

LUDUS MILITIS

TACTICA



TACTICAL DRILL HANDBOOK

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LESSON I

STATIONARY COMMANDS

Reverte *As you were!* or, *Revert to Original Position*

State *Stand Fast! (or Rest in Place)*

Silentium *Silence!*

Mandata Captate *Attention to Orders.*

Captate *Attention*

Arma, Portate *Carry Arms!*

Arma, Demittite *Lower Arms!*

Signum Demittite *Leave the Standard!*

COMMANDS TO ADJUST FORMATION

Move Ad Scutum *Move Toward the Shield!*

Move Ad Contum *Move Toward the Spear!*

Cede *Give Way!*

FACINGS

Ad Contum, Clina *To the Spear, Face!*

Redi *Return to Front!*

Ad Scutum, Clina! *To the Shield, Face!*

Transforma *About Face!*

Ad Contum Oblique, Clina! *Right Oblique, Face!*

Ad Scutum Oblique, Clina! *Left Oblique, Face!*

DOUBLING AND UNDOUBLING FILES

Ad Duo. Exi *To Two Ranks, File Out!*

Ad Quattuor. Intra *To Four Ranks. File In!*

Ad Octo. Intra *To Eight Ranks. File In!*

Ad Quattuor. Exi *To Four Ranks. File Out!*

LESSON II

FORMATIONS, OPEN AND CLOSE ORDER

Ad Arma. Ad Signum *To Arms! To the Standard!*

Dirige Frontem *Dress the Front!*

Ad Contum, Stringe *To the Spear, Draw In!*

Iunge *Close Up!* **Largi** *Open Up!*

Ad Latus, Stringe *By Flank, Draw In!*

Largi ad Ambas Partes *Open Up to Both Sides!*

MARCHING IN COLUMN

Movete *Forward March!*

Gradum, Servate *Keep the [Military] Step!*

Plenum Gradum, Servate *Maintain Full Step!*

Celerate *Speed up!*

Tardate *Slow Down!*

Ordinem, Servate *Preserve the Order!*

State *Halt.*

CHANGING A COLUMN'S DIRECTION

Transforma. Move *About Face. March!*

Ad Contum [Scutum], Deponete
To the Spear [Shield], Change Front! (of column)

Signum Sequite *Follow the Standard!*

LESSON III

OPEN ORDER EVOLUTIONS

Movete. State *Forward March! Halt!*

Ad Contum [Scutum], Clina. Move. State. Redi

Muta Locum *Change Places!*

OPENING AND CLOSING WHILE MARCHING

Iunge *Close Order!*

Largi *Open Order!*

Ad Latus, Stringe *By Flank, Draw In!*

Largi ad Ambas Partes *Open Up to Both Sides*

Dirige Frontem *Dress the Front!*

EVOLUTIONS IN CLOSE ORDER

Dirige, Frontem *Dress the Front!* **Movete** *Forward March!*

Move ad Contum/Scutum *Incline to the Right/Left*

LESSON IV

CHANGE OF FRONT

Ad Signum. Deponete *To the Standard. Change Front by Files!*

Ad Contum, Iunge *To the Spear, Close Up!*

Ad Contum, Depone *To the Spear, Change Front!*

Ad Scutum, Largi *To the Left Flank, Open Up!*

Ad Scutum, Iunge *To the Shield, Close Up!*

Ad Scutum, Depone *To the Shield, Change Front!*

Ad Contum, Largi *To the Right Flank, Open Up!*

Ad Contum, Deponete *To the Spear, Change Front by Files!*

Ad Scutum, Deponete *To the Shield, Change Front by Files!*

LESSON V

MISSILE AND CLOSE COMBAT

Tela *Missiles*

Pila, Parati Pila, Ready! **Mittite** *Throw!*

Vos Servate *Guard!*

Gladios Destringite *Draw Swords!*

Percute *Charge!*

Gladios Recondite *Sheathe Swords!*

SPECIAL FORMATIONS

Undique, Servate *To All Sides, Guard!*

Ad Testudinem *To the Testudo!*

LESSON VI

OBLIQUE FORMATIONS

Ad Contum [Scutum] Oblique, Clina. Move.

MARCHING EVOLUTIONS

Ad Contum [Scutum], Clinate, Move *Turn the Spear [Shield], Turn!*

Ad Contum Oblique, Move *To the Spear Oblique, Turn!*

Transformate. *Retire by Files!*

Ad Contum [Scutum], Deponete *To the Spear, Outflank!*

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INTRODUCTION

Although it is certain that ancient Roman armies conducted what we would call military drill, recreating this drill with certainty is not possible. No drill manual in Latin from the Roman era survives, if one was ever written. However, a plausible and practical reconstruction can be made with the documentary evidence that has been passed down to us. Principle works include Greco-Roman tactical treatises dating from the 1st century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D.; the 4th century *Epitoma rei Militaris* by Vegetius that has preserved some military ordinances dating from the Augustan to the Antonine eras, and principles from the late 1st century works of Frontinus; and two early Byzantine manuals on strategy which include tactical drill drawn from much older sources. Although this handbook is meant to be a practical guide for Roman army reenactors, a serious attempt has been made to document and explain the historical basis for every command and movement.

There is a tendency to regard military drill as an invention that came about with the rise of modern armies. However, the principles of military drill were summarized as early as 49 B.C. in the *Outline of Tactics* by Asclepiodotus. The concepts of rank and file, front, flank, column, interval, distance, cover, close and open order—and evolutions such as facings, countermarches, and pivots — were all described in detail therein. Aelianus' rework of Asclepiodotus was closely examined in the 16th and 17th centuries. John Bingham's 1616 translation of Aelianus was appended with a few pages of arms drill for handling pikes and muskets, becoming one of the earliest drill manuals to appear in English, and a basis for subsequent works. Translations of Aelianus into other languages were used for similar purposes by different nations. Modern military drill is in a sense a descendent of ancient tactics, a heritage from the Roman era.

Ancient authors in the Roman realm used the Greek word *taktika* or its Latin equivalent *tactica* to describe military formations and movements practiced on the drill field and used to maneuver bodies of troops in battle up to the moment of close combat. Tactics in the ancient sense was a branch of philosophy or the military arts that fell in between individual weapons training and combat, and strategy — which included all the means by which a general could defeat an enemy. This handbook follows that tradition. It is the intention of the authors to treat weapons training and battle strategy in separate handbooks to complement this edition.

I. OPERATIONAL RANK STRUCTURE

The top to bottom structure of a Legio (Legion) is given below. All numbers are a “best guess,” based upon research of the Principate and early to mid Imperial period:

Legio – 5,000 men (+/-)

Cohors – Ten per Legion. Each Cohors (Cohort) consisted of 6 Centuriae (480 men at full strength) except for the 1st Cohort

Centuria — Basic operational unit was a Centuria (Century) of up to 80 men at full strength

Contubernium (plural Contubernia)—A group of tentmates that formed the basic division of a Centuria.¹ Eight men could sleep in a standard army leather tent. These eight Milites were probably all file members, and thus were also the basic tactical unit in a Century formation. This handbook is based on this premise.

As the largest probable US / North American formation will remain into the foreseeable future a Centuria, the “operational” rank structure and drill provided in this document reflects this reality. This assumption will follow on in both the Drill and Formations sections below.

II. RANKS AND POSITIONS FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS MANUAL

Centurio –Commander of Centuria (Only one Centurio per Centuria. At the end of the Republic legions went from double centuries (maniples) with two Centuriones to separate centuries with one Centurio.)

Optio –Second in command of Centuria, also known as the rearguard officer.² (1 per century). Duties include dressing ranks and maintaining the intervals of the formation.³

Tessarius – Literally the “Keeper of the Block,” a piece of wood on which the password of the day was written. Probably had similar duties, functions and equipment on the field as an Optio, but was junior in rank. Possibly an Optio in training. (1 per century)

Signifier – Guide and standard bearer (1 per century)

Cornicen — The player of a Cornu, a horn that was used for signals on the field (1 per century)

Decanus –Leader of a Contubernium (squad) (up to 10 per full strength century)⁴

File Leader — Soldier in the front rank at the head of a file. The number of file leaders would depend on strength of unit as well as how many ranks in the formation. This is not a permanent rank per se, but a position that would be filled by veterans known for their fighting prowess.⁵

File Closer — Soldier in the rear rank at the end of a file (up to 20 per full strength century formed in four ranks) Not a permanent rank, but positions that would be filled by experienced veterans known for their steadiness.⁶

Miles (plural *Milites*) — Legionary or common soldier (up to 80 per century, including the file leaders and closers), literally the rank and file soldiers.

III. WHAT IS DRILL? TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Drill acts to build discipline, immediate obedience of orders and pride in unit (morale.) Drill by its very nature does not come easy and requires that time be spent practicing both the issuance of orders and the proper performance of the same. It is always best to begin drill training from the very basics before moving into the more complex or difficult movements. This manual therefore begins with static formations and transitions into marching and formation changes.

Terms

All drill must begin with a common understanding of the terms used. As this manual is a “cross cultural” one, the commands are in Latin, while the terms, methods, and meanings shall be in English.

Rank. A formation in which soldiers are side by side or abreast of each other in a line

File. A line of soldiers (Milites) one behind the other extending from the front to the rear rank.

Column. A formation in which files are placed one behind the other

Front. The direction that a formation in ranks faces, also the line of the most forward rank

Flank. The right or left of a formation either in line or column. The direction is at right angles from the way the files face.

Head. The leading part of a formation when in column (This is the location of the Signum and Optio on the march)

Depth. Space from front to rear of formation

Width. Space occupied by formation from left to right.

Open Interval. A wider standard lateral space between files in the same rank. For our uses, this shall be approximately 70” center to center based on the historical record (Polybius 18.30.7-9 ; Asclepiodotus IV.3)

Close Interval. A narrower standard lateral space between files in the same rank. For our uses, this shall be 35” center to center based on the historical record (Polybius 18.30.6 ; Asclepiodotus IV.3 ; Vegetius III-14)

Open Distance. A wider standard space between ranks in the direction of depth. For our uses, this shall be approximately 70” center to center based on the historical record (Polybius 18.30.7-9 ; Asclepiodotus IV 3 ; Vegetius III-14)

Close Distance. A narrower standard space between ranks in the direction of depth. For our uses, this shall be approximately 35” center to center based on the historical record (Asclepiodotus IV 3)

Open Order. A formation where the ranks are in Open Distance AND the files are in Open Interval.

Close Order. A formation where the ranks are in Close Distance AND the files are in Close Interval.

Alignment. The dressing of a rank on a straight line (Asclepiodotus X.1)

Cover. The dressing of a file on a straight line front to back (Asclepiodotus X.1)

Inclining. A method of marching files or a formation forward with a slight sideways shift without facing away from the front, performed by taking oblique footsteps.

Guide. File or individual on which a movement is regulated (For our purposes, the guide shall be the individual carrying the Signum, Vexillum, or Eagle; or the files to his immediate left and right)

Signum. The unit standard of a Centuria, usually a pole embellished with metal ornaments. For practical purposes, a Signum is used much like the guidons or colors employed by more modern armies as a visible reference point for alignment. Historically, Signa were also revered objects (Iosephus, 3.115) that embodied the genius or spirit of the Centuria, and were always to be protected and followed.

Militaris Gradus (Military Step)

“The first thing the soldiers are to be taught is the military step, which can only be acquired by constant practice of marching quick and together. Nor is anything of more consequence either on the march or in the line than that they should keep their ranks with the greatest exactness. For troops who march in an irregular and disorderly manner are always in great danger of being defeated. They should march with the common military step twenty miles in five summer-hours, and with the full step, which is quicker, twenty-four miles in the same number of hours. If they exceed this pace, they no longer march but run, and no certain rate can be assigned.”—Vegetius, *De Re Militari*, I. 9

The passage above and other primary source documentation suggest the Roman army marched in steps of uniform length and rate to maintain even ranks. It is unclear whether this implies that it marched in lockstep. Trajan’s Column has panels showing legionaries marching out of lockstep, but the Adamklissi metopes depict infantry marching in step (see bibliography for online references).

Pace. The length of a step should be 29 inches and a full pace should cover 58 inches.⁷

Step Count. For our purposes, the Military Step is about 100 per minute, Full Step is about 120 per minute.⁸

IV. COMMANDS

Verbal orders to effect action, movement, or maneuver in a body of troops are called commands. Commands must be concise and distinct. Most drill commands are structured into two parts, with the particulars — the who, what, or how — coming before the verb used for the general action to be carried out. This principle was recognized as early as the middle of the 1st cent. B.C:

“Now the commands by voice must be short and unambiguous. This would be attained if the particular command should precede the general, since the general are ambiguous. For example, we would not say, “Face right” but Right face so that in their eagerness some may not make the turn to the right and others to the left when the order to turn has been given first, but that all may do the same thing together ; nor do we say, Face about right! ” but Right about face I” nor Counter march Laconian ” but Laconian counter march! ” — Asclepiodotus xii. 11

Example of a basic command: **Ad Scutum , Clina!** (To the Shield, Face!)

Ad Scutum (this indicates the particular direction of the following movement,) -*pause*- **Clina!** (the general verb for the movement)

There should be a **pause** between the two parts of the command sequence to allow the body of troops to recognize that the next part of the command will require their action and what action it will be. (In the body of the manual this “verbal pause” shall be indicated by a comma).

To ensure that commands are understood they should be brief and vowels should be softly spoken, while consonants are annunciated hard. A phonetic representation of the above command as delivered would be: **“ahD / SKoo TuM** pause **KLee Nah!”** (The slashes in the pronunciation guides indicate breaks between words, not verbal pauses.) The words in italics after the pronunciation guides are examples of how the command might be rendered in English, not necessarily a literal translation.

Also remember, the pronunciations provided in the Drill portion of this manual are *DRILL COMMANDS, NOT SPEAKING COMMANDS.*

Upon the final vocalization of the command the body of troops responds or complies with the order.

It is important that the person issuing the command/order speaks loud enough that the rear ranks can hear the commands.

Most commands are issued from the side of the formation half way back if in column,⁹ or several paces in front of the center files when in a Centuria front¹⁰ (See the following illustrations in Section 2.)

