EIGHT

Republican Rome

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Introduction

Wars and conquest were the hallmarks of Republican Rome.[1] Nearly every year for almost five hundred years, the city's armies marched off to war; their efforts won Rome first hegemony in central Italy, then dominance within the peninsula, and finally rule over the length and breadth of the ancient Mediterranean. Long, relentless warfare profoundly affected the Roman people, yet what most impelled and sustained this massive undertaking was nothing less than the very character of Republican Rome itself. No case therefore more strikingly illuminates the continuous interplay of war and society as they acted and reacted upon one another. This chapter centers on two fundamental and related questions: first, what features of the Republic's economy, society, politics, and ideology enabled Rome's armies to win this vast imperium and, second, what impact its acquisition in turn had on Rome.

To begin with some background, the Republic's expansion falls into three broad phases. Rome became prosperous and powerful under the monarchs who ruled it in the late seventh and sixth centuries as well as at the outset of the Republic established in 509 when a group of dissident aristocrats overthrew Rome's last king. Its territory at the close of the sixth century was perhaps 820 square kilometers, and scholars usually put the total population between twenty-five and forty thousand. Temple construction and the archaeological record reveal affluence as well as cultural sophistication, while a treaty struck with Carthage in the first year of the Republic demonstrates Rome's status as the

The Roman Empire, ca. 44 B.C.E.
(Dates of provinces are given in parentheses)

region's dominant power. The city was on a par with the largest of its Etruscan neighbors and all but the grandest poleis in the contemporary Hellenic world.[2] Yet the ensuing decades would sorely test the city's strength. Large-scale migrations out of the Apennine highlands, probably in response to population growth and famine, created widespread dislocation throughout Italy and drove tribes living in the mountains east and south of Latium and Rome down into the plain in search of food and land at the expense of earlier settlers. During the mid–fifth century the city found itself locked in a complex, desperate struggle with these migrants as well as its various Latin and Etruscan neighbors. Rome's territory shrank, and the archaeological record indicates precipitous economic decline as well. Rome's military situation seems to have improved toward the end of the century, although reliable details are scarce. One solid fact, however, emerges at the close of the fifth century: the city's conquest of Veii, its powerful Etruscan neighbor to the north and chief rival for dominance in the region. Unfortunately, Rome's humiliating loss at the Allia River (traditionally 390) to a large war band of Gauls soon followed, and although the Gauls departed after pillaging the city, the defeat seems to have badly shaken Rome's standing in central Italy. Thereafter local warfare continued down to the latter part of the fourth century.

A new phase opens at this point, marked by swift, dramatic growth over the next two centuries. In 338 Rome gained decisive control over Latium after crushing a revolt of its former allies and incorporating many of them among its citizens. Rome's territory now leapt to 5,525 square kilometers, with a total free population of perhaps 347,300.[3] At about the same time, the focus of Roman warfare began to shift to more distant theaters, particularly Campania, a rich agricultural region to the south. Involvement here set in motion a long series of wars with the Samnites who occupied the mountains east of Campania. Increasing Roman success eventually brought most of the rest of Italy's peoples into the struggle on one side or the other, either fearing the growth of Roman power or in an attempt to employ it in local conflicts. Rome's great victory at Sentinum in 295 over a combined army of Samnites, Etruscans, and Gauls turned the tide decisively in Rome's favor. Fighting continued intermittently down through 272, particularly when Tarentum, the last major city free of Roman dominion, enlisted the Epirote king Pyrrhus against Rome in 281. However, by 264, on the eve of the city's first war with Carthage, its control over Italy south of the Appenines was unchallenged. Rome's territory was now perhaps 26,805 square kilometers, and the total free population around 900,000.[4] In addition, the city had forced nearly every other state in the peninsula into alliance with itself, whether by intimidation, conquest, or by offering protection against a powerful neighbor. Allies surrendered control of their foreign relations to Rome and allowed it to draw on their manpower for its armies. Together with

