

*“Feasts and Harlots, Baths and Idleness”
The Geography of Billeted Troops in Late Antiquity*

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The billeting of troops has frequently elicited negative reactions from the civilians forced to pay for or provide housing to soldiers in homes or within military barracks built on private property. American responses to the Quartering Acts passed by British Parliament in 1765 and 1774 were ones of grave displeasure, particularly for commercial business owners. The 1765 act stipulated that colonists were not responsible for quartering troops in private homes, but it specified that colonists did have to offer up tax money as well as any empty warehouses, outhouses, inns, stables, alehouses, and victualling houses (public houses) as quarters for British troops.¹ The British government forced billeting throughout their North American colonies for extended periods, particularly during and after the French and Indian War. This act fomented resentment and dissent among many of the older colonies, but not in newer frontier colonies in modern Canada and elsewhere. In the end, the British billeting acts compelled Americans to legally and socially redefine ideas of private versus public space, a renegotiation enshrined in the Third Amendment to the United States Constitution.² This amendment guaranteed American homeowners protections from billeting in peacetime and remains today one of the most unchallenged amendments within the US Bill of Rights since its ratification in 1791.

In a similar manner to American colonists, civilians in many cities across the late Roman Empire from the fourth through the mid-sixth centuries had to renegotiate their own conceptions of public and private spaces, as military and urban spaces increasingly collided within certain eastern frontier cities and Italy.³ While American colonists were far from the only people to complain, rebel, or seek protections from the financial and social burdens of billeting troops in their homes or businesses, they were exceptional in successfully halting a state policy that had been in use since

¹ Pickering 1765: 5 George 3 c.33.

² McCurdy 2019.

³ Sarantis 2013: 2.

antiquity. As this chapter explores, ancient legislation, literature, and epigraphic evidence similarly attest to the negative impact of billeting on those in the Roman Mediterranean; however, the frequency of billeting in private households and the rate of violence often connected to it may be overstated by Roman historians today.

Roman imperial exemptions from quartering provided predominantly elite civilians, such as senators or clerics, with protections from having to quarter troops. Only rarely did whole communities receive release. These communities often publicly displayed inscriptions that in turn attest to the value of immunities from billeting. However, not all attestations of billeting are as straightforward as they may seem. There was a Greco-Roman tradition of moralizing rhetoric when writing about soldiers in cities, which can distort modern attempts to recreate the lived experience of billeting in Late Antiquity. Moreover, there is often a modern misuse of the upturn in fourth- and fifth-century legal evidence, itself a product of enhanced documentary habits and anticorruption initiatives, to infer a surge in the frequency of billeting. Finally, there is the tendency to use the unprecedented evidence of and from Dura-Europos as a proxy for all Roman frontier cities. These biases condition us to view the late Roman Empire in a manner disparate to the social reality. There is little evidence to corroborate arguments that ubiquitous billeting was a pivotal issue contributing to the widespread corruption, luxury, and "fall" of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity.⁴

7.1 The Nature of the Evidence

Many centuries before Edward Gibbon narrated the decline of the Roman Empire in 1776, the late fifth-century historian Zosimus had already attributed Rome's decay to Constantine and to Christianity. Unlike Gibbon, Zosimus provided a modicum of optimism in his work, observing that this decline was not irreversible if traditional Roman religion and piety were restored.⁵ In his *Historia nova*, the Constantinople-based bureaucrat presents critiques of Christianity and luxury embedded in his recounting of the empire from Augustus up to the last extant portion, on the eve of the sacking of Rome in 410 CE. In his second book, he casts Constantine

⁴ MacMullen 1988 (152–67) is elaborating explicitly on the argument of Jones 1964 (2:647, 1036). This argument is echoed by Southern and Dixon 1996 (2014: 84) and most recently stated by Storey and Storey 2017 (89). For the especially high toll on the Roman Near East using the argument of Jones, see Forness 2018 (100–01).

⁵ Kruse 2019: 34.

as sowing the first σπέρματα (seeds) for the destruction of the empire.⁶ To his mind, Constantine's fatal course of action lay in moving troops off the Roman *limites* (frontier lines) and into the cities. He remarks that this shift oppressed Roman townspeople by displacing them, assumedly due to the necessity to house the troops. It also softened the soldiers by exposing them to entertainment and luxuries. Like many historians and philosophers writing Greco-Roman literature, Zosimus leans heavily on the classical rhetorical approach of decrying τρυφή (*truphe*, "extravagance") as a corruptive element to military discipline.⁷ This was moralizing speech widely used by Greek writers such as Aristotle, Xenophon, Ephorus, Plato, and Polybius, and then by Roman-era writers like Sallust and Plutarch since at least the fourth century BCE.⁸ Most importantly, this rhetoric of luxury was heavily used by one of Zosimus' primary sources for this portion of his history: Eunapius, a mid-fourth century sophist and often anti-Christian historian.⁹ When the rhetoric concerning luxury and Constantine's troop movements are combined with the mentions of billeting in the Theodosian Code, it can seem especially persuasive to imagine thousands of homes overrun by Roman soldiers carousing through towns, drinking heavily, visiting brothels, and indulging in the baths.

Visions of corrupting luxury and decline parroted by numerous Greco-Roman authors contended that the city presented an environment hostile to the ideal of military discipline (much as it could for monastic bodies). They allege that urban landscapes softened and feminized troops, distracting them from focused military service. In antiquity, this rhetoric was particularly attached to billeted foreign troops. In the first century BCE, Livy claimed in his history of Rome that Hannibal's wintering soldiers billeted just after the Battle of Cannae (216 BCE) during the Second Punic War weakened their bodies through daily indulgence in "sleep and wine and feasts and harlots and baths and idleness (*otium*)."¹⁰ Later, Clement of Alexandria and many other Christian apologists warned

⁶ Zosimus 2.34.1–2. ⁷ Zosimus 2.32.1, 2.34.2. See Cameron 2011: 655–57.

⁸ For the rhetoric of the *mollitia* (softening) of soldiers with luxury, see Zanda 2013 (4) and Pownall 2004.

⁹ The ninth-century Byzantine historian Photius (*Bibl.* 98.11.66) commented that Zosimus essentially copied the text of Eunapius word for word in many places. See Liebeschuetz 2003 (178). Cameron 2011 (655) believed that Emperor Julian originated this attack on Constantine as corrupted by luxury.

¹⁰ Livy 23.18.12: *Somnus enim et uinum et epulae et scorta balineaque et otium consuetudine in dies blandius ita enervauerunt corpora animosque ut magis deinde praeteritae uictoriae eos quam praesentes tutarentur uires*. "For sleep and wine and feasts and harlots and baths and idleness, which custom rendered more enticing every day, so completely feminized bodies and minds, that henceforth their previous victories – rather than the present strengths protected them." See Phang 2008 (102), who

that urban locations for comfort and intrigue within the city, such as baths or inns, were loci for immorality and feminization, providing myriad temptations to corrupt moral discipline.¹¹ For both non-Christian and Christian moralists, the feminizing "softness" of cityscapes always had to be taken into account, but there was also the money-saving necessity to depend on citizens to house soldiers. The challenges presented by rhetorically charged, long-held perceptions of the city in Late Antiquity are incomplete without also understanding the temporary nature of most billets in private homes rather than barracks, preexisting cultures of surveillance, and the civilian-soldier tensions surrounding billeted Gothic troops in the late Roman Empire.

