

Essay on the superior roman military

[Environment](#), [Water](#)



Abstract

The strong abilities of Romans to manipulate their physical environment via the development and use of strong military forces has led them to acquire several tracts of land across Europe, with its end as the Roman Empire having become memorable in scholarly works due to its sheer expanse. The magnanimity of the Roman Empire is perhaps best measured by the largeness of its territorial acquisitions. This study finds that the strong military forces of Rome has enabled it to two more consequential forms of physical manipulation – the slaughter of many people supporting Roman rivals and the systemic acquisition of land as “ war spoils” in victory. From a series of existing literature including both primary and secondary sources, this study shows how the manipulation of the physical environment via massive military strength is a crucial point to reckon in understanding the Ancient Roman civilization, with the most solid manifestation of which being the success of the Romans over the Carthaginians in the Punic Wars.

Keywords: Romans, Rome, Roman Empire, war spoils, Punic Wars, Kingdom of Rome, Roman Republic, Roman Empire

Introduction

Ancient Rome is notable mainly for its vast territorial reaches, many of which have helped characterized modern-day Western Europe. From being a small city-state based in what is now the city of Rome in Italy the Romans did not deprive themselves of any possible expenses that would benefit them in the rise of Rome as a highly politically powerful entity in Europe. The expansion of Roman territories across almost all of Europe and parts of Northern Africa

shows how the Romans were highly phenomenal at best in terms of their political expertise - a feat reachable only through the high proficiency of their military forces.

Given the superiority of ancient Rome in political affairs, the question on how Romans were able to manipulate their physical environment now arises. As a hypothetical premise, one could assert the success of Ancient Rome in its efforts for territorial expansion and establishing the Roman state as one that lies on the immensely devastating military power of the Romans and the effects of their devastation in terms of eliminating population and transfer of land use. Superbly notable in this premise is the attestation of both primary and secondary sources as supportive bases for the inherent ability of the Romans to manipulate their physical environment primarily through their powerful military. Consequentially, acquisitions that followed and the stabilizers thereof also came from the reputation of the Romans as supremely powerful in terms of their military. This study particularly focuses on the Punic Wars as the prime examples in explaining how the Romans were able to subdue the elements that confronted them in their favor due to the integrity of their military power. The vast expanse of the Punic Wars, alongside the fact that it has happened in the early days of the Roman Empire, makes it a fitting example for the purposes of this study. The Punic Wars, having involved the rivalry of Rome with the Carthaginian Empire, has endowed a historical pattern that repeated itself for every territorial acquisition the Romans made at their zenith.

Immense military power has enabled the Romans to conquer several lands within Europe - first, by conquering the whole of the Italian Peninsula and

then by spreading throughout the rest of the continent. Ancient Rome was divided into three eras – the Kingdom, the Republic and the Empire. Although there is an understanding that the records on the Roman Kingdom were vague and seemingly mythical at best due to the poor standards of compiling historical records that time, there is nevertheless a notion that Ancient Rome was already undergoing expansion by that time. With Ancient Rome starting out as a city-state according to the legend of Romulus and Remus, its territories have expanded to cover most of Europe today – a phenomena largely unachievable without emphasis on constructing competent military forces. Rome, having started as a small city-state, constantly faced attacks from neighboring Etruria, from which Etruscan armies confronted them with threats of seizure and occupation. Gradually, battles that transpired between Rome and Etruria has resulted into victories for Romans and their eventual occupation of Etruscan lands, which served as a successful precedent for them to expand within Italy (Cary, 1919; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002; Walbank, 1945).

A chief testimonial to the growing power of the Romans outside Italy is the Punic Wars, which was divided into three episodes between Rome and Carthage. The Carthaginian Empire, which governed Carthage, was immensely highly powerful back then and has preceded the Romans in terms of dominating the entire Mediterranean Sea. Both the Romans and the Carthaginians first crossed paths when the settlements at Sicily – an island in the Mediterranean Sea located between Rome and Carthage, called for both of them to help iron out its domestic political concerns (Cary, 1919; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002; Walbank, 1945).

Undoubtedly, the Romans were highly skilled in fighting land battles, which was tested against the Carthaginians as both of them sought to secure peace in Sicily. The desire to avoid the intent of annihilation, however, has caused both the Romans and Carthaginians to build animosity against one another. What was initially thought as a series of military exercises became a root of conflict between Rome and Carthage. To balance the scenario in the foregoing respect, the Romans realized that it has to provide its best efforts in terms of providing superior naval forces in the face of those already established by the Carthaginians. During that time, the Carthaginians were highly reputed for its strong naval force, which has enabled it to expand throughout the rest of Europe and Northern Africa – almost all areas surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, in particular. The Carthaginians were nevertheless confident that they would be able to avert any Roman threats at sea through their inherently superior navy (Cary, 1919; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002; Walbank, 1945).

