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# Courage and Cowardice in the Roman Imperial Army

**Jon Coulston**
University of St Andrews, UK

**Abstract**

This paper examines the courage and cowardice of Roman soldiers in the period from the late first century BC to the fourth century AD, set within a broader chronological context of service in standing armies. The specific sources for Roman warfare are evaluated together with features of service in the Roman armies. Discussion of courage is based on Roman concepts of *virtus* and *disciplina*, and examines religious and ritual observance, standing formations, regional cultural traditions, diet, medical support, training and skills development, military equipment, and service rewards. Cowardice and its consequences are investigated in the contexts of surrender, desertion, and enslavement, with particular reference to the literary sources and archaeological evidence for the defeat of Varus' army in Germany (AD 9).

**Keywords**

Courage, cowardice, *disciplina*, equipment, identity, Roman, service, *virtus*

Courage and cowardice would seem to be two sides of the coin of military behaviour in war, on campaign and in battle. Any attempt to examine these two concepts in the context of the Roman imperial army immediately faces problems in the ancient source material which might seem to limit the scope of investigation. As in other periods of study, the literary and iconographic sources are heavily weighted towards elite ideals and perceptions. Moreover, without diaries, apposite soldiers' letters and other sub-literary material it is especially difficult to take a 'Keeganesque' approach to ancient warfare experience, although some attempts to come closer to a Roman 'face of battle' have been attempted by Sabin and others.[1] Nevertheless, the archaeological record for the Roman armed

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[1] In the manner of J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London, 1976). See A.K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War, 100 BC–AD 200* (Oxford, 1996); P. Sabin, 'The Mechanics of Battle in the Second Punic War', in T. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin, eds, *The Second Punic War: A*

**Corresponding author:**
Jon Coulston, School of Classics, Swallowgate, Butts Wynd, St Andrews, KY16 9AL, UK
Email: jcnc@st-andrews.ac.uk

forces is uniquely rich and intensely studied, providing many alternative avenues of approach which are often less available to scholars of later periods. The tremendous growth of conflict landscape studies over the past two decades has greatly enhanced the recovery and study of military artefacts, and the understanding of conflict archaeological processes, over an ever-widening chronological spread, from Neolithic combat trauma to Cold War installations. The Roman period has not been neglected in this respect.[2]

The Roman army of the mid-first century BC to the early fifth century AD has been a privileged field of ancient studies for many fairly obvious reasons, such as the centrality of the Roman Empire to perceptions of European culture, the prominence of Roman generals in military history, the enduring presence of pictorial monuments such as Trajan's Column in Rome, and the substantial archaeology of frontier works and other military installations which excited antiquarian interest from the sixteenth century onwards.[3] It must be admitted that centuries of study have produced a rather

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*Reappraisal* (London, 1996), pp. 59–79, and 'The Face of Roman Battle', *Journal of Roman Studies* XC (2000), pp. 1–17; G. Daly, *Cannae: The Experience of Battle in the Second Punic War* (London, 2002). For application to classical Greek warfare, see V.D. Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1989). The method is critiqued by E.L. Wheeler, 'Battles and Frontiers', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* XI (1998), 644–51; K. Kagan, *The Eye of Command* (Ann Arbor, 2006).

[2] These developments really commenced with the Little Bighorn project (1983 onwards) which demonstrated the value of detailed archaeological studies: D.D. Scott, R.A. Fox, M.A. Connor and D. Harmon, *Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman, 1989); R.A. Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle: The Little Big Horn Reexamined* (Norman, 1993); D.D. Scott, P. Willey and M.A. Connor, *They Died With Custer: Soldiers' Bones from the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman, 1998). This has filtered through to broader historical works, notably J.S. Gray, *Custer's Last Campaign* (Lincoln, 1991); J. Welch and P. Stekler, *Killing Custer* (New York, 1994); J. Donovan, *A Terrible Glory: Custer and the Little Bighorn* (New York, 2008). Conflict landscape archaeology has developed for various periods, with particular success in the skilled archaeological excavation of First World War trenches: Y. Desfossés, A. Jacques and G. Prilaux, *L'archéologie de la Grande Guerre* (Rennes, 2008); M. Brown and R. Osgood, *Digging up Plugstreet: The Archaeology of a Great War Battlefield* (Yeovil, 2009). For the Roman period, see J.C.N. Coulston, 'The Archaeology of Roman Conflict', in P.W.M. Freeman and A. Pollard, eds, *Fields of Conflict: Progress and Prospect in Battlefield Archaeology* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 23–49; S. Jilek, ed., *Archäologie der Schlachtfelder – Militaria aus Zerstörungshorizonten. Akten der 14. Internationalen Roman Military Equipment Conference (RoMEC)* (Wien, 2005); G. Davies, *Roman Siege Works* (Stroud, 2006); *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht: Konflikt* (Stuttgart, 2009); M. Geschwinde, H. Hassmann, P. Lönne, M. Meyer and G. Moosbauer, 'Roms vergessener Feldzug. Das neu entdeckte römische Schlachtfeld am Harzhorn in Niedersachsen', in *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht: Konflikt*, pp. 228–32; A. Busch and H.J. Schalles, *Waffen in Aktion. Akten der 16. Internationalen Roman Military Equipment Conference (RoMEC)* (Mainz, 2009).

[3] For overall studies, see G.R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London, 1969); L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army from Republic to Empire* (London, 1984); R. Davies, *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh, 1989); J. Peddie, *The Roman War Machine* (Stroud, 1994); C.M. Gilliver, *The Roman Art of War* (London, 1999); A. Goldsworthy and I. Haynes, eds, *The Roman Army as a Community* (Portsmouth RI, 1999); B. Campbell, *The Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 337: A Sourcebook* (London, 1994); B. Campbell, *Warfare and Society in Imperial Rome, c. 31 B.C.–A.D. 230* (London, 2002); M.C. Bishop and J.C.N. Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, 2006); P. Southern, *The Roman*

lifeless picture, emphasizing the institutional and prosopographical, and sometimes anachronistically starting from modern military perceptions, with the result that the world of the Roman soldier has apparently become well known and predictable. While it is undeniable that 'regular' standing armies of many periods shared some features of organization, ranking, supply, and other practicalities, it is vitally important to contextualize Roman armies and soldiers within their own culture, and not to be seduced by 'modernizing' perceptions following what might be termed the 'universal soldier' model. In many respects the Roman forces seem very familiar but are still not really well known.

Roman armies did have standing formations with 'regimental' identities and traditions. There were rank, promotion, and pay structures; personal field decorations and unit citations; an identifiable officer class; concepts of doctrine; military discipline; state supply of food, clothing, and equipment; medical provision; and end of service retirement mechanisms. These have all been explored with success, but often *in vacuo* and in a self-reinforcing manner. Little regard has traditionally been paid to what was different from other periods and distinctively 'Roman' about this particular military culture. Roman army studies have tended to be left behind in academic developments across the histories, partly because of the modernizing and homogenizing assumptions, and partly because, until well into the 1980s, Roman studies as a whole tended to be very conservative and more empirically than theoretically based.[4] When material from other periods and cultures was brought into discussions it was in a one-dimensional and reaffirming exercise limited to reinforcing stereotypical perspectives. However, comparative studies do have a crucial part to play in aiding construction of models and widening perception of alternative possibilities. They do not show how the Romans 'must' have done things, but do facilitate the exploration of how Roman practice might be related to, and differentiated from, other military cultures.[5] Exploitation of the archaeological record is transforming many aspects of traditional army studies, notably in developing the fields of

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*Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford, 2007); P. Sabin, H. van Wees and M. Whitby, eds, *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* (Cambridge, 2007); P. Erdkamp, ed., *Blackwell Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007); E. Künzl, *Unter den Goldenen Adlern* (Stuttgart, 2008); S. James, *Rome and the Sword: How Warriors and Weapons Shaped Roman History* (London, 2011); T. Fischer, *Die Armee der Caesaren: Archäologie und Geschichte* (Regensburg, 2012).

[4] Change is traceable, for example, through the *Proceedings of the Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (TRAC)* (Oxford, 1990–).

[5] Of special importance here is the development of a Roman professional standing army during the first century BC to the first century AD. Comparisons and contrasts may be drawn with the first appearance of standing formations in the Spanish Army of Flanders, and the transition between the 'aggregate contract' and 'state commission' armies which is well documented for seventeenth-century France. See G. Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries Wars* (Cambridge, 2004); J.A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610–1715* (Cambridge, 1997); D. Parrott, *Richelieu's Army: War, Government and Society in France, 1624–1642* (Cambridge, 2001); G. Rowlands, *The Dynastic State and the Army under Louis XIV* (Cambridge, 2002).

technology and economy (including military equipment), gender roles, religious networks and rituals, and military identities.[6]

The present paper is concerned to examine and characterize the environment within which Roman courage was encouraged, and also within which martial behaviour came under stress and broke down. Many factors common to armies throughout history may be defined, but all had a specific dimension in the Roman context. Leadership, institutional culture, training, strategic and tactical practice, diet, gender relations, disciplinary regime, reward, religious belief, and self-identity will be reviewed as elements which potentially enhanced courage. Loss of morale through deteriorated conditions, fear of wounding or of the consequences of capture, and the possibilities of surrender, desertion, and mutiny by Roman soldiers will be examined in the light of a specific historical defeat, that of Varus' army in Germany (AD 9).

