

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Roman Light Infantry and The Art of Combat

The Nature and Experience of Skirmishing and
Non-Pitched Battle in Roman Warfare
264 BC – AD 235

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Summary

This thesis is an evaluation of Roman light infantry and non-pitched battle combat in the Roman army, from the years 264 BC – AD 235. This study incorporates a thorough etymological assessment of the Latin and Greek vocabulary of light infantry, and how the ancient sources use these terms. Building on this assessment, this thesis then includes a discussion on defining Roman light infantry. From this follows an analysis of the various modes of combat of these troops, including skirmishing, ambushing, small-scale engagements. A ‘face of battle’ approach (after John Keegan) assessing the nature and experience of the various forms of warfare mentioned above is also included.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 LATIN VOCABULARY OF LIGHT INFANTRY	8
ACCENSI.....	8
ANTESIGNANI.....	14
AUXILIA	32
CAETRATI	37
COHORS.....	39
EXPEDITES	40
EXPLORATORES.....	44
EXTRAORDINARI.....	45
FERENTARI.....	48
FUNDITORES	49
IACULATORES.....	51
LANCIARI.....	52
LEVES	54
RORARI	57
SAGITARI	59
VELITES.....	63
3 GREEK VOCABULARY OF LIGHT INFANTRY	69
GENERAL LIGHT INFANTRY	69
ΓΥΜΝΗΣ.....	69
ΕΨΖΩΝΟΣ.....	71
ΚΟΥΦΟΙ	80
ΨΙΛΟΙ	83
JAVELINEERS	90
ΑΚΟΝΤΙΣΤΑΪ.....	90
ΑΚΡΟΒΟΛΟΣ.....	93
ΓΡΟΣΦΟΜΑΧΟΙ.....	96
ΛΟΓΧΟΦΟΡΟΙ	98
ΠΕΛΤΑΣΤΑΪ.....	104
SLINGERS	107

ΛΙΘΟΒΟΛΟΙ.....	107
ΣΦΕΝΔΟΝΗΤΗΣ	109
4 A COMPARISON OF GREEK AND LATIN VOCABULARY FOR LIGHT INFANTRY	111
5 DEFINING LIGHT INFANTRY	128
6 THE TACTICAL ROLE OF LIGHT-ARMED TROOPS	142
TACTICAL ROLE OF LIGHT TROOPS IN THE MANIPULAR LEGION	143
TACTICAL ROLE OF 'LIGHT' INFANTRY IN THE COHORTAL LEGION	157
7 THE NATURE & EXPERIENCE OF SKIRMISHING AND NON-PITCHED BATTLE.....	174
DEFINING SKIRMISHING AND NON-PITCHED BATTLE	178
TYPES OF NON-PITCHED BATTLE.....	180
RHETORIC OF COMBAT.....	181
COMBAT TECHNIQUE.....	187
THE UNIT'S BATTLE.....	200
THE INDIVIDUAL'S BATTLE	225
8 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	242

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Tombstone of Flavius Cordus, from Mainz.	53
Figure 2: Base of column from Mainz depicting a soldier.	54
Figure 3: Fragmentary weapons relief from Perinthus, 1 st century BC.	61
Figure 5: Stele from Demetrias, depicting Chaironides of Crete, end of 3 rd century BC.....	62
Figure 4: Stele from Demetrias, depicting Thersagoras, a Cretan from Polyrrhenia, beginning of 2 nd century BC.	62
Figure 6: Factors involved in making a personal kill	238

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1 Introduction

This thesis is a study of the Roman army's light infantry and the nature of the combat that these types of troops were involved in, from the year 264 BC to AD 235. These dates have been chosen for several reasons. The first is that the timeframe required for a study of Roman light infantry must inherently be broad, due to the relatively little amount of evidence that we have for this portion of the army. Another reason these dates were chosen is that they encompass a period in Roman history during which its military activity was very high. Beginning with the First Punic War in 264 BC, the wars and campaigns that followed this date saw Rome's gradual dominance of the Mediterranean world. As such, the military activity in this period was also increasingly widespread, involving rising numbers of soldiers, up until the disbandment of over 30 legions under Augustus. Thus, this period of intense military activity naturally includes the significant use of light infantry. The final century leading up to the establishment of the Roman Empire saw major organizational changes in the army, including the disappearance of the dedicated light infantry unit known as the *velites*. Nevertheless, light infantry still existed in the Roman army and this thesis assesses this change through the Principate. The *terminus ad quem* for this thesis is the beginning of the so-called 'Crisis of the Third-Century', due to the chaotic nature of the history of this period and the profound changes which the 'Crisis' had on all of the Empire's institutions, and the army in particular.

Within this temporal framework, I have attempted to compile and assess the extant evidence for the Roman light infantry and, from this, derive possibilities for the nature of the combat scenarios they experienced. The thesis begins with a review of our sources' etymological uses of the terms describing these troops. Building on this assessment, I discuss how we might define Roman light infantry. This is followed by an examination of their tactical uses on campaigns and the possible reasons for their wide variety of deployments. Finally, I use all of this information to discuss the nature of the various modes of combat light troops were often involved in. This includes skirmishing, both within and outside the widely assessed theatre of pitched battle but putting a special emphasis on a non-pitched combat.

Light Infantry

A great majority of works in the literature focus on heavy infantry and pitched battles and only a few publications emphasize the importance of the light infantry.¹ Even fewer publications assess non-pitched battle combat and skirmishing, and the dominant role that light infantry played in these situations.² Indeed, a thorough study of the light infantry in the Roman army has not yet been undertaken.³ This is the reason for the present work. Rome's light infantry – and their modes of combat – has long been ignored, silently classified as unimportant, which, like skirmishing, seem to be derived from an apparent prejudice in our sources.⁴ Indeed, Polybius' assertion that the *velites* were selected from the 'youngest and poorest' almost reads as 'least important' – at least it seems to have been interpreted in this way by modern scholars, given the lack of modern scholarship on the subject. Despite this bias, the existence of the lightly armed troops in all armies throughout the history warfare is testament in itself to the integral nature of such troops. Thus, the present work will attempt to elucidate what kind of troops these were and their role in Roman warfare.

In order to understand the role of light infantry better, it is necessary to attempt to define them. Thus, Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis assess the Greek and Latin vocabulary used to describe these troops by our ancient authors.

Vocabulary of Light Infantry

The aim of these chapters is to lay the groundwork for the discussion that defines what the light infantry was. This will include clarifying and discussing the various Greek and Latin terms, uses, organization and equipment of the light infantry. For many of the groups discussed, there are no distinct definitions or descriptions. Therefore, I have attempted to

¹ Some examples of historiography emphasizing the importance of light infantry: Foss 1975, 26; Gilliver, 1996a, *passim*; Rawlings 2007, 86; Trundle 2010, *passim*.

² E.g. Gilliver 2007b, 141-143.

³ There are however, a handful of studies on the *auxilia* of the imperial Roman army, and this division of troops has been described as the light infantry by sources such as Tactius; see n. 145, below.

⁴ E.g. Tac. *Hist.* 2.24; Plut. *Comp. Lys. et Sull.* 4, where in describing the death of the Spartan general Lysander, he says he threw away (παρναλώσας) his life ingloriously, running like a πελταστής (Λύσανδρος δὲ πελταστοῦ καὶ προδρόμου δίκην ἀκλεῶς παρναλώσας ἑαυτόν) (see also chapter 3). It is thus implied that glory was gained in standing your ground when facing death. However, this could be the bias or *topos* of our sources Cf. Van Wees, 2004, 78, 83. Similarly, Gilliver 1996a, 55. For Greek sources overlooking light infantry, and the similar importance of light infantry to Greek armies that their Roman counterparts had, see Trundle 2010, *passim*. That modern historiography does not include an in-depth study of Roman light infantry could be a reflection of the ancient tendency to avoid discussing light infantry in detail, see p. 6, below.

deduce this information by analysing the descriptions of these units in some instances of their usage. The aim of this analysis will be to focus on how the ancient sources discuss tactical manoeuvres, and from this, draw information on the light infantry organization and their equipment. The conclusions drawn will aid us in defining light infantry in a Roman context. Part of this analysis will also include a comparison of the Latin and Greek terminology in Chapter 4 with a view to establishing any similarities between the various definitions. All of these assessments will be drawn together in Chapter 5 in a discussion on defining the light infantry. With these definitions established, an assessment of the tactical roles and then the nature of skirmishing and low-intensity warfare will be included in Chapters 6 and 7.

It is important to remember that, as with most ancient armies, there were few steadfast conventions (if any in some cases) when it comes to the unit size and armament. In the Roman military, there were of course basic standards of armament, if only to create tactical cohesiveness within the formal units.⁵ However, the nature of many light units, especially before the establishment of the standing army, probably allowed for variation in the armament, most of which is difficult to ascertain from our sources. Also, in regards to the organization, it must be remembered that theoretical number strength almost never matched actual unit numbers, which was something that was impossible for any army to maintain at all times, especially while on campaign.⁶ Strategic and tactical circumstances often required flexibility of a campaigning army, which in turn, could demand that unit size be altered, and the Roman army often did this.⁷ That said, the assessments in Chapters 2 and 3 will present evidence on the organization and equipment of the light units by analysing them in the strategic, tactical and philological contexts.

Historiography

The study of the Roman army really involves an exercise in Military Intelligence ... The principal task of Military Intelligence is to discover and assess the strength, Order of Battle, organization, equipment and value for war of an enemy's army.⁸

⁵ For more on the variability in equipment within units, see Burns 2003, 67-70; Gilliver 2007a, *passim* and esp. *op. cit.* nn.11, 12 for further bibliography.

⁶ Cf. Elton 2007, 377 who notes that generalising is necessary to some extent in Roman 'face of battle' studies.

⁷ The cohortal system is a prime example of this, cf. Bell 1965.

⁸ Birley 1988, 3.

Modern Roman military studies in English owe much to Eric Birley and his observation above is particularly significant for this study. The Military Intelligence Birley speaks of has yet to be gathered for the light infantry of the Roman army and their modes of combat. Thus, it is the aim of this thesis to do so.

Much of the older work on the Roman army (especially that coming out of the ‘Durham School’ originated by Birley), has isolated the army from its working context, focusing on the organization and the careers of the soldiers.⁹ As Hanson has observed, many of the standard modern texts on classical armies are general surveys; indeed, the wide general interest in the Roman army has produced just such works on our subject.¹⁰ The more scholarly works on the Roman army include contextual approaches that have contributed to a resurgence in the significance of Roman military history within the field of ancient history and classical studies.¹¹ Phang has recently reviewed these approaches at length, and they include morality of war, cultural ideals, Augustan reforms, imperial military discipline, demography, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, social status and the face of combat.¹² Yet, as James has suggested, Roman military scholarship has had a tendency to shy away from the more violent aspects of the Roman military studies, which is probably partially due to the distaste of the principal theme of bloodshed.¹³ Alternatively, as Lee has pointed out, there is also an implicit psychological dimension inclusive of overtones of subjectivity, which has probably had some part in historians’ avoidance of the subject.¹⁴ The relatively small number of publications that

⁹ Cf. e.g. Watson 1969, Dobson 1978, Maxfield 1981, Mann and Roxan 1988, Davies 1989, Breeze and Dobson 1993; cf. James 2002, 21.

¹⁰ Hanson 2007, 8; general works, e.g. Connolly 1998, Goldsworthy 2003, Gilliver et al. 2005.

¹¹ Gilliver 2007b, 122, v. esp. n. 2; cf. Speidel 1992c, 18-19. Also, post-2005 there is a notable increase in the number of scholarly bibliographic items for Roman military history of the period studied in this thesis. E.g. Lendon 2005; Dominguez Monedero 2005; Kagan 2006; Lendon 2006; Quesada Sanz 2006; Southern 2006; *Cambridge History...Roman Warfare* 2007; *A Companion to the Roman Army* 2007; Gilliver 2007a; Phang 2008; Sage 2008; Dobson 2008; *Waffen in Aktion...ROME* 2010; Koon 2010; Mattern 2010; *A Companion to the Punic Wars* 2011. This resurgence seems to have begun in the mid-1990s; many more bibliographic items could be included here if listed post-1995. Reasons for this resurgence may be tied to the widening gap between the modern age and the World Wars, as they had an ostensibly negative effect on military scholarship, see James 2002, 12-14.

¹² Phang 2011, *passim*; some examples: morality of war: Rosenstein 1990, Gilliver 1996b; cultural ideals: Lendon 2005, Wallace-Hadrill 2008; Augustan reforms: Alston 2007, Gilliver 2007c; discipline: Lendon 2005, Phang 2008; demography: Scheidel 1996, Rosenstein 2004; ethnicity: Speidel 1975, Southern 1989; religion: Speidel 1978b, Southern 2006; gender and sexuality: Phang 2001, Williams 2010; social status: Breeze and Dobson 1993, Bragg et al. 2008; face of combat: Goldsworthy 1996, Sabin 2000. For a general overview of Roman battle historiography, see Sabin 2007, 401.

¹³ James 2002, 1, 12-14; also the individual’s experience is harder to clarify due to lack of evidence, cf. Campbell 1997, 479, and ch. 7, below. However, this ‘shyness’ of bloodshed is something that is less prevalent in scholarship as of late, see n. 9, above.

¹⁴ Lee 1996, 199.

do address the violence involved (often through the ‘face of battle’ approach), commonly focus on the pitched battles and their tactics.¹⁵ As mentioned above, pitched battles were certainly the climax of a campaign, and commonly offered a decisive result in a war. This is probably why our sources focus on them.¹⁶ However, the focus on battle by both ancient and modern authors is, as Elton has noted, misleading.¹⁷ While this focus on pitched battle is a direct result of the emphasis placed on them in ancient historiography, these were probably not the most common forms of combat. It might take years of continuous campaigning before a set-piece battle.¹⁸ Thus, during this time, any combat that may have occurred could have taken the form of skirmishes or more static pitched battle-like combat (only on a smaller scale and more spontaneous), which I have defined below as non-pitched battle.¹⁹ As a result, soldiers on campaign may have engaged in these types of combat more often than pitched battle. Furthermore, due to the spontaneity of these engagements, as well as the fluidity of skirmishing, light infantry was especially relied upon in these situations. So, if skirmishing and non-pitched battle were some of the more common forms of combat, and if light infantry played a significant (if not dominant) role in these situations, we require a thorough study of both light infantry, and their combat roles – particularly as regards skirmishing and non-pitched battle. In this way, we may form a more complete understanding of the Roman army and the way it fought.

The focus on combat in the latter part of this thesis places this work amongst ‘face of battle’ studies.²⁰ Thus, some of the most significant publications in regards to this thesis are works on the face of battle. These include publications by Lee (1996), Goldsworthy (1996), Sabin (2000), Zhmodikov (2000), Kagan (2006) and Koon (2011). A review of this historiography will be included in Chapter 7 on the nature and experience of skirmishing and non-pitched battle combat.

What is Non-Pitched Battle?

...In war nothing is so insignificant as not sometimes to involve serious consequences (Livy 25.18)

¹⁵ E.g. Goldsworthy 1996, Sabin 2000, Zhmodikov 2000, Daly 2002; cf. also Phang 2011, 119-20, esp. nn.82-85.

¹⁶ Cf. James 2002, 1; also Giddens 1985, 2, 18; Fuller 1954.

¹⁷ Elton 2007, 380.

¹⁸ Sabin 2007, 403.

¹⁹ See ‘What is Non-Pitched Battle’, below.

²⁰ Discussed further below, see ‘A Face of Battle Study’, p. 7.

This observation from Livy lends great weight to the importance of this thesis. Ancient narratives and modern scholarship has focused on pitched battles, but these usually occurred when neither side felt at a disadvantage, and so this dependence on a degree of mutual consent meant that it may have taken extended periods of campaigning to engage in such a set-piece combat.²¹ This is particularly true for the imperial period, as James has pointed out,

Full-scale battle was a relatively rare expedient, most routine objectives being achieved by less drastic and expensive methods (although not necessarily less drastic or expensive to its opponents or victims).²²

Nevertheless, the focus on pitched battles in our ancient sources and, as a result, in our modern ones, is a consequence of the Roman view that the pitched battle gave the greatest and most honourable results in warfare.²³ Indeed as Goldsworthy plainly put it, ‘battles are important because they decide things’.²⁴ Thus, despite the fact that our sources tell us of many skirmishes and small-scale engagements that took place during continuous campaigning, there is a significant dearth of a detailed narrative on these events. Consequently, the lack of the scholarly research on these events is a direct result of the way they are presented in the sources.²⁵ This ancient historiographical approach is best summarized by a statement from Tacitus:

...the skirmishers had met in a series of actions, frequent indeed, but not worth relating (Tac. *Hist.* 2.24)

Yet, such ‘actions’ are surely worth relating because in fact, they were probably the most common type of combat a Roman soldier faced on a campaign. This may be justified as follows. During the period under review, there are significant periods where a relatively low level of military activity occurred. As Rich has pointed out, 167-91BC is one of these periods, and as such, it required lower force levels than the preceding period.²⁶ The first and second century AD also saw significantly fewer pitched battles than the two preceding centuries. Nevertheless, Roman military forces were consistently maintained throughout the 500-year period under review. Furthermore, the Roman soldier was constantly trained for

²¹ Sabin 2007, 403. There are no publications on non-pitched battle, although Gilliver 2007b includes a brief discussion of such warfare, see n. 2, above.

²² James 2002, 38.

²³ Gilliver 2007b, 125.

²⁴ Goldsworthy 1996, 3.

²⁵ Cf. Woolf 1993, 186-188 who points out that little is known about these kinds of incidents, the frequency and seriousness of which is under-reported in the literary sources. During the empire, this may have been motivated by imperial pressure or propaganda and the emperor’s desire to save face, *ibid.* 187.

²⁶ Rich 1993, 47-48.

combat, which was likely expected to occur at any given time. This combat may have included ambushes, skirmishes, small-scale operations, and street fighting in siege warfare.²⁷ In this way, the pitched battle was often (but perhaps not always) just the climax of an extensive campaign. The more common types of combat are what we may generally label as a non-pitched battle and this is the most common form of combat that most soldiers would have seen during our period.²⁸ The nature of this combat often precluded traditional heavy infantry tactics and so as mentioned above, light infantry were the dominant type of soldier used in these situations. As a result, because this thesis seeks to understand the nature and experience of non-pitched battle combat and skirmishing, it is likewise necessary to clarify our understanding of the types of troops commonly used in these situations, i.e. the light infantry. Thus, this study of skirmishing and non-pitched battle in Roman warfare is necessarily also a study of Roman light infantry.

A 'Face of Battle' Study

As mentioned above, this thesis also seeks to add to the small corpus of Roman 'face of battle' studies with an assessment of the nature of the combat conducted by the light infantry. These types of studies apply John Keegan's 'Face of Battle' approach to investigate the experience of the ancient combat.²⁹ As a result of this approach, we currently have a much clearer picture of what Roman battle could have looked like. Yet, due to the aforementioned concentration on the legionaries or heavy infantry in our sources, the experience of combat for the light infantry is much more difficult to ascertain. As a result, none of the extant 'face of battle' studies for the Roman army have evaluated this experience for light infantry; this thesis seeks to fill that gap.

As Phang has recently pointed out, reconstructing Roman combat has long been controversial. Much of this controversy has concerned the machine-like discipline and ordered movement that seventeenth to nineteenth century warfare anachronistically imposed on the Roman combat.³⁰ In addition, since we have no eyewitness accounts of the combat for

²⁷ Particularly in provinces like Spain where the period 153-133 BC saw continued fighting.

²⁸ More precise definitions of non-pitched battle and skirmishing are given in chapter 7, where they are essential to the analysis.

²⁹ These studies include: Goldsworthy 1996, Sabin 2000, McCall 2002, Daly 2002, Koon 2011; cf. Keegan 1976. They are reviewed at length in Chapter 7, under 'Historiography', directly preceding my own use of the 'face of battle' approach.

³⁰ Phang 2011, 119-120; cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 283; James 2002, 32, 38.

our period apart from Caesar's commentaries, there is a significant dearth of evidence on the matter. This is a very important point to keep in mind for this thesis; much of the discussion regarding the possibilities of the nature and experience of combat for light infantry is open to interpretation as a result of our lack of evidence.

Despite this, research that humanizes the Roman army is an important step away from the mechanized view that the Roman army scholarship has taken in the past.³¹ As James has effectively put it,

the shift of focus from army-as-institution to soldiers-as-people is ... fundamental for understanding all aspects of the Roman military, [including] our idea of what motivated Roman soldiers to behave as they did ... on the battlefield or in sacking cities. It is a key part of widening the spectrum of research towards a more truly holistic study of the military aspect of Roman civilization.³²

This thesis seeks to be a holistic study of the Roman light infantry. All *milites* in the Roman army were recruited as combatants. Their primary purpose was to engage in combat, in whatever way best suited the tactical exigency. Roman light infantry were an integral part of this combative force, and to understand them properly, we must understand what kind of soldiers they were and how they contributed to the military effort of the army.

³¹ Works emphasizing a mechanized view: e.g. Liddell Hart 1926, Fuller 1954, Luttwak 1976, Webster 1985, Birley 1988, Peddie 1994.

³² James 2002, 44.

2 Latin Vocabulary of Light Infantry

In order to understand both the tactical role of light-armed troops and the experience of low-intensity combat better, it is necessary to discuss the varieties of light infantry units. A philological assessment of the ancient terms for these units, as well as whatever information of their organization, equipment and role we might garner from the corresponding evidence, should provide the basis from which to analyze their experience during combat. The following chapters will assess both the Latin and Greek terms associated with light infantry. The major issue with such an undertaking is the lack of source material. Many of the terms associated with light infantry appear rarely in the literary sources, and even more rarely in epigraphic evidence. Although some terms appear more frequently, the sources often have little to offer as far as clarifying any details of the type of contingent mentioned. This is one of the major reasons that a thorough assessment of light infantry has yet to appear in modern historiography.

Despite these issues, below I have attempted the first comprehensive list of terminology for light infantry, along with a description of their philological and tactical uses. This chapter includes Latin terms in alphabetical order, while the following chapter will cover Greek terms. In each section, I will also note when the ‘earliest historiographical use’ occurs. This refers to the earliest usage of the term (in the language under discussion) in reference to the Roman army, in terms of the time of writing, rather than the date of the historical circumstances of the events being written about in the source.

*Accensi*³³

These men appear as a formal part of the early manipular army in Livy, with additional references in Varro, Vegetius and Festus. Varro’s reference to *accensos* in his discussion of the office of the *magister equitum* at 5.14 of *De Lingua Latina* is the earliest historical usage of the term. Varro does not discuss *accensos* at this point in his work, and simply says that

³³ Since this term is often used to denote any sort of attendant, and as a verb, denoting something being kindled or set alight, the proceeding assessment only includes instances where the term is used as a noun in a military context to specifically denote personnel, unless otherwise stated.

the *magister equitum* has power over these and the cavalry. Significantly, *accensi* are not mentioned in any other sources, and they only appear as part of the army in three places in Livy, once in Vegetius, in three chapters in Varro and four times in Festus.³⁴ This scarcity of references to these men compared the other units of the manipular army (i.e. *hastati*, *principes*, *triarii*, and *velites*) is significant because I would argue that it is a strong indicator of some misinterpretation of their position or role, particularly on Livy's behalf. As far as their position is concerned, Livy places them at the back of the legion with the *rorarii* and the *triarii*. However, they are not mentioned in Polybius' description of the manipular army.³⁵ Oakley has satisfactorily dealt with this issue as follows: that Livy mentions them as the fifth line of the legion (i.e. being placed in the rear after the *principes*, *hastati*, *triarii* and *rorarii*), is probably the result of 'a confused attempt to incorporate the five Servian classes into the manipular army'.³⁶ This also explains why they are not mentioned by Polybius: they simply were not part of the fighting force, which is a notion we shall return to shortly. That they are connected with the *rorarii* (in Varro as well at *Ling.* 7.58), causes the perception that they are also light-armed troops, however, as Oakley points out, the *rorarii* have also been misplaced and misunderstood by Livy, and may have simply been an earlier form of *velites*.³⁷ Whether the *accensi* are at all classifiable as light troops then, has come into question, and I will attempt to clarify their position here.

Much of modern scholarship has accepted the *accensi* as some sort of light infantry unit, or as assistants to their heavy infantry comrades.³⁸ A closer investigation of our sources reveals that the latter is probably more realistic. Indeed, following Mommsen, Cary equates them to *apparitores* or public servants who attended Roman magistrates.³⁹ Nevertheless, there are a number of possibilities regarding the military function of the *accensi* that are worth discussing. Yet, as we will see, several of these possibilities are highly unlikely.

³⁴ Livy 1.43, 8.8, 8.10; Veg. *Mil.* 2.19; Varro *Ling.* 5.14, 6.9, 7.3; Festus 13.23 L, 17 L, 216.23 L, 506.26 L.

³⁵ I.e. they are not mentioned as a regular part of the legion like the γροσφομάχοι (understood to mean *velites*). This also means that unlike Livy they are not mentioned as having a place behind the *triarii*. If they are described as something other than *accensi*, such as ψίλος or εὐζωνος, it would be impossible to know if Polybius is referring to a unit that may be equated to *accensi*.

³⁶ Oakley 1998, 472ff. for similar views from earlier scholarship.

³⁷ Oakley 1998, 469-471; for more on this see 'Rorarii', below.

³⁸ E.g. Smith et al 1891, 502; Mommsen *Staatsrecht* 3.282; Kromayer & Veith 1928, 268; Ogilvie 1965, 170; Samuels 1990, 12-13; Keppie 1998, 216; Roth 1999, 92; Sage 2008, 73; cf. the Lewis & Short definition: 'a kind of reserve troops who followed the army as supernumeraries'.

³⁹ Cary et al. 1949, 2, 72, cf. Mommsen *Röm. Staatsr.* i³.332 ff.

As mentioned above, the *accensi* are some of the least-mentioned Roman light infantry units with Varro's *De Lingua Latina* having the most references to them. In the Loeb edition (translated by Roland G. Kent), Kent translates the term as 'assistant' seven times,⁴⁰ none of which actually refer specifically to a military unit, nor to men engaged in combat. Rather, these references are to men assisting the consul in various military-related actions such as calling the citizens in Rome to the consul (who then orders a centuriate assembly – 6.9.88), calling soldiers in camp to prepare for battle (6.9.89), or calling the time of day in the camp (6.9.89, 95).⁴¹ Vegetius describes similar functions for the *accensi* (*Veg. Mil.* 2.19), as does most modern scholarship.⁴² As this is the most thorough discussion of the term by any of our sources, it is significant to note that they are presented here as assistants rather than combatants.

Varro associates these assistants with heralds (*praecones*) insofar as they “gave the call [as mentioned above] just like a herald [*praeco*]” (6.9.89).⁴³ It is probably unlikely that *accensi* functioned as heralds, but there are a few arguments that can tentatively be made in favour of this argument. If we accept that *accensi* performed similar tasks to heralds, and, as the sources have suggested, are interchangeable in their function, then a tentative implication could be that *accensi* transmitted top-level battlefield commands – that is, from the commander – e.g. Livy 5.21, 9.12 (where heralds perform this task).⁴⁴ These instances occur during sieges (thus, large-scale non-pitched battle), and barring a lack of explicit evidence, it could be argued that *accensi* were used in larger-scale, low-intensity engagements, such as pre-pitched-battle skirmishing for the purpose of transmitting strategic commands between commanders and skirmishing combatants.⁴⁵ Also, another interpretation for *accensi* is

⁴⁰ Loeb 1989.

⁴¹ The latter reference is also translated as 'aide' and '*accensus*' in the same passages. The cases used in all of these passages are nominative singular, dative singular, and accusative singular: *accensus*, *accenso*, *accensum*.

⁴² *Op cit.*: *Ad obsequia tamen iudicium uel tribunorum nec non etiam principalium deputabantur milites, qui uocabantur accensi, hoc est postea additi, quam fuisset legio complet.* For modern scholarship, see note 38.

⁴³ c.f. Varro *Ling.* 6.9.95; Frontin. *Aq.* 100: these passages suggest *accensi* and *praecones* have interchangeable roles; see also Livy 6.3, 29.27; Caes. *BG* 5.51 for heralds (*praecones*) acting as assistants to the commander; for heralds calling to soldiers in camp, see Livy 1.28. Many of the instances of *praeco* in Livy have a herald carrying out orders of the commander-in-chief (e.g. consul, dictator, etc.), thus similar to the tasks assigned to *accensi* described above.

⁴⁴ 5.21: *deinde multa iam edita caede senescit pugna, et dictator praecones edicere iubet ut ab inermi abstineatur*; 9.12: *quod uocem audiri praekonis passi sunt incolumem abiturum qui arma posuisset.* [my emphases]. However, for the likelihood of this possibility, see n. 45, below.

⁴⁵ Although this is impossible to argue with any kind of certainty. Also, even though Livy uses *praeco* to describe the heralds in the examples, it must be remembered that Livy's method and thus military terminology has been criticised by modern scholarship, e.g. see Ogilvie 1965, 5-17; Oakley 1998, 452; Therefore, it could also be argued that Livy has used *praeco* instead of *accensi*. When considering the argument that *accensi* may

‘supernumeraries’: a term that comes up in Livy’s description of the Servian class system, where they were registered in the army as being a part of this group, which also included cavalry, engineers and musicians. These units all have vital functions in the army, and since it is known that musicians had a role in transmitting commands, it is perhaps worth noting the close association that the *accensi* have to them in Livy’s description. Therefore, this reference then supports the idea that they may have had some role in the transmission of commands. Furthermore, this suggestion does not ignore the etymology of *accensus*: it does mean ‘to attend to’; Cato uses it in this way,⁴⁶ and yet being an attendant could possibly include helping officers or the commander to transmit commands.⁴⁷ Light armament would obviously best serve someone in that position, as it provided a high degree of manoeuvrability, thus allowing them to cover distances quickly. The issue with this possibility lies in their status: if they were just servants, they would not have had to take the military oath, and therefore would not be allowed to engage in combat. As such, they probably would not have been relied upon for transmitting important battlefield commands, since such messengers would likely be expected to defend themselves and reliably deliver commands in the face of battle.⁴⁸

Another speculative hypothesis that should be discussed comes up through Festus’ commentary. At 216.23 L he claims that the *optio* was originally known as an *accensus*, since that was his role, i.e. attending to/assisting the centurion. One possibility is that these *optiones* could have been the *accensi*, particularly if we incorporate Livy’s Servian class system, in this way, their numbers match perfectly to the number of centuries in a legion, as follows. In Livy’s description of the Servian system, the *accensi* are noted as part of the fifth (and lowest) property class of recruits, and that they totalled one century, or 60 men and there are 60 centuries per legion (Livy 1.43). If we understand *accensi* to be an interchangeable term with *optiones*, then there are 60 *optiones* per legion, or one *optio* for

be used as heralds transmitting commands, it is important to elucidate exactly what type of commands this may have entailed, especially because of the low/rank-less status of the *accensi*.

⁴⁶ See Varro *Ling.* 7.3.58.

⁴⁷ Cf. Jos. *BJ* 6.416 where Titus has one of his freemen decide prisoners’ fates; while this is not the transmission of commands, it is a similarly highly responsible task for an attendant.

⁴⁸ This also raises the question of how they could even assist soldiers if they were not meant to fight, but as mentioned in note 50, the only feasible time for such assistance would be during lulls in the fighting.

each centurion.⁴⁹ Furthermore, *optiones* assisted their centurion from the back, and as for the question regarding how they did so, we need only to look to the suggestion already made regarding the transmission of commands. However, there is some significant confusion in Festus regarding these terms, which likewise casts serious doubts on any connection between *optiones* and *accensi*. Festus notes that the *accensi* are said to have replaced dead soldiers (13.23.L; 17 L; cf. 506.26 L). The terms used in these passages to indicate the role that *accensi* played are *adscribebantur*, *subrogabantur*, and *substituiebantur*. All of these terms can be translated as variations on ‘to substitute’, ‘to elect’, ‘to nominate’, ‘to appoint’, but their present and imperfect passive forms suggest that they are in fact doing the substitution, rather than for example, as *optiones*, simply directing soldiers to fill the places of dead men. Filling in the vital gaps in the line by directing soldiers into said places seems to be a reasonable role for the centurion’s assistant (as it was something that the centurion could not turn his attention to, fighting at the front). Yet, if we are to understand these men to be low ranking and light-armed as Livy suggests, then these men taking the place of dead men (who were presumably heavily armed) seems highly unlikely. Furthermore, as there were presumably only 60 *accensi* in a Roman legion, their number seems somewhat small relative to the rest of the infantry to replace dead men (17 L: ‘*in locum mortuorum militum subito subrogabantur*’; 506.26 L: ‘*quique in mortuorum militum loco substituiebantur*’) with the intention of maintaining a solid fighting line. Due to these inconsistencies, we must conclude that there is some sort of misinterpretation of the original manuscript: e.g. it was not the *accensi* doing the replacing (as the passive verbs suggest), but rather they could have been assisting in this process of replacing troops by removing dead bodies or helping the wounded from the field. Whether the *accensi* were the soldiers specifically detailed to this task is impossible to ascertain from our sources, and so the suggestion remains speculative.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this role would better coincide with Livy’s description of them as *minimae fiduciae manum* (8.8). With this interpretation, Festus’ reference to Cato’s description of them: *qui tela ac potiones militibus proeliantibus ministrabant*, also makes more sense

⁴⁹ However, in Livy 8.8.8 there are apparently 900 *accensi*, which would void this argument, however, the passage is notorious for its ambiguity and uncertainty, and so it is unlikely that the *accensi* were a regular part of the fighting force with the *triarii*. cf. Oakley 1998, 471-472.

⁵⁰ If they were indeed charged with removing dead bodies and/or helping the wounded from the field, the only time during a battle that this would be feasible would be during lulls in combat. This subject in itself is poorly documented in the sources, which have a tendency towards formulaic battle descriptions that overlook such (often) inconsequential details. For more on lulls, see Sabin 2000; Zhmodikov 2000, 72; Goldsworthy 2000, 209; Anders, unpublished Cardiff University MA dissertation, 2007.

(although he adds that Cato referred to them as *ferentarii* – 506.26 L).⁵¹ Indeed, I would suggest that especially considering Cato’s description, the *accensi* seem to be best classified as ‘water-boy’ type assistants.

In any case, Festus’ descriptions certainly confirm the light-armament of this group, and its likely association with *ferentarii*.⁵² The few mentions of *ferentarii* in the sources confirm their similarity in armament to the *accensi*.⁵³ In light of this evidence, Livy’s claims in 8.8 that they were part of the main force of troops, or that they were mistaken for *triarii* in 8.10, must be dismissed as a mistake attributable to Livy’s own lack of understanding or that of his source, which resulted in a seemingly artificial fulfilment of the fifth class of the Servian army.⁵⁴ Even if we accept that there were more than the 60 *accensi* that Livy suggests at first, this would not affect the idea that they were some sort of light-armed servant, as Rawlings suggests.⁵⁵

We must conclude then that the most appealing interpretation of the *accensi* is that they were lightly armed assistants, not recruited as regular infantry, but rather as ‘combat assistants’, armed lightly perhaps to defend themselves if at all necessary, or just simply as a safety precaution due to the risk of coming in close proximity of the fighting.⁵⁶ As servants, they would not have combatant status (having not taken the military oath), and thus would not engage in the *mêlée*.⁵⁷ Further, since the sources clearly identify them as helping the main force in some way, and I would suggest that we conceive of them as those who might bring water or other critical supplies (e.g. spare weapons, medicinal goods such as bandages) to the front during lulls in combat. Once they took leave from the front, another tentative possibility might be that they could assist the wounded off the field, or help remove dead bodies. Since the little information that our sources have to offer have them fit best in the role of non-combatative servants, we cannot classify them as traditional light infantry.

⁵¹ For ‘*ferentarii*’ see the discussion below, p. 48.

⁵² Paul. Fest. 13.23 L, 506.26 L; cf. Oakley 1998, 471.

⁵³ See p. 47; cf. Sall. *Cat.* 60.2; Tac. *Ann.* 12.35; Varro *Ling.* 7.3.57; also Smith 1891, 502.

⁵⁴ See Oakley 1998, 472; Sage 2008, 73, also n. 45 above.

⁵⁵ Rawlings 2007, 56, suggests they could have originally been attendants to the hoplites in Rome’s pre-manipular army, ‘analogous to the servants who carried the equipment of Greek infantrymen on campaign and who might have acted as light armed troops during combat.’

⁵⁶ Sabin 2000 argues for a ‘default state’ of battle where the two fighting lines are engaged in missile combat, rather than hand-to-hand *mêlée* as the regular state of the battle, where the latter is a rarity. Zhmodikov 2000 argues along similar lines. Such cases would also necessitate some form of protection even for the servants helping the soldiers. Cf. Josephus’ reference to the training of the servants, *BJ* 3.69, cf. also Speidel 1989, 244.

⁵⁷ For possible military roles of servants, see Speidel 1989, 242-245.

Antesignani

Our earliest historical usage of this term comes from Caesar in his work *Bellum Civile*, although Livy refers to them as being part of the legion in the mid-Republic.⁵⁸ As with many of the contingents under discussion here, the lack of evidence prevents us from being able to define these troops categorically. Furthermore, the only conclusion that has generally been agreed upon in scholarship is that the *antesignani* were troops that fought in advance of, or in the front ranks of the legion.⁵⁹ Parker gives the most extensive scholarly discussion of the *antesignani* to date, but our inability to define *antesignani* categorically indicates that the term must be reviewed.⁶⁰

Lewis and Short define *antesignani* as ‘a chosen band of Roman soldiers who fought before the standards, and served for their defence’. This is certainly a good starting point for this contingent of soldiers; however, the definition also presents several issues. To begin with, which standards these men were in front of must be considered. The second, perhaps less obvious issue, is that the definition does not specify period relevance, which as it happens, is vital to the discussion of *antesignani*.

As with identifying any ill-defined term, a philological assessment of the name of the contingent must be undertaken as the primary source for clues. The aforementioned scholarship has repeatedly explained the simple fact that *antesignani* means ‘before the standards’. However, as alluded to above, this brings into question what standards are being referred to, as well as the position of said standards in the army. Because our references to *antesignani* range in our sources from the mid-Republic to the late empire, we must also take into account any changing nature of the *signa* referred to in the term. In light of this, it is

⁵⁸ His earliest reference to *antesignani* occurs at 9.39, in the wars against the Etruscans under the consul Marcus Rutilus (310 BC), although this could be an anachronistic use of terminology (whereas Caesar is referring to troops in his own period). Furthermore, Livy’s usage of the term does not necessarily refer to the same troops as Caesar’s usage of the term does. Livy’s usage and understanding of the term is discussed below (pp. 15ff.), and a discussion of Caesar’s usage follows this.

⁵⁹ E.g. Smith 1891, 502; Le Bohec 1989, 188; Carter 1993, 198; Goldsworthy 1996, 18 esp. n. 25; Oakley 1998, 510; Gilliver 1999, 111.

⁶⁰ Parker 1928, 36-41.

worth remembering the Roman tendency to be conservative with military terms;⁶¹ we will return to such uses of *antesignani*, later.

Due to the changes from manipular organization to cohortal organization in the Roman army's structure, older scholarship tends to take the view that Livy's and Caesar's *antesignani* differ significantly from each other. The general understanding of this scholarship is that Livy used the term simply to refer to the *hastati*.⁶² Indeed, it is only Livy and Caesar who provide us with multiple mentions of the soldiers in battle, and along with a few references in Frontinus and Vegetius, it seems we could have more than one definition of this group.⁶³

Kromayer and Veith believed that Livy's *antesignani* were actually the *hastati*, and some subsequent research on the subject has followed suit.⁶⁴ While I would suggest our evidence indicates a difference between Livy's *antesignani* and later contingents with the same name, I intend to re-evaluate the evidence on which the equivalence of *hastati* and *antesignani* is based and suggest an alternative identification for the *antesignani*.⁶⁵ In light of this, we should examine the evidence on which this conjecture is based.

Kromayer and Veith based their understanding that the *antesignani* were actually the *hastati* on several of Livy's passages (9.39, 22.5) and Frontinus at 2.3.17.

Livy 9.39.7 states

There was no giving of ground anywhere; as the *antesignani* fell, and so as not to lay bare the defence of the standards, those in the second line became the first.⁶⁶

For Kromayer and Veith, the debate revolves around what is meant by the 'second' and 'first line' (*fit ex secunda prima acies*), and the *signa* in *antesignani*. To them, the *signa* were the legionary standards mentioned by Pliny (*HN* 10.4.16), since they seem to have had a

⁶¹ An example of this is Caesar's command '*manipulos laxare*' (*BG* 2.25): where he refers to the (non-existent) maniples in his cohortal army, Gilliver 1993, 31. See also Caes. *BG* 6.34, 6.40; Tac. *Ann.* 1.21, 1.34, 2.55; *Agr.* 28; *Hist.* 1.57, 3.81, 4.77.

⁶² Cf. Smith 1891, 502; Kromayer & Veith 1928, 407-9; Parker 1928, 37. Lendon 2005, 223 also makes this assumption based on the older scholarship.

⁶³ Front. *Strat.* 2.3.17; Veg. *Mil.* 2.2, 2.7, 2.16.

⁶⁴ See n. 62.

⁶⁵ Any dispute with this specific argument from Kromayer & Veith has not been published thus far.

⁶⁶ Translation is my own, thus: '*Nihil ab ulla parte movetur fugae, cadunt antesignani et ne nudentur propugnatoribus signa, fit ex secunda prima acies.*'

‘Palladial-character for the entire army.’⁶⁷ Because of this, they conclude that these *signa* must have been placed in the gap between the *hastati* and the *principes*, where they would have been safer than in the front with the tactical *signa*, that is, the standards of each manipule held in the front lines and used for combat manoeuvre. I would argue that Livy’s description above, does not suggest in any way that the *antesignani* mentioned in the passage were all of the *hastati*, and in fact the *hastati* are not mentioned at all in the entire chapter. Rather, as Oakley points out, Livy probably uses *antesignani* to mean the front lines of actual combat (i.e. the one or two lateral files of men engaged in hand-to-hand fighting at the front of the *acies*). He goes on to say that while Livy regularly equates *antesignani* to *prima acies*, which normally refers to the *hastati*, the *signa* referenced by the term *antesignani* are those immediately behind the fighting lines, or in other words, the tactical manipular standards.⁶⁸ I would agree that 9.39 seems to support the image of the front rank of soldiers (i.e. perhaps one or two lines deep) falling and being replaced immediately by the line of soldiers behind them. Thus, if in this instance these men were *hastati*, the passage should be taken to mean that those *hastati* who fell, were replaced by the *hastati* behind them.⁶⁹

I would argue Livy’s reference to *antesignani* in 22.5 supports this view, again in contrast to Kromayer and Veith’s opinion. It reads:

And renewed fighting came forth, not the well-ordered kind by means of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*, nor that with the *antesignani* in front of the standards, and the rest of the fighting lines behind the standards, nor with each soldier in the legion in either his cohort or manipule.⁷⁰

The discussion here revolves around a careful analysis of the Latin, so I will include it here:

et noua de integro exorta pugna est, non illa ordinata per principes hastatosque ac triarios nec ut pro signis antesignani, post signa alia pugnaret acies nec ut in sua legione miles aut cohorte aut manipulo esset

The key line here for our purposes is arguably ‘*nec ut pro signis antesignani, post signa alia pugnaret acies*’. Kromayer and Veith understood ‘*acies*’ to mean the fighting lines in a *triplex acies*, that is, the *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii* mentioned in the passage. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Livy consistently uses *prima acies* to refer to the *hastati*, so for

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*: „signa“ ausgesprochenen Palladial-charakter, und zwar für das ganze Heer.

⁶⁸ Oakley 1998, 510.

⁶⁹ This interpretation also means that *principes* or even *triarii* fighting in front of their manipular standards were considered *antesignani*, this is discussed further below.

⁷⁰ Translation is my own.

Kromayer and Veith, ‘*alia...acies*’ refers to the *principes* and *triarii*. In that way, the ‘*signa*’ in the passage conform to their view of the normal location of the legionary standards in pitched battle.⁷¹ However, I would argue that the *nec ut...nec ut* construction marks a balanced pair of thoughts signifying a separate notion from the three units of the *triplex acies* mentioned before this clause. Thus, the passage gives a sense of two separate but related thoughts; the first is that there was no proper formation of the *triplex acies*. I would interpret the second thought as: (regardless of the fact that there was no *triplex acies* to speak of), even the standards within each tactical unit were not doing their job of organizing unit structure and movement, including having the *antesignani* in front of said standards. So, since 22.5 discusses the chaos of the ambush at Trasimene, the image Livy presents is one where fighting is going on everywhere and from every side, rather than only in front of the manipular standards, as would have been usual. Accordingly, this interpretation is that the *antesignani* were those men fighting in front of the manipular standards within each unit (whether it be the *hastati*, *principes*, or *triarii*), while the rest of the men behind the standards do not engage in combat. In this way, any man who engaged in hand-to-hand combat was considered an *antesignanus* for the period that he was fighting the enemy. That this is an acceptable interpretation of Livy’s definition of *antesignani* and a suitable invalidation of Kromayer and Veith’s view, will be shown below with a further assessment of Livy’s passages.

First, Kromayer and Veith’s use of Frontinus should be addressed. At 2.3.17, Frontinus recounts Sulla’s tactics at Chaeronea:

[Sulla] arranged a triple line of infantry, leaving intervals through which to send, according to need, the light-armed troops and the cavalry, which he placed in the rear. He then commanded the *postsignani*, who were in the second line (*acies*), to drive firmly into the ground large numbers stakes set close together, and as the chariots drew near, he withdrew the line of *antesignani* within these stakes.⁷²

Again the ‘*acies*’ here suggests the same notion for Kromayer and Veith as it did above. Yet, once more, the Kromayer and Veith’s identification seems to be problematic here. The only way that this tactic could function efficiently would be if the *acies* was quite thin (and thus

⁷¹ Kromayer & Veith 1928, 407. NB. Livy 22.5 describes the ambush at Lake Trasimene, and so for Kromayer and Veith, Livy is emphasizing the placement of the standards in a regular pitched battle with a *triplex acies*.

⁷² ‘*Triplicem deinde peditum aciem ordinavit relictis intervallis, per quae levem armaturam et equitem, quem in novissimo conlocaverat, cum res exegisset, emitteret. Tum postsignanis qui in secunda acie erant imperavit, ut densos numerososque palos firme in terram defigerent, intraque eos appropinquantibus quadrigis antesignanorum aciem recepit.*’

long as well). Therefore, it seems much more realistic to have a thin line of men (i.e. a few ranks) standing in front of the standards to retreat just a few feet behind them, moments before the chariots reached them, in order to catch their enemy in their trap of stakes. If Sulla had indeed formed his entire *acies* of *hastati* quite thinly, then as Kromayer and Veith suggest, the *hastati* are the *antesignani*. On the other hand, if he formed the *acies* more deeply, there probably could still only be a few ranks functioning as the *antesignani* in this instance for the tactic to function efficiently. In this case, the *antesignani* are still (as in Livy above) the men standing in front of the manipular standards, ready to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. This should have been a usual sight to the enemy. In this way, the trickery of the stratagem is clear: the enemy sees a normal formation, with *antesignani* ready to engage them, unaware that just a few feet behind those *antesignani* lay stakes. The importance of this passage lies in the fact that it emphasizes that any man in front of the manipular standards could be considered an *antesignanus*, regardless of the formation of the *acies*.⁷³

In summary, I would argue that Kromayer and Veith's view that the *antesignani* were simply the *hastati* is a misinterpretation of the ancient sources. Furthermore, the analysis above suggests a possible interpretation of what *signa* Livy is referring to in his use of the word *antesignani*. The conclusion that they were tactical *signa* at the front of the maniples seems to me to be a good possibility. In contrast, Kromayer and Veith's understanding that these *signa* were the mid-Republican legionary standards described by Pliny is problematic.

Nevertheless, Kromayer and Veith were not the only scholars to have this understanding of *antesignani* in Livy. Parker, who, as mentioned above, gives quite a thorough discussion on the topic, makes a similar claim, citing Livy at 9.39 as well, but also 8.11 as an example. The passage reads as follows:

the whole army was butchered, the *hastati* and *principes* cut to pieces; slaughter occurred both in front of the standards [*ante signa*] and behind the standards; the *triarii* finally saved the situation⁷⁴

⁷³ I.e. Part or all of the *hastati*, depending on the formation, could be considered *antesignani*. If it were all, then they are likely not only in front of the manipular standards, but also the legionary standards. The problem with this passage is the fact that *acies* could vary between battles, and so it is of course impossible to know how deeply (or thinly) Sulla formed his lines at Chaeronea. Furthermore, we cannot be certain if this legion is a cohortal or manipular one.

⁷⁴ Translation is my own: '*trucidatum exercitum omnem, caesos hastatos principesque, stragem et ante signa et post signa factam; triarios postremo rem restituisse*'.

The first point that should be made here is that the passage does not include the term *antesignani*, and as such is not necessarily a useful reference in analysing this corps of men.⁷⁵ That said, Parker's comprehension of this passage is that Livy is making a literary association: *hastati* and *principes* compared to *ante signa* and *post signa*. The understanding is that the *signa* referred to here are the legionary standards mentioned by Pliny (the five animal standards), and that the *hastati* stand before these standards and the *principes* behind these standards; thus making the *hastati* the *antesignani*.⁷⁶ Thus, with both of the units *ante* and *post signa* destroyed, the *triarii* remained to save the situation.

Yet, this interpretation means Livy is being tautological: if *hastati* are understood to be those men *ante signa*, and the *principes* are understood to be those men *post signa*, then saying that the *hastati* and *principes* were cut to pieces, and then saying that slaughter occurred *ante signa* and *post signa* is redundant. As such, we should read the statement regarding the entire units of *hastati* and *principes* as separate from the statement regarding the standards.⁷⁷ Accordingly, a better explanation of the passage is that Livy is simply stressing the seriousness of the situation.⁷⁸ Also, Livy could be pointing out the contrast to a normal battle situation (as mentioned above): instead of combat and casualties occurring in front the manipular standards, he is stressing the massacre of the battle; slaughter occurred everywhere. Indeed, in reading this short phrase, '*stragem et ante signa et post signa factam*' as separate from the preceding one regarding *hastati* and *principes*, Livy does not specify what or who is in front or behind the standards. He does not say that entire units or an entire *acies* of a *triplex acies* standing in front or behind the standards was destroyed. Rather he simply states that 'slaughter occurred', again emphasizing the butchery of the battle. Furthermore, there is no evidence in our sources to indicate that the legionary standards (to which both Parker and Oakley think Livy is referring to) are placed in between units. So, I would argue that it is incorrect to understand '*ante signa*' as a reference to both legionary standards, and to their position between units. Consequently, allowing for the interpretation that the *antesignani* were always and only the *hastati* is precarious.

⁷⁵ Cf. e.g. Livy's use of the two words (*ante signa*) at 21.55 as well.

⁷⁶ It is perhaps worth noting here that Oakley 1998, 509, has also understood Livy's reference to *signa* in this passage to mean the legionary standards although he does not come to the same conclusion as Parker does regarding *antesignani* despite this understanding.

⁷⁷ Other instances in Livy that seem tautological may be explained as a copyists error, e.g. 10.29.11 n. 1 in Roberts' translation.

⁷⁸ I owe these insights to K. Gilliver, who pointed it out in pers. comm. 6/08/2009.

From the above analyses of Livy, the conclusion is that for him, *antesignani* refer to the front lines of combat. Oakley also argues that the word *signa* within *antesignani* must be a reference to the tactical manipular standards and that these standards must have had their place directly behind the front lines of combat.⁷⁹ Indeed, a passing reference to a *pullarius* being placed amongst the *prima signa* (i.e. the foremost standards) and then falling *ante signa* due to an enemy javelin (10.40.12-14) further emphasizes this point.⁸⁰ As we have seen above, the *antesignani* could be any number of men, from any of the *acies*, fighting in front of the manipular standards. The term is not pre-designated to any man or men in particular, nor is it a title that a soldier may hold, as they did in later periods.⁸¹ Put simply, any man who ended up at the front, whether by choice or by force, was part of the *antesignani*.⁸² This argument also means that even when *triarii* reached the front, those men in front of the standards from the *triarii* could also be considered *antesignani*. So for Livy, any men who were actually engaged in hand-to-hand combat during a ‘controlled’ pitched battle⁸³ and thus stood before their manipular standards, were considered the *antesignani*.⁸⁴ As such, the Livian definition does not qualify as a description of a distinct corps of men, and as will be shown, this denotes a significant difference in usage with Caesar, despite their being roughly contemporary. We will return to this contrast and compare it in further detail below.

The question remains for the present assessment whether *antesignani* might be classed as light infantry. It is clear from the above conclusion that since any infantryman, whether from the *hastati*, *principes*, or *triarii*, could at some point in a pitched battle fight as an *antesignanus*, Livy’s *antesignani* cannot be classified as light infantry.

⁷⁹ Parker 1928, 38 (see esp. for why tactical standards must be near the front of the fighting manipule); Oakley 1998, 510 (includes further Livy references).

⁸⁰ A *pullarius* is the keeper of the sacred chickens in the army; he is placed in the front lines as punishment in this incident.

⁸¹ As seen on tombstones, see p. 27, below. *Antesignanus* being a pre-designated term or title is also discussed below.

⁸² Although ending up there by choice is more probable.

⁸³ That is, tactically ‘controlled’, as opposed to pitched-battles that turned into uncontrolled massacres where the tactical standards were no longer functioning due to the mass engagement on all or most sides of a unit (e.g. Livy 8.11).

⁸⁴ Cf. Livy 30.33 at Zama where the *antesignani* had to leave lanes for the elephants to run through, the *velites* were placed in between these positions (at the head of the lanes): ‘*vias patentes inter manipulos antesignanorum velitibus...complevit*’, again emphasizing the forward positions of the *antesignani*.

Moving on to the next period in which the term is encountered, Caesar's *antesignani* are perhaps the most promising candidates for light troops at first glance. With additional evidence from Cicero and Varro, this period provides the most substantial data on this group.

Perhaps one of the first issues to make note of is the etymological understanding of the term for this period, and how it differs from the Livian use of the term. Unlike the suggestions from the older scholars above, modern historians understand the term to mean before the *tactical* standards, and thus have no reason to equate the corps with an entire unit such as a cohort (in the way that older scholarship equated the Livian use of the term with all the *hastati* for example). So, like the conclusion reached above, the *antesignani* here are also men standing at the front of the fighting lines, only at this time, the men behind them are organized into cohorts, rather than maniples.

Parker argues that under Caesar, the *antesignani* were no longer simply any first line of troops engaged in combat, but a specialised unit that occasionally operated at the front lines.⁸⁵ His reasoning for this is based on Caesar's references to them as *fortissimos viros* who were assigned a mission with centurions (Caes. *BC* 1.57), as light units, i.e. *expediti* (*BC* 3.75) and as *expeditos* assigned to fight with cavalry (*BC* 3.84). In contrast, both Carter and Gilliver have an alternative and more reasonable opinion to Parker's. Their understanding is that the *antesignani* were men who regularly operated at the front lines, and who were occasionally used for special duties.⁸⁶ Although I would argue against Carter's understanding of 'front lines' as the first four cohorts in a *triplex acies* (thereby accepting the view of Kromayer and Veith, above), the emphasis on the *antesignani* not being a special unit is important.⁸⁷ Thus in contrast to Parker, the *antesignani* are simply men known for fighting at the front. Carter adds that Caesar would have chosen these men in particular for special operations because of their skill:

A legion's standard was its symbolic, and often tactical heart, and it is plausible that the men who were deployed in front of it were the best fighters.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Parker 1928, 40.

⁸⁶ Carter 1991, 191; Gilliver 1999, 111.

⁸⁷ Carter 1993, 198. As indicated above (p. 15 ff.), the first *acies* (i.e. all the *hastati* in the manipular legion and by extension, the first four cohorts in the cohortal legion) cannot be equivalent to the *antesignani*. This is especially true for Caesar, who probably would have made the distinction of calling upon 'his first four cohorts' (e.g. *prima quattuor cohortis*), rather than calling up the *antesignani*, if this were the case. Cf. Caesar's usage of the term *cohors*, (e.g. Caes. *BC* 1.11-12, 1.15-18, 1.24-25, 1.31, 2.18-20 etc.)

⁸⁸ Carter 1991, 191.

It is worth emphasizing the similarity between Livy and Caesar's *antesignani* at this point in the analysis. For both, the *antesignani* were men fighting in front of the army. We might speculate that because Livy was roughly contemporary with Caesar, this may have had something to do with his similar understanding of this military corps, i.e. perhaps Livy is retrojecting his (limited) knowledge of his contemporary *antesignani* onto those in his histories. However, there is a significant difference in the usage of the term by Livy and by Caesar. This difference is that Caesar notes their usage in special duties.⁸⁹ This suggests that the *antesignani* were a recognized corps of men, chosen for special duties because of known skill and/or reliability in combat. Thus, unlike Livy's *antesignani*, not everyone who engaged in hand-to-hand combat (which likely would have been most of the legion at one point or another) was considered an *antesignanus*. This then raises the question of how one became an *antesignanus* and whether they were perhaps appointed to that post, as centurions were for their skill and bravery. The only evidence that suggests an answer is from Cicero, where he negatively recalls Antony's choice to fight as an *antesignanus*:

In that [civil] war, not only on account of your timidity but also on account of wantonness, you had enjoyed the blood of citizens or rather you drank it; you had been an *antesignanus* in the battle line at Pharsalus; you had murdered Lucius Domitius, an illustrious and noble man, and slaughtered many others who had fled the battle...pursuing them most unmercifully.⁹⁰

This passage suggests several features of being an *antesignanus*. The most unsurprising is perhaps the fact that someone fighting in the front lines, as Antony had at Pharsalus, would have seen a significant amount of combat. What is important to draw from this is that it also solidifies the fact that the *antesignani* in the Late Republic were the front line of men engaged in combat, as they are in Livy. The other important feature of being an *antesignanus* is the apparent choice to do so. That Antony *chose* to fight as an *antesignanus*, suggests that Roman soldiers could chose to fight at the front.⁹¹ Indeed, there is no evidence indicating where men were placed in their century once on the battlefield, and so there is no reason to assume that this could not have been arranged purely on a volunteer basis.⁹² If this was the

⁸⁹ Caes. *BC* 1.43, 1.57, 3.75, 3.84.

⁹⁰ Cic. *Phil* 2.71; My translation, 'cui bello cum propter timiditatem tuam tum propter libidines defuisti. gustaras civilem sanguinem vel potius exorbueras; fueras in acie Pharsalica antesignanus; L. Domitium, clarissimum et nobilissimum virum, occideras multosque praeterea qui e proelio effugerant, ... crudelissime persecutus trucidaras'.

⁹¹ Though Antony may have had more choice than a *miles* because he was a senator/aristocrat, but this is impossible to prove.

⁹² Cf. Asclep. 3.5 where the strongest are placed in the front of the phalanx.

case, then this probably occurred consistently, (barring death or serious injury for the individual) if only as a result of the pursuit of *gloria* through displays of *virtus*. In this way, a soldier would either become known amongst the ranks as an *antesignanus*, or simply be able to claim the title.⁹³ With this status, they could easily fit into the role of ‘go-to’ men for Caesar; brave and eager soldiers would be best suited for special tasks of challenging tactical degree. This is the case at *BC* 1.57 where Caesar needed men to act as combatants on the ships in the naval battle of Massilia. He specifically states that ‘*electos ex omnibus legionibus fortissimos viros...*’. This passage also suggests that Caesar’s *antesignani* are not formally a unit. They are simply ‘the bravest men from all the legions’; soldiers known for regularly volunteering to be the first to face danger, and so are called upon for other special combat circumstances. *BC* 3.84 also suggests that anyone could volunteer to be an *antesignanus*. Caesar elected ‘*adulescentes atque expeditos ex antesignanis*’; to me this implies that anyone of any age or physical prowess could have volunteered to be an *antesignanus*, as bravery does not necessitate youth and agility, and so in this instance the distinction of this situation is emphasized as Caesar chooses to elect ‘the youngest and quickest’ of them.⁹⁴

It is important to note that the *antesignani* have been shown above to have been drawn from regularly enlisted legionaries under Caesar, rather than a distinctive unit. So, for the present discussion, they can be identified initially as being heavy infantry.

One of the reasons why we see them being used for special deployments under Caesar and not in the mid-Republic, may have to do with the prolonged service of the army in Caesar’s time versus the citizen militia that Livy’s history covers. With the permanent cohortal legion, it might have been easier to identify someone who consistently volunteered to fight in front of the standards. In contrast, the mid-Republican yearly enrolment probably made it difficult for a soldier to find himself in the same position within the army every year. So, even if he regularly volunteered to stay fighting in front of the standards while his unit was in the front

⁹³ This might be an explanation for the mention of the title on military tombstones; this is discussed on p. 27, below.

⁹⁴ It is important not to understand *expeditos* to mean ‘light armed’ in this passage, since doing so would mean that some *antesignani* were more lightly armed than others; this would be tactically imprudent, and work against the success of the corps. The Lewis & Short definition of *expeditus* is (among other things) ‘unfettered, unimpeded’, which can be understood to mean unencumbered by baggage (i.e. *impedimenta*) and *expeditus* can also give a sense of increased agility, and not only being light-armed. Also, as Carter points out, there was no category of troops known as ‘*antesignani expediti*’, see Carter 1993, 198.

acies, the following campaign or season could possibly see him surrounded by completely different men. In contrast, the permanence of service of the officers and soldiers in the cohortal legion, would give the *milites* a better opportunity to be recognized amongst their peers as those who consistently fought as *antesignani*. Because of this, they could now be recognized as an *antesignanus*, and they could therefore be easier to single out for special deployment. This in turn meant that they could now claim the title of *antesignanus*, thus changing the understanding of who the *antesignani* were between the manipular legion and the cohortal legion.⁹⁵ In the manipular legion, a soldier could fight as an *antesignanus*, but in the cohortal legion, they could claim to be an *antesignanus*. In both, they were probably self-selecting: they chose to fight in that position, but only the permanence of the cohortal legions allowed for the recognition of someone who consistently fought in that position amongst established peers. This, in turn, allowed for the use of a specific designation. Whether the *antesignani* fit the definition of ‘light’ infantry because of their special deployment under Caesar will now be assessed.

Caesar mentions the *antesignani* acting as light infantry when they are sent to secure high ground.⁹⁶ In another instance, also similar to the earlier use of *velites*, Caesar sends the *antesignani* intermixed with horse to fend off Pompeian cavalry (*BC* 3.75). Carter claims that since on this occasion they are described as ‘*expeditos antesignanos*’, they are lightly armed, which he further points out was done only under special circumstances.⁹⁷ However, I would argue that as above *expeditos* should more likely refer to the most agile or most eager men.⁹⁸ Caesar has not only already used *expeditos* in this sense regarding the *antesignani*, but also we do not have any other explicit evidence from the late Republic describing the *antesignani* as being lightly armed. Furthermore, I would take *expeditos* as referring to the most agile men because of the circumstances in which they are supposedly lightly armed

⁹⁵ For the title of *antesignanus*, see tombstones, p. 27, below.

⁹⁶ *BC* 1.43; also, this reflects the tactics of the *velites*: e.g. Polyb. 10.15.10.

⁹⁷ Carter 1993, 198; also Gilliver 1999, 111; if they ever were lightly armed, then Carter and Gilliver are probably right to say that this occurred only in special circumstances, especially if we are to consider them regular heavy infantry as argued above.

⁹⁸ See esp. n. 168, below where McGushin 1977, 286 suggests that Sallust’s use of *expediti* at the battle of Pistoria (*Cat.* 60) was probably in reference to ‘those who *ad pugnandum alacres videbantur*’. Cf. also Veg. 1.20 where those who begin the battle are ‘*velocissimi et exercitatissimi*’. Although Vegetius is ostensibly referring to *levis armatura* and *ferentarii* in this passage, it is relevant because of the probability that *antesignani* took over many of the tactical roles of light troops, as discussed below. Furthermore, regarding these light troops Vegetius notes that ‘*nec erant admodum multi*’; since we know that the light troops made up at least 30% of the fighting force (see ‘Tactical Roles’), the *antesignani* are a much more likely group to be described as ‘not being many in number’ (and thus, at 1.20, Vegetius may have been thinking of the Caesarian *antesignani*).

here. If the *antesignani* are simply regular legionaries, then they are normally dressed in ‘heavy’ equipment.⁹⁹ So in an instance where they were to get to the rear of the column as quickly as possible to fend off a Pompeian cavalry attack, having time to change their equipment on the march to a ‘light kit’ before heading off, seems unlikely.¹⁰⁰

There is only one other passage in the Caesarian corpus that suggests a link between light-armed troops and the *antesignani*, and that is at *BAfr.* 78. It is mentioned here that Caesar normally kept 300 men from each legion in light order (*expeditos*); at *BC* 3.84, he mentions 300 *antesignani*. The numbers might suggest that these legionaries in light order could be *antesignani*. However, the troops in the *African War* are not described as such and so we cannot imply that they were.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, at *BC* 3.75 there are 400 *antesignani*, and so the number of *antesignani* ostensibly out-number the quantity of men kept in light-order. Thus, without explicit evidence, it is probably safest to conclude that the *antesignani* were not normally lightly armed.

What is clearer from both of the passages just mentioned is the subtle correlation to *velites*. Caesar uses his *antesignani* in much the same way that *velites* were used: fighting ahead of the legion, being sent to secure high ground, and fighting alongside cavalry.¹⁰² Parker has suggested that the *antesignani* replaced *velites*. He bases this conclusion on the idea that the position of the *antesignani* alone must have meant that they skirmished in front of the standards and thus took the place of the *velites*. Bell has subsequently treated this subject, and does not suggest that this was the case.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Parker’s suggestion ignores the vital point that *antesignani* appear in Livy, as do *velites*. Although they never appear in the same passages together, our conclusion above means that they probably co-existed, and so they did not ‘replace’ them in the traditional sense. Furthermore, we know that the *antesignani* fought with the legion, and were capable of pitched-battle formation, something that the *velites* were not. Yet, perhaps Parker is not entirely wrong in his idea. I would suggest that a better approach would be to say that the *antesignani* took over some of the duties of the *velites*. Bell, for example, suggests that a heavy infantryman would be better

⁹⁹ Unless Caesar has them marching in light order in the column, but he does not specify this anywhere.

¹⁰⁰ There is evidence from the imperial period that may imply separate armament for *antesignani*, and this will be discussed below with other imperial evidence.

¹⁰¹ Gilliver 1993, 149.

¹⁰² For more on the uses of the *velites* see Chapter 6, on ‘Tactical Roles’, below.

¹⁰³ Bell 1965, 419-422.

able to fill the role of the *velites* as well as their own, and Goldsworthy has also suggested that legionaries could operate in a ‘light’ role.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, certain tactics used by the *velites* were probably too effective to discard after their disappearance. For example, the usefulness of the combined cavalry-infantry tactics is noted elsewhere (see Chapter 6 on ‘Tactical Roles’, below), and it would certainly seem unreasonable to abolish such an apparently powerful tactic with the disappearance of the particular type of light infantry associated with it.¹⁰⁵ Thus, from this we might suggest that Caesar used this corps of men as a replacement for the light infantry wing of the mid-Republican armies, yet it is impossible to ascertain if this was truly his intent. Still, this correlation is also noticeable in a fragment from Varro (*Sat. Men.* 21), which seemingly associates the *antesignani* with the *velites*. Unfortunately, the fragment is too short and ambiguous to provide us with any specific information on either the *antesignani* or their relationship to the *velites*, but perhaps it deserves a formal placement within scholarship on *antesignani*. The text is as follows:

*quem secuntur cum rotundis velites leves pennis, antesignani quadratis
multisignibus tecti*

A literal translation might be:

those whom the light armed *velites* with round shields followed, the *antesignani* having been covered/shielded by/with the many standards for the square

Since *tekti* and *antesignani* are the same case, they are either genitive singular with *tectus* as a noun – ‘of the covering/shield of the *antesignani*’; or nominative plural – ‘the *antesignani* cover’; or with *tectus* as a perfect passive participle – ‘the *antesignani* (having been) covered’. With *tekti* as a participle the main verb is missing, as well as an object, since ‘*quadratis multisignibus*’ can only be dative or ablative. Since *quem* is an abrupt beginning, we are also unable to identify with whom or with what unit the following action of the *velites* refers to, and as such it would be risky to associate this action with the *antesignani*.¹⁰⁶ Thus, in the absence of context the interpretation of this fragment is very difficult.

¹⁰⁴ Bell 1965, 421; Goldsworthy 1996, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Although auxiliaries also might have been used in such a role.

¹⁰⁶ The fragment has been mentioned most recently by Tansey in an article in *Klio*, and he speculates that *multisignibus* “seems to suggest that the shields of the *antesignani* were decorated with individualized rather than unit blazons.” This assumption is likely based on the apparent literary contrast of *rotundis pennis* and *quadratis multisignibus*, and thus *quadratis* is translated as shields. However, even if this were the case, it could be referring to any or all of the shields in the legion; see Tansey 2008, 67.

What we can deduce from this fragment for our purposes then is that the *antesignani* are a distinguishable group within the legion, and that perhaps they performed some unique role of protection (e.g. protecting the standards would seem the most sensible correlation). Yet, this definition is the same as that reached above: as described by Livy, they are anyone fighting in front of the standards. And so unfortunately, Varro does not offer us much in regards to clarifying the term. Thus, beyond their mentions of undertaking roles attributable to light infantry in Caesar, we have no clear reason to classify the *antesignani* under Caesar as light troops.

For the late Republic then, our definition of *antesignani* is similar to the one that Livy provides us with. This corps of men seem to be the front-line combatants, who possibly volunteer for that position. Consistently doing so in the permanent legion allows them to earn the unofficial title. Recognized as *antesignani*, they could then easily be rounded up for special combat duty, like being dispatched with the cavalry for example. It must be remembered however, that no other civil war generals are mentioned to be using *antesignani*, and so the possibility exists that Caesar's use of them may have been unique.¹⁰⁷ In any case, evidence for the existence of such a title continues into the imperial period, and this evidence will be examined next.

The only evidence we have for the imperial period is epigraphic, and it is very fragmentary. Because of this, it is especially difficult to reach any precise conclusions regarding the *antesignani* in this period. Nevertheless, a review of the possibilities they present will be undertaken here.

We have two tombstone inscriptions referring to *antesignani*; the first comes from Strasbourg, and dates to AD 70:

L(ucius) Valerius Co|metius, uetera|nus leg(ionis) VIII Aug(ustae), | militauit
armis | antesignanis | her(edes) ex test(amento)¹⁰⁸

It is difficult to draw anything from the tombstone itself, but it certainly indicates the existence of the title of *antesignanus* during the Principate. Whether the title was an official one or not is impossible to say.

¹⁰⁷ Gilliver 1993, 149.

¹⁰⁸ *AE* 1978, 471.

The second inscription comes from Syria and it is dated to AD 172/173. It reads as follows:

᾽ Ἐτου|ς δ|πυ´ | Γά|ιος | Ἰού|λιος || ἀν|τισιγν|ανός¹⁰⁹

Again, the inscription gives us almost nothing in terms of defining the group, but as above, we may say that the term *antesignanus* existed throughout the imperial period.

One of the more contentious and most often discussed inscriptions mentioning *antesignani* is one found at the base of *Legio III Augusta* in Lambaesis. It reads as follows:

ARMA ANTESIGNANA XXX

*ARMA POSTSIGNANA XIV*¹¹⁰

There have been several interpretations of this inscription, primarily amongst the older German scholarship, which includes speculative ratios of troops who may have been equipped as *antesignani* or as *postsignani*. Yet, as Parker points out, any inference of armament ratios from the inscription is groundless.¹¹¹ Kromayer and Veith have also argued for the possibility that the inscription above supports the idea that the *antesignani* were a distinct unit. This conclusion is made on the basis that different armament must indicate an exclusive unit. They further argue that the actions of the *antesignani* as described by Caesar necessitate them being a distinct unit. For example, the speed with which they need to execute orders such as those described by Caesar (e.g. at Caes. *BC* 3.75), necessitates that they be from the same part of the legion; that

...it would have been almost senseless militarily to entrust this task to a division which would have to be collected from all parts of the Legion and form up for this purpose only.¹¹²

However, this argument ignores the possibility that the composition of the men needed for specific tasks could have simply depended on the task. If we take the Pompeian cavalry attack on Caesar's column as an example (*BC* 3.75), it would make more sense to have the *antesignani* collected (as the front-line volunteer combatants defined above) from the units closest to the rear of the column (where the attack occurred). So, what would rather make

¹⁰⁹ *IGLS* 2132.

¹¹⁰ Le Bohec 1989, 188.

¹¹¹ Kromayer & Veith 523; Domaszewski, noted in Parker 1928, 40, n.1.

¹¹² Kromayer & Veith 1928, 389: „Es wäre militärisch geradezu sinnlos gewesen, diese Aufgabe einer Abteilung zu übertragen, die sich zu diesem Zwecke erst aus allen Teilen der Legion hätte sammeln und formieren“.

almost no sense militarily would be to entrust the task to a pre-designated unit that was, for example, marching at the front of the column. Similarly, if a general sent a whole century for such a task, he would risk breaking up the cohesion of the cohort. If the general only assigned a few men from each century, he would not be taking such a risk.

