς δυνάμεσι). Finally, he ordered a last conversion, through

⁵⁰ Polybius describes this new conversion clearly: 1.23.2-3.

which the infantry found itself in line again, and advanced against the enemy wings, while the cavalrymen encircled them from behind. These manoeuvres have sometimes puzzled historians. 51 Polybius himself, however, clearly describes in his sixth book an order to march in column in which the Roman maniples advanced in the same way as Scipio's wings, ready to wheel left or right and to face attacks from both sides.⁵² It should be assumed that this was the rationale behind Scipio's apparently overcomplicated manoeuvre. He was probably afraid of an advance of the Punic centre, of an attack by the enemy's cavalry, or, as Lazenby suggested, he wanted to prevent the Carthaginian centre from advancing: if it had done so, it would have been vulnerable on both flanks to attacks by the Roman columns. What is interesting is Polybius' description of the three units (σπεῖραι) that led the Roman column in the second phase: τοῦτο δὲ καλεῖται τὸ σύνταγμα τῶν πεζῶν παρά Ρωμαίοις κοόρτις. Scholars have sometimes been misled by Livy, who simplifies Polybius' account, about the nature of these units. Livy writes that Scipio advanced cum ternis peditum cohortibus [...] sequentibus in obliquum aliis. 53 The historian translated the term σπεῖρα as cohort, as was customary in his own time.⁵⁴ However, Polybius himself writes that he employed the words σπεῖρα and σημαία as synonyms, to translate the Latin manipulus.55 Moreover, it makes sense that he defines the three leading maniples of the column – which, after the first conversion, were one maniple each of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii* – as a cohort. This is exactly what the cohort was, at least in later times. Livy himself, after all, writes that the soldiers were advancing in column. It follows that in this case, the *cohors* was just a grouping of three maniples, without any change in their way of fighting: after the last manoeuvre, they found themselves deployed against the enemy in the customary triplex acies. This is indeed what led some scholars to assume that at

⁵¹ E.g. Connolly, *Greece and Rome*, cit., p. 201; Connolly, *The Roman Army*, cit., p. 167. There are, however, good accounts of this battle. Rather interestingly, most of these accounts make perfect sense of Polybius without mentioning the cohort. See Walbank, cit., p. 302; J.F. Lazenby, *Hannibal's War: A Military History of the Second Punic War*, Warminster, 1978, pp. 147-8; A.K. Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*, London, 2000, pp. 282-3.

⁵² Polyb. 6.40.10-13.

⁵³ Liv. 28.14.17.

⁵⁴ Marquardt, cit., p. 435; Bell, cit., p. 407.

⁵⁵ Polyb. 6.24.5. Polybius' employment of the term is often quite generic (and at times applied to non-Roman armies). When employed in a Roman context, however, it defines the maniple: in three instances out of four (2.29-33; 14.8; 15.9), the author mentions the three *ordines* of the maniples.

this stage the cohort was just a concept, a name to define three maniples, without any of the tactical peculiarities that it would only take up later.⁵⁶ Far from being proof that a tactical reform was happening at the end of the third century, the battle of Ilipa seems to point to the opposite conclusion: despite the existence of the concept of *cohors*, the Roman armies were still deploying, manoeuvring, and fighting in their customary manipular way.

Cohorts are mentioned by the sources in two other Scipionic battles in Spain. The first mention comes in the context of a mutiny of a part of his soldiers in the camp at Sucro, during the same year, 206. Apparently, after Scipio promised them their overdue *stipendium* and summoned them to his headquarters, they started to discuss singulaene cohortes an universi ad stipendium petendum irent.⁵⁷ Even if we accept this (and I am inclined to think that Livy generically meant that the soldiers were unsure whether to go together or in groups), and if we assume that these were Roman cohorts, this says nothing about their tactical organisation: the context was not "tactical" at all. Soon after, Scipio fought against Andobales and Mandonius, chiefs of Spanish populations that had fought together with the Romans against the Carthaginians. The battle was fought in a very narrow space, so Scipio could deploy only four cohorts for the direct assault against the enemies. Polybius writes that these cohorts were densely packed together (ἄθρους ἄγων).⁵⁸ This has led some scholars to assume that these tactical units were different from a simple sum of three maniples, and that they were more like a phalanx in nature.⁵⁹ As understood by Livy, however, it is better to believe that they were packed together because of the tight space (quattuor cohortes in fronte statuit, quia latius pandere aciem non poterat). 60 Again, it is difficult to understand whether these cohorts were organised in any peculiar way. It is remarkable, at any rate, that the sources do not highlight any tactical change by Scipio.

⁵⁶ Marquardt, cit., p. 421 ("diese Cohorten hatten nur im *agmen*, nicht in der *acies* eine Bedeutung"); Delbrück, cit., pp. 378-81; Parker, cit., p. 28; Walbank, cit., p. 302. Interestingly, Rawson, cit., p. 19 expressed the opposite opinion: "the cohort was at the time a tactical but not yet an administrative unit".

⁵⁷ Liv. 28.25.15.

⁵⁸ Polyb. 11.32.1-2.

⁵⁹ Brizzi and Bell have employed this passage to support their theory of the emergence of the cohort as a densely packed formation that could withstand the attacks of the Spanish populations.

⁶⁰ Liv. 28.33.12.

Skipping ahead by around a decade, mentions of cohorts are quite frequent in the context of Cato's expedition in Spain in 195-194, so much so that Connolly commented that "Cato's army in Spain appears to be divided totally into cohorts". 61 This conclusion appears to be supported by the first relevant passage. According to Livy, Cato had to decide at the start of his campaign whether or not to send a part of his troops, as requested, to help his allies. He chose to pretend to send a third of the army, but then recalled these soldiers back. To define this third part of the army, Livy employs the periphrasis pars tertia ex omnibus cohortibus. 62 Evidently, a maniple from each cohort, i.e. an entire ordo (whether that of the *hastati*, *principes* or *triarii*, we do not know) was sent and then recalled. This, again, proves that the cohort existed, at this stage, as a concept. This testimony is important, as it probably derives in some way from the writings of Cato himself.⁶³ However, not only do we not hear anything about any peculiar tactical features of the cohort, but, in this case, the maniples, and not the cohorts, are the units employed. Once again, then, the only suitable conclusion seems to be that, at this stage, a cohort was just a union of three maniples without any further peculiarity.

Cohorts were also employed by Cato in his most important battle, near Emporiae.⁶⁴ At the very beginning of the battle, the consul sent three cohorts to lure the

⁶¹ Connolly, The Roman Army, cit., p.165.

⁶² Liv. 34.12.6; cf. Frontin. Strat. 4.7.31 (tertia pars militum).

⁶³ Livy himself mentions Cato, together with Valerius Antias, as one of his sources for Cato's campaign, at the end of the description of the battle of Emporiae. Astin, cit., pp. 28-9 notes the similarities between Livy's description of this campaign and Cato's oration de consulatu suo, but states that Livy probably took most of his material from the Origines. As a result, the description of Cato's campaign and of the battle of Emporiae is "not only more detailed, but patently more authentic" than Livy's usual conventional accounts. J. Briscoe, A Commentary on Livy: Books 34-37, Oxford, 1981, pp. 63-5 agrees with Astin (although he maintains that Livy might have read both the oration and the Origines), and criticises the view according to which Livy did not read Cato directly but only through an annalistic account (as maintained by P. Fraccaro, «Catone il Censore in Tito Livio», in Id., Opuscula, vol. 1, Pavia, 1956, pp. 115-37 (pp. 123-5); P. Fraccaro, «Le fonti per il consolato di M. Porcio Catone», in Id., Opuscula, vol. 1, Pavia, 1956, pp. 177-226 (pp. 201-7)): see already T.J. Luce, Livy: The Composition of his History, Princeton, 1977, pp. 162-5. For a fuller status quaestionis, see G. Brusa, «La battaglia di Emporiae, il De re militari, lo stratagemma: per una valutazione della fama militare di Catone il Censore», Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire Ancienne, 10 (2021), pp. 177-216 (pp. 184-5), as well as the authors cited in the mentioned works.

