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Volunteer Soldiers in the Roman Republic: The Case of Scipio Africanus' Veterans

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Abstract: Increasingly, scholars have recognised the significance of volunteers in the Roman army during the middle Republic (c. 264–146 BCE). Whilst studies have noted the phenomenon of individual volunteers, during the 190s veterans volunteered for service in the armies sent to the eastern Mediterranean from a recognised, cohesive and famed military collective: Scipio Africanus' veterans from Spain and Africa. It is suggested that Scipio's veteran volunteers brought experience, skill and *esprit de corps*, aspects of professionalism only otherwise found in the legions of the late Republic and Principate. This provides another explanation for Rome's extraordinary military successes in the eastern Mediterranean between 200–188.

Keywords: veterans, volunteers, Scipio Africanus, Roman imperialism, warfare, legions

The Roman army of the Republic is normally regarded as a citizen militia. The standard account of how regular recruitment (the *dilectus*) in the Roman army in the middle Republic might have looked is laid out by Polybius in Book 6 (6.19.1–26.12). He described groups of men of similar ages and physiques being brought forward from each tribe and then being allocated by the military tribunes to each of the four consular legions that were being levied. This process would be repeated again and again until each legion was filled with 4,200 men—or 5,000 in times of emergency.¹

¹ Polyb. 6.20.1–9. Brunt (1971), 627–634 suggests that Polyb. was not describing the enlistment process but the distribution process of recruits into the legions; cf., de Ligt (2007), 115–116, but see now Pearson (2021), 13–42 for a defence of Polyb.'s presentation. Armstrong (2020) has suggested a radical reinterpretation of the recruitment process which alleges that it continued to be based around clan-groups and local affiliations so that “we seem to have legions with strong preexisting relationships and affiliations – it was, in many ways, an army composed of existing groups and entities – and not just an undifferentiated mix of ‘Romans.’” (at p. 93). Whilst I am sympathetic to Armstrong's vision of a less rigid understanding of Roman military organisation, there is simply no compelling evidence that sup-

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Traditionally, a major set of changes are said to have occurred under Gaius Marius (*cos.* VII 86): particularly, the recruitment of volunteer soldiers from the *proletarii*.² During the first century the bond between commander and soldiers became stronger and soldiers themselves more professional: they “came to be known by the name of their commanders (*Sullani*, *Fimbriani*) and by their own numbers and symbols.”³ The armies of Marius, Sulla, Fimbria, Pompey and Caesar were often settled together in colonies or on large tracts of land and could be called up again by their commanders or others if needed.⁴ This was part of an evolution towards the permanent legions with corporate identity in the Principate. Yet many scholars have suggested that there was not a military revolution at the end of the second century and that the recruitment of near professional soldiers dates back to the third century. As Keppie summarised: “there clearly existed from about 200 [BCE] onwards, and perhaps earlier, a core of near professionals, men who liked the adventure and the risks, or who had few if any home ties, and who were glad to volunteer over a number of years, up to the prescribed maximum of 16 years, or more.”⁵ The classic example to which Keppie and others refer is Spurius Ligustinus, the career of whom was recorded in a speech given to him by Livy during the *dilectus* for the Third Macedonian War.⁶ In that speech Ligustinus said that he had first been a *miles gregarius* in 200 and served in the army in Macedonia for two years before being promoted by Titus Quinctius Flamininus to a centurion of the 10th maniple of the *hastati*. After returning to Italy, Ligustinus volunteered for campaigns in Spain under Marcus Porcius Cato, against the Aetolians and king Antiochus III, for two campaigns in Italy and two more in Spain. Ligustinus concluded that he had done twenty-two years of service

ports his argument here. All dates in this paper are BCE and translations are my own, unless stated otherwise.

2 E.g., Sall. *Iug.* 86.2–4; Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 9.1. For scepticism about the revolutionary nature of these reforms, see Gauthier (2016).

3 de Blois (2000), 14.

4 de Blois (2000), 14–21. E.g., Sulla’s veterans rose up together to join Catiline under the command of Manlius (Cic. *Cat.* 2.20; Plut. *Cic.* 14.2–3; Sall. *Cat.* 16.4); Caesar’s troops were loyal to him because of the profits of the victories he gained for them (App. *B Civ.* 2.30); these veterans were a powerful force in Roman politics after Caesar’s death (Cic. *Att.* 14.5, 14.14, 14.21, 15.5, 16.8, 16.15).

5 Keppie (1984), 53.

6 On volunteers, see also Gabba (1976), 11; Harris (1979), 46; Miller (1984); Gabba (1984), 119–120; Yalichev (1997), 238; Hoyos (2007), 64; Wolff (2010); Tweedie (2011), 462; Biglino (2020). Taylor (2023) does not dispute that there were volunteer-professionals between 200–167, but argues that there was a break until the late Republic defined by amateurism and difficulty in recruitment. Brunt (1974) and Cadiou (2018), 217 argue that even in the late Republic and Principate conscription was used.

in the army, had received special honours thirty-four times, and had won six *coronae civicae* (civic crowns).⁷

However, Ligustinus alone cannot prove that professional volunteers were widespread or common in the Roman army in the early second century, especially as some have questioned the extent of his volunteering credentials.⁸ Moreover, the volunteering of individual soldiers for different campaigns was distinct from the formation of whole military units with strong horizontal bonds and a sense of identity as in the later Republic. As de Blois writes: “such armies were much more homogenous than the forces in which Ligustinus and his companions had served.”⁹ But there is an excellent, and often overlooked, set of volunteers during the early second century demonstrating firmly that a portion, sometimes a substantial portion, of the Roman forces in at least three of Rome’s major battles (Zama, Cynoscephalae, and Magnesia) were veteran soldiers who had volunteered to reenlist: Scipio Africanus’ veterans.¹⁰ Scipio’s veterans were significantly different from individual volunteers discussed by historians. They were members of a recognised, cohesive and famed military collective and were recruited as a unit rather than individually. It is argued that this veteran collective was treated as a quasi-permanent military unit in the Roman army.

