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THE ROMAN ARMY AS A COMMUNITY

Including papers of a conference held at
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edited by
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Military service and cultural identity in the *auxilia*

Ian Haynes

At a time when the Roman military's rôle in cultural change is a popular theme, it is surprising that one facet remains virtually unexamined. This was the capacity of the army, more than half of which was composed of provincials serving in auxiliary regiments, to transform the cultural identity of those who passed through its ranks. I will discuss aspects of this process in the *alae* and *cohortes* stationed in the western empire from Augustus to Septimius Severus. Admission to such regimental communities involved far more than mere militarization. It encompassed exposure to a range of 'symbols' — experiences, values, ideas, and artifacts — that were not exclusively military. This exposure resulted from the use of the army as an instrument of the Roman state and the necessity for its soldiers to operate within an environment defined in part by the needs of the state. Diverse factors influenced the cultural identities of auxiliaries. To be sure, both pre-service socialization and subsequent interaction with civilians would have been significant, but Roman cultural attributes predominated in the military environment within which these men served. In this sense, auxiliaries were 'Romanized'.

Today, the terms Roman and Romanization give rise to distrust. The latter concept has been subjected to repeated criticism over the years and is often rejected outright,¹ but I have chosen the words deliberately. My intention is not to represent Roman culture as a single, uncomplicated and unchanging entity; rather, it is to recognise that there were certain conventions and assumptions that evolved in Rome's past which had real ramifications in the lives of those provincials to whom they were introduced. This is particularly true in a military context. On a personal level, soldiers would surely have felt stronger ties to their families, friends and colleagues than to the State. The fact remains, however, that they had to work with concepts of Roman origin if they were to function effectively in their professional rôles. This paper will demonstrate how membership in the military community, participation in its religious year, and exposure to its official language influenced the cultural identity of auxiliary soldiers, distinguishing them from their civilian peers.

Social relations

Who then were enlisted? What was the procedure? You went to every one of the provinces, and then examined who were to undertake this service. When you had found them, you released them from their native land and gave them your own city in exchange. Consequently, they actually became reluctant for the rest of their lives to call themselves by their original ethnics ... On the day they join the army, they lost their original city, but from the very same day became fellow-citizens of your city and its defenders (Aristides, *Ῥώμης ἐγκώμιον* 26k, 74-75)

Thus wrote Aristides in the A.D. 140s of the enlistment of soldiers. Poetic and idealized as this account undeniably is, it points to the impact of recruitment on the cultural identities of soldiers. The abrupt introduction of an individual into a new living and working environment can lead to a sense of social dislocation, while the character of that environment will have an impact on the way the individual perceives himself.

The form of Rome's army and the pattern of recruitment which sustained it was determined by a conceptual framework that was fundamentally Roman. The division between auxiliary and legionary forces was a natural product of the fundamental distinction between non-citizen and citizen. The careers and working conditions of recruits were largely determined by their

1 For recent discussion of the concept, and instances of its outright rejection see Barrett 1997; Freeman 1993, 1996, 1997; Hingley 1996; Millett 1990; Reece 1990; and Woolf 1997.

status under Roman law. Over time, increasing numbers of citizens did join the *alae* and *cohortes*, but it was not until the edict of Caracalla in 212 that the citizenship distinction between the *auxilia* and the legions became redundant.

In cases where regimental groups were raised *en masse* from a particular area, soldiers would initially have found themselves serving alongside, and sometimes under, men with similar cultural backgrounds. Units could be composed of individuals who had experienced little exposure to Roman government and viewed it with hostility or suspicion. A large number of regiments were raised through mass conscription, a fact that led some of them, such as Tacitus' famous Usipi, to mutiny (*Agr.* 28). A reality too often forgotten by scholars is that conscription remained a fact of service throughout the first two centuries A.D. (Brunt 1974).² Many who found their way into the ranks of the *auxilia* would have been conscripts, often born some distance from centres where the transforming impact of Roman rule was most in evidence. For such men the social impact of enlistment could have been dramatic indeed.

