The Gothic War: Belisarius and the Defense of Rome

In 536 AD, the Roman General Belisarius marched into Rome with only 5,000 men. He was tasked with reclaiming the ancient capital for the Emperor Justinian.



Waiting for him were 150,000 Goths under King Vittigis. This is the story of how a small band of soldiers held the "Eternal City" against the entire might of the barbarian kingdom.

NotebookLM

A Fracture in the Gothic Kingdom

The Betrayal of Amalasuntha and the Gothic War.



The Legacy
Theoderic the Great
Lato Regular



The Regent – Murdered
Amalasuntha
Lato Regular



The Usurper
Lato Regular

The Legacy: Theoderic ruled Italy maintaining a fragile peace.

He expertly balanced Gothic military strength with Roman administrative traditions.

The Regent: His daughter, Amalasuntha, attempted to 'Romanize' the Goths, sparking a backlash.

Her progressive reforms and pro-Byzantine policies were met with resistance from the Gothic nobility.

The Betrayal: Her cousin Theodatus imprisoned her on an island in Lake Vulsina and orchestrated her murder.

After being seized, she was confined to an island in the lake, where her assassination was carried out shortly after.

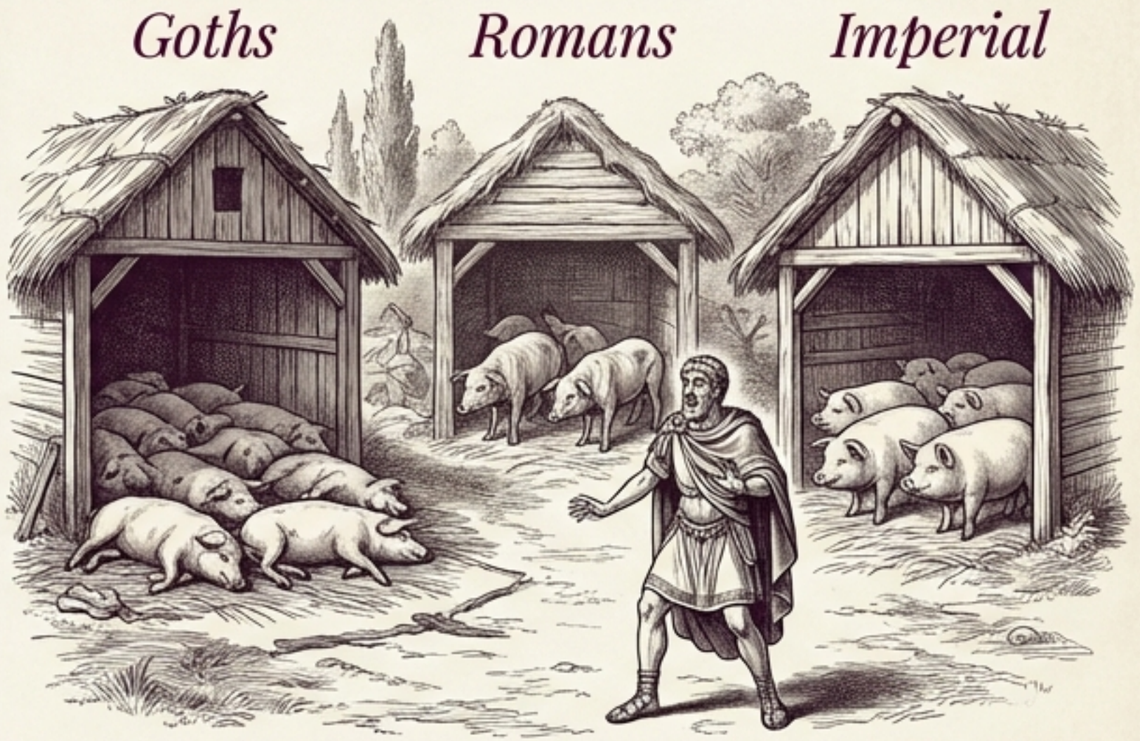
The Casus Belli: Emperor Justinian launched a war of 'liberation' to avenge the queen.

The murder provided Justinian with the pretext for the long and devastating Gothic War to reclaim Italy.

NotebookLM

The Cowardice of King Theodatus





The Swine Prophecy: Theodatus consulted a Hebrew prophet who shut swine in three huts. The result—dead 'Goths' and safe 'Imperial' swine —**paralyzed the King's with fear**, allowing Belisarius to sweep through Sicily unopposed.

NotebookLM

The Infiltration of Naples

The Problem:
Walls impregnable, aqueduct blocked by rock.



The Engineering:
Soldiers scraped away rock with sharp iron instruments to avoid noise.

The soldiers tunnel has the **ward** in Naples exit in the **gates** from the city.

The Result: **400 men** led by **Magnus** and **Ennes** entered at night, opening the gates from the inside.