In light of recent attempts, particularly by Machado, to analyse community bonds in middle Republican armies, these Scipionic veterans are incredibly interesting.¹¹ The greatest argument against applying the ‘legion as society’ approach to middle Republican armies is that each legion was not a permanent institution and would be disbanded after the campaign in which they served was over, new legions being created anew for the next campaign as described by Polybius above. Yet, it will be argued that this was different for Scipio’s veterans: they were part of an elite military force whose group identity remained throughout the 190s and 180s allowing them to develop an *esprit de corps* and professionalism which was often lacking in the armies of the mid-Republic, but was more regularly found in the legions of

7 Livy 42.34.5–12. Taylor (2020a) argues for the accuracy of this part of the speech by convincingly positing that it ultimately derived from information in Ligustinus’ census return. Cadiou (2002), 77 suggests that the original speech was found by Livy in Cato the Elder. See Milne (2024), 5 for the various views on the veracity of Ligustinus’ service history.

8 Cadiou (2002) argues that much of Ligustinus’ military service was not voluntary but the fulfilment of the standard military service for which, according to Polyb. 6.19.2, Roman infantrymen were liable to sixteen years.

9 de Blois (2000), 14.

10 Wolff (2010), 21–22, 24 mentions them in the list of all volunteers before Marius and they appear at numerous points in Miller (1984), 137–150. However, neither study focuses on Scipio’s veterans as a group nor charts their service through the period.

11 Machado (2023), esp. 33–66.

the late-Republic and Principate. In a sense Scipio's veterans were forerunners of the first century military collectives discussed above. This brought a unique element to the armies of the 190s and 180s in the eastern Mediterranean. It should certainly be interesting to all historians of Rome's imperial expansion during the middle Republic that many of the soldiers in Rome's eastern armies were linked with Scipio Africanus, himself a significant force in Rome's imperial endeavour. But more importantly, it will be suggested that the presence of Scipio's veterans in these armies made them a superior fighting force and so might provide another explanation for the incredible success of these Roman forces against those of the Hellenistic kings during this period.

I Scipio's veterans in the Roman army

Scipio's veterans are mentioned by Livy towards the beginning of Book 31: at the end of 201 the issue of land grants for these veterans was discussed in the senate. *Decemviri* were elected to survey and distribute to these men *ager publicus* in Samnium and Apulia with two *iugera* given for every year of service in Spain or Africa: this board consisted of Publius Servilius, Quintus Caecilius Metellus, Gaius and Marcus Servilius Geminus, Lucius and Aulus Hostilius Cato, Publius Villius Tappulus, Marcus Fulvius Flaccus, Publius Aelius Paetus and Titus Quinctius Flaminius.¹² Shortly after, in 200 after war had been voted for against Philip V and the Macedonians by the *populus* at the second time of asking, the senate gave Publius Sulpicius Galba, to whom the *provincia* of Macedonia had been assigned, permission to enlist African veterans who volunteered for service. All other veterans (including those in armies in Gaul, Bruttium, Sicily, Sardinia and Etruria) were to be demobilised (Livy 31.8.6). It seems that there was pressure from many of the veterans of the Hannibalic War not to serve again: the pro-praetor Marcus Valerius Falto and praetor Quintus Fulvius Gillo were told to select men with the shortest period of active service from the army of the previous year's consul Publius Aelius Paetus to form a garrison in Sardinia and Sicily (Livy 31.8.8–11). Yet it would appear at first that a certain group of *veteres Africani* were not so inclined: whilst Glabrio was at Brundisium ready to depart for Macedonia, he was able to enlist a number of volunteers from Scipio's African army (Livy 31.14.2). However, their status as volunteers is compli-

¹² Livy 31.4.1–3, 31.49.5–6. Brunt (1971), 70 n. 1 says 40,000 were settled; Broadhead (2007), 155; Erdkamp (2011), 112–113; Coles (2017), 293–294, 297. Veterans were occasionally settled in colonies (e.g., Livy 35.9.7–8, 40.34.2–3) but the distribution of *ager publicus* was unique to Scipio's veterans in the early second century. Scipio's Spanish veterans would have been the surviving men from the 28,000 infantry and 2,800 cavalry who served under Scipio in Spain from 209 onwards (Livy 26.42.1–3).

cated by events of the following year. 2,000 of these *veteres Africani* mutinied claiming that they had not volunteered to join Glabrio's army but had been forced to do so by their military tribunes despite having served many years in Sicily and Africa (Livy 32.3.3–6). Briscoe points out that their service in Sicily and then Africa identifies them as the remaining members of the *legiones Cannenses*, the surviving forces from the Battle of Cannae in 216, which the senate had sent to Sicily in disgrace.¹³ Scipio's veterans in 200 had, therefore, a longer institutional history.¹⁴

After being sent to Sicily by the senate, these *legiones Cannenses* remained there under various commanders; indeed, they were employed by Marcus Claudius Marcellus in the siege of Syracuse though the senate forbade them to win any military distinctions or return to Italy after the successful capture of the city (Livy 25.7.1–4). When Scipio was granted the *provincia* of Sicily in 205 with instructions to begin an invasion of Africa, he was not granted authority to call a levy but instead was given command of the *legiones Cannenses* and was allowed to enlist volunteers. Various Italian towns provided material, provisions, arms and money: Caere, Populonia, Tarquinii, Volaterrae, Arretium, Perugia, Clusium and Rusellae. He also managed to enlist men from Umbria, Nursia, Reate, Amiternum, Camerinum and from amongst the Sabines, Marsi, Paeligni and Marrucini (Livy 28.45.13–21). Overall, from the Romans and *socii* Scipio was able to enlist c. 7,000 volunteers.¹⁵ Scipio decided that the *legiones Cannenses*—numbered the Fifth and Sixth legions—would form the basis of his army because “no other soldiers in the Roman army were as long-serving, none as experienced not only in various types of battles but also in the besieging of towns” (Livy 29.24.12–13: *neque ullos aequae veteres milites in exercitu Romano esse expertosque non variis proeliis modo sed urbibus etiam oppugnandis*).¹⁶ After inspecting the legions, he removed soldiers that were weak and filled the legions with the volunteers he had from Italy resulting in over-strength legions of 6,200 men each (Livy 29.24.13–14; cf., 29.1.12–14). Taylor argues that the number 6,200 was before the older and weaker soldiers were removed and so the legions created would have been of the normal 4,200.¹⁷ Livy reports that there were different accounts of how many soldiers Scipio took over to Africa: 10,000 infantry and

¹³ Briscoe (1973), 172.