⁶⁴ Liv. 34.15. For a more in-depth analysis of this battle, see Brusa, *Le coorti*, cit., pp. 115-22, and G. Brusa, *La battaglia di Emporiae*, cit., pp. 183-94, with further bibliography.

enemies into attacking the well-ordered Roman legions. Then, during the battle, he sent *duas cohortes delectas* to attack the enemy's flank, and reinforced his own lines with *cohortes subsidiariae ex secunda acie*. The latter decision is probably also mentioned by Appian, according to whom Cato intervened μετὰ τριῶν τάξεων ἐφέδρων.⁶⁵ The *cohortes delectae* must be units of Italian *extraordinarii*. The others might be Roman cohorts. Even if they are, though, there is nothing implying that they are anything else than sums of maniples, fighting in the customary way. Indeed, Cato's legions surely fought by maniples, as later an attack by *ordines* of *hastati* and *principes* is mentioned. The battle of Emporiae is thus a good way to highlight the flexibility of the Roman manipular system, in which units could be regrouped into bigger formations as needed. Cohorts only appear to be one such formation.

This analysis of the mentions of the cohorts in Spain, therefore, leads one to think that no tactical reform was at work between the end of the third and the beginning of the second century. The cohort in Spain was not the revolutionary unit, fighting in close order, theorised by the "Spanish current". Legions, as highlighted by the battle of Ilipa, were still fighting in their regular triplex acies. Skilled generals such as Scipio and (to a far lesser extent) Cato were able to exploit the flexibility of the manipular formations, often building up ad hoc units, such as the cohorts. There is no indication, however, that these units fought in a peculiar way. This is not to say that the Roman army could not fight in a "phalangitic" (i.e., densely packed) formation on occasion. However, maniples surely allowed for such a disposition without issues:66 there was, at this stage at least, no need for a tactical reform. Moreover, as has been noted, the concept itself of military reform in the Roman world is problematic.⁶⁷ There was no higher command that could impose durable reforms, and single commanders could employ ad hoc innovations as needed. It is very unlikely that the cohort was such an innovation, introduced by Scipio. Not only is this unit found before his arrival in Spain, but it is also very unlikely that Polybius, who held Scipio in such high esteem, would brush off this introduction with the simple phrase "this unit is called by the Romans a cohort", without any further mention of the impact of his hero. I would

⁶⁵ App. Hisp. 40.

⁶⁶ On this matter in general, see Wheeler, cit.; on the maniples as "building blocks" that allowed for such a disposition, see Taylor, cit., pp. 79-80. On both of these issues, see below.

⁶⁷ Taylor, cit., p. 78. See also the conclusions below.

contend that, at this stage at least, the cohort was just a section of the legion, made up of three maniples.⁶⁸ This grouping was by no means, moreover, the only one that could be employed by Roman commanders. In the middle republic, the maniples appear to be very flexible and adaptable building blocks, suitable for both loose and tight formations, and employable for building up several kinds of larger units.⁶⁹

The only argument left to support the Spanish theory is the widespread assumption that mentions of cohorts appear only in the accounts of wars in the Iberian Peninsula. This is, however, simply not true. While it is right to say that the mentions of maniples are much more frequent in the wars against the Hellenistic kingdoms, cohorts appear in Livy both in Italy, in the context of the Hannibalic war, and, in the East, from the very first conflict against the Macedonians. As soon as Ser. Sulpicius Galba landed in Greece, near the Isthmus, there was a fight between the cavalry of Philip V and a *cohors Romana*, whose nature Livy does not specify in any way. More interesting are the occurrences during the second Macedonian war. The first of these, for 199, refers to a fight between some *cohortes Romanae* of Galba, which were advancing *quadrato agmine*, and a body of Cretan archers, who were swept away by the closely packed Roman soldiers.

⁶⁸ The other occurrences concerning Cato are less interesting: according to Livy, after the battle of Emporiae, Cato first sent some *expeditae cohortes* to devastate the fields of the Turdetani, then led seven cohorts back *ad Hiberum* (Liv. 34.19.9-11). In Plutarch we find that, at the very end of his campaign, he waged a last campaign with σπείρας ὁπλιτῶν πέντε (Plut. *Cato Mai*. 11.1). In all cases, these are just partitions of Cato's army, which is hardly telling about the tactical nature of these units.

⁶⁹ Among the many examples that could be cited, one is particularly telling: in 181, L. Aemilius Paulus employed, against the Ligurians, a wide variety of units: a unit made up of four allied and two Roman cohorts; another with the *hastati* of one legion (one *ordo*); another with the *principes* of the same legion; another with *hastati* and *principes* of the other legion (two *ordines*); the last, in reserve, with the *triarii* of the two legions, plus two Roman cohorts. For a fuller treatment, see Brusa, *Le coorti*, cit., pp. 129-34.

⁷⁰ Even Cadiou, *Les guerres*, cit., although challenging the idea of the specificity of the Spanish context, still accepts that mentions of cohorts are especially abundant in Spain (p. 168). For some statistics about the occurrences of maniples and cohorts in the sources, see Brusa, *Le coorti*, cit., pp. 135-6.

⁷¹ These mentions are not very relevant and are not discussed here: Liv. 22.5.7 (Trasimene); 27.49.4 (Metaurus); Liv. 30.33.1 and Frontin. *Strat.* 2.3.16 (Cannae). On this last battle (and on Livy's misunderstanding), see Brusa, *Le coorti*, cit., pp. 159-68.

⁷² Liv. 27.32.4.

⁷³ Liv. 31.37.6. The Roman soldiers are also described as *conferti*.

In this instance, then, we find units similar to the phalanx-like bodies of troops theorised by both the Spanish and Marian views, but before Marius, and not in Spain. In the two following cases, however, things change quite a lot.

In 198, T. Quinctius Flamininus opened his campaign by laying siege to several Macedonian towns in Thessaly and Phocis. The siege of Atrax is particularly relevant. When the Romans managed to destroy a section of the wall, the garrison deployed on the breach in a densely packed phalanx. The consul, then,

cohortes in vicem sub signis, quae cuneum Macedonum – phalangem ipsi vocant – si possent, vi perrumperent, emittebat. Sed ad loci angustias (haud late patente intervallo diruti muri) genus armorum pugnaeque hosti aptius erat. Ubi conferti hastas ingentis longitudinis prae se Macedones obiecissent, velut in constructam densitate clipeorum testudinem Romani pilis nequiquam emissis cum strinxissent gladios, neque congredi propius neque praecidere hastas poterant, et, si quam incidissent aut praefregissent, hastile fragmento ipso acuto inter spicula integrarum hastarum velut vallum explebat. Ad hoc et muri pars adhuc integra utraque tuta praestabat latera, nec ex longo spatio aut cedendum aut impetus faciendus erat, quae res turbare ordines solet.⁷⁴

Flamininus sent one cohort after another against the phalanx, whose flanks were protected by the remains of the wall. The legionaries of each cohort threw their pila, and then, with their swords, tried to break the tips of the sarissae, opening their ranks to try and penetrate the wall of the enemy pikes. The description of the behaviour of these units, then, conveys an impression opposite to that of Galba's dense formations. Because of the nature of the battlefield, the Roman units were not able, despite their superior flexibility, to break the enemy formation. The siege of Atrax shows, once again, that the cohort was just a section of the legion, which, in this case, was picked solely because of the narrow nature of the battlefield. Like the legion and the maniple, this unit appears to be very flexible, suited to different contexts and without precise and fixed tactical characteristics. The same conclusion follows from the siege of Elatea, which is described by Livy in the same way (phalanx on the breach, Roman cohort trying to dislodge it), with the only difference that, this time, Flamininus sent other soldiers to conquer another section of the wall. 75 Another Livian passage concerning Flamininus' campaign (this time against Nabis) is interesting. The historian twice

⁷⁴ Liv. 32.17.11-13.

⁷⁵ Liv. 32.24.

mentions Roman columns marching with *cohortes legionariae* in the front. A quick comparison with Polybius' account of the movements of Scipio's army at the battle of Ilipa leads one to think that these columns marching into battle were just a regular *triplex acies*, with three parallel columns of *hastati*, *principes*, and *triarii*. Seen from the front, these columns built, as Livy writes, cohorts of one maniple of each of these *ordines*.

