

## The Roman Army

We have two very detailed accounts of the structure of the Roman army during the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the legendary sixth king Servius Tullius. While Livy and Dionysius differ on some details, the Servian constitution provides us with a glimpse of the archaic Roman military. It was a heavily hierarchical system, with the richest citizens on top forming the cavalry, and various grades of infantry indicated by wealth. The very bottom class, the proletarius, were exempted from fighting because they couldn't afford arms or armor. The Servian constitution largely expresses a political arrangement – those who contribute the most to the state in the military sphere have the most influence in voting. This is typical of states in the Mediterranean, especially the Greeks. Athens provides a good alternative path, where the assembly gave the most power to the lower classes who rowed in the all important Athenian fleet, as the Old Oligarch saw.

The Roman army gradually evolved from what were apparently hoplite tactics to the more flexible legionary form over the centuries. It drew strength, as Cornell and others show, from the alliance arrangements with various other cities, first the Latins, and then the remainder of Italy. Allies contributed troops who fought under Roman command. This system functioned for much of the Republic.

By 150 however the Roman army was facing a growing manpower crisis. Brunt has amply documented the decline in citizens meeting the minimum property requirements, and the repeated lowering of the minimum. Army life had become much harder, as Rome's wars took soldiers farther and farther afield, away from their farms, for extended periods of time. Economic conditions were becoming depressed, and an increasing amount of land was falling into the hands of a few. This need for soldiers led, as Crawford states, to the land reforms of Tiberius Gracchus in 133. Which attempted to give land to the landless, and create a new class of citizen soldiers. This effort was generally unsuccessful, and led to the complete opening of the army to all regardless of wealth by Marius.

The failure of the senate to recognize that poor soldiers would look to their generals for support on discharge led in large part to the fall of the republic and the huge armies raised by successive dynasts. When Augustus consolidated his power in 28, there were some 60 legions. He immediately began to demobilize them, providing them with land at great expense. 28 legions were left, still an enormous number. Of course, the secret was that the emperor's control rested on the army, as Goodman notes. However, Augustus was careful to station the legions on the frontiers, leaving Rome under the thumb of the newly formed praetorian guard. The number of legions was still quite high, and a huge burden on the state purse, but as Starr points out, the Roman Empire was beset on many flanks with potential enemies, and if things grew difficult, would have great hardship surviving.

The disposition and number of legions did not change after the loss of Varus until the Flavian period. In 68 the secret was let out, that Emperors could be made elsewhere than Rome. But had Nero not committed suicide, Galba's legion could hardly have survived the various others that stood between him and Rome. Vespasian finally came out on top thanks to his armies. But the specter of four emperors in a single year made by different armies was a sign of things to come. Domitian at least favored the army greatly, making it and not the old aristocracy, the backbone of his reign, and when Nerva succeeded, he secured his position through the adoption of a popular general, Trajan.

By the Severan period, things had changed greatly. Septimius Severus was one of several would-be emperors elevated either by the various armies or by the praetorians in 193. Once his position was secure, he never forgot that it was the army, not the senate or the aristocracy, to which he owed his position. Pay increased drastically. The soldiers were given additional privileges, such as the right to marry, and became an increasingly important part in the government. Septimius supposedly said to his sons on his deathbed to favor the army above all else. But his actions were seen by Rostovtzeff as leading to a breakdown in discipline and in leading to an overthrow of the old Roman aristocracy and middle class by the proletariat in the third century, what he called the military anarchy.

After a period of rapid turnover in Emperors, Diocletian gained sole power in 284. The previous 50 years had seen every frontier in the empire collapse. Diocletian halted the swift turnover in Emperors by choosing a co-ruler, an act that would be increasingly common over the next century of the Roman Empire. By now the emperor's major function was to command the army. In the time of Diocletian it was huge – some estimates range as high as 600,000 men, although Cameron feels that number is much too high and probably represents a paper figure. In any case, the army was a huge burden on the state. Diocletian took steps to reform the tax system to better support the army. Civil and military administration was separated for the first time under his reign. The trend away from using senators in high posts accelerated and talent became more important for a rising officer. Or, as Brown put it, describing the process of change through the third century, the Romans cleared away all the deadwood. The army, instead of being posted all along the frontiers, was instead concentrated at various cities, the better to be supplied. Luttwak has argued that what this was a defense in depth, with fortified points on the frontier meant to be held until the main professional army came up, but his thesis has not won wide acceptance.