

= Triarii =

Triarii ( singular : Triarius ) were one of the elements of the early Roman military Manipular legions of the early Roman Republic ( 509 BC ? 107 BC ) . They were the oldest and among the wealthiest men in the army , and could afford high quality equipment . They wore heavy metal armor and carried large shields , their usual position being the third battle line . They were equipped with spears .

During the Camillan era , they fought in a shallow phalanx formation , supported by light troops . In most battles triarii were not used because the lighter troops usually defeated the enemy before the triarii were committed to the battle . They were meant to be used as a decisive force in the battle , thus prompting an old Roman saying : ' It comes down to the triarii ' ( res ad triarios venit ) , which meant carrying on to the bitter end .

= = History and deployment = =

Triarii may have evolved from the old first class of the army under the Etruscan kings . The first class comprised the richest soldiers in the legion who were equipped with spears , breastplates and large shields , like heavy Greek hoplites . They served as heavy infantry in the early Roman army , and were used at the front of a very large phalanx formation . After a time , engagements with the Samnites and Gauls appear to have taught the Romans the importance of flexibility and the inadequacy of the phalanx on the rough , hilly ground of central Italy .

= = = Camillan era = = =

By the 4th century BC , the military formations the Romans had inherited from the Etruscans were still in use . Though their efficiency was doubtful , they proved effective against Rome 's largely local adversaries . When Gauls invaded Etruria in 390 BC , the inhabitants requested help from Rome . The small contingent Rome sent to repel the Gallic invaders provoked a full @-@ scale attack on Rome . The entire Roman army was destroyed at the Battle of the Allia .

This crushing defeat prompted reforms by Marcus Furius Camillus . Under the new system , men were sorted into classes according to wealth , the triarii being the richest after the mounted equites . Triarii were armed with spears , or hastae , about 2 metres ( 6 ½ feet ) long . They also carried swords , or gladii , about 84 centimetres ( 29 inches ) long , in case the spear broke or the enemy drew too close .

They fought as hoplites , usually carrying clipei , large round Greek shields , and bronze helmets , often with a number of feathers fixed onto the top to increase stature . Heavy plate armour was favoured , with mail also being popular . Many would paint or engrave portraits of ancestors onto their shield , believing that it would bring them luck in battle .

In this type of new Roman legion , the 900 triarii formed 15 maniples , military units of 60 men each , which were in turn part of 15 ordines , larger units made up of a maniple of triarii , a maniple of rorarii and a maniple of accensi . The triarii stood in the third line of the legion , behind the front line of hastati and the second line of principes , and in front of the rorarii and accensi . In a pitched battle , the leves , javelin @-@ armed skirmishers who were attached to maniples of hastati , would form up at the front of the legion and harass the enemy with javelin fire and cover the advance of the hastati , spear armed infantry .

If the hastati failed to break the enemy , they would fall back and let the principes , heavier and more experienced infantry , take over . If the principes did not break them , they would retire behind the triarii , who would then engage the enemy in turn ? hence the expression rem ad Triarios redisse , " it has come to the triarii " ? signaling an act of desperation . The equites , cavalrymen , were used as flankers and to pursue routing enemies . The rorarii , the poorer reserve soldiers , and accensi , the least dependable troops armed with slings , would be used in a support role , providing mass and supporting wavering areas of the line .

=== Polybian system ===

By the time of the second Punic war of the late 3rd century BC , this system proved inefficient against enemies such as Carthage . After a series of more " organic " changes as opposed to a single intentional reform , a new system gradually came into being . Infantry were sorted into classes according to age and experience rather than wealth , the triarii being the most experienced . Their equipment and role was very similar to the previous system , except they now carried scuta , large rectangular shields that offered a greater degree of protection than the old round clipeus .

The number of triarii had been reduced to 600 per legion , now forming 10 maniples of 60 men each . The triarii still made up the third line in the legion , behind the front line of hastati and the second line of principes , but the rorarii and accensi had been phased out . Leves had been replaced with velites , who had a similar role but were also attached to principes and triarii .

Pitched battles were conducted in a similar fashion : the velites would gather at the front and fling javelins to cover the advance of the hastati . If the hastati failed to break the enemy , they would fall back on the principes , who now carried swords rather than spears . If the principes could not break them they would retire behind the triarii , who would then engage the enemy .

This order of battle was almost always followed , the battle of the Great Plains and the battle of Zama being among the few notable exceptions . At the Great Plains , Scipio , the Roman general , formed his men up in the usual manner , but once the hastati had begun to engage the enemy , he used his principes and triarii as a flanking force , routing the opposing Carthaginians . At Zama , Scipio arranged his men into columns , side by side , with large lanes in between . The opposing Carthaginian elephants were drawn into these lanes where many were killed by velites without inflicting many casualties on the Romans . Once the surviving elephants had been routed , he formed his men into a long line with his triarii and principes in the centre and hastati on the flanks , ready to engage the Carthaginian infantry .

=== Marian reforms ===

With the formal military reforms of Gaius Marius in 107 BC , implemented to combat a shortage of manpower due to wars against Jugurtha in Africa and Germanic tribes to the north , the different classes of units were scrapped entirely . The wealth and age requirements were removed ; anyone could join as a career , rather than as service to the city , and all would be equipped as milites , with the same , state @-@ purchased equipment . Auxiliaries , local irregular troops , would fulfill other roles , serving as archers , skirmishers and cavalry . Sallust , in his Jugurthine War , describes several instances in which Roman or allied regular heavy infantry were equipped with light equipment and used as light footsoldiers . This was supposedly a common practice .