

How the Roman Army evolved

- When the City of Rome overcame its Italian neighbours and they became allies
- When Rome expanded out of Italy and more of its enemies became allies, and Italians became citizens
- When the Republic gave way to Civil War and the protagonists owned the Legions
- When Emperors became Commanders-in Chief

When Rome came into existence as a village on the banks of the R Tiber, sometime in the middle of the 8th century BC, great and successful armies had already existed for over a thousand years, and the art of warfare was well established. 250 years on, when Rome itself had become an empire, it had an army to match, with its own methods of fighting. The object of this talk is to follow what changed, and many things that didn't change, over this period of time.

I need to start with a description of the geography and politics of Italy when Rome was in its infancy, and how it survived and eventually succeeded in becoming a regional power. Then it might be possible to identify certain significant developments, and I think there are four key evolutionary moments (as per the slide above).

Italy c400 BC

- The people of Rome, whether they were indigenous or came in from elsewhere, were called Latins
- Their nearest big neighbours were the Etruscans, whose land included the towns of Veii and Fidenae (see in the inset on this map)
- Rome became a republic in the middle of the Etruscan wars with the overthrow of the king, Tarquin the Proud in 509 BC
- Conflict with the Samnites started when this other large neighbour formed an alliance with Veii in 475 BC
- Rome was initially protected from the Gauls, otherwise known as the Celts, by the buffer of Etruria/Tuscany
- Southern Italy was largely under the control of Greek colonies, and as Roman influence extended S they came into conflict with the Greeks (notably King Pyrrhus)
- By the middle of the 3rd century BC Rome was unchallenged in Italy (at least by other Italians)



There are various theories and legends about the first people to settle in Rome, and they are not really relevant to this talk. *The people of Rome, whether they were indigenous or came in from elsewhere, were called Latins.*

Their nearest big neighbours were the Etruscans, whose land included the towns of Veii and Fidenae, which you can see in the inset of this map. These towns, and by extension the Etruscans, were almost continuously in a state of war with Rome until around 265 BC. It was only after this that the Romans achieved supremacy in their immediate area.

Rome became a republic in the middle of the Etruscan wars with the overthrow of the king, Tarquin the Proud in 509 BC. Some of the basic structures of the Roman military had been introduced in the reign of one king, as we shall see, but the Republic set them in stone.

Tarquinius sought help from Lars Porsena of Clusium, an Etruscan king, and I'm tempted to quote Macauley's epic poem about Horatius on the bridge in his Lays of Ancient Rome (except for the fact that there are seventy verses of it).

Conflict with the Samnites started when this other large neighbour formed an alliance with Veii in 475 BC.

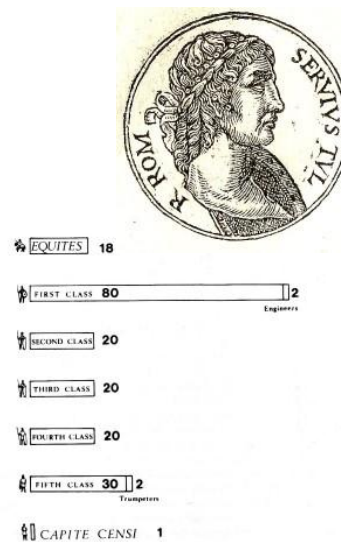
Rome was initially protected from the Gauls, otherwise known as the Celts, by the buffer of Etruria/Tuscany. But this did not stop Rome being sacked in 390 BC, and thereafter Rome was in intermittent conflict with Gallic tribes pushing in from the N until Cisalpine Gaul (meaning Gaul S of the Alps) became a Roman province in 200 BC.

Southern Italy was largely under the control of Greek colonies, and as Roman influence extended S they came into conflict with the Greeks (notably King Pyrrhus). The fighting between the Romans and Greeks raised issues of military organization and strategy, which I will mention later.

By the middle of the 3rd century BC Rome was unchallenged in Italy (at least by other Italians), and was projecting its power beyond Italy into Spain and N Africa. So having outlined the political situation, I now want to look at the ways the Roman army specifically developed during this period, and why it became the dominant force in Italy.

How the Early Roman Army was made up

- The first Roman Army was made up from the King's bodyguard and retainers plus local clan contingents, and is thought to have consisted of both cavalry and infantry
- There were three clans or tribes called the Ramnes, Tities and Luceres, each contributing 1000 men under the command of a tribune
- The better off families provided a body of cavalry, around 300 in total, known as the Equites (Knights)
- The sixth king was Servius Tullius, the man on the right, and the one who probably built the Servian Walls around the city
- Below the Equites in order of wealth came the First Class, armed with bronze cuirass, spear, shield and greaves. The Second Class were the same but minus the cuirass. The Third Class were similar but without the greaves. The Fourth Class carried only a spear and a shield. And the Fifth Class (bless them) were armed only with slings
- The chart shows a grouping called the Capite Censi. These were men who appeared in the head-count but since they had no property they were ineligible for callup. They will, however, have a role to play later on



The first Roman Army was made up from the King's bodyguard and retainers plus local clan contingents, and is thought to have consisted of both cavalry and infantry. There is archaeological evidence that they were protected by oval shields, leather corselets, conical bronze helmets, and some metal over the chest area.

There were three clans or tribes called the Ramnes, Tities and Luceres, each contributing 1000 men under the command of a tribune. They were each subdivided into hundreds, making up a force of 3000 men known as a legio or 'levying'. Here we have the origin of terms and names which persisted as tribune, century and legion.

The better off families provided a body of cavalry, around 300 in total, known as the Equites (Knights). They were expected to have enough money to equip themselves for service, and this concept also continued throughout Roman history with the Equestrian Order.

