

Roman centurion

A centurion was in command of a unit of 80 to 100 men (Latin centum = hundred) within a legion of the Roman army. His rank is comparable to an officer today, but it was not a uniform rank. The rank of a centurion depended on the position his hundred held within the legion. Centurions could come from the rank of Roman citizens; only higher ranks required membership of the knighthood or senatorial rank. The pay of a centurion was about twenty times that of a legionary, and he was not dismissed after his term of service. He often remained with the army until his death.

Centurions were considered the backbone of the Roman army. They stood for discipline, order and bravery, and were responsible for training and equipping the legionaries in their hundred-man units. A centurion had the right to award or punish his legionaries. He had his own room in the quarters, his own tent, his own horse and his own beast of burden.

His equipment was also different from that of an ordinary legionary. The wearing of metal greaves was reserved for centurions and other high-ranking members of the army, which also had to do with the high purchase costs. The centurion wore a movable splint armour made of metal splints and leather straps, decorated with medals in the front. The centurion carried his sword on his left side. The helmet was decorated with a conspicuous helmet bush, usually coloured red. The helmet bush was made of horsehair or feathers and was worn across the helmet in battle. In this way, the legionaries could easily and quickly recognise their commander during a battle. As the best soldier, the centurion was always in the front line. The army was so powerful that the Romans could conquer a world empire.