NotebookLM

The Rise of Vittigis and the Retreat to Ravenna



Regime Change: The Goths deposed and killed Theodatus, electing the warrior Vittigis.

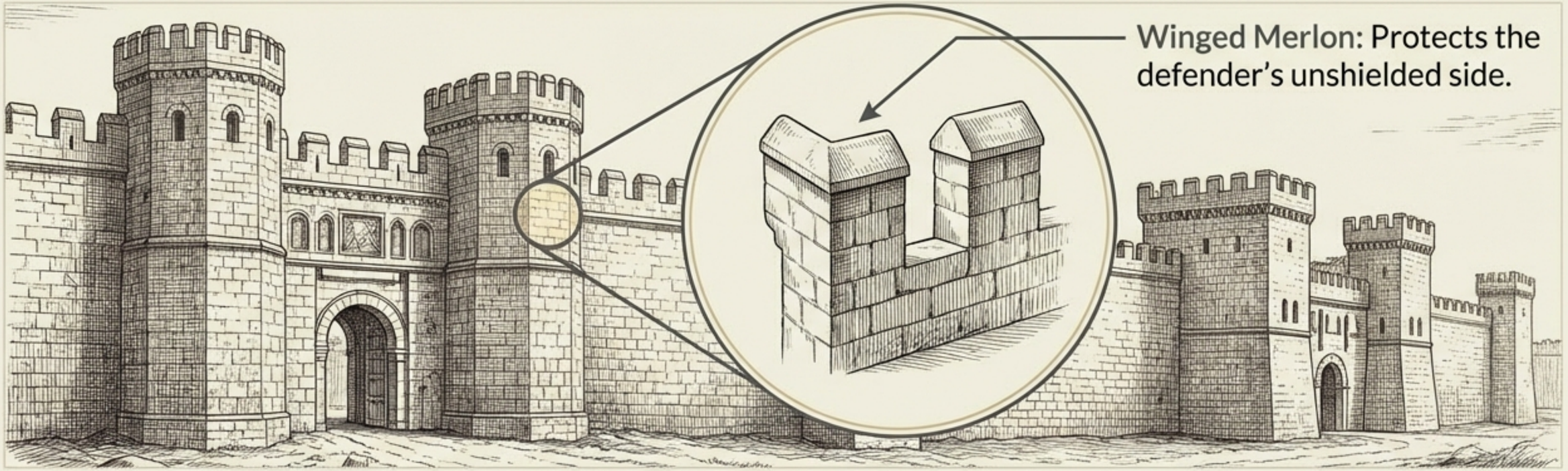
Strategic Error: Vittigis abandoned Rome to consolidate his forces in the North.

Consequence: Rome was left guarded by only 4,000 men, allowing Belisarius to enter without a siege.

The retreat to Ravenna marked a pivotal shift in the Gothic War.

NotebookLM

The Star Returns to the Center of the World



December 9, 536 AD: Belisarius enters Rome via the **Asinarian Gate** as the Goths flee.

The Preparation: Anticipating a siege, Belisarius repaired **walls and filled granaries**, ignoring the grumbling of the populace who believed defense was impossible.

NotebookLM

The Iron Ring Closes

5,000 Imperial Troops

150,000 Gothic Troops



Vittigis returns with a massive host. They establish **seven fortified camps** and cut all **14 aqueducts**, halting the city's flour mills.

NotebookLM

The Battle at the Bridge: “Shoot the White-Faced Horse!”



The Ambush: Belisarius, scouting with 1,000 men, runs into the entire Gothic army.

The Target: Deserters recognize the General. The cry goes out to target his mount.

