

IRON MEN:  
ROMAN MASCULINITY AND THE ROMAN MILITARY DAGGER

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## ABSTRACT

The Roman military dagger, or *pugio*, is an understudied weapon. Scholars have largely disagreed on the use of the weapon, but most acknowledge that the *pugio* functioned as more than a tool, military adornment, and weapon. Soldiers might have used the *pugio* to demonstrate their capacity for violence and thus express their masculinity. This thesis investigates the *pugio* through archaeological and historical methodologies, through a study of iconographic representations of the *pugio*, archaeological evidence, and classical sources. The *pugio* is depicted on grave *stelae* of common soldiers but not on those of officers or high-ranking Romans, perhaps due to differences in the way these groups constructed male identity. Also, the *pugio* appears in rivers throughout Northern Europe, a depositional pattern examined using a chi-squared test. The appearance of the *pugio* in these rivers could be linked to expressions of Roman masculine virtues, as soldiers interacted with local populations.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ned Fischer earned his Bachelor of Arts in Biology, Classics, and History at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. His fascination with ancient warfare, combined with an enthusiasm for identity studies, has driven his MA research. He is keenly interested in the role of masculinity in shaping identities and societies in the modern and ancient worlds.

Laura who is my dearest friend, my parents Dean and Anne, who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams wherever they may lead, and my grandmother Lois, who passed away during my first semester at Cornell, this thesis is for you all.

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## Introduction

The army is a unique institution through which to consider the construction of male identity in the Roman world. Roman soldiers were expected to behave in ways unacceptable to the rest of society. They were compelled to act violently for the protection of themselves and their state, As Richard Alston notes, “Violence has been seen as a particularly male attribute and usually legitimated violence offered by the soldier has often meant that soldiers have been represented as ideals of manhood”.<sup>1</sup> Soldiers sometimes carry out barbaric acts simply to establish their own power or legitimacy in the face of their enemy.<sup>2</sup> Savagery and feats of martial valor not only instilled fear in the hearts of the Roman soldier’s enemies, but also solidified his place in a hyper competitive and aggressive male society.

This thesis investigates masculinity in the Roman army from the end of the first century BC to the late first century AD through a close analysis of the Roman military dagger, or *pugio*, a weapon that embodied the ruthless aspects of a Roman soldier’s work and the violent nature of Roman masculinity. One of the central arguments of the thesis is that Romans considered the *pugio*, a weapon commonly depicted and cited in the military context, to be distinctly a Roman soldier’s weapon. Display and use of the *pugio* allowed the wielder to assert himself both psychologically and physically, while affirming his masculinity in a way that encompassed Roman ideals. Because of the extremely short-range penetrative violence entailed in killing with the *pugio*, the weapon became synonymous with manliness and soldiering, and its display and use communicated Roman values and conceptions of virility and masculinity.

To understand the *pugio*’s place in the Roman soldier’s kit and the Roman imagination, one must also understand the masculine social sphere within which *pugio* users were trying to affirm their place. The Roman army involved a complex system of honor that held together the community of men and soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Simon James and Jon Lendon have both emphasized that honor maintained and characterized the society of Roman soldiers, who encouraged bravery, strength, and other attributes that allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Alston 1998, 205.

<sup>2</sup> James 2011, 25-7.

<sup>3</sup> Lendon 1997, 243.

success in war. However, these scholars diverge slightly on *how* honor maintained the army community. Lendon credits the officers, who went to great lengths to establish themselves as tough, resourceful, austere, and severe, as the main source of pride and honor in a trickle-down system where common soldiers at the bottom competed for the admiration of their commanders in order to be distinguished from their peers.<sup>4</sup> James, on the other hand, underscores the pack mentality of the Roman army and how soldiers commonly acted against their officers' orders. James maintains a metaphor for Roman soldiers throughout his book, *Rome and the Sword*, describing them as ruthless, bloodthirsty, and unruly wolves; violence was a way to establish one's martial valor and reinforce one's role in the pack.<sup>5</sup> James and Lendon agree that Roman soldiers, though intensely trained and ferociously disciplined, were constantly seeking to outdo one another in feats of arms, and sometimes fought and killed each other, officers, officials, generals, emperors, and civilians.<sup>6</sup> Lendon's observations of how the pursuit of honor worked to establish an in-group within the army has influenced scholars' approach to discussing the paradox of a well-maintained and regulated army versus a group of violent, armed men seeking to legitimize their own manly virtue.

While soldiers could and often did take advantage of the communities they lived alongside, their presence had effects beyond terrorizing the populace. Nico Roymans describes how Roman material culture became relevant to local populations through interaction with soldiers, especially in the form of weapons. Roymans argues that the importance placed on Roman weapons in the provinces of Europe is evidence of the effect Roman presence had on the militarization of local communities. According to Roymans, the newfound emphasis on Roman material culture helped define groups of non-Roman natives: "Martiality will have played an important part here in the self-definition of elites and, following this, also of lower social groups which [sic] were integrated into elite networks".<sup>7</sup> Roymans argues that

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<sup>4</sup> Lendon offers a number of instances in which Roman soldiers vied for the admiration and honor of their officers. Lendon also discusses how the system of honor held together the community of soldiers, many of whom went to extreme lengths to demonstrate their resilience, toughness, and masculinity. Lendon 1997, 238-265.

<sup>5</sup> James, 25-27.

<sup>6</sup> Lendon 1997, 237-66.

<sup>7</sup> Roymans 1996, 28.

the occurrence of Roman weapons in the archaeological record relates to the rise and spread of Roman military ideals. He critiques the view, prominent in existing scholarship, that Roman weapons belonged to Roman soldiers. Rather than assume that the Roman weapons found in the archaeological record were lost or left behind by Roman soldiers, Roymans argues that their occurrence in foreign lands might reflect a change in the ideals and values of the indigenous population and not the actions of Roman soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Working under the assumption that the appearance of Roman military equipment in non-Roman contexts indicates a spread of Roman martial ideology, I suggest that the machismo and violence surrounding the *pugio* was extended and accepted into non-Roman society as demonstrated by military daggers appearing in foreign contexts.

This influx of Roman material might indicate a new emphasis on Roman military values within provincial populations. The common Roman soldier sought to distinguish himself as a man of arms through his choice of dull clothing and personal display of weapons.<sup>9</sup> James establishes how soldiers might differentiate themselves through their clothing and adornments:

*Milites* still regarded themselves as proud Roman males with values and traditions to uphold... men whose ideology emphasized traditional Roman plainness and the sweat, dust, and toil of service, contrasting appropriately with the gaudy colors and elaboration of the dress of women and barbarians.

Beyond the spartan clothing, soldiers maintained “their specific status as men licensed to kill for the state physically and visually by wearing the sword itself.”<sup>10</sup> James draws on the notion that soldiers are not just characterized by extrajudicial violence; it is their wardrobe and arms, which allow them to carry out their task of violence, that make soldiers. This thesis will focus on one of the weapons, which, when used and displayed, helped uphold a man’s status as a warrior.

In the first part of this thesis, I survey the ways in which scholars have interpreted the use of the *pugio* through its appearance in the archaeological, iconographic, and literary record. From there I investigate how the common Roman soldier used the *pugio* as a symbol of masculinity and how the

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<sup>8</sup> Roymans 1996, 28.

<sup>9</sup> James 2011, 190.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

military dagger's use as a *mêlée* weapon predicated its adoption as a sign of manliness. Next, I examine the *pugio* in archaeological contexts and discuss how the weapon's appearance in rivers could have been linked to the weapon's expression of masculinity. Archaeological finds of *pugiones* are accounted for only in regions throughout Europe, and this thesis will present a possible explanation for the military dagger's distribution, particularly in the context of rivers, as a meaningful material pattern in antiquity related to the use and symbolism of the weapon.

How Romans actually used the *pugio* is the subject of much debate, which has pushed scholarly discourse to characterize the *pugio* as a weapon, tool, or adornment, while largely ignoring its social context. While the *pugio*'s use is an important facet of research, focusing exclusively on its use overlooks an important aspect of the weapon. By demonstrating how the *pugio* worked as an affirmation of masculinity, I account for the discrepancy between different iconographic representations of the *pugio* noted by Saliola and Casprini. I also provide an original hypothesis of how soldiers might have used the *pugio* to negotiate intersectionality between class and manhood. I also propose an answer to why the *pugio* ends up in watery contexts throughout Europe, a phenomenon that has not been considered and which I describe as a reflection of Roman military values spreading to native cultures. Finally, I use modern analogy to link ancient soldiers' use and display of the *pugio* to today's soldiers who often use, talk about, and compare combat knives.

