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THE ROMAN ARMY IN FOURTH-CENTURY CE EGYPT

By

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B.A., Indiana University, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2014

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A Thesis Approved on

April 15, 2014

by the following Thesis Committee

Jennifer Westerfeld, Thesis Director

Blake Beattie

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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

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ABSTRACT

THE ROMAN ARMY IN FOURTH-CENTURY CE EGYPT

Jon Bruce Manley

April 15, 2014

This thesis uses the military reforms of the Roman Emperors Diocletian and Constantine as a jumping-off point for the examination of the Roman army as it existed in fourth-century CE Egypt. The thesis argues that the Roman army was not an elite institution isolated from the civilian population, but an integral part of provincial society. Studying the army's relationship with the civilian population allows for the military to be placed more firmly into the social and economic context of the late Roman Empire. Egypt selected itself as a good case study for such an investigation because of the abundant amount of documentary evidence that has survived from the province. Relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the Roman army in Egypt during the later Empire, and it is the intent that this thesis will help lay the ground work for more detailed studies to come.

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INTRODUCTION

The dominant mental image that comes to mind when one thinks of the Roman Empire is arguably that of the Imperial Roman army. Rome's army carved out an empire that extended over three continents and kept its borders intact for centuries. It is often lauded for its discipline, organization, adaptability, and effectiveness. A professional and standing army since the time of Augustus, the Roman army acted as the most visible representation of imperial authority in the provinces. The perception that often attends the army is that of an imperial war machine, constantly on the march in an effort to expand Rome's frontiers and "civilize" barbarous territories. However, most soldiers never saw a major campaign or battle. The role of the military extended beyond fighting, and was usually subject to the needs of the province in which a soldier was stationed. Responsibilities often included the defense of the borders from raids and invasions, policing the province and maintaining order among its inhabitants, justice administration, tax collecting, and construction and the maintenance of infrastructure. In light of these responsibilities, the army of the Roman Empire should be viewed more as a peace keeping force rather than an instrument of imperial expansion. The nature of these duties shows that the military played an integral role in provincial society.

Relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the army's presence in individual provinces. A notable exception to this is Richard Alston's *Soldier and Society in Roman*

Egypt.¹ Alston's study is a bottom up history of the army in Roman Egypt with particular emphasis on its role in the province, relationship between soldiers and civilians, and its impact on the economy and society. Egypt presents itself as the best case study for such a work given the abundant amount of documentary evidence concerning the army; namely, papyri. Alston contends that the peculiarities of Egypt as a province do not hinder the applicability of his work to the study of the army in other provinces, noting that the army functioned similarly throughout the empire and that all of the provinces would have been administered slightly differently based on local traditions and circumstances.² Alston does not view soldiers and veterans as being part of a mission of Romanization or as an elite entity separate from provincial society, as they have been portrayed in the past,³ but instead as an integral part of that society bridging the gap between the ruling elite and civilian population. Other myths that Alston dispels are that of the bullying soldier and the economic burdens of maintaining a military garrison. Alston concludes that the study of the Roman army cannot be done in isolation from the society in which it was present since the two influenced each other. From such studies, new insights can be drawn about the nature of Roman imperialism and the economic, social, and cultural history of the provinces.

Alston covers in detail the period from 30 BCE to 284 CE, treating Rome's military presence in later imperial Egypt as little more than an afterthought. No blame can be

¹ Richard Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: A Social History* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995).

² I follow Alston's view. The issue of the "peculiarity" of Roman Egypt and whether or not Egyptian evidence can be applied to other parts of the Empire has been subject to much debate. James G. Keenan, "Egypt's Special Place," in *Jesuit Education and the Classics*, ed. Edmund P. Cueva, Shannon N. Byrne, and Frederick Joseph Benda (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 177-92 attempts to offer an explanation for the origins of this question.

³ For such a view, see Graham Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D.* (London: Black, 1969), 273-80.

attached to Alston for ending his study with Diocletian. The army that Diocletian inherited had greatly evolved (and would continue to evolve from Diocletian onward) since the time of Augustus, and, given Diocletian's reorganization of the province of Egypt, 284 CE marks an appropriate terminus for his study. A thorough examination of the later Roman army in Egypt is still a *desideratum*, and it is the intent of this thesis to lay the groundwork for such a study. It is from a close reading of Alston's monograph that this present thesis has sprung. The focus of this project will be fourth-century Egypt and I will apply the model and methods of Alston's study to the military garrison stationed in Egypt in that period. It is the intent that this study be applicable to other provinces, especially since Diocletian's reorganization of Egypt removed many of the features that made it distinct from other provinces. To that end, similar questions will be asked about the nature of the fourth century army in Egypt.

The purpose of this project is to examine the military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine in Egypt. Such an examination will provide valuable insights into how these military reforms were implemented and the role of the new army at the provincial level. Topics that will be examined include the administrative and organizational nature of the reforms that took place in Egypt, the role of the military garrison in Egypt, the army's relationship with the civilian population, and impact of the army on the Egyptian economy and society. My working hypothesis is that the role and purpose of the army changed little during the fourth century: the army still maintained order within the province and protected it from external threats, and it acted as the face of the government to the populace, having a close association with them. The army of the fourth century continued to be a fundamental part of Egypt's provincial society and economy with

similar duties as their predecessors. The main difference between the later Roman army and the army of the Principate is its organizational structure and support logistics. The reforms of Diocletian laid the template for the army of the later Empire, the workings of which can be examined in detail from Egypt.

Historiography

Although Alston provides the only detailed study of the army in Roman Egypt, there is no lack of scholarly material on Egypt as a Roman province or on the Roman army. Most works on the Roman army are institutional histories that tend to focus on the Early Imperial period without much reference to social history or civilian interaction. Much of the evidence used in such studies tends to be literary with only a few documentary sources included. A recent example of this is Yann Le Bohec's *The Imperial Roman Army*.⁴ Le Bohec's monograph is a badly-needed update of Webster's *The Roman Imperial Army* (1969) and serves as a history of the army from the first to third centuries as an institution. Its emphasis is on the structural organization of the army, recruitment, training, tactics and strategy, with only a general description of the army's role within the empire and little interest in the army's interactions with civilians and their impact on the society and economy. Pat Southern's *The Roman Army* covers the development of Rome's army in a broad and general way from the Early Republic to the fall of the Western Empire. It fares a little better at incorporating social history into the study of the

⁴ Yann Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London: Routledge, 2000).

army, but it is more concerned with the army as a social entity distinct from the civilian population.⁵

The army of the Later Roman Empire has in the past not garnered as much academic consideration as that of the Principate, but more recent interest has sought to fill that gap. Any study of the late Roman army should begin with A. H. M. Jones' magisterial *The Later Roman Empire*.⁶ Although it has begun to show its age, Jones' wide ranging and exhaustive administrative survey is a foundational work for the modern study of the late Roman Empire. Its detailed chapter on the army discusses a broad array of topics including recruitment, supply and finance, benefits and conditions of service, the "barbarization" of the army, and the distinction between field and border troops. The debt owed to Jones for the study of the later Roman army is immense and is made evident in recent works by Pat Southern and Karen Ramsey Dixon, Hugh Elton, and M. J. Nicasie.⁷ Though heavily reliant on Jones, each of these authors provides readable updates that discuss the evolution of the late army as a reactionary measure against the threat of civil war and outside invasions. However, each of these authors approaches their subject through traditional means of examining tactics, strategy, and the institutions of the army without much regard to the military's social history. As well as covering many of the same topics as Jones, these recent studies also tend to focus on the Western Empire.

Ramsay MacMullen's *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* turns away from the traditional approach to the tactics and institutions of the Roman army, directing

⁵ Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), see 607-86 for the army of the Late Empire.

⁷ Pat Southern and Karen Ramsey Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); M. J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998); Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350-425* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

attention instead to soldiers in peacetime and their interactions with civilian populations.⁸ MacMullen considers the social and economic history of the third and fourth centuries as altered by the army claiming that there was a gradual militarization of civilian activities (like farming and craft production) beginning with Septimius Severus. MacMullen's view is rather bleak compared to Alston's conception of the military's dealings with provincial society. For MacMullen the military's presence was much more intrusive on civilian populations.

A. D. Lee's *War in Late Antiquity* is a more recent attempt to understand the military's impact on society and is a reaction to some of the more recent histories of the late Roman army which have focused on the traditional aspects of military history.⁹ Lee's study also differs in that it deals with Late Antiquity from roughly the third to seventh centuries, and it gives the East due consideration, taking advantage of the wide range of documentary material from Egypt. Lee diverges from MacMullen in that he has a more optimistic view of soldiers' interactions with civilians.

Roman Egypt, like the army, has received an abundance of scholarly attention. The attractiveness of Egypt to academics is likely due to its economic importance to the Roman Empire and its wealth of documentary evidence which gives us an unparalleled look into the administration of a province and the everyday life of its inhabitants. Alan K. Bowman's *Egypt after the Pharaohs* is a good starting point for the study of Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period.¹⁰ Bowman approaches his subject topically rather than chronologically with the intent "to exploit both the material and the archaeological

⁸ Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

⁹ A. D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History* (Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

¹⁰ Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642: from Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

evidence in order to see the impact of the presence of the Greeks and Romans in Egypt against the backdrop of the Egyptian tradition.”¹¹ Bowman’s work is concerned with the continuity of Egyptian civilization under Graeco-Roman rule and the effects of Greek and Roman culture on Egyptian society.

Recent studies on Roman Egypt by Livia Capponi and Andrew Monson have focused on the transition from Ptolemaic to Roman rule.¹² Capponi and Monson both reexamine the question of whether the administrative institutions and traditions of Ptolemaic Egypt were maintained or restructured by Egypt’s Roman conquerors and conclude that it is not simply a question of continuity versus change; the reality was more complex, with certain features being preserved and others being changed to fit Rome’s needs. Roger Bagnall’s *Egypt in Late Antiquity* is an in-depth introduction to Egypt in the late Antique Period, and places particular emphasis on the changing social and political realities of the fourth century with a short section on “The Military in Society.”¹³

Interest in frontier studies, in which Egypt is firmly situated, over the past few decades have highlighted both the military, economic and social features of Rome’s frontier system. Edward Luttwak’s *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* argues that since the time of Augustus the protection of the Empire’s borders was part of a systematic and empire-wide policy of defense.¹⁴ Luttwak describes the policy of the later Empire in terms of a preclusive defense strategy which he labels ‘defense in depth.’ Luttwak, a defense analyst by trade, is responsible for applying a modern understanding

¹¹ Ibid, 7.

¹² Livia Capponi, *Augustan Egypt: The Creation of a Roman Province* (New York/London: Routledge, 2005); Andrew Monson, *From the Ptolemies to the Romans: Political and Economic Change in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹³ Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), see 172-80 for “The Military in Society.”

¹⁴ Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

of border security to the Roman Empire, and he does not recognize that Roman policy tended to be more reactive than proactive. C. R. Whittaker, on the other hand, studies Rome's borders from an economic and social perspective and argues that Rome had a more flexible conception of their boundaries than Luttwak maintains, at least until the late Empire when defense was more of a concern.¹⁵ Robert B. Jackson's *At Empire's Edge* concentrates solely on the frontiers of Roman Egypt by giving vivid descriptions of Egypt's Roman remains on the borders of the province.¹⁶ Although Jackson's descriptions make use of the most up to date archaeological reports (at the time of its publication), it lacks any central thesis or interpretation of the sites.

Although the Roman army and the province of Egypt have received no shortage of scholarly treatment, a detailed examination of the later Roman army as it operated in Egypt is clearly lacking. The present thesis will help fill that gap and serve as an introduction to the institutional and social history of the army in late Roman Egypt. While Egypt is the focus of this study, it is intended that the same questions asked in this thesis can be applied to the army of the later Empire as a whole, even if the conclusions may differ. The army in Egypt functioned much as it did in other provinces, especially after Diocletian's reforms further standardized the administration of the empire. Soldiers in Egypt, as in other provinces, guarded the borders, oversaw supply routes and tax collection, and acted as representatives of the government. Furthermore, soldiers were recruited and trained through similar methods, often retired in the province in which they served with some kind of compensation. In these ways soldiers played an important part

¹⁵ C. R. Whittaker, *The Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Robert B. Jackson, *At Empire's Edge: Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002).

in the economy and society of the province. This thesis will contribute to the understanding of the character of the Roman army of the later Empire and its relationship with provincial society by using fourth century Egypt as a case study.

Methods and Sources

Literary sources for the Roman army of the fourth century are scattered and rather scant. The *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus is the most complete source for the Roman army and military history from the years 353-378 (the only extant portions of his thirty-one book history covering the years 96-378). No other major, contemporary literary or historical account exists for the military history of the fourth century. Despite the elusiveness of literary sources for the army, however, we are still able to draw on a range of material to put together a picture of the late Roman army. The laws collected in the seventh book of the *Codex Theodosianus* are invaluable for the study of the later Roman army. Although compiled during the reign of Theodosius II (r. 408-450), many of the laws concerning the army date to the fourth century. The *Notitia Dignitatum* is a valuable but problematic document for the Roman army in this period. The *Notitia* was likely compiled in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and shows the administrative organization of the eastern and western halves of the empire as well as the names and placements of legions. The *Notitia* shows the organization of the army at the end of the fourth century, but does not provide any detailed information of the army's development over the century.¹⁷

¹⁷ Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army, 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 44-9 for problems of using the *Notitia Dignitatum* as a source.

The archeological remains of Roman Egypt are rich with many sites and artifacts which concern the army. The Roman military presence in Egypt can be seen at the quarries and mines of the Eastern Desert, especially at Mons Claudianus, which were guarded by soldiers. Fortified roadway stations (*stationes*) also attest to the army's presence in Egypt. The large number of surviving forts in Egypt gives us an insight into lives of soldiers. The later Empire was a period of entrenchment when many new forts were built throughout the empire to maintain the frontiers. These forts served more than just a military purpose; they primarily functioned as storehouses for the *annona*.¹⁸

By far the most abundant source material for the study of the late Roman army is the vast amount of papyri that have survived because of Egypt's dry climate. These extant fragments of documentary evidence can give us incomparable insights into otherwise unknown aspects of military society, and this is what makes Egypt the perfect case study for an investigation of the army at the provincial level. Particular insight into the workings of the fourth century army is provided by the surviving papers of Flavius Abinnaeus, a cavalry commander at Dionysias from 342-4 and again in 346.¹⁹ The *Abinnaeus Archive* gives us a unique look into the role the army played in Egyptian society and the responsibilities of an army officer to his soldiers and the community.

Another accessible collection of papyri relating to the army is Robert Fink's *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*.²⁰ Although the papyri in this volume were originally published elsewhere, it succeeds in bringing together in one place this otherwise scattered

¹⁸ Roger S. Bagnall and Dominic Rathobone, *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004) is a good overview of the archaeological sites of Graeco-Roman Egypt.

¹⁹ Collected in H. I. Bell et al., *The Abinnaeus Archive: Papers of a Roman Officer in the reign of Constantius II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

²⁰ Robert O. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus* (American Philological Association: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1971).

evidence. There are two main disadvantages to this compilation: it is no longer an up-to-date collection, given the amount of papyri discovered since its publication; and it only covers the first to third centuries, giving it limited value for the study of the fourth-century army. However, the volume is not inconsequential for this study: the pieces collected in it are illustrative of the function of the army of the Principate, even if it does not include recent discoveries; and although it does not include evidence from the fourth century, it will provide the opportunity to see in what ways the role of the army changed or stayed the same in the fourth century.

Another papyrological collection that will be consulted is Hunt and Edgar's *Select Papyri*.²¹ It is far beyond the scope of this project to attempt an analysis of all of the papyri relating to the Roman army in the fourth century given the vast and ever-growing amount of papyri. Representative pieces of evidence will be selected for the different aspects of the army that will be considered with discussions of their implications and tentative conclusions. The conclusions drawn are intended to be preliminary and lay the foundation for future studies.

