

# Roman Standards & Standard-Bearers (1)

112 BC–AD 192



RAFFAELE D'AMATO

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

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*Series editor Martin Windrow*

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF THE STANDARDS</b>	<b>4</b>
Religious significance – the cult of the standards ■ Sources for research	
<b>THE LEGIONS: LATE CONSULAR PERIOD</b>	<b>9</b>
Distribution: The <i>aquila</i> ■ The legion's <i>vexillum</i> ■ <i>Signa</i> : maniples or cohorts?	
Appearance: The <i>aquila</i> ■ The legion's <i>vexillum</i> ■ <i>Signa</i> of legionary units	
<b>THE LEGIONS: EARLY IMPERIAL PERIOD</b>	<b>16</b>
Distribution	
Appearance: the <i>aquila</i> ■ The <i>vexillum</i> ■ The <i>imago</i> ■ The <i>genius legionis</i> ■ The chapel of the standards ■ <i>Signa</i> of legionary units	
Miscellaneous standards: <i>Vexilla veteranorum</i> – <i>Insignia triumphali</i> – <i>Simulacra</i>	
<b>IMPERIAL GUARD STANDARDS</b>	<b>35</b>
Praetorian cohorts ■ Praetorian <i>aquilae</i> ■ Other Praetorian <i>signa</i> : cavalry, bodyguards, scouts	
<b>STANDARDS OF THE <i>AUXILIA</i></b>	<b>41</b>
Distribution	
Appearance: infantry <i>signa</i> and <i>imagines</i> ■ Cavalry <i>vexilla</i> ■ The <i>draco</i> ■ Cavalry <i>signa</i> and <i>imagines</i>	
<b>STANDARD-BEARERS</b>	<b>49</b>
Career	
Uniforms & equipment: headgear – body armour – belts & swords – shields – clothing – military decorations	
<b>STANDARD-BEARERS IN BATTLE</b>	<b>58</b>
Inspiring the troops ■ Passing tactical orders ■ Positions ■ The column of march	
<b>SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>64</b>

# ROMAN STANDARDS & STANDARD-BEARERS (1)

## 112 BC – AD 192

### INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF THE STANDARDS

The standards of the Roman army, the *signa militaria*, were not only a practical means of locating and recognizing different units on the battlefield, of providing a rallying point, and of relaying movement orders. They were so central to the military consciousness that in Latin the term *signa* was

synonymous with ‘troops’ or ‘army’. The standards also symbolized the pride and power of Eternal Rome, and had a religious significance that linked the army to the *Res Publica Romana*. They have left a powerful legacy: over the intervening centuries a fainter echo of the reverence with which they were regarded by the soldiers who fought under them has passed down into the flags presented by rulers to military regiments throughout the Western world. On countless battlefields, hard-pressed soldiers have been inspired to ‘rally to the colours’ in a way that would immediately resonate with a Roman legionary.

It is well documented that the cult of the standards had a central position in Roman military worship. As soon as a standard was adopted by a particular unit it became a holy object, attracting veneration. At the end of the 2nd century AD the Christian writer Tertullian

Augustan-period funerary monument of the auxiliary soldier Tiberius Julius Pancuius of the part-mounted *Cohors III Lusitanorum Equitata*, from Neuss, Germany. Alföldi proposes a Hispanic origin for this veteran's name; he died aged 55, after 27 years of service. He is described in the inscription simply as a *miles* (soldier), and only the carved standard identifies him as a *signifer*. The shaft of his *signum* is decorated, from top to bottom, with a small spearhead (invisible here); a tablet ‘unit nameplate’ with hanging side-strings; a *phalera* of saucer-like *patera* type, but showing radiating lines; a *lunula* crescent moon, and a *tufa* hand-protecting tassel. Note his muscled cuirass, and at his upper arm two ranges of *pteryges*, the lower one apparently fringed; these are attached to a *subarmalis* or ‘arming doublet’ worn under his armour. (Photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)



complained about the devotion of Roman soldiers to their standards (*Apol.*, 16, 8): ‘The camp religion is all about worship of the standards; oaths are taken upon the standards, which are set above all the gods.’

The *signa*, through their divine power, might reveal important auspices before a battle, which superstitious Romans regarded as good or bad omens. For instance, Cassius Dio writes that when Crassus was about to lead his army across the Euphrates one of the legionary eagles ‘was unwilling to join him in his passage [...], and stuck fast in the earth as if rooted there, until many took their places around it and pulled it out by force, so that it accompanied them quite reluctantly’. In thus ascribing to the *aquila* a quasi-human personality, he underlines its importance as the embodiment of the legion’s collective identity. On this occasion, the *vexilla* (flags) were also said to have shown a similar unwillingness, spontaneously falling off the bridge into the river. Unable to interpret these omens, however, Crassus pressed on, leading his army to ruin.

The religious meaning of the *signa* was impressed upon the Roman soldier from the moment of his enlistment. In a military assembly the *tiro* (new recruit) met the *signa*, the gods of the legion; from this moment on they were to take the place of the gods of his home (*lares*), the cults of his family and of his native city. Tacitus (*Ann.*, II, 17) calls the *aquilae* the ‘guardian spirits of the legions’ (*propria legionum numina*). Josephus (*BJ*, III, 6, 2) calls the legionary *signa* ‘the holy objects’. Numerous inscriptions record individual soldiers making dedications to the standards in the hope of winning the favour of the gods: e.g., *CIL VII, 1031*, inscription of AD 175–178 at Lanchester, Northumberland, to the *Genius* and *Signa coh(ortis) I F(idae) Vardul(lorum) c(ivium) R(omanorum) eq(uitatae) m(illiariae)* (‘To the Soul and the Cohort Standards of the 1st Faithful Part-Mounted Thousand-Strong Cohort of Vardulian Roman Citizens’, from north-central Spain). Roman soldiers feared divine anger if misfortune befell the standards, as when rebellious legions of the Rhine garrison could not save theirs from being carried away by a tempestuous storm and flood; in consequence, Tacitus (*Ann.* I, 30) calls their military camp ‘luckless’ (*castra infausta*).

The sacred nature of the standards was such that oaths might be pronounced in front of them (Tac., *Ann.*, XV, 16: ‘a sworn guarantee was given by Paetus, in the face of the standards and the presence of witnesses deputed by the king ...’). Even enemies acknowledged the sacred character of Roman standards (Suet., *Vit.*, II, 4: *ad veneranda legionum signa pellexit*). During the reign of Caligula, ‘Artabanus ... King of the Parthians, [when] crossing the Euphrates, paid homage to the Roman eagles and standards and to the images of the Caesars’ (Suet., *Cal.*, XIV, 3; also Cassius Dio, LIX, 27). Tacitus (*Ann.* XV, 29) describes the impressive ceremony of submission



Legionary *signiferi* of the Dacian Wars. The staff of the *aquila* is undecorated. The other *signa* are all surmounted by a hand in a wreath, identifying manipular/centurial standards carried within a cohort; two of them each have four *phalerae*, suggesting centuries from two different cohorts. (Trajan's Column, scene LXXVII; cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

of Tiridates, King of Armenia, in front of Nero's statue and the parading army of Corbulo: '... columns of legionaries standing amid a glitter of eagles and standards and effigies of gods, which gave the scene the character of a temple; in the centre, the tribunal supported a magisterial chair, on which was a statue of Nero. To this Tiridates advanced, and ... lifted the diadem from his head and placed it at the feet of the image.' The phrase *in modum templi* emphasizes the sacredness of the moment, in which the presence of the standards was an essential component.

Being holy objects, the eagles and other standards were 'anointed [with unguents] on festive days' (Pliny the Elder, *HN*, XIII, 4). Josephus attests to one episode of the direct worship of the standards by Roman soldiers. When the legionaries entered the courtyard of the Temple at the climax of the battle for Jerusalem, with the sanctuary already blazing, they 'brought their *signa* to the Temple and set them over against its eastern gate; and there they did offer sacrifices to them, and there they [acclaimed] Titus [as] Imperator' (*BJ*, VI, 6.1).

There was no shame more disgraceful than for a legion or cohort to lose its standard on the battlefield. Sometimes commanders gambled on this and threw them into the enemy's lines, to incite the soldiers to protect them at all costs (*Caes*, *BG* V, 37; *BC* III, 64). The *signiferi* were picked warriors, expected to be ready to die to defend the standards. Caesar quotes an occasion when they failed in this duty in order to emphasize the extraordinary degree of panic that gripped his troops. At the battle of Dyrrhachium his army attacked Pompey's camp, but were caught by surprise by an enemy counterattack, and fled. In the confusion, many *signiferi* threw away their standards in order to ease their flight, 'and everywhere was full of disorder, panic, and flight, so much so that [even] when Caesar grasped the standards of the fugitives' he could not stop the rout (*BC*, III, 69, 71).

One consequence of the sacred importance attached to Roman standards is that they were seldom lost or abandoned, so in modern times archaeological finds have been very rare.

## A

### LATE CONSULAR PERIOD

#### (1) *Vexillarius* of a magistrate, c. 80 BC

This man, reconstructed from a figure on an Etruscan urn, is a member of the staff of a political office-holder (perhaps – judging from his white sash – a consul) in the time of Sulla. He carries the ceremonial flag identifying a particular group, and his sky-blue *caerulea tunica* indicates a member of the magistrate's *apparitores*. The tunic's construction, copied from a specimen from Ballana in ancient Nubia, is simply two rectangles of cloth sewn together and shallowly hemmed with zig-zag stitching, leaving wide slits for the head and arms. When laid flat it is actually wider than it is long, c. 1.4m x 1.27m (4ft 8ins x 4ft 2ins). The elaborate boots are noteworthy.

#### (2) *Aquilifer* of *Legio X*; 55 BC, Britannia

The famous eagle-bearer of Julius Caesar's favourite legion is reconstructed using archaeological evidence from his time, and the monuments in Gallia Narbonensis celebrating *Legio X* and the Gallic Wars. Under the lion pelt he wears a simple bronze helmet notable only for its figure-of-8 cheek-guards. His muscled cuirass (*thorax stadios*) is made of bronze; it is

worn over a leather jerkin (*subarmalis*) showing a line of lappets at the bottom edge, and stiffened linen *pteryges* below this and on the upper arms. His legs appear to be wrapped with puttees, and his footwear are hobnailed hide *calcei* boots. The legionary eagle is reconstructed from coins struck in 82–81 BC by Valerius Flaccus and A. Postumius Albinus; characteristics are the upraised wings, the crosspiece (here a fore-and-aft yoke shape, sometimes a bundle of lightning-bolts), and undecorated shaft.

#### (3) *Signifer* of a *manipulus* of *Legio III*, 43–31 BC

Late Consular funerary monuments often show *signa* as part of a panoply of arms and armour (instead of a uniformed figure) on the tombstones of standard-bearers. This *signifer* of a *maniple* in Octavian Caesar's *Legio III*, during the period of civil wars against Marcus Antonius, is reconstructed partly from a monument at Sora. He is equipped with a Hellenistic *cassis* helmet adorned with crests in whitened pheasant feathers and horsehair; a hardened leather muscle-cuirass and *pteryges*, and an articulated leather *galerus* or *manica* on his right arm; and a large, heavily decorated oval *scutum* shield.





Standard-bearers and standards from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, scenes IX, XXXIV. (Left & centre) Legionary standards and flag; (right) standard and flag of a Praetorian cohort. In these scenes, four types of body armour are carefully differentiated: ringmail, and a muscled cuirass with *ptyerges* (left); ringmail, and the laminated '*lorica segmentata*' (centre); and scale armour (right). (*in situ*, Rome; photos A. Negin & R. D'Amato)

### Sources for research

We do have actual fragments of standards, although not a complete specimen. We know how the *signa* looked from the rich iconographic record, and from literary evidence. The best-detailed representations are found on the national monuments of Imperial propaganda such as the famous Columns and triumphal Arches, but individual memorials also give us a good deal of information. Funerary inscriptions to soldiers record the names of standard-bearers, and some distinguish between the ranks of *aquilifer*, *signifer* and *imaginifer*. All over the empire we have a mass of inscriptions commemorating vows made to the standards, whether recorded by a *legatus* (CIL XIV, 36, 8), a whole unit or detachment, or a single soldier. The authenticity of the images surviving on monuments is suggested by the fact that changes in equipment and armament visible in the iconography have been confirmed as approximately contemporaneous with the stratified finds made by archaeologists. The monuments may be of relatively crude execution, but they represent the *signa* in a degree of detail, sometimes together with the standard-bearer's uniform. In most cases, the standard depicted on a gravestone can be identified to a particular *legio*, *cohors* or *ala* by the inscription.

The present author is convinced that the sculptors commissioned to produce all kinds of military artworks – representing standards as well as costume, armour and weapons – were familiar with their particular appearance rather than merely following 'artistic conventions'. Even when veterans far away from their unit's home base commissioned representations of standards on their funerary monuments, they knew their appearance perfectly well, and would have given the artist the correct information. This is confirmed by the fact that very often mundane details like the ferrule or the handle of a *signum* are represented in the same specific detail as, for example, the military decorations displayed.

Last but no less important is the evidence of coins on which standards are represented, although these images are often so stylized as to require careful interpretation. Coins are particularly important when they depict episodes specifically linked to standards, such as the restitution by the Parthians to Augustus in 19 BC of the standards lost by Crassus at Carrae. Sometimes a coin may represent only the animal or mythical emblem of a legion, identifiable by comparison with a *vexillum* or other legionary *signa*, and such evidence is sometimes the only source for reconstructing the appearance of certain standards.



# THE LEGIONS: LATE CONSULAR PERIOD

## Distribution: the *aquila*

Pliny the Elder (*HN*, X, 5, 16) states that in 104 BC Marius replaced the old *signa* of the legions with the legionary eagle alone: ‘Caius Marius, in his second consulship, assigned the eagle exclusively to the Roman legions. Before that period it had only held the first rank, there being four others as well – the wolf, the minotaur, the horse, and the wild boar – each of which preceded a single division. Some few years before his time it had begun to be the custom to carry only the eagle into battle, the other standards being left behind in camp; Marius, however, abolished the rest of them entirely.’ This was the first time that a single standard represented the whole legion, as distinct from those of its components. From that time on the presence of the eagle meant the presence of a legion, and the eagle became the symbol of the *legio*. It was placed under the protection of the *primus pilus* (senior centurion) in the First Cohort, and held on a shaft by an officer called the *aquilifer* in the first rank. Some eagles were famous relics: Catilina used for his troops ‘the eagle which, it was said, had been in the army of Gaius Marius during the war with the Cimbri’ (Sall., *Catil.*, LIIII).

The single legionary eagle instituted by Marius was flanked by other *signa militaria* (Quint., *Decl.*, III, 34–35, ‘*signa militaria aquilaeque*’; Caes., *BC*, VII, 5, ‘he had the eagles and the standards of 13 legions ...’; XXXI, 13; also *BG*, VI, 40, 1). Referring to the eagles in the sense of the legions themselves, and as *signa bellorum* (war standards), Isidorus quotes Lucanus (*Phars.*, 1.7): ‘... standards [against standards], eagles matching eagles.’



One of the fragments of a frieze of Augustan date later moved to the Abbazia of San Domenico in Sora, representing a *signum* and a legionary *aquila*, probably of *Legio III Sorana*. The frieze was part of the funerary mausoleum of a legionary senior centurion (*primus pilus*), so the standards represented are presumed to be those of the First Century of the First Cohort. The manipular standard shows a right hand, a *tabula*, and two *phalerae*; a second and probably adjoining fragment shows three more *phalerae* above a lower tassel, giving a total of five.

## The legion's *vexillum*

After the eagle, the legion's most important standard was the *vexillum*: 'The veteran soldiers whom we stated to have set out together (with the others) under a *vexillum* ...' (Caes., *BG*, VI, 40). This was the Roman army's oldest type of standard, probably of Etruscan origin, and was originally a flag raised on Rome's Janiculum hill while the *Comitia Centuriata* was being held (Cassius Dio, 27–28). Each *legio* had its *vexillum*, carried by the *vexillarius* and raised in front of the headquarters tent of the *Imperator* (general) as the signal of a call to arms. In time, however, use of the word was extended to mean any military group identified by such a flag (Caes., *BG*, VI, 36, 2: 'several men of the legions had been left behind sick, and ... 300 hundred were sent together under a *vexillum* ...').

## *Signa*: maniples or cohorts?

Each legion consisted of ten cohorts, 30 maniples and 60 centuries (each cohort being divided into three maniples, and each maniple comprising two centuries). Two different types of standard seem to be mentioned: that for a maniple, and that for a cohort (Caes., *BG*, II, 25; VI, 34). Confusingly, however, these were probably the same physical objects, fulfilling a double function.

One might deduce from Caesar (*BG*, II, 25, 2) that a *signifer* with a *signum* was present in each *cohors*: 'where he perceived that his men were hard pressed, and that in consequence of the standards of the Twelfth Legion

## B

### THE AUGUSTO-CLAUDIAN PERIOD

All three of these figures are reconstructed from tombstones in the area of Mogontiacum (Mainz) in Germania Inferior.

#### (1) Gn. Musius, *Aquilifer of Legio XIII Gemina Martia*, c. AD 40s–50s

We interpret the costume on this important monument, illustrated on pages 16 and 54, as showing three layers. Over the unbleached woollen tunic (now made in a T-shape, with separate arms), Musius wears a quilted fabric *subarmalis* which is visible in vertical strips at his throat and in concentrically sewn 'cap' shoulders; to this are attached leather *pteryges* with woollen fringing, protecting the upper arms and groin. Over this he sports a sleeveless, waist-length jerkin of stiff leather (attached to the *subarmalis* by holes over studs at the top of the shoulders), to which is attached a grid of straps suspending the eagle-bearer's many military decorations. His oval shield, smaller than the usual legionary *scutum*, shows the blazon of his legion in metal appliqué. The monument depicts the eagle as holding an acorn in its beak and with its raised wings garlanded, perched on a bundle of thunder- and lightning-bolts, and mounted on a faceted plinth-like socket. A claw-shaped handle enables the bearer to plant the pointed ferrule in the ground and pull it out.