The fact that the cohort was just a section of the legion is shown by another passage from the subsequent campaign against the Macedonians, or rather, from its very end, back in Rome. 77 During Aemilius Paullus' triumph, the soldiers marched equites turmatim et cohortes peditum suis quaeque ordinibus.⁷⁸ If we believe Livy, the soldiers marched through Rome by cohorts, retaining, however, their division in *ordines* – that is by maniples. The reason why the legions were divided into cohorts must have been that the Roman streets would have been way too narrow otherwise. Once again, the cohort is just a partition of the legion that retains the further partition into maniples. Indeed, one passage from Polybius seems to provide, for this campaign, very similar evidence to those provided by Livy about Flamininus' sieges. Polybius writes that three maniples (i.e. a cohort, although the historian does not employ this term) formed a tortoise to besiege the Heracleium. The first maniple closed their ranks with their shields on top of their heads, and the other two ran over these shields and were able to mount the walls.⁷⁹ This seems to be another instance of three maniples fighting together; each, however, retained its tactical significance.

There is, to sum up, no evidence at all of a tactical reform, involving the cohort, in the middle republic. The passages analysed point to the fact that cohorts

⁷⁶ Liv. 34.28.5 (*primi agminis cohortes*); 34.28.7 (*primae legionariae cohortes ibant*). The latter phrase proves that these were not allied cohorts. Another instance may be detected in Plut. *Flam*. 4.4, who writes of a march in three parallel columns of σπεῖραι. Given that the source is Polybius, it seems natural to translate these as maniples and to compare this text, once again, with Polybius' description of the march and of the battle of Ilipa.

⁷⁷ Other occurrences from other campaigns in Greece are of less value. Livy twice mentions cohorts sent to accomplish special missions (the incarceration of some Aetolians in 190: Liv. 37.3.8; the looting of Epirote cities at the end of the war against Perseus: Liv. 45.34.1-6).

⁷⁸ Liv. 45.40.4. The same marching disposition seems to have been employed in Scipio the Elder's triumph over Carthage as depicted by App. *Afr*. 66: the army marched κατά τε ἴλας καὶ τάξεις.

⁷⁹ Polyb. 28.11. Polybius' text is fragmentary. The episode is told more fully by Liv. 44.8-9, who, however, only mentions the two maniples mounting on top of the tortoise.

were just groups of maniples. When our sources allow us to evaluate their actions in battle, we see that the presence of cohorts did not entail any change in how the Roman maniples fought; or rather, that they retained the high degree of flexibility and adaptability of the Roman maniples and legions. Once again, a tactical reform was simply not needed.

Legionary cohorts in the first century. A tactical reform?

As said at the beginning of the introduction, Caesar's age is generally taken as the *terminus ante quem* for the transformation of the Roman army from a manipular into a cohortal system. There is some merit to this line of reasoning, to be sure. As seen in the introduction, the cohort seems to have a much higher importance in Caesar's *commentarii* than in, say, Livy. The loss of Livy's books for the age of Caesar prevents commentators from understanding whether the growth of this importance was a feature peculiar to Caesar's writings, or it was shared by Livy in the latter part of his work. Given Caesar's importance as a military author, at any rate, it is hardly possible to deny that the cohort had become, at the middle of the first century BC, a major unit of the Roman legions. Caesar often reckons the strength of his own armies and of those of the enemy by cohorts, and in his descriptions of battles the cohorts appear to be the focus of his attention. The reasons and the steps that led to this change are difficult to understand, because of the paucity of relevant sources down to at least the war against Jugurtha.

From the time of the civil war between Marius and Sulla, the strength of Roman armies starts to be generally reckoned by cohorts. Not only do sources indicate the number of cohorts at the command of the generals, but, when they write about recruitment, they also generally specify how many cohorts were levied. While he was preparing to sail for Italy to fight against the Marian commanders, according to Plutarch, Sulla remarked that he was going to face πεντεκαίδεκα στρατηγοὺς πολεμίους πεντήκοντα καὶ τετρακοσίας σπείρας ἔχοντας. In this case at least, the term σπείρα surely means cohort: instead of quantifying the enemy forces as 45 legions, he talked about 450 cohorts.⁸⁰ This same approach, as will be seen below, is detectable in other cases, both by Plutarch and by Appian, especially, as noted, during recruitment operations. Regarding this last point, a later

⁸⁰ Plut. Sull. 27.3. Plutarch attributes this phrase to Sulla himself (ὥς φησιν αὐτός).

passage by Cicero is interesting: according to Cicero, while Catiline was enlisting followers against the consular army of Antonius, he first built up all the cohorts of his two (very undermanned) legions, and he assigned officers to each cohort. Then, when other men joined his standards, he distributed them in his pre-built cohorts. This highlights the importance of the cohort for recruiting purposes in the last century of the republic. This aspect will be dealt with in greater depth later; however, it is notable that at least one of the two changes highlighted for the age of Caesar seems to go back to the age of Marius and Sulla.

Whether or not this administrative change was paralleled by a tactical change, is another matter. Supporters of the Marian view traditionally ascribed the "death of the maniple" to the first part of the Numidian war, right before the period of the social and civil war, on the grounds that the maniple is still mentioned (together with the cohort) in Metellus' campaign, while in Marius' campaign we only find cohorts. Let us start with the former. The relevant battle was fought near the river Muthul (108).82 Metellus was advancing in a column with *cohortes* expeditae (presumably of extraordinarii?) in the front, in a line of march that was perpendicular to that of the Numidians. When he saw the enemies, he ordered a conversion and deployed his men in a traditional triplex acies. This manoeuvre resembles, once again, Polybius' description of the march of the army in three parallel columns of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*, whose maniples were ready, through a conversion, to deploy in a triple line facing enemies from either side. Once they had turned against the enemy, the Romans clashed with the Numidians, who were, however, able to *conturbare ordines* of the Romans. A chaotic phase followed; at last, Metellus managed to milites in unum conducere and ordines restituere; he was therefore able to lead against the enemy cohortis legionarias quattuor. Bell wrote that the battle shows Metellus as a mild reactionary, still

⁸¹ Sal. Cat. 54.1-2 (duas legiones instituit, cohortis pro numero militum complet; deinde, ut quisque voluntarius aut ex sociis in castra venerat, aequaliter distribuerat). P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower: 225 BC – AD 14*, Oxford, 1971, p. 688 comments that this procedure was probably not exceptional, and was meant to build up the cadre of the officers.

⁸² Sal. *Iug.* 48.51. On this battle, see M.A. Levi, «La battaglia del Muthul», *Atene e Roma*, 6 (1925), pp. 188-203; A. Vachette, «La bataille de Muthul», *Les études classiques*, 5 (1936), pp. 574-83; G.M. Paul, *A historical commentary on Sallust's Bellum Iugurthinum*, Liverpool, 1984, pp. 141-56. Both Vachette and Paul note the parallel between Metellus' march and Polybius' description.

an advocate of the maniple, but able to employ the cohort on occasion.⁸³ To my mind, the explanation is much simpler. The four cohorts must have been the only soldiers that Metellus was able to rally: in all likelihood, he regrouped the closest soldiers around the standard-bearers of the closest maniples (it must be remembered that the cohort did not have a standard). Indeed, Sallust writes that Metellus regrouped the soldiers by maniples (*ordines*), and this interpretation is the only way to make sense of the mention of cohorts in an army organised by *ordines*.

What about Marius, then? The reason why part of modern historiography has emphasised his role in the creation/standardisation of cohorts is essentially his supposed reform of the recruitment. It is well known that, according to the sources, Marius opened the recruitment for the Roman legions to the proletarians. It has been deemed natural that the abolition of the census threshold allowed for the abolition of the maniples. This conclusion is, in itself, far from compelling. Moreover, the significance of the Marian reform has been challenged to the point that, especially after Cadiou's seminal work, it is now no longer acceptable to regard Marius as a reformer.⁸⁴ Even if he was, there is still no evidence at all that he introduced a tactical reform.⁸⁵ The soldiers he led to Numidia had to be able to fight together with Metellus' old soldiers, who were used to fighting by maniples.⁸⁶ No source mentions the employment of cohorts by Marius as peculiar tactical units.⁸⁷ Even more interesting is the fact that, before the start of Marius' civil war against Sulla, Plutarch never mentions levies by cohorts. It appears, then, that not only did Marius not change the arrangement and tactical nature of

⁸³ Bell, cit., pp. 415-16: "something of a military reactionary, though by no means an unmitigated one". Cohorts detached by Metellus (without any additional details) are also mentioned by Sal. *Iug.* 56. By a comparison with *Iug.* 58, it is probable that these were cohorts of *socii*.

