

A monochromatic, reddish-brown image of Roman legionaries in full battle dress, including helmets with tall crests and tunics with arm guards. They are standing in a line, looking towards the left. The background shows architectural details like a column and a pediment.

THE
MAKING
OF THE
ROMAN
ARMY

FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

LAWRENCE K E P P I E

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THE MAKING OF THE ROMAN ARMY

From Republic to Empire

Lawrence Keppie



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Preface (1998)

The publication of this book in 1984 was warmly received by reviewers, and its continuing success was marked by the appearance of a revised paperback edition in 1987, and further printings in hardback, at the behest of bookclubs and others, in 1988 and 1991. Though a hardback edition was available in the USA from 1994 onwards, the book has been obtainable from British booksellers only with difficulty since the end of 1991.

Since initial publication in 1984 there has been an explosion of publications on the Roman army. The chief works dealing with the Republic and the transitional period up to the death of Augustus in AD 14 are reported here in brief Addenda to the bibliography (below, p. 258). Particularly notable is the new emphasis on the study of military equipment, epitomised by the full-length treatments by Bishop and Coulston (1993) and by Feugère (1993), and the founding in 1990 by Dr Bishop of the *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies*. A series of Roman Military Equipment Conferences (ROMECC) have been held at various locations in Austria, Britain, France, Holland and Germany, with resulting publications. There is also, newly available, a fresh study of the Roman art of war (Goldsworthy 1996).

The particular purpose of this preface is to highlight important developments in our knowledge of Roman military history through seven centuries or more, up to AD 14, with special emphasis on recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries.

In northern Greece the outlines of one camp and part of another, surviving as earthworks in open countryside, have been observed in the vicinity of the battlefield of Cynoscephalae (197 BC), but the date and context for their construction remain unclear (Hammond 1988). Excavations by Erich Schulten in 1903–12 at or near Numantia in northern Spain, scene in 133 BC of a Roman siege and the site of camps documenting the organisation of the army in the later second century BC and after, have been the subject of recent scrutiny, especially in doctoral theses by John Pamment Salvatore (University of Birmingham, 1993), now published (Pamment Salvatore 1996), and by Michael J. Dobson (University of Exeter, 1996).

A fresh examination of the monument marking the site of Octavian's camp in 31 BC high above the Promontory of Actium has established the dimensions of the enormous bronze prows from captured ships which were once exhibited there, thus enhancing our knowledge of ancient shipbuilding in general and the strength of opposing fleets at Actium in particular (Murray and Petsas 1989).

An important area of improving knowledge concerns the campaigns of Caesar in Gaul between 58 and 49 BC. Renewed excavation at Alesia under the auspices of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), initially in collaboration with the Römisch-Germanische Kommission Frankfurt, has largely confirmed the results of excavation by Colonel Stoffel in 1861–65, but added new details. Attention has been paid to other Caesarian sites, such as Gergovia and Bourges; the interim results of ongoing research were presented at a conference held in Sheffield in 1996. Over many years Peter Connolly has been undertaking valuable fieldwork on Caesarian battlefields in Spain and elsewhere. Fortifications associated with the siege at Ategua near Cordoba in 45 BC have been identified by aerial reconnaissance (Blasquez and Corzo 1986).

Fresh attention has also been paid to Roman military activity under Augustus in Gaul (Reddé 1996); special mention may be made of excavations following aerial reconnaissance at the site of Aulnay-de-Saintonge, near Saintes (Aquitania), of a legionary installation of Augustan-Tiberian date (Tassaux *et al.* 1983, 1984; P. Tronche in Reddé 1996). Continuing excavation at sites such as Xanten, Nijmegen and Vechten has improved our awareness of the earliest strategic deployments in the Rhine delta before AD 14 (Bechert and Willems 1995).

