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Storia Militare Antica e Bizantina (6)

a cura di
Marco Bettalli, Elena Franchi e Gioacchino Strano

Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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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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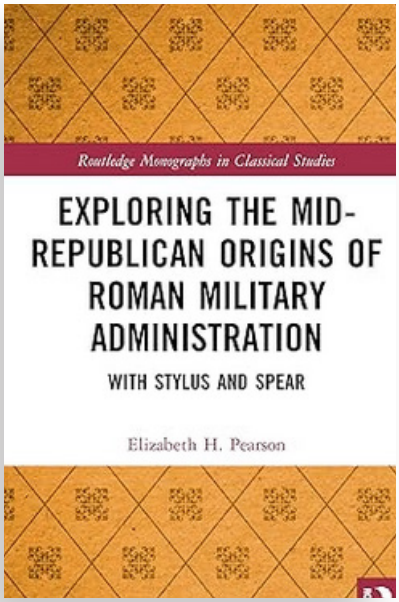
Elizabeth H. Pearson

Exploring the Mid-Republican origins of Roman Military Administration

With Stylus and Spear

London-New York, Routledge, 2021 (paperback edition 2024), pp. 217



This book, already appeared in 2021, but now available in paperback as well, has a very ambitious aim. The author's objective is to unveil the way in which the Roman military administration worked during the Middle Republic. In the initial abstract, the book promises to employ several kinds of evidence besides the traditional literary sources (Livy and Polybius in particular). While this statement is perhaps somewhat over-optimistic (as the Author recognises in the Introduction) in some cases demographic and topograph-

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ical models are employed to support the Author's theses. Nevertheless, the bulk of her arguments, as was inevitable, is based on the literary sources. These sources allow, according to Pearson, to understand, "despite the lack of extant documentation, a great deal [...] concerning the paperwork which enumerated Roman manpower and tracked it on campaign". In the Introduction, besides describing her aims and discussing her sources, the Author also starts to express her belief that the Roman republican military administration must have been far more complex than generally allowed for. This statement is probably correct; this belief, however, should not lead us to assume that specific documents or administrative procedures existed, even though we have no evidence about them. In some cases, as will be said, I had the impression that some of the author's theses relied a bit too heavily on this initial assumption.

The first chapter, "Dilectus", discusses the procedures to levy the Roman troops. Pearson's main contention is that Polybius is right. His description of the *dilectus* in book VI is defended against the criticism of those (especially Brunt) who deem it implausible: Pearson stresses the fact that Polybius was in Rome, and that he was an expert in military matters. Moreover, no one (not even Cato) apparently found fault with his account, which, therefore, could not be outdated. While I do agree that Polybius' account should be taken seriously, I also think that it is important to remember that Polybius himself represents his description as a brief sketch, excusing himself for the incomplete nature of the account. Even if we assume that the historian did not make any mistakes, we should be wary of assuming that he did not omit anything. This has important consequences for the main thesis of the author, namely, that the administrative procedures related to the *dilectus* were held in the area of the Capitol hill. In order to prove that Polybius is right, she estimates both the Roman recruitment pool (i.e., those that had to assemble *in Capitolio* for the *dilectus*) and the capacity of the area, showing that the men could fit in the area of the Capitol. However, she fails to discuss an important issue raised by both Brunt and Rawson, namely that of practicality[1]. If we

1 While Brunt's arguments (P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower: 225 BC – AD 14*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, pp. 625-34) are reviewed in detail, I think that Rawson's reconstruction might have received a more in-depth discussion. Rawson had the same goal of the Author, namely the defence of Polybius against Brunt's criticism, but she did not carry this demonstration to the extreme (E. Rawson, «The Literary Sources for the Pre-Marian Army», *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 39 (1971), pp. 13-31: p. 15), as she assumed that local