## I. Sources

The literary sources are overwhelmingly elite. Surviving histories, biographies, panegyrics, and collections of letters or poems reveal much about the desirable elements defining proper triumph in war and the correct behaviour of those in command, but also about the ideal *disciplina* of the lower status soldiery. These definitions are paralleled remarkably closely in metropolitan art, specifically triumphal monuments such as Trajan's Column. The role of elite generals, and especially of the emperor as commander, was defined as a fatherly over-watch, normally without direct involvement in combat, although certainly with elements of bravery in the face of missiles and surprises, and without rashness. Emperors in particular presented themselves to the troops as a fellow soldier (*comilito*) who was seen to take great care with the soldiers' welfare, personally choosing healthy campsites, consuming the same food and drink as the men, and joining in with their physical hardships of toil and exposure to the elements.[7] Anecdotal evidence is presented in the histories for the honourable behaviour of high-ranking officers, such as Cn. Pompeius Longinus, who was captured by the Dacian king Decebalus, and who committed suicide rather than allow himself to be used as a lever in negotiations to the Romans' disadvantage.[8] This also played along with the senatorial tradition of honourable death chosen to preserve personal and family good name (*fama*).[9] Of course elite mores have often been impressed upon, adopted, and actively embraced by other elements, so that a society might be suffused with these behavioural patterns, as in Victorian Britain, for example, which is more easily monitored than the Roman context through a much greater array of media (newspapers, prints, photographs, paintings, theatrical productions, etc.).[10]

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[6] For general overviews, see S. James, 'Writing the Legions: The Development and Future of Roman Military Studies in Britain', *Archaeological Journal* CLIX (2002), pp. 1–58, and 'Limesfreunde in Philadelphia: A Snapshot of the State of Roman Frontier Studies', *Britannia* XXXVI (2005), pp. 499–502; James, *Rome and the Sword*.

[7] Dio 68.8.2; Pliny, *Panegyricus* 13, 15, 19; *HA, Hadrianus* 10. Cf. J.B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 235* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 32–69; N.S. Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition on the Middle and Late Republic*, Berkeley, 1990), pp. 92–152; J.E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, 2005), pp. 259–60.

[8] Dio 68.12.

[9] Y. Grisé, *La suicide dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1982); E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 147, 244, 252, 265.

The tendency to ascribe the mores, perceptions, and idealizations of an articulate elite to the whole society is prevalent in studies of wider Roman culture for the stable imperial period. It is particularly troubling for the conventionally 'silent' elements defined by gender, social status, provincial, and extra-imperial cultural identities. For the lower levels of the Roman soldiery the elite sources are anecdotal, providing some specific instances of personal behaviour, such as the soldier in Trajan's wars who, realizing the fatality of his wounds, rushed out of his tent and set upon the enemy with reckless bravery.[11] The minor actors of historical dramas emerge periodically, but the suspicion is that they were sometimes merely literary devices designed to personalize, enliven, and ennoble events. It is often difficult to evaluate anecdotal evidence presented by such writers as Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Josephus, not least because even the supposedly 'technical' literature gave prominent place to *stratagemata*, compilations of anecdotal military exempla.[12] More prominent among elite writers was a hostile view of soldiers who constituted a potentially anarchic force of armed plebs, dangerous in times of instability, and requiring tight control and *disciplina* fostered by responsible commanders. Tacitus, Dio, and Herodian all relished the brutish part played by *milites* in troubled times, also emphasizing their boorish Latin culture, made virtually barbarian by the far-flung military society of the imperial frontier regions.[13]

That the soldiers themselves did have a strong self-identity and a 'hierarchy of placement' within wider Roman society, and within their armed formations, can be deduced from surviving letters, graffiti, ownership inscriptions, and other sub-literary evidence, but most clearly from personal funerary monuments. Although stylized and affected by a range of selection factors (the deceased's status, wealth, regional/local culture, period, etc.), gravestones are a tremendous source of self-presentational information, bearing biographical inscriptions and sometimes a detailed pictorial representation. Indeed, they were autobiographical to the extent that they were often provided for in the soldier's will and reflected how the deceased wished to present his achievements for eternity.[14]

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[10] J.M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984); J.W.M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815–1914* (Manchester, 1988); P. Harrington, *British Artists and War: The Face of Battle in Paintings and Prints, 1700–1914* (London, 1993); M. Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–1900* (London, 2000); U. Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Amsterdam, 2001); M. Martin, *Images at War: Illustrated Periodicals and Constructed Nations* (Toronto, 2005).

[11] Dio 68.14.2.

[12] Onasander, *Stratagemata*; Frontinus, *Stratagemata*. Cf. Arrian, *Ektaxis kata Alanon*; *Techne taktike*; Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*.

[13] Tacitus, *Historiae* 2.93–4; Dio 68.7.5, 74.8.1, 75.2.6; Herodian 1.17.2, 2.4.1–4, 7.11–12.

[14] A. Pegler, 'Social Organisations within the Roman Army', in K. Meadows, C. Lemke and J. Heron, eds, *TRAC 1996: Proceedings of the Sixth Theoretical Roman Archaeology*

In the transition from republic to empire, Roman soldiers became increasingly ‘professional’ and enjoyed an especially close and developing relationship with the emperor. Enlistment was a career-long choice, with actual length depending on the status of formation: 16 years in citizen bodyguard praetorian *cohortes*; 20 years in citizen *legiones*; 25 years in non-citizen bodyguard cavalry, auxiliary regiments, and fleets. This was not just a career but a life-defining service, *tiro* to *miles* and, on proper discharge (*honesta missio*), a *veteranus* until death. From the civil wars of the first century BC the trend of long services joined the development of formations with a continuous institutional history, expressed in titulature and insignia.[15] The Roman imperial ‘army’ should also be referred to as ‘armies’, in the plural, because the forces of the Roman state were not monolithic but devolved into a series of geographical army groups. Britain-Rhine, Danube, and Orient had the largest concentrations of citizen legions and fought the most significant foreign wars. Forces in Hispania and Africa were comparatively small, engaged in few major wars, and thus were politically much less prominent than the others. Variations between army groups may be detected archaeologically in material culture (ceramics, equipment design, and decoration), installational architectural features, and cult practices.[16]

Soldiers further belonged to their individual legion or non-citizen regiment. Within this they identified with the smaller subdivisions, much less often the constituent *cohors* than with their *centuria*. This could be designated formally by cohort number and *centuria* title; informally, by the name of their centurion at the time. The

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*Conference* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 37–43; R. Alston, ‘The Ties That Bind: Soldiers and Societies’, in Goldsworthy and Haynes, *Roman Army*, pp. 175–95; S. James, ‘The Community of the Soldiers: A Major Identity and Centre of Power in the Roman Empire’, in P. Baker, C. Forcey, S. Jundi and B. Witcher, eds, *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Leicester, 1998* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 14–25; W. Eck, ‘Monumente der Virtus. Kaiser und Heer im Spiegel epigraphische Denkmäler’, in G. Alföldy, B. Dobson and W. Eck, eds, *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 483–96; A. Gardner, ‘Identities in the Late Roman Army: Material and Textual Perspectives’, in G. Fincham, G. Harrison, R. Holland and L. Revell, eds, *TRAC 2000: Proceedings of the Tenth Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 35–47; V.M. Hope, ‘Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier’, *World Archaeology* XXXV (2003), pp. 79–97; J.C.N. Coulston, ‘Military Identity and Personal Self-Identity in the Roman Army’, in L. De Ligt, E.A. Hemelrijk and H.W. Singor, eds, *Roman Rule and Civic Life: Local and Regional Perspectives* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 135–52; J.C.N. Coulston, ‘Art, Culture and Service: The Depiction of Soldiers on Funerary Monuments of the 3rd Century AD’, in L. de Blois and E. Lo Cascio, eds, *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC – AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects*, Impact of Empire 6 (Leiden, 2007), pp. 529–61.

[15] Summarized by Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, pp. 146–52, 181–9. See also ‘The Changing Face of the Roman Legions (49 BC–AD 69)’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* LXV (1997), pp. 89–102; R.J. Brewer, ed., *Roman Fortresses and Their Legions* (London, 2000); J.H. Farnum, *The Positioning of the Roman Imperial Legions* (Oxford, 2005).

[16] Coulston, ‘Military Identity’; V.G. Swan, *Ethnicity, Conquest, and Recruitment: Two Case Studies from the Northern Military Provinces* (Portsmouth, RI, 2009).

*centuria* titles were a long-standing convention based on the republican legionary order of battle (*acies*). *Centuriae* of 60–80 men were paired in *manupuli*. Each *manipulus* took its place in one of three legionary lines (front *principes*, middle *hastati*, rear *triarii*/*pilani*), one *centuria* in front of (*prior* position) the other (*posterior* position). The *cohors* thus took two *centuriae* from each line, so the *centuriae* were designated accordingly. While the organization of the legion evolved, the titulature remained.[17] This is one of a number of interesting terminologies which the Roman armies retained for hundreds of years, and in this case it enabled the individual to situate himself exactly within his formation, administratively for pay and duty rosters, in camp where the tents were pitched in lines by unit, on the march within the column, and in the battle line.[18]

Within the *centuria* soldiers were further grouped into 10 eight-man tent-parties (*contubernia*), a spatial organization which became physically expressed through the architecture of permanent barracks when this class of building developed in the Augustan period.[19] Soldiers worked, marched, cooked, messed, and presumably fought together with their *contubernales*. There were no 'mess-halls', and there is little evidence for communal dining above the level of *contubernium*. Individuals further defined themselves on gravestones by their career achievements (rank attainments, military decorations), their geographical and ethnic background (birthplace, tribe, people, etc.), and through the citizen, non-citizen, and ethnic forms of their personal names. Abbreviated forms of name and unit designation were also inscribed or painted onto equipment, especially helmets and shields, to designate personal ownership.[20]

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[17] *Princeps prior, princeps posterior, hastatus prior, hastatus posterior, pilus prior, pilus posterior*. D.J. Breeze, 'The Organisation of the Legion: The First Cohort and the *Equites Legionis*', *Journal of Roman Studies* LIX (1969), pp. 50–5; Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, pp. 173–4; M. Speidel, *The Framework of an Imperial Legion* (Cardiff, 1992); J.C. Balty and W. van Rengen, *Apamea in Syria: The Winter Quarters of Legio II Parthica* (Buxelles, 1993), pp. 16–18; J. Roth, 'The Size and Organisation of the Roman Imperial Legion', *Historia* XLIII (1994), pp. 346–62; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, pp. 222–31.

