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The Ownership and Disposal of Military Equipment in the Late Roman Army

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Unfortunately, relatively little evidence survives concerning the ownership and disposal of military equipment in the late Roman army. However, a particularly valuable document in this respect is a letter dated AD 401 which authorizes the discharge of eleven members from an *ala* stationed at Psofthis in Egypt.[1] This was addressed by the *comes et dux Aegypti* Flavius Eleutherius to the prefect of the camp at Psofthis and is indicative, therefore, of official policy and the correct legal procedure. It requires the prefect to ensure that before the removal of their names from the musters the soldiers in question should return every type of arm with which they had been equipped. However, the brevity of the text prevents our understanding the full significance of his instruction in this matter. Was this a routine request made of all soldiers before they were discharged? What weapons had actually been issued to the soldiers? What was the penalty should the soldiers fail to return the weapons as requested? These and other questions remain unanswered, and any further contemporaneous evidence which might shed more light on this issue would be most welcome. Fortunately, a neglected hagiographical text may provide some such evidence.

The *Passio Typasii* purports to describe the trial and death in Mauritania Caesariensis of a military veteran by the name of Typasius during the Diocletianic persecution of Christians. According to this document, Typasius had originally refused to accept a donative from the emperor Herculius Maximianus (285–305) prior to an expected engagement in Mauritania Sitifensis with the Quinquegentiani, a coalition of native tribesmen.[2] He wished to leave the army, and promised that if he released him Maximianus would defeat the barbarian tribesmen without any battle. Indeed, he also promised that within forty days victories would be reported from Britain, Gaul, Egypt and the East.

He knew these things because the angel Gabriel had revealed them to him during the previous night. However, the emperor was angered by Typasius' defiance, and did not believe his predictions. Thus he had Typasius placed in irons to suffer the death penalty should things not turn out as he had foretold. Inevitably, though, events occurred exactly as Typasius had said they would, and he was granted, therefore, an honourable discharge.

It is at this point that the account of Typasius' behaviour becomes of particular interest to us, and it is necessary therefore to quote the relevant passage in full (*BHL* 8354. 4-5):[3]

> *Depositam itaque militiam, sanctus Typasius ad domum suam rediens, arma et cingulum posuit atque sibi in agro suo monasterium fecit et ibidem tempore infinito permansit. Igitur Diocletianus et Maximianus imperio suo, deletis gentibus, laetabantur. Sed post aliquantos annos Maximianus, quanta illi favor divinus per beatissimum Typasium praestitisset oblitus, edictum per Africam misit, ut demolirentur ecclesiae, incenderentur divinae legis codices, turificarent sacerdotes et populi, atque omnes revocarentur ad militiam veterani. Eodem tempore sanctus Typasius solus in monasterio quod sibi construxerat habitabat. Tunc praepositus saltus atque decurio eum cum cingulo quod deposuerat vel cum scuto et lanceis de eadem cellula protraxerunt atque eum Claudio, qui tunc Caesariensis provinciae dux fuerat, tradiderunt. Quem cum Claudius comes vidisset, praeposito et decurioni dixit: Quare istum cum veste lugubri meis oculis ingessistis? Decurio*

respondit: Typasius ista in nostra vexillatione militabat, sed a domno nostro Maximiano Augusto in Sitifensi provincia honestam missionem meruerat, et depositis in domo sua armis in solitudinem aedificavit sibi domum in qua solus habitabat. Modo praeceptum venit imperatorum nostrorum Diocletiani et Maximiani ut omnes veterani ad signa propria revocarentur; et convenimus istum Typasium ut ad militiam rediret, et noluit.

When he had left the army saint Typasius returned home. He put aside his weapons and military belt and built a hermitage for himself on his land where he remained for a long time. Thus Diocletian and Maximianus rejoiced in their empire when the native tribes had been defeated. But after some years Maximianus forgot what great divine favour had been granted to him through most blessed Typasius, and sent an edict to Africa commanding that the churches were to be demolished, the texts of divine law burned, that the priests and people were to offer sacrifices of incense, and that all veterans were to be recalled to military service. At that time saint Typasius was living alone in the hermitage which he had built for himself. Then the *praepositus saltus* and the decurion dragged him out, along with the military belt which he had put aside, and his shield and javelins from the same storeroom, and surrendered him to Claudius who was then *dux* of the province of Mauritania Caesariensis. When the *comes* Claudius had seen him, he said to the *praepositus* and the decurion, "Why have you brought before my eyes this man with his mournful dress?" The decurion replied, "Typasius used to serve in our detachment, but he earned an honourable discharge from Maximianus Augustus in the province of Mauritania Sitifensis. He laid up his weapons in his house and built a dwelling place for himself in the wilderness which he inhabited alone. Recently, there came a command from our emperors Diocletian and Maximianus that all veterans were to be recalled to their former standards, and we summoned this man Typasius to return to military service, but he refused."