choose to believe that all of the *dilectus* procedures were held on the Capitol, and we rule out the existence of local levies of Roman citizens (in Roman *municipia* as well as in *fora* and *conciliabula*), it follows that all Roman citizens of military age had to assemble in Rome every year (actually, twice, if we follow Polybius), for several days. This seems to be impractical to say the least; considering that Polybius might well be incomplete, I don't see why one should not suppose that local recruitments did in fact exist, perhaps on the model of those carried out by the Latin and Italian communities. The author's belief in a very centralised and efficient bureaucracy, as well as her decision to follow Polybius and nothing but Polybius, might have influenced her conclusions on this point.[2] Another point which might be (at least in part) dependent on the Author's assumptions about the pervasiveness of military bureaucracy is that of military exemptions, especially following the completion of the maximum period of military service required by Rome. The Author states that Rome was able to "track" individual citizens through documents stating, for each of them, how many years they had served. While some military exemptions must have been recorded in some ways, those for the citizens who had completed their period of service need not have been. Theoretically, it was just possible, if a man did not attend the levy and the consuls wished to prosecute him, to ask him when and in what legion he had served, and to check these claims against the lists of the enrolled in each legion for the various years. It might have been more practical to choose the soldiers among those who attended the *dilectus* and then, if there were not enough people, to call citizens from the roster and, if they did not come, to start examining each citizen's reasons for not attending.[3] Given the lack of conclusive sources, a *non liquet* could be the

levies in Roman colonies and *municipia* might have been carried out, although she accepted Polybius' account for Rome and the rest of the *ager Romanus*. The only arguments employed by the Author against this view (p. 62) are that regional levies would be less efficient (without discussion) and that, at this time, Rome still was "a glorified polis".

2 Another problem is that of *conquisitio*. Brunt, cit., p. 633 thought that the levy of 212, through *conquisitores* in two areas around Rome, is to be understood as a normal levy outside of Rome, in *fora* and *conciliabula*. The Author, instead, interprets this levy as a *tumultus* (pp. 35-36). She might well be right in this case. However, there are other cases of *conquisitores* and *conquisitio* (not always carried out by *conquisitores*, but also by magistrates) in Livy: these should have received attention.

3 The terms employed by our sources, *dilectus* and *legere*, need not imply that all of the citizens were called by name. Leaving aside the volunteers, it is possible that, as a norm, the recruiting officers just chose among the attending men, and, if chosen, each gave his na-

only possible answer; some caution, at any rate, is needed. The Author, in brief, thinks that "some form of personal service record was held by Rome for each citizen". Apart from the matter of the exemptions, she infers this from the fact that the newly recruited soldiers had to be divided into the three *ordines* (and the *velites*) according to their experience. However, while Polybius states that some consideration had to be paid to their age (and not, strictly speaking, to their military experience: Polyb. 6.21.7-8: τοὺς μὲν νεωτάτους [...] τοὺς δ᾽ ἀκμαιοτάτους ταῖς ἡλικίαις [...] τοὺς δὲ πρεσβυτάτους), the wealth of the recruits must have been important as well (again, Polybius: τοὺς μὲν νεωτάτους καὶ πενιχροτάτους), as the *milites* in the different *ordines* had to show up with different weapons according to their *ordo*. Most importantly, Polybius states that the number of *triarii* was fixed, as was the ratio between *velites*, *hastati* and *principes*. Does this mean that, during the first phase of recruitment, the consuls already knew that they had to choose, at least roughly, 600 men for the *triarii* and, say, 1,200 each for the *velites*, *hastati* and *principes*? If so, Polybius' reconstruction of two different phases (selection of the recruits; division into *ordines*) is puzzling. If not, it is still very much unclear. For the rest, the chapter is very interesting, especially in the use of demographic and topographical models to estimate whether the crowd of citizens attending the *dilectus* could fit the Capitol area.[4]

The second chapter (The census and centralised military bureaucracy) resumes where the first stopped. Pearson again focuses on the ability, this time by the censors, and not by the consuls, to read records of the service history of the citizens. She demonstrates this in particular with Livy's account of the 169 BC census, when the censors ordered the soldiers disbanded from the Macedonian legions who attended the census and who had not yet completed their service period to go back to the province, and with the punishment inflicted by the censors of 209

me. Indeed, as noted by the Author, Polybius does not mention names being called out. Of course, this could still happen if no one, or too few people, attended the *dilectus*.

