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PANOPLY AND IDENTITY DURING THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

by Michael J. Taylor¹

Abstract

This paper examines how the Romans in the early Republic adopted Celtic panoply, in the process abandoning Greek-style hoplite equipment. The first part details the Celtic aspects of the major pieces of Rome's new military equipment: La Tène sword, oval shield (scutum), javelin (pilum), mail armour and Montefortino helmet. The next section seeks possible military and cultural explanations for this transition, suggesting among other factors that the new kit may have been driven by increased recruitment from beyond the narrow hoplite class. The panoply eventually coalesced into a symbol of specifically Roman identity, especially as the Romans deployed distinctively equipped armies into Magna Graecia and the Hellenistic East.

L'articolo esamina come i romani nella prima repubblica adottarono la panoplia celtica, abbandonando gradualmente l'armamento oplitico di stile greco. La prima parte del contributo descrive in dettaglio gli aspetti celtici dei principali elementi del nuovo equipaggiamento militare di Roma: la spada di tipo La Tène, lo scudo ovale (scutum), il giavelotto (il pilum), la cotta di maglia e l'elmo di tipo Montefortino. La sezione successiva cerca possibili spiegazioni militari e culturali per questa transizione, suggerendo tra l'altro che il nuovo armamento potrebbe essere una conseguenza dell'incremento del reclutamento al di fuori della ristretta classe oplitica. La panoplia finì col diventare un simbolo di identità specificamente romana, specialmente quando i romani dispiegarono eserciti equipaggiati in maniera distinguibile nella Magna Grecia e nell'Oriente ellenistico.

CELTIC WEAPONS, CITIZEN SOLDIERS

This paper examines changing military panoply as a cultural dynamic in the early and middle Roman Republic. In the sixth and fifth centuries BC, combatants in central Italy predominantly fought with an imported Hellenic panoply, centred upon the round, rimmed hoplite shield (*aspis*). In addition to its effectiveness in combat, hoplite gear marked the elite status and cosmopolitan horizons of its wearer. The famous Chigi olpe explicitly linked hoplite weapons and tactics to aristocratic sociability and long-distance commercial contacts with the Aegean

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