# SHADOWS OVER THE EMPIRE

Magic, Corruption, and War: A Visual Chronicle of Ammianus Marcellinus, Book 28 (A.D. 368-370)




Sixteen years after the death of Nepotianus, Bellona, the goddess of war, raged through the eternal city, destroying everything from trifling beginnings. The Empire is fracturing not just from the barbaran spear, but from the judge's gavel. As Valentinian fortifies the Rhine, Rome and Tripoli are devoured by their own protectors.

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# THE FORESHADOWING OF RUIN



**THE CONTEXT (A.D. 368):** The Empire is divided. Valentinian I rules the West, Valens the East. The atmosphere is thick with paranoia.



**THE WARNING:** Ammianus compares the current state of Rome to the "First Median War" and the siege of Miletus, where citizens, overwhelmed by distress, destroyed their own property and lives.

*"Would that they could be buried in everlasting silence... lest similar things may some day be again attempted."*

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# ENTER THE BASILISK: THE RISE OF MAXIMIN

**Origins:**
Born in obscurity at Sopianae. Father was a clerk.

**The Prophecy:**
His father predicted he would rise to supreme power but perish by the executioner's axe.

Prefect

**The Tactic:**
"Like a serpent that glides underground," he waited until he had the power to strike.

**The Sardinian Secret:**
Maximin feared a sorcerer who knew his past; he later had the man murdered.

Obscurity

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# THE PRETEXT: FROM POISON TO MAGIC

- **THE SPARK:** Chilo and his wife Maxima claim they were poisoned by Sericus, Asbolius, and Campensis.
- **THE ESCALATION:** Maximin convinces the Emperor that “magic” is rampant among the nobility.



- **THE LEGAL BREACH:** Furious, Emperor Valentinian issues a single edict: the ancient laws exempting Senators from torture are suspended. Anyone can be put to the rack.
- **THE ENFORCER:** Maximin is appointed pro-prefect of Rome, joined by Leo—a secretary described as “insatiable of human blood.”

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# JUSTICE SUSPENDED: THE REIGN OF TERROR

**THE METHOD:**
Roman Praetorium Maximin kept a cord suspended from a remote window to receive anonymous, evidence-free denunciations.

> “No one could ever be acquitted unless he chose.”



**THE VICTIMS:**

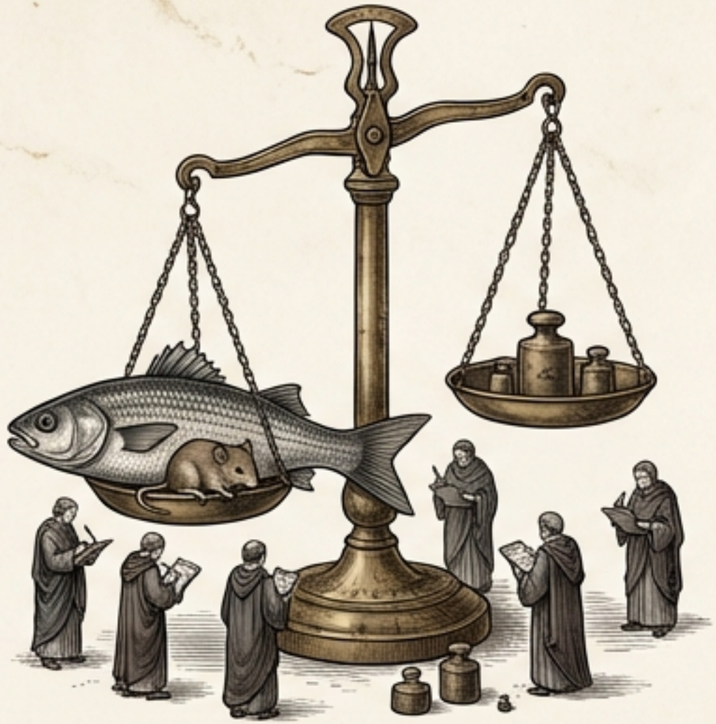
- **Marinus (The Advocate):** Executed for “seeking a marriage” by magic, with no evidence.
- **Claritas & Flaviana:** Noblewomen executed. Claritas was stripped naked before death; the executioner was burned alive for the indignity.
- **Alypius:** A young noble executed for “trivial misconduct.”

