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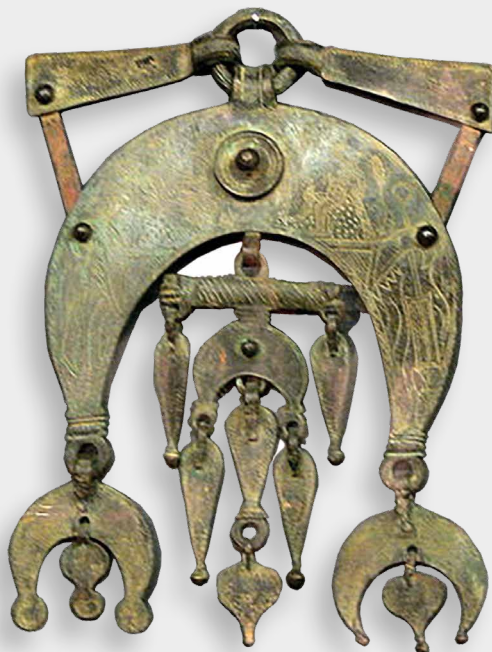
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**Storia Militare Antica**

a cura di

MARCO BETTALLI ed ELENA FRANCHI



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma  
Contatti: [direzione@nam-sigm.org](mailto:direzione@nam-sigm.org) ; [virgilio.ilari@gmail.com](mailto:virgilio.ilari@gmail.com)

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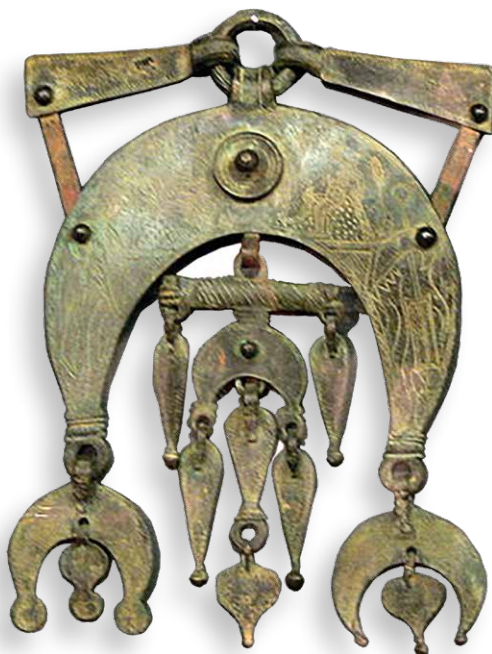
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Museo Carnuntinum (Bassa Austria). Pettorale come parte dell'equipaggiamento per cavalli (I secolo) del Reno Settentrionale (?), ritrovamento fluviale.  
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# The late antique Roman officer as a religious functionary in the Christian Roman army

by WINFRIED KUMPITSCH

ABSTRACT. Scholarly research of the Roman army religion has shown that officers played an important role in the performance of the official cult. As religious functionaries, the officers sacrificed and made dedications on behalf of their unit, recited oaths, vows and prayers to be repeated by their soldiers and also inspected the attire of the men during official events. But while we have an increasingly better understanding of the cultic role of the officers in pre-Constantinian army religion, our knowledge about their role in post-Constantinian times remains superficial at best. This paper will thus examine what the ancient sources tell us about officers in this context and it will argue that the officers of the Roman army in late antiquity continued to maintain their functions as religious functionaries.<sup>1</sup>

KEYWORDS: ROMAN ARMY RELIGION; ROMAN OFFICERS; LATE ANTIQUITY; KULTFUNKTIONÄRE; RELIGIOUS DUTIES; CHRISTIANISATION; MILITARY CHAPLAINS

## *Introduction*

Although Roman officers were not religious specialists such as the *haruspices*, *victimarii*, *pullarii* and *turarii*, they nevertheless served an important role in the overall religious life of the Roman army. This role was described as the duty of “Kultfunktionäre” (religious functionaries) by O. Stoll in an attempt to summarize the cultic duties of the officers.<sup>2</sup> The fact that oaths and prayers were recited by the officers and repeated by their soldiers

1 The topic of this paper is a part of my PhD thesis “*Die Christianisierung des römischen Heereskultes und die Rolle der Soldatenheiligen im 4.-6. Jahrhundert*” written as part of the IGS “Resonant Self–World Relations in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices”, a cooperation of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz and the Max-Weber-Kolleg of Erfurt, funded by the FWF and DFG.

2 Oliver STOLL, «Offizier und Gentleman. Der römische Offizier als Kultfunktionär», in Oliver STOLL (Hg.), *Römisches Heer und Gesellschaft. Gesammelte Beiträge 1991-1999*, Suttgart, Franz-Steiner Verlag, 2001, p. 151.

was not only known in historiography,<sup>3</sup> but also in Christian circles.<sup>4</sup> The officers were required to represent the subordinates under their command before Gods, be it through the performance of sacrifices, or the dedication of altars<sup>5</sup>. That the religious duties of the officers were also known in the civilian sphere is attested by an episode described by Eusebius in his Church History. Eusebius relates the story of a martyr named Marinus, who had been promoted to the rank of centurion, but was reported to the governor by a jealous and unsuccessful competitor as a Christian and therefore unfit to perform his new duties.<sup>6</sup> While one is free to question the historicity of the story, the detail that Marinus was not only accused of being a Christian, but also as unfit to perform his duties as centurion, because of his religious affiliation, confirms that people outside the military sphere knew about their role as religious functionaries. According to Stoll, the fulfilment of this role was not only a military duty, but also a part of the self-conception and social distinction the officers had in the army.<sup>7</sup>

While the importance of religious functionaries in the pre-Constantinian army is still extensively examined by scholars, the subsequent fate of this role in the post-Constantinian Roman army receives barely any attention. This is insofar astonishing, as there is a general consensus among scholars that the observation of religious duties was at all times an important part of Roman military life. This lack of interest might well result not only from the scarcity of sources for this specific topic, but also from a specific conception about the role and importance of military personnel in religious activities. Already A. Heisenberg stated: «Demgegenüber muß man darauf hinweisen, daß die praktische Ausübung der religiösen Pflichten, soweit die militärwissenschaftliche Literatur es erkennen läßt, auch in den späteren Jahrhunderten keinen breiteren Raum in dem täglichen

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3 The revolt against Galba begins at first with the unwillingness of the soldiers to repeat the recited oath, leading to disruptive shouts culminating in an attack on the imperial images: PLUT. *Galb.* 18, 9; 22, 4; SUET. *Galb.* 16, 2; TAC. *Hist.* I 55, 3-56. When Vespasian is performing the oath for Vitellius, his soldiers remain silent: TAC. *Hist.* II 74, 1.