Yet, we must return to the question of specific armament for *antesignani*, which is apparently presented by the above inscription. Kromayer and Veith accept that the *antesignani* were armed differently and suggest that the flat shields mentioned in a *testudo* by Dio at 49.30 could have been the ones belonging to the *antesignani*.¹¹³ We might take Kromayer and Veith's suggestion a little further with some more recent scholarship on Roman military equipment. Bishop and Coulston argue that flat shields would have belonged to the *auxilia*, and that as such they were capable of engaging in a variety of combat scenarios, i.e. they could fight in a traditional, solid formation for pitched-battle-type tactics, or in more open order, skirmish-type action.¹¹⁴ Now this seems like something that the *antesignani* were capable of: they were a part of the legion, but could also engage in light-infantry-type tactics, as we have seen in Caesar. Thus, we might conclude that at Lambaesis, the third legion stored different armour for the *antesignani* (we might speculate that amongst this could be flat-shields) and this was for any instances of their special deployment. It must be remembered however, that there is no evidence for an empire-wide trend of providing distinguishable equipment for a corps of *antesignani*. This could have simply been for a specific campaign and/or a method of armament used only at Lambaesis.

Although our evidence from the Principate gives us almost no information about the *antesignani*, one thing we can say is that the designation seems to have existed across the empire. Our inscriptions come from Gaul, Africa and Syria, and so we might postulate that the corps was a regular element of the imperial Roman military.

Beyond these inscriptions, we can only speculate why we do not have more evidence for *antesignani* during the imperial period. Yet one of the primary reasons for our lack of evidence is certainly that our descriptions of pitched battles in imperial literature are quite

¹¹³ Dio 49.30: The passage claims that flat shields were used in the centre of a *testudo*. Scene 51 from Trajan's column shows a *testudo* formed with curved *scuta* only, but the column is also contentious as evidence, see Bishop & Coulston 2006, 255, esp. n.4. For more on the variety of armament, particularly within units, see Gilliver 2007a, who argues convincingly against total uniformity in armament.

¹¹⁴ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 258.

poor. They are simply not as detailed as our Republican sources, and so tell us much less about the soldiers involved. A speculative possibility for the lack of evidence for *antesignani* during the imperial period may be because such brave fighters were often promoted to staff positions, such as *optiones*, *signiferi*, and centurions. Thus, by the time they appear on tombstones, they have the more common officer ranks.¹¹⁵ Another reason may be that because they were never an official or administrative unit, the term was rarely written down. Alternatively, since we can say that *antesignani* is a legionary term based on our evidence, perhaps they do not appear in the imperial literature because the auxiliaries of the period could be given the tasks they the *antesignani* had been given formerly.

Vegetius provides us with the latest evidence that we might consider relevant to the present analysis of *antesignani*. The late Roman author mentions *antesignani* three times in his *Epitoma rei militaris*, correlating the *antesignani* to officers or drillmasters in his discussion of the ancient legion.¹¹⁶ His understanding is consistent when he describes their armament, as he relates it to the equipment of other officers, claiming that,

all *antesignani* and standard-bearers, though infantry, received small cuirasses, and (leather) helmets covered with bearskins to frighten the enemy.¹¹⁷

It is perhaps worth mentioning that Apuleius makes a similar correlation, using *vexillarius* and *antesignanus* interchangeably; perhaps they were indeed outfitted in a similar fashion.¹¹⁸ As Hijmans et al. point out, Apuleius uses these terms in ranking robbers who have organized themselves on army lines, and while robbers could have had deserters in their ranks, the terms obviously cannot be applied literally (although the correlation between *vexillarius* and *antesignanus* should still be well noted).¹¹⁹ Also, it is interesting to note that Apuleius was from North Africa (Madauras) and *Legio III Augusta* was the only legion stationed in all of

¹¹⁵ Because they were probably the first soldiers in a legion to engage in combat, any notable displays of skill, courage or *virtus* on their behalf would have been noticed more often and perhaps sooner than other troops in the legion. Thus, to say that they were the *immunes*’ or *principales*’ selection pool might be a reasonable conjecture. Cf. Apuleius’ correlation between a *vexillarius* and an *antesignanus*, note 118, below. However, it must be noted that in the Principate, status, literacy and patronage were far more important than bravery in battle for such promotion (v. e.g. Gilliver 1999, 13-14). Furthermore, fighting was not as regular an occurrence during the Principate as it was in earlier periods.

¹¹⁶ Veg. Mil. 2.7: ‘*Campigeni, hoc est antesignani, ideo sic nominati, quia eorum opera atque uirtute exercitii genus crescit in campo.*’

¹¹⁷ Veg. Mil. 2.16: ‘*Omnes antesignani uel signiferi, quamuis pedites, loricas minores accipiebant et galeas ad terrorem hostium ursinis pellibus tectas.*’. It is interesting to note the similarity of the wearing of bearskins on helmets and Polybius’ description of the velites with their animal-skin-covered helmets (Polyb. 6.22); again, another link between *antesignani* and *velites*, albeit quite weak in this case.

¹¹⁸ cf. Apul. Met. 4.10-11.

¹¹⁹ cf. Hijmans et al. 1977, 208-209.

North Africa (excluding Egypt). Although Apuleius travelled extensively during his studies, he eventually settled in North Africa. It may be that Apuleius' familiarity with the term *antesignani* had to do with the existence of the group in *Legio III Augusta*, as seen in the inscription above.¹²⁰ Ultimately, however, this is only conjecture.

As we have seen, none of the other evidence we have on *antesignani* supports the idea that it was a distinct unit, nor does any literature suggest that they were officers. While it may be true that *antesignani* were officers in Vegetius' time, he does not give very much information on the duties and roles of the *antesignani* in battle, so we cannot establish if the corps that Vegetius refers to is related to examples from our earlier evidence.¹²¹ The only clear connection he makes to the earlier legion is his mention of them amongst the heavy infantry.¹²² While he lists the *antesignani* as an individual unit alongside the *principes*, *hastati* and *triarii*, it has been shown above that this is probably not the case, so it is difficult to accept Vegetius' understanding of the Republican *antesignani*. Since for him the name is interchangeable with *campidoctores*, perhaps Vegetius' use of the term is an example of the Roman trend to be conservative with military phrases and words, even when new terminology had replaced old words.¹²³

Thus, the definition for *antesignani* in the late empire is probably quite different from our earlier definitions, insofar as by Vegetius' time, they seem to be *campidoctores* or officers. Yet, if it were a regular officer's post there probably would have been a greater wealth of archaeological evidence, as there is for the other officers, especially because there were probably fewer *signiferii*, *optii* and *centurii* in a legion than *antesignani* (based on the above analysis of who they were).¹²⁴ Thus, it may be that there is little evidence for them as officers because the *antesignani* were regularly enlisted legionaries. That they were not technically separable from other soldiers is the common motif we have seen in both Livy and Caesar, and so the possibility that *antesignanus* was an unofficial title or that this group was not an administrative unit, remains a plausible reason for our lack of evidence.

¹²⁰ See note 110.

¹²¹ According to Milner, 1996, 38 n. 6, Ammianus (19.6.12) also seems to suggest this that *antesignani* were officers in the late empire: '*Horum campidoctoribus, ut fortium factorum antesignanis...armatas statuas...iusserat imperator*'.

¹²² Veg. *Mil.* 2.2.

¹²³ I.e. using old terminology to describe things that actually differ from the original sense of the term, See n. 61 above.

¹²⁴ Also, because they were self-selected to their 'posts' as *antesignani*, the term itself might also be self-appointed, i.e. unofficial; cf. Domaszewski 1967: the title does not appear in the list of officers.

In conclusion, we find that our evidence for *antesignani* is extremely fragmentary, and often tremendously unclear, but brought together, there are several assertions we might make. First that each period, mid-Republic, late-Republic, Principate and late empire, has different definitions for the group termed *antesignani*. While this is true, there seems to be a common link between the mid-Republic and the late Republic, insofar as the *antesignani* were the men engaged in combat in front of the battle line. We also know that they were probably self-selecting, and that the longevity of Caesar's legions (and those that followed in the empire) brought about the change in their designation: they could claim the title of *antesignanus*. Also, under Caesar they took over some of the tactical roles of the *velites*, such as attacking with cavalry. Although we have almost no evidence for the group during the Principate, the term seems to have been used across the empire. The lack of evidence for this unit during the imperial period may also be a result of their duties being transferred to the *auxilia* of that period,¹²⁵ a feasible probability, as shall be discussed in Chapter 6, in the section on the *auxilia*'s tactical roles. Finally, from the analysis above it seems that the *antesignani* cannot be considered traditional light infantry in any period in which they are mentioned. The only possible exception is under Caesar, where they function as light troops despite heavy equipment.¹²⁶

Auxilia

This term is most familiarly used to refer to the professional auxiliary wing of the army during the imperial period, but earlier writers such as Livy and Caesar refer to the foreign troops provided as aid to the legions from allied and friendly states. As such, several other light units that are individually discussed in this chapter can fall under the title of *auxilia* (e.g. *caetrati*, *funditores* and *sagittarii*), but are dealt with individually, having been specifically designated by the sources as units functioning in a 'light' capacity.¹²⁷ Thus, this section will consider references to any unit(s) designated as *auxilia*, but not designated by any other term that might be directly associated with light infantry (such as the ones mentioned above, for

¹²⁵ Gilliver 1996, 60.

¹²⁶ This is of course rather significant, so for more on this see Chapter 5, below.

¹²⁷ Cf. Lewis & Short definition: '*auxiliary troops, auxiliaries* (mostly composed of allies and light-armed troops; hence opp. to the legions)'.

example).¹²⁸ Also, because the definition of *auxilia* varies significantly between Republic and Empire, these periods will be assessed separately.

During the Republic, as with their successors, the *auxilia* were commonly used in the tactical role of light infantry. However, just as with the professional *auxilia* of the principate, the Republican *auxilia* were also used in a ‘heavy’ tactical role in pitched battle.¹²⁹ In many of the passages that mention *auxilia*, it is not always clear how they were armed and thus whether they were ‘lightly’ equipped or not. Nevertheless, there are several examples that are explicit as to their light armament, discussed below.

As will be shown below, there are various types of auxiliaries: light-infantry, auxiliaries acting as light-infantry (despite their armament being traditionally ‘heavy’), and heavy infantry auxiliaries. The term *auxilia* is often applied to allies or mercenaries who fought as heavy infantry in pitched battle, and so these do not fall under the present analysis. In some cases, the function of these allies and mercenaries is not clearly mentioned. Those that we know functioned as light-infantry, such as Numidian troops, will be discussed below, while the Balaeric slingers and Cretan archers will be discussed under *funditores* and *sagittarii*.

Many instances of *auxilia* refer to these troops as heavy infantry (*peditum*) and, therefore, they will not be discussed here.¹³⁰ When the *auxilia* are explicitly stated to be light-infantry (e.g. *levis armum*, *expeditus*) or engage in light tactics with other light infantry, our sources do not mention armament, although they do occasionally mention the ethnicity of the auxiliaries.¹³¹ Some of these areas providing *auxilia* to Rome during the Republic include Gaul, Spain, Greece (and Asia), Egypt, Numidia and Germany.¹³² Although some inferences of these peoples’ armament might be made through other sources of information that we have on this topic, we cannot come to any definitive conclusions, nor can we generalize in such a way. Rather, in Chapter 5, “Defining Light Infantry,” I will discuss instances of *auxilia* that are seen to function as light infantry. Although some of these units may also occasionally

¹²⁸ NB. *auxilia* is rarely used in conjunction with an adjective meaning light in our imperial sources.

¹²⁹ Livy 22.37 implies that all Roman *auxilia* fight only as light infantry (*levis armum*), but this is cannot be true – as shall be shown below – and so the passage should not be taken to mean that.

¹³⁰ E.g. Livy 33.3, 34.26, 38.13, 38.20, 40.30, 42.52; Caes. *BC* 1.61.

¹³¹ Livy 22.3, 22.21, 22.45, 22.47, 25.34, 33.15, 37.16, 38.26, 40.48, 42.57, 42.65; Caes. *BG* 8.10, 8.17.

¹³² Gaul (Livy 21.48, 21.55, 21.56, 23.28; Caes. *BG* 2.24, 3.18, 3.20, 8.10), Spain (Livy 22.22, 25.30, 27.38, 28.13, 40.30, 40.40; Caes. *BC* 1.29, 1.38, 1.61, 2.17) Greece & Asia (Livy 33.3, 34.24, 34.26, 42.55; Caes. *BC* 1.29; also Pergamon: Livy 32.8, 38.13, 38.20, 42.52; Epirus: 32.14; Sparta: 32.39; Crete: 42.35; Thrace: 33.15 Caes. *BC* 3.95; Lydia & Phrygia 42.52), Egypt (Caes. *BC* 3.111, 3.112), Germany (Caes. *BG* 6.29, 8.10), Numidia (Livy 42.65; Caes. *BG* 2.7, 2.10, 2.24, 2.25).

function as heavy infantry (e.g. Roman imperial *auxilia*), these instances will be further analyzed in the aforementioned chapter.

During the Second Punic war, we have examples of auxiliaries being used in a ‘light’ capacity to check the raiding and plundering of the enemy (Livy 22.3, 22.21), and used in conjunction with the *velites* (Livy 22.45, 42.65). Unfortunately, our sources give very little detail about these auxiliaries, but they are probably allied (*socii*) troops, since there is no specification of ethnicity.¹³³ We likewise do not have much specific detail regarding the equipment of allied troops, but it seems that they were similarly equipped to the legions.¹³⁴ Not only would this would have been necessary to ensure tactical cohesion, but in Livy 22.45 and 42.65 we have a specific example of the light-armed contingents of the *auxilia* functioning alongside *velites*. This may mean they were similarly armed, especially since heavy mail armour would make swift movement alongside *velites* more difficult. Furthermore, like the *velites*, the ‘*auxiliis levium armorum*’ under Flaminius are sent with cavalry to check the plundering enemy, a well-known tactic for Roman light-infantry (Livy 22.3).¹³⁵ We also know that these light-armed auxiliaries had a similar record of discipline to their Roman allies, and Livy (22.21) claims that this was the reason for their easy victory in a skirmish with the Ibergetes tribe. So for the allied auxiliaries of the Second Punic war, it seems there may have been some contingents armed similarly to Roman *velites*.

The cavalry–light infantry combination is also seen with some Numidian auxiliaries.¹³⁶ From Livy we can infer that when it comes to Numidian *auxilia*, they were armed in such a way that they must have fought in a similar fashion to *velites*. Livy notes that during action against Perseus in 170 BC, the *velites* were used to strengthen (‘*ad firmanda*’) the ‘*Numidae pedites*’ who are then referred to as ‘*levium armorum auxilia*’ (42.65).¹³⁷ Livy also notes that the Africans were ‘*aequantium equos velocitate*’ – a common reason for tactically combining light infantry and cavalry, which is something we have also seen with Roman *velites*.¹³⁸ Caesar also mentions Numidian cavalry and infantry working together (Caes. *BC* 2.25), as

¹³³ This is because, *auxilia* and *socii* can be often be used interchangeably when no ethnicity is specified.

¹³⁴ Cf. Goldsworthy 2000, 49.

¹³⁵ See n. 133; cf. Chapter 6 ‘Tactical Roles – Use with Cavalry’, below.

¹³⁶ Livy 42.65; this tactic is also used with other Roman auxiliaries, cf. e.g. Livy 22.3, 22.21, 31.36, 33.15; Caes. *BG* 8.17.

¹³⁷ It would be tactically insensible to combine two infantry units with completely different armour and fighting styles.

¹³⁸ Livy, 26.4.4-10, 27.12.9, 28.14.20, 31.35, 37.41, 42.58; Polyb. 11.23; Dio 18.58; App. *Iber.* 67, Hann. 20; see Tactical Roles - Pitched Battle: use with cavalry, below.

well as placing Numidian light infantry amongst other cavalry and light infantry (*BG* 2.7, 2.10, 2.24). As Daly has pointed out, during the Punic wars, the Numidians were generally known for light armament, and their cavalry may be described as ‘mounted peltasts’.¹³⁹ Although our evidence is extremely sparse, the few cases of Numidian infantry that we have present them as light infantry auxiliaries.

Germans auxiliaries appear twice in Caesar in a light infantry role (*BG* 6.29, 8.10). Since these are the only examples of Germans being employed as *auxilia* during the Republic (perhaps unsurprisingly given their relative lack of contact with Rome), we cannot come to any conclusions on their role as light infantry. However, archaeological evidence seems to support this function. As Todd has summarized:

During the last two centuries BC, Germanic weaponry continued to be dominated by the arms of the infantry-man, the spear and dagger, with throwing weapons steadily increasing in significance.¹⁴⁰

Thus, unlike the prominent role that the sword played with the Celts, the Germans more commonly relied on spears, which was probably a result of the scarcity of iron in their area. Combining this archaeological evidence with German ideologies gives us a clearer picture of what their combat style could have been like. Owen states that a love of independence, a spirit of individualism and a love of booty motivated the Germans. Yet, at their core, their driving ambition was the attainment of honour, fame, and recognition, and indeed their social structure was based on these values.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, their imperial successors were well-known for their displays of individual bravery.¹⁴² These ideologies and fighting style certainly resembles a more fluid style of combat. This in turn, may have looked like skirmishing or reflected a light infantry approach to combat: the *velites* for example supposedly also approached combat with recognition in mind, wearing animal-skins on their helmet for the purpose of recognition.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Daly 2002, 94; for more on Numidian light cavalry during the Punic wars, see *op. cit.* 91-95.

¹⁴⁰ Todd 1975, 170.

¹⁴¹ Owen 1960, 155-159, cf. Caes. *BG* 4.3.

¹⁴² This is particularly true with the Batavians in the imperial *auxilia*, e.g see Tac. *Hist.* 2.17; *Agr.* 18; cf. Hassall 1970, 135.

¹⁴³ It must be noted however, that our sources also describe the Germans as forming a ‘phalanx’ in battle when fighting Romans (Caes. *BG* 1.52, Dio 38.49), the men would lock their shields together, and have their spears (their main weapon) protruding forth. Furthermore, Plutarch also tells us the front ranks were bound with chains through their belts, so as not to break their lines (Plut. *Mar.* 27), but this is the only mention of this tactic, and so it may be rhetoric.

Thus, while we know that some troops classified as *auxilia* by our Republican sources functioned as light infantry, our evidence is scarce, and there are only a few cases where this is evident. By contrast, there are more references to them as ‘heavy’ or ‘line’ infantry, and reasons for this are difficult to ascertain. One suggestion might be that a sufficient amount of other types of light infantry existed (e.g. *velites* – who made up approximately one-third of the Roman infantry, peltasts, *funditores*, *sagittarii*, etc.).

Having reviewed the Republican sources on *auxilia* here now follows an assessment of the imperial sources. The professional *auxilia* – the significant ‘light’ infantry division of the imperial Roman army, are perhaps somewhat underrepresented in modern scholarship, relative to the amount of studies that are published on their legionary counter-parts. This of course is a reflection of the attention devoted to these respective divisions in the extant literary evidence. As Gilliver has pointed out, this division of the army has often been unjustifiably seen as ‘cannon-fodder’. Instead, as suggested by Gilliver and as indicated in Chapter 6 (p. 169, below), the *auxilia* were a ‘specialized-corps’ of combatants; experts in hand-to-hand combat, who were tactically flexible, and strategically indispensable.¹⁴⁴

In the realm of Roman light infantry, this is the unit for which we have the most evidence, particularly in the archaeological record. Also, the term ‘*cohortes*’ in the literary evidence for the imperial period (particularly in Tacitus), likewise refers to the Roman imperial *auxilia*, but this term will be philologically discussed separately. Despite being very dated now, Cheesman still provides the most useful dedicated discussion of the imperial *auxilia*, and has philologically discussed various other terms associated with them, as well as their strength and organization.¹⁴⁵

The term *auxilia* is most often translated as ‘aid’, ‘help’ or ‘assistance’ in all our sources (when not referring to the military unit), and it is significant that the ‘light’ wing of the army was labelled as such: it seems to me to be a clear and deliberate segregation between the traditional ‘might’ of Rome – the legions, and their philologically ‘lesser’ brothers-in-arms, the ‘help’.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Gilliver 1996, 64 *et passim*.

¹⁴⁵ Cheesman 1914, 21-56. For more recent discussions of strength and organization of the *auxilia*, see e.g. Gilliver 2007c, 193-196, Rankov 2007, 50-55; for a historiographical discussion of the *auxilia* see ch. 6, ‘Tactical Roles’, p.161.

¹⁴⁶ A fact that is perhaps not surprising given the citizen status of the legionaries.

That the *auxilia* functioned in both a light infantry capacity, as well as in pitched battle, we know from the tactical analysis below, so then what is left to discuss is the armament of the professional *auxilia*. As with the number of men in the army, this topic has its theoretical ‘facts’ and an unascertainable reality. Bishop and Coulston have discussed the armour of the professional *auxilia* at length, and how it compared to (or contrasted with) legionary armour. As they have pointed out, nothing is unequivocally provable, but the differences in equipment depicted on Trajan’s column seem to be the most likely theoretical reality. That is, that the *auxilia* were not normally equipped with segmented armour, and were equipped with the flat oval shield and long thrusting spears (as opposed to the short-range armour piercing *pilum* that legionaries used as ‘shock weapons’ prior to engaging in hand-to-hand combat during pitched battle). A *spatha* or *gladius* and mail or scale armour completed this theoretical ‘uniform’. As Bishop and Coulston have pointed out, this armament possibly allowed for tactical versatility,¹⁴⁷ a point that coincides with the argument for tactical flexibility made in the section on tactical roles, below. It must be remembered that it was highly unlikely that all auxiliary infantry were similarly armed; variation in equipment fluctuated throughout the army and within units, and similarity in equipment probably existed to enough of an extent to maintain tactical cohesion, but beyond this we cannot be certain how each soldier would have been outfitted.¹⁴⁸

As mentioned above, we have a significantly larger amount of evidence regarding the professional *auxilia* than any other ‘light’ infantry unit. As a result, an in-depth assessment of their role is possible, which I have included in Chapter 6, “Tactical Roles”.¹⁴⁹

Caetrati

Very little is known about this group of light-armed Spaniards, since only Livy and Caesar mention them; our earliest reference being from Caesar at *BC* 1.39. They are depicted in iconography found at Osuna, in which they are identifiable by their armament, among which is the *caetrata*, or ox-hide target for which they were named.¹⁵⁰ Apart from their tunic and

¹⁴⁷ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 254-259; it should be noted however, that I do not entirely agree with the idea that the flat shield is better suited to open-order fighting – see the discussion under ‘Fighting Capability’, in Chapter 6, p. 169, below.

¹⁴⁸ For more on variation of equipment within units, see Gilliver 2007a, *passim*.

¹⁴⁹ See p. 160, below.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Lewis & Short definition: ‘armed with a *caetra*, shield-bearing’.

caps, the depiction shows us very little, and unfortunately archaeological evidence for them does not go much further than that.¹⁵¹

Livy consistently refers to Macedonian peltasts as *caetrati*, and though these are clearly not the same as Spanish *caetrati*, the reference is worth noting as it denotes some sort of similarity in Livy's understanding.¹⁵² According to Williams, Philopoemen's peltasts (which Livy refers to as *caetrati*) were not light infantry, the basis of her argument being the fact that Livy does not use the word *velites* to describe this unit.¹⁵³ However, the use of the term *velites* could have confused Roman readers, as the corps was exclusively Roman, and moreover, Livy does not use the term to describe any other group. *Caetrati* on the other hand, seems to denote any foreign version of the same or similar corps. Furthermore, Livy distinguishes Philip V's *caetrati* from his "Cretan auxiliaries", as the latter were *velocissimi pedites* (31.36).¹⁵⁴ So it may be that Livy is using *caetrati* to denote light infantry in foreign armies that are a part of the native portion of the force, like the Macedonian peltasts were to Philip's army.¹⁵⁵

Daly argues that the *caetrati* were javelin-men, and as such were armed similarly to Roman *velites*, i.e. with not only a throwing spear, but also a sword as a sidearm; in this case, the *falcata*-type.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Livy articulates this specifically at 33.8, and along with one of Caesar's references to the unit, this suggestion seems to be a good possibility.¹⁵⁷ It must be remembered however, that Livy's understanding might have been influenced by the time period in which he was writing, which was roughly contemporary with Caesar. Thus, our chronology for this group is particularly difficult to ascertain. It is difficult to tell whether Livy's description of *caetrati* is applicable to those in the mid-Republic, the late-Republic/early Empire, or both. So, aside from the wide chronological spread and thinness of our evidence, what the ancient authors tell us is that they do seem to bear a resemblance in

¹⁵¹ See Daly 2002, 111; for related archaeological evidence see Connolly 1998, 150-52.

¹⁵² The Hellenistic peltast did not carry an ox-hide shield: a primary difference, but the *caetra* was similar to the *pelta* cf. Williams 2004, 259, n. 14; For a discussion of peltasts, see p.104, below.

¹⁵³ Williams, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Williams *ibid.*, n. 15. Briscoe does not comment on Livy's use of the term *caetrati* (whose commentaries cover the books in which most of Livy's usages of *caetrati* may be found).

¹⁵⁵ In contrast to light auxiliaries like the Cretans, who are obviously not native to the Macedonian army. This of course assumes Livy is quite careful about the terminology he chooses to describe foreign contingents, at least in this instance.

¹⁵⁶ Daly 2002, 110.

¹⁵⁷ cf. Livy 35.29 where they are '*instructi*' – suggesting they engaged in close-combat, with swords; similarly in 37.39 where they fight in pitched-battle formation with other auxiliaries; also Caes. *BC* 1.75.

armament to the Roman *velites*, and it would seem that their tactical use was similar – perhaps a natural result of this resemblance. As with *velites*, we see *caetrati* being used in conjunction with cavalry at Caes. *BC* 1.75. It is also worth noting here that these Spaniards are part of Afranius’ personal guard (*praetorius cohors*). Although we never see *velites* as the commander’s praetorian guard, there are examples of them being sent on reconnaissance with the commanding officer (e.g. Polyb. 10.32.2).

Caesar also mentions that like the Lusitanian light infantry, the *caetrati* were good swimmers, presumably on account of their water skins (*utres*), which were inflatable for floatation (*BC* 1.48). As discussed below, it was tactical versatility that made light units useful, and part of this skill was the ability to manage various kinds of terrain (e.g. Caes. *BC* 1.70); being able to manoeuvre around or through water could prove to be a vital part of this versatility (e.g. Livy 44.35). This benefit is also seen with the Batavians during the imperial period (e.g. Tac. *Hist.* 2.17). Indeed, perhaps the reason why we see little of the *caetrati* in our evidence is because the Romans often had similar troops from other regions (e.g. *velites*, peltasts, Batavians, etc.), which voided the necessity of recruiting these kinds of light units from Spain. Another reason, perhaps a more likely one, could simply be that our sources do not distinguish so carefully between the specific vocabulary for auxiliary troops, as we have seen with *auxilia* above.

Cohors

One of the first things to note about the usage of this word in our sources is that it often comes with an adjective, that is, a term describing exactly what kind of cohorts are being referred to. Among these, the most common are *auxilia*; *ala*; *expeditus*; *extraordinarius*; *leves*; *socius*; *subsidiarius*, and many of these terms appear below. Other common adjectives include the ethnicity of the auxiliary unit, such as the Batavian or Tungrian cohorts. When the terms ‘*auxilia*’ and ‘*ala*’ are used with *cohortes*, in Tacitus they often refer to the Roman imperial auxiliaries, but we do find the terms occasionally used in Caesar and Livy.¹⁵⁸

The term cohort is most commonly a reference to a distinctive unit (one of 10 in a legion), but it may also be a general reference to the particular size of a group of men; without a

¹⁵⁸ See Livy 10.40, 10.41, 10.43, 21.60; Caes. *BC* 1.63, 1.73. For the possible time of establishment of the cohort, See Bell 1965, 405; Rawson 1991, 42, 53; Keppie 1998, 63; Dobson 2008, 58-60.

descriptive adjective, it is usually several hundred men.¹⁵⁹ Varro tells us that the term is derived from agriculture language meaning joined or coupled together. This, in turn, is a reference to the maniples that are joined together to form the cohort (Varro *Ling.* 5.88). The possible existence of cohorts in the mid-Republic, and the corresponding prospect of a combined light infantry – heavy infantry mix in these cohorts, is discussed in Chapter 5.¹⁶⁰

Some of our references to cohorts have them being used in ‘light’ tactics, and these cases will be addressed in Chapter 6. For the cohorts that are expressly stated to be ‘light’, e.g. ‘*leves*’, ‘*expediti*’, see the sections on those terms below.¹⁶¹

Expedites

Our sources use this term in two ways: either as a noun on its own, describing light infantry, or as adjective in conjunction with various units to emphasize the lightness of their equipment, whether an *ad hoc* tactic, or a permanent feature of the corps. Units that are equipped in this way are thus often used in ‘light’ tactics. This applies without much variation to both the Republic and the imperial period. Our earliest author to use this term is Caesar, and it appears in his Gallic War at 1.27.

For our purposes, it would be beneficial to determine what this usage of ‘light-armed’ refers to in our sources as far as equipment is concerned, however, as we shall see, our sources are not explicit in this respect.

To begin with the Republic, Livy uses *expeditus* as an adjective describing the *iuventi*, *exercitus*, *agmen*, *milites*, *iaculatores*, *auxilia*, *legio*, *cohortes*, *pedites*, and *funditores*.¹⁶² He also uses it as a stand-alone noun, which is most commonly translated simply as ‘light-infantry’. The above corps include troop divisions that are traditionally considered light (*iuventi*, *iaculatores*, *funditores*), and those that are often considered heavy (*exercitus*, *agmen*,

¹⁵⁹ The paper-strength unit size being 480 men in the cohortal legion. Livy uses the term to refer to similar numbers of men, e.g. 4.38-39: 300 dismounted cavalymen form a ‘cohort’, 7.7: 400 men in each Hernician ‘cohort’, 10.40: 400 in each Samnite ‘cohort’, 23.17: 460 in the Perusian ‘cohort’, 43.18: 500 in the Illyrian ‘cohort’.

¹⁶⁰ See p. 134 ff.

¹⁶¹ The earliest reference to what may be ‘light’ cohorts in the period under review appears in Caesar at *BC* 1.39.

¹⁶² *iuventi*: Livy 2.11, 37.16; *exercitus*: 6.3; *agmen*: 10.12, 28.7; *milites*: 21.36, 25.21 (Carthaginian troops); *iaculatores*: 21.46; *auxilia*: 22.21; *legio*: 24.41; *cohortes*: 27.40, 28.23; *pedites*: 28.14, 34.26; *funditores*: 37.41 (Greek troops). As noted in brackets, some of these refer to enemy corps, and so will not be included in the assessment that follows.

legio, cohortes, pedites).¹⁶³ The *iaculatores* are probably *velites* and we know that they were regularly lightly equipped.¹⁶⁴ If we consider Polybius' description of *velites* as the youngest and the poorest (6.22), then it is also likely that the '*expediti iuventi*' are probably also *velites*. *Funditores* are slingers, and are discussed in their own section below. What is more difficult to determine is the nature of the 'heavy' infantry described as *expediti*. The terms used seem to refer to the regular heavy infantry of the legion, yet our sources do not tell us what a light-armed legionary's armament would have been. There are several cases where the term is understood to mean 'without baggage' or in 'light marching order', and this almost always the translation in the context of the march (i.e. with *agmen*).¹⁶⁵ For all the other instances of legionaries described as *expediti*, we can only speculate what this might mean as far as equipment is concerned.¹⁶⁶

When the term is used on its own, Livy seems to be referring to the regular light infantry of the manipular legion, i.e. the *velites*, since we see them employed in 'light' tactics that have been assigned to the *velites* elsewhere, such as skirmishing, quickly occupying high ground, or reconnaissance.¹⁶⁷ The tactics in which light-armed legionaries (i.e. *expeditus cohorts*) are mentioned include attacking enemies conducting a siege (24.41), an ambush (27.40), and a joint siege operation with the navy against Gades (28.23). It is not clear why the legionaries were *expediti* in these cases, except perhaps the exigency of these situations. From this we might conclude that due to the haste required in these cases, these *expediti* may have been legionaries in light marching order, i.e. without their baggage, so that they could arrive at their tactical positions with some advantage (e.g. at the place of ambush before the enemy arrived).

With the emergence of the cohortal legion, we see the transference of typical 'light' tactics from the *velites* to the regular infantry. Sallust uses *expeditus* most often with *cohortes*,

¹⁶³ Although Livy's use of *expeditus pedites* seems to be referring to *velites* since they attack with cavalry.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Lewis & Short 1879, '*iaculator*', and *Iaculatores*, below.

¹⁶⁵ Livy 7.34, 10.12, 24.41, 28.7, cf. the Lewis & Short definition: 'unfettered, unimpeded, unencumbered, without a burden, soldier lightly burdened, a swiftly marching soldier'

¹⁶⁶ Livy's reference to *expeditiis auxiliis* led by a tribune at 22.21 notes that their Iberian counterparts were a hastily-organized militia (*tumultuariam manum*), which in turn provides a subtle contrast to the nature of the *expediti auxilii* (i.e. that they were neither hastily-organized nor a militia). While this does not add much to our understanding of this corps, it underscores their professionalism and their ability to be led by a Roman commander.

¹⁶⁷ E.g. Livy 21.32, 21.36, 21.46, 21.47, 22.16, 28.34, 32.6, 33.6, 34.28, 36.15. For more on 'light' tactics see ch. 6, 'Tactical Roles', below.

where we find these cohorts engaging in tactical manoeuvres such as advancing ahead of the marching column (*Iug.* 46, 100), securing high ground (*Iug.* 50), and rushing ahead of the army to garrison a town with their provisions (*Iug.* 90). Unfortunately, as with Livy, Sallust is not explicit as to the armament of these legionaries and so we cannot determine the specifics of their ‘light’ equipment. Sallust uses *expeditus* twice more, to describe *pedites* mingling with cavalry (*Iug.* 59) and to describe light-armed soldiers in the front line at the battle of Pistoria (*Cat.* 60). It is interesting to note that these would probably be *velites* in an earlier period, but regrettably, we do not know what kind of soldiers Sallust is describing or how they were equipped.¹⁶⁸

Caesar uses *expeditus* to refer to Roman troops five times: twice regarding *antesignani*, and three times regarding the entire legion.¹⁶⁹ The uses with *antesignani* are discussed in that section above. He also uses it once regarding *evocati* (*BC* 1.27), but this instance, as with *antesignani*, seems to refer to the most agile of these men, rather than light troops. When he mentions the whole legion, he is referring to their being equipped without their baggage, for purposes of swiftness. It should be noted here that Livy, as well as Cicero (*Att.* 5.18, 8.9a, *Fam.* 15.4) use the term in the same way; this consistency suggests that *expeditus* might simply mean ‘without baggage’ when referring to the entire legion.

From our imperial sources, Frontinus uses the term twice to refer to Roman troops, once regarding the *velites* at Zama (*Strat.* 2.3.16b), and once under Fulvius during the Cimbrian wars (*Strat.* 2.5.8). In the latter instance, Frontinus claims that Fulvius with

part of his force observing the customary practice, he himself, with the light-armed troops took a hidden position behind the camp of the enemy, and as they poured forth according to their custom, he suddenly attacked and overthrew the deserted rampart and captured their camp.¹⁷⁰

The phrase *Itaque per partem exercitus custodita consuetudine ipse cum expeditis*, implies that it was customary (*consuetudine*) for Fulvius to keep part of his army equipped somehow more lightly than the rest of the army, perhaps for these ambush-type stratagems. Yet,

¹⁶⁸ McGushin 1977, 286 suggests that Sallust’s use of *expediti* at the battle of Pistoria was probably in reference to ‘those who *ad pugnandum alacres videbantur*’. If this is true, we can correlate them to the *antesignani*, cf. *antesignani* under Caesar, p.21, above. This would also emphasize the point made above that *expediti antesignani* are not necessarily light, but rather the most agile/eager, See p. 24.

¹⁶⁹ *Antesignani*: see section above; entire legion: *BC* 3.77, *BG* 5.2, 5.7.

¹⁷⁰ Translation is my own: *Itaque per partem exercitus custodita consuetudine ipse cum expeditis post castra hostium consedit occultus effusisque eis ex more repente adortus et desertum proruit vallum et castra cepit.*

Frontinus' anecdote is generally confusing, since we do not know which Fulvius he is referring to, and so we cannot place this stratagem chronologically. Livy 40.30-32 refers to Q. Fulvius Flaccus using this stratagem with the Celtiberians in 181 BC; however, there is no account of Fulvius's warring with the Cimbrians. If this is the same Fulvius as in Livy, then the *expediti* here might be *velites*. Otherwise, there is not much more we can say regarding the nature of Fulvius' light-armed troops.

Like the Republican sources, Tacitus' usage of the term mostly refers to a light marching order, used in order to have groups of legionaries move quickly to a strategically important position.¹⁷¹ There are three instances that vary from this usage however, the first occurs at *Ann.* 4.25, where Tacitus describes the abrupt assassination mission against Tacfarinas in AD 24. Here, *expeditae cohortes* and cavalry are sent out before dawn to surprise and annihilate the rebels, asleep in their camp.¹⁷² The second instance sees a Vespasianic commander named Varus, *cum expedita manu*, defeat a small Vitellian force of 400 cavalry towards the end of the civil war.¹⁷³ The third instance involves *eques cum expeditis cohortibus* at the siege of Jerusalem, where they are sent to skirmish with Jewish forces under the walls of the city (*Hist.* 5.11). Although we cannot say how these light-armed troops would have been equipped, we might reason that they would have either have to have been very fit or very lightly armed in order to keep up with cavalry.

Thus, both our Republican and Imperial sources do not specify what they actually meant by *expeditus* when referring to troops. It is possible that Livy meant the *velites* when he used the term on its own. We can also say that it very often refers to a group of legionaries or an entire legion in light-marching order, and this simply means that they were unencumbered by their baggage (*impedimenta*), but aside from this, the 'light infantry' that otherwise are associated with *expeditus* must remain a mystery.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Tac. Ann.* 1.50, 1.56, 1.60, 2.7, 3.74, 13.41, *Hist.* 2.45, 3.50, 4.34.

¹⁷² It is unclear whether these are legionaries or auxiliaries.

¹⁷³ *Hist.* 3.61. The term *cum expedita manu* is often translated 'flying column' by Church and Brodrigg (Macmillan, 1877), and is the same Latin term used to describe groups of legionaries sent to occupy strategic positions quickly, as mentioned above.

Exploratores

This group has been discussed at length by Austin and Rankov, although there is little in our sources beyond their employment as spies and scouts.¹⁷⁴ Though our earliest historiographical reference is at Caes. *BG* 1.12, there is only one reference in our sources relating *exploratores* to combat, and that is in Tacitus where he dismisses the importance of their skirmishing.¹⁷⁵ Since our sources overwhelmingly discuss their reconnaissance role, it is probable that they were not meant to engage in combat. This can also be seen in their easy capture by a group of eager Batavians during the civil war of AD 69 (Tac. *Hist.* 2.17). However, that is not to suggest that they were not armed or that they were incapable of any kind of combat, but rather that successful reconnaissance was their primary objective. Engaging in combat and risking their lives was probably something they tried to avoid since it could jeopardize the success of their reconnaissance. Beyond this there is nothing we can determine about their armament. Lewis and Short's translation as skirmishers in the plural comes from Tacitus *Hist.* 2.17, cited above.

We have several inscriptions from the late third century that hint at their organization. One indicates that those stationed in Dacia (recruited from *Germania inferior*) were commanded by a legionary centurion, acting as their *praepositus*.¹⁷⁶ In light of this, Speidel has suggested that their number will not have exceeded the strength of a regular cohort, which is a reasonable assumption.¹⁷⁷ Alternatively, two inscriptions suggest that *exploratores* units were commanded by prefects, and it seems that the *cohors IX Batavorum equitata miliaria exploratorum* was theoretically 1000 men strong.¹⁷⁸ Thus, it seems that the size of an *explorator* unit was not necessarily set in stone – a reasonable reality given that their tactics would have varied depending on the exigency of their deployment. Furthermore, regarding *exploratores* (from *Germania superior* specifically), Speidel guesses that most if not all of these soldiers would be mounted (as the unit name of *cohors IX Batavorum equitata* above suggests), however, I find that gravestones like that of the *explorator* Tamonius may suggest

¹⁷⁴ Austin & Rankov 1995, 42-54, *et passim*.

¹⁷⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 2.24: '*etiam per concursum exploratorum, crebra magis quam digna memoratu proelia*'; this occurs after the first Battle of Bedriacum in AD 69, near Placentia.

¹⁷⁶ CIL III 12574.

¹⁷⁷ Speidel 1992, 92.

¹⁷⁸ CIL XIII 6814; CIG III 6771 = IG XIV2422 = IGR I 10 = ILS 8852; cf. Speidel 1992a, 93, 99-100.

otherwise; specifically because he is not depicted as a cavalryman.¹⁷⁹ Also, the gravestone belonging to Lecterus depicts him as either a light infantryman or dismounted cavalryman (specifically because of his small shield), and the inscription does not directly suggest he was an *explorator*.¹⁸⁰ Speidel has suggested that his unit, the *numeri Divitesium* was one of *exploratores*, sent from Lower Germany on an exploratory expedition.¹⁸¹ In any case, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of these units, how many men would be mounted in them, and how the foot soldiers might be equipped.

With the information that we have, we know the *exploratores* could have been mounted or part-mounted. Yet, because it is impossible to determine how many men within these units would have functioned as infantry (if any), we cannot define the *exploratores* as a corps of light infantry. Rather, we can only suggest that some of the soldiers in these units may have functioned as such upon demand.

Extraordinarii

The clearest definition for this group comes from Polybius, who says

The allies muster along with the citizens, and are distributed and managed by the officers appointed by the Consuls, who have the title of *praefecti sociis* and are twelve in number. These officers select for the Consuls from the whole infantry and cavalry of the allies such as are most fitted for actual service, and these are called *extraordinarii* [ἐκτραορδιναρίους], (which in Greek is ἐπίλεκτοι).¹⁸²

Polybius' Greek translation, i.e. ἐπίλεκτοι, emphasizes that these are indeed the select few, or 'chosen' as Liddell and Scott define it.¹⁸³ This does not give us any specific details as far as their equipment is concerned, and the only thing it suggests is that they were similarly

¹⁷⁹ CIL VIII 9060 = ILS 2627, Speidel 1992, 99. He also suggests that in the late third century infantry gravestones had become so popular that it was used for horsemen as well, citing CIL V 944 as a single example.

¹⁸⁰ CIL III 728 = 7387

¹⁸¹ Speidel 1992, 92

¹⁸² Translation: Shuckburgh. Macmillan. 1889. ἀθροισθέντων δὲ καὶ τῶν συμμάχων ὁμοῦ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις, τὴν μὲν οἰκονομίαν καὶ τὸν χειρισμὸν ποιῶνται τούτων αὐτῶν οἱ καθεσταμένοι μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν ὑπάτων ἄρχοντες, προσαγορευόμενοι δὲ πραιφεκτοι, δώδεκα τὸν ἀριθμὸν ὄντες. οἱ πρῶτον μὲν τοῖς ὑπάτοις τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν χρεῖαν ἐκ πάντων τῶν παραγεγονότων συμμάχων ἵππεῖς καὶ πεζοὺς ἐκλέγουσι, τοὺς καλουμένους ἐκτραορδιναρίους, ὃ μεθερμηνεύμενον ἐπιλέκτους δηλοῖ. Though Polybius transliterates the Latin, this is our earliest historiographical reference to the group. It may also be worth noting that Josephus associates λόγχη with the ἐπίλεκτοι. This is discussed under λογχοφοροί, in Chapter 3. It should also be noted that cavalry appear as *extraordinarii* at Livy 40.31, and 42.58. The discussion here, as everywhere, focuses only on the infantry.

¹⁸³ Cf. the Lewis & Short definition: 'select, out of the common order, extraordinary'.

equipped to the rest of the allied contingents, as they were selected from all the allies. As to why they were selected from the allies, we cannot say. Rawlings suggests that in selecting these men from the allies, the Romans may have been copying a Hernician custom.¹⁸⁴ Hoyos suggests that *extraordinarii* were a part of the commander's bodyguard, and as such, their recruitment may have been a symbol of comradeship and trust among the allies.¹⁸⁵ Either suggestion is possible, but unascertainable.

It is also impossible to determine what Polybius actually meant by 'most fitted for actual service' (τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν χρείαν), and whether this has any correlation to the way they were equipped, or whether it was simply a judgement of their fighting skill. At 6.30 Polybius notes that they could be placed at the head or at the rear of the marching column, which is a tactic that was often given to 'light' troops, but this still does not allow us to make any firm assertions regarding their equipment.¹⁸⁶ However, there are two other questions that arise regarding *extraordinarii* in Livy, and that is their organization and their link (if any) to *antesignani*.

Regarding their organization, Livy mentions 23 centurions from the allied contingents dying at the Battle of Mutina (193 BC). Although it is impossible to determine the specific organizational structure of the allies, this passage suggests that they too had centurions in their ranks.¹⁸⁷ Whether Livy is simply using centurion as a general term denoting a unit commander is unclear. We do know however that the total number of allied infantry was equal to the number of infantry in the legion (i.e. theoretically 8,400 in a consular army), and that the allied contingents are commonly referred to as being grouped in cohorts.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Rawlings 2007, 53. That Romans probably copied other armies' conventions is attested elsewhere, cf. esp. *Ineditum Vaticanum*: Von Arnim 1892, *Hermes* 27: 118: 'But when we found ourselves at war with the Samites we armed ourselves with their oblong shields and javelins ... and by copying foreign arms we became masters of those who thought so highly of themselves', trans. Cornell 1995, 170.

¹⁸⁵ Hoyos 2007, 67. As to whether they were the commander's bodyguard, this is true if we read the dative 'τοῖς ὑπάτοις' (i.e. the Consuls) at 6.26.6, as a possessive dative. Thus, 'the officers select for the Consuls' ('οἱ πρῶτον μὲν τοῖς ὑπάτοις'), would mean that the *extraordinarii* were selected for the Consuls to have as their own, or in other words, as their bodyguard. However, Polybius does not use the word for bodyguard in the passage.

¹⁸⁶ See p. 159 ff., below.

¹⁸⁷ Some Italian allies, and the Samnites specifically, may well have provided Rome with the manipular organization and large *scuta*, cf. *Ineditum Vaticanum*: Von Arnim 1892, *Hermes* 27: 118; trans. Cornell 1995, 170; Burns 2003, 65.

¹⁸⁸ E.g. Livy 29.19, 30.41, 41.2; Sall. *Iug.* 105; Tac. *Ann.* 1.49, 2.16, 13.38, 14.26, *Hist.* 5.18, however, these uses of cohort could be a result of the authors homogenizing allied military structure to that of the legions due to their unfamiliarity with the former.

Furthermore, the *extraordinarii* had their own place in camp and in the order of march.¹⁸⁹ So it is likely that their organization must have somehow reflected Roman organization, if only to ensure tactical cohesion in the battle line: they were traditionally placed on the flanks, and the *extraordinarii* were usually in the front lines.¹⁹⁰ While the evidence from Livy is vague, the latter point suggests a tentative link with the *antesignani*.

As mentioned above, the *extraordinarii* were known as the select or chosen few, picked for their suitability (ἐπιτηδειοτάτους) for combat. It is this and their fighting in the front line (*prima acie*, Livy 35.5), that suggests a correlation to *antesignani*. The etymology of *extraordinarii* supports this suggestion as those who were ‘beyond’ (*extra*) ‘the regulars’ (*ordinarii*): soldiers who in both skill and position fought beyond the regular troops. Polybius suggests that some of these men might be chosen for special tasks in direct service to the consul (6.31). This may be correlated to the emergency summons Caesar gives to his *antesignani* (e.g. *BC* 3.75). The link between the two falters however, when we consider the time period in which the respective groups exist. As seen above, the *antesignani* seem to have existed throughout the period under review, whereas we only have evidence for the existence the *extraordinarii* in the mid-Republic. They are mentioned eight times by Livy (and no other Latin authors), with the last reference occurring in 181 BC (40.27). Because *antesignani* is the more enduring term, it might be suggested that as with *rorarii* and *velites*, the early term of *extraordinarii* may have been eventually replaced with *antesignani*, yet this is only speculative. So, with the given evidence, we cannot suggest any positive connection of any kind.

Hence, the sources provide us with little information on the *extraordinarii*, however, we can ascertain that they are associated with heavy infantry. They are placed in the battle line alongside the legions and have a similar if not the same organizational structure. While a connection to the *antesignani* is extremely speculative, it only adds to the already observable implication that the *extraordinarii* should not be considered as specialist light infantry.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Place in camp: Polyb. 6.31; Order of march: Polyb. 6.40. cf. Walbank 1957, 709.

¹⁹⁰ E.g. Livy 27.12, 34.47, 35.5.

¹⁹¹ Specialist insofar as they were not dedicated light infantry like the *velites*; they may have been able to function as light infantry if they were taking on light tactics as the *antesignani* did.

Ferentarii

This term appears very rarely in our sources, and it is only Vegetius and Varro who mention this group several times (Varro being the earliest historiographical reference at 7.57). Vegetius describes them as part of the ancient Roman armies, or the armies of the mid-Republic, and while he describes them at length, none of our sources for the mid-Republic mention *ferentarii*.¹⁹² However, from the late-Republic, Sallust makes one mention of them in his description of the Battle of Pistoria (*Cat.* 60), describing the opposing armies coming close enough for the *ferentarii* to engage. While the reference makes it impossible to say anything about their equipment, their position is correlated to skirmishers or *velites*.¹⁹³ Vegetius makes similar suggestions, describing them alongside *levis armaturae* and *funditores*.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, throughout his work Vegetius emphasizes that *ferentarii* are some form of light-armed troop, and his description of their equipment can be likened to the armament of the *velites*.¹⁹⁵ Also, like Livy's description of the *accensi*, Vegetius places the *ferentarii* in the third line of the Republican legions: a parallel we have already seen above.¹⁹⁶ If we are to consider this association to be valid, then the possibility exists that the *ferentarii* may have performed a similar function to the *accensi*. However, while our other evidence supports the idea that the *ferentarii* were some sort of skirmishers, it also renders the suggestion that they were non-combative assistants like the *accensi* quite doubtful. For example, Varro describes them as 'cavalrymen who only had weapons which were to be thrown, such as a javelin' (Varro *Ling.* 7.3.57). Also, Tacitus describes them skirmishing with the Britons before the heavy infantry engaged at the battle against Caractacus (*Tac. Ann.* 12.35): a similar role to the one described by Sallust.

With such sparse evidence, any conclusions on the *ferentarii* remain speculative. Yet, our sources seem to agree that *ferentarii* were some sort of light infantry. Their loose correlation

¹⁹² Vegetius: see n. 195, below. The term does however, appear in Plaut. *Trin.* 2,4, with the sense of 'a friend in need', cf. Lewis & Short 'ferentarius', and also n. 14 in the Riley edition, 1912: "The 'ferentarii' were the light-armed troops, who, being unencumbered with heavy armour, were ready to come immediately and opportunely to the assistance of those who were in danger of being overpowered by the army. The word is here [at *Trin.* 2,4] used figuratively, to signify 'a friend in need.'"

¹⁹³ Festus also makes this correlation: Paul. ex Fest. p. 85, 7; 93, 14; and 369, 5.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis & Short define them as 'a class of light-armed troops'.

¹⁹⁵ Veg. 1.20, 2.2, 2.15, 2.17, 3.20, 3.26, esp. 2.15: '*ferentarii et levis armatura, quos nunc exculcatores et armaturas dicimus, scutati qui plumbatis gladiis et missilibus accincti*', also at 3.20 he has them attacking with cavalry: a tactic also used by the *velites*. This tactical versatility is typical amongst Roman light infantry, cf. ch. 6, below.

¹⁹⁶ Veg. 3.14, Cato likens *ferentarii* to *accensi* and this is mentioned in Festus 506.26L, see *Accensi* above.

to *velites* or skirmishers appears several times, and Vegetius is consistent in his multiple descriptions of them as lightly armed troops. Thus, although we know almost nothing about this group, I would suggest it can be said that they were probably light infantry.

Funditores

This is the Latin term for ‘slingers’.¹⁹⁷ The ambiguity of our sources makes it difficult to identify any differences in this corps between the Republic and Imperial period. They are more commonly mentioned in the literary sources for the Republican period, but it also seems that slinging may have been part of the general training for auxiliaries and legionaries during the Imperial period.¹⁹⁸ Our earliest reference that is relevant to this study appears at Caes. *BG* 2.7.

We know very little about the armament of these units, although Griffiths has provided a good assessment of the archaeological evidence.¹⁹⁹ In addition to his assessment, there is some sculptural evidence for the armament of slingers, but, it is problematic as it comes from Trajan’s column.²⁰⁰ In scenes 70 and 72 on Trajan’s column, a slinger is depicted wearing a tunic and carrying his sling-bullets in a small pouch slung over his shoulder. There is a slinger in scene 66 as well who is similarly armed, only he is also carrying a shield in his left hand and wearing a short blade on his belt. Whether or not the shield and sword were a regular part of the slinger’s armament is difficult to ascertain, but his lack of body armour is consistent in the depictions on Trajan’s column.

There are several other factors that support the lightness of their equipment. Perhaps most importantly, our sources do not discuss them engaging in hand-to-hand combat; while there are some descriptions of them skirmishing in loose order with other light infantry and

¹⁹⁷ Cf. The Lewis & Short definition: ‘one who fights with a sling, a slinger’.

¹⁹⁸ Greep 1987, 192-93, although the evidence points to a decline in the use of the sling in the imperial period: v. Griffiths 1989, 274. Also, for suggestions as to why they only appear in the Republican literature, see Griffiths 1989, 255. Imperial period training: Veg. 1.16; Hadrian’s *adlocutio* to the army in Africa (ILS 2487) and Griffiths 1989, 269-271. It should be noted however that slinging, like archery, was quite a specialized activity, and so dedicated slingers, such as those from the Balearic isles, were probably much more capable of consistently inflicting damage with the sling than Roman infantry with little training in the art.

¹⁹⁹ Griffiths, 1989, 255-260.

²⁰⁰ For Trajan’s column as contentious evidence, see e.g. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 255, esp. n.4.

cavalry, they themselves are not normally depicted with the appropriate equipment for close combat, such as a shield or sword.²⁰¹

The archaeological record has many examples of sling bullets,²⁰² and while this is useful in determining the nature of combat when these weapons were involved, apart from this, it is, not surprisingly, very difficult to identify the equipment of slingers in the archaeological record.²⁰³

It should also be noted that slingers were often foreign recruits, and the Balearic Isles were well known for their men who had trained in slinging since childhood.²⁰⁴ This also makes it more difficult to ascertain any standards of equipment (or lack thereof) and organization since our sources are less concerned about these aspects of foreign recruits, relative to regular units of the Roman army.²⁰⁵ Domingez Monedero has suggested that for slingers from the Balearic isles, Strabo's description is probably fairly accurate (Geo. 3.5.2). He notes that

in addition to the sling, the arms of the Balearic Islands had a goatskin shield and a spear hardened in fire and sometimes had an iron tip.²⁰⁶

Although none of the iconography from the Roman period portrays the spear, a slinger's shield is depicted on Trajan's column. Regarding this and other additional weaponry like the sword for example, Domingez Monedero asserts that Balearic slingers would need such equipment to defend themselves once their main function as slingers concluded in a battle.²⁰⁷ Indeed, such equipment could have been necessary for the skirmishing which we know they engaged in. Domingez Monedero also adds that slingers may have modified their equipment to conform to Roman requirements:

²⁰¹ Scenes 70 and 72 on Trajan's column show slingers without any additional weaponry aside from their slings and stones. Only one scene on the column shows a slinger with a sword (scene 66). Skirmishing with others: Livy 37.41; Caes. *BC* 3.45, 3.88, *BG* 2.10, 2.19, 3.93, 7.36, 7.80. Also, Domingez Monedero has contested the idea that Balearic slingers were not capable of any combat except for slinging; see below.

²⁰² Bishop & Coulston 2006, 45, 58, 88-89, 135-36, 168, 206. Also, Greep 1987, *passim*; Griffiths 1989, 255-259.

²⁰³ Much of this has to do with the organic nature of the remains, see Griffiths 1989, 255.

²⁰⁴ Balearic Isles: see esp. Polyb. 3.33; also Lucan *Phars.* 3.710; Livy 21.21, 27.2; Domingez Monedero 2005, 177-179 *et passim*; Cretan archers & Balearic slingers: e.g. Caes. *BC* 3.4, *BG* 2.7; Sall. *Iug.* 105; Livy 37.41 38.21, 38.29, 42.35, 43.7, cf. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 58. Of course, as Domingez Monedero notes, after the Roman conquest of the Balearic isles, the slingers served as auxiliaries rather than mercenaries for Rome, *op. cit.* 179; cf. also Griffiths 1989, 267.

²⁰⁵ Although Vegetius loosely correlates them with the *ferentarii*, who fulfilled the pre-pitched-battle role of skirmishing, Veg. 1.20, cf. 2.17.

²⁰⁶ Domingez Monedero 2005, 178, my translation: '*ademas de la honda, el armamento de los balearicos consta de un escudo de piel de cabra y una lanza endurecida al fuego y a veces con punta de hierro.*'

²⁰⁷ Domingez Monedero 2005, 178.

With the integration of the Balearic Islands in the Roman world it is quite likely that, in fact, the natives were changing their ancestral sling to conform to a standard that Rome had to represent.²⁰⁸

While this is impossible to prove, it is also impossible to say when and where this may have happened. As such, we cannot track any sort of changes in slinging equipment, but if some sort of development over time occurred, it naturally makes it impossible to determine any 'standard' equipment amongst slingers.

As far as size of units of slingers is concerned, it seems it varied depending on the levy. At *BC* 3.4 Caesar says 1200 slingers were levied (although he does not say where from), but the portion that this number constitutes for his total force of slingers is unascertainable. Thus, as with most foreign corps, size and organization is an insolvable question.

We can conclude that these missile units could certainly be considered light, especially due to their regular skirmishing with other light infantry, and to the iconography that depicts them with no armour. Yet, beyond their various tactical uses, there is little we can ascertain regarding their organization and equipment.

Iaculatores

While this term appears relatively few times in our sources, the etymology of the word itself suggests that these men threw things at the enemy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both Livy and Vegetius' reports of these men describe lightly armed javelin throwers.²⁰⁹ Thus, possibly the most obvious parallel we have in the Roman army is the *velites*. This is not only because these men are seemingly light-armed javelin throwers, but also because of the tactics in which they are used. Livy has them functioning with cavalry several times (21.46, 21.52, 27.12), which is similar to the *velites*. Also, in other instances they are deployed at the front of the battle line, ahead of the heavy infantry (Livy 21.46, 22.45, 42.59). So, I would suggest the possibility that when referencing Roman troops, *iaculatores* is simply another term for *velites*, but ultimately this is only speculation. It is impossible to determine why the sources would use a different term for the same troops. If they are indeed the same troops, then

²⁰⁸ Dominguez Monedero 2005, 179, my translation: '*Con la integracion de las baleares en el mundo romano es harto probable que, en efecto, los nativos fuesen modificando su ancestral honda para adaptarla a la norma que Roma trataba representar.*' He cites Strab. 3.5.2 as a possible indication that specialization of equipment occurred.

²⁰⁹ Cf. the Lewis & Short definition: 'a thrower, caster, hurler'. Also, Livy's reference at 21.21 is our earliest historiographic citation.

etymologically, *velites* emphasizes that they were veiled (*velare*), i.e. by an animal skin, as per Polybius' description of them (see *Velites*, below). The term *iaculatores* on the other hand, emphasizes that they threw javelins (*iaculari*), highlighting their function as skirmishers and javelin throwers.²¹⁰ Perhaps the authors intentionally chose to emphasize one aspect or the other about these light armed troops, but again, this is only conjecture. The only suggestion we may make with certainty is that they are some sort of light armed missile troop: appearing alongside slingers, archers and *levis armaturae*.²¹¹

Lanciarii

We have very little evidence in the period under review for this term. We have evidence for soldiers using the title on their tombstones from the early third century AD. However, the title appears more frequently on tombstones from the period between the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine.²¹² From our period, the only direct evidence we have for this type of soldier comes from the tombstones of the soldiers from Legio II Parthica, stationed in Apamea, Syria. There are three tombstones depicting *lanciarii*, although only two use the title in the inscription.²¹³ All three monuments date from between AD 215-218, and as such are some of our earliest evidence for *lanciarii*. However, Speidel has argued for an earlier appearance of a *lanciarium*, based on a gravestone from the early first century AD.²¹⁴ The tombstone of Flavoleius Cordus from Mainz (fig. 1) shows the soldier holding what Speidel suggests is a *lancea*. Though most of the weapon is broken away, a thong fastened to the shaft and looped around the soldier's index finger can still be seen. Speidel points out that Isidore of Seville tells us that this feature is the mark of a *lancea*.²¹⁵ Yet, the inscription does not mention *lanciarium*.²¹⁶ Furthermore, Isidore's assertion that a thong attached to a spear made it a *lancea* is insubstantial evidence on which to base such an argument, especially considering

²¹⁰ Cf. Varro *Ling.* V.24: '*Iaculum, quod ut iaciatur fit.*'

²¹¹ Livy 22.45, 28.11, 36.18, 42.58, 42.59; Veg. 3.14, 4.21.

²¹² Cf. Tomlin 1999, 133, esp. n. 23.

²¹³ AE 1993, 01574 and 10575 make note of the title, the funerary altar of Alerilius Zolius shows him holding several *lanceae*, in the same manner as the former funerary monuments. See Balty & Rengen 1993, pp. 23-26. See also Tomlin 1999, 133, esp. n.24 for a discussion of possible early uses of the *lanceae* found in Tacitus, see also below.

²¹⁴ Speidel, 1992d, 15-17.

²¹⁵ Isidore *Origines* 18.7.5: '*lancea est hasta amentum habens in medio; dicta autem lancea, quia aequa lance, id est aequali ammento, ponderata vibratur*'; cf. Speidel *ibid.*, esp. n. 19.

²¹⁶ The Inscription reads: P(ublius) Flavoleius P(ubli) f(ilius) Pol(lia) / Mutina Cordus mil(es) / leg(ionis) XIII Gem(inae) h(ic) s(itus) e(st) / ann(or)um XLIII stip(endiorum) XXIII / C(aius) Vibennius L(uci) f(ilius) ex t(estamento) fec(it)

that Isidore was not a military writer, but a theologian who was writing in the sixth century. As such, I would not associate this tombstone with the *lanciarium*.



Figure 1: Tombstone of Flavius Cordus, from Mainz.

Returning to the evidence from the Syrian tombstones, the iconography on the monuments depicts each man holding a handful of spears in his right hand, with a round shield in his left. On the tombstone of Aurelius Mucianus (AE 1993, 1575) we can also make out a cloak, *cingulum*, and sword belt, worn over the right shoulder. The other two images are poorer quality, but a *cingulum* on both soldiers is also just visible. The number of javelins each man carried (between four and five) suggests that these were missile weapons, rather than stabbing spears.²¹⁷ Balty and Rengen have suggested that the *lancea* was probably used by the *antesignani*.²¹⁸ There is no evidence to support this conjecture, and furthermore, since I have determined above that the *antesignani* seem to be regular legionaries, we know they normally only carried two *pila*, rather than four or five lighter javelins.²¹⁹

Mucianus' tombstone inscription also notes that he was a *lanciarium* in training or an 'instructor' (*discens*). This

suggests that the position of *lanciarium* was a specialized one which required additional training. However, the funerary altar of Aurelius Zolius depicts him as a *lanciarium* yet the inscription describes him as simply *miles*.²²⁰ Why Zolius is not styled *lanciarium* is impossible to say, but it certainly makes it less clear as to how or when the title was used.

²¹⁷ Cf. *velites*, below where Livy suggests they carry up to seven javelins.

²¹⁸ Balty & Rengen 1993, 25.

²¹⁹ There is no literary evidence for *lanciarium* from the period under review, although Tacitus notes the *lancea* being used with the *contis* against a *testudo* at Bedriacum (Hist. 3.27). Also, Suetonius suggests that imperial bodyguards carried *lancea*. (Suet. *Claud.* 35.1; *Galb.* 18.1). Cf. also Suet. *Dom.* 10.3 where 'Lucullan' lances are introduced, probably for the guardsmen of Sallustius Lucullus; cf. Tomlin 1999, 136 n. 45, also E. Birley 1961, 22; A. Birley 1981, 82-83.

Based on the depictions of these *lanciarrii* holding several javelins in one hand, Speidel has also argued that the depiction of a soldier from the base of a column, from the legionary fortress at Mainz (fig. 2) could be further evidence for first-century *lanciarrii*.²²¹ Yet, I would argue that the link between the three javelins depicted on this relief and *lanciarrii* is much too tenuous to come to such a conclusion.



Figure 2: Base of column from Mainz depicting a soldier.

Due to the scant evidence for *lanciarrii* in our period, there is little we can determine about them other than the fact that they were probably some sort of missile troops.

Leves

This term is often paired with *armaturae* in Republican sources or *cohortes* in the imperial sources. It seems to have a different connotation for mid Republic, late Republic and Empire due namely to the differences in Roman military structure in those times.²²² For this reason, the usage of this term by our sources from each period will be assessed separately.²²³

Beginning with Livy, aside from the infamously confusing passage at 8.8, we might assume that his use of the term with respect to Roman soldiers of the mid Republic refers to *velites*, and indeed at 30.33 he states this explicitly: ‘*velitibus – ea tunc levis armaturae erat*’. Also, in his description of the battle at

²²⁰ See Balty & Rengen 1993, 24.

²²¹ Speidel 1992d, 16-17.

²²² One of the main differences between the late Republic and Empire being the establishment of the professional *auxilia*.

²²³ Our earliest historiographical reference to this term occurs at Caes. *BG* 2.10.

Mount Olympus, Livy uses *velites* and *levi armatura* interchangeably.²²⁴ His mention of *leves* as the javelin and spear-armed contingents attached to the maniples of *hastati* at 8.8 is confusing because of the light-armed *accensi* and *rorarii* that he places at the back of the legion as well. Since the latter contingents and Livy's references to them are dealt with in their own sections within this chapter, it may suffice to say here that the aforementioned *leves* at 8.8 also resemble *velites* in Polybius' description of them, in that they are attached to a maniple of heavy infantry.²²⁵ While the remaining uses of this term in his work are also unspecific as far as what kind of soldiers these were (aside from the obvious fact that they were 'lightly armed'), his references are almost always to the tactical uses of the *leves armaturae*.²²⁶ If we compare these tactics those known to have been employed by the *velites*, we might further establish the link between the two terms. Perhaps one tactic that was not only known to have been used with *velites* but conceivably also required that the infantry used in its execution be lightly armed (for purposes of speed), was the combination of cavalry and light infantry. Livy cites *leves armaturae* engaging in this tactic fourteen times, a significant portion of his references to Roman *leves armaturae*.²²⁷ As with other tactics typically assigned to *velites*, they are seen skirmishing (22.28, 28.13, 40.48, 44.4),²²⁸ used against elephants (28.15, 30.33), and perhaps most importantly, are posted at the front of the legion – the usual position for the *velites* (21.55, 30.33, 38.21).²²⁹

All of the above evidence certainly makes a strong case for Livy's use of the term to be considered as simply a synonym for *velites*, especially because he indirectly states that he is using it in this way at 30.33. Finally, given the period Livy is writing about, it is further probable that the Roman *leves armaturae* he refers to are *velites* (or at the very least, they

²²⁴ Livy 38.21: '*cum comminus uenerant, gladiis a uelitibus trucidabantur... Pauci iam supererant Gallorum, qui, postquam ab leui armatura superatos se uiderunt*'. However, there are other light units fighting with the *velites* in this battle, including slingers and archers. Livy also mentions 'Tralli and Thracians under Attalus' which go forward with the *velites*, but we cannot say anything about how they were armed.

²²⁵ Although Polybius divides them amongst all three lines of heavy infantry, and Livy only 'attaches' them to the *hastati*, suggesting they do not carry shields: '*prima acies hastati erant, manipuli quindecim, distantes inter se modicum spatium; manipulus leues uicenos milites, aliam turbam scutatorum habebat; leues autem, qui hastam tantum gaesaque gererent, uocabantur. haec prima frons in acie florem iuuenum pubescentium ad militiam habebat*.' for more see 'Velites' below.

²²⁶ That they were obviously lightly armed, see the Lewis & Short definition: '*light in weight, not heavy*, also, by metonymy, *light-armed troops*'.

²²⁷ I.e. 14 times out of 38 references, and they are: 22.12, 22.24, 23.16, 25.15, 27.48, 28.13, 28.14, 28.16, 28.22, 33.5, 34.28, 42.57, 42.58, 42.65.

²²⁸ At 40.48, cf. Front. *Strat.* 2.5.3 where they are also referred to as '*levi armatura*'.

²²⁹ Livy also uses this term to refer to auxiliary or foreign light infantry, who are often seen engaging in similar tactics. Cf. 21.57, 22.46, 27.30, 31.36, 31.43, 33.8, 37.18, 42.57, 42.64.

were units armed in a similar way to the *velites*), because they were the main light infantry arm of the Republican Roman army.

Since the *velites* were no longer a part of the Roman army for our late-Republican sources, the *leves armaturae* were obviously something else for writers such as Caesar and Cicero.²³⁰ Although they are not always clear about the armament of these troops, we do have a few descriptions of these soldiers in this time, and that they were often foreign troops. Out of the few uses of this term, there are references to German auxiliaries (*BG* 7.65, *BC* 1.83), Numidian light-infantry (*BG* 2.10, 2.24)²³¹ and Spaniards (*Front. Strat.* 2.5.31). There are also three references to *leves* being tactically deployed with cavalry (*BG* 7.65, *BC* 2.34.2, 2.34.3). While this might reaffirm the lightness of their armament, it does not tell us much more than this. Furthermore, since we know *antesignani* were sometimes chosen by Caesar to be deployed with cavalry, the possibility exists that they acted as the light-infantry in some of these references. Thus, with this evidence, it may be that *leves armaturae* was simply a term used to describe particular units functioning in a light role, rather than the actual lightness of their equipment.²³²

Although we have almost no information regarding *leves armaturae* for the late Republic, the period may be seen as a transitional stage for Roman light infantry. With the *velites* gone, the roles of light infantry were split amongst legionaries (e.g. *antesignani*) and foreign auxiliaries serving in a light role. From this, a seemingly natural development would be the professionalization of the foreign light infantry at the beginning of the Principate: the regular *auxilia*. This in turn would eliminate the need for *leves armaturae* amongst the legionaries.

For the Imperial period, Tacitus uses the term several times, but as with our other sources, there is little we can ascertain. The tactical contexts in which the light infantry are used are typical for contingents equipped as such, that is, situations in which they require agility and speed, such as being deployed with cavalry (*Ann.* 2.8, 3.39, 4.73), or skirmishing (*Ann.*

²³⁰ There are two references to *levis armatura* in Cicero's works, although they do not tell us anything of the nature of these troops, cf. *Cic. Phil.* 10.14, *Brut.* 139. Also, at *Front. Strat.* 2.3.17, discussing the Battle of Chaeronea, the *leves armaturae* are skirmishers (he actually has them deployed with *velites* – possibly an anachronism), but we know nothing more than this. Because Livy was contemporary with these sources, it may be that he was using his contemporary knowledge of *levis armaturae* when discussing them in his histories, although we cannot know this for certain.

²³¹ Although the reference at *BG* 2.24 is ambiguous, Rice Holmes suggests these are the same *leves* as in 2.7 and 2.10 (i.e. Numidians, archers and slingers), see *op. cit.* 1914, 89.

²³² Such possibilities will be discussed in further detail below in Chapter 5.

13.41).²³³ Bishop and Coulston have suggested that the regular Roman *auxilia*, that is, the official auxiliary wing of the Imperial Roman army, would have likely been well-suited for such tactics and open-order fighting, due to their armament.²³⁴ Similarly, at *Ann.* 4.73, Tacitus alludes to the fact that these light infantry are the aforementioned *auxilia* of the Roman army, and Furneaux believes this is the case, as he does for the more ambiguous ‘*levis armatura*’ mentioned at *Ann.* 2.16.²³⁵ In contrast, at *Ann.* 14.34 the light-armed auxiliaries are seemingly locally recruited men, but Tacitus is imprecise once again.