Modern ideas of a "grand strategy" from above and largely negative views of the late Roman military from Constantine onward still lean heavily on Zosimus' allegation that the emperor moved troops into cities and off the frontier zones, even if the archaeological evidence for forts along the Rhine and Danube refutes it.¹² However, billeting is mentioned only sporadically in late Roman literary sources and even less so in the material evidence.¹³ The spotty literary citations and the transient nature of the archaeological contexts for the evidence for soldiers living with civilians also means there is not currently a monograph-length examination of its use and impact across the Roman Empire. Our best material understanding of the phenomenon comes from Roman Syria during the second to third centuries CE, where scholars such as Simon James, Nigel Pollard, and Jennifer Baird have carefully analyzed the evidence from Dura-Europos and adjusted earlier assessments by Michael Rostovtzeff.¹⁴

The strongest evidence for the late Roman use and abuse of billeting ostensibly lies in the legislation from the Theodosian Code, the Justinian Digest, the Justinian Code, and Justinian's *Novels*, which concern the law of *hospitalitas* (law of quartering). However, the increase in imperial documentary habits and anticorruption legislation in the fourth through sixth centuries is patent and not itself an indicator of an increase in

demonstrates that Stoics, and particularly Cicero, argued that "luxury relaxes the masculine and especially martial habitus, causing it to dissolve in floods of 'pleasure.'"

¹¹ Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.5, rails against the luxurious and licentious nature of baths in Roman cities.

¹² Luttwak 2016: 146–215. See also Jones 1964 (2:1036) as followed by Southern and Dixon 1996 (2014: 84). Jones 1970 (167) does call Zosimus "grossly unfair" to Constantine, and Millar 1993 (209–10) notes there is no evidence to support this allegation in the Near East. Whittaker 2004: 38.

¹³ For an idea of the scale and supplies needed for visiting troops: P.Panop. Beatty 1 Z. 276–331 (18 September 298 CE) lists the extensive provisions needed for the traveling troops of Diocletian within the city of Panopolis in Roman Egypt.

¹⁴ Pollard 2000; Baird 2014; James 2020.

corruption.¹⁵ Legal evidence, as a prescriptive genre from above, is a difficult category to use in order to reconstruct a social reality from below. More importantly, it is a poor metric for gauging scale, namely the regularity and scope of an act. Just because a modern law forbids jaywalking or extortion, it does not tell us how often or where it occurs. We must approach the legislation on billeting in the uniquely preserved late Roman law codes with the same caveats. For example, a law promulgated in 393 CE by Theodosius dictates that soldiers were not able to demand more than their legal housing allocation. It underscores that homeowners did not have to provide extras to soldiers, items such as firewood, mattresses (or pillows), or oil.

The Emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius, Augusti to Abundantius, Stilicho and the rest of the counts of both military branches. No soldier shall demand pickles [i.e., extras] by any name from his host, that is, they shall not demand wood or oil or mattresses. Given on the fourth day before the kalends of August at Constantinople in the third consulship of Theodosius Augustus and the consulship of [Flavius] Abundantius, the *vir clarissimus*.¹⁶

From a law of 398 CE, we know that civilian homeowners in the late fourth century CE were required to provide one third of their house to quartered soldiers.¹⁷ However, the social reality of whether billeted Roman soldiers habitually or forcibly demanded their proverbial *salgammum* (pickles) from host families is a difficult question without many firm answers – only anecdotal evidence. Was the emperor indicating his care for the Roman people by assuring them of what was required of them, or was this a common “pickle” in which people found themselves, namely soldiers taking more than they were owed?

Presuming the worst and further casting it as illustrative of the entirety of the Roman Empire works in service to a thesis of widespread exploitation and military oppression in the late antique Mediterranean that is not confirmed. However, that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t attempt to reconstruct the process and geography of billeting. This chapter assesses the civic responsibility to billet troops in urban centers within the late Roman Empire in terms of the procedure, legislation, geography, and

¹⁵ Bond 2018: 49–64.

¹⁶ Cod. Theod. 7.9.3 (29 July 393 CE) (Mommsen and Meyer 1905: 332–33): *Imppp. valentinianus, theodosius et arcadius aaa. abundantio, stilichoni et ceteris comitibus utriusque militiae. nemo militum a suo hospite salgami aliquid nomine postulet, id est ne lignum aut oleum culcitaeve poscantur. dat. iiii kal. aug. constantinopoli theodosio a. iiii et abundantio v c cons.*

¹⁷ Cod. Theod. 7.8.5 (398 CE).

sociocultural fears in order to underscore the scattered nature of billeting, which appears to have been concentrated only in certain areas. I argue that while most Roman civilians in cities were expected to take on the duty of providing the service of *hospitium* or *hospitalitas* to soldiers if needed, the onus often fell disproportionately on civilians stationed on the eastern frontiers and, in the later fifth century CE into the early sixth, on those in northern Italy. There is less evidence than previously posed by Ramsay MacMullen and others to attest to widespread abuses of the system.¹⁸ The frequency of civilians quartering troops, the *munus hospitalitas*, in the late Roman Empire is still a question without a concrete answer. This chapter instead draws on a diffuse range of evidence to problematize an old question: Can we track the geography, lived experience, and impact of sociolegal changes in troop billeting for late Roman civilians and soldiers?

7.2 Billeting in the Republic and Early Principate

Romans did not create billeting. In the eastern Mediterranean well before Roman conquest, forced billeting was already a regular tactic used by Hellenistic kings, particularly the Antigonids, Seleucids, and Ptolemies.¹⁹ From the Middle Republic onward, Roman troops were more regularly cited in literature as being housed within cities. Billeting was not always a constant burden; rather it was most often seasonal in nature. It increased in frequency during the winter months of December to February, when troops were not actively fighting or on campaign. For Roman troops in Macedonia in the early second century BCE, this meant billets in the city of Apollonia; for Caesar's troops in the Gallic War, it meant a mix of winter barracks and billets in Gallic towns.²⁰ Although we don't have the written complaints of either the Macedonians or the Gauls, it was quite the financial and social burden to billet troops in one's city or town for a

¹⁸ MacMullen 1963: 78–84.

¹⁹ The term *billeting* is a modern one and comes from the French *billet*, particularly applied to quartering French and then British troops in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Hellenistic terminology of the Ptolemies for troop quartering is spelled out in a letter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, *περί της σταθμοδοσίας των στρατιωτῶν* (regarding the lodging of soldiers): P. Hal. 1 = TM 5876 (259 BCE), for instance. For more Hellenistic examples, see Austin 2006: 62.172, 191, 193, 201. Also see Lewis 1986: 21–24.

²⁰ Livy 31.18.9, 28.41.10; Caesar, *BGall.* 2.35. Caesar most often denotes billeting not in specific towns but by using the preposition *in* (among) in the accusative, followed by the name of the Gallic tribe who inhabited a town (e.g., *in Carnutes, Andes, Turonos*). Those public officials traveling on the *cursus publicus* often carried a *diploma* with their name on it, which entitled them to lodging and a few amenities, as paid for by the local provincials, although this is not considered military troop billeting. See Roth 1999: 177–81.

winter. The silence of many provincials in the republic does not mean it was not oppressive or extortive. We do, however, lack many written testaments of those provincials forced to provide housing for troops at this time.

