

Introduction

The military is a if not the central element in Roman history. Rise and fall, the route from Romulus' huts to a world empire – and back to a provincial city – often seemed to Roman eyes, as still to ours today, an uninterrupted series of wars. What does war signify in such a culture? Is it the normal state or an exception? How does war appear to the inhabitant of Rome? Where does he or she learn what war is? What does it mean to him or her to hear the words: This is war?

1. The religious construction of war

The present study represents an attempt to find answers to these questions by means of an investigation into the religious construction of war in Rome.¹ What does it mean when we talk of the religious construction of war? As a concept and corresponding activity, war is a social construct. Most societies evince a whole variety of violent forms of internal and external conflict. A part of this spectrum is typically specified as 'war' as opposed to 'peace', and expanded into a distinct system of rites and rules. An ethnologically-based definition of war as opposed to simple killing comprises four elements: first, the fundamental reliance on distinct military commands for dealing with the conflict; second, the social sanction distinguishing deaths in war from deaths within society; third, the readiness of the participants in principle to kill and die; and, fourth, the mutual adoption of these elements by the opposing sides, as well as the conviction on the part of both sides as to the overarching legitimacy of their actions.² When it comes to specifics, however, war does not mean the same to all people. Estimates of the 'point when' war exists, of where the 'threshold to war is crossed', diverge. Distinctions are made in terms of 'civil war', 'cold war', 'conditions verging on war', 'border incidents'. The question how a society classifies war in terms of its self-image may be approached via an investigation into the legal construction of war: who defines the war (or 'measure

1 My study does not include the Italic and – later – non-Italic allies and auxiliary troops. C. SAULNIER (1980a; 1983) began to collate the facts about the early Italic armies; s. a. generally ALFÖLDI 1965, especially 299–370. For the republican period, I wish primarily to stress the source problem; the sources flow so sparsely here that, while a study would not absolutely be condemned to fail, reconstructions would probably prove so extravagant as themselves to demand a further study. Another, objective consideration is that, for the period after the Latin War, which is to say the time when the Roman sources begin to flow more richly and reliably, we have in any case to begin from an assumption of Roman-style warfare and perception of war.

2 DIVALE, HARRIS 1976, 521; MEAD 1968, 215–16; OTTERBEIN 1973, 923.

of self-defence!)? Who wages it? What is the legal status of soldiers? What obligations are determined upon in respect of non-combatants ('civilians')?

In the case of Rome, the 'legal' construction of war appears a potentially less fruitful subject for investigation than its 'religious' construction. 'Religion' here is the primary forum through which fundamental cultural, social and political decisions are reflected, publicly communicated and legitimized by recourse to superhuman agents.³ It is thus also the forum where anyone who is not (yet) directly involved in war learns what war 'is'.

This way of determining parameters – religion as a way to communicate about the understanding of war in rituals, symbols, and rules, and especially in qualifications of times and places – prevents problematic judgements, emphasizing not the question whether a particular element belongs to the acknowledged sphere of 'religion', but the determination of the relevance of that element to the understanding of war. The usually anachronistic, frequently polemic distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane', 'holy' and 'secular' war, falls away. The 'religious construction of war' as an entire concept provides an opportunity to address important anthropological questions concerning war, and, while enabling us to determine the place of war in Roman culture and in the history of state formation,⁴ restores particular significance to the transition to war, and to killing and the taking of plunder.⁵

In attempting to arrive at an inclusive interpretation,⁶ we are able to acquire an understanding of seemingly isolated utterances in our sources. This must not, however, involve us in the temptation to reconstruct historical developments. In the context of a rapidly expanding society, the picture of an unchanging Roman culture appears implausible: especially in a field located at the focus of change, the burden of proof rests with those making such a claim. This also applies at the next level: in the reconstruction of ritual details as in the reappraisal of broader contexts, great importance accrues to the task of demonstrating the parameters and elements of societal change.

