

A laurel wreath, a symbol of honor and victory, frames the central text. The wreath is composed of dark green leaves with lighter green highlights, arranged in a circular pattern. In the background, the Latin phrase 'SPQR' is faintly visible in a large, serif font.

The Roman Military



SPQR

SPQR=

Senatus Populusque Romanus

(the Senate and the people of Rome)

Rome conquered with its army. And it conquered a lot of area.



The Romans fielded an amazing military that changed over time.

- It had several strengths

1. Had a strong hierarchy / chain of command that allowed subordinates to take initiative
2. Had solid and effective weaponry
3. Had flexible and maneuverable battle formations called legions
4. Were very good engineers

The armor

- In the early republican days, soldiers wore bronze cuirasses, much like the Greek hoplites.
 - These are later worn by just higher ranking officers and were usually nicely decorated.



- They also used chain mail (Lorica Hamata)
 - This was a long chain mail shirt that went down to around mid-thigh to the knees.
 - It would weigh around 15 pounds and a belt would be worn to take some of the weight off the shoulders and to keep it from flapping around as much.



- Some used Lorica Squamata, or scale armor.
 - This was cheaper and easier to produce than chain mail but was less flexible and more vulnerable to attack, especially by upward thrusts that just bypassed the scales.



- The classic Roman armor, though, is the Lorica Segmentata (this is what we call it – we actually don't know what the Romans called it).



- The lorica segmentata were layered bands of iron riveted to strips of leather.
- It allowed for good degree of movement (which the solid cuirasses lacked) while still offering a solid amount of protection (which the chain mail and scale armor lacked)



- The helmet
 - The main one is the imperial Gallic helmet.
- It had hinged cheek guards.
- Also had a front visor and a very wide rear visor for the purpose of deflecting blows (they weren't for shade).
- Just looking at this helmet and comparing it to the Greek helmet, what does it tell you about how the Romans fought?





- The helmet of a Roman centurion (kinda like a modern day army captain).

The centurion was in charge of the basic battle units. Because he was the mobile field commander, he had to be identifiable and so wore the transverse crest on his helmet (no, it wasn't Mohawk or Mandinka style).





Actual Roman helmets



Top down view

Photo Romanhideout.com



Back view

Photo www.RomanHideout.com

One more



Photo www.RomanHideout.com

- The scutum
 - The shield. It was about 3 to 4 feet in length and was curved in a semicircle.
- It would be held by a handle right about where that pommel is. The pommel protected your hand and could also be used to whack an enemy in the face.
- The top and bottom would also be lined with metal. This enabled both the ends to be used offensively. Why bother using your sword to dispatch an enemy when a shield blow to the throat will work just as well?





- It was made of strips of wood, so it was lightweight, but strong.
- The shields would overlap each other in battle, but would part enough for sword thrusts.



The weapons

The Gladius

- This was a short thrusting sword about 22 inches long and weighed about 3 pounds.



- The gladius was worn on the right side and drawn out with one hand (you didn't want to risk cutting the guys to your side by bringing it across your body).





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- The pilum
 - A throwing spear (javelin) about 6 feet long.
 - It had a pyramidal iron tip and a narrow iron shaft that attached to the main, heavy wooden shaft.
 - A legionary carried two into battle. Shortly before engaging the enemy, he would throw both.



- The weight of the wood combined with the throw on that narrow point would drive it through most shields, armor, and flesh.
- The narrow iron shaft would almost immediately bend and deform, no matter what it hit.



- This made it a non-returnable weapon. If it hit the ground, the enemy couldn't pick it up and throw it back. It was useless after one use.

- The tip's shape also meant that it couldn't be removed. If it hit your shield, you had a heavy bent spear hanging off of it. You either had to leave it, thus making your shield extremely unwieldy or you had to throw away your shield, leaving you defenseless.

- Brilliant!



- So one guy throwing a pilum, not too intimidating. What if it was 10 guys like below. Now imagine 100 pila coming your way followed quickly by a second volley. I wouldn't like it one bit.