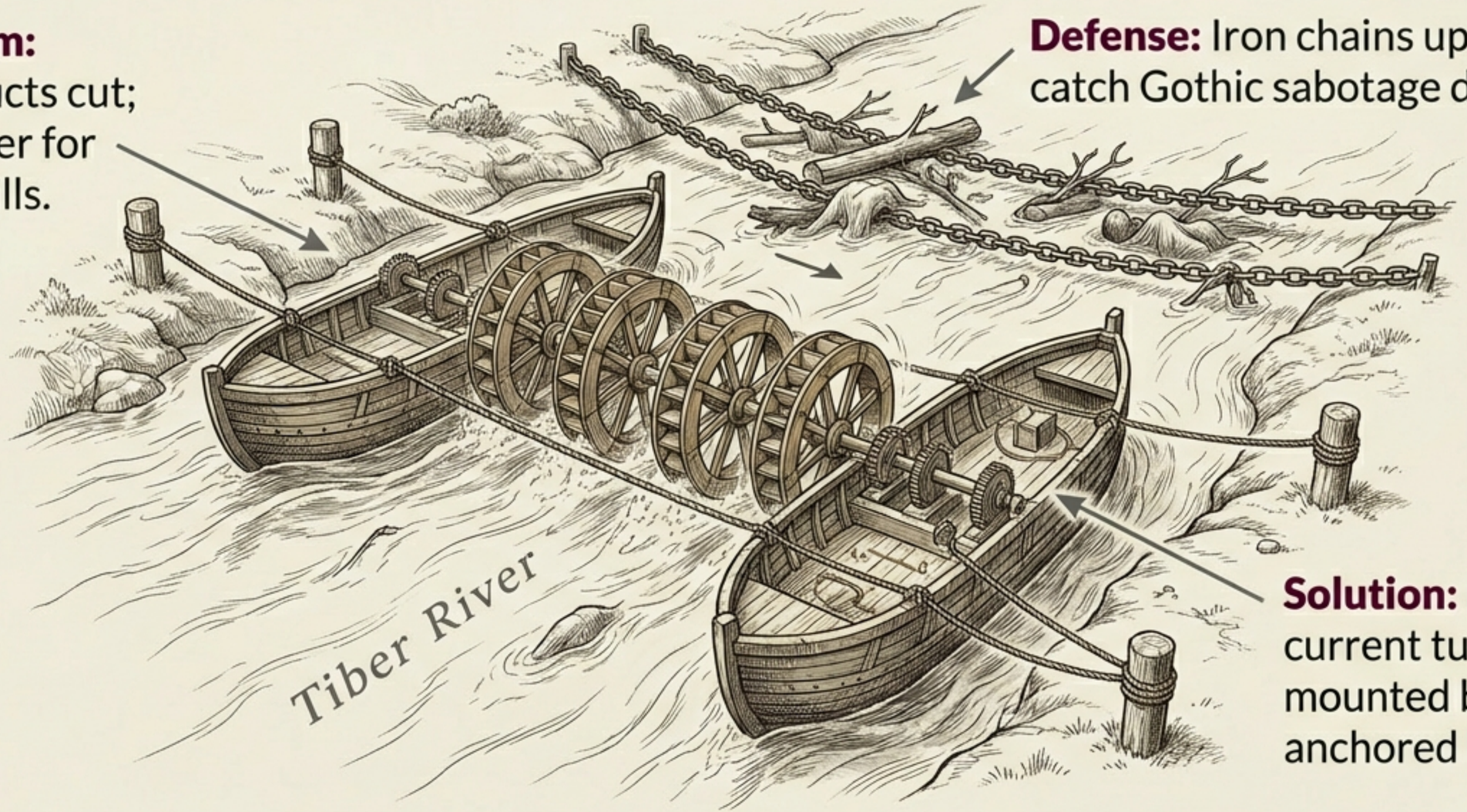
The Result: Belisarius fights in the front lines. Rumors of his death cause panic in Rome, until he returns, alive, to rally the defense.

NotebookLM

Crisis and Invention: The Floating Mills

Problem: Aqueducts cut; no power for flour mills.

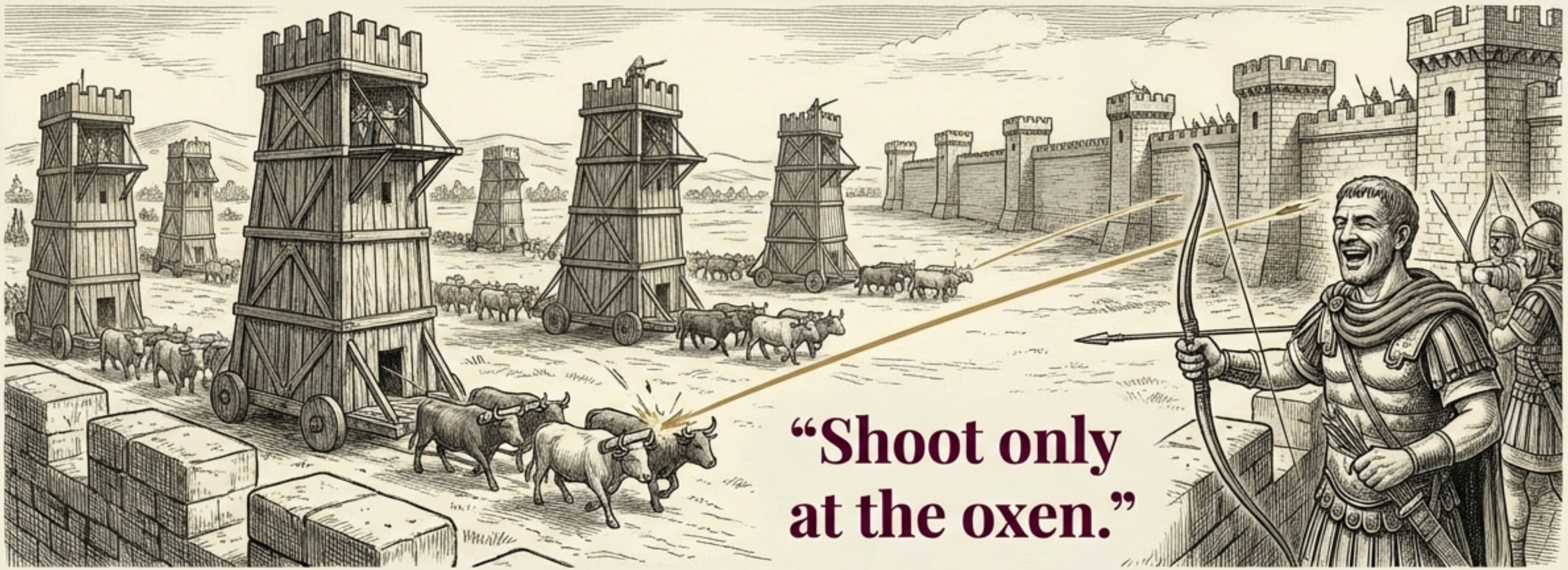
Defense: Iron chains upstream catch Gothic sabotage debris.



