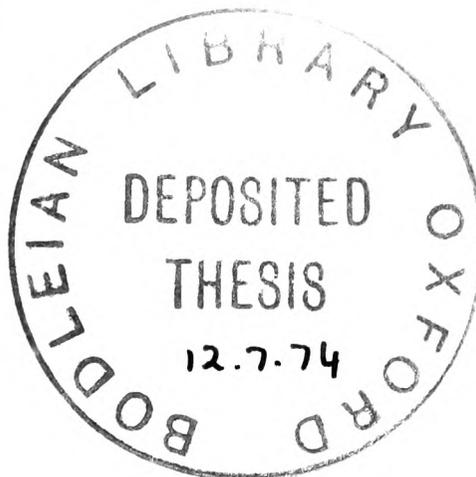


THE ROLE OF MILITARY MEN IN SYRIA AND EGYPT FROM
CONSTANTINE TO THEODOSIUS II

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INTRODUCTORY

There are a few introductory remarks that need to be made as to the range of my topic. The detailed discussion relates largely to only northern Syria and Lower Egypt, in accordance with the scope of the surviving evidence. But its particularities are explained in terms of general contrasts between town and country, or comitatenses and limitanei, such that a general picture for the whole of Syria and Egypt does, I hope, emerge. The chronological range of the discussion is given in the title, but the mention of two emperors is not solely, even if it is principally, a chronological indication: it is intended to point to the role of the army as reformed by Constantine in the empire for whose organization our most imposing source is the Code of Theodosius as constituting our theme.

It is important to note that the subject of this thesis is in one way narrower, and in another broader, than the title may at first view suggest. Since my

theme is the role of military men in Syrian and Egyptian society, there is no treatment of their fighting role, nor indeed, save incidentally, of military organization; for the essential lines of the latter, in particular the difference between comitatenses and limitanei, I can only refer the reader to the outstanding discussion in A. H. M. Jones, The Later Roman Empire. I have also drawn a distinction between the activities of the military in mere obedience to imperial instructions and those that arose spontaneously from their contact with the civilians they lived among, and devoted my exclusive attention to the latter; there is, for instance, no treatment of the role of the duces of Egypt in the imposition of the Arianizing policies of Constantius II and Valens.

But in a different way the range of my discussion has been fairly broad. It is not possible to study meaningfully the role of the military in society without frequent excursions on that society itself. Principally, a study of the military patronage of countrymen that is the subject of one of Libanius' orations necessitates a general treatment of rural patronage and the condition

of the Syrian countryside; and my discussion of the military jurisdiction in the Abinnaeus archive includes a consideration of the civilian jurisdiction which this supplemented and to some extent replaced. This broader aspect of my treatment has made necessary a restriction to a single society in a single period, but without this the study of the role of the military degenerates into a meaningless assemblage of stray references.

Even with this restriction the evidence for our topic is scattered and miscellaneous, and therefore the order ~~of the chapters~~ is to some extent a matter of free choice. The main arrangement of my material, after the preliminary chapter, is neither chronological nor geographical, but follows the division between city and countryside. It is this division that dominates the discussion of the location of the army in the opening chapter; then the varied evidence for the role of the military is set out in the framework it provides, and often in detail recurs to it; finally, the concluding chapter interrelates the evidence in accordance with this contrast, which in this way emerges as my fundamental motif.

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I

THE LOCATION OF THE ARMY

1. THE LIMITANEI

It is a necessary preliminary to the study of the role of the military in Syria and Egypt to determine where the various units of the army were stationed. This will reveal with which segments of society they had most contact, and an examination of the rationale in the choice of stations may enable some interesting deductions as relevant to our topic as to a study of the defence of the empire.

For the limitanei, or stationary 'frontier' troops, the question is not hard to answer, since the exact location of their camps is set out in the Notitia Dignitatum, a document of the close of the fourth century. And here our first attention is directed to Lower Egypt, partly because of the great richness of its topographical material, and partly because it is Egyptian papyri which, in a later chapter, will constitute our essential evidence for the role of the limitanei in the life of the Eastern Empire.

The soldiers stationed in Lower Egypt, though for the greater part far from any frontier, ranked as limitanei, under the command of the comes limitis Aegypti. As such, they are listed in the Notitia, together with the names of the localities in which they were stationed. These names are, on the whole, remarkable for their obscurity, but we are so well informed on the topography of Roman Egypt, above all from the routes listed in the Antonine Itinerary, that almost all these stations can be either identified or at least approximately located.

Before discussing the choice of stations, it will be necessary to consider the few cases, not more than a fifth of the whole, where even the approximate location of the posts is uncertain: the places in question appear in our source as Parembole, Nee, Sosteos, Cefro and Naithu. The term parembole simply means 'camp', and it is therefore not surprising that there were several localities in Egypt that went by this name; on the other hand, the legion placed here by the Notitia was certainly stationed in the parembole at Alexandria in the time of the Principate, which makes it

reasonable to suppose that the same parembole is in question here, though one would like some confirmation. Easily the best identification offered for Nee locates it in Alexandria: 'Nee' could very well be a contraction for 'Neapolis', and the only known Neapolis that is possible here is one of the districts of Alexandria; on the other hand, only one other of the auxiliary units is known to have been located in the western half of the province of Aegyptus, so this location must be regarded as doubtful. In the case of 'Naithu' the problem of identification is more complicated: the name does not appear elsewhere in this particular form, but there are a number of adequately similar place-names preserved in other sources with which scholars have been tempted to identify it; easily the best candidates, on purely linguistic grounds, are the 'Nitine' of the Antonine Itinerary, located just north of Andro in the province of Aegyptus, and the 'Natho' of the Copts in Augustamnica which has itself been identified with the city of Leonto. This final identification needs a closer scrutiny. It is suggested by Amélineau on the strength of an entry in a list of the sees of Egypt that runs 'Leonton=

Baki Natho=Sahraget'. However, he also argues that Sahraget was a separate town associated with Leonto for ecclesiastical purposes: surely, then 'Natho' might have been so too. And if it is to be identified with either Leonto or Sahraget, it is the latter which is the obvious candidate, since in Coptic scalae mentioned by Amélineau 'Sahraget' is given as the Arabic equivalent of the Coptic 'Natho'. So these lists serve to locate Natho, and therefore possibly our 'Naithu', in the vicinity of Leonto, but it seems mistaken to identify the two places. Finally, the names Cefro and Sosteos are not to be found, in either the same or linguistically similar forms, in any other source.^{1.}

It may be assumed that all who have worked at the identification of this list of place-names in the Notitia have considered the possibility that some clues might be deduced from the order they occur in. Van Berchem has, indeed, noted that this is not a purely random one.^{2.} The difficulty is that, unless we can detect some principle to be rigidly applied, the mere fact that the order is not entirely random will not help us in the identification of

the few doubtful cases. Unfortunately, there can be no question here of the simple ordering according to location that we find, naturally enough, in the itineraries: for instance, the list of alae of the laterculum minus moves roughly from north to south, but without anything like the regularity we require. After such a topographical order the most obvious possibility would be for the units, which are primarily and explicitly arranged according to their class and category, to be subdivided according to the province each one was stationed in, whether Aegyptus, Augustamnica or Arcadia. It is true that these three civilian provinces enjoyed a single military command, but in matters in which the civil administration was involved, such as provisioning, this division would be relevant. And in fact it turns out that this principle of subdivision is followed without a single exception.

Before this is demonstrated in detail, it will be necessary to examine two points of obscurity which may perhaps have been responsible for the failure to recognize this subdivision according to province. First, there is the familiar problem of the 'Provinciae Augustamnicae' rubric:

it is initially implausible to attribute any exact notions of provincial boundaries to a document which apparently separates off half the alae and cohorts of the laterculum minus under a special rubric assigning them to the province of Augustamnica, when half the units so listed belong in fact to the province of Arcadia and five auxiliary regiments actually stationed in Augustamnica are listed above the rubric in the preceding section. This is an anomaly that any view of this section of the Notitia must attempt to account for. Van Berchem has tried to cut the Gordian knot by asserting that the rubric in question relates not to the units listed after it, but to the place-name, Busiris, that immediately precedes it. There are four objections to this. First, there can be no reasonable doubt that a new subsection of the list begins at this point, since it is two cohorts that precede the rubric, but two alae that follow it. Secondly, such a note to help out the student of topography would be entirely without parallel in the Notitia, which never specifies which particular town of an homonymous group is in question. Thirdly, there may indeed, as Van

Berchem observes, have been several towns in Egypt called Busiris, but there is no known example in Augustamnica. Lastly, it is unlikely to be a mere coincidence that both the alae that follow the rubric are given stations in Augustamnica. Clearly the traditional view is basically correct, but this fourth objection does suggest what must be the solution to this enigma. The major apparent anomaly is that the cohorts listed a few lines after the rubric belong in part to Arcadia; this is removed if we understand the rubric to refer only to the two alae that follow it immediately. Some difficulty, indeed, still remains: why are only two of the Augustamnican alae listed under this rubric, and why are these alae placed in the middle of the list of cohorts? The most natural explanation is that dislocation has occurred in the text: if we shift the rubric and accompanying alae a dozen lines up so that they head the remaining Augustamnican alae, order is restored. Unfortunately, the existence of such dislocation may now seem to imperil any trust in a subdivision according to province being accurately preserved in the manuscripts. But one case of detected and defined dislocation does not

render other occurrences any the more likely: this phenomenon remains a constant possibility in ancient lists, and only deprives deductions of that total certainty one has no right to demand.³

The other point of obscurity that may have delayed the detection of this principle of subdivision is the question of the exact lie of the provincial boundaries. Our chief sources for these are the lists of cities according to province drawn up by Hierocles and George of Cyprus. These naturally leave the exact boundaries uncertain, and in one case suggest a false inference. They list no city in the region east of the Nile just south of the Delta, where, of the localities in the Notitia, Babylon and Scenae Mandrorum were situated; but the Arcadian lists by including Leto and Memphis imply that the west bank at this point was already in this most southern of the three provinces. This creates a reasonable supposition that the same was true of the east bank, and modern maps of Late Roman Egypt follow this assumption: if it is correct, the accurate subdivision by province suggested here would be refuted by the listing of the ala at Scenae Mandrorum in what would be an

Augustamnican section. However, Pococke's Notitia Alexandrina, whose authenticity and antiquity has been adequately established by Gelzer, explicitly places both Babylon and Scenae Mandrorum in Augustamnica.⁴

It will now be possible to demonstrate in detail the existence in this list of the Notitia of a rigid subdivision according to province. The list begins with an enumeration of the legionary stationments -- first Memphis in Arcadia, then Babylon and two other posts in Augustamnica, finally Andro and Parembole, the former certainly in Aegyptus and the latter, as we have seen, probably so. After mentioning the alae on the laterculum maius, where only one post is named, the list continues with the alae of the laterculum minus -- first the post of Terenuthis in Aegyptus, then 'Nee', which, as we saw, is either in Aegyptus or entirely unidentified, next no less than five stations in Augustamnica, to which should be added the two of the misplaced 'Provinciae Augustamnicae' section, and finally what is clearly the Arcadia section, consisting of three camps certainly in this province and, listed third of the four, the unidentified Sosteos. The list concludes with the

cohorts of the laterculum minus, interrupted as already observed by the misplaced Augustamnican alae: this part begins with the unidentified Cefro, followed by the Busiris which, as we have seen, cannot be placed in Augustamnica and is indeed most probably the well-known city of this name in Aegyptus; then, after the 'provinciae Augustamnicae' interruption, follow 'Naithu', already assigned either to Aegyptus or Augustamnica, and two posts certainly in this latter province; finally come the four posts of the Arcadia section. It will have been noted that in the two lists of the auxiliary forces -- of alae and then cohorts -- the subdivisions follow the natural order of first Aegyptus, then Augustamnica and finally Arcadia, but this order is reversed, for some obscure reason, in the legionary list.

The detection of so rigid a pattern of geographical subdivision has obvious consequences for the problems in identification and location of the camps, and this in two ways. First, a number of already justified but not entirely secure assumptions are now confirmed. For instance, it becomes clear from its position in the list that the

Busiris in question cannot possibly be the Arcadian one, and, wherever 'Nee' is finally to be located, Seeck's emendation 'Arsinoe' is definitely excluded.⁵

Secondly, it becomes possible to make some further advance in the location of the five names that were listed above as being either doubtfully identified or entirely unlocated. So, 'Parembolai' is now shown to belong in all probability to Aegyptus; this excludes the parembolai in Augustamnica and Arcadia and so confirms the identification with the camp at Alexandria. Cefro and Sosteos, hitherto entirely unlocated, can now be placed in Aegyptus and Arcadia respectively; if we add to this the observation to be made below that almost all the other military stations taken together cover a total of only half a dozen routes, the field for speculation becomes significantly restricted. Unfortunately, our pattern of subdivision helps little over the identification of the two remaining cases where there is serious doubt, 'Nee' and 'Naithu'. It indeed becomes clear that the former cannot belong to Arcadia, but the position of the name in the list of Xalae of the laterculum minus does not exclude either of the two remaining possibilities,

so that its identification by Van Berchem with the Alexandrian Neapolis is neither disproved nor effectively strengthened. Similarly, 'Naithu', which has already been restricted to either Aegyptus or Augustamnica, may be taken on the list either to close the Aegyptus subsection of the cohort part or to open the Augustamnica one. But here the attribution of all the units to their respective province does show the rarity of auxiliary stationments in Aegyptus; this added to the linguistic point that 'Naithu' is surely nearer to 'Natho' than to 'Nitine' makes it reasonable to prefer the Augustamnican identification. We are left, then, with only Nee, that is one out of a total of 28 different names, still quite indefinitely located.

The discovery that this list in the Notitia takes into account the division of Lower Egypt into three provinces has another consequence of much greater importance. The date of the creation of Arcadia is not known exactly, but it lies between A.D. 383 and circa 400. It follows that the list before us was drawn up not earlier than the Theodosian period. This is, indeed, what we would at first have expected of any list

in the Notitia, but this very list has been argued by recent writers to have been anachronistic: the relevant evidence from papyri has been taken to show that the list is essentially Diocletianic and was out of date at least by 319. We must examine whether this papyrological evidence can be given a different interpretation.^{6.}

The area that the papyri illustrate in reasonable detail is that west of the Nile running south of Memphis down, just beyond Arcadia, to the city of Hermupolis. Here the Notitia lists three units, a vexillation of horse at Hermupolis, a cohort at Narmuthis and an ala at Dionysias -- that is, setting aside the case of 'Sosteos', of which the location is entirely unknown, beyond a probability that it was somewhere in the western part of Arcadia. These three military stations reappear on papyri of the fourth century, but with some important particularities. The unit at Hermupolis is referred to by a few papyri dating from 340 to 357. This raises no controversy.^{7.} But the evidence for Narmuthis has been taken to show that it had ceased to be a military station by 346. Meanwhile different considerations have led to the view that the fort at Dionysias was abandoned by the end of the century and quite possibly before the Theodosian period.

Finally, and most seriously, papyri have been taken to demonstrate that by 319 an additional post had been set up in Arsinoe, a post that finds no mention in the Notitia.

The argument concerning Narmuthis runs as follows. Narmuthis and Dionysias were both in the Arsinoite nome, but the former in the division of Polemon and the latter in that of Themistes. Now in July 346 we find two criminal cases involving inhabitants of Narmuthis referred to one Abinnaeus, the praepositus of the unit at Dionysias: the conclusion is drawn that there can no longer have been a praepositus militum at Narmuthis. However, this argument is weaker than seems at first sight. In one of the cases, if the defendants are in Narmuthis, the plaintiff writes from the village of Theoxenis in Themistes, and it is there that the crime was committed; meanwhile in the other case, if the plaintiff writes from Narmuthis, the crime was committed, and the criminals apparently located, in the village of Magais in the most distant corner of Themistes. This does not, of course, mean that the praepositus at Dionysias was the natural person to appeal to in preference to his counterpart at Narmuthis, -- it is not improbable that

both were appealed to --, but it excludes the suggestion that, had there been a military post at Narmuthis at this date, the cases would not have been referred to Dionysias. Quite apart from this, there is other evidence in the Abinnaeus archive that can be employed, more reasonably, to the contrary effect. The documents, in particular those concerned with the official business of the Dionysias unit in the collection of annona and military jurisdiction, refer continually to villages over the whole area of the division of Themistes. In contrast, the references to villages in neighbouring Polemon are of great rarity, and the only ones that might suggest that the praepositus at Dionysias had any authority there are the two just discussed. It follows that the authority of the praepositus stopped short at the boundary between the two divisions. Of this the most natural explanation is that Polemon still had at Narmuthis its own praepositus militum. It is to be concluded that the evidence of the Abinnaeus archive, so far from excluding a post at Narmuthis in the 340s, demonstrates that it still existed.⁸

Subsequently, Dionysias itself was deserted: modern excavators have found that the fort was finally abandoned

with its contents entirely removed and the gates carefully shut. The last dated reference to the fort is a papyrus of 362; meanwhile, the many papyri of the neighbouring village of Theadelphia cease after 350. Does this establish an early date for the withdrawal? It is to be objected that the dates of the extant papyri are a poor indication since almost all belong to the correspondence of only two individuals; one could also point to Caranis, where archeological evidence suggests that habitation continued for a hundred years after the last extant papyrus. Consequently a much better argument is that the content of the papyri has itself a story of catastrophe to tell, at Theadelphia that early in the fourth century three fifths of the land had been abandoned, while by the middle the population had shrunk to three. But was the stationing of soldiers at Dionysias associated with prosperous agriculture nearby? Its location at the extreme north-west corner of Themistes shows that the main consideration in mind was the existence of a trade-route from the desert that entered Themistes at this point. And even in the time of Abinnaeus it was thought no hindrance that, owing to the poverty of the area in the immediate vicinity of the camp, by far the greater part of its supplies

had to come from the opposite half of the division. The withdrawal from Dionysias cannot, then, be dated.⁹

There remains the suggested indication of an early date for the Notitia list in its omission of a post at Arsinoe. The papyrological evidence for this new post needs to be set out in detail. In 319 the sitologoi of Theadelphia are sent a receipt by a bouleutes of Arsinoe who is corn-receiver and baker 'for the noble soldiers there under the command of the ducenarius'. The ducenarius was a junior officer in a cavalry vexillation, with primicerius and senator between him and the tribune: it follows that we have here not a vexillation commanded 'in default of a tribune by the next senior officer', but a small detachment of one.¹⁰ Later, in the Abinnaeus archive of the 340s, we meet at Arsinoe a 'praepositus of the soldiers', that is, a tribune in command of a whole vexillation.¹¹ Finally, a papyrus of 359 refers to cataphractarii 'now stationed' in Arsinoe. 'The vexillation shown to be cataphracts', says one scholar, ignoring the adverb. 'Now reinforced by cataphracts', suggests another; but, since there is only a single parallel in the Aegyptian list of the Notitia for two units in one station,

our conclusion must rather be that the garrison of Arsinoe now consisted of a different vexillation.¹² So, in 319, the 340s and again in 359 we find at Arsinoe the whole or part of a vexillation, but on each occasion a different one -- a variability that puts the city in a class apart. Was there, perhaps, no permanent garrison here, but temporary stationing, of duration unknown? Certainly we cannot assume a continuous military presence from 319 to 359, and the position thereafter remains quite unclear. It does not, then, follow that this Notitia list, in omitting Arsinoe, is Diocletianic rather than Theodosian.¹³

Meanwhile there is evidence inside the Notitia itself which suggests that its omission of the Arsinoe post simply means that it did not exist at the time of the work's final compilation. We find in the laterculum maius sections of its Egyptian lists, in which an Arsinoite vexillation would have been included, the names of several units raised after the period of the Tetrarchy. Three legions are listed for the Thebaid whose names reveal a late dating -- one a creation of Constantius, the remaining two named after Valentinian. And then three alae, two in Lower Egypt and one in the Thebaid

-- the former with the significant rubric 'nuper constituta' --, proclaim themselves to be Theodosian creations. In addition, the Notitia's division of the general command among three duces, if we include Libya, is certainly later than the period of our papyri and probably Theodosian. It follows that, even if these sections were in origin Diocletianic, they have been kept up to date. Now between the last papyrological reference to the Arsinoe post and the date of the Notitia there were troop movements out of Egypt certainly in the early years of Theodosius and very possibly for Julian's and Valens' Persian wars. It will seem easier to suppose that the final Arsinoite unit was moved elsewhere during this period than that the Notitia in omitting it is in error.¹⁴

The view that the Egyptian lists of the Notitia are essentially Diocletianic and any later revision merely irregular and sporadic need not concern us further: the papyrological evidence does not upset the natural conclusion from the internal evidence, above all the compiler's awareness of a separate province of Arcadia. But a further point needs to be made. Our knowledge of the Egyptian army of the fourth century rests on the Notitia and the Abinnaeus

archive. If the papyri of the time of Abinnaeus revealed a major discordance between the location of the army in these two sources, it would be necessary to distinguish carefully between the army of the time of Abinnaeus and that of the Notitia, whatever period the latter was accurate for. But we have seen that, in the limited area the papyri cover, both sources place posts at Dionysias, Narmuthis and Hermupolis and the only difference is that Arsinoe was garrisoned at least between 319 and 359, though very possibly not continuously, but is absent from the Notitia. The agreement is so much greater than the difference that it becomes the task of the historian not to contrast the army of the Abinnaeus archive to that of the Notitia, but use both sources together to build up a comprehensive picture of the role of the military in Late Roman Egypt.

We may now return to the particular problems of the list in the Notitia for the army of Lower Egypt. The reduction in the number of posts of entirely uncertain location enables the construction of the following table, giving the number of units of both the laterculum maius and laterculum minus in each province. In order to bring

out its significance, the figures for Augustamnica are arranged according to the fifth century division of the province (which leaves in Augustamnica II all but the more northern posts of Pelusium, Sile, Rhinocorura and 'Gerasa'), and we have added the number of cities in each province that follows from a conflation of the two, largely identical, lists of Hierocles and George of Cyprus, which have been shown by A.H.M. Jones to record, essentially, the situation during the reign of Theodosius II.¹⁵

| Province | Nr. of units of lat. maius | Nr. of units of lat. minus | Total | Nr. of cities |
|------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|------------------|
| Aegyptus | 2 | 3(?+1) | 5(?6) | 27 |
| August. I | 1 | 3 | 4 | 13 |
| August. II | 2 | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| Arcadia | 2 | 8 | 10 | 8 |

Two facts emerge from this table. First, because of the siting of the auxiliary camps, the military coverage of Lower Egypt was highly uneven. Secondly, the more urbanized a province, the fewer military units it contained. To this last fact may be added the observation that of the 28 different place-names in the military list and the 54 such

names in the list of cities, counting Parembole as in Alexandria and omitting the obscure case of Nee, only 9 coincide.¹⁶ It follows that as a matter of fact soldiers in Lower Egypt were on the whole stationed neither in the important towns nor indeed in the most urbanized regions. But it is, of course, quite a different question whether this was the consequence of a deliberate policy to keep soldiers, as far as other considerations allowed, out of the cities or simply the accidental result of entirely independent considerations. To ascertain, then, what the location of these military units has to tell us of the intended role of the army, it will be necessary to enquire closely what explanation can account best for the choice of military stations.

The first line that must be explored is that of strategic considerations. Of these the fundamental point is extremely obvious: from archaic to modern times the only direction from which under normal circumstances Lower Egypt has been in danger of invasion is the extreme north-east, via Pelusium. And it follows from the geography of the country, cut up as it is by deserts and marshes, that such an invasion has to be met not by some broadly extended

lines of interconnected points, but by the placing of military posts along the few routes feasible for an invading force. Of the location of these routes we are excellently informed by two classes of ancient material. On the one hand we have the itineraries, of which the Antonine is the significant one for our period; on the other, we know at least the approximate routes of several imperial marches across the province and of the Persian and Arab invasions of the seventh century. Fortunately the two coincide, and we are left with a secure and detailed picture of the strategic requirements for the defence of Late Roman Egypt.¹⁷

The first route along which the invader would have to march was the stretch of coastline leading from Rhinocorura westwards to Pelusium. Here we find in the Notitia military stations at both the end points and at Scenae, not far east from Pelusium. The next route, and indeed the one of primary importance, ran from Pelusium south-westwards to Memfis; it is along this that the Persians appear to have marched in A.D. 617 on their way to Alexandria. For this route the Antonine Itinerary lists a total of six intermediate stops: both the end-points and four of these stops reappear in our list in

the Notitia. Now these four stops are far from equally spaced out along the road; there is in fact a concentration along the southern sector. This makes excellent strategic sense, for the northern sector could be avoided by an army that took the route roughly due south from Pelusium to Thaubasium and then cut due westwards along the Canal of Trajan so as to rejoin the road to Memphis about halfway along; it was indeed this alternative route that the Arabs took in 638. The Trajanic Canal was not suitable for any permanent posts but on the first part of this route we find in the Notitia two stops, apart from Pelusium itself.^{18.}

Once this complex of routes, which may be roughly designated the Augustamnican limes, had been traversed by the invader, the essential route to hold became the road from Memphis north-west to Alexandria; it was along this that the Persians marched as soon as they had fought their way from Pelusium to Memphis. Along this route the Antonine Itinerary places five stops; again the two end points are held by the soldiers of the Notitia, along with two intermediate points, of which one is not actually

named in the Itinerary. In the invasions of the seventh century it was this apparently rather indirect route to Alexandria that was of military significance, but the Itinerary records a direct route from Pelusium to Alexandria across the Delta; that this route had been feasible for armies at an earlier period is illustrated by Titus' march across it in A.D. 70. Of the stations along it only one, apart from the two extremities, appears in the Notitia, and that is common to the Memphis-Alexandria route; on the other hand, two of the Notitia stations that do not lie along any other of our routes, Busiris and Naithu, are situated near this road and could have been thought to cover it, but it would seem to follow from this comparatively poor coverage that in our period, just as in the seventh century, the route that, being easiest for a large invading army, required substantial defence was not this route but the longer one through Memphis.¹⁹

These few routes of major strategic importance turn out to account for all the units stationed in Aegyptus and all but the extreme south-west corner of Augustamnica, with only one possible exception -- the unlocated post

of 'Cefro'. It would seem reasonable to suppose that this station too was located on one of these routes: since we have assigned it to Aegyptus, its most likely location is clearly on the road from Memfis to Alexandria.²⁰

We come finally to the posts of Babylon and Scenae Mandrorum and the ten units assigned to the province of Arcadia. It must at once be admitted that their number was in excess of the strategic importance of a region far from the southern frontier of Egypt and of only minor significance in the event of an invasion of Lower Egypt from the north-east. On the other hand, as was shown by the Arab invasion of 638, which turned from Memfis south into Arcadia before venturing on the road to Alexandria, -- quite apart from the obvious need to overawe the Berbers of the desert --, this region deserved a garrison of its own for the purpose of local defence, and as to the location of this strategic considerations have again to be examined.

Here the essential point to be appreciated is the contrast between Arcadia west and Arcadia east of the Nile. The former included the fertile region of the Fayyum,

which has considerable breadth as well as length, even if our period saw a shrinking in its cultivated area. By contrast, eastern Arcadia, in ancient as in modern times, consisted of desert impermeable by a large army save for a narrow strip without width along the east bank of the Nile. Hence the location of military units in this region would naturally fall into two dissimilar sections: in the east troops would be concentrated along the road down the right bank, while in the west we would expect scattered garrisons over a wide area.

When we turn to the Notitia, this is exactly what we find. The eastern road is set out in the Antonine Itinerary, and ran from Babylon at its northern point down to Musae in the extreme south of Arcadia with five intermediate stops: in the Notitia we find that all seven of these posts had military garrisons. Meanwhile over the western part of the province we find four posts -- five, if we place 'Sosteos' here, which is reasonable in view of the already complete coverage of the eastern road -- scattered over a wide area with no concentration on the Nile.²¹

In all, strategic considerations account for the location of the military posts in Lower Egypt remarkably well. It is clear that the factor considered of paramount importance in the choice of stations was the defence of the province against possible invasion. On the other hand, there are several points of detail that this factor cannot account for. Above all, there is the problem of why a full third of the total number of units were placed in the province of Arcadia, which -- apart from Memphis in its most northern portion -- was without much strategic importance.

It is this problem that forms the basis of the attempt by van Berchem to provide a general explanation of the distribution of the auxiliary units in terms quite other than strategic. His field of enquiry is wider than ours here in that it includes the military posts in the Thebaid. But since his thesis works better for Lower than for Upper Egypt, we will do him no injustice if for our purposes here we restate his argument as it applies to Lower Egypt.^{22.}

Van Berchem first observes that, while the Antonine Itinerary includes routes leading from the region of the

Delta up into the Thebaid along both banks of the Nile, we find in the Notitia the eastern route heavily manned while the western is virtually ignored, save for the partial exception of where, in the Fayyum, links with oases give the country a lateral extension. None of this, he urges, makes strategic sense, since Egypt was only seriously threatened at its northern and southern extremities, while for defence against the nomads of the desert both banks were equally important. The implication is that the auxiliary troops in Lower Egypt did not have as their primary function the defence of the province against invasion: for what, then, were they principally intended?

Van Berchem then notes that, according to his own theory, the places listed in the Antonine Itinerary were the mansiones where the annona collection was stored. Now there appears to be a remarkable degree of coincidence between the places listed in the Itinerary and those found in the Notitia. Is not the natural conclusion that the main function of the auxiliary units was to serve as guardians of the annona depots?

Van Berchem's thesis would, if acceptable, have fundamental and far-reaching consequences for the study of the Late Roman soldier. Hence it is necessary to set out in detail the variety of objections that it invites -- setting aside, however, the special problems of the correct interpretation of the purpose and rationale of the Antonine Itinerary.

It will be obvious in the light of the preceding discussion that van Berchem underestimates the strategic sense shown in the choice of military stations. It is true that he restricts his argument to the auxiliary troops, but the omission of the laterculum maius from the discussion above would have made no major difference: the holding of the line from Memphis to Alexandria would have been much depleted and the odd post of prime strategic importance elsewhere vacated, but the general picture of the military coverage of Lower Egypt would not have been transformed: the auxiliary troops make up the great majority of the units, and the emphasis on the Augustamnican limes would remain just as marked. Nor would the apparent disproportion in the number of units assigned to Arcadia be significantly

increased, since two thirds even of the auxiliary troops were stationed in the other two provinces. Clearly the position is not that the distribution of the auxiliary forces fails to make strategic sense, but that some aspects of it require special explanation along different lines; one has no reason to demand one single explanation in a matter where a variety of considerations could well have had an influence.

But the really weak link in van Berchem's argument lies in his various deductions from the Antonine Itinerary. The requirements for an argument from the high degree of coincidence between the Itinerary and the Notitia need to be precisely stated. Since the Itinerary lists some fifty places in the area covered by this section of the Notitia and all on major arteries of communication, it would be surprising on any hypothesis if a large number of these did not reappear among the thirty stations of the Notitia: as a consequence van Berchem requires for his argument here a quite exceptional degree of coincidence, though admittedly even this degree would not prove the truth of his thesis,

since it could be suggested that military stations and mansiones coincided not because the soldiers' chief role was to guard the annona but simply because such an arrangement facilitated their provisioning. Now in fact the degree of coincidence when worked out arithmetically turns out to be less than impressive: of the 23 stations of cohorts and alae named in the Notitia no more than 13 appear in the Itinerary. It does not of course follow that half the units could not possibly have been used to guard the annona, since van Berchem's interpretation of the Itinerary may not be correct.^{23.}

But the lamest foot in the argument lies in its attempt to base on the Itinerary an explanation of certain anomalies in the choice of military stations, when that emphasized above all is the abandonment in Arcadia of the west bank of the Nile in favour of the east: for, as van Berchem is well aware, the Itinerary sets out routes equally down both banks. It is indeed this fact alone that creates the apparent anomaly in the distribution of troops over Arcadia -- one that we tried to explain by drawing attention to the very different lie of the land in the two halves of the province.

This contrast between the Notitia and the Itinerary could be used to illustrate the general difficulty in van Berchem's thesis independent of the special problems raised by the Itinerary. Since the whole of Egypt contributed to the annona according to a distribution that was intended to be even and equitable, men entrusted with the protection of its depots would have been distributed equally and evenly over the country, apart from a concentration, in whatever region, on the arteries of traffic along which the annona would be conveyed. But the troops of the Notitia -- especially if with van Berchem we take the auxiliary units on their own -- are on the contrary most unevenly distributed over the Egyptian countryside, with Arcadia (and the Augustamnican limes) heavily garrisoned while Aegyptus is largely left without military coverage. Again, it is the anomalies from the strategic point of view that tell decisively against any explanation by reference to the annona.^{24.}

It may be remarked that much the same criticism would apply if the attempt were made to make use in this context of the conclusion of Lesquier's that during the period of the Principate the distribution of army units over Lower Egypt

was such as to suggest that their main function was the maintenance of internal order; for it was in Aegyptus alone that there were recurrent civic disorders, while for matters such as the guarding of roads we would expect an even distribution.^{25.}

Van Berchem's view is not, then to be accepted, either in its original form or even in some modified version according to which the needs of the annona were an important secondary consideration in the choice of military stations. We must look further in our search for the correct explanation subsidiary to the strategic one.

At this point it will be necessary to note one further oddity in the location of the units: along the routes covered by the army there is a curious pattern of the more important towns being frequently avoided. First, on the route from Rhinocorura to Pelusium it is curious that the intermediate station was placed at Gerra rather than in the more important city of Casium, which, unlike Gerra, figures in the relevant list in the Antonine Itinerary. Then, on the road from Pelusium to Memphis, we find no military station

at Heliopolis, the only city on the road listed by Hierocles and George of Cyprus, although it was on a strategically more important stretch of the road than, say, the military station of Tacasarta. Similarly, on the route from Memphis to Alexandria, we find the comparatively minor Terenuthi chosen in preference to the cities of Leto, Niciu and Hermopolis, all of which occur in both the city lists and also as stations on this road in the Itinerary. Taking next the posts near the route from Pelusium to Alexandria across the Delta, it will appear significant that Naithu rather than, say, the not distant city of Leonto was selected for a military post. Finally, in the choice of stations in the region of Arcadia west of the Nile and south of Memphis, where the fact that only local defence was in question would most naturally have led to their location in the towns of chief importance, it is strange that none of the four units were placed in any of the five cities of the region.^{26.}

It is tempting to conclude that in the choice of military stations there must have been a deliberate policy to keep the army, where strategy allowed, away from the cities and in the countryside. Would the existence of such a policy serve to account for those more fundamental aspects in the

choice of military stations that resist a strategic explanation?

One of these was the lack of an effective military presence along the road from Pelusium to Alexandria across the Delta, which, if less important than the route via Memphis, would still seem on strategic grounds worthy of more attention. Now this route was uniquely rich in cities: of the nine places on it that appear as intermediate posts in the Itinerary no less than seven are listed as cities in Hierocles and George of Cyprus. Then there is the anomaly of the location of half the Arcadian troops along the tiny eastern strip in preference to a fuller coverage of the western area: now the west of Arcadia appears from the city-lists to have been far more urbanized than its eastern part. Finally and above all, there is the oddity of the placing of one third of the total number of units in the strategically unimportant province of Arcadia: the city lists show that this was easily the least urbanized part of Lower Egypt.^{27.}

We noted at the beginning of the discussion that, whatever explanation was to be given, the army of Lower Egypt was stationed in few cities and concentrated in the

less urbanized areas. We then considered to what extent its irregular distribution could be explained by strategic considerations, and saw that these accounted markedly well for the choice of military posts, apart from some anomalies which required explanation by reference to other possible factors. With these it was not found helpful to draw attention to the need for the army in the management of the annona system or in the general maintenance of internal order. But these anomalies could be accounted for if it was supposed that there was a deliberate policy to keep the army, where strategy allowed, in the less urbanized regions and, more locally, not in the cities but in the countryside. The existence of such a policy seemed to be supported independently by many particular details in the selection of individual stations. It may be concluded that this policy really existed and, after the strategic requirements, was the determining factor in the choice of military posts.

It will not be necessary, or indeed desirable, to treat the remaining limites in the same detail. In the Thebaid

the location of the military posts was so exceptionally limited by the purely geographical factor and that of immediately local defence that no general conclusions are invited of relevance for more typical areas. Meanwhile in the case of Syria the evidence for the identification of the posts is not adequate for more than the detection of the overall pattern.

It will be desirable, in view of the emphasis in later chapters on northern Syria, to give our fullest treatment to the units assigned by the Notitia to the dux Syriae, in the most northerly sector of the Syrian limes. We have a variety of material to help us over the identification of the posts in question. Some are listed in the Geography of Ptolemy, whose figures for latitude and longitude, despite the scientific limitations of his day and centuries of manuscript transmission, are surprisingly reliable. Then, as with Lower Egypt, the ancient itineraries prove useful, here especially the Peutinger Table. Thirdly, some chapters of Procopius' De Aedificiis provide very approximate locations for some obscure stations. Lastly,

one important source is the apparent survival of the ancient name, in several cases, in the modern Arabic one -- such as 'Acadama' in 'Jabal Aqdam'. This evidence taken together enables us to locate, either exactly or approximately, 8 of the 12 names in the laterculum maius and one of the 6 of the laterculum minus, consequently a total of 9 out of 18. Such a proportion might appear to make generalization somewhat hazardous. But it becomes possible, once we allow the two not unreasonable assumptions that the location of the troops of the laterculum maius may be taken as representative of that of all the units under the dux Syriae and that 8 out of 12 does, unlike one in two, form an adequate basis for generalization.²⁸

What we find is that these eight stations form a network with a substantial west-east as well as north-south extension lying in the south-eastern area of northern Syria between the cities of Callinicum and Palmyra, its western line situated at a consistent distance of approximately 100 kilometres from the line of north Syrian cities running from Hierapolis through Beroea and Chalcis to

Emesa and Laodicea. The army of Egypt was concentrated on a few arteries; but here the limitanei were scattered over a broad area. The obscurity, for us, of so many of the Syrian stations is one consequence of this, since far fewer of them are included in the itineraries.

In this area of the north Syrian limes the only city to be found in the lists of Hierocles and George of Cyprus is Resapha-Sergiopolis, which only achieved city status under Anastasius. So here again we find the limitanei stationed in the area of slightest urbanization. But in this case no conclusion can be drawn as to the existence of a policy to keep the army in the countryside: this area was the only frontier region in northern Syria and so the inevitable choice for this part of the limes from strategic considerations alone.²⁹.

Moving southwards, the next section of the Syrian limes is that of the dux Phoenicae. In contrast to its northern neighbour, the narrowness of the agricultural belt at this point makes this zone coincide with an urbanized area. As a consequence we find that of the 26 military stations listed in the Notitia two reappear among the four cities of the region. Here weight was given to purely strategic consid-

erations. On the other hand, attention must be directed to the two cities which were not chosen for military posts -- Heliopolis and Damascus. Heliopolis was not of strategic importance, but Damascus, which the emperor Julian describes as 'the eye of the whole Orient', had, after Palmyra, the most important location, as far as communications were concerned, of the whole region.^{30.}

From Phoenice we proceed southwards to the zone of the dux Arabiae. Here the city lists give the large total of 18 cities, in addition to a considerable area where the absence of cities made conglomerations of villages the administrative units. None of these were at any great distance from the frontier, with the consequence that all required local defence. If we now turn to the Notitia for this region, we find 21 forts. Of these only three coincide with cities.^{31.}

The most southern section of the Syrian limes is that of the dux Palaestinae. This coincides with the Palestine III of Hierocles and George, or Palaestina Salutaris. Here, excluding one late creation, the city lists give a total of 10 cities, of which five fall in the southern and most

exposed half of the province. Of these, four, including three of the southern five, reappear among the 29 military stations listed in the relevant section of the Notitia. It is surprising to find that Petra, the metropolis of the province, was not a military station, although in the southern sector.³²

The physiognomy of the Syrian limes has now emerged. Of the 94 military posts named for the whole area only 9 were in the cities of the region. If the troops had automatically been stationed in the cities, as being the places most deserving of defence, the figure would have been not 9 but 42. In addition, we have pointed to certain cities, such as Damascus, where a garrison might have seemed inevitable but in fact did not exist. Unfortunately, the unknown location of so many of the military posts makes it impossible to draw a comprehensive picture of the choice of rural stations, and without this the overall situation must remain to some extent obscure. But, in the light of the conclusions invited by the richer evidence for Lower Egypt, it will seem reasonable to suppose that in Syria too the curious avoidance of the cities was no accident, but the consequence of a policy to keep the army, for the greater part, out of the cities and in the countryside.

There remains for discussion the limes of the Thebaid. Here, excepting the oases of the desert, we find a total of 41 military units, with the names of all their stations save one. Meanwhile, we learn from the city lists that the region contained 20 cities. But, after Lower Egypt, the degree of overlap is at first very surprising: we find no fewer than 15 units in a total of 12 different cities. Was this necessitated by overriding strategic requirements? The effective defence of the Thebaid was, indeed, a matter of very grave importance. The danger to Syria and Lower Egypt of foreign invasion was only potential, but the reality of the constant threat to the peace and prosperity of the Thebaid from the surrounding Blemyes and Nubians is shown both by the very serious wars in the latter part of the reign of Theodosius II and by the more stray references to similar troubles in the fourth century. Nor did these attacks come from a single direction: enemies could invade from across the desert at numerous points both west and east. The region of Atripe, near Panopolis in the northern half of the province, was less exposed than most; but in the pages of Schenuti it derives

from its position no security against the most devastating attack. In these circumstances, the requirements for effective defence are not unlikely to have been virtually the sole factor in the selection of military posts. The detailed information in the Notitia enables us to test whether this was so.^{33.}

Self-evidently, the southern half of the province lay more exposed to attack than the northern. This is reflected in the overall lay-out of the posts: for thirteen units of the laterculum maius known to have been stationed in the Upper Thebaid, there are only three in the Lower. We find these three all located in cities, which is at first surprising, but in the event makes strategic sense. The major route from the desert ran north from the Oasis Maior to a point just by the city of Lycopolis; from here the route most tempting to an invader ran northwards up the west bank of the Nile, where the first two stations after Lycopolis in the Antonine Itinerary are the cities of Cusae and Hermupolis. It is these three cities in which the three units were located, while the units of the laterculum minus kept to the villages.^{34.}

In the Upper Thebaid the military coverage was more comprehensive, but here too there were points of particular stress. On the loop in the Nile in the northern part of this sector, major routes through the eastern desert terminated at the cities of Caenopolis and Coptos: we are not surprised to find two units of the laterculum maius at both points. Meanwhile, at the particularly exposed southern extremity of the province we find a concentration of three military posts. For an effective defence it was essential to hold the road down the right bank of the Nile which linked these two concentrations. Here the Antonine Itinerary lists five intermediate stations, three of which are cities: we find military posts at all of these with the exception of one of the cities.³⁵

If we set aside the posts out in the western oases, there now remains for discussion only one sector of the limes -- the stretch along the west bank of the Nile from the beginning of the loop down to the immediate region of the southern frontier. Here the Itinerary lists ten stations: six of these, and in addition one intermediate

locality, were military posts. Hitherto the location of units in cities has been explicable as a mere accident resulting from the priority accorded to the overall strategic requirements. But at this point the position changes. Of the Itinerary's 10 stations exactly half are cities: these turn out to house no fewer than 6 of the 8 military units in this sector. It is clear that here the location of units in cities was no accident: we must suppose that along the west bank, in contrast to the east, the demand was simply and solely for a local defence naturally concentrated in the centres of wealth and high population density.³⁶

If this can be proved for the west bank, it becomes reasonable to suppose that the requirements for the immediately local defence of the chief localities was also a factor operative in the rest of the Upper Thebaid. It is to be concluded that here the serious danger of foreign attack on any number of possible points led to a reversal of the policy that held elsewhere of keeping the army, where possible, out of the cities.

