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Malta Classics Association*

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Editorial

The finished product is not always indicative of all the work that goes into its production, and academic journals such as this *Melita Classica* are no different. The papers contained within this year's volume are, no different to others in previous editions of the *Melita Classica* and those in other works and publications, the product of hours of research, study and hard work by authors dedicated to producing a work representative of their broader dedication to their subject and craft, through which they hope to introduce a broader public to an area of study they have found to be interesting and of value.

To this work by the authors is added the commitment and work of my colleagues on the Editorial Board, our blind reviewers (whom I thank especially for their selfless service since they must remain nameless and unrecognised) and all those who have contributed in small or great ways to the publication of this work, including our returning and generous sponsors, the Farsons Foundation.

The *Melita Classica* remains the most tangible proof of the MCA's commitment to fostering and promoting the study of Classics in Malta and abroad, and of making it as widely accessible to as many people as possible.

This ninth volume of the *Melita Classica* is once again representative of the broad scope of Classics as a field of study. The papers contained within are concerned with the study of history, literary study and criticism, translation and transmission of texts, and reception. We hope that you will find them intriguing and informative. Our hope is that reading through these pages may quicken your own passion for Classics and set your mind alight with inspiration, ideas, and insights.

Samuel Azzopardi

Editor

Change and Evolution in the Roman Army through Roman and Greek Eyes

*Gabriele Brusa*¹

An outline of the problem

The Roman ability to change and innovate their weapons and military institutions, taking inspiration from foreign peoples, is well known to modern authors. Ancient sources, both Greek and Latin, constantly underline this cultural predisposition, and represent it as a Roman strength, both as a general rule and concerning specific military techniques or pieces of equipment. To get an idea of the importance and pervasiveness of this idea, it is useful to cite some of the most relevant sources:

ἀγαθοὶ γάρ, εἰ καὶ τινες ἕτεροι, μεταλαβεῖν ἔθῃ καὶ ζηλώσαι τὸ βέλτιον καὶ Ῥωμαῖοι.²

*Maiores nostri, patres conscripti, neque consili neque audaciae umquam eguere, neque illis superbia obstabat quo minus aliena instituta, si modo proba erant, imitarentur [...] Postremo quod ubique apud socios aut hostis idoneum videbatur, cum summo studio domi exsequebantur; imitari quam invidere bonis malebant.*³

οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι συμβουλευεῖν τοῖς Καρχηδονίοις ἔφασαν μὴ διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς τὰ κατὰ τὴν θάλασσαν πολυπραγμονεῖν· μαθητὰς γὰρ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ἀεὶ ὄντας γίνεσθαι κρείττους τῶν διδασκάλων [...] καὶ νῦν ἂν Καρχηδόνιοι βιάσωνται μαθεῖν αὐτοὺς ναυμαχεῖν, ταχὺ τοὺς μαθητὰς τῶν διδασκάλων ὄψονται περιγενομένους.⁴

1 Gabriele Brusa is a PhD candidate at the University of Pavia.

2 Polyb. 6, 25, 11: “for no nation has ever surpassed them in readiness to adopt new fashions from other people, and to imitate what they see is better in others than themselves” (Paton).

3 Sal. Cat. 51, 37-38: “Our ancestors, Fathers of the Senate, were never lacking either in wisdom or courage, and yet pride did not keep them from adopting foreign institutions, provided they were honourable [...] In fine, whatever they found suitable among allies or foes, they put in practice at home with the greatest enthusiasm, preferring to imitate rather than envy the successful” (Rolfe).

4 Diod. 23, 2, 1: “The Romans, for their part, advised the Carthaginians not to teach them to meddle with maritime affairs, since the Romans, so they asserted, were pupils who always outstripped their

κάν τοῖς ἄλλοτρίοις ἐπιτηδεύμασι περίεσμεν τῶν ἐκ πολλοῦ αὐτὰ ἡσκηκῶτων [...] μὴ δὴ Ῥωμαῖους ἀναγκάζετε ἄφασθαι τῶν θαλαττίων. Εἰ γὰρ ἡμῖν δεήσει ναυτικοῦ, πλείους μὲν καὶ ἀμείνους ὑμῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ κατασκευασόμεθα ναῦς, κρεῖττον δὲ ναυμαχήσομεν ἐκ πλείστου ναυτικῶν.⁵

Λαμβάνοντες ἅμα τοῖς δοριαλώτοις καὶ εἴ τι χρήσιμον καὶ καλὸν ὑπῆρχε παρ' ἐκείνοις εἰς μίμησιν: ὅπερ ἐν τοῖς πάλαι χρόνοις ἐποίουν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι.⁶

All these texts – which are just a few of those that may be cited⁷ – are a testament to the importance and to the persistence over time of the idea according to which the Romans were especially skilled in copying their enemies. This concept is certainly recognizable from the very beginning of Greek reflections about the Romans, and goes on to live well into the imperial era. One must immediately note that all cited authors consider this ability to be positive;⁸ apparently, no source criticizes them as too fond of changes and reforms. This remark, paired with the fact that these ideas are constantly found in the Roman tradition, in Polybius (who describes the Roman army mainly after Roman sources) and in pro-Roman sources, leads to consider this view as a distinctively Roman one, which was borrowed by the Greeks at least from Polybius' times, if not earlier (the chronology of the

masters [...] So now, should the Carthaginians compel them to learn naval warfare, they would soon see that the pupils had become superior to their teachers" (Oldfather).