So you put it together and...





Actual fighting:

- I'll let this guy tell it:



Up to 500 soldiers would be deployed in a line, shoulder to shoulder facing the enemy. The shield (scutum) is held slightly away from the body so the soldier can move it up and down to block incoming missiles



They would wait for the enemy to come close, then as one they would take a step forward and thrust their scuta into the bodies of faces of the enemy, causing them to lose balance and so render them vulnerable.



The scutum is then withdrawn and the sword (gladius) is thrust into the body of the opponent. Note the way in which the gladius is deployed horizontally to pass between the enemy's ribs into his vital organs.





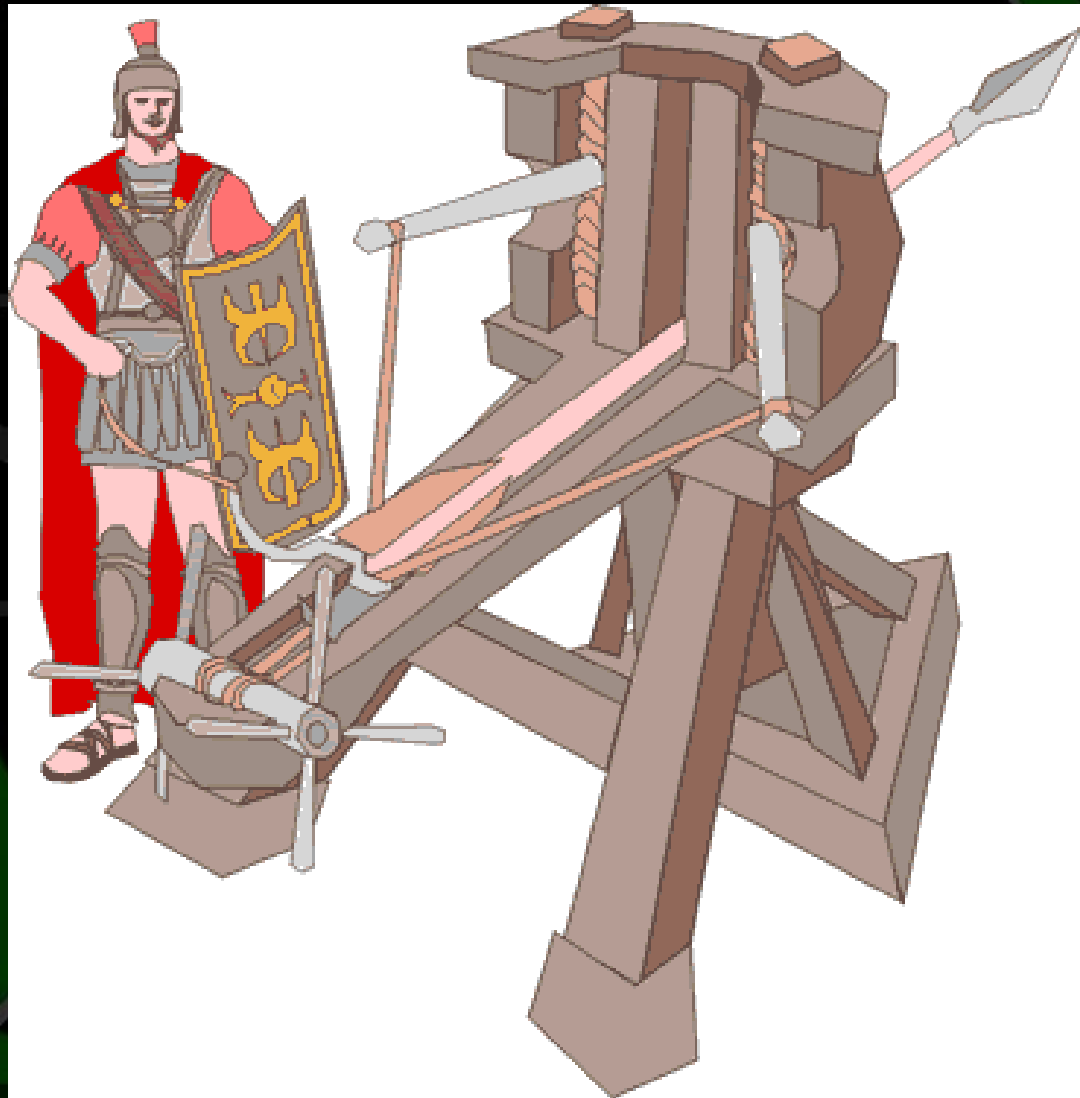


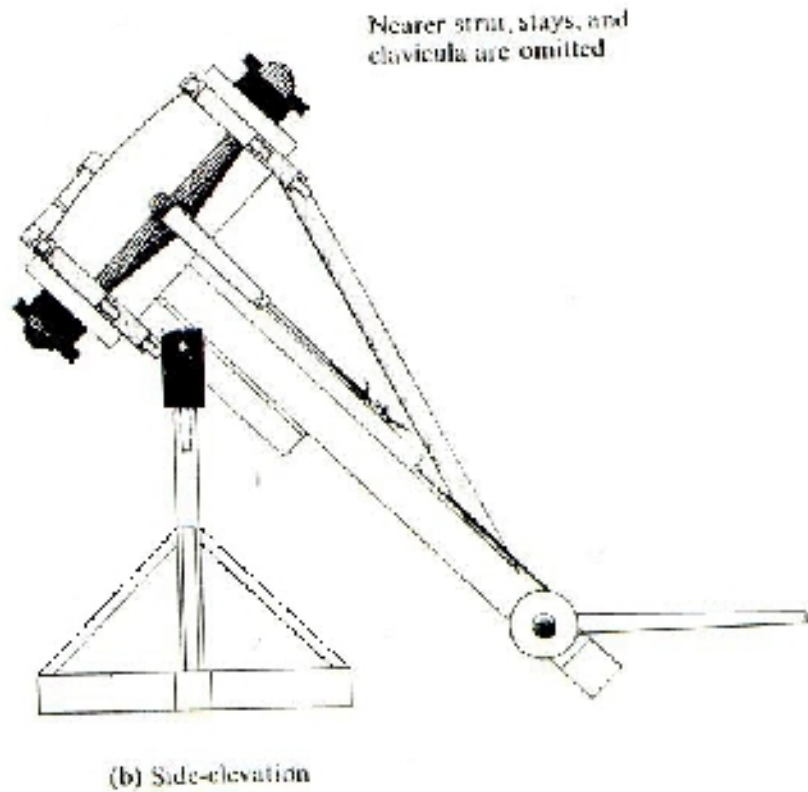
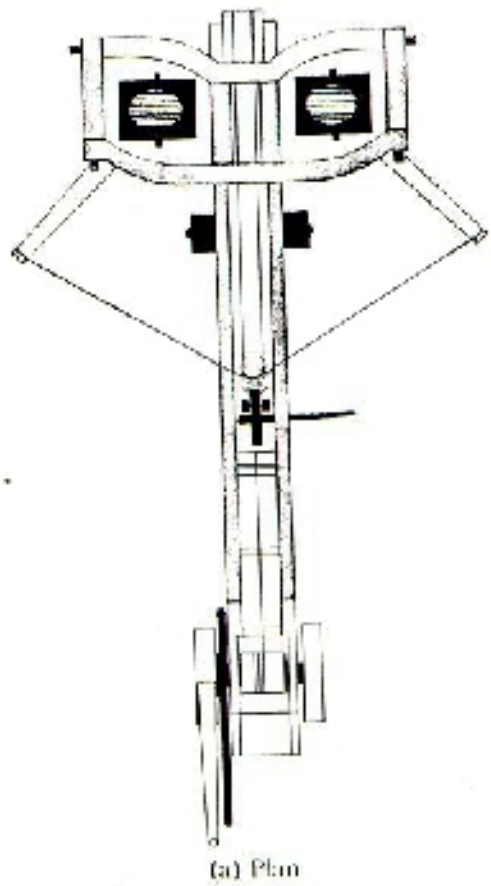
Artillery

