

CHAPTER ONE

Warfare and the Army in Early Rome

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1 Introduction

By the mid-sixth century BC, Rome had become the largest city in western central Italy and one of its leading powers, but the reach of Roman power remained for a long time confined to the Tiber basin and its immediate environs. The Romans' penetration further afield began with their intervention in Campania in 343 BC and led in some seventy years to the conquest of all Italy south of the Po Valley. However, this advance and the ensuing expansion overseas cannot be understood without some examination of Roman warfare and military developments in the preceding centuries. This is the subject of the present chapter, and the following chapter considers some aspects in further detail.

The evidence for early Roman history is notoriously problematic. Roman historians developed extensive narratives, preserved most fully for us in two histories written in the late first century BC, by Livy and by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (the latter in Greek, and fully extant only for the period down to 443 BC). However, Roman historical writing only began in the late third century BC, and it is clear that the early accounts were greatly elaborated by later writers. For the period of the kings, most of what we are told is legend or imaginative reconstruction. From the foundation of the republic (traditionally dated to 509 BC), the historians give an annual record. This incorporated a good deal of authentic data, transmitted either orally or from documentary sources such as the record of events kept from quite early times by the Pontifex Maximus. However, this material underwent extensive distortion and elaboration in the hands of successive historians writing up their accounts for literary effect and expanding the narrative with what they regarded as plausible reconstructions. As a result the identification of the hard core of authentic data in the surviving historical accounts is very problematic and its extent remains disputed. There is general agreement that much of what we are told is literary confection, and this applies

in particular to most of the accounts of early wars, which are full of stereotyped and often anachronistic invention.

Despite these difficulties, it is possible to establish a good deal about early Roman history and to make an assessment of the character of its warfare. We are helped in this by a range of further information, including data preserved by other ancient writers, for example antiquarian accounts of Roman institutions, a few inscriptions, and, particularly for the regal period, extensive archaeological evidence.¹

2 Roman War and Expansion: The Regal Period

Rome's early success owed a good deal to its site: a group of defensible hills, at the Tiber crossing where the north-south route from Etruria to Campania intersected with the route from the interior to the sea and the saltbeds at the Tiber mouth. In origin Rome was just one of many communities of Latins, inhabiting the plain south of the Tiber and the immediately surrounding hillsides, and sharing the same Indo-European dialect and material culture and some common sanctuaries. North of the Tiber lived the Etruscans; these were non-Indo-European speakers, but in the early centuries the material culture of the southern Etruscan communities, and in particular Rome's neighbor Veii, had much in common with that of the Latins. East of Veii, and still north of the river, lived the Faliscans, linguistically close to the Latins. On the Roman side of the river, beyond the Latins lived other linguistically related peoples such as the Sabines. The wide range of peoples sharing and competing for these lands was to be an important factor in the Romans' early development.

Habitation began at Rome at least c. 1000 BC, and by the eighth century several hut-villages had formed, on the Palatine Hill and elsewhere. Grave furnishings in the region show increased social stratification and some spectacular wealth from the eighth century. In later seventh century Rome we can discern the creation of public buildings and spaces at Rome: by now it had evolved from a village community into a city-state.

Rome was now ruled by kings, perhaps more than the seven recorded by tradition. Modern writers have often supposed that under the last three kings (Tarquin I, Servius Tullius, Tarquin II) Rome was under Etruscan rule, but this doctrine has been refuted by Cornell. These reigns must have covered the mid- to late sixth century, and both the historical tradition and archaeological indications show that this was a period of enhanced prosperity, with Rome now established as the most flourishing city in Latium.²

The Roman historical tradition ascribed victorious wars and expansion against the Latins and other neighboring peoples to all but one of the kings, but very little of this detailed narrative can be historical. It is, nonetheless, likely that by the late sixth century Roman territory had reached roughly the extent which the tradition indicates for the regal period: there was a significant bridgehead on the right bank of the Tiber, and at least on the left bank Roman territory reached the sea, while to the southeast it extended up to the Alban Mount. Alföldi argued that much of this expansion did not take place till the later fifth century, but this must be wrong, since such substantial growth in that period would surely have been reflected in the tradition.³



Map 1.1 Early Latium and its environs

Rome was not the only Latin community to expand in the archaic period, but its territory had become much larger than any other's. Beloch's estimates, though highly conjectural, are plausible approximations: he reckoned Roman territory at the end of the sixth century as 822 square kilometers, just over a third of all Latin territory (2,344 km²).⁴

The literary tradition represents Rome as seeking to assert supremacy over the other Latins from the reign of Tullus Hostilius on, with the Latins frequently mounting combined opposition. Little in this tradition is of any value, but, in view of the greater size of their city and territory, it is likely that the last kings were able to establish some form of hegemony over at least some of the Latins.