2. THE COMITATUS

The evidence for the choice of military stations is naturally far thinner and less direct in the case of the comitatus, or field army, which, in our area, was stationed in northern Syria under the command of the magister militum per Orientem: there is no list of its camps in the Notitia, and none of the historians pay attention to the location of the comitatenses outside actual campaigns.^{37.}

Modern writers have turned for aid to the pages of the Theodosian Code, where one would expect information on what is in effect a detail of administration. Effectively all it contains on this topic is a few titles devoted to the quartering of soldiers in the cities, which clearly gave rise to a number of abuses such as the Codes love in their ineffectual way to dwell on. The conclusion has been drawn quite regularly that the soldiers of the comitatus wintered in the cities.^{38.}

Unfortunately, a somewhat closer scrutiny makes it plain that these constitutions are concerned not with the choice of the regular quarters for the comitatenses

whenever they were not out on campaign, but with the purely temporary lodging of soldiers on the march. Admittedly, most of these laws are so vaguely worded as to seem ambiguous to the modern reader, but the odd phrase or injunction in this constitution or that shows that the whole has a restricted application. This is most often clear from the phrases used to refer to the soldiers enjoying quartering: twice they are referred to as 'transeuntes', and in one law explicitly as 'soldiers returning from campaign or setting out to war'. Then there is the constitution against various abuses of the system that concedes the bare right of compulsory quartering on condition 'that the journey be swift and continuous in all cases, and that no traveller be allowed to linger, lest the length of his stay should disturb the estate in any way'. Another consideration is that certain of these laws set up special exemptions from quartering for particular categories of building, such as places of worship or the private residences of officials of the highest rank, which one cannot believe can ever have been threatened with permanent or prolonged transformation into military barracks.^{39.}

At the beginning of Ammianus' account of the revolt of Procopius we hear of two detachments on their way to urgent service in Thrace who 'were to stay in Constantinople for two days as was habitual'.⁴⁰ It is surely this type of temporary quartering with which the Theodosian Code is here concerning itself; on the question of interest to us, namely the location of the permanent winter camps or quarters for the comitatenses, it has precisely nothing to say. The obvious explanation for this omission is that the soldiers of the comitatus wintered in permanent military camps reserved for their exclusive use, a system that would not find its way into the Codes, since such a matter of purely military organization did not provide those opportunities for dishonesty and resentment that led relations between the military machine and the civilian population to be well-covered in the Codes. And, quite apart from the treatment in the Codes, one would expect the comitatenses to have had permanent camps of their own, to return to quite regularly after the campaigning season. It was absurd to imagine that the soldiers of the field army were regularly herded into the great cities where they could only be housed by extensive billeting among the local population.

But it would be unfair to give the impression that this view was based solely on a misunderstanding of the Theodosian Code. For the system of billeting it is indeed our essential evidence, but the view that, whatever our prior expectations on military grounds, the comitatenses did winter in the great cities has in its support testimony both direct and categorical in Zosimus. According to this careless, but not fantastical, historian, the emperor Constantine withdrew most of the army from the frontier limites -- that is, on creating a special field army -- 'and placed them in the cities that did not need protection, stripping those that were threatened by the barbarians and imposing on the peaceful cities the destructive influence of the military'. 'As a consequence', our writer continues, 'already most of the cities have become desolate, and the soldiery, abandoning itself to the theatres and other luxuries, debilitated'. The animus of this passage against the Christian empire is all too clear and elsewhere pagan writers, including Zosimus himself, choose to give quite different explanations of the alleged decline of the cities and the army, but the statement of fact as to the location

of the field army seems at first too definite to be dismissed. But generalizations in the ancient historians of the Roman empire are notoriously untrustworthy: they felt no scruple over a general statement even where they had only one case in mind. We must, then, proceed to study the particular evidence for each possible location without using Zosimus to weight the scales.⁴¹

It is not only Zosimus who draws our first attention to the city of Antioch, as being the greatest of the peaceful cities of Syria. It is well known that it was here that the magister militum per Orientem had his permanent headquarters; so too did subordinate generals of the Syrian comitatus.⁴² We must inquire whether some portion of their army was also quartered in the city.

It is clear from the treatment in Libanius' Antiochikos of the revolt at Seleuceia in the time of Diocletian that no part of the army was stationed at Antioch at the beginning of the fourth century. But one might expect the position to have changed in about the year 333, when there was the start of major hostilities with Persia, involving a military influx into northern Syria and the

use of Antioch as his headquarters by the Caesar (soon Augustus) Constantius. This exceptional military concentration continued, with only short interruptions, for over four decades, until the Balkan campaign of 378.⁴³ Did a part of the imperial army regularly winter in Antioch itself? There is one piece of evidence that may suggest it did. Libanius in a speech delivered in 360 refers with pride to the role of the city at the time of the first outbreak, in the early 330s, of the Persian war: 'at a time when so many regiments were stationed in the city ... , each inhabitant housed a soldier with pleasure'. If there was at this time a large military presence in Antioch itself, one might expect the same to have true throughout the years of campaign of the following decades.⁴⁴

But even this passage may perhaps suggest a contrary view. The inconvenience for the local population, in the matter of food as well as accommodation, in a large and constant military presence is obvious, and Libanius with his anti-military bias would have been specially conscious of it. It is scarcely credible that he would have selected such a burden for complacent panegyric in a speech on the

glories of his native city that is striking for its idealization, and avoidance of all harsh realities. The implication is that the burden of this time was exceptional and did not long continue. And this conclusion may be supported in detail from the other evidence.

For the period of Julian's stay in Antioch in the autumn and winter of 362/3 our information is somewhat less thin than usual. We learn from the emperor's own Misopogon that during his stay the city was full of strangers because of himself and the imperial officials with him. The implication is that the burden on Antioch was caused by these, their bodyguards and staff, rather than by a presence in the city of a substantial number of comitatenses, who would have deserved a separate mention. There are similar hints too in Ammianus. This source informs us of drunken soldiery in Antioch at this time who had to be carried back from the temples 'to their own lodgings', after attending Julian's sacrifices. He adds that the worst of these for drunken and disorderly behaviours were the Petulantes and Celtae; these were picked troops, ranking above the legiones comitatenses, who had accompanied Julian

from Gaul. No other military presence in Antioch is referred to by Ammianus. The implication is that the military presence that irked the Antiochenes was not one of ordinary army units but of small select detachments that accompanied the imperial suite as its military escort.⁴⁵

The same certainly happened on the return of the army into Syria after the debacle of Julian's Persian expedition: we learn from Zosimus that Jovian took into Antioch with him only his guardsmen. For the Caesar Gallus' more prolonged stay in the preceding decade the argument returns to implications from Ammianus: we gather that the troops lodged in Antioch which lynched the praetorian prefect and quaestor of the palace consisted of palatine scholae -- that is, Gallus' own guard.⁴⁶

The forty-five years of prolonged hostilities with Persia must have proved a heavy burden on the city of Antioch, even if the emperors in conscious compensation showered the city with munificent buildings. Not the least part of this burden was the presence inside the city itself, outside the months of campaigning, of emperors, Caesars, their staffs and guards.⁴⁷ But it appears that rarely

if ever, was any substantial section of the army quartered with them in the city. The passage from Libanius on the extensive billeting that accompanied Constantius' first arrival in the city must be taken to record a quite exceptional state of affairs or, better still perhaps, interpreted as merely recording in exaggerated fashion the first, perhaps most chaotic, billeting in the city of the imperial guard.

This conclusion also provides a reasonable argument a fortiori in regard to the question of a military presence in Antioch between 378 and the close of our period, a time of virtually uninterrupted peace with Persia and no imperial visits. If during the years of heavy military concentration in northern Syria the only troops lodged regularly, or perhaps at all, in the city were the detachments of the imperial guard, we would not expect any military presence there during this subsequent period. To test this expectation one must turn to the evidence for the 380s, the last decade where the speeches of Libanius, briefly reinforced by the Antiochene sermons of St. John Chrysostom, shed their exceptional light on the history of the city. If their evidence on this topic is indirect and to some extent vague

and confused, sufficient information does emerge from it.

In 387 occurred the quite exceptional riot of the statues, which took on the semblance of a revolt. We learn from Libanius that the unit whose job it was to put down the riot was a force of archers maintained by the city, that is to say a municipal armed police. They were in this case aided by soldiers selected from the regiments of the comitatus, under the command of the Comes Orientis, who had full authority in Antioch. Now the fact that it was said to be the duty of the archers and not of these troops to put down the revolt and also that they arrived later than the archers, despite the dilatoriness of the latter that so angered Libanius, suggests that these comitatenses were not stationed in Antioch itself, but rather in its immediate neighbourhood.⁴⁸ This seems to be confirmed when we turn to the situation during the aftermath of the riot. Libanius, in his speech directed against those who had fled from the city and hesitated to return even after reassurances by the imperial commissioners sent specially from Constantinople, mentions as one of their excuses that the city 'had become like a fort'. This suggests a substantial military presence, but the reference could be merely to

some detachment that accompanied the commissioners as their bodyguard. It is this latter interpretation that is dictated by the evidence from John Chrysostom's 'Homilies on the Statues'. This writer refers frequently to the danger of the city being handed over to the army for destruction: as when he writes, 'when any comer announced that soldiers have encircled the city and are about to plunder its wealth ...', this threat is of an attack from the countryside, not by any troops stationed in Antioch itself. The implication is that the city contained no significant body of troops.⁴⁹ And since it would be implausible to suggest that troops were actually withdrawn from Antioch because of the riot, it follows that there cannot have been any significant military presence in the city during the more typical period before it.

By 392, however, the position had changed: a speech of Libanius dated to this year testifies explicitly to the presence in the city of a military detachment. The obvious deduction is that the final settlement after the riot included the stationing in the city of a military garrison, so that any riot in future could be nipped in the bud. But even

here there is no substantial military presence: it is a single detachment, and the worst Libanius can charge it with is rowdiness and dishonesty in public houses. We have no information as to how long this detachment remained in Antioch; but the most probable suggestion in the light of the evidence for the preceding hundred years would be that the absence of fresh riots led to a fairly swift withdrawal.⁵⁰

The picture that finally emerges as to a military presence in Antioch during the various divisions of our period has a certain simplicity and consistency. As is shown, above all, by the Libanian evidence relating to the Diocletianic period and that from Chrysostom on the aftermath of the riot of 387, under normal conditions the city did not house any military units. There were, however, two exceptional periods in the fourth century. One of these was short and of little importance: the city was given, temporarily, a small garrison during the last years of Theodosius I. The other claims more attention: for thirty of the forty-five years between 333 and 378 there was a concentration of troops in northern Syria and, in

the winter months, an imperial presence in Antioch; the city received not only the Augusti and Caesars, but a substantial guard with them. The fact remains that even under these circumstances ordinary detachments of comitatenses were not quartered in the city.

There remains the question of where exactly soldiers quartered in Antioch were housed, and whether the majority were lodged in barracks or billeted among the local population. On this point there is invaluable information in a chapter of Theodoret's Ecclesiastical History -- where we read of a holy man walking out from the city to 'the military training-ground'. Theodoret attempts to inform us in detail on the topography, but his exposition is so poor as to leave the precise details unclear. But the essential points come across: just north of the city was the imperial palace, and the training-ground to the north or west of the latter, out among fields but still in walking distance from the city. Now it is true that Theodoret writes of a training-ground not a barracks, but here one may deduce the one from the other. In order to visit the soldiers the holy man does not call on them in any quarters either within the city or somewhere outside distinct from

the place of exercise itself: the implications are, first that their quarters cannot have been within the city itself, and secondly that they were in all probability just by the training-ground. Finally, one can add that there are also references to this training-ground in Libanius, though without the same detail of topographical information.^{51.}

On the question of the regularity of the use of this site, one common feature of the ancient references to its use will strike us as significant: Theodoret's holy man paid his visit at a time when the emperor Valens was staying in the city, the first of the two Libanian references is concerned with the time of Julian's stay, and the second deals with the hypothetical situation if the emperor Theodosius were to visit the city. In the light of our discussion above it is clear that this training-ground and barracks were not for the use of some regular portion of the Syrian field army, but that of the picked detachments that accompanied the emperor as his guard; as we mentioned incidentally, the imperial palace was nearby.

The existence of these military quarters just outside the city may suggest that no soldiers of the imperial guard that accompanied the emperor to Antioch were lodged within

the city-walls. However, a passage in Ammianus' account of Julian's stay in the city tells of soldiers being conveyed to their 'lodgings', or 'inns', (diversoria), a term that could not possibly be used of barracks.⁵² But it remains the case that the existence of this military camp beyond the imperial palace must have very substantially reduced the number of soldiers who had to be billeted on the Antiochene population. A deduction may be hazarded as to the date of construction of these barracks: if according to Libanius very extensive billeting was necessary in 333 and all the references to the training-ground fall in the 360s and 380s, the explanation might well be that it was set up between these two dates, as soon as it became clear that the Persian war, and so the imperial presence, was to be of long duration.

If the regular detachments of the Syrian field army were never quartered at Antioch, there are two possible explanations that invite themselves: either the comitatenses wintered in a quite different region, most plausibly further to the east and nearer the imperial frontiers, or alternatively

the city was specially exempted because of the policy we detected in Egypt to keep the army where possible out of the cities. The choice between these two will be determined by whether or not detachments of the field army were stationed in the countryside around the city. It is to this next possible location of our so far elusive quarry that we should now turn.

We saw that the riot in Antioch of 387 was put down partly by soldiers 'selected from the regiments' who promptly entered the city at the command of the Comes Orientis. It is clear that these regiments must have been stationed in the countryside within quick reach of the city. We saw too that Chrysostom's congregation in the city were terrified by rumours that soldiers had surrounded the city and were about to sack it: these wild rumours would have been much facilitated, had detachments of the comitatenses been encamped around the city. But there is more direct evidence on this point, and such that is quite conclusive. First, Libanius' De Patrociniis, (dated to about 390), to be discussed in detail in a later chapter, testifies to military detachments being quartered in the villages of

the Syrian countryside, including villages in the plain of Antioch, such as one on an estate belonging to Libanius himself. Secondly, one of the constitutions in the Theodosian Code, dated to 398, forbids the pasturage of animals by the army on privately owned fields in the territorium of Antioch. It is, then, certain that detachments of the Syrian field army were quartered in a number of villages in the Antiochene countryside -- at least in the 380s and 390s, the period to which this evidence happens to refer. What of the remaining decades of our period? For the first half of the fifth century, the evidence in the Lives of St. Simeon Stylites suggests that the position remained the same, especially where we read of the saint's body being conveyed from a point in the eastern extremity of the territorium of Antioch to the city itself by 'an infinite army of soldiers'. As regards the earlier period, that of the Persian wars, it might be suggested that winter quarters near Antioch would have been at too great a distance from the area of campaigning. However, considering the exceptionally large number of detachments that had to winter in Syria and the fact that the burden of provisioning them is known to have weighed

heavily on the Antiochenes, it is reasonable to suppose that, just as the emperor and his large bodyguard chose to winter in Antioch rather than, say, Hierapolis, detachments of comitatenses wintered in the surrounding countryside.^{53.}

For the exact location of comitatenses in the rest of Syria, we have no comparable evidence, and the argument must largely have recourse to considerations of probability, and reasoning by analogy from the Antiochene area. There is, however, one new class of ancient material on which some scholars have laid predominant weight -- the archaeological evidence for the area between Chalcis and Palmyra. During the period of the French mandate in Syria, Fathers Mouterde and Poidebard made a careful study of the Roman ruins above ground in northern Syria. They concluded that from the Principate through to the Arab conquest there existed, east and south from Chalcis, a complex network of forts and military roads. A more recent writer has concluded that it must have been here that the Syrian field army was concentrated.^{54.} One should add that much of this area falls into the province of the dux Syriae, and here military installations prove nothing about the comitatenses; however, no identified forts listed in the

Notitia under the dux are located in the western part of this area, that enclosed by Chalcis, Apamea, Seriane and Barbalissus: so it is here that we must look closely for physical traces of the field army. And our use of the evidence collected by these archaeologists must also be limited chronologically, and not merely because our period is shorter than theirs: only the traces relating to the fourth and fifth centuries will prove anything here, since this period is cut off from those on both sides of it, on the one hand by Constantine's sweeping military reforms and on the other by the reorganization of the Syrian limes under Justinian. With these two substantial limitations, it will be useful to list the whole of this evidence that relates immediately to installations of defence.⁵⁵ One should add that this list has to be treated with some caution, because of the disadvantages that attend archaeological investigation without excavation. On the one hand, Mouterde and Poidebard's dating is so hesitant as to be obviously insecure; on the other, they admit with disconcerting frankness that they have often been uncertain as to which buildings were, in fact, military. But accepting their statements of probability

as verities, we arrive at the following list:^{56.}

(1) Tūrīn, which lies two thirds of the way along the road from Apamea to Antioch. (Strictly this falls into the Antiochene region that I have treated separately; but Mouterde and Poidebard allow their limes to stretch as far west as this.) The evidence is two inscriptions, dating to 364/5 and 395, which testify to the presence here of one soldier of the Ioviani and a family of Lanciarii -- names of several regiments known to have existed in the comitatus. Unfortunately, however, the lists in the Notitia show that, whereas regiments with these names were included in the comitatus praesentalis and also in Illyricum and Thrace, there were none to be found in the Syrian comitatus. It follows that these soldiers are retired veterans whose presence proves nothing about the location of whole and active regiments.^{57.}

(2) Ghūr, on the road from Apamea to Emesa. Here we find a watch-tower 'of apparently the third or fourth century'.

(3) Jūsa-l-ʿAmar, half way along the road from Emesa to Heliopolis. Here we find a small fort a part of which 'evokes, it seems, the fifth century'.

(4) Tamak, which lies two thirds of the way along the road from Apamea to Occariba. Here a tower 'appears to date to the fourth century or the end of the third'.

(5) Khazzana, in the area immediately south-east from Chalcis. Here we find a small fort of the 'third or fourth century'.

(6) Burj Sbanna, in the same area as the preceding. Here again there is a small fort 'probably of the third or fourth century'.

(7) Qlay^ca, in the same area again. Our authors date part of the citadel here to the fourth or fifth centuries.

What is one to say of this miserable list? The grand total consists -- omitting the bogus case of Turin -- of six constructions for defensive purposes, all of the most minor character, and of which four are allowed a dating in the third century, before the virtual creation of the field army under Constantine. Perhaps still more devastating than this numerical count is the consideration that none of these fortlets need be more than installations for local security without any regular military presence.⁵⁸

The archaeological material assembled by Mouterde and Poidebard fails then to prove, or even to suggest, a concen-

tration, or even the mere presence, of detachments of the field army in the area they name the limes of Chalcis. On the other hand, its extreme paucity must not be used in support of a negative conclusion, since these writers' similar material for the more eastern region where the limitanei are known to have been concentrated is no less exiguous. Two causes of this deserve mention. First, the archaeological material, apart from inscriptions, for northern Syria in the Roman and Byzantine periods that survives above ground in regions that have been continually inhabited is sparse and widely scattered in location and date. Secondly, if the datings profered by Mouterde and Poidebard are anything to go on, our period of the fourth and fifth centuries saw much less building in their region for purposes of defence than either the second and third centuries or the sixth.

We must return, then, to the literary evidence for information as to the location in Syria of the comitatenses that were not encamped in the area round Antioch. Since this virtually deprives us of evidence from the Antiochene

writers, and the historians were not interested in the organization of the army outside military operations, the material here is exiguous in the extreme. But there are two particular references that provide us with the essentials. The Arcadian constitution in the Theodosian Code forbidding the military appropriation of pastures refers specifically not only to pastures near Antioch but also to the municipally owned pasture-lands of Apamea. This proves that detachments of the field army were stationed in the south-west quarter of northern Syria, despite its considerable distance from the frontier. Secondly, we learn from a variety of sources that during the Persian wars the centre where the army assembled was Hierapolis, the city roughly due east of Antioch near the Euphrates. It follows that many detachments of the Syrian field army must have been stationed in the adjoining area of northmost Syria; and since, in the detailed accounts of the route followed against the Persians in Ammianus and elsewhere, one regular feature is a march into Mesopotamia via Hierapolis, this is just what we would expect.^{59.}

The field army was, then, widely scattered over north-western Syria -- though not, one would guess, in the eastern

region where the limitanei were stationed: one clear principle in the choice of military stations in the Late Empire was the avoidance of unnecessary concentrations of troops in one region, since these would make military provisioning so much harder -- a consideration of particular importance in regions, such as that in question here, that were not rich in agricultural produce.

One further question remains: were the detachments regularly, as at Antioch, stationed not in the cities but in the adjoining countryside? On this point the nearest there is to direct evidence is Libanius' claim that military detachments in the territories of all the cities practised rural patronage in the same way that they did in the vicinity of Antioch.⁶⁰ One may observe in addition that it is hard to imagine why Antioch should have been exceptional in this respect. So we may conclude that, in all likelihood, the policy of keeping the army in the countryside held just as much in these regions as it did almost everywhere else. But one particularity deserves to be mentioned: cities like Hierapolis that were on the regular line of march in the Persian wars must have been burdened

much more heavily than Antioch with the temporary billeting of troops 'returning from a campaign or setting out to war'.

It is time to return to the passage of Zosimus that, above all, has in the past obscured the true picture. This historian draws a picture of the new Constantinian army wallowing in the cities at a huge distance from the frontiers, and thereby rendering the richest regions desolate.⁶¹ There can be no question of preferring such biased generalization to the detailed Antiochene evidence; but it is worth inquiring of what aspect of the true picture this is a distortion. We found that the Syrian comitatus was not concentrated in eastern Syria and Mesopotamia, but spread in addition over a large area to the west, even including the area south of Antioch which was particularly far from the frontier and very heavily urbanized. In these regions the army was a heavy burden on the cities, not because detachments were regularly billeted on them, but because of the expense of provisioning the soldiery. If this is not what Zosimus says, it is not very far from it. In so far as he is thinking of the Orient, it is this situation to which he must be referring. It

may also be observed that of certain other regions of the empire, notably Thrace, where the army did winter in the cities, his picture is nearer to the truth: if its erroneous-ness lies not in careless elaboration but in false generalization, the true facts that underlie his statements may well have nothing to do with the Orient at all.

It was our conclusion that in the stationing of the limitanei there was a deliberate policy to keep the units, as far as the needs of defence allowed, in the countryside and away from the cities. The material for the study of the location of the Syrian comitatus is in contrast very sparse, but the detailed evidence for Antioch allows the conclusion that here too the same policy prevailed. Now that we have established the policy's range of application, it is time to draw some preliminary conclusions as to its exact character and purpose.

But first, one more observation deserves to be made regarding the location of the limitanei. If we divide the units according to which of the two latercula each one occurs on, a curious distinction emerges: of a total for all of Syria and Egypt of 33 units that were harboured in the

cities, no fewer than 25 belong to the laterculum maius. This striking fact must be accounted for in any view of the nature of the policy under discussion as it applied to the limitanei. And of such possible views there are two that stand forward as strong candidates.⁶²

First, it could be suggested that this disproportion in the stationing of the units of the two different latercula is to be explained in terms of a more limited application of the policy than we have suggested -- namely, that it was exclusively the laterculum minus that it had in mind. Such a limitation would be inexplicable if the purpose of the policy was to safeguard the tranquillity of the cities from military interruption. It would follow that its purpose was, more positively, to enable the units of the laterculum minus to fulfil some particular function in the countryside. And the reason for the exclusion of the laterculum maius would evidently be that the function in question was not a military one and was therefore uniquely entrusted to the inferior units, whose quality as purely fighting regiments was not so carefully prized.

The alternative view would be that the policy in question applied to all the units in theory, but that disproportion arose in practice for the reason that, when strategic

considerations of rare and overriding importance demanded the exceptional placing of a military unit in a city, it was usually a unit of the laterculum maius that was selected because of its superior calibre.

The choice between these two views will be determined principally by what we find to be the role of the limitanei in the countryside, -- which means, in the event, the evidence of the Abinnaeus archive, the subject of a later chapter. But here there is one observation that makes possible an interim verdict. A general policy to keep the army out of the cities would account equally for the rural location of the comitatenses. In contrast, the first of these views would require an entirely independent, and indeed novel, explanation of this phenomenon. Despite the complexities of human life, it is natural, in history as well as the exact sciences, to prefer the simpler of two alternative explanations. But fortunately, we can, in the case before us, wait for the unequivocal verdict of the papyri.⁶³

But for the purposes of our subject, still more important than this controversial matter is the mere fact that, as it has transpired, the soldiers of the Late Roman Orient were largely resident in the countryside. The high command was

based on major cities such as Antioch; in a search for the role played in this region by the magistri, comites and duces, it is the cities that obviously demand attention. In contrast, it is among the villages of the countryside that we must devote our principal investigation of the role of the subordinate officers and common soldiery. The shape our study must take is now clear to us.

II

MILITARY PATRONAGE IN THE SYRIAN COUNTRYSIDE1. THE SYRIAN COUNTRYSIDE

A discussion of the role of the military in the Syrian countryside requires as a preface a study of the patterns and conditions of Syrian rural life. This is not altogether fortunate, since the evidence is such that simplification can lead to serious distortion in a variety of directions, while the complexities that emerge from a more discriminating approach are easier to map than account for.

It is customary to start with the distinction drawn explicitly by Libanius between villages which belonged to a single large landowner and villages whose land was divided between a number of small proprietors. We will find that rural patronage blurred the simplicity of this division, but it remains important enough to justify a separate treatment of the two.¹

The single owner of a Syrian village during our period

must not be thought of as a feudal magnate, lording it over his serfs from a castle dominating the village: for the Syrian landlord was essentially a city-dweller whose interest in the countryside was almost purely financial. J. Weulersse has made the same point admirably in relation to modern Syria. There the large landowners possess country houses on their estates, but spend almost the entire year in the cities which are their true home; these cities, which are, historically, alien entities imposed by foreigners rather than local concentrations that have developed through the synoecism of villages, are socially divided from the countryside they control, to such an extent that these constitute two different populations who co-exist within the same political circumscriptions without mixing. What evidence there is for the fourth and fifth centuries goes to show that the same was true then. Libanius expresses disgust towards 'those who busy themselves over the land, far away from cities, and live together with oxen', and in his little school-exercise in praise of farming can think of no sincerer compliment than that it is the countryside that supports and sustains that city life which is the 'glory

of the mainlands and islands'. For more direct evidence that the landlords did not live in the country one can turn to several passages in the homilies delivered in Antioch by St. John Chrysostom: perhaps the most indicative is one where he urges landowners to endow a church and priest on their estates with the argument that then they will have someone on the spot to protect and discipline their farm-workers and through dining with the overseers of neighbouring estates build up friendship and trust that will free their own villages from suspicion, should a murder or theft be committed.²

The landlord was on the whole, then, an absentee. The direction of his estates was left to what the sources call epitropoi or overseers. These were persons of some consequence whom we find, on occasion, recommended to provincial governors. They had as their duty the direct management of any 'domain' land and the general supervision of the coloni.³ Beneath the epitropoi we find the peasants themselves; these, on the whole, were coloni, or tenants, who farmed the land for whatever rent their masters chose to demand.⁴

J. Weulersse, in a work already referred to, has painted a markedly sombre picture of the life of the modern Syrian peasant. Oppressed by both the requirements of his master and the additional extortions of a bailiff keen to make his own fortune on the side, he lives a life that is not only almost on a subsistence level in economic terms, but is marked psychologically by a sense of helpless misery.⁵

For our period a similar picture is drawn in a well-known passage from a sermon of John Chrysostom's, which for a true evaluation requires full quotation:

'If one was to examine how the landowners treat their wretched peasants, one would see that they are more cruel than barbarians. They impose constant and intolerable charges and laborious services on those who toil the whole of their lives and yet pine with hunger; they allow them no respite or indulgence, but wear them out, whether the land they work on is productive or unproductive, using them as one would asses or mules or rather inanimate stones. What could be more pitiable than labourers, after a whole winter of exhausting toil in frost and rain and busy nights, returning home with empty hands and still in debt, but their hunger and ruin less terrifying to them than the oppression of the overseers, who are inexorable in imposing tasks on them and, should they fail to meet these demands, drag them to court to endure torture and imprisonment?'

In addition, they are paid for their work at the vine-harvest by a small cash sum rather than a share of the crop, and are given loans in their need at fifty per cent interest.⁶

Are we to accept this passage as giving a true picture of the life of Syrian coloni, or should we dismiss it as largely rhetorical exaggeration? Chrysostom's sermons are remarkable for their deeply felt but rational criticism of specific abuses in Antiochene life. On the other hand, this passage comes as simply one of a number of in part purely conventional illustrations of the theological commonplace of man's violation of God's law: in consequence, its subject is not really the average landowner, but the type of the unjust landowner. We must suppose that conditions were sometimes as this passage describes, but we need not imagine that they were so universally.

And before we are tempted to conclude that the fourth century colonus endured the same conditions of poverty as the modern fellah, we should also consider the very superior quality of Syrian agriculture in the Roman period. While

the modern peasant is unable to utilize river water for irrigation and makes scant use of water from wells, concentrating instead on dry culture, there is in our period abundant evidence for irrigation, even of river water.⁷

In addition, while the fellah concentrates on the essential but not highly profitable production of cereals, there was in ancient times extensive production, at least throughout the territory of Antioch, of vines, olives and other fruits, which yield a far greater return.⁸

But the question then arises how much of this wealth was left to the peasant after a great part had been drained away to the cities through rents and usury, or pocketed by dishonest overseers. Much of the evidence for village prosperity can be imagined to refer only to the free villages of many masters, but there is another passage from one of Chrysostom's sermons that cannot be so treated. In a homily devoted to the need for church-building in the countryside, he criticizes rich landowners for building their coloni baths and other secular buildings but neglecting their souls. 'Baths', he argues, 'enfeeble the peasantry, inns addict them to luxury, while...markets and

other places of assembly render them rebellious.'⁹

This picture of pampered peasants suffering the corruptions of luxury casts a new light on the condition of the Syrian coloni. How are we to account for such unexpected humanity in their masters?

Weulersse observed in modern Syria that the condition of the serf depends to a large extent on the nature of the crop he is made to farm. The production of cereals not only yields a small return but is so unskilled that it does not require the enthusiastic co-operation of the fellah. By contrast, the vastly more profitable farming of vines or olives, or the care of irrigation works, requires the devoted service of the peasant whose negligence will ruin his master. This devotion has to be bought by allowing the farmer to keep for himself a much higher proportion of the total yield.¹⁰ We have seen that this more developed agriculture was widely practised in ancient Syria, and so would expect at least a good proportion of the Syrian coloni to have enjoyed a favoured status with good living conditions. Does the evidence we have discussed conform to this? That some landlords

attempted to secure the loyalty of their coloni by extensive, even luxurious, building on their behalf fits well into this pattern, and indeed confirms it. In need of explanation is rather the fact that some coloni suffered severe oppression. One explanation in line with our argument would be that these were peasants who concentrated almost exclusively on cereal culture. Is there any reason to suppose that this was so? Chrysostom's oppressed coloni received loans (presumably in kind) at fifty per cent interest which they repaid from the harvest. Liebeschuetz has observed in this context that in Egypt such interest was commonly charged when loans of wheat were in question; this suggests that these coloni were also cereal growers. Moreover the work which they do in the vineyards is not as tenants, but as casual labourers called in to help with the harvest.¹¹

We should lastly consider the size of these coloni. Farmers for whom the master provides baths and inns are scarcely the single tenants of extensive farms, and neither are those subjected to the authority of overseers. But farmers whose debts can lead to court cases in the city give the impression of being more than the tenants of tiny

strips. There was, no doubt, considerable variation, but what little evidence there is suggests that the average Syrian colonus was a small farmer, but not some villein with only the tiniest strip to live on; and his status will have reflected this.¹²

In conclusion, one cannot but note that the evidence bearing directly on the Syrian colonus is far from extensive, but we are still enabled to deduce that at least in the late fourth century, and presumably throughout our period, he could hope to enjoy a prosperity undreamt of by the modern fellah, but also that there were very considerable variations, perhaps due largely to differences in the type of crop the peasant was entrusted with. As a result, coloni who were not at the top of the scale must frequently have been led to hope for better things, either through a new contract of service or indeed occasionally a new master; the situation was a perfect recipe for unrest and contention.

Of the two classes of village which Libanius distinguishes

the other is that of 'large villages which belong to many masters'. The phrase itself does not exclude the masters in question being a number of large landowners each of whom own and rent out a part of the village, but the fact that we find, in the same section of the speech, inhabitants of a village of this type paying their tax contributions direct to the curial collectors, without the intermediation of landlords, shows that they are independent farmers who own as well as cultivate their land.^{13.}

On the question of the prosperity and degree of real independence of these free villages, the view most widely accepted today is based on the researches of Georges Tchalenko into the archaeology of the Limestone Massif in the eastern extremity of the territorium of Antioch. His conclusions as to the development of village life in this area during our period deserves to be recapitulated.^{14.}

The Limestone Massif stands out from the plain of Antioch by reason of its aridity, which makes cereal culture only possible in a few valleys; on the other hand, almost the whole of its surface is suited to olive culture, and its eastern slopes to viniculture as well. Therefore under peaceful conditions, when regular and extensive trade is

possible with the cereal growing plains to the west and east, it is possible for it to support a populous and flourishing rural life, on account of that rare profitability of olive culture that has been mentioned above.^{15.}

During the period of the Principate this region was little developed, and it is reasonable to suppose that it depended essentially on that subsistence agriculture in which cereal culture must play the chief part. But, from the end of the fourth century down into the sixth, the ever increasing number of houses and villages, as well as the particular evidence for oil presses, bears witness to a steady development away from mixed culture towards virtually a monoculture of the olive. The feature of this development most interesting in this context is not however simply the increase of population and wealth, but a curious evolution by which formerly sizeable estates were broken up into smaller units and villages previously owned by a single magnate developed into communities where a number of more modest proprietors lived together on equal terms.^{16.}

Let us take as one example of this social development the village of Bamuqqa on the Jabal Barisha, not far south of the main road from Antioch to Chalcis. For the first

three centuries of our era, there was on this site simply a small, but luxurious, villa, together with a small number of dependent buildings. But from the fourth through to the sixth century there developed, at a slight distance from the villa, fifteen or sixteen distinct farmhouses, modest in their proportions, but altogether more substantial and better built than humble peasant cottages. The archaeological remains cannot prove that the inhabitants were not the dependents of the owner of the villa, but the obvious wealth of the village, as well as the slighter evidence of its location, suggests strongly that they enjoyed considerable independence, whatever their legal status. Another, rather different, example is the village of Beḥyo on the Jabal il Aʿla to the west. Unlike Bamuqqa, this village did not come into existence before the fifth century, because the ground was too arid for cereals, but then, with the development of olive monoculture, we find houses of all ranks being built, from villas to humble cottages.¹⁷

This phenomenon clearly invited explanation in terms of the needs and potentialities of olive culture; in this it is not dissimilar from the pattern we observed among the

coloni of the great estates. But the farmers here are in certain ways significantly different from the pampered peasants of St. John Chrysostom; for the greater amplitude and more individual character of their dwellings suggests a fuller independence and an economic position altogether superior to that of the ordinary peasant, whether tied or free, of the regions of older wealth.¹⁸

One might, for two reasons, have expected these farmers to have been under the firm control of landlords. First, we can actually see some of the villages into which they conglomerated arising on land that at least before had belonged to single large estates, and presumably this was the usual pattern, even if some of the previously unused land may not have been claimed by any owner hitherto. Secondly, since newly planted olive trees take ten to twelve years before they bear fruit, the new plantations will have required, at first, the financial backing that implies the involvement of the wealthy.

It is these facts which provide the basis of the explanation of the farmers' greater independence that Tchalenko

proposes: he suggests that the owners of the original villas must have developed their lands through some system very similar to that employed nowadays in the Arab world under the name of mughārasa. By this, a farmer plants olive trees on an estate, whose owner supports him until they begin to bear fruit; then the estate is divided into two halves, one of which is kept by the proprietor, while the farmer is given full ownership of the other. As a result, the proprietor finds his income from the estate greatly increased, while the farmer becomes the owner of a modest, but valuable, holding. We may agree with Tchalenko that some system like this, by which fresh labour was attracted to the region on very favourable terms, provides part of the explanation of the break-up of the old estates of the Massif; but such a system could account by itself only for the halving of the estates, not for the far more extensive partitioning that we have before us.^{19.}

Perhaps the additional factor was a process by which the estates of the erstwhile magnates were divided up between their descendants into ever smaller parts. Tchalenko observes that the inhabitants of the villas of the Principate

were not comparable to the great landlords of wealthy areas: their properties were much smaller, and, above all, they actually resided on their estates and farmed their own land. Hence, in their pattern of life, they will really have been glorified peasants.²⁰ Now studies of more modern agricultural societies in various parts of the world point to two social developments among well-to-do peasants under the conditions of rapid expansion. First, since it is only members of their own families that they can rely on for enthusiastic labour for the sole benefit of the family, opportunities for expansion lead rapidly to an increase in the size of their families, and the more these increase, the faster can be the expansion. Secondly, junior male members of a peasant household have as their main ambition the setting up of their own establishments, where alone can they hope for independence and the status it confers; consequently, where expanding wealth permits, there will be a process of constant partitioning. The combination of these two factors will lead, in a time of great expansion, to the rapid break-up of large farms into many much smaller units.²¹

This pattern has an obvious applicability to the problem before us. And there are certain details in the archaeological evidence for the Massif that provide explicit support for its employment here. Of these the most striking is that we find some of the villas originally built for single families subsequently divided up into a number of independent dwellings: here segmentation of the original families is immensely more plausible than landlords giving up parts of their villas to imported labour. One might also adduce the observation of Tchalenko's that the farmhouses of the new fragmented properties were extremely similar in design to the older villas, only more modest in size.²² The break-up of estates in question was certainly a complex process: the new villages vary very greatly in composition and character. But of the factors that can be surmised, this process of the expansion and fragmentation of families surely deserves a prominent place.

But, whatever the explanation, the overall pattern is clear: Tchalenko's villages provide clear and irrebuttable evidence of a dramatic growth, in at least one area, in the number of prosperity of rural communities made up of several

small and independent farmers. The question that now poses itself is whether this development on the Limestone Massif creates the supposition of a similar growth in prosperity among the free villages of other regions of Late Roman Syria.

This is a supposition that some modern scholars have thought reasonable, and Tchalenko's picture has, in default of comparable evidence, been used to suggest that our period was an age of increasing prosperity for free villages generally.²³ However, one has only to examine the probable explanation for the development in Tchalenko to see that his region was in a variety of ways quite exceptional.

First, we have attributed Tchalenko's break-up of properties partly to a segmentation in the families of the villas, a segmentation explained by the fact that they were resident farmers with a peasant mentality. There is no similarity between these and the city magnates who owned the estates in the regions of older wealth. But what of the immigrant labour that undertook to plant olives on so profitable terms? But here again the history of the Limestone Massif cannot be taken as typical. The system of

mughārāsa or the like, by which this class attained wealth and independence, was due to a development from subsistence agriculture to olive monoculture. Now we have no reason to suppose that this also occurred in areas of Syria, such as the plain of Antioch, where there was already at the beginning of our period a well-developed system of mixed culture and olive monoculture would simply have led to the starvation of the population; indeed it was only the plentiful production of cereals in the surrounding areas that made the specialization on the Limestone Massif possible.^{24.}

These peculiarities in the history of the Massif are not only formidable in themselves, but point to a more general difficulty in extrapolation to other areas. It is misleading to talk of the overall pattern being simply a growth in prosperity: what we have is rather the first full development of a hitherto neglected area, and extensive colonization. In contrast, most other areas of Syria must already have been so fully developed that no room was left for a comparable expansion. The secret of the wealth of the new small or medium farmers of the Massif was an economic expansion that could keep ahead of the accompanying rise in population; the plain of Antioch, for instance, will

have remained a richer area, but its wealth had to be divided between a population that was already huge.

It might also be pointed out that to picture the Limestone Massif as a sort of small farmers' paradise is to over-simplify: for we may discern certain cross-currents by which in some areas certain farmers prospered only at the expense of others. Let us take, for instance, the fortunes in the fourth century of certain villages in the plain of Dāna, which was fertile enough to support mixed cultivation. Here and at this date we find a few villages, such as Sarfūd, developing into prosperous communities almost from scratch. In contrast, we find a village such as Kish^ʿala, which had been in evidence since the first century, entering a period of at least decline and possibly disappearance, since it contains no building later than the fourth century, and this although Kish^ʿala was one of the generally flourishing class of communities of small proprietors who depended for their living on olive culture. In cases such as this, the most probable explanation for the variation is that in the competition for land and skilled labour that might occur in any area of Syria some

estates and village communities might find themselves being squeezed out to the advantage of others. As far as the history of the Limestone Massif is concerned, the plain of Dāna is not to be taken as a typical area; but the fact that, unlike other areas of the Massif, it had already before the fourth century been reasonably developed may suggest it was more typical of the pattern in Syria as a whole.²⁵

So we must return, unprejudiced, to the literary evidence, which is fortunately of reasonable quantity for that region of Syria, the plain of Antioch, which will prove of chief concern to us. Here we encounter hazards of a different kind. One writer has been troubled by the apparent anomaly that while the archaeological evidence just discussed might be thought to bear witness to a gradual growth in prosperity during the fourth century, there is a passage in one of Libanius' orations that testifies to a serious depression in the 380s:

'I said that those who work on the land used to possess coffers, clothing and gold coin, and marry off their daughters with a dowry; but nowadays you will find many farms deserted, emptied by the pressures of taxation...; and those who remain on their fields have no need to lock their doors: for he who owns nothing is not afraid of thieves.'

