

should gain unrivalled power. Therefore there were two consuls, each with equal *imperium*, who held office for twelve months and then returned to private life, since it was illegal to hold the same office in consecutive years and in theory a decade was supposed to pass before the same post could be held again. The competition between senators for the senior office made it unusual for it to be held more than once, highly exceptional more than twice. Only at times of great crisis was the normal order suspended and a single dictator appointed with supreme power overriding even that of the consuls. Yet this post was no basis for lasting dominance of the State, since it only lasted for six months. Most often it was used as a way of holding elections for the next year's magistracies in the absence of the current consuls and the dictator resigned after a matter of days.<sup>21</sup>

Rome's political structures do not fully explain the strong sense of community which bound all classes in the State together. To a modern eye Roman society may seem grossly unfair. The more prosperous classes had a disproportionate political influence and a small élite monopolized the important offices. There is no evidence to suggest that poorer citizens felt themselves to be unfairly disadvantaged. Although poorer citizens do seem to have been fairly deferential in their attitude to the wealthy, they still felt free to voice their opinion of their leaders in certain circumstances, as when soldiers marching in a triumph customarily sang ribald songs about their commander. Patronage pervaded Roman society, connecting all classes together in an intimate bond of mutual dependence. Patrons expected support and respect from their clients, senators for instance would demand their political and electoral support, but in return clients expected to receive aid in their own affairs. However indirectly, whether through the patron of their patron's patron or even further removed, most poorer citizens had some form of access to those at the centre of power. Social advancement was also possible, and perhaps far easier than is often imagined. Roman citizens identified themselves very strongly with the Republic and felt a part of it. When the State went to war all classes participated, each according to their level of prosperity, and all shared both the danger and the prizes of victory, even if the wealthier benefited more from the latter.

#### The Roman Army

Like the Greek city states Rome had originally possessed a hoplite army, composed of citizens wealthy enough to equip themselves with the panoply of a heavy infantryman. Most hoplites were farmers and could afford to spend only a few weeks on campaign before they needed to return to their

fields. As a result a conflict between the hoplite armies of two city states was of short duration, usually decided by a single clash between the rival phalanxes. The principle of a citizen militia was retained at Rome, long after other states had come to rely on professional soldiers. However, the Romans modified the system to cope with demands of wars which were being fought further and further away from the city, and the intimate link between hoplite warfare and the agricultural year was broken. From the beginning of the fourth century the Roman State paid its soldiers for the duration of their service. The wage was not high and certainly did not make the army a career, but it supported the soldier during his service. Men now served in the army until they were discharged, usually at the end of a campaign which might last more than one year. Some effort was made to distribute the burden of military service evenly throughout the population, since it was rare that more than a small minority of citizens were required for the army in a single year. Legislation required a man to serve for no more than sixteen campaigns and it was unlikely that many men reached this maximum before the Punic Wars. Effectively the Roman army had changed from a citizen militia into something resembling a conscript army similar to those which flourished in Europe after the French Revolution. The State could call upon citizens to serve in the army and for the duration of their service it provided them with food and pay, but also required them to be subject to military law and a harsh system of discipline. The willingness of Roman citizens to submit to these conditions allowed the Romans to develop an army that was larger, better trained and more complex than the citizen armies of any other city state.<sup>22</sup>

Our most detailed picture of the Roman army is provided by Polybius, but it is difficult to know whether all the practices he describes were followed throughout the period of the Punic Wars. His description of the army appears to be set in the Second Punic War, although it has sometimes been argued that it refers to the mid second century. We do not know whether or not the armies fielded in the First Punic War were significantly different to this in structure and tactics, but the admittedly brief descriptions of the battles in this conflict do not suggest this.<sup>23</sup>

Originally the word *legio* (legion) had simply meant army or levy and referred to the entire force raised by the Roman people in one year. However, as the number of citizens regularly enrolled for military service increased, the legion became the most important subdivision of the army. By the third century the legion consisted of five elements. Its main strength consisted of the three lines of heavy infantry. All of these men had the same basic property qualification and they were divided according to age and

