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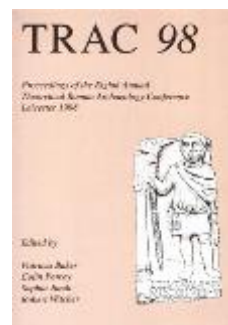
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Author: Simon James

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The Community of the Soldiers: a major identity and centre of power in the Roman empire

by Simon James

Introduction

We tend today to conceptualise the Imperial Roman military as a monolithic state institution. In this paper, which concentrates especially on the second and third centuries AD, I will argue that such a view has rendered largely invisible, a fascinating and very complex social entity of profound importance in the history of the Roman world. The military consisted of people, not cogs in a machine, and it is quite clear that, distinct from the military institutional structures of the state, 'the soldiers' (*militēs*) formed a major, well-defined identity-group which constituted a recognised and self-aware empire-wide 'imagined community'.

This community, segmented into hundreds of discrete military formations scattered across the empire, each with its own substantial train of dependants and unique pattern of external social interactions, played a profound role in the history of the Roman world and its neighbours, distinct from that of 'the army' as an organisation. However, as yet this complexity is only partly understood.

What follows is a consideration of the community of *militēs*, and the nature of soldierly identity which underpinned it – especially the bodily expression of that identity, where archaeological, representational and documentary evidence allows us to approach aspects of the ideology and symbolic lives of the *militēs*.

The anachronism of current terminology

The Imperial Roman military is widely envisaged as a monolithic instrument of state power, its nature closely analogised, more or less overtly, with the armed forces of modern nation states. We commonly speak of 'The Roman Army', implicitly capitalised, and a mechanical analogy is frequently employed, that of 'the Roman war machine' (e.g. Peddie 1994); its units conceptualised as chess-pieces, Roman soldiers as brutally disciplined, and brutal, automata.

I suggest that such a conception of 'The Roman Army' is a modern reification which significantly distorts the evidence. The concept of 'The Army' seems to me to imply elaborate centralised institutions, a unified hierarchy of command, perhaps a permanent general staff, etc., which did not exist under the Republic or the Principate (the only standing central command institution was the emperorship itself). Certainly, it implies a single unified organisation; but, tellingly, during the later Republic and down to the middle imperial period at least, the Romans appear to have had no such term, and no such concept: 'army' (*exercitus*), singular, was used for a particular grouping of forces, such as the standing army of a province or a corps specially assembled for a particular campaign. When generalising about the military, they employed plurals, writing of 'the armies' (*exercitūs*), 'the legions' (*legiones*), 'the regiments' (*numeri*), etc., and not least of 'the soldiers' (*militēs*), denoting a socio-political category.

In place of the monolithic/machine model, it is suggested that we should start to think and speak of 'the soldiers', and of Roman armies in the plural, as better ways of conceptualising the Roman military, ways which are much closer to ancient understandings of the military: as a social entity and not just a state institution.

Not 'the army' but 'the soldiers'

It has been widely assumed that discipline made imperial soldiers unthinking military thugs; they may often have been brutal, but they certainly were not robots. Here the current theoretical emphasis on individuals in the past as self-aware social agents is highly valuable, and provides a perspective which makes good sense of a lot of ignored or downplayed data. In fact there always has been plentiful evidence that Roman soldiers were active agents. The way soldiers appear in the surviving literary sources is very far from an image of unquestioning obedience. Under the empire, soldiers in society were represented as feared, dangerous, arrogant outsiders (Carrié 1993:105), a class of men with their own peculiar codes who exploited their position for personal ends with virtual impunity (e.g. MacMullen 1963:84–9). The evidence for the wilfulness and unruliness of soldiers has been played down under the long-prevailing, top-down, officer-centred view of the Roman military; incidents of indiscipline and mutiny have tended to be seen as aberrant or signs of bad leadership. But there is good reason to believe that such behaviour by the troops was normal, even expected by those in authority, a fact of life to be managed and controlled as far as possible. The roots of this situation seem fairly clear. The arrogance, unruliness and sometimes rebelliousness of the troops were surely rooted not only in the violence implicit in their identity, and the privileged place they enjoyed in imperial society, but in the traditional rights to free speech of Roman citizen soldiers of the republican era and in the traditions of warrior classes of other peoples from whom many soldiers continued to be recruited.

