

## THE DELMATAEAN WAR SOCIETY

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*Abstract.* – Drawing on Slobodan Čače's theories concerning the emergence and evolution of the Dalmatian social order, the author endeavours to reconstruct the Delmataean military organisation. He concludes that warrior values were upheld here, and that the military organisation was the product of indigenous development, with only limited acceptance of Hellenistic influences. Before the arrival of the Romans, the predominant aspect of war was the conquest and defence of fortresses. Following the destruction of Delminium and its leading aristocracy in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, society was reorganised on a federal basis. Consequently, their army became a confederation of armies under a single federal command. There was also an elite standing detachment during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, which may have numbered up to 12,000 soldiers. The operations described in the sources demonstrate a strong chain of command and discipline, as well as a distinct ability to manoeuvre. This clearly indicates common training standards across the entire federation. In conflicts against the Romans, the Delmatae drew on their previous war experience, avoiding open battles and defending themselves in fortifications while exploiting the opportunities offered by the karst terrain for ambushes and surprise attacks. The history of the conflict between the Delmatae and the Romans clearly demonstrates the development of their military doctrine and tactical approach.

*Key words.* – Delmatae, Ancient Warfare, Army and Society, Illyricum.

We have long been in the habit of comparing local "barbarian" military forces with the equipment and combat performance of the Greeks, the Hellenistic states and the Romans. This is somewhat logical, since these were contemporary armies that are best known from literary sources and archaeological evidence. But this approach carries the risk of identifying these communities and their armed forces too closely with the Greeks or Romans, leading us to attribute characteristics to them that they did not possess. Furthermore, Greek and Latin accounts of battles and military campaigns often create the misleading impression that the outcome of

warfare depended primarily on the virtues and ingenuity of supreme commanders. While commanders certainly played a more important role than their subordinates, their capacity to influence events was heavily constrained by the structure and qualities of their armies. The way in which an army is employed depends more on its organisation and society's broader conception of warfare than on the general's intentions. These two aspects – military organisation and the cultural understanding of war – are complementary, shaping the behaviour of an army in combat. The command-and-control structure determines the extent to which commanders can influence their troops' actions, thereby defining the range of available tactics. Logistical arrangements, meanwhile, define the temporal limits of operational endurance in the field, as well as the army's ability for quick manoeuvres. At the same time, a society's conception of war defines the type of conflict it anticipates and the form its military engagements are likely to take. For example, put simply, if a society's experience has been that wars are resolved by a single pitched battle, it will presume that the next war will be resolved in the same way. Therefore, it will not develop an army capable of rapid or subtle manoeuvres, nor will it maintain a logistical system capable of sustaining prolonged operations. Consequently, it will not develop an army capable of rapid or subtle manoeuvres and its military forces will be compelled to seek swift resolution through large-scale confrontations with the enemy. Such a society is incapable of not only waging guerrilla warfare, but also of conceiving it as a viable option.<sup>1</sup>

The military organisation of ancient societies was largely dependent on the structure of the society to which the army belonged – a point that we will examine in greater detail later.

Another fundamental principle to bear in mind is that a society's perception of war is primarily shaped by its prior experience of warfare. Consider, for example, the well-known cases of the French Maginot Line or Soviet (now Russian) military doctrine. These cases demonstrate a recurring pattern: during peacetime, armies tend to prepare for the most recent conflict, assuming that future wars will resemble those of the recent past.<sup>2</sup>

Another closely related principle is that every army tends to develop defensive equipment specifically designed to counter its own offensive weaponry. This notion is quite logical, given that the majority of conflicts a community engages in are not against external imperial powers, such as

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<sup>1</sup> For further detail, see Goldsworthy 1996, 32ff.

<sup>2</sup> In the Balkans, this tendency is perhaps most evident in the case of Yugoslavia. Whether anticipating conflict with NATO or the Warsaw Pact, its wartime contingency planning involved concentrating the bulk of its forces in the Bosnian mountains. The logic was clear: in such terrain, both NATO's technological superiority and the Soviet Union's numerical advantage in armour could be neutralised. These strategic choices were informed by Tito's partisans' wartime experiences during the Second World War.

the Romans, but rather consist of internal disputes, including duels, and wars against neighbouring communities. Due to similarities in terrain, comparable levels of technological development, parallel access to trade and imports, and similar socio-military structures, these neighbouring groups will generally possess analogous equipment and modes of warfare that may bear little resemblance to Roman models. Direct, immediate military experience most significantly shapes and improves an army's tactical behaviour and determines the types and forms of weaponry preferred at a given time. The Delmatae's experience of warfare against the Romans was sporadic, and in comparison to their continual engagements with neighbouring groups – and likely internal conflicts as well – amounts to little more than a drop in the ocean. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Delmatae primarily adapted to the Roman military model. Most of the changes within their armed forces are better understood as adaptations that conferred advantages over neighbouring opponents. When fighting the Romans, they sought to make the best use of what they already had, applying the elements of their own combat style that could offer a tactical advantage. The Delmatae's consistent refusal to adopt Roman operational methods makes it clear that they did not regard the Romans as a military model to emulate. In their confrontations with Roman forces, they repeatedly adopted a defensive strategy, waiting for Roman mistakes to exploit. Their occasional successes stemmed from such strategies, such as taking advantage of the terrain against Gabinius, persistently defending fortifications against Vatinius, and capitalising on Roman negligence against Figulus.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the Delmatae managed to defend their territory against Rome for around 125 years until the time of Octavian, and then maintained a military presence for a further 40 years before eventually joining the revolt led by Bato, is testament to their persistence and ability to learn and adapt. However, we should not expect to find any revolutionary changes to their military organisation or tactics. The changes that did occur were adaptations by nature. When faced with new circumstances, any society will seek to adjust its military structure with as few fundamental disruptions as possible. In Iron Age societies, any intervention in military organisation necessarily touches on broader social relationships, and substantial reforms can pose serious risks to the position of the elite and, by extension, to the stability of the entire societal framework. For this reason, existing military systems are usually modified with minimal adjustments that emphasise more effective elements already in use, rather than being radically restructured.

Such a process is, of course, inherently slow. It is therefore reasonable to ask to what extent the Delmataean military organisation and their

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<sup>3</sup> On these campaigns see Bilić-Dujmušić 2004, 187–209, 294–314, 321–355.

conception of warfare enabled them to confront the successive Roman commanders who brought their might against them over the course of more than a century and a half. Precise details of the structure of the Delmataean military are largely beyond our reach – our sources simply do not permit such a reconstruction. However, one general observation can be made: in practical terms, the Delmatae were capable of resisting Octavian and could realistically hope to win that conflict. Initially, they fought against *ad hoc* consular armies, which were less well-equipped, significantly less manoeuvrable and generally lacking in experience. However, by the time Octavian arrived, the Delmatae had already gained considerable experience in fighting post-Marian legions. These legions were characterised by a host of technical and tactical innovations, and crucially consisted of long-serving veterans hardened by numerous campaigns. It is unlikely that such an army stood against them at Promona under Caesar,<sup>4</sup> nor was it commanded by their ally Marcus Octavius, who had to improvise land-based operations, primarily siege operations, using naval infantry. Nor is it likely that the defenders of Salona in 49 BC fielded anything resembling the contemporary legionary structure. However, later opponents of the Delmatae, such as Cornificius, Gabinius, Sulpicius, Vatinius, Pollio, Agrippa and eventually Tiberius, did lead fully developed late Republican legions into battle. The first two of these commanders largely relied on newly levied, inexperienced and poorly coordinated troops. But the others – especially the final three – commanded seasoned legionaries with substantial combat experience.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the Delmatae managed to defeat, or at least halt and repel, some of these forces, inflicting significant casualties. In other words, by the time of Octavian's campaigns, the Delmatae had already gained experience fighting precisely the kind of legions he brought with him. It is therefore evident that, by that time, their military organisation had adapted sufficiently to offer effective resistance to the expected Roman style of warfare.