5 *Ineditum Vaticanum*: "when it comes to foreign practices we surpass those who have long been used to them [...] Do not force the Romans to engage in affairs of the sea; for if we have need of naval forces we shall, in a short time, equip more and better ships than you, and we shall prove more effective in naval battles than people who have long practised seafaring" (Cornell). This text, which received its current name because it was only edited at the end of the nineteenth century and was found in a Vatican manuscript, quotes some Roman speeches after an introduction which defines the work's genre (a *chreia*, a collection of important exempla and quotations). The title line, unfortunately partially lost, defines the collection as ἀποφθέγματα Ῥωμαϊκά, but the length of the speeches, as the editor notes, hardly suits their definition as "sayings". The copyist, however, probably intended the work as such, and seems to have considered it as a work by Plutarch, although he attributed it to a certain Caecilius as well. The second of the short orations that the text reports is the one partially quoted here. The reference edition is that by Von Arnim (1892).

6 Athen. 6, 106: "If there were any useful or honourable institutions among the people whom they have subdued, those they take for their imitation at the same time that they take the prisoners. And this was the conduct of the Romans in olden time" (Olson).

7 See also, for example, Liv. 8, 8, 3; Plin. *Nat.* 7, 81; Plut. *Rom.* 21, 1; Arr. *Tact.* 33, 2-3; *Suid.* s.v. "μάχηρα".

8 Polybius cites the Roman adoption of Greek cavalry equipment as proof of their ability to constantly improve. Diodorus and the *Ineditum* report the same tradition, as a proud Roman answer to Carthaginian threats. Sallust and Athenaeus underline the fact that the Romans used to imitate strangers very frequently, but were always careful to choose among foreign customs only the best and praiseworthy (and Sallust considers the abandonment of this practice as proof of contemporary Roman decadence).

Ineditum Vaticanum is far from clear, and similarly unsure is whether the speech it reports was really delivered during the first Punic war).⁹ One should truly talk about a Roman self-representation, which is proposed by the Romans themselves to foreigners as well. This is particularly evident from the speech contained in the *Ineditum Vaticanum*, which will be discussed more at length below, and is worth summarizing here. An unnamed Carthaginian scorned a Roman ambassador (or general), telling him that the Romans were so inexperienced at sea that, were they to begin a war against the Carthaginians, the Punics would not even have allowed them to wash their hands in the sea. The Roman, a certain Kaeso, answered that the Romans were indeed inexperienced, and admitted that they did not formerly have a military tradition about many other techniques. However, they had always proved able to learn from their masters and defeat them with their new knowledge. The Roman flavour of this story is evident.

As mentioned, the theme is well known in historiography, but modern works have tended to focus on its practical implications, rather than on its cultural features. Several works dealt with the origin of some elements of the legionary panoply, to verify whether the sources which attributed a non-Roman origin to them are correct. Most authors followed an archaeological path,¹⁰ but researchers have obtained contrasting results. Only about the *gladius* reasonably certain conclusions have been reached (namely, a Spanish origin),¹¹ while on the other components many doubts remain. What is particularly important to note is that the ancient tradition itself is extremely contradictory: many weapons are attributed by several authors to different peoples; one can see, in transparency, a deeply contested antiquarian reconstruction, which of course fueled modern divergence of opinions. Debated by the sources are, for example, the origins of the *scutum*¹²

9 As said, the introductory line reports the names of Plutarch and a certain Caecilius. The text has therefore been attributed to Caecilius of Kale Akte – Cavallaro (1973–74), Humm (2007), who supposes that Caecilius followed Philinus of Agrigentum, whose reconstruction he re-shaped in a pro-Roman fashion – although modern historiography is not unanimous: Woerther (2015) 139–143 thinks that Caecilius' mention is a copyist's mistake. The tradition of a meeting between a Roman commander and a Carthaginian one, however, appears to be older, and to stem from Roman encomiastic self-representation at the time of the first Punic war. Badian (1964) proposes to identify this meeting with that between a Carthaginian and Kaeso Quinctius.

10 For a good synthesis, see Bishop and Coulston (1993).

11 Quesada Sanz (2007), Kavanagh (2016).

12 Ancient tradition reports both a Sabine (*Ineditum Vaticanum*; *Sal. Cat.* 51, 38; *Athen.* 6, 106; Probably also *Diod.* 23, 2, 1, and maybe *Liv.* 8, 8, 3) and a Samnite (*Plut. Rom.* 21, 1) origin; but also about the earlier adoption of the round "phalangitic" shield opinions differed: was it Greek, or Etruscan? Note that this adoption itself is doubtful: Rosenstein (2010). Why did the Romans develop such traditions about pieces of equipment they weren't really sure to have actually employed in the past?

