

BLUE STAR SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Military Personnel in the Ancient World

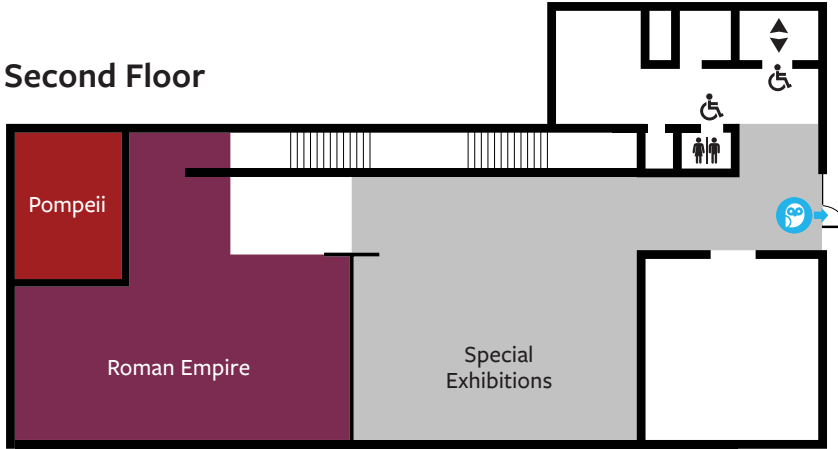


CYPRUS, GREECE, ETRURIA

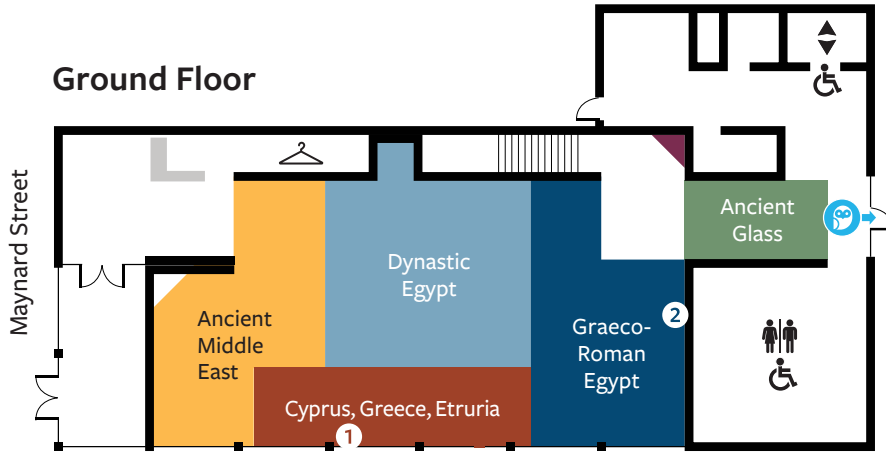


GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT

Second Floor



Ground Floor



Gift Shop



Restroom



Accessible



Coatroom



Elevator

BLUE STAR SELF-GUIDED TOUR:

Military Personnel in the Ancient World

The Kelsey Museum holds many artifacts that come from a military context or that depict warriors and soldiers as subjects of art. On this tour, we'll encounter objects that reference the bravery, military prowess, and strength of these men and women.

We begin the tour at the Greek case near the windows, number **1** on the map. Let's look at three pottery vessels that depict warriors and soldiers. Greek pottery of the 8th through 5th centuries BCE is generally divided into four categories: Late Geometric (776–700 BCE), Corinthian (ca. 725–600 BCE), Attic Black Figure (ca. 625 BCE), and Attic Red Figure (ca. 530 BCE).

Corinthian painters invented the black-figure technique around 675 BCE, but it was best exploited by artists in Athens starting around 625 BCE. The Attic black-figure technique, with its emphasis on silhouette and details, was gradually replaced by the red-figure technique, which offered greater flexibility. The images on both black- and red-figure pottery provide a wealth of information about Greek culture, including daily life, funerary rites, and mythology.

Find object number 14, in the center of the case (KM 1979.1.1). This vessel is an amphora, a Greek word that means "carried from both sides." Amphorae were two-handled jars used to store and transport various foodstuffs, although this particular example is decorative and was likely intended for serving wine. Look closely at the battle scene on the side of the vessel. Do you recognize the figure in the center? He is wearing a lion-skin cloak, which is a big clue to his identity. This is Herakles, a major hero of Greek mythology. He was known as Hercules to the Romans, and that is how we often refer to him today. Herakles was famous for completing twelve seemingly impossible labors. One of those labors was to retrieve the belt of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. The Amazons were a mighty race of female warriors, and when Herakles tried to leave with the queen's belt, they fought back.

This scene shows Herakles in combat with three Amazon warriors. The other side of the vessel depicts men departing for war. A drawing of the scene is shown next to the object label. A warrior bids farewell to an

older man, while an archer helps a cavalryman tend his horse.

