# Roman military commands

Commands developed and used during demonstrations by Legio XXI Rapax, based on various historical sources, with particular emphasis on the requirements of a century-sized formation.


- Infantry Commands of Legio XXI Rapax
- Commands for BALLISTARII, SAGITTARII et FVNDITORES

# Infantry Commands of Legio XXI Rapax

# General information

Below we present selected Roman commands in Latin, used by Legio XXI Rapax both during drill and during the execution of other camp duties, as well as when carrying out actions in combat and on the ***Campvs Martivs.***

The commands have been grouped by category and may be used in any situation, depending on the commander's decision. For example, an officer may order the soldiers to sing both on the march and in camp, while turns may be performed while standing in formation at assembly, as well as during a march.

> It is worth noting here that, when reconstructing a legion from the 1st century AD, we try to pronounce words as they were pronounced at that time. For this purpose, we use the principles of the pronunciation of so-called restored Latin (*latina restitvta*). Therefore, during our conversations you are more likely to hear: kenturio, salłe, and kajsar... rather than centurio, salwe, and cezar. Learning the rules of pronunciation will make it easier to read the Latin expressions below correctly.

# Commands

## ASSEMBLY

**Milites! Ad arma!** - Soldiers! To arms! Alarm!
**Signifer veni** - Standard-bearer, present yourself
**Ad signvm / Ad signa venite** - Come to the standard / to the standards; Assembly!
**Avdite me** - Listen to me
**Silentivm!** - Silence!
**State** - Attention
**Laxate** - Stand at ease
**Envmerate** - Count off
**Ad dvos / tres nvmerate** - Count off by twos / threes
**Enominate** - Give your names
**Adsvm** - Present
**Acies** - Line, battle formation

**Vnvs ordo** - One rank
**Dvo / tres ordines formate**- Form two / three ranks
**Primvs / secvndvs / novissimvs ordo** - First / second / last rank
**Agmen** - Marching column
**Dvos / tres agmina formate**- Form two / three columns
**Vnvs / dvo / tres passvs (gradvs) procedite** - Advance one / two / three double steps (single steps)
**Qvattvor / qvinqve / sex passvs (gradvs) recidite** - Move back four, five, six double steps (single steps)
**Salvtate** - Salute
**Spectate ad frontem** - Look straight ahead
**Spectate ad dextram / sinistram** - Look to the right / left
**Dirigite** - Align yourselves
**Dirigite ad dextram / sinistram** - Align to the right / left
**Arma (scvta / pila) svrsvm / deorsvm** - Weapons (shields / javelins) up / down
**Arma (scvta / pila) deponite / svmite** - Put down / pick up weapons (shields / javelins)
**Abite** - Dismiss
**Silentivm** - silence!

## ON THE MARCH AND IN COMBAT

**In aeqvatis passibvs / Sine passvs pergite** - March in step / march without step
**Ad dextram / sinistram vertite** - turn right / left
**Convertite** - Turn around
**Dvplicate** - Double the formation
**In acie ad dextram / sinistram pergite** - Move [rotate] in formation to the right / left
**In agmine ad dextram / sinistram vertite** - Turn the column right / left
**Ad signvm ad dextram / sinistram pergite** - Follow the standard to the right / left
**Ad Optionem / Centvrionem pergite** - Follow the Optio / Centvrio
**In loco calcate** - March in place
**Recta** - Straight ahead
**Consistite** - Halt
**Conglobate / Densate** - Close up
**In agmine / ordinibvs laxate** - Loosen the column / ranks
**In agmine / ordinibvs densate** - Close up the column / ranks
**Sine principalibvs pergite** - March without the officers
**Transite** - “Pass through each other”;
*description of the manoeuvre:* the left wing turns 90 degrees to the right, and the right wing turns 90 degrees to the left, and they pass through each other through the gaps between the columns.
**Mvta locvm** - Change place; *descriptively:* a 180-degree change in the direction of march of the formation; each soldier individually follows his own column,
**In duas partes separate** - “Divide into two parts”;
*description of the manoeuvre:* the right and left sides of the formation from the Principales operate separately as two distinct units, each having its own assigned commanders directing their actions in the further part of the demonstration until the centvria is reunited.
**Gladios stringite** - Draw swords

**Gladios recondite** - Sheathe swords
**Pila praeparate** - Prepare javelins [for throwing]
**Pila iacite** - Throw javelins
**Pila infigite** - Drive the javelins into the ground
**Retro** - Repeat; *descriptively:* return to the previous position
**Cvrrite** - At the run
**Accelerate** - Speed up
**Tardate** - Slow down
**Pvgna! Praeparate!** - To arms! Prepare yourselves!
**Porro!** - Attack! [charge in formation]!

