RES GESTAE MILITARIS

An Operational Analysis of Late Roman Warfare (353–378 AD)

Based on the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus



Thesis:

An objective examination of the operational capabilities of the Late Roman Field Armies (*Comitatenses*) against evolving asymmetrical threats. This analysis traces the degradation of Roman military supremacy from the disciplined victories of Julian to the catastrophic systemic failure at Hadrianople.

NotebookLM

THE THREAT MATRIX: COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

SASSANID PERSIANS



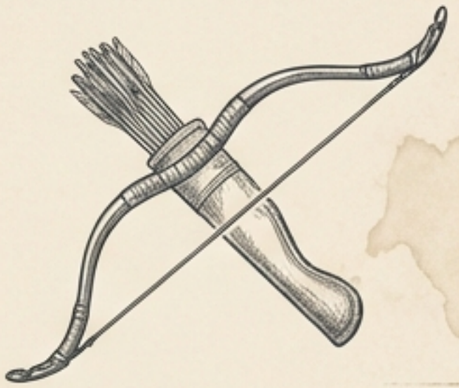
- Centralized Command: King Sapor II (Saansaan)
- Unit Focus: Cataphracts (Iron Cavalry) & Clibanarii
- Engineering: Advanced siegecraft (rams, mounds)
- Doctrine: Pitched battles, strategic patience

ALLEMANNI / FRANKS



- Structure: Decentralized tribal confederations
- Physiology: Described as “huge bodies” relying on brute strength
- Tactics: Terrain ambushes, forest warfare
- Equipment: Light armor, high mobility

NOMADIC TRIBES (Saracens/Huns)



- Description: “Rapacious Hawks” (Ammianus, Book XIV)
- Tactics: Hit-and-run, avoidance of static defense
- Terrain: Usage of trackless mountains and deserts
- Weaponry: Asymmetrical missile fire

“The Saracens… never desirable to have either for friends or enemies, ranging up and down the country like rapacious hawks.” — Res Gestae, Book XIV

NotebookLM

ANATOMY OF THE COMITATENSES (c. 360 AD)

EMPEROR / AUGUSTUS

MAGISTER EQUITUM
(Master of Horse)

MAGISTER PEDITUM
(Master of Foot)

A (Elite Infantry)

Legions: Joviani, Victores, Petulantes. Auxiliaries: Cornuti & Braccati.

B (Specialists)

Sagittarii (Archers) & *Balistarii* (Field Artillery).

C (Cavalry)

Scholae Palatinae (Guards), *Cataphractii* (Armored Horse).



Equipment Evolution: Shift toward heavier defensive armor to counter Persian archery. Use of 'Testudo' formation and crested helmets for psychological warfare.

NotebookLM

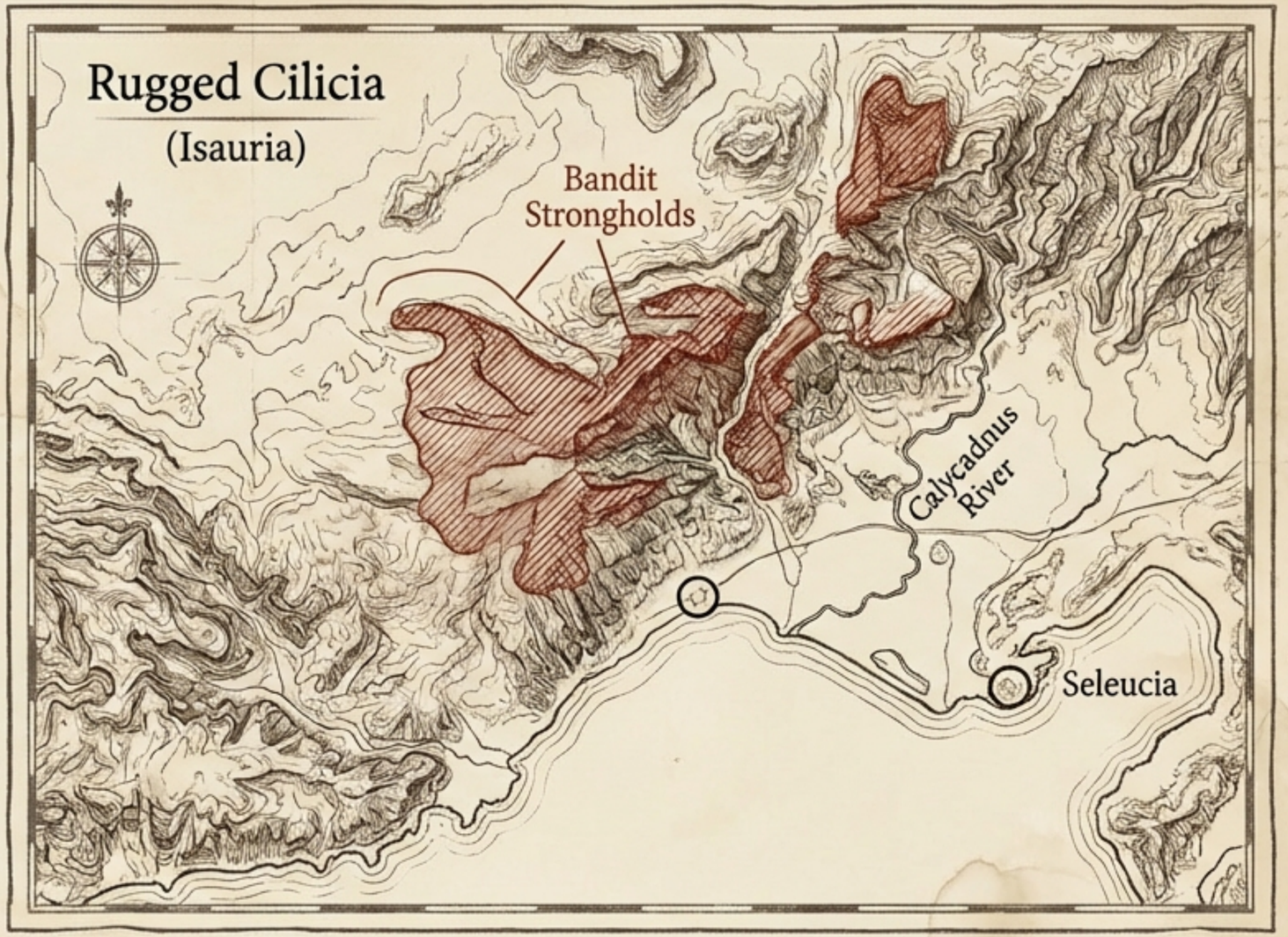
COUNTER-INSURGENCY: ISAURIA (353–355 AD)

