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# GRECO-MACEDONIAN INFLUENCES IN THE MANIPULAR LEGION SYSTEM

## **ABSTRACT**

Since ancient times the Roman military system of the late third and second centuries BC as described by Polybius was considered a vastly different evolution, almost a revolutionary departure from the hoplite battle practice and definitely alien to the Macedonian phalanx. All our main sources, writing under the Roman Occupation regime (Plutarch, Polybius), or being outright Romans (Livius) have projected and imposed this view. Though, the manipular system if properly scrutinized shows many common features with the Spartan system of the era and even with the Macedonian one, features possibly imported in Italy by the campaigns of such war-leaders as Archidamus and Alexander of Hepirus. The incorporation of these approaches in a selective base and their integration with materiel, policy and even tactics, technique and procedure (TTP) of local peculiarities produced the Republican roman military system.

KEYWORDS: MANIPULAR LEGION, SPARTAN MORA, MACEDONIAN PHALANX, RECRUITMENT, MANEUVERING.

# INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the long convex scutum in place of the round clipeus may be dated either to Servius Tullius sometime after 575 BC (Liv. I.43,1) or to c. 400 BC, when the soldiers received regular pay (Liv VIII. 43,3) while Sallust (Sal. Cat, LI) echoing a generally held opinion, believe that the Romans borrowed the scutum and the pilum from the Samnites during their bitter struggles. The looser manipular system may

have been introduced during the siege of Veii in 396 B.C.E. (an operation for which the older phalanx formation was not suited), but if so it did not prove effective at Allia in 387 BC. The manipular formation is mentioned at the mobilisation of 340 BC (Liv. VIII.8,1-17), but since another rival tradition cited by Plutarch (Plut. Camill, XL 3-4) regards Camillus as an important military reformer, it is possible that the system was designed by Camillus against the Gauls. Livy assigns two centuries of engineers to the army sometime during

VI century BC (Liv. I.42,5-43,10) as does also Dionysius (D.H. IV, 16-18) though it seems that their personnel were weapons-makers, carpenters, wood workers, ironsmiths and other technicians, supporting the army units.

Apart from these considerations, open-order fighting was characteristic of Greek IV century BC warfare. It is more than possible that the new Roman manipular formation was based on Greek precedents, as the old one had been. Xenophon's men had opened ranks to let the enemy's scythewheel chariots pass harmlessly through (Xen. Anab. I.8,20); Timoleon's men decided the outcome of the battle of Crimissus in 340 BC against the Carthagenians by superior swordmanship (Plut. Timol. XXVIII) a feature witherto considered a roman prerogative (Polybius, Histories XVIII.28) and hoplite units were surging to attack in deep formation without forming a line in uneven ground (Xen. Anab. IV.2,11). Camillus was aware of the Greek world and the Greek world was aware of him, since he had dedicated a golden bowl to Apollo at Delphi and contemporary Greek writers refer to him (Plut. Cam 22.2-3, Plin. Nat. III. 5,57).

An important parameter is the existence of military teachers all through the earlier ages of Greece, since their names are mentioned occasionally though their writings – if any, have disappeared. The first established real military writers and Camillus' contemporaries were Xenophon, writing on horsemanship and on managing a cavalry squadron, outlining the duties of a cavalry officer and Aeneas Tacticus (from Stymphalus in Arcadia) who wrote a number of treatises concerning siegecraft and tactics (Oliver 1993: 657-669).

Last but not the least, the first half of the IV century BC was marked by the amazing career of Iphicrates, a general who addressed successfully the problems of flexibility and mobility through a series of reforms so that he could make up for the rigidity of the hoplite phalanx. Indeed when asked whether he valued more the horsemen, the footmen, the archers or the shield-bearers, he answered that he preferred one who understood how

to command all the above combining their advantages (Plut. De Virt. Mor. 187b) and his heavy influence is well attested on his successors. During the same era Dionysius the Elder devised a system of coordinating with devastating effects various and completely different arms such as cavalry, light troops, mercenaries, heavy infantry, elite units, catapult detachments of engineers and siege machinery (Diod. XIV.41-43 & 47,7).

