

# The structure of roman legion



a) Itemise the main features of Roman arms and armour

Velites- youngest and poorest men armed with 4ft(1. 2m) javelins, sword and a 3ft(1m) diameter shield made of wicker and covered with hide. Helmet are their only defends and many of them are made with bear or wolf skins.

Hastatus or princeps- forms the first two lines of the heavy infantry. Armed with a heavy, long scutum (shield), 2pila (heavy and light) and a short, straight cut and thrust sword. Armours are prepared by individuals, so it differs. Mostly it consists breastplate, some leg protection and a helmet.

Triarius - oldest veterans, who carried a long thrusting spear. Shield design is uncertain. The helmets are Etrusco-Corinthian helmet with two greaves

b) Briefly explain the reasons for flexibility of the Roman Legion.

The flexibility of the roman legions is due to its quick recalls and battle formations. The roman legions are made up of different groups such as Velites, Triarii, Principes, Hastati, Posterior century and Prior century. Each group has a different role. As soon as each row is tired or exhausted, gaps will be given to the front line where they can retreat and rest, while the next group will move to the right and fill the gap left by the front line. The quick retreat and charge gives the roman legion great flexibility, which lets them to adapt to different situations.

c) Outlines the relationship and interdependency of the century, maniple, cohort and legion.

The basic fighting unit of the Roman army was the maniple, which consisted of 120-160 men organised into two centuries. Each maniple is separated into two century containing around 60 to 80 men. Many groups of centuries will then make into a cohort which consists of 6 centuries and a group of velites. The six centuries are separates into Hastati, the first rank, the Principes, the second rank, and Triarii, the third rank. Each of these ranks contains two centuries. A cohort like this then make up a group of forces called the legions. The Roman army consists of four legions that make up the roman army.

The interdependency of the century, the maniple, cohort and legion is that they have the flexibility to attack, retreat and regroup while the other legions, centuries, cohort will protect them. As the front rank of an century, cohort or legion gets exhausted, a gap will open up to them so they can retreat to the back and prepare themselves, while the second rank will fill up the position of the front row. The same happens when the second row is tired which turns it into a circle. All of them rely on each other for support and defence. If the ranks behind can not leave a gap properly for the first rank to retreat, then the second rank could not advance and therefore confusion and disorder will occurs. The centuries, maniples... etc must interdependent each other.

### The Battle of Cynoscephalae

a) According to Polybius, what were the main advantages of legion over the phalanx? In your answer make specific reference to Polybius XVIII

According to Polybius the main advantage of the legions over the phalanx is the flexibility of the Roman army. It is described by Polybius that " phalanx requires one time and one type of ground only in order to produce its peculiar effect" and " to find a stretch of country of say two to three miles or more which contains no obstacles of this kind is exceedingly rare". As it was explained before that the Roman army is really flexible. It can move easily and it can move under different situations because each rank doesn't need to support each other.

" Each man makes his movements individually". The advantage allows the Legions to completely demolish the Phalanx. If the phalanx remains on the ground where it suits them, they can't help their allies and they can't assure their own safety. By leaving the favoured ground to fight, the phalanx will face a crisis where they can't have a good formation. Which means they will be easily overthrown by the Roman Legions which has the main advantage of flexibility to move individually, retreat individually and attack with great flexibility by using different centuries and keep changing legions. It is described by Polybius " of it leaves the terrain which favours it and attempts an action else where" " it is easy to forecast what will happen from the tactics which the Romans are now putting into practice"

b) Show how Livy's description of the Battle of Cynoscephalae confirms Polybius's view of the legion's superiority.

Livy's description of the battle of Cynoscephalae confirmed Polybius's view on many occasions. When the Macedonian army first engaged the enemy, they were in confusion and somewhere retreating. " Macedonians who turned

their backs were being cut down, and they had no chance of survival unless they receive support." [Livy]. This proves polybius' view where he said that "later in the battle, whether the phalanx in its charge drives back the troops opposed to it or is driven back by them, in either event it loses its own peculiar formation" [polybius]. This means that once the Macedonian loses its formation then it will be easily defeated by the Romans.

This is also again showed in Livy's description of the battle when he describes the charging of the phalanx in confusion. " Whole the men of the centre, which was nearer to the right wing, were standing there engrossed in the spectacle of the conflict, as of they were in no way involved. The phalanx, which had come up in column, not in line, was more suitably disposed for marching than for fighting." [Livy]. On other occasions, Levy confirmed Polybius' view where he said " phalanx requires one time and one type of ground only in order to produce its peculiar effect" [Polybius]. On Livy's description, he mentioned the trouble of the Phalanx retreating to due that they had charged down the hills and moving back up will be slow while they are open for attack. "

The nature of the ground added to their difficulties; for in pursuing the routed enemy down the slop... for a short time the King's forces suffered heavy casualties, attacked as they were on both sides, then they took to flight, the greater part of them abandoning their weapons." [Livy]. Livy's description also proved the Roman legions flexible and attack individually. As Polybius had described that " nothing can withstand the frontal assault of the phalanx". This is proved in Livy's description where the only way to defeat them is by scattering their formation and go from the rear. " He brought

them quickly round to attack the enemy's right wing from behind. Such an assault from rear would have thrown any line into confusion" [Livy] all of Livy's descriptions mentioned confirms the superiority of the Roman Legions over the Phalanx.