Remarkable evidence of the extent of Roman claims in the late sixth century may be afforded by their first treaty with Carthage, preserved by the second century BC Greek historian Polybius (3.22), in which the Carthaginians undertake not to injure "the people of Ardea, Antium, Lavinium, Circeii, Tarracina or any other of the Latins who are subjects." Although the alternative dating to 348 still has its supporters, most scholars now accept Polybius' dating of the treaty to the first year of the republic. Whichever dating is correct, the claim to rule over Antium, Circeii, and Tarracina probably represents an exaggeration of Roman power. These coastal towns, and the Pomptine Plain behind them, were occupied by the Volsci, and full Roman control was not established there until 338. It is commonly supposed that the Volsci were invaders who only arrived in the Pomptine region in the early fifth century. However, the tradition represents them as already present there in the time of the Roman kings, and we should accept its accuracy on the point. The supposed fifth-century Volscian invasion of the Pomptine region and ousting of the Latins would have been a momentous event, and it is most unlikely that no trace of it should have survived in Roman memory.⁵

Warfare was probably not the only means by which the Romans in the seventh and sixth centuries were able to extend their territory and their power. Nonetheless, despite its unreliability in detail, the historical tradition is probably right to portray them as often at war then with their Latin and other neighbors. The profits of such wars will have been one of the sources of the wealth of sixth-century Rome: the tradition that the great temple on the Capitol was built from the spoils from the last Tarquin's capture of Pometia may be well founded.⁶

The frequency of these wars can only be conjectured. Violent conflict between Romans and members of other communities may well have occurred most years. Ritual evidence has often been held to show that in early times, as later, war was a regular, annual occurrence for the Romans, with ancient rituals held in March and October being interpreted as opening and closing the campaigning season. However, the original significance of most of these rituals is disputed, and there is no ancient evidence that they constituted a seasonal war-cycle.⁷

One indication of the significance of warfare in archaic Latium is the spread of fortifications. Earth ramparts with ditches appear at some sites in the eighth century, and at numerous others over the seventh and sixth centuries. Some sites acquired complex defenses, like the three successive ramparts protecting the approach to Ardea. At least one town, Lavinium, seems to have acquired a stone circuit wall by the sixth century.

However, the large cities did not yet feel the need for such comprehensive defenses: the circuit walls at the southern Etruscan cities date to the later fifth and fourth centuries, and, although Rome acquired some partial fortifications in the archaic period, the first circuit wall, the so-called Servian Wall, in fact dates to the early fourth century.

3 Roman War and Expansion: The Early Republic

Little of historical value can be gleaned from the complex tales relating to the overthrow of Tarquin II, but there is no good reason to doubt the core fact, corroborated by the surviving magistrate list, that in the late sixth century BC (conventionally 509) the king was expelled and replaced by two annually elected chief magistrates, originally called praetors, but generally known from their later title, consul.⁸ As already noted, the historians give an annual record from this point, in which wars bulk large, but any attempt to assess the warfare of the period must take full account of the record's deficiencies. The campaign details are generally obvious confections; there are some evident duplications, and at least some of the reported campaigns are probably the construction of historians, seeking to fill out the annual record with plausible invention.

It is often supposed that, as in later centuries, the Romans of the early republic were almost constantly at war, but that, whereas their later warfare was generally expansionist, in the fifth century they were mostly on the defensive against enemy attacks, and often fighting for their very survival.⁹ This assessment requires modification.

The historical tradition itself indicates a striking fluctuation in the frequency of warfare: Roman forces are reported in combat in only fourteen of the years from 454 to 411, whereas before and after that period warfare is said to have occurred almost every year. Much of the recorded warfare may be invented, and much actual warfare may have left no trace in the record. Nonetheless, it is likely that this striking disparity has some correspondence to reality, and that the Romans were engaged in significantly less warfare in the later fifth century than before or after.

The expulsion of the kings appears to have ushered in a phase of widespread turbulence in the Tiber region. Rome may have been occupied for a time by the Etruscan adventurer Lars Porsenna, and, besides other conflicts, the Romans were confronted by a coalition of Latin states. However, they came out of these struggles well. Upstream on the Tiber left bank, they secured possession of Fidenae and Crustumerium.¹⁰ The Latins were decisively defeated at Lake Regillus (probably located northwest of Tusculum; the battle is dated to 499 by Livy or 496 by Dionysius). A few years later, treaties of alliance were concluded first with the Latins and then with the Hernici, who lived in the upper valley of the Sacco, separated from the Tiber Valley by the watershed between the Alban Hills and Praeneste. According to tradition, both treaties were negotiated by Spurius Cassius, in respectively 493 and 486.