Project Outline

Before we turn to the army of fourth-century Egypt, a general outline of Roman Egypt and the Roman army must be drawn. This will include a consideration of the nature of Roman government in Egypt and the organization of the army in broad terms, followed by a discussion of the reorganization of the province by Diocletian and the military reforms of the late third and early fourth centuries. Once the framework has been

²¹ A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri*, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1932);

established, a more detailed study of the institutions and responsibilities of the fourth-century army can begin. First the army will be examined from top-down perspective. Aspects that will be studied include the size of the garrison in Egypt, its role in policing the province and defending its boundaries, fortifications systems, and unit distribution. The investigation of these features will help to shed light on the organization of fourth-century army as a whole and the nature of the defensive strategies of the later Roman Empire. Next, the societal aspect of the army and its relationship with the civilians of Egypt will be considered. To understand the social impact of the army in a province, topics such as the army's role in justice administration, tax collection, recruitment, veterans in society, economic impact, and military officers as patrons will be examined. Finally, the project's conclusion will briefly consider how the investigation of these features enhance our understanding of the fourth-century army as an institution, the place of the army within the social and economic framework of the later Roman Empire, and the directions that scholars can take the study of the later Roman army.

CHAPTER ONE

EGYPT AND THE ARMY

Rome's diplomatic relations with Ptolemaic Egypt began long before its seizure in 30 BCE. Friendship between Rome and Egypt stretched back at least to 273 BCE when an alliance was negotiated during the Pyrrhic War. In 168 BCE, Rome prevented the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, from occupying Egypt. Throughout the second century, Egypt remained Rome's staunch ally and supported Rome during the Macedonian and Syrian Wars. During the course of the first century, Egypt became little more than a vassal state of Rome when in 81/80 BCE, Ptolemy XI named Rome as the successor to Egypt and Cyprus. Official annexation of Egypt did not occur at this time, and the Ptolemies remained in control under the watchful eye of Rome. The reign of Ptolemy XII Auletes (r. 80-51 BCE) was strongly backed by Rome, but marked by internal unrest in Egypt. After Ptolemy Auletes' death, a dynastic struggle erupted between his children Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII. It was at this time, in 48 BCE, that Julius Caesar arrived in Egypt in pursuit of Pompey. During a yearlong stay, Caesar settled the conflict not by annexing Egypt, as might have been expected, but by placing Cleopatra VII and her younger brother Ptolemy XIV in power as friends and allies of Rome.¹

¹ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 5-7; Suetonius, *Divus Caesar* 35, in *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Penguin, 2007) for Caesar's decision not to make Egypt a province.

After Caesar's death in 44 BCE, Egypt once again came to the fore of Roman affairs during the civil war between Octavian and Antony in which Rome's republic came to an end. Antony, in control of the East, married Cleopatra and bequeathed the Roman territories of Cilicia and Cyprus to Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra thus became the target of Octavian's propaganda machine, depicting Antony as having abandoned Roman traditions in the thrall of an oriental seductress, in order to justify a war. Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at the Battle of Actium in September 31 BCE and fled back to Egypt where they both committed suicide the following year. In 30 BCE, Octavian entered Egypt without challenge, murdered the illegitimate son of Caesar and Cleopatra, and formally reorganized Egypt into a Roman province.¹

Rome's governance of Egypt was based in part on their Ptolemaic predecessors as well as their own innovations. Strabo gives a general overview of the administrative organization of early Roman Egypt.² The province was governed by a prefect (*praefectus Aegypti*) of the equestrian class chosen by the emperor, and beneath him was a justice administrator (*dikaiodotes*). Independent of the prefect was the *idioslogos*, who acted as a revenue and inheritance investigator. Each of these officials was accompanied by imperial freedmen. Ptolemaic legacies adopted by Rome included the Interpreter (*interpres*), the Recorder (*scriba publicus*), the Chief Judge (*iudicum praefectus*), and the Night Commander (*praetor nocturnus*). These offices continued to be filled by native appointees. The administrative districts of Egypt, called nomes and governed by local officials called nomarchs, were maintained by the Romans. The nomarchs and other

¹ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 34-7.

² Strabo, *Geography* XVII.12-13, trans. H. L. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917-1932).

nome based officials were under the supervision of Roman appointed *epistrategoi*, also a Ptolemaic legacy, who answered directly to the *praefectus Aegypti*.³

The nome capitols, called *metropoleis*, underwent a process of municipalization under Roman rule in which the *metropoleis* gradually evolved into what might be considered Greek *poleis*. This process reached its conclusion in 200/1 CE when Septimius Severus passed a decree granting *boulai* (town councils) to Alexandria and the *metropoleis*.⁴ The *metropoleis* and their local officials shared in the burden of provincial government, especially as related to the transportation of supplies and collection of revenue. A key component of this arrangement was the development of a complex liturgical system, which had existed under the Ptolemies but was greatly expanded by the Romans. Liturgies were obligatory posts often chosen by lot from the members of the local elite. Liturgical responsibilities included tax collection, financial support of public works, record keeping, policing, as well as other areas of administration. Liturgical services also existed in the *chora* with more of a focus on agriculture and irrigation.⁵

Egypt provided Rome with numerous unique economic benefits. Most important among these was the carefully managed *annona* which supplied most of the empire's grain.⁶ Egypt also was commercially important to Rome. As Strabo points out, Alexandria was well situated for trade by both land and sea, and he referred to the city as "the greatest emporium in the inhabited world."⁷ Trade relations were maintained with Ethiopia and the "Troglodytes" on the African side of the Red Sea. Furthermore, the Red

³ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 25-49 gives a more detailed analysis of these offices.

⁴ Alan K. Bowman and Dominic Rathbone, "Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 107-27.

⁵ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 65-81; Richard Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 186-92 gives a good overview of the different nome based magistracies.

⁶ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 129-32 discusses Rome's collection of grain revenue in Egypt.

⁷ Strabo, XVII.13.

Sea ports opened up trade with India through Arab intermediaries. According to Strabo, Egypt's trade network was able to bring in a hefty tribute even if administered poorly.⁸ Other revenue came from taxation. As in other governmental matters, Rome adopted what worked from the Ptolemaic system of taxation but made their own modifications to it. The biggest change was Rome's introduction of a poll tax called the *laographia* in Egypt. This tax was levied on all adult males and slaves aged 14 to 62. Alexandrian and Roman citizens and their slaves were exempt from this tax, and this further set Alexandria and its citizens apart from the rest of Egypt.⁹

Given the peculiarities of Roman administration of Egypt and its importance, it is sometimes viewed as a province under the special care of the emperor, or even his personal property. This interpretation is in part based on the literary sources, especially Tacitus who, in the *Annals*, says that "one of the unspoken [*arcana*] principles of Augustus' domination had been the exclusion of senators and knights from Egypt without his leave" because of his fear that it could be used a base to launch a revolt and starve the empire.¹⁰ The Latin *arcana* for "unspoken" translates more literally as 'secret,' 'private, or personal.' It may be best, then, to understand this as an unofficial policy of Augustus. Also, in the *Histories*, Tacitus claims that Egypt was kept "under the control of the imperial house" because of its fertility, isolation, and the ignorance and incivility of its population.¹¹ Egypt was under the care of the emperor, but so were several other provinces. During Augustus' reorganization of the provinces in 27 BCE, the provinces of

⁸ Strabo, XVII.14; Derek Williams, *The Reach of Rome: A History of the Roman Imperial Frontier, 1st-5th Centuries AD* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1996), 66.

⁹ See Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 123-55 for taxation in Roman Egypt, especially 138-41 for the poll tax; Andrea Jordens, "Government, Taxation, and the Law," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 59-61.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* II. 59, trans. Michael Grant (New York: Penguin, 1996).

¹¹ Tacitus, *Histories* I.11, trans. Kenneth Wellesley (New York: Penguin, 2009).

the empire were divided into two classes: either senatorial or imperial provinces. The imperial provinces were under the control of the emperor, and Egypt seems to have been one of these.¹²

The emperor's position in Egypt was somewhat unique but not unprecedented. Augustus essentially became the successor of the Ptolemies, presented as a pharaoh and a god. It is unclear to what extent Augustus encouraged this practice, but he does not seem to have discouraged it.¹³ Such a façade of continuity would seem only natural, and Augustus held a similar status in other Eastern provinces. Further evidence that Egypt was considered an ordinary province comes from the *Res Gestae* of Augustus in which he claims to have “added Egypt to the empire of the Roman people.”¹⁴ There is no indication here that Egypt was any different from any other province. Egypt, therefore, cannot be said to have had a special status within the empire; it just seems more irregular because of the amount of documentary evidence and the isolation in which it is often studied from the rest of the empire.¹⁵ Although Egypt's status in the empire may not have been as unique as once thought, its importance as a source of revenue and grain should not be underestimated. Nor should the fears of Augustus be seen as unwarranted.

One thing that can be said to be peculiar about Egypt is the country's geography. Egyptian civilization has always been centered on the Nile River, which flows from Upper Egypt in the south to Lower Egypt in the north, where it empties in the Delta

¹² See Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 10-12 for the ambiguous status of Egypt between the years 30-27; H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 BC to AD 68* (London/New York: Routledge, 1989), 210-12 generally discusses the provincial settlement of 27.

¹³ Friederike Herklotz, “Aegyptio Capta: Augustus and the Annexation of Egypt,” in *The Oxford Companion to Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14-15 discusses the Egyptian reception of Augustus as ruler of Egypt.

¹⁴ *Res Gestae* 27, in *Roman Civilization* vol. 1, ed. Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 570.

¹⁵ Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 10-12 describes the status of Egypt as a province, especially for the years 30-27 BCE.

region into the Mediterranean. The annual inundation of the Nile, caused by monsoon rains in Ethiopia, was responsible for the Egypt's extraordinary agricultural fertility. Egypt's natural barriers help separate it from the rest of the world by limiting its accessibility. The south was protected by the cataracts of the Nile, which begin just south of Aswan, and make the river unnavigable. The north had the Mediterranean as a boundary with the Alexandrian port acting as the best point of entry. The Libyan Desert to the west is arid and inhospitable except for the existence of a few oases which can sustain small populations. The Eastern Desert contained quarries from which minerals such as granite, marble, limestone, and quartz were extracted. The eastern part of Egypt was accessible from the Sinai and the west from the Libyan coast. The geographic features of Egypt made its defense from external invasions relatively easy with the main concern being sporadic raids from nomadic desert tribes.¹⁶

Even though Egypt's geography provided a natural defensive barrier, the province still required a military garrison whose placement was dictated by the country's geography. In a short passage, Strabo succinctly describes the military garrison of Augustan Egypt:

There are also three legions of soldiers, one of which is stationed in the city [Alexandria] and the others in the country; and apart from these there are nine Roman cohorts, three in the city [Alexandria], three on the borders of Aethiopia in Syene, as a guard for that region, and three in the rest of the country. And there are also three bodies of cavalry, which likewise are assigned to the various critical points.¹⁷

Strabo's observed the army in Egypt while part of the entourage of Aelius Gallus, Egyptian prefect from 26-24 BCE, shortly after Egypt's annexation. The first legion

¹⁶ Bowman, *Egypt After the Pharaohs*, 12-20 for the geography, ecology, and population of Egypt.

¹⁷ Strabo, XVII.12.

mentioned in this passage, stationed at Alexandria, was encamped at Nicopolis just to the southeast of the city. Strabo later reveals the position of the second legion to be Babylon (Old Cairo).¹⁸ The location of the third legion was not specified by Strabo. Speidel, however, has convincingly argued for its encampment at Thebes on the basis of epigraphic evidence and further postulates that it was placed at Thebes because the city was the center of a revolt in 29 BCE.¹⁹

Only the names of two of these three legions are known: the XXII *Deiotariana* and III *Cyrenaica*. The XXII *Deiotariana* was named after a Galatian king who had created an army trained in the Roman manner. The III *Cyrenaica* had originally been a legion of Marc Antony's that defected to Octavian after the Battle of Actium. By 23 AD one of the legions was removed from Egypt, and the two remaining were both encamped at Nicopolis. The number of legions may have briefly been raised again to three in the early second century when the II *Traiana* was raised for Trajan's Parthian campaigns. Shortly afterwards, the III *Cyrenaica* was moved to Arabia and the XXII *Deiotariana* vanished, possibly as a result of the Bar-Kochba revolt, leaving the II *Traiana* as the only legion stationed in Egypt.²⁰ The legion stationed near Alexandria helped ensure order in the city, protected the northern coastal paths into Egypt, and could be mobilized for an eastern campaign if the need arose. The legion that was stationed at Thebes was there, as discussed above, to guarantee the faithfulness of a city that had previously rebelled and to help cover Egypt's southern border. The legion at Babylon was strategically placed at the apex of the Delta which acted as the bridge between Upper and Lower Egypt.

¹⁸ Ibid, XVII.30.

¹⁹ M. P. Speidel, "Augustus' Deployment of the Legions in Egypt," *CE* 57.113 (1982): 120-4; Strabo, XVII.53 for the revolt at Thebes.

²⁰ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 23-5.

The gradual reduction of legions in Egypt was a natural step. The province was easily pacified after its occupation and the frontiers remained secure. The auxiliary cohorts and cavalry *alae* mentioned by Strabo, whose strength remained largely consistent, were sufficient to guard the borders and maintain order in the province. Strabo mentions explicitly that three of the cohorts guarded the southern border at Syene and another three were stationed at Alexandria. The three cohorts, whose positions were not specifically mentioned by Strabo, were, on the basis of archaeological remains, mostly stationed on the eastern side of the Nile to protect the quarries and trade routes, with the three unspecified cavalry units being distributed alongside the cohorts.²¹ If the units were at their ideal strength, the garrison of Roman Egypt at the end of the first century BCE can be estimated to have been around 22,000, later reduced to about 17,000 and then 12,000.

The army in Egypt played a role in most of the major campaigns in the east. Early after the occupation of Egypt, they took part in relatively minor expeditions into Ethiopia and Arabia. The key operations that the Egyptian legions took part in include a series of campaigns led by Corbulo in the east between 58 and 63 CE, the Jewish War of 66-70, the subjugation of Arabia in 106, Trajan's Parthian war, the Bar-Kochba revolt of 132-6, the Parthian campaigns of the Severans, Valerian's disastrous Persian expedition in 260, and an invasion by Carus of Persia in 283. In Egypt itself, the military was required to defend the borders from nomadic raiders at times, especially the Blemmyes and

²¹ Valerie A. Maxfield, "The Deployment of the Roman Auxilia in Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert during the Principate," in *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der Romischen Kaiserzeit*, ed. Geza Alföldy, Brian Dobson, and Werner Eck (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), 407-42 and Valerie A. Maxfield, "Where Did They Put the Men? An Enquiry into the Accommodation of Soldiers in Roman Egypt," in *The Army and Frontiers of Rome*, ed. William S. Hanson (Portsmouth, RI: The Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2009), 63-82 both give good discussions of the auxiliary units, attempts their identifications, and examines the archaeological remains of their forts; Capponi, *Augustan Egypt*, 17-22 argues that remnants of the Ptolemaic army were reused in the *auxilia*.

Axumites, particularly during the mid-third century when there was a general collapse of the Empire's borders. It was during this period that Egypt was briefly occupied by the Palmyrene queen Zenobia.²² The often volatile city of Alexandria sometimes required the intervention of the army. Ethnic tensions between the Greeks and Jews of the City occasionally erupted into rioting, especially during the years 38-41 AD. Rioting also occurred at the start of the Jewish War in 66 and the Jewish revolt of 115-117 caused particular disturbances. The revolt of the Boukoloi in 171-2 was another major disruption that was soon followed by the attempted usurpation of Avidius Cassius with the support of the Egyptian Prefect Volusius Maecianus in 175.²³

The army was not continually at war, and they did not spend peacetime solely making preparations for war. There is some evidence for soldiers repairing canals and roads soon after Egypt's annexation,²⁴ but this was not typical. Evidence also exists for the army's role in tax collecting, usually as offering protection to tax collectors but sometimes in a more direct role. There is more evidence for the supervision of grain boats and the monitoring of the quarries and supply routes of the Eastern Desert. Centurions bridged the gap between the central authorities and often mediated local disputes. Another responsibility was the policing of the province and a network of watchtowers and fortified garrisons was maintained in support of this. The main concern with policing was the protection of supply routes and suppression of banditry.²⁵

²² Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 70-4 for external threats to Egypt

²³ Ibid, 74-79 for internal threats.

²⁴ Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 18.

²⁵ Alston *Soldier and Society*, 79-98 for the army in peace; for policing, see especially Roger S. Bagnall, "Army and Police in Roman Upper Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 14 (1977): 67-86 which argues that the police system was largely liturgical in nature.