### History of the *Pugio*

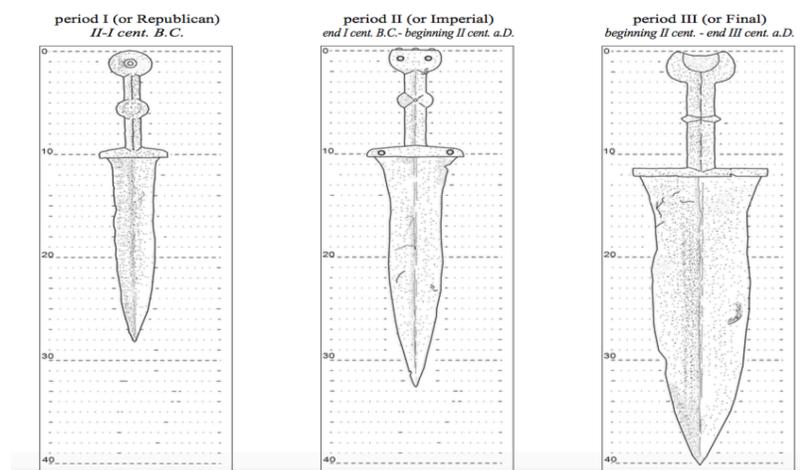


Figure 1: Representative shapes and sizes of *pugio* types over time. Notice the growth of the weapon as well as the shrinking of the disk on the handle. Lengths are given in cm. Taken from Saliola and Casprini.

The *pugio* is a stout dagger, a double bladed knife with a sharp point and a handle often with two disks; it was used by the Roman army from the end of the second century BC through the third century AD.<sup>11</sup> Marco Saliola and Fabrizio Casprini established a typology for the *pugio* that covers the entire duration of its use in the Roman military based on its changing size and ornamentation, which has led to its classification into three distinct types.<sup>12</sup> The earliest type (Type I), and also the smallest, corresponds to the late first century BC. Type II, which accounts for most archaeological finds and is characteristically the most ornately decorated, existed from the end of the first century BC to the first quarter of the second century AD. Type III, morphologically the largest, coincides with the beginning of the second century AD until the *pugio* fell out of use in the late third century. Earliest examples of *pugiones* are the shortest versions of the weapon, which grew from under 30 cm when first adopted by the Roman army to over 40 cm when the military dagger fell into disuse (Figure 1). Although the size of the *pugio* changed through time, its form remained about the same, retaining its leaf-shaped blade and double-disc handle.

The two disks that often make up the handle and pommel of the weapon are essential in interpreting its origins, as similar weapons are prevalent on the Iberian Peninsula prior to Roman military presence. Scholars agree that the *pugio* was a design borrowed from the Celtiberian double-disc-handled (dobleglobular) dagger, probably first taken as booty, and then copied by Roman smiths.<sup>13</sup> The dagger's absorption into the Roman army was most likely a quick process, once Roman soldiers took daggers as trophies in the Numantine and Sertorian Wars of 153-133 BC and 75 BC respectively. Roman smiths thereafter began emulating its size and shape.<sup>14</sup> The military dagger was first observed to have coexisted in the same location as Roman troops at the camp of Renieblas, Spain, in 153 BC.<sup>15</sup> Roman soldiers used

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<sup>11</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> De Prado (2008): 76.

<sup>14</sup> Quesada-Sanz and De Prado 2006, 71.

<sup>15</sup> De Prado (2008): 76.

the military dagger exclusively in campaigns on the Iberian Peninsula until after the end of the First Triumvirate, when it spread further afield.

The earliest recorded military dagger found outside of the Iberian Peninsula is part of a group of Roman weapons recovered from the battlefield in Alésia (France), and dated to 52 BC.<sup>16</sup> On the basis of this evidence, Michel Feugere makes the point that the *pugio* seems to have diffused throughout the Republic. By the mid first century BC Roman soldiers were using it as a part of their kit, and the *pugio* had transformed into an object identified not as foreign and barbaric, but as fully Roman. These excavations recovered a plethora of Roman weapons, including 11 *gladii*, 38 *pila*, and 5 *pugiones*, the *gladius* and the *pilum* being weapons considered specifically Roman. Eduardo De Pardo describes how this diffusion of the Celtiberian weapon from the Iberian Peninsula to Alésia demonstrates its widespread adoption.<sup>17</sup> The military dagger came to be considered a Roman weapon, so much so that, today, the discovery of a weapon is enough for scholars to claim a Roman military presence in the surrounding area.<sup>18</sup> Though references to the use of the *pugio* in the military are numerous, as are iconographic representations of the dagger in military parade, scholars disagree widely about its actual use.

### **Historiography and Interpretations of the Use of the *Pugio***

Ian Stephenson provides one of the earliest attempts to describe the use of the *pugio*. His approach does not employ much archaeological or literary evidence. Stephenson largely neglects the ancient sources saying, “Unfortunately the literary sources are largely silent on this matter and we must therefore rely on comparative evidence and conjecture”.<sup>19</sup> Stephenson describes how the weapon’s size made it a perfect choice for attacking foes at very close range, when a longer weapon, like a sword or spear, would have been ineffective. Stephenson also hypothesizes, through analogy to other military daggers, that soldiers might have kept the *pugio* on their person for dispatching men who had fallen, particularly cavalry.

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<sup>16</sup> Five *pugiones* were found in the area of Alésia, which are the earliest known specimens that exist outside of the Iberian Peninsula. Feugere 2002.

<sup>17</sup> De Prado (2008): 5–85.

<sup>18</sup> Istenič 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Stephenson 1999, 78.

Michel Feugere, Graham Sumner, Raffaele D'Amato, Carmelo Ibáñez, and Michael Bishop agree that the *pugio* was never more than a reserve weapon, though they disagree on its effectiveness as a backup.<sup>20</sup> Sumner and D'Amato say little about the military dagger's actual use beyond that it was simply an auxiliary weapon to the more formidable *gladius*. Bishop has asserted that: "With a blade of between 250 and 350 mm, the *pugio* was clearly a formidable weapon to have as a back-up should the sword be lost or damaged, and we need not view it solely as a 'boy-scout' knife used for eating meals or whittling wood."<sup>21</sup> Carmelo Ibáñez describes *pugiones* as weapons to be used simply as a last resort, saying "their ability to fight is obviously very low".<sup>22</sup> Ibáñez also argues for a secondary use of the military dagger as a utility knife that soldiers used around camp.

Ibáñez, Feugere, and Flavio Russo offer yet another view, citing the *pugio*'s craftsmanship, depictions appearing only in military parade, and its ornamentation as reasons for never seeing combat. Ibáñez bases his argument on the weapon's supposed ineffectiveness and from interpretations of military grave stela, on which the *pugio* is depicted only as a supplemental piece in military parade, and never in combat use. Likewise, Russo states that "the craftsmanship is far too refined, to the point that it was kept more as an ornament than as a fighting weapon." Feugere tells his reader that while the weapon carried great symbolic meaning, it was probably not very effective.<sup>23</sup> But the notion advanced by all these authors, that *pugio* was never used in combat, is not supported by literary citations of the *pugio*. And the idea that the *pugio* was used as a simple tool is unattested in the iconographic and literary evidence.

In light of these opposing claims, it seems that the explanations for the *pugio*'s use are educated assumptions based on its size, iconographic representations, and finds. Through analogy to other known uses of military daggers, speaking with military experts on daggers as effective weapons in battle, and considering the literary references to the *pugio*, as well as the iconographic evidence, the *pugio*'s use comes into focus. It is the *pugio*'s use for close, penetrative killing that gives the weapon meaning.

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<sup>20</sup> Feugere 2002, 126; Sumner and D'Amato 2009, 96; Ibáñez 2003, 72-73; Bishop 2006, 85.

<sup>21</sup> Bishop 2006, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Ibáñez 2003, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Russo 2009; Feugere 2002, 167.

