

## THE PAY OF THE AUXILIARIES

# POOR RELATIONS?

Not much evidence survives for Roman military pay. We often read that auxiliaries were paid less than legionaries, and that cavalrymen always received more than infantrymen, but what exactly is the evidence for this? And how much did auxiliaries actually get paid?

By Duncan B. Campbell

At the start of the early Imperial period, the basic pay of a legionary *pedes* (infantryman) was 225 *denarii* (900 sesterces) per year, out of which he was expected to pay for food, clothing, and weapons. The historian Tacitus reports that, in AD 14, disgruntled legionaries were unhappy with their ten *asses* per day (the *as* was a large copper coin worth  $\frac{1}{4}$  sesterce) and demanded to be paid a full *denarius* of sixteen *asses* (*Annals* 1.17.6). It seems that their demand was not heeded, for legionaries continued to receive 75 *denarii* three times a year up until the reign of the emperor Domitian (AD 81-96).

We are often told that Domitian added a fourth pay instalment (or *stipendium*) of 75 *denarii*. This was the view of Alfred von Domaszewski (who appears frequently in the *Roman Army in Detail* articles), whereas Professor Peter Brunt believed that soldiers continued to be paid thrice yearly, but that

Domitian increased the amount of each instalment. Domaszewski based his opinion upon the testimony of the biogra-

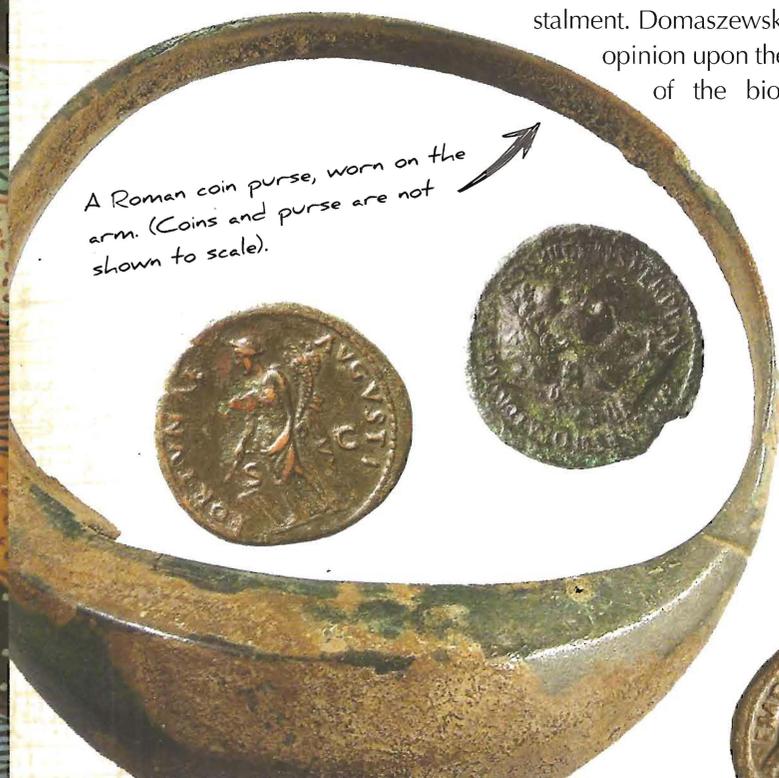
pher Suetonius, who claimed that Domitian “added a fourth *stipendium* for each soldier, which was three *auri*” (*Life of Domitian* 7.3). However, Brunt pointed out that the historian Cassius Dio, clearly referring to the same event, later recorded that, following Domitian’s victory over the German tribes in AD 83, “he increased pay for the soldiers, perhaps on account of this victory, and where 75 drachmas [i.e. *denarii*] had been received by each one, he ordered 100 to be given” (*Roman History* 67.3.5).