The sixth king was Servius Tullius, the man on the right, and the one who probably built the Servian Walls around the city. Servius Tullius ruled from 575 to 535 BC and was responsible for the introduction of the Five Classes, illustrated here on the right. This so-called Servian Constitution was used both in the military and in organizing the populace into centuries for voting in the Assembly. Yes, they had an Assembly, and the idea of tribal voting by centuries also persisted into the Republican period. In the military context the classes were linked to the ability to provide one's own arms and equipment.

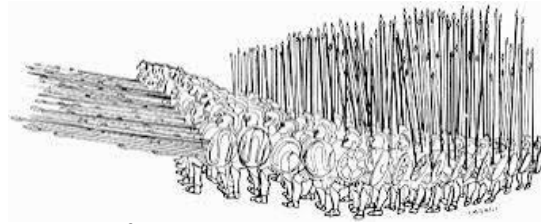
Below the Equites in order of wealth came ...

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Military strategy

Phalanx (top right)

Hoplite (bottom right)



- The original meaning of *phalanx* refers to a military formation that was used in ancient warfare and consisted of a tight block of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder, several rows deep, often with shields joined. The word *phalanx* comes from the Greeks, though they were not the only ones who used this formation
- A hoplite was a heavily armoured infantryman, from the word *hoplon* after the circular shield they usually carried. Hoplites fought in close order, with shields overlapping and spears projecting forward. Hoplites were organised into groupings which in Greece would have been *lochoi*, and they fought in ranks eight or more men deep in the phalanx
- In the early Roman army they would have been organized differently



The simplest distinction between styles of fighting in the first few hundred years of Rome's existence is between the massed phalanx inherited from the Greeks, and the less disciplined free attacking of the Gauls. The Romans were never less than disciplined and like all Italian tribes adopted the phalanx concept, with soldiers known as hoplites.

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In the early Roman army they would have been organized differently. This will be explained. In theory the first three of Servius' classes could all have been employed as hoplites without distinction, apart perhaps from the row they occupied. The numbers involved did not call for too much organization. It has been suggested, however, that in the 6th century BC there might only have been one legion of 4000 men, and that the number of men and legions did not go any higher, or the 2nd and 3rd classes get involved, until after the Gauls sacked Rome in 390 BC.

Other changes brought about by the Gallic invasion

- Marcus Furius Camillus (right) 448 to 365 BC (approx)
- To compensate for the loss of protection by not necessarily having a cuirass, soldiers began using the rectangular *scutum*
- They began receiving a cash allowance or *stipendium* whilst away from home
- The Equites were expanded from 600 to 1800 and assistance given to new centuries in the form of mounts and maintenance while on campaign
- The importance of the phalanx was downgraded, and more flexibility provided by the introduction of *manipuli*
- The maniple (or handful) was a distinct sub -section of the phalanx capable of limited independent action, provided it was properly led
- The soldiers, no longer true hoplites, were equipped with throwing javelins instead of jabbing spears



M Furius Camillus. Whether or not he was an authentic historical figure, this man is reputed to have captured Veii in 396, and then taken early retirement. When the Gauls left Rome after sacking it Camillus was recalled and successfully pushed them back to the other side of the Apennines. Camillus is credited with important reforms of the Roman army, besides the increase in manpower mentioned earlier and the proper introduction of the 2nd and 3rd classes. Whether or not these reforms were really Camillus' or introduced gradually over a period of time is debated.

To compensate for the loss of protection by not necessarily having a cuirass...

They began receiving a cash allowance or stipendium...

The Equites were expanded from 600 to 1800 ...

The importance of the phalanx was downgraded, and more flexibility provided by the introduction of manipuli. In the phalanx each hoplite was partially protected by the overlapping shield of the man on his right. There was a natural tendency to get as much protection from your neighbour as you could, despite the captains yelling at you, so that the phalanx tended to drag slightly to the left and lose shape. It was also very difficult to manoeuvre.

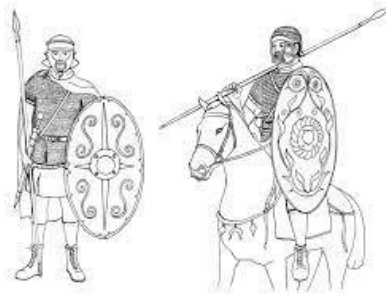
The maniple (or handful) was a distinct sub-section of the phalanx capable of limited independent action, provided it was properly led.

The soldiers, no longer true hoplites, were equipped with throwing javelins instead of jabbing spears. This flexibility in battle-order and equipment is one of the main factors in the Romans' successful conquest of the Mediterranean world.

The final defeat of the Samnites in 340 BC is the first of the key evolutionary moments I mentioned at the very beginning, and this was when Rome found itself unchallenged by Italians, started building roads all over the place, and could welcome fellow Italians as allies and fit them into the Roman military.

The Allies (Socii)

- Whilst the legions remained for the time being exclusively filled with Roman citizens, they were soon accompanied on campaign by contingents drawn from Latium and Italian allies
- Every year the consuls summoned the leaders of the towns whose services were required and agreed the numbers and the place of assembly
- Groups of contingents, typically 10 cohorts, were called an *ala sociorum*. An *ala*, meaning wing, was equivalent in size to a legion, and on campaign there would be the same number of *alae* as there were legions
- The imposition was probably resented, and those allies situated on a coast could also be required to provide ships, marines and crews if called upon
- The numbers mentioned here relate to the middle Republic period, when the allies were relatively small in size, such as towns. In the Imperial system, much later, the Auxiliary formations could represent a whole nation, rather than a collection of small contingents



Whilst the legions remained for the time being exclusively filled with Roman citizens, who regarded it as a responsibility and a privilege to defend their state, they were soon accompanied on campaign by contingents drawn from Latium and Italian allies. These socii as they were called were either meeting treaty obligations as a result of their surrender to Rome, or because they chose to be allies. They were generally organized along Roman lines and equipped in more or less the same way as the legions, unless they had some special skill in, say, horsemanship or archery.

