Military Affairs in Livy

Ab Exercitū Condito

I. What was the military? What are “military affairs?”
   a. Seen clearly as early as the Trojan pillaging in Laurentum.
   b. Romulus and Remus “Robin Hooding?” Probably not.
   c. Becomes more clearly defined, with specific military terminology, after the war with the Sabines.
   d. Evolves into the obscenely complex, detailed system of Republican Rome.
      i. e.g. Livy 8.8 below. Descriptions just of the specific military formations alone could run the length of multiple pages.
   e. “Affairs” encompasses not just the battle and its description, but things like the battle march, the exhortations to troops, the resultant triumphs or ovations.

II. How were these affairs presented?
   a. As a range of narratives, from single-sentence summaries to accounts that span multiple books.
      i. But even the simple summaries could be paired with alternate accounts that were far longer and more complex; duplex fama.
   b. Heavily rhetorical and increasingly epic accounts, not just the account of numbers and organizations provided by some historians, e.g. Polybius.
   c. Livy’s accounts are stated to be open to interpretation. He provides options (and often hints at which he prefers) but, as stated in the Praefatio, does not often care too much which is more accurate.
   d. Often somewhat confusing language or obscured subjects in accounts of battle.

III. Themes/tropes/motifs
   a. Military engagements tended to be defensive actions.
   b. “Roman Youth” from the beginning, of necessity, the army was composed of the iuvenes, later grown to pubes.
   c. Roman ingenuity
   d. Urbs Capta
   e. Cyclical/repeated depictions and occurrences in military affairs
   f. From small beginnings, great things will grow

IV. “Military Affairs” as a vehicle, a canvas
   a. Livy uses military affairs, from the battles to the campaigns, from the speeches to triumphs, to convey ideas about morals, values, vices, virtues, and aetiologies.
      i. The Trojan’s pillaging, Romulus’ prayer, duplex fama, womanly virtue, vehicle for lessons, extensive vehicle for aetiology.
“It is of course one of the commonplaces of Roman history that the tendency of the annalists of Rome was to balance every Roman defeat with a cor-responding and immediate Roman victory. Roman vanity demanded that a disaster to the arms of Rome should be at once avenged.” (Salmon 28)

“Thus, Livy is the only one to tell us that an ingens multitudo came from Rome to camp at Veii in anticipation of booty (5.21.1).” (Miles 9)

“Livy's descriptions of fourth-century engagements are of highly dubious provenance, and may have simply been invented for literary or patriotic effect.” (Sabin 3)

“…it is abundantly clear that the statements that his fleet in the battle numbered 170 (Orosius vi, 19) or 'under 200' (Florus ii, 21), which nearly all historians have followed, will not do; at the same time, these figures in some way represent something in Livy, which must be considered. I see no process by which a real figure of 400 or over could be changed or corrupted into 170 or 'under 200,' so the corruption or misunderstanding must lie else-where than in the figures; that is, Livy's figure was the total, not of Antony's fleet in the battle, as the epitomators say, but of something else.” (Tarn 173)

“…we realize that it is due to Roman vanity, and to Roman vanity alone, that we have the story of a revenge-victory in the same year as Caecilius' death [as recounted in Livy].” (Salmon 29)