The relevance of this text to our present investigation should be immediately obvious. It describes the honourable discharge of a veteran, Typasius, who took away with him his equipment – belt, shield and javelins – and stored them at his residence. But to what extent can we trust this text and its depiction of events during the Diocletianic era? Unfortunately, the *Passio Typasii* is a clever fiction, and it is a certainty almost that there never existed any such martyr, veteran or otherwise.[4] However, we are fortunate in that it is possible to establish with some accuracy the approximate date of composition of this fiction. Furthermore, it is possible by the same means to show that the author was particularly concerned that his story should be as plausible as possible. It was not an entirely imaginative flight of fancy, a fact which explains why some modern commentators have been tempted to place rather more credence in the text than is properly due.[5]

In order to make his tale as plausible as possible, the author of the *Passio Typasii* used as source and model two authoritative texts of his era. On the one hand he used a pagan, secular source, the *Breviarium* of Eutropius, to provide him with authentic historical detail concerning the events and personalities of the Diocletianic era.[6] This work was published *c.* 369.[7] On the other hand he used a Christian source, the *Vita Martini* of Sulpicius Severus, to provide him with a model upon which to base his account of the discharge of Typasius from the army.[8] This work was published *c.* 396.[9] It cannot be stressed enough how unusual it is that the author of a fictitious hagiographical account should concern himself so much in this manner with an appearance of accuracy or plausibility. Certainly, there remain elements which will strike the majority of modern readers as implausible, even impossible, the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Typasius being a prime example. However, it was an era which respected, even expected, the miraculous. Thus, for example, in 398 the Moor Mascazel led the imperial forces against his brother, the rebel *comes Africae* Gildo, in the belief that bishop Ambrose of Milan (deceased in 397) had appeared to him in a dream and instructed him how exactly to conduct the forthcoming campaign.[10]

It is clear, therefore, that the *Passio Typasii* was composed after *c.* 396. However, a number of factors suggest that it was composed only very shortly after this date, *c.* 397/99.[11] Firstly, the fact that the author turned to the *Breviarium* of Eutropius rather than the *Historia Adversus Paganos* of the North African Christian Orosius is suggestive. Orosius published his work *c.* 417, and in so far as the author of the *Passio Typasii* seems to have been unaware of it, the suspicion must be that he was writing at an earlier date.

Secondly, the description of the havoc wreaked by the Quinquegentiani, and the poor response by imperial officials to the same, seems to allude to the revolt by the Moorish *comes Africae* Gildo in 397–8. Finally, the description of the attempted conscription of Typasius on his land by the *praepositus saltus*, that is by the official in charge of the imperial estates in that province, seems to allude to the circumstances of 397 when, contrary to normal practice, conscription was briefly allowed on imperial estates.[12]

In this manner, it is clear that the dating of the composition of the *Passio Typasii* is facilitated by the accuracy of many of the incidental details which seem to match the social and political circumstances of one particular period. In brief, the author of the *Passio Typasii* turned for inspiration not only to authoritative literary sources but to the functioning of the society within which he found himself. Therefore, although we cannot accept that his account of the behaviour of Typasius in taking his military equipment home with him following his discharge was necessarily true of some or any veterans of the Diocletianic era, there are good reasons to accept that such action was indeed typical of the society and era in which the author himself lived. Soldiers retained their weapons upon retirement in his day. He assumed, therefore, that the same must also have been true of the Diocletianic era in which he wished to set the martyrdom of Typasius, and described Typasius' retention of his weapons accordingly.

There are several reasons for accepting that the author was probably correct in his understanding that soldiers retired with their military equipment, and that this detail was not the product merely of a vivid imagination. Firstly, his knowledge of official titles and technical military vocabulary is unusual in its detail and accuracy. This suggests some direct contact and familiarity with the institutions and practices of the late Roman army. His use of terms such as *honesta missio*, and indeed his whole emphasis upon the honourable nature of Typasius' discharge, inclines one to speculate even whether he anticipated a substantial military presence among his audience.[13] Secondly, there was no obvious need for him to have gone into the detail which he did in this matter. If we examine, for example, the immediate model for his account of the discharge of Typasius, that is Sulpicius Severus' account of the discharge of Martin of Tours from the army of Julian Caesar in 356, we find no reference whatsoever to the military equipment which Martin had undoubtedly possessed.[14] However, our most important consideration in this matter must surely be the motifs and norms of the genre to which the *Passio Typasii* belongs.