the city's colonies (see later discussion), this network of alliances nearly tripled Rome's military manpower.[5] Two great struggles with Carthage followed: the first (264–249) gave Rome control of Sicily; the second, the war with Hannibal (218–201), brought mastery of the western Mediterranean. Wars in the east ensued, against Macedon twice (200–196 and 171–167), and with Syria and the Aetolian League (191–189). At the same time, Rome completed the conquest of Gallic northern Italy, begun before the Hannibalic War, and undertook the pacification of Spain. By the last third of the second century, after renewed conflicts in Spain, Greece, and Macedon, and against Carthage, Rome controlled the entire Mediterranean basin.

Conquests well beyond the Mediterranean characterize the final phase of Republican expansion, most notably Gaul, initiated in the last decades of the second century but principally the work of Caesar in the 50s, and Anatolia and Syria by Pompey during the 60s. Fighting also occurred in Africa and the Balkans, and Rome withstood a grave threat at the close of the second century from migrating Germanic tribes, the Cimbri and Teutones, defeated in southern Gaul and northern Italy under Marius's leadership. A backdrop of social and political conflict at Rome distinguishes this phase of Rome's expansion, most dramatically revealed in the revolt of Rome's Italian allies in 91–89 and two civil wars: between Marius, his successors, and Sulla, 89–81, and then in 49–45 between Caesar and Pompey and then Caesar and Pompey's heirs. The latter, along with the renewed civil wars following Caesar's assassination, effectively ended the Republic and laid the basis for the establishment of the monarchy.

War and Society in the Early and Middle Republic

Rome could sustain this arduous burden of conquest over so many generations because war greatly helped the city mitigate socioeconomic and political conflicts. The origins of this pattern lie far back in the Republic's earliest years. Scholars dispute nearly everything about this era owing to the lack of contemporary sources and the distortions introduced, wittingly or not, by ancient authors writing centuries after the fact. What follows claims only to be a fair reconstruction based on current scholarship but one, it is hoped, that avoids building too much on hotly disputed premises. Most Romans in the fifth century were farmers, as they would remain throughout the city's history, producing crops destined almost exclusively for their own consumption, principally *far* (emmer wheat). Since the average size of their holdings appears to have been quite small—in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 hectares—they also probably exploited some portion of Rome's public land, the *ager publicus*, in order to survive and, in many cases, flourish, for a considerable number of these farmers grew wealthy enough to serve as hoplites. As in contemporary Greece, a phalanx of

citizens able to equip themselves with a full panoply defended early Rome. This group, the *classis*, formed the core of the city's armed might, numbering at the beginning of the Republic probably between three and six thousand hoplites in all.[6] Below them, *infra classem*, poorer citizens fought as light-armed skirmishers, while those with the greatest wealth, principally a small aristocracy known as the *patricians*, served as cavalry and supplied the army's officers and generals. The patricians also derived their income from agriculture via control over large tracts of land and the dependent labor necessary to work them. All citizens served without pay and supplied not only their own weapons and armor but also food while on campaign in keeping with the rudimentary state of Rome's financial structures and public fisc.[7]