The treaties were probably formally equal, but it was a mark of the Romans' pre-eminence that the other Latin communities collectively made a bilateral agreement with the republic. Livy's and Dionysius' accounts of the subsequent warfare must

exaggerate the subordination of the Latins and Hernici to the Romans, but it is doubtful whether the allied forces ever served under a non-Roman commander. Most importantly, the alliances lasted. Livy (6.2.3) may exaggerate in claiming that there was no wavering in the loyalty of the Latins and Hernici until 389, but it is likely that there was little or no armed conflict between the Romans and their Latin neighbors in the intervening period, in marked contrast with the sixth century and earlier.¹¹

Livy and Dionysius report very frequent conflict with the Sabines, Volsci, and Aequi, usually represented as starting with enemy raiding on the territory of the Romans or their allies. The Romans are portrayed as often suffering reverses, but generally gaining the upper hand, sometimes winning battles and capturing towns, but often contenting themselves with retaliatory plundering. Conflict with the Sabines is last reported in 449, but with the other two extends from the first notices, in 495, down to 388 for the Aequi and the later fourth century for the Volsci.

Modern writers commonly suppose that the historical reality behind these conventionalized reports is that, especially in the early fifth century, the Romans and their allies were under sustained and almost annual assault from mountain peoples pressing down on the plains. This interpretation depends heavily on the sources for the frequency of the conflicts and for the conception of the Romans' role as essentially defensive and reactive. However, the apparent frequency may partly result from the historians' invention of items to fill up the annual record, and their proclivity for presenting all Roman wars as justified responses to aggression is notorious. Moreover, the sources are much more upbeat about Roman successes than the bleak modern portrayals allow.

The Sabines of the Tiber Valley had had frequent contacts, both peaceful and violent, with their Roman neighbors from early times. Intermittent conflict between Romans and Sabines probably continued in the early fifth century, but then tailed off, as the tradition suggests. The conflict with the Aequi and Volsci, however, arose from the early fifth-century regional turbulence and the ensuing alliances with the Latins and Hernici. The Romans themselves were separated from the Aequian and Volscian lands by the intervening territory of Latin communities, and the prospect of help against these enemies was probably one of the factors which attracted the Latins and Hernici to the Roman alliance.

The Volsci who came into conflict with the Romans and their allies dwelt in the coastal Pomptine plain from Antium to Anxur (their name for Tarracina) and the adjacent Monti Lepini. It is commonly supposed that they were invaders originating from the central Italian mountains who had only recently arrived in this region, but, as we saw above, it is preferable to follow the ancient sources in holding that they had been present there from the sixth century or earlier. Whatever their origins, they were not now predominantly mountain dwellers: many dwelt in the plain or on the coast, and some of their settlements will have had an urban character.

The Aequi who clashed with the Roman alliance dwelt in the upper Aniene Valley and the surrounding mountains. From there they could cross easily into the upper Sacco valley, where some of them had evidently settled. The Aequi fit best with the model of mountaineers assaulting plainsmen, but it does not follow that their clashes with the Latins and Hernici always arose from Aequian marauding rather than the

mutual disputes of neighbors. It is often supposed that in the early fifth century the Aequi occupied the Algidus, the main Alban Hills crater, and much adjacent territory, and that important Latin cities like Tibur and Praeneste either became subject to the Aequi or reached an understanding with them. If so, the Romans themselves would have been very vulnerable, but the sources give no warrant for postulating Aequian expansion on this scale. They are generally portrayed not as occupying the Algidus, but advancing into it to raid. It is most unlikely that the subjection of Tibur and Praeneste should have left no trace in the sources. Praeneste may often have clashed with the Aequi, but we hear little of this probably because this strong city was better able to defend itself than other Roman allies.¹²

The Romans on the whole probably did well out of the Aequian and Volscian wars. Only occasionally would these peoples' raids have reached Roman territory: such incursions are reported only in 488, 478, 470, 469, 465–463, and 446, all in narratives of doubtful historicity. The Romans' chief involvement was in dispatching armies in support of their Latin and Hernican allies, perhaps a good deal less often than the tradition implies. Such expeditions will have afforded much opportunity for booty. Moreover, the Roman alliance is reported as making significant territorial advances against the Volsci, notably in the late 490s, and in the late fifth and early fourth century, when they temporarily secured Anxur/Tarracina, and founded a colony at Circeii.

The early republic also saw three Roman wars with the city of Veii, their nearest Etruscan neighbor. The first war is reported as extending over the years 483–474 and the second (with intermissions) over 438–425. The issue in the second war was Fidenae: the war started with its revolt from Rome to Veii, and ended with the Roman capture of the town. These first two wars were typical conflicts between neighboring communities, but the third was a fight to the death. The Romans laid siege to Veii; resistance was allegedly protracted, but the city was eventually captured under the leadership of the celebrated Camillus (traditional date 396). Some of the inhabitants were made Roman citizens, and the rest sold into slavery. The land acquired from Veii all became public land (*ager publicus*), and much of it was soon afterwards distributed in small allotments to Roman citizens. This was a major expansion of Roman territory: Beloch (1926, 620) estimated the territory acquired from Veii as some 562 square kilometers and the total extent of Roman territory as now about 1,510 square kilometers.

