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## A citizen-soldier of the Roman Republic: Beyond the literary creation

**Abstract:** The main aim of the article is to draw attention to the distortion of Republican Roman soldiers' image. Some modern scholars treat the 'ideal type' as a reflection of reality and attribute to legionaries the features desired by representatives of the social elite. Meanwhile, it seems that less wealthy citizens created their own vision of the qualities that a Roman soldier should have. This leads to the question of whether the officers and their subordinates had the same understanding of obedience and discipline.

**Keywords:** Roman Republic, Roman soldier, military discipline, social discipline

Contrary to popular belief, a professional army based on voluntary recruitment was not established until the end of the Roman Republic. The author of far-reaching reform, directly affecting the entire political and social system, was in fact Emperor Augustus,<sup>1</sup> so therefore understanding

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<sup>1</sup> The literature devoted to Augustus' military reforms is abundant. See especially: K. A. Raafaub, *The political significance of Augustus' military reforms*, in: *Roman frontier*

the specifics of the Republican armed forces requires consideration of all the phenomena that shaped the citizens' attitude to military duties. The Roman soldier was basically a citizen-soldier, with all the consequences. This means that the socio-cultural history is of decisive importance for the study of Republican military history, because without understanding who the Roman soldier was, it is impossible to understand the course of campaigns etc.

The social history of the Roman army has long enjoyed popularity among scholars, as a result of, among others, the large number of preserved inscriptions that pinpoint the geographic and social origin of the (mostly Imperial) recruits, internal relations in the units and the living standards of the veterans. Ramsay MacMullen's study on the relationship between soldiers and civilians in the Later Roman Empire was a breakthrough publication.<sup>2</sup> Over 30 years later the same scholar wrote an article devoted to the internal ties in the legions.<sup>3</sup> Both publications were closely related to the process of shaping a 'new military history' within which the combination of history and sociology (in the form of two research perspectives: 'army and society' and 'army as a society') remains one of the most important trends.<sup>4</sup>

Although Roman military issues are still often described in terms of 'the Roman war machine',<sup>5</sup> due to the efforts of numerous scholars the

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*studies* 1979, vol. 3, eds. W. S. Hanson, L. F. J. Keppie, Oxford 1980, pp. 1005–1025; K. Gilliver, *The Augustan reform and the structure of the imperial army*, in: *A companion to the Roman army*, ed. P. Erdkamp, Malden–Oxford–Carlton 2007, pp. 183–200; M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im Römischen Reich der Hohen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart 2009, pp. 19–51; W. Eck, *Herrschaftssicherung und Expansion: das römische Heer unter Augustus*, in: *Studi su Augusto. In occasione del XX centenario della morte*, cur. G. Negri, A. Valvo, Torino 2016, pp. 77–93.

<sup>2</sup> R. MacMullen, *Soldier and civilian in the later Roman Empire*, Cambridge 1953.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *The legion as a society*, "Historia" 1984, Bd. 33, H. 4, pp. 440–456.

<sup>4</sup> About the primary assumptions of the 'new military history' see J. W. Chambers II, *The new military history: Myth and reality*, "The Journal of Military History" 1991, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 395–406; J. Black, *Rethinking military history*, London–New York 2004, pp. 35–59; J. Bourke, *New military history*, in: *Palgrave advances in modern military history*, eds. M. Hughes, W. J. Philpott, New York 2006, pp. 265–266.

<sup>5</sup> The problem mentioned above was already pointed out by: A. K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman army at war 100 BC–AD 200*, Oxford 1996, p. 283; S. James, *Rome & the sword: How warriors & weapons shaped Roman history*, London 2011, pp. 22–24.

overall picture is gradually changing. Perhaps the key moment in the holistic perception of the Republican military service (as one of the basic components of citizenship, closely related to the rest) was the publications of Claude Nicolet. He established the research perspective that the Roman soldier was simply a citizen who manifested his social and legal status through military duties.<sup>6</sup> Nicolet's point of view perfectly complemented the considerations of William V. Harris, who had convincingly explained how the conduct of wars was profitable for the majority of Roman citizens during the Republican period.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the question of who the Republican Roman soldier was remains partially open. The analysis of literary sources suggests that the overall picture of Roman soldiers often did not coincide with their behaviour in specific situations. It seems, then, that in order not to duplicate the 'ideal type' (as defined by Max Weber), attention should be paid to interpretation limitations and their causes. Otherwise, it may turn out that the modern scholar will unknowingly duplicate the idea of what the Roman soldier should be according to ancient historians, who were not always familiar with the military, but who wanted to promote their ancestors' virtues as an inspiration for the next generations.