4 Although some points, such as the inclusion of the *capite censi* in the census, might have needed a more in depth discussion. While I do agree with the Author on this matter, different views have been put forward. See, for example, the traditional view of E. Gabba, «Le origini dell'esercito professionale in Roma: i proletari e la riforma di Mario», *Athenaeum*, 27 (1949), pp. 173-209: p. 187. A good case for the presence of the proletarians in the lists of the census is made by S.J. Northwood, (2008), «Census and tributum», in Id. and L. De Ligt (eds.), *People, Land, and Politics: Demographic Developments and the Transformation of Roman Italy, 300 BC - AD 14*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2008, pp. 257-70.

BC to the cavalrymen who had survived the defeat of Cannae: without regard to their previous service, they were compelled to serve in Sicily for ten years *equo privato*. Both interpretations do not seem compelling. In the first case, Livy states that the censors would have reviewed the reasons for the discharges (*missorum quoque causas sese cognituros esse*), in the context of the census, which might well mean that they asked all previous soldiers from the Macedonian legions whether they had completed their service, and when they had served; again, they could simply check these claims against the lists of soldiers of the various legions of the previous years. In the second case, Livy might mean that the cavalrymen were just compelled to serve for ten years in a row, without discharge, without any consideration to their previous service. On balance, I don't think that the existence of documents recording the service history of each and every Roman citizen is sufficiently proved, although the Author is right in assuming that, if a quarrel arose, the magistrates were able to reconstruct this service history, potentially from other lists. Another point that I did not find compelling, for the same reasons expressed above about the *dilectus*, is the assumption that local forms of census never existed. To my mind, Brunt's arguments still carry some weight[5]. The discussion of the census itself, however, is very good, and I found it intriguing especially in the second part of the chapter. Here, the Author discusses the potential underrepresentation, during a census, of those who were on campaign. Through careful scrutiny, the Author concludes that, while no separate census was conducted in the legions, the underrepresentation was mitigated by the fact that around 50% of the soldiers were still counted, mainly because many still had an alive *pater familias*.

Overall, the military documents whose existence is demonstrated in these two chapters are the census (obviously), the *tabulae iuniorum* (mentioned by the sources) and the lists of enrolled soldiers for each legion. This latter is, in my opinion, the most interesting outcome of the Author's research: indeed, the next chapter, on the military administration during the campaign (ch. 3: "Recording men on campaign"), is perhaps the book's best. Here, Pearson starts from logistical considerations, especially concerning food and supplies, to show that a commander had to know exactly how many men he could count on. Hence, he needed to know the figures of the dead in all circumstances. The author even tries

5 Brunt, cit., p. 36-43.

to redeem Valerius Antias and his casualty figures. I think that this is not even necessary: the fact that a historian, or even a commander, could lie about these figures does not detract from the fact that he needed to have precise (and correct) numbers. In many cases, as the Author argues, the Romans must have counted the corpses to make an estimation of the dead as precise as possible. I think it might also be possible, given the existence of lists of the soldiers, that something like a roll call was carried out after a battle, or maybe even at set intervals. The attention then shifts to the quaestor, who, it is argued, needed to know more. Here I much liked the discussion of the necessity to keep track of the retinues for food, clothes and, above all, additional weapons (the author is right about Polybius' mention of replacement and additional weapons).

The next chapter (ch. 4: Tributum and stipendium) focuses on the mechanisms through which the money to pay the soldiers was raised and then redistributed to the soldiers. The main contention of the Author is that, originally, the money was provided in advance by rich individuals, from the *ordo* of the so-called *tribuni aerarii*, who then paid the wages of the soldiers who came back from the military campaign at the end of each year. They were able to tell how much each citizen of their tribe owed them, and so they could get the money back. Once the military campaigns lost their seasonal nature (and, at any rate, before the Hannibalic War), the soldiers started to be paid during the campaign, by the quaestors, but the *tribuni aerarii* were still the men who levied the *tributum* (or rather, who provided the money for it in advance, and then got it back by "taxing" the citizens[6]). Large sections of this reconstructions are, despite the Author's claims to the opposite, purely conjectural.[7] The sources about the *tribuni aerarii* are very few and very

