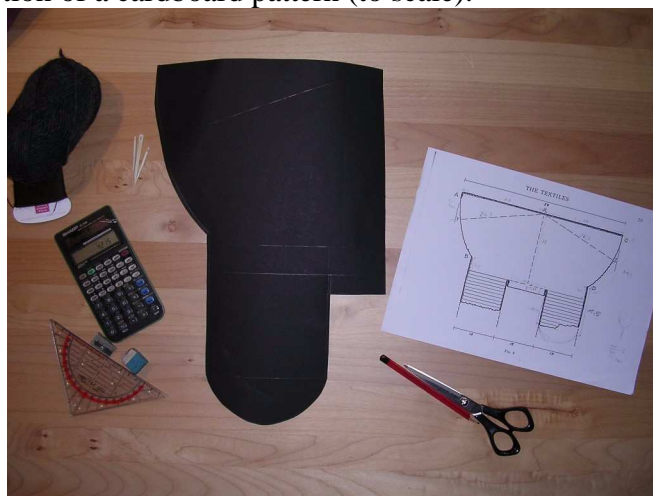


Dura-Europos ,arming cap'

Among the items found during the excavations at Dura-Europos in Syria (destroyed ca. 256 AD) was a strange cap with ear tabs, which was seen as an ,arming cap', i.e. a cap worn under the helmet in order to keep the helmet in place and to dissipate the shock of blows. (SCANNEN !)

A reconstruction of this cap was attempted by LEG III ITAL in November 2004.

At first, a sketch of this cap was copied out of Pfister & Bellinger, The excavations at Dura-Europos / Final report/4,2, 1945, The textiles (p. 58, No. 289, Fig. 8, Pl. XXVIII). The next step was the construction of a cardboard pattern (to scale).



Then, a piece of wool cloth was cut out. The edges had to be secured with a sewing machine (the original had been woven in one piece), but the rest of the stitching was done by hand (with a bone needle).



The long side of the cap was sewn together with the edges overlapping. The ear tabs and the neck were fitted with a felt padding (similar to the original cap).

The result looks somehow bizarre at first glance:



A Central-Asian looking wool cap (style „Bolsheviki“) with ear tabs which can be folded up if necessary.

The cap looks very much like a so called *bashlyk*, the traditional cap of the steppe nomads until today. Similar „phrygian caps“ were already in use among Skythes and Sarmatians, as the following examples show:



gold cup from the Kul'Oba Kurgan (4. Jh. v.Chr.)



Amazon from the Odessa alabastron

The Dura-Europos cap is thus certainly no genuine Roman headgear. It was nevertheless partially tested as an ‘arming-cap’ (see below).

Roman helmets usually need a felt lining, or they would fit too badly (replica of a Niedermoermter by Deepeeka [India]):



The cap clearly improves the visibility.



Furthermore, the ears are kept warm under the cold helmet; if the cap is tied up at the throat, the carotid artery is also protected against the chill (and it works well as a nightcap !).

It was NOT tested how well the cap could absorb blows – the helmet had been too expensive for that.

Conclusion: The cap which has been found in the rubble of Dura-Europos is most likely an Iranian/Central-Asian *bashlyk*, and has not been specifically designed to be an 'arming-cap', although it might have served in that role. It is unlikely that the Roman army in Raetia made regular use of such caps. Instead, a regular felt lining is more likely. On the other hand, *vexillationes* of III ITAL took part in several campaigns in Syria in the 3rd century – perhaps a few *bashlyks* were imported as souvenirs ?