4 TERT. *de corona* I 1; XI 1; XII 1; XV 3 are refutations of the notion that the simple presence at the ceremonies, without repetition of the recited prayers and oaths, should not be considered an act of idolatry.

5 Georgia Lynette IBRY-MASSIE, *Military Religion in Roman Britain*, Boston, Brill, 1999, p. 46.

6 EUS. *Hist. Eccl.* VII 15, 2.

7 STOLL cit. p. 150-51; 161.

Leben des byzantinischen Soldaten beansprucht als in der ersten noch ganz unter römischen Einfluss stehenden Zeit.»<sup>8</sup> And D.S. Bachrach's observations about the religious roles of the officers in the 6<sup>th</sup> century military handbook "Strategikon of Maurice" is content with stating that: «Much of the responsibility for ensuring proper religious behavior among the troops rested on the efforts of their officers and generals.»<sup>9</sup> Bachrach shows no interest in enquiring about the reasons for this state of affairs, because: «Nevertheless, no matter how important a role generals and officers played in organizing and leading religious practices, the armies of the Late Empire still required the service of priests to carry out particular religious tasks, particularly on the field, that only those who were ordained as priests could perform.»<sup>10</sup> Or put differently, the role any military personnel played in the grand scheme of the religious atmosphere within the army is irrelevant, because they were not priests. And while it is quite obvious that the Christian priests were needed for the performance of their very specialized rituals, one must wonder if the sole focus on the religious specialist is not limiting our understanding of the religious atmosphere in which a Roman soldier lived. In this paper, I will try to answer the question what the implication might be, if we assume that the duties of officers in respect to religious conduct did not result purley from a "someone has to do it" mentality, but from the circumstance that the officers of the Christian Roman army were still religious functionaries.

### *The Constantinian turn and the self-conception of officer's*

With this assumption in mind, we will begin our examination with the reign of Constantine, more precisely his reform of the army cult. Eusebius informs us in two short passages, first in his panegyric oration *Praise of Constantine* of 336 AD, second in his *Life of Constantine* published after 337 AD, how Constantine changed the polytheistic cult within the Roman army into a monotheistic one. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that Eusebius is attempting to

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8 August HEISENBERG, «Kriegsgottesdienst in Byzanz», in Ernst KUHN (Hg.), *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte vornehmlich des Orients. Ernst Kuhn zum 70. Geburtstag am 7. Februar 1916 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, München, Breslau, Verlag von M&H Marcus, 1916, p. 246.

9 David S. BACHRACH, *Religion and the Conduct of War, C. 300-1215*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2003, p. 16.

10 BACHRACH cit. p. 17.

conceal the fact that Constantine created a cult that was acceptable to both the Christian and polytheistic soldiers:

«18.3 τὴν δὲ γε σωτήριον ἡμέραν, ἣν καὶ φωτὸς εἶναι καὶ ἡλίου ἐπώνυμον συμβαίνει, τὰ στρατιωτικὰ πάντα διὰ σπουδῆς τιμᾶν διδάσκων, τοῖς μὲν τῆς ἐνθέου μετέχουσι πίστεως ἀκωλύτως τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ προσκαρτερεῖν μετεδίδου σχολῆς, ἐφ' ᾧ τὰς εὐχὰς μηδενὸς αὐτοῖς ἐμποδῶν γινομένου συντελεῖν.

19. τοῖς δὲ μὴπω τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου μετασχούσιν ἐν δευτέρῳ νόμῳ διεκελεύετο τὰς κυριακὰς ἡμέρας ἐν προαστείοις ἐπὶ καθαροῦ προίεναι πεδίου κἀνταῦθα μεμελετημένην εὐχὴν ἐξ ἐνόου συνθήματος ὁμοῦ τοὺς πάντας ἀναπέμπειν θεῷ. μὴ γὰρ δόρασι χρῆναι, μηδὲ παντευχίαις, μηδ' ἄλλῃ σωμαίων τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἐξάπτειν ἐλπίδας, τὸν δ' ἐπὶ πάντων εἶδέναι θεόν, παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δὴ καὶ αὐτῆς νίκης δοτῆρα, ᾧ καὶ τὰς ἐνθέστους προσήκειν ἀποδιδόναι εὐχὰς, ἄνω μὲν αἶροντας εἰς οὐρανὸν μετεώρους τὰς χεῖρας, ἀνωτάτω δ' ἐπὶ τὸν οὐράνιον βασιλέα τοὺς τῆς διανοίας παραπέμποντας ὀφθαλμούς, κάκεινον ταῖς εὐχαῖς νίκης δοτῆρα καὶ σωτῆρα φύλακά τε καὶ βοηθὸν ἐπιβοωμένους. Καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς δὲ τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς ἅπασι διδάσκαλος ἦν αὐτός, Ῥωμαῖα γλώττη τοὺς πάντας ὧδε λέγειν ἐγκελευσάμενος·

20.1 σὲ μόνον οἶδαμεν θεόν,/ σὲ βασιλέα γνωρίζομεν,/ σὲ βοηθὸν ἀνακαλούμεθα,/ παρὰ σοῦ τὰς νίκας ἠράμεθα,/ διὰ σοῦ κρείττους τῶν ἐχθρῶν κατέστημεν,/ σοὶ τὴν τῶν προὑπαρξάντων ἀγαθῶν χάριν γνωρίζομεν,/ σὲ καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἐλπίζομεν,/ σοῦ πάντες ἰκέται γιγνώμεθα,/ τὸν ἡμέτερον βασιλέα Κωνσταντῖνον παῖδάς τε αὐτοῦ θεοφιλεῖς ἐπὶ μήκιστον ἡμῖν βίου σῶον καὶ νικητὴν φυλάττεσθαι ποντιώμεθα.