Every year the consuls summoned the leaders of the towns whose services were required and agreed the numbers and the place of assembly. A contingent of 500 men was quite usual (and came to be called a cohort) under the command of a praefectus, while cavalry were grouped in squadrons of 10 called turmae under a decurion.

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Branching out

- Not long after becoming the leading power in Italy at the end of the 4th century BC, the Romans started to extend their interests to other parts of the Mediterranean world
- Within a decade, however, Rome was engaged in fighting the Carthaginians in Sicily and Spain
- One of Rome's greatest military defeats was at Cannae, located on the far right of the map showing Hannibal's advance into Italy
- The main tactical error which led to the defeat at Cannae was over-concentration of forces into something akin to a phalanx, taking away the flexibility of maniples, and enabling Hannibal to envelop the lot
- The last chapter of the Punic Wars stars P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus
- An easily overlooked consequence of the wars with Carthage was the expansion of Roman naval strength



Not long after becoming the leading power in Italy at the end of the 4th century BC, the Romans started to extend their interests to other parts of the Mediterranean world. First, though, they had to contend with some Greek trouble. Mostly the Greek colonies in Italy had welcomed Rome as protectors against their Italian neighbours, but on one occasion Taranto in the heel of Italy called for help from King Pyrrhus, and this led to 5 years of inconclusive fighting, from 280 to 275 BC. It did, at least, show that the Greek phalanx idea was now outdated.

Within a decade, however, Rome was engaged in fighting the Carthaginians in Sicily and Spain. I don't want to give a blow-by-blow account of the three so-called Punic Wars which lasted for 128 years, started in Sicily, moved to Spain and Italy itself, and ended in North Africa. Hannibal and Scipio Africanus are interesting characters for talks in their own right, but here I want to focus on the defeats, triumphs, and lessons learned.

*One of Rome's greatest military defeats was at Cannae, located on the far right of the map here, which shows Hannibal's advance into Italy where he peregrinated on the other side of the Apennines. He had won a couple of battles but was avoiding a further direct clash with Rome whilst waiting for reinforcements and allies. The Roman commander at the time was Q Fabius Maximus, known as *Cunctator* from the Latin to delay, since that was what he was successfully doing, making things difficult for Hannibal without incurring further losses himself. Unfortunately, in Rome they were impatient for action and removed him in favour of the consuls, Paulus and Varro. The result was a calamitous clash at Cannae, with between 50,000 and 70,000 Romans and allies being killed.*

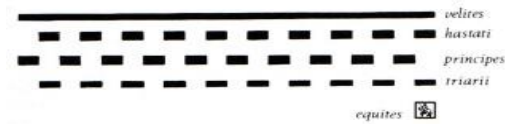
The main tactical error which led to the defeat at Cannae was over-concentration of forces into something akin to a phalanx, taking away the flexibility of maniples, and enabling Hannibal to envelop the lot. The immediate priority for Rome after Cannae was to avoid complete capitulation, which was achieved by resilience and the enlistment of the remaining headcount, as well as prisoners and slaves, and a return to the tactics of the Cunctator. The resulting stalemate included several battles, but eventually Hannibal was recalled to N Africa. The lessons of Cannae were learned, but acted upon at a later date.

The last chapter of the Punic Wars stars P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus. He and his brother fought against Hannibal and his brother Hasdrubal in N Africa, culminating in the Battle of Zama, in present day Tunisia, in 202 BC.

*An easily overlooked consequence of the wars with Carthage was the expansion of Roman naval strength. The invention of the *corvus*, shown here, made a lot of difference. It was a pivoting bridge which was dropped onto enemy ships and enabled marines to cross over and board.*

Description of the Roman army in the 2nd century BC

- At this time the legions, as distinct from allies (*the alae sociorum*) were composed exclusively of citizens. In a typical year there would be four legions, each with a minimum strength of 4200 which could be bumped up to 5000
- Once a year all men aged between 17 and 46 with a certain amount of property were required to attend on the Capitol for selection. Preference was given to volunteers, but conscription was not uncommon
- Legionaries received an allowance of half a silver denarius per day towards the cost of their equipment and living expenses. Equites received one denarius per day
- Those selected for the legions were allocated to one of four categories: *velites*, *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*. These differ from the Servian class distinctions and so will need a more detailed explanation



The Roman legion. c.160 bc, according to Polybius

The Greek writer Polybius described in detail the organization of the Roman army in his *Histories*. He was born at the same time as the end of the Punic Wars, so his observations were about as contemporary as you can get. He also had first-hand experience of action against the Romans as a Greek cavalry officer. Polybius is a more reliable source than Livy, who was writing about 150 years later when things had changed quite a bit.

At this time the legions, as distinct from allies, the alae sociorum, were composed exclusively of citizens...

Once a year all men aged between 17 and 46 with a certain amount of property were required to attend on the Capitol for selection... This process did not apply to men selected in previous years and still serving their period of service (say 6 years). Some men might sign on for just one year but be expected to attend later selections, until 6 years were up. Many veterans would apply to continue in the legions after their period of service, with a maximum of 16 years being the general rule.

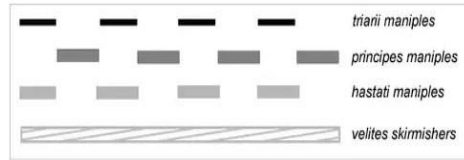
Legionary categories in the 2nd century BC



- The velites, or skirmishers, were the youngest or poorest, or both, of the new recruits. They were armed with a sword and a small circular shield. The gladius, the famous Roman stabbing weapon, was introduced from Spain around this time. The velites wore a wolfskin over their helmets. There must have been a lot of wolves
- Hastati and principes carried an oval shaped shield (scutum), a gladius, and two spears (pila), one heavy and one light for throwing. As chest protection they had bronze pectorals, and greaves on their legs.
- The triarii were the most experienced of the 'rankers', and were armed with a thrusting spear instead of a javelin
- Each legion had 300 cavalry, divided into *teturmae*, with a *decurion* for every three *teturmae*. They wore linen corselets and carried a spear and circular shield

For command purposes the maniple system was employed, except for the velites who were just spread around, with each maniple having one or two centurions. The senior centurion of the legion commanded the right-hand maniple of triarii. The rank of centurion altered over time, and this description here differs from what we understand about later centurions.

