

MARIUS'S MULES

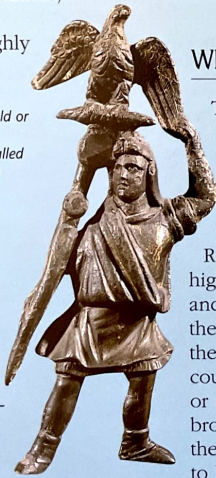
Marius allowed all Roman citizens to enlist, whether they owned land or not, and each man was given the same weapons and training. Soldiers also began to receive wages for the first time, so lots of poor men joined the army to earn a living. Marius made Roman soldiers carry so much heavy equipment that they became known as 'Marius's mules'.

ORGANIZING THE ARMY

The Roman army was divided into groups of 6,000 men, called legions. The soldiers, known as legionaries, were very well trained and highly organized.

Every legion had a gold or silver eagle that was carried by a soldier called an aquilifer, shown in this bronze statue.

Most soldiers fought and travelled around on foot, but the army also had a cavalry - mounted soldiers who rode alongside the legions and could move ahead to surround enemies. (For more about the army's organization, see pages 356 and 357.)



A combat helmet made of bronze and iron worn by a Roman cavalry soldier

WEAPONS OF WAR

The Romans fought most of their battles on open ground, attacking their enemies with javelins and swords. But the Roman army was also highly skilled at besieging and capturing cities. First, the soldiers surrounded the city so that no one could escape and no food or equipment could be brought in. Then, they used catapults to launch rocks at the defenders, and tried to demolish the walls with battering rams and siege engines.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS

The Romans recruited soldiers from all the areas they conquered, so the army had an almost endless supply of men. These foreign warriors, known as auxiliaries, often had special skills which made them useful. For example, warriors from the Middle East were skilled archers, and many other auxiliaries fought in the cavalry. By the 2nd century AD, there were more auxiliaries in the army than legionaries. When they retired, auxiliaries were given Roman citizenship as a reward for their loyalty and bravery in fighting for Rome.

This stone carving shows archers from the Middle East serving as auxiliaries in the Roman army.