2. τοιαῦτα κατὰ τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς ἡμέραν ἐνομοθέτει πρᾶττειν τὰ στρατιωτικὰ τάγματα, καὶ τοιαύτας ἐδίδασκεν ἐν ταῖς πρὸς θεὸν εὐχαῖς ἀφιέναι φωνάς.»<sup>11</sup>

11 «18,3. The Day of Salvation then, which also bears the names of Light Day and Sun Day, he taught all the military to revere devoutly. To those who shared the divinely given faith he allowed free time to attend unhindered the church of God, on the assumption that with all impediment removed they would join in the prayers. 19. To those who did not yet share in the divine Word he gave order in a second decree



In these two passages, Eusebius is trying to convince his audience that Constantine created a Christian or at least Christianizing cult-practice in the army.<sup>12</sup> The impact of this passage depends on the subject of scholarly interest. On the one hand he long succeeded in convincing scholarship about the Constantinian period. This is because irrespective of whether they saw Constantine as a true believer, or an opportunistic politician, most accepted this particular report unquestioningly and fitted it into their own narrative.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand scholarship of the Roman army rejected the Eusebian claim and proposed that the religion of the army remained polytheistic until the introduction of military chaplains.<sup>14</sup> As a result of these two different assumptions, both fields of scholarly

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that every Lord's Day they should march out to an open space just outside the city, and that there at a signal they should all together offer up to God a form of prayer learnt by heart; they ought not to rest their hopes on spears or armour or physical strength, but acknowledge the God over all, the giver of all good and indeed of victory itself, to whom it was right to offer the lawful prayers, lifting up their hands high towards heaven, extending their mental vision yet higher to the heavenly King, and calling on him in their prayers as the Giver of victory and Saviour, as their Guardian and Helper. He was himself the instructor in prayer to all the soldiery, bidding them all to say these words in Latin:

20,1. «You alone we know as God, You are the King we acknowledge, You are the Help we summon. By you we have overcome our enemies. To you we render thanks for the good things past, You also we hope for as giver of those to come. To you we all come to supplicate for our Emperor Constantine and for his Godbeloved Sons: That he may be kept safe and victorious for us in long, long life we plead.»

20,2. Such were the things he decreed should be done by the military regiments every Sunday, and such were the words he taught them to recite in their prayers to God.» (EUS. *vita Const.* IV 18,3-20,2 trans. Averil CAMERON)

12 Averil CAMERON, Stuart G. HALL, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 318.

13 For example: Timothy David BARNES, *Constantine and Eusebius*, HU Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1981, p. 48 claims that the Roman army religion had successfully been Christianised; Paul STEPHENSON, *Constantine Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*. Quercus Publishing, London, 2011, p. 228-29 interprets the day off on Sunday as one of many incentives encouraging soldiers to convert; Klaus ROSEN, *Konstantin der Große. Kaiser zwischen Machtpolitik und Religion*. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 2013, p. 299 argues for an end of sacrifices, but sees the establishment of sole worship of the Christian God in the army not before Theodosius; Martin WALLRAFF, *Sonnenkönig der Spätantike. Die Religionspolitik Konstantins des Großen*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg, 2013, p. 101-02 rejects the ideas of two separated cult activities and argues in favor of a combined practice.

14 Oliver STOLL, «Religions of the Armies» in Paul Erdkamp (Ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 471-73; Alan Douglas LEE, «Religions: Late Empire», in Yann LEBOHEC (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*

research deemed it unnecessary to inquire into the cultic duties of army officers, after a certain point in history, because in their perception the officers appeared to have lost their importance for the religious life of the army by this period. When this is understood, the necessity arises to examine both positions about the end of the status as religious functionaries.

Beginning with the Eusebian report, we see that what made him so convincing at first is that on the one hand he appears to be allocating two entirely plausible activities for the different religious groups, «time to attend unhindered the church of God» for Christians and «march[ing] out to an open space» for the polytheists, and further to this he declares the end of sacrificial practices in the army. The inherent problems of these two different activities only become apparent on looking closely at the details and once one realizes that Eusebius has no interest whatsoever in giving a description of how exactly all of this was to have been organised. What he was intent upon, however, was to convince his audience that Constantine had indeed created a proselytising-Christian cult. For this purpose he simply claims that the Christian soldiers receive «time to attend unhindered the church of God [...] that [...] they would join in the prayers», leaving his audience the freedom to imagine whatever activity they might wish to fill in the blank space of the details. He then frames the assembly of the polytheists as a catechistic event and the prayer as something of a Christian nature, but once again no details are given how the ceremony took place. Furthermore, in the *Praise of Constantine* he describes the event again:

«Οὗτω δὴ βασιλεὺς αὐτὸς, ὃ τῆς παραδόξου ἀκοῆς, λόγων εὐκτηρίων διδάσκαλος τῷ αὐτοῦ στρατῷ καθίστατο, εὐχὰς τε εὐσεβεῖς θεσμοῖς ἀκολούθως παρεδίδου θείοις, ἄνω μὲν αἴροντας εἰς οὐρανὸν μετεώρους τὰς χεῖρας, ἀνωτάτω δ' ἐπὶ τὸν ἐπουράνιον βασιλέα τοὺς τῆς διανοίας παραπέμποντας ὀφθαλμοὺς, κάκεινον ταῖς εὐχαῖς νίκης δοτῆρα, σωτῆρα, φύλακά τε καὶ βοηθὸν ἐπιβωμένους· ναὶ μὴν καὶ ἡμέραν εὐψῶν ἡγεῖσθαι κατάλληλον, τὴν κυρίαν ἀληθῶς καὶ πρώτην ὄντως Κυριακὴν τε καὶ σωτήριον, τὴν δὴ καὶ φωτὸς καὶ ζωῆς, ἀθανασίας τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς ἐπώνυμον.»<sup>15</sup>

*Part 3*, Chichester, Blackwell Publishing, 2015, p. 829.

15 «(9) This he taught all men to acknowledge, above all the military, who surely most of all need to know not to pin one's hope on spears and panoplies, nor on strength of body, but to recognize the God over all, the Giver of every good, and of victory itself. (10) Thus indeed

Here he, only describes the prayer ceremony, but does not mention the separate Christian activity, which leaves us wondering why he omitted this detail in his oration, conversely why he included it in the *Life*.<sup>16</sup>

Our western cultural traditions lead us to identify sacrifices with non-monotheistic religions, and what is more with blood sacrifice as the main sacrificial form.<sup>17</sup> But while most public sacrificial ceremonies did involve a blood sacrifice and distribution of the slaughtered meat from these functioned as a reaffirmation of social hierarchies,<sup>18</sup> bloodless sacrifices made up the bulk of the daily sacrificial practice.<sup>19</sup> The narrative, that the end of sacrificial practices was a sign of successful Christianisation has been shown to be a Christian discourse strategy, developed during the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> This discourse identified the polytheistic sacrifice primarily with its bloody forms, allowing through this the unbloody forms to be integrated into Christian practices of veneration.<sup>21</sup> The main purpose of this, however, was to justify the continuation of the imperial cult, since this allowed Christian authors to claim that its bloodless forms had now been transformed from an idolatrous into a reverence shown to the emperor of a

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did the sovereign himself – incredible as it sounds – become the teacher of rules of worship to his army, and he transmitted pious prayers in accordance with divine ordinances – to raise their outstretched hands above toward heaven while fixing the eyes of the mind on the highest point, the Heavenly Sovereign, and then to invoke Him in their prayers as Giver of Victory, Savior, Guardian, and Rescuer. In fact, he even ordained one especial day of prayer, the one which is truly supreme and first, belonging to the Lord and to salvation, the day, indeed, both of light and of life, named for immortality and every good.» (EUS. *laud. Const.* IX 9-10 trans. DRAKE)

16 Johannes WIENAND, *Der Kaiser als Sieger. Metamorphosen triumphaler Herrschaft unter Constantin I.*, Dissertation. DeGruyter, Berlin, 2015, p. 322-34.

