

# **Introduction**

**by**

## **Andre Norton**

**IT WAS A** soldier of hardly more than peasant birth, but possessing the spark of military genius and practical knowledge, who forged that steel-hard backbone which upheld first the Roman republic, and then the Empire—the Legion. Up to the time of Marius, men had fought hard and well, but the loose formation of an army founded on what had been a militia of citizens called out in times of national danger was not the weapon a leader convinced of his own destiny needed—or wanted.

The concept of the professional soldier, whose home was truly the army itself and whose god was the Eagle of the Legion to which he was oathed, was born. In spite of the bloodbath ordered by Sulla, jealous of his predecessor's power, the idea of the Legion—and the Eagle—remained until it was accepted as the only possible answer to warfare with both barbarians of the borders and the trained armies of any others who dared to resist the expansion of Rome.

To suffer such defeat as to lose an Eagle was a shame so dark that it could only be washed out in blood. Prob-

bly the most notable of such losses was the massacre of three of Augustus Caesar's Legions—and the loss of their Eagles—by Quinctilius Varus in the Teutoberger Wald; Augustus is said to have lamented, "Varus, Varus, give me back my Legions!"

But an earlier defeat was suffered by the Proconsul Crassus (of the first Triumvirate). Envious of Julius Caesar and greedy for the fabled treasures of the Middle East, he marched his army to a bloody defeat at Carrhae in 43 B.C.

It is always wise to explore the footnotes in any history. While gathering material for the novel *Imperial Lady*, we found it necessary to read the history of the Han Dynasty—a remnant from nearly two thousand years ago. And in a translation of those very ancient pages, there exists a footnote that proved to be an open door for imagination's sweep.

We are told in a very brief paragraph that a portion of the Han Army, which had poured its might along the Silk Road conquering all that it met, rode into the Middle East and was present as audience to the defeat of the Legions.

Impressed by the way these Westerners stood up to disaster and death, the commander of the Han force who had reached that point so far from his homeland claimed a cohort of these prisoners as a novel gift for his emperor.

So baldly, the paragraph states a fact and mentions nothing more about the Romans' fate in a land so far away that they had no way of measuring the distance.

What did become of the Romans? Because history does not tell us, perhaps we can try to guess. A handful out of a Legion, looking to their Eagle for inspiration and guide—what could chance thereafter?

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December 1992