

Elizabeth H. Pearson, *Exploring the Mid-Republican Origins of Roman Military Administration. With Stylus and Spear.* New York: Routledge, 2021. 217 pages. ISBN 9780367820732.

By the third century BC, the Roman state was capable of keeping tens of thousands of Roman and Italian soldiers deployed and supplied overseas, often engaged in intensive combat. Military records receive occasional mention in our sources, for example when Tiberius Gracchus reentered Numantia to reclaim his quaestorial tablets (Plut. *Tib. Grach.* 6.1-3). Yet the administration of the army during this period is mostly invisible, in contrast to the imperial period, where we have a wide array of surviving military documents. In this fine book, Elizabeth Pearson explores the administrative structures of the Middle Republican army, both through explicit references to administrative processes in the literary sources, as well as inductive reasoning towards the sort of record-keeping necessary to support certain operations. A key conclusion of the book is that the military administration of the Middle Republican period was highly centralized in Rome itself, where the citizen troops were levied and demobilized, and potential recruits were counted in the census. This stands in stark contrast to the more decentralized administration of the Imperial period, with legions stationed permanently in frontier fortifications with their own records and archives, allowing for some samples to be preserved in favorable environmental conditions in places like Bu Njem, Vindolanda and Dura Europos.

Chapter 1, “*Dilectus*,” explores the levy, in which Roman citizens were administratively processed into legions. Pearson dives into several controversies here, plausibly arguing that the Polybian text for maximum infantry service should be read as six years, and not sixteen, as commonly emended. More audaciously, she deftly argues against P.A. Brunt’s hypothesis that after the fourth century BC the centralized levy on the Capitoline gave way to decentralized levies in the countryside, with only those selected for service reporting to Rome to be organized into legions. Pearson argues that the sources clearly continue to support a levy on the Capitoline into the second century BC, and asserts that this would have been physically and administratively feasible. Not only could the Capitoline itself likely accommodate over 25,000 men packed tight, but the space would have been more than sufficient if one tribe was called up at a time. Furthermore, Pearson demonstrates that not all the male citizen body would need to come the Capitoline in the first place, subtracting out men over a certain age (probably 35), those currently serving, those who had already served their required campaigns, and those who were covered by exemptions (*vacationes*) would leave a far more manageable number of recruits to process. Furthermore, bringing a winnowed field of eligible men to Rome, rather than engaging in the local levies hypothesized by Brunt, had the advantage of processing potential recruits in the vicinity of the state’s own centralized archives: it was easier to bring the recruits to the paperwork than the paperwork to the recruits.

Chapter 2, “The Census and Centralised Military Bureaucracy,” discusses the Roman census as the event that undergirded the entirety of Roman military administration, given that the census rolls were used to generate the muster rolls (*tabulae iuniorum*) used in the levy. Pearson advocates for a centralized census, even suggesting that no attempts were made to register soldiers serving in the legions, with the exception of documented efforts to do so in 204 BC, which she sees as unique. But Pearson suggests that this was hardly devastating, as about half of men serving would have been registered by their still-living *patresfamilias*, others perhaps by proxies, while she raises the possibility that the censors might have used legionary rolls to account for deployed citizens in order to ensure an accurate count.

Chapter 3, “Recording Men on Campaign,” focuses on the military records maintained and used by the armies themselves. Pearson emphasizes that a Roman general and his quaestor needed to know the precise strength of the forces they commanded, especially since minor fluctuations in strength might be multiplied into massive changes in ration requirements. Simply keeping the army properly fed required accurate head counts. Furthermore, the fact that Romans deducted the pay from soldiers to account for rations, equipment and clothing suggests that each soldier had some form of basic account where these deductions might be noted.

Finally, the need to effect reinforcements, the annual *supplementa* dispatched to armies, suggests paperwork and correspondence, to let the senate know the rough size of the replacements that needed to be sent. Strength management involved counting the dead, in many instances by name, figures that might be forwarded to Rome as part of the general’s *commentarii*. Many of these *supplementa* were standardized (i.e. 5000 legionaries and 7500 allies), but there are enough fluctuations to suggest that outgoing commanders notified the senate of the army’s strength requirements, based on casualties and wastage. Furthermore, the arrival of a *supplementum* was a moment when time-expired soldiers were discharged, also suggesting that service records were maintained at the army level. Pearson concludes the chapter by arguing that the *lustrum* of the army following the arrival of a new commander represented a key administrative pause in which the incoming commander not only reviewed his troops, but acquainted himself (and his staff) with their records.

Chapter 4, “*Tributum* and *Stipendium*,” examines the collection of the war tax (*tributum*) and the issuance of payment (*stipendium*) for soldiers. Pearson argues that during the fourth century BC, taxation and military pay was completely decentralized through tribal officials: the *tribuni aerarii* collected *tributum* from their tribes, and distributed *stipendium* to soldiers in their tribes after they demobilized. The ancient suit of *pignoris capio* allowed soldiers to sue *tribuni aerarii* who failed to make appropriate payment. Notably, the central Roman state played no part in either the tax collection or payment, which was all handled at the level of the tribe. Pearson suggests that this decentralized system fell apart by the third century BC, as long-term deployments created the problem of paying Roman soldiers in the field and eventually overseas. While *tribuni aerarii* likely continued to collect *tributum* until its abolition in

167 BC, by the Punic Wars pay packets were dispatched to armies serving abroad, which also required pay records to be maintained at the army level.

Chapter 5, “Documents and Archives,” considers the physical aspect of both the records and the archives where they were stored, noting the potential use of bronze, papyrus, wood and wax tablets, and linen sheets. There is no conclusive evidence as to what particular military records were kept on, and in all likelihood a variety of media was used. Nonetheless, Pearson notes that the spatial requirements of storing these records were considerable. She speculates on several potential storage sites, including the temple of Saturn, the Aedes Nympharum and the Atrium Libertatis, the latter two both closely associated with the census. She offers the attractive assertion that we should consider these buildings together as a sort of interlocking military administrative complex, located near the Capitoline to provide the archival capacity necessary to support the levying of troops nearby.

Chapter 6, “Record Producers and Record Keepers” considers the personnel aspect of military administration. Pearson accepts that there was widespread semi-literacy within the Roman army, allowing, for example, the passing of marked chits during the watch. But she admits that most Roman soldiers probably were insufficiently literate to make meaningful contributions to military administration. While believing that the military tribunes might have carried some of the burden, she argues that key figures for military administration were the magistrates’ *scribae*, free civilian *apparitores*. She argues that public slaves were mostly used as archivists rather than as record creators, although she posits that public slaves might have transcribed the names from the census declarations onto the *tabulae iuniorum* in the lull between when the censors’ *scribae* wrapped up the census and before the consuls’ *scribae* arrived to conduct the next levy.

Overall, this work makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Roman army in the Middle Republic. The acts of recruiting, maintaining, deploying and discharging Roman armies in the Middle Republic required a substantial underlying administrative apparatus and considerable written records. Scholarly tension exists concerning the scope and sophistication of Roman governance during the Republic, namely whether it was simply a set of *ad hoc* contrivances of aristocratic amateurs, or if it rested upon the edifice of substantial technocratic capacity. Pearson makes a strong case towards the latter, and reminds us that Rome’s conquests were driven in no small part by the power of paperwork.

MICHAEL J. TAYLOR
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
mjtaylor@albany.edu