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Roman Military Clothing (2)

AD 200–400



Graham Sumner



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Author's Note

The contents of this book follow those in the first part of this study, MAA 374, *Roman Military Clothing (1) – From Caesar to Commodus, 100 BC–AD 200*. Despite the basic chronological division, however, there are inevitable cross-references between the material in the two volumes – specifically, in the Summary on pages 39–43 of this book. The two books are presented collectively as a single work of reference.

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Artist's Note

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ROMAN MILITARY CLOTHING (2) FROM SEVERUS TO STILICHO, AD 200-400

INTRODUCTION

...He [Caracalla] took off his Roman cloak and put on German dress, and showed himself in the silver-embroidered cape they wear. He also put on a blonde wig, neatly done in the German hairstyle. The barbarians, delighted with this, loved him greatly. (Herodian, 4.7.3)

THE ROMAN SOLDIERS OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS differed little in appearance from those of Augustus almost two centuries earlier. The 3rd century, however, saw a period of political, military and financial turmoil in the fortunes of the empire. In the fifty years from the murder of Alexander Severus in AD 235 to the accession of Diocletian in 284 there were nearly thirty emperors – of whom only three died natural deaths.

Fortunately the empire was saved by a succession of tough soldier emperors. Many of these men had risen up through the ranks and came not from Rome or even Italy, but from the frontier, especially the Balkan provinces. Their direct, straightforward approach was reflected in their military equipment, which perhaps for the first time in Roman history achieved a measure of uniformity.

The overall responsibility for the procurement of military clothing shifted from the army itself to an army of bureaucrats, a process culminating in the *vestis militaris* or clothing tax. Local officials, town councillors, landowners and a host of civil servants took on the role of middlemen between the weavers and the army. The only source for the once vast amount of paperwork which this tax created are a number of documents from Egypt. These seem to indicate that the tax was collected in kind, but modern scholars suggest that a cash equivalent was paid instead.

It is presumed that this money was then spent on the purpose for which it was intended – clothing the army; but it is unclear why the documents refer to clothing rather than to money. One suggested reason was that this was perhaps a way of explaining to taxpayers what their money was to be spent on, to sweeten the bitter pill of paying an unpopular tax. There is no archaeological corroboration for this clothing tax anywhere else within the Empire; however, the Code of Theodosius does state that it was collected throughout the East. The Theodosian Code also warns against corruption in the clothing industry, including the fraudulent use of dyes in the dye works; any offenders caught were to be stripped of their citizenship, and beheaded!



The influence of Germanic or Gallic clothing is already apparent in this 1st century AD figure of a standard bearer from Mainz. He wears a cloak edged with a broad band of tablet-weaving and a fringe; he might even be wearing a long-sleeved tunic, although the lines around the wrists could also be interpreted as *armillae* bracelets.

TUNICS

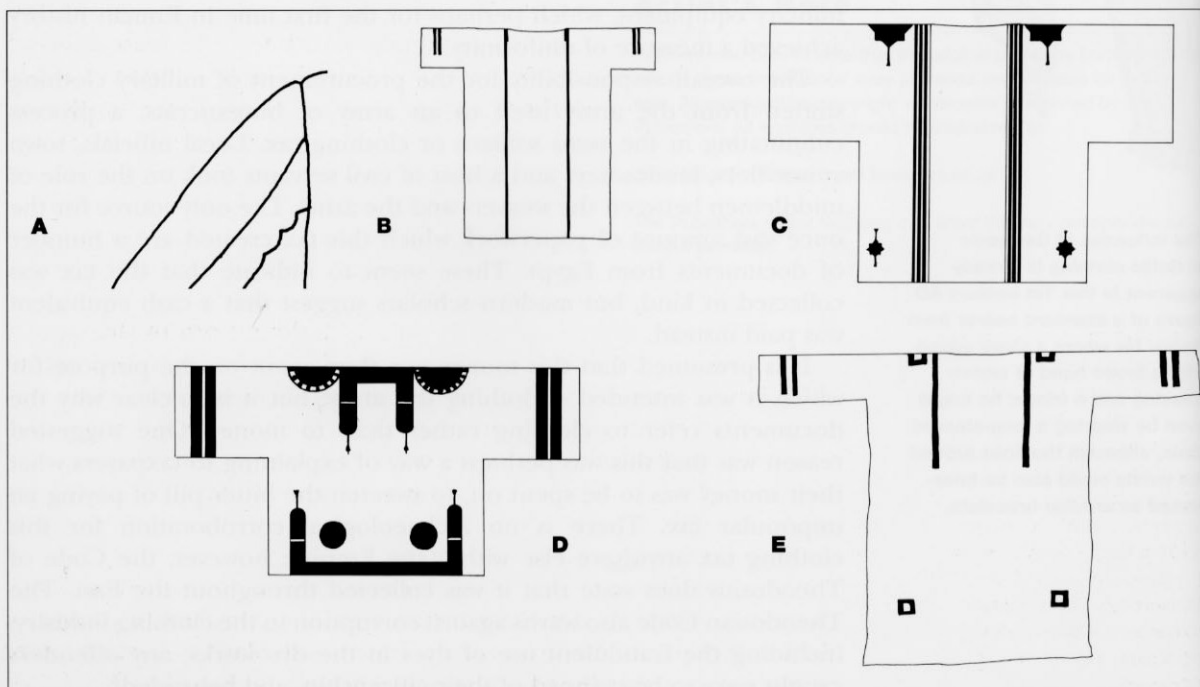


By the early 3rd century, the date of this tombstone from Aquincum in Hungary, there is no doubt that this standard bearer is wearing a tunic with wrist-length sleeves.

Although the Arch of Severus, which was dedicated in AD 203, still shows Roman soldiers wearing a style of tunic apparently traditional during the late Republic and early Empire, the 3rd century itself saw the widespread introduction of long-sleeved tunics into mainstream fashion. One reason was undoubtedly the increasing influence of Germanic troops and mercenaries serving with the Roman army. As early as the 1st century AD, Tacitus (*Hist.*, 2.30) criticised Aulus Caecina, a senior army commander and pretender to the throne, for adopting what he considered as 'barbarian dress'. While Tacitus only refers to a brightly coloured cape and trousers on this occasion, a long-sleeved garment would undoubtedly have completed Caecina's garb.

Many emperors and high-ranking officers had barbarian bodyguards, and one way of winning and maintaining their favour would be to adopt their style of dress. For instance, Cicero spoke out against Mark Antony for wearing both 'Gallic boots and cloak' after returning from a campaign in Gaul. Furthermore, the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* remarks how the defeated Gallic separatist, the Emperor Tetricus (r.270–273), was led in Aurelian's triumphal procession wearing a scarlet cloak, yellow tunic and 'Gallic trousers' (*SHA, Aurelian*, XXXIV, 2). This fashion was taken to its extreme by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Bassianus, more commonly known as Caracalla (r.211–217) after the 'Gallic cape', *caracallus*, that he habitually wore.

Caracalla frequently went about in Germanic costume, and as we see from the quotation above, went even further on occasion. This approach was not just an eccentricity; it was based on a serious appreciation of the need to curry favour with the troops in an age of uncertain discipline. The same emperor not only granted his soldiers generous





Detail of a tunic *clavi* terminal.
(Rochdale Art Gallery &
Museums Service)

increases in pay, but made a show of sharing the hardships of campaign life, as Dio records (*Epit.*, LXXVIII, 13.1): ‘...[Caracalla] marched on foot with the soldiers and ran with them, did not wash nor change his clothes, joined in every task with them, and chose exactly the same kind of rations as they had’. Caracalla understood that he needed to be seen as a fellow soldier in order to survive. It is reported that the deathbed advice of his father Septimius Severus was, ‘Be generous to the soldiers, and damn everyone else’.

The Thorsberg finds and the iconographic record

The importance of the finds from Thorsberg in Schleswig Holstein, Germany, is often overlooked, especially in the context of Roman military equipment and uniforms; yet on that site a complete costume of tunic, cloak and trousers, dating no later than the 3rd century AD, were found in a peat bog. They represent the typical image of Celtic and Germanic clothing, but they and other textile finds from Germany and Scandinavia were found with items of Roman military weapons and equipment. It has generally been assumed that while the Roman items are the result of trade or loot, the textiles themselves are Germanic in origin; but this is not self-evident.

Lise Bender Jørgensen and other Scandinavian textile scholars put forward the opposing view that the Thorsberg finds and others like them are Gallo-Roman in origin, and may actually represent the clothing of a Roman auxiliary. While this may never be proven either way, one fact cannot be dismissed: from the 3rd century onwards a new Roman uniform appears in the iconographic record. This consists of a tunic with long, tight-fitting sleeves, a cloak and trousers. All of these garments, if not identical in manufacture or materials, are strikingly similar to the Thorsberg finds.

The Thorsberg tunic is made from wool and measures 86cm in length and 52cm in width. The sleeves are sewn on separately and had tablet-woven borders. Recent analysis of the tunic found traces of madder and a purple lichen dye. It is probably safe to conclude that clothing styles from northern Europe were introduced into the Roman army, firstly by the auxiliaries recruited in the northern provinces and from beyond the empire; later by German Imperial bodyguards; and finally by legionaries based on the northern frontier who adopted the fashion themselves. Ultimately this fashion was then spread by emperors like Caracalla, who is recorded as wearing German clothing even when he was in Syria and Mesopotamia (Dio, *Epit.*, LXXIX, 2-3).

The present study concentrates on the clothing worn by the regular soldiers of the Imperial army. However, the army also made use of irregular soldiers including the *numerii* and *cuneii*. Later came the *foederati*, Germanic settlers who were given land within the empire on the condition that they provided troops for the army when required. All of these types of troops, probably commanded by their own chieftains, would have worn their own clothing, providing many more diverse styles and influences within the Imperial army.

When the Danube army led by Septimius Severus marched on Rome the civil population, doubtless accustomed like ourselves to images of Roman troops on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, were horrified to see what their frontier armies actually looked like (Dio, LXXV,

OPPOSITE Tunic dimensions, to constant scale:

- (A) Thorsberg, Denmark –
86cm long x 52cm wide.
- (B) Dura Europos, Syria –
92cm long x 65cm wide.
- (C) Egypt; Whitworth Art Gallery,
University of Manchester –
113cm long x 100cm wide.
- (D) Egypt; Whitworth Art Gallery,
University of Manchester –
92cm long x 94cm wide.
- (E) Egypt; 137cm long x
97cm wide.



TOP Titus Flavius Bassus, a 1st century cavalry trooper with the Ala Noricorum, from his tombstone in Cologne, Germany. He wears knee-length *bracae* and a long-sleeved tunic with turned-back cuffs. These are identical to those worn by a Celtic warrior from a sculpture in Avignon Museum, France.

ABOVE A cavalryman from the Arch of Constantine, early 4th century. He is completely unarmoured and wears a long-sleeved tunic and trousers.



2.6). What shocked them most was the soldiers' barbarian appearance, presumably because they wore long-sleeved tunics and trousers or *bracae*—garments which had been considered unacceptable and un-Roman for generations. Amongst the faults of disgraced emperors like Elagabalus and Commodus had been their fondness for long-sleeved tunics, which were also considered effeminate by the more puritanical writers. Even today archaeological reconstruction paintings and re-enactors are unlikely to depict Roman soldiers of the early Principate wearing these garments.

It was not only the Germans and Gauls who wore long-sleeved tunics: the Romans were practically surrounded by peoples who had always favoured them. At least one auxiliary cavalryman from the 1st century AD, Flavius Bassus (almost certainly of Thracian origin), chose to be remembered on his tombstone wearing such a tunic. His sleeves also have distinctive turned-back cuffs, reminiscent of those seen on a famous Romano-Celtic sculpture depicting a warrior which is now in the Avignon Museum, France. Since large numbers of Celts and Germans were recruited into the army—especially the cavalry—it is perhaps more of a surprise that, so far, the tombstone of Bassus is the only surviving example from the early Principate which definitely shows long sleeves.

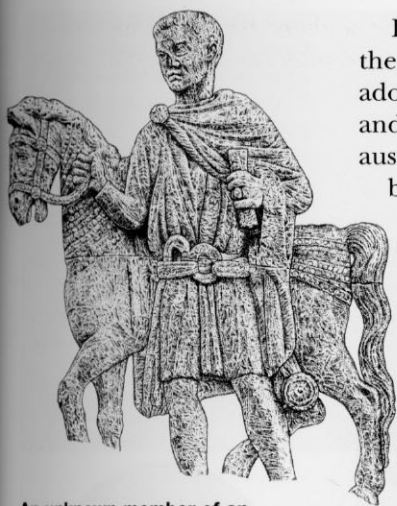
Documents from Egypt written in Greek—the principal language of the Eastern empire—refer to a number of different tunics. The military tunic is known as the *sticharion*, which probably originated from the Greek word for 'striped', and may be a reference to the coloured bands known as *clavi*.¹ The army also requisitioned a long-sleeved garment called a *dalmatica* although, judging by the documents, in smaller numbers than the *sticharion*. The *dalmatica*, as its name suggests, had probably originated in the province of Dalmatia and had doubtless been popular with the 3rd century soldier-emperors.

Another type of long-sleeved garment was the *camisia*, generally understood as a tight-fitting linen shirt. It has been argued that the term derives from a Germanic loan word which came into Latin usage via the Celts. The *camisia* was later popular with priests, but it has been suggested that they themselves had adopted it from the army.

In the East long-sleeved tunics were also commonplace, and it is from the Eastern half of the empire that the best evidence comes for the very widespread use of such garments in the Roman army of the 3rd century AD. A remarkable series of tombstones have been discovered re-used in the defences at Apamea, Syria, dating from between 214 and 252. They show a wide range of junior officers, specialists and ordinary soldiers, all of whom wear long-sleeved tunics.

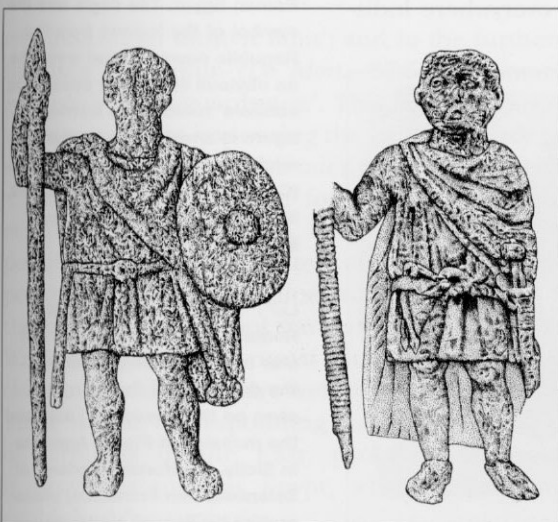
One other fashion that probably spread from the Eastern frontiers was the taste for elaborately decorated clothes, sometimes even decorated with silver or gold thread. While originally scorned by the Romans as hopelessly barbarian, this manner of dress was ultimately to become the attire of the emperors, their courts and their bodyguards. When the pretender Procopius was proclaimed emperor in 365 no purple cloak was available, so in order to look the part he wore a gold-embroidered tunic, purple trousers and shoes, and held a small piece of purple cloth (*Amm. Mar.*, XXVI, 6.15).

¹ This feature is discussed at length in the first part of this study, MAA 374.



An unknown member of an emperor's horse guard, the *Equites Singulares Augusti*, from an early 3rd century tombstone in Rome. He can be seen to wear a fringed cloak and a long-sleeved tunic, with the popular ring-buckled belt.

The uniform nature of 3rd century equipment is vividly illustrated by these two tombstones of soldiers from units at the opposite ends of the military hierarchy. LEFT *Aprilius Spicatus*, a soldier of a humble *Numerus Divitensium*, from Istanbul, Turkey. RIGHT *L. Septimius Valerinus*, a Praetorian Guardsman, from Rome.