Soldiers under the empire had a highly visible special status and resultant professional pride. Their right to bear arms in public symbolised their unique position as guarantors of the Roman order through the threat, probably more often than the delivery, of lethal force on behalf of the state. They held privileges regarding control of property and inheritance denied to others, and occupied a unique legal position, with their own military courts (Campbell 1984:207–42). This special status and official power also gave the brotherhood (or Mafia) of the soldiers unofficial local power, without redress, over civilians (Campbell 1984:246–54). They stood outside the local civil hierarchies; alternately despised and feared, soldiers (and particularly wealthy veterans) were nevertheless courted by civilians of many levels (MacMullen 1963:99–118). The *milites* grouped in regiments scattered across the Roman world were very much aware of their special, shared status, forming a self-conscious 'imagined community' (a concept I will explore further below).

Clearly then, the military was not simply a hierarchical machine controlled with ease from the top; framed by an inordinately complex organisational structure manifested in its hundreds of permanent units, and the amazing proliferation of ranks, grades and offices (Domaszewski 1967), it constituted an equally complex social system (e.g. MacMullen 1984). 'Class-divided' like Roman society as a whole (Giddens 1985:1), the army was a field of continual contention and renegotiation between a variety of cross-cutting interest-groups: the rank-and-file soldiers; centurions and other prominent groups such as standard-bearers; regimental and provincial army commanders; and the emperor, or those who would be emperor. All this resulted in a web of mutual obligation, mutual dependence and mutual implicit threat in which the ordinary soldier was a key player; maintaining the goodwill and consent of the *milites* at large was obviously vital to military (and so to imperial) authority; the political power of the soldiers was potentially very real, if usually unfocused and not clearly articulated by the men themselves (Campbell 1984:383). Stability and control was achieved, at least most of the time, by constant indoctrination, training, surveillance and discipline, but surely also by the prospect of rewards and personal patronage extended by the emperor, provincial governors/generals and regimental officers.

Soldiers' awareness of their own implicit power was greatly enhanced by the Civil War of the 190s, and the reign of Severus, which showed with glaring clarity the dependence of the emperor on the support of the armies. Thereafter, it became ever more difficult for emperors to

maintain strong discipline, because they were constantly obliged to curry the goodwill of the soldiers. Hence the ever-growing importance, which Campbell has examined (1984:32–59), of the soldiers perceiving the emperor as *commilito* ('fellow-soldier'), revealing the concern of the emperors to court the loyalty of the troops as much as to demand it (Campbell 1984:191–8).

What was the nature of this huge and powerful entity, the *milites*? Perhaps the question is best answered through a consideration of how the soldier's identity was actually created and reproduced.

Creating and reproducing Roman soldierly identity

Beyond obedience, encouraged by both simple material rewards and the threat of savage punishment, a sense of personal attachment to regiment, emperor and Rome was achieved by inducing in the recruit (*tiro*), whether volunteer or conscript, a profound ontological shift; his entire sense of being was systematically changed as he acquired a new identity, or more accurately, changed some of his multiple existing identities, and perhaps acquired additional ones. The process of joining a regiment affected his cultural/national/ethnic identities, social status, 'professional' and perhaps religious identities, and indeed the definition of his masculinity. Of course, the degree of change and the profundity of the shock involved will have varied according to the recruit's personal background, and the unit he was joining (legions, and 'ethnic' auxiliary units, for example, seem to have maintained quite varied and distinctive traditions). Unless he had grown up at a camp and was already half-integrated, everything about military life was initially alien.

