

# Pilum

## Quarterly Military Nova Roma Newsletter

### Second Quarter — 2008

---Rhine River Patrol #15 (A Trbunes Secret)---

The tribune sat in the deep shade of a spreading oak tree with the remains of a sumptuous mid-day meal before him. Lobster shells and cherry pits littered the table and covered the large silver serving platter. Standing close by the edge of the table stood a large flagon half-filled with a fine Falerian wine, while next to the wine stood a pitcher of cool water fresh from the springhouse under the building behind him. He held loosely in his hand an elaborately carved wooden goblet, and appeared to be in deep thought. The hot sun beat down upon the paving stones just outside the tree's shade line, and the air in the small but quite pretty patio was very still. Only the buzzing of the bees in their mud house in the corner of the garden broke the silence. A waiter hovered in the background waiting for a summons to clean the table. The waiter had been warned strictly not to disturb the Tribune's thoughts and previous experience with this officer had taught that he meant what he said.

Tribune Mettallus was deeply troubled. His arrangements with the people in the marine office at Ostia was in serious risk of being discovered, and he was not sure what action to take to ward off the impending danger. The problem was this twice damned Navarch and his ships under construction. With the man's arrival and his immediate energetic pursuit of the building schedule, the completion date loomed much nearer than he had ever thought possible, and his efforts behind the scenes to have the vessels assigned to the Adriatic Fleet at Ravenna was rapidly coming apart.

The diversion of those ships was absolutely necessary, since a specialized tactical division of warships released against the Rhenus Delta pirates would be disastrous for them and for his carefully laid plans. It was particularly bad since this new officer who was apparently totally ignorant of the present situation, or he was stupid and the Tribune raised his eyebrow at this thought, he certainly didn't seem stupid. To make it worse, he was apparently well thought of in Rome and he pursued his tasks as though his life depended upon the success of his ships. The Tribune smiled wickedly, and so it did, in one way at least!

How should he deal with this new and urgent problem, he asked the goblet in his hand. There was no reply. Should he murder the man? No, murder was such a negative term, and there was sure to be an investigation. Should he make arrangements for him to disappear? That sounded much better, however probably not, because again there was the risk of an investigation, and he did not want any investigations around this situation. Regardless of the term that was used the man had to be dealt with, if the Tribune's planning was to be fulfilled without a sniff of it getting to the authorities. The Fleet Commander was so involved with his collections and his new wife, that he left virtually everything to the Tribune, and that was the way he wanted it. Now he had to deal with the man and he had to decide quickly what method to use. He had met the man, and it was clear that he would not be amenable to joining the scheme. He appeared to be foolishly honest, and devoted to the corrupt government and the insane Emperor in Rome. His action in facing down a bully-boy twice his size and then purchasing a woman slave apparently to save her from the owner's rightful intentions indicated a formidable opponent, and one who had some strange thoughts about slaves and what they were for. The Tribune would have to be very careful in the handling of this problem -- very careful indeed!

The waiter cautiously approached the Tribune and his words startled the Tribune from his thoughts, "Your Excellency," said the waiter.

The Tribune turned around furiously, "I told you that I was not to be disturbed, you fool," said the angry Mettellus, fingering the jeweled dagger where it lay on the table. These words were directed to the small Greek slave-waiter who was plainly terrified of this officer in his spotless uniform. The slave stood stock-still his eyes on the slowly turning dagger in the Tribune's hand.

"Most Esteemed Sir, your servant at the gate, has indicated strongly that his message is most important, Your Excellency," the frightened man replied shakily bowing low before the angry officer, and dropping to one knee.

Mettellus twisted his face in irritation at this interruption. "Very Well, show the man in and be damn quick about it!!" The Tribune's irritation at being interrupted was very evident from his furious words.. The waiter scrambled to his feet, and fled through the patio archway. A moment later a long shadow fell across the Tribune's table, and he turned in his chair to greet a tall man with a mirthless smile, "This had better be important," he growled through gritted teeth.

"Oh, I think that you will be pleased with this information, " was the smooth reply.