ANALYSIS:

- Guerilla Tactics: Isaurians utilized ‘trackless mountains’ and ‘entangled defiles.’ Tactics included rolling massive rocks down on infantry and night raids.
- Roman Limitation: Heavy infantry unable to deploy formation on steep declivities.
- Siege of Seleucia: Shift from raids to conventional blockade. Roman defense led by Count Castucius.

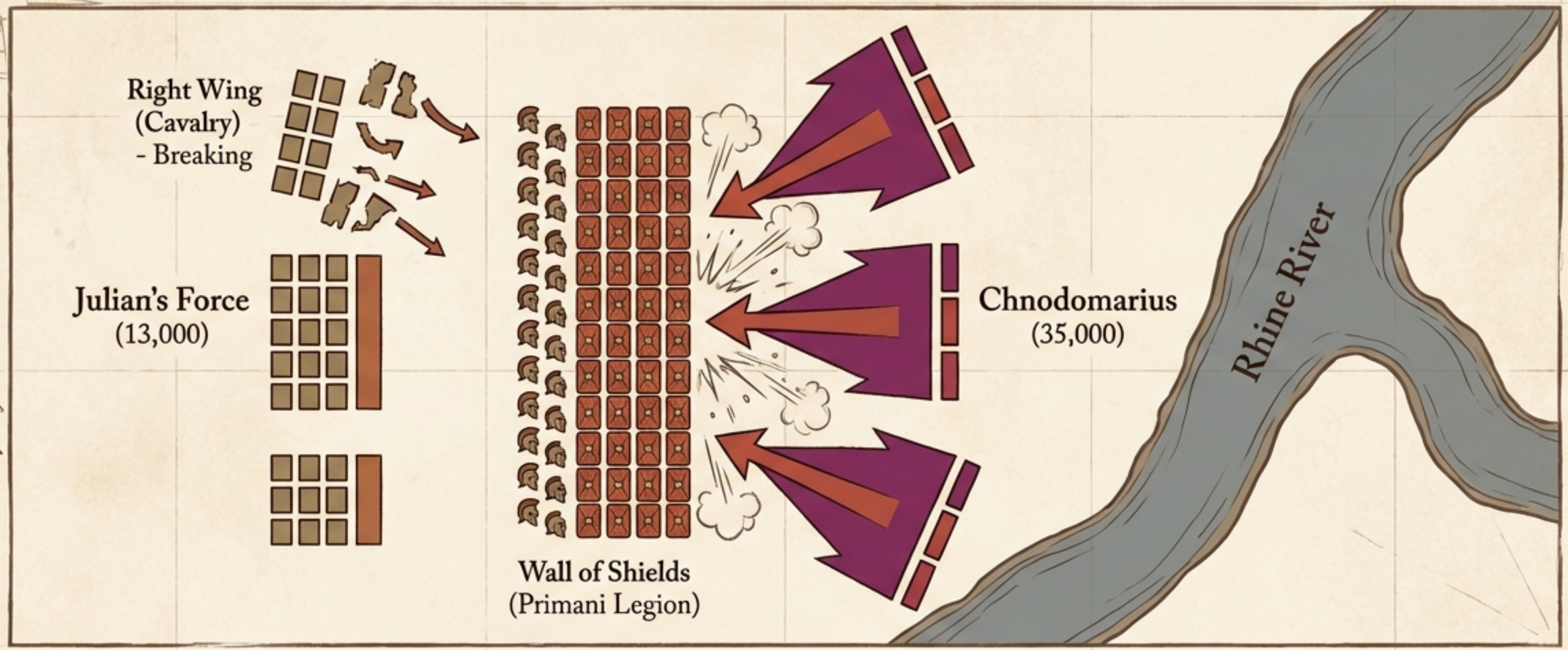
OUTCOME:

Insurgency quelled not by tactical victory, but by arrival of overwhelming reinforcements under Nebridius.



NotebookLM

Infantry Doctrine: Battle of Strasburg (357 AD)



KEY PHASES OF THE BATTLE

Phase I: Crisis. Roman cavalry panic on the right wing.

Phase II: Stabilization. The infantry center stands "immovable." Julian physically rallies the troops.

Phase III: Counter-Offensive. The Cornuti and Braccati engage. Allemanni trapped against the Rhine.