¹⁴ The history of the *legiones Cannenses* has been discussed in detail by Péré-Noguès (1997); (1998). Rocca (2021), 28 concludes that they were Rome's first professional army.

¹⁵ Livy 28.46.1. Plut. *Fab.* 26 suggests that he only took 300 volunteers from his Iberian troops. Plut. might be mistaking these for the 300 men Scipio armed by having the Sicilians give up their arms for them. Blösel (2015) argues that senatorial resistance to a *dilectus* and the provisions provided by the Italian *socii* were a fabrication created in the first century. He suggests that Scipio came to Sicily with a normal consular army. This is a possibility, but it speaks directly against the evidence we have.

¹⁶ See Agnew (1939) for the numbering of legions.

¹⁷ Taylor (2019), 316 n. 22.

2,200 cavalry; 16,000 infantry and 1,600 cavalry; 35,000 infantry and cavalry combined (29.25.1–4). 35,000 seems much too extreme but both lower estimates are plausible. The 10,000 figure would have to assume that there were no *alae* of *socii* amongst Scipio's troops but just the two legions with a strength of c. 5,000. If this was the case, most of the *milites Cannenses* would have been replaced by the 7,000 volunteers that had been brought from Italy.¹⁸ 16,000 infantry is the most likely: it would have been formed of the two legions and their two allied wings with around 4,000 troops each.¹⁹ It would indicate that the *milites Cannenses* formed a sizeable part of these legions. It is impossible to be conclusive here, and overall it does not matter too much for the argument being advanced.

Now, to return to the mutiny of 199, Briscoe assumed that these 2,000 men represented the sum total of those who volunteered in 200, though this is not necessarily the case.²⁰ It is possible that there was a larger group of volunteers from Scipio's veterans and it was only those who had originally been part of the *legiones Cannenses* that wished to return to Italy. And, whilst the mutiny was quelled, there is nothing in Livy to indicate that the veterans were actually sent back to Italy: the consul Publius Villius merely promised that if they ceased to mutiny he would write to the senate about their potential demobilisation (32.3.6–7). Furthermore, more of Scipio's veterans joined the Macedonian army in 198 when Titus Quinctius Flaminius brought a *supplementum* of 8,000 infantry and 500 cavalry from Rome (Livy 32.9.6). Livy wrote that “the consul Titus Quinctius held the levy such that he could select soldiers of confirmed courage who had served in Spain or Africa” (32.9.1: *consulem T. Quinctium, ita habito dilectu ut eos fere legeret qui in Hispania aut Africa meruissent spectatae virtutis milites*). Corroborating this, Plutarch wrote that Flaminius' *supplementum* consisted of 3,000 of Scipio's Spanish and African veterans (*Flam.* 3.3). Quite what Livy was implying by indicating that Flaminius had held the *dilectus* in a specific way is hard to grasp. It seems more obvious that these men were simply volunteers who decided to join Flaminius. If we remember that Flaminius had been one of the *decemviri* responsible for settling these men, it is perhaps not surprising he was known amongst them and perhaps could command the loyalty of not a small portion. If correct, it would suggest that more of Scipio's veter-

¹⁸ Livy 30.2.1 notes that 3,000 men were sent to Sicily “since the most robust had been transferred from this province into Africa” (*quia quod roboris ea provincia habuerat in Africam transvectum fuerat*). That is, these 3,000 men were sent to replace the men Scipio had taken to Africa. If the senate sent the same number of troops that Scipio took from Sicily to Africa, it suggests that there were 10,000 troops with the *milites Cannenses* forming 3,000 of them.

¹⁹ Taylor (2019), 316 reconciles the 16,000 with the forces at Zama of c. 30,000 through the supplementary forces provided by Masinissa.

²⁰ Briscoe (1973), 94; Wolff (2010), 24.

ans decided to enlist after they had been given land in Samnium and Apulia. These men would have been present at the Battle of Aous and Cynoscephalae, though no specific mention is made of them, and they probably returned to Rome with Flamininus in 194.²¹

Scipio's veterans are not mentioned again until 190 when, according to Livy, "5,000 volunteers, both Romans and allies, who had performed their military service under the command of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus" (37.4.2-3: *quinque milia voluntariorum, Romani sociique, qui emerita stipendia sub imperatore P. Africano habebant*) presented themselves to the consul Lucius Cornelius Scipio as he was preparing the army for his campaign against Antiochus the Great, the Seleucid king.²² It is probable that 5,000 men was a significant part of the remaining military-aged veterans by 190.²³ It is also possible that these were the soldiers that easily dispatched Antiochus' force of fifty-four elephants during the Battle of Magnesia by throwing javelins into their sides or hamstringing them with swords: Livy wrote that they were not unnerved by elephants because they had become accustomed to dealing with them during the African campaign in the Hannibalic War (37.42.5).

Such is the evidence we have for Scipio's veterans serving as volunteers in Roman armies during the 190s, though there might, of course, have been other cases

²¹ Livy 34.52.1–12; Fronza (2020), 179.