The oppressive nature of billeting obligations is inherent in the fact that special dispensations were rare. They were privileges often sought in the East since the Hellenistic period. In Polybius' discussion of Philip V of Macedon, known for conquering areas such as Samos and then installing garrisons within a town, the Greek historian notes that an *anepistathmeutos* meant a special grant that exempted one from having to house troops.²¹ The island of Thasos had offered surrender terms to the Macedonian king but had included that this dispensation be given to them before they capitulated. Romans continued the practice of occasional community-wide grants of reprieve from billeting. The *lex Iulia de provinciis* in 59 BCE then limited what had to be given by provincials to billeted governors, officials, and soldiers in their retinue in terms of firewood, hay, salt, and beds. In true Cicero fashion, in 51 BCE, Polybius crowns in a letter to Atticus that in Cilicia, he took much less than was owed to him and his traveling staff, often preferring tents to civilian homes.²² Cicero wanted his own governorship in Cilicia to be seen in better terms than his predecessors. When he arrived, he had already found out that previous governors had taken bribes in order to not billet soldiers in certain places during the winter. Cyprus apparently paid 200 Attic talents to avoid having to host winter soldiers.²³

A number of laws from the late Republican period also stipulated that particular cities and provinces receive exemption from the onus due to Roman troops, leading legal historians to conclude that the norm was to have houses open to partial or full military requisition if needed. After 47 BCE, Julius Caesar granted Judaea a reprieve from billeting troops, a gift of thanks extended to them for the Jewish aid given to the dictator and his troops during the Alexandrian War.²⁴ Following the death of Caesar, veterans were used as a personal bodyguard by two of the three triumvirs.

²¹ Polybius 15.24. From Polybius' discussion of Philip on Thasos in 202–201 BCE: Θάσιοι εἶπον πρὸς Μητροδωρον τὸν Φιλίππου στρατηγὸν παραδοῦναι τὴν πόλιν εἰ διατηρήσῃ αὐτοὺς ἀφρουρήτους, ἀφορολογήτους, ἀνεπισταθμεύτους, νόμοις χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἰδίοις. (The Thasians answered Philip's general Metrodorus that they would surrender their city, on condition that he would guarantee them freedom from a garrison, tribute, or billeting of soldiers and the enjoyment of their own laws.)

²² Cicero, *Att.* 5.16. ²³ Cicero, *Att.* 5.21.

²⁴ Josephus, *AJ* 14.10: "And I think it not proper that they should be obliged to find us winter quarters."

These previously smaller squads, known as the *cohortes praetoriae*, were expanded by both Antony and Octavian and would need housing. By the Augustan period, there were nine cohorts of around five hundred to one thousand men per cohort, but only three were supposed to be stationed within the city of Rome itself at any one time.²⁵ The rest of the troops were billeted in Italian towns until Tiberius' reign. Augustus' three urban cohorts of soldiers were housed in civilian houses when in the city.²⁶ The current and well-known *Castra Praetoria* in the city was not built until 27 CE and would take up 16.7 hectares, completed thirteen years after Augustus' death. Make no mistake, the citizens of Rome under Augustus likely felt surveilled and put upon to some degree by having to house his soldiers within the eternal city. Even after the Praetorian Guard was moved to its own castra in the city, Rome remained a city filled with soldiers policing the *urbs*, until the abolition of Maxentius' Praetorian Guard under Constantine – even if soldiers in Rome were no longer discretely embedded in civilian houses after Augustus.²⁷

During the High Empire, the epigraphic and literary evidence for possible billeting begins to increase, especially in the eastern Mediterranean: in the provinces within Asia Minor as well as Syria, Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia. However, epigraphic evidence for soldiers in cities can be inconclusive. The existence of a graffito, such as one from the gladiatorial barracks at Pompeii that notes a soldier within the town, does not mean we can automatically conclude billeting.²⁸ Many soldiers traveled in and out of cities for festivals, fairs, patrols, or a good time. Within Roman literature, we also can't get a clear perspective of city activities when discussing the military. This is because urban settings were seen by moralizing writers as kryptonite to the Roman military's masculine supermen. In his *Annals*, Tacitus remarks on the troops of Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, who was proconsul of Asia under Emperor Claudius.

²⁵ Southern 2007: 117.

²⁶ Suetonius, *Aug.* 49.1. See Fuhrmann 2011: 115. There is continued debate over whether these soldiers wore togas while in the city or palace or simply wore a special uniform.

²⁷ *Pan. Lat.* 9.21.2–3; Constantine also dispersed the *equites singulares Augusti* and sent both of these and the Praetorian troops to the frontiers along the Rhine and the Danube. See also Doležal 2022: 296.

²⁸ *CIL* 4.8767 from the Gladiators' barracks, Large Palaestra, Pompeii, Italy: *Floronius / binetas miles / leg(ionis) VII hic / fuit neque / mulieres / scierunt nisi / paucae et / ses erunt*: "Floronius, the fucker, privileged soldier of the seventh legion, was here. Not many women came to know him – there were six." MacMullen 1988 (210) includes this graffito in appendix C on "Soldiers in Cities," which he says is meant to demonstrate, via the appendix's collected citations, "how much of the imperial army was stationed in cities and towns or their suburbs" in the Roman Empire, with an increase after 300 CE (209).

Under Nero, he became legate of Cappadocia and Galatia, tasked with protecting Armenia from the Parthian threat. In reorganizing the troops stationed in the East in preparation for this, Tacitus states that in 55 CE Corbulo had to deal with the *ignavia* (laziness, or cowardice) of the soldiers who transferred from Syria.²⁹ To his mind, these soldiers had become slothful in the midst of peace and because they were previously stationed in towns. Now they were out of practice with combat and discipline. Instead, the historian surmises that they had become “slick and profit-driven” as patrollers of local cities.³⁰ The rhetoric of Tacitus would later be drawn on and blithely parroted by others for evaluating soldiers as recruits. Writing either in the late fourth century or sometime after 425 CE, Vegetius notes that recruits from the country were more fit for military service than those from the city, since country boys had lived all their lives in the sun rather than the shade, did not know of bathhouses, and were ignorant of luxury.³¹

While the billeting of troops continued into the empire, it was perhaps often not remarkable enough to comment on in the provinces unless there was abuse, complaints, or civilian discord. Special dispensations either relieving civilians from quartering soldiers or granting civilians freedom from the onus of providing lodging to state officials traveling with valuable *diplomata* along the *cursus publicus* both remained a cherished commodity. Although the temporary housing of officials with *diplomata* was quite different than long-term billeting of troops, the financial burdens of both could be oppressive. We can rarely discern a quantitative uptick in either billeting or proffering of such dispensations based solely on either extant papyri or inscriptions, but the value of such grants is patent. In a missive inscribed in Greek on a limestone stele from Hama, Syria, Domitian notes the immunities, referred to as φιλόνηρωπα, recognized by his divine father, Vespasian, in regard to requisitioned transport and lodging for the public post.³² In Asia Minor in the second and third centuries CE, there was, for instance, a noticeable epigraphic surge in complaints that may be linked to an increase in the number of soldiers and officials in the region. However, Asia Minor was also a space with a long, strong epigraphic habit developed since the Hellenistic period; there was a cultural documentary and epigraphic practice committed to recording city

²⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.35. ³⁰ Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.35: *nitidi et quaestuosi* (slick and profit-driven).

³¹ Vegetius, *Mil.* 1.3. See Charles 2019 for debates over the dating of the treatise. I here prefer Charles's dating of it to after 425 CE.

