

EL EJÉRCITO ROMANO COMO AGENTE POLÍTICO Y SOCIAL: EMILIO GABBA

The Roman Army as a Political and Social Agent: Emilio Gabba

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Abstract

Emilio Gabba's work on the transformation of the civic militia into a professional army represents a milestone in the historiography of the late Republic. However, these studies hold a paradoxical place within his scholarly output: fewer in number than his works on other themes, they are also more influenced by certain interpretative biases. This article offers some reflections on this issue.

Keywords

Military History, Late Roman Republic, Fraccaro, Ideology.

Resumen

Los trabajos de Emilio Gabba sobre la transformación de la milicia cívica en ejército profesional constituyen un hito en la historiografía de la República romana tardía. Sin embargo, estos estudios ocupan una posición paradójica en su producción académica: menos numerosos que los dedicados a otros temas, están también más marcados por ciertos sesgos de interpretación. Este artículo ofrece algunos elementos de reflexión al respecto.

Palabras clave

Historia militar, República romana tardía, Fraccaro, Ideología.

Of all the major issues concerning the history of the Roman army in the late Republic, two stand out as central to the work of Emilio Gabba—one of the greatest Italian historians of the 20th century, who passed away in 2013¹. These are the evolution of the relationship between the army and society during this period and the role of soldiers in political life during the civil wars. This is largely due to the enduring influence of his book *Esercito e società nella repubblica romana*, which remains his best-known and most frequently cited work². Bringing together a collection of previously published articles, it includes, in particular, two extensive studies on the late Republican army. These were landmark contributions that established his academic reputation from the outset³.

On an international level, the perspective outlined by Emilio Gabba in these acclaimed works has significantly shaped scholarly views on the Roman army at the end of the Republic. His influence can be seen, for example, in the work of Jacques Harmand and Claude Nicolet in France, as well as in the work of Robert E. Smith and Peter A. Brunt in the English-speaking world⁴. It is no coincidence that the republication of these texts in the 1973 volume coincided

1. For an overview of Emilio Gabba's career and work, see the most recent contributions collected in Desideri & Giua, 2011 and the proceedings of the two major conferences held in his memory shortly after his death: Collective, 2016; Carsana & Troiani, 2016. On the latter publication, see Capogrossi Colognesi, 2018 and the other contributions published in *Athenaeum* 106.1 in 2018. In a short book of interviews with Umberto Laffi, originally published in 2009, Gabba himself talked about his training, career and views on history: Laffi, 2015. On the value of this account, see in particular Pani, 2011 and Tessitore, 2012.

2. Gabba, 1973. According to Baroni, 2016, p. 115, this is unquestionably «(il) libro più famoso di Emilio Gabba».

3. Gabba, 1949 and Gabba, 1951. On the immediate impact of these two publications and their echo in the historiography of the time: Baroni, 2016, p. 118; Cadiou, 2018, pp. 40-44.

4. Smith, 1958, especially pp. 1-10 et 44-58; Brunt, 1962, p. 69: «my debt to earlier writers, especially E. Gabba and R. E. Smith, will be evident»; Harmand, 1967, especially pp. 17-18. The links between E. Gabba's approach and that of C. Nicolet on military themes have recently been highlighted by Augier, 2019, in particular pp. 165-166 and 179.

with the moment Gabba was appointed to the Chair of Roman History at the University of Pavia, marking the beginning of the most productive and celebrated period of his career⁵.

For the Italian scholar, the changes that gradually positioned the army as a new political and social agent at the end of the Roman Republic can be summed up as the interaction between the processes of the ‘proletarianization’ and ‘professionalization’ of the legions. This is well reflected in the titles of his two most emblematic articles on the subject⁶. The centrality of these ideas in his approach to the relationship between the army and society has often been highlighted by commentators⁷. Gabba himself underscores this point in the opening sentence of the preface to the 1973 volume:

Ho riunito in questo volume una serie di articoli che sono venuto pubblicando dal 1949 in poi, e che, più o meno direttamente, si lasciano tutti ricondurre al comune intento di chiarire taluni degli aspetti più vistosi della trasformazione politica e sociale dello stato Romano dai Gracchi ad Augusto, e soprattutto la posizione, nelle società del tempo, dell’esercito di professione, che si venne affiancando, e poi sostituendo, alla tradizionale milizia cittadina⁸.

In Gabba’s view, the supposed disappearance of the civic militia in the first century BC, replaced by a professional army, was an inevitable and disastrous consequence of the transformation of the social base of legionary recruitment, as the poorest citizens (the proletarians) took the place of the wealthy⁹. For him, this shift, resulting in an army of proletarianized volunteers, was one of the fundamental causes of the collapse of the Roman Republic in its last century¹⁰. The main arguments supporting this interpretation are well known and have recently been outlined by Anselmo Baroni and Giuseppe Zecchini in their broader assessments of Gabba’s contribution to the study of the Roman army¹¹. For my part, I have

5. On the circumstances of the transfer from Pisa to Pavia in 1974: Gabba in Laffi, 2015, pp. 29-30; on the effervescence of Gabba’s scientific activity from that period onwards: Laffi, 2016, pp. 20-22.

6. «Le origini dell’esercito professionale in Roma: i proletari e la riforma di Mario» (1949); «Ricerche sull’esercito professionale romano da Mario ad Augusto» (1951).

7. In her review of the 1973 work, published in 1975 in *L’Antiquité Classique* 44, Mireille Cébeillac Gervasoni observes: «une idée fondamentale a toujours orienté la pensée de cet auteur : comprendre comment une armée de citoyens non-prolétaires a pu devenir un regroupement de volontaires de rang prolétaire» (p. 782).

8. Gabba, 1973, p. ix.

9. This causal link is also the starting point for the 1949 article, in which it is stated from the outset that the «composizione proletaria delle legioni romane (...) è il presupposto degli eserciti di professione del I sec. a. C.», Gabba, 1949, p. 173.

10. Laffi, 2016, p. 15 rightly points out that, in his work, Gabba highlights «il ruolo determinante dell’esercito professionale nella crisi della repubblica romana».

11. Baroni, 2016, pp. 119-120; Zecchini, 2016, pp. 97-100. For the place of these publications on the army within Emilio Gabba’s broader reflections on the late Republic: Clemente, 2016 (note that this article has been translated into Spanish: Clemente, 2016-2017). In particular, he points out that «I saggi (...) propongono una visione unitaria dell’ svolgimento storico della tarda repubblica, continuamente approfondito

explored in detail elsewhere the elements that underpin, particularly in Gabba's work, the twin hypotheses of the proletarianization and professionalization of the Roman legions in the last two centuries of the Republic¹².

This contribution therefore has a different objective. Rather than revisiting the content of Gabba's publications on the late Republican Roman army, it seeks to situate them within the broader framework of his scholarly work. I begin with a certain paradox: despite their lasting impact, these studies represent only a very small portion of Gabba's academic production. Moreover, they belong to an early stage in his intellectual development, a period when his thinking was strongly influenced by Plinio Fraccaro—well before he reached the maturity of his historical and, above all, historiographical perspective, shaped in large part by the influence of Arnaldo Momigliano and Franco Venturi¹³.

This threefold observation highlights the foundations of the interpretative model that Gabba adopted and reinforced regarding the evolution of the legions at the end of the Republic. Rather than from being solely the result of an objective analysis of ancient sources, this model primarily reflects the academic culture internalised by the young Gabba during his intellectual training, as well as some political and social biases inherited from his family background.

The Late Roman Republican army in Emilio Gabba's scientific production

The fame of Emilio Gabba's 1973 book, mentioned in the introduction, tends to overshadow a striking yet rarely noted aspect of his scientific output: despite their significance and lasting influence, his works specifically addressing the Roman army at the end of the Republic are relatively few in number.