6 Actually, the Author, building upon the theories put forward by J. Tan, «The Long Shadow of *tributum* in the Long Fourteenth Century», in S. Bernard, L.M. Mignone and D. Padilla Peralta (eds.), *Making the Middle Republic: New Approaches to Rome and Italy, c. 400-200 BCE*, Cambridge, University Press, 2023, pp. 38-63, thinks that these wealthy citizens had wide networks within their tribe, and so were presumably able to recover the money without a proper direct taxation, through exchanges of money, favours, and goods. Tan's account is intriguing and fascinating, but, as Pearson's one, is based on a "wealth of evidence" (p. 44) that is simply not there. Tan just accepts, without any discussion, Nicolet's theories.

7 The idea that the *tribuni aerarii* were wealthy private individuals who raised the money for *tributum* has been put forward by several scholars, but also challenged numerous times. A larger *status quaestionis* would have been desirable, especially concerning the early German scholarship (J. Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, vol. 2, Leipzig, S. Hirzel,

difficult to make sense of. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.19.1-4) does not, as the Author states, compare the Roman *tributum* to the Athenian *eisphora*, and he does not at all imply that the *tributum* was "lent" by wealthy individuals to the Roman Republic. Moreover, not a single source about the *tribuni aerarii* ever hints at the fact that these men provided in advance, or raised in any way, the money to pay the soldiers. The very few sources that mention their role only tell us that they paid the soldiers. Most importantly, Varro states that the *pecunia* to pay the soldiers was *attributa* to them, so that they could act as paymasters. In our sources, the act of *attribuere*, or *enumerare* a sum of money to meet some of the state's expenses usually entails that this money was provided to some magistrates from the Roman treasury. Plautus, who is twice credited with mentions of the *tribuni aerarii*, actually never writes about them.[8] The only thing that we can infer from the passages of Gellius (from Varro) and Gaius is that there was a time

1884, pp. 173-7; T. Mommsen, *Römische Staatsrecht*, vol. 3.1, Leipzig, S. Hirzel, 1887, pp. 189-95; J. Lengle, «Tribunus aerarius», *RE*, VI.A (1937), pp. 2432-5), for its tendency to stress the role of public officers (sometimes identified with the *tribuni aerarii*) and not of private citizens, a point later made also by E. Gabba, «Sul *miles inpransus* dell'Aulularia di Plauto», *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo*, 113 (1979), pp. 408-14. For an interpretation of the *tribuni aerarii* as private citizens, see especially C. Nicolet, *Tributum: recherches sur la fiscalité directe sous la republique romaine*, Bonn, Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1976, pp. 46-55; J. Muñiz Coello, «El *stipendium*, el cuestor y *qui aes tribuebat* (Gai. inst. IV 26). El abono de la paga al soldado en la república», *Klio*, 93 (2011), pp. 131-48; and N. Rosenstein, «*Tributum* in the middle republic», in J. Armstrong (ed.), *Circum mare: themes in ancient warfare*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, pp. 80-97 (p. 91).

8 In one of the two passages (Plaut. *Aul*. 3.505-535), a rich man complains about the expenses of his wife, which compel him to pay a number of men, leaving him no money to give to a *miles* who *cedit* asking for *aes*. In this passage, the man is never defined as a *tribunus aerarius*, and it is never implied that he took any money from Roman citizens to pay the *miles*. The passage is puzzling, and it cannot be employed without very careful contextualisation (see Gabba, «Sul *miles inpransus*», cit.). Moreover, according to the Author, at the time of Plautus' play, the *tribuni aerarii* were not paymastrs any more, but only collectors of the tribute. It is very improbable that Plautus brought into the play a figure whose role was declinig, without defining this role at all, not mentioning what this man still did (levy the *tributum*) and making reference to what the *tribuni aerarii* did not do any more (paying the soldiers). In the other case (Plaut. *Poen*. 5.1286) a soldier steals something from a *leno*, with the words "*aere militari tetigero lenunculum*". Again, some caution is needed. Despite the interpretation of Muñiz Coello, cit., the passage is not necessarily an instance of *pignoriscapio*. The *leno* was obviously not a *tribunus aerarius*, no reference to *pignoriscapio* is made, and the soldier does not say that he wanted to collect the *aes* from the *leno*, but that he wanted to "touch", or "hit", the *leno* with it: the meaning of the expression is likely to be connected with booty.