V. FORMATIONS

“The general should train his troops in some such manner as the following. First arming the soldiers, he should draw them up in military formation that they may become practiced in maintaining their formation; that they may become familiar with the faces and names of one another; that each soldier may learn by whom he stands and where and after how many. In this way, by one sharp command, the whole army will immediately form ranks.” — Onasander, *The General*, X 1-2

Formations are used for two primary purposes:

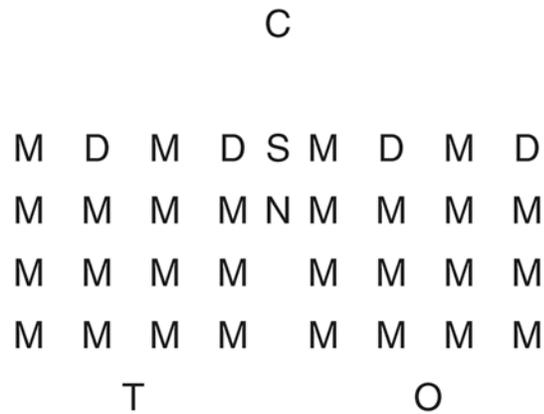
- To move a body of men from point A to point B with a minimum amount of disorder or chaos.
- To facilitate transition from a movement phase into a tactical phase swiftly and in an orderly manner.

A formation is a body of troops arranged in an orderly fashion in ranks and files.



C = Centurio; O = Optio; T = Tessararius;
S = Signifer; N = Cornicen; D = Decanus ;
M = Miles

Left: Files in column facing the direction of march.
Below: Files in a Centuria front facing the Centurio, represented by the letter “C”.

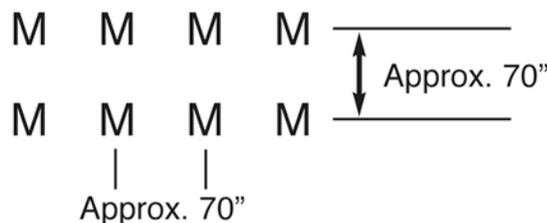


C = Centurio; O = Optio; T = Tessararius; S = Signifer;
N = Cornicen; D = Decanus; M = Miles

When a formation is marching it is most often in “column.” This reduces its front and moves the Militaries as a block. (See illustration, above left)

When a formation is in Line, it is either to facilitate a combat formation or to receive instructions. (See illustration, above right)

When the Milites fall in to formation, they should have a basic distance shoulder-to-shoulder and back to front. This is called “Interval.” Interval has two distances Close and Open. The diagram which follows illustrates Open Order for instructional purposes (center to center, NOT total distance apart.)



“Cover” is simply aligning files front to back and is automatic. The Milites simply shifts right or left to center their noses on the center of the back of the Miles in front of him when they fall in or after dressing the line.

LESSON I

CONTUBERNIA DRILL

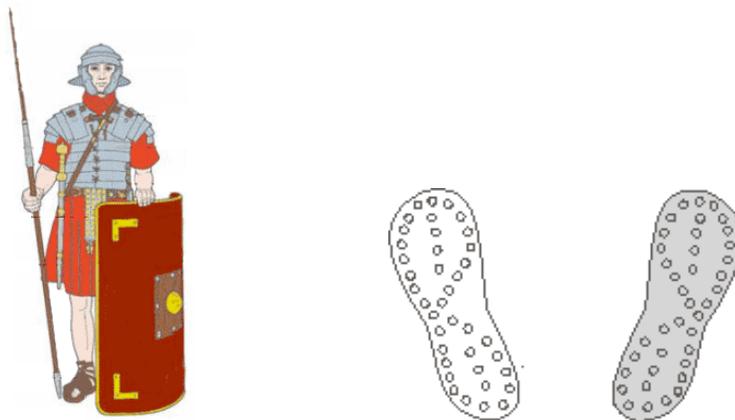
Roman basic units were likely formed on Contubernia. For the purposes of this manual, participating organizations at an event should be divided into squads of eight each (with smaller organizations being used to fill deficiencies), and fall into the formation in those groupings with an assigned Decanus. This will require some preplanning and coordination prior to actual presentation or operation. It is suggested that this be accomplished as early as possible and that the Contubernia established be maintained throughout the event.

I. BEGINNING DRILL

If there are enough instructors available, each Contubernium may be drilled separately in the basic drill movements. This may assist each Miles in learning the essentials well, before attempting more complicated movements. This also gives each Contubernium practice functioning as a small unit before being incorporated into a larger Centuria formation.

Position of Attention:

The position of attention for our uses shall be: Feet comfortably at about shoulder width apart, standing straight. Pilum in Miles' right hand with the butt end resting on the ground to the outside of his right foot, shield grounded on its bottom edge in front of him supported by his left hand on center of top edge of shield. If not equipped with weapons, then his arms are along his side. Shoulders square, head erect, and eyes to the front. When at attention, no talking is allowed.



To form a Contubernia in Open Order:

- The Decanus (double-file leader) posts himself where the Contubernium is to be formed
- The file leader places himself to the left of the Decanus, elbows almost touching, and then takes four steps sideways to the left and aligns his shoulders with the Decanus.
- The next two Milites will place themselves behind the file leaders, raise their right arms holding the Pila perpendicular, almost touch the right shoulder of the file leader, step backwards three steps, and assume the position of attention. This process will be repeated by the next two Milites to fall in. The two file closers repeat this process, forming the eight men into two files in four ranks.

The Decanus and the three Milites behind him in the right hand file are termed the **Secundi**. The file leader and the three Milites behind him in the left hand file are termed the **Primi**.¹¹

II. STATIONARY COMMANDS

Correcting a command mistake:

If a commander makes a mistake, or changes his mind on a command, he may issue the “As you were” command which stops any action by the formation and reverts it to its previous position:

Reverte! (Reh WayR Tay!) *As you were! or, Revert to Original Position* ¹²

Stand Fast:

To put a formation at rest command:

State! (STah Tay!) *Stand Fast! (or Rest in Place)* ¹³

Keeping the right foot in place, Milites may look about, talk, adjust equipment, etc. while they wait for another personage to address them, or to prepare to move. (When this command is given on the march it means Halt.)

It must be remembered that after putting a formation at Stand Fast it MUST be called back into attention before any other command may be ordered.

Attention to orders:

To bring a unit to attention for instructions or such events as an adlocutio, awards, ceremonies, or pay, command:

Silentium! **Mandata Captate!** ¹⁴

(See LeN Tih uM! MahN Dah Tah / Kap Tah Tay!) *Silence! Attention to Orders.*

Formation and silence are maintained at the position of attention.

To bring a unit to attention:

To bring a unit back to the position of attention from Stand Fast for a subsequent movement or arms command, the Centurio, Optio, or drill master commands:

Captate! (Kap Tah Tay!) *Attention!* ¹⁵

Carry Arms:

From the position of attention, the command to raise weapons to facilitate movement or facing is:

Arma , Portate! (AR MaH / PoR Tah Tay!) *Carry Arms!* ¹⁶

The position of Arma Portate for drill is: Pilum over right shoulder, at a very slight angle such as will prevent injury to Milites to rear and allow movement and performance of drill. The is point up, butt spike down, and held with an overhand grasp (much like holding a glass to drink).¹⁷ Hand positioned half way down shaft of Pilum. Shield carried by handle on left side, held close to body. The position of Arma Portate is maintained until the command to lower arms is given.

Lower Arms:

From the position of Arma Portate, the command to lower weapons is:

Arma , Demittite! (AR Mah / Deh MiT Tih Tay!) *Lower Arms!* ¹⁸

Milites lower their weapons to the ground and hold them in the position of attention. If the gladius has been drawn, it is returned to its scabbard.

To dismiss a formation:

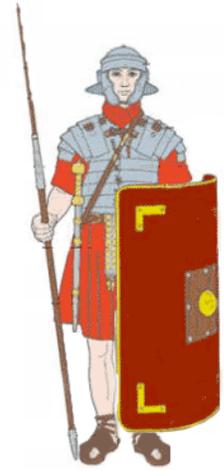
Signum Demittite! (SeeG Num / Deh MiT Tih Tay!) *Leave the Standard!* ¹⁹

III. COMMANDS TO ADJUST FORMATION

Minor adjustments are often required to a formation's position, or to the alignment and interval of its ranks and files.²⁰ The Optio normally gives these commands.

Trail Arms:

When a formation is at attention with weapons, commands may be given to effect minor movements or alignments: side step, back step, and dressing of ranks. When these are given, each Miles shall automatically lift the Scutum up by the handle, hold it naturally on the left side, and raise the Pilum just enough to ensure that it does not drag. On conclusion of the movement, weapons are automatically returned to the position of attention.



Left Step:

Move²¹ **Ad Scutum!**²² (Moe way / ahD / Skoo Tum!) *Move Toward the Shield!*

Each Miles picks up his weapons at the trail position, then shifts his left foot approximately 12 inches to the left, following with the right foot. When the desired distance is covered, the Optio calls "**Sta!**"²³ (**Stah**). Each Miles halts, sets down his weapons and resumes the position of attention.

Right Step:

Move Ad Contum!²⁴ (Moe way / ahD / KoN TooM!) *Move Toward the Spear!*

Each Miles picks up his weapons at the trail position, then shifts his right foot approximately 12 inches to the right, following with the left foot. When the desired distance is covered, the Optio calls "**Sta!**" Each Miles halts, sets down his weapons and resumes the position of attention.

Back Step:

Cede! (Kay Day!) *Give Way!*²⁵

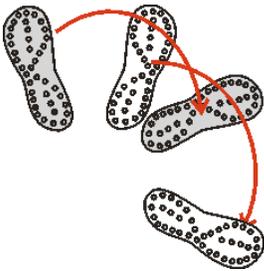
Each Miles picks up his weapons in the trail position, then steps backwards while maintaining cover and alignment. When the desired distance is covered, the Optio calls "**Sta!**" Each Miles halts, sets down his weapons and resumes the position of attention.

IV. FACINGS

Facings²⁶ change the direction a Miles is pointed. Facings may be either to the “Right,” “Left,” “Right Oblique,” “Left Oblique,” and “About,” or “To The Rear.”

While facing, your arms should not swing out from your sides, but remain at the position of attention or carry arms. Also, there shall be no “heel and toe” pivots in facing movements, only simple turns made by lifting and turning feet.

Commands to perform facing movements from the position of attention:



Right face:

Ad Contum, Clina!²⁷

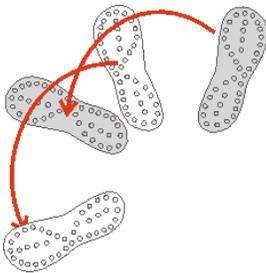
(Ahd / KahN TooM / Klee Nah!) To the Spear, Face!

Each Miles will lift his Scutum, keeping Pila in hand at the trail, then slide his right foot out to the right and twist it slightly right, twisting his body also 90 degrees to the right. The left foot will then be brought up along the right to the standard position of attention described above.

To face back to the front:

Redi! (Ray Dee!) *Return!*²⁸

Reverse the same movements as above to return to face the original direction, or front.



Left face:

Ad Scutum, Clina!

(Ahd / Skoo Tum / Klee Nah!) To the Shield, Face!

Perform with exactly the same movements as above, but to the left side and beginning with the left foot.

To face back to the front:

Redi! (Ray Dee!) *Return!*

Reverse the movements above to return to face the original front.

About face:

To turn a static (not moving) formation around 180 degrees use an “About Face” command. From the position of attention, command:

Transforma! (Trans For Mah!) *About Face!*²⁹

Lift shield slightly (if so equipped), keep Pila in hand at the trail, and perform two left face movements.³⁰ This keeps the shield close to the body and allows a smooth, pivotless movement.

To face back to the front:

Redi! (Ray Dee!) *Return!*

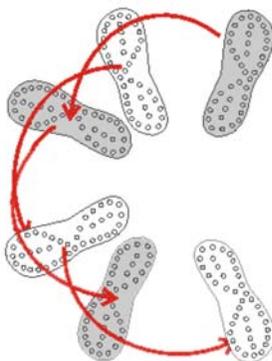
Reverse the movements above to return to face the original front.

Face obliquely to the right or left:

Ad Contum [Scutum] Oblique, Clina!³¹

**(ahD / KahN TuM [Skoo TuM] / o Blee Kway / Klee Nah!)
Right [Left] Oblique, Face!**

Duplicate the right or left facing movements above but complete only half-way through the 90 degree turn, or 45 degrees.



V. DOUBLING AND UNDOUBLING FILES

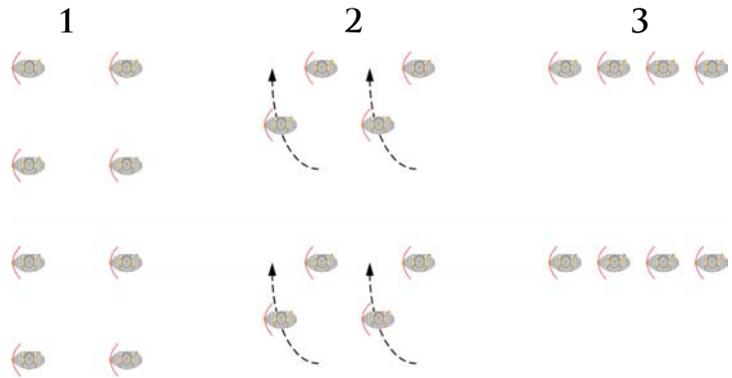
The number of ranks in a Contubernia may be decreased to two or increased to eight, starting from four ranks in Open Order.

The ranks may be halved from four to two.
The command for this is:

Ad Duo.³² Exi!³³

(ahD / Dew oh , eKS ee!)
To Two Ranks, File Out!

Milites of the second rank step to the left of the file leaders to their front. Milites of the fourth rank step to the left of the Miles to their front.

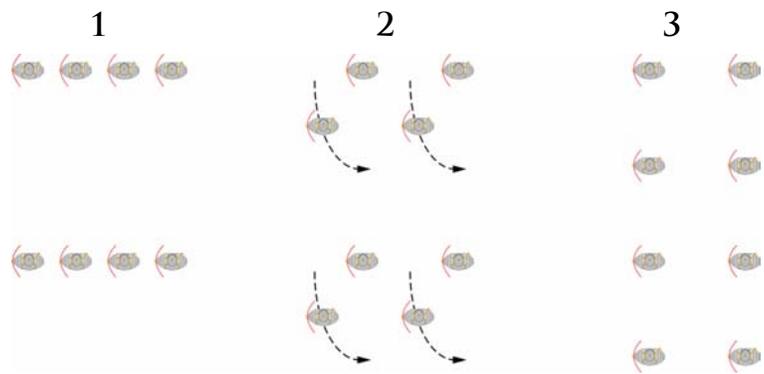


To double back from two to four:

Ad Quattuor.³⁴ Intra!³⁵

(ahD / Kwat Too oRR. eeN TRaH!)
To Four Ranks, File In!

Milites of the original second rank step backwards and right and stand behind the Miles of the original front rank. Milites of the original fourth rank step right and position themselves behind the Miles of the original third rank. This restores the original formation.