Established auxiliary regiments invariably drew replacement recruits, whether conscripts or volunteers, from the nearest convenient source (Cheesman 1914, 70). Within a generation of a regiment moving out of the area in which it was raised, its ethnic/tribal title became meaningless (Mann 1963, 147).³ Theoretically, if a regiment was stationed for a protracted time in an area with a plentiful supply of recruits, most of its members might be native to the region. In practice, however, many of the areas around military installations, even those with extensive *vici*, could not have supplied sufficient men.⁴ Attached soldiers and transferees added further variety — the ranks of regiments were seldom homogeneous. Units that moved around, or that needed a large influx of recruits to bring them up to campaigning strength, could rapidly become cosmopolitan communities. The Adamklissi altar (*CIL* III 14214) demonstrates just how mixed such regiments could be: it records 1 African, 1 Norican, 2 Britons, 1 Raetian, 3 Spaniards and 12 Gauls, all of whom served in the same, unknown regiment during the Dacian Wars. Within such ethnically diverse communities, men of common origin sometimes banded together. The formation of such informal associations is evidenced by three mid 2nd-c. altars from Birrens (*RIB* 2100, 2107 and 2108); each attests a different ethnic group within a single regiment, *cohors II Tungrorum equitata*. It is noteworthy that all three groups use a form of dedication, an altar with Latin inscription, alien to their own ancestral traditions — a reminder that in the cosmopolitan mix of the army, Roman cultural norms were sometimes the only common point of reference.

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- 2 The evidence suggests that conscription was employed throughout the 1st and 2nd c. A.D., even if many recruits were volunteers. In addition to Tacitus' references to various 1st-c. *dilectii* among the Thracians (*Ann.* 4.46), Batavians (*Hist.* 4.14), and Usipi (*Agr.* 28), there is considerable evidence for later conscription. Trajan was clearly aware that his armies contained many *lecti* (conscripts) and *vicarii* (substitutes provided by men to avoid conscription) (*Plin., Ep.* 10.29). Hadrian, Pius and Commodus all found it necessary to confirm exemptions from conscription (*Dig.* 27.1.6.8) and in 185 a village official was even able to extort money for the release of draft-dodgers he hunted down (*PLond.* 2.173).
- 3 The only exception to this may be the Batavian units. Syrian units, formerly considered to be a special case, have been shown by D. Kennedy to follow the same practice as the rest of the *auxilia* (Kennedy 1980).
- 4 That many soldiers were recruited from *vici* at auxiliary forts just as many legionaries were recruited from those *in castris* seems beyond doubt. There are many examples of legionaries giving their birthplace as *castris*: see, for example, an inscription from Coptos of Augustan/Tiberian date (*ILS* 2438). The fact that auxiliaries seldom offer an equivalent formula may be explained by the fact that those born in *vici* should have registered in their *civitas* (*Dig.* 50.1.30). Nonetheless, the size of the best known *vici* suggests to me that most would have been too small to provide more than a fraction of each unit's manpower needs.

All too little is known about the families of auxiliary soldiers. We may surmise, however, that many men were accompanied by families and dependents even when their regiments travelled long distances. This is implied in the case of a diploma of 109 (*CIL XVI 161*) which records a Hamian trooper of *ala I Hamiorum sagittariorum* stationed in Mauretania Tingitana with a Syrian wife. Just as a regiment's own composition might vary, so might its civilian following. Yet all too little is known of those who accompanied the army and lived in the *vici* or perhaps alongside them in their forts.⁵ Their rôle as a potential source of recruits has already been mentioned, but their society is ill understood. In some ways, the civilian followers probably counterbalanced the Roman military culture of the fort, retaining other traditions.⁶

While military service did not necessarily isolate soldiers from civilians, it did change the way they interacted with them. The act of joining the army released auxiliaries from the hierarchy and conventions of the societies from which they came and enabled them to acquire new status and relationships and to form new cultural identities. As richly armoured warriors, representatives of imperial power and regular wage-earners, soldiers enjoyed a special position in many provincial societies. The associated authority and legal status could serve to distance soldiers from civilians.⁷ In doing so, that authority and status also acted as the binding that held together the diverse and cosmopolitan community that was the army.

