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Reviewed Article:

The VIA SCIPIONIS Project Outdoor Travelling Experimental Archaeology and Re-enactment

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In August 2015 the first rendition of an experimental archaeology project was held, for the first time in Spain. The objective was to study the problems faced by the Roman Republican legions from the second Punic War during their marches. This project, named VIA SCIPIONIS, captured an historical episode from the year 209 BC, within the context of the second war between Rome and Carthage.

> Numerous examples around the world show how the diffusion of history, via Living History and Experimental Archaeology can be revitalizing agents in the cultural, tourism and economical fields, often attracting thousands of visitors each year. Outstanding examples would be the Battle of Hastings (UK), Waterloo (BE), Almansa (ES) or Gettysburg (USA), archaeological parks as Carnutum (AU) or Guédelon (FR) or festivals like the Jorvik Viking Festival (UK) or Tarraco Viva (ES).

In that year, a war event occurred that would change the equilibrium between the two hegemonic powers of the Ancient Mediterranean, Rome and Carthage. Publius Cornelius Scipio "Africanus", general of the Roman army intended for the Iberian Peninsula from 211 BC, marched against *Qart Hadasht* (current Cartagena city), the main Carthaginian military harbour in Iberia. His plan concluded with the fall of the city in just one day, thanks to an ingenious ruse. According to Polybius and Titus Livius, the Roman army that was encamped at the mouth of the Ebro River walked the distance to *Qart Hadasht* (460 km) in just seven days. A real feat, as it means that those men walked an average distance of more than 60 km/ day. Recent archaeological surveys conducted by a scientific team from the University of Barcelona, lead by Dr. Jaume Noguera, have established the possible location of that camp on a promontory between L'Aldea and Amposta villages, along the Ebro River watercourse (Noguera 2012; Noguera et al. 2013). Livius quotes this point as *Nova Classis* (Liv.XXII, 21, 1-6).

This project was designed and powered by a small archaeology company (ARTIFEX, conservation and recreation of the archaeological heritage) aiming to recreate that episode, combining science, entertainment, cultural tourism and spread of history. The project received academic and institutional support from the Experimental Archaeology Laboratory of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, the Spanish Experimental Archaeology Association (Experimenta) and EXARC. The first attempt to fund the project was through crowd funding, trying to collect some funds for the NGS (NGO) *Educo* and its program "Dining scholarships". The aim of this program is to provide a daily meal to the children affected by economical crises in Spain. We failed to exceed 35% of the total requested, leaving the proposal on "stand by". Later, we decided to fund with our own financial resources. The main objective was then to call attention to the potential of the project, to generate the interest of local public administrations that initially had ignored it, and to encourage them to financially support the project. With eight volunteers, the equivalent of a Roman Republican "*contubernium*" (a

modern platoon), with the definitive collaboration of the re-enactment groups Evocati Apri Scipioni and Ibercalafell (who generously gave part of their equipment), and the small company LA SVBVRA, SL (who fronted most of the costs), we began to walk from l'Aldea on 3 August 2015 until we reach Cartagena (Murcia Region) on 17 August.

Participants involved with the VIA SCIPIONIS project crossed four regions, six provinces, and through more than sixty villages on foot to reach their destination, always trying to follow the original ancient *Via Augusta*, which was constructed on an older road named *Via Heraklea*. That ancient path connected villages of the eastern side of the peninsula and was probably used by Hannibal during his march to Italy. Unfortunately, just a few sections of the original layout have been documented archaeologically and are generally in very poor condition due to abandonment by the government. The coincidence, on the other hand, of modern routes of the road networks, highways and railways with the route of the ancient *Via Augusta* has resulted in the disappearance of the archaeological remains and now, except for a small segment, only the signalling is conserved (Despiau et al. 2011).

The first and most important objective of this project was to compile data necessary to carry out a scientific study of the Roman Republican legions on foot. There are been several studies for the Imperial period (Himmler 2008; Junkelmann 1986), but not for the Republican army. We focused our research in three main topics. In first place, the wear suffered by the leather shoes (*caligae*) and the loss of hobnails, trying to relate the loss during the march with the archaeological evidences found at Baecula's battlefield (Quesada Sanz et al. 2015)and trying to compare the results with the ones obtained by Himmler (2008).

Secondly, we studied the impact of the march upon the participants. We recreated the diet consumed by the soldiers and studied how suitable it was for such a march. Also, we kept records of injuries suffered during the march, to see how they fitted the archaeological evidence (Golubović et al. 2009; Slaus et al. 2004)and more contemporary evidences (Knapik *et al*. 2004; 1996; Knapik and Reynolds 2012; Tilbury-Davis and Hoope 1999).