#### (2) Quintus Carminius Ingenuus, *Signifer of Ala I Hispanorum*, c. AD 20

This Spanish cavalryman has a copper-alloy Weiler-type helmet with embossed and silvered 'hair'. Over a Celtic-style tunic of a 'tweed' weave he wears two layers of protection: a padded fabric jerkin with short sleeves, under a leather corselet, both thigh-length and both notched at the hem for ease of movement. The monument seems to show a stud on top of the

shoulder to fasten the layers together, as in B1 (which argues against the corselet being ringmail), but this is obscured here by the sling of his hexagonal shield. We base the sword on an archaeological find of a *spatha* all of 94.5cm (37¼ins) long. The *signum* is reconstructed from the Ingenuus tombstone, showing four pendants attached directly to the crossbar, and from a recovered spearhead finial with these 'side-forks': Period iconography sometimes shows the bridle straps of military horses in yellow leather and the body harness as red or red-brown. A recent find has revealed that the bronze stiffener plates for the saddle horns were sometimes attached to the outside, decorated with e.g. the face of a deity.

#### (3) Gaius Valerius Secundus, *Signifer of Legio XIII Gemina*, AD 6–15 ?

This soldier's monument shows a masked helmet with the 'peak' on the brow extended into a pointed shape, and the bear's pelt slung entirely behind the left shoulder instead of with the legs around his neck (both these features are also seen on the Flavian-period tombstone of Genialis Clusio of *Cohors VII Raetorum*). We illustrate the helmet as of hybrid typology with extensive copper-alloy decoration. Secundus's armour has been variously interpreted; we base our reconstruction, all in leather, on comparison with other tombstones (Luccius and Secundus from Mainz, and C. V. Crispus from Wiesbaden), and with fragmentary finds from Windisch. It is unclear which layer of his protection the *pteryges* are attached to, but below them the monument separately shows these very short trousers with vertical slits or stitching. The unusual articulated plates on the 'apron' straps are from an archaeological find. Note on the cohort or manipular/centurial standard, below the six *phalerae*, the Capricorn symbolizing the *genius* of *Legio XIII*.



Two angles of an *aquila* of gilded bronze from Amiternum, late 1st century BC. The gilding and the height (25cm, about 10ins) do not exclude the possibility that this eagle was part of a military standard of some Late Consular legion fighting for the *Triumviri* Marcus Antonius or Octavian Caesar. Note the general similarity of shape with that on the frieze fragment from Sora. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Abruzzo; author's photos, courtesy of Polo Museale dell'Abruzzo)



being collected together in one place ... that all the centurions of the Fourth Cohort were slain, and the standard-bearer killed, the standard itself lost ...' This seems to indicate the presence of a specific standard for the cohort. However, Latin has no words for 'the' and 'a', and some scholars argue that this passage meant simply that within the Fourth Cohort one of the three manipular *signiferi* was killed. Domaszewski, in his monumental work on Roman *signa*, contests the existence of a cohort standard, at least in the age of Caesar, on the grounds that it would serve no tactical purpose given the presence of the *signa manipulorum*. Mommsen also rejects the idea of the cohort standard, pointing out that neither inscriptions nor artistic images distinguished between the *signiferi* of maniples and cohorts.

Against this, as proof that *signa cohortium* already existed in Caesar's time, we have the evidence of coins. One coin of 20 BC representing the *signa* of Crassus recovered by Augustus shows a number 'X' on a *vexillum*; 'tenth' cannot refer either to a *manipulus* nor to a *centuria*, but only to a *cohors*. Moreover, simple logic argues for the utility of a *signum cohortis*, and its introduction would be in line with the new 'cohortal' structure of the legion introduced late in the 2nd century BC.

A problem remains, however. Each *legio* had ten *cohortes* totalling 30 *manipuli*; and we have express mention by various authors of each legion having 30 or 31 *signa* (in the latter case, 30 for the maniples plus one eagle). For instance, 'the *signiferi* of the maniples, of which, according to the ancient custom, there were 30 in the legion' (Serv. Aen., XI, 463). Cicero (*Ad Fam.*, X, 30, 1, 5) tells us that at the battle of Forum Gallorum, Antonius's army of two legions and two Praetorian cohorts (so, 22 cohorts) lost two *aquilae* and 60 *signa*, so the latter must have been manipular standards. Caesar (*BC*, III, 69, 71) had three legions and three Praetorian cohorts (so, 33 cohorts) when he was defeated at Dyrrachium, and lost 32 standards; however, after the victory of Pharsalus his army collected up nine eagles and 180 other standards (*BC*, III, 99, 4). We know from the sources that Pompey arrayed 12 legions in this battle (so, 120 cohorts). The number 180 argues for the presence of manipular standards – and is a multiple of 30, representing the total of maniples in six legions.

The explanation must logically be that maniple and cohort standards were not mutually incompatible. It is indeed possible that, in each *cohors*, one of the three *signa manipulorum* was employed as a standard for the whole *cohort*



(perhaps the *signum* of the veteran *triararii* who historically made up one-third of each cohort?), distinguished by a small *vexillum* bearing the cohort's number. If separate cohort standards had been added to those carried by the maniples, the sources would have spoken of 40 standards for each *legio* instead of 30.

The *signa* of the Late Consular legions, then, were the standards of the maniples. Even after the reforms of Marius at the end of the 2nd century BC, with the regular introduction of cohorts and centuries as the administrative units within the legion, the maniple remained as the tactical unit, consisting of two centuries united under one *signum*. (Mommsen even proposes the existence of *signa* for centuries, but according to Caesar (*BG* VI, 34, 6, 40, 1) *signa* and *manipuli* were considered as terms with a synonymous meaning.) Therefore, if the legion of the mid-1st century BC had about 30 *signa*, these must evidently have been those of the maniples, which served simultaneously to identify the relevant cohorts and centuries.

### Appearance: the *aquila*

Each legion received its own symbolic eagle, either in silver (Cic., *Catil.*, I, 24: App., *Civil War*, IV, 101, speaking of the army of Brutus and Cassius: '... the two silver eagles which surmounted the standards') or gilded. A description of the Late Consular eagle in the context of Crassus's crossing of

Soldiers of one of the Gallic legions, from a frieze in Arelatum (Arles, France), c. AD 21. Although much weathered, close examination of the central figure reveals him to be a *signifer*, clad in muscled armour and with a lion's pelt over his head; this is one of the earliest representations of a standard-bearer wearing an animal skin. The top of his *signum* is now lost, and the remains of its staff carried over his shoulder have been erroneously interpreted as some kind of mace. Note, too, the small round shield slung to hang at his left hip. (Musée de l'Arles et de la Provence Antique; photo courtesy of Agostino Carcione)



Gladiatorial helmet of a *hoplomachus* from Pompeii, dating from the Augusto-Tiberian period. On each side of the embossed personification of Rome on the front are figures interpreted as kneeling Germanic warriors handing over the lost *signa* of Varus's army from the Teutoburg disaster of AD 9, whose subsequent recovery by Germanicus during a wide-ranging punitive expedition was celebrated in Roman propaganda. The shafts of both standards show two *phalerae* of the *patera* type, below crosspieces with hanging side-straps. That on the left is surmounted by a hand, and that on the right by a sitting eagle, so they are clearly legionary *signa*. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

the Euphrates is in Cassius Dio, XL, 18: 'the so-called "eagle" of the army ... is a small shrine and in it perches a golden eagle. It is found in all the enrolled legions, and it is never moved from the winter quarters unless the whole army takes the field; one man carries it on a long shaft, which ends in a sharp spike so that it can be set firmly in the ground.'

The eagles of Caesar's army are represented on coins; one of them has a shaft composed of a series of spheres, and another, furnished with a double handle, has a small laurel leaf in the eagle's beak. The wings were spread, and the talons might grip thunderbolts in allusion to Jupiter: 'the eagles of Pompey's legions shook their wings and let fall the thunderbolts which they held in their talons, in some cases of gold' (Cassius Dio, XLIII, 35). Cicero (*Cat.*, I, 9, 24) remembers them as worked in silver, and Pliny the Elder writes that all the *signa* were in silver, so that their shining allowed them to be visible from afar (*HN*, XXXIII, 58; also *Caes.*, BA, LXXV, 5).

Sometimes the eagle's shaft bore military decorations such as discs (*phalerae*). The eagles that Crassus lost in the battle of Carrae are visible on various coins and on the armour of the Augustus of Prima Porta (*Prop.*, *El.*, III, 5, 48); one has three *phalerae*. The colour of these as restored today is blue, as is the eagle, perhaps representing silver, on a brown shaft. A different restoration by Fenger showed the *phalerae* and eagle in gold; but Amelung describes the colour of the *phalerae* at the moment of the find as blue (see Plate H1). A second eagle from Crassus's legions is represented on a coin

of Augustus minted in 20 BC. The eagles of the VIII and XXI *legiones* of Marcus Antonius, flanked by two military *signa*, are represented on coins of 32–31 BC; the shaft of one *signum* is composed of small spheres, and it has a handle.

### The legion's *vexillum*

According to Cassius Dio, the *vexillum* was a large standard made from a piece of cloth hanging from a crossbar attached to a spearshaft. One of the best representations from the Marian period is visible in the sacrifice scene on the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus.<sup>1</sup> On coins of Imperial date we can still see the *vexillum* of Caesar's Legio X, surmounted by a bull and ornamented with two silver *phalerae*. (The bull, a Zodiacal sign associated with Venus, the legendary *genitrix* of the Gens Julia, was adopted by Caesar's favourite legion, and probably restored by him as a *signum* for other legions. This was the prototype of the *signa* bearing animals and gods as emblems of the Imperial legions.) Dio describes the *vexillum* of Crassus at the battle of Carrae as embroidered in purple letters with the name of the legion and of the commander. Such a flag is visible on coins of L. Caninius Gallus of 12 BC; the *vexillum* is fringed at the borders, and its shaft is furnished with *phalerae*. Antonucci suggests a white or light red-coloured cloth; ancient sources refer to the *vexillum* as purple, fluttering in front of the commander's tent (Plut., *Pomp.*, LXVIII; *Val. Max.*, XV), and it is called by Virgil the 'war standard' (*Aen.*, VIII, 1).

### *Signa* of legionary units

The other *signa* of the legions are represented on coins and monuments of the 1st century BC as shafts with a pointed ferrule (*cuspis*), furnished with streamers and/or *dona* (awards): e.g., 'eggs' (*ova*), medallions (*phalerae*), crowns (*coronae*), and crescent moons (*lunulae* or *curniculae*).<sup>2</sup> On coins the *signa* of M. Antonius's legions show a central eagle flanked by standards fitted with *phalerae* and crescents. These were not casual ornaments: later reliefs make clear that they marked specific awards presented to a military unit. Coins show some *signa* of maniples additionally bearing a *vexillum*; as discussed above, this may be the *signum cohortis* displaying a cohort number on the flag. A coin of Flaccus from 82 BC represents two such *signa* with flags bearing an 'H' and a 'P', referring to a maniple of *hastati* and a maniple of *principes* (who made up, with the *triarii*, the three age categories of infantrymen within a Consular Roman unit). Similar *signa* represented on coins of 49 BC are sometimes fitted with a handle. Simple *signa* decorated with *phalerae* and surmounted by a right hand (*manus*) are visible on the Scafa reliefs and from the Church of San Domenico in Sora; the hand strongly suggests *signa manipulorum*, and it symbolized *fides*, the allegiance between the soldiers and the *Res Publica*.

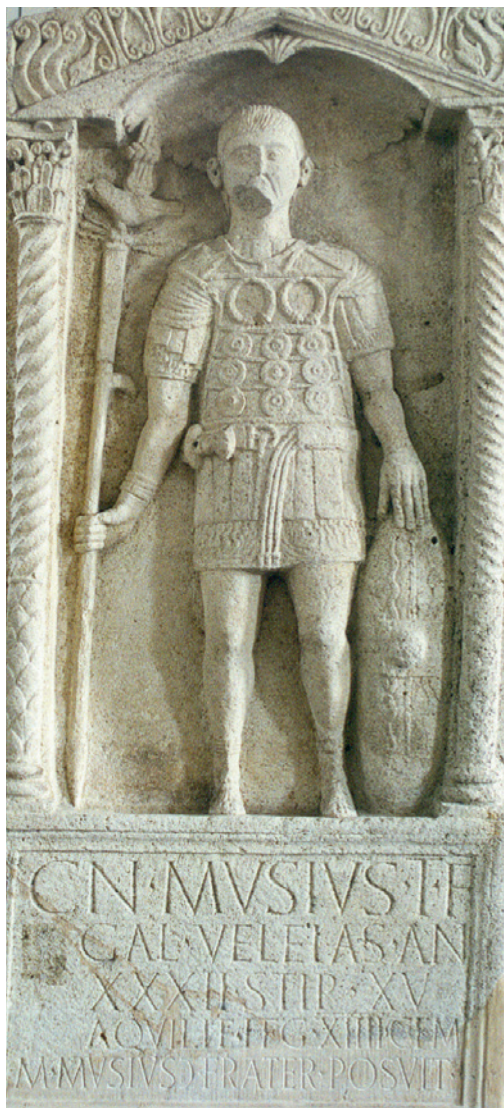
It is probable that the new form of *signum* without a *vexillum* was introduced late in the Consular period, as shown on the coins representing the recovered standards of Crassus. Five further *signa* of Crassus's legions are represented on an important gladiatorial helmet from Pompeii. Although probably in use by a *provocator* until the eruption of AD 79 which buried it, this helmet was made in the Augustan-Tiberian period, and shows elements

1 See reconstruction in MAA 470, *Roman Centurions 753–31 BC*, Plate F1.

2 In this text the Roman term 'crowns' is used, meaning wreaths of leaves; other awards – mural crowns, naval crowns, etc. – are specifically described.

The famous stele of Gn. Musius, *aquilifer* of *Legio XIII Gemina Martia*, mid-1st century AD; see reconstruction as Plate B1. (Note that in this text we use the terms stele, gravestone, tombstone, and funerary monument interchangeably.) The eagle itself has upraised wings encircled by a laurel-wreath crown; it sits gripping a bundle of lightning- and thunder-bolts, on a faceted 'plinth' of quadrilateral section forming the socket, with a curved handle below this. The interesting features of Musius's uniform include the corselet mounted with his decorations (see page 54), and the free end of his belt split into four narrow straps, one of them passing through the buckle and three fitted with pendants to form an 'apron'.

It is an interesting chance of history that the tombstones of three standard-bearers from the Fourteenth Legion have all been found in military sites along the Rhine: the *signiferi* Gaius Valerius Secundus and Quintus Luccius Faustus, both of the Augusto-Tiberian period, and this *aquilifer* from a generation later. In the reigns of Claudius and Nero *Legio XIII Gemina* fought in Britain, and earned itself the additional titles *Martia Victrix*, but only the first of these appears in the Musius inscription. (Römische Germanische Museum, Mainz; photo courtesy of Dr Stefano Izzo)



below which are a *phalera*, a crosspiece with suspended straps and pendants, a second *phalera*, a second laurel crown, a ship image (marking success in some naval operation), a double-claw handle, and a pointed ferrule.

of propaganda related to the recovery of Roman standards. Three are represented:

(1) Surmounted by a right hand, this shows from top to bottom a transverse element with a zig-zag pattern, perhaps representing a three-dimensional crown of leaves around the shaft; another wreath or crown scratched with a fishbone-type pattern; a *phalera* incised with a cross; and finally a rectangle scored in checkerboard style, probably indicating a tassel. (2) A 'flying' *vexillum* surmounted by a slim-bodied animal with strong hind legs and a bushy tail, the shaft and crosspiece both incised with spiral lines; the animal image suggests a legion's *vexillum*. (3) A (cavalry?) *vexillum* with a fringed cloth, surmounted by a spearhead.

The *signum* of the *cohors speculatorum* ('scout battalion') of Marcus Antonius's army is represented on his coins as surmounted by a laurel crown (*corona civica*),

## THE LEGIONS: EARLY IMPERIAL PERIOD

### Distribution

Cincius, mentioned by Aulus Gellius in his *Noctes Atticae* (XVI, 4, 6), wrote in the reign of Augustus: 'in the legions are 60 centuries, 30 maniples and 10 cohorts'. At the beginning of the Imperial period the various *signa* were carried by the *signiferi* as identification standards for *cohortes*, *manipuli* and *centuriae* (Prop., *El.*, III, 12, 2; Mart., *Ep.*, XI, 3; Tac., *Hist.*, III, 31).





The eagle, now headless, from the gravestone of L. Sertorius Firmus, *aquilifer* of *Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis*, mid-1st century AD; see reconstruction as Plate C1. Its talons grip a three-dimensional 'thunderbolt' rendered as a thick rod, spirally grooved and tapering at both ends. The jagged, arrow-headed 'lightning bolts' above and below this are carved in low relief at the right. (Archaeological Museum, Verona; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

The eagle remained the first and most important *signum*, assigned to the First Cohort, followed in precedence by the *vexillum legionis* and the Imperial *imago*, the totemic *genius* of the legion (usually a sign of the Zodiac), and then by the other *signa legionis*: the *signa manipulorum*, *signa cohortium* and *signa centuriarum*.

The standard-bearers of the legion were the *aquilifer* (eagle-bearer, only in the *centuria* of the *primus pilus*, i.e. the First Century, First Cohort); the *imaginifer*, bearing the *image* of the Emperor on a shaft; and the *vexillarius* (bearer of the *vexillum*), all of them in the First Cohort; and a *signifer* (CIL, III.2, 6023) for each *centuria* of the *cohortes* (*signiferi centuriae*). In lists, the *signiferi* are often mentioned with the *vexillarii* and the *imaginiferi*. While the word *signum* might refer generally to every kind of standard (including the *aquila*, *vexillum*, *imago*, etc. – and, indeed, to a standard's shaft), the *signifer* is found only in relation to the secondary

Fragment of a silver *aquila* from the 'Marengo treasure', c. AD 166; this may be one of the few known fragments of a legionary eagle. The Marengo hoard probably included the *aquila*, the *genius legionis* and an Imperial *imago* of *Legio II Italica* from the Antonine period. (Museo di Antichità, Turin; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



standards of the legion's constituent units. An inscription (CIL III, 6178, 6180) giving a list of soldiers of *Cohors I* of *Legio V Macedonica* from Troesmis in AD 134 mentions the *aquilifer* and *imaginifer* one immediately after the other, illustrating the importance of these standards. Beside them are two standard-bearers who carried the emblems of the legion (Pseudo-Hyg., III).

