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Evidence for the Byzantine Army in the Syene Papyri

For more than seventy-five years, the standard work on the Roman army in Byzantine Egypt has been Jean Maspero's *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine*. Maspero's book was published in 1912, when the contents of the Syene papyri were as yet imperfectly known. At that time, Maspero had available for study of the Syene papyri: one London facsimile; an edition and reduced facsimile of a second London piece; one fully edited Munich papyrus; Wenger's "preliminary report" (*Vorbericht*) and its Munich papyrus extracts; and some additional information about the London papyri through correspondence with their assigned editor, Harold Bell.¹

Maspero refers to the Syene papyri when he evaluates the Egyptian frontier region around the first cataract.² In his concern with the frontier's role in the larger system of military defense, he uses the Syene papyri to flesh out meager bits of literary, archaeological and other papyrological evidence. For example, Hierocles' fifth-century list of cities,³ the *Synekdemos* (732.2), is cited as evidence for a military fortress, *castrum*, on the island of Philai. The camp at Philai, φρούριον,

¹Preliminary transcripts of the London papyri had been made by Frederic Kenyon. A plate of one of the London pieces had been published in 1908 in *The New Palaeographical Society's* series of facsimiles (vol. VI, pl. 128). An edition and reduced plate of another London piece, inv. 1800 (later to become *P.Lond.* V 1731), appeared the very next year in *The Light of Egypt*, by Robert de Rustafjaell, who in 1907 had been agent for the purchase of the British Museum's half share of the Syene archive. Leopold Wenger's preliminary report (*Vorbericht*) on the Munich half of the archive had appeared in 1911, as had his edition of the Munich papyrus that was later to become *P.Münch.* 8. Wilcken included as *Chr.* 470, publ. 1912, the available extract of what would become *P.Münch.* 2. Bell's well-known article, "Syene Papyri in the British Museum," did not appear in *Klio* (vol. 13) until 1913, and the full publication of the Munich and London halves of the archive did not occur until, respectively, 1914 and 1917. For bibliographical details, see J. Joel Farber and Bezalel Porten, "The Paternuthis Archive: A Third Look," *BASP* 23 (1986) 81-97.

²Relevant page numbers in *Organisation militaire* are 20-21, 25-27, 56-57, 60, 147.

³According to A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) 712, Hierocles' list is "a document which is based on an official register, probably drawn up in the middle of the fifth century, . . . imperfectly revised down to the reign of Justinian."

is further evidenced in a well-known fifth-century petition, *W.Chr.* 6 (425/50), concerning raids by desert nomads (the Blemmyes and the Nobades) on towns near the First Cataract--Syene, New Syene, and Elephantine of the province of Upper Thebaid. Maspero also refers to the remains of a terracotta wall protecting the land route from Syene to Philai and suggests that Diocletian may have been responsible for its construction.

He supports this suggestion by discussing an important digression in Procopius, *Persian Wars* (1.19.27-37), a work composed in the sixth century during Justinian's reign. The digression indicates that Diocletian, at the end of the third century, probably in the summer of 298, was responsible for significant military and political changes on the Nubian frontier.⁴ Upon personal inspection, he decided to withdraw the Roman *limes* to Philai. He is reported by Procopius to have judged the spot eminently defensible "for rocks [there] r[o]se to an exceedingly great height at no great distance from the Nile." Tribute received from the region to the south had been negligible, the land was poor. Diocletian had another motive: to lure the Nobades from their habitations near "the Oasis," presumably the Khargeh Oasis in the Western Desert,⁵ which they traditionally raided, to the Nile. These tribesmen could then be used as a buffer between the Romans and the Blemmyes and other desert nomads.⁶ To solidify the new frontier, Diocletian saw to the construction of "a very strong fortress," φρούριον, on Philai, kept in good repair through the sixth century (presumably the *castrum* listed by Hierocles); and he arranged for the building of temples for common

⁴For details: Alan K. Bowman, "The Military Occupation of Upper Egypt in the Reign of Diocletian," *BASP* 15 (1978) 25-38, at 28-30. In general on the frontier and its history: H. Kees, *Ancient Egypt: A Cultural Topography* (Chicago 1961) 308-30. For the Diocletianic reforms, cf. Wilcken, *Grundzüge* 68-70; Walter B. Emery, *Nubia in Egypt* (London 1965) 232 ff.

