

Ancient Rome – Roman Army

The Roman army was the backbone of the Roman Empire and one of the most successful armies in world history. It was well-trained, well-equipped, and well-organized. In order to guard such a large empire, the army took advantage of well built Roman roads to move about the empire quickly.

Who were the soldiers?

The soldiers in the Roman Legionary were all Roman citizens. They signed up to fight for 20 years. At the end of the 20 years they were generally awarded land and/or a large sum of money. This way the army was made up of trained and experienced soldiers. It also put land in the hands of loyal soldiers.

There were also non-citizen soldiers called auxiliaries. They joined for 25 years and were awarded Roman citizenship at the end of the 25 years. Roman citizenship was a big deal and came with lots of privileges.

How was the Roman Army organized?

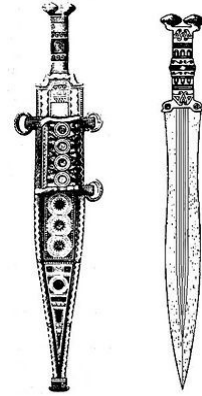
The army was divided up into Legions of around 5400 soldiers. Legions were led by a Legate who was usually a Senator or a Governor. Legions were made up of ten groups of soldiers called cohorts. Cohorts were then further divided into groups of 80 men called centuries. The officers, or leaders, of each century were called centurions.

Armor

The government knew the importance of the Roman army and provided them with good armor and weapons. Roman soldiers had armor made of strips of strong iron. The iron made the armor strong and the strips made it flexible. They also had iron helmets which protected their heads and neck, but still let them have good vision for fighting. All of this [iron](#) armor was heavy, so they needed to be strong and in good shape. They also carried tall shields in some cases.

Weapons

The Roman soldiers used a variety of weapons including a pugio (dagger), gladius (sword, see picture to the right), hasta (spear), javelin, and bows and arrows. The soldiers were trained to fight with their weapons and practiced on a regular basis. They would sometimes spar with each other using wooden swords.



Roman Gladius by Juan Cabre Aguilo

Fun Facts about the Roman Army

- Officers, such as centurions, wore large crests on their helmets. This allowed the soldiers to see them better in battle.
- The average legionary carried at least 90 pounds of weight and often had to march 20 miles a day.
- At its largest, the Roman army was made up of 30 legions, or over 150,000 soldiers. Counting the auxiliary soldiers, some estimate there were well over 1 million soldiers in the Roman army.
- Gaius Marius, Roman consul and general, is largely credited with transforming the Roman army into the powerful group that conquered much of the civilized world.
- The Romans used catapults to throw huge rocks which could knock down walls. They also used large crossbows called ballistas to fire arrows that were more the size of spears.



Roman ballista catapult

Ancient Rome – Roman Army Quiz

1) The main division of the Roman army was around 5400 soldiers. What was this division called?

- Troop
 - Brigade
 - Regiment
 - Platoon
 - Legion
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2) What were auxiliaries in the Roman army?

- This was a smaller group of 80 men in the legion
 - They were the officers who led the soldiers
 - They were soldiers who were not Roman citizens
 - They were the non-soldiers such as cooks and medics
 - They were soldiers stationed inside the city of Rome
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3) What was the armor that the Roman soldiers wore made of?

- Bones from oxen
 - Bronze
 - Strips of iron
 - Toughened leather
 - Hardened steel
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4) What type of weapon was the Roman gladius?

- A type of sword
 - A spear that could be thrown
 - A long pole that was used from horseback
 - A small knife or dagger
 - A type of bow used with arrows
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5) What were two units of Roman soldiers that were smaller than the legion called?

- Regiment and Platoon
- Cohort and century
- Legate and consul
- Troop and brigade
- Squad and section

6) What was a Roman centurion?

- A very old officer who was retired
- The leader of a legion of men
- A Roman soldier who was not a citizen
- An army officer in charge of a century of men
- A special type of soldier with expertise in engineering

7) About how many men were there in a Roman century?

- 10
- 25
- 50
- 80
- 100

8) True or false: Roman soldiers were generally well-rewarded for their service in the army after they retired.

- TRUE
- FALSE
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9) What great Roman general is generally credited with building the Roman army into a powerful and organized world power?

- Julius Caesar
- Trajan
- Lucius Sulla
- Augustus
- Gaius Marius

10) What work of Roman civil engineering was important in allowing the Roman army to protect such a large empire?

- Miles of Aqueducts leading into Rome
- The arch
- A paved network of Roads
- The Pantheon
- The Colosseum