The ideal type has never been fully reflected in reality, but I believe that deconstructing such an image is not enough. The study of archetypes can provide valuable information on the characteristics defined as important for shaping the citizens' attitudes. It can lead to a partial resolution of the question as to whether the Roman community was founded on military values. In other words, should a citizen have the qualities of a soldier

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<sup>6</sup> C. Nicolet, *The world of the citizen in republican Rome*, trans. P. S. Falla, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1980, pp. 8, 89, 207, 384; idem, *Il cittadino, il politico*, in: *L'uomo romano*, cur. A. Giardina, Roma–Bari 1989, pp. 11–12, 17; idem, *Rome et la conquête du monde méditerranéen*, vol. 1, *Les structures de l'Italie romaine*<sup>10</sup>, Paris 2001, p. 303. A similar observation was previously expressed by: Y. Garlan, *War in the ancient world: A social history*, trans. J. Lloyd, London 1975, pp. 86–89, 91.

<sup>7</sup> W. V. Harris, *War and imperialism in republican Rome 327–70 B.C.*, Oxford 1979. Cf. J. Rich, *Fear, greed and glory: The causes of Roman war-making in the middle Republic*, in: *War and society in the Roman world*, eds. J. Rich, G. Shipley, London–New York 1993, pp. 38–66.

or did he become a soldier after being enlisted in the army? I am fully aware of the contributory nature of this article, but in my opinion to understand the specifics of the Republican Roman army, it is necessary to ask what characteristics were expected from a soldier, but also who expected them? The latter question is perhaps more important because it takes into account the soldiers, not just commanders and officers.

## Two possible perspectives

A scholar focusing on Roman warfare can easily fall into the trap of duplicating the image of a Roman soldier reproduced by representatives of social elites without verifying its correctness. As Nicolet wrote in general:

L'histoire militaire, dans tous les sens du mot, de l'Antiquité est particulièrement délicate : c'est un des domaines où les anachronismes sont les plus menaçants, les distances physiques et mentales les plus difficiles à réduire. Non que les sources fassent défaut : la tradition historique ancienne est essentiellement une chronique militaire; mais les déformations typologiques du genre, chez des auteurs qui, le plus souvent, ne sont pas des techniciens, sont nombreuses (...).<sup>8</sup>

Then the expectations formulated by the *nobilitas* towards recruits of mostly plebeian origin may turn into a general vision of the army without the soldiers' point of view, who in the history of Rome were never just a passive mass obedient to the commanders. Such a claim is confirmed, for example, by the plebeian secessions of 494 and 449 BC of an unequivocally military character.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the memory of past violent events resulted in

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<sup>8</sup> C. Nicolet, *Rome et...*, p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> Liv., 2.24–34, 3.50–54; Dion. Hal., 6.23–28, 11.2–50; F. Cassola, *Lo scontro fra patrizi e plebei e la formazione della 'nobilitas'*, in: *Storia Einaudi dei Greci e dei Romani*, vol. 13, *Roma in Italia. Le popolazioni dell'Italia antica e la nascita di Roma*, dir. A. Momigliano, A. Schiavone, Torino 1988, pp. 451–456; T. J. Cornell, *The beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000–264 BC)*, London–New York 1995, pp. 256–260; A. Ziolkowski, *Storia di Roma*<sup>2</sup>, Milano–Torino 2010, pp. 64–65, 67–69.

attempts to force recruits into the framework of absolute obedience to senatorial and equestrian officers. Despite all this, in the case of confrontation between superiors and soldiers, the former were usually were in a worse position.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Romans, the durability of the community was ensured by the continuation of ‘civic rituals’ – any serious disturbance could be perceived as a threat. Traditionalism was the basis of functioning in the public sphere, although its content changed with the passage of time: history was used to promote model, or even archetypal events and characters, because the main value was the patriotic and moral formation of the readers. Roman historiography was written by the elite for the elite, often taking the form of family genealogies. Economic conditions prevented the emergence of an alternative vision of written history, because the non-elite did not have enough free time (*otium*) and finances. Perpetuating the memory of great ancestors was used to explain the dominant position of the social elite (the idealisation of the past as a tool of political domination). Thus, *exempla maiorum* might be an argument to force plebeians to behave in a certain way, in line with the current political need of the most significant families.<sup>11</sup> It would be highly incomprehensible if the above regularity did not also apply to the military sphere.<sup>12</sup> The well-known example of Titus Manlius Torquatus, who sentenced his son to death on the battlefield, is

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<sup>10</sup> The apogee of conflicts between commanders and soldiers was in the Late-Republican Period. Contrary to the widespread belief, commanders usually had no arguments forcing their subordinates to obey. Moreover, most of the conflicts resulted from the soldiers’ disagreement with the political intentions of the leader, which contradicts the dominant vision that idea of citizenship did not matter much for the Late-Republican soldiers. See A. Keaveney, *The army in the Roman revolution*, London–New York 2007, pp. 71–92; M. N. Faszczka, *Bunt w późnorepublikańskich armiach rzymskich (88–30 przed Chr.)*, Oświęcim 2017, pp. 75–230.