⁸⁴ Cadiou, *L'armée imaginaire*, cit.; Cadiou's focus is the supposed reform of the recruitment, and the deconstruction of the myth of the introduction of proletarian armies.

⁸⁵ Fest. s.v. «sex milium et ducentorum» writes that Marius was the first to enrol a legion 6,200 men strong. While he may have levied a particularly high (though by no means unprecedented) number of men, he surely did not introduce a long-lasting reform on this matter: Brunt, *Italian Manpower*, cit., pp. 671-6 and 686-93.

⁸⁶ Sal. *Iug.* 87.1: *expletis legionibus cohortibusque auxiliariis*; this was, in other words, a *supplementum*.

⁸⁷ Indeed, contrary to what supporters of the "Marian view" believe, Roman cohorts are very rarely mentioned in the Marian phase of the Numidian war. We twice find some *cohortes expeditae* (maybe Roman? *Iug.* 90.2 and 103.1), and only once cohorts detached from the legions (surely Roman: *Iug.* 100.4).

the cohort, but also that the growth of the administrative importance of the cohort, as a recruitment unit, postdated both his Numidian and his German campaigns.

With the civil war, as mentioned, sources start to reckon the strength of the legions by cohorts. Is there any indication of a parallel tactical change? Unfortunately, the evidence is too scanty to allow for a definitive answer.⁸⁸ The only passage that may be employed is Frontinus' account of Sulla's battle against Archelaus (86 BC). According to the author,

Triplicem deinde peditum aciem ordinavit [...] Tum postsignanis qui in secunda acie erant imperavit, ut densos numerososque palos firme in terram defigerent, intraque eos, appropinquantibus quadrigis, antesignanorum aciem recepit.⁸⁹

Livy consistently employs the terms *antesignani* and *postsignani* to define two ordines (the *hastati* and *principes*) of the Roman army. ⁹⁰ If we assume that Frontinus employed the same terminology, then Sulla's army was still ordered by maniples in a *triplex acies*. There are a number of problems, though. In Caesar, the expression *triplex acies* generally defines three lines of cohorts, not maniples. It is also unclear, as shall be seen, whether Caesar employed the terms *antesignani* and *postsignani* in the Livian fashion. The meaning of these two terms in Frontinus is not clear. Lastly, this battle was fought before the massive recruitment of new legions and cohorts in the civil war; one might doubt whether the new legions were ordered differently than the old consular army. To decide whether or not a tactical reform had been/was being carried out, one has to turn to Caesar's *commentarii*, with the caveat that these works offer, as well, very scanty hints.

In his recent paper on the birth of the legionary cohort, Taylor argued that the main reason for this evolution was the disappearance of *velites* and the reduction

⁸⁸ In the context of Sulla's Mithridatic war, Plutarch mentions cohorts four times (Plut. *Sull*. 17.3: units of account; 17.7: reserve cohorts; 21.2: cohorts from the right wing; 24.1: four cohorts as Sulla's bodyguard). From a tactical perspective, these mentions do not add anything to the matter. In Appian's account of the civil war, cohorts are mentioned only as units of account, mainly to specify the number of men who were killed or deserted in the battles.

⁸⁹ Frontin. *Strat.* 2.3.17. The mention of *antesignani* and *postsignani* is particularly relevant, as Plutarch mentions cohorts both in the battle of Chaeronea and Orchomenus (see above).

⁹⁰ Liv. 8.39.4; 9.39.7; 22.5.7; 23.29.3; 30.33.3. From Liv. 8.8.7-8 and 8.11.7, it is clear that the three *ordines* of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii* were distinguished by Livy between *pilani* (*triarii*) and *antepilani* (the other two). The latter were also separated between *post-signani* (*principes*) and *antesignani* (*hastati*).

of the importance of lightly armed troops in the armies of the late republic. These soldiers were able to form a screen behind which the Roman legions could safely deploy for battle. With their disappearance, the switch from a marching formation to a fighting formation became dangerous. Until the social war, the Romans could obviate this issue by stationing the four cohorts of *extraordinarii* in the front. After the enfranchisement of the Italians, according to Taylor, the legions were organised in cohorts, on the model of the *extraordinarii*. Four cohorts deployed in the first line, having the same function previously held by the *extraordinarii*, while the others formed two lines of three cohorts each (4-3-3). The reason why the Romans could not do the same with the maniple is, according to Taylor, the fact that the cohort had a much wider front. In his view, all the *centuriae* of each cohort fought side by side. Four cohorts, therefore, would have a front of 24 (6 x 4) centuries. Taylor's theory has, in my opinion, a huge merit – namely, the importance attached to the social war and to the Italian context. It also has, however, several weaknesses.

The first problem is that lightly armed soldiers were not absent from Caesar's army. Gauthier has argued that Roman citizens could be employed as lightly armed soldiers, and that, therefore, *velites* had not been abolished. ⁹³ Even if one assumes that they were, however, one must notice that Caesar frequently mentions troops of *funditores*, *sagittarii*, and *milites levis armaturae* in general. In a few cases, he even stresses their importance; it would be too rash to assume that the Romans had to modify the organisation of their legions to account for the loss

⁹¹ Taylor, cit.; the disappearance of the *velites* is taken by Taylor as a given.

⁹² It should be noted that the total number of the cohorts of *extraordinarii* in the Roman armies is unclear. According to Polybius, the *extraordinarii* were around a fifth of the total number of *socii*, which he considers roughly equal in number to the legionaries. This would mean that each legion was accompanied by a total of two cohorts, and not four. Four cohorts may have been the usual complement of *extraordinarii* for a consular army, but this number is only attested once (Liv. 40.27.3) and is debated. See V. Ilari, *Gli Italici nelle strutture militari romane*, Milano, 1974, p. 145. On these *extraordinarii* in general, see Ilari, cit., pp. 143-6; C. Wolff, «Les *extraordinarii*», *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire Ancienne*, 9 (2020), pp. 167-79.

⁹³ Gauthier, *Did Velites Really Disappear*, cit.; cf. Gauthier, *The Transformation*, cit.; and Gauthier, *The Changing Composition*, cit.; also, Taylor takes the passages in which Caesar mentions *expediti* legionaries as proof that he needed to obviate to the lack of light infantrymen by creating ad hoc corps of light soldiers. *Expeditus*, however, does not mean "lightly armed" but "unencumbered"; Caesar once (*Gall*. 2.19.2) mentions the soldiers of six entire legions as *expediti*.

of their light infantry.94

The arrangement of the cohorts of a Roman legion in three lines of four, three, and three cohorts, as argued by Taylor, is a very common assumption in modern historiography. The evidence, however, at least from the time of Caesar, is simply not there. To be sure, the fact that the Roman army generally deployed, and also marched, in three lines (*triplex acies/tripertito*) is often stated by Caesar, although the author also mentions, in special cases, arrays in one or two lines. In a few instances, it is also possible to understand clearly that these three lines were lines of cohorts, and not, as normal in Livy's books, of maniples (*ordines*). Although this is not always the case, It is best to assume that normally Caesar deployed his army in three lines of cohorts. However, it is far from certain that these lines contained four, three and three cohorts each. Caesar once mentions such a disposition, but this is meant by the author as an exception: in describing the arrangements for the battle of Ilerda against Afranius (49 BC), he writes:

Acies erat Afraniana duplex legionum V, tertium in subsidiis locum alariae cohortes obtinebant, Caesaris triplex, sed primam aciem quaternae cohortes ex V legionibus tenebant. Has subsidiariae ternae et rursus aliae totidem suae cuiusque legionis subsequebantur. [...] Tali instructa acie tenere uterque propositum videbatur.