Tacitus expressly mentions the *signa cohortium* (*Ann.*, I, 18) when writing of the Pannonian revolt ('three eagles and the standards of the *cohorts* side by side'), so it seems that a *signum cohortis* did exist from the reign of Tiberius. Tacitus mentions them again (*Ann.*, I, 34) on the occasion of the assembly of the rebellious Rhine legions before Germanicus: 'Germanicus commanded them to divide into companies (*manipuli*) ... At least, he insisted, bring the flags forward (*vexilla praeferrere*); there must be something to distinguish the

## C THE CLAUDIO-NERONIAN PERIOD

### (1) Lucius Sertorius Firmus, *aquilifer* of *Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis*, AD 42

Firmus's tombstone from Verona is the richest representation of an eagle-bearer's uniform that survives. We show his corselet as made with alternate rows of silvered and bright copper-alloy scales sewn to a red leather backing. At the bottom edge, largely obscured by the 'apron' straps, this *lorica plumata* shows a line of rounded lappets with, alternately, extensions of the scales and plates engraved with heads of Medusa and Sylvanus. The shoulders are additionally protected with metal *humeralia*, and the armour is worn over a *subarmalis* with fringed *pteryges*. The sword, after one from Windisch, is worn on the left and the dagger on the right, on two *cingula* faced with alternating plates; the 'apron' straps have ivy-leaf terminal pendants. Comparison of fragments of shield covers suggests a height of 60–70cm (24–28ins) for the oval shield, with sewn rather than nailed-on edging. The eagle is mounted on lightning- and thunder-bolts; the only additions to the shaft are a handle and a ferrule with crossbar.

### (2) Praetorian *signifer*, *Cohors II Praetoria*, AD 48

Following the usual iconography of Praetorian standard-

bearers, his helmet is adorned with a lion pelt – here from a mature maned male, though several images also show lioness pelts. The *humeralia* uniting the back- and breast-plates of his silvered muscle-cuirass show decoration, and the *pteryges* of his under-armour jerkin are fringed only at the thigh. This type of leather ankle boot is termed a *calceus ordinarius*. The small circular *parma* shield is copied from a painted panoply at Pompeii. The standard is visible on coins of Claudius celebrating his elevation to the throne; it perhaps represents the *signum* of the cohort's Second Century. In addition to the *phalerae cum imagines*, note the gilded, squared *corona vallaris* between the two crescents, and the unusual form of the tassel.

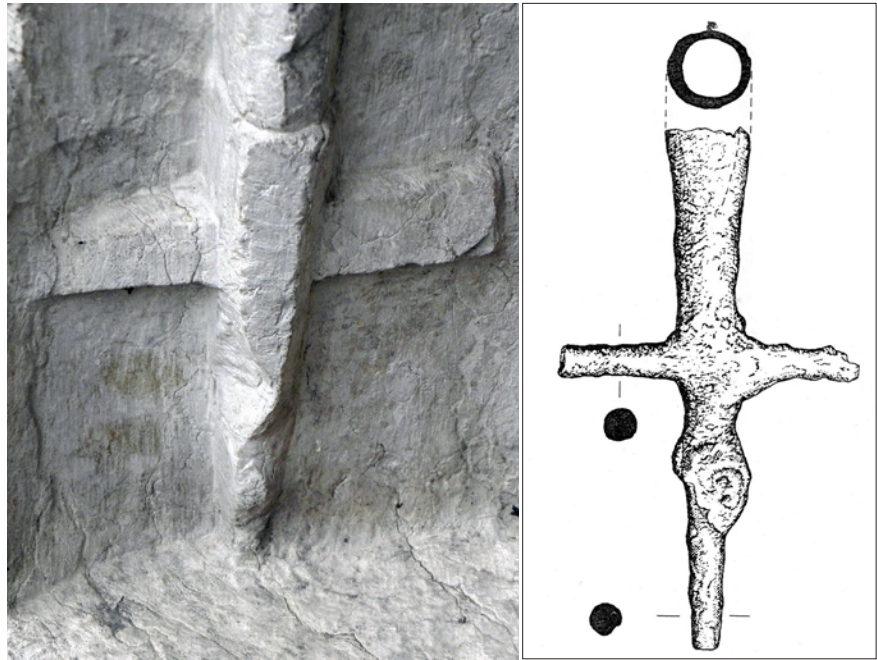
### (3) *Aquilifer* of *Legio I Adiutrix*; *Mogontiacum*, AD 68

From a Flavian-period column base at Mainz, this soldier wears a short, hooded *lacerna* cape in a Germanic 'tweed' weave, evidently with a separate double fringe added. Since this was a 'marine' legion, we choose to show the tunic as blue; its creasing and baggy 'hang' over a hidden waist belt suggest lightweight linen. We interpret the eagle (hardly visible on the Mainz carving) from an example on a harness ornament in the Antiken Sammlungen Kabinet in Vienna. The eagle is represented with spread wings, perched on a thunder-bolt, and we reconstruct the three *phalerae* as of bi-metal construction.



**RIGHT** Close-up of the standard butt on the monument to the *aquilifer* Firmus of *Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis*. Note the clear depiction of a metal ferrule, with a crossbar to prevent it sinking too deep when planted in the ground in camp or on the battlefield. (Archeological Museum, Verona; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

**FAR RIGHT** Much corroded iron ferrule with crossbar from the butt of a standard, c. 13.7cm x 7.5cm (5¼ x 3ins). This exceptional fragment of a *signum* or a *vexillum* was found at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, where, in AD 105, a probable Roman *vexillatio* composed of *auxilia*, *milites* and *equites legionis* was engaged in a bloody fight. Defending their tented camp or wooden barracks against a sudden Dacian attack, the Romans probably used any weapon that came to hand, perhaps even including the pointed ferrules of standards. (Drawing by Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Etienne-Piso-Diaconescu)



cohorts.’ This reference to *vexilla* can only refer to those of cohorts; the soldiers were outside their *castra*, so did not bring the legion’s collective standard with them from the chapel. The text makes clear that only when they obeyed Germanicus’s order were the cohorts recognizable.

*Signa cohortium* are also expressly mentioned in inscriptions of the 2nd century AD. Each legion must have had either ten *signa cohortium*, or some additional elements on manipular or centurial *signa* by which the different cohorts could be distinguished. It is plausible, from examination of the Columns of Trajan and Antoninus Pius, that the *signum cohortis* within the legion had a spearhead, and was fitted either with a flag or with a silver *tabula* (‘nameplate’) bearing the number of the cohort and, in the case of auxiliary units, a name. This silver tablet is attested both for Praetorians (e.g. stele of Pompeius Asper) and for the *Auxilia* (fragment of *signum* from Niederbieber), so was presumably also used in the legions.

Under the Empire the manipular arrangement remained in force as regards both the standards and the ranks of the centurions. During the whole period in which the legion was organized in *manipuli* each of these tactical units had its own *signum*, 30 in each legion. Varro (L.L.V, 88) writes that ‘the manipule is the smallest *manus* unit which has a standard of its own to follow’. The soldiers of the *manipulus* were called *milites unius signi*, i.e. marching under a single standard. We still have various mentions of the *signa manipularum* in the Early Imperial period (Tac., *Ann.*, I, 20: ‘the maniples dispatched to Nauportus before the beginning of the mutiny ... tore down their flags (*vexilla convellunt*)’. The identification element of the *signum manipularis* was perhaps a hand, a small shield or another symbol at the top of the standard. So, probably, within the same cohort the standards of the three maniples were identified by the hand, and that of the whole cohort was either a *vexillum*, or the standard of the manipule of *triarii* fitted either with a *vexillum* (on the basis of Tac., *Ann.*, I, 34, quoted above) or with another identifying element such as the numbered tablet.

The doubling of the *centuriae* had already automatically doubled the total *signa* of each legion. Instead of the 30 *signa manipulorum*, each legion now had 60 *signa centuriarum*, probably serving simultaneously to distinguish the centuries and also the cohort's constituent maniples of *hastati*, *principes* and *triarii*. The *signum centuriae* was probably regularized under Hadrian, when the three old *manipuli* were subsumed into the six *centuriae*.

### Appearance: the *aquila*

There is discussion over the existence of actual archaeological specimens of *aquiliae*, but a considerable number of representations give us a good idea of what they looked like.

*Aquiliae*, cast in silver, gold or gilded bronze, are usually represented on monuments standing on their feet, with wings either raised steeply erect or spread to the sides (e.g. that of Legio XX Valeria Victrix on the Hutcheson Hill distance slab, Antonine period), in the former case sometimes encircled by a wreath or crown (e.g. *aquila* of Sertorius Firmus). A clan symbol such as a leaf or acorn is sometimes held in the beak, and the talons are sometimes positioned gripping a bundle of lightning- and thunder-bolts – the *fulgures* of Jupiter the Greatest and Best (e.g. the *aquila* of Gn. Musius, Plate B1). These variations presumably made the eagles of individual legions readily distinguishable. The eagle statuette is shown mounted on a plinth-like base, which may vary in cross-section and height, but which is often fairly tall and tapers down to form a socket for the shaft.

The shaft is often shown as either sheathed in silver metal or silver-painted. Sometimes it is unadorned; sometimes it presents at or below the halfway point a kind of claw-shaped metal handle. Some representations clearly show a metal ferrule for sticking the shaft into the ground. A much-corroded fragment of an iron *signum* found in Dacia is essentially similar to the heavy ferrule visible on the monument of Firmus in Verona, with a crossbar to prevent it sinking too deep when planted (see opposite). On Trajan's Column the shapes of the legionary *aquiliae* are all quite similar (scenes II, XXII, XXVII, XLVIII, LI and LIII): eagles with raised wings are mounted on quadrilateral-section plinths, and the shafts lack ferrules. Of particular interest are two eagles, the wings of one being encircled by a *corona muralis*; according to Monaci, these are identifiable as the standards of Legio I Adiutrix (scene IV) and a Praetorian unit (scene LIII).



Coloured reconstruction of a group of marching standard-bearers in a relief on metopa X (XVI) from Adamklisi, AD 109. Note the two vertically attached wreath-crowns, and what appears to be an *ovum*, below the eagle. (Museum of Adamklisi, colour reconstruction by Dr Catalin Draghici, photo courtesy of Dr Anca Cezarina Fulger)

Detail of a 2nd-century AD relief from a granary site at Corbridge (Corstopitum) in northern England, showing a *vexillum* of *Legio II Augusta*; compare with Plate E2. In the uncropped relief, it is flanked by two handsomely carved Corinthian pillars, representing the *sacellum* shrine in a military base. This is one of the few representations of a richly bordered flag, probably that of a detached *vexillatio* of the legion; the inscription is 'VEXILLUS/ LEG II AUG'. The upper part, today lost, seems to have featured either a crescent moon or a *pelta* shield. Note also the handle on the shaft: this sort of double-claw or 'moustache' shape is not unique in the iconography. (Photo courtesy of Dr Stefano Izzo)



Examples of legionary eagles are hard to identify in the archaeological record; the association of the eagle with Jupiter made it a very common image in many contexts, and eagles were also used upon *signa* other than the legionary standard. Two specimens have been proposed as military eagles: a bronze 1st–2nd century find once in the Axel Guttman Collection, and another specimen found in Bulgaria. However, this measures 12cm (c. 5ins) high, while analysis of the iconography suggests a height comparable with a human head, i.e. c. 25–30cm (10–12ins). Many sources also describe *aquilae* as made from silver or gold, or gilded, with a particularly

glittering appearance (Tac., *Ann.*, XV, 29). At the moment, there are only two archaeological specimens that meet these criteria, one of them fragmentary: a Late Consular or Early Imperial eagle from the Abruzzo (see page 12); and the head of an eagle found in the Treasure of Marengo (page 18). Before World War I the RGZM reconstructed a legionary eagle in gold metal based upon the stele of Gn. Musius. The wreath around the wings was reproduced as embossed metal, though we should recall that the sources describe eagles as being actually garlanded on ceremonial occasions.

## D

### THE FLAVIAN PERIOD

#### (1) **Genialis Clusio, imaginifer of Cohors VII Raetorum, AD 69–80**

His stele (see page 26) suggests a helmet with a brow 'peak' extended forwards into a point, but here we choose instead to reconstruct a highly decorated masked helmet formerly in the Guttman Collection. This is of iron entirely skinned with bright copper-alloy except for silvered Imperial busts on the broad cheek-guards, and is embossed and engraved with deities, stags, and vegetal and geometric patterns. The stele shows the bear's pelt slung entirely behind his left shoulder, as in Plate B3. Just visible under the bottom edge of his leather corselet is a ringmail *lorica hamis conserta*. The corselet has heavier caped shoulder-guards linked by a double-hook on the breast, and *pteryges* are visible only at the upper arms. Note the gilded *imago* of Vespasian in armour, enclosed in a silvered shell recalling the *aedicula* of a temple.

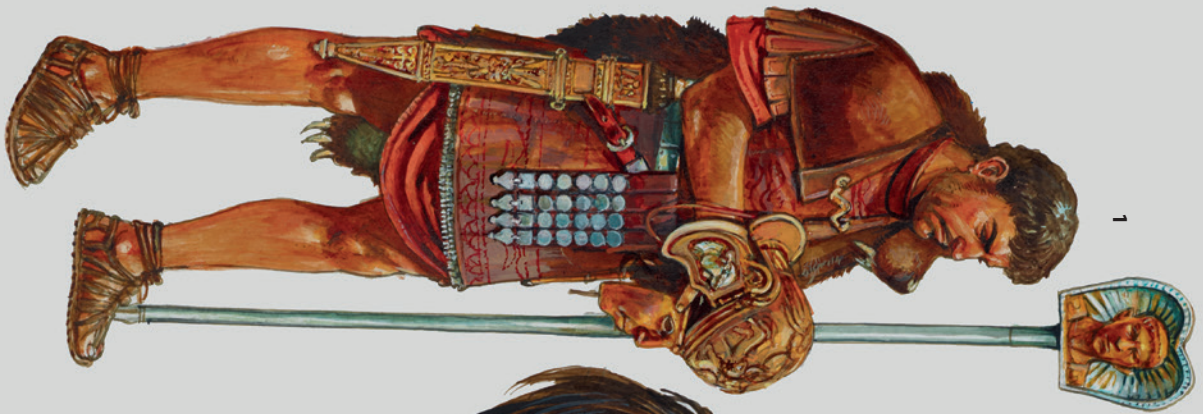
#### (2) **Ioulios Crispos, semiaforos of cavalry, Isauria**

This Anatolian standard-bearer of veterans, probably serving

with a local cavalry *ala*, is reconstructed from his monument. The copper-alloy scale corselet (*thorax folidotos*), with *humeralia* over the shoulders hooked together on the breast, is worn over a quilted *subarmalis*. His long-sleeved tunic and long, loose Persian trousers (*sarabara*) are of typically Eastern appearance, and he wears *cothurni* boots with decorative flaps. His standard is crowned with a large bi-metal disk decorated with a distinctive pattern; we reconstruct its spearhead from a specimen at Regensburg, dated by Kovács to the second half of the 1st century AD.

#### (3) **Signifer, Legio I Macriana Liberatrix, AD 69**

This short-lived legion was raised in Africa by the governor, Clodius Macer, and later taken into service by Vitellius; the standard-bearer is taken from a votive altar in Verona. Adorned with a torque and bracelets of silver and gold befitting his status, he wears a muscled cuirass in hardened leather over a *subarmalis* showing stiff linen *pteryges*, and *calcei* boots. We interpret the spear-headed standard as a *signum cohortis*, with the *tabula* embossed 'LEG. I. MACR. LIB./ COH. III!'. Below the *phalerae* and *lunula* on the silver-painted shaft are two *ova*.





Fringed *vexilla*, from the Antonine panel showing prisoners in c. AD 180 on the later Arch of Constantine. The two at the left are represented in the usual way; the third is reversed, showing in front of the cloth the spearhead finial with a nailhead. This difference may be intended to distinguish *vexilla* connected with the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his general Pompeianus, represented in the scene, from the *vexillum* of the soldiers, probably the standard of a vexillation from either *Legio II Adiutrix* or *XXX Ulpia*. Some standards represented not a unit but the dignity or power of an individual, whether a victorious *Imperator* or the reigning *Princeps*. Such flags were made of violet-purple cloth, with heavy gold fringes and two hanging straps laden with pendants, and were surmounted by a gold eagle; for instance, see the 'Submissio' scene on the Aurelian panel of the Arch of Constantine. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

The psychological importance of the *aquila* was much greater than that of the other standards. Standards might be seen as basically tactical, but this was the sacred bird of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, protector of Eternal Rome, under whose wings the legions would always march to victory. The eagle never left the camp unless the whole legion set out. At the head of the First Cohort the *aquilifer* was usually accompanied by the legion's senior centurion (*primus pilus*, 'first javelin'), who, like him, would defend the eagle at the cost of his life if need be – like the *centurion* Atilius Verus, who was killed in the act of recapturing the eagle of Legio VII from the enemy at the battle of Cremona (Tac., *Hist.*, III, 22).

During temporary halts on the march as well as in winter quarters the eagle would be protected by a shrine, as documented (Cassius Dio, XL, 18) and depicted (reliefs of Trasacco, shaped like a temple *aedicula*). The Portonaccio sarcophagus attests, from the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a sort of shoulder-guard for carrying the *aquila*, wrapped around the shaft and fastened under the tassel.

### The legionary *vexillum*

The *vexillum* was the legion's second identifying standard (Tac., *Hist.*, III, 22), which bore the number and the name of the *legio* and sometimes also an emperor's name (Tac., *Hist.*, II, 85: '... tearing in pieces the flags that displayed the name of Vitellius'). Some coins suggest that the legion's emblem might also be displayed on the rectangular purple cloth flag; those of Legio V Macedonica and XIII Gemina represented on coins struck in Dacia show their numbers, and a personification of the *Provincia Dacica* flanked by an eagle and a lion (see below, 'The *genius legionis*').