⁵Cf. C. D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians* (Ann Arbor 1966) 16-19, at 17-18.

⁶The policy succeeded, at least in part, to judge from *SB* V 8536, cf. J. Rea, "The Letter from Phonen to Aburni," *ZPE* 34 (1979) 147-62. See further J. Gascou, "Militaires étrangers en Egypte byzantine," *BIFAO* 75 (1975) 203-06, at 206. For the Procopius passage and for details on the (disputed) origins and history of the Nobades: L. P. Kirwan, "Comments on the Origins and History of the Nobatae of Procopius," *Kush* 6 (1958) 69-73.

worship by Romans, Nobades and Blemmyes.⁷ This was all part of a policy designed to "rationalize" the imperial frontiers, to dispense with "exposed salients," and to co-opt strong clients who, according to Edward Luttwak, "could reinforce the frontier by relieving Roman troops of the burden of day-to-day defense against low-intensity threats."⁸

This background, along with other considerations, suggested to Maspero that although their units are only named in unofficial style, as for example, "the legion of Syene," "the numerus of Elephantine," the soldiers in the Syene papyri were technically garrison troops, "limitanei," stationed in Syene, Elephantine and Philai. A.H.M. Jones, in his *Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964), published more than fifty years after Maspero's book, agreed. He, too, pointed to the unofficial naming of the three Syene military units--"almost invariably regiments are spoken of under the colourless style of *numerus*";⁹ but Jones went beyond Maspero in attempting, on the basis of "a strong presumption of continuity" (655), to identify each of the units with a unit listed in the fifth-century *Notitia Dignitatum*. "The legion of Philai," according to Jones, "was doubtless Legio I Maximiana, recorded at Philai in the *Notitia*. That of Syene may have been the *Milites Milarii*, classified among the legions and located at

⁷General orientation: Rex Keating, *Nubian Rescue* (New York/London 1975), chapt. x, esp. 183-85. Interestingly for the Syene papyri, which are mostly mid-sixth- to early seventh-century in date, the Philai temples, including the great Isis temple, were shut down and defaced by Justinian's general Narses not quite a hundred years after Marcianus' treaty (453 CE) with the Blemmyes and Nobades. This treaty not only allowed the nomads access to the Philai temples, but sanctioned the loan of the Isis cult statue (on condition of its return) for use as an oracle in their own lands. The source for this is Priscus fragment 21, readily accessible (in translation) in C. D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila* 18-19.

⁸Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore/London 1979) 158-59. I have not yet seen Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford 1990).

⁹*Later Roman Empire* 654-55. *Numerus*, of course, is merely the Latin loanword for the Greek ἀριθμός. There is no difference in sense between them. The loanword *legio* also denotes, in these documents, the same kind of unit as *numerus/arithmos*, but perhaps with a bit of an archaizing touch (cf. Farber-Porten, *BASP* 23 [1986] 87). The use of such classicizing terminology was, according to J. Gascou ("Le garnison de Thèbes d'après O. IFAO inv. 12," *CRIPÉL* 8 [1986] 73-74), characteristic of Byzantine garrisons in Upper Egypt between Luxor and Philae. Usage between Syene documents varies, but usage within documents tends to be consistent. Within documents the choice of terminology seems to have been up to the signatory or to the first witness, if he was a soldier; the remaining witnesses would in the natural order of things simply copy the word he had chosen.

Syene. At Elephantine the Notitia records only the cohort I Felix Theodosiana" (662).

It is hard to say whether Jones is right in these identifications; but clearly right is his observation that the only document of military content in the Syene dossier is *P.Münch. 2* (= *W.Chr. 470*), which concerns the enrollment of Flavius Patermuthis son of Dios in the *numerus* of Elephantine. This is a unique and therefore especially important document.¹⁰ By its text, the *priores* of the *numerus* of the fortress of Elephantine acknowledge to Flavius Patermuthis son of Dios, a new recruit, that they have received his certificate of recruitment (*probatoria*), along with others, from the duke of the Thebaid.¹¹ The duke has instructed them to enter his name in the roster (*matrix*) of their unit as of the coming January 1st (579 CE).