A manipular legion



- With the exception of the *velites*, the *hastati* were the youngest and least experienced soldiers in the legion, and often the ones with the most to prove. The *principes* were more experienced troops, and provided the legion with its staying power in combat, whilst the *triarii* were the old hands of the legion, the ones with the most experience.
- In combat, the legion would deploy with the *hastati* in the front rank, behind a swarm of *velites*, with the *principes* behind them and the *triarii* forming the third and final line of the legion. This was called the triple axis.
- In this chart each block represents a maniple of men of whichever category it was.
- The maniples would deploy in a way known as the *quincunx*, with a gap between each maniple and the line behind staggered so that its maniples lined up with the gaps in the line in front.

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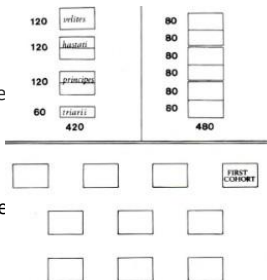
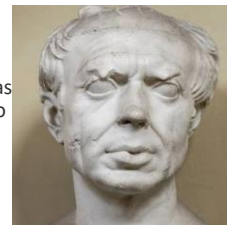
In combat, the legion would deploy with the hastati in the front rank, behind a swarm of velites...

*In this chart each block represents a maniple of men of whichever category it was. A maniple consisted of 120 men arranged in 3 ranks of 40. The chart does not show a whole legion, just part of it, because in fact there would be ten maniples of each type, but with the *triarii* at half the strength of the others. Including the skirmishers, it added up to 3 times 1200 plus 600, making 4200 men, and 4500 with the cavalry.*

*The maniples would deploy in a way known as the quincunx, with a gap... This formation allowed the *hastati* and *principes* to fall back through the lines if need be, without disrupting the line in the process. The *triarii* served as a barrier force, as well as a line against which the *hastati* and *principes* could regroup and counterattack.*

Novus Homo and 'mule-master'

- Gaius Marius (157 to 86 BC) was regarded by his aristocratic contemporaries as a New Man from the provinces, which makes it remarkable that he was able to become consul seven times.
- Marius joined the army and attracted attention, first as a military tribune and then magistrate. He married into the family of the *Julii Caesares*, and made it to the Senate.
- His first military success was the defeat of the Numidian king Jugurtha, and with popular support he was given command of the army against the *Celts*.
- Marius achieved his objective of supplementing the army by enlisting volunteers from the *Capite Censi*. He was not the first to do so, but it became more of a permanent state of affairs.
- One positive consequence was that the state was then required to arm and equip the soldiers, because they could not afford it themselves.
- The property qualification for enlistment in the legions became a thing of the past.
- Marius is credited with supplanting the maniple in favour of the cohort in the organization of the Roman legion.



We have reached the period of time when my second evolutionary moment comes into play, ie when Rome expanded out of Italy and more of its enemies became allies, and Italians became citizens. Changes in the way that the army was organized and operated are identified with a man called Gaius Marius. It may not be strictly accurate to credit Marius entirely, but he was the man in charge. The reference to 'mule-master' will be explained in due course.

Gaius Marius (157 to 86 BC) was regarded by his aristocratic contemporaries as... This was strictly against the rules, but it gave him the time and space in which to oversee significant changes in the Roman military

Marius joined the army and attracted attention, first as a military tribune and then magistrate. He married into the family of the Julii Caesares, and made it to the Senate. His early years in Rome were a time of unrest, with the Gracchus brothers active in social reform as tribunes of the plebs and succeeding in bringing about legislation which would later be helpful to Marius.

His first military success was the defeat of the Numidian king Jugurtha, and with popular support he was given command of the army against the Celts, the Cimbri and Teutones, tribes which had inflicted a serious defeat of the Romans at Arausio in S Gaul. Marius moved against them, but they chose to cross into Spain temporarily. It was expected that they would return, which they did two years later, but this gave Marius as consul over the whole period the opportunity to build up and train his army to meet them. At Arausio the Romans lost the almost unbelievable number of 120,000 killed, by some estimates, and Marius' first job was to recruit men to replace them.

Marius achieved his objective of supplementing the army by enlisting volunteers from the capite censi. He was not the first to do so, but it became more of a permanent state of affairs. You recall that these were the citizen headcount without the required property qualifications for joining the legions. This had both positive and negative consequences.

One positive consequence was that the state was then required to arm and equip the soldiers, because they could not afford it themselves. This enabled the legions to standardize equipment and do quality control. The Senate didn't like it, of course, but they were in a way hoist by their own petard. The Senate had ordered Marius to hold a *dilectus*, expecting him to fail because of public resentment at conscripting more of those with property who had not already been called up.

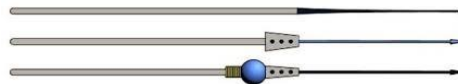
The property qualification for enlistment in the legions became a thing of the past. Marius didn't actually remove the qualification, but following the Senate's orders to make up the numbers, which he did by calling for volunteers, he achieved the same outcome. The property qualification had actually been eroded before this time, from 11,000 asses under Servius Tullius to 4,000 asses when Polybius wrote his History, and most recently 1500 asses under Gaius Gracchus.

The opening up of the legions to all citizens had some negative consequences. To start with it started a trend towards the soldiers generally becoming less decent and more arrogant. It sounds bad putting it that way, but the fact is that the first legionaries tended to regard their stint as duty to the state, though no doubt they moaned about it. A moaning soldier is a happy soldier. They had property to begin with, and on leaving the legions after six years they had property to go back to, plus what they might have taken in plunder. The 'great unwashed', on the other hand, had no property to go back to, and their priorities turned to personal advancement and enrichment on the coat tails of their commanders. I will come back to this theme in the next chapter of the story.