Attachment of the soldier to the imperial regime was achieved through exposure to propaganda and ideological indoctrination, from saluting the standards to the perhaps subliminal impact of imagery on the coins in his pay. His new existence was framed within carefully created theatres of control; he found himself in the special physical environment of a military base – in my view commonly designed more with surveillance and control of the soldiers in mind than with external functions or defence against perceived external threats. He was also immersed in new practices and routines in space and time, according to unfamiliar diurnal and annual cycles of life and ceremonial, including official Roman and specifically military festivals, rooted in the distant past of an Italy the recruit had probably never seen. As part of their own particular regimental traditions and identity, auxiliary units may also have continued to venerate cults of their place of origin (Figure 1).

It was of course an overtly masculine environment, governed by a distinctive warrior value system, into which he was integrated through indoctrination and, varying according to degree of personal enthusiasm, through conscious voluntary effort, in the re-creation of his sense of self. The potential depth of psychological impact of the transformation may be gauged from the fact that many soldiers acquired a new Romanized name on enlistment, itself a profound expression of the imposition/adoption of a new persona, and assimilation to Roman hegemony.

He had also joined a community with its own special language, the *sermo militaris*, which he would have to learn and use correctly to be a member of the group. This was much more than just bad Latin; it was of course full of jargon and technical expressions, many of which were taken from Greek and languages of other peoples recruited into the army (Carrié 1993:127–8).

The *tiro* also experienced a radical physical transformation of his own body, in terms both of visual appearance and personal habits and practices. He was introduced to a perhaps new hygiene and grooming regime, including the routines of Roman baths and particular military fashions regarding hairstyle and patterns of facial hair; dietary and drinking habits may also have been alien, depending on his origin. And, of course, he was also put into military uniform which, as will be seen, is no anachronistic term.

Through physical exercise, weapons training, and especially drilling in squads and rhythmic marching, the recruit was made to feel a part of a corporate group with a high purpose, and sense of its own potency and worth. Arising from immersion in the synchronised, rhythmic



Figure 1 Painting from the Temple of Bel, Dura-Europos, Syria, showing Roman soldiers of cohorts XX Palmyrenorum attending a sacrifice. Note the swagged belts, white tunics with (now faded, but visible) purple trimming, dark breeches and cloaks (brown except for officers). Probably AD230s. (Reproduced by kind permission of Yale University Art Gallery).

actions of a group, the emotional power of this process of 'entrainment' can be enormous, and is key to understanding how the sense of solidarity in a group, especially one facing physical dangers, is established and maintained (Ehrenreich 1997:184).

Transition of a man to the new status of *miles* was sacramentalised via the oath of personal loyalty to the emperor. Periodically renewed on accession days, and taken afresh to each new emperor, it imposed both religious and legal obligation (Campbell 1984:19–32). Yet, emotionally, perhaps the most important step of all was one we can infer, but have no direct evidence of, to my knowledge; this was the acceptance (rapid, slow or grudging) of the individual into long-term membership of a particular small, fairly stable, all-male warrior group, his *contubernales*. Units were generally divided into *contubernia*, sections nominally of eight men who shared a barrack room, and who seem to have formed basically fixed groupings on duty as well, sharing a tent in the field, and perhaps standing together in line of battle (Goldsworthy 1996:257). Such small stable sub-groups have been shown to be of central importance to the dynamics of modern soldierly behaviour—especially to the unit cohesiveness vital to success on the battlefield (Goldsworthy 1996:257), and I suspect that the formation of such groups is probably a universal trait of warrior behaviour, although this remains to be investigated. While, as in most human groups, each regiment will presumably have had its permanent misfits, in general the personal social bonds between men who shared experiences, who knew and often trusted each other intimately, will have formed the basic glue which held the regiment together in peace and war.

From the point of view of the system, the object of all this was to disconnect, as far as possible, the soldier from his own provincial roots and to connect him body and soul to the emperor through complete immersion in, and identification with, Roman military in the form of his unit. The regiment formed a self-contained society complete in almost all respects except the literal, physical ability to reproduce itself, amounting to a good approximation of a 'total

institution' (for a detailed case study applying this notion to the Roman garrison of Dura-Europos, see Pollard 1996). From the point of view of the soldiers themselves, it may be argued that things were rather different.