26

But before we postulate a general depression at this date,

which would be contrary to the evidence from St. John Chrysostom discussed above, we should consider whether the general character of this speech allows us to put such faith in its reliability. Briefly, the theme of the oration is that the writer's enemies are wrong to consider him tiresome and oppressive: for, if we may set aside the other considerations that Libanius' ever fertile mind brings to bear on the question, the decline since his youth in every aspect of national and civic life is of such momentous proportions that no feeling man could bear it with equanimity. For instance, the army of the day suffers from a sad degeneracy:

'It is thought honourable to be drunken with wine and gorged to vomiting..., but ignominious ... to take suitable exercise in the plain; the consequence is that in battle the enemy has only to shout and they all vanish in flight.'

In contrast, all was different in the age Libanius thinks deserving of praise: then the soldiers 'were strong and brave, ... our cavalry a joy to our side and a terror to the enemy, and through the barbarians' own choice there was peace'. One might remark that in the virtually contemporary

Oration XXIV it is asserted on the contrary that there can be no question of attributing the military misfortunes of the time to any cowardice or lack of training in the army. But the passage reaches its height of absurdity in the claim that, while the soldiers of the past were true professionals and had no wish to marry, the soldiers of these latter times were quite incapable of such providence. Is it not clear that Libanius in this oration is playing the role of an incorrigible laudator temporis acti, as his opponents at the time accused him, without intelligence or discrimination? Libanius' late orations are often of quite special interest for the historian, but on the question of an alleged decline in the empire since the triumph of Christianity he can become almost paranoid, and never more so than in the second oration, which is of psychological rather than historical significance.²⁷.

It is, then, elsewhere that we must look in this writer for sound testimony on the economic condition of Syria. The locus classicus is perhaps some sections in his panegyric of Antioch, an earlier composition, dating to 360. In a general section on the climate and natural conditions of the territory of the city, he claims that,

while elsewhere the land yields certain crops but not others, that of Antioch, through the lie of the land, the climate and the opportunities for irrigation, supports cereals and fruit-trees, vines and olives, not only throughout the plains but also in some of the mountainous areas. We have noted above that in conditions of advanced farming, with olive-culture and irrigation, one may expect the small man to be more prosperous and more independent than where cereal culture strongly predominates. We are not, then, surprised when Libanius proceeds to orate on the prosperity of the villages of independent farmers: the territory of Antioch is said to contain villages more heavily populated than many cities, which support their own industries and conduct a flourishing traffic among themselves.²⁸

The testimony of this speech may be thought to be as of doubtful value as that of the second oration, and for a more obvious reason: one could not expect a panegyric to say the contrary. And this speech is typical of late Roman panegyric in that it evades unpleasant realities not by a judicious choice of subjects and only in part by

an exaggeration of more fortunate traits, but above all by using the form of a description rather to preach an ideal: so this speech, for instance, assures the reader that in Antioch alone was there more eagerness to undertake than to avoid liturgies, the imperial governors always carried out instantly the wishes of the boule and the demos itself treated the bouleutae with the respect children show their parents.²⁹

It must, then, be admitted that the evidence of the Antiochikos is, by itself, open to scepticism. Fortunately, however, it can be corroborated from a variety of sources. The frequent references in John Chrysostom as well as Libanius to irrigation suggests a much more prosperous agriculture than that of modern Syria. Also, the fourth century Expositio Totius Mundi tells us that all the cities of Syria were rich in corn, fruit, vines and olives, which suggest the mixed culture which Libanius speaks of.³⁰ But perhaps the most striking confirmation is to be found in the numerous references in Theodoret's mid-fifth century account of Syrian religious history to 'great and heavily populated villages', to quote his standard phrase, which he applies just

as readily to villages in the plain of Antioch as to the thriving communities of the Limestone Massif.³¹

The resulting impression is that the free villages of Syria as a whole, and in particular those of the plain of Antioch, enjoyed a material prosperity comparable to that of the special region studied by Tchalenko.³² At the same time, there can be no question of attributing to the area as a whole the same pattern of general expansion and the segmentation of large estates.

However, for the topic of military patronage, a determination of the general level of material prosperity is not in itself very indicative. Here the question of real import is the morale of the free peasantry and the nature of its ambitions. If we suppose that this will have depended on the overall pattern of expansion or depression, the point to be made is that the similar impression left by the evidence from Libanius and John Chrysostom for the fourth century and that from Theodoret for the fifth suggests that the general level of prosperity remained much the same throughout our period. But even this is inadequate: one wishes to know whether the individual village enjoyed stability and felt security or if, on the other hand, it

had to fight a constant battle to keep its head up among its neighbours, whether tied or free.

Studies of the countryside of the Near East in modern times draw a sharp distinction between communities where there is a superfluity and those where there is a shortage of land. In the former we find that the peasants can expand onto unused land, prosperity is widely shared, land ownership is not a matter for constant dispute and this enables the farmer to prosper on his own without close alliance with his immediate neighbours against communal enemies. In contrast, where there is a shortage of land, serious and sometimes sanguinary contention arises over the ownership even of land that cannot be worked and, where there is irrigation, over the sources of water. The victors in such disputes must prosper at the expense of the losers, with the consequence that there arise serious inequalities. The effect of all this on the mentality of the villagers is memorably put by Weulersse in the following terms:

'There develops between rival communities forced to live side by side what one may call the minority complex, a fundamental psychological reflex of social groups throughout the Orient. It is a collective and pathological touchiness that imagines every motion of the

neighbouring community to be directed against itself, and that makes each community united against the slightest attack made on any of its members.'

So a strong communal spirit develops, as a defensive mechanism.^{33.}

For our period, this contrast may be observed inside the region of the Limestone Massif itself. There, on the whole, the rich opportunities for fresh expansion enabled general and peaceful development, while the lack of communal building has been taken as evidence for an absence of communal spirit, of which the continuous segmentation of properties may also be in part the expression.^{34.} On the other hand, we found that in the plain of Dāna, a region more typical of Syria as a whole, certain villages expanded at the expense of their neighbours, since it was an area already well-developed.

For the fertile regions of the plains, and in particular the plain of Antioch, the best direct evidence is the oration on military patronage by Libanius, which is the subject of the main section of this chapter. We will read there of patronage being secured by whole villages in order to enable them, among other things, to carry out with impunity criminal

raids against neighbouring villages, fouling their wells, diverting their water supplies and the like.³⁵ In addition, there is the evidence for emigration. The peasants who were attracted to the Limestone Massif by mughārāsa or the like may be assumed to have come from the plain of Antioch. It has been noted elsewhere that it is generally the members of the poorest households who migrate. So, while the existence of emigration is evidence of a shortage of land, the emigrants themselves must represent that part of the population which, in the competition for land and employment, was worsted by more fortunate competitors.³⁶

A writer on expansion in modern Syria has noted that, while labour is attracted to the developing regions by higher wages and the building of new villages, the areas of older cultivation have not shared in the overall economic advance at all.³⁷ Similarly, we have seen that the expansion on the Limestone Massif is no evidence for an increasing prosperity in areas such as the plain of Antioch. There the ancient material points not indeed to the depression of recent times, but to a situation of real prosperity very unequally distributed -- both among coloni and the free

peasantry. And this inequality was first the cause and then the consequence of competition and contention. It is in this unhealthy climate that we must locate the role of the rural patron.

2. RURAL PATRONAGE

Rural patronage can be briefly described: it was a system whereby villagers bought with regular gifts, typically of produce, though sometimes also of labour, the aid of the powerful, in financial and fiscal matters and also in the settling of disputes. It is also fundamental that the services of a patron were required equally by all types of village, whether free or in a domain. A village of coloni inevitably enjoyed the patronage of its master -- whence the formulaic use on Egyptian papyri of the phrase 'lord and patron'; it was only occasionally that it looked further, most obviously when it needed patronage to secure better terms of contract out of the master himself. But once this is admitted, there is no harm in concentrating on the more interesting question of the patronage of free villages, as in the terms of our

exposition we shall do here.^{38.}

As to the mechanism of patronage two additional points should also be made. First, the client of a rural patron was regularly, though not invariably, a village or community of peasants, not an individual farmer. So is it in the story of the hermit Abraam, in Libanius and Chrysostom and also, one might add, in the countryside of modern Syria. Secondly, although in exceptional circumstances a patron might be sought for the nonce, the rural patron with whom we are concerned had a permanent link with his clients. This was inevitable in domain villages where the master himself was the patron, and in practice we find the same with the free villages, who needed the services of patrons constantly and were not in a position, because of the short supply of suitable patrons, to chop and change once they had secured one.

The role of the patron is best set out in terms of the natural dependence of the peasant community on the aid of the powerful in financial and fiscal matters and in the settling of disputes.

All who derive their livelihood from the land are subject to periodic depressions due to climatic variations. Syria is especially subject to short periods of severe

drought which can largely ruin the cereal harvests.³⁹

Now it is the community of small farmers which, above all, is endangered by this. If the harvest in its area is ruined by natural disasters, it will not, like many a rich man, have lands in other areas which may, in the same season, have been less seriously affected.

And, above all, the rich man's much stronger economic position and greater profit margin protect him from suffering the regular plight in difficult times of farmers living near subsistence level: these find that the survival of their farms will depend on the good will of the providers of credit, whether in cash or kind. And the peasants' greatest misfortune is that they cannot hope to pay off the debt after a number of good harvests, since in years of plenty the price the farmer can get for his produce will fall in proportion to the size of the harvest surplus. In this way, once the peasant community has started to borrow from a man of wealth, a permanent tie is created between them, it turns for further loans to the same source, the creditor takes a general interest in its welfare, since it provides him with a regular income, and

the relation between the two becomes that of patron and client.^{40.}

Another matter of prime importance where patronage was much needed was that of taxation, both assessment and payment. The assessment of taxation or of liturgical obligations was unfortunately much open to influence. Libanius in his panegyric of the emperors Constantius and Constans mentions that in the previous assessment of tribute many poor farmers had been subjected to burdens entirely beyond their means. He stresses the plight of poor farmers rather than the better off largely for emotive effect, but it was the poor who were more likely to suffer from partial assessment, since the rich were in a far stronger position to influence the assessors.^{41.} But through patronage small farmers could hope to obtain like benefits for themselves. We find this illustrated for Egypt, at a rather humble level, in an early fourth century papyrus where we learn that three landowners had secured from the village secretary the laying of severe liturgical burdens on a fourth landowner while they themselves and thirteen others whom they patronized were to enjoy virtual immunity. Another case which illustrates the value of patronage in matters of this kind is that of the pursuit of patronage in

sixth century Egypt, and presumably also in earlier centuries, as a protection against forcible depredations by municipal officials on the pretext of unfulfilled tax obligations: an example is the papyrus where a village requests the patronage of no less a person than the empress to scare off tax collectors from whom it was suffering even more than 'places ravaged by barbarians'.⁴² On a more normal level, patrons could help villagers to meet their fiscal obligations. An example is the story in Theodoret's Religious History of the experiences of a village near Cyrrhus. The collectors arrived to find that the villagers were unable to pay the sum demanded, at which they took some of them into custody and flogged others. But the villagers were rescued by a hermit, one Abraam, who secured the sum for them by borrowing from friends in Emesa. They promptly adopted the hermit as their regular patron, for in providing them with credit to meet their fiscal obligations he had already taken the role of patron himself.⁴³

There remained the various functions of the patron in relations to village disputes. It has been observed elsewhere that the open field system and division of land into strips, which we may imagine was as regular in Syria as in

other rural communities, makes agricultural co-operation inside the village community quite essential, at least at the major stages of the farming year. It was also necessary for the village to maintain unity and harmony among its members, if it was to resist with any hope of success the encroachments of other villages and the great landlords. If internal disputes were not to disrupt this, a mechanism was needed for their resolution. There were no village magistrates to provide this, so recourse was often had to the patron. He had the two qualifications needed for an intermediary: he was as an outsider impartial, and he enjoyed an informal authority over the village such as even the losing party would have to recognize.⁴⁴ No less important was the function of the patron in relation to disputes with neighbouring communities. His mere name provided some protection, and if, as often, some imperial official was called in to judge the dispute, it was very difficult for a mere village to secure a favourable hearing without the intermediation of a powerful patron.⁴⁵

There is still dispute over whether the incidence of this system of patronage was a sign of prosperity or of depression. On the one hand, there used to be a consensus that rural

patronage indicated that the small man found himself in serious economic difficulties, and led inexorably to the development of great estates at the expense of the free villages. A fundamental assumption underlying this view was that no free peasant would have accepted patronage unless in danger of ruin. On the other hand, a different interpretation of the function of patronage has enabled one recent writer to claim: 'Rural patronage in Syria was not a symptom of decline. It was like the governor of an engine, in that it enabled the inland villages to pass through a period of rising prosperity without overheating.' According to this view, patronage provided a means whereby problems and disputes that arose out of healthy economic developments could be peacefully resolved.⁴⁶

It will immediately be appreciated why the interpretation of rural patronage has been closely connected to the question of the health or otherwise of the Late Roman rural economy. In the light of the discussion above of the Syrian countryside, it will appear that neither of these views is acceptable for our region as a whole; for the picture here is neither one of the build up of great estates at the

expense of the free villages nor of economic expansion. However, the attempt to relate rural patronage to some particular economic trend is open to a more fundamental criticism. The needs met by patronage, as set out above, were constant and inevitable in any society where power was concentrated in the hands of the wealthy: we may consider the existence of rural patronage as a sign of a corrupt and unjust social and political system, but it cannot be used as an economic indicator.

But there certainly will be a relation between the economic situation and the details of contract between patron and client: if the poorest and most backward peasants may well be unable to obtain patronage on any terms that do not reduce them to serfdom, richer peasants are in a stronger position both to obtain good terms and to fulfil their part of the bargain without dangerously reducing their profit margins. Now the general prosperity of the Syrian peasant will have placed him in the second of these categories. And patrons will also have been restrained from excessive demands by the consideration that the wealth of their client villages depended, as we

saw, on a system of mixed culture where effective farming required the enthusiastic application of the peasantry: if the villagers found that their labours served only to enrich the patron, this enthusiasm was bound to diminish, and the resulting depression would reduce the income of the patron just as surely as it ruined the village. The same economic facts that won good treatment for many coloni will have secured for most free villages terms of contract from their patrons that were of real advantage to both parties.

In fact, the classic view of rural patronage as essentially destructive of the liberties and prosperity of the free peasantry is fundamentally wrong-headed, stemming as it does from assumptions of liberalism that may be admirable in a modern politician but for the ancient historian are simply a snare. On the one hand, there has been the temptation to think in terms of a false ideal of total independence, when without patronage the peasant had in fact no security. On the other, there has been a tendency to set the interests of the landowner or patron and those of the serf or client in opposition: but it is on the wealth and prosperity of the countryside that the status of

the great landowner depended, and it is on the power of his patron that the peasant had to rely in his dealings with third parties of whatever description..

But this view, however false in conception, still serves to ensure a close scrutiny of the disadvantages for the peasant community that were essential concomitants of the system. The chief of these must now be described and their seriousness evaluated, if we are not, in place of the traditional view, to paint a picture whose different emphasis is no less one-sided.

First, there is some truth in the picture of rural patronage leading to the enserfment of free villages. In the sense that the patron of a free village was comparable to the proprietor of a village in a domain, this was, indeed, universal; but since independence without power or influence was not a state to be coveted, and even coloni could be highly prosperous, this fact is not as regrettable as has sometimes been supposed. However, there is evidence of a cynical practice of patronage as a means of building up estates. We learn in one of Libanius' orations of the machinations of one 'Mixidemus', who rose from humble origins to a position of great influence in the imperial civil

service: his method was to worm his way into a village by a small purchase of land, and then obtain complete control of the whole community by threatening to use his power to ruin them. Such techniques in the autonomous metrocomiae of other parts of the Orient led to imperial enactment to prevent the purchase of any of their land by outsiders. But even here the truth was not perhaps as lurid as Libanius suggests: we learn incidentally that 'Mixidemus' was indefatigable, and presumably highly effective, as a rural patron, so that these villages will have received in exchange services of real utility. In any case, the evidence of Theodoret is that the free villages survived, and the fierceness of Libanius' indignation suggests that his 'Mixidemus' was not a typical patron.^{47.}

Instead, our main attention should be directed to a different defect in the system: if the social and political facts of life created a real need for rural patronage, they did not create a comparable supply of good patrons. The basic requirements for really effective patronage may be briefly set out. If the patron was to provide credit, he needed to be a man of wealth (or at least with authority over men of wealth); if he was to exert influence over tax

assessment and litigation, he needed to be of influence in the city; if he was to be a perfect arbitrator of local disputes, he needed to be an outsider of imposing rank or station. It is at once clear that these requirements were best met by the magnates of the city, who, indeed, were ex officio the patrons of their own coloni. Unfortunately, it transpires from several passages of Libanius that the great men of the city, who were busily engaged on more important tasks, were not prepared to devote time to the chores of rural patronage, beyond what was required by the most basic self-interest. Libanius writes of the patronage practised by 'Mixidemus' in the following terms:

'The wretch slaves on behalf of countrymen As letters come from the fields bidding him do this or that, he cannot sit idle, but has to leap up to put himself at the disposal of his clients.'

In his oration on military patronage, he discourses on the obligation of coloni to seek patronage from their masters only, but this through personal experience of sad consequences for the master if his coloni develop strong links with other persons of influence; he leaves the impression that he would above all prefer coloni to leave their masters untroubled with their petty affairs. For instance, in mocking soldiers

for their readiness to be the patrons of 'men who work at the land, live far from cities and share their dwellings with oxen', he implies that the peasantry are beneath attention. And the language in which he recommends coloni to seek the patronage of their masters is oddly cautious: to say, 'it is possible for them to make the lords of the estates kinder towards them' -- so as to deal with disputes and so on --, scarcely constitutes an enthusiasm for patronage when the master was supposed to act as his labourers' patron automatically. In all, landowners of the stock of Libanius betray no eagerness to play the rural patron, beyond, that is, their unavoidable role as the payers of the taxes for their estates and, one may assume, the providers of credit to their own coloni in time of extreme need.^{48.}

Into the gap left by the indifference of the great magnates, above all for the free villages, advanced a curious assortment of individuals, very various in their motivation. Some were civil servants of humble origins, keen to obtain a share of the agricultural wealth of the community and the status it conferred, in exchange, above

all, for moderating fiscal demands; others, in the latter half of our period, were hermits or clergymen, who were at least partly motivated by a desire to convert the largely pagan countryside to the true faith; and it is the subject of military patronage in the countryside for which this section is a preparation. The enthusiasm with which these new patrons were greeted and the recourse to them even from great distances -- in addition to their obviously limited supply -- suggest, however, that, even after their services are taken into account, there remained a serious shortage of good patrons.⁴⁹

This will have had a variety of consequences. Some villages will have had no patron, and consequently inadequate security. Others will have had patrons who failed to fulfil their function effectively, whether through a deficiency of influence or a deficiency of interest. Meanwhile, really effective patrons will have been in a position to demand a high price for their services: 'Mixidemus', we learn, exacted huge gifts of produce, whatever the season, and had the wives of clients to serve in his household.

But we saw that the clients of 'Mixidemus' were well rewarded in exchange. It is the villages without effective

patronage that really deserve our sympathy. It was the conclusion of the preceding section that the prosperity of rural Syria was very unequally distributed. Some coloni were pampered, others oppressed by their masters; more important still, there was a general shortage of land, which led to much strife and contention and a situation where the really successful villages prospered at the direct expense of their less fortunate neighbours. Now it is natural to suppose that patronage had no healthy influence over these variations. Powerful patronage is a means whereby the client obtains advantages either directly or indirectly at the expense of others. If patronage relieves the fiscal burdens of one village, it is other villages without such protection that will have to pay the difference; the village with a ready supply of credit is likely to expand, in hard times, at the expense of its neighbours; if two villages have a dispute, it is the one with the more powerful and active patron that is likely to come off the victor; and we shall see in the next section how villages used the cloak of patronage to enable them to plunder their neighbours with impunity. Moreover, where there is competition for a short supply of good patrons, it is the wealthier of the

aspirants that will be successful: consequently, the communities that were for other reasons the less prosperous will have found that the system of rural patronage served to weaken their position and increase the gap between them and the richer villages. So it emerges that the social and political set-up that made effective patronage desirable was a danger to the general prosperity of the peasantry, whether tied or free, not because of the strings attached, but because there was not enough of it. It is into this context of a strife-ridden countryside with an insufficiency of patrons that we must set the rural patronage practised by military men, as described in one of the orations of Libanius.

3. LIBANIUS 'DE PATROCINIIS'

We have seen that rural patronage was practised in Syria by persons in a variety of stations and callings. Among these a prominent place was taken by those officers and soldiers of the comitatus who, as we noted in our introductory chapter, were quartered in camps scattered over north-west

Syria. For their activities we have as our informant Libanius, in his De Patrociniis, a political pamphlet that can be dated to between A.D. 388 and 392. This work takes the form of an address to the emperor requesting the enforcement of the law forbidding certain forms of patronage in which military men of all ranks were involved.⁵⁰

It is on the first part of the oration, the section of factual narrative, that we must concentrate here. It describes the abuses of the rural patronage practised by military men, first in the villages with many masters and secondly in those with one. Coherent in arrangement and rich in detail, it sheds a strong, if distorted, ray of light on an otherwise quite obscure topic. At the same time, above all through the writer's preference for picturesque effect over pedantic precision, it plays a will-o'-the-wisp to the unwary commentator. It will require painful and minute treatment.

Libanius' account of military patronage in the villages of the free peasantry deserves to be quoted at length:

'(4) There are large villages, each having many masters. These have recourse to the soldiers stationed in them, not in order to protect themselves, but to harm others. They make their payments from the produce of the land -- wheat, barley, fruit --, also gold money or objects.

When their gifts have turned these men into their bodyguards, they find they have bought the licence to do whatever they please. And now they cause harm and trouble to their neighbours, appropriating their land, cutting down their trees, plundering, slaughtering animals, reeking havoc and feasting. The men who owned them before weep as they see this, but the feasters laugh and, so far from fearing an investigation into what they have done, add threats to repeat the same in the future. (5) You are appalled by this, o emperor, but you have still to hear the worst, if daughters are more valuable to someone than sheep or goats, for they do not let even them alone. Must I mention blows, assaults, women dragging along women by the hair, wells made unusable for their owners by objects thrown into them, and gardens ruined when their river-water is diverted? Meanwhile they provide for the soldiers, some supporting many, some few, while these spend most of their time reclining in the village squares, glutted with meat and wine. The consequence is, that, if any of the victims happen in their anguish to defend themselves and a blow falls by chance on a soldier, then destruction descends on the striker of the blow, without any hope of redress; he is compelled to undergo every outrage at the hands of drunken soldiers, while the laws are totally without effect. (6) This situation has turned the farmers into brigands, and put into their hands the sword instead of the plough. The greater the power they gain through the support of the military garrison, the greater the crimes they dare to commit, while the local police officers turn a blind eye to what goes on in front of them, since they are aware how much they would suffer at the hands of the patron if they tried to help the victims.'

Libanius proceeds to describe the fate of the curial tax-collectors when they visit 'these villages walled in by the officers (strategoi)' in pursuance of their duties. They

find that the villagers, insolent and obstinate, refuse to pay up.

'At this they get angry and raise their voices, behaving as men who are being denied their rights. Then they threaten them with the archontes, but this is useless, since these are weaker than those who live off the villages. Then they have recourse to seizure; but the others show that they have stones. So the tax-collectors return to the city with wounds in place of revenue, showing what they have suffered by the blood on their clothes.'

In the city they find no-one to protest on their behalf because of the power of 'the patron'.

Despite the quantity of picturesque detail in these pages, they still exhibit Libanius' most irritating habit as a writer -- a taste for imprecision in treating what is important but unemotive. As a consequence, this passage has invited a variety of misinterpretations of what one would have expected to be the most straightforward and obvious points.

But before we proceed to the principal problems this section raises, it will be necessary to dispose of one point of detail which is not without importance: who are the archontes in the final passage? Commentators of this speech, and historians of ancient Syria, have always taken

them to be the local magistrates of the village; the passage then takes on a rare importance as being, as we shall see, a unique piece of evidence for there being magistrates in the villages of northern Syria in the period of the Late Empire. It must be confessed that the view that these archontes are village officials has generally been associated with an error in translation: the clause in question has been translated not 'they threatened them with the archontes', but 'they threatened the archontes', as a result of simple ignorance of the true construction of the verb in question.⁵¹ But the correct translation, although it permits a different interpretation of the reference of 'archontes', does not exclude the view that these are local magistrates. But there are a number of other objections, that may be set out under three heads.

(1) It does not seem that the term 'archontes' would be used by Libanius in reference to village magistrates. Petit has treated at length Libanius' use of this word and its cognates. The conclusion he comes to is that this author never uses it of municipal offices, but always of imperial ones, and, indeed, most frequently of the imperial

governors.⁵² Our archontes can, then, scarcely be local magistrates of the village, and the natural interpretation is that the authority with which the tax-collectors from Antioch are threatening the recalcitrant villagers is that of the consularis Syriae and the comes Orientis. Libanius' point would be, as indeed his story implies, that not even the imperial governors were ready to intervene in favour of the tax-collectors against villages upheld in their resistance by military patronage. He does not, of course, mention that patronage by persons of his own class was a much more constant cause of inequitable distribution of the burden of taxation.

(2) The 'village magistrates', who are 'weaker than those who live off the villages', are not only an irrelevance but a nuisance. The situation that Libanius is describing is of villages 'walled in' by military patronage resisting the lawful exactions of curials. In this context, a fifth column of village officials who side with the curials against the rest of the village and its military patrons is not credible, both as regards the realities of Syrian country life and from the point of view of Libanius' style of narration.

(3) Village magistrates are not only out of place in

this oration, but they seem, as far as northern Syria was concerned, not to have existed. If this has been doubted, it is essentially because of the common misinterpretation of the text before us. Reference is also made to a few inscriptions that describe certain village notables of this region by the titles of comarch, strategos and the like, but without much confidence since the exact purport of these titles is unknown. Meanwhile, the extreme sparsity of this inscripational evidence invites an argument in the contrary direction. G. M. Harper, in the only full treatment of Syrian rural magistrates, notes the curious fact that all but a very few of the possible cases come, on inscriptions, from the districts of Auranitis, Trachonitis and Batanea, in the province of Arabia. But he appears to believe that, since this region was not significantly different from the rest of Syria, one must suppose that this is merely an accident of distribution of evidence. However, the topographical work of George of Cyprus reveals that, while the territory of northern Syria was entirely divided up between the cities, this southern area was divided up between comae. While, in fact, the north was entirely controlled by cities, the south contained

villages that were politically autonomous and must have discharged through their own officials those functions undertaken in the north by the curials of the cities. Now this coincides perfectly with the distribution of extant inscriptions of village magistrates. The conclusion is invited that the extreme paucity of the north Syrian evidence is an indication that real village magistrates -- such as tax-collectors might have invoked -- simply did not exist in northern Syria; and of this we may be quite confident as regards the territoria of great cities such as Antioch.⁵³

It would appear, then, that the archontes of this passage of Libanius cannot be village officials, and must rather be the governors of the province. In the immediate interpretation of the text before us this is a point of only minor importance, but the conclusion that the villages of northern Syria lacked an official organization of local magistrates is obviously important in a variety of ways. As regards our topic of military patronage it has the implication that it will have been the patron himself who was the visible head of the village: this excludes

one way in which a free village under patronage might have been significantly different from a domain village under its master.

Apart from such problems of detail, there are in Libanius' exposition a number of more general points where ambiguous expression produces obscurity for the modern reader who is not guided by the same sure knowledge of ancient conditions as the speech's original recipients.

Above all, for whom and against whom is the patronage in question intended? It is not obvious whether the clients are individuals who require 'protection' against their immediate neighbours, or whole villages, against neighbouring communities. A number of indications seem to point to the former. First, it has been felt that some of the details, such as women dragging women by the hair, would be absurdly trivial if the more important sort of patronage was in question.⁵⁴ But then a fondness for small detail for the sake of vividness is a constant aspect of Libanius' style, both in this speech and elsewhere. Secondly, the statement that some of the villagers 'supported many soldiers, other few' may suggest that it

was not the community as a whole that stood in the relationship of client to patron, although evidently other explanations are not excluded. Thirdly, we read of the soldiers 'sitting in the middle of the villages... so that, if any of the victims try to defend themselves', dire consequences ensue: if it is two village communities who are fighting one another, why does the trouble occur in the centre of the village of the aggressors? Admittedly, it remains possible here to interpret Libanius more loosely. In all, there are indications which, though not conclusive, do point to the clients being individual villagers rather than whole communities. In this case military patronage would have accentuated conflicts and divisions inside a village community, while we have seen that rural patronage as a whole had an influence in the opposite direction.

However, other indications in this passage may be thought to prove the contrary. First, when we read of rivers being diverted and wells polluted, it is surely a community, not some individual small proprietor, who is being victimized. Secondly, the patronage which protects a whole village from the tax-collectors is surely the

patronage of a whole village. But conclusive are the various references in this section to one single patron. At the end of the passage which treats the patronage and gluttony of individual soldiers or groups of soldiers in such a way, as we have seen, as to suggest a number of quite separate patronages inside the same village, Libanius remarks incidentally that the local police fail to act through fear of 'the patron'; and further on we read of villages protected by 'strategoi', which can only mean each village by one superior officer, and of the curial tax-collectors being thwarted by, again, 'the patron'. The implication of these passages is not simply that superior officers were involved as well as their men, but that all the various activities involved fell under a general patronage exercised by military commanders manifestly over entire communities.

At this point we must tackle one of the special problems of these chapters -- the identity and rank of this 'patron'. Most commentators have taken him to be a very senior commander in the military hierarchy, of necessity then the magister militum per Orientem -- not the dux Syriae, as sometimes supposed, since we saw in our first chapter

that the troops in the Antiochene region were comitatenses and the limes far to the east. This officer was evidently in an excellent position to thwart curials, and would deter the local police by being in a position to counter any representations that they might attempt to make with superior civil authority. The 'strategoi' might seem more resistant to this interpretation, but they might either be distinguished from 'the patron', or the plural might be explained as referring simply to a number of successive magistri. The trouble with this view is that the context of the whole section is the local situation out in the countryside; it is not natural to turn the patron who can intimidate the local police into the exalted and distant magister militum. In this context, the patron must surely be the praepositus in command of the local detachment. This is not to exclude a wider context altogether -- we shall treat below the role of the magister in the thwarting of the curials --, but the conclusion to be drawn here is that the references to a single patron may be taken as evidence that the military patronage that Libanius is castigating, is, essentially, the patronage of a whole village by the officer in charge of the

detachment that is stationed in it.

Now we have noted that one of the chief functions of the rural patron was to provide a peaceful adjudication of disputes within a village. This function a resident patron, with time on his hands, was in the best possible position to fulfil. It is then not credible that such a patron would allow these disputes to lead to extensive violence aided and abetted by his own subordinates. It follows that the suggestion that military patronage was used by individual villagers to protect them in violent attacks against fellow villagers has to be rejected; we have to understand the passage that suggested this view as in fact referring to the use of patronage against neighbouring communities.

But if the essence of the patronage in question was the protection of the whole village by the local garrison acting under its commander, the passages which seemed to refer to the patronage of individual villagers by separate parts of the garrison have to be understood to refer to what might be described as certain complications in the system of payment. Let us quote the relevant section again:

villagers provided for the soldiers, 'some supporting more, some fewer, while they spent most of their time reclining in the middle of the villages, gorged with meat and wine'. We might have expected the payment of 'wheat, barley, fruit, also gold in coin or bullion' to be organized entirely on a communal basis, with, at regular intervals, a fixed amount being paid by the village as a whole to the detachment in the person of the praepositus. But here we find individual farmers making gifts to separate groups of soldiers. And the phrase 'some supporting more, some fewer' suggests that what is in question is not the occasional additional gift, but either the whole or at least a major part of the total payment. How are we to explain the unnecessary complexities of this system of payment? Surely by concluding that there was no system at all. And if there was no fixed system of payment, there can scarcely have been a fixed system of patronage. We must rather understand that the military patronage of villages, far from being contractual, had a looseness and flexibility which distinguishes it markedly from certain more regular forms of rural patronage. But we must not exaggerate the importance of this: if a contract was lacking, little else was. The soldiers,

both commander and men, receive frequent gifts, and the mention of gold suggests they were often substantial. In return, they grant the villagers constant protection both against neighbouring communities and the curials of the city. The irregularity of the system, or rather lack of system, did not reduce its effectiveness, but rather increased its flexibility and also perhaps its impunity in case of any attempt to suppress it.

If we have insisted on the local character of the patronage in question, we must still account for the fate of the curial tax-collectors when they return to the city -- Antioch in this case. There they find no-one to help them against the recalcitrant villagers, since the power of the patron prevents this. We have seen that the patron is the praepositus of the local detachment: how had he such influence in Antioch? The obvious explanation is that he in his turn enjoyed the protection of his superior, the magister militum per Orientem. We shall find that in the case of the domain villages this same pattern is clearly to be observed: the local praepositus is able to protect peasants against members of the curial class because he can invoke the aid of his commander. Even if 'the patron' is

not the magister militum himself, those who have seen in this part of the speech a reference to the politics of the city have not been mistaken.

According to Libanius, the military patronage of independent villages had one other peculiar aspect that must invite our attention: the victim has to endure the violence of drunken soldiers, woe betide him if he try to defend himself, the farmer has now not the plough but the sword at his disposal, and so on; in more general terms, the farmers have been turned into brigands, and seek military patronage not in self-protection, but in order to be able to perpetrate violence against others.

One can indeed appreciate that military patronage might often lead to a recourse to violence. In helping one village to ruin its neighbour, the civil patron might be able to rely on brute force, if, that is, he had sufficient manpower locally available; more normally, perhaps would he have recourse to corruption in the city. But how uncertain, how indirect his aim compared to that of the military patron, with his regiment of armed men by, whose persons, in addition, were specially protected by the law. Where brute violence was both so easy and so profitable, it is natural to assume

that it was not avoided.⁵⁵

On the other hand, Libanius' claim that the sole aim of military patronage was the protection of violence and aggression is not to be so readily admitted: one cannot but be incredulous of such a simplicity of purpose and constant crudity of means. The reason for his lop-sided presentation is clear: rural patronage was so regular a feature of country life that if military patronage was to be suppressed, as he desired, it had to be represented as unlike normal patronage as possible. One need not accuse Libanius of a needless recourse to fiction, but the picture he paints must be supplemented from what we know of rural patronage elsewhere. One may assume, then, that military patrons performed all or at least many of those functions of the normal patron which we described above -- lawful aid over economic difficulties, support in the payment of tribute, arbitration in local disputes, and so on. Is, in fact, anything involved that is essentially different? Consider, for instance, the use of military patronage against tax-collectors: is this not directly comparable to the case ~~w~~e mentioned above of an Egyptian village seeking patronage as a means of protection against

corrupt assessment and collection? Libanius insists on the financial ruin of the curials the villagers refused to pay, but this does not prove that they were entirely unjustified in their resistance.

The full animus of Libanius' attack on military patronage is only revealed, however, in the next section of the speech, which treats this patronage as it was practised in the villages 'that belong to one master': he had himself been worsted by some tenants on an estate of his because of the power of the military patronage that they enjoyed. Libanius emphasizes that his case was a typical one, and indeed there is no reason to doubt the general validity of what it has to tell us of the relations between owners, farmers and military patrons in the case of the great estates of rural Syria.⁵⁶

One major problem that Libanius has to face is why the peasantry should not be satisfied with his own patronage and that of their other masters, but have recourse to military patrons. In accordance with his interpretation of the military patronage of independent villages, he gives

as the reason that the coloni are after impunity in wrongdoing. And from this not merely their neighbours, but their masters themselves suffer: after some time the farmers give their employers 'the wild eye' when they urge them on in their labours, and refuse to work the land save on their own terms. This explanation by Libanius of the military patronage of coloni is surely disingenuous: the true reason is evidently that, as we saw above, the distinguished landowners on whose patronage he would have them rely were generally unwilling to perform the services required from the rural patron locally. And indeed Liebeschuetz has pointed out the important implication of the statement in the text that the farmers use this military patronage against their masters 'after some time': the phrase excludes the possibility that, as has generally been supposed, the coloni acquired military protection with the original intention of using it against their own masters -- for the 'wild eye' appears only as a later development. We may, then, assume that patronage here had as its original, and basic, purpose the same functions that are to be attributed to it in the case of the free villages.

It is only subsequently, and incidentally, that the new bond interferes with the old ties between the peasant and his master.^{57.}

The next stage is concisely described by Libanius' masterful, but curiously short-breathed, rhetoric:

'Then they (the masters) file a case as the plaintiffs, but the wrong-doers have supporters who act as well as promise. The patron is victorious over the laws, and a pitiful sight ensues. What is this? Shouts and abuse from the farmers, a mass of advocates, contests, judgements, victories. The master departs crestfallen,^{58.} while his labourers pursue him with jeers.'

It is this misfortune that Libanius suffered himself; and it is to his case that, following the argument of this oration, we must now direct our attention.

Libanius had some Jewish tenants who had been working on the same estate for four generations. But they then decided 'not to remain what they were, but to shake off the old yoke and determine themselves how they ought to be treated'. A court case ensued between master and tenants.

Before we continue, one oddly obscure point should be considered: are the rebellious coloni in question seeking to leave their masters' employ, or simply to obtain a more favourable contract of work? It is odd that Libanius'

account should leave the reader in any uncertainty over this simple point, but in fact he has been understood not unreasonably to mean either. There are two phrases in particular which seem to imply that a quitting of their master's service is involved: first, there is the phrase quoted above -- 'shaking off the old yoke' --, secondly, the patron is said to urge for the coloni 'who have left their post' 'to be let alone'.⁵⁹ However, the other possibility has rather more of the text to support it. First, in the more general passage -- before Libanius proceeds to the case from his own experience -- there is nothing to suggest that a quitting of employ is involved, while instead we hear of the farmers claiming to be 'outside compulsion, working as they please and refusing to touch the ground if they are not persuaded to'. Secondly, the sentence with the phrase 'shaking off the old yoke' concludes with what is surely the more definite expression 'the determiners of how they should be used', and it is the master's unwillingness to see his coloni be this that is said, in the next sentence, to be the motive for his taking the matter to court.⁶⁰ One might add that, had Libanius' Jewish

tenants wished to leave his service, they are surely more likely simply to have decamped than to have undergone the risks of a law case. It would seem, then, that the expressions which suggest that more is involved than a revision of contract are to be interpreted in a loose sense and that the matter at issue between the master and his coloni was simply that they refused him certain payments or services.

It might not be thought that our picture of Syrian rural life would be significantly affected by this minor point of interpretation, but unfortunately the erroneous view, which is as old as the editio princeps, has been pre-supposed in the keenest controversy that this speech has given birth to. It has been much debated whether Libanius' tenants were coloni in the special sense of labourers tied by law to the soil. On the one hand, for instance, it has been assumed that Libanius' plea in court must have been that his Jewish tenants had no right to desert his farm; on the other, for instance, the apparent emphasis of the writer on the fact that they had served his family for four generations could be taken to imply that it was a long tradition, not law, that was being flouted. But once we

appreciate that our text has nothing to do with coloni deserting the land, it becomes clear that the whole debate has been a needless irrelevancy.⁶¹

The obstinacy of Libanius' tenants led to a law suit, where they won a Marengo. First, the judge asked who they were, whom they were plaguing and in whom they put their trust; then he ordered witnesses to be summoned while the defendants were to be kept in custody -- a severe measure against which Libanius protested. The defendants now had recourse to 'the general (strategos)', whose support they bought with gifts of corn and fodder; he privately applied pressure on the judge, who determined to decide the case in favour of the tenants. For some time he protracted the case, to the plaintiff's evident irritation. Finally he announced his decision, but betrayed a guilty conscience by declaring on oath that his judgement had been impartial. Libanius was horrified that military patronage should prevail against a distinguished curial in a case concerning his own labourers.

So much for Libanius' own account of the case, the essential accuracy of which we can only accept. But once

again his allusive manner, and dislike of technicalities, leave the modern reader unclear on some essential details: we are not told where the case is heard and at what level of jurisdiction, nor is it obvious of what rank was the general who interceded on behalf of the labourers. The fullest discussion of this question is to be found in Harmand's commentary. His thesis is briefly countered in a few lines of Liebeschuetz's which almost in themselves provide a sufficient refutation; but, since Harmand's view raises some important points, it deserves, perhaps, rather fuller treatment.^{62.}

Harmand locates the trial in the village where the Jews lived -- except if it was too small to have magistrates of its own, in which case the location would be a neighbouring townlet. The court would be that of the magistrates of the place, and the 'general' the commander of a resident detachment and the local patron of the labourers involved. Harmand believes that this is demonstrated by the labourers being able to make gifts of produce to the general and the manifest ease of access between the general and the court; this claim does not, perhaps, need to be more than noted.

However, his main argument rests on the system of

jurisdiction that may be known to have prevailed quite generally in the Late Empire: minor cases, he claims, were not tried, at least in the first instance, by the governors of provinces, but by the local municipal magistrates. Harmand gives a number of references for this view, which seem, however, to refer only to jurisdiction inside cities; the notion that country villages had courts of their own is Harmand's own, and simply erroneous: the view that the villages of northern Syria had magistrates of their own has been rejected above. And Harmand's suggestion that this might have been the case with Libanius' own village is almost incredible. Villages belonging to great landowners could not possibly have had magistrates of a rank to hear cases between the master and his coloni: there can have been no-one inside such a village with authority over the master himself. Nor is it possible to imagine the case being heard in a neighbouring townlet: such metrocomiae with authority over their neighbours were not a feature of the north Syrian scene.^{63.}

By a process of exclusion, we are left, then, with the city itself, in this case Antioch, as the location for the hearing. That country lawsuits could only be heard in the

city is a fact worthy of remark. The consequence would have been that in a case, as here, between a wealthy city-dweller and humble countryfolk the former would normally be in an incomparably stronger position, both financially and politically. One remembers too the 'mass of advocates' involved in the hearing of the cases of which the one before us is put forward as an example. How, then, could the countryman bear the expense of a hearing and how could he hope to prevail against the influence an important curial would be able to bring to bear on a hearing in the city, unless he enjoyed the backing of some powerful patron? There is a small detail in the text before us which indicates this. The first questions the judge asks Libanius' coloni are 'who they are, whom they are offending against and in whom they place their hopes'. Harmand sees judicial corruption in this, but Libanius, who is not in the habit of leaving his reader to infer his points, says nothing about that and the context quoted here surely indicates that the question was a purely routine one. What is indicated then is, that coloni who brought a case to the city, could be assumed to be acting with the support, and under the

directions, of some patron whom the judge would have to take into account. Nothing could give a clearer indication of the value and importance of rural patronage.^{64.}

It is harder to determine the identity, inside Antioch itself, of the judge in question. One possibility, however, may be quickly excluded -- that of a hearing by municipal magistrates. To quote A.H.M. Jones, 'the jurisdiction of the municipal magistrates, always very limited, had (sc. by the time of Diocletian) withered away, and even for the pettiest cases the court of first instance was that of the provincial governor', while the existence of municipal magistrates for any purpose has, surprisingly perhaps, been disproved by Petit. The judge who hears Libanius' case must then be an imperial official, the obvious candidate being the imperial governor, in this case the consularis Syriae.^{65.} A passage from Libanius' oration De Vinctis is curiously apposite here, as Liebeschuetz has noted. In a section on the jurisdiction of the governors of Syria, we read:

'The savagery of masters has continual recourse to this (arrests and judgements by the governor), since it is easy to imprison those who are compelled by the law to keep silence even when they are wronged. Here we must include those who work the land for the landowners,

since some treat them as slaves and, if they fail to approve of the master's exactions, he has only to utter a few syllables and an official with fetters comes to the estate and drags off the culprits to prison.'