Marius is credited with supplanting the maniple in favour of the cohort in the organization of the Roman legion. The graphic on the right compares the two in simply manpower terms, so have a look at it and I will move on to explain what it meant.

Maniples v cohorts (cont) and Arms and Equipment

- It is unlikely that the change from maniples to cohorts was sudden and universal, but it was complete by the time of Julius Caesar, just four decades later
- The new cohort was not divided into different categories of soldier for the simple reason that the removal of the financial qualification made ranks equal and equipment standard
- The size of a fully manned century was now clearly defined as 80 men. There were 6 centuries in a cohort, and a legion consisted of 10 cohorts
- Marius removed the *hasta* from the legionary's weaponry and kept the *pilum* (see picture top right)
- Another Marius introduction which endured was the pack which each soldier carried on a pole, containing emergency rations, cooking equipment and entrenching tools. This led to legionaries being nicknamed Marius' Mules (right)
- Lastly concerning Gaius Marius, he made the eagle (*aquila*) the sole image for the standard of a legion. There were several other animal images used on military standards, but they were relegated



*It is unlikely that the change from maniples to cohorts was sudden and universal, but it was complete by the time of Julius Caesar, just four decades later. The word cohort was not new and had been used by Polybius to refer to groupings of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*, and there is archaeological evidence from Roman camps of the 1st century AD that the names of these three old categories were still in use in some context. The old names hung on, for example, in the titles of certain legionary centurions in the First Cohort of the new legions.*

This change made by Marius may have been prompted by his belief that a cohort was better equipped to withstand the wild Celtic charge.

*The new cohort was not divided into different categories of soldier for the simple reason that the removal of the financial qualification made ranks equal and equipment standard. The *velites* ceased to exist at all as a category, with skirmishing undertaken as required by whoever was given the task.*

*The size of a fully manned century was now clearly defined as 80 men. There were 6 centuries in a cohort, and a legion consisted of 10 cohorts. The First Cohort was the home of the *Pilus Primus*, or First Spear, who was the leading centurion of the legion, in the same way that the centurion of the 1st *triarii* maniple had been.*

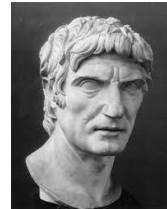
*Marius removed the *hasta*... (see top-right picture). A *hasta* was a thrusting spear seven to nine feet long. A *pilum* was a throwing spear with a long metal head. Sometimes the head had a hook, sometimes it was pyramidal. The design enabled it to penetrate a shield, to punch through to the man behind the shield and not to be easily removed. The *pilum* developed from Italian heavy javelins which had relatively short iron heads. Gradually the heads became longer until they were nearly three feet long, with a combination of long iron rod, ball or weight. Marius is alleged to have had the two metal rivets fixing the head to the shaft removed and replaced by a wooden pin, so that the *pilum* bent or broke on impact, preventing the weapon from being thrown back. The head could be retrieved and re-used.*

Another Marius introduction which endured was the pack which each soldier carried on a pole (picture)

*Lastly concerning Gaius Marius, he made the eagle (aquila) the sole image...Pliny the Elder suggests the army of the Republic bore five different animal standards - the eagle, the wolf, the minotaur, the horse and the boar. Marius possibly made the eagle the supreme symbol because of its association with the god Jupiter. The other symbols were subsequently either relegated to a lesser role, or abolished altogether. During the Empire they achieved great significance, and who can forget Brian Blessed as Augustus in *I Claudius* crying out in an anguished voice 'Quinctilius Varus, where are my eagles!*

Social War 91 to 87 BC

- The event which brought to an end this phase of the evolution of the Roman army was the demand for citizenship by the Italian tribes
- At this point I should start mentioning the name of L Cornelius Sulla (right) as a key player
- The peoples of the hills of central Italy formed the heart of the uprising the Marsi in the north and the Samnites in the south. Neither the Latin colonies nor Etruria and Umbria joined in
- In 90 BC Roman armies were defeated in the northern sector, while in the south the Italians were equally successful and burst into southern Campania
- Only by political concession could Rome hope to check the revolt. The consul Lucius Julius Caesar thus helped pass a law granting Roman citizenship to all Italians south of the Po who had not participated in the revolt, and probably also to all who had but were ready to immediately lay down their arms. This move pacified many of the Italians, who soon lost interest in further struggle against Rome. Roman forces under Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo (the future Pompey) in the north and Lucius Cornelius Sulla in the south soon inflicted decisive defeats on the remaining rebels and captured their strongholds
- This effectively solved the legions' recruitment problems, as membership was now open to Italians as well as Latins, and also produced many consequences for the Roman Army



The event which brought to an end this phase of the evolution of the Roman army was the demand for citizenship by the Italian tribes. Resentment was building up around the turn of the 1st century BC amongst the Italian Allies, the *Socii*, against Roman autocratic rule. They had fought as hard as the Romans against the Cimbri and Teutones, and now wanted Roman citizenship and the privileges it conferred. They had advocates in Rome, such as tribune of the plebs Marcus Livius Drusus, who tried to solve the problem by proposing legislation that would have admitted all Italians to citizenship. His programme aroused heated opposition in the Senate, and Drusus was soon afterward assassinated. The frustrated Italian allies then rose in revolt, demanding independence.

At this point I should start mentioning the name of L Cornelius Sulla (right) as a key player. Sulla was from an impoverished branch of the patrician Corneli family. He was initially a protégé of Gaius Marius, being given preferment after being instrumental in helping Marius win the war against Jugurtha, and then being made a legate and military tribune under Marius against the Celts. I should explain that a legate at this time was a deputy to a commander, and not as it later meant the commander of a legion. Sulla, as a traditionalist, was no natural ally of Marius, however, and before long he was distancing himself from Marius and changed his allegiance to the other consul at the time.