Soldiers apparently did generally accept this hegemonic framework of indoctrination, and saw themselves as part of an 'imagined community' of *milites*. The concept of the imagined community was developed to explain features of modern nationalism (Anderson 1991), but seems equally applicable here: such a community is imagined because it cannot be experienced directly—most soldiers rarely saw more than their own, and a few neighbouring regiments, and even in major wars, they rarely set eyes on more than a few percent of their *commilitones* ('fellow soldiers'; significantly, a widely used term: Campbell 1984:32–59: e.g. at Vindolanda, Bowman & Thomas 1996:324, No. 3). This widespread common identity was expressed through a system of shared symbols, from the image of the emperor, the eagle of Jupiter, to the clothes they wore and the language they spoke. Soldiers could instantly recognise each other.

Milites were active participants in creating this military culture, within which they interpreted, developed and probably subverted many elements in their own ways, and made their own contributions at its various levels, to mainstream official regimental identities, and to their own identities as individual soldiers. Out of sight of military officialdom, they probably instigated local 'military subcultures' of their own, at the level of their immediate peer-groups, the visible social community of their *commilitones* in their own unit, and the imagined community of *milites* at large (for a sociological study of such a 'military subculture' in a modern British battalion, see Hockey 1986). Indeed soldierly identity looks to be internally complex, with 'nested' levels: the soldier conceptualised himself in relation to his immediate *contubernales*; to his century, *turma*, or cohort; especially to his regiment as the immediately perceptible, bounded community of daily experience; probably to his provincial army group; as well as to 'the soldiers' at large. As with other dimensions of identity, the particular aspect or level emphasised at a given moment will have depended on context; for example, provincial army loyalties flared in times of civil war, but at other times, it was probably the small group and the regiment which were most important, with the 'imagined community' as the ideological substrate. I believe that soldiers' contributions to the resultant military culture can be seen in the documentary, archaeological and representational evidence.

The nature and expression of soldierly identity

It is possible to examine the identity of the soldier in more detail than almost any other identity in the Roman world, especially those outside the political elite. It was peculiar and complex: a particular masculinity, under the empire usually monopolising the traditional free, propertied male role of bearing weapons for the state; a social status; a professional identity, which was also political (warrior as Roman citizen) and at once involved with national identity (legally speaking, imperial soldiers were, or were becoming, Roman citizens), while also being to an important degree multi-cultural—the army was drawn from many peoples, both within and beyond the frontiers, and many units preserved elements of these cultural origins as part of their regimental identities, from regimental cult (Figure 1) to equipment and language.

The particular dimension of this identity that I want to explore in this provisional treatment is the bodily expression of soldierliness, specifically in the first half of the third century AD. The richness of the data-set permits mutual elucidation of a range of documentary data, archaeology and representations, such as military tombstones, commissioned by soldiers to project images of themselves or close comrades, and so effectively self-representations of soldiers.

Military dress of the third century AD is quite well understood, through a combination of highly detailed representations created for, if not by, individual soldiers (including funerary portraits and other depictions on stone and in paintings) and archaeological finds (weapons, dress fittings, footwear and textiles). These categories of evidence are mutually illuminating, the archaeological finds corresponding exactly to many details of the representations, the latter

permitting reconstruction of the often-fragmentary archaeological remains. The result is a finely detailed and nuanced understanding of military dress across most of the empire.

A fair repertoire of variation in more decorative components is seen, overlying a remarkable basic homogeneity which literally is a uniform. It is currently believed that this uniformity did not derive from modern-style dress regulations, and there is no evidence for centralised manufacture of clothing or equipment at the time. It seems to me that homogeneity arose due to movement between units of commanders and other officers, especially centurions, and not least of large numbers of troops across the empire on campaigns, and the exchange and copying of soldierly fashions and symbols between units. We are seeing the development of widespread military customs, which are a material expression of the 'imagined community' of *milites* discussed above: other non-material traits of this identity, such as special language, modes of behaviour, attitudes and values, were surely transmitted from unit to unit, adopted and adapted via the same contacts.