²² Briscoe (1981), 296 comments that these men were genuine volunteers and "the loyalty of Scipio's African veterans is remarkable". See also Miller (1984), 139; Wolff (2010), 22. Brunt (1971), 393–395 uses Livy 37.2.3—which described Scipio being granted 8,000 infantry soldiers—to suggest there were not many volunteers because he could only attract 5,000. As Rich (1983), 321 n. 157 pointed out, Brunt read this wrong as that was the number of troops that he was entitled to conscript.

²³ It is probable that almost all surviving *milites Cannenses* were beyond or nearly beyond military age by 190: the youngest in 216 would have been 17 meaning that by 190 they would be 43. Of the 7,000 volunteers some very rough calculations can be done to estimate how many would have been left by 190. These men crossed to Africa in 204 and returned at the end of 201, spending three years campaigning in Africa. Using the lower of Rosenstein's estimates for mortality when on campaign—4.75% in Rosenstein (2004), 136—this would mean that after the three years campaigning approximately 5,760 would have been left of the original 7,000. Then there would have been further mortality between 200–190. The average mortality rate of men aged 17–30 was 1.5% per year (Rosenstein 2004, 136); although we don't know the age structure of these volunteers, to ensure a low calculation let us use this 1.5% for all. This would mean that by the end of 191 of the original 7,000 only approximately 4,950 would have been left. And, this does not factor in the higher mortality rates for those who went to Greece with Flamininus. Now, it is also possible that the veterans volunteering in 190 also included the veterans from the Scipio's army in Spain. If we applied the same basic calculations to Scipio's 28,000 in 209, then in 190 there would be approximately 15,500. Of course, this is also too high given many would have been over 30 during this period so were subject to a higher mortality rate and many would also have reached over 46 by 190. But even on a low estimate of mortality, there would have been only c. 20,000 remaining veterans of fighting age in 190 meaning the 5,000 that volunteered were a quarter of the whole, a sizable proportion.

which were not recorded by our sources.²⁴ This review demonstrates that in the armies of Rome that conquered the eastern Mediterranean between 200–188 there were a core of volunteer veteran troops that had fought under the command of Scipio Africanus during the Hannibalic War, most of whom had been present at the Battle of Zama where Hannibal was finally defeated. Here we have clear evidence of volunteer veteran soldiers serving in repeated campaigns to supplement the lonely example of Spurius Ligustinus, and evidence of them being in significant enough numbers to show that volunteer veterans were a meaningful part of the Roman army as early as the 190s. But, more significantly, rather than just individual veterans volunteering for service like Ligustinus, in each of the instances above Scipio's veterans seem to have been recruited as a collective military group. In each case, between 2,000–5,000 veterans volunteered and were specifically identified, unlike with other volunteers, as being Scipio's veterans. The existence of this category within the annalistic tradition demonstrates that it existed in the mid-Republic. Indeed, it was a category solidified by the grant of land to these veterans, something unique in the mid-Republic. And, successive volunteering and recruitment from this military collective shows that it was viewed as a kind of permanent military unit, some elements of which could join regularly recruited armies. Indeed, the fact that it likely would have been mostly different men volunteering in each of the cases discussed above suggests that what mattered was not the individuals themselves but the fact they belonged to that military group. In other words, the military group had an institutional presence.

The existence of such a military category, defined by its service under Scipio, might seem unusual in a mid-Republican context, but it has contextual support. As demonstrated in Ligustinus' speech, without there being permanent legions the names of commanders were used to specify the army in which soldiers served. For example, Ligustinus served in the armies of Titus Quinctius Flamininus, Marcus Porcius Cato, Manius Acilius Glabrio, Quintus Fulvius Flaccus and Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus. Given that Ligustinus served in Macedonia under Publius Sulpicius Galba and Publius Villius Tappulus, but mentions neither as his commanders, and served twice in Italy without mentioning his commanders, it seems that soldiers might have only mentioned commanders who had been successful. Or, to put it an-

²⁴ There is a further possible instance, but it is dubious. Livy 35.2.8–9, using Valerius Antias, records that on his way to Spain in 193 the praetor Gaius Flamininus was diverted to Africa where he recruited “vagabond soldiers from the army of Publius Africanus” (*vagos milites de exercitu P. Africani*). It is quite unbelievable that some veterans of Scipio's army had remained in Africa for over seven years and Brunt (1971), 218 n. 3 suggested that it reflected the settling of soldiers in the provinces in Antias' day. Alternatively, Flamininus might have recruited the veterans from Rome. But it is just as likely that the whole tale had been fabricated at some point.

other way, being in the army of a successful commander brought a degree of pride and was worthy of commemoration, whereas being in the army of a commander without significant success was not. Scipio Africanus was, of course, the most famous Roman commander in the late third/early second centuries because of his victories over the Carthaginians in Spain and then in Africa. He celebrated a triumph in Rome at the end of 201,²⁵ in which the African veterans who did not go straight to Macedonia would have marched and each was given 400 *asses* from the campaign's *praeda* (Polyb. 16.23.1–7; Livy 30.45.1–5). Therefore, it is obvious that his veterans would have taken great pride in being part of an army that had been under Scipio's command and won great success with him.

Furthermore, it is possible that many of those who were recruited by Flaminius and Lucius Scipio had been living in close proximity where they had been settled in 201–200.²⁶ Indeed, when veteran settlements became more common in the first century there was a tendency to settle veterans in groups. For example, Sulla settled his veteran forces together in colonies or *viridane* allotments distributed across Italy, with a partial number known to us: Pompeii, Urbana, Praeneste, Fae-sulae, Arretium, Volaterrae and Aléria on Corsica.²⁷ In fact, in 206 Scipio himself seems to have had a similar policy when he established a town called Italica in Spain where he settled his wounded soldiers (App. *Hisp.* 38). If it was the case that Scipio's veterans were settled in close proximity their military bonds would have remained active even in civilian life where their status as Scipio's veterans underlay the land distribution they had received.