# THE BASICS OF THE MANIPULAR LEGION

The republican roman legionary system before Marius was characterized by a number of important technicalities in organization, structure and drill. These are mostly considered as effected by Camillus, but there is important evidence of similar practices in Greek armies since the 4th century BC, and even since the 5th, while the Romans are mentioned implementing them in the 3rd c BC. Spartan influence might have been transferred due to Archidamus expedition in mid-4<sup>th</sup> century (c 345 BC) in southern Italy (Ath. 12.51, Diod. XVI.63,1), while Macedonian influence might be traced to the campaigns of Alexander of Hepirus and of Pyrros of Hepirus (Plut. Pyrrh. 15-18) or even to the Roman embassy to Alexander (Plin. Nat. III.5,57).

# SUCH ROMAN-DEFINING IMPLEMENTATIONS ARE:

- 1. A standardized division of yearly draftees to two different camps each under one yearly elected official (consul) (Plb. VI.26).
- 2. Each camp holds 2 expeditionary units, the legions, each (a) with full autonomy in combat, combat support and logistical support units of all arms and services and (b) without residence limitations in the selection of recruits, at least at the times of Polybius (Plb. VI.20).

- 3. The standardized division of each legio to 10 subunits (cohorts) deployed in line abreast and of full depth which can be dispatched individually and redirected (Plb. VI.24; XVIII.32,11 & XV.8).

  4. The formal division of the legion (and its cohorts) to three age echelons (maniples) with two subunits each (centuries). This division was in a standardized manner, where the first two age-classes were equal in strength and the third was kept absolutely steady and to half the nominal strength of each of the other two (Plb. VI.24).
- 5. The ability to interchange the three lines (Zhmodikov. 2000: 70).
- 6. The practice of having the two centuries of each maniple in both line ahead and line abreast formats.
- 7. The first cohort being of double size compared to the others of the legion (Breeze. 1969: 50)
- 8. The main offensive arm was the straight sword, not the spear or the javelin (Plb. VI.23).

### LAKONIAN AFTERTASTES

Polybius (Plb. VI,11) flatly states that the roman constitution is very similar to the original, Lycourgian of Sparta. The implementations 1 and 2 were definitely present in Spartan Morai which were units of expeditionary autonomy at least from the end of 5th century as described by Xenophon (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4) and manned by draftees from all the territory. The granting of leave on religious grounds (Festivity of Yakintheia) to all troops residing in one locality (Amyclae) dispersed within the whole army (Xen. Hell. IV.5,11) in 396 BC show the non-territorial conscription-at least of that time. This was in stark contrast to the usual practice of territorial or tribal conscription such as the Athenian Phylai and Taxeis which were tribal units (Aristot. Ath. Pol. LXI.3-5), Boetian contingents, Argive Lochoi, Macedonian Taxeis and Ilae which were territorial units (Arr. An. II.9,3, Diod. XVII.57,2). Constitutionally, the two Spartan war kings shared the

command when campaigning with full force and commanded each half the army in battle, before changing this in 492 BC, allowing only one king per campaign. Still, in 479 BC, two separate campaigns were pursued, one under a king and one under the other minor king's chamberlain, but the division of the army was not in half (Hdt. VIII.131 & IX.10-11); moreover the same happened, much to the dismay of one of the opponents (Phliasians) who considered this unlikely, in 385 BC (Xen. Hell. V.3,10).

The existence of cavalry Morai as described by Xenophon (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4) indicates the multi-arm nature of the lakonian Mora, as a direct analogue of roman cavalry turmae; the stationing of Morai to different outposts (Xen. Hell. V.I,29) shows their expeditionary nature and self-containment in services and arms. It is not known whether morai possessed an organic light-troop component as did the legions with their velites, but as they were stationed independently abroad in many cases, they should have under command a light-armed component-which would merge into the light infantry screen of the whole army for a pitched battle, under separate command. For the Battle of Plataea, Herodotus provides some interesting pieces of information: 5000 Peers are the main expeditionary force, and they are supported by an equal number of Periekoi (Hdt. IX.10-11). They emerge in two separate waves, and in battle they stand side by side and not intermingled in any way. Each body have an assigned support of light troops; but the ones assigned to the Spartans were many more and better equipped for battle (Hdt. IX.29) giving the impression that they were fighters, whereas the other light troops were manservants of the hoplites and occasionally did some fighting. This reminds the Roman system of citizen/allied legions (Plb. X.16). In Thucydides (Thuc. V.68,3) one can have no concrete idea on Spartan war machine of the late 5th century, but the binary system of the early 4th century described by Xenophon (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4), with 4 Lochoi per Mora begs the question of paired Peer/

