NEW APPROACHES TO BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

Justinian's Men

Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518-610

DAVID ALAN PARNELL

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David Alan Parnell
Indiana University Northwest
Gary, Indiana, USA

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David Alan Parnell

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Byzantine army, like most professional armies, had in theory a rigid command hierarchy in which soldiers and officers were ranked and divided into units. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the army operated in practice the way it was drawn up on paper. The military hierarchy was conditioned and occasionally subverted by powerful social issues, including the way officers identified themselves and others, and particularly by the relationships officers formed with each other. These social issues within the Byzantine military are especially apparent in and around the reign of the emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565). The army was quite busy during this period as it fought in all corners of the Mediterranean world, from Visigothic Spain to the Persian Empire. These wars inspired considerable commentary from contemporaries, and these observations shed light on the army that portrays it as a vibrant and lively social community. This book considers the Byzantine army of the sixth century as a complex web of social relationships. In this army, the identity of an officer and the people that officer knew and counted as friends were of just as much importance, if not more, as the officer's official rank and position. These officers were not simply names and ranks on a roster or protagonists in a battle narrative, but people: Justinian's men. Their relationships with each other, with their subordinate soldiers, and with their emperor were complex and subject to change. The depth of detail available on these men and their relationships may startle some who are accustomed to Justinian's

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wars being summarized as a series of generals being appointed and battles being fought. Two brief examples demonstrate the importance of identities and social relationships to the functioning of the army.

The most important cultural identity of the sixth century was that of the Romans, which was usually contrasted with that of non-Roman 'barbarians.' Byzantines identified themselves as Romans and in fact were Romans, being not simply heirs in some loose sense but direct continuators of the Roman Empire.[1] Therefore in this book, the terms Byzantine and Roman will be used interchangeably. These Romans served side by side in the army with non-Romans, whom they sometimes labeled barbarians. Centuries of cultural contempt lay behind the term 'barbarian' and for many Romans using that label on a non-Roman would have been almost second nature. Despite the weight of historical precedent, many non-Romans in Byzantine military service seem to have escaped both contempt in general and the label of 'barbarian' in particular. The sixth-century historian Procopius described Pharas, an important non-Roman officer in the Byzantine army, in this fashion:

> Pharas was energetic and thoroughly serious and upright in every way, although he was a Herul by birth. And for a Herul not to give himself over to treachery and drunkenness, but to strive after uprightness, is no easy matter and merits abundant praise.[2]

The term 'barbarian' is conspicuous by its absence in this description. Procopius confirms here the weight of the general negative view of Pharas' people, the Heruls, but admits that in his experience the Herul that he knows is not at all as barbaric as he might have expected. In this case, personal knowledge of an individual impacts the assessment of that individual. Identity becomes more complex than prejudicial overarching judgment when it is placed in the realm of a personal relationship.

Relationships between officers dramatically impacted the way the army functioned. In the face of deep personal ties, whether affectionate or antagonistic, the formal hierarchy of the army counted for little. The more prominent an army officer, the easier it is to untangle the web of social networks that tied him to other officers in the army. For this reason it is easiest to chart the relationships of Belisarius and Narses the Eunuch, the two

[1] For a thorough discussion of the Byzantines' Roman identity, see Chap. 3.
[2] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.29–30.

most famous generals who fought in the wars of Justinian. Traditionally considered immensely powerful men, the two were often painfully dependent on the approval and support of subordinate officers. As Belisarius prepared to enter Ravenna in 540, he had reached the zenith of his success in the Ostrogothic War. He had driven the Ostrogothic army to seek refuge behind the walls of Ravenna, and had convinced them to surrender the city to him. Surely if Belisarius was ever in a powerful position, this was it. Yet while preparing for his great moment, Belisarius found it necessary to create a pretext to send away four senior army officers whom he suspected of being opposed to him.[3] That Belisarius, the commander-in-chief of the army in Italy, on the cusp of his greatest success in the war, did not feel like he could proceed without first sending away some personal enemies speaks volumes to the importance and power of social relationships in the functioning of the army.

The era in which Belisarius and his fellow officers served Justinian is a particularly appropriate period in which to study the Byzantine army in action. While the army was central in all periods of Byzantine history, in the sixth century its importance was underlined by the wars of conquest that Justinian directed. The conquests of North Africa, Italy, and a portion of Spain put enormous pressures on the army and the emperors who commanded it. In addition to these wars, warfare and diplomacy with Persia, the only nearby state of comparable strength, remained a major concern of the government. The devastating effects of the plague from 541 on taxed the army's ability to maintain its many projects. All these activities and events put the army under significant stress and make the period particularly useful for examining how it operated under pressure. Fortunately for the interested historian, contemporaries realized the importance of their era and were careful to write accounts of what was happening. This period is particularly blessed with the amount and variety of its source material, especially compared to the less-documented fifth century before it and seventh century after it. Still more helpful is that so many of these sources were men who were interested in what the army was doing and how its officers behaved, which makes an examination of this army as a collection of identities and social relationships even more fruitful.

The reign of Justinian (Fig. 1.1) was both lengthy and busy. Convinced that it was his mission to bring about a restoration of the empire, Justinian

[3] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.29–31 and see Chap. 5, 'Populating the Social Networks in Italy, 538–539.'

Fig. 1.1 Justinian and his men in a mosaic from the church of San Vitale, Ravenna. The emperor stands in the middle, with Belisarius to his right, Narses to his left, and a group of imperial guardsmen on his far right. Image via Wikimedia Commons; ©The Yorck Project: *10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei*. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH.

embarked on a number of projects almost immediately, starting with revamping the law code. Justinian tapped a prominent jurist, Tribonian, as his legal minister (*quaestor*) and tasked him with producing a new compilation of laws, which became the *Justinian Code*. In 532, however, Justinian faced a serious challenge to his rule when he maladroitly handled the complaints of the Blue and Green sports fans in Constantinople. The city mob rallied with the combined fan factions in a major revolt against Justinian, known as the Nika Riot after the slogan of the rioters, *nika*! ('Win!'). Justinian put down the uprising, mostly thanks to soldiers under the leadership of Belisarius and other generals. That same year, Justinian was able to sign a treaty with King Khusrau I of Persia, the 'Perpetual Peace.' This freed Justinian's armies to embark on campaigns of conquest

in the West. In a quick war, Belisarius was able to conquer the Vandals and bring their entire kingdom in North Africa under Byzantine control (533–534). This success was followed by war against the Ostrogoths in Italy, which took much longer but eventually resulted in the conquest of the entire peninsula (535–554).

Justinian kept occupied while his generals were conquering lands in the western Mediterranean. In Constantinople itself, he built the great church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), which was the largest cathedral in the world at the time. Justinian also pursued religious issues, seeking to reconcile Monophysite Christians with the Orthodox Church. In all these projects, Justinian worked in concert with his partner and wife, Theodora, much to the chagrin of some of the Byzantine elite. Justinian faced severe challenges in the early 540s that represent a turning point in his reign. In 540, the Persians broke the peace and sacked Antioch, putting the empire in the difficult position of waging war on more than one front (as the war in Italy was still ongoing). The plague arrived in 541, killing a significant portion of the empire's population and therefore altering the demographic and financial basis of the government. In 541, Justinian was also forced to sack his most important minister, the praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian, who had been outmaneuvered by his rivals into appearing to plot against the emperor. These disasters and changes combined to grind military advances to a halt. By the 550s, the situation had stabilized. The Ostrogothic war in Italy came to a close under the leadership of Narses, and a peace was signed with the Persians that at least limited the Persian war to certain theaters. Justinian added to his conquests a small portion of Spain, and then spent the remainder of his reign stabilizing what he had won and fighting defensive wars in the Balkans. By the time he died in 565, the emperor had greatly expanded the size of the Byzantine Empire despite the debilitating effects of the plague. But the events of Justinian's reign had also made the enlarged empire much more difficult to control and defend. Ruling it successfully required a prudent blend of diplomacy and moderation in spending that few of his successors practiced.

Justinian's reign did not exist in a vacuum, and understanding the operation of his army requires an examination of most of the sixth century, including the period before his reign, which produced him, and the period after, in which the full impact of his policies and wars were felt. The chronological boundaries of this book are therefore set to include the prelude to the reign of Justinian, that of his uncle Justin I (r. 518–527). Though Justin did not rule for long, he successfully seized power from the family

of Anastasius I (r. 491–518), who had ruled before him, and bequeathed it to Justinian. The century covered by this book also encompasses the reigns of Justinian's successors. Justin II (r. 565–578) and Tiberius II (r. 578–582) faced wars on multiple fronts, including Italy, Persia, and the Balkans and spent heavily, stretching the empire's finances perilously thin. Maurice (r. 582–602) cleared up these wars and economized as much as possible, to the point that he provoked the army into a mutiny that cost him his life. His usurper, Phocas (r. 602–610), could not control the army or government effectively and suffered disastrous losses in a war against the Persians, to the point that Justinian's system of administration definitively disintegrated.[4] His reign therefore is the bookend of this study. The army changed dramatically in the remainder of the seventh century in the cauldron of emergency and disaster in wars with the Persians and Arabs.[5] The sources that make possible this examination also become fewer and less detailed in the seventh century.

Fortunately, Justinian's reign attracted considerable attention from contemporary authors of history, the most significant of whom was Procopius of Caesarea. Assessor (legal adviser) and private secretary to Belisarius, Procopius accompanied the general in campaigns in the East, Africa, and Italy in the 530s. After leaving Belisarius' service, he authored the *History of the Wars,* the *Secret History*, and the *Buildings.* While his proximity to the important people and events of the period make him a knowledgeable source with particular information about the relationships of officers, it also makes it likely that his work is tinged with his own bias and possibly with that of his patron Belisarius as well.[6] In spite of this criticism, Procopius is easily the most important source for the operation of the army in this period and should generally be trusted unless there is particular reason to be suspicious of his motives.[7] However, it is appropriate to keep in mind the role Procopius played in shaping the narrative of particular passages while analyzing the information he pro-

[4] For narrative histories of this period, see Stein 1949 and Treadgold 1997.

[5] Among many fine studies on the convulsions of the seventh century, see Haldon 2016 and Kaegi 2003.

[6] See Cameron 1985, 134–8 and Kaldellis 2004, 12.

[7] On Procopius as 'the single most important source for his age,' see Kaldellis 2004, 4. For sympathetic views of Procopius' trustworthiness, see Treadgold 2007, 176–226, and, especially as a military source, Lee 2004, 115. For Procopius as a teacher of combat technique, see Whately 2015.

vides.[8] Agathias of Myrina, who worked as a lawyer in Constantinople, continued the narrative of Procopius to 558.[9] His civilian position in Constantinople means he was less likely than Procopius to be biased in favor of individual officers, but also means he had less direct information about officers' lives and relationships. Menander Protector, the continuator of Agathias, wrote a history covering the period from the end of Justinian's reign through that of Tiberius II.[10] The final historian in this chain of storytellers was Theophylact Simocatta, who carried the tale through the reign of Maurice (582–602).[11] So the entire sixth century is covered by four historians who wrote in some detail, although none in as great of detail or with as much focus on the army as Procopius. In addition to these histories are chronicles which, although more sparse, are also of some value in describing the army.[12] Marcellinus Comes, who was a scribe for Justinian during the reign of Justin, wrote a chronicle covering the period from 379 to 534. An anonymous continuator brought the chronicle up to 548.[13] John Malalas, a midlevel bureaucrat who seems to have alternately served in the local bureaucracy of Antioch and the imperial bureaucracy in Constantinople, wrote a world chronicle that probably originally extended to the end of Justinian's reign, although the extant manuscripts cut off in 563. Fortunately, though the chronicle is of little value for its earlier years, it becomes more detailed for Justinian's reign, of which Malalas was a contemporary.[14] These chronicles tend to paint history in broad brushstrokes and do not often contain detailed information on individual soldiers and officers in the army, but they do occasionally offer a glimpse into the army's impact on the civilian world. This short review is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of sources used in this book but merely a brief introduction to the principal sources for the army and its operations in the sixth century.[15]

[8] Cameron 1985, 136.

[9] Agathias *Histories*, translated by Frendo 1975. See also Kaldellis 2003 and Cameron 1970.

[10] Menander *History*, translated by Blockley 1985.

[11] Theophylact *History,* translated by Whitby 1986. See also Whitby 1988.

[12] Scott 2012 makes an argument for the importance of chronicles for providing a mindset of sixth-century Byzantium that cannot be found elsewhere.

[13] Marcellinus Comes, *The Chronicle*, translated by Croke 1995.

[14] Joh. Mal. *Chronicle*, translated by Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott 1986. See also Jeffreys, Croke and Scott 1990.

[15] For a thorough review of the Byzantine historians of the sixth century and an evaluation of their value, see Treadgold 2007.

Previous studies of the Byzantine army in this period have made use of these sources but with different objectives in mind. There have been many fine examinations of the formal structure of the Byzantine army on questions including its size, organization, recruitment and degree of loyalty.[16] Historians have also shown considerable interest in the identity of soldiers and officers within it, often questioning the degree to which the army was 'barbarized' in this period.[17] Most of this examination has however focused on the bare facts—as much as they can be determined—of identity, especially the questions of how great a percentage of the army was of non-Roman origin, whether that percentage increased as the sixth century wore on, and what that means. The study of social networks, or the relationships between individuals, is still relatively new in the field of Late Antique studies; the most prominent use of such techniques is that of Adam M. Schor on ecclesiastical networks.[18] This book is a general social analysis of the sixth-century Byzantine army and the first work to focus on this century in particular.[19] It considers officers not merely as actors on the battlefield or names in a story but as participants in a variety of social issues and relationships that significantly influenced the operation of the army.

The second chapter of this book lays the foundation for the study by describing the framework, that is the structure and functioning of the Byzantine army, in the sixth century. The army was versatile and structurally diverse with many different units including the field armies (*comitatenses*), border armies (*limitanei*), federates (*foederati*), and guardsmen (*bucellarii*). The ranks and positions within each unit are also examined. Finally, attention is paid to the processes, as much as is known, of recruitment and promotion in the army. These descriptions introduce necessary vocabulary and provide the setting for the discussion of officers in the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 introduces the question of identity in military service and argues that the cultural and ethnic identity of soldiers and officers was generally of less importance than their behavior and service record. As many modern historians (for example, John Teall, Michael Whitby, and Hugh Elton) have pointed out, the Byzantine army of the sixth century, particu-

[16] Special mention should be made of these particularly important pieces of scholarship: Sarantis and Christie 2013, Elton 2007, Whitby 2007b, Rance 2005, Lee 2004, Whitby 2000b, and Treadgold 1995.

[17] See Teall 1965, 296 and Greatrex 2000, 274.

[18] Schor 2007 and Schor 2011.

[19] Lee 2007a is an excellent introduction to the social history of war in Late Antiquity in general.

larly in the reign of Justinian, made considerable use of non-Romans.[20] This chapter considers the prominence of non-Romans in Byzantine military service and argues that while they made up a significant portion of the army, they were by no means in the majority. Also central to this chapter is the term 'barbarian' itself and the way it is used in the sources of the sixth century. Authors such as Procopius and Agathias use the term regularly, although perhaps not as liberally as some would expect. The term is primarily used in battle scenes and other wartime scenarios to describe the military enemies of the Byzantine Empire such as the Ostrogoths or Vandals. However, the term could also be used for non-Romans in Byzantine military service and it is important to assess when and why this happened. In this context, the word 'barbarian' seems to have been primarily applied to individuals who were behaving poorly and to have been withheld from those non-Romans who had a good service record.

The fourth chapter begins a series of examinations of the relationships, both familial and social, of Byzantine army officers that impacted their careers. This chapter starts with the most obviously important relationship for each army officer: the one that he had with the emperor. This examination generally focuses on the relationship between the emperor and the most senior officers of the army, because the evidence of these interactions is much more plentiful than that of the emperor and junior officers. Central to this topic are the relationships of Belisarius and Narses to Justinian, for which sources like Procopius and Agathias provide the most evidence, but less famous generals such as Artabanes, Bessas, and Martin are also considered. An examination of promotions, assignments, and transfers helps to explain the complicated relationship between emperor and officers. The emperor transferred most officers no less frequently than every few years; this was an intentional strategy, not merely an accident of bureaucracy. It demonstrated both a will to use good talent in multiple theaters and a desire to ensure that a powerful general did not get too comfortable in one geographical area. The emperor prioritized loyalty first and competency second for his senior officers. Since good behavior ranked a distant third, many officers could get away with misbehavior in both their private lives and even in military matters as long as they assured the emperor of their loyalty.

Chapter 5 continues the theme of relationships of Byzantine army officers, this time with each other. Officers built up social networks during their careers and used these networks to advance their own interests.

[20] Teall 1965, Whitby 1995, Elton 2007.

This phenomenon is particularly observable in the lives of the top generals of the period. This chapter explores multiple examples in Italy, North Africa, and on the eastern frontier in which generals such as Belisarius, Narses, Peter, Sergius, and John (the son of Sisiniolus) sought to marshal support among their fellow officers. The failure of the emperors to provide unequivocal support or to declare unambiguous chains of command probably encouraged generals to develop de facto hierarchies by assembling social networks. These networks benefitted top generals by helping them to amass support for their opinions in war councils and benefitted junior officers by giving them a patron who might help to advance their career. These networks were also highly personal, so animosities and affections could impact them just as much as career ambition. In short, the Byzantine army of the sixth century cannot be understood solely in terms of a strict command hierarchy because of the presence and importance of competing and sometimes overlapping social networks.

The sixth chapter narrows the focus of the social networks of army officers to their families and their most personal relationships. It addresses the issue of nepotism within the Byzantine army by examining several families in military service. There is little evidence to suggest that an officer with a family member already in the army was preferred for high rank (with the exception of members of the imperial family), but there is ample evidence that multiple members of a family tended to serve in the military both at the same time and across generations. There is also evidence to suggest that a particular family might gain a reputation for a certain type of service, such as the family of Vitalian, who had rebelled against the emperor Anastasius (513). In the decades after the downfall of Vitalian (520), seven of his descendants (nephews, sons, and grandsons) served in the army. In addition, this chapter considers the immediate family, that is the wives and dependent children, of military officers. Most officers were married and many probably had children. Sometimes military men let concerns for their wives and children take precedence over their military duties, much to the irritation and condemnation of authors like Procopius. Belisarius' relationship with his wife Antonina is the most detailed example of such behavior, but the existence of other examples suggests Belisarius was not as unusual as Procopius made him out to be.

Chapter 7 ends the series of chapters examining the relationships of Byzantine army officers by addressing the relationships between officers and the soldiers they commanded. Officers, and the authors who often wrote from their viewpoint, most typically viewed soldiers in groups and

addressed them as such, but occasionally they dealt with individual, named soldiers. While officers likely had more meaningful relationships with other officers, they did occasionally single out soldiers for special treatment. This treatment could include praise in a speech, the promise of monetary reward, or the recruiting of the soldier into the officer's personal guardsmen (*bucellarii*). Far more common than these individual relationships was a sort of formalized group relationship in which both officers and soldiers viewed each other as faceless collections of individuals. Each side had expectations of the other ranging from obedience and loyalty to ensuring the flow of pay and the distribution of booty, and means of enforcing these expectations if they were not met.

The eighth chapter takes a step back from these relationships within the army to consider the wider relationship between army and society as a whole, particularly public perception of the army as an institution and army officers individually. Evidence for these attitudes is perhaps more plentiful than some would imagine, but it is widely scattered. Soldiers and officers seem to have generally approved of their army service as a whole, although they could be pushed to disobedience if normal operations were suspended for some reason, as happened occasionally in this period. Authors such as Procopius provide a viewpoint that could probably best be described as that of the elites. While these elites were intensely interested in the army, their opinion often seems to have been critical of both individual officers and the performance of the army as a whole. It is likely that average civilians spent much less time thinking or worrying about the army as an institution than those of higher socio-economic status. They were, however, quick to point out the misbehavior of officers and soldiers, which ranged from petty harassment to serious mistreatment and appalling violence. Evidence drawn from the available sources suggests that the popularity of the army varied wildly depending on whom it affected.

The book wraps up with a brief conclusion that recapitulates the social issues that influenced the organization and functioning of the Byzantine army in the sixth century. Although identities and various types of relationships are described in separate chapters, they of course existed side-by-side in an officer's life. The average Byzantine officer juggled treatment based on perceptions of his identity, his relationship with the emperor, other officers, his subordinate soldiers, civilians, and his family all at once. This meant that the army was much more complex in reality than it would have appeared on paper, all thanks to the way identities and relationships impacted the careers of Justinian's men.

CHAPTER 2

Byzantine Army Structure

The Byzantine army was versatile and structurally diverse.[1] It has been the subject of several excellent studies, and it is not intended to review all of their conclusions here.[2] Instead, this chapter provides a brief overview of the army to establish the setting for the examination of the careers and relationships of the men who served in it. The sixth century Byzantine army was administratively continuous with the army of the early Roman Empire, which has been thoroughly studied.[3] The Roman army evolved steadily over centuries, with the most radical changes coming first during the third-century crisis (235–284) and then again in the fourth century under the Constantinian dynasty (293–363).[4] While it is possible to present a good picture of the army in the sixth century, it is more difficult to explain exactly how it reached this form. Lack of evidence makes it challenging to assess the development of the army in the later fourth and fifth centuries. One of the best sources for the army of the period is itself

[1] Due to the nature of the sources, it is difficult to completely detail the organization of the army. Even when they actually discuss military structure, most of the time sources fail to specify numbers of soldiers in a unit, ranks of soldiers and officers, or even the official name of the unit. See Jones 1964, 1:654–5.

[2] Important monographs include Southern and Dixon 1996, Treadgold 1995, and Sarantis 2016. Among edited volumes with many fine contributions, see Cameron 1995, Maas 2004, Sabin, Van Wees, and Whitby 2007, Haldon 2007, and Sarantis and Christie 2013.

[3] See, for example, Webster 1985.

[4] For a summary, see Southern and Dixon 1996, 6.

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highly problematic. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a list of civil and military officials by rank and location, is an official and authoritative but not necessarily comprehensive document. Moreover, its date of composition is variously estimated. It is generally agreed to represent the army after 395, but the information is not uniform, with western officials and troops being updated more recently than eastern units.[5] Even this problematic evidence, which is among the best available, chiefly covers the very late fourth century. By the sixth century, sources like Procopius and his fellow historians give a good impression of the army, but even they do not provide the same specific detail on units that the *Notitia Dignitatum* had provided for the late fourth century. Naming every unit and detailing its history and where it was stationed at any particular time in the sixth century is therefore not possible. Still, a review of the army's structure and the way it functioned, as much as is known, provides a useful setting for the individuals and relationships described in the remainder of this book. This examination begins with a survey of the sixth-century army's basic divisions.

Basic Divisions

The key distinction in terms of the divisions of the army of the sixth century was that between field armies (*comitatenses*) and frontier armies (*limitanei*). The field armies were the backbone of the army and were primarily responsible for wars of conquest or significant defensive campaigns. They were mobile armies, kept separate from the frontier forces, and stationed in particular regions of the empire. They descended from the units of soldiers who were companions of the soldier-emperors in the third and early fourth centuries (*comitatus*). For most of the sixth century, there were four field armies stationed in specific regions of the empire, each commanded by a general known as a master of soldiers (*magister militum*). These regional field armies were stationed in Illyricum, Thrace, Mesopotamia, and Armenia.[6] Following the conquests of Africa, Italy and a portion of Spain, each was provided with a regional field army as well.[7] Two more field armies were designated as in the emperor's presence (*prae-*

[5] Southern and Dixon 1996, 1.

[6] The Army of the East was responsible for the entire swath of the Eastern frontier ranging from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The Army of Armenia was a creation of Justinian, designed to supplement the Army of the East and responsible for lands to the north of Mesopotamia. See Jones 1964, 1:655.

[7] Treadgold 1995, 15–17.

sentales), and were stationed near Constantinople, probably in Thrace and northwest Asia Minor. These field armies, although permanently based in a particular region, were in theory still mobile and could be sent anywhere they were needed.[8] For example, Belisarius took portions of the Army of the East to Africa in 533, and generals of Illyricum frequently led portions of their army to fight in the Italian theatre during the Ostrogothic War.[9] Whether at their home station in their assigned region or on campaign elsewhere, the field armies did the bulk of the heavy fighting, participated in large battles, and were typically the units described whenever a contemporary author wrote generally about soldiers or armies.

Although the frontier armies (*limitanei*) used to be discarded by historians as little better than an ill-equipped frontier militia, most modern scholarship ranks them higher. While these units were on the whole sometimes of inferior quality to those in the field armies, their troops were still trained and professional soldiers.[10] The frontier soldiers were stationed on all the major borders of the empire, and were usually grouped in armies commanded by dukes (*duces*). The forces of a duke could span several provinces and the military hierarchy he commanded was separate from the civilian, provincial hierarchy.[11] Although by the sixth century some of these soldiers lived on government lands, and many probably farmed to supplement their income, they were still paid a salary for their work as soldiers.[12] They served, as their name implies, on the frontiers and had responsibility for guarding roads and manning frontier forts. The frontier armies at times fought alongside units of the field armies against the same enemies, particularly on the eastern frontier against the Persians.[13] These frontier troops were considered important enough to the stability of a region that they were reconstituted in Africa following the Vandalic War.[14] Even if inferior to the field armies, the frontier armies were not expected to repel major

[8] Jones 1964, 1:660.

[9] For Belisarius and the Army of the East, see Procopius *Wars* 3.11.1–21 and Treadgold 1995, 15. For the generals of Illyricum, see Procopius *Wars* 6.13.17, 7.10.2.

[10] Jones 1964, 1:649; Treadgold 1995, 11; Isaac 1992.

[11] Treadgold 1995, 9.

[12] Jones 1964, 1:653, 661–2.

[13] Rhecithancus was the duke at either Damascus or Palmyra in 541 when he and his troops accompanied Belisarius on an invasion of Persian Mesopotamia (Procopius *Wars* 2.16.17–19). Malalas relates that the dukes of Phoenicia and Euphratesia joined elements of the Army of the East to bring Alamundarus to battle in 528 (Joh. Mal. 18.16). See also Jones 1964, 1:651.

[14] Jones 1964, 1:663; Southern and Dixon 1996, 65.

invasions by themselves and played an important role in maintaining security and order as well as serving as a garrison for critical border fortresses.[15]

In the literary source material, even in Procopius—our best military source of the whole century—the distinction between field army and frontier army is not always easy to follow. The soldiers of the field armies are often merely called 'soldiers' (στρατιῶται) or 'Roman soldiers.' In fact, there is a considerable prejudice in most literary sources in favor of the field armies, which were typically the bulk of the forces involved in the campaigns of conquest in the West or the major battles against the Persians in the East. Other sources, most notably papyri, tend to emphasize the frontier armies, which were the only troops permanently stationed in Egypt.[16] The lack of distinction in the sources between the two types of soldiers is probably partly due to the fact that the difference was so obvious in context that it was not necessary to point it out, and may also have been to avoid bogging down the narrative with such detail. In some instances, however, soldiers of the field and frontier armies would fight alongside one another in the same campaign, and in these cases only the specification of the title of their commanding officer would identify the soldiers of the different units.

The federates (*foederati*) of the sixth century were somewhat like special forces. In the fourth century, federates were non-Roman soldiers serving under their own officers by treaty with the Roman government. These arrangements were desirable because these units could be hired temporarily for a specific campaign and then sent back to their homes afterward with no long-term commitment or expense. Units of this type continued to exist and to play a major role in supplementing Roman armies in the sixth century, but by then they were known as allies (*symmachoi*). These allied forces can be found in most major conflicts: Belisarius brought a unit of Huns to Africa in 533, Narses had a close relationship with a unit of Heruls in Italy, and Arab forces under their own chieftains served with the Army of the East against Persia.[17] The federates of the sixth century had changed dramatically, having lost their identity as units of ethnic non-

[15] Benjamin Isaac has expertly described the *limitanei* in Palestine in Isaac 1989. See also Isaac 1992. In defense of the importance of the *limitanei*, see Whitby 2007a, 523.

[16] As explored in Isaac 1992.

[17] Belisarius brought 600 Massagetae (Huns) to Africa (Procopius *Wars* 3.11.11–12). Narses had a close relationship with the Heruls, and was even able to select their own commander from among them (Agathias *Histories* 1.11.3). On Narses and the Heruls, see also Whitby 1995, 106. The Ghassanid Arabs under Arethas fought with Belisarius at Callinicum (Procopius *Wars* 1.17.47, 1.18.7).

Romans serving under treaty. Procopius makes this clear, complaining that although 'formerly barbarians alone were enrolled in the federates, now there is nothing to hinder anybody from taking on this name.'[18] This suggests that the federate corps of the sixth century comprised both non-Roman and Roman soldiers, who were probably individually recruited rather than recruited in groups like the contemporary allies and former federates.[19] These new federates were not however just special soldiers in the normal units of the field armies. They received regular pay just as the soldiers of the field armies did, but they were grouped into their own units with their own commanders even when they served under a general and alongside units of the field army on campaigns.[20] Although it was most common to find federates with a field army, they could occasionally serve alongside frontier troops.[21] The federates were therefore something of a large special forces division with its own hierarchy and officers which could supplement and stiffen regular field or frontier forces when necessary.

This then was the breakdown of the major divisions of the Byzantine army of the sixth century. The army was divided between garrison forces on the frontiers and mobile field armies that did the majority of the heavy fighting, with special units of federates and temporarily hired units of allies available to assist where needed. To this picture however must be added the guardsmen (*bucellarii*) who generally and loosely defined were private retainers of high-ranking officers and officials.[22] The origins of the guardsmen lay in the Germanic tradition of military entourages and in the Roman institution of personal staff (*domestici*) that accompanied senior officials.[23] In practice, a guardsman had a dual nature, as both a private guard and a public soldier. All guardsmen swore loyalty to both their master and to the emperor.[24] This dual nature made them a useful resource for a general: Italian observers in the 530s described the importance

[18] Procopius *Wars* 3.11.3.

[19] Jones 1964, 1:664.

[20] See the description of the military forces under Belisarius in 533: Procopius *Wars* 3.11.5–15.

[21] Jones 1964, 1:665.

[22] The definitive work on the *bucellarii* is Schmitt 1994. See also Gascou 1976 and Haldon 1984, 101–2.

[23] Schmitt 1994, 156.

[24] Jones 1964, 1:666. Although in a private relationship with their master, *bucellarii* received their food and weapons from the state. On the mixture of private and public aspects of their role, see Lenski 2009, 159.

of Belisarius' guardsmen by exclaiming that 'one man's household was destroying the power of Theoderic (the former king and founder of the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy).'[25] The guardsmen are typically described as personal guardsmen of their masters, but their functions were many and varied and they could be a significant and noteworthy military force by themselves when numerous enough. In fact, some generals could command large numbers of such guards: in 540, during the Gothic War, Belisarius had 7000 guards, according to Procopius.[26] Smaller numbers were more common: Valerian had about 1000, Narses had fewer than 400, and most officers (even generals) probably had even fewer than that.[27] In addition to being used as a regiment on campaign or in the line of battle, these guardsmen were frequently employed for special missions and clearly enjoyed their employers' trust. Detachments of guards would be used for special operations and individual guards could be assigned to act as diplomats, messengers, or even in command of regular soldiers.[28] These guards could be recruited from Romans or non-Romans alike, and family members of the general appeared frequently in this capacity.[29] While this may seem to emphasize the private nature of the guardsmen, it is worth remembering that the emperor maintained some control over their disposition. When Belisarius was dismissed from his command in the East in 542 and later sent to Italy in 544, he was forced to leave his guards behind in the East.[30] The interest that the sources of the period take in describing guardsmen makes it clear that they were an important part of the army at the time despite their small size in relation to the other forces.

[25] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.20–21.

[26] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.20. Modern historians have criticized Procopius' figure. Hugh Elton has charged that the number is 'probably an exaggeration' (Elton 2007, 282). Michael Whitby argues that this was too large a number of guards to be 'employed permanently by an individual' (Whitby 1995, 117). There is no particular reason why this number has to be an exaggeration, and neither critic has suggested a plausible motivation for Procopius to exaggerate it. As Belisarius' private secretary, Procopius was in excellent position to know exactly how many *bucellarii* his boss employed. Moreover, Belisarius is known to have needed soldiers in the Ostrogothic War, and known to have been rich from his victory over the Vandals. It is not hard to imagine that he would hire as many soldiers as he could, even up to 7000. The number does seem unusually high, but this does not mean it is incorrect.

[27] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.18–20, 7.27.3; Agathias *Histories* 1.19.4–5; Schmitt 1994, 162–3.

[28] See Chap. 7.

[29] For example, Damianus, the nephew of Valerian, was in command of 400 of his uncle's guardsmen (Procopius *Wars* 6.7.26).

[30] Procopius *Wars* 7.10.1, 7.12.10.

Fig. 2.1 Two men, possibly guardsmen, spearing a tiger. From the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, Istanbul. Photo by the author.

Size and Units

The overall size of the army in terms of numbers of soldiers under arms is closely related to the number and nature of its divisions. That does not mean that the size of the army at any specific point is easy to determine. It is a question that has vexed historians for some time.[31] The sources rarely use exact numbers and when they do it is primarily for a polemical purpose. The most frequently cited figure for the sixth century is one given by Agathias, who claimed that the army size 'attained by the earlier emperors,' which he specifies as 645,000 men, had dwindled by 559 under Justinian to 150,000.[32] Historians have used these figures in various ways. Theodor Mommsen and A.H.M. Jones both put estimates of the actual size of the military establishment of the fourth century in range of the former figure: Mommsen at 554,500 and Jones at 600,000.[33] Warren Treadgold, in a comprehensive review of the available sources combined with shrewd estimations, argued that Agathias' second figure referred only to the field armies. He agreed with this number, setting the size of the field armies in 559 at 150,000 and estimated the size of the frontier armies to be slightly larger at 176,000, making the combined army size somewhere

[31] See the summary in Treadgold 1995, 3–6.
[32] Agathias *Histories* 5.13.7–8.
[33] Mommsen 1889, 257; Jones 1964, 1:683.

around 300,000 men.[34] Succeeding scholarship has not veered far from Treadgold's estimate.[35] That this was the total for a shrunken empire (in other words, one that did not contain the former Western Roman Empire) would explain both why the number is smaller than that of the fourth century and why Agathias might use this information as a polemical complaint. More important than the exact number of soldiers under arms is that the army of the sixth century was a large and diverse force composed of many different units spread throughout the empire and organized for different purposes.

In the daily lives of soldiers and officers, the size of the units to which they belonged was of considerably more importance than the overall size of the army. Each of the field armies probably contained between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers.[36] Most large campaign armies during this period were also likely to have been about 20,000 men strong, including the forces commanded by Belisarius at Dara in 530 or those commanded by Narses at Busta Gallorum in 552.[37] These armies were of course broken down into smaller units for easier command and control. The basic units of the field armies were still the legions, descended from the classical legions of the early Roman Empire and rich with history. The legions of the sixth century were smaller than their classical counterparts; each typically contained about 1000 men.[38] Soldiers of the federates or the frontier armies might serve in still smaller units of 500 men, which were also leftovers of the early empire, named cohorts and alae.[39] When desirable, legions and other units could be combined, or brand new larger combat units of about 3000 men could be created. Although described variously in literary sources, sometimes by the region in which their soldiers were recruited (such as 'the Army of Isaurians'), these units came to be termed brigades (*moirai*).[40] It is important to stress that both the size and name of units larger than a legion could vary considerably. This should not be surprising

[34] Treadgold 1995, 59–63.

[35] See Haldon 1999, 99–101; Elton 2007, 285; and Lee 2007a, 77. More recent volumes such as Sarantis and Christie 2013 ignore the question altogether, which indicates that the answer is perhaps considered settled pending new information.

[36] Treadgold 1995, 63. See also Procopius *Wars* 1.15.11, 1.18.5.

[37] Dara: Procopius *Wars* 1.13.9–39 and see also Haldon 2001, 30. Busta Gallorum: Procopius *Wars* 8.29–32 and see also Rance 2005, 447. Compare Elton 2007, 285.

[38] Elton 2007, 279.

[39] Elton 2007, 280.

[40] Elton 2007, 282. Maurice *Strategikon* 3.6–9.

given the complexity of the institution in question and the period of time the institution had to evolve.[41]

On smaller units—within the legion, cohort, or alae—we are on safer ground thanks to the information provided by the *Strategikon* of Maurice, a handbook on military matters created near the end of the sixth century.[42] The manual talks of regiments (*banda*), which appear to have been units of about 500 men or less.[43] So a legion would be divided into multiple *banda*, but a cohort or alae which was already at a strength of 500 soldiers would not. Regiments were further divided into groups of 100 men, roughly comparable to the centuries of the old Roman legions but now commanded by officers adorned with the Greek title *hecatontarch* (commander of one hundred). These groups were further subdivided into units of ten men each, commanded by *decarchs* (commanders of ten), and then into even smaller squads of four or five men each, commanded by *tetrarchs* (commanders of four) and *pentarchs* (commanders of five) respectively.[44] So during his service in the field army a Roman soldier would have several layers of camaraderie with his fellow soldiers and his officers starting with the very close relationships of his five and ten man squad, then the larger 100 man unit, the 500 man regiment, the 1000 man legion, the several thousand man brigade, and the field army to which that brigade belonged.

Ranks and Positions

Although the chain of command of the Byzantine army should be linked closely to the unit structure just described, it remains somewhat obscure thanks to the terminology used in the sources. Many positions continued to have official Latin names, but most literary sources of the period translate these official titles into generic Greek nouns. For example, although we know from the *Codex Justinianus* and other sources that the top generals of the empire were titled *magistri militum*, most of the Greek sources of the sixth century describe them only as *strategoi* (generals).[45] This sim-

[41] Elton 2007, 284.

[42] For a good interpretation of the descriptions and diagrams of the *Strategikon*, see Treadgold 1995, 93–96.

[43] Maurice *Strategikon* 3.1–4.

[44] Maurice *Strategikon* 1.3.

[45] Southern and Dixon 1996, 64. Often the word *strategos* was modified with geographical terms to offer an approximation of the Latin title. For example, Procopius describes Belisarius

plification is multiplied through the hierarchy for officers in much less well-known positions, making specificity in ranks extremely difficult when reading literary sources. The top of the military hierarchy, however, is clear enough. Generals with the title of *magister militum* led the regional and expeditionary field armies. When they were at the head of one of the regular field armies, they were titled after their region, such as the General of Armenia (*magister militum per Armeniam*), and when they were in command of an expeditionary force, they were frequently titled *magister militum (vacans)* to indicate that their command was free of regional affiliation.[46] As already mentioned, dukes were the commanders of the frontier armies. Most frontier provinces had a duke or shared one with a nearby province.[47] The dukes were stationed in various forts throughout their commands. It seems that the regular generals had authority over the dukes within their area of command so that the General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*) could issue orders to the duke of Palestine, for example.

The very top of the hierarchy of both field armies and frontier armies is quite clear but, unfortunately, the officer positions below them are more difficult to discern. Thanks to the *Strategikon*, we know at least the official names of the positions. A field army led by a general was split into several large brigades (*moira*), each of which was commanded by a brigade commander (*merarch*). A brigade was divided into legions of about 1000 men, each of which was commanded by a commander of a thousand (*chiliarch*). Legions were split into two smaller units of about 500 men, each known as regiments (*banda*) or sometimes still as cohorts or alae after the early imperial model. Officers with the rank of tribune commanded these regiments.[48] The *vicarius* (deputy) was the second-in-command to a tribune and had an important job since the tribune might frequently be absent on assignment or consulting with higher-ranking officers.[49] To further complicate matters, by the end of the sixth century dukes were appearing as commanders within a field army and not strictly as the generals of the frontier

not as *magister militum per Orientem* but as being the general (*strategos*) in command 'of the troops of the East' (Procopius *Wars* 3.11.1–21).

[46] Jones 1964, 1:535. This distinction does not always appear in Greek sources, as both generals (*magistri*) of named regions and generals without regional distinction (*magistri militum vacans*) were dubbed *strategoi*.

[47] Jones 1964, 2:Map IV.

[48] Jones 1964, 1:640.

[49] Jones 1964, 1:643, 675.

armies.[50] It is precisely these ranks that cause the most confusion in the literary sources of the sixth century. Authors of the period were eager to point out the generals in their story (who were often the protagonists or important as targets of scorn) and usually ignore the officers below the rank of tribune altogether because they were not considered important enough to mention. However, officers in between fall in a curious middle ground where they were important enough to mention but not crucial enough for the author to provide detailed information about their rank or position. So although we know the official position names from the *Strategikon*, literary sources of the sixth century almost never use those official terms. Procopius frequently identifies all such mid-ranking officers generically as commanders (*archons*), while Menander and Theophylact have a tendency to use the equally ambiguous term 'brigadier' (*taxiarchos*).[51] None of these authors use the Latin title *comes rei militaris*, which was common for mid-level commanders in the fourth century.[52] This terminology generally makes it impossible to discern just what type of unit an officer commanded or to determine the exact hierarchy of an army. So although we know that the army of Belisarius in Italy in the 530s, to take one example, should have had brigades, legions, and regiments, we cannot know how they were organized or who commanded them in most instances. When commanders and senior officers are mentioned, they appear only as *archons* without further description of their rank or just what they commanded. In addition to the difficulties caused by the vague terminology of the sources, the hierarchy of ranks especially in field armies on campaign (about which the sources write the most) seems to have been rather less than strict or predictable. The overall influence or authority an officer had and even his ability to command the unit to which he was assigned probably depended significantly on the personalities of the officers and their relationships with one

[50] Jones argued that in the sixth century, dukes could command federates and units of the field armies (Jones 1964, 1:660, 665). On the increased role of dukes, see also Jones, Martindale, and Morris 1971 [Hereafter *PLRE*], Guduin 1, 3:561.

[51] John the son of Sisiniolus was sent as a commander with Solomon on his second trip to Africa and described as an *archon* (Procopius *Wars* 4.19.1). Damianus, described as a *taxiarchos*, was employed by the general Tiberius as a messenger to Justin II in 571 (Menander Protector *History* 15.5). Vitalius was the commander in charge of the right wing at the Battle of Solachon in 585 and is also described as a *taxiarchos* (Theophylact *History* 2.3.1).

[52] On the relationship between the vague titles *archon, taxiarchos*, and *comes rei militaris,* see *PLRE* 3: Theodorus 21 at 1251 and Stein 1949, 2:814–5.

another.[53] For example, although a duke of the frontier army commanded significantly more men than a commander of a thousand in the field army, when the army of the duke combined with the field army of a general to repel an invasion, the commander of a thousand might temporarily outrank the duke because of his closer relationship with the commanding general.

The bottom of the officer hierarchy was much clearer and less subject to flux even when units were moved around or combined. This is because when transferring units regiments seem to have been the smallest unit that would be moved, so the hierarchy within the regiment would remain constant. Also, the officers below the regimental commander did not attract the attention of authors like Procopius or Agathias, but the ranks are known thanks to the *Strategikon*. Below the tribune and his deputy, who commanded the regiment, were commanders of one hundred (*hecatontarchs*), who commanded units of 100 soldiers including themselves. As we have already seen, commanders of ten (*decarchs*), who commanded companies of ten men including themselves, reported up to the *hecatontarchs*. Each company of ten men was split into smaller squads: *pentarchs* commanded five men including themselves and were the front ranks of the company, and *tetrarchs* commanded four men including themselves and made up the rearguard of the company.[54] In addition to these positions, each regiment of 500 men had its share of staff officers, heralds, and musicians that are also largely ignored in contemporary literary sources.[55] The entry-level officer rank was *protector*. All officers ranked as at least protectors and all soldiers promoted to officer rank would be promoted to protector first, but protector was a rank and not a position, so one could become a protector without actually gaining the positions described in this section.

Recruitment in the Sixth-Century Army

A key question in the structure and organization of the army is just how Byzantine soldiers were recruited. The means of recruitment in the sixth-century Byzantine army remains as obscure as many other features of army

[53] On the importance of personalities and relationships to exercising authority in the army, see Chap. 5.

[54] Maurice *Strategikon* 1.3.

[55] Each regiment had about twelve staff officers, including surgeons, heralds, cape bearers, trumpeters, and drummers. See Treadgold 1995, 95.

structure. Evidence is in fact slight enough that two equally plausible but contradictory theories of army recruitment in the period have been advanced. One theory posits that recruitment was primarily voluntary by the sixth century, while the other maintains that conscription remained an important means of finding soldiers. Before proceeding to these two arguments, it is worth noting that it is generally accepted that recruitment during the fourth and fifth centuries relied heavily upon conscription.[56] The regular conscription of this period was established by Diocletian and preserved in law. Moreover circumstantial evidence in literary sources exists to suggest that military service was indeed unpopular enough to warrant the necessity of conscription: men resorted to desertion and even self-mutilation to avoid service.[57]

The first theory argues that conscription had become unnecessary by the sixth century and had been replaced entirely by voluntary recruitment. Historians who have advanced this claim have marshaled a range of evidence to support it, the most prominent being that the compilers of the *Justinian Code* removed all traces of laws for conscription, which had been so prevalent in the *Theodosian Code*.[58] For Jones, this one fact was decisive and guaranteed that recruitment in this period was 'entirely voluntary.'[59] Jones seemed surprised by his own conclusion, arguing that military service was not more attractive, pay was not improved, and abuses were rampant. To try to explain why military service had become popular enough to obviate the need for conscription, Jones suggested that perhaps economic conditions generally were worse, so that more men were willing to become soldiers, and that they were also encouraged by the local nature of service.[60] Research since Jones however generally concludes that the Roman economy was booming before the arrival of the plague in Justinian's reign.[61] The emperor Anastasius left at his death in 518 a reserve of about 23 million gold coins (*solidi*), an enormous sum. [62] That Anastasius could have assembled such a large treasury reserve in a poor economy seems unlikely.

[56] Jones 1964, 1:615.
[57] Jones 1964, 1:615–9.
[58] Ravegnani 1998, 15.
[59] Jones 1964, 1:668.
[60] Jones 1964, 1:669–670. Southern and Dixon 1996, 65, adds as an additional possibility for the popularity of military service that prospective recruits were enthusiastic about taking part in expansionist campaigns.
[61] Ward-Perkins 2005, 110–137.
[62] Procopius *Secret History* 19.7.

Treadgold offered a different explanation that accounts for the health of the Roman economy and seals the argument for voluntary recruitment much more firmly. Looking at the available evidence, he plausibly argued that Anastasius, among his financial reforms, replaced the issue of actual rations, uniforms, and weapons with generous cash allowances that allowed soldiers to purchase their own goods. Treadgold reconstructed the base pay of soldiers and argued that by this change Anastasius effectively raised the discretionary pay of soldiers in the field armies by two-thirds.[63] By doing this, Anastasius was able to transform the field armies into an 'overwhelmingly native force of eager volunteers.'[64] A pay raise in the reign of Anastasius neatly explains the dichotomy between the massive unpopularity of military service with a system of conscription in the fourth century and the popularity of service with a system of voluntary recruitment in the sixth century. An act of Maurice lends further credence to this argument. In 594, he was considered generous for allowing sons of men killed in military service to take their fathers' places in the army.[65] That it was considered a boon for sons to be guaranteed military service is a far cry from the days when men had to be conscripted into the army and fought to avoid that fate with all their might. The desirability of military service had by this point changed dramatically.

Although this is an attractive and convincing argument, Whitby has shown that it should not necessarily be assumed that conscription had completely ended by this period. He cautioned that an argument from silence is not definitive: merely because the laws do not explicitly mention conscription does not mean it did not occur.[66] For Whitby, recruitment in Justinianic armies was based on a traditional compulsory levy, which was 'a fact of life that did not require an imperial edict or rescript to confirm its existence.'[67] He marshaled a smattering of indirect evidence to suggest that conscription continued to exist, including references in the *Justinian Code* to the requirement for landowners to provide a recruit for the army.[68] More compelling than his argument that formal conscription continued to exist is Whitby's contention that conscription and voluntary recruitment were not necessarily complete opposites. He noted that voluntary

[63] Treadgold 1995, 149–154.
[64] Treadgold 1995, 203.
[65] Theophylact *History* 7.1.7.
[66] Whitby 1995, 68.
[67] Whitby 1995, 77.
[68] Whitby 1995, 78–80.

recruitment might have included liberal 'encouragement' for volunteers to emerge, with the implication that landowners might have persuaded or forced their tenants to 'volunteer.'[69] This is not hard to imagine and is a caveat worth remembering.

Overshadowing this whole issue of whether conscription was necessary is the question of whether there was a broad enough pool of potential recruits to man the army without resorting to conscription. For John L. Teall, the lack of enough potential Roman recruits caused an alleged increase in non-Roman recruitment.[70] A. Fotiou accepted Teall's arguments, and used the anonymous dialogue *On Political Science* to support a contention that there was 'a reluctance or even refusal of Byzantine young men from rural areas to enlist in Justinian's army.'[71] Fotiou's evidence for this claim, based on the dialogue, is almost entirely indirect. The dialogue is a request for social improvements: that the government improve relations between farmers and soldiers; that the government pay the soldiers on time; and complaints that too many able-bodied men were entering clerical orders instead of the army, and that too many young men preferred the circus factions to army service.[72] That each of these four arguments prove the unpopularity of military service may be rejected in turn. The first two do not directly reflect an undesirability of military service in general, the third was nothing new in the sixth century, and the fourth did not even affect the rural peoples that made up the bulk of army recruits. Fotiou's second point, regarding the tardiness of military pay, may have had some effect on recruitment late in Justinian's reign. Rumors of late pay may have deterred some from enlisting, but the period of time in which pay was tardy was small relative to the sixth century as a whole, and it is unlikely that those who wanted to enlist would have held back for that reason alone. Certainly, however, tardiness of pay would have had some impact on whether soldiers who were already enlisted felt satisfied with their situation.[73] In summary, it seems plausible to conclude that there are no truly sufficient grounds for claiming that the imperial government faced a significant manpower shortage in its efforts to recruit men into the

[69] Whitby 1995, 68, 78. See also Ravegnani 1998, 25 on cases of exceptional recruitment.

[70] Teall 1965, 315. See Chap. 3.

[71] Fotiou 1988, 67.

[72] Fotiou 1988, 68–75.

