## Army and Society in the Late Republic and Early Empire

## Lawrence Keppie

The army which acquired and consolidated Roman control over Italy and soon the wider tracts of the Mediterranean world in the final few centuries BC consisted of legions of Roman citizens supported by contingents drawn from allied communities and subject tribes (Keppie 1984a, 14). Essentially the army in these early centuries consisted of a careful selection of able-bodied citizens who were required to present themselves annually for army service in the legions, led into war by their elected magistrates (Polybius 6.19; Hopkins 1978, 1-74; Patterson 1993). At the end of the campaigning season the legionaries returned home to tend to their farms which hopefully other members of the family had ministered to over the summer months. Soldiers were required to provide their own equipment and were initially unpaid: military service in defence of the state was an honour, a duty and a privilege.1

This system had worked well while the Romans were engaged on the defence of their home territory or in the conquest of adjacent areas. But as Roman domains became more extensive, and the distance between homeland and the scene of service increased, the system had to be adapted. From the early second century BC onwards, soldiers needed to overwinter in the provinces, first in Spain and later in such provinces as Macedonia and Asia (Brunt 1971, 416ff). Magistrates returning to Italy at the end of the campaigning season took home those whose term was adjudged complete, and their successors in office brought out new recruits. Soldiers were no longer fighting to defend their homeland, but to expand control over territories overseas; both they and their commanders hoped to profit from it. Nevertheless,

even at this time, only those with property could serve the state, though the 'qualification' was gradually lowered; from the later second century the state took over the provision of equipment, and after about 100 BC the ranks were open to any freeborn citizen, of whatever means. One can imagine that soldiers with experience were always preferred to youthful recruits, and when the former presented themselves voluntarily, they were gladly accepted. Such men looked for promotion to the centurionate, and began to consider themselves nearprofessional soldiers; it is impossible to know what percentage of such men might be found under arms in any particular year. The best known example of such a man is Spurius Ligustinus, reported by Livy (42.34.5-11). Presenting himself for service in 171 BC, he was concerned to secure an appointment appropriate to his lengthy and courageous service over nearly 30 years. His repeated absences abroad had not cut him off from family life: he reports that he had six sons and two married daughters. In the event Ligustinus was made chief centurion of the First Legion, other candidates deferring to his prior claim for preferment.

By the early first century BC the expectation of soldiers was for six years continuous service at some distance from their homes, though each man was legally bound to offer himself for further service, between the ages of 17 and 46, up to a maximum of 16 years. In a recent study Walter Scheidel (1996, 93-138) has estimated at up to 50% of all eligible males might see see some military service during their adult lifetimes. The pool from which soldiers could be drawn was always increasing as the population grew and Roman territory became

more extensive; after the Social War of 90-89 BC, all freeborn male inhabitants of Italy south of the River Po were Roman citizens.

The first century BC was categorised by all but continuous military conflict, and by intense political rivalries at Rome. The details do not concern us here. However, the bouts of civil war from 49 BC onwards, between Caesar and Pompey, between the Triumvirate and the Liberators in 44-42 BC which led to battle at Philippi, and then between Octavian and Antony, the last culminating in the battle of Actium in 31 BC, saw the enlistment of a vastly increased number of men who but for the special circumstances of the time would never have seen military service at all, and had no wish to prolong it beyond a hoped for victory of their faction. This increased demand for men, who were encouraged to service by lavish promises of land and money (which of course were in the end only payable to the victorious side in each phase of the wars) could not be met from Italy itself. Indeed many of the protagonists in these wars were necessarily denied access to the traditional recruiting grounds of peninsular Italy, by dint of their provincial power bases, and were thus forced back on sources of manpower more immediately to hand. One can think here of Pompey in the east in 49-48 BC, Brutus and Cassius in the eastern provinces in 44-42 BC, Lepidus in Africa in 41-36 BC, Sextus Pompey in Sicily and the western Mediterranean in 40-36 BC, and most obviously Antony in the east between 41 and 30 BC (Brunt 1971, 473ff, 698f). These commanders could conscript men from the communities of Roman citizens to be found in areas such as Spain, southern Gaul, north Africa and western Asia Minor, the descendants of earlier emigrants; it is difficult to quantify the numbers which would have been available, but important not to underestimate them (Brunt 1971, 159-264). But they could never have been sufficient. Thus the commanders looked also to non-citizens to fill the ranks. There were indeed precedents for this: in 55 BC Pompey had raised in Spain what the literary sources term a 'homegrown legion' (legio vernacula), and Caesar in Gaul had in 52 BC created a legion from non-citizen Gauls, named the Alaudae, the Larks, after their bird-crested helmets. In both these cases the need for additional troops, to be quickly available, outweighed conformity with standard procedures. The significant fact is that they, and other commanders and provincial governors during the civil wars that marred the succeeding decades, chose to form such recruits into legions rather than create additional cohorts of native and allied infantry. Presumably they had specific need of heavily armed infantry to bear the brunt of battle and stand in line with the regular legions.