Liebeschuetz concludes from this passage that cases such as the one before us were regularly heard by the governor himself. It certainly does refute any suggestion that the case was of too petty a nature to be tried by the governor, but scarcely proves either that Libanius' case must have been dealt with by the governor's court or that the governor must have heard it in person.⁶⁶ There are, in fact, two other possibilities in the identification of the judge that need to be considered -- first, the defensor civitatis, and secondly a pedaneus iudex.

Petit in his discussion of the defensor at Antioch adduces an Egyptian papyrus of about 340 in which we find an equivalent of the Syrian defensor hearing a case that involved advocates, that is, presiding over a fully-fledged judicial court, such as in the hearing before us. But in the province of Egypt with its exceptional size and rarely litigious population we would expect to find a development of jurisdictions inferior to the prefect's that might easily be unparalleled elsewhere. We should surely

rather pay heed to the edict (dated 373) that gives as the raison d'etre of the defensor that 'innocent and peaceful rustics' be not 'exhausted by the fraudulent practices of court trials and harassed even when they demand satisfaction, while they either provide for an avaricious advocate or win over the chief of the office staff with very large bribes, as he blocks the threshold, while the records of the case are purchased from the secretaries, and while in the name of a fee the enforcement officer demands more from the winner of a suit than the loser will pay; the dignity of a senator does not allow such practices, but with a speedy decision he settles the controversies that have arisen, for, if anything has been wrongfully and violently taken away, he eliminates all dilatoriness and restores the property to its owner'. There are two points to be noted in this passage, both of which could be corroborated from other edicts of the same period. First, the defensor was not intended to conduct normal judicial hearings. Secondly, and as a necessary consequence, he was not to deal with cases which required such a hearing, but with straightforward, and petty, cases where all that was required was discipline. It would not, then, appear that the judge

in Libanius' case can have been a defensor civitatis.^{67.}

There remains to consider the possibility that the judge was a pedaneus iudex. The character and function of this official are succinctly explained by an edict of the emperor Julian's which laid down that 'there are some matters where it is unnecessary to wait for the governor of the province' and that therefore governors were to be given 'the power of setting up pedanei iudices, that is judges with the authority to settle minor matters'. But it would appear that here the criteria for what could count as 'minor matters' were markedly less strict than in the case of the defensor civitatis, for Diocletian, whose main fear in his edicts on the question was that the governors would delegate too much jurisdiction, insisted only that governors should always hear in person cases concerning status. Libanius' case could, then, have been delegated to a pedaneus iudex. In another edict of Diocletian's one important point is made clear: there were to be no appeals from the pedaneus iudex to the governor. This is of importance for us, for Libanius seems not to have had the option of an appeal.^{68.}

There is then a possibility that the judge in question was not the governor of the province himself, but a subordinate

to whom he had delegated the case; and that this was actually the case is surely suggested by the absence, among all the various terms by which Libanius refers to the judge, of any which attribute to him authority outside the hearing of the case itself, a fact which is contrasted to his habitual use of the term 'archon' when a governor is in question. On the other hand, this does not mean that the attitude of the governor to the case was a matter of no relevance. The fact that the pedaneus iudex was chosen by the governor as his substitute without any appeal from the one to the other would have meant the governor had a certain responsibility for the decisions of his deputy. Therefore in a case involving an important man such as Libanius the attitude of the governor would be crucial. Even if it is the pedaneus iudex who cowers before military patronage, there must have been in the background the malignancy, or at least the indifference, of the governor of Syria towards Libanius.

There remains to consider the identity of 'the general'. Harmand is surely right in claiming that the ease with which the defendants (or their supporters, if they are still in custody) make their way to 'the residence of the

general' implies that he was resident in the locality where the case was being heard. This will mean that the general must be a military man resident in Antioch. This would make sense too of the influence he exercises over the judge, who would scarcely have proved so subservient, and so immediately, to an officer in the countryside. Once we have located the general in Antioch itself, his identification becomes easy. There was only one superior military official regularly resident in Antioch and who, then, without further details could be understood by Libanius' readers to be referred to here: we must conclude that the general of this section is the magister militum per Orientem.⁶⁹ Whence it is, no doubt, that Libanius at the beginning of the speech expresses the fear that what he has to say will cause serious offence to powerful and influential men.

How did coloni from the countryside manage to interest so distant and high-ranking an official in their cause? The first point to be noticed is that they do so at a surprisingly late stage. At the first session of the hearing, the judge shows a marked hostility towards the

defendants: in asking them 'against whom they are committing outrage' he reveals a bias opposite to that he adopts later in the proceedings, and then commits them to prison against the wish even of the plaintiff. It is immediately after this that we first hear of the defendants making their way to the house of the general, whose support they buy with gifts of produce.⁷⁰ Thereafter the judge's conduct is in marked contrast with his preceding: dissimulation and procrastination serve only for a time to disguise the embarrassing transformation in his attitude. Surely the implication of this volte-face is that the judge did not know of any backing of the defendants by the general at the time of the first session. What made the latter show his hand only at such a late stage, after, indeed, his clients had been imprisoned? And how was his patronage not revealed during the first session when the judge asked the coloni 'in whom they placed their hopes'? Surely we must conclude that his patronage was only secured by the coloni after the first session and that the patron in whom, at the time of the first session, the defendants placed their hopes was not, as has been supposed, the general. Who, then, would he have been? Now this whole section on

Libanius' case has been in illustration of the consequences of the patronage of coloni by the garrisons situated in the countryside. The patron who fulfils the necessary function of introducing the coloni to the jurisdiction of the city will surely, then, be the praepositus of the garrison encamped in or near Libanius' domain.

We may now account for the involvement of the magister militum. The praepositus accompanies his clients to Antioch, where they find to their chagrin that in the city his patronage carries little weight. The coloni are taken into custody, while supporters of theirs -- among whom surely the praepositus would take precedence -- make their way to the residence of the magister militum. He receives humble gifts coming from the coloni, but what wins him over is the intercession of his immediate subordinate. So he then intercedes with the pedaneus iudex, and secures victory for the defendants against their master. Thus here too, as we surmised in the case of the free villages, the praepositus of a detachment stationed in the countryside is able, on occasion, to thwart city-dwellers of high station on behalf of the local peasantry, and this simply and solely because he himself is under the protection of the commander-in-chief

in Antioch.

But before we exaggerate the power of the praepositus, we should not ignore the exceptional circumstances of Libanius' defeat. We have argued that, even if the actual hearing was conducted by a pedaneus iudex, the attitude of the provincial governor remained crucial. It is hard to believe that this exalted official would have borne the interference of the military commander with silent passivity, had he not, for his own reasons, been already hostile towards the plaintiff. Now even Libanius, the most difficult of men, was only rarely during this period on bad terms at the same time with both the magister militum and the civil governor: it follows that most Antiochenes of similar standing could not have been worsted in the same way. But one may still agree in part with Libanius when he observes in the concluding sentence of this section that if he, a successful rhetorician distinguished by imperial favour, could be undone through military patronage, what chance had those who were without the same standing: even if many curials might not have suffered the same reverse, landowners less rich and less influential would scarcely have been more successful. Of such humbler station, one

may surmise, must have been the thwarted tax-collectors of the first section of the speech.

Libanius concludes his exposition of the sufferings of landowners at the hands of military patrons with a passage of generalization which, since it contains a new point, deserves to be quoted:

'In (the territory of) each city there are the same peasants, the same search (for patrons), the same payments, the same profits, the same penalties, the same cause of happiness, the same reasons for dejection. From the other estates, where there is no opportunity for these outrages, many farmers, leaving behind their wives and children, set off in pursuit of those mighty men, those towers of strength, hoping to benefit from their lawless exercise of power'. 71.

We need not pause on Libanius' claim, which we have no reason to dispute, that his misfortune could be paralleled from all over Syria. More interesting is his treatment of the question which will have arisen in the mind of every reader as to the situation in villages in which no detachments were stationed. Here, he tells us, the recourse of the coloni was to take considerable trouble to obtain the patronage of more distant detachments. This one may believe with the qualification that not many peasants are likely to have wandered from their holdings in pursuit of patronage, and

then only as a last resort. And one misapprehension of the commentators should be corrected. Since wives and children are left behind, there is no question of the farmers abandoning their holdings. This is not, then, a further example of fugitivi coloni, that is, coloni who desert their holdings in order to work, permanently, somewhere else.

After his discussion of the ways and means of military patronage in the villages belonging to one master, Libanius proceeds in the remaining sections of the speech to urge at length the illegality of military patronage and press for imperial intervention. A point to be noted is that the patronage of independent village communities to which the first part of the speech, after the proem, had been devoted is here effectively ignored: clearly, Libanius' concern was patronage in estates such as his own, and the main purpose of the first section simply to win the sympathy of his readers.

What these sections have to tell us, in a general way, of the ethos of rural patronage is valuable and has been treated above. For the purposes of our discussion here

there is only one problem that is outstanding, namely the identity of the law which Libanius finally invokes against the abuse that is the subject of the speech.

He does so in the following words:

'But why have I taken such trouble at this time when there is already a law that deals with these matters? I am not requesting that a law be made -- that would be ridiculous --, but that the one that already exists be not shown to have been promulgated in vain. For it has been promulgated in vain, in vain, o emperor, ... What would have been done had there been no law against it, is happening 73. even though there is a law against it, ...'

The question is, to what law is Libanius referring?

May we not hope that the very law in question will have been preserved for us in the voluminous texts of the Codes, or at least, if the actual law has been lost, that another on the same topic may be contained therein? All the commentators have in this hope searched through the Codes, and all, in their own opinion, with success, although with widely differing answers. Before we enumerate their suggestions, let us be clear as to our requirements. The abuse Libanius has been attacking is the specific abuse of military patronage in villages exercised on behalf of the peasant against his master, or his neighbours. Now up to this section, the close and climax of the speech, Libanius

has pressed home the points essential for his case with an admirable fullness and eloquence. We will expect him, then, not to have left it to his reader to determine whether the law in question was decisive. Since he does not argue this point, it surely follows that the law dealt specifically with the abuse in question; had it been of a much more general scope, or differently focussed, he would not have left it to others to determine its relevance. Libanius does not tell us the specifications of the law in question; but it is quite clear what law we are to look for.

With this in mind, let us consider the various edicts which have been proposed as solutions to our problem. They may be briefly tabulated:

(1) Codex Theodosianus I.29.8 (392), suggested by Tillemont. Here it is the protection of brigands that is reprehended.

(2) C Th V.17.2 (386), suggested by Zulueta. This law is directed against the sollicitation or harbouring of coloni belonging to another master. Its inclusion in the section on fugitivi coloni suggests that it is the harbouring of peasants who desert their holdings permanently that is in question.

(3) C Th XI.24.2 (368), proposed by Heitland and Martroye. Here it is the gaining of patronage to the disadvantage of

the fisc in exchange for the ownership of the land that is reprehended.

(4) C Th IX.33.1. (384), proposed by Harmand. This law is directed against the protection of 'plebeians' from 'public order'. The title under which it is included in the Code and the annexed interpretation show that what this law had in mind was the exciting of mobs to seditious acts.^{73.}

It is clear that none of these suggestions fit our requirements. One can only conclude that the law Libanius had in mind, and any others, if there were others, on the same topic, have not been included in the Codes. This fact might be taken to suggest that at the times of their compilation the abuse our speech treats was no longer of importance. But the edicts contained in the Codes against other forms of rural patronage would show, according to the same notion as to the editing of the Codes, that corrupt rural patronage was still a serious threat; and, more generally, a comparison of the Theodosian and Justinian Codes as to what laws the former omits but the latter includes would surely leave one sceptical as to the perfect logicity of the compilation of the Theodosian Code. The conclusion to

be drawn from the loss of Libanius' law is rather, once again, that the Codes give us a far from comprehensive picture of the Late Empire.

It is interesting that a law had been promulgated, even if not enforced, against rural patronage by the military. It testifies, as indeed many extant edicts do, to members of the curial class having sufficient influence at court to secure the promulgation of laws in their own interest and against that of the military. It testifies, too, to the practices which arouse Libanius' ire being reasonably widespread and inspiring a sufficient degree of disquiet. Libanius' personal interest and, above all, the lack of corroborating evidence outside this speech may tempt one to scepticism as to the importance of the patronage he attacks; but the existence of this law provides the necessary corroboration.

4. CONCLUSION

'It is hard work for the farmer to yoke the oxen, draw the plough, cut the furrow, sow the seed, endure the winter, bear the cold, dig a ditch, protect the seed

from too much water, make the banks of the rivers higher, and cut deeper furrows through the middle of the field; but these hard and labourious tasks seem easy and light whenever the farmer looks forward to the earing of the corn, the sickle sharpened, the threshing floor covered by the sheaves, and the harvest in due season carried home amid great rejoicing.'

(St. John Chrysostom, Homily on glorying in tribulations) 74.

We have seen how flourishing was the agriculture of northern Syria during the period of the Late Empire. A cereal culture improved by extensive irrigation, farming of vines and olives on many types of land and in every district, the whole supporting and supported by a lively commerce that benefited greatly from a large and wealthy urban population and conditions of rare peace -- in a variety of ways the countryside of ancient Syria enjoyed a prosperity quite different from the subsistence economy of modern times.

For Libanius, and indeed for the city dwellers as a whole, the true purpose of this prosperity was to support an Hellenic civilization in the cities, into which was to be drained the wealth of the countryside. But in practice the farming population kept much of the wealth that it created. Two factors, above all, effected this: communities of free peasants flourished throughout our period, while the advanced state of agriculture made it profitable for masters

to stimulate their coloni to full use of brain and arm by making them benefit personally from the fruit of their labours. As a consequence, in marked contrast to the Syrian fellah of modern times with his defeatism and passivity, his ancient forebear, the colonus as much as the independent farmer, often displayed a spirit of confidence, initiative and self-esteem. Even though the Limestone Massif, whose economy enjoyed a dramatic expansion throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, should not be taken as typical of northern Syria, a favourable picture of the prosperity and independence of Syrian rural life remains justified.

But at the same time the economy of the countryside suffered from a variety of stresses and strains that set off darker cross-currents above all in the psychology and social relations of the Syrian peasant. Perennial facts of the climate, quite apart from any more subtle economic pressures, created a constant problem of indebtedness. The corruptions of a taxation system dominated by the wealthy were weighted against the interests of the small farmer, while in any disputes between them the rich city-dweller derived a great advantage from a judicial system which

entrusted all jurisdiction to city courts whose judgement was determined by influence. Above all, the prosperity of the countryside was variably and irregularly distributed. This was only due in part to inevitable variations from district to district or from farm to farm in the productivity of the land and type of crop, for mixed agriculture was widespread in the plains, while olive monoculture was often enormously profitable in less fertile areas. A greater effect must be attributed to other, less healthy, factors. First, in contrast to the Limestone Massif where productivity was rising faster than population, the plains with a long history of cultivation were already populated as heavily as an intensive agriculture could support. As a consequence, the ambition and initiative of the population expressed itself in bitter competition and contention over the possession of land and control of water supplies. These contentions led to open violence as well as litigation between neighbouring communities. Those whose efforts met with success grew and prospered at the expense of the defeated, who through impoverishment and discouragement might enter on a decline that could not be reversed. Secondly, the conditions in which the coloni lived varied widely

according to the policy of the landowner. At one extreme, we find farmers existing near subsistence level and working at the more profitable forms of farming, such as viticulture, only as hired labourers at harvest time; at the other we find skilled farmers whom their masters allow not only a reasonable percentage of the crop, but also, in some cases luxuries such as inns or baths, in the hope that they will be contented with their employment and farm the land as profitably as possible. A consequence of this inequality was that many coloni who were not at the top of the ladder became jealous of their more fortunate brethren and dissatisfied with their own conditions of employ. This led in many cases to a worsening of relations between master and colonus, contentions and lawsuits.

These stresses and strains that marred the felicity of Syrian rural life created special needs for the Syrian peasant, whether tied or free, of help and protection. These needs were met by the institution of rural patronage, by which a powerful man would take a village community under his wing. A patron could supply his clients with credit, or help them over the repayment of debts; he could use his influence on the provincial administration to secure the tax-assessment they wanted; he could use his name to protect his

clients against their neighbours, whether in defence or in aggression; and with his support, but not without it, they could take litigation to the city and hope for favourable verdicts. Finally, the patron could act as mediator over internal disputes inside the village; in this way he would in free villages play the role left vacant by the lack of any local magistrates. In villages owned by a landlord the position was made more complicated by the fact that the master was meant, conventionally, to play the patron for his own coloni, but was often not suitable: city magnates were too proud, often too busy, to slave away for the benefit of their peasants, while over certain matters such as indebtedness, still more conditions of employment, the master was too interested a party. Hence even coloni were in search of patronage, especially for help over local difficulties and disputes. So the patron in either sort of village not only helped his clients over particular matters, but fulfilled the role of a visible head and unifier in a country of absent landlords and non-existent magistrates.

Such an account of the functions of the patron may suggest that the institution of patronage served quite

generally to keep the peasant afloat, and to make some reparation for the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Unfortunately, however, the social and political system that made patronage of such potential value failed to provide a remotely adequate supply of good patrons. As a consequence, many communities were unprotected against oppressive tax-collectors and covetous neighbours. Worse still, the villages in the strongest position in the bid for patrons will have been those that were already the richest of their kind. Patronage will certainly have served to maintain the prosperity of these communities, and insofar as it was the great landlords or state officials -- or, indeed the accidents of the climate -- that patrons protected them against, it will have been solely a benefit, if limited in extent, for the Syrian peasantry. But insofar as their gains were made up by the losses of neighbouring communities unable to resist their depredations or the extra burden of taxation that was transferred from the favoured villages onto their shoulders, the institution will have been of great harm to exactly those sections of the rural population least able to bear it. And even for the richer villages with active and effective patronage there was always

the danger that the patron might misuse his position to contrive their reduction to serfdom; in this there was no great threat to their standard of living, but the enterprising peasantry of flourishing villages, whose mentality emerges so strikingly from the De Patrociniiis, will have treasured, as well as their prosperity, their freedom of action.

If such was the character of rural patronage as a whole, what is to be said in particular about that practised by soldiers of the Syrian comitatus? As represented by Libanius, it stands well apart from the other forms: its essential function was to further violence and disruption, and it had therefore been singled out for condemnation by the law.

However, Libanius had personal motives for bias and distortion, and it is hard to believe that it was so peculiar and so limited in its exercise. If the military patrons of free villages protected aggression, it is reasonable to assume that they will have performed as well the other, more peaceful, functions of patronage. In addition, one detail in Libanius' narrative implies that the patronage of villages that belonged to one master did not, after all, have

his discomfort as its original purpose; and since this purpose is not specified in the writer's indictment, it can be deduced that it was quite unobjectionable.⁷⁵

In fact, the most important point to be made about military patronage of countrymen has nothing to do with any peculiar features: the fact to be noted first and above all is simply that it existed. Soldiers of the comitatus stationed in villages of the countryside certainly had the time, as they had the status, to undertake the traditional role of the rural patron. They might have kept out of the affairs of men 'who share their dwellings with oxen', or imposed themselves in some novel fashion. But instead they took on a role that was in accord with both the needs of the countryside and, too, its established pattern of social hierarchy. It is this that is the chief lesson for the modern historian of the De Patrociniiis, once he has seen through the smoke-screen of Libanius' personal prejudices.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to distinguish a number of ways in which military patronage was distinct in character and effect; and, indeed, had it lacked peculiarities of its own, it would scarcely have attracted the special attention of Libanius. Here there are several aspects that

deserve emphasis.

A rare, though not unique, feature of this patronage was its instant availability in country places. We have stressed the fact that there was a general shortage of rural patrons. But there was a still greater shortage of persons of authority resident in the countryside, and therefore immediately available to fulfil the more local functions of the patron, such as adjudicating internal disputes, for which there existed no mechanism among the villagers themselves.

In this exercise of an informal authority, one characteristic which military men shared with the holy man who acted as mediator in rural disputes was the position of an alien, and this in two ways. A member of the comitatus could have been recruited from anywhere in the eastern empire: he is therefore likely to have been a newcomer to the district, without any of the anterior ties that might have restricted him in his assumption and exercise of patronage. At the same time, his station and role in society being different from that of either peasant or landowner, he had no anterior bias in favour of any social or occupational class in his particular neighbourhood, whatever his social position

had been before he became a soldier. Libanius was horrified that a patron should have supported recalcitrant coloni against their own master, especially when the latter was of the curial class: most patrons, themselves both local landowners and of local origins, would presumably have been more hesitant.

Once the local praepositus militum found that his patronage involved him in disputes between his clients and magnates of the city, a further aspect of his situation came prominently to the fore. He himself was not of exalted rank, but he had as his superior an officer of real importance, the magister militum per Orientem. We have no reason to suppose that this general would encourage his subordinates to enter into conflict with curial tax-collectors or great landowners, least of all with those with whom he was of terms of friendship; but it is one of the lessons of the De Patrociniis that, once such contention had arisen, he was not ready to see his subordinate worsted by some city magnate to whom he felt no personal obligations. Consequently, the praepositus of comitatenses stationed in the countryside possessed, in addition to the advantage of local availability, a protection for himself that greatly strengthened his

championship of others.^{76.}

For patronage such as this, one might expect the price to have been high, as in the case of the rural patronage practised by 'Mixidemus'. And Libanius, indeed, alleges gifts of all kinds to the military, large enough, in the case of domain villages, to reduce the income of the owner.^{77.} However, we concluded from his fuller account of the details of patronage inside a free village that there was no regular system of payment, and therefore presumably no fixed system of patronage. The pattern was one, rather, of informal improvisation, and both sides will have preserved to a maximum their own freedom of action.

Some commentators have tried to see in this oration the building up of estates by military men by means of adopting villagers as their clients. But the informal character of their patronage, which was no more rigid in free villages than in those already incorporated into estates, definitely excludes this; so equally does the silence of Libanius, who repeats here none of those charges of enslaving the peasantry that he brings against 'Mixidemus'.^{78.}

One may wonder why military men did not use their position to gain a firm grip on the land. The explanation probably lies in their lack of local roots. It is well-known that

the comitatus was recruited from all over the Orient, even from the Thebaid; consequently, the chances for an officer finding himself in command of a station in his own region of origin were obviously slim.⁷⁹ On the other hand, it might be supposed that officers who found themselves despatched as praepositi to particular villages would often proceed to build up strong local ties, and on discharge settle down as veterans in the very localities they had served in. It is hard to see what could have discouraged such officers from using patronage as a means of building up estates for their retirement. It would seem to follow that the praepositi of the De Patrociniis cannot have been permanently stationed in the same place, but must have been shunted around, whether with their detachments or, more probably, as a result of their own transfer or promotion.

The lack of suitable inscriptions makes it impossible to determine the typical career of the military officer, but one famous example is at least suggestive. The Abinnaeus of the mid-fourth century papyrus archive served for many years as a subordinate officer in the vexillation at Diospolis in the Thebaid. He was finally elevated to the protectorate, and assigned to the Syrian field army; in this he served for not more than four years, and was then sent, as an aging man,

to command the ala of limitanei at Dionysias in the Fayyum. At his relinquishment of this command, about ten years later, he finally retired, not in the vicinity of any of the places he had served in, but in Philadelphia, in a different part of the Fayyum, where his wife happened to have property. The career of Abinnaeus is scarcely good evidence for the general pattern in the Syrian field army, but it does suggest to what the lack of interest in building up estates displayed by the praepositi of the Libanian oration must be attributed.^{80.}

Even if it is an error to regard rural patronage as typically a system that led to the enserfment of free villages, it remains the case that most patrons, whether local landowners or imperial officials permanently in the province, could be suspected, and sometimes rightly, of aiming at the expansion of their own property. But here were patrons who not only were active locally and with powerful friends in the city, but had no apparent designs on the land. It is, then, not surprising if peasants flocked from distant villages in search of 'these towers of strength'.

Military patronage was all too like other forms in its

favouritism and shortage of supply; as such, it will have been a mixed blessing for the general prosperity of the Syrian countryside. But in its distinctive features it stands out, as indeed in a very different way does the rural patronage practised by holy men, as genuinely weighted in favour of the continuing prosperity and independence of the small farmer, whether a free peasant or a tenant who had no wish to be reduced to serfdom; and as such, it constituted a threat to those magnates and officials of the city who had designs on the peasant in the contrary direction. It is true that this picture depends on evidence from Libanius that is manifestly biassed and incomplete. But that military patronage really had this character is shown by the fact that it elicited from Libanius a whole oration in protest and, still more, by the promulgation of an edict to curb it.

We saw that, despite the pressures on the peasantry in the over-populated regions of ancient wealth, the free village survived, and flourished, into the time of Theodoret, and that even the coloni were on the whole much better off than the fellaheen of modern times. For this the chief explanation lies in the advanced agriculture and formidable wealth of the countryside, while the surplus population was reduced

by plentiful opportunities for emigration, for instance to the Limestone Massif. But a subsidiary reason is to be found in the activities of military patrons, who not only stepped into the gap caused by the shortage of patrons of a more normal kind, but played their role with striking effect and to the real benefit of those villages which secured, and directed, their services.

III

THE ABINNAEUS ARCHIVE: A MILITARY UNIT IN RURAL
EGYPT

'Not even so would he stay his hand from battle ... but, attacking the tents and thick fences of the Blemyes, he broke them and burned them, and slew those whom he overtook; and he ran to the rocks and the hills and the black waters, searching to find them while they left their beds. Even as a lion, raging in heart against a cow in the pastures, swiftly pursues a herd of cattle at midday -- the trained hunting-dogs cannot restrain him from entering the thick fences and the herdsmen are aghast, but the lion leaps swiftly into the stalls, driven by irresistible fury, and blood splashes upon its jaws that bring the oxen death --, even so did Germanus fall upon their tents...' ¹

In such language does a papyrus fragment of the fifth century celebrate the glorious career of one of the military commanders in Late Roman Egypt. A civil governor would, in contrast, have been praised for the justice of his rule and the tranquillity of his period of tenure. Similarly, in a letter of St. Isidore's to a military man in Lower Egypt guilty of causing the local population 'trouble of every sort', the miscreant is urged not simply

to act with less arrogance, but to 'undertake hard and dangerous work, for which those in power will reward you'.²

We have seen that the location of troops in Lower Egypt was, despite the absence of any serious prospect of invasion, determined first and foremost by a consideration of the requirements for defence. These two passages are typical of the many which demonstrate that Late Roman military men were thought of primarily as fighters, both in time of war and when, in time of profound peace, a soldier might hope to last his whole career without one glimpse of an enemy. To describe any section of the Late Roman army as, for instance, a mere police force is to neglect this simple fact.

But a soldier who had no battles to fight or enemy to keep a watchful eye over cannot be expected to have spent his days scanning the horizon for an invader who never came. The fact that his station had been chosen above all in accordance with the requirements for defence tells us nothing of the life he actually led. In this context, more attention is invited by the apparent existence of a policy to keep military men at a distance from cities. This policy was no doubt motivated by a variety of considerations, but it is reasonable to suspect that one of these

will have been the activities in which the soldier occupied his time. What, then, was the role assumed by military men whom imperial policy might exclude from the luxury of the Egyptian cities, but only to immerse them in the bustling life of its rural communities?

It is our great good fortune that here the skeleton outline of the Notitia is given flesh and bones by the survival of a body of papyri from the archive of an officer who was throughout the 340s praepositus in command of an ala of horse located, as in the laterculum minus of the Notitia, at Dionysias, a village in what was, by the date of the Notitia, the western part of Arcadia and which modern archaeological excavation has enabled us to place precisely, at one point at the south-west extremity of what was then Lake Moeris.³ The eighty documents that survive from the archive are far from a complete collection and cannot be assumed to be a fully representative selection, but the picture that they present is only very partially supplemented from other sources and remains the essential element in our knowledge of the role of the military in the countryside of Late Roman Egypt. It

deserves, then, to be spelled^{out} in detail.

If the military duties of Abinnaeus' unit were only theoretical and potential in the peaceful conditions of his place and time, we will expect it to have undertaken some public services or other of a non-belligerent description. It is here that the evidence of the archive is comprehensive rather than patchy: the documents deal above all with the day to day official business of the unit. The emphasis is on two matters -- the care of the annona collection and criminal jurisdiction.⁴

We discussed in our first chapter a theory of van Berchem's that the location of the Egyptian military posts was determined by the soldiers' function as guardians of the annona depots. In support of this view he employs not only the evidence of the Notitia and Antonine Itinerary, but also the more particular information to be found in the archive before us: document after document testifies to a keen involvement displayed by the unit not simply in its reception of needed supplies, but also in the actual collection of taxes in kind. Van Berchem comes to the conclusion that, despite the important role played by liturgical officials, the annona was not only stored in

the camp but also collected by the soldiers themselves.⁵

What we must first determine is the range of taxes in the collection or administration of which the archive proves the unit to have been involved. The least interesting possibility is that it extended no wider than the supplies needed for its own consumption. Alternatively, we might find in question a wider range of annona militaris, intended in addition for other units and for civilian officials. Finally, we might hope to find evidence of a military involvement in the collection of the important corn taxes for Alexandria and for Constantinople or of other taxes not in kind at all.⁶

The document that involves the widest range is a letter to Abinnaeus from the 'overseer of the imperial domains', conveying orders from both the dux and the catholicus that the praepositus provide a company 'for the collection of the imperial taxes', presumably meaning the rents from imperial lands. However, the heavy emphasis the writer lays on the orders from the dux and his threat to report Abinnaeus should he fail to cooperate suggest that the order was an abnormal one and the providing of such companies no regular and automatic part of a praepositus'

duties. As for the rest of the archive, we hear of other special missions for which Abinnaeus is asked to provide soldiers of his command, but none of them are fiscal.⁷

But if there is no evidence that the unit was regularly concerned with the collection of taxes on behalf of civilian needs, we might hope for some evidence that it was involved in the collection of supplies for other units. Here there are three documents which deserve attention. Van Berchem lays emphasis on a letter from the actuarius at Dionysias that refers to a need to comply with instructions from the dux that 'all the annona quotas of the year be locked up in camp', instructions issued, he informs Abinnaeus, 'at the request of the actuarii of the Upper Thebaid'; the conclusion he draws is that the Dionysias unit stored annona for the use of military posts in Upper Egypt. But it is surely more natural to suppose that these instructions had been generally directed to all military posts and that the Upper Thebaid is referred to simply because it was the actuarii there who had requested the reform, which was one in the interest of the actuarius of every camp concerned.⁸ The second document relevant here is a letter to Abinnaeus from the

exactor of Arsinoe, which is understood by the editors of the archive to refer to Abinnaeus having sent to the exactor horses he had requisitioned, presumably for the use of other cavalry units. Unfortunately, the relevant sentence on the papyrus is badly damaged and the verb-ending and pronominal stem that make Abinnaeus send horses to the exactor is an editorial supplement; a different one, not less possible palaeographically, would make the exactor the sender and Abinnaeus the receiver. Since Abinnaeus' was a cavalry unit and its needs provided for by the exactor, while we are failing to find adequate testimony that the Dionysias ala helped in the regular provisioning of other units, the latter supplement, if a choice has to be made, will seem the more natural.⁹ Finally, there is a quite unproblematic document where the praepositus of the vexillation stationed at Arsinoe first instructs Abinnaeus to provide with a military guard a number of smiths he has sent out to gather timber for his detachment, and then requests the immediate despatch of '15 bushels of nitron and also capers' for which Abinnaeus has sent him a 'pittakion', that is, a military document of entitlement. This letter indeed proves that the Dionysias ala helped to some degree

in the provisioning of other units, but the case is a peculiar one: one cannot hazard a generalization about the collection of the annona militaris from the requisitioning of timber and the provision of certain luxuries, while in addition Abinnaeus' relationship with the praepositus of Arsinoe was an exceptional one, not only in their propinquity but in the fact that, at least for certain purposes, Abinnaeus was the other's subordinate.¹⁰

Examination has left us with only two documents which refer to an involvement of Abinnaeus' unit in the collection of tax contributions not intended merely for its own consumption, and in both cases the involvement is severely limited. But we have hitherto touched only tangentially on the archive's main body of documents concerning tax collection, namely the letters, and lists, relating to that collection of annona in which two civilian officials, the exactor and the epimeletes, were actively concerned. There is no question here of any explicit evidence of the involvement of Abinnaeus in the provisioning of civilians or of other military units; the problem is whether the opposite conclusion, that this annona was purely for the

consumption of the Dionysias ala, can be hasarded either.

Since these documents are concerned almost exclusively with the collection of contributions, it is quite unclear in most cases for whose consumption they are intended. But there are a few that do give an indication. One document refers to the dispatch to the camp of '16 artabas of wheat, one spathion of oil, sealed, 8 goatskins and 8 sacks', an exiguous collection of odds and ends that sounds intended for merely local use.¹¹ The reference to the camp deserves closer attention. Other papyri in the archive mention that the contributions are to be taken there: particularly important is the papyrus already referred to on which an actuarius complains to Abinnaeus that the epimeletes has fallen behind in his collection and so delayed the fulfilment of the order of the dux that 'all the annona quotas of the year be locked up in camp'. This document shows that the annona in the collection of which Abinnaeus was involved was gathered together and stored in Dionysias.¹² That any of this was intended for the use of other units will now appear unlikely if we consider the topography of the region. Dionysias was situated 26 miles north-west from Arsinoe, at the south-

west corner of Lake Moeris. The letters and lists extant in the archive specify the village from which the annona is collected in twelve places: of these, no less than eleven specify villages in the region immediately to the west and south-west of Arsinoe, while only one refers to the much wider area that stretched between them and Dionysias.¹³ That this is not merely a coincidence is suggested by the archive of Sakaon of Theadelphia, which shows that in at least one village in the area nearer Dionysias the extensive production of cereals broke down completely during the first decades of the fourth century, owing to a collapse of the irrigation system.¹⁴ One may conclude that easily the greater part of the annona that was stored in Dionysias was brought all the way from just outside Arsinoe. Now Dionysias lay at one isolated corner of the Arsinoite nome, largely surrounded by lake and desert, such that all provisions sent from it to other military units would have had to be sent either back to Arsinoe initially or immediately past it, save in the single case of the unit at Oasis Minor, to which a desert route wound south-west from Dionysias.¹⁵ Surely such provisions would have been gathered and stored not in Dinnysias but in

Arsinoe, where the stationing of a vexillation at this date will have ensured the existence of a military granary. It follows that the annona with which Abinnaeus' unit was concerned was in all probability exclusively for its own consumption.

This conclusion is strengthened by one fragment of evidence from the Oxyrhynchus papyri. We have mentioned the unit at Oasis Minor as the one unit that could sensibly have been supplied from cereals stored at Dionysias. Now a papyrus dated to 305 acknowledges the receipt of wheat and barley for this unit from the granaries of Oxyrhynchus. If the fort at Dionysias, already existent at this date, had stored an annona surplus of any significant size, its greater propinquity would surely have made it virtually the sole supplier for the ala at Oasis Minor, certainly to the exclusion of places such as Oxyrhynchus.¹⁶ Again the conclusion is invited that the cereals stored at Dionysias were for the exclusive consumption of the local ala.

That the annona collection which is so prominent in the Abinnaeus archive was only a local affair will not seem surprising if we consider the fertility of the region.

As already mentioned, the region in the immediate vicinity of the fort had largely, though not entirely, abandoned cereal culture by this date, and concentrated on pasturing, as is shown by the frequent reference to herds of sheep or goats in the Theadelphia archive. The rest of the land between Dionysias and Arsinoe was clearly much more fertile, but scarcely of a size to support more than one unit; meanwhile, the rest of the Arsinoite nome, with which, as we shall see, Abinnaeus' unit had very little to do, will have contributed rather to the stores of the units at Arsinoe and at Narmuthis.

We can now draw our threads together. An examination of the few documents in the archive that explicitly relate, or might seem to relate, to the involvement of the Dionysias ala in tax collection for purposes wider than the mere provisioning of the unit itself revealed a lack of any positive evidence for such involvement apart from two or three cases either quite minor or clearly irregular. On the other hand, it has transpired that the annona collection that does, by contrast, feature prominently in the archive was probably for the benefit solely of the local unit. One

may conclude that the ala at Dinnysias was regularly involved in the collection of taxes only to the extent that it took an active interest in its own provisioning. This conclusion makes nonsense of any suggestion that the collection of taxes formed one of the unit's important functions, since it is no part of the function of an official that he receives his salary.

This analogy invites the suggestion that the position of the unit might have been different from that of the typical government employee in that the many and varied references in the archive to the collection of the annona may seem to imply that it had to work hard at the collection itself. Was it no joke but a stern reality that its main task was the reception of its wages?

Such, indeed, appears to be the view of the editors of the archive. They note the active involvement of two liturgical officials, the exactor of Arsinoe and his subordinate the epimeletes, in the administration of the annona, but conclude that the actual labour of collection was undertaken by the military.¹⁷ The evidence for this is somewhat miscellaneous, and it will be worthwhile to assemble and classify all the significant references to a military involvement in the administration and collection

of the annona.

The editors of the archive assume that the notification of the contributions to be made was the responsibility of the two liturgical officials; and indeed one would not expect the tax-payers to have accepted the word of the military on this matter. On the other hand, the documents testify that Abinnaeus was closely involved even at this stage: we have the letter of a tax-collector which refers to a schedule of payments to be made with which the praepositus has provided him, and such schedules, or possibly accounts of actual payments, with the name of each individual contributor, feature prominently among the financial lists preserved in the archive. One could mention too the letter of the exactor's to Abinnaeus from which it transpires that a question 'about the peasants concerning the balance' is one that has to be discussed between them.¹⁸ It appears, then, that the military, because of their personal interests, were active in the administration and supervision of the collection, but, in the light of our general understanding of Egyptian tax-collection and since the exactor was no subordinate of Abinnaeus', the legal authority and actual responsibility

must have remained in civilian hands.

On the mechanism of the actual collection the archive presents a more comprehensive picture. The most valuable documents here are two letters to Abinnaeus from one Aetius: it is unfortunate that neither of them specify the writer's post, but in view of the formula he uses in addressing Abinnaeus and his role in the collection, it may be assumed that he was a civilian and an epimeletes. In the first of these letters the official mentions various contributions, largely of wheat and barley, which are in process of conveyance to the camp: it is clear that he himself, with the help of subordinates to whom he alludes, has already carried out the actual collection. In the second letter he describes in detail two cases where villagers refused to pay the contributions he demanded from them.¹⁹ In contrast, there is no reference throughout the archive to the collection being carried out by soldiers of the unit. What we find instead is that the delivery to the camp was sometimes entrusted to them: Aetius mentions, for instance, that he has sent 'two spathia of oil and the basket' 'by Agathus, a soldier from Hermoupolis', and asks Abinnaeus 'to convey the wheat and

barley from Theoxenis' himself. On the other hand, two documents refer to not a few 'Libyan' camel-drivers performing conveyance of the annona, so that soldiers did not bear the burden unshared.²⁰

There remain two documents that shed a still more significant light on the limitations of the military involvement in the annona collection. In one letter a military accountant complains to the praepositus that the preparations for the annona inspection by an official of the dux are being held up by the incompetence of the epimeletes, a delay for which the accountant himself is being blamed: the significant point is that the first step the accountant took, before appealing to Abinnaeus, was to ask the exactor to send instructions to his subordinate. To this may be compared another letter in the archive concerning the activities of an officer in the ala, to whom some matters in the administration of the collection have been entrusted by his commander. On going to visit the epimeletes, he found him under arrest by an official of the provincial governor's; but this does not enable Abinnaeus' subordinate to transact his business without the cooperation of the epimeletes, for instead he has to secure his release from custody, so that he may go to the camp, and meanwhile extract

a letter from him 'to the people of Theoxenis about the barley tax'. It is striking in both these documents that, in both the notification of tax-payers and the collection of contributions, the military seem unable to shortcut authorisation by the civilian officials.²¹

The conclusion must be drawn that the editors of the archive have overestimated the involvement of the military in the annona collection. The unit had the strongest personal interest in the collection, and we find as a consequence that their officer played a subordinate role in the administration of the collection and kept the most detailed accounts, while his men were sometimes entrusted with the conveyance of contributions from the epimeletes to their praepositus: but the supplying of the camp remains essentially in civilian hands, at every stage of the operation; the military bear neither the responsibility nor the main part of the burden of the collection.²²

The Abinnaeus archive is perhaps unique, in our period, for the light it sheds on the role of the military in the collection of the annona militaris. It has always been known from the imperial Codes that soldiers were meant to

be the happy recipients but not the exactors of the tax, but there could in the event be a world of difference between imperial intention and provincial practice. . . . What would seem more natural than that in the rural districts of the frontier underemployed military units should virtually have taken over their own provisioning, while the oppressed countryfolk had no real opportunity of legal redress? But here at Dionysias, where the evidence we require is finally at our disposal, we find the military almost too respectful of the **system** of civilian tax-collection. The politics of rural Egypt will require our close attention.