CASUALTIES:
~6,000 Allemanni / ~243 Romans

NotebookLM

DEFENSIVE SIEGECRAFT: AMIDA (359 AD)

PRECISION ARTILLERY:
Scorpions used to target high-value leaders (son of Grumbates)

IRON-FRONTED SIEGE TOWER

SCORPION BALLISTA

ROMAN COUNTER-MEASURE:
Incendiary darts to burn wicker shields.

PERSIAN FORCE:
Chionitæ, Gelani, Segestani (with War Elephants)

ARCHERS IN WICKER BLINDS

PRECISION ARTILLERY:
Scorpions used to target high-value leaders

PERSIAN SIEGE MOUND

ROMAN DEFENSIVE WALL



OUTCOME:
Siege Duration: 73 Days.
Result: Strategic delay for Sapor II, but total loss of Roman garrison.

NotebookLM

EXPEDITIONARY LOGISTICS: JULIAN'S INVASION (363 AD)

Total Force:
65,000 Men

Objective:
Ctesiphon

Vanguard Skirmishers
(10 miles ahead)

Cavalry Flanks
(Arinthæus & Hormisdas)

Baggage Train
&
Heavy Infantry

Cavalry Flanks
(Arinthæus & Hormisdas)



Fleet:
1,100 Supply Ships,
50 War Galleys

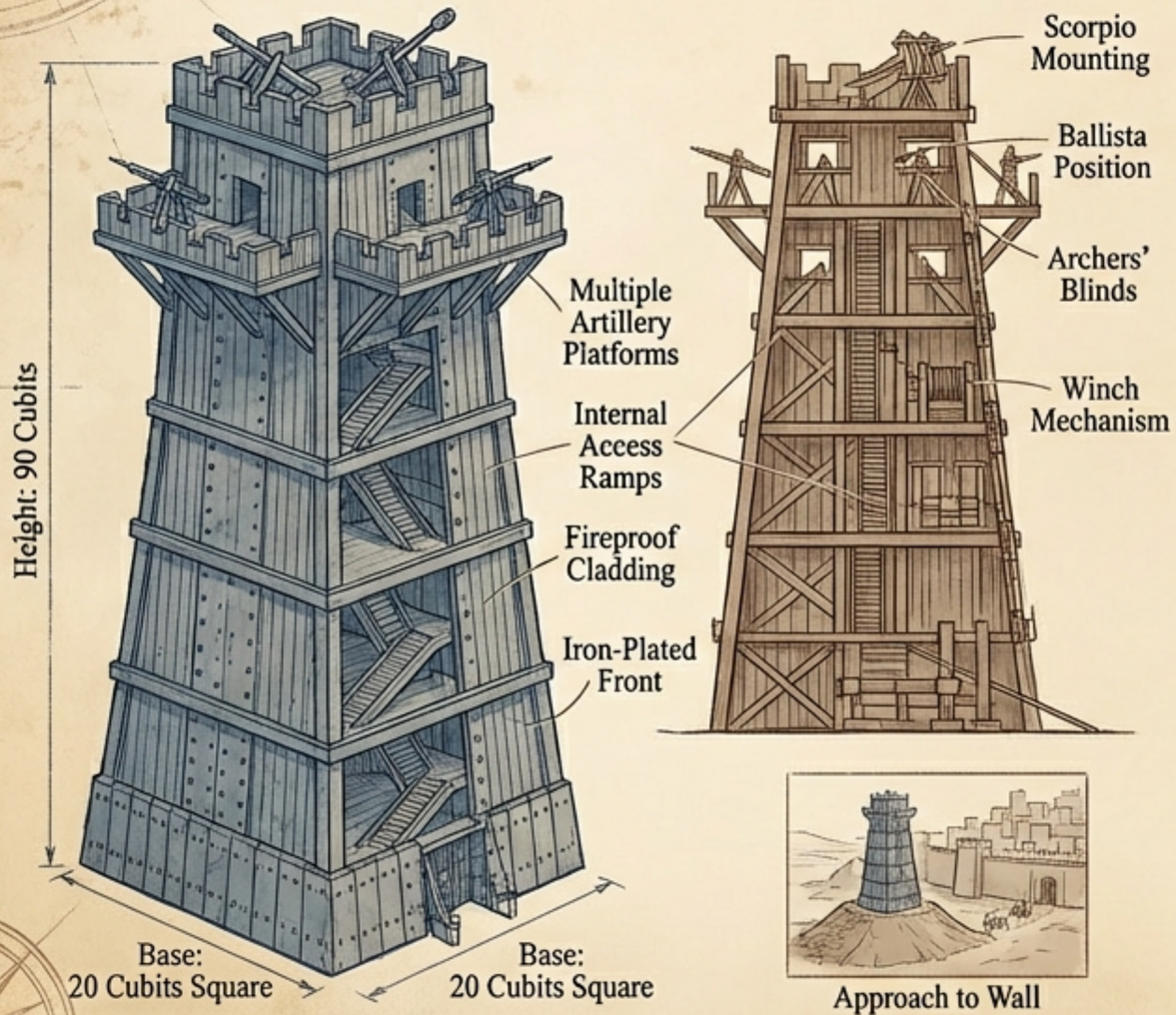
STRATEGIC NOTE:

Fatal Pivot: The crossing at Circesium and the subsequent decision to burn the fleet.

