

FABRIZIO BIGLINO

Royal Holloway, University of London

The Silent Revolution: The Roman Army between Polybius and Marius

Traditionally, Polybius' description of the Roman army in Book VI of his Histories is considered the de facto image of the mid-Republican Roman legions until the major changes introduced by the reforms attributed to Gaius Marius. However, there are several elements highlighting the fact that Polybius' description actually depicts a rather outdated military system, making it hard to accept it as an up-to-date portrait of the army by the mid-second century. By examining hints within the sources, this paper aims to properly examine the major variations that interested the Roman military system from the mid-third to the late second centuries and to highlight their overall impact.¹

Keywords: Roman army, Roman Republic, Polybius, Gaius Marius, Roman military system

The Roman army was a very complex organization that had, in its ability to change and adapt to the necessities of war, one of its most striking characteristics and, arguably, one of the keys to its success.² From the earliest days when, as described by Keppie, it was little more than an armed band of few hundred men raiding neighbouring territories, the *exercitus*, throughout the long Republican period, experienced several radical transformations until 31. Then, following his victory at Actium, Octavian established a new standing army of professional soldiers, closing one phase of the Roman army's history and starting an entirely new one.³

¹ All the dates are BC unless indicated otherwise; all translations are from Perseus Digital Library with the exception of Valerius Maximus, *Memorable doings and sayings*, trans. by D. R. SHACKLETON-BAILEY, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard U.P., 2000.

² Diod. Sic. 23.2: "...the Romans, so they asserted, were pupils who always outstripped their masters."; also see Plb. 6, 25 and BRAND (2019: 108-109).

³ KEPPIE (1984: 14); on Augustus' reform of the Roman army, see Suet. *Aug.* 24.

This paper aims to examine a series of significant changes experienced by the Roman army during the period comprised between the mid-third and the late second centuries, emphasizing their long-term impact. These progressive transformations proved to be so important that they influenced the well-known Marian reforms as such contributing to structural changes in the late Republican army. However, despite such implications, these changes are presented in a very disjointed fashion in the sources and are not even as prominent as other well-known and attested episodes such as the manipular system or the already mentioned Marian reforms.⁴ This overall lack of attention by the sources might be caused by the fact that their impact was considered limited only to the military and they did not seem to bring revolutionary transformations that affected Roman society as well. The manipular legions, after all, required a different recruitment system from the hoplite army inherited by the monarchy; thus, Roman society was re-organized in order to facilitate the levying of these new units. Marius, on the other hand, is credited with opening the legions to all citizens, including the *capite censi*, the poorest elements in Roman society excluded from military service up until that moment.

By looking at the evidence as a whole, this paper will show that, though slow, this was a progressive and organic transformation of the army dictated by the necessities of war, necessities that were different from those experienced by the Republic during its previous wars. From the mid-third century, after all, Rome started to wage war outside of peninsular Italy, and the development of a more complex military structure was thus inevitable.⁵

Between Polybius and Marius

Of great importance for this paper is Polybius' description of the Roman army in Book VI of his *Histories*, which is generally considered the de facto image of the mid-Republican military and the main reference regarding its structure and other key mechanisms – such as recruitment procedures,

⁴ The manipular legion is mentioned in Liv. 8, 6–8, but more as a state of affairs by the mid fourth century.

⁵ Plb. 1, 12 on Appius Claudius Caudex's forces landing in Sicily in 264: "That was the first time an armed force of Romans left Italy by sea..."

payment, etc. – until the major changes introduced by the reforms attributed to Gaius Marius from 107.⁶ Polybius' description, however, suffers from one major issue: its chronology. While it is generally accepted that Polybius wrote during the mid-second century, he actually depicts a rather outdated military system, making it hard to accept it as an up to-date portrait of the Roman army.⁷ Polybius, like other Greek military writers, offers a textbook description which does not take into account intermittent or real-life variations. The Roman army, between the mid-third and the late second centuries, experienced several important variations. Throughout this paper, I will emphasize these changes by bringing together the evidence scattered in different sources and, ultimately, suggesting that the army, by the mid-second century, was quite different from the one described by Polybius and actually closer to the one attributed to Marius.

The traditional structure and evolution of the Republican army can be summarised as follows: by the time of the siege of Veii (406-396), the hoplite phase, inherited from the monarchy, had reached its peak, although this has been debated by recent scholarship.⁸ The next development involved the introduction of the manipular system, which required the adoption of new equipment and recruitment practices.⁹ Though trying to date with confidence this conversion is quite challenging, it is possible to

⁶ Regarding the date of the reforms, both Sall. *Jug.* 86 and Plu. *Mar.* 9 place them right after he won his first consulship; Gell. 16, 10, 14 offers an alternative by suggesting that the reform of the recruitment system might have happened during the Cimbric War (maybe in 104, following the defeat at Arausio, so during Marius' second consulship), but then adds: "...or more probably, as Sallust says, in the Jugurthine War, to have enrolled soldiers from the *capite censi*, since such an act was unheard of before that time."

⁷ RAWSON (1971: 13–15); also see BRUNT (1971: 627–628).

⁸ RAWSON (1971: 13): "Literature and archaeology agree to make us believe that at some time in the archaic period the phalanx style of hoplite warfare was introduced to Rome, possibly from Etruria..."; also see GOLDSWORTHY (2003: 21–23) and RICH (2007: 17–18); on Rome not adopting hoplite warfare see ROSENSTEIN (2010), ARMSTRONG (2016: 111–112).