Overall, our sources are not specific regarding *leves armaturae*, but for each period we can apply some speculative possibilities. In Livy, they are probably the *velites*; in Caesar, they could either be foreign auxiliaries, light-armed legionaries, or any corps designated with ‘light’ tasks. With Tacitus, he may occasionally be referring to the professional Roman *auxilia*. What is interesting to note is the development of ‘light’ infantry from *velites* to the much more heavily armed *auxilia*.²³⁶ We might conjecture that this could have been a result of the changing nature of warfare; insofar as by the time of the Principate, Rome was no longer encountering large organized armies like those of the Greeks and Carthaginians. Thus, it the speculative possibility exists that heavily armed infantry were more suitable for tactical roles as *leves armaturae* due to the type of armies Rome typically faced in this period.

Rorarii

The evidence for this group of infantry is so sparse that there is very little that can be said about them at all. Most significantly, they make an appearance in Livy’s description of the organization of the legion. However, it must be emphasized that Livy is the only writer on military matters who mentions them, and only twice at that. He describes them as younger and less distinguished (‘*mius roboris aetate factis que*’) than the *triarii*, being placed behind them (8.8), and briefly mentions their rushing forward to strengthen the ranks of *hastati* and

²³³ Furneaux 1884, 398 suggests the ‘*leves cohortes*’ at 3.39 are auxiliaries, i.e. the Roman *auxilia*, especially because they were organized into cohorts.

²³⁴ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 259.

²³⁵ Furneaux 1884, 527 and 276 respectively.

²³⁶ Indeed the fact that the regular heavy-infantryman could use ‘light’ tactics just as well as the *velites* by the 1st century BC, was probably a significant factor in the disappearance of the latter. See Bell 1965, 421. However, this also assumes that the *leves armaturae* were always heavily armed, which may not have always been the case, e.g. they could have been lightly armed when they were assigned ‘light’ tasks, but there is no way to prove this.

principes during the battle of Mount Vesuvius in 340 BC (8.9). Aside from this there is a brief description of the etymology of the word in Varro and Nonius, which we will return to momentarily. Livy's description tells us almost nothing, and it is important to highlight his lack of references to these men anywhere else. Oakley notes that the entire passage is confused, and that Livy or his sources may have been trying to create a false parallel with the five Servian classes and thus create five lines of infantry in the army.²³⁷

Varro's description tells us they 'were those who started the battle, named from the *ros* 'dew-drops', because it 'sprinkles' (*rorat*) before it really rains.²³⁸ Nonius Marcellus tells us something very similar, saying

Those soldiers are called *rorarii* who, before the battle lines had met, began the battle with some javelins. This is derived from the fact that light rains precede heavy ones ... Lucilius in the fifth book of his Satires gives the following lines: "Five javelins, the golden belted light-armed skirmisher." ... Again Lucilius in Book X: "In the rear the light-armed skirmisher was standing."²³⁹

The obvious correlation we can make from this is with the *velites* who had exactly the same role.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately, this relationship is unclear, not only because of the little information we have on the *rorarii* but also because of the confusion regarding when the *velites* were formally established. Although the question of the *velites*' establishment will be discussed more fully in the section on *velites* below, there is pertinent evidence on the relationship between the two units from Lucilius. Two fragments show that the term *rorarius* was still used in the second century BC; one mentioning '*rorarius veles*' possibly in reference to military rewards, and the other saying '*pone paludatos stabat rorarius velox*'.²⁴¹ As Oakley has pointed out we can only guess as to what this means for the relationship between *rorarius* and *veles*; on the one hand it may be that they refer to the same troops and that *veles* simply

²³⁷ Oakley 1998, 465, cf. '*accensi*' p. 9, above.

²³⁸ Varro *Ling.* 7.3: '*Rorarii dicti ab rore qui bellum committebant, ideo quod ante rorat quam pluit*'; cf. Festus 323.8 L; Nonius 552,30; this is likewise our earliest reference to the term.

²³⁹ Non. 552 M, cf. Lucil. 7.323, 10.423; Sage 2008, 89.

²⁴⁰ The *velites* were not only known to begin the battle, but also retire through the ranks of heavy infantry, thus, 'standing at the rear' is something we might also have seen from them. Cf. the Lewis & Short definition of *rorarii*: 'a kind of light-armed Roman troops, who usually made the first attack and then retired, skirmishers'. Cf. also Ennius's "the *hastati* threw their *hastae*; an iron down-pour came" (Macrobius 6.1.52 = Ennius, *Ann.* 8. frg. 281) v. further Rawlings 2007, 57.

²⁴¹ '*Rorarii appellabantur milites qui ... primo ... inibant proelium ...*' '*quinque hastae, aureolo cinctu rorarius veles*' (Lucilius 7.323); the possible reference to military rewards here is '*aureolo cinctu*'. The second reference at Lucilius 10.423 reads 'Behind those in the soldier's cloaks was standing the swift skirmisher' translation: Warmington, Loeb 1888.

came to replace *rorarius*.²⁴² Alternatively, we might speculate that there may have been light-armed troops at the back of the legion called *rorarii* and those at the front called *velites*, with the former perhaps being more experienced, as per Livy's suggestion that they were less distinguished than the *triarii* (rather than the *hastati* or *principes* for example, like the *velites* would have been). Eventually these *rorarii* may have faded out or joined the *velites*, since they were both light-armed units.²⁴³

Thus, determining specifics about the *rorarii* is not possible with the little evidence we have, although we do know that they can be classified as light-infantry, and that they used javelins as skirmishers.

Sagittarii

While our literary sources divulge very little detail on archers fighting for the Roman army, we do know that Cretan archers were ubiquitous in serving as foreign troops in the Roman army and in those of her neighbours, particularly during the Hellenistic period. Also, we have sculptural evidence from the Imperial period that shows that archers had become regular auxiliary soldiers. This evidence will be discussed chronologically according to historical context, rather than historiographical time of writing.²⁴⁴

Using accounts of Cretan archers in Hellenistic campaigns and battles, we can better interpret the surviving iconographic evidence, discussed below. As we shall see, the archer's armament may have reflected that of other light troops, such as the *velites*.

In a skirmish between the Romans and Philip V's army, Livy describes the Cretan archers in Philip's army as

trained to skirmish in loose order and unprotected by armour, [they] were at the mercy of the *velites* who with their swords and shields were equally prepared for defence and attack. Incapable of sustaining the conflict [with the Romans] and trusting solely to their mobility they fled back to their camp.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Cf. Daly 2002, 72-73 who suggests that an upgrading of Livy's 300 *leves* (Livy 1.43) to the same standard of equipment as the *rorarii* would have resulted in a new unit renamed the *velites* in 211 BC (cf. Livy 26.4). For more on the establishment of the *velites*, see that section below.

²⁴³ Oakley 1998, 470-71; cf. Sage 2008, 88.

²⁴⁴ Our earliest relevant historiographic reference is at Caes. *BG* 2.19.

²⁴⁵ Livy 31.35; Livy also emphasizes their mobility in the following passage where the Cretans, running with the cavalry ran "at such a rapid pace that only the fleetest of the infantrymen could keep up with the horsemen" (31.36).

Yet, this example contradicts Livy's description of the Cretan's capabilities the very next day. Philip used his Cretans and cavalry to attack foraging Romans who fled to their camp. When the Romans came out of their camp to defend their fleeing comrades, the Cretans were ready and in close order, making sudden onsets and easily wounding the disordered Romans who were not holding any formation (31.37). This last example hints at panoply that consisted of more than just a bow. A closer examination of Cretan mercenaries further suggests that they were capable of hand-to-hand combat.

Polybius describes the Cretans engaging in close combat at the siege of Psophis:

the Cretans, attacking the mercenaries who had sallied from the upper gate, forced them to fly in disorder, throwing away their shields. Pressing close on their heels and cutting them down, they entered the gate together with them, and thus the city was taken from every side at once.²⁴⁶

Thus, with the ability to engage in such combat, it may be likely that they were armed with some sort of shield and sword, along with their bow. Indeed, at 10.29, while describing the campaign in Hyrcania, Polybius notes that Antiochus III had shield-bearing Cretans under the command of Polyxenidas of Rhodes, who marched parallel to the infantry, slowly, and in good order. So it would seem that here the Cretans are capable of functioning in a phalanx-type formation, bearing shields. In Plutarch's *Life of Amelilius Paulus*, Cretan and Thracian light shields (πελτοαι, γέρρα) and quivers are part of the display of captured arms in Paulus' triumph, taken from Perseus' forces (32).

Although archers may be traditionally considered missile troops rather than light infantry, it must be remembered that the line between the two is very thin, if at all extant. That missile troops were armed with more than just their missile weapons, and further that they were armed with a shield and sword along with their missiles is something that is evident in other light troops as well, particularly the *velites*, and the example of the slinger in scene 66 of Trajan's column, mentioned above.

²⁴⁶ Polyb. 4.71.

A fragment from a weapons relief from Perinthus dating to the first century BC shows a small hoplite's shield, behind which lies a bow, a quiver, a short spear, and another rectangular object that seems to have two spears projecting from it (fig. 3). Beneath that is a curved dagger with a simple scabbard. The panoply is similar to that of Chaironides (see fig. 5), and may have belonged to a Cretan.²⁴⁷



Figure 3: Fragmentary weapons relief from Perinthus, 1st century BC.

A funerary stele from Demetrias belonged to Thersagoras, a Cretan from Polyrrhenia, and it dates to the end of the third century or beginning of the second century BC (fig. 4). It is poorly preserved but the archer can be seen with his bow and quiver, wearing what may have been a white tunic, and carrying what may

likely be a shield slung over his back. According to the descriptions made when the stele was discovered over 100 years ago, Thersagoras was also wearing a helmet of some sort, a feature that is presently indistinguishable.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Post 2009, 25, 28.

²⁴⁸ Post 2009, 26, 28.

Another stele from the ancient city of Demetrias dating to the end of the third century BC, belonging to a Chaironides, depicts the Cretan wearing a white short-sleeved tunic, a very



Figure 5: Stele from Demetrias, depicting Thersagoras, a Cretan from Polyrrhenia, beginning of 2nd century BC.

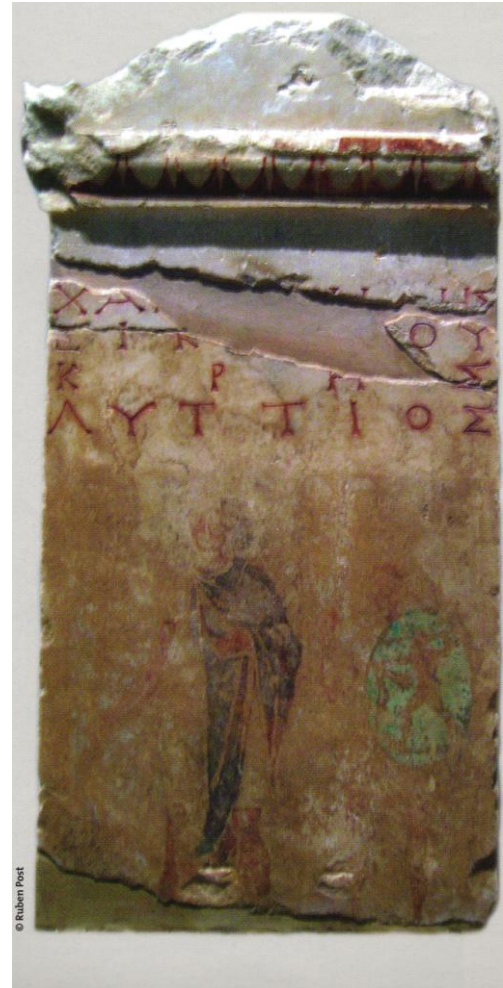


Figure 4: Stele from Demetrias, depicting Chaironides of Crete, end of 3rd century BC.

dark cloak, a bronze helmet, and a bow (fig. 5). His servant standing behind him carried a small oval shield and several javelins.²⁴⁹ Thus, his armament is consistent with Thersagoras' equipment.

Although Chaironides and Thersagoras were Cretans who may have served as mercenaries a few decades before Livy's descriptions of Cretans in Philip V's army, I would suggest that it may be possible that Cretan archers were usually armed with more than just a quiver and bow. The iconographic evidence from the Hellenistic period suggests that they likely had a

²⁴⁹ Post 2009, 24, 27. The paint on the stele has faded but the descriptions were made soon after its discovery in 1907.

shield and perhaps some sort of blade or javelin as well, and were thus similarly equipped to other light infantry of the period such as *velites* or *funditores*.

During the Imperial period archers became regular auxiliary soldiers, as evidenced by units such as *Cohors I Sagittariorum*.²⁵⁰ In such units, armament would have reflected Roman military standards, as seen on the tombstone of Hyperanor, a Cretan of the aforementioned cohort. Armed with a *gladius* and *pugio* strapped to a belt with a *cingulum*, he wears a tunic and holds his bow in his left hand.

The archers depicted on Trajan's column are probably Syrian, probably from Palmyra according to Frere and Lepper, and so are armed differently than the Cretan examples we have seen above.²⁵¹ In scene 66, they can be seen with cone-shaped helmets and scale-mail armour. Similarly, in scene 115, they are equipped in the same way, only a *gladius* can also be seen slung around their shoulders and worn on the right hip. In scene 70, they are also equipped with cone-shaped helmets, and what may be ring mail armour. All of this Imperial evidence, and especially the ring mail armour, suggests to me that they were prepared for hand-to-hand fighting, whether they actually engaged in such combat or not.

As far as size of archer units is concerned, it is impossible to come to any conclusions. At *BC* 1.51 Caesar mentions 200 archers lost in an engagement; at 3.4, 3000 archers are levied. As with slingers above, it is impossible to tell what proportion of archers these numbers made up in Caesar's armies.

As we can see, an archer's panoply and their organization varied depending on the time period and area from which they came. They seemed to function, perhaps not surprisingly, in light infantry or missile-unit roles quite regularly throughout our time period, even though they may have also been armed with heavier equipment at times. Thus, I would suggest that *sagittarii* can be considered light infantry.

Velites

The *velites* are probably the best-known example of light infantry in the Roman army, although they only appear in the mid-Republic. Thanks to the accounts of Livy and Polybius,

²⁵⁰ E.g. CIL XIII 7514.

²⁵¹ Lepper & Frere 1988, 160.

we have a fairly clear picture of this light-infantry unit, relative to any other light infantry mentioned above.²⁵² Thus, it might be beneficial to start this section with Polybius' description of these men, since it gives the most specific information on this unit. Beginning with a description of the yearly levy, he says,

When they [the military tribunes] arrive on the appointed day, they first select the youngest and poorest to form the γροσφομάχοι (*velites*) ... The youngest soldiers or *velites* are ordered to carry a sword, spears, and target (παρμήν). The target is strongly made, and large enough to protect the man; being round, with a diameter of three feet. Each man also wears a headpiece without a crest; which he sometimes covers with a piece of wolf-skin or something of that kind, for the sake both of protection and identification; that the officers of his company may be able to observe whether he shows courage or the reverse on confronting dangers. The spear of the *velites* has a wooden haft of about two cubits, and about a finger's breadth in thickness; its head is a span long, hammered fine, and sharpened to such an extent that it becomes bent the first time it strikes, and cannot be used by the enemy to hurl back; otherwise the weapon would be available for both sides alike.²⁵³

According to Festus (332.35L), the *velites* were also known as both *procuritores* and *procubitores*. These words respectively refer to those standing in front of those given frequent attention or cherished and those standing in front of those lying down. As Festus points out, this is a direct reference to the *velites*' duty of standing guard along the *vallum* of the marching camp: a task mentioned by Polybius and also presumably in Cato's military treatise.²⁵⁴ Although Festus suggests that Cato describes the *velites* using these terms, Festus is the only author in our extant corpus of ancient literature in which the words *procuritores*

²⁵² Aside from the regular *auxilia* of the Roman Imperial army perhaps. Polybius is arguably our earliest relevant reference to the *velites*, but because he does not use the Latin term, the other earliest historiographic citation comes from a fragment in Varro, discussed above under '*antesignani*'.

²⁵³ Polyb. 6.21-22, translation: Shuckburgh, Macmillan. 1889· παραγενομένων δ' εἰς τὴν ταχθεῖσαν ἡμέραν διαλέγουσι τῶν ἀνδρῶν τοὺς νεωτάτους καὶ πενιχροτάτους εἰς τοὺς γροσφομάχους ... Καὶ τοῖς μὲν νεωτάτοις παρήγγειλαν μάχαιραν φορεῖν καὶ γρόσφους καὶ πάρμην. ἡ δὲ πάρμη καὶ δύναμιν ἔχει τῇ κατασκευῇ καὶ μέγεθον ἀρκοῦν πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν· περιφερῆς γὰρ οὖσα ὡς σχήματι τρίπεδον ἔχει τὴν διάμετρον. προσεπικοσμεῖται δὲ καὶ λιτῶ περικεφαλαίῳ· ποτὲ δὲ λυκείαν ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων ἐπιτίθεται, σκέπης ἅμα καὶ σημείου χάριν, ἵνα τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ἡγεμόσι προκινδυνεύοντες ἐρρωμένως καὶ μὴ διάδηλοι γίνωνται. τὸ δὲ τῶν γρόσφων βέλος ἔχει τῷ μὲν μήκει τὸ ξύλον ὡς ἐπίπαν δίπηχυ, τῷ δὲ πάχει δακτυλιαῖον, τὸ δὲ κέντρον σπιθαμιαῖον, κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἐπὶ λεπτὸν ἐξεληλασμένον καὶ συνωξυσμένον ὥστε κατ' ἀνάγκην εὐθέως ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἐμβολῆς κάμπτεσθαι καὶ μὴ δυνασθαι τοὺς πολεμίους ἀντιβάλλειν· εἰ δὲ μή, κοινὸν γίνεται τὸ βέλος. Cf. also the Lewis & Short definition: 'kind of light-armed soldier, who attacked the enemy out of the line of battle, a skirmisher.'

²⁵⁴ Polyb. 6.35.5; see p. 148 below for the passage. For Cato, see Festus 16.

and *procubitores* appear. Nevertheless, his usage of the terms reinforces our understanding of the various tactical roles assigned to the *velites*.

Regarding their organization, from Polybius we also know that they were not divided into maniples, and from this that they were not assigned any centurions or *optiones* either (6.24). Rather, he tells us that the *velites* were ‘divided equally amongst all the companies (μέρη),’²⁵⁵ although this must have been only for administrative purposes since we know that they started the battle, ahead of all the maniples.²⁵⁶ Thus, their officers (that Polybius mentions above) were probably those of the company that they were attached to, and although we have no evidence indicating any specific role for commanding the *velites* in battle, the transmission of commands would probably have had to come from the heavy infantry or cavalry units.²⁵⁷ We also know that there were probably about 1,200 *velites* in a paper-strength manipular legion, which also agrees with Polybius’ description of the overall size of the legion (6.21).²⁵⁸

One of the most significant questions regarding the *velites* is when they were established.²⁵⁹ This is difficult to determine due to the confusion in our sources, and there is some disagreement amongst scholars because of this. Brunt dates the reform to 214 based on the reduction in the minimum property qualification for military service that occurred between 214 and 212. He is followed by Gabba who has argued for the introduction of the *velites* in 211. Walbank does not find the argument convincing, and Rich refutes the notion of a reduction in the property qualification for military service. Daly convincingly contests

²⁵⁵ Polyb. 6.24 ‘τῶν δὲ γροσφομάχων τοὺς ἐπιβάλλοντας κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος ἴσους ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ μέρη διένειμαν.’

²⁵⁶ Cf. Livy 27.18, 28.14, 30.33. Also, if Livy used Polybius as a source here, it may be that he puts light-armed infantry with *triarii* in his description of the legion (mentioned above under *rorarii*) to account for Polybius’ claim that each maniple had some γροσφομάχοι, cf. Oakley 1998, 464-65.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Livy 42.58 where he claims Caius Crassus (brother of the consul Licinius) commanded a joint force of cavalry and *velites* in the Battle of Callinicus against Perseus in 171 BC. Cf. also Sage 2008, 88 who suggests that ‘the maniple’s centurions could have exercised command over *velites* in battle’. This presents a practical impossibility, however, with the officers of the *triarii*: if the *velites* that were attached to all the maniples, their ostensible officers in the *triarii* would not be able to see what was going on whilst the *velites* skirmished in front of the *triplex acies*. Thus, if centurions were giving any commands, then it would have had to be those in the front ranks of the *hastati*, as their position would make it most practical for them of all infantry officers to give commands: they would be closest to the *velites* whilst they were engaged in skirmishing.

²⁵⁸ Oakley 1998, 457, 459-463; Livy’s statements on size are much too confused to make any assertions, cf. Rawlings 2007, 56. Cf. also Daly 2002, 71 for variations of size at Cannae.

²⁵⁹ Regarding the subsequent disappearance of the *velites* see Bell 1965, 419-422; cf. Dobson 2008, 63.

Gabba's view and emphasizes the fact that we have no reason to believe that the proportions of light troops changed at the end of the third century.²⁶⁰

Regarding the origins of the *velites*, perhaps the most significant passage on the subject is in Livy, found at 26.4. Describing the battle of Capua (211 BC), he mentions a 'new' tactic where light-armed troops rode to battle with cavalry, and then dismounted to engage the enemy. This tactic apparently caused 'the Romans [to have] the superiority in their cavalry.'²⁶¹ Then follows the statement understood to mean 'The *velites* were subsequently incorporated in the legions.'²⁶² Besides the obvious point that there was not enough cavalry (300 paper-strength) to carry all the *velites* (1,200) into battle,²⁶³ an analysis of the Latin indicates that this paragraph should not be interpreted to mean that this new tactic resulted in the establishment of the *velites*.

In describing the armament of the *velites* at Capua (26.4.4), the Latin reads '*...praefixa ferro quale hastis velitaribus inest*,' or iron heads like (*quale*) the ones of the *velites*. This implies to me that Livy here is claiming that the *velites* already existed, as *inest* is in the present tense. I suggest that if Livy meant to say that these were the first *velites*, he simply would have used a word other than *velitaribus* (e.g. *levibus*, *roraiibus*, etc.).²⁶⁴ Furthermore, as Oakley has pointed out, Livy is recording a tactic that is seemingly being carried out by existing *velites*, and that the tactic was designed for a specific occasion.²⁶⁵ In addition, in the key sentence (26.4.9), '*Inde equitatu quoque superior Romana res fuit; institutum ut velites in legionibus essent*, certainly has a sense that the *velites* already existed. As *institutum* is a perfect passive participle, and *essent* is in the imperfect subjunctive (which traditionally denotes a nonfactual claim, e.g. 'may be' or 'could'), the sentence should read: 'Thereafter the Roman side was superior in cavalry; it having been established that the *velites* could also be in the legions.'

²⁶⁰ Brunt 1971, 402-404, Gabba 1976, 5-6, Walbank 1957, 698 (citing Gabba's argument originally published in *Athen.* 1949, 177ff., 181ff.) , Rich 1983, 294-95, 305-12, refutes the notion of a reduction in the property qualification for military service. Daly 2002, 72-73 see esp. 72, n. 44.

²⁶¹ At 3.23 Vegetius suggests something similar about the *velites*, but this is probably a misunderstanding of Livy or some other source on his behalf, see the argument below.

²⁶² Cf. '*ex omnibus legionibus electi sunt iuvenes maxime uigore ac leuitate corporum ueloces; eis Parmae breuiiores quam equestres et septena iacula quaternos longa pedes data, praefixa ferro quale hastis uelitaribus inest. eos singulos in equos suos accipientes equites adsuefecerunt et uehi post sese et desilire perniciter ubi datum signum esset*' ...(thereafter follows a description of the tactic in action)... '*inde equitatu quoque superior Romana res fuit; institutum ut uelites in legionibus essent.*'

²⁶³ v. Lazenby 1996, 178; Daly 2002, 72.

²⁶⁴ Alternatively, if he wanted to express that these light-armed soldiers were early forms of the *velites*, *inest* would have been in the future tense.

²⁶⁵ Oakley 1998, 470.

The sentence is evidently unclear in its meaning, and indicates to me that Livy was actually not sure when the *velites* were established. Indeed, he is obviously confused since in the very same paragraph he suggests they existed before 211 (at 26.4.4);²⁶⁶ not to mention his references to the *velites* before 211 at 21.55, 23.29, and 24.34.

So, I suggest that this passage should in no way be considered as a factual statement regarding the founding of the *velites*. Still, when exactly they were established is extremely difficult to determine, especially because of the confusion in Livy's account of the Roman army. For instance, amongst Livy's many contradictions and confusing statements on the *velites*, we cannot determine whether the *velites* could have existed as *rorarii* or under some other name (e.g. simply '*leves armaturae*') for an indeterminate amount of time. Yet the *velites* as described by Polybius above (γροσφομάχοι), probably existed by 255 BC, the date for the Battle of Tunis. Polybius' reference to γροσφομάχοι in his description of the battle at 1.33 is his first use of the term. Consequently, because he establishes his definition for γροσφομάχοι in book 6, it follows that the γροσφομάχοι at 1.33 are the same that are described in detail at 6.21-22 since he uses the same term. It cannot be that the γροσφομάχοι at the battle of Tunis were a different type of light-armed infantry to the ones he describes in book 6 (i.e. the *velites*) precisely because he uses the same term. There are other Greek terms for light infantry, several of which Polybius uses, (as discussed in the chapter on Greek vocabulary, below), but the troops at 1.33 must be the same as the ones at 6.21-22. Despite this, it is still impossible to determine the exact date of the *velites*' establishment, particularly because of the confusion between the Polybian and Livian accounts of the Roman army. However, as Oakley has put it 'decisive proof in favour of Polybius is wanting, but, given Livy's unreliability elsewhere, he is clearly to be preferred'.²⁶⁷ Perhaps the best conclusion then, would be that light-armed javelin-fighters existed in the Roman army from at least the date of the manipular reform, irrespective of their actual name.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ A similar but less thorough observation has been made by Daly 2002, 72.

²⁶⁷ Oakley 1998, 465.

²⁶⁸ The exact date of this is also unknown, but Oakley reasonably argues for the 290s or 280s, Oakley 1998, 457.

One important note we might take from Livy's description at 26.4 is the description of the javelins used by the *velites*.²⁶⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 6 on tactical roles below, seven javelins per person would have meant a tremendous amount of 'firepower' for the *velites* as a whole and this certainly highlights the significance of skirmishing.²⁷⁰ Indeed, although their name is derived from *velo* or cloak (thus making the 'cloak-wearers'), there is a notable correlation to the Greek word βέλος or missile/dart (pronounced as ['velos] in both the Roman-period and modern Greek), again emphasizing their role as missile troops.

Overall, the picture we get of *velites* is one important to our understanding of light-infantry in general, especially in cases like Livy's use of *leves armaturae*, discussed above.

²⁶⁹ I.e. 'seven javelins, four-feet long'

²⁷⁰ There is no way of determining how many javelins the *velites* actually carried, but Livy's description here could simply be taken to mean that they carried as many as they could.

3 Greek Vocabulary of Light Infantry

The following chapter will assess the uses of terminology referring to light infantry by the Greek authors of the Roman period. As with the preceding Latin chapter, this chapter will aim to determine the etymological aspects of light infantry terminology, as well as any equipment and organization that we can associate with each term. The following chapter, Vocabulary Comparisons, will evaluate the technical aspects of the terminology, and draw overall conclusions for the two chapters on the vocabulary of light infantry.

For ease of reference, I have categorized the Greek vocabulary of light infantry into the following groups, appearing in order:

General Light Infantry
 Javelineers²⁷¹
 Slings

All the terms under each of these headings appear in alphabetical order. Also, each author's usage of the term will be assessed below in order of their historical time of writing.

General Light Infantry

Γυμνής

As γυμνής is derived from the Greek word γυμνός, meaning naked or un-armoured, it is the latter meaning that appears most often in our sources. Thus, in reference to troops, we find soldiers or fighters that are simply 'naked' or 'un-armoured'. Many of these are enemy soldiers fighting Rome, rather than fighting with the legions. Furthermore, while they are not always entirely unarmed or naked, they are often significantly less armed than their Roman counterparts; thus, 'lightly armoured' might be an acceptable definition as well.²⁷²

²⁷¹ That is, troops that use a javelin as their primary weapon, but I do not wish to suggest that this is the only weapon/form of combat that these troops were capable of.

²⁷² E.g. App. *Lib.* 7.40, 14.98, 14.99, 18.124; Arr. *Ektaxis* 31; Jos. *AJ* 14.546 *BJ* 2.512, 3.114, 3.477; thus, 'un-armoured' does not mean they have absolutely no equipment. Cf. The Liddell & Scott definition: 'a light-armed foot-soldier, slinger'.

Most of the references to these troops occur in reference to the Republican army, and the earliest use of the term occurs in Plutarch's *Life of Titus Flamininus* at 4.9. Here, we have a possible reference to *velites* as γυμνητικὸν, when Plutarch describes these forces harassing Philip's marching column in skirmishes (*Flam.* 4.9). While it is impossible to determine exactly what kind of troops these are, the fact that they were skirmishing suggests they were probably best equipped to do so, and so given the time period, these would probably be *velites* rather than regular legionaries.

There is an odd mention in Appian of un-armoured Roman troops engaged in foraging, where Fabius Maximus Aemilianus has legionaries protect these troops (*App. Hisp.* 11.65). Although γυμνοῖς in the passage has been translated by Horace White in the Loeb as unarmed, it is probably unlikely that these soldiers, who may be legionaries or *socii*, are completely unarmed. Naturally, their shields would be cumbersome during foraging, but it seems to me that foraging without armour or even just a sword is also rather dangerous, even with a guard (although this does not preclude the possibility that such folly occurred from time to time). On the other hand, that foragers were simply slightly more lightly armed than their guard is probably more likely, and perhaps this is how we should interpret this passage.

Of the troops that are described more specifically, we find these are often foreign contingents fighting for, and against Rome, and when their weaponry is mentioned, they are armed with missile weapons such as stones, arrows, and javelins.²⁷³ We also have several references to these 'light-armed troops' as Balearic slingers at the battle of Zama,²⁷⁴ and skirmishing troops in Perseus' army before the battle of Pydna (mentioned alongside ψιλῶν; perhaps resembling peltasts) (*Plut. Aem.* 16). Appian also describes γυμνητῶν (again, alongside ψιλοὶ as well as archers) in Antony's army during his preparations for war against Brutus (*BC* 3.3).

They are mentioned alongside λογχοφόροι twice in Arrian's *Ektaxis* (14, 29), where they appear as non-Roman light-armed troops who are meant to run with cavalry during the attack.

²⁷³ *Jos. AJ* 14.456; *BJ* 2.512, 3.114; *Dio* 47.34; *Arr. Ektaxis* 14; *App. Lib.* 14.98.

²⁷⁴ *App. Pun.* 7.40, Appian refers to the σφενδονῆται here as Γυμνήσιοι, which is an allusion to the Balearic slingers, suggesting slingers from the isles were always considered γυμνός; cf. *Strab. Geo.* 3.5.1, who also uses this term to refer to the islands; cf. Dominguez Monedero 2005, 178. That this label refers to their role as light troops, rather than to them always being lightly armed, see the discussion in Chapter 5.

While λογχοφόροι are some sort of javelin-troop,²⁷⁵ it is not clear whether they were actually lightly armed. However, that they and the γυμνήτες here must run with cavalry, suggests that they may not have been wearing heavy mail.

Thus, it seems that while γυμνής may denote light-armed troops, it is certainly not a specific troop type. Further, while the etymology of the term seems to emphasize a lack of armament, the particulars of such descriptions are also often lacking in our sources. Because such a wide variety of troops are labelled with this term, it is possible that γυμνής is simply used to describe the ‘light’ function of particular troops, and indeed, their light function is the only common link between them.²⁷⁶

Overall, this term is most popular with Appian.²⁷⁷ As to why it is not a popular term amongst most authors, it may be suggested that this is because the etymology of the word suggested nakedness or being un-armoured, and other writers may have seen it as an inappropriate term to describe infantry, even if lightly armed, due to this association with a complete lack of armament. Alternatively, it may be that this term was not in regular use until the second century AD.

εὐζωνος

Perhaps the first thing that should be noted here is the definition of this term. Liddell and Scott define the term in Homer as ‘well-girdled, as an epithet of women’. The physical sense of being well-girdled seems to have persisted in some way, since Liddell and Scott also define the term as well-equipped. Precisely how εὐζωνοι were ‘well-equipped’ will be determined below. In many authors, the term is best and most commonly understood to mean light-infantry. This in turn, may be derived from the definition ‘active’, which Liddell and Scott also attribute to the term. The reasoning behind this is simply that troops acting in a ‘light’ capacity may appear to be the most active. There are three ancient authors in which this term appears as a reference to Roman light infantry, and they are Polybius, Dionysus of Halicarnassus and Appian. Their uses of the term will be assessed in that order, coinciding

²⁷⁵ On the grounds that they are armed with the λογχή, for more on this, see λογχοφόροι, below.

²⁷⁶ For more on this view, see Chapter 5.

²⁷⁷ Appian’s uses of the term constitute ten out of the fourteen relevant references in our sources, see the table on p. 114, below.

chronologically with their historical time of writing. In this way, any changes in use over time may be made clearer.

Polybius uses the term to refer to light-armed troops in general, regardless of whether he is referring to Greek, Carthaginian or Roman forces. Though he uses other terms to describe light-armed troops, he uses this term most often. In reference to Roman troops he uses the term thirty times, and it is his favoured term for Roman light-armed troops. However, as will be shown, though Polybius uses this term interchangeably with other terms for light infantry, εὐζῶνοι has the sense of troops who are ‘well-equipped for the given task’. These men first appear in Roman forces at the Battle of Panormus (251 BC), and are regularly referred to until Cynoscephalae (197 BC). It is worth noting the similarity of this time period to the one that covers Polybius’ use of γροσφομάχοι (255 – 202 BC). As is noted in the section on ἀκροβόλος, it is very likely that Polybius uses various terms to refer to the same type of troops. So, given that the time period of his use of γροσφομάχοι is so close to that of his use of εὐζῶνοι, it may also be likely that he uses the latter term to refer to *velites* as well. Since Polybius’ histories cover the period during which the *velites* were known to exist, it follows that the *velites* should make regular appearances in descriptions of military action. This is especially true when one considers that his histories also cover one of the most intense and active periods in Roman military history; so, due to the high frequency of combat, it is no wonder that this significant portion of the Roman army is mentioned so often. This ostensibly indiscriminate use of vocabulary for light troops on Polybius’ behalf will be assessed in further detail below.

Polybius describes εὐζῶνοι engaging in many ‘standard’ light tactics discussed in Chapter 6, ‘Tactical Roles’. This includes attacking elephants (1.40), beginning battles ahead of the heavy infantry (3.73, 3.105, 3.113, 3.115, 10.39), skirmishing (3.101, 3.104, 11.21, 11.22), attacking foragers (3.102), attacking with cavalry (3.102, 3.110, 11.21, 11.22), and reconnaissance (18.19, 18.21).

All the tactics listed above point to light armament, and they also fall under most of the uses of light infantry in the manipular legion, as discussed in the aforementioned chapter. Thus, it may be argued that these troops are *velites* or some similar light-armed corps. Furthermore, in his description of the light-armed action before the Battle of Ilipa (11.22), he describes the

εὐζώνους as both ἀκροβολιζομένους and γροσφομάχοους (11.22.5-10). We know these are *velites* in all instances here for several reasons. Firstly, γροσφομάχοους is the only specific term he uses to describe the light infantry at Ilipa. He does not use any other term that might suggest there were slingers or archers mixed in with these light infantry. And as will be shown in the section on γροσφομάχοους below, this is the term Polybius uses to describe the *velites* specifically. Thus, Polybius identifies the light infantry (to which he had been referring in general terms) as *velites* by using the more specific designation. Secondly, we know these can only be Roman light-armed troops. This is because the only *socii* and *auxilia* that are mentioned in the passages leading up to this one are the Spaniards forming part of the heavy infantry. Furthermore, the tactical manoeuvring of these light infantry directly reflects that which is specifically attributed to the *velites*: they retire between the lines of heavy infantry. Finally, Livy uses Polybius' account for his description of this battle, and there he makes it clear that he understands these troops to be *velites*.²⁷⁸ Like Polybius, he uses three terms interchangeably to refer to the light-armed troops at Ilipa (28.14). Moreover, he also uses two general terms and one specific term: *leves armatura*, *expeditis peditum* and *velites*. The crucial wording comes at 28.14.20, where Livy may be equating the *leves armatura* in the passage to the *velites*: *cornua ancipiti proelio urgebantur: eques levisque armatura, velites, circumductis alis in latera incurrebant*. Because the text at 28.14.20 does not use language that explicitly equates the *leves armatura* to the *velites* (e.g. *levisque armatura, id est velites*), most modern editions of the Latin of this passage read *levisque armatura, ac velites*.²⁷⁹ However, as indicated for the aforementioned reasons in Polybius, the *leves armatura* and *velites* in this passage should be equated, and so the original reading without the *ac* should be considered correct. A translation of Livy 28.14.20 with this understanding could read:

The wings were hard pressed by a twofold attack; the cavalry and the light-armed, (the *velites*), wheeling round, charged their flanks...

²⁷⁸ That Livy uses Polybius for his accounts of this time period, see Smith 1993, 4.

²⁷⁹ This trend seemingly started with Gronovius in the 17th century, cf. Drakenborch 1818, 452. This perhaps should not come as a surprise since the passage appears to be less confused with the *ac* added.

This should make it obvious that Livy is equating the two terms, thus highlighting his understanding that Polybius is using three terms interchangeably whilst consistently referring to the *velites*.²⁸⁰

Further passages in Polybius also indicate his use of varied terms for light infantry, amongst which we may include εὐζώνος. At 11.23, the εὐζώνων appear first as γροσφομάχοους (these are the same γροσφομάχοους mentioned on p. 73 above, at Polyb. 11.22). The terms are then used interchangeably, with each term being used twice in the section. Clearly, there is a direct correlation for Polybius, and as suggested above, it is probable that he is simply using synonyms for the *velites*.

That there were several synonyms for light infantry should not come as a surprise; there are after all, several synonyms for heavy infantry as well.²⁸¹ However, Polybius not only uses as a synonym for light infantry, but also as an adjective to describe an entire army, i.e. one in light marching order (14.8, 14.10). This goes back to the definition of εὐζώνος meaning well-equipped, or more directly ‘well-equipped for the task at hand’. Accordingly, when used in contexts where speed was required of the army, being well equipped meant being lightly armed. What this actually means in terms of their equipment is probably just that they were marching without their baggage, rather than actually wearing less armour.²⁸²

This meaning of being the ‘most appropriately equipped’ is also probably what Polybius tried to convey at 10.39.3. Here he says that Scipio sent his εὐζώνος forward to assist the front line of men. The latter were the advance group of both γροσφομάχοι and ἐπιλέκτοι that Scipio had initially sent out to harass Carthaginian pickets (10.39.1-16). When the εὐζώνοι were then sent out to assist this group of γροσφομάχοι and ἐπιλέκτοι, the group is referred to as τοῖς προκιδυνεύουσι. This provides particular clues as to how we should interpret Polybius’ usage of εὐζώνοι in this passage. Προκιδυνεύουσι comes from the verb meaning ‘to run risk before’. As such, it may be translated here as ‘those who are

²⁸⁰ This perhaps raises the question of why Polybius is seemingly technical in his use of terminology in Book 6 (v. Rawson 1991, 35-48), but less so in other places. The reasons for this are unascertainable. We may speculate, however, that Polybius desired to present his formal description of the Roman army in technical terms in Book 6, and then felt free to use various terms elsewhere (as he does at 11.22-23), perhaps for literary effect.

²⁸¹ E.g. *pedites*, *milites*, πεζοὶ. This is discussed in further detail in the following chapter, see p.120, below.

²⁸² Polybius also occasionally uses the term in this sense when referring to other armies, such as Hannibal’s army on the march at 3.35 or that of Philip at 5.5.

risking the first danger’ or possibly ‘those who are bearing the brunt of the battle’.²⁸³ Thus, this term could possibly be associated with the *antesignani* of the Republican army, or the first line of infantry. This point could be especially valid at 10.39.1 where part of the προκινδυνεύουσι are referred to ἐπιλέκτοι (i.e. picked troops). Ἐπιλέκτοι certainly has strong connotations with the *antesignani* as some of the most reliable troops.²⁸⁴ Yet, because Polybius differentiates between the γροσφομάχοι and the ἐπιλέκτοι within this particular group of προκινδυνεύουσι, the result is that προκινδυνεύουσι refers to both *velites* and *antesignani*.²⁸⁵ It may certainly seem odd that this reference discusses such eager heavy infantry troops being paired with the lightly equipped *velites*. And indeed, it raises the question of how such troops may have fought together. Yet, the actual dynamics of their tactical deployment are impossible to determine from Polybius’ description, and we so we can only speculate on how these two varying troop types may have functioned together.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, regardless how the γροσφομάχοι and ἐπιλέκτοι functioned together or what kind of combat they were engaged in (e.g. skirmishing or hand-to-hand fighting), the most important aspect of this scenario is that they were probably the most appropriate tactical group to execute their orders. This is especially true considering their apparent success, mentioned by Polybius at 10.39.6. As a result, the εὐζωνοι that come to their aid were probably also ‘the most appropriately equipped’ for the task of assisting the προκινδυνεύουσι, rather than a specific light infantry unit.

It is interesting to note that aside from Polybius’ references to an army in light marching order, all of his uses of εὐζωνοι refer to men who engage in non-pitched battle combat. Because those being employed in such combat can be considered to be engaging in ‘light’ tactics, (simply because they contrast the tactics of static heavy infantry) this term has a strong association with light infantry in Polybius.

²⁸³ As Liddell & Scott suggest, see ‘προκινδυνεύω’ *op cit.* They cite IGIX(2).531.5 for both ‘those who are risking the first danger’ and ‘those who are bearing the brunt of the battle’.

²⁸⁴ See *antesignani*, above, as well as the discussion on *delecti* / ἐπίλεκτοι in the following chapter.

²⁸⁵ That is to say, προκινδυνεύουσι is not an equivalent term for *antesignani*, nor should *velites* be considered *antesignani*.

²⁸⁶ For example, perhaps the line-infantry engaged other similarly equipped infantry while the *velites* skirmished with other skirmishers or simply out-flanked the enemy line-infantry. In any case, this is certainly an instance of non-pitched battle combat.

In his Loeb translation of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Cary regularly interprets the term as ‘light infantry’ or ‘lightly equipped’. However, many of these references concern Roman infantry well before the timeperiod covered in this study (e.g. many references occur during 6th century BC). Nevertheless, these references will be included here for philological comparison.

For the most part, Dionysius’ use of the term seems to refer to an intentional and situational outfitting of troops, out of haste. When the Fidenates revolted from Roman rule and engaged in raiding their territory, Ancus Marcius led out an army of light troops (εὐζώνω στρατιᾷ ἐλάσσας) before the Fidenates could make necessary provisions for war (3.39). Similarly, when the Latins raided Roman territory, Tarquinius Priscus ‘marched out against them with his εὐζωνόη who were ready for action’.²⁸⁷ Occasionally, they are also described as young; against the Latins, Tarquinius

took with him such of the Roman youth as were εὐζωνοτάτην, and led them with all possible speed against those of the enemy who were dispersed in foraging.²⁸⁸

Also, the light armed youth (εὐζωνον νεότηνα) of the Veientes are found plundering Roman fields as soon as the army had been discharged (9.14). In another example, an ill-fated soldier by the name of Siccus was sent on a spurious reconnaissance mission (during which he was to be assassinated) and he was accompanied by ‘a company of picked youths fitted out with light equipment’.²⁸⁹

Thus, the type of group that Dionysius portrays with his various uses of the term is not a specific light unit, but instead the group appears as lightly equipped infantry who need to get somewhere quickly. This is emphasized again at 4.51, when he has Tarquinius putting his army into light marching order (εὐζωνον). Marching against the Sabines, Tarquinius’ mobile force is effectively able to outmanoeuvre them. This is because they split into two

²⁸⁷ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.50 ‘ἐξήλθε μὲν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς τὴν εὐζωνόη τε καὶ ἐν ἐτοίμῳ δύναμιν ἐπαγόμενος’

²⁸⁸ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.63: ‘ἀναλαβὼν τὴν εὐζωνοατᾶν Ρωμαίων νεότητα ὡς εἶχε τάχους ἐξῆγεν ἐπὶ τοὺς διεσπαρμένους ἐπὶ τὰς προνομᾶς’

²⁸⁹ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 11.26: ‘ἐπιλέκτων νέων εὐζώνω ἐσταλμένων ὀπίσει’; NB. the equipment here is described with the noun associated with hoplite armour; εὐζώνω is used as the adjective to describe this equipment as light.

groups, and surrounded the Sabines. This highly mobile manoeuvre is what brought the Romans victory, since as Dionysius describes, the pitched battle leading up to the Sabines' encirclement was doubtful for the Romans. Again, it is simply the lack of baggage that aids the Roman victory, and not an actual light unit.²⁹⁰

Because these instances of εὐζώνοι in Dionysius refer to troops that are lightly equipped for a specific reason, and are not an actual light-armed unit, we may conjecture that they were some sort of predecessor to select 'light' units in later periods (such as the *antesignani*) who were called out in similar tactical circumstances.²⁹¹ Indeed, many if not all of the above instances could probably be reasonably translated as 'most appropriately equipped', rather than 'lightly equipped'. It may also be that Dionysius uses εὐζωνος in its sense of being 'active', where the most active or (or in other words the most vigorous) troops are chosen for these special assignments. However, that the best troops were chosen or picked for unique tactical scenarios is probably a convention that dates as far back as soldiering itself. What may be rather more significant are the references to the youth in conjunction with εὐζώνοι. As seen in the section on tactical roles below, the *velites*, (described to be the youngest and the poorest by Polybius), were commonly used for a range of tactical scenarios, especially those that required celerity. Indeed, youth and vigour or 'activeness' (as per one of the dictionary definitions of εὐζωνος, above) often coincide. Thus, while speculative, it may be that the young εὐζώνοι in Dionysius' references were predecessors to the *velites* of the Republic.²⁹² We should not, however, consider Dionysius to be using this term to describe *velites*. Dionysius does not mention troops that were obviously *velites* and he is writing about a period that may have preceded their existence as an identifiable unit.

Of course, none of the references in Dionysius aid in creating a specific definition for the εὐζώνοι, especially for the period under review. It is clear however that they were probably

²⁹⁰ This may raise the issue of what a light unit actually was, and whether the historical sources in general see a difference between a unit lightly equipped and a unit operating without baggage. This issue is discussed in the following chapter, 'Comparison of Vocabulary'.

²⁹¹ It should be noted however, that Dionysius does not use a term like ἐπιλέκτοσ to describe such men, which could have been a more appropriate term if he were describing picked soldiers.

²⁹² However, it should also be noted that young soldiers probably made up a portion of the *hastati* as well. Furthermore, Caesar also chooses the youngest of his *antesignani* for purposes of celerity, and these are regular legionaries (Caes. *BC* 3.84 – see p. 23, above). Thus, the ostensible association with youth should not be seen as conclusive evidence for equating Dionysius' εὐζώνοι and the *velites*.

either more lightly armed than other infantrymen or simply equipped in such a way that best suited the given tactical scenario. Based on a fragment from Dionysius, we might speculate that they could have simply been *sine impedimentia*, as it were. The fragment reads: ‘εὐζώνω καὶ οὐδὲν ἔξω τῶν ὀπλων φερούση στρατιᾶ’ (14.2).²⁹³ Naturally however, because this is a fragment, we cannot use it as a concrete evidence for the equipment of the εὐζώνοι.

Dionysius’ references to εὐζώνοι should not be taken as a reflection of how these troops may have been referred to in the 6th century BC. Rather, it is likely that his vocabulary is indicative of how such quickly deployed or most appropriately equipped troops may have been referred to in the Augustan period. However, this is not to say that Dionysius is exaggerating the role of particular troops by using this particular vocabulary. Instead, I would argue that Dionysius is using εὐζώνοι in a way that makes the most sense to his Augustan audience, i.e. he uses the word to describe what he understands to be troops that are most appropriately equipped for the given tactic. Thus, while he is describing the Roman army from several hundred years before the current period under assessment, we may say that for said period, εὐζώνοι was one of the most suitable terms for troops functioning in such light tactics.

Appian uses εὐζωνος four times in reference to Roman troops.²⁹⁴ Two instances involve tactics that are commonly assigned to light-infantry, namely, deployment with cavalry (*BC* 4.7), and pursuing a routed army.²⁹⁵ At *Iber.* 17, Appian describes how Gnaeus Scipio took some εὐζώνων on a mission to save some of his foragers from a Carthaginian ambush. Whether this force was actually light-armed (for purposes of speed, in order to reach the threatened foragers quickly), or simply well-equipped for the attack is difficult to determine. However, it may be suggested that because they could not withstand the first charge from the Carthaginian forces, they could be categorized as lightly armed. The fourth reference mentions a group of soldiers taken by Sextus Pompey for a nighttime ambush on Marcus Titius’ fleet (*BC* 5.14). As above, it is not clear what kind of troops these are but ‘well-

²⁹³ My translation: ‘with an army of light troops carrying nothing but their arms.’

²⁹⁴ App. *Iber.* 17, *Mith.* 6.45, *BC* 4.7, 5.14.

²⁹⁵ *Mith.* 6.45; this is also often assigned to cavalry to ensure that the pursuers catch the fleeing soldiers, and so it may be suggested that the Roman pursuers here were deployed alongside cavalry (as with the former example), or otherwise, were simply lightly armed for purposes of speed.

equipped’ seems to be the most suitable translation; in this way, the sense of ‘being well-equipped for the tactic/task at hand’, comes across quite clearly. However, it may also be suggested that these troops were lightly armed, since they did not intend on engaging in combat, but rather aimed only to burn the fleet, and probably wanted to do so quickly and quietly.

It is interesting to note, albeit speculatively, that it would seem that εὐζῶνοι could sometimes refer to elite troops like the *antesignani*. As indicated above, Appian’s use of the term certainly seems to suggest that he meant that these troops were the ‘best’ for the job. The various translations used for the references at *Mith.* 6.45 and *BC* 5.14 in particular, ostensibly support this conjecture. In the former, the Horace White translation (MacMillan Co., 1899) interprets εὐζῶνοις as ‘best troops’; similarly John Carter (Penguin, 1996) interpreted εὐζῶνων as ‘crack troops’ at the latter point in Appian’s work. In this way, we might also associate them with Caesar’s elite and ‘light’ troops, the *antesignani*. As discussed above, like εὐζῶνοι, the *antesignani* have been seen to be deployed with cavalry, and were required for tactical situations that required celerity. Indeed, aside from the reference to Gnaeus Scipio, Appian’s remaining three uses of the term can be correlated to such troops (i.e. troops used for such manoeuvres), and our modern interpretations from White and Carter seem to support this.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the point remains speculative, but it is worth noting the link in understanding for modern scholars, that troops used for such special tactical deployments are to be considered some of the best troops.

Regarding the actual equipment of Roman εὐζῶνοι, it is impossible to be specific. However, from all three authors above, there seems to be two main military definitions for this term. In some instances, and especially in Polybius, the tactics that they are involved in (e.g. attacking with cavalry, skirmishing, reconnaissance),²⁹⁷ suggest that they are probably often armed in a similar way to *velites*. In other words, εὐζῶνοι seems to mean lightly-armed or refer to troops engaged in light-infantry-type tactics. In other instances and particularly in Dionysius and Appian, the term seems to refer to the troops that are ‘most

²⁹⁶ Similarly, in a French translation of Diodorus Siculus (1865), Ferdinand Hoefer interprets μάλιστα εὐζώνους (at 2.26) to mean elite light troops (*l’élite des troupes légères*).

²⁹⁷ Attacking with cavalry: App. *BC* 4.7; Polyb. 3.102, 3.110, 11.21, 11.22, 18.19, 18.21. Skirmishing: Polyb. 3.101, 3.104, 3.115, 11.21, 11.22. Reconnaissance: Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 11.26; Polyb. 18.19.

appropriately equipped' for the given task. This variation may reflect each author's personal preference of vocabulary. Alternatively, the term's dichotomy in meaning may be a reflection of the contemporary understanding of military terms for each of the individual authors.²⁹⁸ That is, while εὐζώνοι generally denotes fast-moving troops, it seems that for each of the three authors, the specific troops type that this referred to varied, based on the military realities of the time period in which they were writing.

κοῦφοι

Like many of the terms here, this word is used in a general sense for lightly armed troops. It is often used as an adjective in the ancient sources, rather than a noun, and so it is most often used to describe anything that is light.²⁹⁹ As such, it does not usually denote a formal unit of soldiers, but most often refers to men who are somehow lightly equipped. Κοῦφοι is one of the least frequently used words amongst all the terms under assessment here, at six uses in our sources. There is no evidence to help us determine why this is the case.

There are no specific details regarding their equipment, except for one reference in Appian (discussed below) and in Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The first historical use of this term in reference to the Roman army appears in Dionysius' description of the Servian legion. His use of the term is somewhat convoluted. Because he uses it alongside ψιλοῖ, it is not clear whether he is referring to one or two types of light infantry. As such, it may be worth including the Greek here:

πέμπτη δ' ἑκαλεῖτο συμμορία τῶν ὀλγου πάνυ τετιμημένων ἀργυρίου, ὅπλα δ' ἦν αὐτῶν σαυνία καὶ σφενδόναι· οὗτοι τάξιν οὐκ εἶχον ἐν φάλαγγι, ἀλλὰ ψιλοῖ καὶ κοῦφοι συνεστρατεύοντο τοῖς ὀπλίταις εἰς τριάκοντα λόχους διηρημένοι.

My translation:

The class which was called in the fifth place consisted of those whose property was rated very low, and their arms were javelins (σαυνία) and slings (σφενδόναι); these had no fixed place in the battle-line, but being light-armed

²⁹⁸ For further discussion of this idea, see Chapter 4, below.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Liddell & Scott's definition: 'of troops, *light-armed*'.

men (ψιλοὶ) and nimble men (κοῦφοι), they campaigned with the heavy-armed men and were distributed into thirty centuries.³⁰⁰

The passage may be understood to mean that the fifth class included two types of light infantry: javelin-men and slingers. Alternatively, κοῦφοι may be translated as an adjective rather than a noun. In this case, the passage may be understood to mean that the ψιλοὶ (light-armed troops) are κοῦφοι (nimble/agile) and that they may be armed with either the javelin or the sling, or both. These men also resemble Polybius' description of *velites* insofar as they are deployed with heavy infantry in battle.³⁰¹ What is most probable then is that Dionysius is not certain what term to use for these troops. As a result, it may be that Dionysius is labelling the Servian light infantry with two Greek terms (ψιλοὶ and κοῦφοι), seemingly unable to decide which term is more suitable.³⁰² Nevertheless, this does not clarify why they were apparently equipped with two types of missile weapons.³⁰³ So, perhaps what we should draw from this particular use of κοῦφοι is the association between any kind of light troops (and especially troops armed with slings), and their being regarded as agile or mobile (κοῦφοι).³⁰⁴

Similarly, Appian lists slingers and archers amongst the ἕτεροι κοῦφοι under Eumenes at the Battle of Magnesia (6.33). Appian also regularly refers to κοῦφοι on both sides during the civil wars under the Second Triumvirate. At *BC* 5.12.113, he mentions Numidian

³⁰⁰ *Ant. Rom.* 7.59; It is interesting to note Dionysius' use of the word σαυρία for javelin here, as it is a word that rarely appears in the sources (Strab. 15.1.66, 15.3.18, Diod. Sic. 14.27, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.17). It is not used anywhere else in a Roman context.

³⁰¹ That the light infantry of the fifth class eventually developed into the *velites*, see Cornell 1995, 187-88.

³⁰² I am particularly grateful to both Ioannis Smyrnaios and Dr Laurence Totelin for their suggestions regarding this difficult passage.

³⁰³ It may be argued that being poor, soldiers from the fifth class used javelins or slings, whichever they could afford.

³⁰⁴ This description also has an interesting correlation to training given to the recruit as described by Vegetius. He notes that recruits should be trained in a number of various missile disciplines, including throwing the javelin, shooting arrows, slinging, and throwing lead-weighted darts (*mattiobarbuli*) (*Veg. Mil.* 1.14-17). The fact that skills such as these were assigned to regular infantry in Vegetius' 4th century legion is a marked contrast with the manipular legion. In the latter, the missile disciplines would have been reserved for the light infantry and the allies or mercenaries. This shifting of 'light' tactical delegation from the more lightly armed troops to the heavy infantry is something we already see by the time of Caesar with his *antesignani*. Cf. Chapter 6, 'Tactical Roles', below.

κουῦφοι on the Pompeian side, although this is the only reference to ethnicity.³⁰⁵ Here they are described as

the light-armed troops from Numidia in Africa, who hurled darts from long distances and made their escape when charged by their enemies.

The non-Roman ethnicity should be noted here, since it would be the non-Roman troops of the imperial *auxilia* that would take up the role of ‘light’ troops shortly thereafter. At *BC* 5.12.110, Appian notes that there were 1000 κουῦφοι in Octavian’s army compared to approximately 15,000 legionaries (three legions). In section 116, Octavian’s army at Tyndaris had 5000 κουῦφοι and 20,000 legionaries. Although we cannot draw any specific conclusions from these numbers, it is interesting to note that there were significantly fewer light-armed troops than heavy infantry.³⁰⁶

Appian also gives us an example of their tactical uses. Cornificius sent his κουῦφοι from his camp in Tauromenium, Sicily to face Pompeian cavalry after a naval battle during the civil wars (App. *BC* 5.12). Again the theme of using light-armed troops against cavalry appears. Similar instances can be found in Plutarch’s *Publicola* (22.3) and Arrian’s *Ektaxis* (23).³⁰⁷

Troops described as κουῦφοι occasionally have the lightness of equipment emphasized. At Dio 49.3, Sextus’ forces at the battle at Naulochus are described as follows:

the enemy leaped overboard into the sea whenever their vessels sank, and because of their good swimming and light equipment succeeded easily in climbing aboard others, the attackers were at a corresponding disadvantage.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ However, regarding troops fighting against Romans, Josephus uses the term to describe Jews at 2.543, and Plutarch describes Iberian light infantry as such at *Sert.* 12.

³⁰⁶ This is a drop in light-to-heavy ratio from the manipular legion, and contrary to the closer ratio between legionaries and *auxilia* of the Empire. At the end of the civil war, the ratio is even smaller according to Appian, with 40,000 κουῦφοι next to approximately 200,000 heavy infantry (45 legions) (App. *BC* 5.13). This disparity between the light-to-heavy ratio of the civil wars and that of the early Principate may suggest that Appian’s numbers are inaccurate. Perhaps there had been more foreign or other ‘light-armed’ troops than Appian was aware of. At the same time however, Dio’s discussion of the same events in Appian *BC* 5.12.115-116 emphasizes the lack of light-armed troops on Octavian’s side, but specifically under his general Cornificius (Dio 49.6-7). In any case, it is difficult to draw any substantial conclusions from Appian’s approximate data.

³⁰⁷ However, the Arrian reference here uses κουῦφοι as an adjective to describe the λογχοφόροι, who are stationed with horsemen and picked troops. Nevertheless, combining cavalry-light infantry tactic is also a well known tactic (see Chapter 6, ‘Tactical Roles’, esp. p. 156, below). In the Plutarch reference, τὸ κουφότατον are ostensibly acting alone.

³⁰⁸ Translation: Cary: ἐκπηδώντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν ὅποτε βαπτίζονται, καὶ ἑτέρων σκαφῶν ῥαδίως ἔκ τε τοῦ καλῶς νεῖν καὶ ἐκ τοῦ κούφως ἐσκευάσθαι ἐπιβαινόντων,

Although not Roman troops, Dio describes the Dalmatians facing Tiberius as κοῦφοι, noting they were effective at skirmishing, with excellent speed and agility because of their equipment (Dio 55.30). The same is said about the Iberians under Sertorius who caused the heavy-armed Romans under Metellus great difficulty, and consistently defeated the Roman armies sent to Spain.³⁰⁹

In another instance of the speed associated with κοῦφοι, Antony's general Ventidius pursued the fleeing Sextus Pompey with το κουφότατον τοῦ στρατοῦ shortly after the battles of Philippi, (Dio 48.39). Here, it may be suggested that as with *expediti*, the army may simply be in light marching order, however, as with the other κοῦφοι in our sources, these details and/or the specifics of their armament are impossible to ascertain.³¹⁰

ψιλοὶ

Ψιλοὶ is generally used by our sources to refer to light troops who are also capable of using missiles.³¹¹ From tables 1 and 2 in the following chapter, it is evident that ψιλοὶ is also the most frequently used light infantry term.³¹² Interestingly, unlike any of the other terms, it is used at least once by all the authors. It is used most often by Arrian, and least often by Polybius. The consistent usage of the word may rest in the fact that it is often used as an umbrella term to refer to missile-bearing troops. Indeed, this is how Arrian uses it in his *Τεχνή Τακτικά*, where it appears 13 times as a general reference to light-armed troops.

Polybius provides the earliest historical use of this term in reference to Roman troops, which appear under Marcus Minucius Rufus during the Second Punic War (3.104). However, in the following passage (3.105), Polybius refers to these very troops as εὐζώνων, a generalizing

ἀντιρρόπως ἠλαττοῦντο. NB. As this is a naval battle, being lightly equipped may have been regarded as being advantageous.

³⁰⁹ Plut. *Sert.* 12.5, cf. *Pomp.* 27.2

³¹⁰ For further comparisons between Latin and Greek terminology, see Chapter 4 on Vocabulary Comparisons, below.

³¹¹ Cf. Liddell & Scott's definition: 'as a military term, of soldiers without heavy armour, light troops, such as archers and slingers, opp. ὀπλίται' Thucydides (4.23.4) provides a general description of ψιλοὶ which could probably be applicable to certain ψιλοὶ fighting for Rome as well.

³¹² See pages 113 and 114, in Chapter 4, below.

trend I have already noted in Polybius and other authors. Indeed, Polybius often uses *ψιλοὶ* as a reference to bare ground, rather than as a reference to soldiers.³¹³

A relevant earlier reference to Roman *ψιλοὶ* comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, when he describes the Battle of Asculum in 279 BC (20.1-2). Uniquely for the Roman army, the *ψιλοὶ* here were used with a special contraption designed to combat Pyrrhus' elephants. He describes the situation as follows:

Outside the line they stationed the light-armed troops and the wagons, three hundred in number, which they had got ready for the battle against the elephants ... Furthermore, standing on the wagons, which were four-wheeled, were many also of the light-armed troops — bowmen, hurlers of stones and slingers who threw iron caltrops; and on the ground beside the wagons there were still more men.³¹⁴

It should be noted that Dionysius has grouped missile troops under *ψιλοὶ*, which, as we shall see, is a recurring usage in the ancient sources. Also, it seems these *ψιλοὶ* were not necessarily prepared or armed for close combat, for

when the men stationed in their towers [on the elephants] no longer drove the beasts forward, but hurled their spears down from above, and the light-armed troops [on Pyrrhus' side] cut through the wattled screens surrounding the [Roman] wagons and hamstringed the oxen, the men at the [aforementioned Roman] machines [i.e. the *ψιλοὶ*], leaping down from their cars, fled for refuge to the nearest infantry and caused great confusion among them.³¹⁵

Onasander's discussion on the tactical uses of *ψιλοὶ* includes the advice they should be sent to forage (10.8) and that they should be used in broken terrain (18.1).³¹⁶ Also, as mentioned in the sections below on *ἄκοντιστής* and *σφενδονήτης*, Onasander suggests that these *ψιλοὶ* should be deployed in front of the heavy infantry. By grouping *ἄκοντιστής* and *σφενδονήτης* under *ψιλοὶ*, Onasander appears to class *ψιλοὶ* as troops who are known to use missiles as an essential form of combat, and this is confirmed with further suggestions he makes for their tactical deployment. He states,

³¹³ E.g. Bare (treeless) ground: 3.55, 3.71, 18.31; he also uses in it reference to his writings in the sense that they are not embellished: e.g. 9.1, 29.12.

³¹⁴ Translation: Cary.

³¹⁵ Translation: *op. cit.* My square brackets, inserted for clarification.

³¹⁶ This reflects the deployments discussed in Chapter 6, see pp.150-151; 168-173.

If each army should have a number of ψιλῶν to be the first to hurl their weapons against their opponents before the hand-to-hand battle; or after the clash of the phalanx, attacking from the flank, they should make use of their missiles (βέλεσιν), for thus the enemy will be forced together into a narrow space and will be greatly confused by such tactics.³¹⁷

Onasander's suggestion that the ψιλοὶ might hurl their weapons before hand-to-hand combat indicates that these troops were probably capable of more than just missile combat. It is this distinction of being able to engage in hand-to-hand combat that differs from Dionysius' use of the term. It should once again be pointed out that the contemporary understanding of the term may have had an effect on the author's usage of it.³¹⁸ Onasander is writing in the mid-first century AD, when *auxilia* (who can also fight in the line of battle) were providing the role of light troops. Thus, this may be why we see ψιλοὶ in Onasander as capable of more than just missile combat. Nevertheless, Onasander's use of the term also highlights the fact that missiles were a key component of their panoply. This is further evident in his next chapter where he says,

If the enemy remain in the crescent position, the general should post his ψιλοὺς and archers opposite them, who with their missiles will cause heavy loss.³¹⁹

Josephus' use of ψιλοὶ is also quite general. The tactical deployments in which he describes them are quite standard for light-armed troops.³²⁰ He tells us that the ψιλοὶ under Vitellius were foreign allies, and they are seen being deployed with cavalry.³²¹ During the Jewish War they are deployed with archers, Vespasian having ordered them

...to march first, that they might beat back any sudden attack from the enemy, and might search out suspicious woods that had potential for ambushes.³²²

³¹⁷ 20.2, translation Illinois Greek Club, Loeb Edition.

³¹⁸ This has already been mentioned above on p. 80.

³¹⁹ 21.7, translation: *ibid.*

³²⁰ Cf. Chapter 6, below.

³²¹ Jos. *AJ* 18.120: Οὐιτέλλοις δὲ παρασκευασάμενος ὡς εἰς πόλεμον τὸν πρὸς Ἀρέταν δυσὶ τάγμασιν ὀπλιτῶν ὅσοι τε περὶ αὐτὰ ψιλοὶ καὶ ἵππεις συμμαχοῦντες ἐκ τῶν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίου Βασιλειῶν ἀγόμενος, 'So Vitellius prepared to make war with Aretas, leading two legions of heavy infantry, as many ψιλοὶ and cavalry that belonged to them, allied from the kingdoms under the Romans' (my translation).

³²² Jos. *BJ* 3.116, my translation: Τοὺς μὲν ψιλοὺς τῶν ἐπικούρων καὶ τοχότας προάγειν ἐκέλευσεν, ὡς ἀνακοόπτοιεν τὰς ἐξαπιναίους τῶν πολεμίων ἐπιδρομὰς καὶ διερευνῶεν τὰς ὑπόπτους καὶ λοχᾶσθαι δυναμένας ὕλας. It should be noted that this role is typically undertaken by light troops, see p 144 ff., below.

Plutarch likewise uses the term quite generally. He mentions Roman *ψιλοὶ* in the Third Mithridatic War, where a legate of Lucullus is sent to protect the soldiers setting up the marching camp (Plut. *Luc.* 25). This legate, named Sextilius, is sent with *ψιλοὶ* as well as cavalry and heavy infantry, and is unwillingly engaged by Tigranes' general Mithrobarzanes who is killed and his attack force defeated. Plutarch does not specify what kind of light troops these are. Similarly, he mentions *ψιλοὶ* under Crassus (Crass. 20, 24), but is ambiguous with details. We only know that they unsuccessfully attempted to skirmish with Parthian cavalry at Carrhae (24), and this could possibly make them some sort of missile-using light infantry.

Our evidence regarding Roman *ψιλοὶ* from the late-Republic ends with references from Plutarch's *Antony* and his campaigns in the east. When listing the composition of Antony's army in Armenia, Plutarch notes that there were thirty-thousand foreign horsemen and *ψιλοὶ* (*Ant.* 37.3). Plutarch notes that in Parthia, the *ψιλοὶ* had slings and javelins (*Ant.* 41.5), and it is also likely that the *ψιλοὶ* at *Ant.* 42.2 are the *ἄκοντιστής* and *σφενδονήτης* mentioned in the preceding section (i.e. 42.1). This is similar to Onasander, who also uses *ψιλοὶ* to group *ἄκοντιστής* and *σφενδονήτης* together (Onas. 18.1), as mentioned above. At *Ant.* 45.3 and 49.1, Plutarch notes that the heavy infantry enclose the *ψιλοὶ* within a *testudo* formation, a tactic that is also mentioned by Dio at 49.30.1. While Plutarch does not specifically state that the *ψιλοὶ* engaged the enemy from within the *testudo* (i.e. with missiles), he does say that the Parthians would not come to close quarters with the legionaries, and at 49.1 he says that the light infantry were ordered to engage. If the *ψιλοὶ* were still enclosed by the *testudo* at this point, they would very likely have engaged the Parthians with missiles from a distance.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section (p. 83), Arrian uses this term frequently in his general work on tactics. Interestingly, he separates them from peltasts, but this may simply be a Greek convention, since he is ostensibly describing a Greek army.³²³ Thus, his description of the equipment of the *ψιλοὶ* may not help our understanding of these troops for

³²³ DeVoto 1993, i; cf. e.g. *Tact.* 3.1.

the Roman army.³²⁴ The same argument might be used for the tactics that follow this description. However, because these tactics are quite general, and because Arrian's understanding of tactics is probably more Roman than Greek (given that he was a Roman military commander under the Principate), these tactics they may be worth discussing here.

Arrian states that ψιλοὶ are deployed next to the heavy armed troops, so that the heavy army may protect the lightly armed ψιλοὶ (*Tact.* 9). We see a similar notion in Plato in his description of the 'pyrrhiche', or war dance.³²⁵ We might equate this to the *velites*' retiring into the ranks of heavy infantry. Arrian also says that another place for the ψιλοὶ would be on the flanks of the heavy infantry (*ibid.*). This was a typical tactical deployment of light infantry in the Roman army.³²⁶ Arrian further notes that the use of missiles on behalf of the ψιλοὶ was advantageous in keeping the heavy infantry protected. Indeed, it seems that for Arrian this term expressly denotes missile troops.³²⁷ As mentioned in the section on λογχοφόροι below, Arrian's use of ψιλοὶ in the *Ektaxis* also refers to missile troops.³²⁸

Arrian puts great emphasis on the tactical use of ψιλοὶ. He highlights the variety of tactical deployments in which they may be used (*Tact.* 13, 25), and claims that they should constitute half of each formation (14). Gilliver has noted the tactical flexibility of Roman light infantry, and this is a primary part of the discussion of tactics in Chapter 6, below.³²⁹ So while there are evident tactical connections with Roman light infantry, Arrian's discussion remains too general for us to determine anything specific about these troops.³³⁰ For Arrian then, ψιλοὶ is a general term, and he uses it to refer to some of the most lightly armed missile troops.

³²⁴ He claims that they were the opposite of hoplites because they had no breast plate, shield, greaves or helmet, and they primarily used missile weapons (*Tact.* 3.1). Some slingers are equipped in this way on Trajan's column (see p. 49, above), but Arrian does not use the term for slingers (σφενδονῆται) to describe these troops.

³²⁵ See p. 188, below.

³²⁶ Especially if they were deployed with cavalry, cf. Polyb. 11.22; Caes. *BC* 3.88-9; Gilliver 1999, 103, 106.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*: τὸ δὲ ψιλὸν ἐναντιώτατα ἔχει ἰῶ ὀπλιτικῶ πάντα, ὅτιπερ ἄνευ θώρακος καὶ ἀσπίδος καὶ κνημίδος καὶ κράνους ἐκηβόλοις τοῖς ὅλοις διαχρώμενον, cf. *Tact.* 9.

³²⁸ They are armed with a λόγχη at *Ektaxis* 25, and various other types of missiles at *Tact.* 3.3, including bow shots (τοχεύμασιν), light javelins (ἀκοντίοις), slings (σφενδόνας), and stones thrown from the hand (λίθοις ἐκ χειρός).

³²⁹ Gilliver 1999, 113-114.

³³⁰ He does have specific discussion of their equipment and their organization (*Tact.* 14.3-4), but these are evidently related to Greek armies as we have no equivalent examples in Roman armies.

Appian refers to Roman $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ at the siege of Astapa during the Second Punic War (Hisp. 6.33), and although he does not discuss their armament specifically, he does mention that they are deployed with cavalry. This deployment, as already mentioned, was a standard tactical use of *velites*, and it is probable that these $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ included *velites* amongst them or that they actually were the *velites*. The same goes for the Roman deployment at Cannae, where Appian has $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ with cavalry deployed on the wings.³³¹ Similarly at Syrian War 6.36, Appian suggests the light-armed troops and cavalry would normally have been deployed together to guard the marching camp. Though guarding the camp was also a regular assignment of the *velites*, that cavalry joined them for this task is unusual.³³² At the Battle of Magnesia, Appian describes $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ and bowmen mingled with the rest of the troops (App. Syr. 6.31). These later envelop the Macedonian infantry, who were

denuded of cavalry on either side, [and] had opened to receive [their own] light-armed troops, who had been skirmishing in front, and closed again. Thus crowded together, Domitius easily enclosed them with his numerous light-armed troops and cavalry (6.35).