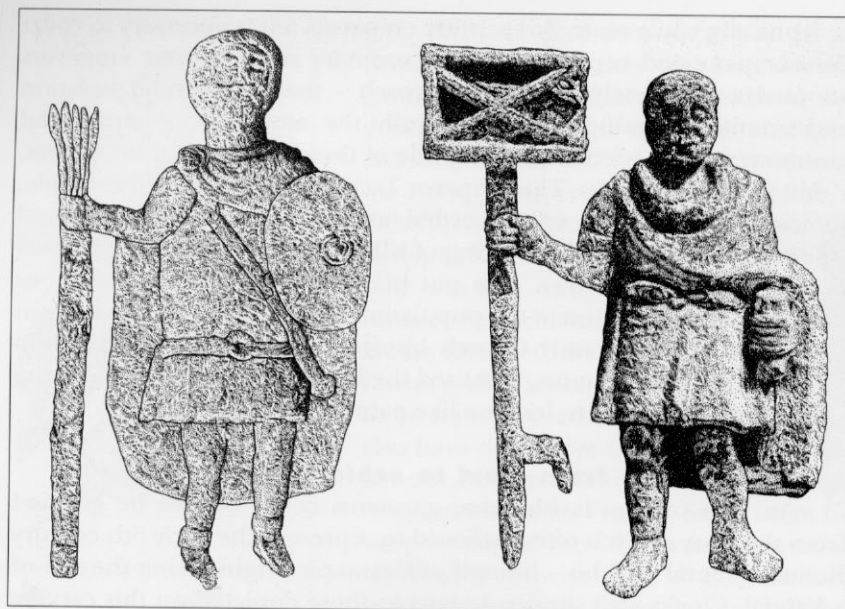
Ironically, while many 3rd century emperors felt it necessary to court the company and copy the dress of ordinary soldiers, later emperors adopted a completely opposite approach – that of splendid isolation and oriental magnificence. Periodically the more disciplinarian and austere emperors tried to stem the tide of these non-Roman influences, but with little success. The Emperor Tacitus (r.275–276), for example, was another who was recorded as dressing like his men, and attempted to ban the wearing of silk tunics and gold *clavi* (stripes) (*SHA*, XXVII, 10-11). It is not plausible that these prohibitions were aimed not just at the population in general but at the army in particular. Even early Church historians such as Asterius, Bishop of Amaseia in Pontus, chastised their contemporaries for ‘wearing pictured garments, looking like painted walls.’

Decoration: from *clavi* to *orbiculi*

An idea of how lavish these garments could be can be gleaned from the ivory diptych often believed to represent the early 5th century Roman general Stilicho – himself of Germanic origin, being the son of a Vandal. Cloaks with similar designs to those depicted on this carving have been found at Antinoe in Egypt, confirming that garments like those represented in ancient art did exist. These gaudy costumes were a precursor of the splendour that was seen as an essential element of Byzantine court ritual.

In its simplest form this decoration took the form of patterned purple roundels known as *orbiculi* on the shoulders and skirts of tunics; later small rectangular patches also appear. Some scholars believe that they were placed over vulnerable areas of the body as a form of protection. These decorations were woven into the fabric but were frequently removed and attached to new clothes when older ones wore out. The patterns developed over time. First a yoke at the neck joined the two vertical *clavi*, which themselves became wider and shorter, ending just above the waist. The terminals of the shorter *clavi* were often decorated with leaf or tassel ends. There were further changes: unlike that of earlier times, the tunic was no longer pulled up and bloused over the belt, but simply belted snugly at the waist, and was worn just over the knees rather than above them as before.

However, the physical remains of purely military tunics remain difficult to identify even from supposedly military sites – most obviously, because of the large numbers of civilians who would be present in and around forts, especially in the late Roman period. Furthermore, the fashion for wearing military-style garments was extremely popular with minor officials, civic dignitaries and civil servants. An example of this trend can be observed on a tapestry found in Egypt, which apparently shows a priest whose appearance could easily be mistaken for that of a soldier. This is not surprising, considering the important role the army played in Roman society; and at a more practical level, of course, military clothing was eminently suitable for outdoor wear (just as

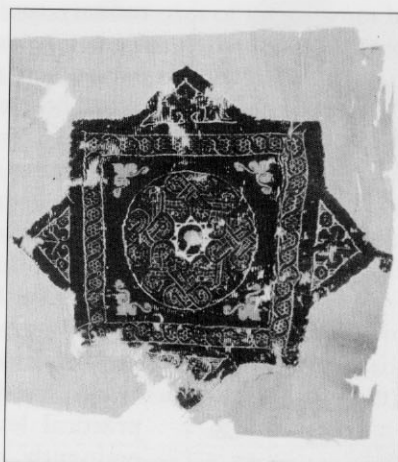
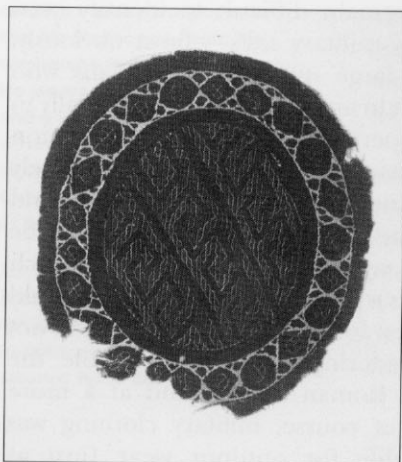


Tombstones of soldiers from Legio II Parthica, based at Apamea in Syria, from among a number dated to the first half of the 3rd century.

LEFT Aurelius Mucianus, a trainee *lanciaris*; typically of these monuments, he wears a long-sleeved tunic with a ring buckled belt, and a *sagum*; and note the rolled effect at the ankles. RIGHT Felsonius Verus, *aquilifer* – the representation of the eagle in a cage would appear to be unique.



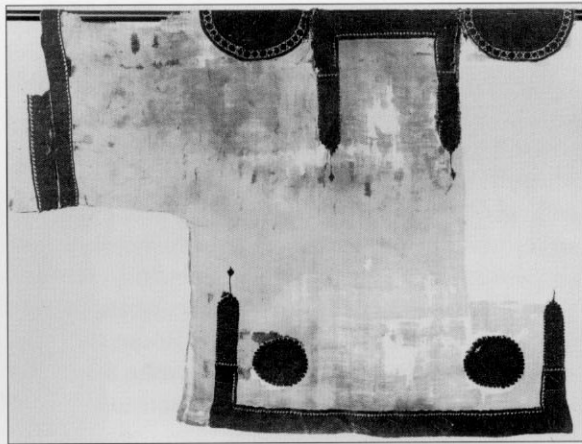
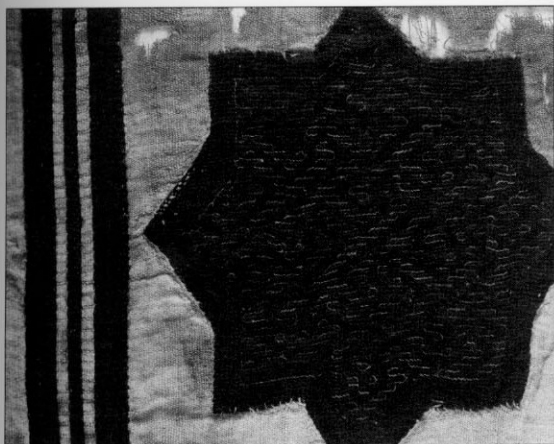
ABOVE Tunic ornaments from Roman Egypt. The eagle was the symbol of the legions from the Republic onwards, and would be an obvious choice for decorating soldiers' tunics. The warrior figure is another image that might have appealed to soldiers. (California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco; photographs by Russell Hartman)



LEFT Tunic ornaments from Roman Egypt. The circular and star motifs are very similar to the decorations that can be seen on the frescos in Luxor and the mosaics at Piazza Armerina in Sicily. (California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco; photographs by Russell Hartman)

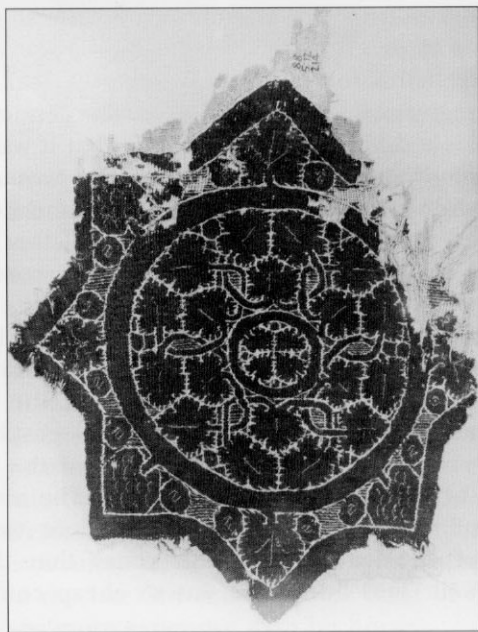
modern 'combat'-style trousers are popular today). The results of excavations at the isolated desert forts of Egypt, which should contain a higher proportion of textiles for military use, may one day provide a more detailed picture of the characteristics of military clothing.

Some military garments could clearly be very ornate. For example, Claudius Herculanus, an Imperial horseguard of the Emperor Aurelian (r.270–275) was depicted on his tombstone clothed in either a tunic or a cloak decorated with a large sunburst design; this would be particularly appropriate, given Aurelian's association with worship of the sun god. A motif like this would have looked especially impressive if it had been picked out with golden thread, and was probably worn by all of Aurelian's guards (to whom it was doubtless presented by the emperor himself). An extravagance such as this would not have been unusual; expensive clothing was often given out as gifts by the emperors to their troops, to emphasise both their own and their regimes' magnificence. The Emperor Maximinus Daia (r.310–313) 'spent money everywhere indis-



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT
Octagonal star medallions from
tunics discovered in Egypt; the
example from the Whitworth
Art Gallery also shows details of
the *clavus* decoration.
(Whitworth Art Gallery,
University of Manchester; &
British Museum)

TOP RIGHT
Preserved linen tunic from
Egypt, 3rd-4th centuries AD.
It is decorated with purple wool
clavi, and shoulder and knee
orbiculi. (Whitworth Art Gallery,
University of Manchester)



Dolphin motif on a *clavus*, orig-
inally part of a tunic from Egypt.
The dolphin represented
swiftness and salvation; it also
appears as part of the furniture
of Roman sword scabbards in
the 3rd century. If soldiers did
personalise their own tunics, it
may have been with images like
this. (Victoria & Albert Museum)

criminally and without limit'; and to the further disgust of the Church historian Lactantius (*De Mort.*, 37.5s) he awarded 'costly dress and gold coins to his guardsmen'. This luxurious apparel was obviously seen as instrumental in impressing the local population and overawing foreign dignitaries or potential enemies, as well as boosting the soldiers' morale.

The principle material for tunics and cloaks in the later Empire remained wool, although linen garments might have been equally popular in the East. State controlled workshops called *gynaecaea* – possibly established by Diocletian (r.284–305) – were responsible for the production of wool garments, and at least 15 are known in the Western empire, in contrast with only two *linyfia* that produced linen clothes. In addition there were nine dyeing houses or *bafia* in the West. There is little corresponding information concerning the production of garments in the East, probably because very little changed in provinces such as Egypt, where textile manufacture had been established for centuries.

CLOAKS

The rectangular *sagum* cloak, which had been worn by soldiers for centuries, remains the most popular cloak represented in Roman art. Other types did exist, however, and some of them appear to have been adopted by the army. The first of these was the hooded type. The *paenula*, a hooded cloak used in the early Roman period, seems temporarily to have lost its appeal; it does not appear on soldiers' tombstones from the late 2nd century, although it clearly remained in use by civilians. It is also worn by soldiers depicted on the wooden door of Santa Sabina in Rome dating to the 5th century. It is possible that the *paenula* had become associated with the Praetorian Guard, as it is frequently represented on monuments depicting guardsmen. Its temporary eclipse may therefore be associated with the disbandment of the Guard by the Emperor Septimius Severus, and their replacement by a bodyguard drawn from amongst his own provincial soldiers.

As described above, the Emperor 'Caracalla' earned his sobriquet from his fondness for wearing a cloak known as the *caracallus*; but regrettably, it is not known for certain what the *caracallus* actually looked like. The best guess is that it was a hooded, sleeveless cape; it may therefore have resembled the *paenula* and the long type of hooded cloak seen on many Gallo-Roman and Romano-British sculptures. One ancient author, Pollux, actually says that it was like the *paenula* (*Onom.*, 7, 60). Dio Cassius (*Epit.*, LXXIX) records that it was Caracalla himself who invented this peculiar garment by cutting up and sewing together in barbarian fashion another type of cloak; however, this is unlikely, since with the exception of the hood, Roman capes were not normally sewn up. Credit for the design of the *caracallus* is also given to the emperor by Spartian, who in his biography goes on to say that Caracalla was responsible for the length of the cloak, which almost reached the ankles (*Anton. Cara.*, 9, 7-8). The *caracallus* was therefore probably of heavy wool suitable for outdoor wear, although the price edict of Diocletian specifically states that there was a linen version as well. This linen type was so cheap compared with other cloaks that

Military cloaks: by the 3rd and 4th centuries the rectangular *sagum* appears to have been the cloak most associated with the army. Fringes, as well as applied decorations, can be seen on many examples. (A) Tombstone of Aurelius Lucianus, Rome; (B) fresco, Luxor, Egypt; (C) mosaic, Piazza Armerina, Sicily; (D) mosaic, Cologne, Germany.

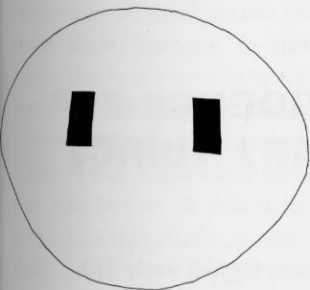




Grotesque figurine from Augst, Switzerland, wearing a full-length hooded cloak.



RIGHT Front view of a remarkably well preserved leather cloak dating from the Roman period, found at Sogaards Mose, Denmark. Finds like these provide clues to the types of clothing worn along the frontiers of the empire, which would ultimately find their way into the Imperial armies. (Skive Museum, Denmark; photograph by Niels Thomsen, Stockholm)



Plan of an oval cloak from Egypt; size, 2.86m x 2.42m. In the Greek-speaking East this type of cloak would be called a *chlamys*, but it corresponds to the Roman *paludamentum* worn by senior officers. The black rectangular decorations can be seen on other sources. When worn, the cloak would be folded in half with the resulting squares visible at the front and back.

it cannot have covered more than the head and shoulders, and is therefore conceivably the *caracallus minor* that this price edict also mentions.

According to Wild, there is no evidence that the *caracallus* was known outside Gaul before the beginning of the 3rd century and Caracalla's campaigns along the Rhine. As Dio Cassius records (*Epit.*, LXXVIII), Caracalla liked to be seen by his troops as a fellow soldier, and took to wearing ordinary military clothing. Herodian (*Hist.*, IV, 7.3) tells us that Caracalla based his clothing on that worn by his German bodyguard. It therefore seems likely that his famous cloak was copied from a type that he saw being worn by ordinary soldiers of the Rhine frontier armies.

Later writers refer to another hooded cloak called a *birrus* or *byrus*, and the price edict of Diocletian mentions a *byrus Britannicus*. This again was probably very similar to the *paenula* – perhaps with the addition of an extra flap-type fastening at the neck, whereas the earlier *paenula* had required the additional use of a scarf.

Decoration

In spite of the fact that Roman writers regarded the wearing of brightly bedecked clothing as both barbarian and effeminate, the practice of wearing decorative cloaks was yet another fashion that found its way into the ranks of the Roman army. The cloaks depicted on the temple frescos at Luxor, for instance, are decorated with large *orbiculi*. An indication of how elaborate some of these garments became is that in the late 3rd century price edict of Diocletian a guardsman's cloak was more expensive than his horse...