The peculiar nature of this disposition is shown both by the *sed* (i.e., to Caesar,

⁹⁴ The last of these categories is particularly interesting. Like the other two, it is quite frequently mentioned, but it is unclear whether these light soldiers were Romans. In some cases they surely were not (Caes. *Gall.* 7.65.4-5: Germans). In the *Bellum Hispaniense*, however, these men seem to be distinguished from both legionaries and auxiliaries (*Hisp.* 24; *Hisp.* 30).

⁹⁵ E.g. W. Rüstow, Heerwesen und Kriegführung C. Julius Cäsars, Gotha, 1955, pp. 44-6; Marquardt, cit., p. 424; Rice-Holmes, cit., p. 587-8; Steinwender, cit., pp. 428-9; Parker, cit., p. 28; Fraccaro, cit., pp. 145-8; Keppie, The Making, cit., pp. 64-5; Lendon, cit., 224-5; A.K. Goldsworthy, Caesar: the Life of a Colossus, New Haven-London, 2006, p. 219; Cagniart, cit., p. 86; N. Rosenstein, «General and Imperialist», in M.T. Griffin (ed.), A Companion to Julius Caesar, Malden, 2009, pp. 85-99 (p. 95); Matthew, cit., pp. 29-31; Breccia, cit., p. 69. Contra already A.F. von Göler, Caesars Gallischer Krieg und Theile seiner Bürgerkriegs, vol. 2, Freiburg-Tübingen, 1880, p. 215.

⁹⁶ Caes *Gall*. 1.83.1 and 3.24 (*duplex acies*; but in both cases there was another *acies* of auxiliaries); *Afr*. 13.2 (*acies simplex*).

⁹⁷ Especially in the passage quoted below. Cf. Caes. Civ. 3.89, on Pharsalus.

⁹⁸ See, in particular, the arrays of Scipio and Caesar in *Afr.* 59-60. Scipio had two *acies*, one with his legions and one of auxiliaries. Caesar had his legions in his first *acies*, some cohorts in his second *acies*, and a *tertia acies* only on one wing.

this was not the usual *triplex acies*) and by the comment on the reason why this particular array was chosen. We have no idea about how Caesar's lines of cohorts normally deployed, and the phrase *sed primam aciem quaternae cohortes tene-bant* might lead one to think that, normally, the *prima acies* comprised a different number of cohorts. The hypothesis that the first *acies* developed from the four cohorts of *extraordinarii* is, therefore, difficult to prove.

During the middle republic, the *extraordinarii* were most likely arranged into maniples, like the other socii. 99 This would again contradict the assumption that they influenced the evolution from the manipular to the cohortal legion. This also leads one to question Taylor's assumption that the shift was important because of the wider front of the cohort compared to the front the sum of three maniples of the earlier republic. There is no compelling evidence, once again, about the disposition of maniples and centuries in a cohort in the age of Caesar. As noted, it is probable that Sulla still deployed his maniples in the traditional three lines (ordines). In Caesar, however, the expression triplex acies generally refers to lines of cohorts. Although he still employs the term *ordo* to refer to maniples (or rather centuries), he only employs this word, as well as the terms *hastatus*, *princeps*, and pilus (triarius) in the context of the definition of the rank of his centurions. It is well known that the six centurions of a cohort were the *hastatus prior* and posterior, the princeps prior and posterior, and the pilus prior (primipilus for the first cohort) and posterior. 100 The fact that the leaders of the centuries retained their old names, however, is not proof that how the centuries themselves were deployed did not change. In a middle republican cohort, the maniples in a cohort were deployed one behind the other, each with their two centuries abreast.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The normal cohorts of allies were surely equal to three Roman maniples (a Roman cohort), as Polybius mentions their maniples and *ordines* both in the context of the encampment (6.30) and while describing Roman practices in looting towns (10.16). Livy consistently writes that the *extraordinarii* were arranged in *cohortes delectae*. It is probable that these cohorts were modelled on the normal allied cohorts. On the composition of these allied cohorts, see Ilari, cit.; on the *extraordinarii*, see again Ilari, cit., pp. 143-6; Wolff, *Les extraordinarii*, cit.

¹⁰⁰ The *primus pilus* is often mentioned by Caesar (*Gall.* 3.5; 5.35; 5.44; 6.38; *Civ.* 1.13.4; 1.46.5; 3.91.1); the others are much less represented (*Civ.* 3.64.4: *princeps prior*; 1.46.4: *hastatus prior*, in this case of the first cohort).

¹⁰¹ The standard description of the three *ordines* is Polybius' sixth book (cf. Liv. 8.8). Polyb. 6.24.8 specifically states that the two centuries of each maniple deployed abreast: the two centurions commanded the left and right part of the maniple.

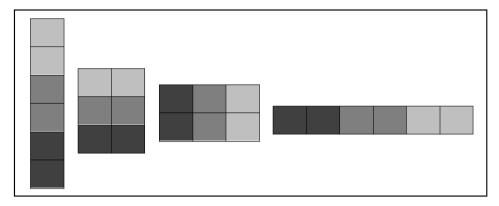


Table 2: Possible array of the six centuries in a cohort. The two cohorts of the same *ordo* are in the same shade of grey.

Unfortunately, Caesar does not discuss the arrangement of these units in his own age; undoubtedly, he took this matter for granted, and assumed that the readers would know. This makes it unlikely that he altered the convention in any way, but it is not impossible that someone between the age of Sulla and that of Caesar introduced a change. Such a change has often been assumed by modern authors, although opinions have varied widely. Four possible arrangements of the six cohorts are possible (width x depth): 1×6 , 2×3 , 3×2 , 6×1 , as detailed in the very schematic table above.

Each of these possibilities has found its supporters in a debate that was particularly hot in less recent historiography. In many cases, however, these opinions are unsupported by any evidence. As far as Taylor's reconstruction goes, as proofs of a 6×1 disposition are mentioned the episodes of desertion during the battle by the soldiers (they must have fled from a single line; otherwise, they would have been stopped by the line behind them; however, similar things happened during the days of the "manipular disposition", and at any rate there were, normally, several lines of cohorts) and the disposition of cohorts in three lines (the array would have been too deep; however, we do not know how deep a single century was, and in some cases a higher depth of the legion might have been

^{102 1×6:} Keppie, *The Making*, cit., p. 65; 2×3: von Göler, cit., p. 216; 3×2: Rüstow, cit., pp. 36-44; Votsch, cit., pp. 34-5; F. Fröhlich, *Das Kriegswesen Cäsars*, vol. 2, Zürich, 1890, pp. 144-8; Rice-Holmes, cit., pp. 587-8; Lammert and Lammert, cit., p. 488; Parker, cit., p. 31; Veith in Kromayer and Veith, cit., pp. 377-80; Marin y Peña, cit., p. 58; Breccia, cit., p. 69; this has been the most influential opinion; 6×1: Steinwender, cit., pp. 21-433; Fraccaro, cit., pp. 144-5.

preferable). The other factor often quoted is a statement by Frontinus about the battle of Pharsalus. Apparently, each of Pompey's three lines was ten men deep. 103 This would exclude both the 1×6 and 2×3 models, as ten is not divisible either by six or three. However, while the 1×6 model may be unlikely, the 2×3 is not. There is no evidence that the centuries had the same number of men, and therefore the same depth. During the middle republic, the centuries of *triarii* were half as big as those of *principes* and *hastati*. The fact that things had changed in the late republic is often assumed by modern historians, but never stated by ancient sources.

Some hints may be exploited to support the 2×3 model – that is, the idea that things had not changed. M.P. Speidel, studying the epigraphically attested signs to define each century's signs, arranged them in order to form a sort of rectangle. ¹⁰⁴ The result would be a 2×3 disposition. However, it is not beyond doubt that these signs represent the outlay of a cohort while in battle, and even if they did, it would be equally possible to postulate a 3×2 formation (the one, indeed, most commonly assumed as correct by scholars). ¹⁰⁵ One may also be tempted to turn to Hadrian's speech at Lambaesis, during which the emperor addressed the *principes*, *hastati* and *pili* separately, and apparently also praised a *hastatus* (the first centurion of the *hastati*?) for training his men. ¹⁰⁶ However, these hints pertain to the imperial army and not to the late-republican one.

