CHAPTER SEVEN

A.H.M. JONES AND THE ARMY OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

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1. Introduction

‘The history of the later Roman army falls into two distinct chapters’, the fourth century and the sixth, divided by an obscure period in the mid-fifth century, when the Western army disintegrated and the Eastern army evolved into something markedly different.¹ But in the Later Roman Empire Jones gives the army, like other institutions, just one chapter, not two, and two-thirds of it to the well-documented army of the fourth century, the army of Ammianus Marcellinus, the Notitia Dignitatum and the Theodosian Code.²

As usual this is a social, economic and administrative survey: “I have therefore little to say about wars, but much about the organisation, recruitment and conditions of service of the army”.³ Topics include the types of unit, the difference if any between comitatenses and limitanei, the recruitment of soldiers, their pay, rations, conditions of service, their promotion and discharge, morale and discipline, the protectores and other officers, and lastly numbers. Jones was apparently not much interested in military equipment and battle tactics, for example cavalry against infantry, Romans against barbarians, nor in grand strategy, a concept which has interested his successors more than it may have done the Romans.⁴ They have also studied Roman military intelligence and ‘the face of battle’, unlike Jones, despite his own wartime service in

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¹ Jones (1964) II, 607.
² Ibid., II, 607–54, to which add II, 679–86 (army numbers), and most of Appendix II, ‘The Notitia Dignitatum’ (in III, 347–80). Also relevant are I, 52–60 (Diocletian), I, 97–100 (Constantine), I, 149 (Valentinian) and I, 156 (Theodosius).
³ Ibid., Preface, first two sentences.
⁴ Luttwak (1976) “has done for Roman historians what they have not done for themselves” (Yavetz), but compare Mann (1979) and Millar (1982). See also Nicasie (1998) 117–84.
Intelligence at the War Office, after an experience of the Ministry of Labour which he later claimed had not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire. But like Eric Birley, whose own wartime service reinforced the fascination, he made himself expert in the Roman order of battle. This is well summarised in Appendix II and Map IV.

2. Sources

Jones excavated in Istanbul and Jerash before the War, but he candidly admits his “most lamentable gap” is the archaeological material. Thus he cites none of the “ample archaeological and epigraphic evidence for [Diocletian’s] activity in building strategic roads and fortresses”. A law of 409 which mentions the fossatum Africae prompts him to cite the French aerial survey of that ditch-system, but he could also be as vague as Gibbon: “The forts of the limitanei are depicted in the illustrations [...] in the Notitia and the ruins of many still survive”. But unlike Gibbon, he had seen some of them for himself, and even if he neglected excavation reports, he could have taken a short cut through the Proceedings of the Frontier Congresses which began in 1949. Since then, of course, forts and frontiers have been much studied.

Jones famously over-states his neglect of ancient moralists and modern scholarship, but his three principal sources were inevitably written, secular and ancient. The first is Ammianus Marcellinus, who describes himself as a former soldier and a Greek; he was a protector domesticus who experienced the Persian siege of Amida (359) and Julian’s disastrous invasion of Mesopotamia (363), before retiring to Rome in the 380s where he wrote the long Latin history whose surviving books provide much the most detailed and powerful narrative of the years 353–78. Jones, like Gibbon, rightly praises him as a great historian, “a man

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5 Jones deserves to echo Gibbon here, but in fact he only claimed it was “of some academic profit” (Crook (1971) 428). For ‘the face of battle’ in Ammianus, see Matthews (1989) 279–303, citing earlier treatments. For Intelligence, see Lee (1993); Austin and Rankov (1995).
6 Jones (1964) Preface.
7 Ibid., I, 55.
8 Ibid., III, 192.n.51. Baradez (1949) is the “recent archaeological surveys” of Jones (1964) II, 652, the note to which (III, 201.n.103) quotes the whole of CTh 7.15.1 (409).
9 Birley (2002).
10 See, for example, Johnson (1983); Isaac (1992); Elton (1996b).