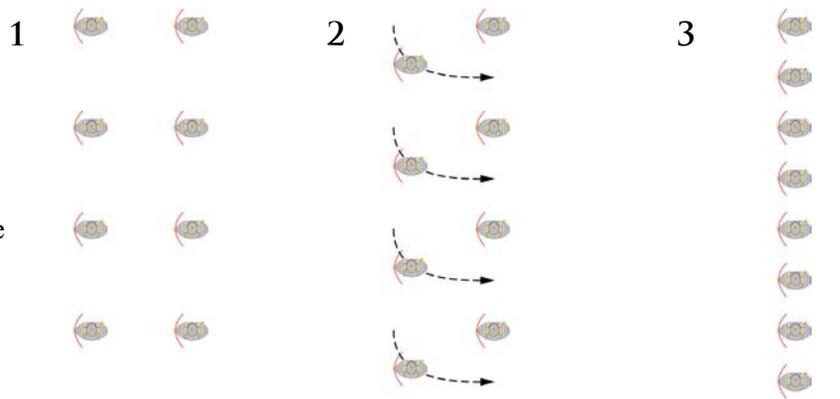


To increase depth from four to eight:

Ad Octo.³⁶ Intra!

(ahD / oK Toh. eeN TRaH!)
To Eight Ranks, File In!

The Primi (Milites of the left file of the Contubernium) position themselves behind the Secundi (Milites of the right file) by stepping backwards and to the right, producing one file of eight men behind the Decanus (file leader).

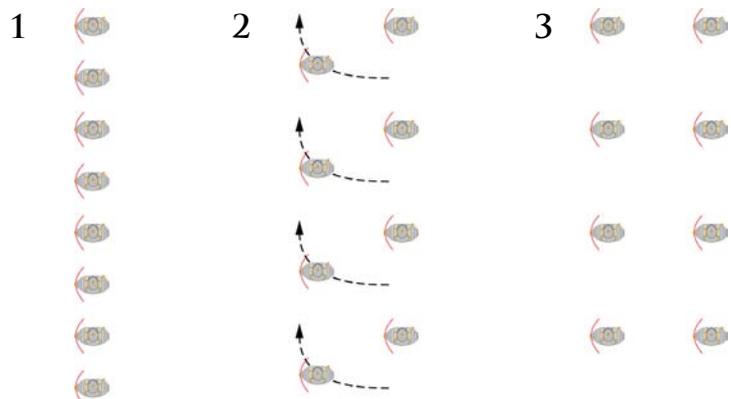


To decrease depth from eight to four:

Ad Quattuor. Exi!

(ahD / Kwat Too oRR. eKS ee!)
To Four Ranks, File Out!

The Primi (Milites of the original left file of the Contubernium) step to the left side of the Secundi at the Open Interval space, returning the Contubernium formation back to its original configuration.



LESSON II

CENTURIA FORMATIONS

A basic Centuria formation herein will consist of four ranks, each rank composed of an even number of files organized into Contubernia.

I. FORMING THE CENTURIA IN OPEN ORDER BY CONTUBERNIA

The procedures in this section are used to form the Centuria in four ranks in Open Order when Contubernia have been previously established, and their numbers are known.

To form the Centuria, the Centurio will choose the ground that the formation will take place and the direction that the front will face. He will instruct the Signifer to post the Signum at the center of the front to be established, and place himself several paces away and facing the Signifer. The Optio and the Tessararius will post at Close Interval to the right and left of the Signifer. The Cornicen falls in behind the Signifier at the Open Distance. This being done, the Centurio will command the Milites:

Ad Arma! (Ahd / AR MaH!) **Ad Signum!** (ahD / SeeG Num) *To Arms! To the Standard!* ³⁷

a. At the command, the Optio and the Tessararius step forward one pace and turn about to face the rear. The Cornicen sounds the assembly.

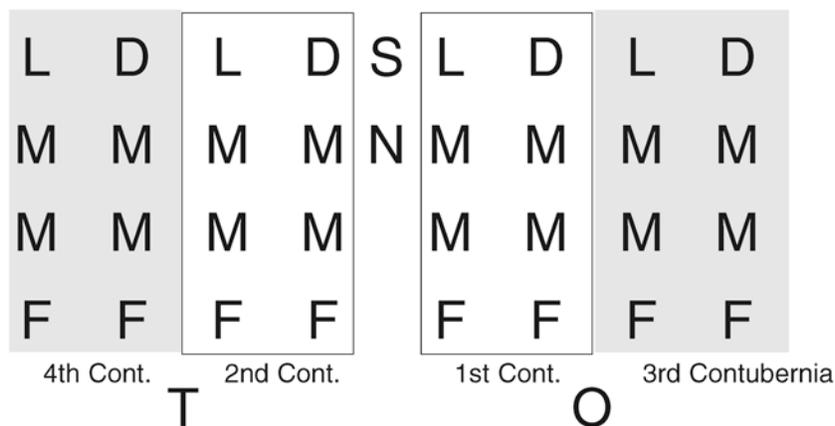
b. Primum (1st) Contubernium will post to the right of the Signifer, with the left file leader at Close Interval to the Signifer. The file leaders of the front rank will align themselves with the Signifer, and the rest of the Contubernium adjusts its dress and cover on the file leaders in the Open Order. When alignments have been made, the Milites assume the position of attention at Arma Portate.

c. Secundum (2nd) Contubernium will post to the left of the Signifer, with the right file leader at Close Interval to the Signifer. The file leaders of the front rank will align themselves with the Signifer, and the rest of the Contubernium adjusts its dress and cover on the file leaders in the Open Order. When alignments have been made, the Milites assume the position of attention at Arma Portate.

d. Tertium (3rd) Contubernium will post to the right of Primum Contubernium at Open Interval with the file leaders in line with the front rank, dress and and assume the position of attention at Arma Portate.

e. Quartum (4th) Contubernium will post to the left of Secundum Contubernium at Open Interval with the file leaders in line with the front rank, dress and assume the position of attention at Arma Portate. ³⁸

C



C = Centurio; O = Optio; T = Tessararius; S = Signifer;

N = Cornicen; D = Decanus (file leader);

L = half-file leader; F =file closer; M = Miles

f. Additional odd numbered Contubernia will post on the right, in order, as in 1-d above. Additional even numbered Contubernia will post on the left, in order, as in 1-e above.

g. After the first Contubernium is formed, the Optio and the Tessararius step sideways, outward from the Signum, one Open Interval (six Roman feet), and check the interval between the first and second files with their staffs, making corrections as needed. As each Contubernium is established, the Optio and the Tessararius move outward one Open Order Interval and repeat the process until all files are in proper interval. The Optio and the Tessararius then turn about and face the front.

h. Unassigned Milites, being insufficient in number to form another Contubernium, will fall in first behind the Cornicen, and align themselves with the ranks established. If this file is filled, the remaining Milites will form a fifth rank at Open Distance and Open Interval, centered on the formation. The Milites of this rank, and of the file of the Signifer, do not double or change interval, but will close and open distance when the ranks are ordered to do so.

When all Contubernia are in formation, the Optio will command:

Dirige Frontem! (Dee Ree Gay / FRoNT eM!) Dress the Front! ³⁹

a. The file leaders turn their heads to look inward toward the Signum, align their shoulders with those of the Signifer by stepping forwards or backwards, adjust their interval by stepping left or right, and then turn their heads to look to their front.

b. The center guides in files next to the Signifer look straight ahead and adjust their distance to the proper interval by stepping forwards or backwards.

c. The remaining members of the rear ranks look to their front, cover their file leaders by stepping left or right, turn their heads to look inward, and align their shoulders with those of the center guides by stepping forwards or backwards, and then turn their heads to look to their front.

d. The Optio and Tessararius step to the right and left flanks, face inward, and inspect the formation, giving commands to the numbered ranks to adjust their alignment when required: **Primus** [Secundus, Tertius, Quartus.] (**Pree Mus, Sek OON Dus, TaiR Tee us, Kwor Tus**) **Dirige!** The Optio and Tessararius then check the distance between the ranks with their staffs, making corrections as needed with commands to the numbered ranks to move forward or backward a number of steps. When this has been completed, the Optio and Tessararius post to the rear of the formation, centered on the right and left half of the Century..

When the ranks are aligned, the Centurio may command:

Arma , Demittite! (AR Mah / Day MiT Teh Tay!) Order Arms!

Milites lower their weapons to the ground and hold them in the position of attention.

II. FORMING THE CENTURIA IN OPEN ORDER WITHOUT CONTUBERNIA

“Recruits should therefore be constantly in the field, drawn up by the roll and formed at first into a single rank. They should learn to dress in a straight line and to keep an equal and just distance between man and man. They must then be ordered to double the rank, which they must perform very quickly, and instantly cover their file leaders. In the next place, they are to double again and form four deep.”—Vegetius, *De Re Militari*, I. 26

The procedure in this section is used to form the Centuria in four ranks in Open Order when Contubernia have not been established.

To form the Centuria, the Centurio will choose the ground that the formation will take place and the direction that the front will face. He will instruct the Signifer to post the Signum at the right of the front to be established, and place himself six paces away and facing the Signifer. The Cornicen falls in behind the Signifer at the Open Distance. This being done, the Centurio will command:

Ad Arma! (Ahd / AR MaH!) Ad Signum! (ahD / SeeG Num) *To Arms! To the Standard!*

Milites arriving at the formation form up in a single line to the left of the Signifer at Close Interval, at the position of attention and Arma Portate.

When all Milites are in formation, the Optio will command:

Dirige Frontem! (Dee Ree Gay / FRoNT eM!) *Dress the Front!*

The Optio and Tessararius inspect the line and make adjustments to ensure that it is straight, and the intervals are correct. The Tessararius then posts on the left of the formation one Open Interval behind the front, and aligns himself with the Cornicen on the right. The Optio positions himself in front of the Signifer.

Space reserved for illustration

The Centurio then doubles the rank:

Ad Duo. Intra! *To two ranks, File in!*

The first Miles to the left of the Signifer stays in place; the second Miles moves to the rear of the Miles to his right, lining up next to the Cornicen. Every other Miles, in sequence, then moves to the rear of the Miles to their right, lining up in the new rank that has been established. The Optio will walk along the rank to make sure the right Miles are doubling to the rear. When this is done, the formation will be in two ranks in open order.

Space reserved for illustration

The Centurio next closes the files:

Ad Contum, Stringe! (ahD / KahN TooM , STRiNG Gay!) *To the Spear, Draw in!*

The two Miles on the right of the formation stays in place; the rest of the Milites face right and move forward until they are about one interval away from the Miles to their front, at which point they stop and turn to face the front. The Optio steps in front of and faces the rear rank.

Space reserved for illustration

The Optio then moves the second rank back four steps:

Cede! (Kay Day!) *Give Way!*

The rear rank steps backward. The Optio calls out the steps: **Unum, Duo, Tres, STA!** At the command “sta” the rank stops in place. The Tessararius positions himself one Open Interval behind and to the right of the second rank, covering the file of the Cornicen and Signifer.

Space reserved for illustration

The Centurio doubles the rank again:

Ad Quattuor. Intra! *To four ranks, File in!*

The first Milites to the left of the Signifer stay in place; the second Miles in each rank moves to the rear of the Miles to his right, lining up next to the Cornicen. Every other Miles, in sequence, then moves to the rear of the Miles to their right, lining up in the new ranks that have been established. The Optio will walk along the front to make sure the right Miles are doubling to the rear. When this is done, the formation will be in four ranks in open order.

Space reserved for illustration

The Optio dresses the formation, if necessary:

Dirige Frontem! (Dee Ree Gay / FRoNT eM!) *Dress the Front!*

III. OPENING AND CLOSING ORDER AND FILES

The ranks and files of the Centuria may be closed and opened to create narrower or wider fronts with more or less compact depth.

The Centuria may be directly brought from Open Order to Close Order by the command:

Iunge! (YooN Gay!) *Close Up!*⁴⁰

The files close in towards the Signum to Close Interval distance by facing inward, marching in this direction to achieve the proper interval, and then turning to face the front. The file leaders immediately check their intervals by sight, and make quick adjustments by stepping left or right, and then hold their position. At the same time, the second rank closes forward on the first rank to Close Order distance, followed by the remaining ranks in sequence.⁴¹

Space reserved for illustration

The Centuria may be directly brought from Close Order to Open Order by the command:

Largi! (LahR Gee!) *Open Up!*⁴²

The front rank of file leaders holds its position; the rear ranks turn about to face the rear. The rear ranks then obtain Open Distance by taking elongated steps of 35 inches in increasing numbers by rank; i.e. the 2nd rank takes 1 step, the 3rd rank takes 2 steps and the 4th rank takes 3 steps. The Optio and Tessararius act as guides for the rearmost rank.

Each Miles then faces away from the Signum and obtains Open Interval by taking elongated steps of 35 inches in increasing numbers by file; i.e. the 2nd file from the Signum takes 1 step, the 3rd file takes 2 steps, etc. The Optio and Tessararius act as guides for the outermost files on the right and left flank, respectively. Each file turns to face the front when the appropriate number of steps have been taken. The file leaders immediately check their intervals by sight, and make quick adjustments by stepping left or right, and then hold in place. The rear file members cover the file leader.⁴³

Space reserved for illustration

The interval of the files may be opened or closed on the center without changing the depth of the ranks. These movements are useful when doubling or undoubling files. The commands for this are:

Ad Latus , Stringe! (ahD / Lah Tus , STRiNG Gay!) *By Flank, Draw In!* ⁴⁴

The files close in towards the Signum to Close Interval by facing inward, marching in this direction to achieve the proper interval, and then turning to face the front. The file leaders immediately check their intervals by sight, and make adjustments by stepping left or right. The rear file members cover the leader.

Space reserved for illustration

Largi ad Ambas Partes! (LahR Gee ahD / AM BahS / PaR TayS!) *Open Up to Both Sides!* ⁴⁵

The files face away from the Signum and obtain Open Interval distance by taking elongated steps of 35 inches in increasing numbers by file. The 2nd file from the Signum takes 1 step, the 3rd file takes 2 steps, etc. The Optio and Tessararius act as guides for the outermost files on the right and left flank, respectively. Each file turns to face the front when the appropriate number of steps have been taken. The file leaders immediately check their intervals by sight, and make quick adjustments by stepping left or right, and then hold in place. The rear file members cover the file leader.

Space reserved for illustration

COLUMN FORMATIONS AND EVOLUTIONS

I. MARCHING IN COLUMN

To prepare a unit to march in column:

From a Centuria formation at attention, command: Arma, Portate! and face the formation in the desired direction of march: Ad Contum [Scutum], Clina!

Marching step commands:

To march in formation with the Military Step command:

Movete! (Moe way Tay!) *Forward March!*⁴⁶

Entire unit marches in the Military Step of 29 inches with a step count of approximately 100 per minute, a natural hiking speed. The Signifer sets the pace for the rest of the formation.

To maintain the Military Step:

If the formation becomes too extended or compacted because some Milites are marching faster or taking longer steps than others, command:

Gradum , Servate! (GrahD uM , SeR wah Tay!) *Keep the [Military] Step!*⁴⁷

Each file or Miles adjusts its pace to correct the interval.