The Romans sought to match Carthage in terms of naval power – a feat normally recognized as impossible that time. The persistence of Roman sailors to train their abilities thoroughly at sea and the creation of boarding technologies enabled Rome to become somewhat an instant naval power the Carthaginian Emperor had to reckon within at least five years after the Romans started their naval efforts. Being built from virtual nothingness, the navy of the Romans somewhat involved a transmission of military expertise by the Roman Empire that highly enabled Rome to confront Carthage competitively (Cary, 1919; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002; Walbank, 1945).

The Romans first landed on Carthage under Marcus Regulus, with the general subsequently guiding them to numerous victories in Northern Africa. Despite the fact that not all battles in Northern Africa were won by the Romans, they nevertheless exhibited their improved skills in naval warfare, which led to the defeat of Carthaginians at sea. Carthage, with its loss to Rome at sea given their supposed naval dominance, struggled through a phase of psychological distress due to their pride shattered by the progressive Romans. Yet, the rise of Hannibal during the Second Punic War served as a tough test for the Romans, given that numerous military and naval victories by Carthaginians under him has earned him the title “ invincible”. While Hannibal was able to infiltrate parts of the Italian peninsula, his failure to seize and destroy Rome was borne out of the quick counter-response of the Romans to infiltrate Carthage. Although Carthage barely survived after the Second Punic War, the Third Punic War proved to be the final straw to its existence as a once-great capital of a once-great Mediterranean empire. The complete annihilation of Carthage to ruins – a pattern routinely tried by the Romans to achieve in its successive battles, became the impetus for its territorial acquisitions outside Italy (Cary, 1919; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002; Walbank, 1945).

Denuding Populations of Captured Lands

Population elimination resulting from massive military conquests thoroughly enabled Ancient Rome to create an environment of hostility and submissiveness.

The Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage entailed the deaths of several Carthaginians – soldiers and civilians alike. The resolute destruction of

Carthage by Rome resulted to the availability of vast tracts of land available for wealthy Romans to dispose. Highly notable is the fact that such phenomena have enabled the Romans to switch from a democratic government towards a more autocratic one. The availability of land due to conquests has given wealthy Romans with greater favor, as their ability to purchase large tracts of land became instrumental for securing territories for Rome. The emergence of latifundia – plantations established by wealthy Romans above their newly-acquired lands from conquests, eliminated independent yeomen farmers, with many of them becoming slaves to land supposedly their own in the process (Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002). What made the Romans extremely capable in terms of manipulating their physical environment is the fact that they possess the very capacity to undermine rival populations with the sheer strength of their military forces. The case of the Punic Wars alone has set forth a daunting precedent that has made the Romans a highly-feared adversary in Europe. Without any contentions whatsoever, the Romans demolished Carthage by the end of the Third Punic War, vowing as they did never to leave any trace of the once-great city that rivaled its power. From such an example alone, the Romans were able to exhibit that they had the capabilities to adjust accordingly to beat far more superior opponents. The birth of the naval forces of the Romans just as an immediate response to that of the Carthaginians shows how Rome has strategically placed its priority over defeating their rivals in the Mediterranean Sea in order for it to have exclusive access to trade routes covered by Carthage. In return, the Romans killed several people along the way – landowners and yeomen farmers alike. The death of landowners and

the use of yeomen farmers as slaves have given further power to the Romans in terms of acquiring more territories outside Italy – a feat that would not have become possible had they preferred to spare as many people living on enemy soil. The denudation of people from a particular geographic area and the consequent domination over those who survived has thus pushed the Romans to conduct successful conquests. The lesser physical opposition they met, the greater tracts of land they acquire (Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002).

The Vast Availability of Land

Transfer of land use became the norm among Romans due to the elimination of populations resulting from military conquests (Polybius et al., 2010).

Farms, in particular were highly targeted as the death of owners during military conquests have left their lands ownerless and were put on sale to wealthy Romans that utilized slave labor. Every conquest done by the Roman military has entailed the availability of land; the resulting displacement of yeomen farmers entailed their capture as slaves for wealthy Romans – a process that went on throughout the Republic and Empire eras, eventually falling out due to the waning influence of the central government, changing loyalties among commanders and pressure coming from attacks by Germanic tribes (Heather, 2007; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002).