## FORMATIONS

**Testvdinem formate / deformate** - Form / break the tortoise formation
**Cvnevm formate** - Form a wedge
**Orbem formate** - Form a circular formation
**Pontem formate** - Form a ramp
**Ad orbem!** - To the circle!
**Scvta castrorvm formate** - Shield wall

## IN CAMP

**Adportate aqvam / lignvm** - Bring water / firewood
**Date aqvam / lignvm** - Give water / firewood
**Nvntio me! Mvnvs factvm** - I report! Task completed
**Me volo campvm / latrinam / tentorivm / silvam ire** - I would like to go to the field / to the latrine / to the tent / to the forest
**Permitto / Non permitto** - I permit / I do not permit
**Excvbia prima ab secvnda ad qvartam horam** - First watch from the second to the fourth hour
**Svrgite!** - Wake up! [but also: Rise, Stand up, for example from the ground]
**Dormite** - Go to sleep
**Cantate** - Sing
**Omnes tirones / milites** - All recruits / soldiers
**Laborate** - Work
**Sedete** - Sit down
**Videte** - Watch, look
**Tentoria stativte / detendite** - Pack / pitch the tents
**In tentorium / tentoria** - Into the tent / tents
**Extingvite lvmina** - Extinguish the lights
**Orate** - Pray

Learning all these expressions and performing them correctly does not by any means mark the end of Latin study for a recruit. It is difficult at our meetings to get by without basic knowledge of Roman numerals, both cardinal and ordinal, and in particular of the Latin names of all elements of weaponry and camp equipment.

We invite you to read the next articles **in the Latin language section**.

# Commands for BALLISTARII, SAGITTARII et FVNDITORES

In addition to the general commands used in the Centvria formation during the combat demonstration on the **Campvs Martivs**, different orders are also used for carrying out the shooting demonstration.

> **DUE TO THE HIGH RISK OF SERIOUS INJURY AND EVEN LOSS OF HEALTH, THIS STAGE OF THE DEMONSTRATION MUST BE CARRIED OUT UNDER STRICT CONTROL AND ON THE ORDER OF THE HIGHEST COMMAND!!!**

**SOLDIERS** during the shooting demonstration are assigned to one of three missile sections:

- Archers (Sagittarii)
- Slingers (Fvnditores)
- Artillerymen (Ballistarii): scorpiones, high-powered manvbalistae

The positioning, formation, and manoeuvres are agreed in advance between the main commander (Tribvnvs, Centvrio, Optio) conducting the demonstration and the selected Optiones (leaders) commanding the assigned shooting groups.

The potential risk of being hit by friendly fire must always be taken into account during these actions. Therefore, we follow the main principles below:

1. Each section has its designated leader (Optio), who issues orders and directs its actions. All commands must be given in Latin according to the table below.
2. Sagittarii, as the most numerous section occupying the largest space, cover the extended centre of the formation. For a good impression before the audience, milites may, by decision of the commander, set up shields leaning against pila in a double rank several metres in front of them, with gaps between them as in the “LAXATE” formation
3. Fvnditores are positioned on the left wing because they need to run out in front of the formation.
4. Ballistarii are positioned on the right wing, at a slightly greater distance than the Fvnditores on their side, due to their great power and effective range.
5. The Optio of his group raises his sword, signalling to the commanding officer conducting the demonstration (Tribvnvs, Centvrio, Optio) that the group is ready to attack (machines, bows, and slings loaded, and the men ready)
6. ONLY AFTER MAKING SURE THAT THERE IS NO RISK OF DANGER TO BYSTANDERS IN THE SURROUNDINGS OR TO THE AUDIENCE DOES THE COMMANDER AUTHORISE THE ATTACK BY ISSUING THE COMMAND TO THE INDICATED GROUP.

7. Archers, manvbalistae, or slingers run out onto the field in front of the formation simulated by shields (running between them), and only then draw their bowstrings, except in the case of manvbalistae / make the swing and attack. After firing, they return to their original position in the formation.

**AN ATTACK MUST NEVER BE CARRIED OUT BY ALL GROUPS AT ONCE!!!**
**THE RISK OF ENTERING ONE'S OWN CROSSFIRE AND, AS A RESULT, SUFFERING EVEN FATAL INJURIES IS VERY HIGH!!**

# COMMANDS:

| **BALLISTARII** (concerning scorpiones and manvbalistae) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Latin command** | **meaning** | **description of the action** |
| Ballistas tendite! | Tension the ballistae! | The crew places the locking hooks on the bowstrings and tensions the mechanism to the desired firing power |
| In manubalistas **tela inserite!** | Load the manvbalistae! | The crew places the locking hooks on the bowstrings and, resting the nose of the machine on the ground, tensions the mechanism to the desired firing power |
| Tela accendite! | Ignite the projectiles! | In the case of projectiles with incendiary tow, the crew initiates ignition at this moment |
| **Ballistas parate** ad emittendum! | Prepare to fire! | The crew sets the firing angle, places the bolt in the launcher, and retreats several steps behind the artillery machine for safety reasons |
| Tela! iacite! | Fire! Shoot! | The person operating the trigger releases the mechanism and fires the machine |

| **SAGITTARII** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Latin command** | **meaning** | **description of the action** |
| Sagittas imponite! | Nock the arrows! | The archer takes an arrow from the bundle of projectiles stuck in front of him and places it on the bowstring WITHOUT DRAWING IT! |
| (Prae)parate Vos! | Prepare yourselves! | The archer draws the bowstring to the desired power and range he wants to achieve, correcting the firing angle |
| Ignem parate! | Prepare fire! | When projectiles with flammable tow are being presented, the archer lights the arrow |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sagittas iacite! | Fire! Shoot! | The archer releases the bowstring and shoots the projectile from the bow |

| **FVNDITORES** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Latin command** | **meaning** | **description of the action** |
| Fundas parate | Load the slings! | The slinger places the projectile in the pouch of the sling |
| Parate vos! | Prepare yourselves! | The slinger prepares to begin the swing |
| Fundas iacite ab infra | Shoot from below! | The projectile is released from the sling with an underhand swing |
| Fundas desuper iacite! | Shoot from above! | The projectile is released from the sling with an overhand swing |