

Michael P. Speidel, *Guards of the Roman Armies. An essay on the singulares of the provinces*. *Antiquitas* 1/28. Rudolf Habelt Verlag, Bonn 1978. 149 pages, 3 plates.

The subjects of this work are the cavalry and infantry supplied by auxiliary units for service in the officium of provincial governors as singulares, there performing a variety of functions as guards, messengers, police, and of course soldiers. This, the first detailed study of the subject, 'attempts to reconstruct the history of the provincial equites, pedites and dromadarii singulares during the first three centuries A. D. in as many aspects as possible'. Chapters are devoted to: the institution of the singulares: origins, recruitment, strength, weapons, officers, units, the disappearance of the singulares in the third century (38 pages); functions of the singulares: guard duties, on the march, in camp, in battle, officers' school(?), strategic reserve (12 pages); auxiliary units raised from singulares (13 pages), conclusion (3 pages), the documents (56 pages), with appendices on the British singulares (4 pages) and protectores and singulares (4 pages), and a detailed bibliography (10 pages). The number of docu-

ments discussed – 83 – is an accurate reflection of the paucity of sources for the provincial singulares and therefore the limitation of the conclusions that can be drawn. Only one fort that could have been occupied by the singulares has been located and nothing is known of its internal arrangements. Nevertheless the author has made a coherent story from the limited evidence and the comments below reflect the scarcity of the sources as much as the author's treatment of them.

Michael P. Speidel offers a view of the Roman army as seen through the eyes of the singulares with which I am unable to agree. He postulates that 'the singulares constituted . . . a bond of unity, cohesion and control within the provincial armies'. This is a statement of belief rather than knowledge: there is no evidence to support the assertion. Speidel continues, 'Men returning to their own ala or cohort, or being appointed officer in another unit, brought with them, wherever they went, the standards, the training, the spirit and the loyalties they had imbibed at headquarters'. This may well have been the case but their influence, contra Speidel, may not have been for the best. The state of the army of Syria in 58 when Corbulo became governor is eloquent witness to the disadvantage of billeting troops in towns (Tac. ann 13, 34): all singulares would have been stationed in or close to major towns. Further, it could be argued that proximity to the provincial governor would not necessarily induce loyalty to the emperor: in the Roman world it was the governor not the army who usually initiated rebellions. At times the author dangerously transfers back to the Roman period modern concepts: did, for example, a 'Roman High Command' (p. 54) exist? The use of such terms, including non-commissioned officer, tends to obscure rather than clarify discussion.

In other areas Speidel fails to distinguish clearly between fact and hypothesis. It is only a suggestion, not a fact, that all new *pedites singulares* of the Syrian army were enrolled in cohorts XX Palmyrenorum between 219 and 222 (p. 8); much of the discussion of the posts in the singulares is speculative (p. 33 ff.); there is no evidence that soldiers from the *equites singulares Augusti* were promoted to *decurion* in auxiliary units 'apparently in an effort to promote uniform standards of training and command in the different provincial armies' (p. 51), or that the governors' singulares 'likely . . . served as a school for non-commissioned officers of the units of the line' (p. 52) (the system of patronage in the Roman world suggests that the singulares might have received favoured treatment from governors, but unfortunately the possible evidence for this is destroyed by Speidel himself!); it is an interesting, possibly correct, suggestion of E. Birley that the *pedites singulares Britannici* left Britain because of complicity in the Lucullus affair, but not a fact (p. 127); similarly it is an interesting suggestion by M. W. C. Hassall that the 1500 javelin-men of Britain who achieved the fall of Perennis were singulares, but not a fact (p. 128–129); it is probable that the singulares were quartered in the Cripplegate fort at London though there is no formal proof. Elsewhere Speidel's interpretation of events is open to question. For example, there are other possible reasons for Severus drafting legionaries into the praetorian guard than that suggested by Speidel, namely it was an extension of the principle of selection of the governors' singulares from among the frontier units (p. 68). The evidence cited by Speidel to support his statement that 'the cavalry and infantry of a governor's singulares were organised into separate units' (p. 24) is not conclusive: there were several idiosyncracies in the Roman army's organisation and command and there could be another here. Certainly the fact that the *equites singulares* may have had a separate *tabularium* is irrelevant as the *equites legionis* had a separate *tabularium* but no commanding officer, while the cavalry and infantry in a cohort *equitata* fought separately (cf. R. W. Davies, *Historia* 20, 1971, 751 ff.) and had no separate commander. This reflects the fact that in the Roman army the fighting and administrative organisation did not coincide: for example, neither *maniple* nor cohort in the legion possessed a separate commander or organisation.

