INTEGRATION OR DISINTEGRATION?
THE ROMAN ARMY IN THE THIRD CENTURY A.D.

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My issue in this paper is: what was the main trend within the Roman military forces in the third century AD? Integration, or disintegration into regional entities? This paper is not about cultural integration of ethnic groups in multicultural parts of the Roman Empire, such as the city of Rome, thriving commercial centres, and border regions to which the armies had brought people from various parts of the Empire, and where multicultural military personnel lived together with indigenous groups, craftsmen from different origins, and immigrants from commercially active regions, either in *canabae* adjacent to *castra stativa*, or in garrison towns, as in the Eastern parts of the Empire.

In *variatio* upon an issue raised by Frederick Naerebout in another paper published in this volume, I might ask myself in what sense an army, which in the third century AD was progressively composed of ethnically and culturally different units, kept functioning as an integrated entity, or in actual practice disintegrated into rivalling, particularistic regional forces whose actual or potential competition for money and supplies constantly threatened peace and stability in the Empire, particularly in times of dangerous external wars, when the need for supplies increased.

The discussion should start with Septimius Severus. After his victories over Pescennius Niger, some tribes in northern Mesopotamia, and Albinus in Gaul, Severus had to replenish the ranks of his armies, for example at the Danube frontiers, which had yielded many men to Severus’ field armies and his new praetorian guard. Besides he had to compensate for the many losses that Niger’s eastern army and Albinus’ British troops had sustained, and find recruits for his new *legiones Parthicae* I, II and III. He had to do so in a post-plague period, in which many mobile young men (soldiers!) were missing because they – as always in times of plague – had died first and foremost, prices were rising, workers could demand higher wages, and demographic recovery at best was just taking off.¹ This

may be the reason why Severus in A.D. 197 increased the soldiers’ pay by 100%. He had to induce good recruits to join the forces but in this way added an enormous burden to state expenditure. Severus added other inducements to enlist as well. In 3.8.4, Herodian tells us that the soldiers were given – with the increase in pay – a very substantial donative and privileges that they had not had before, such as a permission to wear a gold ring and the right to live at home with their wives. In this way military personnel started to own property in the region where their units were normally stationed. Its prosperity may have increased, and its status may have been enhanced. If so, these Severan measures may have rein-

2 On Severus’ military reforms in general see J.-M. Carrié, ‘Eserciti e strategie’, in A. Carandini, L. Cracco Ruggini & A. Giardina (eds.), Storia di Roma III 1 (Turin 1993), 87–89; Y. Le Bohec, The Imperial Roman Army (London/New York 1994), 191–194; P. Cosme, L’armée romaine (Paris 2009), 221. On the increase in pay see J.B. Campbell, The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 235 (Oxford 1984), 185 ff.; Duncan-Jones 1994, op. cit. (n. 1), 29; Carrié & Rousselle 1999, op. cit. (n. 1), 75; M.A. Speidel, ‘Roman Army Pay Scales’, in M.A. Speidel (ed.), Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit (Stuttgart 2009), 380 [this article was published before in The Journal of Roman Studies 82 (1992), 87–106]. Unlike other authors, Speidel comes to the conclusion that Severus doubled the amount paid by Domitian (from 84 AD onwards), and not just augmented it by 50%. Duncan-Jones 1994, op. cit. (n. 1), 45 convincingly argues that about 72 to 77% of the state budget was spent on the defenses of the empire and the soldiers’ pay. So a sizeable raise in the soldiers’ pay would have dire budgetary consequences.

3 See Carrié 1993, op. cit. (n. 2), 87–89. B. Pferdehirt, Die Rolle des Militärs für den sozialen Aufstieg in der römischen Kaiserzeit (Bonn 2002), 212–214 refers to evidence from the Digesta, but unfortunately not very accurately. On the ending of the marriage ban for soldiers see S.E. Phang, The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.–A.D. 235). Law and Family in the Imperial Army (Leiden/Boston 2001), 17–19 who thinks that it was directly meant to encourage recruitment. On p. 382 she rightly remarks: ‘Severus’ military reforms were not merely to indulge the army; he probably sought to increase recruitment after the Marcomannic War, the Antonine plague, and the civil wars of 193–7 had decimated the army.”


forced a tendency towards regional particularism among the military in the Rhine, Danube, Eastern, and African frontier zones. As the author of *Digesta* 50.1.23.1 says: “A soldier seems to live where he serves, unless he has possessions in his homeland.”