### Social and military organisation

According to Čače's analysis, Delmataean society in its earlier history was dominated by a single central hub, Delminium.<sup>6</sup> Although no source states this explicitly, the cumulative evidence concerning Delminium strongly points in exactly that direction:

1. The Delmatae were named after the city of Delminium.<sup>7</sup>
2. Strabo describes Delminium as once having been a "great city" (*megale polis*), which was reduced in size by Nasica.<sup>8</sup> As archaeology has

<sup>4</sup> App. *Ill.* 12. Bilić-Dujmušić 2004, 246ff.

<sup>5</sup> Bilić-Dujmušić 2004, 279–379.

<sup>6</sup> Čače 1979, 101–116, esp. 113ff.

<sup>7</sup> App. *Ill.* 11; Strab. 7.5.5. Čače 1995, 107–108.

not identified any large settlements in the Duvno field, it is reasonable to interpret Strabo's comment as referring to Delminium's political and communal importance rather than its physical size.

3. The first Roman campaign of 156–155 BC was clearly directed at Delminium.<sup>9</sup> Only the conquest of this city brought the war to a satisfactory conclusion. Both Roman commanders regarded Delminium as the “head of the snake” that had to be cut off – the principal stronghold whose fall would compel the entire community to submit.

4. Frontinus reports that everyone (presumably all the Delmatae) came to defend Delminium (*concurso omnium defendebatur*).<sup>10</sup> This implies that someone had the authority to mobilise all available forces for the defence of a single city, and it also attests to Delminium's importance within the broader community.

5. The assertion that the Delmatae levied tribute from weaker neighbours suggests the presence of a permanent and active core of authority within the community – an organisational nucleus capable of exerting dominance over others.<sup>11</sup>

Taken together, these pieces of evidence strongly suggest that the “Delminians” held a hegemonic position within the broader Delmataean community and functioned as its primary centre of cohesion up until 155 BC. Therefore, the aristocracy of Delminium must have been the chief driving force behind the community's aggressive policies towards its neighbours – policies that led to territorial expansion and conflict with the Issaeans and Daorsi. In this context, Strabo's remark that Delminium was destroyed because of the greed of its inhabitants becomes more understandable.<sup>12</sup> The collapse of the Illyrian kingdom created a power vacuum that allowed a new regional military power to emerge in the area. This power was headed by a ruling elite centred around Delminium. However, this social structure appears to have been fundamentally altered after 155 BC. Nasica not only destroyed the city and converted its farmland into pasture, but also sold its inhabitants into slavery.<sup>13</sup> This honourable, noble and pious Roman deliberately eradicated the Delmataean elite – utterly and irreversibly. This was no accident. The leaders of the Delmatae were not killed or enslaved simply because they happened to be in Delminium when it was coincidentally the target of a Roman assault. On the contrary: Delminium was attacked precisely to eliminate those responsible for pursuing an aggressive foreign policy, defying Roman commands and making it clear that they would continue to do so. When the Issaeans and Daorsi

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<sup>8</sup> Strab. 7.5.5.

<sup>9</sup> App. *Ill.* 11; Flor. *Epit.* 2.27.

<sup>10</sup> Front. *Strat.* 3.6.2.

<sup>11</sup> Čače 1979, 115.

<sup>12</sup> Strab. 7.5.5. On this see Čače 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Zon. 9.25.

presented their case to the Roman Senate,<sup>14</sup> they likely framed the situation in a way that convinced the Senate that continued Delmataean aggression would endanger all that Rome had achieved thus far in Illyricum. The scale of the devastation wrought by Nasica was a response to this perceived threat. He resolved to eliminate the problem permanently by annihilating the ruling class and destroying their political centre and its immediate economic base. This ensured that no revival of that elite could take place. This event undoubtedly plunged the Delmatae into a severe crisis, removing them from the regional power dynamics for a considerable time. Yet by 119 BC, they were in conflict with Rome again. This suggests that, in the intervening decades, they had re-emerged as a regional force, having recovered from the earlier catastrophe and re-organised their society – though this time on entirely new foundations.

Following the catastrophe of 155 BC, it seems that Delmataean society underwent a structural reorganisation, likely through the formation of a federation based on more egalitarian principles and without a single dominant centre. While there must have been a designated location for the occasional assembly of federal bodies, the community to which that place belonged seemingly held no special status or prestige.<sup>15</sup> This kind of political arrangement probably helped to create a stronger sense of community, fostering a collective identity and enhancing its overall power. It is even plausible that Vatinius's report of twenty original *oppida* refers to the founding members of this initial alliance, with the remaining settlements being drawn into the federation through various means later on.<sup>16</sup> Although the precise structure of this federation remains unknown, Rome's persistent difficulties in curbing Delmataean aggression strongly suggest that it functioned effectively in practice. There are signs pointing to the existence of federal institutions: if Verso was elected as a military commander,<sup>17</sup> then a body must have existed to carry out the election. Similarly, if the Delmatae ultimately rejected Caesar's terms in 45 BC despite their envoys in Rome having accepted them,<sup>18</sup> there must have been an authority responsible for both dispatching those envoys and overruling their decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> Polyb. 32.9.

<sup>15</sup> Čače 1979, 113.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, Vatinius complains here to Cicero that the strength of the Delmatae is underestimated in Rome, and he claims that they have not only 20 but even 60 cities (see Čače 1979, 106). This would suggest that Vatinius had studied some data on the Delmatae before he left for Illyricum, and had obviously found outdated information about 20 *oppida*, and only realised this was wrong when he arrived on site. It is therefore possible that the figure of 20 *oppida* which *sunt Dalmatiae antiqua*, i.e. a description of the situation from an earlier time when the Delmataean alliance was of this size, was already circulating in Rome.

<sup>17</sup> App. Ill. 25.

<sup>18</sup> App. Ill. 13.

From this, it is reasonable to infer the existence of a “federal council” – a deliberative body made up of representatives from the various constituent communities that followed a defined protocol when making binding decisions. In 33 BC, the Delmatae were compelled to hand over the strikingly high number of 700 hostages to Octavian.<sup>19</sup> Such numbers were often proportional to the manpower available to the defeated side and often corresponded to the number of individuals involved in decision-making, i.e. the membership of a local senate or governing body.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the Delmataean “federal council” comprised as many as 700 members.

The soldiers of Verso are described as chosen men (*machimotatoi*). The same campaign also mentions the forces of Testimus, as well as at least two other armies under unnamed commanders. Given that Verso’s elite troops number 12,000, they could not have been drawn from a single community. Rather, they must have constituted an elite unit formed at the level of the entire federation. Furthermore, this elite force was accompanied by a significant number of additional troops. This clearly indicates the existence of a “federal army” – that is to say, the forces referred to in the sources as “the Delmatae” represent a coalition army comprising contingents from across the alliance.

Verso was clearly a commander operating at “federal army” level, yet Appian’s account does not clarify how he was appointed to that position. Was he chosen by the “federal council” through a voting process, or elected directly by the soldiers? If the latter, this would imply the existence of an additional federal institution, at least in times of war: a kind of federal popular assembly, composed of recognised warriors, as seen elsewhere in the ancient world. If such a body existed, its function would probably have been limited to electing the supreme military commander. However, given the vast geographical spread of the Delmataean communities, it is unlikely that this assembly could have convened regularly as a permanent legislative institution, in the manner of the Roman *comitia centuriata* or the Spartan *apella*. Such logistical limitations would have made it difficult to provide swift responses in emergency situations. One can hardly imagine a rapid winter mobilisation against Gabinius being decided through an assembly requiring widespread coordination, for instance. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to dismiss the possibility of regularly scheduled annual gatherings, likely associated with seasonal festivals (probably in spring to mark the start of the campaigning season). Such an occasion may have served to elect the year’s federal military commanders in the event of war and perhaps to review or amend the “federal council’s” longer-term decisions by accepting or rejecting them.