A major problem lies in the recognition of singulares on inscriptions. Speidel prefers to see SC expanded *s(ummus) c(urator)* rather than *s(ingularis) c(onsularis)*, ignoring the convincing case made for the latter expansion by R. W. Davies (*Britannia* 7, 1978, 134 f.) based in particular upon statistical probabilities. Speidel's case rests upon one inscription in Greek. The relevant section reads: *σοῦμμος ἱππ(έ)ων συνγου[λα]ρίων* (AE 1940, 216). This is a dangerous example on which to build an argument as the full title of the soldier is abbreviated seemingly uniquely from *summus curator* to *summus*. Elsewhere SC, as Davies demonstrates, is an accepted abbreviation for *s(ingularis) c(onsularis)*. While certainty cannot be obtained the probability lies with Davies.

Another area of difficulty lies in the recognition of promotions from *singularis*: does the phrase *decurio ex singularibus* indicate a promotion or merely that the soldier was from the singulares, or even deceased or retired? Speidel proposes that as the inscriptions are found at or near provincial headquarters rather than the auxiliary

unit's base (or at neither), the phraseology merely indicates that the decurion was a member of the *singulares* and his interpretation is supported by AE 1905, 165 which records an *equus ex singularibus ex cohorte praetoria IX, stipendiorum II* – the soldier is unlikely to have held the two posts of *singularis* and *equus* in his first two years service in the guard. Yet Speidel has failed to convince himself of the force of his own argument and is prepared to use evidence he has already discredited to his own satisfaction to support his hypothesis (p. 51 f.) that the *singulares* 'likely . . . served as a school for non-commissioned officers of the units of the line'.

There is, however, another possible interpretation of the phraseology not considered by Speidel: an inscription may have been erected as a *singularis* was preparing to take up a post elsewhere as decurion (cf. E. Birley, *Chiron* 9, 1979, 495 ff. for the erection of such inscriptions pertaining to equestrians and senators and *Britannia* 1, 1970, 310, no 23 for a possible case relating to a centurion). While the altars may reflect such a situation (Speidel's numbers 21 and 40), it may be considered coincidental, in view of the paucity of the sources, if two surviving inscriptions relate to soldiers who died before they were able to take up their appointments (20 and 44). The balance of probability would appear to lie, in these two examples, and possibly the others, with Speidel, though clearly each case must be considered on its own merits.

Two further points should be mentioned. Speidel considers the question of the status or rank of the *singulares* (p. 36), but fails to distinguish those in the provincial *numerus singularium* and the *equites singulares Augusti*, i. e. units composed wholly of *singulares*, from the *singulares* of senior officers in units not composed wholly of *singulares*. The former were undoubtedly *munifices*, as Speidel argues, but, contra Speidel, the latter were surely *immunes*. Elsewhere, in particular Speidel's interesting suggestions that the *singulares* served as a mobile reserve for the governor (p. 14) and that the creation of a field army in the later third century led to the disappearance of the *singulares* (p. 53 and 69), deserve wider consideration.

Printer's errors are few. A number of minor errors, and possibly overstatements, appear to have crept in as a result of language problems: for example, the auxiliary shield was oval not oblong (p. 15–17).

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