

L'ARMÉE ROMAINE DES ORIGINES

par

ANDRZEJ ŁOŚ

ABSTRACT: Thanks to the development of archaeology as well as the bloom of anthropological and comparative research, studying the earliest history of the Roman army is no longer such a hopeless endeavour as it was regarded to be until recently. The French scholar Th. CAMOUS attempted to prove, not without success, that the descriptions of military episodes from the period of the early Roman monarchy composed by ancient historians should not be *a priori* considered literary fiction. CAMOUS was able to find striking similarities between the military activity of Romulus' army and the wars lead by primitive peoples as observed by ethnologists. His analysis encourages the renouncing of the *ars nesciendi* regarding the most ancient history of Roman warfare. It is beyond doubt that the hoplite army did not appear *ex nihilo*. Military activity similar to *levée en masse*, comprising family members, companions (*sodales*), and clients of the most powerful aristocrats had possibly already started in the non-*polis* phase of Roman history (before the mid-7th century). It is probable that the army created after the assumption of the *polis* regime was initially a federation of such private units which were put at the king's disposal. The position of the first rulers in relation to clan chiefs was relatively weak. It could be strengthened by the politics of territorial expansion realised by Tullus Hostilius and especially by Ancus Marcius.

The theory that the Roman army in its oldest times used war carriages to break the enemy's ranks, which is accepted by some investigators, is most probably a historical myth. The testimonies about the role of the cavalry are more trustworthy. Its operation would mainly be short raids into the enemy's territory, often with the purpose of robbery, as well as a military reaction towards similar attacks by hostile neighbours. It is impossible to reconstruct infantry tactics from the period preceding the hoplite reform introduced by Ancus Marcius or – more plausibly – by Tarquinius Priscus in the first decades of the 6th century.

Il y a plus de soixante ans, F. DE MARTINO parvenait à la conclusion que «la ricostruzione dell'esercito romano antico è tra le imprese più ardue, e forse disperate»¹. Peut-être, cette opinion de l'éminent homme de loi, historien et homme politique italien était-elle trop radicale, mais elle ne mérite certainement

¹ DE MARTINO 1952: 146.