During a mock naval battle, Agrippina, wife of the Emperor Claudius (r.AD 41–54) had worn a military cloak made entirely of gold cloth. Ornamented cloaks might be woven with gold and silver thread, frequently in the form of mythical beasts or deities, and actual flowers might be woven into the fabric. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* relates that the Emperor Alexander Severus (r.208–235) thought that inserting purple and gold threads into linen clothing was madness: he believed that this practice defeated the object of wearing finer materials in the first place, and that the gold thread made the garments heavier (*SHA, Severus Alexander*, XLI, 11).

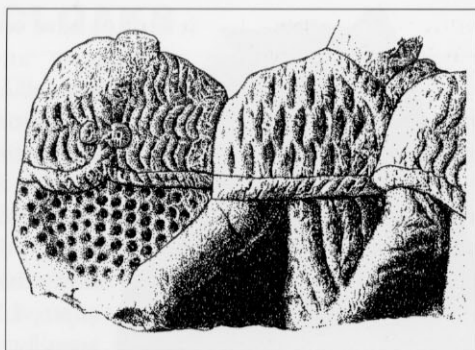
The Emperor Aurelian (r.270–275) was also opposed to garments made from silk or decorated with gold, and apparently was once heard to remark, 'God forbid that a fabric should be worth its weight in gold' (*SHA, Aurelian*, XLV, 5). Nevertheless Aurelian himself was not adverse to presenting his own soldiers with decorated clothing (*SHA, Aurelian*, XLVI, 6); his Imperial guards in particular had lavish golden clothing and armour (*Ammianus*, 31, 10.9) and were even referred to as

Fragment from a stone relief from near Cordoba, Spain, which shows an *alicula* (see below) being worn by a mail-clad figure, presumably a soldier. Note the heavy emphasis on the cape's shaggy texture, its bound edge, and a front fastening.

BELOW Hunter taken from stone sarcophagus, wearing a short cape-like garment called an *alicula*. Sculptors often took pains to indicate the rough texture of the material; some examples have hoods, others do not.



Portrait painted on linen, from Deir el-Medineh, Egypt, and dating from the early 3rd century (item 1 in the text catalogue). The soldier wears a long-sleeved white tunic with stripes and fringes at the sleeve cuffs. A red *sagum* cloak is fastened on his right shoulder; a waist belt and sword are just visible.



'ostensionales' (SHA, *Sev. Alex.*, XXXIII, 3).

In spite of periodic objections the practice of wearing decorated clothing caught on, and according to the writer Eusebius an embassy to the Emperor Constantine I (r.306–337) brought cloaks that were bedecked in this manner.

This group of decorated

cloaks are known as *sagulum versicolor*, but Roman writers including Eusebius also referred to them as *barbarica*, leaving us in no doubt as to their origins (*Vita Const.*, 4, 7).

Cloaks had other functions and could also be used for signalling, as demonstrated by the Emperor Aurelian (SHA, *Aurelian*, XXIV, 1), and by two episodes in the Persian wars of the mid-4th century, as recounted by the soldier-historian Ammianus Marcellinus. When Ammianus was fleeing from the Persians he encountered a body of Roman cavalry whom he signalled by waving his cloak, which he adds was the usual way of indicating that the enemy were close at hand (Ammianus, *Book* 18, 6. 11). Later in the war, Ammianus (*Book* 19, 5) describes how a detachment of Persian archers captured a section of a city's defences and used a scarlet cloak to signal that it was safe for the rest of their comrades to attack.

The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* documents the existence of varieties of cloaks worn on different occasions, and still refers to some as 'military'. For example, the soldiers of the usurper Saturninus wore heavy military cloaks in winter but very light cloaks in summer (SHA, *Saturninus*, XXIV, 10). Saturninus also insisted that his soldiers wear their cloaks when reclining at the dinner table, so they would not expose too much of their legs...

CATALOGUE OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE COLOUR OF MILITARY TUNICS AND CLOAKS

(1) Painting on linen, Deir el-Medineh, Luxor, Egypt; early 3rd century AD

Originally part of the outer shroud of a mummy, this painting probably depicts a member of the Luxor garrison. He wears a white tunic with long fringed sleeves, which are also decorated with two red bands. He wears a red *sagum*, which virtually obscures the sword worn on his left side, leaving only the hilt visible.

(2) Fresco, Dura Europos, Syria; c.AD 239

Unlike all other pictorial evidence, which portrays anonymous soldiers, the fresco from Dura Europos depicts a known historical unit – the auxiliary Cohors XX Palmyrenorum (Equitata), based at that city fortress

in the early 3rd century. The tribune of the cohort, Julius Terentius, and the other soldiers depicted all wear long-sleeved white tunics with purple decorative bands around the sleeves. Terentius' cloak is also white and has a fringe along the bottom edge. Only one other soldier wears a white cloak, the rest being a yellow-brown colour, with those of the ordinary soldiers in the background appearing to be of a coarser material.

All the soldiers appear to wear very tight-fitting blue-grey trousers. The contemporary and distinctive ring belt buckles and wide leather baldrics complete with metal fittings all appear to be accurately portrayed. If red cloaks were the standard dress of centurions as argued by Fuentes, it is surprising that none appear in this scene, unless this colour was considered inappropriate at a religious service. In such a case we would have another example of soldiers wearing different garments for different occasions.

(3) Fresco, Dura Europos, Syria; mid-3rd century AD

Although badly damaged, it is possible to make out that a figure on another fresco (on a nearby wall to the previous scene, and possibly contemporary) likewise wears a white tunic. In addition he has a red cloak – the same 'uniform' as the portrait painting from Deir el-Medineh (item 1 in this catalogue). The man stands next to a female figure, possibly a goddess; he was identified by Fuentes as a centurion because of his red cloak, but there is nothing else to support this identification.

(4) Fresco, Dura Europos, Syria; 3rd century AD

A fresco which survived only as fragments but may originally have shown an entire battle scene. A cavalryman, possibly a horse archer, engages an infantryman who protects himself with an oval shield. The infantryman's tunic is white edged in red-purple like those from the Terentius fresco. To the right of these figures a man clad in a red-brown tunic appears to be carrying off a youth.

(5) Tunic, Dura Europos, Syria; 3rd century AD

A number of wool textile fragments have survived from Dura Europos including a near complete tunic; this was white with narrow purple stripes on the cuffs of the sleeves. It almost matches the tunics rendered on the wall paintings, but this does not confirm that it was a military garment. Nevertheless the dimensions of this tunic may be of some relevance to this study: it was 92cm long and 65cm wide, with sleeves 33cm wide and 17cm long. It had two purple clavi 8cm wide, and two purple bands on each sleeve all approximately 1.1cm wide and 21cm long. It is practically the same width as the Thorsberg tunic, but appears rather small compared with the Nahal Hever tunics from Israel dating to the 2nd century AD.² It is possible that this tunic did not belong to an adult; it seems unsafe to draw from it any conclusions about reduced height requirements in the later Roman army.

Detail of fresco from Dura Europos, Syria, c.AD 239 (item 2 in text catalogue). It shows the tribune Julius Terentius (centre right) sacrificing at the head of his men of the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum. Of the other officers only the *vexillarius* is clearly identifiable (centre left). In the entire group only one other figure wears a white cloak like Terentius; all the others have yellow-brown cloaks, and those in the background are rendered in a way which seems to indicate that they are made from a coarser material. See Plates D1 & D2. (Yale University Art Gallery)



² See MAA 374, illustration page 5



Detail of fresco from Dura Europos showing a soldier, possibly a centurion, attending a sacrifice (item 3 in text catalogue). He wears a long-sleeved white tunic and a red *sagum* cloak.

One of the most famous of the Dura Europos frescos is the so-called 'Ebenezer' scene (item 6 in text catalogue). This detail includes figures wearing hooded mail or scale shirts (left), and various clothing styles seen in the Eastern theatre. The two unarmoured riders (centre & right) wear blue tunics and red trousers. See Plate B3. (Yale University Art Gallery.)

(6) Synagogue frescos, Dura Europos, Syria; 3rd century AD

A number of figures in the frescos from the synagogue at Dura Europos have been identified as a potential source of evidence for Roman military equipment, the most famous example being the scale or mail coifs worn by some soldiers. The figures are represented in contemporary dress, which seems to reflect Roman, Palmyrene and Persian influences rather than the Old Testament period in which the stories illustrated are set.

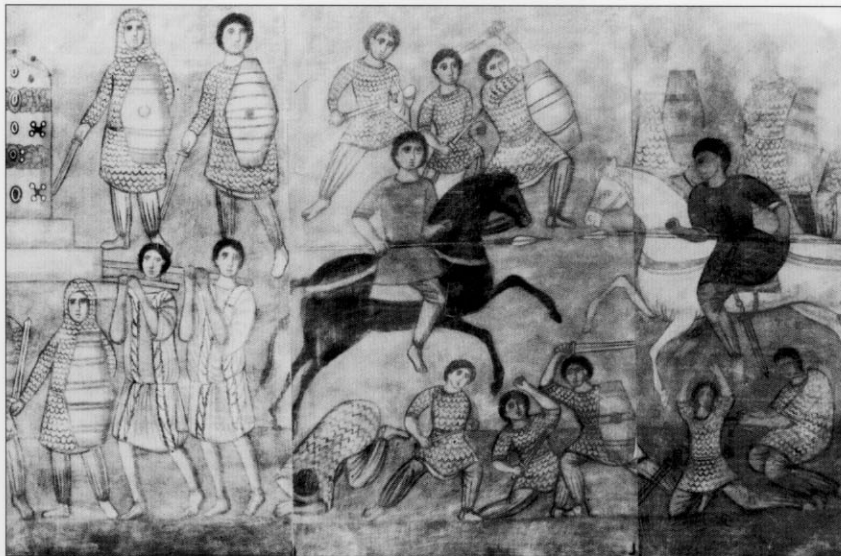
In one scene showing the Israelites crossing the Red Sea two phalanxes of infantry are depicted. The soldiers all carry large oval shields which obscure most of their bodies, but it is just possible to make out that they all wear either white or light pink-red tunics. In the 'Ebenezer' fresco two unarmoured light cavalrymen armed with two-handed spears face one another as if fighting; however, they both have blue tunics with white visible at the ends of short sleeves, and red trousers. One man has a much shorter Roman-style haircut than the other.

In the 'Ezekiel' fresco a single large armoured figure dominates the scene, whilst in the background a separate group of four figures are all equipped in a similar fashion. They are depicted in much the same style as that used to illustrate military deities, for example those included in the sacrifice scene also from Dura Europos. The large figure has a muscled cuirass while the smaller figures wear *lorica squamata*, but all of them have the classic leather or white linen *pteruges* below the waist. The larger figure appears to be wearing a bronze helmet, while his companions are possibly meant to be wearing iron headpieces. He is further distinguished from the others by his long-sleeved blue tunic and pinkish-red cloak; they wear pinkish-red tunics, and the only cloak visible in their group is a yellow-brown colour.

(7) Praetextatus catacomb painting, Rome; 3rd century AD

This painting of two Roman soldiers apparently crowning Christ with thorns is believed to be the earliest representation of an event at the time of the Passion. The soldiers wear off-white tunics and cloaks. In the

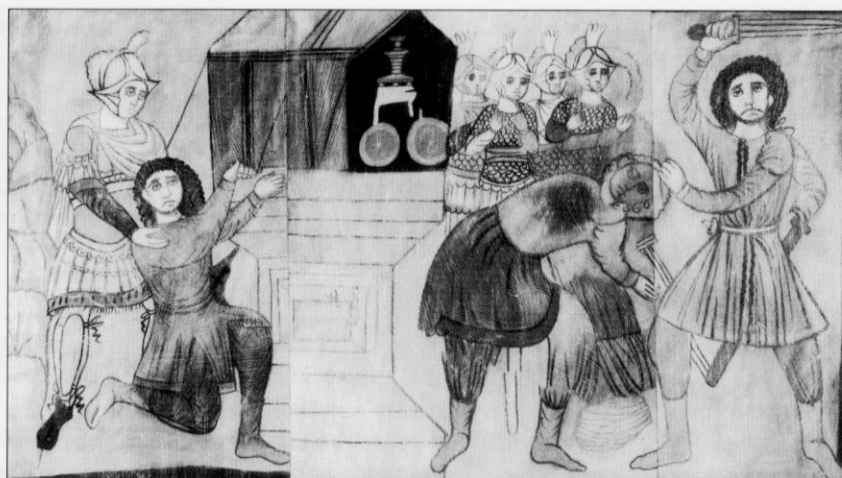
church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Rome are preserved parts of a wall painting showing the death of the saints; all that remains of one of the Roman soldiers carrying out the execution is part of a red cloak.



(8) Fresco, Castellum Dimidi, Algeria; mid-3rd century AD

Excavations at this isolated desert outpost yielded evidence of decorated plaster which might represent military costume. The painting is unfortunately

The 'Ezekiel' fresco from Dura Europos (item 6 in text catalogue); once more the mixture of Eastern and Classical styles is clearly evident. The group of soldiers (top, right of centre) wear scale armour over linen or coloured leather *pteruges*. The large figure at extreme left has a muscle cuirass, and greaves with the ties visible. (Yale University Art Gallery.)



Detail from wall painting in the Praetextus catacomb, Rome (item 7 in text catalogue); it is believed to be the earliest surviving depiction of an event from Christ's Passion – in this case, the crowning with thorns. The two soldiers have off-white tunics and cloaks.



FAR RIGHT Detail of partly reconstructed mid-3rd century wall painting from Castellum Dimidi, Algeria (item 8 in text catalogue). This figure, possibly an officer making a sacrifice, wears a blue-grey cloak over a long-sleeved white tunic. (Reconstruction after M.L.Gaillard)

poorly preserved and few fragments remain; however, it is possible to reconstruct at least one figure, which is wearing a white tunic complete with a blue-grey cloak. If this can be called a 'uniform' it is very similar to those in the Fayum portraits from Egypt. Another partially restored figure has a white tunic and a red cloak outlined in black.

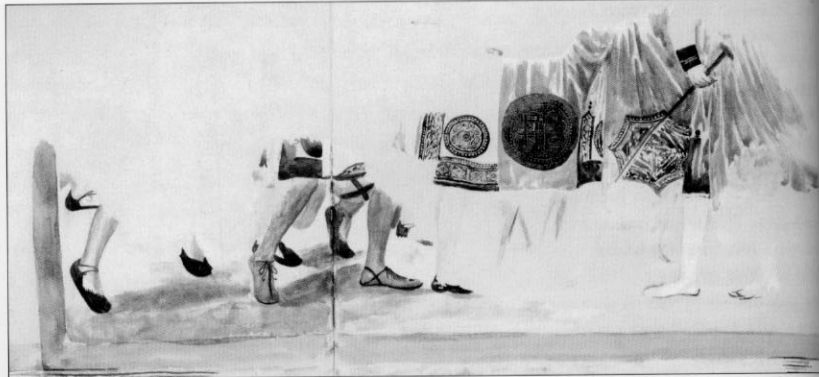
(9) Fresco, Luxor Temple, Egypt; mid/late 3rd century AD

What would have been a major source of evidence for Roman military costume was discovered in Egypt at the temple of Luxor, which in the 3rd century was actually converted into a Roman fort. A series of wall paintings were uncovered and originally believed to represent Christian saints, but it is now accepted that they date to the reign of Diocletian (r.284–305) and formed part of the fort's shrine of the military standards. Sadly, since the Victorian excavators were more interested in the Pharaonic reliefs underneath, the paintings survive today largely in the form of watercolour copies made in 1859. (Even today a modern guidebook states with cheerful philistinism that 'fortunately what little is left is wearing off!')