NotebookLM

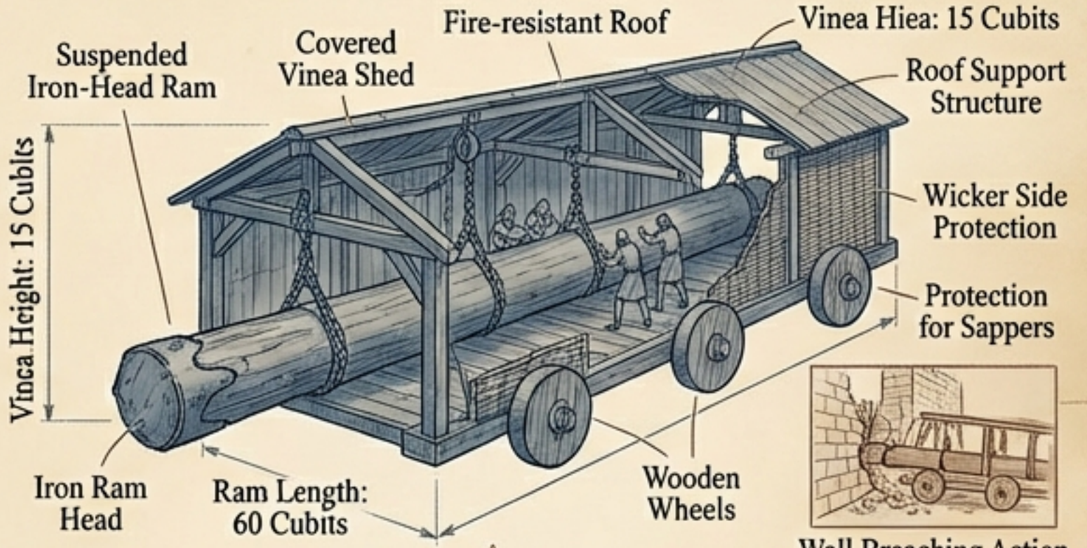
OFFENSIVE ENGINEERING: THE CITY-TAKER

HELEPOLIS: THE CITY-TAKER



Approach to Wall

BATTERING RAM & VINEA SHED



Wall Breaching Action

TACTICAL ANALYSIS: MAOGAMALCHA

- Approach: Use of *vineæ* (wicker sheds) to approach walls.
- Breaching: Simultaneous mining operations and Ram attacks.
- Assault: Use of 'Firebolts' (malleable iron with naphtha) to clear battlements.
- Doctrine: Total destruction and psychological terror.

NotebookLM

OPERATIONAL FAILURE: THE RETREAT (363 AD)



ATTRITION FACTORS

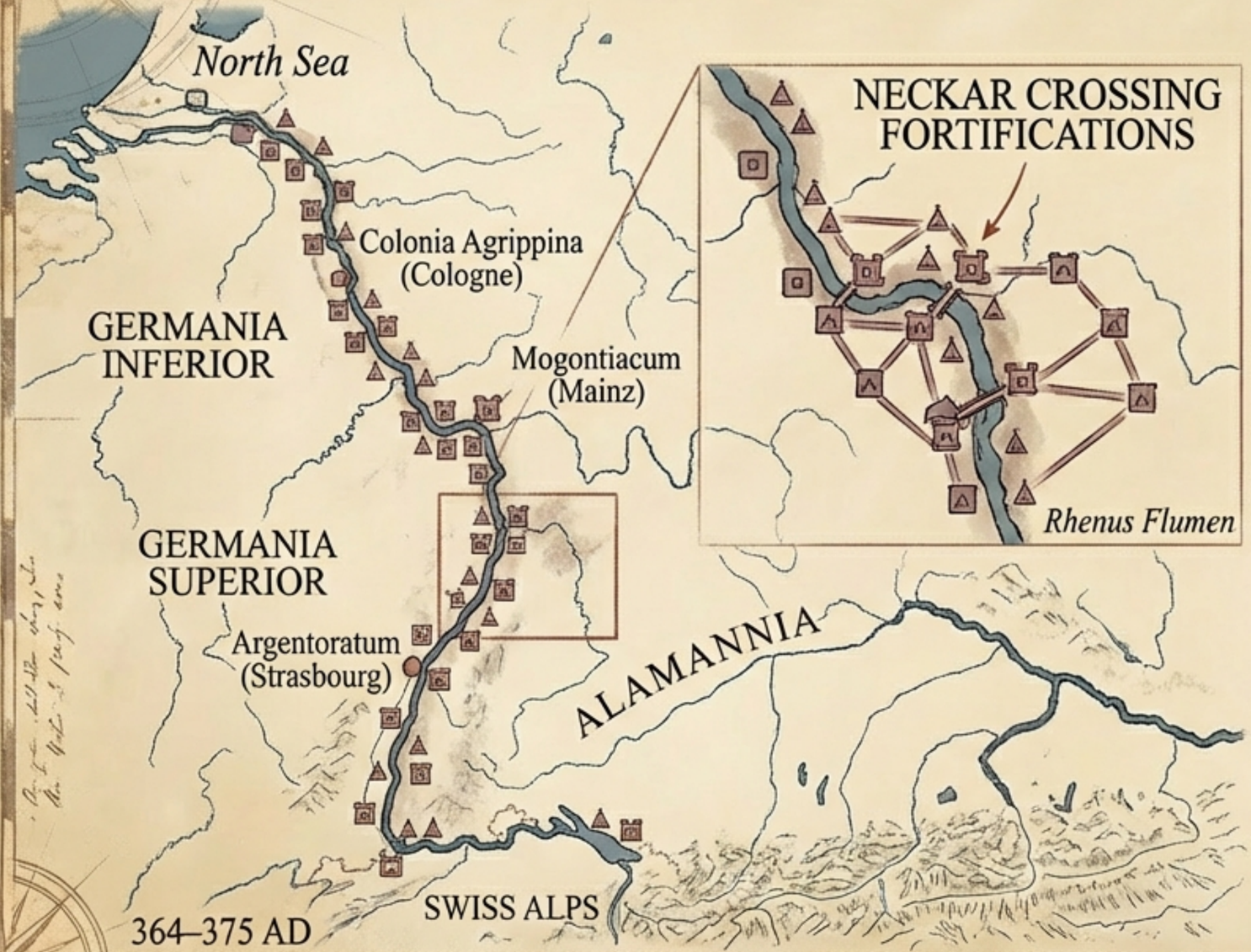
- **Environmental:** Extreme heat, lack of water and fodder.
- **Tactical:** Persian refusal to engage in pitched battle; constant rear-guard harassment.
- **Leadership Void:** Julian killed while fighting without breastplate.