³² *IGLS V* 1998 = *SEG* 17.755 (81–96 CE). Lewis 1968: 135–42.

petitions, special grants of immunity from quartering, and letters registering official or imperial responses.³³

Even in Italy and Rome, the Roman state always retained the right to impose quartering, not only for soldiers but also for traveling officials and their entourages. When Septimius Severus' infantry and cavalry troops came to the city of Rome in 193 CE to acclaim the new emperor, we are told by the *Historia Augusta* that while the emperor donned civilian clothing to enter the city, his soldiers remained in full military dress and then took up quarters in temples, porticoes, and the shrines on the Palatine *quasi in stabulis* (as if in barracks).³⁴ They caused fear and disdain by threatening citizens and taking goods they did not pay for, but the *Historia Augusta* does not mention their being placed in private homes. In the accounts of Cassius Dio and Herodian, details about living arrangements for soldiers in Rome are not mentioned. Septimius Severus may have known that one way to retain elite support while caring for his soldiers was to avoid billeting them in the houses of the wealthy and therefore avoided this in Rome and elsewhere. A later letter to the province of Asia in 204 from Septimius Severus and Caracalla notes that Roman senators were exempt from billeting in Rome and in the provinces.³⁵

7.3 Dura-Europos: A Case Study in Billeting?

Numerous Roman cities on frontier zones like Palmyra or important cities such as Jerusalem had permanent military sectors for garrisons interwoven in the urban fabric. In some cities, military areas adjacent to or just outside the city were established, as was the case in Bostra in Arabia. These military sectors were often set against the city walls and allowed for protection of city gates. The Romanized city of Dura-Europos offers one of the best-preserved insights into daily life in the eastern Mediterranean during the third century CE for a town living side by side with soldiers in their own military sector. Sitting along the Euphrates within modern Syria, the site's graffiti, *dipinti*, art, papyri, and material culture suggest how Roman civilians and soldiers may have interacted within a location where thousands of soldiers lived, worked, and died. The town was located along the

³³ Brélaz 2020: 176.

³⁴ SHA, *Sev.* 7.2–3. Compare with the much rosier picture of Severus' entrance provided by Dio 75 [74].1–2; Herodian (2.14) notes that fear and panic were brought to the populace because of Septimius Severus' vast achievements. For once, the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* seems the most truthful source on this event.

³⁵ *IK* 12, 207–08 (Ephesus). See Eck and Kolb 2022: 25.

frontier with the Parthian Empire and then the Sassanids. By the 160s, it had undergone a second conquest by the Romans prior to being destroyed by Sassanian troops around 256/57 CE.³⁶ It is best known for its synagogue and its early house church converted into a basilica, and it contained a cosmopolitan mix of people and religions. By the reign of Emperor Commodus in 180, the Cohors II Ulpia equitata was stationed within the city, later replaced by an auxiliary cohort of Palmyrenes called the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum by 208 CE, perhaps before.³⁷ It has been estimated that the city hosted 300–1,000 soldiers at any one time, with an estimated total population of about 3,000–6,000 people in the third century.

It is dangerous to use Dura-Europos – or any other Roman city, such as Pompeii – as an extended metaphor or metonym for the entirety of the empire. Much of the evidence for billeting at the site comes from inconclusive evidence such as domestic inscriptions that mention or depict military elements. The epigraphic evidence for billeting soldiers and Roman military occupation in houses at Dura-Europos led Rostovtzeff to paint a more concrete and perhaps overly negative view of the Roman military occupation there and in turn to intensify and extend his cynicism regarding Roman troops in the frontier provinces.³⁸ A. H. M. Jones was heavily influenced by Rostovtzeff's sweeping assessments of decline as tied to destruction of the bourgeois elites prevalent in the early principate and saw himself as continuing Rostovtzeff's work into the later empire.³⁹ Jones's tempered pessimism then begat many of the negative views of the late empire further developed within MacMullen's sweeping narratives of corruption. MacMullen leans heavily on the earlier mid-second- and third-century evidence for Dura-Europos to illustrate his literary citations of billeting found in the *Historia Augusta* for Aurelian in Arabia or in Ammianus Marcellinus, as well as the fourth-century evidence provided by legislation.⁴⁰ While MacMullen recognizes that the “bulk of evidence” and material culture is from third-century sources, he still posits that billeting

³⁶ James 1985: 111–24. ³⁷ Smith 2013: 153.

³⁸ Rostovtzeff 1938 (31) famously notes, “Dura was dying before the Sasanians killed it.” For a softening of this judgment, see James 2020 (287), who stresses the uncertainty of epigraphy tied to the soldiers and a negotiation of space rather than complete brutality by the Roman military, as theorized by Rostovtzeff. For the dangers of modern scholars constructing sweeping narratives of decline, see Brakke, Chapter 5 in this volume.

³⁹ Liebeschuetz 1992.

⁴⁰ MacMullen 1963: 77n3; also see 78n8 citing Rostovtzeff and Pascal 1935 (38) and Rostovtzeff et al. 1936 (80–84, 303), which leans completely on the Dura reports and underscores Rostovtzeff's remark that the graffiti demonstrate the close relations between billeted troops and those who lived in civilian houses (81).

increased from 300 CE onward – where the uptick in the legislative evidence from the Theodosian Code comes into his argument.⁴¹

Current excavations and revised archaeological narratives question the evidence from Roman Syria and the certitude with which we can pinpoint billeting there. The work of ancient historians and archaeologists at Dura-Europos and Roman Syria presents an indispensable but altogether less severe framework for reviewing the civilian–soldier interaction on a daily basis within Dura-Europos and other Syrian cities. Of particular interest is tracking how domestic spaces were often modified into barracks to house Roman troops. In terms of layout, military barracks were frequently strip buildings that included a veranda, which domestic houses with a courtyard could be modified to mimic. In terms of meeting places, soldiers may have used the courtyards of modified houses to interact, and in terms of the town at large, they may have met regularly within the agora of cities to interact. In larger cities like Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople, there were set meeting places just for the military to meet outside the city as well.⁴² Urban soldiers had an effect on the landscape of Dura-Europos and many other Roman cities. Within the city, many houses were modified to accommodate barracks and revamped for soldiers to stay in. Baird remarks that it was more practical to take over preexisting structures and modify them for soldiers than to build new ones altogether.⁴³

In respect to the social relations between civilians and soldiers, informal soldier marriages and the resulting children within garrisoned towns and fortresses already existed, long before soldiers were given the formal right to marry.⁴⁴ The ban on marriage for Roman soldiers remained for the first two centuries CE at least. Although Septimius Severus is often credited with lifting the legal restriction around 197 CE, scholars have recently pointed to epigraphic evidence and literary ambiguity that indicates the ban was still in place in the first decade of the third century.⁴⁵ But by the early third century at the latest, the allowance for soldiers to marry legally would, in turn, open up billeted soldiers to marrying civilians nearby, in town, or even in those households they were billeted in. Although evidence is sparse, at Dura-Europos soldiers did mix with civilians and even married them, as evidence from extant papyri suggests.⁴⁶ A marriage contract from

⁴¹ MacMullen 1988: 209.

⁴² Lavan 2006: 215.

⁴³ Baird 2014: 116.

⁴⁴ Greene 2013 and 2020.

⁴⁵ Eck 2011.