and of the thrusting spear;¹³ the most interesting case, however, is that of the *pilum*, which was apparently considered a sort of a “national weapon” *par excellence*,¹⁴ and which nevertheless received no less than three foreign reconstructions, and is never described as invented by the Romans.¹⁵ What appears to be clear is that ancient authors could not reconstruct with any degree of certainty the origin of Roman weapons. Several contrasting traditions developed about arms about which no real memory existed, and whose origins were obscured by their archaism.¹⁶

Modern historiography did not completely disregard some implications of these ideas, despite the lack of specific studies on these matters. This Roman self-representation has been connected to the idea that the Romans were especially good at learning from their defeats and able to turn them into victories exactly by observing and copying their enemies. However, there has been a general lack of critical approaches to these Roman boasts, and their cultural features have not been discussed in depth. Many studies just mention *en passant* this supposedly extraordinary “Roman adaptability”, especially after defeats, as one of the most significant strengths of the legions.¹⁷ It is significant that these ideas remained basically unknown to the recently flourishing historiography about Roman defeats

13 Most authors talk about borrowing from the Etruscans (Diod. 23, 2; Athen. 6, 106; *Ineditum Vaticanum*), but Livy compares them to the Greek and Macedonian ones (8, 8, 3) and Polybius (6, 25) relates of the Roman adoption of Greek cavalry spears, which appear to be remarkably similar to the infantry ones, and that he evidently assumes to have been unknown to the Romans before. Keppie 2005 (6) even supposed that the theory of the “Etruscan spears” was developed to hide the real borrowing: namely, that from the Greeks.

14 According to Festus (s.v. “*pilumnoe poploe*”) in their ritual *carmina* the *salii* defined the Romans as a whole as “*pilum* armed people”.

15 Plin. *Nat.* 7, 81 (according to whom it was Etruscan), Athen. 6, 106 (Spanish), Sal. *Cat.* 51, 37-38 (Samnite; Sallust reconnects this weapon to the manipular system, which he assumes to have been borrowed from the Samnites). Of course, modern reconstructions were no less divergent; the two main currents were those created by Schulten (1911), about a Spanish origin, and Reinach (1907) about a Samnite one. For a more detailed *status quaestionis*, see again Kavanagh (2016).

16 An exception is the *gladius*, probably adopted by the Romans at some point during the III century: Quesada Sanz (2007), 394. As it is far more recent than most other Roman weapons, the sources are unanimous about its Spanish origin.

17 This idea is briefly mentioned by the majority of modern military manuals about Rome: some examples among the most famous general works include Le Bohec (1989) 129, Gilliver (1999) 15-16, Keppie (2005) 6-9, Southern (2006) 1-2. Defeats which were recognized as particularly important for the army’s evolution include in particular the Samnite wars and the Hannibalic campaign: Le Bohec (1996) 71-72 and especially Blösel (2015) 118: “mit seiner Anpassungsfähigkeit an die je unterschiedlichen Kriegsumstände verkörperte Scipio gleichsam eine seit den Samnitenkriegen zentrale Tugend des römischen Militärs”. The only noteworthy contrary opinion is, to my knowledge, that by Lendon (2005) 185, who puts far more emphasis on cultural developments than on technical considerations originating from defeats. All of these reconstructions, however, appear in more general works, in which they are quite marginal and not deeply developed.

and the cultural aspects of their representations.¹⁸ As a noteworthy exception, one has to notice the brief but very interesting points that Cornell raises about the already mentioned *Ineditum Vaticanum*.¹⁹ The author observes that the Romans were very much aware of their debt to Greek culture; this notion could lead to some problems in terms of national pride, and was therefore re-shaped into a tradition which valorized this debt instead of negating it, but at the same time stressed the fact that the Romans were always able to surpass (and defeat) their teachers.

This brief suggestion by Cornell deserves to be accepted and, if possible, widened. It is especially important from a methodological point of view. It is dangerous to accept without previous criticism Roman propaganda about military matters, both because other peoples' visions are largely lost (what did the Carthaginians answer to the speech by Kaeso quoted by the *Ineditum*, if it was really delivered?), and as it is a constructed self-representation. For reasons that must be explored, the Romans chose to develop traditions, often contrasting with each other, about their own permeability to foreign institutions, but this does not mean that they were right. Cornell's caution has not been widely adopted, and the *topos* of the superior²⁰ adaptability of the legions continues to be put forward, simply taken from the sources.²¹ In this text, a different approach shall be adopted: the theme will be dealt with in particular through a comparison with Greek military culture, and through some comments on Greek opinions about Rome during the time of the latter's overseas conquests. While the attempt to reconstruct the origin of legionary weapons, and the history of their diffusion into the Roman world, is surely interesting and potentially fruitful, some cultural questions have been overlooked, and are worth asking: why did Roman self-propaganda focus on their ability to learn from the others instead of underlining their own native tradition? And why, even when considering weapons which were perceived as distinctively Roman (the *pilum*) and whose origin was not necessarily well-known, did they prefer to create multiple traditions about foreign borrowings?

18 In their jointly edited book about cultural reconstructions and representations of Roman defeats, Clark and Turner (2018) 10 just mention the fact that any study about Roman defeats should involve a reconsideration of the theme of "Roman adaptability": cf. Clark (2014) 16-17. In the rest of these two texts, however, the issue is never raised again.