P.Münch. 2 is important because of its details about enrollment procedures and its technical terminology, and because it is a direct testimonial about military enrollment in the sixth century. Other indications of enrollments may be found elsewhere in the archive, but this evidence is indirect and circumstantial. What it requires is an earlier document in which a man appears as a civilian and a later document in which he appears as a soldier. One example is Aurelius Paeion son of Dios. Originating from Syene, he is one of four parties to an arbitration agreement, *dialysis*, *P.Münch. 1* (= *FIRA III 184*), drawn up in 574; seven years later, he appears as Flavius Paeion son of Dios, soldier of the *numerus* of Syene, witnessing *P.Münch. 4*, the sale of a boat.¹² The arbitration agreement, *P.Münch. 1*, mentions by way of addendum (lines 53-55) that a *στρατεύσιμον*, an enrollment fee, of one *solidus* has been paid by his father for the (unnamed) son of Paeion's elder brother, Jacob;¹³ and a son of Jacob's named John appears as a soldier of the

¹⁰The document's presence among the papers of Flavius Patermuthis son of Menas is a puzzle. Farber and Porten, art. cit., suggest that this Patermuthis may have had some family relationship with the archive's principal figure, Patermuthis son of Menas. What the relationship may have been, is unclear.

¹¹Elephantine, along with Syene and Philai, was located on the southern fringe of the province of Upper Thebaid. The duke was the highest military and civil official of the entire Thebaid (Upper and Lower) since the time of Justinian's Edict XIII, 539 (or 554) CE: Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 281.

¹²Cf. Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 669; Keenan, *ZPE* 13 (1974) 299 with n. 196.

¹³This is clearly what the Greek, as written, points to. Heisenberg, however, in his

numerus of Syene in 583 CE, in a second arbitration agreement, *P.Münch.* 7. Here, however, he is mistakenly accorded the status designation Aurelius, used for civilians, rather than Flavius, the designation regularly accorded soldiers, even new recruits.¹⁴ John himself, though still for some reason a recruit,¹⁵ appears a year or two later (*P.Lond.* 1728) with the name Flavius. By 22 August 585, his full military status is assured (*P.Lond.* 1730). He is then styled: "Flavius John, son of Jacob, soldier of the unit (*arithmos*) of Syene, originating from the same, boatman by trade."

Even more complicated than John's career are the ins and outs of the military career of his brother-in-law, the archive's main figure, Flavius Patermuthis son of Menas. Patermuthis appears as Aurelius Patermuthis son of Menas in 578/82 CE (*P.Lond.* 1724). In 581, he is Flavius Patermuthis, recruit in the *numerus* of Syene (*P.Münch.* 4);¹⁶ but in 583 and 584 (*P.Lond.* 1727, 1729), he is again an Aurelius--and boatman from Syene, remaining so at least until 30 May 585 (*P.Münch.* 9). Then on 22 August 585 (*P.Lond.* 1730) and again on 28 January 586 (*P.Münch.* 10) he is Flavius Patermuthis, soldier of the *numerus* of Elephantine, though continuing to be identified as a boatman by trade. Later in 586, on 16 August, Patermuthis is a soldier of the *numerus* of Philai (*P.Lond.* 1732). He is a soldier of Elephantine in 590-91 (*P.Münch.* 12) and on 18 January 594 (*P.Münch.* 13); a boatman on 15 February of the same year (*P.Münch.* 14); and a soldier of Elephantine in the last two documents of the archive, dated 611 and 613 (*P.Lond.* 1736-37).

One might, as a way out of the apparent confusion, presume with Jones (*Later Roman Empire* 662-63) that Patermuthis's inconsistent

¹⁴Bell, *Klio* 13 (1913) 166, cf. Keenan, *ZPE* 11 (1973) 62-63.

¹⁵Possibly the unit had a standing list of recruits awaiting openings for active service. How long someone would, or could, remain a recruit is unknown. Likewise, the exact results of the procedures exemplified in *P.Münch.* 2, summarized above, are in doubt. Did they make Patermuthis son of Dios a soldier on active duty, or did they simply confirm his status as a recruit?