Another result of civil war was that the number of legions in service greatly increased. In the middle of the first century BC, before civil war broke out, it was normal to find 12-14 legions in service each year, though this figure was often inflated by wars in progress, e.g. in Spain in the 70s; but by the time that Caesar crossed the Rubicon in January 49 BC, the number was about 21, by his death there were some 37 in service, and to these could be added the 10 veteran legions of his former command in Gaul which were in process of disbandment and settlement in colonies. At the time of Philippi it is likely that some 60 legions were in service, and hardly fewer by the time that Octavian met Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in September 31 BC (Brunt 1971, 473-509). Throughout the previous decade Octavian had been based in Italy, and thus could draw soldiers from normal sources, but Antony was unable to do so.

In contrast to earlier times when legions were in general reconstituted annually, and in any case disbanded after fairly short lifespans, Octavian chose in 41 BC after Philippi to retain the existing numerals and titles of many of the older legions which now became permanent institutions, and indeed for the most part continued to exist for up to four centuries (Keppie 1984a, 132ff). Some of Antony's older legions were accorded the same rights after Actium. The reason is clear-Octavian saw the value of adherence to his side of legions which had fought with Caesar. By 30 BC Octavian had effectively reunited as much of the old army of Caesar as still existed, under his legal heir. The 27 or 28 legions of this new army were distributed to provinces of the empire where military campaigning was imminent or external threats required action—principally northern Gaul to the Rhine, Spain, Syria and the Balkan provinces bounded on the north by the River Danube.

The social and economic impact of this long period of internal conflict during the first century BC was considerable. On the one hand, the cost in lives and money was significant (Brunt 1971, 435ff). On the other, the victorious troops received as their reward for adherence to the winning side land in Italy itself, usually at the expense of existing owners who were dispossessed without compensation and presumably, in a very large number of cases, financially ruined (Brunt 1962; Keppie 1983, 101ff).

The impact is reflected in the literature of the time, including the poems of Vergil (Eclogues i, ix), Propertius (Elegies i.21, i.22, iv.1.126-30) and Horace (Epistles ii.2.130-36). Older views that the discharged soldiers were spendthrifts and wasters, who quickly deserted their newly acquired farms and drifted to large towns, to Rome or the provinces of their former service have, I hope, been firmly discredited: these veterans aimed to become permanent landowners, and to some extent at least they succeeded (Keppie 1983). The soldiers saw in these land grants an opportunity for social advancement for them and their families; many must have been sons of small farmers, others former owners who had lost touch with their own farms, or sold up, or been forced out by aristocratic owners amassing large estates. The settlement schemes offered a chance of redress, and for Caesar and Octavian a means of introducing into the Italian countryside, and indeed to the provinces, a new class of middling proprietors keen to succeed.