Solution: River current turns wheels mounted between anchored boats.

NotebookLM

The Eighteenth Day: The Siege Engines Arrive



The Goths launched a massive assault with towers. Belisarius waited until they were close, then ordered his archers to kill the draft animals, leaving the massive towers stranded and useless.

NotebookLM

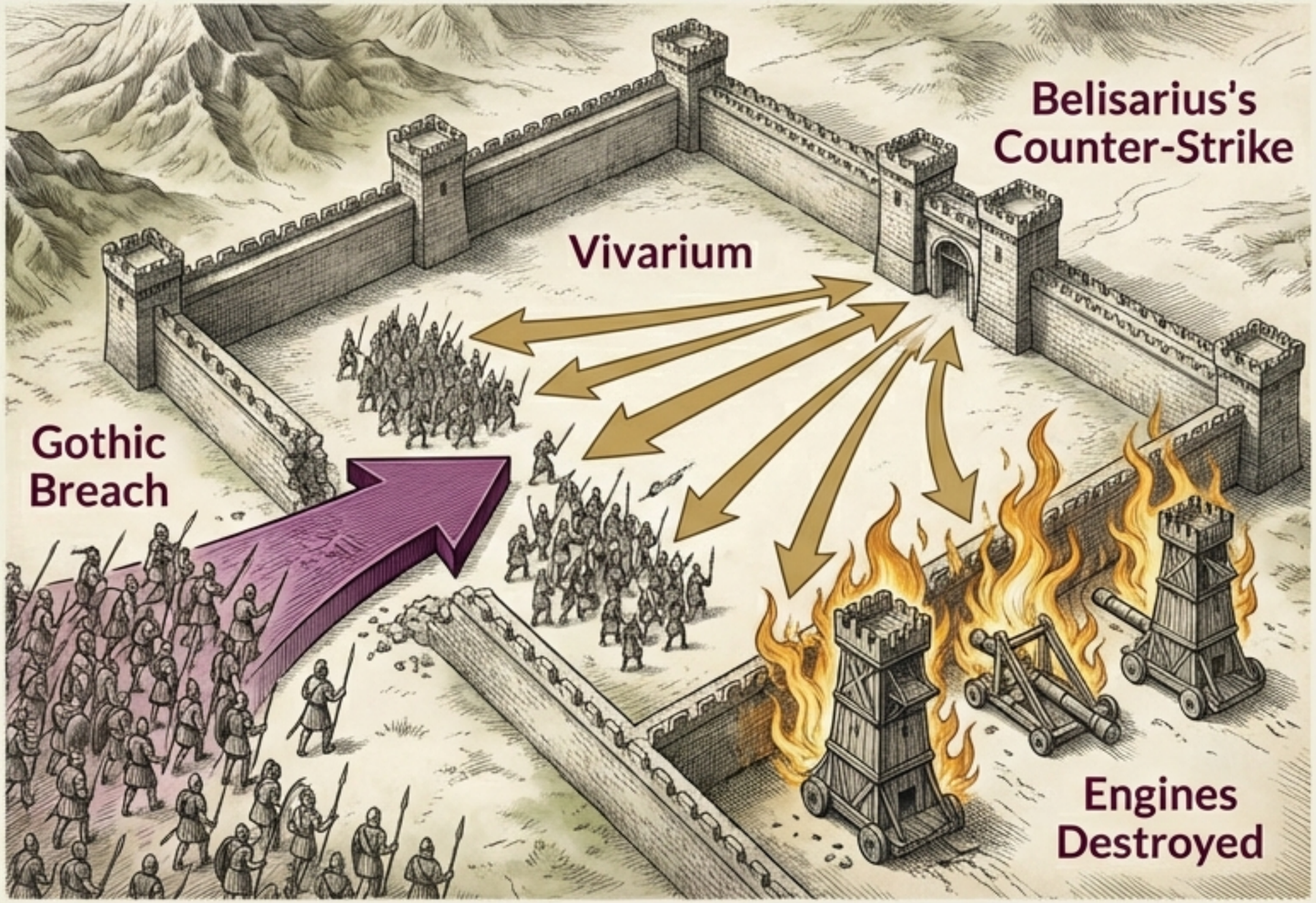
Desperation at the Tomb of Hadrian



At the Mausoleum, defenders ran out of missiles. In desperation, they smashed the priceless ancient statues of the tomb and hurled the fragments down, crushing the Goths under the weight of history.