¹⁶Bell's arguments (*Klio* 13 [1913] 164-65) against identifying this Patermuthis son of Menas with the archive's principal figure are unconvincing. The matronymic Thekla as applied to a Flavius Patermuthis son of Menas in *P.Münch.* 5 recto is, however, a problem (the matronymic of the archive's Patermuthis is elsewhere consistently Tsia); but what seems to unite in their concerns *P.Münch.* 4 and 5 are the outsider parties from Kom Ombo, especially Aurelius Menas, son of Paul and Susanna, not the parties from Syene. It seems then that the one who doesn't belong in "the Patermuthis schema" is not the Flavius Patermuthis of *P.Münch.* 4, but he of *P.Münch.* 5 recto.

titling is a function of his own indifference. Or the matter might at least be simplified by holding that Patermuthis's link to the Philai *numerus* was the result of a "scribe's blunder."¹⁷ Or: one can take the documents at face value and suggest that Patermuthis was recruited in 581 for the Syene *numerus*, but did not go on active service because this was a time of peace and there were no openings in the unit. Unlike his brother-in-law John, who remained on the waiting list of recruits for the Syene *numerus*, Patermuthis returned to full civilian life as a boatman. When an opening did emerge, it was not with the Syene, but with the Elephantine *numerus*, and it was that unit that Patermuthis joined by 585, continuing in its service for at least twenty-eight years (to 613), except for a brief and temporary assignment to the Philai *numerus* in (and perhaps around) 586.

This seems the best that can be done with Patermuthis's career in the face of insufficient evidence and lack of apt parallels. This in turn leads to our pointing out another shortcoming in the Syene papyri: they do not tell anything about what the Syene recruits did when they went on active duty. B. Porten, in writing about the Egyptian military frontier as it was more than a thousand years earlier, states: "The Aramaic documents contain very little reference to the military activities of the Elephantine garrison."¹⁸ Much the same can be said of the garrisons evidenced in the Syene papyri. We must, I think, assume that the Syene area was generally peaceful; and we must then, like Porten, proceed to speculations about the duties of a peacetime garrison. Yes, these soldiers guarded the frontier as a kind of militia. They may have served as local police at the limits of empire, perhaps assisting in the collection of taxes and tolls. Some may have supervised the Elephantine Nilometer; some may worked the stone quarries between Syene and Philai on the Nile's east bank, or provided an escort for its products (cf. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* 40-41). The soldiers may likewise have guarded transport (βασταγή) and convoyed short-distance caravans along the Syene-Philai road. Two Syene soldiers identified as "troopers," *kaballarioi*,¹⁹ may have been permanently, or frequently, seconded to this task. This last speculation may find support in the mention of the

¹⁷Thus Bell, *Klio* 13 (1913) 165.

¹⁸Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1969) 28-61; the quote is from 35.

¹⁹Fl. Kyriakos son of Menas, *P.Münch.* 11 and 12; Fl. Kollouthos son of Victor, *P.Münch.* 12.

camel-yard (καμηλῶν) for one end of the Syene-Philai route in three of the papyri.²⁰ According to these, the yard was located in the southern section of the Syene fortress (*phourion*). The transport service was (possibly) semi-official in character and (certainly) concerned with the transport between Syene and Philai of cargoes offloaded from ships onto camels.²¹ If so, there may have been some additional connection with the fact that some men in the Syene documents are identified as "boatmen by trade." Maspero had held (pp. 56-57) that "nearly all" the soldiers of Syene, Elephantine and Philai doubled as boatmen. In this he was wrong, for only Patermuthis son of Menas' being linked at one time or another to each of the three garrison units makes this assertion seemingly possible. In fact, only two soldiers, Patermuthis and John, continue to be identified as boatmen when in military service. The rest of the archive's boatmen are civilians and these are all from Syene.²²

Maspero was right, however, in holding that the soldier-boatmen (ναῦται) were boatmen by private virtue, not from public duty. They were not part of a riverine imperial navy, nor did they serve in shipping public grain downriver to Alexandria. Rather, they were, as private individuals, concerned with river traffic through the first cataract between Syene-Elephantine and Philai. They may have been the kind of derring-do cataract sailors whose exploits were a tourist attraction both in antiquity and in modern times down to the construction of the Aswan

²⁰P.Lond. 1722, *P.Münch.* 11 and 12, cf. Bell, *Klio* 13 (1913) 172-73.