The military crisis confronting Rome during the fifth century brought tensions latent in this arrangement to the surface. Enemy raids and loss of territory probably hurt the city's small farmers the most, since they had few resources to fall back on in the event they lost all or even part of a year's crop, while losing their land meant complete ruin.[8] Those so affected had little choice but to seek a livelihood and protection by placing themselves in the debt of wealthy aristocrats, who could probably mobilize private military resources among kinsmen and dependents to defend themselves and their lands. Under the institution of debt bondage (*nexum*), a free man offered his labor to another on the security of his person in return for support. He thereby ceased to be completely free, for the penalty for failing to perform his part of the bargain was sale into slavery. For the aristocratic creditor, on the other hand, the fifth-century troubles were both bad and good: his lands, too, were threatened, but he was more able to sustain losses and to protect his crops, while the availability of debtors increased. And because such men possessed few other options, a creditor was in a position to dictate terms and impose burdens beyond what was customary. More debtors from whom more labor could be extracted enabled aristocrats to cultivate more land and so grow richer. The land they exploited, however, was usually *ager publicus*, and their appropriation of it further undermined the economic viability of the small farms that sustained most of the populace, the plebs. The latter therefore agitated throughout this period both for limits to the abuses debtors could suffer under *nexum* and especially for land to enable farmers to avoid or escape debt. But war was shrinking Roman territory, and the rich, who controlled the public lands that might have gone to satisfy plebeian demands, were naturally reluctant to give it up or to see the supply or powerlessness of dependent laborers for their estates limited. Yet as the ranks of prosperous smallholders dwindled, the number of men able to serve in the city's phalanx diminished with it. Some debtors may have continued to serve as hoplites, but if so their oppression scarcely made them eager defenders of a polity that allowed their merciless exploitation against its foes. Fears that a similar fate might someday await them

probably affected even those plebeians who had not yet fallen into debt and made them, too, reluctant warriors. Hence as Rome's military crisis increased the bitter antagonism between the plebs and the patricians over debt and landlessness, the city's ability to defend its remaining territory declined, leading to further shrinkage, increasing internal conflict over land and debt, and consequently greater military weakness in a steadily downward spiral.

But war also offered a way out of the impasse. The military pressure on the Republic furnished the plebs with a weapon capable of forcing concessions from the patricians: the *secessio,* a general strike that included refusal of military service. This made the two sides somewhat more equal in their struggle and impelled compromise, initially the creation of plebeian magistrates, the tribunes of the plebs, to protect debtors from abuse. Subsequently in the late fifth and fourth centuries, as Rome slowly built up a network of alliances that could mobilize enough manpower to turn the tide in Latium, conquered territory became available for distribution to landless plebeians, creating an alternative to debt-bondage and so limiting the labor force aristocrats could use to monopolize public lands needed by plebeian smallholders to sustain themselves. Yet patrician aristocrats benefited not only because the pressure on the public land they already held thereby eased but also through the overall increase in the amount of public land available for exploitation, for not all conquered land was parceled out to colonists or among individual settlers. The problem of supplying labor for their domains remained, but to meet this need the former occupants of conquered lands, many of whom defeat had reduced to slavery, were now available. Consequently, aristocrats could afford to yield to demands to let their debt bondsmen go and, ultimately, acquiesce in the abolition of *nexum* itself. Moreover, the economic independence and prosperity of Rome's small farmers expanded the pool of manpower available for the legions and thereby facilitated further conquests.

Successful war thus allowed the Republic to avoid any permanent solution to the competition for access to public land between rich and poor; instead, the creation of ever more *ager publicus* simply palliated that conflict. This link between conquest and profit—both land and the movable booty that victory also brought—became a fundamental incentive leading the Romans to war year after year.[9] Moreover, this expansion also contained a self-perpetuating dynamic in the continuous supply of poor peasants that it concurrently produced. Not all of those the city defeated faced slavery. Much depended on circumstances, and these not infrequently led Rome to allow many of the conquered to keep their freedom, but at the cost of surrendering a significant portion of their lands and becoming Roman allies. Others struck treaties to forestall attack or strengthen themselves against enemies closer to home. Alliance imposed a significant military burden: an ally's principal obligation was to supply troops to

fight alongside the legions. However, allies also shared in the spoils of victory, including colonies. These provided a place for impoverished allied citizens—particularly those whose land had gone to Rome as the price of peace—but also required further conquests to acquire new territory for colonies, conquests that the allies' contribution to Roman military power would in turn help facilitate. New conquests, however, brought new allies and newly impoverished peasants and began the cycle again.