⁹ Liv. 8, 8: "The Romans had formerly used round shields; then, after they began to serve for pay, they changed from round to oblong shields; and their previous formation in phalanxes, like the Macedonian army, became a battle line formed by maniples..." this passage is placed about 340, at the time of the Latin War. Also see KEPPIE (1984: 19).

suggest that it was a progressive transformation that took place between the late fifth and early fourth centuries. Diodorus suggests that the Romans were militarily influenced by their contacts with the Samnites.¹⁰ Therefore, it might be possible to suggest the years between 390 – the Gallic raid – and 354 – first official contact between Romans and Samnites – as the transformation period, with the First Samnite War (343–341) as the potential *terminus ante quem*.¹¹ After all, Livy states that by the time of the Latin War (340–338) both Romans and Latins employed maniples as their tactical units, so they had to be relatively familiar with them.¹² The next major change highlighted by the sources are the reforms attributed to Gaius Marius who, in particular, is credited with having opened military service to all Roman citizens. This is considered a true revolution by the literary sources since, up until that moment, service in the army was based on the census rating of the individual citizens.¹³ The so-called Marian reforms are believed to represent a major step toward the professionalization of military service, a process later completed by Octavian's military reforms and the creation of the Imperial army.¹⁴

Where does Polybius' description fit in this summary? As said, it is considered the main source on the Roman army during the mid-Republic before the changes of the late Republican period, but, at the same time, it suffers from a chronological issue. Therefore, suggesting a more plausible date for Polybius' account allows us to better understand the chronology of the crucial changes that the Roman army experienced during the mid-Republican period. Keppie argues that Polybius is describing the Roman army at the end of the Second Punic War, thus sug-

¹⁰ D.S. 23, 2.

¹¹ D.S. 16, 45, 7 and Liv. 7, 19 on the treaty of 354 between Romans and Samnites.

¹² Liv. 8, 8: "They knew that not only must section meet section in battle, the whole line of *hastati face hastai, principes face principes*..."

¹³ Plu. *Mar.* 9: "...he immediately began to rise an army. Contrary to law and custom he enrolled large number of paupers..."; Sall. *Jug.* 86: "Meanwhile he himself enlisted soldiers, not in the traditional way from the propertied classes, but accepting whoever volunteered, generally from the headcount."; Val. Max. 2, 3: "This old tradition had been in force for a long time and was well established by then, but Marius abolished it by enlisting men without property as soldiers."

¹⁴ See KEPPIE (1984: 146–147) and GOLDSWORTHY (2003: 50).

gesting that it maintained this structure, organization and strength until the Marian reforms.¹⁵ Michael Dobson, on the other hand, suggests that the dating should be moved to the beginning of the Hannibalic War.¹⁶ Neither suggestion is satisfactory, however, as they both clash with the evidence on the matter of the number of legions that composed the overall army. As Dobson himself remarks, it is clear that the four-legion system was definitely anachronistic by the mid-second century.¹⁷ It is my suggestion, however, that there is evidence in the sources that this number was already outdated by the Second Punic War.

First of all, Livy states that in 218, at the beginning of the war, the Romans levied six legions and the number of legions recruited throughout the war would greatly increase from that.¹⁸ Even by the end of the war, and for years after, the number of legions would not return to the supposed “standard” of four.¹⁹ Second, Polybius himself offers contradictions to his own model. In the well-known description of Rome’s manpower during the Gallic invasion of 225, he suggests that the Roman army fielded ten legions for a total of 52 300 citizens under arms, a considerably larger force than a traditional four legions army.²⁰ Next, the chronicle of the early years of the First Punic War might offers additional references to the abandonment of the four-legion system. In 264, consul Appius Claudius was sent to Sicily with a standard consular ar-

¹⁵ KEPPIE (1984: 33): “It is reasonable to take into account as reflecting the organization of the Roman army as it emerged from the struggle against Hannibal.”

¹⁶ DOBSON (2006: 55): “Consequently it can be suggested that the organisation of the Roman army described by Polybius in Book Six is essentially an account of the structure that the army had reached at the beginning of the Second Punic War.”

¹⁷ DOBSON (2006: 55): “The discrepancy of his source from his own period is also reflected by the description of the army and its encampment being essentially of a double-consular army of four legions with allies. Such an army seems to have ceased being the typical form of the Roman army during the Second Punic War.”

¹⁸ See Liv. 21, 17 on the legions in service in 218.

¹⁹ Liv. 30, 41 reports that in 201 there still fourteen legions in service; the following year (200) the number of legions decreased to six (see Liv. 31, 8), but it increased to eight in 198 (see Liv. 32, 8).

²⁰ Plb. 2, 24 reports 22 000 Romans in consular armies (thus four legions of 5 500 men), 8 800 Romans (two legions of 4 400 men each) were deployed in Sicily and Tarentum, while 21 500 more stayed in Rome as a reserve (roughly four more legions).

my to support the Mamertines at Messina.²¹ The following year (263), both new consuls, Marcus Valerius Maximus and Manius Otacilius Crassus, were assigned to Sicily, each at the head of a consular army.²² Zonaras says that Claudius had left a garrison, so it would seem that in 263 the Romans had more than the traditional four legions in Sicily, thus showing that this conflict can be suggested as the start of the abandonment of the traditional manipular army described by Polybius.²³

Therefore, I believe that Polybius is actually describing the final and most refined version of the manipular system and the army described in Book VI can be dated to the mid-third century.²⁴ Also, the First Punic War can be suggested as the starting point of the progressive transformation of the army that would be completed not by Marius, as is usually implied, but by Sulla. With a more plausible chronology of Polybius' description, it is then possible to emphasize the main elements of the Roman army that no longer apply by the mid-second century and how they had changed.

Next, I will highlight five major elements in which the Roman army of the mid-second century differed from Polybius' description and why they are important. Such elements allow to better contextualize the Roman army, understand its progressive transformation and appreciate how they paved the way to the armies of the late Republic. It is important to emphasize that most of these changes were not planned, but were dictated by the necessities of war – which had influenced most of the previous changes as well.

1. Number of legions

The number of legions is the main problem with Polybius' description. I believe it is hard to argue against the fact that by the mid-second century the four-legion army was clearly anachronistic. Dobson states that it was abandoned during the Second Punic War, though, as remarked earlier in

²¹ Plb. 1, 11.

²² See Plb. 1, 16 and D.S. 23, 4.

²³ Zonar. 9, 4–5; Plb. 1, 17 adds that, following the successes of 263, the Romans reduced their forces in Sicily to two legions.

²⁴ RICH (2007: 18): “By the end of the fourth century the Roman army must have reached much of the form in which it was described for us by Polybius, a century and a half later.”

the paper, it is possible to argue that episodes during the third century suggest an even earlier abandonment of this practice.²⁵ Furthermore, by looking at the sources, there should be no doubt that Rome, following its victory over Carthage, did not return to the previous military structure in terms of the number of legions annually recruited.