Most accounts of the trials and deaths of military martyrs do not afford their heroes the opportunity to dispose of their military equipment. Typically, the military martyr is arrested in camp when his actions reveal to all about him that he remains a Christian in defiance of imperial commands. References to military equipment often occur in the dramatic description of the actions which lead to the martyrs' arrest. One of the most highly regarded of all of the accounts of the martyrs of the Diocletianic persecution is that of the centurion Marcellus who was executed in the province of Mauritania Tingitana.[15] His action is described in a report to his judge, the *vicarius* Aurelius Agricolanus, as follows:[16]

> *Die felicissimo ac toto orbe beatissimo natalis genuini dominorum nostrorum eorundem Augustorumque Caesarum cum sollemne celebraremus, domine Aureli Agricolane, Marcellus centurio ordinarius, nescio qua correptus amentia, se ultro discinxit balteum et spatam et vitem quam gerebat proiciendam esse arbitratus est ante ipsa principia dominorum nostrorum. quod factum necesse habui perferre ad potestatem tuam, etiam et ipsum esse transmissum.*

> On the most happy and blessed day in all the world of the authentic birthday likewise our lords Augusti and Caesars, lord Aurelius Agricolanus, while we were having the customary celebration, the *centurio ordinarius* Marcellus, possessed by some strange madness, voluntarily removed his military belt and deliberately threw down the sword and staff he carried, right in front of our emperors' standards. I thought it imperative to refer this act to your jurisdiction and to have the man himself sent to you.

Alternatively, the martyr is often told to stop his nonsense, pick up his weapons, and accept the reality of military service. Thus his commanding officer spoke to the recruit Theodore as follows (*BHG* 1761. 2):

Βρίγκας πραιπόσιτος εἶπεν· Λάβε σου, Θεόδωρε, τὴν πανοπλίαν καὶ στρατευσάμενος θῦσον τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ πείσθητι τοῖς ἀηττήτοις βασιλεῦσιν.

The *praepositus* Brincas said, "Take your weapons, Theodore, and as a soldier sacrifice to the gods and obey the victorious emperors."

Another military martyr, Theagenes, a recruit whose passion may be a source for that of Theodore, received similar instructions also from his commander (*BHG* 2416. 2):

Ζηλικίνθιος τριβοῦνος ἔφη· Θεάγενες, λαβὲ χλανίδαν καὶ βάλτεον καὶ τὴν ἅπασαν πανοπλίαν καὶ στρατεύου Λικινίωι τῶι μεγάλωι βασιλεῖ

The tribune Zelicinthius said, "Theagenes, take your cloak and belt and all your weapons, and serve Licinius the great emperor."

It is clear from the contents and context of such passages that we are meant to understand that the martyrs had already acted in a manner similar to that of the centurion Marcellus and had thrown down their equipment before their fellow soldiers, although such behaviour is not specifically described. Unfortunately, though, such accounts are of little help to us in our current investigation in so far as they fail to clarify legal ownership of the equipment in question.

There do exist a number of texts which purport to record the activities of military martyrs who did manage to escape from their camps. However, despite the potential of such a theme, the manner of their disposal of their equipment is often passed over in brief, if indeed the matter is raised at all. The description by Basil, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (370–9), of the manner in which the centurion Gordius of Caesarea deserted and sought refuge in the desert is sadly typical:[17]

Τότε ὁ γενναῖος οὗτος προλαβὼν τὴν ἐκ τῶν δικαστηρίων ἀνάγκην, ῥίψας τὴν ζώνην, ὑπερόριος ἦν.

Then, this noble man, anticipating the violence of the law, threw off his belt and became a refugee.

Even when Cyrus, bishop of Cotyaeum (*c.*443–50), used Basil's homily as the basis for his fictitious account of the martyr Menas of Cotyaeum, this was not a topic which was treated at any greater length.[18] Thus the description of Menas' desertion of the *numerus Rutiliacorum* is all too familiar (*BHG* 1250. 2):

Τῇ Κοτυαέων οὖν μητροπόλει ἅμα τῷ ταξιάρχῳ παραβαλὼν καὶ τὸ τῶν κρατούντων ἀκούσας ἀσεβὲς πρόσταγμα, τὴν στρατιωτικὴν ζώνην ἀποβαλὼν, ὑπερόριον ἑαυτὸν ἐν ἐρήμοις τόποις κατέστησε.

When he reached Cotyaeum together with his commander, and heard the impious command of the emperors, he threw off his military belt and hid himself away in the desert areas.

The only item of equipment or clothing specifically mentioned is the military belt. We are left completely in the dark as to the manner in which Menas did or did not dispose of his full range of military equipment. Indeed, in such instances, when the removal of the *cingulum* alone is described, it is possible that this is merely a technical phrase or literary commonplace for the rejection of military service as a whole rather than an attempt at a specific description of an actual physical act on the part of the martyr.

There are occasions also when the martyrs do not themselves remove and discard their military equipment. Consider, for example, the case of the two martyrs Sergius and Bacchus who are alleged to have been *primicerius* and *secundicerius* respectively of the *schola gentilium* during the reign of Galerius Maximianus (*BHG* 1624. 7):

Θυμωθεὶς δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἀλλοιώσας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐκέλευσεν παραχρῆμα κοπῆναι τὰς ζῶνας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἀποδυθῆναι τὰ χλαμίδια, καὶ τὴν ἄλλην τῆς στρατείας ἐσθῆτα, καὶ τὰ μανιάκια τὰ χρυσὰ τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς τραχήλοις αὐτῶν περιαιρεθῆναι, καὶ ἐνδῦσαι αὐτοὺς κολώβια γυναικεῖα, καὶ οὕτως διὰ μέσης τῆς πόλεως ἀπάγεσθαι ἕως τοῦ παλατίου, βαρείας κατὰ τῶν τραχήλων φοροῦντας ἁλύσεις.