# Maniple deployment-I



Fig. 1 Deployment by units. The posterior century deploys at the side of the Prior, similar to the Spartan Anastrophe. By finishing themaniple covers twice the original front and acquires contact with the next maniple at its left

# Maniple deployment-II

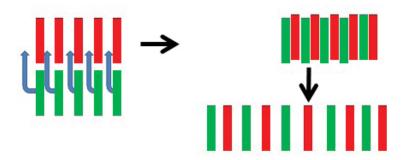


Fig. 2 Deployment by files. The files of the posterior century each advances to the left of the prior respective file of the Orior century. Similar to Greek Paragoge. After the deployment, the files but the rightmost move lateraly to the left to cover the space up to the next maniple.

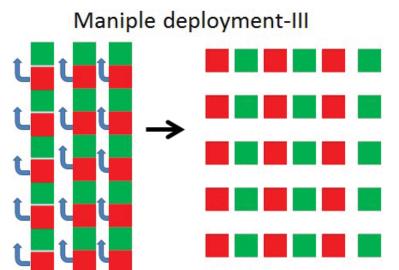


Fig. 3 Individual deployment. Every second number in a file advances forward, at the left side of the trooper in front of him. Similar to the Greek Paragogekat' Epistate. After the deployment, the files but the rightmost move lateraly to the left to cover the space up to the next maniple.

Periekoi Lochoi in each mora under a taxiarch or any other command echelon between Polemarch and Lochagos. In Herodotus time this would have been simple enough; but in Xenophon's time, the scarcity of Spartan Peers due to socioeconomic issues might indicate that in the Spartan Lochoi of the Morai, Hypomeiones, Mothakes and other disenfranchised citizens might have fought along with the Peers.

The Roman implementation 3 is nothing new if compared with the Spartan Army of early 4th century. Each mora had a standard structure which Xenophon details (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4), (although he might have missed an echelon) with full-depth units and subunits in a binary manner, more or less. It is very interesting that the mora and the legion, despite their vast manning difference top strength of 800 or 1000 before Sparta's decline compared to 4-5000 during the republican apex) have the same number-three- of subordinate levels: 4 Lochoi-2 Pentekosteis-2 Enomoteiai to 10 Cohorts-3 maniples- 2 centuries. Even before Xenophon, in 418 BC, Spartan generals could reorient whole major units off their line and into other parts of the front. Such an order was issued in Mantineia, 418 BC by the king to 2 lochos-commanders (Polemarchoi) according to Thucidydes who may have erred the name of the Spartan divisions (Thuc.V.71,3); he calls them Lochoi, but although he mentions the rank of Lochagoi, at the description of the action mentions as their commanders Polemarchs, the rank which takes command of a mora later on. If the Polemarchs command Lochoi, there is no room for Lochagoi.

Xenophon also describes the Spartan order of march, with cavalry, infantry scouts (Sciritai) (Xen. Const. Lac. XIII.6.3) and picked troops (Agema, which might, or might not contain the Hippeis) (Xen. Const. Lac. XIII.6.4), directly reminiscent of Roman extraordinarii (Plb. VI.26; VI.30; VI.40). Spartan Morai had an age division rather horizontal, which makes them similar to legions as far as Implementation 4 is concerned, as well. In some outposts substandard Morai are

mentioned stationing (Xen. Hell. V1.29) and the balance are sent to reinforce (Xen. Hell. VI.4,17), and this applies even BEFORE the term Morai is introduced by Xenophon; such is the case with the Spartan army in the first battle of Madinaea in 418 BC (Thuc. V.72,3) when the second Spartan king is sent with reinforcements consisting of the most young and elder (Thuc. V.75,1).