[73] See Chap. 8, 'The Opinion of Soldiers and Officers'.

army. Whitby argued that it is 'difficult to detect any decline in the size of the armies in the late sixth century.'[74]

The bulk of the evidence, therefore, supports the contention that most recruitment that occurred in sixth-century Byzantium was voluntary.[75] It must be acknowledged that there is some ambiguity between conscription and voluntary recruitment, and voluntary recruitment was not always free from 'encouragement' by higher officials or landlords. Especially when a general showed up with an army in a region to recruit more soldiers, it is easy to imagine individuals being strong-armed into 'volunteering' for the army.[76] Nevertheless, on the whole, the disappearance of explicit laws on conscription from the *Justinian Code*, and the improvement in the quality of a soldier's lifestyle thanks to the pay raise of Anastasius, meant that recruitment must usually have been voluntary. The chance to serve in the army meant a stable living, which to poor Roman peasants must have been highly desirable. Although just one example, the story of the future emperor Justin I and his poverty-stricken companions leaving their homes in the Balkans to move to Constantinople to enlist in the army is worth remembering.[77] Recruits seem always to have been available in sixth-century Byzantium. The key question for Justinian and subsequent emperors was not whether they could convince enough soldiers to enlist, but whether they could pay them once they were under arms.

Promotion

Once soldiers had signed up for the army, they could expect steady employment and usually steady promotion over the course of their military careers, barring death or disability. Below the hierarchy of officers described earlier in this chapter was a host of enlisted soldiers whose ranks are almost never mentioned in the literary sources. In fact, enlisted soldiers are mentioned by name and as individuals incredibly infrequently altogether, as historians of the time focused almost exclusively on the officers.[78] Despite this lack of attention, it is clear from the law codes and occasional casual refer-

[74] Whitby 1995, 100.

[75] Lee 2004, 118.

[76] For example, when Belisarius recruited in Thrace before his second campaign in Italy (Procopius *Wars* 7.10.1). See Ravegnani 1998, 26.

[77] Procopius *Secret History* 6.2–3.

[78] Procopius *Wars* 8.29.13–28 is a rare example of named enlisted soldiers as active agents in Procopius' story. See Chap. 7.

ences that soldiers did have a ladder of ranks that they could climb over time. Soldiers entered the army with the rank of recruit (*tiro*) and while holding this rank did not receive the full pay of a regular soldier. At some point after recruitment soldiers were promoted to the basic soldier rank (*pedes* for infantry, *eques* for cavalrymen). After an unspecified number of years of service, soldiers could be promoted to senior soldier (*semissalis*) and would then be paid at a rate of one and a half times the salary of the basic soldier.[79] After this sequence, soldiers might be promoted through a series of higher enlisted ranks, in ascending order: *circitor, biarchus, centenarius, ducenarius, senator, primicerius.*[80] The *primicerius* was the most senior enlisted soldier of his regiment and had the highest salary of all the enlisted ranks. Of course, not all soldiers would progress through most of these ranks, let alone reach the rank of *primicerius.* Such promotion as did occur for enlisted soldiers seems to have been automatic by length of service. In other words, promotions occurred at set intervals in a soldier's career, essentially independent of the soldier's performance or reputation. Seniority and survival were the only essential requirements. Promotions might come sooner for those who were exceptionally competent or who offered the correct bribe.[81] Instead of receiving promotion along these ranks, a soldier might be promoted to *protector* and join the officer ranks. By the sixth century many senior soldiers received promotion to this rank near the end of their careers or perhaps as a reward upon retirement.[82] Of course the primary reason soldiers desired promotion was to gain access to the increased pay that each rank offered. As is to be expected, it seems that the pay for each grade was sequentially higher than the grade before it.[83] The government occasionally tried to use this scale to its financial advantage by slowing or blocking the promotion of lower-ranked soldiers and encouraging the retirement of higher-ranked soldiers.[84] Such a scheme could save the government money in the short term (or make money for unscrupulous auditors acting on their own initiative), although at the expense of the resentment of the soldiers.

[79] Treadgold 1995, 90; Jones 1964, 1:634.

[80] Jones 1964, 1:634. Compare the analysis of Treadgold 1995, 90–1 and Ravegnani 1998, 33–5.

[81] Jones 1964, 1:633.

[82] Jones 1964, 1:658. See Chap. 4, 'Appointment: Gaining a Position.'

[83] Treadgold 1995, 149.

[84] Procopius *Secret History* 24.2–6.

Promotion for officers was not automatic depending upon seniority, but it would be a mistake to assume that officer promotion was instead completely meritocratic. The reasons for officer promotions and the career paths of officers are in fact quite obscure.[85] While evidence is slim, it seems likely that promotion through the lowest officer ranks was more meritocratic than that in the higher ranks. Many undeserving men likely received promotion to the rank of *protector*, either through graft or as a reward for long service, but as this did not necessarily entail an active position in the officer corps it was not a threat to military competency. Positions like commanders of small units (*pentarchs*, *decarchs*, and *hecatontarchs*) ostensibly were assigned on the basis of merit: the *Strategikon* instructs that these men should be chosen for their courage and fighting skills.[86] To earn promotion to positions higher than *hecatontarch*, it is likely that a considerable amount of personal influence was required. Such influence was known as *suffragium*, the recommendation provided or interest shown by an important man.[87] At the highest level, to earn promotion to duke of a frontier army or general of a field army, for example, an officer would have needed the support of the emperor or someone who had the ear of the emperor.[88] For positions lower than these, the direct support of the emperor was not crucial, but the influence and recommendation of other important officers in the army was probably decisive.[89] Undoubtedly merit played a role in many promotions, and even in situations where the personal support of a senior officer was the deciding factor in earning a promotion, that senior officer might have taken merit into consideration himself in deciding whom to favor with his recommendation. But the qualifications for promotion to these officer positions were certainly nebulous, neither entirely dependent upon seniority nor merit, and subject to the relationships an officer formed during his career.

One of the strengths of the sixth-century Byzantine army was its diversity. The different divisions, from field army and frontier army to federates, allies, and guardsmen had unique roles but also worked well in various combinations. Each unit had its own hierarchy of officers, even if the literary sources make it difficult to discern exactly what each officer did.

[85] Elton 2007, 306.
[86] Maurice *Strategikon* 1.5.
[87] Jones 1964, 1:391.
[88] See Chap. 4.
[89] See Chaps. 5 and 6.

Recruitment seems to have been largely voluntary. Military service was desirable enough, probably due to steady employment and a reasonable salary, to routinely attract recruits. While some may have been coerced to join, systematic conscription seems to have not been the rule in this period. Once in the army, soldiers advanced through the ranks based primarily on length of service. Promotion for officers, on the other hand, was probably informed by some combination of merit and personal interest and recommendation from men with whom the officer had a relationship. It is the course of the careers of Byzantine army officers and the relationships that these men formed during them that are the subject of this book.

CHAPTER 3

Identity in the Army: Romans and Barbarians

Now that some basic features of the Byzantine army of the sixth century have been described, we are prepared to analyze the social issues and relationships that impacted the careers of Byzantine military officers. This chapter starts this process with an examination of the nature of cultural and ethnic identity in the sixth century and how those identities impacted the relationships and careers of military men. The study of identity and its importance in Late Antiquity is lately very much in vogue. It has been the focus of numerous articles, monographs, and edited volumes.[1] Much of this recent work has, however, focused on non-Roman or post-Roman identity, and therefore has deliberately excluded the study of early Byzantine identity. So in this chapter it is necessary to explain the Roman identity of the Byzantines, their conception of the non-Romans with whom they interacted, and how questions of identity might have impacted the careers of Byzantine army officers.[2]

[1] It is beyond the scope of this book to provide a complete bibliography of this popular subject, but as a starting point one might consider Conant 2012, Amory 1997, and Geary 1983. See also Pohl and Heydemann 2013 and, generally, the studies produced as part of the European Science Foundation's 'The Transformation of the Roman World' series, especially Pohl and Reimitz 1998.

[2] As a reminder, in this book the terms Byzantine and Roman are used more or less interchangeably, as the Byzantines considered themselves to be, and were in fact, Romans. Compare Page 2008, who combines the two terms and refers to 'Byzantine Romans.'

D.A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*,
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It is not controversial to suggest that identity in Late Antiquity was complex and subject to change. Something of this complexity may be gleaned from two brief anecdotes. According to the chronicler Menander Protector, the Persian king Khusrau I once sent an army against the Suani, a Transcaucasian people, in order to bring them to submission. In 562 AD, Khusrau himself, reflecting back on the incident, boasted that when this army arrived, the Suani 'in fear became Persians instead of Suani.'[3] Khusrau might have been exaggerating in this boast. Even if the Suani did adopt the name of 'Persians' the change would have been due to fear rather than to a genuine desire to switch identities. But the reality or the sincerity of this transformation is largely immaterial. What is important in this example is that Khusrau could imagine the Suani making this change at his behest. Further, contemporaries such as Menander could find it reasonable enough to report. That the Suani could be said to have so abruptly changed identity is indicative of its relative fluidity in the sixth-century Mediterranean world. The second anecdote suggests similar transformation, but over the course of a generation rather than in a single moment. The commander Dabragezas was an Antian who served in the Byzantine army under the command of the general Martin in Lazica. His designation as an Antian and his non-Roman name set him apart very clearly. However, Dabragezas had a son who also served in the Byzantine army. The son's name was Leontius, which is a good Greek name.[4] The cultural change over the generation gap is noticeable and it seems to indicate that Dabragezas intended to project a Roman identity in the choice of name for his son.[5] While care must be taken in using names as evidence of cultural and ethnic identity, the difference between this father and his son's names is rather striking.

Before examining how identity might have affected the relationships and careers of officers in the sixth-century army, it is necessary to provide working definitions for the terms associated with these issues. Defining terms such as ethnicity and culture is a thorny problem that has been treated

[3] Menander Protector *History* 6.1.505–6.

[4] Agathias *Histories* 3.21.6, 4.18.1.

[5] This kind of change was not new to the sixth century. Roman identity had been forged in a similar way since the Roman Republic. As peoples (Gauls, Spaniards, Thracians, Cappadocians, Armenians) were assimilated into the Roman state they adopted Roman naming conventions over the course of generations.

extensively by both historians and anthropologists.[6] Stephen Mitchell and Geoffrey Greatrex have rightly cautioned that these terms are elastic and that a strict definition of either would be arbitrary.[7] Nonetheless, some sort of general definition needs to be given here. Cultures may be defined as groups with complex social behaviors, long histories, and institutions dedicated to maintaining their identity. The Romans, native inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire, were the chief cultural group of Late Antiquity.[8] Ethnic identity may be considered to exist on a lower level of sophistication than cultural identity because ethnic groups are generally less complex than major cultural groups.[9] Ethnicity, as Patrick Amory puts it, is essentially the definition of a group, 'usually on the basis of its belief in common descent and a shared past.'[10] Ethnicity in the sixth century represents the identification by the Romans of a particular people (Latin *gens*, Greek γένος). Thus examples of ethnic identity in the sixth century include Goths, Franks, and Lombards. This is the primary way that the sources of the sixth century identify non-Romans. Within Roman culture, ethnic identity existed after a fashion but was wholly subsumed in the larger cultural identity of being Roman.[11] Although the Byzantines continued to refer to individual Romans with ethnic labels (such as, 'a Thracian'), these labels chiefly referred to geographical origin rather than ethnic group membership in the same sense as non-Roman labels.[12]

Cultural and ethnic identity in the sixth century cannot be addressed appropriately without considering the terms 'Roman' and 'barbarian' and their interaction. For the term 'Roman,' it is important to acknowledge that in Late Antiquity there were multiple Roman identities, and that the concept was used differently in diverse settings. Recent research has shown how Roman identity was used in different ways in the various post-Roman

[6] See Mitchell and Greatrex 2000, Pohl 1998, Kaldellis 2007, Kaldellis 2013, Pohl 2012, Armstrong 1982, Anderson 2006, Poole 1999.

[7] Mitchell and Greatrex 2000, xi.

[8] Kaldellis 2007, 43. Kaldellis prefers to call the Romans a nation-state rather than simply a cultural group, and Page prefers to call the Romans an ethnic group (Page 2008, 11–14).

[9] Mitchell and Greatrex 2000, xii.

[10] Amory 1997, 14.

[11] Kaldellis 2007, 83–88. Cicero had recognized that Romans could simultaneously hold a regional ethnic identity along with their Roman identity centuries earlier. In Book 2 of *De Legibus*, he acknowledged that men could have two *patriae*, one of birth, and one by citizenship. He stressed however that loyalty to Rome took precedence over loyalty to the *patria* of one's birth. Cicero *De Legibus* 2.5, cited by Ando 2000, 10–11.

[12] Kaldellis 2007, 97.

kingdoms in the western Mediterranean.[13] For the purposes of this book, the focus can be narrowed to Roman identity as defined by the inhabitants of the early Byzantine (or late Roman) Empire in the sixth century. This version of Roman identity has not received the same attention as the usage of Roman identity in the Late Antique West, but it still has been the source of some disagreement. While there is consensus that Byzantines referred to themselves as Romans, there is less agreement over what it meant for the Byzantines to be Roman.[14] The standard argument of Byzantinists for decades has been that the Byzantine Empire was a heterogeneous and multicultural empire tied together by imperial autocracy and Orthodox Christianity.[15] Anthony Kaldellis has successfully challenged this definition with his argument that Byzantium was essentially a nation-state of the Romans. For Kaldellis, the basis of this Roman state was 'a social consensus that all belonged to a single historical political community defined by laws, institutions, religion, language, and customs, in other words to a nation.'[16] This definition of the Byzantine Empire, with its explanation that 'being Roman' meant being an accepted member of the Roman political community, serves as the basis for the use of the term 'Roman' in this book. It is appropriate, however, to offer some caution that being Roman might not mean the same thing to all Romans in the Byzantine Empire. Ioannis Stouraitis has cautioned that the difference in literacy between the elite and the lower classes indicates that being Roman was different for each.[17] It is therefore worth considering that being Roman might have

[13] See Conant 2012 and, less persuasive but still cited routinely, Amory 1997.

[14] See discussion in Kaldellis 2007, 45–47. While Kaldellis argues that the Byzantines really were Romans, others are less certain and continue to see the Byzantines as only 'superficially Roman' or as one of three 'post-Roman' cultures along with the West and the Islamic caliphates. See for example Amory 1997, 31 and Pohl 2012, 22.

[15] See, for example, Mango 1980, 13–31 and Ahrweiler and Laiou 1998, 2. For a summary of this common view, see Kaldellis 2007, 75 and Cameron 2014, 55–57.

[16] Kaldellis 2007, 43. Kaldellis further elucidated his views in Kaldellis 2012 and Kaldellis 2013. But see the criticism of Cameron 2014, 55–57. More recently, Kaldellis doubled down on his argument by positing that the Byzantine state was a monarchically-ruled republic (Kaldellis 2015).

[17] Stouraitis 2014, 179–185. Stouraitis argues that Roman identity in the sense described by Kaldellis was the mentality only of the ruling elite, which is probably pressing his point too far (206). That lower classes experienced Roman identity differently is reasonable to consider. That lower classes felt only to be beleaguered and oppressed by a Roman elite is not. In a similar vein to Stouraitis, see Page 2008, 50 but see also the criticisms of Kaldellis, Review of Page, *Being Byzantine,* in *The Medieval Review*, April 2009.

meant something different for the poor and the powerless than it did for the elite authors writing about the Byzantine army of the sixth century. In this chapter, most of the focus is on the opinions of those elite authors and the army officers they knew and it is not intended to suggest that all or even a majority of Byzantines' opinions are reflected in these definitions of identity.

By the sixth century, being Roman had ceased to be a matter of being born in Rome itself or even being a descendant of Roman colonists. The emperor Caracalla's edict granting all inhabitants in the empire citizenship in 212 AD, along with centuries of Roman rule, meant that being Roman was something that largely transcended definition by descent (the hallmark of an ethnic group).[18] An important aspect of the Roman cultural identity was the Romans' belief that they were superior to peoples they considered less civilized, most of whom they labeled barbarians. Barbarism was traditionally set opposite to the civilization of Roman society.[19] While the Greeks had pioneered the term 'barbarian,' Romans had been at work disengaging the concept from the Greek definition since the Republic. Greeks saw barbarism in terms of language and descent. For them, individuals labeled barbarians were not just less civilized; they were the antithesis of Greeks in every way. The Roman conception of barbarians, emerging particularly clearly in the writing of Cicero, saw barbarians as uncivilized not because of descent but because of *mores*, or customs and character.[20] For Romans, barbarians were not just their opposite, but existed somewhere along a continuum of civilization.[21] This suggested that barbarians could grow more civilized over time, and that some peoples who were labeled barbarian might be less uncivilized than others. As Kaldellis has suggested, 'not all barbarians were necessarily barbaric.'[22] The Romans certainly did not believe that there was a universal barbarian culture.[23] Since neither Roman identity nor the label of barbarism that the Romans placed on other peoples depended upon descent, it was possible

[18] For a more detailed examination of how Caracalla's edict changed the nature of Roman citizenship and raised it above descent identification, see Mathisen 2006.

[19] Dauge 1981, 805–809, Lechner 1955, 294.

[20] Cicero *De Republica* 1.58. On the characteristics of the barbarian in Roman eyes, see Dauge 1981, 424–436 and Revanoglou 2005, 207–212.

[21] For further analysis of the Roman evolution of the term from its Greek origins, see Woolf 1998, 58–60.

[22] Kaldellis 2013, 10.

[23] Pohl 1998, 18.

for barbarians to become Romans. At the same time, it was not guaranteed that a barbarian becoming more civilized would become a Roman, because to become a Roman that individual would have to consciously choose to join the Roman political community and be accepted into it by other Romans.[24]

The Romans believed that the peoples whom they collectively referred to as barbarians were different ethnic groups and had their own distinct ethnic identities. While historians used to accept this view uncritically, today a great mass of scholarship challenges this model. Ethnic identity in Late Antiquity is currently imagined to have been quite fluid. Patrick Geary has argued that 'early medieval ethnicity should be viewed as a subjective process by which individuals and groups identified themselves or others within specific situations and for specific purposes.'[25] Other scholars have pushed this skepticism even further, which Thomas Noble neatly explained: 'Today there is a general consensus that one cannot speak of Goths, or Franks, or Lombards as discrete ethnic groups.'[26] It is not in the scope of this chapter either to confirm or challenge this recent trend in the study of the identity of non-Roman ethnic groups. As the focus here is on the Byzantine army and society, the important issue is what the Byzantines thought. Whether individuals identified by the Byzantines really did belong to 'discrete ethnic groups' or not is immaterial since the goal is to understand what the Byzantines thought and how their thoughts impacted on the way they acted and the way they formed relationships within the army. All that matters is that Byzantines *believed* their non-Roman contemporaries belonged to discrete ethnic groups and made decisions about them based on that belief.

The Distinction Between Romans and Barbarians

Before proceeding to the impact of identity on the careers and relationships of Byzantine army officers, it is appropriate to explore the criteria of those identities, or in other words the ways that sixth-century Byzantines drew distinctions between themselves and non-Romans. Since Romans believed that they were civilized, and that barbarians were uncivilized to some degree along a continuum of civilization, it should be possible

[24] Kaldellis 2007, 91–92; Woolf 1998, 59.
[25] Geary 1983, 16.
[26] Noble 2006, 16.

to explore some of the cultural criteria that Romans might have used to determine where an individual or an ethnic group lay upon that continuum. It is worth emphasizing again that in this analysis only Roman opinions matter, since the concept of barbarism and the continuum are both constructs of the Romans themselves.[27] So we should not imagine that there was a universally accepted set of rules and that all the peoples labeled by the Romans would have agreed with their assigned place along the continuum or even been aware of it. To determine what made a Roman a Roman, it is worthwhile to start with the definition of Kaldellis, who argued that the basis of the Roman state was 'a social consensus that all belonged to a single historical political community defined by laws, institutions, religion, language, and customs, in other words to a nation.'[28] In looking at the differences the Romans drew between themselves and others, it will be useful to briefly examine the categories of law, institution, religion, language, and customs. These were the factors that distinguished Roman identity and set it apart from others. Place of birth or ancestral origin is appropriately absent from this list. While ancestral origin is an important component of ethnic identities, larger cultural identities like that of the Romans placed less of a premium on it. Since any individual could become Roman regardless of birthplace, ancestry and homeland mattered relatively little as far as determining Roman identity. Place of birth was important in the limited sense that individuals born within the empire would most likely be Romans, given that they were naturally residents of the empire and citizens, but beyond this it did not seem to matter. It is true that an individual's birthplace served as an important identifier in terms of separating him from homonyms, but this was of no particular value in determining whether that individual was Roman or not.[29] Because Romans could in theory come from anywhere, a generic definition of a Roman as one born inside the empire and a barbarian as one born outside the frontiers is not terribly useful.[30]

[27] Pohl 1998, 18.

[28] Kaldellis 2007, 43.

[29] Kaldellis 2007, 97, argued something similar, stating that ethnic references used to differentiate Romans from one another were actually more geographic than ethnic.

[30] Compare Teall 1965.

Laws and Institutions

In the context of the sixth-century army, the importance of laws and institutions to Roman identity essentially boiled down to service in the army and therefore loyalty to the emperor. A good Roman in the Byzantine army served loyally. This is not to say that all loyal soldiers in the Byzantine army were automatically Romans. There was a place in Justinian's armies for non-Romans as well. Goths, Antians, Persarmenians, and many others served in regular army units alongside Romans. Service with the Byzantine army could over time Romanize them both culturally and politically in the eyes of Roman contemporaries. On the other hand, it is important to note that one could be a faithful ally of the emperor but remain a barbarian, as in the ethnically based allies (*symmachoi*) that served in the army. Groups represented in this category included Heruls and Huns. They could remain barbarian, although they might not actually be called barbarians. The term 'barbarian' was much more likely to be used in such a way that it merely becomes synonymous with 'enemy.' In the *Buildings*, Procopius makes this quite clear through two similar passages. The first passage, describing the defenses of the city of Zenobia, suggested that 'the barbarians,' when they attacked the city, could shoot arrows from a certain hill nearby. In the second passage, describing Hierapolis, he noted that when 'the enemy' tried to lay siege to it, the water of a spring in the city proved its salvation.[31] In these passages, the use of the term 'barbarian' merely served as a means of varying vocabulary. Agathias also saw 'barbarian' as a synonym for 'enemy', as when describing the army of the Franks marauding through Byzantine Italy.[32] So barbarians could be enemies or servants of the emperor, and not all servants of the emperor were Roman. Because of this, there was relatively little prejudice against barbarians qua barbarians but considerable prejudice against barbarians qua enemies.[33] Individuals or groups serving the Byzantine army could be severely criticized as barbarians, but this occurred in particular contexts for specific reasons.[34] So not all serving in the army were Romans, but all military men who considered themselves good Romans had to serve in the Roman army and have this institutional link to the Roman government. They

[31] Procopius *Buildings* 2.8.21, 2.9.15.

[32] The Frankish army is simply 'the barbarians' (Agathias *Histories* 2.1.3).

[33] Greatrex 2000, 278.

[34] See the section 'Did Cultural Distinctions Impact Relationships in the Army?' in this chapter below.

could not serve a different army and still consider themselves Romans in a full sense.[35]

In connection with this discussion of army service and Roman identity, it is worth taking a moment to consider those who, while not serving the emperor, were not fighting against him either. Should the civilian, formerly Roman inhabitants of Italy prior to Justinian's reconquest be considered barbarian because they were outside of Roman dominion and could not serve the emperor? No source ever labels such individuals or groups in that fashion. Should they then be considered Romans, even if they are not serving the emperor? This position finds some support in the sources. One of the more fascinating pieces of evidence is the story Procopius related about Theodahad's consulting a Jewish soothsayer about the outcome of the Gothic war. The soothsayer had Theodahad separate three groups of pigs, and label them Goths, Romans, and soldiers of the emperor.[36] Here the word 'Romans' was clearly used to refer to native Italians. This evidence suggests that being Roman included some components beyond laws and institutions such that even decades of not being within the empire did not cause a person to fully lose his or her Roman identity. Yet these peoples were still distinct. In view of Justinian's concern for them, and his expectation that they could at least potentially be allies of his armies, these people were probably viewed as 'separated brethren.' This is an awkward construct that did not really fit into the traditional Roman paradigm of a continuity of civilization with Romans at one end and progressively less civilized people moving down the continuum. These inhabitants of Italy were still civilized and close to being Roman, but they had been separated from political participation in the Roman community, as represented most clearly in laws, institutions, and devotion to the emperor. Therefore participation in Roman laws and institutions and the resulting loyalty to the Roman state was a crucial component of Roman identity, but aspects of that identity could survive the severing of this connection. While this

[35] A partial exception may be made for Roman mutineers such as Stotzas (see Jones, Martindale, and Morris 1971 [Hereafter *PLRE*], Stotzas, 3:1199–1200) and Gontharis (see *PLRE* 3: Guntharis 2), who certainly did not cease to be Roman when they mutinied against the emperor. Instead they believed they were carrying on the true tradition of the Roman military, and in that sense were still Roman, even if their loyalist opponents might not have agreed.

[36] Procopius *Wars* 5.9.1–7. Only a few lines later, Procopius has Belisarius declare that he is moved about the fate of Naples, because it has 'for ages been inhabited by both Christians and Romans' (5.9.27).

would have mattered little to the soldiers and officers of the Byzantine army who, whether Roman or not, were constantly in affiliation with the state and the emperor, it might have impacted the way these military men viewed the civilians whose lands they were attempting to conquer.

Religion and Language

In trying to assess the nature of Roman identity within the context of the Byzantine army of the sixth century, it is also appropriate to consider religion and language. These two criteria share in common the general rule that they were important contributors to Roman identity but were neither absolutely required for that identity nor sufficient by themselves to establish it. While the Byzantine emperor was the sponsor of orthodox Christianity, the acceptance of that Christianity did not necessarily make an individual or group Roman by itself. The Tzani are described as originally being a barbarous people that continually attacked the Byzantines, but whom the latter managed to convert to Christianity and enroll in their army. The Tzani were further civilized by the construction of a church in their lands and also, curiously, by clearing the land around them so that they could have regular interactions with their neighbors.[37] In this way religion was coupled with laws and institutions as well as interaction and community to produce civilization. But conversion did not always necessarily entail promotion from barbarism. The Gadabitani, who had probably followed some sort of polytheism (although Procopius alleges they were atheists), were made into zealous Christians, but Procopius does not suggest that they were no longer barbarians after this conversion, much less that they became Romans.[38] Similarly, being Gothic was often linked with Arianism, although evidence about the importance of Arianism to being a Goth is not abundant and is largely circumstantial.[39] Although religion by itself did not therefore confer membership in the Roman community or

[37] Procopius *Wars* 1.15.21–25, Procopius *Buildings* 3.6.9–14. For more on the link between isolation and barbarism, see Procopius *Buildings* 4.5.9.

[38] Procopius *Buildings* 6.4.11–13. By identifying the Gadabitani as atheists, Procopius probably meant that they worshiped gods that he did not recognize.

[39] We know that most Goths were Arians or were expected to be Arians. As Wolfram points out, however, there is no evidence that an Arian Goth converting to Catholicism lost his Gothic identity (Wolfram 1988, 17). Similarly, however, there is little evidence that Goths were encouraged to become orthodox and even some evidence that Theoderic discouraged Romans from converting to Arianism (Amory 1997, 275).

in an ethnic group, the lack of the right religion could be an impediment to membership. Procopius heavily criticized the Moors, because among them 'there is neither fear of God nor respect for men.'[40]

The Byzantines, especially those in the army, closely linked barbarism with Arianism. Most of the barbarian soldiers, including those identified as Goths and Heruls, were Arian, and Procopius explicitly linked barbarian soldiers in the army with the Arian faith.[41] The connection between Arianism and being a barbarian was potent enough to be one component in the mutiny against Solomon in Africa. Procopius related that the Arian, barbarian soldiers within the Byzantine army's ranks were encouraged by the priests of the Vandals to mutiny because Justinian would allegedly not allow these soldiers to receive the sacraments.[42] Despite this extreme incident, it was generally possible for any soldier, including a non-Roman, to serve in the Byzantine army even if his religion was not considered orthodox. This is clear because Arian soldiers must have served in the army to organize the mutiny against Solomon just mentioned. The *Justinian Code* further confirms the presence of Arians in the army by stating cryptically: 'persons in the army, and those who are obliged to perform various duties, either official or personal, should fulfill them (no matter to what sect they may belong).'[43] Religion is not of obvious absolute importance in non-Roman identities of the time either. Among the Ostrogoths, Arianism was an important tool for separating the Goths themselves from their Italian subjects. Theoderic's mother was orthodox, however, at least according to the Anonymous of Valois, and Theoderic himself made an effort to govern Arians and orthodox equitably.[44] Religion was undoubtedly important to many Romans and they could see the adoption of orthodox Christianity as a crucial step to becoming Roman, but it did not necessarily have to be part of the process for all Romans.

The contribution of language to Roman identity was similar to the importance attached to religious affiliation. In general, Latin and Greek superseded local languages and represented civilization for the Roman.

[40] Procopius *Wars* 4.8.9.

[41] Procopius *Wars* 4.14.12.

[42] Procopius *Wars* 4.14.13–15.

[43] *Codex Justinianus* 1.5.7. The inescapable conclusion is that this law represents a tacit acknowledgment of the existence of individuals from other religious 'sects' in the army. More generally, it is likely that Arians served in the army because most Goths deserting to the Byzantines were not described as also converting to orthodox Christianity.

[44] Anonymous of Valois 12.58, 12.60.

The ability to speak Latin or Greek well was a point of pride for intelligent and cultivated Romans. Not surprisingly, the reverse was also true: Byzantine sources tended to identify failure to speak well as a trait of barbarians. Procopius had Pharas the Herul state, 'I too am a barbarian and not accustomed to writing and speaking, nor am I skilful in these matters.' Agathias noted that his (probably fictitious) orator Aeetes the Lazian was 'a remarkably gifted speaker for a barbarian and had an instinctive appreciation of the finer points of rhetoric.'[45] In a noteworthy story related by Procopius, a young Antian pretended to be the long-dead Roman general Chilbudius. He accomplished this deception by imitating the general's mannerisms and most importantly, by learning Latin.[46] The story is intriguing for its emphasis on the importance of language in assisting in changing identity.

Yet, to some degree, it could be expected that even some barbarians might know Greek or Latin and some Romans might not know either. The Goths who captured the Armenian general Gilacius were perplexed to learn that the general spoke neither Greek nor Latin and finally gave up attempts at interrogation.[47] Yet just because some non-Romans might know Greek or Latin does not mean that such knowledge would have been common. It is probably going too far to suggest as Amory does that all Goths in Italy after Theoderic spoke Latin and that Gothic was merely a military pidgin language.[48] Indeed, the Gothic language was an important part of Gothic identity, if the historian Jordanes is to be believed. In the time of Valens (r. 364–378), the Visigoths having become Arians apparently 'invited all people of their speech everywhere to attach themselves to this sect,' which indicates a correlation between religion, language and identity. This may be favorably contrasted with the disdain that Jordanes held for the Huns, who were scarcely human and had 'no language save

[45] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.15, Agathias *Histories* 3.8.8. Kaldellis has convincingly argued that Aeetes is an example of Agathias' mythological mimesis, that the Lazian probably never existed, and that the speeches outlined in this passage never occurred (Kaldellis 2003). Here it is not the historicity of either Aeetes or his speech that matters, but the fact that both Agathias and his audience could presume that a barbarian would not be a good speaker and be surprised when that presumption was contradicted.

[46] Procopius *Wars* 7.14.36.

[47] Procopius *Wars* 7.26.24. Gilacius' lack of knowledge of Greek or Latin does not seem to have prevented him from being considered Roman.

[48] Amory 1997, 102–106. He argues that there 'can be no doubt' that all Goths spoke Latin and some spoke Greek. His argument that Gothic was merely a 'military pidgin' goes too far.

one which bore but slight resemblance to human speech.'[49] The opposition of the Gothic elite in the 530s to Amalasuntha's attempt to educate her son Athalaric in classical Roman fashion may also be an indication of the importance of the Gothic language, its perceived difference from, and opposition to Roman speech and culture.[50] Language was therefore an important component of identity. At the same time, merely knowing a language did not make an individual Roman and merely not knowing a language did not disqualify an individual from being Roman. Language, like religious affiliation, was an important but not sufficient factor in the definition of cultural identity. The ability to speak Latin or Greek well made it easier to be accepted as a Roman but did not itself make an individual Roman.

Customs

The last component of Roman identity to consider is customs, which can be interpreted quite broadly to include cultural practices and traditions as well as certain protocols in dress, hair, or other physical attributes. Cultural practices, traditions, and personality traits, although often trumpeted in the sources, may be discounted as more rhetorical tropes than crucial components of Roman identity. For example, Romans were expected in theory to be virtuous, brave, and obedient, but this would not necessarily actually set them apart from non-Romans, who were expected to be brave and could be virtuous and obedient as well. These issues most frequently appear in the sources in the context of criticizing barbarians for failing to live up to these standards rather than praising Romans for their practices. Agathias described Phulcaris the Herul as both brave and fearless but also wild and impetuous. After Narses had punished a murderer in the ranks of the Heruls, Agathias argued that their subsequent quarreling, sulking and refusing to fight was the 'usual barbarian reaction.' Likewise, after Belisarius had punished murderers on the way to Africa, Procopius reported that 'the barbarians' were angry and resentful.[51]

These statements boil down to rhetorical flourishes and probably do not say much about the actual content of Roman identity beyond the fact

[49] Jordanes *Getica* 24.22, 25.133. Jordanes' disdain for the Hunnic language may be due to the fact that it was not within the Indo-European language group.

[50] Procopius *Wars* 5.2.6–20.

[51] Agathias *Histories* 1.14.3, 2.7.4, Procopius *Wars* 3.12.10.

that ideal Romans should ideally be well-behaved. On the other hand, even poorly behaved Romans did not forfeit their Roman identity because of their misbehavior.[52] This extends also to issues of law, where Romans were typically expected to follow laws and submit to the procedures of justice. It was considered un-Roman to break the law or act disgracefully at trial, as seen in the case of the murderers of Gubazes. The Romans John and Rusticus murdered Gubazes, a Lazian king, and were brought before a Roman tribunal for justice. Agathias himself has nothing but scorn for John and Rusticus, stating that they 'are not fit to be called Romans.'[53] While Agathias surely does not intend to say that the murderers have literally become barbarians through the act of murder, his comment illustrates the importance of context in identification. While these expectations for Romans were in place, there is no reason to believe that Romans literally ceased to be Roman if they broke with custom, behaved poorly, or transgressed a law.

Protocols in dress, hair, or other matters of physical appearance were similarly important only in certain contexts. Identification of peoples by their physical attributes is looked upon unfavorably by modern scholarship. Walter Pohl has argued convincingly that visible designators such as the supposed *francisca* axe of the Franks and even the long beards of the Lombards could exist in various combinations in different individuals and are not necessarily indicative of ethnic identities.[54] Yet to say that it was impossible to identify members of an ethnic group by outward appearance would be to ignore crucial evidence. Procopius alluded to it in his *Secret History*, complaining that the youths of Constantinople adopted Hunnic hairstyles and that Justinian himself occasionally 'played the barbarian' in dress.[55] The fact that the youth in the factions and Justinian himself could adopt barbarian styles but still remain Roman indicates the extent to which physical appearance was relatively trivial, even if it was noticeable. Theoderic, the king of the Ostrogoths, forbade Romans to carry weapons, except for penknives. This probably only means that this law forbade

[52] On poor behavior of Roman military officers, see Chap. 4.

[53] Agathias *Histories* 4.4.1.

[54] Pohl and Reimitz 1998, 42–64.

[55] Procopius *Secret History* 7.8–10, 14.2. Although neither Justinian nor these youths actually became barbarians through these actions, these anecdotes do say something about the (negative) opinions of contemporaries with regard to the appearance of unassimilated barbarians. In the fifth century, Priscus of Panium also distinguished a Hunnic haircut. See Priscus Frag. 269.

civilians in general to be armed, but it could mean that Romans were expected to be noticeably physically distinct from Goths so that the law could be enforced.[56] The Utigurs, a Hunnic people, refused Justinian's request to make war on the Kutrigurs. Their refusal combined the importance of dress, physical attributes, kinship, and language into one sense of identity. They told Justinian that they could not fight the Kutrigurs because 'they not only speak our language, dwell in tents like us, dress like us and live like us, but they are our kin, even if they follow other leaders.'[57] It was evidently possible for individuals to masquerade as members of different cultural groups. Evagrius reported that the Byzantine officer Sittas betrayed Martyropolis by 'introducing a contingent of Persians as if they were Romans.'[58] This evidence suggests that historians cannot assume that ethnic groups were always indistinct in terms of their physical appearance. Outward display was a reflection of personal identification, an advertisement to others of the type of identity an individual wanted to project. These physical markers could sometimes, but not always, be changed to imitate another identity successfully. When persons who identified themselves in a certain way could blend in physically over a period of time, they had in fact successfully changed their identity. Physical attributes were not necessary factors in determining Roman identity or any other identity, but they were contributing factors and could sometimes be used to distinguish one group from another. Adoption of certain styles of dress and hair was therefore an accessory to identity rather than a core distinction between Romans and others.

This overview suggests that none of these factors was solely responsible for making an individual a Roman, but all contributed in some way. Participation in laws and institutions and the concomitant loyalty to the Roman state was an important component of being Roman because outward loyalty and respect of authority is a necessary component of membership in any state, but being Roman was more than just a political state of being. Loyalty to the emperor represented something greater than mere political devotion: it signified membership and participation in the Roman community. Therefore an individual was not a Roman simply because of the language he spoke, or the religion he espoused, or even because he swore an oath of loyalty to the emperor. Instead he was Roman because

[56] Anonymous of Valois 14.83.
[57] Menander *History* 2.24–27.
[58] Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.

all of these reasons in combination made him a participant in the political and cultural Roman community. Some of these aspects of his identity were more important at certain times than others, but they could all be deployed to reinforce his identity on at least some occasions.

As a cultural identity, being Roman overrode other forms of identification an individual might have. Regional or local identities could coexist alongside Roman identity, but did so usually as secondary characteristics. Just as a Roman could characterize an individual as a barbarian while still acknowledging him to be a Goth or Moor, a Roman could also be a Thracian, Isaurian, or Cappadocian. Depending upon the circumstances, a person might be identified or identify himself by his regional or ethnic identity or by his broader Roman identity. For Romans, these lesser identities were based heavily upon ancestry, or perhaps more accurately, geography of birthplace. The birthplace emphasized could be rather specific—a town—or more general—a province. Thus John Lydus, for example, shows great attachment to his identification as a Philadelphian and recounts how fellow Philadelphians helped him in his career.[59] At the same time his very name, John Lydus or John the Lydian, emphasizes his home province, also helping to designate which Philadelphia was his hometown.[60] Likewise, common ethnic labels which were used to label Roman citizens included Isaurian (those who lived in and about the province of Isauria), Cappadocian (those who lived in one of the provinces of Cappadocia), and Thracian (those who lived in the province or perhaps diocese of Thrace). For these Romans, descent from a common ancestor mattered little or not at all. For example, the people in the province of Thrace were extremely heterogeneous, including native Bessi, Greek speakers, Goths, and other Germanic peoples who had migrated across the Danube. Depending upon how they chose to identify themselves, however, they could all be considered Thracians regardless of their descent. Although Procopius explicitly described Bessas as a Goth, he also set him apart as one from Thrace who did not follow Theoderic and therefore retained a separate Thracian

[59] John throughout his text identifies Philadelphia as 'my Philadelphia' (John Lydus *On Magistracies* 3.26, 3.58, 3.59). It is tempting to suggest that this possessive indicates attachment, but it is equally possible that it was merely meant to indicate which Philadelphia he was describing. John was greatly assisted in his career by the prefect Zoticus, also from Philadelphia in Lydia (3.26).

[60] This was done to avoid confusion with, for example, Philadelphia in Arabia (modern Amman in Jordan).

identity.[61] Roman identity was not decreased by such complementary secondary identities. Regardless of what regional identity an individual held, it was almost entirely overwhelmed by his Roman identity, which was far more important. Compared to being Roman, being a Thracian or a Cappadocian was merely an interesting detail rather than a truly important distinction.[62]

Proportion of Romans and Barbarians in the Army

Before looking at how Roman and non-Roman identity, with all of the associated criteria described above, impacted the careers and relationships of Byzantine officers, it is helpful to get some sense of how many non-Romans served in the army. While evidence of criteria of Roman identity (laws, institutions, religion, language, and customs) may be found in the sources, unfortunately it is not possible to assess every known individual in terms of all these components. When trying to determine an approximate proportion of Romans and non-Romans within the sixth-century Byzantine army, it is necessary to employ simpler methods. Compared to the possibilities when researching a more modern army, the evidence is quite limited. For example, there are no surviving archival sources, such as payrolls or unit rosters, for the sixth-century army. Fortunately, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence in the literary sources of the time to shed light on the men that made up the army. To make the best use of this rich, but admittedly scattered and unevenly detailed evidence, I created a database and filled it with every named officer and soldier that I could find in a large range of sixth-century sources.[63] These sources run the gamut from traditional literary histories such as those of Procopius, Agathias, and Theophylact to the letters of Pope Gregory I and archaeological evidence from inscriptions and seals.[64] This initial process simply involved writing down each named individual in the sources and recording whatever

[61] Procopius *Wars* 1.8.3.

[62] Kaldellis 2007, 94.

[63] See Parnell 2010 for the complete database and further explanation of its creation. For another attempt to sort knowledge of individuals into a database, see Whately 2013.

[64] A complete list of the sources used to construct the database: Procopius, Agathias, Malalas, Marcellinus, Menander, *Chronicon Paschale*, Theophylact, Theophanes, John Lydus, John of Ephesus, John of Epiphania, Evagrius, Corippus, Pope Gregory I, and *PLRE,* which draws on additional sources including inscriptions and seals. For full citations, please see the bibliography.

information was provided about him. The result was a database of 772 men who served in the Byzantine army between the beginning of the reign of Justin I (518–527) and the end of the reign of Phocas (602–610). This total, an average of about eight entries for every year of the covered period, is not overwhelming in size. To give a fair perception of how the size of the database compares to the actual number of soldiers in service, there may have been about 700,000 men under arms in the field armies alone during this 92-year period.[65] The database of 772 men represents only 0.1% of this total. While this is a very small sample and therefore conclusions drawn from it must be treated cautiously, the total is not insignificant. The sample is also heavily weighted toward the senior officers that tended to attract attention in literary histories or to leave behind physical evidence of their careers. However, the sample is surely more representative of the army as a whole during this period than simply glancing at the lists of the generals in the back of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, for example.[66]

Creating this database and listing out all named individuals was the easy part of this process. In order to utilize this information to make an argument about the prevalence and role of non-Romans in the army, as many individuals in the database as possible had to be categorized as either Roman or non-Roman. For some individuals, the sources themselves provide a cultural (Roman or barbarian), or ethnic (Goth or Vandal, for example) identifying label. In such cases, the sources are generally to be trusted, since they knew far more than we do about the individual being described and it is their opinion that matters for this analysis. For the many individuals who are not clearly labeled with an identity, a variety of tools may be employed to discover their origins, including looking at information about their family members, if any has been recorded.[67] When this is not

[65] The figure of 700,000 men was reached by estimating that the average term of service in the sixth-century army was about 20 years. The figure of 150,000 men in the *comitatenses* was then multiplied by the number of years covered (92) and divided by the average years of service (20). The exact result (690,000) was then rounded up to the more approximate figure of 700,000. This is of course only a very general estimation and should not be considered a completely accurate representation of the army. Only the *comitatenses* were included in this calculation because most of the men in the database served in these units. If the *limitanei* are also included, there were approximately 1.5 million men in the army during these 92 years, and then the database figure of 772 represents only about 0.05% of the total.

[66] Elton 2007, 300–301.

[67] See Chap. 6.

helpful, one is reduced to looking at the names themselves. It is possible to make plausible guesses as to whether a name is Roman (namely, Greek or Latin in origin), Germanic, Hunnic, or eastern in origin, and that is about as detailed as the identification can be.[68] The names of individuals can be useful in determining their cultural or ethnic identity, though it has become somewhat fashionable to suggest the contrary. Amory insisted that names were of little value in determining ethnic identity since Goths might take Latin names and Romans might have Germanic names, for example.[69] Despite the tendency to downgrade the significance of onomastics in determining identity, it remains widely used for that purpose, simply because names are often the only evidence available. Amory, despite his objections to the use of names as an index of ethnicity, found it significant that no known orthodox clergy in Ostrogothic Italy had Germanic names.[70] Though Hugh Elton has stated that 'names alone are not reliable indicators of ethnicity,' he cheerfully used names to produce an admittedly 'crude estimate' of the non-Roman soldiers in the field armies.[71] Walter Pohl has recognized that the principle of determining ethnicity through names has 'a certain statistical value.'[72] While the occasional identification by name may well be incorrect, over the course of hundreds of identifications the majority should be relatively accurate. Still, it must be recognized and understood that there is a considerable amount of educated hypothesis involved in the identification of individuals in this database, as there is with most quantitative studies of pre-modern subjects. Since uncertainty remains, as with all statistics, these should not be used without some qualification and awareness of the limitations of the data.

Using the methods described above, each individual in the database was categorized as Roman or non-Roman. Analysis of the completed database reveals that about 24 % of this group was most likely identified as non-Romans. To be exact, of the 772 total entries, 586 (76 %) were counted as likely Roman, and 186 (24 %) were probably non-Roman. That three-quarters of the army during this period was most likely of Roman identity is not unexpected; many scholars have predicted that the army of the sixth

[68] For determining identities through name alone, the following resources are particularly useful: Justi 1895, Maenchen-Helfen 1973, Schönfeld 1911.

[69] Amory 1997, 87–91.

[70] Amory 1997, 464–465.

[71] Elton 2007, 300–301.

[72] Pohl and Reimitz 1998, 10.

century was composed primarily of Romans.[73] It is however a boon to see this general consensus borne out by this sort of analysis-in-breadth. However, it is necessary to make a qualification and provide a few details about the nature of these numbers. Because of the relative distinctiveness of their names, non-Romans tend to be easier to categorize than Romans. We can be fairly certain that most Romans would not adopt non-Roman names. The nature of the Roman sample is rather different. As a general rule, even non-Romanized individuals might take Roman names. This admittedly introduces some uncertainty into the statistics. Most of those identified as Roman by name alone were probably actually Romans, but it is possible that some whom contemporaries would have labeled non-Romans, in the process of Romanizing have slipped into this category by changing their names. The change in name could indicate that their colleagues had also accepted them as Roman and means that we are justified in considering them Roman as well, but it is also possible that their Romanization was superficial at best and they were still considered barbarians by their peers. This caveat must be kept in mind when considering the overall numbers of non-Romans. It is possible that the non-Roman category might have been somewhat larger.

Another interesting use of the database is to determine whether the proportion of non-Romans serving in the early Byzantine army shifted over the course of the sixth century.[74] To test the incidence of non-Romans in the army over the course of the sixth century, the century may be divided into three periods: 518–540, 541–565, and 566–610. While somewhat uneven in actual years covered, these periods represent real changes and evolutions in the sixth-century army. From 518 to 540, the army of the empire, as empowered and shaped by the fiscal reforms of Anastasius, fought without serious problems or obvious reasons for a change in personnel or recruitment tactics. Crises ranging from the fall of John the Cappadocian and his profitable financial system to the arrival of the plague definitively changed the situation in the 540s. 540 also represents a turning point in the fortune of the empire's armies, as Italy fell into chaos and more warfare, Africa suf-

[73] For Jones, Romans 'greatly predominated' in the army (Jones 1964, 1:668). Elton's analysis of the names of *magistri militum* mentioned above also came to a conclusion of approximately one quarter of non-Romans (Elton 2007, 300–301). Teall came to a different conclusion, arguing that during Justinian's reign what had previously been primarily Roman armies became to a large degree barbarian (Teall 1965, 296).

[74] This has been a subject of some debate in Late Antique historiography. Teall argued that crises in the 540s caused the empire to recruit more non-Romans than before (Teall 1965, 303–7). Whitby, writing later, doubted that conclusion (Whitby 1995, 108).

fered from army mutinies and attacks of the Moors, and Belisarius struggled in the east against Persia. All of these reasons make 540 a reasonable dividing line. The year 565 also makes for a convenient year of division because it is the year of Justinian's death and the accession of Justin II, who made a conscious effort to break with his predecessor's policies. As Justin himself rather pompously proclaimed, 'to the military, which had already slipped through lack of necessities so that the state was being damaged by the incursions and extensive invasions of barbarians, we have accorded the necessary rectification, so far as it was in our power to do so.'[75] These rectifications probably included replacing the army's high command and may well have been responsible for the Lombard invasion of Italy, beginning in 568, which destroyed the fragile hold of Byzantium upon the peninsula and shattered hopes that it would be successfully revitalized and incorporated into the empire. Justin II also witnessed, in 573, the fall of Dara to the Persians, which affected the balance of power in Mesopotamia and was apparently so disturbing that it caused the emperor to lose his mind. These combined events essentially heralded the decline of the Justinianic system and paved the way for changing political and military policies.

Before discussing the results of dividing the individuals in the database into these chronological periods, it is fair to explain the method used in dividing them. First and foremost, military men were counted in the period during which they first appeared in the service. For example, Belisarius is counted in the first period (518–540), while Comentiolus, one of Maurice's prominent generals, is counted in the final period (566–610). In addition, all individuals whose service straddled two periods were counted in both periods in which they served, so for example Belisarius is also counted in the second period (541–565). Another caveat that should be noted is that only 574 of the 772 total entries were used in the generation of these statistics. This is because the 198 excluded entries were impossible to date with sufficient specificity. Inscriptions and seals especially are frequently dated as 'sixth century' or 'mid-sixth to mid-seventh century,' which means that they cannot be safely located within one of the three periods. Because of this difficulty, they have simply been excluded from the calculation so that they do not throw off the result. All of the remaining 574 individuals can be securely dated to the period(s) they have been assigned. With these caveats in place, Table 3.1 shows the breakdown of the Roman and non-Roman military men in the database over the course of the sixth century.

[75] Justin II's novel 148, preface, as quoted by Whitby 1995, 119.