Setting aside the two seminal articles from 1949 and 1951, which extensively outline the explanatory model most commonly associated with his name, and are supplemented only by a brief reading note from a later period¹⁴, his contributions on the subject remain limited. He published just three articles on the distribution of land to soldiers¹⁵, three on fiscal, monetary and economic issues¹⁶, one on the enlistment of slaves during the Second Punic War¹⁷ and one on the relationship between commanders and their troops¹⁸. Two studies on

con altri contributi. (...) In definitiva, questo lungo lavoro si configura come un'interpretazione generale della storia tardo-repubblicana, vista attraverso il tema del rapporto tra esercito e società.» (*Ibid.*, p. 105).

12. Cadiou, 2009; Cadiou, 2018; Cadiou, forthcoming.

13. On the various stages of Gabba's intellectual development and the influences that led him to gradually open up new fields of research: Laffi, 2016. On the importance of the meeting with Momigliano: Gabba in Laffi, 2015, 1 pp. 8-20; and with Venturi: *ibid.*, p. 44.

14. Gabba 1973b.

15. Gabba, 1950; Gabba, 1953; Gabba, 1975.

16. Gabba, 1977; Gabba, 1978; Gabba, 1979.

17. Gabba, 1998.

18. Gabba, 2002.

tactical and technical aspects, which take a more broadly chronological approach, must be put aside¹⁹. In total, between 1949 and 2013, Gabba's direct contribution to the debate on the evolution of the late Republican army rests on fewer than a dozen scholarly works.

Although significant in itself, the number of publications on this topic must be considered in relation to Gabba's overall academic production over the same period, recently estimated by Umberto Laffi at more than 800 titles²⁰. Within this vast bibliography, studies on the Republican army account for less than 2% - a relatively small proportion. This highlights the fact that, despite a potentially misleading impression, this subject was far from central to Gabba's scholarly work. Over the course of his long career, his research interests were, in fact, more focused on other topics²¹.

This observation does not in any way diminish the fundamental role that these few publications have played in post-Second World War historiography on the Roman Republican army. However, it does align, at least in part, with a point recently made by Anselmo Baroni, who notes that Gabba's reputation as a specialist in military history is primarily based on the early decades of his academic career, but is no longer as justified afterwards²². This indicates that, despite appearances, Gabba's work is not primarily focused on military history.

In fact, Gabba's most influential publications on the subject, those widely regarded as marking a real turning point in modern historiography, are his very first scholarly works²³. This is quite remarkable, as it is not often the case that an academic's earliest writings remain their most impactful. After the two seminal articles published in *Athenaeum* in 1949 and 1951, which had a lasting influence, few later publications sought to develop these initial reflections further. The 1973 book, as previously noted, did not introduce new arguments, but simply compiled these earlier works alongside other articles on the political and social history of the late Republic. In this regard, it is worth noting that the English translation, published shortly afterwards, did not exactly reproduce the Italian edition. Instead, it shortened the original and refocused the perspective more narrowly on military aspects, as reflected by its revised title: *Republican Rome, the Army and the Allies*²⁴. Some have argued that this editorial choice

19. Gabba, 1966 and Gabba, 1980.

20. Laffi, 2016, p. 14, which is based on the bibliographic inventories drawn up for the period 1949-2006 by Baroni, 1996 and Zoroddu, 2007. At the end of Carsana & Troiani, 2016, pp. 351-361, there is also a more selective bibliography, this time for the period 1949-2011, but which already includes more than 200 titles.

21. Notably, when Laffi, 2016, p. 26 lists the many themes he considers central to Emilio Gabba's main fields of research, he does not include military history: «uno storico che ha rivisitato una vastità e una varietà straordinarie di tematiche: storia politica, storia istituzionale, storia sociale ed economica, storia culturale, storia della storiografia».

22. Baroni, 2016, p. 115: «Gabba si era guadagnato, soprattutto nei primi decenni della sua attività scientifica, anche per la scuola storica di provenienza, la fama di specialista di storia militare».

23. Zecchini, 2016, p. 97; Clemente, 2016, p. 105.

24. Gabba, 1976. This translation played a significant role in establishing the book's reputation, particularly in the English-speaking world. Of the 15 articles included in the original Italian edition, along with

partly distorted the original intent of the collection, as conceived by Gabba himself²⁵. In this sense, this English translation played a significant role in the misunderstanding that led to Gabba being seen as a specialist in the Roman republican army.

In any case, after 1973, Gabba did not return to the key issues explored in these early works in any further research articles, with the possible exception of a brief contribution to a 2002 conference volume edited by Marta Sordi²⁶. This article examined changes in the behaviour of military leaders in the first century BC as a result of shifts in the social origin of recruits, but it remained an isolated study within the production of that later period. Indeed, all of his publications on the Republican army after 1973 addressed other issues or, when they did deal with the transformations of the army in the first century BC, merely summarised the arguments originally developed in the 1949 and 1951 articles. This is evident in works such as the introduction to a small collection of documents on military revolts in the Republican period²⁷, and, above all, the chapter on the decline of the civic militia in the prestigious *Storia di Roma*, at the turn of the 1990s. The latter serves as a synthesis of Gabba's views on what he saw as a crucial transformation of the late Republican army²⁸.

In other words, while highly significant, Gabba's contribution to the debate on the army's place and role in society during the last century of the Republic is largely concentrated in a small group of articles published in *Athenaeum* and *La Parola del Passato* in 1949 and the early 1950s. From that point onwards, as he himself acknowledged, he simply referred back to the main conclusions of these early works. This is clearly visible, for example, in the opening lines of the most recent article on the subject, published in 2002:

Questo intervento si basa su alcuni miei lavori precedenti. Come si vedrà dai testi, io sostanzialmente farò riferimento a una serie di scritti che si collocano lungo un percorso cronologico che, pur incominciando dalla fine del IV secolo, in realtà è centrato sul I secolo a.C. (...) Io mi sono

a 16th section of Note e discussioni, the English edition retains only six. Similarly, among the reviews, it retains only those of Toynbee's *Hannibal's Legacy* and Badian's *Foreign Clientelae*. Articles devoted more specifically to political and institutional issues («Politica e cultura in Roma agli inizi del I secolo a.C.; Osservazioni sulla legge giuridiziarica di M. Livio Druso (91 a.C.)»), social and civic aspects («Nota sulla 'rogatio agraria' di P. Servilius Rullus; Ancora sulle cifre dei censimenti»), ancient historiography («Italia e Roma nella *Storia* di Velleio Patercolo; Commento a Floro, II 9, 27-28»), civil wars and their consequences («Senati in esilio; Sulle colonie triumvirali di Antonio in Italia»; «Aspetti della lotta di Sesto Pompeo in Spagna») have been removed from the English version.

25. Zecchini, 2016, p. 100: «In questa traduzione si perde, però, a mio avviso, il nesso essenziale tra esercito e società, che l'autore aveva voluto porre in evidenza nell'edizione originale italiana».

26. Gabba, 2002. Curiously, Zecchini, 2016, p. 106, does not seem to consider this publication as a research work, since he considers that it is rather Gabba, 1980 that constitutes «l'ultimo suo contributo di ricerca e non di sintesi sull'esercito romano».

27. Gabba, 1975.

28. Gabba, 1990. The main lines of the argument are also presented, in an even more condensed form, in Gabba, 1989, pp. 489-491. On the importance of the undertaking represented in Italy by the publication of the *Storia di Roma*: Clemente, 2016, pp. 112-114.

già occupato dell'esercito professionale che si contrappone – non in maniera totalmente drastica ma in modo molto evidente – al precedente tipo di esercito che era una milizia cittadina²⁹.

It should also be emphasised that Gabba's position on these issues remained unchanged over time. Compared with the arguments and ideas put forward in his publications from 1949 and 1951, his later writings show a great deal of continuity. This stability has been noted by several commentators, who have pointed out that Gabba remained steadfastly faithful to the analytical framework established in these early works³⁰.