The claim that the *pugio* was far too ornamental for actual use falls short considering the decorations that appear on the *gladius*, the Roman sword and main mêlée weapon of the legion during the middle to late the first century BC. Many *gladii* were richly decorated, and yet did not suffer in terms of functionality. A reference in Suetonius demonstrates that Caesar encouraged greater ornamentation of weapons, “furnishing them with arms inlaid with silver and gold, both for show and to make them hold the faster to them in battle, through fear of the greatness of the loss” (Suet. *Jul.* 67).<sup>24</sup> An examination of *pugio* chronology will show that highly ornamental military daggers were created only during a particular time frame, from the end of the first century BC until the beginning of the second, a span of roughly 150 years. Furthermore, while many existing *pugio* show signs of stylistic elaboration, there are also many known examples that show little ornamentation at all.<sup>25</sup> Barry Strauss suggests that the *pugio* was more easily produced and cared for than a *gladius*, and that soldiers could have purchased ornamentation for the military dagger more cheaply than for a larger weapon such as the *gladius*.<sup>26</sup> Also, unlike the *pilum*, the Roman javelin designed to bend or break on impact so that an enemy target could not throw it back, the *pugio* was an integral part of the soldier’s kit that was meant to be used over the long term. The *pugio*’s ornamentation, I suggest, precisely demonstrates that this weapon was essential to the Roman soldier; it would not have affected the military dagger’s usefulness as a weapon and tool.

One aspect of the *pugio* largely absent from scholarly interpretations of the dagger’s use, but nevertheless helpful in deciphering how Romans might have conceptualized the weapon, is its etymology, which attests to the weapon’s ability to cause real harm through its use at close proximity.

The Latin term “*Pugio*” derives from the verb “*pungo*”... which belongs to a group of terms with the meaning shock, and in the case of *pugio* means “physical blow, given by a sharp point”... The etymology of dagger (“*pugnale*” in Italian), derives from “*pugnus*”, with the meaning of fist (“*pugno*” in Italian): the way in which the weapon was held. In both meanings, *pugio* and dagger ...the type of combat implied is that of “*pugna*”, that is to say ...“hand-to-hand” combat.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ed. Reed and Thomson 1889.

<sup>25</sup> Saliola and Casprini describe how Type I and III *pugiones* are relatively simple in their design and ornamentation.

<sup>26</sup> Strauss 2015, 132.

Saliola and Casprini discuss how the dagger was a standard issue weapon and how documented cases or a dearth of *pugiones* in the archaeological record demonstrate the adaptability of the Roman army. *Pugiones* demonstrate a wide variety of ornamentation during the Type II phase. Saliola and Casprini 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Saliola and Casprini. 2012, 5.

Saliola and Casprini's analysis of the *pugio*'s etymology provides insight into the Roman conceptualization of the weapon. The name itself implies physical conflict.

Some scholars have turned to analogy when considering the *pugio*'s use in order to better understand what soldiers can do with short blades in hand-to-hand combat.<sup>28</sup> James notes that, apart from Special Forces, few modern soldiers use any sort of bladed weapon.<sup>29</sup> Roman soldiers, however, could not forgo the use of a bladed weapon. The Romans were aware that a thrusting attack with a bladed weapon was far more effective than a slashing attack.

They were likewise taught not to cut but to thrust with their swords. For the Romans not only made a jest of those who fought with the edge of that weapon, but always found them an easy conquest... On the contrary, a stab, though it penetrates but two inches, is generally fatal (Veg. *Mil.* 1.11).<sup>30</sup>

Knowing that Roman infantry were most likely well versed in the thrusting attack, the most efficient way to dispatch a foe, one can assume that the *pugio* was used for such attacks.

The length and width of the *pugio* make it an efficient and devastating stabbing weapon. Cassius Dio points out how the *pugio* was perfectly suited to the Roman style of fighting, which took advantage of the short-range effectiveness of their arms, the training and discipline which enabled soldiers to fight cohesively on the frontlines, and heavy Roman armor. Cassius Dio describes a battle during Caesar's campaign against the Helvetii and Ariovistus where the Romans were able to overpower their physically superior adversaries by means of shorter weapons, more rigorous training, and heavier armor, all of which made the limited armor and long weapons of the Germans ineffective against the Roman short-range tactics. Dio also describes how the Roman short daggers proved effective during this battle because of their superior construction and easy maneuverability, "For their daggers, which were smaller than the Gallic daggers and had steel points, proved most serviceable to them" (*His.* 38.49).<sup>31</sup> Not only does this

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<sup>28</sup> Stephenson uses *The Military Art of Training* (1622) to describe possible uses of the *pugio*. Stephenson 1999, 78.

<sup>29</sup> James 2016, 45.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Clarke 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Cary 1914.

episode illustrate how soldiers could efficiently wield the military dagger in close quarters combat, but it also demonstrates how comfortable Roman soldiers were with this type of warfare.

Knives are commonplace in the military today, though with the use of firearms, which make killing physically and psychologically much easier, soldiers rarely use knives in combat. Knives are essential in the life of a soldier, but mainly for the mundane. Special Forces units, which are accustomed to all manner of combat and entrenchment scenarios, use knives for tasks like cutting wires and cord, breaking locks, repairing equipment, opening cans, and basic survival needs. In an interview with a detachment commander, I learned that many soldiers do not carry a combat knife unless on a mission that would necessitate it.<sup>32</sup> However, although combat knives in the modern military are rarely used to kill, many soldiers today are willing to pay “a knife’s weight in gold”<sup>33</sup> for one they could wear confidently, knowing it will properly defend them in a fight and will communicate their readiness to engage.

Like the Romans, modern soldiers wear combat knives in a highly visible position, such as near the hip or on the outside of a pocket or belt. Body armor requires that soldiers wear their military daggers on the hip or close to the thigh in a modern context as well as in a Roman one. This allows for easy access for a soldier who might be drawing a dagger from a lying or crouching position.<sup>34</sup> Another reason for the military dagger’s prominent placement is to display a piece of equipment that is both costly and emblematic of the soldier’s ability for outward aggression.<sup>35</sup> The Romans had several ways of attaching the military dagger to the person; one was a suspension system that attached to the *cingulum* via rings on the sheath of the *pugio*. Another method was to hang the *pugio* on a separate sling that crossed from the wearer’s shoulder to the opposite hip.<sup>36</sup> These methods of attachment allowed for easy access to the weapon. They might also have afforded a sense of security and promoted the warrior identity. Both the side sling and the belted holster conjure up the distinct image of machismo that is still recognizable today

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<sup>32</sup> Gouthro 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Iovito 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Gouthro 2015; Iovito 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Feugere, Michel. *Weapons of the Romans*. Tempus, 2002, 50.

in what Feugere has invoked as a sort of “Wild-West” likeness.<sup>37</sup> Even in a modern context, where killing is mainly done at a distance, men feel more secure and visibly fierce when equipped with a blade. As one personal correspondence with a Special Forces officer revealed, “A man just feels more tough and prepared with a knife on his side.”<sup>38</sup>

An account of Julius Caesar’s travels across the Adriatic provides one example of how the military dagger encouraged bravery simply by its physical presence. Velleius Paterculus describes the event: “During the voyage, sighting, as he thought, some pirate vessels, he removed his outer garments, bound a military dagger to his thigh (*pugionem ad femur*), and prepared himself for any event” (Vel. Pat. 2. 43.).<sup>39</sup> The choice of the *pugio* as a first line of defense demonstrates how the wearer in this situation felt more equipped to defend himself by strapping it to his person. Whether this story has any historical merit is somewhat irrelevant. Either the *pugio* was truly worn by Julius Caesar in preparation for an attack, or the historian Marcus Velleius Paterculus thought strapping on a *pugio* was an appropriate measure to take for one’s self-defense.<sup>40</sup>

The *pugio*’s appearance on funerary *stelae*, where it is depicted merely as part of a soldier’s military parade dress in the belt accompanied by the *gladius*, poses difficulty in arguing for the potential combat use of the *pugio* (Figure 2). The absence of funerary *stelae* depicting soldiers using the *pugio* in active combat makes the idea of the *pugio* performing a symbolic purpose enticing, as other weapons such as the *gladius* and the Roman cavalry lance, the *contus*, are commonly depicted in combat. The following sections will explore the symbolic meaning of the *pugio* and how soldiers would have used it as a symbol.