- Ballista

- A bit like a giant crossbow that used torsion springs to propel the arrow or stone.







spring-diameters 0 3 6

Nearer strut, stays, and
clavicula are omitted

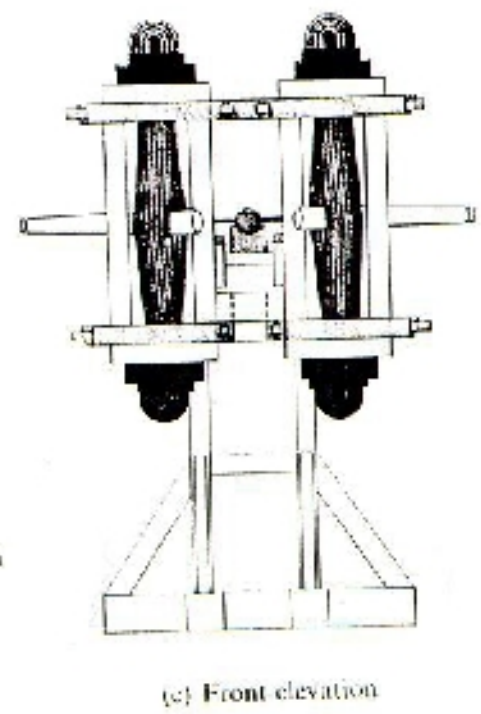


FIG. 1.99. Mark Vb *ballista* (Vitruvius)



What's R. Lee Ermey doing there?



Organization

- Legions
 - Each legion consisted of 6,000 men. They were divided into 10 cohorts.
- Cohort
 - Each cohort had 480 men (although the first cohort, with the most experienced soldiers, had 960).
 - Was divided into six centuries.
- Century
 - Each century had 80 men (except in the first cohort, which had 160).
 - Each century was commanded by a centurion.
 - Each century was divided into 10 contubernium, a group of 8 men who shared a tent.

- So...
 - 1 Legio = 10 cohortes
 - 1 Cohors = 6 centuriae
 - 1 Centuria = 10 contubernia
 - 1 Contubernia = 8 men
- Why is this important? There's suddenly a very strict division of men with an established hierarchy of command. It's orderly.
- It's the basis of modern military organization in the same way that Athens is the basis of democracy.

Hierarchy of command

- Don't want to get into it, but we'll talk about the centurions and the average enlisted man.