NotebookLM

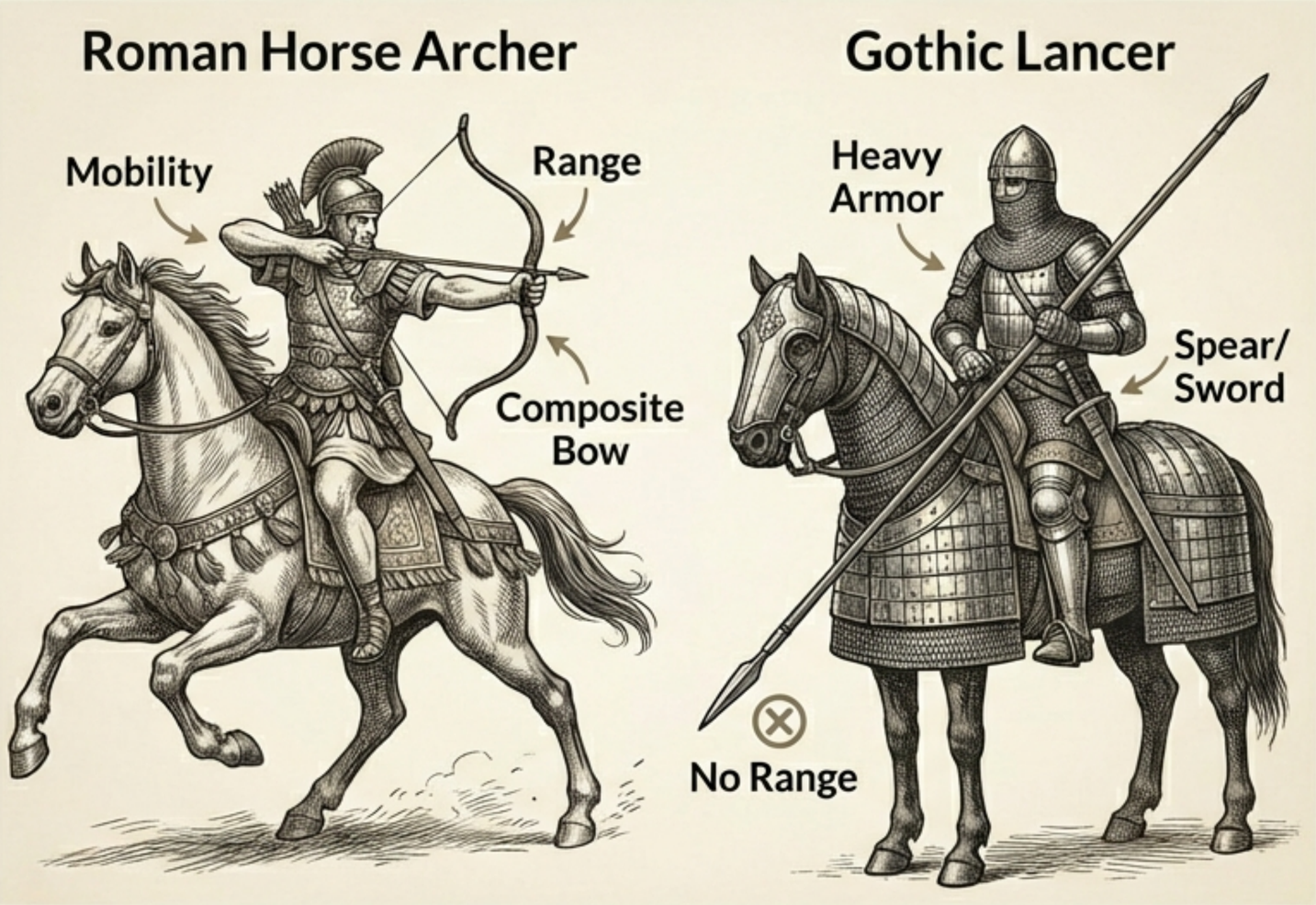
The Trap at the Vivarium



Belisarius allowed the Goths to breach the weak “Vivarium” wall, trapping them in the enclosure. He then launched a counter-attack, routing them and burning their engines. **30,000 Goths perished.**

NotebookLM

The Science of Superiority



Belisarius explained why his small force dominated skirmishes: Roman mounted archers could strike from a distance and retreat. The Gothic cavalry, relying on spears, had no effective range and could not close the distance.