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<sup>37</sup>Feugere describes the common soldier wearing the *pugio* as a “cowboy from the American West”, declaring it an apt description as both men wear their arms as a symbol of their own physical prowess. Feugere 2002, 50.

<sup>38</sup>Gouthro 2015.

<sup>39</sup>Trans. Shipley 1924.

<sup>40</sup>An individual might have felt that a *pugio* was sufficient for self-defense, but the Roman army did not. A soldier who armed himself with only his *pugio* might be subject to capital punishment (Tac. Ann. 11.18).

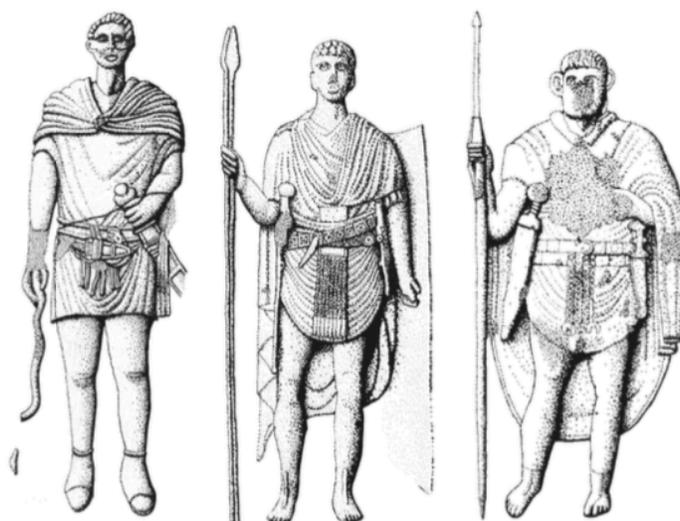


Fig. VII/4: detail of the stelae of (from the left):

- Minucius Lorarius, legionary of the legio Martia (I century B.C.). Note the detail of carrying the pugio on the abdomen in a horizontal position;
- Annaius Daverzus, auxiliary of the cohorts IV Delmatarum (I century A.D.). The soldier is wearing two cingula, one for his gladius and the other for his pugio, worn crossed over.
- Petilius Centundus, legionary of the legio XV Primigenia (I century A.D.), as in the previous stela, the soldier is wearing two cingula, but both in a horizontal position, one above the other.

(from "Roman Military Equipment: from the Punic war to the fall of Rome, M. Bishop & J. Coulston)

Figure 2: Three separate funerary stelae in which soldiers display the *pugio*. Note that the *gladius* also appears in each of these depictions. Taken from Saliola and Casprini.

### Construction of Masculinity

Definitions of masculinity are often linked to power and state structure, and assumptions of what constitutes manliness often entail aggression, assertiveness, independence, and competitiveness.<sup>41</sup>

Manliness for a Roman lay in his ability to have control over himself fiscally, emotionally, and physically.<sup>42</sup> This meant that neither slaves, nor men assuming a sexually submissive role, nor men in debt would have been seen as an outstanding *vir*. None of these groups could exercise complete autonomy over themselves since others, in some manner, dominated them.<sup>43</sup>

Defending oneself and exercising force over another were paragon examples of bodily control in the Roman mind. Phang describes a number of scenarios in which a Roman soldier's masculinity might be challenged when serving in the military and how defense of one's body, especially from penetration, was rewarded in the Roman army.<sup>44</sup> The Roman sword was a familiar image that the Roman people would have easily recognized. The sword demonstrated the man's capacity for lethal violence, and also

<sup>41</sup> Brittan 1991, 2-4; Alston 1998, 205-207; Phang 2008, 92-95.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy O'Sullivan describes how a man's gait, appearance, kept company, and spending habits all contributed to judgments on his *pudicitia* and *virtus*. This conversation on walking as also explores how a Roman man's identity was constantly on display. O'Sullivan 2014.

<sup>43</sup> McGinn 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Phang 2008, 93-95.

his ability to force his will on others. It was the ultimate symbol of Roman *virtus* as it demonstrated a man's dominion and his ability "to inflict violence without tolerating personal injury".<sup>45</sup> The *pugio*, like the sword, was tied to concepts of self-defense and violence. In describing the use of the *pugio* as a symbol of power, Saliola and Casprini argue for the comparability of the dagger and the sword noting, "The real subject which the ancients refer to is most probably the *Gladius*, because the *Pugio* would have been used as if it was its representation in miniature."<sup>46</sup> The concept of the military dagger as miniature sword is further implied when considering literary references to the *pugio*, which suggest that military commanders, especially emperors, used it to signify power of life and death over those serving them.

It appears that the *pugio* is continually used to affirm Roman-ness and also regain *virtus*. Saliola and Casprini categorize every use of the *pugio* that appears in the corpus of Latin texts. There are references to the *pugio* in Greek texts as well which need to be taken into account, but are outside the purview of this thesis. While there are only four descriptions of the *pugio* in the context of war, there are 78 references to the *pugio* throughout Latin literature from the first century BC to the fourth century AD, although writers continue to reference the *pugio* until the sixteenth century AD (Table 1).<sup>47</sup> From the first century BC to the fourth century AD, the *pugio* is used a total of 54 times in a historical context as a weapon for suicide, murder, displays of aggression, violence, or power. Other mentions include: two men killed by accidentally falling on their own *pugiones*, two lists of weapons, one description of the *pugio*, and one of its construction, four accounts of the dagger given as a symbol of submission or consecration, and 14 uses of the *pugio* as a symbolic or literary device.

Table 1: Authors who cite the term *Pugio*. List is divided into citations which Saliola and Casprini considered historical reference and those used as a symbolic device. Taken from Saliola and Casprini 2012, 88.

<b>Author/work</b>	<b>Historical Events</b>	<b>Symbolic Account</b>
Cic.	7	1
<i>Corpus Caesarianum</i>	2	0
Sall.	1	0
Vergililius Maro Grammaticus	1	0
Vell. Pat.	1	0

<sup>45</sup> James 2011, 168.

<sup>46</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012, 85-102.

<b>0-125 AD</b>		
Sen.	1	0
Val. Max.	3	0
Granius Licinianus	1	0
Mart.	1	0
Sextus Frontinus	1	0
Tac.	10	0
Pliny (the Younger)	1	0
M. Iulianus Iustinus	1	0
Suetonius	13	0
<b>125-166AD</b>		
Aulus Gellius	1	0
<b>263-339 AD</b>		
Eusebius Cesariensis	1	0
<b>320-430 AD</b>		
Marcellus Nonius	1	0
<i>Historia Augusta</i>	5	0
Aurelio Victo	1	0
Ammianus Marcellinus	3	0
Saint Girolamo	0	6
<i>Bible</i>	0	3
Aurelius Prudenzio Clemens	1	0
Servius Gammaticus	1	0
Agostino D'Ippona	1	4
Sestus A. Victor	1	0
Orosius	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>14</b>

The *pugio* represents yet another aspect of ideal Roman masculinity- sexual penetration. The Roman vocabulary is littered with phrases, slang, and words that equate the act of sexual penetration to the work of a soldier. Roman metaphors for sex are predominately violent: striking, digging, wounding, penetrating, dominating, and triumphing, all familiar tasks for a soldier.<sup>48</sup> The sword is commonly likened to the phallus and to threats of violence where the phallus would be used as a weapon to threaten and frighten the enemy.<sup>49</sup> Further analysis of the psychology of using a short, deadly weapon such as the *pugio* deepens the connection between sexual penetration and the act of killing. David Grossman describes the similarities between sex and killing, highlighting the intimate nature and the tremendous

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<sup>48</sup> Adams 1990, 145-49.

<sup>49</sup> Mattingly 2011, 106.

intensity of both acts.<sup>50</sup> Although Grossman's discussion on killing as a penetrative act is drawn from a modern psychological study, which should make one cautious when applying it to ancient Roman killing, considering the Latin vocabulary's frequent use of acts of violence and soldiery work to describe sex, it seems that the Romans understood the similarities long before Grossman described them. The very short range at which the *pugio* would have been effective heightens the likeness between these penetrative acts. It is this act of killing that makes the soldier, and it is the act of domination over another that reinforces the killer's own masculinity.