19 Cornell (1995) 170.

20 Modern studies about the Greek and Macedonian phalanx, about its adaptability and evolutions should lead scholars to be even more cautious about a supposedly "exceptional" Roman adaptability. See in particular, about the reforms of the Macedonian phalanxes in the second century BC, Sekunda (2001).

21 In the effective synthesis by Quesada Sanz (2007) 237, "Dado que los propios autores romanos lo reconocían con naturalidad, la investigación moderna acepta [...] que los romanos adoptaron en diversos momentos de su historia las armas de sus enemigos".

A comparison with the Greek world

A comparison with Greek military culture makes the Roman one, by contrast, even more peculiar and interesting. The Greeks tended not to recognize foreign contributions to their hoplite phalanx. The shield ἄσπις can be taken as the most “phalangitic” weapon,²² and it was said to have an Argive origin.²³ The helmet and the spear were Greek as well, the remaining important components of the panoply.²⁴ Many recent studies on Greek warfare demonstrated that the phalanx was hardly the only tactical device employed on Hellenic battlefields;²⁵ however, expressions of the cultural preference accorded to the hoplite phalanx remain important.²⁶ Foreign weapons appear to be put in a sort of morally inferior position, and their “otherness” is underlined.²⁷ Remarks about the adoption of foreign practices and weapons are not completely absent,²⁸ but τάξις, the most important value of Greek armies,²⁹ always remains a Hellenic concept, and an element central to a differentiation between Greeks and barbarians. Herodotus and Xenophon, in whose works one can best appreciate a military comparison between Greek and barbarians, constantly focus on foreign ἀτάξια,³⁰ which serves to emphasize their non-Hellenic provenance. Τάξις remains for them a Greek value, born in Greece and unknown to foreigners. It then comes to define the Macedonian phalanx as well: Polybius, despite being an admirer of the Roman legion, underlines the phalanx’s primacy in terms of good order.³¹ In an important passage, which will be discussed more in depth in a while, Plutarch has an amazed

22 For the Romans, the highest mark of ignominy on the field was the loss of the sword (Plut. *Cato Mai.* 20, 7-8; the oath sworn by the legionaries allowed them to leave the ranks to recover the sword lost in the fight: Liv. 22, 38, 4; cf. Polyb. 37, 13, who mentions, however, any kind of weapons); for the Greeks, it was the abandonment of the shield (Plut. *Mor.* 241f; cowards and soldiers who quitted the ranks were humiliated as ρηψάσπιδες: Plat. *Leg.* 12, 944).

23 Paus. 2, 25, 7 (cf. Plin. *Nat.* 7, 201): indeed, Virgil defines the ἄσπις as the “Argive shield” (Verg. *Aen.* 3, 637: *Argolicus clipeus*).

24 Plin. *Nat.* 7, 200 attributes both to the Lacedaemonians. The most well-known kind of helmet, however, was called “Corinthian” (Herod. 4, 180, 3).

25 It will be sufficient to cite here just Rawlings (2000) and Van Wees (2004).

26 Aristot. *Pol.* 5, 1304a; 7, 1327b (cf. Eur. *Hec.* 585); Plato *Leg.* 4, 706b-706c; Isoc. 12, 115-116; Plut. *Them.* 4 (who cites Themistocles’ opinions).

27 Lissarrague (1990)

28 E.g. Herod. 4, 180, 4, about the Egyptian origin of the hoplite weapons.

29 Sansone (2017), with earlier bibliography.

30 E.g., Herod. 7, 210-212; 8, 86, 1; 9, 59, 2; 9, 62, 3; Xen. *Anab.* 1, 2, 15-18.

31 Polyb. 18, 29 (with the insertion of a Homeric quote, to better illustrate the tight disposition of the phalangites). At 18, 31, 6, the author focuses on the importance of τάξις, which is assumed as the fundamental cornerstone of the phalanx: when good order is lost, says Polybius, the previously invincible phalanx immediately melts down and loses.

Pyrrhus exclaim that the military order of the barbarians (the Romans) was not really barbaric, contrary to his expectations³². Along the same lines, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, king Latinus (who was, according to the author, Greek) expects to easily defeat Aeneas' army, which he assumed to be composed of barbarians. Once he realizes (in amazement, once again) that they were Greeks, and arranged in good order as such, the king loses his self-confidence, and resolves to try to find an agreement with the invaders. It appears quite clear that, according to the Greek self-portrait, a good military disposition was nothing the barbarians could achieve: it was thought to be the prerogative of "good" Hellenes, who had nothing to learn from foreigners. The difference with Roman self-representation is evident; one could talk about an opposition between tradition and adaptability, closure and openness. This might be a suitable starting point for a reappraisal of this peculiarity of Roman military culture.

The Greek point of view: the Romans as barbarians without a tradition

Greek authors quite often dealt with the "Greekness" of Rome. Their opinions differed widely, though, and one cannot talk about "one" single Greek point of view on this matter. There were those who, from a very early stage, considered Rome as a – at least partially – Greek city.³³ Next to this view, however, there was another, which appears to gain in strength especially during the period of the Roman conquest, which was far less favourable to Rome. Anti-Roman historiography is, regrettably, almost entirely lost, but some points of its criticism can be partially reconstructed.