The most surprising aspect of the role of the military as it emerges from the Abinnaeus archive is undoubtedly the existence in our period of a regular system of military jurisdiction for criminal offences. The archive contains a dozen petitions which entrust cases either of theft or of assault to the attention of the praepositus. After a description of the crime in freer language, the request for the officer's intervention is regularly expressed in a few formulae which reappear in petition after petition

with even the same grammatical mistakes, which may be taken as evidence that they stemmed from the praepositus' office.²³ None of the petitions contain all the formulae, but they may be taken as implied where they are omitted: consequently, an exact and regular system of jurisdiction may be deduced from these documents. The form was as follows. The praepositus is requested first to take the culprit, or culprits, into custody; in two cases he is asked to secure their arrest by the liturgical police officers of the village, in others we may imagine that soldiers were used. Once the criminals are in military hands, they are to be made to confess or reveal their accomplices: it is at this stage that their guilt is established in a preliminary hearing. In the cases of theft, this is followed immediately by restitution. In two cases of theft, it appears, as we might expect, that the matter is to go no further; but in most of these cases and in all those of assault, except where the involvement of one of the praepositus' own soldiers apparently gives him the right to settle the case himself, the matter is now to be referred to the praepositus'

superior, the dux: 'for', as the formula runs, 'it is his function to take vengeance on the perpetrators of such outrages'.²⁴ The exact meaning of this clause is not certain, but it is reasonable to suppose that the dux had to pass formal sentence on the criminals, though here he had in practice been anticipated by the decision of the praepositus, and determine the penalties. There is unfortunately no hint of what these are to consist of. One might adduce as a parallel a letter of St. Basil's, from a rather too distant part of the empire, in which the governor of the province is asked to subject a criminal guilty of robbery and assault to a short spell of imprisonment. The documents before us invite one distinction. While in the cases of theft it is simply the petition that is to be sent on to the dux, with the culprits presumably remaining under the custody of the praepositus, in cases of assault the criminals themselves are to be conveyed to the dux: since in both cases the rights and wrongs of the case could only be determined by the praepositus locally, the most natural explanation for this distinction is that

the perpetrators of assault were to be punished more harshly, whether the point was that such penalties were carried into effect only under the eye of the dux, or that in serious cases the accused had to appear before the court which judged him.²⁵

We may suspect that even in cases of theft it was possible for the defendant to insist on appearing personally before the dux, and perhaps on a delay of restitution, until the case had received an official verdict. This is suggested by the analogous situation in civil jurisdiction: for example, in a document of the fifth century a riparius orders the restitution of two stolen cows, but adds that if the criminals are obdurate they must be sent for trial by the governor.²⁶ Strictly, the position will have been that it was the dux who exercised jurisdiction and the praepositus, as his subordinate, who held the culprits under arrest and conducted the necessary investigation; but in practice this investigation was allowed to determine the case, at least in the less serious disputes, and, while the reference to the dux settled the penalty, his verdict was a mere formality, so that the restitution of stolen goods actually

preceded it.

Our chief task must be to set this military jurisdiction in the context of the more regular civilian system. In brief, if Abinnaeus had not consented to hear such cases, to which official would they have gone?

Obviously, criminal cases of this sort fell primarily under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor, and many surviving petitions refer even quite petty cases to his court. But there were two snags here. If the case was disputed, the need for advocates and witnesses would involve an expense scarcely worthwhile in criminal cases. In addition, the governor might well be reluctant to spend time on such trivia, especially among a population notorious for its litigiousness. One might adduce in this context the evidence from Libanius' De Vinc-tis, since there is no reason to suppose that the situation in Antioch was radically different from that in Egypt. The complaint made there is that defendants accused of criminal offences were hastily taken into custody, but had the greatest difficulty in getting their cases heard by the governor, lengthy delays and postponements preventing the hearing even of major cases such as of murder. The governors are, of

course, accused of putting their private pleasures before their duty, but the more interesting point is also made that preference was given to civil cases which involved the interests of the imperial exchequer. One may conclude that the cases that were laid before Abinnaeus lay in the competence of the governor's court, but had virtually no chance of being heard there.²⁷

Next, our attention is directed to the evidence for the entrusting of jurisdiction to the chief local officials, those of the city or the nome. The most obvious candidate is the official referred to indifferently in our period as the ecdicus or syndicus, but shortly to be known as the defensor civitatis. The evidence for his activities has been carefully sifted, and his hearing of cases found to extend only to minor complaints and appeals. Particularly interesting is a petition of 336 concerning a case of assault: the syndicus is asked to investigate and secure for the plaintiff protection in the future, but no request is made for the punishment of the victims. It is reasonable to deduce that this official did not enjoy the right of criminal jurisdiction.²⁸

There is a variety of evidence, too, for the involvement

of the exactor in legal disputes. In a papyrus of 320 a gymnasiarch of the city of Hermoupolis appeals to this official for protection against villagers who are trying to sabotage his harvest: he is asked, if they persist, to send the case to the governor's court. This implies that the exactor had not the competence to judge the culprits himself. When we do on one occasion find a minor case concerning property entrusted to this official, it is as a result of delegation by the provincial governor; but the most interesting point here is that, when the plaintiff first appealed to the exactor, the case was neither investigated nor sent off to the governor. It would seem that this busy fiscal officer was not enthusiastic over any role involving jurisdiction.²⁹ We find the same situation if we turn to the logistes: minor complaints are sent to him but there is no reason to suppose that he had any powers of criminal jurisdiction, and again one document casts doubt on his interest in minor legal disputes in the countryside.³⁰ Finally, more attention must be directed to the role of the riparius, for this official certainly showed interest in cases both of robbery and assault. But again the regular form is for this official to be requested to direct cases to

the jurisdiction of the governor. On the other hand, we find the riparius on one occasion fairly confident that his own authority will be sufficient to effect the restitution of some stolen property, though the matter, if contested, will have to await the decision of the governor.³¹

We may conclude that the cases of robbery and assault which we find referred to the military praepositus lay outside the jurisdiction of all the higher-ranking local officials, those of the city or nome. Their function in the system was rather to forward cases for the governor's consideration. But even here there were snags for the rural litigant. We find a reluctance at times even merely to forward minor cases. And one might point to the curious phrase in one petition to an exactor which refers to the culprits as infected with 'the insolence of country people': this testifies to officials from the city being accredited with a certain dislike and contempt for the squabbles of the countryside.³²

If the chief officials of the nome did not possess criminal jurisdiction, one might expect a fortiori that the same would be true of their inferiors in the countryside. But in fact the contrary is true. The official in question

here is the praepositus pagi, an official entrusted with a fairly small part, consisting of several villages, of a city's territory. Two papyri, one explicitly, the other by implication, credit him with presiding over a 'court of law' (dikasterion). To this we find minor civil cases referred, but only by the governor in delegation.³³ But what was the procedure with criminal cases? Here the clearest evidence is to be found in a petition of 350 concerning a case of assault. The complainant, after the usual formula of attestation, concludes in the usual way to ask for 'vengeance', that is, a verdict and a sentence, but not, in this case, by the provincial governor, as we might have anticipated, but by the praepositus himself. In the light of this document it is natural to understand more vague formulae on other papyri to also refer to a criminal jurisdiction of this praepositus, for instance requests that he should summon certain criminals before him 'and take such measures as are required by the laws'. This deduction enables us to attribute to the praepositus pagi jurisdiction over that same range of cases of robbery and assault that formed the sphere of military jurisdiction.³⁴ But, before we attribute to

this official a jurisdiction of force comparable to that of the governor or of the dux, there is one other document that must be considered. In a petition of 343 the praepositus is asked to punish certain offenders guilty of theft and compel restitution, but, 'if not', the papyrus continues, 'to send them to the great court' of the governor. The point cannot be that the praepositus might choose not to take up the case himself, for then there would be even less chance of his commending it to the governor, but rather that the praepositus' verdict was neither final nor incontestable, if the defendant insisted on the jurisdiction of a higher court.³⁵ But one may doubt whether this limitation on the praepositus' jurisdiction was often availed of in practice: we saw above that governors could be extremely dilatory over criminal cases, and meanwhile the defendant would be held in custody; and indeed, if the governor chose to despatch the case, there was a strong possibility that he might merely delegate it back to the same praepositus.

How was the praepositus to enforce his jurisdiction and and penalties he imposed? Sometimes he is asked to 'summon'

the culprits before his court: the implication is that they will respect his authority and come of their own accord. But more often he is to have them 'brought before' him.³⁶ Here he required the services of the liturgical police officers to which many papyri refer, albeit with a nomenclature irregular and confused. Two of the Abinnaeus papyri refer to village officials, called irenarchs and demosioi, having a duty to present defendants for trial. In another papyrus of our period the task of enforcing the restitution of stolen property is likewise entrusted to two irenarchs of a certain village.³⁷ Elsewhere, however, such officials either do not exist or are ignored: in a document of 346 it is not police officers who have been asked to produce a wanted malefactor, but the village community as a whole.³⁸ But in either case the judge would be dependent on the co-operation of fellow-villagers of the criminal.

The contrast that has emerged between the city whose officials do not exercise criminal jurisdiction and the countryside where comparatively humble officials are not so restricted is an odd one and invites scepticism.³⁹ One

can but make certain suggestions of why this might have been so. First, it is necessary to take into account the rank and influence not only of the official, but also of the persons over whom he exercises jurisdiction. It is possible that city-dwellers, among whom even the humble could be powerfully supported by patronage, would not tolerate fellow-townsmen exercising a jurisdiction that would extend to themselves, while purely rural officials had a freer hand. Secondly, the evidence from Libanius treated above suggests that criminal cases ranked less high than civil ones, and we may suppose that rural disputes would be likely to receive less attention than urban ones. Perhaps the minor criminal cases of the countryside were considered so unimportant as to justify the use of a jurisdiction much inferior to the governor's, while elsewhere the governor of this period was encouraged, at least in the Imperial Codes, to give cases his personal attention. Thirdly one might consider the matter from the angle of the probable evolution of this jurisdiction. The fact that the praepositus' jurisdiction could be rejected and trial by the governor insisted upon suggests that his jurisdiction

developed not from delegation of the governor's authority, where the inferior court would enjoy the same legal status, but from the custom of the inferior official carrying out a preliminary investigation before the actual trial. Such a system of investigation was more likely to lead to the creation of an inferior jurisdiction in the countryside than in the city, since the villager was generally less able than the townsman to secure, through patronage, an interested verdict from the governor. The weakness of the villager in this respect is illustrated by the fact that, as we saw above, in the case of military jurisdiction in the countryside such a preliminary investigation determined the outcome, so much so that, in indictments for robbery, restitution of the stolen property regularly preceded the official verdict.

But for our purposes the problem that needs most careful exploration is the relationship between the criminal jurisdiction of the praepositus pagi and that of the military. There are two questions here: why did villagers have recourse to military jurisdiction despite the existence

of adequate civilian channels, and why did the civilian administration allow such usurpation of its own sphere of activity?

The many surviving petitions of frustrated litigants make us all too well informed of deficiencies in the administration of justice; fortunately, there are a number of these that relate to the praepositus pagi and his subordinates. From these it appears that it was sometimes difficult to induce him to take up a case. For instance, in a petition of 324 complaint is made by a villager in the Arsinoite nome of damage of his crop by a neighbour's animals, the penalty for which was laid down exactly in the laws: but the praepositus must have failed to take it up, for a fresh petition about precisely the same occurrence is addressed to him four months later. Or again, we find a minor civil case in 316 apparently ignored by the praepositus to whom it is first referred, although it is of sufficient plausibility to be taken up later by the governor himself.⁴⁰ We find on occasions a similar reluctance among the police officials on whom the praepositus was dependent for the production of the defendants. There are two sentences in two different

petitions to Abinnaeus that may serve to illustrate this: 'I ask and beseech your humanity to apprehend the demosioi of the village and compel them to present before you the persons guilty of the robbery', and 'I ask and beseech your humanity to apprehend the irenarch and the demosioi of the said village of Hermoupolis and compel them to produce the evil-doers before you'. Here the reluctance of the police to perform their duty had become so epidemic that there had even developed a standard formula for use in the situation.⁴¹

If we ask the reason for this reluctance on the part of the local liturgical officials, the documents draw attention to two that cast some doubt on the efficiency of the civilian jurisdiction entrusted to their charge. First, the physical force that they wielded was insufficient in the case of determined resistance. We possess a somewhat comical petition addressed to the provincial governor by the voluntary substitute of a riparius -- the praepositus' equivalent in the city --: his complaint is that the riparius has failed to keep his promises of a large guard of police officials and of compensation in the event of any injury,

while his unfortunate substitute finds himself, on his rounds, 'daily suspended by ropes and his body belaboured by blows'.⁴² The other factor that militated against the working of the system was the officials' lack of impartiality. Local men temporarily burdened with jurisdiction and police work which could arouse no sense of professional pride could not be expected to be impartial over local disputes. So we find a complainant of damage to his crops by a neighbour's animals turning not this time to the praepositus, but to the logistes of the nome, only to find him in league with his opponent. And in a papyrus of the Abinnaeus archive we find an irenarch accused of turning a blind eye on some outrage because one of his family is among the culprits.⁴³

By contrast, the military were obviously well provided with the physical force to impose their jurisdiction and 'to take vengeance' on the culprits. The evidence indeed suggests that Abinnaeus liked to work in co-operation with the local police, but petitioners imply that reluctance on their part to act will yield to his mandate. Secondly, the praepositus was not likely to be a local man --

Abinnaeus himself perhaps stemmed from the Thebaid --, and so his jurisdiction would often be fairer, and therefore, indeed, more respected.⁴⁴

It is, however, only fair to the civilian praepositi to observe that the same facts, and preferences, can be seen in a different light. One may suspect that it would often be an idealization to accept the plaintiff's representation of himself as the peaceable victim of unprovoked attack: Sakaon of Theadelphia might seem from his archive to have been a veritable village Hampden in the face of oppression by more powerful neighbours and governmental indifference, but we learn from a stray papyrus that he himself was open to accusations of committing abduction, assault and robbery against enemies of long standing. What at first hearing may sound like the cry of an innocent victim will often have been but one further stage in a feud.⁴⁵ Attention may also be drawn in this context to the enactment on the damage of crops by animals in which, as we have seen, one complainant attempted unsuccessfully to interest the civilian praepositus. The enactment specified that the trespassing animal was to be sold, part of the proceeds going to the owner of the

damaged property, and the rest to the municipal treasury. The reason for the severity of the penalty was that it was deliberate damage that was envisaged; it is in accordance with this that, when the complainant raised the matter again some months later, he alleged that the animals in question had been set onto his property by neighbours who intended to secure his ruin. It is indicative enough that such outrages were the subject of a special enactment, but one may go further. The complainant's original, more formal, accusation contains no such specification of deliberate damage in either its description of the offence or its account of the enactment: the implication is that the law, which had originally, in the Ptolemaic and early Roman period, distinguished carefully between intentional and accidental damage, had now to assume that such damage was deliberate, presumably in order to restrict the determined evasions of the culprits in a crime now increasingly prevalent. The context of this savage legislation will have been a society racked by bitter feuds, in which the law was constantly invoked and strenuously resisted.⁴⁶ In the light of the contentions

and litigiousness of which these cases are illustrations, is it surprising if the praepositus pagi and his subordinates were unenthusiastic in the exercise of their jurisdiction?

Into this gap due to caution as much as to indolence or inefficiency the praepositus of the camp was quite happy to be drawn -- or why would a military jurisdiction of civilian disputes ever have grown up in the first place? His position, unlike that of a local liturgical official, was protected and strengthened by his rank in the army and his impartiality as an outsider; and he had all too much leisure on his hands. He and his ala, in that they were provided for by a local community whose need for local defence was only potential, were open to the charge of being parasites: it was by services such as the undertaking of an unremunerative jurisdiction that the military could gain the gratitude, and the respect, of the rural population whose life they had to share.

The role of the military in jurisdiction can then be accounted for in terms of the character, and needs, of the countryside. The real problem only arises when we look

at the wider context of the Late Roman legal system, as revealed, above all, in the Codes. Imperial constitutions of the fourth century admit the jurisdiction of military officers only in criminal cases where the accused is a soldier: this late condition is only fulfilled in one of the cases that are brought before Abinnaeus.⁴⁷ No-one supposes, of course, that imperial edicts were always observed; frequently they do no more than testify to the existence of some abuse. But it does seem strangely anomalous that a whole system of jurisdiction, with its own courts and legal formulae, should have grown up and flourished in direct contradiction to the imperial will.

This problem is fully appreciated by the editors of the archive, who find a close parallel in the very active role which they assign to Abinnaeus' unit, wrongly as it happens, in the collection of the annona. Their solution is, that 'in matters of justice as in fiscal matters, in the immediate zone of a military station, military authority tended, for convenience and contrary to legal dispositions, to take the place of the civil authority'.⁴⁸ The laws, that is, were of effect in by far the greater

part of the empire, but considerations of general convenience, quite apart from the influence of the military, were sufficient to overcome them in those limited areas that were in the immediate vicinity of the camps. This view of the matter is plausible and attractive; the question remains whether it is based on a correct assessment of both the geographical range of military jurisdiction and the subject-matter of the laws.

We have distinguished two districts in the neighbourhood of the station at Dionysias, a strip of land running eastwards just to the south of Lake Moeris, and the much broader area to the south-east immediately to the west of Arsinoe: all the surviving petitions to Abinnaeus requesting criminal proceedings come from these two districts, and exactly half of them, in fact, from the principal village just west from Arsinoe. The Abinnaeus archive is so far from complete that it might seem dangerous to conclude that the officer's writ ran no further, were it not that we find the same geographical delimitations in the evidence both for the annona collection and for the miscellaneous activities of the unit.

Admittedly, there is one important exception: one subordinate of the praepositus reports to his master detention and extortion he has perpetrated in a village north of Arsinoe, at a significant distance, though not great in absolute terms, from the two districts we have mentioned. And important in another context than that of rural jurisdiction would be the reference in the letter from the official of the natron monopoly of the apparent presence of a company from Abinnaeus' detachment in Arsinoe itself. But, when we can count 26 references to dealings between the detachment and the villages just west from Arsinoe and 13 for the district nearer Dionysias itself, these exceptions to our general observation are most striking for their rarity. We may then conclude with confidence that the zone of Abinnaeus' regular judicial activities coincided with that which fed his unit and consisted of the wedge-shaped area that lay between the desert in the west and Arsinoe in the east. Does the extent of this region suggest that military jurisdiction was limited to those districts that lay in the immediate vicinity of military camps?⁴⁹

Such a conclusion, however, encounters insuperable

difficulties as soon as we raise our eyes from the confines of this single district. First of all, if we are to allow to every praepositus militum, as we must to Abinnaeus, an area of judicial activity extending to 25 miles from the camp itself, we will find by far the greater part of Arcadia, Augustamnica and the Thebaid divided up into 'military zones'. Secondly, the delimitation of the region assigned to the ala at Dionysias is to be accounted for not with reference to distances from the camp, but the location of two other military stations, those at Arsinoe and Narmuthis, immediately outside it: and if we add to this the consideration that the district that predominates in the archive is that only just west of Arsinoe and between 15 and 25 miles from the camp, it will seem that it was only the existence of these other stations which hindered Abinnaeus' activities from extending over the whole of the Arsinoite nome. Finally, there is one argument that may be admitted from the coincidence of Abinnaeus' judicial and fiscal zones. There might have been a system whereby those villages in the immediate vicinity of a military station bore the whole burden of its provisioning in exchange for exemption

from the annona civica; but in fact, as is illustrated by the emphasis on the latter even in the archive of Sakaon of Theadelphia, in the closest propinquity to Dionysias, these burdens were equally distributed over the superficies of the Egyptian provinces. It follows that, if they are to have been distinct zones of military jurisdiction, these would be much smaller than the areas from which each camp drew its annona; but we find in the Abinnaeus archive that these two coincide.

The conclusion to be drawn from these various considerations is that our archive refutes rather than supports the notion of special zones in the immediate vicinity of the camps into which military jurisdiction, like some wild animal, can be safely restricted. At the same time the editors of the archive much exaggerate the fierceness of the beast. In their zones of military activity 'military authority tended ... to take the place of the civil authority'. But, as we have seen, this was strikingly not the case in the annona collection, while the evidence of petitions to the praepositus pagi from villagers of Theadelphia shows that military did not oust the civilian

jurisdiction of minor criminal cases even in the immediate vicinity of military stations. ~~We saw that~~

The domiciles of individual soldiers of Abinnaeus' unit were thinly scattered over a very wide area. The same is true of the role of the military in the Arsinoite nome. There were many more praepositi pagi than praepositi castrorum, and irenarchs and demosioi covered the villages more comprehensively than the soldiers could do. Quite probably in all parts of Egypt, save the very thinly garrisoned north-west corner, military jurisdiction extended generally over the countryside; but, quite apart from its apparent omission of the more important legal cases, in exact proportion to the width was the thinness of its coverage. The student of the Abinnaeus archive can too easily make a mistake of perspective. Of course in a military archive it is the role of the military that predominates; but we have only to turn from the Dionysias papyri to those of neighbouring Theadelphia to see that for the average Egyptian villager, even in close proximity to a camp, military men were only a small point on an horizon dominated by the civilian authorities of the nome.

But this is not, of course, to say that military jurisdiction was so inconspicuous as for this reason alone to escape the eye of the law; to the question of its legality we must now turn.

The Codes of Theodosius and Justinian preserve a number of constitutions dating to our period on the subject of military jurisdiction; these may be briefly summarized. First, the essential information as to its legal limitations is provided by an edict of 355: this law allows military men to be the judges only in criminal cases where the defendant is a soldier; other criminal and all civil cases are firmly reserved for the jurisdiction of governors. The line of demarcation was later revised: a law of 413 extends trial by generals of military defendants to civil cases as well as criminal. These concessions were justified, and thereby strictly limited, by special considerations. First, it was recognized to be extremely difficult to secure the attendance and then, if need be, the punishment of military defendants in the governor's court. Secondly, it was considered undesirable that

soldiers should be dragged away from their military duties, often for long periods, in order to defend themselves in civilian courts. A second category of imperial edicts attempts to protect the curial class from military men. A law of 392 insists that the military 'have nothing in common with curias' and must be restricted to their own sphere of authority, while a law of 416 imposes a heavy fine on the officia of generals implicated in the imposition of military jurisdiction on curials. A third class, in ascending order in the importance of the cases involved, consists chiefly in the strengthening in 397 of the penalties that were to be imposed on the advocates as well as the litigants who entrusted a civil case to military jurisdiction without the special permission of the emperor himself. In this context reference could also be made to the edict of 365 which allows magistri militum to hear criminal charges against military men where 'the

merit of the case or the status of the person' deserve an imperial judgement, but the emperor himself is 'too far away'.⁵⁰

This evidence from the Codes is supplemented by the well-known edict of Eutolmius Tatianus, prefect of Egypt from 367 to 370, preserved in one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri. Since no edict makes clearer the logic behind the recognition, but severe restriction, of military jurisdiction, it deserves full quotation:

'I learn from petitions that some persons of civil status, ... in their desire thoroughly to worst their adversaries at law, have recourse to the local praepositi, presenting petitions to them and procuring exactions by their means from persons ... of civil status. That this is forbidden by the law is clear. For a praepositus has authority over soldiers, but not over civilians; it is enjoined on the praesides to (govern) them and to receive their applications. This, therefore, is for the future made clear by this proclamation. If any civilian has a difference with a soldier and relies on the vengeance of the praepositus and is confident of receiving assistance from him, let him apply; for he cannot obtain requisite assistance on the spot from anyone else. If, however, it is

with a person of civil status, let him not attempt to do so'.⁵¹

Despite the use of the term 'vengeance', the implication that, even when the soldier is the defendant, the case is to be entrusted to military jurisdiction because of considerations of expediency rather, apparently, than by legal right, added to the specification that what is in question is the procuring of exactions from civilians, suggests that the concern of the edict is with civil rather than criminal cases.

What have these edicts to tell us of the legality or otherwise, in the eyes of the administration, of the military jurisdiction that we meet in the Abinnaeus archive? It is not adequate to observe, with the editors of the archive, that it falls outside the limited range of cases where the Codes allow military judges, since it cannot be assumed that cases of the kind referred to Abinnaeus were among those the legislators had in mind. Our summary of the particular application of all the constitutions in question brings out their broad, but not unrestricted, field of reference. One chief subject of concern was the problem of how to secure for civilians

effective redress against military men without encouraging the constant summoning of soldiers away from their military duties to the often protracted business of the law-courts. Otherwise, the main object of these laws is to prevent the misappropriation by military men of legal business that should have gone to the provincial governor. Now we have seen that the rather petty criminal cases to which in the archive the dux and the praepositus restrict themselves would not otherwise have found their way to the governor's court: they lay, of course, inside his jurisdiction, but in practice they were of no interest to him and were relegated, as much as possible, to mere praepositi pagi. It is part of the same distinction that, while the archive is concerned with criminal cases brought by humble litigants, the emphasis in the edicts is on civil cases and the interests of influential civilians such as curials.⁵²

But what might seem of direct relevance to the archive is the general principle that underlies this legislation and is explicitly enuntiated by the prefect Tatianus, namely, that it is a usurpation for military

men to exercise authority over civilians. However, our subject happens not to be legal theory, but the facts of history. This principle is one that could have been applied, with obvious logic, to the military jurisdiction of the archive, but there is no evidence that it was. Before we blandly apply these laws to situations of no interest to their formulators, it is salutary to ponder on the real nature and origin of the material preserved in the Codes. A.H.M. Jones in a masterful survey of the topic reminds us that imperial constitutions were not framed by the emperor in an ivory tower as a blue print for the administrative system of the empire, but were ad hoc pronouncements elicited by particular petitions and therefore with particular abuses in mind. Whenever military matters are in question, it is also important to remember that these petitions stemmed largely from the higher echelons of the civil administration and the great cities. Military men, by contrast, can be seen to have taken little part in this, even when the laws directly concerned them.⁵³ This raises the suspicion, which can be confirmed in many

particular cases, that the military, so far from conforming in all matters to the wishes of the civil authorities, simply did not bother to elicit imperial enactments when they chose to flout them. As a consequence, the Codes present not so much the laws which governed Late Roman administration or an impartial expression of the deliberate policy of the emperors as a record of the intentions of the imperial civil service and the work of urban pressure groups. So the conclusion to be drawn from the imperial enactments on the subject of military jurisdiction is not that outside certain narrow limits it did not occur -- edicts were scarcely as efficacious as that -- or even that, when it did occur, it was 'illegal' -- this suggests it flouted some universally recognized 'law of the land' --, but rather that, in cases involving influential civilians, it aroused an interested opposition that was high enough placed or sufficiently well-connected to elicit edicts from prefect and emperor. We must ask ourselves which civilians could consider themselves adversely affected by the jurisdiction the dux assumes in the Abinnaeus archive.

The military jurisdiction that is prohibited in the

Codes was mainly elicited by two aggrieved parties -- the provincial governor whose function is misappropriated and the defendant who is subjected to an authority he has no wish to recognize. It is likewise the civilian judge and the convicted defendant who alone had any interest in objecting to Abinnaeus' judicial role. The attitude of the praepositus pagi has already been examined, and the conclusion drawn that he found his judicial duties more of a burden than a privilege; it is not from this official that we might expect vociferous opposition. On the contrary we find him on one occasion expected to co-operate with the system of jurisdiction that usurped his own. On the 29th of March 342 Sakaon of Theadelphia wrote to complain of a theft of livestock to the praepositus militum and the praepositus pagi simultaneously: both are asked to refer the matter to the dux, 'since it is his function to take vengeance on the perpetrators of such outrages'. In the meantime, the civil praepositus is asked to intervene in the fiscal dispute that led to the robbery, but it is Abinnaeus who is asked to enforce restitution. It is not that this official had handed over

to the military all his criminal jurisdiction: it is the very same praepositus pagi who is asked on another occasion to try a case of robbery and enforce restitution himself. But the case is a good illustration of the lack of opposition from praepositi pagi to military usurpation of their jurisdiction.⁵⁴

The class of persons who will have resented the role assumed by Abinnaeus and his colleagues are the defendants who found themselves the victims of the 'vengeance' of the dux. If we consider on the one hand the clear enunciation in higher courts of a principle excluding most military jurisdiction and on the other the litigiousness of the country population and its knowledge of legal formalities, it will seem probable that, with any degree of encouragement, their complaints would have been many and strident. It is this encouragement we must presume they lacked. Had they been curials, the imperial edicts suggest that their voice would have been heard; but as humble inhabitants of the countryside they lacked sufficient influence in high places. Who was there to listen to their pleas? The praepositus pagi has already

been excluded. The curias of the cities, as we saw, were happy to tolerate a liturgical official exercising a jurisdiction in the countryside that no official exercised in the town only because they regarded the cases in question as almost beneath notice: complaints by mere peasants against the military jurisdiction of the same class of cases will not have excited their interest, unless, of course, untypically the complainant had a powerful patron; it has to be assumed that in these cases the military judge could not afford to be any more regardless of the feelings of the patron than were civilian judges. Finally, there existed the theoretical possibility of appeal to the provincial governor; but we have seen that his official lacked enthusiasm for criminal jurisdiction, and Egyptian governors are most unlikely, in normal circumstances, to have had the slightest temptation to offend the dux merely in the interests of some peasant considered guilty of petty crime.

So the absence of any explicit condemnation in the Codes of the military jurisdiction attested in the archive is not merely accidental, but an accurate reflection of the lack

of any opposition to it capable of influencing the formulators of imperial edicts. Since these included the magnates of the city, this conclusion is relevant in the study of the local politics of the regions near military camps. If we add to this our conclusions on the competence and attitude of the rural official whose sphere of action was being intruded upon, it emerges that the military jurisdiction of the archive was no violent usurpation that reveals a domineering spirit; on the contrary, it was no more than the accommodating adoption of a minor role, which filled a gap in the administration of justice and could arouse the resentment only of a few unfortunate law-breakers too humble in status to gain either wide or effectual sympathy.

On matters other than the annona collection and military jurisdiction the evidence of the Abinnaeus archive is very fragmentary and miscellaneous.⁵⁵ But there is enough on patronage and related matters to enable discussion of the question whether Abinnaeus undertook a role at all comparable to the activities of military praepositi in Syria that excited

the ire of Libanius.

There are several letters which show Abinnaeus in the relation of friend to friend, or patron to client, with civilians in the countryside. The largest group of these are the three letters addressed to the praepositus by the priest Apa Miōs. Their main subject-matter is the mutual exchange of small gifts and services. In one letter the priest asks for the loan of nets to catch gazelles who are damaging the crops, and makes in exchange the gift of a hyena's skin; in another, he treats the despatch to Abinnaeus of some wine and asks to have some ointment made for 'the brethren'. These are manifestly the petty services that kept a friendship going, rather than the more weighty matters for the sake of which it was cultivated. But the editors understand the remaining letter to refer, albeit obscurely, to a matter of more real concern to the correspondent. In this letter Apa Mios expresses an eagerness to see the praepositus personally over some matter of urgent importance. He proceeds to treat, hastily and allusively, the despatch between the two of various commodities; this section begins with the

obscure remark, 'And in the matter of the needs of which I wrote to you that "therefore Apa Ision", don't neglect them'; there is also a reference at one point to an agent of the writer's doing 'what is customary', a phrase which the editors take to signify some payment or gift. The conclusion they draw from these points is that the urgent matter the writer wishes to discuss with Abinnaeus is a fiscal one, 'in which a priest and various deliveries in kind are concerned', whose nefarious nature is the reason for the obscurity of the letter. Unfortunately, this interpretation of the text seems faulty. Above all, the requests Apa Mios does treat in the letter -- with the concluding remark, 'Don't neglect to get done everything we write to you about' -- must be distinct from the matter concerning which he insists on seeing Abinnaeus personally, presumably because it was not suitable for communication in a letter. Secondly, the despatch of various commodities, of which the exact nature unfortunately remains unclear, will not seem in the light of the other letters to have anything to do with fiscal obligations. In consequence, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that there were important matters where our two correspondents

could be of use to one another, but, as elsewhere in Late Roman letter-writing, such matters were thought unsuitable for any but verbal communication.⁵⁶

Fortunately less reticent is a letter to Abinnaeus from one Alypius, an inhabitant, untypically, of Arsinoe itself. Using a formula suitable for use only between equals, he asks the praepositus to secure the repayment of a loan he had made to someone in the countryside; this is followed by a request for the loan of a small quantity of corn, to be repaid at harvest-time.⁵⁷ Neither matter is exactly momentous, but this letter serves to illustrate, in a way the Apa Mios correspondence does not, the real advantages in the possession of the friendship of the military praepositus. As the only imperial, as contrasted to liturgical, official permanently resident in his part of the countryside, as well as the commander of a formidable force, he was all too well placed for the enforcement of civil claims, even if this did not develop into any right of civil jurisdiction, while the storing of annona in the camp provided him with an excellent source for loans, gifts or even sales.⁵⁸

If Apa Mios and Alypius are 'friends' of Abinnaeus, the

archive also contains a few letters, using different formulae and couched in a servile vein, from humbler correspondents who write as client to patron. One of these is such a masterpiece of the genre as to deserve quotation, despite the lack of confidence, as to many of the details, with which the editors offer the following translation.

'To my master and patron ..., Thareotes I beg of you, my master, on behalf of Syrion my brother's son whom I present to you. He asks and begs of you that you will show the same attention to him as to me; for this is what I said: "whatever you have need of, my master furnishes you with it there". I have sent you ... two jars of quails, one pot of fish paste and one flagon of grape syrup. ... I have given the chickens by way of earnest money. Don't worry about them, the chickens are inside. Now as they are still small and white ... let them grow big. I will come to visit you in Phamenoth; keep the hempen cords ready, for I shall bring the huntsmen when I come, so that we may make the nets. ...', 59

It must, however, be admitted that this letter is not an ideal illustration of the relations between client and patron, in that Thareotes may well have stood to Abinnaeus

in the relationship of servant to master, which is one that we would wish to distinguish. On the other hand, in the Late Roman world the two were apt to merge. Here the servant addresses his master as his 'patron', and refers to the despatch of a number of what are probably gifts. Conversely, it is one of Libanius' criticisms of 'Mixodemus' that he made the wives of his clients cook for him and serve at his table. Hence, although this letter does not prove that Abinnaeus acted the patron, once the natural assumption is admitted that he did, it can serve to illustrate the mechanisms of rural patronage.⁶⁰

So the Abinnaeus archive serves to illustrate the ties both of friendship and patronage which linked the praepositus to local civilians individually. Is it possible to connect this pattern with the military patronage of villages that forms the theme of the Libanius oration treated in detail in the previous chapter? There may at first seem a fundamental difference of kind between the Syrian patronage of villages and this Egyptian patronage of individuals. But we saw that the village supported its

detachment not through communal payment, whether in money or kind, but through the gifts of individuals. There need, then, be no radical difference in mechanism between the military patronage of Libanius and that of the archive. But there remains, at the very least, a distinct difference in tone. In the De Patrociniis the soldiers feature as the masters of the countryside, to whom villagers flock for protection; but here the leading civilians of the countryside, such as clergymen, treat the military praepositus as their equal. The exchange of gifts and services to the benefit of both parties is as prominent here as in Libanius, but, even after allowance is made for the different character of the sources, the Egyptian praepositus does not seem to enjoy quite the same pre-eminence as his opposite number in the Syrian comitatus.⁶¹

In the De Patrociniis the most serious aspect of military patronage is the co-operation of villagers and soldiers in thwarting the tax-collectors. Libanius, for obvious reasons, emphasizes the recourse to brute force, -- and to this there is, trivially, a parallel in one document of the archive, which contains the complaints of a collector against a soldier of the unit who had used

violence to hinder him in his work.⁶² But even for the region round Antioch the methods employed must usually have been more subtle, and here there are two papyri in particular which suggest that the attitude of soldiers in Egypt was not different from that of their fellows in Syria. In one document the epitropos of the imperial domains conveys to Abinnaeus orders from the dux 'that a military detachment should be furnished from the troops under your command for the collection of the imperial taxes'. He continues: 'See to it zealously, therefore, that, in accordance with the instructions given you by my said lord the most illustrious dux, you send soldiers for the said collection by the official sent by my said lord the most illustrious dux and also by my lord the most illustrious catholicus, knowing that, if you should refuse to send them, it will be brought to the knowledge of my said lord the dux that you have impeded the collection of the imperial revenues'. The reiterated mention of the dux whose authority the epitropos hopes will be decisive, as well as the explicit threat at the close, make it plain that Abinnaeus was not expected to co-operate without extreme reluctance.⁶³ There is a suggestion of something

similar in the letter to Abinnaeus from the officer of the nitron monopoly, who writes in the following terms: 'I have already in another letter notified your nobility that you are to impound whatever nitron you find being imported into Arsinoe or other places ..., and I think you cannot have received the letter, for I have had no letter from your nobility on this subject'. A tempting explanation of Abinnaeus' silence is that here too he was reluctant to co-operate with imperial civil servants against the interests of the rural population among which he dwelt, and with whose interests he had come to sympathize.⁶⁴

We find, then, in the Abinnaeus archive the necessary pre-conditions for the role assigned to the soldiery by Libanius in the resistance to tax-collection or the exaction of dues owed to the curials of the city: for we find Abinnaeus as the friend and patron of many countrymen and reluctant to co-operate in those exactions of which, unlike the annona collection, his unit was not itself the beneficee. There is not, however, any actual evidence that he adopted in these matters the active, even aggressive, role of the Syrian soldiery. Of course,

this silence could easily be accidental. We must enquire into the probabilities in the light of what we know of the relations between the unit at Dionysias and the city of Arsinoe.

We have already made some deductions on this topic from the roles of the military in the collection of annona and in criminal jurisdiction. Here there was a somewhat surprising contrast between their respect for the system by which the supplies they depended on were collected by civilians and their usurpation of part of the functions of the praepositi pagi; considering where their personal interests lay, one might have ~~exp~~ected the converse to be the case. Since the city depended for its survival on the economy of the countryside, it naturally took a keen interest in its economic life, of which fiscal matters were an important part. The city had indeed no direct interest in the annona collection, but its smooth and equitable working would have a favourable effect on the quantity of cereals and other necessities left over for the support of the city. Hence the collection was entrusted to an important city official, the exactor. In

contrast, problems of criminal jurisdiction in the countryside were of no concern to the curia; it was because of this, as we have seen, that they were entrusted not to any urban official, but merely the praepositus pagi. We noted the same order of priorities in the courts of the provincial governors, who, according to Libanius, gave much more attention to fiscal cases than to criminal. The contrasting roles of the military in annona collection and in jurisdiction might, then, be explained by reference to the wishes of the city. This hypothesis invites the question whether Abinnaeus and his ala had really to pay careful attention to the feelings of the city.

There are two documents in the archive that invite our special attention at this point. In one letter to Abinnaeus from a tax-collector complaint is made against a soldier of the unit who had committed acts of violence against the writer. The letter concludes: 'My intention was to go up to the city and make a complaint to my landlord and Castinus the praepositus of the soldiers, so that they should do me justice, but first of all I have written to you, my master, to do me justice'. Here the writer

threatens that, should Abinnaeus fail to discipline the soldier, he has influential contacts in the city who would be able to make an effective complaint to Abinnaeus' immediate military superior. The implication is that the praepositus' position was thought to be insecure in that he could not rely on automatic support from the higher command.⁶⁵

Very close in its implications is a letter that survives written to Abinnaeus by the president of the boule of Arsinoe, a document of such importance that it deserves full quotation.

'You are not justified in acting as you do, but you are running the risk of being convicted of criminal conduct. You sent to Theoxenis the soldiers under your command and dragged them away, although so many outrages have been committed in the village. For you know that the house of Hatres was looted, and that too when he had so many goods of other people deposited with him; and the cattle have been driven off, and you did not admit inquiry to be made for them, but you carried them off as if there were no laws. For, by god, either send these men, so that we may learn what was done by them, or all we of the council will report to my master the dux about this. For indeed

the people of the hamlet of Ctesis have made written representations against you both to me and to Atammon their praepositus; therefore, do what you know to be expedient for you; you alone can know whether or not you are prepared to send them.⁶⁶

Unfortunately, the illustrious president of the boule is not more careful in his use of pronouns than Abinnaeus' more humble correspondents, and the reference of several in this letter is open to dispute. The main problem is the identity of the men whom soldiers have dragged away from the village and the boule wishes to interrogate. There is also opportunity for disagreement over the identity of the criminals, who cannot be assumed to be identical. The interpretation adopted by the editors of the archive is that the men dragged away were required as witnesses of robbery that had been committed by soldiers. But this is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. The sentence, 'You sent to Theoxenis the soldiers under your command and dragged them away', scarcely supports a separation of the two actions, with first the despatch of the soldiers, then criminal behaviour on their part and only finally the seizure of the witnesses: the only natural interpretation is that the soldiers were sent in

the first place simply to drag 'them' away. One might add that the demand of the boule to investigate the case, despite its lack of criminal jurisdiction, becomes particularly difficult if the criminals were soldiers and so subject only to military discipline.⁶⁷ There are also serious difficulties in the suggestion that the men dragged away were wanted simply as witnesses. Above all, what are we then to make of the instruction, 'send these men so that we may learn what was done by them'? The editors hope this might mean, 'send these men so that we may learn from them what was done', a suggestion that would only invited consideration in extremis. They give as their reason for rejecting the obvious interpretation that the boule had no criminal jurisdiction, but, since on any view they intend to investigate the case, it scarcely seems material whether they are to interrogate mere witnesses or the actual culprits themselves. In any case, one may doubt whether the intention of the boule was really the mere investigation of the facts. If Abinnaeus is to have abducted witnesses, his natural purpose would have been to protect those whom he knew already they would

accuse. The president of the boule, through information from the village plaintiffs, is not likely to have been less well-informed. Now was judicial procedure really so rigorous that the case could not proceed until the witnesses had testified formally? One would rather suppose that it was the criminals the boule wished to secure, in order to dispatch them for trial to the court of the provincial governor.⁶⁸ We may conclude, then, that the interpretations suggested by the editors is contrary both to the wording of the text and the probabilities of the case: the situation seems rather to have been that the offences had been committed by civilians who enjoyed Abinnaeus' patronage, that these criminals were saved from arrest by the civilian authorities by being taken into military custody -- perhaps, one might add, with the excuse that cases of this sort could be entrusted to military jurisdiction --, while the boule protest vigorously at this evasion of justice.

That Abinnaeus, in the enthusiastic fulfilment of his duties as a patron, should overstep on occasion the bounds of right is important, but not surprising. The point that really invites rumination here is the attitude of the boule.

We have seen that the cities took little interest in criminal jurisdiction in the countryside: it is this that has to account for the exercise of this jurisdiction by civilian and military praepositi. But here the authorities of Arsinoe take up a series of rural robberies with keen zest and passionate indignation; how are we to account for this? Let us return for the moment to our other document, the complaint against a soldier who had committed violence against a tax-collector: there the plaintiff threatens to appeal to his landlord in Arsinoe. We saw in the Syrian evidence that city magnates were not enthusiastic over their duties of patronage, but this reminds us not to exaggerate the gap between town and country: there were countrymen who had influential patrons or friends in the city who might be induced to interest the urban authorities in the affairs of their clients. We may assume that it was this factor that made the difference in both the cases before us. In the Theoxenis affair, our attention is drawn to one Hatres, whose house was looted 'and that, too, when he had so many goods of other people deposited with him'; it is this alone of the victims who is mentioned

by name. The fact that a few countrymen enjoyed effective patronage in the city created some restriction on the freedom of action of a prudent praepositus militum. In this case, special consideration^s, unknown to us, led Abinnaeus to desert that path of caution that he kept to with such circumspection in matters such as the administration of the annona. Military violence, influential plaintiffs, an outraged boule -- the document before us is the consequence of this unusual conjuncture.

