



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 55, the Roman Shield (Scutum)

(Wikipedia)

The Scutum was a type of shield used by the army of ancient Rome starting about the fourth century BC. The Romans adopted it when they switched from the military formation of the Greeks phalanx to the maniples formation. In the former, the soldiers carried a round shield, which the Romans called a Clipeus. In the latter, they used the Scutum, which was a larger semi cylindrical and rectangular shield.

### **Structure**

The Scutum was a 10-kilogram large rectangle curved shield made from three sheets of wood glued together and covered with canvas and leather, usually with a spindle shaped shield boss (umbo) along the vertical length of the shield. The convex surface of the Scutum measures around 45 cm in width and around 1.20 m in length, the thickness at the rim being a palm's breadth.

### **History**

The Greek hoplites (citizen-soldiers of Ancient Greek city-states) phalanxes were heavy infantrymen who originally wore bronze shields and helmets. The phalanx was a compact, rectangular mass military formation. The soldiers lined up in very tight ranks in a formation which was eight lines deep. The phalanx advanced in unison, which encouraged cohesion among the troops. It formed a shield wall and a mass of spears pointing towards the enemy. Its compactness provided a thrusting force which had a great impact on the enemy and made frontal assaults against it very difficult. However, it worked only if the soldiers kept the formation tight and had the discipline needed to keep its compactness in the battle. It was a rigid form of fighting and its manoeuvrability was limited. The small shields provided less protection and their round shape enabled the soldiers to interlock them to hold the line together.

Sometime in the early fourth century BC, the Romans changed their military tactics from the hoplite phalanx to the manipule formation, which was much more flexible. This involved a change in military equipment. The Scutum replaced the Clipeus.

By the end of the 3rd century the convex classic rectangular Scutum seems to have disappeared. Fourth century archaeological finds especially from the fortress of Dura-Europos (ancient city on the Euphrates River) indicate the subsequent use of oval or round shields which were not semi-cylindrical but were either dished (bowl-shaped) or flat.

All troops except archers adopted large, wide, usually dished, ovoid (or sometimes round) shields. These shields were still called Scuta or Clipei, despite the difference in shape. Shields, from examples found at the fortress of Dura-Europos and Nydam, were of vertical plank construction, the planks glued, and mostly faced inside and out with painted leather. The edges of the shield were bound with stitched rawhide, which shrank as it dried improving structural cohesion.

### **Advantages and disadvantages**

The Scutum was light enough to be held in one hand and its large height and width covered the entire wielder, making him very unlikely to get hit by missile fire and in hand-to-hand combat. The metal boss, or Umbo, in the centre of the Scutum also made it an auxiliary punching weapon. Its composite construction meant that early versions of the Scutum could

fail from a heavy cutting or piercing blow, which was experienced in the Roman campaigns against Carthage and Dacia where the Falcate sword and Falx (curved blade sword) could easily penetrate and rip through it. The effects of these weapons prompted design changes that made the Scutum more resilient such as thicker planks and metal edges.

The Aspis, which it replaced, was heavier and provided less protective coverage than the Scutum but was much more durable.



Military formation of the Greeks phalanx



Roman Tortoise (testudo) formation



Scutum



Clipeus Cavalry



3<sup>rd</sup> AD Clipeus