Further 'binding' took the form of social networks existing alongside the army's formal rank structure. The manner in which men of a common ethnic or tribal background banded together has been discussed in the introduction to this volume, but there is also evidence for other forms of social networking characteristic of Roman society. Patronage relationships were by no means unique to the Romans but they constituted the web of power that held the empire together. Written sources record a number of instances where soldiers or potential soldiers lobbied benefactors to secure a desirable position.⁸ In a world which placed such importance on patronage, the opportunities for networking that cult groups and *collegia* provided were invaluable. Such associations were to be found in most of the empire's major towns. Indeed, such was the popularity and potency of these networks that they were a constant concern to the State and were perceived as potential breeding grounds for conspiracies. Many *collegia* had a military membership, some exclusively so, and the fact that even one of the most 'army friendly' emperors sought to regulate their membership shows how popular and widespread they were.⁹ The evidence suggests that the benefits of membership of both cults and *collegia* were available to auxiliaries.¹⁰ Recruitment to the army therefore had a profoundly

5 For women and children in forts see van Driel Murray (1995) and Hassall (p. 35 ff. above).

6 Possible evidence for the survival of ethnic tradition in the *vici* comes from Birdoswald: a 3rd-c. inscription records the death of a boy with the distinctively Dacian name of Decebalus (*RIB* 1920). The use of this name at the site 50 to 100 years after ethnic Dacians serving in *cohors I Aelia Dacorum* arrived there suggests the survival of aspects of Dacian culture in the *vici*.

7 This is not to see the army as totally isolated socially, nor to accept unhesitatingly the soldier-bully model assessed by Campbell (1984, 243-63) and critiqued by Alston (1995, 53-68). It is simply to emphasise that in some respects it was a society itself, with its own rules, regulations, and opportunities.

8 Claudius Terentianus' correspondence with his father mentions such letters on various occasions (a good example is *PMich.* VIII 468, 35-41). Julius Apollinarius was well aware of the importance of good letters of recommendation; he obtained such outstanding references that he was actually made an *immunis* shortly after enlistment (*PMich.* VIII 466). Juvenal, *Sat.* 16.5-6, emphasises the value of such letters for aspiring recruits.

9 Septimius Severus was clearly concerned with the membership of military *collegia* (*Dig.* 47.22.1).

10 Evidence for membership in *collegia* amongst the *auxilia* is sparser than that for the legions, but references to *collegia* are known from auxiliary bases. Thus Caecilius Optatus, tribune of an auxiliary regiment stationed at High Rochester, commissioned an altar to DEAE MINERVAE ET GENIO COLLEGI (*RIB*

significant impact on an individual's social relationships; in exposing him to Roman forms of social organisation and transforming his links to provincial society, it inevitably transformed his cultural identity.

Religion

The very act of entering the army had a religious aspect that owed much to Roman tradition. On enlistment each recruit had to take a sacred oath or *sacramentum*. The particular sense of religious sanction and legal obligation enshrined within this oath had its origins in the 3rd c. B.C. (Livy 22.38; Campbell 1984, 19). So profound was the significance of the *sacramentum* that it was protected by its own *Genii*. Soldiers made dedications to the *sacramentii genii* (e.g., *AE* 1924.135) and under certain circumstances felt a very real fear of them (Apul., *Met.* 9.41). The *sacramentum* is known to have been repeated on 3 January and on the anniversary of the emperor's accession, and may even have been taken daily (Davies 1989, 47). It was therefore a sacred and constant reminder of the soldier's special rôle in society.

Irrespective of his personal religious activities and affiliations, the auxiliary soldier's year was punctuated by a series of official festivals and ceremonies. The religious year of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* is famously recorded on the *Feriale Duranum* (Fink, Hoey and Snyder 1940). Significantly, the calendar does not record any festivals specific to the Palmyrene cohort or the place in which it served; instead, it appears to have been a standard list of ceremonies. Most numerous — 27 out of 41 entries (Fink, Hoey and Snyder 1940, 172) — were those associated with the imperial cult; there were also *feriae publicae* and three festivals of military significance. The emphasis on the imperial cult is unsurprising. The veneration of the emperor through religious rituals defined the relative status of the gods, the emperor, and the worshipper within Roman society. Repeated throughout the empire, such rituals lent cultural identity and cohesion to communities. They imposed a Roman definition of the world upon the empire (Price 1984, 248). Romanization involved subscribing to this definition and accepting one's place within it. As a way of constructing power, the imperial cult accompanied by diplomacy and politics was an effective agent (Price 1984, 247-48). It played a valuable rôle in maintaining Rome's desired power relationships where military force alone could not. As such it was particularly important in the army, which was harder to terrorize than the civilian population. Regular repetition of imperial cult ceremonies, as recorded in the *Feriale Duranum*, would have served to remind the auxiliary soldier of his place within the Roman scheme of things. The Dura fresco, formerly believed to depict a dedication to Palmyrene gods but convincingly re-interpreted by Pekáry (1986) as relating to the imperial cult, shows how this worked. Soldiers of an auxiliary cohort, *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, are depicted drawn up to watch their tribune, Julius Terentius, sacrifice before the statues of Gordian III, Pupienus, and Balbinus. Terentius's rôle here is entirely in keeping with the Roman idea of priestly service. His social standing requires that he adopt a religious rôle in a society in which power-holders often fulfilled priestly duties. The same image is repeated on the columns of Trajan and Marcus, although there it is the emperor officiating over a sacrifice to the gods in front of his army.¹¹ Participation in sacrifice and accompanying banquets,¹² sponsoring religious inscriptions, and

