

By Allen Curtis

ROMANO-ITALIC ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

ROMA VICTRIX

Most wargamers are familiar with the Republican Roman army as the historian Livy described it. This is often referred to as the 'Camillan' model, after the reforms attributed to the five-time dictator Marcus Furius Camillus. From about the year 340 BC, concurrent with the end of the First Samnite War, the Roman legion had been separated into distinct lines of battle.

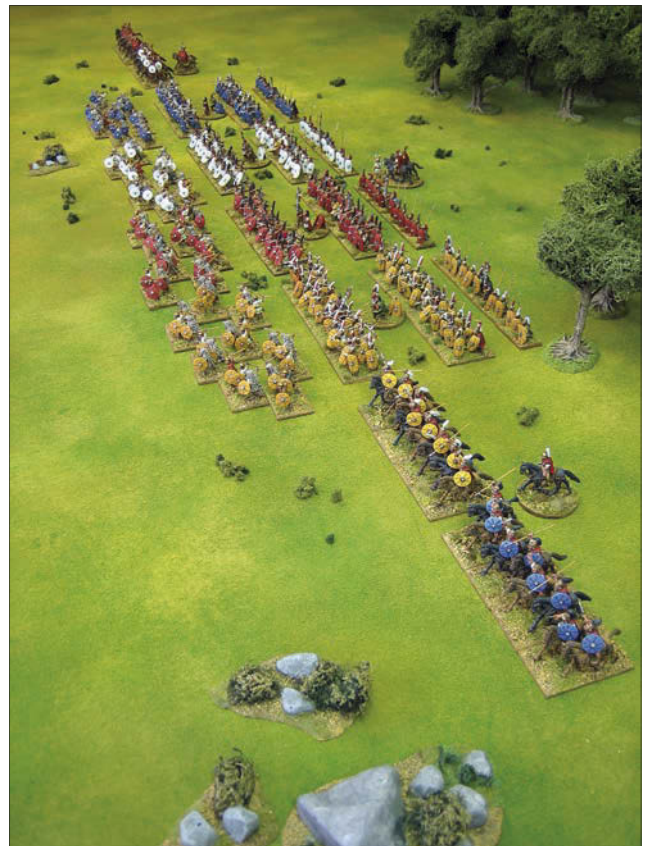
These consisted of a lightly-armed skirmish screen of *leves* (young men and poorer citizens); a line of units (called maniples) composed of *hastati* (spearmen), who despite their name were the first to adopt the heavy throwing spear known as the *pilum*; a line of *principes* (men in the prime of life); and a third line of *triarii*. The *principes* and *triarii* were most probably armed with the ordinary spear called the *hasta*. Two other types, the *rorarii* and *accensi*, were probably also poor citizens, but could be armed and formed into bodies in emergencies.

THE CAMILLAN ARMY

This was the army that eventually defeated the Samnites and other hostile Italian peoples, expanding Roman influence through much of the Italian peninsula. Latin and other tribes also allied with Rome. At first, they armed themselves and employed tactics according to their traditional way of war, but over time, they adopted Roman organization and tactical methods and became virtually identical with their Roman counterparts, so that a consular army of two Roman legions and two Allied *alae* (or 'wings') was, in effect, a four-legion force. Unfortunately, we cannot reliably establish a date by which this transition was complete.

This lack of information is characteristic of the Republican era, up to a point. We don't have much information about the appearance of the legions, and even less about the allies. The later historian Polybius informs us specifically that the Roman *hastati* were distinguished by a triple-feather crest atop their helmets. This has become almost a stereotype, and wargame figure makers extend this to use on their *principes* and *triarii*. It's quite likely that horsehair crests were used, as well. For the allies, it's tempting to use figures with traditional Italic helmets and crests of various sorts. I use separate Oscan (Samnite) heads on mail-armoured figures for allied legions quite late in the Republican era, just to show they're different.

Armour is another somewhat fuzzy area. Roman citizens of sufficient property on the census were required to serve in the legions and provide their own equipment. At a minimum, their armour consisted of a square bronze pectoral (breastplate) and a single bronze greave on the left,



Roman battle array - the triplex acies formation.

shielded leg. As time went by and contact with the Celts of northern Italy increased, citizens began to acquire Celtic mail shirts; some may have worn two greaves, which was more common Italian practice. Allied Italic warriors may well have worn different types of breastplates documented in southern Italian sources — round and muscled — and over time they adopted mail, as well.

