

J.E.H. Spaul, *Cohors²: The Evidence for and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry Units of the Roman Imperial Army*. Oxford, Archaeopress, BAR International Series 841, 2000. 581 pp. ISBN 1 84171 046 6.

As is well known, thanks to Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.5), the Roman army in the year 23 CE consisted of 25 legions, 3 urban cohorts, 9 praetorian cohorts, Roman and allied navies, as well as *alae* and *cohortes* of the *auxilia*. Tacitus adds that the strength of the latter did not differ much from that of the legions. He apologizes for not stating the location and exact figures of the *alae* and *cohortes*: he could not trace these data; they moved from one place to another in response to temporary needs and their number sometimes grew and sometimes decreased (*at apud idonea provinciarum sociarum triremes alaeque et auxilia cohortium, neque multo secus in iis virum: sed persequi incertum fuit, cum ex usu temporis huc illuc mearent, gliscerent numero et aliquando minuerentur*). What Tacitus was unable to do, apparently because he would not waste his time in tracing and sorting out the relevant evidence buried in the imperial archives, modern scholars have attempted to achieve since the late nineteenth century, and they continue in this Sisyphean task helped by occasional epigraphical discoveries. In 1893 C. Cichorius published the basic list of the *alae* (*RE* I, cols. 1224-1270), followed by that of the *cohortes* in 1900 (*RE* IV, cols. 231-356). G.L. Cheesman's comprehensive 'essay', as he called it, *The Auxilia of the Roman Imperial Army*, appeared in 1914. A revised and updated study of the *alae* (*Ala²: The Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Army*, reviewed in *SCI* 16 [1997], 291-3) was published by J.E.H. Spaul in 1994; now we have an equally detailed study of the auxiliary *cohortes* of the pre-Diocletianic army.

In a short introduction Spaul summarizes Cheesman's methods of investigation and main findings, and then presents the sources of information, their characteristics and the assumptions that guided him in interpreting and re-evaluating the evidence. Thus he writes: 'I have assumed that a unit's name was not inflexible but a question of usage. The official name of a unit would be used on a diploma, or loyalty altar, ... Most units have a formal and an informal name. An informal version of the name is frequently used on personal inscriptions. The units themselves are quingenary unless shown to be milliary, and peditate unless shown to be equitate. The ethnic title used reflects the original recruiting ground of the unit, and while the title Augusta indicates at least imperial approval, the title Flavia indicates that they were raised by or upgraded by Vespasian or his sons ... parts of the title may indicate weapons, equipment, previous service areas, but *veterana* normally shows a senior position in the provincial army, while *nova* indicates a reformation' (7). These and other assumptions have left their marks throughout almost the entire book.

The main part of the book includes some 25 sections, of which all but three (*Cohortes Civium Romanorum*, *Cohortes Aliae et Alienae*) are based on the original recruiting ground of the units, that is, the original provinces where the units were raised (e.g. Sardinia, Gallia Aquitania and Africa). The same principle was used by Cheesman to register the auxiliary units in his Appendix II. Each section starts with a list of relevant modern studies, a summary of scholars' views and findings together with the author's comments, and a list of the units discussed in the following section. The provincial sections also include a discussion of the native ethnic groups or tribes. Each entry presents the name of the unit with its various ethnic, imperial and honorary titles; the name as recorded in the sources, that is, diplomas, inscriptions and, rarely, literary sources; the provinces where it served; the dates and provenance of the inscriptions, as well as the dates of the diplomas; the known personnel of the unit; specific bibliography and a concordance of the publications of the relevant inscriptions; a summary of modern discussions with Spaul's comments and conclusions. Altogether Spaul lists and discusses 304 units.