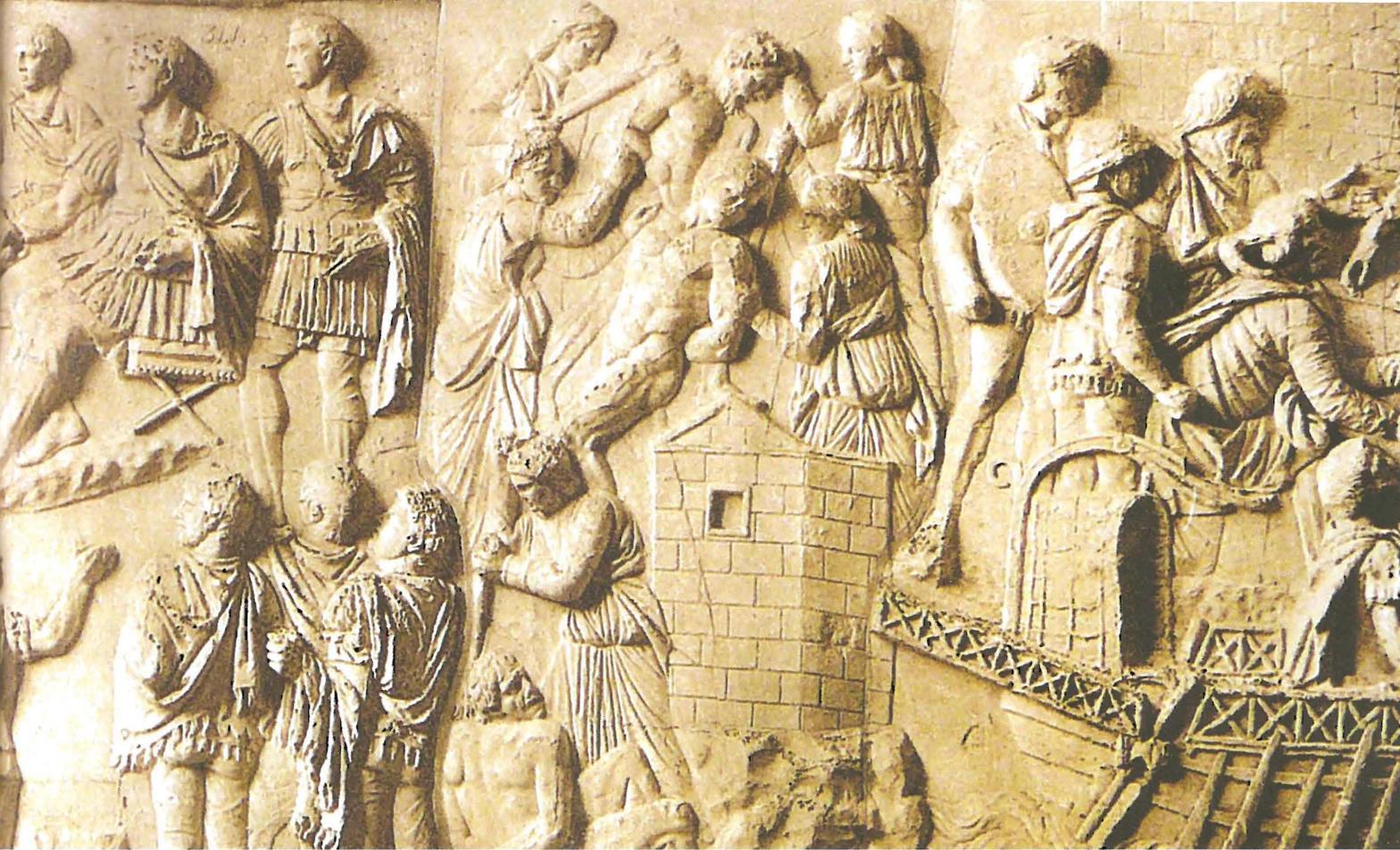
Brunt was aware that a certain Egyptian papyrus from the reign of Domitian (*P. Gen.lat.* 1 = *ChLA* 1.7), published in 1903 (some years after Domaszewski had publicized his views), showed that Roman soldiers were still paid in three instalments. He argued from this that “Suetonius is saying rather carelessly that Domitian gave his troops

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A Roman coin purse, worn on the arm. (Coins and purse are not shown to scale).