[18] Compare the single line of companies of eighteenth–nineteenth-century infantry battalions, with the light company on the left and the grenadier company on the right (long after 'grenadiers' had ceased to carry grenades). J.A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 90–4; M. Stephenson, *Patriot Battles* (New York, 2008), pp. 45–7; M. Adkin, *The Waterloo Companion* (London, 2001), pp. 169–74; H. Strachan, *From Waterloo to Balaklava: Tactics, Technology, and the British Army, 1815–1854* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 23–6, figs 1, 3.

[19] A. Johnson, *Roman Forts of the 1st and 2nd Centuries A.D. in Britain and the German Provinces* (London, 1983), pp. 166–76; D.P. Davison, *The Barracks of the Roman Army from the 1st to 3rd Centuries AD* (Oxford, 1989); M. Reddé, R. Brulet, R. Fellmann, J.K. Haalebos and S. von Schnurbein, eds, *L'architecture de la Gaule romaine: les fortifications militaires*, Documents de l'archéologie française 100 (Bordeaux, 2006), pp. 105–11.

[20] Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 43–6.

## II. Courage and 'Success'

Various words were used for 'courage' (*animus, audentia, fortitudo, ferocitas*), but *virtus* was the one most closely linked to military bravery. Like many Latin terms the meaning of *virtus* was elastic and could be nuanced by the context, but it designated a suite of qualities associated with proper Roman citizen behaviour. From 'man' (*vir*), it literally meant 'manliness', but specifically encompassed service to the state and personal martial qualities, including bravery. In the Roman imperial period soldiers had *virtus* combined with *disciplina*.[21] The latter can be interpreted as combining the equivalents of modern military discipline, tradition, and culture with an intrinsically Roman perception. Within this there were institutional methods by which courage and correct behaviour in war could be fostered, supported, maintained, and enhanced. Many were politically driven in the interests of the emperor's stable rule and personal survival through his special relationship with his *comilitones*. These were part of the institutional evolution of the empire, the army, and the imperial office. They included enhanced conditions of service, (sporadically) increased pay and special monetary awards (*donativa*), and enhanced legal status, especially, during the first–second centuries, for non-citizens who were made citizens on final discharge as the reward for 25 years' service.[22]

Ideals of leadership by elite officers of the senatorial and equestrian classes are most accessible through the literary sources, notably the commentaries of Caesar written for a knowledgeable home audience, and of the historian Josephus, who composed for a non-Roman readership. Less clear is the ethos of the class of *centuriones* who were a mix of promoted rankers, direct appointments, and patronized placemen. Professional cultural cohesion came from training regimes, the use of Latin for technical vocabulary, orders, and official written pronouncements (e.g. construction inscriptions), and a shared military cultural tradition.

Religious observance played a part, with calendars of festivals connected with past and present emperors and specific military tutelary gods.[23] Cult practice pervaded army culture. Deities resided in military standards (*Genii signorum*), and oversaw the exercise field and equine welfare (Campestres, Epona, etc.). Individual buildings and places of soldiers' work were safeguarded by tutelary gods (Genii) that also guarded the welfare of formations down to the level of the century.[24] Soldiers personally sought the favour of specific deities, such as Mars, Silvanus, Hercules, Jupiter Dolichenus, and Mithras.[25] Campaigns were opened and closed with major sacrifices led by emperors and other commanders to enlist the support of the gods and to thank them for victory.[26] It was also crucial to suborn the local supernatural forces of forests, rivers, and mountains as an aid to successful geographical operation. Without proper propitiation of river gods, bridging was an especially hazardous campaign enterprise. As in any army of any period, it is difficult to quantify the effect of religion in fortifying courage, but it is not now considered that army cult observance was fostered by the emperor, the state or high command in an overt or centralized manner, but was developed from the bottom upwards as part of normal socio-religious activity. There is much evidence of personal ritual observance by soldiers, specifically related to protection during training and battle, much of it of an apotropaic nature. Horses were decked with lunate and phallic pendants, preserving them from evil influences, and men sometimes made votive offerings to the gods of the armour and weapons that had saved their lives or brought them glory in service.[27]

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[21] Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi*, pp. 92–113; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, pp. 237–66; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, pp. 176–8, 230–2, 247–8; R. Alston, 'Arms and the Man: Soldiers, Masculinity and Power in Republican and Imperial Rome', in L. Foxhall and J. Salmon, eds, *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1998), pp. 205–23; C.A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones*, Berkeley, 2001), pp. 34–56; M. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2006); W.V. Harris, 'Readings in the Narrative Literature of Roman Courage', in S. Dillon and K.E. Welch, eds, *Representations of War in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 300–20; S.E. Phang, *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 73–151.

[22] Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, pp. 147–8, 181–9; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, pp. 165–71, 182–98, 207–314; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, pp. 153–200.

[23] R.O. Fink, *The Feriale Duranum*, Yale Classical Studies 7 (New Haven, 1940); Phang, *Roman Military Service*, pp. 89–92.

Another element of loyalty and morale enhancement was the development of standing formations with continuous institutional histories. Their foundation and subsequent achievements were enshrined in titulature which was endlessly rehearsed in building inscriptions and on soldiers' gravestones. Unit badges were often the zodiac sign of the founder (e.g. bull for Julius Caesar, scorpion for Tiberius), a totemic animal (e.g. Capricorn or Pegasus for Augustan foundation, wild boar for northern European associations), or a deity (Minerva, Mars, Hercules).[28] The military standards (*signa*) bore these badges and titles, and not only encapsulated the formation's honour, but were themselves literally deities, lodged in temples and propitiated with sacrifices.[29]

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[24] J. Helgeland, 'Roman Army Religion', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, XVI (1978), pp. 1470–1505; M.P. Speidel and A. Dimitrova-Milceva, 'The Cult of the Genii in the Roman Army and a New Military Deity', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, XVI (1978), pp. 1542–55; O. Stoll, *Die Skulpturenausstattung römischer Militäranlagen an Rhein und Donau: Der Obergermanisch-Rätische Limes* (St Katharinen, 1992), pp. 142–6.

[25] M.P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar: The Roman Emperor's Horse Guard* (London, 1994), pp. 140–4; M. Henig, 'Artistic Patronage and the Roman Military Community in Britain', in Goldsworthy and Haynes, *Roman Army as a Community*, pp. 151–64; Stoll, *Skulpturenausstattung*; Stoll, 'The Religions of the Armies', in Erdkamp, *Blackwell Companion*, pp. 451–76.

[26] See Trajan's Column scenes VIII, LIII, LXXXVI–LXXXVII, XCI, XCIX, CII–CIII. The scene numbering of this monument was formulated by C. Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Traianssäule* (Berlin, 1896–1900), and is followed by all subsequent works. The latest accessible reproduction of the sculptures is F. Coarelli, *The Column of Trajan* (Rome, 2000).

[27] M.C. Bishop, 'Cavalry Equipment of the Roman Army in the 1st Century AD', in J.C. Coulston, ed., *Military Equipment and the Identity of Roman Soldiers* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 107–8, figs 46–9; Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 30–1.

[28] Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, pp. 205–12; Coulston, 'Military Identity', pp. 137–8; Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 113–14.

Throughout the imperial period legionary troops were detached from their parent *legio* for a particular campaign or for specific tasks. Sometimes one or more *cohortes* were involved, and in the second–third centuries, when redeployment of whole legions became unusual, detachments might be separated out for years, or even permanently. The soldiers served under a 'temporary' standard (*vexillum*) which transferred its name to the detached formation (*vexillatio*).[30] There was also a tendency to pair *vexillationes* from different legions. It has traditionally been inferred that, when such pairings shared ritual activities, especially dedications to the goddess Concordia, this denoted inter-formation conflict resolution. More likely is that these expressed established rapport and celebration of joint achievement.[31] Concord and/or rivalry between units could also be used positively to foster greater effort and enhance conflict performance. Some elite regiments in the fourth-century armies were regularly paired and fought alongside each other in battle.[32]

The Roman Empire consisted of many peoples with their own military cultures, and many neighbours who likewise differed from the core Roman infantry ways of war. One Roman strength of the empire was the facility to 'mix and match' military cultures, skills, and weaponry drawn from groups both within and without the empire (such as Gallic, Iberian, and Thracian aristocratic cavalry, Syrian and Parthian horse-archers, North African light javelin cavalry, Danubian Sarmatian lancers, etc.). In many cases this involved the positive encouragement of warrior behaviour in native groups. The latter provided recruits for the non-citizen auxiliary forces through the formation of standing regiments, and for more ad hoc formations, perhaps raised for specific campaigns, or supplied by allied rulers. Eastern composite bow technology, archery expertise, and skilled manpower were spread around the empire in all these manners.[33] Some Lower Rhenish German tribes were taxed in kind through the provision of recruits, and there is evidence for Batavians serving in the regular *auxilia* under their own aristocrats. Such Germans also made fiercely loyal imperial bodyguards.[34] The Romans defined the peoples of their world by their economy, languages, clothing, hairstyles, and weapons, and they certainly had a concept of 'martial races'.[35]

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[29] A. von Domaszewski, 'Die Fahnen in römischen Heere', *Abhandlungen des Archäologisch-Epigraphischen Seminares der Universität Wien* V (1885), pp. 1–80; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, pp. 96–9; Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 68, 113–14, 185–9; K.M. Töpfer, *Signa Militaria: Die römischen Feldzeichen in der Republik und im Prinzipat* (Mainz, 2011).