Another interesting hint may be provided by Caesar's mention of the *antesignani* fighting alone. As mentioned, Livy employed the term to define the *hastati* (while the *postsignani* were the *principes*), and it is probable that Frontinus, maybe drawing from Livy himself, applied these two terms, with the same meaning,

¹⁰³ Frontin. Strat. 2.3.22: Cn. Pompeius adversus C. Caesarem Palaepharsali triplicem instruxit aciem, quarum singulae denos ordines in latitudinem habuerunt.

¹⁰⁴ M.P. Speidel, «Centurial Signs and the Battle Order of the Legions», *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 154 (2005), pp. 286-92.

¹⁰⁵ Speidel's reconstruction, based on the attested centurial signs, is shown below (Speidel, cit., p. 290). The issue is that the arrow pointing to the enemies could equally be moved below: in this case, we would have a 2×3 formation. Indeed, J.C. Mann, «Roman Legionary Centurial Symbols», *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 115 (1997), pp. 295-8 theorised this scenario, drawing from the same evidence analysed by Speidel.

¹⁰⁶ On all these (and some other, less significant) hints, see Brusa, *Le coorti*, cit., pp. 225-228, with mentioned bibliography.

to Sulla's legions. Scholars have often discussed the nature of the corps of antesignani in Caesar. The most common view is that they were lightly armed soldiers used for fighting in tandem with cavalrymen.¹⁰⁷ I think that this interpretation should be rejected. Caesar defines them as *expediti*, that is, "unencumbered", not "lightly armed". In one of the two cases in which he describes them fighting together with the cavalry, he also writes that they had to get used to wielding lighter weapons and to fighting with the equites. For the rest, they are described as a picked group of expert (but not necessarily older) soldiers. 108 It is not completely clear whether they were part of the normal cohorts. 109 If, as more likely, they were, it is natural to assume that they were still an *ordo* of the cohorts, most likely the *pili/triarii*, and no longer the *hastati*. 110 If this is true, then it would be possible to detect (at least one of) the ancient ordines still fighting outside of the "cohortal organisation". This would lead to the supposition that the cohorts themselves still deployed by *ordines*, that is, with the maniples one behind the other. This would also be the most economical solution, as it would not compel the postulation of a change that is never mentioned by any source. It must be stressed, however, that this solution is also far from conclusive. The argumentum e silentio about the lack of mentions of a reform is far from compelling, and Caesar never clearly states who the antesignani were (and indeed Vegetius seems to consider them lighter infantrymen).¹¹¹ In very few cases, maniples and centuries are mentioned fighting

¹⁰⁷ Most recently, Taylor, cit., p. 86. This traditional theory, however, was developed at the end of the nineteenth century (A. von Domaszewski, *«Antesignani»*, *RE* 1.2 (1894), pp. 2355-6).

¹⁰⁸ The four passages in which they are mentioned are *Civ.* 1.43.3 (the *antesignani unius legionis* are sent to occupy a hill, and fight against some cohorts of Afranius); 1.57.1 (Caesar selects the best men, among whom centurions and *antesignani*, to be embarked); 3.75.5 (Caesar mixes *antesignani expediti* with his cavalrymen); and 3.84.3 (the same happens, but Caesar specifies that the *antesignani* had to get used to the new way of fighting and to the lighter weapons; also, in this case the soldiers chosen are *adulescentes*).

¹⁰⁹ Caesar never equates them with any of the *ordines*, but he also does not talk about a distinct unit of *antesignani*. Cicero (*Phil*. 5.12) seems to distinguish them from the *manipulares*, but he might also be meaning that the *antesignani* were a distinct (and more important) category of *manipulares*.

¹¹⁰ The *antesignani* seem to be the most prominent soldiers in the legions (see also Cicero's passage above), and so, if they still were an *ordo*, they must have been the *triarii*. This would entail that the *pili/triarii* were now in the front. Some historians have assumed such a switch (Harmand, cit., p. 396; Nicolet, cit., p. 314), but this is not attested by the sources. Indeed, Lendon, cit., p. 223 assumed that the *antesignani* were the *ordo* of the *hastati*.

¹¹¹ Vegetius' position is not perfectly clear. He counts the antesignani as heavy infantrymen

on their own, but they could be detachments from a larger cohort. It is necessary to acknowledge that, despite Caesar's importance as a military historian, details about the organisation of his army are even more difficult to grasp than the characters of the middle republican legions. It is also important to stress, though, that there is no evidence at all for a tactical reform, either by Caesar or by any other commander between the age of Sulla and the end of the republic. We simply do not know for certain whether Caesar's cohorts were arranged and fought in a different way than their middle-republican counterparts. Cohorts, to sum up, might well have remained simple groupings of three maniples, still arranged by *ordines*. Even the decision to deepen the array by deploying the cohorts in three lines is neither revolutionary nor inexplicable. Cohorts had been kept in the reserve as early as 195 (Cato's *subsidiaria acies*), and, with armies getting larger and larger in the late republic, it must have been natural to deepen the array instead of continuing to widen its front. A "major tactical reform", whether in the middle or the late republic, is not detectable.

Only two changes, as noted, can be highlighted. One of them is the employment of the cohort as a unit of account, both to express the strength of armies and in the context of recruitment. The other is the constant employment of cohorts, however they may have fought and deployed, as the most important tactical unit. While it had previously been normal to resort to a wide variety of groupings (*ordines*, sums of *ordines*, sums of maniples, cohorts, cohorts plus other maniples), it appears from Caesar's *commentarii* that cohorts and groups of cohorts were in the late republic by far the most common way in which detachments could be formed and sent out. It is not the late republic by far the next section, I contend that these two changes were deeply interconnected.

⁽Legio autem propriis cohortibus plena cum gravem armaturam, hoc est principes hastatos triarios antesignanos, item levem armaturam, hoc est ferrentarios sagittarios funditores ballistarios), and in this case the term antesignanos might be meant as an attribute of triarios, or as a different category (2.2). Then, he states that the antesignani, as the signiferi, quamvis pedites, loricas minores accipiebant et galeas ad terrorem hostium ursinis pellibus tectas (2.14). He also writes that they were also called campigeni, quia eorum opera atque virtute exercitii genus crescit in campo (2.7).

¹¹² It is worth mentioning a significant example: during the middle republic, it seems to have been common to leave one or two of the *ordines* deployed for battle, while the other(s) fortified the camp (e.g. Liv. 7.23.7; 35.4.6). Caesar does the same, with groups of cohorts (*Gall.* 1.49; *Civ.* 1.41.5; *Alex.* 74.2).

Legionary cohorts in the first century. An administrative reform?

As mentioned, one of the great contributions of Taylor's paper is its focus on the Italian context. The switch from pre- to post-social war Italy coincides, in the sources, with the introduction of the habit of reckoning the strength of armies by cohorts, and, most importantly, of mentioning recruitment by cohorts. I do not consider this a mere coincidence.

The functioning of a regular mid-republican *dilectus* is described in detail by Polybius. To be sure, scholars disagree about the extent to which his depiction should be believed. 113 It seems clear, at any rate, that at least an important part of this procedure was centralised and carried out in Rome. At the same time, the Italian *socii* had to carry out a *dilectus* in their cities, and to send (allied) cohorts to the Romans. With the enfranchisement of the allies, both of these procedures had to change. It was impossible to summon the entire Italian male population to Rome for each recruitment, but the *socii*, now full Roman citizens, were no longer compelled to send allied soldiers.

From the start of the civil war between Marius and Sulla, our sources start to portray commanders sending their own officers in various locations of Italy to recruit soldiers. While Sulla's first march on Rome was carried out with the legions enrolled for the war against Mithridates, Cinna, after taking control of the remaining legion, apparently "made a tour" (διέθει) of Italy himself to raise troops. Among the *novi cives*, he was able to recruit *trecentas amplius cohortes*. ¹¹⁴ Vast numbers of Italian allies were being enfranchised. The old system according to which local communities were bound to send cohorts of allies had been crumbling since the beginning of the social war. It was now impossible to conduct the *dilectus* as had been done before, in a centralised way, with a central role for Rome. ¹¹⁵ In these troubled circumstances Cinna seems to have tried to exploit

¹¹³ The two classic opinions are those of Brunt, *Italian Manpower*, cit., pp. 625-7 (with a critique of Polybius' reconstruction) and Rawson, cit., p. 15, much more open to admit Polybius' credibility. Brunt's criticism has been followed by L. De Ligt, «Roman Manpower and Recruitment during the Middle Republic», in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army*, Malden, 2007, pp. 114-31 (pp. 115-16).