However, it is important to add that this consistency was maintained because he largely disregarded certain objections concerning key aspects of his arguments. A notable example comes from Peter A. Brunt, in a major study on similar themes first published in the *Journal of Roman Studies* in 1962. In the introductory note to the republication of his article in a well-known volume of *scripta varia* published in 1988, he openly regret that Gabba took no account of his points of disagreement:

The argument is essentially unchanged: to my knowledge it has never been refuted. It built on the work of R. E. Smith, 1958, and on articles by E. Gabba in *Athenaeum* 1949 and 1951, since republished with some changes in Gabba 1973 (Eng. tr. 1976). But in crucial points I differ widely from Gabba: for example, I think it misleading to describe the army of the late Republic as «professional»; I rate much lower the importance of clientship; and I think Gabba wholly mistaken in holding (e.g. 1973, 1 17 ff.= 1976, 120 ff.) that normally veterans had no wish to return to the land. In the revised versions of his essays Gabba takes no account of my contentions³¹.

Brunt's sharp criticism somewhat contradicts Gabba's stated intention, in the preface to his 1973 book, to offer a version of his earlier works that, while not fundamentally altering

29. Gabba, 2002, p. 155. In note 1, he specifies which of his earlier publications he is referring to here: «In due memorie del 1949 e del 1951, raccolte poi in E. Gabba, *Esercito e società nella tarda repubblica romana*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1973, pp. 1 ff; 47 ff».

30. Thus Zecchini, 2016, p. 98: «Questo sono in estrema sintesi le tesi avanzate dal giovane Gabba intorno al 1950 sull'esercito della tarda repubblica. Tenendo conto che a tali tesi egli rimase sempre sostanzialmente fedele, come si evince dai suoi contributi alla einaudiana *Storia di Roma* del 1990, si può osservare che (...)». It has often been pointed out that Gabba's chapters on the late Republic for the *Storia di Roma* summed up his interpretation of the period: Clemente, 2016, p. 114.

31. Brunt, 1988, 240. Within this volume, this note introduces the republication, in a revised and updated form, of Brunt, 1962. However, to put the severity of this criticism into perspective, see Brunt's review of Gabba, 1976 in *The English Historical Review* (volume 93, 1978), where he offers a high praise to the significance of the Italian scholar's work: «even fundamental disagreements of the kind I have touched on do not mean that Gabba's work is not entitled to the highest respect; few living historians of the Roman Republic can match his erudition, and there is a wealth of information and ideas in every chapter to instruct and stimulate the student.» (p. 427).

them, would at least point out to the reader the key debates that had emerged in scholarly discussions over the intervening years:

I lavori sono ripubblicati con alcune modifiche, anche di rilievo (...). Le modifiche riflettono naturali mutamenti di opinione sopraggiunti come conseguenza tanto dell'ulteriore sviluppo delle mie stesse ricerche, quanto delle molte e proficue letture di quanto è stato scritto su questi problemi in questi ultimi tempi. (...) Ho anche corredato in più punti il testo con aggiunte, nelle quali ho indicato e talora discusso alcuni risultati di quella più recente indagine critica che mi è parsa singolarmente importante, e prescindendo, come è naturale, dall'accordo o dal disaccordo con le opinioni da me espresse³².

In the years that followed, none of the brief summaries or extensions that Gabba produced on the Late Republican Roman army acknowledged the doubts raised in the 1970s-1980s by certain scholars, whether rightly or wrongly, about key aspects of his argument. These included fundamental issues such as the supposed decline in the proportion of *adsidui* in the second century BC³³, the emergence of a truly professional army in the first century BC³⁴ or the development of clientelistic, quasi-private armies in the last century of the Republic³⁵.

Rather than engaging with these objections or attempting to refute them, Gabba simply reiterated his original positions in publications from the mid-1970s to the 2000s. His arguments remained unchanged, as can be seen in the following quotations, which serve as illustrative examples:

32. Gabba, 1973, p. xi.

33. For example, on this issue: Shochat, 1980, pp. 46-55 argues that «there is no real evidence for a shortage of *assidui*». Above all, Rich questioned Gabba's assertion by suggesting that, at the beginning of the first century BC and perhaps even up until the Social War, there is no clear evidence that the Roman armies were recruited primarily from among the proletarians (Rich, 1983, pp. 327-330).

34. In particular Gruen, 1974, pp. 378-380: «Common presumption holds that the armies of Cicero's day developed a "professional" character absent in previous eras. One of the by-products, some have argued, was the emergence of a military mentality, a homogeneity in the ranks, which produced soldiers alien to civil traditions and indifferent to Republican institutions. Precisely what is meant by "professional", however, remains unclear. (...) The "military mentality" is unattested, and "professional army" is a misnomer»; see also Brunt, 1988, 253: «the significance of Marius' reform was very small. It will be seen that it did not create a professional army of volunteers, as Gabba still supposed».

35. Notably Rouland, 1979 and Brunt, 1988, pp. 257-260. In his preface to the 1994 reprint of his 1974 book, Gruen also agrees with the latter on this point: «Positions taken on these matters in *LGRR* owed much to Brunt's important study, "Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution", subsequently republished in revised form, with updated notes, in *The Fall of the Roman Republic*, 240-280. (...) The composition of the post-Marian armies, in Brunt's analysis, did not differ markedly from the past, nor had Rome developed a dual structure of standing armies and emergency forces. Neither personal attachment to generals nor professionalization characterized the late Republican military» (p. xvi).

... alla fine del II secolo a.C., il formarsi di un esercito di soldati proletari sarà il sintomo più evidente della decadenza politica dell'ordinamento statale tradizionale dominato dalle classi alte³⁶.

In realtà il sistema di leva iniziato da Mario (...) veniva a creare una compagine militare affatto nuova. Non più una milizia temporanea di cittadini-piccoli proprietari, animati da alte idealità e compresi del dovere civico del servizio militare, ma un esercito di proletari volontari che trovavano nel professionalismo militare la via e il mezzo per la restaurazione di una condizione economica compromessa³⁷.

L'esercito professionale diventa una grande clientela personale, divisa fra i singoli generali, e si avvia a cessare d'essere al servizio dello stato. (...) L'esercito professionale della tarda repubblica diventa, quindi, un esercito clientelare³⁸.

Il fenomeno della clientela militare fece, ad ogni modo, acquisire rilevanza individuale e collettiva alle truppe e, quindi, ai ceti sociali inferiori dai quali provenivano. (...) il militare assume una posizione nuova nella vita dello stato, da un punto di vista politico rivoluzionario in quanto agli ordini del suo capo compartecipa del potere reale, da un punto di vista economico-sociale in quanto la preda e le ricompense dopo il servizio lo reinseriscono nel contesto della società con diritti e privilegi³⁹.

La progressiva proletarizzazione delle classi dei medi e piccoli contadini, vanamente contrastata dalla riforma graccana, condurrà verso la fine del II secolo all'ulteriore passaggio a un esercito professionale, largamente fondato sul principio del volontariato, che finirà poi col prevalere sulla milizia cittadina, anche se il metodo tradizionale del *dilectus* fondato sugli *adsidui* non verrà mai abolito⁴⁰.

(con Mario) il servizio militare incominciava così ad essere inteso come una via per restaurare le proprie condizioni economiche compromisesse, vale a dire come una professione⁴¹.

Con la valorizzazione dei ceti sociali più bassi nell'esercito, il servizio militare andò acquistando aspetti sempre più evidenti di professionalismo. (...) ... stabilitosi così fra soldati e generale un vincolo personale, l'esercito cessava d'essere dello stato per divenire privato⁴².