[30] R. Saxer, *Untersuchungen zu den Vexillationen des römischen Kaiserheeres von Augustus bis Diokletian*, Epigraphische Studien 1 (Köln, 1967).

[31] Coulston, 'Art, Culture and Service', pp. 547–8. Cf. Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pl. 3a.

[32] Notably the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani, Cornuti* and *Bracchiati, Celtae* and *Petulantes, Iovii* and *Victores, Lancearii* and *Mattearii*. Ammianus Marcellinus 15.5.30, 16.12.43, 20.4.1, 21.3.2, 13.16, 25.6.2, 26.6.16, 27.8.7, 31.10.4, 31.13.8; *Notitia Dignitatum Or.* V.42–4, 46, *Occ.* V.145–6, 158–64.

[33] J.C. Coulston, 'Roman Archery Equipment', in M.C. Bishop, ed., *The Production and Distribution of Roman Military Equipment* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 220–36.

For individual soldiers there were many elements which further affected morale. Military diet is prominent in the literary sources and formed part of the ethos of service. It was supposed to be based on wine and bread, with little emphasis on meat. Over-indulgence in meat and unwatered wine was an uncivilized trait ascribed particularly to northern barbarians.[36] In fact the zooarchaeological and palaeobotanical record demonstrates very wide-ranging consumption of domestic meats and game, fish, vegetables, and fruit, depending on geographical location, with long-distance supply of Mediterranean products (wine, olive oil, fish sauce, spices, etc.) to even the most obscure postings.[37] Perhaps the latter were especially well provisioned for both service support and cultural imperative reasons. In northern Europe the Italian tradition favouring pork may be detectable among citizen troops at legionary installations, while native auxiliaries ate proportionally more beef.[38] The importance of varying culinary cultures ('foodways') within modern armies and their effects on morale and conflict commitment are well documented.[39]

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[34] Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*; N. Roymans, *Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power: The Batavians in the Early Roman Empire* (Amsterdam, 2004); *De Bataven: Verhalen van een verwenen volk* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 24–69; J.A. van Rossum, 'The End of the Batavian Auxiliaries as "National" Units', in De Ligt et al., *Roman Rule*, pp. 113–31. In general, see I. Haynes, 'Military Service and Cultural Identity in the *Auxilia*', in Goldsworthy and Haynes, *Roman Army*, pp. 165–74; C. van Driel-Murray, 'Ethnic Recruitment and Military Mobility', in A. Morillo, N. Hanel and E. Martín, eds, *Limes XX: Roman Frontier Studies* (Madrid, 2009), pp. 813–22; D.B. Saddington, 'How Roman Did Auxiliaries Become?', in Morillo et al., *Limes XX*, pp. 1017–24.

[35] J.C.N. Coulston, 'Overcoming the Barbarian: Rome's Enemies in Trajanic Monumental Art', in L. de Blois, O.J. Hekster, G. de Kleijn and S.T.A.M. Mols, eds, *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power: Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 200 BC – AD 476), Rome, March 20–23, 2002* (Amsterdam, 2003), pp. 389–424. For the definition and recruitment of 'martial races' in other periods, see C.H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in a Divided Society* (Harmondsworth, 1980); D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 10–46; B. Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (London, 1998), pp. 42–4; J. Black, *War in the Nineteenth Century, 1800–1914* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 152–5.

[36] K.M.D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 20–2; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, pp. 259–64, 271–2.

[37] M. Van der Veen, 'A Life of Luxury in the Desert? The Food and Fodder Supply to Mons Claudianus', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* XI (1998), pp. 101–16; W. Van Neer, A. Ervynck and P. Monsieur, 'Fish Bones and *Amphorae*: Evidence for the Production and Consumption of Salted Fish Products outside the Mediterranean Region', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* XXIII (2010), pp. 161–95. For Roman logistics in general, see P. Erdkamp, *Hunger and the Sword: Warfare and Food Supply in the Roman Republican Wars, 264–30 BC* (Amsterdam, 1998); J.P. Roth, *The Logistics of the Roman Army at War, 264 BC – AD 235* (Leiden, 1999); P. Kehne, 'War- and Peacetime Logistics: Supplying Imperial Armies in East and West', in Erdkamp, *Blackwell Companion*, pp. 323–38.

[38] A. King, 'Animals and the Roman Army: The Evidence of Animal Bones', in Goldsworthy and Haynes, *Roman Army*, pp. 139–49.

There is little direct evidence that alcohol played a role in enhancing courage in the Roman army. Like the soldiers of some more modern armies, *milites* principally drank wine, which was transported in bulk using ceramic amphorae to Roman military installations, and in great wooden barrels on wagons during field campaigns.[40] However, wine was consumed in the ancient world mixed with water, sometimes with flavour-enhancing and/or medicinal additives, and often heated.[41] There were no spirits. Alcohol did not play the central role of 'soldier's refuge' from stress or boredom, or of 'liquid courage' that it did in later periods and armies, nor was there a drinking ethos, as seen, for example, in eighteenth- to twentieth-century armed forces.[42]

There were medical support mechanisms for the individual Roman soldier in the form of surgeons, field medics, and hospitals. The heritage of Greco-Roman 'academic' medicine, developed and improved upon, undertook surgery and paid close attention to treating sharp-force trauma, to diet, and to herbals. This presumably gave greater comfort and support to soldiers than did the medical services of some more modern armies. It was also a great contrast with the provision to be expected for opposing barbarian forces, practically maintaining manpower levels by enhancing soldiers' overall health, especially on campaign, and by aiding recovery of combat casualties. Indeed this was also projected as a feature of Roman *civilitas* in contrast to enemy *barbaritas*, and for this reason care for Roman casualties is depicted on Trajan's Column.[43]

A social element of Roman military life which may also have affected performance was the Augustan prohibition of legal marriage for soldiers in service. This was enforced for 200 years until being lifted, probably by the emperor Septimius Severus in the early third century.[44] It conformed with an elite ideal of proper professional service and pursuit of *virtus* in its broad sense of soldierly 'virtue'. Unlike in later periods, there was no appeal to the soldiers' defence of womenfolk and family in the rhetoric of motivation, but, as in later periods, the reality gap between elite ideal and practical reality meant that women were very much part of the Roman military experience. A parallel might be drawn with the academic 'gendering' of the Georgian Royal Navy, and the profile of women in Roman military installations is being raised through careful study of the archaeological record.[45] There were plenty of women and children in the 'tails' of Roman armies on campaign, and women were also booty of war, so legal marriage did not coincide exactly with gender roles and sexual activity, especially in a slave-owning ancient society with very clear hierarchies of status-defined, dominant, and submissive behaviour.[46] However, women most often appear in Roman sources on the opposing side, especially during the migration of peoples, exhorting and shaming barbarian warriors into greater efforts to defend them from an inevitable fate after Roman victory.[47] It may also be stated with some assurance that Roman military morale and unit 'bonding' did not involve institutionalized 'partner' units of same-sex lovers in the manner of the Theban army of the fourth century BC. Homosexual practices were naturally present in the Roman army – and this particular chapter of 'queer history' has yet to be properly explored – but only within specifically Roman limitations of social acceptability.[48]

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[39] For example the range of dietary requirements of different ethnic troops in the nineteenth–twentieth century Indian Army: Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, p. 94.

[40] Trajan's Column, scenes LXII, CXXIX.

[41] Diodorus Siculus 5.26.3; Van der Veen, 'A Life of Luxury'; R. Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire* (London, 1988), pp. 81–2.

[42] E.g. S. Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and War in the Americas, 1755–1763* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 104–6; D. Porch, *The French Foreign Legion* (London, 1991), pp. 307–8; R.M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848–1865* (Lincoln, 1967), pp. 30–1, 40, 279; R.M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866–1891* (Lincoln, 1973), p. 87; M. Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960), pp. 398–402; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London, 1986), pp. 72–4.

[43] Scene XL. In general, see Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases*, pp. 112–37; P.A. Baker, 'Medicine, Culture and Military Identity', in G. Fincham, G. Harrison, R. Holland and L. Revell, eds, *TRAC 2000. Proceedings of the Tenth Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 48–68; P.A. Baker, *Medical Care for the Roman Army on the Rhine, Danube and British Frontiers in the First, Second and Early Third Centuries* AD (Oxford, 2004).

[44] S.E. Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers, 31*BC *–* AD*235: Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden, 2001); W. Scheidel, 'Marriage, Families and Survival: Demographic Aspects', in Erdkamp, *Blackwell Companion*, pp. 417–34.