Full Step:

Plenum Gradum , Servate! (PLeN um / GRah Doom, SeR wah Tay!) *Maintain Full Step!*⁴⁸

The formation increases the step rate to approximately 120 per minute, a brisk walk. The Signifer sets this pace. To return to the Military Step, command Gradum , Servate!

Controlling a formation in motion:

*To increase speed, command: Celerate! (KeLL eR ah Tay!) *Speed up!*⁴⁹*

*To slow down, command: Tardate! (Tar Dah Tay!) *Slow Down!*⁵⁰*

To either increase or decrease speed even more, simply issue the same command again until the desired rate of march is achieved. (The prefix “Ac” may added before “celerate” for more emphasis.)

To restore the cover and alignment of the column, the Optio commands:

Ordinem , Servate! (oRR Dih NeM, SeR wah Tay!) *Preserve the Order!*⁵¹

The file leaders and closers correct the interval, distance, and alignment by adjusting their step.

To halt a unit in motion:

State! (STah Tay!) *Halt.*⁵²

All Milites take one additional step and stop in place, at attention. If under arms, Pila and Scutum remain at Arma Portate until directed to be lowered. Cover and alignment are maintained.

II. CHANGING A COLUMN’S DIRECTION OF MARCH:

March to the rear:

To change a formation’s direction of march 180 degrees from the halt, command:

Transforma! Move! (Trans For Mah! Moe Way!) *About Face. March!*

At the first command, each Miles faces about to the Scutum side. This puts the formation in a column facing the direction from which they just came. At the second command the column steps out. Cover, alignment, and step are restored on the march.

To change the front of a column:

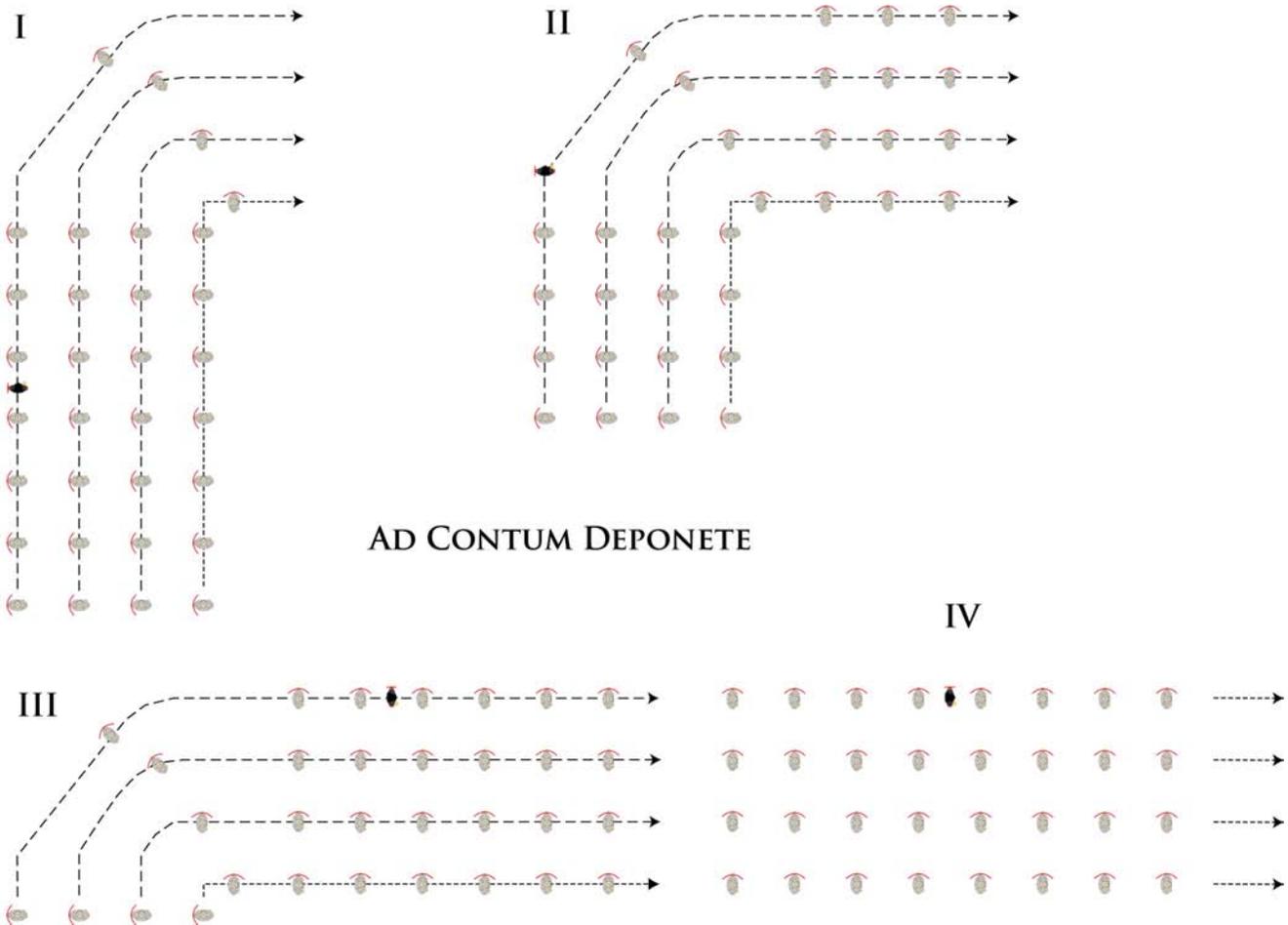
To cause the front (head) of a column on the march to change direction by 90 degrees, command:

Ad Contum [Scutum] , Deponete!

(**ahd KoN Tum [Skoo TuM] , Deh PoNe eh Tay!**) *To the Spear [Shield], Change Front! (by ranks)* ⁵³

The right [left] front file leader takes one more step and turns in a tight arc 90 degrees to the right [left], and marches in this new direction. The next file member takes two or more steps forward, turns in a wider arc, and by taking quicker steps, brings himself up on line with the front file leader and resumes the regular step. This continues across the front of the formation until all front files leaders are on line.

The file members following along turn in the same spot until the entire formation has completed the turn. Cover, alignment, interval, and step are resumed in the new direction.



III. TO MARCH A COLUMN WITHOUT DIRECTIONAL COMMANDS:

The commander may give an order that allows a column to march without directional commands. This informal, or field method consists simply of following the Signum, and is recommended for marches in column for any extended distances. *Command:*

Signum , Sequete! (SeeG NuM , Seh Koo Tay!) *Follow the Standard!* ⁵⁴

If the formation is faced to the right, the Signifer and Optio post at the head of the column in front of the flank files; the rest of the formation stays in place. If the formation is faced to the left, the Signifer and Tessararius post at the head of the column in front of the flank files. *Then:*

Movete! *Forward March!*

The Centuria marches forward with the Military Step. Cover, alignment, interval, and step rate and length are maintained as much as is practical for the terrain covered. Milites may talk and adjust equipment. ⁵⁵

LESSON III

OPEN ORDER FORMATIONS AND EVOLUTIONS

When the basic principles of facing and marching have been mastered, the Centuria is ready to be drilled in movements and formations that may be employed to maneuver and close with an enemy or to defend against his advance. In this section are the commands to move a unit to the front, rear, and to the flanks; to change front by realignment, turning and countermarching.

I. EVOLUTIONS IN OPEN ORDER FROM STANDING POSITION

The movements in this section are carried out with the Centuria formed in four ranks in open order, starting from a standing at the position of Arma Portate.

To move the Centuria to the front, and to halt it in a new position the Centurio will command:

Movete! *March!*

- a. The Signifer picks a reference point directly to his front to fix the direction of the march.
- b. On the last syllable of the command “Movete” every Milites steps forward. The Signifer sets the pace for the formation.
- c. The file leaders glance inward toward the Signum to keep alignment, never advancing or falling behind it, while at the same time maintaining interval to the file leaders to their sides.
- d. The Milites to the rear of the front rank cover the file leaders and continually maintain the distance between their ranks, and keep the alignment and interval with the Milites to their sides.
- e. The file closers in the rear rank maintain the depth of the formation, taking care not to close up or fall behind, while keeping the alignment and interval with the file closers to their sides. *Then:*

State! *Halt!*

When the Centurio voices the last syllable of the command “State” the Milites take one more step, stop, and assume the position of attention.

To dress the ranks after halting, if required, the Optio commands:

Dirige Frontem! *Dress the Front!*

To move the Centuria a short distance to a flank, and return to the original front, the Centurio commands:

Ad Contum [Scutum], Clina! **Move!** *To the Spear (Shield), Face! March!*

Each miles faces 90° to the right or left as indicated on the first command, and steps out on the command “Move.” The file leaders and closers, who now are now on the flanks, maintain the distance and interval of the formation. After the desired distance is traveled, the Centurio commands:

State! **Redi!** *Halt! Return!*

The Centuria halts as described above, and faces to the right or left to reassume the original front. ⁵⁶

To change the front of the Centuria to the rear so the file leaders are in the front rank, the Centurio commands:

Muta Locum! **(Moo Tah / Loh Kum!)** *Change Places!* ⁵⁷

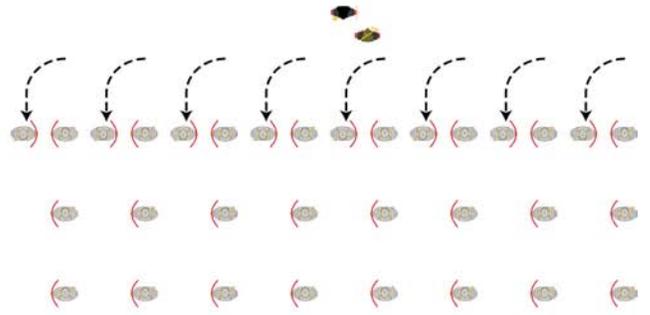
The Signifer moves forward one pace and turns about. The Cornicen moves around and behind the Signifer and turns about.

The file leaders in the front rank march and turn in a tight arc by the Scutum and move to the rear along the left side of their file. When the file leaders pass the second rank, each Miles of that rank marches and turns in a tight arc by the scutum and marches to the rear behind the file leader. The file leader halts at the line of file closers and the second rank man halts at the line of the third rank. The file members in the third and fourth ranks then march forward several paces and turn in a tight arc by the scutum to cover the new line of the file, halting when the proper distance is achieved. The Signifer and Cornicen move up between the center files to position themselves in the front ranks.

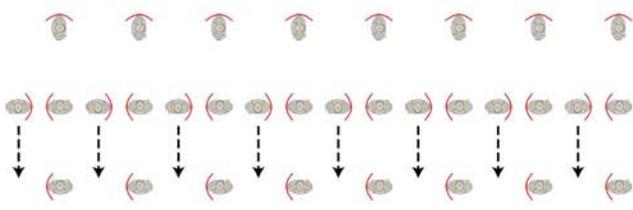
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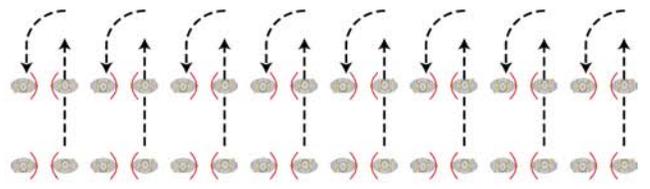
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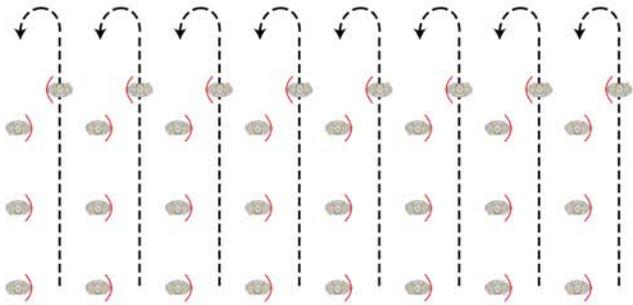
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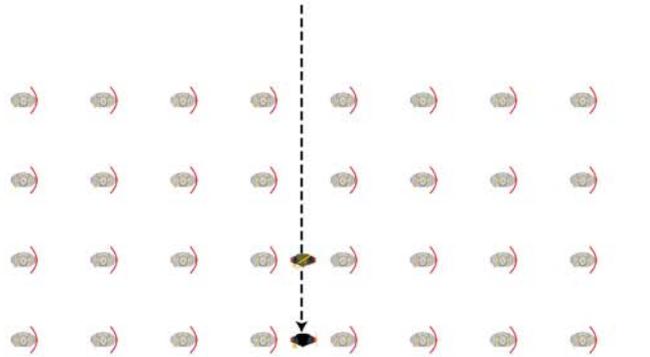
IV



V



VI



MUTA LOCUM

II. OPENING AND CLOSING ORDER AND FILES WHILE MARCHING

A Centuria on the march may be directly brought from Open Order to Close Order by the command:

Iunge! *Close Order!*

The Miles close in towards the Signum by turning and marching obliquely inward, and turning back to the front when Close Interval is achieved. The File Leaders check the interval and quickly adjust by inclining their step sideways; the file members cover the leaders. When the interval is established, the center guides in the second rank close forward on the first rank by taking longer steps to the Close Distance, the rest of the rank follows their lead. The remaining ranks repeat this in sequence.⁵⁸

Space reserved for illustration

The Centuria may be directly brought from Close Order to Open Order by the command:

Largi! *Open Order!*

The center guides in the rearmost rank increase their depth away from the first rank by taking shorter steps to resume the original Open Distance; the rest of the rank follows their lead. The remaining rear ranks repeat this procedure in sequence. When the depth is established, the files open up away from the Signum by each Miles turning and marching obliquely outward, and turning back to the front when the Open Interval is achieved. The File Leaders check the interval by sight and quickly make adjustments by inclining their step sideways; the file members cover the leaders.

Space reserved for illustration

The interval of the files may be closed or opened on the center without changing the depth of the ranks. These movements are useful when doubling or undoubling files on the march. The commands for this are:

Ad Latus , Stringe! *By Flank, Draw In!*

The files close in towards the Signum by each Miles turning obliquely inward, and turning back to the front when the Close Interval is achieved. The File Leaders check the interval by sight and quickly make adjustments by inclining their step sideways; the file members cover the leaders.

Space reserved for illustration

Largi ad Ambas Partes! *Open Up to Both Sides!*

The files open up away from the Signum by each Miles turning obliquely outward, and turning back to the front when the Open Interval is achieved. The File Leaders check the interval by sight and quickly make adjustments by inclining their step sideways; the file members cover the leaders.