²¹See for this route in modern times Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877; republ. London 1982) 183 ff., some of the most delightful pages of an unremittingly delightful book. The nature of the cargoes in antiquity is open to speculation. Perhaps, *inter alia*, wine moving south, date palms moving north. The provisioning of the Philai *castrum* would also have been involved. Cf. Bowman, *BASP* 15 (1978) 34-38, for military provisions sent upriver in the Diocletianic period; J. Gasco, "Le table budgétaire d'Antaeopolis (*P.Freer* 08.45 c-d)," in *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, Tome I (IVe-VIIe siècle) (Paris, n.d.), p. 301, lines 29 ff., commentary, pp. 310-11, for provisions shipped upriver to soldiers of Syene and Philai in the sixth century. For the intervening period: *BGU* III 974 (= *W.Chr.* 423); *P.Giss.* II 54 (= *W.Chr.* 420).

²²They are not as many as one might think from a reading of the general scholarly literature: Aurelius Jacob son of Co(n)stantius, *P.Lond.* 1725 + *P.Münch.* 3; Aurelius Jacob son of Apa Dios, *P.Lond.* 1732; Aurelius John, son of Piturôn, *P.Lond.* 1736-37; Paeion son of Apa Dios (owner of property adjacent to house property under sale), *P.Münch.* 13; a sailor nicknamed Psêre, *P.Münch.* 14. (There is a chance that the names Dios and Apa Dios are interchangeable; in which case the boatman Paeion son of Apa Dios, just mentioned, might be identical with the Syene soldier, Flavius Paeion son of Dios, *P.Münch.* 4 [581], *P.Lond.* 1731 [585], cf. above and *P.Münch.* 1.)

barrage, 1898-1902.²³ They did this as private citizens, not as soldiers. Nor, finally, do the Syene soldiers, whether boatmen or not, seem to have, as Maspero (p. 60) suggested, exchanged their military service for grants of land, as was the case for *limitanei* elsewhere in the Empire. The Syene papyri, unlike the bulk of Egypt's documentary papyri, give virtually no information about agriculture or farm land. This comes as no surprise since, according to Baines and Málek, this is "an almost barren area" that must have relied on food imported from the north.²⁴ Rather the concerns of the Syene papyri are mostly with exchanges of money, but even more so with dispositions of house property.

To turn from these more general considerations about the Syene soldiers to more specific points, it is appropriate to indicate the possibilities of prosopographical analysis. First, as is known, the soldiers do not in the main figure as contracting parties in the documents, but rather (in abundance) as witnesses, as signers for illiterate contracting parties, and as drafters of the documents themselves. Well over one hundred soldiers can be distinguished. For what it's worth, a quick and rough run-through of names and patronymics indicates that the most popular names were John (21), Victor (13), Abraham (10), Dios (10) and Apa Dios (8), Jacob (8), Paul (8), Moses (6), Isaac (6), and Joseph (5). This is the standard type of naming for Christian Egypt, so much so that the occasional (and sometimes questionably deciphered) Egyptian names stand out as oddities. Further, the names Lazaros and Ananias might suggest their holders were Jewish; but their respective patronymics, Peter and George, cancel the thought.²⁵ More to the point: the absence of provably foreign names among those soldiers that find mention in the Syene papyri further establishes what has been accepted all along: that the Syene *numerus* was filled with local recruits and staffed, to the level of the centurionate at least (see below), by locals.

²³Strabo 17.1.49; Francis Steegmuller (tr. and ed.), *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour* (Chicago 1979) 123; Maspero 56-57; cf. Porten *Archives from Elephantine* 37-39, John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1970) 92 ff.

²⁴John Baines and Jaromir Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (New York 1980) 72. Cf. J. A. Wilson, "Buto and Hierakonopolis in the Geography of Egypt," *JNES* 14 (1955) 214 (the area is low in cereal productivity, though rich in sugar cane, onions, fenugreek and beans; the width of cultivation is "decidedly narrow"), 229 (the area "was poor in agriculture, but rich in granite and amethyst").

²⁵Lazaros: *P.Münch.* 13-14, *P.Lond.* 1733; Ananias: *P.Lond.* 1733. A patronymic Aron (Aaron?) is found in *P.Münch.* 13, but his son's name is Psan, presumably Egyptian.