<sup>19</sup> App. *Ill.* 28.

<sup>20</sup> Caes. *BGall.* 2.5.1, 2.15.1, 2.28.2 (more detail in: Čaće 1979, 108 and n. 235).

As would be expected, the aforementioned analysis by Čače shows that the functions transferred to the “federal organs” primarily pertained to external affairs, broadly corresponding to what would today fall under the domains of foreign policy and defence.<sup>21</sup> Within this structure, the “federal council” exercised the role of supreme commander of the federal armed forces. This body made decisions on war and peace, determined the scale of mobilisation and apportioned the burdens of provisioning and equipping the federal troops among the member communities. Beyond setting basic strategic objectives, the council likely did not interfere with the actual conduct of military operations. Once the federal commander had been elected, operational implementation was left entirely in his hands. In more complex campaigns, responsibilities could evidently be divided among several commanders of equal rank. There is no indication in the sources that Verso held authority over Testimus, or vice versa.

Of particular interest in this context is the emergence of the role of *princeps*, which is primarily attested in inscriptions dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>22</sup> *Princeps* figures are found both within local communities (e.g. Rider) and at the level of the entire peregrine *civitas* (e.g. *princeps Delmatarum*). One such *princeps Delmatarum* is recorded as being only 22 years old,<sup>23</sup> suggesting that the position may have been hereditary. While the preserved form of the title is only an approximate translation of the function into Latin, there is little doubt that the role itself predated the final Roman pacification of the Delmatae. It is also likely that the hereditary nature of the office and the hierarchical relationship between the *princeps* of a local community and the *princeps Delmatarum* both stemmed from pre-Roman institutions.<sup>24</sup> D. Rendić-Miočević has argued that the position was collegial: the community at Rider had its own college of leaders (*principes Riditarum*), and also had a representative in the “federal council” bearing the title *princeps Delmatarum*.<sup>25</sup>

I do not intend to discuss the validity of Rendić-Miočević’s interpretation here, nor will I attempt to provide a precise definition of the title in question. What matters are the self-evident elements. 1) The title held sufficient prestige within Delmataean society for individuals to include it in their *cursus honorum*; 2) the office of *princeps* was hereditary; and 3) an internal hierarchy existed among those referred to as *principes*. Octavian’s demand for 700 hostages suggests that there were many Delmataean princes, and the hereditary nature of the office is well documented. Based on this, Čače correctly deduces that the *principes* formed a distinct social stratum and that the Delmataean federation, originally formed after the

<sup>21</sup> Čače 1979, 110.

<sup>22</sup> Rendić-Miočević 1962, 315ff.

<sup>23</sup> CIL 3, 2776. Also from Rider.

<sup>24</sup> Čače 1979, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Rendić-Miočević 1962, 330ff.



collapse of Delminium's hegemony as a decentralised association of allied communities, gradually became dominated by this elite. This development was primarily driven by frequent warfare, necessitating regular mobilisation, the redistribution of resources for military provisioning, the division of spoils and the construction of fortifications. These are precisely the kinds of activities that fell within the limit of the federal authorities, and their growing importance served to consolidate and elevate the central role of the *principes* within Delmataean society.<sup>26</sup>

The new ruling Delmataean elite appears to have been relatively numerous, consisting of the combined principles of the communities that formed the federation. Within this stratum, individuals were probably ranked according to the size and importance of their communities. Assuming that 700 hostages were required to ensure Delmataean compliance and that the number of constituent communities at the time ranged between 50 and 80<sup>27</sup> – which would be quite well described by the Roman term *oppidum*<sup>28</sup> – this would yield an average of approximately ten leading families per federal unit. As the communities forming the federation were *de iure* autonomous, it would not be surprising if each had its own council, with a group of local principles becoming entrenched over time. Regardless of their original structure, these local councils would inevitably turn into a reduced replica of the “federal council” under such conditions.

For such a system to function at all, and for a hereditary elite to maintain its hold on power, there had to be mechanisms to enforce the decisions of “federal bodies” across all constituent communities. This would require executive bodies with clearly defined authority and jurisdiction, acting on behalf of the “federation” within each “federal unit”. Logically, one might assume that these officials were the same individuals who represented their communities in the “federal council”. This would mean that the “federal council” held each of its members accountable for implementing its decisions at the local level and provided them with the necessary instruments of enforcement. As we have seen, the responsibilities of the “federal council” included “foreign affairs”, such as preparations for war and declarations thereof. If the “federal organs” did indeed maintain empowered executive representatives in each community, it follows that their limit would have included military matters. If Rendić-Miočević's interpretation of the *princeps Delmatarum* as a local delegate to the “federal council” is correct, it could imply that his role extended to military affairs, or at least that he was responsible for military organisation. Alternatively, there may have been a separate official alongside the *princeps*, responsible for implementing the military decisions of the “federal council” at the local

<sup>26</sup> Čače 1979, 116.

<sup>27</sup> According to the numbers given by Strabo (7.5.5) and Vatinius (Cic. *Fam.* 5.10a)

<sup>28</sup> Tarpin 1999, *pass.*

level. This official could have been appointed *ad hoc* upon the declaration of war, or they could have served as a regular annual magistrate, accountable to the community's representative(s) in the "federal council". Whatever the precise arrangement, one thing is certain: in a political structure of this kind, there must have been an office or body responsible for carrying out the "federal council's" military directives at the level of the individual federated community.

A military system designed in this way could have been highly effective. At its apex stood the "federal council", functioning as the supreme command authority, with executive agents operating on the ground, both military and civilian. The elected commanders were responsible for conducting specific military operations, while the council's own representatives within each federal unit were intimately familiar with local circumstances and carried out functions that would today be handled by defence offices. These local representatives would have overseen the recruitment, conscription and mobilisation of armed forces and labour, ensured the provision of necessary wartime supplies and managed peacetime defensive preparations, such as fortification construction, stockpiling and military production. The "federal council" coordinated these two branches of its executive apparatus by meeting the concrete material demands of field commanders and instructing local authorities to fulfil them by distributing responsibilities across the federated units. Conversely, it also ensured that any war booty was redistributed in accordance with each unit's contribution and the customary rules in force.

From this, we can infer that the Delmataean federal army was formed from lower units mobilised at the level of these federal units – the *oppida* in Roman sense. These communities varied in size and population, and the units they contributed ranged from several hundred to several thousand soldiers. Each unit was commanded by an officer subordinate to the elected commander-in-chief of the "federal army", or to the commander of the unit's assigned force if there were several commanders. Examples that are known to us show that the Delmataean army was capable of carrying out complex manoeuvres and coordinating the actions of its constituent units.<sup>29</sup> This indicates that the federal army was not merely an aggregate of local detachments. Rather, it suggests that a minimum set of general standards for equipment and trained tactical behaviour existed. Each local unit had to conform to these standards, which enabled coordination and operational coherence.

Since Appian states that Verso's 12,000 soldiers were *machimotatoi* (select troops),<sup>30</sup> it is possible that, in addition to the *ad hoc* contingents mobilised from the federal units, the Delmataean "federal army" also in-

<sup>29</sup> See below, in the section "Strategy and Tactics."

<sup>30</sup> App. III. 25.

cluded an elite detachment. This detachment may have been commanded by Verso or assigned to his army in 34 BC. This could have been a standing unit – that is, a unit that existed permanently and was not disbanded after each campaign. If such an elite force existed, it would make sense for it to have been attached to Verso in 34 BC, given the complexity of his task: capturing the heavily fortified Promona would have required the most capable soldiers. Assuming it was a standing force, it could have compensated for the delays in assembling the “federal army” in the winter of 47 BC due to harsh weather and blocked routes. Together with the troops who managed to reach the rallying point, it could have arrived in time to set an ambush for Gabinius at Synodium.

