

Machaira: 1st Century Colt .45; Sell Your Coat, Buy a Sword!

The Machaira: 1st Century Colt .45

Many kinds of swords existed in the ancient world; the earlier ones made of bronze but by the first century the Romans had developed ones of highly-tempered iron.

The sword was considered the choice weapon for close combat. One of the most impressive types of swords was the *rhomphaia*, a broadsword of antiquity which often approached six feet in length.

The *rhomphaia* was originally developed by the Thracians, a fierce people who lived in the Balkan Mountains west of the Black Sea and north of the Aegean. They were of Indo-European stock and language and considered by the Greeks and the Romans as superior fighters. Both sought these Thracian soldiers as mercenaries.

In their battles with the Barbarians, the Romans encountered soldiers of gigantic stature, some of them almost seven feet tall. On the other hand, the average Roman infantryman was about 5'7".

The preferred weapon of these Barbarians was the *rhomphaia* which was employed in battle with a downward hacking blow. It had one sharp cutting edge and a double handle.

Because of the cumbersome size and weight of the *rhomphaia* the Barbarian soldier's right arm and side became temporarily exposed during the backstroke. Further, after having struck a blow the momentum caused him to be thrown temporarily off balance.

The Romans picked up on this and developed weaponry to take advantage of it. The result revolutionized close combat of the day and gave the smaller Romans the advantage on the battlefield.

The Barbarians' *rhomphaia* was made of bronze, and when made of iron was of inferior quality because of their ignorance of how to temper metals. As a result, their blades were brittle and easily dulled.

On the other hand, the Romans had perfected the tempering of iron and used this superior metal in their swords. However, they were too long for the soldier to take advantage of the precious moments afforded him whenever the Barbarian soldier slashed away with his broadsword.

Coming out of this was an ingenious invention which enabled the smaller Romans to use a superior weapon with maximum efficiency. They called it the *machaira*. It was perfectly balanced with a blade of only 18 inches in length. It had two cutting edges instead of one and it tapered off to a sharp point. Made out of highly tempered iron, the edges were keen, tough, and very maneuverable.

The Roman soldier was never off balance. They were trained to take advantage of the Barbarians whenever they exposed their sides during their backstrokes or while off balance following a sweeping downward slash.

With their shorter weapon, the Romans learned to cut and thrust at their enemies' exposed bodies as they protected themselves from the blows of the *rhomphaia* with their shields. Once the Barbarian committed, the Roman used his quickness to thrust the shorter *machaira* home.

The Roman soldier may have been far smaller than the Barbarian giant he faced. But because he was using less energy with a shorter, balanced weapon he not only disposed of his enemies with great efficiency, he was able to last longer in the battle before fatigue set in. As a result, the *machaira* enabled the Roman Army to become dominant on the battlefield.

In order to master this new light-weight weapon, the Roman soldier spent hours in training until the *machaira* became an extension of his wrist. To learn how to cut and thrust in short, quick movements they had to develop agility in both elbow and shoulder combined with expert footwork.

All this took time and discipline but resulted in building the Roman Army into the force that protected the Empire for half a millennium. It became understood that one well-trained Roman soldier was worth twenty-five to fifty Barbarians in battle. The *machaira* became the key piece of weaponry which served to give the battlefield advantage over to the smaller Romans against these giant warriors from the north.

The Roman soldier stood his ground in combat, was rarely thrown off balance, and his maneuverability was phenomenal. Thus, the once arrogant Barbarians quickly learned well the lesson that size in either man or weapon does not necessarily guarantee an advantage.

This principle was recognized by 4th-century AD Roman military expert Flavius Vegetius who observed in his famous work, *The Military Institutions of the Romans*, that victory is not determined either by numbers or mere courage but rather, by skill and discipline. Roman conquest of the world was the result of continual training in the art of war and exact enforcement of discipline. The Roman armies, with their inconsiderable numbers, successfully opposed numerically superior armies. Thus, it was that a handful of men, conditioned to war, could march to certain victory, while their opponents, raw and undisciplined, were “*but masses of men dragged to their slaughter.*”

Between 1899 and 1902, the United States was involved in a Filipino uprising known as the Philippine Insurrection. The Treaty of Paris signed in 1898 transferred Philippine sovereignty from Spain to the United States but was not recognized by Filipino leaders whose troops were in control of the entire archipelago except the capital city of Manila.

Although an end to the insurrection was declared in 1902, sporadic fighting continued for several years thereafter. About 1,000 guerrillas under Simeón Ola were not defeated until late 1903, and in Batangas province, troops commanded by Macario Sakay resisted capture until as late as 1906.

During this time the U.S. military had a difficult time defending themselves against the guerrillas, especially the Moros on the island of Mindanao. The problem these people presented our soldiers resulted in the development of a new weapon which is still the ultimate sidearm available today. We get a summary from:

Johnson, Gary P. “The M1911's Uncle: Colt's 'Model 1907.’” *American Rifleman*. Feb. 1997, pp. 44-45:

In 1892, the U.S. military began a change from an issue sidearm chambered for the .45 Colt cartridge to one in cal.

.38 Colt. Almost from the start there were complaints of the lack of stopping power from the .38 cal. round, especially during the Philippine Insurrection, where fierce Moro warriors were unimpressed with the .38. Under the influence of opium, some Moros were able to take many .38 cal. hits with little more effect than being temporarily slowed.