Table 3.1 Ratio of Roman to non-Roman military men in the database, 518–610 AD

Period	*Number of Romans*	*Number of non-Romans*	*Total for period*
518–540	158 (68%)	73 (32%)	231 (100%)
541–565	138 (62%)	86 (38%)	224 (100%)
566–610	142 (82%)	31 (18%)	173 (100%)

Not surprisingly, given the above statistics of the incidence of non-Romans in the whole database, we see that in each of the three periods, Romans represent the majority of military men serving in the empire. The variations in that predominance during each period are however of considerable interest. While in the first period of Justinian's conquests the percentage of non-Romans serving in the army was approximately one third, it increased slightly after 540.[76] Six percentage points is not a particularly large increase in a database constructed of so few examples and caution must be taken in drawing conclusions from this particular shift. Regardless of the size of any projected increase in non-Romans during this period, it is important to note that in both periods before and after 540, the incidence of non-Romans remained at around one-third. There are other noteworthy features of the transition between the first and second period. The first is that there are a significant number of soldiers whose careers spanned both periods. This is no doubt partly an incidental result of the importance of the works of Procopius, who helped to make a name for so many of the generals and commanders in Belisarius' initial campaigns against Persia, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths. These officers continued to be prominent into the 540s and 550s, and we are indebted to Procopius and Agathias for our relatively broad knowledge of their careers compared to officers in other periods. The final period (566–610) is remarkable for just how few non-Romans appeared. By this time it would seem that the army came to be significantly dominated by soldiers of Roman identity, a majority of about 82 % in the database. A number of factors are probably involved in this decrease in the use of non-Romans during the period 566–610. The arrival of the Avars and Slavs north of the Danube cut the

[76] This might be taken as confirmation of Teall's hypothesis that crises in the 540s caused the empire to recruit more non-Romans than before (Teall 1965, 303–7) if one wanted to draw a conclusion from this admittedly small shift.

Byzantine Empire off from recruitment of the Germanic peoples of that region, such as the Heruls, who had in the previous two periods earlier in the sixth century been an important part of Byzantine armies. Continued Romanization of those non-Romans living in the empire over the course of the century probably worked to make most families of the previous generation of non-Romans into Romans by this third period. Non-Romans continued to have a role in this period, but it was increasingly confined to specific theaters: Lombards in Byzantine service in Italy is a good example of this compartmentalization.[77] It is also worth noting that only a mere handful of individuals who started their career in the second period are also mentioned in this third period. This is probably partly due to the fact that no prominent military historian such as Procopius recorded events in both periods to provide continuity, but it could also reflect a 'changing of the guard' that occurred after the accession of Justin II.

Ranks of Romans and Barbarian Officers in the Army

Another way that the database helps to show what roles non-Romans played in the army is by demonstrating the ranks and positions held by both Roman and non-Roman officers. It is often difficult to determine exactly what rank an individual held. The sources generally prefer non-technical Greek words to precise Latin terms.[78] It is easier, therefore, to follow the lead of the sources and group officers into non-technical rank categories than it is to break them down into specific ranks or titles. For the sake of convenience, the entries in the database may be divided into these rank categories: generals (*magistri militum*), commanders (*taxiarchoi*, *archons*, *duces* or *comites rei militaris*), regimental commanders (tribunes), low-ranking officers (such as regimental staff officers and protectors), guardsmen of generals (*bucellarii*), imperial guardsmen (*excubitores, candidati, scribones, scholarii*), enlisted soldiers, and 'others' (unspecified ranks). The following two figures (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2) give an idea of the breakdown

[77] Examples abound in Pope Gregory the Great's letters, including Guduin, duke at Naples in 603 (Gregory *Epistle* 14.10) and Aldio, general in Italy in 599 (Gregory *Epistle* 2.32).

[78] See Chap. 2 for more on the ranks and positions of the sixth-century army.

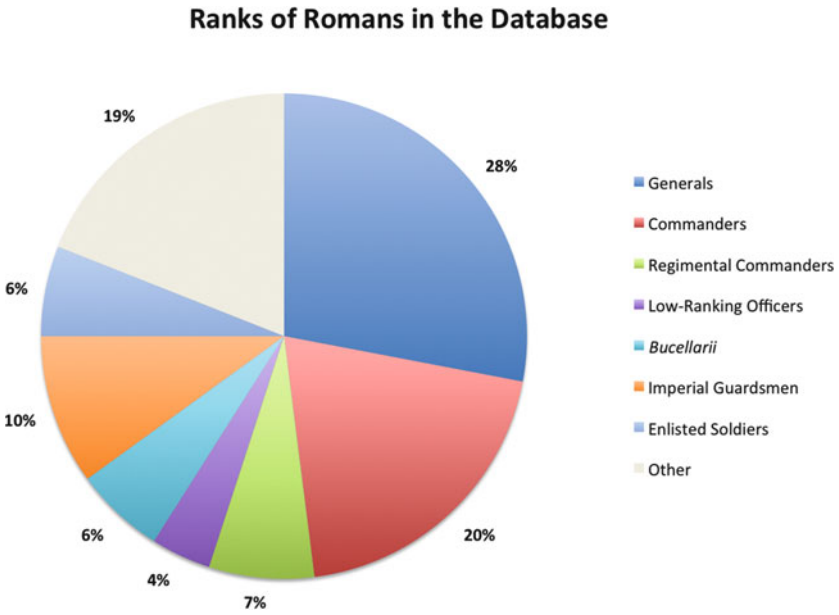

Fig. 3.1 Ranks of Roman military men in the database, 518–610 AD

of Roman and non-Roman military men in the database by these general rank categories.[79]

Several features of these figures are worthy of comment. First, larger numbers of Romans, both in real numbers and in relative percentages, held the highest rank in the army, that of general. In fact, 28 % (174 of 618) of the Romans in the database held the rank of *magister militum*. Only 20 % (38 of 194) of the non-Romans had such commands. The counterpart to this statistic is that a proportionately larger number

[79] The data in the charts counts each individual's rank, as might be expected, but there is one additional twist. All officers who are known to have received promotion are counted for each step of their career. For example, an individual such as John Mystacon, Maurice's general of the East (*magister militum per Orientum*), is counted only once, at the rank of general, while Belisarius, who started his career as a guardsman of Justinian and later served as a duke in Mesopotamia before being promoted to general is therefore counted three times, in each of these categories. Only 40 of the 772 total men in the database were definitely promoted and thus counted multiple times, but this undoubtedly reflects the incompleteness of the sources rather than any real lack of promotion in the army.

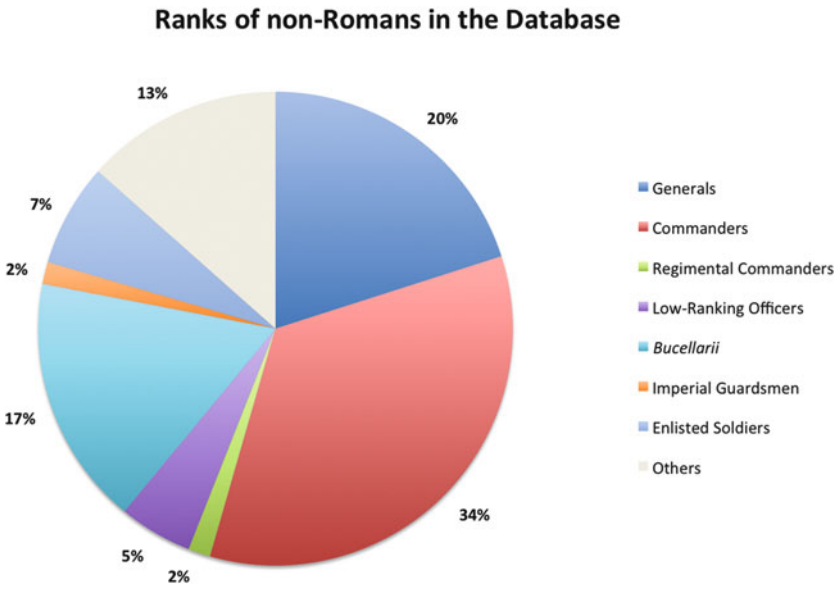

Fig. 3.2 Ranks of non-Roman military men in the database, 518–610 AD

of non-Romans held ranks generally identified as 'commander.' In this blanket category are counted all those who were dukes (*duces*) and generic commanders (*archontes* and *taxiarchoi*) of some sort. For non-Romans, these positions accounted for 34 % (66 of 194) of their total, while for Roman officers only 20 % (125 of 618).

In fact, these mid-level command positions are one of the few areas in which non-Romans were overrepresented in the database in relation to their typical ratio in the Byzantine army overall. In order to illustrate that this is the case, consider the statistics presented in Fig. 3.3, which show Roman to non-Roman ratios in two of the specific rank categories that were first mentioned in Figs. 3.1 and 3.2.

The clustered graph of Fig. 3.3 shows the absolute numbers of Romans and non-Romans in two rank groups in the database. Romans outnumbered non-Romans as generals, 174 to 38. In other words, 82 % of all generals were of Roman identity. Roman preponderance in this area is significant and even more than the average Roman preponderance for the database as a whole as described in Table 3.1. However, non-Romans pull

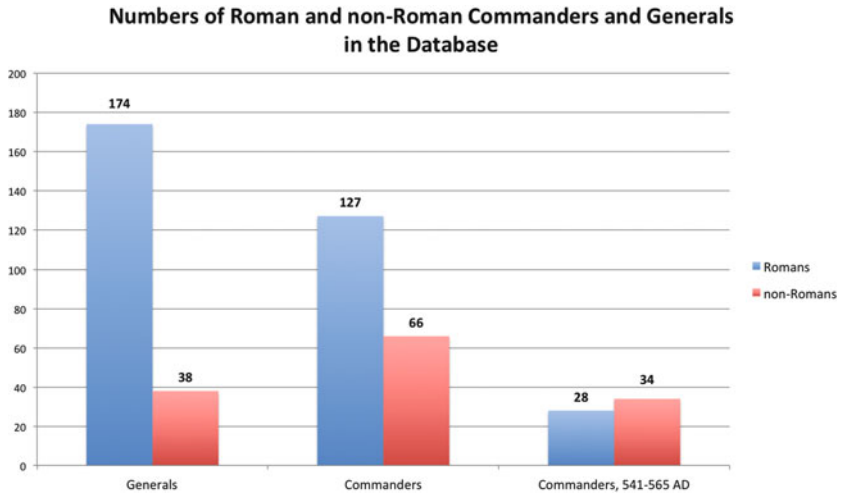

Fig. 3.3 Numbers of Romans and non-Romans as generals and commanders in the database, 518–610 AD

much closer in the numbers of commanders, where they are only outnumbered 127 to 66 (66 % of all commanders were Roman). Since Table 3.1 suggests that the database contains the greatest number of non-Romans in the period 541–565, and Fig. 3.3 suggests that non-Romans were particularly prominent as commanders, it is interesting to combine the two facts. The results of this may be seen in the last cluster of Fig. 3.3, which counts the commanders in the database during the period 541–565 only. Here is one area where non-Romans outnumber Romans, 34 to 28 (55 % of all commanders in this period were identified as non-Roman). In a period in which the database suggests that only 38 % of all entries were non-Roman, this is an interesting deviation. Apparently the importance and incidence of non-Roman officers in the early Byzantine army was concentrated at the middle level of the command hierarchy. In other words, non-Roman commanders most frequently served under Roman generals. This tendency is most notably played out in the importance of non-Roman commanders of units of allies (*symmachoi*), such as the commanders of the Heruls.

In the lower ranks, enlisted soldiers are at similar proportions across both groups: around 5.5 % (33) of the Roman sample and 7 % (14) of the non-Roman sample. Of course the vast majority of those serving in the

Byzantine army would have been enlisted soldiers. The fact that they are so poorly represented in the database (and thus in the sources) is surely because authors recorded information about prominent officers, not the soldiers they commanded.[80] As for other categories, non-Romans have a proportionally larger number of the guardsmen of generals (*bucellarii*) (17 % to 6 %) and Romans have a proportionally larger number of imperial bodyguards of some type or another (10 % to 2 %). These statistics are interesting by themselves but taken together affect the question of the differences in career advancement between Romans and non-Romans during this period. This distinction could indicate that military men gave out appointments in their guard units based on individual merit without concern for the identity of the applicant, but that the imperial government knowingly discriminated in favor of Romans when selecting attendants for the emperor. Having examined the evidence of the database, it is now time to turn to issues like this which indicate how Roman and non-Roman identity impacted the careers and relationships of Byzantine army officers.

Did Cultural Distinctions Impact Careers in the Army?

The literary evidence suggests that active prejudice against non-Romans in the army was very limited. For the most part, it seems that the Byzantine government, Roman officers, and Roman authors who wrote about the army treated non-Roman officers and soldiers fairly. Although historians such as Procopius are typically not credited with being particularly egalitarian, they usually show little to no consistent hostility to non-Roman individuals or groups in their writing.[81] In practice, Procopius, Agathias, and other members of the Byzantine elite appear not to have been so much concerned with non-Romans per se, as with non-Romans who were enemies of the Byzantine political and social order. Non-Romans serving within the Byzantine army generally fell outside this category and were not a threat. We should then expect that the Byzantines of the sixth century would have welcomed non-Roman collaborators with open arms, and this was generally the case, as seen in the large numbers of non-Romans serving at all ranks in the army. Despite this logic and the numbers demonstrated

[80] For ideas on the relationships between officers and their soldiers, see Chap. 7.

[81] Cf. Greatrex, who notes that there appears to be 'little consistent hostility or prejudice towards particular 'barbarians' in the sources of the sixth century' (Greatrex 2000, 276).

in the previous section, a lingering question remains: did the Byzantines discriminate against non-Romans when assigning positions of authority or granting promotions in the army? Even if contemporaries do not appear to have consistently criticized non-Romans in military service, the existence of discrimination in promotion to high rank might suggest lingering attitudes of distrust in Byzantine society. As has been seen, a good number of non-Romans served in the Byzantine army and served in prominent roles. Non-Romans are well represented in the database described above, even if they do remain a minority. Yet the nature of the positions held by non-Romans within the army is worthy of consideration.

Non-Romans were statistically less likely to be generals than native Romans: about 28 % of Romans in the database were generals, while only 20 % of non-Romans held the highest military positions. Instead, non-Roman officers tended to hold ranks as mid-level commanders: about 34 % of them compared to only 20 % of Romans. While interesting, these distinctions are probably not indicative of any organized, systemic discrimination. The fact that 8 % fewer non-Romans became generals is interesting, but the difference is small enough in comparison with the sample size that it probably does not suggest intentional discrimination. While the larger number of non-Roman mid-level commanders suggests that they frequently fought as subordinate officers to Roman generals, this is probably not to be understood as some sort of recognition of the superiority of Roman martial skills. Instead, this statistic reflects the importance of allied units that fought under their own non-Roman leaders, who usually ranked as mid-level commanders. If there is evidence of some discrimination in the army, it is to be found in the numbers of imperial guardsmen. These bodyguards, with official names such as the *candidati*, *excubitores*, and *scribones,* were the soldiers and officers closest to the emperor's person. They were responsible for defense of the imperial palace and worked closely with the emperor, which meant they were often selected for important missions and used extensively as messengers. In the examples in the database, these bodyguards were overwhelmingly Romans. While it is interesting to note that 10 % of the Romans were imperial bodyguards and only 2 % of the non-Romans, the actual numbers are even starker: there are 64 Roman imperial guards in the database, and only 3 non-Romans.[82] Judging by this evidence alone, it is tempting to suggest that the emperors were somewhat reluctant to have non-Romans as their closest guards

[82] See Parnell 2010, 83–84, and appendices.

and messengers. While it is may be possible to argue that Romans dominated the imperial bodyguard units because of intentional discrimination, it is difficult to prove in the absence of explicit evidence such as laws that explained such discrimination. However, just because there was not necessarily intentional, systemic and organized discrimination does not mean that discrimination was completely nonexistent.

Roman concern about non-Roman barbarians serving in the army was probably engrained in the collective memory of Byzantine society by the sixth century. Only a century before, non-Romans within the military structure had posed a significant threat to the unity of the army and the stability of the empire. As one example, the reign of Leo I (457–474) saw extreme strife between non-Roman soldiers led by the general Aspar (ca. 400–471) and the population of Constantinople. Rumors that Aspar and his son were plotting to take over the throne caused riots in Constantinople, and when Leo had Aspar assassinated, the Ostrogoths banded together to ravage the countryside beyond the city walls.[83] While this type of identity-fueled strife, spurred by cultural distrust between Roman citizens and non-Roman army units, seems to have ceased by the Age of Justinian, it would be unreasonable to think that the fears it had aroused had entirely disappeared. It is very plausible to assume that such fears lurked in at least the subconscious if not conscious minds of the emperors and other elite Byzantines. That such subconscious fears could have impacted Byzantine opinions of non-Romans is certainly conceivable.

It is possible that sixth-century Byzantine elites, and military officers in particular, had an attitude towards non-Romans in military service that was complicated by many levels of conscious and subconscious assessment of their value and danger. For simplification, imagine three layers of thought impacting the way Byzantines considered non-Roman military officers. The top, most superficial layer of this mindset was one that the Byzantines themselves recognized to be little more than traditional propaganda. At this level of contemplation, Byzantine military officers and elite civilian authors talked openly and dismissively of 'barbarian' peoples and used historical tropes to describe their impetuousness, lawlessness, and folly. We saw many examples of such typical language above in the section 'The distinction between Romans and Barbarians.' Agathias neatly summarizes these historical tropes by actually making non-Romans call themselves barbarians. He makes the Misimians apologize and claim that

[83] For a summary of these events, see Stein 1949.

they had acted 'with the characteristic recklessness of barbarians.'[84] The Byzantines of course knew that not all non-Romans were reckless, for example, but these code words defined their behavior in propaganda and were the proper way to describe in traditional rhetoric the non-Roman enemies of the empire and, even sometimes, loyal non-Roman military officers. The use of these words might or might not have malicious intent behind them. The response was practically automatic and conditioned by years of propaganda and historical memory.

The middle, most conscious layer of the Byzantine attitude toward non-Romans was open recognition that non-Romans in Byzantine military service could be good, just and brave peoples that served the emperors well. Thus Procopius and Agathias could compliment non-Roman soldiers and officers for their contributions to the Byzantine cause quite openly without any sign of prejudice or resentment, as when Procopius touchingly mourned the death of the Gothic general Sittas, 'a man who was extremely handsome in appearance and a capable warrior, and a general second to none of his contemporaries' as occurring 'in a manner unworthy of his great valor.'[85] This middle layer was the 'real' attitude, or at least the most common conscious response of Byzantines towards non-Romans in the army: they were helpful when they behaved properly and under these circumstances could be treated as equals in military service. Although they could be prone to 'irrational' behavior, when in good spirits and discipline they were regarded as no less worthy than any other members of the Byzantine army.[86] Here, elite Byzantine authors and military officers were at their most egalitarian, even if that is not a quality typically imagined to apply to them.

The bottom, most subconscious, layer of the Byzantine attitude toward non-Romans in military service was a deep-seated unease and subliminal prejudice that Byzantines had against non-Romans from their past experiences with them. The Byzantines, whenever they became aware of it, may indeed have realized that this prejudice was inappropriate or antiquated, but they felt it nonetheless. It possibly manifested itself in the tendency of the Byzantines to limit promotion of non-Romans to such important positions as general and imperial guardsman. Such restraints were not

[84] Agathias *Histories* 4.20.7.

[85] Procopius *Wars* 2.3.22–27.

[86] See the below section 'Did Cultural Distinctions Impact Relationships in the Army?' for further analysis of praise of non-Romans in military service.

enshrined in law, but the emperors and top military officers might have subconsciously shied from giving non-Romans too many appointments as generals or imperial guardsmen. This subtle prejudice was no doubt married to a firm conviction that it was proper tradition that non-Romans should not occupy too many of such positions in the military. Indeed, non-Romans themselves might even have bought into this prejudicial belief that it was not appropriate for them to serve in the imperial bodyguard or to rise too high in the ranks. Many non-Romans may have firmly believed that their place was instead in combat armies in positions high enough to lead their brethren but low enough to allow them to engage in combat frequently. The power of tradition acknowledged by both Romans and non-Romans, combined with this practically subconscious unease and prejudice against non-Romans, is probably the explanation for the interesting but unequal penetration of non-Romans into high military ranks. The Byzantine attitude towards non-Romans in the army in the sixth century was therefore a confusing jumble of old prejudices, common sense based on practical experience, and historical propaganda.

Did Cultural Distinctions Impact Relationships in the Army?[87]

An interesting way to measure the impact of this triple-layered Byzantine attitude toward non-Romans serving in the army on relationships between officers is by examining the way contemporary authors wielded (or refrained from wielding) the term 'barbarian' against those men. Those who served in the army, even if they were very loyal to the Roman cause, could still be accused of barbarism. Indeed, contemporary authors could easily accept that many who served the emperor loyally were in fact non-Romans and even barbarians, even if they liked them and refrained from using that term pejoratively.[88] The term 'barbarian' was used in the sources to refer to those serving in the Byzantine military in two main

[87] The majority of the remainder of this chapter appeared originally in Parnell 2015b. De Gruyter *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, Walter De Gruyter GmbH Berlin Boston, 2016. Copyright and all rights reserved. Material from this publication has been used with the permission of Walter De Gruyter GmbH.

[88] Compare Greatrex 2000 on political loyalty as the primary defining feature of Roman identity in this period. As mentioned above in the section 'The Distinction between Romans and Barbarians,' I would argue there were many different criteria that together defined Roman identity.

situations that show how issues of identity might have impacted on the relationships between officers in the army. First, the term was deployed in a pejorative sense when individuals of perceived non-Roman identity were behaving badly, as a sort of literary shorthand for disapproval. In these situations, Roman contemporaries were influenced by the first and third layers of their attitude toward non-Romans highlighted in the previous section, namely traditional propaganda and nearly subconscious prejudice. Second, an author might utilize the word in a more neutral fashion if he needed to make a quick reference to traditional barbarian tropes to prove a point, even if that point was not criticism of the individual or specific group of individuals under consideration at the moment. In these scenarios, Romans were affected mainly only by the first layer of the attitude, namely traditional propaganda and terminology. Finally, an author might refer to non-Romans in military service simply by name or perceived ethnic identity and avoid using the term 'barbarian' altogether. Here the second layer discussed above affected Roman opinions, that is, their fair assessment and practical acceptance of non-Romans who served well. These uses of or intentional failures to use the term 'barbarian,' demonstrate how these complex opinions held by Roman authors and officers impacted their opinions of and their relationships with the non-Romans in their military service. Even the most strained relationships and the angriest use of the term 'barbarian' showed little or no consistent prejudice that would have made relationships between officers of differing identities impossible.

To illustrate this issue in all its complexity, it is worthwhile to return to the depiction of Pharas in the works of Procopius, which we first encountered in the Introduction. As *assessor* (secretary and chief-of-staff) of Belisarius, Procopius had personal contact with officers and soldiers throughout Belisarius' armies. This is not to say that Procopius is a perfect and always trustworthy source, but of all the sources for the sixth century, he was best positioned to know what military officers thought of their fellow officers, non-Roman or not.[89] After Belisarius' decisive victory over the Vandals at Tricamarum in December 533, the Vandal King Gelimer fled into the mountains of Numidia. Belisarius appointed Pharas to besiege and capture Gelimer. Procopius describes Pharas in this fashion:

[89] We have to be wary that Procopius might have used barbarians as a foil to indirectly criticize Justinian or Belisarius. Cf. Kaldellis 2013, 21–25 but see also the caution of Greatrex, 'Procopius and the Barbarians' (forthcoming).

> Pharas was energetic and thoroughly serious and upright in every way, although he was a Herul by birth. And for a Herul not to give himself over to treachery and drunkenness, but to strive after uprightness, is no easy matter and merits abundant praise. But not only was it Pharas who maintained orderly conduct, but also all the Heruls who followed him.[90]

On first examination, this might seem to be faint praise, or praise by way of exception (in other words, most Heruls are awful, but Pharas and his men were the exception that proved the rule). However, it is important to note that Procopius has nothing but praise for the Heruls he actually knows in this situation. The term 'barbarian' is conspicuous by its absence in this description. This praise of Pharas is heightened even more by its placement in the text. Pharas was not the first officer dispatched to capture Gelimer. Belisarius had first sent John the Armenian, the man in charge of the general's personal household, to track down the runaway king.[91] But in the course of the pursuit John was accidentally slain by Uliaris, an officer of Belisarius' personal guardsmen (*bucellarii*).[92] Procopius describes Uliaris as 'not a very serious man, and one who generally took delight in wine and buffoonery' and charges him with being drunk at the time he accidentally slew John.[93] This unflattering description of Uliaris is found just 13 lines before Procopius' remarks about Pharas. So the praise of Pharas comes not in a vacuum, but appears as legitimate appreciation of one officer's serious nature contrasted with the drunken antics of the man previously on his assignment.

Nor is this positive assessment of Pharas the first time Procopius had mentioned him.[94] The Herul officer shows up prominently early in Book I of the *History of the Wars*. Pharas served with Belisarius at the Battle of Dara in June 530 where he played an important role, commanding 300 Heruls.[95] Before the battle, he made a suggestion about the tactical placement of his unit, which according to Procopius was accepted by Belisarius without question.[96] Procopius praises Pharas and

[90] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.29–31, translated by Dewing 1914, 2:243.

[91] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.9–25.

[92] For the career of John the Armenian, see *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 14. For the career of Uliaris, see *PLRE* 3: Vliaris 1.

[93] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.16–17.

[94] For the career of Pharas, see *PLRE* 3: Pharas.

[95] Procopius *Wars* 1.13.19–20.

[96] Procopius *Wars* 1.14.32–33.

his men, in stock terms, for making 'a display of valorous deeds' during the battle.[97] As in the later description of Pharas in Book IV of the *Wars*, in all these comments Procopius avoided labeling Pharas or his men barbarians, while at the same time clearly acknowledging that they were Heruls.

Back in Africa, Pharas' siege of Gelimer wore on into 534. Pharas decided upon a new strategy. Procopius explains that Pharas sent a letter to Gelimer, in an attempt to convince the Vandal king to surrender. The letter is likely an invention of Procopius, and even if there really was a letter, the specific language Procopius records is almost certainly what Procopius believes that Pharas should have sent rather than what Pharas actually would have written himself.[98] This exchange between Pharas and Gelimer has attracted quite a bit of attention in modern scholarship, with the best examination being an analysis by Charles Pazdernik linking Procopius' version of these events to a passage in Xenophon's *Hellenica*.[99] In the passage in question, the Spartan king Agesilaus attempts to convince Pharnabazus, a Persian satrap, to escape from 'slavery' to the Persian king and become a free man (and Spartan ally).[100] The purpose of Pazdernik's comparison of this episode and the letter of Pharas is, however, to draw out Procopius' opinions of the relationships between Justinian, Belisarius, and Gelimer, not to examine Procopius' view of Pharas.[101] If Pazdernik is right, and it seems likely that he is, then Procopius carefully tailored the exchange between Pharas and Gelimer in order to create an oblique reference to the *Hellenica* episode, linking the Persian king and Justinian, and therefore make a point about Belisarius' current servility, Gelimer's future servility, and Justinian's autocracy. In such a scenario, Procopius did not craft this passage with Pharas particularly in mind—he merely played a role in an exchange with a more ambitious goal. Therefore it is not surprising that the passage does not say much about Pharas himself. What it does say may be assumed to be Procopius' view of Pharas rather than Pharas' view of himself, given that it has been established that Procopius likely wrote the letter.

[97] Procopius *Wars* 1.14.39.

[98] Knaepen 2001, 401; Rubin 1954, 144; Kaldellis 2004, 187.

[99] Pazdernik 2006. See also Kaldellis 2013, 20; Wood 2011, 439–440; and Sarantis 2011, 396.

[100] Xenophon *Hellenica* 4.1.34–36.

[101] Pazdernik 2006, 176–182, esp. Figure 1 on 180.

The letter begins, 'I too am a barbarian and not accustomed to writing and speaking, nor am I skillful in these matters.'[102] While this is allegedly Pharas speaking, we can be fairly confident that Procopius has put these words into his mouth. As appropriate for a barbarian purportedly referring to himself, the term 'barbarian' is used conversationally and neutrally, with no intended malice or venom. Since this is the first and only time that Procopius uses the term with regards to Pharas, it is worth considering why the word is deployed here. One reason is that it is utilized as a familiar catchall term, to complement Pharas' admission that he is not skilled in writing or speaking.[103] Illiteracy was a commonly accepted trait of barbarism, so using the word 'barbarian' here may simply be a quick way to alert the reader of the non-Roman quality of this communication.[104] Another reason, related to the first, is that the sentence as a whole may have been intended as a joke for the reader, since the carefully worded letter that follows completely contradicts the admission of illiteracy. In this case, the term 'barbarian' is merely part of the punch line. Finally, Procopius could have seen the use of the word 'barbarian' as an important building block in his agenda to link and criticize the relationships of Belisarius and Justinian and the proposed submission of Gelimer to Justinian.[105] By having Pharas label himself a barbarian, Procopius forges a link between Pharas and Gelimer. This link is further emphasized as Pharas describes how he is a servant of Justinian: 'Are not we, who also are born of noble families, proud that we are now in the service of an emperor?'[106] The implication is that Gelimer, a barbarian like Pharas, even if noble born, should also be proud to be in Justinian's service. By extension, this connection established between Gelimer and Pharas also links Belisarius to Gelimer through Pharas, suggesting that all three men will soon be servants of Justinian. In doing this Procopius circuitously implies

[102] Procopius *Wars* 4.6.15. For another individual being made to admit his own barbarism, see the confession of Basiliscus in Life of Daniel the Stylite 84 (in Dawes and Baynes 1977). I am indebted to Geoffrey Greatrex for this reference.

[103] Similarly, Basiliscus' admission of barbarism in the Life of Daniel the Stylite complements his acknowledgement in the same sentence that he is 'not able to understand the depths of the holy faith.'

[104] On barbarism and illiteracy, see Taragna, 2000, 87–88. For a parallel to Pharas' admission of poor speaking skills, see Agathias' description of Aeetes the Lazian (Agathias *Histories* 3.8.8).

[105] Pazdernik 2006, 183–184, 197–201.

[106] Procopius *Wars* 4.6.22.

that Belisarius' status, as great a general as he is, is no better than the soon-to-be-captured Vandal king.[107] In this way Procopius is able to use an unrelated episode to criticize the autocracy of Justinian and the servitude of even his mightiest subjects.[108] It is likely that all of these reasons contribute to the explanation why Procopius had Pharas describe himself as a barbarian in the letter. The term is not, in this context anyway, used in a particularly judgmental fashion and is not intended as a criticism of Pharas, but serves broader purposes.

The sum of Procopius' writing on Pharas adds up to the impression that Procopius admired both Pharas and the men who served with him.[109] He described them positively and praised their serious and upright natures. There is no prejudice, let alone outright criticism or anger, directed toward these individuals. When Procopius has Pharas use the term 'barbarian' of himself it is to prepare Procopius' agenda on Gelimer, Belisarius, and Justinian and to underline a (possibly humorous) point—that Pharas is illiterate and not trained in rhetoric. In this particular situation, there is no criticism of this cultural backwardness, merely awareness. While Procopius likes Pharas and his men, he writes very negatively about Heruls in general, charging that they are 'faithless… given to avarice… eager to do violence to their neighbors… and they are the basest of all men and utterly abandoned rascals.'[110] The contrast between Procopius' opinion of Pharas and his men and his opinion of Heruls in general betrays the clash between Procopius' real experience of Heruls that he knows and whom he admires (the second layer of the Byzantine attitude toward non-Romans), and the historiographical tradition he has inherited (the first layer), which says that such uncultured foreigners should be considered barbarians, with all the uncivilized attributes that name is typically intended to conjure.[111] Procopius does not dislike Pharas and his men, and indeed accepts them

[107] Pazdernik 2006, 201.

[108] Kaldellis 2004, 132; see also Procopius *Secret History* 30.21–31.

[109] Cf. Wood 2011, 439–440; Sarantis 2013, 773.

[110] Procopius *Wars* 6.14.36, translated by Dewing 1914, 3:413. See also Greatrex 2000, 269–270.

[111] Historians who focus on Procopius' general criticism of the Heruls as a people and ignore his favorable opinion of the Heruls he actually knows easily miss this clash. Conant uses this passage condemning the Heruls as support for his general claim that Procopius believed 'attempting to reach an understanding with barbarians was useless' (Conant 2012, 256–7). For further focus on the negative view of the Heruls, see Revanoglou 2005, 209–210, 234–236. Not all historians ignore positive attitudes to the Heruls, see Sarantis 2013, 773 and Sarantis 2011, 387, 389.

as loyal servants of the emperor and excellent comrades in arms. While this acceptance does not extend to pronouncing Pharas and his men to be Romans, it is acceptance of their valued position in the army nonetheless.[112] However, Procopius still acknowledges the barbarism of Heruls in general and feels compelled to work in traditional critiques of it, whether to satisfy his own subconscious prejudices, his own deference to classicism, or those of his audience.[113] Procopius may have felt even more inclined to criticize what he saw as the failings of Heruls in general because it served as a useful contrast to make Pharas and other non-Romans that the historian liked look even better.[114]

Of course not all non-Romans in Byzantine military service were as well-behaved and admired as Pharas and his men. Procopius describes a group of Massagetae (Huns) who got drunk on the way to North Africa. In a drunken stupor, two of the Huns killed one of their companions. Belisarius ordered the two murderers to be impaled. Then Procopius says, through the mouth of Belisarius,

> If any barbarian who has slain his kinsman expects to find indulgence in his trial on the ground that he was drunk, in all fairness he makes the charge so much worse by reason of the very circumstance, by which, as he alleges, his guilt is removed. For it is not right for a man under any circumstances, and especially when serving in an army, to be so drunk as readily to kill his dearest friends; indeed the drunkenness itself, even if the murder is not added at all, is worthy of punishment.[115]

Here the term 'barbarian' is deployed again, but in a different context to the alleged self-description of Pharas we examined earlier. In this case, the individuals in question have misbehaved and, as Belisarius says, it is

[112] The closest Procopius comes to calling Pharas a Roman is the announcement, in the form of Pharas' letter, that Pharas is 'in the service of an emperor' (Procopius *Wars* 4.6.22). As we have seen, however, this is not the same as actually being Roman.

[113] But note the warning of Kaldellis that Late Antique authors 'were not uncritical imitators of ancient tropes' and that 'ancient theory… was more a useful tool than a mental straitjacket' (Kaldellis 2013, 9). Cesa also argues that Procopius was cautious about utilizing traditional clichés (Cesa 1982, 211–212).

[114] The criticism of Heruls in general might have also had something to do with the fact that those not serving in the Byzantine military apparently regularly plundered the empire from their base at modern Belgrade (Procopius *Wars* 7.33.13–14). See Sarantis 2011, 395.

[115] Procopius *Wars* 3.12.17–18, translated by Dewing 1914, 2:115–17.

his duty to 'sit in judgment of their actions.'[116] Considering their Hunnic background and the nature of their offense, Procopius here has Belisarius use the term 'barbarian' in a judgmental fashion to describe the murderers.[117] The use of the term is entirely conditioned by the combination of the non-Roman identity of the perpetrators and the circumstances of the drunken murder. So when non-Romans in Roman military service behave admirably and serve well, as with Pharas, they avoid the angry rhetoric, and when they misbehave, they are stuck with the pejorative 'barbarian' label. Even counting their military service, they are still non-Romans in either case, but the language used to describe them changes.

While Procopius is an important source, he is not the only author who provides insights into sixth-century usage of the term 'barbarian' in the context of Byzantine military service. His continuator, the historian Agathias, described the conundrum of Aligern, the brother of Teia, who was the last king of the Ostrogoths. Aligern commanded the garrison at Cumae, which was besieged by the army of Narses. Agathias wrote that Aligern determined that the obvious course of action was to 'hand over the city and its wealth to Narses, renounce his barbarian connections (βαρβαρικῶν διαιτημάτων), and secure his future by having a share of the Roman polity (Ῥωμαϊκῆς μεταλαχεῖν πολιτείας).'[118] When he had done this, Agathias tells us, Narses 'congratulated him on joining his side (ὅς ἀπεδέχετό τε αὐτὸν τῆς προσχωρήσεως) and assured him that his services would be more than amply rewarded.'[119] We can be fairly certain that Aligern, pondering his future, would not have used the term 'barbarian connections' to describe his current network of family, friends, and colleagues. But this is the term that Agathias considered appropriate, and here it is used conversationally and neutrally, much like Pharas' admission of his own barbarism. It is also interesting that Agathias paints a portrait of a non-Roman, in fact an enemy of the Roman state, on the precipice of joining the Byzantine army. Narses, through the lens of Agathias, sees it as quite reasonable for this former barbarian to renounce his previous connections and become a subject and servant of the Byzantine Empire. There is, however, no indication that doing so will make him a Roman. Note that Aligern desires a share in the Roman polity, not to become a

[116] Procopius *Wars* 3.12.16.
[117] Cf. Wood 2011, 429–430.
[118] Agathias *Histories* 1.20.3, translated by Frendo 1975, 28, modified.
[119] Agathias *Histories* 1.20.6, translated by Frendo 1975, 28, modified.

Roman, and that Narses welcomes him to 'his side,' but does not dub him a Roman. It seems that the plan is for Aligern to serve the Byzantine side despite his non-Roman status. Aligern's non-Roman status is emphasized with the phrase 'barbarian connections,' but this is done as neutrally as possible, perhaps in recognition of the fact that Aligern is leaving those connections behind.

Later in the sixth century, Byzantine authors still labored over when to label a non-Roman in military service a barbarian. Kurs, a general in Byzantine service, was not singled out for any special literary treatment in spite of the fact that he was most likely a Hun.[120] The historian Menander simply names him along with his colleague, 'the generals Kurs and Theodorus.'[121] There is nothing to single Kurs out as unusual here. More strikingly, the historian Theophylact passes over an easy opportunity to label Kurs a barbarian or his behavior barbaric. In the late summer of 582, a Byzantine army under the command of John Mystacon squared off against a Persian army. According to Theophylact, 'Kurs did not join battle, since he begrudged John success on the grounds that he was contending for greatest glory.'[122] Here, although Kurs withheld his participation in the battle out of jealousy for his commanding officer, and caused the Byzantines to lose, Theophylact does not lash out at him or label him a barbarian. The only way we know that Kurs was probably a Hun is because of a passing comment by the church historian Evagrius, labeling him a 'Scythian.'[123]

We might compare this restraint of Theophylact with regard to the term 'barbarian' with a similar situation related by Procopius. In 533, as Belisarius prepared to engage the Vandals in battle, Procopius tells us that the Huns held a discussion amongst themselves. They agreed not to fight at the beginning of the battle, but to wait to see which side won, and then to join the victors. Procopius writes, 'Thus had this matter been decided upon by the barbarians.'[124] Why Procopius labeled the Huns here as barbarians, but Theophylact did not label Kurs a barbarian, could boil down to vocabulary differences between the two authors. Perhaps the use of the term 'barbarian' had changed over the course of the sixth century.

[120] For the career and identity of Kurs, see *PLRE* 3: Cours.

[121] Menander Frag. 18.6.

[122] Theophylact *History* 1.9.9.

[123] Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.14. On the identification of Evagrius' Kurs with Theophylact's Kurs, see *PLRE* 3: Cours.

[124] Procopius *Wars* 4.2.3.

Perhaps Theophylact simply did not consider Kurs a barbarian. It is most likely, though, that the actions of Kurs, a single general competing with his fellow generals, seemed to be justifiable in Roman eyes, despite his non-Roman background.[125] After all, Roman generals being jealous to the point of sabotaging each other was a time-honored tradition, common not just in the sixth century, but stretching back to the Roman Republic.[126] On the other hand, Procopius apparently could only consider the treason of the Huns against the Byzantine cause to be barbaric.

Romans Working with Barbarians

This evidence of the way Byzantine officers and authors of the period used the term 'barbarian' adds color and reinforces the explanation offered in the previous two sections for how the Byzantines viewed non-Romans serving in the Byzantine military. The most common attitude toward non-Romans in military service was the middle layer described above, which consisted of open recognition that non-Romans could be good, just and brave peoples that served the Roman state well.[127] Thus Procopius and other sixth-century authors could casually praise non-Roman soldiers and officers for their contributions to the Byzantine cause without any sign of prejudice or resentment, as when Procopius praised Pharas. While in these instances the term 'barbarian' might be used, it was used in a neutral tone without evident hostility. More commonly, the author would simply refer to the individual in question by name or perhaps by his non-Roman ethnic

[125] Compare *PLRE* 3:361, which posits that his behavior in this battle perhaps ended his career, because he is not attested after this. Getting fired, of course, would not really be a barbarian-specific problem either.

[126] On jealousy in the sixth century, see Peter and John the Glutton informing Justinian about Belisarius' alleged plot so that they could get the general out of the East (Procopius *Secret History* 4.1–16) and the protracted conflict between Belisarius and Narses and their supporters in Italy in 538–539, culminating in John and Justin telling Belisarius that they 'would do nothing except what Narses commanded' (Procopius *Wars* 6.21.13–16). These episodes are examined in greater detail in Chap. 5. The pride and jealousy of politician-generals in the Late Republic is well known. See Gruen 1974 for a classic study of the issue.

[127] Contra Pohl, who argues that 'Procopius did not much approve of the non-Roman composition of the Roman military' (Pohl 2006, 18). On the other hand, Wood argues that Procopius 'is prepared to see virtue in those beyond the bounds of the Roman world' (Wood 2011, 446).

identity, as in 'Pharas the Herul.'[128] On that note, it is important to recognize that praise and appreciation did not mean an acceptance of these individuals as Romans. Good military service and even appreciation from one's superiors did not make one a Roman.[129] On the contrary, Byzantine authors knew very well that these people were not Roman. Procopius shows this succinctly in his description of Sisifridus, who 'though a Goth, was exceedingly loyal to the Romans and the emperor's cause.'[130] Sisifridus' loyalty to the emperor did not make him Roman, as Procopius clearly labeled him a Goth.[131] At the same time, he was not branded with the label 'barbarian' and there is no hostile tone in the identification of him as a Goth. Thus Byzantine authors recognized the non-Roman identity of barbarians in military service but eschewed traditional pejorative labels when the individuals in question were behaving properly. Of course, these same authors knew even as they praised non-Romans that these people could slip into what they might label 'irrational' behavior, so they reserved the right to change their tone and deploy terminology traditionally used for non-Romans.[132] When in good spirits and discipline, however, non-Romans in Byzantine military service were regarded as no less worthy than any other members of the Byzantine army. Their perceived ethnic background and non-Roman identity was in these cases merely a matter of curiosity, not one of judgment.[133]

But of course, the term 'barbarian' and the traditional rhetoric of barbarian peoples as impetuous, rash, uneducated, lawless, and generally

[128] Examples are to be found throughout the works of Procopius, Agathias, and other sixth-century authors. For select examples used in this chapter, see Procopius' first reference to Pharas (Procopius *Wars* 1.13.19), Procopius' reference to Sisifridus (Procopius *Wars* 7.12.12) and Menander's reference to Kurs (Menander Frag. 18.6). For additional examples, see Procopius' references to Sunicas and Aigan (Procopius *Wars* 1.13.20), Procopius' reference to Asbadus (Procopius *Wars* 8.26.13), and Agathias' references to Balmach, Cutilzis, and Iliger (Agathias *Histories* 3.17.5).

[129] Kaldellis 2012, 393 and Page 2008, 44. Similarly, Mathisen argues that a barbarian simply settling in the empire did not automatically become a Roman citizen; he had to make use of Roman laws and behave as a Roman citizen for that to occur. See Mathisen 2012, 754.

[130] Procopius *Wars* 7.12.12.

[131] Compare Greatrex 2000, 268–269 and n. 9.

[132] See, for example, Agathias *Histories* 2.7.4. In this case, the Heruls, although generally loyal to Narses up to this point, slipped into what Agathias exasperatedly labeled 'irrational' barbarian behavior.

[133] On ethnicity as a matter of curiosity rather than import under certain circumstances, see Kaldellis 2007, 95 and Greatrex 2000, 268.

uncivilized persisted and could be drawn upon at any time.[134] Even as they praised non-Romans who behaved well, Byzantine authors knew it was possible for those non-Romans to behave poorly and were prepared to deploy this rhetoric, pejoratively or not, whenever they deemed it appropriate. The term and its associated vocabulary seem to have been most prominently used with regard to non-Romans in military service in two types of situation. If the non-Romans in question were behaving badly, the author was likely to use the terminology in a hostile tone, invoking the top and bottom layer of the Byzantine attitude toward non-Romans discussed in the previous section. If there was no particular bad behavior in question and the author simply needed to make a stock reference to the traditional rhetoric of barbarism to prove a point or further an analogy, the author was likely to use the terminology in a neutral tone, drawing mainly only on the top layer of the Byzantine attitude. The Pharas example falls into the latter category. Procopius had nothing negative to say about Pharas and his soldiers, but felt it necessary to have Pharas self-identify as a barbarian to further the author's argument connecting Gelimer to Pharas and Belisarius as servants of Justinian. The example of Aligern also fits this reason for the use of barbarian terminology. Agathias had nothing negative to say about the Goth; on the contrary he was making the right decision by allying with the Roman cause. But it was helpful to categorize his former connections as barbarian to emphasize the correctness of his new course. Finally, the examples involving the Huns, first their defense of a drunken murder, and then their decision to behave treacherously in battle in North Africa, represent the other reason for deploying barbarian-related terminology: the barbarian behaving badly. These groups are pejoratively labeled barbarians not solely because of their perceived ethnic background or non-Roman status, but because of that status in conjunction with their poor behavior.[135] In these situations, as the bottom layer with its subconscious prejudice might suggest, the labeling of non-Romans might have been influenced by or colored by lingering memories and fears in collective Byzantine memory.

[134] Compare Greatrex 2000, 274: 'Naturally traditional distinctions between Romans and barbarians continued to be drawn, but they had decreasing relevance to current realities.'

[135] Compare Pohl 2006, 18–19, who suggests that 'the analogy between barbarians and passionate behavior was deep-rooted in a Roman's mind' and therefore Romans could not really separate the generally inappropriate behavior of a soldier from the specific prejudice against barbarian behavior.

For Byzantine military officers of the sixth century, or at least for the authors who wrote about these men, barbarians were not just enemies of the Roman state, nor were they simply only the people who opposed the emperor.[136] Non-Romans could in fact loyally serve the emperor and work in the Byzantine military without actually being Roman. But even though Byzantine authors recognized these individuals as non-Romans, they did not always label them barbarians. Those in military service who were called barbarians in a hostile fashion were those who came from non-Roman backgrounds and also lived up to barbarian stereotypes in their behavior. In doing so they caused all the fears, suspicion, and prejudice in the background of Byzantine memory to come spilling to the surface. For the most part, having only one of these two conditions was not enough to earn a non-Roman a pejorative barbarian label from a sixth-century author. An individual had to have both the background, with its lack of membership in the Roman political community, and the poor behavior, in order to be criticized as a barbarian. Byzantine military service, even with good behavior, did not immediately turn non-Romans into Romans, as seen with Pharas, Aligern, and Sisifridus, but it did at least shield them from the pejorative use of the term 'barbarian.'

So in the sixth-century Byzantine army, Romans and non-Romans generally served alongside one another without issue, sharing common experiences, dangers, victories, and defeats. However, concluding that Romans and non-Romans could cooperate in Byzantine military service is not the same thing as saying that cultural identity did not matter or that there was no distinction at all. As we have seen, Byzantines in general were very aware of the identity of individuals and groups, and jealously guarded Roman identity. Non-Romans could become Roman, but to do so they needed to join the Roman polity and reflect that membership through participation in the laws, institutions, religion, language, and customs of the Byzantine Empire. That some, perhaps even many, non-Romans did so is reflected in the gradual decrease of the proportion of non-Romans in the Byzantine army over the course of the sixth century. Non-Romans penetrated the Byzantine army at all levels, although succeeded in getting promotion to some ranks (mid-level commanders and guardsmen of generals, for example) more than others (such as generals and imperial guardsmen). Romans within the Byzantine army had a complex, triple-layered attitude toward these non-Romans. On a superficial level, they

[136] Compare Pohl 2004, 448 and Greatrex 2000, 274.

might casually refer to them as non-Romans or even barbarians using rhetoric that was by this point traditional. On a practical, conscious level, they would appreciate them for their good service and good conduct, treat them well, and refrain from calling them barbarians. On a subconscious level, some concern and prejudice rooted in the events of the past lurked and may have occasionally found itself expressed when non-Romans in the service behaved poorly. In general, the differences in identity between Romans and non-Romans only came to the fore in a manner unpleasant for the non-Romans when those non-Romans were caught behaving badly. Clearly a non-Roman could expect to have a productive career and to enjoy friendships with Roman officers during his service in the Byzantine military, even if he never actually Romanized himself. If he misbehaved in dramatic fashion, he might be castigated as a barbarian, but a Roman caught misbehaving by his superiors or peers would have faced considerable scorn as well. Likewise, a Roman officer could expect to have non-Roman colleagues who might become dear friends and allies in his military career and likely thought of them simply as comrades, not as non-Roman comrades. Cultural identity was therefore on its own no significant restraint on career advancement or relationship building for non-Romans.

CHAPTER 4

Officers and Their Emperor

This chapter begins a series of investigations into the significant relationships of Byzantine army officers, starting with an examination of the single most important official relationship an officer could have: that with his emperor. While a liaison with the imperial throne would have been desirable to all military officers, not all would have been equally able to realize this hope. Although all officers, like all soldiers generally, swore an oath of loyalty to the emperor, only the most senior officers would have had sufficient quality and quantity of access to the emperor in order to have a relationship with him. For this reason, this examination will of necessity be biased in favor of senior military officers. The relationship of an emperor to his generals was fraught in the late Roman and early Byzantine world. Emperor and general needed to hammer out all the traditional issues of war, including how to begin a campaign and what resources in terms of men and material to assign, while at the same time negotiating the standard supervisor-subordinate matters of behavior, promotion, transfer and dismissal. Lurking behind all of these concerns was fear: on the emperor's part, that his general might rebel against him; and on the general's part, that the emperor might seek to jealously get rid of him even if, and partly because, he was successful in his role.

