

= Principes =

Principes (Singular : Princeps) were spearmen , and later swordsmen , in the armies of the early Roman Republic . They were men in the prime of their lives who were fairly wealthy , and could afford decent equipment . They were the heavier infantry of the legion who carried large shields and wore good quality armour .

Their usual position was the second battle line . They fought in quincunx formation , supported by light troops . They were eventually done away with after the Marian reforms of 107 BC .

= = History and deployment = =

Principes appear to have been born remnants of the old third class of the army under the Etruscan kings when it was reformed by Marcus Furius Camillus . The second class stood in some of the first few ranks of a very large phalanx and were equipped in a similar manner to principes . They would support the heavier first class in the front ranks . It is probable that engagements with the Samnites and a crushing defeat at the hands of the Gallic warlord Brennus , who both used lots of smaller military units rather than a few very large ones , taught the Romans the importance of flexibility and the inadequacy of the phalanx on the rough , hilly ground of central Italy .

= = = Camillan system = = =

In the early Camillan system of organisation of the 3rd and 4th centuries BC , men were sorted into classes based on wealth , the principes being the wealthiest after the triarii . Principes were armed with short spears , or hastae , up to 1 @. @ 8 metres (6 ft) long . They fought in quincunx formation , usually carrying scuta , large rectangular shields , and bronze helmets , often with a number of feathers fixed onto the top to increase stature . They wore heavier armour types , the most common form being chainmail , which offered a good degree of protection without hindering movement .

In this type of legion , the 900 principes formed 15 maniples , military units of 60 men each . The principes stood in the second battle line , behind hastati of the first line and in front of the triarii in the third . In a pitched battle , the leves , javelin armed light infantry would form up at the front of the legion and harass the enemy with javelin fire to cover the advance of the hastati , light spearmen .

If the hastati failed to break the enemy during their engagement , they would fall back and let the heavier principes take over . If the principes could not break them , they would retire behind the heavy triarii spearmen who would then engage the enemy in turn . The equites , cavalrymen , were used as flankers and to pursue routing enemies . The rorarii and accensi in the final battle line were some of the least dependable troops , and were used in a support role , providing mass and reinforcing wavering areas of the line .

= = = Polybian system = = =

By the time of the Punic wars of the 2nd century BC , this form of organisation was found to be inefficient . In a new Polybian system , infantry were sorted into classes according to age and experience rather than wealth , the principes being older veterans with a greater degree of experience . Their equipment and role was very similar to the previous system , except they now carried swords , or gladii , instead of spears . Each princeps also carried 2 pila , heavy javelins that bent on impact to prevent them being removed from the victim or thrown back

The principes had been increased in number to 1200 per legion , and formed 10 maniples of 120 men each . The rorarii and accensi had been done away with . Leves had been replaced with velites , who had a similar role , with forty of them being attached to each maniple in the legion . 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 , who had also been re @-@ armed with swords . If the hastati failed to break the enemy , they would fall back on the principes . 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 , intended to combat a shortage of manpower from wars against Jugurtha in Africa and Germanic tribes to the north , the different classes of units were done away with entirely . The wealth and age requirements were scrapped . Soldiers would join as a career , rather than as service to the city , and would all be equipped as miles , or soldiers , with the same , state purchased equipment . Auxiliaries , local irregular troops , would fulfill other roles , serving as archers , skirmishers and cavalry .