Some 20 years later, in 394 BC, one and half mora were sent to reinforce Agesilaus returning army before the battle of Coronea (Xen. Hell. IV.3). This half is definitely different than half the subunits (2 lochoi) and must mean all subunits (4 lochoi) half-manned in age groups, for extended service; in Leuctra, 371 BC the Morae participating in the battle were manned with 35 age-classes and another 5 were mobilized for reinforcements after the defeat (Xen. Hell. VI.4.17). Similar tactical disposition is attested by Xenophon for the allied army of Agesilaus in Asia, in cases were a portion of the phalanx, with the younger hoplites, charged on (Xen. Hell. I.31) while the rest were brought up as fast as possible at a trot, being the elder troopers. In 390 BC, similarly, 10 and then 15 age-classes of a Mora at Lechaeon spring forward for pursuit of enemy peltasts (Xen. Hell. IV.5,15), after a previous success in such an endeavor (Xen. Hell. IV.4,16). Last, in defending Sparta from the Thebans, Agesilaus has 300 younger hoplites in ambush (Xen. Hell. VI.6,31) without any elders nearby, indicating they could act as an autonomous unit.

But the army of Alexander had it even more prominently. In Arrian many times Alexander forms flying columns and details parts of the phalanx in these. In some cases, singular divisions (Taxeis) are mentioned (Arr. An. VI.6, 1), especially the one of Koinos. But in other cases Arrian mentions the fleetest and lightest armed from the phalanx (Arr. An. III, 23, 3). This is not a faulty, nor implicated reference to certain taxeis, but speaks of a category of phalangitai from all taxeis. It is very similar, if put into context, with the Spartan Ekdromoi (Xen. Hell. IV.5,16) and the

younger hoplites of the Myrioi (Xen. Ages. I.31) charging at the double from the whole phalanx and being followed by the second, more elderly part. On the other hand, Diodorus (Diod. XVII.26,1-2) specifically mentions, when describing the events in Miletus, phalanx veterans, not participating in siege action, guard and latrine duty and skirmishing and only taking the field for pitched action and in great emergencies. Such practice, if not a projection by Diodorus of roman practices to Macedonian times, reminds the proverbial context of Triarii in the Roman system (res ad triarios venit), while Thucidydes (Thuc V.72,3) implies a reserve of battle-worthy Lacedaimonian elders behind the line and being roughly handled by the enemy 1,000 elite troops having burst through the pro-Spartan phalanx.

## THE MACEDONIAN CONNECTION

The Macedonian system may have been familiar to the Romans either by the invasion of Alexander of Hepirus, (cousin and contemporary of Alexander III the Great), who might well have introduced into his army the newest developments. Not only this explains well the hepeirot success under Pyrrus, but is logical due to the low budget needed for the initial adoption of such developments. On the other hand, some of the issues at hand may well have evolved independently in the two military systems, as they consist converging evolution and provide answers to the same problems.

Both Arrian and Diodorus, the most important Alexander historians, describe the Macedonian phalanx out of Thebes deployed in three lines, each consisting of different divisions. This is of course different from the roman 3-line system, but in this engagement the Macedonians are clearly mentioned to interchange lines. Diodorus mentions 2 changes (Diod. VII.12,2), Arrian only one (Arr. An. I.8,3-5) and this rather receiving the fugitives of a previous class than a proper change)

which refers to Implementation 5. The obvious drill is to have open phalanx and once the fleeing troops have retired, to transform to close order either by "Paragogi", bringing the hind halves of the rows near to their front halves, or 'Paragogi kat' epistati", with every second man (epistati) of the row pacing left and forward, at the left of his previous number (protostati) to result in half depth, double frontal density phalanx. This practice might well have been used earlier. At least since 415 BC as Thucydides (Thuc.VI.69,2) speaks of light troops engaging between the two deployed heavy infantry phalanxes and then retiring-obviously not around the flanks, but through the lines. Though, even the Ekdromi, the dashing out of younger hoplites to pursue enemy light infantry might have been executed in this manner, although this is not a concrete assumption; alternatives are just as possible for the use of Ekdromoi.

Regarding the implementation 7, in Alexander's army, both the King's cavalry squadron and the Hypaspists units, the elite and standing part of the army, might have been double-strength compared to other divisions. It is not possible to extend this observation to other Greek states elite (Epilektoi/Logades) units, as the Theban Sacred Band the Phliasian Epilektoi or the Hippeis of Sparta, all three of which were 300-strong (Plut. Pel. XVIII.1, Xen. Hell. V.3,22, Thuc. V.72,4). In the case of infantry things are solidly attested and straightforward. The 3 chiliarchiai (Arr. An. V.23,7) of the Macedonian Hypaspist Corps are double the 1500 of ordinary infantry taxeis, and their subdivisions of 500 are half the strength of hypaspists chiliarchy. Moreover, the deployment at Pelion of the Macedonian Phalanx at a depth of 120 men (Arr. An. V. I.6,1) shows that there was indeed an echelon of the regular line infantry with such strength; these units in the abovementioned instance were deployed in single file.