The convoluted story of the plot of Artabanes provides an interesting introduction to these fraught relationships. Artabanes, an Armenian, was an officer of some distinction in the Persian army when he defected

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to the Byzantines in 545.[1] Soon after his enrollment in the Byzantine army, he was dispatched to North Africa in command of a small force of Armenian soldiers. This decision was not surprising, as it was fairly common to send recently defected or captured soldiers to fight on fronts with which they were unfamiliar, probably to discourage desertion.[2] While in Africa, Artabanes diffused a mutiny against Justinian by personally assassinating the leader of the uprising. This action won Artabanes considerable fame and Justinian promoted him to General of Africa (*magister militum per Africam*) in 546.[3] But Artabanes set his sights higher. He requested and received a recall to Constantinople, where he was given the command of one of the two armies in the emperor's presence. He nearly married Justinian's niece, Praeiecta, but was prevented at the last moment by Theodora, who championed the cause of Artabanes' current wife and ruled that he could not divorce her to marry into the imperial family.[4] Frustrated at this reversal, Artabanes allowed himself to be persuaded to join in a plot against Justinian. The conspiracy was discovered in early 549. As punishment, Justinian stripped Artabanes of his position and confined him in the palace under guard.[5] But by the middle of 550, Justinian apparently changed his mind. He dismissed all charges against Artabanes, appointed him General of Thrace (*magister militum per Thracias*), and sent him to take charge of Byzantine forces in Sicily.[6] From Sicily, Artabanes worked his way to Italy and served under Narses in the final campaign to defeat the Ostrogoths. Artabanes' career was a startling roller coaster of success and disgrace. His relationship with Justinian could not have been easy. The collaboration between successful and ambitious generals like Artabanes and their emperor is the focus of this chapter. Officers had to negotiate their relationship with their emperor through all phases of their career: appointment, review, and promotion, dismissal, or transfer.

[1] Procopius *Wars* 4.24.2. On the career of Artabanes, see Jones, Martindale, and Morris 1971 [Hereafter *PLRE*], Artabanes 2, 3:125–30.

[2] Consider the postings of the Persarmenian brothers Narses and Aratius to Egypt and Palestine respectively in 535 (*PLRE* 3: Narses 2, at 929 and Aratius, at 103) and then even further away to Italy in 538 (Procopius *Wars* 6.13.16–17) and the posting of captured Vandal soldiers (the *Vandali Justiniani*) to the Eastern front in 535 (4.14.17).

[3] Procopius *Wars* 4.28.29–43.

[4] Procopius *Wars* 7.31.2–14.

[5] Procopius *Wars* 7.31.15–32.51.

[6] Procopius *Wars* 7.39.8.

Appointment: Gaining a Position

The degree to which a relationship with the emperor was necessary in order for an officer to gain appointment depended heavily on the importance of the position in question. In general terms, all officers, even the most junior officer—who would be a senior enlisted soldier promoted to the honorary rank of *protector* at the end of a long career— had some connection to the emperor.[7] Officers received an official document from the emperor confirming their commission.[8] This connection would have been one way and cannot really be considered a relationship. So junior officers had, as we would expect, extremely limited connection to the emperor. On the other end of the officer spectrum were the generals (*magistri militum*). At least in theory, the emperor personally selected and directly appointed generals.[9] While it is unlikely that the emperor knew all generals equally well on a personal level, it is reasonable to assume that he took particular interest in choosing who would occupy these important positions. Promotion to the rank of general, like all appointments that earned their occupants illustrious rank and membership in the senate, typically took place in the emperor's presence.[10] Certainly by the time an officer reached this rank, he began a personal relationship with the emperor. Between the two extremes of the most junior officers and the generals lie the various lower and middle ranks of the military command hierarchy.[11] These ranks are not as easy to observe in literary sources and the reasons for promotion between them are somewhat obscure, but such promotions and transfers would not typically have involved the emperor directly.[12] The emperor would have always had the ability to insert himself into such decisions, but it is unlikely that this would have happened with any regularity. Of course, even without personal appointment from the emperor, officers below the rank of general might have known him, but this would have been the result of fortuitous personal connections rather than official relationships. This brief review establishes that when discussing the way an officer's relationship with the emperor impacted his career opportunities and allowed him to receive appointment to an important position, we are primarily

[7] Jones 1964, 1:634.
[8] Jones 1964, 1:641.
[9] Jones 1964, 1:390.
[10] Jones 1964, 1:528–9, 337.
[11] See Chap. 2, 'Ranks and Positions.'
[12] Elton 2007, 306. Compare Jones 1964, 1:391.

talking about officers who were at some point appointed to senior command roles, mainly as generals.

Little is known for certain about how officers or even generals specifically earned appointment in the sixth century.[13] An examination of the generals described in the sixth-century sources does however provide some clues as to how officers might have gained the emperor's attention and earned appointment to high military rank. What is clearest is that there was no single path to appointment. Aside from their common occupation, the generals of this period have little in the way of group identity.[14] What is most remarkable is not the similarity of their social, economic, or even ethnic origins, but their extreme diversity. By the sixth century, the days when generals had been drawn primarily from the old nobility of Roman society were long gone. The term 'old nobility' here refers to families with several generations of men of illustrious rank.[15] Few generals of the sixth century boasted such old and distinguished family backgrounds.[16] Of 47 generals described by Procopius, for example, only two (Liberius and Areobindus) may be definitively identified as belonging to noble families, although this does not exclude the possibility that there are others for whom Procopius did not provide that sort of background information.[17] To put this in perspective, this is the same number of generals who may be definitively identified as *cubicularii*, that is palace officials who were frequently eunuchs from obscure or even servile families (Narses and Scholasticus).[18] The number of generals coming from both the old nobility and *cubicularii* combined are smaller than those generals who could claim descent from a royal barbarian family. Five of these 47 generals claimed to be

[13] Jones 1964, 1:676.

[14] Most of the remaining pages of this section originally appeared in Parnell 2012, 4–7. Reprinted by permission of Boydell & Brewer Ltd., *Journal of Medieval Military History*, David Alan Parnell, 2012, 4–7.

[15] Of course not all powerful and influential men came from the old nobility. In this sense, the old nobility was a small subset of the ruling elite. See Jones 1964, 1:529–30 on the makeup of the *illustres* in the sixth century and Whately 2013, 50 on defining terms such as 'elite.'

[16] Jones 1964, 1:383, argues that men of high birth were 'sometimes appointed *magistri* with little or no previous military experience,' but the only example he provides from the sixth century is Areobindus, who was more likely an exception than a general rule.

[17] For Liberius, see Procopius *Wars* 7.36.6 and *PLRE* 2: Liberius 3, at 677. For Areobindus, see Procopius *Wars* 4.24.1. For a full description of this analysis, see Parnell 2012, 4, n. 14.

[18] On *cubicularii* generally, see Jones 1964, 1:567–70. For Narses and Scholasticus, see Procopius *Wars* 1.15.31, 1.25.24 and 7.40.35.

descended from barbarian royalty or to have attained such royalty themselves. The general Peranius, for example, was said to be either the son or the brother of the Iberian king Gurgenes.[19] From barbarian kings and eunuchs to illustrious senators, generals were appointed from all sorts of different backgrounds. For many generals, we have no certain information on their career before their appointment, while others clearly came from undistinguished families and rose through the ranks of the officer corps of the Byzantine army, presumably on merit. It was not uncommon for a general to first serve as a duke of border troops, a commander of some sort (*archon*), or even as a guardsman (*bucellarius*) for another general.[20]

There were some other common paths to becoming a general. Not surprisingly in light of the emperor's importance in the appointment process, it helped to have a prior, close connection to the emperor himself. Three of the generals described by Procopius were probably promoted to their rank because they had belonged to the emperor Justinian's household in the years before he became emperor, usually as guardsmen.[21] Belisarius probably received his appointments first as duke of Mesopotamia (*dux Mesopotamiae*) and later as General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*) because he had been one of Justinian's guardsmen during the reign of Justin I. Members of the imperial family also received special preferment for generals' positions. No fewer than seven members of Justinian's family served him as generals.[22] It is worth noting, however,

[19] Procopius *Wars* 1.12.11. Among the other four, Mundus claimed to be the son of a Gepid king (Theophanes *Chronicle* AM 6032). For a full reconstruction of his career, see Croke 1982. Mauricius was the son of Mundus (Procopius *Wars* 5.7.2). Amalafridas was the grandnephew of Theoderic, king of the Ostrogoths (8.25.11). Finally, Justinian appointed Suartuas as ruler of the Heruls, but they rejected him and drove him out, at which point Justinian gave Suartuas a commission as a general (8.25.11). On granting high command to 'distinguished foreign deserters,' see Ravegnani 1998, 88.

[20] Buzes served as a *dux* in Syria in 528 and later appeared as a general in Armenia in 540 (Procopius *Wars* 1.13.5, 2.3.28). Theoctistus served as a *dux* in Syria in 540 but by 570 was in North Africa as a general (*PLRE* 3: Theoctistus 2, at 1226).

[21] Procopius states that both Belisarius and Sittas were guardsmen of Justinian when he was a general (Procopius *Wars* 1.12.20–21), while he describes Chilbudius as belonging to Justinian's household (7.14.1–6).

[22] While these men were indeed members of the ruling elite, they were relatives of an emperor from an obscure family, and so have not been counted as members of the old nobility. The seven were Germanus, Justinian's cousin, (Procopius *Wars* 4.16.1), Justin the son of Germanus (*PLRE* 3: Iustinus 4, at 750), Justinian the son of Germanus and brother of Justin (*PLRE* 3: Iustinianus 3, at 744), Justus the cousin of Justinian (*PLRE* 3: Iustus 2, at 758), Marcellus the nephew of Justinian and brother of Justin II (*PLRE* 3: Marcellus 5, at 816),

that this was not always just blind nepotism. Family connection could lead to military command, but did not do so automatically. Germanus, Justinian's cousin, was perhaps the most famous non-emperor among Justinian's relatives and was quite a competent general. Germanus successfully put down the mutiny in North Africa between 536 and 539 with a combination of diplomacy, placating the soldiers with money, and victory in battle.[23] On the other side of the coin, the future emperor Justin II (r. 565–578), although a nephew of Justinian, was never favored with a general's command, possibly because he did not have military skills.[24] Even for those members of the imperial family who did manage to become generals, they did at least sometimes have to progress through the ranks, starting as junior officers, before they worked their way up to the highest levels of command. For example, Justin, the son of Justinian's cousin Germanus, first entered the limelight by helping to reveal the plot of Artabanes against the emperor in 549, then served as a commander under a different general in 551, and does not appear to have become a general with his own command until 557.[25]

One more curious factor might have helped to gain a general appointment, depending on the identity of the emperor who was doing the hiring. If the emperor himself was older, then a general of greater age might have appealed to him. It has been noted that Justinian gravitated toward appointing older generals as he himself grew older.[26] Indeed, by 550 Justinian was using such elderly generals as Bessas (about 70), Narses (about 70), and Liberius (about 80). Even Belisarius was aging by this time (he was about 60 when he was called out of retirement to fight the Huns in 559). Older men were both within Justinian's generation and thus more familiar to him, as well as too old to think about trying to supplant him. Justinian would have been comfortable with these men holding high

Areobindus who married Praeiecta, the niece of Justinian, and John, the nephew of Vitalian, who married Justina, the daughter of Germanus (*PLRE* 3: Ioannes 46). See Chap. 6, 'Examples of family military service.' On imperial relatives as generals, cf. Whitby 2000b, 308.

[23] Procopius *Wars* 4.16.1–7, 4.17.1–35. For a general assessment of Germanus, see *PLRE* 2: Germanus 4, at 505.

[24] Justin did however receive the high rank of *curopalates*, indicating that Justinian did not dislike him (Theophanes *Chronicle* AM 6051). Justin's exclusion from military office therefore might have been because he was not competent in military matters. For Justin's career prior to ascending the throne, see *PLRE* 3: Iustinus 5, at 754.

[25] Procopius *Wars* 7.32.13–51, 7.40.34–5, and Agathias *Histories* 4.21.1.

[26] Treadgold 1997, 208.

military office. Age however would have been a very situational advantage in gaining appointment. A young or recently appointed emperor might prefer younger generals, particularly officers with whom he had worked before his ascension, while an older emperor near the end of his reign, as Justinian in the 550s, might prefer older generals.

Therefore, officers hoping for appointment to high military rank, particularly as a general, needed to do something to get noticed by the emperor. They need not have a close personal relationship with the emperor before their appointment, but while having that relationship certainly did not hurt their chances, it did not guarantee appointment either. Similarly their ethnic background, socioeconomic status, success in their military career, and even age could all be factors that might help. There was, however, no absolute precondition that could be satisfied to guarantee appointment to high military position. Officers who gained the rank of general probably did so by manipulating the levers of patronage and power and exploiting whatever of these advantages they might have had to convince the emperor and his advisors that they were worthy of that rank. Since this manipulation occurred behind the scenes, it is difficult to document and impossible to prove, but we can be relatively certain that patronage and the use of personal connections like relatives or friends in positions of authority had something to do with it. The importance of patronage in gaining office is clear enough in previous Roman history and in other areas of the sixth-century government such as the civil service.[27] It is implied by the known relationships and previous positions in the careers of army officers, rather than stated by the sources directly, but that does not mean it was not important.

Review: Keeping a Position

Of course, once an officer had gained senior military rank and been appointed to an important position, he would do his best to keep it. Service as a general was at the emperor's pleasure rather than for a fixed tenure.[28] While some generals held their posts for as much as a decade, such tenures seem to have been the exception. Most generals stayed in their position for no more than a few years before being moved or

[27] Jones 1964, 1:391–6; Kelly 2004, 129–37, 158–65.
[28] Jones 1964, 1:378–83.

dismissed.[29] While the emperors probably had some process by which they reviewed their generals to determine whether they should keep their current positions, we know nothing about that process or about how regularly it occurred. It is clear, however, that the emperors did monitor the success and behavior of their generals and were prepared to intervene and terminate their employment if given enough reason. That reason had to be considered sufficient; because it seems that otherwise the emperors frequently let their generals get away with a degree of misbehavior. In the *History of the Wars*, Procopius rather mournfully announced, 'Justinian was accustomed to condone, for the most part, the mistakes of his commanders, and consequently they were found very generally to be guilty of offenses both in private life and against the state.'[30] This is a fascinating accusation that deserves attention. It is probably justified to be skeptical that the situation was quite as bad as Procopius makes it sound, but the evidence does indicate that many generals were in fact guilty of offenses. To see how emperors handled this, it is necessary to review some incidents where generals either misbehaved or failed at their jobs and see just what it took to earn some sort of response from the emperor, whether that response be as little as censure or as great as removal and arrest. These examples illustrate the review relationship between emperor and general in this period and perhaps provide some explanation for why Justinian might have been accustomed to condone misbehavior.

The examination begins in the midst of Procopius' lengthy account of the first phase of the Byzantine War against the Ostrogoths in Italy. In the winter of 537–538, the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine army in the theatre, Belisarius, received an allegation that his subordinate general, named Constantine, had stolen a pair of valuable daggers from Presidius, a wealthy resident of Rome. To right the wrong, Belisarius summoned Constantine to his presence and ordered him to return the daggers. When Constantine refused, Belisarius called guards to have him arrested and taken into custody. Constantine allegedly panicked and attempted to stab Belisarius, but was subdued by the guards.[31] Now Belisarius had to decide what to do with Constantine, who was apparently guilty not only of theft but also of disobedience. Procopius says that sometime later, Belisarius had Constantine executed for these misbehaviors. The situa-

[29] See Jones 1964, 1:380–2 and Parnell 2012, 7–9.
[30] Procopius *Wars* 8.13.14.
[31] Procopius *Wars* 6.8.

tion was however considerably more complicated than this brief survey in the *History of the Wars* suggests. From Procopius' *Secret History*, we learn about the complex social situation lying just below the surface of these events. The year before, Belisarius had discovered that his wife Antonina was cheating on him. To make the matter even more scandalous, Antonina was having an affair with their adopted son, Theodosius. When Belisarius found out about the affair, he forgave Antonina and sent away their son. Constantine had supported Belisarius throughout the whole matter, even going so far as to say 'I would sooner have done away with the wife than with the young man.'[32] Unfortunately for Constantine, Belisarius had decided to stay with his wife. These events are relevant to the execution of Constantine. According to Procopius, Belisarius had Constantine executed on the suggestion of his wife Antonina, who gleefully took revenge on Constantine for daring to suggest that Belisarius should have cast her aside after the affair. Procopius states flatly that this execution, because of the reason behind it, was 'the only unholy deed done by Belisarius' and that because of it, 'Belisarius earned the hatred of both the emperor and all the best men among the Romans.'[33] If Procopius is to be believed, report of Belisarius' actions and even the reasons for his actions reached the ear of the emperor. Justinian evidently disapproved and it is possible that Procopius' words 'earned the hatred' might even imply that Belisarius received some sort of formal rebuke or censure. However, it is clear that no significant punishment was forthcoming. Perhaps Belisarius was too important to the war effort in Italy to recall to Constantinople for more significant punishment. In fact, far from being punished, Belisarius was reconfirmed in his position as early as the next year. When Belisarius quarreled with other commanders in early 539, which might have provided an ideal excuse to recall and punish him for an act that supposedly all disapproved, Justinian instead recalled the argumentative commanders and reconfirmed Belisarius as commander-in-chief of the Ostrogothic War.[34] So in this case, a general allegedly committed murder or at best improperly executed a subordinate and earned imperial displeasure but did not actually receive significant punishment.

[32] Procopius *Secret History* 1.24.

[33] Procopius *Wars* 6.8, *Secret History* 1.30.

[34] Procopius *Wars* 6.22.4. For a detailed analysis of Belisarius' squabble with other commanders in 538–9, see Chap. 5, 'Belisarius and Narses in Italy, 538–539.'

It is reasonable to imagine that incidents like Constantine's theft of property were not uncommon as the Byzantine army occupied Italy in what turned out to be the longest running war of Justinian's reign. Most misbehaviors like theft or extortion would have been handled at the local level, if dealt with at all, and would not have involved the emperor; but occasionally when coupled with other reasons such misbehavior could come to imperial attention. Seven years after Constantine's execution, the war in Italy raged on. From 545 to 546, Totila, the King of the Ostrogoths, besieged the Byzantine-held city of Rome. The general in charge of the Byzantine garrison in Rome was Bessas, who was both distinguished and experienced, having served in the army since 503. This, however, was not his finest moment. Procopius accused Bessas of being lethargic in the defense of Rome and, more than that, using his powers as a general to extort money from the populace by selling the scarce grain within the city at enormously inflated prices.[35] While the rich, of course, could afford to pay inflated prices to stay alive, the poor had no such recourse. Bessas was apparently more interested in profiteering than defending the city. When Rome fell to Totila in 546, Bessas fled. The fall of Rome just six years after Belisarius had apparently pacified Italy was with good reason seen as a disaster. Whether it was because of his profiteering, because of his failure to defend the city, or both, Bessas was in disgrace.[36] He appears in Italy no longer, and so was probably recalled to Constantinople. This then seems to be an instance of a general being punished, although we might be right to suspect that the punishment was primarily for the failure to defend Rome rather than for the profiteering, no matter how many people died in the siege. However, less than four years later, Bessas again received a major appointment, as the General of Armenia, and was sent to Lazica in the Caucasus to take charge of operations against the Persians. Once there he acted vigorously and with immense personal valor, leading his troops in capturing the city of Petra in 551. This restored his status so much that Procopius reported that by this one act he salvaged his reputation as a general and 'became once more an object of respectful admiration among all men.'[37] This episode suggests that even when the emperor noticed misbehavior and punished a general, that punishment was not necessarily absolute or final. It is also worth noting that both of these incidents of

[35] Procopius *Wars* 7.17.9–25, 20.1.
[36] Procopius *Wars* 7.20.16–21.
[37] Procopius *Wars* 8.12.29–35.

misbehavior took place in Italy, comparatively far off from the point of view of the emperor in Constantinople. Misbehavior closer to home might have registered as more of a concern; misbehavior in Italy was evidently not a high priority.

The apparent disinterest of Justinian in handling military misbehavior in Italy was probably continued by his successors in the late sixth century. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that citizens of the empire began to direct their complaints about the criminal behavior of generals in other directions. Thanks to the extensive papal registers of Gregory the Great (r. 590–604), we know that the pope began to deal with many such complaints by the end of the sixth century. In fact there is a noticeable change over the course of the papacy of Gregory in papal confidence towards handling the misbehavior of Byzantine military officers. At the beginning of his papacy, Gregory was tentative in asking for justice from high-ranking military officers. In July 591, less than a year after becoming pope, Gregory wrote to Gennadius, the exarch of Africa.[38] He wrote to warn Gennadius that Theodore, the duke of Sardinia, was misbehaving and implored Gennadius to bring Theodore to heel. Gregory wrote: 'So that the grace of Christ protects your Glory with prosperity, whatever wrongdoings you know are being committed, check them with a swift prohibition.' He continued:

> Marinianus, our brother and fellow bishop of the city of Porto Torres, has informed us tearfully that the poor of his city are totally distraught and badly hit by the cost of commodities. Furthermore even religious members of his church are enduring heavy molestation and suffering bodily injuries at the hands of the men of Theodore, their military commander. It has reached such a point, he says, that they are being thrown into prison, dreadful to relate. Indeed, even in cases concerning his church, he is being seriously impeded himself by the aforesaid glorious gentleman.[39]

Gregory provides no explanation as to why Theodore and his men were abusing the clerics of Porto Torres, but that is probably because it is not his intention to provide any plausible excuses for Theodore. Despite his evident concern for the situation, Gregory in no way attempted to order Gennadius about, but sought piously to implore him into action. Gregory concluded:

[38] Gregory *Epistle* 1.59.
[39] Gregory *Epistle* 1.59, translated by Martyn 2004.

> Therefore I beg you, with the Lord inspiring you, to correct all of these abuses with the threat of your intervention. Do this in such a way that the glorious Theodore and his men abstain from such actions, if not through the contemplation of righteousness, at least through fear of your command, so that justice can flower with liberty in the regions entrusted to you, which may add to your glory and reward.

It is not necessarily surprising that the pope would attempt to intervene on behalf of a church in Sardinia, but it is interesting that both the bishop of Porto Torres and the pope sought relief outside of a request to the emperor. The bishop of Porto Torres sought out the pope, and the pope sought out the immediate military superior of Theodore, duke of Sardinia, who was Gennadius, exarch of Africa. The emperor Maurice (r. 582–602) in Constantinople does not appear in this letter, perhaps an indication that those in the West had essentially given up on imperial review of military officers stationed there.

As he neared the end of his papacy, Gregory became ever more confident in dealing with military misbehavior on his own. Perhaps the combination of the failure of the imperial system to work as he believed it ought and his own success up to this point emboldened him to be more assertive to fill the void of authority. In December 603, Gregory wrote to Guduin, the Byzantine duke of Naples. [40] In no uncertain terms, Gregory rebuked Guduin for failing to punish a soldier under his command who had raped a nun. With typical papal euphemism, Gregory wrote, 'We have been quite amazed that a really strict punishment has not been inflicted so far against that soldier who has ruined a nun with devilish stimulation.'[41] Whereas in the previous letter Gregory had begged and wheedled Gennadius into taking action, now Gregory gave direct commands himself. He wrote, 'we exhort you to make haste in strictly correcting such a great sin as an example for others.' As if to put the exclamation point on his newfound confidence, Gregory concluded ominously 'We shall in no way allow such great wickedness to remain unpunished.' Perhaps the disinterest of the emperors in punishing military misbehavior contributed to the growth in confidence of Gregory in assuming some level of responsibility or even control over Byzantine generals in Italy.[42]

[40] Gregory *Epistle* 14.10.

[41] Gregory *Epistle* 14.10, translated by Martyn 2004.

[42] There are other letters in which Gregory addresses misbehavior of Byzantine officers. See Gregory *Epistle* 1.47, 9.27, 10.5.

If the emperors were so disinterested in punishing routine offenses and misbehaviors in the military that Procopius took note of it, and a half century later Gregory took charge of it, was there anything at all that could push the emperors to review crimes and mete out significant punishment? There was one type of misbehavior that an emperor would not and could not allow to his generals; this offense automatically triggered imperial involvement and severe repercussions for the accused party. It is perhaps not surprising that this one unforgivable crime was sedition or the threat of rebellion. In this context, we can return to the example that began this chapter: the plot of Artabanes. This plot was precipitated by success. Artabanes happened to be in the right place at the right time: he was in Africa in 546, just as Guntharis led a mutiny. Guntharis killed the legitimate general, Areobindus, and seized control of Carthage.[43] Artabanes conspired with other loyal officers and killed Guntharis, returning Carthage to imperial control.[44] Artabanes received a considerable reward for this act of loyalty. He was promoted first to General of Africa, and then when he requested it was transferred to Constantinople and granted one of the positions at the head of the armies in the emperor's presence. These were some of the most significant military posts in the entire empire, so Artabanes could hardly complain of being treated with ingratitude; yet that is exactly what he did. Or rather, as Procopius put it: 'when men lay hold upon prosperity unexpectedly, their minds cannot remain stable, but in their hopes they ever keep going forward.'[45] His complaint centered on the fact that he was unable to marry Praeiecta, niece of the emperor. There is no indication that Justinian would not have liked Artabanes as a member of his family, but rather that the problem was that Artabanes was already married.[46] Frustrated at his inability to 'keep going forward,' Artabanes allowed himself to be persuaded to join in a plot against Justinian. The conspiracy was not very sophisticated. The architect was Arsaces, an Armenian noble living in Constantinople. He gained the participation of Artabanes by playing upon his frustrations and ambitions. Arsaces then went to Justin, the son of Justinian's cousin Germanus, to attempt to solicit the participation of Germanus. Justin and Germanus duly reported the matter to the commander of the imperial

[43] Procopius *Wars* 4.26.
[44] Procopius *Wars* 4.27.11–28.41.
[45] Procopius *Wars* 7.31.6.
[46] Procopius *Wars* 7.31.2–15.

bodyguards.[47] And so the plot was discovered in early 549. As punishment, Justinian stripped Artabanes of his position and confined him in the palace under guard.[48] Therefore, sedition in Constantinople, the heart of the empire, not surprisingly received immediate reaction and significant punishment. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that for an emperor who had presided over the massacre of 35,000 people to end the Nika Riot, termination of employment and imprisonment in the palace was a relatively mild sentence.[49]

Artabanes was not the only general to plot against Justinian. At the successful conclusion of the Vandal War in North Africa, Belisarius was clearly Justinian's favorite. Belisarius had accomplished what multiple generals and armies before him had tried and failed to do: he had defeated the Vandals, restored North Africa to Roman control, and had done it all within a year. Justinian showed his favor by allowing Belisarius to march in a triumph, a Roman military procession that had been reserved for emperors for hundreds of years.[50] Justinian's reaction to Belisarius' victory in Italy five years later would be very different, probably because of the fashion in which Belisarius won that victory. In 540, Justinian was eager to bring the war in Italy to a close so that Belisarius and his soldiers could be transferred to the Persian front, where Khusrau had recently broke the peace. Justinian wrote to Belisarius to strike a deal which would keep the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy intact. The proposed settlement had the Byzantines and Ostrogoths splitting the Gothic treasury, with the Byzantines controlling all lands south of the River Po, and the Ostrogoths controlling lands to the north of it.[51] Belisarius, who had been campaigning in Italy for five years, did not want a negotiated peace, or at least not one that was as favorable to the Ostrogoths. So Belisarius turned to a ruse. He wrote to the Ostrogoths, intimating that if they surrendered to him, he would rebel against Justinian, become emperor in the West, and would rule with the Ostrogoths over Italy. The Ostrogoths found this acceptable and surrendered to Belisarius, inviting him into their stronghold of Ravenna. Once inside, Belisarius arrested the Ostrogothic king,

[47] Procopius *Wars* 7.32.

[48] Procopius *Wars* 7.32.51.

[49] Greatrex 1997, 79.

[50] Procopius *Wars* 4.9. See also Lee 2007b, 399. On triumphs generally, see McCormick 1986. Börm 2013 has argued that this triumph primarily exalted Justinian and actually served to put Belisarius in his place rather than to reward him.

[51] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.1–4.

confiscated the Ostrogothic treasury, and then took both to Justinian in Constantinople.[52] Belisarius, Procopius says, had never intended to actually rebel against Justinian:

> Belisarius was quite unwilling to assume the ruling power against the will of the emperor; for he had an extraordinary loathing for the name of tyrant, and furthermore he had, in fact, been bound by the emperor previously by most solemn oaths never during his lifetime to organize a revolution.[53]

This had all been a ploy to convince the Ostrogoths to surrender. But of course, the ploy did not go unnoticed. Belisarius' enemies within the army immediately reported it to Justinian, accusing Belisarius of attempted usurpation.[54] Justinian acted cautiously, aware of Belisarius' previous loyalty, record of success, and immense popularity. The emperor did not punish Belisarius directly, perhaps buying Belisarius' explanation that it had all been a ruse. But Justinian was concerned enough by this behavior that he denied Belisarius, victor in this war, public recognition or praise. Instead of a public triumph, as he had received after the conquest of the Vandal Kingdom, the wealth of the Ostrogothic treasury which Belisarius had captured was shown privately to the senate.[55] Justinian was likely seeking to manage Belisarius' reputation and keep his popularity from swelling yet further because of his grave concern over this seemingly close call with rebellion.[56]

Another indication of Justinian's concern with this action is the command situation in Italy after Belisarius left. Justinian was so paranoid that another general would follow in Belisarius' footsteps—in earnest instead of merely as a ruse—that he refused to appoint one commander-in-chief, instead giving equal power to multiple generals. The result was disaster, or as Procopius says, 'many blunders were committed and the entire fabric of the Roman power was utterly destroyed in a short space of time.'[57] Even after being informed that the generals were quarreling among themselves and losing battles, Justinian was unwilling to appoint one single general,

[52] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.17–41, 30.25–30.
[53] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.19–20, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:131.
[54] Procopius *Wars* 6.30.1.
[55] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.1–3.
[56] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.4–7. See also Lee 2007a, 68–9.
[57] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.23–24.

contenting himself instead with sending rebukes and censures.[58] In 542, after two years of mismanagement, Justinian finally agreed to appoint a new commander-in-chief, but serious damage had been done to Byzantine fortunes in that time frame.[59] So in this instance, Belisarius' pretense at plotting caused Justinian to be overly cautious in organizing the leadership in Italy, and also encouraged Justinian to mete out a mild punishment for Belisarius: it consisted of reduced praise rather than any retributive sentence. The context probably explains the mild punishment: Justinian had liked and trusted Belisarius for years; Belisarius had not actually attempted usurpation, he had only pretended; Belisarius was very powerful, so Justinian might also have feared that more strict punishment would cause Belisarius to reassess his loyalty and rebel in fact instead of merely as a ruse.

Justinian's punishment would not be as mild the next time reports connected Belisarius with talk about the imperial throne. Two years after the first incident, in 542, Justinian fell ill with the plague that would later bear his name.[60] Belisarius was stationed in the east and was prosecuting war with the Persian Empire. While Justinian was ill and reportedly near death, Belisarius allegedly talked with his subordinate officers about the situation and an unspecified number of them discussed that 'if the Romans in Byzantium foisted another emperor like that upon them all, they would never allow it.'[61] The implication was perhaps that the officers would not accept an unwarlike emperor, but expected an emperor with a military background, perhaps even Belisarius himself. Unfortunately for Belisarius, Justinian recovered, and hearing about this discussion he and Theodora interpreted it, not unreasonably, as an insult against their reign.[62] The result was that Belisarius lost his position, was expelled from military service, his guardsmen were divided up and sent to other generals, his friends were forbidden from seeing him, and much of his wealth was confiscated. Procopius wrote: 'What a bitter spectacle and incredible sight it was to see Belisarius going about in Byzantium as a private citizen: virtually alone, always gloomy and sullen, in constant terror of a murderer's knife.'[63]

Here then is evidence that the emperors reviewed their generals and could potentially impose a tough punishment for military misbehavior.

[58] Procopius *Wars* 7.3.1.
[59] Procopius *Wars* 7.6.9.
[60] On the plague, see Little 2007.
[61] Procopius *Secret History* 4.1–2.
[62] Procopius *Secret History* 4.3–5.
[63] Procopius *Secret History* 4.13–17.

But it is interesting that this punishment typically came not as a response to transgressing regulations or even committing crimes against other soldiers or citizens; it came as a response to reported *lèse-majesté*. Perhaps Procopius was right that Justinian was accustomed to condone offenses on the part of his senior military officers, so long as those offenses were committed against anyone other than the emperor himself. The promotion, transfer, and dismissal of military officers, much like the review process, also highlights this overriding imperial concern with security.

Moving On: Promotion, Transfer or Dismissal

While some reviews might result in no action at all, or only mild censure, other reviews resulted in a change in position. These changes in position may be classified as promotion, transfer, or dismissal from service. No matter how the change was labeled, it was a constant in the careers of sixth-century generals. No general was too successful or too famous to avoid frequent change in office. For example, it is well known that Belisarius fought in the East against the Persians in Mesopotamia (527–531), helped crush the Nika Riot in Constantinople in 532, commanded the invasion of Africa (533–534), commanded the invasion of Italy (535–540), fought a second time in Mesopotamia (541–542), returned a second time to Italy (544–548), and finally near the end of his life in 559 fought the Kutrigur Huns in Thrace, not far from Constantinople itself. It seems that the frequency of transfer that Belisarius experienced was not exceptional.[64] Not all these transfers of theater necessarily meant a change in official title or position. Belisarius maintained his title of General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*) throughout the 530s while he fought in Africa and Italy. Vitalius, the General of Illyricum (*magister militum per Illyricum*), retained that title while fighting in Italy in 544.[65] However, most generals who experienced a change in theater also changed position. These transfers were common for all generals, not just the most senior. From the evidence of Procopius alone, it is possible to identify 25 generals who certainly held more than one command during their careers.[66] Bessas and Martin provide good examples of this movement. Bessas served on the eastern front

[64] See Elton 2007, 308, who notes that for generals it was 'possible to have wide-ranging careers.'

[65] For Belisarius, see Procopius *Wars* 3.11.1–21. For Vitalius, see 7.10.2.

[66] See Parnell 2012, 15–16.

against the Persians in Mesopotamia in 531, then from 535 to 546 in Italy against the Ostrogoths, and still later served again on the eastern front, this time in the Caucasus, from 550 to 554.[67] The general Martin served on the eastern front in Mesopotamia in 531, fought in the invasion of Vandalic North Africa, 533–536, served in Italy, 536–540, served again in Mesopotamia, 543–544, and ended his career fighting against the Persians in the Caucasus, 551–556.[68] It is not unreasonable to suspect that many other generals in the period experienced similar movement. Although the available sources may not provide details, it is probable that many officers may have served in additional theaters with little to no action and would not have attracted the attention of contemporary historians, who generally liked to record important events rather than mundane ones.

Of course, not all movements happened for the same reason. Sometimes the change was a simple transfer engineered to move an officer to a theater where the emperor particularly needed him. The movement of Mundus shows how this would have worked. He was General of Illyricum, 529–530, was transferred and briefly served as General of the East in 531, but by 532 was back in the Balkans as General of Illyricum again. These rapid movements were not promotions or demotions, as the rank in each position was the same, but were prompted by the need to fill the office in the East when Belisarius was temporarily relieved of it.[69] Most movements for generals were these simple transfers, which did not alter their rank but merely assigned them to another theater of war. Such transfers were a normal part of service for sixth-century generals. On other occasions, a change in office would be a promotion to a more important post. For example, Aratius served as a duke in Palestine in the 530s, but was probably promoted to general when he was sent to Italy to join Belisarius in 538.[70] Similarly, Constantianus was a commander—the count of the sacred stables (the *comes sacri stabuli*)—in Italy (536–544), but when sent out with an army to oppose the Gepids and Heruls in the Balkans in 549, he was promoted to general.[71] Promotions could obviously also occur within the same theater and so would not necessarily require a

[67] For Bessas' career generally, see *PLRE* 2: Bessas.

[68] For Martin's career generally, see *PLRE* 3: Martinus 2.

[69] *PLRE* 3: Mundus, at 903–4.

[70] *PLRE* 3: Aratius, at 103. His rank in Italy is not clear, as is often the case with narrative sources like Procopius, but even if he was a mid-level commander, this still represented a promotion from a command position like *dux* in the *limitanei*.

[71] *PLRE* 3: Constantianus 2, at 334–6.

change. Sergius served as a duke in Tripolitana, Africa (543–544), and was promoted to general in charge of all forces in Africa after the death of his uncle Solomon in 544.[72] Finally, some changes could be considered demotions with the most extreme being a complete recall that would precede a full dismissal from the service. Actual demotions for senior military officers seem to have been rare, with simple transfer being far more likely under normal circumstances, and full dismissal being likely only when serious misbehavior occurred. One of the few documented cases of demotion is that of Sergius. His tenure as General of Africa was disastrous. Justinian responded first by forcing Sergius to split the command with Areobindus in spring 545. When this did not work, Sergius was recalled from Africa completely in fall 545, and after arriving in Constantinople was commissioned and sent to Italy with reinforcements for Belisarius in fall 547. While Sergius kept the rank of general throughout these movements, going from commanding an entire theater, to sharing command of a theater, to becoming a subordinate general under Belisarius, can fairly be seen as a series of demotions. Complete recall or full dismissal from the service was the most common significant punishment the emperor might mete out to a senior military officer. We have already seen that Artabanes, Bessas and Belisarius received such treatment at points in their careers.[73] So too did Narses, Buzes and Martin, who were all at one point dismissed from their office and recalled to Constantinople.[74]

It is important to emphasize that dismissal from one office, even dismissal in disgrace because of plotting or attempted usurpation, rarely meant the end of a general's career. Artabanes, though very obviously guilty of plotting to kill Justinian, suffered disgrace for only about a year. In 550, Justinian dismissed all charges against Artabanes, appointed him General of Thrace, and sent him to take charge of Byzantine forces in

[72] *PLRE* 3: Sergius 4. Other examples abound: Buzes was promoted from *dux* to *magister militum* in Mesopotamia in the late 530s (PLRE 3: Buzes, at 254–5), and Artabanes was promoted from commander to *magister militum* in Africa in the 540s (see above).

[73] For Artabanes, Bessas and Belisarius, see the previous section of this chapter, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'

[74] Narses was recalled after his rivalry with Belisarius caused the sack of Milan in 539 (Procopius *Wars* 6.22.4). Buzes was recalled with Belisarius in 542 after they insulted Justinian while he lay ill with the plague (*Secret History* 4.1–12). Martin was recalled from the Caucasus in 556 after he was implicated in the murder of Gubazes, a Lazian king (Agathias *Histories* 4.21.1–3).

Sicily as part of the final push against Totila and the Ostrogoths.[75] So not only did Artabanes recover from disgrace, he even regained high military command. Belisarius similarly enjoyed a return to military power after his own downfall. After about 18 months of disgrace, Belisarius was restored to imperial favor and given another command back in Italy in 544.[76] Even Bessas, after accusations that he profiteered in Rome and after being blamed for losing the city to the Goths in 546, again received a major appointment, as the General of Armenia in 550. Perhaps all these instances of second chances, even after serious offenses, are evidence that Justinian was more generous and forgiving than historians have typically imagined. After all, we are conditioned to think of a Justinian who is jealous of the fame of others and insecure about his hold on the throne. This view of course started with Procopius' scathing character assassination of the emperor in the *Secret History* but has lived on into the twentieth century through some modern scholars like Charles Diehl, who wrote of Justinian's 'weak will, childish vanity, jealous disposition and fussy activity.'[77] Justinian was a parvenu to the old nobility, unpopular with the citizens of Constantinople, and so jealous of Belisarius that he denied him public recognition after the capture of Ravenna and seeming end of the Ostrogothic War in 540. And yet this same emperor repeatedly welcomed back into positions of trust and power generals who had plotted against him in some way. It is fair to say that these second chances are evidence of a side of Justinian's character that is not frequently noticed by modern historians. On the other hand, these second chances may merely reflect that Justinian, like many people, wanted to stick with what was comfortable for him rather than try someone new. Even if Artabanes and Belisarius had slipped in some way, Justinian had other evidence of their loyalty to him and Belisarius at least had worked for the emperor for more than a decade. As long as he felt he could trust them, the emperor seems to have preferred to appoint tried and true veterans as generals, regardless of their prior misbehaviors.

[75] Procopius *Wars* 7.39.8.

[76] Procopius *Wars* 7.9.23, *Secret History* 4.38–39.

[77] Examples of Procopius' character assassination may be found in Procopius *Secret History* 8.22–33 as well as in the historian's description of the Nika Riot (Procopius *Wars* 1.24.32–38). See also Diehl 1913, 3.

The Goals of Emperor and Officers

Having examined the appointment, review, and transition phases of a senior military officer's relationship with the emperor, it is now possible to speak more generally about the goals and priorities of emperors and officers in the sixth century. It seems reasonable to conclude that Justinian in particular, and probably all subsequent emperors of the period in general, were not overly concerned with their generals' behavior. As we have seen in the review section above, consequences for run-of-the-mill misbehavior were slight or non-existent. For Justinian, what mattered most was his own security and stability atop the imperial throne. That this was his chief concern is apparent in the fact that the only misbehavior that he punished with anything approaching severity was sedition or *lèse-majesté*. That ethical misbehavior ranging from corruption and harassment all the way to murder was of relatively little concern is demonstrated by the lack of imperial involvement to correct or punish these offenses. Justinian did not punish Belisarius in any significant way for the supposedly improper execution of Constantine and did not harshly or permanently punish Bessas for his extortion of Roman citizens. By the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great and the clerics under his leadership assumed the emperor in Constantinople would not care much about the misbehavior of his military officials in the West and did not even bother appealing to him. Even incompetence and abject failure to fulfill military duties was not harshly punished, and Justinian was famous for reappointing generals who failed miserably in one war to another war. Thus Bessas, as we have seen, was moved from Italy, where he lost Rome to Totila, to the Caucasus. Similarly Sergius, who was thoroughly criticized as an incompetent while in charge in North Africa, found himself moved to Italy.[78] Justinian's priorities in his relationships with his generals can then be summarized in this way: security came first, concerns of competence came second, and ethical misbehavior came third. Justinian tolerated incompetence, failure, and misbehavior in his generals so long as he felt they were loyal to him and he could trust them. And, if Justinian for whatever reason thought he could trust a general again, even prior concerns about the general's disloyalty could be thrown out of the window and he could receive yet another chance. One only need look at Artabanes and Belisarius to see this remarkable forgiveness in practice.

[78] Procopius *Secret History* 5.28–32.

It is worth speculating on why these priorities might be especially exacerbated in the reigns of Justinian and his successors. After all, security and stability on the throne mattered to all emperors in Roman history, so is it really fair to say that they mattered more in the sixth century? While security and stability were not more important, the context in which that stability needed to be achieved was complicated by the wars of reconquest initiated by Justinian. In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, emperors worried about retaining the loyalty of the army and therefore ensuring their own security against military coups. Anastasius even faced one such coup in the form of the rebellion of Vitalian.[79] But these threats could be parried with other nearby armies.[80] Thus Anastasius could use the available armies in the emperor's presence to help blunt Vitalian's rebellion, which was backed by the Army of Thrace. Once Justinian initiated the reconquests of the West, the armies operating in Italy and Africa were necessarily more independent and there were fewer checks on the authority, and even autocracy, of their generals and later exarchs. Thus Justinian, while increasing the size of the empire, had also opened himself and future emperors to the very real danger of rebellion on the part of generals in the West. This risk was not unknown to contemporaries. When Belisarius was pretending to revolt against Justinian in order to convince the Ostrogoths to surrender to him, even the Ostrogothic king allegedly said of Belisarius 'No one would stand in his way.'[81] Procopius himself seems to have been aware of the possibility and to have hoped that Belisarius would actually rebel instead of just pretend to do so.[82] The danger of rebellion in the West would come to full fruition when Heraclius used the Army of Africa to overthrow Phocas in 610. So from the reign of Justinian on, the emperors had additional reasons—which had not existed even just one generation before—to be concerned about the loyalty of senior military officers. Another reason for the elevation of security and loyalty to the top of the list of priorities was the emperor's essentially civilian background. This was less specific to the sixth century, as a majority of emperors since Theodosius I had a similar background. However, civilian emperors without military experience who stayed in Constantinople

[79] See Joh. Mal. 16.16.

[80] Börm argues that emperors were actually more concerned with usurpation in Constantinople then the rebellion of a general along the empire's borders (Börm 2013, 81).

[81] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.21.

[82] For the apparent hope of Procopius that Belisarius would actually rebel, see Procopius *Secret History* 4.40 and Lee 2007b, 398–400.

for the vast majority of their reign, like Justinian and his nephew Justin II, probably, with reason, feared a military coup more than an emperor of considerable military experience, like Maurice.[83] That Maurice, the emperor with the most military experience and closest connection to the army since Zeno (r. 474–491), was the emperor overthrown by a military coup is an interesting anomaly. Military experience was certainly not a guarantee of protection from a military coup; however civilian emperors are likely to have been more nervous about them because of their lack of significant military experience. For Justinian and his immediate successors, the combination of the threat of a military leader, and the separation and independence that military leader in the West had, would be intimidating indeed. It might explain why the emperors would allow more leeway as far as misbehavior among top military officers in the West. After all, keeping them loyal and avoiding attempts at usurpation was much more important for the emperor than ensuring that they behaved well or even succeeded at their jobs.

Knowing that these were the priorities of the emperor, generals not surprisingly aligned their own goals accordingly. While Procopius records frequent moralizing on the part of Belisarius, these attempts to ensure good behavior were aimed at the rank and file soldiers.[84] Whenever Belisarius scolded his officers, he focused less on ethical behavior than on trying to urge them to follow the military hierarchy or, in other words, to be loyal to him and obey his commands.[85] In this, Belisarius and presumably other senior generals were imitating the emperor's prioritization of loyalty. In his own life, Belisarius showed little concern with maintaining good behavior and in fact engaged in activities for which he surely would have excoriated his subordinates. In addition to the improper execution of Constantine, Procopius alleges that Belisarius knowingly retreated during the Persian war when he knew it was disadvantageous for the army because he needed to go see his wife.[86] He was also apparently corrupt. Procopius

[83] On the significance of the non-military emperors of the fifth and sixth centuries who stayed in Constantinople for most of their reigns and the difficulties this imposed on their relationship with their armies, see Lee 2007a, 30–37.

[84] Procopius *Wars* 3.12.8–22, 4.4.1–8, 5.10.30–37. See Chap. 7 for more analysis of these speeches.

[85] Procopius *Wars* 2.18.6, 6.18. See Chap. 5 for more on these exhortations and the need for generals to gather consensus from their officers.

[86] Procopius *Secret History* 2.18–25. See also Chap. 6, 'Wives and Children of Justinian's Men.'

accuses him of seizing some of the Vandal treasure for himself before turning the rest of it over to Justinian.[87] Like the emperors, senior military officers did not highly prioritize good behavior. For the officers, maintaining their own position for as long as possible was of significantly greater import than behavior. By staying in place as long as possible, officers maximized their benefits in terms of pay and increased reputation. So how could a general maintain his position as long as possible? He could first pay attention to the expectation for him that was highest on the emperor's list of priorities: the first goal for a senior military officer was to convince the emperor that they were no threat to him and were in fact intensely loyal. By remaining on good terms with the emperor, they would ensure that they were not prematurely removed from position because of the emperor's concern over their loyalty or lack thereof. Secondly, generals sought to gain as many resources as possible in terms of soldiers and cash to pay the soldiers, in order to keep getting the job done. For example, Procopius recognized the importance of a general securing the necessary resources by praising Narses for obtaining from Justinian 'money and men and arms in quantities worthy of the Roman Empire.'[88] By gaining these resources, generals would give themselves the best possible chance to do well in their position by winning battles and even entire wars, thus burnishing their reputations in society.

In the first half of his career, Belisarius was a master of this strategy. He cultivated a reputation as supremely loyal to Justinian, emphasized by his key role in quashing the Nika Riot.[89] He apparently further eased the emperor's concerns by formally swearing never to rebel against him.[90] He was capable of fighting masterfully with a smaller army, but took every opportunity to request reinforcements and money, leaning heavily on his personal relationship with Justinian and the writing skills of his secretary, Procopius. His letters to the emperor during his Italian campaigns were almost always requests for additional resources.[91] Belisarius parlayed the trust of Justinian and the use of these resources into key victories that burnished his reputation and made him the envy of the Byzantine world.[92] His downfall was due not to his many ethical flaws such as his weakness

[87] Procopius *Secret History* 1.19, 4.17.
[88] Procopius *Wars* 8.26.7–10.
[89] Procopius *Wars* 1.24.40–58.
[90] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.19–20.
[91] Procopius *Wars* 5.24.1–17, 7.12.3–10.
[92] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.4–15.

in the face of his wife's adultery, his murder of a subordinate officer, or even corruption in seizing treasure for himself, but was rather due to the fact that he at least appeared to pose a threat to Justinian's throne. Thus in the best-case scenario, the emperor set the priority list, and the general followed it diligently. Given the right balancing act in the relationship between emperor and senior military officer, both sides could get what they wanted. The emperor could be ensured of his security if the general were loyal enough, and the general could succeed in his post and gain wealth and fame. Somewhere in all of that, the job could get done, the empire could be defended, and a war could be won. But there was always tension in this balancing act. If the general was too successful and gained too much wealth and fame, that could decrease his apparent loyalty in the eyes of the emperor, if only because a more powerful and successful general was more of a threat as a potential rebel than a weaker and poorer general. So the general sought to get as rich and successful as possible while keeping the emperor assured of his loyalty, and the emperor sought to have his wars won while making sure one or two generals did not become too much more powerful than all the others and thus possibly become a threat. In the midst of this tense, high stakes balancing act, ensuring good behavior by military officers ranked low on the list of priorities for both emperors and generals.

CHAPTER 5

The Social Networks of Officers

While the connection between an officer of the Byzantine army and his emperor was the relationship most critical to his success, the relationship he had with his fellow officers was a close second in importance.[1] Generals, in particular, needed trusted officers to run the army efficiently. These subordinate officers supported the opinions of their general in war councils with other generals and served as confidants for carrying out sensitive missions. Especially in situations where the official military hierarchy might be unclear or contested, personal relationships with trusted subordinates enabled the general to maintain control of the army. That an officer might be a general's official subordinate in the army hierarchy did not automatically make him a confidant of the general. Instead, these critical relationships were social choices that seem to have involved quite a bit of personal preference. It is fair to label the web of such relationships among officers 'social networks' (informal associations of individuals who share a certain degree of group feeling).[2] This appellation invokes the terminology of social network analysis, a branch of sociology that is used to analyze the

[1] The majority of this chapter originally appeared as Parnell 2015a. Copyright (c) 2015 Johns Hopkins University Press. This article was first published in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8:1 (2015), 114–135. Reprinted with permission by Johns Hopkins University Press.

[2] Scott 2000, 20.

D.A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*,
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relations between a finite set of actors.[3] The application of social network analysis to Late Antique history is not unprecedented, as Adam M. Schor has recently used such an approach with considerable success to describe relationships among fifth-century bishops.[4] Here the terminology of social network analysis provides a convenient language to describe the relationships between sixth-century military officers.