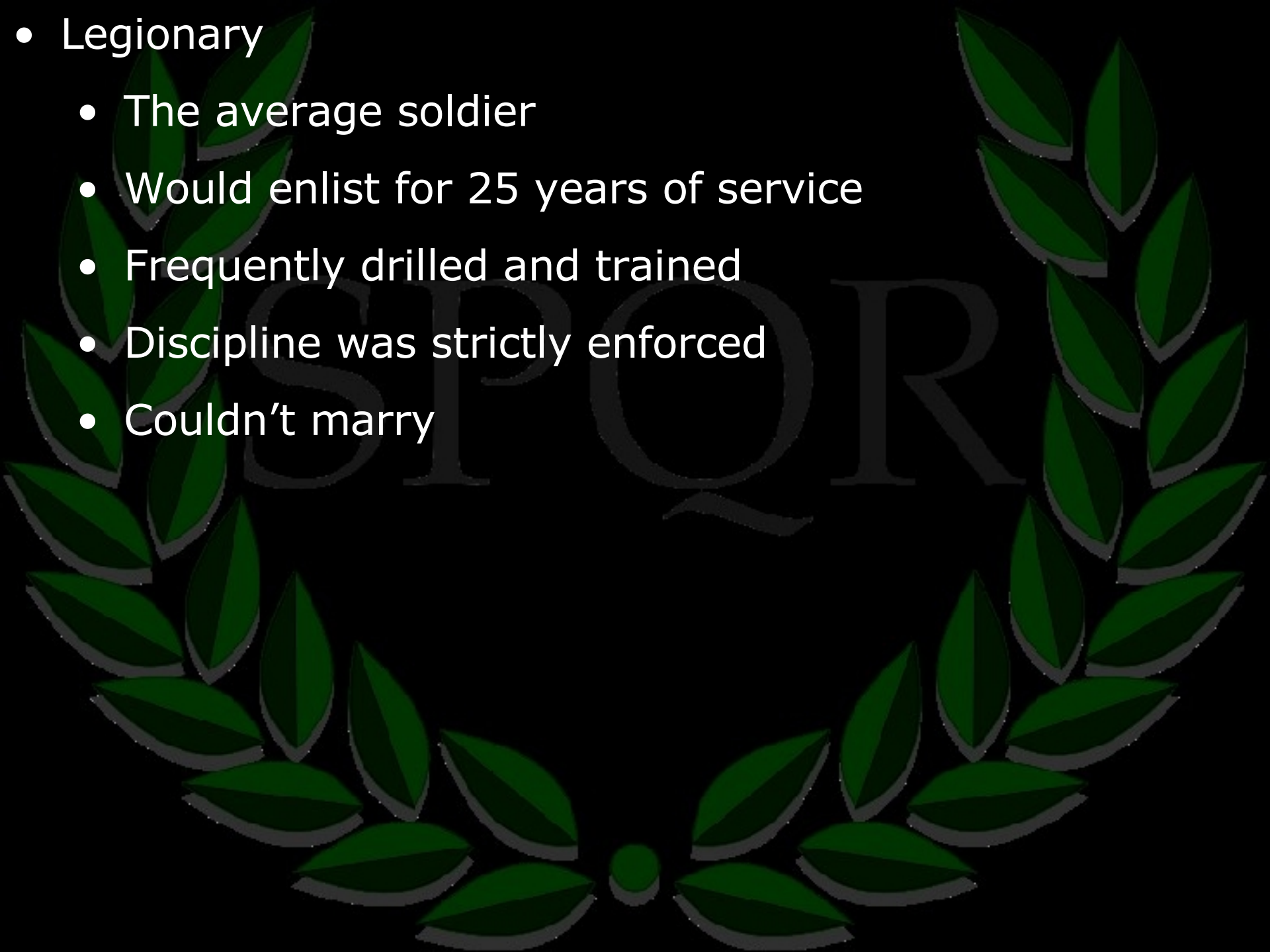
S P O Q R

A laurel wreath graphic, composed of dark green leaves with lighter green highlights, frames the text 'S P O Q R'. The wreath is circular and centered on the page. The text 'S P O Q R' is rendered in a large, dark grey, serif font, positioned in the center of the wreath. The background is black.

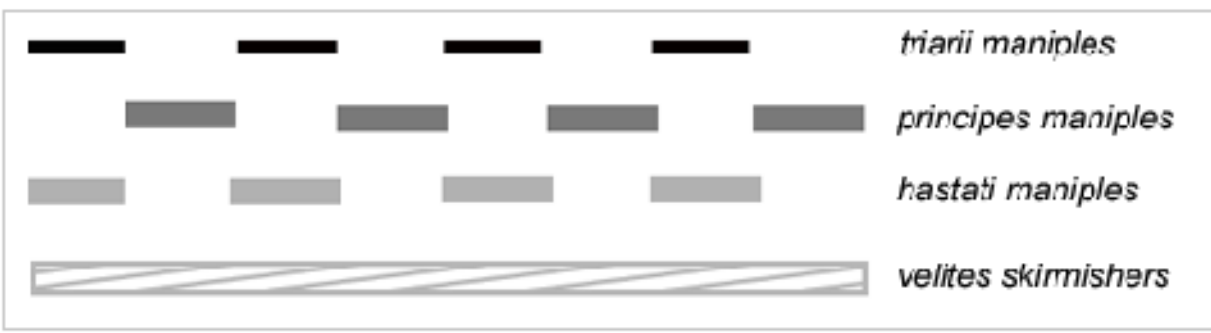
- Centurions
 - Called centurions because they commanded a century (which was originally 100 men, but was later reduced to 80).
 - Mobile field commanders. About equivalent to a modern day army captain.
 - Wore chain mail instead of the lorica segmentata, wore military decorations over the mail, wore greaves, a helmet with a crest, and had his sword on his left side.
 - Got to ride on horseback during marches.
 - Carried a staff with which he administered discipline.
 - Backbone of the Roman army. Took care of day to day duties. Led from the front and had a high casualty rate.