Perhaps the most important thing to note is that Roman victories over the phalanx left a large section of Greek thinkers speechless. Traces of this amazement can be found in Livy, who constructs a sort of indirect debate between Philip V and Aemilius Paullus through their respective speeches before the battle of Cynoscephalae. *Macedonum vero phalangem et tunc stetisse et loco aequo iustaque pugna semper mansuram invictam*: these are the confident words of the Macedonian king to his army.³⁴ To these, Flamininus replies that *fama stetisse, non*

32 Plut. *Pyrrh.* 16, 5.

33 See in particular Plut. *Cam.* 22, 2, who quotes Heraclides Ponticus about the Gallic sack of Rome: the historian wrote about "a Greek city called Rome (πόλιν Ἑλληνίδα Ῥώμην) conquered by the Hyperboreans". Several Greek authors connected its birth with the Trojan myth, in several different ways: Forte (1972) 5-6; Gabba (1976).

34 Liv. 33, 4. For the rest, the king blames the defeats that the Macedonians had suffered on the other sections of his army. The phalanx, in his words (according to Livy) was the only really unbeatable part of it.

*viribus Macedoniae regnum; eam quoque famam tandem evanuisse.*³⁵ This concept of the Macedonian *fama* which was fading away due to Roman victories is much clearer in Polybius.³⁶ The Achaean historian feels compelled to pause his narrative for a while, in the eighteenth book, to insert a rather lengthy digression about the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the phalanx and the legion. The author wanted to demonstrate that, despite the power of the phalanx in a direct clash, its lack of flexibility made it actually inferior to the Roman formation. Much more interesting, here, is his conclusion, in which the author justifies his excursus:

περὶ μὲν οὖν τούτων ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην εἶναι τὸ διὰ πλειόνων ποιήσασθαι μνήμην διὰ τὸ καὶ παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν καιρὸν πολλοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων διαλαμβάνειν, ὅτε Μακεδόνες ἠττήθησαν, ἀπίστω τὸ γεγονός εἰσκέειναι, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα πολλοὺς διαπορήσειν διὰ τί καὶ πῶς λείπεται τὸ σύνταγμα τῆς φάλαγγος ὑπὸ τοῦ Ῥωμαίων καθοπλισμοῦ.³⁷

What Polybius shows is that many thought it impossible that the phalanx, with all its tradition of invincibility,³⁸ could be vanquished by a foreign formation. The historian also hints at the fact that the favourite explanation for the defeats by those who refused to acknowledge (in Polybius' perspective) the Roman superiority was just to blame bad luck.³⁹ The historian censures this opinion in other passages as well, and implies that it was widely spread.⁴⁰ The theme of the "luck of the Romans" is complex, and can't be extensively taken into account here. It is important to recall at least Plutarch's work *On the Fortune of the Romans*, probably written at an early stage of the author's formation, in which he depreciates their victories as the outcome of luck,⁴¹ while in the parallel work about Alexander he gave more

35 Liv. 33, 8, 5. About the cultural clash between legion and phalanx (especially as it emerges from Polybius) see Brusa (2020) 152-155.

36 It is probable that the speeches found in Livy were borrowed, or re-elaborated in some way, from the Achaean's work itself; this section of the *Histories* is, however, now lost.

37 Polyb. 18, 32, 13: "I thought it necessary to speak on this subject at some length because many Greeks on the actual occasions when the Macedonians suffered defeat considered the event as almost incredible, and many will still continue to wonder why and how the phalanx comes to be conquered by troops armed in the Roman fashion" (Paton).

38 Which is in fact underlined by Polybius himself at the start of his digression. The author says that the Roman legion was the strongest formation in the western world, while the phalanx had imposed itself over any enemy which it met, in the eastern world (Polyb. 18, 28, 2).

39 Polyb. 18, 28, 5; of course, this opinion is harshly reproached by the author, who attributes it to "foolish men" (οἱ μάταιοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων).

40 Polyb. 1, 3, 9 (where the "majority of the Greeks" is said to be ignorant of Roman history and of the reasons for their victories); 1, 63, 9 (who cites the opinion of "ἔνιοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων").

41 Plut. *Mor.* 316-326. Plutarch's thought is twofold: on the one hand, he takes into account some events in Roman history; on the other, he shows that the Romans themselves boasted about their

importance to the Macedonian's valour than his fortune.⁴² The most significant text, however, comes from the introduction to Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities*. Like Polybius, the author tries to dispel those he considers wrong opinions about the Romans. In particular, he reproaches the Greeks who, being ignorant of Rome's history, and being Rome's opposers, ascribed their victories to luck. Moreover, he attests that many Greeks accused τύχη of letting the worst among all barbarians vanquish the Hellenes:

ἔτι γὰρ ἀγνοεῖται παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ὀλίγου δεῖν πᾶσιν ἢ παλαιὰ τῆς Ῥωμαίων πόλεως ἱστορία, καὶ δόξαι τινὲς οὐκ ἀληθεῖς, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων ἀκουσμάτων τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσαι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐξηπατήκασιν, ὡς ἀνεστίους μὲν τινὰς καὶ πλάνητας καὶ βαρβάρους καὶ οὐδὲ τούτους ἐλευθέρους οἰκιστὰς εὐχομένης, οὐ δι' εὐσέβειαν δὲ καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπάντων ἡγεμονίαν σὺν χρόνῳ παρελθούσης, ἀλλὰ δι' αὐτοματισμὸν τινα καὶ τύχην ἄδικον εἰκῆ δωρουμένην τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῖς ἀνεπιτηδαιοτάτοις: καὶ οἱ γε κακοθεότεροι κατηγορεῖν εἰώθασι τῆς τύχης κατὰ τὸ φανερόν ὡς βαρβάρων τοῖς πονηροτάτοις τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ποριζομένης ἀγαθά.⁴³

Dionysius was probably referring to historians from the age of Mithridates,⁴⁴ whose cultural campaign against the Romans remained so important that it led Sallust and Pompeius Trogus⁴⁵ to re-elaborate its themes in two speeches

good luck. Plutarch shares the idea, that Livy considers quite widespread, that Alexander's death was a lucky coincidence for the Romans: had he survived, he would have conquered Italy (Liv. 9, 18, 6; Plut. *Mor* 326a). See Braccesi (2006) 201-213.

42 See, on all these issues, Zecchini (2018) 112-113.

43 Dionys. 1, 4, 2: "For to this day almost all of the Greeks are ignorant of the early history of Rome, and the great majority of them have been imposed upon by sundry false opinions grounded upon stories which chance has brought to their ears and led to believe that, having come upon various vagabonds without house or home and barbarians, and even those not free men, as her founders, she in the course of time arrived at world domination, and this not through reverence of the gods and justice and every other virtue, but through some chance and the injustice of Fortune, which inconsiderately showers her greatest favours upon the most undeserving. And indeed the more malicious are wont to rail openly at fortune for freely bestowing on the basest of barbarians the blessings of the Greeks" (Cary).

44 Dionysius ascribes these opinions to historians at the courts of barbarian kings (βασιλεῦσι βαρβάροις), and among Mithridates' historians there was Metrodoros, so hostile to Rome that he was called "the hater of the Romans" (*Misoromaeus*: Plin. *Nat.* 34, 34). However, king Pyrrhus is not to be ruled out, either: as an Epirote, he came from the very margins of the Greek world, and therefore his Greekness could be disputed: Mossman (2005).

45 The *vexata quaestio* about whether or not Pompeius Trogus was "anti-Roman" (Zecchini (2018) 88-89, with further bibliography) will not be addressed here. For this text's purposes, it is better to consider this speech as an instance of the reception of Greek visions hostile to Rome: Zecchini (2018) 59.

(or rather a letter, in Sallust) delivered by the king.⁴⁶ Here the theme of Rome's fortune is implicit in the depreciation of Roman victories.⁴⁷ Moreover, the king represents the Romans as barbarians without a tradition, "who only own what they have stolen",⁴⁸ and depreciates the early Romans as a band of vagabonds and slaves.⁴⁹ This is exactly the reconstruction criticized by Dionysius, who implies that it was quite widespread. Other periods in which anti-Roman propaganda can be detected include the Syrian war against Antiochus III⁵⁰ and the first and second Punic war. In a fragment by the Greek historian Sosylus, who followed Hannibal during his campaigns together with Silenus,⁵¹ Roman technical ability in the naval field is depreciated: their victory over the Punic fleet near the Ebrus is attributed to the technical excellence of their Massaliote allies.⁵² For the first Punic war, we have a hint of Philinus' anti-Roman stance in Diodorus and Polybius;⁵³ above all, we have the tradition reported by Diodorus and the *Ineditum Vaticanum*, in which, once again, the Romans are criticized by the Carthaginians as people without a technical tradition and threatened lest they should begin a war at sea.⁵⁴ This tradition is clearly pro-Roman,⁵⁵ but this self-representation is only understandable as an answer to a real accusation. Once again, they are depicted as people without a military-technical tradition. They answer by portraying themselves as newbies,⁵⁶ but stressing their ability to learn, grow and defeat their teachers: this is indeed what Kaeso tells the Carthaginian, advising him not to compel the Romans to learn

46 Sal. *Hist.* 4, 60; Iustin. 38, 6; cf. Adler (2011) 17-28.

47 Adler (2011) 42-44.

48 Sal. *Hist.* 4, 60, 17.

49 Iustin. 38, 6. Mithridates says that the reason why the Romans hate all kings is that their own kings were men without honour, vagabonds, and slaves like themselves: see Adler (2011) 49.

50 Zecchini (2018) 28; Baronowski (2011) 32-33.

51 Nep. *Hann.* 13, 3: *Huius belli gesta multi memoriae prodiderunt, sed ex his duo, qui cum eo in castris fuerunt simulque vixerunt, quamdiu fortuna passa est, Silenus et Sosylus Lacedaemonius. Atque hoc Sosylo Hannibal litterarum Graecarum usus est doctore.*

52 Schepens (2013) 404-406, with earlier bibliography. The author rightly underlines Sosylus' emphasis on Greek τήχνη, the real winning force, instead of the traditional Roman *virtus*.