Space reserved for illustration

To dress the ranks while marching, the Optio will command:

Dirige Frontem! *Dress the Front!*

- a. The file leaders turn their heads to look inward toward the Signum, align their shoulders with those of the Signifer by shortening or lengthening their step, adjust their interval by inclining their step slightly left or right, and then look to their front.
- b. The center guides in the files next to the Signifer look straight ahead and adjust their distance to the proper interval by shortening or lengthening their step.
- c. The remaining members of the rear ranks turn their heads to look inwards, align their shoulders with those of the center guides by shortening or lengthening their step, look to their front, and then cover their file leaders by inclining their step slightly left or right.

III. EVOLUTIONS IN CLOSE ORDER

The movements in this section are carried out with the Centuria formed in four ranks in Close Order.

Dressing of Ranks:

The method of dressing of ranks in Close Order is slightly different than for Open Order.

At the command:

Dirige, Frontem!

- a. All Milites pick up their Pila and Scuta to the position of Trail Arms.
- b. The file leaders turn their heads to look inward toward the Signum, align their shoulders with those of the Signifer by stepping forwards or backwards, and adjust their interval by stepping left or right. (Milites who are not used to judging Close Interval visually can gauge this by placing their right elbow touching their side and raise their right arm up to waist height, with Pilum held vertically – point up in fist, and extended out to their right side, and almost touch the scutum of the Miles to their right, and then quickly drop their arm back into the position of Trail Arms) The file leaders then turn their heads to look to their front.
- c. The center guides, in the files to the immediate right and left of the Signifer, look straight ahead, cover the file leader, and adjust their distance to the proper depth by stepping to the front or back. (Milites who are not used to judging Close Distance visually can gauge this by holding their right arms straight out holding the Pila perpendicular, move their fist to about a hand's breadth of the right shoulder of the Miles to their front, and then drop their arm back into the position of Trail Arms)
- d. The remaining members of the rear ranks look to their front, cover their file leaders by stepping left or right, turn their heads to look inward, and align their shoulders with those of the center guides by stepping forwards or backwards, and then turn their heads to look to their front.
- e. The Centurion, Optio, or Tessarius shall look down the ranks to verify straightness, directing out of line Milites to either move up or back.

Marching in All Directions:

The following commands are carried out according to the same principles described in preceding levels:

Movete! State!

Ad Contum [Scutum], Clina! Move! State! Redi!

Transforma! Move! State! Redi!

Inclining

Move ad Contum *Incline to the Right (by formation)* ⁵⁹

The each Miles keeps faced straight toward the front while inclining their step sideways toward the right. This slowly shifts the entire formation as a block to the right while maintaining forward progress.

Move ad Scutum *Incline to the Left (by formation)*

The each Miles keeps faced straight toward the front while inclining their step sideways toward the left. This slowly shifts the entire formation as a block to the left while maintaining forward progress.

LESSON IV

CHANGE OF FRONT

There are three methods to change the front or alignment of a Centuria in open order to face a flank.

The first method is normally used to realign an initial formation for battle, especially if aligning with other units or the change of front is less than 90°.

To realign the front of the Centuria to face a new direction to the right or left, the Centurio will command:

Ad Signum. Deponete! *To the Standard. Change Front by Files!*

Prior to the command, the Centurio positions himself in front of the Centuria, facing the new front he wishes to establish. On the command “Ad Signum” the Signifer marches and positions himself directly behind the Centurio. On the command “Deponete,” the Centuria quickly steps forward one or more paces, turns to face the new front, and reforms on the Signum, immediately establishing interval and alignment. The Centurio then marches 3 or more paces to the front and resumes drilling the Centuria. If contact with an enemy force is expected or near, the Signifer will move back one rank and the Centurio assumes his position. The Optio will command the ranks to be dressed, if required.⁶⁰

The second method is used when time is not critical but a precise alignment is desired. The formation is first brought to close order on the flank of the intended turn. This is most easily done while marching, but can be done from the halt as well. The entire unit then pivots on the front rank file leader on that flank. ⁶¹

To bring the Centuria from Open Order to Close Order towards the right flank, command:

Ad Contum, Iunge! *To the Spear, Close Up!*

The right flank file keeps marching straight ahead; the remaining files close in towards the Signum by each Miles turning and marching obliquely inward, and turning back to the front when the Close Interval is achieved. When the interval is established, the center guides in the second rank close forward on the first rank by taking longer steps to the Close Distance, the rest of the rank follows their lead. The remaining ranks repeat this in sequence.

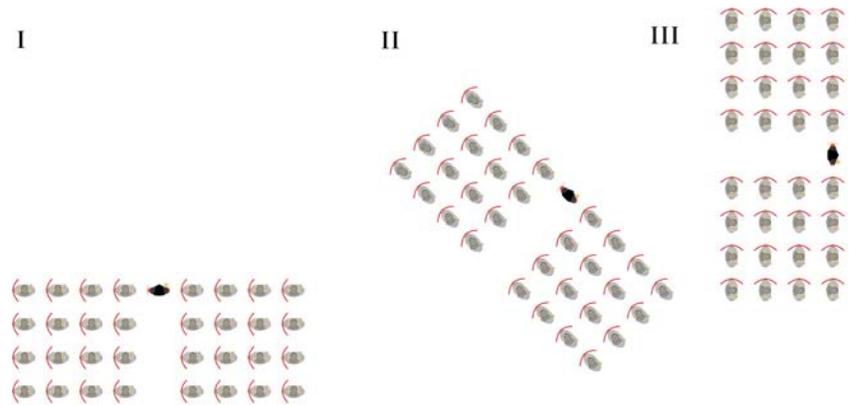
To pivot the entire Centuria to the right, command:

Ad Contum, Depone! *To the Spear, Change Front!*. (by formation) ⁶²

a. The file leader on the right flank, the pivot man for this movement, slowly turns in place to the right.

b. The file leader on the left flank marches at the regular step in a large arc to his right while looking toward the pivot man on the right, ensuring that his distance from the pivot point never varies.

c. The remaining file leaders march in arcs to the right, keeping the rank aligned by glances left and right and adjusting their step.



AD CONTUM DEPONE

d. The file members of the rear ranks keep their distance and interval with the front rank by a combination of forward and sideways steps.

e. If the command was given from the halt, the Centuria halts when it has turned 90 degrees, or if the Centurio commands it to halt before the 90° turn is completed. If the command was given while marching, the Centuria resumes the march straight forward when it has turned 90 degrees, or sooner if the Centurio commands it to march before the 90° turn is completed.

f. Further changes of front are carried out in the same manner, in increments of 90° or less. ⁶³

To return the Centuria to Open Order towards the left flank, command:

Ad Scutum, Largi! *To the Left Flank, Open Up!* ⁶⁴

The right flank file keeps marching straight ahead; the center guides in the rearmost rank increase their depth away from the first rank by taking shorter steps to resume the original Open Distance; the rest of the rank follows their lead. The remaining rear ranks repeat this procedure in sequence. When the depth is established, the files open up away from the Signum by each Miles turning and marching obliquely outward, and turning back to the front when the Open Interval is achieved. The File Leaders check the interval by sight and quickly make adjustments by inclining their step sideways; the file members cover the leaders.

This movement is reversed for a change of front to the left [**Ad Scutum**]; i.e. the left flank file leader becomes the pivot and the right flank file leader becomes the guide.

The third method to change the front of a Centuria in open order is used to march toward a threat on a flank, when time is critical. This is a more loose movement than a pivot, alignment is not maintained while turning but is reestablished at the end of the turn.

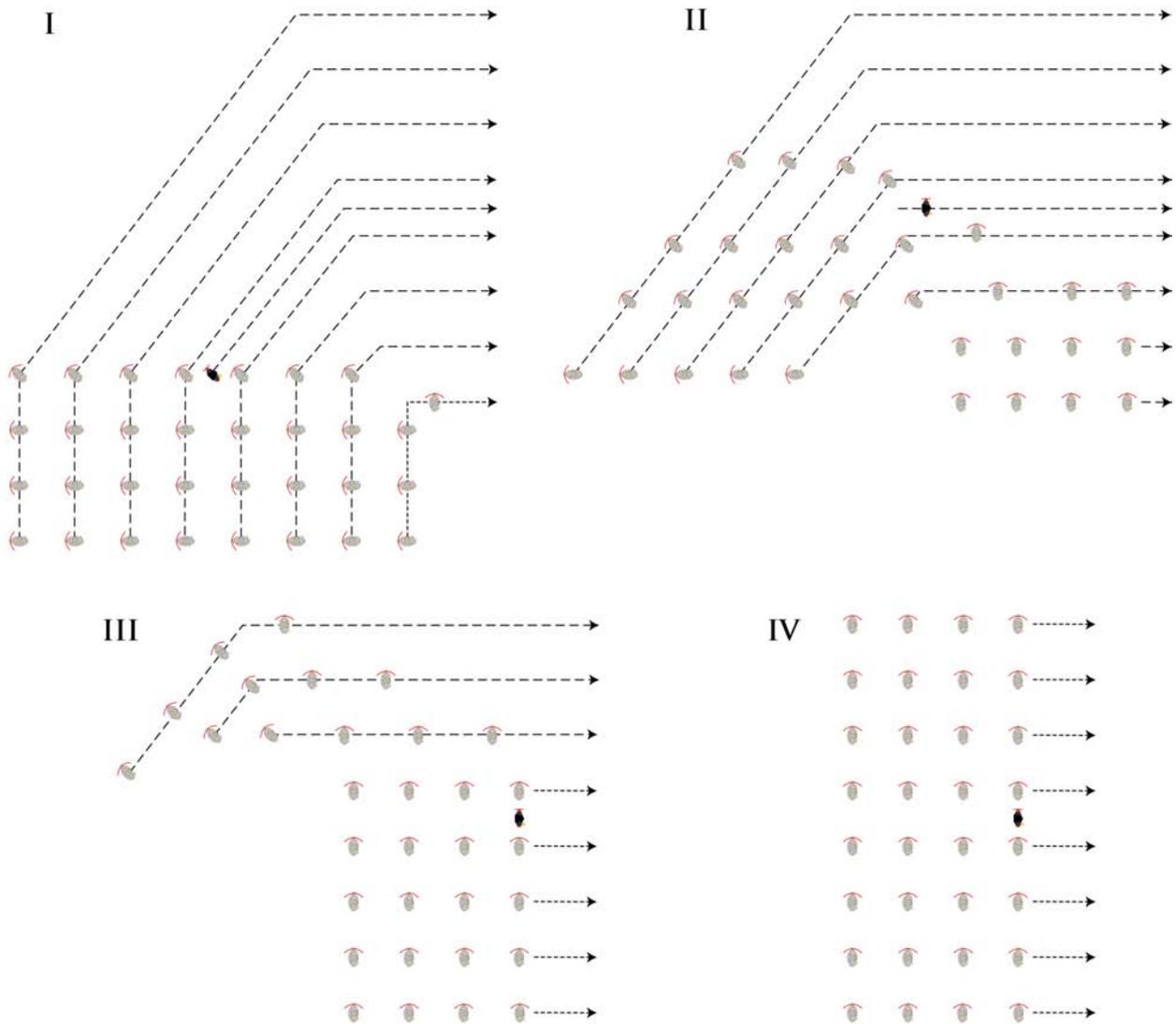
To quickly change the front of the Centuria to face a flank while maintaining Open Order. the Centurio commands:

Ad Contum, Deponete! *To the Spear, Change Front by Files!* ⁶⁵

At the command, the right flank file leader turns in a tight arc 90° to the right and marches forward at the established pace, becoming the guide for this movement. The rest of the front rank takes one or more steps, aligns their shoulders toward the guide, turns in the direction of the new front, and quickly advances to take up the alignment on the guide, resuming the march in this new direction. At the same time, the Milites of the rear ranks follow their file leaders, turning in the same approximate spot and quickly advancing while keeping their order in their file. The alignment of the formation is reestablished on the march by individual adjustments.

This evolution may also be used to outflank an enemy formation, especially when coordinated with another Centuria, or the Centuria is large enough to divide into wings.

This movement is reversed for a change of front to the left [**Ad Scutum**]; i.e. the left flank file leader becomes the guide for the movement.



AD CONTUM DEPONETE

LESSON V

MISSILE AND CLOSE COMBAT

The missile and close combat commands that follow are only for use with needlefelt or non-lethal mock weapons..

I. MISSILE COMBAT

To defend against enemy missiles:

When the enemy launches or is about to fire missiles, any leader may shout the warning, or, the when Centurio determines that the formation is in missile range he will command:

Tela! ⁶⁶ (**Tay Lah!**) *Missiles!*

The rear ranks immediately raise their scuta and angle them to protect their heads and chests, and the men of the front rank, from arrows or other projectiles.

To throw Pila by command:

To prepare a Centuria in Close Order to throw or thrust the pilum, command:

Pila , Parati! (**Pee Lah / PahR ah Tee!**) *Pila, Ready!* ⁶⁷

The even number ranks step left to cover the space between the shoulders of the rank to the front.

Each Miles gets in position to throw by rotating his body so that the left shoulder is more towards the front, the scutum is brought to the front. The pilum is rotated forward from the carry position; the shaft is rested on the top of the scutum, the Miles reverses his grip on the shaft and raises the pilum over his shoulder.

The placement of the feet is adjusted to a braced stance, right foot back, feet a bit more than shoulder width apart.

The command **Reverte** or **Pila Portate** will return the pilum to the carry position.

To throw pila by the entire formation, command:

Mittite! (**Meet Tih Tay!**) or **Iacite!** (**Yah Kih Tay!**) *Throw!* ⁶⁸

Every Miles throws his pilum with a normal javelin motion, and immediately draws the gladius.⁶⁹ The gladius is kept behind the scutum until making contact with enemy.

To throw by ranks, command:

Primus! **Secundus!** **Tertius!** **Quartus!** *First Rank! Second Rank! Third Rank! Fourth Rank!*

Each rank throws their pila on command with a normal javelin motion, and immediately draws the gladius. The gladius is kept behind the scutum until making contact with enemy.

II. CLOSE COMBAT

To position the scutum for imminent contact with the enemy:

The Centurio commands:

Vos Servate! *Guard!*⁷⁰

Each Miles holds his scutum directly in front of body and lowers head. If the pilum has already been thrown, the gladius is drawn. For training purposes, or if an enemy closes so rapidly with the Centuria that there is no time to throw pila, it may be necessary to command the drawing of the gladius.⁷¹

Gladios Destringite! *(Glah Dee ohS / Day STReeN Gih Tay)*⁷²

The Pilum (if carried) is laid aside. Each Miles reverses his right hand with the palm outward, grasps the grip, and lifts the gladius up and forward to clear the scabbard. The gladius is held alongside the body, elbow bent, keeping the tip elevated behind the scutum.