(To Be Continued)

Respectfully Submitted;

Marcus Audens

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## ----The Great Rhene Fluvius----

### The Letters of Lucius Pomonius #6)

The great river spread out before the man standing in the shadow of the great cliff which overhung the river road. The river surface had the appearance of a very large white table set with the immaculate white cloth of the best, closely woven, and bleached linen. It was, of course, the Rhene Fluvius in its winter coat. A light snow storm that morning had laid a covering of white over all, softening the craggy features of the river ice, and the knurled leafless trees close by the water.

However, in these lands the Rhene was thought to be more than just a river, but rather a god of sorts, who when swelled by Spring floods destroyed everything it could reach close by its river bed. In the depth of winter the sounds coming from the river sounded very like the groans of a dying man, and at other times like the shattering of huge amounts of glass or pottery. Titus Otho Atticus, a former legion legate, and now the Chief Engineer to Germania with the mission of building a permanent bridge across the Rhene. Not a temporary bridge as the Divine Caesar had built and then destroyed to show the barbarians the strength and abilities of the Roman Army. This bridge, his bridge, must be a lasting bridge with stone pillar supports and a heavy timber roadway. It would have to be designed to withstand the wrath of the river ice in winter, and the spring floods in the spring. Titus smiled wryly to himself as he drew his doubled cloak closer about his shoulders, in defense of the gusty wind blowing down the river canyon straight from the mountains in the distance. Even now, after his months here, he tended to think of this river as something other than what it was. The tales of the river spirit whispered in the vicus over mugs of the local beer, just outside the fortress gate, the sounds coming from the river, and the raging floods which could well be imagined from previous years waste material of vessels, houses, barns, fencing, uprooted trees, and many other items of now twisted broken, and ruined which lay in the grasp

of the heavy timber and brush along the river's edge. He shook himself sharply as if to dislodge a bad idea. Titus came out here each day to look at this river, to try to get the feel of it, and to know its strengths and its weaknesses. But it seemed to be as great an adversary now as it did when he had first viewed it many years ago.

Not long ago the ice-covered river would have been a natural bridge for the barbarian raiders to cross the river and attack the vicus and the Roman patrols, but that was pretty much in the past now, and while there were still a few raids from time to time from those few holdouts who had not yet learned to accept the Roman world coming to their own, most of the tribes had either been roundly defeated, or had come to the table to be a partner to Rome. Rome's laws and culture was beginning to tame the hill people and it was clear that many of the folk here were quite content to work at their farms and skills while enjoying the security of Rome and perhaps even becoming wealthy from the increasing number of opportunities and fruits of the Roman world. In the winter, it was difficult at best to pry warriors out of their warm houses and halls for a winter campaign. The Germans were not particularly fitted for winter warfare, any more than the Roman army was. Both could manage it, of course, but it was not done often and always with a much greater price in men and livestock than any leader was willing to lose.

Titus did not believe the stories that he had heard over the years about the powerful river spirit that supposedly controlled the entire length of the Rhenus and the valley through which it flowed, but standing here looking at the vastness of the broad river and hearing the sounds that he knew to be grinding ice, such a story would not be hard at all to believe.

A dark band of trees faced Titus across the river, and it was, as he well knew, the place from which any enemy raid would issue. That was the reason that far up the opposite side of the valley there were outposts and look-outs who watched for any such gatherings and provided the vital advance warning of any attack. Then too, there were scouts in the field who lived in the forests only coming in from time to time to report. Many of these scouts masqueraded as peddlers, and road merchants of the outlying villages. He did not envy either in this kind of weather.

Titus moved purposefully across the road and climbed down the embankment to the river's edge, after tying his horse loosely to a nearby bush. When he had reached the ice, he walked out upon the the river carefully, treading through the light snow, watching for any soft spots, and moved to the center of the river. He then brushed away the snow from the ice and rapped the surface of the river with his staff. Only the dull click of solid ice came back. It must be a couple of feet thick, he thought, enough to support the heaviest transport wagon. Again the sound of grinding ice assailed his ears and he turned and hastily regained the road and untied his horse. The river's sounds were very unnerving. The cold was beginning to seep through his cloak, as he thrust his staff through the lower loops of his saddle, and then mounting the horse, he turned it's head toward the fortress and the vicus. The animal sensed that they were headed for home to a warm barn and something to eat. The animal increased its pace but Titus held him in closely. It would not do at all for the horse to slip and fall from which at least some of the unskilled laborers must come. That was the real concern.

