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Wars and Military Science: Rome #3--- The Early Army

For descriptions of the early army one has to rely on the historians Livy and Polybius. Livy is in some ways unsatisfactory, not only because just part of his great work has survived, but also because he wrote under the aegis of Augustus, who wanted the propaganda lessons of the past to stand out clearly. Thus the reasons that he gives for defeat and victory are usually based on Rome's breaking an old custom, or law, or her failing to seek the support of the gods, or the reverse. Thus the taking of (the city of) Veii after a long siege was, according to Livy, due to the killing of the Roman ambassador by the besieged, and he fails to record the extraordinary engineering feat that undermined the city defenses. Livy considered the fall of Rome to be the result of a Roman ambassador's engaging the Celts in battle and so on. The lesson here was that Rome could only fulfill her great destiny by showing the proper respect for the law and the gods. Apart from this, the information Livy gives about the organization of the army ca. 340 B.C. is of great value, although some of his figures are suspect.

Polybius was a Greek with an acute eye and a fine intelligence, who had the great advantage of being a member of the Scipionic circle, which provided him with access to details of all the campaigns. He was very impressed by the organization and the discipline of the army, which contrasted with the irrationality of the Greeks in these matters. His history was in fact written for his countrymen in an attempt to explain the success of the Romans, especially in warfare. His highly detailed account of it ca. 200BC (Book 6) remains the prime source of the army at that time. He deals not only with the organization, but also with the weapons, including the different types of javelins (*pila*) and armor. His remarkable description of the camp has allowed later commentators such as W. Roy in his *Military Antiquities in North Britain* (1793) to draw it out as a plan in all its detail.

Polybius first describes the annual enrollment for citizens under forty-six years old. Every able-bodied man was expected to serve sixteen years in the infantry or ten years in the cavalry. The twenty-four Military Tribunes, who were appointed first divided the assembled host onto four parts which became legions, each 4.200 strong. All the men took an oath of loyalty (*sacrementum*) to their commanders . At a later assembly the men were selected for their positions in the three battle ranks. These consisted of men differently armed and equipped and divided into ten mantiples , each with two centuries and standard bearers. In the first line were the *hastati*, armed with two *pila* with hardened points, protected by a large shield (*scutum*) and a leather cuirass to which was fashioned a bronze breastplate. A distinctive feature of these troops was the large plume of purple and black feathers attached to their helmets, which increased their height by eighteen inches.

The other two ranks , the *principes* and the *triarii* (the third rank) carried large spears (*hastae*) for throwing. The three ranks were screened by lightly arms *velites*, drawn from the poorer citizens, who carried *pila* and a circular shield. The Cavalry force was 500 strong, divided into ten *turmae*, all recruited from the equestrian order. What may seem to be a rather cumbersome battle line based on property distinction was gradually simplified to the standard type of legionary of the late republic.

(Reference: "Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean - Greece and Rome; Wars and Military Science: Rome,' Graham Webster; Eds. M. Grant and R. Kitinger)

Respectfully Submitted;
Marcus Audens

Book Report — *Siege Warfare In The Roman World—146 BC to AD 378* –Duncan B. Campbell, Adam Hook (Illustr), Elite Series, Osprey Publishing, United Kingdom, 2005 - (ISBN 1-84176-782-4)

The Main contents of the book are:

- Siege Warfare in the Late Second Century BC;
- Siege Warfare in the Age of Marius and Sulla;
- Siege Warfare In the Late Republic;
- Siege Warfare During the Principate;
- The Elements Of Siegecraft;
- Epilogue;
- Select Bibliography;
- Color Plate Commentary.

This book is literally crammed full of information about the history of as well as the techniques of Siege Warfare. There are 59 photographs and drawings in this 64 page book, as well as eight colored Plates and the commentary on each plate, The major Roman campaigns are discussed in relation to the main topic of the book, and weapons, devices, strategy and tactics are discussed as well. The main elements of siege warfare are introduced and clearly discussed: the encampment of the besiegers, the circumvallation, the embankment, the siege machinery, showing both diagrams and full – size models of these materials and examples are part and parcel of this small book. In my opinion this book belongs in every military historian’s library.