To rapidly close with an enemy line:

The Centurio commands:

Percute! *(PehR Kew Tay!)* *Charge!*⁷³

The Centuria advances at the regular pace, with scuta held to the front. Formation and alignment are maintained. As the distance to the opposing line is decreased, the pace is gradually increased to almost a run moments before reaching the enemy.

To cease combat:

The Centurio commands:

Gladios Recondite! *(Gla Dee ohS / Ray KoN Dih Tay)* *Sheathe Swords!*⁷⁴

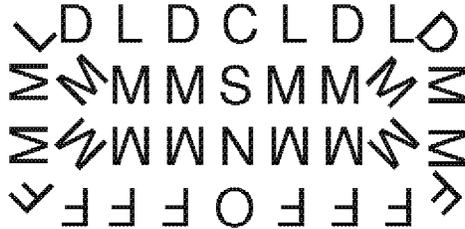
Combat immediately stops. Each Miles returns the gladius to the scabbard and waits for further orders.

SPECIAL FORMATIONS

To cause the Centuria to face to the front, rear, and both flanks, the Centurio will command:

Undique , Servate! (ooN Dee Kwa / SeR Wah Tay!) To All Sides, Guard! ⁷⁵

The left and right flank file pairs face outward. The remainder of the first and second ranks stands fast. The remainder of the third and fourth ranks faces to the rear. The Miles at each of the four corners of the square adjust their alignment by half turns to close the gaps. The Signum is moved to the center of the formation. The Centurio takes position in the front rank of the center file; the Optio closes the rear of the center file. If the Centuria is in missile range of the enemy, the Milites on the inside of the formation raise their shields over their heads to protect themselves and the Milites on the outside from missiles.



To form a Testudo, the Centurio will command:

Ad Testudinem! ⁷⁶ (ahd / Tes Too Dih NeM) To the Testudo!

The front rank comes to the guard position, crouching behind the scutum. The bottom edge is kept below the knees and the top edge should be at eye level, with the head lowered. The rear ranks sheath the gladius, if drawn.

The rear ranks raise their scuta over their heads. Each rank steps forward and places the bottom edge of their scuta on the head of the man in front of them, and then lowers the top edge onto the scutum to their rear that is resting on their own helmet, crouching to the height of the front rank men.

The Centurio, Signifer, Cornicen, Optio, and Tessararius move to the rear of the formation.

To move the Testudo forward, the Centurio commands:

Movete! March!

Each Miles marches forward with a half step. Left foot is always advanced forward; the right foot is brought to back of left at 90-degree angle in a shuffle step. This keeps the strongest stance at all times. ⁷⁷

LESSON VI

I. OBLIQUE FORMATIONS

To move the Centuria obliquely to the right or left, the Centurio will command:

Ad Contum [Scutum] Oblique, Clina. Move! *Toward the Spear (Shield) Oblique, Face. March!*

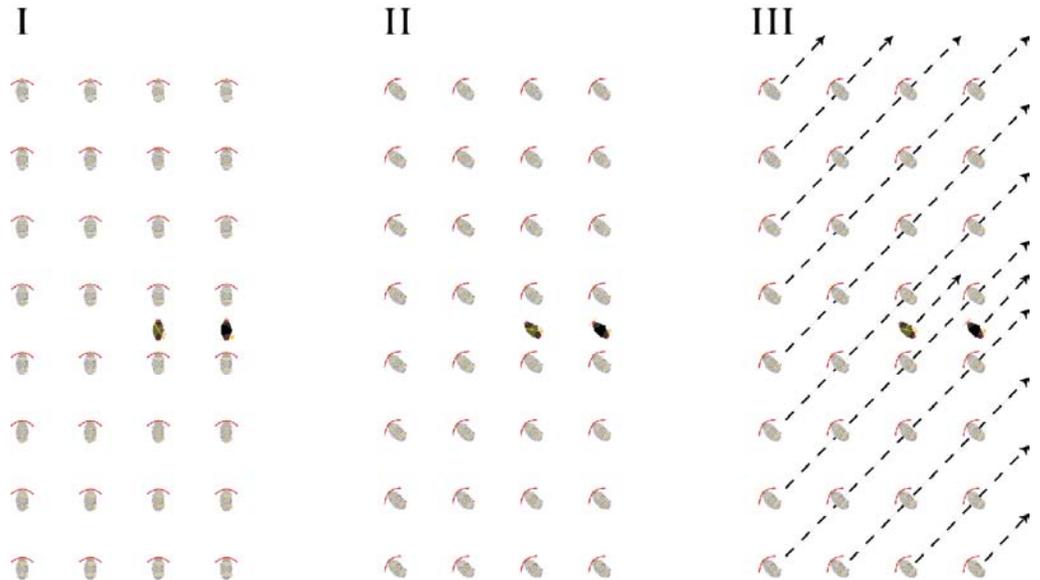
Every Milites turns 45 degrees to the Pilum or Scutum, covering the Miles now in front of him. On the command "Move," the formation marches ahead in the new direction.

After the desired distance is traveled in this direction, the Centurio commands:

Reverte! *Return!*

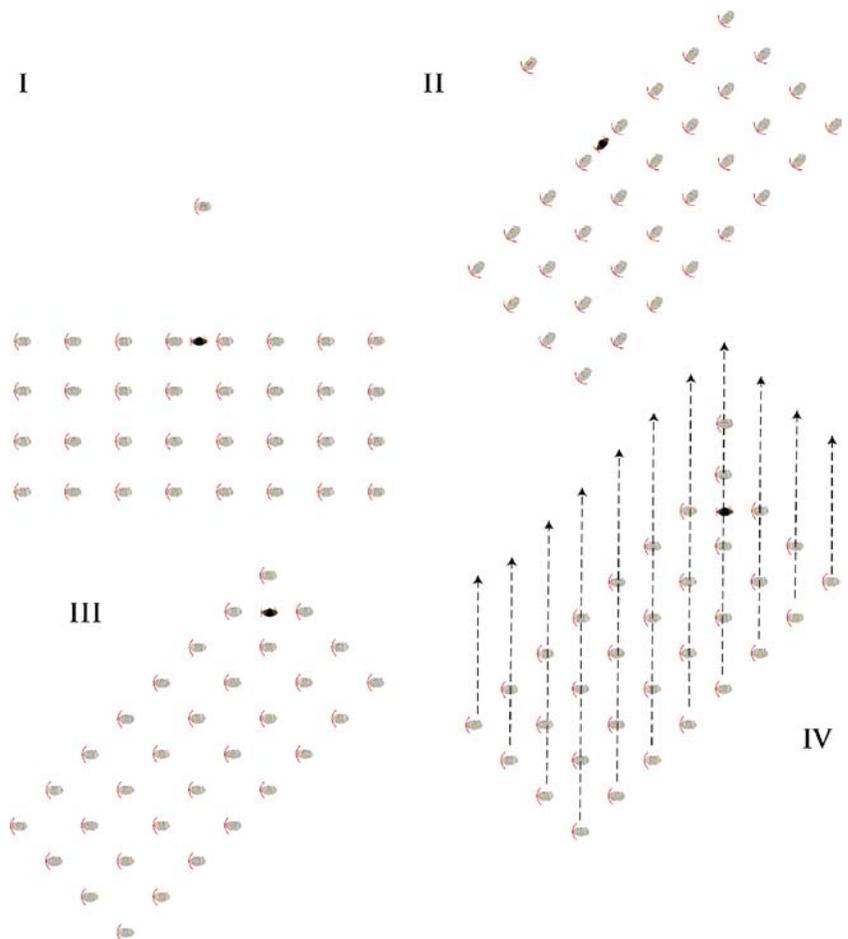
On the last syllable of the command "Reverte," each Miles turns back towards the original front and marches in the original direction of advance.

Dress, cover and interval of the formation are reestablished on the march by individual adjustments by each Miles, or by the commands of the Optio, if required.



Oblique Front

An oblique front may be formed in either Open or Close Order. It is carried out by two commands: First, from the standing position, change the front of the formation 45 degrees in one direction. Then command an oblique face in the opposite direction. This creates an angled formation where the Milites are lined up facing the original front. When the formation marches order is maintained by covering the Miles in front.⁷⁸



II. MARCHING EVOLUTIONS

When the Centuria has mastered all of the preceding evolutions in this handbook, it may be trained to turn and change front while marching, which will allow it to perform in any battlefield circumstance.⁷⁹

Ad Contum [Scutum] Clinare, Move! *Turn to the Spear (Shield), March!*

Each Miles turns in a tight arc 90° to the Pilum or Scutum side and marches in this new direction. The file leaders and closers, who now are now on the flanks, maintain the distance and interval of the formation. After the desired distance is traveled, the Centurio commands:

Redi! *Return!*

Each Miles turns in a tight arc 90° to the right or left and resumes marching in the original direction.

To move the Centuria obliquely to the right or left:

Ad Contum [Scutum] Oblique, Move! *Toward the Spear (Shield) Oblique, March!*

On the command “Move,” every Milites turns 45 degrees to the Pilum or Scutum side and immediately steps out in the new direction, covering the Miles now in front of him. After the desired distance is traveled in this direction, the Centurio commands:

Reverte! *Return!*

On the last syllable of the command “Reverte,” each Miles turns back towards the original front and marches in the original direction of advance. Dress, cover and interval of the formation are reestablished on the march by individual adjustments by each Miles, or by the commands of the Optio, if required.

To cause a formation or advance guard to march to the rear:

Transformate! *Retire by Files!*

On the last syllable of the command “Transformate,” each Miles quickly turns around in a tight arc towards the Scutum and immediately marches 180° to the original direction of advance. Dress, cover and interval are reestablished on the march by individual adjustments.

Space reserved for illustration

To rapidly outflank an enemy's left:

Ad Scutum, Deponete! *To the Shield, Outflank!*

At the command, all file leaders turn in widening arcs to their left, marching as fast as possible without running. The file members closely follow their file leader. The turn continues until the line is facing 90° left the original line of march or contact with the enemy is made. If the enemy falls back or is still some distance away, the rapid advance continues while quickly restoring alignment and order on the move.

To march the front of the Centuria to the rear:

Transmutate! **(Trans Moo Tah Tay!)** *Countermarch by Files!* ⁸⁰

The Signifer marches forward one pace and turns about. The Cornicen moves around and behind the Signifer and turns about.

The file leaders in the front rank march in a tight turn by the Scutum and move to the rear along the left side of their file. When they pass the second rank, each Miles of that rank turns by the scutum and marches to the rear behind the file leader. The file leader continues to march past the line of file closers. As the second rank man passes the third rank, the file members in the third rank turn by the scutum and cover the new line of the file, achieving the proper distance on the march. The file members of the fourth rank repeat this when the third rank member passes him. The Signifer and Cornicen quickly move up between the center files to position themselves in the front ranks.

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CONVENTIONS AND COMMENTARY

On the Usefulness of Ancient Sources

Asclepiodotus and Onasander

The *Outline of Tactics* by Asclepiodotus has been long dismissed as an antiquarian work on the obsolete Macedonian phalanx, or a philosophical piece with no applicable uses. While the treatise does include a brief description of a hoplite phalanx that is similar to Polybius', it is not clear whether the tactics described in subsequent chapters are drawn from historical or contemporary sources. For example, when giving the title of the commander of a 128-man light infantry unit, Asclepiodotus mentions the old term, but continues using the Greek word for centurion, as he says, to reflect what is used "nowadays" (II 8); and later on uses the Greek word for century to describe the unit itself (VI 3). Furthermore, the highly flexible system of infantry tactics he sets forth does not seem to match the accounts of the major battles in the 2nd and 3rd Macedonian Wars, where historians claim the flexible tactics of the Roman legion overcame the rigid hoplite formations of the Macedonians. It is also possible that the *tactica* style of maneuvering was copied by all armies of the Mediterranean world after Alexander.⁸¹ The differences may not have been in tactics but in weaponry and battle array, i.e. Roman legionary infantry armed with *pila* in broad open formations of four or eight ranks, versus Macedonian heavy infantry armed with 21-foot long *sarissa* in blocks 16 or 32 ranks deep in very close order.

Some of the essential — and practical — elements of Asclepiodotus' drill include instructions on how to form in open and close order; to turn by individual and formation; to countermarch; to mix and move light infantry through the spaces of heavy infantry in open order; and to double ranks and files to increase the length or depth of formations.

Evidence that the *tactica* or a similar system was in use, or being adopted, by the Roman army in the Imperial period is provided by Onasander:

"Then he should instruct the army in open and close order; in turning to the left and right; the interchange, taking distance, and closing up of files; the passing and repassing of files through files; the division into files; the arrangement and extension of files to form the phalanx,⁸² withdrawing of files for greater depth of the phalanx..." — *The General* X (1) 2

Although writing in Greek, Onasander makes no mention of specifically Greek tactics or practices. Rather, he highly praises Roman military principles and methods, to which he recommends a good Roman general adhere. Onasander addressed his work to Quintus Veranius, who was Consul in 49 A.D. Veranius was appointed governor of Britain in 57 A.D., and immediately began military operations against the Silures in what is now Wales. He died within a year, so *The General* was likely written between the years 49 and 58.

Accounts of Suetonius Paullinus' battle against Boudicca in 61 AD and Agricola's victory at Mons Graupius are considered evidence of the *tactica* in use in Britain after Veranius was governor.

Frontinus, Aelianus, and Vegetius

Sextus Iulius Frontinus wrote a book on the art of war circa 78 to 84 A.D., probably titled *De Re Militari*. Unfortunately, this is no longer extant, except for parts that may have been incorporated into the epitome of Vegetius. Historians have speculated that the lost treatise contained a section on military drill. M.K. Dahm, in his thesis on the life and writings of Frontinus, proposed that Frontinus did not include drill therein, and years later thought it advantageous to commission Aelianus to write on *tactica*. Aelianus certainly credits Frontinus for providing encouragement:

"I spent a few days at Formiae with Frontinus, the distinguished consular, who has acquired a glorious reputation for skill in military matters. In meeting with him I found that he was equally enthusiastic about Greek learning and speculation (on military science). Therefore I set aside my doubts about writing on (Greek) military tactics, believing that Frontinus would not be enthusiastic if he thought that it had less to offer than Roman practice." — from the preface to *Taktika*, addressed to Emperor Trajan.

The extant works of Frontinus indicate he was a practical man; a reason why he might have done this is suggested by his career, the culture of his time, and his close relationship with emperor Trajan.

Frontinus probably had firsthand knowledge of the *tactica* in use during his service as a tribune in the east and later as governor of Britain, in addition to being familiar with the Greek literature on the subject. Frontinus was also in a position to observe or read official reports on the fighting capacities of legions where training and discipline was lax.

