

PILUM QUARTERLY

3RD QTR-2008

ROMAN MARINE #2

THE FLOOR OF THE PASSAGE WAS DRY, AND THE TEMPERATURE WAS BOTH COOL AND DARK. HE SAW SEVERAL SMALL ROOMS THAT WERE SET OFF THE PASSAGEWAY WHICH WERE FILLED WITH SCRIBAE AND LIBRARIII LABORING OVER PILES OF LEDGERS AND STACKS OF PAPYRI AND PARCHMENT. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY THE ADMINISTRATIVE HEART OF THE FORTRESS AT DUBRIS. AS HASTUS CONSIDERED HIS SURROUNDINGS HIS GUIDE STOPPED ABRUPTLY IN FRONT OF HIM.

“WAIT HERE,” SAID THE OFFICER, AND PUNCTUATED THE ORDER WITH ANOTHER SCOWL. HASTUS SIMPLY NODDED HIS ASSENT AND LEANED CAUTIOUSLY AGAINST THE STONE WALL. THE STONE WAS COLD ON HIS BARE ARM. HIS GUIDE HAD STEPPED AROUND CORNER OF THE DOORWAY AND IMMEDIATELY SNAPPED TO ATTENTION AND GAVE A CRASHING SALUTE. HASTUS THOUGHT THAT THE MAN RESEMBLED A MINIATURE THUNDERSTORM WITH HIS DARK FORBIDDING SCOWLS, AND CRASHING SALUTES, BUT HASTUS KNEW BETTER THAN TO GIVE VOICE TO HIS OBSERVATIONS. “A NEW MAN REPORTING CENTURION, HE AWAITS YOUR PLEASURE SIR.” SAID STAFF OFFICER IN A LOUD VOICE, STILL STANDING STIFFLY AT ATTENTION. HASTUS COULD HEAR A FAINT MURMUR OF A REPLY FROM WITHIN THE ROOM, BUT COULD NOT MAKE OUT THE WORDS. HASTUS DISLIKED OVERT MILITARY COURTESY THINKING IT GREATLY OVERDONE, EVEN ON PARADE, BUT IN THE GOD’S NAME, DEEP IN THE BOWELS

OF A FORTRESS..... HOWEVER, SERVICE EXPERIENCE HAD TAUGHT HIM THAT CONFORMANCE WAS THE BEST PATH, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT. HIS GUIDE'S ACTION INDICATED THAT THE UNKNOWN SENIOR OFFICER IN THE NEXT ROOM WAS DEDICATED TO SUCH TRIVIALITIES, AND THE SEALED ORDERS FROM A DISBANDED LEGION WOULD NOT MAKE HIM THE MOST POPULAR REPLACEMENT AT THIS OUTPOST.

HE WAS FORTUNATE TO BE IN THE LEGIONS AT ALL AS MANY OF HIS FORMER COMRADES HAD BEEN DISMISSED THE SERVICE, AND A FEW WERE SEVERELY PUNISHED FOR THEIR CRIMES AND NEGLECT OF DUTIES AS WELL AS ORDERS. THE LAST BATTLE LAURELS OF THE FOURTEENTH LEGIO WERE MORE THAN TWELVE YEARS OLD, AND THE LEGION HAD GROWN LAZY IN IT'S POST. HIS COHORT , "THE AILING EIGHTH" AS IT WAS "FONDLY" KNOWN TO IT'S MEMBERS, BECAUSE THE COMMANDING CENTURION WAS NOT WELL, AND THE TRIBUNE TO WHICH IT WAS ASSIGNED WAS MORE INTERESTED IN THE REAR OF HIS CONCUBINE THAN THE COMPLETION OF HIS DUTIES. THE FOOLISH ATTEMPTED THEFT OF THE LEGIO'S STRONGBOX, AS WELL AS THE COMPLAINTS AND POOR PERFORMANCE, AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION AT THE TIME DECREED THAT THE LEGION WOULD BE DISBANDED. HIS CENTURION HAD SPOKEN FOR HIM AND HIS ENERGY AND SKILL AS A WEAPONS-MAKER HAD WON ANOTHER POSTING FOR HIM RATHER THAN THE DISGRACE OF BEING DISMISSED THE SERVICE. OTHERS IN HIS COHORT, NOT DISMISSED, WERE SENT EN MASSE TO SUPPORT THE ROMAN FLEET ON THE DANUBE TO BE USED AS NAVAL PERSONNEL, A STEP DOWN FROM THE HONOR OF THE LEGION. HOWEVER, ALL THIS WOULD MAKE LITTLE DIFFERENCE HERE. HE WAS A REMNANT OF A DISBANDED LEGION AND THEREFORE SUSPECT UNTIL PROVEN OTHERWISE. NOW HE WAS FACE TO FACE WITH HIS NEW COMMANDER, AND WITHOUT A FURTHER THOUGHT HASTUS STRODE FORWARD, CAME TO ATTENTIONS AND RENDERED A PROPER SALUTE.