¹¹⁴ App. Civ. 1.66.302; Vell. 2.20.4.

¹¹⁵ Contra N. Rosenstein, «Integration and Armies in the Middle Republic», in S.T. Roselaar (ed.), Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic, Leiden-Boston, 2012, pp. 85-103 (p. 93). A change is assumed, but discussed only in passing, by P.A.

the old decentralised system in Italy with the levy of cohorts from the various communities. The difference was that, as these soldiers were levied for a civil war, he was compelled to make a personal tour of Italy, whose new citizens he had also ingratiated by proposing their distribution among all the tribes. In the meantime, Marius was able to raise soldiers in Etruria; 116 together, they were able to put together the 450 cohorts mentioned by Sulla. Once masters of Rome – and once the news of Sulla's peace with Mithridates reached them – Cinna and Carbo were again compelled to recruit troops: they thus sent their officers throughout Italy requesting money, soldiers, and grain (γρήματα καὶ στρατιὰν καὶ σῖτον). 117 Again, this was nothing new in itself: Italian towns had long been compelled to send at least χρήματα καὶ στρατιὰν. Although they were now Roman communities, because of the long distances involved, this system was kept in place. In the meantime, a dilectus was carried out in Rome. 118 Evidently, this dilectus did not concern the new citizens, who, although Roman citizens, were too far away from Rome to take part in this traditional levy. In Italy, levies continued to be held in this way, and Sulla also employed this same model, while Pompey was recruiting a legion in Picenum. 119 As noted, starting from here, both the strength of the armies and the entity of the levies start to be reckoned by cohorts. It is significant that no source mentions cohorts in the context of Marius' recruitments for the Numidian or German wars: the turning point was the social war, or rather, the complex overlap between the social and the civil war.

One may well suppose that this pattern of decentralised levies was an exceptional measure, determined by this overlap between the social and civil war – namely, between the ruin of the traditional system of recruiting allies and the need to find many soldiers quickly. Brunt's in-depth study of recruitment in the period after this civil war, however, shows that most recruitments were regional

Brunt, «The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution», *Journal of Roman Studies*, 52 (1962), pp. 69-86 (pp. 74-5).

¹¹⁶ App. Civ. 1.67.306; Plut. Mar. 41.2.

¹¹⁷ App. Civ. 1.76.348.

¹¹⁸ App. *Civ.* 1.82.373. It was possible that this *dilectus* was rather a *tumultus*. In the meantime, however, another levy was held throughout Italy, with the same method used before (*Civ.* 81.372).

¹¹⁹ App. Civ. 1.77.354; 1.86.393; Vell. 2.29; Plut. Pomp. 6. Plutarch mentions a tour among the cities of the region.

levies: 120 this decentralised approach to the levies seems to have persisted. Cicero sometimes mentions *conquisitores*, officers sent by Rome tasked with levying soldiers from a particular place. 121 It has been assumed that their employment became standard practice, although this is not stated by the sources. 122 It is not impossible that this kind of recruitment went on to be carried out by the magistrates of the individual cities. Despite the scarcity of the sources it is possible to glean that sections of armies and individual cohorts could be recruited from specific areas, especially, but not only, in Italy. Caesar sometimes mentions recruitments in provincia, presumably meaning, when he talks about legionaries, from Roman communities. 123 Indeed, in one case he mentions two cohortes colonicae, whose men must have been composed of Roman colonists in Spain. 124 During the civil war, it was common both for him and for Pompey to levy cohorts from various communities.¹²⁵ During Curio's unfortunate expedition to Africa, both Curio's and Varus' soldiers (all of whom had been recruited in the region of Corfinium) came from the same peoples, the Marsi and Paeligni. Caesar also mentions a Paelignian centurion and two cohorts of Marrucini. 126

These passages are telling. The Marsi, Paeligni, and Marrucini were no longer allies: they were full Roman citizens. However, they seem to have kept supplying the Roman army with "local" cohorts as they had done before. To my mind, we must suppose that, after the social war, the Romans tried to keep in place the old system of recruitment of Italians as much as possible. During civil wars, levies could be more chaotic, but in all cases the persistence of a decentralised approach

¹²⁰ Brunt, *The Army*, cit. (see in particular the table at pp. 85-6). Cf. Brunt, *Italian Manpower*, cit., pp. 448-51.

¹²¹ Cic. ad Att. 7.21.1; Mil. 25.67; Prov. cons. 3.5 (where a conquisitio is mentioned); cf. [Caes.] Alex. 2.1.

¹²² E.g. Gabba, cit., p. 59; Harmand, cit., pp. 245-247; Cadiou, *L'armée*, cit., pp. 145-6. On these *conquisitores* see in part. C. Wolff, «À propos des *conquisitores*», *Latomus*, 68 (2009), pp. 1050-2. The author emphasises the growth of the importance of these men after the social war, for the recruitment of Roman citizens all throughout Italy.

¹²³ E.g. Caes. *Gall.* 1.7.2; 1.15.1 (cavalrymen); 2.2.1; 3.9.1 (rowers); 3.20.2 (volunteers); 5.1.6 (in Illyria); 7.1.1; 7.65.1; 8.54.2. On these recruitments, see Keppie, *The Making*, cit., pp. 97-8.

¹²⁴ Caes. *Civ.* 2.19.3. In the following pages, Caesar mentions a *legio vernacula*, probably a legion built up in the province and consisting of men from Roman communities.

¹²⁵ E.g. Caes. Civ. 1.14.4; 1.24.

¹²⁶ Caes. Civ. 2. 28-29; 2.34.3.

to the problem of managing the Italian manpower remains important. It is only to be expected that they continued, as they had always done, to recruit their soldiers by cohorts, sort of "small legions", each with its three *ordines* and six centurions. If this interpretation is correct, the reason why sources start to reckon the strength of Roman armies by cohorts becomes obvious. Indeed, in some cases, levied cohorts could not be formally assembled into proper legions.¹²⁷

This interpretation, incidentally, also seems to make sense of a doubt expressed by N. Rosenstein. In an article focusing on the Roman *socii*, Rosenstein maintained that a relatively low level of ability to speak Latin should be assumed among republican *socii*. He also wondered why the enfranchisement after the social war did not reduce the effectiveness of the Roman armies, which now comprised non-Latin speakers fighting shoulder to shoulder with Romans and Latins. ¹²⁸ I would assume that this problem was very much mitigated by the fact that units within the legions remained mostly linguistically homogenous. It must have been largely sufficient that the centurions (the office of *praefectus cohortis* was no more) were able to understand and translate Latin orders.

The only adaptation to the Roman reality of this Italian panorama seems to have been the abolition of the rank of *praefectus cohortis*, the old Italian commander of a cohort.¹²⁹ Taylor considered this a "lost opportunity", ¹³⁰ as this reduced the potentiality of the new Roman cohort as a tactical unit. This once again entails, at any rate, a low level of change, as the Roman cohorts retained the structure and officers of the mid-republican cohort with its three maniples.

If this theory is accepted, then one can understand the reasons behind the growth of the importance of cohorts in the first century. It is also probable that, as mentioned, this change promoted a growth in the tactical importance of the cohort. As cohorts of *socii* had often been deployed during middle-republican cam-

¹²⁷ This is evident from all passages in which the recruitment of numbers of cohorts not divisible by ten are mentioned. Among the most telling passages, see Caes. *Gall.* 7.65.1; *Civ.* 1.15-18. In these passages, other local levies are mentioned.

¹²⁸ Rosenstein, *Integration and Armies*, cit., pp. 92-3. According to Rosenstein, who does not review the evidence in full (cf. again Brunt, *The Army*, cit.), regional levies only happened in special cases: hence his wonder. As a possible solution, he supposes that crash courses in Latin might have been set up.