Angered, therefore, the emperor changed his expression and ordered that their belts be cut, that their cloaks and other military clothing be stripped from them, that the golden torcs be snatched from about their necks, and that they be clothed in women's garments and led in this manner through the centre of the city as far as the palace, with heavy collars about their necks.

However, it is important that such passages be properly understood. There is no suggestion here, for

example, that the martyrs were being punished by deprivation of equipment or clothing which was properly theirs rather than the property of the state. They were not being punished either by deprivation of that which they were most eager to retain. The author is merely trying to emphasize the shame and humiliation which the martyrs must have experienced by being forced to parade in women's clothing, which alone was their punishment.

This punishment occurs again in the account of the trial and death of Gordius of Antioch. However, on this occasion the emphasis is different, for the author seems to want things both ways. He wants on the one hand to depict Gordius' rejection of military service as symbolized by his rejection of his military equipment, but on the other to depict also the humiliation which Gordius had to endure when stripped of his uniform and forced to wear womens' clothing:[19]

Πολλῶν τοίνυν ῥιψάντων τὰς ζώνας, ὁρᾷ Μαξιμιανὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Γόρδιον μετὰ πολλῆς ἀποτεμόντα τὴν ζώνην ἑαυτοῦ καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος ῥιψαντα· πρὸς ὃν εἶπεν· Διατί διέπτυσας τῆς ἰδίας στρατείας, Γόρδιε; Καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν ἀποδυθῆναι τα ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνδυθῆναι κολόβιον γυναικεῖον πρὸς γέλωτα τῶν ὁρώντων.

Accordingly, when many threw off their belts, the emperor Maximianus saw Gordius cut off his belt with great joy and hurl it to the ground. He said to him, "Why have you rejected service in my personal guard, Gordius?" And angered, he ordered him to be stripped of his clothes and to be dressed in female attire to the laughter of those watching.

Thus, in this instance, the martyr throws away his belt of his own free will, but is stripped of the rest of his clothing at the emperor's command.

It would be wrong to give the impression that most hagiographical texts make some reference to the clothing and equipment of the military martyr. The majority do not make any such reference. This may be understandable in the case of the shorter texts as, for example, the highly regarded account of the trial of Julius the veteran.[20] However, it is true also of longer texts. The account, for example, of the death at Milan of the Moorish soldier Victor during the reign of Herculius Maximianus describes in detail his travels to various locations about the city, and continues at some length.[21] Yet no reference whatsoever is made to his military equipment. The same remains true of texts of even greater length and detail. The earliest accounts of the martyrdom of Christopher describe his conscription into the *cohors Marmaritarum* and his subsequent trials and martyrdom in Antioch at great length.[22] In so far as Christopher was depicted alone outside the city when he first decided to take the side of the Christians, and was alone later in a garden near a church, there was considerable scope to develop upon his rejection of military service by showing him casting aside his weapons and equipment in some grand dramatic gesture, and selling or otherwise disposing of the same. However, no such gesture occurs. It can be seen, therefore, that the treatment by the military martyr of his weapons and equipment was not a necessary, or even a particularly frequent, topic.

The author of the *Passio Typasii* was not following some literary convention such that he felt it necessary to describe the martyr's equipment. Indeed, when some item of military equipment is named it is often only the military belt. And although the number of texts purporting to describe the deaths of military martyrs is so large, with many variants in different languages, that no one person can claim to have read them all, I can at least confirm that I know of no text where exactly the same items of equipment are attributed to another military martyr as are here attributed to Typasius.[23] The nearest comparison would seem to be the range of weapons attributed to the martyrs Nereus and Achilleus in an epigram by Pope Damasus (366–84):[24]

Conversi fugiunt, ducis impia castra relinquunt;
Proiiciunt clipeos, phaleras et tela cruenta;
Confessi gaudent Christi portare triumphos.

Converted they flee, and abandon the impious camp of their leader. They hurl down their shields, decorations and bloody missiles. Confessing Christ they rejoice to bear his triumphal sign.

The treatment of the martyr's weapons in the *Passio Typasii* is in fact unique. As revealed by other hagiographical texts already mentioned, where the subject is raised the martyr is supposed to reject his military equipment and/or be stripped of the same. Contrary to this, Typasius initially stores his equipment away safely! One might object that Typasius is shown to store away his weapons on his initial discharge from the army in order to increase the dramatic

effect of his rejection of military service when the *praepositus saltus* and the decurion attempt to conscript him for a second time. However, the weapons do not return in some grand gesture on the part of Typasius such as that of the centurion Marcellus as already described. Certainly, military equipment does appear again in the text when the *dux* Claudius ordered his soldiers to gird Typasius as a soldier. And the result was dramatic (*BHL* 8354. 5):

> *Cumque a militibus cingeretur et hastilia in manu eius ponerentur, statim balteus minutatim ruptus est et hastilia ipsa confracta sunt.*
>
> And when the soldiers were setting a belt on him and spears were being placed in his hand, the belt immediately snapped into many pieces and the spears broke by themselves.