Induction of the new recruit (*tiro*) into the military family, marked by new hairstyle and specific army clothing and footwear, belts, and weapons, created a separation from wider Roman society. Intensive military training involved endurance marching, building field fortifications (for cooperation and coordination, plus physical strength), the development of specialist skills (literacy, metalworking, weapons specialisms), and weapons exercises.[49] There were no separate ‘boot camp’ training centres, and perhaps no clear concept of uniformity of ‘basic’ training for all soldiers. The ideal was that training was continuous thereafter. Weapons training covered the infantry fencing style characteristic of legionary and auxiliary soldiers armed with short sword and large shield. It was learnt through long and repetitive practice, using extra-weight equipment, to build up agility, coordination, specialized musculature, stamina, and endurance.[50] The skeletal evidence for Roman soldiers, such as the unfortunate man killed on the beach at Herculaneum during the Vesuvius eruption of AD 79, corroborates careers of hard physical activity and the development of the ‘mutant musculature’ of swordsmen, archers, and cavalrymen.[51] Something similar is seen on the skeletons of gladiators found at Ephesos (Turkey).[52] The intrinsic combination of the short sword and the large, curving body-shield was central to performance in battle. Technical specialists were scattered throughout the subunits of the legions, not concentrated in any one formation of artillery, engineering, communication, or administration troops. All were expected to take their place in the battle line.

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[45] For example, the work of P.M. Allison, 'Mapping for Gender: Interpreting Artefact Distribution in Roman Military Forts in Germany', *Archaeological Dialogues* XIII (2006), pp. 1–48; 'The Women in the Early Forts: GIS and Artefact Analyses in 1st and 2nd Century Germany', in Morillo et al., *Limes XX*, pp. 1193–1201. Cf. S.E. Phang, 'Intimate Conquests: Roman Soldiers' Slave Women and Freedwomen', *Ancient World* XXXV (2004), pp. 207–37. For the Georgian navy, see Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 268, 282–7; Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp. 75–9; S.J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (London, 1998).

[46] J.R. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250* (Berkeley, 1998), pp. 59–90; H.N. Parker, 'The Teratogenic Grid', in J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner, eds, *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 47–65.

[47] Women and families in wagons also played a part in defining the depths of barbarian defeat, as expressed in Roman texts and iconography, for example Caesar, *de bello Gallico* 1.24, 26; Tacitus, *Annales* 14.37; Dio 51.24.4, 62.12.5; Trajan's Column, scene XXXVIII; F.B. Florescu, *Das Siegesdenkmal von Adamklissi*, 3rd edn (Bonn, 1965), figs 218–21.

[48] Cf. M.P. Speidel, 'A Marsacus as a Horseguard's Boy in Rome', *Helinium* XXV (1985), pp. 254–7. There were also normally substantial numbers of male grooms and servants accompanying Roman troops in garrisons and in the field: M.P. Speidel, 'The Soldiers' Servants', *Ancient Society* XX (1989), pp. 239–47; S.E. Phang, 'Soldiers' Slaves, "Dirty Work", and the Social Status of Roman Soldiers', in J.J. Aubert and Z. Váhelyi, eds, *A Tall Order: Writing the Social History of the Ancient World* (München, 2005), pp. 203–25; Phang, *Roman Military Service*, pp. 234–7.

Marching and building, tactical formations, metallic armour, and weapons combinations defined the Roman soldier. However, he was not a standardized product, ‘uniformed’ by the state, but retained that individuality of the ‘warrior’ seen in many early modern armies. ‘Uniform’ in the sense of the same dress for identification purposes was in any case unnecessary because Roman troops were visually distinguishable from all opponents (except in civil war contexts), and friend and foe in ancient conflict landscapes were not shrouded in black powder smoke. Richly ornamented attire and equipment were not the sole preserve of officers and elite formations, but played their part in general martial display. Decorated equipment, plumes, and crests reinforced identity, bolstered bravery, intimidated the enemy, and identified a man’s actions to superiors on the field.[53] Nor did Roman soldiers have separate sets of equipment for ‘parade’. All was practical and employed in battle, except perhaps for the mask-helmets and other ‘sports’ armour used in equestrian training displays.[54]

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[49] G. Horsmann, *Untersuchungen zu militarischen Ausbildung im republikanischen und kaiserzeitlichen Rom* (Boppard, 1991). On the training of generals, see J.B. Campbell, ‘Teach Yourself How to be a General’, *Journal of Roman Studies* LXXVII (1987), pp. 13–29.

[50] Livy 7.10, 26.51, 44.35; Vegetius, *Epitome rei militaris* 1.11–13, 2.23. Cf. Polybius 10.20.2–5; Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.247; Dio 72.29.3. Overall, see James, *Rome and the Sword*.

[51] S.C. Bisel and J.F. Bisel, ‘Health and Nutrition at Herculaneum: An Examination of the Human Skeletal Remains’, in W. Jashemski and F.G. Meyer, eds, *The Natural History of Pompeii* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 468.

[52] K. Grossschmidt and F. Kanz, *Gladiatoren in Ephesos: Tod am Nachmittag* (Wien, 2002).

[53] Cf. Polybius 6.23.12; Caesar, *de bello Gallico* 2.21. Cf. Parker, *Army of Flanders*, p. 138; Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle*, pp. 169–80; D. Parrott, *The Business of War* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 68, 96–9, 165–6, 276–7.

[54] In general, see H.R. Robinson, *The Armour of Imperial Rome* (London, 1975), pp. 107–35; J. Garbsch, *Römische Paraderüstungen* (München, 1978); M. Feugère, *Casques antiques: les visages de la guerre de Mycènes à la fin de l’Empire romain* (Paris, 1994), pp. 122–40; E. Bartman, ‘The Mock Face of Battle’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* XVIII (2005), pp. 99–119; Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 104–6, 142. For Roman ‘parade’, see M.C. Bishop, ‘On Parade: Status, Display, and Morale in the Roman Army’, in H. Vetters and M. Kandler, eds, *Akten des 14. Internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum* (Wien,

When it came to open hostilities and the Roman soldier crossed over into the conflict landscape, his confidence and courage were already enhanced by *disciplina*, physical and technical training, good diet, medical support, fellowship, status and place within a military tradition, and the favour of the gods. He might further have been buoyed up by the example set by his officers and some active measures, such as pre-battle forensic speeches (*adlocutiones*) exhorting the soldiers forward. *Adlocutiones* were a distinct genre in Roman historical writing designed principally to present the salient issues for the reader.[55] That speeches were delivered to Roman troops is evidenced by the text of one purportedly from the mouth of Hadrian after a review of legionary and auxiliary manoeuvres at Lambaesis (Algeria), the text of which was recorded in the inscription on a monument erected to commemorate the emperor's visit.[56] However, the practical effect of such speeches on morale may be doubted, given the limited range of auditory and visual projection before megaphones, speakers, and plasma screens.[57] The literary ideal would have strongly informed the elite perception of 'correct' martial behaviour, and formal rhetoric was an essential component of Roman public life, but they would have had little real effect on troops' motivation.

Armies in the ancient world were small and manageable by a general with a minimal staff of aides. He (very occasionally, she) could survey a whole conflict landscape unobscured by smoke from firearms. Orders were conveyed to formations by brass musical instruments and by the movement of standards, but, in the complete absence of drums and fifes, music was not a rhythmic method of moving troops or specifically of enhancing their courage.[58]

Troop formations in the battle line were as dense as the tactical situation demanded, with open spacing for skirmishing light infantry, and relatively wide per-man frontage for legionary troops expected to throw short-range heavy javelins (*pila*) and to fence with the offensive shield and short-sword combination. Closer spacing may have been adopted facing cavalry formations, and legionary lines were increased in depth from four-man to eight-man files when facing enemy cavalry armies in the eastern theatre.[59] Roman

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1990), pp. 21–30. Aspects of modern parade and dress are looked at by S.H. Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, 1996); S.H. Myerly, 'Political Aesthetics: British Army Fashion, 1815–55', in M.H. Shirley and T.E.A. Larson, eds, *Splendidly Victorian: Essays in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British History* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 45–68; A. Miller, *Dressed to Kill: British Naval Uniform, Masculinity and Contemporary Fashions, 1748–1857* (London, 2007).

[55] Notably the speeches put into the mouths of Agricola and Calgacus before the battle of Mons Graupius (Scotland, AD 83), Tacitus, *Agricola* 29–34.

[56] Y. Le Bohec, ed., *Les discours d'Hadrien à l'armée d'Afrique: Exercitatio* (Paris, 2003); M.P. Speidel, *Emperor Hadrian's Speeches to the African Army: A New Text* (Mainz, 2006).

[57] Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, pp. 69–88.

[58] Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* 2.22. Nor was music used in reviews in the modern manner: Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, pp. 142–3.

[59] Arrian, *Ektaxis kata Alanon* 16–17. Cf. Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* 2.15. There is a lively debate about the nature and operation of legionary infantry formations: see I. Kertisz, 'The Roman Cohort Tactics: Problems of Development', *Oikumene* I (1976), pp. 89–97; Wheeler, 'Battles and Frontiers'; E.L. Wheeler, 'The Roman Legion as Phalanx', *Chiron* IX (1979),

infantry tactics were offensive, especially facing opposing infantry, and the formation maintained its cohesion through intensive training, both in individual arms skills and in unit manoeuvring. Traditionally, higher ranking and more experienced men were placed as file-closers at the rear of the formation. Men surrounded by *contubernales* would have gained morale enhancement from familiarity with their place in the ranks.