- Skilled centurions were also highly sought after.



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- Legionary
 - The average soldier
 - Would enlist for 25 years of service
 - Frequently drilled and trained
 - Discipline was strictly enforced
 - Couldn't marry

Roman manipular disposition after deployment but prior to engagement



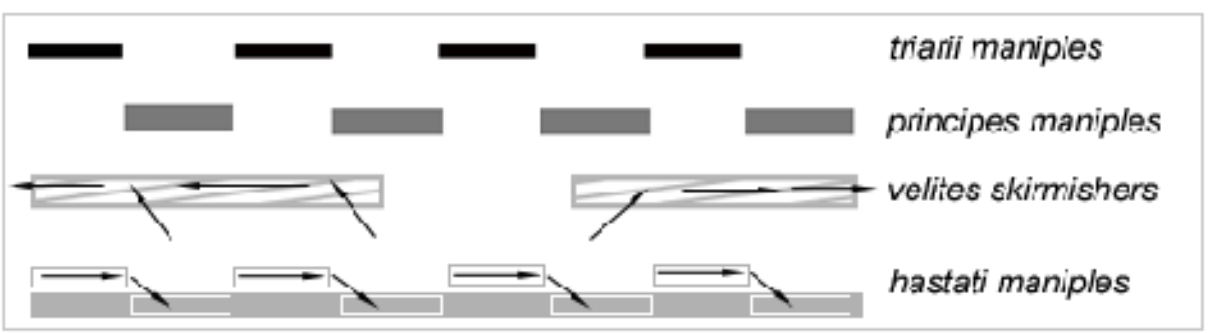
ROMAN
MANIPULAR
FORMATION



ENEMY
FORMATION

Formations

Roman manipular disposition after velites engagement and retreat



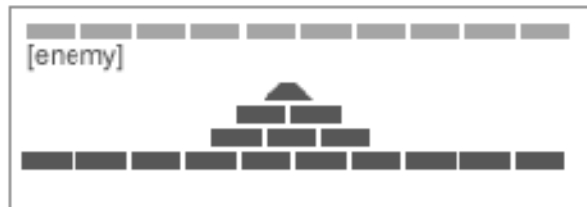
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Alternative formations and variations in deployment



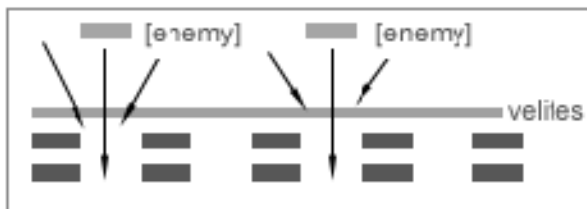
wedge formation - lines thinned to provide concentration in centre to smash through enemy lines



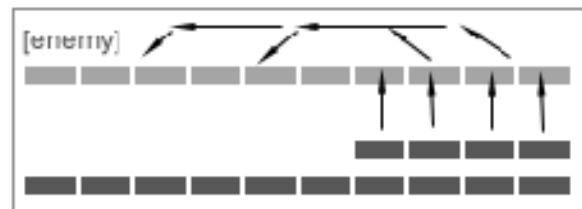
single line defence / extended line - maniples all deployed in a single line to overlap enemy flanks or meet wider enemy formation and protect own flanks