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# THE ROT OF THE NOBILITY



**THE VANITY:** Senators wear robes so transparent they are barely decent, fluttering fringes for attention.



**THE GLUTTONY:** Scales are used at dinner parties to weigh fish and dormice, recorded by 30 secretaries as historic events.



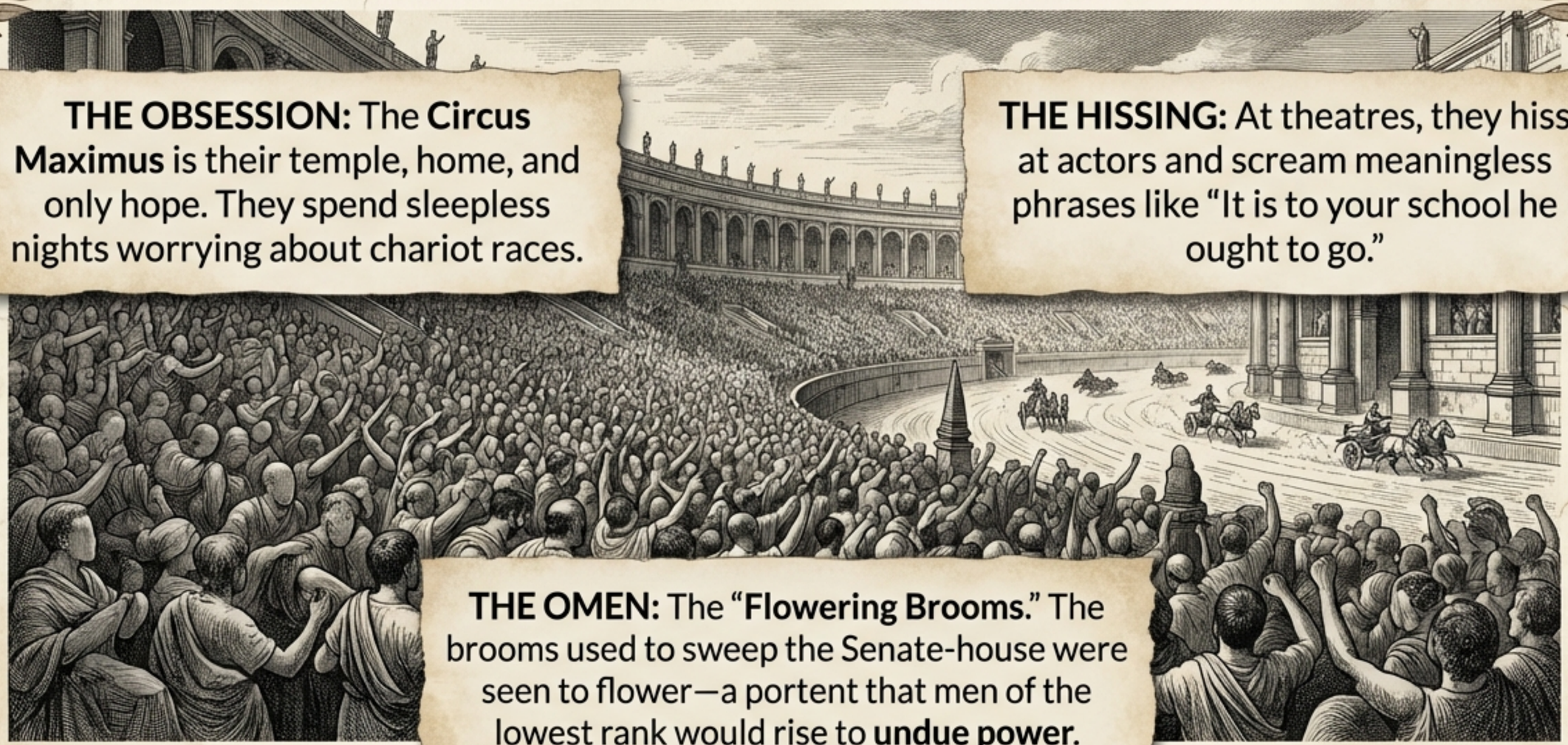
**THE IGNORANCE:** They hate learning 'like poison," reading only gossip and ignoring philosophy.