OUTCOME BOX:

Treaty of Dura
Strategic cession of Nisibis and Singara.
Loss of the Eastern Buffer.

NotebookLM

FRONTIER CONSOLIDATION: THE RHINE LIMES (364–375 AD)

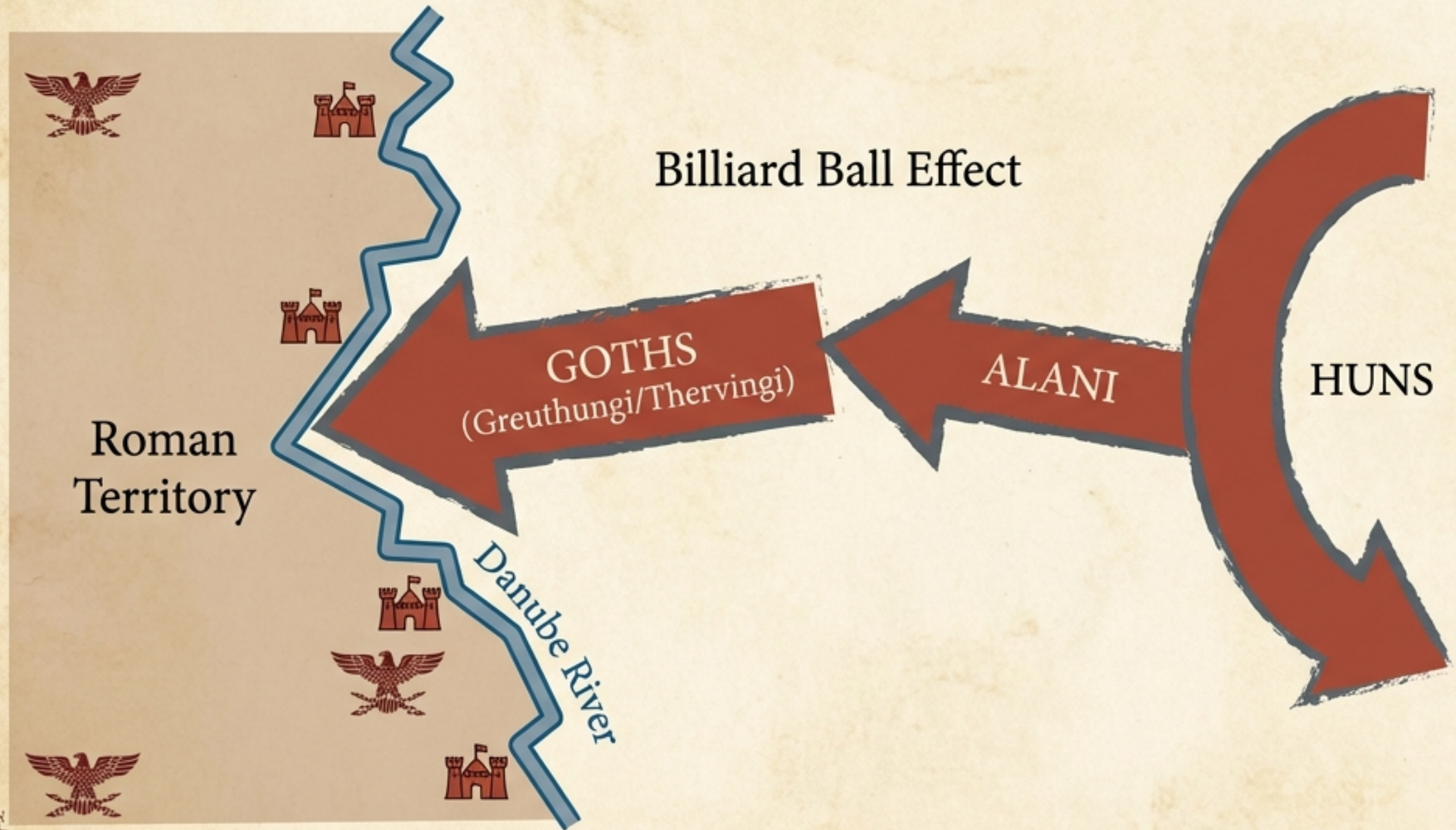


STRATEGIC DOCTRINE & ENGINEERING

- **Doctrine Shift:** From Expansion to Static Defense.
- **Engineering:** Renovated forts, new watchtowers, bridgeheads into hostile territory.
- **Secondary Theatre:** Restoration of 'Valentia' province in Britain by Theodosius.
- **Tactical Innovation:** Use of Burgundian proxies to pressure Allemanni.