2. The political elite's configuration of war with the aid of religion

If we were to confine our attentions to the 'religious construction of war', the result might easily be misconstrued as an attempt to describe a Roman mentality.⁷ It would then also be defective in tending to give only a minor role to historical constellations,

3 RÜPKE 2015b.

4 See e.g. TERRENATO, HAGGIS 2011.

5 WALLACE refers to the great importance of the preparatory phase of warfare between states.

6 Reflections on this concept in CANKIĆ 1971.

7 The sources do not allow of an approach entirely predicated on a history of mentalities. Recourse to changeable 'mentalities' – understood as cognitive, ethical, and emotional dispositions, the self-evident, unquestioned way of life that becomes universally effective – represents an important corrective against over-readiness to assume rationality of a modern western kind. However, the approach appears sensible to me only where mentalities of a specific kind can be described and at the same time supported by internal or external cultural analogies.

to the human subjects involved and their intentions. The problem can be overcome by addressing a second level: the close dialectical relationship between the religious construction of war and the political elite's construction of war with the aid of religion. Any particular war is provided with a relevant ritual framework by the leading elite or defined members of that elite. This element of the construction of war by religious means may be routine, but it always serves concrete purposes of a motivating or legitimizing kind. Religion is instrumentalized in the service of war and contributes to the formation of the 'state', the 'common cause' (*res publica*), and occasionally to its disintegration.

Analysis is commonly unequal to the task of differentiating this second level from the first. From the first perspective, magistrates and priests vary rituals and legal rules in the context of a preconceived understanding of war that remains unquestioned. However, these very variations, emphases, omissions, and reinterpretations confirm the 'religious construction of war', while in the long term determining the manner by which that construction changes. Religion is a process, not a fixed entity, it is 'religion in the making'.⁸ The rate of change of particular elements can vary greatly. One important process of change concerns the role of the military commander, which alters markedly as the competitive but homogeneous leading elite of the Middle Republic gives way to the Augustan monarchy. Rituals that characterize the commander's role, such as the triumph, undergo great changes; others that contribute only a little to it, such as the burning of the enemy's weapons on the battlefield, fall into disuse, while yet others, such as the *lustratio exercitus*, remain largely unaltered. The process of development is by no means uniform; in individual instances it is influenced by an increasing number of factors of differing origin; in extreme cases this leads, at least in the short term, to a divergence between the actual character of a war supported by religion and the religious construction of war as generally understood. Augustus marks the endpoint of the present investigation at this level. While he stands at the close of republican lines of development, at the same time clear breaks and new beginnings may be observed under his regime.⁹

3. Soldiers' religion

It is not only the anthropological inquiry into war, into humanity's dealings with death and killing, that requires a further level of approach. We must also ask whether the implications of the religious construction of war are so great as to alter the way participants in war practise religion. To what extent do they use religion to interpret the circumstances of war as they experience them: in other words, to cope with those circumstances? It is necessary at this point to flesh out both our characterization of

8 ALBRECHT et al. 2018.

9 Fetials, opening of the Janus Gates, monopoly of auspices and Mars will be examples of Augustan positions and even inventions.

religio(nes) militum as a field of practices and beliefs, and our functional analysis of its traits; which in turn opens up the question of the image of war promoted by the state: what consequences does this have for the participants; what is their perception of the religious elements employed? What effect do the acts of divination conducted by commanders have on soldiers? How does the centrally promoted cult, the *religio castrensis* as it has been called in recent studies,¹⁰ function in military camps?

This area too is marked by pronounced changes. The context within which development occurs is best defined by the duality of the citizen soldier and the professional soldier, as used in American military sociology. The trend towards professionalism, with soldiers serving for ever longer periods, stationed ever further from home, begins in the Late Republic, and reaches something of a new level under Augustus, with the Roman army becoming a professional body stationed at the frontiers of empire. It is here that the practices summarized as *religio castrensis* are systematized and give rise to new developments; although, with only the sources of the Flavian to Severan dynasties to aid us in forming a more detailed reconstruction of the process, we are compelled to stray beyond the time-frame indicated.

In order to avoid substantial repetitions, I only occasionally allow the account in the main section (II–IV), devoted to the typical course of a military campaign during the Republic, to give discrete attention to the levels described here, by this means seeking to maintain my emphasis on the reconstruction of ritual details, as these constitute the antiquarian and historical basis for more far-reaching interpretations.

State of the art

War as a theme within the field of the History of Religion had moved more strongly into prominence after the rise of interest in Anthropology from the 1960s onwards, in the years preceding the publication of the first German edition of this book in 1990. The term ‘Holy War’ had achieved wide currency and is still used today, to describe a category of war understood as an intrinsically religious act, carried out on behalf of and with the aid of a god or gods.¹¹ As such, it is difficult to regard it as a meaningful academic term. Where ‘Holy War’ is distinguished from other types of war, the intention, whether positively or negatively connotated, is propagandistic or polemical. Almost any construction of war contains religious elements. Where they occur in particularly great number, they should be described in discrete detail. In the case in question, the term does not even provide an aid to classification.