In the fourth century and particularly following the suppression of the Latin revolt, Rome also began to use the extension of its own citizenship as an instrument of imperial expansion, forcing cities whose loyalty it particularly wished to secure to merge into the Republic.[10] This openness to new citizens set Rome apart from many other city-states, particularly the Greek poleis, which prided themselves on their homogeneity and exclusiveness.[11] On the contrary, the Romans' foundation myth emphasized the highly disparate character of the first settlers Romulus and Remus brought together when they established their city, and this sense of themselves as a composite people certainly helped minimize friction as the Romans absorbed ethnically distinct peoples into their citizen body.[12] This practice probably accounts for much of the growth of Rome's population, since preindustrial agrarian populations do not increase naturally very quickly, and we know of no reason to impute extraordinary fertility to the Romans of the early and middle Republic. It also certainly helped expand the number of men available for the legions. But at the same time this increase continuously renewed the numbers of small farmers and landless among the citizens who looked to Rome's conquests to better their lots, thereby placing further pressure on the city to expand.

As long as the supply of enemies whose land they could conquer and distribute lasted, therefore, the Romans could find social peace at home and at the same time satisfy their allies' needs in order to keep together the alliance system that underpinned their military power. War fostered political peace, too, within the Republic's ruling class, and transformed its character. The aristocracy of the early Republic, the patricians, had by the mid–fifth century formed themselves into a closed caste in response both to pressures on them for concessions from the plebs and the military exigencies of the era.[13] They controlled Rome's government through the senate, technically only an advisory body to the Republic's magistrates but in fact possessing great authority by virtue of its members' prestige, their collective experience and expertise, and the fact that magistrates were drawn exclusively from its ranks and returned to it following their year in office. Patricians also occupied all priesthoods; in addition, they alone knew Rome's unwritten laws and, even after these were codified and published around 450 B.C., the complex procedural formulas essential to conduct suits before the courts. Yet toward the end of the fifth century and increasingly throughout the

fourth, some plebeians challenged these pillars of patrician domination, seeking particularly access to the city's chief magistracy, the consulate. These men, to be distinguished from the mass of small and middling plebeian farmers, acquired the estates necessary to aspire to aristocratic status in the course of the extraordinary increase in Rome's territory that accompanied its conquests. The same warfare also enabled them to gain the prestige essential to lead their fellow plebeians and so claim a place among the city's ruling elite. The army drew its cavalry and officers from the wealthiest citizens, including rich plebeians, and constant warfare afforded the latter many opportunities to win the military laurels that allowed them, back in Rome, to become tribunes of the plebs and spokesmen for plebeian demands. Because plebeians constituted the bulk of Rome's population, their tribunes soon sought a role in the leadership of the whole community and access to the consulate itself. And since their followers were essential to victory in the wars that patrician consuls led, leading plebeians could link agitation for a share of political power to the economic demands of small farmers and gradually force the patricians to open first the consulate (367), later the priesthoods (300), and finally almost all positions of authority to plebeians.[14]

Not surprisingly, as these wealthy plebeians claimed their share of political power at Rome, opportunities arose for them to forge marriage alliances with families from the old patrician aristocracy. The result was the creation of a new elite, the *nobilitas*, for whom war continued to play a vital role. Its members defined themselves through both high birth and an ideology that stressed possession of *virtus* (manly excellence) displayed in the pursuit and acquisition of *gloria* and *fama* (glory and renown) won through service to the *res publica* (Rome's public affairs). War constituted by far the city's most important public business, and hence war offered the greatest scope for accumulating *gloria* and *fama*. These and the *virtus* they bespoke most of all demonstrated a man's fitness for leadership and paved the way to high public office, particularly election to the consulate. Tenure of this magistracy, in turn, stamped a man and his descendants as noble or confirmed the elite status of a scion from a family already distinguished in this way. Consequently, competition for the office was always intense, and possession of the greater military prestige frequently determined its outcome. The victories that consuls won thereafter helped underwrite the *auctoritas* (influence) that their voices carried in senatorial and public debate. Hence the city's constant warfare served as a theater for competitive aristocratic performance, and its opportunities for personal distinction were vital to the ambitions of the *nobilitas*. This dependence of Republican political culture on war contributed greatly to encouraging a fundamental belligerence among the city's elite.[15]