Livy's chronicle shows that the Republic, during the first half of the second century, often recruited eight legions, double the number suggested by Polybius, divided between the four consular ones, two for the Spanish provinces and two more deployed were needed. This number, after all, is mentioned by Livy at least on fourteen occasions between 200 and 167. By no means, however, should this be considered a new standard number of legions, because Rome did not have an official standard number of legions prescribed by law.²⁶ It is possible to highlight the unpredictability of Rome's recruitment by examining Livy's chronicle of the beginning of the century. By 201, the final year of the Second Punic War, there were still fourteen legions in service deployed between Cisalpine Gaul, various parts of Italy, Sardinia, Sicily and Spain.²⁷ In 200, this number was reduced to six until 198, when it was increased to eight, brought back to six in 197 and increased to ten in 195.²⁸

The rest of the second century follows a similar pattern, due to the unpredictability of the necessities of war. There are, in fact, plenty of occasions when the number of legions either increased or decreased quite significantly. The loss of Livy's chronicle, of course, makes it harder to state definite numbers. However, without going into too much detail, it is still possible to suggest a general pattern for the rest of the second century. Between 167 and 150 there was a relatively low number of legions in service, followed by a strong increase between 149 and 146 (due to the Third Punic War). The number of legions remained relatively high until 133, which coincide with the destruction of Numantia and

²⁵ DOBSON (2008: 103): "Such an army seems to have ceased being the typical form of the Roman army during the Second Punic War."

²⁶ NICOLET (1980: 98).

²⁷ Liv. 30, 1.

²⁸ On the legions in service see Liv. 31, 8 (200), 32, 1 (199), 32, 8 (198), 32, 28 (197), 33, 25 (196), 33, 43 (195).

the end of the Spanish Wars, and kept decreasing until 113. The final decade of the second century, on the other end, is characterized by a higher number of legions in service due to the intense military activity experienced by the Republic: the campaign against the Scordisci in the Balkans, the Jugurthine War in Africa and, of course, the Cimbric War.

The unpredictability of second century warfare, and the consequent fluctuating number of legions, can also be linked with the fact that Rome did not experience a difference between peace time and war time, at least not how that is understood today.²⁹ The Republic was always at peace and always at war at the same time, and the second century very well encapsulates this state of affairs: for the most part, peninsular Italy, the core of Roman territory, was at peace during the second century. The invasion of the Cimbri between 102 and 101 was the first time since the Second Punic War that an invading army had entered Italy. Central Italy, on the other hand, would not experience fighting until the beginning of the Social War in 91. The overseas provinces, on the other hand, often required troops, whose strength varied from garrisons to entire armies, but this also changed depending on the situation. Spain, of course, is the most emblematic example of this. Normally, Rome stationed two legions, one per province, as garrison; however, due to the endemic warfare of the second half of the second century, more and more legions were needed for the pacification of these provinces. Information on the deployment of legions during this time comes primarily from Appian's chronicle of the Spanish wars that, though vague at times, still offers an idea of the military efforts employed by Rome. There was more than one legion in Hispania Citerior from 143 to 133 and from 142 to 136 in Hispania Ulterior; potentially, up to five legions were deployed respectively between 136 and 133 (Citerior) and between 142 and 136 (Ulterior). Therefore, the year 136 is, perhaps, the most exemplary of this situation: the entire Roman army, that year, was made up by fourteen legions, ten of which were stationed in Spain (the other four were divided between Northern Italy, Macedonia and Sicily).

Therefore, by looking at the information in the sources, it becomes difficult to accept that, by the mid-second century, the Roman army was

²⁹ NICOLET (1980: 97).

still made up by the four legions system described by Polybius. After all, this de-regulated recruitment, together with the fact that multiple legions could be assigned to individual commanders, as it will be examined later, without a doubt facilitated the formation of the large armies of the first century. The Roman army would return to the concept of a standard number of legions only with Octavian's military reforms which arranged for a standing army of twenty-eight legions (reduced to twenty-five after Teutoburg).

2. Number of men per legion

This element is extremely important in order to properly understand the demographic impact of military service. It is well-known that Polybius states that a standard Roman legion was made up by 4 500 citizens (4 200 infantry and 300 cavalry) and was supported by an allied contingent (*ala sociorum*) of 5 100 men (4 200 infantry and 900 cavalry).³⁰ Therefore, in total, the Roman army described by Polybius, made up by four legions and as many *alae sociorum*, had the strength of 38 400 men (divided between 18 000 Roman citizens and 20 400 *socii*).

However, as said, Polybius is offering a textbook description of the Roman army and, consequently, ideal numbers. In reality, of course, the number of men per legions was extremely variable for various reasons. As remarked by Goldsworthy: "No army in history has managed to maintain all its units at their exact theoretical strength at all times. This is especially true on campaign, when units' strengths are continually eroded..."³¹ and this reality became even more true from the mid-third century, once Rome started to become involved in large campaigns away from peninsular Italy. Also, there are different suggestions on the legions' ideal strength throughout the various literary sources. Livy, for example, stops using Polybius' figures in his chronicle by the late 180s; from that moment it seems that the number of Roman citizens in each legion was increased to 5 500 men.³² At the same time, however, he does not mention the *socii*, so it is uncertain that they were affected by such a

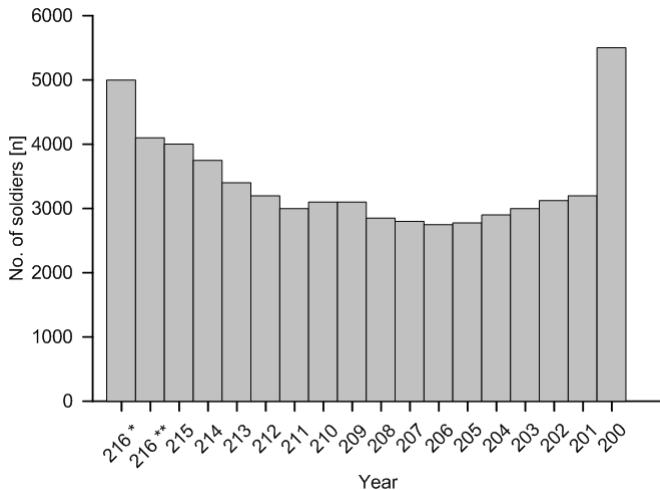
³⁰ Plb. 6, 20; Gell. 16, 4 on the *alae*.