⁴⁶ Pollard 2000 (158) notes that those stationed only temporarily in Syria and Mesopotamia did not usually form families, but the almost complete dearth of epigraphic evidence makes it hard to make any firm conclusions.

October 232 CE between a young woman named Aurelia and a soldier named Aurelius is a strong example of the ways in which soldiers and civilians likely intermixed:

On the present day, Aurelius Alexander, soldier of the cohort written above, of the century of Papius, and Aurelia Marcellina, daughter of Marcellinus, living in Qatna, there being present with her ... her mother, and Agrippinus, her brother, have acknowledged and drawn up (a contract) for each other on the present day that Marcellina has given herself.⁴⁷

Material evidence supports a mix of women and children in spaces thought to be inhabited by soldiers. As Baird notes, the category of military personnel in the city went far beyond just soldiers.⁴⁸ There were a substantial number of soldiers, as well as their accompanying coterie of enslaved persons, grooms, concubines, occasional wives and children, and the extended military community, including entertainers and tradesmen, all of whom needed some form of accommodation.⁴⁹

Many soldiers did not want to leave families to go to foreign conflicts. When Ammianus Marcellinus discusses Constantius II sending the *Celtae* and *Petulantes*, an auxiliary unit of Germans and Gauls who lived beyond the Rhine, to fight the Persians in the East, he notes that Julian, then wintering in Paris, allowed them to go with their families so as to prevent mutiny.⁵⁰ Two other auxiliary units, the *Herculi* and *Batavi*, were also sent, along with three hundred elite men from his other units, assumedly with their families as well – in total it was a third to half of Julian's troops. Although the gendering of objects is difficult, the discovery of figurines, a bottle for nursing, and a possible doll all point to women and children in these modified barracks as well.⁵¹ There is only sparse evidence of wives being taken on intense campaigns such as those during the Gothic Wars. Certainly, there were elite units following the emperor or only temporarily billeted or camped in towns who were usually solo, but some soldiers in permanently garrisoned towns and those in winter quarters could have soldier families that lived in modified barracks within urban military quarters and perhaps even in households where a portion was given over to a soldier.

⁴⁷ P. Dura 30 = TM 17227 (trans. Evans Grubbs 2002: 133–35). ⁴⁸ Baird 2014: 116.

⁴⁹ Sessa 2018 (132) argues that most families were not in tow on campaign, although there are a few examples of wives being taken by soldiers on campaign to Alexandria and to Italy during the sixth-century Gothic Wars.

⁵⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus 20.4.11: The *Petulantes* were an elite unit tied particularly to Julian.

⁵¹ Baird 2014: 125.

7.4 Legislation as Evidence in the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries

At the end of the fifth or early sixth century CE, a polytheist (i.e., pagan) writer named Zosimus complained about the Christian emperor Constantine's alleged deemphasis on the use of troops along frontier zones in the early fourth century in a notorious critique:

Constantine destroyed this security by removing most of the troops from the frontiers and stationing them in cities which did not need assistance, thus both stripping of protection those being molested by the barbarians and subjecting the cities left alone by them to the outrages of the soldiers, so that henceforth most have become deserted.⁵²

But was Zosimus correct? Late Roman army numbers are a difficult, if not impossible, calculation. From the early fourth century, the late Roman army may have expanded from 300,000 to around 500,000, or the more traditionally held 600,000.⁵³ But perhaps there was not a dramatic increase from Diocletian, if John Lydus' suspiciously exact number of 435,266 troops under Diocletian is correct.⁵⁴ The soldiers were drawn from among about 55 million people – a substantial increase from around 300,000 soldiers in the early third century.⁵⁵ The Roman state never drafted more than a little over 1 percent of the population, but there was indeed an increase in the number of soldiers to be housed in the fourth and part of the fifth centuries.⁵⁶ A growth in legislation and bureaucratic reorganization built and then expanded on earlier documentary habits previously encouraged by Diocletian. Much of this would be documented in the late Roman law codes.

In both Latin literature and in much of the fourth-century legislation to be considered now, billeting troops was referred to more uniformly as *hospites recipere* (to receive guests). It could alternately be denoted as owing

⁵² Zosimus 2.34 (Löwenklau et al. 1837, 100–01): καὶ ταύτην δὴ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν διαφθεῖρων ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος τῶν στρατιωτῶν τὸ πολὺ μέρος τῶν ἐσχατιῶν ἀποστῆσας ταῖς οὐ δεομέναις βοηθείας πόλεσιν ἐγκατέστησε, καὶ τοὺς ἐνοχλουμένους ὑπὸ βαρβάρων ἐγύνωσσε βοηθείας, καὶ ταῖς ἀναιμέναις τῶν πόλεων τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐπέθηκε λύμην, δι' ἣν ἤδη πλείσται γεγόνασιν ἔρημοι, καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐκδόντας ἑαυτοὺς θεάτροις καὶ τρυφαῖς ἐμαλάκισε, καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν τῆς ἄχρῃ τοῦδε τῶν πραγμάτων ἀπωλείας αὐτὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὰ σπέρματα δέδωκε.

⁵³ For 300,000–500,000, see Treadgold 1995 (49). For 600,000, see Jones 1964 (2:683). Some estimates go as high as 650,000, based largely on the number of 645,000 supplied by the sixth century, as in Agathias, *Hist.* 5.13.7–8.

⁵⁴ Lydus (*Mens.* 1.27) notes 389,704 soldiers and 45,562 sailors. ⁵⁵ Heather 2007: 64.

⁵⁶ Shaw 1999: 136.

one of the litany of civic *munera*, termed *hospitalitas* and *metatio*. Under Constantine, there were troops in the provinces along frontier zones called *limitanei* and river patrol troops called *ripenses*.⁵⁷ However, the civilian onus of *hospitalitas* only occasionally applied to border troops, called *limitanei*, and was more regularly applied to mobile troops, called *comitatenses*, that required housing within Roman cities, particularly from the early fourth century CE onward.⁵⁸ While the *comitatenses* were troops first attested under Constantine in 325 CE, they were in fact a product of shifts in the second and third centuries.

In addition to housing these troops, there was also the issue of temporarily housing soldiers and the mobile court of Constantine in some cities. After disbanding Maxentius' Praetorian Guard in Rome after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, Constantine relied on a personal bodyguard of palatine troops called *Scholae Palatinae* – five regiments of five hundred cavalrymen each.⁵⁹ Notably, on the public land previously dedicated to the barracks of the cavalry arm of the Praetorian Guard, known as the *Equites Singulares* in Rome, Constantine erected a new spatial statement: the Lateran Basilica. While there was an apparent increase of smaller units of soldiers in cities under Constantine, he did not abandon the frontier zones.⁶⁰ An anonymous panegyrist likely speaking from Trier around 313, a year after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, did note that Constantine removed Maxentius' remaining troops from the luxurious delights of Rome's circuses, theaters, and baths by sending them to guard the frontier zones along the Rhine and Danube.⁶¹ The formulaic literary rhetoric surrounding the lure of baths, harlots, and urban entertainment persisted into the late empire, even if many soldiers during Constantine's rule in actuality remained on or were sent to the frontiers.