In 1904, it was concluded that the minimum caliber necessary to provide adequate stopping power was .45. Somewhat reluctantly, the military began searching for a new .45 cal. cartridge to work in the Browning/Colt self-loading pistols it was then testing.

John Browning was requested to convert the Model 1902 Military .38 pistol to handle the new .45 Rimless Smokeless cartridge being developed by Colt and Winchester. The successful completion and testing of this conversion led to the Model 1905 Colt .45.

In 1907, after conducting a number of tests of the Model 1905 in several configurations, the U.S. government ordered 200 of the pistols with features desired by the military.

On March 20, 1908, 65 of these pistols were issued to Troop K, 10th Cavalry, Fort William McKinley, the Philippines.

Although this article doesn't point it out, it was learned that one .45 cal. cartridge was sufficient to stop opium-crazed Moros whereas the .38s were not. This is an early twentieth-century illustration of how the Romans' *machaira* proved to be superior to the Barbarians' *rhomphaia*.

As the Lord was about to exit this earth and turn the revelation of Plan B over to the apostles, He reissued them their right to keep and bear arms. When He did so He upgraded their weaponry from the long and cumbersome staff to the short and maneuverable double-edged sword of the Roman army. Consequently, as the apostles moved about the country communicating the Gospel from city to city, it might be said that they were "waltzing *machaira*."

CTL: But He said to them, "But now, let the one who has a swag, take it, and also his tucker-bag, and let the one who does not own a machaira ..."

If any of the apostles lacked a means of personal protection for the journey, he is commanded to execute a two-step procedure to rectify the deficiency: first, sell your coat, and two, buy a sword.

The third imperative mood comes up next in the aorist active imperative of the verb: *poleo* - "sell." This is a mandate to enter into a contract, that is, to engage in Charles Murray's second libertarian principle of governance: a voluntary and informed transaction. What they are to sell is mentioned next, the accusative singular of the noun: *himation* - "Cloak [NIV]; outer garment [KJV]; robe [NAS]." For reasons we will note in a moment, we are going to translate it with the word "coat."

The *himation* was a large square piece of cloth like a modern shawl, which could be wrapped around the person.

It was fashioned to fit as a loose robe covering the inner garment called the *chiton*, what might best be described in our vernacular as a cassock.

Former Catholics among us are familiar with the dress-like garment that priests wear. Their cassocks hang down to the ankles but the *chiton* varied in length between from just below the knees to the ankles.

In most cases the *himation* was made of wool but sometimes linen was used instead.

This "outer garment" was frequently used by the poor and by the traveler as his only covering at night. This helps us understand the following mandate in the Mosaic Law:

Exodus 22:26 - If you ever take your neighbor's cloak [*simlâh*: equiv. to Greek *himation*] as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets,

Exodus 22:27 - for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in?

It is apparent that for a person traveling on foot and with no predetermined place to spend the night, this outer garment would be a necessity. You wouldn't begin such a trip without taking a coat and that's the way we'll translate *himation* here.

Now we have seen enough parallel passages and learned enough vocabulary to draw up an inventory of items customarily worn by first-century travelers when taking road trips.

According to Matthew 10:9, Matthew 10:10, Luke 9:3, Luke 10:4, and Luke 22:35 we can document the following list of items not to be taken along by the disciples:

1. No money: Matthew 10:9; Luke 9:4.
2. No swag or *ballantion* for money: Matthew 10:9; Luke 9:3; Luke 10:4; Luke 22:35.
3. No tucker-bag or *pera* for food: Matthew 10:10; Luke 9:3; Luke 10:4; Luke 22:35.
4. No inner garment, the *chiton* or cassock: Matthew 10:10; Luke 9:3.
5. No sandals or *hupodema*: Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:4; Luke 22:35.

NOTE: The disciples and seventy were obviously permitted to wear normal attire including the sandals on their feet. But they were to take no changes of clothing, thus no matilda.

6. No staff or *rhabdos* for personal defense: Matthew 10:10. The coat, or *himation* was considered standard dress and was thus not among the prohibited items.

Luke 22:36, where the Lord issues His new policy for travel accessories, is where the coat is first mentioned. And it is used to emphasize the importance of personal defense.

The Lord instructs them:

“But now, let the one who has a swag, take it, and also his tucker-bag, and let the one who does not own a *machaira* sell his *himation*, his coat...”

This is serious! The Mosaic Law specifically protected a man’s *himation* because it was considered an essential garment.

Even if it had been placed as collateral for a loan, the creditor must return it before evening to its owner, otherwise, “*What else shall he sleep in?*” asks Exodus 22:27.

The Lord drives home the importance of having a weapon for personal defense by telling his apostles if they didn’t own a *machaira* to sell their *himation* and buy one, the aorist active imperative of the verb: *agorazo* - “to buy.”

aorist: Indicates action which has not yet started but is commanded to occur at the next opportunity as a matter of policy.

active: The one who owns a coat is to produce the action after selling his coat by then buying a sword.

imperative: Command; Jesus Christ issues a direct positive mandate: disciples who own coats should as a matter of policy sell them if necessary, in order to obtain a sword.