The Praefectus Castrorum of the legion fortress had welcomed his arrival and had made arrangements for a roomy engineering office. When his young assistant had fallen sick, the praefectus had obtained a young legionary immunes (military surveyor specialist) as a scribe for him. The young man seemed eager enough, but his ability to take the place of a trained engineer was most unlikely.

Titus returned the salute of the guards as he rode through the Main Gate. They probably wondered what he was doing at the river on a day as cold as this. Sometimes he wondered **that himself**. Within minutes he was rubbing his mount down with straw in a warm barn . He turned the animal over to a sleepy-looking groom with strict order to walk him and then feed and water him, and put a blanket over him for the night.

Then Titus brushed the straw from his uniform and taking up his cloak again, walked toward the vicus. There was a small tavern in the vicus that served a tasty lamb stew, and a reasonably food Falernian wine. It was also a gathering place where people talked freely after a glass or two of wine, or a flagon of the local beer. That talk was often valuable as the Chief Engineer needed to know as much as possible about this new country in which he was to invest his immediate future.

(To Be Continued)

Marcus Audens

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### ----Death (1)----

Hastus watched wearily as the sun burst from the horizon and lit the mountain tops around him with the golden glow of morning light. The dark plains that stretch away to the North were still hidden in deep shadow as though still sleeping, wrapped in the cloak of darkness. The hillside above and below him was empty now, except for the dead bodies of the enemy, dead horses, and the few Roman legionaries who had fallen. All was very quiet, and a slight breeze bent the long grass that stood next the large rock where he sat. Hastus' eyes were bloodshot and they felt as though they were full of sand as he rubbed his free hand over them. His lips were dry, and cracked and his throat parched, as he looked longingly at the water bottle wedged in the rocks at his feet.

His right arm ached with the weight of his wounded comrade, and the sharp pain in his ankle was the reminder of it's injury yesterday. In fact his whole body was protesting from it's unrelieved exertions of the previous day and night. Hastus didn't even know the name of the man that he so tenderly supported. They had fought together in the first line as the Parthian horse had swept down upon them on this barren hillside from the rock outcropping above them. The Roman line had beaten back the first surprise assault of the enemy, and as the legionaries surged forward to cover the new ground gained, Hastus had twisted his ankle on a round stone and would have fallen save for the strong hand of this man whom he held on his lap support him and steady his near fall. He looked to his left and saw the eyes of a new man who had been placed into the first line to replace his regular shield mate who had fallen in the first rush of battle. Supported by this new man Hastus was able to hobble a few steps forward and maintain the shield line unbroken.

A terrifying yell from the Parthians announced a second assault on the Roman shield line, and Hastus stiffened in apprehension as he watched the huge line of charging horses swoop down again on the thin line of legionaries. He locked his shield with his new partner and thrust with his heavy pilum, the smaller one now long gone, thrown in the first charge of the enemy. He felt the shock of contact run up his arm that nearly tore the pilum from his grasp, and the scream of a wounded horse. He was thrusting his pilum now for both he and his shield mate, as they held the shield wall intact and at the same time managed to help Hastus keep his balance. The injured ankle swelled in pain from the exertion forced upon it and threatened to collapse beneath him.

As the noise of the melee increased Hastus hastily looked up and saw that his pilum was lodged deep in the chest of a huge horse. The horse was down and the rider was pinned beneath the animal. Hastus struggled to free the pilum with no success until an agonized grunt from his left gained his attention. The supporting fingers slipped from his arm. His shield mate had the hilt of a Parthian sword protruding from under his breastplate. The man clutched the blade with both hands as he slipped to his knees folding his body over the sword in silent agony. His long red shield now forgotten, clattered uselessly on the rock under their feet. The shield wall had moved on without them. Somehow this downed rider had thrown his sword and it had

lodged in his shield-mates body. An unlucky chance to be sure!! A white hot wave of anger took Hastus as he dropped the useless pilum and drew his gladius. He moved toward the downed rider determined to revenge his partner for this chance mortal injury. He swung his gladius viciously and without hesitation on his comrades attacker now defenseless on the ground his leg crushed under the weight of his dying horse. The pinned rider's eyes widened in horror as he saw death sweep down on him in the shape of a gleaming Roman gladius!!

