Cicero de re militari: a civilian perspective on military matters in the late Republic

Abstract
Cicero’s value as a military commentator has traditionally been obscured by his reputation as an unmilitary figure. This focus ignores the considerable quantity – and quality – of references to military matters in his writings, as well as the engagement demanded by his public profile as a senior senator and advocate during the war-torn final decades of the Republic. As a participant-witness writing as events unfolded, he provides unrivalled insight into developing contemporary issues from an equally unrivalled civilian/domestic perspective. Far from precluding meaningful discussion, this perspective draws attention to the wider consequences of the activities of the army, from their symbolic representation of Rome’s might to their impact on domestic stability and role in imperial expansion. This thesis explores Cicero’s contribution to the militarized culture of the late Republic, bringing together his military-themed comments in the first major study of its kind. Chapter 1 sets the scene with an examination of his military service, demonstrating that it met the standards of the day and identifying characteristics of his outlook that can be linked directly to his experience. Chapter 2 investigates his engagement with Rome’s military heritage by way of his use of military exempla, specifically the priorities indicated by his choice and description of these figures. Chapter 3 presents a similar assessment of his relationships with contemporary military figures, noting the effect of their political influence on the interest he took in their military responsibilities. Chapters 4 and 5 assess his theory concerning military matters in the domestic and foreign spheres, respectively. Both highlight the focus on ethics which sets Cicero’s theory apart from that of his contemporaries. Finally, chapter 6 addresses the tension between civic and military values in the previous chapters, contextualizing his pro-civic bias as a reaction to military despotism rather than anti-militarism for its own sake. The analysis of these themes confirms Cicero’s awareness of military matters as well as his contemporary authority as a commentator. It moreover highlights the historical value of his remarks as the rhetorical product of a civilian context and an alternative discourse about the relationship between the army and the state. Although his views are broadly comparable to those of contemporary authors, his coverage of associated domestic concerns is not. The end result is an account of military matters which complements conventional military histories and manuals of military science, and deserves to be taken seriously as military commentary.

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