As previously, the *vexillum legionis* was flown from a transverse bar attached to a vertical and otherwise unadorned spearshaft, whose head varied in dimensions. The squared cloth of the flag, perhaps up to about





**ABOVE** Bust *imago* of the Emperor Caligula, possibly recovered from the River Tiber; it is 9.7cm (3 $\frac{7}{8}$ ins) high, and depicts the emperor in scale armour with a *paludamentum* cloak. This find shows many apparently deliberate scars and gouges made in ancient times, possibly following Caligula's assassination in AD 41. (Swiss private collection, author's photos, courtesy of the owner)

**ABOVE LEFT** Silver *imago* of Lucius Verus from the Marengo treasure, c. AD 166, showing this prince's characteristic long beard. Lucius Verus was an adoptive brother of Marcus Aurelius, who reigned with him as co-emperor from 161 until his death in the field from fever in 169, early in the Marcomannic Wars of 168–180. He is depicted in 'feather-effect' scale armour, with a *Gorgoneion* on the chest, and laced-down *humeralia* over the shoulders. (Museo di Antichità, Turin; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

47–50cm (18 $\frac{1}{2}$ –19 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins) wide and sometimes shallower in proportion, might be accompanied by other hanging elements. A passage in Tertullian's *Apology* gives us some technical terms: the flanking streamers or straps, often weighted by heart-shaped or other metal pendants, were called *siphara*, and the cloth flag was the *stola*. On Trajan's Column the *vexilla legionis* represented in scene V are sometimes surmounted not with a spearhead but with the statuette of a deity.

A relief from Corbridge (see page 22) shows the flag of a detached *vexillatio* of Legio II Augusta. The actual *stola* is fringed along the bottom, and is edged at top and both sides by a wide border also fringed at the bottom ends, but which seems to have been made separately and applied. This strip of fabric is either interwoven or richly embroidered with foliate patterns. A profusion of gold decoration on *vexilla* is suggested by Tacitus's expression *fulgentia per collis vexilla* – 'flags which gleamed among the hills' (*Hist.*, III, 82).

Commemorative stele of Genialis Clusio, *imaginifer* of *Cohors VII Raetorum*, AD 60s–80s – a good example of an *imago* standard with the bust enclosed in a metallic ‘box’ or shell resembling an *aedicula* shrine. The caped effect at the shoulders of Genialis’s armour has been variously interpreted; Plate D1 shows our reconstruction. Note the bearskin slung behind his left shoulder only, apparently enclosing a helmet with the ‘peak’ at the brow extended into a point. (Mainz Landesmuseum; photo courtesy of Dr Stefan Nürlich)



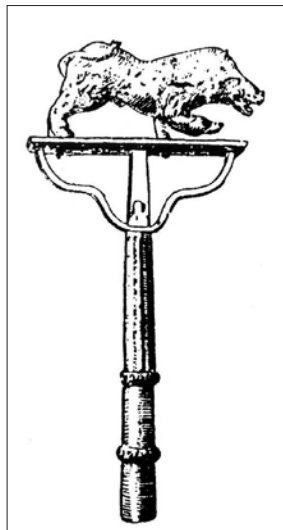
## The *imago*

From Augustus onwards the emperors were identified as divinities. The *imago* was a standard with an emperor’s bust in silver or gilded bronze, mounted on a shaft either alone or enclosed in a shell shape representing an *aedicula*. This Imperial portrait embodied a close relationship of mutual loyalty between the *princeps* and the *milites*. Töpfer suggests that after the death of an emperor his images ceased to be carried, and were either kept in camp or melted down. However, they might have been present for some time together with images of the new Caesar (unless they were hated figures, purged in a *damnatio memoriae*).

Imperial busts in gold or silver have been found, and these *imagines* were probably

fitted on standard shafts (e.g. those of Galba from Herculaneum, now in Naples; Caligula from Vindonissa, in a private collection; Lucius Verus, in the Marengo treasure; and Marcus Aurelius from Avenches, in the local museum). They are usually three-dimensional, about 25–30cm (10–12ins) high, and show the subject clad in armour. This is usually the scale *squama plumata*, with a Gorgon mask in the centre of the breast (Galba, Lucius Verus, and Marcus Aurelius from Avenches).

Portrait medallions of the emperors (*phalerae cum imagines*) were also regularly attached to the shafts of eagles and other standards. Tacitus (*Hist.*, IV, 62) mentions *imagines imperatorum* in the plural, suggesting that previous emperors were indeed still memorialized in this way. Such portrait medallions are mainly visible in the iconography of Praetorian *signa*, but they were also present on the standards of other units, at least until the second half of the 1st century AD. In AD 68 the soldiers of L. Verginius Rufus in Germania Superior ‘threw down and shattered the images of Nero, and called Rufus by the titles of Caesar and Augustus ... [and one soldier] quickly inscribed these words on one of his standards’ (Cassius Dio, LXIII, 25). Later the soldiers of Vitellius, excited to mutiny, ‘stripped out the images of Vitellius from their



Possible *signum* of 1st–2nd century AD, representing the wild boar *genius* of *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*; see also photo of carved gemstone on back cover. (British Museum, London, ex-Daremborg-Saglio)

standards, and took an oath that they would be ruled by Vespasian' (Cassius Dio, LXV, 10).

When a new Caesar was proclaimed, his *imago* was consecrated among the other standards, and his likeness was placed under the eagle or on other standards. Tiberius awarded the title 'Pia Fidelis' to the Syrian legions, which alone had consecrated no images of the usurping Sejanus among their standards (Suet., *Tib.*, XLVIII).

### The *genius legionis*

A further category of standard were those representing animals or mythical figures in bronze statuettes mounted on a shaft. Some of these represented the emblems of a legion; they had no tactical purpose, but symbolized the legion's 'soul', the *genius legionis*. We have a range of evidence for these, from coins to scenes on Trajan's Column, and actual specimens. There had been cults of animals linked with Roman gods since the most ancient times. Domaszewsky associates the wolf with Mars, the eagle with Jupiter, the horse with Jupiter Feretrius, and the bull with Jupiter Stator, but his interpretation is not universally accepted.

Different animals were related to more than one deity – e.g. the bull was sacred to Venus as well as Jupiter – and individual legions had more than one emblem. Other *signa* bore actual or mythical beasts from the Zodiac, like the scorpion of the Praetorians, and the Capricorn of the legions raised by Augustus. However, the latter was also displayed by other legions, so it might also be connected with the day of investiture of the eagle of the legion. More literal associations were Neptune, a dolphin, or an actual warship for legions credited with a naval victory.

Scene XLVIII on Trajan's Column, showing the young Hadrian leading Legio I Minervia, illustrates five standards. These include that legion's emblem of a ram, with slightly bent front legs and lowered head. This identification is important for its association with the eagle and other *signa* of that legion represented in the same scene.

These symbols of the legions, represented on their *vexilla* or mounted upon shafts, were as follows for the period under consideration (with some sources indicated):

*Legio I Adiutrix* – Capricorn, Pegasus, warship; *Legio I Italica* – boar, bull; *Legio I Minervia* – ram, Minerva, ram & Victory; *Legio II Adiutrix* – boar, Pegasus, warship (CIL, XVI, 10–11); *Legio II Augusta* – Capricorn & Pegasus, Mars; *Legio II Italica* – Roman she-wolf, Capricorn; *Legio II Trajana* – Hercules; *Legio III Gallica* – bull; *Legio III Italica* – stork; *Legio III Flavia* – lion; *Legio IIII Macedonica* – Capricorn, bull, ram (ILS 2.283); *Legio IIII Scythica* – Capricorn, ram; *Legio V Alaudae* – elephant (see Appian, BC, II, 96); *Legio V Macedonica* – Winged Victory & eagle, bull; *Legio VI Ferrata* – Roman she-wolf & Twins; *Legio VI Victrix* – bull; *Legio*



Intaglio gemstone carved with a magnificent eagle between two standards, above the inscription of *Legio XIII Gemina Martia Victrix*; latter part of the 1st century AD. On the left is a standard topped with the Capricorn *genius legionis*, and on the right one with the hand of a *signum manipularis*. Both shafts are decorated with multiple alternating *phalerae*, *lunulae* and perhaps crowns. (Swiss private collection; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)

Legionary *signa* on Trajan's Column, scene XXIV; note that the bearers either do not wear helmets under the animal-heads, or if they do, then the cheek-guards are missing. These three standards from the same legion are interpreted as those of a cohort (slanting down from top left), and of its maniples doubling as centurial *signa*. The *signum cohortis* has an oval shield at the top, and an eagle enclosed in a wreath immediately above the crossbar; below this is a civic crown, and a *phalera* showing radiating lines on its border, above what seems to be a mural crown. The two at centre and right are reconstructed in Plate F3; both are surmounted by a hand shown in relief on a plaque, above five *phalerae* and a *lunula*, above a tassel carved to indicate hair. Their exact similarity might suggest that they are the standards of two centuries within the same maniple, differentiated only by an inscription on the crossbars? (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



*VII Claudia* – bull (stele of Cissonius); *Legio VII Gemina Pia Fidelis* – Castor & Pollux; *Legio VIII Augusta* – bull (shield fragment, Newcastle, CIL, VII, 495; relief from Bonn); *Legio VIII Triumphalis Macedonica Hispana* – Neptune; *Legio X Fretensis* – bull, boar, Neptune, warship, dolphin; *Legio X Gemina* – bull; *Legio XI Claudia* – Capricorn, Neptune, dolphin, Roman she-wolf & Twins; *Legio XII Fulminata* – lightning-bolt; *Legio XIII Gemina* – Capricorn, lion, eagle, Victory & lion; Castor & Pollux?; *Legio XIII Gemina* – Capricorn (stelae of *signiferi* Luccius and Secundus); *Legio XV Apollinaris* – Apollo; *Legio XVI Flavia* – lion, Pegasus; *Legio XVI Gallica* – lion; *Legio XX Valeria Victrix* – Capricorn, boar (CIL, VII, 447, 666, 716, 1050, 1122, 1133, 1137, 1141); *Legio XXI Rapax* – Capricorn; *Legio XXII Deiotariana* – wolf (relief from Berlin); *Legio XXII Primigenia* – Capricorn & Hercules, bull?; *Legio XXVIII* – eagle with lion in its talons; *Legio XXX Ulpia* – Capricorn, Jupiter & Capricorn, Neptune, dolphin.



Detail from Trajan's Column, scene XXVI, showing the top of a legionary cohort standard. A heart-shaped spearhead with a knobbed tip surmounts an oval shield in a wreath, above the crossbar with pendant straps, and three *phalerae*, of which the third seems larger than the others. The uncropped scene shows two more *phalerae* above a *lunula*, and a tassel. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

Apart from three-dimensional models, medallions depicting images of the *genius legionis* were also mounted on shafts. Two good examples are represented on the fragment of a catapult from the battlefield of Cremona (AD 69). These show medallions embossed respectively with the bull and Capricorn emblems of Legio IIII Macedonica; each has a curved handle fixed a little way above the butt, and neither has a ferrule.

### The chapel of the standards

When they were not being carried, the standards of the *legio* were kept in a special part of the camp or fort called the *sacellum* or shrine of the standards. It was usually in the central part of the Principia, and under it was the strongroom that held the unit's money and treasures. Its holy character might save the life of the man who sought sanctuary there; Tacitus tells us of the noble Munatius Plancus, who clasped the eagles and *signa* when trying to



Broken *tabula* of a 1st-century AD standard which bore the designation of the auxiliary *Cohors VII Raetorum*, from Castle Niederbieber in the Rhineland. From its current size (16.2cm x 6.5cm/6½ins x 2½ins), Töpfer calculates an original length of 24–30cm (9½–11¼ins). Note at left the broken eyelet, containing a ring-and-pin attachment for a pendant strap. (Rheinerisches Landesmuseum, Bonn; photo courtesy of Dr Stefano Izzo)

escape the mutinous legionaries of Colonia, and who was saved by the brave *aquilifer* Calpurnius (*Ann.*, I, 39).

Some interesting representations of the *sacellum* are found in the iconography. Visible on the well-known ‘sword of Tiberius’ chape from Mainz (British Museum), between columns, is a large *aquila* with high-raised wings, standing on a volute capitol. In two flanking intercolumnar spaces there are two identical *signa*, bearing two rings slightly open at the bottom. Töpfer convincingly proposes this scene as the sanctuary of a legion, with architecture recalling a temple. The *vexilla* lodged there were often adorned with garlands and crowns.

### ***Signa of legionary units – cohortes, centuriae and manipuli***

Unit *signa* are represented on reliefs, tombstones, propaganda monuments, weapons and coins. They took the form of shafts with crossbars and attached pendant ribbons or straps, and *dona militaria* decorating their length; these were awards given to the commander or to the whole unit for some particular deed. Tertullian calls this decoration of standards *suggestus imaginum* (‘decking with images’) or *monilia* (‘jewels’). During the Imperial period the practice reached a high degree of complexity and a wide range of variation; no absolute system has been identified, and in this text we simply report the terms of the academic debate.

Method of attaching a *phalera* decorated with images to a shaft, where a simple nail would deface the image; from a 1st-century AD find at Castle Niederbieber. (Top) Section with original *phalera*, now absent; (below) rear view of the bracket only; dimensions 9.7cm x 4.2cm x 3.7cm (3¾ins x 1½ins x c. 1½ins). This important find allows us to estimate the diameter of standard shafts at between 2cm and 3.5cm (¾ins–1½ins). (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn; drawings by Dr Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Töpfer)



All these secondary *signa* were characteristically surmounted by either a small shield, a hand, a spearhead or some other symbol, and down the shaft were placed decorations such as torques, wreaths, crowns, or bracelets, alternating with the metal discs (*phalerae*) and crescents (*lunulae*) seen since the Late Consular period. Tassels or fringes around the shaft, usually depicted as of domed shape, were



**FAR LEFT** *Patera*-shaped bronze *phalera* from a 2nd-century AD standard, now missing the central head of a fastening nail, but retaining traces of the original silvered finish. Töpfer estimates the diameter of such *phalerae* at between 15cm and 24cm (roughly 6–9½ins); the iconography sometimes suggests medallions of different sizes on the same shaft – see photo page 49. (Private collection; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)

often present, normally in the lowest position, and a conical ferrule is frequently represented.

Among the crowns visible on *signa* were the gilded laurel *corona civica* or *aurea*. From the Late Consular period this ‘civic crown’ was attached just under the standard’s spearhead (e.g. coins of *speculatores* of M. Antonius), and this continued in the Imperial legions (stelae of Luccius Faustus and Gavidius; Trajan’s Column scene LXXVII). Sometimes the animal emblems of legions also appeared as decorations on the shaft (Q. Luccius and C. Secundus, of Legio XIII Gemina). On Late Consular standards multiple *lunulae* may be visible, but in the Imperial period (with isolated exceptions) only one crescent is usually seen, often positioned below the *phalerae* and above the tassel. Often a claw-shaped handle positioned on the shaft helped the bearer in carrying and manipulating the standard. For example, the standard of Gosselius (from Kistanje, in today’s Bosnia) shows, from top to bottom, a small spearhead; five saucer-like *phalerae* of increasing diameters and with beaded rims; a *lunula*; a tassel; a handle; and a lanceolate ferrule.

The *phalerae* decorating such standards were usually plain, in the shape of a *patera* or saucer with concentric embossing. However, some show foliate decoration, Imperial images (reliefs from Venafro), images of gods (Mars, relief in Beneventum), or signs of the Zodiac (Capricorn, relief from Brescia), apparently worked in expensive materials. Domaszewski distinguishes the legionary *signa* from the Praetorian examples by arguing that the former bore plain *phalerae* or *lunulae* and the latter more elaborate types, but in the light of more recent evidence this rigid distinction cannot be sustained.

Usually the manipular or centurional *signum* was surmounted by an open hand (model from Vindonissa, early 2nd century AD). These survived after the manipular organization was suppressed under Hadrian, since they are widely visible on Antonine monuments. After the suppression of the maniple, the hand standards probably became centurial

**LEFT** Copper-alloy disc apparently forming an uncompleted 2nd-century AD *phalera cum imago* found at Newstead, Scotland; it measures 24.5cm (9¾ins) in diameter. Coulston & Bishop suggest that the details of the Imperial image were added as an embossed appliqué panel, perhaps of precious material. (National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)



Bronze pendant from a standard’s side-strap dating from c. AD 64, and measuring 7.7cm x 4.8cm (roughly 3ins x 1.9ins), with the image of Nero. (UK private collection; photo P. Gross, Cologne University, by kind permission of the owner)

This unique find from under the Roman bridge over the River Moselle at Trier has been identified as the handle from a standard shaft (though Töpfer argues against this, on the grounds of its apparently excessive size). The curving, triangular, 'box' body is of bronze, measuring 39cm long by 7–10cm in width (15½ins x 2¾–4ins); here 'A' shows the top and 'B' the right side and an oblique view. The inscription reads 'SIGNIFERIS SURIUS QUINTUS', in a style that dates it to the Hadrianic period, c. AD 120. The tip shows an ancient repair, with two small lead patches soldered on. (Römisches Land Museum, Trier; 'A' drawing by Dr Andrea Salimbeti ex-Nouwen; 'B' © GDKE/Bheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, photos Thomas Zühmer)



*phalerae* or *phalerae cum imagines*, marking the precedence of the highest-ranking centurion (*primus pilus*) of the legion. Within a cohort, a standard with a spearhead served both as the *signum cohortis*, and as the standard of its senior century, led by the *pilus prior* of the unit. Each cohort thus had six centurial standards: that of the senior *centuria* surmounted with a spearhead plus sometimes a *vexillum* or shield emblem, and five surmounted with a hand, identifying the subordinate *centuriae*. Various combinations are visible on Trajan's Column, of which the following are notable:

(1) Scene V: two *signiferi* carrying identical standards, with (from top to bottom): a right hand enclosed in a wreath; a transverse *tabula*; six *phalerae*; a *lunula*, and a tassel. Arguably, these are the *signa* of two different *centuriae* (differentiated on the *tabulae*) of a cohort of *Legio I Adiutrix*, whose *aquilifer* is visible between the two *signiferi*.

standards, not necessarily fitted with an identifying flag. Töpfer proposes that the ex-manipular standards surmounted by the hand were now those of *centuriae*, and standards surmounted by a spearhead those of *cohortes*. The standard of the *cohortis* was probably a spear, either with a flag at its top or accompanied by a separate *vexillum*. The identification of the cohort was by means of an embossed silver *tabula* below the head.