Such an elite unit, which is permanently armed and constantly trained to form the “strike force” of Delmataean military power, might have been created in two ways. The first is by establishing a professional or semi-professional force that is maintained by the community or whose members receive certain privileges for their service, such as arable land or livestock. This force would typically be concentrated in one location, or, for economic reasons, dispersed among several nearby settlements to allow for rapid assembly. It would continually be replenished with experienced and proven veterans. The second method involves the formation of a generational elite, which would be possible if the community had a regulated form of military obligation and conscription. In this case, young men of a specific age (typically 17 in most known ancient societies) would undergo military training by serving a multi-year term, either in their own settlements or at specialised training sites. Units would thus be formed from cohorts of the same age group who would serve together continuously for years. Depending on the service duration, the community would always have under arms multiple age cohorts of men in their military prime, organised into trained units that were familiar with one another as comrades and led by experienced officers. These units would not require mobilisation, but could be dispatched immediately in response to any threat. If this was indeed the case among the Delmatae, given the pace of their military development from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC onwards, it would not be surprising if these young men had acquired genuine combat experience during their military service.

Benac’s survey of visual communication among the hill forts in four karst regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>31</sup> reveals a sophisticated system of observation and signalling, clearly indicating the presence of a centralised command structure (Fig. 1). While this analysis is limited to the Delmataean territory within present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no doubt that it could be extended into Croatian territory as well, encompassing the entirety of the area under Delmataean political control. The purpose of this

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<sup>31</sup> Benac 1985, Map 5.

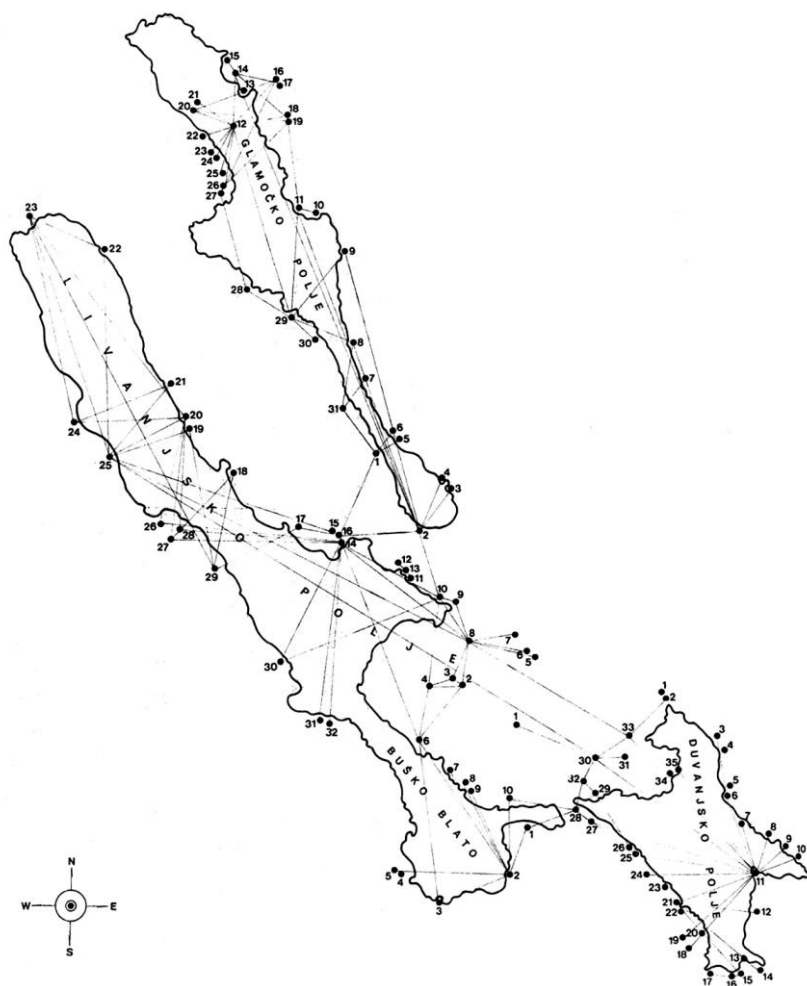


Fig. 1. The system of visual communication among the karst fields (Benac 1985, Map 5)

system was not, for example, to provide a timely warning about the arrival of enemy forces advancing from the Livno field towards the Glamoč field. Such information would have been conveyed much earlier by rising smoke from settlements in the area and by incoming refugees. The establishment of such a network of visual links only makes sense if a prearranged system of signals capable of conveying basic information existed. Benac is correct in noting that there is a lack of direct evidence on how this signalling functioned, but it can be asserted that it relied on visual cues, probably with distinct protocols for daytime and night-time use. The method would have gone beyond merely lighting prepared fuel, which could convey only

a single message and would not enable the final recipient to determine the original source. The most interesting sites within this system are those not associated with settlements, but located in positions that allow for clear visual contact between multiple densely inhabited areas – precisely the locations that served solely as relay stations for message transmission. Benac's analysis dates these sites to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC,<sup>32</sup> so the emergence of this network should be dated accordingly, in line with the period of Delminium's hegemony over the community. It was established by the ruling aristocracy of Delminium to ensure that all information reached the Duvno field as quickly as possible. This does not mean that the Delmatae later abandoned the system, however. In fact, it is more likely that they further refined it to transmit key information more rapidly across a larger territory and reach the spatially dispersed principes of the ruling stratum.

Only two Delmataean commanders are known to us by name: Testimus and Verso.<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to evaluate their abilities as military leaders because we only know about the consequences of their failures, not the reasoning behind their decisions. Verso is something of an exception, however, as we are told about his defensive plan for Promona,<sup>34</sup> and when we place it in its actual topographic context, we can grasp the basic strategic logic he followed. However, even in his case, the rationale behind the sortie from the city – the key move that ultimately led to disaster – remains unclear. The third commander, the defender of Setovia, who proved to be the most capable, remains unnamed, as do those who ambushed Gabinius and Vatinius, took Promona and perhaps even Daorson, and expanded the Delmataean sphere of influence to the Adriatic.

The most interesting thing at this point is that the Delmataean commanders were elected. They were probably chosen by the army itself in the form of an assembly. They were neither preordained chieftains of "blue blood", inheriting command alongside their title, nor individuals who received military authority by virtue of political office. While it is reasonable to assume that candidacy was not open to the entire "armed people" and that only aristocratic circles were eligible, the democratic selection of commanders undoubtedly allowed for a broader pool of candidates, which, in principle, contributed to a higher calibre of leadership. If the army elected its commander, the primary voting criterion was probably the candidate's perceived leadership ability, meaning individuals with significant military experience and a record of success were most likely to be selected. Furthermore, if commanders were chosen by the soldiers, it stands to reason that the soldiers would be willing to follow them and that they

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<sup>32</sup> Benac 1985, 193.

<sup>33</sup> App. III. 25–27.

<sup>34</sup> App. III. 25–26.

would already enjoy the soldiers' trust. All of this would contribute to the quality of command and leadership and help to ensure that the right person was placed in the right position. However, it could also have negative effects on discipline. It would be dangerous if the troops believed that the same army that elected the commander could also dismiss him. The threat of demotion could pressure a commander to be overly lenient with subordinates, preventing him from establishing proper discipline within the ranks. It is unclear how such matters functioned in the case of Delmataean commanders, as information is lacking on whether these elected commanders held office as annual magistrates, as part of a collegium of magistrates, or were chosen for each campaign individually. Another possibility is that this was a form of selecting a "war chief" with an indefinite mandate. Another point of interest is whether lower-ranking commanders were selected in a similar manner and by whom, or whether they were appointed and by whom. Additionally, it is unclear how Verso's staff was organised, and whether it consisted solely of subordinate unit commanders, or if there was a need for "chiefs of branches and services", i.e. individuals with specialised roles and advisory functions.