Taking into account the language of sexual encounters and the symbolism surrounding *pugio* adds a dimension of violence to Roman sexuality and emphasizes how masculinity needed to be asserted in everyday life. Masculinity was pervasive in Rome. The way a man walked, the way he spoke, the company he kept, and what he allowed other people to do were all used to calculate a man's virtue. Livy describes the behavior of Scipio saying, "even the personal appearance of the general-in-chief, as not even soldierly, not to say un-Roman; that wearing a Greek mantle and sandals he strolled about in the gymnasium, giving his attention to books in Greek and physical exercise" (Livy 29.19.11-12).<sup>51</sup> In funeral *stelae* depicting the *pugio*, the military dagger is always accompanied by a *gladius*. The *pugio* was considered inadequate protection for a soldier, but its prominence in the literary sources and iconography makes it seem more significant than just a back-up weapon. This capacity for violence, tied to the notion of life and death, reminded others that the man displaying the *pugio* was to be feared and respected.

### **Differently Constructed Masculinities**

Many scholars have asserted that masculinity cannot be defined, or that any definition is, at best, elusive; instead of a singular definition, there exist many different experiences or masculinities that fluctuate, disappear, and are subject to change.<sup>52</sup> In fact, trying to pigeonhole all males into a definition of masculinity is not only normative but oppressive.<sup>53</sup> Many masculinities can exist simultaneously within a

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<sup>50</sup> Grossman 1995, 2 and 120-137.

<sup>51</sup> O'Sullivan 2014, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Constantinople (2005); Resser 2011; Spence (1993); Vandello and Bosson (2011).

<sup>53</sup> Alston 1998, 205-6.

single group of men. When considering what constitutes manliness for a Roman, the army itself presents something of a paradox. The military provided an outlet for expressions of autonomy from the laws and duties of civic life, violence, and power, but for Romans of the lower class, the military also required conceding part of a citizen's autonomy.

A Roman male abdicated legal and personal autonomy to his commanding officer, who could administer any punishment, even those outside the purview of the Roman legal system.<sup>54</sup> There are even occasions where a soldier's masculinity was literally assaulted by his officer, such as the case of Trebonius, who slew the officer who attempted to rape him.<sup>55</sup> Maintenance of a soldier's personal *pudicitia* became such a problem that soldiers had to be assured that they would not be sexually penetrated by their officers, and thus be further reduced to slave-like or captive status.<sup>56</sup> Because common soldiers depended on the military, and thus gave up political, bodily, and financial autonomy, they could not be seen as paragons of male Roman virtue. If men serving in the army lost their autonomy, and thus were seen as less masculine, as described by ancient authors, why would they want to highlight their occupation as soldiers?<sup>57</sup> This question is especially relevant in the context of the redefinition of manliness that took place in the wake of the Augustan reforms, which not only demilitarized the Roman people, but de-emphasized military service as a prerequisite to manliness.<sup>58</sup>

To answer this question let us return briefly to the tale of Trebonius, which exemplifies the relationship of domination that existed between common troops and their officers, and how this could affect a soldier's manliness. This story highlights why Romans might wish to emphasize their experience as common soldiers, not only as an act of pride but also to iterate their place as bold men. The common soldier might have wished to express his own distinct experience as a man of violence and as part of a larger group of violent men, and might have done so by choosing to display his *pugio*. This might also

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<sup>54</sup> Both James 2011 and Phang 2008 describe how part of military service for the common soldier involved surrendering part of his independence and thus part of his masculinity.

<sup>55</sup> The Trebonius account appears in a number of classical sources, Val. *Max.* 6.1.2; Cic. *Mil.* 4.9; Plut. *Mar.* 14.4-5.

<sup>56</sup> Phang 2008, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Phang describes the instance of the common soldier Trebonius, who killed an officer who tried to rape him, as an example of how the common soldier's autonomy was under duress in the Roman army. See note 51.

<sup>58</sup> James 2011, 130.

explain why grave *stelae* never depict officers or emperors wearing a *pugio*; these Romans did not need to emphasize their capacity for self-defense and violence to legitimize their masculinity.

Documenting resistance in the archaeological record is difficult; however, there are objects that offer windows into a person's choice of expression. Funerary monuments demonstrate a final wish for remembrance, and depictions on funerary monuments are a strong indication of how the deceased wanted to be remembered.<sup>59</sup> Obviously there is more behind a person's funeral monument than calculated self-promotion and expression of wealth; these monuments communicated values. Therefore, the common soldier's tomb is a window through which we can see a small aspect of the person's life, a portion that the individual, or the individual's surviving family, chose to reveal.<sup>60</sup>

It is therefore with a sense of pride in occupation that the lowly Roman soldier planned the motif for the funerary monument highlighting his time of service. While it may be emasculating to emphasize a period of one's life where the individual did not have bodily or political autonomy, there were ways to illustrate one's masculinity within this time period. One way to remind the viewer of the deceased's proper place in society would be to use cues or symbols with loaded meaning. Examining the appearance of the military dagger on funerary monuments leads to the belief that the *pugio* itself might have been one of these cues.

The appearance of the *pugio* on funerary monuments gives insight into the weapon's symbolic nature and the nature of those who wished to utilize its symbolism. Though commonly used by high-ranking officials in Latin literary sources, the *pugio* is entirely absent in *stelae* of officers. However, the *pugio* appears frequently on the *stelae* of common soldiers and non-commissioned officers.<sup>61</sup> This conclusion was drawn from Saliola and Casprini's work, which described and counted the appearance of *pugiones* on grave *stelae* of known ownership.<sup>62</sup> The sample includes only *stelae* whose date is known

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<sup>59</sup> Zanker 1990.

<sup>60</sup> One of the main arguments in Zanker is the idea of choice of funerary monument being left to the person being remembered. Freedmen as well as the aristocracy, chose where their funerary monuments stood and what they depicted. The tomb of Vergilius Eurysaces is a prime example of a funerary choice, Ibid. 15-16.

<sup>61</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012, 39-40.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 28-31.

through publication and consists of 31 samples dating from 43BC to the third century AD, although Saliola and Casprini provide another 10 citations of *stelae* that depict the *pugio* but do not have discernable date or rank.<sup>63</sup> The comparison of these *stelae* indicate that no cavalry or naval personnel chose to have his grave *stela* depict the *pugio*, and only legionnaires, *auxilia*, praetorians, and a single quartermaster chose to have a *pugio* on their graves (Figure 2).<sup>64</sup> The *pugiones* depicted on these *stelae* are not central to the *stelae*'s artistic program, and represent only minor addition to the soldiers' variety of weapons on their person, as soldiers always carried a *gladius* to compliment the *pugio* and quite often carried a lance as well (Figure 2). The segment of the army that chose to use the *pugio* on its grave *stelae* is the same group that would have lost its autonomy by joining the Roman army. Losing a portion of one's autonomy through joining the army may have been offset by taking pride in the shared experience as a *miles*.

Also, the *pugio* appears only on the *stelae* of soldiers in the first century AD and later, with one exception of a centurion whose grave is located in Italy dating to 43 BC. This is important because it demonstrates the time frame within which the *pugio* became a viable symbol for Roman infantrymen. That *pugiones* appear on *stelae* as a symbol of masculinity should not come as a surprise.<sup>65</sup> Because their autonomy might be brought into question by their service in the army, common soldiers and non-commissioned officers may have incorporated the *pugio* into their funerary monuments as reaffirmation of their manhood and to remind viewers of their capacity for violence and domination as well as their shared life with other soldiers. For higher-ranking soldiers, the necessity to display such a symbol was not predicated by the loss of autonomy. Because of the appearance on only a particular class of funerary monuments, it might be argued that the military dagger itself is an acknowledgement of shared experience

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<sup>63</sup> Saliola and Casprini mention the limitations to this study saying that "The greatest limit to our particular investigation is that our analysis is concentrated on only the number of funerary monuments we have examined, which are only a small fraction of those that were actually made. In fact, many monuments have been lost and of those surviving not all are the object of public study and the depictions are not always complete or clear (sometimes the poor clarity is due to the photographic reproduction of a *stela* which was not possible to study from life)" 75.