Spaul's summary of the evidence is a detailed discussion of five problems. Were the cohorts numbered systematically? Spaul emphasizes gaps and duplicates, doubts that unit numbering was based on only one principle, introduces demographic considerations and concludes that gaps do not indicate missing units. When were milliary cohorts introduced? He lists 36 such units, none of which has been shown as milliary prior to the Flavian period. What significance should be attached to imperial titles? Spaul discusses the circumstances that help explain the usage, or dropping, of the imperial titles *Augusta* (not all the 12 units attested with this title were raised by Augustus), *Flavia*, *Ulpia*, *Aelia* and *Severiana*. The specific circumstances cannot always be ascertained, and thus *cohors I Claudia Sugambrorum* is inexplicable on the available evidence. How were the cohorts distributed between the provinces? Spaul examines the evidence thoroughly and reconstructs the figures of the auxiliary units (both *alae* and *cohortes*) stationed in every province in the year 155 CE (cf. Cheesman's Appendix I). Were all cohorts, apart from units of specialists, employed on the same basis? The cohorts performed a variety of duties, both military and civilian (policing, supplying, building, road construction etc.).

In accordance with the assumptions quoted above, Spaul has identified and listed together not a few cohorts which previous scholars considered as distinct units. For example, M. Jarrett registered 28 Thracian cohorts (*IEJ* 19 [1969], 215-24), which have been amalgamated by Spaul into twenty units. He argues, *inter alia*, that 'Eleven units of First Thracians seems too many; seven is more likely, as is five units of Second Thracians' (353). But Jarrett did put forward a reason for accepting the raising of 11 units named *cohors I Thracum*: 'the Roman army was unmethodical in its numbering and naming of units, and every time new Thracian units were raised, they numbered from *cohors* (or *ala*) I upwards; only rarely was a distinguishing title added — and this might not be used consistently and invariably. In consequence, there are ... at least eleven [units] with the title *cohors I Thracum*' (*ib.* 215). Is it unlikely to assume, as Spaul implies, that the Roman authorities enlisted Thracian peditate units on at least eleven occasions? Thracian troops had served in Roman armies under the Republic and there was no reason for Augustus to exclude Thracian units from the *auxilia* in the course of his re-organization of the Roman army. Herod, too, had a regular Thracian unit in his army (Josephus, *BJ* 1.672; *AJ* 17.198; I. Shatzman, *The Armies of the Hasmonaeans and Herod* [Tuebingen 1991], 183-5). At first the Thracian units had served under their own chiefs, but some time under Tiberius recruitment and command were taken over by Roman officers. Rebellion broke out, and was put down, in 26 CE when a rumour spread that instead of serving in adjacent lands, as had been the case in the past, the recruits would be employed far away from home (*Tac. Ann.* 4.46; D.B. Saddington, *The Development of the Roman Auxiliary Forces From Caesar to Vespasian* [Harare 1982], 85-6, 161). Recruitment could be conducted more efficiently after Thrace became a province in 46. In short, that eleven levies were held in more than a century (Augustus to Trajan) does not seem an unreasonable inference from the available evidence. Demographically the raising of at least 28 units during that same period, as Jarrett reckoned, was feasible, particularly so if Thracian units included a large number of recruits from Moesia (Spaul, 353).

Spaul questions the orthodox view that units raised in a levy were numbered in an unbroken series. As an example he takes the case of the cohorts of Gauls which, according to that view as explained by him, should make 24 units. However, he argues, 'ten have left no traces, which is unlikely given the present state of archaeological exploration' (502). Whether or not the *argumentum e silentio* is convincing in this case every reader will have to decide for himself. What puzzles me is that Spaul does not realize that his explanation for the ordinal twentieth in the case of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* is incongruous with such an argument. He is not satisfied with the suggestion that the number indicates that when the cohort was raised, 'nineteen other units were stationed in Syria and as the newcomer it was given an appropriate number' (but cf. 436). He refers to J. Mann's demonstration that Palmyrene archers were recruited in 120 and 126 (in M. Roxan, *Roman Military Diplomas II* [London 1985], Appendix II) and suggests that the