Now the actual deployment of Scipio's veteran volunteers within Roman armies, that is whether they were kept together or distributed through the ranks, is hard to establish, but it very much matters to the conclusions that we draw. If Scipio's veterans were kept together and deployed as a single unit, then the argument that this military collective was regarded as similar to a permanent military unit is greatly strengthened. Indeed, in this case, their organisation operated outside the traditional divisions according to age and wealth into *hastati* (men of the first line in the *triplex acies*), *principes* (men of the second line) and *triarii* (men of the rearmost line) or between Romans and Italians. Although this cannot be proven beyond doubt, there are numerous indications that this was the case and that rather than distributing the veterans through the ranks, these men were kept together.

²⁵ According to Polyb. 11.33.7 and App. *Hisp.* 38, he also celebrated a triumph when he returned to Rome in 206. However, both Val. Max. 2.8.5 and Livy 28.38.4–5 wrote that he was not entitled to one because he was a *privatus cum imperio*.

²⁶ Fronza (2020), 181; Armstrong (2020), 92.

²⁷ Thein (2010), 87.

First, as we have seen above, in his description of the Battle of Magnesia Livy wrote that the Romans were not unnerved by elephants. His specific phraseology is: “the elephants that were placed in-between did not deter the Roman soldier, accustomed from the wars in Africa to avoid the charging beast and either to throw *pila* from the side or, if he was able to get close, to cut its legs with his sword” (37.42.5: *ne interpositi quidem elephantum militem Romanum deterrebant, adsuetum iam ab Africa bellis et vitare impetum beluae et ex transverso aut pilis incessere aut, si propius subire posset, gladio nervos incidere*). Although Livy seems to have been talking about the Roman soldiers generally, his reference to those having fought during the African War could specifically identify them as Scipio’s veterans, 5,000 of whom we know were in the army. Indeed, the specific method of fighting elephants noted by Livy was similar to Scipio’s tactic used at Zama: he had ordered lanes be made between the maniples occupied by *velites* who would throw their javelins into the side of the elephants as they ran past them through the channels.²⁸ Perhaps Scipio’s brother Lucius, who himself was present at Zama, had decided to use a similar tactic and use some of the units of men who had performed such deeds at Zama to do this.²⁹ It is true that in general Roman forces had become much more accustomed to elephants; indeed, the Romans had elephants in their armies at Cynoscephalae, Thermopylae and Magnesia.³⁰ But until Magnesia, the Romans had not actually fought against any elephants since Zama: Philip did not have any in his armies and, although Antiochus deployed them at Thermopylae, it does not seem that the Romans fought them.³¹ The only men to have fought elephants in Lucius Scipio’s army were the veterans from the African campaign, so it certainly would make military sense to use them.

Second, in 199 there was a group of the volunteer veterans who acted together in mutinying over a collective grievance. It is possible that these men, if distributed across the legions, could have slowly come together in winter quarters, organised, picked leaders, separated themselves, and threatened mutiny. But it would make much more sense if they were together from the beginning and formed a distinct number of maniples in one of the legions. Indeed, in his description of the Roman camp Polybius wrote that volunteers were stationed separately from the conscripted recruits amongst certain of the cavalry *extraordinarii* near the consul’s tent

²⁸ Livy 30.33.1–3, 30.33.16; Polyb. 15.9.9–10, 15.12.3–5.

²⁹ Taylor (2024).

³⁰ Second Macedonian War: Livy 30.43.11, 31.36.4, 32.27.2; Polyb. 18.25.6–7. Syrian War: Livy 36.4.9, 37.39.13.

³¹ Livy 36.18.4 mentions their presence on the right flank but the battle consisted of the Romans fighting the Macedonian phalanx. Indeed, at the end of the battle the elephants were at the very rear of Antiochus’ army suggesting that they had not been engaged (Livy 36.19.4).

(6.31.2). Miller interpreted this to mean that they had a recognised special status within the Roman army that allowed them to form a sense of corporate identity.³² In other words, it was standard for them to be kept together and viewed as a distinctive group in the legion.

Wolff counters that Polybius' qualifier—"those volunteers serving under the favour of the consul" (6.31.2: *τινες τῶν ἐθελοντῆν στρατευομένων τῆ τῶν ὑπάτων χάριτι*)—meant that it was only select volunteers that were so stationed and distinguished whilst the rest were distributed through the legions.³³ Yet Wolff's interpretation hinges on how many volunteers would be classified in this way. Flamininus had specifically recruited men of courage from Scipio's veterans, probably using his personal connections from his time as one of the *decemviri* who settled these veterans. And, similarly, Lucius Scipio obviously had a personal connection with these men with whom he had served under his brother in Spain and Africa, especially given that Africanus came to Asia as his *legatus* with them. These volunteers had been recruited by these consuls, likely volunteered because of those consuls and, therefore, would have had a special connection with the consuls beyond other units in their armies. So in these cases it is likely that they were considered to be volunteers serving the consul.

Overall, it seems that Scipio's veterans during the early second century considered themselves and were considered a cohesive military collective from which volunteers could be taken to serve in certain armies. Moreover, there are indications, albeit not conclusive ones, that suggest that they were utilised as a military unit within the armies they were a part of. This is notable because it would have cut across traditional divisions within the army based on ethnicity (Roman vs. Italian) and age-structure (*hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*). The existence of that collective identity matters because it gave these veterans a permanent one which was recognised and celebrated in broader society. Although these men might have been different ages, come from different places in Italy, and had different military experiences depending on when and where they had served, being recognised as Scipio's veterans provided a common and powerful bond between them. It will now be argued that because of this Scipio's veterans had a distinct *esprit de corps* unmatched by other Roman soldiers—conscripts or volunteers—which explain why successive Roman commanders wanted to have many of them in their armies.

³² Miller (1984), 150.

³³ Wolff (2010), 27–28.