This approach to analyzing the relationships of officers is new, but previous scholars, particularly Michael Whitby, Philip Rance, and Walter Kaegi, have recognized that officers had personal antagonisms or particular friendships with their peers.[5] Kaegi accurately noted that the 'army was not a cohesive monolith; instead it was riven with various fault-lines of rivalries and jealousies and grievances and conflicting ambitions.'[6] What has not been recognized is that social networks, or the sum of these personal antagonisms and friendships, were actually critical to the organization and functioning of the Byzantine army in the sixth century. These networks enabled the army to be run cooperatively and even at times supplanted the official military hierarchy. The sources provide clues to the existence and importance of social networks in this period. The *Strategikon* of Maurice, the military handbook of the late sixth century, confirms the importance of collaboration and network formation. The handbook advises generals: 'For what should be done seek the advice of many; for what you will actually do take council with only a few trustworthy people; then off by yourself alone decide on the best and most helpful plan to follow, and stick to it.'[7] Generals required advice, support, and cooperation from their fellow officers to operate effectively. While some of that support would naturally come from a general's private army of guardsmen (*bucellarii*), the majority of it came from his social network of other officers of various ranks. The importance of these networks to the functioning of the army

[3] Wasserman and Faust 1994, 20. It should be noted that this chapter is not strictly a work of social network analysis in all the possible dimensions of the method. There is simply not enough detail in ancient sources to provide all of the data that full network analysis would require (on typical data, see Scott 2000, 2–3). There is, however, enough evidence to show that Byzantine officers formed social networks, and the terminology of social network analysis is helpful.

[4] Schor 2007 and Schor 2011.

[5] While there exists no full study that analyzes the personal relationships of Byzantine officers, these scholars have offered brief insights on the subject in works with different goals. See Kaegi 1981, Kaegi 1995, Whitby 2007, Whitby 2000b, and Rance 2005.

[6] Kaegi 1995, 86.

[7] Maurice *Strategikon* 8.2.23, translated by Dennis 1984, 85.

at this time cannot be overstated, but that importance does not necessarily mean that the sources refer to them openly and frequently. The *Strategikon* refers to social networks somewhat delicately and indirectly by warning a general to be 'prudent in counsel and courteous to his associates,' presumably because that was necessary to maintain the support of those associates.[8] The historians of the sixth century offer more direct confirmation that social networks existed in the Byzantine army. Agathias confirms their existence while bemoaning the state of the army in Lazica in the Caucasus in the 550s:

> But in the absence of any general of note and of any outstanding and authoritative personality everyone was practically on terms of equality. The result was mutual recrimination and mutual exhortation, with each man having ears only for his own suggestions, and nothing worthwhile was accomplished. The fact that opinion was divided, so that one view found favor with one group whilst some other view appealed to the opposing faction, meant that neither policy was put into practice. Resentful that his own point of view did not win general acceptance each man went about his business in a negligent and half-hearted fashion and took pleasure rather in any reverses which might furnish him later with the opportunity of boasting to the next man and of not mincing his words as he pointed out that the sole cause of the unfortunate event had been their failure to implement his suggestions.[9]

Here the 'groups' and 'factions' of Agathias are social networks organized by influential officers to support their policies. The problem faced by this particular army was that no single officer (a 'general of note') had been able to construct a large enough social network to succeed in imposing his strategy on the whole army. The result was chaos and failure.

While this evidence from the *Strategikon* and Agathias is tantalizing, more conclusive proof for the existence of relationships between officers and therefore social networks in the Byzantine military comes from close analysis of Procopius of Caesarea. As mentioned in the Introduction, Procopius is a source to be utilized with care because his close proxim-

[8] Maurice *Strategikon* 8.2.97, translated by Dennis 1984, 91. Centuries later, Leo VI gave generals similar advice, encouraging them to attract the respect of their officers (Leo *Taktika* 2.10, translated by Dennis 2010, 21. See also Haldon 1999, 231).

[9] Agathias *Histories* 4.16.9–10, translated by Frendo 1975, 118. Compare Procopius *Wars* 7.1.16–24.

ity to the important officers of the period makes it likely that his account is biased in favor of those he knew best. However, this proximity also makes him the best source for identifying personal relationships. Analysis of the evidence presented by Procopius makes it possible to begin mapping out the social networks of the Byzantine army and the way those networks were used to secure influence and authority. One starting point in this analysis is to determine which officers worked together frequently over the course of their careers. For example, it is interesting that the general Valerian served with Belisarius in four different campaigns spread across fifteen years. Valerian was with Belisarius in North Africa in 533, in Belisarius' first campaign in Italy starting in 537, in the East in 541, and finally also in his second campaign in Italy in 548.[10] This sort of evidence by itself does not necessarily prove that the two officers were friends, but the frequency with which they worked together is a starting point for positing the existence of some kind of social network containing both Valerian and Belisarius. Further analysis makes it possible to understand the nature of their cooperation and the personal relationship that might have been behind that cooperation, and then to expand out from this pair to find their other associates and reconstruct a larger and more complex network.

Unfortunately, sketching out complete social networks, even for a limited time period, is not possible. The sources of the sixth century tend to focus primarily on the exploits or failures of the great generals as a plot device, to provide a protagonist for readers to follow.[11] The result of this narrative construction is that the sources simply do not record sufficient information about all of the other officers that made up social networks. While it is possible to identify some members of a network, and to exclude some antagonistic officers from it, constructing the complete social network of Belisarius, for example, is not. To form as complete an image of these networks as possible, it is necessary to analyze extended narrative sequences, which are the only parts of these sources that provide sufficient detail for at least partial reconstruction of networks. Procopius' account of Belisarius' first campaign against the Ostrogoths (535–540) is both

[10] North Africa (Procopius *Wars* 3.11.5–6), Italy in 537–540 (5.24.18), the East in 541 (2.14.8), and Italy in 548 (7.27.3, 7.30.1–2).

[11] In the *Gothic War*, Procopius builds a narrative around praising as a heroic protagonist first Belisarius, then Totila, and finally Narses (Treadgold 2007, 204). Agathias builds up Narses as the protagonist of the first part of his narrative (Agathias *Histories* 2.9).

lengthy and detailed and therefore provides a good setting for examining the existence and significance of social networks in the Byzantine army.[12] Of particular interest are the difficulties Belisarius faced in attempting to control the army between 538 and 539. These problems are worth recounting because they shed light on the existence of networks that might have remained hidden in the background but for the scale of the disruption to military operations to which they contributed.

Belisarius and Narses in Italy, 538–539

When Belisarius led the original invasion of Italy in 535, he commanded a relatively small army: 7500 troops supplied by Justinian, plus his own guardsmen.[13] Because of this dearth of soldiers, Belisarius begged Justinian for reinforcements.[14] In 537, Justinian sent several units of soldiers, including 800 commanded by John, the nephew of the general Vitalian who had rebelled against Anastasius.[15] This was the beginning of a sequence that would reveal the importance of personal relationships and social networks in the high command of the army in Italy. In early 538, Belisarius dispatched John with 2000 cavalry to raid the region of Picenum in eastern Italy (modern Marche).[16] John and his soldiers were wildly successful in Picenum, quickly capturing Ariminum (modern Rimini).[17] Later that year (538), Belisarius ordered John to withdraw from Ariminum. Belisarius intended that infantry should now garrison the city, freeing up John's cavalry force for new offensive operations.[18] In a surprising turn of events, John flatly refused the order and decided to remain in the city.[19] No reason is given for this insubordination. John might have been too proud to obey an order that would require him to leave a city under threat, or he might simply have genuinely disagreed

[12] On the complexity of this narrative, see Treadgold 2007, 204.

[13] Procopius *Wars* 5.5.1–4, 7.1.18–21. In comparison, Belisarius had received approximately 18,000 soldiers for the invasion of Vandal Africa in 533 (3.11.2–20). On Procopius' use of numbers and statistics, see Treadgold 2007, 210–18.

[14] Procopius *Wars* 5.24.1–17.

[15] Procopius *Wars* 6.5.1. For John, see Jones, Martindale, and Morris 1971 [Hereafter *PLRE*], Ioannes 46, 3:652–61. For the rebellion of Vitalian, see Joh. Mal. 16.16. For Vitalian's family in military service, see Chap. 6, 'Examples of Family Military Service.'

[16] Procopius *Wars* 6.7.25–34.

[17] Procopius *Wars* 6.10.5–7.

[18] Procopius *Wars* 6.11.4–8.

[19] Procopius *Wars* 6.11.22.

with the strategy behind the order. The Ostrogoths soon besieged Ariminum with John and his cavalry trapped inside. Procopius alleges that John made a speech to the troops in which he blasted Belisarius and accused him of neglect.[20] About this same time, further reinforcements in the form of 7000 soldiers landed in Picenum under the command of Narses the Eunuch. With Narses, in command of this force were the general Justin, and the commanders Aratius and another Narses (no relation to the eunuch), who were brothers.[21]

Belisarius and Narses the Eunuch joined forces at Firmum (modern Fermo) and held a conference of officers to discuss whether the army should go to the rescue of John in Ariminum.[22] That this conference took place at all is interesting and the course of the meeting suggests that all opinions mattered. According to Procopius, the majority of officers present did not want to rescue John, because they believed he had made his decision out of avarice and because 'he would not allow the operations of the war to be carried out in due order nor in the manner prescribed by Belisarius.'[23] In other words, they were hostile to John because he challenged the authority of Belisarius. These officers, while unnamed, no doubt represent Belisarius' friends and allies, or the social network upon which he could rely. These men supported Belisarius and derived their importance and power within the army from that relationship. These unnamed officers may also serve as a mouthpiece for Procopius to voice his own outrage at the situation, but just because Procopius was outraged does not mean that officers in the army were not upset as well. It is also important to note that Procopius makes clear that a majority, not all, of the officers present felt this way about John. This admission foreshadows subsequent evidence for a social network of John and Narses in opposition to Belisarius.

[20] Procopius *Wars* 6.12.17.

[21] Procopius *Wars* 6.13.16–18.

[22] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.1–24. Procopius summarizes the conference with a few brief speeches mostly devoid of technical content, but this is probably because he wishes to present a neatly classicized narrative (Cameron 1985, 37). It is likely that the conference included technical discussion of how to actually accomplish the goals about which the generals argued. Compare with the meetings of Charlemagne and his military advisers described by Bachrach 2002, 318–51.

[23] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.4. Presumably avarice referred to the opportunity of a general commanding a garrison to extort money from the city's inhabitants. For a contemporary example, see Bessas at Rome in 545–6 (7.17.9–14).

At this point in the meeting, Narses stepped in to give an impassioned plea for the rescue of John. Narses cut right to the point:

> Now if John treated your commands with insolence, most excellent Belisarius, the atonement you have already exacted from him is surely ample, since it is now in your power either to save him in his reverse or to abandon him to the enemy. But see that you do not exact from the emperor and from us the penalty for mistakes committed by John through ignorance. For if the Goths capture Ariminum at the present juncture, it will be their good fortune to have made captive a capable Roman general, as well as a whole army and a city subject to the emperor.[24]

By acknowledging the anger at John instead of attempting to ignore it, Narses cleverly avoided further argument over whether insubordination had occurred and seamlessly moved the argument into a practical strategic discussion about the cost of losing valuable assets.[25] At about this time, a message arrived from John flatly stating that he would be forced to surrender to the Ostrogoths in seven days if he received no support.[26] It is likely that the combination of Narses' speech and this note pushed the conversation at the conference toward strategic considerations and away from recriminations of John's misconduct. Unfortunately, Procopius chose this point to cease describing conversation in the conference and switched the focus to Belisarius' personal deliberation and decision. This is likely an attempt by Procopius to mask the weakness of his patron and his patron's social network, although it also serves a narrative purpose of moving quickly to the action. While Procopius presents the next resolutions as decisions of Belisarius, it is more likely that the decisions and the necessary tactical and logistical considerations were hammered out as a compromise between Belisarius, Narses, and their people.[27] The decision was to rescue John and save Ariminum, in other words, to follow Narses' suggestion. Belisarius divided the army up into several groups, and gave command of the portion that was to sail by sea directly to Ariminum to the general Ildiger, the son-in-law of his wife, Antonina.[28] The choice of

[24] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.9–10, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:5–7.

[25] This rhetorical strategy also served to conceal Narses' personal affection for John (Procopius *Wars* 6.16.5).

[26] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.15–16.

[27] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.17–24.

[28] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.21–3.

personnel shifted the focus back to Belisarius and his network, perhaps a deliberate balancing act since the rescue mission itself had been Narses' idea. Although the rescue was a success, John refused to thank Ildiger and by extension Belisarius, Ildiger's superior and relation by marriage. Instead, John asserted that he only owed a debt for his rescue to Narses. This declaration of loyalty to Narses was therefore also a rejection and humiliation of Belisarius.[29] These events fanned the flames of resentment between the officers.

The rivalry between Belisarius and Narses crippled the war effort in Italy, and also revealed two different social networks. Another conference of officers in late 538 failed to produce agreement on what to do next, or even who was ultimately in command of the army, after which Narses, John, and their supporters withdrew from the main army and pursued their own goals through the end of 538 and into the next year.[30] This led to disaster in early 539. When Belisarius heard that the Byzantine garrison in Milan was under siege by an Ostrogothic army, he dispatched a relief force. He selected the general Martin, a longtime associate, and Uliaris, formerly and probably still an officer of his guardsmen, to command the expedition.[31] But when Martin and Uliaris arrived, they halted and wrote to Belisarius requesting reinforcements before they engaged the Ostrogoths. According to Procopius, Belisarius ordered John and Justin, who were nearby, to proceed with all haste to help Martin and Uliaris at Milan. Continuing John's earlier insubordination, John and Justin allegedly replied that they 'would do nothing except what Narses commanded.'[32] Belisarius was then compelled to write to Narses and to convince him to order John and Justin to assist Martin and Uliaris.[33]

The wording of the letter Belisarius wrote to Narses indicates the lack of control Belisarius had over him. Instead of issuing an order, Belisarius was reduced to pleading the case and attempting to convince Narses as an equal. So Belisarius supplied a list of reasons why this order made sense, including the close proximity of John and Justin to Milan, the greater distance of Belisarius himself, and the fact that John and Justin could eas-

[29] Procopius *Wars* 6.18.2–3.

[30] Procopius *Wars* 6.18.27–9, 6.19.8–10.

[31] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.1. Belisarius routinely assigned a joint command to a general and one of his *bucellarii*. For other examples, see 6.4.6 and Chap. 7, 'Neutral Descriptions of Individual Soldiers.'

[32] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.13–16.

[33] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.17–22.

ily regain their former position after helping at Milan. Earlier, Narses had crafted a similarly dispassionate argument about the strategic advantages of relieving John in Ariminum.[34] Now, less than a year later, it is striking that it is Belisarius who is reduced to making such an argument merely to get an alleged subordinate to do what he wishes. It must be admitted at this point that Procopius is the only source for this information, and he is clearly crafting the narrative to favor Belisarius and make Narses and John look bad.[35] While Procopius may have tweaked the specifics of the timing of the events or the wording of the letter to especially vilify Narses and John, the very fact that he might have done so further underlines the rift that had grown between Belisarius and Narses. For the purpose of revealing the relationships between officers, the existence of this rift and the connections between the officers are more important than the details of how exactly their argument caused this problem and who is to blame. For example, even if it is assumed that Procopius and Belisarius made up much of this story, and that in reality there were problems because Martin and Uliaris failed to attack or request reinforcements in time, the fact remains that Procopius and his patron saw fit to shift blame onto a group of officers that Belisarius disliked and distrusted. Both scenarios thus essentially prove the same thing about the existence of competing social networks.

According to Procopius' version of events, Narses found Belisarius' letter persuasive and agreed to dispatch John and Justin with their soldiers, but too much time was lost in the process, and the Ostrogoths captured Milan in early 539 and massacred all of its male inhabitants.[36] As a result of this disaster, Justinian recalled Narses to Constantinople and reconfirmed Belisarius as the sole commander-in-chief in Italy.[37] Beyond the recall, Justinian did not further punish Narses, and does not seem to have punished John or Justin at all. This lack of punishment does not necessarily indicate favoritism, as Procopius explains elsewhere that Justinian frequently condoned mistakes or transgressions in all of his generals.[38] While the recall of Narses and the confirmation of Belisarius' authority might seem to have been a win for Belisarius and his network of supporters, the

[34] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.9–10.

[35] Compare Cameron 1985: 'The *Wars* is pervaded by Procopius' personal views of people and events, and however he defined its real purpose to himself, it was from the beginning inspired by his own strongly held opinions' (137).

[36] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.23–39.

[37] Procopius *Wars* 6.22.4.

[38] Procopius *Wars* 6.22.4, 8.13.14 and see Chap. 4.

general was not satisfied with the performance of his officers. Belisarius seems to have at least partially blamed Uliaris, whom he dismissed from his presence.[39] This may hint that the fault did not lie as completely on the disobedience of John and the general opposition of the social network of Narses as Procopius wants the reader to believe.

Populating the Social Networks in Italy, 538–539

These are the basic facts of the strife within the command structure of the Byzantine army in Italy in 538–539 as presented by Procopius.[40] The historian obviously described this situation in considerable detail. The focus of his narrative is reasonably enough on Belisarius, his patron and the hero at this point of his story, and on Belisarius' main antagonists, John, the nephew of Vitalian, and Narses. While these men are the main characters of this story and their personal rivalry is important, they also did not act alone. Each of these three generals acted as they did with the support and encouragement of fellow officers. It is possible to put together rough sketches of the social network of each officer in this rivalry.

From the narrative presented here, we may identify at least three important officers of the social network of Belisarius. Belisarius dispatched Martin and Uliaris to relieve Milan, indicating he trusted them with a difficult assignment. The fact that Martin and Uliaris accepted the assignment is indicative of their obedience to Belisarius. Of course, the two men ultimately failed to carry out this assignment and Belisarius' dismissal of Uliaris afterwards further places their conduct in doubt, but for the purposes of establishing their relationship at the time what matters is the reciprocal trust and respect that existed at the time of the assignment.[41] We are not limited to this brief episode in 538 for the only connection between Belisarius and these two men. Martin and Uliaris had in fact long worked with Belisarius. Of the two, Martin had the more successful career. He served on the Eastern front at the same time as Belisarius in 531.[42] He was a subordinate commander of Belisarius in the invasion of

[39] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.42–6.22.3.

[40] Kaegi 1981 briefly describes these problems in the Byzantine army in Italy, although he focuses on the events only as evidence of personal disagreement between the main characters (50–54).

[41] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.1–15.

[42] Procopius *Wars* 1.21.23–27.

Africa in 533.[43] From 537 to 540 he fought with Belisarius in Italy, as we have seen. In 540, he was one of only four senior officers who returned to Constantinople with Belisarius and he then subsequently fought with him in the East.[44] In 543 he parlayed his connections into the position of General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*), the same position Belisarius once held, and went on to have a successful career up to 556.[45] So in all, Martin served with Belisarius in four campaigns scattered through a decade. Although Belisarius ultimately dismissed Uliaris, he did serve as an officer of the general's guardsmen for at least five years in both Africa and Italy before their relationship went sour.[46] The third officer that Belisarius could count on in this episode was Ildiger, the son-in-law of his wife. Although no source definitively gives Ildiger's rank, the assignments he received are commensurate with a fairly high rank, probably general (*magister militum*).[47] In 536, Belisarius entrusted Ildiger with the care of Carthage after he repressed a mutiny there.[48] Ildiger saved Belisarius from the attack of Constantine in 538.[49] Also in 538, as we have seen, Ildiger was placed in command of the fleet sent to relieve John, the nephew of Vitalian, at Ariminum.[50] When Belisarius returned to Constantinople in 540, Ildiger was another of the only four senior officers who accompanied him.[51] Ildiger was family and so it is not surprising that he served with Belisarius regularly and received important assignments.

These are the three officers that Procopius named as Belisarius' allies in the difficulties of 538–539, but there is no reason to believe that this list comprises his entire social network at the time. Recall that according to Procopius, most officers at the conference of early 538 did not want to rescue John at Ariminum, suggesting others sided with Belisarius as well.[52] From other portions of Belisarius' biography, we know he had close and extended working relationships with additional officers, including Valerian

[43] Procopius *Wars* 3.11.5–6.

[44] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.1 and 2.13.16.

[45] General of the East: Procopius *Wars* 2.24.13. For the career of Martin, see *PLRE* 3: Martinus 2.

[46] For the career of Uliaris, see *PLRE* 3: Vliaris 1.

[47] See the judgment of *PLRE* 3: Ildiger, at 615.

[48] Procopius *Wars* 4.15.49.

[49] Procopius *Wars* 6.8.16.

[50] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.21–24.

[51] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.1. For the career of Ildiger, see *PLRE* 3: Ildiger.

[52] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.1.

and Cyprian, who were both present with the army in Italy during this time. Valerian, as we have already seen, served with Belisarius in four different campaigns spread across fifteen years, including this campaign in Italy.[53] He was important enough in Italy that when Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople in 540, he was the third of only four senior officers that accompanied him.[54] Cyprian was a commander with Belisarius in the invasion of Africa in 533. Belisarius considered him important enough to select him to accept the surrender of Gelimer, king of the Vandals, in 534. Cyprian then fought with Belisarius in Italy during the general's first campaign (535–540) and remained there until his death in 545.[55] So if both Valerian and Cyprian were important allies of Belisarius, why are they not mentioned frequently in the narrative we just examined? Procopius' failure to mention Valerian and Cyprian by name probably indicates that they remained at Belisarius' side and were not dispatched on missions during this period.[56] In narrative terms, this would keep them in a more generic plural of officers talking to Belisarius. That Belisarius would do his best to keep some trusted senior officers close during his tense standoff with Narses is not surprising. As befits a successful and wealthy general, Belisarius' social network was large, but apparently not large enough to enable him to lead the army without resistance in 538–539.

Turning to the other side of this rivalry, we find the network of Narses and John to be no less developed. Although Narses was clearly the senior general in this group, John came in at a close second. John had, after all, started the problems of 538 on his own before Narses even arrived in Italy. However, as evidenced by the ire of many officers at the conference of early 538, John was not popular enough to stand alone against Belisarius. Despite his skills and length of service, John never overcame this lack of popularity. Years later, in 551, Justinian apparently considered appointing John as commander-in-chief in Italy, but demurred because the other officers in the army would not accept him.[57] Because of this problem, John needed the support of Narses, so it was convenient that Narses was fond of him.[58] In return, John proved to be Narses' most significant and enduring

[53] See note 10 of this chapter.

[54] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.1. To recapitulate, the four senior officers who accompanied Belisarius were Martin, Ildiger, Valerian, and Herodian (not discussed here).

[55] For Cyprian, see *PLRE* 3: Cyprianus, at 368–70.

[56] Cf. *PLRE* 3: Valerianus 1, at 1357.

[57] Instead, Justinian selected Narses (Procopius *Wars* 8.21.7–9).

[58] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.5.

ally. Narses used John as his primary subordinate commander, especially in 538–539, but also later in his triumphant final campaign against the Ostrogoths in 552 and beyond.[59] Narses also probably relied upon John heavily for military advice, since Narses after all was not a military man but a palace chamberlain.[60] As important as John was, Narses had support from many other officers. In fact, Narses' social network is rather easier to identify than that of Belisarius, because Procopius provides a virtual roster. According to Procopius, Narses' supporters included 'the Heruls, and Narses' own guardsmen, and the troops commanded by Justin and John, together with the forces of Aratius and the other Narses.'[61] These officers and their soldiers amounted to about 10,000 men who would follow Narses and, in the words of Procopius, 'did not wish the subjugation of Italy to be credited to Belisarius alone.'[62] It is probably not a coincidence that the men in this list include the officers who accompanied Narses to Italy in 538: Justin, Aratius, and the other Narses.[63] Narses' connection to Aratius and the other Narses went back years. The two men were brothers who had defected from Persia in 530 and were assisted in their transition to the Byzantine army by Narses the Eunuch, himself of Persarmenian heritage.[64] The general Justin's past before arriving in Italy is murkier, but he did have the dubious distinction of joining John in defying Belisarius and insisting he would do nothing without the command of Narses, which is about as stark a sign of support as one could expect.[65] This roster provided by Procopius not only supplies the names of the officers in the network, but also gives the number of soldiers each officer could muster. Here the importance of private armies of guardsmen and the significance of social

[59] In 539, after splitting from Belisarius, Narses dispatched John to Caesena (Procopius *Wars* 6.19.19). In 552, John joined Narses in commanding the left wing of the army at the Battle of Busta Gallorum (8.31.2–3). Later in 552, Narses dispatched John into Tuscany to try to cut off Teias (8.34.21–24).

[60] In 552, John advised Narses on techniques for transporting the army across rivers (Procopius *Wars* 8.26.24–25). See Rance 2005, 470.

[61] Procopius *Wars* 6.18.6. Narses had the support of the Herul allies as a body, including their commander. Their personal connection to Narses seems to have been strong. In 539, when Narses was recalled, the Herul allies refused to serve with Belisarius and left Italy (6.22.5). On the Heruls, see Chap. 3.

[62] Procopius *Wars* 6.18.6–10.

[63] In 538, Narses the Eunuch arrived in Italy with Justin and the other Narses, and Aratius, who had arrived shortly before, quickly joined them (Procopius *Wars* 6.13.16–18).

[64] Procopius *Wars* 1.15.31.

[65] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.16.

networks overlap. Each officer in Narses' social network represented not just one voice in a conference meeting, but potentially hundreds of swords on the battlefield in the form of his private army.[66]

These are the allies of Narses that Procopius names for the situation in 538–539; but like the roster of Belisarius' network, we should not imagine that this is a complete list. Like Belisarius, Narses probably had additional officers in his network that he routinely kept close to his side rather than dispatching on missions. This would have the effect of making them invisible in the sources, since these individuals would not have done much worth recording beyond giving advice to Narses. While it is therefore not possible to suggest additional participants in Narses' network in 538–539, it is possible to track other associates that joined the network after these events. One of Narses' most intriguing followers in the coming years was another John, nicknamed 'the Glutton.' John the Glutton was a close associate of Narses in the 540s and 550s, but prior to that he had served with Belisarius in Italy in 539 and in the East in 541. Belisarius valued John highly enough that he selected him to be one of the officers of his guardsmen by 541.[67] But in 542, John betrayed Belisarius, accusing him of treason, which caused Belisarius to lose favor with Justinian and Theodora for a time.[68] After this, John (not surprisingly) never served with Belisarius again, but he seems to have caught on with Narses, with whom he served in 545 in the Balkans and in 552 in Italy at the Battle of Busta Gallorum.[69] One wonders whether his betrayal of Belisarius, Narses' archrival, actually helped to recommend him to service with Narses. John the Glutton is an important reminder that there were real people with their own agendas in these social networks, and that those agendas led to betrayals, ended relationships, and caused individuals to start up new relationships to compensate. All this could happen at any time. Social networks were in reality as unstable and volatile as the individuals that made them up.

The importance of these officers for Narses' opposition to Belisarius in 538–539 should not be understated. Procopius declares that Narses' social network was partly responsible for the rift between Belisarius and Narses.

[66] Many important officers might have commanded several hundred *bucellarii*. Having more than that would be exceptional, and lower-ranking officers likely had far fewer. See Schmitt 1994, 162–3.

[67] Procopius *Wars* 6.23.3–5 and 2.19.15.

[68] For John's betrayal and Belisarius' fall from grace, see Procopius *Secret History* 4.1–13.

[69] Procopius *Wars* 7.13.21–25, 8.26.13, 8.31.4. For the career of John the Glutton, see *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 'The Glutton' 64.

According to the historian, Narses' friends 'tried to prevent him from marching with Belisarius, and they sought to show him how disgraceful it was for one who shared the secrets of the emperor not to be commander-in-chief of the army, but to take orders from a mere general.'[70] So Narses' actions may have been as much a result of the suggestion of his followers as of his own personal ambitions or doubts about Belisarius' orders.

While these two networks clashed in 538–539, there was also a third, less understood party to this conflict. It is likely that the veteran general Bessas remained aloof from Belisarius and Narses. When Belisarius was about to enter Ravenna in triumph in 540, he sent away four subordinate officers who were 'the men whom he suspected of being exceedingly hostile to him.'[71] These men were John, the nephew of Vitalian, Aratius, the other Narses, and Bessas. As we have seen, the first three of these officers all belonged to the social network of Narses the Eunuch.[72] But Bessas did not have a connection to Narses and probably had never sought one for several reasons. First, he had already served in the army for a long time, starting in the East in 503.[73] As an established general, he likely did not need the support of Narses, who after all had only just recently begun to get involved in military affairs. Second, Bessas arrived in Italy in 535 with Belisarius, three years before Narses, so one might rather have expected him to be close to Belisarius.[74] Finally, there is also no indication that Bessas served with Narses after 538–539. By the time Narses returned to Italy to finish up the Ostrogothic War in 552, Bessas was already out of the region.[75] There is thus no indication that Bessas and Narses served together frequently or were particularly close. So if Belisarius considered Bessas to be hostile, and Narses and John did not consider Bessas a friend, he likely constituted a third party. Bessas' social network was probably smaller and less influential than the other two, as we have no evidence that he could count upon any

[70] Procopius *Wars* 6.18.4, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:19–21.

[71] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.29. Kaegi 1981 recognized the significance of the selection of these four officers, connecting it to earlier disagreements between Belisarius and Narses, but he did not comment upon the inclusion in this list of Bessas, who was not a part of those previous disagreements (53).

[72] Narses the Eunuch was not included in this list because he had already been withdrawn from Italy by Justinian (in 539).

[73] On the beginning of Bessas' career, see Greatrex 1998a, 74, note 4.

[74] Procopius *Wars* 5.5.2–3.

[75] By 550 Bessas was the General of Armenia (*magister militum per Armeniam*) and had taken charge of operations against the Persians in Lazica (Procopius *Wars* 8.9.4).

important officer beyond his own guardsmen. Given Bessas' later extortion of the citizens of Rome, his goals were possibly focused on enriching himself rather than on gathering significant support to attempt to control army operations.[76] If Bessas was so focused on wealth, it would not be surprising that Belisarius would want him out of the way before he entered Ravenna and captured the Ostrogothic treasury there.

Interpreting the Social Networks in Italy, 538–539

Social networks such as those described here may be graphically displayed as sociograms, or diagrams of networks that portray individuals as 'points' and their relationships as 'lines' that connect them.[77] Figure 5.1 is a sociogram that represents the social networks of the Byzantine army in Italy during this episode, as described in the previous section.[78]

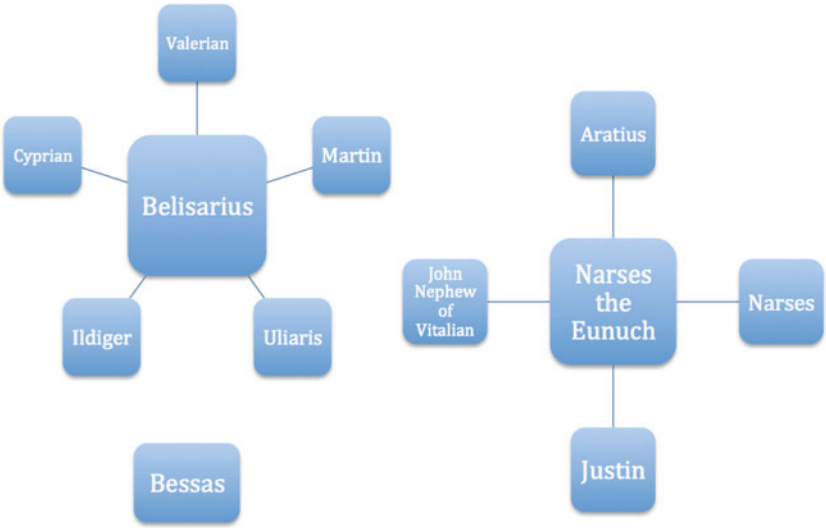

Fig. 5.1 The social networks of the Byzantine army in Italy, 538–539. Note that only named officers are included. Each network probably included additional officers not explicitly identified in the sources.

[76] Procopius *Wars* 7.19.13–14, 7.20.1, 26–28.
[77] Scott 2000, 10.
[78] Compare this figure to those presented by Schor 2011, 44 and 89.

The military strife in Italy in 538–539 was the result of a combination of the personal rivalry of the great generals and the clash between the social networks each general assembled. That there were personal struggles between the principle protagonists is easy enough to see. A speech placed in Totila's mouth by Procopius is the historian's way of suggesting that the personal disagreement was so obvious that the enemy could see it:

> It is also true that Belisarius and John are regarding each other with suspicion, a fact which can be seen from previous events. For the conflict of men's judgments, one with the other, is clearly detected by their actions. This indeed is the reason why they have not even been able to join forces with each other up to this time. For their mutual suspicion disconcerts each of them; and those who admit this feeling are bound to harbor envy and hostility besides. And when these passions assault men, no necessary thing can be done.[79]

There were very real connections between these personal animosities and the formation of social networks. Narses and John on the one hand and Belisarius on the other intentionally created these networks for support against their rivals, and the existence of these networks then amplified the damage to military unity caused by the suspicion the generals had for each other. Personal rivalries and social networks reinforced one another. For good or for ill, these social networks could not exist without the leadership of the bickering senior officers who organized them. On the importance of a general to the organization of these networks, we might consider Procopius' criticism of the generals left in command of Italy when Belisarius withdrew in 540:

> The other commanders, being, unlike him [Belisarius], on an equality with one another… had already begun both to plunder the Romans and to put the civil population at the mercy of the other soldiers, and neither were they themselves any longer giving heed to the requirements of the situation, *nor could they secure obedience to their commands on the part of the soldiers.* [80]

Generals sought to form social networks to improve command and control. This is apparent from Procopius' declaration about the importance of

[79] Procopius *Wars* 7.25.22–24, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:377.
[80] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.22–24, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:157–159, emphasis added.

generals securing obedience to their commands. As important as a general might be in this period, it is quite clear that he needed to win over a significant number of subordinate officers and form a social network in order to exert his authority over the army. If the general failed to create a network, he might not have any way of asserting his control over the army short of appealing to his own orders from the emperor, which may or may not have been clear enough to inspire obedience on the part of junior officers. Thus, these networks within the Byzantine army in Italy between 538 and 539 were essential tools of cooperative leadership that were requirements for running the army during this period. Far from being all-powerful figures who could rule their armies by fiat, the generals relied upon backing from fellow officers to run the army in a cooperative manner. These officers would back the general in conferences, carry out his orders, and offer suggestions that the general might be expected to take into account. The general in turn would make clear that he was working cooperatively with his network by hosting frequent conferences of his officers to discuss the options. The loyalty of these subordinate officers and the degree to which they participated in the cooperative running of the army was based on their personal relationships with the general, rather than on any particular sense of institutional responsibility. A general who could not cultivate such personal relationships would find himself increasingly isolated and outmaneuvered by other generals who could. Having a powerful social network was thus an essential means of support for generalship during the period.

It is necessary to note that while generals formed these social networks for their own benefit, in order to help them run the army effectively and in the way they wished, the officers who supported the generals could expect to benefit themselves. The networks had to be symbiotic relationships in which all participants stood to gain, otherwise there would be no way for the general to draw officers in to his orbit. Unfortunately, the benefits for the more junior officers of the network are difficult to quantify. At a personal level, officers likely enjoyed the feeling of camaraderie that came from supporting their general with other likeminded officers and probably felt satisfaction about their contribution to the relationship. The falling-out between Constantine and Belisarius and the subsequent death of Constantine may reveal something of the importance of this sense of camaraderie. During a dispute over stolen property, Constantine allegedly attempted to attack Belisarius. The general's friends Ildiger and Valerian stepped in to protect him. Belisarius then had his guards drag Constantine

from the room, but do him no harm out of respect to the officers present.[81] This respect for the other officers implies that Belisarius expected them to be distressed by the punishment of Constantine. Perhaps they would view harsh punishment as a breach of the camaraderie of their network and the trust they had in Belisarius. In the *Secret History*, Procopius announces that the murder of Constantine on Belisarius' orders, not long after he was dragged out of the room, incurred 'great hostility on the part of all the Roman notables.'[82] This situation indicates that officers valued the relationships in their social network and that observers could expect officers to be distressed by problems with them.

Of course, the benefits of these social relationships were not confined to warm, personal feelings. On a more practical level, membership of a social network with a powerful general could result in an officer receiving the necessary backing to maintain their own position, even if they were not the highest of achievers or broke military regulations. Although Uliaris had some behavioral problems, particularly carelessness and the propensity to get drunk too frequently, Belisarius' protection covered him until the Milan incident. Likewise, John received the protection of Narses to shield him during his insubordination toward Belisarius.[83] Practical rewards were to be had for capable and ambitious officers as well. They could 'ride the coattails' of a general with whom they enjoyed social intimacy into greater responsibility or promotion. The career of Martin skyrocketed after serving with Belisarius in the East in 531 and accompanying him to North Africa in 533.[84] Even incapable generals might benefit from such connections. In North Africa, the commander Sergius, ridiculed by Procopius as an incompetent, used his association with his uncle Solomon to gain promotion to General of Africa and the governorship of the region in 544.[85] It is reasonable to expect that generals would be more likely to promote or recommend for new positions those officers whom they felt were most loyal to them. So while these networks were critical to the success of the general, and undoubtedly encouraged by the general, his fellow officers could also expect substantial benefits from participation.

[81] Procopius *Wars* 6.8.14–17. For more on this episode, see Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'

[82] Procopius *Secret History* 1.30.

[83] On Uliaris, see note 46 of this chapter. On John, see Procopius *Wars* 6.21.13–16.

[84] See note 45 of this chapter.

[85] Procopius *Wars* 4.22.1–5, Procopius *Secret History* 5.28–33.

Other Instances of Social Networks in Justinian's Army

While the situation in Italy in 538–539 is the best example available because of the detail with which Procopius describes the story, evidence of social networks clashing and subverting the authority of the official hierarchy can be found elsewhere in the reign of Justinian. When Belisarius returned to the East to wage war with the Persians in 541, he found another struggle with a rival officer backed by a social network. His principal antagonist on this front was Peter the General, a Persian captured by the emperor Justin I as a boy and later promoted to high military command.[86] In 541, Peter was ostensibly a subordinate commander under Belisarius, but sought to undermine Belisarius whenever possible. When many officers grumbled against Belisarius' plans to encamp some distance from Nisibis, he was compelled to call together a conference of officers and explain his plans, much as he had done in Italy. He complained to the officers, 'the majority of you are allowing yourselves to act in a most disorderly manner, and each one wishes to be himself supreme commander in the war.'[87] After this harangue, Belisarius explained the reason for his choice of location. While Procopius announces that Belisarius convinced many with this speech, he did not convince enough. Peter, along with another John, the commander of a contingent of soldiers from Mesopotamia, removed himself and his supporters from the army and camped in a different location, closer to Nisibis.[88] The disagreement and fissure in the army led to defeat in an ensuing battle with the Persians.

The whole episode is recounted in considerably less detail than the Italian incident, probably because Procopius was not himself present for these events as he had been in Italy.[89] Some sense of the scale of difference in detail between the two incidents may be grasped in that, although both periods are approximately equal chronologically, Procopius spends twice as many chapters describing the situation in Italy as he does the situation in the East.[90] Nevertheless, despite the relative lack of detail, it is fairly clear

[86] On the career of Peter the General, see *PLRE* 2: Petrus 27, at 870. He had been a general since at least 528 (Joh. Mal. 18.4).

[87] Procopius *Wars* 2.18.6.

[88] Procopius *Wars* 2.18.16.

[89] Procopius likely left Belisarius' service in 540 to begin writing (Treadgold 2007, 184).

[90] Procopius describes the events in Italy between spring 538 and spring 539 in 14 chapters (Procopius *Wars* 6.7–21) and the events in the East between spring 541 and summer 542 in only seven chapters (2.14–21).

that similar factors were at play in the East as those we have observed in Italy. A personal rivalry between Belisarius and Peter was complicated by the fact that each had his own social network and could not exert authority over the supporters of the other man. As in Italy, it would require imperial intervention to break the stalemate and reestablish more unified command and control. In 542, as Justinian lay ill with the plague, Peter and John the Glutton, erstwhile a trusted officer of Belisarius' guardsmen, leaked word that Belisarius had engaged in discussion with other officers about the succession if Justinian should die.[91] This was enough to cause Belisarius' recall to Constantinople and a temporary disgrace. Peter, however, remained in the East in his position.[92] This chain of events indicates that both Belisarius and Peter had their own networks of supporters and that John the Glutton 'defected' to Peter's network. While there is not enough detail to identify the other participants in each network, we can be fairly certain that there were others based on the discussions at the conference and Peter's actions thereafter.

While the information he provides tends to be about Belisarius and his struggles, Procopius occasionally offers a glimpse of other generals engaging in the creation and manipulation of social networks. The Byzantine army in North Africa was rife with factionalism and conflict. This led to the creation of a social network of officers that completely separated from the Byzantine military establishment in a mutiny, started in 536 under the leadership of Stotzas. This network managed to remain independent and intact despite being a target of the Byzantine army until the death of Stotzas in battle in 545.[93] The degree of group feeling and the strength of the relationships within that group required to keep a mutinous army operating without any official support for nine years must have been considerable. Even the officers that stayed within the official military, however, were divided into competing social networks centered on prominent generals. The most significant division developed in 544–545 between the followers of the governor and general Sergius and those of the commander John, the son of Sisiniolus.[94] Procopius despised Sergius,

[91] Procopius *Secret History* 4.1–16. For more on Belisarius' relationship with Justinian, see Chap. 4.

[92] Procopius *Wars* 2.24.13.

[93] Procopius *Wars* 4.14.7–42, 4.24.9–15.

[94] Sergius was Praetorian Prefect of Africa and *magister militum* (*PLRE* 3: Sergius 4, at 1124). John probably ranked as a mid-level commander (*comes rei militaris*), but may have been a *magister militum* (*PLRE* 3: Ioannes 27, at 640). On ranks in the Byzantine army, see Chap. 2.

excoriating him as 'immature, envious, and hugely arrogant.'[95] For this reason we should take Procopius' claim that neither John nor 'anyone else at all' were willing to fight for Sergius with a grain of salt.[96] Sergius surely had his own social network, or he would not have been able to maintain his position. But clearly John had a network as well, since he could not be coerced into working with Sergius, even when a new general was appointed to force them to work together. When Areobindus arrived in Africa in 545 with orders from Justinian to take command, he instructed John and Sergius to unite forces. They refused, and the result was John's death in battle.[97] Details are even more lacking for this story than for the previously described situation in the East. Not being present for these events, Procopius wrote about them very briefly, spending less than a third as many chapters describing the situation in Africa as he did the situation in Italy.[98] Because of the lack of detail, it is impossible to name the individual officers that Sergius and John counted among their respective networks. It is likely that each was supported in their rivalry in a fashion similar to the situation in Italy in 538–539. That John had enough forces with him to engage in the battle that led to his death certainly implies the presence of supporters.

Compared to the situations in Italy in 538–539 or in the East in 541–542, the situation in Africa, with both a mutiny as well as the conflict between Sergius and John and their networks, seems to have been particularly volatile. This was possibly the result of the relative weakness of the two senior rival figures at the heart of each network. In Italy, for example, Belisarius was an important general with a reputation, and Narses was a confidant of Justinian, but in Africa John was a mere commander and Sergius was a general without previous success. Paradoxically, it seems that the same strong personalities that caused the rivalry and problems in Italy also helped to delineate the two major social networks and provided more stability. In social network analysis, it is understood that the influence or lack thereof of the 'sociometric star,' the individual who holds a position of great popularity and leadership within a social network, may affect the

[95] Procopius *Secret History* 5.32.

[96] Procopius *Wars* 4.22.4.

[97] Procopius *Wars* 4.24.1–16.

[98] Procopius describes these events in Africa between spring 544 and spring 545 in just three chapters (Procopius *Wars* 4.21–24), compared to the 14 chapters he devoted to the chronologically similar period in Italy (6.7–21).

overall strength of the network.[99] In Africa, the lack of personal prestige on the part of the two sociometric stars caused additional confusion and volatility.

Explaining Social Networks in the Reign of Justinian

Having reviewed the evidence for the existence of social networks in the sixth-century Byzantine army, it is reasonable to acknowledge that they were not unique to the century. Networks, or 'factions,' as they are sometimes called probably existed at all times in the history of the Roman army. Ammianus Marcellinus, the fourth-century Roman historian and soldier, described the existence of 'turbulent factions' in 363 as the army prepared to acclaim a new emperor.[100] He named two officers in each of two factions. While the circumstances were unusual (the selection of an emperor) rather than the more mundane day-to-day operation of the army, these networks had most likely already existed before this moment. Ammianus also complained that 'a few hot-headed soldiers' proclaimed Jovian as emperor, whom neither of the two networks he had just introduced were considering.[101] This probably indicates that there was at least one more identifiable social network at the time, bringing the total to three. So social networks were not new to the Roman army in the sixth century. Procopius, in light of his classical education, was probably aware of the networks organized by the Athenian commanders during the invasion of Sicily, 415–413 B.C. Thucydides described the conflict between Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachus over how the invasion should proceed.[102] Procopius may even have been inspired by the way Thucydides described the problem and this may have influenced the language he used in reporting the clashes of social networks in the *History of the Wars*.

Although social networks were not new to the sixth century, they seem to have had a significant importance at times during this period. It is worth considering why this phenomenon was so pronounced in Justinian's reign in particular. Even though this system worked under the right circumstances, it probably would not have been considered ideal from the

[99] Scott 2000, 10–11.
[100] Ammianus 25.5.2.
[101] Ammianus 25.5.4.
[102] Thucydides 6.46–50. See also Kagan 1981, 217.

standpoint of military efficiency, which would have favored a rigid hierarchy not dependent on social relationships. Discounting considerations of policy and intentional military planning, there are several explanations for why generals would find themselves needing to form such networks particularly in this period. The structure of the army high command is one reason. In the Byzantine Empire of the sixth century, all of the generals (*magistri militum*), whether they commanded a regional field army or held a commission free from regional distinction, held the same rank.[103] These generals were originally part of a military bureaucracy rooted in the Eastern Mediterranean but suddenly found themselves thrust into new situations during Justinian's wars of reconquest in the West. In their new situations, outside the rigid command structure of the permanent Byzantine armies of the East, there was no official hierarchy, which is what necessitated grand pronouncements such as Justinian's bestowal on Belisarius of supreme authority in his campaigns in North Africa and Italy.[104] But the emperor was far away, and his conferral of supreme authority, which seemed so impressive in the moment, could later easily be pushed aside by officers who found a reason to dislike Belisarius. This issue likely contributed to the reason that generals argued and then found it necessary to array support around themselves in the form of social networks of trusted officers. The influence of these networks could be used by the generals to establish a de facto hierarchy of authority within a structure accustomed to hierarchy but without the customary clarity at the top.

Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is that Justinian encouraged it, either accidentally or intentionally, by not giving proper support to commanding generals.[105] The emperor had reason to fear an overly powerful and successful general, who might threaten his throne. That this fear was well-founded is evident in the fact that the possibility that Belisarius might overthrow Justinian receives attention in both the primary sources and modern scholarship.[106] In addition, it is also possible that Justinian's perspective increasingly pushed him towards caution

[103] On the various *magistri militum*, see Chap. 2. See also Treadgold 1995, 15–17 and Jones 1964, 1:535. Lee sees a connection between the number of generals in the East and the failure of a dominating military figure to emerge there in the fifth century (Lee 2007b, 397).

[104] Procopius *Wars* 3.11.18–21, 6.18.27–28. See Ravegnani 1998, who describes this bestowal of authority as an innovation of Justinian (76–7).

[105] Whitby 2007b, 336 and Kaegi 1981, 30–33.

[106] See Procopius *Secret History* 4.40 and, for example, Lee 2007b, 398–400. See also the extensive discussion of the subject in Chap. 4.

and restraint as his rule experienced setbacks.[107] This caution might have included limiting the authority of senior army officers. Because of these concerns, the prospect that Justinian actively encouraged rivalry among his generals and refused to clarify a hierarchy in order to ensure his own security is not beyond the realm of possibility; that he at least tolerated considerable dissension is even more likely.[108] It is worth remembering that Justinian did not punish Narses or John for their resistance to Belisarius in 538–539, even though he did confirm Belisarius as commander-in-chief, which would seem to imply that any resistance against him should have been considered mutinous and improper.[109] There is perhaps no greater indication of Justinian's toleration of dissent among his military commanders than the fact that he failed to appoint a commander-in-chief for the Italian theater after Belisarius returned to Constantinople in 540. This choice is not surprising given the context. Belisarius had just captured Ravenna under the pretense that he would revolt against Justinian and claim the imperial title in the Italy.[110] While Belisarius did not actually do this, the knowledge of it must have woken all of Justinian's fears of military revolt. So instead of appointing one commanding general to replace Belisarius in Italy, Justinian gave multiple generals equal authority to wrap up the war. Even when this unusual arrangement resulted in battles being lost, Justinian merely rebuked the generals involved. The emperor did not consent to appoint a single commander-in-chief until 542, by which time the Byzantines had lost the upper hand in the war.[111] This sequence, and the scenes that played out in the years before it, show that without unequivocal authority either from their rank or from the direct support of the emperor, generals would have had no choice other than to try to muster that authority through such networks as have been described in this chapter.

A final possible explanation for the creation of these networks is purely social. The personalities of the individual officers involved and the group

[107] Meier has argued for a change in Justinian's reign after the arrival of the plague and other setbacks that made the emperor recognize his own limitations and become pensive about the future. See Meier 2004.

[108] Several scholars have argued that dissension among generals in the Byzantine military reached its peak in this period. See Kaegi 2007, 255 and Lee 2004, 125. Whitby 2000a notes that this sort of dissension was not limited to Belisarius, but was also experienced by other generals of the period (474).

[109] Procopius *Wars* 6.22.4.

[110] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.17–41.

[111] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.23–24, 7.3.1, 7.6.9.

dynamics when these personalities conflicted should be considered a contributing factor. While structural issues such as ranks and imperial support were critical, the relationships of these army men ultimately came down to their personalities, preferences and choices. There is some evidence of strong emotional bonds between certain officers. Constantine's willingness to dispense advice to Belisarius on his marital problems with Antonina indicates a level of intimacy between the two men. Procopius says that Constantine took Belisarius' side in the dispute the general had with his wife because he saw that Belisarius was depressed.[112] While this is the only reported instance in which an officer was directly involved in the marriage dispute of another officer, there are other examples of emotional connection. We know that Belisarius wept bitterly when his guardsman Uliaris accidentally killed another of his officers, John the Armenian.[113] Procopius himself was very fond of the general Sittas and mourned his death.[114] In the case of Italy in 538–539, it is important not to lose track of the personalities of the important characters and the emotional response others had to those personalities. While Narses was very fond of John, the latter probably rubbed many of his other fellow officers up the wrong way.[115] John was proud, impetuous, confident in his own abilities, and utterly scornful of higher authority that did not think exactly as he did. The sources are not rich enough to pin all the blame for disagreements between generals and the formation or ending of relationships between officers on personal issues like the ones recounted here. It is, however, crucial to admit the likelihood that relational issues were at least contributing factors in the formation and functioning of social networks.