Second, despite the drift of scholarly discussions that imply the Syene papyri tell about all three military units--Syene, Elephantine, and Philai-- in equal measures, the fact is that, apart from Patermuthis son of Menas's connection with the unit as a soldier and apart from *P.Munch. 2*, there is little about the Elephantine *numerus* in the Syene dossier; still less about the Philai unit. It is only for the Syene *numerus* that some small sense of internal structure and continuity can be derived.²⁶ As Jones points out, the soldiers mentioned in the papyri are overwhelmingly plain soldiers or NCOs. No Syene unit commander is named, nor is any serving lieutenant commander (*vicarius*). Some *exvicarii* appear, as do *actuarii* (quartermasters) and *adiutores* (record-keepers). Of these the most prominent is Flavius Lazaros, son of Peter, who figures in three documents, all dated to 594.²⁷ *Augustales*, that is, *ordinarii* (centurions--see n. 26) with special distinction,²⁸ find mention in half a dozen documents. Most important are those that are dated to 594 (*P.Lond. 1733*, *P.Munch. 13-14*). From these it can be seen that the unit had at least two *Augustales*, and possibly, since the references are so tightly clustered, four at a time: Flavius Komes son of Paamios, Flavius

²⁶Next in respect to information on internal organization is the Elephantine *numerus*, the most important document for which is *P.Munch. 2* (see above). It includes a new recruit; eight unit *ordinarii*, one of whom doubles as an *adiutor*. The *ordinarii* are among, but do not fully staff, the unit's *collegium* (κοινόν) of *priores*. The leading *ordinarius* is also a *primicerius*. According to Du Cange, *Glossarium manuale ad scriptores mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (Paris 1858) col. 1791 s.v., a *primicerius* was "le premier de ceux qui exercent le même emploi, chef, commandant . . ."; fuller details in Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (Niort 1886) VI 497-98. *Ordinarius* is presumably to be understood as the equivalent of centurion. That at least is the way it is presented by Vegetius (see below n. 28) and John Lydus; cf. J. F. Gilliam, "The *Ordinarii* and *Ordinati* of the Roman Army," in Gilliam, *Roman Army Papers* (Amsterdam 1986) 1-22, at 5-8.

²⁷*P.Munch. 13* and *14* (he signs for illiterates); *P.Lond. 1733* (he has drafted the document).

²⁸*Ordinarii dicuntur qui in proelio [quia primi sunt,] ordines ducunt. Augustales appellantur qui ab Augusto ordinariis iuncti sunt. Flaviales item, tamquam secundi Augustales, a divo Vespasiano sunt legionibus additi--Vegetius, Epitoma rei militaris 2.7.* Vegetius is presumably correct, though obscure, on the connection between *Augustales*, *Flaviales*, and *ordinarii* for the fourth century (his own era) and possibly for the ensuing centuries, but his linking of the first two titles to Augustus and Vespasian is probably anachronistic. In the sense that they have in a military context in late papyri, they probably owe their creation to emperors of late antiquity. *Flavialis* was no doubt created as a distinction by Constantine (see J. G. Keenan, "An Instance of the Military Grade *Flavialis*, *BASP* 10 [1973] 43-46). He may also be responsible for *Augustalis*, but Diocletian is another a likely candidate.

John son of Victor, Flavius Victor son of Psabet, and Flavius Patermuthis son of Hatres.

References to plain centurions are equally important in frequency and significance. The references again tend to cluster, this time in the years from 583 to 585.²⁹ Two of the centurions, Flavius Kyros, son of John, and Flavius John, son of Kolouthos (*sic*), figure as witnesses in three different documents. Since three centurions appear at once in two documents (*P.Lond.* 1729, *P.Münch.* 9), it is clear that the Syene unit had at least three centuries. And since the names of five centurions in all are known for these few years,³⁰ quite possibly five should be accepted as the lowest possible number of centuries for the Syene *numerus*. This would suggest the unit had a paper strength of about 500 men; but the usual view is that the real strength of a sixth-century *numerus* was considerably lower.³¹ The unit's specialists are known to have included a drill-instructor (*campiductor*), a doctor, standard-bearers (*draconarii*), troopers (*kaballarioi*), and a drummer (*tympanarios*).

Through prosopography, it is further possible to identify some cases of military promotion. For example, Flavius Isak son of Jacob, a soldier in 574 (*P.Münch.* 1), has become a centurion by 584 (*P.Lond.* 1729). Flavius Komes son of Paamios, a soldier in 574 (*P.Münch.* 1), has become an *Augustalis* twenty years later in 594 (*P.Lond.* 1733). Flavius John son of Peter, a soldier in 581 (*P.Münch.* 4), has become *draconarius* by 594 (*P.Münch.* 14).