II *Esprit de corps*: the military significance of Scipio's veterans

Given that Publius Sulpicius Galba, Titus Quinctius Flamininus and Lucius Cornelius Scipio all recruited volunteers from amongst Scipio's veterans, it is obvious that they must have been perceived as bringing some military advantage to one's army. Indeed, as Cato supposedly remarked (Fronto, *Ep. Ad Ver.* 1.5)—that he assessed each unit individually to test its merit—Roman commanders were quite aware of the varied quality of different troops. Indeed, as shown above, Scipio himself had wanted to incorporate the *legiones Cannenses* into his forces because he deemed them to be the most experienced men in the Roman army.³⁴ Obviously Scipio's own veterans were experienced and skillful soldiers,³⁵ and (in most cases) had actively chosen to re-join the army with the result that they might have been expected to have a higher morale.³⁶ These were the types of soldiers that were central to the fighting success of the legions: following current research on Roman fighting technique, it seems that much of the battle would be spent a few meters away from the enemy line with periodic bouts of engagement at different points in the line when a small group found the courage to make an attack.³⁷ This is neatly encapsulated in the oath Livy reports each soldier swore: “that he would not leave for flight or from fear nor retreat from his position except by reason of seizing or seeking a weapon, to strike down the enemy, or to save a citizen” (22.38.4: *sese fugae atque formidinis ergo non abituros neque ex ordine recessuros nisi teli sumendi aut petendi et aut hostis ferendi aut civis servandi causa*).³⁸ The men with the courage to make these attacks were thus critical.

Yet this didn't necessarily mark them out from other legionaries, especially those that also had experience fighting in other campaigns. Rather it was their belonging to and volunteering as part of an identifiable and famed military group—

³⁴ Machado (2023), 214–215.

³⁵ After all, they were trained by Scipio: his African forces were trained in Sicily before he embarked on the African campaign (Livy 29.22.1–6) whilst his Spanish forces had been trained at New Carthage (Livy 26.51.4–9; Polyb. 10.20.1–8).

³⁶ The importance of volunteers might be demonstrated by the resistance to conscription for the war against the Celtiberians in Iberia in the late 150s. Polyb. 35.4 explains that men resisted being conscripted because they did not want to fight against the Celtiberians. The young Scipio Aemilianus, however, volunteered as a military tribune and motivated others to volunteer as officers and soldiers. Aemilianus later also relied on volunteers when he attacked Numantia in 134–133 (App. *Hisp.* 84).

³⁷ Goldsworthy (1996), 248–282; Sabin (2000); Lendon (2005), 163–211; Quesada Sanz (2006); Taylor (2014), 4–9, 18–20; cf., Zhmodikov (2000); Wheeler (1979); (2001).

³⁸ See Ward (2016), 309–321 for detailed analysis.

Scipio's veterans—that distinguished them from other soldiers. Reflecting on the typical levying and disbanding of the Roman legions during the mid-Republic, one of the major differences with the legions of the late Republic and especially Principate is that each legion was not a permanent institution and would be disbanded after the campaign in which they served was over. As summarised by Taylor:

“The Roman army did not have standing units (e.g., the US 82nd Airborne) that might serve as institutional repositories for military knowledge even as individual recruits transitioned in and out. Fresh legions were formed to meet new threats, and often made contact with the enemy within months of mustering into service. Battle-hardened legions were generally discharged when a campaign was over ... The maintenance of standing units with corporate identities and institutional continuities was a key aspect of the true professionalization of the army under Augustus and his successors.”³⁹

Added to this, when a new legion was levied there was very little to tie any of its soldiers together beyond their Roman identity: the voting tribes, ages, geographical locations, wealth and experience of the recruits were different. Helm argued that the levy structure created legions that were of heterogenous composition and that without much actually to bind a legion together: “the overall legion was arguably at risk of fractures appearing.”⁴⁰ Machado has recently argued that legions during and after the Second Punic War stayed together for a sufficient amount of time to develop a sense of community and that the men of each maniple formed a tight-knit group of comrades.⁴¹ He posits that “fighting forces which share a strong sense of affinity with one another, it stands to reason, are more likely to be successful in military operations.”⁴² This is no doubt true; but these units and legions still lacked an abstract or institutional identity that soldiers could identify with. They were not permanent, had no names or institutional characteristics, nor became famed or celebrated. That is to say, the bonds created within the legions of the Republic were interpersonal rather than due to the abstract identity of the unit itself.

It was different, however, with Scipio's veterans. In his analysis of the legion as a society, MacMullen argued that one way in which soldiers might be bound to-

³⁹ Taylor (2023), 148.

⁴⁰ Helm (2020), 110; cf., Rosenstein (2010), 298. Of course, there is one major exception to this: the Italian *socii*. They were recruited according to ethnicity and would have stayed within their ethnic groups in the army, providing them with a distinct and continuous identity: Armstrong (2020), 92; Machado (2023), 79–85. E.g., see Taylor (2017) on the distinctive identities created by the Etruscan elite who served in the Roman army. The level of integration between Romans and *socii* within the army is debatable: see Patterson (2012); Rosenstein (2012).

⁴¹ Machado (2023), 39–79.

⁴² Machado (2023), 66; cf., Armstrong (2016), 114–118 on horizontal cohesion.

gether and their combat morale increased was a sense of belonging to a distinguished outfit: “men take a kind of hard pride in belonging to a famous outfit even when doing so exposes them to exceptional danger.”⁴³ It is here suggested that this applied to Scipio’s veterans. They belonged to a famous group of soldiers who had defeated Punic armies, some in Spain, others in Africa where they had humbled Hannibal himself. Many would have had *spolia* taken from those campaigns, gained medals or *coronae*, and might have even displayed such medals and distinctions on their armour.⁴⁴

It can be assumed that all of this gave these soldiers an advantage in battle. Goldsworthy argued that morale in battle was critical and “the soldier’s belief and pride in their unit as something special, as a corps of particular prowess, could have encouraged this confidence, which might have been decisive.”⁴⁵ He points to Caesar’s *Legio X* as the obvious example of this, being “one of the most effective units under his command.”⁴⁶ Caesar’s own view on the ability of *Legio X* is demonstrated by his remarks when his army began to resist his advances against king Ariovistus:

“Even if no man will follow, nevertheless I will go with the 10th legion, whom I do not doubt, alone; this will be my praetorian cohort.” To this legion Caesar had shown the most favour and he was most confident in it because of its courage.

