

XI

NOTE

A note on Major Donaldson's Article on Roman Military Signalling

MAJOR DONALDSON cites the use of the panel from Trajan's column to illustrate the complexity of Roman visual signalling with particular reference to "what looks like two straw ricks". (1) *AA*⁵ XIII (1985) page 22.

These straw ricks are used on modern Italian small-holdings as outdoor granaries. Examples are visible in the vicinity of Monte Cassino and alongside the main road from Rome to Pompeii. Their peculiar use is to combat several menaces, including the Italian rat, which can grow to the size of a large fox terrier and will be familiar to visitors to the amphitheatre at Pompeii and to ex-Servicemen. These persistent pests are notorious for their climbing ability. Moreover, the climate of Italy is such that if stored produce is not surrounded by a free air circulation it will soon become covered in mildew and be rendered unfit for human consumption.

Finally, it is important to have easy access to the stored produce for inspection and Roman farm houses do not lend themselves to the above necessities. The granary is a sapling, stripped of its branches and erected near the farm building so it is partly sheltered from prevailing winds. Depending on overall height, three or four baskets are clipped to the trunk, each basket increasing in diameter as its position descends towards the foot of the upright. The lowest basket will be some three feet from the bottom. Each basket contains produce such as corn cobs and apples (in my experience) and each basket has its own thatched roof. Hence the fir-tree effect. I would assume that military personnel in Roman times would use wicker baskets to fulfill the above functions. Note the panel from Trajan's column would occur in lower Latitudes than those of the British Isles, so it is doubtful whether these granaries would form part of Roman life in Britain.

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