In 30 BC, with the ending of civil war and the return of peace, we might have expected Octavian (or Augustus as it is easier now to describe him, from the title he assumed in 27 BC) to revert to normal sources of recruitment for the legions, and for a time at least we may suspect that he did. While our literary sources are poor in comparison with earlier and later epochs (e.g. Appian's Civil Wars close in 36 BC and Tacitus' Annals do not take up the story until the year of Augustus' death in AD 14), we have the narrative account by Velleius Paterculus (underestimated as a source of factual information on the latter half of Augustus' reign and the northern wars in which as an officer he took part), together with the much later account of Cassius Dio. Epigraphic material in the form of inscribed tombstones of serving and retired legionaries remains slight in comparison with that available for later generations, though a small number of retired veterans can be identified at towns in Italy or the provinces. Epigraphic evidence becomes important only after Augustus' death with the survival of substantial number of gravestones recovered at legionary fortresses on the Rhine, such as Mainz and Bonn, where it constitutes our chief testimony for the replacement in the legions of Italians by men of provincial origin. The process was gradual and probably, in the western provinces, it had not progressed very far by the time of Augustus' death. For legions based in provinces east of the Aegean, that is in Galatia, Syria and Egypt, the process of transformation began sooner, and progressed more quickly. From the beginning of Roman involvement with the East, there seems to have been a reluctance of Italians to serve there, or an aversion to it. At first sight this seems surprising: the East was a land of wealth, valuable raw materials, and caravan routes to the fabled Orient. It was also of course known for its bare and baking deserts, bleak in winter, and was the scene of several Roman reverses, particularly under Crassus at Carrhae in 53 BC. The dilution of the Italian component in the eastern legions began, I suspect, soon after Actium.

One of the two legions found garrisoning Egypt from Augustus' reign onwards was the XXII Deiotariana. The numeral, last in the Augustan series, suggests a unit not formed before Actium, and the title is a clear allusion to, or tribute to, Deiotarus, king of Galatia in Caesar's day, whom we know to have formed two legions from his own subjects, equipped in the Roman manner (Brunt 1971, 474, 506). Deiotarus himself died in 40 BC and his kingdom remained independent till the death of his son Amyntas in 25 BC when it was incorporated into the Roman Empire. We have to assume that the remnants of the royal forces were now accepted into the legionary strength of the Roman army, in a unique example of incorporation which it easy to think that shortage of more conventional forces might have encouraged, as does its subsequent posting to Egypt, always a 'special case,' where Roman military forces were commanded by an equestrian praefectus rather than a senatorial legate. Galatia, a mountainous zone with a strong Celtic (Gallic) element in its population, indeed remained an important source of legionary recruits throughout the Early Empire and after.<sup>2</sup> Some specific pieces of evidence can be adduced to flesh out our picture of recruitment to legions in the East: from Egypt have come inscribed slabs from Coptos (ILS 2483 = EJ 261; see Kennedy 1985) and, less conclusively, a papyrus perhaps listing legionaries of the Roman garrison under Augustus (Fink 1971, no. 3); both documents demonstrate that the legionaries were mostly from the East, and probably non-citizens by birth. A similar picture of legionary manpower comes from an unexpected source: tombstones recovered over many years in the territory of the old Caesarian colony at Narona in southern Dalmatia on the River Neretva. These commemorate veterans of a legion VII (presumably the later VII Claudia) who had settled there in or very soon after AD 14 (Wilkes 1969, 112, 245). The information they provide is valuable on two fronts: firstly the length of service is well beyond the 20 years laid down by Augustus in AD 5 (see below), indeed up to 33 years. Secondly, and more surprisingly, most of the men derived from cities and communities of Asia Minor, including the province of Galatia, only recently added to the Empire. Given their likely date of discharge from the army, they had been enlisted around 15-10 BC. The soldiers bear the names and voting-tribes indicative of Roman citizens, but close examination of the names shows that almost certainly they were noncitizens enfranchised to join the legion. Mitchell has demonstrated that legions VII and XI had served during Augustus' middle years in Asia Minor, moving to Dalmatia in the closing years of the reign, perhaps in or soon after AD 9, very probably in the aftermath of the Varus disaster (Mitchell 1976; cf Syme 1995, 254-55).