Sulla then started moving up the *cursus honorum*, becoming a *praetor* and the governor of Cilicia, in which capacity he fought with distinction in Cappadocia carrying out the Senate's wishes. He was rewarded with senior military positions and this was how he became involved in the Social War, on equal status to Marius.

The peoples of the hills of central Italy formed the heart of the uprising - the Marsi in the north and the Samnites in the south. Neither the Latin colonies nor Etruria and Umbria joined in. The Italians

began organizing their own confederacy; they established their headquarters at Corfinium, which they renamed Italia, created a Senate and officers, and issued a special coinage; soon they had 100,000 men in the field.

In 90 BC Roman armies were defeated in the northern sector...

Only by political concession could Rome hope to check the revolt...

This effectively solved the legions' recruitment problems...

How Italian enfranchisement changed the Roman Army

- The *alae sociorum* which had accompanied the legions on campaign ceased to exist, as the categories of Ally and Latin were abolished
- Since the allied contingents were already organized and equipped the same way as the legions they effectively became new legions in their own right
- The concept of four legions per year, two for each consul, was a thing of the past. The next army list after the war showed 14 legions, and this number soared in a relatively short period of time
- The cost of keeping the army in being became the responsibility of the state treasury
- Legions could be raised anywhere, and the yearly *dilectus* on the Capitol was discontinued. Responsibility for recruitment was given to officials and local magistrates
- Many people had been made homeless by the Social War, and many of these joined the legions. This helped continue the trend previously noted. The very first legionaries regarded their stint as a responsibility and a privilege, while the *capite censi* under Marius were more likely to regard it as an opportunity for personal advancement. New Italian recruits could not be expected to have the same patriotic motives as the first Romans, and soldiers generally became more 'professional', concerned with their own interests rather than the common good, and with loyalty that could be bought

Prelude to civil war –
Sulla et alia –
the 1st Triumvirate



A series of civil conflicts started by Sulla, while not yet full Civil War, was complicated and needs explaining. It's best if I just read this, and you follow as best you can.

When the Social War ended it was necessary to deal with Mithridates, King of Pontus (see the map), who had taken advantage of the opportunity to expand his territory, kill Roman and Italian settlers,

and invade Greece. The consul in 88 BC was Sulla, and he expected to lead the Roman response, except that the Senate appointed Marius instead. Sulla threw his toys out of the pram, persuaded the six legions destined for Asia to follow him, and marched on and occupied Rome. This was quite unprecedented. However, he did so and succeeded in calming things down, being then able to set off for the East and Mithridates. The Senate sent an army after him under the consul Flaccus, but his troops mutinied and joined Sulla instead. On his return to Rome Sulla was made dictator. This was in 82 BC.

Some Roman statesmen and generals were happy to join the winning side, and Sulla received the support of Crassus, a very rich man who made a fortune from property in Rome, buying up tenement blocks which he allegedly had torched himself. Also allying himself was Pompey.

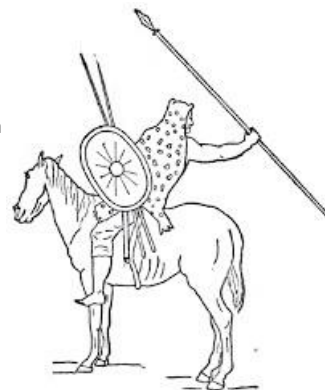
Marius was dead by this time, but support for his faction continued for a while in Spain. Pompey helped put down that rebellion. Meanwhile in Italy, Spartacus was leading a revolt by slaves and gladiators. He defeated two consuls, but Crassus raised and trained six legions and defeated Spartacus in battle. Pompey, returning from Spain, cut off the remnants fleeing north.

The man in the middle in this picture is Crassus, and the man on the right is Pompey. The one on the left is Gaius Julius Caesar, and together they have been called the 1st Triumvirate. Caesar sort of came up on the rails. He had done military service and worked his way up the *cursus honorum*. As consul, he reconciled differences between Pompey and Crassus, and joined them in an informal alliance. It was informal because a triumvirate was not a recognized Roman institution, but it nevertheless ruled Rome for a decade from 59 BC. Sulla had relinquished his dictatorship in 80 BC and died in 78 BC, and the previous political order was restored on his death. It continued to exist during the triumvirate, in theory at least.

That is a very simplified account of events, and I have missed out things like the Catiline conspiracy, but going into more detail would distract from the main story.

How the army reacted to changes in the established order

- Changes in the army during the Triumvirate were not so much in formations, equipment or tactics as in the way the legions conducted and thought of themselves, and in the public perception of them
- The career progression for officers remained in place, but became blurred and not always properly observed. Before entering political life a young man of good family would do 10 years as military tribune or similar, before being able to become *quaestor*, *aedile*, *praetor* and *consul*, in that order. Some positions, like legate mentioned earlier, became personal appointments arranged through patronage or influence
- There was a distinction between a standing army serving in a province somewhere, and an *ad hoc* army raised to meet a particular emergency or threat
- As far as cavalry was concerned the Romans and most Italians were not much good at it, compared with opponents like the Gauls and Spanish
- The Civil Wars proper began with Julius Caesar, whose influence on the Roman army is the next thing to be looked at



Changes in the army during the Triumvirate were not so much in formations, equipment or tactics...

Terms of service were generally unchanged, with a minimum of 6 years' service. To create a legion or supplement an existing one, a magistrate or a general on his way to a province would hold a *dilectus*, in Rome or elsewhere, and select recruits.

There was a distinction between a standing army serving in a province somewhere, and an ad hoc army raised to meet a particular emergency or threat. The former were long term postings in static garrisons, and attracted the type of soldier prepared to make a career of it. The legions raised by Marius, Sulla, Pompey and then Caesar attracted men more interested in rewards, and probably less professional in their attitudes.