Few changes were made in the organization of Egypt between the reign of Augustus and the accession of Diocletian. The most important was the already mentioned implementation of the *boulai* by Septimius Severus in 200/1 CE. Another change to the *status quo* in Egypt was Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 which granted all the freemen of the Roman Empire citizenship thus bringing a great number of Egypt's inhabitants under Roman law. Diocletian came to power in 284 and brought to an end the crisis of the third century, a fifty-year period of civil war, outside invasions, and economic decline. Like Augustus, who also came to power after an era of political instability, Diocletian set about reorganizing the empire by reforming provincial administration, the economy, and the military. Diocletian's provincial reforms further erased the features that made Egypt distinct from the rest of the empire.

In order to combat the military emergencies of the third century, Diocletian developed a system of four-man rule called the Tetrarchy, which included two senior and two junior emperors. This system enabled an emperor to be at one of the various trouble spots in the empire. The number of provinces was increased with their division into smaller units, each of which contained even smaller administrative regions. The provinces were grouped into a series of larger units called dioceses headed by a *vicarius*. The dioceses were part of larger groupings called prefectures under the authority of a praetorian prefect, who gradually began to lose his military function after this point. Military and civil government became separate under Diocletian with each province having a military commander called a *dux* and a civil governor. The increased bureaucratization of the empire and the subdivision of the provinces helped facilitate a more efficient taxation system often paid in kind based both on capitation (poll tax) and

productivity. Diocletian made failed attempts to curb inflation and fix prices with the issuing of the “Edict of Maximum Prices” and the reform of coinage. The reforms of Diocletian laid the groundwork for the administrative organization of the later Empire. Many of Diocletian’s reforms were simply the formalization of practices already in place. Constantine maintained most of Diocletian’s modifications and carried many of them to their conclusion.²⁶

It is difficult to establish a timeline for the application of these reforms, due to the lack of surviving literary sources for this period.²⁷ We do know that they were not implemented instantaneously and occurred throughout Diocletian’s reign in a piecemeal fashion. The reorganization of Egypt probably began in 297/8 when Diocletian first visited the province and took place over about a ten-year period. The purpose of Diocletian’s first Egyptian visit was to put down the revolt of Domitius Domitianus, which he did after a lengthy and violent siege of Alexandria. Diocletian again visited Egypt in 302, and was the last ruling emperor to do so. As with the empire as a whole, the timeline of Egypt’s reorganization is difficult to define but a general picture of the nature of its reformation can be outlined.

Egypt was divided into a series of smaller provinces throughout the fourth century. The province was first divided in two (Egypt and Thebaid) by Diocletian in 295, and by 314 Egypt was further divided in half (Egypt Herculia and Egypt Jovia) before reverting to its pre-314 status in 325. By the middle of the fourth century, Egypt was

²⁶ Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 30-46 gives a brief overview of Diocletian’s reign.

²⁷ Alan K. Bowman, “Some Aspects of the Reform of Diocletian in Egypt,” in *Akten des XIII. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses*, edited by Emil Kiessling and Hans-Albert Rupprecht (Munich: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagbuchshandlung, 1974), 43-51 attempts to establish a timeline for the implementation of these reforms in Egypt based on the papyrological evidence.

again divided into three districts (Egypt, Augustamnica, and Thebaid) with a fourth being added in 381 (Arcadia). Egypt was initially part of the Diocese of the East in the Eastern Prefecture before it became its own diocese (which also included the provinces of Libya) by the end of the fourth century. Instead of being governed by a *vicarius*, like the other dioceses, an Augustal Prefect oversaw the Diocese of Egypt. The provinces of Egypt were governed by officials called *praesides* with the military being commanded by *duces*. At some point during the fourth century, the military of Lower Egypt came under the control of the *comes limitis Aegypti* while the army of Upper Egypt was commanded by the *dux Thebaidos*.²⁸ During the fourth century the administration of Egypt became more consistent with that of other provinces. Instead of the Egyptian Prefect holding sole power over the province's military and civic operations, these responsibilities were delegated on to a larger and more complex bureaucratic system which kept individuals from acquiring too much power.²⁹

Beginning with Diocletian, the old nome-based system gave way to even smaller administrative units known as *pagi* supervised by *praepositi pagi*. Other significant changes were made to Egypt's municipalities which either redefined the role of existing magistracies or slowly phased them out and replaced them with new offices. One of the most important of these new magistracies was the *logistes*. The *logistes* assumed much of the power that the *boulai* had previously possessed and was mostly responsible for financial management in the nomes. The power of the *syndikos*, who had formerly been a representative of a *boule*, was expanded to include the entire nome overseeing its liturgies. The office of *strategos* lost much of its importance in this period. Eventually the

²⁸ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 62-4 and Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs*, 78-81 discuss the divisions of Egypt and its government.

²⁹ Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs*, 78-80.

office became known as the *strategos-exactor* and was almost solely responsible for tax collection. The government became better centralized under this system with the officials answering to the prefect instead of the nomes acting in a nearly autonomous fashion.³⁰

Diocletian's economic reforms also removed some of Egypt's distinctions. The poll tax was introduced in Egypt in 297/8 when Diocletian first visited the province. Taxation in kind was also enacted and set at a fixed rate every year. Quotas were established for Egypt on a nome-by-nome basis with the responsibility for collection falling to each individual nome. Unsurprisingly, grain was the main commodity assessed through this tax given Egypt's high production of it and its importance in feeding the empire and the army. The payment of taxes in gold and silver was also encouraged by Diocletian in an attempt to reintroduce this currency back into the empire as much of it had been hoarded during the third century because of inflation. Constantine would continue and intensify this policy. Another innovation of Constantine was the establishment of a business tax that was called the *chrysargyron*.³¹ Before Diocletian, Egypt maintained its own currency system, based on the Greek drachma, with its mint in Alexandria in contrast to the rest of the empire which used the customary imperial coinage. Diocletian's monetary reform set a standard currency for the entire empire, including Egypt, and was carried to its completion by Constantine's introduction of the *solidus*, a coin worth its weight in precious metal.³²

Possibly the most significant and crucial of Diocletian's reforms were the changes made to the military. Many of Diocletian's other measures were geared toward the

³⁰ Alan K. Bowman, "Some Aspects of the Reform of Diocletian," 43-51 looks at the major offices of Diocletianic Egypt and attempts to establish some sort of chronology for their implementation.

³¹ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 153-60 for taxation in Egypt during the fourth century.

³² *Ibid*, 330-2.

support of the army and defense of the borders, namely the establishment of the Tetrarchy and economic reforms. The army of the Roman Empire did not remain static, so the army that Diocletian inherited in 284 was not the same as it was in the time of Augustus. From the beginning of the Republic, Rome's fighting force had been a citizen army with the liability for service based on property ownership. Although the army was more than a militia, being a soldier was not a career in the Early and Middle Republic. By the Late Republic, Roman expansion led to prolonged wars which required soldiers to be in the field for longer periods of time, and generals were commonly given longer periods of command. With the gradual disappearance of property qualifications and the growing prevalence of career soldiers, the idea of a professional and institutionalized army had fully developed by the time of Augustus.³³ Features of this system included the existence of permanent legions with fixed positions, usually on the frontiers, fixed lengths of service, pay and some kind of recompense on retirement, the granting of citizenship to auxiliaries at the end of their service, and the growing separation between military and civic career paths.³⁴

The basis of the imperial army was the legion. Comprised of Roman citizens, a legion might number around 5000 and consisted of ten cohorts (nine standard cohorts with 480 men each and an augmented first cohort). The cohorts in turn were made of ten centuries (each with 80 men) further divided into ten *contubernia* of eight tent-mates. The infantry of the *auxilia* were also organized into cohorts. The basic unit of cavalry *auxilia* was the *ala* (wing) and comprised approximately 500 men with 16 subunits of about 30

³³ Gaius Marius' recruitment of landless citizens in 107 BCE was a key moment in this process.

³⁴ See Lawrence Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984; reprinted by Routledge, 2004), especially chs. 5-6, for an overview of this transition.

called *turmae*. Sometimes an infantry cohort and cavalry *ala* could be combined to form an *ala milliaria*.³⁵

Throughout the Principate, the institutions of the army gradually became more formalized. However, some of the most important changes made before Diocletian's rule occurred in the late second and third centuries. Septimius Severus raised soldiers' pay and relaxed restrictions on military promotion that led to an increase in *equites* in places of command and edged out some of the old Roman elite. Severus also reformed the Praetorian Guard to include men from all parts of the empire. Furthermore, a gradual increase in the size of the army began under Severus that would continue throughout the third century. During the near-collapse of the third century, the idea of a mobile field army which drew detachments away from the legions at the borders and could quickly be deployed at trouble spots developed. These field armies accompanied the emperors and were established on an *ad hoc* basis by them because of the need for the emperor to almost constantly be on the march in this period.³⁶ These developments became the foundation for Diocletian's military reforms.

The army of Diocletian, like much of the Diocletianic system, was upheld or further modified by Constantine and would go on to form the groundwork for the army of the later Empire. Recruitment, which became more efficient and wide-ranging during Diocletian's reign, was a high priority for Diocletian if he was to rehabilitate the army and maintain a strong border defense. Although Rome had made use of foreign recruits since the republic, Diocletian greatly increased the convention of recruiting barbarians to serve in the army in exchange for grants of land. However, the majority of levies came

³⁵ See Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, 19-29 for the organization of the legions and *auxilia*.

³⁶ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 4-15.

from strict measures of forced conscription among Roman citizens. The number of soldiers levied from each region was based on the same principle as the *annona* and was tied to Diocletian's taxation reforms.³⁷ Another pool of recruits that was exploited was the sons of veterans. A law that dates back to the time of Constantine, but was probably already common practice, required the sons of veterans who were fit for service to enlist.³⁸

Diocletian's robust recruitment measures led to an enlargement of the army, a trend that had begun with Severus. The exact size of the army in this period is difficult to calculate because of the nature of our sources. Lactantius, who was hostile toward Diocletian, implied that the army was quadrupled in size and that his firm recruitment methods sapped the empire's manpower so severely that it had a negative impact on agricultural production.³⁹ Using the *Notitia Dignitatum* to calculate the size of the army in this period is a speculative endeavor at best. The document was compiled about a hundred years after the reforms of Diocletian, and while it shows the distribution of the army units it does not tell us the number of men which made up those units. Another factor to consider in any attempt to calculate the size of the army in this period is the number of new legions raised by Diocletian.⁴⁰ The size of the legions is also a contentious issue. The number of soldiers that made up a legion of the later empire was reduced to as little as 1000, but it is difficult to determine when this shift occurred.⁴¹

³⁷ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 60.

³⁸ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.22.1-5, trans. Clyde Pharr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

³⁹ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 7, in *Christianity in Late Antiquity, 300-450 C.E.: A Reader*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11-23.

⁴⁰ H. M. D. Parker, "The Legions of Diocletian and Constantine," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 23 (1933): 175-189 convincingly argues that Diocletian raised fourteen new legions and that there was a total of fifty-eight at that time.

⁴¹ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 88; Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 31-2 believe that smaller legions were an innovation of Diocletian and argue that this was the only way he could've

While it is impossible to calculate the precise figures of Diocletian's army, it is generally agreed that there was an increase in its size. The best estimate is that the total army was made up of about 500,000 to 600,000 men and that this total was sustained throughout the fourth century.⁴²

Many of Diocletian's economic policies were geared toward the payment and supply of the inflated army. Diocletian regularized soldiers' pay and minted new coins primarily meant as donatives to the troops on the occasion of the beginning of his reign. These efforts had little effect because of the high inflation (the number of coins worth their weight in silver minted seems to have been low and the striking of debased coinage remained high) and it became more common to pay soldiers in kind by providing their supplies and rations in lieu of pay and subtractions from their salary.⁴³ In an effort to curb inflation, Diocletian issued the "Edict on Maximum Prices" in 301. The military aspect of this measure is made clear in the preamble of the edict. While probably an exaggeration, it is claimed in the edict that "sometimes in a single purchase a soldier is deprived of his bonus or salary." The text then goes on to remind the readers of the labors of soldiers in defending the state and refers to profiteers as enemies of the empire.⁴⁴

The proper supply and arming of the army was a priority for Diocletian when he took over and became more regulated. The practice of requisitioning supplies from provincials for the army became common in the third century and was continued by Diocletian. Diocletian, however, did not solely depend on requisitioned materials. We

completely covered the borders. However, they seem to overestimate the number of legions raised by Diocletian. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 56 and Hugh Elton, "Warfare and Military," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. Noel Lenski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 333 both maintain that unit strength remained the same as it had during the Principate.

⁴² Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 49 suggests 500,000 and Jones suggests 600,000, (682-3).

⁴³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* 61-8 discusses Diocletian's financial system.

⁴⁴ "Edict on Maximum Prices," in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, vol. V: Rome and Italy of the Empire*, ed. Frank Tenney (Paterson, NJ: Pageant Books, 1959), 310-17.

know that Diocletian was a great builder, and according to Lactantius and John Malalas, his building projects included arms factories (*armorum fabrica*).⁴⁵ These arms factories were located close to the frontiers to better facilitate the provisioning of the army and they were worked by conscripted civilians as well as soldiers. Soldiers provided the state with a ready pool of labor, and since many soldiers were recruited from farms or rural areas they already had experience in manual labor.⁴⁶

Although Constantine preserved many of Diocletian's military policies, an important innovation of Constantine's was the creation of the *magister peditum* and *magister equitum*. With the establishment of these offices, Constantine finalized the parting of military from civil administration that had been begun by Diocletian. The military commanders of all the provinces were answerable to the *magistri* who were in turn answerable to Constantine. Furthermore, with the creation of the two *magistri*, the Praetorian Prefects were stripped of their military responsibilities and were left only with the assessment of taxes and distribution of rations to the army.⁴⁷

Diocletian rebuilt the frontiers of the empire and focused much of his attention on defense of those borders. As a result units became more sedentary and complex networks of fortifications were built across the empire. Despite of the accusations of the historian Zosimus, Constantine did not dismantle Diocletian's system of defense.⁴⁸ Constantine did, however, create a permanent field army called the *comitatenses* on the model of his

⁴⁵ Lactantius, 7.9; John Malalas *Chronicles* 12.38, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986).

⁴⁶ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 66-7 and MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian*, 24, 31.

⁴⁷ Zosimus, 2.32-3, trans. James J. Buchanan and Harold T. Davies (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967); Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 100-1.

⁴⁸ Zosimus, 2.34.

predecessors. Although the field army was not an invention of Constantine, it did become completely separated from the border armies in his time.⁴⁹

A consequence of the separation of the border and frontier troops was that it forever cemented a social distinction between the two classes of soldiers. A law issued by Constantine in 325 provides the earliest reference to distinctions made between the frontier and field armies. The law has to do with the lengths of service and privileges of veterans and clearly distinguishes the different classes of troops.⁵⁰ The separation between the field army and border troops, who came to be called either *limitanei* or *ripenses* in our sources, was a crucial moment in the creation of the later Roman army. Gradually the frontier soldiers became tied to the land they defended as farmers and provided subsistence from their own agricultural output instead of being paid by the state. This legal and social division between troop types would be upheld until the fall of the Western Empire and well into the Byzantine Empire.⁵¹

The concessions granted to veterans were varied and multiplied by Diocletian and Constantine in an effort to encourage recruitment. The granting of citizenship to non-Romans (i.e., barbarians) at the end of their terms of service had been common throughout Roman history and was continued by Diocletian and Constantine. Soldiers were allowed an honorable discharge of twenty years of service, but could not achieve the full range of privileges unless they completed a minimum of twenty-four years. These privileges included the exemption from the poll tax for all veterans, as well as the exemption of their wives if they had completed a full twenty-four years and were tax

⁴⁹ M. P. Speidel, "The Later Roman Field Army and the Guard of the High Empire," *Latomus* 46 (1987):375-9.

⁵⁰ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.20.4.

⁵¹ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 35-7.

exempt for any vacant lands they received. Veterans were also exempt from market dues and customs, and any curial responsibilities. Constantine especially encouraged veterans to take up trade occupations upon retirement by offering cash grants, oxen, grain, and money for other start-up costs for those who chose to take this route.⁵² The concessions and chances of social mobility offered by a military career were particularly enticing to the lower classes and foreigners.