17 Burkhard GLADIGOW, «Opferkritik, Opferverbote und propagandistische Opfer», in Eftychia STAVRIANOPOULOU, Axel MICHAELS, Claus AMBOS (Eds.), *Transformations in sacrificial practices: from antiquity to modern times: proceedings of an international colloquium, Heidelberg, 12-14, July 2006*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2008, p. 263-64; Christoph AUFFARTH, «Teure Ideologie – billige Praxis. Die “kleinen” Opfer in der römischen Kaiserzeit», in Eftychia STAVRIANOPOULOU, Axel MICHAELS, Claus AMBOS (Eds.), *Transformations in sacrificial practices: from antiquity to modern times: proceedings of an international colloquium, Heidelberg, 12-14, July 2006*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2008, p. 147-49.

18 GLADIGOW, cit. p. 268.

19 AUFFARTH, cit. p. 155.

20 Marco MATTHEIS, *Der Kampf ums Ritual. Diskurs und Praxis traditioneller Rituale in der Spätantike*. Dissertation. Wellem, Düsseldorf, 2014.

21 AUFFARTH, cit. p. 151-55; MATTHEIS cit. p. 44-45.

purely secular nature.<sup>22</sup>

If we take Eusebius literally, the polytheists in the army conducted a ceremony which had no distinctions of rank and status, with all participants united in their worship of the one supreme deity. But any attempt to reconstruct the rough outline of the ceremony is not solely a task for educated guesses. A report does exist dating from some decades earlier concerning the introduction of an allegedly Christian prayer in the Roman army, which gives some details about how this was done. In his *Death of the Persecutors*, Lactantius not only tells the story how Licinius had a dream the night before the decisive battle against Maximinus Daia in which he received a prayer, but he also explains how the text became known to the soldiers:

«Disusso deinde somno notarium iussit acciri et, sicut audierat, haec verba dictavit: «Summe deus, te rogamus, sancte deus, te rogamus. Omnem iustitiam tibi commendamus, salutem nostram tibi commendamus, imperium nostrum tibi commendamus. Per te vivimus, per te victores et felices existimus. Summe, sancte deus, preces nostras exaudi. Brachia nostra ad te tendimus. Exaudi sancte, summe deus.» Scribuntur haec in libellis pluribus et per praepositos tribunosque mittuntur, ut suos quisque milites doceat.» (Lact. mort. pers. XLVI 5-7)<sup>23</sup>

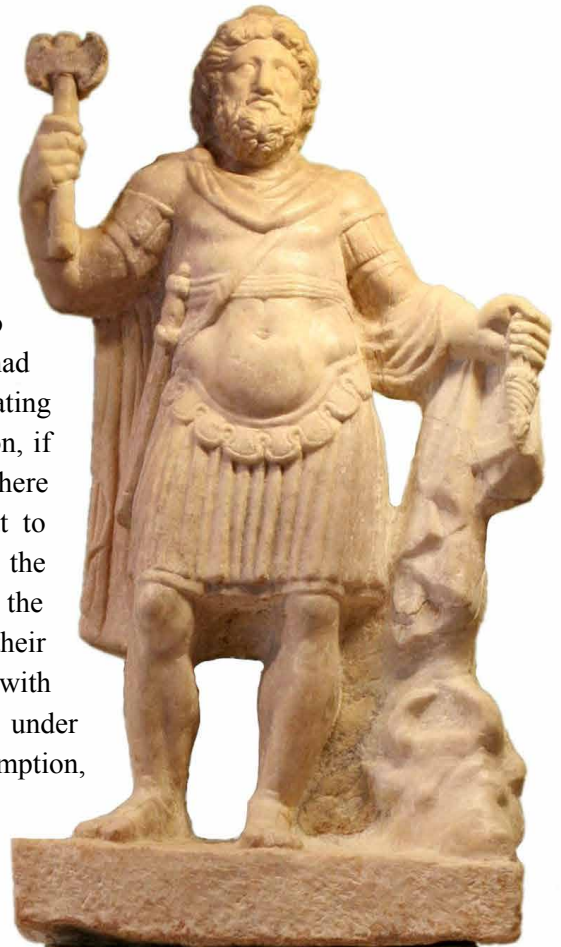
Although it would not have been needed for his narrative, Lactantius, adds the detail here that the prayer was taught to the rank and file soldiers by their officers. With this, he stands in stark contrast to Eusebius, who simply speaks of «a form of prayer learnt by heart». And because of the established fact that the recitation of prayers was part of the regular duties officers had to perform, there is no reason to doubt this aspect of Lactantius report, or to assume that the Constantinian prayer was spread in some other way.

This however makes it necessary to inquire into the role Roman officers might have had in this new ceremony in its entirety. This is especially the case, since the traditional reconstruction of Constantine's military cult reform paid no attention

22 MATTHEIS cit. p. 70-73; 131.

23 «Then, since sleep was gone, he ordered a notary summoned, and dictated these words just as he had heard them: O God most high, we pray Thee: O holy God, we entreat Thee. We commend all justice to Thee; we entrust our safety of Thee. We entrust our command to Thee. Through Thee we live; through Thee we rise up victorious and happy. O most high, holy God, hear our prayers. We stretch forth our arms to Thee. Hear us, O holy and most high God. Several copies of this prayer were made and were distributed to the officers and tribunes so that each would teach it to the soldiers.» (LACT. mort. pers. XLVI 5-7 trans. Mary Francis McDONALD)

to the social implications the role of religious functionaries had for the officers. The complete abolishment of any form of social distinction through the responsibilities exercised during the cult ceremony would have borne the risk of angering the officer corps, and Constantine would be only too well aware of this, since he himself had belonged to this group. But for those equating the end of sacrifice with Christianisation, if they paid any attention to this matter, there would appear to be no alternative but to assume that since the cultic duties of the officers in the religious sphere were the conduct of sacrifices and dedications, their duties in this sphere ended together with the abolishment of sacrificial practices under the reform of Constantine. This assumption, however, downplays the importance which the recitation of prayers and



Statue of Jupiter Dolichenus, propitiator of the military success & safety. Double ax in the right hand and thunderbolt in the left are the usual symbols of sovereignty. The bull lies on the left leg as an attribute figure. The Phrygian cap identifies him as an Oriental. He is dressed as a Roman general. (Archäologisches Museum Carnuntinum, in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Lower Austria, photo by Matthias Kabel, 2007, CC SA 3.0 Unported). The worship of Jupiter Dolichenus, associated with the cult of Mithra, was carried to Rome by the legions who fought against the Parthians. extremely popular during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CCE.