Foremost in importance, though dating nearly at the very end of the period covered by this book, is the localising of the site of the Varus Disaster of AD 9, when three legions were destroyed in forests east of the Rhine, effectively putting an end to Roman ambitions of establishing a frontier on the River Elbe or even beyond (below, p. 168). Metal-detecting finds of coins, initially by a British officer based in Germany, building on earlier numismatic discoveries over several centuries, at Kalkriese north of Osnabrück, prompted organised archaeological excavation which has yielded not only more coins, some counterstamped with Varus' initials, but also weaponry and military equipment including a parade-mask of the type associated with auxiliary cavalrymen of later periods. This may not be the main battlefield where Varus himself committed suicide, and which was visited by Germanicus' troops in AD 15 (below, p. 168), but we must surely be witnessing here one episode in the catastrophe when the Roman troops' morale crumbled in the face of persistent attacks over several days. In addition, continued excavation has revealed more information on Augustan sites east of the Rhine along the line of the River Lippe, at Haltern, Oberaden, Beckinghausen and Anreppen (Kühlborn 1995). In southern Germany beyond the Rhine, a particular revelation has been the discovery, by aerial photography followed by geophysical survey and limited excavation, of a double-sized legionary camp of Augustan date at Marktbreit on the River Main near modern Würzburg, 140 km east of the Rhine (Pietsch 1990). An iron catapult bolt-head inscribed with the name of legion *XIX* (one of those legions lost in AD 9 with Varus) has come from a site near Oberammergau, indicating the legion's involvement in campaigns by Drusus north of the Alps, presumably before its posting to Germany (Zanier 1994).

The pace of epigraphic discovery has not slackened, though the number of military inscriptions which can confidently be dated to before AD 14 remains disappointingly small. For the period of civil war between 49 and 31 BC we now know of a legion *XXVII*, stationed for a time in Macedonia; additional veteran colonists of *V Urbana* have come to light at or near Este in NE Italy, and of legion *XX* near Benevento. Less certainly there is a record of a Caesarian colonist of 59 BC at Capua.

The author is actively engaged on a sequel to the present book, to be published by Routledge, which will provide detailed coverage of the military history of the Roman world from the Principate of Augustus to the close of the Julio-Claudian dynasty amid renewed civil war, in AD 68–69.

Lawrence Keppie

Glasgow

May 1997

INTRODUCTION

Not *another* book on the Roman army? Can there be *anything* new to say? Certainly the Roman army has attracted many writers, but the present book is not yet one more descriptive account of the army of the Roman Empire, familiar to students of Roman Britain from its frontier works and forts. Rather the theme here is of the army's growth, and of its developing institutions and traditions, all of which lie behind the familiar imperial army. The present work carries the story of Rome's army from a militia guarding a village on the Tiber down to the mid-first century AD. In a sense the following pages should constitute prolegomena to Graham Webster's *The Roman Imperial Army*, the most useful introduction to the armed forces of the Empire itself. The legions which lay encamped on the northern coast of Gaul in the summer of AD 43, ready to embark for the Claudian invasion of Britain, were the heirs to eight centuries of growth and development. The four individual legions—*II Augusta*, *IX Hispana*, *XIV Gemina* and *XX* (soon to be *Valeria Victrix*)—all carried with them to Britain the memory of campaigns waged, and battlehonours acquired over many years, since these particular units had come into being during the Civil Wars at the end of the Roman Republic.

My own interest in the Roman army before the Empire developed during preparation of a doctoral thesis, now published by the British School at Rome, under the title *Colonisation and Veteran Settlement in Italy, 47–14 BC* (London 1983), which documented the establishment on land in Italy of time-served soldiers of the armies of Julius Caesar, the Triumvirs and Augustus. The lack of a book on the army, bridging the gap between Republic and Empire, was immediately apparent. Our knowledge of the Republican army is based largely on literary references in ancient authors, which have been studied principally by historians. The army of the Empire is known mainly through inscriptions and its archaeological remains, and its exponents are often archaeologists working in the frontier provinces of the Empire where these categories of evidence survive in quantity. Yet archaeological remains *do* exist for the Republic; the volume of such material is bound to increase as more Roman camps and fortifications are identified by fieldwork and aerial photography. In recent years the work of Peter Connolly, in searching out and illustrating in inimitable style the armour and weaponry of the Republic has opened the eyes of many to the army before the Empire. The period between Marius and Caesar has been studied in detail by Jacques Harmand whose *L'Armée et le Soldat à Rome* (see Bibliography) remains indispensable. It will doubtless surprise the reader to know that not a single Roman camp has yet been found in Italy itself, to testify (for example) to operations against Hannibal, or the Celtic tribes in the Po Valley. In past generations study of the Roman army was taken up by many distinguished military men – serving or retired regular officers—to whom fieldcraft was a way of life. Their special expertise should not be overlooked. Foremost among them were Generalmajor Von Göler, Colonel Stoffel, Hauptmann Veith, and (in more recent times) Major-General Fuller and Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart. For any reader who wishes to deepen his understanding of the psychology of the fighting man of any age in the face of the enemy, John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (London 1976) must be essential reading.