NotebookLM

The Danube Crisis: Migration Mechanics (376 AD)



Analysis

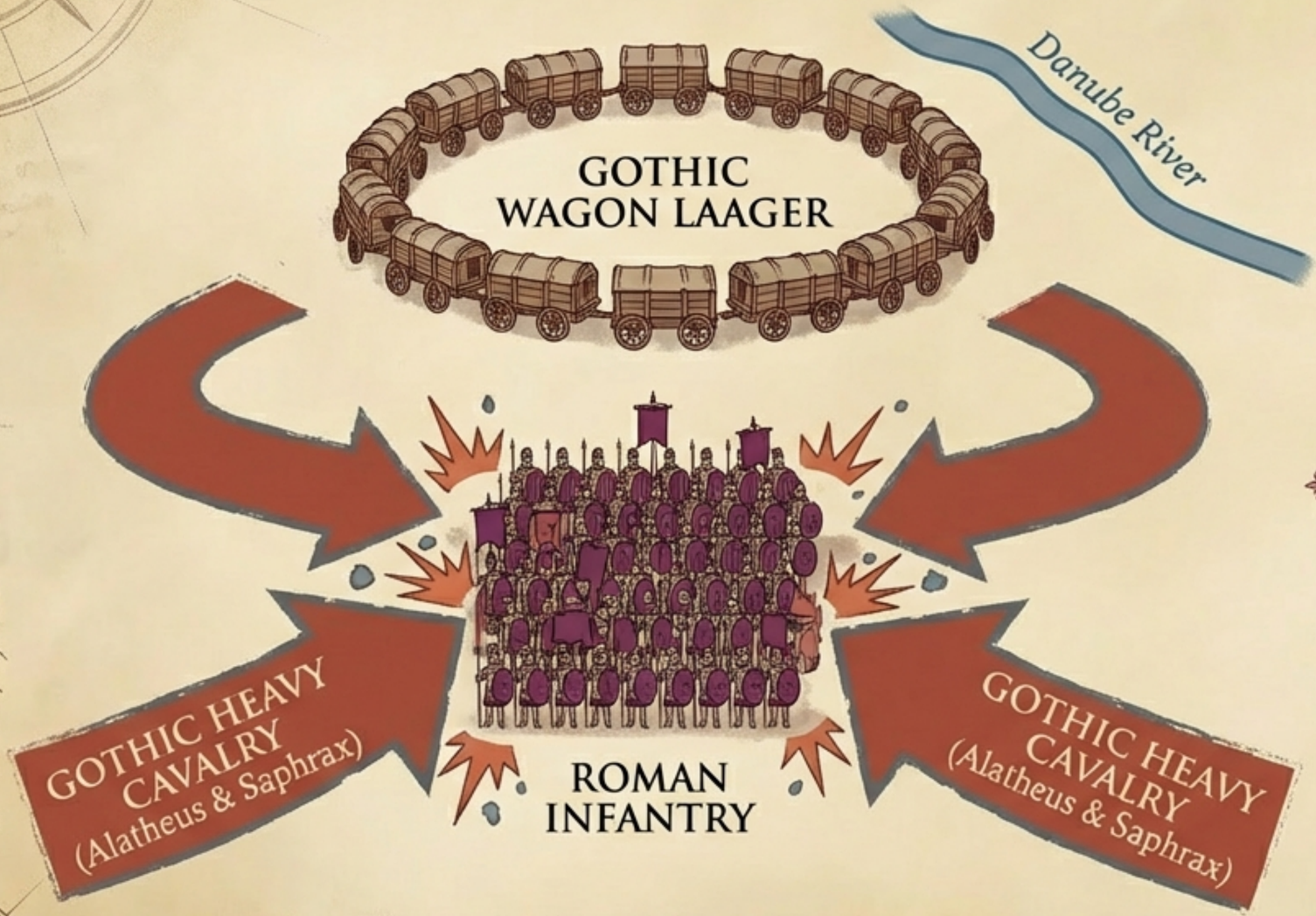
Intelligence Failure: Underestimation of refugee numbers (Fritigern & Alavivus).

Administrative Failure: Corruption of border officials (Lupicinus) trading food for children.

Result: Transformation from Refugee Crisis to Hostile Invasion.

NotebookLM

Systemic Collapse: Hadrianople (378 AD)