The emperor Trajan (seated at top) dispenses largesse to auxiliary soldiers, who are generally identified by this type of dress on the Column.

the equivalent of a fourth *stipendium*", so that they were now paid 100 *denarii* (400 sesterces) three times per year. The classicist G.R. Watson, in his study of Roman military book-keeping, took issue with this judgement, claiming that it was Cassius Dio who misrepresented the situation. In Watson's opinion, Domitian had indeed added a fourth pay day. However, his view was coloured by his belief that another more fragmentary Domitianic papyrus (*P. Gen. lat. 4 = ChLA 1.9*), listing three *stipendia*, might have recorded a fourth one in the damaged section at the bottom.

From time to time, researchers have sided with one or other of these views. However, one thing is certain. If a fourth *stipendium* was added by Domitian, it did not survive for long. Roman soldiers continued to be paid three times a year, and the crucial dates of 1 January, 1 May, and 1 September continually appear on military papyrus.

### Were auxiliaries the poor relations?

When we turn to the question of how much soldiers were paid, so far, all of the evidence (such as it is) relates to the legionary. Unfortunately, no ancient author ever discusses the pay of the auxiliaries, although Domaszewski made the assumption that it must have been much less than legionary pay. He opted for the figure of one-third. Thus, in his opinion, when the legionary rate became 300 *denarii* (1,200 sesterces) per year, auxiliary infantrymen were paid only 100 *denarii* (400 sesterces).

Confirmation, it was claimed, came from another Egyptian papyrus (*P. Berlin 6866 = ChLA 10.410*), recording payments of just over 84 *denarii* to auxiliary soldiers in AD 192, for it was suggested that either the operation of the Egyptian exchange rate or some unspecified deductions had left only five-sixths of the original 100 *denarii*. Watson believed that the re-

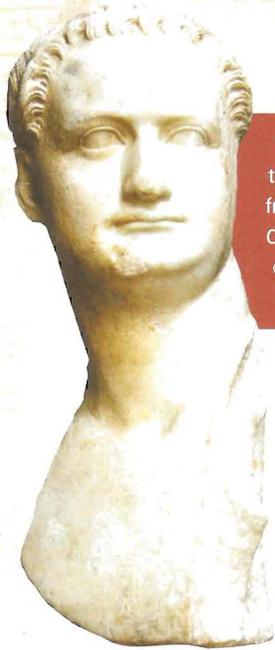
maining one-sixth had been handed out as pocket money, which did not need to be entered in the pay record.

Watson then developed an entire pay structure for the auxiliaries, which was elegant in its simplicity, but was founded upon this supposition. If the basic auxiliary pay was 100 *denarii*, he argued, this meant that the *sesquiplarius* ("pay-and-a-half man") received 150 *denarii*, and the *duplicarius* ("double-pay man") received 200 *denarii*. Since the horsemen in a *cohors equitata* (the so-called part-mounted cohort) must have received higher pay than the infantrymen, Watson assigned them 150 *denarii*, and since the horsemen in an *ala* (or cavalry squadron) must have received higher pay again, he assigned them

#### ► DID YOU KNOW?

Roman soldiers seem to have received most of their pay in copper asses and brass sesterces, which were large coins tariffed at fractions of the silver denarius. The reverse ('tails') side of the coin often carried imperial 'messages' to the soldiers.

All the money shown here (asses of Domitian) dates from between AD 86-87. Many coins from this period have been found at Roman military sites in Britain, while those from slightly later dates are much less common. This may indicate that funds for the military payroll were transported to far-flung sites infrequently, and had to last for several years.