There are other interesting questions that remain unanswered, but which could offer deeper insight into the organisation and quality of the Delmataean military and, indeed, into how the federation functions as a whole. Most of these questions are related to recruitment. For example, who within Delmataean society could become a warrior? Did the Delmatae have a property qualification for military service, as was the case among the Greeks and Romans, or was every able-bodied male above a certain age required to procure a minimum amount of military equipment, as was the case among the Germans?<sup>35</sup> Given that, according to Vatinus, their territory encompassed only one quarter of the indigenous communities, to what extent and in what manner did the inhabitants of the remaining three quarters participate in military obligations? In other words, to what degree did the Delmatae transform into a military elite ruling over conquered territory?

### Strategy and tactics

There is another problem that is profoundly intriguing. When we examine everything we know about Delmataean warfare, we find no instances of pitched open-field battles. Instead, we find surprise attacks on Figulus's marching camp and an ambush against Gabinius. In all other cases, we find either the capture or defence of fortified positions. We cannot say with certainty that the Delmatae ever drew up in formation on an open plain opposite their enemy and engaged in mass combat, as is so often

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<sup>35</sup> Tac. *Germ.* 6.5.

portrayed in cinematic depictions of ancient warfare. This was the practice of the Romans, Italics, Carthaginians, Germans, Gauls, Greeks and eastern states. As the wars of these peoples are far better documented, it is quite understandable that we are inclined to project similar patterns onto the Liburnians, Delmatae, Illyrians and Iapodes. But to what extent is that template accurate in this case? To what extent did geographic conditions and local conceptions of warfare make open battle a less likely form of conflict resolution among these societies? Is it necessary to assume that the pitched battle was seen as the natural and desirable way to resolve a war in these cultures? What if warfare in these regions looked fundamentally different to what we are accustomed to seeing in most ancient contexts? What if the karst terrain of central Dalmatia and western Herzegovina prevented rapid manoeuvring by large formations? What if Iron Age military experience was largely restricted to the occupation and defence of hillfort settlements, both between and within local communities? Would that not be a logical expectation, given the geographical conditions? Warfare could largely consist of a community, under threat of lower-intensity conflict (e.g., a large raiding party), simply withdrawing to its hillfort together with all movable goods, while in the case of an attack by a major army, evacuating some of the more vulnerable hillfort settlements and concentrating in a predetermined central location, in order to assemble enough defenders behind sufficiently strong walls to withstand the scale of enemy force approaching them. Was this not precisely what the Delmatae did in their earlier military history when defending themselves against Figulus and Nasica? Communities living in karst terrain would not have had large quantities of immovable assets requiring protection. The hillfort settlements themselves functioned as social, political, religious and commercial centres, and were fortified and organised for defence against the level of threat they were intended to resist. Such communities would only need hillforts with adequate supplies of food and water and a developed system of watchpoints and signalling. The existence of watchpoints is abundantly confirmed in the field. Thus, warfare would boil down to a siege by starvation or an assault on the walls, occasionally complemented by ambushes against an advancing enemy, which the terrain readily permitted. In the absence of serious siege engines and engineering expertise on the part of the attacker, the outcome would depend primarily on the defenders' equipment, numbers, and the strength of their fortifications. In such conflicts, open-field battles would achieve nothing, and neither side – especially the defenders – had any reason to risk them and reduce their available manpower. Successfully capturing well-provisioned strongholds would have been difficult and would likely have occurred only rarely; the attacker would usually have had to be content with spoils taken from raiding the surrounding area.

In this sense, the influence of Hellenism may have brought about dramatic changes. For example, Hellenism introduced siege engines into military practice, fundamentally altering the nature of battle beneath city walls. Therefore, it is plausible that the major expansion of the Delmatae in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC was driven by the adoption of Hellenistic innovations into their military system. The Delmatae came into contact with the Greek city of Issa at an early stage. To the Issaeans, the Delmatae were the nearest indigenous community with precisely what the Greeks needed: wool, hides and ore. There was intensive contact, which was not without conflict, although the specific forms these conflicts took are unclear. Furthermore, while the Delmatae were vassals of the Illyrian rulers, their troops undoubtedly served in the Illyrian army. By attacking or defending Greek cities as mercenaries, they came into contact with Hellenistic – and even Roman – military doctrines. There was a source of knowledge and access to it. There was also a society whose internal organisation was highly martial and for whom the assault on fortifications was a decisive factor in warfare. The Delmatae were therefore highly receptive to this type of Hellenistic innovation, integrating it relatively quickly into their social and military structures – not to the same extent as in the eastern Hellenistic monarchies, but enough to give them a decisive advantage when attacking neighbouring communities. When the Romans destroyed the Illyrian kingdom, thereby removing the Delmatae from their strategic deadlock, their defensive forces were freed from Illyrian threats while weaker neighbouring communities lost a powerful protector. Raiding, which was likely always a component of the Delmataean economy, now gained renewed momentum. As the Delmatae had adopted Hellenistic military engineering innovations before their neighbours, they were particularly effective in hillfort warfare, and their occasional raids gradually took on a new form: expansion.

Even in their earliest encounters with the Romans, the Delmatae demonstrated considerable skill in defending fortified positions. This seems to have been a consistent feature of their resistance to Roman incursions. What are we to make of the claim that Figulus was unable to deploy siege engines because of Delminium's elevation?<sup>36</sup> That sounds like a rather odd and unconvincing excuse for an army that had conquered Veii, the Samnite cities in the Apennines and Greek fortresses in southern Italy, not to mention Syracuse and Carthage. Ultimately, Figulus himself managed to position siege engines on that very site and used them to hurl incendiary projectiles into the city. Why was this possible later but not earlier? Either the explanation is sloppy, we are missing part of the story that would clarify it, or Appian simply drew this detail from a less reliable source. In any case, Figulus's conduct suggests that he believed himself in-

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<sup>36</sup> App. *Ill.* 11.



capable of taking the fortifications of Delminium by conventional means, despite evidently wishing to do so. From the perspective of those on the other side of the barricade, this implies that the Delmatae were quite capable of defending fortified positions – effectively enough to pose difficulties for the Romans. This was likely because they employed defensive techniques or features that were unfamiliar to Roman commanders and had not been encountered in their prior campaigns. This would also best explain the confusion among authors attempting to interpret Figulus's campaign. The following year, Delminium was captured by Scipio Nasica.<sup>37</sup> However, it is unclear whether he captured the city itself or merely its burnt ruins that Figulus had left behind. It is doubtful that the Delmatae could have fully rebuilt Delminium in a few months, let alone in winter, and it is questionable whether they were able to defend it as seriously as before.

A full century later, the Delmatae seized Promona from the Liburnians and successfully defended it against the army sent by Caesar.<sup>38</sup> While this army certainly lacked the strength and experience of the ten legions that had spent years campaigning in Gaul, it is mentioned under Caesar's name and must therefore have included at least Roman "instructors", if not regular Roman troops (possibly up to a whole legion). It is also likely that it was commanded by one of Caesar's trusted officers. This force, which we may reasonably describe as a Liburnian–Roman coalition, was defeated in its attempt to retake Promona.

Vatinius abandoned his campaign and retreated to Dyrrhachium. His army was so dissatisfied that, the moment a new commander appeared on the horizon, it refused to follow orders. This suggests that, despite the strength of three legions, Vatinius' campaign was not going well. Add to that the reported loss of five cohorts,<sup>39</sup> and the situation was probably even worse. Vatinius's complaints about the number of fortified cities held by the Delmatae, his accounts of the repeated assaults required to capture even a single city and the excessive amount of time it took to do so (long enough to force him to abandon the effort with the arrival of winter) make clear what troubled him and where he saw the causes of his failures. In my opinion, this Vatinius was an arrogant, half-competent fool who received command due to his political skills rather than his military abilities. Regardless of whether that judgement is justified, one fact remains indisputable: three legions encountered serious difficulties in capturing Delmataean cities. These were hardened Caesarian legions with extensive experience of the civil war. This suggests that the Delmatae were capable of successfully withstanding Roman assaults on their fortifications to some

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<sup>37</sup> Flor. *Epit.* 2.25; Front. *Strat.* 3.6.2; De Vir. *ill.* 44.