The Roman elite at the turn of the 1st and 2nd Centuries was fascinated with Greek literary works and history, and the life and conquests of Alexander the Great in particular. Frontinus knew that Trajan was especially so. Presenting him with a Greek philosophical work ostensibly about the tactics of Alexander was a sure way of reinforcing the disciplined use of the *tactica* contained within, not just to the emperor himself but also to all the officers under his command.⁸³

Aelianus copied Asclepiodotus,⁸⁴ changing only the order and organization of the material, and rewording some of the terminology to make it clearer.⁸⁵ The tactics themselves are virtually identical, which would be essential if this work was intended for reinforcing a system of drill already in use.

It is likely Frontinus recognized that it was the duty of the legionary officers to ensure proper training in arms, based on the following passage believed to have been excerpted from his now lost *De Re Militari*:

“The soldiers who were backward in this drill were punished by having their allowance in barley. Nor did they receive it as usual, in wheat, until they had, in the presence of the prefect, tribunes, or other principal officers of the legion, showed sufficient proofs of their knowledge of every part of their study.”

— Vegetius, *Epitoma Rei Militaris* I 13

Vegetius may provide us with clues that Frontinus was familiar with *tactica* in chapters describing the doubling of ranks (I 26) and oblique formations (III 20).⁸⁶

Evidence from Arrianus

It is believed that in the *Order of Battle Against the Alans*, Lucius Flavius Arrianus employs the *tactica* for the battle formation of the legions under his command.⁸⁷ A few years later in, 137 A.D., he wrote the *Tactical Handbook*, containing a reworking and simplification of the infantry drill in the *Taktika* of Aelianus — further evidence of the continuing use of the *tactica*.

* * *

The position of this handbook is that the basic evolutions for light and medium infantry described in the Greek language *taktika* either reflected those commonly in use in the Roman army in the Imperial and Imperial periods — or that basic *tactica* evolutions were gradually adapted for use and incorporated into Roman army practice within this period, especially among units on active frontiers.

Sub sole nihil novi est

Modern reenactors are not the first to attempt the recreation of Roman military drill and training from ancient literature. Vegetius mentions that this was necessary even in the Roman era:

“In former ages the art of war, often neglected and forgotten, was as often recovered from books and reestablished by the authority and attention of our generals.” III 9

In the late fourth century, Vegetius himself had trouble recovering the Roman art of war:

“So once the recruits have been tattooed the science of arms should be shown them in daily training. But neglect due to long years of peace has destroyed the tradition of this subject. Whom can you find able to teach what he himself has not learned? We must therefore recover the ancient custom from histories and (other) books. But they wrote only the incidents and dramas of wars, leaving out as familiar what we are now seeking. The Spartans, it is true, and the Athenians and other Greeks published in books much material which they call *tactica*, but we ought to be inquiring after the military science of the Roman People, who extended their Empire from the smallest bounds almost to the regions of the sun and the end of the earth itself. This requirement made me consult competent authorities and say most faithfully in this opusculum what Cato the Censor wrote on the science of war, what Cornelius Celsus, what Frontinus thought should be summarized, what Paternus, a most zealous champion of military law, published in his books, what was decreed by the constitutions of Augustus, Trajan and Hadrian. For I claim no authority to myself, but merely write up the dispersed material of those whom I have listed above, summarizing it as if to form an orderly sequence.” — *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, I 8⁸⁸

Today we have many of the ancient histories, but they are also of only limited help in our task. Vegetius probably only had epitomes of Paternus and Frontinus to draw from.⁸⁹ In our time that material may only survive through Vegetius' epitome. The existence of *tactica* was known to Vegetius, but he ignored Greek language works.⁹⁰

Use of the Latin Commands in the *Strategikon*

The only ancient source of infantry drill conducted in Latin is the *Strategikon*, written circa 595 A.D. This has preserved, in fossilized form, the Latin commands and phrases of the late Roman army.⁹¹ The preface of the *Strategikon* states that the Latin terms employed in the text are “expressions in ordinary military use,” suggesting a long established oral tradition. The evolutions the commands are associated with are basic *tactica* movements that can found in Asclepiodotus and Aelianus. It is likely the origins of the Latin commands in the *Strategikon* corresponds with the adoption of *tactica* by the Roman army.

By convention, this handbook uses the commands from the *Strategikon* where possible, only changing the word for “standard,” and some case endings, spelling, and conjugations to a more appropriate form for early imperial impressions. This is believed to have a higher likelihood of approximating what was actually used than any set of commands created anew by means of linguistics alone.

Singular and Plural Forms of Imperative Verbs

Most of the verbs in the Latin commands preserved in Maurice’s *Strategikon* are in the imperative mood, as would be expected. However, the singular and plural forms are both used for commands directed to groups of soldiers. There seems to be some pattern in this usage; imperative verbs relating to unit tactical formation (*exi, intra, largi, iunge, stringe, dirige*) or individual redirection of front (*clina, transforma, muta, redi*) are in the singular form, while imperative verbs relating to ranks and files severally or collectively are in the plural (*servate, exite, revertete*). Some verbs relating to motion also seem to follow this pattern (*sequute, percute*). The imperative verbs used in this manual have been organized on this basis. In most cases, the verbs from the *Strategikon* are used as is. The plural verb *deponete* is used except for one movement where the singular is warranted. The verbs *sta/state* and *move/movete* are used in both forms, although they are probably interchangeable in most cases. In this handbook *sta* is used more in the sense of “stop” and *state* is used for “halt” or “stand fast”; *Move* has the meanings and uses of “move,” “incline,” or “march,” especially to the rear, flank or oblique; *Movete* is used for “forward by ranks” (in battle line) or “forward by files” (in column). Verbs related to turnings while marching are also plural: *clinate, transformate, transmutate*.

Initial Formations

There are descriptions in ancient sources of battle formations from two to thirty-two ranks, although the same sources advise against using these two extremes except in special circumstances. Formations of either four or eight ranks are often suggested therein for certain types of infantry:

- Asclepiodotus states that the medium infantry — soldiers armed with shorter spears — should be organized in files of eight (VI 2).
- Arrianus, in *Order of Battle Against the Alans*, describes the deployment of an army under his command in the Spring of 135 AD. Legio XV Apollinaris and Legio XII Fulminata are initially drawn up to a depth of four (5, 6); Legio XII is then put into a depth of eight in the “thick” formation on the left wing while Legio XV covers the center and right (15).
- Vegetius describes the training of soldiers to form up, resulting in a formation of four ranks (I -23).
- In the *Strategikon*, heavy infantry soldiers — those equipped with helmets, mail and large shields — are organized into files of eight, but forming them with a depth of four ranks is recommended, especially when the “troops get roused up to take offensive against the enemy” (XII A 7). An initial formation of the files in four ranks in open order is also recommended, with the observations that “this makes our battle line look more impressive to the enemy” and that it is quicker and safer to close and deepen ranks than it is to open and broaden them (XII B 17).

Based on the evidence cited, the suggested initial formation is four ranks in open order with files of eight, doubled in half files of four. Due to the inherent flexibility this arrangement, the Centuria may be quickly formed into two or eight ranks, if warranted.

Oblique Formations and Movements

It is apparent from the ancient works on tactics that oblique or diagonal formations were known, as evidenced by the passages below:

“In [an oblique front] formation one wing is drawn up close to the enemy and fights the contest, while the other is partly withdrawn and refused; it is called the right oblique when the right wing is advanced and the left oblique when the left wing is advanced.” — Asclepiodotus X 21

Gnaeus Scipio, when campaigning in Spain against Hanno, near the town of Indibile, noted that the Carthaginian line of battle was drawn up with the Spaniards posted on the right wing — sturdy soldiers, to be sure, but fighting for others — while on the left were the less powerful, but more resolute, Africans. He accordingly drew back his own left wing, and keeping his battle-line at an angle with the enemy, engaged the enemy with his right wing, which he had formed of his sturdiest soldiers. Then routing the Africans and putting them to flight, he easily forced the surrender of the Spaniards, who had stood apart after the manner of spectators. — Frontinus, *Strategematon*. II. III. 1

Whenever the doubly opened double phalanx [has] the leading edges touching each other, but the following ones standing apart, such a [formation] is called a wedge. Whenever the face-to-face double phalanx has the following edges touching, but the leading ones standing apart, such a [formation] is called a hollow wedge.
—Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 29

[T]hey make use of another [formation] called the pincers, resembling the letter V, composed of a body of men in close order. — Vegetius III 19

“The second and best disposition is the oblique. . . . It is as follows: as the armies are marching up to the attack, your left wing must be kept back at such a distance from the enemy's right as to be out of reach of their darts and arrows. Your right wing must advance obliquely upon the enemy's left, and begin the engagement.” — Vegetius III 20

The oblique front formation is also mentioned in *Peri Strategikes* 31 and Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 20; the hollow wedge is noted in the *Strategikon* XII B 7.

The existence of these formations implies the existence of a command to face obliquely to make marches to the front possible. This is further suggested by a sentence in Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 11: “Interlocking of shields [occurs] whenever you densify the phalanx to the extent that the formation no longer allows a continuous slant in either direction.”

Based on the evidence above, this handbook will use oblique facing commands to effect oblique formations.

Oblique movements by formations are implied or described in the *Strategikon*. Inclining is specifically mentioned in III 13-14 for moving reserve troops from the rear up to the flanks; oblique marching must have been used to bring formations to close order on the march, as mentioned in XII B 16. In XII B 20 there is an example given of four columns marching in a parallel formation through hostile territory, marching into a line to make a front on a flank to meet a threat. While this could be accomplished through 90° movements, it would be shorter and take less time using an oblique line of march.

Change of Front and *Depone*

“They change front to the right or the left when the commander wants to bring our battle line to the right or left to meet some emergency which might arise. The command for this is: “Change to the right, or the left.” [*Depone au dextra au senestra*] By one tagma at a time changing front, the whole line is quickly brought over to the designated front.” — Maurice, *Strategikon* XII B 16

The above passage from the *Strategikon* has caused some confusion over the use of the Latin command verb *depone* and the form of movement described. The movement has been interpreted to mean a simple wheeling. This in turn has raised suspicions that the word *depone* is corrupted Latin or a transcription error, since its main meaning is to “put down,” and it has no association with wheeling or rotating movements in its classical definition. However, the passage strongly suggests that the movement is more than a simple wheel by “one tagma at a time” performing it; this would not work unless the whole line wheeled at the same time.

An explanation of what change of front meant in this period is found in *Peri Strategikes*, written about 30 years prior to the *Strategikon*:

“Changing the front of the phalanx is a repositioning in one or more directions.

By directions I mean the front, the rear, the right, and the left. Before beginning our discussion of various ways of changing, we must first explain the reason for having the phalanx make such a change. The reason is this. Often enough when the army is marching along and the enemy are unable to launch a frontal assault on it, they will suddenly appear off to the right, at another time off to the left, and sometimes to the rear. Well aware of the damage that can result, the tacticians have devised certain methods to make it easy for one to change the front of the phalanx and thus guard all the rest of it against the approach of the enemy.

A phalanx can change its front in four ways: by individuals, by files, by ranks, by the entire unit. When it is by individuals, one man alone moves, while the others remain in place, and after the first has changed, then each of the soldiers does likewise. When it is by file, all remain in place, and only the first file moves, and after that then each of the others, and the same is done with the rank. When it is by the entire unit, the phalanx moves as a whole. The individual change of front is called a turning, that by file a countermarch, and the same for that by rank, and the one by the entire unit is a wheeling about.”

— Anonymous Byzantine author, *Peri Strategikes* 21

Thus a general command given to several military units to change front would be an order to line up in a different direction; each individual unit commander could use different change front commands to achieve this, whether it be facings, countermarches, wheels, or even combinations of these. In this sense the word *depone* is consistent with the movements, as one of its meanings is to “set up” or “place.”

Separate Latin command verbs exist in the *Strategikon* to change front by facings and certain forms of countermarches. It is apparent from another passage in the *Strategikon* that the command verb *depone* when given to a single unit meant two specific types of changes of front — wheelings and flank turns:

“To change front about to the left or to the right in an orderly manner, a necessary maneuver for the flank guards and the outflankers, the first command is: "To the left. Change front." [*Depone senestra*] If to the right: "To the right. Change front." [*Depone dextra*] And they change front. If only one bandon is involved, then that bandon changes front. But if there are several, then the one changes by itself, and the others conform to its movement.” — Maurice, *Strategikon* III 5

In a classic battle formation the flank guards would usually be deployed behind the left of the main battle line and outflankers behind the right, whether infantry or cavalry. Both units would be trained to deploy quickly from close order to open order or vice versa, as well as to turn to a flank quickly, either to outflank an enemy or prevent being outflanked. Changes of front in close order by unit are carried out by pivoting; in open order changes are by files in a sweeping motion where rank alignment is not maintained. For this the verb *depone* is perfectly suited to command a change of front to a flank.

In this handbook *depone* is used for change front by formation in close order; the singular imperative form corresponds with this. The plural imperative *deponete* is used to command a formation in open order to change front by files, which is consistent with usage of imperatives verbs elsewhere in the *Strategikon*.

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NOTES

¹ Stated in Vegetius II 8

² Stated in Polybius VI 24

³ Stated in Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 32

⁴ This rank is mentioned in Vegetius II 8.

⁵ A term in Greek with this approximate meaning is used several times in Asclepiodotus XII.

⁶ A term in Greek with this approximate meaning is used several times in Asclepiodotus XII.

⁷ This is calculated from the known length of the Roman mile, which was called in ancient times a Mille Passus — a thousand paces, hence, one thousandth of a Roman mile (which was slightly shorter than an English mile)

⁸ This is derived from the passage in De Re Militari describing the military step. (I.8-1) The obvious problem in calculating the steps per minute is the length of a Roman summer hour (the amount of daylight divided by 12). This would vary depending on date and latitude (a summer hour in Scotland on June 22 would be much longer than a summer hour in Egypt on September 20) and whether you consider twilight. If the longest days of summer in the middle latitudes of the European continent are used, the amount of daylight is about 16 modern hours. In Frankfurt, Germany in mid July there is a date when there are 16 hours between sunrise and sunset; the city of Rome has about 16 hours of daylight from mid-June to mid-July if civil twilight is included. The figures of 100 and 120 steps per minute are derived using 90 minutes for a Roman summer hour. Practical experience has shown that these step rates can be closely approximated and maintained without using modern timepieces.

⁹ This practice on a route march is suggested in Iosephus 3.115-126, although the centurion he refers to might be a Primus Pilus watching an entire Legion.

¹⁰ This is the recommended position for a commander during drill in the *Strategikon* XII B 11

¹¹ This is based on a description in the *Strategikon* XII B 9.

¹² A command in Greek with this approximate meaning is mentioned in Asclepiodotus XII 11

¹³ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16. *State* is used to command “halt,” but the word may also mean “stay in place.”

¹⁴ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 14

¹⁵ Adapted by inference from the order in the *Strategikon* XII B 14; a shortened form of *mandata captate*.