Wherever possible the illustrations and line-drawings accompanying each chapter are of material and sites strictly contemporary with the period under discussion. Thus the

reader will find here no scenes from Trajan's Column, the space-fillers of many modern coffee-table productions, nor will Caesar's legionaries be shown marching in uniforms which would have seemed to them futuristic. In fact the only conscious concessions to evidence outside the period under review will be the ground plan (fig. 47) of the legionary fortress at Inchtuthil (built AD c. 84–86), which remains crucial evidence for the internal organisation of a legion in the Early Empire, and a sculptured relief of Praetorian Guardsmen from Rome (pl. 20), which seems to date from the close of the first or the beginning of the second century AD (but see below, p. 234).

In accordance with the criteria laid down for this series, I have kept notes to a minimum, citing for the most part only the basic ancient literary or epigraphic evidence. The notes should be consulted in conjunction with the Bibliography, which is designed to direct the reader to earlier work on each topic discussed. Placenames are a problem, as always. In general I have preferred the Latin form, usually accompanied by the modern name; occasionally I have used the latter alone, where it will be more familiar. All dates are BC, except where specified as AD.

I am glad here to record a deep debt of gratitude to Dr Graham Webster, who encouraged me to submit my ideas to Batsford, and kept a benevolent eye on the progress of the present book. He has read the complete text in draft form, as have Mr Michael Crawford and Dr Brian Dobson. Miss Elizabeth Rawson read a draft of Chapters 1 and 2, and Dr Edith Wightman a draft of Chapter 3. It is also a pleasure to thank participants in the Fregellae excavation of 1982, where half-formed theories were subjected to close examination, especially by John Patterson, Jon Edmondson, and Michael Vercocke. John Patterson readily agreed to take photographs for me in the course of fieldwork in Campania and around Benevento. Much of what follows was drafted in Italy, on trains or in the garden of the British School at Rome, on two separate visits in July and September 1982; Amanda Claridge and her colleagues always made me welcome at the School and smoothed my path. An invitation from Brian Dobson to participate in the 'Roman Army' course at Durham in April 1983 gave me the opportunity to argue my views before an informed audience which included Peter Connolly, Frank Walbank and Jim Summerly; what I have to say about the growth of professionalism in the army owes much to Professor Walbank's own assessments of the Roman attitudes to warfare under the Republic. Peter Connolly was kind enough to lend me his slides of Roman weaponry from Numantia, which form the basis of fig. 18. Among other friends who offered advice or help, I am happy to mention John Drinkwater, David Kennedy, Brigitte Galsterer-Kröll, Donal Bateson, Andrew Burnett, Jane Jakeman and Helen Whitehouse. Peter Kemmis Betty's close scrutiny of the finished typescript did much to improve the final presentation.

The line illustrations were drawn by the author, except where acknowledged to the contrary. Details of the sources of all photographs will be found in the 'Notes on the Plates'. To all the individuals and institutions involved, I am deeply grateful for their co-operation.

Finally it is important to place on record my thanks to Michael Crawford for his hospitality and generosity, and ever-willing offers of transportation over the years in search of inscriptions and sculptured reliefs in far corners of Italy.

Hunterian Museum
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The following list of books and published papers is designed to guide the reader towards previous work on the topics discussed in the foregoing pages. It is not proposed to cite here every work consulted, merely those which the author is happy to recommend as particularly sensible and reliable. The number of books on Caesar and his Gallic campaigns by French authors abounds, and the trickle of works on army units in general becomes a deluge under the Empire. More detailed bibliographies can be found in the works by Harmand (who alone cites 237 items for the period between Marius and Caesar), Webster and Parker (2nd ed.).

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