According to Töpfer, only the standards within the First Cohort were fitted with decorated

Marble fragment from the Temple of Hadrian, 2nd century AD. This shows an armour (clearly of leather) mounted on a big lance as a *trophaeum*; compare with Plate H8. Study of the *vexillum* crossing behind it reveals that, due to the odd perspective chosen by the sculptor, a spearhead at the top of the shaft is shown here superimposed along the crossbar. (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the museum)







Detail from an ivory casket, Trajanic period, showing a standard-bearer of *Legio V Macedonica* carrying what is clearly a shaft-mounted small statuette representing the *spolia* of victory over the Parthians in AD 115, in place of an actual captured armour. Some specimens of these manufactured trophies have been found, though they do not exclude the probability that actual panoplies were also carried in triumphal processions. (Archaeological Museum, Ephesus, Turkey; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

(2) Scene XLVII: two identical *signa*. A spearhead surmounts a wreath enclosing an oval shield, which seems to be superimposed in front of a *vexillum* hanging behind it; below this is a crossbar with hanging pendants; below this, five plain *phalerae*; below these a tassel, and finally a crown. In this case, if the identification system proposed above is correct, we have here *signa* of two different cohorts of Legio I Minervia. Because both have attached *vexilla*, each is simultaneously a *signum cohortis*; the *signum* of the

cohort's former maniple of *triarii*; and the *signum centuriae* of the cohort's senior century, led by the centurion *pilus prior*.

### Miscellaneous standards

In the context of units, the word *vexillum* was synonymous with an unspecified 'company'; such a flag might be carried by a body of recruits, a detached vexillation of legionaries or even of mixed troops, an auxiliary unit, or an employed group of foreign *numeri*. Flags were also used by troops of discharged veterans called back for further service (Tac., *Ann.*, I, 17, 36). A *vexillum veteranorum*, with five eagles on the top of the crossbar, is visible on Trajan's Arch at Beneventum; however, a standard-bearer from Anatolia is depicted with a *signum* of a disc with unique veterans' decoration (see Plate D2). Tacitus (*Ann.*, I, 39 & II, 78; *Hist.*, IV, 22) mentions the flags of Batavian veterans, and of a *Vexilla Tironum*. Flags also identified various other types of unit, including the *Cohortes Voluntariorum Civium Romanorum* operating in Dalmatia (CIL, III, 2745).

During the celebration of 'triumphs' after victory we also find the *insignia triumphi* (Tac., *Ann.*, IV, 44). These

were assembled displays of captured enemy armours, helmets and weapons (*spolia*), mounted upon crossed or T-shaped poles cut for the purpose, and carried by soldiers during the parades and celebrations. They are visible on several monuments, such as the Portonaccio sarcophagus and others of the 2nd century celebrating Roman victories over Germans, Celts or Parthians. They are also clearly visible on coins, such as the series dedicated by the Emperor Hadrian to Romulus, Founder (*conditor*) of Rome. Usually such *congeriae armorum* were composed of a helmet, a cuirass and one or two shields, but just a helmet and cuirass were also often used, as in the Augustan representation of Romulus triumphing with the arms of Acro (painting from the Esquiline). Archaeological finds indicate that smaller, more manageable metal models of such panoplies mounted upon shafts might also be used instead of actual armour.

The army sometimes used statuettes of gods (*simulacra*) mounted upon shafts to invoke the deities' power and protection. Their presence in the *Principia* or on the battlefield alongside the Imperial and legionary

Silver *simulacrum* of Jupiter in armour, identified by the thunder- and lightning-bolts on his right breast; second half of 2nd century AD, from Augusta Praetoria – modern Aosta. (Museo Archaeologico, Aosta; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



standards might attract equal veneration, but they had no practical function (Tac., *Ann.*, XV, 29). They are well represented on the Antonine panel of the Arch of Constantine, where Marcus Aurelius is presenting a barbarian chief allied to the Romans. In the background, *signiferi* with feline pelts and ringmail armour are bearing four standards surmounted by statuettes of Mars, Hercules and Victory (twice), together with three identical *vexilla*.<sup>3</sup>

## IMPERIAL GUARD STANDARDS

### Praetorian cohorts

In the Imperial Guard, Praetorian cohorts had *signa manipulorum* until the suppression of the manipule under Hadrian. Each *centuria* of each Praetorian *cohors* had its *signifer*, as well as the cohort itself, although we cannot exclude the idea (discussed above) of a standard serving a double function as the *signum cohortis* and senior *signum centuriae*.

Imperial Guard standard-bearers escorting an emperor are mentioned with regard to the death of Galba by both Tacitus (*Hist.*, I, 41) and Plutarch (*Galba*, XXVI, 4): ‘the *vexillarius* of the cohort escorting Galba – it is said that his name was Atilius Vergilio – tore Galba’s portrait from the standard and threw it on the ground’.

This passage is confirmed by the iconography. The Praetorian *signa* represented on Trajan’s Column and on the Great Trajanic Frieze (Villa Borghese) bear the *imago* of Trajan on their *phalerae*, combined with crowns, eagles in laurel wreaths, and *lunulae*. In a fragment from the Villa Borghese the three *signa* have a different composition: at the bottom they have the same tassel and wreath, but reading upwards from these the central standard shows a mural crown, a second wreath/crown, a damaged *imago*, another wreath/crown, and at the top an *aquila* standing on a *fulmen*. On the right-hand standard, again reading upwards from the lower wreath, there are an *imago*, a mural crown, another *imago*, another wreath/crown and, at the damaged top, two vertical elements perhaps representing the down-turned wingtips of an eagle. On the last standard, the upwards sequence above the wreath is an empty *imago*, another wreath/crown, a mural crown, and at the apex a hand. Behind the symbols at the top are fastened crossbars with hanging side-straps. The presence of the *manus* suggests that this kind of *signa* were employed as *signa manipulorum/signa centuriae*.

According to the sources, on the standards of the Imperial Guard the images were displayed on medallions. This was the main distinction between Praetorian *signa* and those of the legions and auxiliaries, where the Imperial *imago* was carried by the *imaginifer*, and *phalerae cum imagines* were only rarely displayed on the other standards after the last quarter of the 1st century AD. The bond between emperors and Praetorians was notably strengthened under the Flavian dynasty, when the *signa* of the Praetorians were at least partially renewed. This is confirmed on the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, where the *imagines* of the whole Imperial family are inscribed into two medallions on each *signum*, displayed on the shaft between decorative tassels.<sup>4</sup>

3 See Warrior 72, *Imperial Roman Legionary AD 161–284*, page 11

4 See Warrior 170, *Roman Guardsman 62 BC–AD 324*, page 40

For the rest, on Praetorian standards we can identify either *phalerae* of plain *patera* shape or *phalerae cum imagines*, combined with crowns. These include round gold *coronae murales* (shaped like the walls of a city, and awarded for successful siege operations); similar but possibly square-section *coronae vallares* or *castrenses* (scenes IV–V of Trajan’s Column); *coronae civicae*; and *coronae navales*, sometimes incorporating a ship emblem (Trajan’s Column, scene CIV). Some samples of such combinations on the Praetorian *signa* visible on the Column are as follows (elements listed from top to bottom):

(1: Scene XLII, three *signa*) Leaf-shaped spearhead – small *vexillum* – transverse bar with pendant straps – eagle enclosed in wreath – *corona muralis* – wreath/crown – *imago* – wreath/crown – tassel. One image is inscribed on a *phalera*. The standard-bearers depicted wear leather corselets and have lion-skins over their heads, and may be *signiferi* of the three first *centuriae* of three different *cohortes Praetoriae*.

(2: Scene LI, left, two *signa*) Small shield – wreath/crown – eagle enclosed in wreath – *corona muralis* – *imago* – wreath/crown – *imago* – *corona muralis* – *imago* – wreath/crown – tassel. Both *signiferi* wear the same headgear as in (1); they may carry *signa manipulorum* from two different *cohortes*.

(3: Scene LI, two *signa*) Small shield – wreath/crown – eagle enclosed in wreath – *corona muralis* – *imago* – wreath/crown – *imago* (and lower part invisible). *Signiferi* dressed as above. Probably *signa manipulorum* related to two other *cohortes*.

### Praetorian *aquilae*

The *signiferi* holding the standards described above are depicted advancing on the battlefield, very often preceded by an *aquilifer* bearing an eagle. This raises a controversial question: did Praetorian cohorts have an eagle standard? The description of the second battle of Cremona by Tacitus (*Hist.*, III, 21) speaks only of a *vexillum Praetorianum*. Cowan suggests that in this civil-war clash the guardsmen did not fight organized in their former cohorts,

## E

### THE TRAJANIC PERIOD (I)

These figures are largely based on Trajan’s Column, the Great Trajanic Frieze, and the Adamklisi monument which commemorate Trajan’s First and Second Dacian Wars (AD 101–102, and 105–106), so we imagine them as if they were drawn up on the bridge of boats that he had built to span the Danube. On the road in the distance part of his army advances, the legionaries in column-of-six led by their massed legionary and cohort standard-bearers and trumpeters.

#### (1) *Signifer, Cohors III Praetoria, First Dacian War*

The standard is topped with an eagle set on a *corona muralis*, and is very richly decorated with a second such award, two deep *coronae civicae*, *imagines* of Trajan and his predecessor Nerva, and an upright wreath. The standard-bearer from the Great Frieze sports the usual Praetorian lion pelt but does not seem to wear a helmet. His muscled cuirass is invisible beneath a sleeveless overtunic which seems to have been another distinction of the Praetorians; at the upper arms it reveals the *pteryges* hanging from a *subarmalis*, but only their tips are visible at the bottom. This use of a tunic over armour does not seem to be depicted on the Praetorians on Trajan’s Column.

#### (2) *Vexillarius, Legio XII Fulminata; battle of Tapae, AD 102*

This flag-bearer serves with a detachment from a legion normally stationed in the Eastern Provinces. Note the rich gold-embroidered or woven appliqué borders and gold fringing on the cloth *stola*. Like many other figures in the carvings he wears a ringmail corselet, here apparently over a leather jerkin edged at the bottom with a line of small copper-alloy scales.

#### (3) *Aquilifer, Legio I Adiutrix; first quarter of 2nd century AD*

Another bare-headed figure, he wears the type of leather corselet that appears to have been, along with ringmail, the normal body protection for standard-bearers. His short breeches are woven of a woollen ‘tweed’, after fragmentary specimens found all over the Roman provinces. The iconography of this period normally shows eagles with up-swept wings, here encircled by a *corona muralis* decoration instead of the more frequent wreath-crown.



1

2

3

COHORSIIPR

VEXILLVM  
LEGXII FVL

Detail of Praetorian standard-bearers of the Second Dacian War, from Trajan's Column, scene CIV. Apart from the lion pelts on the bearers' helmets, such *signa* are identifiable from legionary and auxiliary standards by bearing Imperial *imagines* on the staffs among the other decorations. On the central and right-hand standards we see (top to bottom) a spearhead above a *pelta* shape with radiating lines; a laurel crown; an eagle enclosed in an upright wreath; another crown; a *corona navalis*, with garlanded frieze and the protruding bows and stern of a warship; an Imperial *imago*; and either two crowns, or a crown above a tassel. The left-hand standard ends in a deep tassel. Most unusually, note at the bottom centre that these *signiferi* are wearing the *lorica segmentata*. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



but in separate centuries assembled under such a banner; and also that the depicted presence of an eagle among the *signa Praetoriana* echoes a practice dating from the Late Consular period, when the Praetorians were selected from among the army's best fighters.<sup>5</sup>

A Claudian-period relief in the Louvre shows a Praetorian eagle mounted on a heavy, undecorated shaft, with its talons curling over the edge of a decorated plinth. The eagle was presumably in gold, with the shaft gilded or silvered. Another *aquila*, perhaps of the Third Praetorian Cohort, is represented on the late 1st century AD monument to Pompeius Asper (today in the Palazzo Albani, Rome). The eagle sits with open wings, a laurel crown on his back, the head turned to the right, on a four-sided plinth supported by struts rising from the shaft. Like that of another Praetorian *aquila* in a small statuette in the Vienna Museum collections, the staff is fitted with a heart-shaped ferrule with a crossbar. According to Domawszesky, the wreath depicted behind the eagle was probably not physically connected to it, but part of the *dona militaria* shown to the left of it; however, study of the relief does allow its interpretation as attached to the standard. On scene CIV of

<sup>5</sup> See Warrior 170, *Roman Guardsman 62 BC–AD 324*, page 4

Trajan's Column, the Praetorian eagle has raised wings and a medallion or amulet hanging round its neck, and stands on a small plinth like a reversed truncated pyramid decorated with a crown. The *aquila* held by the statuette from the Antiken Sammlungen in Vienna shows a shaft of circular section, with two *phalerae* of which the upper one is larger; both have beaded edges around their flat surface. Directly above the upper *phalera* is a horizontal lightning-bundle, on which the eagle sits with wings opened sideways and head slightly turned to the right.

More interestingly, the famous coin commemorating Caligula's *Adlocutio Cohortes* to the Praetorians (ADLOCU COH = 'speech to the cohorts') shows the guardsmen with four eagle standards which obviously represent those of the said *cohortes*. It is therefore probable that each Praetorian *cohort* had an *aquila*, and that additionally, inside the Praetorian unit, there was a *signum cohortis* featuring an eagle at the top (monument of Maternius Quintianus). Under the *aquilae* on the coins can be seen crowns, and *phalerae* incorporating the imperial *imago*.<sup>6</sup> *Aquilae* also featured on *phalerae* on Praetorian unit standards, having a width of about 15–18cm (6–7ins) on discs about 24cm (9½ins) across.

### Other Praetorian *signa*

The *vexillum* of the Praetorians is visible on various monuments, such as the fragmentary Great Trajanic Frieze. It is a squared cloth (*stola*) hanging from a crossbar mounted on a shaft, fringed at the edges. It was probably of a scarlet or dark purple colour.

The scorpion was one of the emblems of the Praetorians, and is visible on the *signa* represented on the monument to Asper of the Third Praetorian Cohort. On this early Flavian monument we see, from top to bottom: a *corona civica*; a crossbar with pendant straps; an eagle within a *torques*; a second *corona civica*; a Winged Victory statuette; a *corona muralis*; an Imperial image within a round shell; a plate with an embossed *scorpio*; a transverse tablet inscribed 'COH III PR'; a civic crown; a *phalera* with the image of a Silenus; and a tassel. Both shafts have ferrules with transverse bars.<sup>7</sup>

The Praetorian cavalry included a *signifer* for each *turma*. When the Equites Singulares Augusti were created, each *ala* of this bodyguard included a *vexillarius* (CIL, VI, 3304), and the Imperial *imago* was borne by a special officer called a *tablifer*. The *Speculatores* and individual vexillations each had their own *vexillum* (Antonine panels of the Arch of Constantine).

The Equites Singulares also had *signa*, and one of them, of Antonine date, is represented on a tombstone preserved in the Museo Nazionale Romano. It resembles an infantry *signum*, decorated from top to bottom with a *lunula*, a small *vexillum*, three *phalerae*, a *corona muralis*, and a tassel. Cowan suggests that the presence of the *corona muralis* means that these Imperial bodyguards had participated in the capture of an enemy city perhaps during the Parthian campaigns of Lucius Verus.<sup>8</sup>

A Praetorian cavalry *vexillum* is visible on the Great Trajanic Frieze, but it is undecorated except for a bottom fringe. The same applies to the *vexilla* represented on the Antonine reliefs of the Palace of Conservatori, which are surmounted by a wide spearhead. Probably the images or inscriptions they

6 See Elite 50, *The Praetorian Guard*, page 21

7 *idem*, page 25; Warrior 170, page 44

8 See Warrior 170, pages 33–34



Details from fragment of the Great Trajanic Frieze, previously in the Church of Sts Luca and Martina, representing Praetorian standards. (Left) Manipular hand; *corona civica*; *imago* of Trajan on *phalera* with decorated edge; *corona muralis*, possibly butted down against *corona vallaris*. (Right) Eagle (now lost), on *corona civica*; *imago* of Trajan; *corona muralis*; *imago* of Nerva; *corona civica*; tassel. (Villa Borghese, Rome, inv. XXV; author's photos, courtesy of the Museum)

bore have been lost along with the original painted-on colour. Four cavalry *vexillarii* probably of the Imperial Guard are depicted in the 'Decursio' scene on the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius. The *vexilla* are as above, flown from shafts with a wide triangular spearhead, probably of bronze. From Neronian coins we also know the shape of the *signa* of the Germani Corporis Custodes: their standards are headed by a right hand and a cloth *vexillum*, on shafts showing several tassels and/or wreaths.

When the *Speculatores* ceased to form a special bodyguard, they were enrolled into the Praetorian cohorts, but it is probable that they still formed a distinct cavalry unit and had their own *vexillum*. A teardrop-shaped pendant bearing the image of the Emperor Nero, today preserved in a private collection, could be a sample of a fitting from their *vexillum*, referring to their status as Imperial Guardsmen in the Claudio-Neronian Age.



# STANDARDS OF THE AUXILIA

## Distribution

In the Late Consular period the auxiliary units had their own *signa*, such as the totemic tribal boar represented on a coin of the chieftain Dumnorix; the shafts were often painted with bright colours. Later tombstones and other inscriptions relating to auxiliary *signiferi*, as well as archaeological and written records (e.g. Tac., *Hist.*, II, 89; IV, 16) attest that among the Auxilia each infantry unit (*cohors peditata*) had its own *vexillarius cohortis*; an *imaginifer* (as proved by an early Hadrianic papyrus); and *signiferi* for each *centuria*. The soldiers who bore these standards were *peregrini* like their comrades, such as the famous Pintaius (CIL XIII, 8098), an *Astur Transmontanus* (i.e. a man coming from Asturia in Spain), the *signifer* of Cohors V Asturum, who died at the age of 30 near Bonn in Germania Inferior. Sources give the part-infantry, part-mounted *cohortes equitatae* both *vexilla* and *signa* (stelae of Pancuius and Bastarnus), and a *signifer* for each century (*papyrus* of AD 117 re: Cohors I Lusitanorum Equitata).