The paintings on one wall appear to represent cavalymen, but Fuentes was incorrect in saying that they depict four cavalymen in white



Partially reconstructed figure from Castellum Dimidi (item 8 in text catalogue). This figure wears a white tunic and a red cloak outlined in black; he also appears to have some form of hat, but unfortunately the vital area of the fresco is missing. (Reconstruction after M.L.Gaillard).



tunics and one in a brick-red tunic. While it is true that one man wears a red tunic, only the tunic of one other man is clearly indicated in the watercolour sketches; the rest were obviously too badly damaged to record accurately and exist only as outlines. It is evident from what remained on the main central wall that even Roman military tunics now displayed the contemporary civilian fashion for decorative patches. This takes the form of patterned borders at the neck, sleeves and hem, and medallions on the lower part of the tunic and cloak. The tunics on this wall are white and the cloaks yellow-brown with dark green (almost black) patches decorated with white designs. If the figure in a red tunic on the previous wall was an officer as Fuentes suggested, we must note that his tunic is the least decorated of all those in the entire fresco.

A large number of intact tunics from Egypt, dating from this period up until the Byzantine era, have been recovered. Because of their decorated patches they are usually classed under 'Coptic art' – a term some scholars argue is derived from the Greek word for Egypt. As such they are generally dismissed as being either Egyptian or Christian art forms rather than Roman, and they tend to be overlooked by Roman scholars. Nevertheless, it is obvious that – at least in the early part of the period – there were continuing influences from the Classical world as well as from other parts of the empire. It is also clear from surviving mosaics and wall paintings from across the empire that this fashion was not confined to Egypt. Some of the surviving tunics could well be military in origin, although this would be almost impossible to prove. Given the similarities to the iconographic record, it is surely permissible to argue that they give a good general idea of what military tunics might have looked like. In particular, surviving *orbiculi* with eagle motifs would have been especially appropriate for soldiers; while the swastika device can be seen on actual textile fragments as well as on mosaics and fresco which certainly depict soldiers.

(10) Mithraic temple frescos, Italy; 3rd century AD

Followers of the cult of Mithras, a deity of Persian origin whose worship was popular amongst the military, were divided into seven grades. Each grade was represented by a specific character, one of whom was the soldier, *miles*; and on special occasions worshippers wore the appropriate costume of their grade. One would expect, therefore, that since many of the worshippers were from the military the character of the *miles* would wear a costume readily identifiable as military.

Detail from one of the mid-19th century watercolour sketches taken from the early 4th century frescos which once adorned the walls of the shrine of the standards in the headquarters of the Roman fort built into the structure of the temple at Luxor, Egypt (item 9 in text catalogue). Now considered a valuable source of reference for Roman military clothing, the partial remains of these paintings are today completely overlooked by visitors to the Pharaonic temple. (MS Wilkinson dep.d.34 Fol 27v-28r, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

Fortunately there are some surviving wall paintings that illustrate some of these Mithraic rituals taking place. On the walls of the temple at Capua Vetere in Italy there are two scenes which each show an initiate into the grade of *miles* undergoing an ordeal by fire. In both cases the initiate is held by one figure wearing a white tunic with red stripes on the sleeves, while another figure wearing a dark red tunic, red cloak and red-crested helmet approaches brandishing burning torches. While Daniels identifies the figures wearing white tunics as the *milites*, the leading Mithraic scholar Vermaseren says that they are the figures in red.

The identification of the figures in red as *milites* is further supported by another fresco in the Mithraeum at Santa Prisca in Rome, which shows a procession of the seven grades. In this instance the costume of the *miles* also appears to be a reddish-brown, with two rows of purple piping at the wrists of the long-sleeved tunic. Furthermore the military nature of this character is enhanced by the presence of a military bag, *sarcina*, carried over his left shoulder. Nevertheless, it is somewhat confusing to discover that in a second procession scene at the same Mithraeum the *miles* appears to wear an olive-green tunic with brown piping at the wrists – although Vermaseren admits that as this figure has no other recognisable military attributes his identity is not as clear as in the previous painting.

(11) Dio's Roman History, Epitome of Book LXXIX, 2-3; 3rd century AD

As well as inventing a cloak named after him, Caracalla is also recorded as wearing at least three more conventional forms of coloured cloak. Dio describes a purple cloak; a purple cloak with a broad white stripe down the centre; and another, presumably white, where the stripe itself was purple. Dio himself witnessed the emperor wearing the latter.

(12) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, written c.AD 390, *The Two Gallieni*, VII, 4 – VIII, 1

The Augustan History tells us that the Emperor Gallienus (r.253–268) celebrated a Decennial festival with various spectacles and parades. The soldiers were all dressed in white on this occasion, in much the same way as officers were for the triumphal parade of Vitellius described by Tacitus (see MAA 374, page 23, item 14).

(13) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Life of Claudius II*, XIV, 2-10

The equipment owned by Claudius II when he was serving as a tribune in Syria c.255 AD is itemised in two letters allegedly sent by the Emperors Valerian (r.253–260 AD) and Galerius (r.305–311). In the first letter the following can be found among his clothing: two cloaks; two togas; one pair of leggings; one white part-silk tunic with Girbitian purple (from the island of Jerba, Tunisia); one tunic with Moorish purple; two white tunics; and two red military tunics. This certainly supports the suggestion that soldiers could wear different styles of tunic for different occasions; and if 'military' tunics were put on – like 'military' cloaks – as signifying a state of war (described by Cassius Dio, *Epit.*, 50.4; see also Appian, Book V, 100, and Caesar, Civil War, I, 5.6), then this could be seen as support for the hypothesis that red tunics were worn in battle.

In the second letter the list includes two cloaks with purple borders; 16 garments of various kinds; a white one of silk; one tunic with bands

of embroidery, three ounces in weight; three pairs of Parthian shoes; ten Dalmatian striped tunics; one Dardanian greatcoat; one Illyrian cloak; one hooded cloak; two shaggy hoods; and four handkerchiefs from Sarepta, near Sidon in Phoenicia.

(14) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, The Deified Aurelian, XIII, 2-4, and XLVI, 1-6*

If we are to believe the Augustan History, the Emperor Valerian presented Aurelian after his victories against the Goths c.255 AD with – amongst other military decorations – four red general's tunics; two proconsul's cloaks; a bordered toga; a tunic decorated with palms; a toga decorated with gold; and a long undertunic.

This source also credits Aurelian, when he himself became emperor in 270, with being the first to give soldiers tunics with decorated bands, where previously they had only received vertically woven tunics of purple (*SHA, XXVI, 46*). Apparently Aurelian was also responsible for presenting some soldiers with tunics that had one band; and to those who already had tunics with two bands he gave tunics with three bands, and so on up to five bands. It is attractive to interpret this statement as indicating some system of definition of rank, service or award that was recognisable by the number of bands on tunics. This would be hard to prove, however, as surviving civilian clothes, including those belonging to children, have been found with two or more coloured bands.

(15) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Probus IV, 3-6*

Probus, like Claudius II before him, served as a military tribune before becoming emperor (r.276–283), and a list of goods similar to those belonging to Claudius II is recorded. Because of his limited financial means the Emperor Valerian orders the Prefect of the Guard to supply Probus with a list of items necessary for someone of his rank. This includes: two red tunics; two 'Gallic cloaks', and two undertunics with decorated bands.

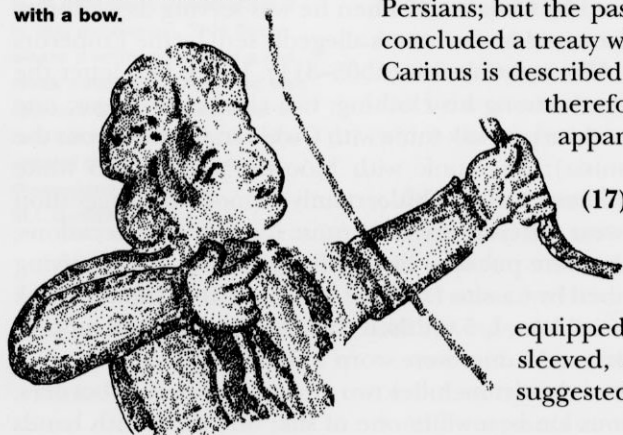
(16) Synesius of Cyrene, *De Regno* 12 *OP.*, m.66, 1804

Although written much later (c.400) this passage may also allude to Probus. Synesius glorifies the simple lifestyle of ancient emperors, and describes how Carinus (r.283–285) appears before an embassy of Persians; but the passage is much more likely to refer to Probus, who concluded a treaty with the Persian king Bahram II. The tunic worn by Carinus is described as made of 'red commonplace wool'. This might therefore be a reference to yet another emperor who apparently dressed as an ordinary soldier.

(17) Fresco, Aquincum, Hungary; late 3rd century AD

The restored fragments from a fresco found in the legionary fortress show the top half of a man, possibly hunting, who is unarmoured but equipped with a bow. The tunic is light green, long-sleeved, and possibly with dark green *clavi*. It has been suggested that the figure represents an officer from the garrison who may originally have been mounted.

Fragment from a fresco found at the fortress of Aquincum in Hungary (item 17 in text catalogue); it shows a man in a light green tunic armed with a bow.



(18) Mosaic, Gamzigrad, Yugoslavia; late 3rd/early 4th century AD

A mosaic from the military site of Gamzigrad on the Danube frontier shows what appear to be two soldiers, protected by a large oval shield, hunting a lioness. Both men wear long-sleeved green tunics decorated with red *clavi*, sleeve cuffs, and *orbiculi* that have yellow motifs. The *clavi* themselves are further decorated with a yellow vine branch design.

If the men are soldiers they may have belonged to a vexillation from Legio III Gallica. Their elaborate costume almost foreshadows the splendour of the Byzantine court, and emphasises the importance of the military at this period. The tunics themselves may be compared with other examples including those from Piazza Armerina, and with surviving textiles from Antinoe and other sites in Egypt, which have similar designs.

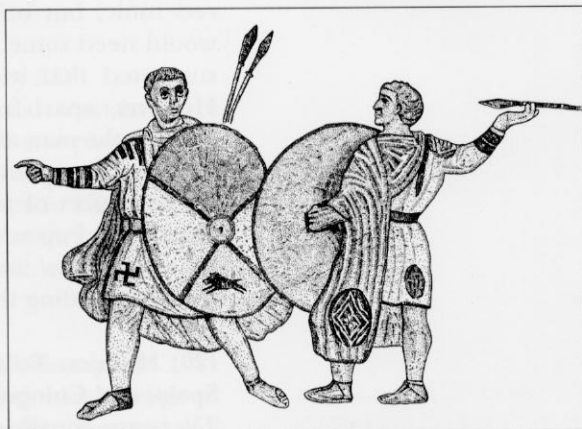
(19) Mosaics, Piazza Armerina, Sicily; 4th century AD

A significant source of evidence for late Roman costumes are the mosaics at the imposing villa of Piazza Armerina, dating to around AD 300. There are a number of theories as to who owned the villa, who commissioned the mosaics, and what relationship they bear to their owner. Candidates include the Emperor Maximian in 305, due to the similarity between three men wearing the common pillbox hat in the 'Great Hunt' mosaic and the co-Emperors Diocletian and Maximian in the famous statue of the Tetrarchs now in Venice. Further discoveries in Sicily have revealed that Piazza Armerina is by no means unique, however (or, indeed, even the largest villa complex on the island). The Praetorian *signum* painted above the main entrance nevertheless lends support to those who argue the villa's Imperial ownership.

An alternative explanation is that the owner, who may have received the villa from an emperor, was an extremely wealthy man who may have had connections with the animal trade from North Africa. At least 70 figures in one mosaic alone are engaged in various activities associated with the hunting and transportation of animals for the Roman games. It is generally inferred that the majority of these figures are soldiers, including those on foot, on horseback and on board ships, but this identification is by no means absolute. It is true that as part of their training, as a means of supplementing their diet and as leisure activity, soldiers hunted animals. Consequently the military may have been involved in the great expeditions required to catch the wild animals needed for the arena. The navy, which supplied sailors to rig the awnings at the Coliseum, provides one example of military involvement. Furthermore, an altar found at Montana (Mihailovgrad) in Bulgaria records how Cohors I Gilicium, a detachment from Legio I Italica and

BELOW Detail of two soldiers from the mid-4th century 'Great Hunt' mosaic at Piazza Armerina, Sicily (item 19 in text catalogue). See Plate G1.

BOTTOM Armoured figures from the Triconchos mosaic at the Piazza Armerina villa, Sicily. They wear crested helmets and scale shirts; the foreground figure has a red tunic.



Legio XI Claudia, and the Danube fleet (Classis Flavia Moesica, based in Lower Moesia – Bulgaria) caught animals for the Emperor Antoninus Pius in 147 AD.

However, the figures on the Piazza Armerina mosaic could equally represent the liveried retainers of a vast private estate, and for the dangerous task of catching wild beasts they would certainly need weapons and shields. Still, the colours worn by most of the men depicted are the common combination of white tunic and yellow-brown cloak.

Of special interest is the fact that many of the figures on board ships wear blue tunics, although others among them have red tunics, which Fuentes interpreted as distinguishing the ships' centurions. However, at least one boat is manned by three figures wearing military-style belts and dressed in white tunics which are highly decorated with *orbiculi* and patterned hems. Other figures represented on the mosaic who are possibly not soldiers include those men leading ox wagons, who wear yellowish tunics. There is one man in a golden-yellow tunic who may be attached to the military, as his belt has 'propeller' fastenings, a well-documented item of military equipment.

The explanation that some of the figures on the mosaic could be civilians would solve at least one anomaly. If only centurions wore red tunics, as Fuentes believed, then the figure on the mosaic wearing a red tunic, but being beaten with a staff by a man in a white tunic, would need some explanation. To try to justify this peculiarity Fuentes suggested that it was the shade of red that was a deciding factor. However, apart from the style of his tunic there is nothing else to identify the man as military; and, like the figure on the Luxor fresco, his tunic is also one of the plainest on the mosaic – hardly what one would expect of an officer of this period. Furthermore, his tunic has been pulled up and over a belt, thereby hiding it; this contrasts with the other 'soldiers' on the mosaic, whose wide waist belts can clearly be seen – including that of the man with the staff who is beating him.

(20) Mosaics, Tellaro villa, Sicily; Bone & Tipasa, Algeria; Centelles, Spain; and Cologne, Germany; 4th century AD

There are equally elaborate mosaics at the villa at Tellaro, also in Sicily. One mosaic at this site also has figures which could be identified as soldiers since they are wearing similar clothing to the figures on the hunting mosaics at Piazza Armerina.

Another hunting scene on a mosaic from Bone, Algeria, which is probably contemporary with the mosaics from Piazza Armerina, shows at least five figures on foot. All of them wear white tunics with black decorated patches, and at least two have dark yellow-brown cloaks. One of the mounted figures in this mosaic wears a cloak of the same shade, but another rider's cloak is more of a reddish hue. A mosaic from Tipasa, Algeria, depicting scenes from the legend of Achilles, does show some figures wearing what appears to be contemporary dress. One in particular wears the characteristic type of military uniform depicted on the Piazza Armerina hunting scene, and in fact archaeologists have used this similarity to date the Tipasa mosaic to the 4th century. Not surprisingly, links have been made between these African mosaics and those from Sicily as possible products of the same school.

The ceiling mosaic at the Imperial Mausoleum at Centcelles, near Tarragona in Spain, would have been as well known as those from Piazza Armerina, but sadly it is not as well preserved. On one of the reconstructed panels from the central section it is possible to see that an emperor was depicted surrounded by officials and guards. The guards' uniforms were clearly similar to those on the Piazza Armerina mosaics.

A male figure on a mosaic from Cologne, Germany, wearing the familiar colour combination of white tunic, yellow-brown cloak and dark coloured trousers, clearly indicates that this type of 'uniform' was not confined to the Mediterranean and North African provinces – in fact, as mentioned above, it may even have originated in the North.