Under Manlius Vulso 189 BC, the $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ appear to be missile troops, since Appian states that ‘the crowd was so dense that no dart ($\beta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) missed its mark.’³³³ Whether they had other weapons as well is not clear; as with many of the Greek vocabulary, our sources’ technicality is far from precise.

Appian mentions Roman $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ several times in his Civil War, but most of these references are vague.³³⁴ However, it may be worth noting that they are mentioned alongside archers, slingers, cavalry and even gladiators (BC 4.10, 5.3); as with Plutarch and Onasander (noted above), this is yet another example where $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ are deployed alongside slingers. Their deployment alongside cavalry also reflects Josephus’ use of the term (see above). Furthermore, this particular case highlights the fact that these $\psi\iota\lambda\omicron\iota$ were probably

³³¹ App. *Hann.* 4.19; see also Daly 2002, 70-73 for a discussion of the light infantry on the Roman side at Cannae.

³³² For this tactical deployment of *velites*, see pp. 147-48, below.

³³³ Syr. 7.42, these troops are probably armed with missiles because $\beta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ can be used to describe any sort of missile.

³³⁴ See esp. App. *BC* 2.7, 3.3, 5.9.

javelineers, since if they were slingers, archers or cavalry, this would mean Appian is being tautological.³³⁵

Dio also mentions *ψιλοὶ* and cavalry during the civil war, when the general Cornificius is attacked by these from a distance (49.6.3). The fact that they attack from a distance here underlines the fact that they are probably using missiles, although it is impossible to say whether they were armed with other weapons as well. Dio also mentions Publius Sulpicius Galba using his *ψιλοὶ* in skirmishes against Philip (Dio 18.58.1) during the Second Macedonian War. Again, we see them deployed with cavalry here.

Using Caesar's account of his forces before the battle against the Belgae, we can determine what kind of troops Dio refers to as *ψιλοὶ* prior to the battle. At *BG* 2.7, Caesar mentions Numidian and Cretan archers as well as Balaeric slingers. It is probable that these light-infantry would have also been present throughout his campaign against the Belgae. So, when Caesar needed light troops to ambush the Belgae, these are probably the same *ψιλοὶ* that Dio refers to when he tells us they, along with cavalry,

fell upon the [Belgae], taking them by surprise, and killed many of them, so that the following night they all withdrew to their own land, especially since the Aedui were reported to have invaded it (39.1.4).

At this point, the *ψιλοὶ* are solely missile troops. However, both their deployment with cavalry and their use in an ambush should be noted as a common tactic for light infantry in general, as discussed in the chapter on tactical roles below. Nevertheless, in Dio's description of the battle between Suetonius Paulinus and Boudicca, his use of *ψιλοὶ* still seems to stress the use of missiles, as he mentions the missile exchange between the *ψιλοὶ* (62.12.3).

Overall then, our sources seem to use *ψιλοὶ* as a general term for light-armed troops, who are often seen to be equipped with missiles. This usage is fairly consistent over time, and it is only Josephus who does not specifically attribute missiles to these troops. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the consistent usage of the term across all of the relevant ancient sources may be a result of the fact that this term can be applied to 'light infantry who

³³⁵ However, it is possible that he is being tautological as literary effect was probably more important to Appian than historical accuracy.

use missiles.’ This definition is obviously quite general, as all infantry with a ‘light’ panoply usually fall under this classification.³³⁶ Indeed, it seems *ψιλοὶ* were certainly considered to be ‘light’ troops, and were tactically used in that capacity. However, the specifics of their armament beyond the fact that they were often equipped with various missiles are difficult to determine.

Javelineers

ἄκοντιστάι

Ἀκοντιστάι appears twenty times in the relevant sources, but fairly rarely in most authors aside from Polybius. This suggests the term’s use went out of favour after the disappearance of a dedicated javelin (i.e. *ἄκοντίων*) unit (e.g. the *velites*). This is nevertheless, a fairly long-lived term that is used throughout the ancient literature, and generally denotes troops armed with a javelin or dart.³³⁷ In addition, this term is used in texts written both before and during our period. Thus, these types of troops appear in a vast array of armies, including the Roman army.

Polybius and Plutarch are the two sources who refer to these troops in the armies of the Roman Republic. Polybius’ discussion of the battle of Telamon is the earliest historiographical use of this term in reference to Roman forces.³³⁸ Here, he discusses the equipment of the *ἄκοντιστάι* and the way it was used. The details are worth repeating at length here:

When the *ἄκοντιστάς* advanced [in front of the legions], as was the Roman habit, rapidly and effectively throwing their missiles (*βέλεσι*), the inner ranks of the Celts found their cloaks and trousers of great service; but to the naked men in the front ranks this unexpected mode of attack caused great desperation and difficulty. For the Gallic shields not being big enough to cover the man, the larger the naked body the more certainty was there of the *βέλη* hitting. And at last, not being able to defend themselves, because the *εἰσακοντίζοντες* were out of reach, and their weapons kept pouring in, some of them, in the extremity of their distress and helplessness, threw themselves with desperate courage and reckless violence upon the enemy, and thus met a voluntary death; while others gave

³³⁶ For more on defining light infantry, see Chapter 5, below.

³³⁷ Cf. Liddell & Scott’s definition: ‘javelin - thrower, javelin-hurling’.

³³⁸ Other Greek authors such as Appian, Diodorus and Dionysius do not use the term in reference to Roman armies during the Republic.

ground step by step towards their own friends, whom they threw into confusion by this manifest acknowledgment of their panic. Thus the spirit of the Gaesatae had broken down by the method of attack of the ἄκοντιστάς. But when the Romans received the ἄκοντιστάις in their ranks, and their maniples advanced, the Insubres, Boii, and Taurisci received the attack, and maintained a desperate hand-to-hand fight.³³⁹

From this passage it is very probable that the ἄκοντιστάι Polybius is referring to are the *velites* of the Roman army; the way in which they were deployed at Telamon is a well known tactic for the Romans.³⁴⁰ They appear three more times in his work, all before the end of the Second Punic War. At 3.110, they are deployed once again as skirmishers, this time in front of the Roman heavy infantry at Cannae. The remaining tactical uses of the ἄκοντιστάι include deployment that is familiar for the *velites* such as being taken on a reconnaissance mission, and fighting alongside cavalry (3.65, 3.69). Thus, it seems that for Polybius, this term probably denotes *velites*, or light infantry that are similarly equipped. As discussed above, Polybius uses several terms to refer to Roman light infantry, and it is probable that ἄκοντιστής is just another synonym for him, particularly for *velites*.³⁴¹

Although Onasander only mentions these troops once, his advice on where to place the ἄκοντιστάι coincides with their deployments mentioned in Polybius (above) and Plutarch (discussed below). He states that

The general will assign his light-armed troops (ψιλούς) – javelin-throwers (ἄκοντιστάς), bowmen (τοχότας), and slingers (σφενδονήτας) – to a position in front of the phalanx, for if placed in the rear they will do more damage to their own army than to the enemy. And if in among the heavy-armed, their peculiar skill will be ineffectual because they will be unable to take a step backwards in throwing their javelins (ἄκοντίων) or to charge forward and cast them, as other soldiers are in front of them and at their heels.³⁴²

³³⁹ Polyb. 2.30, my translation.

³⁴⁰ E.g. Polyb. 3.65 (ἄκοντιστάς), 3.113.4 (εὐζώνους), 3.115.1-4 (εὐζώνους), 10.39.1-3 (γροσφομάχους, εὐζώνους), 11.22.9 (εὐζώνων); Livy 21.46.5-6, 21.55.2-6, 22.47.1, 37.41, 44.35; App. *Hann.* 21 (σφενδοῖται καὶ λιθοβλοῖ); Varro *Ling.* 7.58; Onas. 17 (discussed below) cf. Chapter 6, below. NB. The terms in brackets indicate the terms used in the given Greek passages; all of which are various synonyms used to refer to the skirmishers of the Roman army. This trend is mentioned throughout this chapter as well as the next.

³⁴¹ See esp. the discussion regarding Polybius' use of εὐζώνος in the corresponding section above. Polybius also uses the term γροσφομάχοι to refer specifically to the *velites* (cf. Polyb. 6.12-22) which is discussed below.

³⁴² Onas. 17, Trans. Illinois Greek Club.

This description gives us a fairly clear picture of how the ἄκοντιστάι would have been expected to use their weapon. Here, they are evidently presented as light missile troops, which normally skirmish in loose formation in order to use their weapons properly.³⁴³ Again it must be remembered that Onasander is writing under the Principate, and so while his usage of the term is similar to that of Polybius, Onasander's understanding of ἄκοντιστής may reflect the organization of the army in his period (i.e. these are certainly not *velites*).

Josephus describes ἄκοντιστάι with archers and slingers at both Vespasian's siege of Jotapata, and the siege of Jerusalem (*BJ*. 3.168, 5.297). Although Josephus does not tell us much more about these troops than this, it should be noted that this tactical deployment is the same as it is in Onasander. This too, may reflect the fact that they are both writing during the Principate.

Plutarch makes two references to these troops in the Roman army, and both refer to soldiers in Antony's forces during his Parthian campaigns (*Ant.* 41, 42). In both instances, the ἄκοντιστάι are deployed alongside slingers (as with Onasander and Josephus), and used in very fluid combat, emphasizing the role of the ἄκοντιστάι as missile troops. In this first instance, they are used to fight cavalry, and in the second, they cover the flanks of Antony's surrounded forces that were marching in square formation. As Plutarch does not tell us much more than this, we cannot determine anything specific about the armament of these troops. As they are deployed with slingers, it is likely that they are auxiliaries of some kind, and it is further likely that these troops were equipped with light javelins.

Our only other imperial source to mention these troops as part of the Roman army is Arrian. He places them in front of the standards of the 15th Legion in his *Ektaxis* and tells us nothing more than this (5). Ἀκοντιστάι are mentioned again in section 14 of the same work, but here it is a synonym for the λογχοφόροι from Rhizus (mentioned in the section on λογχοφόροι below). Notably in this instance, Arrian places them behind the heavy infantry,

³⁴³ It should be noted however, that Onasander's remarks suit a tightly-packed infantry formation, but as we know, this was not necessarily always the mode in which heavy infantry were deployed.

a tactic contradictory to Onasander's suggestion regarding these troops, above.³⁴⁴ Arrian claims that the heavy infantry should be placed in front of the javelineers so that they might be protected while throwing over the heads of their comrades. This also implies to me that Arrian may have deemed they were either not sufficiently skilled in skirmishing with cavalry (the Alans were primarily a heavy cavalry force), or that the way in which they or the Alans were equipped may have made these ἀκοντιστάι more effective as a static force of missile troops like archers or slingers. Beyond this, the only thing we can say for certain about these troops is that they were armed with a javelin.

Thus, for the Republic, ἀκοντιστής may be compared to the *velites*: skirmishers armed with javelins that were very fluid in combat. Our Imperial sources are less forthcoming regarding ἀκοντιστής. Beyond this, we may say these troops were armed with a javelin, yet like most of the contingents under review, specifics are indeterminable.

ἀκροβόλος

This term is used as an adjectival participle to describe the action of skirmishing in our sources, rather than actual fighters. This is a result of the fact that all of our examples derive from ἀκροβολίζομαι, the verb meaning 'to skirmish', rather than the noun ἀκροβόλος.³⁴⁵ That is, our examples all begin with the root ἀκροβολίζομ, derived from the verb rather than the root ἀκροβόλ derived from the noun. The earliest historical use of this term in reference to a Roman army engaging in such skirmishes (ἀκροβόλισμου) occurs in Polybius at 1.18 during the siege of Agrigentum.

Like κοῦφοι, this is one of the least frequently used words amongst all the terms, at six uses. This may be explained by the fact that it is mostly used to describe the action of skirmishing rather than skirmishers. However, there are a few instances where the term actually refers to the skirmishers themselves.

³⁴⁴ Also, ἀκοντιστάι appear behind the hoplites in the battle between the Piraeus and Athens in Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.12. Having missile troops fire from behind heavy infantry was perhaps not as uncommon as Onasander implies, cf. Chaeronea in 86 BC, Plut. *Sull.* 18.

³⁴⁵ While this noun appears in Liddell & Scott, it does not appear in our sources. This will be discussed in further detail below. NB. Ακροβολίζομαι is literally translated as 'to throw from afar, to fight with missiles', from which the meaning 'to skirmish' is derived.

While the sources do not specify any equipment or organization, these troops are (perhaps unsurprisingly) always used to skirmish, particularly before battles. Polybius describes Caecilius ordering them out of the fortifications at Panormus to hold Hasdrubal's army back with sallies (1.40). Scipio pulls his skirmishing ἀκροβολιζομένους back between the maniples before distributing them amongst the wings at Ilipa (Polyb. 11.22). This resembles a well-known use of the Roman *velites*, and indeed as mentioned above, it seems Polybius is specifically describing these troops; in the same section he refers to them as both εὐζώνων and γροσφομάχους.³⁴⁶ In several translations of Polybius, the latter term is translated as *velites*.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, at 11.32 Polybius describes an ambush set by Scipio where the γροσφομάχους engage in major skirmishing (μέγας ἀκροβολισμός) against Iberian ἀκροβολιζομένοις. Thus, if γροσφομάχοι can engage in ἀκροβολισμός, I would suggest that it follows that γροσφομάχοι can be ἀκροβολιζομένοις. Given all of this, when Polybius' use of εὐζώνων (mentioned above) is also taken into account, it seems that the three terms for light troops can be used interchangeably. Indeed, Walbank points this out for τοὺς ἀκροβολιζομένοις at 1.40.10, indicating that these troops are the εὐζωνοὶ in §6.³⁴⁸ So, I would suggest that Polybius is simply using various terms for light infantry without any specific difference in meaning. If this is the case, then as pointed out in the sections on γροσφομάχοι and εὐζωνοὶ, it is possible that these light-armed troops are *velites*, or infantry equipped in a similar way. This becomes especially probable when we consider that these troops are commonly used before battles – a regular use of the *velites*.

Etymologically, γροσφομάχοι and ἀκροβολιζομένοι are similar in meaning, the former literally meaning 'those fighting with the γρόσφος (javelin)' and the latter meaning 'to heave the lead point'.³⁴⁹ The main difference between the two is the way in which the terms

³⁴⁶ Polyb. 11.22.9-11, noted under εὐζώνος, above.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh's 1889 Macmillan translation and W.R. Paton's 1922 Loeb translation for 1.33, 6.21, 6.24, 6.35, 10.39, 11.22, 11.23, 11.24, 11.32, 15.9, 15.12; also Ian Scott-Kilver's 1979 Penguin text for 10.39; see also 'γροσφομάχοι', below.

³⁴⁸ Walbank 1957, 102; he also points out that the εὐκνήτοι ('light troops') in §7 (those stationed before the trench and wall), appear in §12 as ἀκέραιοι ('fresh troops'), and that these are quite distinct. NB. This is the only instance in our sources of εὐκνήτοι being used to mean light troops. This varying use of terms to refer to the same troops is another example of this writing convention in Polybius, discussed above.

³⁴⁹ ἀκροβολιζομένοις from ἄκρον (point) and βολίζω (to heave the lead), although βολίς is also another term for javelin, and so the term may also be translated 'those with the javelin points'.

inherently refer to the javelin: the γρόσφος, and the βολίς or ἄκρον. While all these words can mean javelin, βολίς has several ways of being understood (discussed below). Because of this, ἀκροβόλις may have a different literary effect.

To clarify the different literary effects of γροσφομάχοι and ἀκροβολιζόμενοι, it is necessary to understand the various ways in which they refer to the javelin (i.e. γρόσφος, and the βολίς or ἄκρον). While γρόσφος is defined by Liddell and Scott simply as ‘javelin’, ἄκρον means point, or something sharp, and βολίς is any kind of missile. Βολίς can also refer to a sounding lead (thus the meaning: ‘to heave the lead’, mentioned above) or a flash of lightning.³⁵⁰ Thus, the use of βολίς may carry a slightly more poetic sense to it because of its alternate translation as flash of lighting.

Our other author with relevant references to this term is Plutarch. He does not use any terms interchangeably with ἀκροβολιζόμενοι, and indeed his references to what specific kind of troops these are, are less clear. In his *Life of Aemilius Paulus*, several hundred ἀκροβολιζόμενους from both the Roman and Macedonian armies skirmish before the battle of Pydna (18.2). Plutarch notes that some of his sources suggest that 700 Ligurians fighting for Rome could have been responsible for beginning the skirmish, but he does not tell us any more about the forces involved (18.1). In his *Life of Marcellus*, Marcellus coerces Hannibal to give battle by harassing him with ἀκροβολισμοῖς (25.2), once again leaving us with a vague reference to these troops.

As mentioned above, the interesting detail to note is that etymologically, all of our examples derive from ἀκροβολίζομαι, the verb meaning ‘to skirmish’, rather than the noun ἀκροβόλος. Consequently, the verb is acting as an adjectival participle in our examples, which is translated as a relative clause, e.g. ‘those who skirmish’. To me, this could be

³⁵⁰ v. Liddell & Scott ἄκρον, and βολίς. Although a pointed (ἄκρον) piece of lead (βολίς) probably refers to a javelin, it may also refer to a sling stone, and this may be why Liddell and Scott also define ἀκροβόλος as ‘slinger’. The translation as ‘slinger’ is suggested by Liddell and Scott based on the root of the word coming from βάλλω which can be used to refer to anything thrown. However, our sources probably did not use the term to refer to slingers. Indeed, the alternate translation of βολίς meaning ‘flash of lighting’ suggests to me that a javelin more appropriately suits the various definitions of βολίς than a sling stone. This is partly because a flash of lightening more closely resembles a javelin than a sling stone, and because sling stones were difficult to see in flight, and so I think it is unlikely that they were correlated to lighting.

interpreted as having a sense of permanence, insofar as it could carry the implication that they are ‘those who always skirmish’. I think the same sense could apply even if the present tense is translated in the continuous aspect, i.e. ‘those who are skirmishing’, or ‘the ones who are (continuously) skirmishing’.³⁵¹ To me the adjectival use of the participle thus could be interpreted to imply that these men are a permanent feature of the Roman army, or in other words, the *velites*.³⁵² At the same time however, I do not wish to suggest that ‘the ones who skirmish’, is equivalent to ‘the ones who only skirmish’. As indicated in the chapter on tactical roles below, skirmishers or *velites* were flexible in their tactical deployment, and while they may be ‘the ones who always skirmish’, they certainly have other roles as well.

γροσφομάχοι

This is the word that Polybius uses to mean *velites*. References to γροσφομάχοι only exist in Polybius, while γρόσφος appears once in both Strabo and Plutarch.³⁵³ Polybius describes γροσφομάχοι in detail his discussion of the organization of the Roman army in Book 6. These are possibly the most significant references to γροσφομάχοι because they describe their organization and equipment. From the passages in Book 6 we know a great deal more about the γροσφομάχοι than we do of other light infantry.³⁵⁴ Specifically, Polybius’ description of the γροσφομάχοι at 6.21-22 is the main reference for the organization and appearance of the Roman *velites*, hence the consistent translation of γροσφομάχοι as *velites*.³⁵⁵ Indeed, because our knowledge of the *velites* is heavily based on Polybius’ description of the γροσφομάχοι, we can equate the two terms, as Liddell and Scott have.³⁵⁶ As such, Polybius’ descriptions of them have already been included and discussed above in the section on *velites*.

³⁵¹ As there are no temporal aspects in the ancient Greek Present tense, the continuous or the completed aspect may be used to translate the present tense into English.

³⁵² Or some manifestation thereof, (e.g. *rorarii*) see ‘*velites*’ in Chapter 2 for a discussion of when they were established in the legion.

³⁵³ Strabo’s reference is to a Gallic weapon (4.4.3), while Plutarch’s refers to Roman weapons at Chaeronea, although he seems to be referring to the heavy infantry (*Sulla* 18).

³⁵⁴ Although many of the other Greek terms for light infantry may be synonyms for γροσφομάχοι, especially in Polybius, e.g. see ἀκροβόλος above.

³⁵⁵ Evelyn S. Shuckburgh in the 1889 Macmillan translation translates the term to *velites* 16 out of the 17 times it appears in Polybius, translating it as ‘the light-armed’ once at 10.15. Also, some of Livy’s descriptions also add to our corpus of knowledge about the *velites*, see ‘*velites*,’ in Chapter 2.

³⁵⁶ Cf. their definition: ‘fighting with the γρόσφος, *velites*’

Like ἀκροβόλοι, this term is also derivative from the participle γροσφομάχος, the verb meaning ‘fighting with the γρόσφος.’ The curious feature of this term is its rarity and its only appearance in the ancient sources in Polybius, as a reference to the *velites*. There is no evident etymology of the term γρόσφος, and so it is impossible to identify an etymological link to the *velites*. Γρόσφος is not paired with any other suffix aside from μάχος, and it only appears once on its own in Polybius (6.22). Furthermore, although γρόσφος appears three times in Roman literature outside of Polybius, all of these instances occur well after the second century BC.³⁵⁷ However, while it is difficult to determine the origins of this word, the term seems to have been fairly widely known, at least to such an extent that it was also known in Latin as *grosphus* by the fourth century AD (Arn. 6.200), meaning ‘the point of a javelin’.³⁵⁸ As a result, it follows that either the term γρόσφος or the term *grosphus*, was a rare, but recognized word for a javelin, although it is impossible to tell which came first. I think it is unlikely that Polybius invented the word, and indeed, the fact that Polybius does not feel the need to explain his usage of the word suggests that he assumed such an explanation was unnecessary. This in turn was probably because his readers would know the meaning of the term.³⁵⁹ Perhaps the time period of usage can tell us something about its etymology.

All of Polybius’ references to the γροσφομάχοι in action occur from the Battle of Tunis (255 BC) to the Battle of Zama (202 BC). I would propose that the lack of references after the Battle of Zama may be explained by the suggestion that Polybius could have been using a different source. So, for the period that he uses this term, Polybius may have been using a tribune’s *commentarii* (as Rawson suggests) in which the word γρόσφος, γροσφομάχοι or *grosphus* was used.³⁶⁰ Whereas, it is possible that for his history after the Battle of Zama Polybius utilized a source that did not employ any of these words. The suggestion that such military *commentarii* included the use of atypical or rare terms becomes more likely when we

³⁵⁷ I.e. well after Polybius was writing; see Str. 4.4.3; Plu. *Sull.*18.; Horace *C.* 2.16; the term also appears in the 4th century early church father Arnobius 6.200 (although the latter is writing in Latin, and thus using the transliterated term *grosphus*).

³⁵⁸ This Latin term is the etymological root for the modern genus of *Grosphus* scorpions. It would have been strange for this term to have persisted if it was as rare as it appears to be.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Rawson’s similar comments regarding Cato’s ostensible ambiguity, Rawson 1991, 41, and Arrian’s complaint regarding such ambiguity in old writers (*Tact.* 1.2)

³⁶⁰ Rawson 1991, 37.

consider that several very rare military terms appear in Cato the Elder's now lost military treatise. Some of the words that he seems to have employed uniquely include terms related to light infantry such as *ferentarii*, or *procubitores*.³⁶¹ In any case, it is difficult to determine why the γροσφομάχοι do not appear between the years 201 and 146 BC (the rest of the period covered in Polybius' *Histories*). Nevertheless, Bell suggests that we should not take this to be indicative of anything significant, such as the disappearance of the *velites*.³⁶²

λογχοφόροι

Roman λογχοφόροι only appear in Arrian and Josephus, with *The Jewish Wars* having the earliest historiographical use of the term in reference to the Roman army at 3.120. None of the references in these two authors involves λογχοφόροι being used in typical 'light tactics' (these examples will be discussed below).³⁶³ Liddell & Scott's definition of these troops as 'spear-bearing' emphasizes the fact that their weapon acts as the main identifier of this group. As such, a brief discussion on the λόγχη is warranted.

Arrian's *Array against the Alans* provides us with some clues as to what kind of missile this was. In this work, Arrian has the λογχοφόροι placed behind the front ranks of Roman legionary cohorts (Arr. *Ektaxis* 13-14). Thus, as he points out, the λογχοφόροι would have been expected to throw over the heads of the front ranks (*op. cit.* 14), and this is something that would have been most effective if they were armed with a light-javelin type of weapon. The suggestion that the λόγχη was this type of javelin, accordingly makes sense in this passage.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, this can also explain its etymological connection to the Latin term *lancea*.³⁶⁵ The latter weapon is the spear attributed to the late Roman unit of *lanciarrii*. We have several depictions of this weapon on the gravestones of men from these units.³⁶⁶ These depictions indicate that the *lancea* had two key features that signify a direct relationship to

³⁶¹ See both *Accensi* and *Velites* in the Latin vocabulary chapter, above.

³⁶² On the contrary, he suggests a gradual decline of the *velites* with their complete disappearance sometime after the Jugurthine War, see Bell 1965, 419-421. Furthermore, Livy mentions them several times after the 2nd Punic war as well. Walbank does not discuss Polybius' overall use of *velites*, nor does he discuss their disappearance.

³⁶³ For light tactics see Chapter 6.

³⁶⁴ Polyb. 1.78 indicates that the λόγχη was a javelin of some sort.

³⁶⁵ v. Lewis & Short: 'lancea', who note that Paul. ex. Festus makes the correlation at P. 118 M: 'a *Graeco dicta, quam illi λόγχην vocant.*'

³⁶⁶ E.g. *CIL* III 6194; *AE* 1993, 01574; cf. *Lanciarrii* in Chapter 2

the light javelin. First, they were thin enough that several could be held in one hand; this is exactly how Livy describes the *iacula* of the *velites* at 26.4.4.³⁶⁷ Accordingly, examples that mention λογχοφόροι as some sort of light infantry make perfect sense.

Our earlier references to λογχοφόροι see these troops commonly deployed as light infantry (in skirmishes and ambushes), but the sources only refer to them as part of non-Roman armies in these instances.³⁶⁸ Indeed, λογχοφόροι were very probably a type of light infantry in Hannibal's army.³⁶⁹ Although we have no explicit examples of λογχοφόροι in the Roman Republican army, it is possible that similar mercenary forces were hired to fight for Rome. Our examples for these troops under the Empire come from Arrian and Josephus, and both seem to have different definitions for λογχοφόροι, which is something we might expect given the cultural, stylistic, and chronological differences between the two authors.

In Josephus, there is a possibility that λογχοφόροι might not be light infantry. In his description of the sacking of the temple of Jerusalem, he mentions Titus' request that a λογχοφόρος and a centurion beat their fellow soldiers with their staves (ξύλοις) (Jos. *BJ* 6.262). Here, it is not clear whether this refers to the centurion's vine and the soldier's spear respectively, or whether they both have vine-sticks. In any case, because the λογχοφόρος in this instance is given a task of authority, it is possible that he is an officer of some sort, or a soldier from Titus' bodyguard (see below). The other references to λογχοφόροι that we have in Josephus appear in his description of the Roman army on the march. In his reports of both Vespasian's and Titus' marching columns, the λογχοφόροι are placed very close to the commander.³⁷⁰ They are a part of Vespasian's bodyguard and they also march directly behind the bodyguard of Titus. This is not a typical position for light troops on the march in the Imperial period, since, as discussed below, they were commonly sent to the front as scouts or a vanguard or to the rear in a protective role.³⁷¹ Thus, though the λογχοφόροι in Josephus

³⁶⁷ Also, the modern Italian term '*lanciare*' meaning to throw, has an evident root in this word.

³⁶⁸ Particularly in Hannibal's army, v. Polyb. 3.72, 3.73, 3.83, 3.84, 3.85, 3.93, 3.94, 3.101, 3.113. The tactics they are involved in are typical for light armed troops, as discussed in Chapter 6.

³⁶⁹ See Daly 2002, 108-111.

³⁷⁰ Jos. *BJ* 3.95, 3.120, 5.48. At 3.95 Josephus calls them επίλεκτοι, which for Polybius is the same as *extraordinarii* in Latin, see n. 182, above.

³⁷¹ See Chapter 6: 'Tactical Roles: Guarding the Marching Column' below.

were probably armed with a light javelin (or several), this may have been the only light equipment in their panoply.³⁷²

In Arrian's *Ektaxis*, the λογχοφόροι appear as foreign troops, coming from Colchis and Rhizus (Arr. *Ektaxis* 7, 14). Bosworth notes that these are indeed auxiliary infantry, although they are local natives, raised *ad hoc* rather than a permanent unit of the imperial *auxilia*.³⁷³ Arrian also describes the λογχοφόροι as κούφων in section 23.³⁷⁴ This in turn suggests that the λογχοφόροι were not always lightly armed. Indeed, in section 25, Arrian notes that there are two types of λογχοφόροι: those that are lightly armed (ψιλοὶ) and those armed with a shield (οἱ θειασταί. Φερέσθωσαν).³⁷⁵ This implies that those armed with a shield are understood to be not ψιλοὶ or perhaps more heavily armed, and indeed this is expressly stated by Arrian at *Tact.* 3.3.³⁷⁶ Both types of λογχοφόροι, however, are missile troops in this instance. The λογχοφόροι also appear as missile troops in section 14. So, it seems that although λογχοφόροι are not always lightly armed (i.e. ψιλοὶ), they usually appear as missile troops. Correspondingly, they are also referred to as ἀκοντιστῶν in section 14, and as we have seen above, during the Imperial period, this term is normally used to refer troops armed with the javelin. And indeed, Bosworth suggests a lighter missile javelin for the main weapon of the λογχοφόροι, while Goldsworthy suggests that they are armed with a *lancea* or type of javelin in these instances.³⁷⁷ As mentioned above, the λόγχη (and *lancea*) is very probably a light javelin. In accordance with the description of them as κούφοι, Arrian assigns them the task of chasing a retreating army, a typical manoeuvre for lightly armed troops.³⁷⁸

³⁷² Cf. Jos. *BJ* 3.95 where the commander's bodyguard are armed with the λόγχη and Arr. *Ektaxis*, 25, discussed in the following paragraph.

³⁷³ Bosworth 1977, 237; DeVoto also notes their local native status, DeVoto 1993, 122.

³⁷⁴ This passage is discussed in further detail above under κούφοι.

³⁷⁵ DeVoto 1993, 122, notes that the θειασταί here most likely should read πελτασταί, and indeed Arrian himself notes that ψιλοὶ do not carry shields and that πελτασταί do, Arr. *Tact.* 3.3.

³⁷⁶ Arr. *Tact.* 3.3: τὸ δὲ ψιλὸν ἐναντιώτατα ἔχει ἰσχυρὰ ὅπλα πάντα, ὅτι περ ἄνευ θώρακος καὶ ἀσπίδος καὶ κνημίδος καὶ κράνους ἐκβόλοις τοῖς ὅλοις διαχρώμενον, τοξεύμασιν ἢ ἀκοντίοις ἢ σφενδόναις ἢ λίθοις ἐκ χειρός.

³⁷⁷ Bosworth 1977, 238; Goldsworthy 1996, 17, 229.

³⁷⁸ Arr. *Ektaxis* 29; for this being a typical light infantry tactic see Chapter 6, below.

Thus far, the picture we get from Arrian is that λογχοφόροι are probably equipped as missile troops, but this should not be taken to mean that they were necessarily light infantry. This is especially true when we consider the probability that any infantryman was capable of throwing a javelin, a point which Goldsworthy has already noted.³⁷⁹ Moreover, further analysis supports this observation.

In Arrian's description there is a significant similarity to Josephus' description, insofar as they are mentioned as being part of the commander's bodyguard (23).³⁸⁰ There has been some scholarly debate over the identification of the λογχοφόροι in this instance, and so it will be best to include the relevant paragraphs from Arrian here.

(22) The *equites singulares* will be stationed around Xenophon (Arrian), as well as up to 200 infantrymen from the legions (φάλαγγος [τῶν] πεζῶν) as a personal bodyguard (σωματοφύλακες), centurions commanding the picked troops and bodyguard, and the decurions of the *equites singulares*. (23) About 100 of the light-armed javelinmen (κούφων λογχοφόροι) will be stationed around him so he can inspect the battle line and wherever he learns there is a weakness he can go and attend to it.³⁸¹

First, it should be noted that the λογχοφόροι here are not the same type of λογχοφόροι that are mentioned as being part of the battle-line (i.e. the missile troops at 14, and 25). Rather, the scholarly debate revolves around their status as σωματοφύλακες, or the bodyguard of the commander. Regarding their status, Ritterling has suggested that the σωματοφύλακες were the *beneficarii* of the legate's staff and that we should understand the λογχοφόροι to be separate from the σωματοφύλακες.³⁸² He goes on to suggest that the λογχοφόροι are *pedites singulares*, recruited from the auxiliary cohorts and independent of the men drawn from the legions that make up the bodyguard.³⁸³ Speidel has followed this argument as well,

³⁷⁹ Goldsworthy 1996, 18.

³⁸⁰ We also have one reference in Lucian where λογχοφόροι appear as part of his personal escort from Cappadocia when he traveled to the Pontic coast (*Alexander* 55).

³⁸¹ My translation: (22) οἱ δὲ ἐπιλεκτοὶ ἵππεῖς ἀμφ' αὐτὸν Ξενοφῶντα ἔστωσαν, καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς φάλαγγος [τῶν] πεζῶν ὅσον εἰς διακοσίους, οἱ σωματοφύλακες, καὶ ἑκατοντάρχαι ὅσοι τοῖς ἐπιλεκτοῖς ξυντεταγμένοι ἢ τῶν σωματοφυλάκων ἡγεμόνες, καὶ δεκ- 23 ἀρχαὶ οἱ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων. ἔστωσαν δὲ ἀμφ' αὐτὸν *** ας ἑκατὸν κούφων λογχοφόρων, ὡς πᾶσαν ἐπιφοιτῶν τὴν φάλαγγα ὅπου τι ἐνδεὲς καταμανθάνοι, ἐκεῖνο ἰῶτο καὶ θεραπεύοι.

³⁸² E. Ritterling, "Eine Amtsbezeichnung der *Beneficarii consularis* im Museum zu Wiesbaden," *Bonner Jahrbücher* 125 (1919) 9-37, esp. 25-26.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

even going so far as to suggest that the *σωματοφύλακες* are legionary horsemen, since they are brigaded with the *equites singulares*.³⁸⁴ Bosworth has contested Ritterling's suggestion and his view also contrasts that of Speidel; however, his view is that *λογχοφόροι* is a standard term for the *beneficarii* and not the *singulares*.³⁸⁵ This assertion is based on one passage in Josephus, where the bodyguard of the commander on the march are armed with the *λογχη*.³⁸⁶ Bosworth goes on to say that

beneficarii...were specially seconded to the legate and permanently attached to headquarters; there would seem no reason for Arrian to specify that they were drafted from the phalanx.³⁸⁷

Speidel has also made note of this, stating that it is unlikely that administrative staff were used as specialized infantry (like a bodyguard). However, he also interprets Arrian's mention of the phalanx here to suggest that the bodyguard came from the 'infantry legion but not the legionary infantry', and are therefore legionary horsemen (as mentioned above).³⁸⁸ To me, the phrase 'φάλαγγος [τῶν] πεζῶν' is not at all indicative of anything to do with horsemen, but rather the legionary infantry. To explain Arrian's reference to the phalanx, Bosworth suggests that his bodyguard was drafted from the legion, rather than from the *auxilia*, which as he points out, was a rare arrangement, but not unique.³⁸⁹ If this was actually the case, it would obviously mean that the *λογχοφόροι* that are a part of the bodyguard were not drawn from the group of *λογχοφόροι* recruited from Colchis and Rhizus (who were local natives and not legionaries, as noted above). Yet, it would also suggest that some legionaries could have been equipped differently (i.e. as *λογχοφόροι*). Whether this was done *ad hoc* (e.g. for such instances as these where a commander recruited a bodyguard from the legionaries) or whether they were specialist legionaries (i.e. always equipped differently than other legionaries) is indeterminable.

³⁸⁴ Speidel, M 'The Caucasus Frontier. Second Century Garrisons at Apsarus, Petra and Phasis' in: *Roman army studies II* (Stuttgart 1992), 206-207, and Speidel, 1994, 36-39.

³⁸⁵ Bosworth 1977, 250.

³⁸⁶ Cf. Jos. *BJ* 3.95.

³⁸⁷ Bosworth 1977, 250, cf. Watson, 1969, 85-86, following A. von Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*, ed. B. Dobson 1967, 29-37.

³⁸⁸ Speidel 1994, 36.

³⁸⁹ Bosworth 1977, 251, the *pedites singulares* (drafted from the *auxilia*) were typically used as the bodyguard, see von Domaszewski 36-37; M. P. Speidel, *AJP* 113 (1972) 299-305, and Speidel, 1978. For instances of legionaries being drafted as the bodyguard: *CIL* VI 3614: M. Messius M.f. Col. *Pudens, singularis leg. X Frentensis*; *ILS* 2364: Q. Aemilius Marinus, *singularis* of II *Augusta*.

Bosworth also suggests that the 200 *σωματοφύλακες* would have probably consisted of 100 *λογχοφόροι* and 100 *κοντοφόροι*.³⁹⁰ This suggestion seems to be heavily reliant on a particular interpretation of the lacuna in the passage, at section 23:

ἀρχαι οἱ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων. ἔστρωσαν δὲ ἄμφ' αὐτὸν *** ας ἑκατὸν
κούφων λογχοφόρων, ὡς πᾶσαν ἐπιφοιτῶν τὴν φάλαγγα ὅπου τι
ἐνδεὲς καταμανθάνοι.³⁹¹

Bosworth's interpretation suggests that the ἄμφ' αὐτὸν is a reference to the position of the *κούφων λογχοφόρων* which appear after the lacuna (i.e. around the commander). This is the exact phrasing used in 22 to describe the position of the *σωματοφύλακες*. In this way, the *κούφων λογχοφόρων* are assumed to be part of the bodyguard mentioned just a few lines earlier. However, the lacuna is of indeterminate length,³⁹² and so Bosworth's interpretation cannot be considered definite. Nevertheless, the task with which the *κούφων λογχοφόρων* are assigned certainly fits their possible role as *σωματοφύλακες*.³⁹³ Also, we know that there were 100 of them; a figure of 100 would be unusual for a regular unit, and so it may be more likely that they represent a group assigned to protect a commander, rather than any other group such as a regular combat unit, for example. Further, Bosworth's suggestion that there were possibly two types of infantry in the bodyguard can be supported by the fact that in Arrian's line of battle legionaries are armed differently. Furthermore, I would suggest the term *κούφων* here is of particular importance, because it highlights the specialized function of half of his bodyguard. The adjective denotes that the *λογχοφόροι* are agile or exceptionally mobile, and its use also suggests that these *σωματοφύλακες* are not just *ἐπιλεκτοὶ φάλαγγων*, armed with the *λόγχη*. As distinctly mobile troops, they would be particularly capable of inspecting the battle-line with the commander, especially if he was mounted. The other half of his bodyguard might be more static (i.e. not *κούφων*), and in this way the commander would have flexibility in his bodyguard: various troop types

³⁹⁰ Bosworth, *ibid.*

³⁹¹ For a translation see p. 101, above.

³⁹² According to Bosworth *op. cit.* n.146: 'In the archetype, the codex Laurentianus (F), there is a gap of eight or nine letters. That may mean that precisely nine letters were illegible to the scribe, but it is more likely that a lacuna had already been noted (cf. Arrian, *Scripta Minora XXI*) and the length of text missing was not known.'

³⁹³ Regarding this task, the verb *θεραπεύοι* can be interpreted to mean 'medically attend to', but the term *ἐνδεὲς* (wanting or lacking in) is too ambiguous to be understood as wounded or medically needy soldiers.

which would be able to adapt to the actions he engages in. To sum up, I think these λογχοφόροι are particularly mobile σωματοφύλακες.

In the role of commander's bodyguard, Arrian's λογχοφόροι may be correlated to Josephus' references to the same troops. As mentioned above, Josephus presents troops that do not seem to be light infantry, and if we accept Bosworth's argument, then Arrian's λογχοφόροι are legionaries (at least within the commander's bodyguard). Nevertheless, as noted above, the λογχοφόροι acting as a bodyguard could potentially be quite mobile. Those λογχοφόροι on the wings of Arrian's battle line (i.e. the local natives) are missile troops, although not necessarily ψιλοὶ. The conclusion must be then that during the Imperial period, λογχοφόροι is the term applied to soldiers armed with the λόγχη and that they do not necessarily have a completely light panoply, aside from the λόγχη.

Reasons for the less frequent use of this term in other sources may lie in the fact that it is more specific than other terms denoting light infantry: it specifically denotes troops armed with the λόγχη. Since λογχοφόροι are thus not necessarily 'light', the term was probably seen as less applicable to general light infantry in Roman armies. That our only relevant references come from Arrian and Josephus point to the possibility that for the period under assessment, the λογχοφόροι may have been an eastern element of the Roman military.

πελτασταί

According to Diodorus Siculus, the Athenian general Iphicrates introduced small oval wicker shield to the Greek army and furnished former hoplites with them. These troops were thenceforth known as 'peltasts' (πελτασταὶ) after this light 'pelta' (πέλτης) they carried (Diod. Sic. 15.44). Whether this actually happened in this way has been debated by both Best and Trundle.³⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the point remains that πελτασταὶ appear in Greek sources and Greek armies well before the Roman period under review, and so, perhaps it is not surprising to find most of our sources' references to this type of light infantry in Greek

³⁹⁴ Best 1969, 102-103; Trundle 2010, 20.

armies, rather than in the Roman army.³⁹⁵ However, they do appear in Roman armies as allies several times through the mid and late-Republic.³⁹⁶

Plutarch and Appian contribute a total of nine uses of this term (five and four respectively), out of a total of twelve relevant references in the sources. Plutarch is the earliest author to use this term referring to the Roman army (*Life of Sertorius* 12). It is not a very common term amongst other authors. Like λογχοφόροι, the reason that this term is used less frequently than others may lie in the fact that it is less general than other terms denoting light infantry, and so may have been seen as less applicable to general light infantry in Roman armies.

In his description of various divisions or general parts of Greek and Roman armies (as part of his Τεκνή Τακτικά), Arrian describes πελτασταὶ as follows:

The peltast [part] happens to be lighter than the hoplite [part], though heavier than the lightly armed [part] (ψιλοῖ). The rimless shield is smaller and lighter than the [regular] shield and javelins [are] shorter than sarissas.³⁹⁷

Aside from this, our sources only offer details regarding the equipment of πελτασταὶ in Greek armies that existed in earlier centuries, particularly in the 5th and 4th centuries. Indeed, representations of the πελταστής on Greek pottery provide us with the most details on their equipment.³⁹⁸ Yet, as Trundle has pointed out,

Peltasts were not uniformly armed in the fifth and fourth centuries: some carried a thrusting spear, while others carried javelins.³⁹⁹

Thus, it is very difficult to ascertain the relevance of such particulars to the πελτασταὶ fighting for Rome, and what differences in equipment (if any) existed. Since our first reference to πελτασταὶ fighting for Rome occurs in 190 BC, Plutarch's reference to them

³⁹⁵ The πελτασταὶ seem to have originally been a Thracian tradition, v. Hdt. 7.75.1, cf. Best 1969, 4-16; Sage 1996, 42-43.

³⁹⁶ App. Syr. 31; BC 2.10, 5.14; Dio 50.16; Plut. *Sert.* 13, the πελτασταὶ under Sertorius are not allies of Rome, strictly speaking.

³⁹⁷ Arr. *Tact.* 3.4, Translation, DeVoto 1993: τὸ πελταστικὸν δὲ κουφότερον μὲν τυγχάνει ὄν τοῦ ὀπλιτοκοῦ - ἡ γὰρ πέλιτη σμικρότερον τῆς ἀσπίδος καὶ ἐλαφρότερον, καὶ τὰ ἀκόντια τῶν δοράτων καὶ σαρισῶν λειπόμενα -, βαρύτερον δὲ τοῦ ψιλοῦ.

³⁹⁸ See Sage 1996, 42.

³⁹⁹ Trundle 2010, 20; cf. Lendon 2005.

on the Macedonian side at Pydna in 168 BC may provide a useful description of them.⁴⁰⁰ He states that

...the Macedonians engaged man to man or in small detachments, they could only hack with their small daggers against the firm and long shields of the Romans, and oppose light wicker targets (πελταρίοις) to their swords, which, such was their weight and momentum, penetrated through all their armour to their bodies. They therefore made a poor resistance and at last were routed.⁴⁰¹

This description presents a somewhat typical image of light infantry insofar as they are unable to stand up to heavy infantry, their armour (or lack thereof) simply being too light. Beyond this, none of our references to πελτασται in the Roman army explicitly describe their equipment, and so we cannot come to any substantial conclusions.

In any case, πελτασται should be classified as light infantry. Our sources' references to them fighting for Rome support this. Appian relates how Sextus Pompeius used 300 of them in a swift night ambush in 35 BC (App. *BC* 5.14). He also uses the term ἐπέλταζον to refer to the light-armed troops on Caesar's side at Pharsalus.⁴⁰² Dio has Antony mention them beside archers, slingers, cavalry and mounted archers before Actium (Dio 50.16). In Plutarch's account of Actium, the crews of the naval ships engage πέλταις not only with spears and missiles, but also in hand-to-hand combat (Plut. *Ant.* 66). While these men are not explicitly πελτασται, the reference emphasizes the fact that men armed in such a way were used in more fluid styles of combat (i.e. non-pitched-battle), which in turn was the type of combat light infantry most often engaged in.

Plutarch implies that πελτασται died 'inglorious' (ἀκλεής) deaths because of their combat style. In describing the death of the Spartan general Lysander, he says he threw away (παρναλώσας) his life ingloriously, running like a πελταστής (Λύσανδρος δὲ

⁴⁰⁰ There are earlier descriptions of the shield from which the name of the πελτασται is derived, but the accuracy and technicality of these usages is hard to determine: v. Aristotle (Fragment 498 Rose), Polybius (22.9) and Asclepiodotus (1.2).

⁴⁰¹ Plut. *Aem.* 20, οἱ Μακεδόνες, μικροῖς μὲν εγχειριδίῳις στερεοῦς καὶ ποδήρεις θυρεοῦς νύσσοντες, ἐλαφροῖς δὲ πελταρίοις πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνων μαχαίρας, ὑπὸ βάρους καὶ καταφορᾶς διὰ παντὸς ὄπλου χωρούσας ἐπὶ τὰ σώματα, κακῶς ἀντέχοντες ἐτάποντο. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. London. William Heinemann Ltd. 1918. According to Appian these peltasts are Achaean, numbering 3000., App. *Syr.* 31.

⁴⁰² Cf. Caes. *BC* 3.95: 'Thracibus barbarisque auxiliis'; Archers and slingers are also mentioned on Pompey's side at Pharsalus in Appian *BC* 2.10-11.

πελταστοῦ καὶ προδρόμου δίκην ἀκλεῶς παραναλώσας ἑαυτόν).⁴⁰³ What we should take from this passage is the skirmishing associated with πελτασταί, further confirming their usual role as light infantry.

Our sources do not tell us how πελτασταί may have been organized in the Roman army, aside from Appian's implication that they were grouped into cohorts at Pharsalus (App. *BC* 2.10). Moreover, the size of the particular fighting force of πελτασταί in the Roman army at a given engagement would have probably influenced how they were organized.⁴⁰⁴

Slingers

λιθοβόλοι

This term is a very rare one in our sources, particularly in reference to a type of infantry. More commonly, the term is used to refer to artillery such as catapults. In fact, there are only two citations where this term refers to troops that might have been fighting on the Roman side.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, there is only one additional instance in the sources that refer to 'stone-throwers' as infantry fighting in a battle involving Rome, though these λιθοβόλοι fight for Antiochus at Magnesia, and it is also found in Appian (App. *Syr.* 32).⁴⁰⁶

In Josephus, we are told that Vespasian relied on Arabian archers and Syrian slingers and λιθοβόλοι (*BJ* 3.211), though we know nothing more about this group of soldiers. Appian's reference comes in his description of the Battle of Cannae, where he notes that

⁴⁰³ Plut. *Comp. Lys. et Sull.* 4. It is thus implied that glory was gained in standing your ground when facing death. However, this could be the bias or *topos* of our sources Cf. Van Wees, 2004, 78, 83. Similarly, Gilliver 1996a, 55.

⁴⁰⁴ That is, a larger force probably required more officers to command it. Some tentative implications for this include App. *BC* 5.14, where Sextius Pompeius seems to be the only commander leading his 300 πελτασταί in the ambush at, whereas there are three commanders of the πελτασταί in the army of the Aetolian League at Polyb. 5.26.

⁴⁰⁵ Jos. *BJ* 3.211; App. *Hann.* 21; cf. Pritchett 1991, 1-67, for an extensive and thorough treatment of this subject, where he reviews the evidence for slingers and stone-throwers in ancient Greek warfare. His analysis also includes Greek authors of the Roman period writing about these soldiers.

⁴⁰⁶ Polybius however, tells us that the defenders of Agrigentum in the First Punic War chased the Romans away from the wall by throwing stones at them, 1.43.6.

When the trumpets sounded the foot-soldiers raised a shout and first the archers, slingers (σφενδονήται), and stone-throwers (λιθοβόλοι) ran forward at each other towards the middle of the battlefield and began the battle.⁴⁰⁷

The curious aspect of this passage is that Appian indicates a notion of some difference between the σφενδονήται and the λιθοβόλοι.⁴⁰⁸ There is no modern scholarly commentary on this passage, but a tentative suggestion may be that the Roman slingers somehow differed from the Carthaginian slingers,⁴⁰⁹ and so Appian attempts to highlight this with this varied terminology. However, there is no way to confirm this speculation, and in the face of Appian's semantic ambiguity, there is very little we can determine here.

Appian's reference to λιθοβόλοι on Antiochus' side at the Battle of Magnesia includes additional references to other light-armed troops, including τοχοστῶν, ἀκοντιστῶν and πελταστῶν (App. *Syr.* 32). Here λιθοβόλοι may be appropriately translated as slingers, since in this way they would complement the full range of missile-throwing infantry. Yet, the fact that Appian does not use σφενδονήτης to describe these troops is somewhat perplexing, as it is that term seems to be his preferred word when referring to slingers.⁴¹⁰ Again, this could be because he is referring to a specific type of slingers (as suggested for *Hann.* 21), but this is impossible to determine.

Thus, with these two citations in Appian being our only references to infantry λιθοβόλοι in Roman sources, it seems λιθοβόλοι was preferred as a term used to denote artillery. I would suggest that this is because there was already a more specific and suitable term in Greek for 'stone-throwing' infantry (slingers); that is σφενδονήτης. The latter term finds its root in the word σφενδόνη, or 'sling', and so having a term that denotes 'those using the σφενδόνη' is much less ambiguous than a word meaning 'stone-throwers'; especially if the latter can denote artillery.

⁴⁰⁷ App. *Hann.* 21, my translation: ἐπεὶ δ' αἶ τε σάλπιγγες ἤχησαν καὶ αἶ φαλάγγες ἐβόησαν, πρῶτον μὲν αὐτῶν οἱ τοξόται καὶ σφενδονήται καὶ λιθοβόλοι προδραμόντες ἐς τὸ μέσον ἀλλήλων κατηῆρχον.

⁴⁰⁸ As does Josephus in the aforementioned reference (*BJ* 3.211), cf: 'τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς Συρίας σφενδονήταις καὶ λιθοβόλοις.'

⁴⁰⁹ E.g. perhaps they were recruited from different areas where native slinging practices noticeably differed.

⁴¹⁰ See vocabulary comparison chart, Chapter 4.

σφενδονήτης

Σφενδονήτης appears 28 times amongst the relevant ancient authors, and its appearance is fairly regular over time, with the exception of Polybius, where it is not used in reference to Roman troops.⁴¹¹ Our evidence for σφενδονήτης is very much like the evidence for *funditores*, insofar as we have very few details about their organization and equipment, and we must mostly rely on archaeological evidence for this information.⁴¹² Furthermore, all of these details are prone to variation depending on where, when and for what σφενδονήτης were levied.

It should also be noted that although the Balearic Isles were renowned in the ancient world for their slingers (see Strab. Geo 3.5.1, Polyb. 3.33), it should not be assumed that contingents of these troops mostly came from these islands. Our sources also mention Armenia, Persia, Syria, Achaia, Thrace and Crete as places from which σφενδονήτης were levied.⁴¹³ The earliest author to use σφενδονήτης is Dionysius of Halicarnassus at *Roman Antiquities* 5.68.

Tactically, our sources commonly mention them being deployed alongside archers and other light infantry such as ἀκοντιστής.⁴¹⁴ Also, they are often explicitly said to be used in skirmishing roles, such as when Antony used them with ἀκοντιστής to drive off Parthian cavalry (Plut. *Ant.* 41). Other examples of σφενδονήτης being used in skirmishing action include references to Hellenistic armies at Polyb. 10.29, 30. Although these troops are not fighting for Rome in these instances, it is probable that σφενδονήτης were used in similar tactics in both Greek and Roman armies. Like references to *funditores*, our sources do not mention σφενδονήτης engaging in hand-to-hand combat. This emphasizes their role as missile troops, who were probably not sufficiently armed for the melee. Indeed, as

⁴¹¹ Polybius actually uses σφενδονήτης relatively infrequently, but he also uses Βαλιαρεῖς to describe these troops, probably due to the association of Balearic islanders with slinging; cf. Pritchett 1991, 14-15.

⁴¹² See *funditores*, in Chapter 2, for a discussion of this.

⁴¹³ Armenia (Plut. *Luc.* 26; Dio 49.26), Persia (Diod. *Sic.* 17.110, 19.82), Syria (Jos. *BJ* 3.211), Achaia (Greece - Polyb. 4.61), Thrace (App. *BC* 2.8) and Crete (App. *BC* 2.10).

⁴¹⁴ A trend common for both Greek and Roman armies, e.g. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 15.3, *Luc.* 26, 27, *Sert.* 12, *Ant.* 41; Diod. *Sic.* 15.85, 17.110; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 20.1, 20.3; Dio 41.60, 47.43; Jos. *BJ* 3.168, 3.211; Polyb. 5.53, 10.29; App. *Hann.* 21, *Mith.* 32, *BC* 2.11.

mentioned above, Appian refers to the σφενδονήτης from the Balearic Isles as Γυμνήσιοι (*Pun.* 7.40), and Strabo called the islands τὰς Γυμνησίας (*Geo* 3.5.1). In this way, the authors underline their lack of armament. Furthermore, Onasander's understanding of light armed troops (ψιλοί) is that σφενδονήτης were soldiers who used missile weapons.⁴¹⁵ He further states that 'the sling is the most deadly weapon that is used by the light-armed troops (ψιλοῖς)' (*Onas.* 19.3). It is also important to take note of Onasander's suggestion that light troops like the σφενδονήτης should be placed in front of the phalanx (along with ἀκοντιστής as mentioned above) (*Onas.* 17.1). On the other hand, our sources occasionally place them intermixed with the heavy infantry (e.g. *App. Pun.* 7.40; *Dio* 41.60), and generals might have these light troops sally through the line infantry (*Plut. Ant.* 41) to attack enemy heavy infantry (*Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom.* 20.3; *Dio* 41.60) or cavalry (*Plut. Ant.* 41). The picture we get from these references is a style of combat that must have been fairly fluid and low-intensity for the σφενδονήτης.

⁴¹⁵ Onasander groups ἀκοντιστής, τοχοται and σφενδονήτης under the heading of ψιλους at 17.1.

4 A Comparison of Greek and Latin Vocabulary for Light Infantry

As we have seen in the two previous chapters, there is little correlation between the Latin and Greek terminology for Roman light infantry. The Greek terminology seems to be particularly imprecise. This chapter intends to review the differences and similarities between Greek and Latin vocabulary for light infantry. It will also bring together the discussion of the various terms from the previous chapters with a view to establish any similarities between definitions (within one language, as well as between both). Also, it aims to examine the possible reasons for the ancient authors' lack of technicality in their vocabulary.

Historiography

Many modern historians have shown some awareness of the imprecision of the ancient authors' vocabulary, and the ostensible conflict in terminology.⁴¹⁶ Others seemingly accept the variations of terminology without comment, although they are outnumbered by the former. Some examples of modern scholars disregarding the contentious terminology include Kromayer and Veith's statement that *ferentarii* were undoubtedly lightly armed, and Toynbee's discussion of the supposed establishment of the *velites* in 211, mentioning the *rorarii* and *accensi* without any discussion of either term.⁴¹⁷ Further, Walbank's discussion of Polybius 11.22-23, where the ancient author uses several terms for what are probably the *velites*, makes no note of this, nor does he comment on the military terminology used in book 6.21.⁴¹⁸ Sumner discusses the etymology of the 'heavy' infantry units in the manipular legion, but only briefly mentions the *velites* using Polybius 6.19 as a reference, making no comment on the fact that Polybius uses the term γροσφομαχοι (in 6.21), and does not include any etymological discussion of them.⁴¹⁹ Gabba mentions *velites* and their establishment with no etymological discussion of possible previous terminology for them.⁴²⁰ Connolly makes the claim that Livy's description of the army with *rorarii* and *accensi* must

⁴¹⁶ E.g. Kromayer & Veith 1928, 268, 309; Sumner 1970, 69; Delbruck 1990, 278; Rawson 1991, 55-57; Goldsworthy 1996, 20; Oakley 1998, 470; Keppie 1998, 20; Gilliver 1999, 17-18, 19; Goldsworthy 2000, 48; Daly 2002, 73; Rawlings 2007, 56; Dobson 2008, 48; Sage 2008, 73, 88.

⁴¹⁷ Kromayer & Veith 1928 279; Toynbee 1965, 517.

⁴¹⁸ Walbank 1967, 299-301 and 647 respectively.

⁴¹⁹ Sumner 1970, 68.

⁴²⁰ Gabba 1976, 5, 11, 21 n.7.

be correct and Forsythe discusses the Republican army without mentioning *accensi* or *rorarii*.⁴²¹

Despite all these concerns, scholarship has been fairly consistent over time in recognizing the difficulties with light infantry terminology. We cannot determine the precise grounds for the variations in terminology and this is undoubtedly the reason why the question of varying terminology has not been directly addressed by scholars. However, I also think it is important to be careful of dismissing our sources as careless or inaccurate when considering said variation. Doing so discounts the possibility that our sources may not have been careless or inaccurate, but simply not specific enough to reconcile our lack of understanding. This in turn, is due to the general deficiencies of the extant corpus of ancient sources. However, I am wary of applying this hypothesis to Livy 8.8, where scholarship differs on the authenticity of Livy's digression on the legion.⁴²² Rather, I am inclined to interpret Livy's description as a faulty description of the army, as discussed in the Latin vocabulary chapter above.

Any specifics discussed in modern historiography on the vocabulary of light infantry have been included in the various discussions of the terms, below. The contemporary stance of scholarship on defining light troops is discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter will begin with tables indicating the frequency of usage of the terminology from the previous chapters. Some general conclusions drawn from the tables will be followed by specific comparisons between Latin and Greek terms.

⁴²¹ Connolly 1989b, 141 (although he is not an ancient historian); Forsythe 2007 *passim*.

⁴²² Cf. Sumner 1970, 69 who dismisses its authenticity; Oakley 1998, 469-472 claims Livy misunderstood his source; Keppie 1998, 20 notes that 'its very incongruities may lend it a certain measure of authority'; Connolly 1998, 127 argues the description is essentially accurate since Livy has resisted his usual tendency towards modernisation (although it must be remembered that Connolly is not an ancient historian).

Frequency with which ancient authors use various Latin vocabulary referring to Roman light-armed troops

Table 1

	Caesar	Frontinus	Livy	Sallust	Tacitus	Varro	Vegetius	Totals
<i>accensi</i>	-	-	3	-	-	3	1	7
<i>antesignani</i>	5	1	19	-	-	-	3	28
<i>auxilia</i>	7	-	7	-	-	-	-	14
<i>expeditae</i>	9	3	22	6	11	-	-	51
<i>ferentarii</i>	-	-	-	1	1	1	6	9
<i>funditores</i>	13	1	10	5	2	-	11	42
<i>iaculatores</i>	-	6	-	-	-	-	3	9
<i>leves</i>	12	7	30	-	8	2	-	59
<i>rorarii</i>	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	3
<i>sagittarii</i>	21	1	9	4	6	-	27	68
<i>velites</i>	-	3	17	1	-	2	1	24

Frequency with which ancient authors use various Greek vocabulary referring to Roman light-armed troops

Table 2

	Appian	Arrian	Dio	Dionysus ⁴²³	Josephus	Onasander	Plutarch	Polybius	Totals
ἀκοντιστής	2	2	-	-	2	2	3	9	20
ἀκροβόλος ⁴²⁴	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	3
γροσφομάχοι	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	17
γυμνης	10	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	14
εὔζωνος	4	-	-	1	-	-	-	30	35
κοῦφοι	6	1 ⁴²⁵	1	2	-	-	3	-	13
λογχοφόροι	-	7	-	-	3	-	-	-	10
πελτασταί	4	1	1	1	-	-	5	-	12
σφενδονήτης	6	-	6	4	6	2	4	-	28
ψιλοὶ	12	13	6	3	2	9	8	1	54

⁴²³ Some of these terms in Dionysus refer to the army of the Roman Kingdom, and so are not included here.

⁴²⁴ This term is only used to describe skirmishes, rather than skirmishers in Appian, Cassius Dio, Dionysus, and Josephus.

⁴²⁵ This instance of κοῦφοι in Arrian is an adjectival one describing λογχοφόροι

From the tables above, we can see that we do not have many examples for the various terms of light infantry. Due to the scarce use of many of these terms in both Latin and Greek, it should be pointed out that these are probably not very diagnostic for Roman light infantry terminology. Indeed, aside from the terms for slingers and archers, the highest numbers of references come from the generic terms for light infantry (e.g. *expeditae*, *leves*, εὐζωνος, ψιλοῖ). The frequency of these terms may rest in the fact that light infantry armament varied and that authors were not interested in these specific variations. Polybius, for example, who claims to be the most accurate of all authors (29.12) uses a variety of terms to refer to the *velites*. His reasons for doing so may be simply because he is ‘deliberately resolved to confine [himself] to chronicling actions’, as he puts it (9.1), rather than focusing on the technicalities of vocabulary. Alternatively, the possibility exists that the frequent usage of particular terms is simply due to the literary preferences of the author. So for example, perhaps Polybius uses εὐζωνος 30 times because it is his preferred term to use when referring to light infantry. There is a further possibility that authors favour particular terms because of the contemporary understanding or usage of the term. Thus, Livy may use *expeditae* and *leves* more frequently than *velites* simply because the *velites* had not existed as light infantry for several generations before his time of writing. As such, there was no first-hand understanding or experience of the *velites* in his period. Consequently, both Livy and his readers may have found terms like *expeditae* and *leves* easier to grasp; old words like *velites* may have seemed archaic to Livy’s contemporaries. Perhaps one of the most important points to make however, regarding the varied vocabulary for light infantry, is that authors may have chosen to describe these troops in different ways simply to avoid sounding repetitive. That is, the variety of light infantry vocabulary is indicative of the simple fact that there was a wide range of terms to choose from when describing these troops, and so the authors used different terms just because they could.⁴²⁶ Indeed the same variety of vocabulary is used in other military contexts as well, as Koon’s recent study on Livy’s battle narratives indicates.⁴²⁷

It is interesting to note the differences between the use of generic terminology in the Greek and Latin references to light infantry. While *expeditae* and *leves* were often used adjectivally, εὐζωνος and ψιλοῖ, as well as γυμνῆς are simply generic nouns. The Latin

⁴²⁶ Cf. e.g. Lendon 2002, 66, regarding Latin authors’ desire for ‘excellence of literary style’.

⁴²⁷ Koon 2010, 45 *et passim*.

terms could be used like nouns as substantive adjectives, but the same does not apply for the Greek terms. Indeed, as was indicated in Chapter 3, there certainly seems to be a greater generic usage of terminology in the Greek vocabulary. One of the reasons for this may well have been that the Roman army was administered and organized in Latin, and as such, specific terminology was created in that language for that specific purpose.⁴²⁸ When Greek writers wrote about specific Roman military entities (such as troop types or weapons), they usually used terminology that already existed, rather than (as is probable with the Latin) terminology that was created with each Roman military entity, whether it be troop type or weapon type.⁴²⁹ The result is the unspecific Greek terminology for Roman light infantry that we have observed in this chapter. Furthermore, given that Latin authors can also be unspecific in their use of technical vocabulary, we are faced with the added problem of Greek authors probably being equally unspecific, as well as not having the specific translations from the Latin.

As noted in Chapter 1, light infantry was often been seen by ancient authors as less important than the heavy infantry. This lack of interest seems to come through most clearly in the generic terminology associated with them. For example, *ψιλοὶ* is the most popular term used by ancient Greek military writers to describe Roman light infantry, and this favoured usage is prevalent throughout the period under assessment. Because it is a fairly general term describing troops armed with missiles (and possibly other weapons as well), perhaps its frequency rests in the fact that missiles were the single most consistent factor in various forms of light infantry over the entire period under assessment, and so the term could be used to describe the widest variety of troops. For technically uninterested authors, such terms would have probably been seen as quite adequate. The frequency of *ψιλοὶ* also indicates that vocabulary usage changed little from the Late Republic, since it is the dominate term from Dionysius onwards. Our earliest source, Polybius, has *εὐζωνος* as his most frequent term, but because he is our only source from the 2nd century BC, it is difficult to judge whether *εὐζωνος* was generally a more common term for military historians in that period. Yet, regardless of which term was most popular with a specific author, the tendency to use generic terms to refer to light infantry is a trend that did not change much over time.

⁴²⁸ Yet, Arr. *Tact.* 33 suggests that some Roman military terminology was derived from other languages such as Celtic, due to the Romans' propensity for adapting foreign military customs/equipment.

⁴²⁹ Exceptions to this include instances where Greek authors transliterate the Latin term, as Polybius does for example with cohort (*κοόρτις*) at 11.23.

Another possible reason for the lack of technicality may simply have been a lack of familiarity with the troops functioning as light infantry in the Roman army. We know from the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 that light infantry contingents could often be foreign recruits in the Roman army, and so ancient authors may not have been familiar with the technical details of their organization and equipment. Likewise, there may have been no Latin vocabulary for such technicalities. As a result, they may have preferred to rely on generic terms to describe these troops.

Similar Units

In this section, I will discuss similarities between units despite varying terms being applied to them in our sources. The aim will be to determine level the technical precision with which our sources use ancient military terminology. This will be achieved by analysing correlations between units with varying terms.

Antesignani & πρόμαχοι

There is a significant correlation between these two terms in our sources, and although πρόμαχοι do not function in any sort of ‘light-armed’ capacity, the similarity between these groups should be emphasized.

Liddell and Scott define πρόμαχος as a ‘champion’, ‘foremost fighter’ or ‘fighting in front’. We can immediately draw a clear parallel to the *antesignani* based on this definition alone: these are the men who are the foremost fighters, and as discussed in the section on the *antesignani*, they may have been some of the best soldiers, making ‘champion’ an appropriate description. This idea that they were some of the best soldiers who fought in the front ranks is most evident with the Caesarian definition of *antesignani*, but it is less evident in other periods. However, ‘fighting in front’ also applies to the Livian definition of *antesignani* established above, i.e. anyone who happens to be fighting in the front lines. Accordingly, we should evaluate our sources’ use of πρόμαχοι to determine whether there is a practical parallel in addition to the corresponding definitions.

Some of our earliest data regarding πρόμαχοι as Roman troops comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Although Dionysius is writing about an earlier period than the one under review, he is writing during the late Republic, and so his understanding of this term may have

been a contemporary one. Indeed, this is suggested in his description of them in a battle against the Volsci, where like Caesar's *antesignani*, they seem to be the best soldiers, stationed in the front ranks. He states that

...when they were to engage the army of the Volsci and their commanders had drawn them up in order of battle, they refused to come to grips with the enemy, but both the centurions and the πρόμαχοι, some throwing away their standards and others quitting their posts, fled to the camp.⁴³⁰

As was the norm throughout later Roman military history, centurions are found at the front of the battle line, and it is perhaps natural to term those fighting alongside them πρόμαχοι. What is particularly interesting about this quotation is that the standards are seemingly being carried by the πρόμαχοι. Indeed, in the very same chapter, Dionysius describes how the πρόμαχοι were later punished for abandoning the standards (*Ant. Rom.* 9.50.7). Thus, I think it is very probable that, as standard-bearers, the πρόμαχοι were experienced troops. As such, they may have also been some of the best fighters, especially given the significance of their military role. That this reflects the definition for Caesar's *antesignani* could be a result of the fact that Dionysius was a contemporary of Caesar, and was writing under Augustus. Now it remains to be evaluated whether this was the case in the time period under assessment.

Plutarch uses πρόμαχοι to refer to Roman troops twice, although both instances simply describe the front ranks of the battle-line. The first instance occurs in his description of the battle of Pydna (*Plut. Aem.* 20.5). Here, the front-line fighters are cut to pieces and the soldiers behind them are driven back. The fact that they are in the front line of the manipular legion makes them *antesignani* according to both the Livian and Caesarian definitions discussed above.⁴³¹ We can further make a tentative correlation to the self-selecting exceptional fighters examined above based on the actions of the soldiers. They stand their ground, and are eventually cut down, but they do not fall back in fear. Rather, it is the lines behind them that fall back after the first line fell. This suggests to me that these πρόμαχοι exemplified the courage required of a self-selecting elite soldier, and can therefore be considered *antesignani* as per the definition reached above.

⁴³⁰ Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 9.50.

⁴³¹ I.e. in Livy they are simply the men who happen to be in the front rank and with Caesar they are the soldiers who choose to be in the front ranks.

The second reference to πρόμαχοι in Plutarch comes in his Life of Otho (Otho 12.4). Here the πρόμαχοι are the front line of Vitellian troops who are beaten back by Othonian forces. Although as front line troops these soldiers fit the aforementioned definitions of *antesignani*, we have no literary evidence for *antesignani* from the early Principate.⁴³² As such, we should be cautious when labelling these πρόμαχοι as *antesignani*. However, there is no doubt that these were the front line of men.⁴³³

While there is very little direct evidence for Roman πρόμαχοι, there can be little doubt that these were front line fighters. As such, we might correlate them to *antesignani*, although doing so for the imperial period without corresponding literary evidence should be considered tentative. Nevertheless, Plutarch's other uses of the term may strengthen the association. When not referring to Roman troops, the ancient author also uses πρόμαχοι to refer to an athletic champion (Flam. 10.8), and an officer in Alexander's army named Promachus who wins a drinking contest (Alex. 70.2). Both of these examples suggest that the etymology of the term designates individuals who are the best at something. Indeed, even if Promachus had not won the drinking contest, his name and high rank indicate that he was probably a good fighter.

One final reference that may be of use to the current assessment is an instance in Polybius where he uses the term to refer to an 'advance guard' of Achean cavalry and light-armed troops (Polyb 4.12). While these are not Roman troops, it is interesting to note the tactical function which is assigned to the πρόμαχοι. The combined cavalry-infantry tactic has also been assigned to the *antesignani* in Caesar.⁴³⁴ So, while we can only draw a tentative parallel, it is probably one worth noting.

Thus, our evidence regarding the correlation between these two terms is limited, yet I would argue that it may be said that for the Roman army, it is probable that *antesignani* may be referred to as πρόμαχοι, and vice versa. This is especially true for the Republic where we have good corresponding literary evidence.

⁴³² Although if we equate the terms *antesignani* and πρόμαχοι, then Plut. *Otho* 12.4 could be considered our only piece of literary evidence for *antesignani* in the Principate.

⁴³³ Cf. Diod. Sic. 17.26; Plut. *Phil.* 6.6.

⁴³⁴ Caes. *BC* 3.75, 3.84.

Antesignani, Delecti, Expedites, Extraordinarii and ἐπίλεκτοι

The correlation between these troop types is not particularly forthcoming in our sources, nor is it similar to the other parallels listed here insofar as these units are not necessarily the same or similar types of troops.⁴³⁵ Rather, their similarity lies in their function. As the etymology of the *antesignani*, *expedites*, and *extraordinarii* suggests, they are probably all troops that come out of the standard infantry formation: the *antesignani* are before (*ante*) the standards (*signa*) that mark the unit's position in battle; the *expedites* are out (*ex*) of the infantry (*pedites*); and the *extraordinarii* are outside (*extra*) of the regular troops (*ordinarii*). Similarly, as we have seen above, this is often the tactical situation that troops who are labelled *delecti* and ἐπίλεκτοι find themselves in. I will emphasize this connection in what follows.

Some examples highlighting the deployment of *expedites* separate from the main body include skirmishing, quickly occupying high ground, or reconnaissance.⁴³⁶ The tactics in which light-armed legionaries (i.e. *expedites cohortes*, *expeditus legio*) are mentioned include attacking enemies conducting a siege (Livy 24.41), an ambush (Livy 27.40), and a joint siege operation with the navy against Gades (Livy 28.23). In these tactics, the troops operated in smaller numbers away from the rest of the army; this is especially important for the current argument.