La connotazione del generale romano nel I secolo a.C. è, infatti, fondamentalmente militare e sta in rapporto alla situazione socio-politica dell'esercito, che è venuta acquisendo i suoi linea-

36. Gabba, 1975, pp. 3-4.

37. Gabba, 1975, pp. 19-20.

38. Gabba, 1975, pp. 22 and 24.

39. Gabba, 1975, p. 25.

40. Gabba, 1989, pp. 490-491.

41. Gabba, 1990, p. 695.

42. Gabba, 1990b, p. 799.

menti dalla fin del II secolo a.C. e che ha modificato profondamente il rapporto precedente fra il generale e le truppe⁴³.

In short, from 1973 onwards, Gabba's preferred interpretative model of the army remained unchanged across his publications, effectively frozen in the formulation he first set out in the early 1950s⁴⁴. In his view, the Roman armies of the late Republic—proletarianized, professionalized and therefore more loyal to their leaders than to the state—had become both an instrument of social revenge for the most disadvantaged citizens and a political weapon for ambitious generals vying for power⁴⁵.

What is particularly striking is that, for Gabba, the debate on all these issues appeared to have been settled long ago⁴⁶. However, the criticisms directed at his arguments from that time onwards suggested quite the opposite. Since then, in my view, developments in research have only supported this criticism⁴⁷.

An approach partly inspired by that of Plinio Fraccaro

Emilio Gabba's research on the late Republican Roman army, limited in scope and concentrated mainly at the very beginning of his career, appears above all as a brilliant work of youth⁴⁸. It belongs to the period of his scientific and intellectual formation⁴⁹. As his interests later shifted towards other fields, this may partly explain why these early works did not undergo the same update over time as other aspects of his scholarship⁵⁰.

It is worth recalling here a well-known fact: the articles published in *Athenaeum* in 1949 and 1951, which Gabba himself repeatedly cited in all his subsequent writings on the subject, were not only his first two academic publications, but also stemmed directly from his *tesi di*

43. Gabba, 2002, p. 155.

44. A point made, for example, by Zecchini, 2016, pp. 100-101: «l'impostazione del nesso tra esercito e società nella crisi della repubblica romana resta sostanzialmente invariato nei contributi di Gabba alla *Storia di Roma* pubblicata presso Einaudi a partire dal 1988. (...) dunque egli intese riprodurre in sintesi l'esito delle sue ricerche anteriori sull'esercito nella tarda repubblica».

45. Gabba, 1973, p. 30 refers to «l'esercito proletario, professionale e volontario, posteriore al 107», even though this, in his view, «non differa gran che, nella composizione e nella mentalità, da quello che abbiamo mostrato esistere prima di quell'anno». This is the text of the 1949 article.

46. This reluctance to engage with the criticisms of his theses on the army's main transformations during this period contrasts strikingly with his evident willingness to debate other aspects of late Republic, particularly the formation of the Italic elites, the agrarian question or the Social War: Clemente, 2016, p. 111.

47. On the arbitrariness and fragility of the hypotheses regarding the proletarianization and professionalization of the legions at the end of the Republic—accepted by Gabba without sufficient discussion, see Cadiou, 2018 and Cadiou, forthcoming, with a reminder of the previous bibliography.

48. Zecchini, 2016, p. 108 refers to «le ricerche giovanili sull'esercito repubblicano».

49. Polverini, 2016, p. 27.

50. On this point, we will be more cautious than Baroni, 2016, p. 126 when he concludes, with regard to Gabba's work on the Roman army, that there were «ripensamenti continui».

laurea, defended shortly beforehand⁵¹. Gabba himself described, in his fascinating interview with Umberto Laffi, the circumstances that led him to focus on the late-Republican army for his dissertation, and then to publish the results in the form of these foundational articles:

Mi tesis, que fue defendida el 30 de junio de 1948 y obtuvo « *110 lode* » (...), trataba sobre las distribuciones agrarias para los veteranos de la edad tardo-republicana. Resulta interesante mencionar cómo se desarrollaban los trabajos de las tesis con Fraccaro. Le solicité que me dirigiera la tesis el año anterior, en los primeros meses del año 1947. Su respuesta fue : ocúpate de los veteranos. No me dijo nada más sobre el tema; a diferencia de lo que sucede hoy, el docente dejaba completamente en las manos del alumno las formas de la investigación. (...) El día después de haberme laureado, en un patio de la universidad, encontré a Fraccaro, quien me preguntó por qué en vez de perder el tiempo, no preparaba un artículo para la revista *Athenaeum*. Preparé un texto y se lo presenté al profesor. Apenas vio las páginas me dijo en el acto: redúcelas a un tercio. Así lo hice. El artículo apareció así reducido en *Athenaeum* de 1949 y me sirvió para la admisión en el *Istituto Croce* de Nápoles, porque estaba claro que Croce lo había leído y me pidió clarificaciones⁵².

This testimony highlights the crucial role played by Plinio Fraccaro, Gabba's thesis supervisor, in shaping his choice of a military history topic and in securing the opportunity for him to publish his first work in a journal as prestigious as *Athenaeum*, both then as now⁵³. According to Leandro Polverini, who has been able to consult the original dissertation, a comparison with the published articles reveals several differences, primarily due to Fraccaro's insistence on reducing the text⁵⁴. However, the overall perspective—centred on the transition from the civic militia to the professional army and its consequences—remains unchanged, as is evident from the summary presented as an «Avvertanza» to the reader:

I primi tre capitoli corrispondono alla prima parte del titolo; vogliono cioè fissare alcuni elementi della storia dell'esercito romano, attraverso i quali esso, da esercito cittadino, si trasforma in milizia professionale.

Successivamente, alla luce dei vari provvedimenti a favore dei veterani, si cerca di inquadrare il fenomeno stesso del veteranesimo nella storia politica dell'ultimo secolo della Repubblica.

L'ultimo capitolo vorrebbe dare una ricostruzione della figura del veterano dei Triumviri ed essere al tempo stesso un tentativo di mostrare la conclusione della questione dei veterani: la deduzione in colonie militari⁵⁵.

51. On the origin of these first two articles: Baroni, 2016, p. 118; Clemente, 2016, p. 105; Laffi, 2016, p. 15.

52. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 16.

53. Fraccaro, director of *Athenaeum* since 1927, was the one who breathed new life into the journal: Polverini, 2013, p. 301.

54. Polverini, 2016, p. 25. The thesis was entitled *Veteranus. Ricerche sulle origini e sugli aspetti politici della milizia professionale presso i Romani*.

55. Quoted in Polverini, 2016, p. 25.

Obviously, the vision of the late Republican army that emerged from Gabba's early works—an army that had become professional by the first century BC—owes much to Fraccaro, as Gabba frequently acknowledged⁵⁶. For Fraccaro, the issue of veterans, which he had advised the young Gabba to study for his thesis, was inherently linked to that of professionalization⁵⁷. In this sense, it is entirely legitimate to see Gabba's analyses in the 1949 and 1951 articles, derived from his thesis, as a direct continuation of Fraccaro's thinking on the subject⁵⁸.

The same can be said for much of the research the young scholar produced during his first period in Pavia, when he worked as Fraccaro's assistant at the university⁵⁹. Throughout his career, Gabba continued to pay tribute to the man he regarded as his mentor⁶⁰. At the time of Gabba's first publications, Fraccaro was a recognised authority in military history, even though his main focus was on the Middle Republic rather than the Late Republic—that is, on the Polybian army rather than the post-Marian legion⁶¹. His lectures on the military history of the second century BC at the University of Pavia left a strong impression on his students, including the young Gabba⁶².

Fraccaro was then one of the few Italian historians of his time to achieve broad international recognition, particularly in the English-speaking world⁶³. With his first two publi-

56. Gabba in Carsana, 2012, p. 3: «La tesi che Fraccaro mi assegnò riguardava la formazione dell'esercito professionale. Fraccaro la leggiucchiò e dopo la seduta di laurea mi propose subito di ridurla di un terzo per pubblicarla su "Athenaeum". La cosa mi stupì non poco»; Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 15: «Por ejemplo, todo el problema de la historia agraria romana (...) se derivaba de la enseñanza de Fraccaro, así como también mis investigaciones surgidas como historia de las instituciones y de la sociedad militar de la edad republicana».