NotebookLM

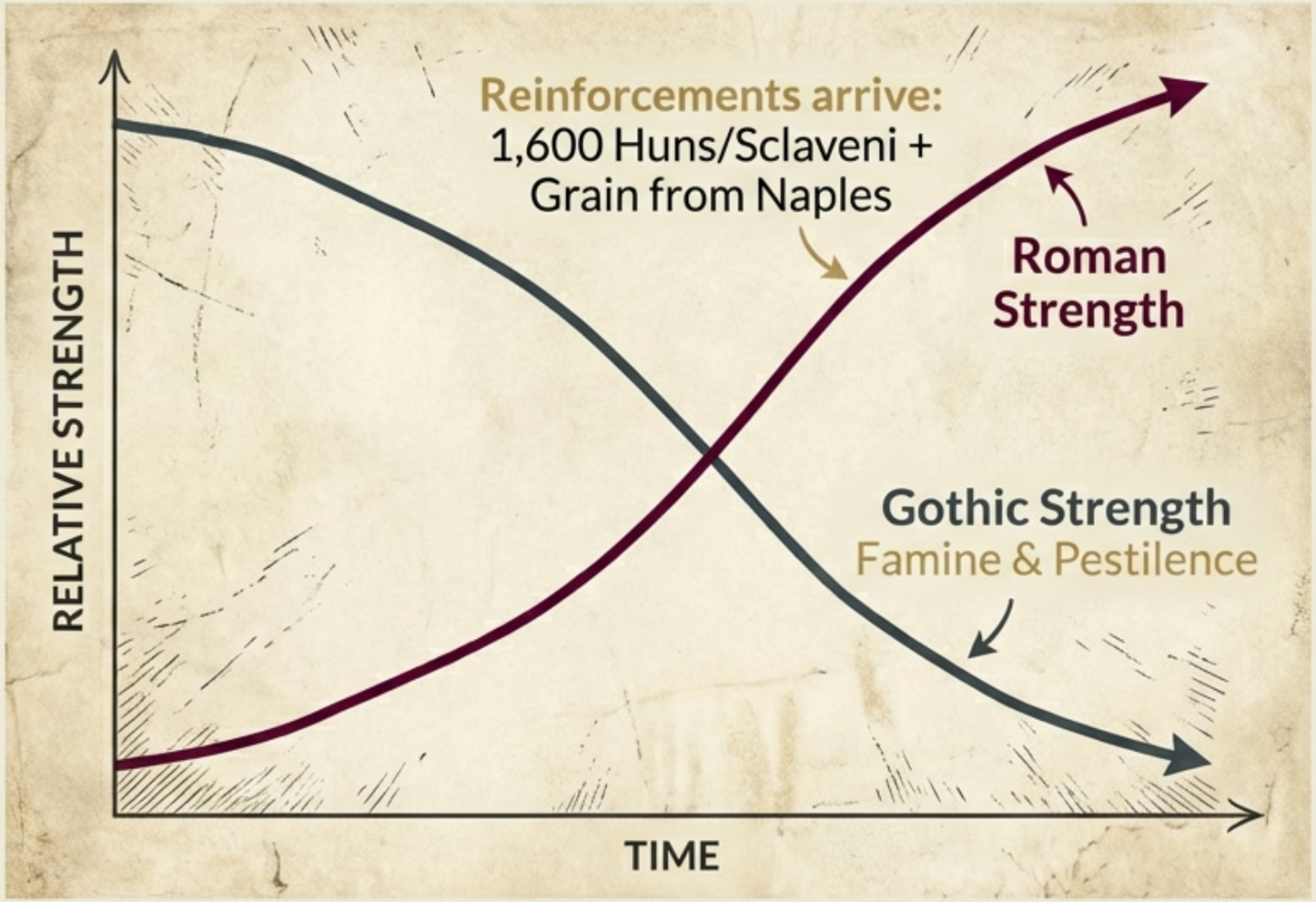
The Wolves of the Camp



Guerrilla Tactics: Belisarius employed Moors and Huns to ambush foraging parties and terrorize the Gothic camps at night. The besiegers became prisoners in their own camps, unable to sleep or gather food.