However, Typasius did not himself reject the *balteus* and *hastilia*. They broke of their accord, or at least without the agency of Typasius himself. Thus this scene does not serve particularly well to illustrate the heroic virtue of the martyr. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that the author would have taken such great care to describe the manner in which Typasius stored away his military equipment just for the sake of this particular scene which is something of an anti-climax. However, an alternative explanation is forthcoming.

Although he miraculously cured a *strator* on the staff of the *dux*, and became a favourite of the *dux* because of this, Typasius eventually met the violent end which is the lot of every martyr. However, the description of his death and burial are of particular interest to us in the present matter (*BHL* 8354. 7):

> *Productus itaque a militibus extra civitatem, decollatus est atque in eodem loco sepultus est. Et super ipsum tumulum posuerunt eius scutum; de quo scuto universi christiani minuta fragmina abscidentes pro sua fide rapiebant, et languentibus et paralyticis et daemoniacis et omnibus male habentibus superponentes, curati sunt.*
>
> Thus he was led forth outside the city by the soldiers, beheaded, and buried at the same place. And above his grave they placed his shield. According to their religiosity, all the Christians used to break off and take tiny fragments from this shield, and when these were applied to the weak, the paralytic, the possessed, and all those who were suffering, they were cured.

It is now clear why his shield was not also am his equipment which was restored to Typasius by *dux* Claudius, all of which broke of its own accc The purpose of the detailed description of the man in which Typasius stored his equipment, which w then dragged with him from his residence by t *praepositus saltus*, was to provide a provenance t the shield which marked his grave.[25] It was not ju any old shield which happened to be at hand when t authorities tried to force military service up Typasius once more. It had more than a passi acquaintance with the martyr. The shield had been valued and very personal possession of the marty and the healing powers of its fragments were propo tionately effective. For those fragments were reli which represented the martyr through contact c proximity, and the greater the contact the more effec tive they were.[26]

It is clear, therefore, that the author of the *Passi Typasii* paid particular attention to the subject o Typasius' military equipment because of the con tinued existence of a shield in his day at the shrine o Typasius. However, he had also to compose a explanation of the shield's survival which was cred ible to his contemporaries. It is true that the Christian faithful of this period were not always as critical as they ought to have been of the historical details of the hagiographical accounts with which they were presented. For example, even the educated Eucherius, bishop of Lyons (*c.*434–50), was quite prepared to accept that decimation was a disciplinary practice current still during the reign of Herculius Maximianus.[27] Thus he did not doubt that the Theban legion (*legio militum, qui Thebaei appellabantur*) suffered this punishment when they refused to act against their fellow Christians. In the case of the *Passio Typasii*, the *dux* Claudius reminded Typasius that deserters were thrown to the beasts.[28] However, such was hardly the case during the reign of Herculius Maximianus, or later either.[29]

In each of these cases the author has made a statement which was untrue both of the dramatic date of his work and of his own age. However, such false statements usually serve a clear purpose. The fiercer the threats which faced the martyrs, the greater was their final glory. Hence these unhistorical statements serve to glorify the martyrs. They were credible to the

faithful for this very reason, because they confirmed their assumptions concerning both the brutal ferocity of the persecutors and the heroic bravery of the martyrs. However, the description of the manner in which Typasius stored his weapons at home is not credible in this manner. It does not obviously confirm any stereotyped images, the preconceived assumptions of the faithful concerning the tale which they were about to read or hear. The description of the manner in which the veteran Typasius stored his weapons at home acquires its credibility from the familiarity of the faithful with concrete examples of the same. In a similar manner, the very format of the tale, the attempted conscription of a monk by hostile authorities, was perfectly credible because this was a familiar reality of the recent past.[30] The fact that the monastic or eremetic way of life did not exist in Mauritania at the dramatic date did not seem to pose a problem. Hence, although a description of the survival of Typasius' shield was a necessity, the exact details of this description were at the author's discretion. For example, the *praepositus saltus* and the decurion might well have been depicted bringing the equipment which he had previously used back to Typasius when they came to conscript him. It might have been stated that they had recovered it from some form of official military storehouse or arms depot (*armamentaria*). But for the sake of credibility, or because of a lack of imagination, these details were informed by what the author of the *Passio Typasii* knew to be the more usual practice in his era, that veterans were discharged in possession of their weapons still.

It should be clear at this point that the author of the *Passio Typasii* was not influenced in his description of the manner in which Typasius retained his weapons upon his discharge from the army by a need to conform to the norms and motifs of his genre, nor by any other literary necessity. However, one should turn at this point to an examination of the social and political reality within which the author was writing. What did that society expect of those who rejected military service for the service of Christ, particularly those who rejected military service in favour of a monastic vocation, as is the case with Typasius?