<sup>11</sup> F. Pina Polo, *Die nützliche Erinnerung: Geschichtsschreibung, ‘mos maiorum’ und die römische Identität*, “Historia” 2004, Bd. 53, H. 2, pp. 147–172. Cf. E. Flaig, *Ritualisierte Politik: Zeichen, Gesten und Herrschaft im alten Rom*, Göttingen 2003, pp. 69–98.

<sup>12</sup> See W. S. Messer, *Mutiny in the Roman army. The republic*, “Classical Philology” 1920, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 163; S. E. Phang, *Roman military service: Ideologies of discipline in the late Republic and early principate*, Cambridge 2008, pp. 20, 113–115.

a clear proof of the educational role of stories about strict obedience presented as an obligation to the Republic.<sup>13</sup>

The most important problem is the lack of sources to reconstruct the ‘plebeian perception’ of military service, which may make some scholars skeptical. The attempts to define the general characteristics of plebeian culture have ended with moderate success.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the plebeian vision of politics was understood fairly well,<sup>15</sup> and Nicholas Horsfall believes that plebeians also developed the frameworks of their own military culture.<sup>16</sup> Even if there is little chance of getting answers to certain questions, they still need to be asked, otherwise only a one-sided and highly stylised version remains – that of the elite, using historiography to build a political position.

One example of a specific attitude towards common citizens is the passage from Marcus Tullius Cicero’s treatise *De legibus* (*On laws*). The famous Roman orator claims that the will of commander should be the only law in the army,<sup>17</sup> which many researchers take as a confirmation that recruits drafted into the legions lost all legal protection. Meanwhile, the juxtaposition of passage with the content of other narrative sources clearly indicates that it was nothing more than Cicero’s vision of an ideal legal system, and not a reflection of reality.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sall., *Cat.*, 52.30; Liv. 8.6–8; Dion. Hal., 8.79.2; Val. Max., 1.7.3, 2.7.6, 5.8.3, 6.4.1, 6.9.1, 9.3.4–5; Quint., *Inst.*, 5.11.7; Front., *Strat.*, 4.1.40–41; Flor., 1.13.20; App., *Samn.*, 3; Gell., 1.13.7, 9.13.20; Cass. Dio, frg. 35.2; *Vir. ill.*, 28.4; Zon., 7.26.

<sup>14</sup> N. Horsfall, *The cultural horizons of the ‘plebs romana’*, “Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome” 1996, vol. 41, pp. 101–119; idem, *The culture of the Roman plebs*, London 2003, pp. 20–30, 96–101.

<sup>15</sup> See especially: C. Nicolet, *The world...*, pp. 343–381; E. Flaig, *Entscheidung und Konsensus. Zu den Feldern der politischen Kommunikation zwischen Aristokratie und Plebs*, in: *Demokratie in Rom? Die Rolle des Volkes in der Politik der Römischen Republik*, hrsg. M. Jehne, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 77–127; idem, *Ritualisierte Politik...*, pp. 13–31; F. Millar, *The crowd in Rome in the late Republic*, Ann Arbor 1998; A. Jakobson, *Political culture and the people’s role in the Roman Republic*, “Historia” 2010, Bd. 59, H. 3, pp. 282–302.

<sup>16</sup> N. Horsfall, *The culture...*, pp. 103–115.

<sup>17</sup> Cic., *De leg.*, 3.3.6.

<sup>18</sup> C. E. Brand, *Roman military law*, Austin 1968, pp. 6, 66–68; A. R. Dyck, *A commentary on Cicero, ‘De legibus’*, Ann Arbor 2004, pp. 7–11; C. Williamson, *The laws*

It is even hard to imagine why often experienced soldiers would be at the mercy of the magistrate in charge, the more so that there was no training system for the Roman officers. The young nobleman could at most rely on the content of the Greek military treatises he had read, the stories of older relatives and by staying in the camp during a military campaign. For legionaries like Spurius Ligustinus, who spent 22 years in the army, only a highly experienced commander could be a real authority, even if Titus Livius (Livy) described him as an idealised model of civic virtues.<sup>19</sup> It would be naive to expect soldiers like Ligustinus to recognise someone as their master of life and death just because they came from a better-off society. It was not a coincidence that the plebeian military elite (usually serving in the rank of centurion) often took the burden of command on their shoulders during battle.<sup>20</sup>

Representatives of the *nobilitas* could build a political position using the memory of their great ancestors' achievements and well-prepared oratorical performances, while people from the lower social group were left only with their own deeds. For this reason, public speakers without a famous family name and oratorical education exposed the scars and advantages of war, contrasting with the inexperience of the elite, and therefore the actual or potential commanders.<sup>21</sup> Thus, military experience directly implied a socio-political position. Since personal achievements were emphasised to contrast with the attitude of some members of the *nobilitas*, it means that both social groups built a different system of values. The heroes of the

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*of Roman people: Public law in the expansion and decline of the Republic*, Ann Arbor 2008, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> Liv., 42.34.1–12.