Organized, agriculture-based ancient Mediterranean polities customarily fielded formations of close order infantry for which the generic Greek term *phalaggos* was used.[60] In pre-gunpowder conflicts there was not the danger of mass casualties inflicted by volleys of musketry or deep formation penetration by missiles, especially artillery projectiles. The formation itself gave security and protection as long as it was not rolled up from the flanks, attacked from the rear, or disrupted by terrain or special weapons (e.g. elephants). A sense of individual security was further enhanced in the Roman imperial army by a system of production and supply which divorced economic status from armour resources; thus the vast majority of Roman troops wore metallic body armour and helmets, and carried large shields. In a pre-gunpowder environment, thickly padded armour with reinforced target areas; padded helmets with reinforced bowls, maximum angled deflection, and optimal sensory maintenance; shields with metal-bossed hand-grips and reinforced rims; and familiar weaponry really did work to protect the soldier and increase his confidence.[61] Opponents along the northern and southern frontiers of the Roman Empire (the eastern theatre was rather different) were less well organized and economically mobilized in terms of military equipment, though there was not the technological asymmetry between Romans and barbarians seen in the imperial wars of later periods.[62]

Enhanced confidence through armour protection may be detected in the particular field of limb-defences. It is clear from the artefactual and iconographic record that Roman imperial soldiers were free to enhance their armour coverage, perhaps specifically if they were in the more frontal positions of formations. It used to be thought that only *centuriones* and some cavalry wore greaves (*ocreae*), and that only gladiators wore segmental plate armour (*manicae*) on one arm, but both are depicted on the early second century AD sculptures of the Tropaeum Traiani at Adamclisi in Romania.[63] This had been

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pp. 303–18; Goldsworthy, *Roman Army*, pp. 133–40, 176–83; Gilliver, *Roman Art of War*, pp. 103–8; A. Zhmodikov, 'Roman Republican Heavy Infantry in Battle (IV–II centuries BC)', *Historia* XLIX (2000), pp. 67–78; Daly, *Cannae*, pp. 58–63; M.P. Speidel, 'Who Fought in the Front', in Alföldy et al., *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft*, pp. 473–82.

[60] Hanson, *Western Way of War*, pp. 28–30; H. van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London, 2004), pp. 166–97.

[61] A US Cavalryman of the Plains Wars, quoted by Donovan, *Terrible Glory*, p. 126, said something similar: 'You felt like you were somebody when you were on a good horse, with a carbine dangling from its small leather ring socket on your McClellan saddle and a Colt army revolver strapped on your hip.'

[62] Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, p. 241. Cf. G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (1988), pp. 146–54; Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest*, pp. 48–51; Black, *War in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 161–3.

[63] Gladiators: J.C.N. Coulston, 'Gladiators and Soldiers: Equipment and Personnel in *Ludus* and *Castra*', *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* IX (1998), pp. 4–5, figs 1–2, 4–5. Adamclisi: Florescu, *Das Siegesdenkmal*, figs 195, 197–201, 204, 212, 217, 221.

interpreted as a special circumstance connected directly to the use by regional barbarians of the two-handed battle scythe (*falx*). However, finds of *manicae* have been made all along the empire's northern frontier in areas where such weapons were certainly absent, as in Britain.[64]

Analysis of combat trauma from pre-gunpowder conflicts, notably the mass burials at Wisby on Gotland (Sweden, AD 1361) and Towton in Yorkshire (England, AD 1461), makes it clear that limbs were particularly vulnerable to injury.[65] While the Roman imperial army did have medical support, and the level of surgical skill did allow for life-preserving amputations, serious injuries and even just the loss of digits might very well render an individual non-functional as a soldier, specifically incapable as a swordsman. Given the almost complete absence of support for men invalided out of Roman army service (see below), this was a particularly acute issue addressed by attention to improved personal protection.

By the early second century AD an ideal of Roman victory had been developed which accentuated 'civilized' military characteristics: *virtus*, craft capacity and organization (such as metalworking), technological capability (artillery and siege warfare), urban and architectural construction, and medical culture. Perfect victories were won by the army exhibiting *disciplina* under the emperor's firm hand, by measured advances using roads and bridges to conquer geography, by coolness in battle when faced with barbarian *ferocitas*, and by efficient butchery with minor effusion of citizen blood. It was certainly not glorious to find the army fighting last stands, desperate siege defences, and 'close-run things'.[66] The writings of Tacitus embody this ideal in history and panegyric; the reliefs of Trajan's Column, in iconography.

Anecdotes of personal bravery, and occasionally cowardice, do occur in the accounts of Roman period historians, notably Julius Caesar and Flavius Josephus, but their main value is in their presentation of elite ideals of citizen behaviour.[67] Few are unbiased inclusions; most may be complete literary fabrications. Even the notable acts recorded on soldiers' gravestones are open to charges of personal advertisement and exaggeration, though some examples stand out for their singularity. One such is the gravestone of Ti. Claudius Maximus, which claimed that the deceased 'captured' the Dacian king

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[64] Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 98–100, 141, figs 58, 86; J. Aurrecoechea, C. Fernández Ináñez, V. García Marcos and Á. Morillo, 'Un protector laminado de brazo (*manica*) procedente del campamento de la *legio VII Gemina* en León', *Archivo Español de Arqueología* LXXXI (2008), pp. 255–64; C. Howard-Davies, ed., *The Carlisle Millennium Project: Excavations in Carlisle, 1998–2001*, 2: *The Finds* (Lancaster, 2009), pp. 694–700; James, *Rome and the Sword*, p. 152.

[65] B. Thordemann, *Armour from the Battle of Wisby, 1361* (Stockholm, 1939–40), pp. 149–210; V. Fiorato, A. Boylston and C. Knüsel, eds, *Blood Red Roses: The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton, AD 1461* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 91–4.

[66] Contrast B. Perrett, *Last Stand! Famous Battles against the Odds* (London, 1991), and the modern public perception of glorious defiance in the face of defeat, as seen in such films as *Zulu* (UK, 1964), *Khartoum* (UK, 1966), and *Black Hawk Down* (US, 2001).

[67] E.g. Caesar, *de bello Gallico* 2.25, 4.25, 5.35, 44, 6.38, 7.51; *de bello civile* 1.46, 3.53, 64, 67; Josephus, *Jewish War* 4.36–8, 5.87, 312–13, 340, 463–5, 6.54–67, 81–8, 161–3, 183–9.

Decebalus. Other sources suggest that the king cheated live captivity by suicide.[68] Maximus and Decebalus are depicted in a small sculptural panel which is almost indistinguishable from the stylized triumphal rider motif seen on numerous other cavalry gravestones.[69] On the monument of Acrabanis, a cavalryman of the *ala Augusta Ituraeorum* (from Györ, Hungary), the deceased is depicted as a horse-archer galloping at a target with one arrow nocked and three already stuck in the roundel.[70] This suggests commemoration of an actual feat of archery comparable with that recorded by a Batavian cavalryman who, while the emperor Hadrian looked on, swam the Danube then broke one arrow in the air by shooting it with a second.[71] The tombstone of L. Septimus from Brigetio in Hungary most unusually depicts a combat between Germans and Romans which may have been specifically historical.[72]

The visibility of soldiers in battle also informed a tradition of battlefield rewards, or 'gifts' (*dona militaria*). A series of decorations in the forms of precious metal crowns, torcs, armlets, and model weapons were awarded to citizens from the republican period through to the third century AD for acts of bravery, notably saving the life of a fellow citizen (*corona civilis*) or being the first over the wall of a besieged city (*corona muralis*).[73] The tradition of high-ranking Romans killing barbarian leaders in single combat celebrated during the republic was occasionally honoured by emperors, as in the case of M. Valerius Maximianus, who slew a king of the Danubian Naristae. Marcus Aurelius rewarded him with *spolia opima* (a horse, harness, and arms).[74] Promotions and money gifts were also bestowed, and these were the main rewards for non-citizens who were ineligible for *dona*. Indeed, it appears that monetary awards and gifts of precious metal items (silver plate, gilded silver armour and weapons) displaced all others during the third century.[75] Army reviews were held for the awards, and receipt directly from the hand of a named emperor (even one who subsequently fell from grace with the elites) was very proudly recorded by soldiers on their gravestones.[76] Whole formations could also be awarded collective *dona* which were reflected in their titulature (*torquata, bis torquata*), honorific titles based on the name of an emperor or of his family (*Augusta, Claudia, Flavia, Domitiana, Traiana, Ulpia, Aeliana, Commodiana, Severiana*, etc.), and even premature block grants of citizenship (styled *civis Romanorum*). When these were spelled out in full in inscriptions it was sometimes specified that the title was awarded 'for valour' (*ob virtutem appelatur*).[77]

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[68] M.P. Speidel, 'The Captor of Decebalus: A New Inscription from Philippi', *Journal of Roman Studies* LX (1970), pp. 142–53; Dio 68.14.3. Cf. Trajan's Column, scene CXLV.

[69] Collected in M. Schleiermacher, *Römische Reitergrabsteine: Die kaiserzeitlichen Reliefs des triumphierenden Reiters* (Bonn, 1984).

[70] Z. Farkas and D. Gabler, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Ungarn* II. *Die Skulpturen des Stadtgebietes von Scarbantia und der Limesstrecke ad Flexum-Arrabona* (Budapest, 1994), no. 83.

[71] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III.3676. Cf. Dio 69.9. Cf. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.161–3, for another equestrian feat.

[72] L. Barkóczi, *Brigetio* (Budapest, 1944), pl. XVI.3.

[73] V.A. Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (London, 1981); Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, pp. 198–203; Eck, 'Monumente der Virtus'.

[74] *L'Année Epigraphique* (1956), p. 124. Cf. Livy 7.10.11; S.P. Oakley, 'Single Combat in the Roman Republic', *Classical Quarterly* XXXV (1985), pp. 392–410.

[75] Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, pp. 248–54; P. Bastien, *Monnaie et donativa au Bas-Empire* (Wetteren, 1998); Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, pp. 210–16, 226–7.

[76] Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.13–14, reminiscent of the great 1805 Boulogne parade, during which Napoléon I gave out 2000 medals: Black, *War in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 195–6.

