

Introduction

In conquering and maintaining its empire, Rome's military strength depended in large part on the non-citizen troops; men from its conquered territories, including former allies, who served in auxiliary units.¹ Their commanders are well-studied, and have some similarities as a group: they were men of wealth, with citizenship granted even early in the empire, despite often originating from the same peregrine communities as the men they led.² Those studying the commanders have also often had military backgrounds. As William Roy wrote in his preface to *Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain*: "Military men ... are naturally led to compare present things with the past; and being thus insensibly carried back to former ages, they place themselves among the ancients, and do, as it were, converse with the people of those remote times."³

The households accompanying the commanders were also a part of imperial Roman society associated with military command. Within dominant (if not all) traditional perspectives of Roman army studies however it was believed that wives, children and enslaved women were absent even within large legionary bases (Chapter 2.5).⁴ Although the presence of women and children even within first century forts is now accepted, much interest was provoked by the discovery at Vindolanda of correspondence between two wives, Claudia Severa and Sulpicia Lepidina. Their correspondence challenged modern assumptions: Roman women were perceived as out of place in a space that was properly a military male domain.⁵ Severa's letters were surprising and exceptional evidence of a literate frontier society that included some women and children.⁶ Responses to the tablets continue to be strongly influenced by longstanding traditions in Roman army studies, which interpret them as evidence for warm female friendships. My impressions of Severa's correspondence were similarly influenced by my own experiences: as a former diplomat, I found her letters formal and polite, rather than transparently intimate, and more akin to routine diplomatic correspondence.

Claudia Severa and her correspondent Sulpicia Lepidina were only two of many women within or closely connected to the households of Roman auxiliary commanders at forts by (later) Hadrian's Wall. The activities of non-combatants,

including these households, have been peripheral to scholarly concerns about the perceived main function of the army: combat and provincial control through violence. They tend to be contrasted with soldiers and categorised as non-military, reflecting their recognised non-combatant status irrespective of their actual roles.⁷ Studying these household members at the time that they were living in frontier military bases groups these people in a way that can address their multiple identities, such as women and men, enslaved, freeborn or freed, and their life phases.⁸

This research therefore first seeks to establish what was the typical composition of auxiliary commanders' household at forts and fortresses during the first three centuries CE, and then to examine the roles that household members can be seen to undertake. It addresses questions of identification affecting those within the household, and how Roman military and later contexts affect what we can see of their roles. Spatial usage of the accommodation buildings – *praetoria* and tribune houses – is contrasted with accommodation in other Roman contexts.

The likely dynamics within the household are considered through establishing the commanders and wives' likely ages, and whether wives came from a similar social milieu to their husbands or, for example, were they ex-slaves or local women. The size of the servile household is considered, and questions asked about the roles of those within it. This research limits its findings to those within the western provinces and North Africa in the first to mid-fourth centuries. The evidence that it collects is widely distributed in time and space, allowing patterns to emerge.

The research builds on the truism that primary evidence underrepresents groups of people in antiquity. It addresses the difficulties of sparse and potentially atypical evidence fragments, by using three primary sources that can each in some way answer questions about the households: monumental Latin inscriptions; structural remains of their accommodation; and writing tablets from Vindolanda.

The amount of material evidence that relates securely to auxiliary commanders' households is small. This makes it difficult to assess its relationship to those whom it may represent. Further, sparse evidence risks being unreflectively perceived as exceptional. Careful attention to 'exceptional' evidence however reduces the risks of

¹ Birley, A. 1979: 90; Maxfield 1981: 32-35; Dejiver, H. 1989d: 57; Haynes 2013: 1-3.

² Devijver 1989f; Melero 2013: 96; Haynes 2013: 42-3.

³ Roy 1793: i.

⁴ von Domaszewski 1899; von Petrikovits 1975: 62 n. 63; 63; Johnson 1983: 16; on earlier, non-dominant perspectives, Pim Allison *pers. comm.*

⁵ Greene 2020: 149; Haynes 2013: 16; Allison 2011: 161; van Driel Murray 1995: 7.

⁶ R. Birley 2009: 175-6.

⁷ Haynes 2013: 38; Speidel (1989: 239-40) suggests some enslaved men perhaps had guard roles that included combat training and defensive fighting.

⁸ As advocated by Eckhardt 2017: 14. I use 'member' as shorthand for individuals living with the commander who were part of his *familia*

overly positivist approaches that can erase both evidence, and consequently people, from the historical record. Using a variety of source material and methods including case studies maximally exploits the available evidence for these people.⁹ Chapter Two therefore reviews previous studies of the auxiliary command. Chapters Three and Four survey monumental inscriptions as evidence for the demographics of the household, and roles of household members. Chapters Five and Six examine spatial usage and the relationship of the household with the army, using inscriptions and the structural remains of fort *praetoria* and fortress ‘tribune houses.’ Chapter Seven considers the women’s letters at Vindolanda, developing an epistolary approach that focuses on the autograph subscripts. Considering these source-types separately then permits the synoptic conclusions drawn in Chapter Eight.

⁹ Baird and Taylor 2011: 12; Joshel 2013: 100-1.