<sup>20</sup> See F. E. Adcock, *The Roman art of war under the Republic*, Cambridge 1940, pp. 17, 21, 106; J. Harmand, *L'armée et le soldat à Rome: de 107 à 50 avant notre ère*, Paris 1967, pp. 324–344; A. K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman army...*, p. 182; J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers & ghosts: A history of battle in classical antiquity*, New Haven–London 2005, pp. 218–219.

<sup>21</sup> M. Leigh, *Wounding and popular rhetoric at Rome*, “Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies” 1995, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 195–212; R. J. Evans, *Displaying honourable scars: a Roman gimmick*, “Acta Classica” 1999, vol. 42, pp. 77–94; E. Flaig, *Ritualisierte Politik...*, pp. 130–133.

general public were victorious commanders, but we cannot forget about the plebeian military elite, so often appearing in literary sources.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the aspect most prone to distortion is the image of Roman military discipline, usually depicted as a symbol of severity. It may seem surprising that only Valerius Maximus associated this virtue, often glorified by ancient writers, with the present times and not with the values of ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Livy's work is full of information about military disobedience, as Cornelius Tacitus' or Cassius Dio's. Many scholars, however, still propagate a simplistic vision of exceptional Roman military discipline, ignoring a growing number of critical voices. William S. Messer diagnosed this phenomenon as follows:

No theme is dearer to the heart of the eulogist of Rome, be he Greek or Roman, than that of the unwavering obedience which was demanded of the ancient Roman soldier. As these eulogists view the power and achievements of the Roman state, the feats of engineering and sanitation and civilization which followed in the wake of her conquering armies and formed an integral part of their task, they overemphasize the strictness of the discipline which secured these results. They are not aware that insubordination may be only the exaggeration of a good quality, the ability of the private soldier to think and act for himself, and that a considerable amount of mutiny may not be inconsistent with even the highest degree of efficiency. They forget that in the details of the narrative, as they themselves have told it, they have given material and incidents which qualify their generalizations. Polybius, one of the sanest of the admirers of Rome, is guilty of this fault and is one of the earliest sources of the myth.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth adding to Messer's argument that the state of ancient literacy meant that the official version of history must have been created by writers associated with the political elite. One of the most intriguing

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<sup>22</sup> J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers & ghosts...*, pp. 212–232; R. Cowan, *For the glory of Rome: A history of warriors and warfare*, London 2007, pp. 102–178; R. D'Amato, *Roman centurions 753–31 BC. The Kingdom and the age of consuls*, Oxford 2011, pp. 11–23.

<sup>23</sup> Val. Max., 2.7 praef. Examples of severe military discipline as a relic of the past: Liv., 8.7.16; SHA, *Alex. Sev.*, 33.5; Veg., 1.1.

<sup>24</sup> W. S. Messer, *Mutiny in the Roman army...*, p. 160.



aspects of the Republican social memory is the possibility of the existence of an alternative, non-elite history. It could function among some of the common people as oral stories with different characters and versions of events.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, the assessment of figures such as Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and his brother Caius, or Publius Clodius (Claudius) Pulcher could have been diametrically different among the plebs than among the senators. Cicero even wrote about laying flowers on the tomb of Lucius Sergius Catilina (Catiline), the alleged conspirator against the Republic.<sup>26</sup> Many of Clodius's followers were once associated with Catiline,<sup>27</sup> and yet both were presented in the sources as careerists ready to sacrifice the state for personal benefits. Were they simply the representatives of city commoners? Plutarch of Chaeronea mentioned monuments of the Gracchi spontaneously erected by the people,<sup>28</sup> which suggests that non-elite citizens could express their vision of history through celebrations or places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). After all, the idea of an obedient and disciplined society rarely comes from the obedient and disciplined. This also applies to the military.

Returning to military discipline, the quotation of legal regulations does not say much about their implementation. What is more, the law is not ontologically neutral, just like its creators: the law expresses the vision of the world belonging to the dominant group (or simply the legislators),<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See C. Rosillo-López, *Popular public opinion in a nutshell: Nicknames and non-elite political culture in the late Republic*, in: *Popular culture in the ancient world*, ed. L. Grig, Cambridge 2017, pp. 91–106.

<sup>26</sup> Cic., *Pro Flacc.*, p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> Cic., *De dom.*, pp. 13, 58, 61, 72, 75; *In Pis.*, 11, 16, 23. It cannot be ruled out that Cicero provided this information as an element of creating a negative image of Clodius, whom he considered 'the second Catiline' (Cic., *ad Att.*, 1.14.5, 1.16.9, 4.33). While the juxtaposition of Catiline and Clodius was probably an invective, some supporters of Catiline could find themselves in the political camp of the latter. The hatred of Cicero was not the only common element of their political agenda (e.g. lifting debts).