We are fortunate in that there survive several brief accounts of the actions of former soldiers who became monks. The account, for example, of the manner in which Victricius, bishop of Rouen (385–410), left the army includes the familiar hurling down of weapons, with no explanation of what eventually happened to the same. In this particular instance, no attempt is made even to define more accurately the items involved. We learn only that the weapons of blood (*arma sanguinis*) were exchanged for the weapons of peace (*arma pacis*).[31] Other accounts are more helpful, though.

The anonymous author of the Greek *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* records his experiences when on pilgrimage to various monastic sites in that region *c.* 394. One of the stories which he heard on that journey was an account of the effect of a famous monk by the name of Macarius of Alexandria upon an anonymous tribune, one of a pair whom he happened to meet while taking a ferry across the Nile.[32] As a result of their conversation the tribune went home, removed his military belt, and after a generous distribution of alms chose to live as a monk. Unfortunately, the author is not specific about how exactly the tribune raised the funds which he distributed as alms. However, there occurs a unusually detailed description of the tribune's fine equipment when he first met Macarius, in a chariot covered entirely in bronze, with horses and servants dressed in gold, and the implication would seem to be that some or all of this finery was sold.[33] However, no specific statements are made to this effect. Fortunately, other sources are somewhat more forthcoming.

In 396 Jerome, the famous monk and scholar then resident at Bethlehem in Palestine, wrote a letter of consolation to Heliodorus, bishop of Altinum in Venetia-Istria, on the death of his nephew, Nepotianus. After describing Nepotianus' behaviour while serving in the imperial palace, presumbably as a member of a *schola palatina*, when he wore a hair-shirt beneath his military tunic, Jerome then describes the manner in which he quit military service:[34]

> *Balteo posito habituque mutato quidquid castrensis peculii fuit in pauperes erogavit. Legerat enim, "qui vult perfectus esse, vendat omnia quae habet et det pauperibus et sequatur me", et iterum, "non potestis duobus dominis servire, deo et mamonae". Excepta vili tunica et operimento pari, quod tecto tantum corpore frigus excluderet, nihil sibi amplius reservavit.*

Putting aside his belt and changing his attire, Nepotianus gave away all his service money to the poor. For he had read, "The man who wishes to be perfect must sell all he has and give to the poor and

> follow me", and again, "You cannot serve two masters, God and Mammon". Apart from a cheap tunic and cloak, designed simply to clothe his body and shut out the cold, he kept back nothing for himself.

Although Jerome reveals that Nepotianus donated all his *castrense peculium* to the poor, he fails to clarify what he understood by this term. Technically, a soldier's *castrense peculium* included his military equipment.[35] Thus Jerome may very well mean us to understand that Nepotianus sold everything, including his weapons, and gave the money to the poor. Unfortunately, the prior question remains unresolved still, whether Nepotianus actually owned his weapons personally to be able to sell them.

Although these and other sources fail to shed any light upon the ownership and disposal of weapons in the late Roman army, they do reveal what was expected of the soldier who became a monk. He was expected to sell everything except the bare minimum required for his immediate survival. Thus the behaviour of Typasius in storing away his weapons contrasts noticeably with what would normally have been expected of a former soldier turned monk in the latter part of the fourth century. It raises difficulties on two counts. Firstly, weapons are like any other goods which are not of immediate use to the survival of a monk. Typasius should have sold them and donated the proceeds to charity. Secondly, the retention of his weapons by Typasius surely suggests a less than total commitment to the peaceful nature of his monastic calling. Intentionally or otherwise, Typasius is depicted as if he had an eye to a future when he might find use again for his weapons. Indeed, this is what makes the description of Typasius' behaviour so credible. It is hardly likely that the author of the *Passio Typasii* intended to depict a flawed hero who had doubts about his vocation. Yet this is the picture which emerges, and the reason for this would seem to be that he has drawn upon the reality of his experience of soldiers turned monks rather than the virtuous picture presented by Jerome and others.

Attention has often been drawn to the fact that the discipline of monastic life seems to have been particularly attractive to those of military background.[36] However, the initial attraction did not always last, and it is not too difficult to find examples of soldiers turned monks who failed to live up to the high standards expected of them. Consider, for example, the former soldier turned monk who decided that he would like his wife to live with him in his cell.[37] Martin of Tours managed to convince him otherwise, though. Again, there is the case of the tribune from Asia who came into contact with monks of the Thebaid through his participation in campaigns against the Blemmydes.[38] Having spent four years as a monk in the desert, he decided that he wished to return to his wife and family. However, after two years held in chains by other monks who realised that he was possessed by an evil spirit, he repented of this foolish idea. Some changed their minds again even before they had left the army, as was apparently the case with Martin of Tours' friend and tribune.[39] In light of the all too human weaknesses of these characters, it is easy to believe that there did indeed exist some former soldiers who as monks retained their military equipment in storage in case they too should change their minds again.