(21) Mosaic, Leptis Magna, Libya; 4th century AD

Two huntsmen appear on a mosaic which archaeologists believe dates to the 4th century AD – again, because they wear a similar costume to those seen on other contemporary mosaics. One man has a short-sleeved white belted tunic beneath his cloak, while his companion displays the more fashionable decorated patches on his long-sleeved white tunic. Both have cloaks of a reddish colour. The man in the short-sleeved tunic appears to have thrown a spear with his right hand but retains two spears and a shield in his left hand; the blazon on the shield is interestingly reminiscent of those depicted on Trajan's Column, which might suggest that these men are soldiers.

(22) Mosaic, Ayios Iakovos, Chios, Greece; 4th century AD

Recent excavations on Chios have uncovered a mosaic consisting of eight panels with gladiatorial and hunting scenes. In one panel a man dressed in a white long-sleeved tunic decorated with purple *orbiculi* and *clavi* is shown in the act of killing a lion with a spear. His costume has much in common with those on the Piazza Armerina mosaics, and could therefore be included with them as possible evidence for soldiers' uniforms.

(23) Fresco, Vibia Ipogaeum, Appia Antica, Rome; 4th century AD

A warrior, probably a mythological hero, is shown in the lower register of a fresco found in the temple of Sabbatius. The tunic is red but has short sleeves, which is unusual but not unknown at this date.

(24) Via Latina catacomb paintings, Rome; 4th century AD

There are a number of interesting figures in these catacombs dating from between 300 and 350 AD. Although these scenes illustrate both Old and New Testament stories, the characters are in contemporary dress. Of special interest, therefore, are the following military figures. Two soldiers are depicted casting lots for the clothes of Christ; one is very badly damaged, but his companion wears a white tunic, a yellow-brown cloak with a small swastika device, and a pillbox hat. Elsewhere a column of Egyptian cavalry chases the Israelites as they cross the Red Sea. The cavalry helmets are remarkably similar to those on the Arch of Galerius, and are coloured light blue, presumably to represent iron. Their cloaks are a yellow-brown shade and their tunics are ivory white.

This Old Testament story is also repeated in another painting in the catacomb; the cavalry are practically the same as before except that



Soldiers from catacomb paintings, Italy (items 24 & 26 in text catalogue). (A) Via Latina, Rome; one of the two figures casting lots for the clothes of Christ. (B) Via Latina, Rome; single figure representing the Egyptian army from the Old Testament. (C) Via Maria, Sicily; soldier with red tunic, crested ridge helmet with 'eyes', and decorated shield.

some of their helmets are yellow and therefore bronze. Finally, a single figure representing the Egyptian army stands in a decorated panel framing the main subject. He wears a reddish-brown cloak; either a crested helmet or a Phrygian cap; and what is supposedly a mail shirt, reaching down to the wrists and to just above the knees. A narrow white band is just visible around the soldier's neck, and beneath the mail shirt covering the knees – possibly a white tunic worn underneath the mail.

(25) Cavalryman, catacomb painting, Rome, Italy; 4th century AD?

A graffito in the Domitilla catacomb shows an armoured cavalryman, possibly a cataphract, who wears an orange-red tunic and cloak.

(26) Via Maria, catacomb painting, Syracuse, Sicily; 4th century AD

A soldier is illustrated, wearing a red tunic decorated with dark red or purple decorated patches like those described above. More remarkable is his crested 'ridge' helmet, which appears identical to an excavated helmet from Intercisa, and to one worn by a soldier on a tombstone from Aquileia. This adds to the validation of this painting as evidence for tunic colours, but it is not clear whether the figure depicts a common soldier or an officer.

(27) A will, drafted by Valerius Apion, centurion, Egypt; c.320 AD

Some circumstantial evidence for red tunics is found in a will drafted by Valerius Apion, a centurion serving with a vexillation from the Equites Promoti of Legio II Traiana based in Egypt. The will lists the possessions left by Apion, including his military equipment; and among the latter is something called an *alabandicum*, which is otherwise unknown. The *alabandicum* was probably so named because of an association with the city of Alabanda, now in Turkey, as it was quite common for goods to be identified with geographical locations – perhaps their place of origin. Alabanda was famous for producing reddish-purple gemstones, as recorded by Pliny. It is well known that some late Roman helmets were

decorated with gemstones, although those discovered so far have not been decorated entirely with one type of stone; so on present evidence it seems unlikely that a helmet would have been given the nickname of *alabandicum*.

A recent interpretation put forward by David Woods suggests that the term refers to the military tunic, which acquired this nickname because of its red colour. As additional evidence he adds that St Jerome referred to the tunic of a state official as 'Punic', deriving from the old Roman name for Carthage; so it is intriguing that Pliny also mentions other red gemstones that were called 'Carthaginian' (*Nat. Hist.*, 37.25, 92-96).

If this is indeed its meaning, the nickname *alabandicum* may only have applied in the East; and Woods also supplies another term for tunics that appears in late antiquity – the Greek word *blattea*. This again appears to be associated with tunics that were reddish-purple in colour; it is used in connection with tunics worn by King Clovis when he was made consul in AD 507 (Gregory of Tours, *HF*, 2.38), and also with the military martyr St Theagenes of Parium (*BHG*, 2416). The latter reference is especially intriguing: by a curious coincidence, St Theagenes was at one time a recruit in Legio II Traiana based in Egypt – the same legion as the centurion Valerius Apion...

(28) Decorated shields, Egypt; 4th century AD?

Recently some excavated fragments of decorated shields from Egypt have come to light. One of them contains a male figure within a rectangular frame, the pose and costume strikingly reminiscent of the figure on the so-called Stilicho ivory diptych. This would suggest that the shield dates from the late 4th or early 5th century AD. While the man's long-sleeved tunic appears to be of a pinkish shade, his long cloak – held in place by a large 'crossbow' brooch – is dark red and is decorated with a large black rectangular patch.

(29) Mosaic, Low Ham Villa, Somerset, England; mid-4th century AD

This remarkable late Romano-British mosaic depicts the story of the romance between the Trojan hero Aeneas and the Carthaginian queen Dido. In keeping with many contemporary mosaics from Britain, the figures are executed in a naive provincial style but with obvious influences from elsewhere in the empire.

The male military costumes in the mosaic may have been influenced by the nearby presence of Legio II Augusta, especially those of Ascanius the son of Aeneas. Although only a boy, in one scene he is depicted holding a spear like his father; he wears a red Phrygian cap and cloak over a long-sleeved white tunic with three bands around the cuffs – a costume he also wears when mounted on a horse. Aeneas himself is sometimes represented wearing a cuirass over a red tunic.

(30) Vegetius, *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, II.7; c.390 AD

Vegetius gives a list of titles and grades of officers of a late Roman legion. Immediately above the ordinary soldiers, whom Vegetius calls *munifices* because they did services *munera*, are the *candidati duplares* and the *candidati simplares*. Fuentes believed it likely that both these grades of soldier were spared the unpleasant duties carried out by ordinary soldiers, and that therefore they may have been able to keep their tunics relatively



Figure painted onto a decorated shield found in Egypt (item 28 in text catalogue). The soldier wears a pinkish red tunic, and a dark red cloak with a black rectangular decorative patch.

clean. The term '*candidati*' may consequently be an example of military slang – Fuentes suggested 'the lily-white boys'.

(31) Vegetius, *Epitoma Rei Militaris*; IV, 37

Vegetius describes how the sails and rigging of small patrol vessels were dyed 'Venetian' blue which, he informs us, matched the ocean waves. *Venutus* was a dark blue, the same as that used by the blue Circus faction. The wax used to pay the sides of the ships was also dyed this colour. Likewise the sailors and marines wore 'Venetian' blue uniforms as camouflage so as to hide by day and night.

Although the exact translation is not particularly clear, Vegetius adds that the Britons called small scouting vessels *picati* – possibly a misspelling of *pictae*, 'painted', presumably because of their blue colour. Fuentes believed that it was just the sailors of the British fleet who wore blue uniforms, but this colour would be equally appropriate for the sailors and vessels of other fleets.

(32) Mosaic, Rielves, Spain; 4th century AD

This was the last piece of evidence presented by Fuentes in his article on 'Roman Military Tunics'. Occupying the central panel of this mosaic is a scene showing warriors fighting. The immediate impression is that the figures are portrayed in an archaic style; for instance, the men all wear short-sleeved tunics rather than the contemporary long-sleeved type. It has been suggested that the figures are in fact gladiators rather than soldiers, although it has to be said that their armour does not look very gladiatorial. Although it is coloured yellow it does not look like scale, and actually has a draped effect, so that it appears more like fabric than metal. One must conclude that a muscle cuirass was what was intended; but, taken together with their Classical appearance, it is unclear what the scene is meant to represent or whether it has any relevance to the Roman army.

(33) Claudianus, *Opera Omnia, Contra Rufinum II*, 108-109; c.AD 404

A poem in praise of the Magister Militum, Stilicho, written by the late Roman poet Claudianus during the reign of the Emperor Honorius, includes some brief descriptions of Roman uniforms. A unit of Armenians, possibly the Comites Sagitarii Armeni, is described as having grass-coloured cloaks. Claudianus in *De Quarto Consulatu Augusti* also refers to the 'white cohorts', probably a unit of the Auxilia Palatina; and in *De Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti* he mentions cavalymen with purple-red sashes or ribbons on the shoulders.

(34) Mosaic, Faenza, Italy; 5th century AD

A crudely executed mosaic possibly celebrates Stilicho's victory at Pollentia. It is believed that the figure on the left represents Stilicho himself, standing before the enthroned Emperor Honorius who is flanked by armed guards. He wears a white tunic decorated with a single broad black stripe, edged with red, down the middle. The sleeve cuffs have two black bands again edged with red, which may represent an actual colour but could simply be an outline. The cloak which Stilicho wears has been given a striped effect, but comparison with the cloaks

(continued on page 33)

EMPERORS IN THE FIELD

1: Severus Alexander (r.AD 222-235)

2: Caracalla (r.AD 211-217)

3: Probus (r.AD 276-282)



FOREIGN INFLUENCES

1: Germanic scout, early 3rd century AD

2: Germanic warrior, Thorsberg, 3rd century AD

3: Palmyrene scout, 3rd century AD



THE SEVERAN ARMY

1: Legionary, AD 193

2: Praetorian Guard, AD 193

3: Roman phalangite, AD 217



THE EDGE OF EMPIRE

1: Auxiliary tribune, mid-3rd century AD

2: Auxiliary vexillarius, mid-3rd century AD

3: Auxiliary centurion, mid-3rd century AD



IMPERIUM BRITANNIARUM

1: Legionary centurion, 3rd century AD

2: Mithraic worshipper, Hadrian's Wall, 3rd century AD

3: Sailor, British Fleet, 3rd century AD



HORSEMEN OF LUXOR

1 & 2: Officers, late 3rd-early 4th centuries AD

3: Heavy cavalryman, late 3rd-early 4th centuries AD



THE GREAT HUNT

1 & 2: Soldiers, 4th century AD

3: Senior officer, 4th century AD



'HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS'

1: Constantius II (r.AD 337-361)

2: Protector Sacri Lateris, Imperial Guard, mid-4th century AD

3: Cavalryman, Equites Catafractarii, mid-4th century AD



worn by the three other figures suggests that this may be an attempt to indicate folds rather than patterns. Stilicho wears long trousers, which are decorated by a narrow row of alternate black and white squares; the background colour of the trousers, and of all the cloaks in the mosaic, appears to be a brownish-purple. An orange-brown cap, apparently of Phrygian style, completes his costume.

Except for his cloak and boots Honorius is shown naked, but in spite of this there is still one interesting costume detail worth mentioning: Honorius clearly wears white socks, which show through the gaps in his leather boots. The clothes of the two fully armoured guards are in marked contrast to the costume worn by Stilicho. They wear the classic muscled cuirass and have old-fashioned, short-sleeved white tunics; a large circle visible on one of them appears to be the fashionable type of applied decoration. It is noticeable that neither of the guards wears trousers, perhaps in keeping with a law banning trousers that Honorius himself had passed. It is possible, therefore, that the artist was aware of the anti-Germanic climate that was currently sweeping the court, and that would ultimately topple Stilicho himself and lead to the execution of this most successful of late Roman generals.

CONTRIBUTORY EVIDENCE

A group of late Roman and early medieval manuscript copies of earlier Roman originals could additionally be included as evidence of Roman tunic and cloak colours. These include the illustrated scenes from the *Iliad* now in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan; and figures at the Crucifixion in an illuminated manuscript in the Bibliotheca Laurenziana, Florence, where the soldier who pierces the side of Christ with his spear is dressed in red.

Perhaps the most famous of these manuscript copies is the anonymous *De Rebus Bellicis*, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. An illustration purporting to represent a garment known as a *thoracomachus* – worn under armour – also shows an unarmoured soldier standing close by. The accessories illustrated, including his pillbox hat, are quite accurately observed and provide a touch of authenticity to the drawing. The soldier's tunic is a red-orange; he wears white *bracae*, and black leg wrappings tied with red thongs.

The majority of the tunic colours in many other manuscript illustrations are also consistent with the earlier evidence – i.e., limited to either red or white – although in the Crucifixion scene described above two figures at the foot of the cross wear blue and green tunics. Likewise the cloaks are from the same colour range as in earlier Roman art. In some cases, for example the scenes from the *Iliad*, the paintings are believed to be copies of earlier works perhaps dating from the mid-3rd to 6th centuries AD.

There are other figures in catacomb paintings that appear to be dressed like contemporary Roman soldiers, with short belted tunics and cloaks. One appears in a scene in the Praetextatus catacomb (see item 7 above) standing next to the Samaritan woman at a well; he wears a white tunic and red cloak. A man similarly attired, but with a sword scabbard also visible, collects water in his hands after Moses has struck the rock with his staff.



Late Roman soldier as seen in the anonymous early medieval manuscript *De Rebus Bellicis*, from the illustration depicting the *thoracomachus*. His tunic is orange-red, and he wears a brown pillbox hat decorated with spots – perhaps to indicate texture? His leg wrappings are black with red ties.



Images of warrior gods from Egypt. Many of these figures, like those above, bear a marked resemblance to members of the Severan dynasty, in particular Caracalla. They are an unrecognised source of reference for military equipment; scale armour, decorated linen cuirasses, *pteruges*, greaves and fringed cloaks are frequently visible. (Reconstruction after M. Rassart Debergh from materials in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology).

* * *

The results of early discoveries and excavations are now virtually forgotten or generally ignored by the majority of modern scholars, and this is especially true in the study of Roman army equipment. A totally dismissive approach is hard to justify, given that they include discoveries that no longer survive or were in a better state of preservation when first recorded. For instance, many early antiquarians must have seen surviving traces of the paint that once decorated all Roman sculptures and monuments.

A good example is perhaps provided by the reconstructions of a Republican *triarius* from the altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus by the 19th century scholars Racinet (in *Le Costume Historique*, Paris, 1883), and Hottenroth (in *Il Costume, Le armi, gli Utensili dei Popoli Antichi e Moderni*, Rome, 1887-92). In both publications this figure wears a blue tunic. This source material was obviously used for the same soldier in a reconstruction that appeared in Forestier, *The Roman Soldier* (London, 1928). Nevertheless both Racinet and Hottenroth depicted a 1st century legionary in marching order wearing a red tunic.