<sup>64</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012. Refer to the graphs on pages 76 and 78-80.

<sup>65</sup> Saliola and Casprini draw on the notion of the *pugio* as a miniature *gladius*, carrying all the associations with power that the *gladius* did.

as a lowly soldier. In other words, those who would have actually needed to use their *pugiones* in the mayhem of infantry combat are the men who would have chosen to put a *pugio* on their *stelae*. Even if these monuments display stock images, they still express: “military identity, status, personal success, and also a sense of difference, or perceived superiority to others.”<sup>66</sup> The *pugio*’s use contributed to its association with manliness among common soldiers and Roman elites alike.

Most iconographic representations of *pugiones*, 24 of the 31, and the military daggers themselves, appear during the first century AD, the time when masculinity is redefined for the Roman soldier. This thesis previously mentioned the time-frame in which the *pugio* became common in the Roman soldier’s kit, as well as how military service began to lack some of its masculine associations during the Augustan period. The shift in identity formation in the Roman army occurring around the late first century BC and the early first century AD would have influenced the proliferation of the use of the *pugio* and its appearance on grave monuments.

### **The *Pugio* in the Historical Imagination**

A majority of Latin literary references to the *pugio* attribute its use to higher ranking members of Roman society. The *pugio*’s use across all levels of Roman society, attested by the archaeological and iconographic evidence for lower ranks and literary citations for higher ranks, suggest that it was more than simply a symbol of masculinity for the common soldier.

One of the most famous uses of the military dagger is its role in the assassination of Julius Caesar. The *pugio*’s lightness, quickness to grasp, and ability to be hidden next to the body made it the perfect tool for a close quarters plot, but the choice of the *pugio* demonstrated the careful nature of the attack, including the symbolism of the weapon used to carry out the murder. The *pugio* is a Roman military man’s weapon.<sup>67</sup> The men killing Caesar were some of the highest ranking men in Roman society, and their *virtus* had been challenged by Caesar’s rise to power. A large part of producing a successful coup was ensuring that the assassins had won the hearts and minds of the soldiers of Rome.

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<sup>66</sup> Hope 2003, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Strauss 2015, 130-138.

The *pugio*, a Roman weapon, would have been chosen to show solidarity with the Roman military. The *pugio* also appears on a coins of a particular mint found in Macedonia which date to 42-43 BC. These coins were minted with the name Brutus, which is given the designation of IMP to demonstrate authority as Imperator, as well as *pugiones* and the *EID MAR* written beneath them. Brutus is identified with the murder, and the *pugiones* indicate common knowledge of how Caesar was killed. Commissioned by Brutus, this coin would have been disseminated throughout his army, and its initial audience would have been soldiers. By distributing the coin to his men, Brutus probably sought to win over the common soldier by appealing to them on their level, with the *pugio*.

The *pugiones* minted on this particular coin are not simply images of stock weapons; they are distinct in the morphology of their handles and pommels. It may even be the case that these military daggers represent the actual weapons used by Cassius and Brutus.<sup>68</sup> Their distinctive forms, especially the *pugio* with the cross-shaped pommel, which was a rare shape for military daggers at this point in Roman history, might have suggested to the viewer that these daggers were in fact those used by the assassins.<sup>69</sup> While it is difficult to know whether the *pugiones* on these coins were recognizable as belonging to a particular Roman military man, it is a tempting proposition. If these *pugiones* could be traced to a specific man, this suggests a personal connection between a man and his military dagger. These particular *pugiones* could have exemplified the men who wielded them and represented their courage, capacity for violence, and manly virtue.

The men attacking Caesar would not have chosen any other knife, say the *sica*, a curved dagger of Thracian origin, not normally carried by Roman soldiers. In Roman eyes, the *sica* was a weapon for cutthroats; a word for “murderer” or “assassin” is *sicarius*, literally, “a *sica*-man”.<sup>70</sup> Cicero, in describing the followers of Catiline, asks his audience what they think of Catiline and his knife-wielding thugs (Cic. *Catil.* 1.6 and 2.10).<sup>71</sup> Cicero has just caricatured the conspirators as poisoners, dancers, drunkards,

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<sup>68</sup> Strauss, Unpublished, n.d.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Translation is my own.

gamblers, and harlots, all actions repudiated by a moral Roman man. By the time Cicero brings up the idea of these men as *sica* wielders, he has already effectively emasculated them. Cicero's use of the word *sica* here is used to expose these men as having diminutive and errant manhoods.

This thesis has discussed the discrepancy between the iconographic sources, which only depict common soldiers in military parade, and Latin literary citations in which men and women, typically of the upper class, used the *pugio* in a variety of violent situations (Table 1). There is only one historical account of a woman using the *pugio* (Plin. *Ep.* 3.16).<sup>72</sup> In 42 AD Arria, wife of Caecina Paetus, killed herself with a *pugio* in highly ritualistic suicide, an event Pliny declares “famous” and “almost divine.” One other account of a woman employing a *pugio* comes from the *Bible*, which describes Judith decapitating a Holofernes, a general of Nebuchadnezzar. This account, occurring long before the *pugio* existed, clearly does not describe an actual event; still it depicts a cunning woman who used deception to lure her heedless victim and wielded the weapon to murder her enemy. It is worth noting one final episode when a woman potentially used the *pugio*, the suicide of Lucretia in 508 BC. We have two separate accounts of this episode. Livy describes the weapon used as a *culter*, an all purpose knife, and Dionysus of Halicarnassus uses the Greek word *ksiphidion*, the military dagger (Liv. 1.58, D. H. *Ant. Rom.* 4.67).<sup>73</sup> While not an historical event, the myth of Lucretia demonstrates how people living in the Augustan Age viewed women's use of the *pugio* and how feminine virtue could be preserved through suicide. Strauss says in the wake of the suicide, “Lucius Junius Brutus and a group of other aristocratic Roman men each held the bloody dagger and swore to avenge her by fighting the tyrants who had caused her death”.<sup>74</sup> The use of the military dagger in this case ties feminine virtue to male political action and violence. While we know Arria used the *pugio*, this should not detract from the *pugio*'s symbolic association with manliness.

I would like to mention two contemporary examples that highlight the military dagger's use not only as a weapon but as a symbol of masculinity. One example is the death of Nero, who, upon fleeing Rome dressed as a pauper to avoid suspicion, eventually committed suicide with one of his two *pugiones*

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<sup>72</sup> Trans. Saliola and Casprini 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Trans. Heinemann 1926 and Cary 1937.

<sup>74</sup> Strauss, Unpublished, n.d.

aided by his personal secretary, Epaphroditus (Suet. *Nero*. 49).<sup>75</sup> In this final act, Nero tried to reestablish himself as a worthy man by taking his own life rather than being captured and taken prisoner. Galba also used the *pugio* as an emblem of imperial honor and power when he hung a *pugio* around his neck after being crowned emperor (Suet. *Gal*. 11).<sup>76</sup> Galba was governor of Spain, the *pugio*'s place of origin, and might have chosen to hang the *pugio* around his neck as an acknowledgement of his and Rome's connection to Spain. The centrality of this placement makes the *pugio* a conspicuous proclamation of Galba's manly authority.

Possibly one of the most telling references to the *pugio*'s ability to reinforce dominance and masculine assertion comes from a Biblical account. Christian scholars writing in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries AD about the Midian War describe how Moses and his followers killed Midianites by stabbing him in the genitals with a "*pugio*".<sup>77</sup> It is impossible that Moses could have used a *pugio* because the actual date for the events described predates the first appearance of the *pugio* by over a millennium. Clearly the *pugio* was such a recognizable symbol that its use in emasculating an enemy seemed appropriate to Christian writers. It is also important that these men chose a weapon, used and displayed to enhance masculinity, in order to kill their enemy through emasculation. This account is not unique, as many Biblical accounts detail the *pugio*'s use in striking an enemy's genitals.

The absence of the military dagger might also be used to measure Roman-ness, as described in the case of Antony succumbing to Cleopatra's influence by becoming more Egyptian. In describing the transformation of Antony, Dio gives his reader a number ways in which Antony has given up his Roman-ness, "He referred to his army headquarters as the royal palace, wore an oriental dagger, and dressed in a totally unroman fashion" (Dio 50.5).<sup>78</sup> Three things are notable in the transformation of Antony into an Egyptian, one of which is the dagger he chose to wear.