Finally, attention should be drawn to a positive example illustrating how an author of a hagiographical work on the subject of military martyrs was influenced by his experience and knowledge of the army as it functioned in his day. The late Roman poet Prudentius included in his *Peristephanon* an account of the trial and deaths of two Spanish military martyrs, Emeterius and Chelidonius.[40] Unfortunately, however, and as he himself reveals, any original trial records had long since been destroyed. Thus he was forced to utilize an oral tradition upon which he seems to have felt felt quite free to elaborate.[41] In the work which resulted he refers at one point to the *magistri signorum*. Until recently there was no evidence to support the existence of such officers so this might well have seemed an error or invention on his part. However, their office has now been plausibly identified with the *magister draconum* of a fifth century gravestone from Prusias ad Hypium in Asia Minor.[42] Thus a hagiographical source, in combination with other forms of evidence, has proven its usefulness to students of the late Roman army. Indeed, the late Roman hagiographer may be able to contribute as much to our understanding of the army in his day as have done his artistic contemporaries through their paintings and frescoes in the catacombs and elswhere.[43] For both interpreted the distant past in terms of their present.

What, then, is the significance of the evidence of the *Passio Typasii* for the retention by soldiers of their weapons after discharge if, as has been argued, this

document is credible witness to this practice in Mauritania Caesariensis *c.* 397? It would seem that the evidence of the letter addressed by the *comes et dux Aegypti* Flavius Eleutherius to the prefect of the camp at Psofthis is directly comparable to the evidence of the *Passio Typasii*. The documents are almost exactly contemporary, one dating to 401, the other to *c.* 397. Both are concerned with local forces used for regional defence only, *limitanei*. Both are concerned with cavalry units, an *ala* in Egypt and a *cuneus* or *vexillatio* in Mauritania. It seems probable also that both concern comparable ranks of men. Flavius Eleutherius' letter refers to men from the rank of *eques* to *decurio*, and there is no indication that Typasius was anything but an ordinary soldier, an *eques*. However, no easy conclusions can be drawn when these comparable pieces of evidence are considered side by side.

Negative conclusions alone emerge. The contrasting impressions given by the two documents remind one of the dangers of generalising too widely on the basis of a relatively small amount of evidence. We cannot universally affirm, as has been done, that in the late Roman period weapons were usually loaned, even to auxiliaries, and that all of them had to be handed back upon discharge.[44] Perhaps the apparent contradiction of our two sources may be explained, for example, in terms of regional differences. One notes that Mauritania Caesariensis fell within the diocese of Africa under the control of the western emperor Honorius (395–423) while Psofthis fell within the diocese of Egypt under the eastern emperor Arcadius (395–408). Perhaps these emperors, or rather their senior officials, favoured different policies in this particular matter. Alternatively, perhaps the explanation lies in the contrasting political fortunes of Africa and Egypt. Egypt proved itself much more settled throughout the fourth century. In contrast Africa experienced tribal assaults, fullscale rebellion, and large scale banditry, although at different times in different locations. A veteran retiring to a relatively isolated farmstead in Mauritania would have felt much more need to own and retire with his own weapons than would a similar veteran in Egypt.[45] However, this remains speculation and much more evidence is required before any satisfactory conclusions can be reached. The sad truth is, that in the matter of the ownership and disposal of weapons in the late Roman army, as in so many other areas, a great deal remains to be learned still.

NOTES

1 REA, 1984. Note the author's complaint, 87, that he had been unable to discover much about the return of arms upon discharge, which complaint motivated this attempt to draw a neglected piece of evidence to the attention of those specialists in the late Roman army who might be better able to assess its significance than is here achieved.

2 See REBUFFAT, 1992, on the Quinquegentiani and the reality of Maximianus' campaign against the same in 297.

3 Unless otherwise stated, all hagiographical texts are referred to by their listings in either *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, 1898–1901, Brussels, (*BHL*), or F. HALKIN (ed.), *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (3rd ed), 1957, Brussels, (*BHG*).

4 However, his cult did originate in late antiquity, as attested by the survival of one inscription, ILCV I, 2067.

5 HORNUS, 1980, 136–7, where Typasius is counted among the genuine military martyrs, although it is accepted that there are some difficulties with the account of his martyrdom. Likewise in HELGELAND, 1979, 785–7.

6 WOODS, 1993.

7 BIRD, 1993, xiii.

8 For a discussion of the similarities between the two texts see FONTAINE, 1963, 43–6, and STANCLIFFE, 1983, 144–8.

9 STANCLIFFE, 1983, 72.

10 Paulinus of Milan, *Vita Ambrosii* 51. Paulinus alleges that he heard this tale from Mascazel himself upon his return to Milan in 398 following the success of his African campaign. He seems to have composed the *Vita Ambrosii c.* 422 in Africa.

11 See WOODS, 1994a, for a more detailed discussion of the matters which follow.

12 *C.Th.* 7.13.12.

