

Dead Men Do Tell Tales: Spendius, Mathos, and Autaritus and the Punic Army

In 240 BCE, in the aftermath of the First Punic War, the Carthaginian army rebelled. Known now as the Mercenary, Libyan, or Truceless War, the rebellion was headed by three soldiers previously in the service of Carthage: Spendius, a Campanian slave, Mathos, a Libyan, and Autaritus, a Gallic mercenary. These men began their careers as common soldiers and members of the historically overlooked non-elite, eventually rising to command. Thus through their unique backgrounds and trajectories, we have a rare opportunity to re-examine certain neglected aspects of the Carthaginian army, including social status, ethnicity, and language within the ranks.

In modern scholarship, there has been little attempt to establish basic biographies of these three individuals, let alone analyze the army based on their experiences. Hoyos (2007) makes important observations about them where relevant, but avoids making statements about the army via their careers. Similarly, Ameling (1993), analyzes the army as a whole, but extrapolates little from the three leaders. Huss (1988) concentrates solely on the Truceless War leaders, and is thus a rarity, but is only concerned with coinage. Fariselli (1999) actually cites a need for more studies on the ethnic composition of Carthaginian soldiers in Sicily; the same should be said about social statuses and linguistics across the army. A fuller understanding of these concepts would not only illuminate the workings of the Punic army, but also allow us to understand the thousands of common people, like Spendius, Mathos and Autaritus, who worked in its service.

There is much to unpack in Spendius, but the most glaring point is his social status. Before soldiering, Spendius was a Campanian slave. After defecting to the Carthaginians, he apparently rose to prominence based solely on his physical strength and merit (Polybius I.69.4).

From these few points, let alone the other facets of his career, we can deduce several things. First, the army willingly accepted both slaves and individual applicants. Slave soldiers in the Mediterranean were rare, and yet the Punic army clearly welcomed them. Second, the army must have been quite merit based, given that Spendius' social status could not have helped him gain prominence. Third, the Carthaginian army was not entirely a mercenary force: Spendius clearly joined for freedom rather than pay.

Mathos is introduced by Polybius shortly after Spendius (Polybius I.69.6). Polybius states that Mathos was a free Libyan soldier, but since Polybius makes no distinction between Libyans and Liby-Phoenicians, Mathos could have been the latter (Polybius I.70.9, I.82.8-9). His skills in strategy and generalship point to experience, and he may have been a career soldier. Indeed, Mathos arose as the de-facto leader over Spendius and Autaritus (Polybius I.77.1-2). Clearly, Mathos was not just a conscripted subject, but also not a mercenary: he occupied some sort of middle ground between the two. He was paid (unlike the Roman *Socii*), and yet also was forced to fight for the Carthaginians, to whom he disliked (Polybius I.70.3, I.70.8-9). Mathos' status is emblematic of the need to reevaluate scholarly notions of ethnicity in the Carthaginian army.

Autaritus is the last of the rebel leaders mentioned by Polybius. Initially, Autaritus was a Gallic mercenary under Carthage in the First Punic War (Polybius I.77.4-5). Specifically mentioned of Autaritus is that he picked up the Punic language during his long service, and this worked to his advantage as he was able to address troops of various ethnicities in the *lingua franca* (Punic) of the army. Autaritus' linguistic skills imply that a military Punic dialect existed, similar to the military Latin dialect in the Roman empire. This in turn paints a picture of a more professional army, as opposed to the temporary mercenary force which Polybius describes.

Together, the three rebel leaders of the Truceless War provide rare insight into the Carthaginian army. Given our limited literary sources, it should be hard to overlook these three characters. And yet, there has been no concerted effort to use their careers to analyze the wider picture, let alone ethnicity, social class, or language. Employing a critical focus on the three leaders will grant not only a better understanding of the Carthaginian army, but of the common soldiers as well.

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