(To be continued)

Respectfully submitted;

Marcus Audens

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### **Book Report ----Sekunda & S. Northwood \* Illustrated by R. Hook, "Early Roman Armies;" Osprey; Men-At-Arms; #283, 2001, 48 pages**

**Rome's Early History == Rome declared herself a republic after expelling the last Etruscan King. Rome's alliances, and conflicts in her rise to power on the Italian Peninsula**

**The Pre-Hoplite Army == Warrior Burials on the Esquiline Hill; The Colleges of the Sali warrior priests, their dress and equipment. The tribal system;**

**The Hoplite Army ---Hoplite tactics were adopted ; Livy's account of the reforms; The Servian 40 century Legion; The 60 century legion;**

**Early Cavalry — The Sex Suffragia, The Public Horse and True Cavalry;**

**The Expansion of Roman Military Strength -- Four new legions; The Infantry; Legionary blazons; The Cavalry;**

**Manipular Warfare -- Fourth Century B.C . Manipular Warfare is adopted; The Gallic Invasions; The Certosa Situla; Samnite Warfare; The Manipular Army in Livy.**

**The Plates --- Earliest Roman Warriors -- 700 B.C.; Roman Warrior Bands -- 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.; Horatius At the Bridge -- 508 B.C.; The Venetic Fighting System -- 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.; Roman Hoplites defeated by Celts -- 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.; Samnite Warriors -- 293 B.C.; Sacrifice establishing A Treaty between Romans and Samnites; Roman Hastati fight one of the Pyrrhus' elephants.**

**Reporter's Thoughts --- I enjoyed the book and found it to be very informative. My thought is that this is a good introductory text to the more involved and detailed books on the Roman Army, and to the early accounts of Livy and Dionysius as mentioned therein.. It is one of the books that I use in my military library.**

**Respectfully Submitted;**

**Marcus Audens**

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## The Macedonian Wars

- **The First Macedonian War (215 — 205 B.C.)** — Phillip the V of Macedon attempted to help Hannibal and the Carthaginians against Rome, but a Roman fleet in the Adriatic prevented him from crossing to Italy and the Romans secured the support of the Aetolian League and Pergamum (212) , as well as of Elis, Mantinea, and Sparta (210). Sparta in particular, after a period of attempted social reform under King Cheilon (219), had risen to power under Machanidas, regent for the young King Pelops. When the Achaean League under Philopoemen (since the murder of Aratus in 213), slew Machanidas at Mantinea (207), Nabis became Regent , and, soon by deposing Pelops, king. The Greeks came to terms with Phillip in 206 and Rome accepted the settlement by the *Peace of Phoenice* (205);
- **(203 — 300) Phillip allied with Antiochus III against Egypt (203) , began operation in the Aegean, but was defeated by Rhodes and Attalus of Pergamum in the battle of Chios (201);**
- **The Second Macedonian War (200-196)**—arose from the appeal by Attalus and Rhodes to Rome (201). When Philip refused to keep the peace, all the Greeks joined Rome (200 — 198) , and Flamininus defeated Philip at *Cynoscephalae* (197) , and proclaimed the freedom of Greece at the Isthmaian Games (196). Flamininus was forced to check Nabis of Sparta (above) who had carried through agrarian reforms (207 — 204) and expanded his power in the Peloponnese, especially by acquiring Argos (198). He now lost Argos and much of Laconia and gave control of his foreign policy to Rome. Upon the murder of Nabis (192), Sparta was forced into the Achaean League by Rome, and Messene and Elis soon joined, so that the league controlled all of the Peloponnese;
- **(192 — 189) The Aetolians declared war on Rome and secured the support of Antiochus III with a small force. The Achaeans and Philip supported Rome. The Romans drove Antiochus back to Asia in the battle of Thermopylae (191), and the Aetolians were finally made subject allies of Rome by M. Fulvius Nobilior;**
- **(189 — 181) Philopoemen humbled Sparta but lost his life in suppressing a revolt in Messenia (183). His successor in the Achaean League , Callicrates, was subservient to Rome and allowed Sparta to revive;**
- **(179 — 167) Perseus became King of Macedon on the death of his father Philip V. He had already persuaded Philip to execute his pro-Roman brother Demetrius and now Eumenes of Pergamum laid charges against him in Rome;**
- **The Third Macedonian War (171 — 167) — Perseus was crushed by Aemilius Paullus at Pydna (168). He later died in captivity in Italy and the Antigonids came to an end. Rome made Macedon into four unrelated republics paying a moderate yearly tribute (167). In Aetolia , 500 anti-Romans were slain. One thousand hostages , including the historian Polybius , were taken from Achaia to Italy;**
- **The Fourth Macedonian War (149 — 148) — was begun by Andriscus, who pretended to be the son of Perseus. On his defeat Macedon became a Roman province (148).**