There had been little or no Roman expansion in the period from the late 490s down to the late fifth century, but at the end of the century a new phase of expansion began, of which the capture of Veii was only the most notable instance. As we have seen, there were also advances at this time in the Pomptine region against the Volsci, and, following their success against Veii, the Romans went on in 395–394 to strengthen their hold north of the Tiber by exacting submission from the neighboring Faliscan communities, Capena and Falerii. However, the annexation of Veii and distribution of its land were actions on a different, and for the Romans, unprecedented scale, and have rightly been seen as the first step on Rome's advance to an imperial power. They also constitute a puzzle: the ancient tradition offers no adequate explanation for the Romans' decision to annihilate their neighbor.

The Roman advance received a sharp jolt in 387 (Polybius' date: the Roman tradition places the event in 390). A horde of invading Gauls defeated a Roman army at the River Allia, near Crustumerium, and the survivors were obliged to abandon the city except for the Capitoline Hill. The Gauls sacked the city and then departed. Further Gallic invasions ensued over the following century, but these passed off without Roman defeats. Although Gauls thereafter had a special menace for the Romans, the consequences of the Sack were neither grave nor long-lasting. The damage done to the city has left no archaeological trace and was probably less great than the tradition claims. To insure against a repetition, the circuit wall was constructed, enclosing an area of some 426 hectares, a huge undertaking which was itself striking testimony to Roman resilience.

The Romans were soon able to resume their expansion. The tradition is again unreliable in detail, but the main trend is clear enough. The Romans consolidated their position in southern Etruria with the foundation of the colonies of Sutrium and Nepes c. 383, and further warfare against Tarquinii and others in 358–351 ended in extended truces. In the south the Aequi were a spent force, attacking for the last time in 389–388, but frequent warfare is recorded with the Volsci. The gains made from them before the Sack were probably lost, but new gains were soon made, and Roman citizens received allotments of confiscated land in the Pomptine Plain. By the mid-fourth century Roman arms were approaching Campania.

Livy reports disaffection among the Latins and Hernici from immediately after the Sack. Its primary cause was probably increasing Roman dominance. In 381, at a hint of resistance, the strategically vital town of Tusculum was absorbed into the Roman citizen body, an unprecedented step for a community of this size. This peremptory act may have prompted the rebellion of Praeneste, defeated in 380. Further conflict followed in the mid-century: warfare is reported with the Hernici in 362–358 and with Tibur and Praeneste in 361–354. Widespread disaffection continued, and was to erupt in 340 in general revolt. When that rebellion was crushed in 338, most of the Latins, and many Campanians and Volsci, were incorporated into the Roman citizen body, a radical initiative which transformed the character of the Roman state and provided the springboard for the conquest of Italy.

Thus the period from the end of the fifth century saw a steady expansion of Roman power, only briefly interrupted by the Gallic Sack. This expansion and the resulting conflicts with Rome's allies probably led to an increase in the frequency of Roman warfare. However, even in the first half of the fourth century the Romans probably did not attain the level of more or less annual warfare which characterized most of the subsequent history of the republic. This was still more true of the preceding century. As we saw, the ancient historical tradition presents the later fifth century as, in Roman terms, an unusually peaceful period, and for most of the century there is in fact likely to have been significantly less warfare than the tradition claims. Moreover, such warfare as there was will have been mainly away from the Romans' own territory.

The first years of the republic were a turbulent time of shifting alliances and conflict with neighboring powers. However, the settlement with the Latins established in the 490s by the victory at Lake Regillus and the subsequent treaty of alliance inaugurated a comparatively peaceful period which lasted for the greater part of the fifth

century. When warfare became more frequent again from the end of the century, the principal reason was the Romans' own expansionism in southern Etruria and against the Volsci and the tensions which this caused for their relations with the Latins.

4 Public and Private Warfare

Much of the conflict which occurred between Romans and their neighbors at least in the regal period was probably not at the communal level, but rather raiding and reprisals by individuals and groups. However, conflicts originating in this way will often have involved the community, and, more generally, the pressures of warfare and the need to mobilize armies are likely to have stimulated state formation and the development of communal institutions. The community in its turn may have sought to control private violence, and an instance of this may be afforded by the ritual of the fetial priests. Accounts of their procedure for declaring war often specify that the demand presented was for the surrender of "the plunder and the plunderers," and it seems likely that it originated as a communal response to private raiding, with the offenders' community being required either to make good the offense by handing them over or to accept the responsibility collectively.