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# THE ROT OF THE COMMONS: BREAD AND CIRCUSES

**THE OBSESSION:** The **Circus Maximus** is their temple, home, and only hope. They spend sleepless nights worrying about chariot races.

**THE HISSING:** At theatres, they hiss at actors and scream meaningless phrases like “It is to your school he ought to go.”



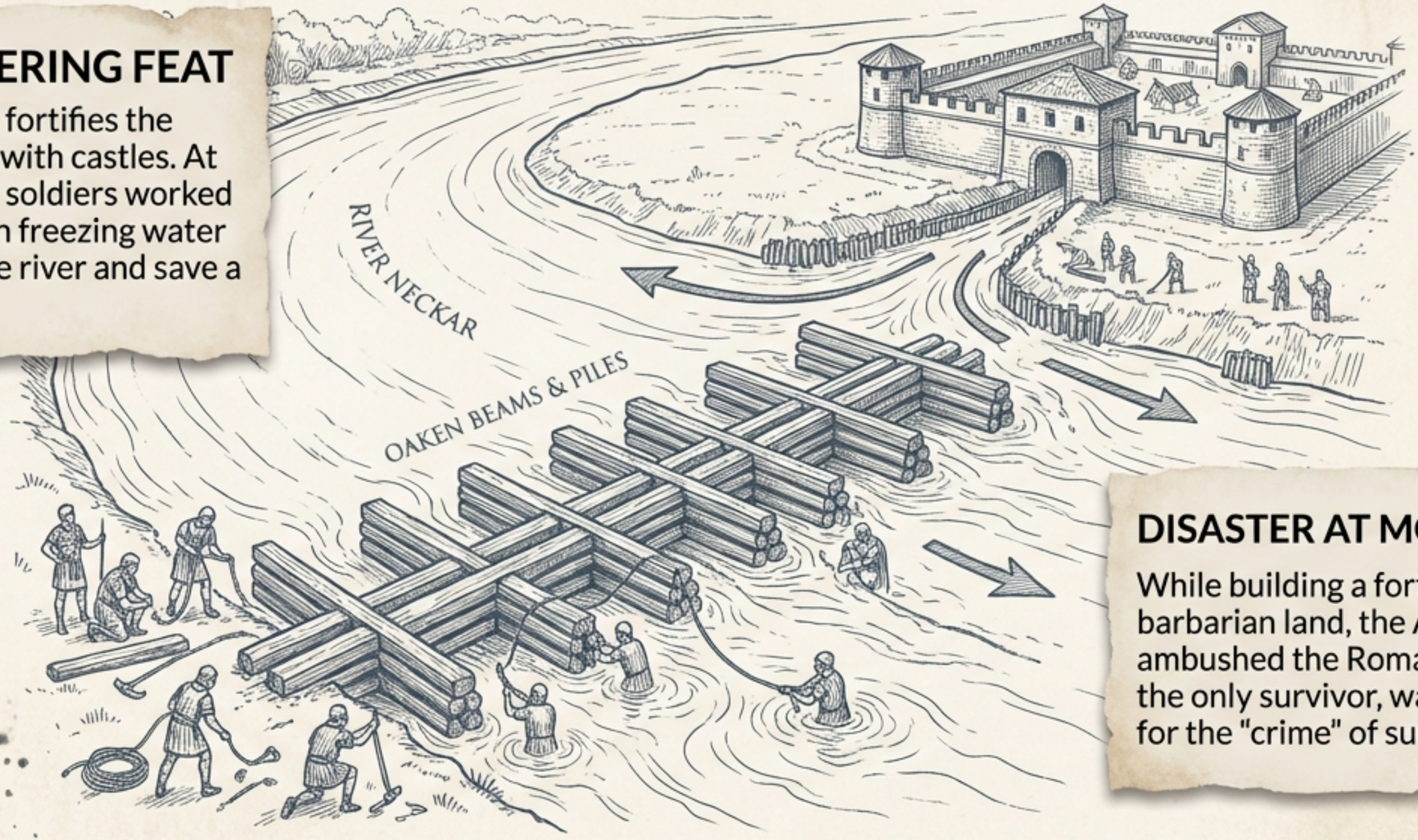
**THE OMEN:** The “**Flowering Brooms.**” The brooms used to sweep the Senate-house were seen to flower—a portent that men of the lowest rank would rise to **undue power.**

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# The Shield Strained: Fortifying the Rhine

## ENGINEERING FEAT

Valentinian fortifies the Gallic bank with castles. At the Neckar, soldiers worked chin-deep in freezing water to divert the river and save a fortress.