## III. Cowardice and 'Failure'

The term for cowardice was *ignavia* and a coward was an *ignavus*. Predictably the ancient sources are vastly less forthcoming about such military 'failure' than they are about *virtus*. Much ignominious activity did attract notice in the elite literature, particularly in connection with poor generalship and political manipulation of soldiers' loyalties, and in the event of military mutinies and insubordination. This fitted in well with elite hostility to the common soldiers, who were characterized as licentious and lazy. The large-scale mutinies of the imperial period were largely about poor pay and conditions, as with those which broke out in the Rhenish and Danubian army groups after the death of Augustus in AD 14.[78] They were ended by protracted negotiation, concessions, and some select executions, rather in the manner of the mutinies of the Spanish Army of Flanders,[79] or the Nore and Spithead naval mutinies.[80] Seldom did Roman troops mutiny in the face of an external enemy (as opposed to civil war situations). One exception is the refusal of an army to embark from the north Gallic coast to invade Britain, led by the emperor Gaius, and which was almost repeated in AD 43. On the latter occasion the troops' dread of the uncharted Oceanus was dispelled comedically and the Claudian invasion went ahead successfully.[81] On campaign in northern Britain later in the first century, a whole regiment of German Usipi mutinied, killed its officers, commandeered transport, and was shipwrecked on the way back home. The survivors were eventually sold back to the Romans as slaves.[82] Not a case of cowardice, but presumably a well-publicized exemplum of the fate awaiting mutineers and deserters.

The only serious uprising of native troops which drew in the support of external barbarians was the Batavian revolt of AD 69–70.[83] This had a Batavian leader, Iulius Civilis, who had previously served in the Roman forces, and occurred at a time when the Rhenish frontier legions were depleted by the best troops marching off to engage in civil war.[84] The Batavian regiments were prominent within the regular *auxilia* for their warrior ethos and mobility in crossing waterways with their horses, and it took strenuous campaigning to suppress them.[85]

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[77] Maxfield, *Military Decorations*, pp. 218–35; Campbell, *Emperor and the Roman Army*, pp. 88–101.

[78] Tacitus, *Annales* 1.16–49; Dio 57.4–6.

[79] Parker, *Army of Flanders*, pp. 157–76.

[80] Lewis, *Social History*, pp. 124–5, 303; Rodger, *Wooden World*, pp. 206, 346.

[81] Suetonius, *Gaius* 46; Dio 59.25.1–3, 60.19.2–3.

[82] Tacitus, *Agricola* 28, 32.

[83] Parallels might be drawn with the mutiny of Indian sepoy regiments in 1857, partly occasioned by British distractions in the Crimea, although this was on a very much larger scale: S. David, *The Indian Mutiny* (London, 2002), pp. 45–66; Omissi, *Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 3–10. The Batavian regiments continued to serve, but legionary formations defeated by the insurgents were cashiered: Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, p. 214; van Rossum, 'End of the Batavian Auxiliaries'.

If the written record was partial and circumspect, then cowardice was even less likely to appear in the iconographic sources, whether triumphalist metropolitan monuments or the personal testaments of private soldiers. Desertion from the Roman army has a very shadowy existence in the ancient sources. Partly it would have depended upon the citizen or non-citizen status of the soldiers involved, and their potential welcome and future among neighbouring peoples. Return of deserters was mentioned in conjunction with peace treaties, but seldom were these men identified further. In the long series of Danubian wars waged in the first to second centuries by emperors from Domitian to Marcus Aurelius there were some quite heavy defeats of Roman forces which may have increased desertion through low morale, especially by non-citizens.[86] In the eastern theatre there were some disastrous defeats, notably in 53 BC with the loss of Crassus and his army to the Parthians,[87] and in the mid-third century AD when thousands of civilians and soldiers were led into captivity within the Sassanid Persian empire. The Sassanids celebrated the victories of their king Shapur I in long triumphal inscriptions and in a series of rock-cut reliefs in south-west Iran. Roman emperors are depicted in submission and lines of Roman soldiers present tribute.[88]

For individual Romans the alternatives to *virtus*, acting through cowardice in war, were rather stark. The nature of physical injury in ancient combat and its psychological impact may have been radically different from the shock and trauma inflicted by early modern and modern munitions. However, medical support was technologically rudimentary. Injuries from pre-industrial weaponry, such as the Dacian *falx*, would have been personally devastating. Parallels might be drawn in this case with the disproportionately traumatic morale effect in the modern period of specifically demonized enemy weapons, such as the Highland broadsword, Gurkha *kukri*, Khyber knife, Zulu *iklwa*, and Dervish sword.[89] Injured Roman soldiers, unlike the time-served veterans, seem to have been summarily discharged from the army with nothing but their personal savings. There were no peg-legged cooks in the imperial forces. On the other hand, outright death was provided for by the special privileges accorded to serving soldiers in the drawing up of wills, soldiers' burial clubs, and the attention of heirs in honouring the deceased with proper burial and a funerary monument.

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[84] Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.12–37, 57–80, 5.14–26.

[85] Dio 60.21.2, 6.

[86] A.S. Stefan, *Les guerres daciques de Domitien et de Trajan: architecture militaire, topographie, images et histoire*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 353 (Roma, 2005), pp. 399–438; A.R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1987), pp. 160–78, 207–10. Cf. Tacitus, *Historiae* 4.23; Dio 68.9.5, 11.3, 80.4.1; Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.452–4, 5.268; Ammianus Marcellinus 31.15.2, 4, 9.

[87] Plutarch, *Crassus* 31; Dio 40.27.4.

[88] D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395* (London, 2004), pp. 224–5, 234–6, 248–51, 255–6.

[89] Coulston, 'Overcoming the Barbarian', pp. 401–3. Cf. Kipling's *Fuzzy-Wuzzy*, 3.3–6, 'So we must certify the skill 'e's shown / In usin' of 'is long two-'anded swords: / When 'e's 'oppin' in an' out among the bush / With 'is coffin-'eaded shield an' shovel-spear.'

Surrender to an enemy occasioned by cowardice and/or a tactically impossible situation might have been especially problematic for Roman soldiers for a number of reasons. Surviving the immediate surrender context is difficult enough in any conflict situation where enemies are in the frenzy of combat. Moreover, perceptions of potential treatment of Roman prisoners by an enemy were dictated by the cultural attitudes towards barbarians and *barbaritas*. Tentative comparisons might be drawn with expectations of torture and lingering death in modern colonial conflicts, and a 'last bullet' mentality expressed by soldiers facing capture by American Indians, Tuaregs, or Pathans.[90] Torture by enemy women added a further layer of 'unmanning' degradation, combined with loss of male identity through gender humiliation, but of course also dread of literal emasculation through castration. Bound men are depicted being burnt with brands by barbarian women on Trajan's Column, but it is unclear whether they are Roman prisoners in Dacian hands, or barbarian raiders undergoing mistreatment by female provincials.[91]

In all wars soldiers are unavoidably captured. Some armies and states have been more sympathetic to this reality than others, as was seen variously in the twentieth century with the 'no surrender' declaration of the Third Reich *Führerbefehl*, or concern for the fates of US Vietnam POWs.[92] Roman soldiers who surrendered were effectively enslaved by their captors, thus losing all legal status as citizens and soldiers.[93] Of course, in some cases, dishonour might be preferable to death, but death by torture might be the reality after surrender. The institutional ignominy was clearly signalled by the dissolution of the legions which had been defeated and surrendered to barbarians in the Batavian Revolt of Civilis. The numbers of the *legiones* XVII, XVIII, and XVIIII, lost with Varus in AD 9, were never reassigned to new legions raised subsequently.[94] Strenuous military and diplomatic efforts were made, with some success, to recover their lost standards over the following 30 years, about the same period of time it took to secure the return of the standards lost by Crassus in 53 BC.[95] Considerably less official concern was expressed about the liberation of Roman prisoners.

Most famously, Roman soldiers who were captured in AD 9 in the Varian disaster reportedly suffered hideous torture and death, and this whole episode may now be profitably examined from the perspective of Roman 'failure'. The pertinent ancient sources raise many issues concerning Roman leadership, bravery, combat trauma, resistance, death, evasion, surrender, captivity, survival, dishonour, and public perception. The defeat of P. Quinctilius Varus with 20,000 troops in the Teutoburg Forest (*saltus Teutoburgensis*) was one of the most devastating of Roman defeats, ranking with Cannae (216 BC), Carrhae (53 BC), Edessa (AD 260), and Hadrianopolis (AD 378). The geographical location of this battle has been sought since the Renaissance. In the 1980s stray finds of coins and other artefacts drew attention to a site at Kalkriese near Osnabrück in Germany. Extensive metal-detecting and area excavation from 1987 onwards have revealed a conflict landscape defined by scatters and concentrations of metallic artefacts, skeletal deposits, linear earthwork features, and local topography. It lies at a point where communications were funnelled between ancient marshes to the north (Großes Moor) and the Kalkrieser Berg to the south, an area which was presumably heavily forested in the Roman period.[96]

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[90] For example, Welch and Stekler, *Killing Custer*, pp. 142–8; 171–2; D. Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco: A Savage Colonial War* (London, 1987), p. 178; J. Masters, *Bugles and a Tiger* (London, 1956), pp. 198–9; Coulston, 'Overcoming the Barbarian', pp. 407–9.

[91] Scene XLV.

[92] J. Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (London, 1988), pp. 298–304; A. Jones, J.G. Hubbell and K.Y. Tomlinson, *P.O.W. A Definitive History of the American Prisoner-of-War Experience in Vietnam, 1964–1973* (New York, 1976); M. Jensen-Stevensen, *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed Its Own POWs in Vietnam* (London, 1990).