57. Fraccaro, 1975, p. 107: «Naturalmente questo avvia al veteranesimo, cioè alla professione militare».

58. See in particular Laffi, 2016, p. 15, according to whom «la matrice fraccariana di questi studi è evidente», and Clemente, 2016, p. 105: «L'influenza di Fraccaro è ovvia, e non serve sottolinearla».

59. Polverini, 2016, p. 27: «alla scuola di Plinio Fraccaro Gabba rimase ancora - non solo in quanto assistente - nel corso del decennio 1948-1958, come mostra l'impronta fraccariana della maggior parte degli scritti che lo portarono dalla laurea alla cattedra pisana».

60. Gabba, 2009, who concludes his tribute as follows: «Sono contento che questa mia forse ultima riflessione sia stata dedicata al ricordo dello studioso mio maestro al quale debbo principalmente l'avvio e il sostegno per la mia attività scientifica ed accademica» (p. 239). The pupil is also the author of the entry devoted to his master in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*: Gabba, 1997, and has returned on several occasions to the latter's academic and intellectual career: Gabba, 1995; Gabba, 2001; Gabba, 2010, pp. 132-134.

61. Gabba in Carsana, 2012, p. 1: «Argomenti favoriti di Fraccaro erano Catone, i Gracchi e la Guerra Sociale. Questo fu il nucleo del suo pensiero storiografico. Alla base dei suoi studi sulla storia dell'esercito romano c'era l'opera di Polibio». Similarly, Gabba, 2009, p. 233, refers to Fraccaro's vision of the «storia dell'esercito romano, basata su Polibio». Fraccaro also worked extensively «sull'esercito romano antichissimo» (Gabba, 2001, p. 39).

62. Gabba in Carsana, 2012, p. 4: «Questo insegnamento ha influito molto sul mio pensiero, come anche i corsi sulla storia militare del II sec. a.C.».

63. Gabba, 2009, pp. 237-238 highlights Fraccaro's close ties with Oxford University, where he was awarded a doctorate *honoris causa* in 1953. In this regard, he points out that several major reference works

cations on the late Republican army, Gabba was widely seen as a pupil of Fraccaro⁶⁴. In the preface to the first volume of *Hannibal's Legacy*, Arnold J. Toynbee placed Gabba among the leading figures of the historiographical school that had developed in Pavia around Fraccaro, praising its scholarly contribution and intellectual dynamism:

Other works (...) from which I have profited particularly are (...) a galaxy of articles, published in *Athenaeum* and elsewhere, by Plinio Fraccaro and the younger representatives of the school of Roman history which Fraccaro built up at the University of Pavia: Aurelio Bernardi, Gianfranco Tibiletti, Giovanni Forni, Emilio Gabba⁶⁵.

Certainly, in this context, Gabba initially appears as one of Fraccaro's heirs in one of his mentor's favourite fields—the history of the Roman army—focusing specifically on the Republican period⁶⁶. While Gabba himself readily acknowledged this intellectual lineage, as we have seen, he also maintained that he had, on his own initiative, expanded the scope to the subject originally suggested by Fraccaro:

Su respuesta fue: ocupate de los veteranos. No me dijo nada más sobre el tema. (...) Fue entonces que yo, habiendo ya leído el libro VI de Polibio, algunas frases famosas de Salustio y algunas observaciones sobre la colonización en Velejo Patérculo, me dediqué a investigar el paso que tuvo lugar a fines del siglo II a.C. con Cayo Mario desde la milicia ciudadana al ejército profesional, y por lo tanto a la necesidad de proveer luego a la distribución de tierras para los proletarios que se habían enrolado. Este fue el filón fundamental de casi todas mis investigaciones sobre el período entre el siglo II y I a.C., que relacionaban la historia social romano-italica con el ejército⁶⁷.

published around the same time or shortly thereafter include acknowledgements or dedications to Fraccaro himself or to some of his students (Badian, 1958; Ross Taylor, 1960; Toynbee, 1965). On Fraccaro's international dimension, see also Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 20.

64. Unusually, the two articles that appeared in *Athenaeum* in 1949 and 1951 were given a brief review in *JRS* 44, 1954, pp. 132-133, which begins as follows: «The subject of these two important articles by a pupil of Professor Fraccaro is the Republican origin of the professional army of the Principate, and the social and economic background to the change from a citizen militia into a standing force». The author of this review is Peter J. Cuff, whose scientific and friendly links with Fraccaro were later emphasised by Gabba himself: Gabba, 2009, p. 237, who also points out that it was the same P.J. Cuff who wrote the English translation of the volume in which these articles were subsequently republished (Gabba, 1976).

65. Toynbee, 1965, vol. 1, v. Gabba discusses this mark of international recognition in Carsana, 2012, p. 2. On Fraccaro as a major intellectual and academic figure, at the head of this «Pavia School» of Roman history, see Torchiani, 2010, to be completed with the review proposed by Polverini, 2013.

66. Baroni, 2016, p. 115: «in effetti Gabba si era guadagnato, soprattutto nei primi decenni della sua attività scientifica, anche per la scuola storica di provenienza, la fama di specialista di storia militare, come il suo maestro Plinio Fraccaro e come alcuni dei suoi colleghi della “scuola pavese di storia antica”». Fraccaro's other pupils were Alfredo Passerini and Giovanni Forni, but they worked on the army of the imperial period. See also *Ibid.*, p. 117.

67. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 16. On this widening of the scope of the subject: Baroni, 2016, p. 118.

Although Gabba shared Fraccaro's interest in "i rapporti fra politica e esercito"⁶⁸, he was less concerned with the army in itself, and, unlike Fraccaro, did not approach it from the perspective of purely military, technical or tactical matters⁶⁹. His few forays into this field came later and, in any case, do not specifically relate to the Republican period⁷⁰. For Gabba, the history of the Roman army was primarily valuable as a branch of social and political history, which it helped to illuminate. In various works, he stated that his aim was to «delineare lo svolgimento storico dell'organismo militare di Roma repubblicana, considerato sotto l'aspetto sociale e politico»⁷¹.

In this sense, as seen in the 1949 and 1951 articles that form the backbone of his work, Gabba's approach to the late Republican army aligns more closely with social history than with military history in the strict sense⁷². Indeed, for him, «la storia militare non può essere che insieme storia della società e delle istituzioni», as Anselmo Baroni put it⁷³. Baroni takes this further, emphasising the spirit in which these early works were conceived: «Insomma, i suoi studi di storia militare tendono a confondersi nella storia politicosociale tout-court, dandole concretezza e spessore storico»⁷⁴. More broadly, he concludes that the conception of military history underlying all of Gabba's work on the Roman army (not just the late Republican period) is one of a history of social, political and economic structures, and the interconnections between them⁷⁵.

From this perspective, the area in which Gabba most clearly diverged from Fraccaro's model is in the role he attributed to individuals, particularly great men, in historical devel-

68. Gabba, 2009, p. 230, who understands this to mean «un confronto con le istituzioni militari e politiche, che è un filone che ho seguito anch'io» (*ibid.*, p. 233).

69. Baroni, 2016, pp. 117-118 recalls that Fraccaro had a particular interest in the military, to the extent that he even considered a career in the army, though his poor eyesight ultimately prevented him from pursuing this path. He therefore channeled this passion into the study of ancient military history, particularly Roman, in which he possessed extensive knowledge. According to Baroni, it is possible that family traditions also fostered Gabba's interest in military matters, as some of his relatives had military experience and even held high-ranking positions in the Italian army: Baroni, 2016, pp. 116-117. Zecchini, 2016, p. 97 is more sceptical on this point: «Non so se le tradizioni militari della sua famiglia abbiano influenzato le scelte del giovane studioso».