Aristocratic warlords, accompanied by a retinue of armed followers and moving quite freely between communities, are widely held to have been an important feature of the society of west central Italy in archaic times, and a striking body of evidence supports this view. Such warrior bands may have been a survival from the pre-state world, and parallels may be drawn with other pre-state societies such as Homeric Greece.¹³

The best attested warlords are three figures from the Etruscan city of Vulci, the brothers Caeles and Aulus Vibenna and their associate Mastarna, known both from Etruscan art, especially the reliefs of the late fourth-century François tomb at Vulci, and from Roman tradition, according to which Caeles brought armed help to a Roman king and settled at Rome with his followers. The scholarly emperor Claudius reported an Etruscan claim that Mastarna had been king at Rome, and identified him with Servius Tullius. However that may be, the evidence does make it plausible to envisage the trio as Etruscan adventurers who intervened with an armed retinue in the affairs of Rome.

A band of comrades in allegiance to an elite leader also appears on a late sixth- or early fifth-century dedicatory inscription from Satricum (a site whose possession seems to have shifted between Latins and Volsci), usually translated as: "... the comrades (*sodales*) of Poplios Valesios set (this) up to Mamars." "Mamars" is an alternative name for Mars, and "Poplios Valesios" is an archaic form of the name Publius Valerius. If the dedicators were from Rome, this Valerius may be the famous Publius Valerius Publicola, whom tradition represented as playing a leading part in the foundation of the republic. However that may be, the inscription is vivid testimony to the importance of *sodalis*-groupings in the region in archaic times, and the temptation is strong to view them as a warrior band.¹⁴

Further warlords followed the example of Mastarna and the Vibennae in intervening at Rome after the expulsion of the kings: Porsenna's activity there is best

interpreted in these terms, but the last reported attempt by a foreign adventurer to stage an armed coup at Rome, the Sabine Appius Herdonius' seizure of the Capitol in 460, was an abject failure.

The movement of such adventurers between communities is in fact part of the well-documented wider phenomenon of elite migration between the states of west-central Italy in the archaic period. At Rome the reception of non-citizens as kings is only one instance of this process. Another is the admission of the Claudian *gens*: according to the traditional story, the Sabine leader Attus Clausus (Appius Claudius) came over to the Romans in 504 with a large retinue. Such movement will have taken place from as well as to Rome, as the case of Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus illustrates. According to the legend, this Roman war hero's opposition to the plebeians led to his exile from Rome; he joined the Volsci and led them on a campaign of conquest deep into Roman territory, ended only at the entreaty of his mother. This powerful tale was evidently developed in oral tradition before being embedded, with further accretions, in the historians' account of the years 493–488. The story must have a kernel of truth, and, as Cornell has recently argued, this must include a Roman renegade who took service with the Volscians.¹⁵

A related development to the activities of aristocratic warlords is often thought to have been private wars by individual clans (*gentes*), conducted by the clan-members and their dependents and focusing on the defense and expansion of their landholdings. However, this hypothesis, like the view that the Roman army was originally composed of clan leaders and their retinues, rests on highly problematic assumptions about the role and importance of the *gentes* in early times.

The only evidence for a *gens* engaging in warfare on its own is the story of the disaster suffered by the Fabii at the Cremera (the Tiber tributary on which Veii itself stood) during the republic's first war with Veii. According to most sources, in 479 some 306 Fabii manned a fort there accompanied (in some accounts) by 4,000 or 5,000 dependents, but in 477 they were ambushed, and only one Fabius survived. The episode has been much embellished, but must derive from an authentic memory of a Fabian disaster. It is often supposed that in reality the Fabii suffered their defeat while conducting a private war from their own landholdings, a late survival of independent gentilicial warfare. However, it is perhaps more likely that the disaster was, as the tradition claims, an episode in a public war. The Fabii, who were politically prominent at the time, could have undertaken the garrisoning of a raiding post which could not be maintained by the normal, short-term levy, perhaps an exceptional reversion to an older form of gentilicial levying. Alternatively, they may simply have suffered heavy losses in a regular battle, which is the version given by our earliest extant source, Diodorus (11.53.6).¹⁶

5 The Evolution of the Army

Weapons figure in grave-goods in west-central Italy from c. 1000 BC on, and from the eighth century graves of high-status warriors in Etruscan and Latin cemeteries are marked by combinations of iron weapons and bronze armor, much of it evidently

intended for display rather than use. Grave-goods virtually disappear from Latin sites by the early sixth century. However, already by this time Greek hoplite equipment had begun to be adopted in the region, including the characteristic double-grip round shield and distinctive helmets and body armor. Hoplite equipment had appeared in the Greek world from the late eighth century, and its widespread use in Etruscan cities is attested from c. 650 on by grave finds and artistic representations. The evidence is thinner for Rome and the other Latin communities, but it seems likely that hoplite equipment came into use there about the same time or soon after its introduction in Etruria.