<sup>28</sup> Plut., *C. Gracch.*, 18.3.

<sup>29</sup> A. Schiavone, *Pensiero giuridico e razionalità aristocratica*, in: *Storia Einaudi dei Greci e dei Romani*, vol. 14, *La repubblica imperiale*, dir. A. Momigliano, A. Schiavone, Torino 1990, pp. 415–418; A. M. Riggsby, *Roman law and the legal world of the Romans*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 77–78.

which does not mean that it is universally supported. An unequal treatment of perpetrators within the Roman criminal law leaves no doubt in this regard.<sup>30</sup>

The significant number of military mutinies breaking out in the Republic may simply be evidence of an attempt to criminalise behaviour widely recognised as a form of civic and thus permitted disobedience.<sup>31</sup> The Roman meaning of the term *seditio* is ‘collective insubordination’, i.e. any collective behaviour deemed unlawful by the commander.<sup>32</sup> In this way, he could convict soldiers for any act against his authority, but on the other hand it allowed him to turn a blind eye to the crimes, as long as he was not able to punish the offenders. The history of Republican military discipline is the history of a constant power struggle between officers and subordinates.<sup>33</sup> Military discipline is always a reflection of social discipline,<sup>34</sup> and although the German historians of law from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created an image of Romans obedient to the law, it is difficult to consider the Roman citizens as particularly law-abiding. The same men who took part in the riots and were able to express their opinions decisively later became recruits – did they lose all personality traits when became soldiers? Definitely not.

Taking into account these aspects does not mean accepting the Marxist vision of ‘two societies’ or ‘class struggles’. The Roman society was not class-based in nature and the emphasis on the alleged duality of culture

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<sup>30</sup> P. Garnsey, *Social status and legal privilege in the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1970, pp. 103–152; J.-J. Aubert, *A double standard in Roman criminal law? The death penalty and social structure in late republican and early imperial Rome*, “Speculum Iuris” 2002, vol. 4, pp. 94–133; A. M. Riggsby, *Roman law...*, pp. 77–88.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. W. S. Messer, *Mutinies in the Roman army...*, p. 162.

<sup>32</sup> M. N. Faszczka, *Bunt w późnorepublikańskich...*, pp. 79–84.

<sup>33</sup> It is worth considering in how many cases the mutineers were punished and how many went unpunished. The decisive advantage of the latter cases shows that there was complete latitude in classifying soldiers’ acts as *seditiones*, depending on the authority and political situation. Cf. S. James, *Rome & the sword...*, pp. 112–113; S. G. Chrissanthos, *Keeping military discipline*, in: *The Oxford handbook of warfare in the classical world*, eds. J. B. Campbell, L. A. Tritle, Oxford 2014, pp. 324–325.

<sup>34</sup> For the Roman army: S. James, *Writing the legions: the development and future of Roman military studies in Britain*, “Archeological Journal” 2002, vol. 159, p. 40.

has nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, the *concordia ordinum* praised by Cicero is nothing more than a historiographic myth. If something held the cohesion of the Republican society, it was the current community of interests and the possibility of improving economic status through a network of dependencies and clientele.<sup>35</sup> However, it must not be forgotten that this is not the same as a community of values, which in some cases could have been opposed (e.g. the question and conditions of obedience). Guido Clemente wrote an article about the concept of ‘democracy without the people’<sup>36</sup> – by analogy, the *nobilitas*’ attempts to shape relations in the army could be called ‘civic duty without the voice of citizens’. Even if this voice was not directly reflected in written sources, numerous cases of military disobedience indicate that legionaries did not intend to be passive performers of the commanders’ will. All scholars focusing on the Roman military issues should keep the possibility of two visions (elite and non-elite) in mind.

### Obedience as a military virtue?

It is striking that despite the evolution of Roman society, related to the gradual influx of the rural population to the city, the small landowner was still the ideal of a soldier.<sup>37</sup> This resulted both from the positive valorisation of stereotypical peasant’s features in the context of military qualities

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<sup>35</sup> C. Nicolet, *Rome et...*, pp. 189–190, 431; F. Dupont, *La vita quotidiana nella Roma repubblicana*, trad. R. Cincotta, Roma–Bari 2000, pp. 9–10, 19; E. Flaig, *Ritualisierte Politik...*, pp. 13–31.

<sup>36</sup> G. Clemente, *Democracy without the people: The impossible dream of the Roman oligarchs (and of some modern scholars)*, “Quaderni di storia” 2018, vol. 87, pp. 87–119. Cf. F. Millar, *The political character of the classical Roman Republic, 200–151 B.C.*, “The Journal of Roman Studies” 1984, vol. 74, pp. 1–19.