³¹ GOLDSWORTHY (1996: 12).

³² Liv. 40, 36.

change as well. Finally, there is Appian (primarily due to his chronicle of the Third Punic War and the Spanish Wars), who, frequently throughout his various histories, employs the number 6 000 with regards to the strength of the legions. This, however, is rather problematic. It is important to remember that Appian was writing during the second century AD and it appears that he did not understand how the Republican army was organized, especially regarding the role of the allies. Though there are a couple of exceptions, he is extremely vague on the composition of the Roman army.³³ As a consequence, the numbers of men reported in his chronicle are never easy to read, and the same is true of the casualties. For the most part, Appian simply says Ῥωμαῖοι (Romans), so it is not sure whether he is talking about Roman citizens only, or also the *socii* or even auxiliaries.³⁴

Most likely, the number of men per legion from the mid-third century onwards, was dictated by the necessities of war and because of this, was extremely variable. I believe that the Second Punic War best represents this pattern. The following graph shows the variations of Roman citizens in the legions estimated by Brunt from 216 (before Cannae, "216*", and after Cannae, "216**", in the graph) to 200:



³³ The *socii* are mentioned only twice throughout the chronicle of the Spanish Wars: App. *Hisp.* 11, 65 and 67.

³⁴ Spaniards were recruited by the Romans: see App. *Hisp.* 10, 58 and 11, 63; also see DYSON (1985: 196).

Brunt suggests that legions in service before Cannae were 5 000 men strong, but that same year, after the battle, the number of citizens in service decreased to 4 100 per legion.³⁵ This negative trend continued for the rest of the war until it reached the lowest point by 206 when, according to Brunt, the twenty legions in service counted on average only 2 750 Roman citizens, a massive drop from the standard Polybian number (4 500 per legion). From this point, the number of Roman soldiers in the legions slowly started to increase again (2 900 citizens per legion in 204), but never reached their supposed standard number for the rest of the war. However, Brunt estimates that in 200, right after the war, the standard manpower of each legion was increased to 5 500 men. The demographic implications of such a model are extremely relevant in investigating the impact of recruitment during the war, or, more in general, of Roman warfare. For example, by looking at the year 211, Rome had a massive army of twenty-five legions in service across the Mediterranean; in Polybian numbers, that would total as 112 500 citizens.³⁶ If, on the other hand, each legion actually counted 3 000 men, as suggested by Brunt, the overall strength of the army would decrease to 75 000 citizens, a significant difference when considering the impact of recruitment during this period of the war. Though very interesting, Brunt's model can be questioned by examining the sources. It is plausible that in 216, for example, with the exception of the stronger legions deployed at Cannae, the rest of the army consisted of normal legions of 4 500 men. At the same time, however, the three legions on the Spanish front were probably slightly weaker.³⁷ Also, in 210, while Brunt estimates that each

³⁵ See BRUNT (1971: 418).

³⁶ Liv. 26, 1 offers the detail on the legions in service in 211, but has several omissions; it seems that there weren't many changes from the previous year, as most of the text is focused on extensions of commands, thus the total of twenty-five legions from 212 was maintained for 211 as well.

³⁷ Liv. 21, 17 says that Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio's army that landed in Spain was composed by two legions of 8 600 Romans and 15 600 allies. Liv. 22, 22 mentions that in 217 the senate, encouraged by Scipio's successes, sent 30 warships and 8 000 men to Spain. However, it is not clear how many of these were Romans and how many allies. Probably this force consisted of one legion plus *socii* under the command of Publius Scipio who joined his brother Gnaeus.

legion counted 3 100 citizens, Livy mentions legions that, after discharging veterans, had 5 300 Romans and 7 300 allies.³⁸ It appears, then, that there is no clear answer on this matter. Nevertheless, considering a combination of casualties, the defection of important allied communities, and the fact that Rome prioritized some fronts over others, it is plausible to suggest weaker legions.

Overall, there is no way to know how the actual strength of the legions varied not only during the Hannibalic War but throughout the second century as well. It is possible that consular legions, as they were the most important and deployed on the main fronts, were kept at standard strength, while others, especially those assigned to less important fronts or to garrison duty, might have less men or not receive reinforcements for longer periods of time.

3. Cohorts instead of maniples

As the hoplite formation was progressively abandoned between the late fifth and early fourth centuries, the Roman army of the Republican period, from a tactical point of view, was dominated by its successor, the maniples, until they were replaced in turn by the cohorts. While it is traditionally believed that this new formation was introduced by Gaius Marius, various sources suggest that cohorts were actually introduced before the Marian reforms, as early as the Second Punic War.³⁹ Although, at first, the passage from maniples to cohorts might be considered secondary, as limited exclusively to the army and its tactics, it also carried deep socio-economic consequences.

Technically, Livy uses the term cohort from his second book in an episode dated to 508, though this is clearly anachronistic.⁴⁰ The earliest reliable reference to a cohort in his chronicle is in 210.⁴¹ Most famously, however, Scipio Africanus is supposed to have employed cohorts during his Spanish campaign. As remarked by Polybius: “Scipio with the three leading squadrons of cavalry from the right wing, preceded by the

³⁸ Liv. 26, 28.

³⁹ On cohorts being introduced by Marius see MATTHEWS (2010: 29–37).

⁴⁰ Liv. 2, 11.