The generals and other officers of the sixth-century Byzantine army formed social networks to help them navigate their war-torn and sometimes chaotic careers. Generals found that they often needed additional support mechanisms to actually accomplish the day-to-day management of the army and they found such support in unofficial, social relationships with other officers. Evidence from the sources of the period shows not merely a spike in personal animosity between figures such as Belisarius, Narses, and John, but an increase in the importance of cooperative leadership. So important were the opinions of fellow officers that the gener-

[112] Procopius *Secret History* 1.24.
[113] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.22–24.
[114] Procopius *Wars* 2.3.26.
[115] Procopius *Wars* 6.16.4–5.

als held war conferences to attempt to win them over to their points of view. The existence of these social networks is evident in the way generals like Belisarius and Narses forged groups of supporters around themselves. These generals might be able to make a decision on their own, but that decision would count for little if their network were not large enough to ensure that the ensuing order was obeyed. These social networks were necessary because of structural issues in the army of the period, the personal fears of the emperor of granting too much support to one general, and the personalities and relationships of the officers in the army. Fully understanding the relationships between these officers requires considering not just the famous generals such as Belisarius and Narses, but also their supporters and detractors such as the Johns, Martins, and Uliarises of the Byzantine army.

CHAPTER 6

Officers and Their Families

Parnell examines the families of Byzantine army officers in two ways. First, he addresses the issue of nepotism by examining several families in military service. There is little evidence to suggest that an officer with a family member already in the army was preferred for high rank, but there is ample evidence that multiple members of a family served in the military both at the same time and across generations. He presents the family trees, as far as they can be reconstructed, of several military families. Second, Parnell addresses the wives and dependent children of Byzantine army officers. While elite authors would have preferred that officers focus on their military duties, officers often chose to prioritize their families and personal affairs.

In the sixth century, as in previous centuries of the Roman state, many soldiers and officers had relatives in military service. This rule held true for Romans and non-Romans alike. Very occasionally these family connections might have resulted in what is considered typical nepotism: fathers or older relatives secured positions for their sons or younger relatives. However, these cases appear to have been quite rare, and more often what we find is simply that several people from the same family served the military specifically or the government in general in a variety of capacities. When examining such instances of family service, it is important first not to assume any modern,

D.A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56204-3_6

negative connotations from the practice of nepotism or other traditions of family service. These practices do not necessarily indicate corruption nor are they clear evidence of a flawed administration.[1] By the sixth century, governmental nepotism and family service already had a long history in the Roman state that may be traced back to the Republic. In the Republic, numerous families remained important in government for centuries. One need only consider the tremendous role played by the Scipiones across the span of the three Punic Wars to realize the extent to which military office and civil governance were family affairs during the Republic. Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio was consul in 261 and 254 BC, and led a Roman fleet in the First Punic War. His brother Lucius Cornelius Scipio was consul in 259 and also fought in that war. Lucius' son, Publius Cornelius Scipio, was consul in 218 and fought in the Second Punic War. Publius' son was the famous Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, consul of 205 and 194 and vanquisher of Hannibal. Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus was adopted by the son of Africanus, became consul in 147 and 134, and razed Carthage in the Third Punic War.[2] To the extent to which the Republic may be considered an oligarchy of the Roman elites, it was almost entirely based on nepotism. Adam Bellow connected oligarchy to nepotism, defining an oligarchy as 'a hereditary ruling class that deploys a broad array of nepotistic instruments to maintain its dynastic integrity.'[3] In his well-known history of the late Republic, Ronald Syme declared that 'in all ages, whatever the form and name of government, be it monarchy, republic, or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade; and Roman history, Republican or Imperial, is the history of the governing class.'[4] Oligarchy and nepotism, integral cogs in the machine of the Republic, were appropriated by Augustus and transmitted through the imperial system.

Unfortunately, the transformation of Roman naming practices over the course of the imperial period makes finding instances of multiple men from the same family in military service somewhat difficult by the sixth century. In the Republic, the Latin practice of having at least three names including a family name helped to identify individuals and connect them in nepotistic relationships. The typical Roman *trinomina* had a *praenomen* (a given name), *nomen* (middle name designating the individual's clan or

[1] Kelly 2004, 181.
[2] On the Scipios and other early elite Roman families, see Scullard 2003.
[3] Bellow 2003, 142.
[4] Syme 1967, 7.

gens) and *cognomen* (surname of the family).[5] However, by the time of the later Roman Empire this practice was in eclipse. Most of the individuals of the sixth century were identified by only a single, personal name, with perhaps a patronymic (an indication of the name of the individual's father) or other identifier (like a nick name) provided to distinguish them from homonyms. This makes it quite challenging to identify family relationships in general during this period. The result is that for most of the individuals known from this period, the historian can know nothing about their relatives, let alone whether they also served in the army and what position they might have held. Despite these barriers to knowledge, evidence for family service in the sixth-century army is surprisingly strong in a qualitative if not necessarily quantitative sense. In other words, while there are not a large number of examples in which multiple men from the same family served in the army, the examples that exist are fairly detailed. Examining a few of these families provides insight into the concept of nepotism and family service in this period and helps to determine how these issues might have impacted military careers.

Examples of Family Military Service

Naturally, the families for which we have the most information are the imperial families. That is not to say that the only examples of family service are imperial families, but because they are so well-known they are a good place to start. It is also important to offer the caveat that imperial families are most likely not representative of the typical Roman family.[6] The allure of power probably made them rather more volatile than a typical family, but despite risks that relatives might abuse their power, emperors could hardly afford to ignore their family members as resources. Relatives of the emperor enjoyed perks of proximity and trust that few other men could match, which gave them an advantage in obtaining desirable positions throughout the government. So it is reasonable to expect imperial relatives to show up prominently in military service, and indeed many of the emperors of the late Roman Empire did make extensive use of their relatives to fill important posts in both the army and civil government. An emperor did

[5] Scullard 2003, 333–7 connects the importance of the *trinomina* with the solidifying of elite Republican families and their influence on politics.

[6] Smythe 2006, 138; Tougher 2013, 303.

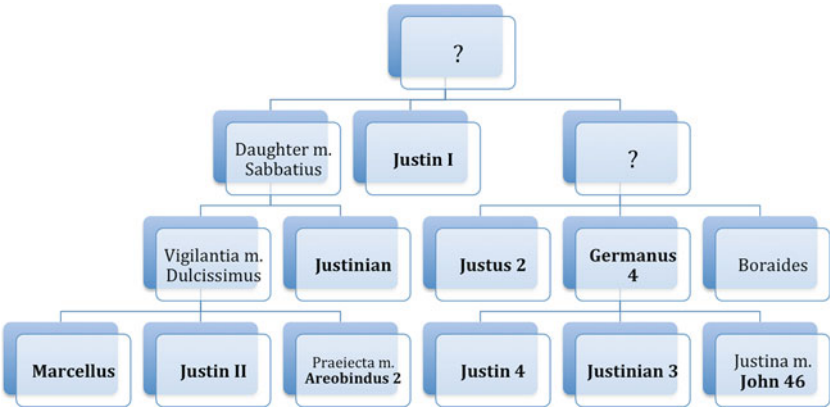

Fig. 6.1 The family of Justinian[7]

not need to have children to pursue this strategy. Justinian, who remained childless throughout his life, called upon his extended family to serve more than any other emperor in the sixth century. Figure 6.1 shows the extent of Justinian's family, with individuals who held office in bold.

Justinian's cousins, Justus and Germanus, both served him as generals. Justus had the less illustrious career, serving on the eastern frontier under Belisarius and Martin, before dying of illness in 544.[8] Germanus, perhaps the most famous non-emperor among Justinian's relatives, had in the words of one historian 'a long career of frustrated promise.'[9] He served as General of Thrace in the reign of Justin I, put down the African mutiny in 536, opposed Khusrau at Antioch in 540, and in 549 was given the command of the Italian theatre, but tragically died of illness while en route to possible glory.[10] Although Justinian's cousin Boraides is not recorded to have held office, he did play an important part in Justinian's reign by helping to topple the rebel Hypatius during the Nika Riot.[11] Germanus' two sons, another Justin and another Justinian, both served the emperor Justinian as generals. Justin was considered important enough to be

[7] See Jones, Martindale, and Morris 1971 [Hereafter *PLRE*], 2:1315, stemma 10.
[8] See *PLRE* 3: Iustus 2.
[9] Treadgold 1997, 207.
[10] See *PLRE* 2: Germanus 4.
[11] Procopius *Wars* 1.24.53.

worth murdering by Justinian's successor, Justin II.[12] Justinian the son of Germanus avoided extermination and continued to serve as a general until 577.[13] Justinian's two nephews by his sister Vigilantia had contrasting careers. Marcellus served as a general, while Justin, the future emperor Justin II, held no military posts but received the dignity of *cura palatii* (one who takes care of the palace) and eventually the throne.[14] Finally, Justinian welcomed two military men into his family through marriage. John, the nephew of Vitalian, prominent as a general in Italy from the 530s to the 550s, married Justina, the daughter of the emperor's cousin Germanus.[15] Areobindus, who served as general of Africa in 545, married Justinian's niece, Praeiecta.[16] Justinian thus made extensive use of his male relatives, bringing nearly all of them into government service. It is interesting that seven of the eight relatives known to have held dignity or office under Justinian served as generals in the army rather than in a civilian capacity.[17] It was evidently in the army that Justinian felt their combination of skills and familial loyalty could be put to best use. Although one might suspect that these men were promoted in the army primarily because of their relationship to Justinian and the fact that he could presumably count on their loyalty, it is interesting that none of them were derided by contemporary authors as incompetent, so they may very well have been at least reasonably qualified in terms of merit as well as by the luck of their birth.

While Justinian made quite extensive use of the men of his family to serve in the army, he was not unusual among emperors in doing so. The emperor Phocas, although he came from a poor and obscure family that previously did not have a history of significant government service, also made considerable use of his relatives in running the empire. They helped

[12] On Justin's death, see Theophanes *Chronicle* AM 6063 and Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1–2. Theophanes places the death in 570, and says that Justin II had previously appointed Justin as the 'prefect of Alexandria.' Evagrius places the death in 566 and makes no mention of an office. Evagrius' account is to be preferred: Justin was probably killed in 566, shortly after the accession of Justin II. See also *PLRE* 3: Iustinus 4.

[13] See *PLRE* 3: Iustinianus 3.

[14] See *PLRE* 3: Marcellus 5 and Iustinus 5.

[15] See *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 46.

[16] See *PLRE* 3: Areobindus 2.

[17] See Chap. 4, 'Appointment: Gaining a Position.'

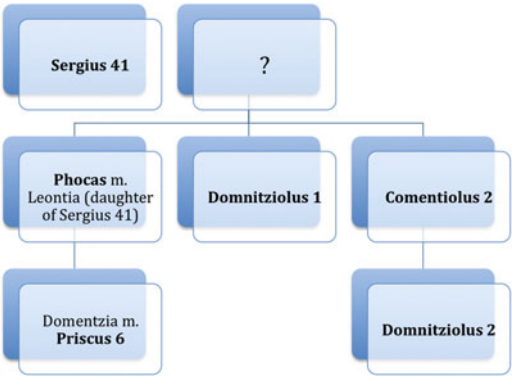

Fig. 6.2 The family of Phocas[18]

to conduct Phocas' reign of terror and to defend him from his enemies, and most of them eventually died with him. Figure 6.2 shows Phocas and his relatives, with individuals who held office in bold.

While the family tree of Phocas is smaller and less complete than that of Justinian, it is still possible to see that Phocas made significant use of his relatives to prop up his government. Like Justinian, Phocas used his relatives chiefly as senior military officers. His reign was a troubled one and the usurping emperor was constantly under threat, either from foreign powers or internal disorder. Even more than Justinian, Phocas felt isolated, probably because of his usurper status, and desperately needed men in charge of his armies whose loyalty he could trust. Phocas therefore appointed his nephew Domnitziolus as his General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*) in 604. Domnitziolus served him well, capturing the rebel general Narses and remaining loyal to Phocas to the bitter end when he was overthrown by Heraclius.[19] Comentiolus, Phocas' brother, replaced Domnitziolus as General of the East sometime before 610, and served the emperor loyally. He refused to accept Heraclius as emperor and was assassinated as he prepared to resist.[20] Domnitziolus the Elder, Phocas' other brother, was made Master of Offices (*magister officiorum*), and in 610 was

[18] See *PLRE* 3:1542, stemma 5.
[19] See *PLRE* 3: Domnitziolus 2.
[20] See *PLRE* 3: Comentiolus 2.

charged with defending the Long Walls outside of Constantinople against Heraclius. When he heard that Heraclius had landed, Domnitziolus fled, but the new emperor nevertheless lost no time in killing him when Phocas had been overthrown.[21] The same loyalty that made Domnitziolus indispensable to Phocas made him an implacable threat to Heraclius. Phocas' other relatives were not nearly as loyal in their service to him. Sergius, Phocas' father-in-law, was a patrician but is not known to have held any significant office. Perhaps Phocas suspected from the beginning that he was disloyal. If so, he was right to be suspicious, since Sergius conspired against him in 604.[22] Priscus, Phocas' son-in-law, was the most opportunistic of all his relatives. Priscus had served as a General of the East and of Thrace under Maurice. He presumably married Phocas' daughter Domentzia after Phocas ascended the throne, since prior to that Phocas would not have been worth a marriage alliance. Priscus was then made count of the excubitors (the imperial guards) in 603, a position which in past reigns had typically denoted the emperor's successor (both Tiberius and Maurice had held the position prior to their accessions). This was however not enough to secure Priscus' permanent loyalty. By 608 he wrote to Heraclius the Elder in Africa, begging him to revolt against Phocas.[23] This at least initially secured him the approval of Heraclius the emperor, who allowed him to continue as count of the excubitors for the first two years of his reign before dismissing him and forcing him to enter the Church.[24]

Thus Phocas, although his reign was more troubled and much shorter than that of Justinian, still relied heavily upon his family, placing the most important military positions in their hands. Of his five male relatives for whom we have information, three of them served in critical positions in the military hierarchy, while a fourth was responsible for the civilian government as Master of Offices. It is likely that Phocas distrusted the bulk of Constantinople's elite and would have placed every significant military position into the hands of a trusted relative if he could. His family seems to have been rather small, although this could just be due to not enough information surviving in the available sources. Of course, giving positions to relatives because of a hope

[21] See *PLRE* 3: Domnitziolus 1.
[22] See *PLRE* 3: Sergius 41.
[23] Theophanes *Chronicle* AM 6100.
[24] See *PLRE* 3: Priscus 6.

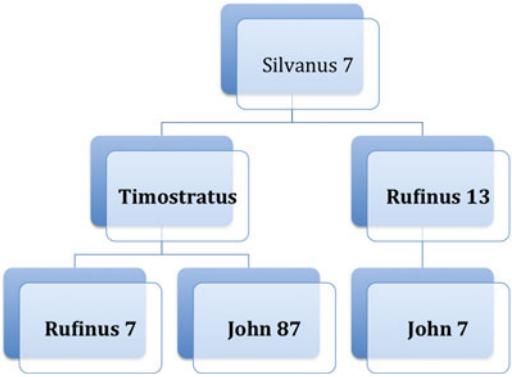

Fig. 6.3 The family of Rufinus[25]

for loyalty did not guarantee that they would be successful in their jobs. That Phocas eventually fell to a coup originating in Africa was probably due just as much to the uneven ability and loyalty of his family members as it was to his general unpopularity or the skill and appeal of Heraclius.

While there is quite a bit of information about the relatives of the emperors because they tended to be important figures in contemporary histories, these were not the only families with multiple members serving in the military. In fact, most soldiers or officers who had a relative in service were not related to the imperial family. To get an idea of what some of these other families were like, we turn to two of the more prominent non-imperial families in government service in the sixth century. The family of Rufinus, a general for Anastasius and an ambassador for Justinian, definitely served in the government for at least two generations. Figure 6.3 shows what is known of his family, with office-holders in bold.

Almost nothing is known about the patriarch of the family, Silvanus, except that he was acquainted with Perozes, king of Persia (r. 459–484).[26] This could indicate that Silvanus had served as an ambassador to Persia, but no source confirms this and in theory he could have gained an acquaintance with Perozes in other ways. His son, Rufinus the Elder, was the General of Thrace (*magister militum per Thracias*) in 515 and one of the ambassadors to the Persians in 532 who helped to negotiate the Perpetual Peace.[27] Rufinus' son John was appointed the count of the straits of the Pontic Sea (*comes angustiarum pontici maris*) in which capacity he fought against the Huns

[25] See *PLRE* 2:1329, stemma 36.
[26] See *PLRE* 2: Silvanus 7.
[27] See *PLRE* 2: Rufinus 13.

and, like his father, also served as an ambassador to the Persians in 540.[28] Timostratus, Rufinus' brother, served in the army as a duke on the eastern frontier, at least in 503–506 and again in 527, and perhaps continuously for the whole period in between.[29] The children of Timostratus, named Rufinus and John, were likewise military men. John was the general in charge of the garrison at Dara when the Persians captured it in 573 and he served the Persians after he fell into their hands.[30] Rufinus, the son of Timostratus, served as a subordinate commander in the Army of the East during the reign of Maurice and lived long enough to assist the general Narses on his campaign to restore Khusrau II to the throne of Persia in 591, perpetuating his family's long relationship with the Persian royal family.[31] This timeline would make Rufinus, the son of Timostratus, an older man in 591, but that is not impossible given what is known about older generals like Narses and Liberius earlier in the century.[32] This family thus served the empire, mostly in the army but also occasionally as important ambassadors, over the course of nearly 90 years. Their service was concentrated along the eastern frontier, fighting and negotiating with Persia. There is no reason to believe that their contemporaries found their family service atypical or inappropriate. If not for a few passages that specifically link them together as a family and the similarity of their names, we might not even know that these individuals were all related. The fact that they were all part of the same family was simply not important enough for contemporaries to dwell upon in their writing, which probably means that family service was fairly common. It is therefore possible that many more such families lie hidden in history because they did not use easy-to-follow naming strategies and the sources did not bother to point out their family relationship when they recorded their deeds.

The family of the general and rebel Vitalian was large and boasted many important military officers over the course of several generations. It is slightly surprising that Vitalian's family would be so prominent and successful in military service. The patriarch of the family, Patriciolus, apparently served the emperor Anastasius loyally. He fought in the Persian war of 503 and possibly became a commander of the federates (*comes foederatum*) sometime between 503 and 513.[33] Vitalian himself had an even more successful career, although perhaps not in the opinion of Anastasius. Like his father,

[28] See *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 7.
[29] See *PLRE* 3: Timostratus.
[30] See *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 87.
[31] See *PLRE* 3: Rufinus 7.
[32] On older generals, see Chap. 4, 'Appointment: Gaining a Position.'
[33] See *PLRE* 2: Patriciolus.

Vitalian also fought in the Persian war of 503, but in 513 he rebelled against Anastasius on religious grounds (he opposed the emperor's monophysite interpretation of the nature of Christ). As a rebel, he defeated two different armies sent against him from Constantinople. As part of his eventual reconciliation with the emperor, Vitalian was made the General of Thrace in 514, but a defeat the next year likely cost him the position he had won. The next emperor, Justin I, promoted him to be a general of the troops in the emperor's presence (*magister militum praesentalis*) in 518 and granted him the civilian and essentially honorary office of consul in 520. However, shortly after this, Justin thought better of it and had Vitalian murdered, presumably because of the potential threat he posed to his rule.[34] One would not expect Vitalian's family to be particularly successful in military advancement after his murder. After all, Vitalian had rebelled against one emperor and had been murdered by another, which might be imagined to be a black mark on his family. However, his family members appear to have suffered no prejudicial treatment and in fact moved on to important roles. Figure 6.4 shows what is known of Vitalian's family, with office-holders in bold.

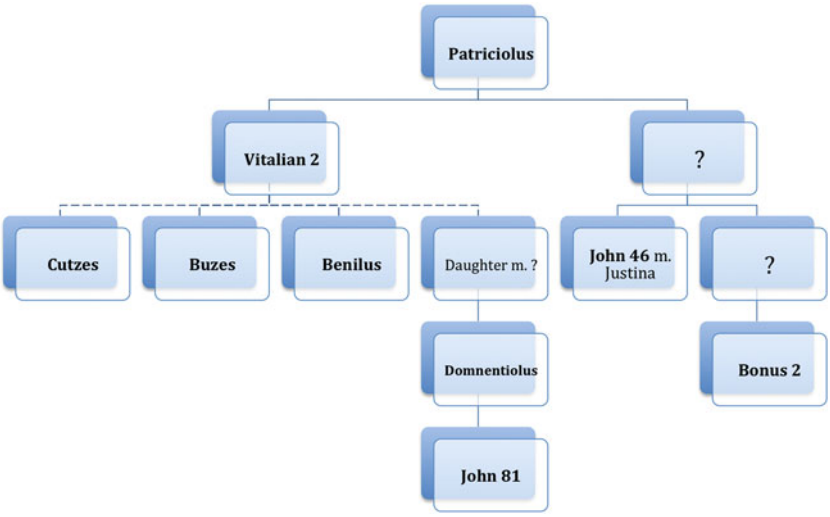

Fig. 6.4 The family of Vitalian.[35] The dashed line indicates uncertain or disputed paternity.

[34] See *PLRE* 2: Vitalianus 2.
[35] See *PLRE* 3:1546, stemma 13.

Although there are several gaps in this family tree and not all of the relationships are certain, it is still evident that this family served in the government across several generations even after the rebellion, rehabilitation, and murder of Vitalian.[36] The most significant uncertainty in this particular family tree is the paternity of the brothers Cutzes, Buzes, and Benilus. All three served Justinian as army officers. The evidence for the relationship between the three and Vitalian is found in the chronicle of John Malalas. The chronicler reports that 'Cutzes of Vitalian' set out against Persian forces with an army.[37] It is likely that Malalas means that Cutzes was the son of Vitalian, and at least one translator of the Malalas text thinks this was the case.[38] No other source confirms this relationship. This makes the connection uncertain, but it is not implausible. The chronology fits and there is no particular reason to doubt Malalas. If Cutzes was indeed the son of Vitalian, then it follows that his brothers were as well, and we can trace the family through three more generations. Cutzes was a duke in charge of frontier troops at Damascus in 528 when the Persians captured him.[39] Benilus fought as a mid-level commander in Lazica on the eastern frontier in 550.[40] Buzes had the most successful career of the three brothers. He served as a duke at Palmyra in 528, when his brother was duke at Damascus. By 540 Buzes had been promoted to General of the East (*magister militum per Orientem*). He belonged to the social network of Belisarius, a factor that worked against him in 542 when he was imprisoned for his role in plotting with Belisarius while Justinian lay sick with the plague. He returned to the emperor's confidence in 549 after the death of Theodora, when he was dispatched as a general against the Gepids. By 554 he was in the East, fighting the Persians in Lazica. He remained active until at least 556.[41] If it seems hard to imagine that Justin and Justinian would promote and trust the sons of a man they had murdered, one needs only to remember that Justinian promoted and trusted Artabanes even after the man had actively plotted to kill him.[42] Of course we do not have all the facts of the situation or know exactly what each individual might

[36] On the service of the family of Vitalian, see comments by Whately 2013, 54 and Ravegnani 1998, 90.

[37] Joh. Mal. 18.26 describes Cutzes as "Κουζτὶς ὁ Βιταλιανοῦ."

[38] Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott 1986, 256, make this translation: 'Koutzis the son of Vitalianus.' But compare *PLRE* 3:366, which characterizes the relationship as 'doubtful.'

[39] See *PLRE* 3: Cutzes.

[40] See *PLRE* 3: Benilus.

[41] See *PLRE* 3: Buzes.

[42] See Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'

have thought or said, but promoting the sons of Vitalian to high military office appears to be in line with other instances of Justinian's capacity to forgive and trust again.

Domnentiolus was the nephew of the three brothers, and consequently probably the grandson of Vitalian. He fought on the eastern front, from as early as 531, and in Italy he was the commander of the garrison at Messana in 550.[43] Domnentiolus' son, John, was a confidant of the emperor Justin II. He is the sole known male member of this family who apparently did not serve in the military. Instead, he received the dignity of a patrician and served as an ambassador to the Persians in 567.[44] The other side of the family was perhaps even more famous. Vitalian's nephew, John, played an important part in the Gothic Wars. Procopius generally referred to him as John, the nephew of Vitalian, in order to distinguish him from homonyms. He served as a general in Italy from 537 to at least 552 and was both a great thorn in the side of Belisarius and a great supporter of Narses.[45] As has already been explained, John furthered his fame by marrying Justina, the daughter of Justinian's cousin Germanus.[46] The final member of the family who emerges from the historical record is Bonus, either the nephew or cousin of John. Bonus was the commander of the garrison at Genoa in 544, but nothing further is known of his career.[47] He possibly enjoyed this position thanks to the patronage of John, who was a general in Italy at this time, but there is no evidence to confirm that John acted as his patron. Altogether, from Patriciolus to John the son of Domnentiolus, it is possible to track five generations and eight individuals of this family that served in the Byzantine military.

These families are all fairly large and each boasted many men that served in the army, often at the same time. For most families that boasted more than one soldier or officer, the information available is far less complete. For example, Agathias relates that a commander named Dabragezas who served in Lazica had a son named Leontius, who also served in the army.[48] Agathias also explains that Dabragezas was an Antian, or non-Roman. Unfortunately, there is no other information about this family, including

[43] See *PLRE* 3: Domnentiolus.
[44] See *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 81.
[45] See Chap. 5.
[46] See *PLRE* 3: Ioannes 46.
[47] See *PLRE* 3: Bonus 2.
[48] Agathias *Histories* 3.21.6, 4.18.1. See Chap. 3.

whether other individuals from it might also have joined the army. Perhaps there were no other militarily important family members. Geoffrey Nathan has argued that contemporary Late Antique historians might have focused only on relatives whom they respected, or felt they ought to respect, and ignored others.[49] On the other hand, Dabragezas might have had additional important relatives and evidence of them simply has not survived. If more complete records existed, some smaller families like this one might prove to have more military men and other families that are currently completely unknown might emerge. It should always be kept in mind that our knowledge of named individuals and their relatives in army service is extremely limited, comprising only a small proportion of the total number of men that actually served in the army during this period. This necessarily restricts our ability to determine just how frequently related men served in the army at the same time.

Implications of Family Service

These family trees have provided a general feeling for the diversity of relatives that might serve and the range of positions that they might hold. It is fairly clear that although family members might share military service in common, they very rarely shared the same position. That is to say, family traditions of military service in early Byzantium did not usually result in what we might consider typical nepotistic relationships: the passing of one particular office from father to son. It is worth noting that such nepotism for the civil service at least was technically enshrined in law in the late Roman period. Arcadius and Honorius allowed certain bureaucrats who were promoted to head a department to nominate their sons or brothers to fill the junior vacancy they left behind. Later, Theodosius II allowed certain officials 'who had a son serving in an unestablished post to advance him to an established position ahead of others more senior.'[50] Both of these laws remained on the books in the sixth century, being repeated in the *Justinian Code*.[51] These laws give a glimpse of the imperial government's view of nepotism and its value in

[49] Nathan 2000, 164.
[50] Kelly 2004, 48.
[51] The relevant references are *Codex Justinianus* 2.7.23.2 and 12.19.7.1.

the administration of the empire.[52] These regulations were technically for lower-ranked bureaucrats and did not apply to the top-ranking administrative posts of the civil administration or to any ranks in the army. Perhaps this explains why there are hardly any examples of such typical nepotism in the military.

The exceptionally rare examples of such typical nepotism may be quickly described. Peter the Patrician had a long and eventful career that culminated in his tenure as Master of Offices (*magister officiorum*) from 539 to 565 during the reign of Justinian.[53] After a short interval, Justin II appointed Peter's son Theodorus to that position in 566 and he held it for ten years.[54] Peter did not directly bequeath his position to his son, since some time expired between their two tenures and two different emperors appointed them to the post. This is the closest example to a typical nepotistic relationship in the sixth century, but even it occurred in the upper administration of the civil service, not in the army. A similar example that did occur in a military context is that of Sergius, who directly succeeded his uncle Solomon as praetorian prefect and General of Africa in 543.[55] Since Solomon was a eunuch and did not have sons, this does seem very close to a direct nepotistic relationship—but it is noteworthy most for being unusual. It is probable that instances of direct father-to-son or uncle-to-nephew inheritance of a particular position were rare. The emperors would have been especially careful to prevent any precedent from developing that might have prejudiced their own autocratic control of the army and administration.[56] However, it is also possible that Peter and his son Theodorus, and Solomon and his nephew Sergius, are representatives of several additional such cases of nepotistic inheritance that are simply unknown today. It is worth noting that Procopius, who had plenty of negative things to say about Sergius in the *Secret History*, satisfies himself with condemning Sergius' abilities and personality and does not seem particularly incensed about the nepotistic transfer of power

[52] Jones 1964 writes about father-to-son nepotism in the bureaucracy of the fifth century: 'there was a tendency for the service to become hereditary by the spontaneous desire of their members to place their sons in the same office' (1:606).

[53] See *PLRE* 3: Petrus 6.

[54] See *PLRE* 3: Theodorus 34.

[55] See *PLRE* 3: Sergius 4 and Solomon 1.

[56] Kelly 2004, 191.

from his uncle.[57] This could indicate that such transfers of a position or rank from older to younger family members were not condemned, even if they were rare. It is also clear that even in these circumstances, when an older relative appeared to bequeath a position to a younger relative, that the emperor remained firmly involved in the transfer. In both cases it was the emperor who decided to promote the younger relative: Justin II clearly appointed Theodorus, because the position was not directly transferred from Peter to Theodorus; and Justinian clearly appointed Sergius, because Solomon was already dead at the time of Sergius' appointment. So while a younger relative might occasionally follow an older relative into a position of power, this was due at least as much to the younger relative's ability to convince the emperor to appoint him as it was to his relationship with the older relative who previously held the position.

Rather than succeeding to the specific office their fathers held, it seems that sons or other male relatives typically aspired merely to military service in general. The exact position they ended up with depended upon both their skills and their level of personal influence with other army officers and the emperor. Over time, it is conceivable that a family's successful service might earn it a reputation as a family particularly suited to serve in the military. For example, a successful general perhaps increased the prospects of his younger family members' also receiving commissions as officers. This could explain the success of the family of Vitalian in the military, or the particular affinity that the family of Rufinus had for the eastern frontier and engagement with Persia. It is also possible that families with multiple members in military service were able to build up trust with the emperors who noticed them. That is, the more members of a family served in the army, especially in important posts, the more the emperor could be convinced that members of that family were loyal to his rule. In turn, this meant more high positions and offices for members of that family. Family service could then be perpetuated both by the interests of individual family members in the army and by specific promotion from the emperor. In this way, even those families that did not have long traditions of military service might create them within the span of a generation with, perhaps, the explicit approval of the emperor. On the other hand, the emperor did not necessarily have to be actively involved in the process. Extremely successful military officers could use their own influence

[57] Procopius *Secret History* 5.28–32.

to encourage the promotion of their relatives, either by assigning the relative to their own command or leaning on their relationship with another officer and asking them to look after the relative. Even between fairly distant relatives, a sense of obligation probably existed that would prompt such benefaction.[58] This sort of patronage in the army must have been extremely common. Ildiger, the son-in-law of Belisarius, served with the general for many years, Leontius served with his father Dabragezas, and Sergius served with his uncle Solomon.[59] Men need not even be enrolled in the army to gain beneficial experience from their older relatives who did serve. The general Soterichus brought his sons Philagrius and Romulus, who had just reached manhood but apparently were not soldiers, with him on a diplomatic mission to visit the Misimians in 556.[60] While there is no explicit evidence that any of these men showed undue favoritism for their relatives, it is reasonable to speculate that the elder men at the least used their influence to further the careers of their young relations, whether they were particularly qualified or not.

Such patronage of family members in military service was likely viewed as ordinary and expected and would not have been considered scandalous. Individual officers were evaluated and critiqued by contemporaries on the basis of their performance and perhaps their personality, not on the way they achieved their position.[61] There was no shame in gaining promotion because one had a successful relative in high rank who exercised influence on one's behalf. The relative was merely another point in the social network that officers used to build their careers. Far from feeling shame at using this connection, an officer probably would have felt foolish if he neglected to exploit this advantage to the fullest extent.

Wives and Children of Justinian's Men

Male relatives in military service were of course not the only family members of the soldiers and officers of the sixth-century army. Roman soldiers had been allowed to marry for centuries by this period, so it is reasonable to assume that most military men were married with children, although

[58] Nathan 2000, 167.

[59] Ildiger: Procopius *Wars* 6.16.21–3; Leontius: Agathias *Histories* 3.21.6, 4.18.1; Sergius: Procopius *Wars* 4.21.

[60] Agathias *Histories* 3.15.6–16.9.

[61] One need only be reminded again of Procopius' critique of Sergius, which was about his ability and partially his personality, not about his family or the reason he gained his position. See Procopius *Secret History* 5.28–32.

there is no statistical data available to prove that assumption.[62] Anecdotally, however, it is easy to demonstrate that many officers were married and that they considered their families quite important.[63] These family relationships impinged upon the officer's ability to completely dedicate his attention to his military service and were frequently viewed by contemporary authors as inappropriate distractions. While it is possible to know something of the attitudes of officers towards their families and something of the opinion of contemporary authors about these attitudes, it is unfortunately almost impossible to know what the wives and dependent children of the officers felt about their status as military families. We would like to know about the experience of these people, but that knowledge remains out of reach. The historians of the sixth century, like most historians of the ancient and medieval world, were concerned with events in the public sphere, almost exclusively involving men, and the private lives of military families were of little interest except when the historians felt these private issues impinged upon public matters. It is in this context that Procopius provides brief glimpses into the domestic lives of some contemporary military officers.

The most famous military wife of the entire sixth century was probably Antonina, the wife of Belisarius, made notorious by Procopius' slanders in the *Secret History*. Procopius accused Antonina of mastering the use of poisons, herbs, and magic, and states that she completely overpowered Belisarius with her charms.[64] The historian also criticized her family, which he said included charioteers and actresses, and her life before her marriage to Belisarius, in which she had several children. While Procopius clearly felt that Belisarius had made an inappropriate choice in his wife, it is worth noting that men marrying women of lesser economic and social standing was not unusual in this period. [65] Procopius spills the most ink on Antonina's scandalous affair with her adopted son Theodosius, which

[62] The study of the Byzantine family is increasing in popularity. For an introduction to the topic, see Nathan 2000, Cooper 2007, Harlow and Lovén 2012, and Brubaker and Tougher 2013. Despite this increase in popularity of the study of Byzantine families generally, the families of Byzantine soldiers specifically remain woefully understudied and poorly understood. See Lee 2007a, 142–4 for a brief introduction to the families of soldiers and, for an introduction to women in warfare in general, see Whately, 'Women and Warfare in the Age of Justinian' (forthcoming).

[63] Compare Lee 2007a, 147–50.

[64] Procopius *Secret History* 1.12–13.

[65] Cooper 2007 argued that men were frequently 'marrying down' in this period to women below their economic and social standing (155–7). Theodora herself of course did not come from a distinguished family. So perhaps in marrying Antonina, Belisarius was not quite as unusual as Procopius made him out to be.

he describes as 'unspeakably disgusting.'[66] While Procopius might indeed have found Antonina's affair morally repugnant and even disgusting, the real reason it was important to him was because it demonstrated her complete mastery over and control of Belisarius, which impacted the general's capacity to fulfill his duties. Procopius' argument that Antonina had emasculated Belisarius is a major theme of the *Secret History*. Not only did the general fail to prevent or even end his wife's affair with their adopted son, he apparently harmed or allowed harm to come to those who tried to bring the affair to his attention and, most importantly, let the affair impact his career. It was at these points that Belisarius' domestic life became worth recording, as his personal relationship with his wife threatened the conduct of wars and the careers of other officers—public matters that commanded Procopius' attention.

Antonina directly impacted Belisarius' career and the operations of his army in at least three ways. First, Belisarius made a habit of regularly bringing Antonina with him when he went on campaign. She accompanied him to both North Africa for the Vandal campaign and Italy for his first Ostrogothic campaign.[67] This by itself was clearly unusual and was most likely a special privilege Belisarius allowed himself. The vast majority of soldiers and officers would not have had a spouse accompany them on campaign.[68] Procopius complained bitterly about Antonina's presence: 'For in order that the man should never be left by himself, at which time he might come to his senses, cast off her enchantments, and form a more realistic opinion of her, she made a point of accompanying him to the ends of the earth.'[69] What a more generous observer might have labeled romantic, Procopius instead deemed evidence of Antonina's extraordinary control of Belisarius. Given that Procopius himself also accompanied Belisarius in North Africa and Italy, it is tempting to speculate that much of Procopius' resentment of Antonina can be traced to these years they had to spend in close proximity. Second, while Antonina's mere presence with the army irritated Procopius, it was when Belisarius abruptly changed the course of a campaign because of Antonina that Procopius truly felt a line was crossed. In 541, Belisarius was in command of the Army of

[66] Procopius *Secret History* 1.15–3.20, especially 1.21.

[67] Procopius *Wars* 3.12.2; 5.18.43. See also Whately, 'Women and Warfare in the Age of Justinian' (forthcoming).

[68] On wives and children staying behind while the army went on campaign, see Ravegnani 1998, 103.

[69] Procopius *Secret History* 2.2.

the East and had just captured Sisauranon when he heard that Antonina was on her way from Constantinople to join him on the eastern front. At this news, Belisarius ordered the army to retreat from Persian territory and he returned to meet his wife as soon as possible. The general wanted to confront Antonina about her affair with Theodosius. Procopius scornfully announced that because of this 'Belisarius was reviled by all the Romans for sacrificing the most critical needs of the state to his paltry domestic affairs.'[70] The historian's choice of words in this sentence is important: the needs of the state are 'critical,' while domestic affairs are merely 'paltry.' In letting his family issues take precedence over his military service, Procopius believed that Belisarius had made a mistake and publically telegraphed his subordination and emasculation at the hands of his wife. The third way in which Belisarius enabled Antonina to impact the operations of the army was in the death of the general Constantine. As described in the previous two chapters, Constantine was accused of theft and then apparently attempted to attack Belisarius when questioned about it.[71] Procopius attributed Constantine's execution not long after this to Antonina's anger over Constantine advising Belisarius to do away with her because of her affair with Theodosius.[72] So Belisarius' relationship with his wife impacted not just his own career but also apparently threatened the lives of the officers who served with him.

The relationship of Belisarius and Antonina is almost certainly an exceptional case. If all Byzantine army officers had such convoluted relationships with their wives that impacted the operation of the army, it is hard to imagine that the army could have functioned at all. Procopius' repeated accusation that Belisarius was under Antonina's power highlights the unusual nature of their marriage. According to Procopius, Antonina had 'quite overpowered' Belisarius and she had 'used magic to subdue him and she could break his will in but a moment.'[73] For his part, Belisarius 'willingly allowed' her to pull the wool over his eyes, he was 'extraordinarily infatuated' with her, he was a 'pathetic fool,' he was 'overcome by a burning erotic passion,' and he 'promised to be her devoted slave.'[74] The frequency of these accusations and the vocabulary

[70] Procopius *Secret History* 2.21.
[71] See Chap. 5, 'Explaining Social Networks in the Reign of Justinian.'
[72] See Procopius *Secret History* 1.24–30 and Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'
[73] Procopius *Secret History* 1.13, 3.2, translated by Kaldellis 2010.
[74] Procopius *Secret History* 1.18, 4.41, 1.39, 3.1, 4.30, translated by Kaldellis 2010.

Procopius utilized indicates not simply his disapproval but also his surprise that a man, especially a successful military officer, would conduct his private life in this fashion. Procopius' disapproval and surprise may be partially caused by the fact that husbands in general seemed to have been gaining power legally and socially within the marriage bond vis-à-vis their wives during this period, and this was therefore an even more unusual case.[75]

While Belisarius and Antonina's relationship was exceptional, Belisarius was hardly the only officer to allow his family's private affairs to impinge upon official military business. Not everyone who neglected their duties to pay attention to their family had a resentful historian with intimate knowledge of the family, so the kind of detail available for Belisarius and Antonina is lacking for other military families. It was clear to Procopius that John, the nephew of Vitalian, neglected his duties in order to arrange an advantageous marriage for himself. In 545, Belisarius sent John to Constantinople to convince Justinian of the need to send reinforcements to Italy. Instead, John took advantage of the time in Constantinople to marry Justina, the daughter of the emperor's cousin Germanus. In doing so, he apparently ignored his orders from Belisarius and 'accomplished none of the objects of his mission.'[76] In this case an officer allowed the prospect of a marriage and then the achievement of that prospect to interfere with his career, although given John's continued career success after this it is obvious that his decision did not adversely affect him. Indeed, marrying the daughter of the emperor's cousin might have improved his career prospects despite Procopius' disapproval of how John sacrificed military interests for a personal matter. John's marriage might have endangered military operations in Italy in one other way, if Procopius is to be believed. The empress Theodora apparently disapproved of the marriage and even made threats against John's life. When John returned to Italy to resume his post, he refused to meet with Belisarius apparently out of fear of Antonina, who had a close relationship with Theodora. John evidently believed that Theodora would use Antonina to strike at him in retaliation for his marriage.[77] As a result of John's avoidance of Belisarius, Rome fell once again to the Ostrogoths in 546. Blaming all of this on John's marriage may be an

[75] Cooper 2007, 144, 152–160.
[76] Procopius *Wars* 7.12.11.
[77] Procopius *Secret History* 5.8–15.

exaggeration on Procopius' part. John had already shown a dislike and disrespect for Belisarius years before this event and it is not clear that John needed any further incentive to avoid the general.[78] But even if this story is an exaggeration, it amply demonstrates Procopius' irritation at any possibility that private family affairs, especially those mediated by women like Theodora and Antonina, should impinge upon the functioning of the Byzantine army and the fortunes of war.

In at least one incident, concern for wives and children impacted an entire army unit at the same time and interfered with their official responsibilities. In 544, the General of Illyricum, Vitalius, led a contingent of soldiers from the Army of Illyricum to Italy in support of Belisarius in the ongoing Ostrogothic War. However, not long after they arrived, the soldiers left secretly in the middle of the night, abandoned Vitalius, and headed back home to Illyricum. The soldiers sent messengers to Justinian to explain this desertion. They claimed they left Italy because they had not been paid, they were running out of supplies, and most importantly because 'a Hunnic army had fallen upon the Illyrians and enslaved the women and children.'[79] Although Procopius does not explicitly identify the women as the wives of the soldiers and the children as their own children, the connection is implied since he does not mention the capture or death of any civilian men. The implication then is that the Illyrian soldiers were concerned for the welfare of their families back home and they therefore deserted in Italy in order to return to Illyricum to try to repulse the Hunnic army and save their wives and children. The situation echoes the concerns expressed by Julian's soldiers when they were summoned to the east to join Constantius II in 360.[80] They also had feared for the safety of their families while they served on a front far from home. So in these instances, on a very broad scale, for many thousands of men rather than just one, it is possible to see the same issue that prompted Belisarius to abruptly end his campaign against the Persians and retreat in 541: concern for family affairs.

These anecdotes vary quite a bit in terms of the amount of detail available and the vitriol expressed by the author in each case. However, the similarities between the situations are more striking than the differences.

[78] See Chap. 5.
[79] Procopius *Wars* 7.11.10–16.
[80] Ammianus 20.4.10.

In each scenario, a Byzantine soldier or officer placed concerns for their 'paltry' family affairs above their military duties. Procopius expressed some level of disapproval in each instance. It seems that Procopius, and perhaps others like him, believed that family life should not impinge upon military service. Family affairs were to remain firmly in the private sphere and should never take precedence over an individual's public life, especially if that individual served in the army. In this context, it is no surprise that Procopius and other authors of the period rarely mention the private family lives of Byzantine military officers. As important as family might be, it was a private matter, and did not belong in the public eye or deserve to be recorded in histories. If the wives and dependent children of officers were mentioned, it was only to criticize the fact that they were impeding the officer's performance of his duty. While this opinion of Procopius is quite clear, it is equally clear that Byzantine military men did not agree with him or at least were not as scrupulous about avoiding conflicts between private life and public duty as he would have liked. Belisarius might have been exceptional in his devotion to his wife, but in general the high priority he placed on his family life does not appear unusual when held up to the actions of John, the nephew of Vitalian, the soldiers of the Army of Illyricum, and Julian's soldiers in the fourth century. Military men were often dedicated family men and not surprisingly would sometimes prioritize their families over their duties and their careers if they felt it was appropriate. It is not particularly surprising that soldiers and officers who were actually engaged in the business of war while providing for families should have a different opinion of where their families fit into their priorities than historians who wrote about them. It is reasonable to suspect that many military men may have agreed with Procopius in theory that their military service should take priority, but in practice clearly they believed that there were exceptions to that rule.

It seems in general that families were an important factor in both the careers and private lives of Byzantine military men, regardless of whether contemporary historians believed that to be appropriate. Many families contributed more than one soldier or officer to the army. Most likely, older and more established individuals in military service looked out for their younger relatives and used their authority and influence to promote their careers. While the imperial families tend to be most obvious in this

practice because of the attention paid to them, less noble and powerful families also made a regular habit of such family service. Although the emperor tolerated family service and a certain degree of nepotistic promotion, cases of typical nepotism were incredibly rare and the emperor was constantly involved in the promotion of individuals to high command, whether they had family members in similar positions or not. The wives and children of military officers claimed quite a bit of their attention, to the chagrin of Procopius and presumably others like him who believed an officer's primary responsibility should be to his official duties. Byzantine soldiers and officers, like men at all times, sought to balance their family lives and their careers but occasionally chose, for some reason or another, to prioritize their family. The disapproval of Procopius and others of similar opinion apparently had no impact upon this decision.

CHAPTER 7

Officers and Their Men

This chapter concludes the series of investigations into the significant relationships of Byzantine army officers. Having examined the way officers interacted with the emperor, their fellow officers, and their family members, it remains to look at the relationships officers had with the soldiers under their command. This is the most difficult relationship to explain, partly because of a dearth of evidence, and perhaps also because officers did not often have significant relationships with the enlisted soldiers serving under them. In fact, the most common way that soldiers were mentioned in the sources of the sixth century, and the most common way senior officers seemed to refer to them, was as large, nameless groups as in 'the soldiers' or 'the men' or 'the army.' In these instances there are no indications of individuality or suggestions of regard between individual officers and soldiers. The soldiers are a homogenous mass of manpower that the general and officers harness to win a battle or achieve an objective. Most descriptions of battle scenes fall into this category. One of the most famous battles of the sixth century, the Battle of Busta Gallorum in 552, provides a convenient example. In describing the disposition of the Byzantine army at the start of the battle, Procopius explains that the army was split in three divisions, a left wing, center, and a right wing. He names the officers in command of each formation, but of course makes no

D.A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56204-3_7

attempt to name any of the soldiers in each division.[1] Here the soldiers are simply the building blocks of the army that Narses and his officers will use to win the battle.

Soldiers also appear as large, homogenous groups in circumstances beyond battle descriptions. They are utilized this way by authors as audiences for the speeches of generals, whether those speeches are designed to inspire the soldiers for a coming battle, reproach them for lax discipline, or reward them for a job well done. The pre-battle speech is a major fixture of war history in both ancient and Late Antique sources. Such speeches purport to record what the general tells his troops just before battle begins to encourage them to victory. Often the author also provides a companion speech, allegedly given by the enemy general to his own troops. Such speech pairs appear before most major battles in Procopius, and many minor battles as well.[2] The tradition of recording pre-battle speeches continued with Agathias and Theophlyact.[3] Historians have long doubted the historicity of these pre-battle speeches, which most likely often reflect what the author believed the general ought to have said rather than what the general really did say.[4] Aside from a few possible exceptions in the works of Procopius, who was after all the secretary and probably the ghostwriter of Belisarius, most pre-battle speeches in the sources reflect the words of the author, not the general.[5] This is not to say that pre-battle speeches did not occur. They almost certainly did and were an obvious way for a general or senior officer to communicate with and inspire his soldiers. The *Strategikon* of Maurice even enjoins the giving of speeches as one of the duties of a general.[6] But because of the impersonal setting of these speeches, in which one officer communicated to the entire army before a battle, they have little to say about the relationships between individual officers and soldiers.

Speeches given by the general to reproach large groups of soldiers for poor behavior or reward them for a job well done also offer little

[1] Procopius *Wars* 8.31.1–5. See Rance 2005, 453. Other instances of soldiers described as merely their battle formations: Procopius *Wars* 2.25.16–17; 4.3.4–5; Theophylact *History* 1.9.7; 2.3.1–2.

[2] Procopius *Wars* 1.14.13–28; 4.1.12–2.32; 8.30.1–20.

[3] Agathias *Histories* 1.16; Theophylact *History* 3.12.11–14.1.

[4] Taragna 2000; Pazdernik 2006, 183; Sarantis 2013b, 78–79; Kaldellis 2010, 260–2; Codoner 2003. See also the discussion in Greatrex 2014, 97–98.

[5] Compare Treadgold 2007, 179.