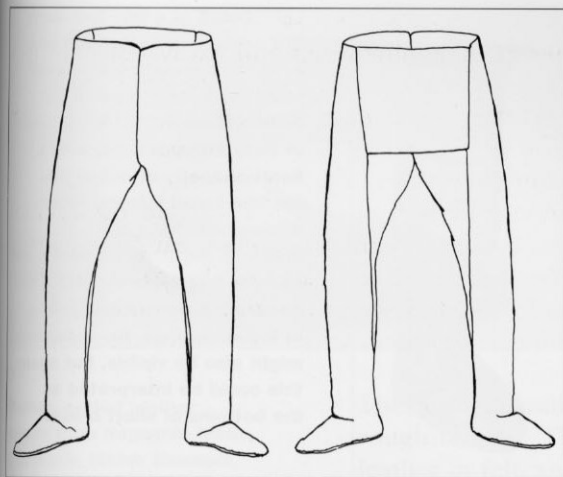
More intriguing, perhaps, is the discovery made by Abbot Rudolph at the monastery of St Trudon in Cologne, Germany, in 1121. When a large sarcophagus believed to belong to St Gereon was opened, the saint's remains and clothing were found to be in an excellent state of preservation. It was recorded that the saint was wearing an undertunic which had apparently been of fine white cloth but had been stained a reddish colour by the red overtunic: '*subitus ad carnem... vestis serica albi maxime coloris sed tamen sub rubea*'. This discovery is of interest because Gereon was a soldier, who had served in either Legio III Diocletiana Thebaorum or Legio Maximiana Thebaorum. He was martyred in c.304 on the orders of the Emperor Maximian for refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods. Had he been buried in his military clothing?

OTHER CLOTHING

Trousers, leggings and leg bindings

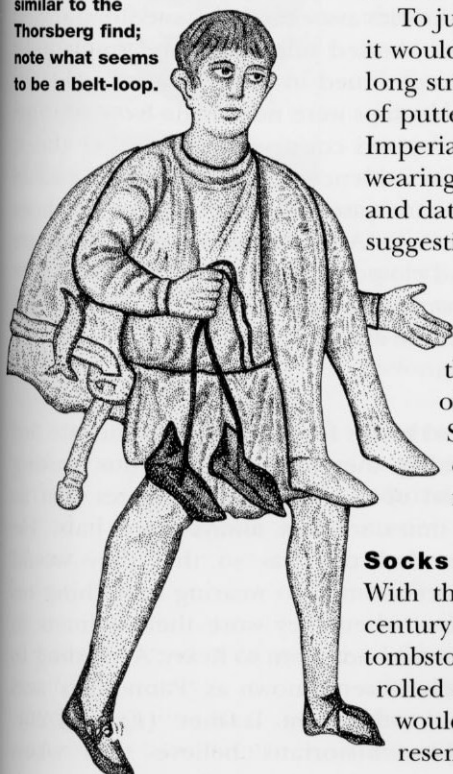
From the 3rd century onwards it is not always easy to determine whether soldiers went bare-legged or wore very tight-fitting trousers. The coloured paints on most sculptures have long since worn away; but mosaics and wall paintings from Africa and the Middle East (including those from Dura Europos) would seem to indicate that the soldiers stationed there wore long trousers tucked into boots. The trousers in these paintings are generally dark in colour, either a greyish shade or chocolate brown. According to the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* the Emperor Alexander Severus wore white trousers and not the scarlet ones which it had previously been the custom to wear (*SHA, Sev. Alex.*, XL, 5-11).

Another form of leg protection which may have been adopted by soldiers are the leggings which frequently appear in various art forms, worn by huntsmen and other outdoor labourers such as the ploughman from Piercebridge, Durham, England. One huntsman on a mosaic from



Front (left) and rear diagram of the Thorsberg footed trousers, which have now been dated to no later than the 3rd century. They are approximately 100cm in length, with legs about 30cm in width.

This wall painting in Silistria, Bulgaria, dates from the late 4th century. It depicts a servant carrying a pair of shoes, and trousers which are strikingly similar to the Thorsberg find; note what seems to be a belt-loop.



Apamea in Syria actually wears both short *bracae* to just above the knee and leggings below the knee. It would be surprising, therefore, if soldiers in the field did not wear what was seen as a commonplace garment for outdoor activities. Two 1st century pay receipts for soldiers from Egypt and Masada, Israel, may provide evidence that leggings were in fact included in the basic kit. Among the list of compulsory deductions for clothing and food for Gaius Messius (possibly a legionary cavalryman) found at Masada, and a similar list relating to Quintus Julius Proclus, a cavalryman based in Alexandria, are items described as *fascia* – the term used for a wrapping. In both cases they are listed next to the soldiers' boots, which suggests that they were a leg wrapping of some sort.

Leggings appear to have been rectangular and made from wool or felt. Most sculptural renditions portray the strings which fastened them below the knee and above the ankle. Actual examples of surviving leggings have even been recovered from German and Danish bogs. The remains of a leg still wrapped inside the material, found at Sogaards Mose in Denmark, graphically proved that these wrappings did not cover the feet. Another bog body possibly dating from the Roman period, which was discovered on Grewelthorpe Moor in northern England in the mid-19th century, may have had leggings that were yellow in colour. A medieval manuscript now in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, which is a copy of a late Roman original, shows a soldier wearing black leggings.

To judge from the contemporary visual arts, however, by that period it would have been more fashionable to wear leg bindings made from long strips of material wound around the leg in a manner reminiscent of puttees. These were probably called *fascia crurales*, and Galen, the Imperial physician to Marcus Aurelius (r.161–180) describes soldiers wearing them. Some of the bandage-like textiles found at Vindolanda and dating to the late 1st century AD could also fall into this category, suggesting that this type of leg binding was worn even earlier.

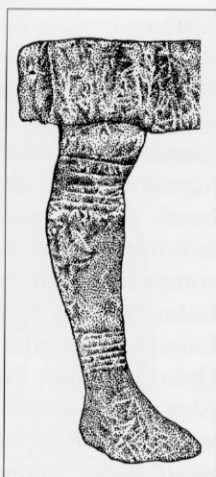
The Imperial biographer Suetonius (*Aug.* lxxxii) informs us that Augustus frequently wore leg wrappings as a protection against the cold; but another 1st century writer, Quintillianus, says that they were considered suitable only for invalids (*xi.3, 144*). In spite of this, by the 3rd century we find that the Emperor Alexander Severus always wore them (*SHA, Severus Alexander, XL5-11*); and early Christian representations of Christ as the Good Shepherd invariably show him wearing leg bindings of this sort.

Socks and boots

With the introduction of the enclosed marching boot from the 2nd century onwards socks may have worn as a matter of course; a 3rd century tombstone from Apamea may show a soldier wearing socks apparently rolled over the top of his boots, but this is conjectural. However, socks would be unnecessary when wearing trousers with integral feet resembling medieval 'footed hose', as in the Thorsberg find.



LEFT Leg wrappings: preserved examples from Sogaards Mose, Denmark, complete with the owner's leg. (Skive Museum, Denmark; photograph by Niels Thomsen, Stockholm); CENTRE fragment of a stone relief from Nijmegen, Holland.



LEFT Detail of a late 2nd-century 3rd-century tombstone of one Ares, an appropriately named weapons-keeper, now in the British Museum. It shows boots of Dura Europos type, with a heart-shaped cut-out at the toe and broad integral laces. Without surviving colour, however, his other garments are open to interpretation. He could be wearing *bracae* and socks, or leg wrappings. An undertunic might also be visible, but again this could be interpreted as the bottoms of short *bracae*.



3rd century Roman boot from Dura Europos. (Yale University Art Gallery) BELOW, reconstructed 3rd century boots by Mark Beaby, based on finds from Dura Europos and recent interpretations by Carol van Driel-Murray. Their integral laces distinguish this type of boots.



By the 3rd century the traditional form of open *caligae* have disappeared entirely from the archaeological record, although they still appear on Imperial sculpture. An extremely popular form of footwear in the 3rd century, attested both archaeologically and sculpturally, was a front-fastening boot with integrally cut laces. It is tempting to suggest that this was a standard pattern produced empire-wide by contractors, since examples have been found as far apart as Usk in South Wales and Dura Europos in Syria in both military and civilian contexts. This kind of footwear is even discernible in a number of pictorial representations.

However, it was by no means the only type of boot in use at this period; indeed, the 3rd century has been described as an age of experiment and innovation. A number of features introduced at this time display many of the characteristics associated with medieval shoes, such as their sewn construction, butted side seams and single-layer soles. Other older techniques continued in use, however, although shoes with openwork cut-outs and straps were now made from a single piece of leather rather than the layered construction of earlier times. Nailed footwear was still much in evidence until at least the end of the 4th century, although there are cases where examples of shoes come in nailed and un-nailed versions. After the 3rd century there are few noticeable changes; open and closed types of boots continue to be represented in the pictorial record, and shoe styles from this period are still around in the early Byzantine era.

Headgear

Roman soldiers are rarely depicted in any form of hat until the late 3rd century. It is surprising, therefore, that Vegetius, writing around the end of the 4th century, states that in earlier times soldiers always wore hats. He explains that this was so that they would become accustomed to wearing something on their heads – when they wore their helmets in battle these would not seem so heavy. According to Vegetius these hats were known as 'Pannonian' and were made from leather (*Epit.*, 1.20). Modern historians believe that when



Roman period leather shoes from Sogaards Mose, Denmark. (Skive Museum, Denmark; photograph by Niels Thomsen, Stockholm)



Phrygian-style cap worn by a 4th century rider, from the Lion Hunt Sarcophagus, Museum of San Sebastiano, Rome.

Vegetius refers to 'earlier times' he sometimes simply means before his own lifetime, rather than Republican and early Imperial times. The hats that he describes are probably those commonly known today as 'Tetrarchic' caps because of their appearance on the statue of the Tetrarchs now in St Mark's Square, Venice. They frequently appear elsewhere in wall paintings and sculptures from this period onwards, and complete the 'military' uniform of both soldiers and civic dignitaries.

The correct term for these hats is *pillei*, and they appear to have come in at least two types.

They are generally of a round pillbox shape, with either a smooth or a rough texture. The smooth versions were probably made either from leather or felt, and those of a rougher appearance from wool or fleece; the edict of Diocletian in fact describes how sheepskin with the wool left on was used to make a *pilleus*. It is possible that the design of these caps originated from the Persian tiara. According to Synesius of Cyrene, the Emperor Carinus (r.283–285) wore one to hide his baldness when he met some Persian ambassadors (*De Regno*, 12 OP, m66, 1804).

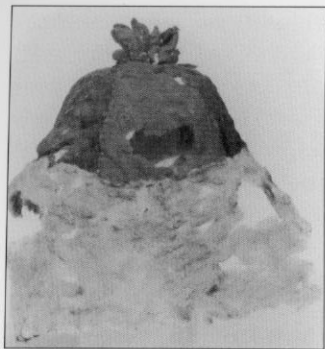
During the course of his adventures in the Persian wars the soldier-historian Ammianus became lost in the desert with only a single companion. Luckily they found a well, but as there was no bucket they had to tear up their clothes to make a rope, and collect water by lowering a hat which one of them was wearing under his helmet (*XIX*, 8.8). Many soldiers may therefore only have worn hats as extra padding under their helmets, which may account for their scarcity in pictorial sources. However, the 1st century writer Petronius does make a joke about a dove nesting in a soldier's hat, which seems to imply that they did exist even in the early Empire (*Fragments*, XXXVI).

Recently archaeologists have identified some well preserved helmet-shaped hats made of wool and found in Egypt as contenders for soldiers' hats. They are either divided into triangular sections coloured alternately in two different shades and with a small pompon on the apex, or are tricoloured red, green and yellow. Meanwhile a plain green felt hat was found during excavations at Mons Claudianus, an Imperial quarry also in Egypt. This may have been a freedman's hat, as there were undoubtedly slaves and civilians working there, but as there was a military presence at the site the possibility exists that it could have belonged to a soldier.

Thoracomachus and subarmillis

It is generally accepted amongst historians that the Romans used the equivalent of the medieval *aketon*, a quilted linen undergarment worn under their armour as added protection. Such a garment, termed a *thoracomachus*, is described by the anonymous author of *De Rebus Bellicis* (XV), a 4th century collection of often-fantastic inventions designed to restore the superiority of the Romans over their barbarian adversaries.

The author admits that the *thoracomachus*, unlike many of his other ideas, already existed and was indeed known to the ancients; he adds that to prevent it getting wet a second garment made of Libyan hide was also required. As confirmed by a modern reconstruction made of



Felt hat from Egypt, with alternating red and green triangular panels, a grey brim, and a mixed red and green pompon. It is of uncertain date, but believed to be from the late Roman period. (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Firenze)

linen stuffed with wool, if the *thoracomachus* does get wet it makes the wearer thoroughly uncomfortable, as it takes a long time to dry out. The hide covering, therefore, was probably treated with tallow to make it waterproof.

These hide coverings may have been termed 'Libyan' because they originated in the leather clothing worn by Libyan mercenaries during the Punic Wars. The Latin poet Silius Italicus refers to the red-dyed leather worn by Libyans, as does the Greek historian Herodotus, who also adds that they were made from goatskin with the hair removed (*Histories*, 4 & 7). It is of further interest that Pliny the Elder comments that madder could also be used to dye leather as well as textiles; and that Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* refers to a red Moroccan saddle.

Illustrations from early medieval copies of *De Rebus Bellicis* depict both the *thoracomachus* and the hide covering as T-shaped tunics, while those from later editions, perhaps influenced by contemporary *aketons*, show them as quilted. These descriptions are nevertheless remarkably similar to garments mentioned in an account by Caesar, who records that during the Civil War battle of Dyrrachium his soldiers made tunics and other protection from arrows out of felt, quilt, and hide (*De Bell. Civ.*, III, 44). Some have argued, however, that the fact that Caesar mentions this indicates that it was not normal practice.

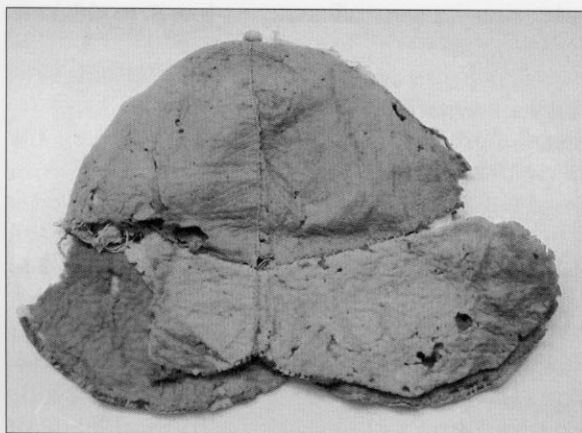
It is possible that in the earlier Imperial period the *thoracomachus* was known by another name. The Emperor Septimius Severus once had the Praetorian Guard parade only in a *subarmilis* to humiliate them (*SHA, Severus*, 6.11). This name clearly suggests something worn under armour. A *subarmilis* is also mentioned in a list of clothes on one of the wooden writing tablets from Vindolanda.

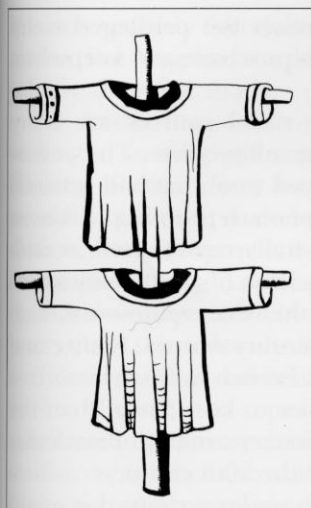
One other problem remains: whether the garment made of Libyan hide was worn directly over the *thoracomachus*, or over armour worn over the *thoracomachus*. The latter arrangement would be familiar to students of 13th century arms and armour, as it parallels the medieval surcoat and could be put on and taken off as required without too much effort. The historian D'Amato believes that the meaning of *thoracomachus* derives from 'fitted to the thorax', thus explaining both the muscular shape of many Roman armours represented in art and the description in *De Rebus Bellicis* of the hide garment as being 'the same shape as the *thoracomachus*' and 'well worked'. D'Amato therefore believes that the hide garment was worn directly over the *thoracomachus*, both with and at times instead of metal armour on top.