IN OMNIBUS  
DOLICHENO  
PRO SALVATE IMP  
CAESARIS COMM  
AVGG SPVR IVS  
SILVANVS LEG  
ET VALDIGNA

oaths had as part of the religious activities. And because the Eusebian report was taken as sufficient in detail, no connections were drawn between this other important aspect of officer duties and the new Sunday ceremony. But with this new approach, it seems reasonable to suggest that Constantine's reform did not abolish the role of religious functionaries, but rather shifted the focus of this duty solely to the supervision of prayers and oaths. For this reason, when we imagine how the new Constantinian army cult was performed, we must picture this event to the terms Tertullian described in *de corona* and the role of the officers like in the description of Lactantius: the soldiers assembling in parade uniform, ordered after their regiments, the officers reciting to them, and the soldiers repeating the prayer. It seems to be possible, that this prayer ceremony was not only limited to Sunday, but became the new form of cultic practice for all religious festivities in the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Religious functionaries and Military Chaplains*

The limitations of this paper preclude an in depth discussion about the activities the military chaplains had to perform.<sup>24</sup> Since the introduction of chaplains into the Roman army is considered to be another reason why the religious responsibilities of the officers came to an end, a brief examination of this may throw light on whether this assumption is correct. The first crucial point is when approximately were military chaplains introduced, because we possess no source giving a reliable date. Sozomenos connects the introduction of military chaplains with Constantine's habit of constructing a church tent, which he includes in his general report about Constantine's Christian actions.<sup>25</sup> Since A. M. S. Jones article, the scholarly consensus is that Sozomenos used the tradition about Constantine possessing a church tent,<sup>26</sup> not only to ascribe a more antique

24 Important studies on this topic are: A. M. S. JONES: «Military Chaplains in the Roman Army», *The Harvard Theological Review*, 46, 4 (1953), p. 239-40; Bernhard PALME, «Personalstandsmeldung aus dem Officium des Dux Thebaidis», *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, XXIV (2002), p. 90-97; Rudolf HAENSCH, «Pagane Priester des römischen Heeres im 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus», in Lukas DE BLOIS, Peter FUNKE, Johannes HAHN (Eds.), *The impact of imperial Rome on religions, ritual and religious life in the Roman empire. Proceedings of the fifth workshop of the international network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 200 B.C. - A.D. 476)*, Münster, Brill, 2004, p. 208-228.

25 *Soz. hist. eccl.* I 8, 10-11.

26 *Eus. Vit. Const.* IV 56, 1-4; *Socr. hist. eccl.* I 18.

origin to a relatively recent development, but quiet possibly to also add another point to the list of Constantine's many pious reforms still observable in his own time.<sup>27</sup> Since the first fragmentary evidence for military chaplains are to be found in an Egyptian papyrus listing an unnamed presbyter under the recipients of the annona, which can only be loosely dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century after 325 AD,<sup>28</sup> and also two letters of Johannes Chrysostomos written after his second banishment in 404 AD to two presbyters, giving comfort after their dismissal from the allegedly *scholae palatinae*,<sup>29</sup> the introduction of military chaplains is accepted as a development of the theodosian dynasty, marking the end of the polytheistic religious life in the army.

However I would like to present two other important arguments in support of the consensus, which I have not seen discussed. Firstly we need to take the development of the pastoral responsibilities of the Christian presbyters into consideration, because scholars far too frequently expect them to have had the same range of responsibilities throughout long periods of time.<sup>30</sup> But in 4<sup>th</sup> century Gaul the presbyter was originally not able to perform any sacrament, and it was a result of a process of this century that a rise in the responsibilities and sacramental autonomy were given to the presbyters.<sup>31</sup> If this is can be taken as an example conditions and developments throughout the empire, then this would imply that before the late 4<sup>th</sup> century it had simply been impossible to assign anyone but a bishop to provide the pastoral care for an army regiment. But it is highly questionable if any bishop would have accepted such a duty. It appears that this development was not limited to the territory of Gaul, but

27 JONES cit. p. 240; LEE cit. *Religions* p. 829; Karl-Rainhart TRAUNER, «Der Beginn einer christlichen Militärseelsorge», *Militär und Seelsorge (M&S) 12, Frühes Christentum und Heer* (2005), p. 20.

28 SB 20 15168 in: Pieter Johannes Sijpesteijn, Klaas Anthony Worp, «Einige griechische Papyri aus dem byzantinischen Ägypten», *ZPE* 90 (1992), pp. 236 no. 3.

29 JOH. CHRYS. *ep.* 213; 218; PALME cit, p. 95 Footnote 18; Roger Tomlin, «Christianity and the late roman army», in Samuel N. C. Lieu, Dominic Monserrat (Eds.), *Constantine. History, historiography and legend*. London, Routledge, 1998, p. 27 Footnote. 54.

30 i.e. David Woods, *The Christianization of the Roman Army in the fourth century*. Ph.D. thesis, Queens University, Belfast, 1991, p. 43 is wondering why the church did not introduced military chaplains earlier.

