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

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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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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 & Rousseau 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.’