(Reference — An Encyclopedia of World History, Macedon and Greece to the Roman Conquest, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, MA Page 80. — Respectfully Submitted; Marcus Audens

## ROMAN MARINE

### Chapter I -- “The Arrival”

“On your feet soldier,” cracked the voice of the staff principalas as the iron gate behind which the burly officer stood slammed open. The discordant sound of the iron gate clashing against the granite blocks which made up this portion of the fort that surrounded them was almost identical to the voice of the officer who had shouted the summons. It looked like it would be a very long day thought the soldier laying on the ground. With the ease of a cat the lean raw-boned legionary slid smoothly to his feet, and the sharp crack of his metal wrist plate in the sharp military salute answering the officer seemed to mollify to some small extent this “guardian” of the inner chambers that confronted him. “Follow close behind me,” the principalas said, scowling, “and keep silent.” Having issued this stern warning, the big man turned on his heel and plunged through the dark passageway behind him. Hastus took a last look at the grey-lead sky above him, and clutching his dress helmet under one arm, and his sealed order cylinder in the other hand, he hurried after his guide.

Service in the legions had never been easy at the best of times, and for Hastus Pilius Scipius, and for him the legions had come early in his young life. Hastus was the son of a poor freedman who had eked out a bare existence in Ravenna as an arms maker. His father’s abilities to learn seemed somehow muted and he never seemed to get any better at his skills, which regulated him to the lowest category in the guild, and did not enjoy many options in the choice of his workplace or opportunities. At eight years of age Hastus was apprenticed to the arms maker in whose shop his father worked. His mother finally died from a wasting disease just after his sixth birthday. She had been poor in health since his birth, and Hastus suspected that his father blamed him for his mother’s death. Soon after Hastus entered the arms-shop his father also sickened and died, probably from the compound problems brought on by excessive amounts of wine consumed, a continuing grief over his lost wife, and the miasma from the marsh which lay behind the arms-shop.

The shop filled the never-ending demand of the legions for sword blades and spear points upon which to further the imperial spread of Romanism, so that if the work was monotonous it was at least steady.. The owner of the shop and his wife had been more than generous to Hastus in taking the frightened little boy into their home. They were kind to him in their own stern way, and Hastus could not say that he had ever been undeservedly beaten for his transgressions. He was taught to write his name, and to work with numbers and in time became good enough to take over the simple accounts and records of the arms-shop and it’s products. During the six years that he was apprenticed he learned a great deal about arms manufacture which would stand him in good stead in his later life. He became an expert at the finishing and hardening of the sword and axe blades that were produced in the shop.

When Hastus was fourteen, the arms-maker and his wife were offered an opportunity in an overseas Roman colony. The offer did not include him, and the arms-maker wrote a letter of introduction to another weapons-maker. Hastus worked as a journeyman weapons-maker for two years and tiring of the repetitious work, he joined the legions. His size and stature got him into the legions even though he had not reached the legal age, and he picked up the skills of a soldier readily. Unlike his father he found that once he learned something he did not forget it, and his curious mind led him to new discoveries which added to his knowledge and skills. He enjoyed the military and it’s camaraderie, and at his last command was finally promoted to “Miles Immunes”, and was placed in charge of a small legion arms shop.

The loud reports that echoed from his iron shod sandals as they struck against the stone floor brought Hastus back to the present. The two men had been hurrying down a long passageway whose gloom was only relieved at long intervals by torch light.

(To be Continued — Marcus Audens)