31 Gregor Preedel, *Vom Presbyter zum Sacerdos: historische und theologische Aspekte der Entwicklung der Leitungsverantwortung und Sacerdotalisierung des Presbyterates im spätantiken Gallien*. LIT Verlag, Münster, 2005.

happened throughout the whole empire, although with different pace.<sup>32</sup> Another important argument against the deployment of military chaplains in the Roman army in the 4<sup>th</sup> century is the reign of Julian the Apostate, more precisely his failed attempt to revive the polytheistic cult within the army. Not one of his Christian critics ever attacks him for, or even mentions the removal of clerics from their pastoral duty within the army, or their brave resistance against his vile acts. The validity of this argument may be put to question, because it appears to be an *argumentum ex silentio*. However to invalidate it, one would first need to explain why the Christian critics are refusing to mention anything about the resistance, or treatment of military chaplains, since this would be an ideal topic to show the vile nature of the Apostate, but instead are content with general remarks and the fate of individual soldiers. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus claims that Julian tried to trick the soldiers to lapse by adding depictions of pagan deities on the imperial statues,<sup>33</sup> and church histories of the 5<sup>th</sup> century tell tales about the brave resistance of soldiers and of those Christian officers who later became emperors.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Gregory of Nazianzus declares the officers to be the group Julian wanted to win over first for his new religious policy in the army.<sup>35</sup> That the planned change in cult-performance required the support of the majority of officers, would imply that the army of Julian had still not only a socially, but also a cultic defined hierarchy like the pre-Constantinian Roman army had, this way strengthening the assumption, that the officers still were religious functionaries. This leads to the question whether the introduction of military chaplains would have marked an end of this duty or if the duties of the officers and priests could coexist, or rather complement each other.

### *The Roman officers in the 6<sup>th</sup> century*

From the void of the 5<sup>th</sup> century there is one very interesting piece of information from the Cilician town Anemurium. Part of the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century floor mosaics,<sup>36</sup> within the so called “Cemetery Church”, are five pieces

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32 Andreas WECKWERTH, «Vom Presbyter zum Priester. Die Entwicklung des Presbyteramtes in der Alten Kirche», *WUB* 3/2020, S. 43.

33 GREG. NAZ. *or. c. Iul.* I 81.

34 SOZ. *hist. eccl.* 5, 17; THEOD. *hist. eccl.* III 11; 13.

35 GREG. NAZ. *or. c. Iul.* I 64.

36 James RUSSELL, *The Mosaic Inscriptions of Anemurium*, VÖAW, Wien, 1987, p. 82-89.



that were funded by officers as fulfilment of a vow.<sup>37</sup> From those, one mosaic in the north corridor bears the following inscription:

«ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐβλαβεστάτου  
ἐ(πισ)κ(όπου) / Ἰνδεμίου  
Φλ(άουιος) Τελπύλλιος /  
νεωφώτιστος ὑπὲρ σω-/  
τηρίας τοῦ νομέρου  
ἐποί(ησε)»<sup>38</sup>

The text of this inscription raises several questions: 1. What is the occasion (Anlass) and 2. what is the reason (Ursache)/ inner motivation for the dedication of Flavius Telpullios? 3. Regarding question 2., what concrete wish does «σωτηρίας» express? 4. Which impact on this decision had the fact that he had been baptized recently? 5. What position did Telpullios have within the *numerus*? The problem is that the possibilities to answer any of these questions are not only numerous, but also influence each other. And it does not help that «σωτηρίας» is confusing rather than clarifying. For as J. Russell notes, in Christian epigraphy «σωτηρίας»



Emperor Justinian and his suite,  
Basilique San Vitale, Ravenna.  
Detail showing the shield with the  
Constantinian monogram. Photo by  
Roger Culos, 2015. CC SA 3.0 Unported.

<sup>37</sup> RUSSELL cit. *Mosaic* p. 67-68; 83-85; James RUSSELL, «The military garrison of Anemurium during the reign of Arcadius», in *Atti Roma, 18 - 24 settembre 1997. International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy 11. Vol. 1*, Rom, Quasar, 1999, p. 725-27.

<sup>38</sup> «In the time of the most devout bishop Indemios, Flavios Telpullios, newly baptized, had this made in return for the preservation of his detachment.» RUSSELL cit. *Mosaic*, Nr. 23 p. 85.

has several meanings, which he narrows down to: «[...]either as gratitude for the preservation of the detachment in the past, or as a prayer for physical protection in the future, or, in an eschatological sense, for its spiritual salvation in the hereafter. I prefer the last of these choices.»<sup>39</sup> But this interpretation of J. Russell is as justified, as the one proposed by A. Lee who interprets it as a thanks for preservation.<sup>40</sup> The following short example will illustrate the complexity of the problem: One could argue that, as “Flavius” had become a honourable title for higher magistrates and officers,<sup>41</sup> Telpullios was an, or maybe even the commanding, officer of “his” *numerus*. The occasion could have been that he had recently been baptized, or he could have been recently appointed to this position as well as baptized, and wanted to show the importance the baptism had for him to the local community. But the inclusion of the plea for the *numerus* makes it highly plausible that the feeling of responsibility was part of the reason. But then again, the decision for one of the interpretations of «σωτηρίας» would change the supposed motive. So while we can not answer any of these five questions with certainty, the information delivered by the mosaic-inscription gives us a very interesting clue. Telpullios deemed it important to present himself to the community not only as newly baptized, but also as caring for the *numerus*. If he had been an officer, this private act could have stemmed from a general feeling of responsibility for the religious well-being of his soldiers.

We can possibly find the official background for such a feeling of responsibility in the already mentioned late 6<sup>th</sup> century *Strategikon of Mauricios*. In this military handbook, the author reminds the reader about the religious duties of both the commander and the officers. The commander should pray before each engagement and ask for God’s help,<sup>42</sup> but is also responsible for giving the sign for supper as well as the singing of the *Trishagion*.<sup>43</sup> The officers are not only reminded that they have to hand over their regiment’s banner to a priest to receive a blessing at least two days prior to a battle,<sup>44</sup> but also that they are responsible for making

39 RUSSELL cit. *Mosaic* p. 87.

40 Alan Douglas LEE, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2007, p. 185.

41 RUSSELL cit. *Garrison* p. 726-27.

42 MAURIK. *Strat.* VIII 2, 1.

43 MAURIK. *Strat.* XII B 22, 33-35.

44 MAURIK. *Strat.* VII A 1.

sure that their soldiers sing the *Trishagion* and do other mandatory activities in the morning and at noon.<sup>45</sup> Commander and officer play an integral part in the drumhead service conducted within the camp:

Ἀλλὰ δεῖ τὴν μὲν εὐχὴν γίνεσθαι ἐν ἐκείνῃ μάλιστα τῇ τοῦ πολέμου ἡμέρᾳ ἐν τῷ φουσάτῳ, πρὶν ἢ τινα τῆς πόρτας ἐξελεθεῖν, διὰ τε τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀρχόντων τὸ „Κύριε ἐλέησον“ ἐπιμόνωσ ἅμα πάντας λέγειν, εἶτα διὰ τὸ αἴσιον καὶ τὸ „νοβισκοῦμ δέουσ“ τρίτον ἕκαστον μέρος ἐξερχόμενον τοῦ φουσάτου.<sup>46</sup>