In the third century soldiers are usually depicted in so-called camp dress – seen on tombstones and other representations, some in colour; this was apparently regular dress when on duty, but not full fighting kit (Figures 1 & 2). It consisted of a long-sleeved tunic (white with characteristic purple bands and patches), dark trousers/hose, hobnailed footwear, an elaborate waist-belt, a longsword on an equally elaborated baldric, and a rectangular cloak with prominent, often highly decorative brooch. In various ways this ensemble was, it seems, immediately distinguishable from the dress of any other group of males in or around the Roman world, as will be seen. Such military dress contained important characteristics which expressed aspects of soldierly ideology, and the relation of the wearer to other social groups. Individual garments, and especially the ensemble, clearly and specifically denoted a soldier, not only by visual appearance, but also by sound.

For example, it may be argued that the apparently universal wearing of white tunics, with small patches of purple (including notched bands over the shoulders and other components) corresponded to the same features seen on the dress of Graeco-Roman and other male civilians (Jews also wore such garments: Roussin 1994:186). Further, such garments, like suits in the West today, were probably a marker of relatively privileged males (who could afford to buy, and who had the means to keep clean, white/purple garments?). In these respects, then, military tunics conveyed visual messages regarding gender and status.

The other major items of military clothing were generally plain and drab; cloaks, usually brown in colour, and dark breeches. There were probably good practical reasons for this, relating to the visibility of inevitable dirt on such garments, their vulnerability to damage and perhaps the need frequently to replace them, and hence maybe the employment of coarse, drab textiles: but further symbolic associations are discernible. For example, plain, drab outer garments correspond appropriately to common motifs of soldiers' service, characterised by toil and sweat (Carrié 1993:115–6) and, therefore, by implication dust and dirt. It is interesting that physical effort is emphasised rather than combat and bloodshed; baths notwithstanding, it is likely that Roman soldiers also smelt strongly, again perhaps in characteristic ways, especially on campaign. Apart from bodily odours, they will have smelt of leather, sheep—from the lanolin-rich raw wool of their water-resistant cloaks, and often of horses. Perhaps by extension of such symbolic associations, soldiers are recorded scorning the extravagance of 'foreign' dress, which 'is not admired by the Roman troops, appearing to be more appropriate to barbarians and women' (Herodian 5.2.4; B. Goldman 1994:167). This was a traditional prejudice going back to the republic, which saw elaboration in dress as 'unroman', and suggests that these dimensions continued to help denote both gender and national identities.

Yet for all this ideological rhetoric apparently embodied in his garments, the soldier did wear small areas of intense colour, precious materials and/or elaborate ornamentation, over and above the purple thread embroidered into his tunic: buckles, strap-ends, attachment-rings, *fibulae*, and a range of non-functional studs and plates were made of bright metal, sometimes



Figure 2 The tombstone of L. Septimius Valerinus, a Praetorian Guardsman. He is shown in 'camp dress'. Note the 'Caracalla'-like hairstyle and beard, the ring buckle and carefully depicted double strap-end on his belt, and his fringed cloak (Rome). (Drawn by Simon James).



Figure 3 Reconstructions of mid-third century AD military belts, based on archaeological finds from Dura-Europos, Syria, tomb groups from Europe and representational data such as Figure 2. The waist-belt was very often (but not always) extended into a long swag to the right hip, and hung down the right thigh, terminating in a pair of terminals, sometimes heavy and perhaps hinged, which would clash as the soldier moved. The uppermost example shows the ring-buckle, a common form but in this case the ring, and attendant studs and strap-terminals, are of ivory. The fittings on the other examples are copper alloy. (Drawn by Simon James).

silver; buckles and strap-pendants could be of these metals or ivory (or bone, as a substitute, as tinned copper alloy imitated silver?). Metal fittings were often elaborate decorative castings, quite often with brightly-coloured glass inlay, including *millefiore*. However, significantly, such display was confined to the very items which symbolised his military status *par excellence* – the waist-belt (*cingulum*), the sword on a baldric (ultimate symbol of warrior status), and the cloak-brooch.