The emperor Domitian was the first to raise army pay from the level set by Julius Caesar a century earlier.

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200 *denarii*. This satisfied his belief that the *sesquiplicarius* in an *ala* should receive the same pay as a legionary (namely, 300 *denarii*), and any legionary who was transferred to the post of *duplicarius alae* would treat it as a promotion, receiving increased pay of 400 *denarii*.

However, others preferred to assume that auxiliary pay, far from being one-third of legionary pay, was actually very close to it, at five-sixths. One of the papyri mentioned above (*P. Gen. lat.* 4) records payments of 297 *denarii*, which Professor Michael Speidel pointed out to be 300 *denarii* minus one per cent, while another (*P. Gen. lat.* 1) records payments of 247½ *denarii*, which is 250 *denarii* minus one per cent. It seems too much of a coincidence that the first of these reminds us of legionary pay, while the second represents five-sixths of legionary pay, which could then be interpreted as basic auxiliary pay.

(The one per cent deduction, he suggested, might be related to the Egyptian exchange rate, as cash had to be converted into drachmas and obols for use in that country.) At the same time, the 84 *denarii* of the third papyrus (*P. Berlin* 6866) falls into place, not as an entire annual salary, but as one *stipendium* paid to an auxiliary infantryman at the rate of five-sixths of the legionary's 100 *denarii*.

Writing in the 1970s, Speidel had the benefit of having studied the career of Tiberius Claudius Maximus, as laid out on his tombstone (*AE* 1969/70, 583), which was then only recently discovered (see "Glorious horsemen: the cavalry of the legion", *Ancient Warfare* XI.3), so he understood how closely the legionary and auxiliary hierarchies were intertwined. Maximus had been transferred to the position of *duplicarius alae* from the legionary cavalry, in which he already held a promoted post as standard-bearer. Thus, Watson's suggested salary of 400 *denarii* (1,600 sesterces) would surely have meant a substantial cut in pay for a post-Domitianic legionary who was at least a *sesquiplicarius*.

### A more complex hierarchy

Any remaining doubt was dispelled in 1992 with the publication of a particular wooden writing tablet dis-

covered at Vindonissa (Windisch, Switzerland), for it recorded that a certain *equus cohortis* (horseman in a part-mounted cohort) named Clua "received 75 *denarii* in lieu of his next pay" on 22 July AD 38 (*AE* 1992, 1272). This was clearly his September *stipendium* paid in advance, proving that, prior to Domitian's pay rise, a horseman in a cohort was paid 225 *denarii* (900 sesterces) – exactly the same as a legionary. And employing the 5:6 ratio, the auxiliary infantryman would then have received 187½ *denarii* (750 sesterces).

Unfortunately, no figures have yet come to light for the horsemen of the *alae*. In the wellknown *adlocutio Hadriani* ('Hadrian's address' to the army of north Africa in AD 128, see the *Core of the Legion* Special Issue), the emperor's disparaging comment about the pay of the *equites cohortis* (the horsemen of the Sixth Part-Mounted Cohort of Commagenians) tells us that they must have earned less than their colleagues in an *ala*, as he gives them faint praise for having performed *pro stipendi modo* ("in accordance with your pay") after the glittering display that the First Cavalry Squadron of Pannonians had put on. But there is no explicit indication of exactly how much more the cavalymen of an *ala* were paid.