Move along the case to your right and find object number 23 (KM 1977.7.1). This amphora is an example of the red-figure style of Greek pottery. The painting is attributed to the so-called Berlin Painter, who has been recognized for his style on more than 300 vessels. His simple compositions often highlight one or two figures against a dark background. One side of this vessel depicts a scene of sacrifice. A woman pours a libation into a kylix (drinking cup) held by a young man who can be identified as a warrior by his garment and spear. If you look very closely, you may also be able to see the outline of an unfinished shield just behind him. This scene seems to tell the story of a young warrior either setting off for or returning from battle. The woman facing him may be his wife. The other side of the amphora depicts a mature man with a staff who might represent the warrior's father.

Now keep moving right and turn the corner to view object number 1 at the end of the case (KM 1982.2.1). This highly ornate volute krater, another example of Greek red-figure pottery, showcases funerary imagery and would have been deposited in a tomb as burial equipment. The scene represents the deceased himself, a young man seated in a tomb that resembles a small temple. The details of the scene tell us that he was a soldier: the helmet and greaves (shin armor) that hang above his head, his red soldier's garb, and the sword he wears across his chest. The young man is accompanied by a dog, which may serve as a symbol of his bravery in battle.

Now please turn around and walk to the display featuring objects of daily life from the Graeco-Roman village of Karanis, Egypt, number **2** on the map.

The objects in this alcove come from Karanis, an agricultural town in the fertile Fayum region of Egypt

from the 3rd century BCE through the 5th century CE. There is a good deal of evidence of a military presence at Karanis going back to its founding around 250 BCE, during the Ptolemaic period. In fact, many of the initial settlers of the town were likely Macedonian Greek soldiers who were granted land in return for their military service. Many towns in the Fayum were established in this way, and it was a mutually beneficial arrangement: the soldiers were able to retire to Egypt as farmers, and the Ptolemaic government was happy to reap the profit from the increased agricultural production.

The objects you see here, however, mostly date to Roman times (1st–4th centuries CE). The Romans conquered Egypt in 31 BCE and they too recognized the agricultural value of the Fayum. They established a strong military presence at Karanis that was housed in a military barracks. The soldiers protected the town and acted as law enforcement; They were rarely if ever involved in full-scale combat. Many Roman military veterans also settled at Karanis after their retirement.

Look around and see if you can spot the two-handled vessels with narrow bottoms. Do these look familiar? In the case in front of you, this is object number 12 (KM 8059); in the case to your left, look for object numbers 1, 29, and 33 (KM 20041, 20723, and 8079; you'll need to step around the outside of the alcove and view the case from the other side to see object number 1). These are also amphorae, although they are quite different from the decorative Greek examples we've just been looking at. These amphorae were strictly utilitarian, used to transport wine and other commodities throughout the Mediterranean and to store foodstuffs in the basements of homes throughout Karanis.

What is the connection between these vessels and the military? In addition to their duties as peace-keepers, the Roman soldiers stationed at Karanis were also tasked with collecting taxes, which often took the form of agricultural products. Soldiers used amphorae like these to transport wine, oil, and massive amounts of grain from farms throughout the region to Karanis. These were later shipped north to Alexandria and eventually across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome, where they helped feed the Roman populace.

A wealth of papyrus documents have been found at Karanis that attest to the many local youths who served in the Roman army at various posts throughout the empire. Move around to the other side of the left-hand case. On the wall, you'll see a label titled "The Roman Military in Egypt." It contains an image of a nearly 2,000-year-old letter held in the Papyrology Collection at the University of Michigan Library (P.Mich.inv 281). The letter was written by Saturnilus, a soldier stationed at Pselkis (Nubia), to his mother, Aphrodous, who lived at Karanis. He announces the birth of a son and says that he hopes to be able to visit her before he has to leave Pselkis for an 18-month-long tour of duty in a frontier garrison:

Saturnilos to Aphrodous, his mother, very many greetings. Before all things I pray for your health and prosperity. I wish you to know that I sent you three letters this month. I have received in full the monthly allowances which you sent to me by Iulius and a basket of olives by the lad of Iulius. I wish you to know that another male child has been born to me, whose name is Agathos Daimon. The gods willing, if I find an opportunity of putting my plan into effect I am coming to you with letters. I wish you to know that it is now three months since I came to Pselkis, and I have not yet found an opportunity to come to you. I was afraid to come just now because they say: that the prefect is on the road, lest he take the letters from me and send me back to the troops, and I incur the expense in vain. But I wish you to know that if another two months pass and I do not come to you before the month Hathyr I have eighteen more months of sitting in garrison until I enter Pselkis again and come to you. All those who come will bear witness to you how I seek daily to come. If you wish to see me a little, I wish it greatly and pray daily to the gods that they may quickly give me a good chance to come. Everything in the army runs with the favorable chance. If I have the opportunity I am coming to you. Take care of my children's pigs for me so that if my children come they may find them. At the next opportunity please send to Ioulas, the son of Iulius, whatever allowance you can, and let him be as a son of mine, even as you love me and I [love] my children. If his brother is at leisure send him to me at once so that I may send my children and their mother to you by him. [Send] me an extra jar of olives for a friend of mine; do not fail to [do] so. You know that whatever you give to Iulius he brings me, which he

indeed promised me to do. Write to me [whatever] he does. Salute Sokmenios and his children and [. . .] and Sabinus and Thaisas and her children and my brothers and my sister Tabenka and her husband and her relations-in-law. And write to me if she has had a child. Salute Tasokmenis, my lady sister, and Sambas and Soueris and her [children] and Sambous and all the relations and friends, [each by name]. Gemella salutes you all, as do Didymarion and the [newly-born] Agathos Daimon and Epiktetos. Salute Gemellus [and . . .] the wife of [. . .]ianus. And it was no great matter [- - -]. I pray for health to you all.