In Sallust, we find *expedites cohortes* engaging in tactical manoeuvres away from the rest of the army, such as advancing ahead of the marching column (*Iug.* 46; 100), securing high ground (*Iug.* 50), and rushing ahead of the army to garrison a town with their provisions (*Iug.* 90). It is interesting to note two more cases where Sallust uses *expeditus*, to describe *pedites* mingling with cavalry (*Iug.* 59) and to describe soldiers in the front line at the battle of Pistoria (*Cat.* 60). McGushin suggests that Sallust's use of *expediti* at the battle of Pistoria was probably in reference to 'those who *ad pugnandum alacres videbantur*'. If this is true, we can correlate them to the *antesignani*, since as discussed earlier, Caesar's *antesignani* are also 'seen to engage in battle eagerly'.⁴³⁷ Furthermore, Caesar uses *expeditus* to describe his

⁴³⁵ Except for Polybius' direct correlation between *extraordinarii* and ἐπίλεκτοι, but he is the only author to do this.

⁴³⁶ e.g. Livy 21.32, 21.36, 21.46, 21.47, 22.16, 28.34, 32.6, 33.6, 34.28, 36.15.

⁴³⁷ McGushin 1977, 286.

antesignani in two out of his five uses of the term (*BC* 3.75, 3.84). Thus, there seems to be a significant correlation between the terms.

As noted in Chapter 2, Frontinus notes one instance of *expediti* being used for an ambush on an enemy camp under Fulvius at *Strat.* 2.5.8. We should note the possible correlation to the *antesignani* here, insofar as they were a group used for a special task: a recurring theme for the groups under discussion here.

There are three instances in Tacitus where *expediti* may be correlated with Caesar's *antesignani*. These instances refer to *expediti* being used with or against cavalry.⁴³⁸ Caesar's *antesignani* also engage in this tactic at *BC* 3.75 and 3.84. Furthermore, as already mentioned above, the *antesignani* are also described as *expediti* in these instances. Thus, our sources from the Republican and Imperial periods are consistent in their usage of *expedites* insofar as the term is often used to describe a group of soldiers separate from the main body of troops.

Regarding the *extraordinarii*, I have already pointed out the very tentative link to *antesignani*, but their fighting in the front line (mentioned in Livy at 35.5), should still be noted. Also, as mentioned above, the etymology of their title is particularly important in the present analysis. Since Polybius directly correlates them to ἐπίλεκτοι we should also note his mention of their duty to cover the rear of the marching column in the event of an expected attack (6.40). Not only is this a case of functioning outside of the regular infantry formation, but it is also similar to the tactic executed by Caesar's *antesignani* at *Caes. BC* 3.75.

Throughout Roman history, there is a tactical tradition of using 'picked men' for specialized tasks: a tradition commonly assigned to *antesignani* during Caesar's day. One of the standard ways of referring to these men in Latin is to use the term *delecti*. In Greek authors writing about the Roman army, the term is ἐπίλεκτοι.

Delecti is never paired *antesignani*, *extraordinarii* or *auxilia*, or the like.⁴³⁹ Nevertheless, like these other troops types it seems that *delecti* were deployed separately from the main body of troops. Examples include Gnaeus Scipio's deployment of his '*delecto milite*' on ships to face Hasdrubal in a naval engagement off the coast of Spain; Antony did the same at

⁴³⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 4.25, *Hist.* 3.61, 5.11.

⁴³⁹ That is, as far as infantry is concerned. Livy mentioned *delectis equitibus extraordinariis* at 42.58.13. Dobson 2008, 52 suggests that they may be equated to *evocati* (cf. Isidorus *Etymologiae* 9.3.54).

Brundisium.⁴⁴⁰ Also, Metellus had ‘*delecta manu*’ march with the van in his column in Numidia.⁴⁴¹

For some authors there is a specific role consistently given to ἐπίλεκτοι. Polybius is the only historian to equate the ἐπίλεκτοι to *extraordinarii* directly, and he almost always uses it to refer to these men.⁴⁴² He occasionally uses the term to refer to a special group, such as the legionaries sent to fight alongside *velites*.⁴⁴³ Appian similarly tells of the ἐπίλεκτοι being deployed to reinforce Scipio’s left wing at Zama (*Pun.* 744). Josephus’ uses of the term most often refer to the bodyguard of a commander, especially under Titus.⁴⁴⁴ Some of his uses of the term refer to specially selected groups of men who are assigned special duties. For example, he mentions a group of ἐπίλεκτοι led by Cestius who attempt to break into the temple whilst attacking Jerusalem (*BJ* 2.535), or select soldiers from Alexandria chosen to protect the artillery during Titus’ siege of the city (*BJ* 5.287).⁴⁴⁵ Plutarch also associates the term with a commander’s bodyguard, as does Appian.⁴⁴⁶ It should be noted that Appian’s ἐπίλεκτοι are sometimes much larger than the other groups of ἐπίλεκτοι mentioned by him and other authors. At *Mith.* 11.76 these soldiers constitute a 10,000-man garrison under Varius at Lampsacus. Similarly, at *Mith.* 12.84 Lucullus marches against Tigranes with two τέλεσιν ἐπιλέκτοις. Appian is the only author to suggest such large numbers of ἐπίλεκτοι; as we have seen, many of these groups are a single commander’s bodyguard, which is normally made up of several hundred men.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁰ Gn. Scipio: Livy 22.19, cf. Polyb. 3.96; Caes. *BC* 3.24.

⁴⁴¹ Metellus: Sall. *Iug.* 46, NB. The reference is inaccurately translated as ‘light-armed cohorts’ by Rev. John Selby Watson in the Harper & Brothers. 1899 edition of the text, although this does emphasize my point that *delecti* functioned in ‘light’ roles (cf. Chapter 6, ‘Guarding the Marching Column’, p. 160, below, for the van of the column being regularly assigned to ‘light’ infantry). In *BG* 1.48, Caesar describes how in the army under Ariovistus, a courageous man was picked out (*delegerant*) by each cavalryman to protect them; this attacking-with-cavalry tactic is also noted in Chapter 6 as one assigned to ‘light’ infantry. At Veg. 1.20, *levis armaturae* are described as being *legebantur*, ‘collected’ or alternatively ‘picked out’, further emphasizing this special selection of such troops.

⁴⁴² v. esp. Polyb. 6.26.7 where: ἐκλέγουσι, τοὺς καλουμένους ἐκτραορδιναρίους, ὃ μεθερμηνευόμενον ἐπιλέκτους δηλοῖ. τὸ δὲ πλῆθος γίνεταί τὸ πᾶν τῶν συμμάχων, τὸ μὲν τῶν πεζῶν; also 6.30.2, 6.30.3, 6.31.2, 6.31.6, 6.31.8, 6.32.6, 6.40.4, 6.40.8, 10.39.1.

⁴⁴³ Polyb. 10.39, this is discussed under εὐζωνος in Chapter 3.

⁴⁴⁴ Jos. *BJ* 1.62, 2.583, 3.95, 3.120, 3.122, 3.331, 5.47, 5.48, 5.82, 5.258; Speidel 1992b, 206, notes that the men at *BJ* 5.44 are *pedites singulares*. For ἐπίλεκτοι as guards, v. esp. n. 28 *op. cit.*

⁴⁴⁵ See also *BJ* 6.243 for such picked men.

⁴⁴⁶ Plut. *Crass.* 17, *Pyrrh.* 30, *Ant.* 53.2; App. *Pun.* 2.8, *BC* 4.9.

⁴⁴⁷ E.g. App. *Pun.* 2.8, Jos. *BJ* 2.583, Arr. *Ektaxis* 23.

As has been shown, the various assignments given to *delecti* and ἐπίλεκτοι include several references to tactics beyond the main body of infantry, thus making these troops comparable to the others discussed in this section, above.

Thus, soldiers classified as *antesignani*, *delecti*, *expedites*, or *extraordinarii* share a common function. All of them engage in tactics separate from the rest of the army; as their names suggests, they come out of the standard infantry formations.

Rorarii & Velites

As discussed in Chapter 2, the *rorarii* seemingly have several things in common with the *velites*. These include their use of javelins, and skirmishing (especially before the battle). We should also note the possibility that they may have existed at the same time. Because of this, I suggested in Chapter 2 that the *velites* replaced the *rorarii*, or that the former term replaced the latter since they seem to have been the same type of troop.⁴⁴⁸

Unfortunately, our evidence for *rorarii* is extremely fragmentary, and so there is little discussion to be had on determining the exact link between these two units. Nevertheless, both Goldsworthy and Daly have proposed that the two terms are synonymous.⁴⁴⁹ I would agree that the fragmentary evidence points to in this direction. This is because the etymology of *rorarii* suggests that they were younger, more inexperienced soldiers who were given the task of skirmishing before a pitched battle began.⁴⁵⁰ This is precisely the same role assigned to *velites*. Furthermore, it is also probable that Livy's placement of the *rorarii* at the back of the legion is an attempt to create a false parallel with the five Servian classes. Livy's use of the term seems to be imprecise. This, in turn, leaves Goldsworthy inclined to believe that the term *rorarii* was somehow related to *velites*.⁴⁵¹ Walbank has suggested that the earlier light-armed troops were called *rorarii* and that the name persisted until the end of the second century. He further notes that the name probably changed to *velites* in 211, basing this suggestion on Livy 26.4 (which claims that the *velites* were established in that year – see *velites* in Chapter 2).⁴⁵² Daly has a very similar argument. He notes that Livy's suggestion

⁴⁴⁸ Kromayer and Veith have made a similar observation, v. op. cit. 1928, 263, 268, 309; cf. Dobson 2008, 48; Sage 2008, 88.

⁴⁴⁹ Goldsworthy 2000, 48; Daly 2002, 73.

⁴⁵⁰ See Varro *Ling.* 7.3: 'Rorarii dicti ab rore qui bellum committebant, ideo quod ante rorat quam pluit'; cf. Festus 323.8 L; Nonius 552,30.

⁴⁵¹ Goldsworthy 2000, 48.

⁴⁵² Walbank 1957, 701-2.

that the *velites* were founded in 211 may have actually been a result of re-equipping the various lightly armed forces in the legion. He says the reform of 211 may have actually been an upgrading of the *leves* (mentioned in Livy 8.8 along with *rorarii*) to the same standards as the *rorarii*. The result would have been the standardization of the force of light troops in the legion, resulting in the newly labelled *velites*. He goes on to point out that this new force was thus simply an enlarged force of *rorarii*.⁴⁵³ Though his specific suggestions are based on conjecture, they point to the probable reality that all Roman light infantry, even if not homogeneously equipped, still probably fulfilled the same function. This points to a correlation which may have blurred the etymological lines for Livy. Indeed, there is a tactical and etymological synonymy between *rorarii* and *velites* which Livy was clearly unable to clarify. To be sure, because our evidence is fragmentary, we are likewise unable to ascertain the exact relationship between the two units. Nevertheless, some similarity is quite evident.

Κουφοί & Ψιλοί

Both of these terms are used by the ancient sources to describe any kind of missile troops. As such, javelineers, bowmen and slingers fall under the definitions for both of these terms. Again, this is another example of the variety of vocabulary available to ancient writers on military matters. The major difference between the two terms is that *κουφοί* is often used as an adjective, while *ψιλοί* is used exclusively as a noun describing the light infantry. This difference might be due to the ancient authors' personal preference based on the particular context in which the term was being used, despite the fact that they generally refer to the same thing.

Ακοντιστής, Ακροβόλος, Γροσφομάχοι, Εύζώνοι *Iaculatores & Velites*

We have very little information on the *iaculatores*, but as discussed in Chapter 2, the possibility exists that the term is simply another way of describing *velites*.⁴⁵⁴ Both of these types of troops are seen to engage in the same tactics, and they are similarly equipped (i.e. with javelins).

⁴⁵³ Daly, *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. Kromayer and Veith 1928, 309.

Ἀκοντιστής also seems to be simply another synonym for the light infantry of the Roman Republican army. As in noted in the section above, they are not only armed in the same way and perform the same function as the *velites*, but Polybius also uses this term interchangeably with the term most commonly translated as *velites*: γροσφομάχοι. I have already noted our ability to equate this term with *velites*, and as such, it should also be seen as an equivalent to ἄκοντιστής. Because the word ἄκοντιστής also emphasizes the javelin as the main weapon of these troops, I would suggest that *iaculatores* can be associated with them as well, since the latter are known as primarily javelin-throwers. Furthermore, as pointed out in Chapter 3, in the section on ἀκροβόλος (p. 93), this term can also be used to describe the *velites*, and so must be added to the present list.

Finally, εὐζώνοι are also occasionally used to describe troops that can be equated to the *velites*, especially in Polybius. However, this term is also used to describe armies in light-marching order, or soldiers who are either well-equipped or lightly armed, or both. So, unlike the other terms listed here, it is not one that we can consider synonymous with *velites* in every instance of its usage, but it can nevertheless function as such.⁴⁵⁵

Other light infantry

There are other groups of light infantry mentioned in the chapters on vocabulary that can be loosely correlated with one another. These include the *ferentarii* and their resemblance to both *velites* and *accensi*; the tentative link between *leves armaturae/cohortes* and the *auxilia* in Tacitus; and the similar generality of both *ferentarii* and γυμνής. Yet, drawing parallels between these groups is generally quite speculative, and is not necessarily worth making significant note of, especially due to our lack of evidence for such assertions.

Conclusions

Thus, it would seem our sources are imprecise in their usage of military terminology when referring to the light-armed troops of the Roman Republic. However, we should also consider whether we as historians have generally been too restrictive with our notions of how military terminology should be used. Perhaps we are too eager to label groups of soldiers with specific terms, while our ancient counterparts saw no such need. On the other hand, this

⁴⁵⁵ The same goes for *leves* in Livy, especially at 30.33 where he equates them with *velites*.

modern tendency might be a result of the ancient labelling and tri-partite division of the legion: we have specific definitions for the *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*, and so historians' labelling of the light-armed troops with one term suits this tradition. It may have also been that the authors' audiences would have understood the different uses of terminology, having knowledge that we presently lack. For example, *rorarii* seem to be equivalent to the *velites*, and it is possible that they were an earlier form of these troops; it is only the disparity of our sources that prevent us from knowing this for certain, but perhaps our authors' audiences were aware of the reasons for this change in terminology.⁴⁵⁶ Alternatively, Livy's use of *cohors* when describing the manipular legion may not have been as inaccurate as the expression may seem at first, since it is possible that the cohort formation existed for the majority of the maniple organization's existence.⁴⁵⁷ Also, as discussed above, the variations in terminology may well have been intentional, and could have offered some inherent rhetorical sense that we cannot grasp. The use of *velites* versus *iaculatores* (examined in Chapter 2 under *iaculatores*) provides a good example of this. They are probably the same type of light infantry, only the former emphasizes their headgear while the latter term emphasizes their main function; thus, the possibility exists that the difference between terms here was purely rhetorical. It should also be pointed out that several terms exist for heavy infantry, such as *pedites*, *milites*, *cohortes*, *πεζοί* and *ὀπλίτης*. Therefore, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter (p.115), I would argue that using varying vocabulary for particular troops was normal, and a result of the simple rhetorical and philological value of a wider vocabulary.

Furthermore, as has been suggested, most light infantrymen were probably all similarly armed and in addition, were probably tactically deployed in a similar way from the beginning of their existence. This seems to have remained consistent until the disappearance of their formal division, i.e. the *velites*. Thus, it might be suggested that the ancient authors may not have found the need to clarify the specific differences between all of the various terminology they had available for light infantry, especially if they perceived light infantry to be generally all the same. Indeed, as we have seen, this perception is not without merit as many of these terms do seem to apply to the same troops. This is also why I have suggested that the

⁴⁵⁶ E.g. If this was the case, then readers may simply have been aware that the *velites* were once called *rorarii*, cf. Daly 2002, 73 for the suggestion that *rorarii* persisted as a military term, even though probably obsolete.

⁴⁵⁷ See Rawson 1991, 43, Keppie 1998, 63, Dobson 2008 58-60.

variations in terminology may have simply been rhetorical or philological, rather than technical.

I hope to have shown in my etymological assessment of the Latin and Greek in the previous chapters, that the technical differences between many terms are indiscernible, and so I further suggest that this in itself is indicative of a correspondence in equipment and roles between these apparently different categories of light infantry.

5 Defining Light Infantry

This chapter aims to draw conclusions from the previous chapters on the vocabulary of light infantry. It seeks to define light infantry based on the findings of these chapters. It will also review the developments and customs in the Roman military that have an effect on this definition. This includes the tactical flexibility between light and heavy infantry as well as the loss of the *velites* and the emergence of the cohort.

Defining Light Infantry: understanding 'heavy' and 'light' infantry

As seen in the previous chapter, our sources favour the use of generic light infantry terminology over the use of technical terminology. Thus, we cannot apply a technical definition to light infantry. Instead, I would suggest that it may have been the task and immediate tactical role of any given group of infantry, which could have provided the reference for their classification in the ancient sources. With this in mind, I would go even further and suggest that tactical mobility could have possibly been a key reason for labelling units as 'light.' For instance, units engaged in static fighting, or infantry that was relatively immobile in their function, e.g. infantry fighting in a battle-line during pitched-battle, are often referred to as infantry, and thus by metonymy 'heavy' infantry. In contrast, infantry that has a much more mobile function, e.g. any operation outside of static fighting, are often labelled 'light'. This is true even if they are equipped in exactly the same way as the aforementioned 'heavy' infantry. Indeed, they may even function in both roles without any evident change in equipment, such as the Caesarian *antesignani*. Thus, a highly mobile function or tactical deployment (such as skirmishing for example) is often accompanied by light infantry terminology. In this way, the given task has much more to do with the sources' uses of light infantry terminology than the specific equipment of the groups labelled as such. Part of the reason for this is that soldiers equipped in various ways engaged in light infantry tactics, especially after the disappearance of the *velites*.⁴⁵⁸ So, our understanding of 'heavy' versus 'light' infantry in the Roman army could be one that is not defined by their equipment, nor indeed their belonging to a specific unit – but rather the way they were employed at a

⁴⁵⁸ For variously equipped soldiers in light tactics, see , p. 159 ff.

given time. Unit designation as light or not is thus dependent on the context in which they are used – it is defined by task and immediate tactical role, and moreover, by the mobility of that task, rather than a predetermined and permanent role.

It has not been common for scholars to recognize this trend, although recently this has begun to change. Rawlings has noted that hoplites were able to participate in various types of combat outside of the phalanx, ‘many of which were individualistic, endemic and low-intensity.’⁴⁵⁹ Modern historiography does not often discuss present-day comparative examples for ancient armies, but it so happens that with light infantry, modern armies provide corresponding paradigms.⁴⁶⁰ The British Army for instance, describes their light infantry as

battalions [that] operate with minimal transport and sometimes almost entirely on foot. They are equipped with the full range of small arms, mortars, anti tank weaponry and surveillance equipment. The Light Role Infantry battalion is a versatile organisation that can work in support of Armoured and Mechanised manoeuvre brigades to dominate urban areas or control mountainous terrain and forests/jungle. They are employed in all major UK operations.⁴⁶¹

Thus, just like many groups of ‘light’ infantry discussed above, their tactical roles determine their classification, rather than the amount of equipment that they carry. Indeed, as described in the quotation, modern British light infantry seem to be quite heavily equipped. Alternatively, their role as support for the heavy infantry may be equated to the traditional role of *socii*, *auxilia* and *velites* in the Roman army who supported the heavy infantry in pitched battle. In this way as well, their role which contrasts that of the heavy infantry, determines their classification.

It is interesting to note that light infantry in modern armies simply refers to men assigned to fight on foot, whereas heavy infantry is equivalent to mechanized infantry units, i.e. soldiers in tanks or armoured vehicles. Naturally, in the Roman army, heavy infantry fought on foot, yet the same is often true for modern armies: infantry, no matter how they are classified, usually end up being re-assigned to light-infantry duty at one point or another, depending on the circumstances. For example, tanks (so-called ‘Infantry Fighting Vehicles’) cannot be

⁴⁵⁹ Rawlings 2000, 250.

⁴⁶⁰ Some authors who have used modern examples: Delbruck 1990, 277; Goldsworthy 1996, 257 *et passim*; Kagan 2006, 99-108 *et passim*.

⁴⁶¹ British Army 2010. *Our Role – Light Infantry*. Available at: <http://www.army.mod.uk/infantry/role/default.aspx> [Accessed: 2 June 2010.]

sent into the mountains, but the men operating them can.⁴⁶² This may be loosely compared to the Roman army: ‘heavy’ infantry after the disappearance of the *velites* are also seen to operate in a ‘light’ capacity; their assigned tasks are not invariable, but tactically flexible.

So, it could be argued that the classification of a group of soldiers as light often had nothing to do with their panoply. Exceptions to this might include units that have a specific name rather than just an adjective describing them as light (e.g. the *velites* or γροσφομάχοι).

Thus, generally, as with so called ‘light infantry’ of later periods, the term more adequately describes the more immediate tactical use of such infantry rather than the actual weight of their equipment.⁴⁶³ As a result, I would endorse Quesada Sanz’s suggested usage of terminology for infantry: so-called ‘heavy’ infantry should perhaps more correctly be termed ‘line infantry’. We can probably retain the term ‘light infantry’ for any infantry engaged in that role, since as noted above, this technical understanding of the name seems to have been apparent for our ancient military sources and has likewise persisted through to modern armies; it must simply be kept in mind that this term does not necessarily describe their equipment.

Tactical Flexibility between Line Infantry and Light infantry

One of the Roman military customs that allows for the suggestion that the given task dictated the classification of troops is the tactical flexibility of both line infantry and light infantry. This section discusses instances of soldiers carrying out tasks (i.e. tactics) that would not necessarily be assigned to them based on traditional classifications derived from their equipment. As a result, these soldiers can be classified as both light and heavy infantry, depending on their function. In order to understand tactical flexibility and various tactical roles of light-armed troops in our sources, it is necessary to assess how they may have been equipped, and so this will also be dealt with briefly throughout the chapter.

⁴⁶² LCpl Alun D. Williams pers. comm. 18/03/2010.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Lazenby 1978, 14; Quesada Sanz 2006, 3.

Line Infantry in Light Roles

Antesignani

This assessment of *antesignani* will consider their role and appearance in the cohortal legion, since it is here (under Caesar specifically) that they are referred to as *expediti*, or light-armed troops.

As discussed on pages 21-27 above, the *antesignani* have been shown to be regularly enlisted legionaries under Caesar, rather than a distinctive unit. Aside from the *gladius* and some form of helmet, archaeological evidence suggests that the typical armament for a Caesarian legionary included ring mail (commonly known as ‘chain’ mail) and a large *scutum*.⁴⁶⁴ Although Caesar’s legionaries carried more equipment than this (e.g. *pila*, a dagger), their mail and shield is arguably what traditionally classifies them as line infantry, insofar as these pieces of equipment were typically carried by troops who functioned as line infantry in pitched-battle. Also, these pieces of equipment were not carried by troops deemed to be solely ‘light’ by our sources (e.g. the *velites*).

There are four instances where *antesignani* engage in tactics that are typically given to light infantry.⁴⁶⁵ They are as follows: quickly occupying high ground (*BC* 1.43), engaging in non-pitched-battle combat (*BC* 1.57), and fighting in concert with cavalry (*BC* 3.75, 3.84). The latter instances use the term *expediti* to describe the *antesignani* in these cases, but as discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 21-27, above), this should not be translated as ‘lightly armed’. When the *antesignani* were not engaging in such tactics, they would have functioned as line infantry in pitched battle. Thus, the functions of Caesarean *antesignani* make them classifiable as both light and line infantry, depending on their given task.

Auxilia

This section will focus on the permanent *auxilia* of the Roman army in the imperial period, which often function in typically ‘light’ roles. These roles include guarding the marching

⁴⁶⁴ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 50-66; Bishop & Coulston also suggest that the shield described by Polybius at 6.23, is similar to the one represented on the so-called ‘Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus’, and the monument of Aemilius Paulus, *op. cit.* 61.

⁴⁶⁵ Typical light-infantry tactics are discussed in Chapter 6, below.

column, reconnaissance, deployment in swift operations and deployment in difficult terrain.⁴⁶⁶ It is interesting to note however, that they were duly effective in pitched battle.⁴⁶⁷

Despite their usage in ‘light’ tactics, they do not seem to have been equipped as lightly as some of the other types of infantry associated with these roles, such as *velites*.⁴⁶⁸ Part of the reason for this may have been their regular use as flanking units on the battle-line. As discussed in Chapter 2 under *auxilia* (p. 32), the armour of the *auxilia* probably consisted of a heavy mail cuirass (probably not segmented armour but either scale or ring mail), a large oval shield and a heavy thrusting spear.⁴⁶⁹ This equipment may be considered as typically ‘heavy’. Thus, terms that are used in our sources to designate the professional imperial *auxilia* as ‘light’, seem to be a classification of their function, rather than their equipment.⁴⁷⁰

Light Infantry in Heavy Roles

Velites/γροσφομάχοι

It has been established that these troops were outfitted more lightly than their legionary counterparts, and often engaged in ‘light’ tactics.⁴⁷¹ Thus, the following discussion will evaluate their involvement in typically ‘heavy’ tactics.

The use of missile weapons should not be discounted as a tactic reserved for light-infantry engaged in skirmishing. Instead, as discussed above and in Chapter 6, recurrent missile combat seems to have been a regular and vital feature of the heavy infantry clash during pitched battles.⁴⁷² Although speculative, since we know that the *velites* or γροσφομάχοι retired into the heavy infantry ranks during pitched battle, it is plausible that they may have been involved in returning any usable missiles. Furthermore, given that a javelin is best thrown with a short run-up to the release, perhaps the withdrawn light infantry of the

⁴⁶⁶ Guarding the marching column: e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1.51, 2.16-18; Hist. 2.17, Jos. *BJ* 5.2.1; Reconnaissance: e.g. *P.Dura* 100, *CIL* VIII 21516, cf. Speidel 1970, 148, esp n. 69; *CIL* III 11918 = *ILS* 9152, *CIL* III 12480, Southern 1989, 110; Austin & Rankov 1995, 190, 194-5, 244; Swift operations: e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 4.25; Difficult terrain: e.g. Tac. Hist. 2.35, Ann. 3.38-39, 14.23.

⁴⁶⁷ cf. Gilliver 1996a, *passim*.

⁴⁶⁸ Even though the chronology between the imperial *auxilia* and the *velites* varies, the ‘light’ tactics which each of these respective groups execute are comparable, cf. Chapter 6, esp. p. 172, below.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 254-259.

⁴⁷⁰ As to why *auxilia* are used in this way despite the little difference in their equipment, see Chapter 6, ‘Fighting Capability’, p. 173, below.

⁴⁷¹ See *velites* in Chapter 2, p. 64, and Chapter 6, pp. 144-159.

⁴⁷² cf. Zhmodikov 2000, *passim*.

manipular legion would have been best suited to return such missiles during pitched battle, since the heavy infantry would need to keep their ranks.⁴⁷³ From there they would have to throw over the heads of the line infantry. If we assume that the manipular legion deployed with maniple-wide gaps between each maniple (in order to form the *quincunx*), the *velites* might fill these gaps upon retiring from the initial skirmishing. In this way, they could keep the enemy from outflanking the individual maniples of legionaries with missile fire, and with their mere presence. If *velites* simply retreated to the rear of the legions (i.e. behind the *triarii*), it must be remembered that if this were indeed the case, then they would be engaged in combat alongside legionaries should envelopment occur, as it did at Cannae for example. Unfortunately, our sources do not mention this kind of combat for the *velites*.

According to Livy, the *velites* were very capable of hand-to-hand combat as well.⁴⁷⁴ This is most evident at the battles of Mount Olympus and Ancyra in 189 BC, where the light infantry destroyed the army of Galatian Gauls. It should be noted however, that this occurred after the latter had panicked due to their inability to cope with the missile attack of the *velites*. Indeed, we might presume that the *velites* would not have been able to withstand a line-infantry clash for extended periods, if only because of their lack of heavy equipment. This does not mean, however, that *velites* were necessarily inferior in skill during hand-to-hand combat. Rather, they were simply equipped for a different primary function (i.e. weakening the enemy with missiles).⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, they would not have been equipped with a *gladius* and a *parma* if they never engaged in hand-to-hand combat; occurrences of this could possibly have transpired in pitched-battle.⁴⁷⁶ There is no evidence supporting the idea that this happened regularly, so what we should take from these references is that the light-infantry were capable of fighting in hand-to-hand combat, although they would probably not be able to withstand an onslaught of ordered and disciplined line infantry on their own.

So while our evidence suggests it was much rarer to find designated light-infantry engaging in typically ‘heavy’ tactics such as hand-to-hand combat during pitched battle, we cannot say that this never happened.

⁴⁷³ Cf. Sallust’s reference to Metellus interspersing slingers and archers between the infantry, *Iug.* 49.

⁴⁷⁴ Livy 38.21.13.

⁴⁷⁵ For the importance of missile combat v. Zhmodikov 2000, *passim*.

⁴⁷⁶ It may be worth noting that although the battles of Mount Olympus and Ancyra are the only ones where the light-infantry have the primary role in hand-to-hand combat (rather than the line infantry), Livy does not note that this was highly unusual or that it was an exceptional circumstance. However, there are of course, inherent problems with creating an argument *ex silentio*.

The Loss of the Velites

A key development that allows for the suggestion that function and mobility defines light infantry was the disappearance of the *velites*, and so this change will be evaluated here. This section aims to determine how significant the loss of the *velites* was, and what the ramifications of their disappearance were. As Bell has indicated, the *velites* had wholly disappeared by Caesar's time. There are a number of possible reasons for this which Bell summarizes:

...the changed conditions of warfare, the greater availability of foreign auxiliaries and the destruction of the economic base for military class distinction. Above all perhaps, the long service and professionalism of the first century army made the ordinary heavy infantryman better able to fill the role of *velites* as well as their own.⁴⁷⁷

Thus, as Bell has demonstrated, the loss of the *velites* seems to have been tactically insignificant; the line infantry were capable of fulfilling many of these 'light' roles. When they were not capable of doing so, foreign infantry, especially specialized foreign 'light' infantry such as Spanish *caetrati*, Cretan archers, and Balearic slingers helped fill these roles. Thus, foreign light infantry seems to have been necessary to fulfill battle tasks that the legionaries could not fulfill themselves. This would have probably been because of the specialized equipment of these foreign recruits (e.g. slings and arrows).

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, (Tactical Roles), the ramifications of this change may have included a greater reliance on the permanent Roman *auxilia* for their fighting capability. The fighting capabilities of the 'light' infantry of the cohortal legion made them more capable of standing their ground against other line infantry than the light infantry of the manipular legion seems to have been. However, we should not attribute the fighting capability of the *auxilia* to the loss of the *velites*. Rather, the emergence of the cohort as the primary tactical unit may have been one of the developments that led to the loss of the *velites* and so this will be assessed next.

The Cohort and its Effect on the Velites

The emergence of the cohort as the primary tactical unit in the Roman army is a critical event in the discussion of function and classification of troops. This change in heavy infantry

⁴⁷⁷ Bell 1965, 421.

organization allowed for more tactical versatility in smaller groups, a task which is directly linked to the disappearance of the *velites* and the amalgamation of their ‘light’ function with heavy infantry.⁴⁷⁸

In order to understand this development more completely, the origins of the cohort must be discussed. This is especially true because as Bell argued in his seminal article, the cohort probably developed out of the need for small-scale mobility,⁴⁷⁹ which is something we can readily associate with ‘light’ tactics. Furthermore, in understanding the development of the cohort, we might better understand the Roman approach to low-intensity warfare and non-pitched battle over time. At this point then, it would be worth discussing the evolution of the cohort, whilst likewise noting any possible association with ‘light’ tactics or light infantry.

Bell suggests that the development of the cohort began in the later 3rd century BC, where we have a reference to a *cohors Romana* under Lucius Marcius in 210.⁴⁸⁰ However, his hypothesis is based on Livy’s usage of the term cohort during the Spanish Wars, along with additional evidence from Polybius, Appian and Frontinus. This method, he explains, is necessary since there is a general view (from Marquardt in particular) that Livy’s usage of the term was due to his mistranslation or misinterpretation of his sources.⁴⁸¹ And indeed, while his method is sound, Bell’s main argument is that the cohort developed from tactics encountered by Roman armies during the Spanish Wars, and as Rawson has already pointed out, this argument does not hold, as the unit probably existed outside of the Spanish theatre.⁴⁸² As Quesada Sanz has sensibly indicated, Iberians were not necessarily the stereotypical ‘guerrilleros’ they are often believed to have been,⁴⁸³ and they probably engaged in pitched-battle combat wherever opportunity allowed.⁴⁸⁴ So, while it is likely that the wars in Spain may have had some influence on the progression to cohorts as the permanent tactical unit, we should be careful in dismissing its possible existence elsewhere. Indeed, as Rawson writes,

...if Livy (with other annalistic writers), mentions cohorts in Spain but not in the East, this may be because it is only for the West that he uses not Polybius but late

⁴⁷⁸ As seen with the *antesignani* under Caesar for example.

⁴⁷⁹ Bell 1965, 410-412.

⁴⁸⁰ Livy 25.39 supported by Frontinus II.6.2; cf. Bell 1965, 415.

⁴⁸¹ Bell 1965, 405, cf. Marquardt 1884, 435 ff.; also Parker 1928, 28, who follows Marquardt: ‘[the introduction of the cohort] is usually assigned to Marius on the ground that the last time we hear of maniples being definitely employed in battle is by Metellus against Jugurtha.’

⁴⁸² Rawson 1991, 43; this issue is dealt with further, below.

⁴⁸³ E.g. see Bell *passim*.

⁴⁸⁴ Quesada Sanz 2006, 11, 13.

annalistic authors, who believed that the cohorts had existed from the regal period on (and of whom little notice need therefore be taken – Coleius, however, also used by Livy, might be better evidence).⁴⁸⁵

Certainly, as Quesada Sanz indicates, warfare in the west probably allowed for more opportunities to use the cohort, because of a similar approach to battle as far as weapons and hand-to-hand combat were concerned.⁴⁸⁶ In contrast, the Hellenistic approach to battle with the phalanx may have not allowed for as many opportunities or reasons to deploy the legion in this way. So, while Bell makes a good point about warfare in Spain having direct influence on the development of the cohort, he should not have excluded other enemies in western theatre, such as the Gauls, or the Carthaginians. I would also suggest that the cohort could have been used for whatever tactical exigency that required it, regardless of the theatre of combat.

One of Bell's primary reasons for focusing on Spain for the development of the cohort lies in the second part of his argument. He suggests that the cohort came about from the need for tactical concentration on the battlefield, i.e. to fill the gaps in between the maniples. He suggests that these gaps were particularly problematic in the Spanish theatre due to the guerrilla tactics encountered there.⁴⁸⁷ Aside from the aforementioned point that guerrilla tactics may not have been as common as previously assumed, this argument is flawed in several points. Firstly, it implies that the Roman battle-line was not solid once pitched battle was underway, and that it had maniple-wide gaps. This is tactically very unlikely, and we should not assume that this was a reality. Maniple-wide gaps would essentially see the regular and simultaneous engagement of the front two lines in a *triplex acies* (i.e. the *hastati* and the *principes*), as the gaps would allow enemy units to surround the first-line maniples and thus necessarily engage the front lines of the second-line maniples.⁴⁸⁸ This is, firstly, something our sources never mention, and secondly, on the contrary, the manipular and cohortal systems that used the *triplex acies* were effective because of their ability to replace the front lines, which is something an engagement with maniple-wide gaps could not allow. I would argue that the system of replacing the front lines was a process that probably took place during lulls in combat: another necessary feature of pitched battle.

⁴⁸⁵ Rawson, 1991, 43.

⁴⁸⁶ Quesada Sanz 2006, *passim*.

⁴⁸⁷ Bell 1965, 409, 411.

⁴⁸⁸ Unless the opposing armies had exactly the same array, which we know they did not, see most recently e.g. Koon 2011, 80-81.

Another argument Bell makes is that the cohort provided the perfect size for punitive expeditions for both tactical and supply reasons.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, there is little doubt that the cohort developed out of tactical necessity, and because the manipular battle array was used for so long with the Roman army, it is more likely that this tactical necessity was derived from outside the realm of pitched battle. Furthermore, these tactical necessities were caused by the numerous instances of non-pitched battle combat that had become more common beginning in the second century BC. Thus, if non-pitched battle combat required the development of the cohort, then this implies that the manipular system was effective in pitched battle deployment. This then raises the question of why the manipular system was later abandoned for pitched battle. The answer may lie in the possibility that the cohort and manipular system co-existed.

If cohorts developed out of tactics outside of manipular pitched battle, then they could have simply been an alternative tactic that was deployed as a part of the manipular system. If the cohort developed out of the manipular system, it did not exist prior to the establishment of that system, despite the fact that it is mentioned in Livy at earlier dates.⁴⁹⁰ That cohorts co-existed with the maniple as a tactical unit is a reality that has already been addressed by several scholars.⁴⁹¹ This co-existence is important because it means that unit organization could have not only affected its function, but also the need for *velites*. The reasons for this are as follows: the deployment of the cohort in the manipular system could have seen *velites* deployed with the maniples that they were attached to within the cohort, (e.g. as in Polyb. 11.23).⁴⁹² This in turn, could have had serious ramifications on the need for an exclusive light infantry unit. I will return to this shortly. First, the primary issue that results from this postulation is the lack of references to the cohort in formal descriptions of mid-Republican military organization. However, this may be easily explained by the fact that that it was only a tactical formation, rather than an administrative one.⁴⁹³ In this way, the omission of the cohort from formal descriptions of military organization is more understandable: none of our

⁴⁸⁹ Bell 1965, 412.

⁴⁹⁰ These are probably all anachronisms, yet, alternatively, we know that Romans had a tendency to be conservative with military terminology (v. e.g. Caes. *BG* 2.25 '*manipulos laxare*', cf. Gilliver 1993, 31), and it may have been the sustained use of the term 'maniple' in Livy's day that confused him.

⁴⁹¹ Bell 1965, 405; Rawson 1991, 42; Keppie 1998, 63; See Dobson 2008, 58-60 for further discussion of the coexistence between cohorts and maniples in the second century.

⁴⁹² This use of the cohort, i.e. deploying three maniples with their attachment of *velites*, could have been used where commanders needed to engage more than just the *velites*, but less than a legion.

⁴⁹³ Rawson 1991, 42. Interestingly, this convention is reflected in modern armies as well, see p. 140, below.

sources for the mid-Republic were writing tactical treatises listing various formations as some later sources do; instead, their descriptions of the Roman system were based on the administrative units into which men were levied. The idea that this was the reason behind the lack of earlier references of the cohort is not a new one. Bell himself alluded to this design of the cohort, and Rawson has explicitly stated this.⁴⁹⁴ Livy provides us with some possible evidence for the co-existence of these formations, as well as for the formal tactical nature of the cohort. At 27.13 after the second day of battle at Canusium, Livy has Marcellus reprimanding his commanders for having standards taken from the maniples and cohorts. He then explicitly differentiates between the two units, having the centurions of the former punished, and the soldiers of the latter to be put on barley rations.⁴⁹⁵ Further, he has those same cohorts drawn up in the front lines for the third day of battle.⁴⁹⁶ Whether cohorts actually had separate standards here is impossible to determine, but a favourable assessment might be to dismiss Livy's reference as an anachronism.⁴⁹⁷ However, standards were required to carry out tactical manoeuvres effectively, and if we accept that the cohort was a tactical unit, it is also possible that some standards were reserved for that formation so that it might properly function as a whole and complete unit.

Having established the potentiality for co-existence of the maniple and cohort, we are presented with two possible deployments of this formation. This mid-Republican cohort was either just a cohort made of line infantry from the maniples (as in later periods), or, a cohort of line infantry and the light infantry administratively attached to their maniples. If the line infantry and light infantry worked in concert as inferred by Polybius (11.23), they may have had to fulfill one another's roles. There are some possible examples of this in Livy, where cohorts engage in tasks often assigned to light infantry. For instance, though deployment with cavalry was often assigned to light infantry in the manipular legion, at 25.39 Livy has a

⁴⁹⁴ Bell 1965, 415-16; Rawson 1991, 42, 53; v. also Keppie 1998, 63.

⁴⁹⁵ This order of punishment may have been a result of the fact that the cohorts had no formal commander. Plutarch also refers to the cohort when he recounts this event at Marc. 25. Livy notes both types of units again at the Battle of Grumentum (Livy 27.41-42).

⁴⁹⁶ 27.13.7: *an, si eosdem animos habuissetis, terga vestra vidisset hostis? signa alicui **manipulo aut cohorti** ademisset?* 27.13.9: ***cohortibus**, quae signa amiserant, hordeum dari iussit, centurionesque **manipulorum**, quorum signa amissa fuerant, dstrictis gladiis discinctos destituit;* 27.13.11: *imperator eos conlaudat pronuntiatque, a quibus orta pridie fuga esset, cohortesque, quae signa amisissent, se in primam aciem inducturum;* 27.14.3: *sinistra ala ab Romanis et cohortes quae amiserant signa in prima acie pugnabant, et legio duodevicensima ab dextro cornu instructa.*

⁴⁹⁷ While these are certainly men of the legion (v. 27.13.6), there is no evidence for a standard of a cohort in any period.

cohors Romana set an ambush with cavalry in the woods near the Punic camp.⁴⁹⁸ In another example, Flaminius sent cohorts to forage whilst in Ambracia (Livy 32.15), yet foraging or guarding foragers was also often assigned to light infantry (see Chapter 6). We see this again at 34.26, where the foraging body of troops is described as *expeditas cohortes*. Again, we have a Roman cohort guarding foragers before Cynoscephalae at Livy 31.37. Acting as guards was not uncommon for *velites* as it was also their task around the camp (Polyb. 6.35.5). Yet, we hear of cohorts acting in this role as escorts for Cato and later for Aetolian leaders (Livy 34.19, 37.3). Polybius tells us that the light infantry would also guard the marching column (a task their imperial successors would also perform), but Livy tells us Quintus had five cohorts guard his column as he marched through Greece (Livy 34.28). Finally, in a role that is loosely related to foraging, Cato has *expeditas cohortes* engage in plundering while in Spain (Livy 34.19). It must be kept in mind however, that none of these examples provide concrete evidence. This is because Livy could simply be mistaken, or guilty of anachronism. Furthermore, if these are indeed cohorts formed from maniples and *velites*, then there would have been light infantry participating in all of these examples. Thus, two possibilities remain: either the line infantry is fulfilling the role of the light infantry in these examples, or they are working in concert as a mixed-arms force.

While there is no hard evidence for the republican cohort being a mixed-arms force, its hypothetical possibility is perhaps strengthened by modern parallels. So-called ‘battlegroups’ or ‘task forces’ in the British and US armies respectively, are mixed-arms groups, organized for specialized tasks. They are only tactical units, rather than administrative units, which is precisely what has been suggested for the mid-Republican cohort, above.⁴⁹⁹ In the British army, battlegroups are described as follows:

The Battlegroup is structured according to task, with the correct mix of infantry, armour and supporting arms. The Battlegroup organisation is very flexible and the units assigned can be quickly regrouped to cope with a change in the threat. A typical Battlegroup fighting a defensive battle on the FEBA (Forward Edge of the Battle Area) ... could contain about 600 men ... The number of Battlegroups in a

⁴⁹⁸ cf. Bell 1965, 420; see Chapter 6, ‘Tactical Roles’, below, for all the various tasks often given to light infantry.

⁴⁹⁹ Rawson 1991, 42.

division and a brigade could vary according to the task the formation has been given.⁵⁰⁰

Indeed, it is simply tactically sound to deploy infantry forces in this way, as commanders can be sure that their force has the appropriate capabilities for any possible scenario. A mixed-arms cohort in the mid-Republican legion would allow the unit to be able to deal with any problem that an entire legion would be capable of dealing with but on a smaller scale, as in punitive expeditions for example, as Bell suggests.⁵⁰¹ Yet, while this modern parallel favours the present hypothesis, without concrete evidence, this suggestion remains purely speculative.

Whether the mid-Republican cohort was a mixed-arms force, or a unit of line infantry fulfilling the tasks of light infantry, the use of the cohort could have led to the phasing out of the *velites*. The reason for this is as follows: if the line infantry were indeed fulfilling the *velites*' roles in these deployments, then this in itself would have reduced the need for an exclusive light infantry unit. So, if this combined deployment became more common towards the end of the second century, there may have been a greater demand for the *velites* to be better equipped for such tasks. As Bell has pointed out this may have led directly to the re-equipping of the *velites* with *scuta* under Marius.⁵⁰² While Bell argues that the last we hear of the *velites* is probably under Sulla in Frontinus (2.3.17), Bell's claim that Marius may have re-equipped his light infantry stands as a possible reason behind the eventual disappearance of the unit.⁵⁰³ Furthermore, as mentioned above on page 134, in the section on the loss of the *velites*, as specialised foreign light infantry became more available to the Roman army (with its expanding empire), the need for *velites* diminished.⁵⁰⁴ The result was the division of the former function of the *velites* between cohortal infantry (e.g. *antesignani*), and foreign light infantry (e.g. Balearic slingers, Numidian missile troops). This is particularly noticeable under Caesar, where on the one hand he had his *antesignani* engage in several of the tactical roles which the *velites* formerly engaged in, and on the other hand, he regularly employed

⁵⁰⁰ British Army 2011. *Formations – Battlegroups and Company groups*. Available at <http://www.armedforces.co.uk/army/listings/10014.html> [Accessed 08 June, 2011]. It is interesting to note the coincidental correspondence in size to the cohort.

⁵⁰¹ Bell 1965, 412.

⁵⁰² Bell 1965, 419-421.

⁵⁰³ Bell 1965, 421.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Bell 1965, 421. The longevity of the manipular system and of the *velites* despite the possible multi-functionality of the line infantry may be explained by the simple fact that the manipular system was effective, and that until the professionalization of the army, the tripartite division of troops with an added component of light infantry was fully functional and did not require complete modification.

foreign light infantry to supplement his legions.⁵⁰⁵ Yet, to a certain extent, even the latter eventually evolved into dual-purpose light and line infantry, seen in the emergence of the imperial *auxilia*. This, in turn, may have been a result of the marked effectiveness of so-called ‘light’ infantry in hand-to-hand combat scenarios. In general, the emphasis on light infantry seems to have increased over time in Roman warfare, with the importance of a versatile and effective ‘light’ infantry corps culminating with the imperial *auxilia*. The *velites* certainly established the importance of these tactics with the high level of tactical versatility that they were capable of, and this is reflected in the heavier-equipped units that adopted their role (e.g. *antesignani*, *auxilia*).⁵⁰⁶

In this way, light infantry had a significant effect on the organizational developments within the Roman army. The establishment of the cohortal organization seems to have resulted in the adoption of the tasks of the light infantry by line infantry, and further reconstructed light infantry as it had originally been created (i.e. soldiers with little or no body armour), to a ‘light’ infantry that to this day we are still familiar with.⁵⁰⁷ This transferrance of tasks between light and line infantry, also contributes to the definition reached at the beginning of this chapter – that light infantry is defined by function and not equipment. It now remains to discuss said tasks of the light infantry in the following chapter on tactical roles.

⁵⁰⁵ For *antesignani*, see that section in Chapter 2, above, for Caesarian light foreign infantry: e.g. Caes. *BG* 2.10, 2.24, 8.17

⁵⁰⁶ For heavier-equipped infantry adopting ‘light’ roles, see Chapter 6 below, p. 158 ff.

⁵⁰⁷ i.e. infantry that functions in ‘light tactics’ but is heavily equipped by traditional standards. See the British Army definition, above.

6 The Tactical Role of Light-Armed Troops

The understanding of light infantry reached in the previous chapters is heavily based on the tactical function or roles that these troops were used in. This chapter seeks to review these various roles of light-armed troops for the entire period under review. Therefore, it will review the role of light infantry in the manipular legion and the cohortal legion separately. The reason for this is the transference of many light infantry tactics from very lightly equipped troops, to more heavily equipped soldiers in the cohortal legion.

Following Greek practice set forth by authors such as Xenophon and Thucydides, ancient Roman military historiography has a tendency to highlight tactics and stratagem.⁵⁰⁸ Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter 7 in the section on the rhetoric of battle narratives, our sources often describe combat from a command-centred point of view; the resulting narrative focuses on the overall movement of units, i.e. tactics. Tactics also directly affected the psychological state of the soldiers involved in them, for both those ordering the tactical manoeuvres, and those executing them.⁵⁰⁹ In this way, tactics are a major part of understanding the ‘face of battle’.

For ‘Face of Battle’ studies, discerning the tactical roles of specific groups of men in the army helps to clarify their experience of combat. This is especially important with light infantry since, as shall be shown, they were often assigned a wide variety of tactical tasks, some of which led to combat that can be labelled as non-pitched battle.⁵¹⁰ Therefore, in order to clarify the ‘face of non-pitched battle’, it is necessary to assess these tactical assignments and how the light infantry were deployed within them.

Vegetius gives us an ancient overview of light troops as follows:

Yet, there were amongst the ancient infantry those they called *levis armaturae*, *funditores*, and *ferentarii*, who were chiefly stationed on the wings and began the first phase of the battle. The quickest and best-disciplined men were collected for this; they were not very many in number, but if the battle had necessarily

⁵⁰⁸ Lendon 1999, 303.

⁵⁰⁹ E.g. being surrounded usually leads to panic.

⁵¹⁰ For my definition of non-pitched battle, see p. 182, below.

compelled them to withdraw, they were in the habit of falling back in between the first ranks of the legion, thus while standing fast the battle line was unmoved.⁵¹¹

Vegetius' comment on the light-armed troops is one that most scholars might not find contentious, and as such, this view has been the norm in Roman army scholarship to date. Further investigation, however, suggests that light-armed troops were used in many other capacities than those Vegetius mentions. Also, interestingly, there was more truth than he probably realized in his statement regarding the 'quickest and best disciplined men' since, as shall be indicated below, just such men would have probably been required to fulfill all of said demanding capacities successfully.

Tactical Role of Light Troops in the Manipular Legion

Scholarly discussions of the function of armies during the Roman Republic have commonly focused on the role of the heavy infantry rather than that of the light troops. This might be explained by the notion that the heavy infantry were the military arm that decided battles, and were therefore seen as the most important feature of a fighting force.⁵¹² However, a closer assessment of the role of the Roman Republic's light troops reveals that they were capable of much more than simply missile combat and indeterminate skirmishing. Indeed, as Vegetius points out, light-armed and missile troops were indispensable throughout Roman history.⁵¹³

I will examine the possibility that the light-armed troops of the Republic, the *velites* in particular, were actually amongst the most versatile units in the Roman army, capable of performing a wide variety of tasks that would not be equalled until the establishment of the permanent force of professional *auxilia* during the Empire.

The following section will describe in detail the various tactical uses of light-armed troops in the mid-Republic. As tactics are often the focus of ancient battle narratives, it is also worth examining how this is reflected in modern historiography. This short historiographic review will be followed by a discussion of the tactical uses of light infantry on campaign: in ambushes and reconnaissance, around the marching camp, and in pitched battles.

⁵¹¹ Veg. 1.20, my translation: *Erant tamen apud ueteres inter pedites qui dicebantur leuis armaturae, funditores et ferentarii, qui praecipue in cornibus locabantur et a quibus pugnandi sumebatur exordium; sed hi et uelocissimi et exercitatissimi legebantur; nec erant admodum multi, qui cedentes, si proelii necessitas compulisset, inter principia legionum recipi solebant, ita ut acies inmota consisteret.* For more on this passage, see 'Tactical Role...Manipular Legion, Pitched Battle', below.

⁵¹² In our period, the only battle decided primarily by light infantry is the 'Battle of Mount Olympus' at Livy 38.20-23.

⁵¹³ Veg. *Mil.* 1.15, cf. op. cit. 1.20.

Historiography

Despite the importance of light-armed troops, and especially *velites* in the mid-Republic, scholarship on the armies of that period has a tendency to gloss over this significant aspect of the Roman military.⁵¹⁴ Moreover, specific tactical details on the usage of light troops are few and far between, as scholarship tends to focus on either the narration of the numerous battles that took place during this period (especially the most famous battles of the Second Punic War) or on the organization and equipment of the soldiers themselves.⁵¹⁵ In 1939, F.E. Adcock claimed that research in this field was difficult, saying ‘on this we are reduced to the interpretation of passages in Polybius and a chapter in Livy which has darkened counsel’,⁵¹⁶ and it seems that scholarship’s opinion on the subject has not changed much. Indeed, compared to the evidence available for the late Republic and the early imperial era, our sources are fewer in number. However, the available information warrants serious attention, since the evidence is quite forthcoming, as shall be shown.

Although no single modern author gives substantial attention to the tactical role of light troops, current scholarship on the subject can be pieced together to provide some suggestions. Their role as skirmishers plays a predominant part in our modern sources, especially as units to be used at the beginning of a battle.⁵¹⁷ This was a formulaic deployment used by several different armies in our period, and this often resulted in light infantry skirmishing with their light infantry counterparts. In this manner, dissimilar troop types rarely engaged; preventing an exploitation of ‘the offsetting strengths and weaknesses within the [standard] combined arms mix.’⁵¹⁸ Yet, as Lendon suggests, perhaps there was more to the light infantry’s role as skirmishers: skirmishing could lead to notable displays of *virtus*, such as single combats.⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, the notion that light-armed troops engaged in hand-to-hand combat is an important aspect of the present assessment of their tactical versatility. The *velites*’ role as

⁵¹⁴ Regarding the importance of light-armed troops in the mid-Republic, as Quesada Sanz points out, the *velites* made up 30% of the Roman armed forces, Quesada Sanz 2006, 246; cf. Polyb. 6.20.8, 6.21.7.

⁵¹⁵ e.g. battles: Lazenby 1978, *passim*. Du Picq 1987, 82-109; Goldsworthy 2000; Daly 2002; organization & equipment: Parker 1928, *passim*. Adcock 1940, 9; Gabba 1976, 11; Lazenby 1978, 13-15; Keppie 1984, *passim*; Connolly 1989, 152; 1998, 129-133; Goldsworthy 2000, 48; Daly 2002, 56-57, 70-73; Commentaries such as Walbank on Polybius and Briscoe on Livy also give little insight on the tactical manoeuvres of light infantry, e.g. Walbank 1967, 250-251, 311, 454; Briscoe 1973, 141, 187.

⁵¹⁶ Adcock 1940, 8.

⁵¹⁷ For example: Adcock 1940, 8; Bar-Kochva 1976, 166; Keppie 1984, 33; Sabin 1996, 69-70. Connolly 1998, 142; Gilliver 1999, Goldsworthy 2000, 48; Daly 2002, 70, 163; 106; Koon 2011, 83. Use at beginning of battle: Lazenby 1978, 13; Keppie *ibid*, 39; Connolly 1989 161; Quesada Sanz 2006, 17; Sabin 2007, 404, 409.

⁵¹⁸ Sabin 2007, 404.

⁵¹⁹ Lendon 2005, 187.

hand-to-hand combatants is scarcely discussed in modern sources, but Meiklejohn aptly points out that the Battle of Baecula was ‘remarkable because for the first time in Roman history the legions were used on the flanks and the light-troops were used in the centre.’ He goes on to say that this indicates, ‘the Romans had at least trained their light-armed troops properly.’⁵²⁰ His observation is perhaps over-simplified, but the reference is valuable nonetheless. Bell’s seminal article on the development of the cohortal legion contrasts this suggested multi-purpose function of *velites* (i.e. that they not only skirmished, but fought hand-to-hand as well). Discussing the reasons for the *velites* disappearance at some length, he suggests they were only useful at a specific range as missile troops, and because of this, they were easily outclassed by many enemies, which was a contributing factor in their disappearance. Despite his notion of their limited usage, he defends their existence by saying that the argument of Marquardt and Schulten is doubtful, i.e. that they completely disappeared in Spain during the mid-Republic.⁵²¹ Regardless, his narrow view of their function shall be shown to be unjustified. Sabin has also recently dismissed the effectiveness of the missile weapon, pointing out that large infantry shields would have intercepted them easily. However, his use of Livy’s unmilitary assertions to prove his point in this instance causes his argument to remain suspect.⁵²² Indeed, it will be shown below that the sheer number and reusability of the javelin naturally increased a soldier’s susceptibility to the *velites*’ missiles. The light infantry’s role alongside the cavalry is occasionally mentioned in modern scholarship, but Sabin is perhaps the only one to acknowledge that this was ‘by no means peripheral to the outcome of the heavy infantry contest.’⁵²³

Modern scholarship then, has certainly considered the tactical role of *velites* and light troops, albeit briefly. More recently, Sage has summarized the variety of roles that light-armed troops in the manipular legion were capable of:

In general, they were used for reconnaissance, for foraging, to drive off opposing light-armed troops, to screen the movements of their own forces from the enemy, and in pursuit once the opposing army had been broken. They were also used to extend the battle line in cases where the wings rested on broken and uneven ground not suitable for heavy infantry. They seem to have been especially effective in dealing with the elephant on the battlefield, after its appearance on Italian and western battlefields in the course of the third century. From this

⁵²⁰ Meiklejohn 1938, 14.

⁵²¹ Bell 1965, 419; cf. Marquardt, *Röm. Staat.* ii 435ff.

⁵²² Sabin 2007, 428. This argument also ignores Zhmodikov’s assertions on the important role of missile weapons in warfare, see Zhmodikov 2000.

⁵²³ Sabin 1996, 70. Cavalry & light infantry: Bell 1965, 420; Sabin 1996, 66, 69; Lendon 2005, 179.

period we often find them operating with cavalry in reconnaissance and pursuit and occasionally in battle.⁵²⁴

While Sage's overview is certainly judicious, these troop types require a more in-depth analysis.

Ambush and Reconnaissance

The tactical role of light infantry outside of pitched battle is an important aspect in studying the nature of combat in the Roman world. In a single campaigning season, reconnaissance and ambushes were regular tactics for gaining advantage over an enemy. Once opposing armies drew close, skirmishing parties attacking enemy marching columns, foragers, reconnaissance, or on the camp itself were also regular features of non-pitched-battle combat. Light-armed troops had significant roles to play in these tactics, as our sources indicate.

Austin and Rankov point out that reconnaissance as a specialized strategy (usually occurring prior to a major invasion) did not exist in the Republic. Our republican sources seem to suggest that tactical reconnoitring, however, was a regular part of warfare.⁵²⁵ Reconnaissance often required a quick survey of what was commonly difficult terrain, i.e. hills, forests, etc. From the infantry, the forces best suited for this in the Republic were the light-armed troops as it would have been easier for them to negotiate this terrain.⁵²⁶ The fact that while reconnoitring it was possible for an engagement to take place further indicates the tactical versatility and combat value of the light-troops used in these situations. The battles of Cynoscephalae and Ticinus are examples of reconnaissance missions (in which the deployed force included *velites*) that led to combat.⁵²⁷ Another danger of reconnaissance was being ambushed. In 208, the consuls M. Claudius Marcellus and T. Quinctius Crispinus set out on a reconnaissance mission with their lictors, 30 γροσφομάχοι, and some cavalry. This group was then ambushed by Numidian light-infantry (Polyb. 10.32; Plut. *Marc.* 7.29). The Numidians killed Marcellus and managed to hit Crispinus with two javelins. Such quick light

⁵²⁴ Sage 2008, 87.

⁵²⁵ Austin & Rankov 30-31; Polyb. 18.19, 21; App. *Hann.* 40; Livy 21.23, 32, 46, 53, 22.12, 15, 19, 42, 23.43, 24.41, 26.3, 27.2, 14, 26, 27, 41, 30.11, 29, 31.33, 32.6, 33.6, 7, 35.4, 37.34, 38.41.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Polyb. 10.15.10 where Scipio sends *velites* to hold high ground during the sack of New Carthage. Also, because of the mobility of the cavalry, they were often used in this capacity, perhaps more frequently than light-armed troops.

⁵²⁷ Cynoscephalae: Polyb. 18.22; Livy 33.7 v. also Livy 33.6 where *expediti* from both sides are sent to secure hills overlooking Larissa: this may be considered reconnaissance (however, NB. Briscoe 2009, 467 who claims Livy misunderstood and/or misinterpreted the Greek source here). Ticinus: Polyb. 3.65, NB: the reconnaissance forces of both Scipio and Hannibal at Ticinus was unusually large, but, cf. Goldsworthy 2000, 172 "Ticinus was one of the smaller actions of the war, little more than a large skirmish", also Daly 2002, 13.

infantry could only have been countered effectively by another force of light infantry or cavalry, and unfortunately for the consul, some of his supporting force fled in surprise and panic, and the others were simply outnumbered (Livy 27.27.3-11). The death of Marcellus cannot be blamed on the lack of heavy infantry as they would have been too slow to counter the light Numidians. When facing enemies known for skilled light-infantry, delegating reconnaissance and ambushes to the light-infantry and cavalry would have been most tactically sound.⁵²⁸ An example of this can be seen when Scipio set an ambush against raiding Spaniards. Luring the enemy into his trap with cattle, he sent *velites* against the skirmishers to hold them in place while his second-in-command, Laelius, sent cavalry to cut off the retreat.⁵²⁹ Caesar also used light infantry to set ambushes; he used Numidian and Cretan archers as well as Balaeric slingers in a night ambush against the Belgae.⁵³⁰ These particular ambushes were a success, yet the question remains whether light infantry were always used for ambushes, and if so, whether it was only light infantry that they faced. Our sources tell us of many ambushes where heavy infantry was threatened or used to attack, one of the most notable in this period being Trasimene.⁵³¹ So, although varying types of units were used in reconnaissance and ambushes, the light infantry were not excluded from performing these tasks in the appropriate circumstances, and so this should stand as a notable indicator of their tactical versatility.

Around the Camp

Guards

Another of the *velites*' tactical roles was guarding the camp, as Polybius (6.35.5) states:

The whole outer face of the camp is guarded by the *velites* (γροσφομάχοι), who are posted everyday along the *vallum* – this being the special duty assigned to

⁵²⁸ However, Rawlings 2007, 57, notes that the *equites* “could not be relied upon to undertake any reconnaissance along the enemy’s line of march.” This is based on the notion that as aristocrats, the *equites* were better at being men of leisure, than soldiers. Light-infantry as ambushers: Livy 28.11, 39.1; App. Hann. 42; also, Livy indicates that *peltasts* were used for ambushes by Greeks: 31.36.1-3, 35.29. Ambushes were not always set by light troops, e.g. Livy 27.41 (though ambushes are still a form of non-pitched battle, regardless, see ‘Types of Non-Pitched Battle’ in the following chapter.

⁵²⁹ Polyb. 11.32.2; cf. Livy 28.3.2-6.

⁵³⁰ Caes. *BG* 2.7; cf. Dio 39.1.4; also Caes. *BC* 3.62 where *levis armaturae et sagittariorum* are used for a nocturnal ambush against Caesar’s ditches at Dyrrachium; cf. also ‘πιλοὶ’ in Chapter 3. It is interesting to note here that these troops were ostensibly using missiles at night and thus, understanding the dynamics of this ambush presents a challenge. This will be assessed in the following chapter under ‘Light infantry versus Line Infantry’.

⁵³¹ Trasimene: Polyb. 3.83-85; Livy 22.4-6; Some other instances where heavy infantry is used or threatened in an ambush: Livy 8.36, 9.25, 10.4, 21.25, 34, 27.41; Front. *Strat.* 1.2; App. Iber. 45, 63, 78, 88, 89, Hann. 10,

them. From the same body, ten men are also stationed before every gate that leads into the camp.⁵³²

As mentioned in Chapter 2 on page 65, Festus (332.35L) confirms this, assigning this task to *procubitores*, whom he equates to *velites* noting:

They were said to be called *velites*, who kept watch before the camp at night, especially with the camp of the enemy nearby, regarding this, so M. Cato writes about in his treatise on military matters.⁵³³

As guards while the legion was in camp, *velites* had the opportunity to see more combat than their fellow soldiers as there are several references in the sources of skirmishes that occur between enemy camps on behalf of light-infantry.⁵³⁴ As Goldsworthy points out, “skirmishing and single combats between the cavalry and light infantry of the two sides occupied much of the time [before deployment].”⁵³⁵ Strategically speaking, this tactic probably had little overall value, but it was probably beneficial as it could have provided ample combat experience for the young troops involved, who might be eager to prove their *virtus*.⁵³⁶ Indeed, Daly argues that this was part of Fabius’ strategy, as his troops had less experience than those of Hannibal.⁵³⁷ Combat experience meant increased endurance, morale, and skill on the battlefield, and in view of this, having light-infantry skirmish between camps in the name of guarding it, could have been tactically beneficial for the Roman consul in charge.

Foraging

As Roth points out, the commander decided which troops to use for particular purposes; and the fact that light troops were also available for the tactical function of protecting troops during foraging is of particular interest here, as it further indicates their tactical versatility.⁵³⁸ A vital part of keeping a campaigning army well fed and supplied was successful foraging expeditions for food, water and timber. Yet, there was great risk involved in these missions,

⁵³² Translation by W. R. Paton. Loeb Edition, Harvard University Press, 1922 through 1927. That this was a regular task of the *ψιλοὶ* cf. App. Syr. 6.36, also ‘*ψιλοὶ*’, above.

⁵³³ My translation: *dicuntur fere velites, qui noctu custodiae causa ante castra excubant, cum castra hostium in propinquo sunt, ut M. Cato in eo, quem de re militari scripsit.*

⁵³⁴ Polyb. 1.19.6; Livy 23.29.1, 32.9.9-10; App. Iber. 25, 65, Hann. 16.

⁵³⁵ Goldsworthy 2000, 56.

⁵³⁶ cf. Lendon 2005, 187-188.

⁵³⁷ Daly 2002, 15-16.

⁵³⁸ Roth 1999, 290, NB. this function was also shared by other troops types e.g. legionaries, see App. *Hisp.* 11.65, also see below. Thus although there is little evidence on this subject for the period under assessment, it is worth mentioning, especially because it seems the practice of using light troops for such varied appointments continued and perhaps grew with time, see ‘Foraging’ on page 165, below.

as foraging parties were often small and vulnerable, naturally finding it difficult to protect themselves when distracted by foraging or burdened by their supplies when returning from foraging. For example, in 171 BC, when Perseus learned from a deserter that the Romans were foraging without a guard, he sent cavalry and light infantry to attack them, capturing about 600 men and 1000 loaded carts.⁵³⁹ As discussed above, light infantry and cavalry would be likely to have been the only effective force against such an ambush of such troops. Probably knowing this, Fabius, for example, sent *levis armatura* with cavalry to guard foragers and be ready for sudden onsets (*composita instructaque in subitos tumultus*).⁵⁴⁰ Naturally however, the inherent danger in foraging often caused commanders to guard these expeditions with more than light infantry and cavalry. Aemilius Paulus had an entire one-third of his army camp closer to the foraging area before the battle of Cannae (Polyb. 3.110). Scipio Aemilianus had to send 1000 soldiers to help a small foraging-guard of cavalry who were attacked (App. *Hisp.* 14.89). Appian does not specify what kind of troops these were, but I would suggest that *velites* might have been involved as they were equipped lightly enough to respond quickly to the situation. Likewise, if Aemilianus had sent maniples of infantry, *velites* may have joined them if they were tactically attached to these maniples, in the same way that they were attached administratively.

Skirmishing in Pitched Battle

As indicated above, scholarship on the tactical usage of light-armed troops generally focuses on their role as skirmishers during pitched battles. This is reflected in Vegetius who, as mentioned above, states that their expected role was to begin the battle.⁵⁴¹

There are many examples in our sources that confirm Vegetius' assertion, describing skirmishing by the *velites* or other light troops at the beginning of battles.⁵⁴² This usage of light troops is of course what scholars most commonly perceive as the typical or universal tactic for these troops, as mentioned above. Therefore, it would be interesting and

⁵³⁹ Livy 42.65.1, cf. App. *Pun.* 14.97.

⁵⁴⁰ Livy 22.12.9; similarly light troops (*expeditas cohortes*) are sent with cavalry to forage at 34.26.8.

⁵⁴¹ Veg 1.20; Vegetius is mistaken when he claims that the light infantry 'were not very numerous'. Since we know that approximately 30% of the Republican armed forces consisted of light-troops, this statement might suggest to some that he may not be referring to the manipular legion (as he simply refers to 'ancient times' in the passage). However, Milner (p. 22, 1996) has observed that his source here was certainly referring to the *velites* (i.e. by mentioning their headgear), and it should therefore be noted that he is indeed referring to the manipular legion, and has incorrectly claimed that there were few light-armed troops.

⁵⁴² Polyb. 3.65, 3.113.4-6, 115.1, 4, 10.39.1-3, 11.22.9; Livy 21.46.5-6, 21.55.2-6, 22.47.1, 37.41, 44.35; App. *Hann.* 21, *Syr.* 6.35; Varro *L.L.* 7.58; Onas. 17.1.

advantageous to understand the reasons or benefits behind this tactic, and it will be shown that they were manifold.

Connolly suggests that this tactic was used ‘to harass the advancing enemy...to try to break up the enemy formation in anticipation of the charge of the heavy infantry.’⁵⁴³ The concept of ‘softening up’ the heavy infantry seems to come from evidence highlighting the danger that light infantry could pose to their more heavily-armed counterparts.⁵⁴⁴ This would be especially true if the light-armed troops managed to attack the flanks of the enemy, as Onasander points out,

Attacks of the light-armed troops (ψιλῶν) on the flanks cause the enemy greater loss, since they cast their javelins from the side of and of necessity strike the body where unprotected.⁵⁴⁵

Yet, an initial attack from the light infantry was a tactic not reserved for Roman armies; Greek armies were known to deploy peltasts and/or *agryaspides* in front of their heavy infantry, as at Thermopylae (191 BC) and Magnesia, and the Carthaginian armies commonly met Roman skirmishers with their own, as at Cannae. Thus, the skirmish at the beginning of a battle often involved two opposing forces of light troops, rather than one side consisting of units of stationary heavy infantry.⁵⁴⁶ Breaking up formations of the latter, therefore, was probably not always the expected result of the pre-battle skirmish tactic. Still, some result was certainly expected, which is something Livy makes clear for us when he makes the claim that during skirmishing exchanges during the Samnite wars ‘even the slightest skirmish had an unimportant outcome.’⁵⁴⁷ The implication here might be that slight skirmishes normally had important outcomes, perhaps not always the breaking up of a stationary unit, but possibly some losses or injuries on the enemy’s behalf. At the same time however, Sabin points out that

it was only in unusual circumstances [i.e. enemy using elephants or chariots – where ‘the light infantry might play a more important role in protecting or

⁵⁴³ Connolly 1998, 142; cf. Arr. *Tact.* 13.1.

⁵⁴⁴ Best 1969, 17 ff. shows how light infantry can threaten heavy infantry; cf. Thuc. 3.97-8, 4.32-7.

⁵⁴⁵ Onas. 19.2, translation: Illinois Greek Club, Loeb Edition, 1923.

⁵⁴⁶ Skirmishing in Greek armies, Thermopylae: App. Illyr. 19. Magnesia: App. Illyr. 33; cf. Bar-Kochva 1976, 166. Skirmishers at Cannae: Polyb. 3.113.4-6, 115.1, 4; Livy 22.45.7, 46.1, 47.1, 4; App. Hann. 21. see also n. 29. Light troops vs. light troops: Livy has Roman *iaculatores* face off against Macedonian slingers at 42.59; for units fighting their equivalent counterparts in battle, see Livy 8.8.15, cf. Rawlings 2007, 52; also Pritchett 1985, 51; Daly 2002, 172. There certainly are instances where light infantry faces heavy infantry at the start of a battle, e.g. Livy 21.55.6-9, 27.18.14, 38.21; App. Ill. 18-19.

⁵⁴⁷ Livy 10.39: “*Quodcum inciperetur remittereturque, omnium rerum etiam parvarum eventus proferebatur in dies.*”

opposing these instruments'] that the skirmishers had much effect on the battle proper.⁵⁴⁸

Furthermore, while Daly contends that it is unfair to say that preliminary skirmishes were insignificant, he admits that they were frequently inconclusive.⁵⁴⁹ As far as the course of a pitched battle is concerned, it seems that this is true. Thus, the idea that light infantry was used at the beginning of battles to break enemy line infantry does not seem to hold sway; however, there are other possible reasons for this tactic.

Screening forces deploying for pitched battle is a tactic useful to any commander. Maurice's *strategikon*, composed around the end of the sixth-century AD, advises commanders that contact should not be made with the main body of the enemy before commanders secure the tactical positioning of their own army. Further, it is important that the enemy not observe these formations before the commander is made well aware of the enemy's formations and intentions.⁵⁵⁰ Sending light-armed troops before one's main infantry was not unusual, and the value of concealing troop dispositions prior to a formal pitched battle can be seen at the battle of Ilipa, when Scipio deployed his troops in reverse formation (a manoeuvre that won the battle for the Romans) but screened his cunning tactic with light infantry.⁵⁵¹ So, sending out light troops to skirmish in front of one's battle line, might make observing troop disposition difficult, especially if the battle was fought on ground where dust was easily kicked up by the movement of many men.⁵⁵² At the same time however, enemy troop dispositions were commonly noticed by opposing commanders, and Onasander later advised generals that they wait to observe enemy dispositions before forming their own. In this case, skirmishing before battle could possibly work as a protective tactic for troops forming up, rather than one of concealment.⁵⁵³ In either case, skirmishing light-armed troops benefited the deploying army.