Thus war at Rome became the nexus linking the interests of rich and poor, Roman and ally, patrician and wealthy plebeian, junior senator and distin-

guished ex-consul. This fact goes a long way toward explaining the harmony of Republican and Italian society during the third and much of the second centuries, the era of the city's greatest conquests. One should not, however, go on to claim that structural factors fully account for Rome's wars during this period. Proximate causes played a critical role throughout. The actions of Rome's enemies and allies more than once drew the city into conflicts.[16] The tactical and strategic imperatives that shaped individual commanders' short-term decisions also significantly affected the course of Republican foreign policy.[17] At times even simple fear, most notably of the Gauls in northern Italy, may have incited Rome to war.[18] Also, because the allies' obligations to Rome were purely military, continuous warfare may have been essential simply so that by availing itself of the allies' military cooperation Rome thereby maintained and strengthened its hegemony over them.[19]

The final ingredient that made this system work so successfully was a military instrument capable of winning the victories that would satisfy all the constituencies at Rome that war served. However, its development first required significant changes in the economic basis of the Republic's war-making. Early Rome's yeomen-hoplites could campaign only for a fairly brief period both because of their agricultural work in the spring and fall, but especially because they paid their own expenses while on campaign.[20] Among subsistence farmers operating in a poorly developed market economy that offered few opportunities to raise cash crops, ready money was in chronically short supply, and that, in turn, limited their ability to wage war. Because wheat is bulky and laborious to transport, soldiers on campaign usually took along only enough for a few days.[21] Once these supplies were gone, they relied on local markets or pillaging to feed themselves. But wheat in Italy is ripe enough to harvest only for a comparatively short time during June and July.[22] Before that it is inedible, and afterward in antiquity it had usually been gathered and secreted behind city walls out of reach. Consequently, markets supplied food much more dependably, although in hostile territory even these might be scarce. However, buying food meant spending money, and because subsistence farmers, even comparatively prosperous ones, were reluctant to part with what little cash they had, their campaigns tended to be brief and consequently close to home.[23]

This limitation mattered little as long as the Republic warred principally against its neighbors, who fought under similar economic constraints. In the latter decades of the fourth century, however, Rome began to challenge more distant and difficult enemies; campaigns in Samnium especially required armies to remain longer in the field. Accordingly, the way wars were funded had to change as well.[24] The solution, payment for military service (*stipendium*), not only solved the immediate problem but also set in motion a series of changes that fundamentally altered the nature of Roman warfare. Soldiers could now

buy the food necessary to remain in the field for months or even years at a time, allowing the Republic's armies to undertake wars not only throughout Italy but also across the entire Mediterranean basin.[25] As campaigns required troops to fight throughout the fall and winter, warfare in turn began to impinge on the requirements of the agricultural cycle and impelled changes in the composition of the legions. Men who bore primary responsibility for their farms simply could not stay away from them until late autumn or winter and still expect to plow and plant enough to support themselves and their families. Only younger men who had not yet taken up primary responsibility for a farm were able to absent themselves on campaign for six or seven months at a time. Roman men seem to have married fairly late—in their middle to late twenties—and before that age many in addition will still have had living fathers, meaning they had some time to wait before they inherited the family farms.[26] So between coming of age at eighteen and being able to start families of their own, they were available for extended military service that conflicted with the agricultural requirements of a subsistence farm.[27]