As noted above, some 27-28 legions were held permanently in service during Augustus' reign—this was twice the total regularly in commission before Caesar's time. This total actually seems quite modest, given the need to defend and consolidate control over a very extensive territory. The strain of civil war had caused military service to lengthen well beyond the six years which recruits in earlier times had to endure; with the return of peace it did not noticeably shorten. In 13 BC the length of service was fixed at 16 years, and in AD 5 it was established at 20 years, to which a period ostensibly 'in reserve' was added. In a recent article I have argued the possibility that these arrangements were concessions to the soldiers who had often to serve even longer at this time, rather than surreptitious or calculated attempts by Augustus to increase it, though later emperors tended to delay releases, because of the high cost of discharges (Keppie 1997b, 91).

In his recent survey of demographic patterns in the Roman army of the Empire, Walter Scheidel estimated that under Augustus between a fifth and a quarter of all those eligible for service would have needed to enlist annually to maintain the number of recruits required for 28 legions and the emperor's Praetorian Cohorts; his conclusions were based on calculating the numbers of young men who would turn 20 years of age in a particular year (Scheidel 1996, 93). As he observes this is a high percentage, and worthy of our close attention. I have not yet made a full study of the detailed figures he offers, but he seems not to have taken into account the trend towards enlistment of non-citizens, especially in the east, which effectively reduced the percentage required from the citizen body as a whole.

In 13 BC Augustus made an important break in the equation between military service and land settlement in colonies within Italy, which had become a standard expectation during the civil wars, and caused such disruption and discontent among the population at large, especially after the battles at Philippi and at Actium (Dio 54.25.5). He substituted a cash gratuity. In his last years Augustus did settle men on land at their home towns, presumably hoping to continue the traditional settlement schemes in a less provocative way (Augustus *RG* 16.2; Brunt 1971, 339; Keppie 1983, 208ff). His successors continued to provide some land in the provinces, but to most soldiers they gave a cash gratuity in its place (Keppie 1984b).

If the length of military service was inevitably a severe discouragement to many of those who had traditionally provided the legions' manpower, then another factor was its location. The long reign of Augustus witnessed an extensive series of military campaigns: the emperor had put into effect a strategic plan to reach clear geographical borders: the Euphrates, the Danube, to the Rhine and even beyond, and the completion of conquest of Spain (Wells 1972, 3ff). Archaeological discoveries in recent years have emphasised the comprehensiveness of Roman military efforts beyond the Rhine, to the Weser and the Elbe in the years from 13 BC onwards. No-one who has observed the massive foundations and post-pits which supported timber-framed buildings within the legionary winter-camps east of the Rhine at Haltern or Oberaden along the River Lippe need doubt the seriousness of Roman intentions (Kühlborn 1995; Wells 1998). More recently fresh discoveries of similar bases at Marktbreit near Wurzburg (Pietsch 1991) and Dorlar on the River Lahn (von Schnurbein and Köhler 1994) have added to the picture of organised preparations for permanent conquest. The scene of military service was moving ever further from Rome's Mediterranean heartland.

In AD 6 a severe brake was put on this relentless advance. Just as Roman forces moved northwards from the Danube and eastwards from the Upper Rhine to overwhelm the kingdom of Maroboduus in modern Bohemia (which would have created a much more manageable northern frontier line along the Elbe and Danube), revolt broke out in half-conquered Pannonia and Dalmatia between the advancing legions and the Italian heartland to the rear. Tiberius, leading the legions northwards from the Danube, hurriedly retraced his steps, and emergency measures were put in hand at Rome itself (Wells 1972, 237ff).