In this way a growing regional chauvinism may have been an important factor in a process of disintegration within the armed forces. I’ll give two examples that seem to confirm this hypothesis. In 6.7.2–3, Herodian relates that in 234 Severus Alexander – who was still in the East after his Persian war – received messages from the governors in the Danube region about Germans invading and devastating Roman territories. In their messages they added that the presence of the emperor and his entire army was needed. Those messages, Herodian continues, caused distress to the soldiers transferred from Illyricum, who were in great anxiety about their families back home, and turned their anger on Severus Alexander, blaming him for his hesitant procrastination over the northern problems.

The other example is the fateful year AD 260, when regional interests, added to a general insecurity, fostered a series of usurpations. A devastating plague had destroyed much of the reigning emperor Valerian’s army, so that he lost the battle against the Persians and became their captive, probably in the spring of 260. His son and colleague Gallienus was pinned down in Italy by raids of luthungi and Alamanni, and could not bring relief or rescue to other frontiers, where generals and governors such as Ingenuus, Regalianus, and Postumus took the purple and thus tried to obtain more means, supplies, and military reinforcements for their own regions. In the East something similar was done by Macrianus at Samosata, a high bureaucrat who had apparently been responsible for the logistics of Valerian’s army. Together with a capable officer, called Ballista, and the Palmyrene prince Odaenathus, he had assembled remnants of Roman forces, mobilized recruits of his own, and successfully started to fight the Persians.

Did the empire witness a rise of regional particularism among the various frontier armies? I have some doubts. To begin with, the Roman armed forces were no complete strangers to one another, although they were

5 D. 50.1.23.1: miles ibi domicilium habere uidetur, ubi meret, si nihil in patria possideat.

6 Cf. Joannes Antiochenus, in FHG IV 593, 140 who copies Herodian’s version.

recruited in many places, not only in Illyricum and the Balkans, but also in Italy, North Africa, parts of Asia Minor, Egypt and the East. Forces from the Danube regions willingly fought Germanic tribes in the West or Persians and other enemies in the East, and only protested or rebelled against east- or westbound imperial war policies when the Danube region lay under imminent threats itself, and many detachments had already disappeared, mainly to the East, and had died of diseases or been rounded up in not very successful warfare. In a similar way troops from the Rhine border and Britain fought on the Danube and the Euphrates, and Easterners or North Africans joined the forces that fought the Germans in the North. A handful of examples. In ILS 2763, we find a military tribune who under Septimius Severus brought Syrian bowmen from Germania Superior to Mauretania, to fight rebellious tribesmen there. Detachments of all four Rhine legions seem to have fought in Severus’ second Parthian campaign. In 6.7.8, Herodian tells us that in A.D. 234–235, at the Rhine border, the army of Severus Alexander counted in its ranks many North African javelin-men, a force of archers from the East, and Parthian volunteers who had fled from their Persian enemy. The great army that went

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9 See Y. Burnand, Primores Galliarum II: Prosopographie (Brussels 2006), 518–520, n° 234 E 177, Sex. Iulius Iulianus.

10 M. Reddé in Le Bohec 2000, op. cit. (n. 8), 124.

to the East under Gordian III contained, among others, a lot of soldiers from the Rhine and Danube borders, together with Germanic volunteers.12 In a volume edited in 2000 by Yann Le Bohec, the history of various legions is discussed, for example by Keppie, Eck, Franke, Reddé, and Le Bohec. In the second and third centuries A.D., all of those legions had to send detachments to other frontier zones.13 In ILS 546, we meet soldiers of vexillationes from legions serving in Britain and Germany, who are now, under Gallienus, fighting somewhere on the Danube frontier.14 In 261 Gallienus’ general Aureolus at Mursa in Pannonia conquered the pretender Macrianus, who had come up from the East. According to Aurelius Victor, Caesares 33.1–2, his army comprised quite a few North African units. The Palmyrene forces of Odaenathus and Zenobia counted many Roman soldiers in their ranks, added to a manus agrestis Syrorum, to use Orosius’ words, and Palmyrene cavalry.15 After a heavy defeat against the emperor Aurelian, in Syria in A.D. 272, Zenobia seems to have boasted that most of her casualties had been Romans.16 In the Res Gestae Divi Saporis, the great inscription of the Persian king Shapur I at Naqsh-i-Rustam, the armies of Gordian III, but particularly of Valerian, are described as consisting of soldiers from practically all provinces, plus Germanic tribesmen.17