53 Diod. 23, 1, 4. Philinus reports Hiero's accusation against the Romans: they pretended to act according to *fides*, but in reality, this was only a way to cover their real, selfish goals. Polyb. 1, 14-15 censures the historian, together with Fabius Pictor, for his excessively nationalistic and partial reconstruction.

54 Once again, Diod. 23, 2, 1; *Ineditum Vaticanum*, 2.

55 Walbank (1957) 75-76, Cornell (1995) 170-171, Scuderi (2017) 17-19.

56 This tradition is clearly present in Polybius, who builds, in agreement with this Roman self-representation, a praising portrait of the Roman ability to build a fleet from scratch (Polyb. 1, 20-23), utilizing a Punic vessel as a model. This picture has been rightly nuanced and criticized by modern historiography, which showed that the Romans did already have a naval tradition: Harris (2017), Steinby (2007) 13-77, Le Bohec (2003).

from the Punics, for the Carthaginians' own sake. The same considerations appear to be valid also about the Pyrrhic war. As said, also in this case there's a hint of the Greek condescendence towards the supposed lack of military technique by the Romans, this time in the context of encampments;⁵⁷ and there is a parallel tradition according to which the Romans learnt how to pitch their camps exactly from Pyrrhus.⁵⁸

There appears to be, in short, a persistent criticism against the Romans as a barbarian people without any technical tradition in the military field, to which the Romans themselves answer by emphasizing their own ability to learn and surpass their teachers. Unfortunately, very scanty fragments of proper "anti-Roman" historiography survive. These critical positions have to be reconstructed through the lens of Roman authors. It appears, however, that this accusation was quite widespread, at least if we trust Polybius and Dionysius. According to their reconstruction, many Greeks thought it impossible that these barbarians, without any tradition, could defeat Greek and Macedonian (and Carthaginian) armies. Of course, one still has to remember that this represents just one side of the coin: on the other, one must consider at least Polybius (according to whom the Romans don't appear to be "bad" barbarians)⁵⁹ and Dionysius (according to whom they are Greeks) themselves. It is important to note, however, that the Romans took care to answer this criticism, in order to hold their pride.⁶⁰

Roman adaptability: an answer to the Greeks?

If the interpretation of the passages considered above is correct, it is possible to detect a recurrent Roman answer to Greek criticism. This is particularly recognizable, as seen, in the tradition reported by Diodorus and the *Ineditum*

57 Again, Plut. *Pyrrh.* 16, 5, where the king expects the barbarian Romans to be arrayed in disorder.

58 Frontin. *Strat.* 4, 1, 14; cf. Liv. 35, 14, 8 and Amm. 24, 1, 3. Schepens (2000) 354-355 thinks that Pyrrhus' amazement about the Romans' good order found in Plutarch reflects a tradition invented by the Romans to negate the fact that they copied Pyrrhus. As seen, however, the Romans did not normally "cover" their borrowings, and actually probably invented some, which makes this reconstruction unlikely. Although the two traditions (borrowing from Pyrrhus/praising of the Roman order by Pyrrhus, just arrived) are clearly different from each other, they probably come from the same cultural background: that which saw the Romans as always able to copy their enemies, and then get better than them.

59 The issue of Roman "barbarism" in Polybius is currently debated, and too complex to be dealt with here. See Nicholson (2020), with further bibliography, for an outline.

60 Cf., once again, Livy's depiction of the *levissimi ex Graecis* who thought the Greeks (and the Parthians!) superior to the Romans in military matters (Liv. 9, 18, 6).

Vaticanum.⁶¹ Kaeso, rebuking the Carthaginian, makes a list of all the military techniques that the Romans did not master, and which they had to learn from the enemies. Roman pride, as said, emerges from their self-representation as people who were always able to beat their enemies at their own play and defeat them with their own weapons. The dialogue between Kaeso and the Carthaginians lends itself to be considered as a summary of this cultural clash: on the one hand, we have a Hellenistic (from Philinus?) accusation. On the other, the Roman answer. Cornell's suggestion, therefore, appears to be right, and seems to hold true not only for this tradition, but also for some of the other cases considered above: together with Pyrrhus' expectations about the Romans' "barbaric" disorder, we have a tradition according to which they learnt how to pitch their camps from the king himself; together with Sosilus' depreciation of Roman naval technique, we find the Roman tradition about the skill they showed in copying the Carthaginians and building a fleet from scratch. It has to be stressed that the sources on these matters are not abundant and, while allowing to put forward some hypotheses, they don't permit to prove them beyond doubt. As already said, there is a regrettable scarcity of surviving anti-Roman texts, which makes it impossible to reach certain conclusions. Picking up Cornell's hints, however, I hope to have argued in favour of an analysis which goes beyond the more practical aspects (and the acritical repetition) of this Roman self-representation, to consider its wider cultural implications.

A "third view"? Dionysius of Halicarnassus

It is well known that one of the main goals of Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities* was to refute the "Greek lies" about Roman origins, attempting to prove that they were a Greek people, with a strong Greek tradition;⁶² according to him they originally shared many customs and institutions with the Hellenes.⁶³ The author stresses the Roman "openness" to foreign practices and (above all) people, and even praises their benevolent reception of strangers and their inclusion into the community.⁶⁴

61 Especially if Humm (2007) is right in his hypothesis, according to which Caecilius of Kale Akte, the source of both Diodorus and the *Ineditum*, drew upon an anti-Roman tradition, reported by Philinus. Caecilius, in this view, may have added the Roman proud answer to the Carthaginian's threat.