THE BITE OF HIS DRESS HELMET CLAMPED TIGHTLY UNDER HIS ARM HELPED HIM TO RETAIN HIS SENSE OF REALITY IN THIS GLOOMY PLACE,

"HASTUS PILIUS SCIPPIUS, ACTING PRINCIPALUS REPORTS HIS ARRIVAL. I SALUTE YOU AND CAESAR." THIS LAST WAS ACCOMPANIED WITH A CLASH OF ARMOR AND THE THUD OF HIS NAILED BOOTS. HASTUS THOUGHT THAT HE HAD DONE RATHER WELL AS CEREMONIALS GO, BUT THE MAN SEATED BEFORE HIM DID NOT CHANGE HIS EXPRESSION AT ALL. THE ROOM IN WHICH HASTUS FOUND HIMSELF WAS SMALL AS UARD ROOMS GO AND RATHER SPARSELY FURNISHED. THE BARE ROCK WALLS WERE HUNG WITH A FEW ITEMS OF ARMOR AND WEAPONS, PROBABLY THOSE OF THE CENTURION, AND A PITCHER RESTED IN A SHALLOW DISH ON A SMALL TABLE IN ONE CORNER. THE OFFICER BEFORE HIM WAS SEATED ON A ROUGH WOODEN BENCH AT A PLAIN TABLE AND THE ROOM'S HARSHNESS WAS RELIEVED ONLY BY A SIMPLE RUSH MAT ON THE FLOOR AND A SMALL CUSHION WHICH EASED SOMEWHAT THE HARD SPLIT SURFACE. THE TABLE WAS PILED HIGH WITH SCROLLS, FOOLSCAP, AND WAX TABLETS. A SECOND SMALL TABLE IN AN OPPOSITE CORNER WAS ALSO FILLED WITH SCROLLS, AND A BASKET BENEATH THE TABLE HELD A SMALL STACK OF WAXED TABLETS, AND WOODEN TABLET LEAVES.

THE SLIGHT FIGURE BEHIND THE TABLE SURPRISED HASTAUS. HIS ARMOR BADGE MARKED HIM AS A SENIOR CENTURION, AND HIS FACE WAS THE COLOR OF WELL-TANNED LEATHER. HE WAS DRESSED AS IF FOR PARADE WITH A RUST RED CAPE AND MOLDED LEATHER CHEST PLATE. HIS WHITE TUNIC WAS FRESHLY LAUNDERED AND BORE AROUND THE LOWER EDGE THE WATERED GREEN STRIPE WHICH DENOTED THE FLEET SUPPORT LEGIONS. HIS RIGHT EYELID DROOPED SLIGHTLY AS THOUGH HE WAS HALF ASLEEP, BUT HIS GREY EYES NEVER WAVERED AS THEY LOOKED AT AND SEEMINGLY THROUGH THE LEGIONARY IN FRONT OF HIM.

THE CENTURION SLOWLY STOOD AND HOLDING OUT HIS HAND , HE ROUNDED THE TABLE TO STAND BEFORE HASTUS, "YOUR ORDERS PLEASE," HE SAID IN A CRISP VOICE. THE OFFICER STOOD A FULL HEAD SHORTER THAN MAN IN FRONT OF HIM. HASTUS EXTENDED THE ORDERS CYLINDER, AND THE OFFICER BROKE THE SEAL AND WITHDREW THE PAPYRUS SHEET INSIDE.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED – MARCUS AUDENS