<sup>38</sup> App. *Ill.* 12.

<sup>39</sup> App. *Ill.* 13.

extent. The Romans' siege towers, rams, catapults, testudines and other siege equipment proved ineffective, so the walls had to be taken by direct assault. This may be partly due to terrain features that limited the use of certain engineering methods and Vatinius' incompetence, but it is undoubtedly also due to the effectiveness of the Delmataean counter-siege measures. Their sustained ability to defend their cities for over a century, despite the ever-increasing capabilities and experience of Roman siege engineers, clearly demonstrates their adaptive capacity and rapid adoption of new countermeasures, ranging from tactical responses to fortification modifications.

In addition to these constants, there is also direct evidence of the "development of strategic thought" – essentially, signs that the Delmataean military system was increasingly aligning with the Hellenistic model. However, this was not an entire adoption and reform of the military organisation along Hellenistic lines, but rather the selective incorporation of elements that suited the Delmataean needs into the existing structure. The arrival of the Romans brought an entirely new mode of warfare to which the Delmatae were unaccustomed. Logically, against the Romans they applied the tactics they had developed in local conflicts. Ambushing the enemy during its advance is an effective tactic in the terrain of the Delmataean homeland. The terrain allows for concealed concentrations of troops and often forces the advancing enemy into a highly extended marching formation. Through their system of watchpoints, the Delmatae were able to monitor Figulus' army and discern its daily routines. The high mountains concealed their own forces' movement and assembly, and the advancing enemy was taken by surprise. The enemy was repelled, but the opportunity to destroy it was not exploited. At that point, the Delmatae were clearly not yet capable of organising a concentrated pursuit. In local conflicts, such a pursuit had evidently not been necessary: once repelled, the enemy likely lacked the logistical capacity to return quickly to the battlefield. However, this was not the case with the Romans. They returned, and the Delmatae again employed the tactics they had used until then, withdrawing into hillforts and abandoning some of them to concentrate in more strongly fortified centres.

However, developments occurred in this area over the following century. After losing five cohorts in an ambush, Gabinius was "forced to retreat to Salona in marching formation under combat" (*in agmine dimicare sit coactus*).<sup>40</sup> The action taken by the Delmatae against Gabinius is precisely what is known as a pursuit: maintaining combat contact with a retreating enemy. The Roman army was renowned for its coordinated pursuit tactics, always seeking to finish off a defeated opponent. However, the Roman army was highly disciplined and always maintained reserves specifi-

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<sup>40</sup> *BAlex.* 42-43.

cally for this purpose. Pursuit is not as simple to initiate as Roman examples might suggest. While it is true that the victor enjoys a significant moral advantage over the defeated, this must not deceive us. Throughout history, it has proven extremely difficult to compel soldiers to pursue an enemy after the enormous stress of battle, the release of fear and sheer physical exhaustion. As the adrenaline wears off, soldiers are simply tired, demoralised and weary of bloodshed and killing. I will refrain from citing the numerous military psychologists on this subject; it is sufficient to note that even Napoleon's officers often failed to compel their troops to pursue the enemy.<sup>41</sup> A coordinated pursuit can only be carried out by a disciplined and motivated army. The Delmatae were clearly capable of this. The 1<sup>st</sup> century BC Delmataean army was certainly not a band of lone heroes and individualists unwilling to obey anyone "equal to themselves", nor does it appear to have been composed of disparate warrior groups with their own chieftains and no clear hierarchy. They did not resemble the Germans or Gauls, who are described in much greater detail. It had an accepted chain of command and soldiers willing to obey orders. Without this, a coordinated pursuit would not only be unimaginable, but also entirely impossible to execute.

We now finally have archaeological evidence of changes in the battlefield tactics of the Delmatae. Interpreting these findings could confirm a growing shift towards the type of warfare focused on fortifications described here. Relatively recently, it has been observed that Delmataean warrior graves over time contain fewer spears and an increasing number of javelins.<sup>42</sup> Spears are thrusting weapons used for close combat, while javelins are projectile weapons intended for fighting at a distance. Playing the obvious card, archaeologists concluded that the Delmatae gradually shifted from close combat to ranged combat.<sup>43</sup> However, this interpretation only makes sense at first glance; something about it is clearly missing. If a soldier enters battle with two, three or four javelins, what will he use in close combat once he has thrown them all at the enemy? How can a battle be fought exclusively at distance?

I believe there are three possible interpretations of such a change, or a combination of them.

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<sup>41</sup> Goldsworthy 1996, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Blečić Kavur 2011, 63–64, and the literature listed therein. The problem with Croatian archaeological terminology is that the term "koplje" (spear) is used for both spears and javelins. Even the athletic discipline is called "bacanje koplja" (spear throwing, not javelin throwing). In the Croatian language, however, there is a clear distinction between stabbing weapons ("koplje" = spear) and throwing weapons ("sulica" = javelin). This confusion has been transferred directly to the parallel English translation of the article. This makes the text a little harder to grasp, but the author makes a clear distinction by using the terms "light spears for throwing" or "throwing spears".

<sup>43</sup> Marijan 2000, 81, 83–84, 94; Periša, Marijan 2003, 94–95.

1. The shift may not be related to warfare at all, but rather be a response to ecological changes in the environment. Spears and javelins are not solely used for warfare; they are far more frequently used for hunting. This could reflect altered living conditions in which hunting wild boars and bears with spears becomes less common and hunting deer and other game suited to javelins becomes more prevalent.

2. In an expansionist and warlike society, one can expect increasing economic and technological development. War booty leads to greater wealth accumulation, while exposure to enemy equipment and increased military production brings technological advancements in weapon manufacturing. Therefore, it is quite possible that the Delmataean smiths began producing increasingly high-quality swords and that more individuals could afford to purchase a good sword, either from their own craftsmen or through import. Consequently, the sword becomes the primary close-combat weapon, rather than the spear, while the right hand remains equipped with a javelin to inflict initial losses on the enemy from a distance.

3. This may also suggest that warfare increasingly took the form of sieges and the capture of fortified positions. An enemy on the rampart can be reached from a greater distance and at a steeper vertical angle with a javelin than with a spear. This would clearly suggest that the Delmatae are no longer just making plundering expeditions, but actually conquering fortresses and territories.

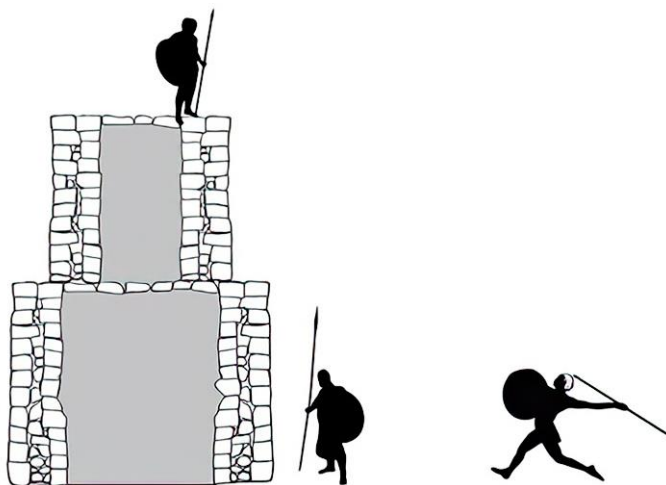


Fig. 2. An illustration of tactical versatility: targets unreachable by spear may be engaged with a javelin.