⁴¹ Liv. 25, 39.

usual number of velites and three maniples (a combination of troops which the Romans call a cohort), he advanced straight on the enemy..."⁴² Because of this, Scipio is sometimes considered the commander responsible for introducing the cohort within the Roman army, though such a reading is slightly simplistic. It is more likely that Scipio employed battle formations and tactical variations that can be considered the basis for the cohorts. Such variations, due to their success and the necessities of war, became more and more common in the Roman army during the second century until they completely replaced the maniples by the final part of the century.⁴³ Furthermore, it is possible to interpret the previously discussed increase in the legions' manpower mentioned by Livy as suggesting the use of cohorts already by the late 180s, since they required more men than maniples.⁴⁴ Most likely, the Romans adapted their legions according to the requirements of each individual campaign and the individual enemy. During this period, these varied from the large, well-organized armies of the Hellenistic kingdoms to guerrilla warfare in Spain. Such a scenario is also supported by archaeological evidence. The army camps at Numantia offer indications for the coexistence of both maniples and cohorts, but also that the latter, progressively, replaced the former from the mid-second century.⁴⁵ This coexistence is further supported by Sallust who, in his account of the Jugurthine War (112–105), states that Roman soldiers were trained to change formation from maniples to cohorts when necessary.⁴⁶ For such manoeuvres to be possible, cohorts must already have been in regular use, further indication that they predated Marius.

Finally, Polybius' comment on cohorts during the Second Punic War should be considered as additional evidence for the outdatedness of the army's description in Book VI. After all, he shows awareness of cohorts being the tactical units of the Roman army, or, at least, that at the time

⁴² Plb. 11, 23; also see Liv. 28, 13 on cohorts being deployed in Spain in 206.

⁴³ See DOBSON (2006: 100) and KEPPIE (1984: 44) on the coexistence of maniples and cohorts.

⁴⁴ Livy 40, 36; also see BELL (1965: 409).

⁴⁵ See KEPPIE (1984: 63) and DOBSON (2006: 100).

⁴⁶ Sall. *Jug.* 51, 3.

both they and the maniples were being employed.⁴⁷ Despite this, his description only covers the old manipular army at a time when cohorts were, most likely, the army's main tactical units. This is reinforced by the last mention of maniples being used in the field coming in Sallust's *Jugurthine War*, only a few decades after Polybius was writing.⁴⁸

As mentioned, cohorts not only implied larger legions or different tactics, but their earlier introduction and their progressive replacement of maniples also carried significant socio-economic implications. There are, in fact, two important factors to be considered: the progressive reduction of the property requirement for military service and the removal of the *velites*. As is well known, maniples were formed by different troop types (*velites*, *hastati*, *principes*, and *triarii*) with different equipment. Cohorts, on the other hand, did not have light infantry and were primarily formed by poorer soldiers who shared the same equipment, thus implying a stronger standardization.⁴⁹ Consequently, the production and distribution of military and non-military equipment on such a scale would have been possible only through state involvement.⁵⁰ These two factors are clearly connected with each other. Keppie, for example, argues that the reduction of the minimum census instigated the passage from maniples to cohorts, suggesting that the latter happened by the time of Marius.⁵¹ As mentioned by the sources, the minimum census requirement for military service was reduced to 1 500 *asses* by the late

⁴⁷ See Plb. 11, 23.

⁴⁸ Sall. *Jug.* 50, 1; 100, 2 and 103, 1 mentions light-armoured soldiers, probably *velites*; also, *Jug.* 50, 4 says: "...they were being wounded only from a distance and given no chance of striking back or engaging in hand-to-hand combat." so he is talking about Roman troops without long-range weapons, probably the *triarii* (as *velites*, *hastati* and *principes* were all armed with *pila*).

⁴⁹ See DOBSON (2006: 103).

⁵⁰ MATTHEW (2010: 34): "The merging of the maniples into cohorts removed the *velites* from the formation, and subsequently removed a large proportion of the legion's missile capabilities. To counter this loss, all legionaries were uniformly armed with sword (*gladius*), large shield (*scutum*) and javelins (*pila*). The removal of the spear as the principal offensive weapon of the *triarii* indicates that the uniform equipping and dependence on the *gladius* and *scutum* was an alteration made to suit close-contact fighting that would occur when engaged."

⁵¹ KEPPIE (1984: 44).

second century, allowing poorer citizens to join the legions, before being abandoned altogether by Marius.⁵² Keppie's logic, however, can also be applied to the earlier change to 4 000 *asses* reported by Polybius, thus suggesting an earlier introduction of cohorts.⁵³ After all, this is already a rather low minimum census requirement, roughly the equivalent of 4 *iugera* of property, and would have allowed the enlistment of poorer citizens who were unable to afford their equipment which now had to be standardized and (perhaps) provided by the state.⁵⁴ Then, by the 120s, when the property requirement was reduced to the aforementioned 1 500 *asses*, this issue became even more common. This, I believe, is well-portrayed by our main epigraphic evidence for the Republican army: the altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus. Dated at least to 122, it shows a level of standardization of equipment well before Marius.

It is in fact reasonable to suggest that the Second Punic War provided a strong impetus for the standardization of military equipment and the subsequent state involvement in its production and distribution. This has been criticized by Daly who, more traditionally, suggests that the Marian reforms were responsible for triggering this process.⁵⁵ His argument, however, is mainly based on considering Polybius' description of the army as up-to-date in the mid-second century, which clearly it was not. The Hannibalic War, after all, caused a first major reduction of the census requirement for service (arguably more impactful than the

⁵² Cic. *Rep.* 2, 40; Gell. 16, 10, 10; Non. 228 L; on the census' reduction see GABBA (1973: 6–7); on Marius ignoring the minimum census, see BRUNT (1971: 406): "There is no other evidence [...] that Marius had to pass a law to authorize his procedure. He simply exerted his imperium to enlist men whom it had not been the normal practice to enlist..." also see DOBSON (2006: 103) and RICH (1983: 323–330).

⁵³ Plb. 6, 19.

⁵⁴ See RATHBONE (2008: 308): "Because actual property values must have varied considerably, the Romans presumably had some notional scale of landholding in mind which corresponded to the cash figures, and minima of 100, 75, 50 and 25 *iugera* for the first four classes seem plausible to me, which would imply a notional 4 *iugera* for the fifth classis." Although ROSENSTEIN (2002: 190) argues: "No source informs us of the minimum number of *iugera* that a citizen would have had to have owned during the middle Republic in order to qualify as an *assiduus*. Quite probably no fixed figure existed..."

