

Roman Military Facts:

The Roman Legion, the ultimate military machine of the ancient world, was the catalyst that spread Roman conquest and civilization throughout the known world. The core of the Roman legion consisted of heavily armored infantry. Disciplined and well trained Legionaries fought in closed ranks against many warrior based armies, where each man fought for personal glory.

With superior tactics and organization, designed specifically for technology such as the *gladius* (Roman short sword), the Legion was an unstoppable force for nearly a millennium. It was among the first paid full time professional army in the world.

Prior to the reforms of Marius in the late 2nd and early first century BC, the Republican Roman Legion had a completely different organization than that which is commonly illustrated for the Imperial period. The earliest Roman army was based originally on the Greek Phalanx system, and the legion continued to evolve from that origin, and from elements of Latin tribes in Italy. By the time the Romans began to resist the yoke of Etruscan rule, the unique legionary system was firmly rooted. The Romans abandoned the use of the hoplite spear as its primary weapon of war and instead moved onto the large shield (*scutum*) and short sword (*gladius*) as their weapons, and corresponding tactics of choice.

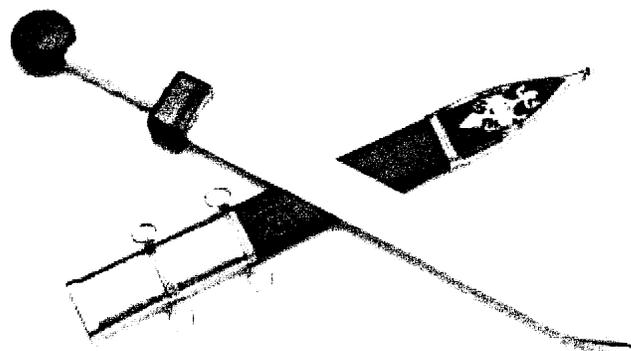
The most significant difference between the Republican and Imperial legions dealt with its makeup of social and financial qualifications. Except for extenuating circumstances where the very survival of Rome depended on using anyone available for defense, the Republican legion maintained a strict social hierarchy. Only landowning citizens were allowed to serve under optimal circumstances, and the status of one's total wealth along with military experience determined their place in the infantry. As each citizen prior to Marius provided weapons and equipment from their own estates, gear could vary, but there was a basic uniform code to be followed within reason. This system was devised out of necessity, but perhaps incorporating the concept of loyalty to the city and morale of the men. Since the army was made up of citizens who could afford their own armor, they were the obvious choice for service. However, in the earliest days, the common concept that only the land owners had a real stake in the outcome of the battle likely played a key role in the development of the early Roman Legion.

A soldier within the Republican Legion served much the same as those within the Imperial one. They were eligible for service for a 20 year period and were retired or exempted from further service after that point. Unlike the Imperial army, however, the earlier Republic did not maintain a standing army so to speak, and soldiers may or may not be entirely active during this time period. In some cases, such as during the Punic Wars, a single soldier may have seen nearly continual service throughout his 20 year eligibility, but at others, he may have had give only periodic service based on the need for the army. Though the Romans rarely had a time of complete peace throughout their history, there were times when it was conceivable that these citizen soldiers could spend a great deal of time working their own lands.

Later under the Emperors, the concept of a Legionary personal bodyguard, under Emperor Augustus, the Praetorian Guard was established as a direct bodyguard for the Emperor. The

headquarters of the legion, or praetorium provided the namesake, and the practice was simply altered to encompass a much broader spectrum. The Praetoria Cohors, as they were first known, was originated with the emergence of great soldier politicians, Scipio Africanus being among the first to adopt these personal guards. Formed from the best, bravest and most loyal of his own men, the Praetoria were generally exempt from any standard camp duties, save for protecting their general.

The later emperors, such as Caesar, Antonius and Octavian certainly fielded their own personal guardsmen. It was not until Octavian's ascension as Augustus, or emperor, that the Praetorian Guard as an institution was established. In the turmoil of nearly a century of civil war and social strife, Emperor Augustus saw the need to establish a body of soldiers explicitly loyal to him. These guardsmen, unlike other military units, engaged in combat or went on campaign only at the direct behest, or in the company of the Emperor and the Emperor's family. Their primary role, of course, was the personal protection of the Emperor, but they also functioned as a police force both in Rome and other Italian cities, at least in the beginning. Originally, Augustus wanted to maintain some Republican tradition, as well as avoid the appearance of tyrannical control. Therefore, those praetorians stationed within the walls of Rome were not allowed to wear the customary armor or uniform that had been widely used. Called the *cohors togata*, this name reflected that these troops wore a civilian toga, more like the Republican people and senators than soldiers. However, they were armed with the standard army issue *gladius*, as opposed to the *fascēs* (or bundled wooden rods) of the senators. Outside of Rome, and on the battlefield, a Praetorian would be equipped in much the same manner as any other Roman soldier.



(Roman gladius)