Many investigations concentrate on the religious-historical paradigm of ‘holy wars’ in the Middle East, waged with the active participation of a god. In terms of method, these studies are useful only to a degree. They rely on reconstructing the theology of war in a narrow sense, describing the gods of war, their intervention in

¹⁰ On the use of this term see Chs. 10 and 11.

¹¹ See KANG 1989. Examples cited are often Islamic *jihad* and the medieval crusades; but cf. PETERS 1980, REINERT 1986, and the outline in THOMPSON 1988; for the crusades see AUFFARTH 1989. Critically RÜPKE 2006a, c. Religious elements of ancient expeditions are collated by HARMAND (1973).

war, and the ritual structure of a military campaign. This is inadequate for any cultural-historical, anthropological, or historical analysis of the kind to be attempted here.

Roman religion in the context of the Roman military and Roman warfare is no new theme in the History of Religion. Research, however, has followed two distinct routes. On the one hand, long before MOMMSEN and WISSOWA, there was interest in rituals associated with the Republic's military activities, often already half-forgotten in the 1st century before Christ: the declaration of war by the *fetiales*, the commander's *devotio*, the *evocatio* of foreign gods. The triumph with the general as a manifestation of Jupiter is probably still one of the dominating topics of research.¹² Interest has been enhanced by researches into the Roman calendar, with DUMÉZIL and VERSNEL offering new interpretive paradigms for this line of study. Studies of 'Holy War' have frequently served as comparative material for this school of research. The second route taken has been and still is impelled by advances in epigraphy and provincial archaeology, and by finds of papyri such as the Feriale Duranum.¹³ This route investigates the evidence for religious practice in military posts, and, since DOMASZEWSKI, has tried to reconstruct the diverse religion of the imperial-period army.¹⁴

In many of the fields touched upon by this book, the past thirty years have produced substantial scholarship criticizing, advancing or detailing hypotheses and results presented here. To integrate this material on the thematic scale of this study has proved an impossible task. I have provided a few references to major new positions or treatments, and at times clarified my arguments (not least due to the care and insistence of my translator David M. B. Richardson, with whom I now share a long-standing professional relationship and even a friendship). In view of the availability of digital texts, I have dropped most of the quotations of sources in the footnotes. In view of the passage of time, I have removed the extensive lists of scholarship up to 1989 in the first footnotes of many chapters and sub-chapters. Overall, the argument is still that of the first, German edition. In several instances, however, my scepticism regarding the advance of state formation and the stability of rituals has sharpened, while my awareness of the processes of ritualization and ritual change has been enhanced.

I am grateful to Christopher Smith, who encouraged me to pursue the idea of a translation even on the basis of such a light revision, for his suggestion that accessibility might be improved by the addition of a critical reflection on the book's virtues and deficits. Federico Santangelo, who has considerably advanced this very field located at the interface between Ancient History and the History of Religion, has agreed to supply a substantial afterword. I am very grateful to him, and encourage every reader to begin with his comments.

12 E. g. ITGENSHORST 2005; BEARD 2007; BASTIEN 2007; ÖSTENBERG 2009; LANGE, VERVAET 2014.

13 This is the calendar of religious observances found in Dura Europos, and belonging to its garrison; it is from the time of Severus Alexander, probably AD 225–7. It was published by FINK, HOEY, SNYDER 1940 and FINK 1971.

14 The most important contributions of the 1970s and 1980s were from E. BIRLEY; SPEIDEL; ANKERSDORFER (1973); HELGELAND and HERZ (1975); see now STOLL 2001; WOLFF, LE BOHEC 2009.

Also deserving of my thanks is Claudia Heise for her revision of the bibliography and Katrin Schlunken for the compilation of the index. Major editorial decisions and guidance in the technical process of publishing have been provided by Katharina Stüdemann and Thomas Schaber of Franz Steiner Verlag. Last but not least, I am grateful to the University of Erfurt for providing a budget sufficient to allow the translation to be financed.

Erfurt, January 2019

Part 1

ROME: A CITY PREPARED

I A bellicose polity?

The concept 'religious construction of war' does not as such imply any statement as to whether or not the Romans were a warlike people. It is, however, of aid in identifying a category of cultural data that may be consulted in assessing such a view. There are various other research approaches to explaining the fact of the Romans' frequent and ferocious resort to war. In seeking primal structural characteristics of Roman society and mentality, these involve the investigation of stimulating elements such as images of enemies, ideologies of heroic death or victory, and concepts of glory, as well as other, less expressly articulated factors such as competition among the aristocracy or between other social groups. One important field consists in trying to identify institutions designed to encourage the acceptance of violence and contempt for life. Finally, there are analyses of the central concepts of *bellum* and *pax*.