In reconstituting the army after the third century crisis, Diocletian and Constantine often looked back to the example of their forbearers. In many cases they just legitimized practices that were already in existence. Foreigners had always been utilized by the Roman military; the mobile field army had precedents with earlier emperors, the hereditability of military service existed before Diocletian and Constantine, as did the growing separation between military and civic career which led to a greater social mobility through a military occupation; and veterans had long received special concessions upon retirement. The contributions of Diocletian and Constantine were the legalization and expansion of these practices which would be maintained throughout the fourth century. Now that the character of Roman Egypt and the army of the later Empire have been established, it is possible to shift attention to the army in fourth century Egypt.

⁵² Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 635-6 and *Codex Theodosianus* 7.20 for the status of veterans.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROMAN ARMY IN FOURTH-CENTURY EGYPT: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

This chapter will look at the army in Egypt from a top-down perspective. By using the *Notitia Dignitatum*, we can get a sense of the organization of the army in Egypt and the military hierarchy of the later Empire. By examining the distribution of units, as described by the *Notitia*, we can gain insight into Rome's military policy regarding fourth-century Egypt. A cursory glance at the *Notitia* shows that Egypt contained many more military units than it had in the Principate. These units were spread over a larger territory and were under the authority of commanders outside of the civil sphere. The archaeological material for the army dramatically increases in the fourth century, and we can see this in Egypt with the number of surviving forts from this period. The fortifications of the later Empire served a larger purpose than just the stationing of soldiers; they represented imperial authority in the province and visually embodied the late Empire's policies of defense and border conservation.

Diocletian, like Augustus, probably had similar fears concerning the possibility that Egypt could be used as a springboard for a revolt and that the empire would be cut off from Egypt's grain supply; a fear that the rebellion of Domitianus (297-8 CE) had made very real. Much like that of Augustus, the military policy of Diocletian in Egypt was to maintain the country's borders, protecting Egypt from outside invasions and ensuring the internal stability of the Egyptian provinces in order to safeguard tax

collection and the grain supply. Diocletian's overall strategy was one of retrenchment and defense.¹

With the exception of Egypt's southern border, the frontiers of the country remained intact. The southernmost boundary of Egypt was retracted by Diocletian at the end of the third century. Procopius tells us that when Diocletian visited the province, he moved the southern border back to the island of Elephantine at the more defensible first cataract; before this it had extended a further "seven days journey" south of that point.² The reasons for the retraction of the border were economic as well as strategic. The region south of Elephantine yielded little pecuniary value and was not worth the cost of the number of soldiers it took to defend it. Raids from the tribal Nobadae further decreased the value of this region. Diocletian's solution was to abandon this territory, settle the Nobadae in it to act as a buffer between Roman territory and the hostile Blemmyes, and pay them for their services. However, Procopius goes on to say that this policy was not successful.³ The practice of settling barbarians in Roman territory to act as a buffer originated with Diocletian and became quite common throughout the later Empire.⁴ The episode with the Nobadae appears to have been the only instance of this practice taking place in Egypt.

Raids from nomadic tribes were only occasional problems, and were easily dealt with by Egypt's garrison. Besides southern Egypt, the Fayyum area was also susceptible to raids from desert tribes. The main areas of concern, however, were still the northwest coast and the Sinai area. These two regions provided the only land routes through which

¹ Zosimus 2.34 contrasts the border policies of Diocletian and Constantine.

² Procopius, *History of the Wars* I.19.29, trans. H. B. Dewing (New York: Macmillan, 1914-54).

³ Ibid, I.19.29-33.

⁴ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 60.

an invasion of Egypt could take place. Egypt, however, would not see any serious danger of invasion during the fourth century. Other areas that required some protection were the road systems and supply routes which transported the *annona* and the quarries of the Eastern Desert.⁵ The areas that needed defending had not changed since the time of Augustus. What did change, however, were the division of military units and the overall organization of the army.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* gives us a detailed picture of the placement of units in the late Roman Empire. The *Notitia* is most reflective of the military situation of the Empire at the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth century when it was compiled. It is debated whether or not the information in the *Notitia* can be applied to the reign of Diocletian. While the *Notitia*, for the most part, probably does not reflect the Empire of Diocletian's time, it at least shows us the point to which the military and administrative system, as promulgated by Diocletian, had evolved throughout the course of the fourth century. It has been argued that the evidence of the *Notitia* for Egypt is relevant to the time of Diocletian, and that the military garrison in Egypt changed little during the fourth century. Whittaker and van Berchem both contend that the *Notitia* largely reproduces the military occupation of Egypt from Diocletian's time with only a few changes. Their arguments are based on the papyrological evidence, especially the Panopolis papyri which date to Diocletian's Egyptian tour at the end of the third century, and which show that little had changed in strategic terms from the Tetrarchy to the end of the fourth century.⁶ Price, however, argues against the value of the *Notitia* for the Diocletianic period. Price contends that van Berchem misinterpreted the papyrological evidence and

⁵ Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 143-5; Williams, *The Reach of Rome*, 249.

⁶ Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 143-4; van Berchem, in *The Abinnaeus Archive*, ed. H. I. Bell, et al. (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1962), 13-14.

that the *Notitia* could not have been compiled before the reign of Theodosius (r. 379-95) because of the existence of Arcadia (named after Arcadius, r. 395-408) as one of the Egyptian provinces.⁷ Price further points out as evidence that several of the units listed have names that suggest they were raised by post-Diocletianic emperors like Constantius, Valentinian, and Theodosius.⁸

Price's overall argument is unconvincing. The stationing of troops in Egypt probably changed little from Diocletian to the end of the fourth century. Egypt was mostly at peace in this century and would have required little movement of soldiers. The placement of troops in the *Notitia* is mostly consistent with what had been seen in Egypt throughout the Imperial period, albeit more spread out; Diocletian and his successors would have had little reason to alter this arrangement. It is clear that the *Notitia* was not assembled before the reign of Theodosius, because of the existence of the province of Arcadia, but this does not mean that the sections concerning Egypt are useless for the pre-Theodosian Empire. The main changes that would have occurred were the occasional raising of new units and possibly the dividing of existing units. The *Notitia Dignitatum* thus provides us with a fairly reliable source for the military of Diocletianic Egypt which was mostly maintained throughout the fourth century.

While the strategic layout of the Egyptian garrison may not have changed much during the fourth century, the division of military command did. The *Notitia* lists the *Comes limitis Aegypti* (Count of the Egyptian Frontier) and the *Dux Aegypti et Thebaidos* (Duke of Egypt and the Thebaid) as the top ranking military commanders, each

⁷ R. M. Price, "The Limes of Lower Egypt," in *Aspects of the Notitia Dignitatum*, ed. R. Goodburn and P. Bartholomew (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1976), 143-5

⁸ Price, "The Limes of Lower Egypt," 144.

responsible for different areas with their own units.⁹ This division is likely Theodosian in date and is a result in the restructuring of Egypt into its own diocese. Before this division, beginning with Diocletian, the *Dux Aegypti et Thebaidos utrarumque Libyarum* held sole power over Egypt's garrison.¹⁰ According to the *Notitia*, the *Comes limitis Aegypti* had four legions under his command and twenty-seven auxiliary cohorts and cavalry squadrons.¹¹ The *Dux Aegypti et Thebaidos* had under his authority a total of seven legions and thirty-six auxiliary cohorts and cavalry squadrons.¹²

The *Comes limitis*, as the name implies, commanded the *limitanei* (frontier soldiers) of the provinces of Egypt and Augustamnica in Lower Egypt. Of the three legions listed under his command, the third *Diocletiana* can safely be said to have originated during Diocletian's reign. Another unit whose foundation can safely be dated to the Tetrarchy is the first Herculian *ala*, so named because of Maximian's association with Hercules. Two cavalry squads that are described as *nuper constituta* (recently founded) are the Theodosian and Arcadian *alae*. The existence of these two *alae* in the *Notitia* confirms that it was compiled in the late fourth century at the earliest. The rest of the auxiliary units listed under the *Comes limitis* have either barbarian names or names that indicate their place of origin (i.e. the eighth squadron of vandals or the fourth cohort of Numidians). The number of units with such names has helped create the impression of "barbarization" of the late Roman army. While there is little doubt that these units may

⁹ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XXVIII, XXXI, ed. Otto Seeck (Berolini: Weidmann, 1876).

¹⁰ Van Berchem, *Abinnaeus Archive*, 14.

¹¹ Or. XXVIII.

¹² Or. XXXI.

have originally consisted of barbarians or recruits from the territories after which they are named, they were likely replaced by local Egyptian conscripts as time passed.¹³

The *Dux Thebaidos* had a greater number of units under his command and they were responsible for the security of the much larger Thebaid province in Upper Egypt. Two more legions called the third *Diocletiana* appear under the authority of the *Dux*. The second *Flavia Constantia* could have been named after either Constantius I or Constantius II. The first *Maximiana* should be dated to the time of the Tetrarchs, and the foundation of the second *Valentinian* could be situated during the reigns of either Valentinian I (364-75) or Valentinian II (r. 375-92). Two more *alae* which bear the name *Herculia* are certainly tetrarchic creations. The first *ala Valeria* surely goes back to the middle of the third century, and was perhaps raised in preparation of Valerian's ill-fated Persian campaign. More recent creations would be the first *cohors felix Theodosiana* and the *Equites felices Honoriani*. Like the units under the *Comes limitis*, many of those under the *Dux Thebaidos* are named after either barbarians or provinces of origin.

Since the *Notitia* clearly lists the locations of each of the units recorded, we can get some sense of the overall strategy behind their assignments and the function they served. The forces of Lower Egypt are concentrated on the northern extremities. The most likely point of an invasion would be from the northeast. Accordingly, soldiers were clustered around Pelusium to protect the point of entry into Egypt. From there, troops were stationed along the main roads leading west to Alexandria and southwest to Memphis where the fifth *Macedonica* legion was stationed near the fortress at Babylon, which was garrisoned by the thirteenth *gemina* legion. The fortress of Nicopolis near the

¹³ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 84.

at-times turbulent Alexandria continued to be garrisoned by a legion (II *Traiana*).¹⁴ The western border of Egypt did not contain as large a number of soldiers. There was little threat of invasion from the province of Libya, so the greater number of units had been concentrated in the east where Persia posed a greater threat; soldiers were, however, still stationed at forts in the western oases. The southern half of Lower Egypt held about a third of its garrison. The main concern in the south would have been raids from Berber tribesmen and the protection of the roads which transported the *annona*. Although Berbers were a potential threat on both sides of the Nile, the river's eastern side was more heavily stationed. The explanation for this is simple given the importance of the mines and quarries of the Eastern Desert and its supply routes. Furthermore, the west is less watered than the east with only a few oases that were watched over. The overall purpose of the stationing of soldiers in Lower Egypt was to protect the province from invasion and protect the interior from desert raiders.¹⁵

The province of Thebaid consisted of the whole of Upper Egypt. Just as the majority of the units of Lower Egypt were stationed in the north, most of Upper Egypt's garrison was concentrated in southern half of the province. The southernmost border was guarded by the first *Maximiana* legion, stationed at Philae on the first cataract and placed there by Diocletian. The third *Diocletiana* legion was located further down the Nile and was split between Thebes and Ombos. There was not much of a threat of a serious invasion from the south. The garrisons in Upper Egypt would mainly have been concerned with defending the province and protecting the *annona* from the occasional

¹⁴ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 167, 198-204; *P.Oxy* 60 references Nicopolis in relation to the *annona militaris*.

¹⁵ *Or.* XXVIII; Price, "The Limes of Lower Egypt, 143-51 more fully discusses the garrisoning of Lower Egypt.

raids of indigenous tribes like the Nobatae and Blemyes. The location of units was a little more evenly distributed along the east and west banks of the Nile, suggesting that each side was just as equally threatened and in need of defense. The larger number of units stationed in Upper Egypt can be explained by the size of the province; the Thebaid was larger than the provinces of Lower Egypt combined. With little danger of a major invasion, the main concern of the soldiers stationed in the Thebaid would have been the protection of the transportation of the *annona* down the Nile.¹⁶

The majority (forty-three in total) of units listed for Egypt in the *Notitia* are cavalry *alae* with a handful of camel units. By contrast, there are only a total of twenty infantry cohorts and eleven legions. This is the opposite of the situation in the Principate where the number of infantry far outnumbered the cavalry. The army of the late Roman Empire generally contained more cavalry, especially in the *limitanei*, were they served as patrol troops.¹⁷ The reason for this increase is because of the greater importance placed on mobility that began during the third-century crisis. Besides the *limitanei*, an unknown number of *comitatenses* may have been temporarily stationed in Egypt at any given time. As the Empire's mobile field army, the *comitatenses* would not have been stationed anywhere for long. In the East, the Field Army was under the command of the *magister militum* of the East or one of two *magistri militum praesentales*.¹⁸

We can observe in the *Notitia* that there was a much higher number of units stationed in Egypt during the fourth century than there had been during the Principate. The *Notitia* does not give us any indication of what the ideal strength of a typical legion

¹⁶ *Or.* XXXI; Alan K. Bowman, "The Military Occupation of Upper Egypt in the Reign of Diocletian," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 15 (1978): 30-3, 38.

¹⁷ Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 105-7.

¹⁸ *Or.* V, VI, VII; Bernhard Palme, "Imperial Presence: Government and Army," in *Egypt and the Byzantine World*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 256.

or cohort listed would have been, which makes determining the size of the garrison in Egypt, not to mention the army as a whole, in this period difficult. By the time of the *Notitia's* compilation, however, the normal legion size of the Roman army was much smaller; legions were only about 1000 men strong but auxiliary cohorts and *alae* remained at about 500. It is impossible to determine when this shift in unit strength occurred but it has sometimes been attributed to Diocletian as part of his overall military reforms.¹⁹

The decrease in legion size was not instituted by Diocletian himself, or by any one emperor, but was part of a gradual process begun under the Tetrarchy. The thousand-man legion had its origins in the detachments of mobile vexillations drawn from full strength legions and usually consisted of about 1000 men. Use of such vexillations had become common during the third century, but with Diocletian vexillations began to be permanently detached from their legions and stationed elsewhere, occasionally in different provinces.²⁰ The goal of such divisions was to spread the soldiers more evenly along the frontiers and was part of Diocletian's overall border policy. This process can be seen at work in Egypt, most explicitly with the third *Diocletiana*. The *Notitia* designates the third *Diocletiana* as being stationed at three different locations in Egypt (Thebes, Ombos, and Andropolis).²¹ Rather than having begun as three separate legions, the third *Diocletiana* was founded as a single legion and later split into three in order to cover more ground. A similar occurrence may also be observed with the *auxilia* in Egypt and

¹⁹ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 47-9 takes this view in opposition to Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 680-1 who argues that Diocletianic legions were the same size as those of the Principate, but cautions that Diocletian may have found several legions to be under-strength as a result of nearly continual war at his accession; Elton, "Warfare and the Military," 327 agrees with Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*; Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 30-3 provide a brief overview of this debate.

²⁰ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 680-1.

²¹ *Or.* XXVIII, XXXI.

the proliferation of smaller forts that was needed to garrison the increased number of smaller units.²² The multitude of units listed in the *Notitia* reflects the outcome of this process of dividing larger units into smaller ones to cover more territory in a time when the reconsolidation of the frontiers was the priority.

While it is still difficult to establish the number of soldiers stationed in Egypt with any precision, an estimate of between 20,000 and 30,000 men is the general consensus.²³ This is higher than the garrison maintained by Egypt during the Principate (perhaps more than twice the size). The increased number of soldiers is in keeping with the amplified recruitment methods of the later Empire. According to Bagnall, this would have only been between 0.5 percent and 0.8 percent of Egypt's population, which would have been roughly the same percentage as in the rest of the Empire's provinces.²⁴

From Diocletian onward the preservation of the borders was a top priority. We have already seen how soldiers were spread more thinly along the frontiers to cover the borders and how larger units were split into smaller ones to achieve this coverage. With troops being extended over a larger space of territory more forts would have to be built in order to provide lodgings. The time of the Tetrarchs saw a proliferation in the construction of fortifications. These forts and outposts served as barracks, administrative and storage centers, as watch posts, visual representations of military authority, and as refuges for civilians. Forts used the geography to their advantage. They were often constructed on hills, at narrow passes, on rivers, and near roads. This way access to and

²² Bowman, "Military Occupation of Upper Egypt," 31-3; Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 31-2; Valerie A. Maxfield, "Where Did They Put the Men? An Enquiry into the Accommodation of soldiers in Roman Egypt," in *The Army and Frontiers of Rome*, ed. William S. Hanson (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2009), 66.