Finally, we also studied the way the soldiers carried their equipment, and how it could be improved to reduce the risk of injuries and pain. For that, seven participants (the eighth one was responsible for logistical tasks) were characterized as consular troopers (*velites*, *hastate*, *princeps* and *triarii*) and as auxiliary troopers (Iberian- Layetanian or, in other words, Iberians from the current area around Barcelona city). The army on the Roman Republic was defined by age and social status. The youngest members were the *velites*, the light infantry. Their equipment consisted in throwing javelins, a sword and a small round shield. *Hastati* and *Princeps* were the line infantry and their shared many similarities in their equipment. Both used a great shield, the *scutum*, and a sword, the *gladius*. Also, they carried two different spears, one light and one heavy, called *pilum*. They could also carry a corporal protection, but it wasn't cheap and their main protection was the shield, so not many soldiers wore it. Finally,

there were the *triarii*, which were the veterans of the army and the richest soldiers. Their function was to act in desperate situations. They were spear and shield, sword and corporal protection. All this equipment could show several differences in decoration, pictorial motives, etc. reflecting the different precedence of the members of the army (Burns 2003). To reflect this particularity, the *triarii* in our experiment was dressed as a Samnite, a tribe of central Italy.

For fifteen days, we documented numerous and interesting physical data as well as physiological and psychological variables (shoe wear, shield suspension systems, baggage and weapons transport systems, shop fitting, et cetera). Although we are still working on the results, several conclusions can be drawn. We could test the high wear of the shoes, although this data was altered as several sections of the route were over pavement. Yet we could study how the hobnails fall down: the pressure of the step makes the column of the square section of the nail rotate inside the sole, enlarging the hole until it wears off.

Concerning the equipment of the soldiers, the leather containers weren't a good choice for the march. As a consequence of the intense heath of Spanish summer, the pitch detaches from the walls of the recipe heating up the water. On the other hand, the employment of pumpkins as canteen was extremely useful, as they chilled the water. As for the transportation of the soldier's equipment, there were two conclusions. First, the most comfortable way to carry the shield it was employing two straps over the shoulders. In second place, the most practical way for carrying shaft weapons was crossed over the neck and lending over the top of the shield.

Unlike the actual historic event, this project was not intended to match the feat of a six-day march. So, we calculated the sections according to distances that could be accomplished daily without reaching critical exhaustion, along with some camping spots inspired by plausible daily walking distances. The daily average was 30 km with historic "caligae" and kit, taking into account temperatures some days reaching above 40°C. The route began with the starting point at the mouth of the Ebro River (between L'Aldea and Amposta), followed by Traiguera, Les Coves de Vinromà, Borriol, Nules, Sagunto, Valencia, Algemesí, Xativa, Moixent, Caudete, Elda, Elche, Rojales Pilar de la Horadada, and finally Cartagena. Other supply points were also determined to simulate the help of the fleet, commanded by Caius Lelius, which sailed parallel to the coast prepared to provide supplies to the troops or to facilitate evacuation in case of Carthaginian attack.

Upon reaching the destination town, we built the proportional part of a military camp built by a *contubernium*) section of a military camp, performed a public talk about the historical period, about the potential for this project to become an engine for tourism, and for social and economic development. It was a direct way to arouse the interest of the public about their heritage legacy. The talk lasted for about an hour but the visit to the camp lasted much

more because it generated much curiosty and interest. It was not unusual to find several people asking questions and observing the camp before the talk and many of those remained afterwards, asking questions and trying the equipment long after the talk had ended. As an average, there were a hundred people in the meetings.

VIA SCIPIONIS is, obviously, a project supported by re-enactment due to its excellent cultural and educational scope and its excellent potential for quality tourism advertising, allowing to transport the public to the past in a fun and direct way, breaking the barrier that usually separates the archaeological or literary vestige through accessibility to replicas of archaeological finds that are normally exposed in a glass case in a museum or mentioned in classical sources. In this sense, the audience has the extraordinary opportunity to sample the same foods and drinks as those who participated in the *Via*, and therefore that of the Roman legionaries of the past. This made it possible to develop a set of activities related to the second Punic War, a seminal event in the history of the peninsular East, and for the political development in the Mediterranean and the advent of Western culture as we know it today. It is important that people understand that our cultural roots have their seeds in that tumultuous period, where the capture of Cartagena represents, within the framework of Hannibal's conflict, the beginning of the end of the Carthaginian presence in Iberia. it can be considered as a turning point, after which the chances of survival of Carthage, which had been one of the most important commercial and military powers in the Mediterranean for centuries, was virtually nullified by an emerging and unforgiving Rome that in two centuries became a powerful empire.