in which the soldier had the right to carry out *pignoriscapio* against a paymaster (who is defined *tribunus aerarius* by Gellius) to get his pay.[9] This does not necessarily entail that the *tribuni aerarii* had raised the money: as Varro suggests, the *pecunia* might have been *attributa* to them. It should also be noted that these men are mentioned as paymasters only in an antiquarian context. One cannot entirely rule out the possibility that Varro was just wrong. Once again, definitive sources are simply lacking, and a good degree of caution is needed. During the latter part of the Middle Republic, the soldiers were paid, as the Author recognises, by the quaestors. However, she still assumes that the *tribuni aerarii* provided the money in advance, and even that, when the *tributum* was given back to the people, the *tribuni* themselves had to give the money back to the single citizens. Again, no source proves (or disproves) this view.[10]

The last two chapters take a different approach. In these, the Author switches to consider, in a very moderate way, several possibilities about the documents themselves and about those who produced and kept the records. In ch. 5 (Documents and archives), Pearson takes into account the material and form of the documents. She stresses the importance of wax tablets, but also tentatively suggests that linen might have been used, too. She also maintains, with a good degree of plausibility, that the records kept in the legions had to be rather more agile: perhaps leaf style tablets were employed. Then, she switches her attention to the places where records were kept, examining the role of the *Aerarium Saturni*, the *Aedes Nympharum* and the *Atrium Libertatis*. All these buildings are discussed in terms of their administrative functions. The last chapter (ch. 6: Record producers and record keepers) examines the role of the *scribae* and, more generally, of those charged with keeping administrative records.

In the Conclusion the Author again states that the Roman mid-republican mil-

9 The passage quoted by Gellius is not, as Tan and Pearson think, from Cato, but from Varro: Gellius mistakenly quotes the *verba Catonis […] ex primo Epistolicarum Quaestionum*: this work was written by Varro, not by Cato. At any rate, the *pignoriscapio* further weakens Pearson's position about Plautus' passage: the *miles* goes away *inpransus*, without attempting to carry out *pignoriscapio*.

10 The only instance in which a specific magistrate distributes money to Roman citizens in the Middle Republic that comes to my mind is Plaut. *Aul*. 1.107, where a man makes reference to a distribution of money made by the *magister curiae* to the *curiales*. Mommsen, cit., p. 189 states, without discussion, that these distributions were made by the *magister tribus*, whom he equates with the *tribunus aerarius*.

itary administration was well developed, and makes a comparison with the age of Augustus, who, according to the Author, tried to reinstate the previous bureaucratic system. So, the argument circles back to the beginning, and to the Author's assumption of a high degree of centralisation and bureaucratic development. As said, I sometimes felt like this assumption acted as the premise, rather than the outcome, of some of the Author's arguments. In this discussion, I focused on most of the points that I found less convincing. It would be unfair, however, to end on a critical note. The only serious complaint that I have about this work is that tentative conclusions are often presented as facts. On the other hand, the book is well written and interesting. Its contention that the mid-republican administration was more developed than generally allowed for must be taken seriously, even if one chooses not to follow Pearson's arguments on specific matters. Any student or scholar interested in the study of the Roman Middle Republic will inevitably find in this book much food for thought.

Gabriele Brusa

Ara detta degli scribi, del 25/50 d.C., dalla Necropoli di Porta San Sebastiano (Terme di Diocleziano) che rappresenta gli scribi addetti a registrare le delibere dei magistrati, Foto Sailko 2014, CC SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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. Yale University Art Gallery, ID 255. Connecticut, U. S. Wikimedia Commons

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