Another possible expectation and/or benefit of the initial skirmish may have been a morale boost for the line infantry. As the skirmishing *velites* were composed of the young and the poor, they were men who had everything to gain in a society where valorous deeds on the

⁵⁴⁸ Sabin 2007, 409; for speculative possibilities on how else light infantry may have participated in a pitched-battle, see 'Hand-to-Hand Combat' below (p. 155), and 'Lightly-Armed Infantry vs. Line Infantry' in the next chapter.

⁵⁴⁹ Daly 2002, 172.

⁵⁵⁰ Maur. Strat. 7.2.3, cf. Dennis 1984, 69.

⁵⁵¹ usual tactic: Polyb. 3.72, 113; see also Goldsworthy 2000, 57, esp. n.37 for further examples; Rawlings 2007, 56; Sabin 2007, 409. Ilipa: Polyb. 11.22.

⁵⁵² For dust being kicked up by skirmishers cf. Thuc. 4.34.2.

⁵⁵³ Onasander 29-30; Daly 2002, 172; Scipio's tactics at Ilipa were a result of his observing enemy dispositions.

battlefield brought fame and fortune not only to the individual himself, but to his family as well. Veterans carried the reputation of their deeds throughout their lives; their spoils and decorations kept in the eyes and minds of their friends, family and the public.⁵⁵⁴ The animal-skin that the *velites* wore on their helmet to be recognized by their superiors was a result of their desire to be seen performing valorous deeds.⁵⁵⁵ In turn, the line infantry who watched their younger, poorer, more lightly equipped and less experienced counterparts pursue recognition through conspicuous courage, were being put in a position where they were expected to out-perform their fellow soldiers taking part in the initial skirmishing. As Daly points out, “an enthusiastic performance by the skirmishers would in this way have inspired the main forces to fight harder when the ‘real’ fighting started.”⁵⁵⁶ In contrast, Koon has recently argued that watching the skirmishing would have induced fear and stress in the line infantry, and that the *triplex acies* was a method of keeping soldiers fresh by distancing them from the horrors of fighting. While this may have been true for some soldiers, and likewise may have been the case in situations where the Romans faced overwhelming odds, such an analysis cannot be universally applied to this portion of the battle. Rather, I would argue that the ethos of the Romans fits the more positive purpose of a morale boost, especially when we consider the importance of *virtus*, *disciplina* and *audacia* in Roman warfare.⁵⁵⁷

As we have seen, the single tactic of sending *velites* to begin a battle with initial skirmishing was actually a multi-faceted one: with this one action, the skirmishers could harass enemy lines, screen their deploying forces, as well as boost their fellow soldier’s morale. This alone is a testament to their tactical versatility; however, there were certainly other tactical uses of *velites* in pitched battle, especially considering the power and efficiency of their weaponry. Although missile weapons in pitched battle have often taken a backseat to the role of the *gladius* and *scutum*, there is ample evidence that indicates that tactically speaking, these weapons were vital over the course of the battle, if not essential to victory.

⁵⁵⁴ e.g. spoils of dead enemies could often be held as sacred family heirlooms, see Livy 23.23; c.f. Gilliver 2007a, 14, 17, esp. n. 34, 43.

⁵⁵⁵ Polyb. 6.22.3; c.f. Daly 2002, 173 esp. n. 40; Lendon 2005, 187; Lendon 2007, 513.

⁵⁵⁶ Daly *ibid.* For the line infantry as spectators see Pritchett 1985, 51-52. This phenomenon might be compared to a sports fan watching ‘their’ team in an important match: fans are encouraged and excited when the team performs well, just as Roman line infantry probably would have felt seeing the *velites* perform well. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.25.2 who, in describing a battle between the Latins and Romans and its preliminary skirmishing amongst the light-armed, notes that this had the effect of producing a spirit of rivalry in both armies before they engaged.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Koon 2011, 82-83, and indeed Koon contradicts himself in the following section of his article, noting the possible morale boost the initial skirmish provided. For more on the ethos of Roman warfare see e.g. Lendon 2005, *passim*; and Chapter 7, below.

Zhmodikov has discussed at length what he believes was the central role of missile weapons in combat, arguing that missiles caused the most serious casualties (i.e. especially to commanders), and that in fact, they were used constantly throughout pitched battle.⁵⁵⁸ One famous example he lists is that of P. Decius Mus, who dies ‘overwhelmed by darts’, as does his son.⁵⁵⁹ His stress on the continued use of missile weapons after the initial skirmish, and on their importance versus swords, points out the lethal capabilities of the weapon, which is something that has hardly been addressed in scholarship. Yet, Rawlings has also noted the importance of missile weapons with the emergence of the maniple, noting, ‘the move to maniples was a move towards missile combat’. He goes on to say that, the organization of the maniples ‘appears to have allowed relatively small groups of men to run forward to throw missiles and retire, or to be replaced by a second line.’⁵⁶⁰ His argument for the missile’s significant role is supported by Livy, who praises the large Roman *scutum* for its excellent ability to defend against multiple missile weapons being thrown, thus indicating both the need to have good protection against missiles, and the value of a weapon efficient in this field.⁵⁶¹ Perhaps the greatest tactical benefit behind the usage of the *velites*’ light-javelin was its range and reusability. Indeed, modern experimentation with light-javelins has indicated that they might have had twice the range of *pila*.⁵⁶² That these javelins did not bend like *pila* also meant that could be reused. Further evidence to indicate the effectiveness of the javelin is the number of javelins the enemy would have had to face. Livy implies that seven javelins were carried by each *velites*, which meant that there were 8,400 to be thrown by a fully manned, fully equipped force of *velites* in one legion.⁵⁶³ If only one of every seven javelins thrown hit its mark, that meant 1,200 either wounded or encumbered soldiers (due to javelins stuck in shields).⁵⁶⁴ With significant figures like these, it is no wonder that light-armed troops

⁵⁵⁸ Zhmodikov 2000, *passim*.

⁵⁵⁹ Livy 8.9.10, cf. Zhmodikov 2000, 68.

⁵⁶⁰ Rawlings 2007, 57-8.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58; Zhmodikov 2000, *passim*; Livy 9.19.7; cf. Onas. 20.2; Caes. *BC* 3.53.

⁵⁶² Goldsworthy 1996, 183; Livy 38.21.13. 30m range: Junkelmann 1986, 188.

⁵⁶³ Livy, 26.4.4, cf. Walsh 1993, 150. Zhmodikov suggests that the re-using of missile was a common feature of combat; however, this ignores the development of one-use *pila*, and the number of times a multi-use javelin could be thrown before becoming damaged beyond use. It is likely that javelins eventually became unusable in a battle either by becoming bent, blunt, broken, or stuck in someone’s shield or body.

⁵⁶⁴ Gauls seem to have been particularly susceptible to these missile onslaughts: e.g. Paus. 10.19-23; Polyb. 2.29-30; Livy 38.19-27; cf. Sabin 2007, 425. Line infantry (e.g. Celtiberian) sometimes preferred to avoid being the subject of close range missile fights by keeping distance and using their javelins, Livy 28.2; cf. Sabin 2007, 426.

were often tactically opposed by other light armed, fast moving troops that might more easily avoid missiles.⁵⁶⁵

Pitched Battle: Use with Elephants

The versatility of light infantry can also be seen in their use with or against elephants. As Sabin points out, elephants and light infantry often worked closely together, as elephants were also generally deployed in front of part or all of the army. He suggests that each elephant was guarded by around fifty light infantrymen.⁵⁶⁶ Yet light infantry were also useful against elephants; which is demonstrated in a particular tactic executed at the battle of Zama, where Scipio filled the gaps between the maniples of heavy infantry with his light troops. He ordered them to open the action, but when falling back, to retire into the gaps between the heavy infantry, leaving corridors for the elephants to run through, where the *velites* could assail them from all sides.⁵⁶⁷ Although this is the only reference to such a tactic in our period, Dionysius of Halicarnassus gives us an earlier reference from the Battle of Asculum (279 BC) where an array of light armed troops were used in different capacities (including being mounted on wagons) to face the elephants of Pyrrhus.⁵⁶⁸

Pitched Battle: Use with Cavalry

It has been shown thus far that the *velites* were tactically versatile troops, and their use with cavalry not only highlights this, but also underlines their potential to cause a severe shock to enemy forces. Regarding this tactic, Vegetius, states:

But if the cavalry are outnumbered, the ancient custom should be adopted of mixing in with them very swift infantry with light shields, specially trained for the purpose, once called *velites*. If this is done, no matter in what force the enemy cavalry turn out, they cannot match the mixed formation. They trained young men who were outstanding runners, placing them one between two horsemen, on foot and armed with light shields, swords, and javelins.⁵⁶⁹

Other sources describe this tactic being used on several occasions, and Sabin points out that the Spanish *caetrati* used this tactics as well.⁵⁷⁰ Light infantry such as the *velites* and slingers were probably the only types of infantry capable of this tactic in the manipular era because of

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. App. *Syr.* 7.42 where Macedonian troops are caught by Roman missile-fire.

⁵⁶⁶ Sabin 2007, 419.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Polyb. 11.24, 15.9.9, 15.12.3; cf. Livy 30.33.3.

⁵⁶⁸ Dion. Hal. 20.1.7; Veg. *Mil.* 3.23 also mentions this use of *velites*.

⁵⁶⁹ Veg. *Mil.* 3.16, translation Milner, 1996.

⁵⁷⁰ Livy, 26.4.4-10, 27.12.9, 28.14.20, 31.35, 37.41, 42.58; Polyb. 11.23; Caes. *BC* 1.75; App. *Iber.* 67, Hann. 20; Dio 18.58; Sabin 2007, 424; see also 'Caetrati', in Chapter 2 above.

their speed and light armament.⁵⁷¹ Livy for example, notes that in Hannibal's army, the light infantry kept up with the horses as they were equal in speed.⁵⁷² Whether riding with the horsemen, or running amongst them, the strength and mixed skills of both units combined often caught their opponents off-guard – as the Roman units did to the Macedonian cavalry at a clash in 200 BC – since this does not seem to have occurred among the cavalry forces of Rome's enemies.⁵⁷³ However, this tactic was not always as successful as Vegetius claims above. At the battle of Ticinus, Polybius (3.65) says the light infantry had no time to throw their javelins and so retreated behind their cavalry, failing to participate in the skirmish. Sabin suggests that using light infantry to counter light skirmisher cavalry would be a good tactic, but admits that this might be difficult in theory as 'the horsemen had the mobility to focus their attacks on less well-defended parts of the line.'⁵⁷⁴ Ultimately, the widespread use of mixing cavalry and light infantry amongst both Roman and foreign armies is indicative of its usefulness. Furthermore, as McCall has pointed out, it was particularly useful in non-pitched battle combat operations such as dispersing foragers or small groups of enemy troops operating away from the main force.⁵⁷⁵

Hand-to-hand combat

There are still tactical uses for light infantry, especially in naval and siege warfare. As Livy puts it, 'range is needed for missile weapons', and so light infantry were used in situations on land and sea where hand-to-hand contact was a rarity.⁵⁷⁶ However, that should not give the impression that light infantry, *velites* in particular, were incapable of hand-to-hand combat without their javelins. As discussed above, the *velites* were armed with more than just their javelins, and their *parmae* and *gladii* made them capable of close-quarters combat.⁵⁷⁷ Furthermore, the fact that they retired in between the front lines of the heavy infantry suggests to me that they may have been commonly exposed to *mêlée* combat. This was also sometimes the case when they were combined with cavalry, as discussed above.⁵⁷⁸ Indeed, at the Battle of Ilipa, Scipio placed the *velites* and cavalry on his wings, behind the line infantry, who were to flank the Carthaginians (Polyb. 11.22). This is one of our first instances where

⁵⁷¹ Conversely, in the cohortal legion, the *antesignani* notably engage in this tactic as well, e.g. Caes. *BC* 3.75.

⁵⁷² Livy 25.34.14.

⁵⁷³ Livy 31.35; Sabin 2007, 424.

⁵⁷⁴ Sabin 2007, 422.

⁵⁷⁵ McCall 2002, 73-74, with examples.

⁵⁷⁶ Livy 24.34.5-6; Polyb. 8.4.

⁵⁷⁷ See 'velites', in Chapter 2.

⁵⁷⁸ exposed to *mêlée* combat: Veg. 1.20: *si proelii necessitas compulisset, inter principia legionum recipi solebant, ita ut acies inmota consisteret*. Hand-to-hand combat with cavalry: Livy 31.35.

the light-armed troops were used for a fundamental tactical manoeuvre against heavy infantry in a battle.⁵⁷⁹ Furthermore, at the battle of Mount Olympus, the *velites* are described as fierce swordsmen, playing a prominent part in the Roman victory by slaying the Gallic warriors with their *gladii*.⁵⁸⁰ For ‘when they have to fight at close quarters,’ Livy says, ‘they transfer the javelins to their left hands and draw their swords.’⁵⁸¹ This capacity gave them the ability to outperform their opponents in certain scenarios. The clash with Macedonian cavalry mentioned above is described in the following way,

for the *velites*, as if they were fighting with their whole line of battle, after discharging their javelins, carried on a close fight with their swords ... By this means neither were the king's cavalry, who were unaccustomed to a steady fight, a match for the others; nor were the infantry, who were skirmishing and irregular troops, and were besides but near half naked with the kind of armour which they used, at all equal to the Roman infantry, who carried a sword and buckler, and were armed, both to defend themselves and to assail the enemy equally.⁵⁸²

The *velites* then, unlike their light-armed counterparts, especially such as archers or slingers, were tactically useful as both missile units, and as foot soldiers capable of hand-to-hand combat.

Conclusions

The tactical role of light-armed troops in the manipular legion was a multi-faceted one. Unlike the common perception that they were simply skirmishers meant to try and disrupt enemy heavy infantry at the beginning of a pitched battle, it has been shown that they were some of the most tactical versatile and important troops in the mid-Republican Roman army. As skirmishers, they likely garnered more combat time per season than most of their fellow soldiers, as they engaged in skirmishes sometimes for days (though not continuously) before any formal battle began. They were often the first men to begin a battle, and if victorious, the

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Livy 28.14.16; Sage 2008, 92.

⁵⁸⁰ The same happens at the Battle of Ancyra, in the same year: Livy 38.25-26.

⁵⁸¹ Livy 38.21.13. Regarding how they then held their *parmae*, it is possible that the javelins were thin enough to allow this, cf. Polyb. 6.22 where he says the shaft was about a finger's breath in thickness. Prolonged street fighting during sieges might also have required the hand-to-hand combat capability of the *velites*. E.g. The six-day slaughter during the fall of Carthage required that troops be regularly replaced (App. Pun. 130), and to me it seems that not using the *velites* in this situation would have meant pointlessly ignoring able-bodied troops. At the same time however, there is no definitive statement in the sources claiming that the *velites* were used in this way.

⁵⁸² Livy 31.35.5-6, my translation: *quam si tota acie dimicarent, et velites emissis hastis comminus gladiis rem gerebant ... ita nec eques regius equiti par erat, insuetus ad stabilem pugnam, nec pedes concursator et vagus et prope seminudus genere armorum veliti Romano parmam gladiumque habenti pariterque et ad se tuendum et ad hostem petendum armato.*

last to end it alongside the cavalry who pursued the routed forces.⁵⁸³ They were highly capable of wounding an enemy with a missile attack, due to the lethal efficiency of their javelins. In pursuit of *virtus*, the aggression and courage that could have been displayed by *velites* may have been capable of causing significant wounds to enemy morale. The light infantry's lack of heavy armour not only also allowed ease of movement during skirmishes, but made them capable of keeping up with cavalry units for a two-pronged attack where the lethality of light infantry were exponentially increased by the speed and shock of the horses' charge. Their swiftness provided Roman commanders with units capable of securing high ground quickly in battle or in reconnaissance and ambushes: an increased mobility resulting from their lighter armament. Above all, they could stand their ground in hand-to-hand combat, and were capable of engaging significant enemy forces, both on their own and alongside the heavy infantry in pitched battle. Light infantry, and the *velites* in particular, were the Republic's most versatile troops, and a key tactical unit for the Roman commanders.⁵⁸⁴ This certainly contrasts the way they are covered in the ancient sources. Yet, as pointed out in Chapter 1 (p. 5), this lack of credit may be a result of the fact that the actions of the line infantry in pitched battles led to the most significant consequences, and were thus more worthy of coverage in the minds of ancient historians.

Tactical Role of 'Light' Infantry in the Cohortal Legion

With the eventual change from a manipular legion to the cohortal, both the appearance and role of 'light' troops began to differ. As determined in the previous chapter, it was normally the function of troops that affected their classification as light, rather than their equipment. This definition is particularly important when discussing the 'light' troops of the cohortal legion.

Perhaps one of the key realities of 'light' troops in this period is the change of tactical delegation of 'light' tactics from lightly armed infantry (such as *velites*) to more heavily armed infantry such as *antesignani* and the imperial *auxilia*.⁵⁸⁵ Thus, in the following section, the tactical roles of such troops will be the focus of the assessment.

⁵⁸³ Connolly 1998, 142.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. Gilliver 1999, 113-114. The same goes for peltasts in the armies of Sparta and Athens in the fourth century, v. Trundle 2010 157.

⁵⁸⁵ See e.g. Vegetius' description of extensive missile training for line infantry (1.14-17); cf. also Parker 1928, 259-60; Wheeler 1979, 304.

In what follows, as with the preceding section, I will examine the possibility that the light infantry of the cohortal legions were tactically versatile, and further that they were often trusted with the difficult and dangerous assignments in Roman warfare.

The following section will describe in detail the various tactical uses of light-armed troops in the cohortal legions. It will begin with a short review of the historiography on the subject, followed by a discussion of the tactical uses of light infantry on campaign, particularly in reconnaissance and swift offensives, as well as their use in difficult terrain and other special deployments.

Historiography

Much of the scholarship on cohortal ‘light’ troops focuses on the *auxilia* and the important issues of the *auxilia*’s historical and geographical origins.⁵⁸⁶ There is relatively little on the other light troops associated with cohortal legions such as the *antesignani*, and other *expediti*.⁵⁸⁷ Cheesman’s seminal work on the *auxilia*, although written in 1914, still stands as one of the most useful scholarly works on the subject.⁵⁸⁸ As for its shortcomings, its age alone prevents the inclusion of a wealth of new archaeological evidence on the *auxilia* that has come to light since its publication. In regards to its usefulness for the present work, Cheesman gives nominal attention to tactics, but he does mention the *auxilia*’s employment on the flanks in pitched battle, as well as their defensive use on the frontier as ‘police’.⁵⁸⁹ Parker, writing in 1928, added little to Cheesman’s research on the tactical role of the *auxilia*. He implied that they fought in loose order – which made them stronger *mêlée* combatants than their legionary counterparts.⁵⁹⁰ Research on the *auxilia* advanced slowly over the century, Rainbird for example, had little to add other than noting that the increase in number of auxiliary units could mean the increase in their strategic and tactical use, an occurrence observable throughout Tacitus.⁵⁹¹ In 1982, Saddington expanded on his earlier article regarding the development of auxiliary forces in the Principate, with the publication of a good improvement on Cheesman’s work. Yet, as its antecedent from 1914, it is also limited in its scope, focusing mostly on the historical and geographical origins and movements of

⁵⁸⁶ E.g. Cheesman 1914, 21-102, 107, 113, 116-17; Watson 1969, 15; Hassall 1970, 135; Dobson & Mann 1973, 191-93, 196; Saddington 1975 & 1982, *passim*; Webster 1980, 144; Gilliver 1999, 23, 2007c, 193; Rankov 2007, 50.

⁵⁸⁷ See these entries in Chapter 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Saddington 1982, expands on much of Cheesman’s work, but is also limited in its analysis (see below).

⁵⁸⁹ Cheesman 1914, 103-111.

⁵⁹⁰ Parker 1928, 259-60, cf. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 257.

⁵⁹¹ Rainbird 1969, 11-12.

auxiliary units. To his credit, Saddington gathers and cites the many references to auxiliaries (in various capacities) in our ancient sources throughout his work, and does occasionally reflect on the strategic functions of the *auxilia*.⁵⁹² More recently, there has been a greater volume of research on the nature of the *auxilia*'s roles in various types of combat, including discussions on their tactical uses, especially in pitched battle. Gilliver's article on the *auxilia*'s role at Mons Graupius convincingly argues for the tactical importance of these units in battle, and she has elsewhere suggested that the *auxilia* could bear the brunt of battle.⁵⁹³ Deployment and use in pitched battle is the focus of Goldsworthy's references to *auxilia*, and specific discussions of combat are grouped with those of the legions seemingly on the basis that both groups of infantry 'were primarily swordsmen' or otherwise similarly equipped. As with Gilliver's argument, he says that it was normal practice to place the *auxilia* in tactically decisive positions in battles.⁵⁹⁴ Lendon has stressed the importance of the auxiliaries in battle as well, emphasizing competition, *virtus* and the pursuit of glory amongst these troops. He has further pointed out that the auxiliaries are often seen doing most of the fighting, while their legionary counterparts are assigned to non-combat duties such as building siege-works: an idea brought up in earlier scholarship by Richmond, and then Lepper and Frere.⁵⁹⁵ This can be especially observed in the iconographic evidence on Trajan's column, and the idea that the *auxilia* excelled at combat over the legionaries will be examined below.⁵⁹⁶ In a recent chapter on tactics, Thorne had little to add about the *auxilia* or other light units, noting that the *auxilia* were used when the army needed rapid mobility.⁵⁹⁷ Finally, while Gilliver's recent discussion on low-intensity warfare stands as a respectable introduction to the tactical use of light units, a longer discourse on the subject is warranted by the current state of scholarship.⁵⁹⁸

Overall then, scholarship on the light infantry's role within the cohortal legions has developed little over time, focusing primarily on the *auxilia*, with minimal investigation into the various other light infantry, and their assorted tactical roles. Rather, in keeping with most scholarship on the Roman army, the focus has primarily been on pitched battle, and general

⁵⁹² Saddington 1982, for material especially relevant to the present assessment, see 183-6.

⁵⁹³ Gilliver 1996a: tactical importance: *passim*, bear the brunt: 1999, 26.

⁵⁹⁴ Goldsworthy 1996, similarly equipped: 177, 181. Gilliver as well as Bishop and Coulston have also discussed the general deployment of auxiliary forces in pitched battle: deployment: 1999, 113-114; 2007b, 128. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 257, esp. n. 13.

⁵⁹⁵ Richmond 1982, 19; Lepper & Frere 1988, 110; Lendon 2005, 242-247. This idea can also be drawn from the ancient historiography, see Lendon *ibid*, esp. n. 21.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*; excelled at combat, see 'Fighting Capability', below.

⁵⁹⁷ Thorne 2007, 221.

⁵⁹⁸ Gilliver 2007b, 141-143.

strategy. This is a natural reflection of what our sources have to offer, as pitched battle was a key element in ancient literature. Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 1, pitched battle was just the climax of extensive campaign combat in the Roman world, and it is the light-troops' tactical role outside pitched battle that has yet to be discussed. The topic needs further exploration, since it may be that the attention scholars have given to the importance of auxiliaries in pitched battle will be reflected in their other tactical uses within the Roman army, as well as those of other light troops.

On the Campaign Trail

While on campaign, light troops were used in various tactical capacities, including guarding the marching column, scouting and gathering intelligence while the army was on the marching or in camp, as well as both foraging and protecting foragers.

Guarding the Marching Column

Some of the most devastating ambushes befell the Romans when marching through enemy territory, the most famous probably being the Varian disaster. Our sources often state the existence of guards in these cases, but the security of the column could be affected by many factors, such as lack of discipline and/or training, low morale, and poor intelligence.⁵⁹⁹ Since the marching column was vulnerable, the Romans had several forms of deploying their column depending on the perceived level of threat. In many of these deployments, the light infantry had a significant role to play, as noted in numerous examples from our sources, throughout the history of the cohortal legion. Sallust for example, points out that Metellus marched through Numidia '*cum expeditis cohortibus, item funditorum et sagittariorum delecta manu apud primos*', even when the level of threat seemed low. Later in the Jugurthine war, Marius similarly marched with light infantry guarding both the front and rear of his column.⁶⁰⁰ Using auxiliaries in the dangerous position of the advance guard was a regular feature of the Roman marching column and was a tradition that stretched back through the Republic. As Gilliver has pointed out, the recommendations of Vegetius (as well as Onasander, although his suggestions lack detail on the placement of specific troops) are similar to those of Polybius.⁶⁰¹ Polybius describes the marching column headed by the

⁵⁹⁹ existence of guards: Sall. *Iug.* 46, 100, Caes. *BG* 2.19, Tac. *Ann.* 1.51, 2.16, Jos. *BJ* 3.97, 3.115, 5.39, cf. Gilliver 1999, 38-45, security factors: *ibid* 51-53.

⁶⁰⁰ Sall. *Iug.* 46, 100.

⁶⁰¹ Gilliver 1999, 40.

ἐκτραορδιναρίους or, ‘the select’ who ‘[out of] the whole force of allies assembled the horsemen and footmen [were deemed] most fitted for actual service’ (Polyb. 6.26.6). These Republican predecessors of imperial *auxilia* were placed at the head or at the rear of the column, depending from where the Romans thought the enemy might attack (Polyb. 6.30.6-9).⁶⁰²

The tradition of using lightly armed troops to guard the column continued through the Republic after the end of the second century. For Caesar, the *antesignani* were the *expediti* whom he trusted to this task, and was especially keen on joining them with cavalry for this purpose (*BC* 3.75, 3.84), and this was a manoeuvre that imitated the function of the *velites* and seemingly proved as effective as Vegetius claims.⁶⁰³ In the civil wars, Caesar did just this to protect his cavalry from Pompey’s, to which his was inferior in number, especially since Pompey’s horse was known to attack his vulnerable cavalry and marching column.⁶⁰⁴ Roman military theory also reiterates that caution be taken on the march, Vegetius for example, warns that

The general should take steps with all caution and prudence to ensure that the army suffer no attack on the march, or may easily repel a raid without loss.⁶⁰⁵

He goes on to say that *levi armatura* should reinforce the vulnerable areas of the column, particularly the side(s) where intelligence says the enemy is expected (Veg. 3.6). In the same way, when Germanicus expected an ambush while marching through Germany, he too placed auxiliary infantry and cavalry at the head of his column, and used the rest of his auxiliaries to guard the rear (*Tac. Ann.* 1.50-51). The Batavian and Transrhenane auxiliaries proved their worth in the face of danger against enemy reconnoitres during the civil upheavals throughout AD 69. Zealously crossing the river Po in full armour they seized some of Otho’s scouts and by the rapidity of their attack terrified the rest into fleeing and announcing that the whole army of Caecina was at hand (*Tac. Hist.* 2.17). Josephus notes that when Vespasian marched out of Ptolemais, he ‘put his army into that order wherein the Romans used to march’; that included

auxiliaries which were lightly armed (ψιλούς τῶν ἐπικούρων), and the archers, to march first, that they might prevent any sudden insults from the

⁶⁰² As to why the task should be given to non-Romans, see ‘Fighting Capability’, on p. 170, below.

⁶⁰³ cf. Veg. 1.15, also above: ‘Pitched Battle: Use with Cavalry’.

⁶⁰⁴ *BC* 3.75, 3.84

⁶⁰⁵ Veg. 3.6

enemy, and might search out the woods that looked suspiciously, and were capable of ambushes.⁶⁰⁶

Josephus also mentions Titus using this formation (*BJ* 5.2.1). Yet, the tactic of putting the light troops in the front or rear of the column was not only to guard against sudden attacks. The other benefit of this formation was that the column could wheel directly into a line of battle, with the traditional deployment of the *auxilia* on the wings and the legions in the centre. This tactic is expressly stated by Tacitus when describing the prelude to the battle of the Weser River in AD 16.⁶⁰⁷ The above-mentioned cases of light troops' positions on the march are just a few examples of one of their more hazardous roles within the Roman army. This role of being trusted to bear the brunt of a front or rear attack against the vulnerable marching column is evidence for what may be greater skill in hand-to-hand combat capability or simply a greater desire for such combat; either of which could be due to specific skill sets or regional specializations, exploited by Roman commanders. This idea will be explored further below.⁶⁰⁸

Tactical Intelligence

Intelligence gathering and reconnaissance was another task commonly delegated to light troops and auxiliaries that was performed either on the march or from a base such as a marching camp or frontier fort by units known as *exploratores*.⁶⁰⁹ During our period, cavalry were commonly assigned with the task of *exploratio*;⁶¹⁰ however, during the Empire, foot soldiers from the *auxilia* are found being used for reconnaissance as well, perhaps as a mixed unit.⁶¹¹ As Southern points out 'it is expected that such units would be mobile, but they were not necessarily all mounted'; *Cohors IX Batavorum* and *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* are examples of such mixed units. The former was made up of mostly *pedites*, and in the latter,

⁶⁰⁶ Jos. *BJ* 3.6.2.

⁶⁰⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 2.16-18; cf. Gilliver 1996a, 58, esp n. 28.

⁶⁰⁸ see page 170, below.

⁶⁰⁹ Arrian *Ektaxis* 1.1, Ps.-Hyginus 24, 30; cf. Speidel 1970, 148. NB.: These units appear most frequently in our sources after the first century AD, e.g. Veg. 3.6; Onas. 6.7; cf. Austin & Rankov 1995, 40, 42, 52, 101.

⁶¹⁰ e.g. Caes. *BG* 7.56, *BC* 3.38; Tac. *Hist.* 3.52; Sall. *Iug.* 53; Arr. *Ektaxis* 1. It must be noted that when the literary sources do not mention cavalry as scouts, they are often inexplicit about exactly what type of troops are functioning as *exploratores* (e.g. Caes. *BG* 2.17, 7.44; Vell. 2.112.5). When we have specific references to the distances at which *exploratores* function, we can assume that further distances (e.g. 24 *milia passuum* - approx. 35kms - in Caes. *BG* 1.41) suggest cavalry are doing the scouting. Thus for our purposes, when light infantry is explicitly described as being assigned to scouting, the troop type is auxiliaries, as shall be shown below. Whether or not other types of troops (i.e. legionaries/heavy infantry) functioned as scouts, is not made explicit by our sources.

⁶¹¹ *P.Dura* 100, *CIL* VIII 21516, cf. Speidel 1970, 148, esp n. 69; Southern 1989, 110; Austin & Rankov 1995, 244. On both cavalry and infantry reconnoitering together, see also Austin & Rankov 1995, 190, 194-5.

the unit roster from AD 219 notes that there were five infantry with ten cavalry in the *exploratores* unit, and in AD 222, there were four infantry combined with five cavalry.⁶¹² Austin and Rankov have suggested that this combination of infantry and cavalry is indicative of the possibility that these men were intended to operate individually rather than as a standing patrol, a method that could be well suited to keeping watch on a frontier.⁶¹³ If this were indeed the case on campaign, the individual soldiers would be easy targets for the enemy: either simply to kill the wandering *explorator* as a spy or an unwelcome enemy, or capture him as a prisoner-of-war (a possibility more viable for those on foot who might find it harder to escape such as situation compared to those on horseback). Based on the Roman army's previously noted use of the combat tactic of placing light infantry with cavalry, I would suggest that these small units of *exploratores* worked together in scouting.⁶¹⁴ In either case, whether operating individually or as a small detachment, scouting was a dangerous task, and furthermore a vital one for keeping a vulnerable marching column safe in enemy territory, highlighting the tactical value Roman commanders put in the light infantry.⁶¹⁵

The use of allies as scouts could have also been a result of the fact that when scouting in their own homeland, they would know the terrain best. As Austin and Rankov have noted,

the availability of allies for the collection of tactical intelligence was one of the factors which enabled commanders to proceed even when their sources of strategic intelligence had dried up.⁶¹⁶

Yet it was not until the establishment of the frontiers in the second century AD that specialized bodies of troops known as *exploratores* became standing units.⁶¹⁷ Up until that time, as mentioned above, Speidel has suggested that 'in every operational unit of the Roman army, some men...were assigned the job of reconnoitring', and this important task was regularly given to the auxiliaries.⁶¹⁸ Evidence for this can be found for example in Tacitus, who mentions the frequent skirmishes of auxiliary scouts in passing, unfortunately brushing

⁶¹² *cohors IX Batavorum*, CIL III 11918 = ILS 9152, cf.. CIL III 12480; *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, P.Dura 100, CIL VIII 21516; also Southern 1989, 114.

⁶¹³ Austin & Rankov 1995, 195.

⁶¹⁴ Previously noted combat tactic: see 'Tactical Role of Light Troops in the Manipular Legion – Pitched Battle: Use with Cavalry'. NB.: Breeze 1969, has argued that legionary infantry fought separately from the *equites legionis* (despite being administered in the same books), but this seems not to be the case with auxiliary infantry and cavalry, e.g. Tac. Ann. 4.73.

⁶¹⁵ dangerous task: e.g. see Speidel 1992a, 100, where *cohors IX Batavorum* were assigned to watch 'over the distant but dangerous Macromanni', and other examples of dangerous assignments for *exploratores*.

⁶¹⁶ *op. cit.* 102, see also Southern 1989, 113.

⁶¹⁷ Speidel 1992a, 89 ff.

⁶¹⁸ See Speidel 1992a, *passim*.

them off as ‘not worth relating’.⁶¹⁹ Another example is the career of T. Porcius Cornelianus, recorded in a Greek inscription from the third century, which notes his time in several auxiliary command posts prior to his position as ‘commander of the scouts of Germany’.⁶²⁰ Much of our evidence that specifically designates the auxiliaries as *exploratores* is like this one. This evidence is epigraphic in nature, and includes Roman military tombstones, many of which Speidel has detailed in his article on the auxiliary scouts of Roman Germany.⁶²¹ Because these auxiliaries function as *exploratores*, we may identify them as light infantry.⁶²²

Intelligence gathering occurred not only on the march or from stationary forts, but evidence from Ammianus (19.3.3) suggests it occurred during sieges as well. Although his account of the siege of Amida is well after our period, the auxiliary units he describes gathering tactical intelligence are classified as *exploratores*, and it is likely that these late-Roman units retained not only the name, but also the function of their namesakes from the Principate. During the siege, the Roman commanders unsuccessfully attempted to get *exploratores* into the town on several occasions, to give and receive information. This incident has been pointed out by Austin and Rankov as evidence that *exploratores* were trained in security of movement, a possibility that may be further supported by other covert political operations performed by these units, which Ammianus also mentions.⁶²³ Yet, clandestine operations may simply have been a later development of the function of the *exploratores* and there is no evidence to indicate that they were involved in such clandestine actions in our period.⁶²⁴ Austin and Rankov suggest the opposite however; pointing out that Dio (68.23.2) mentions scouts (πρόσκοποι) circulating false reports, as directed by Trajan, who was attempting to keep his army and officers on their toes. Yet it seems to me, that the reporting of intelligence – whether real or false by the commander’s order – should be a regular part of scouting, and is unlike the more clandestine activities of spying on imperial staff members (as noted above, Amm. 17.9.7; 21.7.2). What we should take from Ammianus’ example then, is the likelihood that there were varying methods and situations in which tactical intelligence was gathered and distributed.

⁶¹⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 2.24: *crebra magis quam digna memoratu proelia inferior.*

⁶²⁰ *ILS* 8852: *πραϊφεκτος ἐξπλωρατορον Γερμανίας*, i.e. a specially raised unit from German allies, who later became a regular part of the garrison in the province in which they had been operating, cf. Austin & Rankov 1995, 191.

⁶²¹ Speidel 1992a, e.g. cf. *CIL* VIII 21668 = *ILS* 9107, *CIL* VIII 9060 = *ILS* 2627, *CIL* VIII 9798, *CIL* VIII 9059 = *ILS* 2628, *CIL* III 728 = 7387, all of which are light auxiliaries; see also Southern 1989, 111.

⁶²² Cf. the definition for light infantry reached above on p. 129.

⁶²³ *Political Ops*: 17.9.7, 21.7.2; cf. Austin & Rankov 1995, 49.

⁶²⁴ i.e. clandestine actions beyond the normal level of stealth needed during scouting.

Scouting and intelligence gathering then, was a task that confided scouts with delicate information regarding where the army was headed, and what paths through enemy territory its leaders planned to take. The scouts were entrusted to keep this information safe, when out of sight of their comrades and out of reach of immediate assistance in a desperate situation. It provided soldiers with the possibility of betraying their army. Despite this risk, it has been shown that auxiliaries were regularly assigned to function in a light capacity as scouts, thus underlining both their combat skill and overall trustworthiness.

Foraging

As with the previous section on the manipular legion, the light troops of the cohortal legion were available for the task of protecting fellow soldiers (along with other troop types) during foraging, and the danger of this task is highlighted in several examples from the cohortal period.⁶²⁵ The vulnerability of foraging soldiers could be especially high if working without the protection of their shield or helmets. Onasander (10.8) provides suggests a solution, to this stating:

When the general himself sends out foraging parties, he should send with the light-armed men (ψιλῶις) and unarmed men (ἀνόπλοις), guards (μαχίμους), both horse and foot, who shall have nothing to do with the booty, but are to remain in formation and guard the foragers, that their return to camp may be safely accomplished.

Roth has suggested that this should be interpreted as legionaries guarding the auxiliaries who are foraging, but this suggestion is based on an unrelated passage in Josephus.⁶²⁶ Rather, μαχίμους refers to warriors or warlike men in our sources, and these references seem to refer consistently to non-Romans.⁶²⁷ Furthermore, although our sources mention legionaries being assigned the task of guarding foragers, there are several examples of light troops and auxiliaries being put in this position as well. Caesar had his German and Gallic auxiliaries skirmish with the enemy while the Roman troops were foraging, and an earlier attack on his foragers was warded off by the combined force of three legions and all the auxiliaries.⁶²⁸ In another example, Q. Fabius Maximus had his legionaries forage for grain or water, while

⁶²⁵ e.g. Plut. *Sert.* 7.3; Caes. *BG* 5.17, 7.16, 7.20, 8.10, 8.16, *BAfr.* 24, *BHisp.* 21; Dio 49.26.3, 65.4.5; Tac. *Ann.* 12.38. cf. Roth 1999, 286-287.

⁶²⁶ Roth 1999, 290, claims Jos. uses μαχίμους at *BJ* 5.43 to describe legionaries, but Roth must be mistaken, as this word is not used in said passage. At *BJ* 3.155, μαχίμωτέροις is used to describe Romans fighting desperately, and this is the only usage of the word related to Romans in the work.

⁶²⁷ e.g. Strab. 7.3 (referring to light-armed troops), 11.3; App. *Gal.* 2, *Hisp.* 66, 72, *Ill.* 15, 25; Polyb. 1.2, 15.3.

⁶²⁸ Caes. *BG* 5.17, cf. also 8.10, 8.17.

legionary cavalry and auxiliary soldiers stand on guard close by – a similar method to that of Caesar.⁶²⁹ What these examples make clear is the importance of the role of protecting Roman foragers, which was regularly designated to auxiliaries and light infantry.

Special Deployment

Usage in Swift Operations

Our sources tell us of many occasions where auxiliary or light infantry forces were relied upon to execute attacks and other manoeuvres quickly, when there was either no need or no time to use the bulk of the legions. While this is a common theme with light units, our examples remind us of their tactical versatility.⁶³⁰ Caesar rode out to arrest the rebellious Gaul Litavicus with four-light armed legions (*legiones expeditas*) and his cavalry, and thus successfully caught up to his enemy on the march (*BG* 7.40). When Afranius needed to secure strategic high ground during quickly the civil war, he sent a unit of Spanish light-infantry (*caetratorum cohortis*) to hold the hill while he brought up his entire army.⁶³¹ Also during the civil war, Caesar's marching column was being harassed in the rear by Pompey's cavalry, and so he relied on his fast moving *antesignani* to relieve his encumbered forces at the rear quickly, and so immediately routing the enemy forces, they promptly returned to their positions in the main body of troops (*BC* 3.75). When his legions were entrenching a camp in Africa a few years later, Caesar's legions were threatened by encroaching Numidians. Having sent out light infantry (*levis armaturae*) and cavalry, Caesar's units advanced on the enemy so quickly, that they managed to capture some men alive as prisoners, while routing the rest (*BAfr.* 39). In a covert operation, the light infantry (*expeditae cohortes*) and cavalry were sent in a hasty overnight dash to attack the forces of the rebel Tacfarinas in AD 24, before the day dawned. In the morning, the Romans took the rebellious Africans by surprise and wiped them and their leader out (*Tac. Ann.* 4.25). To be sure, we have several examples of these impetuous attacks in our sources, carried out by *expeditae*.⁶³² Thus, light-armed troops were naturally used in varying tactical scenarios that required a quick deployment of troops. Some of these missions were vital to the wars and campaigns in which they were executed, such as the assault on Tacfarinas. These examples

⁶²⁹ Livy 22.12.8-9. Cf. Scenes 107 and 109 on Trajan's column which depict the same practice. Also, in a different but related scene on the column (Scenes 126-127), legionaries are seen constructing fortifications, having laid aside their shields and some even their helmets, are being guarded by a group of auxiliary infantry.

⁶³⁰ Cf. Veg. 1.20, noted above, where the *levis armaturae* are *velocissimi*.

⁶³¹ Caes. *BC* 1.70, cf. Sall *Iug.* 50.

⁶³² Sall. *Iug.* 103; Tac. *Ann.* 1.50, 56, 60, 2.7, 3.74; Cic. *Fam.* 15.4.

then, underline the fact that the light infantry were trusted to manage their rapid operations successfully.

Usage in Difficult Terrain

The Roman soldier is heavily armed and afraid to swim, while the German, who is accustomed to rivers, is favoured by the lightness of his equipment and the height of his stature.⁶³³

Although this is probably just narrative rhetoric on Tacitus' behalf, the theme of auxiliaries being used in difficult terrain is a consistent one in our sources. Indeed, Onasander advises generals to use light infantry in these situations:

If the battle should happen to be in country that is level in some places but hilly in others, then the light-armed troops (ψιλούς) should by all means be stationed in the uneven section, and then, if the general himself should have seized the plain and some part of the enemy's phalanx should possess the eights, he should send against them the light-armed troops (ψιλούς); for from the uneven ground they can more easily hurl their weapons and retreat, or they can very easily charge up the slopes, if they are agile.⁶³⁴

Other examples include the battle at the Axona in 57 BC, which was fought in and around the banks of the river (probably modern Aisne), a mode of attack that disordered the enemy but not Caesar's auxiliaries. According to Caesar, the auxiliaries showed even greater zeal in such difficult terrain, for when they had already killed a great part of the enemy, they continued to chase those who managed to cross the river, having to climb over the bodies of their fallen foes (Caes. *BG* 2.10). Indeed, such heroic displays of courage, *virtus*, and as Caesar puts it in this case, *audacitas*, in difficult terrain are common to the auxiliary forces in our sources. With the establishment of the professional *auxilia*, the Roman army was equipped with units of 'light' infantrymen who were very capable of executing difficult manoeuvres in unfavourable terrain. There are numerous examples in the sources of the *auxilia* being sent in (or charging in on their own accord) when the terrain was unfavourable to the legionaries and their close-order, large-scale combat tactics.⁶³⁵ One of the most notable instances of this happening was the battle of Mons Graupius during Agricola's campaigns. In this particular battle, Agricola kept his legions in reserve and sent the whole of his auxiliary forces against the large congregation of Caledonians in what was literally an uphill battle. Tacitus claims the Roman commander deployed his units in that way because 'victory would

⁶³³ Tac. Hist. 5.14.

⁶³⁴ Onas. 18, trans. Illinois Greek Club.

⁶³⁵ charging in on own accord: see Tac. Hist. 2.17.

be more glorious if achieved without the loss of Roman blood.⁶³⁶ However, as Gilliver convincingly argues, this is far from the truth; that being that the auxiliaries were simply the best suited for the job, since the legionaries preferred static fighting on level ground in pitched battle.⁶³⁷ But the use of auxiliaries in difficult terrain often spread into the domain of non-pitched battle combat. In the early first century AD, P. Vellaeus sent light auxiliaries into the Balkan mountains to quell plundering tribes, who were also recruiting followers.⁶³⁸ Mountainous terrain also brought non-pitched battle combat to Corbulo's troops on his march towards Tigranocerta. His army was plagued by the men of the Mardi tribe who 'are trained in brigandage, and defended by mountains against an invader,' and he sent Iberian auxiliaries to counter them, who then 'ravaged their country and punished the enemy's daring'.⁶³⁹ There were also many actions taking place in and around water. In the Alexandrian War (*BAlex.* 17), Caesar sent a select body of light infantry to take an island whose approach was steep and craggy, and was well defended by both enemy boats and inhabitants assailing the Roman forces from their rooftops. Tacitus describes how in AD 68, German auxiliaries fighting for Vitellius took the battle to the difficult terrain of boat decks and the Po River on which they floated. They attacked the Othonian gladiators manning the boats after diving into the river and out-swimming the boats (in full armour), pulling the vessels into the shallows, then climbed onto the decks, and 'sank them in hand to hand combat' (*Tac. Hist.* 2.35). During Agricola's campaigning in Britain, a group of Batavian auxiliaries braved the waters of the Menai straight, swimming over to the island of Mona (modern Anglesey), and took the inhabitants by surprise, as the latter expected an assault by a naval fleet. Astonished by the audacity of the auxiliaries, the inhabitants gave up the island, worried that 'to such assailants nothing could be formidable or invincible.'⁶⁴⁰

The question remains as to why the auxiliaries in particular were used in difficult conditions. Gilliver suggests that they were physically and tactically best suited for the job, a conclusion based on their armament.⁶⁴¹ Bishop and Coulston's assessment of the differences between

⁶³⁶ Tac. Agr. 35: "*ingens victoriae decus citra Romanum sanguinem bellandi*"

⁶³⁷ Gilliver 1996a, 62, *et passim*.

⁶³⁸ Tac. Ann. 3.38-39

⁶³⁹ Tac. Ann. 14.23: '*latrociniss exerciti contraque inrumpentem monitibus defense; quos Corbulo immissis HHisp.is vastavit hostilemque audaciam externo sanguine ultus est*'

⁶⁴⁰ Tac. Agr. 18; cf. Hassall 1970, 135. See also Tac. Ann. 14.29: an attack on Anglesey by a group of what was like Batavian cavalry auxiliaries under Suetonius Paullinus in AD 60, cf. Hassall 1970, 132.

⁶⁴¹ Gilliver 1996a, 56-7, 61-2. For a discussion on how auxiliaries' armament affected their fighting capability, see 'Fighting Capability', below.

traditional legionary and auxiliary equipment comes to the same conclusion.⁶⁴² To me however, solely attributing their armament as the reason for such deployments, while prudent, seems limited, especially during the Principate. Rather, I think there are further historical grounds for this development.

As indicated in the introduction to this section on cohortal light infantry, it is significant that the tactical delegation of ‘light’ tactics changed from lightly armed infantry (e.g. *velites*) to more heavily armed infantry (e.g. the *antesignani*), most of which fell to the *auxilia* during the Principate. This could have been a result of a trend that began in with the manipular legion. During the wars of the mid-Republic, where the versatility of the *velites* was not enough, specialist foreign infantry was hired, referred to as *auxilia* in our Republican sources.⁶⁴³ This tradition was not uncommon even before the period under review; for example, fifth-century Athens recruited specialist foreign infantry where and when required as well.⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, Best points out that hoplites suffered severe losses without the help of peltasts.⁶⁴⁵ So, regarding the Romans, the establishment of the professional army and the long service and the professionalism of the army allowed the legionaries (the *antesignani* in particular) to take over some of the roles of the roles previously assigned to the *velites*.⁶⁴⁶ Yet the first few decades of the cohortal system still saw the recruitment of specialist foreign *auxilia*. Under the Empire, these were absorbed into the Roman military system, and became the ‘specialist’ imperial *auxilia*; many of these cohorts having been recruited from particularly skilled warrior societies. Furthermore, these foreign specialties and the training of the Roman imperial army resulted in the establishment of its most tactically versatile corps. These foreign specialties rested chiefly in their fighting capability.

⁶⁴² Bishop & Coulston 2006, 257.

⁶⁴³ See ‘Auxilia’ in Chapter 2.

⁶⁴⁴ See Trundle 2010, 157, 159, light troops were used historically in Greek armies to adapt to changing combat circumstances, and they fulfilled a variety of combat roles. This is probably the reason specialist foreign troops were hired by Rome as well, and Trundle’s argument may be correlated to Roman forces, cf. *op. cit.* 157: ‘Best rightly claims that ‘the majority of mercenaries who fought in Spartan and Athenian armies in Greece proper in the fourth century were peltasts’ (1969: 134). The Greek cities of the mainland, whose need for specialist troops to augment their hoplite armies always remained critical, hired them prolifically. That they hired from outside so commonly demonstrates that they had no full time specialist light troops ready for service from within their own communities. Peltasts provided very useful support to hoplite armies in reconnaissance, van and rearguard actions, actions on irregular terrain and provisioning, and especially to mercenary armies, in plundering regions of enemy territory, which was often essential for paying mercenary soldiers.’

⁶⁴⁵ Best 1969, 78, cf. Xen. *An.* 3.4.25-30, 4.1.17-19, 6.3.7-8.

⁶⁴⁶ Bell 1965, 421, cf. Chapter 5 ‘The Loss of the *Velites*’, p.134, above.

Fighting Capability

As noted briefly above, I suggest that the auxiliary forces were perhaps more zealous fighters than their legionary counterparts were. This arises from the suggestion that auxiliary (*auxilia*, ψίλοι) and ‘light’ (*leves cohortes*, *leves armaturae*, *legiones expeditatae*, *antesignani*, ψίλοι) armament, was not necessarily that much ‘lighter’ than legionary equipment, and thus armament cannot be the only explanation for the preferred usage of these units in special deployments.⁶⁴⁷

As discussed in Chapter 2, the armament of the professional *auxilia* and the *antesignani* reflected that of the legionaries: that the mail they wore could have been/was also worn by some legionaries, depending on personal preference.⁶⁴⁸ Moreover, the segmented armour traditionally attributed to legionaries was in fact lighter than the mail attributed to the *auxilia*.⁶⁴⁹ Regardless of this, differentiation between sets of armour between the infantry classes is a vexed question, and can still at times be difficult.⁶⁵⁰ The only difference between their equipment in the imperial period that we can be most sure of, was the shield and the spear, and this has been the evidence for the traditional argument discussed earlier, that the *auxilia* were used in various capacities because of their more suitable equipment to that end.⁶⁵¹ Yet, the evidence remains that it was unlikely that *auxilia* were really ‘lighter’ troops.

Furthermore, I find Bishop and Coulston’s argument regarding auxiliary shields to be better suited to open-order (i.e. non-pitched) combat, to be unconvincing. They provide no concrete proof that the flat oval shield was in fact a better shield to be used in hand-to-hand combat than the rectangular curved shield of the legionaries.⁶⁵² Rather, recent studies suggested that the curved shield was more effective as a defensive weapon in hand-to-hand combat.⁶⁵³ Besides, our examples demonstrating the *auxilia*’s (and other light units’) skill, aggression

⁶⁴⁷ The sources’ use of vocabulary describing ‘light’ units in many cases was a classification of their function, rather than their armament. See Chapter 5.

⁶⁴⁸ Gilliver 2007a, 5; see also ‘Auxilia’ in Chapter 2.

⁶⁴⁹ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 258.

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid* 258-259.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. Bishop & Coulston 2006, 257.

⁶⁵² Bishop & Coulston 2006, 254-259.

⁶⁵³ Goldsworthy 1996, 210; Lee 1996, 200; Kocsis 2007, “Is the shield protective armour or something more?” at: Roman Military Equipment Conference XVI. L. Kocsis demonstrated for the conference attendees, on an accurate reconstruction, that the curved construction of the shield protects the user against powerful blunt-force blows, and will not snap or crack when significant weight is delivered to the side of the shield: Kocsis sat on the side of the shield and bounced on it to prove his point. This points directly to how highly effective *scuta* could have been as defensive implements: they probably would have been able to sustain most forms of attack.

and success as hand-to-hand fighters cannot be attributed to equipment alone.⁶⁵⁴ Thus, there must be more to using the *auxilia* and light units in special deployments such as those discussed above.⁶⁵⁵

Outstanding courage or bravery is one possibility for such use of auxiliary and light units. Rawlings has pointed out Caesar's appreciation for courage (*virtus*, *audacia*) as a key to victory in battle. Interestingly, in *De Bello Gallico*, Caesar applies the term to non-Romans more often than he does to Romans, with *audacia* being 'a mainly Gallic attribute...with a more dynamic resonance [than *virtus* or *fortis*]'.⁶⁵⁶ This notion that non-Romans show outstanding courage in battle is one that has been picked up by other scholars as well. While Lendon suggests that auxiliary troops were naturally more eager, spurred on by military decorations, and advancement in rank, he also believes their performance was driven by inherent *virtus*.⁶⁵⁷ Though he draws on Tacitus' interesting comment that the Batavians are the foremost in *virtus*; that they are 'set apart for fighting purposes, like a magazine of arms, [reserved] for [Roman] wars', I would rather focus the argument on their social status.⁶⁵⁸

I believe it would not be erroneous to say that auxiliaries and allied light-troops, as non-Romans – that is, as people without full citizen rights of their fellow legionary soldiers – may have wanted to validate their equality as Roman soldiers by showing the highest possible levels of *audacia* or *virtus* in battle. When they did, their pride remains as evidence for the struggle they overcame. A funerary inscription from the Danube area, dated to the second century AD has a Batavian soldier boasting of his fame for swimming across the Danube fully armed, and being the best javelin thrower and archer amongst his fellow auxiliaries and legionaries.⁶⁵⁹ This pride was also seen during the Civil Wars of AD 69-70, when Batavian cohorts boasted of their victories against legionaries to other Romans, claiming 'that the

⁶⁵⁴ As for the late Republican period, Sallust (Sall. *Iug.* 105) for example notes how even though Sulla equipped an auxiliary cohort with 'light arms' (*velitaribus armis*) in the Jugurthine War, they were still able to stand their ground against the enemy.

⁶⁵⁵ As far as training may have been a factor in this, little is known of the training of the *auxilia* and light troops, although it is assumed that by the time of the Empire they had the same training as legionaries, cf. Cheesman 1914, 70, Goldsworthy 1996, 20. During the Republic it seems allies were also trained in Roman discipline, e.g. see App. *Hisp.* 11.65. Some auxiliaries who were not trained in Roman discipline were known to get out of control, e.g. Caes. *BG* 2.24, 3.12, 5.16, cf. Goldsworthy *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ Rawlings 1998, 179-180, esp. n. 30: *virtus* used for Roman individuals or groups 33 times, for Gauls and Germans combined, 36. *Audacia* used 7 times for Gauls, once for Britons, once for Romans. This could of course, be a result of Caesar trying to make his enemies sound more intimidating and thus his victories seem more glorious. As for light troops, *fortissimos* is used to describe *antesignani* at Caes. *BC* 1.57.

⁶⁵⁷ Lendon 2005, 247-248.

⁶⁵⁸ Tac. *Ger.* 29, cf. Lendon 2005, 247.

⁶⁵⁹ *ILS* 2558.

whole destiny of the war lay in their hands,' starting brawls and quarrels with the other soldiers. Yet, even the legionaries supposedly admitted that, despite their pride, the auxiliaries taken from them during the Civil Wars were the 'bravest of men.'⁶⁶⁰ Whether it was *virtus*, advancement, or pride, there seems to have been more to the auxiliary forces than just a difference in armament that allowed for their tactical usage in difficult terrain. Our sources also seem to stress excellent fighting capability and the zeal of the auxiliaries. For example, Plutarch relates how 'Against Otho's gladiators, too, who were supposed to have experience and courage in close fighting, Alfenus Varus led up the troops called Batavians' who then swiftly eliminated the gladiator unit (Plut. *Otho* 12.4). Another passage, already mentioned above (Tac. *Hist.* 2.35), where German auxiliaries out-swam enemy boats (whilst in full-armor) and in the following water-borne fight with Othonian gladiators 'leapt into the shallows, laid hold of the boats, climbed over the gunwales, or sank them with their hands,' provides similar evidence supporting their zeal for combat. In another example (Tac. *Ann.* 12.35), Tacitus explains how the auxiliaries helped lead Ostorius' forces to a glorious victory against Caractacus' army. Josephus claims that in the Jewish War, some freshly recruited auxiliaries from free cities, made up for their lack of experience with 'their alacrity (προθυμία) and in their hatred for the Jews'.⁶⁶¹ A scene from Trajan's column appears to reflect this understanding in the literary sources of the fighting capability and zeal of the auxiliaries. In scene 24, an auxiliary is seen fighting with a severed head held by the hair in his teeth. Not only was fighting in such a manner likely more difficult than fighting without the burden of a severed head (thus requiring notable skill), but the zeal and alacrity displayed by the auxiliary in this scene is plainly evident.

Thus, it seems that our sources present a bias towards the *virtus/audacia* of the auxiliaries. Because of this bias, we should not assume that legionaries lacked *virtus* or *audacia*. Rather, I would argue that if auxiliaries were especially keen on proving themselves (possibly due to their inferior social status), then commanders may have wanted to exploit this enthusiasm by using them instead of the legionaries in the most demanding tactical assignments, as argued throughout this chapter.

⁶⁶⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 2.27; 2.28; this could of course, just be rhetoric from Tacitus.

⁶⁶¹ Jos. BJ 2.18.9.

Conclusions

With the gradual disappearance of the *velites* and the emergence of the cohortal legion, one of Rome's most tactically versatile units needed to be replaced. The auxiliary units of the Roman army took up the mantle, and with the establishment of the professional *auxilia* during the imperial period, they also came to replace the *socii* to an extent as well. Although these new auxiliaries varied in equipment, organization and role from their predecessors, they were no less tactically versatile. This can be seen in their usage in scouting, guarding the marching column and foragers, reconnaissance, urgent operations and as combatants in difficult terrain. Their fighting capability, whether a result of natural aggressiveness or alacrity, resulted in their noticeable displays of *virtus* and pride. Their commanders seem to have recognized this, and so deployed them accordingly in situations where they bore the brunt of combat, including pitched battle scenarios. All of the various capacities that Rome's auxiliary and light troops were used in, indicate their skill, alacrity, trustworthiness, and underline their tactical versatility.

7 The Nature & Experience of Skirmishing and Non-Pitched Battle

Having analysed both the various types of Roman light infantry and their tactics, in this chapter I shall examine the ‘face of battle’ for these troops, looking primarily at skirmishes and non-pitched battle. In doing so, I will attempt to elucidate the experience of various types of skirmishing and non-pitched battle combat from the perspective of the Roman soldiers involved in them.

The major issue with this approach is that we do not have a lot of evidence for the ‘face’ of such combat. Indeed, our best evidence for the experience or ‘face’ of combat comes from what our sources tell us about pitched battle. As such, I will draw on this evidence to inform our understanding of non-pitched battle combat. The practicality of this approach will be made clear with my definitions of non-pitched battle and skirmishing, discussed below. Initially however, it is advisable to begin with a review of the modern historiography on assessing battle and battle narratives. This will be followed by a section on the aforementioned definitions, in order to clarify the modes and methods of combat I will be drawing upon. Because I will be drawing on the ancient literature for descriptions of combat, my analysis will be preceded by a section reviewing narrative rhetoric and its use in combat descriptions.

After defining skirmishing, non-pitched battle and reviewing how narrative rhetoric affects our literary evidence, I will suggest possible combat techniques used by Roman soldiers, based on our evidence for this. The conclusions reached here will form basic models of combat technique. These basic models will then be used in the analysis of skirmishing and non-pitched battle combat, to give us a clearer picture of the ‘face’ of such fighting. Thus, the section following ‘combat technique’ will review examples from our sources for skirmishing and non-pitched battle. The general approach to this ‘face of battle’ study will comprise two sections. The first section will discuss the unit’s battle, and how groups of lightly armed infantry might have experienced combat between each other. This will include, for example, an analysis of how light infantry skirmished with light infantry. The second

section will assess the individual's battle and consider how factors such as *virtus* and leadership and the psychology of the self-preservation instinct affected the soldier. I will also make suggestions regarding how these factors may have affected the way Romans fought battles, and trained their youngest soldiers for the mental stresses of combat.

Historiography

Keegan's 'Face of Battle' was the first work to offer a new way of assessing combat. Rather than assessing battle from a tactical perspective, reducing soldiers to simple rectangles on a page, Keegan's approach aimed to elucidate the soldier's perspective of battle. Goldsworthy has pointed out that this approach offers the possibility of a greater understanding of warfare and battle. Goldsworthy's work 'The Roman Army at War' (discussed below), structured its examinations after Keegan.⁶⁶² However, MacMullen's article from 1984 is perhaps the pioneering publication in the assessment of the Roman 'face of battle'.⁶⁶³ By reviewing the social interactions and relationships within a legion, MacMullen touches on important aspects of the experience of battle, outside of tactics and hand-to-hand combat. Human relationships in small networks are what MacMullen claims was one of the most important factors of the legion's success.⁶⁶⁴ He also indicates how class distinctions affected these relationships and how they might be played out on the battlefield.⁶⁶⁵ While MacMullen's observations are not strictly psychological, they play an important part in highlighting the social factors that could have affected the mental attitudes of soldiers on the battlefield. However, his article is only the 'tip of the iceberg' in terms of 'face of battle' assessment, and as such, it provided the foundations for further developments in the field.

Goldsworthy's seminal work on the face of Roman battle is very thorough in its approach and covers many of the aspects of studying the experience of Roman battle.⁶⁶⁶ Though Lee published on the same topic prior to Goldsworthy in the same year, the latter's work is a full-scale examination of the topic, while the former's serves as solid 'preliminary foray' as Lee puts it.⁶⁶⁷ As we shall see in the discussion on combat throughout this chapter, Goldsworthy's assertions on the effect that the cohesion of units had on combat, is extremely relevant for our

⁶⁶² Goldsworthy 1996, 7.

⁶⁶³ MacMullen 1984, *passim*.

⁶⁶⁴ *Op. cit.* 449.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 451 ff.

⁶⁶⁶ Goldsworthy 1996, *passim*.

⁶⁶⁷ Lee 1996, 200.

understanding of the Roman ‘face of battle’, and by extension, the ‘face’ of non-pitched battle. However, as Gilliver has pointed out, Goldsworthy is perhaps somewhat too trusting of his literary sources at times, and furthermore, his use of modern military studies as comparative material is not entirely effective.⁶⁶⁸ Nevertheless, its content provides the vital groundwork for the discussion of the experience of combat outside of pitched battle, including Goldsworthy’s suggestions on combat technique and the individual’s battle.⁶⁶⁹

Further examinations of the Roman ‘face of battle’ include Sabin’s proposal of the ‘default state’ of fighting, and Zhmodikov’s suggestion that Roman battle was dominated by missile throwing.⁶⁷⁰ The former is a model of prolonged combat, where missiles and insults are thrown, but most commonly the combatants are not close enough for hand-to-hand dueling, except for a few sporadic instances of ‘brief, localized flurries of hand-to-hand combat, followed by the losing troops withdrawing with their weapons brandished to deter pursuit’.⁶⁷¹ Zhmodikov’s argument that hand-to-hand combat was relatively rare compared to missile throwing, is certainly in the same vein. However, both of these authors ignore the development of one-use *pila*, and fail to discuss how often spears could be re-thrown. Nevertheless, both of their approaches provide some good discussion for informing this chapter’s assessment of missile combat and skirmishing within a pitched battle.

Looking specifically at how Romans fought their Iberian enemies, Quesada Sanz has suggested an effective interpretation of the Roman fighting technique, taking Roman armament into account. He argues for a fighting ‘cloud’, rather than neatly dressed ranks, once combat was underway.⁶⁷² Though his model focuses on line infantry, the argument, alongside Goldsworthy’s, also provides the foundations for the discussion of the fighting technique of Roman light infantry in this chapter.

Kagan’s recent alternative approach to the ‘face of battle’, entitled the ‘eye of command’, argues that a more suitable method for assessing the ancient face of battle is through the eponymous eyes of the commander. This is because unlike some of the battles which Keegan assessed, we do not have direct evidence for the Roman ‘face of battle’ from the perspective

⁶⁶⁸ Gilliver 1998, 231.

⁶⁶⁹ See ‘Combat Technique’, below.

⁶⁷⁰ Sabin 2000; Zhmodikov 2000, 71.

⁶⁷¹ Sabin 2000, 14.

⁶⁷² Quesada Sanz 2006, 7 ff; cf. Lendon 2005, 179, where the figures representing the *velites*, *hastati* and *principes* also resemble this ‘cloud’.

of soldiers themselves, and furthermore, even if we did have such evidence, it would not necessarily aid in our overall perception of the experience of combat. The reason for this is, as Kagan has pointed out, ‘ordinary combatants often compartmentalize their experiences’.⁶⁷³ Indeed, this reality probably causes combat to be a very individual rather than collective experience in regards to how ordinary soldiers perceived the event. For example, Galba’s letter to Cicero after the battle of Forum Gallorum demonstrates how a participant focuses on the events immediately affecting his part of the battle line.⁶⁷⁴ Because of this, any evidence from individual soldiers would probably be just as biased as any other eyewitness sources we have. In this respect, ideally we would need eyewitness reports from the majority of combatants (on both sides) to get the most realistic picture of the battle experience. This considered, Kagan’s suggestion that the commander of a battle is in the best position to assess the event is quite sound: it is the commander’s role to understand all the micro-events in a battle and what consequences they can produce, and to issue orders or participate accordingly.⁶⁷⁵ Naturally, it is very difficult for one individual to perceive all of these micro-events, but it is the general who receives the most information about them from his subordinates and messengers. Because of this, commander-authors from whom we have eyewitness accounts for battle, such as Caesar, are extremely valuable.⁶⁷⁶ These reports are quite likely much more valuable than any reports from individual sources may have been. Furthermore, according to Kagan, the synergy of battle is only apparent from the kind of perspective that an observer has (such as Caesar). She also adds that the face of battle cannot be reconstructed by simply piecing together individual soldiers’ perspectives since they may omit many interconnections that change the course of the battle.⁶⁷⁷ Commanders on the other hand, are more likely to be aware of such interconnections. So, it is literary evidence that includes eyewitness reports of such interconnections, such as Caesar’s commentaries, that will be crucial to the present assessment.⁶⁷⁸ However, as M.B. Charles has pointed out, Kagan’s assessment could have included a greater consideration of morale, since as stressed in Goldsworthy’s seminal work, this was a major factor in the face of battle.⁶⁷⁹ Furthermore, though literary descriptions of non-pitched battle aid in reconstructing the ‘face of battle’,

⁶⁷³ Kagan 2006, 100; cf. Whatley 1964, 120-21; Thuc. 7.44.1.

⁶⁷⁴ Cf. Cic. *Fam.* 10.30 and App. *BC* 3.67-70.

⁶⁷⁵ Kagan 2006, 106-107 *et* Ch. 4 *passim*.

⁶⁷⁶ Gilliver 2007b, 122.

⁶⁷⁷ Kagan 2006, 101.

⁶⁷⁸ The bias from this will be assessed below in ‘Rhetoric of Combat’.

⁶⁷⁹ Charles 2007, unpaginated; Goldsworthy 1996, Ch. 6 *et passim*.

there are many issues involved in using battle descriptions, including the possibility of *topoi* and narrative rhetoric, even if the sources were eyewitnesses.⁶⁸⁰ This will be discussed in further detail in the section below on the Rhetoric of Combat.

The above selections from the modern historiography have made the most significant contributions to Roman ‘face of battle’ studies. Others such as Lendon’s ‘Soldiers and Ghosts’ and Phang’s ‘Roman Military Service’ also contribute to the discussion, especially as regards cultural and ideological aspects of Roman battle.⁶⁸¹ Naturally, I will be drawing on all of this historiography for my approach to the ‘face of battle’ for Roman light infantry.

Defining Skirmishing and Non-Pitched Battle

Modern ‘face of battle’ studies for Roman warfare have focused on heavy infantry combat in pitched battle. This thesis has focused on the often-overlooked ‘light’ infantry of the Roman army and this chapter aims to elucidate their experience of combat. In the previous chapter, I discussed their tactical roles and it is in those contexts which the ‘face of battle’ for light infantry will be assessed here.

The combat role of Roman light infantry may be broadly divided into two types of combat, skirmishing and non-pitched battle. It is the aim of this section to define the two for the purposes of analysis within this chapter.

The battle standards of the Roman army are the implements of war which help to delineate the definitions contained herein. The sources make it clear that the standards served as rallying points, as well as a guide for the soldiers in combat.⁶⁸² They had a prominent role to play in controlling troop movement in battle.⁶⁸³ In this, we find a key difference between what I would define as a skirmish and a non-pitched battle.

⁶⁸⁰ V. e.g. McDonald 2009, 235-236; Walsh 2009, 218-220; also, Tränkle’s argument that Livy appeals to the humanity of history whilst Polybius is cold and meticulous in his technical detail, Tränkle 2009, 486-488 *et passim*; cf. McDonald 2009, 240, *et passim*. Also, while the issue of *topoi* in battle narratives exists in many of our sources, this does not mean that their historiographic methodology is unsound, cf. Oakley’s argument that Livy for example is conscientious about the reliability and discrepancies or flaws in his sources, Oakley 2009, 446, 449, 451, cf. Livy 6.42.5, 8.40.5, 22.7.4, 33.10, cf. also Koon 2010, *passim*. On the potential weaknesses of an archaeological approach to ancient warfare in general see most recently Whitby 2007, 72-81.

⁶⁸¹ Lendon 2005, esp. 178 ff.; Phang 2008, *passim*.

⁶⁸² E.g. Livy 9.13.2, 22.5.3, 33.7.2; Caes. *BG* 2.21, 2.25, 5.34, *BC* 1.44.

⁶⁸³ Isaac 1995, 29; Phang 2008, 65.

When the standards were planted (to establish a front line of battle), troop movement was restricted insofar as soldiers would not advance too far from their stationary standard.⁶⁸⁴ They were required to adhere to the established front line to ensure unit cohesion and tactical control. Fighting without planting the standards may have resulted in much freer movements covering more ground than movements restricted by planted standards. If there were no standards, as with the *velites* for example, I would suggest that the movement of troops was much less restricted than it would have been with standards. In these instances, soldiers would not have to adhere to an established front line whilst engaged in combat. This could have resulted in unrestricted and flowing movement. Though troop movements would also be restricted by other factors such as terrain, the enemy, and morale, not planting the standards probably increased the likelihood of wider-ranging, more dynamic movements amongst soldiers, compared to their movements with planted standards and the resultant battle line. Though two sides might naturally establish an ‘unofficial’ front line without planted standards (especially because of terrain, for example), they would not have to adhere to any formal positioning on the battlefield. They could thus move in out of their ‘cloud’ of comrades, or to and from the ‘unofficial’ front line (if there was one) as they pleased. This, in turn, could see ‘unofficial’ front lines constantly shifting or even rotating, or simply appearing and then eventually disappearing.⁶⁸⁵ This more dynamic, flowing type of movement may be defined as a skirmish. This type of combat probably involves more running and perhaps missile throwing than other forms of combat. As we do not have evidence for standards amongst primarily missile units and more lightly armed units such as the *velites*, I would suggest that their main form of combat would have been skirmishing.⁶⁸⁶ This includes their most well known role of skirmishing before a pitched battle, as discussed in Chapter 6. Accordingly, some of our examples will include skirmishing in pitched battle.

Combat techniques and the associated movements that would have been restricted by the presence of a planted or stationary standard would have been used by line infantry in pitched battle. Thus, if groups of light infantry were accompanied by standards outside of pitched battle, and if those standards were planted to establish a front line (i.e. an ‘official’ front line),

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. e.g. Caesar’s order not to advance more than four feet beyond the standards: Caes. *BAfr.* 15, 17.

⁶⁸⁵ Hence, the term ‘unofficial’. In contrast, an ‘official’ front line could not move in this way because doing so would destroy the tactical coherence of the unit (and probably result in the capture of the standard and the rout or destruction of the unit) and possibly even the army. Cf. the definition of non-pitched battle, below. For more on the ‘face of skirmish’, see pp. 201-206, below.

⁶⁸⁶ Also, they may not have had standards because their primary duties do not involve fighting in a battle line.

I would argue that their combat techniques would have been the same or very similar to those of pitched battle. That is, they would aim to form and keep a rough front line determined by the placement (i.e. stationary positioning) of the standard. Indeed, this is what our few examples of such combat suggest.⁶⁸⁷ It is for this reason that the section on combat technique will draw on descriptions of pitched battles to inform non-pitched battle fighting. When this type of combat would have occurred in non-pitched battle contexts, we may define this combat as such (i.e. non-pitched battle combat).

It should be emphasized that most of our evidence for the Roman ‘face of battle’ comes from descriptions of pitched battles, rather than from descriptions of combat occurring outside that context. As such, much of this chapter will be drawing on what we know of pitched battles to inform our understanding of skirmishing and non-pitched battle.

Types of Non-Pitched Battle

As indicated above, non-pitched battle combat has been defined quite generally. However, various versions of this type of conflict should also be defined.