<sup>37</sup> Cat., *De agr.*, praef. 4; Veg., 1.3; C. Nicolet, *The world...*, pp. 95–96; S. Diedrich, *Römische Agrarhandbücher zwischen Fachwissenschaft, Literatur und Ideologie*, Berlin 2007, p. 281. Flavius Vegetius Renatus probably copied the remarks of Marcus Porcius Cato the Elder expressed in his unpreserved work *De re militari*. This is indicated both by the fact that Cato the Elder expressed the identical idea in *De agricultura*, and that Vegetius referred several times to his predecessor’s treatise (Veg., 1.8, 1.13, 1.15, 2.3).

(strength, endurance, straightforwardness etc.) as well as from the close connection of right to military service with land ownership, i.e. belonging to the category of the *assidui*.<sup>38</sup> The famous story of modesty and patriotism manifested in the fifth century BC by Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was used not only to build an image of a ‘golden age’ contrasting with the subsequent ‘decay of morals’, but also as an educational model.<sup>39</sup> It can be concluded that soldier should be primarily aware of his duty and not become embroiled in political disputes. The centurion Ligustinus has been described in an identical manner.<sup>40</sup>

Passive acceptance of the designated social role was beyond the imagination of many legionaries. Compliance with non-negotiated patterns required the elite to offer something in return. On the one hand, these were social benefits (*euergetism*) or, in the case of soldiers, the possibility of obtaining rich loot,<sup>41</sup> and on the other hand, maintaining appropriate forms of communication.<sup>42</sup> As Egon Flaig once wrote:

Indes, warum identifizieren sich die nichtadligen römischen Bürger mit den Gemeinwesen, obwohl politische Ungleichheiten und wachsende soziale Distanzen dem entgegenwirkten? Gibt vielleicht die symbolische Dimension der römischen Politik die Antwort auf die Frage, woher die Willigkeit des römischen Volkes rührte, sich der aristokratischen Herrschaft anzuvertrauen? Damit nähern wir uns die Problematik des Gehorsams; diese erschließt sich am leichtesten über die Akte des Ungehorsams.<sup>43</sup>

Going beyond the usual pattern that the main military virtues were bravery (*Virtus*, in a wider sense: manliness) and honour (*Honos*) requires

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<sup>38</sup> Cic., *Top.*, 2.10; *De rep.*, 2.22.40.

<sup>39</sup> MRR, 1.39.

<sup>40</sup> Liv., 42.34.1–12.

<sup>41</sup> P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris 1976, pp. 348–375, 425–451; W. V. Harris, *War and imperialism...*, pp. 54–104.

<sup>42</sup> Ch. Meier, *Res Publica Amissa. Eine Studie zu Verfassung und Geschichte der späten römischen Republik*, Wiesbaden 1966, 24–63; P. Veyne, *Le pain...*, pp. 375–390; E. Flaig, *Entscheidung und Konsensus...*, pp. 77–84; idem, *Ritualisierte Politik...*, pp. 13–31, 99–122.

<sup>43</sup> E. Flaig, *Ritualisierte Politik...*, p. 14.

taking into account not so much the glorification of soldiers as the accusations against them.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the *exemplum* of Manlius Torquatus punishing his son for joining a single battle without permission looks rather unconvincing, because the list of duels made by Stephen P. Oakley contains a lot of similar examples.<sup>45</sup> Unpunished examples, worth adding.

If anyone was a hero for the commoners, it was not Manlius Torquatus but old-time plebeian battle-champion Lucius Siccus Dentatus, who in the fifth century BC won numerous duels and demonstrated many acts of bravery.<sup>46</sup> It seems that at least some Roman politicians belonging to the *populares* realised this fact. Gaius Marius of equite origin, but lacking in significant political support also boasted about winning single combat in his youth.<sup>47</sup> His publicly manifested patriotism was not based on an obedience to consuls, but on an individual act of bravery. Gaius Julius Caesar also understood the value system of non-elite citizens, so readers may find many examples of centurions' and common soldiers' heroism in his *Commentarii*.<sup>48</sup> By the way, this is another argument confirming that Caesar's works were addressed not only to the most influential and wealthy citizens. However, the question of how they acquainted themselves with their content is still open: this was most likely due to public readings and storytelling.<sup>49</sup> However, it requires further research.

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<sup>44</sup> On the military virtues: W. Eisenhut, '*Virtus Romana*': ihre Stellung im römischen Wertsystem, München 1973, 40–43; M. McDonnell, *Roman manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 12–71; S. E. Phang, *Roman military service...*, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> S. P. Oakley, *Single combat in the Roman Republic*, "The Classical Quarterly" 1985, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 392–410.

<sup>46</sup> Dion. Hal., 10.37.3; Val. Max., 3.2.24; Plin., *NH*, 7.101; Gell., 2.11.3; Fest., 208 L. Cf. N. Horsfall, *The culture...*, pp. 104–105 (about different military authorities and historical events considered especially important).