70. Gabba, 1966; Gabba, 1980. On this development, which nevertheless remained very marginal in Gabba's work on the Roman army, see Zecchini, 2016, pp. 98 and 101-103. He notes, however, that it gave rise to greater attention to the «aspetti più propriamente tecnici dell'evoluzione dell'esercito» in the contributions to the *Storia di Roma*. See also Baroni, 2016, pp. 121-122, who observes for his part: «la ricostruzione di battaglie, che spesso ha prevalso nella "storiografia militare" degli antichi e sul mondo antico, non è centrale per G.» (p. 122).

71. Gabba, 1975, p. 1.

72. In this we agree with Zecchini, 2016, p. 97: «quel que mi appare chiaro è che in questa fase non è tanto la storia militare in sé quanto la storia sociale dell'esercito al centro dei suoi interessi».

73. Baroni, 2016, p. 126.

74. Baroni, 2016, p. 121.

75. Baroni, 2016, p. 124.

opments. As Gabba himself noted, Fraccaro tended to steer his students in this direction methodologically, emphasising the impact of prominent figures in shaping history:

Il secondo punto è la valorizzazione compiuta da Passerini di un altro tema estremamente importante la cui individuazione si deve a Fraccaro, nel quadro della storia tardo-repubblicana, dal III sec. a. C. al I secolo a. C., cioè il tema della personalità nella storia politica. (...) vale a dire la vita politica della Tarda Repubblica vista attraverso personalità di alto rilievo, intorno alle quali si dispone di una documentazione abbastanza ricca, e che certamente permettevano di dare un quadro concreto di certe realtà storiche. (...) A tutti questi allievi negli anni Quaranta era stata suggerita la capacità di ottenere una visione della storia romana attraverso figure singole, che permettevano poi una valorizzazione globale⁷⁶.

However, it is well known that Gabba consistently sought to situate the actions of great men within broader historical processes that gave them meaning⁷⁷. This approach is particularly evident in his treatment of Marius and his role in the proletarianization of the legions—a role that Gabba, among others, has considerably qualified⁷⁸. Unsurprisingly, Fraccaro believed that, in his 1949 article, Gabba «minimizza troppo l'importanza del reclutamento di Mario»⁷⁹. This remarks gives an insight into some of the fundamental differences in perspective that separated pupil and master from the outset, even on crucial issues. Gabba himself recalls this with a touch of mischief in his interview with Laffi, when he recounted that, during his thesis defence in 1948, «Fraccaro dijo, no sin cierta satisfacción: Gabba me cita solo para decir que me he equivocado»⁸⁰.

Throughout his career, Gabba's historical method remained shaped by two key principles: a focus on analysing social structures and their evolution, and a commitment to reassessing the significance of individual event within the broader trends of historical development. This methodological framework deeply influenced his approach to all the subjects he engaged with, including, of course, the Roman army, as scholars such as Zecchini have noted:

76. Gabba, 2009, pp. 233-234.

77. Zecchini, 2016, pp. 99-100. According to him, this preference «in quegli anni poteva essere comprensibilmente influenzato dal fastidio per recenti e fallimentari culti della personalità».

78. Zecchini, 2016, p. 98, points out that «il ruolo di Mario è drasticamente ridotto» by Gabba. Similarly, Clemente, 2016, p. 106 considers that «è interessante infine come il Gabba ridimensioni il peso della personalità di Mario, riconducendolo nell'ambito delle pratiche politiche del tempo, e depurandolo della interpretazione di capo democratico rivoluzionario che appartiene alle riflessione polemica successiva. Questa visione che privilegia la complessità dello svolgimento storico, e ne fa un elemento fondamentale dell'interpretazione del periodo, rispetto al ruolo delle grandi personalità, è una costante del pensiero di Gabba, ed è una logica conseguenza dell'individuazione di temi capaci di spiegare l'evoluzione degli ordinamenti politici e sociali, ben oltre il singolo pur rilevante episodio o personaggio». On Gabba's vision of Marius' action in legionary recruitment, see also Cadiou, 2018, pp. 43-48.

79. Fraccaro, 1975, p. 109, n. 25.

80. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 16.

... in genere, però, mi pare chiaro che anche per l'impero Gabba mantiene con coerenza la stessa linea adottata per la repubblica, quella di valorizzare la *longue durée* di lenti e progressivi mutamenti strutturali e di non conferire peso eccessivo agli interventi di singoli riformatori⁸¹.

A strong but implicit ideological background

Despite what has just been said, the gap between Gabba and Fraccaro's school, to which he always felt closer than to other historiographical trends, should not be overstated. In his interview with Laffi, he repeatedly emphasised his intellectual affinity with Fraccaro and the intellectual debt he owed to him⁸². When Laffi asked whether he identified with any major contemporary historiographical currents, he merely acknowledged an affinity with what he termed a «cosmopolitan historicism»⁸³. Despite his consistent focus, as noted, on structures and the long term, he stated that he identified neither with structuralism, nor with Marxism, nor even with the the *Annales* School, which, according to him, had very little influence on his historical training⁸⁴.

In this respect, he followed in the footsteps of Fraccaro. His philological and antiquarian background, grounded in a respect for documentary evidence, led Fraccaro to adopt a form of positivism, and to be cautious about using theoretical and abstract models that were too far-reaching⁸⁵. Gabba similarly believed that modern conceptual frameworks and interpretative models were of limited use in the study of Antiquity⁸⁶. Nevertheless, he argued that Fraccaro's concerns were not so distant from those of the historians associated with the *Annales* School or even Momigliano⁸⁷. He even went so far as to claim that the training

81. Zecchini, 2016, p. 104 (here on Gabba's work on the imperial army).

82. A point underlined by Laffi, 2016, p. 27.

83. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 44: «Yo me ubicaría en una tendencia que no quisiera precisar desde el punto de vista filosófico, pero que se relaciona con la corriente historicista. (...) Yo he buscado valorizar un «historicismo cosmopolita» en lo que me han enseñado mucho las obras y las discusiones con Franco Venturi». On the meaning to be given here to the adjective 'cosmopolitan', as opposed in particular to a nationalist conception of history or to academic compartmentalization: Laffi, 2016, p. 28.

84. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 44: «Me encuentro lejano tanto del estructuralismo como del existencialismo. Renozco la importancia de las teorías historiográficas y de los temas de estudio de los *Annales*, pero no creo que hayan influido mucho en mi formación histórica». On Marxism: *ibid*, 48. These positions are commented on by Laffi, 2016, pp. 31-33, who concludes: «Con ciò ci guardiano bene dalla pretesa di porre un'etichetta sull'opera di questo studioso».

85. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 39: «Resulta inútil negar que en la base de la reflexión historico-política de Fraccaro no hubiese un fundamento positivista». More recently, see Gallo, 2021, p. 570, who refers to the «matrice positivista» of Fraccaro's philological method. On Fraccaro's training and method: Gabba, 2001, p. 37; Sartori, 2001; Torchiani, 2010, pp. 9-27.

86. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 44. See also Laffi, 2016, p. 22.

87. Gabba, as cited in Laffi, 2015, p. 20 discusses Fraccaro's teaching, which later inclined him towards Momigliano's ideas; on page 44 he highlights the convergence of Fraccaro's themes with the intellectual approach of the *Annales* School.

received in Pavia did not incline Fraccaro's students to feel the need to turn to the *Annales* School⁸⁸.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the “historicist” conception—the only one with which Gabba, at the end of his life, wished to identify his way of writing history—is the product of a long evolution, which Umberto Laffi has clearly highlighted:

Che l'attività storiografica di Gabba, caratterizzata all'inizio dalla preminenza di un'impostazione che potremmo definire realistica, di matrice fraccariana, si sia venuta collocando nell'ambito di una plus marcata struttura storicistica, è quanto è emerso, per tabulas, dall'analisi che ne abbiamo fatto sinora. Sia chiaro : non è che Gabba non abbia continuato a dare rilevanza agli interessi per temi di ricerca incentrati su dati positivi (...), ma è altrettanto chiaro che la sua visione storica ha ricevuto nuova linfa e un arricchimento per l'influenza di nuove proposte culturali ispirate dallo storicismo idealistico di impronta crociana, sia pure filtrato attraverso mediazioni successive (Momigliano) e rielaborato personalmente⁸⁹.