1268). I am indebted to A. Pegler, whose Ph.D. research concerns social organisations in the Roman army, for discussing these issues with me.

11 The emperor presides over the *suovetaurilia* on scenes viii, liii and ciii of Trajan's Column and in scene vi on the Column of Marcus Aurelius.

12 The Paris papyrus describes imperial cult ritual, including a banquet, within a regimental base. In front of his regiment the commanding officer worshipped on his knees before statues of the emperor Severus Alexander and the empress Julia Mamaea. Senior officers and *principales* participated in a banquet which took place near the imperial shrine (Wilcken 1894, 83).

the performance of ritual duties were all Roman ways through which auxiliary officers emphasised their status to the men they commanded.

The presence of civilian festivals (*feriae publicae*) on the Dura papyrus surprised the first scholars to examine it. Yet they are just another example of the way Roman tradition manifested itself in military contexts. The most important was the *Natalis Urbis Romae aeternae* on 21 April. Dedications by auxiliaries commemorating this event are known throughout the Roman world: a date recorded on papyrus at the easternmost end of the empire can be matched by an altar from an outpost fort in northern Britain.¹³ It appears that these festivals were less well commemorated in the provincial countryside than they were in Roman Italy or in the armed forces, reminding us of the special symbolic proximity of the army to the empire's capital.

Even if individual soldiers were not obliged or even expected to participate in the ritual acts fundamental to these religious events, the fact that they repeatedly witnessed them must have had an impact on the soldier's world-view. Certainly they helped to characterise the environment in which the soldier lived and worked. As Helgeland observed, "one might therefore describe the camp as an enclave of Romanism in a jungle of non-Roman mores" (1978, 1495).

Language

After its acquisition in early childhood, language becomes the medium for all thought processes. As such, the vocabularies of various languages both reflect and perpetuate differing subconscious assumptions about the world. In the Roman world, just as any other, exposure to unfamiliar languages could convey new cultural concepts.

The crucial rôle of language in cultural change is apparent in both its spoken and written forms. From the moment he was sworn in to military service, the soldier was reminded of the importance of Latin to both the State and the army. It was inextricably linked to his identity as a servant of the state and a soldier of the empire. This association was not merely symbolic; it was essential in the linguistic milieu of the provinces, a milieu in which troops often had to communicate with people of widely differing origins. Not only would the ability to speak Latin have been necessary for the performance of certain regimental duties, it was sometimes the only way soldiers could communicate with one another. It was less vital among the ethnically homogeneous tribal levies of the early empire, but as regiments became regularized, the situation would have changed rapidly. Units required a *lingua franca* if they were to operate at all; regimental commanders, junior officers and recruits from different areas would have been introduced, and the regiments, now operating independently, would have had to dispatch troops to a wide variety of places and people to procure supplies.¹⁴ Though casual conversation might have been conducted in any one of a multitude of tongues, Latin took on special importance.