⁵⁵ DALY (2002: 211–212).

second) which, combined with the massive military demands of the conflicts, brought important changes to the Roman army's structure and organization that continued throughout the second century.

4. Ratio between citizens and allies

The traditional approach to this topic is that the allies were always more numerous than the Romans, a characteristic quite common among first century sources. Velleius famously emphasizes this issue, saying that by the time of the Social War: "The fortune of the Italians was as cruel as their cause was just; for they were seeking citizenship in the state whose power they were defending by their arms; every year and in every war they were furnishing a double number of men, both of cavalry and of infantry, and yet were not admitted to the rights of citizens..."⁵⁶ Other authors, such as Dionysius or Livy, seem to support this and suggest that this issue was already common by the early third century.⁵⁷

Polybius, on the other hand, offers a different trend: each year the *socii* contributed to the army by sending their own forces which totalled the same number of infantrymen as the Romans, but three times as many cavalymen. Overall, a legion was formed by 4 500 Roman citizens and supported by 5 100 allies, thus suggesting a 1:1.1 ratio instead of the 1:2 mentioned by other sources. Polybius' ratio is rather consistent: in his description of the mass recruitment in response to the Gallic invasion of 225 (although this is controversial), he states that the consular armies were formed by a total of 22 000 Romans and 32 000 *socii*, showing a 1:1.4 ratio. In both cases, while the allies still contributed to the Roman military effort more men than the Romans themselves, the difference is not as dramatic as portrayed by Velleius or Dionysius.

⁵⁶ Vell. 2, 15.

⁵⁷ Liv. 10, 26 on the battle of Sentinum (295): "The force with which the consuls had taken the field consisted of four legions and a large body of cavalry [...], whilst the contingents furnished by the allies and the Latin League formed an even larger army than the Roman army."; also see D.H. 20, 1 on the battle of Asculum (279): "...on the Roman side there were more than 70 000, about 20 000 of them being from Rome itself."; on the battle of Asculum also see Frontin. *Strat.* 2, 3, 21, but he does not make any distinction between Romans and allies.

Investigating the number of soldiers in service on a yearly basis is the only way to have a better idea on the actual ratio between Romans and allies during the period under investigation. After all, I believe that the literature claiming the allies always outnumbered the Romans was strongly influenced by pro-Italian propaganda from the time of the Social War. In reality, the ratio between citizens and *socii* in the army of the Republic was not as standardized as traditionally believed. The second century shows that it was actually rather variable, and changed often due to the necessities of war as well as political and tactical factors.

By examining yearly recruitment rates, at the same time, it is possible to suggest a trend that influenced the ratio between citizens and allies during the second century: at first, the number of allied troops actually increased. This was possibly caused by a sort of retaliation against those communities who defected during the Second Punic War following the events of 216. In 190, for example, Livy offers a detailed account of troops recruited and where these new soldiers were moved and stationed. In total, 25 600 Roman citizens and 46 800 *socii* were enlisted that year, thus suggesting a ratio of 1:1.8 in favour of the allies.⁵⁸

Next, following the increase of Roman troops in the legions in the late 180s suggested by Livy, the ratio actually started to move towards parity. As mentioned in the previous section, this manpower increase might have been triggered by the potential earlier introduction of cohorts. Livy does not mention whether this affected the *socii* as well, though it is plausible. The levy of 178/177, for example, shows that a total of 27 500 citizens and 30 450 allies were recruited that year, with a

⁵⁸ Liv. 37, 2: the consular army in Macedonia (formed by two legions) was reinforced by 3 100 Romans and 5 200 allies. The other consul received two new legions (9 000 citizens) supported by 15 600 *socii*. Two city legions (9 000 Romans) and 15 600 allies were moved to Apulia-Bruttium while a new legion (4 500 citizens) and 10 400 *socii* was stationed in Etruria. Livy also mentions that the army in Sicily was reinforced by local recruitment of 2 100 men while the navy also received additional 1 000 marines and 2 000 soldiers. In both these cases, however, Livy does not mention the provenience of the recruits. Considering that provincial and naval recruitment during this period interested the allies for the most part, it is possible that most of these 5 100 extra soldiers were not Roman citizens. We cannot be sure and, in any case, this would not much change the overall ratio.

ratio of 1:1.1 still in favour of the *socii*, but with a rather marginal difference.⁵⁹ Livy's chronicle also shows that Roman soldiers, at times, actually outnumbered the allies. During the levy of 170/169, the first consul received the two Macedonian legions (which were stronger than usual: 6 300 Romans each with the same number of *socii*, so 12 600 citizens and 12 600 allies), the second consul two standard legions (11 000 citizens) supported by 10 600 allied troops, with the rest of the army consisting of four legions (22 000 Romans) and 17 000 *socii*.⁶⁰ Therefore, on this occasion, it is possible to see a ratio of 1.1:1 in favour of the Roman citizens.

With the end of Livy's chronicle, investigating the number of soldiers recruited during the second half of the second century becomes more challenging. As an example, it is possible to examine an episode in Appian's chronicle of the Spanish War, more specifically, the army raised by Fabius Maximus Aemilianus in 145 sent to Hispania Ulterior to fight the Lusitanians. Appian mentions that Aemilianus decided to recruit young men instead of the veterans of the Greek and African campaigns and asked for additional forces from the allies – one of the very rare instances in which Appian actually mentions them. By the time Fabius arrived in Spain, he had two legions for a total of 17 000 men under his command.⁶¹ Unfortunately, while mentioning the allies, Appian does not provide any information on the composition of this force, so we can only speculate; as Aemilianus, according to Appian, asked the allies for 'additional forces', it is possible that the *socii* were slightly more numerous, though probably not by much. Of course, there was already an army in the province, though weakened by previous encounters with the Lusitanians, as Aemilianus was replacing Gaius Plautius, the previous unsuccessful commander. Appian simply mentions that he arrived in Spain with 11 300 men, but there is no mention on the composition of his force, so this may have further changed the

⁵⁹ See Liv. 41, 9: both consuls received two legions of 5 500 Romans each plus 12 600 allies, for a total of 22 000 Romans and 25 200 *socii* in the consular armies. Also, one more legion (5 500 Romans) supported by 5 250 *socii* was sent to Spain.

