

ROMAN HELMETS AND THE HELMET OF SALVATION

All armies in every time period have developed and used distinctive helmets to give protection for the head, the center of thought and decision making. Various types of Roman helmets were available to first century Roman soldiers.

Several things made first century Roman helmets distinctively different from earlier helmets. One innovation was the larger tail-piece covering the back of the neck and shoulders. Earlier Roman helmets were much like modern military helmets, protecting only the head. Some had the appearance of a jockey's cap worn with the bill to the rear. By the first century, Roman military helmets had developed a tail-piece which offered good protection from arrows shot high into the air with the intent of vertically piercing the neck opening on body armor. The tail-piece prevented arrows from doing that as well as protecting from a rear attack and injury to the back of the neck. When the soldier would hunker down the tail-piece would ride just above the armor on the shoulders making it virtually impossible to deliver a blow to the neck from the back.



Another innovation was the hinged cheek-piece just in front of the ears. This piece with its cut-out areas for the eyes, ears, and mouth would be drawn tight against the face by leather thongs attached to the under side of the tail piece, then crossed under the chin and through loops on the cheek pieces. It would be virtually impossible to remove the helmet unless the wearer approved. Because of the shape of the cheek pieces, they would offer good protection against a sword slash to the entire face.

Most first century helmets also had ear guards that protected the ears from blows as well as acting like mini amplifiers to catch sound more easily. After all, if you can't hear your commander or the battle commands your effectiveness is greatly reduced.

An appliance which looks like a short visor/bill on the brow of the helmet is not to shield the eyes from the sun. The function of the 1 to 2 inch wide piece - in combination with the cheek-pieces - is to keep sword slashes off the face.

Helmets also provided unit and rank identification. Centurions—commanders over 100 troops - wore distinctive crests from ear to ear; transverse. One glance would tell you what their unit was because of the colors and style of the crest; it also showed command position. Centurions who were commanders over ten other Centurions – or over 1000 troops—wore their crest from front to back.

Crests were made of horse tail strands like a brush or of feathers. The decorative crests stood about 10 inches above the helmet thus adding to the visual height of the wearer as a psychological warfare element.

In lieu of crests, soldiers would often wear a horse-tail, pony tail type bundle or a cloth bundle as a decoration on the top of their helmet. A few helmets had side mounted tubes into which soldiers could place a single feather or a small bunch of feathers for decoration.

Helmets could range from the very plain to the very ornate. The basic New Testament period helmet was made from a single iron sheet of metal which had been heated and pounded into shape over a wooden last. The tail piece and helmet bowl were one piece. Bronze decorative trim was added to enhance the beauty and strength of the helmet.

Roman soldiers were proud of their helmets and armor since they were status symbols among the troops and certainly among the civilian population.

Wearing a helmet would be uncomfortable without underlying padding that added comfort and fit to the helmet as well as absorbing blows to the head/helm. Padding could be either in the form of a knit cap or a heavy, padded cloth hat. Often sheepskin was glued into the helmet and onto the cheek pieces for padding; this would be easier to maintain than a separate cap or padding hat.

The only vulnerable head blows to a soldier wearing a helmet would be a sword thrust directly to the mouth, into the ear, or into the eyes. Slashing or diagonal sword blows would be warded off by the helmet's construction and design.



www.biblefaces.com

E-mail: dickardis@comcast.net

Phone: 970-667-0866