<sup>47</sup> Plut., *Mar.*, 3.2.

<sup>48</sup> See J. E. Lendon, *The rhetoric of combat: Greek military theory and Roman culture in Julius Caesar's battle descriptions*, "Classical Antiquity" 1999, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 295–304, 306–322; idem, *Soldiers & ghosts...*, pp. 212–232; M. McDonnell, *Roman manliness...*, pp. 300–319.

<sup>49</sup> Horsfall (*The Culture...*, pp. 11–17) believes that songs were the original plebeian method of keeping social memory. Even if there were far-reaching cultural transformations

Republican soldiers frequently voiced their views on the *contiones*, actively shaping relationships with commanders. Rallies were usually convened without consulting the officers, and freedom of speech was regarded as a fundamental citizen's right. Superiors usually had no way of preventing this phenomenon, even if the soldiers' intentions were openly hostile. A soldiers' agency was often regarded by commanders as a personal threat or evidence of a lapse in discipline, while supporters of Nicolet's thesis that military matters should be studied in close connection with other components of citizenship consider the agency as an expression of civic and political awareness.<sup>50</sup> In 69 and 67 BC the legionaries of Lucius Licinius Lucullus during the *contiones* deliberated about remaining under his orders or refusing to follow him.<sup>51</sup> Even in AD 14, after the death of Emperor Augustus, soldiers decided to address their demands to his successor, believing in their full right to do so.<sup>52</sup>

The case of Lucullus' troops is particularly interesting because Cassius Dio found the soldiers' behaviour to be outrageous, even though Lucullus grew rich at their expense. In his opinion the legionaries were obliged to obey orders and show no initiative.<sup>53</sup> Cassius Dio's exceptionally negative attitude towards soldiers was diagnosed long ago, although he was reluctant toward most of the non-elite social groups.<sup>54</sup> Tacitus also recognised that the rebel soldiers of AD 14 had no valid reason for dissatisfaction, though

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over time, the oral form of transmitting history probably did not change in general. The poor level of non-elite education, high price of copies of literary works and the lack of free time complete the picture. For this reason Horsfall emphatically titled one of his book chapters 'Culture without education; education without school' (ibidem, 48–63).

<sup>50</sup> F. Pina Polo, *Procedures and functions of civil and military contiones in Rome*, "Klio" 1995, vol. 77, pp. 213–215; S. G. Chrissanthos, *Freedom of speech and the Roman republican army*, in: *Free speech in classical antiquity*, eds. I. Sluiter, R. Rosen, Leiden–Boston 2004, pp. 313–340; idem, *Keeping military discipline*, p. 323.

<sup>51</sup> Plut., *Luc.*, 32.3–4, 33.3–4. Cf. Cass. Dio, 36.16.2–3.

<sup>52</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, 1.16–22.

<sup>53</sup> Cass. Dio, 36.14.3–4.

<sup>54</sup> D. Harrison, *Cassius Dio as a military historian*, "Acta Classica" 1977, vol. 20, pp. 161–162; L. de Blois, *Volk und Soldaten bei Cassius Dio*, in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Bd. 2.34.3, hrsg. H. Temporini, Berlin–New York 1977, pp. 2660–2675.

he listed the list of their demands.<sup>55</sup> Livy described the rebellion in Sucro of 206 BC in a somewhat similar way.<sup>56</sup> These are just three of many examples disclosing the negative attitude of ancient historians to soldiers' non-military activity. Again, Cicero's postulate concerning the commander's will as the only law in the army may be cited.<sup>57</sup> It is a clear exposition of some elite members' dream to turn soldiers into nothing more than a passive mass. In this context, the words of Cicero about many favourable political changes resulting from civil disobedience sound paradoxical.<sup>58</sup>

A completely different approach was presented by Caesar, who tried to build political support both on the basis of relationship with the elite and ordinary citizens. In the *Commentarii* he made it clear that he did not consider the soldiers' initiative as something reprehensible. He had allowed them to make minor violations of discipline, because he wanted to be sure of their support at the decisive moment.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps this is what distinguishes talented commanders from eminent ones. In contrast, his adoptive son lacking in military capabilities, later Emperor Augustus, believed in strict discipline as the foundation of the effective armed forces.<sup>60</sup> This civilians' fear of soldiers' *ferocia* (rage) was caused by the recent terror of civil wars, but deepened after the establishment of professional army:<sup>61</sup> in the Republic there was no true division into 'civilians' and 'soldiers', but into 'citizens not currently serving in the army' and 'citizens engaged in military service'.<sup>62</sup> In every family there was a man (or men) who was a soldier, so there was no fear of the military before the civil wars broke out.

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<sup>55</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, 1.16–17.

<sup>56</sup> Liv., 28.24.7–9.

<sup>57</sup> Cic., *De leg.*, 3.3.6.

<sup>58</sup> Cic., *De or.*, 2.198–199.