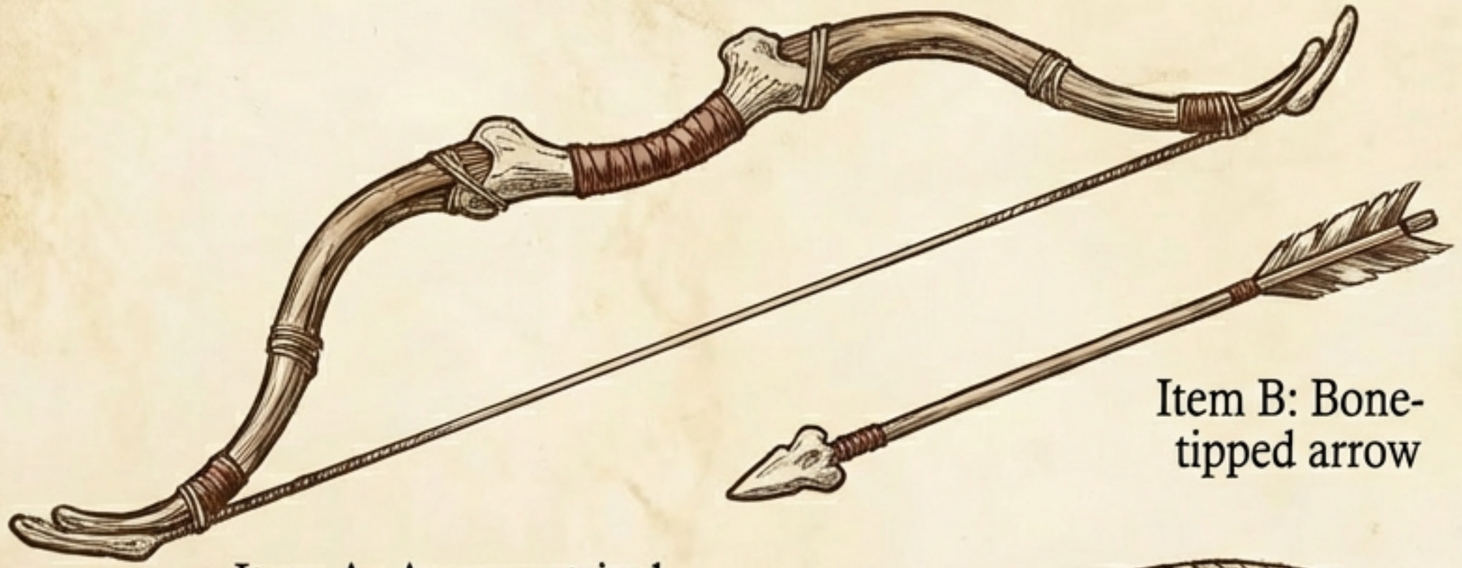


TACTICAL NOTES

- **Error:** Valens engages without waiting for Gratian's reinforcements.
- **Condition:** Romans exhausted by march and heat.
- **The Crush:** Infantry compressed so tightly they "could not lift hands to use swords" (Book XXXI).
- **Outcome:** Death of Emperor Valens; destruction of 2/3 of the Eastern Field Army.