Regarding the standards of the cavalry, Domaszewski draws a distinction between the *cohortes equitatae* (CIL III, 3261; V, 7896), who used the *vexillum* alone, and the all-cavalry auxiliary units – *alae* or ‘wings’ – who used *vexilla* and *signa*. A *signum* for each *ala* is expressly mentioned by Tacitus (*Hist.*, II, 89, ‘unit standards (*signa alarum*) of 12 wings of cavalry’), stating that the number of cavalry *alae* in an army could be counted by the number of their *signa*. But the sources also mention a *vexillarius equitum* (CIL, VIII, 10629; & CIL III, 2012, Cohors III Alpinorum), which means units were also equipped with flags. Where both *signa* and *vexilla* appear, it might be supposed that the *vexillum* was the original standard which was later replaced, when no confusion was likely to ensue, by the more splendid *signum*.

In both the *cohortes equitatae* and the *alae*, an Imperial image was carried by an *eques imaginifer* (CIL III, 3256; & CIL III, 4576, Verecundus, *imaginifer* of Ala I Augusta Flavia Britannica Miliaria). Another British cavalryman was Virsuccius, son of Esus, *imaginifer* of the *turma* Montani within Cohors I Brittonum, who may have perished during the Second Pannonian War of AD 95–96; he was buried in the cemetery of the auxiliary fort of Acuminum (today Stari Slankamen, Serbia) by his heir and friend Bodiccus and his son Albinus (CIL III, 3256).

The legionary cavalry sub-unit, the *turma* of *equites legionis*, probably had a *vexillum*. A

Tombstone of Vellaunus, a cavalryman from the Bituriges tribe, who served as a *signifer* in the *Ala Longiniana* before dying aged 38, after 18 years in the army. Details of the standard (top left) are hard to make out: it might be a bordered *vexillum* painted with a totemic three-horned bull's head, or a modelled bull's head mounted on the shaft below a crossbar with hanging side-straps. Equally, we cannot tell if this was the standard of the whole unit, or just of the *turma* commanded by L. Julius Regulus to which Vellaunus belonged. (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, inv. nr. 8192; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



Stele of Pintaius, *signifer* of *Cohors V Asturum*, Neronian period. He wears a bear's pelt over his helmet, with its legs crossed on his chest and the claws heavily emphasized; note, too, the drape of his tunic skirt, indicating that it is hitched up at the hips. Most of the details of his standard have worn away, but low down, above the tassel and handle, note the globular *ovum*. The exact function of this element, often seen on Late Consular and Early Imperial *signa*, is unknown, but it probably balanced or supported the handling of the standard. (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn; photo courtesy of Dr Stefano Izzo)



papyrus of AD 179 from the Ala Veterana Gallica (Gallorum) seems to confirm this within auxiliary *alae*, too, as does CIL III, 4376 (a *signifer turmae* of Ala Pannoniorum from Arrabona).

### Appearance

The *signiferi* of auxiliary infantry units carried standards broadly similar to those of legionary units, marked with the name of the cohort. As well as being traditional representations of some *genii legionum*, animal emblems also entered the Roman army by its incorporation of local *auxilia* and *numeri*. For example, from Britain we have the image of a bronze boar on the top of a shaft, which may be the *genius legionis* of Legio XX Valeria Victrix, but may equally be the totemic animal linked with the tribe or place of provenance of an auxiliary unit's soldiers.

Like legionary *signa*, those for the Auxilia were decorated with metal disc *phalerae* (stelae of Pintaius and Pancuius) and *dona militaria*. At the apex was sometimes a spearhead surmounting a metal *tabula* embossed with the unit name (e.g. COH VII RAET); the stele of Pintaius shows a laurel wreath (*corona civica*) positioned below this.

## F THE TRAJANIC PERIOD (II)

Like standard-bearers, the musicians must have played an important role in transmitting battlefield orders. In the iconography they are sometimes seen close to standard-bearers, and we know from Josephus (*BJ*, V, 2, 1) that they immediately followed them in the order of march.

### (1) Legionary *cornicen*

Bear or wolf pelts distinguished *signiferi* and musicians of the legions from those of the Praetorian units. Here the former is worn over a bronze Imperial Italic helmet which has had its cheek-guards removed. Over his tunic the hornist wears a quilted fabric jerkin, just visible below the dagged edges of his splendid and expensive gilded-iron ringmail corselet; this is sewn down to a leather backing which is turned and stitched at the edges. He wears short leather breeches, and has a small oval shield slung. The horn is reconstructed from large fragmentary finds and clear sculptural depictions.

### (2) Praetorian *tubicen*

Over the same type of helmet, the trumpeter wears a lioness

pelt – in the iconography these lack a mane but are clearly feline. Over its knotted front legs can be made out a *focale* scarf, apparently pinned rather than knotted. We interpret his many layers of protection as, over his off-white tunic, a leather jerkin visible only as *pteryges*; over this, a *subarmalis* (see yellow leather lappets); over this, copper-alloy scale armour, and over all the sleeveless Praetorian overtunic. Here the breeches are of woven wool. Judging from recovered parts and the iconography, the trumpet appears to be about 1.47m (58ins) long, with a handle or sling attached to two bands.

### (3) *Signifer, Legio XII Fulminata*

The manipular/centurial standard is notable for being surmounted not by a three-dimensional hand but by a representation on a plaque. The *signifer* wears a wolf pelt over a felt cap of 'pillbox' shape rather than a helmet. He too has a substantial scarf, in the neck of an iron ringmail corselet worn over a leather garment with rounded lappets along the edges, those on the skirt being ornamented with bosses. Again, he has a small oval shield slung on his back.



LEG. XII COH. V



1

2

3

*Vexillarii* of oriental troops, from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, scene LXXVIII. These *numeri* of bearded spearmen and archers wear Phrygian caps, long-sleeved tunics and long trousers. (*in situ*, Rome; ex Petersen-Domaszewski-Calderini)



Spearhead of a 2nd-century AD *signum* recovered from the Rhine near Mainz; the total height is 29.7cm (11 3/4ins). The base of the socket is of round cross-section; the 'fork' piece has horizontal and vertical bars of diamond-shaped section, and the neck above the junction is the same shape. (Museum im Andreasstift, Worms; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)

A clear description of the display of *imagines* by auxiliaries comes from Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* XVIII, 55): 'now Pilate ... introduced Caesar's effigies which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as did not have those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there.'

The texts mention two types of *imagines*: the busts enclosed in 'boxes' (*protomae*), and the images on medallions (*ikonai*, or *phalerae cum imagines*). It is further confirmed by the iconography that the *imago* attached to the *signum*, often mounted on a silvered or gilded *phalera*, might be a portrait bust, a head alone, or even a full-length figure. A vivid sample is a *phalera* from Niederbieber belonging to Cohors VII Raetorum, which represents the Emperor Tiberius or Caligula in full armour in front of a trophy of Germanic weapons. The *vexilla* of the auxiliary infantry are also found in the iconography (stele of Firmus, Neronian period), and appear identical to the *vexilla legionis*.

Cavalry *signa* were principally the *vexillum* and the *draco* (see below), plus some other special standards. Sometimes, like other standards, they were carried with either the right or the left hand only, as depicted on monuments



(e.g. Valerius Genialis from Cirencester; Flavinus at Hexham Abbey), while the other hand is holding a spear or the shield. This is not at an artistic convention, but an accurate representation of how they handled the standard and weapons in action. For horsemen particularly the skillful handling of standards was important, since the wind-drag when at full gallop should not be underestimated.

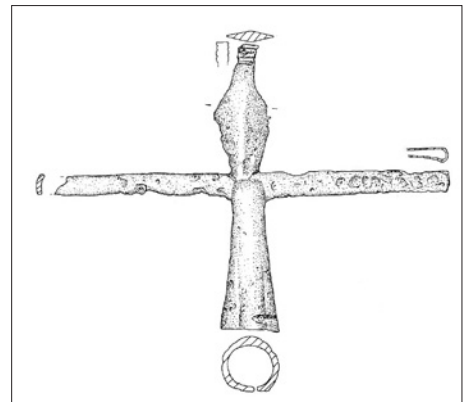
### The cavalry *vexillum*

*Vexilla* were used both by infantry and cavalry, but were the typical standards of the combined, part-mounted *cohortes equitatae*. The cavalry flag was carried by a *vexillarius*, as recorded (CIL322709a) for both *alae* and legionary cavalry. Again, it was a wooden shaft or spear with a crossbar to which was attached a squared piece of cloth, of red or purple colour, usually fringed at the bottom edges (Trajan's Column, scene VII). On the cloth, painted in bright colours or in gold, were the symbols and perhaps the name of the unit, and the fringe at the bottom was woven in gold. The *vexillum* of Vellaunus of the Ala Longiniana may be shown on his Claudian-period tombstone with that unit's three-horned bull emblem either painted, embroidered, woven, or more probably applied on the cloth's surface. The image is not casually chosen: Vellaunus was an *equus* of Celtic origin, and the three-horned bull was a popular motif in Celtic art, the triple horns ritually symbolizing a multiplication of the animal's strength.

A simple cavalry *vexillum* is visible on a coin struck in 12 BC; it has a fringed edge, and two *phalerae* on the shaft. In Ptuj (Poetovium), a relief of AD 45–65 shows the representation of a *vexillarius* of *equites legionis*. The cavalryman is identified (CILIII, 4061) as *C(aius) Rufius/ C(ai) f(ilius) Ouf(entina)/ Med(iolano) miles/ leg(ionis) XIII/ Gem(inae) an(norum) XXXVI/ st(i)p(endiorum) XVI fratre/ pos(uit)/ h(ic) s(itus) e(st)/ vex(illarius)/ eq(uitum)*. He carries a squared flag reportedly bearing 'VEX EQ', i.e. *vexillum equitum*. The cavalry *vexilla*, unlike the larger infantry type, did not have a handle on the shaft. Two interesting specimens of cavalry *vexilla* are also represented on a funerary monument incorporated in the Lapidarium of the Church of St Agnes in Rome.

2nd-century AD spearhead from Albertfava (Castellvicos) in Hungary; length, 19cm (17½ins). It is clearly ceremonial rather than functional, having a copper-alloy frame around the iron blade, tipped with a knob pierced for a small ring. Note also the rings along the profile of the iron socket, possibly for the cords supporting a *vexillum*? (Aquincum Museum, Budapest; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

Heavily corroded iron remains of the top of a *vexillum* shaft, late 2nd century AD, from Windisch (Vindonissa). Height today 12.3cm, width 17.2cm (4½ins x 6¾ins); the flag must therefore have been very small. (Swiss State Museum, Zurich, inv. nr. 11555; drawing by Dr Andrea Salimbeni from Eckhard Deschler-Erb)





Marble fragment from representation of the Roman provinces in the Temple of Hadrian, 2nd century AD. This intriguing sculpture certainly represents a *draco* standard, but depicts it as a living beast – a heavily muscled mythical serpent with a canine head, garlanded with ribbon streamers. Compare this with reconstructions on Plates G2 & H4. (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

### The *draco*

With the *Hyppika Gymnasia* (ceremonial cavalry displays of horsemanship and weapons-handling) described by Arrian of Nicomedia (*Tact.*, XXXV), we have the first written reference to Roman employment of the 'windsock' standard called a *draco*, composed of a multicoloured sleeve-like body attached to the bronze head of a dragon, so that the tube inflated when in motion and twisted and hissed like a serpent. This was probably introduced into the Roman army during the reign of Hadrian, being borrowed from Sarmatian, Danubian (Thracian) or Dacian prototypes. It also probably owed something to the influence of the Parthians, who derived such a standard from the Chinese. In the Late Empire, Isidorus of Seville (*Etim.*, XVIII, 3, 3) narrated the origin of the *signa dracorum* thus: 'The dragon standard

Detail from the sarcophagus from Portonaccio, Rome, of the excessively named Aulus Julius Popilius Piso Titus Vibius Levillus Quadratus Berenicianus, dating from the Marcomannic Wars of AD 168–180. This is the earliest known representation of a *draco* standard being carried in battle, though mention of its use by cavalry predates this. (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)





originated in the killing of the serpent Python by Apollo. Hence they began to be carried in battle by Greeks and Romans.’

The striking appearance of such cavalrymen made a vivid impression on their contemporaries, and we may even find the first literary evidence in The Revelations of St John (*Ap.*, IX,7 ff.), concealed within a description of the hordes of the Apocalypse: ‘... the horses in the vision, and those who sat on them, having breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow, and the heads of lions ... For the power of the horses is in their mouths, and in their tails. For their tails are like serpents, and have heads ....’ The last sentences seem to be a plausible reference to the *draco* standard.

Initially the *draco* was used by foreign *numeri* within the Roman army, such as the Sarmatians, and probably also by the early units of cataphracts recruited among them under Trajan or Hadrian. The most famous image is found in the Chester (Deva) stele, representing a *signifer* of the Sarmatians who were stationed there. Towards the end of the 2nd century we find it as a standard of *vexillationes* composed of both infantry and cavalry (sarcophagus of Portonaccio), and of cavalry *alae*.

Archaeological specimens are very rare. However, the copper-alloy animal head found at Deskford in Scotland, until recently considered to be the mouth of a Celtic *carnyx* (ceremonial trumpet), is now tentatively identified as a *draco* of a Roman cavalry unit. The iconography shows that such heads varied according to local tastes. The researches of Coulston have pointed to a

Strikingly similar to the Portonaccio image is this damaged bronze head of a *draco* standard, missing its lower jaw; second half of 2nd century AD, from Tralles, Turkey. See Plate H4; this is a much more sophisticated piece than the find from Scotland reconstructed in Plate G2. (Aydin Archaeological Museum; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



Though hard to see in this image, this is as yet the only known representation of a Roman army *signifer* bearing a *draco* standard. It comes from the gravestone of a late 2nd-century Daco-Roman cavalryman in what is now Romania; visible details include a Phrygian cap, and a spearhead emerging above the standard. Auxiliary units enlisted into the Roman army retained their national styles of standards, and this contributed to the diffusion of *dracones* in cavalry and mixed units. (Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest, *lapidarium* inv. nr. I.698, ex Tudor)

Monument to Oclatius, *signifer* of the *Ala Afrorum*, from Neuss, Germany; he is depicted wearing the unmistakable *paenula* cloak. The standard engraved into the stone at the left shows a disc with a lion mask, set against a spearhead, both against a larger radiant disc. Below this a *tabula* with the name of the unit is flanked by two pendants. The lion suggests a reference to the original place of the unit's recruitment. (Clemens-Sels Museum, Neuss, inv. R-nr. 123; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)



general image of a wolf head for the early *dracones*, but the heads of these standards represented on the Portonaccio sarcophagus are more snake-like, though one of them with the ears of a dog. Recently an unmistakable and impressive bronze *draco* head has been recovered at Tralles (Aydin province, Turkey) – see page 47. While this is still undergoing study, stylistically it can be dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD.

### Cavalry *imagines* and *signa*

An example of the *imago* of a cavalry unit is carried by Flavinus of the Ala Petriana on his gravestone at Hexham Abbey. The inscription identifies him



as *signifer turmae*, but he was probably an *imagifer alae*. He carries an *imago* worked on a small shield or *clypeus* mounted on a shaft; it shows a figure with a radiant head, probably the Emperor Nero (as proposed by Domaszewski) represented as Helios, the Sun. This was a usual form for cavalry *imagines*, as confirmed by the relief at Komaron. Evidence regarding the display of emperors' portraits on standards makes it quite improbable that every *turma* of an auxiliary cavalry unit had its own *imago*. Domaszewski proposes that there was a standard for the whole *ala*, to which the Imperial *imago* was probably fastened. The *ala* standard was distinct from the *vexillum* or the *draco*; for example, note the photo opposite showing that of the Ala Afrorum. Another *signum alae* is visible on the tombstone of Valerius Genialis from Cirencester.<sup>9</sup>



## STANDARD-BEARERS

### Career

The standard-bearers were ‘junior officers’ (though such modern terms have no real Roman equivalents) of the category termed *principales*, who earned half-again or twice the pay of the common legionaries and were superior to the specialist rankers known as *immunes*. They were selected for their post of honour mainly by virtue of their bravery, fighting ability and good conduct, and their career might progress thereafter. The aspiration of a *signifer* was to rise to become an *aquilifer*; a votive altar from Verona, giving thanks to the gods for such advancement, suggests that the *cursus honorum* went from *signifer centuriae*, to *signifer cohortis*, to *aquilifer*. Unfortunately, however, the sources are sparse on such details of hierarchy, usually referring simply to a *signifer legionis* (though we do know that in the Imperial Guard cavalry a *vexillarius* outranked an *optio*). It is clear that these appointments brought both prestige and responsibilities; in camp the cohort *signiferi* were entrusted with keeping the cash savings of the legionaries, which were limited by Domitian to a maximum of 1,000 sesterces each (Suet., *Dom.*, III).

### UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT

No source or iconographic image from the Late Consular period attests to a particular uniform for the *signiferi*. It is interesting to note that the animal pelt typically worn over the head by Imperial *signiferi* seems to appear only in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (Arc of Arelatum; stele of Gosselius;

Monument erected by an unknown *aquilifer* in Verona, second half of the 1st century AD, probably as a votive altar in thanks to the gods for his promotion from *signifer*. The *signum* on the right has a T-bar at the head with two round pendants directly attached to it; three *phalerae*, the second and third becoming successively larger; a *lunula*; and two egg-shaped *ova*. (*in situ*, Museo Archeologico al Teatro romano di Verona, n. inv. 22537; photo courtesy of Dr Margherita Bolla)

<sup>9</sup> See reconstruction of a similar standard in MAA 506, *Roman Army Units in the Western Provinces (1): 31 BC–AD 195*, Plate C2

Mask of Kalkriese type, and cheek-guards, copper-alloy sheet on iron base, from a possible *signifer* or cavalry helmet, first half of the 1st century AD. This exceptional specimen is similar to representations on contemporary gravestones in the Rhineland. Masked helmets were of composite construction, the stylized human face-mask being attached to the skull by means of holes and rivets each side and a hinge at the brow; the mask was pierced for vision and ventilation at the eyes, nostrils and mouth. (UK private collection, photo courtesy of the owner)



monument of Trasacco). It may perhaps have been introduced under Julius Caesar, if we accept the thesis that some iconography of the Augustan period represents the deeds of Caesar's army. By contrast, the appearance of standard-bearers in the Early Imperial period is well documented.