Just how unusual this conjuncture was is suggested by the mention at the end of this document of similar representations against Abinnaeus that had been made by the hamlet of Ctesis. It might seem rather impressive that so humble a locality, that has achieved mention on no other extant papyrus, should have its complaint supported by the boule, but a more careful reading leaves a rather different impression. The wording of the relevant sentence suggests that this complaint had not already become a point at issue between the boule and the praepositus: unless by coincidence it had reached the boule at the same time as the Theoxenis affair, the implication is that the boule had ignored it until they found it useful as an additional

stick with which to beat Abinnaeus' back in a quite different quarrel. This view of the matter is supported by the brevity and vagueness of its treatment here and, above all, by its mention in this document not as an independent question that requires investigation, but as a subordinate consideration that justifies appeal to the dux over the more interesting complaints of Theoxenis.

But a still more interesting point emerges from these two documents. In both the threat is made to appeal to Abinnaeus' military superiors, in one case the praepositus at Arsinoe, in the other the dux. That appeal would have to go to military officials is not, indeed, surprising: in the former case, the defendant is a soldier, while, if Abinnaeus fail to return the culprits of the Theoxenis robberies, the complaint to a higher authority will no longer be against them, but against Abinnaeus himself; we have already seen that military men accused of criminal charges were subject to the jurisdiction not of the civilian courts, but of their own superiors. But what is at first surprising is the confidence with which the threat is made, notably in the Theoxenis case. One might well have imagined

that so vain would be an appeal to the dux against one of his own officers that the threat could be more than the expression of helpless indignation: but the tone of the letter from the boule leaves no doubt but that it was confident that the dux would extend no automatic protection to his subordinate, but give the complaint a fair hearing. How are we to account for this lack of solidarity among the ranks of the military? One important point to be appreciated is that, just as Abinnaeus had friends and clients among the civilian population, so will his superior. It emerges from a study of the relations between generals and leading civilians that the military man often needed the suffrages of the latter in the furtherance of his career; the goodwill of his own subordinate will often have been of less practical consequence.⁶⁹ It would also be a mistake to assume that the praepositus of a camp will have enjoyed close and necessarily friendly relations with his superior. Abinnaeus, indeed, obtained his command in the face of determined opposition from the dux, who favoured, and continued to favour, different candidates for the post. And we find on occasion a surprising lack

of direct contact between the two: for instance, when the epitropos of the imperial domains secures from the dux the loan of soldiers from Dionysias to help him in his work, the relevant instructions are communicated to Abinnaeus by the epitropos rather than the dux himself.⁷⁰

The clash between the military praepositus and the city over theft committed in the village of Theoxenis is both dramatic in itself and reminiscent of Libanius' narration in the De Patrociniis; as such it can all too easily inspire groundless generalization, as if there was reason to suppose that it was a typical occurrence, or that the position of the city in this case was as weak as that of curial tax-collectors and Libanius himself in their conflicts with the military near Antioch. We saw that in Syria the ability of the tribune of the field army to resist the magnates of the city depended, ultimately, on the protection he enjoyed by the magister militum per Orientem; but Abinnaeus, it transpires, could not rely on comparable support from the dux Aegypti. Therefore, the position of the Egyptian soldiers was much weaker, and the consequence can be seen in the role played by Abinnaeus

and his unit in the annona collection and military jurisdiction, matters where a wealth of documentation enables deductions that are not merely leaps in the dark. Here we find that the military are careful not to arouse the antagonism of the city. If they adopt a role in jurisdiction, it is a restricted and humble one; meanwhile, they are scrupulous not to usurp the functions of city officials in the more important matter of the collection of the annona.⁷¹

In consequence, despite the evidence in the archive for military patronage and for Abinnaeus sympathizing with the peasantry against the exactions of an epitropos of the imperial domains or of an officer of the nitron monopoly, it is impossible to believe that the unit can ever have adopted the intrusive role of the Syrian soldiery in enabling villagers to send tax-collectors back to the city 'with wounds in place of revenue'. This contrast, which raises general issues, will best be pursued in our final chapter, but the conclusion as to the role of limitanei in Egypt is clear: not even in the countryside could they afford to interfere with the established

patterns and hierarchies of civilian life, and it was the attitude of the cities just as much as the needs of the rural population that guided them in their adoption of a role in local society.

IV

SOLDIERS AND HOLY MEN

There remains one aspect of the role of the soldier in the countryside that invites attention both because there exists the necessary source material and for its genuine importance: this is the intercourse of soldiers with holy men. That there were direct contacts between the two is not, indeed, surprising; but it was less predictable that these relations prove to have been of peculiar importance in the careers of many holy men, as well as sometimes spectacular in their manifestation. When the body of St. Simeon, the first and most glorious of the pillar saints, was conveyed to Antioch for burial, the most prominent members of the funeral procession, after the ecclesiastical dignitaries, turn out to have been the Syrian magister militum and his escort; indeed, according to the Syriac Life, the latter consisted of no fewer than twenty-one counts, as well as many tribunes and an 'infinite' number of soldiers.¹ This was the

final expression of a special interest soldiers had shown in Simeon since his boyhood. To what is this interest to be attributed: what had holy men to contribute to the needs and comforts of military life, and what, also, could they gain in return? Our main task will be an interpretation of the role of the holy man in his dealings with military men, but let us first establish the reality and nature of these contacts, from our three most instructive sources -- the Life of St. Alexander the Acoemete, the Syriac Life of St. Simeon Stylites and the Life of St. Isaac.

St. Alexander is most famous as the founder of the Acoemete, or 'Sleepless', monastery near Constantinople, which had as its distinctive mark an almost too literal imitation of the angelic life in the recitation of the Trisagion every three minutes throughout the day. But our concern is with an earlier stage in his career when he wandered through Mesopotamia and Syria performing the role of a holy man.² And here there is one particular episode of interest to us -- an almost

disastrous excursion he made with a hundred disciples into the Persian desert. One distinctive feature of his spirituality was a refusal to take thought for the morrow; in this case this had the consequence that he and his followers nearly expired of hunger and thirst. But at this critical point in their fortunes they were lucky enough to encounter a detachment of soldiers, which gave them the supplies that God had providentially prepared for them. It is important to note the nature of this military detachment: our source makes it clear that it was not, as one might have anticipated, a regiment of limitanei stationed in some town or village of the frontier, but instead a much larger force, with a plurality of tribunes, that was marching up and down the frontier -- in fact, part of the Syrian comitatus.

The tribunes and soldiers who made up this detachment invited Alexander and his monks to accompany them to their 'castelloi', so that they might enjoy his benediction. Our source informs us that these forts lay along the frontier, at a distance of ten or twenty

miles from each other; we soon hear of a variety of inhabitants in them, so that they must count as villages rather than isolated military stations. Alexander, our source continues, followed this detachment constantly and proceeded down the whole limes, strengthening all in the faith.

But, sadly, this edifying combination did not last for long. Alexander could not forget the older aspects of his ministry: in each village in turn he 'looked after the poor as a father and taught the rich to do good, so that they were spurred by his words to bring their claims against debtors before him and burn them'. It was, indeed, of no advantage to the creditors that the farmers to whom they often lent money should be rendered desperate by an accumulated burden of debt. But finally the creditors in one castellum turned out more recalcitrant: they accused Alexander of trying to impoverish them and drove him from their village. The holy man made his way to Antioch, where he was presumed to be exerting influence on the magister militum against those who had expelled him. When, on top of this, the village was crippled by a

drought, it was induced to eat humble pie and make its peace with Alexander. It is this drought, interpreted as a divine punishment, which our source treats as the essential cause of the village's submission; but it would be implausible to suggest that it was overcome merely through superstitious alarm at a climatic misfortune not at all unusual in what our source calls 'the Persian desert'. The modern historian is more likely to attribute it to actual intervention by the magister militum. The detachment that had adopted the holy man presumably still supported him and was in an excellent position to recommend his case to the favorable attention of its commander-in-chief; and it is an implication of the story that it moved with such regularity up and down the stretch of limes in question that the magister had acquired an authority over the region that was in excess of the responsibilities accorded him by imperial edict.

Not long afterwards, we find our holy man on a further visit to Antioch. The main task he set himself was to persuade the rich men of the city to build and endow a

xenodochium for the use of the poor; this suggestion was well received. Unfortunately, this gave him the confidence to administer a public rebuke to both the bishop and the magister militum for neglecting their duties. The general, although he is likely to have protected Alexander previously, promptly expelled him from the city and relegated him to Chalcis; there he remained under a form of arrest until he succeeded in a night escape. After this debacle we hear no more of contacts between Alexander and military men.³

In order to account for the relations between them, let us reconsider the holy man's adoption by a detachment of wandering comitatenses. Most holy men who did not withdraw to a purely eremitical existence at a safe distance from civilization settled down in one particular locality where they developed close links with the local community; but Alexander wandering in 'the Persian desert' surrounded by a horde of famished disciples was in a more awkward position -- in dire need of patronage, but cut off from the large rural communities who could have provided

it. He turns instead to a wandering detachment of soldiers, no doubt well provided with superfluous annona; unlike the comitatenses round Antioch, these led a migratory existence that brought them into contact with a number of villages but prevented them developing really close links with any one of them, as well as depriving them of participation in local parish life. So we have on the one side a holy man dislocated from normal society but in need of patronage, and on the other a military detachment likewise deracinated and in need of spiritual succour: there was then both a kinship between the two and a need for each other.

The other element in the story is Alexander's very mixed fortune at the hands of the magister militum at Antioch. The influence that Alexander enjoyed for a time over this official must be attributed to his initial adoption by a force subordinate to him, its tribunes serving to introduce the holy man to their commander-in-chief. That Alexander soon fell out with his new patron is an example of his repeated failure to win the indulgence of the ruling classes, a failure quite unusual in a famous

holy man and which requires explanation in terms of peculiar elements in Alexander's mission.⁴

From St. Alexander the Acoemete let us turn in contrast to a holy man who had close contacts with military men at each stage of his career.⁵

St. Simeon Stylites was born in about A.D. 390 in a village near Nicopolis in eastern Cilicia. According to the Syriac Life he worked during his boyhood as a shepherd; but, since we are told that he had a 'very rich' aunt, this must be set aside as a typological accretion and the conclusion drawn that he was brought up in a family of prosperous farmers. This makes all the more surprising his precocious apprenticeship as a holy man, marked by perseverance in the most testing austerities. As a consequence of these, it was at least later believed that even his boyhood was graced with miraculous power, for we find three miracles attributed to our saint at this point in the Syriac Life.⁶

In the one which consists of the miraculous punishment of a girl who had unjustly refused to sell Simeon

some food, we are introduced to a unit of soldiers 'who kept guard there (in the village) against the Isaurians'. These soldiers play no part in the miracle at all, but are twice mentioned as witnessing it. Similarly, we read in a second of these three stories that Simeon once appeared with a gigantic eel which fed the inhabitants of the village and the soldiers for three days: here we have another unnecessary mention of this particular unit. But finally this emphasis on the role of the military is accounted for: we hear that 'two of the soldiers, named Silvanus and Bar Shabta, had an exceeding affection for the holy man', that 'they accompanied him from place to place all the time until he ascended his pillar' and finally that 'they told many stories' about the holy man's early years 'before him and his disciples'.⁷ It is the probable role of these two soldiers in the stories' transmission that accounts for the superfluous mention of the military in two of the accounts. There remains the last of our three stories from Simeon's boyhood, which narrates his miraculous rescuing of some

prisoners captured by the Isaurians. Since this must have been known to soldiers stationed in the village in order to protect it against these brigands, this story may also be taken to derive from the same military source.

Despite their later peregrinations, our two soldiers were still, in the period of Simeon's boyhood, resident and active members of their unit; this we may deduce from the detail that the miracles they were later to narrate are said to have been witnessed not by these two soldiers individually on one of their excursions but by the unit as a whole. The unit itself appears in close contact with the village community, but not merged into it: it is to be noted on the one hand that the witnesses of the miracles are regularly said to be the soldiers and the villagers and on the other that the miracles later narrated by our two soldiers all involved direct military intelligence and so are not simply village stories that they had picked up as fully integrated members of the local community. The pattern is, that the two soldiers learn about Simeon through their active membership of a garrison, which,

though a socially distinct body, only encounters Simeon through its close and frequent contact with the civilian population. So the military's first relations with Simeon were due not to any individual role in society but, on the contrary, to a close involvement in local life and keen participation in local interests.

The quite special military role implied in the first chapters of our source is rather to be attributed to the situation at a later stage when in the 410s, after Simeon's period in a monastery, we find him wandering from place to place in the company of our two soldiers. They have now separated themselves from their unit and are enjoying an extended leave, such as soldiers of the limites, underemployed and poorly disciplined, were all too free to take, to the ineffectual annoyance of the central government.⁸ This they do in the pursuit of a religious interest, more admirable to the ecclesiastical than to the military historian. And not only do they accompany Simeon and very possibly supply his wants, but it is natural to assume that in this period as well as later they were active in spreading his

reputation and telling stories of his infant sanctity. In the village itself soldiers had not played a special role, but in the dissemination of Simeon's first fame outside the confines of his village the situation was different: while the soldiers were free to take extended leave, the industrious peasantry that will have formed the local civilian population were tied to work on their farms. At this stage, then, the military interest in Simeon takes on a role and significance of its own.

There remains the final, longest and most important period in Simeon's career -- his years as a pillar saint. The pattern of his life was now transformed. On the one hand he was rooted to one spot tucked away in the hinterland behind Antioch, at the north of the Limestone Massif; on the other, the peculiar and frankly histrionic nature of his asceticism, together with his rare wisdom and sanctity, attracted almost from the first a wide and varied clientele from the Syrian coast as well as from his own region. The Syriac Life contains a quantity of stories of visits paid to Simeon in search

both of his guidance and of his miraculous powers, which increase markedly in this period both in splendour and in credibility. Among those of his clients which it specifies we find a certain number of military men from the Syrian army. Of these the most prominent in our source is the magister militum Dionysius, who plays a part in two episodes.⁹

On one occasion, he received a letter from the emperor commanding him to depart on an embassy to the Persian court. This was clearly too much for his nerves, for he immediately contracted an inflammation of the face. The arts of physicians proving of no avail, he made the journey to Simeon. The holy man worked an instant cure and assured him that his mission to Persia would be successful and he himself return safe and in perfect health. On the fulfilment of this prophecy, the general paid a further visit to Simeon, to tender his thanks and receive anew his benediction; and we are assured that during the rest of his life he received with delight all the instructions the holy man sent him

'concerning the poor or indeed any other matter'.

The other episode involving this general tells of the miraculous cure of a friend of his. A young man from Armenia came to see Simeon 'in the days of the general Dionysius'. He was suffering from a severe inflammation of the face, of which an unusually exact description is given. Also untypical is the full account given of the prelude to the visit: 'When his father heard about the holy man, he sent his son to the general Dionysius with a letter requesting him to intercede with the holy man for the boy Dionysius sent him along accompanied by Delmatius, the son of his sister'. Simeon duly cured him of his ailment, and our Life concludes that 'when Dionysius heard about this, he was astonished and amazed, and strengthened in his faith'.

This account invites a few deductions as to the role played by the magister militum. We learn that the Armenian had heard about Simeon's rare powers from some third party, most probably a Syrian with wide social contacts, considering the Syrian base of Simeon's reputation, and that he then asked Dionysius, whom he must have known

to be a friend and client of the holy man's, to introduce his son to Simeon: does it not seem a reasonable supposition that it was Dionysius himself who had told the Armenian about Simeon and, no doubt, urged him to have recourse to the holy man's miraculous powers? So it would seem that here we have a case of a general making use of the wide social contacts inevitably enjoyed by someone in his position to propagandize on behalf of his favourite holy man and to introduce clients to the saint. Speculation is invited, too, as to the ultimate source for this story. One of its most curious features is that, as our summary brings out, it is virtually told from the point of view of Dionysius himself. The most obvious explanation is that the source for this story was the general himself. Like the two limitanei with whom we started, he must have told stories of Simeon to the holy man's disciples, in whose circle this very early Life was written; and we may assume that he did so to many others as well.

In the light of this passage, similar deductions may be drawn from an episode in our source involving a

different military man: we read that one 'Antiochus, son of Sabinus, when he had been promoted to the rank of dux' told Simeon 'in the presence of everyone' of the immense respect in which the holy man was held by certain tribesman in the Persian desert, with whom he enjoyed good personal relations.¹⁰ There are a number of ways in which this passage draws attention to the role of the military in the spreading of the holy man's reputation. The first is obvious: Antiochus here is telling a fresh story to Simeon's credit 'in the presence of all'. Secondly, the Arab knowledge of Simeon to which Antiochus testifies might well itself be due to contacts with military men out in the Syrian desert, such as Antiochus himself. Lastly, our source introduces the dux with a quite exceptional precision and exactitude: it follows either that Antiochus himself is the ultimate source for the whole section, or at least that, even though the Life does not refer to him elsewhere, he was prominent and well-known as a friend of the holy man's. There may be some significance

too in the odd specification that Antiochus told of the Arab tribesmen 'after he had been promoted to the rank of a dux': the reference not simply to his rank but also to the fact of his promotion, which in this story is quite needless, seems to imply that the writer has in mind activities of Antiochus, presumably in connection with Simeon, at an earlier stage in his career; and in any case some explanation is required of how Antiochus had become an enthusiastic client of Simeon's in the first place, since he would not in the course of his duties as a dux have come anywhere near him. It may seem a reasonable deduction that Antiochus had first served as a subordinate officer in the army stationed round Antioch, and made Simeon's acquaintance then. So this is probably an example of an officer, who first develops an interest in a holy man partly as a result of mere propinquity, subsequently on promotion to service further afield spreading the reputation of the holy man, and on occasion returning to visit him.

Finally, at Simeon's demise, there was a striking expression of a widespread devotion to the holy man in

the Syrian army: according to the Syriac Life, his body was escorted on its way to Antioch by the magister militum, twenty-one counts and 'many' tribunes, as well as an 'infinite' number of the rank and file. And that the commander-in-chief took a strong personal interest in the matter is shown by the decisive part he played in the selection of a burial-place for the saint in Antioch. This final act in the story of Simeon's relations with military men serves to testify that the interest Dionysius and Antiochus showed in the holy man was widespread throughout the Syrian army.¹¹

We may now combine this evidence from the Syriac Life of St. Simeon with the material in the Life of St. Alexander the Acoemete. In the relations between soldiers and holy men at their most humble and local level, there is a strong contrast between the adoption of the wandering Alexander by a wandering army and the friendship that grew up between a military unit and the boy Simeon in the context of a village community. In one case it is local ties, in the other the lack of such ties that is significant. It might seem attractive to link this contrast to that between mobile comitatenses

and settled limitanei; but we have seen that the detachments of the field army were generally stationed in permanent camps in or nearby the villages of the countryside. This implies that the situation in the earlier chapters of the Life of Simeon is to be taken as our paradigm for the greater part even of the comitatus. It follows that, although indeed holy men and soldiers were both intruders into the normal life of the countryside and neither fully integrated, it is not this similarity that explains the close contacts between them, but the fact that both had intimate and permanent links with the ordinary peasant society of the countryside.

It is at the stage when the holy men aspired beyond a merely village reputation that military men could be of exceptional use to him. We have seen that they were much sought after as rural patrons: Libanius' Jewish coloni secured the patronage of the detachment resident nearby initially for help in purely local matters, but they were soon able to use it in a dispute with their curial landlord to win for themselves a favorable hearing in the governor's court at Antioch.¹² Similarly

the holy man who excited the interest and admiration of the local detachment might then hope through its patronage to secure a reputation further afield. Out in the Persian desert or in a Cilician backwater, what more influential patrons were there to turn to? The civilians who had influence and status comparable to that of a military praepositus resided, as a general rule, in the cities; there they were cut off from holy men on the make partly as a mere result of physical distance, but also through constant participation in a traditional Greek culture that had many initial scruples to overcome before it could welcome with any enthusiasm so barbarous a novelty as the Syriac-speaking holy man.¹³

Meanwhile, in the actual dissemination of the holy man's reputation, the military were well-placed through their professional and social contacts, above all with fellow-members of the service. Here one would like to connect the prior adoption of some holy man by a military unit to his subsequent patronage by a general through

reference to the close links that existed of necessity between the different rungs on the military ladder. In the case of the first development of Simeon's reputation, one may doubt whether such a connection can be established: for there is no reason to suppose that the soldiers of the Syrian comitatus were introduced to Simeon by those soldiers of the Isaurian limes who had previously adopted him. However, it would be a reasonable conjecture that the magister militum in Antioch first came to either know or take an active interest in the holy man through hearing of his spiritual gifts from subordinate military men who had found themselves encamped in his vicinity. And there is an example of such a connection more independent of conjecture in the case of Alexander: as we saw, he seems to have been introduced to the commander-in-chief at Antioch by the large detachment that had adopted him in the Persian desert. Admittedly, here the fruits were soon dissipated through Alexander's inability, of which there are many examples, to preserve the goodwill of those in the higher echelons of society. But here the point to be made is

that Alexander's adoption by one military detachment out in the desert at a great distance from the centres of fame and influence provided him with important contacts through which he could have immensely strengthened his position and extended his reputation, as a result of both the power and the influence of the leading imperial officials, had he been willing to alter the nature of his apostolate. It was due to the power of military patronage that Alexander could swiftly have been transformed from a famished hermit out in the desert into a well-known holy man with influence over the most highly placed persons in the very centre of Syrian society. This may serve to illustrate how the two factors of a presence throughout the countryside and close links up and down the service placed the military in a quite exceptionally advantageous position to further the fame and influence of rural holy men.

If the ~~Syrian~~ Lives of Alexander and of Simeon enable us to account for the interest leading generals took

in holy men, it is a third source we must turn to for a fuller disclosure of the role magistri militum could play in the patronage of holy men and dissemination of their fame. The Greek Life of St. Isaac, a work late in date but based on contemporary source material, treats in reasonable detail the career of the holy man who has the distinction of having founded, early in the reign of Theodosius I, the first monastery at Constantinople.¹⁴ We learn from this source that his two chief patrons were the two generals Victor and Saturninus, of whom the former retired from active service at the beginning of the period in question and the latter, in these same years, was at the height of his career; both were pious Catholics.

The first appearance of these three together on the stage of history was both striking and peculiar. On the accession of Theodosius Saturninus and Victor brought Isaac before the new emperor with a story of miracle and prophecy which provided that explanation of the disastrous close of his predecessor's reign which was most convenient for the new regime. Four times before the battle of Adrianople had Isaac accosted

the emperor Valens on his way between Constantinople and his army, to protest against his policy of persecution of the Catholics and finally to prophesy his certain defeat and death as the divine punishment for his obduracy. Valens at one point was driven in his anger to have Isaac cast into a bog, from which it needed a miracle to rescue him, but finally entrusted him, rather oddly, to the two Catholic generals Saturninus and Victor to await the outcome of the battle. Now, after the fulfilment of his prophecy, they produced him publicly for the edification of the new emperor, who was much encouraged in his new Catholic policy.¹⁵

The generals' story of the holy man's testimony will at once appear of doubtful authenticity: such bold and abrasive conduct is not incredible in a holy man, but the story fits in so perfectly with Theodosius' Catholic policy and the attribution of the disaster of Adrianople to the easy scapegoat of Valens' Arianism, that it could all too possible be a Theodosian invention. And indeed the great ecclesiastical historians

of the middle of the fifth century appear to have been suspicious of its historicity: Theodoret chooses to mention that he only knew the story from hearsay, while Socrates omits it entirely.¹⁶

The story is closely connected with a similar one told of a number of Catholic generals, including Victor himself. According to Theodoret -- Socrates and Sozomen are silent -- on some occasion before the battle of Adrianople Traianus was worsted in an engagement with the Goths and defended himself before the emperor's castigation by asserting in the imperial presence that the fortunes of the army could not change until the persecution of the Catholics was ended. Our source adds that two other generals, Victor and Arinthaëus, protested to the same effect. Now Traianus had been a friend of St. Basil's and rebuilt the cell of the hermit Zeugmatus after the Arians had demolished it, while Arinthaëus, also a correspondent of Basil's, had been praised at his death by the saint for his 'general championship of the Church of God': so both, like Victor, were keen and active Catholics.¹⁷ This story of the generals' testimony must appear of a still greater

dubiety than that of Isaac's, since such impolitic speech was certainly not typical of generals. In addition, the story as it appears in Theodoret, our single source, is associated with the impossible claim that the emperor Valentinian -- the First, it seems -- refused to help Valens against the Goths because of his religious policy.¹⁸

This is not to accuse Theodoret himself of invention: there would have been no point in anyone's concocting the story after the period of Theodosius I. And as a Theodosian invention is is easy to account for. Under Theodosius both church and state had an interest in interpreting Valens' defeat as a divine punishment for his Arianizing policy. This had the unfortunate side-effect of putting the Catholic generals who had fought in the Adrianople campaign, and were no less prominent under the new regime, in a somewhat awkward position: for in fighting for Valens they now appeared not merely to have served under an emperor who happened in his ecclesiastical policy to favour heresy, but actively to have resisted a divine judgment that had as its purpose the victory of Orthodoxy. It was this unfortunate

implication that was toned down by the invention that these generals had protested at the time against Valens' religious policy and indeed warned him that it made military success impossible.

The relevance of the story of the generals' testimony to that of Isaac's is that it appears from the Life that the holy man's testimony was reported to the Theodosian court solely by the Catholic generals Victor and Saturninus. This means that the historicity of both these stories must be rejected together. There is also the interesting implication that the story of Isaac's testimony was an invention of the generals themselves, who then appear here as the active agents of the religious and political propoganda of the court. But in their use of Isaac their subsequent actions were soon to show that equally prominent in their purposes was the furthering of the career and reputation of a holy man, one of a breed that had not hitherto established itself in the capital.¹⁹

They proceeded in their patronage of our saint to secure his permanent establishment just outside Constantinople. They vied together for the glory of housing the holy man:

Victor built him an imposing residence, Saturninus a small and humble one; it was, of course, the latter Isaac chose to settle in. As others joined him, this soon developed into the first monastery at Constantinople, Saturninus giving over the rest of the estate. Finally, it was these two generals who took the lead in making use of the holy man's services. Every morning the duties of the day were preceded by a visit to his cell, where they received his blessing. Soon many others followed their example: Isaac was visited for his preaching and invited to private houses so that whole households might benefit from his benediction.²⁰

But, if the influence of Saturninus and Victor extended beyond military circles, it was perhaps in them that it was strongest. At Isaac's death the headship of his monastery was entrusted to one Dalmatius, whose importance in its development is shown by the rather surprising fact that it was later to be known by his name rather than by that of its true founder. Meanwhile, Isaac's relics had been secured by a shrine to St. Stephen set up by the future prefect Aurelian. Now Dalmatius before joining Isaac's community had been serving as an

officer of the guard, while Aurelian started his career by acting as assessor to various generals. So it would seem that in the first monasticism in Constantinople a specifically military interest remained a prominent feature.²¹

The fact that it was military men, rather than civilians, who first patronized monasticism in the capital needs to be accounted for. The answer probably lies in the previous careers, and contacts, of the two generals in question. Victor, who retired from active service in about 379, had served on Julian's Persian expedition, spending several months in or near Antioch. Then throughout Valens' reign he held the post of magister equitum in praesenti, which involved service over a wide area of the Eastern Empire, including one recorded diplomatic mission into Mesopotamia. Of Saturninus' early career much less is known. But before he served in the Adrianople campaign there is one significant reference to him: a letter of St. Basil's, which most probably belongs to earlier on in the 370s, is addressed to a bishop

residing in Antioch in this general's residence, who must have been serving there as a comes in the Syrian comitatus. And there are other references which connect these generals with ecclesiastical affairs: we have a letter of Basil's in which he thanks Victor for 'even anticipating all my appeals on behalf of the Church', while the corpus of the letters of St. Gregory of Nazianzus contains two letters to Saturninus, one of which requests him to use influence over the council at Constantinople in 382, while the other, which is not dateable, requests patronage for some protegee of the bishop's. It is clear that both generals were supporters of the Catholic cause and had both seen some service in Syria, the land par excellence of the holy man. It is these two factors that form the most natural explanation of their patronage of Isaac.²²

So behind the commencement of monasticism at Constantinople lies not only the Syrian development of the holy man -- Isaac himself, who is said to have come from 'the desert', may have stemmed from Syria --, but also the exceptional interest in holy men taken by members of the Syrian army. It is this that makes

the story of St. Isaac further testimony to the nature and importance of the role in religious matters of this group of military men.

The evidence from three selected Lives has served to bring out the keenness of the interest in the holy man shown by many of the military and to establish that their particular role had a special importance in the spreading of the reputation of individuals of the species, especially in the official circles of army and court. There remains the more complex task of determining the nature of their relationship. The problem lies not so much in the services the military might render the holy man, for such activities as the endowment of monasteries, provisioning of wandering monks and favourable propaganda have a certain solidity and obviousness. The difficulty lies rather in the question of what the holy man did for the soldiers: the sources already adduced refer constantly to miracles and benediction, but what sense

have these for the modern reader who apprehends no reality in the one or utility in the other? Here several pitfalls await the historian. Credulity he is unlikely nowadays to fall into; greater is the danger of revulsion and negative scepticism, with a refusal of that sympathy without which no interpretation is likely to achieve subtlety or depth. On the other hand, there are factors which facilitate our task. Those who view particular holy men in isolation, with a concentrated beam which obscures rather than illuminates, may see in them only a series of individual eccentrics: but in their social context holy men had to fulfil a role which stamped on them a certain uniformity, reflected in the Lives by an almost formulaic character in much of the narrative. This means that we can use material relating to many different holy men to build up a typical picture. This factor taken together with the adulatory character of the sources will result in the representation of an ideal. But in this case there should not follow any serious lack of realism: the

provincial governor who failed to live up to the stereotype of the good magistrate was governor still, but a holy man would find himself without propagandists or clients if he allowed himself to fall noticeably short of the ideal of his calling.

As our starting point, let us take the account in Theodoret's Religious History of the hermit Peter, whom the writer had known personally, at least when a child. His career as a holy man started when he settled in a tomb just outside Antioch, where he distinguished himself by his austerities and marked asceticism. From the miraculous cures which this precluded, and to which Theodoret's account is essentially devoted, let us select those which were enjoyed by the historian's own family. Theodoret's mother first went to the holy man in quest of a cure for an eye ailment. This she obtained, although he rebuked her for the richness of her attire; and so she left reformed in mind as well as cured in body. Then, on the occasion of her lying in, it was Peter whose prayers secured her a safe delivery. Her son Theodoret she brought to him

weekly, to enjoy the benefit of his benediction. These extracts from Theodoret's account of the holy man Peter, few as they are, contain the essential elements of the holy man's role, elements that reappear without significant variation in Life after Life, -- the initial adoption of a life of spectacular asceticism, miracles most often of physical healing, and constant benediction, of regular clients as well as strangers.²³

As is instanced in the story of Peter, the initial action by which a would-be holy man singled himself out from his fellows was the withdrawal to some wild place, where a life was adopted of the severest self-denial. It was believed that St. Simeon, in the probative stage of his career, once survived for forty days not only foodless but also without water; more typical, and also more credible, was the diet of Peter, who ate only bread, every other day. There is no need to dwell here on the other techniques of self-mortification, which may indeed suggest to an unsympathetic historian that holy men were 'abnormal self-tormentors', 'not ... more healthy in mind than in body'.²⁴ It is more important

to emphasize the specifically Christian aspects of the anachoretic life -- the constant practice of prayer and psalmody, without which physical austerities were not considered of any spiritual value. It was by means of these that the holy man sustained his part in intercourse with God, 'conversing with the Lord of all and hearkening to that sweet voice'.²⁵ What sanctification was won through this life of solitary devotion? Theodoret writes on James of Nisibis: 'So mortifying his body, he brought constant spiritual nourishment to his soul, and through purifying his intellectual vision and preparing a clear mirror of the Holy Spirit he gazed, in the words of the divine apostle, on the glory of the Lord with uncovered face and was transformed into His likeness from glory into glory'. Meanwhile, in the preface to the Religious History, bodily austerity is commended for subjecting the body to the mind and so enabling the defeat of the devil, who overcomes the soul through exploiting the bodily affections and appetites. These, then, were the supposed fruits of the anachoretic life,

-- victory over the demonic, a clear vision of God, and likeness to Christ.²⁶

The nature and purpose of the holy man's withdrawal suggest the monastic ideal of permanent escape from the world in pursuit of the angelic life. It may then seem strange that in the career of the holy man the adoption of a life of austerity and prayer was so soon followed by that active involvement in society that was a necessary condition for constant benediction and repeated miracles. But let us not forget the biblical models on which Theodoret and indeed all hagiographers laid a repeated emphasis. Of the Old Testament types the chief was perhaps Moses. Gregory of Nyssa writes of his forty days on Mount Sinai in terms reminiscent of a contemporary holy man's retreat. And the narrative then continues: 'After, surrounded by the invisible gloom, he had been instructed ... by the indescribable teaching of God ..., then again, emerging from the gloom, he descended to his people to make them share in the marvels that had been revealed to him in the theophany, to teach them the laws and to set up for the people the

temple and priesthood according to the model that had been shown to him on the mountain'.²⁷ But obviously the model the holy man and his audience had most in mind was Christ himself: now Christ, after being led by the Spirit for forty days without food in the wilderness, 'returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee ... and taught in the synagogues'.²⁸ Moses on Sinai received the Law he was to teach the Jews; Jesus in the wilderness was victorious over the demonic he was then, through the villages of Palestine, to expel from the possessed. To return to the Late Roman holy man, in whom, according to Theodoret the same Spirit worked the same gifts, the account quoted above of the asceticism of James of Nisibis continues immediately: 'Thence it was his freedom of speech with God increased day by day, and what he had to ask God for he obtained straightaway; thence, too, it was that he had prophetic vision of the future, and received by the grace of the Holy Spirit power to work miracles'.²⁹ These were not the gifts needed

by the holy man in his seclusion -- those have already been mentioned: these are what he would require in his role as worker of wonders among the communities of the Christian East. It appears then that, if the adoption of a life of austerity and prayer counted as a necessary condition for acceptance as a miracle-worker, one important reason is that it was often intended as such; and, if holy men considered that this pattern of life won them the gifts they would need to serve their clients, their adoption of an active role in society, despite the preliminary withdrawal usually to a distance from the habitations of men, constituted not a reversal of plan, whose frequency should then surprise us, but a graduation. This not to deny the existence of true hermits who regarded the busy role of wonder-worker and intercessor as a diversion and distraction from their prior calling, but the holy men who concern us here were of a different breed.³⁰

However, in emphasizing above all the active social

role of holy men, there is a danger of giving the contemporary interest they excited too mercenary an interpretation. Much of it is surely to be attributed to a combination of curiosity and hero-worship. As in earlier centuries travelling rhetors had attracted immense crowds in the cities eager to hear a demonstration of Hellenic culture at its most flamboyant and behold its living embodiment, so holy men attracted clients and pilgrims, of the countryside initially, keen to witness what the ordinary Christian venerated as the ideal he could not himself hope to attain -- the full achievement of Christian sanctity and the life of angels upon earth.

Here a particular importance is to be accorded to the miracles which feature so large in the hagiographic literature. There is absolutely no need to go into the problem of their authenticity, which even a believer in ecclesiastical miracles will often have no desire to defend: the matter of importance to the historian is that contemporaries were eager to credit them and paid more attention to them, to judge from the emphasis

in the sources, than to any other aspect of the holy man's role. In our present context, miracles had a double importance. First, the possession of miraculous powers was a proof of rare sanctity and special election. For instance, the hermit Peter mentioned above attributed his healing powers to the fact that, unlike his clients, he was not burdened with mortal sin and thereby deprived of the ability to plead freely and efficaciously to the Father. The importance of this aspect is illustrated by a passage where Theodoret gives as his reason for narrating one miracle the evidence it affords 'of the great favour and influence with God' enjoyed by the holy man who worked it.³¹ Secondly, it was above all through the working of miracles that the holy man achieved likeness to the prophets of the Old Testament and to Christ himself, as Theodoret so often reminds us. To the modern student the working of miracles does not seem an important aspect of the role of the Jewish prophet: but, apart from the more grandiose divine interventions through which Moses secured the release of Israel, miracles performed for individual needs are found frequently

in the histories of Elijah and Elisha; it is clearly no coincidence that it is these three out of the prophets of Israel to whom Theodoret repeatedly compares his holy men.³² More natural and even more awe-inspiring was the likening of the holy man to Christ, as far as the difference in nature and status allowed. A straightforward example of this is the passage where Theodoret writes of James of Nisibis that, in causing a corrupt judge to correct his verdict by making a nearby rock explode, 'he imitated his own Lord, who made the fig-tree wither in order to show he had the power to destroy his enemies if he so chose'.³³ But much more common than such explicit simile is an implicit likening to Christ through New Testament echoes. For some particularly blatant examples of this let us turn to the Coptic Life of Apa Shenuti of Atripe in Upper Egypt, a work which displays the same conventions and ideals as the Syrian hagiographical material, but with a coarseness of treatment impossible from a Theodoret. Emphasis is laid on Shenuti's alleged ability to discern at

once, without human information, the thoughts and past actions of those who visit him; this is evidently an intentional reflection of the similar emphasis in the early chapters of St. John's Gospel. But perhaps the most striking, and presumptuous, instance of all is where the story is told of the young Shenuti taking a walk with a person who in his dealings with him has been made to remind us of St. John the Baptist in his relations with Christ: a voice is heard in the sky proclaiming, "Today is Shenuti made archimandrite of the whole world".³⁴ In this way the imitation of Christ by holy men is accompanied by a corresponding imitation of the Gospels by their biographers. If the hagiographical traditions had been later in date, the deduction would have been invited that the biblical preoccupations of the biographers had led to a heavy exaggeration of the biblical character of the holy man. But our earlier evidence has the rare merit of sharing the same date and culture as its subject-matter: just as in the Gospel narratives the Messianic

preoccupations which lead to typological accretions were shared by the historical Jesus, so in the Lives of Late Roman holy men the biblical parallels which inspire fictional embellishments were of no less fundamental importance for the holy man as he planned his life than for the biographer as he recorded it.

The similarity between the biblical miracles of the Old and New Testament heroes and the ecclesiastical miracles of the Late Roman holy man served to teach a number of lessons. In the context of a theology that stressed the resemblance between the divine operations of different epochs, it could be used to strengthen belief in the authenticity of both: the holy man's miracles might prove the authenticity of the biblical ones to the pagan, just as the biblical evidence for the working of grace was argued to support the claims of the holy man.³⁵ Moreover, Christians in an age of intense hero-worship and personal loyalties were encouraged by this similarity to find in the holy man a unique object for a veneration based on the religious ideals canonized in biblical history. When the generals Dionysius and

Antiochus spread the word of Simeon's miraculous powers, when the generals Victor and Saturninus introduced Isaac to the court of Theodosius with a tale of miracle and prophecy, may we not assume that such religious concerns were present and potent?

However, if this factor may be allowed importance in the credit and interest attached to miracles, it does not in itself provide a full explanation. For one thing, the similarity of the holy man to his biblical prototypes was less close than the frequency of biblical echoes might suggest. Miracles for the succour of the individual are a very minor feature in the role of the Hebrew prophet; physical austerities and monastic devotion have little of the importance in either the Old or the New Testament that they assumed in the asceticism of the holy man; not even so venerated a figure as St. Simeon Stylites assumed the mantle that above all else distinguished the great biblical prototypes -- the role of the law-giver who was God's very mouthpiece as He addressed the totality of His people. The entourage of the holy man rejoiced

in the incidental similarities which linked him to the great figures of the Christian past, but his style was in fact distinct from theirs and peculiar to his own age; hence it is above all in his own social context that his role needs to be mapped and interpreted.

In addition, we need to inquire more closely why the miraculous claims of the holy man were attended to. Theodoret may claim that the biblical parallels vouched for their authenticity, but in practice the Late Roman was, according to his lights, more sceptical. Despite the dramatic character of so many of the accounts, one does not suppose that the miracles of the patristic period were any more self-evident than those more exactly documented for the shrines of modern Catholicism. Not untypical, perhaps, was the timely drought that fell on a frontier village after its expulsion of St. Alexander the Acoemete: despite the claim that here was the miraculous punishment for their recalcitrance, it needed the authority of the magister militum per Orientem before they consented to make their peace with

the holy man.³⁶

And, even where the miracle seemed as indisputable to the eye-witness as to the biographer, the Late Roman had one device that later sceptics may envy: when St. Simeon Salus prophecied correctly concerning a servant-girl's delivery, some of the household praised him as a saint, but others attributed his success to the help of the devil.³⁷ When the scribes had claimed that Christ cast out demons by the prince of demons, he had replied that Satan would not cast out Satan, since 'if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand'; to a modern Christian it is the suggestion of the scribes, but to the Late Roman Christ's reply, that would appear sophistical.

How, then, was even the most gifted of wonder-workers to win belief in his divine election? A life of austerity and prayer was essential, but not even this sufficient -- or the miracles of Alexander and Simeon Salus would not have evoked incredulity. If we ask what it was that distinguished them from holy men whose path was smoother, such as Simeon Stylites or Isaac, the answer can only lie in the eccentricities

that set them apart from the rest of their kind -- Salus' disguise of his sanctity and Alexander's social radicalism. It would seem that the miraculous powers obtained through a regime of mortification needed to be confirmed by the adoption of the standard role for the holy man in all its aspects. Hence, in order to account for the credit and interest attached to miracles, it is necessary to determine this more general role.

Finally, one does not have to be a sceptic to suspect that, however real or however widely credited his miraculous powers, no holy man can have been expected to perform miracles at request constantly and regularly: holy men cannot have been in such demand simply because they would occasionally work, or seem to work, miraculous cures. It must rather be that miracles were taken to prove and illustrate in the most dramatic way a role of which the most important elements in practical terms remain to seek. The question, then, the historian has to answer is, what were the regular services that underlie the miracle stories.

Here, our attention is drawn to two activities --

benediction and moral guidance.

The passage from Theodoret that formed the starting point of our inquiry informs us, at one stage of its narration, that the historian's mother regularly took her child to the hermit Peter in order that it might receive his blessing. Similarly, the generals Saturninus and Victor went to Isaac every morning so that their day might begin with his benediction. We saw, too, that it was in quest of Alexander's blessing that a force of comitatenses adopted the holy man. But there is no need to pile up instances; so frequently do we hear of holy men blessing clients and of men of all stations in society visiting or receiving the holy man expressly to obtain this benefit that we must conclude that benediction was easily the most frequent and also the most sought after of his social functions.