Whatever the exact arrangement, it does seem that the Romans did use covers of some sort over armour. According to Plutarch, at the battle of Tigranocerta in 68 BC, when the Armenian king Tigranes fought against a Roman army commanded by Lucullus, he mistook some of the Roman manoeuvres for a retreat (*Lucullus*, XXVII), until one of his aides pointed out that as the Romans had removed the leather covers from their armour they were in fact intending to fight.

Furthermore, the Jewish historian Josephus records that before parading to receive their pay during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 69 the

Felt hat – possibly a *petasus* – found in Egypt. (Bolton Museum & Art Gallery)





The *thoracomachus* and 'cover of Libyan hide' as seen by an early medieval artist, from the illustrated version of *De Rebus Bellicis*. A later version of the manuscript depicts both garments as quilted.



Figures on sculptured reliefs found at Hollenburg and Grabern in Austria probably depict soldiers' servants or grooms; all wear unbelted tunics. This example seems to wear an undertunic and *bracae*; the length of his sleeves is unclear, but one of the other figures in the series has sleeves ending above the elbow.

Romans removed the protective coverings from their armour, as was their usual custom (*BJ*, V, 346-369). The 2nd century historian Fronto also writes that an officer called Laelianus – a 'disciplinarian of the old school' – was able to rip up soldiers' body armour with his fingers because it was too soft (*Letter to Lucius Verus*, xix). This would be difficult to imagine if it referred to mail, scale, or plate armour, but not if Fronto meant a hide covering or leather armour as suggested by D'Amato.

A final piece of evidence for protective coverings is supplied by Plutarch, who describes a trick employed by the Parthians before the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC. The Romans, previously unimpressed at the first sight of the Parthian army, were completely demoralised when at the last moment the Parthians removed the leather and cloth covers from their armour for both man and horse, which then gleamed in the bright sunlight (*Crassus*, 23-24). The shocking effect is somewhat surprising, as Plutarch's earlier description of the army of Lucullus indicates that the Romans themselves had on occasions employed this very trick.

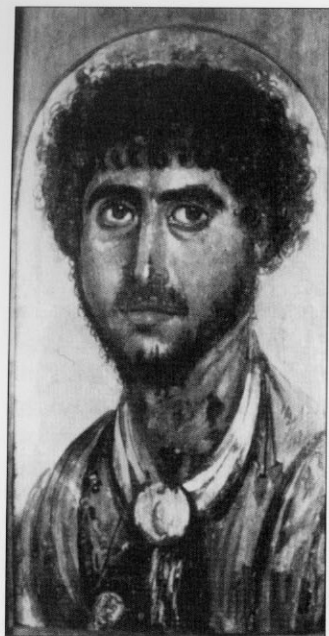
Caracalla, in constant fear of assassination, took to wearing a long-sleeved tunic fashioned to look like armour. This was probably a fabric breastplate, familiar from Greek sources and in keeping with Caracalla's passion for Alexander the Great. Inspired by his hero's army and his conquest of Persia, Caracalla went so far as to equip 16,000 troops as Macedonian pikemen for his own proposed Persian expedition (*Dio, Epit.*, LXXVIII). In what can best be described as an early attempt at re-enactment, the emperor dressed his soldiers with what was interpreted by the Romans as Macedonian equipment. This consisted of a helmet of raw oxhide, a three-ply linen cuirass, high boots, a round shield, long pike, short spear and sword. We will never know how Caracalla's re-created phalanx would have performed: ironically, despite his own fabric armour he was assassinated before the campaign began.

SUMMARY

Overview of evidence for the colours of military tunics and cloaks, 100 BC-AD 400

There is no doubt that a wide spectrum of dyes was available in the Roman period. Ovid lists a number of colours that were suitable for fashionable ladies (*Ars. Am.*, III, 170-185); these include at least two blues, one sky-coloured and the other imitating water; three varieties of yellow, including one the colour of the 'Golden Fleece' and another wax-coloured. Other colours include green, amethyst, white, grey, chestnut brown and pink. The point at issue is whether any or all of these dyes were also used to colour the tunics and cloaks of the Roman army.

Until the article by Fuentes (see Bibliography) the traditional view was that Roman soldiers wore red tunics. The overwhelming impression left by Roman artists, and recorded in ancient literature, is that they wore either white or red; and in the opinion of Fuentes, which seemed to be supported by the evidence he presented, the tunic colour of the ordinary soldier was white, with only centurions wearing red. Undyed wool can come in a variety of shades varying from cream through beige to brown, and this might explain why documents specify that tunics should be white. Simon James recently put forward the view that white



Some evidence is open to speculation even when the source is of striking quality, like this painted wax encaustic portrait from Egypt, probably dating from the mid-late 2nd century. Male civilians in these portraits generally wear a white tunic and a cloak draped over the shoulder; clearly, this individual does not. He is possibly wearing a red *paenula*, and has a white knotted scarf. He might also be wearing a shoulder baldric, partly visible beneath the scarf, while a sword pommel appears to be indicated at the bottom left. This portrait, unique in any case, might therefore be a rare illustration of a Roman soldier of the Antonine period. (Oriental Institute, Chicago)

tunics would immediately signify by implication the privileged status of the wearers, i.e. those who could afford to purchase and keep clean such garments.

Otherwise the colours indicated in the visual sources are more practical for the conditions expected during military life. The yellow-brown cloaks were probably made from undyed wool that had retained its natural lanolin and therefore a degree of waterproofing. Likewise trousers, leggings and leg bindings are generally represented as dark red, blue, brown or even grey-black. It is this issue of practicality which leads many people to favour red for tunics rather than white – although the Habsburg and Bourbon armies of 18th century Austria, France and Spain all wore white uniforms (indeed, some French military historians concluded that the white uniforms were easier to keep clean than the later blue uniforms adopted by the Revolutionary armies). Practicality was rarely a factor in military uniform before the 20th century.

If any form of protective padding was worn under armour this might have helped to keep a white tunic clean; the practice of bleaching white clothes was well established in Roman times, while repeated washing of a red tunic would lead to fading. The well-known myth that red tunics were chosen so that they would hide bloodstains probably originated with Isidorus of Seville, who wrote in the 7th century that Roman soldiers wore red tunics on the eve and day of battle. It is equally applied to the use of red coats by the British army, although the actual reason was less than heroic – red madder dye was cheap. However, cost is unlikely to have been a factor with Roman tunics, considering the expenditure invested in their armour, and the fact that some soldiers were evidently keen to display their own wealth by acquiring decorated equipment and sidearms.

The evidence for white tunics is predominant in the majority of sources until the end of the 3rd century AD, when the evidence for red tunics increases, although in many of the written accounts red tunics are only associated with officers of the rank of tribune and above. This could suggest a change in fashion within the army that echoed or even inspired changes towards more colourful costume in contemporary civilian fashions.

However, it must also be borne in mind that by the end of the 3rd century the Romans had transformed the manufacture of textiles throughout the empire from what was by and large a cottage industry into a state enterprise. According to the price edict of the Emperor Diocletian in c.300, there were at least 43 major textile manufacturing centres throughout the empire including weaving mills run by the army, for example those at Reims, Tournai and Trier. The introduction of these factories, with their greater control of goods produced, may have had some influence on the colour of the military clothing that was manufactured.

Before this period the reliability of the system for supplying the army by civilian contractors is not known for certain, with the possible exception of clothing supplied from Egypt. The frequent mention of the arrival of clothing and other goods in the letters of soldiers serving at Vindolanda suggests that, if not exactly a cause for celebration, it was certainly something worth recording. Whether this system of supply meant that there was a degree of variation in the colour of tunics is again open to speculation. Even if one specific colour was chosen for the army

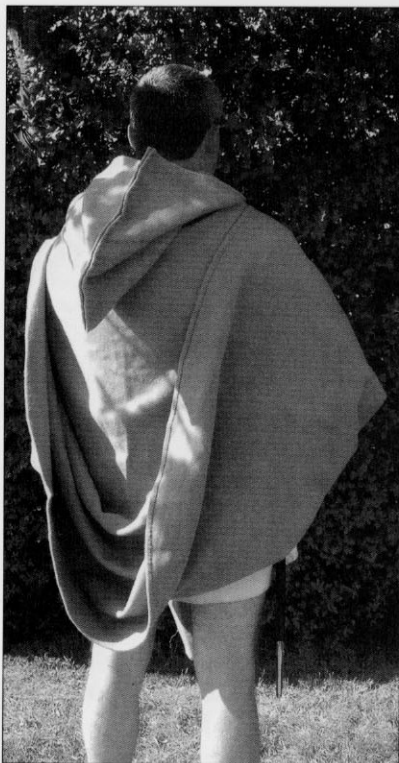
it is very unlikely that dyers across the empire would achieve the same shade.

We know that soldiers were able to receive extra clothing from home, but we do not know if these clothes were governed by or satisfied regulations, or if it was permissible to wear them on duty. It is well known that soldiers were allowed to personalise equipment such as scabbards and belts to suit their personal taste and purse; did this practice extend to their tunics and cloaks as well?

It would be easy to see why red could be perceived as a traditional military colour by the Romans because of its associations with the god Mars, who is represented wearing a red tunic and had red clothing dedicated to him by the red Circus faction. Red-coloured tunics were popular throughout the ancient world and are also found in Greek, Macedonian, Samnite, Etruscan and Ptolemaic sources. A red colour may have been deemed suitable to attract recruits to the new field armies of the later Empire. It is interesting, nonetheless, that when red is depicted in paintings it is generally not scarlet or deep red but a pinkish colour. Does this accurately record a bright red colour that had faded with use? The number of salmon pink textile fragments at Masada, Israel, seems to support this idea. Nevertheless the colours on many surviving garments from Egypt remain extremely vivid, with no evidence of fading.

As colour was an important means of identifying social status within the Roman world it is conceivable that grades within the army could have been identifiable by different colours or combinations of colours. There is even a hint that in the later army a soldier who had been given military awards was recognisable by the number of stripes on his tunic sleeves. If any such systems existed, however, it is now practically impossible to identify them with any certainty.

The most common colour combination seen in paintings and mosaics is a white tunic with a yellow-brown cloak, followed by a white tunic with a red cloak. Some of the men wearing red cloaks do not appear to be officers, and there is no corroboration for the suggestion that centurions were distinguished by wearing red tunics and cloaks. The combination of a white tunic with a white cloak might be connected to the rank of tribune and possibly senior centurion as well, and therefore might designate officers of equestrian status. The phrase 'dressed in shining white' used in connection with parades could easily



Reconstruction by Lesley Ann Holmes of a *paenula*, based on the example from Egypt now in the University of Philadelphia Museum, and the Camomile Street sculpture in the London Museum. The rear view may be compared with a sculptural illustration in the first part of this study (Men-at-Arms 374, page 16).

be taken to indicate that the cloak was white as well as the tunic.

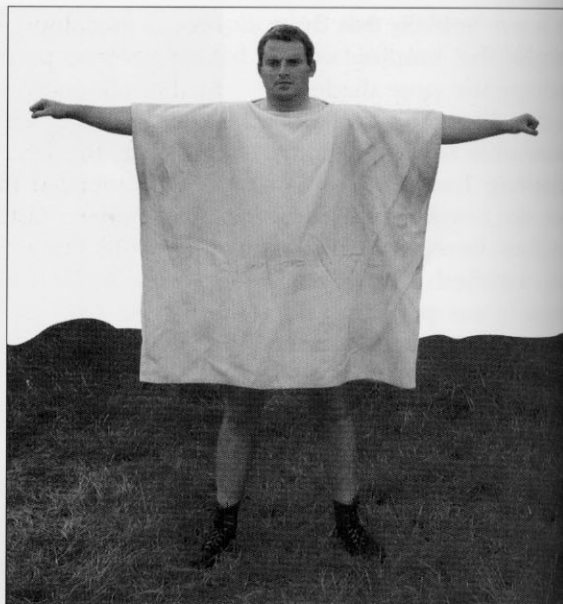
The number of portraits from Egypt showing men in white tunics with blue cloaks could represent members of the fleet. This would not be surprising in view of Egypt's maritime heritage and the importance of the Nile as a communications artery, but it is pure speculation based on the supposition that blue represented the navy. It should be remembered, however, that there are two earlier references to cavalry wearing blue.³

Green tunics are extremely rare and the evidence, such as it is, implies that they may have been reserved for higher grade troops (and, with reference to later Byzantine sources, possibly even to guard units). Purple cloaks were undoubtedly the preserve of senior Republican commanders and later of many emperors when they took the field, although even some of them broke the rules and dressed like their men.

One further explanation worthy of consideration could be that soldiers wore differently coloured tunics and cloaks for different occasions: e.g. a white wool tunic for everyday wear, a bleached wool or linen tunic for best, and a red tunic – the 'military' tunic – when they went into action, just as at times they wore a distinctive 'military' cloak. Most of the paintings seem to show soldiers in what can be termed undress uniform, so naturally they are in white tunics; but when soldiers are fully armoured they are often, although not invariably, shown in red. The account by Isidore of Seville could lend some support to the idea that the Romans reserved red for battle.⁴

It is now certain that soldiers owned more than one tunic, and by the reign of Diocletian at least three tunics of varying quality were available. Senior officers, as recorded in the Augustan Histories (*SHA*), owned numerous tunics and cloaks, which may have been in similar colours to their men but were doubtless distinguishable by their superior quality. A modern parallel would be the bright scarlet privately tailored coat worn by 18th and 19th century British officers, as opposed to the general issue brick-red coat worn by the other ranks.

Based on the available evidence there does not appear to have been a distinction between legionary and auxiliary tunic colours, which is probably not surprising in view of the use of the same supply sources and perhaps an official policy of 'Romanising' the allies. There is more variation in the colours of cloaks which, as suggested above, may have reflected a system of rank distinction – or simply that officers had more choice. The ordinary soldiers seem largely to have been limited to a cloak that was yellow-



OPPOSITE **Reconstruction of a 1st century tunic from Nahal Hever, Israel; these photographs show it both in its simplest presentation and also worn under a mail shirt and leather arming doublet.**

brown in colour, or perhaps preferred it because of its practicality. Nevertheless, by the later Empire even these simple garments were further enhanced with decorations.

There are a whole host of factors – unit traditions, campaign wear and tear, the whims of powerful individuals – which might plausibly have influenced the appearance and dress of the Roman soldier. (By most modern tastes the Romans also had an appalling colour sense; we should remember that they considered red and black a suitable scheme for bedroom walls – though we should perhaps acquit them of a fashion *faux pas* for wearing socks with sandals...). The Roman army was certainly a unique institution in many ways, but it would be rare indeed if it managed to maintain a single uniform colour over the centuries of its existence.

AFTERWORD

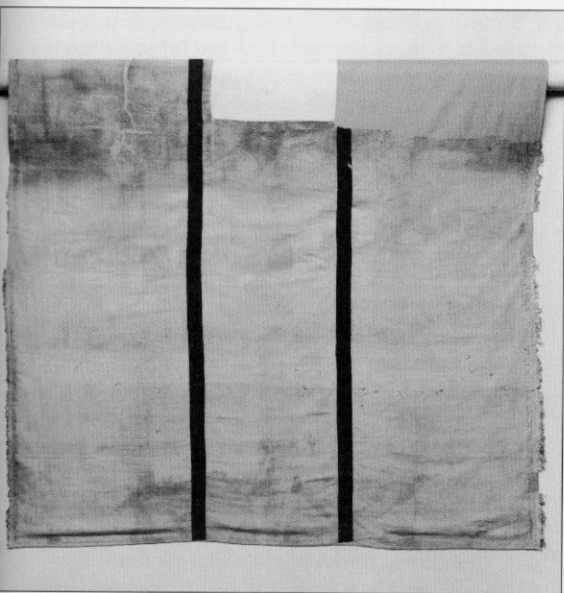
Interpreting and reconstructing the evidence

A common fault among re-enactment societies today is to base their reconstructions on a single archaeological or modern academic source without checking for themselves all the other evidence that may be available. This is particularly evident when it comes to the reconstruction of Roman military clothing. The majority of Roman 'living history' enthusiasts seem to have interpreted their tunic designs from sculptural remains rather than from actual textile finds, while the documentary evidence is probably not even considered at all. There is also a tendency to work on the principle that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, which leads to fictitious even if not implausible reconstructions. The scarcity of accessible academic material has not helped; articles on Roman period clothing rarely appear in the obvious Roman archaeological journals.