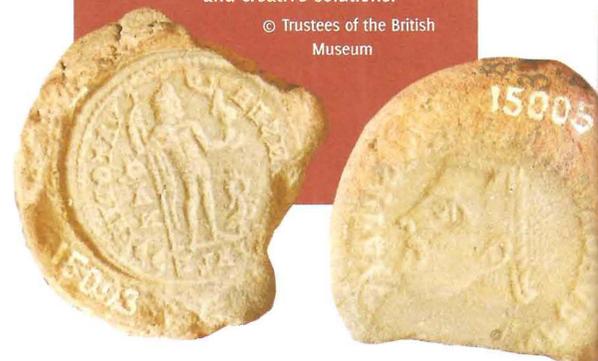
One piece of evidence may shed some light in the darkness,

	<i>pedes</i>	750	<b>1,000</b>
Auxiliary cohorts	<i>sesquiplicarius</i>	1,125	1,500
	<i>duplicarius</i>	1,500	2,000
	<i>equus</i>	<b>900</b>	1,200
Legions	<i>pedes</i>	<b>900</b>	<b>1,200</b>
	<i>sesquiplicarius</i>	1,350	1,800
	<i>duplicarius</i>	1,800	2,400
	<i>equus</i>	1,050	1,400
	<i>equus</i>	1,050	1,400
Cavalry squadrons	<i>sesquiplicarius</i>	1,575	2,100
	<i>duplicarius</i>	2,100	2,800

\* Roman soldiers' annual pay in sesterces (Figures in bold are directly attested)

Discovered in Egypt, these coin molds, dating from the early 4th century AD, were used to create forged currency. During the Late Empire, it became a major problem to keep the legions stationed in far away provinces paid. This no doubt led to more people resorting to desperate and creative solutions.

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The pay chest was kept safe in a strongroom beneath the headquarters building. This example can be seen in the western compound at Corbridge.

for we know that the total amount of pay transferred to the First Cavalry Squadron of Hiberians (a horse-riding people who hailed from the Caucasus) in AD 300 was 73,500 *denarii* (*P. Panop.* 2, lines 37-39). Michael Speidel junior has suggested that this sum represents the pay of 105 auxiliary cavalrymen at 700 *denarii* each. By the third century, the Roman army had experienced three further pay increases, as Septimius Severus allegedly doubled the pay set by Domitian, Caracalla then added 50 per cent, and Maximinus Thrax doubled it again. Thus, in AD 300, soldiers were paid six times the Domitianic rate, and a *stipendium* of 700 *denarii* (2,100 sesterces) would represent a Domitianic rate of  $116\frac{2}{3}$  *denarii* ( $466\frac{2}{3}$  sesterces), which – paid three times per year – would total 350 *denarii* (1,400 sesterces).

In support of this rather odd sum, Speidel has suggested that horsemen originally received an ex-

tra 150 sesterces *equestria stipendia* (“horseman’s pay”) over and above the infantryman’s pay, to compensate for the upkeep of the horse. This figure is in keeping with the 5:6 ratio. Thus, where the auxiliary infantryman (*pedes*) of the *cohors equitata* received five-sixths of the legionary’s pay ( $\frac{5}{6}$ th of 900, so 750 sesterces), his mounted counterpart received one-sixth more (900 sesterces) to bring him up to the legionary rate. And where the legionary infantryman received 900 sesterces, his mounted counterpart (in this case, both the *equus legionis* and the *equus alae*) received one-sixth more (see table).

When Domitian increased all pay by one-third, so that the legionary infantryman now received 1,200 sesterces, this *equestria stipendia* also increased by one-third to 200 sesterces, and the *equus alae* ought to have received 1,400 sesterces. This certainly matches the younger Speidel’s analysis of the third-century

papyrus mentioned above (although other calculations are possible), but more importantly, it maintains the elegant simplicity of figures based on the 5:6 ratio. **AV**

**Duncan B. Campbell is a regular contributor to Ancient Warfare.**

### Further reading

- ◆ P.A. Brunt, ‘Pay and Superannuation in the Roman Army’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* vol. 18, 1950, pp. 50-71.
- ◆ G.R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1969.
- ◆ M.A. Speidel, ‘Roman Army Pay Scales Revisited’, in M. Reddé (ed.), *De l’or pour les Braves!*, Bordeaux, Ausonius, 2014, pp. 53-62.