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<sup>75</sup> Ed. Reed and Thomson 1889.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Saliola and Casprini 2012, 86.

<sup>78</sup> Zanker 1990, 57.

The *pugio* was a potent symbol of manliness and Roman-ness. Though it might have seemed superfluous for a higher-ranking officer to use the symbolism of the *pugio*, the associations would have been powerful. The common soldier experienced the brutality of entering the fray of combat that necessitated the use of the *pugio*. This experience, along with other shared experiences of hardship, made up a common soldier's masculine *habitus* that the soldier was likely proud of and wanted to invoke.<sup>79</sup> It appears that common soldiers, officers, and the highest men of Roman society used the *pugio*, but did so in different ways to fulfill their own needs of establishing or evoking masculinity.

### **The Appearance of *Pugio* as a Sign of Shared Conceptions of Masculinity**

*Pugiones* are found in a wide variety of archaeological contexts, from fort and battle sites to graves and riverbeds. These finds are associated with a range of excavation techniques, time periods, and people. Some finds, like the excavations at Alésia, date to the 1860s, when archaeological methodology was in its infancy, and thus offer little contextual information. Other finds have appeared serendipitously. In the 1990s one *pugio* was found in a vineyard after dirt was brought in from a nearby sinkhole.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, many *pugiones* reside within private collections, were donated to museums or collections with no provenience information, or having once been discovered and documented, are now lost.<sup>81</sup> Beyond the gaps in the archaeological data for the *pugio* and the range of settings in which *pugiones* are held, the descriptions of these finds are often regional and narrow in scope. Due to the lack of context information on some of these finds, it is difficult to paint a broad, encompassing picture of the distribution and common depositional characteristics for the *pugio*. Saliola and Casprini's 2012 publication, however, attempts to collate all *pugio* finds, and provides the basis for the following discussion.

Finds that have context are very diverse, appearing in villas, mining camps, military forts, battlefields, landfills, and rivers. *Pugiones* appear to be used in a civil context as well as a military one,

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<sup>79</sup> On the *habitus* and shared experience masculinity of the men in the front lines of the Roman army see Phang 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Istenič 2009, 332.

<sup>81</sup> Data set from Saliola and Casprini 2012, 112-8 and 123-4.

which would complement literary sources on the military dagger, but would challenge the iconographic representations, which, as discussed, are limited in scope.

A peculiar pattern is evident. Roman military daggers only appear throughout Europe, and many of the finds from known contexts are found in rivers. As Bishop points out, there are a wide variety of ways in which military equipment can end up in the archaeological record. His speculations on the journeys that particular finds took on their way into the archaeological record incorporate one logical theorem: the appearance of military equipment in an area is closely related to a military presence nearby.<sup>82</sup> Roymans refutes this idea of Roman weapons indicating Roman military presence by arguing that an object associated with the Roman military could have taken on new life and meaning in the hands of a local population, in his case Gauls. The appearance of the *pugio* in rivers might correspond to what Roymans calls “social consequences” of interactions between provincial peoples and the Roman army.<sup>83</sup>

Of 216 military daggers that have been discovered throughout Europe, 32 have been found, definitively, in riverbeds.<sup>84</sup> There are 24 specimens whose provenance is unknown, meaning there could be more specimens that were originally found in rivers. The Rhine accounted for 62.5% of these finds (20) (Table 2). Type II *pugiones* composed 16 of the 17 river finds, although this determination was limited to those military daggers whose type could be identified.<sup>85</sup> A chi squared test was run to determine if the percentage of Type II finds in a watery context was abnormally high when compared to the percentage of Type II to the corpus of finds.<sup>86</sup> Although the results were not quite statistically significant, with a P of 0.076, there are a number of reasonable explanations for this. One of the main problems with these data is that almost half of the specimens found in a watery context could not be discussed in typological terms because of their state of deterioration or because they now exist in private collections.

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<sup>82</sup> Bishop 1989, 1-11.

<sup>83</sup> Roymans 1996, 24.

<sup>84</sup> The number 216 was taken from Saliola and Casprini 2012, which notes every known dagger with enough information to publish, again many of these daggers have no context or provenance associated with them.

<sup>85</sup> Of the 32 military daggers found in riverbeds, only 17 could be identified typologically.

<sup>86</sup> This analysis was done through a chi squared test of the percentage of each military dagger type appearing in the entire corpus compared to the sub-corpus of water finds. Unknown types were obviously not included. Type I, although not observed in the sub-corpus of water finds, was included in the analysis because a high portion of Type I finds in the total corpus were found in the same areas as the water specimens.

Were even half of these unidentified finds determined typologically, and if that number followed the trend of types appearing in a watery context, the data becomes statistically significant, with a P value of 0.013. While this is of course speculative, this exercise was done to demonstrate that during the first century BC through the first century BC, when the military dagger saw its most prolific use and when the Type II *pugio* existed, the *pugio*'s use as a symbol of masculinity may have contributed to its deposition in rivers.

Table 2: All dagger finds within the contexts of rivers. Data taken from Saliola, Marco, and Fabrizio Casprini. 2012. *Pugio - Gladius Brevis Est: History and Technology of the Roman Battle Dagger*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

River	Country	Type(s)	Number of daggers
Rhine	Germany	2	1
Waal	Nederlands	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	3	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Danube	Hungary	2	1
Saone	France	2	1
Rhine	?	2	1
Rhine	Germany	2	1
Rhine	?	2	1
Waal	Nederlands	2	1
Seine	France	unknown	1
Rhine	Germany	unknown	13
Rhine	Nederlands	unknown	1
Rhine	Germany	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Kupa	Croatia	2	1
Rhine	Germany	2	1
Total			32

One possibility that bears consideration is arms dedications on the part of soldiers. Although the evidence for arms dedication is not abundant, as it is for Greek soldiers, some evidence for the practice does exist, including evidence for dedications of the *pugio*.<sup>87</sup> Vitellius sent a *pugio* to the Agrippinian colony in order that it be consecrated to Mars, and later, according to Suetonius, dedicated one to the Temple of Concord (Suet. *Vit.* 10. and 15).<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Tacitus describes how Scevinus stole a *pugio*

<sup>87</sup> Connolly 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Ed. Reed and Thomson 1889.

from a Temple of Salus or possibly Fortuna (Tac. *Ann.* 15.53).<sup>89</sup> Dedication of weapons is also documented in the case of Roman soldiers, as recorded in the case of one Q. Cadius Libo, who dedicated his *scutum* and *lancea* to the goddess Vihansa while in Belgium.<sup>90</sup> Giving up his weapons would have been a significant symbolic act for any military man, but dedications to Roman gods or goddesses do not explain why military daggers would be deposited into rivers.

Many *pugiones*' provenance, about 25%, is unclear, and more daggers are found in Roman camps (88) and Roman civil contexts (16) than in rivers; however, the river category is the largest sub-corpus of finds not clearly of a Roman context (Table 3).<sup>91</sup> One might expect the *pugio* to appear chiefly in Roman context, which it does about 49% of the time, but a number of daggers also appear in native graves, native dedications, and native settlements, which indicates that *pugiones* took on a life beyond their existence as Roman weapons. These finds in native context, about 26% of the whole, demonstrate that *pugiones* existed prolifically outside of a Roman military context and that native populations placed importance on them. Of the total finds attributed to a native context, rivers make up 57%, the largest category. It is significant that over half of native finds turn up in rivers.

Table 3: All *pugio* finds from Saliola and Casprini, 2012. Finds are categorized based on binary of Roman finds and native finds.

<b>Find Context</b>	<b>Number of Daggers</b>
Roman Fort, Encampment	88
Roman Civil	16
Roman Grave	1
<b>Roman Context Total</b>	<b>105</b>
Native Grave	3
Native Settlement	19
Native Ritual	2
<b>Native Context Total</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>River</b>	<b>32</b>
Battle Site	2
Unknown	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>

<sup>89</sup> Trans. Saliola and Casprini 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Libo, dedicated his weapons in the city of Tongress, where a dedicatory plaque of his dedications still exists. D'Amato 2012, 19.