Small group clashes

We may define this type of conflict as combat involving forces smaller than one legion, on any kind of terrain, but not within the context of a siege or ambush. The grounds for this reasoning include the fact that most of our examples of non-pitched battle combat involve forces smaller than one legion. Also, during the mid-Republic, two legions was the standard size of a consular army, and so forces smaller than this were not technically classifiable as an army, but rather only part of it. Therefore, when such small forces engaged in combat, the context was unlikely to be a pitched battle. During the late republic and imperial period, one legion plus auxiliaries were used as campaigning armies, and so forces smaller than this may be defined as a ‘small group’.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁷ Discussed below under ‘Combat technique – Infantry equipped with heavy shields and cuirasses’ and ‘Line Infantry versus Line Infantry’.

⁶⁸⁸ Small late republic and imperial armies: e.g. Caesar in Gaul (*BG* 1.7-10) and in the early conquest of Britain (e.g. *Suet.Vesp* 4).

Siege Warfare

Non-pitched battle combat within sieges may be defined as any hand-to-hand fighting that occurs without the two opposing forces first being set up tactically opposite each other. Indeed such setting up, or ‘pitching’ forces does not usually occur during sieges, so much of the hand-to-hand combat during sieges qualifies as non-pitched battle combat. This includes combat that occurs as a result of sallies on behalf of the besieged, as well as combat within the city once the besieging force has breached the walls.⁶⁸⁹

Ambushes, Insurgency and Counter-insurgency

Insurgency and counter-insurgency are not a particular type of combat, but a cause behind many instances of non-pitched battle, particularly ambushes. As a result, they are often associated with ‘guerrilla’ warfare or asymmetric warfare. However, it is important to note that insurgency and counter-insurgency were very much entwined in politics, and as Mattern has pointed out, the military aspect of this kind of warfare is ‘only the tip of the iceberg’ surrounding such combat.⁶⁹⁰ With that in mind, the present work concerns only this military aspect, on a tactical level. This aspect, as already noted, found its predominant form in ambushes. The foundation of this type of tactical deployment was the element of surprise. Furthermore, ambushes could involve small forces (Tac. *Ann.* 4.25) or larger ones (Caes. *BG* 5.34), and occasionally entire armies (Livy 22.4, Polyb. 3.83; Dio 56.20, 1.65). They normally occur on difficult terrain, where one side has a topographic (and thus tactical) advantage over the other. It must be noted that the ‘face’ of any ambush was subject to many relative factors, such as terrain, weather, time of day, numbers engaged, the experience of those engaged, and the leadership capabilities of the commanders and the resulting morale of the soldiers involved. All of these factors mean that we cannot generalize regarding the ‘face’ of ambushes

Rhetoric of Combat

Prior to assessing our examples of combat, a review of how narrative traditions affected our literary sources should be undertaken. Since my definitions of skirmishing and non-pitched

⁶⁸⁹ It should be noted that the focus of this thesis does not warrant a full discussion of siege warfare, and so only a few examples pertaining to non-pitched battle combat will be used

⁶⁹⁰ Mattern 2010, 178.

battle above indicate that our evidence draws on pitched battle descriptions, this section will draw on such evidence to inform our understanding of the ‘rhetoric of combat’.

As MacMullen has pointed out, ‘accounts of conduct in battle are peculiarly subject to bring to self-serving, dramatic, or ideological distortion.’⁶⁹¹ Indeed, Koon has recently indicated that the literary evidence that is our main source for face of battle studies rarely describes the individualized experience, and instead it tends to resort ‘to metaphors or generic statements to explain the situation of large sections of the battle line’.⁶⁹² Reasons for this could include the fact that for the Republic for example, the majority of Roman military writers’ readership would have had some experience as witnesses to or participants in such combat.⁶⁹³ Just like ancient battle narratives then, modern face of battle studies must be reconstructed based on a pre-determined method of approach.

Lendon has discussed this subject at length, and a passage from his article adequately summarizes this problem and offers a sensible solution,

All ancient battle descriptions, in short, reflect a series of decisions made beforehand...about how battles worked, decisions which guided how battle was depicted. When reconstructing an ancient battle, the first necessity is to ascertain the set of conventions the sources are using, to find out what they may be predisposed to see, and to determine what they may be predisposed to ignore. The reconstruction of an ancient battle must be attended with a sense both of how ancient conventions of battle description channel ancient narrative, and with a humble sense of how modern conventions of battle description channel our own evaluation of that narrative.⁶⁹⁴

Thus, there are customs and ideologies inherent in battle descriptions (as in all ancient historiography), and we cannot study accounts of combat independent of this problematic reality. Such customs and conventions in writing may include fallacy and/or omit facts. Yet, as Roth has pointed out ‘even the most accurate and objective account must follow conventions of writing’.⁶⁹⁵ So, we must review these customs in Roman accounts of military events.

⁶⁹¹ MacMullen 1984, 447.

⁶⁹² Koon 2011, 78, more on the literary devices used in such descriptions is discussed below. Cf. also Keegan 1976, 25 ff.

⁶⁹³ Cf. Koon 2010, 27.

⁶⁹⁴ Lendon 1999, 324.

⁶⁹⁵ Roth 2006, 49.

Lendon's article on this subject provides the vital groundwork for this section, introducing both the difficulty in describing combat for any participant, as well as the artificiality of battle descriptions. Lendon highlights the 'inherited way of talking and writing about battle', referring to modern phrases like 'pull-back' or 'pushing forward' which are far from literal. He goes on to say that

More than a half-awareness of this artificiality [on behalf of those describing combat], is, of course, impossible because this rhetoric is not merely a machine to convert experience into words, but the very armature upon which experience is organized and made sense of. For the soldier the raw experience of battle is one of sights, noises, terrors, and alimentary misadventures.⁶⁹⁶

The result of this, is the application of prevailing phraseology to a variety of events. This phraseology may come from the experience of battle itself and likewise may evolve into a standard set of metaphors, such as references to weight or pressing.⁶⁹⁷ This in turn has been developed into a physical theory of battle, and this combined with discussions of order and deployment produces highly geometrical battle descriptions.⁶⁹⁸ Using such phraseology may result in the skewing of the actual experience of combat by making its description less literal and thus less accurate. Because of this, an etymological assessment of specific phrases describing combat should be carried out when we attempt to analyse the experience of combat, as Koon has recently done.⁶⁹⁹ However, even such an assessment might not always successfully decipher how rhetorical certain phrases are.

Beyond this fundamental problem in combat description, another lies in choosing what events and incidents to describe. This issue particularly affects non-pitched battle descriptions, since ancient historians favoured pitched battle narratives as standard part of their historiographical methodology.⁷⁰⁰ Furthermore, since battle is a chaotic and nonlinear event (i.e. many simultaneous events occur at once, not all affecting each other equally or at all), making sense of it for a reader is extremely challenging. Polybius makes note of this difficulty (Polyb. 16.20), criticizing other authors for their battle descriptions (12.17-22, 12.25) and remarks that even a writer's best efforts may include unintentional flaws. As Koon notes,

⁶⁹⁶ Lendon 1999, 274.

⁶⁹⁷ e.g. Polyb. 2.3, 2.68, 18.29, 18.30; cf. Hanson 1989, 171-84.

⁶⁹⁸ E.g. Polyb. 3.113; cf. Lendon 1999, 283; Koon 2010, 27.

⁶⁹⁹ Koon 2010, *passim*; cf. also Walsh 1961, 198, Oakley 1997, 127.

⁷⁰⁰ Gilliver 2007b, 123, 125.

It is not possible to record exactly what happened when many thousands of individuals fought for several hours over distances of a few kilometres. Therefore, every ancient author had to decide how to construct his battle narratives, usually succumbing to the use of certain literary conventions specific to the culture in which he wrote.⁷⁰¹

Thus, battle narrative is necessarily stylized or formulaic; it often gives the reader the view of what seemed to be most important to both the original documenter of the battle and the author using such a source as a reference.⁷⁰² The result is a framework such as that described by Kagan: the narrative often relates that which was noticed and/or executed by the general and his officers.⁷⁰³

Lendon also observes that because battle in its totality cannot be described sensibly, battle descriptions can be considered works of artistry.⁷⁰⁴ And while they should not be considered works of fiction, it is necessary for any author to rely on pre-existing writing schemes to be able to clarify the confusion in a style that has already proven effective. As Lendon has aptly put it, ‘understanding the detailed mechanics of battle and how to describe those mechanics in writing is learned, not natural.’⁷⁰⁵ Thus, because of the importance of the pitched battle narrative in ancient historiography, we can identify literary conventions and formulas for describing ancient battle. For example, Livy regularly divides the battle in sections and stages.⁷⁰⁶ So, while such constructs cannot accurately reflect the reality of battle, they are a prudent method of clearly describing the chaos of combat. Correspondingly, we may point to the irregularity and lessened predictability of skirmishing and non-pitched battle as possible reasons behind our sources’ lack of narrative on these matters. This, in turn, makes an analysis of such combat not only difficult, but nearly impossible to recreate faithfully. This is, again, why pitched battle narratives must inform our understanding of such combat.

Greek military writers were especially influential in shaping the literary conventions of the pitched battle narrative for Roman authors. They were a significant source in the late-Republic because the Latin tradition of technical military language does not seem to have

⁷⁰¹ Koon 2011, 78, cf. Gilliver 2007b, 125.

⁷⁰² Livy may be given as an example of the latter type of author. Oakley 1997, 76, Woodman 1998, 1 ff., Gilliver 2007b, 123; Briscoe 2009, 467, Koon 2010, 27.

⁷⁰³ Kagan 2006, 101.

⁷⁰⁴ Lendon 1999, 277; cf. Woodman 1998, 1-20.

⁷⁰⁵ Lendon 1999, 281; cf. Kagan 2006, 107-108 who argues that commanders are best suited to understanding all of these mechanics of battle.

⁷⁰⁶ Koon 2010, 27.

been as strong as that of the Greeks in this period.⁷⁰⁷ Of course, this may have been a result of the fact that the Greeks were producing technical manuals whereas Roman literature focused on historical narrative. Caesar's writings however, stand apart in this respect, and as such are worth particular focus in this discussion. While they are generally classifiable as historical narrative, they are also a blend of Roman military thinking, Greek theory and his experience.⁷⁰⁸ Yet, Caesar's writings also favour the pitched battle over skirmishing and non-pitched battle narrative. This is probably because his commentaries had the potential to have some effect on his political popularity, and as with all generals in the period under study, the pitched battle itself could bring quick success and political advancement.⁷⁰⁹ His commentaries are nonetheless some of the best accounts of war that survive from antiquity. Alongside their military details, they have particular value because they are eyewitness accounts, or compiled from the reports of subordinates.⁷¹⁰ Indeed, Caesar's battle descriptions have been a source of particular interest for scholars, especially because he is the last of the soldier-authors and the only surviving Roman author to be a participant in the battles he describes for the period under study.⁷¹¹ As Gilliver has pointed out, much of the value of Caesar's commentaries lies in his avoidance of literary formulas common in historical narratives.⁷¹²

That *topoi* are common to both Greek and Roman battle narratives is a familiar notion for scholars.⁷¹³ McDonald and Walsh have noted that this tradition in Livian battle-accounts and siege narratives specifically includes physical metaphors used to describe battle, such as *vis* and *impetus*.⁷¹⁴ Caesarian battle narrative differs from the Greek tradition insofar as it regularly includes two other *topoi*. One is that of *animus* or the mental state of soldiers in

⁷⁰⁷ While Romans had Cato the Elder's *de Re Militari* from the second century BC, both Sallust (*Iug.* 85) and Cicero (*Fam.* 9.25.1) note the reliance on Greek military writers; cf. Lendon 1999, 278; cf. also Lendon 2002, 64 ff.

⁷⁰⁸ Lendon 1999, 278.

⁷⁰⁹ Gilliver 2007b, 125.

⁷¹⁰ Gilliver 2007b, 122. Kagan 2006, 110-11, suggests that Caesar's descriptions of his campaigns in his *Commentaries* may have found their beginnings in correspondence with the Senate while he was in Gaul, v. esp. op. cit. n. 44,. For more on Caesar's biases, particularly at the strategic, operational and tactical levels see Levick, 1998, Welch 1998, Goldsworthy 1998.

⁷¹¹ Polybius, our only other surviving soldier-author writing on Roman military affairs who was a witness to part of what he describes (i.e. the siege of Carthage, his full account of which is of course lost), records many battles, all of which pre-date his lifetime.

⁷¹² Gilliver 2007b, 122.

⁷¹³ E.g. Powell 1998, 115 ff; Lendon 1999 *passim*, Gilliver 2007b, 123, James 2010, 44.

⁷¹⁴ McDonald 2009, 235, 251; Walsh 2009, 202-205, 218-220. Cf. Livy's usage of such terms as well as *audacia* and *animus*, v. Tränkle 2009, 493. Use of physical metaphors in Caesar: Lendon 1999, 285-289.

combat. Lendon makes it clear that not only Caesar but many of our ancient sources were well aware of the importance of a soldier's *animus* on the battlefield.⁷¹⁵ Related subjects have been reviewed by other scholars as well, and they are closely linked with the psychology of combat.⁷¹⁶ I will discuss psychology and combat in further detail in a later section.

Another theme in battle narrative is that of *virtus* or courage. While it is not predominant in Polybius, it is a main theme for Caesar, and for his contemporary Diodorus Siculus.⁷¹⁷ *Virtus* seems to have been a key factor in battle for the Romans, and the only means of achieving a true victory. Indeed, Champion has pointed out that fortitude and bravery are present throughout Polybius' narrative of the First Punic War.⁷¹⁸ For many ancient historians, the role of courage in battle was probably an inherent part of combat regardless of the outcome.⁷¹⁹ Even if a battle was lost, Romans could be portrayed as having had admirable *virtus*, particularly if they died fighting.⁷²⁰ Lendon adds that 'at some level Caesar thinks that battles are supposed to be fought by *virtus*.'⁷²¹ Because of this, the usage of the term can be biased or rhetorical.⁷²² For Caesar in particular, it may well have been used for political ends. He could have used it to make himself or his army appear in a favourable light, to deflect attention from his mistakes or to deceive his reader otherwise. His ability to do this is allowed by the general Roman understanding that courage is a key factor at any particular point in battle.⁷²³ How this applies to skirmishing and non-pitched battle will have to be assessed on case-by-case basis. However, because our definitions of these forms of combat are closely related to the combat within pitched battle, we may find the aforementioned elements of narrative rhetoric similarly applicable to skirmishing and non-pitched battle. Yet, courage is a relative and subjective term.⁷²⁴ So, when evaluating courage, it is necessary to

⁷¹⁵ Lendon 1999, 290-303; also *op. cit.* 315: 'Greek military experts – like Xenophon and Polybius – thought about how battles were won, and despite a strain of Greek political thinking which sought the origins of high bravery in civic customs and institutions...the Greek military tradition never entirely succeeded in integrating courage into its conception of battle.'

⁷¹⁶ Cf. Welch 1998, 89-90; MacMullen 1984, 447-449, 451, on how social relations within the army affected soldiers in battle; Gilliver 1996b, 222, 233, on how morality in war was related to psychological warfare; Goldsworthy 1996, Ch.6 on matters related to morale, likewise Lee 1996, 203-212.

⁷¹⁷ See Lendon 1999, 304-316; Erickson 2002, *passim*.

⁷¹⁸ Champion 2011, 106, cf. Polyb. 1.17.11-13; 6.37.10-13.

⁷¹⁹ Rosenstien 1990, 96; Lendon 1999, 315.

⁷²⁰ Rosenstien 1990, 94, 97.

⁷²¹ Lendon 1999, 309, also true victory, admirable *virtus*, *ibid*; cf. Plaut. *Amph.* 648-53, Lendon 2005, 176, 187-188 *et passim*.

⁷²² Cf. Tränkle 2009, 493.

⁷²³ Lendon 1999, 316

⁷²⁴ E.g. while it is disgraceful and diminishes one's *virtus* to flee in battle, skirmishing (with constant fleeing from conflict) is an acceptable form of combat.

judge individual actions in combat in their proper context, rather than apply the term from a general understanding, and in particular the Roman one that follows that it is an inherent factor in combat. We will see that this is particularly important to keep in mind when assessing the possible psychological effects of skirmishing on soldiers and especially *velites* during pitched battles.

We have seen that rhetorically, Caesar's battle narratives reach beyond the standard Greek discussion of combat. The latter is heavily structured on a tactical conception of battle, interspersed with interesting tidbits about individual actions or events within it.⁷²⁵ While Caesar's descriptions owe much to the Greek standard, his *topoi* of *animus* and *virtus* add an additional element of rhetoric.⁷²⁶ This in turn can create somewhat artistic and impressionistic battle descriptions that often leave loose ends in their tactical summary.⁷²⁷ Yet, this approach is far more useful to a 'face of battle' study than the traditional Greek tactics-focused approach. Perhaps most importantly for this study, this usefulness in elucidating the 'face' of pitched battle, directly helps to clarify the face of skirmishing and non-pitched battle, which are, as I have defined them, closely related to pitched battle combat.

Combat Technique

As mentioned above, determining what we can in regards to the realities of combat technique and what may have been 'typical' will be key to an evaluation of the 'face of battle'. The techniques discussed in this section will be used in the sections that follow as an aid to help elucidate the 'face of combat'. This will be done by applying the suggestions made here to the specific scenarios and examples discussed in the following sections. That said however, it must be remembered that various techniques may have been adapted to suit the local situation.⁷²⁸ As such, the suggestions made in this section may serve as basic combat models on which to build our analysis of particular examples.

Because combat technique is dominated by the arms and armour of the combatant, the practical possibilities of combat technique will be based on known armament sets.

⁷²⁵ E.g. Diod. Sic. 17.58.5; cf. Lendon 1999, 322: Greek writing also put some emphasis on psychology in battle, but does not let it become more or as important as stratagem.

⁷²⁶ Lendon 1999, 316.

⁷²⁷ Lendon 1999, 317.

⁷²⁸ Gilliver 1999, 117.

Lightly equipped infantry: lack of body armour and lack of large shields

Since there are no contemporary accounts of how these soldiers would have engaged in hand-to-hand combat, the following is purely conjectural. Nevertheless, such speculation may aid in elucidating the possible ‘face’ of skirmishing and non-pitched-battle.

For those Roman light infantry armed with a typical Roman *gladius* and perhaps a small shield or *parma* (e.g. *velites*), a slash-and-parry technique would probably be the most suitable type of combat with this armament. Because these soldiers had little protection, and because their shields (if any) were not large, slow movement, both in terms of overall body position as well as arm movement would probably leave the soldier quite vulnerable in hand-to-hand combat. As a result, I would suggest that quick moves with both arms along with light footwork seem to make the most sense with this armament.⁷²⁹

An excerpt from Plato’s *Laws* describes the ‘pyrrhiche’ or war dance, which presumably imitated the movements of such lightly armed or missile armed infantry. Naturally, there are significant cultural and temporal differences between what Plato is describing and Roman lightly equipped infantry. Yet, it may help to give us some indication of what the dynamics of Roman combat may have looked like:

Of the noble kind [of dancing] there is,⁷³⁰ on the one hand, the motion of fighting, and that of fair bodies and brave souls engaged in violent effort; and, on the other hand, there is the motion of a temperate soul living in a state of prosperity and moderate pleasures; and this latter kind of dancing one will call, in accordance with its nature, “pacific.” The warlike division, being distinct from the pacific, one may rightly term “pyrrhiche”; it represents modes of eluding all kinds of blows and shots by swervings and duckings and side-leaps upward or crouching; and also the opposite kinds of motion, which lead to active postures of offence, when it strives to represent the movements involved in shooting with bows or darts, and blows of every description. In all these cases the action and the tension of the sinews are correct when there is a representation of fair bodies and souls in which most of the limbs of the body are extended straight: this kind of representation is right, but the opposite kind we pronounce to be wrong.⁷³¹

⁷²⁹ Possible psychological factors (discussed below) also coincide with this technique.

⁷³⁰ The Loeb translation by R.G. Bury has a note here stating that the term dancing is ‘a wide term, embracing all kinds of bodily gestures and posturing.’

⁷³¹ Pl. *Leg.* 814e-815a.

The connection to skirmishing can be found in the line regarding ‘the movements involved in shooting with bows or darts’.⁷³² Van Wees has suggested that such movements could be performed by the Classical hoplite, but due to the dynamism of these manoeuvres, I would suggest they are more suitable for lightly armed skirmishers.⁷³³ Plato’s phrasing indicates that it is representative (ἐπιχειρούσας μιμῆθαι) of such action which suggests that it is probable that this dynamic may have been prevalent in Roman warfare.

What we have as a possible basic model for lightly equipped infantry then, are very dynamic movements, grounded in light footwork and a wide range of swift motions.

Infantry equipped with cuirasses and heavy shields

This category is applicable to infantry throughout the period under review. Though the styles and shapes of Roman heavy shields and cuirasses changed over our 500-year period, the changes were not substantial enough for us to be able to suggest that there were significant changes in combat techniques as a result.

Although Vegetius argues that a stab or thrust with the point of the sword is more effective than a slash, from sculptural, archaeological and literary evidence we can extrapolate that both techniques were possible and likely used from the stance described below.⁷³⁴ Indeed, Polybius describes the sword as having as deadly an effect with the cut as with the thrust.⁷³⁵ It should not be assumed however, that Roman fencing techniques were as simple as straightforward slashing and thrusting. Vegetius’ description of the training exercises highlight the skill required in the proper use of the *gladius*, and its detail is useful in understanding Roman combat technique, especially as Vegetius is ostensibly drawing on an ancient source for this material (1.11). As such, it is worth reproducing this passage in full here:

We are informed by the writings of the ancients that, among their other exercises, they had that of the post. They gave their recruits round bucklers woven with willows, twice as heavy as those used on real service, and wooden swords double the weight of the common ones. They exercised them with these at the post both morning and afternoon. This is an invention of the greatest use, not only to

⁷³² ἔν τε ταῖς τῶν τόξων βολαῖς καὶ ἀκοντίων.

⁷³³ Van Wees 2004, 91, 189. Although more dynamic manoeuvres might have been performed by hoplites outside of the phalanx, cf. Rawlings 2000, *passim*.

⁷³⁴ Cf. James 2010, 47.

⁷³⁵ Veg. 1.12; Polyb. 3.114.

soldiers, but also to gladiators. No man of either profession ever distinguished himself in the circus or field of battle, who was not perfect in this kind of exercise. Every soldier, therefore, fixed a post firmly in the ground, about the height of six feet. Against this, as against a real enemy, the recruit was exercised with the above mentioned arms, as if with the common shield and sword, sometimes aiming at the head or face, sometimes at the sides, at others endeavouring to strike at the thighs or legs. He was instructed in what manner to advance and retire, and in short how to take every advantage of his adversary; but was thus above all particularly cautioned not to lay himself open to his antagonist while aiming his stroke at him.⁷³⁶

There is archaeological evidence found at Carlisle that could possibly help corroborate Vegetius' description. From there we have a wooden object roughly resembling a body in shape, measuring approximately 1.5 metres in length, bearing evidence of cuts on one side. As Davies has already suggested, this may have been a practice post.⁷³⁷ Practice against such posts would have been important to ensure the soldier knew how to perform under the duress of combat. Such practice could have ensured fighting techniques were instilled into muscle memory, which would then allow the soldier to fight effectively even if the stress of combat had negative or restrictive physiological effects, as fear is often wont to do.⁷³⁸ I would suggest that such fighting techniques would be the same as those used in non-pitched battle, as per the definitions above. As skirmishing would be more fluid, soldiers' movements may have been more arbitrary.

Further evidence for the technique described by Vegetius may be found in several ancient authors, all of whom describe how generals instructed their armies to aim at certain parts of the enemy's body.⁷³⁹ The Adamklissi metopes and combat scenes from Trajan's column also depict Roman soldiers raising their swords above their heads in a slashing movement. Though much of this evidence comes from pitched battles, we should not assume that drastically different techniques would be used in non-pitched battle scenarios.

As Bishop and Coulston remind us however, it was the shield that was essential to Roman sword fighting, it helped to protect against bruising internal haemorrhaging, and other forms

⁷³⁶ Cf. also Veg. 3.4 where intense practice with wooden swords is mentioned.

⁷³⁷ Davies 1989, 78, fig. 3.7.

⁷³⁸ Cf. James 2010, 52; This is discussed further under 'The Psychology of Combat', below.

⁷³⁹ Polyb. 2.33; App. *BC* 2.76.78, *Front. Strat.* 4.7.32, *Luc.* 7.498-501, *Florus* 2.50, *Tac. Ann.* 2.14.21, 14.36, *Hist.* 2.42; cf. Davies 1989, 255, n. 39; also Golubovic et al. 2010, 55 ff.; James 2010, 42-43.

of blunt force trauma sustained even under the most padded body armours.⁷⁴⁰ As such, it would have been essential in any combat, including non-pitched battle and skirmishing scenarios. The *scutum* had a very sturdy yet flexible design due to its curve and construction of layered plywood, as is noted by Goldsworthy.⁷⁴¹ The *scutum* thus served as an excellent defensive weapon, which of course would have been very beneficial, since Roman swords did not lend themselves to parrying effectively, as they were too short. This is particularly important to remember when considering the nature of skirmishing. Any loose-order single combats would have necessitated the use of the shield precisely because the *gladius* was too short to be used as an effective defensive weapon. Furthermore, as James has noted, the usual psychological reaction to danger is not only a rush of adrenaline, but also an instinctive movement to block an attack.⁷⁴² In a speech Tacitus attributes to Suetonius Paulinus, we find that both the shield and the sword were vital in combat. The general instructs his army to ‘close up the ranks, and having discharged your *pila*, with shields and swords continue the work of bloodshed and destruction’ (Tac. *Ann.* 14.36). Tacitus is even more specific regarding the use of shields in his description of the Battle of Mons Graupius,

So the Batavians came to blows with the enemy, striking them with the boss of their shields, to disfigure their faces.⁷⁴³

If a legionary was holding the shield in front of him, standing slightly sideways to his opponent, with his left foot forward, the shield could have been also used as an effective offensive weapon. This is not only because the soldier could have punched with his shield (e.g. using the bottom edge or the front), but its weight, which was between 12-22 lb, could be driven with a substantial amount of the soldier’s body weight behind it.⁷⁴⁴ There are several examples indicating that it was successfully used in this way. The Batavian cohorts at Mons Graupius punched at the faces of the Britons with their shields to gain the upper-hand

⁷⁴⁰ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 241, n. 34, 268; James 2010, 50, 52; For examples of various traumas sustained in combat and their physiological effects, see James 2010, 46-47.

⁷⁴¹ Goldsworthy 1996, 210. See also n. 654, above.

⁷⁴² Sword lengths varied over time, but the *gladius* (as opposed to the *spatha*) was much shorter than the average sword length of Rome’s enemies. For Roman sword lengths see Bishop & Coulston 56, 80, 130-31, 155-56., 202. For Celtic swords see Pleiner 61-63. James 2010, 51.

⁷⁴³ Tac. *Agr.* 36, my translation: *igitur ut Batavi miscere ictus, ferire umbonibus, ora fodere*. However, whether this strike with the shield boss was actually done is a point of debate amongst re-enactment groups who have found that reconstructions of the legionary *scutum* make it too big and cumbersome to execute this manoeuvre effectively (while striking with the bottom edge of the *scutum* is found to be much more effective). On the other hand, reconstructions of smaller auxiliary shields make executing a strike with the shield boss more feasible. Vicus (living history society) pers. comm. 26/09/2010. In any case, it is impossible to prove what kind of shield (particularly its shape, weight and proportions) that the Batavians were using in this instance.

⁷⁴⁴ Goldsworthy 1996, 218, also below; cf. Campbell 2002, 56.

(as noted above – Tac. *Agr.* 36). A soldier on the monument at Adamklissi is also seen punching his enemy's face with his shield boss. A relief from the Arch at Orange depicts a soldier using the bottom edge of his shield to punch at the face of his enemy, which can also be seen in Scene 108 on Trajan's column. This was not a new technique, in fact; perhaps the most famous example is that of T. Manilus Torquatus, who won his legendary single combat against a Gaul with the offensive use of his shield. Clearly, the *scutum* had an important role to play in offensive combat movements.⁷⁴⁵ As such, I would suggest it could have been used offensively in any kind of combat scenario.

Because of the shield's size, soldiers would have been relatively protected against most attacks. However, the size and weight of the shield would have made it difficult to manoeuvre quickly, and if the soldier was not ready in a naturally defensive position with his shield in front of him, he likely would have found it difficult to parry an opponent's attack swiftly.⁷⁴⁶ The size and weight of a Roman shield would have made it difficult to move swiftly and powerfully in a fight, yet, the advantage of using the shield offensively cannot be ignored. A punch from the *scutum* would be a difficult manoeuvre to defend against without a similarly sized shield. Indeed during Polybius' time we hear that such shields did not exist amongst Rome's enemies and thus gave her soldiers confidence in battle (Polyb. 15.15.8). For me, this also explains the popularity of depictions of using the shield offensively in the iconographic and literary evidence.

However, because of the aforementioned cumbersome features of the shield, I suggest soldiers were not constantly swinging the shield about. I would argue that they may have either waited to wear their enemies down in a defensive stance, or simply waited for an opening where a strike with the shield would be most advantageous. Such defensive manoeuvres coincide with Vegetius' description above, and required that the shield be held facing the enemy.

⁷⁴⁵ Livy 7.10. For other examples of the offensive use of shields see Livy 30.34.3, Plut. Caes. 16, also Sabin 2000, 8.

⁷⁴⁶ Goldsworthy 1996, 218. This supposed difficulty of manoeuvring the shield quickly may have had an adverse affect in certain contexts, and some possible examples include skirmishing. That skirmishers may have needed to manoeuvre their shield quickly may be implied from the smaller *parma* that Polybius tells us *velites* had (6.21). However, I am not suggesting that *velites* were equipped with the *parma* for this reason alone. There could have been other reasons which we cannot ascertain, such as the possibility that it was simply cheaper to manufacture *parmae*, compared to the costs involved in making the larger and stronger *scutum*.

While this stance is similar to what Connolly has already suggested, Connolly's proposal differs significantly in the body positioning of the legionary. Connolly argues that when facing enemies wielding a long-sword, the Romans could have adopted a crouching stance that would have allowed them to get underneath the guard of the opponent (especially a larger one) and attack the stomach. He bases this finding on the shape of the Roman helmet from the mid-Republic to the early empire, as well as the design of the *gladius*. He claims that the eye-level peaks at the back of the helmets allowed for this position, and that the Mainz-type sword, being more efficient at thrusting than its successor, meant getting in close for a thrusting strike was essential. Over time, he says the Romans adopted a more erect stance, based on the longer neck-guards of later helmets and the better cutting efficiency of the Pompeii-type *gladius*.⁷⁴⁷ Although there is some evidence regarding soldiers getting under the guard of their opponents, this crouch position would have left the legionary's back very much exposed.⁷⁴⁸ Furthermore, there is no evidence that supports Connolly's argument regarding the efficiency of one blade over another. Goldsworthy convincingly argues for an alternative stance, one that is depicted on the Adamklissi metopes and the relief from Mainz:

Normally the *scutum* was held out horizontally in front of a man [i.e. the long side parallel to the body]. The soldier stood behind it in a slight crouch, his left leg towards the enemy, and his right side turned away...the shield covered a man's torso, the top of his legs, and the bottom of his face. The helmet protected the top half of the head, whilst its cheek pieces covered more of the face. The only parts of the body exposed to the enemy were the legs, principally the left, the right arm, and parts of the face.⁷⁴⁹

The anatomical evidence on skeletal remains also supports the likelihood of this suggestion.⁷⁵⁰ Aside from Maiden Castle there are few skeletal remains from the Roman era, yet as Goldsworthy has pointed out, the similarities between our anatomical evidence and those on skeletons from the medieval ages suggests that we can legitimately generalize about combat wounds.⁷⁵¹ That said, it is interesting to note that both in the anatomical and literary evidence a majority of wounds occur on the legs, right arm and head. Suetonius tells of the heroic centurion Cassius Scaeva who fought with a wound in his eye and shoulder. Plutarch notes the centurion Crastinus' famous last deeds before he was killed by a sword through the

⁷⁴⁷ Connolly 1991, 362.

⁷⁴⁸ For getting under guard of an opponent with a long-sword, see: Tac. *Agr.* 36.

⁷⁴⁹ Goldsworthy 1996, 218-19.

⁷⁵⁰ See James 2010, 42.

⁷⁵¹ This is applicable to pitched battle and non-pitched battle, whereas the ostensible chaos and loose-order of a skirmish makes it nearly impossible to generalize about combat wounds in that type of combat.

mouth.⁷⁵² These are the exposed areas of a soldier when he stands in the stance described above, or even when he attacks. A punch with the shield would give the soldier space between himself and his opponent, not only making it harder for his enemy to reach him with a weapon, but also potentially throwing him off balance, giving a Roman soldier a good opportunity to follow with an attack with his sword. If his opponent were able to parry this attack, the Roman's head, right arm, and lower legs would be exposed: the areas where wounds are most common. However, an over-head swing with the sword may have also exposed the Roman's torso. This is corroborated by the noted importance of bearing battle scars.⁷⁵³ These scars could have only existed if they were glancing blows or cuts, rather than stab wounds to the vitals. Roman soldiers were probably aware of the danger of exposing themselves in an attack, and so again, Goldsworthy's suggestion that they stood on the defensive until the right opportunity became available to them is quite sound.⁷⁵⁴ Also, another example of this defensive type of combat can be found in Cassius Dio's description of the battle of Phillipi, as he states that the soldiers 'were at first cautiously looking for a chance to wound others without being wounded themselves' (Dio 47.44).

The *Bellum Africum*, includes a passage where Caesar instructs his men in fighting techniques which emphasize a back-and-forth movement in the battle-line (Caes. *BAfr.* 71). I will return to this back-and-forth dynamic in the following paragraphs, presently it is worth noting that these directives were made necessary due to the swiftness of the light-armed auxiliaries that his legionaries had trouble with during the campaign against Scipio in Africa. This suggests that the legionaries' normal mode of fighting may have been more static than the dynamic technique Caesar teaches them, which in turn further emphasizes this defensive combat technique. It seems most sensible to me to have this technique applied with the shield facing the enemy, and is equally executable in non-pitched battle.

⁷⁵² Suet. *Caes.* 68; Plut. *Caes.* 44; Lee 1996, 201; Skeletons with wounds to their arms, head and legs: Goldsworthy 1996, 220

⁷⁵³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 7.101; Sall. *BJ* 85; Livy, 2.23, 6.20; Dio 54.13, senators bear their battle scars to show their patriotism, cf. Walters 1997, 40; James 2010, 53.

⁷⁵⁴ Goldsworthy 1996, 222. This in turn goes some way to explaining the duration of battles. If the Roman fighting technique was not aggressive, but rather assertive and economical, it is no wonder achieving tactical advances could have taken some time. Indeed, I think it is the fighting technique, combined with lulls that this technique allowed for, which had a major part to play in the duration of pitched battles. *Contra* Quesada-Sanz 2006, 4, who argues it was simply prolonged lulls that caused battles to last for hours. For lulls, see Sabin 2000; Zhmodikov 2000, 72; Goldsworthy 2000, 209; Anders, unpublished Cardiff University MA dissertation, 2007.

We have additional evidence however, that has not been sufficiently assessed by modern scholarship; furthermore, it points to a much more dynamic movement of the soldier, which in turn helps to explain the way in which lulls occurred and how the standards functioned in combat. In Vegetius' passage at 1.11 mentioned above, I would draw particular attention to the instruction to advance and retire appropriately. This movement suggests a much more dynamic approach to combat.

As already noted, the *Bellum Africum*, includes a passage where Caesar also instructs his men in fighting techniques which emphasize a back-and-forth movement in the battle-line (Caes. *BAfr.* 71). Just as in Vegetius' passage above, the notion of advancing and retreating is prevalent.⁷⁵⁵ Tacitus likewise implies that soldiers naturally extended and contracted their lines, and when this was not done in a controlled manner, the legions could end up in quite loose order, which made them vulnerable. Tacitus tells us that due this exactly what happened to the Vitellian legions at the second battle of Bedriacum, because they were without a commander (*Hist.* 3.25). We might liken this type of back-and-forth movement in combat to modern combat sports such as boxing, where fighters are most effective when they are literally 'on their toes'. Being overly static in life-or-death combat may not have always been advantageous against an enemy intent on landing a killing blow. This is certainly what Dio believes to have been one of the causes behind the Varian disaster. He claims that the freedom to advance and retire on behalf of the Germans was one of the factors that gave them the advantage over the legionaries in the Teutoburger Wald, thus implying that the Romans could not do so (Dio 56.21.4). To be sure, giving ground when necessary is arguably what allowed for lulls in combat: both forces could back away from each other to take the breaks that we hear of in our descriptions of pitched battle.⁷⁵⁶

Dynamic movement in combat is evident in two further instances in Vegetius, both of which include a running jump (*Mil.* 1.9, 2.23). Such a manoeuvre would certainly shock an unprepared opponent, but the realities of fighting techniques however and how they

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. Caes. *BAfr.* 71 where troops are instructed 'quot pedes se recipent ab hoste et quemadmodum obversi adversariis et in quantulo spatio resisterent, modo procurrerent modo recederent comminarenturque impetum' and Veg. 1.11 where 'Contra illum palum tamquam contra aduersarium tiro ... recederet adsultaret insiliret'. It should be noted that Caesar's directives were made necessary due to the swiftness of the light-armed auxiliaries that his legionaries had trouble with during the campaign against Scipio in Africa. The passage suggests that these auxiliaries were fighting with a skirmishing-type of fluid combat technique, rather than a defensive/assertive back-and-forth technique controlled by the standards, i.e. the advancing and retreating of the auxiliaries were much more fluid or significant than what the legionaries were used to.

⁷⁵⁶ E.g. Caes. *BG* 2.27; App. *BC* 3.68; Tac. *Hist.* 3.25

compared to Vegetius' descriptions are difficult to determine. Indeed, this technique seems somewhat reckless, and the size of the Roman line infantry shield (whether legionary or auxiliary) would probably hinder such a manoeuvre. Nevertheless, if soldiers were to perform such a dynamic manoeuvre, I would suggest that non-pitched battle or skirmishing combat would be the ideal circumstance in which to execute it. This is because if a soldier were to perform this manoeuvre in pitched battle, they might critically expose themselves to nearby enemies. On the other hand, Caesar describes just such a jumping manoeuvre in a pitched battle (Caes. *BG* 1.52). Even so, it may have simply been an *ad hoc* manoeuvre that consequentially merited a mention in his commentaries. On the other hand, however, I would argue that it is exponentially more viable in skirmishes. In such circumstances, the threat of nearby soldiers within striking-range or within missile-range is probably significantly reduced. Furthermore, our references to this manoeuvre from Vegetius and Sallust do not mention the technique in a pitched battle context.⁷⁵⁷ In any case, the dynamics of this process and the frequency of its use must remain speculative.

There is a passage in the Caesar's Civil War that seemingly contests this idea of dynamic combat technique, and so it must be evaluated closely.

At the Battle of Ilerda in 49 BC the situation is described as follows:

The manner of fighting of Afranius' soldiers was, to come forward briskly against an enemy, and boldly take possession of some post, neither taking care to keep their ranks, nor holding it necessary to fight in a close compact body. If they found themselves hard pushed, they thought it no dishonour to retire and quit their posts ... This affair, moreover, disordered our men, as they were not used to this type of fighting. Seeing several of the enemy come forward, they were themselves however, keeping their ranks, withdrawing neither from the standards nor without serious cause from their ground which they held, thinking they were to be surrounded on their open flank determined a retreat to be required.⁷⁵⁸

This passage elucidates several possible key features of the Roman fighting technique, at least under Caesar. First; that line infantry were accustomed to facing the enemy head on, and second, that they did not give ground beyond their standards without serious cause (*gravi*

⁷⁵⁷ Veg. *Mil.* 1.9, 2.23; Sall. *Hist.* 2.19.

⁷⁵⁸ Caes. *BC* 1.44, my translation: *Genus erat pugnae militum illorum, ut magno impetu primo procurerent, audacter locum caperent, ordines suos non magno opere servarent, rari dispersique pugnarent, si premerentur, pedem referre et loco excedere non turpe existimarent ... haec tum ratio nostros perturbavit insuetos huius generis pugnae; circumiri enim sese ab aperto latere procurrentibus singulis arbitrabantur; ipsi autem suos ordines servare neque ab signis discedere neque sine gravi causa eum locum, quem ceperant, dimitti censuerant oportere.*

causa). To understand how this fits in with the previously discussed technique, we must assess these features more closely.

That legionaries normally faced the enemy head-on is made clear by the fact that Caesar's soldiers decided to retreat when the Pompeian soldiers broke rank and individually threatened the flanks of Caesar's legionaries. This necessity for head-on combat is made quite clear if we understand the legionaries' movements to resemble the back-and-forth movement described by Vegetius and Caesar. Such back-and-forth movement can only be performed if the soldiers move in a relatively straight line, face-on towards enemy, rather than approaching them in a curving motion. I would suggest that this passage confirms this.

This back-and-forth movement does not necessitate giving ground behind the standards, as Caesar points out. This is because the front line of soldiers is both stationed in front of their own standards, and a short distance away from their opponents.⁷⁵⁹ Because of this space between the opposing armies, when using the back-and-forth technique, the only ground that is given, is that ground which is first taken with the initial advance into this space. As mentioned above, this technique is also made necessary by the position of the standards, which determine the pace of general advance and positioning of the entire unit.⁷⁶⁰ They restrict the soldiers from advancing too far beyond them, or retreating behind them.⁷⁶¹ Thus, the position of the standards necessitates that the *antesignani* adhere to a generally established front line, so this back-and-forth motion could have been necessary to ensure that this line was held. For example, if several soldiers advanced too far beyond their standard, they would have to return to hold their line and prevent themselves from being enveloped by the enemy or exposing any significant gaps or dangerous 'kinks' in their line. They would presumably make this return whilst facing the enemy, thus creating the back-and forth movement.

In the passage regarding Ilerda, the assertion that the soldiers would not give ground should be understood to be an emphasis on the fact that soldiers were not used to backing up too far from their established front line. This can be further determined by the fact that the passage says that the soldiers would not abandon their standards. We know that these soldiers are

⁷⁵⁹ The latter point can primarily be determined by the lack of 'othismos' in Roman battle; also cf. Sabin 2000, where his proposed 'default state' necessitates a space between the opposing lines as the default state of battle.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. Caes. *BAfr.* 15; *BG* 2.25 *BG* 4.26, 5.16, 6.37; Sall. *BJ* 51.

⁷⁶¹ Cf. Caes. *BG* 5.34.

antesignani and so therefore regularly advanced before the standards. As such, these men would not retreat beyond the front line (i.e. back behind the standards) without serious cause (*sine gravi causa*). They could nonetheless fight in front of the standards with the back-and-forth technique and comfortably maintain their line.

Thus, this first engagement at Ilerda highlights the disciplined yet dynamic technique with which Roman soldiers may have fought. They held their line by not retreating beyond their standards, but likewise moved back-and-forth in front of the standards when engaging an opponent. Afranius' men broke both of these normal practices: they did not advance in a straight line but outflanked the *antesignani* and also, they retreated beyond what the Caesarians perceived to be their established front line. As such, their technique merited a description in Caesar's Civil War, which as has been shown, not only implies what techniques the Romans were probably used to, but also matches their explicit description elsewhere by both Caesar and Vegetius.

Since Roman soldiers were probably aware of the danger of exposing themselves in an attack, Goldsworthy's assertion that the Roman fighting technique could have been both assertive and economical, again, is quite sound. Indeed, as has been shown, there is ample evidence to support this fundamental approach to deadly hand-to-hand combat. This in turn goes some way to explaining the duration of battles. If the Roman fighting technique was not aggressive, but rather assertive and tentative, it is no wonder achieving tactical advances could have taken some time. However, it should be understood that this approach to combat was applied once combat was underway, after any initial clash of the battle lines took place resulting from the opening charge. This could be applied to non-pitched battle in precisely the same way as it does to pitched battle.

I hope to have shown that this technique is probably the foundation upon which manoeuvres that are more dynamic could have been executed. Freedom of movement, controlled by the standards, would have been necessary to allow soldiers to take full advantage of their enemies.

As regards imperial auxiliaries, because they may have been equipped with a smaller, flat, oval shield, we have grounds for suggesting that their fighting techniques may have differed from those of the legionary. Yet, this was not necessarily the case. Bishop and Coulston

have argued that the shape of the auxiliary shield may have been more suited to open-order fighting such as skirmishing than the legionaries' curved rectangular shield.⁷⁶² As pointed out in the section on tactical roles however, there is little evidence to support this argument. While the larger legionary shield probably lent itself more efficiently to static, defensive-stance fighting, the shape of the auxiliary shield itself is the only evidence that lends itself to the 'open-order' fighting argument.⁷⁶³ In contrast, evidence from Trajan's column suggests that techniques similar to those discussed with the legionary *scutum* above may have been used. Scene 24 shows auxiliaries with their shields held out almost horizontally, with the bottom curve facing the enemy. This is the same offensive use of the shield mentioned above.⁷⁶⁴ Also, because these shields were smaller than the legionary *scutum*, it may be tempting to equate the technique of the oval shield to that of the *parma* suggested above: auxiliaries might move it about freely as they attacked (as per Bishop and Coulston's argument regarding open-order fighting). However, the auxiliary shield was certainly much heavier than the *parma* and so was not necessarily used in the same way.⁷⁶⁵ Rather, because both the auxiliary shield and the legionary shield were designed as 'heavy' shields, their usage techniques were probably quite similar. Thus, returning to the 'open-order' fighting argument, because the auxiliary shield was smaller in size and shape, it offered less protection, and so may have required a less static mode of fighting than the legionary shield allowed for. This in turn may be understood to mean that the auxiliaries preferred a more dynamic and open-order mode of fighting, and thus their shields complimented their fighting style. The reality behind this inference however, must remain speculative.

⁷⁶² Bishop and Coulston 2006, 257.

⁷⁶³ It should be noted that 'open order' here refers to a loose order skirmish-type of combat. So, for example, that Caesar gives the command 'manipulos laxare' (*BG* 2.25) is not the same type of 'open order' fighting that Bishop and Coulston are referring to. Caesar is simply ordering his men to give themselves more room to move, not to skirmish. That the oval 'auxiliary' shield could be used for both fighting in a line and for skirmishing seems a sensible conclusion to come to based on the shape of the shield alone: its size and shape reflects that of the *parma* that *velites* were said to be armed with. Yet, it was also sturdier than the *parma* and so could presumably also be used in the battle line.

⁷⁶⁴ As a result, perhaps one favoured technique by heavy shield-bearing infantry (i.e. legionaries and auxiliaries) was to use the shield to neutralize the enemy before slashing or stabbing with the sword.

⁷⁶⁵ Indeed, modern reconstructions have shown the auxiliary shield to have an awkward balance, being quite bottom heavy, especially compared to the legionary shield. This may be because their sides do not thin out like the legionary shields. Alternatively, this could be due to a mistake in the method of reconstruction. Furthermore, because of this awkward balance, they feel heavier than the legionary shield, and I have found them to be more challenging to manoeuvre than reconstructions of the legionary *scutum*. However, since the latter is larger, the extent of possible movement with it is relatively smaller. Though these reconstructions were presumably constructed with historical accuracy, this does not mean we can derive any sound scholarly conclusions from them.

There is a reference in Tacitus to the differing ‘faces of combat’ when enemies faced Roman *auxilia* or legionaries. At *Ann.* 12.35 he notes that Britons were felled from behind by the swords and *pila* (*gladiis ac pilis*) of the legionaries when facing the *auxilia*, and conversely, they were cut down by the swords and spears (*spathis et hastis*) of the auxiliaries when facing the legionaries. While there is perhaps a strong sense of narrative rhetoric in this passage, it is interesting to note that the implied mode of attack from both groups is the same; the only difference being the weapons that they used. Naturally, there is some difference in the way *gladii* and *spathae* as well as *pila* and *hastae* would be used, but Tacitus is not specific with the details, and so any deductions would be speculative. Yet, from this passage, we may also infer that when engaging the enemy head-on, Roman troops, whether legionary or auxiliary, fought in a defensive manner. Tacitus explicitly states that the Britons fell to the Roman weapons when they were not facing them. Thus, it may be said that when they were facing them, they were less aggressive and/or eager to wound, as discussed above.

All of the combat techniques discussed above should help inform the following section which assesses the ‘face of battle’ between various groups of light infantry.

The Unit's Battle

Because different types of ‘units’ could have engaged in non-pitched battle combat, the following section will assess the ‘face of the unit’s battle’ for several different types of units. These groups will differ insofar as how they are equipped, and in their combat experience.⁷⁶⁶

Lightly armed skirmishers vs. lightly armed skirmishers (velites and the like)

Pre-pitched-battle skirmishing

Our sources do not describe the dynamics of this kind of combat. For skirmishing in Roman armies, we must not only draw on what little our sources say in general about these engagements, but also on our knowledge of equipment as well as comparative examples from related descriptions of combat to suggest a probable ‘face of combat’ here.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁶ For the sounds and environmental factors affecting battle (with examples) see Lee 1996, 201-202; Goldsworthy 1996, 195-197; Daly 2002, 168-171; Koon 2011, 81-82.

⁷⁶⁷ The effect of the environment on each clash requires an individual analysis of each scenario, as varying terrain, time of day, and weather were never the same, and each aspect would have affected the battle

As two groups of infantry skirmishers set out against each other, there was probably little uniformity of movement. As a result, there was also probably no real ‘clash’ of battle lines.⁷⁶⁸ Without a formal command structure, the *velites* may have been spurred on from behind by the centurions and line infantry of the units they were attached to. Naturally, the glory-seekers would lead the ‘cloud’ of *velites* in their varied pace. Also, because of this lack of uniformity, unlike a *pilum* volley from a legion, missiles probably did not rain down *en masse*. Thus, the opportunity to aim at an entire ‘unit’ of light-armed skirmishers was probably very slim. Instead, skirmishing amongst designated skirmishers (such as those skirmishes that often took place at the beginning of battles), was probably a very individualistic battle, rather than a unit battle.⁷⁶⁹ Individual skirmishers would probably be aiming at other individual skirmishers. Within this scenario, there are two possible ‘faces’ of skirmish; the first probably being the more realistic of the two, as will be indicated below. The first might be likened to the initial clash as described in the Illiad, where the masses of soldiers are close, perhaps throwing missiles at each other, but only the bravest fight at close range, moving in and out of the sparse mass.⁷⁷⁰ Very much like lightly armed skirmishers, the warriors in the Illiad are

highly mobile, moving back and forth in and out of the fight, which is mostly conducted by throwing spears, though occasionally a man moves in close enough to deliver a blow with spear or sword.⁷⁷¹

Polybius describes this kind of dynamic at Ilipa, where the light infantry fought in waves,

such of them as were forced from their ground retired on their own heavy infantry and then formed again for attack...⁷⁷²

In combined forces of light infantry where javelin-throwers and slingers might be grouped together, the latter could also provide the area where the former could retire to. Since slingers are not necessarily always armed with a sword, and javelin-throwers such as *velites*

differently. This kind of empirical analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, for some recent suggestions on how the environment might affect the ‘face’ of battle see Koon 2011, 81.

⁷⁶⁸ Not that there necessarily was a ‘clash’ with line infantry, v. Keegan 1976, 69; Du Picq 1987, 111-112.

⁷⁶⁹ *contra* Koon 2011, 81.

⁷⁷⁰ Hom. *Il.* 3.15-16, 22, 3.29-31, 3.32, 3.36, 3.79-80; cf. van Wees, 1997, 677. Space would also be created by the need for room to run and throw missiles, cf. Onas. 17. For the historical realities of Homeric Warfare see van Wees *ibid.* 689-693.

⁷⁷¹ Van Wees 1997, 678, cf. Daly 2002, 178 n. 53.

⁷⁷² Polyb. 11.22.9-10, cf. Koon 2011, 83.

were, it would be the *velites* who may have occasionally moved forward to engage in hand-to-hand combat, if the slingers were not equipped to do so.⁷⁷³

Naturally, there could have been variations on this dynamic in a skirmish. Daly has suggested that ‘Roman skirmishers were divided into small teams, perhaps based upon their *contubernia*.’⁷⁷⁴ He also suggests that the *velites* must have been deployed in great depth, operating in groups of 150, occupying approximately 5.4 m across. Daly does not clarify his reasoning for such numbers beyond the suggestion that these groups of *velites* corresponded to the maniples to which they were attached.⁷⁷⁵ I would counter that assigning such specific numbers to groups of skirmishers is futile, not least because the dynamic nature of skirmishing itself precludes such restrictions.⁷⁷⁶ This will be discussed in further detail below; suffice it to say presently that maintaining such formations whilst engaged in skirmish-combat was probably near-impossible and thus seems highly unlikely.

The possibility exists however, that some skirmishers acted in concert.⁷⁷⁷ A sudden noticeable push forward from such a group could have resulted in a small breakthrough or minor retreat of the opposing force from which they might rally to resume a more even exchange.⁷⁷⁸ This fluctuation in battle intensity could have been the result of several causes, amongst which could have been the need to help a fellow soldier in danger, or to recover a fallen comrade’s body. Again, this is reminiscent of Homeric warfare.⁷⁷⁹ Using the *Illiad* as an example, van Wees argues this could have been done in two ways, either contracting forces to the required spot or by calling those at the back up to the front.⁷⁸⁰ This dynamic of constant fluctuation within the skirmishing swarm mimics the second possible ‘face of skirmish’. This second possibility differs from the first (mentioned above) insofar as there is greater fluidity of movement amongst all the skirmishers involved. So, with the first

⁷⁷³ Although slingstones would presumably not be fired over the heads of any other infantry, as they are effective when fired in a straight line.

⁷⁷⁴ Daly 2002, 175, cf. also Koon, *ibid*.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid*. 174, see also below.

⁷⁷⁶ In any case, we have no evidence for the organization of the *velites*, so we cannot even say whether they were divided into *contubernia* anyway.

⁷⁷⁷ Daly 2002, 175-176 suggests that bunching of skirmishers was inevitable due to psychological stress. The increased effectiveness and confidence of combatants in a group is a certifiable combat reality, v. Marshall 1968, 42; Grossman and Christensen 2008, 149-158.

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Daly *op. cit.* 174-175, who suggests Roman skirmishers could have attacked in a series of waves.

⁷⁷⁹ Van Wees 1997, 683.

⁷⁸⁰ *Op. cit.* 684, cf. Hom. *Il.* 13.89-93, 125-30, 13.489-95, 17.246-61; van Wees also notes that because of this we should not assume that a massing together of troops was necessarily designed to lead collective hand-to-hand combat. This argument highlights the fluidity of movement within this type of mass.

possibility, the opposing masses or ‘clouds’ of skirmishers generally does not move as a whole, though there is minor movement within the cloud (e.g. to avoid missiles) and minor movements in and out (e.g. by the bravest, or by a small group).⁷⁸¹ In this way, the respective clouds ‘face-off’ against each other.⁷⁸² The second possibility suggests that all the skirmishers on both sides are constantly moving in and around each other with no restrictions of space aside from the opposing *acies* of line infantry, and the dangers of turning one’s back to the enemy.⁷⁸³ This is how Thucydides (6.69) describes *ψιλοὶ* at Syracuse in 415 BC:

First there was the fighting between the *λιθοβόλοι*, *σφενδονῆται* and *τοχόται* of both sides in front of the battle-lines, and, as is usual with *ψιλοὶ*, they chased one another about

Polybius’ reference to the *velites*’ wolf’s skin might make more sense in this scenario for the following reason. In the first scenario, the soldiers leading the mass of skirmishers are the ones engaging in combat most often. Given the general lack of grand movements (though allowing for minor fluidity within the ‘cloud’), from their position they probably would have been hard to see from their own battle-line, where their commanders would have been stationed.⁷⁸⁴ With the second scenario, there is no clear front line between the skirmishing masses, with soldiers constantly moving in and out of combat around the battlefield. As such, the most zealous soldiers might have a chance to display their *virtus* within visual range of their commanders. One objection to this possibility is the sheer amount of energy required to sustain such constant and irregular movement for extended periods of time. As with line infantry combat, pre-pitched battle skirmishing may have seen soldiers take breaks, probably by retiring away from the action.⁷⁸⁵ In doing so, they would cause the ‘cloud’ of skirmishers to have a more static area of movement, which in turn again imitates the first possibility of the ‘face of skirmish’. Thus, the most likely reality was probably a mix of the two scenarios, where part of the skirmishing engagement involved soldiers moving freely about each other, but then, as van Wees suggests with Homeric warfare, there would be an area that was more static, to which soldiers could retire. As discussed below in the section on the Psychology of

⁷⁸¹ Thus resembling a battle-line, cf. Livy 31.35; discussed in more detail below.

⁷⁸² Van Wees has also pointed out that this is the mode of combat which modern natives of Papua New Guinea employ in their battles, van Wees 2004, 154 ff.

⁷⁸³ Cf. Livy 31.35, discussed under ‘Infantry and Cavalry versus Infantry and Cavalry’, below.

⁷⁸⁴ Cf. Koon 2011, 81; Alternatively, tribunes may have ridden amongst the skirmishers to encourage them, as per Daly 2002, 73, however, there is no evidence for this. The exception would be a combined *velites*-cavalry force, as at Livy 42.58, where the consul’s brother commands this wing at Callinicus.

⁷⁸⁵ cf. van Wees 1997, 690; though this is possibly less intense combat than fighting hand-to-hand with a short sword, the running and throwing of missiles would also necessitate breaks, if only occasional.

Combat, this arrangement also allows new recruits to participate in battle, without actually having to engage enemies in hand-to-hand combat. They could instead be part of the more static area of a skirmish if they were too fearful of advancing to the front. In this way, pre-pitched battle skirmishing could also act as a training mechanism for new recruits, where they would not necessarily have to be exposed to extreme danger in order to experience battle.⁷⁸⁶

Following Du Picq, Daly has recently argued that with Roman *velites*, having some ‘in reserve’ (i.e. in the more static area of the cloud) makes the most sense, especially considering their administrative deployment. He notes that because the *velites* were assigned to the line infantry maniples (as per Polyb. 6.24), they would be deployed in lines, according to the manipular assignments. So, the *velites* attached to the *hastati* would advance first, followed by those attached to the *principes*, with those assigned to the *triarii* bringing up the rear. Daly goes on to say that in this way, some skirmishers would be kept in reserve, thus being able to sustain a longer barrage of missiles as a whole; not having it expended all at once.⁷⁸⁷

While this suggestion is comparable to the dynamic I have suggested, I would argue that Daly’s reasoning for this dynamic is somewhat problematic, for two reasons. First, the *velites* had no standards that we know of, and because there were no commanders guiding their movements on the battlefield, I find it unlikely that skirmishers would have been able to, or even endeavoured to keep ranks according to their lines of infantry to which they were assigned. Given both the fluidity of combat, and the desire to display their *virtus*, there would probably be little effort to maintain specific ranks.⁷⁸⁸ Secondly, Daly’s suggestions regarding reserving missiles are directly derived from DuPicq. Yet, while Du Picq’s nineteenth-century skirmishers may have entered combat with ammunition preservation in mind, we have already noted the reusability of Roman skirmishing javelins, and so the same theory is not applicable to our period.⁷⁸⁹ Instead, as I have already suggested, maintaining a group of men in the rear of a skirmish would probably be both a matter of safety and of preventing exhaustion, rather than one of sustaining a missile barrage.

⁷⁸⁶ This is discussed in further detail below, under ‘Psychology of Combat’.

⁷⁸⁷ Daly 2002, 174.

⁷⁸⁸ Non-specific ranks, i.e. non-pre-designated ranks may have formed naturally, given the scenario I have suggested.

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. Chapter 6 – Pitched Battle, p. 153, above.

In regards to this zone of the skirmishing cloud, the area did not necessarily have to be completely static, nor did the soldiers in this area have to have their backs turned to their own battle lines. I would suggest that the ‘static’ or perhaps ‘less-active’ part of the cloud had a zone of free movement that could have seen this mass of troops standing with either their backs to their battle line or sideways (i.e. perpendicular) to their own line infantry. Barring a lot of dust being kicked up, being perpendicular to the line infantry allows skirmishers to be within visual range of their commanders as their view of the active part of the cloud would be more or less un-obscured.⁷⁹⁰

Polybius’ discussion on Roman military decorations also supports this dynamic of a mutually active and less-active skirmishing cloud. At 6.39.4 he discusses the how soldiers were rewarded, noting that

This does not take place in the event of their having wounded or stripped any of the enemy in a pitched battle or the storming of a town; but in skirmishes or other occasions of that sort, in which, without there being any positive necessity for them to expose themselves singly to danger, they have done so voluntarily and deliberately.

The key assertion here is probably the fact that rewards were not given in regular combat within pitched battle (ἐν παρατάξει), but rather in skirmishes (ἀκροβολισμοῖς) or the like. This suggests that skirmishes regularly involved soldiers exposing themselves to danger, but not out of necessity. This in turn supports our scenario where the bravest soldiers come out from the cloud to engage in single combat, and likewise where their commanders can witness them doing so.⁷⁹¹ This aptitude for hand-to-hand combat on behalf of the *velites* clarifies their ability, as light troops, to engage in such combat with heavy infantry and even rout them as at the battles of Mount Olympus and Ancyra.⁷⁹² Indeed, as Lendon has pointed out, *velites* were ‘eager to fight hand to hand’, which was ‘a habit Greek light infantry did not

⁷⁹⁰ This would of course necessitate that the gap between the cloud of skirmishers and the main line infantry would have been small enough for the commanders to be able to recognize individuals, if only by their ‘animal skins’ (v. Polyb. 6.21) at the very least.

⁷⁹¹ Cf. Lendon 2005, 187; 2007, 513.

⁷⁹² It should be noted however that in these two battles, the *velites*’ missile attack was probably the key factor that gave them the advantage over the Gallic infantry. The *velites* did this at length until they wore them down to the point of breaking, before engaging them in hand-to-hand combat (Livy 38.25-26).

share.⁷⁹³ This is emphasized by Livy in his description of an engagement between Macedonian and Roman forces in 199 BC,

So the king's cavalry, unaccustomed to a stationary combat, were no match for the Roman horse, and his infantry, trained to skirmish in loose order and unprotected by armour, were at the mercy of the *velites* who with their swords and shields were equally prepared for defence and attack.⁷⁹⁴

Thus, this readiness for hand-to-hand combat probably made the *velites* a unique type of lightly armed infantry within the Hellenistic era.

An important aspect of the skirmish which must be noted is that we have moving targets shooting single missiles at each other, and so it is debatable whether such combat resulted in many casualties. This in turn explains our ancient sources' inexplicitness on skirmishes: they were simply '*digna memoratu proelia inferior*', as Tacitus puts it (*Hist.* 2.24).

This then raises the question of what the point of such skirmishes may have been. Naturally, there were tactical circumstances external to the actual skirmish that could be directly affected, such as the screening of troop deployment (as discussed in Chapter 6). Furthermore, that the action within such skirmishes was not uniform is not to say that there were not any opportunities for co-operation. Indeed, we have only to look to Polybius to understand the main combative purpose of such skirmishes: they provided the opportunity for individual soldiers to show their soldiering qualities,⁷⁹⁵ and leadership was undoubtedly amongst these. As such, a soldier might choose to lead a small group of comrades against one or two opposing skirmishers so that they might concentrate their missile shots and thus increase the probability of a hit.⁷⁹⁶ This would not only result in the increased combat effectiveness of a skirmish, but also provide the leading soldier with the opportunity to prove his leadership qualities to his officers.⁷⁹⁷ This in turn would mean that the point of skirmishes could have possibly been to provide opportunities for new recruits to prove their fighting or

⁷⁹³ Lendon 2005, 179, 198. Lendon argues that being armed with larger shields than their Greek counterparts may have had something to do with this, *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ Livy 31.35; NB. This could possibly be an example of Livy's Roman bias; also discussed below under 'Infantry and Cavalry versus Infantry and Cavalry'.

⁷⁹⁵ Cf. 6.22.3: προσεπικοσμεῖται δὲ καὶ λιπῶ περικεφαλαίῳ: ποτὲ δὲ λυκείαν ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων ἐπιτίθεται, σκέπησ' ἅμα καὶ σημείου χάριν, ἵνα τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ἡγεμόσι προκινδυνεύοντες ἐρρωμένως καὶ μὴ διάδηλοι γίνωνται.

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Dio 49.6 where infantrymen who left themselves isolated against a group of light-infantry find themselves in dire straits. That casualties were a normal aspect of skirmishing cf. Livy 10.27.7.

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. Lendon 2005, 188. The *velites*' possible desire to impress their superiors is discussed in more detail below, under 'The Individual's Battle'.

leadership abilities, in order to move up in the ranks. Alternatively, as briefly mentioned above, and discussed in the section below on the Psychology of Combat, skirmishing encourages fighting in groups without the necessity of one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat, thus possibly providing a type of ‘stress inoculation’ for new recruits.⁷⁹⁸ Certainly, such loose-order skirmishes were not as intense as hand-to-hand fighting, which also meant that they were less fatal than pitched battle combat.⁷⁹⁹ This, in turn, would make skirmishing less psychologically difficult than pitched battle combat, and it may be why the youngest recruits were chosen to perform these actions (cf. Polyb. 6.21).

Small group clashes

When groups of lightly armed infantry clashed outside of pre-pitched battle skirmishing, there is no reason to assume that the dynamics of this combat were vastly different. The main factor that probably had an influence on how the skirmish transpired was the terrain in which it took place. A wide, open area lacking features that would hem in or restrict troop movement might allow for very fluid combat, with relatively few casualties. Alternatively, wooded area might restrict missile combat and prevent any effective means of hand-to-hand combat.⁸⁰⁰ Hills would add to the velocity of missiles thrown downhill, and take from the impetus of missiles thrown uphill. Plutarch alludes to nature of a missile’s impetus thrown by a skilled soldier in a description of oratory technique saying,

terse and pithy speakers and those who can pack much sense into a short speech are more admired ... Plato, in fact, commends such pithy men, declaring that they are like skillful ἄκοντιστᾶς, for what they say is crisp, solid, and compact.⁸⁰¹

Hand-to-hand combat on a hillside likewise would have given the advantage to the combatant on higher ground. We can apply any of these factors to the above analysis of skirmishing combat to help clarify the face of skirmishes.

One particular skirmish in 217 BC during the Second Punic War, may also help to clarify the face of skirmishing in a clash between small forces. *Velites* under Fabius engaged

⁷⁹⁸ See ‘The Psychological Response to Fear’, below.

⁷⁹⁹ cf. Livy 10.27.7; Caes. *BC* 3.53.

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. Plut. *Cam.* 29.4 where a skirmish between Gauls and Romans in a ruined city results in only a few casualties, partially due to the lack of space for fighting.

⁸⁰¹ Plut. *de garr.* 17. It should also be noted that this refers to any kind of missiles, and that groups of lightly armed troops dispatched for tactical scenarios outside of pitched battle were often a mix of archers, slingers and other lightly armed men (possibly such as *velites*), cf. Caes. *BG* 2.10, 2.19,

Carthaginian light-armed troops in a narrow gorge of a pass. Polybius tells us that on this occasion, Hannibal devised a tactic that involved lighting faggots tied to the heads of oxen at night, and sending them amongst the Roman light-armed. What is important to note in this passage is the fact that Polybius tells us that the oxen fell in amongst the *velites* (ἀὐτοῖς ἐμπιπτόντων). This suggests that the Roman light troops were in a loose enough formation for the oxen to run amongst them. Whether they had advanced in a loose formation or whether they opened their ranks from a tight formation to let the oxen through is impossible to say. Lendon suggests that in general, they seem to have fought as an ‘irregular swarm’.⁸⁰² And indeed, we do hear of another instance where *velites* fight in loose order in broken terrain. During the Third Macedonian War, Roman light troops were dispatched against Macedonian light troops in a narrow pass. Livy describes the situation as follows:

As soon as they met, therefore, they instantly threw their javelins, and many wounds were inflicted and received on both sides in a reckless (*temerarius*) kind of conflict; but few of either party were killed ... the summit of the mountain was wedged into a ridge so narrow, as scarcely to allow space for three ranks of infantry in front. Thus, while but few were fighting, the greater part, especially those that were heavily armed, stood mere spectators of the fight. The light troops even ran through the hollows of the hill, and attacked the flanks of the light-armed troops of the enemy; and alike through even and uneven places, were able to fight. That day, greater numbers were wounded than killed, and night put a stop to the dispute.⁸⁰³

The terrain in this example necessarily allowed for very loose and broken formations amongst the light infantry. That few soldiers were killed in this engagement (which actually lasted two days) highlights the ‘low-intensity’ nature of this combat. And indeed, because of this, it is understandable that the engagement was quite protracted, lasting two days, stopping only due to nightfall.

⁸⁰² Lendon 2005, 179 (with illustration).

⁸⁰³ Livy 44.4.2-5, my translation: *congressi igitur extemplo tela coniecerunt; multa utrimque volnera temerario incursu et accepta et inflata; pauci utriusque partis ceciderunt. ... iugum montis in angustum dorsum cuneatum vix ternis ordinibus armorum in fronte patuit. itaque paucis pugnantibus cetera multitudo, praecipue qui gravium armorum erant, spectatores pugnae stabant; levis armatura etiam per anfractus iugi procurrere et ab lateribus cum levi armatura conserere per iniqua atque aequa loca pugnam poterat. pluribus ea die volneratis quam interfectis proelium nocte diremptum est.*

Many of our examples of clashes between small groups take place between light infantry and cavalry deployed together against similar forces.⁸⁰⁴ So, this type of combat will be discussed in its respective section, below.

Siege Warfare

There is very little discussion in our sources about the use of lightly armed skirmishers in sieges.⁸⁰⁵ We know that lightly armed slingers and archers were key soldiers in siege warfare, and we know that the use of missiles and arrows in particular seems to have been common, as the proverbial anecdote of the centurion Scaeva's severely pierced shield reminds us.⁸⁰⁶ Arrows were probably fired by contingents of auxiliary archers, who, as we know from the vocabulary assessment, were probably not very heavily armed. Slingers were also used in siege warfare, and another example from Caesar describes how the sling bullets could be heated to set thatch roofs on fire.⁸⁰⁷ These soldiers were also lightly armed. Nevertheless, an assessment of missile combat during sieges is perhaps more suitable for a fuller discussion dedicated to siege warfare. Furthermore, since we have no evidence for hand-to-hand clashes between lightly armed infantry during sieges, we cannot add to the present discussion.

Line Infantry versus Line Infantry

Non-pitched battle combat and skirmishes between corps of line infantry occur in the form of small group clashes and ambushes. Line infantry also face off in this type of combat when they are combined with cavalry, but this will be assessed in its own section, below.

Small group clashes

As with much of our evidence, we have few descriptions of small group clashes between line infantry. Furthermore, these descriptions do not necessarily describe specific fighting technique. Two descriptions in the sources offer the most useful details for this type of

⁸⁰⁴ See 'Pitched Battle: Use with Cavalry' in Chapter 6.

⁸⁰⁵ Nor is there much about the manner in which Romans sacked cities in general, see Ziolkowski 1993, 69 *et passim*.

⁸⁰⁶ Caes. *BC* 3.53; cf. *ibid.* 3.50, App. *Pun.* 19.128.

⁸⁰⁷ Setting roofs on fire: *BG* 5.43; other examples of slingers used in sieges: e.g. Sall. *Iug.* 57; Caes. *BG* 1.27, 2.7, 7.81, 8.40; *BC* 3.46; *BHisp.* 13, 18; Jos. *BJ* 4.12; Richmond 1982, pl. 16; cf. also Greep 1987, 192-93; Wheeler 1951, 48-51; Hogg 1975, 51.

combat; both of them come from Caesar, with some additional evidence from Plutarch.⁸⁰⁸ These are our only extended descriptions of non-pitched battle and skirmishing combat amongst line infantry that can provide evidence for the present investigation. Because of this, we cannot take them as being exemplary of such combat in general, but rather as case studies of particular instances of non-pitched battle and skirmishes between line infantry.

The Battle of Illerda in 49 BC was actually a series of non-pitched engagements that began with the attempt to take a hill by Caesarian *antesignani*, which then escalated into a protracted conflict.⁸⁰⁹

The first instance of non-pitched battle combat occurs at the aforementioned prominence. There, one legion's *antesignani* engaged several Pompeian cohorts for control of the hill (Caes. *BC* 1.43). The Caesarians were beaten back, partially because they were second to reach the hill, but also because of the fighting technique employed by their rivals. This unconventional technique is discussed above, but what is important for the present discussion is the implication that the Caesarians had intended to use the standard pitched battle fighting technique in this small group within a non-pitched battle conflict.⁸¹⁰ This is a marked contrast to the nature of light infantry skirmishing, discussed above. One reason for this contrast might include the fact that line infantry expected to face line infantry in standard pitched battle fighting technique, even when facing off in smaller numbers.⁸¹¹ So, when Caesarian troops were faced with a skirmishing technique from other line infantry, they were unprepared to face it.