The military symbolism of such dress made its way into general language. Long established as a metaphor for going to war was the expression 'to put on the *sagum*', i.e. the soldier's cloak (and originally his campaign blanket: N. Goldman 1994:232). Also generally understood, at least by the end of third century, was the symbolic act of rejecting military service by discarding the *cingulum*, the military belt (Woods 1993:55–60).

Dress also influences, indeed frames, bodily posture and movement: the military ensemble actually helped generate the feeling of being a soldier. In trying by experiment to understand how such military dress was made and worn, I have been struck how wearing a long-sword on a baldric, and a carefully-draped cloak, compel an upright bearing, and encourage a swagger and rhythmic pace (compare the difference one feels today when wearing formal dress such as a suit, compared with jeans and a sweatshirt). One can see–feel–how the characteristic military ensemble was active in constituting the embodiment of soldierliness, in the mind of the wearer, and to the eye, and indeed to the ear, of the observer: the crunch of hobnailed boots announced the arrival of a soldier (which, it has been suggested, was the reason for the ban on hobnails instituted in Jewish law of the period: Roussin 1994:188), while it seems to me evident that a common form of military waist-belt, with a pair of (usually metal) strap-ends, was knowingly intended to make a characteristic jangle as the soldier walked, a sound like that made by a small bunch of keys (Figure 3).

There was a fairly broad, but nonetheless bounded, range of permissible variations in the detail of military dress, mostly in the decoration of the fittings mentioned above. It apparently constituted a kind of private semiotics, loosely similar to that seen in the badges on modern military dress, providing the insider with some of the visual cues required to distinguish between units, ranks, and statuses, even if not as systematically as with modern uniform symbols. But the *general* uniformity and distinctiveness of military dress and appearance also encouraged and expressed collective difference from outsiders, and internal cohesion and the sense of solidarity of the *milites*.

Roman, but 'de-Italianized' soldiers

By the third century AD many regiments had long become part of local civilian life in the frontier provinces. The private ties of their men were much more along and across the frontiers than with the core provinces. Hence the need for a high intensity of continuous propaganda and indoctrination from the centre, to foster a sense of corporate cohesion and separation from the provincial matrix, and to maintain ideological identification with the person of the emperor and the state. This process may be seen in the celebration of the birthdays of long-dead emperors and obscure Italian festivals in the military base at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates during the third century (the *Feriale Duranum*, c. AD 225–235; Welles *et al.* 1959:191–214; *P. Dura* 54).

At the level of the individual soldier, and the daily interaction of small groups of *milites*, the material culture they inhabited, the language they used, were all increasingly incomprehensible to Roman civilians, especially those of the 'core' provinces. Incomprehensible not just because these represented the *habitus* of another, separate community, but because so much of it was no longer really Italian-derived. Paradoxically, although the persona of the *Roman* soldier remained unmistakable, during the 200 years the armies had been based away from Italy, it had undergone a profound transformation; a 'provincialisation' or 'de-Italianization', just as, politically, legally and culturally, the term 'Roman' itself no longer equated to 'Italian'.