Holder considered this theme in his discussion of the career paths of pre-Trajanic centurions, decurions, and *immunes* (1980, 86-95). He observed that the importance of being able to speak the native language of a unit, as a factor in posting personnel, diminished over time (1980, 88). The presence of a Spanish decurion in the *ala Pannoniorum* in the early 1st c., may indicate that the native language had ceased to be an important factor in some units in the reign of Augustus (CIL III 2016; Holder 1980, 283). It is possible that the decurion learnt it in order to do

13 RIB 2136 from High Rochester.

14 See Fink 1971, no. 63, for the example of an auxiliary unit based in Lower Moesia which sent troops as far as Gaul, a different linguistic area, to collect clothing and corn.

the job, but it is rather more likely that this was unnecessary because he could communicate with his troops in Latin.¹⁵

The study of Latin loan-words in ancient languages has highlighted key Roman ideas, ideas unfamiliar to non-Roman societies that could only be properly communicated through Latin (Wild 1970, 126). Jackson (1994) and Zimmer (1990) have discussed the words incorporated into the Celtic languages during the period of the Roman occupation of Britain.¹⁶ Their findings are especially important since they indicate which new ideas Latin would have introduced to auxiliary soldiers. Jackson (1994, 78-79) grouped these words according to military life, administration, the calendar, and education. The military terms, however, are of rather less interest to us here than words that define Roman concepts.¹⁷ Auxiliary soldiers would have made extensive use of Roman chronological and legal vocabulary during their period of service. It is no coincidence that so many of the words for units of time in the Celtic languages come from Latin.¹⁸ The new way of thinking about the measurement of time that these borrowings represent may not have affected the lives of peasants in the fields, but it would have been very important within the army. Soldiers were constantly reminded of the importance of time. Commanders of units needed to know the status of their units on a daily basis. The duties of individuals were meticulously recorded on daily duty rosters.¹⁹ Thus the Roman system of time gave structure to the working life of the *milites*.

Roman legal terminology also enjoyed more widespread usage in auxiliary forts than it did in many civilian settlements. Terms such as *heres* and *ex testamento* became regular features in auxiliary epigraphs from the Claudian period onwards.²⁰ Those who commissioned the monuments understood that their privileged status allowed them the freedom to choose, as heir, whomever they desired. In the ancient world this right was unique to Roman law, and auxiliaries were the only non-citizens in the western provinces to whom it was extended (Thomas 1976, 405-7; Cic., *Arch.* 2). The terms defined the special relationship of the heir to the deceased, and the obligations it entailed. The use of this term on auxiliary tombstones indicates that such complex, quintessentially Roman ideas, which could be conveniently conveyed only in Latin, enjoyed widespread usage among the *auxilia*.

The significance of the written word to Roman society must be measured not by the proportion of its members who could write, but by the proportion who participated in literate modes of communication. The Romans cannot be credited with the introduction of writing to the provinces of the western empire, but the emphasis they placed on its use is noteworthy. In Roman society, a far higher proportion of the population used the written word, willingly or reluctantly, actively or passively. This was because, as Hopkins argued (1991, 144):

15 Vell. Pat. 2.110.5 claimed that all the Pannonian rebels of A.D. 6, themselves auxiliary soldiers, knew Latin, though it is possible that he exaggerated for effect or that he was referring to all those Pannonians whom he considered worthy of note.

16 Zimmer 1990 discusses the problem of dating these words to the Roman period.

17 Perhaps the most obvious example of a Latin military term that has survived in other languages is that for fortress, *castrum*. This word appears in English place-names as *chester*, and as the Welsh *castell*.

18 Zimmer 1990, 280 argues convincingly that the Welsh names of days of the week and of months of the year were borrowed from Latin during the period of the Roman occupation. The Roman names have also survived almost unchanged in Italian and French. The 7-day cycle was not, of course, a Roman invention: it had its origins in the Middle East. We owe the earliest names of these days to the Babylonians; these names became familiar to astrologers in the classical world from the time of Alexander the Great. Rome's expansion introduced a number of societies to the 7-day cycle, and many more to Caesar's Julian Year.

19 For examples of dated military rosters see Fink 1971 and Bowman and Thomas 1991.

20 One of the earliest auxiliary inscriptions to bear the *heres ex testamento* formula is the Claudian *stela* of Biturix, discovered at Bonn (*CIL* XIII 8092). Thomas 1980, chapt. IV, 123 treats the special significance of these words in his discussion of the spread of Latin on the Rhine frontier.

The Roman empire was bound together by writing. Literacy was both a social symbol and an integrative by-product of Roman government, economy, and culture. The whole experience of living in the Roman empire, of being ruled by Romans, was overdetermined by the existence of texts.

The Roman legal system was likewise characterised by an adherence to written documents and written law.