It has usually been thought that the introduction of hoplite equipment led rapidly to a new style of fighting, with the hoplites (heavy-armed troops) massed in close formation (the phalanx), using a thrusting spear as their main offensive weapon and also carrying a short sword. Greek city-states' defense, it is held, now depended on middle-class hoplites, serving alongside aristocrats in the phalanx line, and this had important social and political consequences. Difficulties have sometimes been found in applying this model to Etruria: it has been doubted whether an army of citizen hoplites is compatible with Etruscan social structure, commonly supposed to have been dominated in this period by aristocratic *gentes*, and it is notable that Greek equipment is often found in combination with Etruscan weaponry, as on the grave-stele of Aule Feluske of Vetulonia, shown armed with a hoplite shield and helmet but an Etruscan double-axe.¹⁷

Established views of hoplite warfare have, however, recently been subjected to radical critiques, notably by Van Wees.¹⁸ He argues that close-formation fighting was not essential for the effectiveness of the new equipment, and that down to the early fifth century Greek hoplites continued to fight in a quite open formation, interspersed with light-armed troops. He also maintains that there was considerable disparity between working-class and leisured hoplites, with only the latter wearing much body armor. These conclusions fit well with the Etruscan indications, and, if they are correct, the difference between developments in Greece and Etruria may not be as great as supposed, and the adoption of Greek armor in Etruria may not have involved radical changes in fighting methods, let alone social structures. The same will also apply to Rome and Latium: here too fighting may have continued to be fluid and flexible, based on an open formation incorporating both light and more heavily armed troops, and especially at first, only the really well-to-do may have aspired to the new Greek-style shields and armor.

The Romans ascribed to King Servius Tullius the division of the citizen body into centuries based on wealth, and there is no good reason to doubt the attribution. The centuriate system in due course underwent radical modification and was to have enduring political importance as a basis for assembly voting, but, when introduced in the later sixth century, its purpose must have been primarily military. It is often supposed that in its original form the system divided the citizens simply into the "class" (*classis*), who served as hoplites, and the rest who served, if at all, as light-armed. However, although we know that in the second century BC the first of the (then five) classes could be referred to simply as "the class" and the rest as "below the class" (*infra classem*) (so Cato, cited by A. Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 6.13), it does not follow that this was a relic of a much earlier one-class system. Although the details

on equipment given by Livy (1.44) and Dionysius (4.16–21) are of questionable value, the tradition may be right that from its inception the centuriate system divided the infantry into multiple classes. King Servius will then have aimed to maximize the state's military resources by imposing an obligation of military service on all but the poorest citizens and regulating how they should arm themselves according to their means, with those who could afford it equipping themselves with some or all of the hoplite panoply, while the richest served as cavalry (perhaps true cavalry, rather than mounted infantry as in most archaic Greek states). The result will have been a heterogeneously equipped army with both hoplite and diverse other elements, which fits well with Van Wees' open-formation model of archaic warfare.

The Roman army must have changed greatly between the sixth and fourth centuries, but, although numerous attempts have been made to reconstruct its evolution, this can only be speculation. Even the best attested change remains problematic, namely the introduction of military pay. A well-established tradition (e.g. Livy 4.59–60) records its introduction, funded by direct taxation, in c. 406 at around the time of the start of the siege of Veii. It is not a difficulty that Roman coinage did not begin for another century: the payments could have been made in weighed bronze. But most warfare then still consisted of short, local campaigns, and the extended Samnite Wars of the later fourth century are a more likely context for the introduction of regular pay, although some payments may have been made to those manning the Veii siege.

By the end of the fourth century the Roman army must have reached much the form in which it was described for us by Polybius (6.19–26), a century and a half later. In this system the citizen troops were brigaded in legions of at least 4,500 men, of which the heavy infantry comprised at least 3,000. The equipment of these heavy infantry included an oval shield (*scutum*), heavy javelin (*pilum*), and short sword, and they fought in a flexible formation, deployed in three lines, each divided into ten maniples. The essential features of the system, the weaponry and the maniples as tactical unit, are often held to have been introduced only during the Samnite Wars, a doctrine supported by ancient claims that they were borrowings from the Samnites. However, this evidence is questionable and contradicted by other sources, and it seems unlikely that the Romans embarked on the struggle with the Samnites simply with a hoplite army. More probably, the manipular army was the product of a longer evolutionary process, in which a more diversely equipped force gradually became more standardized and tightly organized. Some features like the *scutum* may have been present much earlier, and Livy and Dionysius may perhaps be right in representing some elements in the Servian army as equipped with shields of this type. One important element of continuity from the Servian to the manipular system is likely to have been the maximizing of Roman military resources by imposing the obligation to serve on all but the poorest citizens.¹⁹