<sup>59</sup> Suet., *Jul.*, 67.1.

<sup>60</sup> Suet., *Aug.*, 24.1.

<sup>61</sup> S. E. Phang, *Roman military service...*, pp. 42, 47–48.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the course of mutiny of 47 BC when Caesar called his soldiers 'Quirites'. Their indignation and regret was not caused by the fact that they had felt different from the rest of citizens. Caesar had symbolically released them to a civilian status and thus deprived of the expected benefits of war (Plut., *Caes.*, 51.1; Suet., *Jul.*, 70.1–2; App., *BC*, 2.93.392–94.394; Polyæn., 8.23.15; Cass. Dio, 42.53.3–5).

The changing perception of military service meant that during the reign of Emperor Hadrian *disciplina* was deified and began to appear on coins minted for the army.<sup>63</sup> This may be taken as a proof of how much the Roman army changed since the fall of the Republic.

Another field of conflict were commanders' attempts to usurp the right to keep spoils of war, despite the fact that according to the law the capture of a city or stronghold was tantamount to submitting it to the mercy of the victors. Nevertheless, some ancient authors regretted the alleged cruelty and greed of the Roman soldiers.<sup>64</sup> Legionaries defended their right even more strongly, because looting was one of the most important sources of profit, and sometimes their only opportunity in life to get rich. The commanders' desire to bring looting under control confirms the ideal sacking model described by Polybius of Megalopolis.<sup>65</sup> In this case, the essence was to gain or maintain control over the profits of war, which boiled down to the question of whether armed conflicts still serve the general public or only the elite? Attempts to portray the Republican soldiers as an unruly crowd overwhelmed by greed is an oversimplification of a more complex problem. It would be naive to describe plundering in terms of the principles of citizenship, but it is clear that it was a kind of 'strength test'. The establishment of the Empire by Augustus had ended the process in favour of the rulers. For a long time, however, the soldiers did not forget about not being a part of the 'Roman war machine', seeing themselves as the subject, not as the object of mutual relations.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> M. Ziolkowski, *Il culto della Disciplina nelle religione dell'esercito Romano*, "Rivista storica dell'Antichità" 1990, vol. 20, pp. 97–107; S. E. Phang, *Roman military service...*, p. 91.

<sup>64</sup> A. Ziółkowski, *Łupy wojenne Rzymian III–I w. p.n.e. Pochodzenie, podział, sposoby wykorzystania*, Warszawa 1980 (unpublished diss.), pp. 23–34, 44–62; idem, 'Urbs direpta'. *Los miasta zdobytego przez Rzymian w okresie wielkich podbojów*, in: *Świat antyczny. Stosunki społeczne. Ideologia i polityka. Religia*, red. B. Bravo, J. Kolendo, W. Lengauer, Warszawa 1988, pp. 87–116; idem, 'Urbs direpta', or how the Romans sacked cities, in: *War and society in the Roman world*, eds. J. Rich, G. Shipley, London–New York 1993, pp. 69–91.

<sup>65</sup> Polyb., 10.15.4–16.9.

<sup>66</sup> J. B. Campbell, *The emperor and the Roman army 31 BC–AD 235*, Oxford 1984, pp. 17–156 (the analysis made by J. Brian Campbell remains indispensable to this day).



## Conclusion

Throughout the whole period of the Republic the Roman army was still conscripted, and therefore the Roman soldier did not cease to be a citizen. Military service, however, was one of the main components of *civis Romanus*' duties, and this determined the way most citizens thought about military. So when the preserved sources contain information about the low level of discipline among soldiers, the question arises as to whose perspective they express and whether the insubordination is not a form of the non-elites' perception of citizenship.

Social conditions closely related to ancient literacy meant that authors usually reproduced the vision of the elite, regardless of their attitude to building a political position on the basis of popular support. Different values professed by some common soldiers may be found due to the analysis of their behaviour, often presented as anarchic and violent. Meanwhile, Roman soldiers often did not want to be a passive mass, and were not.

The different perception of military service is particularly distinct in the example of discipline. Attempts to reduce the soldiers' agency give the impression that the ideal of many commanders was obedience and lack of initiative, but the Romans did not want to relinquish their position guaranteed by the citizenship. Surprisingly, many recent scholars return to this vision. Its verification requires paying more attention to the behaviour of soldiers described by the authors, and not to their comments.

Reconstructing the 'plebeian military culture' faces serious difficulties due to a lack of relevant sources. It can be assumed that they transferred the elements of their own tradition through oral stories, celebrations and places of memory. Commoners might also have had different military heroes who embodied values closer to them than strict obedience. These issues must be borne in mind when writing about the Roman army, because the popularity of certain educational patterns does not mean that they were reflected in reality. Examples of soldiers' activity prove that the Republican Roman army did not allow itself to be dominated by the vision of elite, unlike many historians who treat the sources quite uncritically.