recruitment of Palmyrene archers had been started by Vespasian in 72 and was conducted subsequently every six years. Accordingly, the cohort raised in 186 was numbered XX, 'since nineteen other units had been raised before' (502). One is entitled to ask what makes the fact that 19 out of 20 Palmyrene cohorts have left no trace more likely than the fact that 10 out of 24 cohorts of Gauls have not been attested so far by epigraphical evidence. Besides, Spaul overlooks Mann's observation that the title *Palmyreni sagittarii* indicates a *numerus*, not an *ala* or a *cohors* (*ib.* 218). The *numerus Palmyrenorum Porolissensium* may have been elevated to cohort status (*CIL* 3.908; P. Southern, *Britannia* 20 [1989], 137), but is it likely that the 19 assumed units had all been elevated to that status by 186? It is perhaps not otiose to add that so far only 5 *numeri Palmyrenorum* have been attested and that the *cohors I Palmyrenorum Porolissensium* (Southern, *loc. cit.*) has not been listed by Spaul.

Likelihood and, to some extent, feasibility are sometimes a matter of subjective judgement, and given the ambiguity and lack of evidence in not a few cases disagreement will persist. Altogether Spaul lists 426 units of *alae* and *cohortes*, including suspect and late units. By contrast, D. Kennedy registers 525 units (in D.H. French and C.S. Lightfoot [eds.], *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* [Oxford BAR 1989], 245), basing his count mainly on the lists prepared by P.A. Holder, *The Auxilia from Augustus to Trajan* (Oxford BAR 1980), 215-40. This considerable discrepancy is by and large a result of Spaul's tendency to ignore gaps, to accept lack of evidence as an indication for the non-existence of units and to amalgamate units. Perhaps he has gone too far. I shall give only one example to demonstrate that there are real gaps and lacunae in the available epigraphical evidence. 180 units, at the most, are registered in Holder's list of *alae* and *cohortes* in the Julian-Claudian period. Assuming that the units were each on average 500 strong, the total strength of the auxiliary forces will have been about 90,000 in the mid-first century. The strength of the 27 legions that existed at that time will have been about 135,000, if the size of the legion was 5,000, which Spaul accepts for his calculation of the ratio of auxiliary units to legions. Since there is no reason to deny the general correctness of Tacitus, that the strength of the auxiliary forces did not differ much from that of the legions (quoted above), one has to recognise that about 90 units are not attested in the epigraphic evidence. If Spaul were right in his calculation that the overall ratio of auxiliary units to legions was 0.78 in 155, a time for which the evidence is arguably better, there would still be some 30 units missing in the record for the mid-first century. But his calculation is apparently based on error. The figures he registers for the auxiliary units stationed in the various provinces in the year 155 (526) add up to 181,160, which gives a ratio of 1.29 to the 140,000 legionaries (twenty-eight legions) he registers for that year. If that was the ratio in the mid-first century, we could assume omission of 180 units in the available evidence. A calculation made on the supposition that the legion was a 6,000 strong division will give a ratio of 1.07 for the year 155; such a ratio will indicate omission of some 142 units in the mid-first century. Although a ratio of 1.07 seems congruous enough with Tacitus' statement, one has to bear in mind that Spaul's figures (526) do not include auxiliary units that were stationed in Sardinia, Africa and Asia. Also, several of the 37 units which he has not taken into consideration for his calculations (listed on p. 527) may well have existed in 155. For these and other reasons, it is fairly sure that there are real gaps in the available evidence concerning the number of the units even in the mid-second century.

Having stated some of my reservations, I should add that Spaul's is a useful book, an indispensable work of reference for the study of the Roman army. He has put the available evidence at the disposal of all those interested in this subject; helped by the varied and detailed indices (533-81) they can easily consult and check the details, confirming or refuting the arguments or inferences. Misprints and inaccuracies do occur, but apart from a few cases (e.g. error in note numbering on p. 46, omission of a note figure in the text on pp. 39 and 52, Parthians instead of Persians on p. 256, a garbled sentence on p. 326), they need not cause confusion.