Hardly had the crisis passed, after three hard years of stern campaigning, than news reached Rome of a even more serious disaster, this time involving, at a stroke, the loss of substantial numbers of Roman legionaries: Varus, legate of Germany (and Augustus' great-nephew by marriage), had been ambushed east of the Rhine, and his three legions, together with auxiliaries, massacred. The location we now know was at or near Kalkriese north of Osnabrück (Schlüter 1993; Kühlborn 1995, 145ff). Thus by the event of one day, or rather three or four days during which morale crumbled in the face of persistent attacks, the Roman army lost some 10% of its legionary manpower. There were indeed some survivors of the defeat, as well as some detachments which had been placed in line-of-communications bases to the rear, who were able to escape westwards, and prisoners who lived on as slaves. This was not one of Rome's worst military disasters, but it is difficult to suppose that the losses were fewer than 10,000-12,000 men, not counting families, servants, slaves and those auxiliaries who remained loyal.3 There was panic at Rome: levies were held in the city (and presumably elsewhere as well, but the poor literary sources do not allow us to judge), fresh auxiliary regiments were raised, and cohorts both of free citizens (ingenui) and freed slaves, the latter significantly termed

voluntarii (Saddington 1982, 77-82). No new legions were formed at this time, but to judge from Tacitus's account of the mutinies which followed Augustus' death in AD 14, many slaves were enlisted into existing legions at this time (below).

In response to the loss of Varus' three legions, garrisons in provinces further south and east moved westwards in a shunting process, to plug the gap, or hold the line, at the western limit of the great northern frontier arc (Syme 1933, 28-33). The impact on Augustus himself is his closing years is well known: Quinctili Vare, redde legiones was a cry frequently heard from his lips (Suetonius, Aug. 22). But the impact on the army in general and indeed on society at large is more difficult to document—the loss of some 10,000-12,000 men, presumably of varying ages between about 17 and mid 50s, must have had a demographic impact; but it is hard to track it in the epigraphic record. The monument at Xanten, of the centurion Marcus Caelius, who fell in the Varian War, is familiar (ILS 2244). Families throughout Italy, indeed also in Spain and southern Gaul, and indeed any other areas which had seen sons depart for military service in these three legions, must have been devastated by the loss, and may have died out as a result. Nothing in our written sources alludes to any communal grief, and I am unable to identify memorials to others (apart from Caelius) who fell, though indeed gravestones to a few members of the lost legions can be cited; but none alludes specifically to the bellum Varianum, and most may simply be members of the legions who had completed their formal military services in earlier years and returned home (Keppie 1997a, 393-97).

Our sources do allow us to notice the longer-term impact on other units in the army, which can be recovered from Tacitus' detailed accounts of mutinies which broke out in the summer of AD 14 in summer camps where legions had been concentrated, first at or near Emona (Ljubljana) in present day Slovenia, and at or near Cologne on the Rhine frontier, when news of Augustus' death was announced. The mutineers demanded military service on fixed conditions, to end at 16 years (the traditional Republic maximum), with a cash gratuity paid out in camp immediately (Tacitus *Ann.* 1.16ff; Wilkes 1963; Keppie 1973; Keppie 1997b). Among the Rhine mutineers Tacitus alludes to the destabilising

effect of a *vernacula multitudo*, the dregs of Rome's noncitizen, indeed servile population, evidently drafted in large numbers into the legions in the immediate aftermath of the Varus disaster (*Ann.* 1.31; cf. Dio 57.5.4), which was now seeking a means of escape from long years destined to be spent on the cold northern frontier, far from Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Difficulty in finding additional recruits, or persuading them to service, under Augustus and his immediate successors, may come as a surprise, when we know that very much larger numbers had served in the civil wars only now fading from memory. But the difference in the numbers of recruits supplied is perhaps more apparent than real. It is by no means clear that we need to conclude that Italians had within a generation developed an aversion to military service or become less warlike; considerable numbers continued to serve. Many of those under arms in the civil wars were in any case recruited in the provinces, often from non-citizen communities. Certainly Augustus and his successors were reluctant to conscript Italy's youth when they did not come forward voluntarily. It is perhaps a surprise that sons and grandsons of those civil war veterans settled by Augustus throughout Italy seem to have been uninterested in serving; but many of the veterans themselves had been called out only in civil war conditions, and were not themselves long-serving near professionals.