Quod si praeterea nemo sequatur, tamen se cum sola decima legione iturum, de qua non dubitaret, sibi que eam praetoriam cohortem futuram. Huic legioni Caesar et indulserat praecipue et propter virtutem confidebat maxime. (BGall. 1.40)

There are numerous other well-known instances of Caesar’s special attachment to *Legio X*. For example, when Caesar met with Ariovistus he distrusted his force of Gallic cavalry to act as an effective bodyguard. Therefore, he instead mounted members of *Legio X* and used them as his bodyguard instead (Caes. *BGall.* 1.42). Furthermore, *Legio X* was normally given pride of place on the right flank of Caesar’s battle formations, the flank that Caesar would often use to break the opposition line.⁴⁷ That soldiers of *Legio X* felt pride in their legion and that this potentially made them a more effective military force is demonstrated from an episode of the African War. When Caesar’s former *legatus* Titus Labienus, now fighting for the Pompeians, had surrounded a small detachment of Caesar’s forces in 46, and Labienus began taunting them as recruits, a soldier shouted that he was a veteran of *Legio X*. Labienus

⁴³ MacMullen (1984), 448 citing Dollard (1944), 46.

⁴⁴ Gilliver (2007), 17–21.

⁴⁵ Goldsworthy (1996), 254.

⁴⁶ Goldsworthy (1996), 253.

⁴⁷ See battleplans in Goldsworthy (2007), 267, 280, 518–519, 563, 589.

replied that he did not recognise that legion so the veteran killed his horse with a *pilum* and exclaimed, “Labienu, now you know that it is a soldier of the 10th that is attacking you!” (Caes. *BAfr.* 16: *Labiene, decumanum militem qui te petit scito esse!*).

Yet it was not only *Legio X* that demonstrates the importance of strong attachment to a military unit. Machado points out that amongst the cohorts of Italian allies shared ethnicity created a powerful force for shared identity and pride.⁴⁸ The Paeligni are a good example. In 212 a cohort of Paeligni were the first over the Carthaginian rampart at Beneventum when their prefect Vibius Accaus threw their standard into the Carthaginian camp. When the Romans were being reprimanded by the tribune Valerius Flaccus for ceding such a distinction to the Italian allies a centurion Titus Pedanius similarly threw a standard over the rampart to motivate his troops (Livy 25.14.4–7). Both Accaus and Pedanius were rewarded for their bravery (Livy 25.14.13). Machado points to the importance of the unit standard in this episode such that ensuring it was not seized by the enemy motivated first the Paeligni and then the Romans to cross the rampart initially with little hope of support.⁴⁹ Again in 168 it was Paeligni who at the Battle of Pydna first attacked the Macedonian phalanx after their commander Salvius threw their standard into its serried ranks (Plut. *Aem.* 20.1–6). They suffered terrible losses because with such a frontal assault they were unable to break through the phalanx (Livy 44.41.9). However, the fact that they were willing to step into such danger shows the pride they had in their unit.

Therefore, it is likely that Scipio’s veterans, belonging to a well-known, respected and successful military collective, would have brought distinct military advantages in regard to their morale beyond those brought by other veterans or volunteers. In fact, it is also probable that the presence of Scipio’s veterans within the Roman army lifted the morale and confidence of that whole army. Soldiers, especially less experienced ones, could have gained significant confidence from the knowledge that there was a crack unit of veterans from the Hannibalic War amongst them.⁵⁰ Therefore, although Scipio’s veterans only formed a small portion of the overall armies in the Greek east, their impact was likely to have far exceed that number because of the influence their presence had on the rest of the army. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that Galba, Flamininus and Lucius Scipio wanted to have a group of these veterans within their armies.

Of course, there are two objections that could be made to this analysis. First, would such pride apply if Scipio’s veterans did not serve together in an elite unit, as argued above, but were distributed amongst other legions? Without conclusive evi-

48 Machado (2023), 83–84.

49 Machado (2023), 82.

50 McCall (2020), 225.

dence against it, this has to be accepted as a possibility. And, their separation would perhaps undermine the *esprit de corps* of these veteran troops. Yet even if they were placed in different maniples and legions, it remains likely that their identification with and pride in their collective identity would remain. Indeed, surrounded by other soldiers, there would perhaps be pressure for each veteran to perform in battle and not bring shame upon their collective. Just as importantly, having numerous veterans of Scipio's armies spread out through different units in the army was likely to inspire greater morale and confidence in the men within those units. Therefore, although this would certainly weaken the extent to which Scipio's veterans could be considered similar to the more permanent military units of the late Republic and Principate, it would not rob these veterans of all the military advantages that they might bring to Republican armies.

Second, the obvious trade-off to having units with a greater sense of shared identity was, as Machado has argued, the risk of them taking collective action in the advancement of their own interests.⁵¹ *Legio X*, for example, was involved in a mutiny in 47 which was rather serious before Caesar was able to quell it.⁵² And, Africanus himself had also faced a mutiny amongst his forces in Spain in 206.⁵³ Similarly, as has been discussed extensively above, 2,000 older members of the *legiones Cannenses* who were included amongst the volunteer veterans from 200 took collective action in 199. Is this not an overt example of military indiscipline which could undermine morale in the entire army?⁵⁴ Yet, as Brice points out: "the presence of military indiscipline was not a sign of weakness in the military, but was a typical, if undesirable, part of maintaining a military whose success was based on discipline in combat and peace."⁵⁵ As in this case, commanders were nearly always able to deal with mutinies and restore stability with little problem. Moreover, mutinies were often a form of collective political action set against genuine grievances with military service.⁵⁶ The *milites Cannenses* had a legitimate grievance—as Villius acknowledged—regarding their length of service, an issue that all soldiers would have been concerned with. Their actions, therefore, might not really have been seen by the rank-and-file as a rebellion against their commander but the defence of civic rights. In this way, the veterans' actions and the consul's response may well have solidified morale in the army, demonstrating that the rights of *milites* were still respected. Moreover, critically, the potential for collective action clearly did not discourage

51 Machado (2023), 132ff.

52 Chrissanthos (2001).

53 Chrissanthos (1997).

54 Brice (2020a), 113–121; (2020b).

55 Brice (2020b), 64.

56 Machado (2020). Chrissanthos (2004); (1997), 179–184.

Flaminius and Lucius Scipio from accepting more volunteers from amongst Scipio's veterans. Their military advantages were worth the risk for these commanders.