²³ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 175.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

from the province could be restricted and supply could be made easy. Since fewer men needed to be housed, the forts of this period were typically smaller than the larger legionary camps that had previously been the norm.²⁵

The increase of fortifications during the late third and fourth centuries in Egypt is clear in the archaeological record. The archaeological evidence for the army in Egypt during the later Empire is much more extensive than the first three centuries CE because of the number of forts built and the increase and diffusion of soldiers.²⁶ The forts of Roman Egypt in this period were either new constructions or constructed from existing sites (usually old forts). Major forts that date back to the Tetrarchy and survive today are located at Babylon, Luxor, Philae, as well as the oases and desert routes which connected to the Nile to the mines and ports in the Eastern Desert. The Eastern frontier was the most stable and saw the most construction of fortifications, presumably because of the threat posed by the Sassanid Persian Empire. Egypt was a part of the eastern system of fortifications and the Byzantine chronicler John Malalas reports that “Diocletian... built fortresses on the *limes* from Egypt to the Persian borders.”²⁷

The Eastern Desert was more heavily fortified than the desert west of the Nile. About sixty sites have been identified in the Eastern Desert as having some kind of fortification or defensive purpose. The main purpose of these forts was the same in the fourth century as it had been in the preceding centuries to guard the supply routes of the Eastern Desert. These forts would have provided shelter and watering-points for merchants and travelers coming to and from the Red Sea ports. The forts also lodged the

²⁵ See Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 155-74 for fortifications in this period.

²⁶ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 147-8.

²⁷ John Malalas *Chronicles* 12.40, trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies), 1986; with Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 134-5.

soldiers responsible for patrolling these routes, protecting travelers, and guarded mining sites. Furthermore, the forts themselves acted as centers of administration that oversaw the transport of materials and provided logistical support for the commercial and quarrying activities of this region. The most fortified roads are those which end at Coptos and Kaine on the eastern bank of the Nile. Two main roads meet at Coptos, one from Berenice in the southeast and the other from the eastern port at Myos Hormos. Similarly, two roads also meet at Kaine which both originate at 'Abu Sha'ar and run along important quarry sites like Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites.²⁸

The desert on the western side of the Nile was not as heavily fortified; it was not as economically important as the Eastern Desert. However, some forts did exist in the western oases. The forts in the Kharga Oasis give some insight to the overall function of forts in the Western Desert and allow some comparison to their eastern counterparts. The main purpose of the forts of the Kharga Oasis seems to have been to control the access to the area and security of its interior. The great fortress of Qasr el-Ghueita is the most centrally located of the forts in the oasis and enclosed a temple dedicated to Amun. The fort of el Qasr watches the southern end of the oasis and the northern part is protected by Someira and el Deir. The fort of el Deir was the largest fort in the Kharga and is Diocletianic in date.²⁹ The soldiers stationed here would have been concerned with the internal and external security of the oasis as there was some threat from the Blemyes. In earlier periods, protection of trade routes may not have been a major concern in the

²⁸ Valerie A. Maxfield, "The Eastern Desert Forts and the Army in Egypt During the Principate," in *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt*, ed. Donald Bailey (Ann Arbor: The Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), 9-19 gives a more detailed account of these forts and their function; Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 278-92 for the forts, roads, ports, and quarries of the Eastern Desert more generally.

²⁹ Robert Morkot, "The Darb el-Arbain, the Kharga Oasis and its Forts, and Other Desert Routes," in Bailey, 84-7.

Western desert, but beginning in the later Roman Period and Early Middle Ages desert travel increased in this region opening up trade with Sub-Saharan Africa. By the fourth-century, the protection of roads in the Western Desert may have begun to become more of a concern.³⁰

Several forts from the Principate were renovated and reused in Egypt during the later Empire. A clear example of this is the legionary camp at Nicopolis outside of Alexandria that had originally been established by Augustus. Nicopolis was remodeled at different points during the Principate, but in its final form it shared architectural elements similar to other forts built during the Tetrarchic period. By the later Empire, Nicopolis had twenty-four towers that were circular in shape, four gates, and thick walls. It is possible that Nicopolis had been rebuilt by the early fourth century as part of the general strengthening of fortifications in this period.³¹ The site at Babylon also continued to be used throughout the fourth century. The remains of the fortress at Babylon date to the late third century and, again, its structure is similar to other Egyptian forts of this period. Like Nicopolis, the fourth-century fort at Babylon was rebuilt from the earlier stronghold.³²

Most of the military installations of fourth-century Egypt were new creations. The fort at Pelusium, for example, is thought to have been constructed sometime during the third century with other forts in northeastern Egypt being constructed at the end of the century; most of the fortifications in the Eastern and Western Deserts also date to either the late third or early fourth centuries.³³ A well-known fort that can be securely dated to the reign of Diocletian is Luxor at Thebes. The II *Flavia Constantia* is placed by the

³⁰ Ibid, 87-94.

³¹ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 192-3.

³² Ibid, 204; Peter Sheehan, "The Roman Fortress of Babylon in Old Cairo," in Baily, 95-7.

³³ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 193-4, 201.

Notitia in the Thebaid at Cusae.³⁴ Based on epigraphical evidence, however, it has been argued that this legion was originally stationed at Luxor after the fort was first constructed and that the legion took its name from the Tetrarch Constantius confirming that Luxor dates back to the Tetrarchy.³⁵ The fort at Luxor had been converted from a temple of Amun-Min originally built by Amenhotep III and Ramses II and contained many similarities to Nicopolis, such as its many towers and heavy fortifications.³⁶ A fort that can surely be assigned to the reign of Diocletian is Philae. Procopius clearly states that it was Diocletian who constructed a “very strong fortress” (*phourion*) at Philae after he moved Egypt’s border back to this point.³⁷

Dionysias, located in the Fayyum’s Arsinoite nome, is famous as the headquarters of the cavalry officer Abinnaeus whose documents still survive today. The surviving documents of Abinnaeus give us some insight into the functions and workings of the fort. The fort was strategically placed to supervise the road that linked the Fayyum to the western oases and the copper mines in between.³⁸ The construction of Dionysias was completed by the early fourth century. Its construction is typical of the smaller forts built in Egypt at this time with only one gate, a combination of rounded and square towers, it housed a cavalry *ala*, and supported the civil administration of the nome and stored the *annona*. Furthermore, the fort seems to have been constructed with some swiftness as there is some lack of symmetry in its design and building materials taken from other structures were used in its construction.³⁹

³⁴ Or. XXXIII.

³⁵ M. P. Speidel and M. F. Pavkovic, “Legion II Flavia Constantia at Luxor,” *The American Journal of Philology* 110.1 (1989): 151-4.

³⁶ Ibid, 203.

³⁷ Procopius, *History of the Wars* I.19.34.

³⁸ Bagnall and Rathbone, *Egypt*, 140.

³⁹ V. Martin, 19-21, *Abinnaeus Archive*.

Although there were forts in Egypt during the Principate, most of the surviving ones date to the later Empire when there was a great escalation in their construction beginning in the late third century. The fortifications of this period share many similar characteristics: they consisted of thick walls, heavily fortified gates, contained several towers, and were meant to be more permanent than military camps of earlier periods of Roman history. The more heavily fortified forts of the late Empire are consistent with the emperors' policies of defense and border consolidation. Another notable feature of many of these forts is that several of them reused materials from nearby structures, like temples, or were even situated in derelict temples.⁴⁰ Based on the locations of these forts, their functions were varied. They served the obvious purpose of guarding the borders of the province, watched over the desert roads and supply routes, protected travelers and watering points, oversaw the transport of supplies, provided shelter to villages in times of danger, and acted as administrative centers in their region.

During the Principate, the responsibility of arms manufacturing lay with the workshops of individual legionary camps. Beginning with Diocletian, however, the manufacturing of equipment became more efficient and was centralized in state-regulated arms factories called *fabricae*. Lactantius and John Malalas both associate Diocletian with the construction of several arms factories.⁴¹ The construction of *fabricae* were part of Diocletian's overall building projects and were an element in the complete overhaul of the army and administrative systems. Each of the major *fabricae* was responsible for the production of certain materials (i.e. sword, armor, shields, etc.). The *Notitia Dignitatum*

⁴⁰ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 204-7.

⁴¹ Lactantius, 7.9 and Malalas, 12.38.

records the locations of these factories and what each one produced.⁴² As is evidenced by the *Notitia*, *fabricae* were located in frontier zones (although not directly on the borders) on major roadways to facilitate transportation and near the soldiers which they would have supplied. According to the *Notitia*, the supervision of the *fabricae* was left to the *magister officiorum*. The consolidation of arms production and its placement under a civil magistrate helped lessen the threat of revolt from a military commander.⁴³ Another notable feature about the locations of the *fabricae* is that many were constructed in regions that were already centers of production. Such areas would have been a natural choice since they would have already provided the necessary resources for large scale production.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that no *fabrica* has been positively identified in the archaeological record, and until one is excavated the everyday operations of one cannot be discussed in any detail.⁴⁵

Since *fabricae* were built in major manufacturing centers, it should be no surprise that none are listed in Egypt by the *Notitia* since Egypt's economy was agriculturally based. The closest *fabricae* to Egypt were those located in the Eastern Diocese at Damascus, Antioch, Edessa, and Irenopolis in Cilicia. John Malalas attributes the construction of the arms factories at Damascus, Antioch, and Edessa to Diocletian which would make the *fabrica* at Irenopolis a later construction.⁴⁶ It is reasonable to assert that the army in Egypt was mainly equipped by the *fabricae* of the Eastern Diocese because of their proximity and Egypt's original status as a part of that diocese. Furthermore, the

⁴² *Or.* XI for the eastern provinces and *Oc.* IX for the western.

⁴³ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 89-94.

⁴⁴ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 89.

⁴⁵ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 90-3.

⁴⁶ *Or.* XI; Malalas, 12.38.

cities which contained these factories were situated on major roads of the eastern half of the Empire leading to Egypt providing the most efficient means of transport.

The military policies of the later emperors were concerned with defense and the reestablishment and preservation of the frontiers after the anarchy of the third century. We can see this policy taking place in Egypt with Diocletian's retraction of the southern border and strengthening of Egypt's frontiers. The *Notitia* shows the distribution of the military units stationed in Egypt. An examination of this evidence shows that the main concern was the borders of the province where an invasion would be most likely, exactly the same as in earlier periods of Roman occupation in Egypt. The major difference between the army which occupied the country during the Principate and the army of fourth-century Egypt were its organization and size. By the early fourth century, the civil and military leadership of Egypt had been separated, as in the rest of the Empire, and instead of being under the command of a prefect, who was also the civil governor of all of Egypt, the province was divided up, with each region having its own civil governor and military commander. This created a higher level of bureaucratization but also placed less power with magistrates and commanders. The army expanded in size due to Diocletian's increased recruitment measures and Egypt's garrison may have doubled in size. Units gradually became smaller as they were divided up in order to cover more territory and more forts were built to accommodate them. Finally, the centralization of arms production took place as part of Diocletian's reconstitution of military administration and continued throughout the fourth century.

Although the army was strategically placed to ward off an external enemy, no major invasion threatened Egypt in the fourth-century. Other military responsibilities

included the guarding of trade routes and travelers and the supervision of mines or quarries. Occasionally soldiers may have had to defend their nome from desert raiders or ensure domestic order, but no major fighting occurred in this period. Most of the military's interactions were with the civilian populace of Egypt rather than a foreign enemy. The next chapters will look at the army's relationship with Egyptian society, first at the army as a social institution and then the role the army played in provincial society.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ARMY AS A PROVINCIAL INSTITUTION

This chapter will examine how the army existed as an institution within Egyptian society during the fourth century. The Roman army was the largest and most costly organization in the Empire with its presence felt in every province. Although the army is often looked at as its own distinct establishment, it is important to remember that the military did not act in isolation from provincial society. Soldiers existed alongside the civilian populations they were meant to protect. In turn, the army received support from the local populace who were required to provide supplies and recruits for the army and bear the financial burden of a military garrison. To understand the army's existence as a provincial institution in Egypt, we must begin to look at the interactions between soldiers and civilians and the everyday concerns of the army. Among the topics that will be discussed are the legal and social status of soldiers and veterans in the province, the recruitment of new soldiers, and the social networks of soldiers and veterans. The established practices of the fourth-century army had their origins with the reforms instituted by Diocletian and Constantine, and were in many cases either the re-establishment or formalization of practices already taking place.

An important feature of the late Roman army that began to emerge in the early fourth century is the distinction between the *limitanei* (border troops) and *comitatenses*

(field armies). The origins of this division probably arose sometime during the third century when soldiers were drafted from their main unit to make up a mobile field army to accompany emperors on the move. This precedent was later solidified under the military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine in their efforts to reconsolidate the *limites* (borders) by having troops perpetually stationed on them and maintain permanent, mobile field armies.¹ The soldiers stationed in Egypt would have been part of the *limitanei* as they were meant to be a permanent garrison for the province. The vast majority of soldiers of the late Empire would have been frontier troops. Other names besides *limitanei* are used in our sources when denoting the frontier troops, such as *riparienses*, *ripenses*, *castellani*, and *burgarii*. It is unclear whether these names were meant to signify different status levels or if they were used interchangeably when referring to frontier soldiers.² Each of these terms is indicative of the frontiers or stationary soldiers. *Limitanei* refers broadly to the people on the *limites* (borders); *ripenses* and *riparienses* denotes the river banks, which often acted as a boundary, and the people on them; *castellani* and *burgarii* refer to soldiers garrisoned in camps or forts. It is uncertain if these terms were official designations.

Although it is difficult to discern the exact implications of these different terms, it has been pointed out that the *ripenses* seem to occupy a higher level of status based on evidence from the *Codex Theodosianus*.³ In a law of Constantine, dated June 17, 325, the legal status of the different troop classes and veterans is clearly established. In this law the clearest distinction is made between the field and frontier armies and the division of

¹ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 15-20 for the field armies of Diocletian and Constantine and 35-7 for the *limitanei*.

² Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 99.

³ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 36.

the two can be said to be official at this point. The *comitatenses* and the emperor's bodyguards make up the field army, while the frontier armies consist of *ripenses*, *alares*, and *cohortales*. The *ripenses*, although a part of the frontier troops, seem to be a higher grade of *limitanei* higher in rank than *alares* and *cohortales* but not on the same level as the field army. Evidence for the distinction resides in the number of tax exemptions veterans of the different branches received and is dependent on their length of service. All enlisted soldiers were exempt from the capitation tax; veterans of the *alares* and *cohortales* maintained only this tax break while those of the *ripenses* were able to extend it to their wives; veterans of the field army who completed their terms of service were able to exempt themselves, their wives, and their parents and were able to claim further exemptions for their property if they lacked any of the previously-stated family members who qualified for exemption.⁴ It appears that the word *limitanei* was used as an umbrella term to refer to the border troops made up of *alares* and *cohortales*, and that the *ripenses* was a slightly higher class of border soldiers, perhaps responsible for guarding and patrolling rivers.⁵

It is uncertain if troops of the *ripenses* existed in Egypt. The *Notitia Dignitatum* does not list any unit specifically as *ripenses*, but it does reference several commanders of frontier areas situated on rivers, most notably on the Danube.⁶ It can be inferred that the soldiers under these commanders were known as *ripenses*. Egypt is not referred to as one of these river frontiers. The term *ripenses* seems to be reserved for provinces whose boundaries are constituted by a river; even though the Nile is an important feature of Egypt, it does not act as a boundary for the country. The overseeing of the transport of

⁴ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.20.4 cf. 7.13.7.3.

⁵ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 36.

⁶ *Oc.* I, II, V, XI, XXXI, XXXIV, *Or.* I, III, XLII.

the *annona* down the Nile was undoubtedly an important responsibility of the soldiers stationed in Egypt, but river patrol was not their main duty as it may have been for the soldiers in provinces bordered by a river. It is still not clear why the soldiers on the river frontiers received special favor over other border troops. It may be reasoned that to serve on a river patrol required some special skill or that the job entailed extra hazards being on less stable borders. It has also been suggested that the term *ripenses* simply referred to a higher grade of *limitanei*.⁷ If this is true, then the legionary and cavalry vexillations in Egypt may be of this higher class and had the privileges of the *ripenses* as defined in the law. Whatever the case, there seems to be no direct reference to soldiers in Egypt as *ripenses*.