In other words, while never denying the intellectual heritage he received from Fraccaro, Gabba gradually broadened and enriched his perspectives through contact with other scholars, both Italian and foreign, whom he frequently mentions in his conversations with Laffi. As a result, his scholarly work varies in the extent to which it reflects, more or less, what Laffi terms a «matrice fraccariana».

In this respect, it is particularly interesting to consider Gabba's first two articles, based on material from his 1948 thesis supervised by Fraccaro, in which he explored the development of the late Republican army. Both articles were written before Gabba's own encounter with historiography, during his stay at the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici in Naples in 1949-1950⁹⁰. He himself notes that it was the publication of the first of these articles in *Athenaeum* in 1949 that secured him a place at the institute⁹¹. However, it is obvious that the “absolutely new” experience of studying under Benedetto Croce and Frederico Chabod, as he describes it, marked an intellectual turning point. From that moment onwards, his relationship with sources and bibliography began to evolve gradually but significantly:

Habituado a un análisis de tipo filológico-anticuario (que ciertamente conducía a la historia), me encontré frente a una investigación histórica-política sobre los problemas de la historia y

88. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 17: «No había para nosotros, los estudiosos de historia antigua de Pavia, necesidad de recurrir al método de los *Annales*». See on this subject the remarks of Laffi, 2016, pp. 31-32.

89. Laffi, 2016, pp. 28-29.

90. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, pp. 13-14. He insists that the teaching he received there «representó par mí el auténtico descubrimiento de la historiografía».

91. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 17: «El artículo apareció así reducido en *Athenaeum* de 1949 y me sirvió para la admisión en el *Istituto Croce* de Nápoles, porque estaba claro que Croce lo había leído y me pidió clarificaciones.»

sobre el por qué de ella y, por lo tanto, sobre la comprensión misma de los problemas propios y de su presentación⁹².

Gabba's thinking and approach to history were certainly not transformed overnight. Rather, this evolution required further encounters—most notably with Momigliano and Venturi—as well as additional readings to solidify the gradual shift towards the “historicist” conception he ultimately embraced as his own.

In any case, this also means that his research on the late Republican army benefited less from these later developments, as it was carried out, as noted, during the earliest years of his scholarly career; and its initial assumptions were never subsequently revised. As a result, this part of Gabba's work remained more deeply influenced than others by Fraccaro's teaching, as well as by the earlier historiographical framework that he had first encountered through him.

There is no doubt that the 1949 and 1951 articles forcefully advanced an idea that was quite iconoclastic at the time⁹³. In this sense, they undeniably marked a shift in perspective that has had a significant and lasting impact up to the present day⁹⁴. However, Gabba himself acknowledged that he was, in part, developing an intuition first proposed by Hans Delbrück regarding Marius' action⁹⁵. As for the broader picture of the development of the late Republican army that emerges from his work, it differs little from the prevailing scholarly consensus of the time. A comparison, for instance, with the chapter in the *Cambridge Ancient History* written in 1932 by Hugh Last—an eminent Oxford professor and friend of both Fraccaro and Momigliano—reveals many similarities⁹⁶:

92. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 14. To illustrate the intellectual shock he experienced, he notes that until the early decades of the 20th century, almost no Italian historians of the ancient world had adopted a historiographical approach to the issues studied in ancient history.

93. Laffi, 2016, p. 15 rightly describes these publications as «profondamente innovativi».

94. On the nature of this reversal of perspective: Cadiou, 2018, pp. 40-54, and in particular 54: «à l'heure actuelle, sous l'influence de la révision brillamment amorcée en 1949 par E. Gabba, la majorité des historiens a renversé le paradigme qui prévalait jusqu'alors. On ne croit plus que le *dilectus* de 107 fut une *révolution* (un acte révolutionnaire) imposant plus ou moins brutalement une évolution irréversible (une armée professionnelle de volontaires). C'est désormais plutôt un schéma inverse qui est privilégié : l'idée d'une simple évolution sur le long terme (dans la pratique du recrutement) contribuant néanmoins à aboutir progressivement à une *révolution* (l'armée professionnelle, qui ouvre la voie au basculement politique de la République vers le Principat).»

95. Gabba, 1973, p. 29, quotes at length a passage by Delbrück who, on the subject of the Marian reform of recruitment, «aveva posto la questione nei suoi veri termini». Quoted in its original 1920 version, the passage corresponds to Delbrück, 1975, p. 420, where the great German scholar wonders whether Marius had not, in fact, merely given «to something that already existed only a corresponding form». For Gabba, «da quanto abbiamo sin qui detto è innegabile che il secondo dei due casi posti dal Delbrück nel suo dilemma coglie il vero nelle sue linee essenziali».

96. On the strong ties between Last and Fraccaro since the early 1930s, see Gabba, 2009, p. 237 and Gabba in Carsana, 2012, p. 2.

(...) another change (...) belongs to this period - a change which determined the nature of Roman history throughout the remaining years of the Republic. The innovation made by Marius in the recruitment of the legions probably did more than any other single factor to make possible that series of civil wars which only ended with the establishment of the Principate. Yet, grave as its results turned out to be, the work of Marius has often been exaggerated ; and, if its author is to be fairly judged, it will be necessary to appreciate the seeming slightness of the reform from which such tremendous consequences flowed. (...) Marius threw open the legions to volunteers and abandoned all inquiries about the census of the recruits. In appearance the innovation was not great. (...) Nevertheless the result was enormous, and for this reason - that the system of recruitment was now in practice voluntary and that the supply of volunteers was so large that there was no need to fall back on the latent power of compulsion. (...) now the army was composed of men to whom military service was the occupation of their choice, to be protracted as long as possible. (...) Thus the effect of the change in the method of recruitment was to constitute the legions of men who made soldiering a profession and whose natural reluctance to lose their livelihood left them indifferent to the nature of the cause in which they fought⁹⁷.

Apart from the rupture traditionally attributed by Last to Marius—but already partially reassessed here—, the overall picture he presented shares much in common with the vision of the late Republican army that Gabba outlined in his early articles and upheld throughout his career. This vision depicts an army composed of proletarian volunteers, professionalized by necessity, whose interests no longer aligned with those of the city, thus becoming a catalyst for civil wars and a driving force behind the fall of the Republic. Moreover, Last's brief chapter was simply an effective summary of a widely accepted idea, one that had, in fact, been formulated much earlier and can be traced back, in this form, to at least the mid-eighteenth century⁹⁸.

Thus, however striking Gabba's argument may have appeared to his contemporaries, the conceptual framework in which his 1949-1951 reassessment took place remained fundamentally an unchanged one. It adhered to the long-established narrative of a fatal transition from a civic army to a professional one at the end of the Republic. Gabba's contribution lay not in challenging this overarching framework but in redefining the chronology and context, portraying the shift as a more gradual process and placing its origins much earlier than previously assumed⁹⁹.

Gabba's early work mainly reaffirmed this traditional framework but reinforced it, and it is in this reinforcement that his originality lies. Rather than attributing the army's transfor-

97. Last, 1932, pp. 133-136. The work was republished in 1951.

98. For an exploration of the genealogy of this idea, see Cadiou, 2018, pp. 13-17, 47 and especially 57-64. It is worth noting that Gabba was well acquainted with eighteenth century historians, as his family library contained numerous works by them: Gabba in Laffi, 2015, pp. 11-12 and 37; Bono, 2018. On his lasting preference for Enlightenment historiography, see Laffi, 2016, pp. 25-26; Cambiano, 2018.