The destruction of five cohorts each under Gabinius<sup>44</sup> and Vatinius<sup>45</sup> each comprising Roman citizens (half a legion in both cases), and the evident difficulties of Vatinius' campaign, as detailed in his letters to Cicero,<sup>46</sup> suggest that the Delmatae were able to contend with the contemporary Roman army. They point to something far more significant. Firstly, Gabinius' operations took place in winter, outside the usual campaigning season when barbarian armies were typically disbanded and effectively non-existent. Winter conditions undoubtedly hindered Gabinius's movements, but they would also have affected the Delmatae's communications, slowing and complicating the concentration of their forces. Yet the Delmatae still succeeded in assembling their army in time to intercept Gabinius after he had advanced only 15 km into their territory. This indicates a remarkably rapid mobilisation capacity, suggesting that the Delmatae were more advanced than their German contemporaries – and even those that fought a century later.<sup>47</sup> The existence of a more developed and efficient mobilisation system implies a clearer and more advanced command hierarchy, greater internal discipline and higher command and control capabilities within the Delmataean military and the civilian sector responsible for war preparations and mobilisation. Furthermore, organising an ambush strong enough to trap over 2,000 enemies – that is, an ambush involving thousands of troops – is a highly complex task from a command and coordination perspective. Such an operation could easily be ruined by a single reckless, overly anxious or overly brave soldier and is hardly conceivable, let alone executable, without a clearly defined and firmly established chain of command supported by disciplined troops. Since only a quarter of Gabinius's forces were drawn into the ambush (not counting allies for whom we have no data), the rest of his army must have been engaged in some way to prevent them from providing timely assistance. This implies not only the presence of a single "chief" commander,<sup>48</sup> but also a subordinate "officer corps" to whom segments of such a complex operation could be delegated. Using the same comparison, the Germans only managed to carry out such an operation against the Romans once: Arminius' famous ambush in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD. However, this was possible because the operation was led by German chieftains who had previously served in the Roman army and applied the

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<sup>44</sup> *BAlex.* 43; App. *Ill.* 12.

<sup>45</sup> App. *Ill.* 13.

<sup>46</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 5.10b, 5.11.

<sup>47</sup> The Germans appear to have assembled their forces very slowly, so their engagements against rapid Roman punitive incursions most often occurred only once the Romans were already on their way back. Tac. *Ann.* 1.50; 1.55; 2.8; Tac. *Germ.* 11. More details in Goldsworthy 1996, 42ff.

<sup>48</sup> This could be inferred from the appointment of Verso and Testimus as commanders of Delmataean armies.

knowledge they had gained there rather than relying on tribal experience. This was not the case with the Delmatae. It is highly unlikely that Testinus, Verso or the unnamed victors over Gabinius' and Vatinius' cohorts had ever served in Roman auxiliary units. If they had, Roman sources would surely have pointed this out as an explanation for their victories, and there is no indication that Delmataean troops served in Roman auxiliary units at that time or earlier. This level of command and control was most likely internal to the Delmataean system.

Given the geographical characteristics of their native terrain, it is not reasonable to expect that the Delmatae had a particularly strong or well-developed cavalry. Even in the imperial period, this region was not suitable for raising auxiliary *alae*.<sup>49</sup> While horses could certainly be bred in the karst fields of Dalmatia, the practical utility of cavalry as a military force is highly questionable on rocky terrain and in warfare centred on fortifications. A society whose conception of warfare does not prioritise pitched battle – and therefore lacks the capacity to organise the concentrated pursuit of a routed enemy – has little strategic need for cavalry. In this context, horses would primarily be used to increase the speed of messengers or the mobility of the command staff. On rugged terrain, cavalry scouts and vanguards are of limited use as they have to travel along restricted routes and can easily be seen. Foot scouts can make far better use of natural cover and, in some cases, deliver reports more quickly by taking shortcuts across terrain that is unsuitable for horses. Pack animals (horses, mules and oxen) are extremely valuable in logistical terms, but on this type of terrain, they significantly impede the movement of troops and the manoeuvring of units. In these circumstances, however, this may not have been a major disadvantage, since the heavy Roman baggage trains would certainly have moved far more slowly than any logistical arrangements the Delmatae could have mobilised.

We do not know much about this, but it can be assumed that Delmataean logistics were not entirely rudimentary, and that there existed some degree of organized supply. It is unreasonable to think that the Delmatae depended heavily on the number of sandwiches brought from home for the duration of their time in the field, like the Belgae against whom Caesar fought.<sup>50</sup> If this army was capable of preparing fortifications in which several thousand troops could withstand a siege for months, even through the winter, then they must also have known how to organise central depots and distribution systems and set nutritional standards. The leap to a logistical system that supports an army during an offensive campaign

<sup>49</sup> While it is true that the three Delmataean cohorts from the Flavian period are designated as *equitatae*, this was probably due to their deployment locations – two were stationed in Mauretania Caesariensis and one in Dacia, where a greater number of cavalry units were required for regular frontier duties.

<sup>50</sup> Caes. *B Gall.* 2.10–11.

is then a small one – depots simply need to be made mobile. The extent to which the Delmatae organised logistical delivery depended solely on how long they had to stay on the battlefield in previous wars. These were not Germanic or Gallic-type conflicts, where assembled armies would try to meet and fight as quickly as possible at the nearest suitable location – that is, wars in which both sides sought a rapid resolution. The type of warfare practised by the Delmatae in offensive operations against neighbours primarily involved conquering fortified sites. It is hard to believe that their method of taking such positions relied solely on storming them and that if assaults failed, the Delmatae would simply give up. It is far more likely that they also engaged in sieges. During prolonged sieges, once local resources are exhausted, the besieging army must be sustained by bringing in food from the home territory. Therefore, one would expect relatively solid logistical preparation for operations, relying on central storage facilities within the Delmataean alliance's territory and, in the case of their depletion, on forced requisitions. If the aforementioned tax on livestock and grain<sup>51</sup> existed after the fall of Delminium's dominance, it may not have been entirely appropriated by the elite for personal gain, but rather used, at least in part, to build federal military reserves.

It is important to note the need for caution when interpreting our sources due to an “inbuilt distortion”. The authors were not Delmatae themselves, but rather believed they understood the Delmatae and attempted to explain them to readers living in very different social circumstances. For this reason, certain topics become highly problematic. Let us mention two very different examples of such topics. Firstly, when reading the sources, all tactical moves made by the Delmatae appear clear and logical. However, since the sources are exclusively from the Roman perspective, such clarity may be deceptive. The original source of all these interpretations is necessarily autobiographical, coming from a participant – often the commander himself – and ranging from official reports to personal retellings. Therefore, it need not reflect the actual decisions made by the Delmatae, but rather the Roman interpretation of those decisions. It is an interpretation of what the enemy is doing. This interpretation may be inaccurate, but the commander will not admit to making a mistake – sometimes he may not even be aware of it – and will instead create the impression that he correctly assessed the situation and “read the enemy like a book”. Secondly, even when I was at primary school, my history textbook said that the Romans pursued a policy of *divide et impera*. And that holds true. Wherever you looked, there was always some local discord that the Romans skilfully exploited. In every Gallic or Germanic tribe, there were always people who collaborated with the Romans and helped them subjugate their fellow tribesmen. Such people could also be found in Greek cities

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<sup>51</sup> Polyb. 32.9.

and Eastern monarchies, where deposed rulers or pretenders could easily be enlisted to further Roman goals. However, in the sources that speak about the Delmatae, there is not the slightest hint of this. There is no mention of collaborators, defectors or cities dissatisfied with their neighbours. Yet such examples exist in their immediate vicinity – one need only mention the clash between the two Batos, leaders of the great uprising. This is somewhat strange given that, according to Vatinius, this community consisted of a quarter of core *oppida* and three-quarters of those annexed by the Delmatae.<sup>52</sup> So, what the Roman sources refer to as the Delmatae (or what Vatinius, notably, calls *Dalmatia*) is a community that can, at the very least, be described as complex. It is a multi-ethnic society in which a quarter of the population dominates the rest, who were subjugated by force. Yet there is no indication that the Romans attempted to exploit this situation diplomatically. Whenever the Delmatae appear in the sources, they present a united front, completely opposed to Rome. Naturally, the question remains as to how much of this reflects reality and how much is Roman perception – that is, a form of generalisation or stereotyping.