References like these can also be of interest for establishing an individual soldier's minimum length of actual service. We saw above that Flavius Patermuthis son of Menas served for nearly thirty years. The references just given show, respectively, minimum lengths of service of ten, twenty, and thirteen years. Other examples can be adduced. Flavius John son of Abraham was a unit *actuarius* from at least 585 (*P.Lond.* 1731) to 594 (*P.Lond.* 1733). Flavius Eulogius son of Allamon

²⁹*P.Lond.* 1727 (583/4), 12 March 584 (*P.Lond.* 1729), 30 May 585 (*P.Münch.* 9), 30 September 585 (*P.Lond.* 1731).

³⁰In addition to the two just named: Flavius Isak son of Jacob, Flavius Papnuthis son of Martyrios, and Flavius Dioskoros son of John.

³¹The strength of the *arithmos* of Numidian Justiniani assigned to Hermopolis is given as 508 in *P.Lond.* V 1663, a sixth-century papyrus from Aphrodito; for presumed lower figures (in the 250-300 range): Robert Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zum Beginn der byzantinischen Themenverfassung* (Berlin 1920) 273-74. For unit strengths and deployment in the Diocletianic period: Bowman, *BASP* 15 (1978) 30-33.

was a centurion for roughly ten years (*P.Münch.* 8, *P.Lond.* 1734). Flavius Paeion son of Jacob and Flavius Paul son of Paam were soldiers from at least 586 (*P.Münch.* 10) to 594 (*P.Münch.* 14). Flavius Menas son of Abraham and Flavius Hermeias son of John were soldiers from at least 585 to 594.³² Flavius John, son of Jacob and Tapia, served for at least ten years (*P.Lond.* 1728, 1730, *P.Münch.* 14). All these lengths of service of ten years or so are of course only half, or less than half of what the soldiers' actual lengths of service should have been according to normal practice (Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 635). They do not, therefore, teach us something we could not otherwise have assumed about required length of military service in late antiquity.

A final prosopographical point, and one that I think has not yet been sufficiently identified and stressed, touches upon Flavius Markos, son of Apa Dios, a soldier of Syene, who is the "writingest" man in the archive. Markos appears as documentary scribe or subscriber for illiterates (or both) in some ten documents ranging in date from 577 to 586.³³ This suggests another important, and highly topical, field of study, that is, the literacy of the soldiers in the Syene papyri. In this the interest and investigative possibilities lie not so much in how many of the soldiers wrote, how many could not (this cannot be discovered); but rather, if they wrote, how serviceably and fluently did they write. A starting point might be to isolate and evaluate the writing samples of Markos son of Apa Dios. For this, though some impression of Markos's and other soldiers' individual skills can be extrapolated from the printed editions, access to the original papyri or to photographs is essential. But even without that access, the very fact of the notarial work of a soldier like Markos, and the predominance of soldiers of the Syene *numerus* (and not those of Elephantine or Philai) as subscribers and witnesses, seem to indicate that there was in the Syene *phourion* a record-office or "grapheion" which was relied upon, not only by the unit for official purposes or by its soldiers for their personal concerns, but by people of the surrounding area, for the drafting of documents of private law and for providing boards, presumably *ad hoc*, for arbitrations (see *P.Münch.*

³²*P.Lond.* 1730, *P.Münch.* 13; *P.Lond.* 1731, 1733. Menas, the first signatory to *P.Münch.* 13, neglects to include his military title (line 79); the name Flavius, however, assures his military status, *ZPE* 11 (1973) 61-63.

³³*P.Lond.* 1723 (577), partially restored; *P.Münch.* 3 + *P.Lond.* 1725 (580); *P.Münch.* 4 (581); *P.Lond.* 1727 (583/4), 1728 (584 or 585), 1729 (584), 1730 (585); *P.Münch.* 9 (585), 10 (586), 11 (586).

1). We have, after all, in the Syene papyri only a small and restricted sampling of the activities of this hypothetical record-office. It is enough, however, to illustrate the merging of military and civil administration on an imperial frontier. That this should have occurred in a garrison and trade town like Syene should come as no surprise.³⁴

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