99. Zecchini, 2016, p. 97 and especially 101: «coglieva già nell'età di Pirro il germe della futura professionalizzazione delle forze armate romane, che sarebbe giunto a maturazione durante la II guerra punica».

mation to political contingency—Marius’ initiative within the context of his rivalry with the nobility—, Gabba situated it within a form of historical determinism. He linked the process to long-term economic and social causes, shaped in part by Rome’s Mediterranean expansion—the proletarianization of recruits.

As we have seen, this approach is characteristic of Gabba’s military history, in which economic and social changes are reflected in military organisation, which in turn anticipates shifts in political structures¹⁰⁰. However, because the causal link between proletarianization, professionalization and the detachment of soldiers from the city is assumed rather than demonstrated, it is never critically examined—even though it is not self-evident¹⁰¹. Gabba’s argument, therefore, appears to rest on more than strictly historical reasoning; it reflects a deep-seated conviction that informs his entire analysis¹⁰².

In this respect, Gabba’s interpretation of the late Republic seems to have been illuminated, in my opinion, by several recent studies highlighting the «matrice risorgimentale» of his thought. This intellectual heritage stemmed in part from his family background, to which he remained deeply attached, but he also appears to have been shared, at least to some extent, with Fraccaro¹⁰³. This perspective undoubtedly helps explain his very strong conviction that the decline of civic or patriotic ideals inevitably accompanied the emergence of a professional army¹⁰⁴—a point that has been rightly emphasised in recent scholarship:

La questione della patria, che era insita nell’esercito cittadino, si dissolse quindi nell’ascesa dei generali: non era, per il Gabba, un tema neutro; si coglie qui, come in molti altri lavori, la sua formazione liberale di origine risorgimentale, mai esplicitata, ma fortemente presente. La scelta del tema e il suo svolgimento erano consonanti con una radicata coscienza civile¹⁰⁵.

100. Baroni, 2016, p. 120, who refers here to a formula in Gabba, 1975, p. 2.

101. As noted by Gruen, 1974, p. 366.

102. Zecchini, 2016, p. 109 lists «la mancanza di attaccamento patriottico e il perduto senso civico negli eserciti della tarda repubblica» among the themes «caratteristici del suo pensiero». See also *ibid.* 105, n. 31: «Il declino di valori come l’amor di patria, il senso del dovere, la fedeltà e la devozione all’impero, la carica ideale che deve animare un esercito è un tema ricorrente».

103. Laffi, 2016, pp. 14, 21 and 24 (for the quoted expression); Baroni, 2016, p. 115. Interestingly, he adds that in his youth in Bassano Fraccaro himself was influenced by the «insegnamento del liberale e garibaldino Jacopo Dal Fabbro», which helped spark his interest in military history. On the importance of ‘tradizioni familiari e ambientali’ in shaping how Fraccaro’s pupils carried forward his intellectual legacy: Gabba, 2009, p. 234. For insights into his own family’s convictions, see Gabba in Laffi, 2015, p. 10. Regarding Fraccaro’s sense of affinity with «le profonde idealità che erano state proprie di una società essenzialmente di piccoli proprietarie contadini», Gabba, 2001, p. 40 remarks: «Erano idealità e radici che il Fraccaro sentiva e riconosceva come proprie e che lo hanno sempre accompagnato nella ricerca scientifica e nell’azione civile».

104. Zecchini, 2016, p. 99: «Gabba insiste con forza sullo smarrimento degli ideali patriottici quale corollario della professionalizzazione». See also *Ibid.* pp. 105-106.

105. Clemente, 2016, p. 107.

La rivendicazione del ruolo moralmente insostituibile di un esercito di cittadini all'interno di qualsivoglia compagine "statale" deve, a mio avviso, essere collegato alle profonde convinzioni risorgimentali di Gabba: nell'Europa delle patrie un esercito di mestiere era davvero qualcosa di civicamente diseducativo e moralmente inaccettabile¹⁰⁶.

Solo la ricomparsa della milizia cittadina, che sembrava potersi riallacciare idealmente agli eserciti della Roma repubblicana, poteva soddisfare le esigenze di una nobile linea di pensiero, che da Machiavelli e Giusto Lipsio arriva al nostro Risorgimento¹⁰⁷.

For Gabba, therefore, the central role he assigns to the army in the crisis of the Republic is, by definition, a direct consequence of the emergence of a professional army that, by its very nature, had lost its civic foundations. In his view, the primary task of historians studying this period is then to explain the origins of this transformation.

More generally speaking, insufficient attention has been paid to the strongly pejorative and moralizing tone that characterises modern historiography's view of the Roman army during the civil wars¹⁰⁸. For Gabba, as for others, this disapproval of the army of the Late Republic shaped and influenced his interpretation of the sources, at times even overriding their actual content¹⁰⁹. This interpretative bias is evident throughout his work on the late Republican army, from his earliest studies to the most recent one in 2002. In this latest work, he takes Marius' speech in Sallust (*Iug.* 85) as proof that «il richiamo di valori ideali per la truppa e ormai al di fuori di ogni attualità»¹¹⁰. Yet, in reality, the text explicitly presents the consul of 107 appealing to the civic and even patriotic spirit of Rome's future recruits, contradicting Gabba's interpretation¹¹¹.

106. Zecchini, 2016, p. 100.

107. Zecchini, 2016, p. 106.

108. A point stressed by Cadiou, 2018, pp. 275-277 and Cadiou, 2023. On this subject, however, see the very pertinent remarks of Zecchini, 2016, especially p. 110: «Gabba non è tenero nei confronti dell'esercito romano; che il suo cuore batte per l'esercito cittadino dell'alta e media repubblica non può essere ribadito per l'ultima volta».

109. Zecchini, 2016, p. 106 (here on Gabba's work on the imperial army) considers that the idea that «ogni esercito non patriotticamente motivato è un fattore negativo nella storia di un'entità politica» is an idea that belongs to Gabba himself and not to his sources; similarly *ibid.* p. 107, on Gabba, 1980 on Polybius: «forse egli intuì anche che il successivo, inevitabile declino di Roma avrebbe implicato la trasformazione della milizia cittadina con le sue alte idealità in un esercito non soltanto professionale di tipo ellenistico: qui, in perfetta continuità con quanto ho osservato sopra, c'è davvero tutto Gabba, che si sostituisce a Polibio».

110. Gabba, 2002, pp. 158.

111. Sall. *Iug.* 85.47-50. On the civic tone of the end of Marius' speech, see Cadiou, 2018, pp. 210-212, with a reference to the previous bibliography (in particular Nicolet, 1988, pp. 173-174). In the same spirit, see Sall. *Iug.* 87.2.

Conclusion

Emilio Gabba's work on the social and political role of the Roman armies at the end of the Republic occupies a somewhat paradoxical position within the scholarship of this eminent historian.

On the one hand, due to their impact, these studies seem at first sight to be among his most emblematic contributions. On the other hand, upon closer examination, they appear in fact less representative of the originality and evolution of his historical method over time, as they are shaped by certain assumptions—partly derived from his intellectual training and political culture.

This is all the more striking given that Gabba himself was fully aware that the historian is never entirely neutral—a point he emphasises at length in his interview with Laffi¹¹². Moreover, throughout his rich and varied scholarly production, he frequently demonstrated a keen sensitivity to these issues in the writing history¹¹³.

From this perspective, Gabba's classic works on the late Republican Roman army, which are ultimately somewhat dated, are not among his very best. Nevertheless, they remain the most widely used reference on the subject among historians of the late Republic, but obviously without adequate historiographical distance.

112. Gabba in Laffi, 2015, pp. 39-44.

113. Laffi, 2016, in particular p. 30.

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