The information provided so far by the *Strategikon* seems to imply that in general, the religious duties of the officers complemented those of the military chaplains in the way that the observation of mundane religious activities remained with the former, while the performance of the sacred acts was reserved for the latter. The *Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy*, written probably during the reign of Justinian,<sup>47</sup> speaks only at two occasions about religious considerations.<sup>48</sup> In the relevant passage, the author puts great emphasis on the requirement for the commanders of forts to be known for their religious devotion.<sup>49</sup> Sadly it is not made clear whether this is because of a supposed increased loyalty, like it seems to be the case with the envoys,<sup>50</sup> or if it is because of religious responsibilities like the ones we know from *Maurice's Strategikon*. These circumstances increase importance of the joined responsibility of priests, commander and officers in the drumhead service all the more. If the separating element of the responsibilities would follow the mundane – sacred dichotomy, then the emphasized regular involvement of the military leaders in the drumhead service would seem odd. But

45 Maurik. *Strat.* VII B 17, 4-7.

46 «Instead of the shout, prayers should be said in camp on the actual day of battle before anyone goes out the gate. All, led by the priests, the general, and the other officers should recite the «Kyrie eleison» (Lord have mercy) for some time in unison. Then, in hopes of success, each man should shout the «Nobiscum Deus» (God is with us) three times as it marches out of camp.» (MAURIK. *Strat.* II 18, 13-17 Üs Ernst GAMILLSCHEG).

47 George T. DENNIS, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library & Collection, Washington D.C., 1985, p. 2-3.

48 ANON. *Strat.* 9, 21-23; 43, 14-16.

49 ANON. *Strat.* 9, 21-23.

50 ANON. *Strat.* 43, 14-16. The author suggests that when selecting envoys, men should be chosen who are known for their religiosity and have neither been convicted, nor suspected of criminal behavior.

if the officers still were considered as religious functionaries, their participation in a religious ceremony within the military context would only be natural.

There is another source that sheds light on the way the officers participated in such ceremonies, although from a civilian perspective. Around 550 A.D. the North-African poet Flavius Cresconius Corippus created his epos *Iohannis* on the magister militum Johannes Troglita, who had recently put an end to the Moorish revolt in the Province of Africa, at the court in Constantinople. In this epos, he includes several snippets of Christian ceremonies.<sup>51</sup> Two of those are of great importance for the topic and described in the following.

Firstly, there is the description of the triumphal adventus of Troglita at Carthage after his first great victory: «dum patres matresque libet, sic limina templi / magnanimus ductor signis comitantibus intrans / oravit dominum caeli terraeque marisque, / obtulit et munus, summus quod more sacerdos / pro redituque ducis pro victisque hostibus arae / imposuit, Christoque pater libamina sanxit.»<sup>52</sup> While the details of the ceremony are unclear, it is obvious that Corippus emphasises that Troglita had some interaction with the «quod more sacerdos [...] arae imposuit». This is only possible if he had a fixed role in the ceremony, and this role most likely had been a result from his commanding position. It is possible that this ceremony had developed from the old *vota soluta* practice.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, there is the description of the drumhead service on the morning before the decisive battle:

«[...] felici nascente die. iamque ordine certo / Christicolae veniunt populi, Romana iuventus / magnanimique duces signis comitantibus una. / dux ubi distensis habuit tentoria velis / una cum primis media inter castra Iohannes, / hic magnum statuit velans altare sacerdos / et solito sacris circumdedit undique peplis / more patrum: instituuntque choros et dulcia psallunt / carmina deflentes humili cum voce ministri. / ast

51 Because of the limited scope of this article, these rites can not be addressed here. For further analysis see my PhD thesis.

52 «While mothers and fathers were thus permitted to show their horrible faces to the little children [this refers to the Moorish captives], the great souled leader entered the threshold of the temple with his standards. He prayed to the Lord of heaven and earth and sea, and offered him the gift, which the high priest had placed in his usual manner on the altar, for the leader's return and the defeat of the enemy. Then the father consecrated the offering to Christ.» (COR. VI 98-103 trans. George W. SHEA)

53 See also the discussion in Michael McCORMICK, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987, p. 156; 246; Rene PFEILSCHIFTER, «Der römische Triumph und das Christentum. Überlegungen zur Eigenart eines öffentlichen Rituals», in Fabian GOLDBECK, Johannes WIENAND (Hg.), *Der römische Triumph in Prinzipat und Spätantike*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2017, p. 455-57; 481-82.



Tribunus Julius Terentius Performing a Sacrifice (Dura Europos Fresco).  
Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery, Public Domain.

ubi sacrati tetigit dux limina templi / ingrediens, gemitus populi rupere dolentes. / lumina confundunt lacrimis: vox undique caelos / pulsat et infensis tot conscia pectora pugnis / percutiunt. «delicta patrum dimitte, rogamus, / nostraque, Christe» gemunt et tensis aethera palmis / suspiciunt dominique sibi solacia poscunt. / ipse inter primos, genibusque et corpore flexo, / pro populo exorans motus pietate Iohannes / ex oculis lacrimas fundebat fluminis instar, / percutiensque suum geminato verbere pectus / talia voce rogat: «mundi sator, unica rerum / vita salusque, deus, terrae, maris, aetheris auctor / omnipotens, caelum et terram virtutibus implens / undivagumque salum vel quidquid gignitur orbe, / aeraque et taetrum populi pallentis Avernum, / imperium tu solus habes, tibi summa potestas / et laus et regnum magnaue potentia dextrae: / respice iam tandem Romanos, respice, summe, / atque pius succurre, pater, gentesque superbas / frange, precor, virtute tua: dominumque potentem / te solum agnoscant populi, dum conteris hostes / et salvas per bella tuos. nunc sculptile damnat / omne genus, verumque deum te, magne, fatemur.» / haec memorans terras oculorum fonte rigabat / compulsus pietate pater, Libyaeque periculum / mente dolens rerumque graves populique labores. / nec minus umectans iuxta Ricinarius ora / luminibus fundebat aquas supplexque Latinis / auxilium populis vultu maerente rogabat. / magnanimique duces umecto pectore fletus / ad caelum misere suos fortesque tribuni, / atque omnes pariter lacrimosa voce cohortes / ante deum fudere preces. summusque sacerdos / munera pro populis, onerans altare, Latinis / obtulit atque aras lacrimarum fonte rigavit. / tunc precibus placidis patrem benedixit honorans / et solitas reddens Christo dedit ordine laudes. / munus erat summi domino acceptabile caeli, / sanctificans mundansque simul genus omne Latinum.»<sup>54</sup>