Some extrapolation is needed for the cavalry. The 1:10 cavalry/heavy infantry ratio of the Greek armies (Plut. Aem. XIII), (followed by the Macedonian army in its entity, as attested in Chaeronia)

meant that the royal ila should be 300 horse-strong and ordinary ones 150-strong. The latter is attested by Arrian (Arr. An. II.9.3-4), mentioning that Alexander before launching the charge at Issus left 2 Ilai, in all 300 cavalry, to fend off a Persian flanking movement. The elite Macedonian units (the Hypaspists) were stationed to the right (Arr. An. II.8,3 & III.11,9, Diod. XVI.86,1) as did the First Cohort in roman legions (although the stationing of elite troops to the right is attested much earlier for hoplite armies) (Hdt. IX.28). The double standard in the Army of Alexander was discontinued early after Gaugamela, when massive reinforcements (Curt. V.1,40) inflated the strength of line units to 2000 in infantry and to 200 for cavalry, creating the need for an intermediate level of command in both cases-chiliarchies (Curt. V.2, 3-5) and cavalry lochoi (Arr. An. III.6, 11) respectively, while the elite units were not affected.

In some incidents Roman Consuls/Proconsuls are escorted by an elite body of troops 1,000-strong (Plb. X.15); similar bodies tend to assume special missions as in 146 BC in the battle of Corinth (Paus. XVI.3). It is very tempting to connect them with the Epilektoi/Logades units of 1,000 or so that became prominent in Greece at the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Thuc. V.67); it is also tempting to identify these troops with the First Cohort of the senior Roman legion of the respective expeditionary forces; else either a non-standard Elite unit should be identified, or the Extraordinarii, as these operations take place out of the standard order of battle.

The most perplexing issue is Implementation 6. The binary system lies in the heart of ancient greek military systems, contrary to the Persian decimal one. Before the campaign of 334 BC the Macedonian system was binary, with 2 lochoi forming one taxis and similar cavalry units (perhaps called *tetrarchiai*) forming one Ile, perhaps following Athenian standards introduced in Macedon by Iphicrates during the kingship of Amyntas III or by Philip II (Nep. Iph. 3). In Pelion, 335 BC, 2 macedonian Ilae counted for

200 cavalry, each of 100 (Hammond 1974:82, Arr. An. I.6,1). A third unit was evidently added to the Macedonian formations for the Persian campaign, ALLOWING AN UNPRECEDENTED DEGREE of tactical flexibility, with two echelons in triangular formation (center projected or denied). Once major field encounters were deemed over, after Gaugamela, the army bounced back to binary, although now having a much stronger capital unit: the new taxeis were 2,000 strong, in two chiliarchies of 1,000- the standard strength of Greek taxeis and of Macedonian before the triangular system. Thus, a Greek formation having its two units in line abreast was the standard practice (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4, Xen. Anab. III.4,21-22). The Roman system was less streamlined, having two centuries in a maniple, 3 maniples in a cohort, ten cohorts in a legion, two legions under a consul and two consular armies under a dictator-or under the supreme command of the Senate. The legion had a shadow allied unit of the same strength (Plb. X.16). All these units were posted line abreast, as the greek units- but for the maniples, which were posted in successive echelons, though non-linearly (Plb. XV.8). The real question is how exactly were posted the two centuries of a maniple and how they deployed from line ahead to line abreast in the field so as to form a solid line.