Another point for consideration is that this project aims to draw attention to the deep state of abandonment and degradation suffered by the ancient roads in general, and the *Via Augusta* in particular, highlighting the opportunities tourism may provide. The VIA SCIPIONIS Project aims to demonstrate that proper governmental management of these heritage facilities can positively impact local municipalities that are currently hosting a stretch of the original route and its historical relevance through quality tourism. This is not only from the point of view of the dynamics of re-enactment but also with the articulation of a route properly signposted and with universal access, similar to the Camino de Santiago or others across Europe, such as the *Rotta dei Fenicci* or *Il Camino d'Annibale*. In this sense, the possibility for establishing a connection between the *Via Scipionis* and nearby archaeological sites, museums and places of culturaland scenic interest is not to be underestimated.

Despite not having enjoyed adequate publicity, we were visited by over a thousand people, and generated the interest of various media (TVE, RNE, Cadena Ser or COPE among others) and press ("El Periodico de Catalunya", "Diari de Tarragona", "El Punt" or "La Verdad de Murcia" among others). The TVE new programme of the region of Murcia broadcast our arrival at Cartagena (18 August 2015) and the radio program *Las Tardes del Ciudadano García* of RNE interviewed us (11 August 2015). The Periodico de Catalunya, in their summer

supplement, dedicates several pages with the title “Hasta Cartagena como Escipión”(To Cartagena as Scipio) (Berbís 2015)and we appear in the front page of the newspaper La Verdad (16 August 2015 and 18 August 2015). In addition, dozens of bloggers and social network users echoed the originality and value of the initiative. For example, the blog Tabula Rasa echoed our project with the headline “Tras los pasos de Escipión el Africano” (Following the footsteps of Scipi Africanus) (Pastrana 2014). This interest also reached political representatives, both locally and regionally, and numerous mayors, as well as cultural and heritage technicians received this project with open arms as, for example, Mr. Vincent Marzà Conseller de Educación, Investigación, Cultura y Deportes de la Generalitat Valenciana. Also our project was featured in the documentary “Tras la Huella de Aníbal” (Following the traces of Hannibal) by Eterio Ortega from Cedecom production that was emitted by Canal Sur

We must mention our intention to use the VIA SCPIONIS Project as an engine for archaeological research in the sense that it is a project that seeks to reposition some of the scenes of the second Punic War, often displaced in the priority interests of governments. In 1999 Professor Junyent (Lleida University) warned about the problems of the Neoliberal economy in archaeology, especially with the neglect of the administration (Junyent 1999:10). Several examples can be found on the Spanish newspapers: In 2014 El Confidencial showed the cutbacks suffered by the funds for conservation and protection of cultural heritage (Riaño 2014a). This trend prompted another study of how the cultural heritage was managed by the government in 1 October 2014 (Riaño 2014b). In 31 May2015 el Confidencial echoed again the problems faced by the heritage in Spain (Riaño 2015, Jarreta 2015). Also La Información echoed this problem in 5 November 2016 (Brotons 2016).

Numerous examples around the world show how the diffusion of history, via Living History and Experimental Archaeology can be revitalizing agents in the cultural, tourism and economical fields, often attracting thousands of visitors each year. Outstanding examples would be the Battle of Hastings (UK), Waterloo (BE), Almansa (ES) or Gettysburg (US), archaeological parks as Carnutum (AU) or Guédelon (FR) or festivals like the Jorvik Viking Festival (UK) or Tarraco Viva (ES).

The beginning of exploratory archaeological programs in these places, promoted by municipalities and institutions of wider scope, would help generate employment. The consolidation of this route would mean the increase in the number of reenactors and audience and the reassessment of some of the archaeological sites could generate local jobs, directly (tour guides, archaeological works) and indirectly (artisans, hotels, restaurants, merchandising or replicas). The inclusion of these enclaves within local tourism could offer the scientific review of some hypothetical approaches that never have been verified archaeologically on the Roman legions of the 2nd Punic War.

For future versions we intend to implement new experimental objectives, new activities, and new thematic outreaches to expand the scientific possibilities as tourist attractions. Among the novelties we would expand is the group of participants, up to two *contubernii* (16 people plus two or three people in charge of logistics), with participation of European reenactors, and with the use of mules or carriages. We are also considering the possibility of expanding the itinerary with the opening of a second trail between Cartagena and Alcalá del Rio in Sevilla (in commemoration of the Battle of Ilipa that has traditionally been located there) and Cadiz (the surrender to Scipio of this city represents the end of the Punic presence in Iberia). We cannot not rule out other benefits - one of the main objectives sought when this project was initially designed. In this sense, the VIA SCIPIONIS Project may become a solidarity claim for those people interested in financially helping social groups hit by economy downturns. Since this project was born from persistence and a desire for internationalisation, expanding experimental and discursive options constitute an increasingly structured necessity, but also its management and preparation during the months leading up to the march, with the hope that the event may experience growth.