Now that we have rendered the prescriptive ideal and paternal tone of Roman legislation, we can parse it in terms of rhetoric, facility to enforce, and comparative evidence. In the republic and empire, exclusions from billeting were an elite privilege often extended only to the extremely wealthy, such as senators, and from at least Antoninus Pius on, to certain practitioners of the liberal arts: philosophers, rhetoricians, grammarians, and physicians.⁶² But in 333 CE, Constantine similarly gave out special

⁵⁷ Cod. Theod. 7.20.4.pr. (17 June 325, Constantine to Maximus, prefect of the city): *comitatenses et ripenses milites atque protectores suum caput*. (Field troops, river patrol troops, and the imperial bodyguards will be exempt from individual tax.)

⁵⁸ Lee 2007: 163–75. ⁵⁹ Harries 2012: 210. Also note, Kyriakidis 2018: 233.

⁶⁰ Lee 2007: 10. ⁶¹ *Pan. Lat.* 12.21.2–3; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 326.

⁶² Modestinus, *Dig.* 27.1.6.8.

reprieves to physicians and literature professors from the onus of billeting troops, so that they might train young minds in the liberal arts.⁶³ Thereafter, Constantius II would give an exemption to all clerics from billeting troops in 343 CE, as well as an allowance to start businesses that would be tax exempt.⁶⁴ This meant that the onus of billeting likely fell on farm owners and wealthy landowners who had estates used for vacationing or urban rental properties. Non-elites likely also shouldered the burden more than the elites within a certain town, and likely often were the ones to live with soldiers.

The legislation may or may not indicate that empty houses and secondary properties were preferred to partitioning occupied ones. In 384 CE, Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius decreed to Palladius, the master of offices at Constantinople, that all people except high-ranking former prefects were required to quarter troops along with a number of other high-ranking officials whose service was rewarded with this special right. However, these wealthy and protected elites were to retain one house to live in, and if they had multiple houses, these secondary homes had to be open to requisition for billeting.⁶⁵ One imagines there were quite a few summer villas housing soldiers, but particularly that the lucrative rental properties owned by elites (as Cicero, Lucullus, and many other wealthy Romans did from the republic forward) – but often occupied by impoverished tenant-citizens – were open to being billeted or turned into partial barracks. This legislation is ambiguous and may have been created specifically to target empty second homes. Its existence does not mean only secondary properties were preferred but may also have addressed a loophole. In the case of soldiers residing on these properties, it meant soldiers temporarily lived in barns or on agricultural estates with vacant buildings in the countryside alongside tenant farmers, enslaved persons, and farm-workers, or in urban rental properties alongside paying renters when billeted in the city. Not long thereafter, in February of 398 CE, Emperors Arcadius and Honorius then ruled that only one third of a household could be requisitioned by a billeted soldier, with the homeowner (not tenant) getting first choice over the first third of the house chosen for his family to live in, unless the person to be billeted in it was of high status. Illustrious military persons could requisition from civilians half, rather than only a third, of a civilian's household.⁶⁶

⁶³ Cod. Theod. 13.3.3 (333 CE): exemption from having *hospites recipere* (to receive guests).

⁶⁴ Cod. Theod. 16.2.8 (343 CE). ⁶⁵ Cod. Theod. 7.8.3 (384 CE).

⁶⁶ Cod. Theod. 7.8.5 = Cod. Iust. 12.40.2 (398 CE).

What could one expect before having their house used for quartering? Prior to the arrival of the army in a city, special military *mensores* (measurers) or *metatores* preceded the arrival of troops in order to requisition and apportion these lodgings for soldiers and officers.⁶⁷ In terms of the visual epigraphic landscape created from billeting legislation, a law of 393 CE maintains that the handwriting of quartering officers could not be erased from doorways. One must imagine doorways in towns with soldiers to be rather conspicuous, with a list of the persons quartered within it, and to erase it was an offense on par with forgery.⁶⁸ However, not all middling urban structures were open to soldiers as housing, at least in times of nonemergency. Certain spaces integral to the urban and economic fabric of the empire were considered verboten. The law of 398, for instance, stipulated that soldiers were not allowed to intrude on the actual space of an artisan's workshop – even if the soldier was staying in a home with one attached. Likewise, synagogues and religious spaces such as churches were generally exempt from billeting.⁶⁹ Economic, educational, and religious spaces often appear ideally partitioned from military ones so as not to disrupt commerce, learning, or worship. But the question remains: Once a soldier was quartered with a family, what experiences could they expect?

7.5 Civilian Complaints in Late Antiquity: Status Quo or the Exception?

As we have seen, from the Republic into Late Antiquity, Roman soldiers were regularly accused of stealing, requisitioning, extortion, drunken brawls, and sexual assault while living within towns, on campaign, or traveling from place to place.⁷⁰ These complaints were a dismaying but not novel citation of grievances during the late Roman Empire after Constantine. The difference is that in the late antique codes, we now have more evidence for attempts to use legislation to ameliorate them. Unlike the legal evidence, which describes the ideal, the extant papyri and hagiographical accounts allow us to recover a bit more of the experience from below. What we glimpse at are anxiety – but few concrete examples of soldier violence – among civilians, particularly after Theodosius' ascent to the purple in 379 CE. In the late fourth century, there were perceptible concerns by women in particular over the housing of male soldiers that align with the legal evidence. They also demonstrate that in certain

⁶⁷ Cod. Iust. 12.40.1. ⁶⁸ Cod. Theod. 7.8.4 (393 CE).

⁶⁹ Cod. Theod. 7.8.1 (361 CE); 7.8.2 (368 CE). ⁷⁰ Fuhrmann 2011: 230.

communities, monks and clerics could be mediators during instances of soldier extortion or abuse, if they did occur.

An instructive papyrus from Lykopolis in Egypt, dated to around 380 CE, preserves a petition from a widow named Leuchis to the monk Apa John. What this and other pieces of evidence gesture to is a particular fear of barbarian troops being within houses around the vulnerable populations more likely to billet troops.

To my lord, the pious Apa John, Leuchis, daughter of Malamos. Your goodness embraces all those without resources; and let your mercy extend to me too, lord. After God, I await your help, that you ask the tribune of the Goths to remove them from my house, since I am a widow woman. My lord, do it for God's sake.⁷¹

In the late Roman Empire, the stories surrounding billeting non-Roman soldiers in particular raise the question of whether this was truth, fearmongering, or a genuine mix of both. The earlier execution of a soldier who slept with the wife of his host during the third-century reign of Aurelian, for instance, demonstrates that Goths weren't the only billeted soldiers assaulting host families or being punished for it.⁷² One wonders if the "Goths" in Leuchis' house were the troops from beyond the Danube enrolled by Theodosius and then immediately transferred to Egypt as part of the efforts of the eastern Augustus to rebuild the Roman field army after the heavy losses at the Battle of Adrianople.⁷³ Zosimus believed this conscious choice in foreign geography was meant to offset the chance of disobedience, but apparently, once these new troops arrived first in Lydia, they stole from markets and fought with the Egyptian troops in Philadelphia, before later marching to Egypt under the command of Hormisdas.⁷⁴ While we can't assess frequency of billeting in Roman Egypt, Theodosius did seem fond of housing Goths in cities. It was likely the billeting of Goths in Thessalonica in 390 CE that originally roused the civilian tensions there and led to animosity directed at the Roman commander Butheric, a Gothic general who had refused to release a charioteer.⁷⁵ Thus, there do seem to have been underlying fear and tensions among civilians in certain towns immediately following the

⁷¹ P.Herm. 17 = TM 35415: τῷ κυρίῳ μου θεωσεβῆ(*) Ἀπα Ἰ(*)ωάννην(*) Λεῦχης Μαλαμος(*). ἡ χρῆστωτητα(*) σου κατέλαβεν πάντας τοὺς μὲ(*) δυναμένους· καὶ καμὲ(*) φθάσι(*) ἡ ἐλεημωσύνην(*) σου, κύριε. μετὰ των(*) Θεόν τὴν σὴν βοήθειαν(*) προσδωκῶ(*), ἵ(*)να ἀξιῶσι(*) των(*) τρι-βοῦνων(*) τῶν(*) Γούνθων(*) καὶ ἄρη αὐτάς ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκίας μου, ἐπὶ(*) χήρα γυνή εἰμι. κύριέ μου, διὰ των(*) Θεῶν(*) πύει(*). Trans. Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 204.