Those finds that do come to the attention of the amateur are often the victim of 'Chinese whispers', such as the 'complete red tunic from Masada' – in fact, a piece of fabric measuring just 13cm across. Nevertheless, it has been the present author's pleasure to discover a wealth of material over a four-year journey, with the possibility that much more remains to be discovered.

In an effort to reduce the lack of credibility, many of the painted reconstructions in these books have been based on physical interpretations as well as actual replicas of Roman garments. In the course of these experiments many questions were raised, and perhaps not always answered satisfactorily. One of the most striking examples is that most surviving Roman clothes seem to belie the widely held belief that the Romans were far smaller than we are today. This resulted in many struggles with voluminous pieces of drapery in an attempt to marry physical with archaeological and sculptural sources.

Primary evidence for the study of Roman tunics, their materials and methods of construction must be the surviving examples which may date to the Roman period, such as this find from Egypt. (British Museum)



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THE PLATES

A: EMPERORS IN THE FIELD

A1: Severus Alexander (r.AD 222–235)

Severus Alexander became emperor at the age of only 14 after the assassination of Elagabalus, and during his minority his mother Julia Mamaea and his aunt Julia Maesa initially ruled the empire. During his reign two portents of the future occurred. In the East the Parthian regime was replaced by the much more aggressive Sassanian Persians, who now threatened Rome's Eastern frontier. Whilst dealing with this threat the emperor and his mother learnt of a Germanic invasion from the north. Humiliated by the emperor's inability to deal with this new crisis, their own troops put to death both Severus Alexander and his mother. The emperor is dressed here as described in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (SHA, Sev.Alex., XL, 6-7), which generally characterises him as austere, virtuous, and opposed to the wearing of purples and silks. The emperor is also recorded as presenting his troops with clothing such as leggings, trousers and boots.

A2: Caracalla (r.AD 211–217)

The first act of the eldest son of Septimius Severus on ascending the throne was to murder his younger brother Geta. His official name was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, but he is better known today by this nickname, acquired by wearing the long hooded cloak or *caracallus*. The cloak itself is based on those frequently seen in northern frontier sculpture, such as those worn by the hooded deities from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall. The rest of his costume would match the description by Dio (*Epit.*, LXXIX), who describes Caracalla's fondness for Germanic apparel. Before the outset of his proposed campaign against the Parthians, Caracalla was assassinated after he had dismounted to relieve himself.

A3: Probus (r.AD 276–282)

Synesius' description of the bald-headed Emperor Carinus (r. 283–285) at an embassy with the Persians (*De Regno*, 12 OP. m66, 1804) in reality probably refers to the Emperor Probus, who concluded a peace treaty with the Persian king Bahram II. However, it is also possible that the emperor referred to is Carus (r.282–283), since on the coin portraits of the three men only Carus is depicted as bald. The emperor here is clothed in the garments of 'red commonplace wool' as described by Synesius, together with a pillbox hat frequently seen in late Roman art. Probus was a skilled soldier; nevertheless, like many other short-lived emperors he was murdered by his own troops, who in this case resented working on his land reclamation projects.



Eastern influences: dromedarius (camel rider) from Palmyra, Syria. His tunic is longer than those normally worn by the Romans; however, the elaborate decoration would soon be a feature of Roman tunics as well.

B: FOREIGN INFLUENCES

B1: Germanic scout, early 3rd century AD

This German scout dates from the time of Caracalla's campaign against the Alamanni in AD 213. He wears a leather cloak, hat, leggings and shoes based on the remarkably well preserved finds from Sogaards Mose in Denmark. In addition he has a pair of wool twill trousers based on those found in other Danish bogs.

B2: Germanic warrior, Thorsberg, 3rd century AD

The clothing discovered virtually intact at Thorsberg, Schleswig-Holstein in the 1860s has been speculatively associated with a free Germanic warrior, a Roman mercenary or even a Roman auxiliary. Whatever his exact status, the owner's costume of long-sleeved tunic, rectangular cloak and trousers has been seen as typically Germanic – a concept some Scandinavian scholars have recently challenged. Recent analysis of the textiles has concluded that the tunic was red with purple tablet-woven braids; the cloak was two shades of blue; and the trousers, with integral feet, may have been of undyed wool. The various weapons, some of which were undoubtedly of Roman origin, are also based on finds from Thorsberg.

B3: Palmyrene scout, 3rd century AD

This light cavalryman is based on the wall paintings in the Synagogue at Dura Europos, Syria, in particular the Ebenezer fresco. The painting has at its central feature two similarly dressed riders in blue tunics with red trousers; one of the tunics has white bands at the sleeve hem, possibly indicating a linen undertunic. Palmyrene tunics were normally worn to just below or at knee length, and are also wider in the skirt than most Roman tunics. The painting shows the spear held horizontally in both cases, in one instance perhaps with both hands.

C: THE SEVERAN ARMY

C1: Legionary, AD 193

According to Dio Cassius the population of Rome were shocked by the appearance of the Danubian army of Septimius Severus when he marched on Rome in AD 193; we can only assume that it was the 'barbarian' practice of wearing long-sleeved tunics and trousers that caused the outrage. The Arch of Severus, dedicated in 203, still depicts the '*lorica segmentata*' worn by the troops, as well as the traditional Roman *tunica*. The armour worn here is of 'Newstead' type, the latest known version based on a recent reassessment by Mike Bishop. The Italic Type H helmet, here based on a spectacular example found at Niedermormter in Germany, was one of the last of the old-style Roman helmets before the introduction of the ridge type showing Persian influence.

C2: Praetorian Guard, AD 193

One of the first acts of Septimius Severus when he became emperor was to disband the Praetorian Guard and replace it with a bodyguard formed from his own provincial army. The Praetorians were further humiliated by having to appear before the new emperor unarmed and dressed only in their *subarmillis* – presumably a garment worn beneath armour and padded to absorb blows. Its appearance is guesswork, but this impression is based on analogies with the later medieval aketon and modern interpretations. The strips around the waist and at the shoulders – *pteruges* – are familiar from armoured sculptures from throughout the

Roman period; they were probably of either leather or layered linen.

C3: Roman phalangite, AD 217

Caracalla was not only responsible for inventing or popularising a type of cloak, but also for instigating a bizarre military experiment unique in the Roman world – which, if nothing else, reminds us of the effects one individual could have on Roman equipment. For his proposed expedition against the Parthians, Caracalla equipped 16,000 troops as Macedonian phalangites in emulation of the army of Alexander the Great. Dio (*Epit.*, LXXVIII) describes the men's equipment as being of either linen or leather, presumably manufactured in a short space of time. The armament consisted of long pikes and short spears with the standard Roman sword. Overall this man's appearance is very similar to two soldiers depicted on a mosaic from Nabeul, Tunisia, which may have influenced or been influenced by Caracalla's armourers.

D: THE EDGE OF EMPIRE

D1: Auxiliary tribune, mid-3rd century AD

Based on the fresco at Dura Europos which shows members of Cohors XX Palmyrenorum attending a sacrifice, this is a reconstruction of the unit commander, Julius Terentius. He wears a fringed white cloak over a long-sleeved tunic decorated with short purple *clavi*, stripes at the wrist, and a hem with vertical extensions that terminate in notched bands. Both the latter and the swastika device on another figure (see D3) were observed by Simon James after studying the original photographs taken in the 1930s. All the soldiers in the fresco appear to have ring buckle belts.

Detail from tombstone of M. Aurelius Nepos, a centurion of Legio XX based at Chester, England – see Plate E1. He is depicted holding his vineyard staff of rank (*vitis*), and wearing a long-sleeved tunic, a *sagum*, and a belt with a prominent ring buckle. (Grosvenor Museum, Chester)



D2: Auxiliary vexillarius, mid-3rd century AD

The tunic decorations on this and the preceding figure are based on actual textile fragments from Dura Europos. The *vexillum* is inspired by a well-preserved example from Egypt now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; it shows the goddess Victory (based here on a graffito from Dura Europos) rather than a unit title or symbol as often depicted elsewhere. The image on the Dura Europos *vexillum* is unclear but it too appears not to bear any lettering. This suggests that there were a variety of flag-type standards, which probably displayed painted images of gods and members of the Imperial family.

D3: Auxiliary centurion, mid-3rd century AD

Apart from the Tribune Terentius only one other figure in the group wears a white cloak. Although not prominently placed he does stand in the front rank to the right of Terentius and may therefore be a senior centurion. The swastika device on his tunic is echoed by the belt *phalarae* and brooch also found at Dura Europos.

E: IMPERIUM BRITANNIARUM

E1: Legionary centurion, 3rd century AD

This reconstruction shows Marcus Aurelius Nepos of Legio XX as he is depicted on his tombstone from Chester. The most distinctive feature of the monument is the large ring belt buckle; Nepos also carries the traditional vine staff badge of rank. There is no surviving paint on the tombstone; the restored colour scheme is presumed, as are the applied decorations, but similar designs are also seen on Roman mosaics in Britain.

E2: Mithraic worshipper, Hadrian's Wall, 3rd century AD

This figure represents the Soldier (*miles*), one of the seven grades in Mithraic worship. The worshipper is dressed entirely in a reddish brown costume as illustrated in the fresco from the Mithraeum at Capua Vetere in Italy. His Phrygian cap is the same as that worn by the god Mithras himself, and he carries a torch used in initiation rituals.



E3: Sailor, British Fleet, 3rd century AD

In the latter part of the 3rd century the men of the British Fleet were as likely to be on the lookout for ships of the Imperial navy as for those of Saxon or Frankish pirates. At times Britain was completely independent of the rest of the empire, firstly as part of the separatist Gallic Empire under Postumus (r.260–268), and later following the rebellion of Carausius, the commander of the British Fleet (r.286–293). One of the most famous references in ancient literature states that these sailors wore blue uniforms, here interpreted as a dark blue tunic (Vegetius, *Epit.*, IV, 37.). His hat is the conical *petasus* of either leather or felt.

F: HORSEMEN OF LUXOR

F1 & F2: Officers, late 3rd-early 4th centuries AD

These officers are based on the now almost completely lost wall paintings at the Pharaonic temple of Luxor, Egypt, which was converted into a Roman fort during the reign of Diocletian (r.284–305). One wall almost exclusively depicted cavalrymen, so the garrison was possibly a mounted unit. Other figures on the main wall carried T-shaped staffs, so it is likely that they were officers. The earlier vine stick could be used to beat offenders; but a soldier carrying one of these T-shaped staffs is shown using another, smaller staff to beat a man in a famous scene from the Piazza Armerina mosaics. Both men have decorated yellow-brown cloaks; although F1 has the typical white long-sleeved tunic, F2 seems to have had an unusual short-sleeved tunic, black in colour. The short-cropped hairstyle is another feature typical of the period.

F3: Heavy cavalryman, late 3rd-early 4th centuries AD

This cavalryman is equipped with an iron helmet found at Deir el-Medineh, Egypt. Its segmented construction and nasal bar look forward to the *spangenhelm* of the early Middle Ages rather than back to the classic Roman helmets of the past; it is further evidence of influences from across the frontiers, in this case probably from Persia. The shield design is taken from one of the circular devices represented on the fresco at Luxor, which may be or may not be contemporary shield blazons.

G: THE GREAT HUNT

G1 & G2: Soldiers, 4th century AD

The famous mosaic of the Great Hunt from the villa at Piazza Armerina in Sicily is a well known source for late Roman costume. A number of figures wearing short tunics with belts – especially those with metal ‘propeller’ belt fittings – have frequently been identified as soldiers. They could equally be liveried retainers from a private estate, as the 4th century saw the rise of ‘feudal’ landlords with private armies; but whatever their true status, their appearance fits in with most other representations of soldiers from elsewhere. The shield devices are both taken from the mosaic; that of the foot soldier incorporates a wild boar, a symbol associated with Legio XX based at faraway Chester in Britain. However, its

Eastern influences: mounted archer from a fresco found at Dura Europos, Syria. He is wearing a Phrygian cap, as always shown in depictions of the Persian sun god Mithras, who became a popular cult figure in the Roman army – see Plate E2.

appearance here may have more to do with the hunting theme of the mosaic.

G3: Senior officer, 4th century AD

It has been suggested that the central figure from the Great Hunt mosaic, which forms the basis for this figure, represents the Emperor Maximian (r.286–305 & 307–308); it could equally depict any great landlord, senior civil servant or military officer from this period. The T-shaped staff is slightly longer than those shown on the wall paintings from Luxor, so the man is actually able to use it as a support. It is interesting to observe that the pillbox hat is often the same yellow-brown colour as the cloak, which suggests that it was made from the same material.



Central figure from the Great Hunt mosaic, Piazza Armerina – see Plate G3. Some commentators have suggested an association with the Emperor Maximian himself, though their reasons do not seem particularly convincing.

illustrated on the Kertch dish, which is believed to commemorate the *Vicennalia* of Constantius.

H2: Protector Sacri Lateris, Imperial Guard, mid-4th century AD

This guardsman is also based on a figure from the Kertch dish. Most conspicuous is the large oval shield with the Christian *chi-rho* monogram. The tunic and trousers are possibly made of fine wool or even silk with interwoven gold thread. Such elaborate costumes are described by various writers including Iohannes Chrysostomus, who said that the gold uniforms of the guards announced the arrival of the emperor (*Quod Regulares Feminae*, 6; *Epistula ad Ephesinos* c.4 hom. 9, 1). Also visible around the soldier's neck is a large gold torque, a feature of guard uniforms still visible on the mosaics of Justinian I (r.527–565).

H3: Cavalryman, Equites Catafractarii, mid-4th century AD

While serving as Caesar, Julian, later emperor (r.361–363), won one of the last great victories of the empire over its barbarian foes at the battle of Strasbourg in 357. However, the victory was slightly tainted by one unit of Roman cavalry which retreated in disgrace before the enemy. Julian's novel punishment, according to Zosimus (*HN* 3.3.4–5), was to dress the offenders in female clothing before marching them through the entire camp; the unit was then disbanded. The yellow colour of the female tunic would therefore be doubly appropriate in this context. The *tunica talaris* is of a type called a *dalmatica* and is depicted on the Piazza Armerina mosaic. While women's tunics of this period have coloured *clavi* they seem to lack the decorative roundels found on male garments.



Detail of a silver dish from Kertch, mid-4th century AD. It shows the Emperor Constantius II (r.AD 337–361), with an Imperial guard displaying the Christian *chi-rho* monogram upon his shield – see Plates H1 & H2.

H: 'HOC SIGNO VICTOR ERIS'

H1: Constantius II (r.AD 337–361)

Constantius II was the third son of Constantine the Great (r.306–337). At first he reigned solely in the East, but by 358 he had become the ruler of a unified empire. Like many other emperors of this period he was faced with the dual threat of invasions from the east and north, as well as the usual usurpers; that Constantius met each challenge with some success is testament to his abilities. His contemporary, the soldier-historian Ammianus Marcellinus, described Constantius as an expert rider, spearman and archer. Despite being a Christian, however, he was also known for his sadistic cruelty. Ammianus gives us a physical description, and describes the clothing of Constantius as being richly decorated with gold (14, 9, 7 & 23, 3, 2). The tunic design is copied from that

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