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Link(s)

Documentary “Tras la Huella de Aníbal” (Following the traces of Hannibal)

Keywords living history

Country Spain

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Gallery Image

FIG. 1. THE GROUP IN THE MUSEUM.

FIG. 2. MEDIC HELPING WITH FOOT INJURIES.

FIG. 3. THE GROUP RECEIVED A LOT OF PUBLIC ATTENTION.

FIG. 4. THE TEAM IN THE AMPHITEATRE.

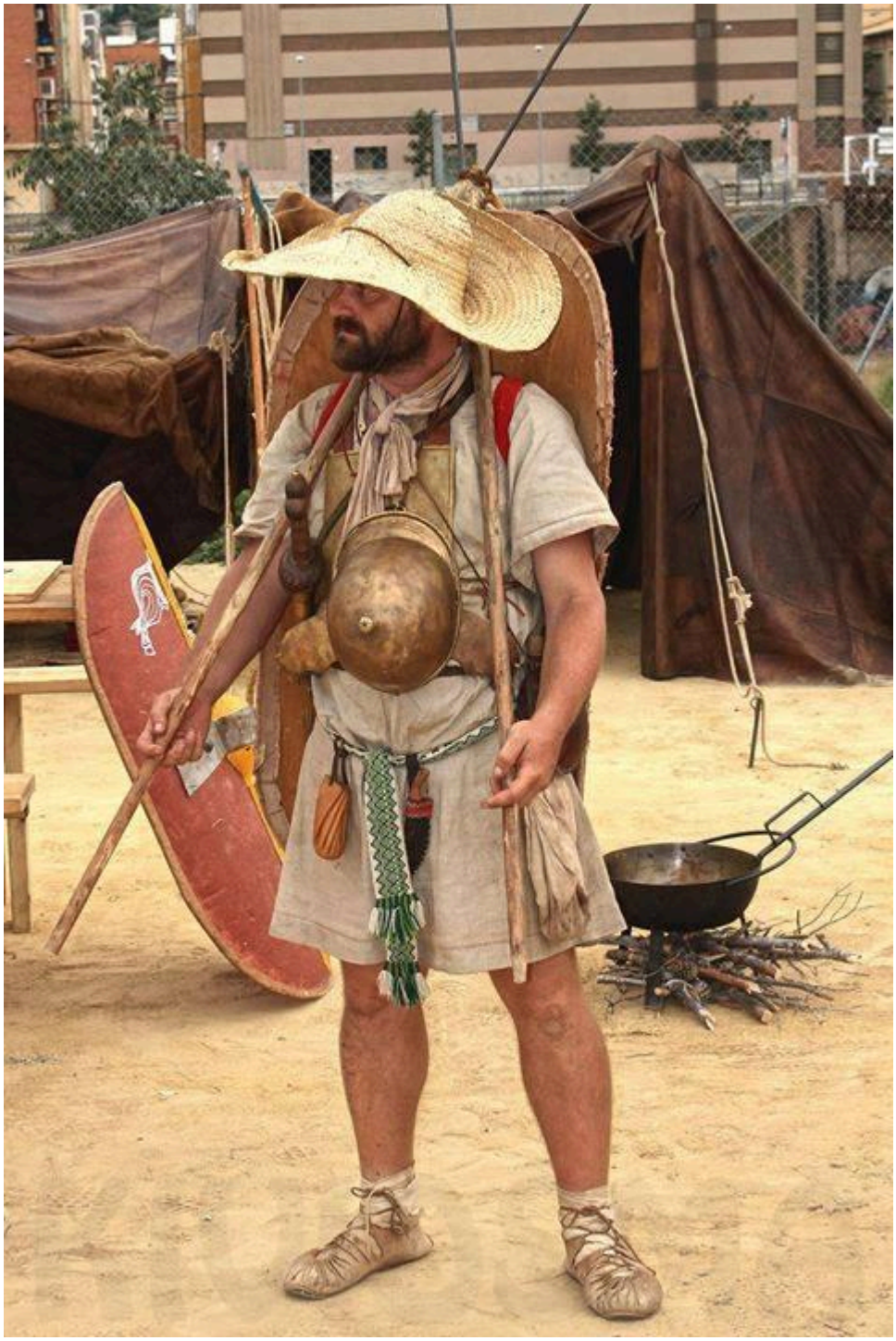

FIG. 5. FULLY EQUUIPPED TEAM MEMBER.

FIG. 6. ON THE ROAD...

FIG. 7. THE DAILY FOOD.

FIG. 8. THE TEAM IN THE CITY.

FIG. 9. THE GROUP POSING IN FRONT OF THEIR TENT.

FIG. 10. FOOT INJURIES.

FIG. 11. TEAM MEMBERS IN THE RUINS.

FIG. 12. LECTURE ABOUT VIA SCIPIONIS.