The *limitanei*, serving in frontier provinces like Egypt, came to be regarded as subpar soldiers, made up of less desirable recruits, tied to the land they defended as cultivators whose service became hereditary.⁸ This view likely came about because of the lesser status of the *limitanei* and its veterans in Roman law and their stationary nature. This assessment of the *limitanei* is more reflective of the sixth century and should not be applied to the *limitanei* of the fourth century.⁹ The *limitanei* of the fourth century were not bound to any land as militia farmers. If they were, there would not be fourth century laws stipulating that veterans of the frontier armies should be granted land upon retirement.¹⁰ Furthermore, the letters of the *Abinnaeus Archive*, which contain the documents of a fourth-century cavalry commander in Egypt, do not give any indication of enrolled soldiers working as land cultivators. If they did work their own land, it would

⁷ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 36.

⁸ This perception likely had its genesis with *Codex Justiniana* 1.27.2.8.

⁹ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 653; Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, 36.

¹⁰ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.20.3, 8, 11; Jones 650.

imply that there was some level of self-sufficiency among the *limitanei* which was not the case since they were rationed by the state or supplied by the civilians.¹¹ Hereditary service should not be seen as a particular mark of the *limitanei*, at least not in the fourth century. The sons of veterans of both the *comitatenses* and *limitanei* were required to serve in the army and could be recruited to either branch.¹² The effectiveness of the *limitanei* as a fighting force in Egypt at this time is difficult to assess given the lack of any major fighting. The inactivity of soldiers in the more peaceful provinces, such as Egypt, helped contribute to the negative view of the *limitanei*. By the sixth century, however, it appears that the soldiers of the *limitanei* did work land on the borders, possibly as a result of past veterans receiving land that then became hereditary.¹³

Several new recruitment policies were enacted in the early fourth century by Diocletian and Constantine to strengthen the army. In many cases, these new policies seem to be the formalization of practices already taking place. Volunteers were always welcome in the army, but most of the recruits were men conscripted for service. The conscription of recruits took three main forms: the sons of soldiers were expected to enroll in the military, annual levies were carried out in which landowners were obligated to offer up recruits, and barbarians settled within the empire were required to provide recruits in exchange for their land.¹⁴ Several laws in the *Codex Theodosianus* (particularly 7.1.5 and 7.22) confirm that the sons of soldiers, including officers, were required to serve in the military or, if unfit for military service, to act as decurions in their local *curia* or perform some other compulsory administrative service. It is impossible to

¹¹ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 650-1.

¹² *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.1.5, 8 and 7.22; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 650.

¹³ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 653-4; Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 87; *Novels of Theodosius II*, 24.4.

¹⁴ Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 128-30.

determine how this was enforced, but the repeated proclamation of the law throughout the fourth century may indicate that it was not enforced with any regularity and that it was not always followed. Annual recruitment and forced conscription are also present in Roman law and show that landowners were required to provide recruits in accordance to the amount of land they owned, which means that the burden would have fallen on rural areas.¹⁵ Again, the frequency with which these laws were repeated may be a sign that they were difficult to enforce and sometimes ignored. Money could also be paid by landowners in place of recruits, with a recruit usually being valued at thirty *solidi* plus the six *solidi* required for a recruit's expenses.¹⁶ These recruitment procedures applied to the whole empire, and we can see many of them taking place in Egypt.

As has already been established, despite the foreign names of some of the units which appear in the *Notitia* for Egypt, the garrison of Egypt was largely made up of local recruits.¹⁷ The widespread methods of recruitment in the fourth century have led some, such as the hostile Lactantius, to believe that a huge burden was placed on the manpower of the empire.¹⁸ The reality of the situation is more difficult to assess, however, since we have no firm recruitment statistics from this period, and it is unclear how thoroughly the conscription laws were carried out. The number of recruits needed to maintain the garrison of Egypt probably would not have put much of a strain on the country's manpower. Palme has argued that the army in Egypt would have needed around 1430 new recruits each year to preserve a garrison that was about 22,000 strong, while still

¹⁵ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 615; *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.13.12, 18; *Novels of Valentinian*, 6.1; also see Ammianus, 31.4

¹⁶ Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 615-616; *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.13.2, 7, 13, 14; *Novels of Valentinian III*, 6.3; Ammianus, 19.11.7 and 31.4.4.

¹⁷ See above; also six units in the *Notitia* are described as being *indigenae*, *Or.* XXXI.

¹⁸ Lactantius 7 accuses Diocletian of bleeding the empire dry; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 60 also believes that Diocletian's recruitment policies "put a strain on the manpower of the empire."

allowing for an annual discharge of around 810 men. This would have averaged out to 30 conscripts annually from each nome.¹⁹ Bagnall suggests that a slightly higher number of recruits per year was needed; approximately 2000 men. This would require each nome to provide 40 or 50 men or for a village to offer one conscript every other year. Bagnall posits that this would not have been a significant drain on Egypt, assuming a population of roughly 4.2 million.²⁰

We are fortunate that in Egypt we have much documentary evidence for recruitment in the form of papyri. The most accessible collection of military papyri of this period is the already referenced *Abinnaeus Archive*, which contains the letters of a cavalry officer of the Arsinoite nome. Evidence of forced conscription appears in an angry letter from Chaeremon, a local official, who is complaining about the unlawful, at least in his view, recruitment of men from Theoxenis. In the letter, Chaeremon threatens to report Abinnaeus to the *dux* (*P. Abinn.* 18). It is impossible to determine whether Abinnaeus was overstepping his authority by conscripting these men or if he was acting under an imperial mandate. Another letter (*P. Abinn.* 17) does refer to a visit of an Imperial notary (*despotikos notarios*) for the purpose of enrolling recruits. However, there is no way to know whether these two instances are related since no firm date for either letter can be established. What is important is that this letter shows an example of compulsory recruitment.

Other letters of the *Abinnaeus Archive* provide further evidence of the recruitment procedure described in the *Codex Theodosianus*. In a letter to Abinnaeus (*P. Abinn.* 19), a man writes on behalf of his brother-in-law, who has been recruited because “[h]e is a

¹⁹ Palme, *Imperial Presence*, 262.

²⁰ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 175; While Bagnall promotes the smaller 4.2 million population for Egypt, he does note that the traditional figure is about 7 million, which he believes is unwarranted.

soldier's son," asking that he be excused from service because his mother is a widow and is reliant on him. The letter goes on to ask that he at least be kept from serving in the field army. This letter shows that the sons of soldiers were expected to enroll in the military. It also indicates that recruiting officers had at least some control over whether a recruit would be drafted into the *limitanei* or *comitatenses*, probably based on the attributes of the recruit. Also, since this letter indicates that there was a chance the recruit could serve in either the *limitanei* or *comitatenses*, it shows that he was not bound to replace his father as a border soldier

Sons following their fathers into the army already had a history in Egypt, as well as the rest of the Empire, before it was made an official policy. By the early second century, if not before, the increasing tendency to recruit locally led to a growing amount of recruits being drawn from areas of veteran settlement. Military service began to develop naturally as a kind of hereditary occupation.²¹ Karanis, in particular, had a substantial veteran community from which many recruits were levied.²² There is a second-century letter written by a recruit stationed at Misenum to his family in Karanis, and it is tempting, but by no means certain, to think that this recruit is following in his father's occupation (*Select Papyri* 12 = *BGU* 423). By the fourth century, it is clear that the recruitment of soldiers' sons had become a legally sanctioned practice based on an established tradition.

Another letter written to Abinnaeus by Paesius, who addresses Abinnaeus as his patron, concerns what appears to be a recruiting operation. In the letter, Paesius writes

²¹ Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Harvard: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 166-7; Hubert Devijver, "The Roman Army in Egypt (with Special Reference to the Militiae Equestres)," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.1 (Berlin/NY 1974): 456-8.

²² Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 50-1.

that he and his son, who was on the prefect of Egypt's staff, spent three days in Karanis but were not able "to drag away a single man." The village instead offered "2 *solidi* and 50 talents of silver" (*P. Abinn.* 35). Here is a clear instance of money being offered in lieu of recruits. It is not stated how many recruits this payment was meant to replace, but it is considerably less than the stated value of a soldier in the *Codex Theodosianus*.²³ This law, which declares that 36 *solidi* should be paid in place of a recruit, was not issued until 375, and the incident recorded in *P. Abinn.* 35 would have occurred in the mid-fourth century. There may not have been an official sum to be paid in placement of a recruit in the time of Abinnaeus and laws were later issued to ensure that an acceptable amount was being paid.

A man had to be fit for service if he was going to be drafted into the army, so guidelines were established to determine if a man was fit enough for military service. Vegetius, whose fourth-century military treatise (*De Re Militari*) calls for a reform of the army based on earlier models, describes the physical attributes of an ideal recruit:

The young soldier, therefore, ought to have a lively eye, should carry his head erect, his chest should be broad, his shoulders muscular and brawny, his fingers long, his arms strong, his waist small, his shape easy, his legs and feet rather nervous than fleshy. When all these marks are found in a recruit, a little height may be dispensed with, since it is much more important that a soldier be strong than tall.²⁴

Vegetius' description shows the importance placed on a potential recruit's strength and appearance, and is a representation of the qualities that recruiting officers should look for

²³ 7.13.7; In the earlier Roman period 50 talents would be a considerable sum of money, but the inflation of the later Empire had drastically reduced its value. For prices and currency in this period see Roger S. Bagnall and P. J. Sijpesteijn, "Currency in the Fourth Century and the Date of CPR V 26," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 24 (1977): 114-21.

²⁴ Vegetius, *De Re Militari* 1.6, trans. John Clarke (Harrisburg, PA: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1944).

when examining a new recruit. Vegetius' account was meant to show the ideal recruit; to what extent his recommendations were followed is uncertain. Two laws in the *Codex Theodosianus* do declare physical requirements for recruits, but not nearly as in much detail as Vegetius; a law of Constantius (7.13.1) decrees that recruits should at least be eighteen years of age and a law of Valentinian and Valens (7.12.3) orders that recruits must be "at least five feet seven inches tall." An early sixth-century papyrus, which appears to be a letter of recommendation, highlights a prospective recruit's physical strength, social and familial background, and age (*P. Ryl.* 609). The physical examination of a new recruit was not a development of the fourth century. An early second-century papyrus contains information about new recruits concerning any distinguishing physical marks and their age; based on this evidence, most recruits were in their early twenties (*RMR* 87 = *P. Oxy.* 1022).

Most of the soldiers who made up the army in Egypt during the fourth century were local recruits. Throughout most of the first century, however, it appears that many of Egypt's soldiers were recruited from outside of the province. The XXII *Legio Deiotariana*, for example, drew many of its recruits from Galatia, where it was founded, for some time. A large percentage of recruits came from other parts of Asia Minor as well as Africa and Syria.²⁵ Even though a preference for local recruitment began in the second century, the army was by no means reliant on local levies, as an early second-century papyrus, which references a total of 126 new recruits from Asia, indicates (*RMR* 74 = *PSI* 1063).²⁶ By the fourth century, most recruitment for the *limitanei* of a province was done locally as it was most convenient. Since these recruits were local, the army of fourth-

²⁵ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 42-43.

²⁶ It should be noted that Fink, 277-8 points out that recruits were being drawn from other provinces to replace losses from the Jewish Rebellion.

century Egypt should not be seen as part of a “civilizing mission” or pacification force as was more so the case in the early Empire. Egypt had been under Roman rule for centuries and might be thought of as sufficiently Romanized. Furthermore, the recruits, as part of Egypt’s provincial society, would not have been seen as a force of occupation in opposition to the civilian population.²⁷ However, recruits may not have been exclusively local. Some specialized units, especially cavalry, would have come from other parts of the Empire, and it is thought that Abinnaeus and his unit was Syrian; this argument is based partly on the cavalry unit Abinnaeus commanded which is thought to have been a corps of Parthian Archers and also the etymology of the name Abinnaeus.²⁸

Various benefits were offered to soldiers to encourage enlistment. Besides the exemption from the poll tax, soldiers were also presented monetary donatives. These donatives were granted to soldiers at various times, but were usually offered when they enlisted, on the accession of an emperor, or on the anniversary of an emperor’s accession, often the quinquennial. The amount a soldier was offered could vary, but known amounts range from five to thirty *solidi*, which was not an inconsiderable sum.²⁹ Despite these generous benefits, military service was not entirely popular. There are several laws in the *Codex Theodosianus* (7.18) concerning draft evasion and deserters (who for the most part seem to have been new recruits attempting to keep their enlistment donative and avoid military service).³⁰ There are also three laws that appear in the *Codex Theodosianus* (7.13.4, 5, 10) which imply that it was not uncommon (it was common enough that

²⁷ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 177.

²⁸ *P. Abinn.* 1; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 176; Turner, *Abinnaeus Archive*, 7; for Abinnaeus’ career see Michael Woloch, “Flavius Abinnaeus: A Note,” *Hermes* 96.5 (1968): 758-60 and T. D. Barnes, “The Career of Abinnaeus,” *Phoenix* 39.4 (1985): 368-74.

²⁹ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 58-59; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 176; *P. Lond.* 3. 982 shows that a new recruit was given 5 *solidi* upon enlistment, see with J. R. Rea, “Letter of a Recruit: P. Lond. III. 982,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 115 (1997): 189-93.

³⁰ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 176.

multiple laws reference it) for men to remove one of their fingers to avoid military service. According to these laws, men who maimed themselves were still liable for some service to the state either administratively or in some menial military position.

Landowners were held accountable for any tenants who injured themselves in the hope of avoiding military service. Proof that such attempts were made is evidenced by a late fourth-century letter from Egypt in which the writer attempted to avoid service on account of his amputated finger (*P. Herm. 7*).³¹

More rewards followed for soldiers who successfully completed their military careers. Veterans had long been granted some kind of recompense and special privileges for their service upon retirement; they often received land to settle on or cash remuneration, were given tax breaks, and citizenship was granted to the non-Roman auxiliaries. The exact kind of compensation received by veterans depended largely on the policies of individual emperors during the Principate.³² Veteran privileges are more clearly demarcated in the fourth century. Constantine officially re-conferred the special privileges of veterans after his civil wars, possibly because the bestowal of these privileges had lapsed or, more probably, to win the favor of the troops. Constantine's concessions to veterans included the exemption from compulsory public services and immunity from municipal and marketplace taxes.³³ Further laws of Constantine more clearly define the rights of veterans and the length of service required to obtain them. A law of the 320s states that veterans shall be given unoccupied lands upon their retirement,

³¹ See with Constantine Zuckerman, "The Hapless Recruit Psois and the Mighty Anchorite, Apa John," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 32 (1995): 186-8.

³² Southern, *The Roman Army*, 162-8

³³ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.20.2.

and that they shall be held free of tax.³⁴ Tax exemptions of higher grade troops extended to their immediate family, but only if they received an honorable discharge after twenty-four years of service.³⁵ The successors of Constantine continued to reissue these same privileges throughout the fourth-century in order to maintain the special status of veterans.³⁶

The documentary evidence from Egypt establishes that many of these privileges were indeed granted to veterans, or were supposed to be. Flavius Priscus, a veteran who received an honorable discharge, confirms his status as a landowner in a letter to Abinnaeus dated June 23, 343 (*P. Abinn.* 45). While it is not unequivocally established in the letter, the land he owns was probably granted to Flavius Priscus as a result of his military service. Earlier examples of papyri show that special privileges had long been granted to veterans in Egypt. Even in the second century veterans were given exemptions from the capitation tax and compulsory services and received land upon retirement. A papyrus from 149 CE (*SB* 12508) shows a soldier being freed from the payment of the capitation tax after twenty-five years of service. Another papyrus from 172 CE (*BGU* 180 = *Select Papyri* 285) is a petition from a veteran complaining that he has been selected for a liturgy in spite of his status. While this petition provides evidence that veterans were to be exempt from compulsory services, it also shows that this rule may have been difficult to enforce and that the status of veterans was sometimes ignored. These concessions continued to be granted during the late Empire. Undoubtedly, the most sought-after prize was the Roman citizenship granted to veterans after an honorable

³⁴ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.20.3.

³⁵ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.20.4.