If we ask what form this benediction took or in what precise ways it was thought to have efficacy, we come up against a general lack of detail or precision

on this point in the hagiographical sources. But we are not surprised to find it automatically associated with prayers on behalf of the client. For instance, a general sent by the emperor Leo to St. Daniel the Stylite 'for the sake of prayer' is also said by our source to have been sent to receive 'prayer and blessing' from the holy man. But this is not to say that these prayers were usually at all definite in content. We read in the Life of Shenuti that he prayed on behalf of all his visitors that 'they should be saved and obtain mercy at the judgment-seat of Christ'. Such explicit testimony and, above all, the lack of mention of any particular prayers in the typical account of the holy man's benediction make it plain that the holy man's blessing was usually sought not to obtain some particular benefit, but as a general assurance of the good will and protection of God.³⁸

But of course benediction could be more particularly directed if the client had some outstanding need. Of special prominence here was the holy man's function as an absolver from the burden of sin. Shenuti once

received from a client the following message: 'I wish to receive your blessing. Perhaps as a result of your holy prayers I shall attain the mercy of God, so that He forgives me my sins; for they are so many'; he proceeds to specify one particular act of murder, for which Shenuti appointed an adequate penance.³⁹ In several stories this is associated with a cure of physical healing. For instance, we read in the Syriac Life of Simeon Stylites of a soldier who was paralyzed by the devil immediately on raping a girl; the holy man cured him on securing a promise of a purer life in future. Or there is the story in the Life of Simeon Salus of a young man who was possessed by a demon on committing adultery: as he expelled the demon, Salus said to the young man: 'Renounce adultery, you wretch, and the devil will not come near you'.⁴⁰ Just as the holy man through his sinlessness had conquered the devil, so the sinner was believed to lack resistance to demonic invasion of his body; hence there was an intimate link between the benediction of sinners and the cure of physical ailments. As an example of how automatically

Late Romans associated sin and disease, one might quote the following account by Joshua the Stylite of the plague which afflicted Edessa in A.D. 494/5:

'At this time our bodies were perfectly sound all over, but the pains and diseases of our souls were many. But God, who finds pleasure in sinners when they repent of their sins and live, made our bodies as it were a mirror for us, and filled our whole bodies with sores, so that by means of our exterior He might show what our interior was like, and that we might learn from the scars on our bodies how hideous were the scars on our souls. And, since all the people had sinned, all were smitten with this plague.' ⁴¹

But no less important for the military man than the remission of sins and accompanying physical cures was that benediction intended to obtain for them personal safety and success in the course of their sometimes dangerous duties. Dionysius, magister militum at Antioch, went to Simeon Stylites on his way to the Persian court in order to receive the protection of his blessing. Likewise, one Titus, on his elevation to the rank of comes rei militaris, was sent by Leo I

to receive the benediction of St. Daniel the Stylite, who promptly converted him to the monastic life; Leo was much annoyed, and exclaimed to Titus that he had sent him to receive the holy man's prayer and benediction, not to be separated from his emperor.⁴² But the most diverting example is the following story from the Life of Shenuti. A dux on his way to war came and received the holy man's blessing,

'and then asked him, "Father, do you wish me to set out to the south and fight the barbarians?" "Certainly," Shenuti replied. "If only, holy father," said the general, "your support might encompass me and you would lend me your leather belt as a protection." The Father gave it him. The dux set off to the south, but neglected to put the ~~belt~~ on, and when he attacked the barbarians was defeated and suffered severe losses again and again. Finally, however, he came to his senses and exclaimed, "I must have been mad not to put on the leather belt that the prophet Apa Shenuti gave me." At once he girded it on, and ~~atta~~cked the barbarians again. This time he cut them down without mercy; and on looking up into the sky he saw Apa Shenuti, in

the midst of a shining cloud, waving a fiery sword and slaughtering barbarians. Then he himself was carried up into the cloud and there inflicted immense losses on the enemy. On returning northwards, he rendered thanks to God, and to Shenuti.⁴³

These aspects of benediction bring it into close and obvious relation with the activities of the holy man as miracle-worker. The association of remission of sin and physical cure is the most striking example of this, but also a special one. More typical are stories such as those of Shenuti and the general, or, indeed, Simeon Stylites and Dionysius: here we find a very natural association between benediction in response to some particular need and the prayer whereby the holy man worked some particular miracle. For, if benediction was his regular activity, the occasional miracle was a necessary, as well as a spectacular, adjunct, and this in two ways. First, the miracles worked by the holy man served as evidence that he did possess the power to secure his clients divine protection, and so proved the efficacy of his benediction. Secondly, it was reasonable to suppose that, if the need arose,

the holy man's blessing could secure miraculous, as well as providential, protection; in this way benediction implied miracle. If we are to account for the prominence of miracle stories in the contemporary hagiographical works, works that must reflect the needs answered by the holy man in his own time, we have to find them in a place in a wider context of more everyday occurrences: it is the holy man's practice of benediction more than all else that provides this context.

If benediction was one of the two main social activities of the holy man, the other was moral direction.

Alexander the Acoemete, during his progress through a number of frontier villages, 'cherished the poor as a father and taught the rich to do good'; 'the rich were spurred by his words to bring their documents of claim against debtors and burn them before his eyes'.⁴⁴ A similar concern for the poor and down-trodden is attributed by the Syriac Life to Simeon

Stylites:

'How many victims of oppression were through his word freed from their oppressors, how many statements of liability were torn up as a result of his efforts! How many of the afflicted became free of those who had acted violently against them, how many slaves were manumitted, and the proofs of their enslavement torn up, by the saint! How many orphans and widows were brought up and nourished ... through his insistence!... He gave orders, too, that the rate of interest should in all cases be set at 6 per cent per annum. The whole of mankind received his behests with joy, so that many ceased collecting interest altogether after he had given these directions.'⁴⁵

This function of the holy man as the director of benefaction is illustrated most simply in a passage in the Life of Hypatius where we read, of an abbot at Constantinople, that 'wherever he learnt of a lack of basic necessities, ... he informed the well-to-do Christians, who sent him the required supplies, for he was honoured by all and obeyed as a father'. In that this encouragement of charity took the form of

the exhortation of individuals, it is not different from the moral direction illustrated above by the story of the holy man Peter instructing Theodore's mother to dress more simply. At the same time, the intrusion of the holy man's direction into the social and economic sphere made him into a patron of the needy akin to the rural patron of Libanius. As the village patron had a duty to secure peace and justice in the community under his charge, so Simeon Stylites, in a surviving document, has sent out directives to one village not only on church attendance, but also on such matters as boundary disputes and weights and measures. But the clearest example of the holy man as rural patron is Theodore's account of Abraam. This hermit settled down in a village, which at first maltreated him, but later chose him to be its patron after he had secured from friends in the city a loan which enabled it to pay its taxes. The village in selecting him as its official patron no doubt hoped and expected that he would agree to perform the other tasks that were customarily carried out by the rural

patron. It would appear, then, that the holy man might find himself involved in the toil and moil of rural patronage in the same way that military officers were.⁴⁶

What, however, distinguished the holy man's patronage from the normal variety was its moral and religious aspect. The ideology behind it is very clearly illustrated by the passage in Theodoret's account of James of Nisibis that refers to the holy man's 'attention to the needy of all categories, care, I mean, of widows and orphans, the conviction of the guilty and just defence of the wronged'. It is surely significant that we are moving here in the tradition of the prophets of the Old Testament, who had urged their people, if they wished to do the will of God, to 'seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow'.⁴⁷ This undoubtedly constitutes a form of patronage, but it is equally obvious that the categories of the needy that James is said to have protected do not coincide with the beneficees of the rural patronage so important in Late Roman Syria. The clients of the rural patron proper

were the united inhabitants of a particular village, who needed a patron to protect them not only against powerful magnates but also, and principally, their immediate neighbours, persons on a level with themselves; but here, and elsewhere, the beneficees of the holy man's patronage are both more restricted and less select -- more restricted in that they tend to be deprived individuals rather than whole communities, less select in that the holy man was expected to succour all who needed his assistance, not some few who had already purchased his patronage. Partiality and favoritism were essential to the notion of 'rural patronage', but had no place in the ideal of the holy man; and those who followed his directives were not particular individuals who might hope for worldly services in return, but, ideally, 'the whole of mankind', glad to be reminded of its moral obligations towards the poor and defenceless. Admittedly, the holy man is likely in practice to have shown special interest in, and been obeyed particularly by, those who were already in his clientele; but, save in the perhaps unparalleled

story of Abraam, there remained fundamental differences both in exterior act and interior motivation.

If the holy man's patronage differed from that of the rural patron proper in nature and purpose, it was also peculiar in method and style. The rural patron relied essentially for securing the requirements of his village on his contacts with curials, imperial officials and so on with whom he was on terms of friendship; their intercourse would be marked by regular requests couched in a style that characteristically combined expressions of deep respect sometimes bordering on servility with a quiet confidence that their requests would be attended to. In contrast, the address of the holy man was celebrated for its brusque and imperious tone. The general Dionysius, after becoming a regular and particularly influential client of Simeon Stylites, 'received with delight all the orders the holy man sent him, in relation to the poor or any other matter, prostrated himself and obeyed the command'.⁴⁸

The contrast became all the greater where the holy man had not only to give directives but administer moral

rebuke. A good instance of this is the account in Theodoret of the intervention by the hermit Macedonius in the affair of the statues at Antioch, in A.D. 387. Sculptures of members of the imperial family had been smashed during a riot, for which offence the inhabitants of the city feared they might be punished by extermination. Libanius in speeches and John Chrysostom in sermons appealed to the emperor for clemency with a combination of eloquence and servility. As the general Ellebichus arrived with other officials from the capital to decide the fate of the Antiochenes, Macedonius intercepted them and gave them a message to convey to the court couched in a very different style: the emperor was not, for the sake of images of men, to destroy those made in the image of God. The envoys treated him with great respect and duly conveyed his message, which, according to Chrysostom, helped materially to avert the expected catastrophe.⁴⁹

Examples of this curiously brutal mode of address are to be found not only in the anecdotes of the

hagiographers, but also in extant letters by monks and holy men. For our subject there is a particular interest in the letters addressed to military men by St. Isidore of Pelusium. A choice specimen is the following note to the officer Gelasius:

'It is a custom of many, even if strangers to the laws of God, to take pride in their birth, wisdom or wealth, looks or rank, although pride is of no benefit to those who come from the dust and return again to it. That you are totally devoid of such qualities, not even you would deny. If, then, you are without that which puffs men up, since you are a pauper of miserable birth, stupid, ignorant and ugly, why do you strut through the city as if you surpassed everyone else in rank, causing every kind of disturbance? Either know yourself and adopt a manner that fits someone as worthless as yourself, or undertake hard and dangerous work for which those in power will reward you.'⁵⁰

Unfortunately the correspondence of Isidore is preserved only in extracts, which can tell us little of the context in which letters such as this were written. Hence a better introduction to this style of letter is to be found in the less mutilated correspondence of St.

Jerome, which is otherwise not as informative on the relations between holy men and soldiers. Particularly illuminating is the author's note attached to one of the letters in the published collection, which gives us a rarely detailed account of the context of composition. It deserves to be quoted in extenso:

'A man from Gaul told me he had a virgin sister and widowed mother who lived in the same city in separate cells and, whether to look after guests or to have their own needs attended to, had adopted certain clerics as their protectors, with the consequence that they caused even greater scandal by living with outsiders than they had by separating from each other. When I groaned over this and expressed my feelings more by silence than by words, "I ask you", he said, "to rebuke them in a letter of yours and call them back to a life of harmony, so that the mother may acknowledge her daughter and the daughter her mother". I replied to him: "This is a fine job you're landing on me, to reconcile two women, when I'm a stranger, though their brother and son was unable to do it -- as if, indeed, I was a bishop and not shut up in a cell far away from crowds, while I devote my time to lamenting sins of the past and struggling

to avoid sins at the present. Moreover it is inconsistent to keep ones body in retirement, but let ones tongue wander all over the world". At which, "Your fears are excessive", he said: "Where is that courage with which 'you scoured the whole world with plenty of salt', as Horace says of Lucilius?" '

When the Gaul adds that the procural of a letter from Jerome on the subject was the principal object of his journey to the East -- after a visit to the holy places --, Jerome finally complies.⁵¹

Jerome's account of his conversation with the Gaul illustrates very clearly two principal facets of the patronage exercised by the holy man. First, though some clients might come to him regularly and certain recipients of his orders would be well known to him, in other cases his intervention was on behalf of persons not anteriorly acquainted with him and involved the sending of instructions to strangers with whom he had had no previous contact; yet even in these cases the holy man's word was expected to be treated as authoritative. One may think of the passage quoted above from the Syriac

Life of St. Simeon Stylites, where it is said that his orders were obeyed by 'the whole of mankind'. Obviously, the extent to which was so will have varied according to the reputation of the holy man, the nature of his behest and the character of the recipient, but it must have required considerable personal courage to refuse a reasonable request by a holy man reputed to enjoy the power to enforce his will by miraculous sanctions.

Secondly, we saw above that the holy man characteristically responded to the problems that were brought to him with moral exhortation in the manner of the Old Testament prophets; and of course in the letter we quoted of Jerome's the problem was of a directly moral nature. Hence the holy man in his replies would naturally employ not the tone of practical advice, but that of moral reprobation and exhortation. Here he was decisively influenced by two traditions in the ancient Near East. On the one side, as Jerome's reference to Lucilius may serve to remind us, there was a classical tradition, of which the Cynics were

both the originators and the prime exponents, of pungent moral criticism, both of society and of individuals, that bordered on the frankly abusive. On the other, there was the ancient Jewish tradition, preserved and canonized in Holy Writ, of inspired attacks on the vices of the powerful; it is reasonable to suppose that it was this prophetic tradition that was really decisive in the case before us. For an example of the pungency and vivid colour of prophetic writing which was taken up by holy men one might quote the following well-known passage from Isaiah: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, the Lord will smite with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts". It is in accord with these traditions of moral exhortation both severe and satirical in vein that Shenuti is said by his biographer to have written 'pungent letters that brought terror to the hearts of men'. Jerome, then, is not peculiar in this respect, even if his particular debt to the Roman satirists was not shared by the Greek

saints.⁵²

The holy man, then, in his activities as a patron and in the style he employed was working according to the best biblical precedents; but we must examine further the interests and attitudes of those who consulted him or obeyed his orders: why were they so ready to attend to the word of the holy man, and why did they not find his tone offensive?

We have noted the popular belief in the holy man's power to enforce his will by means of miracles of healing or cursing. This provides a partial explanation, but no more. The biographer of St. Simeon does not say that the rich obeyed the saint's orders over interest rates in fear and trembling, but 'with joy': the holy man's power and influence was as much a creation of the local population itself as a consequence of superstition before alleged mystic powers. One can but conclude that the patronage of the holy man, like that of the rural patron, developed not as an imposition but in response to the desires and needs of Late Roman society. What were these

needs? Two of our examples bring out one particular aspect of them. We saw an emperor agreeing to spare a city that had grossly insulted him as a result, or so it could be supposed, of the intercession of hermits; likewise, at a more humble and domestic level, two female members of a family were expected by the male member of the family to be reconciled to him and to each other on his terms, if Jerome so directed. Now in both these cases those who yielded to the holy man did so in their own interests: it was not to the advantage of the emperor to cripple one of the great cities of the empire; nor can the two Gallic ladies have been satisfied with isolation from each other and the strong disapproval of their relatives and neighbours. On the other hand, yielding to ones equals, still more ones inferiors, is awkward and humiliating. It is this that made the mediation of the holy man so useful: since he was the stranger in society who stood outside its ranks and hierarchies, he was the person to whom, above all, persons of every

station could yield, while avoiding both the consequences of ill-placed obduracy and the loss of face, even perhaps of repute and influence, that would accompany direct submission to fellow members of ones society with whom one had come into conflict.

Wherever we find the holy man acting as mediator, for instance between debtors and creditors, it is reasonable to suppose that this aspect of his patronage loomed large -- in the context of the highly competitive and combative society that, as far as rural Syria was concerned, we have outlined in a previous section. But there is one other aspect that was perhaps even more important. We noted that the holy man regularly treated the problems that were laid before him, even economic ones, as matters where the moral law was straightforward and decisive; that they were brought to receive such treatment, and the instructions of the holy man so seriously attended to, shows that the ordinary Late Roman was happy to adopt the same approach. For instance, when creditors obeyed orders of the holy man to remit debt, one must suppose that they admitted a moral obligation

to display the generosity of the rich man and the charity of the Christian; at the same time, the need for the holy man's intervention shows that this sense of obligation was often found hard to act upon without the authoritative prompting of a prophet of God. So behind this pattern of prophetic advice and pious obedience lies the existence in society of a moral idealism that was generally accepted but often not acted upon. The efficacy of the holy man in prevailing over such incontinence is not hard to account for: through his closeness to God he had preeminently the power to provide the necessary assurance that some particular sacrifice of personal advantage to the claims of moral idealism was indubitably the will of God and would be rewarded by His blessing. It is this that made the interventions of the holy man on behalf of the poor as convenient for the rich as beneficial to their beneficees; it was because of this that the holy man's behests were received 'with joy'.

If the holy man's prompting was to appear authoritative,

and of divine origin, it had to consist not of mere recommendations, but of commands. These would seem vacuous if he was not believed to have the power to enforce them. Such power was certified by his ability to work miracles, especially of cursing. Their relevance is brought out by various stories of how miracle brought compulsion or punishment on those who would not obey the holy man's mere word. James of Nisibis once forced a corrupt judge into submission by making a rock he was sitting near explode; the holy man Maisymas rendered a curial who was rejecting his intervention of behalf of some coloni utterly unable to move. And it was not accounted a coincidence if someone who disobeyed a holy man subsequently came to grief: when a general in Egypt who had ignored an order from St. Antony to end his persecution of the orthodox died soon afterwards, a story was widely circulated that he had been miraculously bitten to death by his own horses. So here, as with benediction, the stories of occasional miracle served to provide warrant for an

authority constantly exercised in more natural ways.⁵³

Now that we have determined the nature and context of the holy man's rebuke, we may return to the letters of St. Isidore to military men. It is unfortunate that the large extant collection of his correspondence consists of extracts chosen for their edifying character. The consequence is that the correspondents remain unusually opaque and the exact context of composition invariably obscure. But once the nature of the game has been established from other sources, their purpose ceases to evade or their tone to puzzle us. The soldier favoured by the greatest number of letters is one Isaiah, probably a non-commissioned officer, very possibly in the legion stationed at Pelusium: a dozen letters, or extracts from letters, are addressed to him. This correspondence has a single leitmotif: Isaiah is guilty of arrogance and insolence, and must mend his ways before judgement comes. To the frustration of the historian, the anthologist found more interest in general exhortation than specific charges, but in a

few of the extracts this arrogance is particularized. Isaiah is described as one who 'enjoys fighting and rowdyism and does his best to be loathed by everyone' and so deserves to be called 'an evil demon'. There is no modesty in his gait, tongue, eyes or eyebrows; more seriously, he enlivens his leisure with the profession of a highwayman. All this would be bad enough in a gentleman, in one of his obscure birth it is intolerable. Rather should he redirect his violence against his own passions, warned by the sad fate of 'our' Absalom and Goliath and the pagans' Ajax and Hector; such allusions would not be lost on a soldier not entirely devoid of culture, to whom Isidore can quote Plato on immortality. Worse still, he is proving an evil influence on local lads: 'Don't teach someone to indulge himself who has been taught to live modestly, and don't turn a decent man into a lecher and loose liver, dragging him down into that abyss of sin where you lead your life, perhaps in ignorance'. But, if the addressee was really as unregenerate as these letters

affect to claim, would he have kept up a correspondence with a holy man? It is significant that in one extract this mask of prophetic wrath, deceptive to neither, is momentarily lifted: Isaiah is addressed as 'my good friend'⁵⁴.

If the holy man's role consisted primarily of benediction and moral exhortation, there remains to consider the relation between these two: were they necessarily connected, or could one be practised without the other? We suggested that to win acceptance as a miracle-worker the holy man had to fulfil the role expected of his kind without notable deviation. So, if both these elements were part of that standard role, they would naturally occur together. But it may be possible to go further, by taking a closer look at one aspect of the career of Alexander the Acoemete. The forte of this holy man was the public rebuke of corrupt officials and the exhortation of the rich to acts of charity. Yet his laudable activities in this

domain met with a surprising hostility: it was resentment of his quite orthodox activities here that led him to be banished in turn from both Antioch and Constantinople by both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Alexander was a perfectly genuine member of the species of holy man: he had renounced all worldly wealth, slept for twenty years in a jar, and claimed to have worked miracles. Why, then, were his behav~~ers~~ unacceptable while the exactly similar ones of other holy men were received 'with joy'? It has been suggested that the reason was that Alexander had failed to build up his reputation in the normal way through influential clients, and there is certainly evidence to support this. There is an instructive contrast between his influence and that of Hypatius at Constantinople. Alexander arrived there and proceeded to administer prophetic rebuke to several of the magistrates; this was taken ill, and he was ordered to return to Syria and beaten up outside the city. Hypatius promptly gave him refuge in his monastery, at which the bishop of Chalcedon threatened Hypatius himself

with banishment. At this point the empress intervened on Hypatius' behalf, and as a final consequence Alexander himself was enabled to stay in the region, where he founded the great Akoimete monastery. The great difference between the protection and influence which Hypatius enjoys in this story and the helplessness of Alexander is clearly to be attributed first and foremost to Alexander's lack of those links with the imperial family which Hypatius had established as the climax of years of patient ministrations in the capital; Alexander arrived at Constantinople a stranger without influential backing, while Hypatius had already administered benediction to members of the imperial family and corresponded with the emperor. But it remains necessary to account for Alexander's failure to win the patronage and protection of persons of influence. This cannot be attributed simply to his constant peregrinations: for his wanderings were themselves due to the hostility he excited in magistrates and bishops wherever he went. Perhaps the explanation is to be

found in one curious feature of the Life of Alexander that we possess: it contains no stories of miraculous cures or even simple benediction of the rich and influential. The implication is surely that Alexander gave such priority to his mission to aid the poor and oppressed that he failed to complement it with that other social function of the holy man, the comforting and blessing of the rich. As a result, he seemed to his enemies, we may conclude, not an emissary of God sent to give them His protection as well as shaming them into almsgiving, but simply a demagogue and disturber of the peace.⁵⁵

If this explanation of Alexander's trials and tribulations is correct, it follows that the two elements of the holy man's role in society had a necessary connection. A holy man ready to extend God's blessing to the rich without making any moral demands upon them would obviously be a mere flunkey, but on the other hand moral censure and strict commands were not acceptable from a holy man who did not sweeten his medicine, however wholesome society agreed it to

be, with that direct assurance of the good will of God that benediction provided. The rise of the holy man, with the sublime authority over the rich and powerful that the hagiographers, when they can, love to invest him, is not to be pictured as a resurgence of the oppressed against the domination of the established authorities: rather did the holy man owe his influence to exploiting a new way in which the countryside could serve its perennial masters.

Let us return to the magister militum Dionysius and Simeon Stylites, a prime example of the military patronage of holy men. The general, at the shock of being sent on an embassy to Persia, contracted a facial inflammation; he visited Simeon in his dire need, who cured his ailment and promised him success in his mission. On his return, he revisited the holy man to receive anew his benediction, and 'for the rest of his life received with joy all the directions the holy man sent him, concerning the poor or any other matter'.⁵⁶

Miracle, benediction, moral guidance -- the three reappear together, and it is now clear to us what they meant and how they interrelated. Military men were active and influential in the dissemination of the fame of holy men: it is these services that they received in return, whether they were magistri militum or the humble members of the units of the limitanei, whether they resided in the territory of Antioch, the Persian desert, Pelusium or Atripe.

One question requires further scrutiny: how is one to account for that exceptionally keen interest of soldiers in holy men that we demonstrated from the Lives of Alexander, Simeon and Isaac? The point has already been made that the classes of civilian that had an importance and influence comparable to that of the army were concentrated in the cities, where their contacts with holy men were limited partly by mere physical distance, but also through their constant participation in a traditional Hellenic culture that had an initial

prejudice to overcome before it could welcome so barbarous a novelty as the Syriac- or Coptic-speaking holy man. But other factors may have played a part, albeit a subordinate one.

Dionysius had recourse to Simeon over an embassy; a dux in the Thebaid hesitated to encounter the Blemyes until he had secured Shenuti's benediction. These stories illustrate that soldiers of the Late Empire, whether of the mobile army or the garrison of the frontiers, had more frequently than the other sections of the community to perform dangerous duties where the confidence inspired by the holy man's blessing must have been specially welcome. On the other hand, the Syrian and Egyptian frontiers in our period were in no state of constant disturbance, and military interest in holy men was in no way proportional to the very varying risks to life and limb.

Greater attention is invited by certain contrasts between holy men and the functionaries of the official church. We may set aside the parochial life of the countryside, which was of old date in Egypt, but developed very slowly in Syria till the fifth century:

rural pastors such as Apa Miōs scarcely rivalled the holy man in either authority of moral direction or efficacy of benediction. The question is rather the relative appeal to military men of the ecclesiastical life of the great cities and of the ministrations of holy men, apart from the merely geographical factor of relative propinquity. Here, one point of importance does perhaps emerge: there seems to have been a significant difference in the acceptability of military men in these two circles. Many leading bishops were on close and excellent terms with members of the military hierarchy, as will be illustrated in the following chapter, but it remained the case that the official church resided over by the bishops of the city was infected by the anti-military prejudice that was almost a standard element of urban culture. This may be illustrated by the contrasted attitudes towards military alms-giving. The higher ranks of the army were generally suspected, particularly in the cities, of avarice and extortion: it must be concluded that successful military men built up fortunes

that were fiercely envied, especially by the curial families of older establishment. All rich men were expected to be munificent: how much more those whose wealth was thought excessive. Therefore, holy men like Simeon were paying military men a real service in directing, and inevitably publicizing, their benefactions. In the cities, the church was doubtless often glad to benefit from the same source of wealth, but there was a tendency to regard it as tainted, which at its strongest prompted a very different attitude: John Chrysostom in a sermon delivered at Antioch recommends alms-giving, but insists that God will not accept the gifts of 'soldiers who are guilty of extortion and make a profit out of the misfortunes of others'. In the face of such hostility, which was always at least latent in the church of the cities, the military must have turned with fresh enthusiasm to the readier welcome of a Simeon or Shenuti.⁵⁷

V

THE SOLDIER IN THE CITY

It was the conclusion of our first chapter that the Late Roman army was essentially stationed in the countryside; on the other hand, a few units were stationed in cities, detachments of the comitatus were billeted in them when on the march, and it was the great cities such as Antioch that served as the headquarters for the higher command. These facts create as a topic the role of the soldier in urban life; this topic then divides sharply into two sections, -- the relations between generals and the magnates of the great cities, and the behaviour in cities of the common soldiery.

There is no question of generals playing in the cities a role analogous to that of praepositi in the countryside: there was not in the former that shortage

of influential patrons that in the latter created by itself a role for military men. Libanius, the unofficial spokesman for the curials of Antioch, protested when military patronage in the countryside interfered with the interests of the magnates of the city; inside the city itself military patronage would inevitably have clashed continually with that of curials and that of the civilian government, powerful influences whose opposition military men will not have sought wantonly. There is no evidence of military patronage among the humbler classes in the city; the conclusion is justified that it did not exist.

Instead, our attention is drawn to the horizontal relations between generals and the city magnates, both curials and bishops. And here the nature of the evidence again changes. The historians and orators are not very informative for a topic that does not seem to have excited their special interest; so in lieu of them, we turn hopefully to the letter-writers. Whether the historian of the Eastern Empire search the extant correspondence of a Libanius or a Gregory Nazianzen or

a Synesius, all contain several, some many, letters to military men. Now letters that had to be dispatched often long distances by personal courier do not have as their purpose the mere exchange of news or idle gossip; instead they generally contain some request or personal recommendation. As a consequence, one might hope to deduce from this huge corpus of correspondence not simply the social relations of military men, but also their power in the realms of curial life and civilian administration, and the range of their patronage and political alliances. But there are a number of difficulties that need careful estimation.

The first, and most obvious, range of these is concerned with the tight restriction of topics treated in these letters. This severe limitation in their usefulness for the modern historian is to be explained with reference to a variety of factors. First, and above all, the writers were conscious of a need for discretion: for instance, Synesius gives as the reason in one of his letters for the omission of some matters of import that a letter is not sufficiently

discrete, but blabs to whoever chances to see it.¹

Apart from the danger of some confidential communication falling at some stage or other into the wrong hands, it would be an error to suppose that the highly literary and mannered letters which essentially compose the extant collections were intended for the eyes of the addressees alone. This may be assumed simply from their style: a Libanius or Gregory Nazianzen would scarcely have written so stylishly and in the choicest Attic to military men of mediocre literary culture, had they not supposed that their letters would be circulated widely among the wealthy and educated elite. But there is also specific evidence for public recitation. Synesius writes to one Pylaemenes: 'I immediately arranged for you an assembly of the Greeks in Libya, telling them to come to listen to an eloquent letter; and now in our cities Pylaemenes is famous as the writer of the wonderful letter'.² Secondly, the choice of topics and their manner of treatment were restricted, very severely in the more formal correspondents such as

Libanius, less markedly in a more idiosyncratic writer like St. Basil, by the purely literary conventions of the genre. A handbook of the early Roman period, which includes rules for letter-writing that remained in force even into Late Byzantine times, informs its reader: 'We must also remember that there are epistolary topics as well as an epistolary style. Aristotle, who is thought to have been exceptionally successful in attaining the epistolary manner, says, "I have not written to you on this subject, since it was not suitable for a letter" '. What we find was not considered suitable in the letters before us was the exposition of business matters: these, when they are brought up, are referred to in the briefest and vaguest manner. A typical example is a letter Libanius wrote to a general in Egypt to recommend a poor pupil of his: 'for you have power in Egypt through which others have obtained possessions and you yourself an excellent reputation for aiding the cause of justice'. No details are given of the pupil's suit: how, then, was the addressee to ascertain what was required of him? The

answer is here quite plain: it is the pupil himself who conveys the letter and so can supplement it by word of mouth.³ This brings us to a fresh reason for the vacuity and vagueness of so many of the letters: it is a commonplace of Byzantine epistolary theory that the courier must be left with something to say, so as to earn him respect. There is an explicit example of the omission of the main matter from the text of the letter itself in a letter of Libanius' to the father of some pupils of his: the letter treats the question of their residence at Daphnae, but relegates the chief matter, Libanius' judgement on them, to the oral report of the bearer, an Antiochene doctor.⁴ Finally, one additional point arises from the nature and origin of the extant epistolary collections. The composition of formal, highly literary, letters continued throughout the Byzantine period. So it is that the surviving letters tend to have been selected not for their informativeness for the historian but according to their suitability as models for future correspondence. Hence it is the more formal, less particular, notes, rather than those that we would have chosen, that had the best chance of survival.

But, whatever the discretion of the extant letters

on the details of business, they might be supposed to testify, as primary and incontrovertible evidence, to the range of the circle in which the addressee was a friend of importance. Libanius on one occasion apologizes to Promotus for not writing to him before, although the general is 'in the number of my friends'.⁵ But how significant a relationship need this 'friendship', of which the letters were the perfect expression, have been? Certainly it included the making of mutual requests, for support or patronage; but there is reason to suppose that these requests were not always sincere. One indication of this is the frequency with which a request of this sort is made simultaneously to a number of addressees. One example is the dossier of letters which Theodoret wrote in A.D. 448 to recommend the cause of an embassy of Syrian bishops to Constantinople: we note with interest that one of these is to the general Anatolius, but it turns out to be accompanied in the not voluminous extant collection by nine letters in which the same request is made to other notables in the capital, both civilian officials and ecclesiastics. At a humbler level, reference could be made to the half

dozen letters of recommendation from Libanius to a variety of influential personages with which one Diognetus made his way in 388 likewise to Constantinople. Now it is scarcely to be supposed that all Theodoret's ten addressees were each in a position to exert really effective influence on the fate of the embassy, nor would Libanius have written to six different friends if he had supposed that each would really hearken to his request to secure for Diognetus what he needed.⁶ But there is one still more disturbing aspect of the Theodoret dossier: one of the notables whose patronage is requested is the patrician Nomus, who is known to have been a devoted member of the opposing faction and so no ally of Theodoret's. It follows that a letter of 'friendship' is no firm evidence of any friendship significant for us.⁷ The dispatch of letters with requests that were in many cases not expected to be attended to invites explanation by reference to their unconfidential nature. If letters were widely passed round and sometimes publicly recited, the omission of any distinguished person with whom the

writer had the most superficial and distant acquaintance from the number of those he chose to write to on some occasion would be immediately widely known and invite the unfortunate interpretation of being a public indication of enmity or contempt. Indeed, we have evidence of such offence being occasioned and regretted. In 357 one Letoius set off on an embassy to the emperor together with a large number of letters for diverse persons of distinction from Libanius. Unfortunately one Crescens was omitted, and wrote to inquire why he had not received a letter when 'all the others' did; Libanius finds it necessary to invent the story of a servant's negligence in order to soothe the complainant's offended dignity.⁸ Crescens was presumably no real friend of Libanius', or he should have received a letter in the first place; his complaint is that of a courtier who desires the compliment of sharing in the reception of Libanius' attentions with dignitaries such as the proconsul of Constantinople and the master of the offices. One may suspect a similar origin in many of the letters to military men. It was because of such

demands that a Libanius or Theodoret had to send letters to a circle wider than their real friends and allies. The consequence as regards the sincerity of their communications was that requests for support were often mere compliments and requests for patronage mere letters of introduction.

Of course, the effect was not that all correspondence was devalued: letters to real friends and allies were serious and would be attended to. The problem for us is how to distinguish between those letters which merely testify to the prominent position of the addressee and those which are the expression of a real and effective friendship. Generally, external evidence is lacking, though the exceptions are important, such as when the general Saturninus, asked among many by Gregory Nazianzen to support the council of 382, is known from other sources to have been a keen champion of the Orthodox cause.⁹ But one might hope that deductions could often be drawn from the internal evidence. It is rare, in the letters of relevance here, for an indication to be provided by the subject matter; an example would be the letter in which Libanius expresses to Ellebichus

pain and disappointment as the general's failure to support Thalassius' candidature to the Constantinopolitan senate.¹⁰ But even where the subject matter is only a formally worded request, an indication might be thought to be given by the tone of the letter. Unfortunately, the rules of the genre virtually excluded any sincerity as to the degree of friendship: as the same Hellenistic handbook informs us, the beauty of a letter 'consists in the expression of friendship', and consequently exaggerated, or even false, professions were a commonplace. For instance, a letter of Gregory Nazianzen hails the general Modares as a 'friend and familiar and everything whatever of that sort', but a contemporary letter reveals that the acquaintance between them was of the most recent date and still very formal. Or consider the amusing progression in the letters of Libanius to Richomer. In a letter of 388, Libanius recalls the single occasion when they met: Richomer favoured the rhetorician with words that were 'few but beautiful'. In 390 he returns to the same topic, but now with richer invention: 'when we first saw each other, we rejoiced in other and behaved just like those who have been friends for a long time and have passed through

a long period of intimacy'. Now, too, Richomer's friendship, that had indeed gained him his codicil of honorary prefect but had not been of major benefit, is described by the orator as the greatest gift he had ever received from the gods. From the account of the same meeting in the Autobiography we gather that generals would respond with like affectation: 'when he did see me, he put everything else aside, took me and begged me to be his friend, saying that, if he were to win this, he would consider it the best thing in the world'. The consequence of all this was the devaluation of the language of friendship. And, as such expressions meant little, they were sometimes omitted even by close friends: Basil can write to Gregory Nazianzen in the most formal and frigid manner, even excusing the tardiness of his reply with reference to an absence and a courier. This has the consequence for us that, just as warmth of expression may be no indication of close friendship, so a cold formality does not prove a mere acquaintance.¹¹ However, even where nothing can be deduced from the content or

tone of the individual letter, a valuable indication is sometimes provided by the extent of a whole correspondence: where we find a military man receiving a large number of letters from a correspondent, particularly over a period of time, it will generally seem reasonable to suppose that their relationship was more than a formal acquaintance. Of course, the converse does not hold, since none of the extant collections are complete and some are highly selective. An apposite example is provided by the letters of Theodoret to Anatolius. This general was asked to support the embassy of Syrian bishops in 448, but so, as we saw, was Nomus. However, the not extensive collection of Theodoret's letters contains a comparatively large number in which Anatolius is primed on the bishop's views and interests in the ecclesiastical disputes of the day. The conclusion is invited that Anatolius was one of Theodoret's champions in the capital, and that the appeal to him over the embassy had meaning, even though that to Nomus had none.¹²

Finally, there is one type of information these letters can provide independently of their degree of

sincerity: the request to some military man over some matter may not be more than complimentary, but it may reasonably be supposed that the matter would have itself to come within the range of the addressee's duties or proper influence. Let us take as a case in point the letters of Libanius to the Egyptian dux Sebastianus. Between 356 and 358 friends of Libanius on their way to Egypt are regularly provided with letters of recommendation to this commander; in some of these his active assistance is requested, such as in the letter for one Rhetorius, who journeyed to Egypt in the hope of securing his paternal inheritance, where the general is reminded of his championship of justice through which he has secured property for others. Now a dispute over an inheritance was, of course, a matter for the cognizance not of the dux but of the prefect, and it happens that the prefecture was held at the time either by Parnasius, who was a genuine friend of Libanius', or by Cataphronius, with whom he at least corresponded. It may, then, be assumed that Rhetorius was also provided with a letter to the prefect,

and that it was this letter on which his hopes would rely. The request to the dux will, then, probably have been no more than complimentary. On the other hand, Libanius would scarcely have written as he does, or asked for Sebastianus' help at all, if testamentary disputes had been as outside the range of his proper influence as they were of his official responsibilities. The letters to generals should, then, provide us with some indication of the range of affairs where their status had secured for them a position of influence.¹³

Our conclusion must be that the extant correspondence of city magnates in the Late Roman East cannot be used at its face value in the determining of friendships and alliances, and that very often, indeed with the great majority, as it happens, of letters to military men, there are no means to distinguish the sincere from the merely complimentary. It will not, then, be worthwhile to set out the epistolary evidence in detail, and, where it is possible, the emphasis will have to be laid on the other material, which is not

plentiful.

By and large, the army was kept out of the cities; their administration was entrusted partly to imperial civilian officials and partly to curials. Therefore one would not expect imperial military officials to have had great influence on the affairs of the city, in natural contrast to the position in the countryside, where the army was largely stationed and there was a lack of other magnates and officials. Confirmation or refutation of this supposition must principally be sought from the Libanian evidence for Antioch.

We learn from Libanius' orations of several occasions when the influence of the Syrian magister militum was the decisive factor in intrigues and contentions between the civilian magnates of the city. There were two occasions on which we find the consular overawed by military patronage. At some date in the late 360s one Eubulus, an Antiochene of influence, secured the support of Festus the governor and Fidelius,

perhaps the comes largitionum per Orientem, in a plot to destroy Libanius on the charge, quite possibly justified, of having secretly composed a panegyric of the usurper Procopius. They decided that this required the support of the magister militum Lupicinus. But this general, whom Libanius characterizes, conventionally, as 'the terror of the enemy and of the wicked among his subordinates and the admirer of wisdom and eloquence', chose rather to take Libanius into his protection, at which the plot collapsed. Similarly, in about 390, the governor who was hearing the dispute between Libanius and some rural tenants, showed at first a natural bias in favour of the magnate, until he learnt that the tenants were supported by the magister militum, at which he suddenly began to protract the case and finally produced a judgement against Libanius. Even more striking than these cases are those where the general secured, or helped to secure, the actual dismissal of a governor. Some time around 370 a consular attempted to humiliate the teaching profession by having two students publicly flogged; this led to an open break with the magister militum, as a result of which the governor was disgraced.

Similarly, in 388 the corrupt Lucianus was deposed and ruined with the help of the military commander.¹⁴

These incidents have been taken to reveal 'the ineffectiveness of the civilian authority in the face of the military, which acts as a check on judicial abuses'.¹⁵ But, before the conclusion is drawn that in Antioch the military provided a constant counterweight to the governor's authority and freedom of action, it is necessary to inquire whether these particular stories justify such a generalization. The speeches of Libanius, including the Autobiography, provide a huge body of material on the city politics of Antioch. Even in the account of his own career as a teacher of rhetoric it is the civilian governor who recurs constantly as the main and predominant force in the city. In contrast, the magister militum receives only very occasional mention; for every case where a tyrannical governor is stopped in his tracks through the intervention of the military there are a dozen where they appear to have played no part.¹⁶

Here the evidence of the letters comes into its

own. The particular value of the correspondence of Libanius for the relations between generals and city magnates lies not simply in the number of letters it contains of direct relevance but also in the fact that its unique bulk makes possible certain statistical comparisons. A large proportion of the whole collection is addressed to persons not resident at Antioch, but it is still clear that even inside the city the opportunities for personal contact did not preclude the pursuance of 'friendship' through the exchange of letters. Of these many are addressed to civilian governors; one could instance the sixteen letters to the consularis Alexander, whose term of office did not last longer than a year. If generals had a more than occasional influence on the affairs of the city, one would expect to find a large number addressed to them. In fact, our collection contains only a single letter to a military man at Antioch -- a note to the magister militum Ellebichus which professes itself almost the first stage in the development of a 'friendship';

to this could perhaps be added the note to Addaeus that looks forward to the general's arrival for service at Antioch. Admittedly, we know from other sources that Libanius was a real friend of Ellebichus', as is shown by the composition of a panegyric even before the general's position was transformed by his appointment in 387 as one of the imperial commissioners to deal with the aftermath of the affair of the statues; if we possess no other letters addressed to him during his period at Antioch, the reason lies in the extreme scarcity of letters dated to this period. But this only increases the disproportion between letters addressed to civilian and those to military officials during the two periods of a total of fifteen years during which alone letters are abundant and statistics significant.¹⁷ To avoid reliance on a single statistic, reference may also be made to letters addressed to military men who had previously served at Antioch, since in many cases their acquaintance with Libanius started in the Syrian capital. The prime case is that of the general Richomer, who in 383 met Libanius at Antioch and very shortly

obtained for him an honorary prefecture: the series of letters, dating from 388 to 392, in their choice of the first meeting of the two, brief and formal though that was, as the clearest evidence of friendship may suggest that the relationship was never a close one nor of real importance. Then there is the amusingly contrasted evidence for the friendship between Libanius and the general Saporess: Libanius wrote to him in his retirement to felicitate him on recovering the emperor's favour, but meanwhile he had recorded in an oration intended only for private circulation that a visit Saporess paid him in Antioch he would willingly have escaped.¹⁸

In strong contrast to the single letter from Libanius to a military man at Antioch, his correspondence contains about a dozen letters to military men who were based on the court. Most of these letters are open to the interpretation of being mere compliments that provide no evidence of political alliance, but the frequency with which Libanius compliments these correspondents on their good standing with the emperor suggests that Libanius, just as Gregory Nazianzus or

Theodoret, sought at times to make use of the great influence of military men at court. The contrasting paucity of letters to generals at Antioch suggests that the influence of military men over the local affairs of a provincial city was not comparable.¹⁹

And that Libanius valued the acquaintance of a general at court above that of a general at Antioch is borne out by a letter he wrote in 355 to Barbatio: this general had been for some years in Antioch as Gallus' comes domesticorum, at a time when his protegee Gessius was, or had been, a pupil of Libanius', but it is only subsequently, when Barbatio is promoted to magister peditum and becomes a force at court, that Libanius seeks his acquaintance.²⁰

There remains one final category of letters from Libanius to military men -- those to duces or praepositi in other parts of the Orient. One point of importance emerges from these. We find Libanius attributing to a dux Aegypti influence over the settling of civil suits; likewise he asks a dux Isauriae to help one Dionysius to recover property appropriated

by his relatives. This evidence is consonant with Libanius losing a case against some of his tenants as a consequence of the private intervention of the Antiochene magister militum.²¹

This evidence from the letters of Libanius to military men supports and reinforces the impression that is given by a perusal of the whole body of his orations: military men were in a position to exert at least some influence on city affairs, but generally they were not drawn into them whether through their own initiative or the invitation of local magnates. It now becomes necessary to attempt special explanations for the known exceptions. As for the failure of the attempt by Eubulus and Festus to have Libanius condemned for favouring Procopius as a result of the contrary intentions of the magister militum Lupicinus, it may be suggested that this general was in a special position at this time and in regards to this charge in that he had been an important and active supporter of Valens against the usurper; it may be added that he had

a particular interest in protecting Libanius in that, as the rhetorician tells us, he desired his support in a candidacy for the consulship. Still more exceptional was Libanius' loss of a suit against tenants as a result of the machinations of a magister militum: it was highly rare for such cases to reach a court, and in any case the matter was an accidental consequence of military patronage in the countryside rather than an instance of military involvement in the affairs of a city. In the case of the deposition of Lucianus, it is to be observed that the unfortunate governor had already won the enmity of both the curials and his superior and that the general in question may be Ellebichus, whose role and influence was exceptional; the remaining case, of the deposition in about 370, is rendered obscure by the sketchiness of the evidence.²² These individual cases do not, then, upset the impression left by a perusal of the whole Libanian material. Generals stationed at Antioch had a role in the life of the city: their voice was sometimes appealed to against a governor on whose undesirability there was general

agreement, and they played a minor role in 'friendship' and associated patronage. But they were not regularly involved in the affairs of the city and their presence had virtually no impact on its life.