The economic strength that permitted the Republic to offer such payments therefore represents the cornerstone in Rome's military expansion. War, of course, to some extent funded itself: Rome frequently required defeated foes to provide indemnities that compensated the city for the cost of a war, and booty as well represented an important source of income to offset the sums disbursed for pay. But whatever return a war brought came only at the victorious conclusion, while commencing and sustaining it until then required cash up front. The tax that funded military pay, the *tributum,* seems to have accompanied *stipendium* from its inception; only with the massive booty from the conquest of Macedon in 167 in the treasury did the senate cease its collection. But the senate's ability to collect the tax stemmed not from any qualitative change in the Roman economy, which remained primarily agrarian throughout the Republic, but from an increase in the number of prosperous farmers who could afford to pay it.[28] In part, their numbers and wealth resulted directly from Rome's success in resisting the incursions of its neighbors in the fifth century, in the warfare that enlarged its own territory in the fourth and the third, and from the practice of using this conquered land to succor poor and landless citizens. However, it seems more than coincidence that the introduction of payment for military service occurred only following Rome's defeat of the Latin League in 338 and the incorporation of most of its members among its own citizenry, vastly increasing the size of that body and, accordingly, the number of taxpayers.

Pay and longer service in turn allowed Rome in the last decades of the fourth century to develop the sophisticated manipular army of the middle Republic. This involved changes in both weapons and tactics.[29] Heavy infantrymen now adopted an oblong shield, a short stabbing sword, and throwing spears in place of

the hoplite's round shield and thrusting-spear. The bronze breastplate and greaves disappeared: those who could afford it wore mail armor, otherwise a metal pectoral, while a more open helmet permitting greater lateral vision replaced the closed hoplite-type helmet.[30] These changes were closely connected with innovations in Rome's order of battle. The Romans broke up the unitary mass of their phalanx into small squads, the maniples, in which legionaries arrayed themselves more loosely than hoplites in a phalanx, since soldiers wielding swords or throwing spears require more room around them than densely packed phalangites. A more open formation for the thirty maniples constituting a legion also evolved, the so-called *quincunx*, an arrangement of three lines of ten maniples each, each maniple separated from the maniple to its left and right by a distance equal to its own front, and each maniple of the second and third lines placed behind the gap between two maniples in the line in front of it. The arrangement resembled the five spots on a die or the diamonds, clubs, and so forth, on a five in a deck of cards. The maniples themselves fell into one of three age-groups, which in turn correspond to the position each held in the Roman line of battle. Younger men, the *hastati*, in maniples of 120, occupied the front rank; those next in age, the *principes*, also grouped in maniples of 120 men each, constituted the second line; while at the rear the oldest formed the reserve, the *triarii*, whose maniples contained only 60. All of these were armed as described previously except for *triarii*, who still carried heavy thrusting spears. Thus 3,000 heavy infantry normally constituted a legion, in addition to 1,200 of the youngest and poorest recruits who served as light-armed *velites* and 300 cavalry, as before drawn from the upper class. A Roman army normally comprised two legions accompanied by an equal or greater number of allies. What the legions lost in solidity in consequence of these changes they more than made up for in increased tactical flexibility and maneuverability.

Precisely how this formation operated in battle remains controversial, but the key seems to have been the ability of the maniples to fall back or move forward to reinforce one another through the gaps in each line, as well as the looser arrangement within a maniple that permitted its soldiers successively to move up to and retire from a battle's front lines. The result was by far the most effective infantry the ancient world ever knew, as the longevity of the manipular army and especially its successor, the cohort army operating on the same tactical principles, demonstrates. This is not to say that Rome won every battle its legions ever fought nor to deny that its massive reserves of manpower were critical in allowing the Romans to absorb punishing losses and still continue to fight. The Romans, in fact, only gradually realized the full potential of the tactical system they had created. But in the end the legions won every decisive battle and every war, and their ability to do so gained Rome its empire. For our purposes, the important point is that pay was essential to this system's success, for it allowed