As far as cavalry was concerned the Romans and most Italians were not much good at it, compared with opponents like the Gauls and Spanish. It became usual in the 1st century BC for cavalry to be drawn from Numidians, Gauls and maybe Germans. This changed when Rome acquired provinces which could supply auxiliary cavalry, as we shall see later.

Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres



- Julius Caesar wrote the above words to describe how Gaul was divided into three parts– Belgica in the north, Celtica in the centre, and Aquitania in the south
- Within nine years, from 58 to 50 BC, Caesar had conquered the whole of Gaul and made a foray into Britain. He did so by a combination of aggression, brilliant generalship, original thinking, courage, brutality, good manmanagement and a bit of luck
- Caesar began with four legions and ended up with ten before leaving Gaul. Of the four he inherited three were supposed to protect N Italy from the Illyrians. Caesar was also governor of Illyricum but only had to make one brief visit there, and the province was mercifully quiet while he was away fighting in Gaul
- Caesar was not so much a reformer of the army as a man who used what he found, developed things which worked and adapted others

Julius Caesar commanded legions in Gaul as a pro-consul, not as consul. Armies ceased to be commanded by elected magistrates after Sulla, and consuls were formally barred from leaving Italy during their term of office. This was an important break from the concept of a citizen army, enlisted annually to serve under its two elected leaders, which had lasted for nearly 500 years.

Caesar wrote the above words to describe how Gaul was divided into three parts – Belgica in the N, Celtica in the centre, and Aquitania in the S. Actually, he was omitting the two existing Roman provinces to which he had been appointed governor - Cisalpine Gaul (N Italy) and Transalpine Gaul (beyond the Alps). These two provinces controlled the Mediterranean shore line as far as the Pyrenees, and provided him with four legions. Caesar's initial appointment (which also included Illyricum) was for five years, but in 56 BC it was extended by five years following a meeting with Crassus and Pompey in Lucca.

Within nine years, from 58 to 50 BC, Caesar had conquered the whole of Gaul and made a foray into Britain...Again it is not the purpose of this talk to give a blow-by-blow account, so I shall restrict myself to matters of military organization and strategy.

Caesar began with four legions and ended up with ten before leaving Gaul... His first legions were numbered V - VIII, and subsequent legions raised in Gaul were numbered IX – XIV. At one point he had 12 legions, including one borrowed from Pompey, but the XIVth was lost in fighting.

Julius Caesar was not so much a reformer of the army as...

Caesar's army

- Caesar's authority to raise troops came from a proconsul's right to call out local forces in defence of his province
- The cohort was the standard tactical unit of Caesar's army. Centurions, six per cohort, were relied on as the backbone of the army, and often involved in war councils
- Caesar did, however, make more use of legates
- Caesar took particular interest in artillery *ballistae* and 'scorpions', and in engineering, such as siege towers, ramps and bridges
- As far as cavalry is concerned, there is no mention of Roman cavalry in Caesar's army, apart from some *equites* on his staff and assisting his legates
- Caesar's success, power and the need to secure his own future made civil war inevitable. When his aim of a second consulship after his term in Gaul was opposed by a Senate trying desperately to reassert its authority, Caesar cast legality aside and crossed the Rubicon

Vercingetorix



Caesar's authority to raise troops came from a proconsul's right to call out local forces in defence of his province... In practice many of the recruits to his new legions were men travelling up from Italy, from his own province of Cisalpine Gaul, and the Treasury in Rome paid and equipped them. However, he also raised legions in Transalpine Gaul before they were entitled to citizenship, and Caesar paid for them out of his own resources and profits. In one instance he formed a militia of 22 cohorts in S Gaul which was later constituted as a fully-fledged legion.

The cohort was the standard tactical unit of Caesar's army. Centurions, six per cohort, were relied on as the backbone of the army, and often involved in war councils. This was at the expense of military tribunes, which the political system back home foisted on him but were often pretty useless and for whom Caesar seemed to have little time.

He did, however, make more use of legates, which he could employ, without reference to the Senate, in a variety of middle-management roles including command of troops, managing winter camps, and maintaining peace and security in a particular region. As personal appointees they were people Caesar was more likely to trust.

Caesar took particular interest in artillery, ballistae and 'scorpions', and in engineering, such as siege towers, ramps and bridges. His entrenchments around Alesia where he finally defeated Vercingetorix (right), and his bridge over the Rhine, have been much admired.

As far as cavalry is concerned, there is no mention of Roman cavalry in Caesar's army, apart from some equites on his staff and assisting his legates. Caesar drew his cavalry from the Gauls and later from the Germans. As Caesar progressively subjugated Gallic tribes he used cavalry comprising men from those tribes, commanded by their newly appointed magistrates, to fight other Gallic tribes. The Germans turned out to be the best, though, along with Numidians.



Like certain other aspects of Roman history mentioned here, the Civil War is really a topic in its own right, and the only important point I want to make about it in this talk is that during the Civil War the legions ceased to be the army of Rome, and instead acted for the protagonists. Pompey could claim to be the legitimate representative of the Senate and People of Rome, but to all intents and purposes his legions were loyal to him personally against Caesar, and in the case of the 2nd Triumvirate that loyalty was to the two principal members of that, Mark Antony and Octavian. This is the third of my key evolutionary moments, when the behaviour and the perception of the legions changed for ever. They thought of themselves differently, had a taste for power which showed itself repeatedly through the rest of Roman history, and effectively killed off any hopes for the Republic. The actual details of the Civil War I will skip completely.