[93] For the disgrace of a captured Roman soldier, see Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.359–62.

[94] Keppie, *Making of the Roman Army*, pp. 214–15.

[95] *Res gestae divi Augusti* 29; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.60, 61; Florus 2.30. Cf. Velleius Paterculus 2.97; Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 4.

Crucially, the Kalkriese finds include Augustan Roman coins, some counter-stamped by Varus, with none post-dating AD 9. Skeletal remains of humans have been found in pits or shallow depressions intermixed with the bones of some horses and more mules. Some artefacts were included alongside the bones, and crania exhibit trauma. The range of artefacts certainly demonstrates the presence of Roman troops on the site in the Augustan period, and it is extremely likely that the Kalkriese artefacts, spread as they are over a distance of approximately 10 km, represent residue from the conflict landscape of Varus' defeat. The overall distribution of finds may suggest that the Roman forces were attempting to move round the marsh, skirting the foothills, and that a logjam of wagons, pack mules, and wounded soldiers increased the confusion.

There are four main ancient literary sources concerning the Varus disaster, all except one much later in date than AD 9. Velleius was a contemporary who alluded obliquely to the action but supplied a very telling portrait of the commander.[97] Varus was 'a man of mild character, and of quiet disposition, somewhat slow in mind as he was in body, and more accustomed to the leisure of the camp than to real military service'. He seems to have been fatally disposed to believe that the German leaders were friendly and acquiescent to taxation and legal jurisdiction. Velleius also provided the detail that one of Varus' legates attempted unsuccessfully to break out with the cavalry towards the Rhine, leaving the infantry to its own devices. Varus himself committed suicide, and his body was partially cremated by his followers, but then mutilated by the Germans and decapitated. Writing in the late first century AD, Florus likewise played up Varus' misplaced confidence, then dwelt on the torture of captured Romans.[98] Varus' body had apparently been partially buried in an unsuccessful attempt to conceal it.

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[96] G. Moosbauer and S. Wilbers-Rost, 'Kalkriese und die Varusschlacht: Multidisziplinäre Forschungen zu einem militärischen Konflikt', pp. 56–67, and A. Rost, 'Das Schlachtfeld von Kalkriese: Eine archäologische Quelle für die Konfliktforschung', pp. 68–76, in *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht: Konflikt*.

[97] Velleius Paterculus 2.117–19.

[98] Florus 2.30.

The late second to early third century historian Cassius Dio provided the only direct description of events to survive.[99] Again Varus pursued legal settlement and the levy of taxation, ignoring the steady alienation of German leaders. Opposition coalesced around the Cheruscan leader Arminius, who managed to lull Varus to such an extent that he was deaf to all warnings of impending trouble. Varus therefore scattered his forces and then was lured towards an arranged disturbance. Arminius and other German leaders accompanied Varus, but then slipped away to assemble their forces. Apparently the army moved with many wagons, pack animals, women, children, and servants. Across difficult topography and through forest the army became strung out and fragmented, and the weather then deteriorated into periodic rainstorms. German attacks started tentatively, then became more bold. Mixed with wagons and non-combatants, the soldiers were hampered and unable to respond effectively. The army then camped overnight, burnt the wagons, abandoned excess baggage, and moved on the next day in good order, although continuing to sustain losses. On the third day the confining trees prevented proper use of cavalry and infantry together, and losses were even heavier. More torrential rain on the fourth day saw the troops advancing with their shields impossibly heavy and their composite bows useless with absorbed water. Meanwhile, the barbarians had been attracted in ever-increasing numbers into the field. With Roman losses mounting, Varus and his staff committed suicide to avoid capture. This might be seen either as a noble act or as a classic example of command abrogation.[100] With their leaders lost, many of the troops either took their own lives or simply abandoned resistance. Some Roman soldiers with non-combatants managed to escape. Most were killed or taken captive. Some of the latter were later ransomed and returned to Roman territory.

Writing in the late first and early second centuries, Cornelius Tacitus dealt not with the battle itself but with the aftermath in an extraordinarily evocative passage.[101] During retaliatory campaigning across the Rhine in AD 15, Germanicus took his army to the *saltus Teutoburgensis* expressly to visit the battle site. The regularly laid out but ruined first camp was surveyed. The bleached bones of the dead were disbursed where soldiers had scattered, or piled up where last stands had been made. Apparently broken weapons and the remains of horses were evident, and the remains of severed heads were still fixed to trees.[102] The tribunes and leading centurions had been sacrificed on altars.

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[99] Dio 56.18–22.

[100] S. David, *Military Blunders: The How and Why of Military Failure* (London, 1997).

[101] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.61–2.

[102] While evocative, Tacitus' account probably contains much fabricated detail. It is likely that the field was picked clean of all weapons, valuable for their recycled metal, and the excavators have found evidence for scrap-metal sorting on the site. Last stands may simply reflect the piling up of bodies in the despoliation process. The heroic stand on 'Last Stand Hill' at the Little Bighorn battlefield may have been as much the product of *post eventum* wishful thinking as the reality of the 'Buffalo hunt' in which troopers scattered in flight and were hunted down in the last minutes (Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle*, p. 113; Welch and Stekler, *Killing Custer*, pp. 170–1; Donovan, *Terrible Glory*, pp. 272–7).

Treated with caution, the literary sources create a coherent picture. An army weighed down with supernumeraries and excess baggage was provided from the outset with weak, deluded, and vacillating overall command. Without strong leadership from the top, the army struggled on across difficult country and through oppressive weather. Days of downpour, primitive camping conditions, and deteriorating equipment further compounded stress. Discarding baggage may have represented an attempt at imposing order but with limited success, not least because food and spare weapons would have been lost. Abandonment of conveyances, and thus the wounded, would have further eroded morale.

The cumulative hunger, cold, and exhaustion over four days of marching and combat in such conditions led to a crisis of command and control. The barbarians were cautious at first, but evident Roman weakness would have encouraged German attacks and drawn in more warriors from an ever-expanding area. For the Romans, isolation from secure bases and reinforcements would have been combined with fear for the safety of dependants in the column. The hopelessness of flight, the dread of painfully violent injury or death, and the terror of capture and mutilation were inescapable. The final and irrevocable removal of high command led further to the disintegration of military formations and an abandonment of *disciplina*. Headlong flight, abandonment of weapons, and a complete inability in self-defence would have possessed some soldiers. Individuals may even have killed themselves as a culturally appropriate avoidance of torture and dishonour. Others would have bunched together for comfort and hopeless last stands, only to be overwhelmed in detail. Small groups may have maintained some cohesion and fought their way out.

Many aspects of this scenario are familiar from other periods. The transition from tactical stability to disintegration was crucial,[103] but the initiative was never really attained by Varus' forces, not least because of the terrain and the clumsily disjointed nature of the column. The latter was at variance with recognized Roman practice for ordering armies on the march.[104] Fatigue presumably played a key role in sapping the

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[103] The stability/disintegration model: Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle*, pp. 8, 11, 14–15, 39–62, 337–8.

[104] Goldsworthy, *Roman Army*, pp. 105–11; Gilliver, *Roman Art of War*, pp. 32–62. Misreading of the political and strategic situation, followed by the slow march of an encumbered army, recalls similar disasters, such as Elphinstone's disastrous retreat from Kabul in 1842: T.A. Heathcote, *The Afghan Wars, 1839–1919* (London, 1980), pp. 53–63; David, *Military Blunders*, pp. 1–12; P. Macrory, *Retreat from Kabul* (Guilford, 2002), pp. 135–9, 145–8, 166–231. The withdrawal of British troops from Fort William Henry in 1757 during the French-Indian War, and their subsequent massacre by Montcalm's native allies, may form a close parallel as an archaeological context. The graves of soldiers and dependants killed at this time were excavated outside the fort in the 1950s: I.K. Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the 'Massacre'* (New York, 1990); M.A. Liston and B.J. Baker, 'Reconstructing the Massacre at Fort William Henry, New York', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* VI (1996), pp. 28–41; D.R. Starbuck, *Massacre at Fort William Henry* (Hanover, 2002).

Romans' will to fight.[105] When faced by the horror of such a situation people can act in seemingly irrational ways, for example by throwing away their weapons and fleeing when there is no realistic hope of escape.[106] Butchery in the heat of battle might result in no prisoners being spared, and at Kalkriese horses and mules also died with their owners. Nevertheless, it seems that some Romans, such as those who guided Germanicus around the conflict landscape, were spared death and eventually returned to the empire.

The foregoing examination of Roman courage and cowardice is of course open to accusations of generalization from the particular, and of presenting ideal perceptions of behaviour. However, it is hoped that factors based on the 'realities' of archaeological evidence and on human behaviour in stress situations have been profitably incorporated into the discussion. Roman armies fulfilled many functions besides fighting, but the probability that some Roman soldiers enjoyed a long career without ever drawing a sword in anger is not important, because they trained and were poised for war. The courage and cowardice of soldiers were and are always potential quantities, however thorough the military training, binding the discipline, and enfolding the ethos of valour, until such time as operations actually commence. Only then will success or failure be revealed, and armies have never been immunized against defeat by doctrine and preparatory regimes. Despite this truism, the culture of Roman imperial armies, so very different from those of their contemporary opponents, did a great deal to maximize the chances of success, as the history of the empire's expansion, defence, and longevity attests.

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[105] Cf. Keegan, *Face of Battle*, pp. 134–7; Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle*, pp. 267–9.

[106] Fox, *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle*, pp. 52, 136, 337–8.