⁷² SHA, *Aurel.* 7.3–4. ⁷³ Zosimus 4.30.1–2. ⁷⁴ Zosimus 4.30.3–5.

⁷⁵ Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.

Theodosian enrollment of Goths into the Roman army. Alarm that quartering these troops in one's house would lead to rape and violence was surely a part of it, but the other part likely stems from a belief that these were non-Romans within a Roman space.

A critical example of this fear may pervade the Syriac Romance, which is today referred to as *The Tale of Euphemia and the Goth*, dated to around 430 CE. However, there are linguistic complications in separating Gothic and Roman soldiers in this and many other Syriac sources, since the term *Goth* could also be used as a generic term for "soldier."⁷⁶ This tale takes place in Edessa, the seat of the Roman province of Osroene, now the modern Turkish city of Urfa, three decades earlier, in 396.⁷⁷ It recounts the story of a widow named Sophia and her daughter, Euphemia, who were forced to give lodging to a Gothic auxiliary soldier serving in the Roman army to push back the encroaching Huns.⁷⁸ Euphemia is married off to the Goth before being taken back with the soldier to his homeland and trafficked as an enslaved woman. Her husband's first, Goth wife poisons her baby, and thus Euphemia poisons her back before being imprisoned in the wife's tomb. Although literary evidence may not reflect a social reality, the aforementioned papyrus from Lykopolis points to the fact that soldiers living in houses with women could be seen as a threat, and that while some marriages did occur, assault did as well.

What stories like those of the widows Leuchis and Sophia tell us is that while elites were often exempt from housing soldiers, it was perhaps those with less legal and social clout – widows, women, and those without money – who were frequently the most vulnerable and asked to shoulder the burden of quartering troops. They were the ones who suffered most when soldiers were violent or overstepped boundaries. And yet there was opportunity at times. Libanius indicates that soldiers also lived in billets surrounding villages near cities and could form relationships with rural folks with side hustles as private protectors.⁷⁹ In the late 380s or 390s, many who were billeted on the rural farmlands outside Antioch were apparently being enlisted by locals as muscle in a protection scheme to help them avoid paying their landlords and tax collectors. The types of relationships formed between host families and soldiers were not solely negative but rather existed on a broad continuum ranging from hostile to paid protection to even kinship. Libanius' ire toward the protection racket

⁷⁶ Jones 1964, 2:1263n53; Pollard 2000: 158. ⁷⁷ Burkitt 1913.

⁷⁸ Mellon Saint-Laurent 2015: 40.

⁷⁹ Libanius, *Or.* 47. Cf. *Cod. Theod.* 11.24.3–5; Lee 2007: 174.

was due to its financial impact on the wealthy attempting to collect rent from tenant farmers who were the ones who regularly lived alongside billeted troops.

In the legislation, in the papyri, and in the literature, billeting anxiety should not be discounted when reconstructing the mindset of civilians in towns where soldiers were housed in the late empire. But numbers are hard to come by, and mindset does not always translate into actuality. Not all soldiers remarked upon who were in cities were representative of a large population of billeted or garrisoned troops. There were smaller military groups used for policing in cities, protecting roads, and patrolling, and they also worked in imperial armament factories. Although Diocletian had relied on client kings and new frontier fortifications in his formation of the tetrarchy, he also set in motion the establishment of armament factories, called *fabricae*, that were a central part of the supply chain plan to support the army. In the eastern Mediterranean, there was a *fabrica* at Edessa, and there were three at Antioch for the entire diocese of Oriens and separate ones at Damascus, Caesarea, and Nicomedia.⁸⁰ Local townspeople worked in these factories, but they were also predominated by active-duty soldiers used as guards.

There was a militarized nature in many late Roman cities, particularly in places like Sirmium, Damascus, Antioch, Edessa, Verona, Carnuntum, and the host of other cities that had *fabricae* for making supplies – weapons, leather, textiles, and other necessities – for the Roman army. Many soldiers were embedded in cities for reasons related to arms manufacturing or public post, quotidian aspects of government that were not exclusive to warfare. The civilians in these factories were doing *militia*, military service to the state. They were overseen by a civilian *magister officiorum*. With the growth of *fabricae* for the making of arms from Diocletian on, especially in certain eastern towns, there must have been a growth in soldiers or paramilitary persons housed in these cities. Usually, each *fabrica* employed about 100 to 350 workers per workshop, and they were situated in over twenty-five cities, predominantly in the East and then in the northern provinces along roads, but not directly on the frontier for fear of attack or capture. Soldiers mentioned in papyri and remarked on by ancient authors need not always be seen as one of thousands stationed there; they may have simply been there for travel, official business along the *cursus publicus*, or much smaller policing or guard details within a city. As with, say, a graffito by the soldier in Pompeii in the first century, we

⁸⁰ Malalas, *Chron.* 307–08. See Mommsen 1899: 195–279; Shahid 2002: 134–35.

cannot simply assume that reference to a soldier's presence in a city meant an entire legion was garrisoned there, nor can we properly gauge their impact on the civilian population from a complaint alone.

In the late fourth century, there were notable pleas that Gothic soldiers in particular be kinder to the civilian population. These exist especially in the East and can reveal harrowing conditions on a large scale. Writing in Constantinople around 398 CE or perhaps 400, Synesius of Cyrene gave advice to Emperor Arcadius about the need to debarbarize the army in his *De regno*. In it, he also asked soldiers living in cities and those in rural areas to treat civilians with respect, as they would a brother, and to abide by the many laws governing their quartering within the urban landscape.⁸¹ Although a 398 date is more likely, if written in 400, this was possibly a reaction to the Gothic leader Gainas' billeting of around seven thousand troops in Constantinople and requisitioning of a church for the Arian Goths to worship in.⁸² The Gothic occupation of the city led to tumult, rioting, and the eventual use of Arcadius' remaining soldiers alongside armed civilians to kill and maim thousands of Gainas' soldiers, both within the church and in the streets of Constantinople. We cannot prove an overall increase in billeting quantitatively, simply by counting the still rather low number of literary citations. Indubitably, there were some vocalized fears, xenophobia, and anxieties over specifically Gothic troops being billeted in Roman households. These complaints are unmistakable and, at times, were the source of urban revolts; however, these relatively few instances point more to prejudice and tensions than to widespread geographies of billeting.

