

Late Republican Roman *Pilum*

Artefact Description:

Upper part of a bronze Roman *Pilum* (of the Talamonaccio type?). The object has a trapezoid shaped body with a diamond section and a triangle relief on each side. Sides are unequal and the relief shows better on one side. The object also has two barbs (10 mm long) on the lower part of each side. Only some 22 mm of the shaft are preserved, of round section. The tip is broken in antiquity and was not found.



Find Location and Circumstances:

The artefact was found during the excavation work within the international Archaeology Fieldschool organized by the Ecomuseum de Cap de Cavalleria. The exact location was Sector 11, stratigraphic unit 322, and with an approximate chronology between 123 and 50 BC, in the area defined as the Roman military fortress.

Find Date: September 23, 2004.
Material: Bronze
Inventory Number: STE04-322-33
Chronology: 2nd century BC.
Measurements: 56 mm x 23 mm x 12 mm
Condition: Excellent.

Pieces of Reference:

Pila of Ephya, Greece (Les armes des romains, page 100).
Possible *pilum* of Iruña, Basque Country (Estudios de arqueología alavesa, Issue 17, pages 154, 155).
Pila of Castellruf, Catalonia (Lauro, revista del museo de Granollers, Issue 18, pages 9-14).
Pila of Smihel, Slovenia (L'équipement militaire et l'armement de la République, pages 43, 45).
Pila of Entremont, France (Les armes des romains, page 100).
Pila of Les Pennes, France (Les armes des romains, page 100).

Consulted Experts:

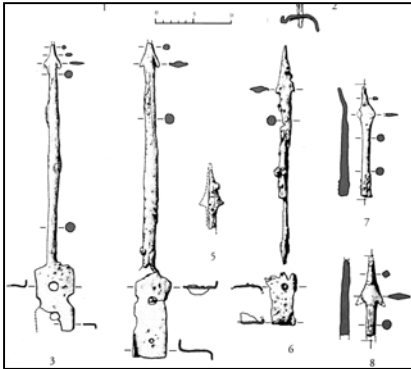
Dr. Eberhard Sauer, Universidad de Edimburgo (Reino Unido).
Dr. Víctor Guerrero Ayuso, Universitat de Illes Balears.
Mr. Simón Gornés Hachero, Universitat de Illes Balears.
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September 29, 2004



The Roman *Pilum*

The *pilum* was a throwing weapon introduced in the Roman army with the deep structural and equipment changes in the Roman military started at the end of the 5th century BC. The development of the *pilum* (together with the introduction of the *scutum* and the evolution of the *gladius*) contributed to the change in the Roman way of making war, as in this time the use of the Greek phalanx was abandoned to adopt a more flexible manner and the use of clearly offensive weaponry.



Pila of Castellruf, from the 3rd century BC. (Phot: Lauro, revista del museo de Granollers)

Originally, the *pilum* was a weapon carried by the *hastati* and the *principes*, more experienced and better armed units than other in the legions. In time, and especially as we get closer to the imperial time, the *pilum* became one of the standard weapons of the Roman legionaries (although not usually carried by the *auxilarii*, non Italian troops that fought along the Romans).

In the beginning, the legionaries armed with the *pila* (*hastati* and *principes*) were grouped in units of 120 soldiers, a relevant piece of information for future calculations on the garrison at the Sanisera Roman Fort, although at the time of the Roman occupation of the island (123 BC), the situation was not exactly the same, and the weapon was more equally distributed among the diverse unit types, while, at the same time, rigid lines between the military categories was getting more and more relaxed.

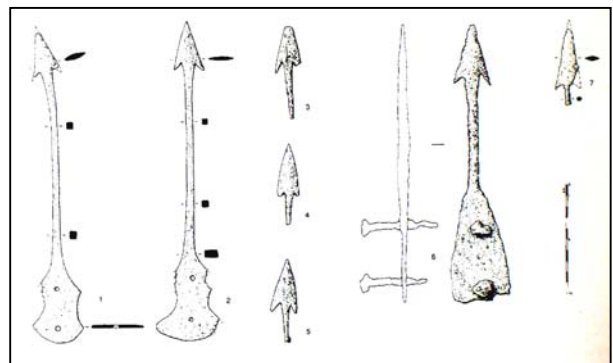
The way the *pilum* was used is of interest. This weapon was a type of javalin that the legionaries would throw as a previous action to the hand to hand fight. Oftentimes, the throwing of the *pila* did not only attempt to reach the enemy's body, but to render the shield and other defensive elements useless. In this way, the fighter would be exposed in the subsequent direct fight.

The *pilum* was unique in many ways. When thrown and on reaching the target, the upper part of the *pilum* would break away from the lower part, to which it was attached in different ways. In this manner, the rain of *pila* would not be used by the enemy to gain weapons that then would be used against the Roman soldiers.

To date, there are no other examples of *pila* in the Balearics that we are aware of, what makes this artefact a unique Late Republican Roman *pilum*, pending future research, and would confirm the presence of Roman military garrisons in Sanisera harbour.



Roman legionaire from the Late Republican era with a pilum. (Photo: Osprey publishing)



Pila from Ephyra, Entremont, and Les Pennes from the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. (Photo: Les armes des romains, by Michel Feugere)

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