<sup>91</sup> These finds were taken from Saliola and Casprini's catalogue of extant *pugiones*. Determinations to category were made by referencing the source which Saliola and Casprini cite as their source for the dagger. The categories for "Roman" or "Native" were chosen to reflect a basic context for comparison for the purpose of this thesis.

Rivers on the Eastern European edge of Rome's sphere of influence acted as borders, and soldiers at these borders of the Empire would have interacted a good deal with the natives in the region, intermarrying and trading for example. Because the Roman military dagger was a symbol of masculinity, it is likely that, through exchanges and alliances, many of these weapons fell into the hands of local chieftains, warlords, and warriors. Roymans describes how gift giving would have circulated Roman luxury or prestige goods among high-ranking members of Gallic society.<sup>92</sup> To soldiers, establishing rapport with the local strong men was probably essential, ensuring coordination and cooperation on the battlefield, assistance in resource and intelligence gathering, and even providing a safe camp environment. Presenting these men with a gift that highlighted shared characteristics of their masculinity was one way of establishing a solid and almost fraternal bond.

Gifts of the *pugio* to other Romans is substantiated in the literary evidence.<sup>93</sup> Tacitus describes how the emperor Vitellius tried to gift his dagger, "Finally, when tears choked his voice, taking his dagger from his side he offered it to the consul who stood beside him, as if surrendering his power of life and death over the citizens"(Tac. *Hist.* 3.68).<sup>94</sup> In this section, Tacitus goes on to explain how eventually, when no one would accept his dagger, Vitellius dedicated the dagger to the Temple of Concord. Not only was the dagger given as a gift in this scenario, but there is a precedent for the *pugio* used as a religious offering. The fact that Tacitus probably spoke with people who had witnessed this event makes it more plausible and Tacitus' interpretation of its significance more accurate. Tacitus also describes how it was not uncommon to see vessels of Roman silver in the possession of Gallic chiefs, having been "officially presented" to high-ranking members of Gallic society (Tac. *Ger.* 5).<sup>95</sup> Although not contemporary to the Type II *pugio*, Ellen Swift mentions how Roman weapons appear in native graves on the borders along

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<sup>92</sup> Roymans 1996, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Summer 2009, 88.

<sup>94</sup> Trans. Saliola and Casprini 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Trans. Townshend 1894.

the Rhine and Seine, and how these weapons were likely a part of a gifting practice established in earlier imperial period.<sup>96</sup>

The practice of gifting is supported by contemporary analogy. Today Special Forces troops give daggers to the foreign troops with whom they are attempting to establish a connection, and in many cases these gifts are reciprocated in kind without any prior cues.<sup>97</sup> Daggers are the “go-to gift” in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Senegal. Gifting daggers is apparently such a common practice that Special Forces soldiers working with allied forces scour local flea markets before they finish training to buy daggers to present to foreign officers in the field.<sup>98</sup> Giving these daggers is a way to bolster the confidence of the recipient and forge a masculine bond between allies through a fairly cheap and simple ceremony.

It is quite possible that military dagger exchanges, gifted from a Roman to an indigenous person, took place in a way very similar to a modern context. An officer might have presented a military dagger to a chief, warlord, or local king as a gift given from a high member of Roman military society to a high member of the local society. Roymans discusses how internal gift exchange within Gallic society would have enhanced the gift-receiver’s prestige within the community while also forging a bond between giver and receiver.<sup>99</sup> This exchange would usually have taken place between equals, which means that the gifting of military daggers might have been seen as bringing communities, locals, and soldiers under the leadership of the exchangers. Roymans also discusses how elite self-definition, especially during the Augustan era, resided in martial prowess, which was being redefined by new interactions with the Roman army including Roman military material culture.<sup>100</sup>

One recent example of a similar symbolic knife exchange took place between the leader of the U.S. Special Forces and Hamid Karzai, the leader coming to power in U.S. occupied Afghanistan. Because first impressions were essential and this knife would act to reinforce solidarity between U.S. and Afghan forces, the Special Forces group went out of their way to ensure that they purchased a knife large

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<sup>96</sup> Swift 2006, 107-108.

<sup>97</sup> Gouthro 2015.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Roymans 1996, 25 and 44-46.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 25.

enough for the occasion, as documented by Eric Blem.<sup>101</sup> The group of Special Forces soldiers commonly referred to this knife and other knives carried by their comrades as “Big F-ing Knives”. While this seems crude, the phrase not only captures the speech of actual soldiers, but also acknowledges that modern soldiers and Roman forces shared a common appreciation for the penetrative quality of knife combat. Blem’s book also offers many incidents where Special Forces soldiers scrutinize and discuss the large knives they and their allies choose to wear.

The act of gifting *pugiones* as a prestige item to natives might account for the presence of military daggers in rivers. Moreover, dedication of prestige items into a watery context is well documented in Gallic populations north of Italy, an area in which this water sub-corpus of *pugiones* was found, as well as in Celtic religious sacrifice.<sup>102</sup> In fact there are many other Roman weapons that have been found in a watery context throughout Northern Europe.<sup>103</sup> Examples of the Roman sword and military dagger appearing in what is likely a dedicatory context suggest that the *gladius* and *pugio* did not simply hold meaning for Romans, but were recognized as important symbols for the Celtic tribes as well. First through exchange with Roman soldiers, and then through religious dedication, these military daggers would have found their way to rivers. Druids could have taken these trophies, symbols of Roman might and masculinity, and ritually dedicated them. Native peoples would have viewed Roman weapons and other prestige goods as a worthy dedication to the deity associated with the river.<sup>104</sup>

The Druids, and any audience to their dedications, may have taken *pugiones*, objects that undoubtedly recalled violence and oppression under Roman rule, and given them over to a spiritual and natural realm. The offering of Roman weapons could have been to purge the memory of Roman aggression or have been cathartic in releasing such weapons to familiar spirits and gods. In this way local

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<sup>101</sup> Blem describes how the Special Forces group made sure to purchase a BFK or “Big F-ing Knife” for the occasion. Blem 2010, 54.

<sup>102</sup> The watery sub-corpus all consisted of finds from the Danube, Kupa, Rhine, Saone, Siene, and Waal. These finds were all provenanced in countries that have established Celtic cultural traditions: Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands. For examples of the Celtic peoples dedicating goods into a watery context: Rankin, 2002, 238.

<sup>103</sup> Roymans 1996, 28-31.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 34.

populations perhaps enjoyed a small victory by deflating the martial value of these weapons and placing them in an environment where they could do no more harm. The *pugio*, and symbolically the Romans, were defeated in this way. If *pugiones* were gifted, or even if they were spoils of war, their greater cultural significance would have made them a worthy offering.

## Conclusions

This thesis provides a synthesis of arguments in order to better approach and understand how Romans used and conceptualized the Roman military dagger, the *pugio*. It notes the discrepancy between the iconographic and historical sources of the *pugio* and offers an analysis of this disparity, due to the differences in the construction of masculinity between Roman men of the upper and lower classes. Part of this analysis describes how different masculinities existed within the Roman army and how different ranks of Roman society used and displayed the *pugio* to augment different aspects of their masculinity. A common soldier might hang a *pugio* on his hip to demonstrate that he was fully capable of aggression, while a Roman man of high rank might use the *pugio* as a means of suicide or murder to preserve his image as an upstanding Roman male. The late first century BC and early first century AD, when the common soldiers' masculinities seem to have been in jeopardy, comprises the height of *pugio*'s use in the Roman army, which draws attention to the fact that Romans saw the military dagger's use and display as an appropriate expression of Roman manliness.

By establishing the link between the *pugio* and its use in constructing masculinity, this thesis demonstrates a potential avenue for how the weapon might have ended up in a particular deposition context and proposes reasons for *pugio* finds within a particular context. The idea that military daggers were gifted as a way of building relationships demonstrates a manner in which local populations and garrisoned Roman soldiers may have interacted without involving violence. The appearance of military daggers in rivers indicates a means by which the *pugio* as an object might have begun a new life with different connotations and uses when in the hands of indigenous peoples. The *pugio*'s appearance in rivers also highlights the Roman military's influence on the material culture and militarization of local populations with which they were in contact. While Roman soldiers undoubtedly carried out many acts of

violence and aggression against native peoples, it is important to remember that these interactions were not one-sided and probably also involved acts of camaraderie and relation building.

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