[6] Maurice *Strategikon* 7.4.

information about relationships, but do suggest ways in which officers and soldiers might have crossed paths other than the simple issuing of orders. Beyond the generic pre-battle morale speech, one way generals typically interacted with large groups of soldiers was in negotiation over how to treat civilian populations and, even more frequently, the property of civilian populations. In most instances, this interaction boiled down to the general attempting to encourage the soldiers to respect civilians and their property, and soldiers transgressing these orders.[7] In 533, Belisarius had to punish an unidentified number of soldiers for picking fruit in the fields of North African farmers in the early stages of the campaign against the Vandals. He then delivered a speech, ostensibly to the entire army, about how the soldiers should not steal from the civilians because they do not want to reconcile the civilians and the Vandals in opposition to the Byzantine army.[8] Similarly, after the sack of Naples in 536, Belisarius had to chastise his soldiers for their exuberance in killing the inhabitants and looting their property.[9] Hoping to forestall such bad behavior in the first place, in 586 Philippicus commanded his soldiers 'not to touch the farmers' labors', enjoining this in order 'to spare the countryside' as a campaign against the Persians was beginning.[10]

Another significant reason for generals to address large numbers of soldiers at once was when distributing booty or special rewards after a battle. Evidence for this is plentiful, if sometimes indirect. Procopius claimed that one of Belisarius' strengths as a general was that he always used to reward his soldiers who distinguished themselves and to pay for their equipment if they lost it in battle.[11] When preparing a detachment of soldiers for a raid in Italy, Belisarius gave instructions to save the booty intact so that it might be divided fairly and properly with the whole army at a later date.[12] Theophylact provides a thorough description of one large meeting in which the general Philippicus distributed booty and rewards:

> On the next day the general held a review of the soldiers: he favored the wounded with gifts, gold and silver decoration was a reward for courageous spirit, and he weighed out the recompense according to the extent of the

[7] See Chap. 8, 'The Opinion of Average Civilians.'
[8] Procopius *Wars* 3.16.1–8.
[9] Procopius *Wars* 5.10.28–33.
[10] Theophylact *History* 2.2.5.
[11] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.8.
[12] Procopius *Wars* 6.7.33–4.

> perils. For some people received promotion as a prize for fortitude, another man a Persian horse, fine in appearance yet good in battle, another a silver helmet and quiver, another a shield, breastplate, and spears.[13]

Other situations reveal that generals had a habit of including promises of material reward in pre-battle speeches as a way to incite the soldiers to even greater valor. The most conspicuous example is that of Narses, who before the Battle of Busta Gallorum was 'holding in the air bracelets and necklaces and golden bridles on poles and displaying certain other incentives to bravery in the coming struggle.'[14] Incidents like these suggest that an important component of the overall relationship between officers and their men was an unwritten contract in which soldiers performed bravely in battle and won a victory, and officers in return agreed to share the booty with the soldiers and provide special rewards. Such an unofficial agreement did not by itself create any personal relationship between an officer and an individual soldier, but all real relationships of affection that might have developed between them must have had reciprocal arrangements like these as part of their foundation.

Positive Descriptions of Individual Soldiers

Although the sources tend generally to treat the soldiers as large, nameless groups, we are fortunate that they do occasionally name individual soldiers and hint at how they interacted with their officers. Individual soldiers are typically named in the sources only when they are doing something extraordinary. It makes sense to pay attention to these extraordinary events, since they were probably the only instances that would have required or resulted in one-on-one interaction between an officer and a soldier. In a normal situation, the soldier doing his job would not attract great attention and would interact primarily with his *decarch* (commander of ten) or other nearest junior officer in the chain of command. To more senior officers, the soldier would just be one in the mass of men who made up the army. Only the soldier involved in something extraordinary would meet face-to-face with higher-ranking officers and have a chance to be recognized. Not all extraordinary actions were positive and led to pleasant interactions with officers, but good deeds are a reasonable place to start.

[13] Theophylact *History* 2.6.10–11, translated by Whitby and Whitby 1986, 51.
[14] Procopius *Wars* 8.31.9. See also Rance 2007, 376.

Praiseworthy actions of soldiers that could get them noticed included valor in battle, clever tactical planning before a battle, and accomplishing an unusual but helpful task.

The most common positive description of an individual soldier in the sources is the standard praise of valor in battle. Such descriptions might be very simple and provide very little detail about what the soldier did to earn such praise: such as the remark of Procopius that three guardsmen named Athenodorus, Theodoriscus, and George were the bravest soldiers in a skirmish during the siege of Rome in 537.[15] Sometimes the author offers more detail on what exactly made the soldier so heroic. Sapeir, a soldier under the command of Theodore and Andrew, led the assault on Beiudaes in 587 and scaled the wall no fewer than three times under enemy fire before he gained the top.[16] Ulimuth and Gouboulgoudou, guardsmen under Belisarius and Valerian, earned respect because they pushed attacking Goths off the wall at Ancona in 538 to save the city from assault.[17] Agathias proudly recorded the valor of Ognaris, a guardsman of Martin, who wounded a Persian elephant at the Battle of Phasis in Lazica in 556.[18] Such actions as these were unusual enough to warrant mention by the author, and therefore probably unusual enough to elicit praise or reward from senior officers in the army. Of course, gaining the attention of a senior officer was even easier when one's valorous action saved that officer's life. Belisarius was in mortal peril at the siege of Auximus in 539 when an arrow flew toward his stomach. Fortunately, his guardsman Unigastus stuck out his hand in the path of the missile and, while losing forever the use of his hand, saved Belisarius from suffering a perhaps fatal wound.[19] Another way to get an officer's attention was to personally defeat an enemy champion, either in a pitched battle or in a special duel before the battle began. Thus John, a guardsman of the general John Troglita, killed the Moorish chieftain Carcasan during the Battle of the Plains of Cato in 548.[20] Even more dramatically, Anzalas, a guardsman of Narses,

[15] Procopius *Wars* 5.29.20. Other stock descriptions of the bravest warriors in a battle without details of what they did that was so brave: Procopius *Wars* 4.5.7–9, 4.20.19, 7.11.18.

[16] Theophylact *History* 2.18.15–25. Similarly, a soldier named Suarunas was praised for his bravery in assaulting a fort in Lazica in 557 (Agathias *Histories* 4.20.4).

[17] Procopius *Wars* 6.13.14–15.

[18] Agathias *Histories* 3.27.1.

[19] Procopius *Wars* 6.27.12–15. In 537, Belisarius' life had similarly been saved by another guardsman named Maxentius (5.8.14).

[20] Corippus *Iohannis* 8.630–6.

killed the Gothic champion Coccas in a duel before the Battle of Busta Gallorum in 552.[21] Duels like these were antithetical to military discipline, but victory in one would gain a soldier the adulation of his peers and at least some sort of recognition—even if it were chastisement for breaking rank—from his officers.[22]

Unfortunately, while it is likely that such acts of valor and heroism as have been related here would have attracted the attention of officers, there is very little evidence on what interaction between officer and brave soldier might have occurred after these acts. Presumably in most instances the soldier had an audience with the general or senior officer, either privately or before the entire army, and received some sort of award. This probably would have looked very similar to the description Theophylact provided of Philippicus rewarding his army, quoted above. Procopius provides another rare but tantalizing glimpse of this process by giving the exact action of a brave soldier and the specific reward received in return. Just before the Battle of Busta Gallorum in 552, Narses selected fifty soldiers to seize a nearby hilltop that would help to anchor the left wing of the Byzantine army during the battle. Procopius writes:

> The fifty won great renown for valor, but two of them distinguished themselves particularly in this action, Paulus and Ansilas, who had leaped out from the phalanx and made a display of valor surpassing all others… after they had checked the onrushes of the enemy many times, it came about that the sword of one of them (this was Paulus) was bent double by the frequent cutting of the wooden shafts and so was utterly useless. This then he immediately threw on the ground, and seizing the spears with both hands he would wrench them from his assailants. And by wrenching four spears from the enemy in this way in the sight of all he made himself the chief cause of their abandoning their attempt. Wherefore, in consequence of the exploit, Narses made him a personal guard of his own from that time on.[23]

It would have been nice indeed to be given a window to see the moment when Narses greeted Paulus and inducted him into his guardsmen (*bucellarii*) as reward, but at least the basic variables of the equation are known. A soldier's valor on the battlefield translated to being incorporated into Narses' personal guards, where he would presumably earn more pay, have

[21] Procopius *Wars* 8.31.13–16.
[22] Compare Rance 2005, 429.
[23] Procopius *Wars* 8.29.22–28, translated by Dewing 1914, 5:359–61.

better access to Narses and the command structure of the army, and begin a relationship with the general which might see him to yet further promotions and advances in the future.

In addition to personal bravery in the midst of battle, soldiers could hope to get noticed for clever tactical suggestions before a battle even began. While tactical planning was normally the domain of officers, enlisted soldiers sometimes had ideas of their own which might be adopted. In 536, while Belisarius and the Byzantine army were besieging Naples, an Isaurian soldier discovered that the aqueduct that brought water into the city was unguarded and could possibly be enlarged enough to allow infiltration. This soldier, unnamed by Procopius, did not feel comfortable proposing his plan to an officer directly, so he first went to another Isaurian, Paucaris, one of the guardsmen of Belisarius. Paucaris reported the matter to the general and Belisarius, 'being pleased by the report, took new courage, and by promising to reward the man with great sums of money induced him to attempt the undertaking.'[24] The aqueduct was enlarged, a commando raid entered the aqueduct and opened the city gates, and Naples fell to Belisarius. The unnamed Isaurian soldier is not mentioned again, but given the earlier pledge of Belisarius it is reasonable to assume that he received some sort of financial reward for his plan. Twenty years later, a soldier received a different reward for proposing a plan to take a fortified location. While besieging a Misimian fort in the Caucasus in 556, an Isaurian soldier named Illus was on sentry duty. He spied some Misimians filling water jugs and surreptitiously followed them back up the hill to the fort, observing that only eight men guarded this particular entrance. Bolder than the unnamed soldier at Naples, Illus went directly to the general Martin and reported this discovery. When Martin planned an assault on this entrance, he designated a hundred picked men and named Illus to move first at the head of the group.[25] The attack was a success, the fort was taken, and the Misimians suffered a severe defeat. Illus is not mentioned again. His reward had apparently been participation in the assault, although it is reasonable to suppose that he might also have received money or promotion as well. It seems that officers not infrequently took advice from soldiers like the unnamed Isaurian and Illus, even if it did not always have a happy ending for those proffering the advice. In 547, Ziper and Ariarith, guardsmen of John Troglita, urged their patron to fight a

[24] Procopius *Wars* 5.9.11–21.
[25] Agathias *Histories* 4.17.6–18.1.

battle at Marta in North Africa. John took the advice, and the two guardsmen were promptly killed in the ensuing battle.[26]

Before moving on from positive interactions, it is worthwhile taking a moment to consider interactions that were not the result of bravery in battle or suggesting a plan but rather were the result of miscellaneous, unusual good deeds. The name of Mindes, an otherwise unknown Isaurian soldier fighting in Italy under the command of Paulus, is recorded only because of his choice not to defect to the Goths. When Paulus surrendered a tower in Rome to Totila in 549, Totila gave Paulus and his 400 soldiers the option of returning to Constantinople or joining the Gothic army. Only Paulus and Mindes chose to return to Constantinople.[27] Surely that journey must have been an opportunity for officer and soldier to bond. Unfortunately, nothing more is known of either of them, so it is not possible to speculate on their relationship. Another opportunity for a soldier to shine came from perhaps the most interesting use of a guardsman in the sixth century. During the Battle of Solachon in 586, a division of the Byzantine army overwhelmed its Persian opponents and began looting the Persian baggage train even though the battle was still raging. Philippicus, the Byzantine general, needed to restore order so the rest of the battle would not be lost, but could not go himself. So the general gave his helmet to Theodorus, one of his guardsmen, ordered him to put it on and sent him to go chastise the looting soldiers. The soldiers apparently thought Theodorus was Philippicus and so obediently stopped looting and returned to the main engagement, leading to a Byzantine victory.[28] This task certainly counts as unusual, requiring neither bravery in battle nor a clever plan on the part of Theodorus, but nonetheless it was an important job and crucial to the Byzantine victory. Perhaps the success of Theodorus in this quest improved his reputation in the eyes of Philippicus and set the guardsman in line for future assignments and rewards.

Neutral Descriptions of Individual Soldiers

Doing something unusual to get noticed in the sources, or meet face-to-face with an officer, did not necessarily imply doing something praiseworthy or exceptional. Sometimes an individual soldier was singled out by his

[26] Corippus *Iohannis* 6.534–5, 670.
[27] Procopius *Wars* 7.36.26–29.
[28] Theophylact *History* 2.4.1–4. See also analysis of the battle in Haldon 2001, 52–6.

commanding officer simply because he was assigned to carry out a mission and that mission was recorded by the sources for posterity—no heroism or clever planning was required. These references in the sources to individual soldiers were therefore neutral. That these men were selected for a mission indicates that they already had some sort of relationship, or at least reputation, with the officer that selected them. Because of this requirement, most of the soldiers designated for special assignment and mentioned in the sources in this fashion were guardsmen (*bucellarii*) rather than regular enlisted soldiers. Guardsmen were routinely dispatched on missions by their generals as part of their regular duties.[29] These missions were quite varied. Some common mission goals were scouting, raiding, capturing a fort or other critical location, or reinforcing a garrison currently at such a location. If the objective was large enough, it would be designated to a significant division of the army under the command of an officer.[30] If the objective was small enough, however, a general like Belisarius frequently preferred to grant a small force of soldiers to some of his guardsmen and send them. In 537, in the midst of the siege of Rome, Belisarius sent out a raiding force of 600 cavalry under the command not of one of his officers but of three of his guardsmen: Cutilas, Artasires and Bochas.[31] While it is easiest to know about Belisarius' guardsmen thanks to Procopius' familiarity with them, it should not be imagined that this phenomenon was limited to Belisarius. John, the nephew of Vitalian, stationed 300 cavalry under the command of his guardsmen Chalazar and Gudilas in Rusciane in 548.[32]

On occasions when the objective was distant and perhaps likely to be lightly defended, one guardsman might be granted sole command of the detachment. So in 534, during the campaign against the Vandals, Belisarius dispatched a guardsman named John to take control of Septem (modern Ceuta) on the Strait of Gibraltar.[33] On at least one occasion, a guardsman received a command that was not really a command at all. In 542, as he prepared to accept Persian ambassadors at his army camp,

[29] See more about *bucellarii* in Chap. 2, 'Basic Divisions.'

[30] For example, see the rescue of John, the nephew of Vitalian, delegated by Belisarius to Ildiger in Procopius *Wars* 6.16.21–3 (and Chap. 5, 'Belisarius and Narses in Italy, 538–539'). Among many other examples, see Procopius *Wars* 6.21.13–16 and Theophylact *History* 6.8.9.

[31] Procopius *Wars* 6.2.10–14. See 7.11.19–21 for a similar example.

[32] Procopius *Wars* 7.30.6.

[33] Procopius *Wars* 4.5.6. See 3.16.9 for a similar example.

Belisarius gave 1000 cavalry to his guardsman Diogenes, ordering him to station these men in such a way as to intimidate the ambassadors.[34] This short-lived faux command might have been a relief from real battles and actual danger. While guardsmen alone sometimes commanded these small detachments, frequently Belisarius preferred to pair an officer with one of his guardsmen in joint command of a force. In 547, he assigned a scouting force to the joint command of the guardsman Barbation and the officer Phazas.[35] Similarly, Phocas the guardsman worked with the officer Valentinus in Italy in 546 and Trajan and John the Glutton, guardsmen, worked with Arethas in Mesopotamia in 541.[36] Unfortunately, it is not possible to know how the officers involved felt about being in co-command with a guardsman of their general. It might be reasonable to suppose a certain amount of camaraderie between the guardsmen of the commanding general and the other senior officers of the army. After all, the most important guardsmen reported directly to the general, as did the senior officers. In war conferences and discussions it is not unreasonable to imagine the general including some of his guardsmen as well as the officers of his army. So contact between guardsmen and regular officers might have been frequent. Contact does not necessarily mean a positive relationship, however. Nor does it guarantee that officers appreciated having co-command of a mission with a guardsman. The guardsman might have been seen, rightly or not, as a 'spy' for the general and a check on the officer's autonomy during the mission. Although the sources do not confirm this, it is entirely possible and even reasonable that generals like Belisarius did make these arrangements with these goals in mind. After all, if the emperor occasionally hedged his bets by appointing several generals rather than a single one, it would not be surprising if his generals followed the example by intentionally dividing smaller commands among multiple officers or guardsmen.[37]

In all these cases, whether they were paired with officers or not, Procopius and other authors offer neither praise nor censure of the guardsmen mentioned. This is reasonable as the soldiers are doing nothing particularly noteworthy, they are merely following orders to move out on a mission ordered by their general. These missions could lead to moments of

[34] Procopius *Wars* 2.21.2.
[35] Procopius *Wars* 7.28.5–17.
[36] Procopius *Wars* 7.15.1–4; 2.19.15–16.
[37] See Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'

heroism that might result in praise and further interaction with the general, as we saw above. They could equally lead to an opportunity to misbehave or fail, and result in condemnation and punishment. But by themselves, these mentions of individual guardsmen in the sources say relatively little about the relationship between officers and soldiers generally or even generals and their guardsmen specifically. We might speculate on the relationships hidden behind these mission details, but it is impossible to be definitive.

Negative Descriptions of Individual Soldiers

Having analyzed positive and neutral mentions of individual soldiers in the sources, there remains the examination of negative descriptions of such men. Inevitably, soldiers occasionally came to the attention of an officer (and then sometimes to an author) because they did something wrong. Soldiers misbehave in all armies and in all periods. It would be wrong to take examples of soldiers being criticized in the sources for their actions as proof that the sixth-century army was any less disciplined than the Roman army of other periods.[38] The soldiers of the sixth century were guilty of a variety of crimes, if the sources are to be believed, but this does not make them exceptional. These offenses fall roughly into two categories: serious crimes against the state and relatively venial misbehavior.

Going by the works of Procopius, soldiers were sometimes guilty of quite serious crimes against the state. Of course, Procopius was unusually well-informed about the army of Justinian, so the fact that he can record many instances of exceptional misbehavior is not surprising. It is worth keeping in mind that the number of soldiers engaged in such misbehavior is of course still an extreme minority of the entire army. The most common crime of soldiers in the field armies appears to have been defection. This is not surprising. When the situation of the army as a whole or for an individual soldier in particular was poor, the easiest way to get out was to run away. For soldiers in expeditionary armies in Italy or Africa, home might be quite distant and so desertion was not a convenient option. However, the enemy army was often nearby and the soldier who wanted out could expect to find a warm welcome there from others engaged in the same

[38] If the army of the sixth century was any less disciplined than the army of earlier or later periods, it was due to complaints because of late pay, which is a fault of the situation and the government rather than the soldiers. See Jones 1964, 1:648–9, 678; Southern and Dixon 1996, 170–4; Lee 2004, 122–3; Lee 2007a, 72; Rance 2007, 374; Kaegi 1981, 1–137.

profession. Defection thus allowed the best of all worlds to a disgruntled soldier: the chance to escape a poor situation and try out a new one all while still doing the job he knew. Sometimes defectors are named individually in the sources.[39] In 549, Indulf, formerly a guardsman of Belisarius, defected to Totila.[40] After the defection, Indulf captured two towns for the Goths and helped the Goths to defeat a Byzantine army detachment in battle.[41] More commonly, Procopius and other authors merely referred to defectors in nameless groups. In 546, four soldiers defected to Totila, in the process opening a gate to the city of Rome so the Goths could capture it and end the siege.[42] The names of the soldiers go unrecorded. Closely related to defection was another serious crime: bribery. Some Byzantine soldiers appear to have been susceptible to bribery, which is not surprising given that there were occasionally major delays in their pay. The story of the four soldiers defecting to Totila in 546 mixes the crimes of defection and the accepting of bribes, as the four soldiers were promised money in exchange for opening the gate. Not all takers of bribes got away with their ill-gotten rewards. During the Byzantine siege of Gothic Auximus in 539, the Goths within the city bribed Burcentius, a soldier under the command of Narses, to sneak a message to Wittigis, the Gothic king. When this treachery was discovered, Belisarius decided to punish Burcentius by giving him over to his fellow soldiers, so they could decide what to do. They burned him to death in full view of the Gothic defenders at Auximus.[43] More intelligent takers of bribes had the sense to flee after being bribed into a crime. In 545, Totila managed to bribe Ulifus, a guardsman of the general Cyprian, to murder his master, who was at that time the commander of the garrison at Perusia. Ulifus murdered Cyprian and then fled to Totila immediately afterward to receive his reward and enter the king's service.[44] We might also suspect that bribery was behind the defection of Indulf. Procopius claimed that Indulf defected to Totila 'for no good reason,' but money would be reason enough.

After defection and accepting bribes, the most serious crime attributed to individual soldiers was mutiny. There were mutinies on each major

[39] For more on desertion and defection, see Chap. 8, 'The Opinions of Soldiers and Officers.'

[40] Procopius *Wars* 7.35.23.

[41] Procopius *Wars* 7.35.23–30.

[42] Procopius *Wars* 7.20.4–7.

[43] Procopius *Wars* 6.26.3–26.

[44] Procopius *Wars* 7.12.18–20.

front of the empire during this time period. Africa was consumed by a serious mutiny throughout the 530s and 540s, which was complicated by the survival of pockets of Vandal resistance as well as the intervention of the Moors. The Army of the East, normally very trustworthy, mutinied against Maurice in the 580s. The Army of Thrace, under the leadership of Phocas, mutinied against Maurice in 602, a revolt that cost him his throne and his life. The sources are rarely specific when discussing embarrassing mutinies. While ringleaders are generally named, we know very little about the soldiers who supported them. For instance, although we know that in 536 there were 8000 men involved in the mutiny in North Africa, we only know the name of the leader, Stotzas.[45] In some ways, this is not surprising. While there was an advantage to naming the ringleaders, who became scapegoats and would be executed anyway, and to naming those who may have been involved in sabotaging the mutiny from within, who were therefore heroes, there was no advantage to naming individual mutineers.[46] Once a mutiny had been suppressed and the majority of the soldiers involved in it returned to loyal service, it was more advantageous to forget that they had been mutinous than to stress it by recalling their names. These major mutinies (in the 530s, 580s, and 602) were not uprisings of soldiers particularly targeted at individual officers, and so do not really reflect relationship issues between officers and their men. The mutineers might have refused to accept orders from their generals, but this refusal derived from complaints about the way the army as a whole was functioning at the time, not from criticism of the generals in particular. For this reason, these major mutinies are addressed in more detail in Chapter 8 as evidence of the opinions of soldiers on the Byzantine army as an institution. Smaller scale attempts at usurpation were more likely to be directed at an individual officer or to result in conflict between officer and the hopeful usurper. In 537, a soldier named John attempted to usurp power in Dara, but was quickly assassinated by a loyal group of soldiers and citizens.[47] In 537–538, Maximinus, a guardsman of Theodorus was suspected of plotting to seize control of the Byzantine army in Africa. Curiously, the general Germanus transferred Maximinus to his personal guardsmen to keep an eye on him. In this case the recruitment of a guardsman was not a reward but a way of trying to enforce loyalty. The move

[45] Procopius *Wars* 4.15.1–2.
[46] On the heroes in mutinies, see Artabanes in Chap. 4.
[47] Procopius *Wars* 1.26.5–12.

did not work and Maximinus continued to plot, so in 538 Germanus had him impaled for his machinations.[48] While starting or attempting to start a mutiny or usurp power might gain a soldier notoriety, it certainly did not result in any lasting relationship with officers except perhaps in cases where the officer joined the mutiny and the mutineers successfully resisted imperial reprisal for some time. In general, it is unlikely that serious crimes such as defection, accepting bribes, mutiny or usurpation led to any sustained contact between officers and soldiers that might have formed a relationship. It was far more likely to result in a permanent split between officer and the misbehaving soldier, either because the soldier succeeded in defection or mutiny, or because he failed and was quickly executed for his crimes.

Relatively venial misbehavior, on the other hand, might attract the attention of an officer to correct the behavior without actually resulting in the execution of the offender, thus creating some opportunity for mutual interaction leading to a relationship. Venial misbehavior ranged from general lack of discipline to drunkenness. Officers were eager to correct lack of discipline, but frequently undisciplined soldiers did not survive their bouts of enthusiasm to face that correction. Chorsamantis, a guardsman of Belisarius, was injured in a skirmish near Rome in 537. Impatient at his recovery time, he became drunk at lunchtime one day and rode out alone against the Goths, fought against a large number of them, and was killed.[49] Procopius blamed his barbarian lack of patience for this action, although certainly any soldier could get drunk and do something foolish. In 545, Ricilas, a guardsman of Belisarius, got drunk and then insisted on scouting on his own, which led to his death at the hands of many Goths.[50] So neither of these soldiers survived to face discipline for their unauthorized activities. Soldiers did not transgress the boundaries of discipline only when drunk. An unnamed Moorish soldier got greedy in 539 and attempted to drag off the corpse of an especially handsomely armored Gothic soldier in the middle of the battle instead of focusing on the melee around him. His negligence resulted in a Gothic soldier spearing him through the calves and crippling him so that his comrades had to carry

[48] Procopius *Wars* 4.18.1–18.

[49] Procopius *Wars* 6.1.21–34.

[50] Procopius *Wars* 7.11.22–25. Compare the drunken misbehavior of Uliaris in Africa (4.4.15–25).

him to safety.[51] Such misbehavior might get a soldier noticed by an officer, but not in any fashion that the soldier would be likely to appreciate. The only long-lasting relationship that was likely to emerge from such contact was one in which the officer kept a close eye on the offending soldier to prevent future breaches of discipline.

The Grievances of Soldiers Against Officers

So far the focus of the chapter has been on the relationship between officer and soldier from the perspective of the officer, and we have examined ways in which the soldier might come to the attention of the officer. There is of course another side to these interactions: when did soldiers especially pay attention to officers, above and beyond their typical following of orders? Since soldiers did not have the institutional capability or the funds to reward their officers, the most common reason for a soldier to pay unusual attention to his officer was when he had a grievance. The most serious grievances developed into full-blown mutinies, as in the one in Africa in the 530s and 540s, in the East in the 580s, and in Thrace under Phocas in 602, although instances of grievances against specific officers were carried out on a smaller scale. Soldiers frequently complained to their officers about money. In 542, the soldiers stationed in Italy apparently participated in some sort of strike, remaining in their cities and forts and refusing to go on campaign because 'the emperor owed them great sums of money.'[52] In 545, a regiment of Illyrian soldiers simply got up in the middle of the night and left Italy to return home because they had served in Italy without receiving regular pay at all.[53] More dramatically, the soldiers stationed in Rome in 548 killed their commander, Conon, and then sent demands to the emperor, not to be punished for this murder and to receive payment of their late wages. Justinian apparently granted both demands.[54] The situation in Italy got so bad that when Narses arrived with his army in 552 to take up the fight against Totila he needed to bring a significant sum of money merely to pay soldiers what was due to them from the past.[55] Simply paying the soldiers what they were owed was seen as an excellent motivator to the coming campaign.

[51] Procopius *Wars* 6.23.36–39.
[52] Procopius *Wars* 7.6.6–7.
[53] Procopius *Wars* 7.11.13–16.
[54] Procopius *Wars* 7.30.7–8.
[55] Procopius *Wars* 8.26.5–6.

That soldiers were routinely aggrieved about missing pay in the reign of Justinian appears to have been common knowledge at the time. Procopius wrote, undoubtedly with hyperbole, that the 'soldiers were demoralized in so many ways, became poorer than all other classes in society, and no longer cared for fighting in war.'[56] Agathias firmly placed the blame on the imperial auditors (*logothetes*), whom he said 'began openly cheating the soldiers out of part of their pay and not paying the rest until it was long overdue.'[57] Like Agathias, Procopius also blamed the auditors, whom he accused of not recording the death of senior enlisted soldiers in their books, thus pocketing their pay and preventing more junior soldiers from promotion.[58] In fact, officers in the army might have managed to successfully redirect bitterness among the men about tardiness of pay from themselves to the auditors. The incident described above in which the soldiers in Rome killed Conon is the only situation in which soldiers killed an officer over an issue that had to do with pay, and even in that situation the soldiers complained not just of tardy pay but also 'trafficking in grain and the other provisions to their detriment.'[59] In other cases, soldiers do not seem to have blamed their officers for late pay. The soldiers did especially resent an auditor named Alexander, who was particularly criticized in the *History of the Wars* and even accused of being solely responsible for the deterioration of morale in the army in Italy.[60] So in some situations, officers might be able to turn resentment about lack of pay into an issue that might form a bond between officers and soldiers against an outside agent—an imperial auditor or the emperor himself. This option was obviously not open to senior officers who needed to remain impeccably loyal to the emperor, and this is where resentment would turn to mutiny, as in the serious revolt in the East in 587 against the general Priscus and the even more serious rebellion of Phocas in 602.[61]

Over and above their regular pay, soldiers expected to receive extra perks, particularly a share of the booty when they won a great victory. However, they were routinely suspicious that their officers would try to withhold this bonus or somehow reduce it. There was a pattern of officers exploiting their men in the Roman army, dating back centuries, so

[56] Procopius *Secret History* 24.8.
[57] Agathias *Histories* 5.14.2.
[58] Procopius *Secret History* 24.5–6. See Jones 1964, 1:676.
[59] Procopius *Wars* 7.30.7.
[60] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.28–33.
[61] On the importance of a general maintaining loyalty to the emperor, see Chap. 4.

perhaps their suspicion was not unwarranted.[62] In 544, Solomon and the army in Africa won a battle with the Moors and the general took in a large amount of booty. When he did not immediately distribute it to the soldiers, they complained and believed they were being cheated. Solomon was obliged to promise that he was merely waiting until the campaign was over and the situation was settled before he began the distribution.[63] In 593, Priscus found himself in a different situation. He ordered that the booty collected by his army thus far should be primarily divided between the emperor Maurice and his children. It is not clear if this was an imperial order or Priscus' own initiative. The soldiers, 'insulted by their attenuated spoils,' proceeded to mutiny. Theophylact credited Priscus with a speech that convinced the soldiers to accept this new distribution of the spoils, although we should be suspicious that words alone satisfied the soldiers in this instance.[64] Clearly an important part of the relationship between officer and soldier in the army was the fair distribution of booty or spoils after a victory. Soldiers likely would have accepted the officers getting a share and perhaps even the emperor getting a share, but they expected something for themselves. Officers could keep soldiers happy by simply adhering to this tradition and making sure the soldiers received something at these distributions. Failure to reward the soldiers in this way would give the soldiers a reason for grievance that could lead to the murder of the officer, general mutiny, or even the overthrow of the emperor.

Were There Relationships Between Officers and Soldiers?

Returning to the original premise of this chapter seems a reasonable way to conclude. Having discussed portrayals of soldiers in the sources, both as groups and as individuals, as well as the grievances soldiers had with their officers, it is reasonable to rephrase the chapter title as a question: did officers even have relationships with their men? Almost overwhelmingly, the evidence suggests that there was no significant personal relationship between senior officer and soldier in the vast majority of cases. Soldiers and officers, although part of the same army and experiencing the same conditions, lived in different worlds. We can imagine the army camp as

[62] Jones 1964, 1:646; Southern and Dixon 1996, 82.
[63] Procopius *Wars* 4.21.23–8.
[64] Theophylact *History* 6.7.6–8.3.

one in which soldiers bunked together, worked together, and ate together, and most senior officers lived alongside but separate. On the march or in battle, low-ranking officers such as *decarchs* (commanders of ten), about whom we know very little, shielded senior officers, including those we know best, from direct contact with the vast majority of enlisted soldiers. This is not to say that there was no interaction between senior officers and soldiers, but this interaction most frequently took forms other than direct personal relationships between individuals. The evidence makes clear that there were expectations from both sides of the divide. Officers expected soldiers to follow orders, maintain discipline, respect civilian property, and to occasionally move themselves to extreme acts of bravery. If the soldiers met these aspirations, they could expect to be praised in groups and have individuals in their midst singled out for special reward. Soldiers expected their officers to lead them to victory, ensure (as much as was within their power) that they received their regular pay in full and on time, and to fairly and promptly distribute booty after victories. If soldiers felt that officers were not fulfilling any of these tasks, they resorted to desertion, defection, strike, or mutiny. So while it is fair to say that senior officers and enlisted soldiers did not generally have personal relationships with one another, they did have a more formalized group relationship, with expectations and means of reinforcement or redress on both sides. When the situation was ideal, the give-and-take of this arrangement was practically invisible and the army operated like a well-oiled machine. When stresses were applied to this relationship, as happened not infrequently during the wars of the sixth century, cracks appeared in the edifice and the difficulty of maintaining the balance of obligations between senior officers and enlisted soldiers was obvious.

CHAPTER 8

Public Perception of the Army

An issue that probably had some impact on the careers and relationships of army officers was the public perception of the institution in which they served. Here we are concerned not so much with relationships between individual army officers, or between officers and civilians, but rather with the overall opinion that the population of the Byzantine Empire held of its army. Byzantine society was complex and there were most likely significant differences in the degree of knowledge of the army, between those who lived in the capital and those who lived in the provinces, between those who were government employees and those that were not, between those who were wealthy and those who were poor, and so forth. It is therefore very likely that the degree to which perception of the army was positive depended significantly upon who was proffering the opinion. A wealthy senator would probably have a different perspective than a mid-level bureaucrat who would again differ in view from a poor peasant farmer. Unfortunately, it is not possible to catalog the opinion of every class or interest group in the empire because there simply is not enough source material to create such specific analyses. Neither is it possible to identify a general 'favorability rating' of the army for the whole population of the empire. The lack of evidence to make certain assessments does not, however, make it impossible to pursue the question of the public perception of the army. There is a good deal of scattered evidence in the histories and chronicles of the sixth century that can be used to make tentative assessments of some aspects of popular opinion of the army. This evi-

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dence may be divided up into three general categories: the opinions of military men who actually served in the army, the opinions of average civilians from all around the empire, and the opinions of wealthy civilian authors who were primarily based in Constantinople. These classifications are quite generic and the range of individuals (and therefore viewpoints) that might exist in each group is admittedly very broad. That one important author, like Procopius, is fully representative of his economic class (wealthy and educated men living in Constantinople) is not at all certain, just as it would not be fair to say that opinions demonstrated by a civilian, urban mob in Antioch were fully representative of all civilians of average means throughout the entire empire. The division of opinions into these categories in this chapter is therefore presented merely as an effective way to divide up the available evidence. We can assume that actual opinions of the army would have varied between individuals and groups even within these classifications. By way of conclusion and as a check on the contemporary opinions of the army that we have assessed, the chapter ends with an attempt to analyze the sixth-century army as an institution and to gauge its effectiveness.

The Opinions of Soldiers and Officers

The perception of the Byzantine army that mattered most for its effectiveness was that held by the soldiers and officers who served in it. Unfortunately, the army did not conduct surveys to measure the satisfaction of its members and it is highly unlikely that such surveys would have survived in the historical record even if they were conducted. A way to derive the opinions of soldiers and officers is to think about whether they were positive about joining the army in the first place. If they were forcibly conscripted or were enlisted in some other fashion that they resented, it is unlikely that they would think very highly about the army or military service. As we saw in Chapter 2, men in the fourth and fifth centuries did face conscription and went to considerable lengths to avoid it, which indicates that at this time army service was distinctly unpopular.[1] However, the situation seems to have changed by the beginning of the sixth century. Thanks to a rise in army pay in the reign of Anastasius, military service became more popular and voluntary recruitment became much more common.[2]

[1] See Chap. 2, 'Recruitment in the Sixth-Century Army.'
[2] Treadgold 1995, 149–154, 203.

It cannot be ruled out that in some instances voluntary recruitment might still have included liberal 'encouragement' for volunteers to emerge, and that this encouragement might have sometimes involved force and violence.[3] So for some soldiers, resentment of the army might have started at the moment of enlistment if that enlistment were not by choice. But there is no evidence that a majority or even a significant portion of the army was forced into it in the sixth century. Therefore it is reasonable to move forward with the belief that most soldiers and officers must have at least have had a neutral if not positive opinion of the army at the beginning of their careers, because they likely chose those careers themselves.

One crude way to measure the opinion of soldiers and officers about the army as their careers advanced is to track desertions. If substantial numbers of men deserted over the course of the sixth century, it would indicate general unpopularity of army service. In fact, desertion did occur on all fronts in the sixth century, but it is difficult to determine its frequency. Some instances of desertion or defection were examined in Chapter 7.[4] Desertion was especially common in the long, drawn-out war against the Ostrogoths in Italy, so this conflict is worth further examination. Even a casual reading of Procopius' *History of the Wars* will weary the reader with the number of instances of desertion or treachery on both sides. However, not every desertion is described with the same level of detail. Procopius rarely names single, identifiable deserters and even when referring to groups of deserters, infrequently provides the exact numbers of individuals involved.[5] That is not to say that numbers are never provided: the historian helpfully explained that 22 cavalrymen, from the command of Innocentius, deserted to the Ostrogothic king Wittigis in 537.[6] But there are many examples of desertion in the text for which the information is even more general in that Procopius does not provide either the exact number of the deserters or their names. For example, the historian reported that in 546 an unspecified number of Roman and Moorish deserters were found under the command of Rhecimundus, an Ostrogothic general, in Bruttium.[7] Because of the anecdotal nature of this evidence and the fact that Procopius makes no claim to record every instance of desertion, it

[3] Whitby 1989, 68, 78.
[4] See Chap. 7, 'Negative Descriptions of Individual Soldiers.'
[5] The naming of the deserter Indulf is a rare exception (Procopius *Wars* 7.35.23).
[6] Procopius *Wars* 5.17.17.
[7] Procopius *Wars* 7.18.26–28.

is impossible to assemble an exact number of deserters or determine the proportion of deserters to loyal soldiers, even if the search is confined to a limited theater or time period.

While the total numbers of deserters or the frequency of desertion cannot be determined, it is worth examining known instances of the phenomenon to see why the men in these situations deserted. Procopius recounts at least eleven separate instances of Byzantine soldiers deserting to the Ostrogoths in his coverage of the Gothic War.[8] Reasons for desertion in these examples frequently involved money. Complaints over money could involve large groups of soldiers at once. For instance, the garrison at Beroea defected to Khusrau I in 540, 'putting forth as their grievance that the government owed them their pay for a long time.'[9] Complaints could also be particular to one officer. Herodian, one of Belisarius' prominent commanders in the original invasion of Italy, defected to Totila in 546, handing over Spolitium to the Gothic king. He became in turn one of Totila's commanders in the conflict. Procopius suggests in the *Secret History* that Herodian defected because Belisarius kept demanding money from him.[10] While it is possible that Belisarius was literally asking for Herodian's own money, it is more likely that Belisarius was attempting to extort ever-greater shares of the booty collected by the soldiers in battle from Herodian. Excuses for switching sides in a long, drawn-out war need not necessarily involve money. Sometimes desertion was simply a matter of practicality or survival. When under pressure, as when besieged in a fortress or city, defection to the enemy was usually easier and safer than standing firm and hoping reinforcements would arrive. So the garrison of Milan in 539 elected to surrender to the Goths, ignoring the orders of their commander, the guardsman Mundilas, who wanted to continue to resist. The Goths kept the soldiers safe, but massacred the civilian, male inhabitants of the city.[11] In 545, a soldier trapped in Rome under the command of Innocentius deserted to the Goths when Totila's siege of Rome was at its height.[12] The next year, four Isaurian soldiers in the Byzantine army

[8] Eleven instances of Roman soldiers deserting to the Ostrogoths: Procopius *Wars* 5.17.17, 6.26.3–7, 7.12.13–16, 7.12.19–20, 7.15.7, 7.18.26–28, 7.20.4–7, 7.23.1–7, 7.35.23, 8.31.11–16, 8.33.10. See Chap. 7, 'Negative Descriptions of Individual Soldiers,' for discussion of some of these examples.

[9] Procopius *Wars* 2.7.37. Compare a similar episode in 7.36.7–29.

[10] Procopius *Wars* 7.12.13–16, Procopius *Secret History* 5.5–6.

[11] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.27–42.

[12] Procopius *Wars* 7.15.7.

made a pact with Totila to let the Goths into Rome.[13] Although money was involved in this example, it is reasonable to speculate that the Isaurians were also weary from a long siege and were eager for it to be over and to be on the winning side. So, depending on the circumstances, Byzantine soldiers and officers could and did find reasons to desert. Their desertion was a vote with their legs that the conditions of the army were unacceptable and that they believed they could find better opportunities elsewhere.

It is reasonable to wonder whether desertions for the reasons just described reflect a negative perception of the army and military service on the part of those defecting. Desertion for reason of survival, such as when one was under siege for a long time and despaired of rescue, was not a specific indictment of the Byzantine army of the sixth century, as soldiers have been deserting or giving up and surrendering in such situations since siege warfare began.[14] Money, likewise, is an issue common to people of all time periods. There is, however, some reason to suspect that money might have particularly been a reason for discontent among Byzantine soldiers and officers at certain times in this period. The devastating effects of the plague from 541 onwards would have put serious strains on the empire's finances, resulting in Justinian needing to economize whenever possible. Much of this economizing seems to have taken the form of delaying the pay of the army during the worst of the crisis.[15] This eased the financial burden of the army and allowed the government to remain solvent, but not surprisingly displeased the soldiers. From the complaints of soldiers and officers about their pay being late to the requests of Belisarius for money to pay his soldiers in the field, evidence abounds that in the 540s and beyond military pay was sometimes late.[16] Of particular interest are the steps that Justinian took to begin resolving this issue, because they indicate that the emperor was fully aware of the problem. When Narses was preparing for his expedition to Italy in 552, Justinian furnished him with a great deal of money not only to recruit soldiers but importantly to 'pay the soldiers in Italy all the money which was due to them from the past, for the emperor had been delinquent in this matter for a long time, since the soldiers were not receiving from the public treasury, as was usual,

[13] Procopius *Wars* 7.20.4–7.

[14] On siege warfare in this period, see Whitby 2013.

[15] Treadgold 1995, 16; Rance 2007, 374; Kaegi 1981, 41–63; Compare Whitby 2000b, 306–7.

[16] Complaints about late pay: Procopius *Wars* 2.7.37 and 7.36.7–29. Belisarius' requests: Procopius *Wars* 5.24.1–17 and 7.12.3–10.

the pay assigned to them.'[17] Just as interesting, Narses was also to use the money 'to bring pressure upon those soldiers who had deserted to Totila, so that they would… reverse their choice of allegiance.'[18] So issues of late pay had made soldiers and officers more prone to desert. Perhaps they believed that the enemy might hire them and be able to pay them more expeditiously. This sort of desertion was a criticism of the army only in the sense that the army was not functioning correctly at that moment (in its job of providing pay), but did not necessarily indicate any serious discontent with the army when it was operating normally. Justinian was aware of all of this, and hoped that the restoration of back pay would satisfy those who were upset but still loyal and even win back those who had already deserted.

A related way to measure the opinion of military men is to track and analyze mutinies. There were several important and long-lived mutinies in the sixth century that on the surface might seem to reflect serious discontent with the operation of the Byzantine army on the part of both soldiers and officers.[19] As we saw briefly in Chapter 7, Africa was consumed by a serious mutiny throughout the 530s and 540s, which was complicated by the survival of pockets of Vandal resistance as well as the intervention of Moorish tribes. The Army of the East mutinied against Maurice in the 580s, when the emperor ordered his general Priscus to cut the troops' pay. Maurice also drove the Army of Thrace to mutiny under the leadership of Phocas in 602. Of all these mutinies, the available information is most complete about the North African mutinies of the 530s and 540s. Procopius gave three reasons for the start of the African mutiny in 536: Byzantine soldiers married to Vandal women wanted the lands of their wives' former husbands; Arian (and thus most likely non-Roman) soldiers in the army were irritated about being excluded from Orthodox Easter services; and a group of 400 Vandal prisoners of war escaped to Mauretania where they planned to resist the Byzantine occupation.[20] However, in describing the speeches of the mutineers later in the narrative, Procopius gives pride of place to complaints about delayed pay. The mutineer leader, Stotzas, rhetorically asked: 'Do you not remember that you have been

[17] Procopius *Wars* 8.26.5–6.

[18] Procopius *Wars* 8.26.6.

[19] See Chap. 7 for a brief introduction to these mutinies as well as examination of more minor mutinies.

[20] Procopius *Wars* 4.14.7–21. On the link between Arianism and non-Roman identity, see Chap. 3, 'The Distinction between Romans and Barbarians.'

deprived of the pay which has been owing you for a long time back, and that you have been robbed of the enemy's spoil, which the law of war has set as prizes for the dangers of battle?'[21] This hints that, despite the other named causes, delayed pay was probably the primary driver of the mutiny. When Germanus arrived to suppress the mutiny in late 536, he found that two-thirds of the Army of Africa had joined, which probably meant about 10,000 men.[22] Fortunately, the newly arrived general had brought with him a considerable war chest with which he began to pay all due back-pay to the loyalist soldiers. As a result of this generosity, mutinous soldiers returned to loyalty and joined Germanus in droves.[23] The response to the arrival of Germanus and especially to his offer of back-pay indicates that issues of delayed pay may have been the crucial motivating reason for the original mutiny for a good number of those involved. Yet Germanus' arrival and the promise of pay did not end the mutiny, which indicates that not only were there other issues in play such as the claims of the Vandal wives or complaints about Arianism, but that bitter feelings had already cemented differences between the two sides. Germanus gathered his army and defeated the mutineer army in battle, but a core group of them escaped under the leadership of Stotzas and fled to Mauretania where they retained their independence for a decade, frequently fighting as an ally for the Moors in their wars with the Byzantines.[24] Clearly larger issues than delayed pay were at stake for this group of soldiers and officers, but these determined holdouts represent a minority not just of the Byzantine army in Africa as a whole but also of the original mutiny. Procopius pegs their number in 545 at about 1000, or about one tenth of the size of the original mutiny.[25] So for the majority of those involved in the African mutiny, pay must have been the primary motivator, since they willingly returned to loyalty when Germanus offered to rectify that complaint. The African mutiny is therefore a good reminder that even among limited groups of soldiers whom we know about from an accurate source, perception of the army was not uniform.

Information on the other major mutinies of the sixth century is not as abundant, but the sources make it unequivocally clear that both the

[21] Procopius *Wars* 4.15.55, translated by Dewing 1914, 2:353.
[22] Procopius *Wars* 4.16.3 and see Treadgold 1995, 63.
[23] Procopius *Wars* 4.16.4–7.
[24] Procopius *Wars* 4.17.24–35, 4.27.7–9.
[25] Procopius *Wars* 4.27.8.

mutiny of the Army of the East in the 580s and the mutiny of the Army of Thrace in 602 were motivated by monetary issues in some fashion. In 587, the Army of the East mutinied when Maurice ordered the general Priscus to reduce the army's pay. Theophylact writes: 'When the third day had passed and the reduction in the soldiers' remuneration was no longer in concealment, but became clear to the whole throng, extreme anarchy made its entry: the masses converged on the general's tent, some carrying stones, others swords, as the occasion served each man.'[26] The revolt was fairly serious in that the army seems to have remained out of imperial control for most of the year. The soldiers elected Germanus, the duke of Phoenicia, as their general, and under his command they continued to fight against the Persians as required, but refused to accept either Priscus or Maurice's new nominee, Philippicus, as their general until 588.[27] Since Theophylact mentions threats to their pay as the reason for the mutiny, and because the entire Army of the East was apparently involved rather than just a splinter faction, it seems safe to assume that money was in fact that primary cause of the mutiny for the vast majority of soldiers and officers involved.

The last mutiny mentioned, that of Phocas in 602, may be dealt with in summary fashion. For either strategic or parsimonious reasons (or both), Maurice ordered Peter, the General of Thrace, to winter his army north of the Danube in enemy territory. The order apparently filled the soldiers with 'extreme rage' such that they refused the orders of their officers and then proclaimed Phocas as their general.[28] The mutinous army under Phocas faced no serious opposition as it marched to Constantinople, and Maurice was so unsure of his chances that he divested himself of his regalia and fled the city.[29] The easy success of the mutiny is evidence of its broad appeal. The relative obscurity of Phocas before the mutiny began makes it unlikely that the driving motivation was some sort of cult of personality around Phocas. By this point the soldiers and officers of the army were quite familiar with Maurice's economizing and weary of threats to their lifestyle and their salaries. It was not that they disliked being soldiers, or disliked army service in general, or even disliked one general in particular.

[26] Theophylact *History* 3.1.9, translated by Whitby and Whitby 1986, 73.
[27] Theophylact *History* 3.5.10.
[28] Theophylact *History* 8.6.2–7.7.
[29] Theophylact *History* 8.9.7.

In fact, one might argue that the soldiers and officers under Phocas particularly enjoyed military service and wanted it to continue unchanged.

The mutiny of Phocas and the others before it were not indications of anger at the army as an institution, but rather demonstrations of outrage at the government when it tried to change the conditions of service to which the soldiers had all been accustomed. In 602 particularly, it was outrage at being made to winter north of the Danube in enemy territory. In 587, it was fury over a proposed permanent reduction in their pay. In the 530s and 540s, it was indignation over the fact that the usual pay was very late. So in a strange way, the mutinies of the sixth century are not necessarily proof of a negative perception of the army among the soldiers and officers who served in it. Instead, these mutinies are a clue that perhaps suggests that the majority of military men actually had a positive perception of their army during this period. These soldiers grumbled and mutinied not because they disliked military service, the organization of the army, or their rate of pay, but because they approved of all three and merely wished them to continue in the form to which they had become accustomed. With the notable exception of the small mutineer group in Africa that maintained independence for a decade, all mutineers described in these pages (who were not killed) were back in legitimate military service with the Byzantine Empire within a year of their mutiny. The mutinies had, in a sense, accomplished the goal of the mutineers: to maintain the standards of service in the army that the men had never wanted to change significantly in the first place.

The Opinions of Average Civilians

It is likely that civilians would have had a rather different perception of the Byzantine army than soldiers and officers. They did not serve in the army, did not derive pay from it, and so were not beholden to it for financial support. While all civilians individually and society in general enjoyed the benefit of the protection provided by the army, for the most part the experience of the army, and therefore the perception of it, was likely quite different depending on the wealth of the civilian and the region in which they lived. In particular, there was probably a vast difference in complexity between the thoughts of elite civilians and those of average citizens. The vast majority of civilians likely did not think about the army in an abstract sense or spend much time considering its effects on their society. Those of average means and the very poor could not spare time or energy

to write denunciations or praise of the army, even if they were literate in the first place (which was unlikely). Anecdotes in the histories of wealthy authors and occasionally in chronicles give some sense of what average civilians thought of the army. While these anecdotes rarely explicitly say what an individual or a group of people thought of the army, it is possible to extrapolate opinions in some cases. Even making use of such extrapolation, evidence of the opinion of civilians is slim for the sixth century. By comparison, there is considerable evidence that the army was unpopular with civilians in the fourth century.[30] Andrew Fear has speculated that this loss of esteem was due to the militarization of society and the gradual movement of the army back from the frontiers deeper into Roman territory.[31] There is less evidence of the army's unpopularity in the sixth century, but this does not mean that the army was necessarily well-regarded by civilians. In fact, most of the evidence that does hint at the public's perception of the army seems to suggest that people disliked the army or were at best quite ambivalent about it. However, as Roger Bagnall has cautioned, 'documentation follows trouble,' so most interactions between army and people that are recorded are likely to be negative to some degree.[32] It is unlikely, though, that negative situations occurred all the time, so there must have been many harmonious interactions between army and people that are simply not recorded.