13 See WOODS, 1994b, for a possible example of a hagiographical account aimed specifically at a military audience. Why should one care whether a military martyr originally received an honourable discharge, unless to appeal to the professional feelings of a largely military audience? Indeed, some Christians might have thought an honourable discharge by a pagan emperor from a largely pagan army something of a contradiction in terms, and a negative rather than a positive attribute. One notes in passing that Sulpicius Severus did not feel the need to bestow an *honesta missio* upon Martin of Tours in his account of the latter's discharge by the emperor Julian (361-63), *Vita Martini* 4.

14 Sulp. Sev., *Vita Martini* 4. However, Martin's charity and consequent poverty had already been emphasized, to the extent even of his cutting his *chlamys* in two to give half to a freezing beggar, *Vita Martini* 3. One notes again that the author of the *Passio Typasii* does not include a *chlamys* among the items which he ascribes to Typasius, although it was an item of equipment or clothing which was often ascribed by other anonymous authors to their military martyrs, as will shortly be revealed.

15 HELGELAND, 1979, 780–3; HORNUS, 1980, 137–8.

16 LANATA, 1972, 514, for the text which follows. The translation is for the most part that of MUSURILLO, 1972, 257.

17 *PG* 31, 496, for the text which follows.

18 For this identification see PEETERS, 1950, 39.

19 HALKIN, 1961, 8.

20 MUSURILLO, 1972, 260–5.

21 *BHL* 8580.

22 *BHG* 310 and *BHL* 1764. See WOODS, 1994c, for a discussion of the historical value of these texts.

23 WOODS, 1991, 1–9, for a brief discussion of the acts of the military martyrs; 230–3, for a reasonably comprehensive listing of those alleged military martyrs known from Greek and Latin sources.

24 *PL* 13, 400, for the text which follows.

25 The only comparable relic which comes immediately to mind is the famous Holy Lance which had allegedly been used by Longinus to pierce the side of Christ and was 'discovered' at a church in Antioch during the First Crusade. The nearest antique comparison seems to be the use to which Constantine I (306–37) allegedly put the nails from the True Cross. Apparently he used them in a bit for his horse and a helmet, which equipment he then used in his military expeditions, Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.17; Sozomenos, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.1.

26 See DELEHAYE, 1933, 50–99, for a full account of the development of the cult of martyrs and the use and varieties of relic in late antiquity. Also HUNT, 1981.

27 VAN BERCHEM, 1956, 26.

28 *BHL* 8354. 5: *Claudius comes dixit: Nosti quia bestiarium merentur desertores qui signa relinquunt.* It is a possibility worth mentioning at least, that the author may have been influenced somewhat by Basil of Caesarea's account of the death of the martyr Gordius of Caesarea as already mentioned. Gordius first fled into the desert, but later returned to Caesarea, marched into the theatre during the course of races, and was eventually beheaded. The author of the *Passio Typasii* may well have been misled into believing that death in the theatre or arena was the penalty for deserters at that period.

29 WATSON, 1969, 121, for the varying degrees of punishment which had traditionally existed. The best illustration of the forms of punishment which were actually imposed during the fourth century is provided by Ammianus Marcellinus' account of the manner in which the *magister equitum* Theodosius quashed the rebellion of Firmus in Mauritania Sitifensis and Caesariensis during the period 373–4. Some deserters were merely demoted, but more had their right hands chopped off, were beaten to death or burned alive, Amm. 29.5.20, 22, 31, 49. Note that Typasius was actually beheaded in the end, despite the warning about the beasts.

30 The pagan emperor Julian (361–3) had forcibly conscripted monks and priests, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 8.10; Sozomenos, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.4. The Arian Valens (364–78) was no less concerned that able-bodied men should attempt to escape military service by espousing the monastic life, Orosius, *Historia Adversus Paganos* 7.33.

31 Paulinus of Nola, *Letter* 18.7 (to Victricius himself): *ante pedes sacrilegi tribuni militiae sacramenta permutans arma sanguinis abiecisti, ut arma pacis indueres, contemnens armari ferro, qui armabaris Christo.*

32 *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 23.2.

33 However, whatever impression the author intended to give, the reality may have been somewhat different. It is a strong possibility, for example, that the tribunes were not military tribunes but *tribuni et notarii* on a mission from the imperial court to Egypt. Hence their particularly splendid accoutrement and entourage.

34 Jerome, Letter 60. 10.1–2. See SCOURFIELD, 1993, 54–5, for the text and translation which follow.

35 BISHOP & COULSTON, 1993, 199.

36 BRENNAN, 1990, 327.

37 Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* 2.11.

38 Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* 1.22.

39 Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 3.5.

40 *Peristephanon* 1.

41 PALMER, 1989, 237–9.

42 SPEIDEL, 1985.

43 E.g., COULSTON, 1990, 145.

44 SPEIDEL, 1992, 136.

45 I refer in particular to the threat from the *circumcelliones* who were particularly active during the latter part of the fourth and early fifth centuries. They were usually armed, sometimes with swords, and gained their name from the *cellae rusticanae* about which they circulated. See WARMINGTON, 1954, 84–8. Indeed, one wonders to what extent the depiction of Typasius has been influenced by this phenomenon.

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