A second objection is that the military middle cadre in the third century AD still had empire-wide careers, or at least careers in more than

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12 See Res Gestae Divi Saporis II. 6–9, esp. 7. See U. Huttner, ‘Von Maximinus Thrax bis Aemilianus’, in Johne et al. 2008, op. cit. (n. 7), 185. The Res Gestae Divi Saporis is the great inscription of the Persian king Shapur I at Naqsh-i-Rustam, in which he is broadcasting his victories over three Roman emperors, Gordian III, Philip the Arabian, and Valerian.

13 Le Bohec 2000, op. cit. (n. 8), 26–35 (L. Keppie, on the legiones Britanniae); 71–73 and 83–85 (Y. Le Bohec, on the legio XXX Ulpia); 87–93 (W. Eck, on the legio I Minervia); 95–104 (Th. Franke, on the legio XXII Primigenia); 120–126 (M. Reddé, on the legio VIII Augusta). On this phenomenon, vexillationes fighting on all frontiers, see also Cosme 2009, op. cit. (n. 2), 210–212.

14 ILS 546 = CIL III, 3228.

15 According to Zosimus, 1.39.1–2, Odaenathus’ army with which he attacked Shapur I in 260, when the Persians were on their way home, consisted of some remnants of Roman legions combined with his own Palmyrene forces. He had at his disposal also a band of Syrian country folk, as Festus, 23 and Orosius, 7.22.12 tell us.

16 Anonymus Continuato Dionis, 10,5, in FHG IV 197: after the battle of Immae, where he had beaten the Palmyrenes, Aurelian sent envoys to Zenobia urging her finally to surrender to him. She replied, saying: “I have hardly sustained any serious losses. For of those who had fallen, the majority were Romans.”

17 Res Gestae Divi Saporis II. 6–9 (the army of Gordian III); II. 20–23 (the army of Valerian).
one region, and in this way did not easily become attached to just one frontier zone. ‘Military middle cadre’ is a viable concept. Centurions and higher officers, such as military tribunes, in earlier days used to come from different social layers in society, but the social distinctions between them progressively became blurred. Some equites voluntarily became centurions, former centurions became equites, the status of the centurionate was much higher than in republican times, and after 260 senators were barred from the army. Furthermore, in daily practice the lower and higher middle cadre had to work together in many ways, they were not completely separate groups.

The evidence is not plentiful, but we know of just enough careers of centurions who became primi pili, prefects of military camps, praepositi of vexillationes, members of the equestrian officer corps, and even procurators, governors, and high equestrian prefects. Many of them had to go from one corner of the empire to another, and served in several frontier zones, Italy and Rome. There may be a possibility, however, that the various functions they fulfilled did not convey them to the home bases of the legions, but to vexillationes serving together in one place, but it is very unlikely that this would have reduced the traveling around by the military cadre to zero in all cases we know of.

| L. Artorius Castus | Severan times | Syria, Palestine, Pannonia, Moesia, Italy, Britain, and Pannonia again | Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 18), 267, no 151 |

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19 See table.
### Table 1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Time</th>
<th>Born In</th>
<th>Active In</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severan times</td>
<td>Beneventum</td>
<td>Rome, Syria, Northern Italy</td>
<td>Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 18), 269f., n° 154; Pflaum 1960–1961, op. cit. (n. 18), n° 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severan times</td>
<td>Vienna in Gallia Narbonensis</td>
<td>Mesopotamia, the Alps, North Africa</td>
<td>Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 18), 279, n° 167; Pflaum 1960–1961, op. cit. (n. 18), n° 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-third century</td>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>Rome, Italy, North Africa, Spain, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Dacia, Britain, Arabia</td>
<td>Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 18), 301, n° 205</td>
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</tbody>
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20 C. Titius Similis was a centurion in a legion and among the frumentarii, princeps peregrinorum (Rome), primus pilus legionis III Augustae (North Africa), praepositus vexillationum (Asia Minor and Eastern border regions), procurator provinciae Moesiae Inferioris, and procurator provinciae Lusitaniae.