⁶⁰ Liv. 43, 12.

⁶¹ App. *Hisp.* 11, 65.

already uncertain ratio of Aemilianus' army.⁶² Finally, it is important to remember that the Romans also employed foreign auxiliaries during the Spanish Wars. Appian mentions the recruitment of other Spaniards under the treaty signed after Gracchus' campaign in 179, as well as reinforcements sent from Numidia.⁶³ This shows how difficult calculating the ratio between Roman citizens and Italian allies would become by the mid-second century, further indication that simply assuming that the allies were always double would be a major generalization.

Overall, the real issue regarding the ratio between Romans and *socii* is the fact that, despite their unquestionable military contribution and importance, the allies are not mentioned very often in the literary sources, making it hard to investigate their military participation more accurately. Polybius, while offering a more realistic ratio, still does not provide an accurate depiction of second century military service. Erdkamp has suggested that he did not make efforts to properly distinguish the Italians from the Romans since, to him, they were part of the same army.⁶⁴ An example of this could be the description of the plundering of a city and the ensuing division of the booty among soldiers: "...when this booty has been sold, the tribunes distribute the proceeds among all equally..."⁶⁵ From this, it appears that Roman and allied soldiers were treated in a rather equal fashion, thus clashing with Velleius' overly dramatic depiction of the allies' military condition by the time of the Social War.

Therefore, I would argue that, during the second century and up to the Social War, the ratio between Romans and *socii* was not standardized, but rather variable, as it was influenced by tactical and political factors. The constant double ratio suggested by later sources should be disregarded as an exaggeration caused by Italian grievances at the time of the Social War. More realistically, I believe it is plausible to suggest

⁶² On Plautius' army see App. *Hisp.* 11, 64.

⁶³ App. *Hisp.* 8, 43 on Gracchus; on the treaties also see DYSON (1985: 196). On Numidians see App. *Hisp.* 11, 67, as part of Servilianus' army (142), and *Hisp.* 14, 89 within Scipio's army at Numantia (134).

⁶⁴ See ERDKAMP (2007: 55).

⁶⁵ Plb. 10, 16.

that the ratio was closer to parity, though, quite often, the *socii* were slightly more numerous. This reflects the fact that they were more numerous than Roman citizens overall.

5. Number of legions assigned to commanders

The formula of two legions per consul described by Polybius is considered a staple of the Republican army.⁶⁶ It would seem, however, that by the mid-second century, this “rule” was not applied anymore, or, at least, it was bent according to the necessities of war. The cause, once again, was that the army of the Republic was actually not very regulated, but was strongly influenced by the necessities of individual campaigns. First, as said earlier, the Roman army did not have a legal limit to the number of legions it could field and the Punic Wars – the Second in particular – showed that the Republic could recruit as many as needed according to the military situation. After all, Rome had the manpower capabilities to field huge armies. Also, the Second Punic War showed that the Republic had the resources and infrastructure to sustain such an unprecedented military effort, though not flawlessly, as Rome often lacked funds (*inopia aerarii*) during the challenging years after Cannae.⁶⁷ At the same time, there was no regulation imposing a limit to the number of legions that could be assigned to an individual commander either. The formula of assigning legions to the consuls appears more as a tradition that dates back to the early Republic, when the army inherited from the monarchy was divided into two once Rome started to elect two consuls instead of having a king. The number of legions was progressively increased to four (the two per consul formula described by Polybius),

⁶⁶ Plb. 619: “On the appointed day, when those liable to service arrive in Rome, and assemble on the Capitol, the junior tribunes divide themselves into four groups, as the popular assembly or the consuls determine, since the main and original division of their forces is into four legions.”

⁶⁷ Liv. 23, 5: “Are we to tell you we are lacking in cash, as if that is all we lack? Fortune has left us absolutely nothing that we can even supplement! Legions, cavalry, weapons, standards, horses, men, cash, supplies...”; see Liv. 23, 31 on the double taxation imposed in 215; also see Liv. 24, 18: “The workings of government were as vigorous at home as they were in the field. Because of the insolvency of the treasury...” and then he describes some measures adopted by the censors to gather money in 214.

most likely during the mid-fourth century, and remained the staple for a century, until the Punic Wars.⁶⁸ As argued earlier, the First Punic War marks the beginning of the silent revolution that would progressively, yet fundamentally, change the Roman army.

It is possible to argue that the deployment of larger legions can be seen as an early occurrence of assigning larger armies to individual commanders. The army with which Scipio invaded Africa during the Second Punic War (205–204) can be seen as an early example. Livy argues that, after preparations were completed, each of his two legions counted 6 500 citizens to which a similar – if not greater – number of *socii* should be added – for a total of, at least, 26 000 men.⁶⁹ This was a considerable larger force than a traditional Polybian consular army (two legions plus *alae*), which totalled 19 200 men. Appian, more conservatively, suggests that Scipio's army, in total, had 17 600 men, though, in true Appian style, does not mention any distinction between Romans and allies.⁷⁰ The stronger legions deployed for the Third Macedonian War (171) should be emphasized as well. Livy reports that the two legions sent to Macedonia were stronger than the rest of the army, with a total manpower of 29 400 men (divided between 12 600 Romans – 6 300 per legion – and 16 800 *socii*).⁷¹ So, though reported as two standard consular legions, in the field these were stronger armies than were normally assigned to individual commanders. Thus, larger armies were already accepted in Rome by the late third century.

This pattern continued throughout the second century, to the point that there were commanders leading armies of five or even eight legions. More interesting is the fact that this is barely mentioned in the literary evidence. Granted, sources on mid-second century military activity are scarce, but it does not seem there was any outrage in Rome when a massive army of eight legions was sent to Africa against Carthage or by the fact that Scipio Aemilianus was besieging Numantia

⁶⁸ Liv. 7, 23 mentions four legions already by 350.

⁶⁹ Liv. 29, 24–25.

⁷⁰ App. *Pun.* 3, 13.