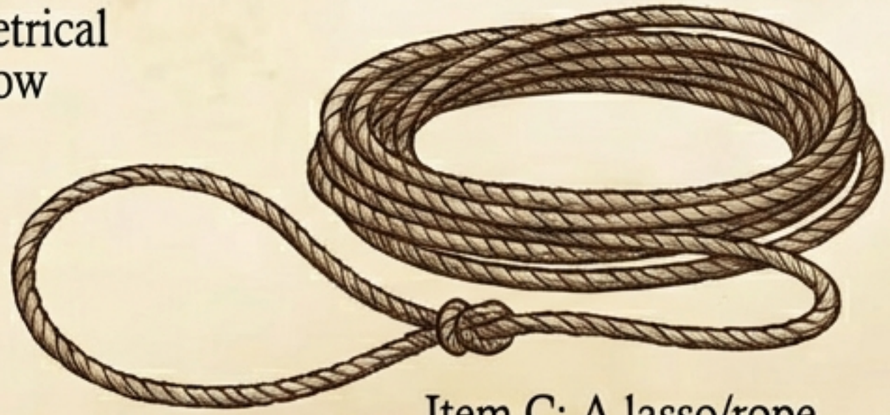
NotebookLM

Ethnography of War: The Huns



Item A: Asymmetrical Composite Bow

Item B: Bone-tipped arrow



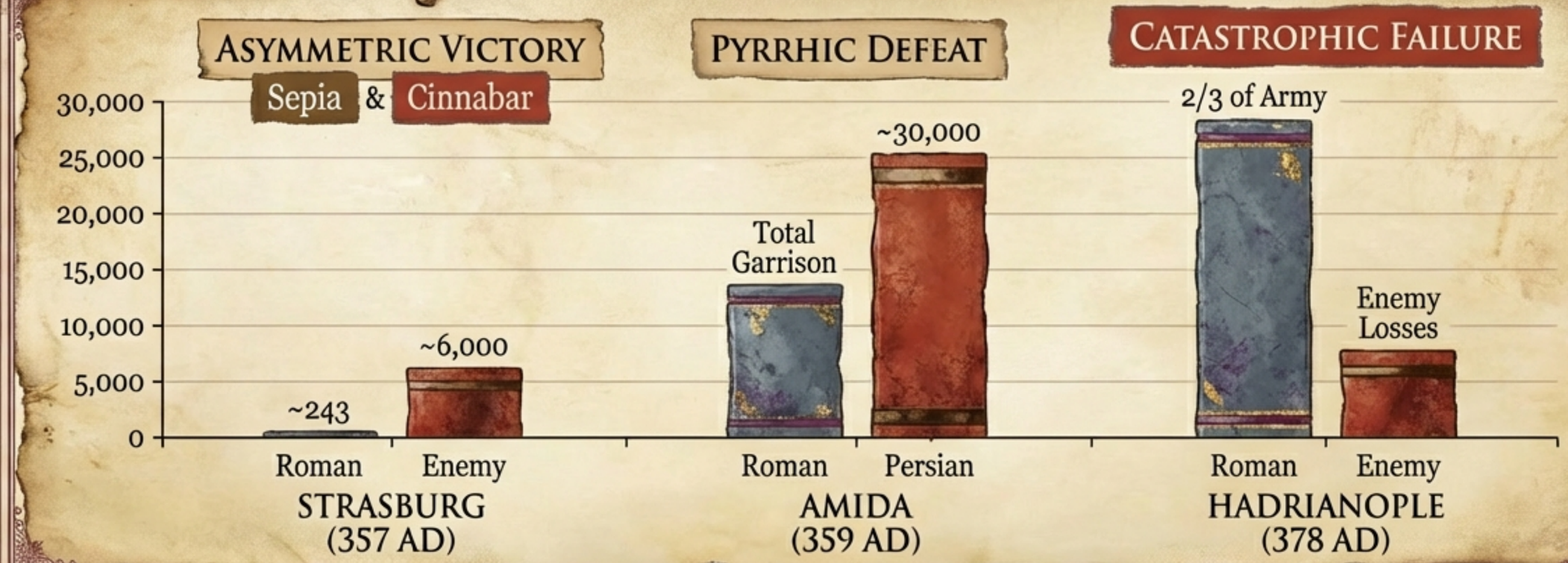
Item C: A lasso/rope

Ammianus Profile

- **Physicality:** "Two-legged beasts," "fixed to their horses," needing no cooked food.
- **Tactics:** Irregular wedge formations, terrifying yells, feigned retreats.
- **Strategic Impact:** Extreme mobility rendered static Roman border defenses obsolete.

NotebookLM

The Butcher's Bill: Casualty Analysis

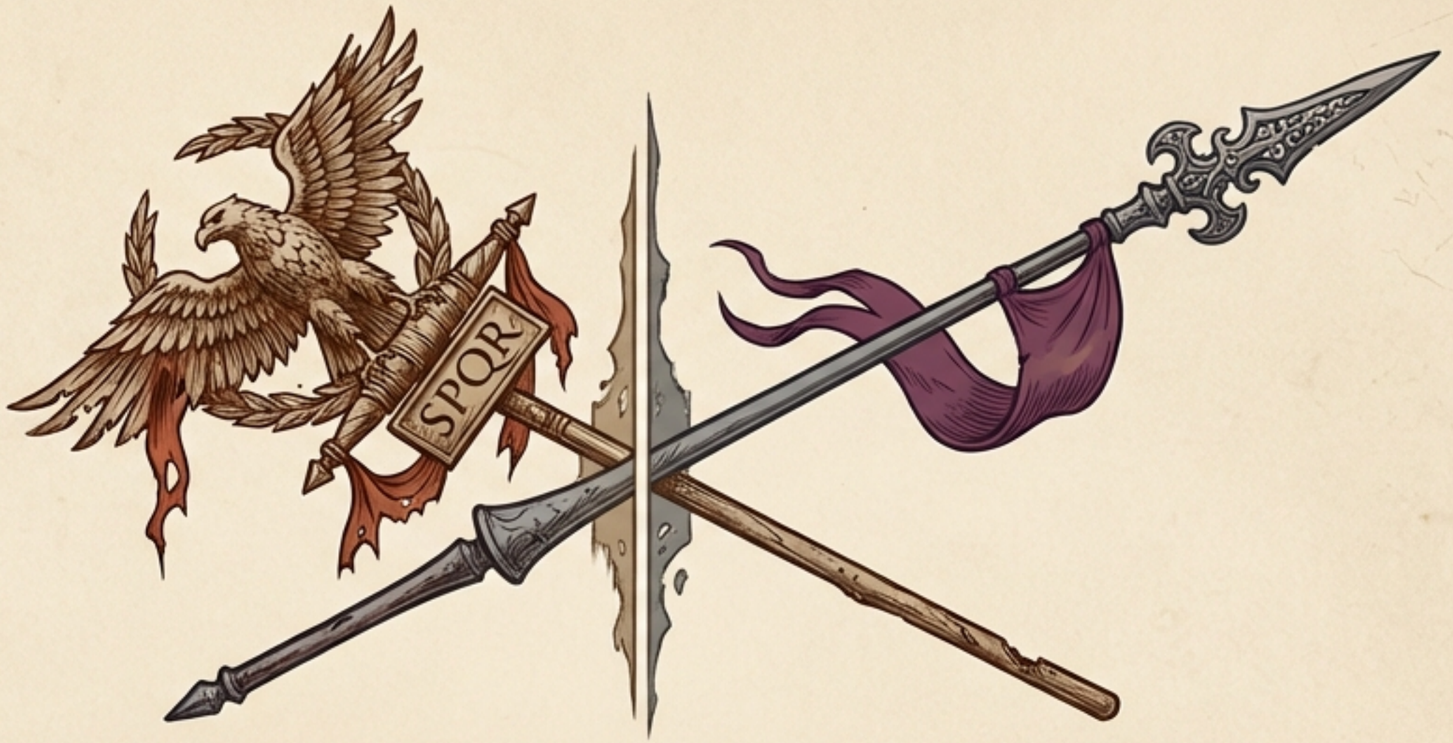


ECONOMIC IMPACT: High cost of "tribute" (gold/grain) paid to barbarian confederations (Book XXVII).

NotebookLM

FORENSIC ANTIQUITY

Conclusion: The Twilight of the Legions



353–363: Tactical Superiority via Combined Arms (Julian).
364–375: Manpower Overextension via Static Defense (Valentinian).
376–378: Systemic Collapse via Logistics Failure and Mobile Adversaries (Valens).

Ammianus records the dismantling of a technically superior military machine by overextension, logistical corruption, and the inability to adapt to the cavalry revolution.

NotebookLM