21 C. Sulgius Caecilianus was optio peregrinorum and a trainer of recruits among the frumentarii (Rome), nauarchus classis Misenatium (Italy), and centurion in the legions III Augusta (North Africa), VII Gemina (Spain), I Parthica (Mesopotamia), XVI Flavia (Cappadocia), and XIII Gemina (Dacia). He was involved in organizing imperial logistics and finances during a campaign, and was praepositus of a detachment of the classis Misenatium, primus pilus legionis XX Valeria Victrix (Britain), and praefectus legionis III Cyrenaicae (Arabia).
Beyond A.D. 260 the career prospects of military middle cadre personnel became better. From that year onwards senators disappeared from the army and could no longer become trubi

22 This Ignotus was cornicularius, centurion, dux legionum Daciae, primipil

23 M. Septimius ... lis served as a centurion in the legions X Fretensis (Palestine), I Minervia (Bonn), I Parthica (Mesopotamia), III Gallica (Syria), XXII Primigenia (Germania Superior), and as a primus pilus and praepositus in Umbria, Picenum and Apulia, probably against bandits.

24 The last trubi... us we know of was Publius Balsamius Sabinius; see Dobson 1978, op. cit. (n. 18), 312 f., n° 221 and Pflaum 1960–1961, op. cit. (n. 18), n° 351.

On careers of centurions, grades below the centurionate, primi pilis, praefecti castrorum, military tribunes, prefects of cohorts and alae, duces and praeepositi of (combinations of) vexillationes see Dobson, Primipilares, 265–323.
Their places were largely taken by equestrian military middle cadre. This was a change in imperial appointment policies, carried into effect by Gallienus (253–268), who needed militarily experienced administrators and commanders.25

Members of the military middle cadre were important, socially as well as politically,26 and were in a good position to influence the soldiers and to shape their political preferences. Sensible usurpators and pretenders to the throne would speak with their officers and centurions first, and if these talks went well, they would declare themselves emperors. According to Herodian 2.7–7, Pescennius Niger in A.D. 193 tried to influence his legionary commanders, his tribunes and his more distinguished soldiers before entering the course of an usurpation, and reckoned that positive news would reach his soldiers via his officers. The first thing Septimius Severus did after he had decided to stage a coup against Didius Julianus, in A.D. 193, was to make overtures to small groups of legionary commanders, tribunes, and senior centurions, discussing with them the ruinous state of the empire, brought about because there was no noble or worthy leader to control it, as Herodian tells us in 2.9–7.27 In the same author’s work, 2.13.1, we read that Septimius Severus, to lure the praetorians into a trap, and disarm and fire them, first approached the military tribunes and centurions, who duly persuaded the praetorian soldiers. In Caesares 20.24–26, Aurelius Victor tells us that the same emperor, Severus, quelled a mutiny by separately speaking with tribunes and centurions. The military middle cadre could also be held responsible for the behavior of their soldiers. In the Historia Augusta, Alexander Severus 53.7, tribunes are blamed for the license of their soldiers at Daphne, outside Antioch, in A.D. 232. This Vita


27 See also Joannes Antiochenus, in FHG IV 587, 126.1.
may be more of a ‘mirror of princes’ than an historiographical work,\textsuperscript{28} but even so it is interesting information.

In conclusion, in the third century AD the Roman military forces were not disintegrating into regional armies that were completely strangers to one another. The military middle cadre, an important factor within the Roman armies, was not a force for disintegration in the third century. On the contrary, having to travel around much more often than in peaceful times, they saw many war zones and parts of the empire, and seem to have had empire-wide careers. Besides, the Roman armed forces came from many parts of the empire and the most important field armies counted detachments from many of those parts, which had to work together through years on end. These factors normally compensated for the material regional interests any troops might have, but not so in A.D. 260–274. In those years serious military situations at practically all borders forced the emperors to accept a continuation of the \textit{Imperium Galliarum} in the West, and of Palmyrene power in the East. This was survival strategy, more than the outcome of a process of military regionalization and a growing regional particularism among the armed forces. Gallienus’ field army comprised detachments from almost all borders.\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{28}] See C. Bertrand-Dagenbach, \textit{Alexandre Sévère et l’Histoire Auguste} (Brussels 1990), 189–193.
\item[\textsuperscript{29}] See Christol 2006\textsuperscript{2}, op. cit. (n. 7), 147–148.
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