The civilian population must have been especially conditioned to fear what armies represented in times of war.[33] In war, rural populations and city dwellers alike risked enslavement or at least forced population transfer if captured by marauding enemy armies.[34] For example, after capturing Antioch in 540, Khusrau I ordered his army to enslave all the survivors of the city's population.[35] He later settled them in 'Antioch of Khusrau,' a newly built city within the Persian Empire.[36] The Persian Empire was a large and complex state and could manage population transfers on such a large scale as a sort of investment into future financial growth. While the initial financial outlay required to move thousands of captured civilians

[30] Fear 2007, 427–37.
[31] Fear 2007, 427.
[32] Bagnall 1993, 174. Compare Lee 2007a, 173.
[33] On the experiences of civilians in war, see Fan Chiang 2015.
[34] Lee 2007a, 138–141.
[35] Procopius *Wars* 2.9.14.
[36] Procopius *Wars* 2.14.1–4. Fan Chiang 2015 argues that many captured civilians probably died en route to their new home (161–4).

might be high, the state could realize profit after the captives had been settled, become financially viable, and began to pay taxes. Other enemies with less complex governments enslaved Roman civilians simply to sell them off for immediate profit. Pope Gregory the Great, for example, saw Roman slaves who had been captured by the Lombards being prepared for sale in 595.[37] Beyond the threat of slavery or forced migration, women in particular faced the extra risk of being raped if captured in war.[38] This threat is to be seen mostly in the sources on the occasions when armies refrained from raping captured women, which was apparently considered rare enough to merit praise. Procopius praised Totila for keeping captured women safe from the rapists among his soldiers, although they 'were extremely eager to have intercourse with them.' For this action Totila 'won great renown for moderation.'[39] The exaggerated praise of Totila is an indication that preventing his troops from raping captured women was considered quite an achievement for a general. Therefore, civilian populations could expect enslavement, forced migration, or rape during times of war if they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. While these fears in particular would have been concentrated on enemy armies rather than the Byzantine army, it is easy to imagine that Byzantine civilians might have generalized the fear and concern to war overall and perhaps even to their own army. Poor civilians at risk of enslavement, kidnapping, or rape would have good reason to be anxious about the threats posed by war and the movement of armies, including those sent to protect them, that may herald the arrival of war.

Beyond threats that typically came from enemy armies, Byzantine civilians had good reasons to be wary of encountering their own army even in times of peace. One of the primary reasons to fear the arrival of the army was that civilians were required to billet soldiers in their homes when necessary.[40] While soldiers in the frontier armies had fixed garrisons and rarely traveled far, soldiers in the field armies moved about frequently and often invoked their legal right to seek shelter in civilians' homes.[41] When arriving at a city, certain men were appointed to match lists of soldiers

[37] Gregory *Epistle* 5.36.

[38] Lee 2007a, 141–5, Fan Chiang 2015, 115–20. See also Ps.-Joshua Stylites *Chronicle* 86.

[39] Procopius *Wars* 7.20.29–31. See 7.6.4 for a similar incident. See also Whately, 'Women and Warfare in the Age of Justinian' (forthcoming).

[40] Lee 2007a, 167–9, MacMullen 1963, 77–80, Fear 2007, 437.

[41] Lee 2007a, 165, Fear 2007, 437.

with available civilian homes and to escort the soldiers to their billets.[42] Not surprisingly, billeting could result in hardship for civilian populations. Civilians were only required to provide shelter for soldiers, but once in their homes soldiers could use intimidation or force to extract even more from their hosts. The chronicler known as Pseudo-Joshua Stylites complained vigorously about billeting in Edessa in the early sixth century:

> When those who came to our assistance ostensibly as saviours were going down and coming up, they looted us in a manner little short of enemies. They threw many poor people out of their beds and slept in them, leaving their owners to lie on the ground at a time of cold weather. They ejected others from their houses, going in and living in them. Others' cattle they led away by force as if plundering an enemy. They stripped some people's clothing off them and took it away. They used rough treatment on others for the sake of obtaining anything whatever.[43]

Complaints about billeting this detailed and dramatic are rare in the sources, but that does not necessarily mean that it was rare for soldiers to abuse their right of claiming billets. In fact, regular imperial legislation in the fourth and fifth centuries against soldiers extorting additional privileges from their hosts makes it likely that the practice was widespread during that earlier period.[44] In addition to the abuses associated with billeting, the soldiers and even senior officers could through various forms of harassment make themselves quite unwelcome. Procopius flags the petty harassment by small groups of soldiers in a speech he puts in the mouth of a Roman who was pretending to desert to the Persians: 'As you know, they [the Roman soldiers] are constantly wandering about the country here in small bands and doing violence to the miserable country-folk...' they are 'robbers, whose ancient custom it is to fear the Persians and to beat the farmers.'[45] In this particular instance the false deserter is attempting to convince the Persians that he is a deserter in truth and therefore needs to run down the Byzantine army in his monologue. Despite these literary constraints, it is easy to imagine at least a kernel of truth in the man's complaints. If the soldiers could be expected to extort additional

[42] Procopius *Wars* 3.21.10.

[43] Ps.-Joshua Stylites *Chronicle* 86, translated by Trombley and Watt. See also Fear 2007, 439.

[44] Fear 2007, 438.

[45] Procopius *Wars* 1.9.7.

benefits from their hosts in billets, it is easy enough to also imagine them extorting a cup of wine, a loaf of bread, or a goat from isolated peasants in the fields as they patrolled the area. In some instances it was not housing or food that the army demanded, but people. In 572, Marcian was General of the East and had in his army, according to the church historian Evagrius, 'some farm workers and herdsmen who had been drawn from the tax-payers.'[46] This vague turn of phrase has been interpreted in various ways: as non-combatant support personnel temporarily incorporated into the army, or as soldiers enlisted with some degree of persuasion, or conscripted with some degree of force.[47] No matter which interpretation is true, it is clear that in this situation rural civilians were incorporated into the army without volunteering for the army or identifying with it—after all to Evagrius they are not soldiers but farm workers and herdsmen. So, just as the soldiers might extort food and supplies from the civilian population, the senior officers might extort people themselves. Because of these various forms of harassment, it is likely that many segments of the Byzantine population resented and feared the arrival of units of the army. It is interesting to note that one of the good deeds attributed to Theodore of Sykeon, a sixth-century saint, was helping people who were oppressed by government officials. 'The blessed Saint was very sympathetic and pitiful to all; if anyone was oppressed by an official or a tax collector or by anybody else he came to the Saint and laid the matter before him.'[48] While soldiers are not specified here, it is easy to imagine that they were included in 'anybody else' and given what we have seen about the ways military men might harass civilians it is reasonable to expect that some might ask the saint for help.

Another way that average civilians might have developed a low opinion of the Byzantine army was through the use of the army in policing duties.[49] Emperors and senior administrators regularly turned to the army to put down civil disturbances and there is ample evidence of the violence done by the army in these instances. The most infamous example of this was the resolution to the Nika Riot of 532, when soldiers under the leadership of Mundus and Belisarius slaughtered 35,000 inhabitants

[46] Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.8.

[47] For discussion of the possibilities, see Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History*, translated by Whitby 2000, 265 n. 31.

[48] Life of Theodore of Sykeon 147, translated by Dawes and Baynes 1977, 184.

[49] Compare Fear 2007, 441–2.

of Constantinople who had been trapped in the hippodrome.[50] While this slaughter was enormous in scale, it otherwise represented a fairly typical military resolution to a civil disturbance in the sixth century. Compare Malalas' brief note about a smaller riot in Constantinople in 547: 'The emperor saw what had happened and gave orders to the excubitors (imperial guards), who set upon the mob. Some were suffocated as they fled and others were slaughtered.'[51] When a riot or other disturbance of the peace occurred in a large urban area, the authorities frequently resorted to a violent solution, and soldiers were the ones to carry it out. Certainly this must have caused resentment among city dwellers. It undoubtedly caused panic, which apparently resulted in some of the deaths in 547 when the rioters blindly stampeded to get away from the soldiers sent to stop them.

Without condoning the violence of the soldiers and the speed with which the imperial government chose violent resolutions to such incidents, it is appropriate to mention that civilians were capable of matching soldiers' violence with their own. For example, in the Nika Riot, when some of the rioters ran into a building known as the Octagon (one of the emperor's bedchambers), soldiers threw fire down on them in an attempt to get them to disperse.[52] As appalling as this is, it turns out that shortly after this the people fought fire with fire, so to speak, and threw fire on the Magnaura palace, which was likely to have been occupied.[53] A similar example worth considering is the dismaying violence in Antioch in 507. Menas, the local police chief (*praefectus vigilum*), wanted to arrest rioters who had sought sanctuary in the church of St. John. He took a force of Gothic soldiers, entered the church and found one of the rioters under the altar. 'He stabbed him with his sword there, dragged his body from the sanctuary and cut off his head, with the result that the holy sanctuary was drenched in blood.'[54] But this enraged the rioters, who rallied together and in a pitched street battle defeated Menas and his soldiers. They seized Menas, 'slit him open and disemboweled him. Then after dragging his corpse around, they hung it on a bronze statue.'[55] So both army and civilian population could engage in appalling violence in the sixth century. Any resentment of violence could therefore have gone both ways, especially

[50] Joh. Mal. 18.71, Procopius *Wars* 1.24. See also Greatrex 1997, 79.
[51] Joh. Mal. 18.99.
[52] Chron. Pasch. 623.
[53] See Greatrex 1997, 85–6.
[54] Joh. Mal. 16.6.
[55] Joh. Mal. 16.6.

in large urban areas where there was a distinct possibility of civil disturbances. Such violence rapidly became an accepted part of the urban lifestyle such that, in certain situations, far from fearing military men, civilians might use the violence of soldiers to their own ends. In 457, an unnamed Roman soldier murdered Proterius, the patriarch of Alexandria. On the surface of it, this appears to be a straightforward example of excessive and illegal violence by a soldier. The reason for the murder is however quite interesting. This soldier was upset because Proterius was complaining that he and his fellow soldiers had not killed enough of the patriarch's religious opponents in exchange for the payment the patriarch had given them![56] So in a great twist of irony, the bishop died at the hands of those whom he had hired to kill his own enemies. Here there is no sign on the part of Proterius of fear or disapproval of the military or even its illegal excesses, but instead a desire to control it for his own purposes.

Although the majority of interactions between soldiers and average civilians do seem to suggest that many civilians would have reason to resent or fear the army, some incidents that are suggestive of more positive feelings are to be found. In 500, when there was famine and disease in Edessa, soldiers 'established places; the ill slept in them and the soldiers took care of their expenses.'[57] While just one example, this hints at another form of interaction between average civilians and the army in which soldiers were responsible for humanitarian assistance in times of crisis. Whether enough positive emotion and gratitude was attached to these interactions to outweigh the everyday petty harassments of ill-behaved soldiers is impossible to determine. However even the staunchest opponents of the army and its excesses, like Pseudo-Joshua Stylites, had to admit that there were decent and well-behaved soldiers within its ranks, 'for in a large army like that there are certain to be some such people.'[58] Sometimes even billeted soldiers would behave appropriately as the law required and cause no trouble to their civilian hosts.[59] In addition, it is worth remembering that senior officers like Belisarius made repeated appeals to their soldiers to behave courteously to civilian populations.[60] The fact that such appeals had to be repeated is probably an indication that the soldiers were not heeding

[56] Zachariah of Mitylene *Chronicle* 4.1–2.

[57] Ps.-Joshua Stylites *Chronicle* 43.

[58] Ps.-Joshua Stylites *Chronicle* 96.

[59] Procopius *Wars* 3.21.9–10.

[60] For example, see Procopius *Wars* 5.10.28–33 and Theophylact *History* 2.2.5. For more, see Chap. 7.

them, but it at least demonstrates that some army officers were attempting to curtail the harassment that has been described in this section. Finally, as mentioned above, authors were probably more likely to write about negative interactions between civilians and soldiers, which means that the existing catalog of evidence is likely skewed. There may have been many more positive interactions between average civilians and the army that were simply not recorded.

So far this analysis has, in binary fashion, been concerned with evidence for either the positive or negative perception that average civilians might have had of the army. It is worth considering, however, that a large number of civilians may not have had any strong opinion of the army. Unlike wealthy intellectuals or government officials, who spent time thinking about the army in abstract terms, a typical poor city dweller or peasant farmer probably would have only thought about the army in practical terms. In other words, if soldiers were not in their face, much less in their town or village, there was no need to have an opinion of the army. The extent of interaction between average civilians and the army varied widely across the empire.[61] On the frontiers, where the frontier armies were permanently stationed, and near the frontiers, or on major roads that crisscrossed the empire, which would have been areas frequented by the field armies, contact was undoubtedly high. It is from these regions that all the stories of interaction between average civilian and soldier related in this section originate. However, inhabitants of smaller cities and rural areas in the empire's interior would have been much less likely to see even a moderately sized army. For inhabitants of these regions, the army might just be a few soldiers who came through town every now and then to assist in collecting taxes or posting notices. In such situations, people were unlikely to have either a strongly positive or negative perception of the army as an institution, though they might have good or bad relationships with the individual soldiers that they occasionally saw. So the army probably made a significant impact on some civilian populations and a negligible impact on others, and opinions of the army and its soldiers varied considerably.

The Opinions of Elite Civilian Authors

Unlike average civilians, who could not record their own opinion of the army as a whole or even of individual soldiers within it that they might know, certain members of the Byzantine elite wrote rather extensively

[61] Lee 2007a, 164.

about the army.[62] In this section, the term 'elite' is used rather loosely to define educated individuals of means who had some connection to the ruling class of bureaucrats, administrators, and army officers.[63] Many of these elite lived in Constantinople, and even those that did not had some connection to those that did. This elite was, in the words of Sam Barnish, A.D. Lee and Michael Whitby, a 'polycracy,' meaning a group of individuals empowered in different ways—by the military, the civilian government, and even by the Church.[64] This elite was quite diverse in its interests, and while it is not guaranteed that all of its members were interested in the army, it is clear that at least some were because of the circulation of works like Procopius' *History of the Wars*.[65] It is not possible to know what all or even a majority of Byzantine elites felt about the army, but the works of elite Byzantine authors like Procopius and Agathias provide insight into the perception of at least some of them.

Before examining opinions about the army as a whole, it is worthwhile to consider the fact that elite authors made many judgments on individual military men. Not surprisingly, Byzantine writers found fault with some soldiers or officers but praised others. Procopius found room to praise military men in the works he authored.[66] Sometimes the historian focused his commendation on a specific instance of bravery. For example, the commander Artabazes was praised for his valor in seizing a gate during the siege of Verona in 542, and in the first siege of Rome in 537 Procopius intentionally singled out Athenodorus, George, and Theodoriscus as the three most valiant fighters in a skirmish.[67] At the Battle of Mount Aurasium in 540, Procopius trumpeted the valorous exploits of Rufinus and Leontius, two brothers serving under Solomon.[68] In other instances, Procopius praised an officer based on the totality of his career rather than one conspicuous moment. As we saw in Chapter 3, Procopius commended Pharas

[62] Lee 2007a approached this question by examining letters sent between elite civilians and important military officers (153–163).

[63] See Whately 2013, 50 on defining terms such as 'elite.'

[64] Barnish, Lee, and Whitby 2000, 199–200.

[65] Whately 2013 suggests that 'a sizeable portion' of the elite had an interest in the military (52) while Scott 2012 argues that 'local potentates' and Justinian himself were more interested in struggles for power within the empire than wars abroad (18–20). On the popularity of Procopius' works, see Procopius *Wars* 8.1.1 and Treadgold 2007, 189.

[66] Stewart 2016b, 36–40.

[67] Procopius *Wars* 7.3.6–17, 5.29.20–21.

[68] Procopius *Wars* 4.20.19.

for his good character, since he was 'energetic and thoroughly serious and upright in every way.'[69] His tribute to Sittas was particularly touching. On the general's untimely death in 539, Procopius mourned that he died 'in a manner unworthy of his valor and his continual achievements against the enemy, a man who was extremely handsome in appearance and a capable warrior, and a general second to none of his contemporaries.'[70] Perhaps some of these instances of praise were a way for Procopius to recognize personal friends or acquaintances, but even after the historian had left Belisarius' service and therefore presumably did not have as close of a personal connection to the army, he still singled out officers deserving of praise. He commended Nazares, 'a man of note' for his 'remarkable exhibition' of warrior prowess in Italy in 544.[71] Of Bessas, who mounted the siege ladders at Petra to attack the Persians in 551, though he was more than 70 years old, Procopius says he became 'an object of respectful admiration among all men.'[72] Other authors, who did not have Procopius' close connection to the army, also singled out individual officers to praise. Theophylact was quite fond of Philippicus, whom he praised as a 'man of talent.'[73] Agathias lionized Narses, arguing that 'fortune lent a hand to his excellent generalship' and that he possessed 'a remarkable degree of shrewdness and an extraordinary capacity for coping effectively with any eventuality.'[74]

Despite the many instances of positive appraisal of the character and abilities of officers, authors also frequently offered harsh criticisms. Procopius criticized many, including even his own patron Belisarius, in the *Secret History*. As we saw in Chapter 6, he accused Belisarius not only of weak moral character and being dominated by his wife, but also of allowing that domination to interfere with his military affairs to the extent of irregularly ordering the murder of the general Constantine.[75] The *Secret History* is also home to Procopius' utter evisceration of the general Sergius, who was accused of being 'soft and unwarlike, quite young in years and immature of character, envious and hugely arrogant toward all people, emasculated

[69] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.29–31.
[70] Procopius *Wars* 2.3.26.
[71] Procopius *Wars* 7.11.18.
[72] Procopius *Wars* 8.11.39–53, 8.12.30–35.
[73] Theophylact *History* 1.13.2.
[74] Agathias *Histories* 2.9.1, 1.16.1.
[75] Procopius *Secret History* 1.15–30 and see Chap. 6, 'Wives and Children of Justinian's Men.'

by his tender lifestyle yet blown up with pride.'[76] While the most famous invective is to be found in the *Secret History*, the historian was also willing to condemn in the *History of the Wars* as well.[77] In the latter, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5, he leveled serious charges of insubordination against John, the nephew of Vitalian, and the general Justin.[78] Bessas, whom Procopius praised in the context of the siege of Petra, came in for withering criticism for extorting money from the terrified inhabitants of Rome when it was under siege in 545.[79] In similar fashion, Procopius excoriated Calonymus, who had been in command of the fleet in the invasion of Vandalic Africa in 533. Instead of returning goods stolen by his sailors from the inhabitants of North Africa, he kept them for himself, until he paid 'his just penalty' by dying of apoplexy.[80] Procopius called out the general Areobindus who in his first battle was terrified at the sight of blood and death and so 'turned coward' and fled.[81] Lest we imagine that Procopius' ire was confined to military men, it is worth remembering that he openly reviled many of Justinian's most important civil ministers as well. The praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian was declared the 'basest of all men,' and the quaestor Tribonian was charged with being 'extraordinarily fond of the pursuit of money and always ready to sell justice for gain.'[82]

As with praise, elite criticism of individual army officers in the sixth century was not limited to Procopius. Agathias was horrified by the murder of the Lazian king Gubazes at the hands of the officers John and Rusticus. In a speech purportedly given by Lazians, Agathias even disowned the two as countrymen: 'these murderers are not fit to be called Romans.'[83] Evagrius castigated the *scribo* Acacius, sent to Nibisis to inform Marcian that he was relieved of his command as General of the East, as a 'reckless and arrogant'

[76] Procopius *Secret History* 5.28–32 and see Stewart 2016a on gendered vocabulary used of eunuchs in this period.

[77] Greatrex argued that both the *Wars* and the *Secret History* contained invective and that the only reason that the *Secret History* had to be published separately was because the emperor Justinian was still alive, not because it had material inappropriate for a history such as the *Wars*. See Greatrex 1998b, 216–219.

[78] Procopius *Wars* 6.21.13–16 and see Chap. 5, 'Belisarius and Narses in Italy, 538–539.'

[79] Procopius *Wars* 7.17.9–25.

[80] Procopius *Wars* 3.20.22–25.

[81] Procopius *Wars* 4.26.16.

[82] Procopius *Wars* 1.24.11–16. John Lydus joined Procopius in his hatred of John the Cappadocian (Lydus *On Magistracies* 2.20, 3.57).

[83] Agathias *Histories* 3.4.1–7, 4.4.1.

man.[84] The anonymous author of the *Chronicon Paschale* provided details on Thomas the secretary (*a secretis*), who acted deceitfully during the Nika Riot. His deceit apparently provoked Hypatius to claim the throne for himself, for which Thomas was beheaded when the dust settled.[85] John of Nikiu, an Egyptian bishop and chronicler, related the story of Abaskiron, a tribune in Egypt who with his two brothers and son abused his authority and terrorized the population of Egypt so much that they had to be hunted down by less corrupt authorities.[86] So for each example of an elite civilian praising individual military men, there is an instance where such authors criticized them as well.

If the writing of some of their authors is any indication, elite civilians were an opinionated group. Elite authors also penned perspectives on the effectiveness or lack thereof of the army as a whole institution, rather than focusing solely on evaluations of individual officers. As with the documentation of the perceptions of average civilians, here the evidence leans heavily to negative opinions of the army's performance. This does not mean that these authors disliked the military or were disinterested in its affairs. Instead they were quite interested, but wished the army functioned better. Procopius and Agathias in particular loved to point out military shortcomings, perhaps so that they could look brilliant or drum up discussion on how to improve the army.[87] Procopius dismissed the command structure of the army in Italy after the departure of Belisarius in 540: 'the other commanders… had already begun both to plunder the Romans and to put the civil population at the mercy of the other soldiers, and neither were they themselves any longer giving heed to the requirements of the situation, nor could they secure obedience to their commands on the part of the soldiers.'[88] Procopius not only criticized these specific commanders and their failures, he also found fault with the entire planning and operation of the war against the Ostrogoths up until Justinian arranged for Narses to end the war with a substantial army. On the occasion of Justinian providing that army for Narses in 552, Procopius praised the emperor but also included this jab at the past twelve years: 'Justinian had previously conducted this war very negligently.'[89] As we saw in Chapter 4,

[84] Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.9.
[85] Chron. Pasch. 625.
[86] John of Nikiu 97.1–9.
[87] On Procopius' predilection for didacticism, see Whately 2015.
[88] Procopius *Wars* 7.1.22–24, translated by Dewing 1914, 4:157–9.
[89] Procopius *Wars* 8.26.7.

Procopius also believed that Justinian typically allowed his generals considerable leeway to commit offenses both in their private lives and in their official capacity.[90] This was not merely criticism of Justinian as emperor, but also a contemptuous appraisal of the character and effectiveness of the army's officer corps.

Both Procopius and Agathias were quite concerned with the army's finances. They correctly determined that the army was likely to be less effective and loyal if it was not paid adequately and in a timely fashion. As we have seen earlier, the army was certainly not regularly paid on time especially during the reign of Justinian. Procopius blamed Justinian personally: 'He was always late in paying his soldiers and, generally, treated them in a heavy-handed way. This caused many revolts that resulted in widespread devastation.'[91] Then again, in the *Secret History,* all the faults of the government as a whole are Justinian's fault. For instance, Procopius described Justinian as 'a moral pervert', 'an evil-doer' who was 'easily led into evil', who was never truthful but always deceitful and crafty, yet at the same time deceived by others.[92] These moral charges were intended to not merely be representative of Justinian's character but were alleged to affect his capacity to rule and thus the functioning of the whole imperial government, including the mismanaged army. Agathias similarly complained about the army not receiving its pay on time, but without explicitly blaming Justinian personally. For him, the financial officials responsible were 'openly cheating the soldiers out of part of their pay and not paying the rest until it was long overdue.'[93] There is some degree of irony in these complaints, because many elite civilians of the period seem to have been aware that the army was rather expensive and that its funding consumed the majority of the empire's budget.[94] Elite authors both wanted the army paid on time and also understood that it was expensive, but did not make the connection that paying the army in full and on time often strained the empire's budget. Agathias went even further than this by complaining bitterly that the size of the army had shrunk since an imagined heyday in the third century. After discussing the change in numbers of soldiers, he concluded: 'such, then, was the extent of the drastic reductions in the

[90] Procopius *Wars* 8.13.14 and Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'
[91] Procopius *Secret History* 18.11.
[92] Procopius *Secret History* 8.22–33.
[93] Agathias *Histories* 5.14.2.
[94] Fear 2007, 445–6 and Lee 2007b, 402.

armed forces incurred through the negligence of the authorities.'[95] So Agathias knew that the empire was not capable at the moment of paying its current soldiers on time, but in spite of that he wanted the army to be even larger than it was. Such contradictions indicate that elite civilians had a difficult time conceptualizing the financial resources of the empire and how they related to the size of the army and the timeliness of military pay. Indeed, Procopius in the *Secret History* has to make sense of this issue by assuming that Justinian wildly wasted the empire's money in a variety of ways, including construction projects that Procopius characterizes as idiotic. He accused Justinian of appropriating 'money in evil ways and then spending it immediately in even worse ways.'[96] Neither Procopius nor Agathias seem to have had any understanding that the deaths caused by the Justinianic plague had gutted the empire's finances and that this might have been one reason for delayed military pay and the revolts that this delay caused.

Despite these intense critiques on the financing and functioning of the army, both Procopius and Agathias also expressed a degree of pride in the army's performance if only in idealized theory or in certain, triumphant moments. Procopius waxed poetic about the mounted archers that he believed were the key element in the sixth-century army's success: 'Contemporary bowmen… are expert horsemen, and are able without difficulty to direct their bows to either side while riding at full speed, and to shoot an opponent whether in pursuit or in flight.'[97] According to Procopius, because of these 'modern improvements,' 'most great and notable deeds have been performed in these wars.'[98] What is interesting about this passage is not merely that Procopius is proud of the mounted archers within the army, but that he explains that they are a modern improvement. Unlike Agathias, who praised the earlier army and bemoaned the army of his day, Procopius is aware that there are reasons to be pleased with the current army. Here Procopius is idolizing the ideal of the mounted archer rather than the Byzantine army specifically, but it is a positive assessment nonetheless. When the army won a dramatic victory it could also pierce through the curmudgeonly pessimism of these elite authors and elicit

[95] Agathias *Histories* 5.13.7–8 and see the discussion on army size in Chap. 2, 'Size and Units.'

[96] Procopius *Secret History* 26.23–4.

[97] Procopius *Wars* 1.1.12–14 and see Rance 2007, 355.

[98] Procopius *Wars* 1.1.16–17.

some pride in the army's accomplishment. After he recounted the victory of the army under Narses against the Franks at the Battle of the Volturnus in 554, Agathias rapturously proclaimed: 'That vast throng of Franks and Alamanni and all the others who flocked to their standards met with complete annihilation, whereas only eighty of the Romans lost their lives, and they were the men who sustained the first shock of the enemy attack. In this battle practically everybody in the Roman ranks showed conspicuous bravery.'[99] At this one moment in time, at least, Agathias thought that the Byzantine army functioned well, the soldiers were brave, and the desired outcome was achieved. For the moment he could forget about his irritation that the army was ill-paid and too small, because it had won a battle.

Having surveyed some opinions of elite civilians on the army as an institution, it is reasonable to attempt to tie these disparate viewpoints together. There would have been a wide range of opinions amongst elites and no one voice, even that of Procopius, should be taken to speak for the group as a whole. However, the evidence presented here does suggest a rough general perception of the army among at least these elite authors: they were intensely interested in army operations and they approved of the army in theory, but they disliked the way it functioned in practice and sought to show off their own knowledge by criticizing it. For the elites, the ideal army contained skilled soldiers of various specialties, it shielded the empire, smashed its enemies in battle, was utterly loyal to the state, was large, and was paid on time without costing too much money. At moments when they glimpsed some aspect of this idealized army, Byzantine elite authors were thrilled to the point of panegyric. Not surprisingly, however, such glimpses were rare, because this ideal army did not exist. Instead, the Byzantine Empire was stuck with a real army in the real world that was managed by real people and faced real problems. Byzantine elites lost no opportunity to criticize those real problems, whether they were the failure of individual officers, the failure of command structures, revolts or mutinies, late pay, or the army simply having too few soldiers. In practice, this meant that while the elites were quite interested in the army, they were at best ambivalent about its performance and frequently set themselves up for disappointment because of their high expectations. In other words, Byzantine elites were not so different from modern political pundits, who are intensely interested in tracking government news and are quite fond

[99] Agathias *Histories* 2.9.12–13, translated by Frendo 1975, 42.

of some idealized form of the government, but exist in a state of perpetual criticism of the very real difficulties and failures that government faces.

The Effectiveness of the Army

The above exploration of the contradictions and ironies that lay behind the opinions of the Byzantine elite about their army is good preparation for a modern analysis of the effectiveness of the sixth-century army. This examination serves as a check on the opinions of Byzantines both rich and poor of their own army. When judging the performance of the army, it is tempting to look at the extremes. On the one hand, the army was responsible for extraordinary successes, including the easy conquest of Vandalic North Africa (533–534), the rather more difficult conquest of Ostrogothic Italy (535–554), and the successful expedition to restore Khusrau II (591). On the other hand, there are the army's abject failure against the Persian invasions during the reign of Phocas (602–610), the tendency of individual field armies to mutiny occasionally, and the defections of soldiers to the enemy. Moreover, some generals, like Belisarius, Narses, and Sittas seem to have been quite capable, while others, like Sergius and Areobindus, were accused of being decidedly bad at their jobs. So clearly the Byzantine army of the sixth century had both highs and lows. Yet the overall effectiveness of the army should not be defined only by these extremes. A better measure of the army's capacity for success in this period lies in its more mundane and less celebrated actions.

First, the army displayed considerable loyalty and professionalism over the course of the sixth century, despite delays to its pay. The exceptions to this rule in the form of mutinies were of course very dramatic, but were relatively rare. The absence of any significant coup attempt supported by combat troops until 602 shows that the army was a mostly reliable instrument.[100] The mutiny and usurpation of Phocas changed this and dramatically unsettled the army, but until that point the army was loyal and professional enough. In addition, the army also successfully kept loyal the numerous temporary units of non-Roman allies (*symmachoi*), who were used regularly to support permanent army units.[101] No revolt or attack by allied units comparable to the actions of the Goths under Alaric in the fourth and fifth centuries, for example, threatened the stability of

[100] Börm 2013, 80–2.
[101] See Chap. 2, 'Basic Divisions'.

the empire. This was no small feat, as left unchecked the Heruls, Huns, and other allies of the sixth century might have caused significant damage to the empire or disrupted its military strategies. Second, the army demonstrated considerable overall strategic success, even if on a tactical level it did not win every battle it fought. Strategic success is demonstrated not just through the expansion of the empire into Africa, Italy, and Spain in the wars mentioned above, but also by the effective defense of the empire's frontiers. While ground was lost along the Balkan frontier in the reign of Tiberius, it was recovered in the reign of Maurice.[102] The army likewise was mostly successful in its defense of the Mesopotamian frontier against the Persians until the reign of Phocas.[103] The less-celebrated successes of the army in Lazica in the Caucasus are yet another reason to rate the army's performance as at least acceptable.[104] A third measure of success is that the army did a good job of replenishing its own ranks. Recruitment seems to have functioned well in the empire and armies were generally not as starved of recruits and reinforcements as is commonly believed.[105] Although Belisarius did have to resort to begging for reinforcements during his second tour in Italy (544–548), this was an exception to the general rule.[106] For the most part, except during the darkest days of the arrival of the Justinianic plague in the 540s, Byzantine armies were of reasonable size to do the jobs asked of them. Generals were able to secure enough recruits to man their armies without much difficulty. Limitations on army size were primarily a matter of arranging logistics to support the army and ensuring there was enough money to maintain pay.

The influence of the emperors' regular interference in the army hierarchy seems to have been generally positive. By moving around officers from position to position and front to front, the emperors provided a check on the ossification of military hierarchies. This not only helped to keep officers loyal to the emperor and to prevent them from getting entrenched in a region, it also gave those officers a wide range of experience with dif-

[102] Treadgold 1997, 220–34.

[103] The loss of Dara to the Persians in 573 is an exception to the rule of the army's mostly successful defense of the eastern frontier, but the loss was not as catastrophic as the emperor Justin II's response made it seem. See Treadgold 1997, 222–3.

[104] Procopius *Wars* 8.11–15.

[105] See Chap. 2, 'Recruitment in the Sixth-Century Army.'

[106] Procopius *Wars* 7.12.3–10.

ferent enemies and different terrains.[107] This versatility was an asset to the empire, especially as it faced wars on multiple fronts as the sixth century wore on. The emperors, particularly Justinian, seem also to have favored a certain amount of continuity in their officer corps. While Procopius thought this an indulgence for misbehavior, Justinian rarely dismissed an officer from military service entirely, instead opting to transfer him to a different position.[108] This allowed officers, even those who might have at first failed in their assignments, to continue to build experience and for the army to benefit from veteran officers with varied work histories. It is impossible to estimate how much these experiences helped the army to win battles or wars, but this degree of continuity must have had at least some beneficial effect.

Lastly, although the army's relationship with civilian society might be described as fraught at best and antagonistic at worst, the fact remains that civilian society remained vibrant through most of the sixth century. Certainly, civilians resented billeting and the accompanying harassment by the soldiers; and undoubtedly many civilians lost their lives or were raped by soldiers. In extreme cases of civil unrest, soldiers were used to put down riots, sometimes with appalling violence and high death tolls. And yet despite these issues, some of which were quite severe, the civilian sector never attempted or really even contemplated a significant overhaul of the army's personnel or its structure. Similarly, the army never seriously attempted a coup or military takeover of the civil government.[109] Even the usurpation of Phocas did not immediately change the overall balance between military and civilian government, which would remain until the upheavals of the reign of Heraclius and the later seventh century. Civilian government and civilian society remained lively and were not suppressed by the army. Proof of this can be found in the condemnations of the army from both chroniclers and elite authors: if the army was successfully suppressing civil society, such denunciations would have been much more dangerous to write. So perhaps somewhat strangely, given the numerous

[107] The general Martin, for example, served in Mesopotamia in 531, in North Africa, 533–536, in Italy, 536–540, again in Mesopotamia, 543–544, and ended his career in the Caucasus, 551–556. See *PLRE* 3: Martinus 2.

[108] See Chap. 4, 'Moving on: Promotion, Transfer or Dismissal.'

[109] The closest that the army came to trying to replace civilian government probably was in 542, when Belisarius and Buzes plotted to enthrone an emperor with a military background if Justinian died. See Procopius *Secret History* 4.1–5 and Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.' On the supremacy of the civil government over the army, see Börm 2013, 75–80.

examples of negative perception of the army by civilians mentioned earlier in this chapter, it can be argued that, in a very broad sense, the army successfully protected and interacted with civilians. The maintenance of a vibrant civil society in spite of frequent war and natural disaster throughout this period must rank as one of the successes of the Byzantine army.

It certainly would be unreasonable to suggest that the sixth-century Byzantine army was perfect, or even that it was always expertly staffed and managed and performed well. The army abjectly failed to halt the Persians during the reign of Phocas, made a real mess of the drawn out war in Italy, frequently harassed civilians, was often irritated by its chronically late pay, and its officers regularly bickered with each other. Yet, although the army faced many challenges and had many failings, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it managed to operate competently throughout most of this period. Thanks to its actions, the empire expanded and managed to hold onto its expanded size, in some form or another, for half a century despite the debilitating effects of an epidemic. In addition to acquiring and defending territory, the army proved to be a reasonable guardian of the imperial government and civil society. It may never have approached the ideal form that some elite civilians wished it might have, but that is neither surprising nor in and of itself a grand failure. In its overall competence the sixth-century Byzantine army was a worthy successor to the imperial Roman army of the previous five centuries.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

Like all armies, the Byzantine army of the sixth century had a command hierarchy, a series of ranks, and expectations of obedience and bravery for the soldiers and officers that populated those ranks. However, considering the army in terms of only these issues would be like studying a government only in terms of its laws or a religion only in terms of its sacred text. The army was much more than the sum of these parts. Similarly, the Byzantine army waged wars and fought battles—events which had considerable impact on the empire's future. But studying the army only in terms of its structure and performance in battle and war leaves untouched a vast web of personal and social issues that the men who made up the army experienced over the course of their careers. The sixth-century Byzantine army was alive with personal relationships, alliances, rivalries, and networks.

It is perhaps surprising that identity, whether cultural or ethnic, was not a major factor in the lively social world that Byzantine military men inhabited. The explosion of research on Late Antique identity in recent decades has possibly conditioned historians to believe that people in this period must have cared as much about the subject as modern historians do. Yet in the sixth-century Byzantine army, at least, it did not seem to matter very much for an individual's career or relationships whether one was Roman or not, or even what ethnicity of non-Roman one was. The concept of Roman identity was important in a general sense, and observers like Procopius and other authors seem to have been keenly aware of

D.A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men*,
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whether an individual was Roman or not. So it would be inappropriate to suggest that the army transcended issues of identity. But on the other hand, a soldier or officer could serve loyally in the army whether Roman or not, could gain promotion to high command whether Roman or not, and could be praised by his contemporaries whether Roman or not. Non-Romans did occupy proportionally fewer positions as generals and imperial guardsmen, and were subject to the pejorative 'barbarian' label when they misbehaved, so it is clear that there was awareness of the distinction of their identity. But there is no evidence that this identity necessarily limited non-Romans in their attempts to seek promotion or to form friendships, alliances, or social networks with other officers in the army.

For all officers, whether Roman or not, their relationship with the emperor was comfortably more important than their identity. Maintaining a positive relationship with the emperor required a careful balancing act. Officers needed to be competent enough at their jobs that the emperor would not sack them for ineptitude. At the same time, if an officer was too good at his job then he ran the risk of earning suspicion from the emperor that he might raise a revolt. A successful general was almost by definition a powerful general whose troops might be loyal enough to him alone to follow him into usurpation. Whether he was good or not, the officer would almost certainly be transferred to a new theater of war on a fairly regularly basis, which both assured that the officer would not have time to ingratiate himself with the soldiers under his command and ensured that the officer gained a variety of experiences. The emperor expected his officers to be steadfastly loyal to his rule first and competent second. The officer in return tried to demonstrate his loyalty, even if he was privately disgruntled with how the emperor supported his army or rewarded him personally. If the officer could not manage that, he preemptively turned to desertion, mutiny, or plotting against the emperor. Even in these instances, emperors like Justinian sometimes chose to forgive rather than to permanently punish. Neither officer nor emperor placed a high priority on ensuring good behavior, so quite a few sins could be covered over by competency and loyalty.

Since their relationship with the emperor was often fraught and difficult, Byzantine military officers sought support from one another. They formed social networks both as a defense mechanism, to retain the authority that the emperor had bestowed upon them when the emperor was not interested in helping them himself, and as a means to seize authority that they had not been granted in the first place. This is especially apparent in

the struggle for power in the campaign army in Italy between 538 and 539. Although Justinian had appointed Belisarius the commander-in-chief of this theater, Narses came to Italy from Constantinople and contested this authority. Both men marshaled officers from the army to support their cause. These social networks were critical to generalship in this period, because officers outside of a general's network might refuse his direct orders, even though they were technically his subordinates. At these times the effective army was only as large as the general's personal network. Junior officers within these networks could also expect benefits from the association, including protection, patronage, and promotion from their general. While there were therefore many practical and career-oriented reasons for these networks, it is important to keep in mind that at their core the networks were, in fact, social. At the end of the day, personal friendships and animosities probably mattered just as much as practical reasons, such as career advancement, in the formation of these networks.

Another network of relationships that officers might draw on in their careers was that of their extended family. Many Byzantine officers hailed from families that placed men across multiple generations into military service. Typical nepotism in high military ranks, in the sense of sons or younger family members directly succeeding fathers or older family members in the exact same position, seems to have been exceedingly rare and possibly even non-existent. The combination of senior officers from other families having their own interests and the emperor regularly making important appointments himself prevented such handoffs of power during this period. A more general form of family patronage was however probably fairly common. Generals occasionally fought with their sons, nephews and brothers. Even when family members served in different theaters or at different times, it is reasonable to envision the more established officer among them using his influence as much as possible to gain appointment or promotion for his relatives. Families were not merely networks of military men seeking to assist one another, however. It is likely that most Byzantine soldiers and officers were married and many of them must have had children. Not surprisingly, officers often focused on their dependents and worried about their health and safety. The historians of the sixth century were interested in affairs of state and seem to have ignored wives and children whenever possible. They only become visible in these sources when officers let their dependents take precedence over their military duties, under which circumstances those officers were roundly condemned. However, denunciation from authors like Procopius

does not seem to have bothered officers or prevented them from focusing on their families. Byzantine soldiers and officers were neither automatons who always obeyed orders nor single men without other obligations. They occasionally placed army, loyalty, and career second to home, wife, and child.

It is very difficult to determine what relationships between Byzantine officers and soldiers might have been like, probably because officers and soldiers did not regularly have any personal relationships with one another. Most of the evidence points to both officers and soldiers regarding each other in groups rather than as individuals. Officers for their part saw soldiers as masses of manpower for winning battles, as audiences for pre-battle exhortations, and occasionally as unruly brigands who needed to be urged to behave courteously to civilian populations. While they might occasionally single out an individual soldier for praise or condemnation, the percentage of soldiers singled out by senior officers must have been quite low. For their part, soldiers viewed officers as the group responsible for advocating for them with the imperial government on issues of pay and conditions of service. This was probably especially important when pay was late, as happened occasionally, particularly in the middle of the sixth century. Soldiers also expected officers to promptly and fairly divide the booty won in battle amongst them. All of this makes it clear that if officers and soldiers did not have individual personal relationships, they did at least have formalized group relationships with expectations on both sides. Both sides also had some means of enforcement if they felt their expectations were not being met. Officers of course had the obvious power of discipline and even execution of offenders, but soldiers as well could push their point by engaging in desertion or mutiny.

As has been seen, Byzantine army officers formed many and varied relationships over the course of their careers and found themselves with a host of social concerns, from placating the emperor and satisfying the soldiers, to negotiating assistance with family members, and power struggles with other officers. Evidence for all these relationships is widespread and there is no one officer that perfectly sums up and demonstrates all of these issues. Certainly, famous generals like Belisarius and Narses, who receive quite a bit of attention from the sources, demonstrate many of these social concerns simply because there is so much available information about them. Because these two are already so well-known, however, it is more interesting to consider a different officer as a representative of the fascinating range of relationships and social issues that Byzantine military officers

had to maintain and navigate. Buzes has appeared briefly in this book several times as an example of different issues, but by way of conclusion it is worth reviewing his whole career at once.

Buzes first emerges in the historical record in 528, when he was stationed at Palmyra as a duke in command of the local frontier soldiers. He hailed from a family of considerable military experience and infamy.[1] His father Vitalian had been both General of Thrace and a general of the soldiers in the emperor's presence, but had also rebelled against Anastasius and died on the orders of Justin I. Buzes' brothers Cutzes and Benilus also served in the army around this time, as did other relatives later in the century. Even before he met other officers in the army, then, Buzes was already well-connected and perhaps even well-known, although not necessarily for good reasons. Procopius described Buzes as a young man in 528, but he did not specify his age. He was perhaps in his twenties. Of his personality, relatively little is known. While young he tended to be rash and headstrong, but this is not necessarily a permanent character trait. Because of his long service in the military, despite setbacks and opposition, it might be reasonable to suppose that he was dedicated and loyal. He might have first encountered Belisarius on the eastern frontier in 528, when the general asked Buzes to join him at Minduos (in modern northern Syria). Here Belisarius and Buzes suffered a defeat at the hands of the Persians. Buzes was again with Belisarius in 530 at the Battle of Dara, where he commanded cavalry on the left wing of the army. Buzes was still with Belisarius the next year, but missed the Battle of Callinicum, staying behind at Amida because he was ill.

He most likely remained on the eastern frontier throughout the 530s, although nothing is known of his career during this time, likely because Procopius' attention shifted to the wars in Africa and Italy. In 539, Buzes was sent against the Armenians to restore them to loyalty. He succeeded only in assassinating an Armenian leader and driving the Armenians into the arms of the Persians. Justinian seems to have not blamed Buzes for this, however, because in 540 Justinian promoted Buzes to General of the East, a position that he shared with Belisarius until 542.[2] The two evidently shared some degree of camaraderie and probably considered each other allies. Both hailed from the Balkans, so they shared a common background, and they had served together before. At this time, Buzes

[1] See Chap. 6, 'Examples of Family Military Service.'
[2] See *PLRE* 3: Buzes.

and Belisarius were accused of saying that they would refuse to accept any new emperor chosen at Constantinople without their input if Justinian, who had caught the plague, was to die. The two generals were recalled to Constantinople and stripped of their positions.[3] Theodora appears to have been especially irate about their discussion. Buzes was therefore imprisoned in an underground chamber below the women's quarters in the palace, where he stayed for two years. In early 545, Buzes was released, but seems to have remained a private citizen. In summer 548, Theodora died and shortly thereafter Buzes returned to prominence by defending Germanus against charges of conspiracy relating to the uncovering of the plot of Artabanes.[4] The combination of Theodora's death and Buzes' honesty in the matter of Germanus seems to have restored him to the emperor's trust. Like many officers in the sixth century, Buzes successfully negotiated his relationship with Justinian and convinced the emperor of his loyalty in spite of previous missteps.

Consequently, in 549 Buzes was again given a command and sent with 10,000 soldiers to assist the Lombards against the Gepids in the northern Balkans. This war ended abruptly when the Gepids made peace with the Lombards, so Buzes had no opportunity to prove himself. He had to wait several more years for another command. In 554, he was appointed along with three other generals to command the army fighting the Persians in Lazica. Here he helped to command the Roman army and worked with its Lazian allies. He enjoyed some success on this front, including the empty satisfaction of being proven right when the other generals refused to heed his warning and the Byzantine army was defeated in 555.[5] He is last attested by Agathias at an island in the river Phasis (today the Rioni in western Georgia) in 556.[6] Presumably he remained in the region until at least 557, when the Byzantines and Persians signed a truce. Nothing further is known about his career and his death is also not recorded.

In a career that spanned at least 28 years, Buzes was both an active participant in and an example of many of the social and relational issues described in this book. His story is a reminder that these matters were not compartmentalized but existed simultaneously, side-by-side in an officer's

[3] See Chap. 4, 'Review: Keeping a Position.'

[4] See Chap. 4.

[5] As Agathias would put it, he was able to enjoy pointing 'out that the sole cause of the unfortunate event had been their failure to implement his suggestions' (Agathias *Histories* 4.16.10, translated by Frendo 1975, 118).

[6] Agathias *Histories* 3.20.8.

life. Buzes worked comfortably alongside non-Roman officers and soldiers, such as with Pharas and his Heruls in 530 at the Battle of Dara, and with Gubazes and his Lazians in Lazica in 554–555. He had to negotiate a complex and fraught relationship with the emperor Justinian. Although Buzes started with the disadvantage of being the son of the rebel Vitalian, and later plotted with Belisarius in a fashion that alarmed the imperial couple, he still managed to retain Justinian's trust more often than not. Credit for that must be given both to Justinian, for being rather forgiving, and to Buzes, who must have been quite convincing in his protestations of loyalty. Buzes utilized the social networks of fellow officers, especially that of Belisarius, with whom he had a longstanding relationship and whom he evidently trusted. He also could claim a significant extended family in military service that may have helped him in ways that we cannot see in the surviving sources. Finally, Buzes is an example of an interesting interaction between the army and civilians. In 540, he was stationed in Edessa as General of the East. Khusrau I and the Persian army marched by, trailing captives from their sack of Antioch. The citizens of Edessa wanted to pay Khusrau to ransom the captives, but Buzes prevented them.[7] Procopius suggests that Buzes wanted the ransom money for himself, but it is at least possible that he was acting under orders not to turn over large sums of money to Khusrau. Whatever the reason, the fact that Buzes and his soldiers stood between the citizens of Edessa and their desire to generously ransom prisoners of war cannot have made Buzes popular in the city, and is one more indication that the relationship between army and civil society could occasionally be tense.

While the relationships and careers of individual officers such as Buzes reveal much about what it was like to serve in the army, it is not possible to get at what most military men thought about their occupation. Evidence about opinions on army service is only available for groups of soldiers and officers that were sometimes quite large. By tracking defections, mutinies, and strikes, it is possible to see when military men got fed up with the army. By and large, they were mostly angry when the army failed to deliver on its traditional promises such as timely pay and fair division of the spoils of war. Under these circumstances, soldiers and officers could protest quite vigorously by refusing to carry out orders, mutinously selecting a new general, defecting to the enemy, or even in the most extreme case attempting to overthrow the emperor. These acts, although occasionally

[7] Procopius *Wars* 2.13.1–7.

quite extended in duration, reveal that most military men were in general quite satisfied with military service in the sixth century, in that the goal was not usually to gain new concessions but merely to retain current ones. In this sense it may be argued that most soldiers and officers were content with their lot in life, assuming all went as promised.

The bulk of this book has concentrated on the social activity of the army's officer corps, but civilians by their opinions had a role to play in the activity of the military as well. Many average civilians resented the impositions of the army, particularly the policy of billeting soldiers in civilian homes, but also including harassment, which probably ranged from petty to severe. The occasional heavy-handed use of the army to police urban disturbances could result in appalling violence that would not endear the military to anyone. Some civilians, however, must have had positive interactions with whole armies and individual soldiers who behaved courteously and even offered assistance during emergencies. Other civilians, who lived far from the frontier and not near a major military road, probably had relatively little experience of the army and therefore no considered opinion about it. Elite civilians seem to have been quite interested in the army's operations, but wished it were cheaper and more effective. They criticized the army harshly when it failed to live up to an ideal form and usually failed to sympathize with the financial problems the government had in maintaining the army. Such criticism of the army seems to have had little to no impact on the way the army functioned, but probably did mean that army officers and at least some civilians did not often see eye to eye.

While the hive of social interactions in the Byzantine army as a whole, and in the officer corps in particular, is interesting in and of itself, it is also but a small reflection of what must have been happening elsewhere in the sixth century. It is easy to imagine such interactions occurring also in the enlisted ranks of the army, in the bureaucracy, in the Church, in small towns, and in the social circles of elite civilians. The sixth-century Byzantine world was alive and vibrant with friendships, alliances and various social strategies for pursuing career success. The army was not just a drab, monolithic structure that protected a vibrant civilian world; its men participated in similar relationships and networks and were themselves just as diverse and lively as those in civilian society.

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