Some of these approaches are beset with problems. There is the question of isolated observations that fail to fit any coherent interpretive model. Claims as to the level of intensity of a phenomenon can be proven only by intercultural comparison, and then often with difficulty. In the crowded field of anthropological approaches to the investigation of war,¹ such analyses are all on the side of the causes of war, not the consequences, and concentrate on values and social structures. Often, not enough distinction is made between the individual's mental state or motivation and a context of intersocietal aggression. Despite the great number of inquiries into individual outbreaks of war, no role is given to the process of transition from peace to war. There is so much haste to declare war institutional to Roman society that scant attention is given to the processes by which war is initiated.

Image of the enemy

Archaic societies are to a large extent characterized by a tendency to identify *hostis* with *peregrinus* (Cic. *Off.* 1.37), with the stranger appearing *a priori* also as an enemy.² This dichotomy between the internal and the external, by which war might be seen as a 'special instance of religion', with 'non-world' being processed into 'world' at an expanding frontier,³ no longer delivers an acceptable interpretive model when it comes

1 Overview in OTTERBEIN 1973:927.

2 See HASENFRATZ 1986:23; GLADIGOW 1986. Cf. EIBL-EIBESFELDT (1984:129, orig. German): 'The *enemy schema* "Enemy" is ... more precisely the *enemy schema* "Human" not overlaid by friendly experiences.' On the problem of *hospis/bostis* see HILTBRUNNER 1978; on instances of perceived enemies (Parthians, Egyptians) SONNABEND 1986; very generally: WEILER 1989.

3 STOLZ 1986b: 136.

to historical time. The Rome of the kings already constitutes a communications hub, with international contacts reaching far into the Mediterranean world.

Caesar's *Commentarii*, which generically conflate author and protagonist, have inspired substantial studies of this image of the enemy.⁴ An analysis of Caesar's harangues to his troops before battle is, if anything, rather disappointing in terms of our inquiry. The enemy is, on the whole, characterized within the traditional 'barbarian' schema.⁵ They are wild, intemperate, rash, and therefore brave. The image is not exclusively negative: some of the characteristics observed might even serve as a moral mirror for Roman society.⁶ Where Caesar lists active types, the traits reflected are those gauged to motivate tactical decisions above all, and rarely strategic judgements. *Superbia* – think of Virgil's *debellare superbos* – plays a certain role in this regard.⁷ *Crudelitas*, on the other hand, occurs only in particular circumstances, although when it does, in the shape of human sacrifice or cannibalism,⁸ it is attributed enormous motivational significance. Here one's thoughts turn to Cicero's conception of *bellum iustum*, which, as a theory of morally- and rationally-based warfare, seeks to identify the grounds for war, and to replace hatred for the enemy with moderation.⁹ Roman warfare, for all its cruelty, never crosses the threshold from instrumental to absolute war.¹⁰

Explicit images of enemies arise from concrete historical situations, become confirmed and internalized, and then persist independently of any state of threat.¹¹ Over a period of three hundred years until the end of the Republic, the Gauls constitute such figures of terror for Rome. Institutionalized in terms of *tumultus Gallicus*, this explains both the high repute given to 'conquerors of the Gauls' (Marcellus, Marius, Caesar) and current interpretations of the *Gallus-et-Galla* sacrifice, by which it is thought that, alongside a Greek man and woman (the menacing 'other' culture par excellence), a Gaulish man and woman were buried alive.¹²

Gloria, victoria

W. V. HARRIS has thoroughly investigated the function of wars for the Roman aristocracy of the Mid and Late Republic, providing a vivid portrayal of the nobility's enthusiasm for war into the Late Republic; only from this time onwards did peace gain acceptance among its number as a foreign-policy goal; the view that war was highly

4 Here I should like to mention KOUTROUBAS 1972 and HEUBNER 1974. See also SCHIEFFER 1972. See Ch. 8.1.

5 HEUBNER 1974:181; see also DEMOUGEOT 1984.

6 See KOUTROUBAS 1972:76; Tacitus' *Germania*.

7 Verg. *Aen.* 6.853; KOUTROUBAS 1972:82; HEUBNER 1974:179 f.; SCHIEFFER 1972:494.

8 See SCHIEFFER 1972:488.

9 Cic. *Leg.* 3.9; similarly Cic. *Off.* 1.35; 2.26 f.

10 SPEIER 1941; see MAIER 1987:28.

11 HEUBNER 1974:105; see BELLEN 1985.

12 Sources and interpretations in LATTE (1960:256 f.), whose postulate of an Etruscan origin is unnecessary.