⁷¹ Liv. 42, 31 says that only the legions in Macedonia were stronger while all the others, including the other two consular legions, kept normal manpower levels.

with five legions.⁷² It is likely that during the levy, legions were still assigned to their commanders in the customary fashion, two per consul. The key difference, however, was made by important cases of accumulation of troops. This became apparent during the Spanish campaigns, in particular the period between 141 and 133 in both provinces, and was repeated in other conflicts, such as the First Servile War in Sicily (135–132) or the campaigns against the Scordisci in the Balkans (114–101).

As said earlier, this might seem like a secondary issue, but it shows that commanders with very large armies were already accepted in Rome by the late third century and were becoming common by the mid-second century. By not having any form of legal directive, and by setting these precedents, the rise of the warlords and their large personal armies during the late Republican period became thus inevitable. Furthermore, when combined with the progressive politicization of the soldiers and the actions of Sulla, the assignment of larger armies to individual commanders is an element that surely had devastating consequences for the Republic.

Conclusions

As argued at the beginning of this paper, the Roman army started to experience a progressive, yet fundamental structural and operational transformation from the mid-third century. These changes, although apparently more limited to the army itself, and thus not properly emphasized in the literary sources, or mentioned in a very confused fashion, would actually have important socio-economic ramifications due to the army's influence on the rest of the Republican structure. By bringing together these changes, however, it is possible to argue that, by the mid-second century the Roman army was most likely closer to the one attributed to Marius and retained little of what was described by Polybius. Therefore, the more traditional picture of the army of the mid-Republican period (which, roughly, can be dated from the mid-fourth to the late second centuries) being structured and organized as described by Polybius until the reforms of Marius simply does not apply anymore.

⁷² App. *Pun.* 11, 75 says that Rome deployed an army of 84 000 men against Carthage; on Scipio's army in Spain see App. *Hisp.* 15, 92.

Polybius, after all, is describing the Roman army on the eve of the Punic Wars, conflicts that had a massive impact on Rome at all levels, including – and especially – the military. The victory over Carthage triggered the Republic’s Mediterranean expansion for which the old manipular army simply was no longer enough. Naturally, because of the magnitude of the two Punic Wars and the new strategic needs of the Republic, the army had to change. Therefore, when Marius became consul in 107, the army, for the most part, was already structured as it supposedly was after his “reforms”, thus questioning the overall importance attributed to those reforms. There is no doubt that his role has been greatly exaggerated by the literary sources, as he probably did not bring anything new to the army, but simply applied what was already common or, at best, simplified it. The recruitment of the *capite censi* is definitely the best example of this. Considering that, by this point, the minimum census for military service was so low that was basically irrelevant, Marius did what would have eventually happened regardless of his role: he ignored it. What is important is that he set the precedent.

In between these moments, the army experienced a silent revolution that continued for the rest of the mid-Republican period until it reached its conclusion with Sulla and the aftermath of his action in 88. From this moment, the Roman army entered into a new phase of its history, the semi-professional forces of the late Republic, that would be concluded only with the end of the Civil Wars. Following Octavian’s military reform, a new, standing army of professional soldiers was formed, marking the beginning of a new phase of the history of the Roman army.

Bibliography

- ARMSTRONG 2016 J. ARMSTRONG: *War and Society in Early Rome: from warlords to generals*. Cambridge 2016.
- BELL 1965 M. J. V. BELL: *Tactical Reform of the Roman Republican Army*. *Historia* 14 (1965) 404–422.
- BRAND 2019 S. BRAND: *Killing for the Republic: citizen-soldiers and the Roman way of War*. Baltimore 2019.
- BRUNT 1971 P. BRUNT: *Italian Manpower 225 BC – AD 14*. Oxford 1971.
- DALY 2002 G. DALY: *Cannae, the experience of battle in the Second Punic War*. London–New York, 2002

- DOBSON 2006 M. DOBSON: *The Army of the Roman Republic: the second century BC, Polybius and the camps at Numantia, Spain*. Oxford 2006.
- DYSON 1985 S. DYSON: *The Creation of the Roman Frontier*. Princeton 1985.
- ERDKAMP 2007 P. ERDKAMP: *War and State Formation*. In: P. Erdkamp (ed.): *A Companion to the Roman Army*. Malden 2007, 96–113.
- GABBA 1973 E. GABBA: *Esercito e Societa' nella Tarda Repubblica Romana*. Firenze 1973.
- GOLDSWORTHY 1996 A. GOLDSWORTHY: *The Roman Army at War 100 BC – AD 200*. Oxford 1996.
- GOLDSWORTHY 2003 A. GOLDSWORTHY: *The Complete Roman Army*. London 2003.
- KEPPIE 1984 L. KEPPIE: *The Making of the Roman Army*. London 1984.
- MATTHEW 2010 C. MATTHEW: *On the Wings of Eagles: the Reforms of Gaius Marius and the Creation of Rome's First Professional Soldiers*. Newcastle 2010.
- NICOLET 1980 C. NICOLET: *The World of the Citizen in the Roman Republic*, Berkeley, 1980
- RATHBONE 2008 D. RATHBONE: *Poor peasants and silent sherds*. In: L. De Ligt and S. Northwood (eds.): *People, land and politics: demographic developments and the transformation of Roman Italy 300 BC-AD 14*. Leiden 2008, 305–332.
- RAWSON 1971 E. RAWSON: *The literary sources for the pre-Marian army*. PBSR 39 (1971) 13–31.
- RICH 1983 J. RICH: *The supposed Roman manpower shortage of the later second century BC*. *Historia* 32 (1983) 287–331.
- RICH 2007 J. RICH: *Warfare and the Army in the Early Republic*. In: P. Erdkamp (ed.): *A Companion to the Roman Army*. Malden 2007, 7–23.
- ROSENSTEIN 2002 N. ROSENSTEIN: *Marriage and manpower in the Hannibalic War: assidui, proletarii and Livy 24.18.7-8*. *Historia* 51 (2002) 163–191.
- ROSENSTEIN 2010 N. ROSENSTEIN: *Phalanges in Rome?* In: G. Fagan and M. Trundle (eds.): *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare*. Leiden 2010, 289–303.