The Imperial era began when Octavian became Augustus

- The method of identifying legions by a number and name got very complicated as a result of the Civil War. Historians have devoted and wasted an awful lot of time trying to reconcile the various legions' numbers once the fighting stopped
- Augustus was faced with a choice between continuing the traditional system of short-term conscription, as advocated by his mentor Marcus Agrippa, or long-term recruitment of volunteers, as advocated by Maecenas
- As suggested previously many soldiers in the Late Republic were inclined to identify with skilful leaders who could bring them rewards. Augustus dealt with this by appointing army commanders himself, and by giving them ambitious foreign conquests to keep them loyal
- The position of legate was upgraded and enhanced by the introduction of *legati Augusti*
- As the Empire grew the opportunities for members of the Equestrian Order increased, who Augustus appointed as military governors, commanders of fleets and prefects of auxiliary infantry and cavalry
- Auxiliary cohorts of infantry and *alae* (wings) of cavalry became an important element of any Roman army. They were recruited from native tribes with treaty obligations and client kings



He ruled Rome for 40 years, and in that time the organization of his army changed in many ways.

The method of identifying legions by a number and name got very complicated as a result of the Civil War. Historians have devoted and wasted an awful lot of time trying to reconcile the various legions' numbers once the fighting stopped, and to decide which legions were a continuation and which were entirely new. Augustus ended his reign with 22 legions numbered from I to 22, or more correctly from I to XXII, but whether these actually corresponded to previous legions with the same numbers is doubtful.

Augustus was faced with a choice between continuing the traditional system of short-term conscription... The latter's argument prevailed, largely because the Empire was extensive enough to require permanent garrisons far from home. Soldiers could look on the army as a lifetime career, and a proper pay structure was introduced. Legions stationed in the provinces were supplemented as required.

As suggested previously many soldiers in the Late Republic were inclined to identify with skilful...

The position of legate was upgraded and enhanced by the introduction of legati Augusti. These were specially selected men halfway up the career ladder, who had served as magistrates in Rome and were now given command of a legion for an indefinite period of time. Many went on to greater things, and the future emperor Vespasian is a good example.

As the Empire grew the opportunities for members of the Equestrian Order increased...

Auxiliary cohorts of infantry and alae (wings) of cavalry became an important element of any Roman army... The employment of Gallic, German, Cretan and Numidian troops in the Civil War had shown their potential, and they became a necessary complement to the legions. They were not only cavalry but also infantry and archers. The command of auxiliaries varied. Client kings might expect to have nominal command of their own soldiers, but other cohorts were led by Roman prefects, with the assistance of native Latin speaking officers. To be any use they had to be properly trained in Roman tactics.

The Army of the Roman Empire

- Legions
- Command structure
- Centurions
- Awards and medals
- Other services and formations
- Recruitment

Roman Wall Blues

by W H Auden

Over the heather the wet wind blows,
I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.
The rain comes pattering out of the sky,
I'm a Wall soldier, I don't know why.
The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,
My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.
Aulus goes hanging around her place,
I don't like his manners, I don't like his face.
Piso's a Christian, he worships a fish;
There'd be no kissing if he had his wish.
She gave me a ring but I diced it away;
I want my girl and I want my pay.
When I'm a veteran with only one eye
I shall do nothing but look at the sky.



The previous slide is what the Roman Army looked like during the reign of Augustus, and it changed relatively little over the succeeding centuries. Obviously, strategy, tactics, and equipment were subject to continuous improvement, and other aspects of military life evolved over time, but it is possible to describe the Army of the Roman Empire with some degree of confidence.

Legions

A legion comprised around 5000 fighting men, in 10 cohorts (the First Cohort being the most senior). Each cohort had 6 centuries of 80 men, divided into squads (*contubernia*) of 8 men who shared a tent or a room in the barracks, and did their own catering a lot of the time.

Their uniform equipment was a bronze helmet, mail shirt, curving rectangular shield, gladius, dagger and two javelins of different weights.

Command structure

An army on campaign could comprise one or more legions plus auxiliaries under a general. Legions were commanded by their appointed *legatus legionis* (top right). Under the legate were the military tribunes, one 'broad stripe' of senatorial rank, and five 'narrow stripes' from the Equestrian Order. They acted as administrative assistants and advisers.

Below the senior tribune and above the junior tribunes came the *praefectus castrorum*, or camp prefect. He would be a former senior centurion or tribune and have general charge of the running of a base or encampment.

Next in seniority would be prefects in charge of auxiliary infantry and cavalry.

Centurions

There might be 60 centurions in a legion, and the most senior was the *primus pilus* or First Spear. He could be compared to a Garrison Sergeant Major in the British Army – not afraid to tell the top brass what to do. In the Roman Empire a First Spear was automatically elevated to the Equestrian Order. Note the transverse crest on the top of the centurion's helmet (bottom right), to make him more visible to his men.

Awards and decorations

There were certain awards and medals awarded for gallantry and prowess. The grass crown was the highest decoration, awarded only to generals for saving a legion or even an army. The mural crown was for being the first man to scale the walls of a besieged city, and the naval crown was its equivalent for being the first man to board a ship in battle. Decorations included torcs and armbands in gold, and discs in precious metal called *phalerae*, for wearing on parade.

Other services and formations

Other sectors of the military deserve mention, without going into any detail because of shortage of time.

After Actium the Imperial Navy were little involved in fighting, other than controlling piracy. Their main role was the transportation of troops and couriers.

The Praetorian Guard were created to be the Emperor's personal troops. They dressed in white uniforms and were very much up themselves, occasionally getting involved in palace coups.

Three Urban Cohorts, under an Equestrian, had the job of policing the capital, which they did in collaboration with seven cohorts of Vigiles, who were the firefighters.

Recruitment

Conscription was rare, and the legionaries were mostly volunteers. During the reigns of the first three emperors, Augustus to Caligula, 65 percent were Italians. By the end of Nero's reign this had gone down to 48 percent, and by the time of Trajan to 21 percent. This was due entirely to the expansion of the Empire and the consequent widening of the areas available for recruitment.

We know from explorations on Hadrian's Wall that soldiers there came from several regions of the Empire. This one (see the poem) appears to have come from N Gaul, and should be quite used to the weather and not complain so much about it.