Below and to the right of this label, within the case, find object number 38, a Roman military diploma (KM 21412). It is two fragments of a small bronze plaque. In the Roman military, a diploma was a document recording a soldier's discharge from the army. These documents often also granted Roman citizenship to soldiers in exchange for their service.

Translation:

[Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Had]rianus Ant[oninus Augustus Pius, son] of the deified Hadr[ian], grandson of [the deified Trajan Parth]icus, [great-grandson of] the deified [Nerva, pontifex ma]ximus, holder of tribunician power for the [X time, saluted imperator twice, consul for the fourth time, father of (his) country, grants to the cavalrymen a]nd infantrymen wh[o served in the four wings which are cal]led the veteran [Gallic wing and --- the Hercul]ian provincial (wing) and the (wing) of the Vocon[tii (and) in the thirteen cohorts (called) the first Ulpian] (cohort) of the Africans and the first (cohort) of the Apameni a[nd --- and the first] (cohort) of the Pannonians and first Augustan (cohort) of the Lusitanians and [the shield-bearing (cohort) of Roman citizens and the fifth (cohort)] of the Nervii of the city of [P]ax Iulia and the second (cohort) of the Ituraei [and the second (cohort) of the Thracians and second (cohort) of the Th]ebans and the third and fifth [and seventh (cohorts) of the Ituraei] and are in Egypt under the prefect [Marcus Sempronius Liberalis]—having se[rved] out twenty-five (years) and having been ho[norably] discharged (and) who[se] names [are written below]—(he grants) Roman [cit]izenship [to those of them] w[ho did not have (it) and conu]bium with the wi[ves whom they had then when citizenship was given to them] (or)—if someone is un[married]—with those whom they should marry after, but o[nly on]e each ---]

Just to the right of the diploma, find object number 39, a small clay flask in the shape of a military trumpeter (KM 4959). Various musical instruments were used in the Roman army to sound alarm, signal formation changes during battle, and provide accompaniment for soldiers while marching. This flask shows a youth playing what appears to be a buccina, a curved horn with a supporting crossbar. The buccina was used to signal changes of the watch during the night, sound the reveille, and announce mealtimes.

Many Roman soldiers retired to Egypt and lived out the rest of their lives there. Object number 42 (KM 21194), above the military trumpeter, is an example of a typical Roman grave marker. It begins *D.M.*, which stands for *D(is) M(anibus)*, “To the Gods of the Underworld.” Next is the soldier’s name, Ti(tus) Helvius Tacitus, followed by *mil*, short for *miles*, “soldier of...” The epitaph is broken here but would have been followed by an indication of which part of the army he served in (i.e., which legion and century or which fleet or which cohort, etc.). It was found in a cemetery in northern Egypt, at Terenouthis, and shows that some soldiers brought their local (in this case, Italian) traditions with them to other parts of the empire where they were stationed.

In recognition of our multicultural society we have chosen to use the more inclusive BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) in our printed materials, although our galleries still employ the designations BC and AD.

Discover More

A Leather Cuirass Discovered at Karanis

One of the most exceptional items in the Kelsey Museum's Karanis collection is a piece of leather armor that dates to about 250–350 CE. Though no specific information can be derived from its archaeological context, the size, quality, and intricacy of this cuirass (breastplate) indicate that it was an expensive item and most likely came from a military context. Its lightweight construction points to its being equipment for cavalry, whose main role was skirmishing, which did not require more extensive protection.

While historically significant, this rare example of military armor is unfortunately too fragile for permanent display. Curators T.G. Wilfong and Andrew Ferrara along with conservator Claudia Chemello researched, reassembled, and conserved the cuirass in preparation for the 2011–2012 special exhibition *Karanis Revealed*.

Visit myumi.ch/48b8Z to download a PDF of the fascinating results of their research, published in the *Karanis Revealed* exhibition catalog.

Further Reading

Would you like to learn more about the military in ancient Greece and Rome? Here is a short selection of books to get you started.

- *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: A Social History*, by R. Alston. London: Routledge, 1995.
- *Greece and Rome at War*, by P. Connolly. London: Frontline Books, 2016.
- *The Complete Roman Army*, by A. Goldsworthy. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003.
- *The Late Roman Army*, by P. Southern and K.R. Dixon. London: B.T. Batsford, 1996.
- *Warfare in the Classical World*, by J.G. Warry. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995.



Roman leather armor found at Karanis. 3rd–4th c. CE. KM 3631.