Roman armies to become much more proficient at arms than levies of farmers who only assembled in response to trouble. The heavy infantry of a manipular legion along with its *velites* and cavalry, together for several months on campaign, had considerable time to drill and otherwise cultivate the skills and discipline they would need in battle. The result was by no means professional armies, but armies unquestionably far better versed in the art of war than many of their opponents.[31] In achieving this extraordinary level of proficiency, the manipular system itself also played a critical role. The power of a Greek polis's phalanx lay in the strength of the bonds among its citizen-hoplites, men who had long lived with one another and knew each other well. Rome was by this time no longer a simple city-state: its territory extended over much of central Italy, and public life for many citizens was mediated through the *municipia* (communities of Roman citizens who also managed their local affairs) rather than Rome itself. The men annually levied for a Roman phalanx might have little familiarity with one another and hence did not bring to war the intense mutual loyalty necessary to cohere under the pressure of combat. Breaking the phalanx into smaller blocks allowed the men of each maniple to develop a far greater degree of cohesiveness among themselves than they would have had as individuals within the mass of a phalanx.[32] Thus by constructing their legions out of many small, tough, easily replicated maniples and keeping them in the field for long periods, the Romans found a way to overcome the limitation on military effectiveness inherent in annual levies of citizen-soldiers from among a large and diverse population, and to create a powerful instrument of war.

Yet the ramifications of the manipular army extend far beyond simply winning battles, as important as this was. The legions' remarkably consistent success was vital to aristocratic cohesion and the stability of the Republic's highly competitive political system. The concentration of honor and authority among a small number of its members was always a threat to an aristocracy like Rome's, breeding jealousy and resentment among those excluded and raising the specter of divisions developing that would ultimately lead to civil strife. Avoiding this problem meant ensuring that a few men did not monopolize the magistracies, particularly the consulate, that conferred prestige and power on those who held them. Instead, tenure of such offices needed to circulate widely within the elite. Yet these posts usually entailed military command, and access to them came through victory in hotly contested elections in which many of the voters would follow the winner off to war. Nothing would have been more natural than for citizen-soldiers to prefer tried and tested former consuls who had already demonstrated their ability to win battles. Yet the trend at Rome was precisely the reverse as repetition of the consulate became less and less frequent during the middle and late Republic, allowing more and more aristocrats to reach this supreme honor. No coincidence, then, that this trend began in the

early decades of the third century, following the creation of the manipular system. Its effectiveness allowed the Romans to develop an ideology of victory that placed little weight on the tactical or strategic skills of the commander but instead saw victory as principally won by the soldiers themselves along with the city's gods. The general served mainly to inspire his men by setting an example of courage and determination in the fighting, a role that most aristocrats, trained throughout their lives to exhibit *virtus,* were capable of performing. Hence elections were won or lost on the basis of the respective *fama* and *gloria* of the candidates and their ancestors, not skill at managing armies in combat, something only experienced and successful former generals could plausibly claim to possess. The Romans anticipated their armies would win no matter who was in command provided only that he possess the requisite moral character.[33]

The army also played a vital role in fostering and strengthening a common civic identity among the Romans. The mechanisms that promoted unity in a polis, such as participation in religious festivals or at political events, tended to operate with diminished efficacy in a widely dispersed citizen body such as Rome's in the middle Republic, for usually citizens had to come to Rome to take part and many lacked the resources to make the long journey with any frequency. Military service was different. It brought together men from all over Roman territory in their late teens and twenties for many months each year over several years. It emphasized to them the special status they shared as Romans, in contrast not only to the enemies they conquered but also to the cohorts of allies who shared their campaigns but whose conditions of service were patently worse. It crosscut local identities and allegiances, since men were enrolled in the legions without regard for where they came from, and ties to hometown patrons counted for little or nothing. Military service entailed a direct interaction between the citizen and his state, one of the few an ordinary man might ever experience in a society pervaded by the mediating links of patronage and where, as in most preindustrial states, the government's overall intrusion into his daily life was minimal at best. At the same time, since the political and social elite of Rome continued to supply the armies' officers and generals, the legions' command structure reflected and at the same time reinforced the social and political hierarchies of the society at large.[34]

The Late Republic

Changes in tactical organization and social composition mark the advent of the late Republican army. In the final decade of the second century, after two hundred years of success, the manipular system finally met its match against the Cimbri and Teutones, whose numbers simply overwhelmed the maniples. In response, the Romans made the cohort, a larger formation that had been used