³⁶ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.20.6, 8, 11.

discharge at the end of their service.³⁷ After the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, the conferral of citizenship upon veterans would have ceased, except for in the case of foreigners serving in the army, and the granting of citizenship is not to be found in the subsequent legislation concerning veterans since all of the Empire's free inhabitants were made citizens by this edict.

Although the army did not comprise its own caste separate from the rest of society, it is evident that some kind of social network did exist among soldiers and veterans in which patronage played a major role. Alston's case study of the Fayyum village Karanis showed that an interconnected web of veterans and veterans' families with close military ties did exist. These relationships played an important role in social and career promotion for family and friends of veterans. Veterans used their connections to act as benefactors.³⁸ Evidence for such a social network is present in some of the letters of the *Abinnaeus Archive*. In a letter written to Abinnaeus (*P. Abinn. 33*), a man named Clematius requests that leave be granted to his relative, a soldier under Abinnaeus' command named Ision. In the letter, Clematius makes reference to other family members, one who is an aide in the camp and another who is a landowning veteran. Clematius makes these references to show his kinship connection to the military in hopes of Abinnaeus looking more favorably upon his request. In another, already referenced, letter to Abinnaeus (*P. Abinn. 45*), the veteran Flavius Priscus mentions his wife, Alia, who is the daughter of a soldier. Priscus' marriage to the daughter of another soldier may show how veterans maintained ties to the military community. However, it is hard to say how representative Clematius' case was without more evidence. In a final

³⁷ *Select Papyri* 315 shows the process of examination of veteran in order to certify citizenship.

³⁸ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 137.

letter (*P. Abinn.* 59), Aurelius Plas, a veteran, writes to Abinnaeus, now retired, asking him to secure the promotion of his son “to the rank of *decurio* of the camp at Dionysias” and promises to repay him in return. This letter is a good example of Abinnaeus’ patronage of a veteran, and shows that Abinnaeus still must have retained some influence in the military community especially at his old fort at Dionysias. That such networks of patronage and support existed in military communities should not be surprising; veterans tended to settle near other veterans and they maintained their military contacts to ensure support in the social sphere.

As part of the military reorganization of the late third and early fourth centuries, new practices were introduced, or re-introduced, into the Roman army concerning recruitment and the legal status of soldiers and veterans. New social realities within the army began to emerge with these changes. An important consequence was that a clear social and legal distinction began to be seen between the *limitanei* and *comitatenses* which continued to be broadened throughout the later Empire. The levying of new recruits also became more wide-ranging with the introduction of forced conscription, the requirement that landowners provide men for the army, and the stipulation that the sons of soldiers had to serve in the military. Once a soldier completed his term of service and received an honorable discharge, he would enjoy several tax exemptions and ownership of a plot of land. After retirement, veterans retained close ties to each other and to the military, forming an interconnected web of social connections that could be used for their own benefits. All of these changes can be seen taking place in Egypt, and many of them were the culmination of a process of evolution formalized in the fourth century.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ARMY AND PROVINCIAL SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

The final aspect of the Roman army in fourth-century Egypt to be examined is its impression on the provincial society and economy. It has been stressed throughout this study that the army did not exist in isolation from the civilians of a province. The army was a key institution in provincial societies and played a major social and economic role in the provinces. Interactions between soldiers and civilians were much more common than those between soldiers and foreign enemies. Most exchanges between soldiers and civilians would have taken place as part of a soldier's official capacity as a representative of the Imperial administration. Soldiers, especially officers, would have acted as justice administrators in their locale. The army also assisted in the collection of taxes and the *annona*, as either attendants to the collectors or sometimes as the collectors themselves. The presence of a large military garrison had a major impact on the province's economy. These social and economic interactions between the army and civilians will be observed in this chapter. The role of the army in provincial society changed little from the first through fourth centuries, but the economic and civic reforms of Diocletian led to a greater level of administrative centralization in the province.

The army's presence in a province could have a significant effect on that region's economy. The civilian population of the province bore the financial responsibilities of the provincial garrison and provided most of its supplies. It is debatable how much of a the

army would have placed on Egypt's population. The presence of the army can be seen to have had both positive and negative influences on local economies. The army could act as an economic stimulus on the frontiers since much of the imperial revenue found its way to provinces where soldiers were stationed, and the supply of the army enhanced the trade routes of the Empire. Conversely, the army could have a damaging effect on provincial economies as it was a drain on a region's financial resources.¹ Alston argues that the army of the Principate did not have much of an impact, negatively or positively, on Egypt. Alston further goes on to assert that Egypt was able to comfortably support its garrison and that the presence of soldiers did not create economic growth. This argument is based on the supposed population of Roman Egypt (which Alston accepts as being around five million) and its comparatively small garrison which would have only consumed about two percent of Egypt's yearly tax revenues (estimated at around 1,220,000 *drachmae*).²

The next question that must be asked is if the army of the fourth century was as easily supported. The expansion of the army and increased taxation might suggest that the maintenance of the army placed a greater financial burden on the provinces. Bagnall contends that the taxes of the later Empire would not have been a major encumbrance on the population although a more efficient and centralized system of taxation was now in place. Bagnall also estimates that the military expenditure in Egypt was less than ten percent of Egypt's revenue.³ This is higher than the two percent that the Egyptian garrison required during the Principate, but it is still not a debilitating amount. It is difficult to determine the exact reason behind the increase in the percentage of tax

¹ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 102-3.

² *Ibid*, 112-15.

³ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 172.

revenue necessary to support the army in the later period. Part of the cause behind the increase was likely the larger garrison that Egypt contained in the fourth century. Another factor may have been that there was a smaller tax base in this period. Depopulation was a problem of the third century, and the population of Egypt seems to have suffered. Alston asserts that the population of Egypt during the first three centuries was about five million, but he recognizes that the more traditional view for Egypt's population is between eight to ten million.⁴ By Late Antiquity a total population of 4.2 million is proposed by Bagnall who, like Alston, does not accept the eight to ten million estimate for the population of Egypt during the Roman period.⁵

A major financial problem inherited from the third century was the increasing inflation of prices and devaluation of Roman coinage. A letter from Egypt (*P. Oxy.* 1411), dated to the year 260, laments the depreciation of the coinage that is no longer acceptable as a form of payment. One measure taken by Diocletian to combat inflation was the issuing of the "Edict on Maximum Prices" in 301, which was meant to set a price cap on all purchasable goods. The edict declares:

Who, therefore, does not know that insolence, covertly attacking the public welfare – wherever the public safety demands that our armies be directed, not in villages or towns only, but on every road – comes to the mind of the profiteer to extort prices for merchandise...and finally that sometimes in a single purchase a soldier is deprived of his bonus and salary, and that the contribution of the whole world to support the armies falls to the abominable profits of thieves, so that our soldiers seem with their own hands to offer the hopes of their service and their completed labors

⁴ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 112.

⁵ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 175; Also, for the decline of agricultural output and the subsequent lower rates of land taxation, see Roger S. Bagnall, "Agricultural Productivity and Taxation in Later Roman Egypt," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 115 (1985): 289-308.

to the profiteers, with the result that the pillagers of the nation constantly seize more than they know how to hold.⁶

The claim that a soldier might spend all of his money on one purchase is surely an exaggeration, but it underscores that the support of the military was a prime factor in Diocletian's decision to issue the edict. Such a decree would prove difficult to enforce, and the edict does not appear to have been very effective in controlling prices.⁷ The introduction of the *solidus* by Constantine and the collection of taxes in kind would help to curb the economic problems of the fourth century, and would be used as a method of paying soldiers. However, the situation may not have been as critical as the inflation levels suggest since prices were often changed to adhere to the fluctuating worth of coins and most people's wealth was based on "land, livestock, produce, and bullion."⁸

The pay of soldiers would have weighed heavily on the Empire's treasury. During the Principate soldiers received fixed rates of pay.⁹ The most complete piece of documentary evidence that provides pay information for Roman soldiers comes from first-century Egypt (*RMR 58 = P. Gen. Lat. 1*). This document is a pay record of two soldiers: Quintus Julius Proclus, from Damascus, and Gaius Valerius Germanus, from Tyre. It is uncertain whether they were legionaries or auxiliaries.¹⁰ This record shows that these men were paid three times in the year 81 and each payment consisted of 247 ½ *drachmae*. Deductions are shown with each payment to cover the soldiers' expenses (e.g., food, clothing, and other supplies). As early as the first century, then, the cost of a

⁶ "Edict on Maximum Prices," in Tenney, 314.

⁷ For evidence of continued price inflation, see the list of prices collected in Bagnall and Sijpesteijn, 116-19.

⁸ Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs*, 93-4.

⁹ For military pay rates and the evidence for it, see Richard Alston, "Roman Military Pay from Caesar to Diocletian," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 113-120.

¹⁰ M. Alexander Speidel, "Roman Army Pay Scales," *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 92-7, argues that it is the document is representative of auxiliary pay, while Alston, "Roman Military Pay," 116-17, believes them to be legionaries.

soldier's supplies was taken out of his pay. As we have already seen, by the fourth century, because of the debasement of coinage and high levels of inflation, it became standard practice for soldiers to be paid in kind with occasional donatives from the emperor.

Payment in kind mostly consisted of provisions for the military requisitioned from the province in which soldiers were stationed. Egypt provides us with good evidence for the logistics associated with provisioning the army. The system of military supply became more centralized beginning with the institution of the *annona militaris* in the late third century than it had been during the Principate. The *annona militaris* acted as a form of taxation in kind to that was meant to supply the army. Two views have been put forth on the provisioning of the army in Egypt during the first three centuries CE. In Alston's assessment, there was no uniform method for the supply of the army in this period. Rather, it was the responsibility of commanders of individual units to obtain supplies from nearby villages and make arrangements with the village officials for the method of repayment.¹¹ However, a different view is taken up by Adams. According to Adams, the supply system in Egypt during the Principate was highly bureaucratized with the government playing a central role. Adams argues that the size of Egypt's garrison would have necessitated central organization. It was the prefect, then, who was responsible for the supply of the army; his orders were carried out by the *strategoï*, and then liturgists gathered the supplies for the military to collect. Responsibility for the supply of the army

¹¹ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 110-12.

eventually fell to the *boulai* when they were introduced in 200. This method of supply acted as the groundwork for the system put into place by the fourth century.¹²

During the fourth century, the praetorian prefect was in charge of the overall supply of the army, but the real responsibility for supply fell to the town councils of provinces made up by the local elite. It was from these councilmen that liturgists were chosen to carry out the collection of supplies for the military.¹³ The most detailed insight into the collection and distribution of supplies to the army in this period comes from *P. Panop. Beatty* 1-2 which contains several letters and official instructions from provincial magistrates concerning Diocletian's impending visit to Panopolis in Egypt at the end of the third century. The supply of the army is a major concern in the pieces of papyri, and we can see the mechanics of the *annona militaris* at work in these documents. *P. Beatty Panop.* 1 shows the organization of supply at the local level under the supervision of the *strategos* and council president, while *P. Beatty Panop.* 2 demonstrates that supplies from Panopolis were distributed widely throughout Egypt in a highly bureaucratic system of transport.¹⁴ The method of supply illustrated by the *P. Panop. Beatty* 1-2 proved to be the groundwork for the development of the *annona militaris* of the fourth century; other fourth-century papyri (especially *SPP* 20.84) show an increasing centralization in the administration of the *annona militaris* with Hermopolis at the center.¹⁵ Elements of this system are to be found even in some pre-Diocletianic evidence (notably *P. Oxy.* 1115)¹⁶

¹² Colin E. P. Adams, "Supplying the Roman Army: Bureaucracy in Roman Egypt," in *The Roman Army as a Community*, ed. Adrian Goldsworthy and Ian Haynes (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 119-125.

¹³ Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 86.

¹⁴ Bowman, "The Military Occupation of Upper Egypt," 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

which helps lend credence to the theory of Adams that the foundation for Diocletian's *annona* reforms was already in place.

The preparation and collection of supplies for the military was not always left to the civil authorities, but soldiers, too, took an active part at times. The collection of the *annona* and other taxes brought soldiers into direct contact with civilians. Examples of military involvement in tax and *annona* collection are clearly present in the *Abinnaeus Archive*. In a letter concerning the *annona militaris*, Aetius, who appears to be a civil official, is writing to Abinnaeus inquiring about the collection of the *annona* by a group of soldiers (*P. Abinn.* 4). Another letter provides confirmation that the *annona*, after its collection, was meant to be stored in the fort at Dionysias (*P. Abinn.* 26). Soldiers were also enlisted for the collection of taxes in Egypt, as is shown in an official letter to Abinnaeus ordering "that a military detachment should be furnished from the troops under [his] command for the collection of the Imperial taxes" (*P. Abinn.* 3). The letter does not specify where the soldiers are to be dispatched, only that they are to be at the service of the officials of the *dux*. Presumably, the presence of the soldiers was meant to act in part as protection for the tax collectors¹⁷ and ensure the collection process went smoothly; some level of intimidation was, perhaps, intended.¹⁸

Several laws of the *Codex Theodosianus* concern military supply and its proper distribution. We can see from 7.4.15 that provincials nearest the borders were required to provide comestibles for the frontier garrisons (although the issuing of this particular proclamation may have been a special measure since it commands this of all of the frontiers and implies that there are already stores held in the camps). The timely

¹⁷ *P. Abinn.* 15, although fragmentary, seems to show the hazards sometimes faced by tax collectors.

¹⁸ *P. Abinn.* 5, where an Aetius writes to Abinnaeus complaining that "no one has paid me anything," shows that sometimes there was difficulty raising the *annona* from the populace.

distribution of supplies from the military storehouses is a matter also addressed in the law.¹⁹ The law seems intended to keep rations from spoiling as they sat in the storehouses, and to prevent the soldiers from demanding money instead of payment in kind or harassing civilians for supplies or money.²⁰ In order to ensure proper and timely distribution, the *annona* and its commutation into money was ordered to be paid at fixed intervals “in the Orient and Egypt” so as not to unnecessarily burden the populace.²¹ A final supply law which must be acknowledged is one that required landowners to provide clothing for the military in accordance to the amount of land they owned; one “for each thirty land tax units” in Egypt.²²

Another way in which the military played an important role in provincial society was through the administration of justice and the mediation of local disputes. During the first three centuries of Roman rule in Egypt, the centurions appear to have played an active role in respect to conflict mediation and the preservation of justice in the local villages. In this way, the centurions helped bridge the gap between the central authority and villagers in their nomes. Alston thoroughly establishes the role played by centurions in their districts. In a letter cited by Alston (*P. Mich.* VI 425), Gemellus Horion petitions the *epistrategos* concerning an abusive tax collector after he had already written to the prefect who requested Horion to refer the matter to the *epistrategos*. The *epistrategos*, in turn, refers the issue to a local centurion. Alston points out that this is a revealing incident which shows a high level of involvement of the centurion in civilian affairs. The crime

¹⁹ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.4.1.

²⁰ As is indicated by *Codex Theodosianus* 7.4.12, 18-21.

²¹ *Codex Theodosianus* 7.4.31.

²² *Codex Theodosianus* 7.6.3.

being reported did not involve any soldier and there is no discernable military concern.²³ The involvement of centurions in village disputes was not unique to the case of Horion as a number of other documents show.²⁴ During the early centuries of Roman rule in Egypt, the centurion was the prime (and most accessible) representative of Roman power in the province.²⁵

Military officers continued to be petitioned to intervene in village disputes and investigate criminal activity into the fourth century. However, a fourth-century law states that the military shall only have judicial authority when a soldier is involved in a legal dispute.²⁶ If we turn to the *Abinnaeus Archive* we can see that most of the petitions directed to Abinnaeus concerning criminal activity do involve a soldier or veteran, but not all of them. Cases concerning active duty soldiers usually concern civilians complaining to Abinnaeus about the misconduct of one or more of the men under his command. Ision, for example, wrote to Abinnaeus to report that Athenodorus, a soldier under Abinnaeus' command, was frequently seen drunk and acting violently in the village and its environs (*P. Abinn.* 28). In another letter (*P. Abinn.* 48), Aurelius Aboul of Hermopolis writes to Abinnaeus to report that eleven of his sheep had been shorn during the night and that the responsible party included two of Abinnaeus' soldiers, Paul and Melas, as well as an Apion, who was the son of the *irenarch*, and a Peter.