## DISASTER AT MOUNT PIRI

While building a fort on barbarian land, the Allemanni ambushed the Romans. Syagrius, the only survivor, was cashiered for the "crime" of surviving.

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# Diplomacy by Betrayal



## THE SAXON TRAP

Romans agreed to a truce, then ambushed the retreating Saxons in a defile. A ‘treacherous and disgraceful” victory.



## THE BURGUNDIAN BETRAYAL

Valentinian invited the Burgundians to help fight the Allemanni, then failed to show up. Feeling mocked, the Burgundians slew their prisoners and left.

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# The Recovery of Britain

## THE HERO:

**Theodosius (the Elder)**, a general of "very famous reputation."

## THE ACTIONS:

1. Restored the ruined city of Londinium.
2. Recovered the lost province of Valentia.
3. Crushed the conspiracy of Valentine, an exile and brother-in-law to the hated Maximin.

## QUOTE:

He entered the city "in high spirits... bringing a mighty aid to the embarrassed fortunes of the Britons."




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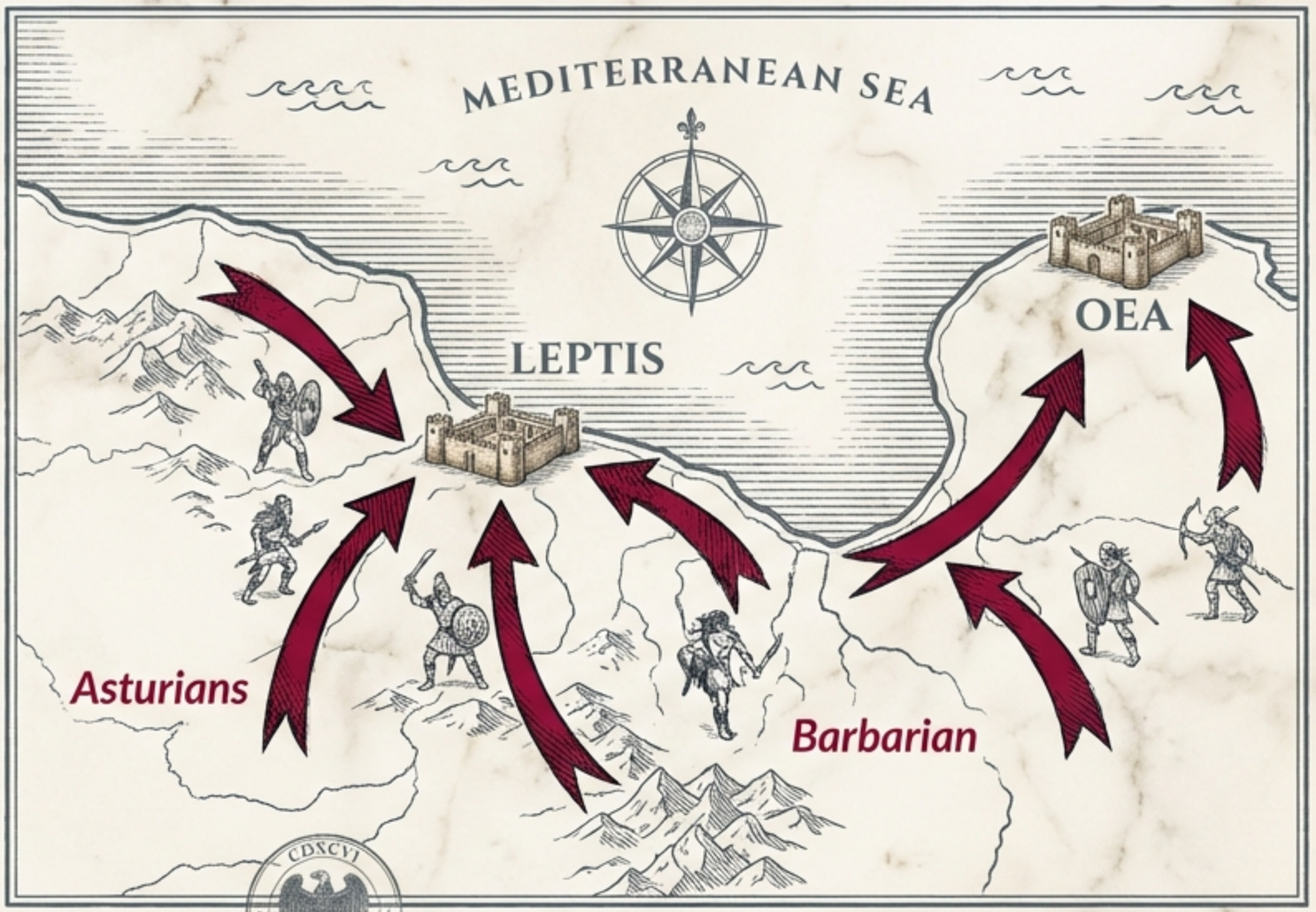
# THE TRAGEDY OF TRIPOLI: A PROVINCE ABANDONED