A good example is provided by the nature of the military uniform discussed above. Archaeology and representations reveal that military dress no longer represented the male

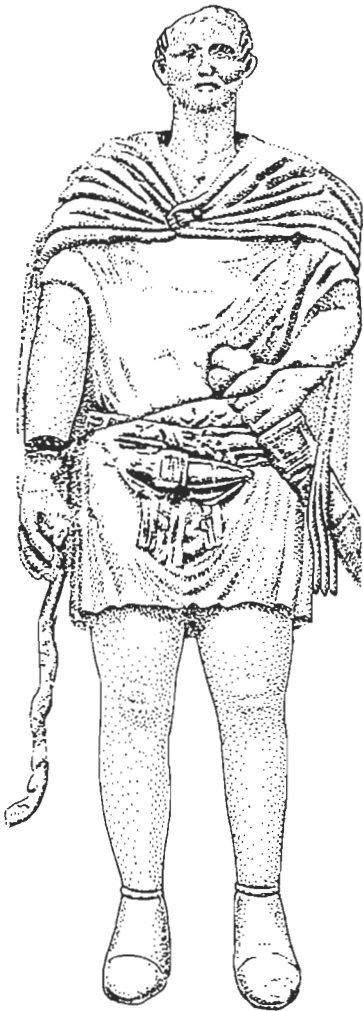


Figure 4 Italian military dress of the late republic: figure of a centurion from a tombstone, Padua. Note the simple, short-sleeved tunic, and bare legs. (Drawn by Simon James, after Franzoni, 1987 46, No. 26, Tav. XIII).



Figure 5 A 'barbarian' from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, later second century AD. He wears a version of the (specifically free?) male dress common across much of Europe north of the Mediterranean world: long breeches, long-sleeved tunic and cloak fastened at the right shoulder. Compare with Figures 4 & 2. (Drawn by Simon James, after Caprino et al. 1955, Scene LXVIII, Tav. O).

clothing traditions of the Mediterranean core, but those of the provincial periphery and beyond: the standard 'barbarian' dress of the North and East had displaced Italian garments. Instead of a simple tunic which left the limbs bare, and various types of cloak (Figure 4), the soldiers now wore essentially the same garments as males (at least, free warrior males?) of the peoples along and beyond the frontiers; long-sleeved tunics, long trousers, and the northern blanket-cloak (Figure 5).

These 'foreign' garments, and other traits, are assumed to have come into the Roman military repertoire by recruitment of units from peoples newly conquered, or not directly

annexed at all, joining up with their own equipment, and warrior traditions. Elements of these became encapsulated within specific regimental traditions, or were generally adopted as part of the living culture of the Roman armies. This process can be seen in the special language of the soldiers, the *sermo militaris*, which was infused with terminology and expressions from subject peoples; for example, terms describing cavalry manoeuvres, and especially bodily postures and movements of individuals, were largely adopted from Celtic (Arr. *Tact.* 33.1; 37.5; 42.4; 43.2; 44.1: Hyland 1993:69–78).

Although such developments were undoubtedly seen at the time, at least in the metropolitan core, as barbarisation of the armies, paradoxically such adoptions and adaptations were, of their nature, time-honoured Roman custom, indeed arguably a characteristic of military *romanitas*. Roman armies had always been composite, including a large percentage of foreign soldiers from allied or subject peoples; and since republican times they had adopted useful or attractive ideas from friends and foes, from Spanish swords to Gallic mail and helmets (Bishop & Coulston 1993:204), Greek siege technology and so on. The common culture of the *milites* was a particular, peculiar, empire-wide case of *romanitas*, which, as will be seen, was intimately related to the many local trajectories of Romanization throughout the provinces where soldiers were stationed.

The wider military communities of the Roman world

The person of the emperor and the notion of Rome provided the overt *raison d'être* for soldiers and regiments, while the empire-wide imagined community of the *milites* expressed their identity. But the reality of their routine existence, in peacetime and to a large extent in war as well, turned on the corporate life of the particular unit to which the soldier was attached (whether in a major legionary base, an auxiliary or *numerus* fort, or away with a vexillation or on some lesser detachment). Each unit formed the kernel of a more-or-less sharply bounded, living, directly experienced *local* military community. The structure and life of each such community intimately involved many other agents who did not appear on the regimental rosters: these included a host of regimental dependants and many external connections, particularly among the local population, but also to varying degrees with more distant places (e.g. the home communities of individual soldiers, even of entire ethnic units, in other provinces or lands).