Cannae tactic (weak centre) - centre left weak deliberately to invite enemy centre attack and envelopment. Required tactical reserve behind apparently weak centre



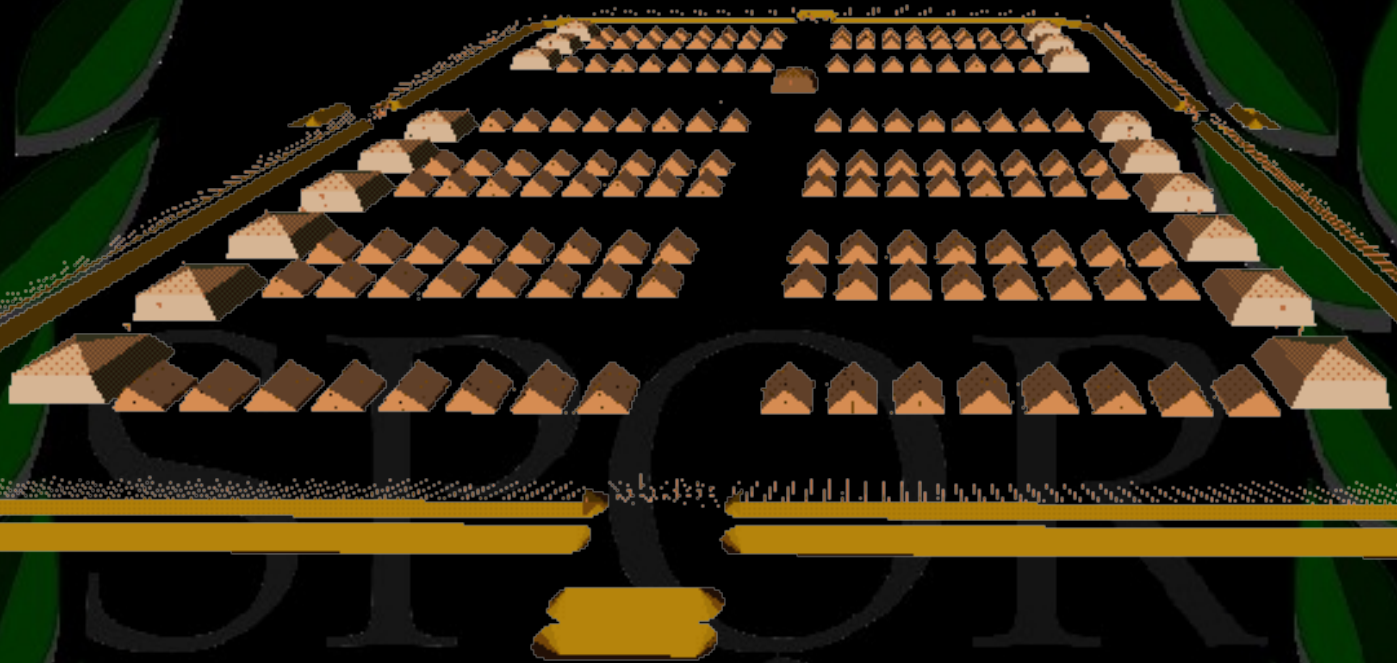
maniple channels / Zama tactic - channels left between maniples for specific purpose of harassing and directing enemy war elephants away from heavy infantry. Tactically very dangerous since heavy infantry flanks vulnerable



strong right flank / rolling up the line - strength would be concentrated on the right flank, which would attempt to break the enemy's left flank, and then "roll up the line" attacking the enemy from the rear.



protected flank - one flank protected by a natural barrier such as hillside, lake, etc. Light infantry and cavalry all concentrated on the opposite flank



Roman Encampment