54 «At the happy break of day, the worshippers of Christ came, in the prescribed order, the people, the young Roman soldiers, and the great-souled captains along with their standards. Among the foremost in the middle of the camp, where he had his tents with their canvas outspread, the leader John came as well. Here the priest had set up and draped a great altar, and, in the usual manner of their fathers, had surrounded it on all sides with holy robes. The ministers had formed a choir and with humble voices sang sweet hymns as they wept. But, when the commander reached the door of the sacred temple and entered, the people burst out with groans of grief, and let tears gush from their eyes. Their voices struck the heavens on all sides, and with their fists they beat their guilty breasts again and again, as if they were their own foes. «Forgive our sins, and the sins of our fathers, we beseech you, Christ.» They moaned, and, with palms extended they looked up to the heaven and asked for the comfort of the Lord. John himself among the foremost, with knees and body bent, was moved by piety to pray for the people. He let tears pour, from his eyes like a river, and, striking his breast with one blow after another, he made his entreaty in these words: «Creator of the world, the only life and salvation of all things, God, almighty author of the land and sea and air, who fill with your power the earth and the sky, the drifting waves of the sea, and whatever is enclosed by the universe, the air and foul Avernum of the pale souls, you alone have command. The greatest power is yours and praise and sovereignty and the might of

Corippus gives a very detailed description of what either could have been the beginning, or the entire ceremony, which makes the text loss a tragedy. But within the preserved text, we find that the officers and soldiers were entering a tent-church in a certain order. With the priest already present and standing with the ministers at the altar singing. Upon the arrival of the commander a *mea-culpa* ritual starts, which is followed by a prayer of the commander, whose example is followed top down the chain of command, the priest offers the gifts and blesses the gathered soldiers. This description is in general in line with the instructions given in the *Strategikon* for the drumhead service, except for the acts performed by the priest. In the *Strategikon* only praying and singing is mentioned, whereas in Corippus we find that an entire mass celebrated before battle. Possible explanations could be that 1. Corippus was either embellishing his epos or following the expectations of the civil court in Constantinople when describing the priest's acts. Or 2., the author of the *Strategikon* did not deem it necessary to describe a set of actions of persons that had nothing to do with the military duties, and furthermore could be expected to know about their own duties. After all, the only other mention of priests serves as a reminder for the officers to hand over of their banner to the priest for blessing, without describing what the priest is doing. As a consequence it would seem reasonable, that by mentioning that priests, commander and officers were involved in the drumhead service together, the reader would know what this comprised.

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your great right hand. Now at long last, look down upon the Romans, look down Almighty and holy Father, and bring us aid. Crush, I beseech you, these proud tribes with your power. Let these people recognize you alone as their powerful Lord, while you crush the enemy and preserve your people in war. Now the entire race condemns their carved divinity, and we confess that you, Almighty, are our true God.» While he recited these words, the father made the earth wet with the tears that welled up in his eyes, and moved with piety, he grieved in his mind for the dangers to the realm and the weighty toils of the people. Beside him Recinarius let tears stream from his eyes and moistened his face no less than his master. As a suppliant he begged with saddened countenance for aid for the Latin people. The great-souled captains and the brave tribunes, their breasts moist with tears, lifted their sobs towards heaven, and with them, all the cohorts poured forth prayers before God with tearful voices. The high priest placed gifts on the altar and offered them on behalf of the Latin people, making the altar wet with his gushing tears. Then praying calmly, he honored and blessed the father, and as is fitting, gave the gifts to Christ and rendered the accustomed praise. The gift was acceptable to the Lord of heaven on high, and at once sanctified and cleansed the entire Latin nation. [There is loss of an unknown amount of text, the narrative continues with the orders for battle-formation.]» (COR. VIII 321-69 trans. George W. SHEA)

This interpretation of the relationship between officers, in their role as religious functionaries, and priests as a symbiotic one can also help to understand passages in other works of that period in time. For example, in Procopius *Vandalic War* there is a short description that appears somewhat cryptical. In preparation for the battle of ad Decimum, Belisarius gives a speech, and after he has finished, Procopius tells us: «Τοσαῦτα εἰπὼν Βελισάριος καὶ ἐπευξάμενος τὴν τε γυναῖκα καὶ τὸ χάρακωμα τοῖς πεζοῖς ἀπολιπὼν αὐτὸς μετὰ τῶν ἰπέων ἀπάντων ἐξήλασεν.»<sup>55</sup> How can «uttering a prayer» be precisely understood? Is this a private or a public prayer? What are the soldiers doing while Belisar prays? When applying the proposed role as religious functionaries onto this passage, it seems to be plausible that Procopius reports with this short remark a prayer ceremony of the expedition forces under the guidance of Belisarius, in the manner the *Strategikon* and Corippus described. Whether priests were attending or not we do not know from the context.

### Conclusion

The beginning of this paper established the role the Roman officers had as religious functionaries in the religious life of the army by explaining that representing their subordinates before the Gods and leading them in prayer and at oath ceremonies was not only part of their duties, but was also important for their social distinction. Thus, the assumptions regarding their religious duties in Christian time were re-examined. The first point of interest was whether the Constantinian reform of the military cult brought an end to their role as religious functionaries. The examination of the Eusebian report, and the cross-reference with Lactantius showed that it is highly probable that, although the officers lost their sacrificial duties, their other cultic responsibilities remained intact. The second point was the question, what impact the introduction of military chaplains had on the officers' duties. Since their introduction can only have been a late 4<sup>th</sup> century development at the earliest, there is a noticeable lack of information on this topic. But a 5<sup>th</sup> century mosaic-inscription gives rise to the assumption, that officers may still have felt in some way personally responsible for their

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55 «After speaking these words and uttering a prayer after them, Belisarius left his wife and the barricaded camp to the infantry, and himself set forth with all the horsemen.» (PROK. wars. III 19, 11 trans. H. B. DEWING)



soldiers in religious matters. Two 6<sup>th</sup> century sources shed some light on the interaction between the duties of officers and military chaplains from a civilian and a military perspective. The comparison of the information provided made it clear, that the officers held important cultic responsibilities, which allows us to still address them as religious functionaries. The separation of duties between officers and military chaplains seems to not have been along the mundane-sacral dichotomy, but a question of qualification to perform sacral rites. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest, that the officers of the early Byzantine army were responsible to control the fulfilment of the religious duties by their soldiers not by chance, but because of an inherited responsibility of the polytheistic Roman imperial army. This further strengthens the impression that the Roman army was not only as a social, but also as a religious community in certain aspects different from the civilian population.

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# Storia Militare Antica

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