## G

### THE ANTONINE-AURELIAN PERIOD

#### (1) *Vexillarius* of a *Cohors Civium Romanorum Voluntariorum*, AD 180

This flag-bearer of the Marcomannic Wars is copied from the Berenicianus sarcophagus from Portonaccio, and a partial helmet specimen showing similar decoration. Note the leather cheek-guards, the embossed ram's head on the sides, and the contrasting red-copper 'rose' of short metal ribbons on the apex. He wears a copper-alloy scale corselet over a leather jerkin with dagged edges; note, too, the knitted socks worn with *calcei*, both from archaeological finds. The *vexillum* is reconstructed with a silvered shaft (wood covered with sheet silver), and a copper-alloy spearhead; obscured here are its small loops for cords attaching the crossbar of the flag. It is hard to judge realistic scale from the iconography, but the *stolae* of *vexilla* may have measured up to about 50cm (19½ins) across. This one bears the inscription 'VEX (ILLUM)/EQ (UITUM)' embroidered in gold.

#### (2) *Draconarius* of a *Sarmatian numerus*; *Britannia*, AD 175

The basic figure is an attempt to reconstruct a tombstone found at Chester (Deva). The horse is larger than the normal Roman type; it is not armoured, but from the monument it is unclear whether the rider wears armour or just a heavy, sheepskin-lined

Sarmatian coat. According to Sulimirski he is wearing a *squama* with scales on the shoulders, upper arms, but only down to breastbone level front and back. The tall conical *spangenhelm* of silvered iron has a scaled neck flap; other authors believe the stele shows simply a conical felt cap. The rest of the costume follows the usual Sarmatian or Alan reconstructions, with war paint and tattoos added from the evidence of steppe burials; note that the short boots have strapped-on prick spurs. The long dagger is characteristically strapped along his right thigh, and he would carry a long sword at his left hip. The head of the *draco* standard is missing from the stele, so we reconstruct the specimen from Deskford (though this was originally interpreted as part of a *carynx* trumpet), integrated with the missing elements.

#### (3) *Publius Aelius Severus, tablifer* of *Equites Singulares Augusti*, c. AD 145

From a sculpture now in the Uffizi Gallery. This special officer of the Imperial Guard wears a *paludamentum* cloak with a gamma symbol inset from each corner, over a fine-quality tunic, *foeminalia* breeches, and horseman's *carabatinae* sandals with pyramidal hobnails. (We can assume that his horse harness would have been in purple leather with gilded ornaments.) The title was specific to the *imaginifer* of this unit, who carries a silver bust of the Emperor Antoninus Pius; such images on standards were not always enclosed in an *aedicula*, as shown in Plate D1.



Detail from the legionary *signifer* shown in scene XXVI of Trajan's Column. The bear's pelt does not appear to be worn over a helmet, since the man's hair is unconfined on his forehead. Note the shoulder, where a dagged edge and a line of raised bosses confirm that he wears a leather corselet; and the throat, where a knotted *focale* scarf shows substantial folds. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



### Headgear

Helmets were generally the same as those of the legionaries, though sometimes apparently with the cheek-guards removed; but standard-bearers (as well as hornists and trumpeters) are often shown with their heads and shoulders covered with the skinned heads and pelts of lions, bears and wolves. This is especially true in 1st and 2nd century AD reliefs (stele of Gosselius of Legio XI; Louvre relief; Trajan's Column scenes IV, V, XVII; Great Trajanic Frieze; Column of Marcus Aurelius). It echoes the 4th-century description by Vegetius of the army of previous periods (*Ep.*, II, 16: 'all the *signarii* and *signiferi* ... received light armour and helmets covered with wild animal skins, to frighten enemies'. Lion or lioness skins are usually associated in the iconography with Praetorian *signiferi*, as on the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius and in the Great Trajanic Frieze, where the lion pelts, worn without helmets, distinguish them from the legionary standard-bearers. Both bear and wolf skins are usually associated with legionary and auxiliary *signiferi*.

Normally the animal head, minus the lower jaw, covers the skull of the helmet, and its upper fangs are sometimes visible at the brow (Louvre relief), no doubt conferring a more terrifying appearance. Often, but not always, the front legs with paws are shown crossed or knotted on the breast. This head-covering was not an invariable rule, however: the eagle-bearer of Legio I Adiutrix, identified by Monaci in scene II of Trajan's Column, is depicted bareheaded, as are the *aquiliferi* in scene XXII.

Interestingly, on the gravestone of the standard-bearer Luccius we find a complete representation of a masked helmet corresponding with the famous specimen found on the Kalkriese battlefield, which probably belonged to a *signifer* who lost his life in Varus's disaster of AD 9. A very similar helmet preserved in the former Axel Guttman Collection (see Plate D1) was found with the skull still intact; the helmet is 23cm high, the mask 18.5cm (9ins & 7/4ins). The helmet is of iron, decorated with a copper-alloy layer in repoussé work representing vegetal elements, deities, stags, and a victory wreath on the central diadem.<sup>10</sup> Remains of a flanged 'peak', like that shown on the Luccius monument, are visible above the right ear.

### Body armour

The 1st–2nd century monuments show a wide range of armours. Flavinus, *signifer* of the Ala Petriana, undoubtedly wears ringmail. So too does a Praetorian cavalry *vexillarius* in the Great Trajanic Frieze. His equipment is no different from that of his fellow troopers, and all wear a Pseudo-Attic helmet decorated with the Ecates rose, the *geminæ pinnae* (side plumes) of Mars, and scorpions embossed on the cheek-guards. On Trajan's Column and the monument at Adamklisi ringmail armour is widely employed by standard-bearers (e.g. scene LXIII).

Scale armour in the shape of a *plumata* is attested for the *aquiliferi*. On the gravestone of Lucius Firmus (see photo) the scale corselet ends in a very similar way to the *plumata* of his brother, the centurion Quintus, but the bottom lappets are alternately covered by *squamae* and decorated with embossed heads, forming a single row overlapping the *pteryges* hanging from an undergarment. Small metallic shoulder-guards are hinged to this



Stele of L. Sertorius Firmus, *aquilifer* of Legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis during the Claudio-Neronian period; see reconstruction of his handsome uniform and scale armour as Plate C1. (Archaeological Museum, Verona; author's photo, courtesy of the Musuem)

<sup>10</sup> Roman bronze helmets might be either forged or spun; but most yellow metal used in military equipment was a copper-zinc alloy. In this text 'copper alloy' refers to that metal, which corresponds to modern brass; any item appearing coppery-red is so described.

Detail from the stele of Gn. Musius, *aquilifer* of *Legio XIII Gemina Martia*, reconstructed as Plate B1. This shows his impressive display of military decorations mounted on a leather corselet by means of straps: two *torques*, above nine *phalerae*. Note also the upper arms, which reveal the concentric sewing of the ‘cap’ sleeves above the fringed *pteryges* of his *subarmalis* worn beneath. (Römische Germanische Museum, Mainz; photo courtesy of Dr Stefano Izzo)



armour. The *squama* is worn by the Praetorian *signiferi* and *aquiliferi* on the Column of Marcus Aurelius (scenes III–IV & VIII), while the legionary *signiferi* and *vexillarii* prefer ringmail (scenes XXXIV–XXXV). The Antonine-period altar of the Villa Medici shows the employment of both ringmail and scale armour by Praetorian and Equites Singulares *vexillarii*. The Column of Marcus Aurelius also shows one of the few representations of an infantry *vexillarius* (probably of a *vexillatio*) wearing the so-called *lorica segmentata* (scene LXVII).

The eagle-bearer Gn. Musius of *Legio XIII*

*Gemina Martia* (see Plate B1) wears a stiff leather corselet, on which are displayed his many decorations. The corselet is worn over a *subarmalis*, and appears to be secured to it by means of two studs visible at the shoulders. The Musius tombstone is important in that it shows the shape of this padded ‘arming doublet’ protruding at the shoulders, made in concentric arcs to which the *pteryges* are attached. Leather armours are visible on various gravestones (Secundus and Luccius from Mainz; Pintaius from Bonn), and the typical short corselet with its borders sometimes reinforced by studs or small bosses is very diffuse among *aquiliferi*, *signiferi* and *vexillarii* on Trajan’s Column (scenes IV–V), even among the Praetorians (scene CXIII).

*Signiferi* clad in the muscled cuirass are clearly represented on various monuments (e.g. that of Pancuius – see page 4). The Praetorian *signiferi* on the Great Trajanic Frieze apparently wear an overtunic over this *thorax stadios* (see Plate E1). A small Claudian-period statuette of an *aquilifer* in the Antiken Sammlungen Kabinet in Vienna (originally from Starigrad, Dalmatia) wears a girdled muscle-cuirass with overtunic and a lion pelt. Sacker suggests that he was a Praetorian *aquilifer*, and that the custom of covering the armour with an overtunic, probably of scarlet or purple colour, was reserved to the Praetorians.

### Belts and swords

On early 1st-century AD tombstones the typical legionary *gladius* sword – sometimes accompanied by a *pugio* dagger – is usually worn on a *cingulum* waist belt decorated with metal plates; the sword scabbard is sometimes attached at the left hip (e.g. the Pintaius stele) and sometimes on the right (e.g. the Musius stele). Where two *cingula* are worn crossed over the abdomen, one each for the sword and dagger, the lower one may be plain while the



upper is decorated with embossed plates. Where a diagonal *balteus* is visible across the torso, it is interpreted as a strap either for carrying the oval shield or possibly for supporting the *signum* (stele of Quintus Luccius).

Usually the ‘apron’ straps passing around the belt (to which they are sewn) are undecorated except for their terminal pendants, normally leaf-shaped. On the tombstone of Firmus, five straps are attached to the sword belt; they taper towards the bottom, finished with ivy-leaf terminals. These heavy *cingula militiae* belts with protective aprons are worn by the Praetorian *signiferi* on the Great Trajanic Frieze, and differ from the other Praetorians on the monument in having longer aprons fitted with only a single row of rectangular mountings. The *signiferi* on Trajan’s Column, legionary or Praetorian, rarely have *cingula* with aprons (scene CVII).

In the 2nd century AD the sword is generally seen worn on the right side from a *balteus* baldric. Cavalry *vexillarii* usually have the sword on the right (stelae of Ingenuus from Bonn, Flavinus from Hexham); but the Imperial Guard *vexillarii* wore it on the left side (base of the Column of Antoninus Pius). The Praetorian *eques vexillarius* in the Great Trajanic Frieze has a sword showing an interesting parallel with the famous ‘*gladius* of Tiberius’ now in the British Museum; the scabbard is decorated with a medallion bearing an emperor’s bust.

## Shields

These are usually oval (stele of Musius), and of reduced dimensions from the normal legionary *scutum*. On Trajan’s Column we see *signiferi* adorned with

Standard-bearers from the Marcomannic Wars of Marcus Aurelius’s reign, from the Portonaccio sarcophagus. The presence in this series of carvings of a cavalry flag close to an eagle and a boar standard suggest a mixed vexillation comprising a cavalry *Cohors Civium Romanum Voluntariorum* and troops from two legions, *Legio I Italica* and *III Flavia Felix*. The *vexillarius* at centre, riding beside the commander, is reconstructed as Plate G1. The embossed ram’s head on his helmet might suggest that he is a *cornicularius*, but another helmet in the carving is similarly decorated with a lion’s head. The legionary eagle grips a large wreath showing a frontal cartouche bearing the number ‘III’, above a large *phalera* and what seems to be a tassel. (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome; author’s photo, courtesy of the Museum)

The staff of this standard on the Portonaccio sarcophagus has been broken away, but the totemic charging boar is still clearly visible. This beast was one of the *genii* of *Legio Italica*, and its bearer is shown here among soldiers possibly identified as legionaries by the *lorica segmentata*. (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



lion pelts marching with a small circular *parma* shield slung to hang under the left arm (scene LI), a practice still visible centuries later in the Eastern Roman army of Byzantium. The *parma* or a small oval shield are visible on tombstones of *signiferi* at military sites on the Rhine.

### Clothing and footwear

The tunics in the sources are very simple and typical of the 1st–2nd centuries. That worn under his armour by Pintaius is a short garment (*colobium*) which leaves arms and legs uncovered. This was probably the *thorax laneus* mentioned by Suetonius, made of wool, which gave some warmth while allowing freedom of movement. It is probably also worn under the ‘arming doublet’ or *subarmalis* by the *signiferi* in the Great Trajanic Frieze.

*Aquiliferi* and *signiferi* are often shown wearing military cloaks: the *lacerna* or *sagum* (Mainz column base; Trajan’s Column scenes XXII, XXVI; Adamklisi monument), or the heavy, hooded *paenula* (Trajan’s Column scenes XXXIII, LXXXVI; tombstone of *signifer* Oclatius, Equites Singulares).





Legionary *cornicen* (see Plate F1) and standard-bearers depicted close to one another in battle on Trajan's Column, scene XXVI – one of several examples of their apparent collaboration which may be found in the iconography. Both played important parts in the transmission of battlefield orders; in a *mêlée* the hornists' calls carried much further than vocal commands, allowing the ordering of rapid mass responses to events. Finally, the fact that they too were adorned with the pelts of predatory animals clearly emphasizes an association with the standard-bearers. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

The shoes of the *signiferi* do not generally differ from those of the soldiers: those on Trajan's Column and the Great Trajanic Frieze all wear *caligae* (see also Suet., *Aug.*, XXV, 3; *Vit.*, VII, 3).

The cavalry standard-bearers of the *alae* on Trajan's Column (scene VI) are represented clad in leather corselets, with short breeches (*foeminalia*) and short cloaks (*sagula*). A leather corselet, probably here the *subarmalis*, is worn by the four Praetorian cavalry *vexillarii* on the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius, in combination with short breeches and short cloaks. Their shoes are open *carbatinae* reinforced with extra leather pieces on the instep, visible on all the guardsmen on the monument. Their harness pendants are shaped like ivy leaves and crescent moons.

### Military decorations

Juvenal tells us that the early soldier had decorations on his armour but not on his dress, as favoured by the 'dandies' of the Imperial age. This reference might well apply to the rich suite of *phalerae* sported by standard-bearers by means of straps directly attached to leather garments. The most evident example of this is the famous gravestone of Gn. Musius, where two *torques* and nine *phalerae* are worn by means of straps on a leather corselet over the *subarmalis*.

Evidently the decorations seen on standards could also be awarded to individuals as personal *dona militaria*. The base of the statue of Sextus Vibius from Amasia, who fought in the Dacian Wars, shows two *vexilla*, three *coronae murales*, five *hastae purae* (blunt silver spears with complex heads), a *corona aurea* and two *coronae vallares*. The dedicatory inscription also mentions *torques*, *armillae* and *phalerae* awarded to him for his bravery.

## STANDARD-BEARERS IN BATTLE

The sources mention episodes in which *signiferi*, by their heroic behaviour, turned a battle in the Romans' favour. The most famous *aquilifer* of all was

undoubtedly that of Caesar's Legio X, who distinguished himself during the first Roman landing in Britain in 55 BC (*BG*, IV, 25): 'While our troops still hung back, chiefly on account of the depth of the water, the eagle-bearer of the Tenth Legion, after a prayer to heaven to bless the legion by his act, stood up and roared at the top of his voice: "Leap down, soldiers, unless you wish to betray your eagle to the enemy; it shall be said that I at any rate did my duty to my country and my general" ... he cast himself forth from the ship, and began to carry the eagle against the enemy ...' As he approached the waiting British warriors alone, the legionaries, fearing above all the shame of losing their sacred standard, tumbled into the water behind him and fought their way up the beach, soon followed by soldiers from the other ships.

The standard-bearers' more normal functions in battle were crucial enough. The *signiferi* were positioned close behind the very front ranks, highly visible and exposed to all the dangers of contact with the enemy. They usually remained close to their commanders, and translated their moment-by-moment orders into visual signals by motions of the *signa*. Most such orders must have been directed to the *signiferi* themselves, which emphasizes their primary role in movements carried out on command. During the Consular period the Roman army developed a complex system for transmitting orders both visually and audibly. The standard-bearers thus had a primary role in the conduct of tactics during the changing

## H

### STANDARDS OF 1st CENTURY BC–2nd CENTURY AD

The shaft of a standard was usually a wooden pole of round cross-section; it might be painted, or even sheathed in thin metal. The realism of scale depicted in Roman iconography certainly varies, but we might estimate that infantry standard shafts were between about 1.6m and 1.9m long (5–6ft), and cavalry standards shorter. While thickness no doubt varied, a fragment from Niederbieber suggests a range of 2–3.5cm (¾–1½ins), a diameter allowing the staff to be held comfortably with one hand. To achieve a stable connection between the shaft and the attached head, the latter must have had a socket of a reasonable depth. The only practical method for attaching the various metal elements to the wooden shaft must have been by nailing. The iconography frequently shows a lateral handle part way down the shaft, shaped like a blunt, slightly down-curved claw. Infantry *signa* are usually shown with a 'tassel' low down, but this rarely appears on the *aquila*, *vexilla*, *genius legionis*, or on cavalry flags. Of a domed shape, sometimes in distinct layers, these must have been made of hair, cloth strips, or perhaps even vegetable material such as straw. Essentially decorative, they would nevertheless have protected the bearer's hand from rain, to prevent his fingers slipping. Infantry *signa* usually had an attached crosspiece below the head, where a metal tablet (perhaps on a wooden backing) bore an embossed identifying inscription. From this were suspended, on each side, fabric or leather straps with small metal terminal pendants.

**(1) *Aquila legionis*, 53 BC.** From the Prima Porta sculpture representing Crassus's lost standards. The eagle has asymmetric spread wings, and perhaps a small laurel wreath in its beak. The *phalerae*, interpreted as enamelled blue, are of two different sizes.

**(2) Praetorian *signum*, Aurelian period.** From the 'Submission' scene of the Aurelian panel from the Arch of Constantine. Below the *tabula* is a three-dimensional Winged Victory, above *phalerae cum imagines* of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus divided by a *corona civica*. Below these is a *corona muralis*, then two apparently rigid metal models of *tufae* tassels. Note the ferrule with a crossbar.

**(3) Imperial *vexillum*, Aurelian period.** From the same relief. We interpret it as being in Imperial violet-purple, with gold-embroidered borders and fringe. The pendants on the side-straps are engraved with an emperor's head.