NotebookLM

The Besiegers Besieged

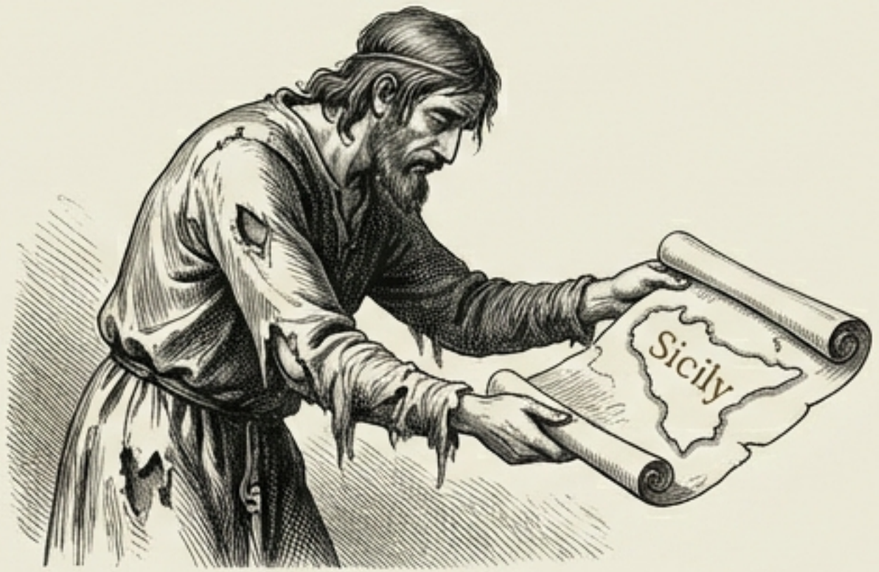


The tide turned. Disease swept the Gothic camps, killing thousands. Vittigis realized his “Great Host” was melting away while Belisarius grew stronger.

NotebookLM

The Negotiation

“We permit the Goths to have the whole of Britain, which is much larger than Sicily.”