Land that came as endowments from war – occupied territories, in this sense, became known as a latifundium, the ownership of which was done through leasing after expropriation from defeated enemies. Although outright ownership was initially not allowed, the inheritable nature of leaseholding eventually paved way for taxable ownership, given the technicality

involved. As the so-called “ war spoils”, latifundia became the commodity of wealthy Romans, whose eventual status as landowners was characterized according to the ways in which they used the land - agriculture being the predominant reason. Soon thereafter, slaves had to be hired to tend to latifundia, with many of those held up as slaves being yeomen farmers who used to own the land they tend. Such form of subordination made the Romans extremely cunning in terms of securing territories for Rome - a fact that somewhat reverted in the final years of Rome as an empire due to peasant revolts, changing loyalties in military commands and the attack of Germanic tribes (Heather, 2007; Polybius et al., 2010; Scullard, 2002).

Conclusion

Specifically, the Romans relied on their massive military power to cause distortions in the physical environments of all the lands they conquered. The immensely devastating consequences of Roman military power has brought Romans more lands to conquer, which naturally caused the death of several people, seizure of their land properties and capture of people - particularly yeomen farmers, as slaves to newly-owned lands of wealthy Romans. Verily, what applied well in the way in which the Romans were able to manipulate their physical environment is the fact that they were highly organized and determined in terms of setting up their military forces, even to the point of expanding towards building a naval force that would prevail over the Mediterranean Sea in a post-Carthaginian dominance era. The strength of Romans in providing a determined force to confront Carthage at sea shows how influential they have become, in that they confronted their adversaries in areas where they are perceived as underdogs. In that respect, the Romans

have become eagerly powerful.

The natural consequence of asserting military dominance by the Romans over lands conquered in successful military battles is the depopulation of the native people inherently opposed to Roman rule. The Romans, for every battle they have engaged in, sought to pillage entire villages and destroy all dominant edifices for the benefit of ensuring their success in battles.

Afterwards, given the defeat of opposing military leaders, the Romans take over the lands they have attacked as their “ war spoils” meant for eventual occupation and incorporation in their own territories. Expropriation was freely done under Roman hands simply because they know that they have already killed many of those who they know will oppose them. The living few, presumably weaker due to the death of their supposed reinforcements, end up becoming slaves to the expropriated lands transferred under the ownership of wealthy Romans.

The changed status of expropriated lands from enemies to latifundia became instrumental to the dominance of the Romans over the territories they have conquered. If now for their strong military assertion over seized lands, there is an understanding that their enemies would revive their campaign against the Romans. Instead of that happening, the Romans felt that they need to subordinate all those left alive after battles in order to make the lands they have conquered more productive. Yet, such a decision incorporated risks of future revolts from the enslaved peasantry - which actually happened towards the end of the Roman civilization as an empire. The rise of Germanic tribes within and without Roman provinces outside Italy proved an even more daunting process towards civil disrepair, with changing commands in

the military making the process of downfall for Rome alarmingly speedier. Whereas this study covers answers to the hypothetical premise formulated in the introduction, it is important to note that such does not holistically address the main issue, hence its format as quite an inspirational backbone for future studies to reckon. Although primary sources from authors that have documented the events this study has mentioned in their lifetimes (Polybius, Livy and Cassius Dio) have sufficiently provided preliminary ideas responding to the hypothesis, it is notable to recognize that future studies may provide wider perspectives for answers to the given controversy. Historiographical accounts, for instance, would definitely require more time for accomplishment, in that it will seek different ways of analyzing and comparing similar and conflicting scholarly views. Indeed, not all scholars in different fields could lay claim to exclusivity towards a uniform set of ideas, but the point of addressing scholarly controversies is to address all merited conflicting accounts.

Therefore, in the case of this study on the history of Ancient Rome, the recommendation of using historiographical-type studies emerges favorably. After all, what one primary source may have seen and documented may not hold true to the merits claimed by another; a historiographical analysis detailing various primary sources in the form of a scholarly debate stands as a viable option for future studies to undertake. Such studies would definitely supplement the literature of the subject matter this study has undertaken, given that it expands to the dimensions of different historians whose analytical lens are presumably different from one another. Ergo, despite the fact that this study was able to address the controversy concisely yet

saliently, it goes without saying that further studies could provide alternative or supplementary notions to already-established answers.

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