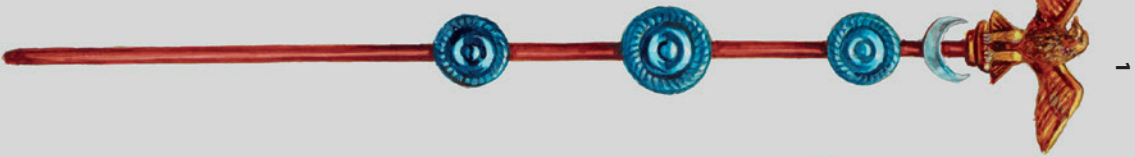
**(4) Cavalry *draco*.** Hypothetical reconstruction based on the head recovered at Tralles in Turkey. There is no direct evidence that the tubular fabric body was always multi-coloured, as illustrated in Plate G2.

**(5) *Signum centuriae/manipularis*.** From Trajan's Column, scene LXXVII. Notable features are metal studs down the side-straps, and a tassel showing four-layered construction.

**(6) *Genius legionis*, Legio III Scythica.** From the Tiberian-period monument at Venafro. The category of this standard is identified by the predominant Capricorn-on-a-globe symbol; the *lunulae*, *phalera*, second globe, and *imago* of Tiberius are notable.

**(7) *Vexillum Tironum*, 1st–2nd century AD.** From the monument of the Collegium Iuvenum at Virunum. This simple flag of a troop detachment is reconstructed with a spearhead having integral loops for the suspension cords of the crossbar.

**(8) *Insignia triumphii*.** From iconography at the Domus Palatina, Rome. A captured *subarmalis* with *pteryges*, a leather cuirass, a sword baldric, and a torn orange-brown tunic (of *exomis* type) overall, have been mounted on a pole for parading in triumph after a victory.



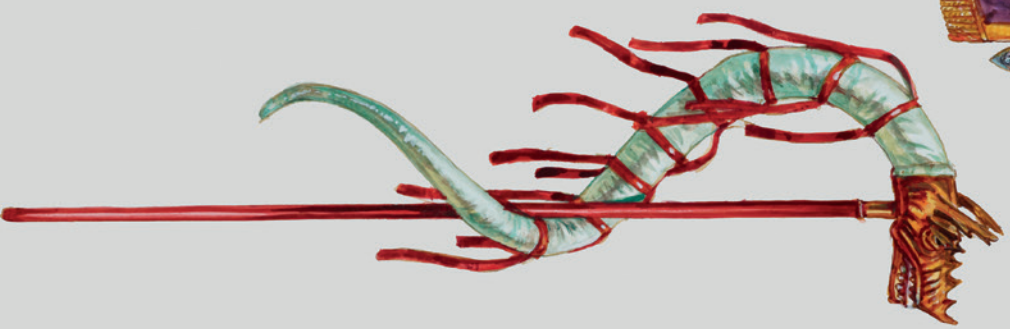
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phases of an action, in combination with shouted orders and horn and trumpet signals.

'*Dato signo*' is the expression used by Caesar when ordering an attack (*BG* I, 52, 3; *BC*, III, 89; and *BH* XXVIII, 2: 'on receipt of this news Caesar displayed the flag-signal for action (*adlato vexillo*'). This phrase underlines the movement of the standards, watched by the soldiers. It was by this means that the commander regulated the movements of different bodies of troops, and during protracted combat they offered rallying points for units whose men became divided. The *signiferi* maintained their positions at the front of each cohort (*BG*, V, 34–35). Caesar stresses this as a general principle of battlefield management (*BG*, VI, 34, 4–6: 'he was disposed to keep the companies (*manipuli*) at their standards, as the established discipline and practice of the Roman army required'). It is clear that the *signa* could only serve their purpose if they were visible to all the combatants, i.e. if they were positioned in the forward edge of battle. Caesar often ordered his soldiers not to advance more than 4ft beyond the *signa* (*BA* XV, 1).

It is uncertain from the sources whether the *signiferi* changed their relative positions in cases when formations were changed to engage on a new frontage. An example of such a manoeuvre comes from Caesar's account of the battle of Ruspina (*BA* XVII, 1). Perceiving that Labienus planned to surround him with cavalry, Caesar 'endeavoured to extend his line of battle as much as possible, directing the cohorts to face about alternately to the right and left. By this means, he broke the enemy's circle with his right and left wings.' Domaszewski interprets this as meaning that from a battle formation of *acies simplex* (i.e. all the cohorts in a single line), Caesar's army met this extreme danger by changing to *duplex acies*, with every second cohort facing about to their rear. This was the same tactic used by Caesar against the Nervii and Helvetii (*BG* I, 25, 6; II, 26,1); on that occasion, the expression used is *conversa signa*, 'turn back the standards' or wheel them about (*BA* XVII, 2). Nevertheless, a simple about-face on the spot by the *signiferi* would not conform with the general principle, often stated, that the standards must always be in the

On the march: Trajan's Column, scene XLVIII, shows the Roman army leaving the fortress of Zanes and passing over a bridge of boats. The *signa* precede the column; note the ram standard of *Legio I Minervia* and the eagle, here depicted with an amulet hanging around its neck, followed by unit standards. These are substantially similar, with four or five *phalerae* of which the top ones are shown as somewhat smaller. Although the standard heads are damaged, close study has revealed that these are (from right to left) a left hand in a wreath, an oval (shield?) in a wreath, and a right hand. Two standards each with a hand suggest two different *centuriae* of the same *cohors*. (Cast in Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)



front line of battle, so such changes of frontage must have involved some degree of counter-marching.

Only in moments of great distress, when the tactical formation of individual units was completely lost, were the standards collected together at one point on which the combatants could rally irrespective of their original deployments. Caesar describes such occasions (*BG*, II, 25, I; *BC*, I, 71): ‘crowded together, with their standards concentrated (*signis confertis*) in one spot, they were keeping neither to their ranks (*ordines*) nor to their [own] standards’. At the battle of Cremona, the complete confusion was aggravated by another factor: ‘the standards were confused, as some band or other carried off in this direction or that those that they had captured’.

Caesar underlines the importance of the *signa* in maintaining the integrity of the battle line. In his description of the battle of Ilerda (*BC*, I, 44, 4), he noted the difference between the Lusitanian way of fighting and the Roman discipline of his troops, who ‘thought it their duty to keep their ranks, and not to quit their standards (*neque ab signis discedere*)’. This could hamper the exploitation of success, as when Caesar’s legionaries fought impetuous enemies like the Britons of Cassivelaunus: ‘our men, on account of the weight of their arms, inasmuch as they could neither pursue [the enemy when they were] retreating, nor dared to quit their standards, were little suited to this kind of enemy’.

That the positions of units in the line of battle were determined by the position of the standards is clear from the phrasing used by Tacitus. In describing the battle of Cremona, after having listed the positions of the legions he writes: ‘Such was the arrangement of the eagles and the standards’ (*Hist.*, III, 21). Again, in his account of the Teutoburg disaster (*Ann.*, I, 65), he writes that ‘when the baggage [column] was clogged in the mud and the ditches, the soldiers around it in disorder, the array of the standards in confusion ... [Arminius] ordered the Germans to charge ... The struggle was hottest around the eagles, which could neither be carried in the face of the storm of missiles, nor planted in the swampy soil’.

### The column of march

When a Roman army was marching according to its usual order (*agmen*), *signa* were collected around the eagle and advanced in a single group. This is clearly visible on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, and is described by Josephus (*BJ*, III, 6; V, 2): ‘Then came the standards encompassing the eagle, which is at the head of every Roman legion ... these sacred ensigns are followed by the trumpeters.’ It is probable that here Josephus refers to the eagle and *signa cohortium*; the standards of the constituent *centuriae* and *manipuli* would surely have remained with their sub-units.

We read in an important passage by Tacitus (*Hist.* II, 89): ‘The eagles of four legions were at the head of the line, while the *vexilla* of four other legions were to be seen on either side ... Before the eagles marched the camp prefects, the tribunes, and the chief centurions, dressed in white; the other centurions, with polished arms and decorations gleaming, marched each with his century.’ This describes the entry into Rome of Vitellius’ army. After the eagles came the *vexilla* (both at the head of the column), and then the standards of the cavalry *alae*. Those of the cohorts and maniples/centuries are not mentioned, so on this occasion they – like the centurions – must have remained with their units and sub-units.

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# INDEX

Figures in **bold** refer to illustrations.

- Antonine 24, 31, 35, 39  
Antonine period, the 18, 21, 54  
Antonius, Marcus A6, 12, 15, 16, 31  
*aquilae* 5, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 30, 35, 36, 38, 39, H58  
*aquiliferi* A6, 8, 9, B10, 16, 17, C18, 20, 24, 30, 32, E36, 49, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57  
Aurelius, Marcus 8, 24, 25, 26, 35, 44, 52, 54, 55, H58, 61  
Auxilia, the 20, 41, 42  
auxiliary 4, 30, 38, 41, 42, 44, 52  
units 20, 34, 41, 42, 47, 49
- battles: battle of Carrae 14, 15; battle of Cremona 24, 36, 61  
battlefields 4, 6, 20, 29, 34, 36, 53, 60  
belts 16, C18, 54, 55  
body armour 8, 53
- Caesar, Emperor Julius A6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 44, 50, 58, 60, 61  
Caligula, Emperor 5, 25, 26, 39, 44  
*centuriae* 12, 16, 17, 21, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 41, 49, H58, 60, 61  
cheek-guards A6, D22, 28, F42, G50, 52, 53  
Claudio-Neronian period, the C18, 40, 53  
Clusio, Genialis B10, D22, 26  
*cohors* 8, 10, 12, 32, 35, 60  
*Cohors VII Raetorum* B10, D22, 26, 30, 44  
*cohortes* 5, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 45, 60, 61  
coins A6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, C18, 24, 27, 30, 31, 34, 39, 40, 41, 45  
Crassus 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, H58  
crescent moons (*lunulae/corniculae*) 4, 15, 22, 27, 30, 31, 35, 57, H58  
crossbar B10, 15, C18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 41, 45, G50, H58  
crowns/wreaths 15, 16, 21, D22, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 35, E36, 38, 39  
civic crowns 28, 31, 39; laurel crowns (*corona civica*) 16, 38; mural 28, 35  
cuirass 34, H58  
muscle (*thorax stadios*) 4, A6, 8, C18, D22, E36, 54
- Dio, Cassius 5, 10, 14, 15, 24, 26, 27  
Domaszewski 12, 31, 41, 49, 60  
*draco*, the 44, 46–8, 49, G50
- eagles 5, 6, 9, B10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, C18, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, E36, 38, 39, 40, 55, H58, 60, 61  
eagle-bearers A6, B10, 17, C18, 52, 54, 58  
Early Imperial Period, the 16, 20, 50
- ferrules 8, C18, 21, 29, 31, 38, 39, H58  
metal 20, 21; pointed B10, 15, 16  
Firmus, Lucius Sertorius 17, C18, 20, 21, 44, 53, 55  
First Cohort, the 9, 17, 24, 32  
Flavian period, the B10, C18, D22
- genius* 5, B10, 17, 26  
*legionis* 18, 24, 27, 29, 42, H58  
Germanicus 14, 18, 20  
gravestones 8, 16, 17, 47, 48, 50, 53, 54, 57  
Great Trajanic Frieze, the 35, E36, 39, 40, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57
- Hadrian 21, 27, 31, 32, 34, 35, 41, 46, 47  
helmets A6, B10, 14, 15, C18, D22, 26, 28, 34, E36, 38, F42, G50, 52, 53, 55  
*humeralia* C18, D22, 25
- iconography 8, B10, C18, 22, 26, 30, 31, 35, E36, F42, 44, 47, G50, 52, 57, H58  
*imaginifer* 8, 17, 18, D22, 26, 35, 41, 49, G50  
*imago*, the 17, 18, D22, 25, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 48, 49, H58  
*Imperator* (general), the 6, 10, 24  
inscriptions 4, 5, 8, 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, 27, 28, 32, 39, 41, 48, G50, 57, H58  
*insignia triumphali*, the 34, H58
- jerkins (*subarmalis*) A6, B10, C18, E36, F42, G50  
Josephus 5, 6, F42, 44, 61  
Jupiter 14, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 34
- lappets A6, C18, F42, 53  
Late Consular period, the A6, 9, 30, 31, 38, 41, 49  
*legio*, the 9, 13, 24, 29  
*I Adiutrix* C18, 21, 27, 32, E36, 52; *I Italica* 27, 55, 56; *I Minervia* 27, 33, 60; *II Adiutrix* 24, 27; *II Augusta* 22, 25, 27; *II Italica* 18, 27; *III Flavia Felix* 27, 55; *III Scythica* 27, H58; *X* A6, 15, 58; *XI Claudia Pia Fidelis* 17, C18, 20, 28, 52, 53; *XII Fulminata* 28, E36, F42; *XIII Gemina Martia Victrix* B10, 16, 27, 28, 31, 54; *XX Valeria Victrix* 21, 26, 28, 42; *XXI Rapax* 15, 28; *XXX Ulpia* 24, 28
- legionaries 4, 5, A6, 8, 9, B10, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, E36, 38, 41, F42, 45, 49, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 61  
cornicen F42, 57  
lightning-bolts A6, B10, 16, 17, C18, 21, 28, 34, 39
- maniples A6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 28, 31, 34, 35, 61  
*manipularis* 5, 9, B10, 12, 20, 27, 31, 32, 40, F42, H58  
*manipuli* 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 30, 60, 61  
Marcomannic Wars, the 25, 46, G50, 55  
military decorations 8, B10, 14, 16, C18, 25, 30, 31, 34, E36, 38, G50, 54, 57, 61  
Mogontiacum (Mainz) B10, 16, C18, 26, 30, 44, 54, 56
- monuments A6, 8, B10, 15, 20, 21, D22, 30, 31, 34, E36, 38, 39, 44, 48, 49, G50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, H58  
Adamklisi E36, 53, 56; funerary monuments 4, A6, 8, 16, 45  
Museo della Civiltà Romana 5, 24, 28, 29, 38, 52, 57, 60  
Musius, Gn. B10, 16, 21, 22, 54, 55, 57
- Nero, Emperor 6, 26, 31, 40, 49
- patera* 4, 14, 31, 36  
*phalerae* 4, 5, 9, B10, 14, 15, 16, C18, D22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 49, 54, 55, 57, H58, 60  
*phalerae cum imagines* C18, 26, 32, 35, 36, 44, H58  
Pompeii 14, 15, C18  
Pompey 6, 12, 14
- Praetorians 8, 12, C18, 20, 21, 26, 27, 31, 35, E36, 38, 39, 40, F42, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57  
*aquilae* 36–9; *cohorts* 8, 12, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40; *signa* 26, 35, 36, 39; *signum* H58; Third Praetorian Cohort 38, 39  
*primus pilus* (senior centurion), the 9, 17, 24, 32  
*pteryges* 4, A6, 8, B10, C18, D22, E36, F42, 53, 54, H58
- Rhine, the 5, 16, 18, 44, 56  
right hand (*manus*) 9, 15, 16, 20, 32, 35, 38, 40, 60  
ringmail 8, B10, D22, 35, E36, F42, 53, 54  
Roman army, the 4, 10, 42, 46, 47, 56, 58, 60, 61  
Rome 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 24, 28, 29, 32, 34, 38, 40, 44, 45, 46, 52, 55, 56, 57, H58, 60, 61
- Secundus, Gaius Valerius B10, 16, 28, 31, 54  
shields A6, B10, 13, C18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 36, F42, 45, 49, 55, 56, 60  
oval B10, 28, 29, 33, F42, 55, 56; *scutum* A6, B10, 55; small 20, 30, 36, 49  
*signa* 4, 5, 6, A6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 48, 52, H58, 60, 61  
*centurarium* 17, 21; *cohortium* 12, 17, 18, 20, 61; *manipulorum* 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 35, 36; *militaria* 4, 9  
*signiferi* 4, 5, A6, 8, B10, 12, 13, 16, 17, C18, D22, 28, 32, 35, E36, 38, 39, 41, F42, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60  
spearheads 4, B10, 16, 20, D22, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, G50, H58  
standard-bearers 12, 13, D22, 33, 34, E36, 53  
steles 16, D22, 26, 28, 42, 44, 47, 49, G50, 52, 53, 54, 55  
*subarmalis* 4, A6, B10, C18, D22, E36, F42, 54, 56, 57, H58  
swords B10, C18, 30, G50, 54, 55, H58
- tabulae* (nameplates) 9, 20, D22, 30, 32, 42, 48, H58  
Tacitus 5, 18, 25, 26, 29, 34, 35, 36, 41, 61  
tassels 4, 9, 16, C18, 24, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 55, H58  
thunderbolts B10, 14, 16, 17, C18, 21, 34  
Tiberius, Emperor 18, 27, 30, 44, 49, 55, H58  
tombstones A6, B10, 16, C18, 30, 39, 41, 45, 49, G50, 54, 55, 56  
Töpfer 26, 30, 31, 32  
Trajanic period, the 33, E36, F42  
Trajan's Column 5, 21, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 35, E36, 38, 39, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, H58, 60  
*triarrii* 13, 15, 20, 21, 34
- vexilla* (flags) 5, 18, 20, 24, 25, 27, 30, 33, 34, 35, 39, 40, 41, 45, G50, 57, H58, 61  
*vexillarii* 17, 40, 44, 54, 55, 57  
*vexillarius* A6, 10, 17, 35, E36, 39, 41, 45, 49, G50, 53, 55  
*vexillum* 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 24, 32, 33, 34, 36, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 49, G50, H58



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## CAPTIONS:

TITLE PAGE *Signiferi* of the Praetorian Guard at the time of the Dacian Wars, AD 101–106; their helmets (apparently lacking cheek-guards) and shoulders are covered with lion pelts. On their standards, eagles encircled by wreaths surmount awards of the *corona muralis* and, on the right, perhaps the *corona vallaris*. The *phalerae* medallions on Praetorian standards often bore imperial portrait images, but these examples seem to be plain. Below them are the deep wreaths of the *corona civica* award, and finally the decorative tassels that protected the bearers' hands. (Trajan's Column, scene CXIII; cast in the Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome; author's photo, courtesy of the Museum)

BACK COVER (Top ) See page 5 (Middle) Intaglio gemstone carved with the boar emblem and title of Legio XX Victrix. (Swiss private collection; photo courtesy of Dr Cesare Rusalen)

## DEDICATION

To my dear friend Marina Mattei, who loves the glory of Rome as I do.

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