Given these changes to the length, the location and the nature of military service during the first century BC, it is hardly surprising that the percentage of Italians, the traditional source of manpower in the legions, began to fall away. Tables prepared long ago by the late Prof. Giovanni Forni, on the basis of epigraphic evidence of tombstones, indicate that of legionaries recruited under Augustus, Tiberius and Gaius, about 62% were Italian, and of those recruited under Claudius and Nero about 50% were Italian (Forni 1953, 51ff; cf. Brunt 1974). The figures in reality apply only to the western provinces, especially the garrisons along the Rhine and the Danube, not to the East where we have practically no epigraphic testimony (Mann 1983). It may be wondered whether the impact of the Varus disaster was a factor in declining enthusiasm for service, though our limited sources offer no clue. Indeed it is not that Italians ceased to serve that comes as a surprise, but the fact that the percentage remained as high as it did under the Julio-Claudian emperors, given that service was now so long, in distant locations, and offered much less opportunity for enrichment. By the Flavian period of the later first century AD the number of Italians had become negligible, and by about AD 100 Italians had, to all practical purposes, ceased to serve. Fathers who in the past had sent sons to serve in the legions urged them to join a Cohort of the Praetorian Guard: service was shorter, safer and normally based in Italy, chiefly at Rome itself. Their places were taken by provincials, who might be descendents of Italian emigrants of long ago, or descendants of settlers placed there by Caesar and Augustus, or increasingly from non-citizen native communities who were happy to earn citizenship by the act of enlistment.

Perhaps an incident of admittedly half a century later, reported by Tacitus in his account of the civil war of AD 68-69, can serve to end this paper. When, at daybreak on 25th October 69 after a hard fought all-night battle between the legionaries supporting Vespasian's candidature for the imperial purple and those backing the incumbent emperor Vitellius, soldiers of one of the Flavian legions, III Gallica (which had been until recently part of the garrison of Syria) turned to hail the sunrise in oriental fashion, the Vitellians were convinced that Flavian reinforcements, which they knew to be approaching, were within sight of the battlefield, so that their cause was lost; they took flight at once (Tacitus, Hist. 3.24-25). The legion, which had once fought with Mark Antony and by this date had been stationed in the East for upwards of a century, had a make-up which was doubtless almost exclusively 'eastern'. The story vividly illustrates a changed cultural context. Yet, while the interests and experiences of the legionaries had diverged from those of the population of Rome, capital of the Empire, a city which most had never seen or were unlikely to visit during their military service, we cannot automatically suppose that soldiers who marched on Rome did so only to destroy or sack it; rather their aim was to overturn the government in favour of one they felt more legitimate. The army's loyalty to Rome was to remain strong long after its manpower had ceased to be ethnically Roman.

Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow

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## Notes

- I From the early 4th century the soldier began to receive a daily sum to cover 'expenses', a *stipendium* which when computed to cover a whole year amounted to 120 denarii; the word *stipendium* came in time to denote a year's military service.
- 2 A similar uncertainty surrounds the origins of the other legion attested in Egypt under Augustus—the legion III Cyrenaica. The title indicates some service or success in North Africa, and the numeral ranks alone as one already twice duplicated in the army list of the Empire (by III Augusta based in Africa, probably serving with Octavian before Actium, and III Gallica, in Syria, known to have been with Antony). We know nothing of the origins and early history of III Cyrenaica, but can retain some suspicion that its antecedents were not entirely conventional (Sanders 1941).
- The cemetery located by excavation west of the Haltern fortress yielded graves of women and children as well as adult males, likely members of the garrison; some of the deceased were probably in promoted posts, even officers, to judge from the size of their monuments (Kühlborn 1995, 82ff with Abb. 12.)
- 4 Percennius, a leader of the mutineers in Slovenia, had in former life been an applause-leader in a theatre, possibly at Rome itself (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.16).
- 5 In common with many legions based in the east, we lack detailed knowledge of men serving in it at this time; see Forni 1953, 222; Mann 1983, 144.