III Battlefield impact in the eastern Mediterranean

Given the potential military benefits provided by Scipio's veterans, and certainly the belief amongst Roman commanders that they brought those military benefits, it is finally worth considering the impact these men might have had on Rome's armies fighting in the eastern Mediterranean in the early second century, a period of enormous military success. Between 200–188 the Romans rapidly conquered the eastern Mediterranean, defeating the Macedonian king Philip V, the Spartan king Nabis, the Seleucid king Antiochus III and the Aetolian League. Rome was victorious in countless skirmishes, numerous sieges and three major battles: Cynoscephalae (197), Thermopylae (191) and Magnesia (190). There have been many attempts to explain these remarkable military successes against some of the most powerful forces in the Mediterranean. For example, Harris has argued that Roman ferocity and violence was more extreme than other states in the Mediterranean.⁵⁷ Moreover, Eckstein has argued that Rome's creation of a highly integrated state in Italy gave it access to resources and stability that could be utilised with devastating effect against smaller states or large but fragile dynastic empires.⁵⁸ Burton has suggested that Rome was able to attract *amici* in the east because the Romans sought to create an "empire of trust" based on the creation of a "security community" that provided for all.⁵⁹ Recently Taylor has rooted Roman success in their substantially higher maximum mobilisation rate built on their expansive citizenship, a militarised citizenry and Italian *socii*. Although the Romans were often outnumbered in individual battles, they were able to suffer more reverses without having to surrender and could control much larger territories across the Mediterranean with military forces.⁶⁰

In addition to these broader points, however, it is possible that there were practical elements of Roman military forces in the eastern Mediterranean between 200–188 that made it particularly successful on the battlefield. Manipular organisation

⁵⁷ Harris (1979), 51; cf., (2016), 44. Eckstein (2005), 487–491 vehemently disagrees.

⁵⁸ Eckstein (2006), 245–257.

⁵⁹ Burton (2011), esp. 158–160, 194, 225, 244–245.

⁶⁰ Taylor (2020b), esp. 169–179.

gave the Romans forces tactical flexibility when facing the more rigid Macedonian phalanx. The *triplex acies* (threefold battleline) ensured that the Romans always had reserve units to deploy in order to exploit opportunities or respond to a crisis on the battlefield. The *lorica hamata* (chainmail shirt) provided effective defence against the weapons used by the Greeks and Macedonians, whilst the *gladius hispaniensis* (two-edged sword, thought to have originated from Spain) was a better weapon than the *xiphos* or *kopis* and could penetrate Macedonian armour.⁶¹ Perhaps consideration of the men fighting should also factor into our analysis of the success of the Roman army.

Of course, it is hard to show any specific instance in which the presence of Scipio's veterans proved decisive. Such limitations are imposed by the evidence. For example, we know at Cynoscephalae that victory was ensured by the actions of a military tribune who took twenty maniples from the victorious Roman right-wing and attacked the successful Macedonian right in the rear (Polyb. 18.26.1–7; Livy 33.9.7–10). Yet we have no idea who the tribune was, let alone what legion or units the maniples came from. It has been argued above that the Roman soldiers used against Antiochus' elephants at the Battle of Magnesia were likely to have been Scipio's veterans. But this can be no more than an inference. There is little point trying to speculate further what they achieved in any specific battle.

Yet from the analysis hitherto, it has been shown that troops of between 2,000–5,000 of Scipio's veterans were present in the armies fighting in Macedonia and Asia. They must have brought military advantages to have been recruited by Roman commanders, and based on military theory and comparative examples, these potential advantages have been demonstrated. Therefore, it would seem fair to conclude that they likely played a role in making the Roman legions superior to their Antigonid and Seleucid adversaries.

In conclusion, it has been argued that Scipio's African and Spanish veterans volunteered for additional military service in the armies of Publius Sulpicius Galba, Titus Quinctius Flaminius and Lucius Cornelius Scipio. Their presence in these armies certainly substantiate the notion that volunteers formed an important part of Rome's military forces in the middle Republic. But, critically, these veterans were significantly different from normal volunteers: they were part of a well-known, successful and famed military collective as veterans of Scipio Africanus' Spanish and African armies and volunteered as part of large groups coming from that collective. That military collective uniquely operated similar to a permanent military unit from which various commanders of Rome's eastern armies from 200–190 drew

61 See Taylor (2014), 318–320; Johnstone and Taylor (2022); Devereaux (2022); Beattie (2026).

forces for their campaign. And, as argued here, they perhaps even deployed them as a singular unit within their armies. These volunteer veterans would have had an *esprit de corps* and aspects of professionalism which were often lacking in the armies of the mid-Republic but were more systematically found in the legions of the late Republic and Principate. They were forerunners of the later veteran armies of Marius, Sulla, Fimbria, Pompey and Caesar and even the permanent legions of the Principate. This adds greatly to our understanding of Rome's eastern armies in the mid-Republic, adding to the impression that there were elements not found in other Roman armies at the time. Because these aspects of professionalism brought clear military advantages, it was finally suggested that the presence of Scipio's veterans in these armies might be folded into the matrix of reasons (e.g., the *gladius hispaniensis*, *lorica hamata*, maniples, *triplex acies*) that made them consistently superior to the Macedonian armies they faced.

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