¹²⁹ On these officers, see Ilari, cit., pp. 137-40. They were local magistrates, while the *praefecti sociorum* were Roman citizens.

¹³⁰ Taylor, cit., pp. 89-91.

paigns, it was probably natural to keep doing the same with cohorts of Roman citizens. Other partitions of the army (*ordines*, other groups of maniples, groups of cohorts plus maniples) lost importance, perhaps also because of the homogenous nature of the single cohorts. As far as I know, indeed, there is no evidence in the sources of cohorts of *socii* ever having been decomposed into their three maniples and regrouped in some other way. Whether or not these changes, both administrative and tactical, are enough to postulate a "reform" in the late Roman republican army, remains to be discussed.

Conclusion. Reform in the Roman republican army?

The concept of military reform has been challenged several times in this paper. Nevertheless, it was noted in the previous section that some kind of change was definitely going on in the late republic. While there is no evidence for any change in the array and fighting characteristics of the cohort, the growth of its importance is certainly notable. However, as Taylor noted, the idea of "military reform" is problematic. ¹³¹ It is quite improbable that one of the commanders of the last decades of the republic was able to devise, introduce, and enforce the idea that cohorts should have been the main unit to employ whenever detachments had to be picked out. A progressive development over time is surely more likely, and the changes brought about by the social and civil wars are surely more than enough to account for the mutations described above.

It should be stressed that, for the middle and late republic, there is next to no evidence, in the sources, for game-changing reforms. Important generals and commanders have been credited by scholars with various important reforms. In this paper, three such generals have been found, namely Scipio, Marius, and Caesar. It is certainly not my aim to deny their military genius. However, it is noteworthy that our sources never present them as reformers. ¹³² Caesar never styles himself as an innovator. ¹³³ Scipio's military career is documented by Polybius, who admired

¹³¹ Taylor, cit., p. 78.

¹³² Of course, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and this *argumentum e silentio* is not conclusive. In the face of the absence of direct evidence, however, I think that we should tread very carefully when trying to attribute proper military reforms to Roman commanders.

¹³³ Despite this, Caesar has sometimes been portrayed as a great innovator: e.g. E. Sander, «Die Reform des römischen Heeres durch Julius Cäsar», *Historische Zeitschrift*, 179

him; again, however, Polybius does not credit him with any innovation. 134 Even the often-mentioned "reform" of the training was an ad hoc programme similar to those put in place by other commanders. Polybius only praises it because it was very thorough. 135 As for Marius, he is credited with some changes; however, the sources again present these changes as transitory, ad hoc measures. Two examples illustrate this well. While the sources only tell us that Marius accepted *capite* censi for his supplementum for Numidia, scholars have often assumed either that he carried out a reform of the recruitment, or that he institutionalised tendencies already at work. Both of these interpretations are unwarranted: no source relates any law or decree that made this change stable. 136 While the sources tell us that Rutilius Rufus had his legionaries undergo a training programme by gladiator-instructors, some scholars have assumed that this was part of a major reform devised by Marius (!) to professionalise his soldiers. 137 The concept of a "military reform" seems to be a modern construction, at least in the context of the middle and late republic. I have contended, in this text, that the Romans did not need a tactical reform. The Roman republican army seems to have been a very flexible and adaptable device. In this paper, we found cohorts fighting in open and close order, arrayed on one, two, three, or four lines. As for maniples, they also had

^{(1955),} pp. 225-54; P.J. Cuff, «Caesar the Soldier», *Greece and Rome*, 6 (1957), pp. 29-35 (p. 31). A much more sensible view is in G. Zecchini, *Cesare e il mos maiorum*, Stuttgart, 2001, pp. 144-58; Y. Le Bohec, *César chef de guerre*, Monaco, 2001, p. 101; and Rosenstein, *General*, cit., p. 98.

¹³⁴ On Polybius' very positive depiction of Scipio, see G. Zecchini, «Scipione in Spagna: un approccio critico alla tradizione polibiano-liviana», in G. Urso (ed.), *Hispania terris omnibus felicior: premesse ed esiti di un processo di integrazione*, Pisa, 2002, pp. 87-103. For Scipio as a great innovator, see the mentioned contributions by Brizzi, and also H.H. Scullard, *Scipio Africanus: Soldier and Politician*, Ithaca NY, 1970, pp. 226-230.

¹³⁵ Other, very rudimentary, programmes are known before Scipio (e.g. Liv. 10.25; 23.35). Most importantly, Scipio's decision was not a real reform, as it did not institutionalise a practice in time: after his campaign, both idle generals that did not train their soldiers (e.g. Sal. *Iug.* 44) and other training programmes (Liv. *Per.* 57; App. *Hisp.* 86; Val. Max. 2.7.2) are mentioned by the sources. On these issues, see P. Bannard, «Military Training», in W.M. Bloomer (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Education*, Malden, 2015, pp. 483-95 (pp. 487-92).

¹³⁶ Again, Cadiou, L'armée, cit.; see already Aigner, cit.

¹³⁷ H.H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, London, 1976, p. 58; Keppie, *The Making*, cit., p. 59; G.P. Baker, *Sulla the Fortunate*, New York, 2001, p. 120. Even Matthew, cit., pp. 86-7, the most strenuous modern supporter of Marius' reforms, frankly admits that no source attributes this decision to Marius.

been perfectly able to deploy in a looser or denser (at times, almost phalanx-like) formation, ¹³⁸ and to build up a variety of tactical units. Bell's statement, "to the Romans, tactically the maniple implied dispersion, and the cohort concentration" is too simplistic and does not account for this adaptability. ¹³⁹ The only difference between the middle and late republic, as argued here, seems to be that the Romans started to exploit the flexibility of their army especially by cohorts, and almost never by maniples – unless, of course, Caesar's *antesignani* really are the old *triarii*. In this case, even less of a change should be assumed. However this may be, there appears to be no ground for theorising a major tactical reform.

Similar points could be made if one switches to the concept of "administrative (military) reform". Again, there is no doubt, even if the reconstruction set forth in this paper is rejected, that an important change in the recruitment of Roman legionaries happened after the social war. However, on the one hand, things seem to have evolved to be not that different from before. Cities continued to send cohorts of soldiers, with the difference being that these soldiers were now Roman citizens (and were thus paid by the Roman treasury: this is perhaps the biggest change). On the other hand, it is probable that the settlement of the issue of the recruitment of the new citizens was a matter of evolution over time (in the troubled period of the civil war) rather than of a neat reform by a single commander.

I think, to sum up, that the concept of "military reform" should not be employed in an uncritical way. The case study of the evolution of the cohort in the middle and late republic seems to show that no real reform was carried out. The Roman army was just evolving and adapting to changing circumstances, and it seems to have been able to evolve and adapt, without any major rupture, even to the changes brought about by the social and civil wars.

¹³⁸ The classical example is Polyb. 2.33.4: Flaminius, against the Gauls, distributed to the *hastati* the thrusting spears of the *triarii*, to turn his front line into a sort of phalanx. This is not an isolated case, though: Polyb. 3.113 (on Cannae) underlines the tightness of the Romans' ranks. Polyb. 1.33.9. writes that Atilius Regulus deployed his legions, against Xanthippus, "many maniples deep".

¹³⁹ Bell's phrase: Bell, cit., p. 409. Contra (and rightly so) Taylor, cit., pp. 79-80.

¹⁴⁰ On the social war as an important turning point see Gauthier, *The Transformation*, cit.; on its importance in the context of the Roman war-finances, see S. Kendall, «Appian, Allied Ambassadors, and the Rejection of 91: Why the Romans Chose to Fight the *bellum sociale*», in S.T. Roselaar (ed.), *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*, Leiden-Boston, 2012, pp. 105-21.

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Cristo appare a San Mercurio e a Santa Caterina di Alessandria nell'atto di calpestare Giuliano l'Apostata la cui morte, supplicata da San Basilio difronte ad un'icona di San Mercurio, fu attribuita all'intercessione del santo. Icona del laboratorio di Georgios Klontzas, Creta, ca 1560/70.

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