62 The whole first book of the Roman antiquities has to be read in the light of such an attempt: Dionysius tries to show that both of the components of the Roman people (the Latins, or Aborigines, and Aeneas' followers) were Greeks. The author himself makes this goal clear to his readers in the introduction (Dionys. 1, 4). See, on this matter, the still fundamental work by Gabba (1982), in particular pp. 804-807. More recently, and with further bibliography, Peirano (2010) 39-43.

63 For example Dionys. 14, 6, 5-6.

64 On this concept in Dionysius, see Gabba (1996) 173-174; see also Poletti (2021), with cited literature. Delcourt (2005) underlines Dionysius' attempt to depreciate Greek practices in terms of

To completely adopt the Roman view, and to depict them as a people without an initial tradition, however, would have been detrimental to Dionysius' cause: the Romans were Greeks, and they had to share a Greek culture. Unfortunately, despite his rather lengthy battle descriptions, the historian doesn't really deal with military matters in depth.⁶⁵ An already cited passage, however, deserves to be cited as an instance of his thought. After the Aeneas' landing in Latium, king Latinus (a Greek, in Dionysius' view) initially plans on attacking the invaders at once;

ὁρῶν δὲ αὐτοὺς ὠπλισμένους τε ὡς Ἕλληνας καὶ ἐν τάξει εὐκόσμῳ
ἀκαταπλήκτως τὸ δεινὸν ὑπομένοντας, τῆς μὲν αὐτίκα παρακινδυνεύσεως,
ὡς οὐκ ἂν ἐξ ἐφόδου αὐτοὺς ἔτι χειρωσάμενος, ἦν ἔσχε διάνοιαν οἴκοθεν
ὀρμώμενος, ἀποτρέπεται.⁶⁶

Dionysius obviously praises the Romans, but he does so from a different perspective than that of the Romans themselves. Instead of underlining their ability to learn, he treats them as exponents of the best Hellenic tradition. Being Greeks, Aeneas and his men arm and deploy themselves with a perfect τάξις, which concerns Latinus and makes it clear to him, from their very first meeting, that his opponents are Greeks just as he is: with good reason Peirano describes this as a "recognition scene".⁶⁷ The difference between this depiction and the Roman vision described in the previous pages is evident. Unfortunately, Dionysius doesn't expand these suggestions anywhere in his work; this single passage, however, highlights the potential versatility of the cultural motive of Roman adaptability.

Conclusion: the ambivalence of a cultural issue

The theme of Roman adaptability, to sum up, appears to be more important in terms of its cultural versatility, than simply as a testament to a real Roman willingness to change and evolve. Of course, one should not go as far as to argue that this presentation is false, and that all the instances of military innovation on their part should be discarded. The fact should just be pointed out that nothing in the sources appears to support the idea that the Romans were special in this

citizenship as opposed to the Roman openness.

65 Oakley (2019) 155-160, about the schematic nature of Dionysius' presentation of military events.

66 Dionys. 1, 57, 3: "But seeing them armed like Greeks, drawn up in good order and resolutely awaiting the conflict, he gave up the idea of hazarding an immediate engagement, since he saw no probability now of defeating them at the first onset, as he had expected when he set out from home against them" (Cary).

67 Peirano (2010) 50-51.

regard. Most armies in antiquity prove themselves flexible and able to adapt to the enemy's nature.⁶⁸ Therefore, as argued, a cultural approach is the one which is most likely to cast some light on this matter.

It is impossible to decide when, and in what context, this representation was created. Overall, it seems more probable that it was originally intended as a deriding portrait by the Greeks (and maybe by the Carthaginians?), presumably during the first Punic war.⁶⁹ What is important is the fact that the Romans immediately adopted this vision themselves: both the Roman self-presentation and the anti-Roman tradition hold the exceptionality of the legions' adaptability as their central point. In this text, it was argued that this central feature was re-shaped and re-proposed in two different ways: on the one hand, we have the Romans themselves, who said that they lacked a tradition, but were always able to adopt that of the foreigners; on the other, there are hints of a much less favourable vision, which also viewed them as lacking a tradition, but just because they were barbarians without a proper (military) culture. This is probably the reason why the emphasis on Roman adaptability survives almost unchallenged throughout the sources: both the Romans and their critics found that this theme could lend itself to their own propaganda. We should view this *topos* as culturally and morally ambivalent and consider in this light the differences between the sources which presented in this text. The only author who refuses, at least in part, this *topos*, is Dionysius of Halicarnassus: the issue was not "ambivalent enough" to fit his theory according to which the Romans were Greeks. A vision which deprived them of a Greek military identity and tradition was simply not acceptable to the historian. Dionysius, however, is an exception, and Rome's propensity for innovation continued to be otherwise underlined by the whole of the ancient tradition.

68 See once again Sekunda (2001), about the Hellenistic armies, which had traditionally been considered much more "static" than the Roman legions.

69 Once again, the importance of the *Ineditum Vaticanum* has to be pointed out.

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