It is well known that the Roman army made extensive use of the written word for its non-civic duties. But it is also important to remember that vast quantities of paperwork characterised the military's management of troops and resources. The fort was a literate environment, in which the written word was displayed on everything from building inscriptions to tile-stamps and bath-house graffiti. Even outside the fort, on altars at local shrines or on soldiers' tombstones, the written word was there to be seen. Military stations were also a centre in which documents were produced. They recorded such varied phenomena as the duties of troops (Fink 1971; Bowman and Thomas 1991), the state of a regiment's horses (*PDura*. 87), or the purchase of oxen (*FIRA* iii.137).

The Roman army valued literacy and soldiers learnt to value it too. Possession of reading and writing skills assured some men better working conditions and better pay; it may even have been a vital qualification for promotion. Yet while a great deal is known about literate officers and may be assumed for clerks, our knowledge of the distribution of reading and writing skills among the *milites* is sketchy. We know that literacy in the Roman army was far from universal.²¹ But what is important is not how many could write, but how many used written forms of communication.

All soldiers were made personally aware of the value of written records throughout their service, even if not every man could create them. The information that the written word conveyed could result in definite material benefits to the individual. It also served to define his financial status and safeguard his legal rights. In this way auxiliary soldiers used writing in a wider variety of ways and to a far greater extent than their provincial peers.

From the very beginning, letters of recommendation (*litterae commendaticiae*) could make a major difference to a soldier's service and promotion prospects.²² Large amounts of papyrological material are concerned with soldiers' pay, savings, and deductions for equipment. Army regulations required that all auxiliaries submit a written statement to the regimental pay office on receipt of their *stipendia*. The discovery of such a document at Vindonissa has had important consequences not only for our understanding of soldiers' pay but also for our knowledge of the uses of writing within the *auxilia*. Speidel (1992, 90) reconstructed the Vindonissa text as follows:

Asino Ce[l]ere, Non[i]o co(n)s(ulibus), XI K(alendas)
 Aug(ustas). S(upra) s(criptus) Clua, eq(ues) Raetor(um)
 tur(ma) Albi Pudentis ac(c)epi * (denarios) L
 [e]t stipendi proximi * (denarios) LXXV.

21 I cannot agree with Horsfall that "The illiterate soldier was seriously disadvantaged and a positive encumbrance, to be taught urgently" (1991, 63). Were this so, we would have to assume that a large proportion of the troopers of the *ala veterana Gallica* were a serious problem for their commanders. Only 22 of the 64 men recorded on legible entries in *PHamb.* i 39 could actually sign receipts for hay-money.

22 The semi-literate Latin of *PMich.* viii 468, 35 demonstrates the importance that individuals placed upon these documents. To help the career of a friend or relative, sponsors were prepared to struggle with a language that they clearly had trouble writing. *Litterae commendaticiae* reflect the immense importance of patronage throughout Roman society; auxiliary soldiers who learned to exploit this system could have benefitted considerably. Well-written letters ensured many recruits an easier life as *immunes* early in their careers. Those not so blessed would no doubt have remarked upon the value of influential friends and the power of letters.

The document, written in A.D. 38, is in the name of one Clua, a soldier in a regular Raetian auxiliary regiment. It is interesting to find that at this early date an auxiliary soldier of native origin was capable of producing such a text, for there is no doubt that Clua was the author (Speidel 1992, 90-91).²³ A point of note is the dating of the receipt; Speidel notes that "dating by suffect consuls outside Italy was very uncommon and may shed some light on military administration customs of the early empire" (1992, 91 no. 28). This is another example of the army — almost uniquely among communities in the provinces — employing an essentially 'Roman' device, in this instance a method to measure time.

Other documents indicate how important it was for the soldier to confront the written word if he was to receive and safeguard that to which he was entitled. One thinks of receipts for hay money,²⁴ debt certificates, such as one dating to A.D. 27 and issued by an illiterate auxiliary cavalryman to an illiterate auxiliary infantryman (*PVind.* I 135), furlough passes and requests for leave of absence or *commeatus*,²⁵ and wills.²⁶ The latter represented a distinctive and important privilege in provincial society. The use of letters to communicate to friends and colleagues is also well attested, as is the propensity of the soldiery to inscribe graffiti.²⁷

But the importance of the written word to the soldier is best illustrated by the diploma, the inscribed bronze sheets which veterans could produce as proof of their legal status and that of their family. So important were these documents to some veterans that they were buried with them (Roxan 1985, 93). Thus, even after the end of a man's military career, the written word continued to define and protect his status in a way unparalleled elsewhere in provincial society.