The Roman deployment in quincunx fashion (Plb. XV.8) puts a standard density in units arranged in fixed distances. This is different to the Greek Taktike (Tactics) where the front had to be evenly covered in density if not in depth also. If a unit –the maniple-is posted in a front line and covers a given part of it, by doubling the files (halving the ranks) it should cover double the distance, or achieve double density. Hoplites did either. It is a question if legionaries did it too. The rear century may perform Paragogi and its files proceed between the files of the front century. This doubles the density, and then it is easy to spread to cover the uncovered area. To move the whole rear unit near the front half is the way we understand it up to this day, but it is more prone to pitfalls as a whole unit must make fit, instead of a line at a time. In reverse, to change the two centuries from line abreast to line ahead (nothing more complicated than the Anastrophe of the Spartan army, executed in army scale (Xen. Hell. VI.5,19) to shorted the line out of an enfilade) (Xen. Hell. VI.2, 21) in the heat of the battle, so as to interchange lines, it is impossible to call back every second unit in the face of the enemy and not to have some remaining units enveloped -or flanked-and broken. Centurions are far from each other, both when abreast and ahead. Even executing Paragogi and Epagogi by file in the heat of battle might prove challenging; though, it surely decreases the density to half, so as to have the second line go through the files of the first in order to relieve it. The two centurions fight next to each other when the maniple is deployed, but are afar when the two centuries are in tandem. And there is the third option the second century is NOT behind the first, but inside it. Every second man belongs to the second century, and the two centurions fight one in front of the other. If the maniple is deployed, then each second man does Paragogi kat' epistati and moves front and left, to cover the space at the left of his front number. Thus the two centurions fight sideby-side and the opening and closing of the ranks is performed in seconds, just enough to allow a replacement line to emerge and take the fight.

Both the quincunx posting and the two centurions argue against the third option. In Macedonian Hellenistic armies it must have had been so. This way, in open order the file leader and the half-file leader form the two first lines of the phalanx; the best warriors and the best weapons to the cutting edge. If deployment is needed, they will fight side by side, the best warriors and weapons posted in the first line of the phalanx. But with the possible exception of decturion, we lack any clue to the roman organization under the century, in stark contrast to the Greek and Macedonian files. The beauty of the third system is that once deployed, the line has enough space between successive ranks to allow lateral moves. A whole ma-

niple may slide into its next, to form a corridor for charging chariots or elephants.

The second option, on the other hand, is favored by historical ecidence and has a closer resemblance to Spartan practices, possibly transmitted as said before with the campaign of Archidamus (Ath. 12.51). Xenophon declares that the Myrioi organised ad hoc six 100-strong Lochoi, each divided to Pentekostyes and Enomoties (Xen. Anab. III.4,21) clearly following the Spartan standard, as the force included a whole Spartan regular regiment (Xen. Anab. I.4,3); thus each echelon should have two lower ones (Xen. Const. Lac. XI.4). Moreover, he exlicitly states that these Lochoi could be formed up, according to the tactical situation, by lochoi proper in straits, by penetkostys in wider areas and by enomotia in open terrain (Xen. Anab. III.4,22). As each echelon comprises two of the lower ones, if all the enomotiae are in line abreast the formation is "by enomotiae". If the two enomotiae of each Pentekostys are in line ahead but the pentekostyes of a Lochos in line abreast, it must be "by pentekostyes", and if all enomotiae are in line ahead, it must be "by Lochos". The term "Lochoi orthioi" (Xen. Anab. IV.3,17) meaning "batallions in column" most probably implies the last of the above deployments. Most probably with the enomotiae deployed at their maximun width and minimun depth. A Roman manipular Legion only differs in that the Cohort had three, not two subunits (maniples) in line ahead and was thus able to deploy the second one out of line, producing the characteristic quincunx of the Roman army.

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# REZIME GRČKO-MAKEDONSKI UTICAJI NA MANIPULARNI SISTEM LEGIJE

KLJUČNE REČI: MANIPULARNI SISTEM LEGIJE, SPARTANSKA MORA, MAKEDONSKE FALANGE, REGRUTOVANJE, MANEVAR.

Još u antičko vreme smatralo se da je rimski vojni sistem krajem III i tokom II veka stare ere, kako je opisano kod Polibija, doživeo znatnu evoluciju, gotovo revolucionarno odvajanje od hoplitskog načina ratovanja, stranog makedonskim

falangama. Svi najvažniji grčki izvori, pisani u vreme rimske dominacije (Plutarh, Polibije) ili rimski (Livije) govore u prilog ovakavom stavu. Mada manipularni sistem ako se podrobnije ispita pokazuje mnoge zajedničke karakteristike sa spartanskim sistemom ratovanja, ili čak sa makedonskim, verovatno da je donet u Italiju nakon vojnih pohoda nekih od vojskovođa poput Arhidama ili Aleksandra od Epira. Selektivno unošenje nekih od elemenata i njihova integracija sa materijalnim, političkim, čak i taktičkim lokalnim specifičnostima, stvorile su rimski republikanski vojni sistem.