As mentioned above, weapons varied. The *hastati* threw the *pilum*, the *principes* and *triarii* (and, when called up, the *rorarii* and *accensi*, as well) had the *hasta*, and the *leves* had other spears and javelins. The *leves* had smallish round shields or perhaps none at all, while the rest of the legion had the familiar oval *scutum*.

THE POLYBIAN ARMY

Sometime around Pyrrhus of Epirus's invasion of Italy — we don't know exactly when, or to how great a degree the changes were in response to Pyrrhus' Macedonian model — the legions underwent several structural and equipment changes. The maniples of *triarii*, previously the same size as the other 'heavy' infantry, were halved in strength. The *principes* adopted the *pilum*, making them practically interchangeable with the *hastati*. The *leves* were replaced by a new light troop type called the *velites*, who were apparently much more capable skirmishers, with shields and javelins, and many or most with helmets.

With these new reforms (often called 'Polybian', after the historian who described them), the Roman army experienced no further ones throughout the Punic Wars and the early wars with Macedon. The army did experience great expansion, with many new legions having to be raised for each campaign against Carthage and Rome's subsequent foes in the Mediterranean. This resulted in great pressure on the available population base, which would eventually result in social, political, and economic developments we needn't go into here. But for the time being, the legions were recruited from citizens of sufficient means to supply their own equipment. Some speculate that the increase in manpower must have resulted in Rome supplying armour and weapons, at least as replacements, but I see no evidence of this. The wholesale state supply of arms wouldn't really come until the reforms of Gaius Marius in the late Republic, when he required the enrolment of the poorest citizens to meet the ever-increasing need for manpower. Likewise, although the Latin and other allies were probably fully adapted to the Roman model, they too would be supplying their own kit.

But to be honest, we don't really know for sure. So if you prefer to give your legions and *alae* a more consistent appearance, that's fine. If you want to give each legionary and ally a different appearance, that's fine, too. Just keep in mind a general principle: throughout the period, the *hastati* were raised from younger, more active men, while the *principes* were raised from older, presumably wealthier men, and the *triarii* would be veterans of many campaigns. Treat them accordingly!



A Roman general marshals his troops.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

After the Punic Wars and during the wars with Macedon, it's very likely that some of the changes attributed to the reforms of Marius in the later Republic actually occurred in practice. Over time, the *triarii* probably adopted the *pilum*, and the difference between the three 'heavy' types of legionary disappeared. The *velites* faded away, so that there was no organic legionary light infantry. The maniple of about 120 men ceased to be the primary tactical manoeuvre formation, and the cohort of 500-600 became the norm. But this period is even less well documented than those before it, and so it's impossible to say when these changes happened, or how long some of the older elements lingered.

Certainly, Marius included such changes when he restructured the social composition of the army. So for his campaigns, and those of Sulla, Lucullus, Pompey, Julius Caesar, and the civil wars of the late Republic, the new, homogeneous, state-equipped legion was the norm. But for the period after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC up to Marius' reforms in 107 BC, you'll need to use your own judgement as to how long to continue the 'Polybian' model of the Roman army. **WS&S**

Allen Curtis will always be remembered for his contributions to wargaming, and the ancient period in particular.

DUAL COMMAND

The Republican Romans had an unusual if not unique form of command. At every tier, there would be two commanders, not one. This principle applied to the highest political position in Rome, where two *consuls* (elected magistrates) would govern the affairs of Rome, but only for a year. Legions were led by two *Legates* who would take in turns to lead the army day by day. This was echoed down to the individual maniple controlled by two *Centurions*. Like the mysterious workings of the *Triplex Acies*, we're not quite sure how this command system worked, but we do know about some of the consequences. The Roman General was a political animal, it was important to do well but perhaps not too well and earn the envy and scorn of your fellow Romans.

With two commanders, so it was thought, no one man would have an excess of power and could rise above his counterparts (and possibly gain kingly ambitions). This dual command system certainly had its advantages, if one man was ill or died in battle, the Legion would not be leaderless. However it also meant if the two men did not agree, the army could and would be ordered differently from day to day, with sometimes disastrous consequences. In game terms imagine dicing before a battle which commander was in charge, the wise and careful experienced one or the younger rash one out to make a name for himself?