The engagement that followed this first reverse for the *antesignani* resembled a pitched battle, though it came about from a failed rout. Caesar tells us that after his *antesignani* had fallen back, his ninth legion chased the victorious Pompeians all the way back to Illerda. In doing so, they put themselves in a topographical disadvantage and ended up downhill from the Pompeians who had turned about. We learn that this hill was steep on both sides, but wide enough to allow three cohorts to form up next to each other. This battle continued for

⁸⁰⁸ These are the descriptions of the Battle of Illerda (Caes. *BC* 1.43-1.46) and Dyrrachium (Caes. *BC* 3.51-53, Plut. *Pomp.* 65).

⁸⁰⁹ Another example of non-pitched battle combat involving the taking of a hill can be found at Sall. *Iug.* 58. However, this example does not describe the details of this engagement, beyond a basic exchange of missiles and the '*maxima vi*' of the Romans.

⁸¹⁰ See 'Combat Technique - *Infantry equipped with cuirasses and heavy shields*', above.

⁸¹¹ Except perhaps when they were combined with cavalry, cf. Caes. *BC* 3.75.

five hours with both sides reinforcing their wounded and tired (Caes. *BC* 1.45). The dynamics of this stage of combat are not described by Caesar, aside from a reference to the effectiveness of the enemy's missiles, being thrown down on his soldiers.⁸¹² It is important to note that the *pilum* was the primary missile weapon of legionaries in the Roman army. Their penetrating power was provided by their weighting and their pyramidal bodkin-head, rather than velocity, meaning they did not have to be thrown with great force to ensure a deadly blow.⁸¹³ Accurate, and with good penetrating power, a legionary could unleash an accurate, penetrating attack without exposing himself to the enemy's weapon, like he would if he were attacking with a *gladius*. This is especially true for the javelins that bent on impact: a common consequence of their design that rendered them incapable of reuse.⁸¹⁴ Other missile weapons, such as arrows, were unlikely to penetrate both the shield and armour of heavier troops, unless at close range.⁸¹⁵ A *pilum*, on the other hand, even if it hit a shield rather than a soldier, its long shafted design was meant to not only penetrate an enemy shield, but also, with its own impetus be carried through the piercing and at the body of the bearer of the shield.⁸¹⁶ Even if the attacked soldier was left unscathed, the narrow shaft would often cause it to bend, as mentioned above, making the shield inordinately heavy, awkward, and generally useless, causing the unlucky soldier to toss aside an important part of his protective armament.⁸¹⁷

Returning to the engagement at Ilerda, given that the soldiers were hemmed in by the steep terrain, it is probably unlikely that loose-order or skirmish-like combat took place. This suggestion may be supported by the fact that Caesar does not emphasize the 'Lusitanian' fighting technique that the Pompeians used earlier for this stage of the battle. Thus, this phase certainly seems to resemble typically practiced line infantry combat as described by Vegetius and Caesar in the section on combat techniques, above. This emphasizes my

⁸¹² Cf. Veg. 3.14

⁸¹³ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 51-52: "Modern experiments with reconstruction weapons have shown the bodkin head capable of piercing 30mm of pine wood, or 20mm of ply, when thrown from a distance of 5 m."

⁸¹⁴ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 50.

⁸¹⁵ cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 185.

⁸¹⁶ Bishop & Coulston 2006, 51-52; modern experiments have proven this capability.

⁸¹⁷ On javelin design see Bishop & Coulston 2006, 50-53. On tossing away shields with a javelin stuck in them cf. Livy 7.23.9, 38.22.9; *BG* 1.25; Plut. Mar. 25.2-3. Also, wresting a stuck javelin out of a shield is probably difficult and time-consuming. In my personal experience, javelins, darts or arrows that have penetrated plywood can occasionally take several minutes and concentrated strength and effort to pull free (even without regard to whether or not it would come out damaged). This is likely not the sort of action a soldier on the front lines would want to be concerned with during combat.

definition of non-pitched battle combat, given above, where legionaries use pitched battle modes of fighting in non-pitched battle.⁸¹⁸

After all the missiles of the enemy were spent, the Caesarians managed to overthrow them and chase them back to Ilerda (*BC* 1.46). Casualty figures are reported as 200 dead and 600 wounded. This seems to be a relatively low number of dead, especially considering the large numbers involved.⁸¹⁹ I would argue that this confirms the typical, defensive type of combat taking place on the irregular terrain before Ilerda. The defensive stance with a cautious back-and-forth movement is probably the type of technique that was used.

We should not assume however, that this was always the mode of fighting between line infantry. Plutarch tells us that skirmishing was frequent between Caesar and Pompey's respective defences at Dyrrhachium (*Plut. Pomp.* 65). Caesar's *Bellum Civile* gives us some insight into the nature of these actions, of which we are told that there were six in total.⁸²⁰ In one instance the commanders arranged sallies that outnumbered the garrisons targeted for attack. Volcatius Tullus is said to have sustained the charge of an entire Pompeian legion with just three cohorts (*BC* 3.52). Conversely, two legions under P. Sulla managed to repulse (*repellere*) some Pompeian soldiers (who had been harassing a Caesarian cohort on garrison duty) by their sudden appearance (*BC* 3.51), but this seems to have taken a long time, the chase being protracted until nightfall. Furthermore, once this chase stopped, Pompey is said to have entrenched his forces out of the reach of Caesar's engines (*BC* 3.51). This then, suggest that the chase took place within range of the defences near Dyrrhachium (i.e. within a set area), thus making it more of a one-sided skirmish, rather than for example, a rout (where the chase may have continued far away from the place of initial engagement). We should think of it as a one-sided skirmish because it seems that the troops under Sulla had the advantage in the skirmish as Pompey's are clearly said to have fled from them. Furthermore,

⁸¹⁸ A possible supporting example of legionaries using pitched battle combat techniques in a non-pitched battle scenario is implied by Tacitus in his description of a Roman attack on Julius Civilis' camp during the Batavian revolt at *Hist.* 4.33. In this example, the legionaries lose their standards in the entrenchments of the camp. The result of losing their standards is that they are thrown into confusion (particularly when their flank is attacked), thus implying that they had advanced in good order (as they would in pitched battle). Without standards, they had no way of being able to reform properly, adding to the success of the flank attack. Thus, in this non-pitched battle scenario, we might surmise that the legionaries had intended to use the pitched battle mode of combat, but the circumstances unexpectedly prevented them from doing so.

⁸¹⁹ NB. Caesar tells us that the original legion that had been deployed was supported by replacements, *BC* 1.45.

⁸²⁰ It must be noted here that these are not battles, but non-pitched engagements between the respective forces. Because Caesar tells us there were six of these engagements in one day (*BC* 3.53) these cannot be understood to be pitched battles.

we should not understand this action to have resembled a rout, because as such, there probably would have been a different outcome. Either Pompey's forces would have been forced to return to their extant entrenchments, or they would have been chased away from safety and from the battleground, and, as is the case with most routs, many of the soldiers would have been killed.⁸²¹ Thus, the description clearly suggests to me that this action was probably more of a very fluid or loose-order skirmish that moved freely, as suggested by Plutarch's reference to skirmishing (Plut. *Pomp.* 65). Furthermore, because it was probably a skirmish, and because it took place within range of engines and entrenchments, missiles were a prominent part of the face of combat at Dyrrhachium. Indeed, Caesar tell us that all of his soldiers within his defences were wounded by missiles, and that around 30,000 arrows were shot into the fort (*BC* 3.53). The circumstance of this skirmish also made it more deadly than skirmishing normally seems to have been. Because it was done within range of the engines and entrenchments, the exposed (as opposed to protected by a tighter order) skirmishing soldiers suffered high casualty rates.⁸²²

Ambushes

Once again, we have few examples where we are given the details of the 'face of combat' in ambushes. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 6, ambushes often involved light infantry as well as cavalry. Because of this, there are few examples of ambushes that involved only line infantry on both sides. Furthermore, as mentioned above, due to the numerous factors that affect an ambush, we cannot generalize on the 'face of combat'. So, instead, this section will evaluate three well-known ambushes, involving large forces of line infantry. These are the Battle of Trasimene, the ambush of Cotta and Sabinus, and the Varian Disaster.

Polybius tells us that many of the Romans at Trasimene stood no fighting chance against the sudden mass attack from the Carthaginians (3.84). The Romans' utter confusion and inability to see or form up is prevalent in both Polybius' and Livy's accounts and this is an important factor in this face of ambush. Not only were the Romans completely surprised and unable to move, but not being able to see due to the heavy fog meant that any usual form of combat

⁸²¹ As Gabriel and Metz have pointed out, in ancient battles from the Sumerians to Rome, men in formation made difficult targets, and as long as they held their ground, it was difficult for any significant killing to occur. Gabriel & Metz 1991, 84.

⁸²² Caes. *BC* 3.53; Cf. the casualty rates of the non-pitched battle before Jotapata, discussed below.

was unable to take place.⁸²³ This face of combat was extremely chaotic and more a one-sided slaughter than any kind of combat. Indeed, if we are to accept Livy's claim that the battle took about three hours, it would seem that dozens of men died on average every minute.⁸²⁴ However, we are told some of the Romans were able to engage successfully in the fighting. There is one phrase in Polybius that we might find particularly relevant to this fact. In his description of the 6,000 soldiers who managed to fight successfully, he notes that they pushed through enemy lines up to the crest of the hill.⁸²⁵ The expression used to denote this push is ὀρεγόμενοι, which is the present plural participle nominative masculine form of the verb ὀρέγω. This verb may be translated as to reach or stretch out, rather than to push. This is important because we should not assume that these 6,000 Romans were literally pushing against the Carthaginians in this instance of combat.⁸²⁶ Literally trying to push an enemy uphill seems highly unlikely and quite suicidal. Rather, they probably forced the Carthaginians to back away and to the sides, thus creating a gap through which they could move forward. This would have had to have been done with consistent forward movement and the disciplined holding of ground gained. Indeed, this is quite accurately expressed by Polybius in the phrase 'ἀεὶ δὲ τοῦ πρόσθεν ὀρεγόμενοι προῆγον,' or 'they carried forward always reaching for the space before them'. I would suggest that such a disciplined technique may have been reminiscent of the combat technique described in the relevant section above: soldiers would have advanced in a defensive combat position, but with quite dynamic movements.

The face of combat at Trasimene differs quite significantly from our next example. The ambush of Caesar's legates Sabinus and Cotta is reported to have been a much more controlled affair, and while the Romans likewise suffered a defeat, Caesar's description does not reflect the wanton slaughter at Trasimene (BG 5.33-35). In contrast, Caesar's description of the fighting reflects the back-and-forth movement discussed above. He describes the Romans advancing against the Gauls and then being pursued by them when returning to their

⁸²³ Cf. esp. Livy 22.5.7.

⁸²⁴ Livy purports that 15,000 Romans were killed in the battle (citing Fabius Pictor), which would mean approximately 5,000 deaths per hour on average, or about one century (80 men) per minute.

⁸²⁵ 3.84.12 ἀεὶ δὲ τοῦ πρόσθεν ὀρεγόμενοι προῆγον, πεπεισμένοι συμπεσεῖσθαί τισιν, ἕως ἔλαθον ἐκπεσόντες πρός τοὺς υπερδεξιούς τοπούς. γενόμενοι δ' ἐπὶ τῶν ἄκρων...

⁸²⁶ This may be considered an instance of the standard set of metaphors used to describe battle, v. nn. 33, 34, above.

standards.⁸²⁷ Despite this disciplined technique, it seems that being surrounded in this ambush had exposed a deadly flaw in this method of combat. This is because when the Romans advanced, they were susceptible to missile fire on their flanks (BG 5.35). Indeed, Caesar claims that his men were quite successful in killing the Gauls when they could engage them, and this in turn might point to the defensive aspect of the combat technique described above. What this ambush had in common with Trasimene, was the envelopment which led to defeat.

Envelopment was also a deciding factor in our final example at the Teutoburger Wald (Dio 56.19-21). When Dio explicitly discusses the nature of the combat experienced during the four-day massacre, he claims that there were several factors that put the Romans at a disadvantage. As mentioned in the section on combat techniques, one of these factors was the lack of space required to move as freely as they would have liked. Another factor was their inability to use their weapons properly, due in part to the poor weather. Their shields are specifically mentioned amongst javelins and bows (56.21.3-4). All of the instances of line infantry combat above have alluded to the importance of being able to employ a defensive stance when engaging in combat. If the Roman shields were as ineffective as Dio claims, it is no wonder that the Romans were wiped out. Encirclement was of course still a key factor leading to the defeat, especially as the number of Germans able to envelope the Romans had increased by the fourth day (56.21.4). Also, the topography promoted this encirclement and it should be counted alongside the weather as being key factors in the defeat.

So while we cannot generalize about the face of ambush, we might surmise that envelopment in an ambush can prevent line infantry from successfully employing the combat technique discussed above. Furthermore, I would argue that the above evidence suggests that if Romans lost the initiative in a battle, they would be exponentially more vulnerable. This is primarily due to form of combat I have argued for above. If they lost the initiative and were consequentially unable to establish a ‘front line’ with their standards, they would probably have found it much more difficult to engage in the defensive back-and-forth technique, since there was no front line that could guide and control this motion. Without an established

⁸²⁷ BG 5.34.3-4 *quam in partem Romani impetumfecerint, cedant (levitate armorum et cotidiana exercitatione nihil eis noceri posse), rursus se adsigna recipientes insequantur.*

‘front line’ from which to advance and retreat, they could either find themselves bunching in their units, or exposing themselves to encirclement, as we have seen above.

Siege Warfare

Sallies during sieges can fall under the definition of non-pitched battle or skirmishing, given above. However, our sources often do not describe the details of their dynamics. Josephus’ description of the siege of Jotapata includes a reference to non-pitched battle combat where desperate Jews attacked the Romans attempting to take the city walls (Jos. *BJ* 3.151). The dynamics of this combat may be partially clarified through the description of their casualties. Josephus tells us that while this action lasted most of the day and stopped only at dusk, only thirteen Romans died, while seventeen perished on the Jewish side. Yet, Josephus adds that six hundred Jews were wounded. Thus, it seems to me that this action probably involved cautious movements. It may have included formations that resembled battle-lines and techniques that were more tentative than loose-order combat (i.e. it was non-pitched battle combat, rather than a skirmish). We might corroborate this claim with the evidence of casualty rates from the skirmish before Dyrrhachium, discussed above. We are told that 2000 Pompeians were killed compared to 20 Caesarians (Caes. *BC* 3.53). Although the casualty figures are probably inaccurate, we should accept that Pompey’s losses were much greater than Caesar’s. Thus in comparing these casualty rates to those from the engagement before Jotapata, a reasonable conclusion would be that the forces at Jotapata were in much better defensive positions than they were at Dyrrhachium. I do not wish to suggest, however, that skirmishing was always more deadly than non-pitched battle combat (or line infantry combat). Rather, I wish to emphasize that the skirmish before Dyrrhachium saw more fatalities than the non-pitched battle combat before Jotapata precisely because it was a skirmish that took place within range of siege engines and the entrenchments (as suggested above). So, because skirmishing in general left the combatant more exposed than non-pitched battle combat, skirmishing before the walls of camps where more missiles would have been exchanged than in most other skirmishes (with extra missiles being shot from men on the walls and engines in the camps), meant that this example of skirmishing was more deadly than skirmishing in other circumstances. Thus, because the engagement before Jotapata also took place before the walls, the conclusion, based on the casualty rates, should be that it was probably a non-pitched battle engagement, where the combatants would be in

more defensive positions than they would be in a skirmish. Furthermore, because neither side was routed at Jotapata, but rather combat was stopped due to nightfall, there was little opportunity for widespread slaughter; the high number of wounded were probably victims of superficial cuts from slashing blows, rather than deadly sword-thrusts.⁸²⁸

Once in a city, it would have been very difficult for Roman legionaries to form up in regular battle lines, and given the infrastructural destruction inherent in most sieges, the ground probably would not have allowed for any kind of formations.⁸²⁹ Likewise, because of the dissimilar circumstances within each siege, the face of such non-pitched battle probably varied greatly. Both Appian and Josephus describe groups of Romans advancing through the streets of Carthage and Jerusalem respectively, but the specifics of how the killing occurred do not go beyond references to stabbing.⁸³⁰ Yet, Appian's description of the fall of Carthage mentions centurions leading their cohorts amongst blasts of the trumpets (App. *Pun.* 129). Indeed, as Ziolkowski has pointed out, there was a diversity of practices once Romans breached city walls, which was based on several varying factors such as the soldiers' mood and the size of the city.⁸³¹

Overall then, one important conclusion we may come to regarding line infantry in various types of non-pitched battle combat is that it seems that they may have had a tendency to fight with similar formation, techniques and command to the ones used in pitched battle, if the relative factors allowed them to do so.

Lightly Armed infantry versus Line Infantry

Instances of lightly armed infantry (such as *velites*) facing more heavily equipped infantry such as line infantry, are relatively rare in our sources. Nevertheless, we have a few cases where this scenario occurs in our sources. Due to the scarcity of these cases, we should not necessarily take them to be exemplary of this kind of combat, and furthermore, we cannot assume that such combat was at all common.

⁸²⁸ This tendency to slashing blows in combat is discussed further below under the Psychology of Combat.

⁸²⁹ Ziolkowski has pointed out that storming and plundering were the common actions following a breach into the city, Ziolkowski 1993, 74 ff. As pointed out in n. 689 under the definition for siege warfare earlier in this chapter, the 'face of urban warfare' is too large a topic to be considered sensibly in this thesis.

⁸³⁰ Cf. e.g. App. *Pun.* 128 and Jos. *BJ* 6.401ff.

⁸³¹ Ziolkowski 1993, 89-90; cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 259 who argues that there was little control over men storming a city.

During the Roman siege of Capua, Polybius recounts how Hannibal attacked the camp of Appius Claudius (9.3). Here, he notes that the line infantry (τῶν δὲ πεζῶν κατὰ σπείρας) attacked the palisades of the camp. The Romans responded by sending out the light infantry (εὐζώνοις) to harass them with missiles (βελῶν). These in turn, were not very effective against the heavy Carthaginian shields. The Roman attack however, certainly prevented any further advance from the line infantry.

The high number of missiles that a corps of *velites* were able to launch (discussed above in Chapter 6), would have naturally made advance quite difficult for line infantry. Indeed, a formation like the *testudo* would be necessary to advance against such an assault of missiles.⁸³² Even so, advancing in a safe formation such as that would be very slow, and in open terrain, it would be vulnerable to out-flanking or attack from the rear by cavalry. Outflanking slow or fixed line infantry and harassing them with missiles is exactly how Scipio employed his *velites* at the Battle of Ilipa.⁸³³ Livy tells us that while the Carthaginian flanks were being held by the Roman line infantry, Hasdrubal's men were harassed by wheeling cavalry and skirmishers (Livy 28.14.20).

This missile storm was seen to be particularly effective at the successive battles of Mount Olympus and Ancyra.⁸³⁴ There, the javelins of the *velites*, aided by the missiles of auxiliary archers and slingers wore down the entire army of Galatian Gauls, to the point where, when they rushed the *velites* in an attempt to avoid the missiles, they were easily cut down.⁸³⁵ In the first battle, Livy specifically notes that the *velites* fought with their *gladii*, adding *quodsi pede collato pugnandum est, translatis in laevam hastis stringit gladium* (38.21.13). This hand-to-hand contest was probably a loose-order fight, as the *velites* would not have been formed up in a tight formation to begin with. Thus, the combat was probably more dynamic and fluid than a line infantry contest.

Because the Roman *velites* retired into the ranks of the line infantry, they may have also somehow been involved in a line infantry clash within a pitched battle, if only as missile-

⁸³² E.g. see Livy 31.39.14-15.

⁸³³ This tactic is also encouraged by Onasander, 19.2.

⁸³⁴ Livy 38.21 and 38.25-26 respectively.

⁸³⁵ NB. Briscoe claims that Livy exaggerates the casualties in this battle, v. Briscoe 2009, 473.

throwers. A fragment from Tyrtaeus (frag. 11.35-8) provides us with an example of how such light infantry would have engaged the enemy within a line infantry formation:

You light armed, squatting under a shield here and there, must throw great rocks and hurl smooth javelins while you stand close by the heavy-armed.

This dynamic is also depicted in Homeric and Archaic art, and so like their line infantry counterparts, it may be that the *velites* would sometimes have engaged in combat cautiously.⁸³⁶ Of course, they would have done so with missiles, while their more heavily armed companions would do so in hand-to-hand combat.

Dio gives us a glimpse of the face of line infantry versus light infantry combat in the post-*velites* era. During the Sicilian revolt of the first century BC, he tells of Sextus Pompeius' light infantry attacking the line infantry under Octavian's general Cornificius during the latter's retreat to Mylae,

Both cavalry and ψιλοὶ attacked him [Cornificius] from a distance, not daring to come to close quarters, and proved exceedingly troublesome to him; for they would not only attack whenever opportunity offered but would also quickly retreat again, whereas his men, being heavy-armed, could not pursue them in any case owing to the weight of their armour, and moreover were endeavouring to protect the unarmed men who had been saved from the fleet. Consequently, they were suffering many injuries and could inflict none in return; for, in case they made a rush upon any of them, they would put them to flight, to be sure, but being unable to carry their pursuit to the end, they would find themselves in a worse plight during their retreat, since by their sortie they would become isolated.⁸³⁷

This reinforces the other suggestions put forth by our sources that light infantry could secure an advantage over more heavily armed line infantry by attacking from afar. Also, there may have been some additional advantage for the ψιλοὶ here because of the strategic circumstances affecting the line infantry. The Caesarians were retreating, and therefore may have been less organized and/or disciplined in such circumstances. This, in turn, may have caused them to expose themselves unnecessarily to the skirmishing attacks of the ψιλοὶ, which is something they may not have done had they been formed up in their usual ranks. As in the section on ambushes for line infantry, above, the lack of a controlled front line, determined by the standards, led to a lack of cohesion or discipline in the ranks.

⁸³⁶ Homeric and Archaic art: van Wees, 2004, 173.

⁸³⁷ Dio 49.6 translation: Cary, Loeb 1927.

Dio (49.7) goes on to describe the type of wounds that would have been suffered by the line infantry in this situation saying

Indeed the wounded were far more numerous than those who died; for since they were being hit by stones (λίθοις) and javelins (ἀκοντίοις) thrown from a distance and sustained no blows dealt in hand-to-hand fighting, they received their wounds in many parts of their bodies, and not always in a vital spot.⁸³⁸

This kind of sustained missile attack from light infantry on line infantry could allow the former to have the advantage in hand-to-hand combat, such as at the battles of Mount Olympus and Ancyra.

Caesar's night ambush against the Belgae before the ensuing pitched battle against them has been already been mentioned in preceding chapters.⁸³⁹ The fact that slingers and archers were deployed against the infantry of the Belgae at night presents the practical dilemma of how missiles were successfully used in poor visual conditions. While the possibilities are purely speculative, they may aid in revealing various potentialities of such combat. Given that the ambush was on a bridge, the possibility exists that it was in a clearing and subject to moonlight.⁸⁴⁰ With this light and possibly its reflection off the water, the silhouettes of the Belgic infantry could have been visible. Furthermore, if they were bunched together, being on or near the bridge, the Roman missile troops would have had a large, possibly silhouetted target area at which to aim, thus eliminating the need to see very much of the target at all. This would have been a devastating attack for the Belgae, as they would not have been able to see the arrows in mid-flight, causing confusion or even panic.⁸⁴¹ Because of this, in turn, the light infantry could have used the cover of darkness to camouflage their location (if only partially due to the moonlight), possibly making it difficult to know where the missiles were coming from. Overall, the situation must have been quite chaotic for the Belgic infantry, and so it is no wonder that Dio tells us that the Roman troops killed many of them, taking them by surprise. If we are to accept such a speculative suggestion as a good possibility in this kind

⁸³⁸ It is impossible to say whether the stones (λίθοις) were being thrown by slingers or whether they were being thrown by hand (cf. λιθοβόλοι in Chapter 3, above, where this term is almost never used for slingers). If these were slingers however, this would coincide with the ostensible Roman practice of placing σφενδοθήτης alongside ἀκοντιστής (see σφενδοθήτης in Chapter 3, above).

⁸³⁹ See Chapter 3, 'ψιλοί', and Chapter 6 'Ambush and Reconnaissance'; Caes. *BG* 2.10; Dio 39.1.4

⁸⁴⁰ Other sources of light could have been fire-lit missiles, but this is less likely for several reasons: not only were the targets on what may have been a wooden bridge, but using such missiles would have given the archers' positions away. As we shall see, the element of surprise here was vital to this ambush, especially given the disproportionate strengths of missile troops versus line infantry.

⁸⁴¹ Sling-stones were always invisible in flight, v. Onas. 19.3.

of tactical circumstance, we may conclude that missile troops were ideal for laying night-time ambushes against line infantry, especially against an enemy in a concentrated formation.

While we do not have specific casualty figures for Roman light infantry, it is interesting to note that in Greek warfare, combat for the light-armed troops was more dangerous than it was for hoplites. The lethality of combat for peltasts is demonstrated in Xenophon's *Anabasis* where 50 per cent of the light troops died on the campaign as opposed to only 25 per cent of the hoplites.⁸⁴² Best also notes that this was probably because of the type of combat which the peltasts were involved in, since in their role as shock troops they 'had to bear the brunt of the fighting.'⁸⁴³ While this was not a common feature of combat for Roman light infantry, we cannot speculate because we do not have evidence of general casualty figures for light infantry in Roman warfare.

Infantry and Cavalry versus Infantry and Cavalry

As we know from the previous chapter on tactical roles, the combining of cavalry and infantry was a common deployment during the Republic. This deployment would be used for skirmishing and non-pitched battle tactical scenarios. Livy gives us a thorough description of the nature of such combat between the forces of Philip and Rome near Athacus in 199 BC.

The king's forces assumed that the type of fighting would be that to which they were accustomed, that the cavalry, alternately advancing and retreating, would now discharge their weapons and now retire, that the swift movements of the Illyrians would be useful for sallies and sudden charges, and that the Cretans would shower arrows upon the enemy advancing in disorder. The Roman attack, no more vigorous than stubborn, prevented the carrying out of this plan; for just as if they were in regular line of battle, both the *velites* after hurling their spears, came to a hand-to-hand combat with their swords, and the cavalry, as soon as they had charged the enemy, stopping their horses either fought from horseback or leaped from their saddles and fought mingled with the footmen. So neither the king's cavalry, unused to a stationary battle, could stand against the Romans, nor his infantry, running to and fro and almost unprotected by armour, against the light-armed Romans, equipped with shield and sword and prepared alike for defence or offence. So they did not sustain the struggle, but relying on nothing else than their swiftness of foot they fled to the camp.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴² Xen. *An.* 6.2.16, 6.4.23-24, 6.5.26; cf. Best 1969, 78; Trundle 2010, 156.

⁸⁴³ Best 1979, 78.

⁸⁴⁴ Livy 31.35, trans: William Heinemann, Ltd. Harvard University Press; London, 1935.

The description here confirms the proposed ‘face of skirmish’ above, insofar as Livy describes a formation ‘just as if the whole battle-line was fighting’.⁸⁴⁵ Thus, this ‘face of skirmish’ saw the front line of the cloud of the *velites* moving back-and-forth while the less-active area behind them held ground.⁸⁴⁶ This also supports the previously discussed ability of the *velites* to engage in hand-to-hand combat; while it is true that they seem to be fighting unprepared opponents in this instance, the fact that they were ‘armed for both offense and defence,’ is evident here.⁸⁴⁷ This instance of skirmishing might indicate that the Macedonians had not encountered this type of combat before, or that they were just taken by surprise on this occasion. If the former is true, then we might speculate that the Romans were engaging in typical infantry-cavalry tactics, and that the Macedonians were simply incapable of fighting in this manner. In any case, it is impossible to ascertain the truth in this regard.

It is also interesting to note that the cavalry dismounted to fight on foot. It certainly seems strange that the Roman cavalry would do so, instead of pursuing the Macedonian cavalry to ensure the safety of their infantry. This notion of dismounted cavalry here also echoes Livy’s description of the institution of the *velites* (26.4), discussed in Chapter 2. This suggests that there may have been some Roman military tradition associated with the cavalry that involved dismounting and fighting on foot.⁸⁴⁸

Though dismounting is also described at the battle of Callinicus, it was a battle between Rome and Perseus in 171 BC that involved large deployments of cavalry and infantry on both sides (Livy 42.58). Indeed, this is our only reference to *velites* having a designated commander (who in this instance is the consul’s brother Caius Crassus), and this is namely because they are deployed with the Italian cavalry for the battle (Livy 42.58.12). Once the battle commences, Perseus’ allied Thracian cavalry and light infantry attack the combined force of Italian cavalry and *velites* and the resulting combat is graphically described by Livy. He tells us

⁸⁴⁵ Livy 31.35.5: ‘*quam si tota acie dimicarent*’; Briscoe 1973 offers no commentary on anything from 31.35.4-7, thus omitting the description of the Roman fighting technique entirely. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this passage could possibly serve as an example of Livy’s tendency to Roman bias.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. ‘Pre-pitched battle skirmishing’ under ‘Lightly armed skirmishers versus lightly armed skirmishers’, above.

⁸⁴⁷ Livy 31.35.6 ‘*armorum veliti Romano parmam gladiumque habenti pariterque et ad se tuendum et ad hostem petendum armato.*’

⁸⁴⁸ See McCall 2002, 70-72 for a discussion of this; cf. Livy at 42.59 where dismounting cavalry is described at the Battle of Callinicus and Front. *Strat.* 2.3.23 where Domitian has his cavalry fight on foot whilst fighting the Chatti in forests.

The infantry on both sides attacked the spears of the cavalry with their swords, cut at the legs of the horses and stabbed them in the flanks.⁸⁴⁹

If this were the usual form of attack when the *velites* were combined with cavalry, we might see this as a reason for cavalymen to dismount and fight on foot. This is because by dismounting they might have a better chance of defending their horses (and themselves) from a fate similar to that which they suffered at Callinicus. The possibility of such a necessity may be the reason behind Livy's confused statement about the establishment of the *velites* (discussed in Chapter 2). Indeed, as McCall points out

In a melee against mounted cavalry, the light infantryman enjoyed the greater advantages of agility and speed over the cavalryman. He had all the benefits of dismounted Roman cavalry and one further benefit: he was completely unhampered by horse.⁸⁵⁰

He goes on to say that, Roman cavalry preferred a relatively stationary type of hand-to-hand combat over more fluid combat. Thus, combining them with light infantry such as *velites* would have been duly effective, as Livy indicates above. Alternatively, McCall also proposes that light infantry could have served as a defensive base from which cavalry could strike and regroup.⁸⁵¹ Indeed, it may have been difficult for light infantry to engage enemy cavalry successfully unless the cavalry were relatively immobile. Certainly, holding a line towards the rear of any skirmishing action may have been something the *velites* were capable of, as suggested above in the section combat techniques.

While Polybius' description of another infantry-cavalry skirmish in the Second Macedonian War does not mention dismounting cavalry, he does note that both sides fought in close combat quite spiritedly.⁸⁵² We might compare this skirmish to Polybius' description of another infantry-cavalry skirmish that occurred not too long after the first, which in turn was the catalyst for the battle of Cynoscephalae (18.21). Here, Polybius notes that the cavalry and infantry on both sides engaged each other in irregular attacks.⁸⁵³ So, if we are to compare these two descriptions, we might deduce that the face of this type of combat involved fluidity

⁸⁴⁹ Livy 42.59.3, there is an unpropitious lacuna in the text where the combat actions of the *velites* are described: ... *gladiis hastas petere pedites ... nunc succidere crura equis, nunc ilia suffodere* (my translation above).

⁸⁵⁰ McCall 2002, 75.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid*; see also the discussion regarding elephants, below.

⁸⁵² Polyb. 18.19.11: 'συνέβαλλον ἐκθύμως'.

⁸⁵³ *op. cit.* 18.21.3 'μετ' ὀλίγον ἤρξαντο καταπειράζειν ἀλλήλων', the irregularity may have been dictated by the lack of light at the beginning of this skirmish (*ibid.* 18.21.1); Walbank 1967, offers no commentary on the specifics of skirmishing in these passages; Polybius specifies that the infantry on the Roman side were εὐζώνοι (18.21.1).

of movement, as well as the odd single combat amongst the infantry, as a result of both the irregularity (ὀλίγον ἤρξαντο) and bravery (ἐκθύμως) of the men involved. Furthermore, since Polybius tells us that the ratio of cavalry to εὐζώνοι on the Roman side at Cynoscephalae was 10 to 1, we might speculate that the lightly armed infantry could have their flanks (as individuals or groups) fairly well covered by the cavalry.

When Caesar sent his *expeditos antesignanos* against Pompeian cavalry (Caes. *BC* 3.75), he notes that

so great was the success, having engaged in combat with their cavalry, they put them all to rout, and leave a considerable number dead upon the field, and return without loss to the marching column.⁸⁵⁴

Although the specific dynamic of fighting here is not made clear, we may assume that it differed from instances where the *velites* were deployed with cavalry insofar as there may have been significantly less missile combat on behalf of the infantry. Thus, the *antesignani* here probably engaged the Pompeian horse at very close range. Furthermore, since Caesar emphasizes the fact that the *antesignani* and cavalry fought together (*ut equestri proelio commisso*), the fighting between the cavalry may have been relatively static, rather than having the *antesignani* constantly on the run with the cavalry.⁸⁵⁵ In this way, the infantry would be able to reach and engage the cavalry, just as the light infantry did in Livy's description of the Battle of Callinicus.⁸⁵⁶ If the cavalry was not static, they probably would have been able both to out-manoeuvre and out-reach the infantry. Thus, the effectiveness of the Caesarian attack must have been in the simultaneous assault from both the cavalry and infantry.

In a different kind of encounter, but perhaps relevant to this section, Polybius describes the *velites* engaging elephants at Panormus (1.40).⁸⁵⁷ While this description does not involve cavalry, it is an instance of light infantry engaging mounted troops, the mount however being

⁸⁵⁴ Caes. *BC* 3.75.5, my translation, '*ut equestri proelio commisso pellerent omnes compluresque interficerent ipsique incolumes se ad agmen reciperent.*'

⁸⁵⁵ As stated in Chapter 2 under 'antesignani', this passage does not necessarily point to lightly armed legionaries, but rather, to the quickest of them. As such, if they were in constant motion they would probably tire more quickly than cavalry, and therefore not have been able to fight '*ut equestri proelio commisso*'.

⁸⁵⁶ And as they do at Caes. *BG* 8.19, though the combat dynamics are once again, not described here.

⁸⁵⁷ This and the following examples involve infantry versus mounted troops, and so are not entirely applicable to the heading of this section. Yet, because there are so few examples for the dynamics of this kind of combat, I have decided to include them here, rather than giving them their own section.

elephants rather than horses. Here, using a moat for cover, the *velites* skirmished with the elephants, throwing missiles at them in their approach, and then, being routed by the charging elephants, retreated to the safety of the moat. The elephants were then faced with the missiles of men stationed beyond the moat and on the walls of Panormus, and in this way, they were defeated. Having *velites* attack elephants with missiles and then retreat is also a tactic that Scipio Africanus famously employed at Zama.⁸⁵⁸ In both cases, the *velites* had some sort of cover to retreat to, whether it was the moat at Panormus, or the gaps of the maniples at Zama. Thus, I would propose that in combat scenarios that involved *velites* and cavalry versus cavalry, the same sort of dynamic could have been used where the *velites* threw javelins at the enemy horses and then retreated behind the cover of their cavalry escort.⁸⁵⁹

Naturally, the most probable reality of the face of combat involving infantry and cavalry is one that was dictated by many factors. These may have included the terrain on which the skirmish was fought, the number of men, the experience and skill of the men, the ratio of cavalry to infantry and the weather. Unfortunately, we are rarely given any of these details. However, in most of these scenarios, it seems that combat between cavalry had to be static for any accompanying infantry to be most effective.

The Individual's Battle

Virtus and Leadership

The previous sections under 'The Unit's Battle' determined that the face of skirmish was often a very fluid one, perhaps unsurprisingly. Some skirmishes however, especially those that occurred before pitched battle, could have had the tendency to resemble a loose-order battle line, and while there was probably still fluidity of movement at the front of this cloud, the duration of the skirmish necessitated lulls, and thus less dynamic areas of activity. As with line infantry, self-motivated individuals as well as those with leadership tendencies would have been required both to re-ignite action and spur men forward from these lulls and less-active parts of the cloud. Furthermore, it is probable that in any skirmish, those infantrymen who stepped up to this challenge that were rewarded appropriately. Our strongest piece of evidence for this dynamic within a skirmish involving lightly equipped

⁸⁵⁸ See p. 154, above.

⁸⁵⁹ Cf. Polyb. 3.65 where the ἀκοντιστάς retreat behind cavalry and into the maniples at the beginning of the battle of Ticinus; cf. McCall 2002, 75.

infantry is the aforementioned wolf's skin of the *velites*. This is a good indication of the fact that commanders paid close attention to individual action. This dynamic is in accord with the Roman ideals of *virtus*, as Lendon has already discussed. As he aptly puts it,

There were no officers or centurions among the *velites* to compel them, no standards to urge them: the *velites* fought in a realm of artificial equality and self-motivation. But the lack of compulsion allowed them to make the heroic choice to seek out single combat, decorations lured them, and their headgear allowed them to be recognized when they did so.⁸⁶⁰

We cannot expect all of the *velites* to have had this sort of motivation, or at least, what is more likely is that some of them had greater motivation than others, as is typical in most groups. This is further demonstrated in the role of the Caesarian *antesignani*. These men stepped forward before the rest of the battle-line to be the first to engage in combat. This is perhaps not surprising considering the fact that the *antesignani* seemed to have taken over many of the *velites*' tactical roles.

Regarding the notion of single combats, Oakley points out that during our period, it is conceivable that single combats occurred several times each year. Furthermore, he states that single combat could decide battles without a full engagement of all the forces deployed. This point is vital considering that most examples of monomachy are found to have occurred prior to the main clash, i.e. during initial skirmishing.⁸⁶¹ It must be noted however that these instances of monomachy on the battlefield are not the same as instances of ritual single combat where entire armies would observe the fight.⁸⁶² Rather, these regular instances of hand-to-hand, one-on-one combat occurred in a broader engagement. Daly emphasizes this stage as an exhibition of bravado that served as a morale-boost for the side that performed well.⁸⁶³ Although there is no definitive statement in our sources linking the *velites* and the initial skirmishing to specific instances of single combat, Lendon suggests that this was indeed one of the roles of the *velites*, noting that young soldiers could distinguish themselves in the ancestral fashion in this way. He goes on to argue that the manipular array 'reflected

⁸⁶⁰ Lendon 2005, 187.

⁸⁶¹ Oakley 1985, monomachy occurring several times per year: 397; deciding battles: 405 esp. n. 119; occurring prior to the main clash: 403.

⁸⁶² Indeed, the issue with Oakley's article is that that he fails to give sufficient discussion to whether his examples are of single combats in front of whole armies, or single combats that take place within a broader engagement.

⁸⁶³ Daly 2002, 173.

the need for young Roman men to display their *virtus*,’ and that not only the richest but the poorest Roman men could endeavour to meet this societal inclination to demonstrate *virtus*.⁸⁶⁴

This desire for recognition and glory that Lendon refers to would certainly have inspired aggression and heroic action from these young and/or poor soldiers trying to establish themselves in a society where valorous deeds on the battlefield brought fame and fortune not only to the individual himself, but to his family as well. Veterans carried the reputation of their deeds throughout their lives; their spoils and decorations kept in the eyes and minds of their friends, family and the public.⁸⁶⁵ This gave Roman competitiveness a sense of structure that was in accord with their value of *disciplina* – a discipline that meant that even a wild attack by aggressive young soldiers at the beginning of a battle was a controlled tactic; a tactic that could possibly have even sought a rout through the intimidating quality of a victorious single combat.⁸⁶⁶ Of course, the potential for heroic action does not mean that activities such as single combats occurred with every opening skirmish of a pitched battle, much less a rout resulting from one. However, even if no single combat came out of this aggressive foray, there were probably still many opportunities to prove one’s *virtus* and leadership abilities.

With the phasing out of the *velites*, this desire for recognition and glory through competitiveness probably transferred to the *antesignani*, as did some of the *velites*’ tactical roles.⁸⁶⁷ The men at the front of the *acies* – the first ones to engage in combat – would have had the same opportunity that the *velites*’ had; they were the first troops to display their *virtus* in front of the rest of the army. This highlights the enduring nature of this Roman value, and it likewise points to an enduring association with troops that are labelled ‘light’ by our sources. The same can be said for the imperial army, where soldiers of the *auxilia* – often labelled as ‘light’ by our sources – are said to have this characteristic.⁸⁶⁸ This is particularly true for the Batavian auxiliaries for example, which Tacitus notes for their *virtus* on several occasions.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁴ Lendon 2007, 513-514.

⁸⁶⁵ e.g. spoils of dead enemies could often be held as sacred family heirlooms, see Livy 23.23; c.f. MacMullen 1984, 449; Gilliver 2007a, 14, 17, esp. n. 34, 43.

⁸⁶⁶ for a discussion of Roman *disciplina*, see Oakley 1985, 407 and Lendon 2005, *passim*.

⁸⁶⁷ See *antesignani* in Chapter 2.

⁸⁶⁸ For ‘light’ *auxilia*, see Chapter 2.

⁸⁶⁹ E.g. Tac. *Hist.* 4.15, 4.23, 5.17, *Ger.* 29; cf. *op. cit.* 2.28: ‘*fortissimorum virorum auxilio*’.

Yet, the Roman cultural characteristic of *virtus* is only one aspect of a greater force that had a much larger role to play in a soldier's actions, and that is the psychology of the soldier in combat.

The Psychology of Combat

Man in battle ... is a being in whom the instinct of self-preservation dominates, at certain moments, all other sentiments. Discipline has for its aim the domination of that instinct by a greater terror. But it cannot dominate it completely. I do not deny the glorious examples where discipline and devotion have elevated man about himself. But if these examples are glorious, it is because they are rare; if they are admired, it is because they are considered exceptions, and the exception proves the rule.⁸⁷⁰

Assessing the psychology of the Roman soldier may seem a difficult investigation, as we do not have Romans on which to evaluate their psychological state of mind. Yet, as Du Picq points out in the above quotation, there is an instinctual level of psychology that is not learned or culturally influenced, but inherent to most animals, and that is the psychology of self-preservation.⁸⁷¹ We can assume that this aspect of human psychology is prevalent in battles. While Butterfield has suggested that all battles have something in common, Keegan offers the following response to this suggestion:

What battles have in common is human: the behaviour of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honour and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them. The study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage...⁸⁷²

Like all combat, fear and courage were a major part of Roman combat, as can be observed in the aforementioned Roman cultural feature of *virtus* and the emphasis Romans placed on having it, and thus hiding fear. These psychological reactions are influenced by a number of external factors that may be reflected in modern studies in psychology.⁸⁷³ These include cultural and familial upbringing, training, discipline, group dynamics, leadership and unit cohesion, rewards, and morale.⁸⁷⁴ The first two factors are impossible to measure on dead men, which makes it difficult to evaluate how the individual Roman soldier may have really experienced battle. Aside from the first two factors, the rest can, to some extent, be assessed

⁸⁷⁰ Du Picq 1987, 77-78.

⁸⁷¹ Cf. Sabin 1996, 72; James 2010, 51.

⁸⁷² Keegan 1976, 303; cf. Butterfield 1969, 102: 'every battle in world history may be different from every other battle, but they must have something in common if we can group them under the term "battle" at all'.

⁸⁷³ MacMullen 1984, 447.

⁸⁷⁴ Goldsworthy 1996, ch. 6, *passim*.

in Roman warfare as Lee and Goldsworthy have already done.⁸⁷⁵ Indeed, as Goldsworthy has pointed out, it seems the Roman system was designed to manage the effect of all of these psychological factors of battle.⁸⁷⁶ Yet, as alluded to above, I would argue that there is further psychological evaluation that can be applied to Roman soldiers, and that is their reaction to mortal danger and the resulting instinct of self-preservation.

Self-preservation in attack

A major innate feature of the human psyche is the self-preservation instinct, and it is very likely that this instinct was prevalent in Roman soldiers. As seen in the earlier discussions of fighting techniques and the unit's battle, I proposed that combat could have been a cautious affair on the Roman side. That is not to say however, that Romans were never aggressive in combat. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the shield could have been used in an aggressive manner in offensive combat movements, and certainly charging into battle would fall under aggressive combat as well. Even so, the instinct of self-preservation may be observed in such aggressive attacks. Using the *scutum* as a primary weapon of both defence and of ensuring distance between the legionary and enemy suggests to me an emphasis on safety, rather than aggression. This highlights a discrepancy between the traditional aggressive Roman attitude towards combat and warfare and the actual face of combat.⁸⁷⁷ Lendon's arguments, regarding how the Roman value of *disciplina* forms an opposed pair with *virtus*, highlight this apparent balance between traditional Roman aggression, and safety or sensibility in combat.⁸⁷⁸

Although *disciplina* certainly seems to have been an integral part of the Roman military ethos, whether Roman weaponry, armour and combat techniques were manufactured or developed with safety as a primary concern, is impossible to prove. Furthermore, the precise

⁸⁷⁵ See Goldsworthy 1996, Ch. 6; Lee 1996, 203-212, esp. on how honour, fear, shame group identity, cohesion and leadership affected Romans in battle; similarly Lendon 2005, *passim*.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid*; cf. Lendon 1999, 297.

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 222 who argues that only 25 percent of soldiers were actively seeking to kill the enemy (although this number is based on Second World War studies and should not be taken as fact or absolute). This may also be contrasted with phalanx combat and the ostensible aggression behind the 'othismos debate' (see esp. Goldsworthy 1997; van Wees 2000, 126-134; Rawlings 2007b, 96-97). Comparing the two types of combat, the greater opportunities for individualism in Roman combat and therefore exposure to the enemy probably led to a more tentative approach to fighting than that found in phalanx combat. For more on phalanx combat see esp. Pritchett 1985, 33-93; Hanson 1989, esp. 193 for deliberate exposure to the enemy; Wheeler 2007.

⁸⁷⁸ Lendon 2005, 177-178, 211 *et passim*.

origins of *disciplina* and how closely related they may have been to a self-preservation instinct cannot be ascertained.⁸⁷⁹ Still, that some sort of self-preservation instinct existed amongst Romans is probably true. Thus, a tentative link may be revealed between the need to deal with the psychological issues inherent in battle (such as fear or the self-preservation instinct) and the way that Romans attacked in combat.

We know that slashing with the *gladius* was not uncommon; we know this from Vegetius' suggestion at 1.12, and from other sources such as the depiction of such techniques on Trajan's column, the Adamklissi monument, as well as the allusion to them in the literature.⁸⁸⁰ Given this, it is interesting to note that psychologically, there may have been an inherent aversion to a thrusting technique. Lt. Col. Grossman, who has written extensively on the psychology of combat, suggests that stabbing another person is somehow intimately sickening, saying,

[For] a sword-armed soldier his weapon becomes a natural extension of his body – an appendage. And the piercing of the enemy's body with this appendage is an act with some ... sexual connotations ... To reach out and penetrate the enemy's flesh and thrust a portion of ourselves into his vitals is deeply akin to the sexual act, yet deadly, and is therefore strongly repulsive to us.⁸⁸¹

Grossman further suggests that the one aspect of Roman warfare that could have helped their soldiers to overcome this instinctive repulsion to stabbing was the design of the *gladius*. He proposes that the relatively long and sharp point of the Roman sword allowed soldiers to execute a killing blow with little penetration.⁸⁸² Indeed, as Vegetius (1.12) states, 'a stab, though it penetrates but two inches, is generally fatal.'⁸⁸³

Yet, while Grossman occasionally references ancient armies in his work, much of his psychological analysis applies to present-day society. Thus, the application of his analysis on the Roman soldier's psyche is quite speculative, but there may be some further common

⁸⁷⁹ Lendon *ibid.* points to the stories from early Roman warfare for the first signs of *disciplina* as part of the Roman military ethos. However, we cannot say when exactly it became a part of this ethos and whether its initial recognition/use was related to any primal instincts prevalent in warfare that Romans were consciously aware of.

⁸⁸⁰ V. e.g. Caes. *BG* 1.52 where the Germans '*impetus gladiatorum exceperunt ... et despur vulnerarent*'. The slashing technique has also been suggested as a possible mode of combat for lightly armed infantry such as *velites*, above.

⁸⁸¹ Grossman 2009, 121.

⁸⁸² Grossman 2009, 146.

⁸⁸³ Cf. James 2010, 48, who graphically discusses the effects of sharp-force trauma.

ground on which we can advance the present analysis. This lies in a possible link with an unconscious resistance to killing in all sane humans.⁸⁸⁴

Resisting the Kill: Self-preservation of the species and primal instinct

Grossman suggests that modern soldiers resist killing because of many factors, but one that might be relevant to our period is that of instinctive intra-species resistance to killing.⁸⁸⁵ That is, creatures of the same species, no matter how aggressively predatory they may be, almost never attack to kill each other. While they may occasionally or even often engage in aggressive behaviour towards one another, they do not usually inflict killing blows. This seems to be an instinctive response, as it is visible across many various species, from piranhas to rattlesnakes to baboons.⁸⁸⁶ The reasons behind this seem to be a primal necessity to ensure the survival of the species, and it may be likened to other primal needs such as procreation.⁸⁸⁷ Indeed, Goldsworthy has argued that for Romans in combat ‘it was not the actual fighting and killing that was important, but the courage that they displayed in the face of danger.’⁸⁸⁸ He goes on to cite Marshall’s Second World War study which concluded that the most important factor in keeping a soldier actively fighting against the enemy was the close proximity of his comrades.⁸⁸⁹ How closely such modern psychological studies may be applied to Roman soldiers is debatable, but probably not feasible due to massive differences in cultural values and ethics.

So, whether this unconscious resistance to killing fellow members of the same species was present in Roman soldiers is impossible to say. Naturally, the Romans were far more used to killing and death than any present-day society, and that in itself may be an indication of the lack of such self-preservation-of-the-species instincts. Yet, to say that the Romans lacked

⁸⁸⁴ As opposed to psychologically unsound humans with sociopathic tendencies, cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 264-265; Grossman 2009, 30-32, 86 ff. For Homeric warfare where fierce fighters are considered to have gone ‘mad’ cf. van Wees 2004, 164-165. However, Keegan 1976, 49-52 points out that soldiers may kill ‘unethically’ (e.g. killing those who have surrendered) if commanded to do so, but that such behaviour in modern armies justifies arrest and psychiatric examination (particularly on behalf of the commander). Hanson 1989, 165-169, discusses savage fighting in hoplite warfare, but he also notes that in ‘most armies ... the fear of death was an overriding concern’, *op. cit.* 179. Some cultural norms may have overrode a natural resistance to killing, e.g. the Celts who would decapitate their victims (shown on Trajan’s Column, scene 24) may have differed in this respect.

⁸⁸⁵ Grossman 2009, 5-6; Cf. Brothwell 1999, 34, who notes that warfare is not a natural pathology of man.

⁸⁸⁶ Grossman, *ibid.*

⁸⁸⁷ Cf. James 2010, 48, n. 57. However, cf. Keegan 1976, 49-52, noted above.

⁸⁸⁸ Goldsworthy 1996, 266, cf. *op. cit.* 174, where he argues that most killing took place once men ran away; also in Hanson 1989, 180; also discussed below.

⁸⁸⁹ Goldsworthy 1996, 178; cf. Marshall 1968, 42.

standard primal instincts (including the survival of the species) also seems flawed. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius implied some philosophical awareness of this instinct noting,

To break off any particle, no matter how small, from the continuous concatenation--whether of causes or of any other elements--is to injure the whole.⁸⁹⁰

So, while it may be suggested that such an instinct could have been a cause for preference of slashing to thrusting techniques, unfortunately, this cannot be proven. There is, however, another trend in Roman battle (and most ancient battles) that may indicate the prevalence of instinctive resistance to killing, and that is mortality rates in relation to routs.

As Gabriel and Metz have pointed out in their assessment of ancient battles from the Sumerians to Rome, significant killing did not occur whilst men were in formation.⁸⁹¹ Rather, most of the killing occurred once an enemy was routed.⁸⁹² This trend has continued into the modern period as well.⁸⁹³ Grossman suggests that this phenomenon may be explained by two theories. The first is what he terms a ‘chase instinct’, where just as most animals will instinctively chase anything that shows fear and suddenly runs from them, soldiers somehow instinctively know to do the same to a fleeing enemy with the intent of killing them.⁸⁹⁴ Kagan points out how battlefield casualties psychologically affected troops, saying

Sudden loss of life, even if the numbers of deaths are few, may be more frightening than slow but sustained casualties far greater in number.⁸⁹⁵

In other words, once soldiers began to run and sustain high casualties at a rapid rate, the running perpetuated more killing as it encouraged more soldiers to run and likewise encouraged the opposition to continue the killing.

⁸⁹⁰ M. Aur. *Med.* 5, translation Staniforth 1964. Reasons behind the idea that all of humanity and even living things are inextricably linked and interdependent are often more theoretical and rooted in abstract spirituality than rational and lucid, cf. Grossman 2009, 38-40; this concept is prevalent in several religious and spiritual philosophies including, amongst others, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Baha’i, Taoism, Brahman-Atman Yoga, and the concept of Qi. Indeed, spirituality has always been a significant part of human existence, and that many differing spiritual philosophies show an awareness of the unity of humanity could be considered an indication of some primal and innate understanding of this unity that comes with existence. How much this applied to Roman psychology is unascertainable, but it would be foolhardy to dismiss its application altogether.

⁸⁹¹ Gabriel & Metz 1991, 84.

⁸⁹² Cf. Keegan 1976, 103-105, 150-151; Du Picq 1987, 57-61. This has also been noted by several contemporary ancient historians: v. Hanson 1989, 180; Goldsworthy 1996, 174; Sabin 2000, 5; James 2010, 53; cf. the *τροπή* in Greek warfare, v. e.g. Rawlings 2007b, 97.

⁸⁹³ cf. du Picq 1987 110 ff.; Clausewitz 1987, 351; Grossman 2009, 127, also citing Griffith, P. *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

⁸⁹⁴ Grossman 2008, 201, 2009, 127.

⁸⁹⁵ Kagan 2006, 128

The second theory that enables killing from behind, Grossman explains, is

...a process in which close proximity on the physical distance spectrum can be negated when the face cannot be seen. The essence of the whole physical distance spectrum may simply revolve around the degree to which the killer can see the face of the victim ... if one does not have to look into the eyes when killing, it is much easier to deny the humanity of the victim.⁸⁹⁶

This certainly helps to explain the lack of fatalities prior to a rout. In skirmishes, such opportunities (i.e. victims' backs turned to the pursuer) may have been more frequent, due to the lack of formal battle lines. This, in turn, may have taken the intensity or moral/psychological stress out of combat. For those skirmishers with little experience, such as the *velites*, this may have helped them endure the stress associated with killing and fear of death. In this way, skirmishing may have been a type of 'stress inoculation' for new recruits, and this will be discussed in further detail below. Regarding exactly how much influence the particular instinct of resistance to killing had on Roman warfare, this remains indeterminable.

There is one final instinct related to self-preservation that may be applied to Roman warfare, and that is a human's physiological response to fear.

The Physiological Response to Fear

Keegan summarizes Marshall's assessment of soldiers' behaviour in modern warfare by saying that

all men are afraid on the battlefield, yet most, despite their fear, remain products of their culture and its value-system⁸⁹⁷

We know that the Roman value-system and its culture was much more accepting of violence than modern society. As such, modern studies of how soldiers react to violence cannot be realistically applied to the Romans.⁸⁹⁸ However, fear was still a very present force on the battlefield; for evidence of this we have only to look as far as the tendency for defeated armies to rout.⁸⁹⁹ Furthermore, as an innate instinct, the study of fear is often more

⁸⁹⁶ Grossman 2009, 128.

⁸⁹⁷ Keegan 1976, 72.

⁸⁹⁸ As Goldsworthy and Daly have done for example, citing Marshall's work (Marshall 1947), v. Goldsworthy 1996, 178, 219; Daly 2002, 175.

⁸⁹⁹ For the Roman fear of punishment see Lee 1996, 203-204. For Livy's emphasis on the part which fear plays in battle v. e.g. 31.34.5, 32.5.2, 33.7.8, 33.15.6, 35.27.16, 36.16.6, cf. Walsh 2009, 220, who notes that this may be one of his *topoi*. Cf. also Lendon's discussion on how important the *animus* of Caesar's soldiers was to their

physiological than psychological, and so modern understanding of the subject may be retroactively applied to Roman soldiers.

Fear causes vasoconstriction, which raises the heart rate, and we slowly lose fine-motor control. As the fear increases, the sympathetic nervous system prepares the body for fight-or-flight response by inhibiting digestion, increasing secretion of epinephrine and norepinephrine, dilating the bronchial tubes in the lungs, dilating the heart vessels and tensing muscles.⁹⁰⁰ As vasoconstriction increases with increased fear, less blood gets to the muscles, and so they receive less oxygen making motor control deteriorate significantly. It may be at this point that soldiers unconsciously know to run. If soldiers are not fleeing from fear at this point, increased stress also causes the loss of peripheral vision, or ‘tunnel vision’ as it is commonly referred to. Because of this, there is also a loss in depth perception meaning threats seem closer than they are. There is also increased presbyopia (far-sightedness), which makes it difficult to see relatively close things.⁹⁰¹ In such circumstances during battle, the frightened individual would naturally back away, which in turn could lead to a rout.

Another consequence of vasoconstriction is the lightening of the skin, hence the term ‘white with fear’. Also because of this, the outer layer of skin can take conspicuous damage without the loss of much blood. This is probably an innate survival mechanism meant to limit blood loss in combat.⁹⁰² It is possible that such effects were present or even visible in some cases in Roman combat.

So, primal instincts of self-preservation could have possibly affected combat in some way. Indeed, fighting techniques, small-unit tactics, and armour may have consciously or unconsciously been affected by such instincts, but unfortunately, the extent to which this is true is impossible to ascertain.

Beyond primal instincts however, many other factors affect the psychology of a soldier in combat. Like Goldsworthy, Grossman has suggested that the Romans were aware of some of

general, and how a weak *animus* resulted in fear, Lendon 1999, 296-299. For terror tactics as a part of psychological warfare v. Gilliver 1996b, 222.

⁹⁰⁰ Cf. Grossman 2008, 14.

⁹⁰¹ Grossman 2008, 47, A common modern phrase describing this phenomenon is being ‘so scared you can’t see straight.’

⁹⁰² Grossman 2008, 46.

these factors to some extent, and so manipulated them to make their army less susceptible to the aforementioned instincts and more effective at killing. This will be assessed presently.

How the killing occurred in skirmishing and non-pitched battle

Both du Picq and Grossman have demonstrated that authority and leadership on the battlefield were decisive factors in prompting soldiers to kill.⁹⁰³ Regarding battlefield leaders, Grossman further points out that the centurion was a leader with a particular advantage in attaining obedience in men because he had the legitimacy of having come up through the ranks, proven his combat ability, shared and continued to share the face of combat with the men he was directing.⁹⁰⁴ Indeed, such leadership where the man directing a tactical sub-unit joins the fray is seen to have been doubly effective not only with the centurionate, but also whenever Republican generals did this.⁹⁰⁵

Thus, in non-pitched battle, any man directing soldiers to kill, probably had significant influence in actually making them do so. In pre-pitched battle skirmish situations where there were no pre-designated leaders (especially with the *velites* for example), the demands of authority could have come from the soldiers or centurions standing in formation observing the skirmish, or perhaps from tribunes riding amongst the skirmishers.⁹⁰⁶ Alternatively, individual soldiers may have encouraged their comrades in displays of leadership.

Regarding such personalized encouragements, Marshall noted that

it is the touch of human nature which gives men courage and enables them to make proper use of their weapons.⁹⁰⁷

This is also related to Goldsworthy's assertions on the importance of morale in the Roman army.⁹⁰⁸ In non-pitched battle, such encouragement was likely to come from unit leaders, and amongst units such as the *velites*, there was room for this 'touch of human nature' to manifest

⁹⁰³ du Picq 1987, 93-94, 127-128; Grossman 2008, 205-7, 2009, 141-48, citing examples such as Dr. Stanley Milgram's study on obedience, v. Milgram, S. 'Behavioural study of obedience' in : *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, (1963), 371-78; cf. also Marshall 1968, 103-105; Keegan 1976, 49-52.

⁹⁰⁴ Of course, it was not always the case that centurions came up through the ranks; some were promoted for reasons of patronage, and this is especially the case in the permanent army of the Empire.

⁹⁰⁵ E.g. Caes. *BG* 2.25; App. *BC* 2.104; Polyb. 3.116.

⁹⁰⁶ Daly 2002, 71, 73.

⁹⁰⁷ Marshall 1968, 41.

⁹⁰⁸ Goldsworthy 1996, Ch. 6 *et passim*.

in any one of the soldiers – soldiers who might later become the centurions continuing to encourage their men.

Vegetius points out that a soldier's training works to turn fear of battle into enthusiasm for it (2.23) Josephus likewise comments on the efficiency of the Roman soldier in battle as a result of their training (*BJ* 3.70).⁹⁰⁹ Grossman terms such training 'stress inoculation', noting that realistic and repetitive training takes the surprise out of combat, and furthermore turns combat actions into muscle memory, so that they become a sort of habit.⁹¹⁰ We have seen above that post exercises were probably a regular part of Roman military training. As regards to something more akin to 'stress inoculation', we have evidence for such training given to Roman soldiers through the medium of regular and 'safe' skirmishing under Fabius during the Second Punic War. Livy (22.12.10) tells us that

[Fabius] refused to stake all on a general engagement, and yet by means of little skirmishes, undertaken from a safe position and with a place of refuge close at hand, he at length accustomed his soldiers, disheartened by their former defeats, to be less diffident of their own courage and good fortune.

This passage is particularly interesting for the suggestion that controlled skirmishing may have had such an effect on soldiers. This is especially true since we know that pre-pitched battle skirmishing was, in effect, a controlled type of skirmish; furthermore, just as with Fabius' method, *velites* in a pre-pitched battle skirmish had a refuge to retire to within the ranks of the heavy infantry. What we may draw from this then is the notion that pre-pitched battle skirmishing may have been a type of psychological and physiological combat training for young soldiers, a type of 'stress inoculation'. In an abstract sense we might see this as a highly developed training ritual that not only allowed for 'failure' within this 'training' (i.e. voluntary retreating to the rear of the skirmishing cloud) but also the opportunity to overcome such 'failure' and thereby 'pass' the training (i.e. by actively engaging the enemy and performing bravely). This then might mentally prepare such young troops for the transition to line infantry in a later campaign. Indeed Sabin and Zhmodikov's suggestions that very little hand-to-hand combat took place between line infantry during pitched battles might be a reflection of this earlier 'training' in the following way.⁹¹¹ If fresh recruits adopted a style of fighting where they were only rarely engaged in hand-to-hand combat, then as line infantry

⁹⁰⁹ Cf. Marius' 'light' engagements with his fresh troops as a way of instilling courage: Sall. *Iug.* 87.

⁹¹⁰ Grossman 2008, 34-36. For an example of ancient awareness of the value of habit, v. Arr. *Epict. diss.* 2.18.

⁹¹¹ Sabin 2000; Zhmodikov 2000.

they may have held on to these old habits and only engaged in intense fighting in sporadic flurries, as Sabin and Zhmodikov suggest.⁹¹²

There were certainly many other factors in instigating soldiers to kill, and Grossman's model of all factors involved in making a personal kill reflects this.⁹¹³ We can potentially apply this model to Roman warfare, but to do so would be beyond the scope of this thesis. A visual depiction of the model itself should suffice for the present discussion (see Figure 6).⁹¹⁴

In conclusion, while no amount of evidence can truly elucidate the face of non-pitched battle for us, I hope to have shown that there are some common factors in this type of Roman combat. These include: a cautious fighting technique, effective group dynamics through battle-line formations - whether in loose order or controlled more stringently by the standards, an innate instinct of self-preservation, and the conventions and traditions that helped overcome those psychological factors to make Romans excellent skirmishers and non-pitched battle combatants.

⁹¹² Alternatively, a lack of hand-to-hand combat could also be explained by innate instincts, such as self-preservation, as proposed above.

⁹¹³ See Figure 6.

⁹¹⁴ Some of the points depicted in the figure may also be found in Goldsworthy's discussion on 'Motivating the Roman Soldier', *op. cit.* 1996, 250-264.

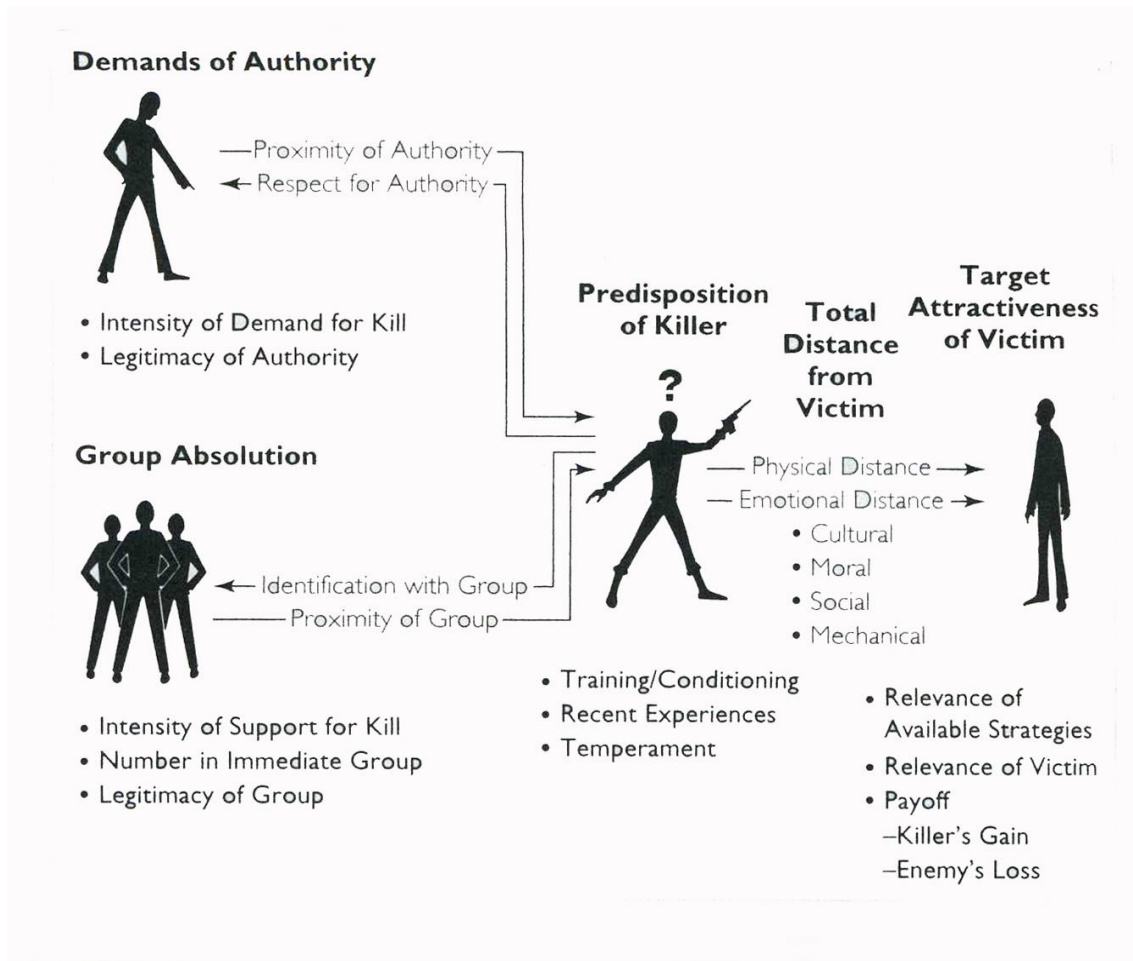


Figure 6: Factors involved in making a personal kill (after Grossman).

8 General Conclusions

Throughout its history, the Roman army was a mixed force. Like most successful armies, the Roman army found itself victorious because it had various specializations within its organization that allowed it to handle almost any kind of military exigency. Light infantry was a major part of this mixed force and, as shown in Chapter 6, the light infantry of the Roman army were assigned the widest variety of tactical deployments, including some of the most dangerous.

Goldsworthy's assertions that the Roman army's success lay partly in the hands of a few exceptionally brave men is directly reflected in the role of light infantry.⁹¹⁵ Examples include the *velites*, who were not only assigned the widest variety of tactical roles, but aimed to stand out for bravery in battle. Also, the *antesignani* were the first to engage in pitched battle and thus the first to be called upon for challenging *ad hoc* tactical exigencies. The imperial *auxilia* carried on the role of foremost fighters and tactically versatile soldiers.

All of this begs the question as to why a full-length study of Roman light infantry had not yet been undertaken. As we have seen throughout Chapters 2 to 5, the answer probably lies in the way our sources treated such troops. As Chapters 2 and 3 indicated, there are few terms related to light infantry that give us a clear understanding of the types of troops that these terms refer to. Instead, most light infantry terminology is quite general. It is only when our sources use specific terms such as *accensi*, *antesignani*, and *velites* that we can begin to determine what kind of soldiers these may have been. Indeed, as suggested in Chapter 4 (p. 116), the Latin terminology sometimes has a tendency to be more specific than Greek in naming these troops, nevertheless, the most often used terms are quite general in meaning, such as *expeditae*, *leves*, εὐζωνος, and ψιλὸι. Furthermore, the broad or general definitions of these terms seem to have encouraged the non-technical usage of the terminology.⁹¹⁶ This usage of light infantry terminology was probably also a result of our sources' general views

⁹¹⁵ Goldsworthy 1996, 285, cf. Ch. 6.

⁹¹⁶ Non-technical usage: e.g. using any kind of term to refer to light infantry, rather than specific terms to refer to specific kinds of light troops.

on the light infantry and their role(s). Though light infantry may have been used for the widest variety of tactical exigencies, these manoeuvres rarely resulted in an outcome affecting the overall campaign. As result, our sources saw them as ‘*digna memoratu inferior*’ as Tacitus so unequivocally put it. This has been directly reflected in modern historiography.

Thus, this thesis has attempted to look beyond the limitations of the ancient historiography and clarify our understanding of how the Roman army worked as a fighting force. I would suggest that one of the most significant conclusions reached as a result, is that the general terminology for light infantry in both Latin and Greek primarily describes the category of tactics being undertaken by the group, and not the equipment of the named unit.

Perhaps one of the important outcomes of Chapter 7 and the assessment of the psychology of combat is the new suggestion that serving as *velites* could prepare soldiers psychologically for serving in the *acies* by allowing them to kill in a more controlled environment. The dynamics of skirmishing that I have suggested result in a ‘cloud’ of skirmishers where soldiers are only exposed to combat if they so choose, culminating in a ‘controlled’ combat environment for the soldiers involved. This, in turn, meant that a soldier was not given a combative ‘baptism of fire’ as it were, but rather, was introduced to the psychological rigors of combat at his own pace. If he survived this training, he might move up into the *acies*, having presumably been psychologically prepared for the more restrained and disciplined methods of combat he would engage in as a line infantryman. We might look to this suggestion as a possible explanation behind the Roman army’s proverbial discipline, i.e. this may have been one of the methods by which discipline was achieved. We should not forget however, that a cautious fighting technique and rigorous group dynamics also contributed to this ostensible discipline. Furthermore, it seems that if this potential training *cursus* were in any way officially recognized, it then becomes difficult to explain why the *velites* were eventually replaced by both line infantry and foreign light infantry.⁹¹⁷ Thus, we must keep in mind that while serving as *velites* could possibly prepare soldiers psychologically for serving in the *acies*, we have no direct evidence to suggest that this was a recognized method of training on the Roman army’s behalf, nor indeed could it have been the only or main way in which to instil discipline in soldiers.

⁹¹⁷ I.e. if serving in the *velites* psychologically prepared soldiers for combat, then the question remains how they would be psychologically prepared once the *velites* disappeared as a fighting force from the army.

The general approach of this thesis has been to collect and analyze terms related to light infantry, and to determine how our sources use them and from this, attempt to clarify possible modes of combat for Roman light infantry. As has been shown, such combat could be quite sundry, since variously equipped soldiers, from slingers to heavily armed legionaries could participate in skirmishing and non-pitched battle combat.

Though the present work has attempted to elucidate the ancient understanding and definitions of Roman light infantry there is much more work that needs to be done. A fuller discussion of missiles and missile warfare might be included, which may also require new archaeological discoveries. With the extant archaeological evidence, more in-depth analysis of sling bullets and arrows heads might improve our understanding of the ‘face of missile warfare’.

A more thorough investigation into the dynamics of command and control might also help elucidate the face of non-pitched battle, by clarifying the precise methods of transmitting commands from the highest levels of command through to the smallest units. Until then, I hope to have contributed to our understanding of the Roman ‘face of battle’ by demonstrating that Roman light infantry was not only a subsidiary unit within the legions, but that almost any soldier could be regarded as light infantry. Functioning in this capacity, most Roman soldiers would have seen combat most frequently as light infantry.

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