6 War and Society in the Early Republic

With the overthrow of the kings, political dominance at Rome passed to the patricians, a group of wealthy aristocratic families, who from the early years of the republic became

a closed caste. The first two centuries of the republic saw repeated clashes between the patricians and the plebeians, the so-called Struggle of the Orders. In the fifth century the plebeians' gains were mainly defensive: in 494/3, the right to elect their own officers, the tribunes, and, in 451/0, a law code, the Twelve Tables. During the fourth century most of the patricians' political privileges were ended, giving wealthier plebeians access to office, while economic reforms, chiefly debt relief and the limitation of landholding, were enacted in the interests of poorer plebeians.²⁰

Their military service was the plebeians' principal weapon. They are said to have carried out "secessions," withdrawing from the city in what was in effect a military strike, in 494, 449, and 287. We also hear frequently of tribunes obstructing levies in the hope of obliging the magistrates and Senate to accept their proposals. This tactic is not known to have been used in later times, and so, although the individual stories of obstruction are generally fictional, they probably draw on an authentic memory that this device had sometimes been employed in the early republic.

The original plebeians have sometimes been identified as the poorer citizens who served in the army, if at all, only as light-armed. However, in that case they would have had little political muscle, and there is no good reason to reject the sources' view that the *plebs* comprised all non-patricians. As we have seen, the make-up of the army was probably diverse, and all levels were probably represented both in the plebeian movement and among their opponents.

It is often supposed that in the fifth century incessant warfare and frequent enemy incursions had severe effects on the peasantry and produced a recession, and that all this fuelled the plebeians' discontents.²¹ However, as we have seen, most of the fifth century was probably relatively peaceful. The supposed recession may be doubted: the decline in pottery imports (a regional phenomenon) and temple foundations are hardly certain indicators. Debt agitation is in fact attested in phases when we have identified comparatively high levels of warfare: in 494/3, and then not again until the fourth century (agitation from 385 and debt-relief measures in 367–342).

There was evidently much peasant land-hunger. The sources report frequent unsuccessful agitation for the distribution of public land in the fifth century, but the narratives are couched in terms which reflect the controversies of the late republic, and whether they have any authentic content is a matter of dispute. Settlements were, however, founded on land confiscated from defeated enemies. The foundation of a number of new communities (*coloniae*) is reported in both the fifth and early fourth centuries, of which at least some will be authentic; these ranked as new Latin states, and the settlers will have been drawn both from Roman citizens and their allies. In addition, numerous individual allotments of land were, as we have seen, made to Roman citizens in the early fourth century, in the former territory of Veii and on the Pomptine Plain. Land hunger may have been one of the factors which impelled the renewed expansion of the late fifth and early fourth century. By meeting it through substantial distribution of confiscated land, a precedent was set which was to be repeatedly followed, becoming one of the central themes in the history of Roman imperialism.

The pattern of almost constant warfare which was so central a feature of Roman life from the later fourth century on was not already established in the period before

the great advance of c. 343 BC. Continuous war was the product, not the cause of Roman imperialism. Nonetheless, in much of this earlier period warfare was frequent, and many enduring features of the Romans' attitude to and conduct of war took shape then, for example military organization and fighting methods, the treatment of the defeated and ritual practices like the triumph.

Romans will have continued to be involved in piracy, but on land private wars will have died out from the fifth century. Warfare had become a civic activity, and fighting in the republic's armies was an obligation which fell on all but the poorest citizens. It helped to define what it meant to be a citizen, and gave ordinary citizens some leverage against the elite.

Warfare, then, was an activity in which both the elite and ordinary citizens took part. One illustration of this is afforded by the part played by individual combat in early Roman warfare. Fighting by individual champions may have played a leading part in the earliest warfare. Massed fighting later predominated, but individual acts of valor were still prized, both in and before the main engagements. The Roman practice of awarding decorations for outstanding feats must have gone back to the early republic, if not before. Individual combats between Romans and enemies were common before the main engagements, and some of these encounters became famous, like the duels fought against Gauls by Titus Manlius Torquatus (367 or 361) and Marcus Valerius Corvus (349). Sometimes, however, such combats were forbidden in the interests of discipline, and there were also exemplary tales of commanders enforcing discipline by executing their sons for contravening the ban.²²

Individual acts of bravery were one of the ways by which aristocrats like Torquatus or Corvus could win personal distinction, but the rewards of valor were open to ordinary soldiers as well. The record for military decorations was said to have been held by Lucius Siccus Dentatus, tribune in 454, who "fought in 120 battles, won eight single combats after challenge, was distinguished by 45 scars on his front and none on his back" (Pliny, *Nat.* 7.101–2). The tally of Siccus' achievements is a later fiction, and he may be an altogether legendary figure. However, the tale remains an important exemplar of the possibilities which their military role opened to ordinary citizens. From the early republic on, aristocrats who sought to distinguish themselves for valor were striving to excel in activities in which ordinary citizens too were full participants.