¹⁶ A command in Greek with this approximate meaning is in the drill command sequence in Asclepiodotus XII 11. In Vegetius I 19 *arma portandi* is used in reference to carrying arms.

¹⁷ Several depictions of marching legionaries on Trajan’s Column suggest this.

¹⁸ Commands in Greek for “spears up” and “spears down” are in the drill command sequence in Arrianus *Techne Taktika* 32. Demittite can mean drop, lower, or leave. In the *Strategikon* III 5 and XII B 14 forms of the verb *demittere* are used in the latter sense.

¹⁹ In the *Strategikon* III 5 and XII B 14 forms of the verb *demittere* are used to warn soldiers not to leave their standard. The implication is that once called to the standard it could only be left by order of a commander.

²⁰ The importance placed on maintaining aligned and ordered formations suggests that commands of this nature may have been needed or used.

²¹ *Move* is a Latin command word found in the *Strategikon* III 5 and XII B 16.

²² Based on command in the *Strategikon* XII B 16, *ad scuto*. Accusative case ending is used here to agree with preposition *ad* which would be more likely in 1st cent.

²³ *Sta* is a Latin command word found in the *Strategikon* III 5.

²⁴ The word *contum* is used here for spear in the accusative case, based on the command given in the *Strategikon* XII B 16, *ad conto*. There has been some suggestion that *conto* is a word of Byzantine origin, but it appears that this is a form of the classical Latin word *contus*. Cassell’s Latin Dictionary defines *contus* as either a pole, spear or pike. Its use dates to at least around 105 AD, as it appears in Tacitus in *Historiae* I.79. Arrianus uses the Greek form of the word, *kontos*, to describe the heavy javelin carried by the front ranks of Legio XII Fulminata in 135 A.D. (see Sander van Dorst’s translation and commentary)

- ²⁵ *Cede* is a Latin command word found in the *Strategikon* III 5, although in that usage for cavalry it has the alternate meaning of “fall back.” Marching “backward by the rank of file-closers” is mentioned in Asclepiodotus XI 1.
- ²⁶ Facing movements are described in Asclepiodotus, Aelianus, Arrianus, *Peri Strategikes*, and *Strategikon*. The directions for infantry for facing in all five works are translated as “to the spear” for facing to the right and “to the shield” for facing to the left.
- ²⁷ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16
- ²⁸ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16
- ²⁹ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16.
- ³⁰ In Aelianus XXV about faces are executed with two separate facings in sequence. Turning to the shield is used when the enemy threatens from the rear.
- ³¹ Adverbial form of *obliqua*, the word used by Vegetius to describe an oblique formation. (III 20)
- ³² Inferred from Latin command in the *Strategikon* XII B 16, *ad octo*. Reducing the number of ranks to two to allow passage through a narrow defile is stated later in XII B 20 .
- ³³ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16.
- ³⁴ Inferred from Latin command in the *Strategikon* XII B 16, *ad octo*. Reducing the number of ranks to four is mentioned later in the same passage..
- ³⁵ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16
- ³⁶ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16, although it was used with the command *intra* to reduce 16 ranks to eight.
- ³⁷ These commands are derived from a passage in Caesar’s *Bello Gallico* II 20: “Caesar had every thing to do at one time: the standard to be displayed, which was the sign when it was necessary to run to arms”
- ³⁸ A process for placing files to the left and right of the standard is described in the *Strategikon* XII B 11.
- ³⁹ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16
- ⁴⁰ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16
- ⁴¹ This general method is described in Asclepiodotus XII 9 and Aelianus XXXIII 2.
- ⁴² This is the verb indicated by the Latin commands *largiter ambula* (march openly) and *largia ad ambas partes* (open up to both sides) in the *Stratekigon*, and by the command *iunge* to go to close order.
- ⁴³ This general method is described in Asclepiodotus XII 9 and Aelianus XXXIII 3. The greater difficulties and length of time needed to go from close order to open order are noted in the *Strategikon* XII B 17.
- ⁴⁴ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* III 5 which is used to maneuver a cavalry formation, although the principle and command would be valid for an infantry formation.
- ⁴⁵ *Largia ad ambas partes* in the *Strategikon* XII B 16. The singular imperative form *largi* is used here; although when pronounced with *ad* as a command the words would assimilate and sound identical to *largia*.
- ⁴⁶ The singular imperative verb *move* appears in the *Strategikon* III 5 and XII B 16. See “Conventions and Commentary” herein for an explanation of the use of *movete*.
- ⁴⁷ This command is inferred from *ordinem servate* (keep the ranks) in the *Strategikon* XII B 14, and Vegetius I 9 where the importance of soldiers learning the *gradum militarem* is equated the utmost need to keep their ranks (*ordinem servent*). It is obvious that maintaining steps of even length at an even rate would be useful if not essential in maintaining a formation of even ranks and files.
- ⁴⁸ Vegetius in I 9 uses this noun for the quicker form of the military step.
- ⁴⁹ Commands to adjust rate of march do not appear in the *Strategikon*. However, Vegetius in I 9 describes the importance of teaching recruits the military step and describes two different rates of speed; this implies that commands to increase or decrease speed were needed and used. A command verb for increasing the step count is suggested in the passage by the words *ambulare celeriter* (to march quickly).
- ⁵⁰ This command does not appear in the *Strategikon*, but verb is suggested by the words *tardius procedit* in Caesar, *Bello Gallico*, VIII 16.

- ⁵¹ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16.
- ⁵² Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16. The singular imperative *sta* is also used in the *Strategikon* III 5.
- ⁵³ A turn is probably what is indicated for one of the columns deploying to the right and forming a new front from the flank in the *Strategikon* XII B 20. In *Peri Strategikes* 24, the countermarch by files into a new position is probably describing a change of front by a column turn.
- ⁵⁴ This command is adapted from the *Strategikon* XII B 14, where the word *bando* is used instead of *signum*. A *bandon* is a different type of standard that came into use in the later Roman period.
- ⁵⁵ Marching in a column of fours in open order in a relaxed way is recommended for longer distances in the *Strategikon* XII B 17.
- ⁵⁶ These movements and commands are based on a passage in the *Strategikon* XII B 16.
- ⁵⁷ Latin command verbatim from *Strategikon* XII B 12. There are three types of countermarch by files described in the ancient sources: the Macedonian, Laconian, and the choric or Cretan. (Asclepiodotus X 15; Aelianus XXVIII, and *Peri Strategikes* 24). The choric countermarch is used here as it keeps the formation in its own space, which seems to be indicated by the meaning of the command.
- ⁵⁸ It is noted in the *Strategikon* XII B 16 that “iunge” may be performed while marching or standing still by closing in toward the center. The use of oblique movements with inclining is strongly suggested for carrying this evolution while marching.
- ⁵⁹ These command words appear in the *Strategikon* but not in this combination. The movement itself would be necessary for sideways adjustments in extremely close order when shields overlap and interlock “to the extent that the formation no longer allows a continuous slant in either direction.” (Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 11) Even in the normal close interval, inclining would be called for when in missile range of the enemy, especially for left flank guards, as oblique marching to the shield would expose the files to fire.
- ⁶⁰ This method is described in the *Strategikon* XII B 11.
- ⁶¹ This method is described in detail in Asclepiodotus XII 2-4 and Aelianus XXXII.
- ⁶² Different changes of front by formation are mentioned at length in Asclepiodotus X 1-12. Almost identical descriptions appear in Aelianus XXXII. The *Peri Strategikes* 23 references “the ancient authors” to describe this movement, and proceeds with a description that is very close to passages in Asclepiodotus. None of the descriptions give any suggestion as to methods of maintaining cover and alignment.
- ⁶³ The passages in Asclepiodotus X 1-12, Aelianus XXXII, and the *Peri Strategikes* 23 describe changes of front by formation in terms of quarter-turns (90° increments).
- ⁶⁴ Extending in one direction is a command found in the summary in the *Strategikon* XII B 24.
- ⁶⁵ This movement is part of a tactic described in Asclepiodotus X 18, Aelianus L., Arrianus, *Techne Taktika* 29, and Frontinus II.III-10 which is used to outflank an enemy line: a formation is extended from close order to open order to increase the frontage, or a unit in open order is moved to the flanks, and the overlapping unit or one wing of a unit sets about to the left or right to attack the enemy’s flank. In the *Strategikon* III 5 the *depone* movement is described as “a necessary maneuver for the flank guards and the outflankers,” which are the bodies of troops that would most often need change the front of the formation in open order, whether cavalry, infantry, or mixed forces.
- ⁶⁶ This word and the practice of teaching the holding of the shield obliquely to deflect missiles is derived from the passage in Vegetius I 4: *tractare scutum et obliquis ictibus uenientia tela deflectere*; and Onasander XX in which the rear ranks of heavy infantry carry their shields above their heads when advancing within bowshot of the enemy. The practice of the rear ranks raising their shields above their heads to protect themselves and the men in front is described in *Strategikon* XII B 12 as part of the *undique servate* and *ad fulkon* formations.
- ⁶⁷ Latin command word verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16. It is not clear if this is a variation of the plural imperative *parate*, or one of the forms of *parati* which relate to being ready or prepared is intended. Holding the pilum at the ready for thrusting purposes is described in *Ektacis kata Alanoon*,
- ⁶⁸ Conjugates of the Latin verb *mittere* are almost always used when throwing of *pila* occurs in the works of Caesar and the *incerte auctores*. (*Bello Gallico* I 25; II 23, 27; V 44; VI 8; VII 88. *Bello Civilis* III 93. *Bello Africo* 16. *Bello Hispaniensi* 16) Forms of the verb *iacere* are mostly used when *tela* are launched. (*Bello Gallico* II 33. *Bello Civilis* I 50, III 63, 86. *Bello Hispaniensi* 9, 11, 12, 16)

⁶⁹ This is attested in *Bello Civilis* III 93: "...and after a short respite they again renewed their course, and threw their javelins, and instantly drew their swords, as Caesar had ordered them." Phrases in the *Strategikon* XII B 7 and XII B 12 are evidence that this was a standard practice.

⁷⁰ Based on the command *undique servate* in the *Strategikon* XII B 16 where *servate* has the meaning of "guard." An incomplete openwork military belt plate dating from the 2nd Cent in the shape of the letters "SERV" hints that some form of the verb *servare* was significant to the common Miles (Chapman, 127, Sr21).

⁷¹ This is attested in *Bello Gallico* I 52: "Accordingly our men, upon the signal being given, vigorously made an attack upon the enemy, and the enemy so suddenly and rapidly rushed forward, that there was no time for casting the javelins at them. Throwing aside [therefore] their javelins, they fought with swords hand to hand;" and in VII 88, "Our troops, laying aside their javelins, carry on the engagement with their swords."

⁷² Cassel's Latin Dictionary definition of *destringere* notes "esp. to draw or bare the sword." Caesar and Hirtius use forms of this verb with *gladii*: *gladiis destrictis* (*Bello Gallico* I-25, VII 12 and *Bello Civilis* I 46); *gladii destricti essent* (*Bello Gallico* VIII 23); and *gladiosque destringunt* *Bello Civilis* I 75

⁷³ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* III 5.

⁷⁴ This verb is suggested by Cicero in *de Inventione* II 14: *gladium cruentum in vaginam recondidit*

⁷⁵ Latin command verbatim from the *Strategikon* XII B 16. The formation is modified from the original description which has the rear ranks facing to the rear without concern for the flanks (i.e. in both directions), which would be normal for a unit in line that had other units covering its flanks. A unit set apart from the main formation would need to protect its flanks, i.e. in all directions. The word *undique* can mean either "both" or "all." Furthermore, there is a drawing accompanying *Strategikon* XII A 7 that shows a small infantry rearguard formation facing in all directions. Onasander provides evidence that this formation was standard practice in the 1st Cent. AD when he recommends practicing a "battle formation facing in two directions, when the rear guard turns to fight an encircling enemy" (X 2). Arrianus in *Techne Taktiki* 11 said that a tortoise or "little brick" formation could be square, rounded, oblong, circular or "whatever is convenient," with some (milites) placing their oblong shields in front of them, and others lifting them over their heads.

⁷⁶ Adapted from the command *Ad Fulkon* in the *Strategikon*. A fulkon is a late-Roman/Byzantine formation with locked shields, in some ways similar to the Testudo of the Imperial and Imperial period.

⁷⁷ Caesar's phrase in *Bello Gallico* VII 85, *alii testudine facta subeunt*, indicates that the testudo was not just a stationary defensive formation. How a testudo moved is not precisely known from ancient sources.

⁷⁸ See "Oblique Formations and Movements" under Conventions and Commentary herein.

⁷⁹ Ancient sources on tactics and military history refer to special troops assigned to the vanguard, as flank guards or as outflankers. In some cases these were lightly equipped infantry attached to a larger heavy infantry unit. In Roman instances they may also have been the better soldiers, or whole centuries or cohorts, specially picked out for these tasks.

⁸⁰ Latin command based on *Strategikon* III 5 where the verb is in the imperative singular to command a whole unit to march about. The plural form used corresponds with the movement by files. The evolution here is similar to the Laconian countermarch, which is preferred by the ancient authors more than the other forms because it advances toward the enemy.

⁸¹ There is an indication Frontinus thought this was so. In II.III-10 of his *Strategematon* he relates that in the battle against the Romans under Regulus (255 B.C.) the Spartan mercenary general Xanthippus, placed his light-armed troops in front of the main battle line and then ordered them to throw their javelins, withdraw within the ranks of the reserve line, hurry to the flanks, and then rush forward to envelop the opposing line. In the next passage (I.III-11, he claims that Sertorius employed the same tactics against Pompey (77 B.C.). Even if Frontinus is not historically accurate, the evolutions he depicts are described in Asclepiodotus VI.1 and X.17.

⁸² In this period the Greek word *phalangi* or the Latin *phalanx* could be applied to any formation of infantry drawn up in a battle array, not just Macedonian hoplites. Caesar uses Latin declensions of the word in *Bello Gallico* even when referring to Helvetii on foot (I 24), and German formations (I 52). Arrianus uses the Greek *phalangi* for Legio V and XII (*Ektacis kata Alanoon*).

⁸³ Dahm, M.K. "The Career and Writings of Sextus Julius Frontinus" at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Frontinus/MKDahm*/body.html

⁸⁴ *Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander*, p. 236. Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

⁸⁵ Aelianus says so himself in his first chapter.

⁸⁶ Various scholars have argue that the sections in which these two references are found can be attributed to Frontinus. See Dahm., *Ibid.*, Appendix II

⁸⁷ Dahm, op. cit.

⁸⁸ Milner, N.P. *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*. Translation with notes and introduction by N.P. Milner. Pp. 9-10
Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2001.

⁸⁹ Milner, *ibid.*, xxv

⁹⁰ Milner, *ibid.*, xxiii

⁹¹ McCormick, 156