Veterans also petitioned military officers when involved in legal altercations, as is made clear in the *Abinnaeus Archive*. A petition of 343 (*P. Abinn.* 45) from the veteran Flavius Priscus asks that Abinnaeus investigate the robbery of his home, as does a similar

²³ Alston, *Soldier and Society*, 86-7.

²⁴ Alston collects cites a large amount of petitions to centurions in *ibid*, 88-90.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 96.

²⁶ *Codex Theodosianus* 2.1.2

petition of 346 (*P. Abinn. 47*) from the veteran Flavius Aunes. Each of these petitioners asserts his status as a landowning veteran who has been honorably discharged in the opening lines of his letter. By establishing their position as honorably discharged veterans, the petitioners must have thought that their standing would earn them some privilege. It is unlikely that either of these veterans served under Abinnaeus or their service surely would have been brought up in the petition. These petitions show that veterans felt they were entitled to the intervention of a military official when a crime had been committed against them. Military investigation in criminal activities evidently extended to the immediate family of soldiers and veterans. Aurelia Mary, who was a soldier's daughter-in-law, petitioned Abinnaeus concerning the shearing of nine of her sheep and seizure of three others (*P. Abinn. 49*). In two more petitions (*P. Abinn. 51-2*), Aurelia Ataris, who is the daughter of a veteran, wrote to Abinnaeus to request that he apprehend and punish a group of men who had assaulted her.²⁷

There are also examples of civilians writing to Abinnaeus to request his intervention in criminal activity despite the specification that the military should only be involved in judicial matters when a soldier (or ex-soldier) was involved. There are three extant petitions written to Abinnaeus from civilians and do not involve soldiers or veterans in any way (*P. Abinn. 53, 55, 56*). Each of these three petitions is reporting a theft of some kind. The criminals are known to the accusers in each case, and there is no indication that any of the criminals or accusers was a soldier. In another petition (*P. Abinn. 50*), the status of the writer, Aurelius Anteus, is not preserved, and so it is impossible to tell if he was a veteran or not.

²⁷ Interestingly enough the same Apion, who was accused of shearing eleven sheep in *P. Abinn. 48*, is also part of the accused party here.

Unfortunately, we do not know the outcome any of these cases or what Abinnaeus' response to any of them was. The existence of so many petitions, however, shows that the people who wrote them were confident that the cases would be investigated. This would seem to show that judiciary responsibilities did fall upon local military officers and that their judiciary authority, at least in practice if not in law, did extend to the civilian population. Another possibility that is raised by Bagnall is that petitions to military officers were simply attempts to enlist the aid of a powerful individual to their cause, even if that person had no legal authority in their case.²⁸ This theory is difficult to verify since, again, we do not know the outcome of any of these cases or even if Abinnaeus acted on them.

In some of the petitions addressed to Abinnaeus, however, we can sense some dissatisfaction with Horion the *irenarch* of Hermopolis. As mentioned above, Horion's son, Apion, was implicated in two separate criminal incidents and in another petition, which is badly mutilated, it is implied that the *irenarch* is remiss of his responsibilities and that his son is involved in criminal activities (*P. Abinn.* 48, 51-2, 54).²⁹ Furthermore, in a petition from the veteran Flavius Aunes regarding the burglary of his home, Abinnaeus is asked to force the unnamed *irenarch* of Hermopolis, presumably Horion, to bring the culprits to Abinnaeus to answer for their crimes (*P. Abinn.* 47). The fact that Flavius Aunes had to request that Abinnaeus compel the *irenarch* to take this action may be some indication of the *irenarch's* dereliction of duty. The number of petitions to Abinnaeus could reflect the community's displeasure with Horion's performance as

²⁸ Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 169; also see, Traianos Gagos and Peter van Minnen, *Settling a Dispute: Toward a Legal Anthropology in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 30-5 for government officials acting as mediators.

²⁹ *P. Abinn.* 54 is so fragmentary that the name of the *irenarch* and his son are missing but Horion and Apion are almost certainly meant.

irenarch. By petitioning Abinnaeus, the populace may have been seeking an alternative keeper of the peace to the negligent Horion.

A final item that must be noted is that in nearly all of the petitions to Abinnaeus, the writer asks Abinnaeus to inform the *dux* of his or her case as it is his ultimate responsibility to administer justice. The writing to a local official and requesting that he submit the matter to a higher office is the opposite from what we saw in the case of Gemellus Horion of the second century who originally petitioned the prefect who in response referred the matter to local authorities. While this is hardly conclusive evidence, this may indicate the increasing localization of authority during the fourth century.

The *Abinnaeus Archive* also gives us some insight into the army's relationship with a new and powerful institution, the church. There are at least three letters to Abinnaeus from a local priest, Mios, which survive intact. In the first letter, Mios asks that Abinnaeus send him nets from the fort because "gazelles are destroying the sown crops" (*P. Abinn.* 6). A second letter has Mios requesting an urgent meeting with Abinnaeus after he had already visited the fort at Dionysias and learned that Abinnaeus was away. The exact subject of the meeting is not explained in the letter, but it somehow involves another priest and consignments for which instructions are provided. Regarding these instructions, Mios explicitly tells Abinnaeus not to "neglect to have everything we write to you about done" (*P. Abinn.* 7). In a final letter from Mios (*P. Abinn.* 8), Abinnaeus is informed about a delivery of wine and is asked that the deliverers be paid and sent back immediately as there is also a festival taking place. A letter also survives from Kaor, the priest of Hermopolis (*P. Abinn.* 32). In this letter, Kaor writes to

Abinnaeus asking him to forgive a soldier named Paul for desertion, but only this one time.

These letters can tell us much about the army's relationship with the church. When writing to Abinnaeus, Mios addresses him as an equal, often greeting him as his "beloved brother" (*agapetos adelphos*) in the salutation.³⁰ In his letters, Mios is not writing to Abinnaeus as a supplicant requesting favors, but as someone who also has great authority in the nome. The letter in which Mios asks Abinnaeus to send nets because of the gazelles that are damaging the crops shows that Mios was looked to as a caretaker of the community, a responsibility he shared with Abinnaeus. Based on *P. Abinn. 7*, Mios seemed to expect that he would be able to meet with Abinnaeus when he arrived at the fort unannounced. This expectation of an unscheduled meeting is further evidence that Mios and Abinnaeus had similar status and authority in the nome. Also in *P. Abinn. 7*, and 8, Mios gave Abinnaeus plain instructions which he expected would be followed. The letter from Kaor shows a priest acting as an intermediary between a deserter and his commanding officer. This shows that clergy were another option for supplicants who could act as arbitrators on their behalf.³¹ Based on this evidence, the army's relationship with the church was one of cooperation and possibly competition; each institution had responsibilities to oversee the continued order of the community, but

³⁰ Eleanor Dickey, "Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri," *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004): 155-6 for the use of the word *adelphos* (brother) in greeting someone of similar status to whom the writer is not related.

³¹ Richard Alston, "Ties That Bind: Soldiers and Societies," in *The Army as a Community*, ed. Adrian Goldsworthy (Portsmouth, RI: The Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 193 suggests that villages had the option of taking on military commanders or clergymen as their patrons.

the existence of another powerful establishment may have diminished some of the army's influence.³²

The decline of military influence in society goes against traditional notions of increased militarization and the army's usurpation of power in the later Roman world. The fourth-century orator Libanius famously complained in Oration 47, *On Patronage*, that the military was subverting the traditional power structure of the Antiochene aristocracy by taking on peasant tenants of landlords as clients and preventing them from paying their duties thus impoverishing the aristocracy of Antioch.³³ It has been argued that Libanius' complaint was in reality prompted by the rise of military officers as large-scale landholders in competition with the traditional aristocracies. Evidence for this argument comes from the supposition that this phenomenon can be seen in documentary evidence from Egypt, namely in the case of Abinnaeus and Flavius Vitalianus, another military officer.³⁴ However, Bagnall argues that there is not enough evidence to show that either of these two officers could have competed with the landed aristocracy. Flavius Vitalianus seems to be described as a landowner (*geouchounti*) in a couple of documents (*P. Grenf.* 1.54; *P. Lond.* 5.1656), but on closer inspection he appears to actually be a lessee acting as a middleman between a landholder and other tenants. There is enough evidence to suggest that Abinnaeus, on the other hand, did own some land, but there is no sign of how much land.³⁵ Even more unfavorable to the theory that there was an increase in landed military officers is provided by Bagnall's examination of the land registers of

³² Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 169 notes that even with the evidence from the *Abinnaeus Archive* there was probably a decline in the army's role in the administration of justice in this period.

³³ Libanius, Oration 47, *On Patronage*, in *Libanius: Selected Works II*, trans. A. F. Norman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

³⁴ Roger S. Bagnall, "Military Officers as Landowners in Fourth Century Egypt," *Chiron* 22 (1992): 47 gives a brief overview of this argument.

³⁵ Bagnall, "Military Officers as Landowners," 48-51.

Hermopolis from the middle of the fourth century. According to Bagnall's calculations, less than one percent of land in the Hermopolite Nome was owned by active duty soldiers, and the average amount held was only seventy-five arouras. Bagnall further emphasizes that it was not economically feasible for most officers to compete with the landed aristocracy.³⁶

As the largest organization in the province, the army in Egypt played an integral role in the country's economy and society. As we have seen, many of the economic reforms of Diocletian were geared toward the support of the army. In Egypt, the *annona militaris* was a highly centralized system of supply built on foundations already in place, and the burden it placed on the populous was not great. Soldiers were never far from Egypt's civilian population. Interactions between soldiers and civilians, in both official and non-official capacities, were a common occurrence. As seen in the *Abinnaeus Archive*, soldiers were sometimes responsible for tax and *annona* collections, and occasionally they were involved in legal altercations with civilians. Abinnaeus, as a representative of Imperial authority in the province, was often petitioned to intervene in local conflicts. The involvement of the military in these aspects of civilian society has led to theories of increased militarization in Late Antiquity, but closer examination of the evidence has shown that the military was just one element of a complex society that also involved the church, civic government, and provincial elite.

³⁶ Ibid, 52-4.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been an examination of the fourth-century Roman army as it existed in the provinces of Egypt. The choice of Egypt for this study was determined by the amount of surviving documentary evidence and archaeological remains from the region which gives us an unparalleled insight into some of the everyday aspects of military life. Although much of the surviving evidence is unique to Egypt, the questions that this study has asked have an overall applicability to the army in the rest of the Empire. The Roman army was a largely homogenous institution throughout the Empire, and Diocletian's reorganization of Egypt integrated it more fully into a standardized system of provincial administration. The end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth saw the reformation of the Roman army after a period of long civil strife which had lasted decades by the time of Diocletian and Constantine. Their military reforms essentially created the army of the late Roman Empire. In many ways these military reforms were the formalization of practices already taking place. By focusing on the army in Egypt in this period, we are able to see the disposition of the Diocletianic and Constantinian army at the provincial level.

The main function of the army and the strategic concerns of holding Egypt had not changed much since the time of Augustus. Egypt was an important imperial acquisition because of its grain supply, and the protection of it was a major concern. Most of Egypt's garrison during the fourth century, as it was during the Principate, was

stationed around Egypt's borders; particularly in the south, the northwestern coast, and especially the Sinai area. Other units were placed along the Nile, the trade routes of the Eastern Desert, and the oases of the Western desert to protect these important supply routes and ensure the safety of the *annona* transport. The Egyptian garrison proved to be mainly sedentary, with no major invasions or campaigns occurring during the fourth century. The army would have been mainly concerned with the internal order of the province and the occasional raid from desert nomads.

Important changes, however, were made to the general structure of the army. An official division was made between the *limitanei* (border troops) and *comitatenses* (field armies). The statuses of these two divisions were clearly defined in Roman law with the *comitatenses* being given the greater position. The garrison of Egypt was a frontier army. The division between frontier and field armies had its origin in the third-century crisis, when emperors began drawing vexillations away from the borders to accompany them on campaign. This division became permanent as a way to strengthen the frontiers and keep a mobile force that could accompany the emperor and quickly be dispatched to trouble spots.

A general increase in the size of the army was also seen as a result of the more thorough measures of recruitment implemented. Annual conscriptions were now held in which landowners had to offer up recruits and the sons of soldiers were legally required to enlist. The enlistment of the sons of soldiers had been a long-established practice dating back to as early as the first half of the second century; the practice was just formalized by Diocletian. The recruitment for the *limitanei* of Egypt took place almost exclusively on a local level, a practice that had been on the rise for the better part of two

centuries. In view of this, the army of fourth-century Egypt cannot be seen as a Romanizing force, as the army of the Principate is often viewed, since Egypt had been under Roman rule for centuries.

The increased size of the army can be perceived in the high number of units listed for Egypt in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. However, while the *Notitia* does not give us an indication of the size of these units, we know that the military units of the later Empire were smaller than their counterparts of the Principate. The reduction in unit size goes back to the early fourth century when larger units were split up to cover more territory, and eventually these divisions became permanent. The larger number of units and their distribution throughout Egypt is attested by the greater number of forts that were built during this period, many of which still survive.

Upon retirement, veterans were given some kind of compensation for their service and granted special privileges. Veterans had long received recompense for their service, but during the fourth century veteran remunerations became better defined legally. Veterans were entitled to plots of vacant land, a cash payment, and exemption from certain taxes and liturgical sources. Their length of service and whether they served in the *limitanei* or *comitatenses* determined the types of tax breaks they received and whether they could extend this privilege to family members. The biggest difference between veteran privileges of the later Empire and those of the earlier period was the bestowal of citizenship upon retirement. The universal grant of citizenship in 212 removed this special privilege from veterans and took away an incentive for enlistment.

As the largest institution of the Roman Empire, the army had an integral part in economy and society. The military was the largest expenditure of the Empire, and the

support of the army was at the center of Diocletian's attempt at economic stabilization. The employment of the *annona militaris* was meant to supply the army by requisitioning supplies from civilians in the provinces. The evidence from Egypt shows that this was a highly centralized system carried out by the civil authorities of the municipalities. Soldiers were mostly paid in kind with these provisions, but could be awarded monetary donatives at times. The paying of soldiers in kind was a solution to the economic woes of the period, but an antecedent of this practice was the deductions made from a soldier's pay to cover the cost of their supplies. While it was not cheap to support the army, it has been shown that the expense of the Egyptian garrison was manageable.

For the soldiers in Egypt, relations with the local populace were much more common than interactions with foreign enemies. For civilians, soldiers were a representation of imperial authority and acted in official capacities often attending tax collectors. Military officers were also looked at as powerful individuals within the community. The petitions from the *Abinnaeus Archive* show Abinnaeus' role in conflict mediation in the Hermopolite Nome in cases involving both soldiers and civilians. This judiciary role was part of the army's responsibility of ensuring internal stability. What is also seen in the *Abinnaeus Archive* is that the army did not act alone; we also get a sense of the church's responsibility to the civilian population and how the civil administration functioned, or perhaps failed to function in the case of the negligent *irenarch* Horion.

The army was an integral part of provincial society and should not be studied in isolation from it. Even though soldiers and veterans were accorded special privileges, they were visible in several aspects of a province's society and economy, existing alongside the civic government and the church. By looking at the evidence from Egypt

for the army in the fourth century, we have seen the ways in which soldiers came into contact with the civilian population and how the army's presence shaped the economy. From a broader perspective, we have also seen the creation of the later Roman army with the implementation of the military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine at a provincial level, and that many of these reforms were actually based on earlier precedent.

While the goal of this thesis has been to gain a greater understanding of the fourth-century Roman army by looking at a particular province, it was impossible to provide an exhaustive survey of all of the fourth-century evidence from Egypt relating to the army. Instead, it has laid the groundwork for future studies. Much work still remains to be done on the subject. The evidence that has been investigated in this study is representative of a much greater body of material. The relatively small amount of documentary evidence used in this study has only allowed for a fairly cursory treatment of the main issues. From here, however, the fourth-century army can begin to be placed more firmly into the economic and societal contexts of the later Roman Empire. This provides many avenues for future research, such as the military's relationship with the civic government of the empire; the army's relationship with the church and Christianity within the army; the economic impressions left by the military; how military officers acted as patrons; and the re-integration of veterans into society. Aside from the social and economic aspects of army, many questions still remain concerning the institutional nature of the late Roman army. Important among these questions are the distinction between the different levels of frontier soldiers and the progression to smaller unit sizes. The fourth-century Roman army can serve as a lens through which the social history of the late Roman Empire can be viewed.

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