**THE CAUSE:**
Stachao is executed. The Asturians invade to avenge him, ravaging the fertile lands of Leptis.

**THE EXTORTION:**
The citizens beg Count Romanus (Military Governor) for protection.

**THE ULTIMATUM:**
Romanus refuses to mobilize his army unless the starving, besieged **citizens provide him with 4,000 CAMELS and abundant supplies.**

**THE RESULT:**
Unable to pay, the citizens are left **to die.** Romanus marches away.




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# The Web of Lies: Romanus and Palladius



TRIPOLI AMBASSADORS

Pleas for Help



EMPEROR VALENTINIAN

Reports “Citizens are Lying”



PALLADIUS (The Notary)

Investigate



COUNT ROMANUS

Bribes/Lies



REMIGIUS (Master of Offices)



*Paid from soldier payroll*

**BRIBED BY ROMANUS**

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# THE DEATH OF TRUTH

## THE VERDICT:

Palladius reports the citizens complained “without reason.”
**Romanus** tortures citizens into false confessions.

## THE SENTENCES:



**Governor Ruricius:** Executed at Sitifis for “falsehood.”



**Ambassadors** (Jovinus, Caelestinus, Concordius, Lucius): **CONDEMNED TO DEATH.**

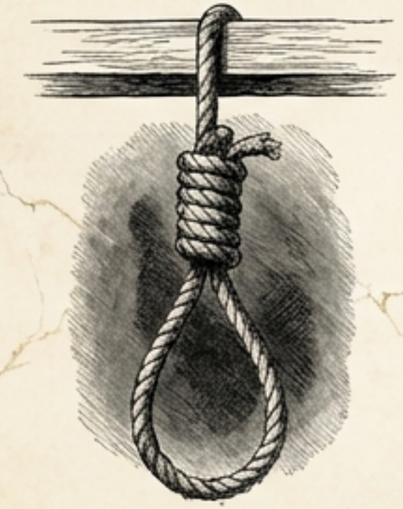


**Erecthius & Aristomenes:** Ordered to have their **TONGUES CUT OUT.**

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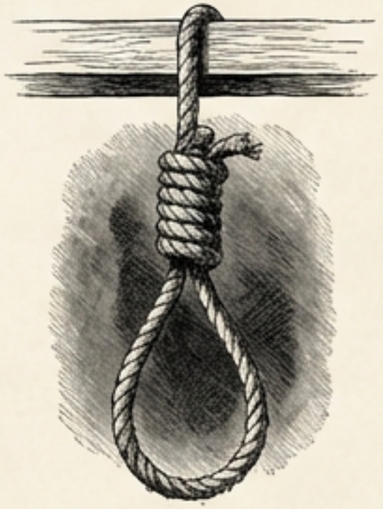
# THE FATE OF THE CONSPIRATORS

## PALLADIUS



Committed suicide by hanging.

## REMIGIUS



Committed suicide by hanging.

## ROMANUS
### (The Architect)



**JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED**

ACQUITTED through manipulation.

**FINAL INSIGHT:** In Ammianus's Rome, the external enemy burns the crops, but the internal enemy kills the soul of the Empire.

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