I found this book to be extremely interesting, and a real source of inspiration for my military drawings as both an interested military historian and engineer.

The select bibliography of thirteen references, was also most interesting as a possible addition to my military library. Also the fifteen related Osprey Pub. Book titles was an exciting supplement to the material found in this book.

This volume like almost all of Osprey’s books was an easy read and also an excellent reference work for the use in military study..

Respectfully Submitted;

Marcus Audens

Roman Marine #3

As he read his expression darkened somewhat, and when he had finished reading he returned to his bench looked up at Hastus thoughtfully. "Report your last station, your rank and specialty if any," he said in a dry voice.

"My last station was Legio Fourteen, Eighth Cohort, acting principalas, with a specialty in horses and armor."

"Hmmm," said the centurion looking over the papyrus order sheet. "a legion dog-face raised to acting rank just prior to the disbandment of your legion and the partial transfer of your cohort. You do not inspire my confidence principalus." This last was spit out with a contempt that was impossible to miss as though it was distasteful.

Hastus was stung to an angry retort:

"I supported my cohort for six years Primus, first as a legionary, then as a weaponsman, and finally the honor of being made a leader. No one has found fault with my efforts to date, nor will you!!!!" When Hastus had finished he again saluted and ended with, "my report is complete Primus," coming stiffly to attention.

The centurion had sat quietly and listened carefully to what Hastus had to say. A smile played around the centurion's lips, "Well," he said softly but with a hard edge to his words, "you are a proud one are you not?" He continued before Hastus could reply, "However, pride and effectiveness are two different things." The centurion's face darkened, "I have no use for talkers here, only doers. I will speak for us all. There is a fortress to be built, a fleet to care for, and to man against the day of an attack by these cursed northmen, and that day WILL come!!!!" The centurion emphasized this last by striking the table with his fist so that the scrolls there jumped. "I have no time or sympathy for you or your precious posting. You come to us from a disbanded legion and a scattered cohort. Disbanded for what reason we do not know; intrigue, lack of need. Or worse.....cowardice!!! I know you not. Prove yourself!!! The centurion rose from his bench and turned away. Then he turned suddenly and pointed a slim finger up at Hastus, he spoke so low that Hastus could hardly hear him, "and keep a tight hold on your unbridled tongue while you still have it!!" To the staff principalas still standing in the doorway the centurion said, "Put him on the North wall." A frosty glint appeared in his eyes, " give him the ten men of Tiarch."

"It is done centurion," replied the staff principalas and saluting he turned on his heel.

He glanced at Hastus but said nothing. Hastus was almost blind with fury. He could feel the blood draining from his face. His clenched fists were clasped tightly to his side. The little centurion approached him and in his cold quiet way leaned close and whispered, "Get Out!!!!" Hastus fled.

During the course of the check-in procedure, Hastus' dignity and self-appreciation was in tatters. He mumbled brief replies to the official queries and directed his gaze, for the most part, to the stone floor. The sights and sounds of this vast building were all around him, but Hastus was too crushed to see or hear them. The wall of fitted stone blocks was rising all around the administrative complex of the fortress. Gangs of men watched over closely by principales, and in some cases by centurions labored on and below the walls. There was a sense of urgency everywhere and the work went on amid the urgings of the supervisors to work harder, and in many cases longer, trying to keep to a very strict and limited time schedule. To the South rose a great stone arched gate, which was still under construction. Nearby four carpenters worked the huge beams and timber balks that would be used to support the heavy stone blocks as well as the thick wooden timbers that would form the outer entrance doors to the main keep. In the midst of all this bustle the stone wall to the North was strangely empty of workmen. To a hurried glance, it looked to be almost completed, but a closer observation revealed that it was a double wall, incomplete on the outside and only partially filled with rubble.

"Wake up man, and attend to what I say!" The sharp tone of the principalas broke through Hastus' thoughts. He looked at the junior officer for a moment not comprehending his words, and then his military training took over. The events of the last hour were still very much on the legionary's mind. "You definitely know how to make friends in a hurry! You happen to be the third or fourth to cross the Primus so far this year." The principalas looked at Hastus strangely, almost as if he admired the new soldier.

"And where are these persons now, that share the Primus' feelings for them?" asked Hastus with some interest.