This conclusion was not predictable: it may seem surprising that the curial class did not make more frequent use of the military as a counterweight to the often resented authority of the provincial governors, in the same way that coloni in the countryside are known to have used military patronage as a protection against magnates of the city. The explanation certainly cannot lie in the generals continually being called away from Antioch by their military duties: there was peace on the eastern frontier during the period to which at least half of the Libanian evidence belongs, and in any case the example of Libanius' letters to Richomer during his absence in the west occasioned by the war against Maximus illustrates that campaigns did not interrupt social intercourse.²³ Instead, our attention must be directed to the contrast in character between the country and the city. If we find praepositi in the countryside exercising patronage

and even jurisdiction, the explanation lies above all in the fact that the civilian magnates lived in the cities and held most rural business unworthy of their attention. In contrast, the affairs of the city were their chosen province, and here military interference would have been keenly resented. Governors would have appealed against it as an infringement of their sphere of duty and subversion of their authority, to a central government that aimed at a true separation of powers between civilian and military officials. Meanwhile, the curials were held back from any attempt to use the influence of generals against the authority of governors by a number of factors. There was no reason to suppose that military men would consent to such a role; they were not more likely than the governors to be respectful of the traditional freedoms of the curial class or appreciative of the urban civilization of the Greek East, and they could receive in return for any help much less from the curials than from the governors from whom they received all their supplies. In addition to any such calculation, curials were held back by an instinctive dislike of the

military caste. This prejudice receives surprisingly clear expression even in the letters of Libanius to military men; he writes to a dux Isauriae that all other generals he takes trouble to avoid, and compliments a retired magister militum per Orientem on demonstrating that 'even a general need not prove troublesome'.²⁴

As a consequence of these factors the Antioch of Libanius was not a place where the military had a role of importance. There is no evidence to hinder us from treating Antioch as being in this respect typical of the major cities of Syria and Egypt. The development from a principate to a despotate brought about by the crisis of the third century involved, among other changes, a loss of city autonomy. But it was the civilian officials appointed by the emperor whose powers were increased: military men remained, as they had been before, a fringe influence which it needed exceptional circumstances to call into any prominence.

Antioch was not, of course, a typical city but the apex of the urban civilization of the Greek East.

Below it extended a continuous range of humbler cities, at one end scarcely inferior to Antioch, at the other glorified villages whose social life will have been elevated rather than transformed by the dignity of autonomy. As for the involvement of the military, the greatest contrast to the situation at Antioch is to be expected in those smaller cities in remote areas by turbulent frontiers where military men were more numerous and their purely fighting role made them of real importance. We are fortunate in that the only full evidence apart from the Libanian material relates to an area of this description: the letters and orations of Synesius shed a lesser, but complementary, illumination for the area of the Cyrenaican Pentapolis, centred on his episcopal see of Ptolemais, for a few years in the first quarter of the fifth century.²⁵

In contrast to what we find in the Antiochene evidence we are often reminded by the letters of Synesius of the role of the military, at a humbler level, in the Dionysias of Abinnaeus. We read of similar

exchanges of gifts: just as the cleric Apa Miōs sends a hyena-skin to the local praepositus castrorum, so the bishop Synesius sends a horse to the Libyan general. And as in the Fayyum such contacts led to prominent civilians exerting patronage on behalf of individual soldiers before their commander, so here we find Synesius interceding for a soldier who, on/returning to service after an illness, seeks a responsible position on the staff of the dux. Finally, the military commander's role as a judge receives a similar emphasis, although here the main requirement is that he should be impartial in the hearing of disputes between soldiers and civilians.²⁶

This pattern brings out one great difference between the situation of the military here and at Antioch: there the detachments were kept at a distance from the city, but here there is a substantial military presence that creates those stresses that friendship is needed to relieve. But in the circumstances there was another equally important reason why Synesius and his peers could not afford to imitate the disdain of a

Libanius: the province was suffering from constant raids by the nomads of the interior, against which the enthusiastic co-operation of the military was its only protection. Ideally, the military and the cities might have played their roles independently and with little contact, the one on the outskirts as the protectors, the other inside the closed circle as the civilization that was being protected. But, as we learn most vividly from the experience of the Atripe of Shenuti, a real friendship had to grow up between the protectors and the protected if the former were to do more than sit comfortably in their forts while the surrounding country was laid waste by barbarian hordes. From Synesius on Cyrenaica there is a clear instance of this in the effect on the defence of the province of the departure of the general Anysius. He, through the energetic and courageous use of a tiny crack detachment, had managed to hold the enemy at bay. After his departure we hear of reinforcements from Egypt which brought up the army to a size superior to that of its opponents. But the Alexandrians in charge of the campaign adopted a policy of safety first: the army kept inside the walled cities, while the

countryside, on which the cities depended for survival, was freely ravaged. Now Anysius was a friend of Synesius, who wrote him a comparatively large number of letters, if the proportions in the extant collection are anything to go by, which bear testimony to close and effective ties between them: in contrast, Synesius' distant and vague references²⁷ to 'the Alexandrians' indicates a lack of such relations with them. Hence, in the Cyrenaica of Synesius good relations with the military were not the luxury they tended to be at Antioch.²⁷

But if the Synesian evidence is sometimes reminiscent of the Abinnaeus archive, the more exalted rank of those involved on all sides leads also to some phenomena reminiscent of the Libanian material. Just as the magister militum per Orientem was occasionally called in to help secure the dismissal of an unpopular governor, so we find Synesius trying to thwart a civilian governor through the offices of a dux he is in close alliance with.²⁸ And as we found Libanius using his suffragium to aid Lupicinus' consular ambitions, so Synesius can

offer departing duces testimonials to help them in their subsequent careers. The evidence for these testimonials deserves to be set out in detail. We have a letter written by Synesius on behalf of a general, Marcellinus, whose period of office had just expired, to his military superiors. The bishop makes all the right remarks about the general's conduct: in addition to success in war he had checked the indiscipline of the troops and rapacity of their officers, and his honesty had only been matched by his justice and philanthropy. 'Therefore', he continues, 'a philosopher priest who has never granted a testimonial bought by favour is not ashamed to praise him'. Then comes the following passage:

'We wish that the court of the governor were also here with us so that, collectively and individually, all we inhabitants of Ptolemais might have presented him in return with such an offering as was in our power ...; I would most willingly have made a speech on the occasion on behalf of us all. But since today he is beyond the frontier, we wish to dedicate to him our testimony in the form of a letter, not as those from whom a favour of solicited, but as those who have solicited one.'

The implication of this passage is that generals on good

terms with the local population regularly received such a public expression of its goodwill. Now among Synesius' extant orations is to be found one such speech, in honour of Anysius, as is here referred to; this speech, which uses the same topics of commendation, though with an appropriate emphasis on military achievements, was recited before the representatives of two cities. Of course, such testimonials on behalf of civilian governors had often been mere compliments that tradition demanded were paid to the unjust as well as the just. But Synesius, whether or not the public speech was standard and inevitable, took care that his true opinion of the duces was known to the higher command: we have a letter of his to the magister militum Simplicius in which he castigates severely the incumbent dux.²⁹

This material raises us above the village level of Abinnaeus and reminds us of the positive elements in the Libanian picture. One major difference between the two may be conjectured: if the significant involvement

of the Syrian magister militum in the affairs of Antioch was rare and exceptional, it may well be that in the very different circumstances of Cyrenaica generals were figures whose importance in local affairs was more regular and more constant, even if this cannot be demonstrated from the exiguous extant evidence.

If the role of the military in the cities of Cyrenaica reminds us both of the Libanian evidence and the Abinnaeus archive, the explanation clearly lies not simply in the humbler rank of the cities themselves, but in special circumstances of locality and situation. Quite how special these circumstances will appear depends on how we characterize them. The circumstance of constant foreign attack was a rare one indeed for a city in Syria or Egypt during our period. But the emphasis could also be laid on the fact of a substantial military presence, which made close contact between soldier and civilian inevitable and created a strong motive for the building up and preserving of amicable relations. But, in either case, the Cyrenaican cities of Synesius, even if in other respects more typical

cities than Antioch, will have been exceptional in their relations with the military, for the simple reason that the great majority of Syrian and Egyptian cities were not in areas of military concentration and even in those areas there was a general preference for keeping the army away from the cities. The evidence from Synesius shows that the contrast between the meagre role of the military in Antioch and their prominent one in a village such as Dionysias was not purely a matter of the distinction between city and countryside: but in actuality there was a strong correlation between the two.

But one point of importance valid with all generals in all cities does emerge from the pages of Synesius. We saw that the general Marcellinus elicited from the bishop a letter to his superiors to testify strongly to his success in the province and, above all, his popularity and good repute among the local population. This allows the deduction that such support by civilians was among the requirements for the good opinion of the imperial government, which had no desire to see the inevitable tensions between soldier and civilian increased; we may

imagine that likewise magistri militum at Antioch found their advance to the highest posts at Constantinople facilitated by the known favour of the influential and vocal curials of the Syrian capital, and this is indeed illustrated by Libanius' support of Lupicinus' consular ambitions. Now the need for such favour from the curials will have had a major influence on the conduct of the general in the city: he will inevitably have been prompted to win curial support by fulfilling that role in the city that the curials wished him to. What was this role? We see from Libanius that generals could occasionally win the favour of the city through helping to oust unpopular governors or performing more minor services, but it is clear that the best that military men could generally do was to keep out of the affairs of the city. The evidence shows that military men were not, as a rule, drawn into the political life of the city through the invitation of the curials themselves; the testimony of Synesius allows us to conclude that they were held back from spontaneous intervention not simply through a preference for a

quiet life but also because unwanted interference might hinder their advancement in the imperial service.³⁰

From the role of the general in the city we descend to the behaviour in the city of soldiers in the ranks. This subject is one where the surviving evidence is inadequate for more than the sketchiest appraisal, but is at the same time of very limited importance. The reason is in both cases the same: it was the conclusion of our first chapter that the military units, apart from temporary billeting when on the march, generally had their quarters in the villages of the countryside rather than in the cities. In particular, that portion of the troops under the Syrian magister militum that had its quarters in the Antiochene region was kept outside the city itself; and it is on the Antiochene evidence that our study of military men and the cities must above all rely.

Another difficulty arises from the confused terminology of our sources: it is well-known that the term 'soldier'

was applied indifferently to military men and the subordinates of the civilian governors. The decision of whether a particular reference is to be understood of the military or the civil service is one that has often to be made purely according to the instinct or caprice of the historian. A good example of this source of obscurity is the Libanian evidence for 'soldiers' active in Antioch under the authority of the comes Orientis: 'soldiers' under a civilian official may usually be assumed to be civil servants, but this governor had, untypically, military units subject to his command, as is illustrated by his role in the riot of the statues in 387. Now we read in one of Libanius' speeches of the comes placing 'soldiers' at the city gates in order to limit the removal of bread from the city during one of the periodic shortages. Some writers have assumed these 'soldiers' to be military men. This is not a demonstrable error, but the probabilities need to be considered. We have seen that military units were only exceptionally

quartered in the city. Moreover, the comes had a huge civilian staff: an imperial constitution of 394 attempts to limit it to six hundred apparitores. Meanwhile we learn from a constitution of 392 that these apparitores had physical force at their disposal. The conclusion must be drawn that these 'soldiers' of the comes Orientis are much more likely to have been civilians than military men. This example serves to illustrate that a consequence of placing the army largely in the countryside is that unspecified 'soldiers' in the cities are best assumed to be civil servants rather than soldiers in our sense of the term. Once this is admitted as a general rule, the subject of the functions of the soldiery in the cities ceases to exist.³¹

Nevertheless, some soldiers were stationed in cities, or temporarily billeted there; there remains to consider their relations with inhabitants of the cities. It will not be supposed that soldiers of the units had an important social role to play in the cities, as they had outside them. This follows from a comparison between the population of the countryside and that of the city, among which soldiers will have seemed few and humble in

station; the same could also be argued a fortiori from the minimal involvement of their military superiors. The question to be investigated is rather the less interesting one of whether the soldiery behaved themselves and earned the goodwill of the populations they were intruded upon.

For the richest evidence on this it is necessary to turn outside the geographical and chronological limits of our subject, if only a short way, into the Edessa of the historian Joshua the Stylite, at the opening of the sixth century. Before the Persian invasion of 503 the only military units in Edessa and the neighbouring area were the local garrisons whose relations with the civilian population were presumably no worse than those of Abinnaeus' unit with the population of the Arsinoite nome; certainly we hear of no friction, but rather of the soldier in a time of plague setting up hospitals and paying the expenses of the sick. But the situation was transformed by the influx into the cities of soldiers from outside the province to counter the Persian invasion. Joshua exclaims at length against the appalling behaviour of the new arrivals, who had to be billeted on the inhabitants of the cities. His

fullest treatment of this theme concerns an army's temporary billeting on Edessa both on its way to the front and on its way back:

'They plundered us almost as much as enemies. Many poor people they turned out of their beds and slept in them Others they drove out of their own houses, and went in and dwelt in them. The cattle of some they carried off by force as if it were the spoil of war; the clothes of others they stripped off their persons and took away. Some they beat violently for a small cause. They openly plundered everyones little stock of provisions and the stores that some had laid up in the villages and the cities. Many they fell upon in the highways. Because the houses and inns of the city were not sufficient for them, they lodged with the artisans in their shops. Before the eyes of everyone they ill-used the women in the streets and houses. From old women, widows and the poor they took oil, wood, salt and other things for their own expenses; and they kept them from their work to wait upon them. In short, they harassed everyone, both great and small, and there was not a person left who did not suffer some harm from them.'

It is interesting to find that the generals were not at

all happy about the conduct of their troops in the cities of Mesopotamia during the war, presumably because they desired the goodwill and suffrages of the local population: we find them doing their best to prevent the grosser abuses, not always with avail, trying to make up for the extortions of their subordinates by bestowing alms on the poor, and on occasion deliberately shortening the length of the army's visit to a city.³²

That it was temporary billeting that led to trouble between soldier and civilian in the cities is very much what one would expect. Small and permanent garrisons would possess quarters of their own, and would have no wish to win the enmity of the population they had to live among for perhaps a lifetime. In contrast, armies billeted temporarily, whether for a few days or a few months, would probably find their hosts resentful from the start at the mere fact of billeting and would not be held back by either self-interest or sentiment from securing by extortion whatever they required.

There remains to examine whether there is direct evidence of this contrast inside our own region and period.

Perhaps the best testimony is that of the Theodosian Code. The imperial constitutions were largely elicited by the civil service and the cities, and so provide a comprehensive catalogue of the abuses that caused serious offence. Now, while the Code contains nothing specifically on the relations between the inhabitants of the cities and military units permanently stationed there, it is vocal, repetitive and detailed on temporary billeting: this contrast is a good index of the relative annoyance involved. It is interesting, too, to observe the inability of the imperial legislators to enact firm limitations on the exactions of the soldiers billeted. The following edict, addressed 'to the provincials', is divertingly hesitant to make a clear ruling:

'If any person should of his own accord wish to assist a person whom he has received into his house by supplying him with necessary articles such as oil, wood and other things of this kind, he shall know that this privilege is granted to him. But if any person in violation of Our interdict should wish illegally to seize the aforesaid articles from you by violence, you shall have the right to appeal to the provost and the free opportunity to complain about this

injury. Thus spontaneous kindness shall not be restrained in you, and yet your household goods shall not be exhausted against your will and that of your patrons.'³³

The Libanian evidence for Antioch is not particularly helpful on this point, but even here the same contrast is illustrated by the account in one of his last speeches of the depredations suffered by the inn-keepers of Antioch at the hands of the garrison that was planted in the city after the riot of 387. We hear that they lost victuals and sometimes even money. The account continues:

'And robbery is carried out not only by the soldiers but also by those who make their livelihood from entertaining them. For the wretched inn-keepers' position is made worse by a tame lion, a bear, a panther, a huge hound and straightway an ape as well. Meanwhile, one fellow extorts money by playing the flute, another goes round with a pipe, one of them imitates Pan, another Silenus and another a Bacchante. And if there were none of these, the horn whose lip is decorated with silver is quite sufficient.

One feels that soldiers of a garrison against whose conduct

in their favourite haunts nothing worse could be said had little to be ashamed of.³⁴

To conclude, there is plentiful evidence to show that soldiers temporarily billeted were a constant source of strife and ill-feeling. But what few references there are to soldiers permanently stationed in or by a city suggest that their behaviour, as we would have expected, was much better. Indeed the very paucity of reference to them is an indication of the ease of their relations with the surrounding populations. But the same slenderness of evidence forbids us to attribute to them a role of any importance in the social life of the cities of the Greek East.

VI

CONCLUSION

It was the conclusion of the opening chapter that, for by far the greater part, the camps of the army were not located in cities. Strategic requirements accounted for this to some, but only a limited, extent. Consequently it was necessary to posit the existence of a policy to keep the units of the army, wherever the primary considerations of defence permitted, out of the cities and in the countryside. But the mere evidence for the location of the army could not determine the exact nature and purpose of this policy. The question is whether the aim of the policy was simply to keep the army out of the cities, or more positively to enable it to fulfil some role of importance in the countryside. Now the second of these possibilities has no attraction in the case of the comitatus, which remained a truly professional army, but the suggestion that one of the prime functions of the limitanei was to assist in the administration of

the countryside, complementing the work of the civil service in the cities, does deserve attention.¹

The answer to this question is provided by the Abinnaeus archive, with its full information on the role of a unit of limitanei in the administration of a rural district in Lower Egypt. Many of its documents refer to the annona militaris, which has suggested to van Berchem that the main function of the unit was an active role in the annona collection, for the benefit of many units apart from itself. However, we found in a closer examination that the involvement of the unit was severely limited. Its commander kept a close scrutiny on the collection, and common soldiers were sometimes used to convey the produce collected to the camp; but the actual collection from the contributors and the general management of the whole remained firmly in civilian hands. Moreover, it is probable that the involvement of the unit extended only to the provision of supplies for its own consumption. No-one will suggest that this subordinate role in its own provisionment

supplies the explanation for the unit's location in the countryside.²

The solitary sphere where we found the unit to have been busily engaged in administration, at least in the person of its commander, is that of minor criminal jurisdiction. But if, untypically, jurisdiction was here allowed to military men, it was because cases of robbery or assault among the peasantry did not arouse the interest of either the imperial administration or the curials of the city. It is not, then, conceivable that limitanei were placed in the countryside specially to enable them to fulfil this function either.³

In consequence, if we are to account for the mainly rural location of the army, whether limitanei or comitatenses, our attention must be directed not to the needs of the countryside but to the peculiar situation of the cities.

Here the first possibility that deserves examination is that most of the army was placed outside the cities in order to facilitate its provisioning. Because of the great expense of transporting supplies over any

distance, it was necessary for the army in peace-time to be widely scattered not only over the provinces as a whole but also, in cases where many units needed to be stationed in a limited area, over the territory of single cities. It is not, then, surprising if the comitatenses of northern Syria were not herded into the few cities of the region. But this does not account for the complete exclusion of cities in favour of the countryside, for instance in western Arcadia south of Memphis or in the region of Antioch. Here we must inquire quite generally whether a unit in the countryside was easier to provision than one in a city.

The army received by far the greater part of its pay in kind. This burden, which was principally that of the annona, was equally distributed over the countryside. Now cities were typically the market centres of their territories, whither, quite apart from the payment of rents or interest in kind, rural produce was brought in large quantities. Consequently, it would usually be no harder to send the supplies for the local regiment

to the city than to some single point in the countryside. Nor is the balance greatly affected by the payment in kind to a civil service that resided in the cities: its total size was not commensurate with that of the army, and it was presumably concentrated in those few cities which housed provincial governors.

Soldiers also received significant sums of money, not only the stipendium et donativum but also cash in a commutation of supplies that was sometimes regular and sometimes illicit. As is illustrated by a variety of stories of the gluttony of soldiers billeted in cities or stationed in the countryside, a large proportion of this was expended on foodstuffs. Consequently the placing of soldiers in a city would increase the demand for basic supplies and therefore their price; such a rise was clearly disadvantageous to the urban proletariat. But, at the same time, increase in demand benefited the trader, and the soldiers would provide the poor with a variety of fresh employment. It cannot therefore be said that the presence of military men with money to spend would in normal circumstances

be harmful to the economy of a city. It is significant that when, as in Antioch during Julian's stay, we do hear of a military presence causing a rocketing of food prices, we find an exceptional combination of a huge military build up in preparation for a campaign and a failure of the harvest; there is no hint here that the economy of a city would be upset by the permanent presence of a single military unit.⁴

But there is a more fundamental objection to any attempt to explain the concentration of the army in the countryside by reference to the problems of provisioning. The food shortages that might arise from a substantial military presence would not be affected by the detail of whether the army was in the cities themselves or in the surrounding territories that fed them, since the problem was not transport from countryside to city, but a deficiency of supplies in a whole area. A clear example of this is the bread shortage at Antioch in A.D. 362. We learn that because of the combination of a failure of the harvest and a large military presence the city suffered an inflation of food

prices that threatened to destroy the poor. Now the army was not concentrated in the city, where only a few palatine units were lodged. Moreover, we hear that one effect of Julian selling imported grain in the city at a lower price was to make grain cheaper in the city than in the countryside: the implication is that the inflation of food prices was no less severe in the countryside than it had been in the city. This was because the failure of the harvest automatically affected both: the fresh supplies that were needed to remedy the situation in Antioch had to come not from its territory but from that of the cities of Chalcis, Hierapolis and elsewhere.⁵ This example illustrates how the problem of provisionment is not relevant to the question of why the army was mainly located in the countryside. Its relevance is rather to the broader question of the choice of regions for military concentration. A heavy concentration in a single area was dangerous, as the Antiochene famine of 362 may also serve to illustrate. This led to the scattering of the army in peace-time over most of the

empire. However, a region that had to support a particularly heavy burden of the economically parasitic population of the cities would find an appreciable military presence a severe drain on its too limited agricultural resources: it is this that provides part of the explanation for the concentration of the limitanei of Lower Egypt in the least urbanized regions.⁶

In our quest for the explanation of the mainly rural location of the army, the possibility that next deserves examination is that its purpose was to maintain the fighting efficiency of the army. It is a commonplace in ancient historians that armies are debilitated by residence in cities; the soldiers cannot resist the pleasures of civilization and military discipline goes by the board. However, there is reason to doubt that this conventional wisdom has relevance for our area. The thriving villages of Libanius or the papyri were scarcely schools of asceticism: comitatenses in the Antiochene countryside lounge in the marketplaces of prosperous villages, glutted with meat and wine, while near Arsinoe limitanei wander drunken over the fields and make villages their prey. Perhaps the most serious

threat to military discipline lay in soldiers absenting themselves from their camps in pursuance of their private interests; we find soldiers in rural stations homing away from the camp back to their family farms or accompanying a holy man in his peregrinations round the countryside. Here the location of a unit in the physically concentrated society of a city might even be an advantage.⁷

In order to account for the concentration of the army in the countryside, it may be more profitable to consider the attitude of the curials of the city towards military men. Whether we turn to the pages of Libanius or the historians or ecclesiastics, we find that all writers who express the common attitudes of the ruling classes of the city think in terms of a single stereotype of the military man: even Ammianus, who as an ex-officer should have been more impartial, considers soldiers typically arrogant, indolent and avaricious. The various elements in this indictment deserve separate examination.

The charge of arrogant conduct is made most memorably by Ammianus: he accuses the emperor Valentinian I of having been the first to encourage the arrogance of the

military, who 'swelling up with pride imagine that the fortunes of all without distinction hang on their nod'. Here it is the high command that the writer has in mind. For the lower ranks the Egyptian evidence is fullest. In Synesius it is a commonplace that the common soldiery tend to indiscipline; in St. Isidore the criticism most often levelled against subordinate officers is that of the arrogance expressing itself in outrageous conduct -- rowdyism, robbery and the like. Now this charge against the military is particularly arresting, since it concerns directly the relations between soldiers and civilians. But nevertheless, the evidence does not permit us to lay weight on it. First, this charge is made comparatively seldom, much less often than those of luxurious living and avarice; it is significant that Libanius chooses to attribute the military protection of peasants against curials to avarice rather than arrogance. Secondly, we saw in the preceding chapter that, on the whole, the behaviour of the military was not such as to encourage this charge:

generals did not obtrude themselves into the affairs of the city, and the regiments whose conduct was deservedly unpopular were those temporarily billeted in cities, while those permanently stationed there caused so little trouble that they receive only minimal mention in our sources.⁸

The writers of the time were much fonder on a charge rather uninteresting for a modern reader -- that of an indolence and gluttony quite devastating in effect on the efficiency of the army as a fighting force. L~~i~~an~~i~~us, for instance, in his general account of the degeneracy of the army of his day lays his main emphasis on the charge that the soldiers thought it 'splendid to vomit and get drunk and then immediately to gorge oneself again, but disgraceful to train oneself in military exercises on the drill-ground'. That soldiers, at least those with commissions, with their plentiful supplies and abundant leisure lived a usually comfortable ~~ex~~istence may be believed, and in Zosimus the intensive drilling of even comitatenses is on occasion a novelty deserving of special note. But where the fighting record

of the army of our period is open to serious criticism, most noticeably in the Egyptian limites, the explanation will not seem to the modern historian to have anything to do with high living: the evidence points rather to the problems that arose in part from the too sensitive relations between generals and leading civilians, which on occasion broke down in time of crisis with devastating consequences for that co-operation that was a precondition for effective campaigning, and in part from the excessive dispersal of the military units, that were often reduced to guarding a large number of isolated strong points while the surrounding area was left open to devastation. One might add that the charge of luxurious living is not made with any consistency: the same sources that wax eloquent on the gluttony of the soldiery accuse its officers of turning their men into ragged starvelings.⁹

But the favourite charge against the military, especially generals and officers, was that of avarice. According to Libanius the single guiding instinct that inspires their misdeeds is an insatiable desire for wealth, which pours in in such quantities that 'each day and

night the generals need fresh coffers'. In Ammianus the military are accused, above all, of amassing wealth by means of 'graft and their use of leisure'. In Libanius' De Patrociniis these methods are set out in detail. The main emphasis is laid on those which involve excessive exactions of pay and provisions for the army. In particular, supplies are claimed for many more soldiers than actually exist. There is also a more general, and somewhat obscure, reference to 'the pay of the office-holders (probably the military commanders), silver and the burden of (providing) camels'; the last reminds us of the dux Romanus in Africa refusing to lead his army against the barbarians unless four thousand camels were provided, and suggests that the subject of the whole sentence is the extortion of additional supplies. In addition, the officers are said to feather their own nests by embezzling pay intended for their men. Secondly, Libanius refers to various sums extorted from civilians in exchange for real or supposed favours. Clients have to make payments

in exchange for military patronage; when soldiers claim to have been assaulted, military justice has to be bought off; even curials find -- in some unspecified fashion -- that they have to make payments to military men.¹⁰

How seriously should we take this charge? One does not have to turn to the complaints of a Libanius or the invective of a John Chrysostom to be conscious that then as now avarice was the most universal of human vices. One must ask whether military men had any special motives for indulging in it. There is reason to suppose that they had. A.H.M. Jones has pointed out how the pay of the soldiers, most markedly in the case of the higher ranks, singularly failed, during the third and fourth centuries, to keep up with the rate of inflation: for instance, the salary of the dux Libyae had dropped by the time of Justinian to about one eighth of the second century rate for persons of his rank. If the officers of the army were not to see a steady decline in their wealth and subsequently their social station, they had to make up for this by embezzlement and extortion. And

these methods of acquiring wealth were ones they were in a good position to practise. In the first place, as the recipients of an enormous quantity of supplies in kind they had every opportunity for demanding more than they needed, embezzling what they received and retailing at a profit whatever they did not require for their own immediate consumption. Secondly, the officers of the army, as imperial officials, were men of influence who could sell valuable services and whose iniquities it was hard to bring to book.¹¹

In these respects it is interesting to compare them with the officials of the civil service. There is a well-known passage describing civil servants in a sermon of St. John Chrysostom's that points to a strong resemblance:

'What fault do they not commit day by day? They are outrageous and insulting to the point of frenzy, and make their profit out of the ruin of others ... Their equals excite them to jealous vainglory, their subordinates to ravenous greed, while those who rely on their help in legal disputes encounter only enmity and

perjury ... Everything they do is for the satisfaction of gluttony, avarice and vanity.'¹²

Civil servants, likewise, needed to supplement their pay through corrupt practice, in their case still more profitable because of their dominant role in jurisdiction and the collection of taxes. But they were also in the same position as the military in a more fundamental way: both were the employees, and payees, of the state. There is reason to suppose that this fundamental aspect of the soldier's situation was an essential element of his unpopularity. In A.D. 360 the emperor Constantius visited the ruins of Amida, which in the preceding year had fallen to the Persians. He was accompanied by the comes largitionum, who made the bitter comment: 'See with what courage the cities are defended by the soldiers whose abundance of pay is already exhausting the wealth of the empire'.¹³ The military were really in an impossible position. The huge army that was required for the defence of the Late Empire against the very serious external threats made the provision of its pay and supplies a heavy burden on the civilian population. But the individual soldier

had still to top them up through embezzlement and extortion. Civilians, inevitably, did not conclude that military 'avarice' was the alternative to much higher taxation, but that military corruption was particularly intolerable since it was the army on whose behalf the rest of the population had to make such enormous sacrifices.

The consistently hostile account of the military in the literary sources must be taken as the expression of the standard attitude of the upper classes. Under examination, the particular charges that are made seem to relate not simply to the occasional misbehaviour of individuals, but to the basic situation in which all military men were placed. We may then suppose that this hostility was quite general and the unanimity of the sources not just a matter of literary convention.

Now there is reason for supposing that this feeling will have been particularly strong in the cities. The wealth of the cities was essentially agricultural. The surplus that was left over after the rural population had taken what it needed had to be divided between the

cities and the imperial exchequer, of which the army was the main expense. Hence, the resources that went to the army, whether in pay or through corruption, were a direct deduction from the wealth of the cities. The position was made worse by the fact that there was little the army could do for them in return, beyond protecting the general security of the empire. Since the vast majority of the cities were not near the frontier, they rarely had any need for local defense; and whereas in the countryside the military could fulfil many useful functions, above all of patronage, the cities were already plentifully supplied with a large variety of persons of influence.¹⁴

It is this hostile attitude of the cities towards the military that probably provides the explanation of the mainly rural location of the army. It is well-known that the curiae of the cities, in strong contrast to the inhabitants of the countryside, exerted real influence on the imperial administration. The Codes reveal that the emperors were constantly solicitous to carry out their government in such a way as to avoid antagonizing the ruling classes of the cities. As

regards our topic, attention may be drawn to the numerous edicts on the annona militaris and on billeting; here the main concern of the laws is to limit as much as possible the loss and inconvenience that these inevitably caused the cities.¹⁵ Now in the matter of the overall location of the army it may be assumed that the hostility the urban upper classes felt towards military men will have led to persistent and powerful demands that the cities be relieved as much as possible of their presence. In particular, the city magnates who laid such emphasis on the avarice and rapaciousness of the military will have been eager to keep this at a distance; while if stress was also laid on the soldiers' alleged preference for the luxurious life over the maintenance of their effectiveness as fighters, that provided a further reason for concentrating the army outside the centres of civilization, even if the villages of our region did not in practice provide an environment of markedly greater severity. The cities will have wanted the army to be located as much as possible in the countryside, as in the event we find they were.

This location, which considerations of strategy or provisionment fail to account for, may then be attributed to the demands of the cities.

Since the army was largely located in the countryside and discouraged from an active participation in the affairs of the city, it is its role in the countryside that deserves the main attention of the historian. Here a miscellany of sources reveals a variety of activities, all involving the patronage of inhabitants of the countryside. Of these the most considerable is the rural patronage treated in Libanius' De Patrociniis: we find commanders of detachments undertaking the role of patron of particular villages, largely as their champions in disputes with neighbouring communities. Meanwhile, the emphasis in the papyrological material of the Abinnaeus archive is on the military accepting a jurisdiction over minor criminal cases, which may be related to the rural patron's role in the arbitration of disputes among his clientele. Finally, military men were exceptionally active as the patrons of rural holy

men, whom they frequented with enthusiasm and whose fame they were particularly instrumental in spreading abroad.¹⁶ It cannot be said that the surviving evidence, which is miscellaneous in character and limited in geographical scope, provides us with a comprehensive picture of the role of the military in the countryside of Syria and Egypt, but it does serve to indicate, and illustrate, the character of their involvement in its affairs. What we find is that they undertook with real application a variety of functions that should properly have been fulfilled by civilians of consequence, but failed to be so because of the concentration in the cities of the members of the upper classes, whether civil servants, landowners or important clergy.

The evidence enables us to answer the question of the manner and spirit with which these various functions were undertaken. Here there is a marked contrast between the conduct of comitatenses in northern Syria and that of limitanei in Lower Egypt. Both exercise the patronage of countrymen, but not with the same degree of tact and caution. The commanders of detachments of the Syrian

field army are ready to come into conflict with members of the urban upper class in defence of the interests of their clients; in contrast, we find a unit of limitanei near Arsinoe very careful not to arouse the antagonism of the curia of the city through interfering with the civilian collection of the annona militaris, and in the jurisdiction that they had assumed keeping to a single class of minor cases that were not of interest to curials. The explanation for this contrast seems to lie in the differing relations of these two kinds of soldier with their superiors. In the De Patrociniiis the praepositi militum have easy contact with the magister militum in Antioch and enjoy his protection in their conflicts with members of the curial class; but meanwhile the praepositus Abinnaeus has very limited direct contact with the dux Aegypti and civilians seem to assume that the dux will not extend any automatic protection to his subordinate, especially in opposition to the interests of the curia of Arsinoe.¹⁷

The explanation for this contrast, it may be suggested,

lies in comitatenses and limitanei having had a different organization. The Syrian comitatus had to be housed in a large number of camps, in order to facilitate its provisioning; but all the evidence for its social role, hagiographical as well as Libanian, points to close contacts being maintained up and down its ranks, just as much in peace-time as necessarily during a war, so that it preserved its character as a single army. In contrast, the units of the limes of Lower Egypt were scattered over a vast area in separate posts, and each one, unlike the units of the field army, was recruited locally; in normal conditions they never had to act in concert, and, although the praepositus dispatched business to his superior and had to receive some orders from him, both of them had much closer relations with the civilians with whom they were in contact, with the consequence, for instance, that we find orders from the dux reaching the praepositus not directly but with the intermediation of some civilian official.¹⁸

If this is the correct explanation of the contrast between the De Patrociniis and the Abinnaeus archive, it

becomes clear what deductions may be made by a process of extrapolation in the case of the limitanei of Syria, where, for our topic, there is a dearth of direct evidence. It will be the Abinnaeus archive, rather than the evidence from Libanius, that must be taken as indicating the role these soldiers will have played in the Syrian countryside.¹⁹

However, although the contrast between the conduct of the comitatenses and that of the limitanei is a real one, its extent should not be exaggerated. If military patronage in northern Syria led sometimes to conflict between soldiers and curials, there is no reason to suppose that such conflicts were inevitable or indeed frequent. First, the tact and discretion shown by the magister militum per Orientem in his direct relations with the various civil authorities in Antioch suggests that he will not have encouraged his subordinates to come into conflict with curials, and, indeed, in the case of Libanius' own lawsuit he only intervenes half way through the hearing when it has become clear that the praepositus militum and his clients are in serious

difficulty. Secondly, most of the functions of military patronage in the countryside did not involve the interests of the city. It is striking that even the military patronage of coloni leads to conflict between the soldiers and the landowner only 'after a long time'. It is most important too to note that, when conflict does arise between patron and city magnate, it is the clients who are responsible: it is the coloni who decide 'not to remain what they were', and the recalcitrant villagers who 'show that they have stones'. Hence even the patronage practised by comitatenses was in no way directed against curials, and conflict between the two was accidental and possibly quite rare. Meanwhile, even Abinnaeus sometimes comes into conflict with curials, as when his protection of robbers in the village of Theoxenis leads to a strongly-worded protest from the president of the curia of Arsinoe. The corpus of Libanius' writings and the Egyptian evidence as a whole point to what is essentially the same picture. Military men do not insist on the luxury of urban quarters, nor do they obtrude themselves into the life of the cities,

where the curial class was determined to maintain its Hellenic pattern of life without military interference: even the high command for our region, which was based on Antioch, only intervened in the affairs of the city on the rare invitation of the civic authorities.

Instead, their active social role was in the countryside, and here conflict with city magnates is accidental, and, by the limitanei, carefully guarded against.²⁰

If military men were not aggressive in their patronage, neither was the resentment of members of the curial class indiscriminate. If Libanius directs what may seem like a general attack on the military patronage of villages, his real concern is with those special occasions when this patronage led to direct conflict with magnates of the city; and we must assume that the law he invokes shared the same concern, real but limited. A much clearer indication is provided by the evidence of the imperial Codes on the one hand and of the Abinnaeus archive on the other on the subject of military jurisdiction. The Codes insist that, in important cases, civilians must always be tried by civilians, and in this reflect

the determination of both the civil service and the curiae of the cities that civil cases, and all cases involving important civilians, should be heard in the regular manner. But we find in the countryside a military jurisdiction of minor criminal cases: here the development of a standard form and formulae and the lack of any mention in the Codes, coupled to its practice by soldiers who in other matters are scrupulous not to offend the city authorities, indicate clearly that curials had no objection to soldiers appropriating jurisdiction where their own interests were quite unaffected.²¹

So we find that the hostility towards military men which the upper classes of the city evinced so unmistakably, and which was presumably reciprocated, did not lead typically to conflict. Instead, military men acquiesced in a mainly rural location and concentrated on patronage, and related services, in the countryside, where the possibilities for conflict with the cities were minimized.

In the countryside, too, they had to pay attention to the wishes of civilians, since their aim, at least in

large part, was to gain the respect and esteem of the civilian population whose life they had to share. It is notable that the nature of their contribution here was in accord with the wishes and requests of those they patronized. We find comitatenses undertaking the burden of rural patronage, and in all the episodes that Libanius describes, whether attacks on neighbouring communities or legal contention with a landowner, it is the clients who take the initiative. Meanwhile, the limitanei accepting a jurisdiction over a class of cases that concerned not their own interests but those of the quarrelsome and litigious population among which they lived, and it is, naturally, the complainants who initiate proceedings. So, if the military were keen to play an important role in local life and thence gain standing and respect, they allowed themselves, both in their choice of function and in the details of execution, to be guided and directed by their clients. It may also be noted that in their choice of function they followed, in the main, civilian patterns. Comitatenses help peasants in rural Syria through adopting the traditional role of rural patron, while we learn from the Abinnaeus

archive that the military praepositi undertook a jurisdiction that imitated, in its scope and character, that of the civilian praepositi pagi. So we see that the military in their role in society showed a compliant spirit not only in the cities but also in the countryside.²²

Ramsay MacMullen, in his pioneering study of the activities of military men in the Roman Empire in the third and fourth centuries, came to the conclusion that there was a specifically 'military way of doing things', which, through the involvement of soldiers in all areas of life, led to a 'militarization of civilians'.²³ It is not for us here to enter into a general critique of this view, but it may be contrasted with the picture that we have drawn for our region and period. Here it is the traditional patterns and interests of civilian life that continue to dominate, not simply in the sense that these were not upturned by military intervention, but also in the sense that the role of the military in society, in town and country, was determined in its scope by the wishes of civilians and in its workings by

the traditional patterns of civilian life. Their role remained in certain ways peculiar. Comitatenses were distinguished in their rural patronage by their willingness to champion the peasant against city magnates and their freedom from any suspicion of having designs on the land; the military jurisdiction over criminal cases, which was voluntarily undertaken, was more effective than the reluctant ministrations of inferior liturgical officials; the army was exceptionally well-placed in its combination of a presence in rural society and widespread contact with persons of importance to propagate the fame of holy men.²⁴ But these special aspects merely enabled them to fulfil with greater efficacy the tasks that civilian society chose to entrust to them. Hence, the most striking aspect of the role of the military in Syria and Egypt in the period from Constantine to Theodosius II is the testimony it bears not to some process of militarization, however conceived, but to the strength and resilience of the traditional patterns of civilian life.