NOTES

- 1 On the evidence for early Roman history see further Cornell 1995, 1–30; Forsythe 2005, 59–77. On the historical tradition see especially Oakley 1997–2005, 1.3–108. I shall explore the themes of this chapter in more depth in a forthcoming work on war, expansion and society in early Rome.
- 2 See further Cornell 1995, chapters 4–6 and 8.
- 3 Alföldi 1965, 101–75, 236–318. For refutation see e.g. Thomsen 1980, 130–8.

- 4 Beloch 1926, 169–79, followed e.g. by Cornell 1995, 208–9. See further Forsythe (in this volume).
- 5 For the Carthage treaty see e.g. Cornell 1995, 210–14; Oakley 1997–2005, 2.252–62. For the Volsci as already present in the Pomptine region from at least the sixth century see Musti 1992, 25–31; Gnade 2002, 138–56.
- 6 Cicero, *Rep.* 2.44; Livy 1.53.2–3, 55.7–9; Dionysius 4.50; Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.72. Pometia is perhaps to be identified with the town later known as Satricum.
- 7 The war-cycle interpretation is challenged by Rüpke 1990, 23–6.
- 8 See Cornell 1995, 215–41, refuting alternative views.
- 9 See, e.g. Oakley 1993, 14–16; Raaflaub 1996, 283ff. Cornell 1995, 293–326, gives the best available account of Roman warfare and external relations in the early republic. For the period after 390 see also Oakley 1997–2005, 1.344–65, 2.3–18.
- 10 The common view that Fidenae was held by Veii until the Second Veientine War rejects the ancient evidence for no good reason.
- 11 On the Cassian treaties see further Cornell 1995, 299–301; Oakley 1997–2005, 1.336–41. Dionysius 6.95 purports to cite the text of the treaty with the Latins. A fragment of the antiquarian Lucius Cincius (Festus 276–7 Lindsay) implies shared Roman and Latin decision-making and is most naturally taken to mean that commanders were sometimes supplied by communities other than Rome.
- 12 For the view criticized here see e.g. Cornell 1995, 306; Oakley 1997–2005, 1.338. It is true that Dionysius sometimes speaks of the Algidus as being in Aequian territory (10.21.1, 11.23.4, 28.1), but his topographical indications are confused: he envisages it as a city, and a full night's march from Tusculum. Ravaging of Praenestine land is reported for 462 (Livy 3.8.6).
- 13 See further Cornell 1995, 130–45, 157–8; Rawlings 1999. In general on private and public warfare in archaic Rome, see Cornell 1988; Timpe 1990.
- 14 See Stibbe et al. 1980; Versnel 1997 (interpreting the incomplete first word as “young men”).
- 15 Cornell 2003, rightly observing that the common view that the historical Coriolanus was a Volscian or Latin enemy leader implausibly rejects an essential feature of the story. Cornell is less convincing when he argues that Coriolanus was already a warlord before he left Rome: the sources' references to him as accompanied at Rome by a retinue and leading a volunteer force against Antium (Dionysius 7.19, 21, 64; Plutarch, *Coriolanus* 13) are probably just literary elaborations.
- 16 Other main accounts: Livy 2.48–50; Dionysius 9.15–22; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.195–242. The private gentilicial war interpretation is advocated, e.g., by Richard 1988, and rejected, e.g., by Welwei 1993. The location of the tribe Fabia and Fabian landholdings on the border with Veii is merely a modern conjecture. On the role of *gentes* in early Roman society see now Smith 2006.
- 17 Snodgrass 1965; Spivey and Stoddart 1990, 127–39; D'Agostino 1990. For a comprehensive survey of military equipment in ninth- to seventh-century Italy see Stary 1981.
- 18 Van Wees 2004.
- 19 *Scuta* in the Servian army: so Saulnier 1980, 106–9; Connolly 1981, 95–6. In general on the evolution of the early Roman army see Rawson 1971; Kienast 1975; Thomsen 1980, 144–211; Cornell 1995, 173–97. On the themes of this section, and for a different view, see Forsythe (in this volume).
- 20 On these conflicts see especially Cornell 1995, 242–92, 327–43; Raaflaub 2005.
- 21 For example Cornell 1995, 265–6, 306–7; Raaflaub 1996, 286.
- 22 See Oakley 1985; Lendon 2005, chapter 8.

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FURTHER READING

Cornell 1995 is a brilliant account of the period, though sometimes perhaps over-confident of the value of the ancient tradition. Forsythe 2005 is another fine account. There is much valuable information in the authoritative commentaries on the early books of Livy by Ogilvie 1965, and Oakley 1997–2005. The archaeological evidence is well presented by Holloway 1994.

The following are good essays on early Roman warfare and society: Harris 1990; Oakley 1993; Raaflaub 1996. Rawson 1971 is a classic study of the early Roman army. There are well-illustrated accounts for the general reader in Connolly 1981 and Sekunda and Northwood 1995.