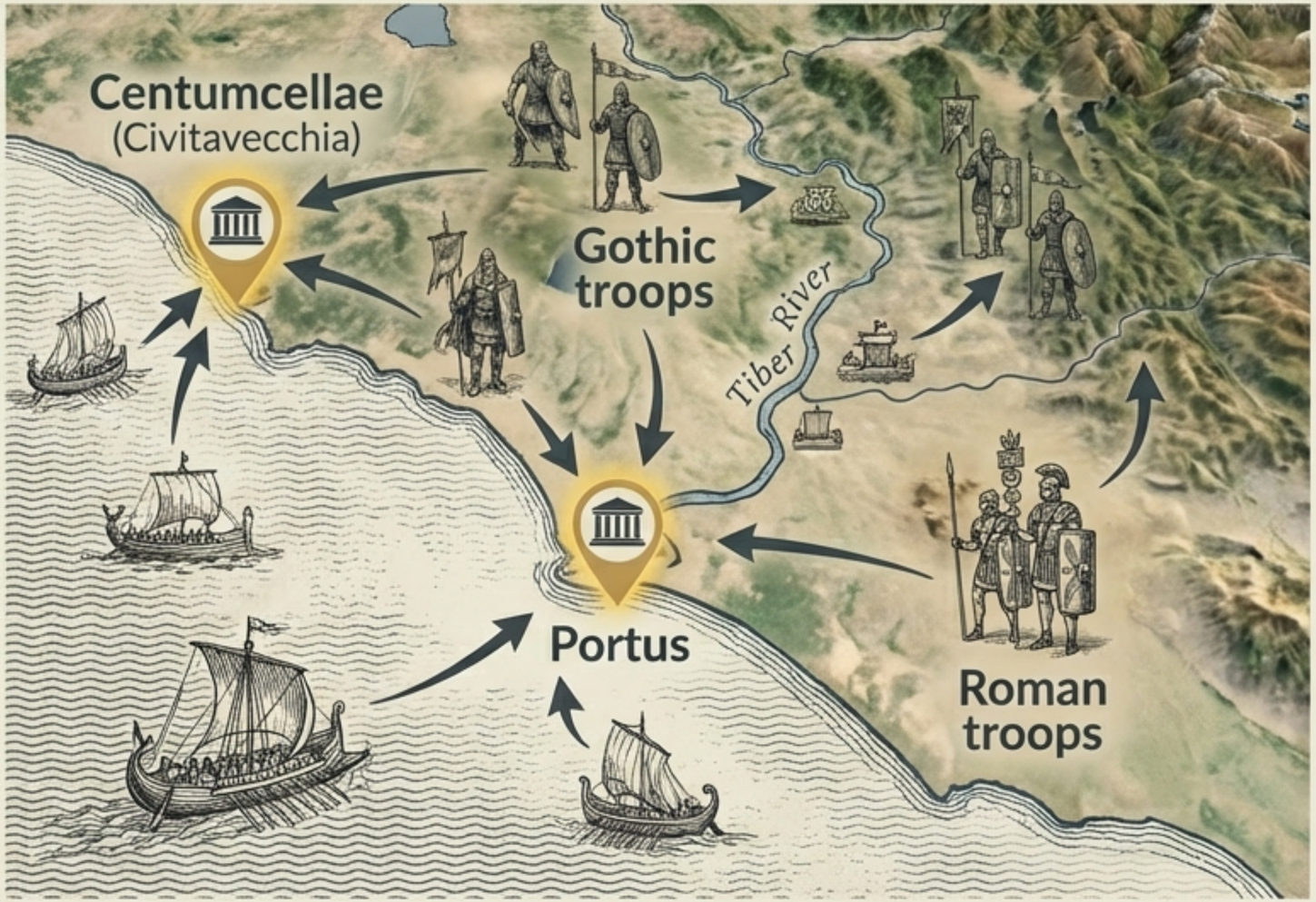




The Goths offered Sicily for peace. Belisarius mocked them by offering Britain—a province Rome had lost long ago and which was useless to the Goths.

NotebookLM

The Collapse of the Gothic Position

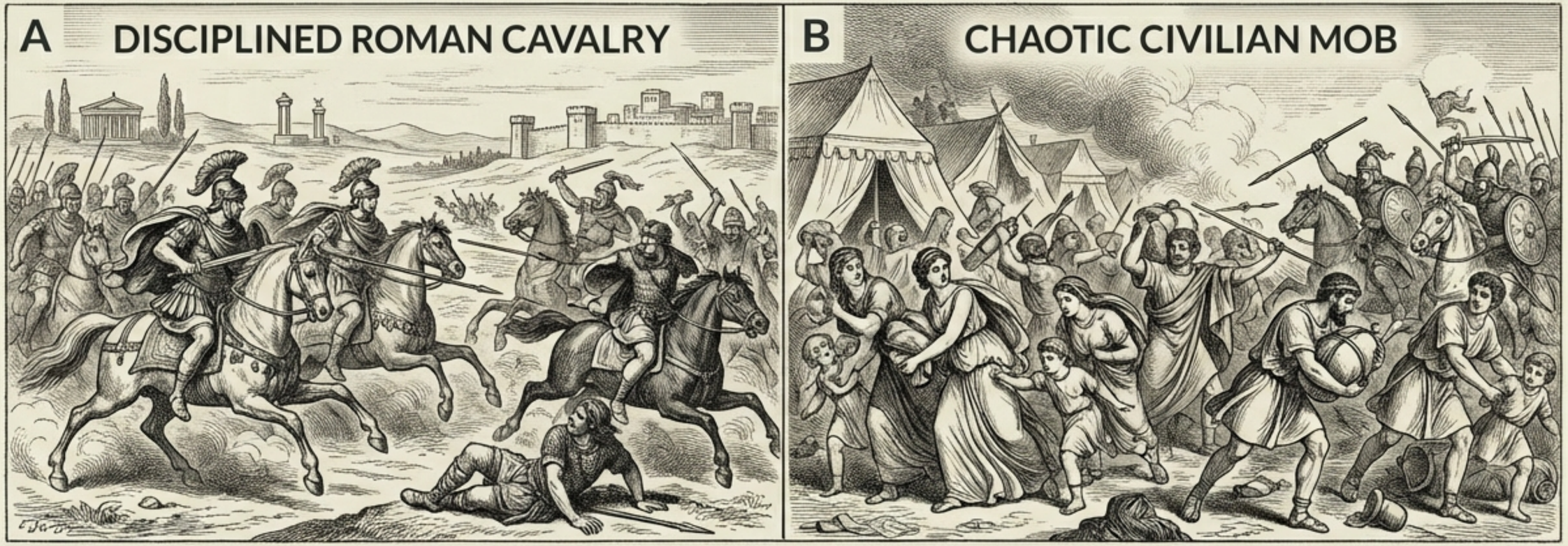


Starving and **cut off** from the sea, the Goths **abandoned** the vital ports. Rome now had a free flow of supplies.

The **checkmate** was complete.

NotebookLM

The Danger of the Mob



Pressured by the populace, Belisarius allowed a sally. While his **cavalry won**, the untrained **mob dispersed to loot** and were nearly destroyed. The lesson: **Discipline** and **walls** are superior to open field risks.

NotebookLM

The Burning of the Camps



One year and nine days after the siege began, the Goths burned their shelters and retreated. The 150,000 had failed. Belisarius, with his 5,000, remained master of Rome.

NotebookLM

Conclusion: The Triumph of Intellect



- **Asymmetrical Warfare**: A 30:1 disadvantage overcome by engineering (floating mills), psychology, and tactical innovation.
- **Economy of Force**: Achieving decisive results with minimum resources.
- **Legacy**: The Defense of Rome stands as the ultimate case study in the superiority of the professional soldier over the massive host.

NotebookLM