7.6 Conclusion

What can we conclude about Zosimus' infamous allegations concerning Constantine's movement of soldiers into cities? First, we might consider the source. Like many historians and their writing, Zosimus was a product and often a reflection of the era he lived in. He was a bureaucrat writing from Constantinople as a non-Christian during the reign of Anastasius, probably around 498 and before 503.⁸³ He was neither a contemporary of Constantine nor an expert in the military; however, he did believe in the decline of the Roman Empire from the reign of Constantine forward, as a battle between the *mos maiorum* and Christian innovation, such as stopping of the Secular Games in 314 CE. He was a high-ranking legal expert,

⁸¹ Synesius, *De regno* 18.1–2.

⁸² Faber 2011: 126.

⁸³ Jeffreys 2006: 135.

an *advocatus fisci*, who, as previously mentioned, trafficked in the use of earlier sources, such as Eunapius, in order to fault and critique Constantine. He also likely reflected the present view in the late fifth and early sixth centuries of Roman bureaucracy and its abandonment of tradition.⁸⁴

As we have seen, Zosimus was well practiced in the tradition of classicizing rhetoric focused on Roman luxury, the city as a feminizing agent, and the language of *otium* (leisure). Each had been decried by Greco-Roman philosophers and historians since the classical period. In his recounting of Constantinian troop movements, he may also be projecting blame for the current events in Edessa and elsewhere in eastern cities, particularly those in Syria and Mesopotamia under Anastasius. The early sixth-century source known as the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* points to soldiers extracting the poor from their beds, taking their cattle, and living in their houses during the Roman conflict with the Persians from 502 to 506 CE.⁸⁵ But low survival rates of ancient literature and letters hinder our ability to assess the frequency of such occurrences, and in fact there were legal and physical attempts to protect the populace. Epigraphic evidence points to the increased imperial funding and oversight of military transit camps, called *metata*, in the fifth and early sixth centuries to alleviate billeting burdens in the area of Apamea and elsewhere, such as Cyrenaica.⁸⁶ Along particular frontier zones such as Syria and Mesopotamia during certain conflicts, billeting may indeed have been a disruptive and upsetting part of life. This was particularly true for the poor in certain provinces. But these struggles often appear recognized by the emperor with constant attempts to address soldier misconduct and extortion. Just as with the modern assessments of Dura-Europos, scholars today cannot take occurrences in a few places to be inevitably illustrative of happenings throughout the whole empire.

Roman billeting did continue into the sixth century CE. However, under Justinian, the combined number of field and frontier troops was much smaller than the half million estimated in the fourth century. With substantially fewer people to draft from, only the men aged eighteen to forty years from the 30 million likely living in the empire and conquered

⁸⁴ Bjornlie 2013: 85–86. Bjornlie notes this struggle between tradition and innovation that was then later refuted by Evagrius, as well as Zosimus' likely reflection of contemporary political views from the standpoint of the bureaucracy in Constantinople.

⁸⁵ Ps.-Joshua Stylites, *Chron.* 86.

⁸⁶ Apamene inscriptions: *IGLS* 1952, 1610, 1397; Cyrenaica: *SEG* 9, 356, 414; *SEG* 27, 1139. Trombley 2004: 85.

provinces were eligible for service.⁸⁷ Billeting would continue to be used in the reign of Justinian during the Vandalic War (533–34), the various conflicts with the Sassanians, and the Gothic War in Italy (535–54 CE). Procopius later notes that Justinian established special *ad hoc* καταλύτῃρια (barracks) for his troops in various cities, assumedly so as not to interfere in the domestic spaces of those in the cities.⁸⁸ However, this was not always enough. Procopius remarks on the harassment of local folks by Roman soldiers during the Persian War, and in his *Secret History* he notes that landowners were forced to feed the army, to pay exorbitant taxes, and to give up the “best rooms” of their houses for quartering troops.⁸⁹

Despite complaints, we cannot characterize all army conduct monolithically. An exception to the maligned military behavior noted by Procopius was perhaps Belisarius’ troops marching through North Africa to reclaim Roman land from the Vandals. Apparently, the general encouraged them to enter towns such as Carthage in a disciplined fashion, buy their groceries at the market, and then enter billets, appointed by clerks, in an orderly manner.⁹⁰ In a *Novel* dated 1 March 545, Justinian explicitly reinforced the rules of *hospitalitas* and directed soldiers, presumedly in the Gothic War in Italy, to take only empty rooms while on the march and in spaces marked for billeting.⁹¹ Armies on the march were to have *delegatores* sent ahead to procure provisions and set housing, but there is no doubt that Roman billeting in Syria, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Lazica in the East and in North Africa and Italy in the West must have been a burden in the reigns of Justin and Justinian.

Under Justinian, the legislative evidence remains paternal, vague, and difficult to use to reconstruct the frequency, scope, or lived experiences of those in houses with billeted soldiers; however, the use of law to advertise a concern for the welfare of the Roman people is still apparent. Justinian continued to attempt to maintain preexisting quartering rules for campaigns against the Goths in Italy and for Persian campaigns in particular. The literary and epigraphic evidence at this time is lacunose and without consistency, but there is no doubt that when billeting occurred, it still had the potential to be a dangerous and financially ruinous undertaking. It was also one that seems often disproportionately foisted on non-elites outside the clergy with vacant rooms, impoverished tenants living in rented houses, and those landowners or tenants occupying the countryside along military roads with barns or stables. As we have seen, there had indeed

⁸⁷ Kaldellis 2014: xiii.

⁸⁸ Procopius, *Aed.* 2.3.26.

⁸⁹ Procopius, *Anecd.* 23.22.

⁹⁰ Procopius, *Wars* 3.21.1.

⁹¹ Justinian, *Nov.* 130 (1 March 545 CE).

been instances of corruption and abuse of the system since the republic, but billeting was also not of the same intensity for all cities across the entirety of the empire or for all time periods. It may be frustrating, but it is more honest to state that there simply is not enough evidence to measure the scope and full impact of late Roman troop billeting. Given these uncertainties, it also cannot be deployed to support any modern arguments that use billeting to indicate "decline."

Decades of scholarship have demonstrated that Gibbon's alleged decline and fall of the Roman Empire has been greatly overstated, often because of the use of the testaments of the few to illustrate the experiences of the many. This is the case for billeting as well. The *hospitalitas* system likely expanded to accommodate the larger number of soldiers under Constantine. Its documentation, organization, and legislative boundaries also became more pronounced in the fourth to early fifth centuries. The system may indeed have exacerbated financial and social inequalities in certain key frontier cities in the Roman Empire and been seasonal or temporary hindrances to others. In certain moments of need or crisis, billeting could be an oppressive burden, only occasionally foisted on private homes in larger cities like Thessalonica, Antioch, Rome, Ravenna, and Constantinople.

The recovery of the social reality for civilians in billeted communities is fraught. Scholars must be careful to consider the nuances, biases, and limits of each of our sources. Just as Dura-Europos is not a case study that is representative of all cities in the late Roman Empire, the mere existence of billeting legislation does not allow us to quantify the occurrence of an action cited therein. We must also unpack the classical rhetoric adopted within these sources. Allegations of soldiers indulging in urban baths, harlots, and *otium* may make for a traditional Roman morality tale, but they were not always accurate depictions of the life of a soldier in the late Roman Empire. Likewise, late Roman stories of women being sexually assaulted by Goths, being carried across the empire to be enslaved, or being married off to barbarians could also be deployed as morality tales. What can be said is that, like the billeting of British troops in North American colonies many centuries later, Roman billeting in the late Roman Empire did similarly spur a renegotiation of space and place for the military within certain urban contexts.

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