None of this evidence for the written word need indicate that a formal process of education had been instituted for the *auxilia*: we know of too many long-serving illiterates to give credence to such a theory. Nothing, however, rules out the possibility that particularly promising candidates for promotion were given extra help by those able to assist them, or that ambitious individuals sought help in acquiring literate skills. Whether or not the average auxiliary regiment would boast 'clerks able to teach', a term which may have distinguished some of the legionary *librarii* (*Dig.* 50.6.7), there would always have been someone around who could help. Being able to work in Latin, and to use writing, were important to the auxiliary soldier in a more fundamental way than to most provincials. In these ways too I would suggest that we see him undergoing a process of Romanization.

23 The possibility remains that Clua was merely copying out a formula, and that he was incapable of composing anything himself. If that were the case, however, there would have been some strange errors in the formula itself. These were the omission of the consul Nonius' *cognomen*, Quintilianus, and the writing of the letter 'e' in two different ways, as E and II. Such irregularities may perhaps better be attributed to one individual's idiosyncratic writing style than to an official template prepared by regimental clerks.

24 There are, for example, the receipts submitted by the troopers of *ala veterana Gallica* in Egypt in the late 2nd c. for hay-money (*PHamb.* i 39). 44 of the 64 legible receipts were written for illiterates.

25 Many requests for *commeatus* found at Vindolanda were addressed to the commander, to *domine Cerialis*. The text of *Vind* 85.146, for example, is: *rogo domine Cerialis me dignum habeas cui des commeatum.*

26 One of the soldier's most important legal privileges was to make a will. Ulpian (*Dig.* 29.1.42) records that a man gained the right to make a will as soon as he joined the army. He had no right to do so before then unless he was a citizen. This particular privilege had important social consequences, and again placed the soldier in a special position in provincial society.

27 Many recorded graffiti take the form of ownership marks. Some of these have been discussed by MacMullen (1960). In this context Evans' (1987) comments on graffiti in Roman Britain are of interest. He notes the high proportion of known graffiti that comes from military sites. However, I do not find convincing his analysis of the reasons for this.

Conclusion

No grand plan existed to transform the *alae* and *cohortes* into enclaves of Roman culture, but every effort was made to ensure that these regiments could operate as agents of imperial government. That government employed key concepts and values which had grown out of Roman tradition and so too, inevitably, did its fighting units. Forms of social organisation, religious obligation, and communication that were considered important to the maintenance of the Roman world order necessarily manifested themselves in the army. Here they served an additional rôle, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to work together, sustaining unit cohesion. This in turn had an impact on the cultural identity of auxiliary soldiers. Enlistment brought with it access to new patronage networks and to *collegia*, elements of Roman society unknown in the communities where many soldiers were recruited. Alongside these opportunities there were obligations. The loyalty of soldiers to the emperor and the empire had to be assured. Religious obligations — the *sacramentum*, veneration of the emperor and, to a lesser extent, celebration of the *feriae publicae* — played a vital rôle in affirming loyalty in the Roman world. Exposure of soldiers to these rituals was therefore more intensive than that of ordinary provincials. Another theme of profound practical and symbolic importance to the cultural experience of the Roman auxiliary had to do with language. Without Latin in both its spoken and written form the Roman empire would have been profoundly different. Latin speakers could articulate concepts alien to many provincials. Those who could make use of the written word were further advantaged; they could communicate over time and space. This ability was crucial to the effective running of the state and the army, but merely advantageous to most provincial families. Wherever they were stationed, auxiliary soldiers must have been constantly reminded of the importance of writing.

The extent to which auxiliary soldiers underwent exposure to these aspects of Roman cultural style justifies the claim that they were 'Romanized'. Re-adjusting to this aspect of the military environment must have been difficult for many men. Yet throughout the Roman world the process continued relentlessly. Discharged soldiers went on to transform, little by little, the communities in which they settled. Tacitus' *Civilis* might have been referring to war when he said '*provinciarum sanguine provincias vinci*' (*Hist.* 4.17), but he could as easily have referred to Roman peace.

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