Despite issues with our sources, it is clear that the Delmataean army that confronted the first Roman intervention, led by Figulus and Scipio, was not the same army that later opposed Octavian in terms of organisation, structure and equipment. This is the key to the longevity of the Delmataean resistance. The Delmatae were not just warlike, relatively numerous, resilient highlanders with strong morale whose social organisation favoured martial structures; the Romans were also not particularly disinterested in fully crushing them. Societies like this were common in Italy, among the Gauls, in Hispania, in Numidia and among the states of Asia Minor. Yet none of them were able to fight the Roman legions as effectively as the Delmatae. The Delmatae had one additional, crucial advantage: they were willing to learn and capable of applying what they had learnt.

High adaptability to innovation was extremely rare among ancient societies, which were generally conservative and resistant to changes in established social structures and customs. Change can threaten the elite, and major changes can severely undermine them, instilling a dangerous sense of insecurity among the masses. Ancient societies dislike such instability. The Romans were the great exception, as they were capable of using every military and political crisis as an opportunity to refine society, implementing reforms and adapting their military to new needs. It was precisely this ability that enabled Rome's greatness and vast expansion (with war spoils facilitating everything else). At the same time, the Delmatae's similar social and military adaptability allowed them to resist Rome for a very long time with notable effectiveness. The Delmatae's willingness to adapt and adopt useful elements from the surrounding world is evident

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<sup>52</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 5.10a.



when we compare their behaviour over time. Consider the incident involving Gaius Fannius and his accompanying envoys,<sup>53</sup> which demonstrates a total disregard for established international norms when dealing with emissaries arriving under the sign of peace and representing a foreign power. Yet, just over 100 years later, Delmataean diplomats were negotiating directly with Caesar in Rome.<sup>54</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

Our literary sources on the Delmatae are limited, and most of the archaeological finds are accidental and have not been systematically investigated. The available sources exclusively refer to conflicts between the Delmatae and the Romans, which are predominantly described as defensive actions. From this, we can cautiously infer that the mode of warfare of the Delmatae and all the elements shaping it differ significantly from those of the Romans, Greeks, Gauls or Germans. The Delmataean battle style is neither the frenzied charge of thousands of Gauls throwing themselves at the enemy in waves nor the slow assembly of a Germanic force attacking in a few wedges. These examples reflect a considerably lower degree of military organisation and tactical cohesion than that observed among the Delmatae.

Where we can reconstruct specific Delmataean actions on the battlefield, we observe a degree of tactical sophistication that is not typical of loosely organised barbarian forces. The Delmataean army is capable of re-deployments and coordinated manoeuvres that the Gauls and Germans of the time would not have been able to execute. It was clearly not an army centred around renowned warlords and their personal followers, nor was it merely a sum of thousands of individual warriors.

At this point, we can reasonably conclude several key characteristics of the Delmataean military system:

1. To some extent, Delmataean society was warlike in the sense that values typically associated with warrior culture were encouraged and held in high regard. Respect for martial virtues was also evident in cult practices. This is demonstrated by the large number of Delmatae who later served in the imperial auxiliary units. While these social values could not lead to a “national characteristic” of belligerence among the Delmatae, they certainly influenced attitudes towards aggression and authority, as well as the ideals and behavioural models upheld by community members.

2. The structure and organisation of the Delmataean army cannot be defined through comparisons with better-known ancient armies, such as the Roman, Greco-Hellenistic, Gallic, Germanic or Hispanic forces. Nor can it be defined by analogy with the armies of the Eastern monarchies.

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<sup>53</sup> Polyb. 32.9, 32.13; Zon. 9.25.

<sup>54</sup> App. *Ill.* 13.

While some similarities exist, these belong to general categories, such as the presence of types of battle equipment found throughout the Mediterranean or combat characteristics dictated by the inherent nature of bladed weapons. The army's specific organisational features and understanding of war were largely the result of indigenous adaptation to novelties introduced by Hellenism, particularly within the broader region and among the immediate neighbours of the Delmatae. Above all, the Delmataean army was an expression of the society that created it.

3. These influences did not result in a complete 'rewriting of solutions' that would have brought the Delmataean army closer to a Hellenistic or Roman ideal. Rather, among the Delmatae, the Hellenisation of the army was achieved by adapting existing solutions to the new requirements imposed by military development.

4. Following the destruction of Delminium, Delmataean society was federative in nature and dominated by a fairly broad social elite, a fact that was reflected in the organisation of the army. The army was composed of troops sent by the communities that formed the alliance. Furthermore, it is plausible that a permanent elite unit existed at least by the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

5. In conflicts against the Romans, the Delmataean army consistently avoids open battle, and its strategy is primarily based on resistance from fortified positions. On the other hand, it appears that the Delmatae possessed effective methods for capturing their neighbours' fortresses. Thus, the fundamental characteristic that can presently be discerned is their adaptation to a mode of warfare we have termed "hillfort-type warfare", which is largely centered on the conquest and defense of fortifications.

6. The ambush of Gabinius, Verso's organisation of Promona's defence based on the surrounding heights, the surprise attack on Figulus's camp and Testimus's retreat into the hills before Octavian all suggest that the Delmatae consistently sought to exploit the terrain to their advantage.

7. These same actions, which are the only ones preserved in our sources with any detail whatsoever, demonstrate that the Delmataean army was capable of executing complex manoeuvres in the field and coordinating actions among lower units. This was an army that could be mobilised and operate in winter, outside the usual campaigning season. All of this suggests a well-developed subdivision into smaller units, a relatively robust command structure and a high level of internal discipline.

8. The Delmataean army was not the kind of barbarian military force that would gather and then rush to engage the enemy on the nearest suitable battlefield. Instead, Delmataean commanders planned engagements carefully, anticipating the enemy's moves and assessing appropriate countermeasures. Testimus's example shows that this army did not enter battle at any cost; clearly, there was no dishonour in retreating before a

superior enemy in order to wait for more favourable conditions. This was an army that only entered combat on its own terms, either once it had gained the advantage over the enemy or if the enemy left it no other choice.

9) There must have been a strong morale booster, either embedded within the social structure or the military system itself. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it was, something sustained the Delmatae on the battlefield across generations and effectively drove their aggression against neighbouring communities. If this army was capable of holding the line and continuing to fight for ten years despite losses,<sup>55</sup> then there must have been something that gave them the will to keep going. The original motivations and goals would have long faded from the soldiers' minds after such a period; these were certainly no longer what kept them fighting, no matter how successful the campaign. Something powerful must have been maintaining morale and pushing the Delmatae to continue waging war. From a societal perspective, this may have been intense chauvinism, which was not unusual in the ancient world. It may also have been rooted in religion, with ample parallels in antiquity and even the modern era. However, soldiers hardened by years of warfare cannot be driven by patriotism or divine favour. At that point, what keeps them in the fight is their comrades. Therefore, the Delmataean military structure must have fostered the development of strong bonds of *camaraderie* – perhaps through encouraging homosexual relationships between soldiers, as was common among the Greeks and Germans, or insisting that the same men consistently fought side by side in formations, as in the Roman model. Alternatively, it may have been something unique to the Delmatae.

We cannot go beyond this point – the sources simply do not permit it. Only archaeological research could provide a more complete answer. In Delmataean territory, such research is currently limited to collecting and sorting through accidental finds. Without systematic investigations providing insight into Delmataean society, its spatial organisation and its military equipment, we will never have enough material to integrate with historical sources and begin constructing a coherent picture of the Delmataean army. For now, we are unfortunately limited to highlighting phenomena that we believe should be the focus of future research. The current lack of interest in the Delmatae is a great loss, as their military prowess could ultimately prove to be one of the most significant indigenous phenomena of the ancient world.

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<sup>55</sup> App. III. 25.

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