Documentary evidence makes it quite clear that, even before it was legalised by Severus, official soldiers' marriages were more-or-less commonplace. While it is likely that the majority of the soldiers at any one time were still single—especially younger ones—even single soldiers often had other dependants, whether blood-relatives or servants: slaves or freedmen/freedwomen (Carrié 1993:114; Speidel 1992; Maxfield 1995; Varon 1994). In the Roman world, women, children and servants seem generally to have taken much of their social standing from that of the male head of the family. Given that these people were also supported, largely if not wholly, by the soldiers' pay, we should think of them, too, as fully members of the military communities, in a social rather than institutional sense. Beyond these, there were also groups not personally attached in these ways to individual soldiers, but to varying degrees tied to the unit more than the host civil population, even when the regiment concerned was in the middle of a city: such was the case, it seems, with the group of 'dancers and entertainers' from Zeugma who took up residence for some months in a house at Dura-Europos, where graffiti make it clear they were dealing intimately with military personnel: it seems likely that they were providing services for a legionary vexillation on detachment from Zeugma whence, perhaps, they had followed it (Rostovtzeff *et al.* 1952:46). These regimental communities, then, were probably fairly distinct entities within the local civil context, even in cities.

Conclusions

If we consider the formal and personal connections of any established group of ordinary soldiers, they evidently stood at the centre of a complex network of often conflicting influences

and pressures. It is notable that the 'official' military culture to which they were exposed on duty, emanating from the centre, and 'top down', was still largely of the Italian tradition – state ideology, ceremonial, command structures, regimental organisation and the names of units, etc. were all drawn primarily from roots deep in the Roman republican past. It was centralising and normative, although imperial norms were themselves evolving, with the increasingly provincial backgrounds of the emperors. Yet, as we have seen, more and more of the *habitus* of the ordinary soldier came 'from the bottom up', incorporating not only the existing Italian warrior values and traditions of the legions, but increasingly those of other peoples as well, from the frontier regions and even beyond them, primarily via recruitment of provincials and 'barbarians'.

The long stationing of particular units, and entire army groups, in the same place and the interaction of each with its own particular social matrix of provincials and 'barbarians', ecologies and climates, resulted in a tendency to regionalization, with differences between armies accentuated by their long separation. Individual soldiers, and then whole units, developed personal ties with people of the frontier regions, not only through marriage but other legal, financial and commercial interchanges. They seem often to have recruited local men into their ranks as well, further strengthening such ties. The connections of men and unit were increasingly within, across, and even beyond the frontier provinces rather than with the geographical or state core of the empire. Some units preserved connections even with distant provinces where they had been raised, as in the case of the Syrians of Intercisa (Fitz 1972).

It was these divergent, localising tendencies which the imperial centre sought to counteract through its unceasing bombardment of indoctrination. Yet it was a by-product of the imperial systems of command and control of the soldiers which, in my view, provided the real glue which maintained the military as a distinct entity, and prevented it becoming a series of regionally-minded armies, at least until the disasters of the 260s: this was the soldiers' highly developed sense of common identity and solidarity across the empire, constantly renewed by frequent, inter-provincial movements of *milites*, which helped to cross-cut, or better to cross-link, these 'radial' (imperial-convergent and local-divergent) tendencies.

The men of each regiment, of each stretch of frontier, of each provincial or regional army stood at the centre of unique trajectories of social development, at once both components of aggregate imperial history, and also of innumerable distinct local histories, each of which demands consideration in its own particular terms. In the frontier provinces, the military communities – distinct from, and in addition to the state institution of the armies – constituted a major component in those wider processes known as Romanization. The soldiers scattered across the empire numbered over 400,000 in the early third century AD, at least in theoretical establishment (Campbell 1984:4). With their dependants, including slaves, freedmen and freedwomen as well as wives, children and other kin, they will surely have exceeded a million, a grouping as large in numbers as the City of Rome and, it seems to me, a community just as influential in the social, political and economic history of the middle imperial period as the capital itself.

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